



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **March 10, 2013** ✠

Sunday of the Last Judgment

Meatfare Sunday

Holy Martyr Quadratus (251) St. Anastasia, the Patrician of Alexandria (567)

God can do everything, except compel of person to love Him. Man is free, for he is in the image of the divine liberty, and that is why he has the power to choose.

~ Paul Evdokimov

✠ **Tues. March 12, 6:30pm ~ Inquirer's Class**

✠ **Wed. March 13 6:30pm ~ Compline with Penitential Canon of St. Tikhon**

⇒ **Next Sunday is Forgiveness Sunday, also known as Cheesefare Sunday.**

✠ **Great Lent Begins Monday, March 18** ✠

✠ **Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete: Mon. thru Thurs., March 18 thru 21**

✠ **First Presanctified Liturgy: Friday, March 22 ... with Potluck Lenten Supper**

⇒ **Note: All services are at 6:30pm.**



Theosis

✠ The heterodox live in ignorance. God will judge them accordingly. But for us Orthodox salvation is theosis, that is, our union with Christ through His holy commandments and Mysteries.

~ Elder Sophrony of Mt. Athos and Essex (+1991)

Open our Hearts to Him

✠ We must not approach Christ out of fear of how we will die and of what will become of us. Rather, we must open our hearts to Him, as when we tug at a window curtain and the sun immediately shines in. In this way Christ will come to us, that we might truly love Him. This is the best way.

~ Elder Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia (+1991)

When Mercy Comes

✠ The foolish man frequently asks God to show mercy to him, and deliver him from difficulties, but when mercy comes, he does not accept it; since it did not come as he wished, but as the Physician of souls saw fit. For this reason, he becomes heedless and agitated --- at times lashing out at men and at times blaspheming against God. Moreover, by displaying ingratitude, he does not receive the consolation that comes from God.

St. Mark the Ascetic (5th C)

A Blessed Beginning!

✠ **Cry out the Jesus Prayer without ceasing. May God grant you a blessed beginning! May it not abandon you, or rather, may you not abandon the Prayer---the life of the soul, the breath of the heart, the sweet-scented springtime which creates a spiritual spring in the struggling soul.**

My children, prayer and humility are the all-powerful weapons which we must keep continuously in our hands with sleepless attentiveness, because these, with God's help, will give us the victory against the demons.

~ Elder Ephraim of Mt. Athos

The Elder Paisios: On Visiting a Monastery – A Light to the World

When worldly people visit a monastery and see proper monks, then even if they are unbelievers, if they are well-disposed, they can become believers. Many atheist scientists, who came to the Holy Mountain just for a visit, have changed their way of life. They are troubled, in the good sense, by what they see and hear, and are helped. They see young men, who are joyful, who had every opportunity to succeed in the world, but who have abandoned wealth, position, and so forth, to live ascetically, with prayer and vigils, and they ask themselves, "What is going on here? If indeed God exists, if there is another life, if there is a hell, what am I doing with my life?" So they rein in their sinful way of life, or correct it altogether. I know of one case. A young woman of twenty attempted suicide by cutting her veins, but was saved in time. After that, a monk took her to a monastery. The poor thing was wild. But when she saw the nuns there, she quickly recovered. "I see another world here," she said, and asked, "May I stay here?"

This is the silent preaching of the monks. Many preach, but few inspire confidence in what they say, because they don't practice what they preach. A monk doesn't deliver sermons out loud to be heard by others, but preaches Christ silently with his life and helps with his prayer. He lives the Gospel, and the Grace of God gives him away. Thus the Gospel is preached in the most effective way, something which people thirst to see and hear, especially today. And when the monk speaks, he doesn't simply offer a thought; he speaks from his experience. But even if he does express a thought, even this is enlightened.

- Geronda (Elder), some people say that young men and women enter a monastery because they are disillusioned or have some disability, or even because they are weak in the head.

- It seems that these people have one or two such cases in mind and then go on unfairly, out of spite or envy, to malign ninety per cent of the monks. But if they look closely, they see that this is not the case, and they will admit that there is

indeed something higher here, that God does indeed exist.

This is why a monk must always set a good example for other people, Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven? A true monk is the light of the world. What does Saint John Climacus say? The Angels serve as light to the monks, and the monks serve as light to the people a/the world?

When the monk can be distinguished from the people of the world, then he can have a positive effect upon them. What helps the people in the world, who are suffering over vain things, is holiness, which, through its simplicity, teaches them to grasp the deeper meaning of life and dispel the heaviness in their heart.

Monks are Christ's regular army, and that's why they're not paid. You see how many people who come to visit the Holy Mountain can never forget it. Wherever else they go, people will ask them for money, and so on, while on the Holy Mountain all they have to do is present their visitor's permit and after that they can go anywhere they wish without paying anything. They will eat free, they will sleep free. They find something different and are helped spiritually. When I was at the Kalyvi of the Precious Cross," someone came who had many problems. We spoke for an hour and a half. Then he took out a five hundred drachma note. "What's that?" I asked him. "For a simple visit to the doctor we pay at least this much," he told me. "Please forgive me, is it perhaps not enough?"

On the Modern World

✘ 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 evil 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.

+Archbishop Averky of Syracuse (+1976)

St. Isaac the Syrian: Gehenna - the Torment of God's Love

From his Ascetical Homilies 27:

- "In love did God bring the world into existence; in love is God going to bring it to that wondrous transformed state, and in love will the world be swallowed up in the great mystery of the One who has performed all these things; in love will the whole course of the governance of creation be finally comprised."

- "God's recompense to sinners is that, instead of a just recompense, God rewards them with resurrection."

- "If zeal had been appropriate for putting humanity right, why did God the Word clothe himself in the body, using gentleness and humility in order to bring the world back to his Father?"

- "Let us not be in doubt, O fellow man, concerning the hope of our salvation, seeing that the One who bore sufferings for our sakes is very concerned about our salvation; God's mercifulness is far more extensive than we can conceive, God's grace is greater than what we ask for."

- "Sin, Gehenna, and Death do not exist at all with God, for they are effects, not substances. Sin is the fruit of free will. There was a time when sin did not exist, and there will be a time when it will not exist. Gehenna is the fruit of sin..."

From Ascetical Homilies 48:

- "As for me I say that those who are tormented in Gehenna are tormented by the invasion of love. What is there more bitter and violent than the pains of love? Those who feel they have sinned against love bear in themselves a damnation much heavier than the most dreaded punishments. The suffering with which sinning against love afflicts the heart is more keenly felt than any other torment. It is absurd to assume that the sinners in Gehenna are deprived of God's love."

- "Love is offered impartially. But by its very power it acts in two ways. It torments sinners, as happens here on earth when we are tormented by the presence of a friend to whom we have been unfaithful. And it gives joy to those who have been faithful."

- "That is what the torment of Gehenna is in my opinion: remorse. But love inebriates the souls of the sons and daughters of heaven by its delectability."

- "This is the aim of Love. Love's chastisement is for correction, but it does not aim at retribution... But the man who considers God an avenger, presuming that he bears witness to His justice, the same accuses Him of being bereft of goodness. Far be it that vengeance could ever be found in that Fountain of love and Ocean brimming with goodness! The aim of His design is the correction of men."

From Ascetical Homilies 51:

- "Even in the matter of afflictions — the judgment of Gehenna, say — there bides a hidden mystery, whereby the Maker has taken as a starting point our patent willfulness, using even Gehenna as a way of bringing to perfection His greater dispensation. If the world to come proves entirely the realm of mercy, love, and goodness, how then a final state that claims requital for its measure?"

- "God is not One who requites [i.e. requires payback for] evil, but He is One who sets evil right."

- "That we should think that Gehenna is not also full of love and mingled with compassion would be an insult to our God. By saying He will deliver us to suffering without purpose, we most surely sin. We

blaspheme also if we say that He will act with spite or with a vengeful purpose, as if He had a need to avenge Himself."

- "Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David calls Him just and upright, His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. 'He is good', He says 'to the evil and to the impious.' How can you call God just when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers?...How can a man call God just when he comes across the passage on the Prodigal Son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth?...Where, then, is God's justice, for while we are sinners Christ died for us!"

St. Peter the Tax Collector – An extraordinary life! (Remembered Sept. 22)

To encourage people to give alms, Saint John the Merciful used to tell them that once some poor men were warming themselves in the sun, and they began to talk about those who gave alms, praising the good and reviling the bad. Among them was the tale of the Scrooge-like conversion of Peter the Tax Collector.

There was a certain Peter, a tax-collector, very rich and powerful but utterly pitiless towards the poor. He was from Constantinople and had been appointed by Emperor Justinian (527-565) to administer the Roman province of Africa. Harsh and without an ounce of compassion, he became known to all as "the Miser".

When the poor came to his door, he drove them away angrily, and not one of them could be found who had ever had an alm from him. Then one of these men said: "What will you give me if I get something from him today?" They made a wager, and he went to Peter's house and begged for an alm. Peter came home at that moment and saw the poor man standing at his door. Just then his slave was carrying some wheaten loaves into the house, and Peter, finding no stone to throw, snatched up a loaf and hurled it angrily at the beggar. The man caught it and hurried back to his companions, showing them the alm that he had received from the tax-collector's hand.

Two days later the rich man lay mortally ill and saw himself in a vision standing before the Judge and a pair of scales was brought before him. Some black demons were heaping up his evil deeds on one side of the scale, while opposite stood some white-clothed angels who looked sad because they could find nothing to put on their side. Then one of them said: "True, we have nothing but one wheaten loaf, which he gave, reluctantly, to Christ two days ago." He put the loaf on the scale, and it seemed to balance the bad deeds on the other side. The white-robed angels said to him: "Add something to this loaf, or the demons will have you!"

The tax-collector woke up and found that he was cured of his illness, and said: "If the one loaf that I threw at that man in anger could do me so much good, how much more would it do for me if I gave all I have to the needy!" Then, one day when he was walking along dressed in his finest garments, a man who had lost all he had in a shipwreck asked him for something to wear. At once he took off his expensive cloak and gave it to the man, who took it and sold it as soon as he could. When the tax-collector went home and saw his cloak hanging in its place in the house, he was so sad that he could not eat, and said: "I was not worthy to have a needy man keep something to remember me by." But then while he was asleep he saw a personage more brilliant than the sun, with a cross on his head and wearing the cloak that he, Peter, had given to the man in need. "Why are you weeping, Peter?" the apparition asked. When Peter explained the cause of his sadness, the other asked: "Do you recognize this cloak?" "Yes, Lord," he answered. "I have been wearing it," the Lord told him, "since you gave it to me, and I thank you for your kindness, because I was freezing from the cold and you covered me."

Peter came to himself, began to bless the poor, and said: "As God lives, I will not die until I have become one of them!" He therefore gave all he had to those in need, then called in his notary and said to him: "I'm going to tell you a secret, and if you breathe a word of it or if you don't heed what I say, I'll sell you to the barbarians!" Then he gave him ten pounds of gold and said: "Go to the holy city [Jerusalem] and buy goods for yourself, and sell me to some Christian stranger and give the proceeds to the poor!" The notary refused, and Peter told him: "If you don't listen to me, I'll sell you to the heathens!" So the notary took him as one of his slaves, clothed in rags, to a silversmith, sold him for thirty pieces of silver, took the money, and distributed it to the poor.

Peter, now a slave, did the most menial work, and was treated with contempt and pushed and struck by the other slaves, who even called him a fool. The Lord, however, appeared to him frequently and consoled him, showing him the clothing and other gifts given to the poor. Meanwhile the emperor and everyone else bemoaned the loss of so valuable a man. Then some of his former neighbors came from Constantinople to visit the holy places and at one point were invited by Peter's master to be his guests. While they were at dinner, they whispered to each other: "That servant looks like our friend Peter, doesn't he?" As they stared at him curiously, one said: "It certainly is Peter, and I'll get up and hold him!" But Peter sensed what was going on and got away. The doorman was a deaf-mute who opened the door only at a signal, but Peter ordered him to open, not by signs but by speaking. The man heard at once and received the power of speech, answered Peter, and let him out. Then, going into the house, he said, to the surprise of all who heard him speak: "That slave who worked in the kitchen has gone out and run away, but wait! He must be a servant of God, because when he said to me, 'I tell you, open!' a flame came out of his mouth and touched my tongue and ears, and right away I could hear and speak!" They all jumped up and ran after Peter, but could not find him. Then everyone who belonged to that house did penance for the vile way they had treated so good a man.

Everyone went looking for Peter, but their searches were fruitless. The Saint had gone into hiding, and nothing further was heard of him until his death, though it is said that he returned to his former home in Constantinople and reposed there.

REFLECTION – Our Choice: The earthly kingdom or the Kingdom of Heaven

In this life, man is given a choice: either the earthly kingdom or the Kingdom of Heaven. God imposes no pressure on this choice, but each one freely decides. When the brothers Marcus and Marcellinus were condemned to death, the pagan judge allowed them a month to contemplate either renouncing Christ and His Kingdom or being put to death. Then their kinsmen came to the prison with one kind of advice, and St. Sebastian with another. The kinsmen wept and implored them to do as the judge willed and to spare their youth. Their tearful father showed them his gray hairs and his infirmity; their mother swore by the food of her breasts by which she nourished them; their children wept around them.

In essence, all of them proposed that they should renounce the Heavenly Kingdom for the sake of the earthly kingdom. However, St. Sebastian counseled them to the contrary, saying: "O courageous soldiers of Christ, do you want to lose the eternal wreath for the sake of the flattery of your kinsmen? Do you want to relinquish the victorious banner for the sake of women's tears? This life is transient; it is so unstable and unfaithful that it can never save even those who love it. What is this life worth even if one lives for a hundred years? When the last day arrives, do not all our past years and all earthly delights seem as though they had never existed? It is indeed unreasonable to fear to lose this quickly passing life, when one will receive that eternal life in which delights, riches and rejoicing begin and never end, remaining eternal to the ages of ages. Remember the Lord's words: 'A man's foes shall be they of his own household.'" With these and many other words, St. Sebastian prevailed. The holy Martyrs loved the Kingdom of Heaven more than the earthly kingdom, and they joyfully went to their deaths for Christ.

~ St. Nikolai of Serbia (+1956)

This and That

The more I study the history of intellectuals, the more they seem like a wrecking crew, dismantling civilization bit by bit -- replacing what works with what sounds good. Thomas Sowell

However emotionally similar **envy** and **resentment** may seem, their consequences are often very different. Envy may spur some people to efforts to lift themselves up, while resentment is more likely to spur efforts to tear others down. Thomas Sowell

One of the most foolish, and most dangerous, things one can do is to take **love** for granted, instead of nurturing it and safeguarding it as the prize jewel of one's life. Thomas Sowell

"The old liberal secular antipathy to Christianity has converged with the new PC movement and the therapeutic society to produce a climate wherein it is easy for the Muslims to lie about the nature of Islam." Dr. Srda Trikovic

Over 90% of children diagnosed with Down syndrome while in the womb are murdered before they can be born. It is not difficult to discern what Charles de Gaulle would have thought of this, and what his adversary in Nazi Germany would have thought. Sadly, that seems to make no difference at all. Tom Piatek

How do we preach women's equality -- an easy access to divorce, contraception and abortion -- to people (Muslims) who swear by a sacred book that says you kill people like that? Patrick Buchanan

Our First Amendment protects freedom of speech to call the Prophet vile names. Our freedom of the press protects pornography. Our freedom of religion means all religions are to be equally excluded from public schools. Other nations believe in indoctrinating their children in their own beliefs and values. Where do we get the right to push *ours* in *their* societies? Patrick Buchanan

Re-marriage (in the Orthodox Church) is unquestionably an accommodation to the hardness of our hearts and our inability to forge strong enough bonds with Jesus Christ to obviate the need for intimate human companionship. The Church recognizes the sadness inherent in the fact of multiple marriages despite the hope and joy of a new union and the opportunity to write a new icon on top of an older one that has been desecrated. Michael Baumann

Postponing Gratification

Of the anti-virtues which thrive in the anti-culture in which we are now embedded and which, regrettably, is embedded in us, the most prevalent is the inability to postpone gratification. It leads us to fornicate rather than marry; to go into debt in order to consume; to vote for or support the one who promises us the most the quickest - true of the "welfare mom," the corporate CEO looking for opportunities of graft and corruption among the plethora of internal improvement projects, or the "farmer" looking for cheap loans, grants and land-bank considerations. The list could, of course, go on. Robert M. Peters

People have a genuine desire to know the truth, but it has a lower priority than other desires. Clyde Wilson

Morally responsible people sacrifice in the present to invest in the future. Irresponsible people impoverish the future to enjoy more of the present. Which describes the United States today? Clyde Wilson

A Monastic Witness

From "Life Transfigured" - Holy Transfiguration Monastery ~ Nativity 1999

In Orthodox tradition, the monastery has been called "an entrance to paradise." Monasteries by their very existence proclaim that paradise exists. The monk or nun, through a life of poverty, chastity and obedience, seeks a foretaste of heaven while living on earth. In this they point out the goal of life for every Christian. Monasteries serve to remind us of the need to look beyond the world and its vanities. Christ in His teachings on earth encouraged people to follow Him — to follow His ways, His teachings and to keep His commandments. Although all Christians are called to do this, the monastic strives to do so in perhaps a more obvious manner. By forsaking family, friends, career, possessions and such things as fashionable clothing, the monk or nun is a concrete reminder that Christians are not of this world and that our joy is to be found in following Christ.

The ascetic life as practiced in monasteries helps a person become a temple of the Holy Spirit, to become holy, to be a light in this world. But the world, the flesh and the devil fight to keep us from this.

The world, for its part, will have us believe that we should celebrate the advances of science — many that we have seen in recent years and many, many more yet to come.

The flesh, the desire to find all our joy and meaning of life solely on this earth, will drive us to acquire every new, and quite unnecessary, invention. We will be driven to work endlessly just to acquire the house of our dreams, or a car better than that of the neighbor, or a computer that can give us far more information than we can ever use at a rate far faster than our souls can assimilate.

And third, the devil will keep our focus away from Christ and salvation in Him. Evil is constantly drawing the attention of the world. The news media focuses on what is bad because people somehow find it interesting and titillating. The devil can convince us of all kinds of notions which are not true but which keep us away from Jesus Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Blessed is the soul which becomes weary of being lulled to spiritual sleep by the flesh, fooled by the world and surrounded by evil, and cries out to God: "Enough! I long to know Thy presence among us, O Lord." And the presence of God among us is seen and felt in His children on this earth — the Christians who take their name seriously and truly follow Him.

Among the front line warriors for Christ are the ascetics who deny themselves, who do not eat everything they want, who sleep in moderation, who cut their wills and live in obedience for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom. The motto of the current generation, "If it feels good — do it," produces the fruits we see around us: abortion, murder, restlessness, jealousies, mental illness, addiction, etc. Whereas the fruits of following Christ's commandments and acquiring the

Holy Spirit are: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23a).

These thoughts are articulated most beautifully in a prayer by St. Ephraim the Syrian:

To those who renounce the world and its vain doings, who scorn its lusts and abhor its comforts, is given a promise of recompense in the Gospel of salvation — an everlasting habitation and eternal life.

Out of love for their Lord, they have left their families in this world, their parents, their wealth and their possessions; for they heard that blessed are the poor in spirit. And in return for this the heavenly kingdom awaits them.

They have made their bodies into a temple of the Holy Spirit; by their strict way of life they have overcome lusts. they have borne the yoke of strenuous labor; out of love for the Lord they have despised their own life....

They have disdained the desires of the flesh and loved restraint. They have driven away the corruptions of the flesh and loved chastity....

The Father loves them, and with love the Son embraces them! and the Holy Spirit abides in their pure bodies....

Paradise opens its gates to them; they abide in dwellings of light and there they find repose

(A Spiritual Psalter, A. Janda, tr., St. John of Kronstadt Press, 1997, p.21-3).

It is the birth of Christ — the coming of God in the flesh among men, and His death on the Cross for our salvation and His Resurrection — that should be the focus of our celebration of life. Let us make our time into a time to turn our lives and our efforts over more fully to God.

Let us recall the example of the monastics, who remind us our life is not of this world but of the world to come. The new millennium is, also, for Christians a time to fall down before God to thank Him, to worship Him, and to follow Him. Let us thank Him for His love, for His care and mercy. Let us worship Him in our daily prayer, in our respect for each other and all that He has created and in our prayer as the Holy Orthodox Church. And let us follow and glorify Him by keeping His commandments, by loving our neighbors as ourselves, and by loving "the Lord thy God with all your heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Mt. 23:37).

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