

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

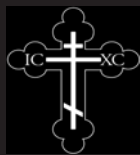
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AN ESSENTIAL EPISTLE ON THE GREATEST BLASPHEMY OF OUR DAYS

By George Karras, "Orthodox Heritage" editor, May 27th, 2020.

Today, at the end of the most tragic Lenten and Paschal season His Bride has ever lived, we celebrate the Apodosis of Pascha and tomorrow Orthodoxy observes His Holy Ascension. Sadly, most Orthodox churches shall remain either closed or with limited (at best) participation, as priests all over the western world willingly implemented the directives of their hierarchs to "ensure the safety of the flock." Those who seek to finally receive His Holy Body and Blood shall be exposed to the machinations and blasphemous creativity of the various hierarchs and dioceses, with very few exceptions, and no spiritual basis whatsoever; as always, their justification shall remain that it is all for "the health and safety of the faithful." This comes as even CDC declares the mortality rate of Covid-19 to be at levels of any other ordinary flu virus. In the end, once all data is gathered, a handful of honest world leaders will inform their citizens that this entire reaction to Covid-19 was not just unnecessary but completely destructive. Honest historians shall catalogue it as one of humanity's darkest pages.

Let us return, however, to the topic at hand. As has been the case in past ecumenist-related positions, selected theologians (of rather peculiar background and questionable educational reputation) will misquote one or two Church Fathers, or call upon the Church's history to justify whatever hierarchal invention has been presented to the faithful. Such quotes are always out of context, and, without exception,

inaccurate when the faithful are presented with the source document in its totality. The faithful, on the other hand, stand aside, trying to determine the why's and the how's, and all in the midst of a likely economic devastation for their families.

Let us examine recent and current ecclesiastical events a little closer.

The Closure of Churches Elimination of the Eucharist for the Faithful

Our Lord tells us that *He is the bread (manna) from Heaven* (Jn 6:35, 38). *I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.* (Jn 6:35). He also instructed us that to eat of this *New Bread* meant *never seeing death* (Jn 6:49-50). He says *...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.* (Jn 6:53). And, as if to settle completely the issue, Jesus adds, **for my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.** (Jn 6:55).

It is the result of these divine admonitions that the Holy Church decreed the mandatory, frequent inclusion of the Eucharist as well as their liturgical participation of the flock into their lives. Specifically, the ninth Apostolic Canon required that: *All those faithful who enter and listen to the Scriptures, but do not stay for prayer and Holy Communion must be excommunicated, on the ground that they are causing the Church a breach of order.* As the Church evolved through its early history, church attendance was also included within the Church canons: *In case any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon, or anyone else on the list of the Clergy, or any layman, without any graver necessity or any particular difficulty compelling him to absent himself from his own church for a very long time, fails to attend church on Sundays for three consecutive weeks,*

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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while living in the city, if he be a Cleric, let him be deposed from office; but if he be a layman, let him be removed from Communion. (Canon LXXX, “The Rudder,” p. 384). Naturally, the faithful who desired to attend and partake of the Holy Gifts, during this Covid-19 crisis, bear no accountability—such accountability is placed upon those who closed the churches and established attendance restrictions.

In spite of the aforementioned scriptural passages and Church decrees, the majority of the western hierarchs willingly (and sadly without any opposition whatsoever) agreed to withhold the Holy Gifts from His flock. The admonitions of the courageous Greek priest Fr. Vasileios Volouthakis (during his Holy Friday homily) remain available in the digital media to remind all of the atrocity of such decision: “The hierarchs and the archons of the people consented to scourge and imprison Jesus, so that they can debar and boycott Him away from His flock, Shame on the hierarchs and the civil leaders of the people, shame on them. This shame shall never be erased from history; this indignation of the flock shall never be erased from its conscience. The wrath and the curse of God shall come upon the heads of all those who decided to withhold the Body and Blood of our Lord from the faithful... Shame! What has become of the Church of Greece? Shame! I am shamed and question as to why the people of God are not as astonished as I would have expected. They have imprisoned us and closed the churches over a deception, an obvious medical deception...” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CI3cbQYchHE>).

It has been said by those in positions of ecclesiastical authority that since local synods had decided the closure of the churches, any exception is unacceptable and constitutes disobedience; there is nothing further from the truth. The

decision of a (geographically) local synod is never binding to the flock; the people are not obliged to follow such local synodical decision. The final judge of the validity of such a decision is the flock, and this is 100% patristically based, throughout the long history of the Church. Let us be reminded of the many cases whereby local synods adopted heretical views only to be rejected by the people and reversed in subsequent synodical gatherings. Of course, should such closure be warranted indeed, then the lead hierarchs should have called a pan-Orthodox Synod before uniquely deciding and acting on their own and inflicting such great spiritual harm upon the flock.

And now, after several months of longing and suffering, our Orthodox Church’s life enters a new phase; it comes just days after the multi-week shut-down of the liturgical life for the faithful, throughout the Great Holy Lent, Pascha, and most of the post Paschal time period. Let us be reminded that serious pandemics, Muslim and German occupations, communism, world wars, civil wars and earthquakes never before resulted in the closure of churches. His flock withstood during the last few months an event that is indeed unique to the Church’s 2,000-year history! The clergy’s “instructions” to observe the services via live webcasts has been ludicrous and horrific; is Orthodoxy entering the phase of televangelism now? How embarrassing and shameful to consider that standing in front of a television with lit Paschal candles is a form of *oikonomia* for the celebration of His Resurrection by the faithful. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of souls, and especially young children, were prohibited from receiving His Body and Blood. Needy souls were not allowed to have Holy Confession, unless it was “in secret,” and never in their parish church. Why? Was

the Covid-19 virus present only in the parish churches but not in the crowded stores and pharmacies?

Celebrant clergy (in empty churches and with just a chanter and perhaps a deacon) read aloud during the Pascha services the words of St. John Chrysostom: *Wherefore, enter you all into the joy of your Lord; and receive your reward, both the first, and likewise the second. You rich and poor together, hold high festival. You sober and you heedless, honor the day. Rejoice today, both you who have fasted and you who have disregarded the fast. The table is full-laden; feast ye all sumptuously. The calf is fattened; let no one go hungry away.* Yet the flock went hungry, they did not participate in the Holy Eucharist; they stood staring at cold television sets that exemplified resemblances of something religious yet so far away. The few souls that dared to defy orders, mostly in Greece and other eastern European nations, found themselves fined and / or arrested. Blessed be the clergy that found ways around the bishopric and civil directives!

There is, however, an even greater tragedy: We wonder: how many souls departed this temporary earthly life, un-confessed and un-communed, as the great majority of western clergy eagerly over-adopted and blindly followed the shutdown directives? Is there any spiritual accountability towards such a spiritual tragedy? No Covid-19 death can possibly outweigh the heart-break of a dying man or woman (and especially a child) who desires but is unable to confess and receive the Holy Sacraments before departing this life.

We would also be remiss if we did not emphasize that these ridiculous restrictions took place even in states such as Arizona, whereby its governor included religious activities as Constitutionally protected (which means that the Arizona Governor, just like several governors in the USA, deemed religious activities as community essential). This, however, meant nothing to the bishops as they blindly made their directives universal in all cities and states, irrespective of local laws and limited restrictions within several geographic regions. As a brethren reminded us, “it is as if they were in competition to outdo the civil authorities!”

Luckily, not all clergy complied with the bishopric directives—there have been a handful of exceptions and a few, very few blessed souls were afforded the observance of a somewhat normal Lenten and Paschal season.

We stand in appreciation of the position taken by the civil authorities in the United States, via President Trump, on May

22nd, 2020: “Some governors have deemed liquor stores and abortion clinics as essential but left out churches and other houses of worship—that’s not right—so I’m correcting this injustice. I am ordering governors to allow houses of worship to open immediately, declaring them “essential” to American life during COVID-19. So, the governors need to do the right thing and allow these very important essential places of faith to open right now, this weekend. If they don’t do it, I will override the governors. In America, we need more prayer, not less.”

This directive was followed by several churches; tragically, some of them (rather most of the Orthodox churches in America), selected to still remain closed to the faithful for the weekend of May 24th, as bishops gathered with legal advisors to compose policies and procedures, again in the interest of “the health and safety of the faithful.” We have been provided multi-page documents originated by several dioceses; all of them have their own unique rules and

regulations, especially as it relates to the delivery of the Holy Eucharist. The exhaustive details and specific guidelines developed by most dioceses compete and likely exceed anything corporate entities such as Home Depot and Costco have developed. Worship in most Orthodox churches have



now become a complex process.

The “New” Eucharistic Approach

For two thousand years, clergy has been transmitting the grace of the Holy Mysteries in a similar manner, always having celebrants and participants alike, come in contact with the Holy Chalice (and *lavitha* in second millennium). Modern logic or ungodly doubts have been absent; such blasphemous thoughts never entered the teaching or practices of the Church, until now. Participants witnessed a perpetual great miracle. Is it possible that now, because of a new-found flu virus, the Holy Communion can cause sickness or the slightest damage? Is it possible for the Body and Blood of our Lord and God to contaminate our body and blood?

For centuries, the same Holy Chalice and the same *tongs* have been in use, never washed, never disinfected. The priests of the nursing homes and hospitals, even the ones for the most infectious diseases, give the Holy Communion to the faithful and reverently consume the Gifts and live long, healthy lives.

It is this history and experience that lead us to the only logical and acceptable conclusion: the proposed deviations in the delivery of Holy Communion to the faithful, either via “plastic

spoons” or dipping of the *lavitha* into alcohol for ... sterilization, or the use of several “spoons,” (as directed by the GOA Archbishop) all constitute an absolute blasphemy towards the Holy Spirit. For any person, hierarch or otherwise, to infer or to explicitly state that the current method poses any threat to the faithful who approach the Holy Chalice with faith and fear of God is preposterous and unfounded in the long history on the Church. It is best that any person who has any doubts (i.e., lack of faith) relative to the sanctity of the Holy Eucharist, as it has been delivered to the faithful for nearly 1,000 years, to not approach the Holy Chalice.

The faithful ought to question any clergy and especially any bishop wishing to deviate from Holy Tradition: during their own lifetime of receiving Holy Communion, how many faithful approached the Chalice with herpes, AIDS, hepatitis, flu and colds, mouth cancers and every other common or uncommon disease of our days? Why is it that parishes and communities never experienced any related pandemics? Why are the priests (who consume the remnant of the Holy Gifts in the end) still alive? What has changed with Covid-19, when medical evidence every day points to its “ordinary flu strain” nature?

Let us also make a necessary correction towards the terminology utilized by clergy eager to abandon traditional Eucharistic methods. The Holy Eucharist is being delivered via “tongs”—*lavitha* in Gk; it is not a “spoon,”—κοχλιάριον in Gk. The term *lavitha* refers to the burning coal given to Isaiah by an Angel with tongs. (Isa 6:6-6:7: *Then flew one of the Seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.*)

We suspect that other plans are hiding behind such measures and we are quite confident that even post-pandemic, most of the established liturgical deviations will be maintained. How else would the ecumenist movement be able to join with the Latins and share the same format of Eucharist? Are Latin-type “wafers” the next plan by the appointed hierarchy of the Orthodox Church?

A New Iconoclasm?

We wish to also address the new iconoclastic directives prohibiting the kissing of the priest’s right hand, delivery of the *antithoron* in small zip-lock baggies (and not by the priest openly, as before), and especially the veneration and kissing of holy icons.

The faithful kiss the priest’s right hand from time to time and always when he delivers *antithoron*. This is an act of veneration. The people are venerating the High Priesthood of Christ, of which the parish priest is simply a participant. They also venerate the hand that sanctifies the Holy Gifts; to contemplate the likely spread of a virus via the hand that just sanctified bread and wine into His Body and Blood is as illogical and blasphemous as the questioning of the Holy Eucharist’s delivery via the *lavitha*.

With regard to the holy icons, all Orthodox hierarchs and clergy have been taught in theological schools the mandatory veneration of icons, as based on the 7th Ecumenical Synod. Let us be reminded on the significance of icons within the liturgical life of the Church.

The power of iconography is not in the matter but in who icons point to, in who lies behind the images. Saint Basil the Great had written long before: *The honor given to the image passes on to the prototype that lies behind it.* The doctrinal significance of icons is that they proclaim the Incarnation. Therefore, the Fathers of the Church decreed that not only are icons permissible but that it is essential to have them—for to reject them is to deny Christ’s humanity, his materiality. Therefore, the Fathers continued, *as the sacred and life-giving Cross is everywhere set up as a symbol, so also should the images of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the holy angels, as well as those of the saints and other pious and holy men be exhibited on the walls of churches, in homes and in all conspicuous places, by the roadside and everywhere, to be revered by all who see them.* The Fathers made it clear that icons are both teaching devices and also means of grace, points of contact with God and the saints.

The Seventh Ecumenical Synod among it decrees stipulated that *that veneration and honor shall be paid to the representations of the Lord and of the Saints and that they should be bowed to, and saluted with kisses, and attended with lights and the offering of incense.* And for the greater establishment of the veneration of the holy images, the Seventh Ecumenical Synod anathematized all those who made war against the images, and set forth the veneration, and established it forever, as is evident from the ninth canon of that synod. *That none of the books containing the heresy of the traducers of the Christians are to be hid. ALL the childish devices and mad ravings which have been falsely written against the venerable images, must be delivered up to the Episcopate of Constantinople, that they may be locked away with other*



heretical books. And if anyone is found hiding such books, if he be a bishop or presbyter or deacon, let him be deposed; but if he be a monk or layman, let him be anathema. (Canon IX, 7th Ecumenical Synod).

Concluding Thoughts

One of the greatest pandemics in modern history was that of 1918. Albeit forgotten, it was virus-based pandemic that lasted about 15 months, from spring 1918 to early summer 1919. It infected 500 million people—about a third of the world’s population at the time. Humanity experienced 50,000,000 deaths. Humanity had to concurrently deal with World War I. The Covid-19 experience stands in minuscule comparison, both in terms of its ferocity as well as its mortality. Yet there were no church closures—on the contrary, people flooded the churches in prayer to be delivered from this (true) pandemic. In the adjacent picture, we see the faithful overflowing a cathedral in San Francisco as they crowd fills the street in prayer, with no regard towards “social distancing.” And none of them with any “masks.”

The Covid-19 time-period comes not long after the sad and tragic schism our Church experienced following the Ukrainian mess caused by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The manner by which the Church’s hierarchs are addressing “post-pandemic liturgical practices” will only further divide His Bride and deepen, or perhaps even cause, new schisms. It is rather

apparent that great confusion, anxiety, sadness and a form of a psychological withdrawal is prevailing amongst most the flock. What most of the clergy has and continues to call *oikonomia* we call *paranomia* (lawlessness). And we do not stand alone in our characterization.

The mess that the great majority of western bishops created with this “event,” in the final word, is the clearest indication yet of the complete lack of any spiritual leadership on their part. It is tragic that in this one crucial moment in history, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is blindingly absent. We believe that if the Church of Constantinople had not fallen into its multi-decade ecumenical delusion(s) and preserved the Church’s dogma, then it would command respect among hierarchs and flocks worldwide and all bishops would have looked and followed Phanar’s patristically-based lead. Such fallen, confusing and uncoordinated rules, regulations, policies, procedures and liturgical practices would not have been possible.

In his one and only address to the faithful, the Ecumenical Patriarch exclaimed: “Perhaps some of you have felt that these drastic measures undermine or harm our faith. However, that which is at stake is not our faith—it is the faithful. It is not Christ—it is our Christians. It is not the divine-man—but human beings.”

We beg to differ with the Bishop of Constantinople—since when have wars, serious pandemics, hunger and martyrdom ever compromised the faithful flock? We dare suggest that if anything, they have strengthened it. We instead believe that the newly found liturgical practices being adopted by hierarchs worldwide do undermine the Faith 100%; such practices and teachings damage the possibility of spiritual healing for a great majority of the flock. It is the therapeutic nature of the Church as a spiritual hospital, providing a means for acquiring divine power and grace for the healing of diseases of soul and body, that our bishops must focus upon. As such, litanies and Holy Unction, Confession and Holy Communion are what

the faithful need; worldly pre-occupations with new social norms, isolation, fear, seclusion, and dissociative imaginations are neither Orthodox nor beneficial whatsoever. They are instead the direct product of the Evil One’s influence upon the current **true pandemic of faithlessness**.

As we close our painful post-Paschal thoughts, we also self-reflect and conclude that a lot of what we are experiencing is likely the

result of our (the flock’s) fallen spiritual state. May we improve ourselves, for we remain convinced that should the flock (under the leadership of few brave and patristically-bound dedicated shepherds) repent and pray, God shall send us the bishops we desire. Until then, we will be “stuck” with the hierarchs that we deserve...

Let us stand well, let us stand with fear...



The Holy Orthodox Faith, my beloved, is something that is extremely fragile; She is like a human eye: it cannot tolerate even a loose eyelash. Our Faith is never to be mixed with or allow the entry of any foreign elements. She must remain pure, undefiled, immaculate and untainted.

Blessed Bishop Augustinos Kantiotos of Florina (+2010)



ON THE GOOD SHEPHERD

By the blessed Augoustinos Kantiotis bishop of Florina (+2010), from "Follow Me," Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts (1989), pp. 305-312.

The Image of the Good Shepherd

To represent the love that Peter and the disciples should have, the Lord presented Himself as a shepherd. It is not the first time the Lord used the image of a shepherd; He spoke one other time about shepherds and flock, both in the Old Testament and the New (Pss 22:1-5, 77:72-73, 13, Zach 10:3; Nah 3:18; Isa 40:11, 63:11; Jer 2:8, 3:1-3, 15, 10:21, 12:10; Ezek 34:2-30, 37:24; Mt 9:36, 10:16, 18:12, 25:32-33; Jn 10:1-17; 1 Pet 2:25; Heb 13:20; Eph 4:12). In the Gospel of John (10:1-17) two images are presented. One is the bad shepherd who enters the sheepfold, not through a gate, but another way, and is therefore not a real shepherd but a robber and thief who owes obedience to no one. The other is the beautiful image of the good shepherd who labors and sacrifices himself for the sheep. The Good Shepherd is Christ Himself. He said, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.* (Jn 10:11).

Those who live in the highlands, the livestock-breeding areas of Greece, have a vivid picture of the laborious life shepherds lead. At sunrise they get up and lead their sheep to the cool meadows and to clear water. They guard them from the intense heat of summer and the chill of winter. They care for the sick sheep and heal the wounds of those who have fallen and injured themselves, allowing them to rest in the shade of trees. They amuse the sheep with flutes but carry a sling and weapons to drive away packs of robbers and thieves like the beasts of the forest that come out at night to devour the sheep.

A beautiful image of the shepherd can be found in 1 Samuel (17:34-35). David was a shepherd, the youngest son of Jesse. Let's see how he describes his own life as a shepherd. When, as an adolescent he presented himself to King Saul, seeking permission to do battle against the giant, Goliath, he said: *I watched over my father's flock in the wilderness, where there are wild beasts, lions and bears. I did not allow them to come near. I struck them. One day a lion ... snatched a sheep from me, but I did not let him leave undefeated. I defeated him. I took the sheep from his mouth. He attacked me, but I took the*

lion by the throat and struck. I squeezed his throat and strangled him. O King, I fought and defeated the beast that wanted to eat my sheep, how can I allow that dishonorable foreigner Goliath, who frightens the people of God, to go on? I look at him as one of the beasts of the desert which I attack, fight, and strangle. It was the shepherd's life David had in mind when, as king of Israel, he wrote the 23rd Psalm.

In this beautiful psalm, the Lord is presented as a shepherd and believers as sheep that go in love under the strong protection of their Good Shepherd. It is as if David were saying, "Lord, when I was a shepherd, I let no sheep be devoured by beasts. My sheep were secure under my pastorage; how shall I not be safe in Your love and protection, for You must see me as a sheep in Your holy flock. If you are my shepherd, how could I hunger, thirst, or become the food of wild beasts? No, Lord, You love me; You care for me; it is my steadfast belief that *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.* (Ps 23:1-2).

The image of the good shepherd should be in the minds of all those who lead those souls for whom Christ shed His precious Blood.

The Care of Souls

Have you been installed as the pastor of a parish or diocese? Look out for yourself and your flock. Be an affectionate father and a vigilant guardian of Jesus' holy flock. Not a single sheep should perish. You should undertake the various concerns for the sheep. Are there children in your district? Treat them with special affection.

They are like those children whom Christ loved and blessed. They are the favored lambs of your flock. By reason of their age, they are in special need of good care, especially in difficult times when the cold winds of disbelief and corruption blow, chilling the sheep. Are there young adults? They are still inexperienced, like the young sheep that leave the fold for the first time. Warn them about the cliffs. Are there mature, older people in spirit rather than body? Like the lambs that stop nursing and feed on the grass, so these seek suitable food.

It is your duty to discover, to constantly uncover. You must not leave your sheep without food for even one day. Lead your reasoning sheep to the green fields, to the meadows, to the boundless pages of Holy Scripture. Guide them to the crystal waters of the great Fathers and Teachers of the



Gospel. In hot times, in times of pain and affliction, let your sheep rest beneath the shadow of the Cross, and if there are times of leisure and gaiety, entertain your sheep with your pipes, with sweet songs of love for Christ. But while playing your pipes, *have your sling ready beside you*. Before you know it, **the wild beasts of the plains—the faithless, the godless, and the heretical—will try to make inroads into Christ’s flock**. Draw your sling; use words of rebuke to drive the beasts away. Be ever vigilant.

If, however, you are informed that a reasoning sheep, attracted by a little grass on a sheer cliff, has slipped and fallen over the precipice of sin and deception, do not delay. Run and do everything you can to pull your sheep from the rocks of destruction. Save it, even if it is in the mouth of a lion, wolf, or bear. Was it hurt by its fall? Clean the wound. Use oil and wine. Did it become sick? Call the physicians; furnish a suitable, effective medicine for every ailment of soul. Has it been assailed by an incurable illness? Has it become mangy? Though you are very sad, do not hesitate. Distance it as quickly as possible from the flock, so that the illness is not transmitted to the healthy sheep. (For an analogy of one with spiritual malignancy to a mangy sheep, whereby because of the seriousness of the illness, the persistence of evil, and the contagiousness of the disease, the animal must be separated from the flock).

A bright reminder of the pastor’s spiritual love is an epistle of St. Basil which he sent to a fallen monk. He first scolds him for his great fall by which so many souls were offended, but does not want to leave him to fall into the terrible gulf of despair. He appeals to him, saying: *Arise quickly; raise your eyes to heaven, come into consciousness, cease from your evil... It is salvation; it is repair. Be of good courage, do not despair*. (Epistle 44, “To a Fallen Monk”).

Be vigilant at all times. Constantly listen in the mystical ears of your soul to the command of the Chief Shepherd Christ, *Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep*.

The Lord’s words resounded in the ears of Peter. The image of the good shepherd was stamped on his mind. Addressing himself to the presbyters of the Church, Peter gave them this icon of the good shepherd and said: *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*. (1 Pet 5:2-4).

Questions for Today’s Pastors

Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep. We who call ourselves pastors should stop and meditate on these words of the Lord. Make them a spiritual scale to weigh yourself. Come and be weighed, everyone, from deacon to patriarch. Let each place his hand on his chest and ask, “Have I taken an interest in souls? Have I been concerned with bringing up

a new generation in the Lord? Do my lambs listen to my voice and come to me? Are my young people led by my love, by suitable teaching? Do I feed hungering Christian souls with choice food? Do I speed to save those in spiritual and natural human danger? Do I play the pipes, yet carry my sling? Do I claim the law of God? Do I champion the rights of my holy flock? Do I make war against evil? Do I fight the beasts, so that I can say with Paul “I am ready, like the ever-memorable shepherds and teachers of the Church, to sacrifice myself when my flock is in danger? Does the idea of sacrifice and martyrdom move me?”

In the official journalistic arm of the Church of Greece, a modern church writer, Constantine Callinicos, published three weighty articles on the catechism of our children, titled “Feed My Lambs.” In these articles he answers the complaints of those who fight against catechetical schools. He considers the catechesis of children and the young most important to the life of the Church—Didactic and moving is this blessed writer’s lines to the catechists through which he closes these articles: *Feed My lambs* is the Lord’s command, and conforming to this, Greek catechist, close your ears to the later arguments of inactivity. Consecrate your life to the form of the conscious and unbreakable members of Christ. Love those souls for whom Christ died. Teach to them the perceived and undoubted faith of our Orthodox Church. Make them into the invincible arrows of propagandists. Show them that the Christian religion is not only a frown but a smile, a poem, a song and vigor of body and soul, and armor for tomorrow. Find together with the blessings of God you will rejoice all your life in the gratitude of your students. Truly I tell you, the hairs of these little children will grow white, but their memory of you, who guided them from the proper age to Christ our Savior, will never fade.” (“Ecclesia,” vol 1924, p. 125).

Shepherds of the twentieth century, answer these and a thousand other questions that come from the depths of your hearts as to whether you are on course as spiritual guides. If your conscience answers, “yes,” you can say that you love Jesus the Nazarene, and as a sure sign of this love you have His concern for the sheep. But if the answer is “no,” then you should fear because you do not love Jesus the Nazarene; you are His enemy and foe, and from the inside, from the altar, you make the worst war against His holy religion, undermining and throwing down the strongholds of faith and morals. Because of you, His name is blasphemed among the Gentiles. Because of you the tabernacle of David has become poor. Because of you, the sheep have become swine and the churches are without congregations.

The Church is in a miserable condition today. Many who are celebrants of the Mysteries and many who are endowed with the *Epitrachelion* and *Omophorion* are also exploiters of the sacred and the holy, merchants and traders of Christ.

How many shepherds are there in whom we recognize the Good Shepherd?

The Sweet Hope

In the midst of this gloom there is a ray of hope. What is it? It is the three or more thousand young people who in the last years studied in theological schools and seminaries and are still there. These are the candidate pastors and teachers of tomorrow.

Will these young men augment the number of bad shepherds? It would be the greatest spiritual calamity if these young people imitate the worst examples of the past generation. Let them not copy the example of the bad shepherds, but let them extend the Church into the Future with the heroes and martyrs among the clergy in mind. Even though they are young, let them gaze upon the shining examples like the 300 or more priests who were slaughtered on a day of national tragedy, putting up their lives for their sheep. Let them gaze at the icon of the Crucifixion, the good Shepherd, and let them hear His voice which says to every one of us: "My child, do you wish to be a missionary? Do you wish to become a clergyman in these days? Do you love Me more than all your parishioners? Do you love Me more than these?"

To these questions do not be quick to answer. Search deep in your heart. Meet with an experienced spiritual father, and if, after a thorough and strict investigation of your inner life, your conscience tells you a true desire for Christ burns in your heart, then kneel before the Crucifix and say the prayer of your heart, "Lord, I love You." You will hear His voice reach the depths of your soul saying, *Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep.*

Amen.



My blessed children, the holy Fathers teach that a man's heart is entangled with the prickly roots of various passions which are lodged very deep within it. When a person, through enlightenment of God, attempts to uproot (in essence, to transfigure) a passion, he grips and removes the rootlets with forceps. However, as he attempts to uproot each passion, he simultaneously lacerates the heart. When the heart is cut open, it bleeds and hurts. If a person decides not to bear the pain, he gives up at that point, he abandons the struggle, and thus remains passionate and sinful. If, however, he patiently endures the pain, he removes the root of the passion and is set free.

Blessed saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona (+2019)

ON THE MODERN WORLD

By the saintly Archbishop Averky of blessed memory (+1976).

We are living in a strange time, when all the true and healthy Christian concepts are being replaced by false and deceitful concepts, discovered often with an evil intention with the undoubted intention, naturally, of drawing people away from the right path of a truly Christian life. In all of this there can be discerned some kind of rationally acting black hand which is working to bind people as tightly as possible to this temporary, earthly life by forcing them to forget the future life, the eternal life assuredly awaiting us all.

We must be clearly aware of the kind of time in which we live. Indeed, only a spiritually blind man, or one who had already sold his soul to the enemies of our holy faith and Church, could fail to sense the spirit of the approaching Antichrist in everything which is now happening in the world. Of what sort of genuine union of all Christians in the spirit of Christian love can one speak now when the Truth is denied by almost everyone, when deceit is in control almost everywhere, when a genuinely spiritual life among people who call themselves Christians has dried up and been replaced by a carnal life, an animal life which has nonetheless been placed on a pedestal and concealed by the idea of pretended charity which hypocritically justifies any sort of spiritual excess, any sort of moral anarchy. Indeed, it is from this that are derived all these numberless "balls," various kinds of "games," "dances" and amusements toward which, despite their immoral, anti-Christian nature, even my modern clergymen have a tolerant attitude, sometimes even organizing them themselves and participating in them.

A terrible, unrelieved, hopeless unscrupulousness has taken possession of many people. The true doctrine of the faith and the Church for which the first Christians died in such tortures has become a hollow sound for the majority of modern "Christians." They neither know this doctrine, nor do they desire to know it, for they are indifferent to it.

Dull, cold indifference to almost anything which bears the imprint of ideological content and seeking in everything only one's own personal advantage. This is the character of our time.

This lack of ideological content, this unscrupulousness accompanied by departure from the true faith and the Church and by indifference to them is the basic, fundamental sin of which we, Russian Orthodox Christians, must repent.

It is not for us to enjoy ourselves, to amuse ourselves, to dance on the grave of Russia, brought down to its deathbed by us, but rather to repent in tears, really to repent, as the Holy Church teaches us, with a firm intention to change our life radically, to renew our spirit.

HOW AND HOW MUCH TO PRAY

Source: "Watchfulness and Prayer, Themes from the Philokalia, No. 1," published by the Holy Monastery of St. Gregory Palamas, Koufalia, Thessaloniki, Greece, 2nd edition (1998), pg. 60-69.

We know people who can walk in the midst of noise and the crowds of Athens, who can walk through Omonoia Square (center of Athens, Greece, *Ed.*) and the most central streets of the capital with their mind undistracted, free, surrendered to unceasing prayer. This means that the prayer has brought about in their souls the divine attraction of Christ, the sacred magnetism of Heaven and Heavenly life.

Nikitas Stithatos writes: *He who succeeds in attaining real prayer and floods his being with the love of Christ, does not become a prisoner to his emotions nor does he become attached to anything.* [St. Nikitas Stithatos was the disciple and biographer of St. Symeon the New Theologian; he is far less well known to us than St. Symeon himself. Born around the beginning of the eleventh century, at an early age (c. 1020) Nikitas entered the monastery of Studios at Constantinople, and there he remained as a monk for the rest of his life, being ordained in due course to the priesthood. His personal contact with the New Theologian cannot have lasted very long, for the latter died in 1022. *Ed.*].

My brother, pray with simplicity and peace, calmly and plainly, like the gentle breeze, like your breath. Only concentrate all your emotions, all your will around the holy Name of the Lord. Let His Name penetrate your soul like a drop of oil saturates a cloth. Surrender all your being and lock it inside His Name.

Yet you will never soften your soul, you will not make it fruitful, fertile, *good soil* (Mt 13:8), until you teach it to cry and mourn, and be contrite before the Cross of the Lord for its sinfulness and for the sins of the whole world, in which it feels it has a share.

Even today there are ascetics, who weep with a universal, life-long lament as they pray for the evil of the world.

Once in a while, before you begin, or during prayer, during a break, and also after fatigue, open the Holy Scripture and take delight in its divine meadows. You will find *green pastures* to "lie down" (Pss 23:2); you will discover the natural environment your soul seeks. Its hunger and thirst for Christ will be satisfied. Christ is the focal point of Holy Scripture. That is why the prayer of the heart will make you embrace

Holy Scripture consuming you with longing for it. And Holy Scripture will again spontaneously return the Name of Christ to your lips and heart.

In order for every prayer to be acceptable to God and bring forth fruit, it must be said with concentration and the gathering of the mind. If you have a lot of concerns in your work, turn your mind to Christ and unceasing prayer, which will give you strength and will guard you so that the *thorns of the cares of the world* (Mt 13:22) will not choke you.

At the appointed hour of the prayer rule *lay aside all worldly cares* (Cherubic hymn) and lift up your mind and heart unto the Lord. In order to fly, every bird first rallies around and then centralizes its strength. The greatest success for the cultivation of the prayer of the heart is precisely that concentration of the intellect, the release from every parasite that sucks it dry. We, beginners, need to curb our intellect and force it to stay within itself and occupy itself exclusively

with the words of the prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.*

St. Nicodemus the Hagiote and many holy Fathers advise the beginners to bow the head and briefly hold the breath as a means of helping the intellect in its self-concentration: *Lord Jesus Christ—inhale—have mercy on me—exhale.*

This can be done for a short time until our intellect is curbed. Later on, let the prayer roll lightly like a stream and, without interruption, water the interior depths of our being. All our attention should be given to the words of the *prayer*.

Another proven way of saying the *prayer* is to take a deep breath while reciting it five, six, or seven times: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.*

In the beginning, as we said, let us force ourselves to say the *prayer* out loud or whispered with a fast cadence, so that the intellect will not have time to form any distracting thoughts. After a considerable time, our intellect will then get used to praying mentally and will become sweetened, as if it had tasted honey. We will want to say the *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me* continually, and whenever we break off, the interruption will sadden us.

Our intellect is the *purveyor of the soul*. Its task is to take what it sees and hears to the heart, the center of man's spiritual and physical being. Therefore, when we say the *prayer* and do not think about anything else, but pay attention to its words, then while we breathe lightly, the intellect with its own effort and will takes the prayer down to the heart



and keeps it there, reciting it rhythmically. This goes on until the Grace of God overshadows our soul. His Grace is the moving force. It moves everything.

In the beginning the Grace of the prayer is purifying; afterwards it becomes enlightening. Grace will come after much struggle and effort, tears and mourning, provided we pray wherever we are: walking, lying down, standing up, working, night and day. When the intellect tires, the prayer should be recited orally. When the lips tire, it should be given back to the intellect, until it is filled, saturated. Then the prayer will become energy. In other words, at that time Grace works even without the will of man, when someone may be eating, sleeping, working, or walking, while within him the "prayer" awakens and shouts, flooding him with peace and heavenly joy.

When at last you have prayed sufficiently, according to what you want, you can stop at one or two words of the prayer where your spirit finds rest and your heart is sweetened. For example, let your intellect and lips repeatedly say, *Jesus Jesus, my Jesus, or my Lord*, slowly and without interruption, with longing that brings tears, with compunction and love.

St Basil the Great notes: *An intellect undistracted by external things and not dispersed through the senses among worldly things, returns to itself, and from itself it ascends to God by an unerring path.*

We discover the realm of God when the intellect turns and enters the heart. *The Kingdom of God is within us.* When man returns unto himself, he feels with uncontained longing the yearning for the pristine beauty which is found in the Name and Person of Jesus Christ.

Every word of the prayer locks inside it a depth of the knowledge and wisdom of God. We can live all of Jesus, all the Gospels, all the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit, all the mystery of the world, by means of the Name of the Lord Jesus. Within that cry of the seeking of divine mercy we are conscious of all the grandeur of the Divine Incarnation, the pain of the Fall, and the joy of our Adoption.

The struggle to keep the *prayer* inside our intellect is not only due to its natural weakness and tendency to wander, it also results from the rabid and covert attack of the devil. However, in time our persistence will win. Our mind be-

longs to God and, little by little, it must become the *mind of Christ*.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite calls the return of our intellect to itself and subsequently to the heart unwavering, cyclic. For just as the circumference of a circle returns again to itself and unites, so also with the intellect: it returns to itself by means of this cyclic motion and becomes one.

St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite writes: *Once in the heart, do not let your intellect remain idle, but find the indwelling Logos that enables us to think and compose Spiritual works, judge and examine inwardly and read entire books without the mouth speaking a word. Once the intellect has found this "indwelling Logos," do not allow it to say anything else but the words of the prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Just as God transcends all sensible and intelligible things, so must the intellect rise above things perceptible and intelligible in order to unite with God.*

Let your will with love adhere completely to the words of the prayer, so that the intellect, the *indwelling Logos* and your will, these three aspects of your soul, may become one. Thus, it appears that man is an icon of the Holy Trinity, as St. Gregory Palamas writes: *When the single mind is threefold, while yet remaining single, it is united with the Divine Threefold Oneness, closes the door to delusion and rises above the domination of the flesh, the world, and the prince of this world.*

The quantity of prayer depends entirely on our volition. The holy Fathers write that one cannot practice perfect prayer of the heart without devoting a great deal of time to it.

How much should we pray, then? Unceasingly. Without interruption. Since the devil, the enemy of our soul, fights us without ceasing, we too should unceasingly make use of the fearful and omnipotent weapon of the divine Name.

Since we are in danger of falling into sin every moment and of grieving the Lord, let us unceasingly repeat His saving Name. Let us also ask Him for His mercy. St. Diadochos of Photiki says that when man calls-upon the Name of God as frequently as he can, he does not fall easily into sin.

As long as we desire to find Jesus incessantly within us, let us call Him unceasingly. Inasmuch as we want our heart to be ablaze with the incorporeal fire of divine love, let us nourish this fire with unceasing prayer. And, as long as we do not want our mind to be imprisoned by vain and cunning



thoughts, let us give it the “loftier thought” of unceasing prayer. Let this become its “good change,” its pleasure, its delight, its nourishment: the sweeter-than-honey Name of Jesus.

My brother, frequent repetition and ceaselessness of prayer will bring you the fruit that you desire. Do not worry if, in spite of all your effort, you feel internal dryness. Persist. Fruit is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit *bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth.* (Jn 3:8). What God asks of us is to pray, to pray as often as we breathe.

It is imperative that we “pursue the prayer” for many years with a system, with asceticism by forcing ourselves. For our mind is scattered, diffused, and with difficulty is restrained in the center, its objective, its happiness which is Jesus. But with time, however, a blessed day will come when, instead of us “pursuing the prayer,” it will pursue us. It will spring out, it will gush up, it will overflow from inside the heart, it will charm the mind with the very delightful name, the “name which is above every name.” (Phil 2:9). A blessed time will come then, when although we may be walking, talking, eating, sleeping, the heart will talk to Christ, her adored Bridegroom. “I sleep, but my heart is

Awake. (Cant 5:2)

Apart from our attempt to pray everywhere and always, under whatever circumstances, it is imperative for us to have daily a designated period in a specific quiet place for regular prayer of the heart. This will be regulated by our spiritual father.

Frequent practice of [prayer] will teach us attentiveness. Quantity will certainly lead on to quality. *If you want to learn to do something well whatever it may be you must do it as often as possible.* (*The Way of the Pilgrim*, p. 209). In deed. That is how it is. The athlete who wants to succeed in a certain sport struggles, trains and repeats his attempt to improve his performance and to assure victory. The scientist repeats the experiment in his laboratory—even if he fails many times—for a conquest in the field of medicine, technology, etc. The artist repaints the same work many times until he ends with his classic creation.

The same thing happens with the Christian who wants to become an athlete, craftsman and artist of prayer. He repeats the words of the prayer *Lord Jesus Christ... have mercy on me.* In the beginning with effort, with patience on the untamable mind, but with longing and assurance that he will gain victory over his former nature. He will conquer the Name of Jesus, he will imprint it perfectly with the seal of prayer.

Staretz Amvrosy, one of the renowned ascetics of the Russian Church, insisted a great deal on the cultivation of the Jesus Prayer. He had the advice of St. John Climacus as the rule of his life. *Flog your enemies with the Name of Jesus; for there is no stronger weapon in heaven or on earth.* (Ladder

21:7). He would relate much to stress the importance of mental prayer. Amongst others, he would tell this impressive story also:

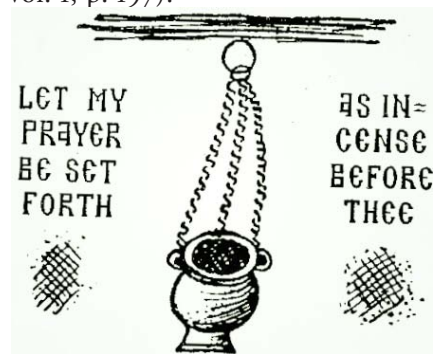
“A certain devout Christian had a myna bird in his house, which he was teaching to speak. The bird also learned the words, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*, which that Christian repeated often. One summer day it found the window open and flew out to the street. Then a hawk saw it from on high and rushed toward it. The bird, surprised by the attack, instead of another cry, cried out the prayer, and the hawk—an extraordinary thing—pulled back at once as if someone was chasing it away.

“What do we notice here?” the Staretz concluded. “That, even if the Jesus prayer is said unconsciously, it has its results and makes possible the impossible.”

Struggle, therefore, brother, with all your strength to pray without interruption. The more you persist, the faster you will become accustomed to it. The tongue and lips get used to the prayer and, without you realizing it, the companionship of the prayer will become your permanent property. If at some time, for some reason, it stops, you will feel as though you are missing something vital. Your mind will seek Jesus with longing. For frequent prayer creates such a strong habit that will soon become second nature. That is the goal you must attain.

You cannot be called a Christian if you do not pray often. All the saints prayed continually and with ardor. Therefore, become a practitioner of unceasing prayer. It will give enlightenment to your mind, because it will always be found underneath and within the enlightening Name of Jesus Who is the Sun of Righteousness and the light of the world.

Truly blessed is the man whose mind and heart are as closely attached to the Jesus Prayer... as air to the body or flame to the wax. The sun rising over the earth creates daylight and the venerable and holy Name of the Lord Jesus; shining continually in the mind gives birth to countless intellections radiant as the sun. (St. Hesychios the Priest, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 197).



The spiritual level of a family is not measured by the quantity of prayers, but in the degree of harmony and spiritual rest that they have in their household.

Mother Magdalena of Essex

TIMELY PROPHECIES

From various Orthodox sources.

How will the clergy and monks be in the latter days? What do our saints say?

Saint Hippolytus of Rome: *The shepherds will be like wolves; the priests will embrace falsehood; the monks will lust after the things of the world.*

Saint Kosmas Aitolos: *A time will come when the harmony that exists now between clergy and laymen will not be. Clergymen will become worse and more impious than everyone.*

Abba Pambo: *And I'll tell you this, my child, that the days will come when the Christians will add to and will take away from, and will alter the books of the Holy Evangelists, and of the Holy Apostles, and of the Divine Prophets, and of the Holy Fathers. They will tone down the Holy Scriptures and will compose troparia, hymns, and writings technologically. Their nous (souls) will be spilled out among them, and will become alienated from its Heavenly Prototype. For this reason, the Holy Fathers had previously encouraged the monks of the desert to write down the lives of the Fathers not onto parchment, but onto paper, because the coming generation will change them to suit their own personal tastes. So you see, the evil that comes will be horrible.*

Saint Nilus the Myrrhstreamer of Mount Athos: *When the advent of Antichrist draws near, people's reasoning will be obscured because of carnal passions while profanity and indecency will prevail. People will become unrecognizable; people's faces will be disfigured; men will not be distinguishable from women because of their shameless garments and the hair on their heads. Then they will become wild and will resemble the beasts because they will be seduced by Antichrist... The Churches of God will be deprived of God-fearing and pious pastors, and woe to the Christians remaining in the world at that time; they will completely lose their faith because they will lack the opportunity of seeing the light of knowledge from anyone at all... The Christians' shepherds, Archpriests and priests, will be conceited and will no longer recognize the right path from the left...*

Abba Moses: *In those days ... in the church will prevail abbots and shepherds without any practice in a life of virtues, lacking faith... unable to distinguish a righteous path from the wrong one, complacent and preoccupied with the daily cares... having attained their position via bribes... not knowing how to catechize and lead the flock. The ignorance, negligence, scorn*

and disdain of shepherds shall result in the abandonment and loss of many brethren.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem: *We seek our own sign of His coming; we Churchmen seek a sign proper to the Church. And the Savior says, "And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." (Mt 24:10). If you hear that bishops advance against bishops, and clergy against clergy, and laity against laity even unto blood, be not troubled; for it has been written before.*

A long time ago (during the 4th century) when some monks inquired as to how people will live during the several upcoming generation and how the monks and clergy shall behave, Abba Ischyron said the following: *We ourselves have fulfilled the commandments of God. Those that come after us, will struggle to achieve half of our works. And those who come after them, the men of that generation will not accomplish any works at all and great temptations will come upon them; and those who shall patiently endure and hold the Faith to the end, they will be deemed greater than any of us or our Fathers (the saints).*

Saint Ambrosy of Optina (also known as Starets Ambrosy): *Hard times will come; and as the Apostle says, behold, due to poverty in piety heresies and schisms will appear in the churches; and as the Holy Fathers foretold, then on the thrones of hierarchs and in monasteries there will be no men to be found that are tested and experienced in the spiritual life. Wherefore, heresies will spread everywhere and deceive many. The enemy of mankind will act skillfully, and whenever possible he will lead the chosen ones to heresy. He will not begin by discarding the dogmas on the Holy*

Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ, or the Theotokos, but will unnoticeably start to distort the Teachings of the Holy Fathers, in other words the teachings of the Church herself. The cunning of the enemy and his "tipics" (ways) will be noticed by very few -- only those that are most experienced in spiritual life. Heretics will take over the Church, everywhere, and they will appoint their servants, and spirituality will be neglected. But the Lord will not leave His servants without protection. Truly, their real duty is persecution of true pastors and their imprisonment; for without that, the spiritual flock may not become captured by the heretics. Therefore, my son, when you see in the Churches mocking of the Divine act, of the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and of God's established order, know that the heretics are already present. Be also aware that, for some time, they might hide their evil intentions, or they might covertly deform the divine faith, so that they better succeed by deceiving and tricking the inexperienced.



Ὑπακοή στους Ἁγίους Σὲ τοῦτα τὰ ἁγιασμένα χώματα μάθαμε νὰ κάνουμε ὕπακοή στους ἁγίους καὶ τοὺς ἥρωές μας

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτριος Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος-Κιλκίς.

Οἱ καμπάνες καὶ τὰ σήμαντρα νὰ μὴν χτυποῦν, τὰ μεγάφωνα γιὰ νὰ ἀκοῦν οἱ ἐνορίτες κλειστά. Μὲς στὸ ναὸ μόνον ὁ παπᾶς καὶ ὁ ψάλτης. Ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία ἐστὶν μετάδοσης τῆς ἀσθένειας. Ἀστυνομία καὶ συλλήψεις. Πρόστιμα καὶ φυλάκιση.

Ὅπως τὰ παραθέτω νομίζεις ὅτι διαβάξεις εἰκόνας ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας ἢ τῆς κομμουνιστικῆς Σοβιετίας καὶ τὶς διώξεις τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ. Ἀντίσταση καμμία. «Τώρα νὰ ὑπακούσουμε στὸ κράτος καὶ μετὰ ... χαρὲς καὶ πανηγύρια». Μάλιστα. Βγαίνει ὁ Ναυπάκτου ὡς κυβερνητικὸς ἐκπρόσωπος καὶ ὁ Πέτσας ὡς ἐκπρόσωπος τῆς Ἱεραρχίας. Οὔτε ἓνα ὄχι δὲν ἀκούστηκε. Παραπέμπουν στους Πατέρες,

οἱ ὁποῖοι τοὺς διαψεύδουν καὶ τοὺς ἐλέγχουν καὶ ψάχνουν ἐναγωνίως κείμενα ὑποστηρικτικὰ τοῦ προσκυνήματος στους ἐφήμερους ἄρχοντες.

Τί διαβάζουμε ὁμῶς στὴν Ἱερὰ Ἱστορία; Τί ἔπρατταν οἱ ἅγιοι ὅταν ἡ ἐξουσία αὐθαιρετοῦσε εἰς βάρος τῆς Πίστεως;

Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος ἀποστόμωσε μὲ τὴν ἀνδρεία καὶ τὴν ὀρθόδοξη ἀρχοντιά του τὸν ἱταμὸ ὑπαρχο Μόδεστο καὶ τὶς ἀπειλές του: «Τὴν δὲ βασιλέως φιλίαν μέγα μὲν ἠγοῦμαι μετ' εὐσεβείας, ἄνευ δὲ ταύτης ὀλεθρίαν ἀποκαλῶ». (Ἀναφερόταν στὸν αὐτοκράτορα Οὐάλη, ὁ ὁποῖος ταχθεὶς ὑπὲρ τῶν αἰρετικῶν Ἀρειανῶν, ἤθελε νὰ καταβάλλει κάθε ἀντίσταση).

Ὁ ἅγιος Ἀμβρόσιος, ἐπίσκοπος Μεδιολάνων, ἠλεγξε δριμύτατα καὶ ἀπαγόρευσε στὸν Μέγα Θεοδόσιο τὴν εἴσοδο στὸν ναό, λέγοντάς του ὅτι ἐπιβάλλεται, ὅπως μιμήθηκε τὸν Δαυὶδ στὸ ἀποτρόπαιο ἔγκλημά του, νὰ τὸν μιμηθεῖ καὶ στὴν υψοποιοῦ μετάνοια. Καὶ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας ἀναγκάστηκε, μετὰ τῆς συνοδείας του, νὰ... ἀποχωρήσει συντετριμμένος καὶ νὰ ὑποβληθεῖ σὲ ὀκτάμηνο μετάνοια γιὰ τὴν σφαγὴ τῶν ἀθῶων στὸν ἱππόδρομο τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης.

Ὁ στῦλος καὶ πρόμαχος τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἅγιος Μάρκος ὁ Εὐγενικός, ὅταν σχεδὸν ὅλη ἡ ἀντιπροσωπεία, ποὺ συνόδευε τὸν αὐτοκράτορα

Ἰωάννη Ἡ' τὸν Παλαιολόγο, στὴν ψευτοσύνοδο Φερράρας-Φλωρεντίας, κραύγαζε «στέργομεν, καλὸν ἐστὶν ἡ ἔνωσις», ἀρνήθηκε ὁ ἅγιος νὰ ὑπακούσει σὲς ὀργισμένες προτροπές τοῦ Ἰωάννη. Ἐπιτίμησε μάλιστα καὶ τὸν θλιβερὸ λατινόφρονα Βησσαρίωνα, τὸ παπικὸ «κοπέλι». Ἡ ὑπερήφανη καὶ ἀγέρωχη στάση τοῦ ἁγίου προκάλεσε τὸν σεβασμὸ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, ποὺ τὸν διαβεβαίωσε ὅτι θὰ τοῦ ἐξασφαλίσαι ἀνενόχλητη παλιννόστηση. (Καὶ ἡ ἐπιτημένη καὶ ἀταπεινῶτη παπικὴ ὀφρὺς ὁμολόγησε τὸ περίφημο «οὐδὲν ἐποιήσαμεν», θρίαμβος τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ τοῦ Γένους μας. Φοβάμαι ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ μεγαλοπρεπὲς «οὐδὲν» τῆς παπικῆς ἀποτυχίας, κινδυνεύει σήμερα νὰ διαγραφεῖ καὶ νὰ παραμείνει μόνον τοῦ τὸ κακοφοβερόν «ἐποιήσαμεν»).

Ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, μὲ ὑπέροχη παρηρσία καὶ ἀκατάβλητη τόλμη, στηλίτευσε τὴν αὐτοκράτειρα Εὐδοξία, γιὰ τὴν ἀνέγερση, ἐπὶ πορφυροῦ κίονος, ἀνδριάντα τῆς, ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸν ναὸ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ Σοφίας. Ἀντηχεῖ στους αἰῶνες ἡ ἀνδροκάρδιος φράση του: «Πάλιν Ἡρωιδᾶς μαίνεται, πάλιν ταράσσεται, πάλιν ὀρχεῖται, πάλιν ἐπὶ πίνακι τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ Ἰωάννου ζητεῖ λαβεῖν». Γιὰ ἓνα ἄγαλμα ἔξωθεν τοῦ ναοῦ ἀντέδρασε ἔτσι



ὁ ἅγιος. Σήμερα ποὺ οἱ ποικιλώνυμοι ἐκκλησιομάχοι διασύρουν τὴν πίστη, τοὺς ἐπαινοῦν καὶ σκύβουν τὸ κεφάλι στὰ ἐντάλματά τους. (Πόσοι ἀπὸ τοὺς σημερινούς «ἄρχοντες» τοῦ λαοῦ, ἀνταποκρίνονται σὲς προδιαγραφές ποὺ θέτει ὁ ἅγιος Χρυσόστομος: «Τὸν γὰρ ἄρχοντα παντὸς λαμπτήρος λαμπρότερον εἶναι δεῖ καὶ βίον ἔχειν ἀκηλίδωτον, ὥστε πάντας πρὸς ἐκείνον ὄραν καὶ πρὸς τὸν αὐτοῦ βίον τὸν οἰκεῖον χαρακτηρίζει». Ποῖος ἀπὸ τοὺς σημερινούς ἔχει «βίον ἀκηλίδωτον» καὶ ἀποτελεῖ παράδειγμα-«οἰκεῖον»—πρὸς μίμηση;).

Διαβάσαμε καὶ εἶδαμε τοῦτες τὶς ἡμέρες γιὰ ἐλάφια καὶ ἀρκούδες, ζῶα μικρὰ μετὰ μεγάλων, ποὺ σεργιανίζουν ξεφρόντιστα σὲς ἔρημες πόλεις τῆς τρομοκρατημένης Εὐρώπης. Θυμήθηκα ἓνα κείμενο τοῦ ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελιμίροβιτς. Περιέχεται στὸ ἐκπληκτικὸ βιβλίον, τὸ ὁποῖο ἐξέδωσαν οἱ θαυμάσιες ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη»—πολὺ σπουδαῖο τὸ ἔργο τους, ἔργο ἀποστολικό, τὸ ὁποῖο δροσιζει καὶ

ἀναπαύει πολλές ψυχές. Τὸ βιβλίον τιτλοφορεῖται: «Μέσα Ἀπὸ τὸ Παράθυρο τῆς Φυλακῆς, Μηνύματα στὸ Λαό». Πόνημα περισπούδαστο, «κάθε του λόγος εἶναι Εὐαγγέλιο, κάθε λέξη του ἓνα μικρὸ Εὐαγγέλιο», ὅπως γράφει στὸν πρόλογο ὁ ἕτερος Σέρβος ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς. Ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος, τὸ 1944, μεταφέρθηκε στὸ γνωστὸ κολαστήριον τοῦ Νταχάου, ὅπου καὶ συνέγραψε τὰ κεῖμενα τοῦ βιβλίου.

Στὸ πόνημά του ἀκτινοσκοπεῖ μὲ ἀκριβεία τὸν λεγόμενον εὐρωπαϊκὸ πολιτισμὸ, τὸν ἄθεο πολιτισμὸ τοῦ Πάπα καὶ τοῦ Λούθηρου.

Γράφει στὴ σελίδα 108: «Στενοχωριέμαι γιὰ τὴν Εὐρώπη, γιατί θὰ καταστραφεῖ ὅπως ἡ Καπερναοῦμ. Οἱ περήφανοι πύργοι της θὰ καταστραφοῦν καὶ οἱ λεωφόροι της θὰ μετατραποῦν σὲ τόπους ποὺ θὰ φυτρώσουν θάμνοι μὲ ἀγκάθια, ὅπου θὰ κάνουν τὴ φωλιά τους τὰ φίδια. Στὸν τόπο ποὺ τώρα ἀκούγονται φωνὲς ἐναντίον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, θὰ ἀκούγονται κραυγὲς ἀπὸ κουκουβάγιες καὶ τσακάλια.

Τὴ στιγμὴ ποὺ ἡ Εὐρώπη νόμισε γὰ τὸν ἑαυτὴ της πὼς ἐκπολιτίστηκε, τότε ἦταν ποὺ ἀγρίεψε. Τὴ στιγμὴ ποὺ νόμισε πὼς τὰ ἤξερε ὅλα, τότε ἦταν ποὺ παραφρόνησε. Τὴ στιγμὴ ποὺ νόμισε ὅτι ἀπέκτησε μεγάλη δύναμη, τότε ἦταν ποὺ ἔχασε ὅλη τὴ δύναμη».

Τὴν Μεγάλῃ Ἑβδομάδῃ δὲν ἀκούσαμε ψαλμοδίες καὶ καμπάνες στὶς πόλεις, ἀλλὰ σκυλιὰ νὰ γαβγίζουν καὶ τσακάλια νὰ οὐρλιάζουν. Θὰ μᾶς ἀπαντήσουν ποτὲ γιατί ἀπαγορεύτηκαν αὐτά; Ἄν αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι πόλεμος κατὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ τότε τί εἶναι; Καὶ σὲ τοῦτα τὰ ἁγιασμένα χῶματα μάθαμε νὰ κάνουμε ὑπακοὴ στοὺς ἁγίους καὶ στοὺς ἥρωές μας. «Ὅταν μοῦ πειράζουν τὴν Πατρίδα καὶ Θρησκεία μου, θὰ μιλήσω. θὰ νεργήσω κι ὅτι θέλουν ἄς μοῦ κάμουν».



Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ὁ κόσμος, δὲν θὰ διορθωθῇ ἀπὸ ἑσένα Ἐνὼ ἐσὺ θὰ διορθωθῆς, θὰ τελειωθῆς, θὰ φωτισθῆς, διὰ νὰ φωτίσης τοὺς θέλοντας.

Τὸν κόσμον μόνον ὁ πόλεμος θὰ τὸν διορθώσῃ ὅπου ἤδη θὰ ἔλθῃ ἢ καὶ ἔρχεται μετὰ καλπασμοῦ. Ἡ δυστυχία θὰ φέρῃ πολλοὺς εἰς συναίσθησιν· οἱ δὲ ἀμετανόητοι, ἀναπολόγητοι!

Ἅγιος Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ἡσυχαστῆς

Πίσω Ἀπὸ τὸν Πόνον καὶ τὶς Κακουχίες, Κρύβεται Τεράστια Εὐλογία Ἀνθρωπέ μου!

Ἅγιος Γέροντας Ἐφραίμ Φιλοθέου καὶ Ἀριζόνας. (+2019).

Δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ μποῦν οἱ πιστοὶ στὴν βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν μὲ ἄλλο τρόπο, παρὰ μόνον μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν στενὴ πύλη τῶν πειρασμῶν καὶ τῶν θλίψεων. Καὶ ὅσο πιὸ γρήγορα τὸ καταλάβει αὐτὸ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, τόσο πιὸ ἀνώδυνα θὰ ἐπιβιώσει. Ψεύτικος εἶναι τοῦτος δὲ ὁ κόσμος. Ψεύτικος καὶ εἰκονικός. Σὲ ρουφάει σὰν μαῦρη τρύπα, σὲ κάνει νὰ ξεχνᾷς ποῦ ἀνήκεις καὶ γιατί δημιουργήθηκες. Χάνεις τὸν προσανατολισμὸ σου ἀνθρωπέ μου, καὶ τὰ βάζεις μὲ Αὐτὸν ποὺ σὲ ἐπαναφέρει στὸν χαμένο σου δρόμο. Πίσω ἀπὸ τὸν πόνο καὶ τὶς κακουχίες, κρύβεται τεράστια εὐλογία ἀνθρωπέ μου. Ὁ ὑπέροτρος σου ὅμως ἐγωισμὸς, δὲν σ' ἀφήνει νὰ τὴν δεῖς.

Γιατί τόσο ἐγωισμὸ ἀνθρωπέ μου; Πηλὸς εἶσαι καὶ τίποτα σὲ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμον δὲν σοῦ ἀνήκει. Ὅλα δανεικὰ τὰ πῆρες. Γιατί τόσοσ πόνος τώρα ποῦ καλεῖσαι νὰ τὰ ἐπιστρέψεις; Δὲν ξέρεις ἀνθρωπέ μου πὼς τὰ δανεικὰ ἐπιστρέφονται; Δὲν γίνεται νὰ ζεῖς ἀνθρώπινα καὶ νὰ ἐπιδιώκεις τὰ ἀθάνατα. Δὲν γίνεται νὰ ξεδιψάσεις μὲ θαλασσινὸ νερό. Δὲν γίνεται νὰ ζεῖς εὐτυχημένος, ἀπὸ τὴν στιγμὴ ποὺ ζεῖς στὴν ἐξορία, μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Πατέρα σου. Δὲν πλάστηκες γιὰ τὰ γίγνα, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὰ οὐράνια καὶ ὅσο σωστὰ καὶ ἂν ζεῖς στὴν γῆ, ὁ πόνος τῆς ἐξορίας πάντα θὰ σὲ ἀκολουθεῖ. Τὸ ξέρω ἀνθρωπέ μου, πὼς δὲν εὐθύνεσαι ἐσὺ προσωπικὰ γιὰ τὴν πώση τῶν πρωτόπλαστων, καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ γνωρίζει καὶ ὁ Θεός! Ὅχι μόνον τὸ γνωρίζει, ἀλλὰ καὶ μερμινᾶ καθημερινά, ὥστε νὰ ξαναεπιστρέψεις ἐκεῖ ποὺ ἀνήκεις. Ὁ Παράδεισος εἶναι ἐκεῖ ἀνθρωπέ μου καὶ σὲ περιμένει. Θέλει ὅμως σκληρὸ ἀγῶνα καὶ αὐτοθυσίᾳ! Γιατί σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τότε, αὐτὸς τώρα δὲν χαρίζεται ἀνθρωπέ μου, ἀλλὰ κερδίζεται!

Πὼς προσπαθεῖς ἀνθρωπέ μου νὰ πείσεις τὸν Θεὸ πὼς ἄδικα ἐκδιώχθηκες ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο, ὅταν ἀκόμη καὶ τώρα, μετὰ ἀπὸ τόσες χιλιάδες χρόνια, ἐξακολουθεῖς νὰ ἀκοῦς τὸν ὄφι καὶ νὰ πράττεις τὰ δικά του ἔργα. Δὲν ἀνήκουν ἀνθρωπέ μου ὅλα αὐτὰ στὰ παλιὰ τὰ χρόνια. Δὲν εἶναι μία παλιὰ ἱστορία τῶν ἁγίων βιβλίων. Στὸ ἴδιο ἔργο θεατὲς εἴμαστε ἀκόμη. Δὲν μαθαίνεις ἀνθρωπέ μου, δὲν μαθαίνει! Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τώρα ἔχει κλειδὶ ὁ Παράδεισος!

Ὁ Θεὸς ὅμως δὲν ἄλλαξε. Δίκαιος εἶναι ἀκόμη. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ ἴδιο κλειδὶ θὰ πάρουν ὅλοι. Δὲν θὰ ταιριάζει ὅμως ὅλων στὴν κλειδαριά. Πρέπει νὰ σκαλιστεῖ σωστὰ ἀνθρωπέ μου τὸ κλειδί. Νὰ πάρει τὸ κατάλληλο σχῆμα καὶ μέγεθος. Πρέπει νὰ ἀφαιρεθοῦν κομμάτια ἀπὸ αὐτό. Καὶ κάθε φορὰ ποὺ θὰ ἀφαιρεῖται ἓνα κομμάτι, ἐσὺ θὰ πονᾷς. Πρέπει νὰ σκαλιστεῖ ἀνθρωπέ μου τὸ κλειδί, ἀλλιῶς δὲν θὰ ταιριάζει. Πρέπει νὰ πονέσεις ἀνθρωπέ μου, ἀλλιῶς δὲν θὰ εἰσέλθεις...

Ὅπως δὲ οἱ Ἀθηνωτικοὶ στὴν Διάρκεια τῆς Δουλείας Ἔσωσαν τὸ Γένος καὶ τὸ Ὁδήγησαν στὸ 1821, Ἔτσι καὶ Σήμερα οἱ Πατερικὰ Ἀθηνωτικοὶ θὰ Διαφυλάξουν τὸ Γένος ἀπὸ τὰ Ἐπερχόμενα Δεινὰ

Τοῦ π. Γεωργίου Μεταλληνοῦ (+2019), «ΟΦΕΙΛΗ ΑΓΑΠΗΣ», π. Γ. Δ. Μεταλληνοῦ ὁμοτ. Κάθ. Πανεπ. Αθηνῶν, ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη».

Αποφρὰς ἡμέρα διὰ τὸ Γένος μας δὲν εἶναι μόνον ἡ 29η Μαΐου 1453, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ 12/13η Ἀπριλίου τοῦ 1204, ὅταν ἔπεσε ἡ Βασιλεύουσα καὶ ἡ αὐτοκρατορία τῆς Νέας Ρώμης-Ρωμανίας στοὺς Φράγκους τῆς Δ' Σταυροφορίας. Ὑπάρχει, μάλιστα, γενετική σχέση μεταξύ τους.

Τὸ φιλοδυτικὸ ρεῦμα ἀποτελοῦσαν κυρίως διανοούμενοι καὶ πολιτικοί, οὐνίτες ἢ οὐνιτίζοντες. Οἱ Ἀθηνωτικοί, δηλαδή, ὁ Κλήρος, οἱ Μοναχοὶ καὶ τὸ εὐρὸν Λαϊκὸ σῶμα, διατηροῦσαν μόνιμη, μετὰ τὸ 1204, δυσπιστία ἐναντι τῆς Δύσεως. Ὁ δὲ ἀντιδυτικισμὸς τῆς (Ὁρθόδοξου) Ἀνατολῆς συνιστοῦσε στὸν λαὸ περισσότερο αὐτοάμυνα καὶ αὐτοπροστασία.

Ἡ συνείδηση αὐτῆ τῶν Ἀθηνωτικῶν θὰ κωδικοποιηθεῖ στὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ (18ος αἰ): «Καὶ διατὶ δὲν ἤφερεν ὁ Θεὸς ἄλλον βασιλέα, πὺ ἦταν τόσα ρηγάτα ἐδῶ κοντὰ νὰ τοὺς τὸ δώση, μόνον ἤφερε τὸν Τοῦρκον μέσαθεν ἀπὸ τὴν Κόκκινην Μηλιὰ καὶ τοῦ τὸ ἐχάρισεν; Ἦξερεν ὁ Θεὸς πὺς τὰ ἄλλα ρηγάτα μᾶς βλάπτουν εἰς τὴν πίστιν, καὶ (= ἐνῶ) ὁ Τοῦρκος, δὲν μᾶς βλάπτει. Ἄσπρα δώσ' του καὶ καβαλλίκευσέ τον ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι. Καὶ διὰ νὰ μὴ κολασθοῦμεν, τὸ ἔδωσε τοῦ Τοῦρκου καὶ τὸν ἔχει ὁ Θεὸς τὸν Τοῦρκον ὡσὰν σκύλον νὰ μᾶς φυλάη».

Οἱ ἀλώσεις τοῦ 1204 καὶ τοῦ 1453 ἀπειλοῦσαν γεωγραφικὰ σύνορα καὶ προκάλεσαν δουλείες σωμάτων. Ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ φρόνημά μας ἔμειναν ἀδούλωτα καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ἐπιβίωσαμε, κατορθώνοντας νὰ φθάσουμε στὸ 1821. Σήμερα τὰ σύνορά μας βρίσκονται στὴν ψυχὴ μας. Αὐτὴ ἀπειλεῖται μὲ νέα (τρίτη) ἄλωση. Ἡ Ὑπερδύναμη τῆς Νέας Ἐποχῆς, μὲ ὅλες τὶς συνιστώσες της, ἔχει ἀποβεῖ «καθολικὴ μας μητρόπολη» καὶ μόνιμο σημεῖο ἀναφορᾶς,

καθορίζοντας καὶ προσδιορίζοντας σύνολο τὸν ἐθνικὸ μας βίον, καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ φρόνημά μας, μὲ τὴν ἐξωπροσδιοριζόμενη παιδεία. Χρειάζεται συνεπῶς παράλληλη καλλιέργεια τῆς ἐθνοκεντρικότητας, ὄχι ὡς σοβινιστικὴ ἐχθρότητα, ἀλλ' ὡς λυτρωτικὸ ἀντίβαρο στὸν οἰκουμενιστικὸ ὁδοστρωτήρα (πολιτικὰ καὶ πνευματικὰ), πὺ ἰσοπεδώνει τὸ φρόνημα καὶ ἐκθεμελιώνει τὰ σύνορα τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ συνειδησῶν μας.

Οἱ Ἀθηνωτικοὶ τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ὅσοι διατηροῦν τὴν αὐθεντικότητά τῶν Ἁγίων μας, μένοντας ξένοι πρὸς κάθε ἔννοια φανατισμοῦ καὶ μισαλλοδοξίας, ταυτίζονται μὲ τὴν «μαγιά» τοῦ Μακρυγιάννη, σώζοντας τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ τὸ Γένος-Ἔθνος στὴν συνείδηση καὶ τὴν ζωὴ τους, ἀπρόθυμοι πάντοτε νὰ θυσιάσουν στὰ εἴδωλα τῆς Νέας Ἐποχῆς καὶ αἶροντες τὸν σταυρὸ τοῦ μαρτυρίου καὶ τῆς παντοειδοῦς θυσίας.

Τὸ μέλλον τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ τῆς Ἑλληνικότητας στὸν τόπο μᾶς εἶναι ἀλληλένδετο μὲ τὴν στάση τῶν «Ἀθηνωτικῶν» στὴν σημερινὴ φοβερότερη καὶ ὑπουλότερη ἀπόπειρα τῆς Φραγκιάς νὰ ὑποτάξει, δηλαδή νὰ διαλύσει, τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Πίστη καὶ τὸ Γένος μας. Ὅπως δὲ οἱ Ἀθηνωτικοὶ στὴν διάρκεια τῆς ποικιλώνυμης δουλείας ἔσωσαν τὸ Γένος, μὲ ὅλα τὰ συστατικά του, καὶ τὸ Ὁδήγησαν ἀκμαῖο στὸ 1821, ἔτσι καὶ σήμερα οἱ πατερικὰ Ἀθηνωτικοὶ θὰ διαφυλάξουν τὸ Γένος ἀπὸ τὰ ἐπερχόμενα δεινὰ.



Ἡ αἴθουσα τῆς Ἱεραρχίας δὲν εἶναι αἴθουσα κάποιας μασονικῆς στοᾶς, ὅπου ὠρισμένα μόνον ἄτομα συνεδριάζουν καὶ λαμβάνουν μυστικὰς ἀποφάσεις. Ὅχι! Ἡ αἴθουσα τῆς Ἱεραρχίας πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ὡς τὸ ὑπερῶν τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς, ὅπου ἔπνεε ἡ αὔρα τοῦ Παναγίου Πνεύματος: «Ὁὐ δὲ τὸ Πνεῦμα Κυρίου, ἐκεῖ ἐλευθερία» (Β' Κορ. 3:17).

Θρυλικὸς Γέρον Αὐγουστίνος Καντιώτης (+2010)

Ἐκθρονισμοὶ καὶ Ἐνθρονισμοὶ

Τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ Ἁγίου Μητροπολίτου Φλωρινῆς Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτη (+2010), ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸν «ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ», 2 Ἰουλίου 2017, ἀριθ. φύλλον 2024, ἐκδίδεται ἀπὸ τὴν Κοινοβιακὴ Γυναικεία Τερά Μονὴ Ἁγίου Αὐγουστίνου Φλωρινῆ, imaaflo@yahoo.gr



Ὅπως ὅλα τὰ θαύματα ποὺ ἔκανε ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἀγαπητοί μου, τοῦ ἔδιναν ἀφορμὲς γιὰ νὰ διδάξη τὸ λαὸ ψυχοσωτήριες ἀλήθειες, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ θεραπεία τοῦ δούλου τοῦ ἑκατοντάρχου τῆς Καπερναοῦμ τοῦ ἔδωσε ἀφορμὴ νὰ πῆ μία ἀλήθεια, ἡ ὁποία πιστοποιεῖται μὲ ἀναρίθμητα

παραδείγματα. Τὴν ἀλήθεια αὐτὴ τὴν διατύπωσε μὲ τὰ ἑξῆς λόγια.

«Πολλοὶ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν ἤξουσι καὶ ἀνακλιθήσονται μετὰ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν, οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἐκβληθήσονται εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων.» (Ματθ. 8:11-12). Πάνω στὴν ἀλήθεια αὐτὴ θὰ μιλήσουμε τώρα.

Τί σημαίνουν τὰ λόγια αὐτὰ τοῦ Σωτῆρος; Ὅτι **οἱ μὲν Ἰουδαῖοι**, ποὺ ἦταν «οἱ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας», λόγῳ τῆς ἀθλίας διαγωγῆς τους ἀπέναντι στὸν Κύριο **θὰ ἐκδιωχθῶν** ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνάκτορα τῆς θεϊκῆς εὐνοίας καὶ θὰ ῥιχτοῦν στὶς φυλακὲς τῆς αἰωνίου κολάσεως, **οἱ δὲ εἰδωλολάτρες**—αὐτοὶ εἶνε οἱ «ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν»—λόγῳ τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς μετανοίας ποὺ θὰ δεῖξουν ἀκούγοντας τὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, **θὰ γίνουν δεκτοὶ** στὰ ἀνάκτορα τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ θὰ καταλάβουν τὶς θέσεις ἐκεῖνες, ποὺ εἶχαν προετοιμασθῆ στὴ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν γιὰ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους.

Καὶ ποῖο ἦταν ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἔκανε τὸν Κύριο νὰ πῆ τὰ λόγια αὐτά; Ἡ εἰλικρινὴς, βαθειὰ καὶ ἔμπρακτη «πίστις» (ἔ.ἀ. 8:10), ποὺ ἔδειξε ὁ ἑκατόνταρχος ἐξ ἀφορμῆς τῆς ἀσθενείας τοῦ δούλου του. Μολονότι ὁ ἀξιωματικὸς αὐτὸς ἦταν ὄχι Ἰουδαῖος ἀλλὰ Ῥωμαῖος καὶ ἀνῆκε σὲ ξένη θρησκεία, μολονότι ἔβλεπε τὸ δοῦλο του νὰ βρῆται στὶς τελευταῖες του στιγμὲς καὶ κάθε ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας του νὰ χάνεται, μολονότι τὸ ἀξίωμα ποὺ κατεῖχε—ἢ μᾶλλον ὁ ἐγωισμὸς ποὺ δημιουργοῦν σὲ ψυχρὲς ἐπιπόλαιες τὰ ἀξιώματα—θὰ γινόταν ἐμπόδιο ὥστε νὰ μὴν πλησιάσῃ τὸν ἀπλοῖκὸ Διδάσκαλο καὶ νὰ μὴν ταπεινωθῆ σ' αὐτὸν ζητώντας τὴ βοήθειά του, παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ὁ ἑκατόνταρχος **ἐκτιμᾷ τὸν Ἰησοῦ**

ἀσυγκρίτως περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅ,τι οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι.

Νιώθει καὶ πιστεύει ὅτι καὶ ἓνας μόνος λόγος τοῦ Κυρίου ἔχει τὴ δύναμι νὰ θεραπεύῃ καὶ τὴ χειρότερη ἀσθένεια, ὅπως αὐτὴ τοῦ δούλου του, ποὺ τὸν βασάνιζε «δεινῶς». (ἔ.ἀ. 8:6). Γι' αὐτὸ στέκει μπροστὰ του μὲ εὐλάβεια καὶ σεβασμὸ, ὅπως στέκει μπροστὰ στὸ βασιλιά ὁ ἀπλὸς στρατιώτης. Δὲν κοιτάζει τὰ ἐξωτερικὰ ἐμβλήματα τοῦ ἀξιώματός του ἀλλὰ συναισθάνεται τὴν ἀθλιότητα ποὺ κάθε ἄνθρωπος ἔχει, καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ἀξιωματοῦχος ὁμολογεῖ τὴ μηδαμινότητά του ἀπέναντι στὸν Κύριο λέγοντας: «Κύριε, οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανὸς ἵνα μου ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην εἰσέλθῃς»· δὲν εἶμαι, Κύριε, ἄξιος νὰ σὲ δεχθῶ στὸ σπίτι μου. (ἔ.ἀ. 8:8).

Ποῖός ἀπὸ τοὺς φαρισαίους, ποὺ ἔβλεπαν ἓναν ἀξιωματικὸ νὰ ζῆ στὰ στρατόπεδα καὶ ὄχι ὅπως αὐτοί, θὰ μπορούσε νὰ φανταστῆ, ὅτι στὴν καρδιά τοῦ Ῥωμαίου αὐτοῦ στρατιωτικοῦ εἶχε ἐνθρονισθῆ τέτοια πίστι καὶ ἀρετή; Αὐτοί, **οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι**, παρ' ὅλη τὴν προγονικὴ τους δόξα καὶ τὴν ἐξωτερικὴ τους θρησκευτικότητα, ἐξ αἰτίας τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ καὶ τῆς κακίας τους, **ἀπομακρύνονταν συνεχῶς** ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰησοῦ καὶ κινδύνευαν νὰ χάσουν τὴ σωτηρία τῶν ψυχῶν τους, ἐνῶ αὐτὸς, **ἓνας ἐθνικὸς ἑκατόνταρχος**, ποὺ γεννήθηκε καὶ ἀνατράφηκε σὲ εἰδωλολατρικὸ περιβάλλον, **πλησιάζει τώρα τὸ Χριστό**, προσκολλᾶται σ' αὐτὸν καὶ σφύζεται!

Ἄλλὰ ἡ προφητεία αὐτὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι οἱ μὲν Ἰουδαῖοι, οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ αὐτούς, θ' ἀποσκιρτήσουν καὶ θὰ χαθοῦν, ἐνῶ οἱ ἐθνικοί, οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες, θὰ ἐπιστρέψουν στὸ Θεὸ καὶ θὰ σωθοῦν, **ἡ προφητεία αὐτὴ ἐξακολουθεῖ καὶ μέχρι σήμερα νὰ ἐκπληρώνεται**. Γιατὶ ὅ,τι συνέβη μεταξὺ τῶν Ἰουδαίων, συμβαίνει τώρα μεταξὺ τῶν Χριστιανῶν.

Οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ζοῦν στοὺς κόλπους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας—αὐτοὶ εἶνε κατ' ἐξοχὴν «οἱ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας». Ζοῦν αὐτοὶ σὲ στενὴ ἐπικοινωνία μὲ τὸν Κύριο—τὸ νόμο του μελετοῦν, στοὺς ναοὺς του συχνάζουν, ἐξομολογοῦνται, κοινωνοῦν, μετέχουν σὲ ὅλες ἐκεῖνες τὶς εὐλογίες ποὺ ἀπολαμβάνουν «οἱ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας», τὰ παιδιά τοῦ οὐρανοῦ Πατέρα. Ἄλλ' ἐὰν δὲν προσέξουν, ἐὰν δὲν ἐκτιμῆσουν ὅπως πρέπει καὶ ὅσο πρέπει τὴ μεγάλη τιμὴ ποὺ τοὺς ἔκανε ὁ Κύριος νὰ τοὺς ὀνομάξῃ «τέκνα Θεοῦ» (Ἰω. 1,12-11,52), «ἀδελφούς» του (Ματθ. 28:10), «υἱοὺς τῆς βασιλείας» (ἔ.ἀ. 8:12, 13:38) καὶ «φίλους» του (Λουκ. 12:4, Ἰω. 15:14), ἐὰν δὲν δεῖξουν διαγωγὴ σύμφωνη μὲ τὴν ὑψηλὴ κλήσι τους, ὑπάρχει φόβος νὰ ἐκπέσουν ἀπὸ τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ—νὰ πάθουν δηλαδὴ δυστύχημα μεγαλύτερο ἀπ' αὐτὸ ποὺ παθαίνει ἓνας **βασιλιάς** ἐνδόξου κράτους ποὺ λόγῳ σφαλμάτων του ἐκθρονίζεται, γίνεται ἐκπτωτος, χάνει τὰ μεγαλεῖα του, πέφτει σὲ ἀφάνεια καὶ πεθαίνει πικραμένος στὰ ξένα. Εἶνε δυστυχησμένος ὁ βασιλιάς αὐτός; ἔ, πολὺ πιὸ

δυστυχοσιμένοι εἶνε «ὁ υἱὸς τῆς βασιλείας»· γιατί χάνει θέσι - θρόνο ἐνδοξότερο ἀπὸ κάθε ἄλλο θρόνο τῆς γῆς.

Παραδείγματα τέτοιων τρομερῶν πνευματικῶν ἐκθρονίσεων ἔχουμε, ὅπως εἶπαμε, ἀναρίθμητα. Ἐνα ἀπὸ αὐτὰ εἶνε ὁ **Ἰούδας**. Ἦταν κι αὐτὸς «υἱὸς τῆς βασιλείας», ἕνας ἀπὸ ἐκείνους ποὺ ὁ Κύριος εἶπε πὼς θὰ καθίσουν «ἐπὶ δώδεκα θρόνους κρίνοντες τὰς δώδεκα φυλὰς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ» (Ματθ. 19:28, Λουκ. 22:30), γιατί ἡ θέσι ποὺ εἶχε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὁ Ἰούδας κοντὰ στὸ Χριστὸ ἦταν ἀσυγκρίτως ἀνώτερη ἀπὸ ἕνα κοσμικὸ θρόνο. Καὶ ὅμως ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς φιλοχρηματίας του πέφτει. Πέφτει, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ μία πόρνη καὶ ἕνας ληστής—ἡ μὲν πόρνη μὲ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας, ὁ δὲ ληστής μὲ τὴ θερμὴ προσευχὴ του «*Μνήσθητί μου, Κύριε, ὅταν ἔλθῃς ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ σου*» (Λουκ. 23:42)—ἐπιστρέφουν ὅπως οἱ ἄσωτοι υἱοὶ καὶ καταλαμβάνουν θέσι περιλάμπρη στὴ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

Τὰ παραδείγματα αὐτά, ποὺ πολλὰ παρόμοια μπορεῖς νὰ μελετήσῃς στὴν ἀγία Γραφή, στὴν Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία, καὶ νὰ δῆς στὴ ζωὴ τῆς συγχρόνου Ἐκκλησίας, ἐπιβεβαιώνουν τὰ προφητικὰ λόγια τοῦ Κυρίου, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρέπει νὰ βάζουν σὲ φόβο τὶς ψυχές μας. Τί εἶσαι, ἀδελφέ μου, **ἄγιος**; Ἔστω ὅτι εἶσαι. Ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλι πρέπει νὰ φοβάσαι τὴν **πτῶσι**. Ἄνοιξε τὰ μάτια σου νὰ δῆς πόσοι, ποὺ ἔφτασαν στὰ ὕψη τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἔστησαν τὴ φωλιά τους ἀνάμεσα στὰ ἄστρα (βλ. Ἦσ. 14:12-13), ἔπεσαν καὶ τσακίστηκαν· καὶ ἡ πτῶσι τους ἦταν τόσο πιδὸ μεγάλη ὅσο μεγαλύτερο ἦταν τὸ ὕψος τῆς ἀρετῆς ὅπου εἶχαν ἀνεβῆ. Δὲς τὶς πτώσεις τῶν Ἰουδαίων, τοῦ Ἰούδα, τοῦ διακόνου Νικολάου (ποὺ ἔγινε ἀρχηγὸς τῶν νικολαϊτῶν, τῆς πιδὸ αἰσχροῦς αἰρέσεως), τοῦ Ἀρείου καὶ τὸσων ἄλλων. Ἐὰν αὐτοὶ ἔπεσαν καὶ ἐκδιώχθηκαν, πόσο μᾶλλον ἐσὺ μπορεῖ νὰ πέσης καὶ νὰ χαθῆς; Βλέπε τὰ μνημεῖα τῶν πεσόντων καὶ μὴ μετανοησάντων πλέον, βλέπε τοὺς γκρεμοὺς καὶ τὰ βάραθρα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, βλέπε τὴν ἀσθένεια τῶν ψυχικῶν σου δυνάμεων, καὶ νὰ καλλιερῆς μέσα σου ἐκεῖνο τὸ φόβο ποὺ τόσο ἔντονα συνιστᾷ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος λέγοντας: «*Μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε*». (Φιλιπ. 2:12).

Ἄς φοβώμαστε, ἀλλ' **ἄς μὴ ἀπελπίζώμαστε** οὔτε γιὰ τὴ δικὴ μας σωτηρία οὔτε γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῶν ἄλλων ποὺ ζοῦν τώρα μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστὸ. Ἔπεσε; Μπορεῖς νὰ σηκωθῆς καὶ νὰ βαδίσῃς καὶ πάλι τὸ δρόμο τῆς σωτηρίας. Δὲς τὶς πτώσεις τοῦ Πέτρου καὶ τοῦ Δαυίδ· ἔπεσαν, ἀλλὰ πάλι σηκώθηκαν καὶ ἐπανεκτίστησαν τὶς θέσεις ποὺ πρὸς στιγμὴν εἶχαν χάσει. Ζοῦν μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστὸ οἱ ἄλλοι; Μὴν τοὺς ἀπελπίσῃς, μὴν τοὺς περιφρονήσῃς. Ποῦ ξέρεις, ἐὰν αὐτοὶ ποὺ ζοῦν σήμερα τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ ἀσώτου, μίπως αὔριο μμηθοῦν καὶ τὴ μετάνοια τοῦ ἀσώτου; Εἶνε σήμερα «υἱοὶ γεέννης» (Ματθ. 23:15), ἀλλ' αὔριο

γίνονται «υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας». Ζοῦν σήμερα στοὺς σταύλους τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ἀλλὰ αὔριο φιλοξενοῦνται στὰ θεϊκὰ ἀνάκτορα· εἶνε σήμερα ῥακένδυτοι, ἀλλὰ αὔριο εἶνε ντυμένοι ὅπως οἱ πρίγκιπες τῶν οὐρανῶν· εἶνε σήμερα ἐκπτωτοι, ἀλλ' αὔριο ἐνθρονίζονται!

Ἀδελφοί μου! Ἐφ' ὅσον ζοῦμε σὲ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμο, ὅπου κάθε μέρα συμβαίνουν ἀκατάπανστες ἀλλοιώσεις, ὄχι μόνο στὸ βασιλεῖο τῆς φύσεως ἀλλὰ καὶ στὸ βασιλεῖο τῆς χάριτος, ἄς ταπεινοφρονοῦμε· ἄς φοβώμαστε, ἐνθυμούμενοι αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Κύριός μας· «*Πολλοὶ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν ἔξουσι καὶ ἀνακλιθήσονται μετὰ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν, οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἐκβλήθησονται εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον*».

(†) **ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστίνος**



Ἡ Ὁρθὴ Ἀποψη τοῦ Ἁγίου Χρυσόστομου γιὰ τὴν Προσευχὴ στό Σπίτι καὶ στό Ναό

Εὔξασθαι μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκίας δυνατὸν, οὕτω δὲ εὔξασθαι ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀδύνατον, ὅπου πατέρων πλήθος τοσοῦτον, ὅπου βοῆ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἀναπέμπεται. Οὐχ οὕτως εἰσακούη κατὰ σαυτὸν τὸν Δεσπότην παρακαλῶν, ὡς μετὰ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τῶν σῶν. Ἐνταῦθα γὰρ ἐστὶ τι πλέον, οἷον ἡ ὁμόνοια καὶ ἡ συμφωνία καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης ὁ σύνδεσμος, καὶ αἱ τῶν ἱερέων εὐχαί. Διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο οἱ ἱερεῖς προεστήμασιν, ἵνα αἱ τοῦ πλήθους εὐχαὶ ἀσθενέστεραι οὔσαι, τῶν δυνατωτέρων τούτων ἐπιλαβόμεναι, ὁ-μοῦ συναέλθωσιν αὐταῖς εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.

Μετάφραση: Βέβαια εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ ποσευχηθῆς καὶ στὴν οἰκία σου, εἶναι ἀδύνατο ὅμως νὰ προσευχηθῆς ἔτσι, ὅπως προσεύχεσαι στὴν ἐκκλησία, ὅπου ὑπάρχει τόσο πλήθος πατέρων, ὅπου ἀναπέμπεται ἀπὸ ὅλους μαζὶ κοινὴ προσευχὴ πρὸς τὸν Θεό. Δέν εἰσακούεσαι τόσο πολὺ παρακαλῶντας μόνος σου τὸν Κύριο, ὅσο ὅταν τὸν παρακαλῆς μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ἀδελφούς σου. Διότι ἐδῶ στὴν ἐκκλησία ὑπάρχει κατὰ τὸ ἐπὶ πλέον, ὅπως δηλαδὴ ἡ ὁμόνοια, ἡ συμφωνία, ὁ σύνδεσμος τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ οἱ εὐχὲς τῶν ἱερέων. Γι' αὐτὸ βέβαια καὶ ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς τῶν ἀκολουθιῶν εἶναι οἱ ἱερεῖς, ὥστε οἱ εὐχὲς τοῦ πλήθους, ποὺ εἶναι ἀσθενέστερες, ἐνισχυόμενες μὲ τὶς δυνατότερες εὐχὲς αὐτῶν, νὰ ἀνεβοῦν μαζὶ μὲ αὐτὲς στὸν οὐρανόν.

Ἐπομένως, ἀπὸ τό σπῆτι δέν εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ συμμετέχουμε στὴν θεία Λειτουργία καὶ νὰ «κοινωνᾶμε»...

Ὁ Δάσκαλος τοῦ Γένους Φώτης Κόντογλου

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτρης Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος-Θεολόγος.

«Ὅποτε καθίσω καὶ λογαριάσω τί γερό, τί ἀκατάλυτο ἔχω στὴν βιβλιοθήκη μου, τί θὰ μπορούσα νὰ πιάσω σὲ μίαν ὥρα ἀνάγκης καὶ νὰ στυλωθῶ, πιάνω τὸν Κόντογλου...»

[Γιῶργος Ἰωάννου]

† † †

Στις 13 Ἰουλίου τοῦ 1965 κλείνει γιὰ πάντα τὰ μάτια τοῦ ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, ὁ Δάσκαλος τοῦ Γένους, ὁ «ἀρχαῖος» ἄνθρωπος τῆς Ἀνατολῆς. Κατὰ τὸ ξόδι του, ὁ τότε ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν κυρὸς Χρυσόστομος, εἶπε μεταξὺ ἄλλων: «Τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα προπέμπομεν σήμερον, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρα, ὁ ὁποῖος μπορεῖ νὰ καταταγῆ, χωρὶς ὑπερβολὴν, μεταξὺ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ὁμολογητῶν τῆς Πίστεως. Διότι οἱ ὁμολογηταὶ τῆς Πίστεως αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς ἔκαμνον, ὅ,τι ἔκαμνε καὶ ὁ ἀείμνηστος Φώτιος. Ἐστάθη εὐθυτενῆς, ἐστάθη γενναῖος ἀπέναντι τῶν πολεμίων τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου ἡμῶν Πίστεως καὶ ἐγκατάλειψεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον αὐτὸν μίαν παράδοσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ γραπτὸν λόγον, ἵνα ἡ νεωτέρα γενεὰ ἐκπαιδεύεται εἰς τὰ Ἑλληνοχριστιανικὰ νάματα...».

Ὅταν αὐτὰ λέγονται ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τοῦ ἀρχιεπισκόπου Χρυσοστόμου Χατζησταύρου, Μακεδονομάχου, ἀρχιδιακόνου καὶ δεξιὸ χερί τοῦ ἔθνοϊερομάρτυρος Χρυσοστόμου Σμύρνης ἀλλὰ καὶ προμάχου καὶ ὑπερασπιστῆ τῆς ἁγίας Ὁρθοδοξίας μας, τότε **«τί ἔτι χρειάν ἔχομεν μαρτύρων»;**

Ὅντως ἔζησε ὀσιακά, ὀρθόδοξα ὁ μαστρο-Φώτης, ποὺ φέτος τιμᾶμε τὰ 55 χρόνια ἀπὸ τὴν κοίμησή του.

Ἀφήνουμε ὅμως τὸν ἴδιο νὰ διηγηθεῖ τὸν βίο καὶ τὴν πολιτεία του, σὲ ἐπιστολή του στὶς 5 Αὐγούστου τοῦ 1964 στὸν ἐπίσης μακαριστὸ γέροντα Θεόκλητο Διονυσιάτη. Περιλαμβάνεται στὴν ἐξαίρετη ἔκδοση τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Κοινοβίου Ὁσίου Νικοδήμου Πενταλόφου Παιονίας Κιλκίς, «Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου στὴν Τρίτη Διάστασή του». (Γουμένισσα 2003, σελ. 64-66):

«Εἰς τὴν ζωὴν μου, ποτὲ δὲν ἐσκέφθην διὰ τὴν ἐξασφάλισίν μας οικονομικῶς. Μοῦ ἦλθαν καὶ μοῦ ἔρχονται εὐκαιρίαι διὰ νὰ ἀποκτήσω πολλὰ χρήματα (προτάσεις ἀπὸ τὸ ἐξωτερικὸν

νὰ ζωγραφίσω ναοὺς καὶ μέγαρα, δι' ἐκδόσεις βιβλίων προπάντων κοσμικῆς γνώσεως καὶ τέχνης, διὰ δημοσιεύματα παντὸς εἴδους, ἱστορικά, λαογραφικά, αἰσθητικά, περιγραφικὰ ταξιδιῶν, κλπ). Τίποτε δὲν δέχομαι. Θέλω νὰ μείνω ἀκτῆμων καὶ ν' ἀποθάνω τοιοῦτος. Ὁ Χριστιανὸς πρέπει νὰ μὴν συνδέεται μὲ τίποτα μὲ τοῦτον τὸν κόσμον. Οὔτε εἰς τὴν Ἀκαδημίαν δὲν ἐδέχθην νὰ ἔμπω, παρ' ὅλας τὰς προσκλήσεις ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐτῶν. Ὅχι ἀξιώματα. Ὅχι πρωτοκαθεδρία. Ἐπάνω εἰς τὸ ἱκρίωμα ἐργάζομαι σκληρῶς, ἰδρώνω, τσακίζομαι, ἀκόμα σήμερα, μὲ πόδι τσακισμένο.

Πέρασα τὸ ἥμισυ τῆς ζωῆς μου ἐπάνω στὴν σκαλωσιάν, ὡς στυλίτης. Μὲ χαρὰν ὑπηρετῶ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, ἡ ὁποία ὑπῆρξεν ἀδιάφορος διὰ τὸ ἔργον τῆς ἁγιογραφίας, ἀκόμη καὶ ἐχθρική. Τώρα δέ, μὲ τὰ παπικά, οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν προϊσταμένων



τῶν ναῶν, ὄντες ὅλοι φιλο-παπικοί, δὲν μὲ θέλουν ὡς ἁγιογράφον καὶ μόλις ζῶ ἀπὸ τὴν μίαν ἐκκλησίαν ποὺ ἔχω, ἐνῶ τιποτένιοι μογιατζήδες καὶ ἀνάξιτοι μαθηταί μου ἔχουν ἐργασίαν ποὺ δὲν προφθάνουν, πλουτίζουν, καθ' ὅσον συναλλάσσονται μὲ τοὺς ἐπιτρόπους καὶ τοὺς προϊσταμένους τῶν ναῶν καὶ

μουντζουρώνουν τοὺς τοίχους, μὴ πατῶντες εἰς τὴν λειτουργίαν, συχνὰ δὲ καὶ σαρκάζοντες τὰ τῆς θρησκείας. Ἐγὼ εἰς αὐτὰς τὰς ἐπιφορὰς τοῦ σατανᾶ ἀντιτάσσω τὴν πίστιν μου. Καὶ ἐνῶ διασαλπίζεται ἀνὰ τὸν κόσμον ἡ φήμη μου ὡς «πρυτάνεως» τῆς β. (=Βυζαντινῆς) τέχνης κ.τ. (=κ.τ.λπ.), ἐγὼ πολλάκις δὲν ἔχω ἐργασίαν. Οἱ Ζωῖκοί, παρ' ὅτι ἔρχονται νὰ μὲ ἰδοῦν, δὲν μὲ χωνεύουν. Οἱ καθηγηταὶ τοῦ Πανεπ. (θεολόγοι) μὲ μισοῦν, καὶ μὲ ἐδίωξαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἁγιογράφησιν τῆς Καπνικαρέας καὶ πῆραν ἕναν ἄθλιον μαθητὴν μου. Οἱ Οὐνίτες μοῦ πρότειναν νὰ ζωγραφίσω τὴν ἐκκλησίαν των καὶ τοὺς ἐδίωξα, ἀλλὰ ἔσπευσε νὰ τὴν ζωγραφίσῃ ὁ Κοψίδης, πρ. μαθητῆς μου. Οὐδεὶς ἀνθίσταται εἰς τὸν μαμωνᾶν. Βασιλεία αὐτοῦ καὶ ὄχι τοῦ Χριστοῦ...

...Λοιπόν, πάτερ Θεόκλητε, δὲν ἀφήνομεν τίποτε ἀπὸ ὅσα κερδίζω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐργασίαν μου, τόσον, ὥστε συχνὰ νὰ δανειζόμεθα διὰ νὰ βοηθήσωμεν

ἄλλους. Ὅταν ἐπάθαμεν τὸ δυστύχημα, ἀπεκαλύφθη ἡ ἀπενταρία μας, καὶ ἔτσι ἐπίστευσαν καὶ κάποιοι φίλοι μας ὅτι ὄντως δὲν εἶχαμεν χρήματα. Ἐπιροίπτομεν τὴν μέριμνά μας ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον τὸν Θεὸν μας. Αὐτά, σὰς παρακαλῶ, νὰ φυλαχθοῦν μεταξὺ μας».

Ὁ Κόντογλου ἀνήκει στοὺς λίγους, τοὺς ἐλάχιστους πνευματικούς ἀνθρώπους, πὺν ὅσο ζοῦσε δὲν φιλοῦσε «κατουρημένες» ποδιές, ἀλλὰ μάστιζε ἀλύπητα μὲ τὴν μάχαιρα τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς παράδοσης τοὺς Γραικύλους τῆς σήμερον, τοὺς προσκυνημένους εὐρωλιγουρηδες.

Τρεῖς κυρίως ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τὴν εὐλογημένη Ἐπανάσταση τοῦ 1821 καὶ ἐντεῦθεν εἶχαν συλλάβει ἐναργέστατα καὶ μὲ ἀξιοθαύμαστη συνέπεια λόγου καὶ πράξης τὸν πνευματικό μας ἑξανδραποδισμό: ὁ Μακρυγιάννης, ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης καὶ ὁ Κόντογλου, σὰν νὰ παρέδιδε ὁ ἓνας στὸν ἄλλο τὴν σκυτάλη τῆς γνήσιας παράδοσης τοῦ Γένους καὶ τὰ ὄπλα γιὰ τὴν ἀπόσπηση τῶν μiasμάτων τοῦ Φραγκολεβαντισμοῦ καὶ τῆς δυτικολαγνεῖας, πὺν σάπισαν—τὸ βλέπουμε στίς ἡμέρες μας—τὸ «ὀλόδροσο δέντρο τῆς φυλῆς μας».

Γράφει γιὰ ὅλους αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαγμένους στὴν σκοτεινὴ καὶ δυσώδη Εὐρώπη, πὺν ἐπιστρέφουν στὴν φτωχὴ πατρίδα καὶ ληλατοῦν κυρίως τὴν ψυχὴ τῆς:

«Οἱ περισσότεροι σπουδαστές μας, μόλις πατήσουνε στὴν Εὐρώπη ἀπομένουνε ἐμβρόντητοι ἀπὸ τὴς ψευτοφιλοσοφίες πὺν διδάσκουνε κάποιοι σπουδαῖοι καθηγητές, καὶ μάλιστα σὲ ξένη γλῶσσα. Ἡ ξένη γλῶσσα τοὺς κάνει μεγάλη ἐντύπωση! Κατάπληξη τοὺς κάνουνε καὶ οἱ μεγάλες πολιτείες, οἱ φαρδιοὶ δρόμοι, τὰ μεγάλα χτίρια, οἱ λεωφόροι, τὰ τραῖνα, οἱ λογιῆς-λογιῆς μηχανές, οἱ ἀγορές, τὸ πολὺν χρῆμα, τὰ βλοσυρὰ Πανεπιστήμια. Κι αὐτὸ γίνεται, γιὰτὶ οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαστές εἶναι χωριατόπουλα, πὺν νοιώθουνε μέσα τους ντροπὴ γιὰ τὸ χωριὸ τους, κι ὅ,τι βλέπουνε κι ἀκοῦνε, εἶναι γι' αὐτοὺς οὐρανοκατέβατο!

Τοὺς ξέρω καλὰ αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαστές, γιὰτὶ

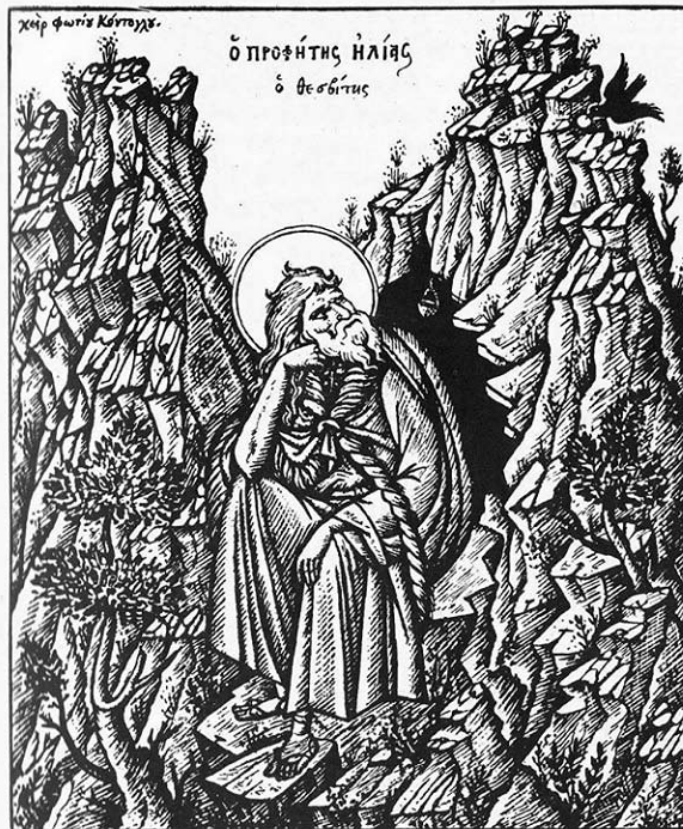
καὶ ἐμεῖς περάσαμε ἀπὸ κείνες τὴς χώρες, καὶ ζήσαμε σ' αὐτὲς κάμποσα χρόνια. Ὅποτε ἐρχόντανε στὴν Εὐρώπη ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἦτανε, στὴν ἀρχή, σασιτισμένοι καὶ ζαρωμένοι, σὰν καὶ κείνα τὰ μαντρόσκυλα πὺν ἀκολουθήσανε τὸν τσομπάνο καὶ βρεθήκανε στὸ κέντρο τῆς πολιτείας, μέσα στὴν ὄχλοβοῆ κι ἀνάμεσα στ' αὐτοκίνητα, καὶ σασίσανε, τὰ κακόμοιρα, καὶ βάζουνε τὴν οὐρὰ τους ἀνάμεσα στὰ σκέλια τους, τρομοκρατημένα. Μὰ σὰν γυρίσουνε στὸ μαντρί, τὴν ξανασηκώνουνε περήφανα, καὶ γίνονται θηρία ἀνήμερα. Μ' αὐτὰ τὰ σκυλιὰ μοιάζανε, στὰ μάτια τὰ δικὰ μας, πὺν εἶχαμε

ζήσει πρὶν ἀπὸ χρόνια στίς μεγάλες πολιτείες, ἐκεῖνα τὰ νεοφερμένα Ἑλληνόπουλα, πὺν μᾶς θεωρούσανε στὴν ἀρχὴ σὰν προστάτες τους. Κ' ἦτανε ταπεινὰ καὶ φρόνιμα. Μὰ μὲ τὸν καιρὸ ξεθαρρεύανε, καὶ πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ παίρνανε στὸ τέλος ἓναν ἐγωϊσμὸ σιχαμερόν, μιλώντας μὲ καταφρόνηση γιὰ τὴν πατρίδα τους. Καὶ πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ σὰν γυρίζανε πίσω στὴν Ἑλλάδα, κάνανε τὰ θηρία, κάνανε τοὺς πάνσοφους, κάνανε τοὺς προφέσσους, μιλώντας ὀλοένα γιὰ τὴν Εὐρώπη καὶ γιὰ τὴν κακομοιριά τῆ δικῆς μας σὲ ὅλα τὰ πράγματα.

Γι' αὐτὸ λέγω, πὺς ἡ Εὐρώπη εἶναι ἡ

δοκιμαστικὴ πέτρα γιὰ κάθε ἓναν ἀπὸ μας, πὺν θὰ πάει σὲ κάποια χώρα τῆς: ἢ θὰ γίνεῖ πίθηκος ξενόδουλος, θαυμάζοντας σὰν οὐρανοκατέβατα ὅλα ὅσα βλέπει κι ἀκοῦει σὲ κείνη τὴ χώρα, καὶ θ' ἀρνηθεῖ τὸ γάλα τῆς μάνας του, ἢ θὰ καταλάβει πόσο ψεύτικα εἶναι τὰ φανταχτερὰ στολίδια τῆς, καὶ πόση βαρβαρότητα ὑπάρχει κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν πολιτισμένη ἐπιφάνειά τῆς, καὶ θὰ ἀγαπήσει μὲ πάθος τὸν τόπο του, νοιώθοντας «μὲ ἐπίγνωση» τὴν πνευματικὴ τῆς εὐγένεια καὶ τὴν ὑπεροχὴ μας, μπροστὰ σὲ κείνες τὴς ἀνθρωπομερμηγιές». («Εὐλογημένο Καταφύγιο», ἐκδόσεις «Ἀκριτάς», σελ. 226-227).

Ἀτίμητη καὶ ἀνυπολόγιστη ὅμως εἶναι ἡ συμβολὴ του στὴν ἀναχαίτιση τῶν παπικῶν καὶ προτεσταντικῶν



κακοηθειῶν σὸ δὴθος καὶ τὸ δόγμα τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας. «**Ὁ παπισμὸς εἶναι ἢ πιδ σατανικὴ διαστροφὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Εἶναι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος**» θὰ γράψει σὲ ἐπιστολὴ του στὸν Γέροντα Θεόκλητο.

Χωρὶς ὑπερβολὴ ὑπῆρξε ὁ πρῶτος εὐαγγελιστὴς καὶ διδάσκαλος στὴν Ἑλλάδα τῆς Βυζαντινῆς ἀγιογραφίας. Ἐπαναφέρει τὴν ἀγιογραφία στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη περπατησιά της, γιατί «*εἶχεν ἀλωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὶς χαλκομανίες τοῦ δυτικοῦ ἀνθρωπισμοῦ, τὶς “γενοβέφεζ” —ὅπως τὶς ἔλεγε— πὸν εἶχαν κυριαρχήσει στοὺς ἀγιορεῖτες ἀγιογράφους μέσω τῶν ρωσικῶν παραγγελιῶν*». («*Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου στὴν Τρίτη Διάστασή του*», σελ. 204).

Μὲ ἀγωνία διαβλέπει τὴν ἀλλοτριώση τοῦ Γένους σ’ ὅλες τὶς καλλιτεχνικὲς του φανερώσεις ἐξαιτίας τῆς πνευματικῆς πανούκλας πὸν ὀνομάζεται ἐξευρωπαϊσμός.

«*Καμαρῶστε τί “ἔργα” παρουσιάζουν οἱ “τέχνες” σήμερα. Εἶναι νὰ φράζει κανένας τὰ μάτια του. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ πασαλεῖμματα ἀπάνω στοὺς μουσαμάδες, πὸν λέγονται “ἔργα ζωγραφικῆς”, ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ παλιοσίδερα ἢ τὰ νταμαροκοτρώνια πὸν παρουσιάζονται γιὰ “ἔργα γλυπτικῆς” σὲ κάνουνε ὄχι μονάχα νὰ ἀηδιάσεις γιὰ τὸ κατάντημά μας, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ θυμώσεις γιὰ τὴν ἀδιαντροπιὰ πὸν φανερώνουν αὐτὰ τὰ τερατοურγήματα...».* («*Μυστικὰ Ἄνθη*», ἐκδ. «Ἀστήρ», σελ. 14).

Δὲν ξεφεύγει ἀπὸ τὸ ἀνύστακτο ἐνδιαφέρον του γιὰ τὸ Γένος καὶ τὸ τυμπανιαῖας ἀποφορᾶς—σήμερα— πτώμα τῆς Παιδείας.

«*Τώρα, ἄς ποῦμε καὶ τὰ σημερινά μας. Τὰ σχολεῖα, ἂν βγάλει κανένας λίγα στὴν μπάντα, τ’ ἄλλα ὅλα δουλεύουν γιὰ νὰ βγάλουνε λεβαντίνους κι ὄχι Ἑλληνες, μ’ ὅλα τὰ ψευτοελληνικὰ ἐξωτερικὰ πασαλεῖμματα. Οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπ’ αὐτοὺς πὸν διδάσκουνε τὰ παιδιὰ μας κινήσανε ἀπὸ τὸ χωριό, καὶ πέσανε μὲ τὰ μοῦτρα στὰ “μοντέρνα”. Γινήχανε θεριακλήδες τοῦ μοντερνισμοῦ. Ὁ νοῦς καὶ ὁ λογισμὸς τους, μέρα-νύχτα, στριφογυρίζει στὶς μοντέρνες ἀνοησίες. Τὴν Ἑλλάδα δὲν θέλουνε μὴδὲ νὰ τὴν ἀκούσουνε, τὴν “Ψωροκώσταινα”! Δὲν ὑπάρχει πιδ ἀντιπαθητικὸ καὶ πιδ μικρόμυαλο πλάσμα ἀπὸ τὸν ξιπασμένο ἄνθρωπο, πὸν ἀρνήθηκε τὸ γάλα τῆς μάνας του καὶ ρεμπεύεται κιόλας γι’ αὐτὸ τὸ κατόρθωμα.*

Λοιπόν, ἀπὸ τέτοιους δασκάλους τί θὰ μάθουνε τὰ παιδιὰ μας, τὰ κακόμοιρα τὰ παιδιὰ μας; Θὰ μάθουνε, πὸς γιὰ νὰ γίνει κανένας σπονδαῖος καὶ γιὰ νὰ φαίνεται πὸς εἶναι ἔξυπνος, πρέπει νὰ μὴν ἔχει τίποτα Ἑλληνικὸ ἀπάνω του. Ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ μόρτικο ὕφος, πὸν εἶναι σήμερα τῆς μοντέρνας

μόδας, πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ξενικό, τεντυμποϊκό.

Εἴτε βιβλίο, εἴτε τραγούδι, εἴτε παιδικὸ θέατρο, εἴτε χορός, εἴτε προσευχή, ὅλα πρέπει νὰ μὴν εἶναι Ἑλληνικά, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι καλὰ γιὰ τοὺς μαθητὲς τῶν σχολειῶν μας. Στὰ βιβλία, στὰ παιδικὰ θέατρα, στὰ παραμῦθια καὶ στὰ βλακώδη ἀναγνώσματα, ὅλα εἶναι ξανθὰ. Ὅλα! Ἄνθρωποι, ζῶα, σύννεφα, τοποθεσίες. Ἄν ἦτανε μπορετὸ νὰ γίνει κ’ ἢ θάλασσα ξανθιά». («*Εὐλόγημένο Καταφύγιο*», σελ. 183-184).

Δασκάλους «*θεριακλήδες τοῦ μοντερνισμοῦ*», «*ἀναγνώσματα βλακώδη*» ἐντοπίζει μὲ ἐκπληκτικὴ διορατικότητά ὁ Κόντογλου στὶς σημερινὲς καὶ διαχρονικὲς γάγγραινες τῆς πολύπαθης Παιδείας!

Κορφολουγοῦμε, ὡς ἐπίλογο, ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ του ἀνθῶνα τοῦτα τὰ ἐλάχιστα (τίποτε ἄλλο, ἐξάλλου, δὲν «*ζωγραφίζει*» καλύτερα τὸν Φώτη Κόντογλου ἀπ’ ὅτι τὰ ἴδια τὰ γραψίματά του): «*Ὅσοι ἀπομείναμε πιστοὶ στὴν παράδοση, ὅσοι δὲν ἀρνηθήκαμε τὸ γάλα πὸν βυζιάσαμε, ἀγωνιζόμαστε, ἄλλος ἐδῶ, ἄλλος ἐκεῖ, καταπάνω στὴν ψευτιά. Καταπάνω σ’ αὐτοὺς πὸν θέλουνε τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἓνα κουφάρι χωρὶς ψυχή, ἓνα λουλούδι χωρὶς μυρονδιά. Κουράγιο! Ὁ καιρὸς θὰ δείξει ποιὸς ἔχει δίκιο, ἂν καὶ δὲ χρειάζεται ὀλότελα αὐτὴ ἢ ἀπόδειξη*». («*Ἡ Πονεμένη Ρωμοσύνη*», ἐκδ. «Ἀστήρ», σελ. 324).

Κατάντησε ἡ πατρίδα μας κουφάρι ἄψυχο, παίγνιο τῶν Εὐρωπαϊκῶν κακεργετῶν. Τὸν δρόμο γιὰ νὰ βροῦμε τὰ φτερὰ τὰ πρωτινά μας, τὰ μεγάλα, μᾶς τὸν δίδαξε ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου: πίσω στὴν Παράδοσή μας. Ἔως πότε θὰ εἴμεθα ἀχαρκτηριστοὶ Γραικύλοι;



Ἀπὸ ἕξι μέρη μᾶς πολεμοῦν οἱ δαίμονες, καθὼς λέγουν οἱ Πατέρες καὶ μάλιστα ὁ Ἅγιος Μελέτιος ὁ Ὁμολογητῆς: Ἀπὸ τὰ ἄνω καὶ κάτω, ἀπὸ δεξιὰ καὶ ἀριστερὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν. Καὶ ἄνω εἶναι αἱ ὑπὲρ τὴν δυνάμιν μας ὑπερβολαί, ὅπου κάμνομεν εἰς τὴν ἀρετὴν, κάτω δὲ αἱ ἐκ τῆς ἀμελείας μας ἐλλείψεις, ὅπου παθαίνομεν εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν ἀρετὴν (διὰ τοῦτο εἶπον οἱ Πατέρες, ὅτι τὰ ἄκρα εἶναι τῶν δαιμόνων) καὶ δεξιὰ μὲν λέγονται, ὅταν οἱ δαίμονες μὲ δεξιὰν αἰτίαν καὶ πρόφασιν τοῦ καλοῦ μᾶς ῥίπτουν εἰς τὸ κακόν. Ἀριστερὰ δέ, ὅταν ἀπὸ φανερὰν αἰτίαν τοῦ κακοῦ, μᾶς κάμνωσιν νὰ ἁμαρτάνωμεν. Καὶ ἔμπροσθεν μὲν εἶναι, ὅταν οἱ δαίμονες μᾶς πολεμοῦν μὲ τοὺς λογισμοὺς καὶ ἐνθυμίσεις τῶν πραγμάτων, ὅπου μέλλουν νὰ ἔλθουν, ὀπισθεν δὲ ὅταν μᾶς πολεμοῦν μὲ τὶς ἐνθυμίσεις καὶ προλήψεις τῶν περασμένων πραγμάτων.

Ἅγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἁγιορεῖτης

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS ARE DUTY-BOUND TO HAVE TRUE ORTHODOX BISHOPS!

Originally published in "Orthodox Heritage," vol. 1, issue no. 11, under the title "The Seat of Moses: Its Powers and Perils." This article is being re-published in line with the perilous times and current ecclesiastical events which confront the faithful in our days.

What can we do? These are our bishops. We know that they have betrayed Orthodoxy and that they are breaking the Holy Canons that tell us that we must avoid all prayers with the heterodox. We know that they believe in the Anglican Branch Theory and practice "eucharistic hospitality," and that they preach "Marxist Christianity," and that their joys and sorrows are one with their theistic overlords. We know that they are wolves in sheep's clothing, that they are traitors to Orthodoxy, and disdainers of the writings of the holy Apostles and the holy fathers of the Church. But what can we do? Willingly or unwillingly one is forced to remain with the hierarchy that has been given us, for without a bishop there is no Church. We have to obey our bishops, don't we?

† † †

Orthodox Christians are duty bound to have Orthodox bishops. They are obliged to obey their bishops only if their bishops obey Holy Tradition, as it is embodied in the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Canons and the teachings of the Church Fathers. If the bishops are not obedient to the Church, we are not obliged to be obedient to them. Indeed, how can one demand obedience to disobedience? Why should one show reverence to irreverence?

The Orthodox Church has criteria by which the Orthodoxy of all—bishops, clergy and lay people alike—is evaluated. These criteria are the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition, as it is expressed in the Holy Canons and writings of the saints of God and the holy Church Fathers. As a result, there is no room here either for anarchy or for despotism. There is no danger of slipping into dictatorial Papism or into free-for-all Protestantism. On many occasions, when discussing such matters with Roman Catholic priests or monks, we have made it abundantly clear to them that, "All Orthodox bishops are infallible—until they make a mistake..."

Our Orthodox bishops know exactly where they stand and they know they must stand there correctly or they will have to answer to God and to the people of God. At their ordination to the episcopacy, they make three solemn declarations and vows before God and the Orthodox faithful. In the first declaration, the candidate recites the Creed wherein, among other things, he declares his belief not in the Anglican Branch Theory, but in the Undivided Church which is *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*. He professes that the Holy Spirit

proceeds *from the Father*—not "from the Father and the Son" as the heretical denominations aver. In the second declaration he pronounces the Orthodox Catholic faith regarding the Person of the Son of God, and here he denounces the doctrines of Sabes, Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, Dioscorus and all the other Monophysites and Monothelites. In the third declaration, the candidate professes the Orthodox Faith concerning the Holy Trinity, adding also the words, *I believe also in the One, Catholic and Apostolic Church's traditions and interpretations concerning God and things divine*. Furthermore, he denounces those who do not accept the holy icons as the Church has accepted them. And at the end of the declaration, he states, *I anathematize and openly proclaim with a great voice: To every heretic anathema. To all heretics, anathema!* [*Great Euchologion* (Venice, 1862), pp. 166-76].

These are indeed very strong and frightful words. The candidate for the episcopacy is here proclaiming before God and the people of God that he will uphold and defend every aspect of the Orthodox Faith, and he calls the Church's anathema and excommunication upon those who refuse to obey the voice of Christ Who has spoken in His holy Church: *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* (Mt 18:18).

Of course, like every other mortal, bishops too have failings—for *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. (Rom 3:23). But, like all other mortals, they too struggle with their weaknesses and try as best as they can to overcome them. Like everyone else, they are not always successful. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they too have human flaws, as long as they uphold and defend and teach the Orthodox faith, they are being faithful to the confession of faith and the vows that they made at their ordination. We do not revere our bishops; they too are mortal, and therefore have failings like the rest of us. We revere and love them because, though mortals and, therefore, possessing human failings, they have taken upon themselves the heavy task of: (1) Defending and propagating the Holy Orthodox and Catholic Faith, (2) striving to cultivate an increase in the piety and fervor for God of the flock with which they have been entrusted, and (3) seeking by all means to increase that flock.

They are the living icons of Christ our Savior. It is by their authority that all the Holy Mysteries are performed in the Church. Furthermore, since they are the true icons of Christ our Lord and Teacher, it is their duty to rightly divide the Word of Truth and to observe and uphold the Holy Canons, to maintain and extend that Truth of which they are icons, and to see to it that their flock does the same. The English word "bishop" comes from the Greek word *episcopos*, which means "overseer," and this term describes their duties and obligations well; if they fulfill these obligations, we revere and honor them as our fathers and tutors in Christ. Such

holy bishops, faithful to their commitment towards observing and upholding the Holy Canons, came together in the Ecumenical and Local Councils in defense of the Orthodox Catholic Faith. As Chrysostom Stratman expressed it:

These authentic shepherds of the Lord's flock had but one concern, the welfare and safety of those entrusted to them. Guiding, nourishing, and protecting their sheep was their one earthly occupation and preoccupation. They lived for Christ's flock and many died for it, as did the great and holy St. John Chrysostomos...

[*The Ecumenists* (Oak Park, III.), p.7]

Granted that not all bishops are saints, and perhaps a few are totally unworthy of their calling; what does Our Savior teach us in regard to this point? Our Lord and God taught us that those religious leaders who do not observe the laws of God stand convicted of hypocrisy, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old. Nevertheless, as long as they continue to teach us the law of God—even though they themselves do not observe it—we are to obey them. Our Savior said:

The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. [Mt 23:2-10].

Here too, in our Savior's words, we find the key to understanding the difference between human sin and blasphemous heresy: Sin is a transgression of the Gospel's precepts. Heresy, on the other hand, is an **alteration** of those precepts.

So, as long as our hierarchs sit in the seat of Moses, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Church Fathers, and Saints—that is to say, as long as they continue to teach the Orthodox faith correctly and without alteration—we are to obey them, even though they themselves, perhaps, are not in order personally. On the other hand, if they openly and without shame teach heresy—that is, change the teachings that have been delivered unto us by the Saints of God—then we are not under any obligation whatsoever to listen to them or to obey them. They no longer sit in the seat of Moses.

What, then, should one do if one is faced with the possibility that one's bishop has gone astray in matters of the faith?

"We are just simply, Orthodox Christians. What do we know about theological matters anyway?"

This is a typical statement, heard too often. The answer, of course, is that **we are the rational flock of Christ**. As conscientious Orthodox Christians, we are expected to know our Orthodox Faith well and to live it. This means that we have been attending and listening carefully to the Divine Services. We have been reading the Holy Scriptures together with the commentaries of the Holy Fathers. We have been studying the Lives of the Saints, the Holy Canons and Church History. We have been keeping the holy fasts and cultivating the life of prayer. We have been trying to keep the commandments, struggling with our passions, and striving to grow in true love for God and man. If we have not been doing these things, we are not conscientious, practicing Orthodox Christians. We are not a rational flock.

This is what the *Apostolic Constitutions* say about what kind of flock we are supposed to be:

The sheep and rams are rational, and not irrational, so that no layman may ever say that. "I am a sheep, and not a shepherd, and I give no account of myself, but the shepherd shall see to it, and he alone shall pay the penalty for me." For even as the sheep which follows not the good shepherd shall fall to the wolves unto its own destruction, so too it is evident that that which follows the evil shepherd shall acquire death, for he shall utterly devour it. [Apostolic Constitutions, 2:19 (PG I.633)]

Nor should we forget what the Orthodox Patriarchs of the East wrote in their *Answer to Pope Pius the IX* in 1848, "...the guardians and defenders of the faith is the very body of the Church, that is, the people..." (J.Karmiris, ed., *Ta Dogmatica kai Symbolica Mnemeia* [Athens, 1953], vol.2, p. 920).

Let us return now to the question we mentioned above. What does an Orthodox Christian do when he ascertains beyond a shadow of a doubt that his bishop is openly and stubbornly preaching heresy? Fortunately, we have an abundance of examples that tell exactly how we must proceed should such a dire and grievous situation ever arise. Church History, the Lives of the Saints, the writings of the Church Fathers and the Holy canons all provide guidance for us.

To begin with, the first thing an Orthodox Christian must do—once he is sure his bishop no longer preaches Orthodoxy—is to find the nearest bishop who does preach Orthodoxy.

Although this is the first, and easiest, solution to the problem, things do not always work out so simply. There have been occasions when the entire hierarchy of an area fell into heresy, as occurred in all North Africa during the Arian controversy in the fourth century, and in the Polish occupied territories with the so-called Union of Brest during the seventeenth century. There have been other occasions in the Church's history when the Orthodox Christians did not know who the nearest Orthodox bishop was. Such was the plight of the Orthodox Christians during the iconoclast

period. What did they do when all the bishops known to them were iconoclast? There simply were no Orthodox bishops at the head of the dioceses in the Byzantine Empire at that time. The Orthodox bishops who had not died at the hands of their tormentors were languishing in prisons and exile, and the Orthodox Christians hardly knew where they were or if they were alive or dead.

What did the Christians do then? They simply commemorated “our Archbishop” or “Metropolitan” or “Bishop” without mentioning any name, and by this they meant the nearest true and faithful Orthodox bishop whose name, at the moment, was unknown to them (the bishop who still teaches the Orthodox faith correctly and without alteration.) This practice is used to this day by the zealot fathers of the Holy Mountain who refuse to commemorate the Patriarch Bartholomew (and Demetrios before him) of Constantinople, and who instead use the formula “for every episcopate of the Orthodox which rightly divideth the word of truth.”

The life of Saint Maximus is also instructive for us. Saint Maximus, though only a simple monk, resisted and cut off communion with every patriarch, metropolitan, archbishop and bishop in the East because of their having been infected with the heresy of Monothelitism. During the first imprisonment of the Saint, the messengers from the Ecumenical Patriarch asked him:

“To which church do you belong? To that of Byzantium, of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, or Jerusalem? For all these churches, together with the provinces in subjection to them, are in unity. Therefore, if you also belong to the Catholic Church, enter into communion with us at once, lest fashioning for yourself some new and strange pathway, you fall into that which you do not even expect!”

To this the righteous man wisely replied “Christ the Lord called that Church the Catholic Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the Faith. It was for this confession that He called Peter blessed, and He declared that He would found His Church upon this confession. However, I wish to know the contents of your confession, on the basis of which all

churches, as you say, have entered into communion. If it is not opposed to the truth, then neither will I be separated from it.”

The confession which they were proposing to the Saint was not Orthodox, of course, and so he refused to comply with their coercions. Furthermore, they were lying about the See of Rome which, in fact, had remained Orthodox. Sometime later, at his last interrogation by the Byzantine authorities, the following dialogue took place:

The Saint said, “They [the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria and all the other heretical bishops of the East] have been deposed and deprived of the priest-

hood at the local council which took place recently in Rome. What Mysteries, then, can they perform? Or what spirit will descend upon those who are ordained by them?”

“Then you alone will be saved, and all others will perish?” they objected.

To this the Saint replied: “When all the people in Babylon were worshipping the golden idol, the Three Holy Children did not condemn anyone to perdition. They did not concern themselves with the doings of others, but took care only for themselves, lest they should fall away from true piety. In precisely the same way, when Daniel was cast into

the lion’s den, he did not condemn any of those who, fulfilling the law of Darius, did not wish to pray to God, but he kept in mind his own duty, and desired rather to die than to sin against his conscience by transgressing the Law of God. God forbid that I should condemn anyone or say that I alone am being saved! However, I shall sooner agree to die than to apostatize in any way from the true faith and thereby suffer torments of conscience.”

“But what will you do,” inquired the envoys, “when the Romans are united to the Byzantines? Yesterday, indeed, two delegates arrived from Rome and tomorrow, the Lord’s day, they will communicate the Holy Mysteries with the Patriarch.”

The Saint replied, “Even if the whole universe holds communion with the Patriarch, I will not communi-



cate with him. For I know from the writings of the holy Apostle Paul: **The Holy Spirit declares that even the angels would be anathema if they should begin to preach another Gospel, introducing some new teaching.**”

As history had demonstrated, Saint Maximus—who was only a simple monk and not even ordained—and his two disciples were the ones who were Orthodox, and all those illustrious, famous and influential Patriarchs and Metropolitans whom the Saint had written against were the ones who were in heresy. When the Sixth Ecumenical Council was finally convened, among those condemned for heresy were four patriarchs of Constantinople, one Pope of Rome, one Patriarch of Alexandria, two Patriarchs of Antioch and a multitude of other Metropolitans, Archbishops and Bishops. **During all those years, that one simple monk was right, and all those notable bishops were wrong.**

In the Life of Saint Hypatius of Rufinianus (commemorated on June 18th), we find the following account:

When Nestorius came from Antioch in order to become Patriarch of the illustrious Imperial City of Constantinople (he was brought there by Dionysius, who had become *magister militum per orientem*—a Roman honorary military title of significance), Saint Hypatius saw a vision, at the very moment in the holy Church of the Capital that some laymen installed him (Nestorius) upon the throne; and immediately a voice announced, “In three and a half years this tare will be uprooted.” Thus Saint Hypatius began to say to certain persons and particularly to the brethren of his monastery, “I have great anxiety over this man who has come, my children, for I have seen that he will turn aside from the faith; but he will reign only three and a half years.”

Thus, when he passed by the Saint’s monastery, Nestorius did not wish to go to meet him—he had accidentally learned what the Saint had said—although he had hitherto visited everywhere, including all the monasteries and Church dignitaries and abbots, as he made his way to the Capital. When he had entered the Capital and had become Patriarch, he immediately sent clergymen to Saint Hypatius with the message, “Go say to that dreamer: ‘I shall reign for twenty years in the City and where are your dreams?’”

Saint Hypatius replied to them, “Tell the Patriarch that if it comes to pass as I discerned it, it was a revelation; if not, it was a dream and I, as a man, imagined it.” Thus embarrassed by the answer which they brought back to him, Nestorius sometime after sent other people in order to ensnare him in certain of his words. But after having tempted him with troublesome and useless questions, they were not only unable to trap him in his words, but they left his presence filled with admiration for him,

having understood that the Saint possessed great intelligence. It was for this reason that Nestorius left him in peace and did not send anyone else to him.

The three years having passed, little by little the evil treasure of his heart began to show itself. For in his sermons he said abominable things about the Lord which were to fall again upon his own head, and which are not permitted for us to repeat. This evil man did not know the Holy Scriptures, which say, “Who shall declare his generation?”, and, “Search not into things too deep for thee.” When he understood that Nestorius held opinions contrary to those which should be acknowledged, Saint Hypatius immediately, in the church of the Apostles, erased his name from the *diptychs*, so that it should no longer be at the Oblation (the Eucharist offering).

When the most pious Bishop Eulalis learned of this, he was anxious about the outcome of the affair. And seeing that it had been noised abroad, Nestorius also ordered him to reprimand Hypatius. For Nestorius was still powerful in the city. Bishop Eulalius spoke this to Hypatius: “Why have you erased his name without understanding what the consequence of it would be?” Saint Hypatius replied, “From the time that I learned that he said unrighteous things about the Lord, I have no longer been in communion with him and I do not commemorate his name; for he is not a bishop.” Then the bishop, in anger, said, “Be off with you! Make amends for what you have done, for I shall take measures against you.” Saint Hypatius replied: “Do as you wish. As for me, I have decided to suffer anything, and it is with this in mind that I have done this.”

Now when Nestorius had left for Ephesus, and the Council had assembled, on the day when he should be deposed, Saint Hypatius saw in a vision that an angel of the Lord took hold of Saint John the Apostle, and led him to the most pious Emperor and said to him, “Say to the Emperor: ‘Pronounce your sentence against Nestorius.’” And he, having heard this, pronounced it. Saint Hypatius made note of the day, and it was verified that Nestorius was deposed on that very day, the three and a half years having passed, as the Lord had foretold the Saint. And some days later the decree of the deposition was brought. It was read in the presence of all the clergy and people, Bishop Eulalius and Saint Hypatius being present together in Church.

The significant point in this account is that the Saint ceased commemorating Nestorius even **before** any Synodal decision had been made against the latter. Furthermore, the Saint declared, “I am no longer in communion with him and I do not commemorate his name; **for he is not a bishop.**” All this was said and done **before** any Church Council had condemned Nestorius’ heresy. And indeed, heresy is heresy whether or

not a Council condemns it. It is not, after all, the decision of the Council that makes the heresy a heresy. Rather, following in the path of the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers, the Church Councils openly proclaimed the true Orthodox doctrine, while at the same time demonstrating in what points heresy had deviated from that doctrine.

The Holy Canons are not silent in this regard either. Here is what the 15th Canon of the First and Second Council sets forth:

If any presbyter or bishop or metropolitan dares to secede from communion with his own patriarch and does not mention his name as is ordered and appointed in the divine mystagogy, but before a synodical arraignment and his [the patriarch's] full condemnation, he creates a schism, the Holy Synod has decreed that this person be alienated from every priestly function, if only he be proved to have transgressed in this. These rules, therefore, have been sealed and ordered concerning those who on the pretext of some accusations against their own presidents [i.e., prelates] stand apart, creating a schism and severing the unity of the Church. **But as for those who on account of some heresy condemned by Holy Synods or Fathers sever themselves from communion with their president, that is, because he publicly preaches heresy and with bared head teaches it in the Church, such persons as these not only are not subject to canonical penalty for walling themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification, but they shall be deemed worthy of due honor among the Orthodox.** For not bishops, but false bishops and false teachers have they condemned, and they have not fragmented the Church's unity with schism, but from schisms and divisions have they earnestly sought to deliver the Church.

Regarding this matter, the following is noted in the book *Against False Union*:

The communion with and respect of one church on the part of the other churches remains and continues only as long as that local church remains in the Church, that is as long as it lives and proceeds in Spirit and Truth. When a patriarchate ceases to be a church, admitting communion with heretics, then its recognition on the part of the other churches ceases also.

The Orthodox people must become conscious of the fact that they owe no obedience to a bishop, no matter how high a title he holds, when that bishop ceases being Orthodox and openly follows heretics with pretenses of union "on equal terms." On the contrary, they are obliged to depart from him and confess their Faith, because a bishop, even if he be patriarch or pope, ceases from being a bishop the moment he ceases being Orthodox. The bishop is a consecrated person, and

even if he is openly sinful, respect and honor is due him until synodically censured. But if he becomes openly heretical or is in communion with heretics, then the Christians should not await any synodical decision, but should draw away from him immediately.

As we saw from the few examples cited above—and there are countless others—the Orthodox faithful did not mince words, nor were they afraid to take immediate action when they ascertained that their bishop had strayed from Orthodoxy. Inevitably, there were those who found fault with this "extreme" course of action. The latter were not so much disturbed by the heresy of their bishop as they were by the words and actions of the "zealots," as they usually labeled the conscientious flock. These "super-correct" extremists were disturbing the peace of the Church and fomenting schism, said they. How did those "unhealthy elements" dare to rebuke the bishop and cut off communion with him **before** any Synodal clarification? As we have seen, Saint Hypatius and Saint Maximus the Confessor gave us two concrete examples of how they dared. Saint Theodore the Studite and Saint Mark of Ephesus also dared, and today the church honors and reveres them for doing so.

The Church—which had just weathered the century long onslaught of iconoclasm—saw that there were often occasions when, for one reason or another, there was no possibility of calling an Orthodox Council. Precisely for this very reason, therefore, the First and Second Council which convened in Constantinople in 861 formulated the Fifteenth Canon, which merely articulated and gave canonical expression to the ancient practice of the Church, to wit, that the Orthodox Christians should "**wall themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification.**" Thus, should the Orthodox faithful ever find themselves in an extreme situation—doctrinally speaking—they were encouraged and protected by this canon—no matter what they were called by others, and no matter what sanctions and actions the erring bishop threatened to take against them. Actually, church History has demonstrated repeatedly that the believers who were the first to react against heresy were wholly justified in their course of action on every occasion.

This, then, is the Orthodox understanding and the ancient practice of the Church in this matter. As we mentioned in the beginning, there is room here neither for anarchy, nor for despotism. We have criteria, and these criteria are the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Church Fathers, the Lives of the Saints, Church History, and the Holy Canons.

This witness, this Faith is sealed with the blood of the martyrs and confessors of the Church. And truly, since the Church is built upon this rock, how is it possible for the gates of Hades to prevail against Her?

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear! (Mt 11:15).

THE BREAD, THE WINE, AND THE MODE OF BEING

By Fr. Chrysostom Koutloumousianos, Ph.D., Hieromonk at the Holy Monastery of Koutloumoussiou, Holy Mountain.

The recent reappearance of the ancient terror of a pandemic has prompted fertile conversation among theologians and literary people across the world. Various opinions have been articulated, such as that disease can be transmitted through the current way of distributing Holy Communion, or that the Eucharistic Gifts themselves can be bearers and transmitters of pathogenic germs. It is said that since the bread and the wine do not alter their essence and essential properties, it follows that they are subject to decay and can also spread toxic viruses. This idea has supposedly found Christological grounds as well in that the human body of Christ is a carrier of germs which can be harmful to us, though not to Him; after all, germs themselves are not bad, since there is nothing bad in creation.

Within this framework the following evidence drawn from the writings of the Fathers might be relevant and useful.

Undoubtedly, there is nothing bad in creation. No form of life, nor even natural destruction can be considered as bad, because evil is only that which alienates us from God. However, at the same time one should not ignore or deny the products of personal sin, such as, for example, a dangerous laboratory hybrid, as well as the effects of the ancestral Fall, namely decay and death, to which the human being has been submitted. Now, God's incarnation manifested something entirely new in the world.

Let us open a short parenthesis to delineate the Orthodox belief regarding the Eucharistic elements. Do we hold that they are merely a representation of the Lord's presence in the congregation, as is the general understanding in Protestantism? In this case, the holy bread could be offered in sterilized bags and the holy wine in certified sealed bottles. If, on the other hand, in accord with the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the holy gifts are Christ with respect to their essence, then either we must commit ourselves to worshipping the gifts or fall into unbelief when thinking they can be corrupted.

The Greek Fathers speak neither of transubstantiation nor symbolic function but of the "change" of the material ele-

ments. This "change" signifies a new mode of being, inaugurated through the appearance of God in the flesh. Here we must consider the patristic distinction between the *logos of nature* and the *mode of existence*, a distinction which is useful for an Orthodox approach to the mystery of Christ.

The Fathers use this distinction as a tool for explaining God's miracles in history. When God intervenes to perform a wondrous act, He does not alter the nature of things—that is, their logos or principle; instead He innovates the manner in which their nature operates, so as to fulfill the divine economy. The innovated mode means nature operating beyond its own ordinance, beyond its limits, translating the human being "into another form of life," as for instance when Noah remained unharmed amid wild animals and holy men would walk upon the waters.

The Incarnation was the climax of all divine interventions. The incomprehensible mystery that took place in the Logos Incarnate was the indissoluble union of divine and human nature. Such union meant the exchange of the nat-



ural properties in Christ, in the same way that a blade becomes fire when thrown into fire while at the same time fire acquires a sharp edge. Human nature remains intact while its mode of existence is altered. This is why Christ was born both in a divine and a human way, that is, carried by a woman, yet without labour pains and corruption. He was not subjugated to nature; instead, elevating it to Himself, He made nature "a transcendental mystery" Christ's human nature operates in a divine mode, and it operates in a divine mode because it carries the fullness of divine activity.⁽¹⁾

This same reality and understanding can be applied to the Eucharistic mystery. Here also an alteration of the material elements takes place. Neither is their logos or essence changed, nor their natural properties, but their condition and conduct, that is, their mode of being. Just as in Christ everything human has a transcendental mode, since human nature in Him has the fullness of divinity, so the Eucharistic Gifts receive and transmit to its participants the same *theandric* activity of Christ. We partake, therefore, not of something that is subject to decay and deterioration, but of God Himself, through matter that has become life-giving, as the very flesh of Christ is life-giving.

Clearly, authentic communion has to do not only with the presence of Christ in bread and wine but also with His pres-

ence within us. Union and assimilation with God is not accomplished without the good resolve (*prohairesis*) and synergy of man, nor is it exclusively fulfilled in the Eucharist.⁽²⁾ We need to follow and wholeheartedly imitate Christ freely and be born in the Spirit. Divine activity operates in various inscrutable ways according to the measure of each one's faith and longing.

Thus, when Christ is offered as bread, He does not alter the nature of bread but its "economy." Christ's human nature was passible (capable of feeling-suffering, *Ed.*), yet, one with the Divinity, and for this reason it could not be seized and possessed by death. And as His body was dead and risen, since it was never detached from Divinity, similarly, when we receive this body we foretaste the resurrection. Just as Christ suffers as a human being, yet acts as God, in the same way the consecrated elements, though subject to "suffering" and corruption, act upon us as uncreated divinity. As St. Cyril of Alexandria says: *The body of Christ is holy and has the power to vanquish every illness. It was and is holy, not merely as flesh with its natural powers, but as the temple of the indwelling divine Logos, who sanctifies His flesh with His Spirit. This is why Christ vivifies the daughter of the leader of the synagogue not only through His omnipotent command but also with His bodily touch.* (Ἀναστασίου, *Doctrina Patrum*, σελ. 129, 131-32).

Therefore, to those that receive communion with faith and true repentance the Lord's body becomes a "safeguard," "for strength, healing and health of soul and body," maintenance and deification of human nature.⁽³⁾

The consecrated elements operate as the deified body of Jesus. Through matter, God grants life uncorrupted. And although immortality is an eschatological condition, and we shall all, sooner or later, cross to the other side of the bank, yet "doses" of incorruption are given in this mortal life according to the measure of each one's faith, longing, godly fear and love.



(1) See Maximus the Confessor, PG 91.298-300, 344, 1048-1056, 1273-1276, 1341-1345.

(2) See Chrysostom Koutloumousianos, *The One and the Three: Nature, Person and Triadic Monarchy in the Greek and Irish Patristic Tradition*, James Clarke, Cambridge 2015, pp. 119-22, 132-34, 150-53.

(3) John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 87. Also see *Prayer before the Holy Communion*, and Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 37.



If you could see what Grace comes down in Liturgy, you would be ready to gather the dust from the floor of the Temple and wash your face with it.

St. Gabriel Urgebadze (+1995)

A STORY FROM THE TRAVELS OF THE HOLY APOSTLE THOMAS

By Fr. Moses Samaan; we offer this beautiful story of how St. Thomas began to bring many Indians to the knowledge of God. It comes from the First Book of the "Evergetinos."



The great Apostle Thomas was placed by the Lord in the service of a businessman, Abban, as one very able in the art of construction. Together with the businessman Abban, St. Thomas arrived in the land of India. There he was led before the king of the land. The king asked him, with interest, about his skills, and the Apostle Thomas assured him that he was among the most accomplished builders and demonstrated to him

adequately his skills in this art.

Indeed, from all that he said about his art, St. Thomas was reckoned by all those hearing him to be a remarkable architect, for which reason the king entrusted him with a plentiful amount of money to build him a palace in a certain part of his kingdom.

No sooner had the Apostle Thomas received the king's money, plentiful as it was, he distributed all of it to the poor and to all who were in need.

After a short time, the king sent emissaries to the place which he had indicated that his palace be built, so as to see the construction. He was astonished, however, to learn from his emissaries, when they returned, that Thomas had not even laid the foundations for the building and that all of the money that the king had entrusted to him had been distributed among the poor. The king then became furious and commanded that the Apostle be tied up, hands behind his back, and brought before him.

Quicker than he could say it, the king's command was fulfilled and the Apostle Thomas was brought before him. The king said to him with uncontrollable anger: "Did you finish my palace?"

"Yes," the Apostle Thomas quietly answered him, "and a very beautiful one."

"All right, then," the king said sternly, "let us go to see it."

"It is not possible in the present life, O king, to see the castle which I am preparing for you. At your departure from this world, however, you will see it, and you will enjoy it with great happiness and rejoicing," the holy Apostle responded.

These words of the Apostle Thomas, King Gundaphor (that was his name) considered deceitful, and did not believe them to be true.

In the meantime, he was told that the Apostle Thomas was poor and had nothing that he could confiscate. Having thus lost any hope that he could get his money back, he decided, under the influence of his rage, that only the death of the Apostle Thomas would satisfy his anger. So, he arranged to have the Apostle skinned alive and afterwards thrown into a fire to be burned. But He who brings about all things by His omnipotence and calls them into accord with His Divine Will conveniently arranged for a change in the course of events through a fatal blow to Gad, who was the brother of King Gundaphor. And behold what happened. This Gad was even more upset than his brother the king at St. Thomas' failure to build their palace; and being more greatly infuriated by the Apostle, who had supposedly swindled them, he encouraged the king to proceed with Thomas' punishment. In the interim, however, Gad died.

The death of Gad, however, prompted the postponement of the Apostle Thomas' death. Owing to the magnitude of the calamity of Gad's death, the king forgot about his condemnation of St. Thomas and busied himself with the funeral arrangements for the dead Gad.

But what an astonishing miracle God performed—He Who wishes not the death of a sinner, but that he should turn from his sin and live the life of virtue.

As soon as Gad died, Angels took his soul and showed him the everlasting abodes that exist in the other world for those who are saved from sin. Gad's soul was so overwhelmed by the beauty, the magnitude, and the extraordinary brightness of one of these heavenly mansions, that he set aside all else and persistently pleaded with his Angelic guides to let him live in just one of the smallest of the rooms in the mansion.

The Angelic guides, however, would not consent to his request, pointing out that the mansion belonged to his brother Gundaphor, and that it had been built by someone from a foreign place by the name of Thomas.

Upon hearing this, Gad began with even greater zeal to implore his Angelic guides to go back and return to the world, so that he could buy this dazzling castle from his brother.

And what should happen thereupon?

At the beckoning of Him Who orders all things, it was appointed that Gad's soul should return to his dead body, not only to save the Apostle from death, but to save many souls with the miracle of Gad's resurrection.

Now, those who were caring for his burial, while wrapping Gad's dead body in funeral linens, suddenly saw the soulless body begin, little by little, to come to life. Amazed, they immediately ran to King Gundaphor to relate to him this unheard-of event.

Astonished, the king hastily ran to the side of his dead brother. And, oh, the wonder! Gad, up to this time dead, opened his lips, which had been sealed by death, and, as though waking up from sleep, insistently began to plead with his brother, saying:

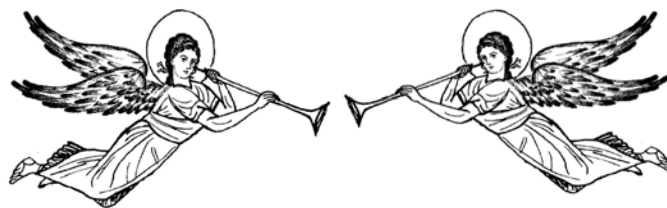
"If you love me, my brother, fulfill my request to buy the beautiful palace which Thomas the Christian has built for you in Heaven."

Carefully listening to these words, the king well understood their meaning and recognized that the Apostle Thomas was in fact an Apostle of God and that the God Whom the Apostle Thomas proclaimed was indeed a true God and a lover of man; forthwith his soul was enlightened with the brilliance of faith, and he answered his brother:

"My brother, I cannot sell you that building, the acquisition of which did not come so easily. Rather, I believe it easier to take the building for myself and to introduce you to the architect who made it—who by Divine Providence is still alive—and he can make a similar castle on your behalf."

Immediately the king commanded that Thomas be brought before him, who in the meantime was freed from prison and from his fetters. When the Apostle appeared, both of the two brothers fell at his feet and asked forgiveness for the wrong which they had brought upon him—albeit out of ignorance—and asked him to preach in their country the God Whom they knew not and His commandments, that they might live all of their lives in accord with His Will and thus merit the eternal and unseen good things, the images and types of which Gad had, indeed, been deemed worthy to foresee.

The Apostle Thomas heard all of this with amazement and marveled at the depth of God's Providence; immediately, then, he suitably thanked God and catechized them. Thereafter, he baptized all of them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He also baptized other numberless throngs of Indians, who came to believe in God on account of the miracle which had taken place.



On earth, everything is temporary—brief, transitory. Soon, everything will pass by—that which is pleasant and delightful, as well as what is lamentable and sorrowful. If we have chosen for ourselves the glorious path of piety, then we must remember and not forget the words of the Apostle: *All that will live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution.* (2 Tim 3:12)."

St. Ambrose (+1891)

THE HERMIT AND THE BANDIT

From the manuscripts of Philotheou Monastery, Mount Athos, translated by NS.

There once was a hermit who labored in the wilderness for seventy years, fasting, holding vigils, and always exercising much watchfulness. In all of these years that he labored serving God, he was not deemed worthy to neither see any visions nor experience any divine revelation. For this reason he fell to thinking:

“There is a likely some reason of which I am not aware, that makes God not pleased with my labors. This must be why I have never experienced any revelation or any mystery.”

Contemplating these things, the elder began to labor and to pray to God with more vehemence, saying:

“Lord, if my labor is truly pleasing to You and if You receive my works, I the sinful and unworthy one beseech You to give me just a drop of Your spiritual gifts, so that through the vision of some mystery I will be informed that You have heard my prayer. Thus, I will be able to commit my ascetic life to You with more courage and trust.”

Praying in this manner, the elder heard a voice from God which said, *If you desire to see My glory, go deeper into the wilderness and there many mysteries will be revealed to you.*

As soon as he heard the voice, the elder left his cell at once. After wandering for a while, he encountered a bandit who, as soon as he saw him, overtook him with all of his strength, desiring to kill him. After he caught the elder, the bandit said:

“It is good that I met you, Abba, because now I will complete my work and be saved!”

“But how will you be saved if you kill me?” asked the astonished elder.

“We bandits have the following law and faith: the one who is able to kill one hundred people will go to Paradise. Therefore, having labored much until now, I have killed ninety-nine, and lacking one, I have striven much to fulfill the last and to be saved. That is why you have given me much joy, and I thank you because today, through you, I will become worthy to indulge in Paradise!”

Having heard this, the bewildered elder trembled from the unexpected and desperate situation in which he found himself. Then, raising the eyes of his mind towards God, he said:

“Is this Your glory, Master and Lord, which You have willed to show me, Your servant? Such counsel have You given me, the sinner, to leave from my cell in order to inform me with such a mystery? With such gifts have You rewarded my labors? Now I have known in truth, Lord, that all of my asceticism has been in vain and all of my prayers have been accounted before You as something worthy of loathing and disgust. Even so, I give thanks to You for Your love of man, that You have punished my unworthiness as is meet, for my innumerable sins, and

that You have given me over into the hands of this bandit and murderer!”

Saying things such as these with pain, the elder began to thirst. Afterwards he said to the bandit:

“My son, since the Lord, due to my many sins, has given me over into your hands in order for you to kill me and take me from this life, as the wicked man that I am—and behold, your wish has been fulfilled—I beseech you to also fulfill one small wish of mine. Give me a little water to drink, and then you can cut off my head.”

As soon as the bandit heard these words of the elder and desiring to fulfill his request, with much joy he put his sword back into the sheath, and bringing forth from his chest pocket a small vessel, he went down to the river nearby to fill it with water and bring it back to the elder to drink. Yet while he was there filling the vessel, he gave up his soul and died.

Time having passed and not seeing the bandit returning, the elder thought to himself:

“Perhaps he became tired and fell asleep, and that is why he is delaying in returning? Maybe this is my chance to escape and return to my cell? But I am old and am afraid that I do not have the strength to run. Being weak, I will tire quickly, and he will catch me. Thus having enraged him all the more, he will torture me without mercy, cutting me up into many pieces. So I better not run but should rather go to the river to see what he is doing.”

Thinking upon this, the elder went down to the river and found the bandit dead, for which he wondered greatly. Raising his hands towards Heaven, he said:

“Lord, Lover of men, if You do not reveal this mystery to me, I will not lower my hands. Let your compassion be upon this labor of mine and show it to me!”

With this prayer on his lips, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said:

“Do you see, Abba, the one who lies dead before you? For your sake he received this sudden death, so that you could escape and not be killed. For this reason you should bury him as one saved. Since he did obedience to you and for the fact that he put his sword back into the sheath in order to bring water to quench your thirst, the rage of God was quenched, and He received him as a worker of obedience. Furthermore, his admission to killing ninety-nine people was accounted as a confession. Therefore bury him and commemorate him with those who have been saved. Through this you should know the abyss of love for men and the compassion of God. Now go back to your cell rejoicing, and be more zealous in your prayers. Do not say that you are sinful and unworthy of revelations. Behold the mystery which God has revealed to you. And you should also know this: all of your ascetic labors have been received by God, for there is never a labor which has been done for God which does not rise up before him.”

Upon hearing these things, the elder buried the dead.

FROM GOD, WE SHOULD EXPECT NOTHING LESS THAN THE IMPOSSIBLE

By Fr. Rafael Noica, translated from Romanian by NS.



I have received many letters to which I can never respond. I have spoken with many, and I have concluded that just about every person today is experiencing each his own personal tragedy; every person is overwhelmed by pain and despair. However, let us listen to what St. Paul says: *God has illumined our hearts to shine the knowledge of His glory towards Christ. This treasure we have in earthen vessels*, I am paraphrasing a little, *in order to understand that the excellency of the power is not of man, it does not come from us, but is from God.* Thus, the Apostle says, *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus... Why? ... that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.* (cf. 2 Cor 4:6-10).

If St. Paul would not have *lived* the love of God for man, oppressed as he was on all sides, he would have been distressed; in confusion, he would have despaired; being persecuted, he would have felt forsaken—how many among us today feel forsaken by God? Being cast down, he would have also been destroyed, as many which despair today—God forbid—cast themselves down, and it is difficult for them, or maybe even impossible, to ever rise again.

We should never forget that God loves man deeply, and because of this love, He can never abandon him. And whatever might happen to man, no matter how atrocious and awful, even if he no longer sees a way of escape, there is one thing left—the word of St. Silouan, which is more relevant today than ever before: *Keep your mind in hell and do not despair.* Behold how St. Paul, just as St. Silouan did, kept his mind in hell, as the holy Apostle instructs us. He sees himself oppressed, he sees himself in great perplexities, he sees himself cast down, he sees himself persecuted; however, in none of these cases does he ever despair. What does it mean to not despair? It does not mean that you do not feel any or even get tempted by despair, even to your limit sometimes, when you reach a point of desolation and no longer know what else to do. At the moment of anguish, however, when you no longer know what else to do, you extend your thoughts to the one indiscriminate consolation, and whatever may be at hand, knowing that although you do not feel it now, God loves you.

I have advised several people last year, especially youths from abroad: when you feel that life is too difficult and you are unable to reach any measure of a godly virtue, you should know that it is not just difficult, it is impossible. Your own nature witnesses this thought to you, it gives testimony from within that this idea, this word, is impossible; but from our God we should expect nothing less than the impossible! Nothing less than impossible since if God is our God, well then the impossible is that which we expect from Him and that which only He can deliver; **for Him nothing is impossible.** And the thing which is impossible, due the love and the power of God, you will see working in you. I pray to God to receive this word and to strengthen your faith, which is both a prayer for me as well as for you.

The commandments of God are a divine revelation to intoxicate us, to sweeten us with the beauty of His Image, and to draw us towards His Kingdom. However, on our own, this accomplishment is not possible, yet that which is impossible, for the love of God and for His almighty power, we expect to see working in us.

There Is No Need to Despair

Why were we told to not despair? St. Paul enlightens and clarifies for us the strength of this divine love: he tells us that if divine instruction is for us to love God with all of our soul, heart, mind, and with all of our human strength, then God, in His own divine way, He equally and in a significantly deeper manner loves His creation, which He Himself fashioned. That is indeed how God loves Adam. In other words, to save Adam, He gave everything upon the Cross: from all of His Being, from all that He was and all that He had. Out of fellowship and love for man, He sacrificed even to the last drop of His blood for this one person who had so grievously sinned against Him. Why? Because He was the only One Who was capable of passing through into Hades and be resurrected from the dead; he thus forged a new path towards life, a path which Adam and his descendants had not reached, that is, the Resurrected Man sitting on the right hand of the Father.

Therefore, during all of our gloomiest and darkest days and moments, we have and should always employ a safety net, as circus acrobats put underneath them when they perform dangerous acts. The safety net is this: do not despair. When He says *Do not despair* God does not forbid the oncoming of hopelessness, but He is saying that we do not need to despair. In this way we can live through our gloom and doom moments, face them and say “Yes, this is how things might be, but for the sake of God I refuse to believe and live in despair,” and go on with our life accordingly, just as He would expect us to do. *Waiting, I waited patiently for the Lord*, says a psalm, *and He was attentive unto me* (cf. Pss 39:1)—and do so until the Lord descends and attends unto us. And truly He will come!

Despair—those innermost depths of despair—are a threshold through which we must pass, which in the hands of God

are nothing but a premise for our resurrection from that state, for salvation. The Apostle also says that *we the living are continually given over to death for Jesus*. Why? *So that the life of Jesus should be shown in our bodies of death*. (2 Cor 4:11). It is difficult for man to believe in the moment of despair that God gives to him this pain—or rather that He allows it since God gives nothing bad but only allows it. It is difficult for us to believe that this pain which is allowed for us to experience is given in order for us to also see the Resurrection of Jesus. Because if we, as St. Paul says elsewhere, with the baptism of Jesus—baptism in Greek means submersion—are submerged with Christ into the death of Christ, it is only in this manner that we can also know His Resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:4-5) as also the life of Christ may in turn be in us, and the life of Christ is eternal life. Therefore, even in our animal-like, biological nature which we now live—and I say this without insulting human nature but simply as the reality of our current temporal life—yet from this present state of ours, God still wants to grant us the knowledge of resurrection, which after what we call death will be able to be seen with more clarity and transparency, especially after the general Resurrection (i.e., Second Coming, *Ed.*).

When Conditions Are So Tragic, The Power of God Also Manifests Itself

Our salvation is in God's Hands; as long as salvation is possible through Him, from now on, we should know we should view it as a paradoxical "event," an event that is both puzzling and enigmatic. Bottom line: there is no need to despair. "God," I once said to someone, "will not conquer the world." And when he began to panic, I added, "He has conquered it already; He no longer needs to conquer it again!" But His conquering is often revealed in paradoxical forms—His glory in this world is perhaps more grand now than ever before. Thus, when conditions become so tragic (a common phenomenon in our days), when there is only one thing left to do, and with a desperate hope we turn to the thought and prayer that maybe Someone up there hears us, it is then that the power of God begins to manifest itself.

An Orthodox nun from Beirut was telling me that one Pascha night, while Lebanon was in the midst of an awful war, they did not know whether they were going to be able to celebrate Paschal services or not—yet the Orthodox clergy decided to serve anyway. She told me that at any given moment a bomb, a grenade, a mortar shell, or who knows what could have fallen from anywhere. But nothing fell, and they served on the night of Pascha in the hope of the Resurrection and while also having the great fear of bombardment. She said, "Never have I felt such a feeling of the Resurrection as on that night!" Again I say that during the most terrible moments of our life is when we begin to live and experience more perfectly than ever the presence of this God of ours, the God Who otherwise may have seemed that He did not exist.

Brothers and sisters, these things which I am sharing with you are not from theory but from painful experience, I am sharing them with trust and confidence. May God do the rest, may He put into your hearts patience and trust. And you should know that man is powerless, but this does not mean that your life is compromised. For the days which are coming, man is more and more alone, and I do not know where this loneliness will end up. But if you remain alone in the whole world, do not forget that Christ was alone in the whole world, slandered by all, and those who loved Him were far from Him. Remaining alone, weak, and apparently abandoned by all, you are likened to Christ Who also was slandered—if you want a reason to not despair. We continue in those states, and we await God; He will come and will have mercy upon us. May God do this for you, and as Elder Cleopa used to say, **may we all meet each other at the gates of Paradise!**



My brothers and sisters, you ought to detest every friendship with evil and wicked men and to avoid their company. Thus does God exhort you through Isaiah: *Go ye out from the midst of [them and] separate yourselves*. (Isa 52:11). Thus does St. Paul command you: *Put away from among yourselves that wicked person*. (1 Cor 5:13); and again: *That he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you*. (1 Cor 5:2). Thus did the Prophet David resolve never to consort even with the most elect of wicked men: *With men that work iniquity, and I shall not join with their chosen*." (Pss 140:4)

What am I saying? Even if wicked men are such necessary friends, relatives, and familiars to you as is your right eye, you should likewise hate and abhor their company; for their company becomes a stumbling block for you by transmitting their evil to your soul like a scabies and a plague: *Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners* (1 Cor 15:33), causing others to be scandalized at you and supposing that you, too, are as evil as they. Hence, the Lord said about these men: *If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee*. (Mt 5:29).

St. Chrysostomos also says: *Therefore, let no one have an immoral man for his friend. For if, when we have immoral sons, we disown them, without regard for nature or its laws, or for the constraint that it imposes on us, much more ought we to shun our friends and acquaintances when they are wicked. For even if we receive no harm from them, we shall not in any case be able to avoid incurring a bad reputation, since those outside our circles do not scrutinize our lives, but judge us by our companions*.

St. Nikodemus the Hagiorite: "Christian Morality"

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ON THE LATTER DAYS...

By St. Hippolytus of Rome (+236), from "The Anti-Nicene Fathers, vol. V: Fathers of the Third Century," pp. 243-244.

Wherefore all shall walk after their own will. And the children will lay hands on their parents. The wife will give up her own husband to death, and the husband will bring his own wife to judgment like a criminal. Masters will lord it over their servants savagely, and servants will assume an unruly demeanor toward their masters. None will reverence the grey hairs of the elderly, and none will have pity upon the comeliness of the youthful.

The temples of God will be like houses, and there will be overturnings of the churches everywhere. The Scriptures will be despised, and everywhere they will sing the songs of the adversary.

Fornications, and adulteries, and perjuries will fill the land; sorceries, and incantations, and divinations will follow after these with all force and zeal. And, on the whole, from among those who profess to be Christians will rise up then false prophets, false apostles, impostors, mischief-makers, evil-doers, liars against each other, adulterers, fornicators, robbers, grasping, perjured, mendacious, hating each other.

The shepherds will be like wolves; the priests will embrace falsehood; the monks will lust after the things of the world; the rich will assume hardness of heart; the rulers will not help the poor; the powerful will cast off all pity; the judges will remove justice from the just, and, blinded with bribes, they will call in unright-

eousness. And what am I to say with respect to men, when the very elements themselves will disown their order?

There will be earthquakes in every city, and plagues in every country; and monstrous thunderings and frightful lightnings will burn up both houses and fields. Storms of winds will disturb both sea and land excessively; and there will be unfruitfulness on the earth, and a roaring in the sea, and an intolerable agitation on account of souls and the destruction of men.

There will be signs in the sun, and signs in the moon, deflections in the stars, distresses of nations, intemperateness in the atmosphere, discharges of hail upon the face of the earth, winters of excessive severity, different frosts, inexorable scorching winds, unexpected thunderings, unlooked-for conflagrations; and in general, lamentation and mourning in the whole earth, without consolation. For, *because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.* (Mt. 24:12).

By reason of the agitation and confusion of all these, the Lord of the universe cries in the Gospel, saying: *Take heed that ye be not deceived; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not yet by and by.* (Lk 21:8-9).

Let us then observe the word of the Saviour, how He always admonished us with a view to our security: *Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ.*