



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **May 11, 2014** ✠

Fourth Sunday of Pascha

Sunday of the Paralytic

**Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Equals-to-the-Apostles
and the Evangelizers of the Slavs (869 and 885)**

St. Rostislav, Prince of Moravia (870)

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

✠ **Tues. May 13 6:30pm Inquirer's Class**

✠ **Wed. May 14 6:30pm Vespers of the Midfeast and Blessing of Waters**

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism – Saturday, May 24, 3:00pm:

Joseph Mabry and the Lang's and the Murphree's

Note: Godparents are the Sarris', the Lotz' and the Condra's.

Happy Mother's Day !!!

➤ **To all our Mothers and to all the Mothers of this community!**

Memory Eternal to all our departed Mothers!

WE MUST NOT AVOID COMMUNION because we deem ourselves to be sinful. We must approach it more often for the healing of soul, and the purification of the spirit, but with such humility and faith that considering ourselves unworthy we would desire even more the medicine for our wounds... It is much better if, in humility of heart, knowing that we are never worthy of the Holy Mysteries that we would receive them every Sunday for the healing of our maladies, rather than, blinded by pride, think that after one year we become worthy of them. **St. John Cassian (4th C)**

Faith Energized by Love

"**Faith without works and works without faith will both alike be condemned**, for he who has faith must offer to the Lord the faith which shows itself in actions. Our father Abraham would not have been counted righteous because of his faith had he not offered its fruit, his son. He who loves God both believes truly and performs the works of faith reverently. But he who only believes and does not love, lacks even the faith he thinks he has; for he believes merely with a certain superficiality of intellect and is not energized by the full force of love's glory. The chief part of virtue, then, is faith energized by love."
St. Diadochos of Photiki (The Philokalia Vol. 1), 5th C

Children in Church

It is easy to love children enough to say, "Yes, yes, yes" and to be popular with them. You have to love them a lot more to say "No" for their own good. As far as churchgoing is concerned, children must always be welcome in church. That does not mean that the rest of us have to put up with the distraction and inappropriateness of bad behavior. How can a child hope to learn anything about the Faith while creating mayhem? Rather let us all take the responsibility for helping parents to guide their children both in church and elsewhere.

~ an internet commentator, Natalya



This and That

Islam has been spread by the sword throughout its entire history. Although there are differing interpretations of jihad, the most prevalent one throughout the history of Islam has been subjugating the infidels to bring them under the Islamic Ummah (worldwide Islamic 'state'). As Christians are called to preach the Gospel to all the world – so Muslims are called to take over the world for Allah.

Unfortunately, they have a point that the West is a licentious, greedy, imperialistic force against virtue. It is just that what they offer is worse as it subjugates women, enshrines the sexual passions of men as good and is a return to the law which Jesus Christ transcended.

The original Muslims were nomadic pagans who Mohammed took over with his special brand of militarism, eroticism, lust of power and heretical Christianity promising not only the usual rights of rape and pillage for those successful in the local brand of war, but even greater in the 'world to come' i.e., 70 virgins and all that. Eternal rape and pillage. – Michael Baumann, Internet Comment

The Conversion of an Empire

Historically, many peoples had powerful incentives to reject Christianity. The new faith challenged much in Greek society – Homer, the idol industry, the Coliseum, the subservient status of women...

The message of Jesus arrived in Athens, the cultural capital of Greco-Roman civilization, in the person of Paul, a member of an unpopular ethnic minority... Paul told his esteemed audience about a Jewish preacher for whose sake he asked his hearers to "turn away" from the foolishness of idols. Most of his listeners scoffed at the story. Yet some did believe.

From such small beginnings, Christian believers had, by the time of Constantine, become a force to be reckoned with. When it was legalized by Emperor Constantine in 313 AD, about 10 percent of Romans had already become Christians, despite 300 years of persecution. By the time of Theodosius the Great (347-395), most Greco-Romans claimed to be Christians.

– David Marshall

The "Creative Touches" in God's Creation

When we look over God's handiwork, we notice that not everything in our world has a purely functional or instrumental value. Whatever evolutionists may try to say, there are some things that God made just to look nice, or smell pleasant, or sound delightful. This suggests that God Himself has put a premium on aesthetic richness, even when such riches are not tied to a specific use.

Relatively few of us can make a living as professional painters, filmmakers, musicians, sculptors, poets, ballet dancers, novelists, architects, or opera singers. The jobs most of us are called to do are not purely creative, but that doesn't mean we can't insert creative touches into our work to underscore the fact that human beings are not merely functional creatures. I am reminded of this when my wife takes a little extra time to set the dinner table nicely, perhaps by adding some flowers and candles, and putting on pleasant music in the background. These little extras do not have an immediate utility, but they are important because they mirror God's creative activity. When God created the world, he didn't just make everything for its utility, but added "unnecessary" little extras that enrich our experience.

Robin Phillips, Touchstone, Sept-Oct 2013

⇒ "Communism was responsible for the deaths of some 150 million human beings during the twentieth century. The world remains inexplicably indifferent and uncurious about the deadliest ideology in history. We rightly insisted upon total de-nazification (of the Germans); we rightly excoriate those who now attempt to revive the Nazis' ideology. But the world exhibits a perilous failure to acknowledge the monstrous history of Communism." – Claire Berlinski

Amoral Education – "It is extraordinary to me that you can, in fact, engage in public education beginning at the age of six and never, ever meet a teacher who feels any responsibility to encourage you to distinguish between right and wrong." ~ William F. Buckley

The days between Pascha and the Ascension...

A Time of Miracles

The days between Pascha and the Ascension are a very special time of the year, just as Great Lent is. For the Apostles — and for us as well — these are days of walking with the risen Christ. The labor of Lent is over, and just as after birth-giving, now there is a very precious time of new life. In the Apostles' day, the fear of death and all its horrors had been taken away, leaving a time of incredible joy. The Apostles never knew when Jesus was going to come among them. Not knowing what else to do, they had gone back to the work they knew before meeting Christ. But there He was, after a night with no worldly catch, wailing on the shore with breakfast and a new mission for them: to be fishers of men. Each year for us too, Lent is a time to give up our sins, passions, jealousies, whatever holds us down. Now we must take care not to reach for those old burdens, but to take up the new life and joy in Christ that this year will bring. The Church, as a good Mother, helps us with this.

In the appointed readings following Pascha, the Church has woven together events and miracles so as to give us a time of walking in the Kingdom with the risen Lord, glimpsing the reality of the life to come. It is the joyous casting away of all doubt:

“Throughout the whole period between the Resurrection and the Ascension, God’s providence was at work to instill this one lesson into the hearts of the Disciples, to set this one truth before their eyes, that our Lord Jesus Christ, who was truly born, truly suffered and truly died, should be recognized as truly risen from the dead.”

(St. Leo the Great, Synaxarion of the Lenten Triodion & Pentecostarion)

However, it is not a “happy-go-lucky” time. Throughout the daily readings from St. John’s Gospel, we see the Pharisees and Jews increasingly angry with Jesus. He is destroying life as they think it should be. So too we must be on guard and not let the world steal our Resurrection joy, nor return to dull, old life-as-normal, but let the grace of the Resurrection permeate our lives, working miracles for us. Let us look at the Sundays following Pascha to see what it is the Church wants to teach us about how to do this.

The first, **St. Thomas Sunday**, reaches us about Christ’s patience with our unbelief: “The Lord endured the disbelief of Thomas and showed him His side” (“Lord, I Call”). We also learn how to make our unbelief salvific - during times of trial, weakness or doubt we should wait *with* the Church, which Thomas at first failed to do — staying in that upper room that is the Christian community. We do not try to pretend that all is well, but keep our eyes steadily gazing upon our Resurrected Lord and awaiting His will. Thomas, in finally learning this lesson, “has woven a crown for himself with his faithful doubt... For by his doubt he... showed Christ’s indisputable Resurrection to all nations. Through his disbelief, he has led all to faith” (St. Thomas Sunday Canon, Ode 7).

The next Sunday commemorates **Saints Joseph and Nicodemos, and the Myrrh-bearing Women**. These were the ones who witnessed to Christ’s burial and to His

Resurrection. They teach us to hope even in the face of what appear to be insurmountable obstacles — after all, when the women went to the tomb early in the morning, they did not even know how they were going to get into it in order to anoint Christ's body. They put their entire lives at risk. If the guards did not kill them, the Pharisees were certain to throw them out of the Temple. Their courage was truly an act of love, showing us how to love the Lord with fervent hearts, seeking him fearlessly, in spite of the world's clamor. For their faithfulness, they were first granted to see an angel who announced the Resurrection to them before anyone else, and then they saw the Resurrected Lord Himself.

The Healing of the Paralytic comes next. Jesus first shows us that He will meet us wherever we are, entering into our misery. Then He asks the Paralytic a question that we also can profitably consider during this time of miracles: "Do you want to be healed?" (John 5:6). It seems to be a ridiculous question, but in actuality many do not want to be healed because it is likely to mean change, increased responsibility, perhaps even a new and different cross. We see the patience of Jesus yet again, as He, knowing our weaknesses, waits for our permission to heal us.

The Samaritan Woman is the next Sunday, and is another example of Christ initiating a conversation that will lead to healing. We see once more His patience with us, as well as His gentleness. One small step at a time, He leads the Samaritan woman to understanding and repentance:

"Jesus met the Samaritan woman by Jacob's Well! He wraps the earth in clouds, yet He asks for water from her. O Wonder! He Who rides on the Cherubim speaks with an adulterous woman. He Who suspended the earth on the waters, asks for a drink. He Who causes the lakes and springs to overflow is weary with thirst. Truly He desires to set the woman free from the enemy's snares. He drowns her sins in the waters of life, for He alone is the compassionate Lover of man!"

(*'Lord I Call,' Fifth Thursday of Pascha*)

The last Sunday in this cycle is the **Healing of the Blind Man**. By making the clay to put on the man's eyes, Jesus showed that He is the very One Who, from the beginning, took clay and formed man. Knowing this gives us great boldness to call on Him in affliction. If Christ can give the blind man eyes, something he never had at all, what can He not do for us? The new eyes were just half of the miracle. Understanding what he saw was the other half. Jesus tells us, "I am the Light of the world, he who follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:2).

During this time of Paschal joy, may we make this prayer from the service for St. Thomas Sunday our own:

"O Christ Who, being God, arose from the tomb, we see Thee not with our eyes, but with the fervent faith in our hearts, and we magnify Thee in song!"

(*St. Thomas Sunday Canon ode 9*).

~ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *Life Transfigured Journal* (date unknown)

Spiritual Warfare in the Pauline Epistles

by Fr James Parnell

"We forget that we are at war."

Throughout his letters, St. Paul stresses a sense of urgency and vigilance that we have long since lost. This emphasis is based on the reality of a conflict described plainly as a war against evil. It can even seem foreign to us, as it is spoken of in terms far different from the culture wars in which the sins of others become the targets for our Bible bombs and canonical cannons.

No, the conflict he most often references is not that of public conflict with other groups/individuals, but of spiritual conflict. Even conflicts related to those who preached other doctrines (focus on circumcision, spiritual gifts, etc.) are viewed as but a manifestation and example of a spiritual reality: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." (II Corinthians 10:3-6).

In this vein, his letters are filled with military and athletic references which help illustrate his focus on preparing his flock for a contest, a war. St. Paul minces no words when describing the imminence and regularity of conflict, both with the world and within oneself. He twice describes the life of a Christian as "a good fight," and speaks at length of a war within himself. [I Timothy 6:12 & II Timothy 4:7; Romans 6-8.] The snares of the devil and the powers of evil are not conjured up as a metaphysical metaphor or scare-straight-tactic, but spoken of as a reality of warfare.

St. Paul's famous encouragement to arm oneself with spiritual armor and weaponry is expressly based on the real threat of engagement by the enemy.[Ephesians 6:10-20.] In Ephesians, it's not described as a possibility, but rather a promise. Indeed, the conflict within this world between good and evil is realized in the expectation of suffering. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me." [Philippians 1:29-30]

Suffering as a Christian is not simply an occupational hazard, but rather a job description. Yet we are not called to do so in a masochistic way, seeking humiliation and abuse for the fun of it. It is an expectation that a life lived in Christ is one which naturally comes to a point of intersection with a death like Christ's, even if, in America, it is not with wood and nails.

When we cry, 'Abba! Father!'... "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." [Romans 8:16-18] Yet as Christians in America, we often take one of two paths to excess when it comes to "spiritual warfare." One is abuse and the other is apathy.

Culture wars and Christianity can often seem synonymous in popular media. Pope Francis is quoted as saying, "Who am I to judge?" and the papers are ablaze with wonderment that a Christian leader might dare to withhold from judging another person. Imagine it ... a Christian who doesn't point the finger at someone else over their sins. Pick your hot topic, and there's a "Christian" group that sounds more like a hate group than a light on a hill. We take the conflict that Paul describes and use it as fodder for war against flesh and blood, under the guise of protecting the faith or fatherland. Yet,

despite the media hype, the majority of us probably feel more comfortable on the sidelines, just slightly outside the danger area, away from the main push of the battle. We wait for the end, if we

even take notice of it at all, and when pushed to suit up and wade into the thick of it, or perhaps simply when jostled by another running to fight, we ask, like the demoniacs from the: "Have you come to torment us before the time?" We perhaps know too well who the victor will be and feel no need to risk our own skin.

We can take comfort and rejoice in the fact that Christ trampled down death by his death, that he won the victory already, and indeed St. Paul encourages us to do exactly that. Yet, though the victory has been won, the fight drones on, for the enemy still fights as though he doesn't know he's beaten. We, as Christians, as the Church, the Body of Christ, are called to be that reality: to embody Christ today, here and now, and make that victory a reality in our lives today, and in the lives of those around us. We are here to fight the good fight and it is for this reason that Paul speaks of his own suffering for the Gospel.[Colossians 1:21-29]

Yet for many of us, there's just too much going on. With timelines and hash tags, memes and viral videos, 24-hour news channels and up-to-the-minute as-fast-as-you-can-share-it information at our fingertips, it can be hard not to get caught up in it all. There's a sense that we must keep up with the ever-changing, as though the news is always new and newsworthy. Those things that seem to us to remain the same: stagnant, still, and steadfast, these are often put on hold, ignored, in order to focus on that which seems different: the new, changing, and constantly updated, globalized world. The temptation to check your e-mail instead of praying in the morning, to read the news feed instead of the Bible, to attend a social event instead of Vespers, or update your social media persona instead of visiting the sick is so powerful exactly for this reason. We know that the prayer book, the Bible, the services of the Church, and those in need will still be there tomorrow.

We take God for granted and, at best, assume that we'll have time to get to it later, once everything slows down. Yet, they never seem to, and we are stuck in a Groundhog Day scenario of never quite making time for that which time was made. Before we know it, the enemy has won a small victory in the battlefield of our hearts. Our senses are deadened to the realities of God working in our lives, of Christ in our midst. We become at ease in our sins and at peace with our spiritual laziness. We take a rest. We begin to doze off. We forget that we are at war.

✘ ✘ ✘

Study is Intoxicating, Knowledge is Beautiful, Faith is Infinite

By Metropolitan Nicholas of Mesogaia and Lavriotiki, Greece

Study is intoxicating. Our world is made with unimaginable beauty and wisdom. These two things are worth discovering by someone as much as they can. You just have to do it with human humility, not with the audacity of a pseudo-god. It must be approached within its limits.

Human knowledge, understanding and wisdom are not infinite nor complete. And nature itself shows us our limits.

The universe presents the principle of singularity (a mathematical anomaly). It hides its secret. According to the principle of uncertainty, as nature reveals one secret it hides another.

We are blessed to know many and great things, but doomed to not conquer the infinite and the all.

But this infinite and all, which is beyond our senses and knowledge, leads us to God. Whoever is dizzy from their knowledge has lost God. His life is like a chain and each link is one of success. But the final result is total failure and off the mark.

Knowledge is very beautiful, but it does little to liberate you. It has boundaries and it is finite. This is why we need faith. This leads to infinity and to all.

Concealing Evil

Walter E. Williams, February 19, 2014

Evil acts are given an aura of moral legitimacy by noble-sounding socialistic expressions, such as spreading the wealth, income redistribution, caring for the less fortunate, and the will of the majority. Let's have a thought experiment to consider just how much Americans sanction evil.

Imagine there are several elderly widows in your neighborhood. They have neither the strength to mow their lawns, clean their windows and perform other household tasks nor the financial means to hire someone to help them. Here's a question that I'm almost afraid to ask: Would you support a government mandate that forces you or one of your neighbors to mow these elderly widows' lawns, clean their windows and perform other household tasks? Moreover, if the person so ordered failed to obey the government mandate, would you approve of some sort of sanction, such as fines, property confiscation or imprisonment? I'm hoping, and I believe, that most of my fellow Americans would condemn such a mandate. They'd agree that it would be a form of slavery -- namely, the forcible use of one person to serve the purposes of another.

Would there be the same condemnation if, instead of forcing you or your neighbor to actually perform weekly household tasks for the elderly widows, the government forced you or your neighbor to give one of the widows \$50 of your weekly earnings? That way, she could hire someone to mow her lawn or clean her windows. Would such a mandate differ from one under which you are forced to actually perform the household task? I'd answer that there is little difference between the two mandates except the mechanism for the servitude. In either case, one person is being forcibly used to serve the purposes of another.

I'm guessing that most Americans would want to help these elderly ladies in need but they'd find anything that openly smacks of servitude or slavery deeply offensive. They might have a clearer conscience if all the neighbors were forced (taxed) to put money into a government pot. A government agency would then send the widows \$50 to hire someone to mow their lawns and perform other household tasks. This collective mechanism makes the particular victim invisible, but it doesn't change the fact that a person is being forcibly used to serve the purposes of others. Putting the money into a government pot simply conceals an act that would otherwise be deemed morally depraved.

This is why socialism is evil. It employs evil means, confiscation and intimidation, to accomplish what are often seen as noble goals -- namely, helping one's fellow man. Helping one's fellow man in need by reaching into one's own pockets to do so is laudable and praiseworthy. Helping one's fellow man through coercion and reaching into another's pockets is evil and worthy of condemnation. Tragically, most teachings, from the church on down, support government use of one person to serve the purposes of another; the advocates cringe from calling it such and prefer to call it charity or duty.

Some might argue that we are a democracy, in which the majority rules. But does a majority consensus make moral acts that would otherwise be deemed immoral? In other words, if the neighbors got a majority vote to force one of their number -- under pain of punishment -- to perform household tasks for the elderly widows, would that make it moral?

The bottom line is that we've betrayed much of the moral vision of our Founding Fathers. In 1794, when Congress appropriated \$15,000 for relief of French refugees who had fled from insurrection in San Domingo to Baltimore and Philadelphia, James Madison rose on the floor of the House of Representatives to object, saying, "I cannot undertake to lay my finger on that article of the Constitution which granted a right to Congress of expending, on objects of benevolence, the money of their constituents." Tragically, today's Americans -- Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative -- would hold such a position in contempt and run a politician like Madison out of town on a rail.

Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University.

The Bible and Tradition, an excerpt from Rev. Dr. Eugen J. Pentiuc: The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition. Oxford University Press, February 2014.

“The Bible is a scented garden, delightful, and beautiful.... Let us seek in the fountain of this garden ‘a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’ We shall taste a joy that will never dry up, because the grace of the Bible garden is inexhaustible.” – St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.17

The fourth century exegete and theologian St Gregory of Nyssa urged passionately his audience, “Let the inspired Scriptures be our umpire, and the vote of truth will be given to those whose dogmas are found to agree with the divine words” (On the Holy Trinity, and of the Godhead of the Holy Spirit).

This is a powerful statement on the centrality of Scripture as an arbiter and criterion of truth of the Church’s doctrinal fabric.

Several centuries before Gregory, Papias, a “hearer” of the Apostle John, speaks rather differently:

“For I did not think that the information from books would help me as much as that from a living and surviving voice” (in Eusebius, Church History 3. 39). Papias’ statement is a clear testimony to the importance of the oral teaching in the transmission and interpretation of the apostolic kerygma (proclamation) throughout the centuries – that same kerygma that would eventually develop into the Church’s Holy Tradition. As Paul D. Hanson notices, “The most appropriate context for the theological interpretation of the Bible is the living community of faith, which for Christians is of course the church.”

How is this centrality of Scripture to be reconciled with the guidance of Holy Tradition? Unlike those post-Reformation Western theologies which have resorted either to the binomial formula of “Scripture and Tradition” (i.e., Roman-Catholic view in the period from the Council of Trent to the Second Vatican Council II) or to the plain reductionism inscribed in the formula of sola scriptura (i.e., the classical Reformation view), Eastern Orthodox theological discourse is dominated by an integrative model: “Scripture within Tradition.”

A caveat is warranted at this point: to assert the “centrality” – even “sufficiency” – of Scripture does not mean a self-sufficiency. As Father Georges Florovsky writes, “We cannot assert that Scripture is self-sufficient; and this not because it is incomplete, or inexact, or has any defects, but because Scripture in its very essence does not lay claim to self-sufficiency. We can say that Scripture is a God-inspired scheme or image (eikon) of truth, but not truth itself. . . . If we declare Scripture to be self-sufficient, we only expose it to subjective, arbitrary interpretation, thus cutting it away from its sacred source.”

If it is true that Tradition is, in the view of more than one Orthodox theologian, the very life of the Holy Spirit in the Church, then Scripture might be imaged as the Church’s pulsating heart, the center, always radiating life and sustenance to other facets of the body, giving concrete content to the textual, aural, and visual manifestations of Tradition.

“ All Scripture, then, is given by inspiration of God and is also assuredly profitable. Wherefore to search the Scriptures is a work most fair and most profitable for souls. For just as the tree planted by the channels of waters, so also the soul watered by the divine Scripture is enriched and gives fruit in its season, viz. Orthodox belief, and is adorned with evergreen leafage, I mean, actions pleasing to God. For through the Holy Scriptures we are trained to action that is pleasing to God.”

~ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (8th C)