



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **January 20, 2013** ✠

Synaxis of St. John the Baptist (O.C.)

St. Euthymius the Great (473)

St. Euthymius of Turnovo (14th C)

"A genuine friend is one who, when his neighbor is undergoing tribulation, imperturbably and calmly suffers with him: afflictions, needs, temptations and calamities --- as if they were his own."

~ St. Maximos the Confessor
(Jan. 21)

***Memory Eternal!* The Ever-Memorable Priest of God, Father Jacob Myers of St. John the Wonderworker in Atlanta! May his soul dwell with the blessed!**

**Funeral Services: Friday, January 25, Funeral Vigil, 7:00pm ET @ St. John's - Atlanta
Saturday, January 26, Funeral Liturgy at 9:00am ET**

This Week: NO VESPERS SATURDAY

✠ **Monday, Jan 21 - Inquirer's Class, 6:30pm**

✠ **Wednesday, Jan 23, 6:30pm Akathist to St. Xenia, on the eve of her Feastday!**

God has done all things for our benefit...

✠ We are guarded and taught by the angels; we are tempted by the demons so that we may be humbled and have recourse to God, thus being saved from self-elation and delivered from negligence.

On the one hand, we are led to give thanks to our Benefactor through the good things of this world, by which I mean health, prosperity, strength, rest, joy, light, spiritual knowledge, riches, progress in all things, a peaceful life, the enjoyment of honors, authority, abundance and all the other supposed blessings of this life. We are led to love Him and to do what good we can, because we feel we have a natural obligation to repay God for His gifts to us by performing good works. It is of course impossible to repay Him, for our debt always grows larger.

On the other hand, through what are regarded as hardships we attain a state of patience, humility and hope of blessings in the age to be; and by these so-called hardships I mean such things as illness, discomfort, tribulation, weakness, unsought distress, darkness, ignorance, poverty, general misfortune, the fear of loss, dishonor, affliction, indigence, and so on. Indeed, not only in the age to be, but even in this present age these things are a source of great blessing to us.

St Peter of Damascus (7th C)

The Old Adam – the New Adam

The first sin, culpable indeed, was the fall of free choice from good into evil; the second, following upon the first, was the innocent transformation of human nature from incorruption into corruption. For our forefather Adam committed two 'sins' by his transgression of God's commandment: the first 'sin' was culpable, when his free choice willfully rejected the good; but the second 'sin', occasioned by the first, was innocent, since human nature unwillingly put off its incorruption.

...In turn, just as through one man, who turned voluntarily from the good, the human nature was turned from incorruption to corruption to the detriment of all humanity, so too through one man, Jesus Christ, who did not voluntarily turn from the good, human nature underwent a restoration from corruption to incorruption for the benefit of all humanity." **St. Maximus the Confessor (7th C)**

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (9.3)

God descends to the humble as waters flow down from the hills into the valleys.

St. Tikhon of Voronezh

Our holy Fathers have renounced all other spiritual work and concentrated wholly on this one doing, that is, on guarding the heart, convinced that, through this practice, they would easily attain every other virtue, whereas without it not a single virtue can be firmly established.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

The Holy Eucharist is the first, most important, and greatest miracle of Christ. All the other Gospel miracles are secondary. How could we not call the greatest miracle the fact that simple bread and wine were once transformed by the Lord into His very Body and His very Blood, and then have continued to be transformed for nearly two thousand years by the prayers of priests, who are but simple human beings? And what is more, this mystery has continued to effect a miraculous change in those people who communicate of the Divine Mysteries with faith and humility.

St. Ambrose of Optina

Strive as well as you can to enter deeply with the heart into the Church reading and singing and to imprint these on the tablets of the heart.

Abbot Nazarius of Valaam

The man who follows Christ in solitary mourning is greater than he who praises Christ amid the congregation of men.

St. Isaac the Syrian

Keep the body properly slim so that you reduce the burden of the heart's warfare, with full benefit to yourself.

St. Philotheus of Sinai

I consider those fallen mourners more blessed than those who have not fallen and are not mourning over themselves; because as a result of their fall, they have risen by a sure resurrection.

St. John of the Ladder

Examine yourself every day to see if you have sinned. If you pray about these sins, God will forgive them. . . Force yourself to say many prayers with tears. Perhaps God will have mercy on you and strip you of the old man, the sinner.

St. Isaiah the Solitary

Truly, nothing annoys the demons of lust like revealing his works, and nothing pleases him like concealing one's thoughts.

Apophthegmata Patrum

You know, brethren, that the life of the monks and consecrated virgins is angelic, surpassing the conduct of men. For those who lead such lives have died to the ordinary lifestyle of men and live in the One Who died and was raised in their behalf.

St. Theodore the Sanctified

SPIRITUAL LIFE IS THE BASIC PREREQUISITE FOR A GOOD FUTURE

By Elder Paisios the Athonite, from the book "Family Life," published by the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist, Souroti, Greece (2002), translated by Fr. Luke Hartung.



-Geronta, the girl who said to you that she is considering monasticism told me that a boy from class asked why she won't go out to the movies or out on dates with boys. What should she have answered?

- She should have said: "Not even my brother has ever asked me such questions, and now you are?"

- A few days later the boy found her outside of school—she hadn't seen him—and he went to take her arm.

She only said "hello" and immediately went inside.

- No, that's not good! In such a position she should have reacted, because as things went, she may have given him the impression that she is fine with this show of affection and now he'll do it again. The age she's at now is a little difficult and it's not good for her to keep company with boys. It is not even necessary for her to speak with them, unless perhaps they need help. If she decides to get married, when she meets a nice guy, she should tell her parents about it. They will evaluate whether the right prerequisites for starting a good family are there. For now, as she still hasn't decided which life she will follow, speaking with boys won't help; she'll just get dizzy for nothing and lose her peace. Those kids who do such things are extremely miserable souls, flighty and constantly troubled; they have no peace. Their face and eyes are wild.

The attraction of the female gender to the male—and vice versa—exists in the nature of man. But, you should tell her that it's not the time for that now; she instead needs to attend to her studies. Kids who nurture this attraction from a young age, spin like tops before the right time. Later, when the appropriate hour does come, the top is already spinning and they aren't able to be happy because they've already lived that happiness. On the other hand, those kids who are careful, rejoice all the more when the proper time comes, and until that time they have great serenity. You know those mothers who have lived purely, how peaceful they are, even though they've got heaps of worries?

I always stress that a young person before marriage should strive to live as spiritually as possible and to keep their purity intact. This ensures double health. Spiritual life is the basic prerequisite for whichever life one may follow. The world

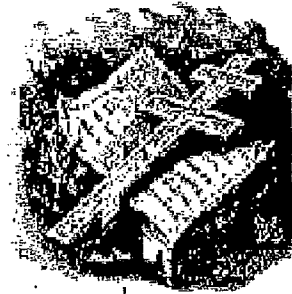
has become a field of wheat which, once the ears of grain sprouted forth, has entirely been trampled by pigs. Now all we see are weeds, mud and wheat thrown upside-down and, every once in awhile, off to the side, a lone, upright stalk.

The more spiritual work one puts into his or her adolescence the easier it will be later on, whichever life is chosen. The better one loads and prepares before the battle, the easier it will be in the midst of the war, when bullets are flying and bombs are landing all around. Until the time comes to decide, for example, if a girl will become a nun or a good mother, a pure life is essential. That's why, she must strive as much as she is able, to progress in her studies. When she guards her eyes and ears and rejects bad thoughts, she won't have far to go later.

When he meets a good girl, a young man should strive to have good thoughts; to see her as the living image of a saint. However, if he meets a girl who is a bit off track, to see her as a sister and be sorry for her, just as he'd be sorry to see his own sister fall, for we are all children of Adam.

- But today, Geronta, in the colleges, etc. there are many temptations for a young person.

- You must get connected with other spiritual people, so as to be helped and move about in a spiritual atmosphere. Let's not make things more difficult than they already are. I know a lot of kids who are in college and live in purity, by their own small effort and the great help of God.



We humans both grieve and rejoice. But grief should not overpower us, because great sorrow brings despair; which is the greatest sin—it's a lack of trust in the power of God. You have many thoughts, and they tire your mind. Say the Creed, and the Supplicatory Canon to our Panagia. Learn [this Canon] by heart ... so that your mind adheres to it and our Panagia will help you. Our Panagia, and our Lord's Cross, guard man from the many snares of the devil.

Without fail, kneel half an hour a day and pray to God. When you have great affliction, pray without ceasing—do not stop until you're aware of some relief in your soul. God beholds our persistence and faith, and sends His help. If you do not receive it, do not depart from prayer. He is compassionate, and will give it; but He also wants us to seek it from Him.

Elder Ieronymos of Aegina (+1966)

REFLECTION ~ On Bodily Purity and Fasting

Bodily purity is primarily attained by fasting, and, through bodily purity, spiritual purity is also attained. Abstinence from food, according to the words of that son of grace, St. Ephraim the Syrian, means: "Not to desire or ask for various foods, either sweet or costly; not to eat anything outside the designated time; not to succumb to the spirit of gluttony; not to excite hunger in oneself by looking at good food; and not to desire at one moment one kind of food and at another moment another kind of food."

Great is the fallacy that fasting and Lenten food harm the health of the body. It is a known fact that the ascetics lived the longest and were the least prone to illness. St. Daniel and the Three Children in Babylon offer us an example of this. When the king ordered his eunuch to feed these young men food from the royal table and to give them good wine to drink, Daniel told the eunuch that they did not want to accept the royal food and wine but wanted only vegetables for food (for Daniel did not want to eat the food sprinkled with the blood of the idolatrous sacrifices). The eunuch, fearing that the youths would be weakened by the fasting foods, related his fear to Daniel. Then the Prophet suggested that he make a test and convince himself that the fasting food would not weaken them: to nourish the other youths at the royal court with food from the king's table, and to feed the four of them only on pulse for the course of ten days, and then make a comparison. The eunuch heeded Daniel and did what he suggested. After ten days, the faces of the four ascetic youths were more radiant and their bodies were stronger than the bodies of the Babylonian youths who ate and drank from the king's table.

Not letting himself be turned...

An Elder was asked, "How can a fervent brother not be shocked when he sees others returning to the world?" (i.e., giving up the monastic life)

And he said, "Watch the dogs who chase hares. When one of them has seen a hare, he pursues it until he catches it, without being concerned with anything else. The others, seeing the dog launched in pursuit, run with it for a short time and soon come back. Only the one who has seen the hare follows it till he catches it, not letting himself be turned from his course by those who go back, and not caring about the ravines, rocks, and undergrowth.

So it is with him who seeks Christ as Master; ever mindful of the Cross, he cares nothing about any of the scandals that occur, till he reaches the Crucified One."

The Prayer Rope

Once, there was a monk from the Monastery of St. Paul who had gone to the Church of St. Gerasimos on the island of Cephallonia. During the Divine Liturgy, he stood in the Altar area and was praying with his komboskini (prayer rope) the Prayer of the Heart – "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" – while the others were chanting. They had also brought a possessed person into the church to be cured by St. Gerasimos. While the monk was saying the prayer in the Altar, the demon was being seated outside and was shouting, "Stop working that string, will you, monk; it is burning me!"

The priest heard it too, and said to the monk, "Pray with your komboskini as much as you can, my brother, so that God's creature can be freed of the demon."

The demon then shouted in great anger, "You, rotten priest, you. What are you telling him to pull that string for? It is burning me!"

The monk then prayed with his komboskini with even greater effort and the possessed man was delivered from the demon.

What the eye is for the body, faith is for reason. -- Theodoret of Cyrus

From the Second century Treatise, "Letters to Diognetus"

Since I see, most excellent Diognetus, that you are so very anxious to understand the religion of the Christians, and that your inquiries respecting them are distinctly and carefully made, as to what God they trust and how they worship Him, that they all disregard the world and despise death, and take no account of those who are regarded as gods by the Greeks, neither observe the superstitions of the Jews, and as to the nature of the affection which they entertain one to another, and of this new development of interest, which has entered into men's lives now and not before: I gladly welcome this zeal in you, and I ask of God, Who supplieth both the speaking and the hearing to us, that I may be granted to speak in such a way that you may be made better by the hearing, and that you may so listen that I the speaker may not be disappointed. /../

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. For they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, neither do they use some different language, nor practice an extraordinary kind of life Nor again do they possess any invention discovered by any intelligence or study of ingenious men, nor are they masters of any human dogma as some are. But while they dwell in cities of Greeks and barbarians as the lot of each is cast, and follow the native customs in dress and food and the other arrangements of life, yet the constitution of their own citizenship, which they set forth, is marvelous, and confessedly contradicts expectation. They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is a foreign country. They marry like all other men and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their meals in common, but not their wives. They find themselves in the flesh, and yet they live not after the flesh. Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men, and they are persecuted by all. They are ignored, and yet they are condemned. They are put to death, and yet in dying they are endued with life. They are poor, and yet they make many rich. They are in want of all things, and yet they abound in all things. They are dishonored, and yet they are glorified in their dishonor. They are slandered, yet they are vindicated. They are reviled, and they bless; they are insulted, and they respect. Doing good they are punished as evil-doers; being punished they rejoice, as if they were thereby given new life. The Jews war against them as heretic- and the Greeks persecute them, although none of those that hate them can tell the reason of their hostility.

In a word, what the soul is to the body, so are the Christians to the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and Christians through the diverse cities of the world Just as the soul has its abode in the body and yet it is not of the body, so Christians have their abode in the world and yet they are not of the world. The soul, which is invisible, is guarded in the body, which is visible: so Christians are recognized as being in the world, and yet their religion remains invisible.

The flesh hates the soul and wars against it, though it receives no wrong, because it is forbidden to indulge in pleasures; so the world hates Christians, though it receives no wrong from them, because they oppose its pleasures. Nevertheless, the soul loves the flesh and its members in spite of this hatred: so, too, Christians love these that hate them. The soul is enclosed in the body and yet holds the body together; so Christians are confined within the world as in a prison house, and yet they are the ones who hold the world together. The soul, though it is immortal, dwells in a mortal tabernacle; so Christians sojourn amidst perishable things, while they look for the imperishability which is in the heavens. The soul when hardly treated in the matter of food and drinks is improved; and so Christians when punished increase more and more. So great is the office for which God has appointed them, and which it is not lawful for them to decline.

For it is no earthly discovery, as I said, which was committed to them, neither do they care to guard so carefully any mortal invention, nor have they been entrusted with the stewardship of human mysteries. But truly the Almighty Creator of the universe, the invisible God Himself from Heaven planted among men the Truth and the holy teaching which surpasses the wit of man, and fixed it firmly in their hearts, not as any man might imagine, by sending (to mankind) an emissary or angel, or ruler, or one of those that direct the affairs of earth, or one of those who have been entrusted with the dispensations in heaven, but the very Artificer and Creator of the universe Himself, by whom He made the heavens, by whom He enclosed the sea in its proper bounds whose mysteries all the elements faithfully observe from Whom the sun has received even the measure of the courses of the day to keep them, Whom the moon obeys as He bids her shine by night, Whom the stars obey as they follow the course of the moon, by Whom all things are ordered and bounded and placed in subjection, the heavens and thy things that are in the heavens, the earth and the things that are in the earth, the sea and the things that are in the sea, fire, air, abyss, the things that are in the heights, the things that are in the depths the things that are between the two. Him He sent unto them.

Was He sent, think you, as any man might suppose, to establish a sovereignty, to inspire fear and terror? Not so but in gentleness and meekness has He sent Him, as a king might send his son who is a king He sent Him, as sending God; He sent Him as a man unto men; He sent Him, as Savior, as using persuasion, not force: for force is no attribute of God, He sent Him, as summoning, not as persecuting; He sent Him, as loving, not as judging. For He will send Him in judgment, and who shall endure His presence?...Do you not see them thrown to wild beasts that so they may deny the Lord, and yet not overcome? Do you not see that the more of them are punished, just so many others abound? These are not like the works of a man; they are the power of God; they are proofs of His presence...

Second century treatise, "Letters to Diognetus", by an unknown author - Adapted from A Treasury of Early Christianity, edited by Anne Freemantle; Viking Press, 1953

HOMILY ~ On the Church's compact structure, similar to a body

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part (Ephesians 4:16).

This word, brethren, is on the spiritual body, God's holy Church. From Him, that is, from Christ, the whole body is fitly joined together and compacted. The most wise Apostle cannot find a better comparison for the Church than the human body. What the head is to the human body, so is Christ the Lord to the body of the Church. From the head, the nerves spread through all parts of the body, and through the nerves, all the parts of the body perceive, feel and move; and their life lies in this perception, feeling and movement. It can be said that the head, through the brain and the nerves, is present in every part of the body. If the head is cut off, every part of the body becomes dead in an instant. Christ is present in every part of the Church, in every faithful member of it. Through Him, each of the faithful perceives the spiritual kingdom, feels love and moves aright toward God. From Him, every member receives strength according to the effectual working in the measure, that is, according to function and gift. The Lord gives this strength directly, by contact, by touch, by His personal presence. Love is a wonderful bond that binds Christ to the faithful, the faithful to Christ and the faithful to one another. Brethren, what happens to one part of the body when it is torn away from the nerves that link it to the head? It becomes inactive, insensitive and motionless: dead. This also happens with every member of the Church who leaves the structure of the Church, and thus severs his tie with the Head of the Church. Brethren, may God preserve us from this calamity!

O Lord Jesus, the Source of life and love, do not allow any dark power, within us or without us, to separate us from Thee and Thy Body, Thy Holy Church that Thou hast purchased with Thy precious blood! To Thee be glory and praise forever! Amen.

Great Nations Need Great Citizens

By Richard Lamm, former governor of Colorado, *Chronicles Magazine*, July 1992

... We are losing those stern virtues that made us a great nation in the first place and becoming an overindulged people with hedonistic values that are not compatible with long-term greatness.

... For freedom to be workable as a political and social system, strong inner controls, a powerful moral compass, and sense of values are needed.

{excerpt}

... Our Constitution will not save us if the intangibles go sour....

... Less mentioned, but equally important to the success of our nation, is the foundation upon which the Constitution was built. Our Founders assumed the often inarticulated values, customs, mores, and culture of hardworking people who cared about the future. They assumed these public virtues would continue. Mary Ann Glendon, in her thoughtful book *Rights Talk*, points out that the Founders of our country "counted on families, custom, religion, and convention to preserve and promote the virtues required by our experiment in ordered liberty. Jefferson, Adams, and especially Madison, knew that the Constitution and laws, the institutionalized checks on power, the army, and militia could not supply all the conditions required for the success of the new regime. They often explicitly acknowledged the dependence of the entire enterprise on the qualities of mind and character with which they believed the American population had been blessed."

If you change the underlying social milieu, not even the brilliance of the Constitution can save the country. The Constitution is a structure for citizens who are dedicated and motivated. It will not save a society that does not vote, does not care, has no sense of posterity, and is addicted to hedonism. The Constitution, however brilliant, will not make up for people who have lost the ability to care about the future of their nation. Tocqueville particularly warned that excessive individualism could destroy all that public virtue had built.

Are we not there? Former Secretary of Commerce, Peter G. Peterson, says "American individualism used to honor community values. Now, it seems to be a quest for unlimited personal advantage. As consumers, rather than citizens, we seem to have become a nation of silent players and special interests in which few speak effectively for the common good."

America talks endlessly about the follies of its leaders, but what about the follies of its citizens? America in many respects faces more of a "citizenship" problem than a leadership problem. Ortega y Gasset found that "what makes a nation great is not primarily its great men, but the stature of its innumerable mediocre ones."

Too many Americans believe that our nation has a divine destiny, but this is a dangerous hubris. As Toynbee warned, all great nations rise and all fall and the "autopsy of history is that all great nations commit suicide."

Every once-great nation in history thought God was on its side, but to date God has never allowed any great civilization to exist for very long. Greatness in nations is not a geopolitical status, but an ephemeral stage. We talk about "American exceptionalism," but we are merely whistling past history's graveyard, in which every other once-great civilization lies buried. I am not sounding taps for America, but instead an alarm bell. We are losing those stern virtues that made us a great nation in the first place and becoming an overindulged people with hedonistic values that are not compatible with long-term greatness. We forget Livy's warning that "luxury is more ruthless

than war." Americans know what they want, but not what they can afford. They have forgotten that rights and privileges require duties and responsibilities

The battle flag that Admiral Nelson chose for the Battle of Trafalgar read, "England expects every man to do his duty." The words really seem an anachronism. We know all about our rights, but very little about our obligations. We speak of rights in a loud voice, and responsibilities in a whisper. We want the fullest kinds of freedom in democracy, but unrestrained freedom may undercut democracy. Ambassador Henry Grunwald put it this way:

We have not grasped the cost accounting of freedom. The great source of our current bafflement is that we somehow expect a wildly free society to have the stability of a tradition-guided society. We somehow believe that we can simultaneously have, to the fullest, various kinds of freedoms: freedom from discipline, but also freedom from crime; freedom from community constraints, but also freedom from smog; freedom from economic controls, but also freedom from the inevitable ups and downs of a largely unhampered economy.

Both American conservatives and liberals are embodiments of this paradox. Liberals are forever asking state intervention in the economy for the sake of social justice, while insisting on hands-off in the private area of morals. Conservatives take the opposite view. They demand self-determination in politics, but suspect self-determination in morals. They demand laissez-faire in business, but hate laissez-faire in behavior. In theory, there is no contradiction between these positions. For freedom to be workable as a political and social system, strong inner controls, a powerful moral compass, and sense of values are needed. In practice, the contradiction is vast. The compass is increasingly hard to read, the values hard to find in a frantically open, mobile, fractioned society. Thus a troubling, paradoxical question: Does freedom destroy the inner disciplines that alone make freedom possible?

Democracy is built on an inordinate faith in ordinary people. Winston Churchill summed up democracy with the words, "Trust the people." But, as Grunwald points out, that may be undercut if people lose their self-discipline and self-restraint. Freedom can thus be too free. "Freedom is the luxury of self-discipline," says one French philosopher. Well, we have the freedom, but little sign of self-discipline.

Our educational system's deterioration needs no elaboration. Thomas Jefferson stated, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free ... it expects what never was and never will be."

When asked what beliefs they would die for, 48 percent of a large national poll said "none." Only 24 percent said they were willing to die for their country.

We can supply order for a while without citizenship but not forever. We can ultimately never make enough laws or hire enough policemen to make up for a lack of self-discipline and self-restraint. A society that needs to put up mesh fences over many of its freeway overpasses to keep fellow citizens from throwing harmful objects at each other does not seem to have lasting power. A society that talks seriously about granting "rights" to animals and trees, but is silent about any obligations and responsibilities of citizenship, lacks proportion and sustainability.

"Civilization begins with order; grows with liberty and dies with chaos," warns Will Durant. We risk that outcome. There has been a great unbalancing in America. We have unbalanced community in favor of individualism; responsibilities in favor of rights; and duties in favor of privileges. We want education without study; wealth without work; freedom without participation; and democracy without citizenship. We self-correct or perish, for this is hardly a sustainable agenda.