

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **November 3, 2013** ✠

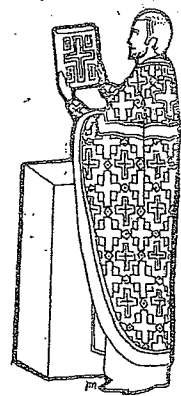
**Hieromartyrs Acepimas the Bishop, Joseph the Priest
& Aeithalas the Deacon of Persia (376)**

St. Hubert of Liege (727) St. Theodore the Confessor of Ancyra (9th C)

New Hieromartyr George, Priest of Neapolis, Asia Minor (1797)

"My little Christ," he wrote,
"I do not have an apron or
shoes. You send them to me.
You know how much I love
you."

- St. Nectarios, as a boy,
writing to the Lord...



This Week:

✠ **Saturday, November 9 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy – St. Nectarios of Pentapolis**

✠ **Saturday Baptisms ~ ~ ~ 3:00pm ~ Ethan Desko and Nikole Preston**

⇒ **Hospitality Committee Meeting Today**

⇒ **The 18th All-American Council is in Atlanta, July 2015 ~ Volunteers are needed!**

Saving for Our Future: A Story from the Prologue of Ochrid

In ignorance, many people labor more to avoid suffering in old age and terminal illness than to avoid the torments of hell in the life after old age and death. Such was the case of an unmarried and avaricious man who, from year to year, and with ever greater passion, amassed for himself unnecessary wealth. When asked why he strove so much to pile up excess wealth he replied: "I am gathering it for my old age. This wealth will heal and feed me in old age and sickness." And indeed, his foreboding came true. In old age, a grave and long-lasting illness befell him. He distributed his accumulated wealth to physicians so they would heal him, and to servants so they would care for him and feed him. His wealth was soon spent, and the illness continued. The physicians and servants abandoned him, and he fell into despair. His neighbors brought him bread until his death, and he was buried at the expense of the community. He had used his wealth for that which he had intended it.

God had even done for him according to the man's will. God had sent him the illness that he had, in a sense, desired, and for which he had prepared great wealth. Nevertheless, all his wealth was unable to alleviate his sufferings in this world-so with what would he be able to alleviate his sufferings in the other world? Nothing, if he took with him neither faith, nor hope, nor charitable deeds, nor prayers, nor repentance!

Someone saw a departed man in the great glory of Paradise, and asked him how he had become worthy of that glory. The man replied: "In my earthly life I was the hireling of an evil-doer who never paid me. But I endured all and served him to the end, with hope in God." Then the onlooker saw another man in even greater glory, and when he asked him, that one replied: "I was a leper, and to the very end I offered gratitude to God for that." But no one saw in the glory of Paradise the man who had amassed money for illness in old age.

~ **St. Nikolai of Serbia**

God's Love Acts in Two Ways ~ St. Isaac of Syria

"(God's) 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."

Pearls of the Holy Fathers {13 – Part 3}

Go, make your thoughts like those of the evildoers who are in prison. For they are always asking when the magistrate will come, awaiting him in anxiety. Even so the monk ought to give himself at all times to accusing his own soul, saying, "Unhappy wretch that I am. How shall I stand before the judgment seat of Christ? What shall I say to Him in my defense?" If you give yourself continually to this, you may be saved.
Abba Ammonas

A brother who shared a lodging with other brothers asked Abba Bessarion, "What should I do?" The old man replied, "Keep silence and do not compare yourself with others."

I pray Thee, O compassionate Lord, do not allow me to be condemned because of the unworthy and ungrateful manner in which I contemplate the great mysteries that Thou hast revealed to Thy Saints and through them to me, a sinner and Thy unworthy servant. For see, Lord, Thy servant stands before Thee, idle in everything, speechless, as one who is dead; and I do not dare to say anything more or to presumptuously contemplate further. But as always I fall down before Thee, crying from the depths of my soul. . .
St. Peter of Damascus

At the Last Judgment the righteous will be recognized only by their humility and their considering themselves worthless, and not by good deeds, even if they have done them. This is the true attitude.
Holy New Hieromartyr Barlaam

Death's awful mystery comes upon us suddenly, and soul and body are violently severed, divorced from their natural union by the will of God. What shall we do at that hour if we have not thought of it beforehand, if we have not been instructed concerning this eventuality and find ourselves unprepared?
St. Nilus Sorsky

Blessed is he who always has before his eyes that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 23:1), and keeps in mind that God is powerful to arrange for His servants as is pleasing to Him.
St. Barsanuphius the Great

As a pilot calls on winds and a storm-tossed mariner looks homeward, so the times call on you to win your way to God. As God's athlete, be sober; the stake is immortality and eternal life.
St. Ignatius the God-bearer

Why do you increase your bonds? Take hold of your life before your light grows dark and you seek help and do not find it. This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits.
St. Isaac the Syrian

The Seraph could not touch the fire's coal with his fingers, but just brought it close to Isaiah's mouth: the Seraph did not hold it, Isaiah did not consume it, but us our Lord has allowed to do both.
St. Ephraim the Syrian

Believe me when I say, I have never been so sure of my heart in peacetime as in the times of persecution. For I have confidence that if I should die while suffering for Christ and being strengthened by His mercy, I will find still greater mercy with Him.
St. Athanasius the Great

Our father among the saints

St John Kochurov

October 30 /November 12 OS

There is holy connectedness of place in the life of St. John Kochurov, whose modern, martyred life spans both Russia and America. St John as a missionary priest on the North American continent and builder of the beautiful Holy Trinity Cathedral, Chicago, is *ours*; yet to the Russian believers, in giving his life as the first clergy martyr of the Russian Revolution in 1917, he is also "*nash*" (*ours*). Thus St John, by his life declares the singularity of the holy Orthodox faith, believed everywhere and by all. He underlines the oneness of the vineyard, despite the unique needs and development of its parts.

St John was born within a clergy family on July 13, 1871 in the village of Bigildino-Surka in the Ryazan region of central Russia. His parents were Alexander and Anna (Perhval'skaya) Kochurov. He was an exemplary student at the Ryazan Seminary, and continued advanced studies at the St Petersburg Theological Academy, from which he graduated in 1895 at the age of twenty-four. Here his personal talents were recognized, and he was assigned to serve in America, being ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Nicholas (Ziorov) of the Aleutians and Alaska on August 27, 1895 at the St Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St Petersburg. His wife, Matushka Alexandra (Chernisheva) Kochurova, would be his spiritual helper in the new land.

In America, the Midwest would be his main area of mission work, Chicago particularly, from which he was responsible for developing a number of parish communities. He built with other builders, such as St Alexis Toth, and was a close friend of St Tikhon. Blessed with a gift for organization and supervision, he founded parishes in Illinois at Madison (1900) and Joliet (1907). Working largely among Slavic workers, employees in the steel mills and other trades, Fr John encouraged the formation of brotherhoods as a means of seeding for future church organization, and followed by the construction of small chapels where services might begin.

A gifted preacher and writer, he was described as "a man with intensely intelligent eyes," which is confirmed by his picture. His work in building the parish of the Holy Trinity in Chicago, was a gift to posterity appreciated by both the faithful and historic buildings preservationists alike. Employing Louis Sullivan as architect of the Holy Trinity Cathedral (who was later considered the Dean of American Architecture for his many fine buildings in Chicago, New York and elsewhere) Fr John was able to appeal to a number of financial backers, including Harold McCormick, son of the industrial magnate of McCormick Reaper fame. Sullivan, a student of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris as well as being American-trained, built for the Orthodox a unique, embellished temple in the style of the Russian

provincial churches, magnificent in its detail. Consecrated by St Tikhon in 1903, this Cathedral for the Diocese of Chicago and the Midwest of the Orthodox Church in America, is also the seat of the bishop, the Most Reverend Job, Archbishop of Chicago; the church's centenary was recently celebrated.

After twelve years in America, St John returned to Europe. Due to his skills in education he was assigned to teach catechism in the schools of Narva, Estonia, working within the Orthodox minority there. In 1916, he was assigned to St Catherine's Cathedral in Tsarskoe Selo, translated literally as "The Tsar's Village," the place of residence of the royal family where the Alexander and Catherine Palaces were located, with urban environs, located twenty-four kilometers south of St Petersburg (later renamed Pushkin). Here he was known for his powerful, moving sermons.

Martyrdom came swiftly to the still-young priest. On October 30, 1917 as the town was under attack by Bolshevik forces during the turmoil of the Russian Revolution, people thronged to the churches seeking consolation. The clergy decided to conduct a prayer service and procession throughout the town to pray for peace. The following day, the town was seized by the Bolsheviks and Fr John was arrested as he attempted to quell the crowd. He was taken to the outskirts of town and there martyred. He thus became the first clergy martyr of the Russian Revolution in 1917, in a line of Russian New Hiero-Martyrs of the 20th century.

Seventy-seven years later, his sacrifice was fully recognized. On Sunday December 4, 1994, the Divine Liturgy with the Glorification of Sts Alexander Hotovitsky and John Kochurov took place in the 15th Century Dormition Cathedral in the Kremlin, Moscow. Concelebrating the Liturgy were His Holiness Alexei, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia and His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius. It was a holy event remembered warmly by many in attendance, including His Grace, Bishop Seraphim.

The following excerpt from the Proclamation at that time clearly connects St John, martyr of the twentieth century, to the holy martyrs of old. "Aware of Her unbroken connection with the synaxis of the new martyrs of Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church continues to individually glorify those who, during the persecutions to which the Orthodox Church in Russia was subjected, through their righteous lives and martyrs' deaths, manifested the highest ideal given to the Church of Christ by the Holy Apostle Paul: *For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord* (Rom. 14:8)." Combining the faith of both lands, he was found faithful unto death. St John is described as *a martyr for Christ and neighbour*, combining the two great commandments of which our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ clearly speaks. May St John pray for us!

Photographs of the life of St John can be viewed at oca.org.
2003 Events, Holy Trinity Cathedral Chicago, "Feast of St John Kochurov," Oct. 31, 2003.

Neither Conservative nor Liberal

Fr. Stephen Freeman

Orthodoxy is neither conservative nor liberal – it is *Orthodoxy*.

It need have no reference to the conversations that are happening outside. Orthodoxy was Orthodox when there were no denominations. The only measure of Orthodoxy is its participation in the Truth. Too many people bring the baggage of their former Christianity(ies) with them and try to graft it onto the trunk of the Orthodox tree.

The Christian revelation, in contrast to that of the ancient Greeks, is that human beings are part of the good creation of the good God. The goodness of creation (Gen. 1) is not a description of creation's morality, but of its fundamental existence. God does not create and command, "Be good!" He creates and declares, "It is good."

St. Athanasius explains that when humanity chose to break its relationship with God (through disobedience) we cut ourselves off from the source of life. However God did not take life from us (He does not take back the gifts He gives) but we removed ourselves from it. And so we die. We not only die physically, but we have a process of death at work in us. St. Paul speaks of this process as "corruption." This movement away from and towards death and destruction reveals itself in the many broken things in our lives. We hurt and kill each other. We hurt and destroy creation. We are weak and easily enslaved to powerful things such as drugs and alcohol. We are dominated by greed, envy, lust, anger, etc. We cannot help ourselves in this matter because we do not have life within ourselves. Only God can give us the true life that alone can make us well.

This good God who loves mankind is not an angry God. He is not a vengeful God. He does not will us harm or punish us for our destruction. Though the Scriptures use these images, the Fathers of the Church have been consistent in understanding that this language is figurative and should not be understood literally. For instance, St. Anthony says:

God is good and is not controlled by passions. He does not change. Now someone who thinks it reasonable and true to affirm that God does not change, may well ask how, in that case, it is possible to speak of God as rejoicing over those who are good and showing mercy to those who honor Him, and as turning away from the wicked and being angry with sinners. To this it must be answered that God neither rejoices nor grows angry, for to rejoice and to be offended are passions; nor is He won over by the gifts of those who honor Him, for that would mean He is swayed by pleasure. It is not right that the Divinity feel pleasure or displeasure from human conditions. He is good, and He only bestows blessings and never does harm, remaining always the same. We men, on the other hand, if we remain good through resembling God, are united to Him, but if we become evil through not resembling God, we are separated from Him. By living in holiness we cleave to God; but by becoming wicked we make Him our enemy. It is not that He grows angry with us in an arbitrary way, but it is our own sins that prevent God from shining within us and expose us to demons who torture us. And if through prayer and acts of compassion we gain release from our sins, this does not mean that we have won God over and made Him to change, but that through our actions and our turning to the Divinity, we have cured our wickedness and so once more have enjoyment of God's goodness. Thus to say that God turns away from the wicked is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind.

St. Nectarios Kephalas the Metropolitan of Pentapolis - November 9

Saint Nectarios, the great wonderworker of modern times, was born Anastasius Kephalas in Selebria, Thrace on October 1, 1846. Since his family was poor, Anastasius went to Constantinople when he was fourteen in order to find work. Although he had no money, he asked the captain of a boat to take him. The captain told him to take a walk and then come back. Anastasius understood, and sadly walked away.

The captain gave the order to start the engines, but nothing happened. After several unsuccessful attempts, he looked up into the eyes of Anastasius who stood on the dock. Taking pity on the boy, the captain told him to come aboard. Immediately, the engines started and the boat began to move.

Anastasius found a job with a tobacco merchant in Constantinople, who did not pay him very much. In his desire to share useful information with others, Anastasius wrote down short maxims from spiritual books on the paper bags and packages of the tobacco shop. The customers would read them out of curiosity, and might perhaps derive some benefit from them.

The boy went about barefoot and in ragged clothing, but he trusted in God. Seeing that the merchant received many letters, Anastasius also wanted to write a letter. To whom could he write? Not to his parents, because there were no mail deliveries to his village. Not to his friends, because he had none. Therefore, he decided to write to Christ to tell Him of his needs.

"My little Christ," he wrote. "I do not have an apron or shoes. You send them to me. You know how much I love you."

Anastasius sealed the letter and wrote on the outside: "To the Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven." On his way to mail the letter, he ran into the man who owned a shop opposite the one in which he worked. The

man asked him where he was going, and Anastasius whispered something in reply. Seeing the letter in his hands, the man offered to mail it for him, since he was on his way to the post office.

The merchant put the letter in his pocket and assured Anastasius that he would mail it with his own letters. The boy returned to the tobacco shop, filled with happiness. When he took the letter from his pocket to mail it, the merchant happened to notice the address. Astonished and curious, the man could not resist opening the letter to read it. Touched by the boy's simple faith, the merchant placed some money in an envelope and sent it to him anonymously. Anastasius was filled with joy, and he gave thanks to God.

A few days later, seeing Anastasius dressed somewhat better than usual, his employer thought he had stolen money from him and began to beat him. Anastasius cried out, "I have never stolen anything. My little Christ sent me the money." Hearing the commotion, the other merchant came and took the tobacco seller aside and explained the situation to him.

When he was still a young man, Anastasius made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. During the voyage, the ship was in danger of sinking in a storm. Anastasius looked at the raging sea, and then at the captain. He went and stood beside the captain and took the helm, praying for God to save them. Then he took off the cross his grandmother had given him (containing a piece of the Cross of Christ) and tied it to his belt. Leaning over the side, he dipped the cross into the water three times and commanded the sea, "Silence! Be still." At once, the wind died down and the sea became calm.

Anastasius was saddened, however, because his cross had fallen into the sea and was lost. As the boat sailed on, sounds of knocking seemed to come from the hull

below the water line. When the ship docked, the young man got off and started to walk away.

Suddenly, the captain began shouting, "Kephalas, Kephalas, come back here." The captain had ordered some men into a small boat to examine the hull in order to discover the source of the knocking, and they discovered the cross stuck to the hull. Anastasius was elated to receive his "Treasure," and always wore it from that time forward. There is a photograph taken many years later, showing the Saint in his monastic skufia. The cross is clearly visible in the photo.

On November 7, 1875, Anastasius received monastic tonsure at the Nea Moni Monastery on Chios, and the new name Lazarus. Two years later, he was ordained a deacon. On that occasion, his name was changed to Nectarios.

Later, when he was a priest, Fr. Nectarios left Chios and went to Egypt. There he was elected Metropolitan of Pentapolis. Some of his colleagues became jealous of him because of his great virtues, because of his inspiring sermons, and because of everything else which distinguished St. Nectarios from them.

Other Metropolitans and bishops of the Patriarchate of Alexandria became filled with malice toward the Saint, so they told Patriarch Sophronius that Nectarios was plotting to become patriarch himself. They told the patriarch that the Metropolitan of Pentapolis merely made an outward show of piety in order to win favor with the people. So the patriarch and his synod removed St. Nectarios from his See. Patriarch Sophronius wrote an ambiguous letter of suspension which provoked scandal and speculation about the true reasons for the Saint's removal from his position.

St. Nectarios was not deposed from his rank, however. He was still allowed to function as a bishop. If anyone invited him to perform a wedding or a baptism he could do

so, as long as he obtained permission from the local bishop.

St. Nectarios bore his trials with great patience, but those who loved him began to demand to know why he had been removed. Seeing that this was causing a disturbance in the Church of Alexandria, he decided to go to Greece. He arrived in Athens to find that false rumors about him had already reached that city. His letter of suspension said only that he had been removed "for reasons known to the Patriarchate," and so all the slanders about him were believed.

Since the state and ecclesiastical authorities would not give him a position, the former Metropolitan was left with no means of support, and no place to live. Every day he went to the Minister of Religion asking for assistance. They soon tired of him and began to mistreat him.

One day, as he was leaving the Minister's office, St. Nectarios met a friend whom he had known in Egypt. Surprised to find the beloved bishop in such a condition, the man spoke to the Minister of Religion and Education and asked that something be found for him. So, St. Nectarios was appointed to be a humble preacher in the diocese of Vitinea and Euboea. The Saint did not regard this as humiliating for him, even though a simple monk could have filled that position. He went to Euboea to preach in the churches, eagerly embracing his duties.

Yet even here, the rumors of scandal followed him. Sometimes, while he was preaching, people began to laugh and whisper. Therefore, the blameless one resigned his position and returned to Athens. By then some people had begun to realize that the rumors were untrue, because they saw nothing in his life or conversation to suggest that he was guilty of anything. With their help and influence, St. Nectarios was appointed Director of the Rizarios Seminary in Athens on March 8, 1894. He was to remain in that position until

December of 1908.

The Saint celebrated the services in the seminary church, taught the students, and wrote several edifying and useful books. Since he was a quiet man, St. Nectarios did not care for the noise and bustle of Athens. He wanted to retire somewhere where he could pray. On the island of Aegina he found an abandoned monastery dedicated to the Holy Trinity, which he began to repair with his own hands.

He gathered a community of nuns, appointing the blind nun Xenia as abbess, while he himself served as Father Confessor. Since he had a gift for spiritual direction, many people came to Aegina to confess to him. Eventually, the community grew to thirty nuns. He used to tell them, "I am building a lighthouse for you, and God shall put a light in it that will shine forth to the world. Many will see this light and come to Aegina." They did not understand what he was telling them, that he himself would be that beacon, and that people would come there to venerate his holy relics.

On September 20, 1920 the nun Euphemia brought an old man in black robes, who was obviously in pain, to the Aretaieion Hospital in Athens. This was a state hospital for the poor. The intern asked the nun for information about the patient.

"Is he a monk?" he asked.

No, he is a bishop."

The intern laughed and said, "Stop joking and tell me his name, Mother, so that I can enter it in the register."

"He is indeed a bishop, my child. He is the Most Reverend Metropolitan of Pentapolis."

The intern muttered, "For the first time in my life I see a bishop without a panagia or cross, and more significantly, without money."

Then the nun showed the Saint's credentials to the astonished intern who then admitted him. For two months St. Nectarios suffered from a disease of the bladder. At ten thirty on the evening of November 8, 1920, he

surrendered his holy soul to God. He died in peace at the age of seventy-four.

In the bed next to St. Nectarios was a man who was paralyzed. As soon as the Saint had breathed his last, the nurse and the nun who sat with him began to dress him in clean clothing to prepare him for burial at Aegina. They removed his sweater and placed it on the paralyzed man's bed. Immediately, the paralytic got up from his bed, glorifying God.

St. Nectarios was buried at the Holy Trinity Monastery on Aegina. Several years later, his grave was opened to remove his bones (as is the custom in Greece). His body was found whole and incorrupt, as if he had been buried that very day.

Word was sent to the Archbishop of Athens, who came to see the relics for himself. Archbishop Chrysostomos told the nuns to leave them out in the sun for a few days, then to rebury them so that they would decay. A month or two after this, they opened the grave again and found the Saint incorrupt. Then the relics were placed in a marble sarcophagus.

Several years later, the holy relics dissolved, leaving only the bones. The Saint's head was placed in a bishop's mitre, and the top was opened to allow people to kiss his head.

St. Nectarios was glorified by God, since his whole life was a continuous doxology to the Lord. Both during his life and after his death, St. Nectarios has performed thousands of miracles, especially for those suffering from cancer. There are more churches dedicated to St. Nectarios than to any other modern Orthodox Saint.

St. Nectarios on Tradition

"Sacred Tradition is the very Church. Without the Sacred Tradition, the Church does not exist. Those who deny the Sacred Tradition deny the Church and the preaching of the Apostles."

This and That - Advice for our Youth

Youth can make us think that our various hungers, once met, will satisfy us. We hunger for a marriage, only to discover that no match is perfect and it involves lots of work and death to self, etc. Same is true of a job – any job and every job.

Happiness is not based on our own choices. It comes from God, comes from communion with God, comes with victory over the passions, comes with contentment. A person is blessed to find happiness, joy, contentment, etc. It's difficult and rare... It is a blessing to find work that pays sufficiently and supports our family, that isn't always a drudge, that gives dignity, etc. I'm not certain work is meant at all to fulfill us. It's meant to feed us. Some work is more enjoyable and more rewarding than others – but almost all of that stuff is not in the work itself – it's within us. That is the nature of the spiritual life.... Our purpose, and thus vocation, is to live in communion with God through Christ by the Spirit. Everything else flows from that. Considered apart from that, everything is a distraction.
– Fr. Stephen Freeman

Success? Satisfaction? Fulfillment? Those are not wrong things – but when we put the means of success, satisfaction, fulfillment outside of ourselves – in a job or career – we have set ourselves up to a bondage that will almost always fail us and enslave us to despondency. – Fr. Stephen Freeman

Avoiding Misery

But if I were talking to someone just starting out in life, I would have plenty of advice about avoiding misery. Learn a job skill that involves producing something that your fellow man actually needs. Learn it in a way such that you could do it whether another person employed you or not. Learn it even if that's not your chosen career path. Don't go into debt, not even for a house. Marry a person whose faults you know and who is from as similar a background to yours as possible. Find a non-toxic parish and organize your life to be involved in it. Try to fill your life and your children's lives with innocent merriment and the means to make it (music making, story-telling, culinary arts, dancing, and so on) knowing that any of these can be elevated to an act of private or public worship. Persevere in works of charity because you're likely to need it yourself someday. Do at least the minimum to maintain relationships. Be aware that large and small apocalypses face us all the time and everything you build can always be lost. And whatever else may happen or whatever else you do, invest time and energy daily in increasing your love for God and preparing to stand before him. ~ Internet comment

Real wealth includes things like health, friends, family, the respect of those we love, our faith in God, our service to the Church, personal integrity, and so much more. A good job is in that list. It is important, but a good job isn't even close to the top.
– internet comment

As far as using **debt** to buy what we want is concerned, don't bite the hook. Don't use a credit card unless you can pay it off every month. Pay cash for cars. Avoid student debt. Never have student debt that exceeds an average first year salary in your field. Avoid that unless you are in a field like nursing or petroleum engineering where you are pretty certain to find a job. Don't buy a house that costs more than 3 times the annual salary of the primary breadwinner. Put 20% down if at all possible.
Advice from a financial advisor

Why is it that in my 40 years as a Christian I have never heard a sermon on the evils of debt? One of my friends in the ministry suggested that probably all preachers are in debt.

Advice from a financial advisor