



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

September 10, 2017

Sunday before the Cross

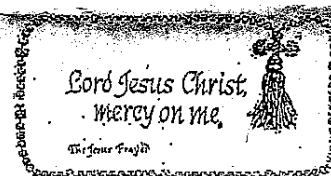
Postfeast of the Nativity of the Theotokos
Martyrs Menodora, Metrodora, & Nymphodora (305)

St. Finian of Ulster (579)

Elder Tikhon of Kapsala, Mt. Athos (1968)

"Music praises God.
Music is well or better
able to praise Him than
the building of the church
and all its decoration.
It is the Church's
greatest ornament."

~ Igor Stravinsky



✠ Wednesday, Sept. 13, 6:30pm ~ Vespers of the Precious & Life-Giving Cross

✠ Thursday, Sept. 14, 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy – Feast of the Cross

➤ –Next Sunday ~ Annual Parish Meeting

➤ October 8, 2017 – St. Symeon's 40th Anniversary ~ with Archbishop Alexander

Anniversary Photos: Send 10 of your favorite parish life photos, old and new, for inclusion in the 40th anniversary commemoration to st.symeon.orthodox.church@gmail.com. Please include a description of who, what and when for each photo. If you don't have digital copies, you may give original carefully labeled photos in an envelope to Shea Cole, who will scan them and return them to you.

The Tyranny of Thoughts

✠ We can go wherever we want and do whatever we want, but that is not freedom. Freedom belongs to God. When a person is free from the tyranny of thoughts, that is freedom. When he lives in peace, that is freedom. He is always in prayer, he is always expecting help from the Lord - he listens to his conscience and does his best. We must pray with our whole being, work with our whole being, do everything with our whole being. We must also not be at war with anyone and never take any offense to heart.

~ Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (2003)

The Letter of St. Dionysios the Areopagite on His Visit to the Most-Holy Theotokos

When Saint Paul entered Athens in about 50-51 A.D., the Greeks brought him to the Areopagus that they might hear his teaching. One of the men in the audience, a member of the highest court in Greece, was Dionysios. He was a nobleman from a pagan family who, when he heard the words of the divine Paul, believed. (Acts 17: 19-34). Together with his wife, Damaris, his whole household was baptized. Saint Paul then consecrated Dionysios as Bishop of Athens. Then, taking leave of his wife, sons and status, for the love of Christ, Dionysios traveled widely with the Apostle Paul

(p. 3)

Saved by the Theotokos: A Story from Elder Thaddeus of Serbia:

"When I was in the Vlashki Dol parish church, a certain man came to see me and to tell me his story. Here is what he related:

"He was sitting on the steps of his home, tired after a long day's work in the fields, when out of nowhere a stranger appeared. He thought that it was an unexpected guest arriving at his home, but the stranger invited him to take a walk with him. He led him away. The man had no notion where the stranger was taking him. And on they walked, when suddenly a woman appeared before them. She was full of light. As soon as she asked, "Where are you taking him?" the stranger disappeared. Then she asked the bewildered man, "Do you know where you are?" He answered that he did not. Then she struck him and repeated the question. He still did not know where he was. After she had struck him a second time, he recognized his home and the surrounding fields. She told him to go home. The man wanted to thank her, but she had vanished. Then he went home, and the first thing his wife asked him was, "What's that thing around your neck?" He looked, and it was a noose. The stranger, clearly a demon, was taking him away to make him hang himself. The man asked me to give him a little paper icon of the Most Holy Theotokos because he believed that it had been she who had saved him."

St. Paisios: The Humility of the Theotokos

✠ "She carried within her a cloudless heaven, filled with the rays of the sun. Her life was a sea without waves, a serene lake, a silent river, a fragrant meadow filled with flowers, a pleasant aromatic garden. She was never anxious to be noticed, honored, given the first place or the first chance to speak; nor to be praised, flattered or lauded. Thus she did not have any inferiority, fear, insecurity, sleeplessness, worry, giddiness, oddity, peculiarity, misery, nor foolish over politeness or foolish, overly pious religiosity. The humility of the Theotokos was her most precious and most luminous adornment, and it reflected the light and grace of the humble Jesus."

✠ The person who has real humility is the one that immediately forgets the good deeds he does, while any good done to him (even the most insignificant) he considers enormous and experiences a feeling of gratefulness for it. ~ St. Paisios (1994)

✠ St. Theophan the Recluse tells us to begin prayer as if we have never prayed. The only real rule of prayer that we must ascribe to is to start again. Everyone must build this Temple for the Lord in their heart. It is the inner vocation of us all. Outwardly we will do different work and be in different circumstances concerning vocation but we will continue to work this work together if we are striving for our salvation. Our prayer must be that we seek the Lord anew today, beseeching Him to help us to begin again on the path of prayer which will lead us to the light of Christ which illumines all.

✠ Childhood joys are pure; they leave an imprint on a person that greatly affects him or her when they grow up. – St. Paisios

and came to know the other Apostles. Three years after his conversion, Dionysios had a strong desire to behold the Theotokos. Therefore, with the Apostle Paul's blessing, he visited Jerusalem.

Upon beholding the Theotokos he was filled with immeasurable spiritual joy, after which he wrote a letter to the Holy Apostle Paul describing his visit. This letter has come down to us in Holy Tradition. Saint Dionysios wrote the following to his spiritual father, Saint Paul:

"I have seen with my own eyes the ~~most-holy~~ Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, who surpasses in sanctity all the angels of heaven. By the grace of God, the good favor of the Apostles, and the unutterable goodness and mercy of the gracious Virgin, I was granted this meeting. Again, I confess before Almighty God, before the grace of the Savior, before the great glory of the Virgin, His Mother, that when I was introduced to the beautiful and most pure Virgin, together with John---the first among the Evangelists and Prophets, who, while living in the flesh, shines like the sun in heaven---a great divine radiance shone about me from without and lit up my soul. At the same time, I sensed such a wonderful fragrance that my spirit and body could hardly bear this manifestation of glory and foretaste of eternal bliss. From divine grace and glory, my heart and spirit were prostrated.

"I bear witness before God, Who dwelt in that most honorable virginal womb, that I would have taken her for the true God and would have honored her with the adoration that is due to God alone, if my newly-enlightened soul had not retained thy divine instructions and laws. No honor and glory of men can compare with that beatitude I experienced, unworthy though I be. That moment in time was for me one of extreme happiness. I thank my most high and gracious God, the divine Virgin, the great Apostle John, and thee, O Paul, the adornment of the Church and invincible leader, for having mercifully granted me such a great blessing."

From St. Dionysios' letter, we, too, clearly see what divine grace must have been present in the face of the all-revered Mother of our God. During her lifetime, all those souls that beheld her were enlightened and their hearts were filled with spiritual joy.

Saint Gregory Palamas (+1359) adds: "Must not the one who was to give birth to the fairest among the sons of men been comparable to Him in everything and been clothed by her Son with marvelous beauty? This Son, was in fact, to resemble her in every aspect so that whoever would see Jesus would at once recognize, because of this perfect resemblance, the Virgin, His Mother."

The sweet-voiced and immortal mouth of the Church, Saint John Chrysostom, cries out, "Wherefore, in life there is none other such as the Theotokos Mary. You may wander about the earth, look round about the sea, examine the air thoroughly, the heaven in thy mind, search all the invisible hosts, remember, and see if there be any other such miracle throughout the creation."

One of the greatest of the Greek Fathers, the priest-monk and

is still only drinking milk, should they tell him to eat meat because it is strengthening? Maybe it is more strengthening, but the poor thing can't even digest it. That's why starting out they should give him little pieces of meat and broth, so that he'll want more.

—Geronda, sometimes even the adults are so tired in the evening that they aren't able to do compline.

—When adults are very tired or sick they should say half of compline or at least one "Our Father." They should not completely bypass prayer. In wartime if you end up on a hill in the evening, surrounded by enemies, you let out a few shots to frighten the enemy, so they will not attack. Adults should also let out a few shots so as to scare the little demons away.

Prayer has great power within the family. I know two siblings who not only kept their parents—who had a big problem between them—from separating, but even caused them to be more in love.

With us, my father used to say: "You don't know what you're going to do? Two times each day you must entrust the future to God, so as to know where you'll end up." Each morning and evening we would all pray together before the icons, father, mother and the children, ending with a prostration before the icon of Christ. When a problem arose in the family we would pray and it would clear up. I remember once, when our youngest brother got sick and my father said: "Come, let's beg God to make him well or to take him, so that he won't suffer anymore." We all prayed together and he recovered.

Even at the table, we all sat together. First we prayed and then we would begin eating. If someone started to eat before the food was blessed we would say "he fornicated." We considered a failure to remain temperate as fornication. It destroys a family if each person comes home, at whatever hour he wants, and eats alone without reason.

Children and the Spiritual Life

—Geronda, if a mother gives holy water to her child and he spits it out, what should she do?

—She should pray for her child. Maybe the way in which she gives the holy water to her child causes a reaction. For the child to be on the path of God the parents must also live right spiritually. Some parents who are religious strive to help their children to become good, not because they are concerned for the salvation of their souls, but because they want to have good children. In other words, they are more worried about what people will say about their child instead of whether they might go to hell. So how can God help? The aim is not for children to go to church through compulsion, but to love the church; not to do good through compulsion, but to feel the need to do good. The holy lives of parents instruct the souls of their children and they naturally follow. In this way they grow up piously, with health of both soul

and body and without spiritual injuries. If parents force their children out of fear of God, He helps and the child is benefited. If, however, they do it out of egoism, then God does not help. Children are often troubled because of their parent's pride.

—Geronda, some mothers ask us what prayer should a child of three or four years old do?

—You should tell them: "You are the mother; see how much your child can handle." They shouldn't give them a rule.

—Geronda, what if the little children get tired when their parents bring them here for vigils?

—During Orthros they should let them out a little to relax, and during Divine Liturgy bring them back into the church.

Without forcing their children mothers must teach them to pray. Villagers in Cappadocia intensely lived the ascetic tradition. They would take their children to hermitages, do prostrations and pray with tears, and in this way, the children learned how to pray. Chetes [*primarily of Turkish and Kurdish descent, were irregular hordes of freed criminals who were organized into loose bands of "killing squads" in the Ottoman army. It was the Chetes who led the attack in the Armenian Genocide and Greek Population Exchange and became known as merciless and blood-thirsty outlaws whose number one joy was the screaming voices of violated women, children and dying Christians*] would sometimes go by night to rob them; and when passing the chapels they would hear crying and stop in surprise. "OK, what's going on?" they would say. "During the day they are all smiles and at night they cry?" They couldn't understand what was going on.

Miracles happen through the prayers of small children. Whatever they ask of God He gives them because they are guileless and He hears their pure prayer. I remember one time our parents had gone out into the field and had left me in the house with my two younger siblings. The sky suddenly darkened and a torrential rainstorm began. "What will our parents do now?," we said. "How will they get back home?" The two little ones began crying. "Come here," I told them, "we will ask Christ to stop the rain." The three of us knelt down before the family's icons and prayed. In just a few minutes the rain stopped.

Parents must use discernment to help their children draw near to Christ from their early years, and from their childhood to live the joy on high—spiritual joy. When they start school they should learn, little by little, to read spiritual books to help themselves live spiritually. In this way they will become little angels, and their prayers will have greater boldness before God. Such children are spiritual heads of the home. The lives of saints especially help small children in their spiritual lives. As a small boy I found a little book of the lives of saints which they had back in those days. I went out into the forest to read and pray. I was flying with joy.

If children live spiritually they will live joyfully in this life, and in the next they will rejoice eternally with Christ.

Remembering the Old Russia

Philip Jenkins, Chronicles

THIS FALL MARKS THE CENTENNIAL of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Although few commentators today are likely to glorify that event or its aftermath, most will assume that the revolution was a regrettable necessity, which swept away a repressive and stagnant ancient regime. Such a view is false. Culturally and spiritually, that lost pre-revolutionary Russia was a treasure house, and indeed a birthplace of the modern West. The grim view we hold of Russia's old Christian world is one of the last triumphs of Soviet propaganda.

That is nowhere more true than in the case of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is so often portrayed as a haven of obscurantism and anti-Jewish hatred. In fact, most of the episcopate strove to discredit and suppress antisemitic propaganda. Meanwhile, the country was in the midst of a general spiritual revival, with rising levels of literacy among peasants and a publishing boom in devotional literature. The church made serious inroads among industrial workers through a series of charismatically led reform movements preaching a kind of social-gospel activism. The legendary St. John of Kronstadt was only the most celebrated of many locally famous holy men and women.

The church boasted a thriving cultural life, as most intellectuals and artists were suffused with its imagery and traditions, even if they rejected its political authority. Many proclaimed themselves *Bogoiskateli*, "God seekers." In 1915, Sergei Rachmaninoff produced in his choral "All-Night Vigil" one of the greatest musical accomplishments in modern religious history. Nikolai Berdyaev was a groundbreaking philosopher, a radical pioneer of Christian existentialism. The Orthodox Russia that entered the war looked as if it were beginning an epoch of cultural achievement equal to any in its storied past.

Historians commonly draw a sharp division between such achievements of the old order and the dazzling triumphs of modernism, which they commonly associate with the revolutionary world. In this view, 1917 represents a watershed, a glorious transition to modernity. Again, that is a pernicious myth. Well before this date, Russian artists and musicians were already key pioneers of modern literature, art, music, and design, and they drew overwhelmingly on Christian traditions. However radical it might appear in retrospect, experimental modernity was rooted in a thoroughly Orthodox thought-world of angels, apocalypse, and icons...

... Russian painter Natalia Goncharova in 1910 created her stunning image of the Archangel Michael, the leader of the heavenly hosts. Although an advanced modernist, her work draws heavily on Russian icon traditions. In 1915, she designed sets for Sergei Diaghilev's planned ballet *Liturgy*, which was to feature such ancient images as the six-winged seraphs, with music based on Orthodox liturgical themes.

Mentioning Diaghilev suggests the enormous Russian contribution to modernist music, as avant-garde Europeans venerated such titanic innovators as Igor Stravinsky and Alexander Scriabin. But Stravinsky in particular was a devout Orthodox believer, who famously remarked that "Music praises God. Music is well or better able to praise him than the building of the church and all its decoration; it is the Church's greatest ornament." Obviously, Stravinsky did not return to Bolshevik Russia after 1917, nor did many of the key modernists. The gullible modernists who did choose Bolshevik rule usually ended up silenced or murdered.

When we struggle past the Bolshevik myths, we must give full credit to that old Christian Russia for inventing the modern West, and the modern mind.

Pearls of the Holy Fathers {19}

Let us then seek above all things to have the brand and seal of the Lord upon us; because in the Day of Judgment, when the severity of God is shown, and all the tribes of the earth, even all Adam, are gathered together, when the Good Shepherd calls His own flock, all those who have the brand recognize their own Shepherd, and the Shepherd takes knowledge of those who have His own seal, and gathers them together from all the nations. Those that are His hear His voice, and go behind Him. ~ St. Macarius the Great

We have eaten Christ's Body in place of the fruit on the Tree of Paradise, and His altar has taken the place of the garden of Eden for us; the curse has been washed away by His innocent Blood, and in the hope of the Resurrection we already walk in this new life, in that we already have the pledge of it.

~ St. Ephraim the Syrian

We must have our loins girt, lest, when the day of our setting forth comes, He may find us hindered and entangled. Let our light shine in good works; let it glow, that He may lead us out of the night of this world to the light of His eternal brightness.

~ St. Cyprian of Carthage

How deadly it is for the soul not to celebrate in Church, especially not to participate in Christ's Divine Mysteries; how overgrown the soul becomes with weeds of sin, how it weakens. ~ St. John of Kronstadt

If you truly desire to be saved, then show obedience in every deed; separate your feet from the earth, raise your mind to Heaven, and may your instruction be there day and night.

~ St. Barsanuphios the Great

We celebrate the service unwillingly, hurriedly and with omissions in order to finish the holy work sooner and to return mere quickly to every-day worldly life! What a terrible illusion! In our blindness we disregard the words of the Holy Spirit which live in the prayers recited during the services and in the ministrations of Sacraments; we neglect what could be for us the source of sweet peace and joy in the Holy Spirit and even physical health. It is a great sin to perform the Sacraments negligently. We blaspheme when we do. What, then, are we to do in order to celebrate the Sacraments and the services befittingly? We must firmly believe that our God, revered in the Holy Trinity, is always with us, that He always sees us and that at our first word of prayer for help He is ready to help us in our holy work.

~ St. John of Kronstadt

When you read Holy Scripture, perceive its hidden meanings. "For whatever was written in past times was written for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4).

~ St. Mark the Ascetic

One of the elders said concerning the lustful thoughts which come into the heart of a man, and which are not carried into effect, that they are like unto a man who sees a vineyard, and who desires to eat the grapes thereof, but is afraid to go in lest he be caught and suffer death. If he be caught outside the hedge he will not die, because he hath neither gone into the vineyard nor hath eaten the grapes, but hath only desired; now he shall be beaten with few stripes, because he hath coveted, but he shall not die.

~ Paradise of the Fathers

What hinders us from communing more often? Our negligence, our indolence, overcome by which we do not prepare ourselves as much as possible for Communion.

~ St. Macarius of Corinth

Join humility to temperance, because without the former the latter is useless. ~ St. John Climacus

The end of the world is at hand, the Day of Judgment is near, the fires of Gehenna are burning, and each of us will have to give an account of his deeds and his life.

~ St. Maximus of Turin