



St John of Kronstadt

## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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✠ **October 27, 2013** ✠

**Martyr Nestor of Thessalonica (306)**

**St. Procla, Wife of Pontius Pilate**

**St. Nestor the Chronicler of the Kiev Caves (1114)**

**St. Demetrius of Bulgaria (13<sup>th</sup> C)**



✠ **New Temple Foundation Blessing Today!**

⇒ **The 18<sup>th</sup> All-American Council is in Atlanta, July 2015**

**Volunteers are being sought to help with the Council. See Father Alex for details.**

⇒ **Hospitality Committee Meeting – next Sunday, November 3.**

There will be an organizational meeting on Sunday, Nov. 3 after refreshments for anyone interested in working on the Hospitality Committee. The Hospitality Committee helps serve those parishioners who have illnesses, new babies, deaths in the family, are in nursing homes or home bound, or have celebrations at church! The committee arranges such things as flower delivery to hospitals and funerals, meal schedules for the sick, visits and/or cards to those who are ill or homebound, Parish showers for babies and weddings, help with wedding and baptism receptions, etc. We'd also like to add such things as a welcoming committee for new members/families, nursing home visits, etc. Bring your eagerness and your ideas to the meeting!

### **The Daughter of the King**

*The king's daughter is all glorious within (Psalm 45:13).*

The Church of God is the daughter of the King. However poor and unattractive to the physical eye it may seem on the outside, no matter how persecuted and humiliated, it is filled with royal radiance and beauty from within. The King, He Who is fairer than the sons of men (Psalm 45:2), imparts beauty to His royal daughter. The Church of God is like a vesture for Christ; Christ lives in her. No outer beauty can be compared with inner beauty, that is, the beauty of Christ.

The Most-holy Theotokos is the daughter of the King: Her vesture is woven with gold (Psalm 45:13). This vesture is the virtue of her soul. That we understand "vesture" as virtue is clear in the parable of the marriage of the king's son. The man who was not clothed in a wedding garment was driven from the king's table and punished (cf. Matthew 22:11-13). True faith in God was the golden vesture of the Most-holy Virgin. Virginity, meekness, compassion, sanctity, piety, devotion to God's will, and all other virtues, were like embroideries on this golden garment. However, her beauty was the work of the Lord Christ, hidden within her and born of her.

The soul of every faithful Christian is like the daughter of the King. All the beauty of that soul is in Christ and of Christ, Who is within the soul. A soul without Christ the Sun of Righteousness is in darkness, without form and comeliness, as the universe would be without form and comeliness without the material sun.

**St. Nikolai of Serbia, from the Prologue**

✠ "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."

**St. Isaac of Syria**

## This and That

The Progressive Movement has always been elitist because it believes that the elite should control the government and the government society because the average person is not intelligent enough to know what is best for them. Thus the experts should run society. Now the Progresses have also accepted the dogma of political correctness which is profoundly anti-traditional Christian, pro-gay rights, pro radical feminism, and basically believes that traditional morality is out of date because it stifles human freedom by imposing on society outdated moral values. Unfortunately this movement has taken control of almost all the main line Protestant sects and the Democratic Party... It also uses our educational institutions and the entertainment media to feed our youth pro-progressive propaganda. I am afraid that we have entered into a time when people who share our Orthodox beliefs will be subject to ridicule and an effort to marginalize everyone who does not accept the dogma of political correctness.

Archpriest John Morris

What a small portion of a sexually sinful population want to do is not marriage. It is a counterfeit. At best it will demean and devalue real marriage just as heterosexual fornication and adultery do. The success of the activists positioning the issue as one of civil rights means that anyone who objects in any way is a bigot and the full force of the law and other government coercion will come down on us.

Michael Bauman

When dealing with the difficult question of Christian divisions, the Orthodox may wish to bear in mind that God alone knows where the limits of the Church are. As St Augustine said, 'many of those who on earth considered themselves to be alien to the Church will find that on the day of Judgment that they are her citizen; and many of those who thought themselves to be members of the Church will, alas, be found to be alien to her'. To declare that outside of the Orthodox Church there is not and cannot be the grace of God would be to limit God's omnipotence, to confine Him to a framework outside of which He has no right to act.

~ Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfayev)

Nowadays there is this also: there is a magical understanding of all issues. People want to solve all their problems in a magical way, without anyone wanting to put out any effort. Even the Mysteries of the Church are perceived as magical ceremonies that solve every concern without the contribution of personal struggle. The devil is expelled through prayer ("the name of Jesus ravages wars"), the experience of the Mysteries of the Church, and asceticism in grace; that is, with our personal struggle for the transformation of the passions and the acquisition of personal communion with the personal God of the Church.

Our trust in the love and Providence of God and the experience of the life-bearing Tradition of the Church gives the means of being liberated from the tyranny of the passions, the dominion of the devil and the fear of death.

Fr. George Papavarnavas

A desire for action is generally a very good thing. But we should restrain the desire to change the world. Changing the world is a thought habit of modernity driven by the arrogance of our age. How things turn out in the world is entirely up to God. **It is up to us to change ourselves and live rightly and well.** The aggregate of such actions are very much in the hand of God. If He chooses to bless, even very small things can have a profound effect. Americans are particularly subject to the temptation to change the world. We get all judgmental about the lack of schools, hospitals, etc., on the part of the Orthodox. I've heard various such things (rants). Gosh, just having a healthy parish is a pretty big accomplishment in most places in our country...

Fr. Stephen Freeman, *Glory to God for All Things* Blog – recommended reading

# Is "Halloween" Just Harmless Fun?

*From a pamphlet by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia*

The "feast of Halloween," celebrated by many in America, is rapidly finding its way in many parts of our world. It is portrayed as harmless fun for children. This could not be any further from the truth! Halloween is normally regarded as one more occasion for a party, one more opportunity for a good time without the least inquiry as to its meaning or origins. It is hardly a surprise when we consider that the greatest Feasts of Christianity such as Pascha and the Nativity of Christ (for which our ancestors prepared with fasting, prayers and tears) are now to so many, simply dates for eating, drinking and the exchanging of gifts. Be warned: Halloween is not what it appears to be! Its seemingly innocent manifestations represent a memory of an ancient celebration deeply rooted in paganism and demonology; furthermore, it continues to be a form of idolatry in which Satan, the angel of death is worshipped.

Known also as *All Hallows Eve*, the feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times. It was originally a Celtic festival celebrated widely among the peoples of the British Isles and northern France. These pagan peoples believed that life was born from death. On this night, a certain deity whom they called Samhain, their lord of Death, was honored at their New Year's festival (end of October). On that night, Samhain was believed to lead hosts of evil spirits into the world. Samhain is also identified as the Grim Reaper, the leader of the ancestral ghosts. On the evening of the festival, a huge bonfire built from oak branches, which they believed to be sacred, was ignited in a high place. Upon these, fire sacrifices of crops, animals and even human beings were burned as an offering in order to appease their demon lord. It was also believed that Samhain, being pleased by their faithful offerings, allowed the souls of the dead to return to their homes for a festal visit on this day. Thus they believed that cold, dark creatures filled the night, wandering and begging amongst the living. It is from this belief that the practice of wandering about in the dark dressed up in costumes imitating ghosts,

fairies, leprechauns, elves, smurfs (a German nature spirit), and other assorted demons, grew up. It is important to note that the 'souls of the dead,' or ghosts, are in fact demons cunningly mimicking the attributes of departed loved ones as much as is necessary to delude the observer. Any attention paid to such illusions is destructive! The dialogue of "trick and treat" is also an integral part of this system of beliefs and practices. It was believed that the souls of the dead who had entered into the world of darkness, decay and death, and therefore into total communion with and submission to the demon Samhain, bore the affliction of great hunger on their festal visit. Out of this grew the practice of begging for "treats" (offerings). If these "treats" were not forthcoming, then the wrath and anger of Samhain would be unleashed through a system of "tricks" (curses).

**From an Orthodox Christian viewpoint, participation in these practices at any level is idolatrous, and a genuine betrayal of our God and our Holy Faith. To do so by dressing up and going out would be to willfully seek fellowship with the 'dead' whose lord is also known as Satan, the Evil One, who stands against God. Or, to participate by submission to the dialogue of "trick or treat" is to make offering, not to innocent little children, but to the lord of Death, whom they unknowingly serve as proxy for the 'dead.'**

**In the days of the early Celtic Church, which was strictly Orthodox, the Holy Fathers attempted to counteract this pagan New Year festival by establishing the Feast of All Saints on the same day (in the East the Feast of All Saints is celebrated on the Sunday following Pentecost). As is the custom of the Church, the faithful Christians attended a Vigil Service in the evening and in the morning a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It is from this that the term Halloween developed. The word has its roots in the Old English of All Hallow E'en, i.e., the Eve commemorating all those who**

were hallowed (sanctified). The people who remained pagan and therefore anti-Christian and whose paganism had become deeply intertwined with the occult, satanism and magic reacted to the Church's attempt to supplant their festival by increased fervor on this evening. In the early middle ages, Halloween became the supreme and central feast of the occult, a night and day upon which acts of witchcraft, demonism, sorcery and satanism of all kinds were practiced. Many of these practices involved desecration and mockery of Christian practices and beliefs. Costumes of skeletons developed as a mockery of the Church's reverence for Holy Relics; Holy things were stolen, and used in perverse and sacrilegious ways. The old practice of begging became a system of persecution designed to harass Christians who were, by their beliefs, unable to participate by making offerings to those who served the lord of Death.

As Orthodox Christians, it is important to be aware of how these anti-Christian, pagan and demonic practices have crept into our society and our very lives as innocent fun, and playful diversions. Our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to the "narrow path," to the bearing of our own Cross, to the difficult road of rejecting sin and embracing righteousness. By refraining from this hidden demon worship, we set ourselves apart from the world, perhaps even are mocked and laughed at for such stupidity and simple-mindedness. "How can children having fun be related to demonic activity?" they may ask. In the face of all this we must also remember that Satan is the "father of lies," the great deceiver and he will go to any lengths to trap us into choosing to follow him rather than our Lord, even if we do so unwittingly and in ignorance. Know this: the devil exists; evil spirits exist! Our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world in order to destroy "him that had the dominion of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14). Remember that many martyrs were tortured and killed rather than allow themselves to be coerced into tossing a little incense on a pagan altar. **When we willingly participate in the sacrifice to the lord of death as a "harmless" social custom, we ourselves make a mockery of the witness of those martyrs.** Instead, as Orthodox Christians, we are given the opportunity on this night to remember the feast of the Holy

Unmercenarys, Saints Cosmas and Damian, celebrated on November 1<sup>st</sup> (and St. John of Kronstadt, O.C.). God has provided us with His Saints as a powerful weapon against the snares of Satan, even in the midst of such a deception. We should take full advantage of this weapon and turn our hearts and minds away from the celebration of death and onto the remembrance of God, Who is "wonderful in His Saints." Another weapon given to us by Christ is the power of prayer and fasting. In Christ's own words, "by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21) we can overcome evil.

We take great pains to protect our children and ourselves from disease and harm. We teach them good nutrition, hygiene and personal safety. We discourage them from engaging in fornication, substance abuse and other immoral and dangerous acts. Why do we allow them to dabble in darkness? Even if Halloween was good, clean, innocent fun, to what benefit - spiritual, intellectual or otherwise - is this for a Christian? Let's teach our children to surround themselves with what is good and to "walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). Let's show them that the hope of the Christian life is to be delivered from death into life with God for eternity! We are Orthodox Christians. We are called to be not of this world. We were instructed by our Saviour to pray: "deliver us from the evil one." Halloween is the celebration of the evil one. Who could possibly support it?

What do the Holy Scriptures and Holy Fathers say on the subject? Here are just a few pertinent quotes.

"Abstain from all appearance of evil"  
[1 Thess. 5:22].

"Care should be taken to see that the children of Priests shall not give any mundane spectacles, nor witness any. This, in fact, has ever been preached to all Christians, to the effect that wherever there are blasphemies they ought not to approach." [Canon XVII of Carthage]

"That one must not join the heathen in celebration of holidays and festivals, and share in their Godlessness."  
[Canon XXXIX of Laodicea]

## We and the Spirits of the Departed ~ Talking to God about Souls

By Theodore Ruginiotes, *Mystagogy*

Of course, all of us hope that the souls of our beloved are in the state of foretasting paradise, but only for the Saints can we be sure. So, when a person's soul departs from this world, we immediately start to talk to God about that person. In other words, we immediately start to pray.

For us, all people are equal, therefore the following apply to everybody: men, women, or children, irrespective of their social status.

If that person is not an Orthodox Christian, the only thing to be done is our personal prayer for him, which may be accompanied by fasting or some other small or big sacrifice, which will make our heart cleaner and in this way more appropriate to send our prayers to God. We do not perform for him any "official" ceremonies in our churches, because the first step and the necessary condition for these ceremonies to be effective, is Holy Baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity. Holy Baptism "transforms" the person into the "good olive tree", into the "real grapevine", into Christ. Therefore, in the absence of Baptism, we can offer prayer, with all the warmth and strength of our souls, and fasting or some other sacrifice, but there are no church ceremonies. They have no effect.

If the person departing for heaven is an Orthodox Christian, the first thing we do after his departure is a church ceremony, in which all of us participate, called "care" of the body of that person. During this ceremony we ask God for the first time (all of us together, as a Church, in other words, as a single body) to give rest to the soul of our brother or sister "in the Light of His presence".

Next, we bury the body into the ground and place a cross at the burial point, the symbol of the victory of Christ against death. We do

not burn the body, because for us, although it is not holy so as to worship it, it is however worthy of respect. It is worth our respect because: a) Christ, the age-old God, Son of the Father, the God, who assumed exactly the same body as ours and because He was the New Adam, the grace His own human body received was conveyed to all mankind, b) every Christian has received personally on his own body the grace of God, since he was Baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, was Chrismated with sweet oil (holy scented oil), and received the holy body and blood of Jesus during the Mystery of Holy Communion, c) if that person has come very close to God, holy grace is intensely present in his relics (bones), which become "holy relics" – if we burn the body, we will deprive ourselves, society, and the whole world, from a source of holy grace, and it is possible that we will never realize that the person reached a state of sainthood, as sainthood is often revealed through the holy relics (which release scent, holy oil, and perform miracles).

After the burial, a series of church ceremonies begin, called "commemorations" (remembrances") and in these also we ask God for the repose of our brother or sister. During "commemorations", a very small portion from the holy bread of Holy Communion is dedicated by name to the departed brother, who, in this way is commemorated "inside" of the Holy Mystery. Commemorations are performed at the third day a person died, then at the eighth day, then at the fortieth day, then at the end of the third month, and then every three months until the completion of the first year, and then every year on the date the person died.

Besides the commemorations, Christians are in the habit of presenting to the priest the names of our departed ancestors and brethren, so that he can commemorate them during Holy Communion during the Divine Liturgy that he will celebrate on Sunday. Messages sent (with God's permission) by

departed people to living people through their dreams, reveal that this commemoration offers significant benefit to the state of the soul. Especially when this commemoration is done during forty consecutive Divine Liturgies, which is called "sarantaleitourgo" (=forty liturgies, from the Greek word "σάραντα" = forty).

One of the innumerable testimonies that reveal how much benefit to the souls the commemoration during the Divine Liturgy has, is the case of St. Theodosius Chernigov (of Russia). The Saint appeared to Monk Alexios, who had lovingly performed the exhumation of his relics, and told him: "I thank you for getting tired for me, but I ask you to mention my parents' names, Nikitas and Maria, during the Divine Liturgy." Fr. Alexios was surprised and asked him: "You, being a saint and praying directly to God for everybody, you ask from me to commemorate your parents?" And the Saint answered him: "You are right, but the benefit they will have by commemorating their names during the Divine Liturgy is much greater than the benefit that my prayers will offer." When later the monastery's book of commemorations was found, where Saint Theodosius was abbot, it was proved that his parents' names were exactly those he had told Fr. Alexios (and were previously unknown)... [from Fr. Seraphim Rose, *The Soul After Death*].

The Church, besides the prayers for the departed sent to God in every Christian ceremony, has assigned one day of the week to be specially dedicated to the commemoration of the departed (meaning the prayer for the repose of their souls), and this day is Saturday. The Church has also assigned some special Saturdays to be dedicated to the commemoration of all the departed, from the beginning of the existence of the mankind on earth until the present day. These Saturdays are named "Saturday of Souls". Also, a special prayer for the departed is read during the important church ceremony of the Vespers of Kneeling during the Sunday of Pentecost.

Apart from the above, Christians are in the habit of privately lighting a small oil lamp as a symbol of our prayer to God, so that our departed ancestors and brethren will experience His Light with contentment. Also, we burn incense, as a symbol of our prayer, which rises to heaven like the smoke of the incense and which must smell pleasantly (meaning that the prayer must be done with a pure heart, devoid of evilness, hatred, egoism, and without desire of exploitation of other people), as the smoke of the incense smells pleasantly. We dedicate oil lamps and incense to our beloved departed not only at home (near their pictures) but at their graves as well, which we visit whenever we want. Sometimes we call the priest to the grave to perform a small service (Memorial – called a "Trisagion" or "Panikkhida") for the repose of the departed.   ✠ ✠ ✠

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✠ Met. Hilarion (Alfeyev) writes that St. Symeon the New Theologian's exegesis of Ephesian 5:15-16 ("See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil") uses images taken from the life of merchants. The verb ἐξαγοράζω ('to redeem') means 'to buy up', or simply 'to buy'. "Our earthly life is the time for commerce. We see that some merchants run fast to the market, leaving the others behind them, and on arriving immediately strike bargains in order to make a profit. But the others go to the market without hurry, waste their time in chatting with friends or in eating and drinking; as a result they remain without profit.

The same happens in spiritual life. Eternal goods and eternal life are sold: the price includes bearing disasters and temptations, as well as mortification of the body. One person uses each opportunity to 'redeem the time' through patience, fasting, vigil and other virtues; another wastes his life without profit. As a result the first is saved and the second is not."

## Wisdom of St. John of Kronstadt

"The object of our life is union with God: in this life by faith, hope and love and in the future one by all-perfect love. But see how the enemy and we ourselves here distort this object. We unite ourselves in our hearts with various things in accordance with the diversity of our passionate attachments. Sometimes, O horror! our love is fixed upon silver, upon food, drink, dress, dwelling, furniture, upon men like unto ourselves, until we forget God. Sometimes we are proud, we envy, hate, lie, and then we unite ourselves directly with the Devil himself, who is malice, falsehood, pride, envy personified—and we thus insult our Master, Who created us after His own image and likeness; how we distort this divinely drawn image, drawn from God Himself! But we think of this too little, are too ignorant of that which is the most essential matter to us—our union with God."

"In what does the life of a Christian consist? In having nothing in the heart but Christ, or, if possessing earthly blessings, in not in the least attaching himself to them, but in clinging with the whole heart to Christ."

"Christian hope is our hope in Christ and in the eternal bliss promised us by Christ. He is the limit of our desires."

"Your Lord is love: love Him and in Him all men, as His children in Christ. Your Lord is a fire: do not let your heart be cold but burn with faith and love. Your Lord is a light: do not walk in darkness and do not do anything in darkness of mind, without reasoning or understanding, or without faith. Your Lord is a God of mercy and bountifulness: be also a source of mercy and bountifulness to your neighbors. If you will be such, you will find salvation yourself with everlasting glory."

"Take care; do not forget, Christian; never lose hearty faith in Him Who is your invisible Life, your Peace, your Light, your Strength, your Breath; that is, in Jesus Christ."

"God the Father is Life, God the Son is Life, God the Holy Spirit is Life: the Holy Trinity is Life. Life is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; if you deny in heart the Father you deny the life of your heart; if you deny the Son, you deny your life; if you deny the Holy Spirit, you also deny your life."

"Could the leaves exist without the tree, and could the tree itself exist without earth, air, water and warmth? Likewise no soul can exist without God, without His Son, without His Spirit. God is my being, my breath, my light, my strength, my drink, my food. He carries me as a mother carries her infant in her arms. More than this. Carrying me, my soul and body, He dwells in me and is united to me."

"Looking upon the Savior's Cross, contemplate Love, crucified upon it for our salvation; and think, for what blessedness He has saved us, and from what torments He has redeemed us! He has snatched us from the jaws of the beast and hast brought us to the Father! O love! O redemption! O indescribable, endless blessedness!"

"When Christ is in our heart, we are contented with everything: what has been discomfort to us becomes the greatest comfort, what was bitter to us becomes sweet, poverty becomes our wealth, our hunger is satisfied, and our sorrow turns into joy! But when Christ is not in the heart, then the man is not contented with anything, he does not find happiness in anything: neither in health nor in comfort, nor in ranks and honors, nor in amusements, nor in rich palaces, nor in a luxuriously served table covered with all kinds of viands and drinks, nor in rich attire—in nothing. Ah! how necessary for the man is Christ, the Life-giver and the Savior of our souls!"

"There is no happiness for me on earth save the Lord Jesus Christ, with His Father and the Holy Spirit. After God, there is nothing on earth dearer to me."



## Dostoevsky: Fear the Christian Socialist

July 15, 2013 by Chris Banescu –

***“The socialist who is a Christian is more to be feared than the socialist who is an atheist.” ~ Fyodor Dostoevsky***

A sober warning comes to us from the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky in his book, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Given that some Orthodox Christian leaders today embrace and promote socialist ideas, this ominous observation should give us pause. Is history repeating itself?

“We are not particularly afraid of all these socialists, anarchists, atheists and revolutionaries. . . . But there are a few peculiar men among them who believe in God and are Christians, but at the same time are socialists. Those are the people we are most afraid of. They are terrible people! The socialist who is a Christian is more to be feared than the socialist who is an atheist.”

~ Fyodor Dostoevsky (Fedor Dostoevskii), *The Brothers Karamazov*

I located this translated quote in the opening pages of the book Red Priests: Renovatism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905-1946, written by Edward E. Roslof. When looking up the exact wording in the *The Brothers Karamazov* book by Dostoevsky, a slightly different translation used the term “dreaded” instead of “feared” when referring to Christian socialists.

Here is the relevant excerpt from *The Brothers Karamazov* book for reference (paragraph breaks and emphasis mine).

“Allow me to tell you one little anecdote, gentlemen,” Miusov said impressively, with a peculiarly majestic air. “Some years ago, soon after the coup d’etat of December, I happened to be calling in Paris on an extremely influential personage in the Government, and I met a very interesting man in his house. This individual was not precisely a detective but was a sort of superintendent of a whole regiment of political detectives — a rather powerful position in its own way. I was prompted by curiosity to seize the opportunity of conversation with him. And as he had not come as a visitor but as a subordinate official bringing a special report, and as he saw the reception given me by his chief, he deigned to speak with some openness, to a certain extent only, of course. He was rather courteous than open, as Frenchmen know how to be courteous, especially to a foreigner. But I thoroughly understood him.

The subject was the socialist revolutionaries who were at that time persecuted. I will quote only one most curious remark dropped by this person. ‘We are not particularly afraid,’ said he, ‘of all these socialists, anarchists, infidels, and revolutionists; we keep watch on them and know all their goings on. But there are a few **peculiar men among them who believe in God and are Christians**, but at the **same time are socialists. These are the people we are most afraid of. They are dreadful people. The socialist who is a Christian is more to be dreaded than a socialist who is an atheist.**’ The words struck me at the time, and now they have suddenly come back to me here, gentlemen.”

~ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Part I. Book II: An Unfortunate Gathering, Chapter 5

**Fr. Alexander Schmemmann on Socialism:** “Man’s nature is to reject it, because it can only be thrust on people by force. The most fallen possession is closer to God’s design for man than malicious egalitarianism. Possession is what God gave me (which I usually (mis)use selfishly and sinfully), whereas equality is what government and society give me, and they give me something that does not belong to them. **(The desire for) Equality is from the Devil because it comes entirely from envy.**”

– Father Alexander Schmemmann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann*, 1973-1983, page 330-331.