

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **February 16, 2014** ✠

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

St. Nicholas, Enlightener of Japan (1912)

Hieromartyrs Pamphilios the Priest

& Valens the Deacon in Palestine (309)

St. Macarius, Apostle to the Altai, Siberia (1926)

I have miserably bowed down to the pleasures of the body becoming wholly enslaved to the demons that provoke the passions. I have become a stranger to Thee, O Lover of mankind! But now I cry with the voice of the Prodigal: I have sinned, O Christ, despise me not, for Thou alone art merciful! ~ Matins, Ode 7



✠ **Tues. February 18, 6:30pm Inquirer's Class – *Holy Tradition***

Pre-Lent and Lent

- ✠ **This Saturday, Feb. 22 10:00am Memorial Saturday Divine Liturgy**
- ✠ **Sun. Feb 23 10:00am Meatfare Sunday – Parish Meatfare Dinner after Liturgy**
- ✠ **Feb. 24 – 29 ~ Cheesefare Week ~ ✠ Sun. Mar 2 Forgiveness Sunday**
- ✠ **Monday, March 3 + Great Lent Begins +**
- ✠ **Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete: First week - March 3 – 6**
- ✠ **Friday, March 7 – First Presanctified Liturgy {All evening services - 6:30pm}**

Elder Paisios: On Asceticism

"They [i.e., those who mock asceticism] haven't experienced the spiritual joy of asceticism. Another will tell you: 'I need to drink these many glasses of milk. I will fast during Great Lent, but I will make up for it afterwards; because I need the calcium.' It is not that his body needs it, but he says that he is entitled to it; and so he puts his thoughts at ease that this is correct, that he is not sinning. Of course, it does not even occur to him that even to think like this is a sin. Where will man's logic take him? He wants to be in order with the fasting periods prescribed by the Church, but he doesn't want to be deprived of what he missed out on during Lent. Well then, how can the Holy Spirit abide in such a person?"

"Man becomes incorporeal through ascetic discipline. Obviously, one aspiring to a higher spiritual goal must abstain. If one practices abstinence in order to lose weight, he is only caring for the well-being of his body. Then, this abstinence is nothing more than yoga. Unfortunately, the subject of asceticism has been cast aside even by people of the Church. They say, 'I need to eat my food, to enjoy this and that, for God created all things for us.'"

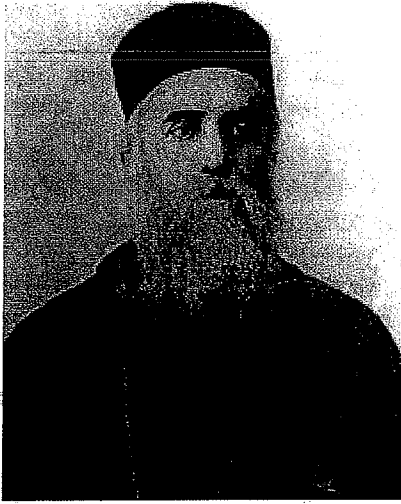
"In war, efforts are made to block the enemy: they surround him; they confine him within the city walls; they deprive him of food. Then they cut off his water. If the enemy is left without basic supplies and ammunition, he will be forced to surrender. What I am trying to say is that the devil can also be similarly disarmed and forced to retreat by means of our spiritual struggle through fasting, vigils and prayer. As the hymn writer has expressed it: 'By fasting and by vigil and by prayer, receiving gifts of grace from heaven...'"

⇒ **"We have been through an epoch of atheism, and we know what it is to live without God," Patriarch Kirill of Russia said. "We want to shout to the whole world, 'Stop!'"**

"The general political direction of the [Western political] elite bears, without doubt, an anti-Christian and anti-religious character," the Patriarch said in comments aired on Russian television.

Atheism is a Mental Disorder

by **St. Nectarios of Aegina**



Atheism is a mental disorder: it is a terrible ailment of the soul that is difficult to cure. Atheism is a passion that severely oppresses whomever it seizes. It holds in store many misfortunes for its captive, and becomes harmful not only for him but also for others who come into contact with him.

Atheism denies the existence of God. It denies that there is a divine Creator of the universe. It denies God's providence, His wisdom, His goodness, and, in general, His divine qualities. Atheism teaches a falsehood to its followers and contrives false theories concerning the creation of the universe. It professes, as Pythia upon a tripod,¹ that the creation is an outcome of chance, that it is perpetuated and preserved through purposeless, random interactions, that its splendor transpired spontaneously over time, and that the harmony, grace, and

beauty witnessed in nature are inherent attributes of natural laws.

Atheism detracts from God, Whom it has denied, His divine characteristics, and, instead, bestows them and His creative power to lifeless and feeble matter. Atheism freely proclaims matter to be the cause of all things, and it deifies matter in order to deny the existence of a superior Being, of a supreme, creative Spirit Who cares for and sustains all things.

On account of disbelief, matter becomes the only true entity; whereas the spirit becomes non-existent. For atheism, the spirit and the soul are egotistical inventions of man, concocted to satisfy his vainglory. Atheism denies man's spiritual nature. It drags man down from the lofty height where he has been placed by the Creator's power and grace, and lowers him amongst the rank of irrational animals, which he accepts as ancestors of his distinguished and noble lineage. Atheism does all this in order to bear witness to the words of the Psalm: "Man, being in honor, did not understand; he is compared to the mindless animals, and is become like unto them" (Ps. 48:20).

Atheism detracts faith, hope, and love from the world, these life-giving sources of true happiness for man, it expels God's righteousness from the world, and denies the existence of God's providence and succor.

Atheism accepts the laws that exist in nature, yet denies Him Who has appointed these laws. Atheism seeks to lead man to an imaginary happiness; however, it abandons and deserts him in the middle of nowhere, in the valley of lamentation, barren of all heavenly goods, void of consolation from above, empty of spiritual strength, bereft of the power of moral virtue, and stripped of the only indispensable provisions upon the earth: faith, hope, and love.

Atheism condemns poor man to perdition and leaves him standing alone as prey amidst life's difficulties. Having removed love from within man, atheism subsequently deprives him of the love from others, and it isolates him from family, relatives, and friends. Atheism displaces any hope of a better future and replaces it with despair.

Atheism is awful! It is the worst of all spiritual illnesses!

On Remembering the Dead – A Talk with Elder Michael of Valaam

✧ A leaflet given to me by Fr. Michael was entitled: "Of Commemoration of the Dead." The leaflet is worthwhile to be quoted in full.

"Our bright joyous Faith," the leaflet states, "teaches us that the time will come when we shall see our dear departed ones and shall live with them inseparably forever. God is boundless Love. He will not separate those who were united in the bonds of love. We will rejoice with those whom we loved and with whom we shared our joys here. Our near and dear ones will be still nearer and dearer. Our mutual love will be greater.

Knowing all this, with what fervor we must commemorate our dead. Our timely commemoration may very well free them from everlasting suffering. How grateful they shall be to us. Our prayer for the reposed shall be as strong as our love for them was in their lifetime. They shall be correspondingly nearer to us. True prayer of faith may bring the dead so near to us that we shall be able to feel their presence. During prayer one heart speaks to another. Father John of Kronstadt once said, 'We must pray for the dead in such a way as if we would be ourselves in hell, suffering. We must feel their torments and pray earnestly for their rest in the place of light where are neither sadness nor tears.'

Our holy doctrine says, 'Pray one for another.' The prayer of the Church is so powerful that in rising to heaven it ascends to the very throne of the Almighty. The same prayer also descends to hell and liberates those who are imprisoned there. The prayer of the Church is addressed to the Heavenly Father in the name of His well-beloved and only-begotten Son, commemorating His immeasurably great sacrifice which He made on the Cross for the sins of the world. This is done before the all-pure Body of the Son, broken for us to procure the forgiveness of our sins, which rests on the altar.

This prayer is accompanied and strengthened by the prayer of all the saints, particularly by the all-powerful intercession of the Mother of God, tireless Advocate for Christian people. Every time that the propitiating Sacrifice of the Body and of the Blood of the Son of God is offered, the entire host of the heavenly militia, the congregation of angels and saints is present. Each time that our deceased brethren are commemorated during Liturgy, their souls are allowed to attend, together with angels and saints, to pray for their salvation. With what trembling hope, perhaps, the soul of your dear one awaits your entrance into the temple of God when you are going to request the priest to commemorate this very soul during the great and terrible sacred rite, and to pray yourself with the entire Church for that soul. With what joy and consolation the soul of the departed one is replenished when, called to the temple of God by commemoration, it appears before the throne of the Lord together with the choir of angels to implore the Lord and the Church for the forgiveness of sins and a good answer before the terrible Tribunal of Christ. What indescribable joy, happiness and beatitude fills the soul when the particle, taken for its commemoration at the Proskomedia, together with the rest of the particles, is immersed in the Most Holy Blood of the Son of God in the Holy Cup with this prayer, 'Wash away, O Lord, the sins of all those commemorated here by Thy precious Blood and through the prayers of Thy Saints!'

We should, therefore, keep true love for our dear departed. When we shall die, they too shall remember us at our death's hour with the same love with which we commemorate them here. This will help us. While we bade them farewell here with tears and prayers they shall meet us with joy and good tidings. The dead know everything about us and what we do here. They see and hear us perfectly when we pray for them. Even if we wanted to hide ourselves in the bowels of the earth and pray for the dead, they would see, hear and know precisely

who prays for them. They would also know to whom we pray, for whom and for what purpose.

How much more the Lord Himself knows all that! Good deeds and prayers of the living made in commemoration of the dead save them both. With what tender, holy parental love the dead parents love their children remaining on earth – their orphans! With what angelic love the dead children love their parents who remain on earth! With what strong love the married people who passed away love their remaining partners! With what pure and tender love our brothers, sisters, friends, and all true Christians love those who remain here, their relatives and friends unite with them in the Holy Faith! What a multitude of souls awaits us over there.

“There,” Bishop Theophan the Recluse says, “the soul of a man is met by all for whom it prayed, to whom it prayed, during its days on earth.” What a consolation! How merciful is the Lord to our soul! At one He sends to meet us, when we enter the unknown land, all those for whom we prayed and to whom we prayed.

This strong faith, this premonition of life to come, serene and radiant death, complete acceptance of their lot in life – all these graces the Saints receive because of their faith in Christ. Therefore, if you want to help your departed ones wholeheartedly and to do everything commanded by the Holy Church, never allow any doubt to enter about his or her ultimate salvation. Learn that this doubt is a suggestion of the evil spirit. And why? Because if the dead were unworthy of salvation, God would not allow you to pray for them, according to St. John of Damascus. The latter says, “For those dead who are unworthy of salvation, God moves none to pray for them, neither parents, nor wife, nor husband, nor relatives, nor friends.”

The following prophecy is accomplished in them, “Miserable are those among the dead for whom none of the living prays.” Until the Last Judgment of Christ there is time to help each other and the state of our dead. The Bloodless Sacrifice offered for the dead washes their sins and they receive an opportunity to come to a better state. After the Bloodless Sacrifice, the most powerful means to obtain the forgiveness of sins of the dead is works of charity. St. John Chrysostom says, “Honor the dead with alms and good deeds because it will help them to escape everlasting torments.” Amen! *November 23, 1947*

When I finished reading the paper I looked in wonder at the Elder. His astonishing eyes, bright and clear, looked at me. I realized at once that Fr. Michael read my thoughts and knew my past, “Father,” I asked him, “what do you think of death?”

“There is no death,” he answered, “there is merely a passing from one state to another. To me personally, the life of another world is much more real than my life here.”

“I know one Archimandrite,” I said, “who thinks likewise.”

“Blessed is he,” the Staretz answered. “He is on the right road and perhaps nearing that other life. The more the Christian lives the interior life, the more he is detached from this world, and imperceptibly he approaches the other world. When the end comes it is easy: the thin curtain simply dissolves.”

“Can you feel a living contact with the dead, Father?”

“Certainly. The prayers for the dead maintain this contact. Those who omit that prayer break off contact, with deplorable results. Prayers for the dead are needful not only to them, but to us as well.”



"THE PRODIGAL SON"

"As the Prodigal Son I come to Thee, merciful Lord. I have wasted my whole life in a foreign land; I have scattered the wealth which Thou gavest, O Father. Receive me in repentance, O God, and have mercy on me." This hymn tells of the Prodigal Son, for Jesus' parable of this name is the theme of the Gospel. As we move toward the season of Great Lent in the Orthodox Church, the Tradition of the Church holds up examples of repentance for us. As in the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, we learned from this Gospel to emulate the Publican's humble repentance and to flee from the self-righteous and prideful complacency of the Pharisee. Humble self-realism is the foundation of repentance.

The story of the Prodigal Son helps to deepen our understanding of repentance — what it is and how much we need to embrace it.

The story is a very familiar one. The younger son of a well-to-do man asks his share of his inheritance from his father in advance. Taking it, he turns his back on his father and his way of life and goes off, the Gospel says, to a "far country" where he dissipates his inheritance on wild living. He ends up broke — not in the gutter, but worse — in a pig sty, tending swine and wishing he could share their food — an image that certainly must have been appalling to the Jewish listeners who first heard this Gospel story and who, by

law, regarded swine as unclean beasts. The prodigal ends up in the same condition as these swine in this distant and alien place. He grows desperate as famine strikes and leaves him starving. Then as the Gospel puts it, he comes "to himself" — he comes to his senses. He journeys back to his homeland, makes the long pilgrimage back to his father, hoping that at least he can be taken on as a "hired servant." Far from that, his father somehow sees him coming in the distance, as though perhaps he has been patiently watching and waiting for his lost son all this time. He does not wait for the son to come with his head hanging in shame before him, but he runs out to meet him with the embrace of love. He puts a new robe on the thin and dirty body of his son as he casts off the tattered rags of his old alien life. He places the ring of stewardship on his finger and kills the fattened calf for a happy feast of celebration. "My son," he says, "was dead, and is alive again — was lost and now is found."

Let us look deeply into this parable and see what riches of wisdom Christ has placed here for us who have eyes to see and ears to hear. The prodigal takes his inheritance away to "a far country." He rejects the good life he shares with his father in favor of a different kind of life far from home. We think immediately of Adam, our first parent, called by St. Luke a "son of God" in his genealogy, chapter three, verse 38 of his Gospel. Adam is a creature adopted by God as

His son, His child. But he is not an appreciative son. He is one who taken his birthright, his inheritance of freedom and godliness and wastes it. He goes his own way, far from Paradise, to a land that tempts him from afar but ends up as a place of pain, deprivation, and despair. The "far country" is this world — the abandoned homeland is Paradise. The prodigal, we can see, is not some special kind of person. He is Adam, every man, you and I. The prodigal is not someone we can look down our nose at, eying his dissipated life from the high ground of moral rectitude. If we think we can interpret this parable along such lines, we have surely missed the point of the parable, that of the Publican and Pharisee, altogether. The prodigal is not someone else — the homosexual, the drug addict, the dissolute swinger. This is a parable and Jesus expects us to see beyond the details of the story to the deeper and broader meaning. Looking at it in this way, we must say that the prodigal son is every man, every child of God, you and I.

From *"The Light of Orthodoxy"* Radio Program. Fr. Thomas Mueller, Ss. Cyril & Methodius Orthodox Church, Milwaukee WI.

FEBRUARY 14 - SAINT AUXENTIUS

A very distinguished administrator in Constantinople among the officials and courtiers of the Emperor Theodosius the Younger, he was set aflame by the love of Christ. Auxentius became a monk and remained only a short time in Constantinople. When men began to praise him, he fled and settled on a

mountain near Chalcedon that later became known as Auxentius's mountain. He could not realise his desire to remain there permanently, hidden from men, as some shepherds found him and made his whereabouts known. They began to bring the sick to him to be healed, and he healed many of them.



He restored sight to the blind and cleansed lepers, anointing them with oil. He also raised up the palsied and freed many who had been possessed by demons. All this was cause for wonder, but his humility was more wonderful. When he was asked to pray for the healing of someone, he excused himself with the words: 'I also am a sinful man.' But, constrained by many requests, he approached

the healing in the following way: either he called all present to pray with him for the sick person, or he first stirred up the faith of the people and told them that God would give according to their faith, or he said over the head of the sick person: 'The Lord Jesus Christ heals you.' He did this that the wonder worked should not be attributed to him but to almighty God. He took part in the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon and powerfully defended Orthodoxy against the Eutychian and Nestorian heresies. He lived to a great age; then, in 470, God took his youthful soul to Himself and left his aged body on the earth from which it was made.

From *The Prologue from Ochrid*. Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic. Lazarica Press. Birmingham, B30 1QE England

Witnesses to the Conversion of a Culture

Never in American history has there been a swifter revolution in public opinion than on the issue of homosexuality, which in less than ten years has undergone a dramatic "transformation of values" from the sin that dares not speak its name to a way of life that demands repeated acts of approval from the larger society.

Even those who see no moral issue here ought to be troubled by the way in which beliefs of many centuries have been swept aside with minimal resistance, thereby revealing the shallowness of the culture - the ability of a determined minority (by no means all of them homosexual) to use tactics of moral bullying against people who cannot bring themselves to defend their own professed principles. As the homosexual W. B. Yeats famously said in another context, "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."

The great paradox of the homosexual revolution is the fact that it occurred in the midst of an epidemic that at one time seemed to threaten the very survival of the revolutionaries themselves.

The Smithsonian Institution has chosen "101 Items That Made America," a list that includes both The Pill and the AIDS Quilt, which attempted to list all the people (mainly men) who succumbed to that virus. Not surprisingly, the museum does not explicitly link the two items. But it was the highly misleading claim that the contraceptive revolution guaranteed "safe sex" which directly prepared the way for the kind of sexual promiscuity that resulted in both AIDS and the millions of "unwanted pregnancies" ended by abortion.

...Indeed, the rapid embrace of the full homosexual agenda by a significant portion of the American population is almost like a large-scale religious conversion, with all the feelings of a new righteousness blossoming forth in our midst-complete with its own martyrs to the faith. This is not the glory of the Lord, but the glory of any sexual expression one chooses. James Hitchcock; *Touchstone*

...The world does not recognize homosexuality as a sin, but guess what? The world doesn't recognize sin *at all*. So, we either serve God or mammon - our love of God, or our desires.

Homosexuals are not "these people" or "those people" they are human beings caught in a web of sin, desire, longing and shame just like everybody else. Some sins are more rooted and pernicious than others but we all have those really deeply rooted ones that tend to create a cascade effect if we indulge them and seem to define our false selves.

The physical/psychological/emotional patterns at work in sexually oriented sin can be difficult with a high probability of never total victory in this life. If the Church and her people become ambivalent on the nature of the sin - that is cruel.

— Michael Baumann

***Is America Going to Pot?* - Patrick Buchanan**

...as with same-sex marriage, now legal in 16 or 17 states, the legalization of marijuana appears to be an idea whose time has come. What does this tell us about our country?

As Alexander Pope wrote: *Vice is a monster of so frightful mien, As to be hated needs but to be seen; Yet, seen too oft, familiar with her face, We first endure, then pity, then embrace.*

Abortion and homosexuality used to be scandalous. Now they are constitutional rights and popular social causes, and same-sex marriage is the civil rights cause of the 21st century.

As Justice Antonin Scalia noted, if tradition, religious beliefs, or a community animus against conduct is insufficient to restrict private behavior, upon what legal ground do we stand upon to outlaw polygamy, adult incest, or prostitution? Undeniably, the claims of the individual to maximum autonomy and freedom appear triumphant over the claims of community. The clamor of *me* is prevailing over the claims of *us*.

The Pope and Capitalism

Walter E. Williams, December 18, 2013

Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation, levied charges against free market capitalism, denying that "economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world" and concluding that "this opinion ... has never been confirmed by the facts." He went on to label unfettered capitalism as "a new tyranny." Let's look at the pope's tragic vision.

First, I acknowledge that capitalism fails miserably when compared with heaven or a utopia. Any earthly system is going to come up short in such a comparison. However, mankind must make choices among alternative economic systems that actually exist on earth. For the common man, capitalism is superior to any system yet devised to deal with his everyday needs and desires.

Capitalism is relatively new in human history. Prior to capitalism, the way people amassed great wealth was by looting, plundering and enslaving their fellow man. With the rise of capitalism, it became possible to amass great wealth by serving and pleasing your fellow man. Capitalists seek to discover what people want and produce and market it as efficiently as possible as a means to profit.

A couple of examples would be J.D. Rockefeller, whose successful marketing drove kerosene prices down from 58 cents a gallon in 1865 to 7 cents in 1900. Henry Ford became rich by producing cars for the common man. Both Ford's and Rockefeller's personal benefits pale in comparison with that received by the common man by having cheaper kerosene and cheaper transportation. There are literally thousands of examples of how mankind's life has been made better by those in the pursuit of profits. Here's my question to you: Are people who, by their actions, created unprecedented convenience, longer life expectancy and a more pleasant life for the ordinary person -- and became wealthy in the process -- deserving of all the scorn and ridicule heaped upon them by intellectuals, politicians and now the pope?

Let's examine the role of profits but first put it in perspective in terms of magnitude. Between 1960 and 2012, after-tax corporate profit averaged a bit over 6 percent of the gross domestic product, while wages averaged 47 percent of the GDP. Far more important than simple statistics about the magnitude of profits is its role in guiding resources to their highest-valued uses and satisfying people. Try polling people with a few questions. Ask them what services they are more satisfied with and what they are less satisfied with. On the "more satisfied" list would be profit-making enterprises, such as supermarkets, theaters, clothing stores and computer stores. They'd find less satisfaction with services provided by nonprofit government organizations, such as public schools, post offices and departments of motor vehicles.

Profits force entrepreneurs to find ways to please people in the most efficient ways or go out of business. Of course, they can mess up and stay in business if they can get government to bail them out or give them protection against competition. Nonprofits have an easier time of it. Public schools, for example, continue to operate whether they do a good job or not and whether they please parents or not. That's because politicians provide their compensation through coercive property taxes. I'm sure that we'd be less satisfied with supermarkets if they, too, had the power to take our money through taxes, as opposed to being forced to find ways to get us to voluntarily give them our earnings.

Arthur C. Brooks, president at the American Enterprise Institute and author of "Who Really Cares," shows that Americans are the most generous people on the face of the earth. In fact, if you look for generosity around the world, you find virtually all of it in countries that are closer to the free market end of the economic spectrum than they are to the socialist or communist end. Seeing as Pope Francis sees charity as a key part of godliness, he ought to stop demonizing capitalism.

Occasionally, environmentalists spill the beans and reveal their true agenda. Barry Commoner said, "Capitalism is the earth's number one enemy." Amherst College professor Leo Marx said, "On ecological grounds, the case for world government is beyond argument." With the decline of the USSR, communism has lost considerable respectability and is now repackaged as environmentalism and progressivism. - Walter Williams