



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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August 14, 2016

Forefeast of the Dormition

Holy Prophet Micah (8th B.C.)

St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves (1074)

Come, all ye who love
to keep the Feasts!
Come, let us form a choir!
Come, let us crown
the Church with songs!
As the Ark of God
goes to her rest.
For today heaven opens
wide as it receives
the Mother of Him
Who cannot be contained!

~ Vespers - Litiya

This Week:

Tomorrow: 10:00am Divine Liturgy – Feast of the Dormition of the Most-Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

Tuesday, August 16 6:30pm Inquirer's Class

Wednesday, August 17, 6:30pm Akathist of the Dormition

*Most-Holy
Theotokos,
save us!*

Next Sunday, August 21:

Sacrament of Holy Matrimony ~ Alexandra Stratas and Luke Hobbs, 3:00pm

Looking Ahead: Annual Parish Meeting, Sunday, September 18

"While we have time, let us visit Christ, let us serve Christ, let us nourish Christ, let us clothe Christ, let us offer hospitality to Christ, let us honor Christ."

~ St. Gregory the Theologian

It is Meet to Magnify Thee

From Apostolic times and to our days all who truly love Christ give veneration to Her Who gave birth to Him, raised Him and protected Him in the days of his youth. If God the Father chose the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Her, and God the Son dwelt in Her, submitted to Her in the days of His youth, was concerned for Her when hanging on the Cross - then should not everyone who confesses the Holy Trinity venerate Her?

Still in the days of Her earthly life the friends of Christ, the Apostles, manifested a great concern and devotion for the Mother of the Lord, especially the Evangelist John the Theologian, who, fulfilling the will of Her divine Son, took Her to himself and took care of Her as for a mother from the time when the Lord uttered to him from the Cross the words: "Behold thy mother."

The Evangelist Luke painted a number of icons of Her, some

On the Holy Dormition

* The death of the Theotokos was also life-bearing, translating her into celestial and immortal life...Its commemoration not merely renews the memory of the wondrous deeds of the Mother of God, but also adds thereto the strange gathering at her all-sacred burial of all the sacred Apostles conveyed from every nation...Thus, she exalted those under her through herself, and showing while on earth an obedience to things heavenly rather than things earthly, she partook of more excellent deserts and of superior power.

She alone in her body, glorified by God, now enjoys the celestial realm together with her Son. For earth and grave and death did not hold forever her life-originating and God-receiving body – the dwelling more favored than Heaven and the Heaven of heavens.

How indeed could that body suffer corruption and return to earth?

The “ark of holiness” (Ps. 131) is resurrected, after the prophetic ode, together with Christ...by her ascension uniting those on high with those below. In this manner she was in the beginning “a little lower than the angels” (Ps.8), as it is said, referring to her mortality, yet this only served to magnify her pre-eminence as regards all creatures. Receptacle of great graces...she only is the frontier between created and uncreated nature, and there is no man that shall come to God except he be truly illumined through her. It was through the Theotokos alone that the Lord came to us.

St. Gregory Palamas, Sermon on the Dormition

WHAT IS THE HIGHEST GOOD?

Saint Herman of Alaska (+1837) in conversation with officers on board a ship, asked them: “What do you, gentlemen, regard as most worthy of love, and what do you most wish for your happiness?” One answered money, another fame, etc. Then the saint responded: “Is it not true that each of you desires that which he thinks is most worthy of love?---If this is true,” he continued, “what can there be better, higher, nobler and more worthy of love than the Lord Jesus Christ?.....Should we not above all love God, seek Him and desire Him?”

LIKENESS OF CHRIST

ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT gives excellent advice on how we can become more Christ-like. He states that the most serious disease of the soul and the greatest disaster is “not to know God, who created all for man, and who has given him mind and word, which enables him to rise on high and enter into communion with God.”

He insisted upon developing one's likeness to Christ, to become a living icon of Christ. He said, “God is good and does only good. He harms no one and remains always the same. As for ourselves, when we are good, we enter into communion with God through our likeness to Him. When we become evil, we cut ourselves from God through our unlikeness to Him. When we live virtuously, we are God's own. When we become wicked, we fall away from Him.”

“This does not mean that He is angry with us, but that our sins do not permit God to shine in us, and that they link us with the tormentors, the demons. If later, through prayer and good deeds, we obtain absolution of our sins, it does not mean that we have pacified God and changed Him, but that, through such actions and our turning to God, we have cured the evil in ourselves and have again become able to partake of God's goodness.”



together with the Pre-eternal Child, others without Him. When he brought them and showed them to the Most Holy Virgin, She approved them and said: "The grace of my Son shall be with them," and repeated the hymn she had once sung in the house of Elizabeth: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior."

However, the Virgin Mary during Her earthly life avoided the glory which belonged to Her as the Mother of the Lord. She preferred to live in quiet and prepare Herself for the departure into eternal life. To the last day of Her earthly life She took care to prove worthy of the Kingdom of Her Son, and before death she prayed that He might deliver Her soul from the malicious spirits that meet human souls on the way to heaven and strive to seize them so as to take them away to hades. The Lord fulfilled the prayer of His Mother and in the hour of Her death Himself came from heaven with a multitude of angels to receive her soul.

Since the Mother of God had also prayed that she might bid farewell to the Apostles, the Lord gathered Her for Her death all the Apostles, except Thomas and they were brought by an invisible power on that day to Jerusalem from all the ends of the inhabited world, where they were preaching, and they were present at her blessed translation into eternal life.

The Apostles gave her most pure body over for burial with sacred hymns, and on the third day they opened the tomb so as once more to venerate the remains of the Mother of God together with the Apostle Thomas, who had arrived then in Jerusalem. But they did not find the body in the tomb and in perplexity they returned to their own place; and then, during their meal, the Mother of God Herself appeared to them in the air, shining with heavenly light, and informed them that Her Son had glorified her body also, and She, resurrected, stood before His Throne. At the same time she promised to be with them always.

The Apostles greeted the Mother of God with great joy and began to venerate her not only as the Mother of their beloved Teacher and Lord, but also as their heavenly helper, as a protector of Christians and intercessor for the whole human race before the Righteous Judge. And everywhere the Gospel of Christ was preached, His Most Pure Mother also began to be glorified....

The end of the earthly life of the Most Holy Mother of God was the beginning of Her greatness. "Being adorned with Divine glory" (Irmos of the Canon of The Koimisis), She stands and will stand, both in the day of the Last Judgment and in the future age, at the right hand of the throne of her Son. She reigns with Him and has boldness towards Him as His mother according to the flesh, and as one in spirit with Him, as one who has performed the will of God and instructed others (Matt. 5:19). Merciful and full of love, She manifests her love toward Her Son and God in love for the human race. She intercedes for it before the Merciful One, and going about the earth she helps men.

Having experienced all the difficulties of earthly life, the Intercessor of the Christian race sees every tear, hears every groan and entreaty directed to Her. Especially near to Her are those who labor in the battle with the passions and are zealous for a God-pleasing life. But even in worldly cares She is an irreplaceable helper. "Joy of all who sorrow, and intercessor for the offended, and feeder of the hungry, consolation of travelers, harbor of the storm-tossed, visitation of the sick, protection and intercessor for the infirm, staff of old age, Thou art the Mother of God on High, O Most Pure One." (Service to the Panagia Odigitria)....

There is no intellect or words to express the greatness of Her Who was born in the sinful human race but became "more honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim." "Seeing the grace of the secret mysteries of God made manifest and clearly fulfilled in the Virgin, I rejoice; and I know not how to understand the strange and secret manner whereby the Undefined has been revealed as alone chosen above all creation, visible and spiritual. Therefore, wishing to praise Her, I am struck dumb with amazement in both mind and speech. Yet still I dare to proclaim and magnify Her. She is indeed the Heavenly Tabernacle." (Oikos from the Feast of the Entrance into the Temple).

Every tongue is at a loss to praise as is due; even a spirit from above is filled with dizziness, when it seeks to sing Thy praises, O Theotokos. But since Thou art good, accept our faith. Thou knowest well our love inspired by God, for Thou art the Protector of Christians, and we magnify Thee." (Irmos of 9th Ode, Feast of Theophany).

- from the writings of Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco on the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God.

PRAYER TO THE MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD IN TIME OF SORROW

Most Holy Mother of Christ, Most Pure, Most Blessed, Mother of God, see how Satan strikes me like sea waves against a ship!

He pursues me by day and torments me by night.

I have no peace--my soul sways--my spirit trembles.

Make haste, illustrious Lady, and help me!

Beseech the sweet Lord to have mercy on me and forgive the sins I have committed. O Most Holy Mother of Jesus, thy loving kindness is great and the greatest adversary to the power of hell.

Even when the most grievous sinner falls into hell's inferno, shoved by diabolic power, if he cries out to thee, thou art ready to deliver him.

Deliver me also. See how Satan wants to make me stumble and annihilate my faith, but I place my trust in the Lord.

Glory be to thee, more holy than the Cherubim and Seraphim, forever!

AMEN.

Discourse in Iconography by St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco

Iconography began on the day our Lord Jesus Christ pressed a cloth to His face and imprinted His divine-human image thereon. According to tradition, Luke the Evangelist painted the image of the Mother of God; and, also according to tradition, there still



exist today many Icons which were painted by him. An artist, he painted not only the first Icons of the Mother of God, but also those of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul and, possibly, others which have not come down to us.

Thus did Iconography begin. Then it came to a halt for a time. Christianity was cruelly persecuted: all that was reminiscent of Christ was destroyed and subjected to ridicule. Thus, during the course of the persecutions, Iconography did not develop, but Christians attempted to express in symbols what they wished to convey. Christ was portrayed as the Good Shepherd, and also in the guise of various personalities from pagan mythology. He was also depicted in the form of a vine, an image hearkening back to the Lord's words: "I am the true Vine.... ye are the branches" (St. John 15:1, 5). It was also accepted practice to depict Christ in the form of a fish, because if one writes in Greek "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior" (*Iesous Christos, Theou Hios, Zoter*) and then groups together the first letter of each word, one discovers that one has written the Greek word *Ichthys*, "fish." And so, Christians depicted a fish, thereby calling to mind these words which were known to those who believed in the Savior. This also became known to the pagans, and consequently the image of the fish was also held suspect.

When, following the victory of Emperor Constantine the Great over Maxentius,

freedom was given to Christians, Christianity quickly transformed the Roman Empire and replaced paganism. Then Iconography flourished with full force. We already see directives concerning Iconography at the first ecumenical councils. In some church hymns, which today are still frequently used, mention is also made of Iconography.

Now what are Icons? Icons are precisely the union between painting and those symbols and works of art which replaced Icons during the time of persecution. The Icon is not simply a representation, a portrait. In later times only has the bodily been represented, but an Icon is still supposed to remind people of the spiritual aspect of the person depicted.

Christianity is the inspiration of the world. Christ founded His Church in order to inspire, to transfigure the world, to cleanse it from sin and bring it to that state in which it will exist in the age to come. Christianity was founded upon the earth and operates upon the earth, but it reaches to Heaven in its structure; Christianity is that bridge and ladder whereby men ascend from the earthly Church to the Heavenly. Therefore, a simple representation which recalls the earthly characteristics of some face is not an Icon. Even an accurate depiction, in the sense of physical build, still signifies nothing. A person may be very beautiful externally, yet at the same time be very evil. On the other hand, he may be ugly, and at the same time a model of righteousness. Thus, we see that an Icon must indeed depict that which we see with our eyes, preserving the characteristics of the body's form, for in this world the soul acts through the body; yet at the same time it must point towards the inner, spiritual essence. The task of the Iconographer is precisely to render, as far as possible and to as great an extent as possible, those spiritual qualities whereby the person depicted acquired the Kingdom of Heaven, whereby he won an imperishable crown from the Lord, for the Church's true significance is the salvation of man's soul. That which is on the earth perishes when we bring the body to the grave; but the soul passes on to another place. When the world comes to an end, consumed by fire, there will be a new

earth and a new Heaven, as the Apostle John the Theologian says, for with the eyes of his soul he already foresaw the New Jerusalem, so clearly described in his sacred Revelation. The Lord came to prepare the whole world for this spiritual rebirth. To prepare oneself for this new Kingdom, one must uproot from within oneself those seeds of sin which entered mankind with our ancestors' fall into sin, distorting our pristine, grace-endowed nature; and one must plant within oneself those virtues which they lost in the fall. The Christian's goal is to change daily, to improve daily, and it is of this that our Icons speak.

In calling to mind the saints and their struggles, an Icon does not simply represent the saint as he appeared upon the earth. No, the Icon depicts his inner spiritual struggle; it portrays how he attained to that state where he is now considered an angel on earth, a heavenly man. This is precisely the manner in which the Mother of God and Jesus Christ are portrayed. Icons should depict that transcendent sanctity which permeated the saints. The Lord Jesus Christ is the union of all that is human and all that is divine; and when depicted in an Icon, the Savior must be painted so that we sense that He is a man, a real man, yet at the same time something more exalted than a man, that we not simply approach Him as we approach a visitor or an acquaintance. No, we should feel that He is One Who is close to us, our Lord Who is merciful to us, and at the same time an awe-inspiring Judge Who wants us to follow Him and wishes to lead us to the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, we must not turn away to one side or the other. We should not depict only the spiritual aspect of the saint, completely disregarding how he looked while alive on earth. This would also be an extreme. All saints should be depicted so as to convey their individual characteristics as much as possible—soldiers should be portrayed arrayed for battle; holy hierarchs in their episcopal vestments... It is incorrect to depict bishops of the first centuries vested in the *sakkos*, for at that time bishops wore the *phelonion*, not the *sakkas*, and yet this is not such a great error, for it is far better to make a mistake in what is physical than in what is spiritual, to ignore, as it were, the spiritual aspect.

However, it is far worse when everything is correct in the physical, bodily sense, but the saint appears as an ordinary man, as if he had been photographed, completely devoid of the spiritual. When this is the case, the depiction cannot be considered an Icon. Sometimes much attention is spent on making the Icon beautiful. If this is not detrimental to the spirituality of the Icon, it is good, but if the beauty distracts our vision to such an extent that we forget what is most important—that one must save one's soul, must raise one's soul to the heights of Heaven,—the beauty of the depiction is already detrimental. It cannot be considered an Icon, but merely a painting. It may be very beautiful, but it is not an Icon. An Icon is an image which leads us to a holy, God-pleasing person, or raises us up to Heaven, or evokes a feeling of repentance, of compunction, of prayer, a feeling that one must bow down before this image. The value of an Icon lies in the fact that, when we approach it, we want to pray before it with reverence. If the image elicits this feeling, it is an Icon.

This is what our Iconographers were zealous about—those ancient Iconographers of the time before the conversion of Russia, of whom there were many, and our Russian Iconographers, too, beginning with the Venerable Alypius of the Kiev Caves, who painted a number of Icons of the Mother of God, some of which still survive. These wondrous Icons, which continued the Byzantine tradition of the painting of Icons which inspire compunction, were not necessarily painted in dark colors; frequently they were done in bright hues; but these colors evoked a desire to pray before such Icons. The holy hierarch Peter, a native of Galicia who later became Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia, painted Icons, some of which were until recently to be found in the Cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow. An entire school of Iconography was established in Novgorod under the direction of the holy hierarch Alexis of Novgorod, a whole series of whose Icons have been preserved. The Venerable Andrew Rublev painted an Icon of the Holy Trinity which is now famous not only in the Christian

world, but throughout the half-Christian world as well.

Unfortunately, this Orthodox movement as a whole started to collapse when Russia began to be infiltrated by Western influence. In certain respects, Russia's acquaintance with the European West was very beneficial. Many technical sciences and much other useful knowledge came from the West. We know that Christianity has never had any aversion to knowledge of that which originates outside itself. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom studied in pagan universities, and many writers, among whom were our spiritual authors and many of the best theologians, were well acquainted with pagan writers. The Apostle Paul himself cited quotations from pagan poets even in the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, not all that was Western was good for Russia. It also wrought horrible moral damage at that time, for the Russians began to accept, along with useful knowledge, that which was alien to our Orthodox way of life, to our Orthodox faith. The educated portion of society soon sundered themselves from the life of the people and from the Orthodox Church, in which all was regulated by ecclesiastical norms. Later, alien influence touched Iconography as well. Images of the Western type began to appear, perhaps beautiful from an artistic point of view, but completely lacking in sanctity, beautiful in the sense of earthly beauty, but even scandalous at times, and devoid of spirituality. Such were not Icons. They were distortions of Icons, exhibiting a lack of comprehension of what an Icon actually is.

The purpose of this article is, first of all, to promote an understanding of the true Icon, and secondly, to cultivate a love for the Icon and the desire that our churches and our homes be adorned with genuine Icons and not with Western paintings which tell us nothing about righteousness or sanctity, but are merely pleasant to look upon. Of course, there are Icons painted correctly in the Iconographic sense, but yet very crudely executed. One can

paint quite correctly in the theoretical sense and at the same time quite poorly from a practical standpoint. This does not mean that, from the principle of Iconography itself, these Icons are bad. On the other hand, it happens that one can paint beautifully, yet completely ignore the rules of Iconography. Both such approaches are harmful. One must strive to paint Icons well in principle, method and execution. This is why we oppose certain people and their attempts to paint our churches, for they have the wrong approach, the wrong point of view. They may paint well, perhaps; but when the point of view is incorrect, when the direction is wrong, no matter how well the locomotive runs, it nonetheless slips off the track and is derailed. This is precisely what happens to those who execute their work technically and correctly, yet due to an incorrect approach and an incorrect point of view, they travel the wrong path. From *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Jan-Feb 1980), pp. 42-45.

Do not forget God, letting yourself be seduced by vain distractions. You will be able to rely on His word in difficult days, because prayer will keep you safe in His continual presence. Remain constantly before His face, think of Him, remember Him in your heart. Otherwise, if you only meet Him from time to time, you risk losing your close friendship with Him.

St. Isaac the Syrian

Treat everyone with equal love and respect. Do not be hasty in judgment, or quick to show anger, but be patient and calm, trusting always in the judgment and the power of God. Day by day, pray to God to forgive you for the ways in which you failed in your duties, asking him for greater strength in the future.

St. Polycarp of Smyrna, Bishop and Martyr (1st C)

A 10th Century Prophecy of the 20th Century?

"Once holy Andrew, the Fool for Christ of Constantinople, was sitting with his disciple Epiphanius and talking with him of the salvation of the soul. At that time, a demon came to Epiphanius and began to set a trap for him, to turn his thoughts in another direction, but he dared not approach Andrew. Andrew then cried to him in fury: 'Get away from here, you impure adversary!' The devil recoiled and replied wickedly: "You're the greatest enemy I have in the whole of Constantinople!"

Andrew did not drive him away at once, but let him speak. And the devil began 'I feel that the time is coming when my trade will be destroyed. At that time men will be worse than I am now, and children more adept at wickedness than those who are full-grown. And I shall then take my rest and shall do nothing more to men, for they will do my will of themselves. St. Andrew asked him: 'At what sins do your people most rejoice?' The devil replied; 'The service of idols, slander, evil against one's neighbor, the Sodomite sins of drunkenness and love of money --- these give us most joy.' Andrew asked again: 'And how do you bear it when someone who has served you denies you and your works?'

The devil replied: 'You know that better than I do. We find it hard to bear, and do our utmost to bring him back, for many who have denied us and turned to God have come back to us.' When the evil spirit had said this and much else, holy Andrew breathed on him and he disappeared." (from the life of St. Andrew the Fool for Christ, +911)

HOMILY ~ About the Power and the Efficacy of Good Works - St. Nikolai of Serbia

**"For such is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."
(1 Peter 2:15)**

Brethren, it is difficult to argue with an atheist; it is difficult to talk with an unreasonable man; it is difficult to convince an embittered man. It is difficult to convince the atheist, the unreasonable man and the embittered man with words. You will convince them easier by deeds. "They may through observing you by reason of your good works glorify God" (1 Peter 2:12). Do good deeds to those who wish to argue with you and you will win the argument. One deed of compassion will bring the unreasonable man to his senses and will pacify the embittered man quicker than many hours of conversation. If atheism, unreasonableness and bitterness stem from ignorance, that ignorance is as a fury, which can quickly be restrained by good works. If you argue with an atheist in his own rabid manner, you strengthen the fury of atheism. If you converse with the unreasonable by derision, the darkness of unreasonableness is increased. If you think you will overcome the embittered man with anger, you will stir up a greater fire of bitterness. A meek and good deed is like water over a fire. Always remember the holy apostles and their successful methods of behavior with men. If an atheist provokes you, the man does not provoke you but the devil provokes you: man by nature is religious. If the unreasonable man scolds you, the man does not scold you but the devil scolds you: man by nature is reasonable. If the embittered one persecutes you, then it is not the man who persecutes you but the devil who persecutes you: for man by nature is good. The devil provokes you to lengthy arguments and unfruitful conversations and flees from good deeds. Do good work in the Name of Christ and the devil will flee and only then will you have dealings with men, with true men; religious, reasonable and good men. **Therefore whatever you do, do in the Name of the Lord.**