



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **January 27, 2013** ✠

Sanctity of Life Sunday

New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia

St. John Chrysostom ~

Return of his relics to Constantinople from exile in Armenia (437)



✠ **Tuesday, Jan. 29. 6:30pm - Inquirer's Class**

Great Feastday: Saturday, February 2 – The Entrance of Christ into the Temple

✠ **Great Vespers w/ Litiya – Friday, Feb. 1, 6:30pm**

✠ **Divine Liturgy – Saturday, Feb. 2, 10:00am**

✠ **Memorial Service: Fecanin / Hrynick Families – Feb. 2, 5:00pm**

⇒ **Sundays Ahead: Feb. 3 - Anna Damon Baby Shower; Feb.10 - Preston Marriage Blessing, 2:00pm; Feb. 17 ~ Zacchaeus Sunday ... First Pre-Lenten Sunday**

⇒ ***Ice Skating Party at Pelham Rink Today!***

The Life and Salvation of All

✠ God belongs to all free beings. He is the life of all, the salvation of all —faithful and unfaithful, just and unjust, pious and impious, passionate and dispassionate, monks and laymen, wise and simple, healthy and sick, young and old —just as the effusion of light, the sight of the sun, and the changes of the seasons are for all alike; 'for there is no respect of persons with God.'

St. John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 1

Pro-Life Prayer

The following prayer is to be read after the singing of "Blessed be the Name..." (2x):

Let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy.

O Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, Who are in the bosom of the Father, True God, source of life and immortality, Light of Light, Who came into the world to enlighten it: Thou wast pleased to be conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary for the salvation of our souls by the power of Thine All-Holy Spirit. O Master, Who came that we might have life more abundantly, we ask Thee to enlighten the minds and hearts of those blinded to the truth that life begins at conception and that the unborn in the womb are already adorned with Thine image and likeness; enable us to guard, cherish, and protect the lives of all those who are unable to care for themselves. For Thou art the Giver of Life, bringing each person from non-being into being, sealing each person with divine and infinite love. Be merciful, O Lord, to those who, through ignorance or willfulness, affront Thy divine goodness and providence through the evil act of abortion. May they, and all of us, come to the life of Thy Truth and glorify Thee, the Giver of Life, together with Thy Father, and Thine All-Holy and Life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Sanctity of Life Sunday 2013

January 27, 2013

To the Hierarchs, Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America

Dearly Beloved in the Lord:

As we make our way into the civil New Year, we continue to grieve over the tragic loss of the innocent lives at the Sandy Hook Elementary School. Those directly affected by this most recent act of violence, as well as those who have suffered through the many other examples of inhuman brutality during the past year, undoubtedly will require a long period during which they can find healing for their broken hearts and answers to their questions concerning the providence of God and the goodness of humanity.

Our society is increasingly weary of the sting of death and human sin and wary of the proclamations of hope and life coming from religious circles. Young people, unconvinced by shallow theology and hypocritical sermonizing, are increasingly identifying themselves as unbelievers, atheists, questioners or simply confused. People of all ages are losing faith or becoming critical of it, in part because they do not seem to find a satisfactory Christian response to tragedies such as the Newtown and Aurora massacres.

As Orthodox Christians, we too dwell under the shadow cast by every assault on the sanctity of human life, whether it be against the unborn, the infirm, the terminally ill, the condemned, or innocent school children. We, too, wrestle with the same questions with which society wrestles, since every one of us faces the same reality of death. But unlike those who have no hope, we know that, just when death seems to have gained the victory, life blossoms forth, as seen most clearly in Christ's arising from the tomb on the third day.

The same Paschal confirmation of death being swallowed up by life is revealed in our most recent celebration of the Feasts of the Nativity and Theophany of Christ. The months of December and January are the richest in commemorations of some of the most venerable Saints of the Church: Prophets and Ancestors who pave the way for the Birth of the Savior and Hierarchs, Confessors and Monastics who shine with the glory that was revealed at His Baptism. But no less proclaimers of His glory and His life are the Martyrs, including those little ones who suffered incomprehensibly—the Holy Innocents.

We proclaim, as Orthodox Christians, that all life is a participation in and reflection of the One Who is Life Itself. And we do so, even in the midst of the insanity of this world, knowing that human passions and human sin may cause destruction in our communities. But Christ Himself, by His example of voluntary suffering, reminds us that we have our part to play in proclaiming life. If we are to transform the collective heart and mind of our society, we must begin by transforming our own hearts and minds.

Heeding the Gospel, let us remain faithful to the vision of human life as a sacred gift, recommitting ourselves to defending the lives "of all mankind," as we pray at every Divine Liturgy. And let us commit ourselves to bearing witness to the life of Christ in all we do, say and think, so that even in small ways, we might proclaim the glory of the Kingdom not yet fully revealed, but already fully present in our midst.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+TIKHON

Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada

The Incarnation and Peace among Men

+ His Eminence Archbishop Dmitri

"For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity..." (Ephesians 2: 14-15)

This Scriptural passage is read on the 24th Sunday after Pentecost. St Paul is describing an important meaning -- result -- of the Incarnation. The enmity between nations and people of differing races, taken for granted as something natural, even sanctioned by religion, was destroyed by the entrance of God into human history.

The Incarnation is the great turning point of history. Even the secular world marks its time "Before Christ" (BC.) and "Anno Domini (AD. -- the year of our Lord). Time since Christ is the modern era. Twentieth-century man likes to think of his century as the truly modern one, and of deep concerns for equality and justice as being products of his time. Yet, all that is said now about these concepts was said centuries ago by Jesus Christ Himself, and society is only beginning to catch up with His advanced ideas.

Racial equality, brotherhood among nations and peoples, integration -- these are ideas that one hears expressed continually in our day, and many, even some Christians, regard them as foreign to the teachings of the Church. The fact is that Christians themselves have obscured and distorted the fundamental characteristics of the new life that God Incarnate gave to the world.

Religion has been historically, the sanctifier of national differences. The Faith often has coincided with the boundaries of the nation, and unfortunately Christian communities have been strongholds of ethno-religiosity-national faith ideas.

One radical misunderstanding of Christians of their own faith is partially responsible for this attitude. **Christianity is often thought of as one of so many religions, when the truth is that Christianity is not religion in the usual sense of the word. It is above religion; Christ came to complete and crown religion. It is the new life in Christ, the worship of God in spirit and in truth.**

Unaided by direct revelation, man's relationship to God found its expression in religion, yet when the fullness of time was come, and God entered into the world, the real nature of that relationship was revealed. This revealed relationship, then, is "super-religion," above and beyond all pietistic systems devised by man, the end toward which all religion was directed.

However, throughout Christian history there have been those who would force Christianity into the mold of traditional religion and make of it one more competitor for men's loyalties. Even in our own Church, by historical accident, the Faith had been identified with nationalities. It is particularly sad that Christians have not taken the initiative and, being true to their nature, broken down the walls of partition. It is tragic that Christians have identified themselves with the old idea of religion as the separator of men. Due in part to this misunderstanding, a large-scale abandonment of the Church was seen in years past, and is evident even to this day.

In reality, faith in Christ is the force of unification and could solve the world's problems; all those things which captivate men's minds in our day -- peace, brotherhood, equality, social justice -- have their origin in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The Church has always prayed for the union of all men in the Liturgy, because she is convinced that God so wills it. Tragically, when men speak now of peace, brotherhood, equality and social justice,

they offer humanism as the only basis for these things.

The unity and peace of which St. Paul spoke are unity and peace that only Christ can give, and this is exactly what faith in Christ will lead to. Unity and peace on any other foundation can only lead to further chaos and wider gulfs of separation.

We Christians must re-examine ourselves and allow ourselves to be unified by Christ. We can start by removing, with God's help, all enmity and ill-will that exists among ourselves; we must consciously make ours, the characteristic measures by which we can judge just how close we are to Christ -- "do unto others as we would have them do unto us," "forgive men their debts, just as our heavenly Father forgives us our debts."

No matter how chaotic the world may be, no matter how much hatred and bitterness exists among men, we know that when men take seriously Christ's command to "love our neighbor as ourselves," the influence and effect of that love is so great that it can overcome the world.

Through the Incarnation

✠ If men had not been created according to the image of God, the Lord would not have been incarnated of the Most-Holy Virgin. O how our nature is raised, both in its creation and in its redemption! Through the Incarnation of the Son of God from the Most-Holy Virgin Mary, God has most truly united Himself with men. We sing to her: "Thou, by thy glorious birth-giving hast united God the Word with men, and linked our apostate nature with heavenly things." Glory to thee, who art worthy to be praised by every reasonable creature, for thou hast obtained from God such grace and purity that thou wast able, through the favor of God the Father, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, to give flesh to the Son of God! Make us also worthy, O Lord, to attain purity of spirit and body through the Communion of the Divine Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Thy Son.

~ St. John of Kronstadt

God became Man

The Word became flesh. What grandeur this hides! God became man, He descended from the heavens; the bodiless God, the infinite, incomprehensible Spirit came and dwelt within human nature in order to save it. He became a slave to deliver us from slavery; He became man, so that we may become gods by grace; "You are gods, and all of you are the sons of the Most High." We have become a special people, a holy nation, a priesthood of God, through the advent of the divine Child!

The divine Word—Who lives, reigns, and governs all of creation—the Only-begotten Word of God, the boundless sweetness of God's existence, the glory and hymn of the Martyrs, the endurance of the holy monks, the sole Bridegroom of pure souls. And as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God—"who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God." Those who will be saved are not born of the will of the flesh and desire, but of God, and they will reign beside Him. "We have received grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." He gave us the Ten Commandments; He gave us precepts in the new grace of the Gospel, and disregarding the gratitude we owed Him, He gave us even more grace!

~ Elder Ephraim of Arizona

The Shield and the Spear

'Let's take the example of the spear. When it strikes a shield, if the shield is weak it will be pierced. But, if it is strong and sound, then the spear is not able to cause it any damage. On the contrary, the spear falls down after having become bent at this point of impact. The same thing happens to a soul. That is, if the arrows which the devil throws finds the soul weak and languid, they will penetrate to the soul's core. If, however, they find the soul strong and hard, the devil himself will depart inactive --- knowing that he did not cause any harm to this soul. Thus, two benefits, or rather three, since the soul remained unharmed, but was made stronger, and the devil himself became weaker from his endeavor."

~ St. John Chrysostom (407)

The Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple

On the days of the Lord's Great Feasts, especially Nativity and Pascha, we are full of joy and happiness, laying aside, for the time being, with the Church's blessing, grief over sins committed and sorrow at the thought of our unworthiness and moral imperfection. Is it possible to mourn and cry over our sins when the churches resound with the life-asserting words of our teacher? "Enter and share the joy of the Lord... The Feast is ready, partake of it in delight.., come all ye and enjoy the Feast of Faith, receive the riches of grace. Let no one deplore his weaknesses...let no one cry over his sins." On the other hand, can we play and enjoy ourselves during days of fast, especially during Lent and Holy Week, when the Holy Church reminds us of the hour of death and the Last Judgment, and of how the King of kings and the Lord of Lords cometh to be slain and to give Himself to be the food of the faithful?

The Feast of the Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ is intentionally celebrated by the Church straight after the radiant days of the Nativity and Theophany, when Christians are preparing themselves for Lent, prayer and contrition. In the divine service for the Presentation, there is occasion for both joy and grief, for both exultation and gentle tenderness bordering on sorrow. *Rejoice, O Mother of God, Virgin full of grace; for from Thee hath shone forth the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, giving light to those in darkness.* How much serene joy there is in this festal Troparion that fills our souls as during the Feast of the Nativity, when in the wake of the Shepherds of Bethlehem and the Wise Men, we hurry to the manger of the Divine Infant and with all our heart: *To adore Thee the Sun of Righteousness and to know Thee, the Orient from on High!* These marvellous and gladdening echoes of Christmas lend wings to our souls and fill our hearts with joy.

But we hear other words as well, words that make us meditate over the price paid for this great joy. Indeed, having glorified God with the inspired words: *Lord, Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace...* the pious elder Simeon said to the Immaculate Virgin: *Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also) that the thoughts of many may be revealed.* The Ever - memorable Metropolitan Philaret speaks these notable words concerning this: "Thou Blessed amongst women! Thou Most Immaculate amongst daughters of men! The wise Elder Simeon did not hesitate to entrust thee with this awesome mystery: A sword shall pierce through thine own soul also... A day of grief and awe, though of salvation, the Day of Crucifixion resolved for thee the mystery of the prophecy. The crown of thorns worn by Jesus, the nails that crucified Him, the spear that pierced Him, His wounds, His woeful cry, His dying gaze--this was the sword that pierced thy maternal heart, as deeply as thy incommensurably perfect love, as thy incomparable purity.. .Today when thou dwellest in the Divine Glory of thy Son, thou seest the Light of God, the purpose for which the sword had pierced thine own pure soul.'

In every church there is an image of Holy Golgotha. Every time we enter a church, let us contemplate this image with veneration and say a prayer of thanksgiving and sincere contrition. And then we shall be able to understand much in the wonderful blending of radiant joy and serene sorrow that are so characteristic of the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord. From Holy Golgotha, as from the beginning of beginning, the time proceeds for our birth into eternity, and the time to die to sin, the time to love God and His sacred Law, the time to hate evil, the time to bewail our unworthiness, and the time to glory in every gift bestowed upon us by the Father of Light!

The Services of the Feast of the Meeting of Christ in the Temple

By the Priest N.R. Antonov

The Services of the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord. The Feast of the Meeting was inaugurated to commemorate the taking of Christ the Savior into the Temple, when He was a forty-day old infant that the appointed sacrifices might be made there, and His meeting with the Righteous Simeon and the Prophetess Anna. The origins of the Feast date back to the mid-point of the fourth century.

In the hymns for the Feast, the thought is contained that the bringing of the Savior into the Temple was the realization of the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law, and that Jesus is the Savior foretold by the Prophets, incarnate for the salvation of mankind. The Ancient of Days, the God of Sabaoth, one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, is now seen as an Infant, and He Who of old gave the Law, the Creator, is now seen to fulfill the Law. Now that Light shines, which is to illumine the nations. Christ, Who is mystically borne aloft by the Cherubim and hymned by the Seraphim, is taken in the aged arms of Simeon and, as He is the Originator of the Old and the New Testaments, two doves are offered in sacrifice representing the Church of the Old Testament and that of the New, which was to comprise people from among the nations who had been newly illumined (by Baptism).

In the Old Testament readings we have the following themes:- the first, which is composed of sections from the books of Exodus and Leviticus, speaks of the Old Testament Law that the firstborn son should be consecrated unto God; the second (Isaiah 6:1-12) tells of the vision of the Prophet Esaias (Isaiah), in which he saw the Lord of Sabaoth seated upon a throne and surrounded by the Angels; and the third (Isaiah 19:1,5,12,16,19- 21) is composed of a prophecy about the flight into Egypt, about the affliction that should come upon the Egyptians and their turning to God, and in fact according to tradition, during the time when the Savior was abiding in Egypt, in the town of Heliopolis, the pagan gods of this city fell down before our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Canon of Matins, heaven and earth and all living creatures are called upon to witness how the Only-begotten Son of the Most High, Who sits upon the Cherubim, more exalted than all the heavens, appears in the Temple as the Son of an earthly mother, as a tiny Infant and as One Who had not the slightest sin He submits to the Law, which was given for us sinful mortals. Then it describes how the Infant Christ was taken from the hands of the All-Immaculate Virgin Mary by the Righteous Simeon, and it repeats his prophetic words concerning Jesus Christ, the Light of revelation for the nations and the glory of Israel.

In the Prokeimenon we have "My soul doth magnify the Lord" from the hymn of praise of the Mother of God.

The Epistle reading (Hebrews 7:7-17) speaks of the high priestly ministry and death of the Savior and how these excelled the Old Testament sacrifices, and then it tells how the Law of Moses was transformed with the coming of the Savior. In the Gospel (Luke 2:23-40) we have the evangelical record of the Meeting of the Lord.

The Megalynarion:

O Virgin Theotokos, thou Hope of all Christians, protect, watch over and guard all those who put their hope in thee. In the shadow and the letter of the Law, let us, the faithful, discern a figure: every male child that openeth the womb shall be sanctified to God.

Therefore do we magnify the firstborn Word and Son of the Father without beginning, the firstborn Child of a Mother who had not known man!

Choose Life!

As we get closer to the journey of Great Lent, we have clear cut choices to make, as spelled out in Deuteronomy, 30:19: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live..." Isn't it up to us to choose life and ignore the "false gods" of our culture telling us that the killing of the unborn is morally acceptable?

Scripture tells us that Mary had to flee with Joseph to Egypt with the Christ Child in order to save Him from those who feared Him as a dangerous threat. In a way the Christ Child represents every helpless unborn child whose life is threatened by those who fear or reject the Gift of Life. (From the pamphlet "Mary and the Gospel of Life" by Catholics United for Life)

"Our culture holds that a human life is precious when someone thinks it is, be it a parent or be it a civil court, and when that life is deemed to be without value, then it is expendable. Sad to say, many in our society do not question this gross inconsistency but rather take it for granted."

R.C. Bishop Robert C. Morlino

In a book titled *Culture of Death: The Assault on Medical Ethics in America*, Wesley J. Smith argues that "a small but influential group of philosophers and health-care policy makers" is working to bring about a culture in which "killing is beneficent, suicide is rational, natural death is undignified, and caring properly and compassionately for people who are elderly, the prematurely born, disabled, despairing, or dying is a burden that wastes emotional and financial resources."

"The American people oppose funding abortion with their tax dollars, yet pro-abortion leaders in Washington routinely ignore their moral and ethical concerns. It is high time that this tyranny of the minority be stopped." - Population Research Institute president Steven Mosher speaking in support of the proposed "No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act."

"Promoting easy access to RU-486 and other drugs that induce abortion risks trivializing the termination of a pregnancy. Commercializing abortion medication can turn "an unwanted pregnancy into being almost like an annoying cold to be gotten rid of with a pill."
R.C. Archbishop Rino Fisichella. President of the Pontifical Academy for Life

"Even as our ability to manipulate biological life in the laboratory continues to grow, the principle of life itself remains elusive and beyond our grasp. Living beings, with all their structure and complexity, should never cease to impress us and inspire us with a certain awe, so that even in our bated eagerness to harness their powers, we might avoid reducing life itself to a mere commodity or raw material for our biotechnical prowess to conquer."

Rev. T. Pacholczyk, Ph.D. of the National Bioethics Center in Philadelphia

The Gallup Poll's 2011 Values and Beliefs Survey finds that 61% of Americans prefer that abortion be legal in only a few circumstances. That total is obtained by adding the 39% who want it legal in only a few circumstances to the 22% who don't want abortion legal in any circumstances. The pro-life message is alive and well. (NRL News, June/July, 2011)

As we work defending the lives of the weakest among us, let us remember the words of Martin Luther King Jr. as he fought against another injustice in this country: "Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle."

More Lifelines

On Roe v. Wade: "Roe holds that a change in location, passage through the birth canal, can turn a potential human being into an actual human being. But this makes no sense. What something is does not depend on where it is. The Court didn't just reason poorly in Roe. It abandoned reason altogether." Richard Stith, Esq. Ph.D. in "Roe v. Reason", 2005-06 Respect Life Program

"Some say that the government should not be involved in the personal private decision of abortion. They don't know how right they are. The government got too involved in the abortion decision when it legalized it on January 22, 1973." Rev. Frank Pavone, The Southern Cross, October, 2008

In an open letter to Congress, Doug Johnson of National Right to Life writes, "While it will come as a shock to many Americans, in the capital of our nation, abortion now is allowed for any reason at any point in pregnancy. Abortions are openly advertised and performed far past the point at which an unborn child becomes pain capable."

Please contact your legislators and encourage them to pass the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act in your state.

With wisdom beyond her years, the 2011 winner of National Right to Life Pro-Life Essay Contest wrote: "In the teenage world, pregnancy is not seen as a beautiful gift, it is seen as something dirty and embarrassing. Abortion is a way out, and is even considered the loving option. But you can't solve problems by creating larger ones." - Mariah Chiara Naegele, NRL News, June/July, 2011

Arguing against the American Psychological Association's "deeply flawed report," claiming that abortion has no impact on a woman's mental health, Priscilla Coleman, a Professor of Human Development and Family Studies at Bowling Green State University, reaches a startlingly different conclusion. After examining 22 of the best designed studies on abortion and mental health (1985-2009), Professor Coleman found that aborting women showed an 81% increased risk of mental health problems, with particular risks like substance abuse and suicide even higher." British Journal of Psychiatry. 9/1/11

"Three U.S. Supreme Court decisions—Dred Scott v. Sandford(1857), Plessy v. Ferguson (1 896) and Roe v. Wade—were an attack on human dignity. "The first two denied the full human dignity of African Americans, the third created the constitutional right to abort unborn children. Because God created human beings in His image and likeness, human dignity is not something that the state can give, nor can the state take it away." Rev. Mitch Pacwa in The Southern Cross, 9/10

Scripture tells us that the man who committed the first murder claimed ignorance about the one he had killed, telling God he did not know where his brother was. His answer was a lie. Similarly, the U.S. Supreme Court's claim not to know when human life begins is an attempt to escape their responsibility to protect their vulnerable brothers and sisters.

Fr Frank Pavone, The Southern Cross, 10/08

The argument for legalized physician assisted suicide rests on a false premise: that suffering from advanced disease is inevitable. "This is simply not true. Our ability to relieve suffering and improve quality of life has never been more powerful."

Dr. Charles F. von Gunten, in San Diego Union Tribune, 5/3/09

"I stand here today with my sisters in Christ who also made the choice to have an abortion. We thought that our choice would be a solution to our immediate problems...But we have suffered spiritually, physically, and emotionally because of our choice."

Leslie Brunolli, of Silent No More Awareness Campaign, The Southern Cross 9/1 0