

## *Fire & Light*

**St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447

Visit [stsymeon.com](http://stsymeon.com)

✠ **May 25, 2014** ✠

**Sixth and Final Sunday of Pascha**

**Sunday of the Blind Man**

**Third Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist**

## *Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!*

✠ **Tues. May 27 6:30pm Final Inquirer's Class of Session**

✠ **Wed. May 28 6:30pm Vespers – Feast of the Ascension**

✠ **Thurs. May 29 10:00am Divine Liturgy – Feast of the Ascension**

> **Wednesday is the**

**Leavetaking of Pascha**

*(a fish day)*

***Many Years! Newly Illumined:*** Joseph Mabry, Panteleimon and Sophia Lang, John and Christina Murphree and children Mary, Lucy and John !

➤ **And to Godparents - The Sarris', the Lotz' and the Condra's!**

### **Because of the Resurrection**

"Because of the Resurrection of Christ, because of His victory over death, people have become, continue to become, and will continue becoming Christians. The entire history of Christianity is nothing other than the history of a unique miracle, namely, the Resurrection of Christ, which is unbrokenly threaded through the hearts of Christians from one day to the next, from year to year, across the centuries, until the dreaded judgment.

**St. Justin Popovich (+1979)**

### **The Natural and Normal Life**

Life according to the Gospel, holy life, Divine life, that is the natural and normal life for Christians. For Christians, according to their vocation, are holy. That good tiding and commandment resounds throughout the whole Gospel of the New Testament. To become completely holy, both in soul and in body, that is our vocation.

**St. Justin**

### **Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow (+1867) talks about the spiritual life in terms of ascending like a stone thrown in the air:**

"When we throw a stone up, it ascends until the moment when the propelling force ceases to be effectual. So long as this force acts, the stone travels higher and higher in its ascent, overcoming the force of the earth's gravity. But when this force is spent and ceases to act, then, as you know, the stone does not remain suspended in the air. Immediately, it begins to fall, and the further it falls the greater the speed of its fall. This, solely according to the physical laws of terrestrial gravity. So it is also in the spiritual life. As a Christian gradually ascends, the force of spiritual and ascetical labors lifts him on high. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: 'Strive to enter in through the narrow gate.' That is, the Christian ought to be an ascetic. **Not only the monastic, but every Christian. He 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. Now, if the Christian, who is ascending upon this ladder of spiritual perfection by his struggles and ascetic labors, ceases from this work and ascetic toil, his soul will not remain in its former condition; but, like the stone, it will fall to the earth. More and more quickly will it drop until, finally, if the man does not come to his senses, it will cast him down into the very abyss of Hell."

## This and That

### The Papacy

The Orthodox have always essentially seen the Pope as the Bishop of Rome. And Pope Francis often refers to this title as the title which allows him to exercise his ministry. The Orthodox are used to seeing the Pope as a figure who puts himself on a pedestal and the papacy as a form of ecclesiastical imperialism and that the Pope's intention was to subjugate them and exercise power over them. Now there are many signs which are pointing in the opposite direction. For example, the Pope has stressed on more than one occasion that the Catholic Church can learn from the Orthodox Church when it comes to synodality and the synodal nature of the Church.

This doesn't address the conciliar and papal declarations providing for more than the currently imagined role. What does one do with something like the Papal document, Lumen Gentium, written only 50 years ago (1964), that states:

"But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head. The pope's power of primacy over all, both pastors and faithful, remains whole and intact. In virtue of his office, that is as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church. And he is always free to exercise this power. The order of bishops, which succeeds to the college of apostles and gives this apostolic body continued existence, is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church, provided we understand this body together with its head the Roman Pontiff and never without this head. This power can be exercised only with the consent of the Roman Pontiff."

### LAW'S FUTILITY

Good law is easy to destroy and hard to build; and bad law, even from a distance, can wreak a lot of destruction. But not all the good and wise laws in the world, applied extrinsically and, as it were, mechanically, can do much to change the *hearts* of men. **Good laws corroborate and invigorate what is noblest and wisest in a culture, but the nobility and the wisdom and the culture must be there to begin with.** Bad laws have allowed the jungle to proliferate. Good laws, without religion, without the life of the spirit, at best can prune the creepers here and there... And now, what will it accomplish to crack down on vicious bullies on the internet - to restrain the monsters you have raised? A little, here and there. But the real problem is not legal. Can the law mandate love? No more than it can raise the dead.

What, then, must we Christians do? We have a duty to fight destructive laws and to promote healthy laws, but we should never put too much trust in the principality of the law. Our secular opponents place most of their trust in those mechanisms. Let them. The fight is for a Christian (and therefore human) culture, one town, one parish, one school, one classroom, one family, one soul at a time.

We need more (and other) than politicians and lawyers. We need fully committed mothers and fathers. We need genuinely Christian schools. We need poets, playwrights, artists - all who quicken the life of the imagination. We need celebrations, in public. We need the innocent feasts that used to bring real boys and real girls together, on the shores of married life.

-Anthony Esolen, Touchstone, Nov-Dec. 2013

**Gaping holes exist in the scientific understanding of existence, which the sciences answer chiefly by ignoring them. They do not mention purpose (there is none), the possibility of an afterlife (there is none), free will or determinism (we have freely determined that there is no free will), or Good and Evil (evolutionary traits evolved to further cohesion within the pack). Minor omissions, these.**

The purest form of this approach is atheism. To me the most tedious thing about atheists is how proud they are of themselves, but I have never understood just what it is that they believe or don't. They reject Yahweh, Allah, Shiva, and Zeus....but do they not wonder about death? Nothing comes after, they say.

How do *they* know?

Fred Reed



## An Orthodox Understanding of Death

*From Life Transfigured – Holy Transfiguration Monastery newsletter*

A key to an Orthodox understanding of death is the knowledge that God is solely good and that He desires our salvation far more than we are capable of desiring it. Being good, "God did not make death, and He does not delight in the death of the living...for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of His own eternity" (Wis. 1:13, 23). God created human beings and placed them in Paradise, intending for them to dwell with Him in unending joy. Only one injunction was placed upon Adam and Eve: not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge—fruit which must have been good because everything God created was good. It was not out of capriciousness that God placed this prohibition against eating, standing back as if waiting to see if His creatures would fall. St. Gregory the Theologian explains:

"Nor was it forbidden because God grudges it to men...But it would have been good if partaken of at the proper time; for the Tree was, according to my theory, spiritual vision, which it is only safe for those who have reached maturity of habit to enter upon, but which is not good for those who are still somewhat simple and greedy, just as solid food is not good for those who are yet tender and have need of milk" ("On The Pascha," *Alive in Christ*, Vol. X, No. 1, Spring 1994, p. 48).

"Through the devil's envy death entered the world" (Wis. 2:24). In tempting Adam and Eve, the serpent had as his goal the eternal destruction of their souls. He wanted to introduce evil into human nature without any chance of reprieve. In accepting temptation, Adam and Eve rejected God and hence life, because God is life. Says St. Maximus the Confessor, "Death is principally the separation from God, from which followed necessarily the death of the body" (quoted in Alexander Kalomiros, "The River of Fire," Seattle, 1980, p. 128). Contrary to most Western theology, we believe that death was not inflicted upon us by an angry God, but rather that we ourselves closed the gates to His life-giving Grace. Humanity was made subject to death, not as a punishment as if we had also committed Adam's sin, but "because he [Adam] became mortal, he transmitted the sin to his seed; we were born mortals from a mortal" (*ibid.*, p. 128).

God, in His infinite mercy, took what was meant to be an eternal evil and turned it to our good. As Elder Joseph of Mt. Athos teaches, "God knew man's fall before even creating him ...Man's freedom was contained in the idea of creation and, consequently, his fall did not astonish God. Nevertheless, according to the sacred Damascene, God did not want man's sin and the devil's wickedness to overcome His divine goodness. For this reason He provided a greater revelation of His love" ("God Appeared in the Flesh," tr. Fr. N. Palis, *Community Newsletter*, Vol. 3, #5, December 1995, p. 5). God restored His creation to its original position and reopened the gates of Paradise. How was this accomplished?

In the words of St. Gregory: "The Word of God Himself, Who is before all worlds, ...the Unchangeable Image, the Father's Definition and Word, came to His own Image, and took on Him Flesh for the sake of our flesh, and mingled Himself with an intelligent soul for my soul's sake, purifying like by like; and in all points except sin was made Man"

("On the Pascha," p. 48).

The Church throughout her entire history has stressed the importance of understanding that Jesus was born, in history, as an actual human being, having the same attributes and needs as any other human being, and that upon being crucified He died the same death that every other person has died. As St. John Damascene says, "If He was born only in appearance, the mystery of God's economy is deceit and play-acting, and the Lord became man in appearance and not in truth; and in appearance and not in truth have we been saved" (quoted in Archimandrite Vasileios, 77)c Hymn of Entry, Crestwood, NY, 1984, p.20). The Incarnation of the Word, through His Crucifixion and death, did not merely bring us back to the same state as before the Fall; rather through uniting Himself with our human nature, Jesus raised us through adoption to sonship with the Father.

Western theologians often express that God's justice operates like a vendetta; all must be sentenced to death for Adam's sin. They say that no single man or even all of humanity could appease the insult Adam gave to God's honor when he ate of the Tree. A contemporary Greek theologian explains this Western perspective: "So in order to save both God's dignity and mankind, there was no other solution than the Incarnation of His Son, so that a man of godly dignity could be sacrificed to save God's honor" (Kalomiros, p. 106). But as St. Gregory the Theologian asks, "on what principle did the Blood of His Only Begotten Son delight the Father, who would not receive even Isaac, when he was being offered by his Father, but changed the sacrifice, putting a ram in the place of the human victim?" St. Gregory answers by saying that God the Father accepted the voluntary sacrifice of His Son, but did not ask or demand it of Him, "because Humanity must be sanctified by the Humanity of God, that He might deliver us Himself, and overcome the tyrant, and draw us to Himself by the mediation of His Son Who also arranged this to the honor of the Father" ("On the Pascha," p. 51).

Having died as a man, suffering the same separation of soul and body that we will all suffer, Jesus out of His astoundingly infinite love for us destroyed death. St. John Chrysostom proclaims, "'Death is swallowed up in victory' (I Cor. 15:54), i.e. utterly; not so much as a fragment of it remains nor a hope of returning, incorruption having consumed corruption. ...For He not only disarmed death and vanquished it, but even destroyed it, and made it quite cease from being" ("Homilies on First Corinthians," Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Grand Rapids, MI, 1983, Vol. 12, pp. 256-7). Death is neither God's punishment inflicted upon us nor is it a finality. Rather our trust in God enables us to approach death with joy, transforming it into an affirmation of life. We stand firm in our faith that in the new heaven and earth, God "will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more" (Rev. 21:4).

---

✠ Some praise life in a desert, others life in monasteries, still others a place of authority among people, to instruct and teach them and organize churches where many may find food for body and soul. I would not wish to give preference to any of these, nor to say that one is worthy of praise and another of censure. In all ways of life, blessed is the life lived for God and according to God in all actions and works. **St. Symeon the New Theologian**

## THE PAPIST HERESY & ITS DEEDS

By Vladimir Moss, from *"The Mystery of the Church: The Orthodox Church from Adam to the Second Coming of Christ."*

Papism amounted to a completely new view of the relationship between truth and authority in the Church. Instead of the Eastern view that authority is based on truth, which is the expression of apostolic tradition, the popes began to teach that truth is guaranteed by the authority of the pope alone. And this new teaching had a political dimension: the authority of the pope extended to the State as well as to the Church.

As pope Gregory VII, the real founder of the heretical papacy, put it in 1076: "The pope can be judged by no one; the Roman Church has never erred and never will err till the end of time; the Roman Church was founded by Christ alone; the pope alone can depose and restore bishops; he alone can make new laws, set up new bishoprics, and divide old ones; he alone can translate bishops; he alone can call general councils and authorize canon law; he alone can revise his judgements; he alone can use the imperial insignia; he can depose emperors; he can absolve subjects from their allegiance; all princes should kiss his feet; his legates, even though in inferior orders, have precedence over all bishops; an appeal to the papal court inhibits judgement by all inferior courts; a duly ordained pope is undoubtedly made a saint by the merits of St. Peter."

It was the Crusades of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries that opened the eyes of the faithful to the true nature of the monster that had been born in their midst. And it then became imperative to cast out this teacher of what was in effect a blatant form of idolatrous man-worship, lest the warning of the Lord to the Thyateira Church be realized: *I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts.* (Rev 2:20-23).

Already before the First Crusade, the previously unheard-of spectacle of wars between nations calling themselves Christian had become common. Thus, for much of the period 886-1018, the Greeks were fighting the Bulgarians; in 1043 the Russians attacked Constantinople; and between 1066 and 1081, the Normans conquered England and southern Italy and invaded Greece. Fortunately, in the East a shared religion and a com-

mon respect for the ideal of the Christian Empire ensured that the scars did not go deep. Thus, when the Bulgarians or Serbs waged war against the Empire, they did not seek to destroy it, but rather to replace the Greek Emperor with a Bulgarian or Serbian one. For Tsarigrad—"the city of the King"—remained unchallenged as the spiritual and political centre of Eastern Christendom.

In the West, however, the Norman Conquest of England, motivated as it was by religious as well as political considerations, and blessed by the pope, left deep scars which changed the religious, political, social and even linguistic character of England, and underlay the hostility between England and France for centuries to come.

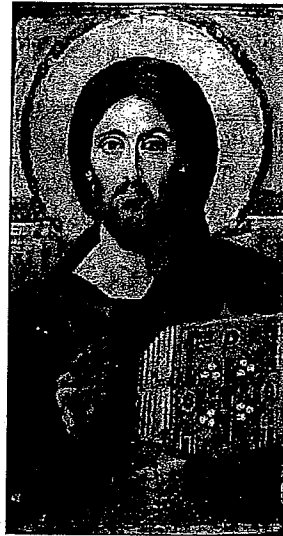
And when the West as a whole marched to the Christian East during the Crusades, idealistic plans to free the Holy Places from the Mohammedan yoke soon degenerated, on the part of the knights—into lust for land and spoils, and on the part of the pope—into dreams of subduing "schismatic Romania" to himself. Thus, the only Orthodox nation really to benefit from the Crusades was Georgia, whose people under the leadership of King David the Restorer profited from the preoccupation of the Saracens with the Crusaders to liberate their land from the Mohammedan yoke.

But the ancient autocephalous Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch and Cyprus merely exchanged one heavy yoke for another, much more of a rapacious and religiously intolerant one. This process reached its bloody climax in 1204, when the Crusaders ravaged Constantinople, defiling

the sanctuary of Hagia Sophia and installing a Latin king and patriarch.

The honour of being the first Westerner decisively to condemn the Jezebel of the Roman papacy belongs to Bishop Ethelwine of the North English see of Durham, who solemnly anathematized the pope in 1070, after witnessing the terrible fruits of Papism in his own land. Shortly after, a flood of English refugees began arriving in Constantinople and Kiev (the daughter of the last English Orthodox king Harold married Grand-Prince Vladimir Monomakh), and English soldiers played a notable part in the Byzantine Emperor's wars against the West.

Sadly, however, England and the rest of the West gradually succumbed to the papist machine, and only occasionally did the Orthodox consciousness of the first thousand years of Western Christianity flicker into life, as when the English Proto-Protestant John Wiclif declared in 1383: "The pride of the pope is the cause why the Greeks are divided from the so-called faithful... It is we Westerners, too fanatical by far, who have been divided from the faithful Greeks and the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ..."



A reminder of what true Catholicism is was provided by the foundation, not long before the Western schism, of the multinational monastic community of Mount Athos, whose first coenobitic community had been founded by St. Athanasius of the Holy Mountain in the tenth century. "Following the lead of St. Athanasius," writes Vasiliev, "many new monasteries, Greek and others were founded. In the time of Basil II, there was already one Iberian or Georgian monastery; emigrants from Italy founded two, a Roman and an Amalfitan. Bishop Porphyrius Uspensky, a profound Russian student of the Christian East, asserted that when the aged Athanasius died (about 1000 A.D.) there were three thousand 'various monks' on Mount Athos. As early as the eleventh century there was a Russian Lavra on this mountain..."

After the schism, however, the Latin monasteries ceased to exist; and early in the thirteenth century, when the uniate John Beccus was patriarch in Constantinople, Catalan soldiers ravaged the Holy Mountain, putting to death many monks who refused to accept the pope. From that time until now, the Holy Mountain—which today has Bulgarian, Serbian and Romanian, as well as Greek, Georgian and Russian communities—has been at the heart of the Orthodox Church's struggle against the false unia with Rome.

"On October 7, 1207," writes Boyeikov, "pope Innocent addressed 'all the Russian bishops, clergy and the whole Russian people', demanding that they renounce Orthodoxy, since 'the land of the Greeks and their Church has almost completely returned to the recognition of the Apostolic see.' The Russian Church rejected the pretensions of the papacy, and the centre of Russian-Byzantine relations moved to Nicaea. The metropolitan of Kiev, who was himself a Nicaean Greek, in inspired manner led the struggle of the Russian Church in the name of the defense of Ecumenical Orthodoxy. The metropolitans of Kiev and all Russia cared for the unity and reconciliation of the warring princely groupings (of Kiev, Suzdal, Chernigov and Volhynia).

"Historians have paid a lot of attention to the Latin expansion in the Baltic. But they often forget that the other flank of the struggle in this period remained Southern Russia, while the field of battle was the Balkans. In 1205, the Bulgarians destroyed the crusading army of Baldwin II at Adrianople. The Second Bulgarian kingdom, which came into being in 1187, was historically drawn towards Orthodox Russia'. Tsar Ivan Asen II (1218-1241) was allied to Kiev and Nicaea, for which pope Gregory IX expelled him from the Catholic Church in 1236. This was on the eve of the Mongol-Tatar invasion.

"Then came 1238: Ryazan was burned to the ground, Vladimir was defeated, and the holy right-believing Princes Yury Vsevolodovich and his sons, and Vasilko of Rostov fell in battle. It was in these circumstances that on August 9, 1238, the pope blessed the Hungarian king to undertake a crusade against Bulgaria.

"The Russian Church and the whole of the Russian land was overwhelmed by the flame of the Mongol-Tatar invasion. The prophecies of St. Avraam of Smolensk became clear. Many churches, monasteries, books and church utensils were captured and destroyed; in the taking of the Russian cities, many bishops, priests and monks were killed; the administration of the Church fell into disarray: Metropolitan Iosif disappeared without a trace, while Bishops Mitrophan of Vladimir and Simeon of Peryaslavl were killed. Kiev, the adornment and 'mother of Russian cities' was turned into ruins (1240) and lost its significance as a political and ecclesiastical centre. Russian state life became concentrated on the North-Eastern counties."

The thirteenth century represents a deep nadir in the history of the Orthodox Church. Beginning with the (temporary) fall of Constantinople to the Latins, and continuing with the (again temporary) apostasy of King John Asen of Bulgaria, the devastation of most of Russia and the second city of Christendom, Kiev, by the Mongols in 1240, and the signing of the unia with Rome by the Emperor Michael Paleologus at the council of Lyons in 1274, it shows Orthodoxy struggling to survive against enemies from East and West who were at the height of their power. Even the better rulers of the time, such as the Nicaean Emperor John Vatatzes, were forced into making alliances with heretics and infidels which would have horrified earlier generations.

Only the twentieth century can compare with the thirteenth in the depth and extent of its spiritual and physical destruction.

However, there were bright spots in the prevailing gloom. One was the gradual rise of Serbia under the inspired leadership of the holy King Stephen Nemanja and his son St. Sava. Another was the struggle of Novgorod, the last independent province of Russia, under St. Alexander Nevsky. This great prince decided, in spite of much opposition from his people, to pay tribute to the Mongols in order to concentrate all his forces in a successful war against what he considered to be his—from the spiritual point of view—more dangerous enemies, the papist Swedes and Teutonic Knights. It would have been good if other Orthodox—especially Greek—rulers of the time had imitated the priority St. Alexander placed on religious and spiritual over political freedom, and had taken heed to his saying: *Not in might, but in truth, is God.*



Let us strive to enter by the narrow gate. Just as the trees, if they have not stood before the winter's storms, cannot bear good fruit, so it is with us. This present age is a storm, and it is only through many trials and temptations that we can obtain an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.

St. Theodora

## Teachings of St. Dorotheos of Gaza (5<sup>th</sup> Century) – On the Incarnation (Part 1)

"In the beginning, when God created Man, He put him into Paradise; and, as Holy Scripture says (Gen. 2:25), having adorned him with every virtue, commanded him not to eat from the tree in the middle of Paradise (Gen. 2:16-17). He was in the luxury of Paradise, in prayer, in the vision of God, in all glory and honor, having sound perception and being in his natural state --- just as he was created. For God created him after His own image (Gen. 1:27), that is to say: immortal, with free-will and adorned with every virtue. However, when he disobeyed God, ... he was then expelled from Paradise. He fell from his natural state into a state contrary to nature; that is to say, into sin, into ambition and the love of the pleasures of this life and all the other passions and was dominated by them, and became subject to them because of his transgression. Thus, in turn, evil increased and "death reigned" (Romans 5:14). Godliness was no more, and ignorance of God was everywhere. ... The enemy unfolded all his wickedness ... and it was from then that idolatry, polytheism, magic, murders and the rest of the devil's evil started."

"Then God, Who is Good, had mercy on His creature, and gave him -through Moses - the written law: ... for help, for a return and for the correction of evil. However, evil was not corrected. He sent prophets, but they also were unable to correct it. .. We could say that evil is not in one part, nor in one place, but throughout the entire body. It contains the person's whole soul, it constrains all its powers. ...Then God, Who is Good and loves mankind, sent His Only-begotten Son (John 3:16), because only God could heal man and enable him to rise up from this kind of suffering."

"Thus, our Lord came down, becoming Man for our sakes, in order - as St. Gregory says - to heal like with like --- the soul by the soul and the flesh by the flesh. He became perfect man without sin. He assumed our essence, the first fruit of our nature, and He became a new Adam 'according to the image of Him Who created him' (Colossians 3:10). He renews human nature and makes our senses perfect again, as they were at the beginning. He renewed fallen Man by becoming Man. He liberated him from the dominion of sin, which had compelled him by force. Then the enemy guided Man by force and tyranny. Moreover, as the Apostle points out, those who did not sin were almost forced to do so: 'For the good that I will to do, I do not; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice' (Romans 7:19)."

"Thus, as we have said, He gave us commandments which purify us even from our passions --- from the evil disposition which is contained 'within us' (Rom. 7:21-22). He has endowed Man with the ability to distinguish between good and evil. He wakes him up. He shows him the causes of sin and he says to him: 'The law said, "You must not commit adultery", but I say that you must not lust (Matt. 5:27-28; Ex. 20:13). The law said, "You should not murder", but I say unto you do not even be angry' (Matt 5:21-22; Ex. 20:15). If you have this lust, even if you do not commit adultery today, the desire inside you does not cease to tempt you until you commit it. If you are angry and provocative towards your brother, you will soon fall into slander. Then, you will want something bad to happen to him; so gradually you come to the point of murder."

### St. Cyril of Alexandria:

+ "The assertion that the Word dwelt in us (cf. Jn. 1:14) is a useful one because it also reveals to us a very deep mystery. For we are all in Christ. The common element of humanity is summed up in His person, which is also why He was called the last Adam: He enriched our common nature with everything conducive to joy and glory just as the first Adam impoverished it with everything bringing corruption and gloom. This is precisely why the Word dwelt in all of us by dwelling in a single human being, so that through that one being who was 'designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness' (Rom. 1:4) the whole of humanity might be raised up to His status so that the verse, "I said, you are gods and all of you sons of the Most High" (Ps. 82:6) might through applying to one of us come to apply to us all."

# **Christ is Risen!**

**"...if they (the Apostles) had not seen Him risen and had proof of His power, they would not have risked so much."**

— a sermon on I Corinthians by St. John Chrysostom

It was clear through unlearned men that the Cross was persuasive. In fact, it persuaded the whole world. Their discourse was not of unimportant matters but of God and Orthodox religion, of the Gospel way of life and future judgment, yet it turned plain, uneducated men into philosophers. How the foolishness of God is wiser than men and His weakness is stronger than men!

In what way is it stronger? It made its way through the world and overcame all men; countless men have sought to eradicate the very name of the Crucified, but that name flourished and grew ever mightier. Its enemies lost out and perished; the living who waged war on a "dead man" proved helpless. Therefore when a philosopher tells me I am dead, he shows only that he is foolish indeed, for I, whom he thinks a fool, turn out to be wiser than those reputed wise. So to, in calling me weak, he but shows that he is weaker still, For the good deeds which tax collectors and fishermen were able to accomplish by God's grace, the philosophers, the rulers, the countless multitudes cannot even imagine.

Paul had this in mind when he said: "The weakness of God is stronger than men." That the preaching of these men was indeed divine is brought home to us in the same way. For how otherwise could twelve uneducated men, who lived on lakes and rivers and wastelands, get the idea for such an immense enterprise? How could men who perhaps had never been in a city or a public square think of setting out to do battle with the whole world? That they were fearful, timid men, the Evangelist makes clear; he did not reject the fact or try to hide their weaknesses. Indeed he turned these into a proof of the truth. What did he say of them? That when Christ was arrested, the others fled, despite all the miracles they had seen, while he who was leader of the others denied Him!

**How then account for the fact that these men, who in Christ's lifetime did not stand up to the attacks by the Jews, set forth to do battle with the whole world once Christ was dead – if, as you claim, Christ did not rise to speak to them and rouse their courage? Did they perhaps say to themselves: "What is this? He could not save Himself but He will protect us? He did not help Himself when He was alive, but now that He is dead He will extend a helping hand to us? In His lifetime He brought no nation under His banner, but by uttering His Name we will win over the whole world?" Would it not be wholly irrational even to think such thoughts, much less to act upon them?**

**It is evident, then, that if they had *not* seen Him risen and had *proof* of His power, they would not have risked so much.**

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Christos a Inviat! A Deverat a Inviat!

AL Maseeh Qam! Haqqan Qam!

Cristo e' Risorto! E' Veramente Risorto!

Christos Voskrese! Voistinu Voskrese!

Christos Anesti! Alithos Anesti!

Christ est Ressuscite! En verite il est Ressuscite!

Cristo ha Resucitado! En Verdad ha Resucitado!

Ta Criost ar eirigh! Go jehveen, taw e ar eirigh (pronounced *air-ree*)!

Christus ist Auferstanden! Wahrhaft Auferstanden      Kriste Aghsdga! Cheshmaritad Aghsdga!

***Pascha, the Pascha of the Lord!***