



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✘ **September 8, 2013** ✘

Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos

⇒ Inquirer's Class – Tuesday, September 10, 6:30pm

✘ **Feast of the Elevation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross**

✘ **Friday, September 13, 6:30pm ~ Vespers of the Cross**

✘ **Saturday, September 14 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy of the Cross**

⇒ **Note – No Vespers Saturday September 14**

⇒ **Annual Parish Meeting next Sunday, Sept. 15**

⇒ *Please keep up with your Building Fund Pledges!*

Rejoice, O people!
This is the day of the Lord!
The palace of the Light,
The scroll of the Word of life
Today comes forth from the
womb! The gate facing
the East is born!
She awaits the entry
of the great High Priest!
She alone admits Christ
into the universe!
For the salvation of our souls!

+ Most-Holy
Theotokos
save us!!!

+ Lord Jesus Christ

have mercy on me!

The Nativity of the Most-Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

✘ The Holy Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, was born of aged parents, Joachim and Anna. Her father was of the lineage of David, and her mother of the lineage of Aaron. Thus, she was of royal birth by her father, and of priestly birth by her mother. In this, she foreshadowed Him Who would be born of her as King and High Priest. Her parents were quite old and had no children. Because of this they were ashamed before men and humble before God. In their humility they prayed to God with tears, to bring them joy in their old age by giving them a child, as He had once given joy to the aged Abraham and his wife Sarah by giving them Isaac. The Almighty and All-seeing God rewarded them with a joy that surpassed all their expectations and all their most beautiful dreams. For He gave them not just a daughter, but the Mother of God. He illumined them not only with temporal joy, but with eternal joy as well. God gave them just one daughter, and she would later give them just one grandson-but what a daughter and what a Grandson! Mary, Full of grace, Blessed among women, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Altar of the Living God, the Table of the Heavenly Bread, the Ark of God's Holiness, the Tree of the Sweetest Fruit, the Glory of the race of man, the Praise of womanhood, the Fount of virginity and purity - this was the daughter given by God to Joachim and Anna! She was born in Nazareth, and at the age of three, was taken to the Temple in Jerusalem. In her young womanhood she returned again to Nazareth, and shortly thereafter heard the Annunciation of the Holy Archangel Gabriel concerning the Birth of the Son of God, the Savior of the world, from her most-pure virgin body.

Today, people, the first fruit of our
salvation is here!

For behold, she who was foreordained
from generations of old as Mother and
Virgin

and receiver of God,
comes forth in birth
from a barren woman:

A flower has blossomed from Jesse,
and from his root
a branch has sprung.

Let Adam our forefather be glad
and let Eve rejoice with exultation!

For behold, she who was made from
the rib of Adam

plainly declares her daughter and
descendant blessed.

For, she says, deliverance is born to
me, through which I shall be set free
from the bonds of hell.

Let David rejoice, striking upon the
harp,

and let him bless God!

For behold, the Virgin comes forth
from a barren rock,
for the salvation of our souls!

St. Euphrosynos the Cook ~ September 11

St. Euphrosynos was raised by devout parents, but given no advanced education. They were quite old when he was born, so they committed him to the care of the monks on Mt. Athos while he was still a young child. They died not long after. At this time, Mt. Athos was renowned as an intellectual center. Euphrosynos was relegated to the kitchen. The truth is, he worked hard but was not appreciated by the other monks, because he preferred praying more than scholarly discussions.

One evening, there was a profound theological lecture delivered in the monastery. As one of the elders, St. Euphrosynos was called upon to comment, but actually he had not comprehended much and, embarrassed, said very little. That night the abbot had a dream, in which he saw the most beautiful garden. The only one in this garden was Euphrosynos the Cook. Euphrosynos explained to the abbot that he was seeing the Kingdom of Heaven and he handed him a branch with apples on it. The abbot awoke from his dream to find a real branch of apples in his hand. (It was not the season for apples.) He woke the other monks and went to see Euphrosynos in his usual place in the kitchen. Euphrosynos acknowledged that that was the branch of apples he had given the abbot. The monks were all amazed and gave Euphrosynos great honor, but he declined, asking simply to be excused from the kitchen and the monastery to live out the rest of his days as a hermit in his cave. The apples were found to have miraculous healing powers.

REFLECTION – On the Most-Holy Theotokos

St. Dionysius the Areopagite (1st C) writes of the immeasurable joy, the outer and inner radiance, and the indescribable fragrance that he sensed in the presence of the Holy Theotokos when he visited her in Jerusalem. In his zeal, he says that if he had not known the One True God, he would have recognized her, the Holy Virgin Mary, as God. The Holy Virgin made such a powerful and unique impression on men during her earthly life-and she received an incomparably greater power and glory after her physical death when, by the will of God, she was exalted above the heavenly hosts. Her power comes from her ceaseless prayer for the faithful, for all those who turn to her for help.

As she was compassionate toward her crucified Son, so the Holy Most-pure One is also compassionate toward all those in need, and who turn to her for help. It could be said that the entire earth is covered by the miracles of her mercy.

The first monk at Pochaev saw a fiery pillar extending from earth to heaven, and in that flaming pillar he saw the Holy Theotokos. She was standing on a rock. On the spot where she stood, a spring of healing water sprang forth: even today, it heals many of the sick. And her footprint remains in the rock.

~ from the Prologue

Elder Paisios:

"If children put themselves in their parent's place, and if a daughter-in-law puts herself in her mother-in-law's place and thinks to herself: 'One day I too will grow old and become a mother-in-law. Wouldn't I want my daughter-in-law to give me attention and care?' Then, I believe, such problems would not exist."

✘ You are protected by your "Sealing" (Chrismation) from the evil assaults by the Evil One who, by your Baptism, no longer has power over you. ~ St. Cyril of Jerusalem (5th C)

Do No Harm

Thoughts on Preparing Children for Confession - Part 2

Fr. Alexei Uminsky

To Parents About Confession

Children know well that if they commit a sin, parents punish them. True, there are parents who, out of malice and irritation, punish even infants who scream and keep them from sleeping. We are all acquainted with the state of fatigue and frustration, but we understand that such a state is not normal. One has to punish a child from the moment when he understands what punishment is, when punishment is capable of bringing him to his senses, stopping him and warning him.

In the Gospels, we read of the Dread Judgment and the Second Coming and how the greatest punishment for man is separation from God. Unfortunately, we who are now living on the earth fear earthly punishment more than what was solemnly proclaimed to us concerning our separation from God at the Dread Judgment. We are afraid when the Lord visits us with sorrows, although such punishment is for the good; it gives us the opportunity of coming to ourselves and turning to face God. Punishment is not like revenge or the retribution which is brought upon criminals. That which we greatly fear and call punishment is translated from Church Slavonic as "teaching" (order, instruction, edict).

Daily, on television and radio, news is broadcast from which we find out about tragic events happening at different ends of the earth. One day my child asked, "Papa, so many people are perishing. Why does God allow all this?" "Imagine you're going in a car at a high speed," I attempted to answer, "and you see a sign that forbids going faster than 25 mph. You know what this means, but without slowing down, you keep going. Further on you see another sign that warns drivers that a slippery road is ahead. Paying no attention, you go further at your former speed. Then you see a sign that says 'cliff,' but you're going 60 mph, and you fly off the cliff at breakneck speed.

"Can you say that God punished you? God was warning you. You saw the signs that told you how to avoid danger. Such an end is the result of your behavior. You broke the law and this led you to misfortune. Self-will destroys the harmony between man and God. The absence of harmony is suffering (through illness, the loss of close ones), but this is not vengeful reproach. The most terrible punishment is when you - satiated, rich, and healthy - go directly to hell."

"What do you want," I asked my son after this conversation, "that God punish you and save you through punishment, or that He not punish you and forget about you? After all, I also punish you when you misbehave. I act this way so that you'll correct yourself. After punishment a person becomes smarter. Or would you rather that I stop paying attention to you? Imagine that one day you took money from me without asking and bought yourself some ice cream. I didn't pay attention and you thought, 'How good. I can always take money without asking.' Then you took something else, then more Then you became a thief and they put you in jail. So, would it perhaps have been better if I had punished you when you took money from me the first time for ice cream:"

"Yes. it would have been better," my child agreed.

Why do we Confess?

The answer to this question is rooted in the personal spiritual experience of the parents. They are obliged to pass on to their child everything they know how to do.

If a person does not have a spirit of repentance, if he does not confess but thinks to himself, "My life is already set, but I want to raise my child right, so that he goes to church, Confession, and Sunday school, but I can somehow live without this," then he will not be able to explain to his child why he needs to confess and what Confession is. What the child does not see in his parents, what he cannot gain from them, he will gain only at a mature age and under the kind of circumstances of life through which the Lord will bring him to Himself. Any other knowledge will be superficial, not deep, and quickly lost.

It is also difficult to explain to a child why we confess when we do not read the Gospel to him. If we have a family tradition of such reading before sleep - if not daily, then at least often - then the question "Why do we need to confess?" will usually not arise. The Gospel begins with the words "Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Repentance is the path of spiritual life which leads us to salvation. Life without repentance cannot be called faith in God. Salvation is impossible without repentance.

True, much more often one has to explain to children not why one needs to confess but how to confess. The child does not ask, "Why do you have to eat soup?" He will sooner ask, "How do you make soup?" The mother will try to answer this question and teach the child to make soup. It's not the question *why*, but the question *how* which moves a person. "How does one need to confess?" This is a question of inner spiritual life. A person who lives in repentance must without fail find suitable words with which to answer him, the meaning of which will not be superficial. Confession is an inner requirement of every person.

How can you help your child?

If the family has a spiritual guide and its own spiritual tradition, it is not complicated to resolve the problem of children's preparation for Confession; it is more complicated to avoid harming the child's soul while helping. Some parents themselves write a confession for their child. Here a seven-year-old child who has only just learned to write comes to the priest and gives him a written note with complex sentences and correctly arranged punctuation marks. *All parents have to know that they must not do this.* For some reason adults are very worried that their child will not remember all his sins at Confession and try without fail to remind him about everything he forgot. But the Lord does not forgive our sins by quantity. You do not have to be afraid if a child does not tell everything. If his confession is sincere but he did not remember everything, this is not so terrible. After all, the Lord puts up with us adults although we do not immediately confess all our sins. More than that, if the Lord were to show us how we really are, we simply would not be able to bear the awareness of our sinfulness. Being merciful to us, the Lord gives us the possibility of gradually struggling with the sins we are aware of. It is not obligatory for an adult or a child to confess what he does not see within himself and is not aware of. A child has the possibility of overcoming in himself only that which he recognizes as sin, and you should not do this instead of him. It is our children, rather, who grant us the opportunity weep over the sins of our own youth. When we see in them we had conveniently forgotten in ourselves and had blotted out of our memory, then we will understand what forces us again and again to bear the spirit of repentance in ourselves, to weep before God and entreat Him that what had deformed and darkened us will not harm the souls of our children. Maybe this is how the Lord reminds us of our sins.

Of course, you have to speak a little with a child before Confession. You can begin this way: "So, let's try to remember what we've done. Let's pray to God together and ask His forgiveness for our sins. Even if you're afraid to say something, the Lord sees your sin and knows about it; but if you talk about it at Confession, He will definitely forgive you of it. Only you two, God and you, will know about this sin. No one else." When we conceal our sin, it remains in our soul forever and can take root. In the same way that weeds, if they are not uprooted when they are still small, can take over the whole garden, so also unconfessed sin gradually ensnares our whole nature. If the child trusts his parents (for such a conversation it is very important to have the child's trust), then you can discuss bad actions together. You can tactfully remind the child of his mistakes, but in no case should you confess instead of the child.

Also, you should not tell the priest which sins your child has; he simply does not need that. And, of course, in no case should you approach the priest after Confession and ask, "Did he tell you about this? About that?" After conversations like that all the child's trust in the spiritual father will be lost. From experience it is evident: the more a child trusts his parents, the more he will trust a priest, even an unfamiliar one. You can discuss some kind of family problem together with the priest, but it is not good to inform on your child.

Children quite often are inwardly prepared for Confession, but cannot find the courage in themselves to make the first step. Then the priest, knowing their inner makeup, can carefully and tactfully help them in this. Here extends the domain of the mysterious, Grace-filled action of God in a person's soul, which we do not know and which is inaccessible to our mind.

When parents try to give some kind of advice to the priest before Confession, this means they are laying their own parental responsibility upon the priest. To raise a child in love and patience - this is the task of parents, which the Lord Himself has entrusted to us; the priest has another calling.

The Lord said, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31). If children do not listen to their parents, to whom will they listen? We parents have to gather up patience and courage and carry our cross, raising children for the Heavenly Kingdom, and not to interfere in that domain in which the Lord Himself acts.

From What Age should Children Confess?

Many parents think that the earlier a child begins to confess, the better. However, the Orthodox Church, knowing the nature of man through its spiritual experience, does not confess very young children. Seven-year-old children come to Confession. However, all children develop differently, and you should not strictly mark seven years of age as the time for their first Confession.

There exists a science called Christian anthropology, according to which a child does not confess until age seven, not because he is sinless - children often, even at a very early age, do nasty things - but because Confession is not only a recognition of one's personal sin, but also a resolute struggle with it. Children in early childhood are not capable of being genuinely conscious of their sins or beginning to struggle with them; therefore, the correction of the negative qualities of a very young child's soul lies entirely on the parents. A trusting conversation with his mother or father is the young child's Confession. Parents, in a certain sense, are the spiritual guides of their children. They love their child, know him, help him to correct himself, and can have pity on or punish him. But the child without the help of his parents can neither be conscious of his sin nor correct it. A very young child cannot even correctly name his sins.

This and That

Lecturing Russia

With the death of its Marxist-Leninist ideology, Russia is moving back toward its religious and Orthodox roots. Secretly baptized at birth by his mother, Putin has embraced this.

Increasingly, religious Russians look on America, with our Hollywood values and celebrations of homosexuality, as a sick society, a focus of cultural and moral evil in the world.

Much of the Islamic world that once admired America has reached the same conclusion. Yet the (Washington) Post is demanding that our government stand with "the persecuted rock band" of young women who desecrated with obscene acts the high altar of Moscow's most sacred (Christ the Savior) cathedral.

Upon what ground do we Americans, 53 million abortions behind us since Roe v. Wade, stand to lecture other nations on morality?
- Patrick Buchanan

Nationalized health care was one of the first programs enacted by the Bolsheviks after they seized power in 1917. Nearly a century later, the U.S. enacted "Obamacare." - Diane West

Whether we're talking about the Soviet promise to provide every basic need to the people and run their lives, or the more literal example of monarchs declaring that they were divine entities incapable of doing wrong—time and time again we see government play God, but always with a slightly different angle.
Anthony Gucciardi

"God looks at our hearts. He's not caught up in externals."

This all-too-common response to spiritual problems in churches reinforces a particularly insidious moral disorder: Since God looks on the heart, we need not have any rules. No sex distinctions (in church dress), no modesty, no "Yes, Sir," and "Yes, Ma'am," no "You may not behave that way while you're at our house"—in short, no protection against the "better angels of our nature" which, being sinful and lacking any moral formation, are really little demons.
- Aaron Wolf

Boys still need fathers who are willing to teach them by example how to have courage, respect, and honor, and how to treat a lady; girls still need daddies who will keep them from dressing like harlots and stop any boy in his tracks who would harm their reputations; and wives—and congregations—still need men who will stand before them and say, with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."
- Aaron Wolf

Millions of Muslims are willing to die to keep America and American values out of their societies. How many Americans are willing to fight and die over there to force them on Arab peoples?

...There is a growing confidence in the Islamic world that the future belongs to them. Whence comes this confidence? Western peoples are dying, as Muslim populations are exploding and Muslim migrants are pouring into Europe and the United States. While Islam is booming in the East and being welcomed in the West, Christianity is dying in the West and being expelled from the East.

Patrick Buchanan

... No, bigotry isn't particularly the problem of religion, and, yes, it can flourish in the most professedly open-minded individuals. For instance, someone labeling all religiously based discrimination as de facto bigotry is itself an example of bigotry, for the very reason that it precludes taking into account all of the facts informing religious morality.
Jason Stewart

The only thing we learn from history is that we do not learn from history. - Patrick Buchanan

The True Culture War

~ Fr. Stephen Freeman, *Glory to God for All Things Blog*

The cultural landscape of the modern world is continuing to shift and change. Opinions that were but shortly ago in the minority have moved into the majority and the political world is quickly realigning itself. Positions that were once traditionally Christian with wide public support or acquiescence are being marginalized. In various places Christians find themselves to be objects of scorn – even disgust. I think that we are headed into some fairly dark days. But I do *not* think that such things are the true “culture wars” of our times. The ebb and flow of culture, like the rising and fall of nations and empires, are in the hands of God. Christians are called to be salt and light in the world – but we are called to be such, precisely because the world needs salt and light (sometimes more, sometimes less). **But the great culture war is raging within the Christian heart.**

I have written, and published, about the false structures of a “two-storey” universe. It is an image I use to think about the effects of living within a secularized culture and the temptations of a secularized Christianity. But all of the structures of a two-storey world exist in the imaginations of modern believers. God is everywhere present or He is nowhere at all.

Secularism is an intellectual construct. It has its own history – dating largely to the centuries of the early Reformation. Its assumptions are that the universe exists in a “neutral” zone. Things are just *things* with no particular religious significance in themselves. Religion is a matter of personal belief, but not a description of the material order.

Along with this comes a secularization of the Sacraments. The significance of the Bread and Wine in the Eucharist is “spiritual,” affecting no material change in the Bread and Wine (note that the word “spiritual” is coming to mean “not having to do with everyday things”). “Freedom of religion” means “freedom of belief” since religion is simply a matter of belief (i.e. it’s intellectual).

Life lived in the “neutral zone” comes to be seen and understood as “normal life.” Today it even becomes synonymous with the “real world.” Religious practices that are publicly displayed tend to jar the neutrality of the real world. The sensibilities of the mainstream are often offended by such uninvited and unwelcome intrusions. The public square is not a religious square.

These two-storey assumptions are increasingly becoming the objects of legislation or public policy. Thus, a creche has no place in the public square or the Ten Commandments in a courthouse. But this is not the location of the culture war.

It is the fact that *we ourselves increasingly feel* that these things have no place in the public square. The sensibilities of believers have long been the objects of secularizing efforts. Secularism was invented in order to pacify believers (literally). The Thirty Years War in the first half of the 17th century, pitted Protestant against Catholic across the heart of Western Europe as the Holy Roman Empire came to an end and religious factions and various princes vied for power. It was hugely devastating.

The sensibilities of the 18th century and the Enlightenment were shaped to a large extent by this turmoil. The sense that religious thought was the source of interminable conflict was difficult to gainsay. Kant and other significant thinkers of the 18th century offered alternatives to a religiously shaped world. Kant wrote *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, a book whose title says it all. John Lennon echoed the sentiment when he *Imagined* “no religion, too.”

Nearly four hundred years have heard the preaching of a secular gospel. Stanley Hauerwas at Duke notes that one of the great achievements of the modern secular nation states was their ability to get Protestants to kill Protestants and Catholics to kill Catholics. Wars did not cease – the only change

was their justification. Modern secularists are shocked at the religious nature of the Islamist challenge, as though an outright grab for territory or control of the oil market would be more acceptable. The Thirty Years War has never been repeated. Kant and associates were successful. Rationalism and secularism, however, have not solved the origins of war itself.

The culture war that rages within the believer is born of a double loyalty. How can Jesus be Lord of all and yet be Lord of nothing in the world around us? Some solve the contradiction by postponing Christ's Lordship to the future. He will be Lord when He gets back. There are a variety of arrangements on this theme, but it is perhaps the dominant solution to the two-storey problem. In the last few decades, as the gentleman's agreement that kept nominal religious allegiance unchallenged in popular culture has broken down, religious figures have urged a frontal assault. In the ballot box and in legislatures (and frequently in some pulpits) efforts to regain a political majority have pushed the stakes in the culture wars to new highs. The result has probably been a backlash that has only hastened the marginalization of religion.

But those strategies and assaults have yet to address the heart of the problem – the *heart* – for it is within what the Fathers call the *heart* that the true war is being waged. To a large extent, Christianity has lost the war, for it has largely lost the heart and any memory of what it ever meant.

The heart is not the seat of emotions and feelings in the writings of the Fathers. Instead, it is the organ of spiritual perception, that inmost place where we encounter God and *know* the truth (not *think* the truth). The heart dwells in the present and does not judge or compare (these are faculties of the mind). But creation as a one-storey universe is entered into and known primarily as a *perception*. If we have lost the ability to perceive, we have spiritually lost our way.

Statements such as "all of creation is a sacrament," makes little sense to the rational mind. "Do you mean that we should *think* differently about things?" And the answer is, "I mean you can't *think* about sacraments at all (except as abstractions): A sacrament is a *means* of knowing rather than something to be known.

The Incarnation of Christ is viewed by many Christians as a visit – God became man – died on the Cross to save us – and now He's gone. For them, the Incarnation establishes nothing of a relationship between God and matter. The womb of the Virgin was but a temporary shelter, later to receive other children conceived in the manner of any woman. The fact that Christ is bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh means nothing – for it is not the flesh of Christ that saves. The saving action of Christ is a transaction accomplished off-stage on an altar in heaven.

This is not a caricature. For the ever-virginity of Mary is rejected by modernist Christianity as a pious fiction (and as idolatry by others). Atonement theories popularized since the Reformation concentrate on the abstractions of the Father's wrath and the debt paid by Christ. The blood of Christ is poured out on a heavenly altar, the Cross being but an instrument of death. It is perhaps fitting that the "tomb" that General Gordon declared to be Christ's tomb (in the late 19th century) – today known as the *Garden Tomb* – is over a thousand years too old to be true. But the fiction is better than the fact, because the fiction looks like the Tomb that Gordon (and his coreligionists *imagined*). Besides, the other one had an Orthodox-Catholic Church built over it and had been turned into a shrine with oil lamps and candles!

God is everywhere present and filling all things. The Incarnation has revealed all of creation to be a sacrament, a means of communion and participation in Christ, for He has Himself entered into communion and participation with creation. The efforts to exile the Incarnate God from our world, whether the public square, or a loaf of bread, are futile in the long run. For it is indeed a culture war, but it was won long ago. The heart perceives the truth of this and wonders at the goodness of God in the land of the living.