

**CHRIST IS RISEN!  
HE IS RISEN INDEED!**



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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✠ April 29, 2012 ✠

### **The Myrrhbearing Women**

St. Basil the Wonderworker of Ostrog (1671)

St. Nektary of Optina (1928)

THE MYRRHBEARERS



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

✠ Baptisms in May— May 12, 19 and 26 – 3:00pm

May 12 - Jesse Boyer and Kathryn Potts

May 19 - baby Mary Reed.

May 26 - the Batton Family – Aimee, James, Tristan and Baby Marie & Ailene Keeton

⇒ Pepper Place – The first Saturday is May 12 – 7:00am to 12Noon

Volunteers for the day are needed.

Baked goods, ethnic foods, interesting food items are needed – the fruit of our own labors – not bought items. We hope to commit to 2 Saturdays per month through the Summer. All proceeds go to the Building Fund. **YOUR COMMITMENT is NEEDED!**

⇒ Yard Sale – Friday and Saturday, June 8 and 9

It will be announced when it's time to start bringing in items.



✠ “The first Resurrection takes place by means of two Mysteries, Baptism and Repentance... The worker of that Resurrection is the Holy Spirit.”

~ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

Let us assimilate that Truth by faith in it; Let us cry out in prayer to this Truth, and it will draw us out of the abyss of demonic deception and self-delusion.

Bitter is our state! It is that prison from which we beseech that our souls be led out, that we may confess the name of the Lord (Ps. 141:8). It is that gloomy land into which our life has been cast by the enemy that hates and pursues us. It is that carnal-mindedness (Rom. 8:6) and knowledge falsely so-called (I Tim. 6:20) wherewith the entire world is infected, refusing to acknowledge its illness, insisting, rather, that it is in the bloom of health. It is that “flesh and blood” which “cannot inherit the Kingdom of God” (I Cor. 15:50). It is that eternal death which is healed and destroyed by the Lord Jesus, Who is “the Resurrection and the Life” (John 11:25). Such is our state. And the perception thereof is a new reason to weep. With tears let us cry out to the Lord Jesus to bring us out of prison, to draw us forth from the depths of the earth, and to wrest us from the jaws of death! “For this cause did our Lord Jesus Christ descend to us,” says the venerable St. Symeon the New Theologian, “because He wanted to rescue us from captivity and from most wicked spiritual deception.” ✠ ✠ ✠

## **Pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17)**

**Make sure that you do not limit your prayer merely to a particular part of the day. Turn to prayer at anytime. (St. John Chrysostom)**

**In everything they (the Apostles) did, they thought of God and lived in constant devotion to Him. This spiritual state was their unceasing prayer. (St. Basil the Great)**

**Rising in the morning stand as firmly as possible before God in your heart, as you offer your morning prayers and then go to the work apportioned to you by God, without withdrawing from Him in your feelings and consciousness....When there is no inner activity occupying a person, one must develop a *habit* of a continual repetition of a short prayer. This will eventually repeat itself and will bring one to constant remembrance of God, thus rejecting other thoughts of no profit. However, habit of the tongue is one thing, establishment in the heart is another. (St. Theophan the Recluse)**

**Those who have truly decided to serve the Lord God should practice the remembrance of God and uninterrupted prayer to Jesus Christ, mentally saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." (St. Seraphim of Sarov)**

**The most important weapon to use against the devil is the Holy Cross, of which he is terrified. But make the sign of the Cross correctly: with the three fingers of the right hand joined together, touch your forehead, your abdomen, your right shoulder and finally your left shoulder. The sign of the Cross may be made in conjunction with prostrations. (Elder Porphyrios)**

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### **Elder Paisios – On Excuses**

**"Excuses have nothing to do with the spiritual life. I must understand that when I try to justify myself with excuses, I'm in a wrong state of mind. I cut off my communication with God, and I am deprived of divine Grace; because divine Grace does not come to one who is in a wrong state."**

**"The moment a person justifies the unjustifiable, he is separated from God. Can an electric current pass through insulation? No. Isolation. Isolation from God and man. There is no stronger barrier to the grace of God than excuses! It is like building a wall and separating yourself from God; by making excuses, you cut off all ties with Him."**

**"It is the humble acknowledgement of one's mistake, without knowingly attempting to justify himself, when he is at fault and when people reprimand him. But when he does not stand up for himself even when he is wrongly accused, well then, that's when he gets an excellent grade."**

**One who justifies himself with excuses makes no progress in the spiritual life, nor can he find any inner peace. God will not condemn us for a mistake we have made, but we must not try to justify ourselves for that mistake; and consider it to be a natural thing."**

**"You don't excuse others, but you excuse yourself? Next time, Christ Himself will not excuse you. It is quite possible - in a moment - for a man's heart to become hard as a rock, when he acts out of malevolence; and, on another occasion, to become very tender, when acting out of love. You should seek to acquire a maternal heart. You see, a mother forgives everything; and sometimes pretends not to even see certain things."**

## Pascha of Incorruption

Listen to the triumphant chants of the Church! Not only on the days of Holy Pascha, but on all the great feasts, you often hear the word, "incorruption." The whole matter of salvation of the human race is expressed in living Church theology as the gift of incorruption. It means that we need incorruption. We are in a state of corruption. The Synaxarion for the Holy and Great week of Pascha [Bright Week] is of course only read in monasteries, and not even in all of them. Meanwhile, the meaning of the events we celebrate during this week is described thus: "Then He came down from the heavens and made His dwelling in the womb of the Virgin; now He has stolen human nature from the treasury of hell, raised it to heaven, and brought incorruption—man's ancient inheritance." There are two remarkable details here: Pascha is positioned next to the events of the Nativity of Christ, and corruption is called the ancient inheritance.

When you hear the chants in Church, you become more and more convinced that they are truly rich in a treasure of ideas, and are greatly important for a truly Orthodox understanding of life today. Our dogmatics courses taught in the theological seminaries and academies are in this respect on an immeasurably lower level than that theology taught to the faithful by our readers and chanters from the church kliros.

Pascha of incorruption... The ancient inheritance is returned... Our seminary theology talks about some legal accounts between God and man. Sin is called for the most part a crime against God, an offense against God, for which God's justice must take revenge against the despicable offender. But the Church first of all calls sin corruption, the loss of our ancient inheritance: incorruption. In this there are no legal accounts to settle with the Lord God. Man fell away from God, and his spiritual and physical corruption began. Self-rule in spiritual life led to slavery to sin and passions. Man began to decay in seductive passions. The soul rots and decays. This may sound strange, but that

is really how it is. The process of spiritual corruption can be compared to any kind of decay. If an organism decays, everything breaks down in it, and with time, poisonous and foul smelling gases rise from it. It is the same with spiritual nature that has been harmed and infected by sin, which is as if rotting. The soul loses its chastity, its integrity, and decays; its will is weakened, along with everything connected with it and everything subject to it. Passionate thoughts and evil deeds continually break forth from the sinful soul. Anyone with an attentive relationship to his own spiritual life would not be surprised at how difficult it is to instill all that is good and beautiful into the soul, and how easily and quickly everything dark and evil takes root and grows in it. Therefore, wouldn't we say that there is something bad living in our soul? Our soul is not healthy, it is sick. Corruption reigns in our soul, and our body is quite obviously subject to corruption. Many do not notice their spiritual sickness; they stifle the inner groaning and cry of the soul with the noise of life. But death and bodily decay are irrefutable, and all life's vivid color pales before this decay. They can reject the works of the ascetics who expound upon spiritual death, and perhaps even laugh at them. But find me a nihilist who could not understand the funeral services and St. John Damascene's lamentation over the grave!

Humanity has always seen the inner corruption of its spiritual nature, and has always beheld with its own eyes the destruction of the temple of its body. To admit that you are spiritually rotting and to know that your body is the inheritance of worms—that is the lot of sinful man! Where is the joy? What can we hope for in the future? Sin is essentially linked with unhappiness and suffering. Sinful awareness paints the future in dark, joyless colors. The Hebrew Sheol, the kingdom of shadows in the murky Hades of the Hellenes and Romans—both depict a disconsolate future.

Salvation is healing. Salvation is freedom from corruption. Salvation is a return to the original goodness of incorruption; for man was created in incorruption. Needed was the restoration to health of human nature. This restoration is given in the incarnation of the Son of God. "We could not have become incorrupt and immortal, had not the Incorrupt and Immortal One not been first made what we are." The Incorrupt and Immortal One, in His unity of persons, has assumed "the corruption and death of my stolen nature." The nature of corruption received the inoculation of incorruption, and the process of creation's renewal, the process of man's deification, has begun, as has also begun the creation of god-humanity. The sting of death has been blunted. Corruption is conquered, for the antidote for the illness of corruption is given. All those born of earth have inevitably come to those gates of death and hid behind them, trembling with horror. But now, Christ is resurrected! What does this mean? This means that salvation is truly wrought. For, human nature has joined with Divine nature in the person of Christ, "unmingled, unchanged, undivided, and inseparable." It is not God Who has passed through the gates of death, and not before God were the "eternal chambers open wide," not for God's sake was the stone rolled away from the doors of the tomb, but for the sake of the God-Man. Together with Christ, our human nature has passed through the mysterious gates of death. Death reigns, but not forever!

Death was terrible to the human race before Christ's death, but after Christ's resurrection, man became terrible to death, for One of us has conquered death; He did not remain in the tomb, and did not see corruption. Passover was the freeing of Israel from Egypt. Our Pascha frees us from the slavery of death and corruption. Christ is risen! I now know that my salvation is truly wrought. I know that God truly appeared on earth. There have been great people, conquerors of the elements, conquerors of nature; but death cut them all down and revealed our common nothingness. Who has passed through the doors of death? It can only be God. This means that God was truly incarnate on earth, truly brought the healing cure against the

corruption that corrodes and torments me. Incarnation and resurrection are united into one. The incarnation gave meaning to the resurrection, and the resurrection irrefutably convinces us of its truth and reality as something that is not a phantom or a dream.

Now I am no longer frightened by death, for I have seen the victory over corruption. I also see a different law other than the law of life working in me—I see the law of death and corruption. I see how sin reigns over me at times. But I know that this reign has been shaken, that my situation is not hopeless. I can now hope for victory, I can hope to overcome sin, I can hope for freedom from slavery to corruption. Now I can look with joy upon the podvig of struggle with sin and passions, for the enemy has been conquered many times by ascetical strugglers. The saints of God shine in the heavens of the Church like stars—those who lived on the earth, conquered sin, attained purity and chastity, which is incorruption, and therefore departed rejoicing upon the way of all the earthly. Incorruption, that is, purity and chastity, gives joy. Blessedness is not an external reward, as unfortunate Catholic hirelings reason with their minds. Blessedness is the inner consequence of virtue. Virtue is a healthy soul, and a healthy person is always happier than a sick one. My sinful illness is curable—the resurrection of Christ convinces me of this. To me is opened the blessedness of paradise. Let no one lament his poverty when entering the Kingdom of all! Joy has come to all, because hope for incorruption, for redemption from sinful corruption, has also come. Christ God has brought us out of death into life. Egypt is left behind, Pharaoh has perished, and the Promised Land and incorrupt Kingdom lay ahead—where there are many abodes, and where the rejoicing is endless! Pascha of incorruption! Salvation of the world! Christ is Risen!

**New Hieromartyr Hilarion (Troitsky),  
Archbishop of Verey**  
**From his three-volume work, published by  
Sretensky Monastery [in Russian]**  
Translated by Nun Cornelia (Rees)

# The Church and Contemporary Youth

Excerpts from a talk (and booklet) given at Rutgers University on May 28, 1987, by Monk Moses Mavrikis, a disciple of Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos, visiting from Greece.

Audience:

*All religions claim to have found the correct way of worshipping God. Which religion must a person accept?*

Father Moses:

About what will happen to these people with other faiths: when I went to the Holy Mountain for the first time in 1970, I went to an ascetic hermit and I asked him something related, "Say a person was born in South America. in Africa. His father was a pagan, a Buddhist, a Brahman. Why should he be judged? He never knew Christ nor any other religion." The hermit said, "Listen, my child, I do not know theories, I will tell you a story. There was once an Elder who was going through the forest, and as he proceeded he encountered a man who said, 'I, Elder, have murdered ninety nine people. Stay, so that I may kill you also, and make them a hundred murders.'

May it be blessed, my child.' said the Elder, 'If this will satisfy you, do it. Only, before you kill me. I want some water from the well.

'I will go.' said the assailant.

The Elder waited and the thief was not seen. 'The blessed man said he would bring water, what happened to him?' The Elder went near the fountain and found the thief dead. He considered this a sign: a man tells him he has killed ninety nine people, he intends to kill him and then suddenly dies. The Elder was evidently a holy man, and God, who hears the prayers of all people - how much more that of a holy man - answered him and said, 'The fact that he told you he had committed ninety nine murders was considered a confession - he placed his entire past at your feet. The fact that he

told you he wanted to kill you was considered a pure confession - he told you what he did and what he thought of doing. The fact that he immediately and willingly went to bring you water was considered the penance - the canon of his repentance and this man was forgiven and went to Paradise." This Elder was telling us. "Man's reasoning is one thing, God's reasoning is another."

But, is it ever possible for God, the Creator, Kindness Himself, the source of good, kindness and beauty, to think less lovingly than we do? Is it ever possible for God, the creator of people, to neglect His creatures and to love them less than we do? Thus, the position of the Church is that all those outside the Church will be judged according to the innate natural law of the conscience. However, we Christians will be judged according to the Gospel.

Regarding those who lived before Christ. After His burial and before His Resurrection, Christ descended into Hades and proclaimed repentance. Those who repented and accepted Him were saved. Moreover, let me say that the Orthodox Church accepts some of the ancient Greek philosophers. Basically, the monasteries preserved the ancient Greek writers who would have been unknown today if it was not for patient monks who transcribed them. St. Basil the Great urges young people to read the ancient writers. Also, in the writings of the great Church Fathers we find many references to Plotinos, Plato and even Aristotle. Thus, the Fathers had studied philosophy and they did not reject it.

Furthermore, with reference to the ancient Greek philosophers, we believe that some of them had the enlightenment of God and they believed in one God. That is why, in Athens, they had the altar of the Unknown God. On this altar Saint Paul the Apostle began his sermon. Indeed, some writers refer to those ancient philosophers who spoke of one God; they call them, "Christians before Christ."

It is logical, and we all understand, that each person believes that his faith is the truth. However, this does not mean that it is actually the truth because, it is a basic dogma of philosophy that there is one truth - we do not have many truths. Nor can the truth be apportioned and divided. We cannot say, "You have some of the truth and I have some of the truth. So, come let us unite our truths." You either have the truth, or you do not. Forgive me for what I will say, but we cannot say someone is a little bit pregnant. She either is, or is not- There is no half thing there. You either have the truth, or you do not.

Audience:

*What can a person do to cast away negative emotions? In society today we observe more negative things and fewer positive things.*

Father Moses:

I will express a very simple thought. If what Christ said, "Do not do unto others what you would not have done unto yourself," became a reality, that is, if each of us was righteous, the world would automatically change. However, because we are little idlers, we want to cast away all responsibilities from ourselves and ascribe them to all other people. "It's the Presidents fault, the Archbishop's fault, my wife's fault, my child's fault, my boss's fault, my colleague's fault, the Governor's fault, the neighbor's fault, the street-sweeper's

fault... It's everyone's fault except my fault!" It is very easy for us to say this. However, the Fathers of our Church say exactly the opposite, "The world is evil because I am evil. If I am set aright, then the world will be set aright."

Moreover, the great problem - and some people think this is selfish, but it is not selfish at all - is how we may guard ourselves. Each of us here and all people are unique people. Neither did the same person exist in the past, nor will he exist ever again. There is a uniqueness of the human being which every individual is called to protect from being alienated internally by the powers of evil.

The Elder Paisios used to tell us, "Above my cell, birds fly by. I cannot prohibit them. I cannot raise wire netting up to the heavens. I can only stop them from nestling on my roof. Thus, let us turn our heart into a factory of good thoughts." Let us see things from their good side. We always see the most impossible, deceitful and perverted side of things. We do not view from a good perspective. People today do not look at each other in the eyes. There is a great loneliness.

The first book I wrote was called, "The Community of the Desert and the Desolation of the Cities." We live in desolate cities. People in next door apartments do not know the names of one another. If you say, "Good morning," the others say, "Why did he say good morning ? He wants something from me." People are tragically lonesome. You see someone surrounded by millions of people, and yet, he feels as if he is alone on the planet. For this, no one is at fault but ourselves and our disposition and relationship with God and one another. Moreover, we are very strict with others and very lenient with ourselves. We judge others very severely, but ourselves with great leniency. However, all the Saints of our Church were very lenient and sympathetic toward others and very

severe with themselves. We do not have any severity with ourselves, 'All of our dealings are well done.'

Audience:

*You said there is one truth.*

Father Moses:

I did not say this myself. It is a basic dogma of philosophy.

Audience:

*A certain phenomenon may seem different to me and different to you. Therefore, it does not remain one phenomenon.*

Father Moses:

No. The phenomenon, the truth is one. You and I may see different things. However, the truth remains one.

Audience:

*There exist uncountable religions in this world. There are many who preach the "truth." We were born in Greece to a Christianity, to Orthodoxy. We learned Orthodoxy. I have a very good friend who is a Muslim and he told me with great passion about a trip of Mohammed to Jerusalem, where God took him, spoke to him and then returned him back to earth...*

Father Moses:

You mean, your friend?

Audience:

*No. I mean Mohammed*

Father Moses:

These thoughts of yours are logical, they are not absurd. However, I repeat and insist, tonight when you and all of us, myself and each person goes to rest, say to yourself, "Why am I not happy? What deprives me of joy? Is it because the Muslim thinks the way he does? Is it because the Brahman believes he has the truth? Is it because I believe I have the truth?"

As Saint Maximos the Confessor says, "We must try to find the cause of the cause." That is, the motive of the motive. What deprives us of our joy?

### **A Christian means a joyous person.**

And, unfortunately, we are unhappy today. And when I say joyous, I do not mean that we jest, tease and say jokes. But, joy means sobriety, tranquility, expectation, hope, patience, the Grace that God gives to His children, and with it, they pass through this life painlessly without being overpowered by the spirit of the world and the consumer society. In this way a person can live with serenity, liberty and grace he can live truly joyfully.

An Elder said, "The good doctor does not give us aspirin when we have a fever, but he searches to find the cause of the fever." Let us, therefore, search for the elements that deprive us of our joy. And in our search, the Muslim, the Brahman, the Mormon, the Protestant and the Catholic have no responsibility or opinion. In our country they say, "Every little lamb hangs from its little leg."

Each of us has an immortal soul and freedom so great, it is astonishing that God even allows us to deny Him. He does not restrain our freedom in the least. He allows us to deny our brother. We deny our brother every time we sin against him - especially with murder, i.e., - the greatest form of wickedness and malice. He even allows us to destroy ourselves with suicide which is an act of despair. Thus, He left us perfectly free.

God has one inability - if we can call it thus. He cannot violate the human freedom and will. It is a hindrance. He created us, as your friend Kazantzakis says, "Amplly" free.

## **On the Apostles and the Resurrection**

### **A Sermon on I Corinthians by St. John Chrysostom**

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

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.



### **The Resurrection at all times...**

✠ Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord continually proves to us that there shall be a future Resurrection, of which He has rendered the Lord Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising Him from the dead. Let us contemplate, beloved, the resurrection which is at all times taking place. Day and night declare to us a resurrection. The night sinks to sleep, and the day arises; the day [again] departs, and the night comes on. Let us behold the fruits [of the earth], how the sowing of grain takes place. The sower goes forth, and casts it into the ground; and the seed being thus scattered, though dry and naked when it fell upon the earth, is gradually dissolved. Then out of its dissolution the mighty power of the providence of the Lord raises it up again, and from one seed many arise and bring forth fruit.