

ST. PETER

ST. PAUL



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **June 29, 2014** ✠

Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul

Let us honor
with spiritual songs
the true preachers of godliness!
The most radiant Stars of Christ:
Peter the rock of faith!
and Paul, the true preacher
and friend of Christ!
These two planted
the Word of faith
in the hearts of the faithful,

- **Note: NO Vespers next Saturday, July 5**
- **Cornerstone Blessing will be next Sunday, July 6, God willing.**
- **No services this week – Father is away.**

"On days when a Saint is celebrated, Christians ought to pray more ardently, with contrition and love, and entreat the Saint to intercede with God for the salvation of their soul. The feast day of every Saint is for Christians a serious reminder of the great sufferings which the Saints experienced for the sake of Christ's faith. They were glorified by God and with glory they received a place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us then honor the Saints and invoke their help, in order that they might strengthen us in our prayer. And we may rest assured that our prayer will be listened to by God."

St. Raphael of Mytilene (1463)

Elder Damaskenos (+2001 - Monastery of St. John the Forerunner, Megara) writes:

"We have the Saints and all the heavenly world dancing with us and celebrating with us. The Saints, with their love, capture our minds, so to speak... Every instant they communicate with us, because they are found amidst the light of God, and they are no longer burdened by material things. Therefore, they closely follow us continuously, and when we call upon them, immediately they visit us and save us from many temptations, and the *nous* rejoices..."

"You see that the Saints leap to come to us, and they want us to leap towards them, that we might be friends. We should return this visitation, for they desire it unbelievably. And what if the visible world is separated from the invisible? We must embrace the love of Christ, and make the leap!"

St. John of Kronstadt:

"Your soul seeks true life and its natural food. Go to the Church; she will give you this in plenteousness. She affords us peace and blessedness through her Divine services and especially through the Sacraments."

"How do we maintain connection with the spiritual world, with the heavenly Church? By calling upon them in prayer, by keeping the feasts instituted in their honor, and by the Church services. How do we maintain connection with the departed? By means of prayers for them, especially when united with the offering of the bloodless sacrifice. How do we maintain union with living Christians and all men? Again, by means of prayers for them all in God's Temple and even at home."

This and That

~ I am doubtful that there can be any rapprochement with modernity. With technology, yes. But modernity is inherently heretical and antithetical to the Christian Gospel. It believes in a dead world and an absent God.
– Fr. Stephen Freeman

~ If the **modern scientist** is the man for whom God is dead, is there any way he may be induced to wonder about his own science? How can there be any reason to wonder, since, God being dead, everything is permitted?

But that does not prevent the traditional philosopher from predicting that there are two evils awaiting our new Dr. Frankensteins and the crowds that acclaim them. One is mental imbalance. When everything is permissible, why should one thing be preferable to another? Is the average man, enthusiastic at first about doing whatever he pleases, capable of refraining from acknowledging the subjectivity of his choices—i.e., the growing awareness that they are arbitrary? Passions may justify choices, but only for so long. Then man starts drifting from whim to whim until he realizes utter freedom means meaninglessness. Is it not striking that the more horizons science opens, the more people escape into virtual reality, mental illness, or drug addiction?

Something else is obvious. The progress of science—the development of the power of man—is increasingly wielded, not exclusively over things as used to be the case, but over man. And to whom is this progress entrusted? It is crucial to realize it is entrusted not simply to individuals (a danger that is every so often stressed) but to individuals who are—what else could they be?—human beings, a danger of a much more formidable nature, for it amounts to man playing God to man, which is the sum of all evils mankind has managed for centuries to inflict upon itself.

Playing at God, Claude Polin, Chronicles

A British Priest observes...

- It is worse than in the days of the Cold War; then you knew that the Soviet Union was atheist and persecuted the Church. Now the Russian Federation is becoming Christian and it is the West that is atheist and persecuting the Church and indeed any spiritual or traditional values at all.

-My fourth visit to the United States only confirms what I knew already – that the American people are an extraordinarily generous, open and friendly people; however, they are also a people whose goodwill and often naiveté are much abused by Europe and successive US governments. The ruling American elite with its global machinations, arrogance, bankruptcy and taxes is one thing; ordinary Americans are quite another.

What has struck me on this visit is the retreat and defeat of what I would call Traditional America. A great country is now ruled by a New America, which is increasingly and systematically anti-Christian: this is the America of abortion, corruption, drugs, churches for sale, Atheist-TV and bullying support for anti-Christianity imposed by its elite on its people and on the rest of the world. New America is choosing not a 'wonderful life', but the nightmarish alternative proposed in that classic film. In other words, the fragments of America's Christian Tradition are disappearing very rapidly.

– British Orthodox priest Fr. Andrew Phillips, Orthodox England Blog

Sola Scriptura doesn't work...

~ For Protestants who always suffer from a crisis of authority (having neither the Church nor Tradition) prefer some sort of necessity even in their Biblical interpretation. For if they cannot demonstrate such a necessity they feel insecure and unsure of their doctrine. They should feel that way – but because they are building their house upon the sand instead of the rock. *Sola Scriptura* doesn't work without some sort of authoritative interpretation.
– Fr. Stephen Freeman

The Holy Apostles Peter and Paul ~ June 29

The greatest feastday of the Orthodox Church in the month of June is that commemorating the holy, glorious leaders of the Apostles, Saints Peter and Paul (June 29). It is preceded by the Apostle's Fast which always begins the Monday after All Saints Sunday and ends on the eve of the feast. Each of the 12 Holy Apostles has a particular day on which they are commemorated, but on June 30 they are all honored together. Saints Peter and Paul are commemorated together since the first was the head of the Apostles and the second the greatest of all missionaries. Let us learn from their lives of the zeal and love which our Lord requires of those who follow after Him.

Peter was the son of Jonah and the brother of Saint Andrew the First-Called (Nov. 30). He was of the tribe of Simon and the town of Bethsaida. He was a fisherman and was first known as Simon, but the Lord was pleased to call him Cephas, or Peter (Jn. 1:42). He was the first of the disciples to clearly confess his faith in the Lord Jesus, saying: **"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."** (Mt. 16:16). His love for the Lord was very strong, and his faith in Him went from strength to strength. When the Lord was put on trial, Peter denied Him three times, but it needed only one look into the face of the Lord, and Peter's soul was filled with shame and repentance. After the descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter became a fearless and powerful preacher of the Gospel. After his first sermon in Jerusalem, about 3000 souls were converted to the Faith. He preached the Gospel throughout Palestine and Asia Minor, founding the Church at Antioch, and in Italy and Illyria. He performed many wonders, healing the sick and raising the dead, and even his shadow had the power of healing the sick. He had a major struggle with Simon the Magician, who declared himself to be from God but was actually a servant of the devil. He finally put him to shame and overcame him. Peter was condemned to death on the order of the wicked Emperor Nero, a friend of Simon's. After installing Linus as Bishop of Rome and exhorting and encouraging the flock of Christ there, Peter went to his death with joy. When he saw the cross before him, he asked the executioner to crucify him upside down, because he felt himself to be unworthy to die in the same way as his Lord. And so this great servant of the greatest Master went to his rest and received a crown of eternal glory.

Born in Tarsos of the tribe of Benjamin, Paul was formerly called Saul and studied under the famous teacher of the Law, Gamaliel. He was a Pharisee and a persecutor of Christians. He was wondrously converted to the Christian Faith by the Lord Himself, who appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22). He was baptized by the Apostle Ananias, named Paul, and enrolled in the work of the great Apostles. He traveled over vast areas of the Roman Empire, preaching the Gospel everywhere with burning zeal, from the borders of Arabia to the land of Spain, among both the Jews and the heathen, and thus he received the title of "the Apostle to the Gentiles." His fearful sufferings were matched only by his superhuman endurance. Through all the

years of his preaching, he hung from day to day like a thread between life and death. Filling his days and nights with toil and suffering for Christ, organizing the Church in many places and reaching a high level of perfection, he was able to say: **"I live; yet not I but Christ lives in me."** (Gal. 2:20). Like Peter, Saint Paul was martyred at the command of the Emperor Nero in about 67 a.d.. Saint Paul was one of the most influential men in the history of the human race. Almost half of the 27 books of the New Testament were written by Paul. His writings have changed the course of human history. With the exception on our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, perhaps no other man in the history of the Church had done more for the Faith than Saint Paul. O Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, intercede with Christ our God that He may grant forgiveness of our sins!

ON THE FEAR OF GOD

"Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear..."

- 1 Peter 1:17

Saint Peter speaks here of the fear of losing God's grace, the fear of sinning and falling away from the source of our life. His words have a double basis: heavenly inspiration and personal experience. By divine inspiration, the simple fisherman became a teacher of the people, a pillar of the faith and a mighty wonderworker. Through personal experience, Peter acknowledged that all his strength and wisdom were from God, and, because of that, he knew the need to have the fear of God in himself. No other fear except the fear of God. A madman takes fright when the lightning merely flashes and the thunder cracks, but a wise man stands in the fear of God every day and every hour. The Creator of the thunder and the lightning is more awesome than either, and He does not just appear before you from time to time as do thunder and lightning, but is with you unceasingly and never separates Himself from you. Therefore, it is not enough to feel the reverent fear of God only from time to time, but we must breathe it in with every breath. The fear of God is the fresh breeze in the suffocating air of our souls. It brings purification and lightness, and a sweet fragrance and health. Until he had become established in the fear of God, Peter was merely Peter and not an Apostle, a hero, a teacher of the people and a worker of wonders.

Oh, brethren, let us not make merry before the time of harvest. This life of ours is not the harvest but the time of sowing, in toil, sweat, and fear. The farmer lives in trepidation until he has gathered the crop from his field. Let us also leave our merrymaking until the day of the harvest, for now is the season of toil and fear. Shall I be saved? That question should torment each one of us, just as the question: "Shall I reap the fruit of my labor from the field?" torments the farmer. The farmer labors and waits in trepidation every day. Let us also labor and wait in fear for the whole season of our sojourn on this earth!

- Saint Nicholas Velimirovich

The Sin of Democracy by Fr. Stephen Freeman



Our modern age has drunk the Kool-Aid of philosophical democracy (the autonomous authority of the individual) to the dregs and seeks to use the Bible to underwrite the project. A book that could not have been owned by an individual prior to the printing press in the 15th century (by reason of cost) cannot be used philosophically to support the autonomy of the individual right and competency to read and interpret. With the sole exception of Philemon, the letters of the New Testament are not written to individuals (Timothy and Titus receive letters only by virtue of their position as leaders of a community). They are letters to the Church and the

individual is not a Church. The practice of the reading of Scripture for nearly 1400 years was largely that of listening to its being read within the assembly of the Church – and this continued for quite some time even after the printing press' advent. The doctrine of "soul competency" is a modern invention, contrary to the New Testament itself and the practice of primitive and early Christianity. The Kingdom of God is not a democracy. Every pretender to its throne is a usurper.

"Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (Mat 8:8-10 NKJ)

+++

Jesus' encounter with the Roman Centurion is one of the least *modern* experiences in all of Scripture. Of all the stories in the New Testament, this one would be the most difficult to repeat in our culture. In our world, we ourselves are our only authority – we are neither over anyone else nor subject to any. We are filled with the spirit of democracy, and, as such, despise the *Kingdom* of God.

The world of kings and rulers began to collapse at the very time that nation-states began their rise. In 1534, Henry VIII of England repudiated any authority greater than himself with regard to the Church of England. A little over a century later, Parliament followed his example and overthrew the King himself and beheaded him. The same fate met the king of France 150 years later. The march of modern progress has meant death to tyrants.

Except that it has not. When Henry refused to recognize the Pope's authority, he made himself a "Pope." With every advance and repudiation of authority, authority itself does not disappear – it simply becomes more universalized. Today, in contemporary Christianity, it is said that "everyman is a Pope." Whereas a few generations ago, people asserted that the Bible alone had authority, today, that, too, has been overthrown. Each person is his own authority.

This is perhaps stated in an extreme way. We do have bosses in the work place, teachers in the classroom and other authorities. But as anyone in "authority" can confirm, such positions are under increasing pressure and scrutiny. They often have authority, only because they have coercive power. Authority that rests naturally with a person or position has virtually disappeared from our world. I am fully sympathetic with the political place of democracy. It evolved as a means of addressing tyranny – though it is often quite ineffective in confronting modern leaders who tyrannize in the name of democracy. But I offer no political suggestions in this article and have no interest in a conversation on the topic.

I am, however, deeply interested in the spiritual disease that accompanies the interiorizing of the democratic project. We have not only structured our political world in a "democratic" manner, we have spiritualized the concept and made of it a description for how the world truly *is* and how it *should* be.

The assumptions of democracy have become the assumptions of modern morality and the matrix of our worldview. It is this interiorization of democracy that makes the Centurion impossible in our time. People of the modern world have a sense of inherent equality, and often resent any assertion of authority. Of course, equality is true in a certain manner, and utterly false in another. It is true that all people have equal worth – no one life is more valuable than another. But by almost any other measure, we are not equal, because we are not commensurate. I am of equal worth, but I am not as smart as another. I am of equal worth but I am not as talented, or handsome, or wealthy, etc. Apparently, intelligence, talent, beauty, wealth and the like are not the proper standards of comparison when we speak of equality. But our interior sense of equality often makes us assert equality where none exists.

This is particularly true in the spiritual life. I am sometimes told, “I do not need to confess my sins to a priest. I can pray directly to God.” A young man said this to me recently and added, “The Bible says we should only confess to God.” I pointed out to him that he was actually incorrect, that in its only mention of confession, the Bible says we should confess our sins “to one another.” He was surprised and dismayed.

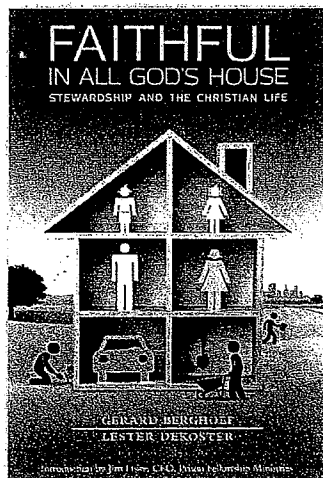
The Scriptures also speak of elders and leaders and obedience and respect and many other things that have no place within the spirit of democracy. The young man’s mistake was to think that the Bible affirmed his democratic world-view. But the Scriptures belong to the world of the Roman Centurion. Much of what today passes for Protestantism is nothing of the sort. Rather, it is a thinly veiled cloak for the democratic spirit at “prayer.” “Salvation by grace through faith is a slogan for *individualism*, a Christianity “by right.” There are no works, no requirements, only a “grace-filled” entitlement. For the ultimate form of democracy is the person who needs no one else: no Church, no priest, no sacrament, only the God of my understanding who saves me by grace.

Our outward forms of Christianity are morphing as quickly as the market can imagine them. Even the new atheist Sunday meetings differ little from many Christian gatherings. God Himself may not be necessary to the spirituality of our democracy. Where does God fit in a world of equals? The classical world of Orthodox Christianity is profoundly undemocratic. It holds that the universe and everything that exists is *hierarchical*. This teaching is not an artifact of an older patriarchy (a typical democratic critique), but an essential part of the Christian gospel. For if Jesus is *Lord*, then the universe has a Lord. Democratic spirituality distrusts all hierarchy – anything that challenges the myth of equality is experienced as a threat. “Jesus never said anything about...”

The veneration of saints, the honoring of icons and relics, the place held by the Mother of God are deeply offensive to modern democracy. The complaints heard by those who reject such things are quite telling. It is rarely the classical protest of true iconoclasts that are heard. Rather, it is the modern declaration, “I don’t need anyone between myself and God.” It is the universal access to God, without interference, without mediation, without hierarchy, without sacrament, ultimately without any need for others that is offended by the hierarchical shape of classical Christianity.

A spiritual life without canon, without custom, without tradition, without rules, is the ultimate democratic freedom. But it unleashes the tyranny of the individual imagination. For with no mediating tradition, the modern believer is subject only to his own whim. The effect is to have no Lord but the God of his own imagination. Even his appeal to Scripture is without effect – for it is his own interpretation that has mastery over the word of God. If we will have no hierarchy, we will not have Christ as Lord. We cannot invent our own model of the universe and demand that God conform. It is a great spiritual accomplishment to not be “conformed to this world.” The ideas and assumptions of modern consumer democracies permeate almost every aspect of our culture. They become an unavoidable part of our inner landscape. Only by examining such assumptions in the light of the larger Christian tradition can we hope to remain faithful to Christ in the truth. Those who insist on the absence of spiritual authority, or demand that nothing mediate grace will discover that their lives serve the most cruel master – the spirit of the age.

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Work & Play

Faithful in All God's House:

By Gerard Berghoef & Lester DeKoster

This is an excerpt from Faithful In All God's House by Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster. The book was originally released as God's Yardstick in 1982. It has been rereleased under a new title by Christian's Library Press and is edited by Brett Elder. The book examines a holistic approach to stewardship, which DeKoster and Berghoef defined as "willed acts of service that not only make and sustain the fabric of civilization and culture, but also develop the soul."

WORK

The basic form of stewardship is daily work. No matter what that work may be.

No matter if you have never before looked on your job as other than a drudge, a bore, or a fearful trial. Know that the harder it is for you to face each working day, the more your will to persevere schools the soul.

Work is the fundamental form of stewardship because:

God himself works: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (John 5:17), the Lord says. It is not recounted that God plays, but he works. That is to say, God is ever-busy making provision for our existence. Work is that which serves another. Play is that which serves ourselves.

Work knits the fabric of civilization. We take for granted all the possibilities which work alone provides. And we become aware of how work sustains the order which makes

life possible when that order is rent by lightning flashes of riot or war, and the necessities which work normally provides become difficult to come by.

Man's history begins in a garden and mounts to a city. A garden is what God the Holy Spirit does, without man, with a wilderness. A city is what God the Holy Spirit does through man's work.

It is of the nature of work to serve the community. Whether work is done in the home, on the land, or in the countless forms of enterprise developed across the centuries, work is doubly blessed: (1) it provides for the family of man, and (2) it matures the worker.

Work matures the worker because it requires ethical decision. Merely to rise to one's daily tasks requires an act of will, a decision to serve the community, however reluctantly, however unaware the worker may be that such is the case. Such willed acts of service not only make and sustain the fabric of civilization and culture, but also develop the soul. And, while the object of work is destined to perish, the soul formed by daily decision to do work carries over into eternity.

This perspective on work, as a maturing of the soul, liberates the believer from undue concern over the monotony of the assembly line, the threat of technology, or the reduction of the worker to but an easily replaceable cog in the industrial machine. One's job may be done by another. But each doer is himself

unique, and what carries over beyond life and time is not the work but the worker. What doing the job does for each of us is not repeated in anyone else. What the exercise of will, of tenacity, of courage, of foresight, of triumph over temptations to get by, does for you is uniquely your own. One worker may replace another on the assembly line, but what each worker carries away from meeting the challenge of doing the day's shift will ever be his own. The lasting and creative consequence of daily work happens to the worker. God so arranges that civilization grows out of the same effort that develops the soul.

The forms of work are countless, but the typical one is work with the hands. The Bible has reference to the sower, to the making of tents and of things out of clay, to tilling the fields and tending the vine. Handwork makes visible the plan in the mind, just as the deed makes visible the love in the heart. While the classic Greek mind tended to scorn work with the hands, the Bible suggests that something about it structures the soul.

The results of one's work can never be fully known. What will become of the produce raised, of the machine built, of the person fed? No one can foretell what will be the final consequence of today's effort. Nor does the paycheck really measure the value, nor the effort, of the work for which it is given. Wages are set by the market, and the results of work are hidden in the mists of tomorrow. What endures is what happens to the worker who

bravely makes it through the day.

Seen in this light, which is the light shed by the Bible on work, it is easy to understand why work is the primary form of stewardship. To work, most of us give the largest unit of our lives. By work, we together raise the level of our culture, keep its order, supply its needs, and point to its promise of better living for more of the world's peoples.

For the believer then, stewardship begins with the day's work. Done well, as unto God, in the full knowledge that by work the world lives, work serves God and man and the self.

PLAY

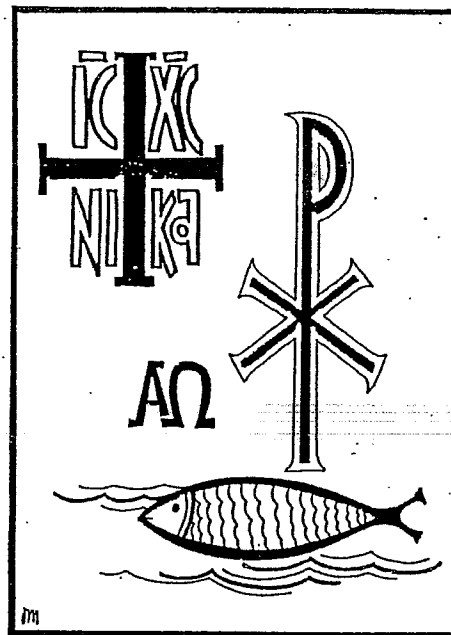
We have spoken of play as that which is done to please or serve the self. Play may absorb much effort, long planning, and lots of time. But so long as the end in view is the satisfaction of the self, such effort cannot be called work. This is true what-

"Play may be indulged as recreation, that is, as preparation for doing work better when the worker has been so refreshed."

ever the form of play, whatever its esteem in the community as compared with work. What the self heaps up in time for its own use does not carry over into eternity, and burdens the soul that is thus occupied.

Play may be indulged as recreation, that is, as preparation for doing work better when the worker has been so refreshed.

You will know whether it is work, or play, which is occupying your time, your effort, and . . . your life. And knowing, you can yourself judge whether the time and effort you give to any activity is work, an investment in eternity, or play, and an investment in temporality.



ON THE HONORING OF THE HOLY SAINTS **By St. Nectarios of Aegina (+1921)**

Our Church honors saints not as gods. But as faithful servants, as holy men and women, friends of God. It extols the struggles they engaged in and the deeds they performed for the glory of God and with the action of His grace, in such a way that all the honor that the Church gives them refers to God, Who has viewed their life on earth with gratification.

The Church honors them by commemorating them annually through public celebrations and through the erection of churches in honor their name.

The Church invokes the saints in its prayers as intercessors with God, and also honors their relics and everything that belonged to them, as well as icons depicting them.

The honor given to the saints is an expression of the love of the faithful towards them for their sublime virtues and great struggles, whereby they received the crown of glory.

The honor given to the saints is a confirmation of the love that is burning in our soul for rising to the height of their virtues, which abide as an eternal example for us.