



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **November 25, 2012** ✠

Leavetaking of the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

St. Catherine the Great-Martyr of Alexandria (313)

St. Clement, Pope of Rome (101) Hieromartyr Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria (311)

St. Clement of Ochrid, Bulgaria (916)

New Hieromartyr Seraphim, Archbishop of Smolensk (1937)



Advent

This Week:

✠ **Tues. November 27 – 6:30pm ~ New Orthodox Inquirer's Class**

⇒ **Note: Four Tuesdays before Christmas – Introduction to Doctrine, Worship, Spirituality & Church History - Great for our Young People and the Not so Young!**

✠ **Wed. November 28 - 6:30pm ~ Akathist of Thanksgiving**

Seeking

✠ "To every careful thinker there is a gain, saith the proverb; and Christ implied more than this, when He said, 'He that seeketh findeth.' Wherefore it does not occur to me any more to wonder how Philip followed Christ. Andrew (November 30) was persuaded when he had heard from John, and Peter the same from Andrew, but Philip not having learned anything from any but Christ Who said to him only this, 'Follow Me,' straightway obeyed, and went not back, but even became a preacher to others. For he ran to Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write.' Seest thou what a thoughtful mind he had, now assiduously he meditated on the writings of Moses, and expected the Advent? For the expression, 'we have found' belongs always to those who are in some way seeking." **St. John Chrysostom**

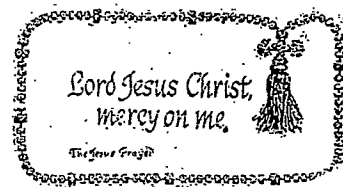
Eat and Drink Christ Every Day

✠ The man who has found love eats and drinks Christ every day and hour and so is made immortal. 'Whoever eats of this bread', He says, 'which I will give him, will never taste death.' Blessed is he who consumes the bread of love, which is Jesus! He who eats of love eats Christ, the God over all, as John bears witness, saying, 'God is love.' **St. Isaac of Syria**

Remember that while you pray God expects from you a positive answer to His question: "Do you believe I can fulfill your prayer?"

You must be able to answer from the bottom of your heart: "Yes! I believe, O God," and then you will be answered according to your faith ... remember that not one word is lost during prayer if you speak from your heart.

St. John of Kronstadt



HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN ALEXIOS of Atlanta

Message on the Beginning of the Nativity Fast

As we begin the season of Advent in preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior, I pray that this will be a time of peace and spiritual renewal for all the Family of the Faithful in our Holy and God-protected Metropolis of Atlanta.

This year, even at Halloween, I noticed Christmas decorations everywhere, as businesses try to attract customers, and there are elaborate office parties to celebrate the season. And the list goes on. However as Christians, we must ask ourselves the questions: Is this really celebrating Christmas?

Really the answer for Orthodox Christians must be, No, because the Fathers have told us that we should prepare ourselves in a spiritual way, with prayer and fasting and almsgiving to truly celebrate our Lord's Nativity, the Feast Day of Christmas.

Sometimes even our generosity and desire to celebrate the season can lead to a focus on materialism and away from the true meaning of the Birth of our Savior. Yet if we take a moment to reflect, we realize that most gifts are soon forgotten, and also that giving is a good thing which should not be confined only to relatives and friends.

For this reason, I am pleased to share with you that our Annunciation Cathedral family has decided to devote more time to prayer during this special season in our liturgical year. So we are going to bring the old tradition of celebrating the Divine Liturgy everyday, in order to fulfill our obligation to pray for ourselves and the people. I offer this idea for your personal edification.

As you see, the Church is at all times offering us the opportunity to prepare ourselves and our minds to a specific event, so that we may be filled with joy as participants and celebrants in the great Feast of the Nativity, the Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This year I encourage you to use the tools that our Church has provided for us: worship, prayer, fasting and charity to help us prepare ourselves to receive our King as He comes to us as a little child.

The Holy Great Martyr Catherine (Nov. 24)

St. Catherine was the daughter of Constus, the governor of Alexandrian Egypt during the reign of the Emperor Maximian (305-313). Living in the capital, the center of Hellenistic knowledge, and possessed of a rare beauty and intellect, Catherine received an excellent education, studying the works of the greatest philosophers and teachers of antiquity. Young men from the most worthy families of the Empire sought the hand of the beautiful Catherine, but she was not interested in any of them. She told her parents that she would enter into marriage only with someone who surpassed her in nobility, wealth, comeliness and wisdom.

Catherine's mother, a secret Christian, sent her to her own spiritual Father, a saintly Elder living in a cave outside the city, for advice. After listening to Catherine, the Elder said that he knew of a Youth who surpassed her in everything. "His countenance is more radiant than the shining of the sun, and all of creation is governed by His wisdom. His riches are given to all the nations of the world, yet they never diminish. His compassion is unequalled."

This description of the Heavenly Bridegroom produced in the soul of the holy maiden an ardent desire to see Him. "If you do as I tell you," said the monk, "you will gaze upon the countenance of this illustrious man." In parting, the Elder handed Catherine an icon of the Theotokos with the divine Child Jesus on Her arm and told her to pray with faith to the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the Heavenly Bridegroom, and She would hear Catherine and grant her heart's desire.

Catherine prayed all night and was permitted to see the Most Holy Virgin, Who said Her Divine Son, "Behold Thy handmaiden Catherine, how fair and virtuous she is." But the Child turned His face away from her saying, "No, she is ugly and unbelieving. She is a foolish pauper, and I cannot bear to look at her until she forsakes her impiety."

Catherine returned again to the Elder deeply saddened, and told him what she had seen in the dream. He lovingly received her, instructed her in the faith of Christ, admonished her to preserve her purity and integrity and to pray unceasingly. She then received the Mystery of

holy Baptism from him. Again St. Catherine had a vision of the Most Holy Theotokos with Her Child. Now the Lord looked tenderly at her and gave her a beautiful ring, a wondrous token of her betrothal to the Heavenly Bridegroom (This ring is still on her hand).

At that time the Emperor Maximian was in Alexandria for a pagan festival. Therefore, the celebration was especially splendid and crowded. The cries of the sacrificial animals, the smoke and the smell of the sacrifices, the endless blazing of fires, and the bustling crowds at the arenas defiled the city of Alexandria. Human victims also were brought, the confessors of Christ, those who would not deny Him under torture. They were condemned to death in the fire. The Saint's love for the Christian martyrs and her fervent desire to ease their sufferings compelled Catherine to speak to the pagan priest and to the Emperor Maximian.

Introducing herself, the Saint confessed her faith in the One True God and with wisdom exposed the errors of the pagans. The beauty of the maiden captivated the Emperor. In order to convince her and to show the superiority of pagan wisdom, the Emperor ordered fifty of the most learned philosophers and rhetoricians of the Empire to dispute with her, but the Saint got the better of the wise men, so that they came to believe in Christ themselves. St. Catherine made the Sign of the Cross over the martyrs, and they bravely accepted death for Christ and were burned alive by order of the Emperor.

Maximian, no longer hoping to convince the Saint, tried to entice her with the promise of riches and fame. Receiving an angry refusal, he gave orders to subject the Saint to terrible tortures and then throw her in prison. The Empress Augusta, who had heard much about the Saint, wanted to see her. She prevailed upon the military commander Porphyrios to accompany her to the prison with a detachment of soldiers. The Empress was impressed by the strong spirit of St. Catherine, whose face was radiant with divine grace. The holy martyr explained the Christian teaching to them, and they were converted to Christ.

On the following day they again brought the martyr to the judgment court where, under the threat of being broken on the wheel, they urged that she renounce the Christian Faith and offer sacrifice to the gods. The Saint steadfastly confessed Christ and she herself approached the wheels; but an angel smashed the instruments of execution, which shattered into pieces with many pagans standing nearby.

Having beheld this wonder, the Empress Augusta and the imperial courtier Porphyrios with 200 soldiers confessed their faith in Christ in front of everyone, and they were beheaded. Maximian again tried to entice the holy Martyr, proposing marriage to her, and again he was refused. St. Catherine firmly confessed her fidelity to the heavenly Bridegroom Christ, and with a prayer to Him, she herself lay her head on the block beneath the executioner's sword.

The relics of St. Catherine were taken by the angels to Mount Sinai. In the sixth century,, the venerable head and left hand of the holy martyr were found through a revelation and transferred with honor to a newly-constructed church of the Sinai monastery, built by the holy Emperor Justinian (November 14).

St. Catherine is called upon for relief and assistance during a difficult childbirth. Pilgrims to her monastery on Mt. Sinai are given souvenir rings as a remembrance of their visit.

✠

Saint Justinian the Emperor and his wife

Saint Theodora: St. Justinian, a major figure in the history of the Byzantine state, was also a great champion of Orthodoxy, a builder of churches and a Church writer. He is said to be of Slavic descent, perhaps born in Bulgaria. During his reign (527-565) Byzantium won glory with military victories in Persia, Africa, Italy, as a result of which paganism was decisively routed among the Germanic Vandals and Visigoth tribes. By command of the Emperor Justinian the pagan schools in Athens were closed. Justinian sent John, the Bishop of Ephesus, throughout the regions of Asia Minor with the aim of spreading Christianity. John baptized more than 70 thousand pagans!

The Emperor gave orders to build ninety churches for the newly-converted, and he generously supported church construction within the Empire. His finest structures of the time are considered to be **St. Catherine's**

Monastery at Sinai, and the Church of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople. Under St. Justinian many churches were built dedicated to our Most Holy Lady Theotokos. Since he had received a broad education, St. Justinian assiduously concerned himself with the education of clergy and monks, ordering them to be instructed in rhetoric, philosophy and theology.

The right-believing sovereign devoted much attention and effort to the struggle with the Origenists of his time, who then were reviving the Nestorian heresy. To counter their heretical speculations, the Church hymn "**Only-Begotten Son and Immortal Word of God, Who for our salvation...**" was composed, and Justinian commanded that it be sung in the churches. From that time to the present day, this hymn is sung at the Divine Liturgy before the Small Entrance after the second Antiphon.

At the command of the sovereign, the Fifth Ecumenical Council was convened in the year 553, censuring the teachings of Origen and affirming the definitions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon. He also attempted to secure religious unity within the Empire through his (unsuccessful) dialogues with the non-Chalcedonians.

The holy Emperor Justinian wished to have orderly rule and law within the realm. Under his guidance and supervision a complete compendium of Roman law was compiled. It has come down to us as a law codex known as "the Justinian Codex." The "Church laws" of Justinian are included in all the variants of the Russian collections of Canon Law.

In his personal life, St. Justinian was strictly pious, and he fasted often. During Great Lent he would not eat bread nor drink wine. He is also remembered for promoting the idea of "symphony" between Church and State. The holy Emperor Justinian died in the year 565.

The Empress Theodora, who died in the year 548, was also numbered among the Saints with her husband. She was at first a notorious harlot and actress, and an adherent of the Monophysite heresy, but then she repented. After becoming Empress, she led a virtuous life, maintaining purity of both soul and body. She provided wise counsel for her husband during his reign, and she also saved his throne during the Nika riots of 532 by her political intelligence and expertise. ✠

The Rod of Jesse

"This sacred Feast that we are keeping is the first to commemorate our recall and re-creation according to grace, for on it all things began to be made new, enduring precepts began to be brought in instead of temporary ones, the spirit instead of the letter, the truth instead of shadows. Today a new world and a mysterious paradise have been revealed, in which and from which a New Adam came into being, re-making the Old Adam and renewing the universe. He is not led astray by the deceiver, but deceives him, and bestows freedom on those enslaved to sin through his treachery.

Today a paradoxical book has been made ready on earth, which in an indescribable way can hold, not the imprint of words, but the living Word Himself; not a word consisting of air, but the heavenly Word; not a word that perishes as soon as it is formed, but the Word Who snatches those who draw near Him from perdition; not a word made by the movement of a man's tongue, but the Word begotten of God the Father before all ages.

Today the living Tabernacle of God not made with hands appears, the inspired human Ark of the true Bread of Life sent down from Heaven for us (cf. Jn. 6:32 ff.). Today, according to the Psalms 'Truth has sprung up from the earth,' the true image of human nobility which comes from above, 'and righteousness has looked down from heaven' (Ps. 85:11 LXX). This righteousness has deposed the unrighteous ruler from his just dominion, after being wrongfully condemned by him and rightly condemning him, and having bound the strong and evil one, plundering his goods (cf. Mt. 12:29), and transformed them, rendering them receptive to divine righteousness.

Thus Christ took sin's prisoners to live with Him forever, justifying them by faith in Him, but He bound the Prince of Sin with inescapable bonds, and delivered him to eternal fire without light. Today, as prophesied, out of the 'Stem of Jesse' a Rod has come forth (cf. Isa. 11:1), from which a flower has grown which knows no wilting. This Rod recalls our human nature, which had withered and fallen away from the unfading garden of delight, makes it bloom again, grants it to flourish forever, brings it up to Heaven, and leads it to Paradise. With this Rod the great Shepherd moves His human flock to eternal pastures, and supported by this Rod, our nature lays aside its old age and feeble senility, and easily strides towards Heaven, leaving the earth below for those who, devoid of support, are plunging downwards."

~ St. Gregory Palamas (*Homily on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin from The Homilies Vol. 2; St. Tikhon's Seminary Press pgs. 236-237*)

On Temptations

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.—

The Apostle James 1:12-18

That He Might Give us Life

✠ Our Savior was crucified for our sakes that by His death He might give us life and train and attract us all to endurance. To Him I press on, and to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. I strive to be found true, judging myself unworthy of this world's goods; and yet not I because of the world, but the world because of me. Think of all these things in your heart; follow them with zeal; fight, as you have been commanded, for the truth to the death: For Christ was made 'obedient' even 'to death' (Phil. 2:8).

St. Basil the Great

Poverty Nonsense

by Walter E. Williams, *October 18, 2012*



Here's a recent statement frequently suggested by leftist academics, think tank researchers and policymakers: "People were not just struggling because of their personal deficiencies. There were structural factors at play.

People weren't poor because they made bad decisions. They were poor because our society creates poverty." Who made that statement and where it was made is not important at all, but its corrosive effects on the minds of black people, particularly black youths, are devastating.

There's nothing intellectually challenging or unusual about poverty. For most of mankind's existence, his most optimistic scenario was to be able to eke out enough to subsist for another day. Poverty has been mankind's standard fare and remains so for most of mankind. What is unusual and challenging to explain is affluence – namely, how a tiny percentage of people, mostly in the West, for only a tiny part of mankind's existence, managed to escape the fate that befell their fellow men.

To say that "our society creates poverty" is breathtakingly ignorant. In 1776, the U.S. was among the world's poorest nations. In less than two centuries, we became the world's richest nation by a long shot. Americans who today are deemed poor by Census Bureau definitions have more material goods than middle-class people as recently as 60 years ago. Dr. Robert Rector and Rachel Sheffield give us insights in "[Understanding Poverty in the United States: Surprising Facts About America's Poor](#)" (9/13/2011). Eighty percent of poor households have air conditioning. Nearly three-fourths have a car or truck, and 31 percent have two or more. Two-thirds have cable or satellite TV. Half have one or more computers. Forty-two percent own their homes. The average poor American has more living space than the typical non-poor person in Sweden, France or the U.K. Ninety-six percent of poor parents stated that their children

were never hungry during the year because they couldn't afford food. How do these facts square with the statement that "our society creates poverty"? To the contrary, our society has done the best with poverty.

Maybe the professor who made the statements about poverty – who, by the way, is black – was thinking that it's black people who have been made poor by society. One cannot avoid the fact that average black income today is many multiples of what it was at emancipation, in 1900, in 1940 and in 1960, even though average black income is only 65 percent of white income. There is no comparison between black standard of living today and that in earlier periods. Again, the statement that "our society creates poverty" is just plain nonsense.

What about the assertion that "people weren't poor because they made bad decisions"?

The poverty rate among blacks is 36 percent. Most black poverty is found in female-headed households, but the poverty rate among black married couples has been in single digits since 1994 and stands today at 7 percent. Today's black illegitimacy rate is 72 percent, but in the 1940s, it hovered around 14 percent. Less than 50 percent of black students graduate from high school, and most of those who do graduate have a level of academic proficiency far below that of their white counterparts. Black men make up almost 40 percent of the prison population.

Here are my several two-part questions: Is having babies without the benefit of marriage a bad decision, and is doing so likely to affect income? Are dropping out of school and participating in criminal activity bad decisions, and are they likely to have an effect on income? Finally, do people have free will and the capacity to make decisions, or is their behavior a result of instincts over which they have no control? As a black person, I'm glad that the message taught to so many of today's black youths wasn't taught back in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, when the civil rights struggle was getting into gear. The admonishment that I frequently heard from black adults was, "Be a credit to your race."

On Love ~ Saint Silouan of Mt. Athos (+1938)

The soul cannot know peace unless she prays for her enemies. The soul that has learned of God's grace to pray, feels love and compassion for every created thing, and in particular for mankind, for whom the Lord suffered on the Cross, and His soul was heavy for every one of us. The Lord taught me to love my enemies. Without the grace of God we cannot love our enemies. Only the Holy Spirit teaches love, and then even devils arouse our pity because they have fallen from good, and lost humility in God.

I beseech you, put this to the test. When a man affronts you or brings dishonor on your head, or takes what is yours, or persecutes the Church, pray to the Lord, saying: "O Lord, we are all Thy creatures. Have pity on Thy servants and turn their hearts to repentance," and you will be aware of grace in your soul. To begin with, constrain your heart to love enemies, and the Lord, seeing your good will, will help you in all things, and experience itself will show you the way. But the man who thinks with malice of his enemies has not God's love within him, and does not know God.

If you will pray for your enemies, peace will come to you; but when you can love your enemies - know that a great measure of the grace of God dwells in you, though I do not say perfect grace as yet, but sufficient for salvation. Whereas if you revile your enemies, it means there is an evil spirit living in you and bringing evil thoughts into your heart, for, in the words of the Lord, out of the heart proceed evil thoughts - or good thoughts.

The good man thinks to himself in this wise: Every one who has strayed from the truth brings destruction on himself and is therefore to be pitied. But of course the man who has not learned the love of the Holy Spirit will not pray for his enemies. The man who has learned love from the Holy Spirit sorrows all his life over those who are not saved, and sheds abundant tears for the people, and the grace of God gives him strength to love his enemies.

Understand me. It is so simple. People who do not know God, or who go against Him, are to be pitied; the heart sorrows for them and the eye weeps. Both paradise and torment are clearly visible to us: We know this through the Holy Spirit. And did not the Lord Himself say, "The kingdom of God is within you"? Thus eternal life has its beginning here in this life; and it is here that we sow the seeds of eternal torment.

Where there is pride there cannot be grace, and if we lose grace we also lose both love of God and assurance in prayer. The soul is then tormented by evil thoughts and does not understand that she must humble herself and love her enemies, for there is no other way to please God.

What shall I render unto Thee, O Lord, for that Thou hast poured such great mercy on my soul? Grant, I beg Thee, that I may see my iniquities, and ever weep before Thee, for Thou art filled with love for humble souls, and dost give them the grace of the Holy Spirit.

O merciful God, forgive me. Thou seest how my soul is drawn to Thee, her Creator. Thou hast wounded my soul with Thy love, and she thirsts for Thee, and wearies without end, and day and night, insatiable, reaches toward Thee, and has no wish to look upon this world, though I do love it, but above all I love Thee, my Creator, and my soul longs after Thee.

O my Creator, why have I, Thy little creature, grieved Thee so often? Yet Thou hast not remembered my sins.

Glory be to the Lord God that He gave us His Only-begotten Son for the sake of our salvation! Glory be to the Only-begotten Son that He deigned to be born of the Most Holy Virgin, and suffered for our salvation, and gave us His Most Pure Body and Blood to eternal life, and sent His Holy Spirit on the earth!

O Lord, grant me tears to shed for myself, and for the whole universe, that the nations may know Thee and live eternally with Thee, O Lord, vouchsafe us the gift of Thy humble Holy Spirit, that we may apprehend Thy glory.

Prayer List:

Kassiane (spot of cancer)
John (Wells - cancer)
Peter (young man – colitis)
Lydia, Paul Constantine
John & Anna (Jones), Child Ezra, Ch. Madeleine & Chloe
Thomas (Reese)
Kaitlin (troubled)
Sophia
Minka, Katia
Michael (cancer), Heather (Hodgkins)
Greg (leukemia)
Andrea, Dean (troubled)
Rdr. Christopher, Helen, Stephen
Andrew (cancer survivor)
Melanie (Watson)

Expecting:

Anna with child (twins – high risk)
Mary with child
Macrina with child
Tatiana with child
Lindsay with child

Continued Prayer: Sophia, Larisa, James (Hicks), Rdr Christopher, Helen, Jerry, Anna, Ignatius, Mariana, Irena, Xenia, Anastasia, Alexis, John (cancer), Michael (Lazarescu), Larry (Russo), Hugh, Byron, Elias, Demosthenes, Adam, Andrew, Andrew, Lorraine, Reader Symeon, Theodora, Mary, Loes, Vissarion, Grace, Joseph, Theodore & Faith (Kulik)

Clergy: Metropolitan Jonah, Archbishop Nikon, Archimandrite Ignatios, Priest Ignatius, Priest Benedict, Priest Ernesto, Priest Stephen (in Phila.), Deacon Ephraim, Hierodeacon Michael, Subdeacon Innocent

Departed:

Newly Departed Patriarch Maxim of Bulgaria
Newly Departed Ronny
Newly Departed Asma
Newly Departed Teresa

Elderly: Columba, Sophia, Lucia-Maria, Elena, Emmanuel, Daria, James, Olga, Thomas, Susan, Georgene, James, Anna, Dorothea, Martha, Vera, Curtis, Raymond, Julian, Florence, Virginia, Mildred, James, Elsie, Lyda, Hugh, Janet, Jerry, Thelma, Lou, Michael, Alvon

Soldiers: Jack, Michael, Matthew

