



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **May 18, 2014** ✠

Fifth Sunday of Pascha

Sunday of the Samaritan Woman

Martyr Theodotus of Ancyra and Seven Virgin Martyrs:

Alexandra, Tecusa, Claudia, Phaine, Ephrasia, Matrona and Julia (303)

Martyr Peter of Lampsacus (251)

New Hieromartyr Priest Damian Strbac of Grahovo, Serbia, by the Ustashi (1940's)



Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!



✠ **Tues. May 20 6:30pm Inquirer's Class / No Wednesday Service**

✠ **Sat. May 24 3:00pm ~ The Sacrament of Holy Baptism**

Joseph Mabry, Panteleimon and Sophia Lang, plus

John and Christina Murphree and children Mary, Lucy and John

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

Purified through Holy Baptism

✠ "Therefore, having become man for our sake, God freed Man from the tyranny of the enemy. For He destroyed all of the devil's power. He has broken all of his strength and delivered us from under his control, from slavery to him, unless we want to sin voluntarily. For He gave us power, as He said, 'to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy' (Luke 10:19), since He has purified us from every sin through holy Baptism. **Through holy Baptism, every sin is forgiven and erased.** However, God - Who is good, being aware that even after holy Baptism we are going to sin again ... has given us, in His goodness, holy commandments which purify us; so that if we desire it, we can be purified again - through observance of the holy commandments - not only from our sins, but also from our passions. Sins are one thing, and passions another. The passions are anger, idleness, desire for pleasure, hate, evil desire and others. Sins, on the other hand, are the acting out of the passions; that is to say, putting them into practice. ... It is expected for someone to have passions, but not to carry them out."

- St. Dorotheos of Gaza (5th C)

A Little Action

Right now, our kids are the most vulnerable, and you know who made them vulnerable? The lack of faithfulness on our part. We have to correct some things. The Church is pure. We priests and we people of God share a ministry, and we have to correct that. We have to rejuvenate ourselves, knowing that this is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. And when we read those prayers of Baptism, it's for our salvation. Salvation is a very expensive word - costly. And it requires us to have a little action. Not bleacher-sitters.

+ Fr. Alexander Atty

A Christian must take pains for his soul and his life. He must direct his life on the Christian path, and purge his soul of all filth and impurity.

- Fr. Alexis Trader

This and That

The Modern Project

The drive of the modern world is towards productivity and consumption. That individual rights are also championed is perhaps an upside, but the effect of mass culture is homogenization. The more we consume, the more alike we become. Modern production is capable of tremendous variety, but the streets of Bangkok, Beijing, and Berlin all present the display of America's ubiquitous blue jeans. We could be different, but we're not.

The result has been a growing shift of populations driven by economic concerns. Such shifts have happened throughout history, but often over multiple generations and in a more stable format. The modern speed of technology has quickened the pace of such change and overwhelmed the natural limits of human adaptation. We are left with very few "natural" bonds. We have kinsmen, but they often live at great remove. We live in communities with common economic concerns, but disparate religious and cultural background. Blue jeans and contemporary rock music make for a very thin cultural bond.

The modern project wants short-term results, but is begetting long-term disasters. The destruction of the family (extended family as well) is one of the most outstanding products of the modern project. It will take generations to repair the damage done. But that is our task (among so much else).

The "human" endeavor of globalism is, more or less, "Let's see what happens if we decide that economics is all that matters – disregard family, history, and every form of inherited culture, and just define ourselves by our jobs and the market..."

The modern project will eventually fail. Ideologies that lack a grounding in nature will eventually crash under their own weight and the strange consequences of their ideas. The massive productivity that we presently enjoy will come to an end at some point. The unnatural dislocations that we currently experience will cease. If we survive that collapse, the world that slowly rebuilds will likely have more natural affinities and practices. It is essential that the Church remember what it is to be human – for when we repent ourselves and seek to return – who else will know what it looks like? In the meantime, we continue the work of God's human project – restoring people to sanity and the holy Church of God.

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

The Tendency to Seek Political Saviors

The historic human tendency to over-evaluate political leaders, especially potential ones, requires more notice than it commonly receives. Our ancestors' footsteps have worn deep paths in the terrain. We might desire one of these days to take a closer look.

The hubris of the political class stems from two factors: basic human fallibility coupled with the human tendency to seek political saviors. The two factors, in fact, overlap. We seek political saviors because of some inborn resistance to the notion that human saviors aren't precisely thick on the ground around here. "O put not your trust in princes, nor in sons of men," the Psalmist counsels, "in whom there is no salvation. For when the breath of man goeth forth he shall turn again to his earth, and then all his thoughts perish. Blessed is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, and whose hope is in the Lord his God . . . Than which no better political advice is to be found—anywhere. Nevertheless, the human itch for power, or the desire that power be deployed for the relief of this or that necessity, commonly overcomes scruples of all kinds. – William Murchison

Op-ed writers bewail Vladimir Putin's threat to the "rules-based" world we have created. But under what rule did we bomb Serbia for 78 days to tear away Kosovo, the cradle province of the Serb people?
Patrick Buchanan

ST. PHOTINE

This great martyr of Christ was the Samaritan woman who conversed with Christ at the well of Jacob. The story is related to us in the Gospel of the Evangelist John (chapter 4). With her two sons and five sisters, she was baptized after Pentecost. They followed the Apostles and preached the Faith of Christ, thus converting many idolaters to the true faith.

The great persecutions against the Christians started in the year A.D. 64 under the Emperor Nero and, after the death of the Apostles Peter and Paul, Nero wanted to murder the rest of the Apostles and all those who believed in Christ. Little did they realize that the more they tried to erase the name of Christ from the face of the earth, the more they strengthened the people's faith in Him.

When the persecutions first began, Saint Photine and her youngest son, Joseph, were in Carthage (a famous city in Africa) teaching the Gospel of Christ. Her oldest son, Victor, was a soldier in the Roman army, and was stationed in Rome. Because of his courageous deeds during the war between the Romans and the Arabs, Nero made him a general. Not knowing that Victor was a Christian, Nero sent him to Southern Italy to persecute the Christians. Sebastian, the Duke of Southern Italy, told Victor that he knew that he was a Christian and advised him to do as Nero had ordered so that he would not endanger his life. Victor told Sebastian that he would not endanger his own life, but that he would, nevertheless, obey the will of the Immortal King and not that of a tyrant. Sebastian told him to reconsider and also to advise his mother and brother to stop their preaching. Upon saying this, the Duke was blinded and lost his voice. He was filled with severe pain. Some by-standers lifted him up and placed him on a bed where he remained for three days. After the third day he yelled, "I believe in the God of the Christians." Victor came and baptized him. After emerging from the baptismal font, Sebastian regained his sight and praised God. Those idolaters who were present feared that the same might happen to them and went to Victor to be baptized.

Stories of these events reached Nero. He was also told that Victor and Sebastian were spreading the teachings of Peter and Paul, and that Victor's mother and brother were doing the same in Carthage. Nero sent a battalion of soldiers to Southern Italy to arrest the Christians and bring them to Rome. Christ appeared to these Christians before the soldiers arrived and told them to have faith, and they would be rewarded in His Kingdom. He appeared to Victor separately and told him that from that day forth he would be known as Photinus, instead of Victor, for he had bestowed the true light upon many people.¹

Christ also appeared to Saint Photine in Carthage. She left Carthage with a large number of Christians and went to Rome where they continued to teach Christianity. Several days after their arrival in Rome, Saint Photine and her followers met Photinus and Sebastian. Along with many Christians they went before Nero who asked them why they came to Rome. Photine informed him that they had come to teach him to be-

¹ Photinus is the Greek word for someone who sheds light.

lieve in Christ. Photinus and Sebastian told Nero that they were willing to die for their beliefs. The Emperor turned to Saint Photine and asked who the others who accompanied her were. She told him that the women were her sisters Anatolē, Photo, Photis, Paraskevē, Kyriakē, and that the man was her youngest son, Joseph. Nero then asked if they had all agreed to die for the Nazarene. Photine told him that they had. The order was then given to the soldiers to crush iron balls against the joints of their fingers. This torture lasted for hours; however, the Saints felt no pain, nor were their fingers crushed.

So shocked was Nero when he heard this, that he ordered the soldiers to cut off the hands of the Saints. The soldiers tied the Saints' hands to a cutting board and tried seven times to sever them. Instead, they became paralyzed and fell to the ground as if dead. Relentlessly, Nero began to consider ways in which to conquer the Saints. He ordered that the men be placed in a dark prison. Photine and her sisters were taken to the treasury and were presented with a great amount of gold. Nero ordered his daughter, Domnina, to go with her servants and talk with the Saints. When Domnina arrived in the treasury, Photine discovered that the Princess was also a Christian. Afterwards, the

royal daughter and her servants were baptized by Saint Photine and her sisters. Domnina's name was changed to Anthousa and her head servant's name was changed to Stephanis. Saint Anthousa then took all the gold in the treasury and distributed it among the poor.

When Nero discovered what had occurred, he was enraged and ordered that a furnace be heated for seven days. After the seventh day, Photine and the others were placed within the furnace and there they remained for three days. Thinking that he had burnt the Saints, Nero ordered that they open the furnace and throw the bones into the river. However, when the grates were opened, they found all the saints in perfect health and praising God for the miracle. When the Romans heard of this miracle, even they praised God. Nero was outraged and ordered that the Saints be poisoned. A chemist named Lampadius was ordered to

make the poison. Saint Photine was the first to drink the poison and the rest drank after her. None of them felt any effects. Lampadius was amazed and told the Saint that he had a much stronger poison and that if they drank it and were not harmed, he too would believe in Christ. After the Saints drank this poison without being harmed, he took all his sorcerer's books, burned them, and was then baptized and renamed Theoclitus. Upon hearing this, Nero ordered that Theoclitus be taken outside the walls of the city and beheaded. This was done immediately and Theoclitus received the wreath of immortality from Christ.

The Emperor continued his hideous tortures; however, the results were again negative. It was then ordered that lead and sulphur should be boiled and poured into the Saints' ears. With Divine Help, the Saints remained unharmed. Nero was amazed.



Soldiers were then ordered to cut out the eyes of the Saints and throw the Christians into a dark prison, which was filled with poisonous snakes. When the Saints entered the prison, all the snakes died. Instead of a stench, a sweet fragrance lingered in the air, and instead of darkness in the cell, there was bright light. Suddenly Christ appeared unto the Saints and said, "Peace be with you." He took Saint Photine by the hand and said to her, "I am always with you. Never fear, instead, always be happy." Christ gave them back their sight and they saw and praised their Master. He gave them courage and ascended into heaven.

The Saints remained in prison for three years, for the Romans often forgot their prisoners or did not bother to open the cells believing that the inmates were dead. After the third year, the guards had passed by the cell to free one of Nero's servants. They discovered that the Saints lived and were in good health. The soldiers informed Nero that the blinded Galileans were alive, well, and had regained their sight. They also told him that the prison had become a house of God and that many pagans went there to be baptized and taught the Christian religion. Nero was shocked when he heard this and summoned the Saints before him. Photine told Nero that they would never stop teaching Christianity. The Emperor then ordered that the Saints be crucified upside-down for eight days and that their bodies be torn with iron claws until the joints were destroyed. On the eighth day, the executioners came to see whether the Saints were still alive. As they gazed upon their victims, they were blinded. An angel of the Lord descended and freed the Saints and left them in perfect health.

Saint Photine cured the executioners of their blindness and they in turn believed in Christ and were baptized. Nero was furious when he heard of this and ordered that Saint Photine be cut all over her body and then thrown into a dried well. Saints Sebastian, Photinus, and Joseph were also cut and thrown into an old bathhouse. Nero ordered his soldiers to amputate the breasts of the five sisters of Saint Photine; however, Saint Photis would not allow the soldiers near her. Nero was angered at her bravery and had her executed. He had two treetops bent and tied to the feet of the Saint. When the ropes, which held the treetops, were cut, Saint Photis was split in half. Nero then had all the other Saints, except for Saint Photine beheaded. Saint Photine was placed in prison. She was extremely depressed because she had not received the crown of martyrdom as had her other companions. Soon she saw a vision of Christ Who made the sign of the cross to her. Several days later she died in prison.

Saint Photine is celebrated also on February 26th, together with the other Saints:

Saint Anatolē, the second sister of Saint Photine;

Saint Photo, the third sister of Saint Photine;

Saint Photis, the fourth sister of Saint Photine;

Saint Paraskevē, the fifth sister of Saint Photine;

Saint Kyriakē, the sixth sister of Saint Photine;

Saint Photinus, the oldest son of Saint Photine;

Saint Joseph, the youngest son of Saint Photine;

Saint Sebastian, the Duke of Southern Italy;

Saint Theoclitus, the chemist.



Judge Not!

By Fr. Thomas Kulp

St. Macarios the Great often said to his disciple, "Condemn no man, and you will be saved. If you think that this is an easy formula for salvation - *think again!*

None of us can get through a single day without judging or condemning someone, if not with our lips, then with a glance, a gesture, or a thought. Remember that God judges us not only according to our actual deeds; He sees right into the depths of our hearts. He can read our inner-most thoughts like an open book.

Our Lord assures us that whoever looks at a woman lustfully commits adultery with her in his heart. The same principle applies to every aspect of our spiritual lives. It is the very attitude of condemnation, however secret and hidden, that must be rooted out of the heart as a deadly poison.

So does Christ warn us, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged ... For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

Unless we judge and condemn ourselves first, we ourselves shall stand convicted on the final day of reckoning. This is the real key to a God-pleasing life. We cannot see clearly to remove the splinter in our brother's eye, unless we have first removed the plank from our own.

You may say that you are as good as the next guy, or perhaps better than most. But how have you arrived at this conclusion, unless you have already judged others by your own exalted standards and found them lacking? It is impossible for us to think ourselves better than others unless we have first judged them.

We are all guilty of this sin. In fact, we do it so often that we are hardly even aware of it. As soon as someone says or does something that offends us, we are right away passing judgment on him.

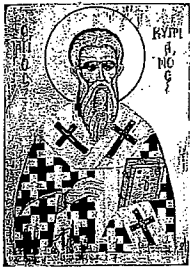
None of what I have said means, of course, that we must be naive fools, willing to take everyone at face value. We do not necessarily condemn someone when we judge him to be bad company for ourselves or our children. There are people with whom we do better not to associate. Nor are we wrong to chastise those who may have gone astray. It is one thing to judge and condemn our brother, quite another to condone and accept obvious evil.

Our first step is to put our house in order. When we see a sinner, our reaction must always be, "There, but for the Grace of God, go I." If we are not guilty of the same sin, praise God for his mercy. If we begin to evaluate others by first condemning ourselves, the thought of judging others will never occur to us. We are all imperfect. Can we therefore waste our time condemning others when we will one day stand naked and defenseless before the Judgment Seat?

✘ "If you are not what you should be, you should not despair. It is bad enough that you have sinned; why in addition do you wrong God by regarding Him in your ignorance as powerless? Is He, who for your sake created the great universe that you behold, incapable of saving your soul? And if you say that this fact, as well as His Incarnation, only makes your condemnation worse, then repent; and He will receive your repentance..."
St. Peter of Damascus (The Philokalia Vol. 3)

THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

By Saint Cyprian of Carthage, from a letter written to a new convert, around 246 A.D.



I promise to share with you the grace God in His great mercy has shown me, and to tell you as simply as I can what I have experienced since I was baptized. Until that time, I was still living in the dark, knowing nothing of my true life. I was completely involved in this world's affairs, influenced by all its changing moods and troubles, and exiled from the light of truth.

I had indeed been told that God offered men and women a second birth, by which we could be saved, but I very much doubted that I could change the kind of life I was then living. Frankly, I could not see how a person could cast off his fallen nature, and be changed in heart and soul while he still lived in the same body as before. How was it possible, I asked myself, to change the habits of a lifetime instantaneously.

How can one suddenly rid oneself of accumulated guilt and break with sin that has become so deeply rooted in one's life? Can a man whose life has been characterized by feasting and luxury, learn frugality and simplicity in a single moment? A person who craves public distinction and honor cannot bear to be passed over and unnoticed.

Another who is accustomed to throngs of flattering attendance, takes it a terrible penance to be left alone. Is every species of temptation suddenly to lose its force? Should we no longer feel the enticement of wine and good living, where pride no longer swells our heads or anger blazes our breasts? Shall we no longer be troubled by covetousness or cruelty or ambition or lust?

These were my thoughts. My past life was so burdened with so many sins, that I saw no way ever to be rid of, that I had grown accustomed to giving way to my weakness. I despaired of ever being any better. Consequently, I simply humored my evil inclinations, and made no attempt to combat them.

But at last I made up my mind to ask for Baptism. I went down into those life-giving waters, and all the stains of my past were washed away. I committed my life to the Lord. He cleansed my heart and filled me with His Holy Spirit. I was born again, a new man.

And then in a most marvelous way, all my doubts cleared up, I could now see what had been hidden from me before. I found that I could do things that had previously been impossible. I saw that as long as I had been living according to my lower nature, I was at the mercy of sin, and my course was set for death. But that by living according to my

new birth in the Holy Spirit, I had already begun to share God's eternal life.

You know, as well as I do, what sins I died to at that moment, just as you know the gifts the Holy Spirit gave me with my new life. I have no desire to boast, but it is surely right to thank God for His free gift. It was through faith in Him, that I received the power to break with the sins into which my own folly had led me.

We have received the seal of the Holy Spirit. Our task now is to preserve the integrity of what we have received by living a truly Christian life. We must give time to prayer, and to the study of scripture. Now speaking to God; now listening to His word to us, and letting His teaching mold us. He has enriched us with a treasure no one can take away.

We have eaten and drunk at His heavenly banquet; and can never again know the pinch of poverty.



I want you to know this, that Jesus Christ our Lord is Himself the true Mind of the Father. By Him all the fullness of every rational nature is made in the image of His image, and He Himself is the head of all creation, and of His body the Church. *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* (Col. 1:15-18)

Therefore we are all members one of another (Eph. 4:25), and the body of Christ, and the head cannot say to the feet, "I have no need of you," and if one member suffers, the whole body is moved and suffers with it. But if a member is estranged from the body, and has no communication with the head, but is delighted by the passions of its own body, this means that its wound is incurable, and it has forgotten its beginning and its end.

And therefore the Father of creatures, moved with compassion towards this our wound, which could not be healed by any of the creatures, but only by the goodness of the Father, sent forth to us His Only-begotten, who because of our bondage took upon Himself the form of a bondservant, and gave Himself up for our sins; for our iniquities humbled Him, and by His wound we are all healed. And He gathered us out of all regions, till He should make resurrection of our hearts from the earth, and teach us that we are all of one substance, and members one of another.

Therefore we ought greatly to love one another. For he who loves his neighbor, loves God; and he who loves God, loves his own soul.

St. Anthony the Great (+356)

Wisdom from Our Holy Fathers

When Christ is in Our Heart ~ St. John of Kronstadt

"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 us is Christ, the Life-giver and the Savior of our souls!"

On Fleshly Desire

Take care, my brothers and sisters, for the Evil One wars against spiritual strugglers in several ways. He works against a person with unimaginably hypocritical cleverness. Thus, before a sin is committed, the Enemy diminishes its significance in the eye of the strugglers. More than any other sin, he puts before them the desire for fleshly pleasures as such a small thing that - prior to succumbing to it - it appears as insignificant to the conscience of a brother or sister as throwing a glass of cold water on the ground. However, when the fleshly desire is fulfilled, then the Evil One greatly puffs up the sin in the conscience of the sinner - kindling in his soul numberless thoughts of despair, like black waves from Hell; so that the brother's good thoughts of repentance are submerged, and he is hurled into the depths of hopelessness.

~ St. Ephraim the Syrian

Not Improving?

Not only is your spiritual state not improving, it has become unbearable - because you have little trust in God. You look at your sins and rightly consider that in all justice you deserve to suffer for them in eternity and even before death and at the time of death, at the toll-houses and beyond. If you look at it in this way you can easily fall into utter despair. Can a Christian really think like this?

If one could save oneself through one's personal merits, what need was there for our Lord Jesus Christ to come to earth and suffer? No one has entered the Kingdom of God through his own efforts alone. Each one of us must: 1) understand his dilapidated state, his rottenness, his fall, that he is filled with all manner of lies, that his soul is completely disfigured, and so forth; 2) be convinced by bitter experience that he cannot correct himself by means of his own strength, even though he must continually war against his corrupt nature and weep over the wretched state of his soul; and 3) turn to the Lord like the Publican: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner. I am perishing, drowning in my own sins; save me, Lord Jesus Christ, as Thou savest all who turn to Thee: thieves, publicans, harlots and others."

~ Abbot Nikon of Russia (+1963), *Letters to Spiritual Children*, p. 116

The World – the Passions ~ St. Justin Popovich (+1979)

"What are the passions in themselves? They are 'a certain hardness or insensitivity of being.' Their causes are to be found in the things of life themselves. The passions are the desire for wealth and amassing of goods, for ease and bodily comfort; they are thirst for honor and the exercise of power; they are luxury and frivolity; they are the desire for glory from men and fear for one's own body. All these passions have one common name - 'the world.' The world means carnal conduct and a carnal mind. The passions are the attacks of the world on man by means of the things of the world. Divine grace is the only power capable of repulsing them."

⇒ **Spiritual life is the heart of our community.** What we do in church should do everything for us: Holiness, not happiness. That's our role: to be holy, to acquire the Holy Spirit. Our spiritual life is the main reason for existence as a parish. Liturgical: feed the sheep. Celebrate, worship, and Sacraments with care and beauty.

+ Fr. Alexander Atty