

ST. GREGORY  
PALAMAS



## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ November 10, 2013 ✠

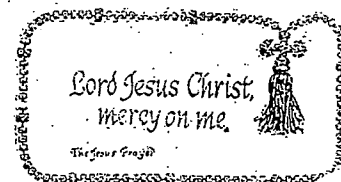
Apostles of the 70: Erastes, Olympas, Herodion,

Sosipater, Quartus & Tertius (1<sup>st</sup> C)

Martyr Orestes the Physician at Cappadocia (304)

Martyr Constantine, Prince of Georgia (842)

As for me, I will call upon God  
and the Lord shall save me.  
Evening, and morning, and  
at noon, will I pray, and cry  
aloud: and he shall hear my  
voice. ~ Psalm 55



✠ *Many Years!* Newly Illumined Nicholas Desko and Xenia Preston!

✠ **The Advent Season begins Friday, November 15**

### *The Devil Will Do Anything to Prevent us from Benefiting*

- Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos

*"We should not be the source of distraction to others during the sacred time of worship..."*

The devil is quite the craftsman. For example, if he brings a miserable thought to a spiritual person during the Divine Liturgy, that person will recognize the deception and reject the thought. So the devil will suggest a spiritual thought. "That particular book has a lot of information about the Divine Liturgy." If that won't work, the devil will distract the man by making him look at the chandelier, let's say. And, absent-mindedly, the man will start wondering who might have made the chandelier. Or he might remind him of some sick person that he has to go and visit. "Oh, an inspiration during the Divine Liturgy!" he thinks, when all along it is the devil who intervenes, causing the man to dwell on his thoughts. Then all of a sudden, he hears the priest saying, "With the fear of God, with faith and with love draw near," and realizes the Divine Liturgy is almost over, and he did not really participate in it at all.

This happens even right here, in the (monastery) Church: the appointed nun goes to light the candles on the large central chandelier (the Polyeleos), and I have seen how even adults are distracted when they turn to see how the nun lights the candles. This is such a childish thing. Only very young children get excited about such things and say, "Look! She lit the candles!" This is understandable for young children, but for adults what can you say? Or, when we are supposed to avoid moving about the Church during the Divine Liturgy, temptation can move a nun during this sacred time to turn the pages of a book on the lectern and start distracting others with the motion and the sound. So, they hear the rustling sound and their mind starts to wander. And yet that is how the mind is distracted from God, and the devil rejoices. For this reason, we should not be the source of distraction to others during the sacred time of worship. We harm people without realizing it. Or you may notice how during a particular reading, when the Reader is about to read an important line in the text, one which could benefit the people, a door will bang in the wind or someone will cough, distracting the congregation's attention and depriving them of the spiritual benefit of the sacred text. This is how the devil does his work.

*O, if you could only see how the devil moves about to do his work! You have not seen him, and this is why you do not understand certain things! He'll do anything to prevent man from benefiting. I have observed this at my Kalyvi when I have had conversations with visitors. Just as I reach a crucial point, precisely when I am about to say something important to help my listeners, there will be noise, or someone will arrive and interrupt. The devil will have previously diverted their attention upon the Skete from afar, or have them look at something that will motivate them to arrive at that moment...*

## Two Fears

**We as, Orthodox Christians, are forever faced with two-fears: a secular fear and a spiritual fear.** Let us look at the secular fear - a fear that in probability surrounds us everyday of our lives.: A fear of death, a fear of living, a fear of the unknown, therefore hindering our joy in life, especially with the current events and negativity that we are "bombarded," with each and everyday. We live in fear of tomorrow. For this reason, we as Christians must understand its true meaning and how it contradicts our faith and our belief.

There is a beautiful passage in the New Testament that reads, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love," (1John 4:18).

My beloved brethren, I ask that you read this very meaningful passage again slowly. Read it in parts so that you not only ingest but digest its powerful meaning. The passage clearly explains that first fear, the secular fear, is not Christian. As Father Alexander Schememann, of Blessed Memory once said, "That human life is permeated through and through with fear, fear of the unknown, fear of unhappiness, fear of suffering, fear of dying, fear of death. Life is full of fear, death is full of fear, and its liberation from this fear that man so desperately desires."

The answer is in that passage of 1 John 4:18. "Perfect love casts out fear" and we as Christians know what that "Perfect Love" is. It is Jesus Christ. If I have Jesus' love, that perfect love, within me, I therefore know NO FEAR. It is destroyed. It is obliterated, and my trust in God has strengthened as well as strengthening my soul.

Thus, for a believer, for the true Christian, this ~~NEGATIVE~~ fear is sinful.

Now comes the second fear, or better yet, the "Positive Fear." In Proverbs 9:10 it reads, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." This "fear" my friends, is not a fear in its true meaning. In the Divine Liturgy, the Priest proclaims at the time of Holy Communion, "With fear, faith, hope, and love draw near." Again, this is not a negative fear, but a positive one. A fear within us that is not made up of unhappiness, but of happiness and a joy that we are approaching our God with reverence, love, peace and humility. It is a fear of God's awesomeness. His Greatness, His ever-presence. It is a positive fear of God that destroys all the negativity and fear of this secular world.

In spite of the crisis and hardships that we daily face, continue to ask for God's Mercy and Love. Keep in mind Lamentations 3:22, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercy never comes to an end".

Fr. Angelo Pappas, Myrtle Beach, SC

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✠Therefore, whatever has been sown by the fidelity of the Fathers in this husbandry of God's Church, the same ought to be cultivated and taken care of by the industry of their children, the same ought to flourish and the same ought to advance and go forward to perfection. For it is right that those ancient doctrines of heavenly philosophy should, as time goes on, be cared for, smoothed, polished; but not that they should be changed, not that they should be maimed, not that they should be mutilated. They may receive proof, illustration, definiteness; but they must retain withal their completeness, their integrity, their characteristic properties.

~ St. Vincent of Lerins

## **November 13:**

### **St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople**

Saint John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, one of the Three Holy Hierarchs [January 30], was born at Antioch in about the year 347 into the family of a military-commander. His father, Secundus, died soon after the birth of his son. His mother, Anthusa, widowed at twenty years of age, did not seek to remarry but rather devoted all her efforts to the raising of her son in Christian piety. The youth studied under the finest philosophers and rhetoricians. But, scorning the vain disciplines of pagan knowledge, the future hierarch turned himself to the profound study of Holy Scripture and prayerful contemplation. St. Meletius, Bishop of Antioch (February 12), loved John like a son, guided him in the Faith, and in the year 367 baptized him.

After three years John was made a Church Reader. Later on, when St. Meletius had been sent off into exile by the Emperor Valens in the year 372, John and Theodore (afterwards Bishop of Mopsuestia) studied under the experienced instructors of ascetic life, the presbyters Flavian and Diodorus of Tarsus. The highly refined Diodorus had particular influence upon the youth. When John's mother died, he accepted monasticism, which he called the "true philosophy." Soon John and his friend Basil were being considered as candidates for the episcopal office, and the friends decided to withdraw into the wilderness to avoid this. But St. John, while evading the episcopal rank out of humility, secretly assisted in Basil's consecration.

During this period St. John wrote his "Six Discourses on the Priesthood", a great work of Orthodox pastoral theology. The Saint spent four years in the toils of wilderness life, living the ascetic life under the guidance of an experienced spiritual

guide. And here he wrote three books entitled, "Against the Opponents of Those Attracted to the Monastic Life", and a collection entitled, "A Comparison of the Monk with the Emperor" (also known as "Comparison of Imperial Power, Wealth and Eminence, with the True and Christian Wisdom-Loving Monastic Life"), both works which are marked by a profound reflection of the worthiness of the monastic vocation.

For two years, the Saint lived in a solitary cave in complete silence. But the Saint was obliged to return to Antioch to recover his health. In the year 381 St. Meletius, the Bishop of Antioch, ordained him deacon. The years following were devoted to work on new theological writings: "Concerning Providence" ("To the Ascetic Stagirios"), "Book Concerning Virginity," "To a Young Widow" (2 discourses), and the "Book of St. Babylos and Against Julian and the Pagans."

In the year 386, St. John was ordained presbyter by Bishop Flavian of Antioch. St. John was a splendid preacher, and for his rare talent with God-inspired words he received from his flock the title, the "Golden-Mouthed" ("Chrysostom"). For twelve years the Saint preached in church, usually twice a week, but sometimes daily, deeply stirring the hearts of his listeners.

In his pastoral zeal to provide Christians with a better understanding of Holy Scripture, St. John employed hermeneutics, an interpretation and analysis of the Word of God (i.e. exegesis"). Among his exegetical works are commentaries on entire books of the Holy Scripture (Genesis, the Psalter, the Gospels of Matthew and John, the Epistles of the Apostle Paul), and also many

homilies on individual texts of the Holy Bible, but also instructions on the Feastdays, laudations on the Saints, and also apologetic (i.e. defensive) homilies (against Anomoeans, Judaizers and pagans). St. John as presbyter zealously fulfilled the command of caring for the needy. Under St. John, the Antiochian Church provided sustenance each day to as many as 3,000 virgins and widows, not including in this number the shut-ins, wanderers and the sick.

At the beginning of Great Lent in 388, the Saint began his commentary on the Book of Genesis. Over the forty-day period he preached 32 homilies. During Passion Week, he spoke about the Betrayal and about the Cross, and during the Paschal Bright Week his parishioners were daily instructed by his pastoral discourse. His exegesis on the Book of Genesis was concluded only at the end of October (388). At Pascha in the following year the Saint began his examination of the Gospel of John, and towards the end of the year 389 he took up the Gospel of Matthew. In the year 391 the Antioch Christians listened to his commentary on the Epistles of the holy Apostle Paul to the Romans and to the Corinthians. In 393 he addressed the Epistles to the Galatians, the Ephesians, Timothy, Titus and the Psalms. In his homily on the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. John denounced a schism in Antioch, "I tell you and I witness before you, that to tear asunder the Church means nothing less than to fall into heresy. The Church is the house of the Heavenly Father, One Body and One Spirit."

The fame of the holy preacher grew, and in the year 397 with the death of Archbishop Nectarios of Constantinople, successor to St. Gregory the Theologian, St. John Chrysostom was summoned from Antioch, and elected to the Constantinople throne. At the capital, the holy archpastor was not able to preach as often as he had at Antioch. Many matters awaited the

Saint's attention, and he began with the most important -- with the spiritual perfection of the priesthood. He himself was the best example of this. The financial means apportioned for the Archbishop were channeled by the Saint into the upkeep of several hospices for the sick and two hostels for pilgrims. The Archpastor fasted strictly and ate very little food, and he refused invitations to meals because of his delicate stomach.

The Saint's zeal in spreading the Christian Faith extended not only to the inhabitants of Constantinople, but also to Thrace to include Slavs and Goths, and to Asia Minor and the Pontine region. He established a bishop for the Bosphorus Church in the Crimea. St. John sent off zealous missionaries to Phoenicia, to Persia, and to the Scythians, to convert pagans to Christ. He also wrote letters to Syria to bring back the Marcionites into the Church, and he accomplished this. Preserving the unity of the Church, the Saint would not permit a powerful Gothic military commander, who wanted the Emperor to reward his bravery in battle, to open an Arian church at Constantinople. The Saint exerted much effort in enhancing the splendor of the Church services: the Church's principal Liturgy is credited with his name, he introduced antiphonal singing for the All-night Vigil, and he wrote several prayers for the Rite of Anointing of the sick with oil.

The Saintly hierarch denounced the dissolute morals of people in the capital, especially at the imperial court, irrespective of person. When the Empress Eudoxia connived to confiscate the last properties of the widow and children of a disgraced dignitary, the Saint rose to their defense. The arrogant empress did not concede and nursed a grudge against the archpastor. The hatred of Eudoxia against the Saint blazed forth anew when malefactors told her that apparently the

Saint had her particularly in mind in his sermon on women of vanity. A court was convened composed of hierarchs, who earlier had been justly condemned by Chrysostom: Theophilus of Alexandria, Bishop Severian of Gabala, who shortly before had been banished from the capital because of improprieties, and others.

This court of judgement declared St. John deposed, and that he be executed for his insult to the Empress. The Emperor decided on exile instead of execution. An angry crowd surged at the church, resolved to defend their pastor. The Saint, in order to avoid a riot, gave himself into the hands of the authorities. That very night at Constantinople there was an earthquake. The terrified Eudoxia urgently requested the Emperor to bring the Saint back, and promptly sent a letter to the banished pastor, beseeching him to return. Once more, in the capital church, the Saint praised the Lord in a short talk, "For All His Ways".

The slanderers fled to Alexandria. But after only two months a new denunciation provoked the wrath of Eudoxia. In March of the year 404 an unjust council gathered, decreeing the exile of St. John. Upon his removal from the capital, a fire reduced the temple of Hagia Sophia to ashes and also the Senate building. Devastating barbarian incursions soon followed, and in October 404 Eudoxia died. Even pagans saw in these events heavenly chastisement for the unjust judgement against the Saint of God.

## **Seek Ye First the Kingdom**

✠ If we seek the things that are perfect, the secondary things will follow. The Lord says, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." What sort of person do you think the children of such parents will be? What kind of person are all the others who associate with them? Will they not be the recipient of countless blessings as well? For generally the children acquire the character of their parents, are formed in the mold of their parent's temperament, love the same things their parents love, talk in the same fashion, and work for the same ends. If we order our lives in this way and diligently study the Scriptures, we will find lessons to guide us in everything we need!

**St. John Chrysostom**

In Armenia, the Saint strove all the more to encourage his spiritual children. In numerous letters (245 are preserved) to bishops in Asia, Africa, Europe and particularly to his friends in Constantinople, including the deaconess, St. Olympiada, St. John consoled the suffering, guiding and giving support to his followers. In the winter of 406, St. John was confined to his bed with sickness, but his enemies were not to be appeased. From the capital came orders to transfer St. John to desolate Pitius in Abkhazia. Worn out by sickness, under military escort for three months in the rain and frost, the Saint made his final journey. At Comana, his powers failed him.

At the crypt of St. Basiliscus of Comana (May 22), comforted by a vision of the Martyr ("Despair not, brother John! Tomorrow we shall be together"), and having received the Holy Mysteries, the hierarch fell asleep in the Lord on September 14, 407 with the words, "Glory to God for all things!" The holy relics of St. John Chrysostom were solemnly transferred to Constantinople in the year 438. The disciple of St. John, the venerable Isidore of Pelusium (February 4), wrote: "The house of David is grown strong, and the house of Saul enfeebled. He is victor over the storms of life, and is entered into Heavenly repose."

**The memory of St. John Chrysostom is also celebrated on January 27 (Relics) and January 30 (Feast of the Three Holy Hierarchs).**

## Wisdom from the Life of St. Paisius Velichkovsky (+1794)

St. Paisius Velichkovsky, searching for a monastery to live in, went to Kiev where he happened to meet his sister-in-law, the widow of his older brother Archpriest John. She informed him of his mother's sorrow when he left Kiev, and her mind seemed to be affected by her grief. Then one day an angel appeared to her and told her that instead of loving the Creator with her whole heart and soul, she loved His creation (her son) more. Because of this excessive love, the angel went on, she was thinking of starving herself to death, which would result in her eternal condemnation. The angel said that by God's grace, her son would become a monk, and that she should also renounce the world and become a nun. After this, she became calm and accepted God's will. She entered a convent and was tonsured with the name Juliana. After about ten years, she departed to the Lord.

While at Kiev, St. Paisius (named Platon before his tonsure) met two monks from Romania who were about to return to their country. After crossing the border into Moldavia, they came to the Skete of St Nicholas, which is called Treisteny, around 1745. The Elder of the Skete, Hieroschemamonk Michael, was away on business in Ukraine, so Platon and his companions were welcomed by the Superior, Fr Demetrius. Platon was placed under a general obedience and given a cell near the Skete, from which the church was visible.

As he was sleeping one night, the semantron (a wooden board hit with a hammer) was sounded calling the monks to Sunday Matins, but Platon did not hear it. He woke up and ran to the church, only to find that the Gospel had already been read, and the Canon was being sung. In his grief and shame, he did not enter the church, but returned to his cell and wept bitter tears. After the Liturgy, when it was time for the meal, the Superior and the Elder were surprised that Platon had not been seen at the services. The Elder ordered that the meal be delayed while he sent a Fr Athanasius to find out what had happened to Platon. Fr Athanasius found him and asked why he was weeping. With difficulty, Platon was able to tell him the cause of his sorrow. Fr Athanasius tried to console him and urged him to come to the Skete, where the others were waiting for him. Finally, he was persuaded to go.

Seeing the brethren at table but not eating, Platon fell down before them weeping and asking forgiveness. The Elder and the Superior lifted him up and heard from Fr Athanasius the reason for his sorrow. The Elder told Platon not to grieve so over something that had happened involuntarily, and did his best to console him. From that time, however, the Saint would not sleep lying down in bed, but sitting up on a bench.

### **Humility and Grace ~ Elder Paisios of the Holy Mt. (+1994)**

✠ God wants and desires only one thing from us: our humbleness. He does not need anything else; just to humble ourselves, so He can make us partakers of His divine grace, which was granted to us through the mystery of holy Baptism. Although we did not love Him yet, neither had we struggled to acquire His grace, He gave it to us as a gift out of His extreme kindness. He is only asking from us to humble ourselves and respond out of gratefulness and appreciation to His love. Thus, divine grace, which abides in us, will be activated and function accordingly. It will make us love God and get to know Him; it will do everything for us, if only we humble ourselves and allow for it to act. The only obstacle to the energy of God's grace is our pride, our lack of humility.

## THE CAUSE IS PRIDE AND WEAK FAITH

To your question. What cause does the demon find and he has rights over your soul, since you sincerely repented? The cause is pride and weak faith. The holiest and most righteous man in his time Job, when God deprived him of his children, his belongings, his health, did not murmur, but glorified God.. and you the sinner complain that, since you repented and sincerely confessed, the demon has rights upon your soul? And you won't be convinced in the counsels of the prudent and wise who tell you that God allows you to be bothered, to suffer, for reasons of chastisement and benefit of soul, but you categorically deny their counsels and don't accept them, for this reason you see a great obstacle in your spiritual journey.

The Apostle Paul did not boast that he healed the sick, raised the paralytics, resurrected the dead, chased out demons from people, but he boasted in his many illnesses. All the saints in this temporal life had afflictions, distresses, illnesses, persecutions, troubles, but they did not complain, because they hoped and believed, that with these temporal afflictions they would gain eternal life, the kingdom of the heavens.

So henceforth rejoice in afflictions. Prefer the narrow and grievous path which leads to the kingdom of the heavens, and do not want the wide and spacious one, which leads to perdition. Have patience, faith, courage, love and hope. He who forbears until the end shall be saved, and "*in your patience you shall gain your soul*"...

## THE SIGN OF THE CROSS A SIGN OF PAPIST ANGER?

*The revealing article that follows is from a Roman Catholic periodical, The Pilgrim (Jan.-Feb., 1998, Brooklyn, Missouri).*

Not too long ago someone asked me why I make the sign of the Cross from the right to the left. It was pointed out to me that, in the West, it is from the left to the right. I pointed out to this person that in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, the Sign of the Cross was always from the right to the left: "I will go to the right," "Thine own right hand can save thee," "Thy right hand is full of righteousness," and "Thy right hand hath upheld me." These are but a few references to the right hand as the hand of honor. I am sure that we can all think and quote many more references well known from Scripture. Also, it was the Good thief, who confessed Christ and was crucified with Him on His right side. It is interesting that when the Church was undivided, both East and West shared many things in common; one of them was the Sign of the Cross.

I just recently came across the following information. According to the New Catholic Encyclopedia, "In the thirteenth century we find Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) directing that the sign is to be made with three fingers from the forehead to the breast and from the right to the left shoulder. Later the whole hand with fingers extended was used, and the direction changed from the left to the right." On page 250 of the book *The Mass and Vestments of the Catholic Church: Liturgy, Doctrine, History and Archeology*, by the Rt. Rev. Monsignor John Walsh, published by Benziger Brothers in New York in 1916 [a renowned Roman Catholic publishing house], the "Nihil Obstat" and "Imprimatur" are included, and it says: "The Sign of the Cross. This is made always with the right hand on the forehead, breast, left and right shoulder, with the following distribution of the formula: "In the name of the Father" on the forehead; "and of the Son" on the breast; "and of the Holy Spirit, Amen," as the hand passes from the left to the right shoulder. Until the sixteenth century and Pope Pius V [1566-1572], the custom was to carry the hand from the right to the left shoulder, which still continues in the Greek Church [emphasis added by the Roman Catholic editor]. The Pope, bishops, and members of the Carthusian and Dominican Orders follow the primitive arrangement of the fingers in signing the Cross by closing the little and ring fingers of the right hand, and extending the other three. The three extended fingers symbolize the Blessed Trinity and the

two folded ones the twofold nature of Christ" (both God and Man). When one reads the reason for Pope Pius V's decision, we find that the reason was that he was angry with the Eastern Church, and made this decision on the basis of anger and for the purpose of increasing the division of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church [emphasis added].

After reading this information I began to think that, by making this simple Sign of the Cross, I am making a profession of faith as did the early Christians and Martyrs...and the many other Saints who made the Sign of the Cross in the same way, and that while I cannot equal their sanctity or life, I do share with them this symbol of faith of the undivided One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, unchanged until the sixteenth century.

**Note of the Orthodox Christian Witness:** To us, it is also a sign that these good people should abandon all the other practices and doctrines in which the Papacy has, literally, misdirected them for over a millennium. Also, thanks be to God, Christ has not proved to be a false prophet. The gates of Hell have not prevailed against His Church. It is still the undivided One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

## PEARLS OF THE HOLY FATHERS

You must unflinchingly approach according to this instruction, namely: approaching the holy altar, picture to yourself that in actuality you have become worthy to be at the Last Supper together with Christ and the holy Apostles.

▪ ***Elder Nazarius***

An old man one day received the grace of being able to see what passed, and he said, "I have seen a brother meditating in his cell and the demons standing outside the cell. While the brother was meditating they were not able to enter, but when he stopped meditating, then the demons entered the cell and strove with him."

▪ ***Apophthegmata Patrum***

We should consider, dearly beloved brethren — we should ever and anon reflect that we have renounced the world, and are in the meantime living here as guests and strangers. Let us greet the day which assigns each of us to his own home, which snatches us hence, and sets us free from the snares of the world, and restores us to paradise and the Kingdom. Who that has been placed in foreign lands would not hasten to return to his own country? Who that is hastening to return to his friends would not eagerly desire a prosperous gale, that he might the sooner embrace those dear to him?

▪ ***St. Cyprian of Carthage***

The only way that a man who wishes to be wise in the eyes of God can do so is to become a fool for the world and a despiser of human glory.

▪ ***St. Isaac the Syrian***