



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **March 18, 2012** ✠

The Sunday of the Cross

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (386)

St. Nikolai of Ochrid & Zhicha, Serbia

who labored in America (1956)

St. Edward, Martyr and King of England (978)

St. Maria (Skobtsova) of Paris, martyred at Ravensbruck (1945)

✠ **Fourth Week of Great Lent** ✠

✠ **Wed. Mar. 21, 6:30pm ~ Presanctified Liturgy**

✠ **Fri. Mar. 23, 6:30pm ~ Presanctified Liturgy (Meal)**

⇒ **Next Sunday is the Feast of the Annunciation.**

⇒ **This Saturday – Church painting – 10:00am-4:00pm**



"The fruit of the tree brought sorrow to the first formed man, for Thou hast banished him from Paradise. But, nailed upon the Tree as man, O Savior, Thou hast called him back to Paradise again! Therefore, I cry out to Thee, O Deliverer: Set me free from all my sorrow, cleansing me by fasting, tears and penitence, O most loving Jesus, the Savior of our souls!"

Wood and Water

✠ Moses was himself saved by means of wood and water before the Law was given, when he was exposed to the Nile's currents, hidden away in an Ark (Exod. 2:3-10). And by means of wood and water he saved the people of Israel, revealing the Cross by the wood, Holy Baptism by water (Exod. 14:15-31). Paul, who had looked upon the mysteries, says openly, 'They were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud' (I Cor. 10:2). He also bears witness that, even before the events concerning the sea and his staff, Moses willingly endured Christ's Cross, 'Esteeming', he says, 'the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt' (Heb. 11:26). For the Cross is the reproach of Christ from the standpoint of foolish men. As Paul himself says of Christ, 'He endured the cross, despising the shame' (Heb. 12:2).
-St. Gregory Palamas (1359)

The Anchor of Salvation

✠ Orthodox flock, hold strongly onto the Faith of Christ as the anchor of salvation, and He will lead you to your new fatherland... Do not forget your Mother, the Orthodox Church. She will not teach you bad things, she will guard you from the wolves which are appearing in sheep's clothing among you... Always remember that prayer and labor are the true hope of the true sons of the Holy Church ... Always remember also that it is not joys and satisfactions that lead to the blessed life, but sorrows; it is not through the wide gates that we can reach the Heavenly Kingdom, but along the narrow path, through the magnanimous bearing by each of his cross.

Hieromartyr Hermogenes, Bishop of Tobolsk (1918)

✠ **There is no one except Christ who is *not* obliged to carry his cross with a certain justice and on account of a certain culpability.** + Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, *The Victory of the Cross*

⇒ The Cross has been an image of hope and victory since the time our Lord hung from Calvary's Cross. Not too long ago many Christians – even non-Orthodox ones, marveled that when the Twin Towers fell on 9/11, a cross was formed in the rubble. Many took hope in this symbol, and this cross has been saved and is now on display at Ground Zero.
– *Internet comment*

Thoughts at the Beginning of the Fast

Members of the One Spiritual Body

✠ In relation to one another — being members of the one spiritual body — we are obliged to help one another. Just as bodily parts, directed by the soul, make one another complete, so must we, directed by the Spirit of God, serve one another without envy. Under this disposition, the surpluses of all those carrying out prayers will supply the lack in prayers of those carrying out obediences and conversely, the abundance of labors performed by those doing obediences will compensate for the lack of those abiding in prayer, so that in the words of the Apostle, there may be equality in everything. May only simplicity, love, humility and absence of envy grow among the brothers. To what extent a person believes, loves and labors, is measured by his daily accomplishments that make him worthy of the Heavenly Kingdom. This is the true Angelic life: when we unite with one another without envy, with simplicity and love, with peace and joy, when we regard a neighbor's achievement as a personal gain, while his weaknesses and sorrows as personal detriment. After all, it is said: "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philip. 2:4).

- St. Ephraim the Syrian

The True Mind of the Father

✠ I want you to know this, that Jesus Christ our Lord is Himself the true Mind of the Father. By Him all the fullness of every rational nature is made in the image of His image, and He Himself is the head of all creation, and of His body the Church (Col. 1:15-18). Therefore we are all members one of another, and the Body of Christ, and the head cannot say to the feet, 'I have no need of you'; and if one member suffers, the whole body is moved and suffers with it (Eph. 4:25).

But if a member is estranged from the body, and has no communication with the head, but is delighted by the passions of its own body, this means that its wound is incurable, and it has forgotten its beginning and its end. And therefore the Father of creatures, moved with compassion towards this our wound, which could not be healed by any of the creatures, but only by the goodness of the Father, sent forth to us His Only-begotten, who because of our bondage took upon Himself the form of a bondservant, and gave Himself up for our sins; for

our iniquities humbled Him, and by His wounds we are all healed; and He gathered us out of all regions, till He should make resurrection of our hearts from the earth, and teach us that we are all of one substance, and members one of another. Therefore we ought greatly to love one another. For he who loves his neighbor, loves God: and he who loves God, loves his own soul. - St. Anthony the Great

Do Not Rely on Your Knowledge

✠ "An elder said: Do not rely on your knowledge. For the divine knowledge to settle in your heart, worldly knowledge must be erased. Become as a little child. Do not boast of your knowledge, for 'knowledge makes one proud' according to the Apostle Paul. Put yourself lower than everyone else. Degrade yourself. How much was the Lord humiliated on the Cross? What a disgrace, naked, abandoned, insulted, and then He was glorified. The same way you ought to reach the utmost humility and then you will be glorified."

- Athonite Gerontikon

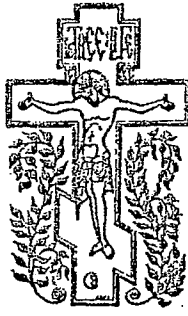
The Devil Never Sleeps

✠ "The devil fasts; he never eats; he lives in virginity since he never marries; he keeps vigils. Have you ever heard of the devil sleeping? You work, but do you think he just sits around? He cannot just sit around. Do you think you could outrun him if you started running? In a split second he can be at the other end of the world. There is only one way in which you can surpass him, and that is for you to say to yourself, 'I am nothing but dust and ashes. I am a sinner and can do nothing. I am not worthy even to live on this earth!' Humility is the only thing the devil fears. He is not afraid of anything else, not even if you were the most ascetic person on the earth! If you do not ask others for forgiveness you are in his hands for him to mock as he pleases."

+Elder Cleopa of Sihastria

The Psalm

✠ The Psalm is the tranquility of souls, the arbitrator of peace, restraining the disorder and turbulence of thoughts, for it softens the passions of the soul and moderates its unruliness. A Psalm forms friendships, unites the divided, mediates between enemies. For who can still consider him an enemy with whom he has set forth one voice to God? So that the singing of Psalms brings love, the greatest of good things, contriving harmony like some bond of union and uniting the people in the symphony of a single choir. - St. Basil the Great



Saint Nicholai of Zica on the Cross

In today's Gospel, the Lord offers the Cross, this bitter means of healing, to everyone who desires to be saved from death. The Lord said, *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* The Lord does not drive men before Him to the Cross, but calls them to follow Him - for He has borne the Cross. Before He gave voice to this call, He foretold the sufferings: *The Son of Man must suffer many things ... and be killed, and after three days rise again* (Mark 8:31). This is why He came to be the Way. He came to be the first in suffering and the first in glory; He came to show that all that men reckon to be impossible is possible, and to make it possible.

He does not force men or exert pressure on them, but suggests and offers. *Whosoever will...!* It was by their own will that men fell into the sickness of sin, and it is by their own free will that men must be healed from sin. He does not hide the fact that the medicine is bitter, very bitter, but He makes it easier for men to take it by having first taken it Himself, even though He was healthy, and has shown us its marvelous action.

Let him deny himself... The first man, Adam, also denied himself when he fell into sin, but he denied his real, true self. Seeking from men that they deny themselves, the Lord seeks that they deny their false selves. Put more simply: Adam denied the Truth, and clave to a lie; now the Lord seeks of Adam's descendants that they deny the lie and cleave once more to the Truth from which they had fallen away. Therefore, to deny oneself means to deny the deceitful non-being that has been imposed on us in place of our God-given being. We must deny the earthboundness that has, for us, replaced spirituality, and the passions that have replaced good works; the servile fear that has darkened in us our sonship of God and the grumbling against God that has killed within us the spirit of obedience to Him. We must deny evil thoughts, evil desires and evil deeds. We must deny the idolatrous worship of nature and our body. In brief: we must deny all that we reckon is "me", but is in reality not us but the devil and sin, corruption, illusion and death. Oh, let us deny this "second nature," for it is not our nature as God created it, but an accumulated and hardened illusion and self-delusion in ourselves - a hypocritical lie that goes by our name, and we by its.

What does it mean: to take up one's cross? It means the willing acceptance, at the hand of Providence, of every means of healing, bitter though it may be, that is offered. Do great catastrophes fall on you? Be obedient to God's will, as Noah was. Is sacrifice demanded of you? Give yourself into God's hands with the same faith as Abraham had when he went to sacrifice his son. Is your property ruined? Do your children die suddenly? Suffer it all with patience, cleaving to God in your heart, as Job did. Do your friends forsake you? And you find yourself surrounded by enemies? Bear it all without grumbling, and with faith that God's help is at hand, as the Apostles did. Are you condemned to death for Christ? Be thankful to God for such an honour, like thousands of Christian martyrs. Nothing will be sought of you that has not been done before, but you will rather follow the will of many -- apostles, saints, confessors and martyrs -- who have done Christ's will. We must know, furthermore, that in seeking our crucifixion, the Lord is seeking the crucifixion of the old man, the man made up of evil habits and the service of sin. For, by this crucifixion, the old, animal-like man in us is put to death, and the new man, made in God's image and immortal, is raised to life. As the Apostle says: *Our old man is crucified*, and explains at once why: *that we should not serve sin* (Romans 6:6). The cross is heavy for the old, sensual man, heavy for a body *with the affections and lusts* (Galatians 5:24), but is not heavy for the spiritual man. The Cross is, *to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God* (I Corinthians 1:18). We therefore boast in the Cross of Christ, and in the cross we bear for His sake.

\$20.00

Sometimes we just need to be reminded!

A well-known speaker started off his seminar by holding up a \$20.00 bill. In the room of 200, he asked, "Who would like this \$20 bill?" Hands started going up. He said, "I am going to give this \$20 to one of you but first, let me do this." He proceeded to crumple up the \$20 dollar bill. He then asked, "Who still wants it?" Still the hands were up in the air. "Well," he replied, "what if I do this?" And he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now crumpled and dirty. "Now, who still wants it?" Still the hands went into the air.

"My friends, we have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20. Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value. Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless to those who DO LOVE you. The worth of our lives comes not in what we do or who we know, but by WHO WE ARE.

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give
him shall never thirst; (John 4: 14)

ON FASTING

The Holy Apostle commands us saying "Let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk becomingly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." From the time of the Apostles, Prophets and Fathers till our own day, it is evident from the life of the Church that fasting is part of our "armor of light"; it is a mighty weapon against the enemy given into our hands by the Saviour Himself, Who is a type and example for us in all things and Who fasted in the flesh in order to teach us to fast. To those weak and ill, it is a medicine and antidote--a bath in which to be washed and cleansed. Armored with holy fasting, St. Elias the Tishbite withstood Ahab and his army singlehandedly and called down fire from the heavens. By fasting St. Moses, the seer of God and the elder of Israel, prepared to ascend the mountain in the desert and behold the Glory of God. By fasting the Three Children were shown forth to be fairer than the other children in Babylon in the house of the king, and Daniel was shown forth to be a shepherd of lions.

Fasting, therefore, should always be understood as a thing most necessary in our battle with the evil one. Only a man who has lost his mind would put down his weapons, strip himself naked of his armor and then jump into the line of fire to do battle with the enemy. Such a one would be committing suicide. A man who calls himself a Christian and does not fast, is such a man. In the final analysis he who does not fast does not believe in God, for he does not really believe in the existence of the enemy and the great victory gifted to us over him by our Saviour. He who does not fast does not believe in Him Who said to the enemy, "Man shall not live by bread alone." This is why Apostolic and Patristic canons proclaim that all who do not keep the fasts have fallen away from the Faith (i.e., have become excommunicated), and our Holy Father St. Seraphim of Sarov instructs us not even to speak with such persons.

Those who fell away from our Holy Faith through schism and heresy, by distorting the dogmas and truth of Holy Orthodoxy, in consequence distorted the life of the Church also, and especially the teaching concerning fasting. Thus, to the Latins, fasting became primarily a means of atonement, satisfaction, retribution, payment for sins committed or for earning merits, wages, favor, etc., when all sins had been payed for. The Protestants correctly abhorred the use of fasting as "works" which won merits which, in turn, were banked as surplus in the treasury of the the Popes to be dispensed to "poor souls" in purgatory; the few that continued to fast, however, were not able to free themselves from the error of Anselm concerning atonement and punishment. Thus, after some centuries of keeping fasts as 'a pious and ancient custom,' yet having lost the correct understanding and position of fasting in the life of the Church, both Latins and Protestants have totally abandoned fasting. Now we see that even those that were nearer to Holy Orthodoxy in Liturgy and practice--the Copts, Armenians, Jacobites, etc.,--in their last gathering in Addis Ababa have

"reformed" their rules concerning fasting. This was to be expected since all have fallen into heresies and are separated from the Holy Church. But now we hear even from those who bear the name Orthodox similar trends and aspirations. For us sinful folk, who nevertheless are still Orthodox in our Faith, this is one more indication that these people are despisers and apostates from Orthodoxy. They are only proclaiming to all that have ears to hear that they no longer wish to walk in the way and tradition of our Saviour, the Apostles, Prophets, and Fathers, but rather wish to make "provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Of them the Psalms say, "They mingled with the nations (heathen) and learned their works" and the Holy Apostle says, "They have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof."

St. Abba Isaac the Syrian says, "The Saviour began the work of our salvation with fasting. In the same way, all those who follow in the footsteps of the Saviour build on this foundation the beginning of their endeavour, since fasting is a weapon established by God. Who will escape blame if he neglects this? If the Lawgiver Himself fasts, how can any of those who have to obey the law be exempt from fasting? This is why the human race knew no victory before fasting, and the devil was never defeated by our nature as it is: but this weapon has indeed deprived the devil of strength from the outset. Our Lord was the Leader and the first example of this victory, in order to place the first crown of victory on the head of our nature. As soon as the devil sees someone possessed of this weapon, fear straightway falls on this adversary and tormentor of ours, who remembers and thinks of his defeat by the Saviour in the wilderness; his strength is at once destroyed and the sight of the weapon given us by our Supreme Leader burns him up. A man armed with the weapon of fasting is always afire with zeal. He who remains therein, keeps his mind steadfast and ready to meet and repel all violent passions."

Those who do not fast--especially those of the clergy--teach that fasting consists in not thinking and doing evil and quote from our Saviour, the Apostles and Fathers to support their views. They usually forget that our Saviour, the Apostles and Fathers all fasted the physical fast as well as the spiritual fast. When man partakes of the glory of God, he does not partake of it in the spirit only, but physically also--in a complete sense. When one praises God, he does not praise Him only in the Spirit, but with physical voice also in chant and prayer. When one worships God, he does not worship him noetically only but physically also--the body participating by standing in prayer, by making prostrations and using the fingers and hand to seal itself with the sign of the Cross. When one communicates God, he does not communicate in spirit only but eats the very Body and drinks the very Blood of the Lord unto healing of soul and body. Thus one praises God and is united with God not in part, but completely as one whole--soul and body. When one labors in virtue, one labors not only noetically but physically also, even unto blood, in order not to deny our Saviour. Our Holy Martyrs did not witness just by words and thought, resisting evil in their hearts and minds, but gave their bodies up to torments and their heads to be cut off, that they might remain with our Saviour. Thus, since we are not just spirits, but "wear flesh and live in the world," we cannot possibly fast spiritually only and not fast physically also. There is a unity and interaction between the body and the soul. They cannot be separated while we are still in the body.

In the Ladder of Divine Ascent, St. John writes "Satiety of food is the father of fornication; an empty stomach is the mother of purity." He who always keeps his stomach full and he who fasts know the strength of this saying.

ON THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN - Part 2

Elder Porphyrios of Athens (+1991)

"Become Saints and you will have no problems with your children."

A psychological state is created in a child as a result of its parents that accompanies it throughout its life. Its later behavior and its relationships with others are directly connected with the experiences that it carries with it from its childhood years. The child grows up and develops, but at bottom it does not change. This is manifested even in the smallest expressions of life. For example, you get a craving for food and want to eat. You take something and eat it, then you see something else and you want that. You feel hungry and think that if you don't eat you'll feel faint and you'll start to tremble. You're afraid you'll lose weight. This is a psychological state that has its explanation. Perhaps you never knew your father or your mother, and you feel deprived and hungry, poor and weak. And this psychological reality is expressed by way of reflex as a weakness of the body.

A large part of the responsibility for a person's spiritual state lies with the family. For children to be released from their various inner problems it is not enough for them to receive good advice or to be compelled by force; nor do logical arguments or threats do any good. These things rather make matters worse. The solution is to be found through the sanctification of the parents. Become Saints and you will have no problems with your children. The sanctity of their parents releases the children from their problems. Children want to have saintly people at their side, people with lots of love who will neither intimidate them nor lecture them, but who will provide a saintly example and pray for them. You parents should pray silently to Christ with upraised arms and embrace your children mystically. When they misbehave you will take some disciplinary measures, but you will not coerce them. Above all you need to pray.

Parents, especially the mother, often cause hurt to a child for some act of misbehavior by scolding it excessively. The child is then wounded. Even if you don't scold the child outwardly but bristle with anger inwardly or look fiercely at the child, the child understands. The child believes that its mother doesn't love it and asks, 'Do you love me, Mommy?' The mother answers, 'Yes, dear,' but the child is not convinced. It has been wounded. The mother loves it, she'll caress it later, but the child will pull its head away. It refuses to be caressed, regarding this as hypocrisy because it has been wounded.

Over-protectiveness leaves children immature

Another thing that harms children is over-protectiveness, that is, excessive care or excessive anxiety and worry on the part of the parents.

A mother used to complain to me that her five-year-old child was disobedient. 'It's your fault,' I told her, but she didn't understand. Once I went for a walk by the seaside with this mother along with the child. The little boy let go of his mother's hand and ran towards the sea. There was a sand dune there and the sea came in directly behind it. The mother immediately reacted with anxiety and was about to run towards the boy who was standing on top of the dune with outstretched arms trying to keep his balance. I calmed her down and told to her to turn her back on the boy while I kept an eye on him askance. When the boy despaired of provoking his mother's attention and causing her to panic and scream as usual, he calmly climbed down and walked towards us. That was the end of it. Then the mother understood what I meant.

Another mother used to complain that her little boy wouldn't eat all his food, especially his

yogurt. The little one was about three years old and tormented his mother every day. I said to her:

'What you should do is this. Empty the refrigerator completely and then fill it with some yogurt. When lunchtime comes you'll give Peter his yogurt. He'll refuse to eat it. In the evening you'll give him it again and the same the next day. In the end he'll get hungry and will try some. He'll throw a tantrum, but you'll just put up with it. Thereafter he'll eat it quite happily.'

That's just what happened and yogurt became Peter's favorite food.

These things aren't difficult, but many mothers are unable to do them and the result is that they give their children a very bad upbringing. Mothers who are always standing over their children and pressurizing them, that is, over-protecting them, have failed in their task. You need to leave the child alone to take an interest in its own progress. Then you will succeed. When you are always standing over them, the children react. They become lethargic and weak-willed and generally are unsuccessful in life. This is a kind of over-protectiveness that leaves the children immature.

A few days ago a mother came here in a state of despair because of her son's repeated failures in the university entrance exams. He had been an excellent pupil in elementary school and all the way through high school. But in the end he failed repeatedly and showed indifference and had strange reactions.

'It's your fault,' I said to the mother, 'educated woman though you are! How else did you expect the boy to react? Pressure, pressure, and pressure all these years, "Make sure you're top of the class, don't let us down, and get yourself an important position in society..." Now he's thrown in the towel; he doesn't want anything. Stop this pressure and over-protection and you'll see that the boy will regain his equilibrium. He'll make progress once you let him be.'

A child needs to be surrounded by people who pray and pray ardently

A child needs to be surrounded by people who pray and pray ardently. A mother should not be satisfied by giving her child a physical caress, but should also coddle it with the caress of prayer. In the depths of its soul the child senses the spiritual caress that its mother conveys to it and is drawn to her. It feels security and certainty when its mother mystically embraces it with constant, intense and fervent prayer and releases it from whatever is oppressing it.

Mothers know how to express anxiety, offer advice and talk incessantly, but they haven't learned to pray. Most advice and criticism does a great deal of harm. You don't need to say a lot to children. Words hammer at the ears, but prayer goes to the heart. Prayer is required, with faith and without anxiety, along with a good example. {to be continued}

REFLECTION – Pathetic Proofs for God... St. Nikolai of Serbia

If someone loses his faith in God, he is recompensed with stupidity. Of all stupidities, it is difficult to say whether there is a greater one than this: that someone who calls himself a Christian and then proceeds to gather pathetic proofs for God and eternal life from other beliefs and philosophies. He who does not find gold among the wealthy; how will he find it among the poor? The revelation of eternal life, of facts, of proofs, of signs, and of actual visions of the spiritual world - all of these not only constitute the foundation of the Christian Faith, but constitute its walls, floors, ornaments, all the furnishings, the roof and the domes of the majestic building of the Christian Faith. A single ray from the spiritual world glistens through every word of the Gospels, not to mention the miraculous events, both in Evangelical and Post-Evangelical times as well as throughout the entire history of the Church for two-thousand years. Christianity has thrown open wide the gates of that world in so great a measure, that it should not be necessary to call it a religion, in order not to confuse it with other faiths and religions. It is a revelation! God's revelation!