



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **November 24, 2013** ✠

The Advent Season

Postfeast of the Entrance

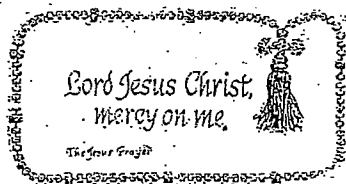
of the Theotokos into the Temple

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

Great-Martyr Mercurios of Caesarea in Cappadocia (259)

Martyr Mercurius of Smolensk (1238)

A Blessed and Joyous Thanksgiving to all!



- ⇒ **Note: No Vespers this Saturday, November 30. Matins and Divine Liturgy – Dec. 1**
- ⇒ **Many Years! To all our Catherines! ~ Our most popular Saint's name at St. Symeon's.**

✠ **Memory Eternal! ~ James Mondragon + November 14, 2013 Funeral - November 19, 2013**
Mrs. Olga Mondragon wishes to thank everyone for all your kindnesses, prayer and support during James' illness, and with the funeral arrangements, including a special thanks to all who helped with the funeral meal. The Mondragon family noted the tremendous support of Olga's Church family and express their gratitude as well.
May God beatify and give him rest...and comfort Olga and the family!

- ✠ **Next Feastdays – St. Nicholas – December 5 and 6 (10:00am Liturgy on December 6)**
St. Herman of Alaska – Vespers only: December 12

A Thanksgiving Thought

✠ When mind and heart are united in prayer and the soul is wholly concentrated in a single desire for God, then the heart grows warm and the light of Christ begins to shine and fills the inward man with peace and joy. **We should thank the Lord for everything and give ourselves up to His will;** we should also offer Him all our thoughts and words, and strive to make everything serve only His good pleasure.

St. Seraphim of Sarov

A Teacher to Others

✠ "Some people say: 'I want others to know Christ as I know Christ.' And so they act like a teacher to others. But to do this, their life has to be in accordance with what they are teaching. When the lives they lead teach a different Christ, and do not correspond with what they say, they cannot claim to have known Christ. And if one does not have inner practical experiences, he will be outside the realm of reality; and sooner or later, he will be betrayed by his own self." - Elder Paisios

✠ **"I am in God, with God, before God, under God. He is my life. My soul is in God, as a fish in water or a bird in the air, surrounded by Him upon all sides at every time; it lives in Him, it moves in Him, it rests in Him and finds freedom in Him."**

~ St. John of Kronstadt

This and That

"Slaughter in Syria: 45 Christians Killed by Islamists in Sadad and Thrown into Mass Graves," CatholicOnline reported on November 5.

The initial detailed report, accompanied by graphic images, came out of Syria on October 31. "What happened in Sadad is the most serious and biggest massacre of Christians in Syria in the past two years and a half," Archbishop Selwanos Boutros Alnemeh, Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Homs and Hama, told Fides on November 1:

"Forty-five innocent civilians were martyred for no reason, and among them several women and children, many thrown into mass graves. Other civilians were threatened and terrorized: thirty were wounded and ten are still missing. For one week, 1,500 families were held as hostages and human shields, among them children, the elderly, the young, men and women... All the houses of Sadad were robbed and property looted. The churches are damaged and desecrated, deprived of old books and precious furniture. Schools, government buildings, municipal buildings have been destroyed, along with the post office, the hospital and the clinic. What happened in Sadad is the largest massacre of Christians in Syria and the second in the Middle East, after the one in the Church of Our Lady of Salvation in Iraq, in 2010."

Comment: Tragically unsurprising that the West, busily engaged in tearing out all semblance of its Christian roots, would allow (encourage?) genocidal Muslims to hasten the de-Christianization process overseas through expulsion, torture and murder. One need only glance back to the Armenians of 1915 to recognize the Islamic model. A West which will not defend its own roots is not likely to be concerned with the extirpation of its foreign cousins and their churches by barbarians.

Ron Holt

"It is certainly true that Jesus' answer remains a powerful rebuke to those who would confound the gospel with one or another form of state-imposed socialism. The poor, whom we always have with us, will be taken care of properly only when we freely behave as Christians and not when Caesar, at the point of a bayonet, requires us to render doubly unto him so that he can purchase political power with our tribute."

Thomas Fleming

The liberal church no longer subjects its members to the impossible task of reconciling its traditional beliefs with Scripture and tradition, but it is no longer Christian either, for the Christ it now claims to honor never existed except in the minds of its apostate teachers.

S.M. Hutchens

Piety demands that I love my native land, but...Without God, patriotism degenerates into nationalism, and the modern nation degenerates into a technocratic collective.

Anthony Esolen

The Normal Times...

The Cold War was a clash of ideologies and empires for the future of the world. Men took drastic measures to preserve what they had. At the end of the Cold War, the old tactics and measures were not set aside, but improved upon, and now are no longer restricted for use against the likes of Al Qaida, but against allies. At the Cold War's end, the late Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick talked hopefully of America becoming again "a normal country in a normal time." Seems as though the normal times are never coming back.

The basis of democracy is morality, not majority voting. It is the belief that the majority of people are good and decent and that there are moral standards which come not from the State but from elsewhere.

Margaret Thatcher (+2013)

Worship of the state, or of the national commonwealth, is no healthy substitute for communion with transcendent love and wisdom.

Russell Kirk

The Temple of the Holy Spirit

The following is an excerpt from an article written by Rev. Patrick Henry Reardon
Pastor of All Saints Orthodox Church, Chicago, Illinois and Senior Editor of the monthly journal, Touchstone

Eastern Orthodox Christians have no trouble accepting the bon mot of Hans Urs von Balthasar: "Ethics is an echo and a thanksgiving for theology." Narrative being my normal and preferred form of moral discourse, I beg to begin this outline with a personal story. It involves a memory from distant childhood - what was probably my first attendance at a funeral. I must have been 6 or so, I think, and most of that liturgical service is a hazy blur in my mind now. I recall vividly, nonetheless, that what struck me most about that burial rite was its use of incense. I was quite surprised and more than slightly puzzled to see our pastor, clothed in black brocade vestments, walking around the casket three times, waving the smoking censer over the dead body repeatedly with the deepest and most intentional reverence. This action not only made a strong impression; it also posed to my young mind a rather serious question of liturgical propriety. My experience of the liturgical worship up to that point in my young life had prompted me to associate the burning of incense solely with the veneration of the Holy Eucharist. Why, then, I wondered, would a dead body be venerated with the wafting of incense smoke, treated like the Holy Communion, as it were? What could this ritual possibly mean in such a context? I took the question to my mother.

Nearly six decades have passed since then, but to this day I hold and cherish the clearest remembrance of my mother's very correct answer. "Well, of course, the priest incensed the body," she said. "The bodies of Christians, after all, are the temples of the Holy Spirit." Her answer, I recall, was delivered without the slightest hesitation or uncertainty. My mother enjoyed an intuitive grasp of the special dignity of the Christian body in properly theological terms, and she knew exactly why that body, whether living or dead, was venerated by the liturgical use of incense. Quite simply, the Christian body is holy. It is the consecrated dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

As I reflect on the matter now, at a distance of more than half a century, I find yet another thought inescapable by way of inference: What my mother told me about the Christian body must have been a common understanding at that time. She was not especially educated; indeed, she had not even finished high school. Nor, when I was young, did my mother strike me as a particularly devout person, though I am much disposed

to question and correct that impression now. Anyway, the point is that my mother's theological assessment about the reason for incensing the dead bodies of Christians, an assessment overwhelmingly confirmed by all my later studies in Orthodox theology, must have reflected a rather widespread understanding among believers in those days. Back during World War II, I suspect that many a child would have received exactly the same answer to the same question, and with equal quickness and assurance.

THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

According to Eastern Orthodox theology, the rhetorical question "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" is one that pertains to the body every bit as much as it pertains to the soul. While it is certain that the soul leaves the body at the time of death, we Orthodox find no reason in Holy Scripture for supposing that the Holy Spirit takes leave of the body simultaneously. Indeed, why suppose that the Holy Spirit leaves the body at all? Were the Holy Spirit to depart from the body at the time of death, what could it possibly mean to say that death has been swallowed up in victory? Why should we imagine that the corpse of a Christian has become less holy, less sanctified, than it was five minutes before it died? On the contrary, we affirm, that body remains forever the temple of the Holy Spirit.

This emphasis on the holiness of the Christian body is an essential feature of Eastern Orthodox dogmatic theology. We believe and confess that the dynamisms, the *energeiai*, of the Holy Spirit are poured out, through the sacraments, upon the Christian's body, its corporeal substance, in a divine action that is no less physical for being spiritual. By the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit there is effected a spiritual, divinized alteration in the very nature (*physis*) of the Christian's flesh, the seed of its future resurrection and immortality. In this sense, the alteration is physical.

In Orthodox theology, moreover, we believe that the soul itself is sanctified through the body. Holiness is experienced and thought of as quite physical, meaning that it involves our entire *physis*, or nature. Sanctification is not "spiritual" in the sense of non-material. It is spiritual, rather, in the sense that divine

THE DRUG OF IMMORTALITY

grace transforms the entire human constitution, including the very structure and organic composition of the body's living cells. The anatomy itself is spiritually altered. For the Orthodox, "spiritual" does not mean "bodiless." We believe that there is no part of human experience - and most emphatically not the experience of holiness - that is separated from the body. Indeed, the expression "bodiless" is reserved entirely for references to the angels. It does not pertain to human beings.

According to Orthodox theology, then, salvation and holiness come to man through his flesh. Just as Jesus' dying in the flesh and rising again in the flesh are the cause of man's redemption, so this redemption comes to him through the physical channels of the preaching and sacraments of the Church. Man's soul is saved and sanctified through his body. Divine grace reaches the human spirit through the medium of human flesh. We have it on good authority that even faith comes through something so physical as the act of hearing. Tertullian's famous sacramental dictum says it all: *Caro cardo salutis, "the flesh is the hinge of salvation"* (On the Resurrection 8.2).

According to Eastern Orthodox theology, furthermore, what in the West is known as the doctrine of "the mystical body of Christ" is not a simple analogy. When, in First Corinthians 12:12, St. Paul says that "as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ," this is not understood in the East as implying some merely metaphorical comparison of the social order to the correct functioning of a living organism, a comparison such as one finds in Cicero. Rather, it is the very bodies of Christians that are made "the members of Christ." This interpretation is appropriate to the ethical context in which it appears in First Corinthians. In fact, Saint Paul takes this principle of bodily holiness to be a self-evident premise from which a number of moral inferences are necessarily derived. "Do you not know?" he asks three consecutive times in this context: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? . . . Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? . . . Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (First Corinthians 6:15,16,19) The body, in short, is "for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (6:13). The holiness of Christians, that physical sanctification by which they can no longer even claim their bodies as their own property, is treated as a standing principle that places definite moral limits on what sorts of things can be done with those bodies (cf. also Romans 6:13).

As earlier noted, the childhood question that I put to my mother was spawned by a sense that the corpse in the coffin was being treated in much the same way that I had come to associate with the veneration of the Blessed Sacrament. That seemed to my young mind very inappropriate. That is to say, while I knew without doubt that the Holy Eucharist, as the true body and blood of Christ, is worthy of the most profound veneration, it was not yet clear to me that participation in the Sacred Mysteries actually effected a change in the human body itself. My mother's answer to my question, then, served to throw a new light on the meaning of the Eucharist. My later study of Eastern Orthodox theology, also, would in due course attest to the correctness of the instincts involved in my question. There was more connection between the Holy Communion and the Christian's body than I had ever imagined.

According to Orthodox theology, just as the action of the Holy Spirit, whose descent is sought in the Church's epikletic prayer, transforms the nature (*physis*) of the bread and wine to make them be the true body and blood of Christ, so this sanctification passes into the very bodies of those who share in the blessed Eucharist. The mystery of the Holy Communion is the foundational reason for saying that the bodies of Christians are the temples of the Holy Spirit.

The Orthodox believe it is in the Holy Eucharist that we are incorporated into the body of Christ: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread, one body, for we all partake of that one bread" (First Corinthians 10:16f).

According to Orthodox dogma the very flesh and blood of Christians are sanctified, theologically defined, by their living, sacramental contact with the flesh and blood of the risen, perfected Christ, in whom they place their trust in life and in death. Their members are thereby suffused with the dynamisms of the Lord's resurrection. Those very members will rise again by reason of the Holy Communion: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). That is to say, the Holy Communion places within the believer's body the dynamics of its final rising from the dead, and this is the reason why that body in the coffin was being incensed by my boyhood's parish priest. That body shared in the transforming, mystic consecration of the bread and wine by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That incensing was a veneration of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who would continue to abide,

The Spiritual and “Religion”

Amanda, commenting in *Glory to God for All Things Blog*

The challenge is to examine and go deep within ourselves and question what being “spiritual” really means. Modern day spirituality rejects religion, but nowhere can I find that religion rejects spirituality. Religion is primarily an acceptance of “forms”. To be religious is to be bound to a state of life, a set of forms and conduct that indicate a belief in God. And isn’t belief in God and the unseen the epitome of spirituality? So I asked myself this question, what conduct indicates faith in God, what form, what practice? I was hard pressed to find anything that better expressed spirituality than prayer. Prayer is actually talking to God within my heart.

Prayer connects me to God, who is Spirit. Fasting is a natural spiritual expression even for spiritualists...have you noticed all the health and natural food ideology present in modern day spiritualism? Even new age religions acknowledge the need for the human to cleanse and purify. Fasting is a part of religion, but I find it to be a difficult spiritual struggle in that it requires my flesh to submit to my spirit, it brings these two realities into better harmony, in essence it makes me more like Christ who was the perfect harmonious man.

Almsgiving is not exclusively about money...in its deepest sense it is about mercy, a kind of pity that breaks the heart of the giver. It just so happens that money is a readily available resource. But one is reminded of the apostles’ words, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee.” Even those who have no currency are still expected to give what we have been given and give with a broken heart full of mercy and joy, and that is not a religious mandate or a sterile practice. It is life giving and extremely spiritual.

Those are the three religious practices that Christ himself observed. He also participated in the Jewish rituals, but when he is questioned about how he observed those rituals he responded, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” True religion always acknowledges and maintains that its practices, rituals, and forms are for man and meeting the needs of the spiritual man. Incense is for man, not man for incense. Candles are for man, repetition is for man, vestments are for man, cathedrals are for man, icons are for man. If it were not so then we would be no better off than those who offered these things to a dead god in fear of His /Her wrath or seeking favors or protection. We would be pagans.

So what do we need as spiritual creatures that religion provides. Why do we need external forms and repetition? I think it is because I am dying and the process of dying includes the awful loss of memory. I easily forget that there is a God, and I have to have forms to tether me to God. Religion and ritual is first and foremost an exercise of memory. In etymological terms one of the meanings of religion is re-”again” + legere- “read”. Without the rereading men forget. And I think the modern world has cut off its nose to spite its face...in its presumption, thinking that spirituality absent of religion was the way to become spiritual, it has lost its mind, its memory, its remembrance of God. Therefore it has lost also its spiritual health.

The Eucharist as the Savior instituted it is a ritual “in remembrance.” All the rituals that spiritual people claim make up dead religion are not tolls, or payments, or requirements for membership. They are needful and in the purest sense spiritual because they meet the needs of man as he is, both body and soul. True religion is always spiritual because it proclaims the Incarnation, the seen and unseen, and it tethers these two worlds together, these two realities. To be spiritual without religion is to put these two worlds or realities at odds, to elevate the unseen over the seen. And this to me is to deny

the Gospel and to not be Christian. The Gospel is the good news. That good news is best revealed by the Incarnation, God loves man. God came in the flesh observing all the laws of nature, and physics, and anatomy, and physiology, and chemistry, and even gynecology. His ascendancy over the laws of nature were miracles, the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. And the Sacraments, rituals, and religious practices are miraculous also, in that they confer on this dead flesh the life giving energy, or grace of God. How awesome is that! I too have a "guilty secret", I forget, I start off good, but I end up treating holy things with contempt, most tragically my neighbor, my brother. I do not have spiritual eyes to see that I am standing in the midst (in my neighborhood) of the holy and that everything bears the weight of God's glory. Thank God for religion, and the very little I have. Possibly the most meaningful and needful thing I have found in Orthodoxy is the repetitious reminder, "Wisdom, Let us Attend."

Western Culture

Allied with the purveyors of equity, diversity and inclusion are the multiculturalists, who call for the celebration of cultures. For them, all cultures are morally equivalent and to deem otherwise is Euro-centrism. That's unbridled nonsense. Ask your multiculturalist: Is forcible female genital mutilation, as practiced in nearly 30 sub-Saharan Africa and Middle Eastern countries, a morally equivalent cultural value? Slavery is practiced in Sudan and Niger; is that a cultural equivalent? In most of the Middle East, there are numerous limits on women -- such as prohibitions on driving, employment, voting and education. Under Islamic law, in some countries, female adulterers face death by stoning, and thieves face the punishment of having their hand severed. Are these cultural values morally equivalent, superior or inferior to those of the West?

Western values are superior to all others. Why? The greatest achievement of the West was the concept of individual rights. The Western transition from barbarism to civility didn't happen overnight. It emerged feebly -- mainly in England, starting with the Magna Carta of 1215 -- and took centuries to get where it is today.

One need not be a Westerner to hold Western values. A person can be Chinese, Japanese, Jewish, African or Arab and hold Western values. It's no accident that Western values of reason and individual rights have produced unprecedented health, life expectancy, wealth and comfort for the ordinary person.

Western values are under ruthless attack by the academic elite on college campuses across America. They want to replace personal liberty with government control and replace equality before the law with entitlement. The multiculturalism and diversity agenda is a cancer on our society, and our tax dollars and charitable donations are supporting it.

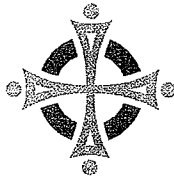
– Walter Williams

St. John of Kronstadt:

"Your Lord is love: love Him and in Him all men, as His children in Christ. Your Lord is a fire: do not let your heart be cold but burn with faith and love. Your Lord is a light: do not walk in darkness and do not do anything in darkness of mind, without reasoning or understanding, or without faith. Your Lord is a God of mercy and bountifulness: be also a source of mercy and bountifulness to your neighbors. If you will be such, you will find salvation yourself with everlasting glory."

"Take care; do not forget, Christian; never lose hearty faith in Him Who is your invisible Life, your Peace, your Light, your Strength, your Breath; that is, in Jesus Christ."

"God the Father is Life, God the Son is Life, God the Holy Spirit is Life: the Holy Trinity is Life. Life is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; if you deny in heart the Father you deny the life of your heart; if you deny the Son, you deny your life; if you deny the Holy Spirit, you also deny your life."



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS
OF NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

Office of the Secretariat

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)*

November 24, 2013

To the Most Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics and
Devout Faithful of the Holy Orthodox Churches in the Americas:

Dearly Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

On this Sunday before Thanksgiving, we begin to turn our attention to the week ahead with great anticipation. Beloved families and friends will gather together from near and far. The dinner table will be laden with our favorite foods, and we will give thanks to our Heavenly Father for the blessings that make this gathering possible.

As much as the Thanksgiving holiday is a day of gratitude, it is also a day of sharing. Had it not been for the kindness of Native Americans sharing their bounty with defenseless Pilgrims seeking refuge in a foreign land, all of the struggling families may have perished. It is with this same compassion and caring for others that International Orthodox Christian Charities, or IOCC, lives its mission each day, tirelessly responding to Christ's call to help our neighbors in need without discrimination.

IOCC, the humanitarian arm of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America, has been sharing the compassion of the Orthodox faithful with those in need since 1992. Through your generous support, IOCC has delivered \$438 million in humanitarian assistance to vulnerable families and communities in more than 50 countries.

From its first airlift of food and medicine to the former Soviet Union, to its current efforts as one of few humanitarian agencies working inside Syria to aid thousands of families displaced in their own war-torn country, IOCC demonstrates daily the impact of our faith in action. Through IOCC's close work with the Church, impoverished families in Greece have access to fresh, nutritious food and medical care; struggling farmers in Kosovo are learning new ways to grow cash crops and rise out of poverty, and the children of Cameroon are thriving with access to clean, safe drinking water.

Despite the distance that may separate us from those in need, we are nevertheless bridged by Christ's love. The willingness to share your blessings with them through IOCC carries with it the power to help transform thousands of lives around the world. And so we designate this day each year as IOCC Sunday, and embrace the message of St. John to aid those who suffer for “if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?” (1 John 3:16) By sharing your abundance today, you commend the larger vision of unity that lies before us, and you open your heart to greater love for others and to the everlasting grace of our Triune God.

We ask that you remember our brothers and sisters around the world who are suffering in the face of poverty, war or natural disaster. And we pray that the abundant blessings of our merciful God be with you and your family during Thanksgiving and always.

With paternal blessing and love in Christ,

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America

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NOVEMBER 24, 2013

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International Orthodox Christian Charities