



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ April 22, 2012 ✠

St. Thomas Sunday

Holy Apostle Nathaniel of the 12

St. Theodore the Sykeote (613)

New Hieromartyr Platon, Bishop of Banja Luka, Poland (1941)

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!



GLORY TO GOD!

Glory be to God! Christ is Risen!

Glory be to God for everything! Glory be to God for having created me to His image and likeness. Glory be to God for having redeemed me, the fallen. Glory be to God for having extended His solitude to me, the unworthy. Glory be to God for having led me, the sinner, to repentance. Glory be to God for having offered me His holy words, like a lamp in a dark place, thus setting me on the path of righteousness. Glory be to God for having illumined the eyes of my heart. Glory be to God for having made known to me His Holy Name. Glory be to God for having washed away my sins through the bath of Baptism. Glory be to God for having shown me the way to eternal bliss. The way is Jesus Christ, Son of God, Who says of Himself, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.'

Glory be to God, that He has not brought me to perdition through my sins, but suffered them because of His kindness. Glory be to God for showing me the vanity and emptiness of the world. Glory be to God for helping me in various temptations, misfortunes, and calamities. Glory be to God for protecting me in accidents and mortal dangers. Glory be to God for defending me against the Devil, who is the enemy. Glory be to God for raising me when I was prostrate. Glory be to God for comforting me in my sorrow. Glory be to God for converting me when I was erring. Glory be to God for punishing me as a father. Glory be to God for announcing to me His Last Judgment, that I might fear it and repent of my sins. Glory be to God for revealing to me eternal torment and eternal bliss, that I might flee the one and seek the other. Glory be to God for offering to me, the unworthy one, food, clothing, and shelter. Glory be to God for all things!

~ From St. Tikhon of Zadonsk's Will

Christos Voskrese! Voistinu Voskrese!

Al Maseeh Qam! Haqqan Qam!

Christos Anesti! Alithos Anesti!

Hristos a Inviat! Adevarat a Inviat!

Cristo ha Resucitado! en Verdad ha resucitado!

Your light surrounds me,
giving me life, O Christ,
for seeing You is Life-giving –
It is Resurrection!

~ St. Symeon the New
Theologian

Attendance figures: Palm Sunday – 170
Holy Friday – 120
Holy Saturday Liturgy – 75

Pascha - 202 (Procession count)
Agape Vespers -101
Bright Monday - 75

About the personal experience of all the Apostles

"What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands---We proclaim now to you" (1 St. John 1:1).

Behold, such is the apostolic preaching! The Apostles do not speak as worldly sages, nor like philosophers and even less as theoreticians who make suppositions about something in order to discover something. The Apostles speak about things which they have not sought but which unexpectedly surrounded them; about the fact which they did not discover but, so to speak, unexpectedly found them and seized them. They did not occupy themselves with spiritual researches nor have they studied psychology, neither did they, much less, occupy themselves with spiritism. Their occupation was fishing - one totally experiential physical occupation. While they were fishing, the God-Man [Jesus] appeared to them and cautiously and slowly introduced them to a new vocation in the service of Himself. At first, they did not believe Him but they, still more cautiously and slowly with fear and hesitation and much wavering, came toward Him and recognized Him. Until the Apostles saw Him many times with their own eyes and until they discussed Him many times among themselves and, until they felt Him with their own hands, their experienced fact is supernatural but their method of recognizing this fact is thoroughly sensory and positively learned. Not even one contemporary scholar would be able to use a more positive method to know Christ. The Apostles saw not only one miracle but numerous miracles. They heard not only one lesson but many lessons which could not be contained in numerous books. They saw the Resurrected Lord for forty days; they walked with Him, they conversed with Him, they ate with Him, and they touched Him. In a word: they personally and first handedly had thousands of wondrous facts by which they learned and confirmed one great fact, i.e., that Christ is the God-Man, the Son of the Living God, the Man-loving Savior of mankind and the All-Powerful Judge of the living and the dead.

O Resurrected Lord, confirm us in the faith and devotion of Thy Holy Apostles!
To Thee be glory and thanks always. Amen.

HOMILY

About how we will resemble Him Whom we love

"Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Until now, we were slaves and now we are the children of God. We were the slaves of evil and now we are the servants of good; the supreme good in heaven and on earth. We were slaves to all of that which is lower and worse than man and now, we will serve the All-Highest and the All-Good. We were squashed by darkness and now, we will labor in the light. Until now, the devil, sin and death held us in continual fear and now, we will live close to God in freedom and joy.

Now, when now? Now, when the Lord appeared on earth in the flesh, when He gave us the knowledge of light, freedom and life; when He gloriously resurrected and manifested Himself in His glorified body; when He fulfilled all the prophecies of the Prophets and all of His promises. Now we, too, are the children of God: "The sons of light and the heirs of the Kingdom."

"We shall be like Him." Truly, this has not yet materialized but He has manifested Himself and, for now, that is sufficient. He Himself showed how beautiful man is in the Resurrection and we know that we will also be the same as He. The Apostle John says: "We know that we shall be like Him." He does not say we suspect or it has been told to us but he does say: "We know that we shall be like Him." For He did not resurrect for His sake, but for our sake. He did not resurrect from the grave, only to show His power to the dead who are without hope, but to assure the dead that they, too, will live again and to show them how they will be when they become enlivened. Neither did the Apostles write: "We know," because of their vanity before the ignorant, but because of brotherly love toward man, that all men may know the same and "that we may also know."

O resurrected Lord, confirm in us also this saving knowledge through the prayers of Thy Holy Apostles! To Thee be glory and thanks always. Amen.

{Quoted by Fr. Ignatius Crockett on Bright Monday.}

A Paschal Homily

of St. Justin Popovich of Chelije, Serbia (+1979)

Translated April 12, 2010, by Fr. John Peck

Our father, Archimandrite Justin Popovich (1894-1979) was a theologian, a champion, a writer, a critic of the pragmatic Church life, a philosopher, and archimandrite of the Monastery of Chelije, near Valjevo, Serbia.

Sentenced to Immortality

Man sentenced God to death; by His Resurrection, He sentenced man to immortality. In return for a beating, He gives an embrace; for abuse, a blessing; for death, immortality. Man never showed so much hate for God as when he crucified Him; and God never showed more love for man than when He arose: Man even wanted to reduce God to a mortal, but God by His Resurrection made man immortal. The crucified God is Risen and has killed death. Death is no more. Immortality has surrounded man and all the world.

By the Resurrection of the God-Man, human nature has been led irreversibly onto the path of immortality, and has become dreadful to death itself. For before the Resurrection of Christ, death was dreadful to man, but after the Resurrection of Christ, man has become more dreadful to death. When man lives by faith in the Risen God-Man, he lives above death, out of its reach; it is a footstool for his feet:

“O Death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?” (I Cor. 15:55).

When a man belonging to Christ dies, he simply sets aside his body like clothing, in which he will again be vested on the day of Dread Judgement.

Before the Resurrection of the God-Man, death was the second nature of man: life first, death second. But by His Resurrection, the Lord has changed everything: immortality has become the second nature of man, it has become natural for man; and death – unnatural. As before the Resurrection of Christ, it was natural for men to be mortal, so after the Resurrection of Christ, it was natural for men to be immortal.

By sin, man became mortal and transient; by the Resurrection of the God-Man, he became immortal and perpetual. In this is the power, the might, the all-mightiness of the Resurrection of Christ. Without it, there would have been no Christianity. Of all miracles, this is the greatest miracle. All other miracles have it as their source and lead to it. From it grow faith, love, hope, prayer, and love for God. Behold: the fugitive disciples, having run away from Jesus when He died, return to Him because He is risen. Behold: the Centurion confessed Christ as the Son of God when he saw the Resurrection from the grave. Behold: all the first Christians became Christian because the Lord Jesus is risen, because death was vanquished. This is what no other faith has; this is what lifts the Lord Christ above all other gods and men; this is what, in the

most undoubted manner, shows and demonstrates that Jesus Christ is the One True God and Lord in all the world.

Because of the Resurrection of Christ, because of His victory over death, men 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 Dread Judgment.

Man is born, in fact, not when his mother bring him into the world, but when he comes to believe in the Risen Christ, for then he is born to life eternal, whereas a mother bears children for death, for the grave. The Resurrection of Christ is the mother of us all, all Christians, the mother of immortals. By faith in the Resurrection, man is born anew, born for eternity. "That is impossible!" says the skeptic. But you listen to what the Risen God-Man says: "All things are possible to him that believeth!" (Mark 9:23).

The believer is he who lives, with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his being, according to the Gospel of the Risen Lord Jesus.

Faith is our victory, by which we conquer death; faith in the Risen Lord Jesus. Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin. The Lord "has removed the sting of death." Death is a serpent; sin is its fangs. By sin, death puts its poison into the soul and into the body of man. The more sins a man has, the more bites, through which death puts its poison in him.

When a wasp stings a man, he uses all his strength to remove the sting. But when sin wounds him, this sting of death, what should be done? One must call upon the Risen Lord Jesus in faith and prayer, that He may remove the sting of death from the soul. He, in His great loving-kindness, will do this, for He is overflowing with mercy and love. When many wasps attack a man's body and wound it with many stings, that man is poisoned and dies. The same happens with a man's soul, when many sins wound it with their stings: it is poisoned and dies a death with no resurrection.

Conquering sin in himself through Christ, man overcomes death. If you have lived the day without vanquishing a single sin of yours, know that you have become deadened. Vanquish one, two, or three of your sins, and behold: you have become younger than the youth which does not age, young in immortality and eternity. Never forget that to believe in the Resurrection of the Lord Christ means to carry out a continuous fight with sins, with evil, with death.

If a man fights with sins and passions, this demonstrates that he indeed believes in the Risen Lord; if he fights with them, he fights for life eternal. If he does not fight, his faith is in vain. If man's faith is not a fight for immortality and eternity, than tell me, what is it? If faith in Christ does not bring us to resurrection and life eternal, than what use is it to us? If Christ is not risen, that meant that neither sin nor death has been vanquished, than why believe in Christ?

For the one who by faith in the Risen Lord fights with each of his sins there will be affirmed in him gradually the feeling that Christ is indeed risen, has indeed vanquished the sting of sin, has indeed vanquished death on all the fronts of combat. Sin gradually diminishes the soul in man, driving it into death, transforming it from immortality to mortality, from incorruption to corruption. The more the sins, the more the mortal man. If man does not feel immortality in himself, know that he is in sins, in bad thoughts, in languid feelings. Christianity is an appeal: Fight with death

until the last breath, fight until a final victory has been reached. Every sin is a desertion; every passion is a retreat; every vice is a defeat.

One need not be surprised that Christians also die bodily. This is because the death of the body is sowing. The mortal body is sown, says the Apostle Paul, and it grows, and is raised in an immortal body (I Corinthians 15:42-44). The body dissolves, like a sown seed, that the Holy Spirit may quicken and perfect it. If the Lord Christ had not been risen in body, what use would it have for Him? He would not have saved the entire man. If His body did not rise, then why was He incarnate?

Why did He take on Himself flesh, if He gave it nothing of His Divinity?

If Christ is not risen, then why believe in Him? To be honest, I would never have believed in Him had He not risen and had not therefore vanquished death. Our greatest enemy was killed and we were given immortality. Without this, our world is a noisy display of revolting stupidity and despair, for neither in Heaven nor under Heaven is there a greater stupidity than this world without the Resurrection; and there is not a greater despair than this life without immortality. There is no being in a single world more miserable than man who does not believe in the resurrection of the dead. It would have been better for such a man never to have been born.

In our human world, death is the greatest torment and inhumane horror. Freedom from this torment and horror is salvation. Such a salvation was given the race of man by the Vanquisher of death – the Risen God-Man. He related to us all the mystery of salvation by His Resurrection. To be saved means to assure our body and soul of immortality and life eternal. How do we attain this? By no other way than by a theanthropic life, a new life, a life in the Risen Lord, in and by the Lord's Resurrection.

For us Christians, our life on earth is a school in which we learn how to assure ourselves of resurrection and life eternal. For what use is this life if we cannot acquire by it life eternal? But, in order to be resurrected with the Lord Christ, man must first suffer with Him, and live His life as his own. If he does this, then on Pascha he can say with Saint Gregory the Theologian:

"Yesterday I was crucified with Him, today I live with Him; yesterday I was buried with Him, today I rise with Him" (Troparion 2, Ode 3, Matins, Pascha).

Christ's Four Gospels are summed up in only four words. They are:

"Christ is Risen! Indeed He is risen!"

In each of these words is a Gospel, and in the Four Gospels is all the meaning of all God's world, visible and invisible. When all knowledge and all the thoughts of men are concentrated in the cry of the Paschal salutation, "Christ is Risen!", then immortal joy embraces all beings and in joy responds: "Indeed He is risen!"



Christ is Risen! Let us forgive all!

This year, the words of the closing hymn of the Resurrection Matins service really spoke to my heart. It is: a call to heart-centered intimacy; a call to forgive everything - past and present - in the spirit of the never-ending JOY of our Savior's Holy Resurrection, even to those who hate us.

Well, then, should not this Christ-centered call apply also to family members and friends with whom we are currently - at best - 'benignly rejecting', and - at worse - festering bitterness and/or contempt? My brothers and Sisters in the risen Lord Jesus, how can we expect our Lord to - as another Resurrection hymn states - "make our lives peaceful", if we continue to show Him our contempt through the way we treat those closest to us?

What a glorious time this is for us to let go of our anger, harshness and judgment of those whom we feel have offended us, rejected us, been cruel to us --- even for years? And here is the most effective way to do this: We must pray that our Lord Jesus will grant us His grace to take full blame for the conflict, and not expect any apology from the other party --- even if, by the standards of this fallen world, we were ones being "wronged". In this way, my beloved sojourners on the sea of life, we will be victorious, even if the other person chooses to reject our efforts. I have total confidence in the truth of what I am sharing with you, because I have frequently read about these things in the teachings of our holy Church Fathers, and in the lives of our Saints; and actually have seen living results of it in my 37+ years of service to our Lord Jesus and His Church.

When we surrender our wills to Christ in this manner, then He will give to our hearts at least these two things: His peace, "which surpasses all understanding"; and a love for the other person that is no longer me-centered and conditional, but Christ-centered and unconditional! And then we will experience and inward freedom, that words cannot circumscribe!

However, we cannot approach the other person with any hidden agenda; or our efforts will bear no good fruit. A story from the Desert Fathers will clearly illustrate this: Once two monks at a Monastery became quite angry with one another, and begin to harbor resentment for one another. One of the monks decided to make an attempt at reconciliation with his brother. However, on the way to speak with him, he allowed the devil to fill his thoughts with memories of the unkind things the other had said to him, and to put in his mind that: if he asked for forgiveness, then the other monk had to do likewise. Thus, the reconciliation attempt failed completely.

Therefore the monk went to his Spiritual Father, who explained to him that his hidden agenda made it *impossible* for God's grace to enter into the conversation. Therefore, he instructed his spiritual child to pray fervently for God's grace; and to approach his brother --- unconditionally, and willing to accept full blame for the loss of their friendship. Approaching his brother's cell in this manner, armed him with God's grace, their division was destroyed!

O my dear and blessed brothers and sisters in the Risen Lord, think of what healing power would start taking place within ourselves, our families, our parishes, even our Nation, if you and I choose to follow this path during the next 38 days --- if we too would "forgive all by the Resurrection!"

Truly He is Risen!

Your servant in Christ,

+Fr. Demetrios Carellas, Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery, Saxonburg, PA

We began Lent with it, and Christ brings us back to it once more: **Forgiveness: Christ's Last Act on the Cross**

Just as we need to go to the doctor for periodic checkups for our physical health so to for spiritual health. Twice a year I go to the doctor for blood work. They take more blood than I would like to give, they don't give me a sucker for being cheerful about letting them poke me with a needle, and they put a cotton ball held tight by a band-aid that hurts when you rip it off. So giving blood is not the most pleasant thing in the world, but I know it is for my good. By looking at my blood, doctors can tell early on if I have cholesterol problems, sugar problems, possible cancer; my blood gives a picture of my overall physical health. It is really amazing that our blood contains such valuable information that we have only just begun to decipher.

The same type of care must be given to our spiritual health. We should go to a doctor of souls periodically for a checkup. A thorough examination of our soul can tell if we are suffering from guilt, anger, resentment, self-delusion, pride, gluttony, lust, selfishness, greed, and any number of spiritual diseases that would prevent us from being happy, joy filled, loving, discerning, wise, peaceful and content children of God. The soul gets so many layers of sickness and disease that sometimes it can take years to unravel the twisted result of years of neglect. People go to therapy for years to try and correct feelings of inferiority, insecurity, unnamed phobias, addictions, anger management problems, and many other ills that the soul can be afflicted with that prevent us from living full and meaningful lives.

One of the biggest causes of spiritual disease is not being able to forgive. When we hold on to hurts, resentments, wrongs suffered, unjust actions against us, we do not hurt the other person. Rather like a bonsai tree, we truncate the natural process of spiritual growth and become a spiritual midget. This kind of a result in the tree world is seen as a great art and accomplishment, but in the spiritual world it is seen as a tragedy. Fr. Anthony Coniaris says that "not forgiving someone is like taking a poison pill and waiting to see if the other person dies."

That illustrates exactly what happens when we refuse to forgive someone. Living in community is fraught with opportunities to step on each other's toes; living in the community of marriage even more so.

But Christ gives us a key ingredient to healthy relationships when he tells Peter that you must forgive not 7 times, but 70 times 7 on a daily basis. That is to say that it is never right not to forgive. It was Christ's last act on the Cross before He died, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." That kind of forgiveness demonstrates great courage and shows us what it means to be a person created in the image and likeness of God. If Christ can forgive those who have tortured, hated, rejected, persecuted and killed Him, it means that there should be nothing in our existence that we cannot turn over to God for ultimate judgment.

Forgiveness is not winning the lawsuit or settling the case. That is justice. That is satisfaction on a human level. But even then there still must be forgiveness, letting go of the anger, bitterness, disappointment, and outrage at having suffered unjustly at the hand of another. The mystery of forgiveness--and it is a mystery--is in trusting that God is love and that He will ultimately judge correctly in every situation. By holding on to our resentment and disappointment we remain prisoners of hate. Our heart is not free to love but is always constrained by anger and resentment and this poisons every aspect of our lives. Some can't forgive because they think that sanctions bad behavior. Forgiving someone does not make what they did 'right'. Evil is evil no matter what. There are horrible cases of evil that one day will have to be accounted for, but forgiveness is not about balancing the scales. Forgiveness is

about letting go of the right to be the ultimate judge. Even if someone is punished for a horrific crime, this does not always help the victim regain peace and joy. Only forgiveness, letting go of hatred and anger, will get it out of your system.

They say that depression is anger turned inwards. The longer we hang onto grudges the deeper the distortion and disfigurement of our soul. God is not calling us to be doormats, or sanction abusive behavior; we must confront evil and stop its ill effects in our lives and society. But forgiveness is about something different. It is about letting go of the right to destroy, get even, punish, or kill someone who has hurt us. It is about turning that person over to God who is the only Just Judge and knows all the facts that go into every case. Christ asks us to forgive 7 times 70 because He knows that is an essential ingredient in our spiritual health and that without it we will be prisoners of hatred, bitterness and anger. God has given us challenges and problems that have no earthly solution, only forgiveness can restore peace and joy in our lives. Turn over your anger to God; let go today and let God be the judge and let peace flood in to your heart. You will be glad you did. Be set free. Forgive!

~ Fr. Anthony Salzman

THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER

When we hear about prayer it seems like it should be a simple thing as most people will say they pray. The disciples knew that prayer wasn't so easy as they watched Jesus pray all night long. Certain illnesses they couldn't cure because Jesus said to them they needed to "pray and fast" more. As Jews, the disciples knew about prayer. They went to their local synagogues and prayed. They had a rich historical tradition with many wonderful prayers which included the psalms of King David. The disciples understood that prayer, as simple as it may seem, was in fact a difficult spiritual exercise, and they wanted to learn more about it.

Once, Abba Agathon was asked by some of the monks, "Among all our different activities, which is the virtue that requires the greatest effort?" He answered quite clearly, "There is no labor greater than praying to God. For every time a person wants to pray, the demons try to prevent him; for they know that nothing obstructs them so much as prayer to God. In everything else that a person undertakes, if he perseveres, he will attain rest. But in order to pray, a person must struggle to his last breath." This is quite a statement about prayer and provides insights to why we may struggle with our prayer lives.

Sincere prayer is a moment when we communicate with God, and the last thing the devil wants us to do is communicate with God. Prayer is the most intimate, personal contact we can have with our Lord. And not only do we connect with Him, but we open up our hearts to receive His Holy Spirit. Now, prayer may seem simple as we teach our children to pray. And yet, prayer is also something that we need to practice and practice more as we mature and grow in our spiritual lives. No one can ever say they've reached perfection in the art of prayer. The more we pray, the more we open up our hearts to God. So often in our prayers, whether our private prayers at home, or in our communal prayers here at Church, we may forget that we actually stand in the presence of God. Prayer is a spiritual discipline that we are to struggle to learn and master over our lifetime. Whenever we come before God in our prayers whether when we wake up for our morning prayers, or say prayers before we go to sleep, or offer prayers before any meal or at any other time throughout the day, let us remember to offer our prayers with humility of heart and with sincerity. ✘

✘ "When you pray, keep your mind quite free from any imagining, any irrelevant thought," said Father Anatol. "Enclose your mind in the words of your prayer." --*The Monk of Mount Athos*

✘ **What torments an envious person?** The good fortune or preference of a neighbor; although he himself has the same fortune and at times is also given preference, it is annoying to him that his neighbor has these. But where there is love and humility, all the nuances of envy are burned up.

~ **St. Macarius of Optina**