



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ March 24, 2013 ✠

The Sunday of Orthodoxy

Prefeast of the Annunciation

St. Zacharias the Recluse of Egypt (4th C)

The mystery hidden from all eternity, unknown even by the angels, is now entrusted to the Archangel Gabriel. He will come to thee, O precious vessel! He will salute thee, crying in joy: Rejoice, O pure dove! Rejoice, O all holy one! Make ready by thy word to conceive the Word of God! - Vespers of the Prefeast

Second Week of Great Lent

- ✠ Tomorrow, 10:00am Divine Liturgy – Feast of the Annunciation
- ✠ Presanctified Liturgy: Wednesday, March 27 6:30pm
- ✠ Presanctified Liturgy: Friday, March 29 6:30pm ... *with Potluck Lenten Supper*

On Today's Gospel:

✠ "'They straightway left their nets and followed Him' (Mt. 4:20). The Apostles did not grudge leaving their nets for the Lord's sake, although they were perhaps their only property, and precious to them because they lived by them; and we, likewise, for the Lord's sake, ought to leave everything that hinders our following Him – that is, all the many and various nets in which the enemy entangles us in life."
St. John of Kronstadt

The Image of His Image

✠ "I want you to know this, that Jesus Christ our Lord is Himself the true Mind of the Father. By Him all the fullness of every rational nature is made in the image of His image, and He Himself is the head of all creations, and of His body the Church. Therefore we are all members one of another, and the Body of Christ, and the head cannot say to the feet, 'I have no need of you,' and if one member suffers, the whole body is moved and suffers with it."
St. Anthony the Great

From *Our Life in Christ* website: "The Orthodox Church is evangelical, but not Protestant. It is orthodox, but not Jewish. It is catholic, but not Roman. It isn't non-denominational - it is pre-denominational. It has believed, taught, preserved, defended and died for the Faith of the Apostles since the Day of Pentecost 2000 years ago."

The Church: The Ark of Salvation

St. Nikolai of Serbia

If you believe in Christ the Savior, O Christ-bearers, you also believe in His work. His work is the Church, the Ark of Salvation. Aboard it are sailing the hosts of the saved and of those being saved. The Lord founded this work of His on faith, as strong as rock. Just as He said and ... (over)



prophesied: "On this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). And truly, up to the present day they have never prevailed, nor will they from this day forward.

The Church is called the body of Christ. "You are the body of Christ" (Rom. 15:5; 1 Cor. 12:27). Therefore, there is only one Church. For there cannot be two bodies under one head, and Christ is called the head of the Church (Col. 1: 18). Therefore: one Christ, one head, one body-one Church.

If there are apostasies and heresies, why should that confuse you? This was all foreseen and foretold, just as an experienced helmsman foresees and tells travelers about the storms and troubles ahead. "For there must be heresies among you," says the apostle, "so that those who are genuine among you may be recognized" (I Cor. 11:19). If one group of passengers aboard the ark should carve a dugout for themselves and then lower themselves into the sea to drift apart, you are naturally sad-and so you should be. Their example, a desperate example of a stubborn plunge into peril, strengthens your faith in the one and only ark of salvation.

The Church is called holy. It is clear to you why she is called holy. First, because it was the Saint of saints, the Holy of holies, who founded her. Second, because the Lord transformed, redeemed, purified and strengthened her with His own holy and most pure blood. Third, because from the beginning the Holy Spirit of God has been guiding her, inspiring her, and bringing her to life. Fourth, because all her members are called to be holy, separated from everything unholy in this world, in which they are growing and through which they are journeying. Fifth, because the holy heavens are set aside for her habitation. Sixth, because in her are all the God-given means by which men become holy and prepare themselves for heavenly citizenship. Therefore, the Church is called holy.

Moreover, the Church is called universal. Why this? First, because she unites to the living God the children of all lands, all tribes, and all languages. She is not confined to a single race, nor to a single tribe, nor to a single nation. Like the man who stands at the crossroads and summons all wayfarers to the king's banquet (cf. Matt. 22:9), so also does the Church. So also does the holy, universal Church summon and unite all the sons and daughters of men to salvation. And she rejects no

one except one who rejects her and, consequently, himself as well. This is the difference between the all inclusive Church of the New Testament and the preparatory Church of the Old Testament, which was limited to a single people.

Furthermore, the Church is called universal because she includes both the living and those who have fallen asleep. Those who have fallen asleep in the Lord are as much her members as those who are still living on earth. Wayfarers whom the ark of salvation has transported to the new land, to the eternal kingdom as well as those who are being transported today or those who will be transported tomorrow-are all members of the one, holy, universal Church.

And thus the Church is called universal because it is not limited by race, by language, by space, by time, or by death.

In addition to all this, the Church is also universal in both her teaching and in her structure.

The holy Church is called apostolic. The Church is called this first because Christ's apostles were her first members. They were the first personal witnesses of the miraculous life and work of the Son of God on earth, and His first followers. Second, because the apostles organized the structure of the Church and spread the Church across the world. Third, because the holy apostles were the first after the Lord to spill their own blood onto her foundations. Fourth, because her apostolicity has not ceased even to this day. The apostolicity of the Church is reflected today in two ways: in her apostolic mission to the world and in the apostolic succession of her hierarchy. Both in her ministry in the world and in her ministers, the true Church, the Orthodox Church, bears the ceaseless seal of apostolicity.

It is not the task of the Church as an institution to rule but to minister; to minister to the nations of God to the point of martyrdom after the manner of Christ the Lord; to illuminate the souls of men, to guide the moral life of men spiritually, to shine. It is her task not to enslave but to set free. For all men are called to the freedom of Christ, to the freedom of the sons of God. As it is written: "You are no longer a slave but a son" (Gal. 4:7). And again: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5: 1). As the ark of salvation the Church of God transports

not slaves but free children, royal children, into the immortal heavenly kingdom. There is no cargo more precious and no pier more joyful!

This is the faith of the valiant and of those who love others. The cowardly and selfish find it difficult to accept this faith. The valiant are those who have the courage to rise up against the pagan chaos in their soul and establish order in it according to the gospel. Those who love others are those who like to journey with others and who view their companions in the light of that eternal light in the distance. And they rejoice in their companions, as in their own brothers, in themselves, and in that eternal light which illuminates and embraces them all, and draws them all to itself. The valiant and those who love others like order in themselves and around themselves. They appreciate the help of others and do not refuse help to others. They like to step back in order to make way for others. Like God they burn with the desire that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Recognizing the majesty of the living God, they consider themselves as nothing great. They regard themselves as tiny organs of the mysterious and great body of the Church, whose head is Christ. They do not push or quarrel over first place. They are not afraid of this life, nor do they fear death. They praise the good works of their companions, but their own they do not make public. And so in harmony, in order, and in joy, they migrate like a flock of birds to warmer regions-to the kingdom of divine light and fatherly warmth.

This is your faith, Christ-bearers, the faith of your valiant forefathers who loved others. Let it also be the faith of your children from generation to generation, all the way to the end of the journey, to the tranquil haven. This is the salvation-bearing Orthodox faith, which has never been put to shame. In truth, this is the faith of the truly chosen people, of those who bear the image of God in themselves. On the Day of Retribution, on the great Day of God's Justice, when Christ will have judged with justice, they shall be called blessed. *The flood - the ark - salvation.*

Saint Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

Lord! I confess to Thee that neither in the country nor in the forest are to be found life, and health, and vigor of the spiritual and material powers, but with Thee in the temple, and, above all, during the Liturgy and in Thy Holy Life-giving Mysteries! O greatest blessedness of the Holy Mysteries! O, Life-giving Mysteries! O, Divine Mysteries, that are love unspeakable! O Divine Mysteries that are the Lord's constant and wonderful Providence for saving and sanctifying us! O Divine Mysteries, that are the prefiguration of eternal life!

~ St. John of Kronstadt

Not to Remain Silent

“The Commandment of the Lord is not to remain silent in times when the faith is in danger. ‘Speak, he said, and do not remain silent.’” And, “*if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*” (Heb. 10:38). And, “*if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out*” (Lk. 19:40). Thus, when it is a matter of faith, one should not say: ‘Who am I, a priest or a leader of the people?’ In no case should one remain silent.”
-- St. Theodore the Studite

THE DISPUTE OVER HOLY ICONS

Disputes concerning the Person of Christ did not cease with the council of 681, but were extended in a different form into the eighth and ninth centuries. The struggle centered on the Holy Icons, the pictures of Christ, the Mother of God, and the saints, which were kept and venerated both in churches and in private homes. The Iconoclasts or icon-smashers, suspicious of any religious art which represented human beings or God, demanded the destruction of icons; the opposite party, the Iconodules or venerator of icons, vigorously defended the place of icons in the life of the Church. The struggle was not merely a conflict between two conceptions of Christian art. Deeper issues were involved: the character of Christ's human nature, the Christian attitude towards matter, the true meaning of Christian redemption.

The Iconoclasts may have been influenced from the outside by Jewish and Muslim ideas, and it is significant that three years before the first outbreak of Iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire, the Muslim Caliph Yezid ordered the removal of all icons within his dominions. But Iconoclasm was not simply imported from outside; within Christianity itself there had always existed a ‘puritan’ outlook, which condemned icons because it saw in all images a latent idolatry. When the Isaurian Emperors attacked icons, they found plenty of support inside the Church.

The Iconoclast controversy, which lasted some years, falls into two phases. The first period opened in 726 when Leo 111 began his attack on icons, and ended in 780 when the Empress Irene suspended the persecution. The Iconodule position was upheld by the seventh and last Ecumenical Council (787), which met, as the first had done, at Nicea. Icons, the council proclaimed, are to be kept in churches and honored with the same relative veneration as is shown to other material symbols, such as the ‘precious and life-giving Cross’ and the Book of Gospels. A new attack on icons, started by Leo V the Armenian in 815; continued until 843 when the icons were again reinstated, this time permanently, by another Empress, Theodora. The final victory of the Holy Images in 843 is known as ‘the Triumph of Orthodoxy’, and is commemorated in a special service celebrated on ‘Orthodoxy Sunday’, the first Sunday in Lent. The chief champion of the icons in the first period was St John of Damascus (?675-749), in the second St Theodore of Studios (759-826). John was able to work the more freely because he dwelt in Muslim territory, out of reach of the Byzantine government. It was not the last time that Islam acted unintentionally as the protector of Orthodoxy.

One of the distinctive features of Orthodoxy is the place which it assigns to icons. An Orthodox church today is filled with them: dividing the sanctuary from the body of the

building there is a solid screen, the iconostasis, entirely covered with icons, while other icons are placed in special shrines around the church; and perhaps the walls are covered with icons in fresco or mosaic. An Orthodox prostrates himself before these icons, he kisses them and burns candles in front of them; they are censed by the priest and carried in procession. What do these gestures and actions mean? What do icons signify, and why did John of Damascus and others regard them as important?

We shall consider first the charge of idolatry, which the Iconoclasts brought against the Iconodules; then the positive value of icons as a means of instruction; and finally their doctrinal importance.

(1) The question of idolatry. When an Orthodox kisses an icon or prostrates himself before it, he is not guilty of idolatry. The icon is not an idol but a symbol; the veneration shown to images is directed, not towards stone, wood, and paint, but towards the person depicted. This had been pointed out some time before the Iconoclast controversy by Leontius of Neapolis (died about 650): We do not make obeisance to the nature of wood, but we revere and do obeisance to Him who was crucified on the Cross ... When the two beams of the Cross are joined together I adore the figure because of Christ who was crucified on the Cross, but if the beams are separated, I throw them away and burn them.' Because icons are only symbols, Orthodox do not worship them, but reverence or venerate them. John of Damascus carefully distinguished between the relative honor of veneration shown to material symbols, and the worship due to God alone.

(2) Icons as part of the Church's teaching. Icons, said Leontius, are 'opened books to

remind us of God'; they are one of the means which the Church employs in order to teach the faith. He who lacks learning or leisure to study works of theology has only to enter a church to see unfolded before him on the walls all the mysteries of the Christian religion. If a pagan asks you to show him your faith, said the Iconodules, take him into church and place him before the icons. In this way icons form a part of Holy Tradition.

(3) The doctrinal significance of icons. Here we come to the real heart of the Iconoclast dispute. Granted that icons are not idols; granted that they are useful for instruction; but are they not only permissible but necessary? Is it essential to have icons? The Iconodules held that it is, because icons safeguard a full and proper doctrine of the Incarnation. Iconoclasts and Iconodules agreed that God cannot be represented in His eternal nature: 'no one has seen God at any time' (John I, 18). But, the Iconodules continued, the Incarnation has made a representational religious art possible: God can be depicted because He became human and took flesh. Material images, argued John of Damascus, can be made of Him who took a material body: Of old God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was not depicted at all. But now that God has appeared in the flesh and lived among humans, I make an image of the God who can be seen. I do not worship matter but I worship the Creator of matter, who for my sake became material and deigned to dwell in matter, who through matter effected my salvation. I will not cease from worshipping the matter through which my salvation has been effected.'

The Iconoclasts, by repudiating all representations of God, failed to take full account of the Incarnation. They fell, as so many puritans have done, into a kind of dualism. Regarding matter as a defilement,

From the Fathers

they wanted a religion freed from all contact with what is material; for they thought that what is spiritual must be non-material. But this is to betray the Incarnation, by allowing no place to Christ's humanity, to His body; it is to forget that our body as well as our soul must be saved and transfigured. The Iconoclast controversy is thus closely linked to the earlier disputes about Christ's person. It was not merely a controversy about religious art, but about the Incarnation, about human salvation, about the salvation of the entire material cosmos. God took a material body, thereby proving that matter can be redeemed: 'The Word made flesh has deified the flesh,' said John of Damascus. God has 'deified' matter, making it 'spirit-bearing'; and if flesh has become a vehicle of the Spirit, then so - though in a different way - can wood and paint. The Orthodox doctrine of icons is bound up with the Orthodox belief that the whole of God's creation, material as well as spiritual, is to be redeemed and glorified. In the words of Nicolas Zernov (1898-1980) - what he says of Russians is true of all Orthodox:

[Icons] were for the Russians not merely paintings. They were dynamic manifestations of man's spiritual power to redeem creation through beauty and art. The colors and lines of the [icons] were not meant to imitate nature; the artists aimed at demonstrating that men, animals, and plants, and the whole cosmos, could be rescued from their present state of degradation and restored to their proper 'Image'. The [icons] were pledges of the coming victory of a redeemed creation over the fallen one . . . The artistic perfection of an icon was not only a reflection of the celestial glory - it was a concrete example of matter restored to its original harmony and beauty, and serving as a vehicle of the Spirit. The icons were part of the transfigured cosmos.'

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When a man walks in the fear of God he knows no fear, even if he were to be surrounded by wicked men. He has the fear of God within him and wears the invincible armor of faith. This makes him strong and able to take on anything, even things which seem difficult or impossible to most people. Such a man is like a giant surrounded by monkeys, or a roaring lion among dogs and foxes. He goes forward trusting in the Lord and the constancy of his will to strike and paralyze his foes. He wields the blazing club of the Word in wisdom.

*St. Symeon the New Theologian,
The Practical and Theological Chapters*

In Christianity truth is not a philosophical concept nor is it a theory, a teaching, or a system, but rather, it is the living theanthropic hypostasis - the historical Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Before Christ men could only conjecture about the Truth since they did not possess it. With Christ as the incarnate divine Logos the eternally complete divine Truth enters into the world. For this reason the Gospel says: "Truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17. *St. Justin Popovich*

Faith and love which are gifts of the Holy Spirit are such great and powerful means that a person who has them can easily, and with joy and consolation, go the way Jesus Christ went. Besides this, the Holy Spirit gives man the power to resist the delusions of the world so that although he makes use of earthly good, yet he uses them as a temporary visitor, without attaching his heart to them. But a man who has not got the Holy Spirit, despite all his learning and prudence, is always more or less a slave and worshiper of the world.

*St. Innocent of Irkutsk
Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (10.2)

When the blessed Eulogius saw an angel distributing gifts to the monks who toiled at all-night vigils, to one he gave a gold piece with the image of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to another a silver piece with a cross, to another a copper piece, to another a bronze piece, and to another nothing. The others who had remained in the church, left the church empty-handed. It was revealed to him that the ones who had obtained the gifts are those who toil at vigils and are diligent in prayers, supplications, psalms, chants, and readings. Those who received nothing or who left the church empty-handed are those who are heedless of their salvation, are enslaved to vainglory and the clamors of life, and stand feebly and lazily at vigils and whisper and jest.

St. Joseph of Volokolamsk

Chastise your soul with the thought of death, and through remembrance of Jesus Christ concentrate your scattered intellect.

St. Philotheus of Sinai

What toil we must endure, what fatigue, while we are attempting to climb hills and the summits of mountains! What, that we may ascend to heaven! If you consider the promised reward, what you endure is less. Immortality is given to the one who perseveres; everlasting life is offered; the Lord promises His Kingdom.

St. Cyprian of Carthage

A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.

St. Poemen the Great

The way of humility is this: self-control, prayer, and thinking yourself inferior to all creatures.

Abba Tithoes

Acts of charity, almsgiving and all the external good works do not suppress the arrogance of the heart; but noetic meditation, the labor of repentance, contrition and humility — these humble the proud mind.

Elder Joseph the Hesychast

Oh, what great happiness and bliss, what exaltation it is to address oneself to the Eternal Father. Always, without fail, value this joy which has been accorded to you by God's infinite grace and do not forget it during your prayers; God, the angels and God's holy men listen to you.

St. John of Kronstadt

What we need is a little labor! Let us endure this labor that we may obtain mercy.

St. Dorotheus of Gaza

We see the water of a river flowing uninterruptedly and passing away, and all that floats on its surface, rubbish or beams of trees, all pass by. Christian! So does our life. . . I was an infant, and that time has gone. I was an adolescent, and that too has passed. I was a young man, and that too is far behind me. The strong and mature man that I was is no more. My hair turns white, I succumb to age, but that too passes; I approach the end and will go the way of all flesh. I was born in order to die. I die that I may live. Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom!

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk