



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **July 20, 2014** ✠

Holy Prophet Elias

St. Elias, Patriarch of Jerusalem (518),

St. Abraham of Galich (1375) St. Athanasius of Bretsk (1648)

St. Elias of Georgia (1907), St. Maria of Paris (1945)

O Elias, blessed of God!
Thou beheld the presence
of God which enlightened
thee!
Not in an earthquake,
but in a still small voice!
Thou ascended to Heaven
in a wondrous manner,
sitting upon a chariot
drawn by four horses:
Thou hast become wondrous,
O God-inspired one!

- **Father Alexander is at the Diocesan Assembly in Dallas this week. Contact Fr. Ignatius in an emergency – 223-5617, but certainly call 907-9447, as well.**

Construction: Labor needed from our own community in the weeks ahead....

- **Lighting Changeover.**

In a week or so, the existing church lighting will be transferred to the new temple. We will need a brigade of our own people to install the replacement fixtures for the future hall lighting, which are in boxes in the classrooms.

Our own efforts will save us \$!!! Work can take place in the evenings or Saturdays, or whenever. I am away next week, unfortunately, or we could get it started. The week of July 28 and thereafter would be the time to begin.

- **Iconostasis move.** A likely Saturday project to disassemble and re-assemble the existing Iconostasis in the new. There is a new one ordered but will not be ready till November-December.

- **Landscaping and General Moving of Liturgical Items**

- **Removal of classroom walls in the existing**

We are being given a 30-day timetable for completion by the Contractor. Once we have certificate of occupancy, we can begin to work out the moving details.

God's Inscrutable Will

✠ Two brothers were going to see St. Anthony. On their journey they ran out of water and one of the two died. The other was at death's door. At the end of his strength he lay down on the ground awaiting death. Anthony, sitting on the mountain side, called two monks who were there and urged them, "Take a jug of water and hurry to the road from Egypt. Two brothers were coming. One of them is already dead, and the other is going to die unless you are quick. This has just been revealed to me in prayer." The monks went and found the dead monk and buried him. Then they refreshed the exhausted one with a drink of water and took him to the Elder. The distance was a day's journey. Someone perhaps will ask, "Why did not Anthony speak before the first monk died?" That would be wrong. It was no business of Anthony's to determine the time of his death. That is reserved to God, and God decreed death for the one and revealed to Anthony the danger in which the other was.

St Athanasius of Alexandria's Life of Anthony

Kindling the Divine Fire

✠ In the beginning there are a great many battles and a good deal of suffering for those who are advancing towards God and afterwards, ineffable joy. It is like those who wish to light a fire; at first they are choked by the smoke and cry, and by this means obtain what they seek ... so we must also kindle the divine fire in ourselves through tears and hard work.

-- Mother Syncretica of Egypt

On Saint Seraphim by St. John of San Francisco

(18/31 May 1953)

Holiness is the fruit of man's efforts and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Holiness is reached by him who wears a cross and in the name of Christ wages warfare against the obstacles to holiness, to becoming akin to Christ. These obstacles are sins, sinful habits, firmly rooted in the soul. Struggle against them is the major work of a Christian, and in so far as he purifies his soul, so far will he receive of the Holy Spirit.

St. Seraphim taught the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, and he genuinely acquired it, for the Most Holy Mother of God recognized him as being her own. And the faithful, sincere seekers of the Truth and Light, as was Motovilov, because of their reverence, saw how this great God pleaser shone with the light of holiness.

How varied are the paths of saints! At the throne of God, in front of everyone is the Most Holy Mother of God, more glorious than the seraphim and all the angels and archangels who stood firm, faithful to God through the fearful struggle that was raised against God by the most radiant of them all, Lucifer, which means Light-bearer, who is now the devil, in other words, the one cast down to the deepest darkness. In this struggle the bright angels came so close to God that it is already impossible for them to step back or separate from Him.

All the pleasers of God are like the angels in their love and devotion. They, just as the angels, waged war against the dark forces, and became strengthened in love of God. All of the Prophets of the Old Testament lived in such a struggle. Godlessness prevailed, the Law of God was forgotten. The world persecuted them because they interfered with its sinful life. They hid in the "depths of the earth." The world hated them. The prophet Isaiah was sawed in two by a wooden saw, the prophet Jeremiah was trampled in a swamp. And in such surroundings they stood fast in faith and devotion. All righteous ones were sorrowful in the world because they were strangers to the sinful world. All of the Apostles suffered in one way or another. Righteous men left for the desert. What made them Saints? Suffering? Not suffering alone makes Saints, but striving towards God, love of God, and the labor of overcoming obstacles to holiness, which is the fruit of man's labor and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

No Images in Prayer

"Never desire nor seek any face or image during prayer. Do not wish for sensory vision or angels, or powers, or Christ, lest you lose your mind by mistaking the wolf for the shepherd and worship the enemies — the demons. The beginning of the beguilement (plani) of the mind is vainglory, which moves the mind to try and represent the Deity in some form or image.

St. Nilos of Sinai

The Truly Righteous

The truly righteous always think within themselves that they are unworthy of God. And that they are truly righteous is recognized from the fact that they acknowledge themselves to be wretched and unworthy of God's concern and confess this secretly and openly and are brought to this by the Holy Spirit so that they will not remain without the solicitude and labor which is appropriate for them while they are in this life.

St. Isaac the Syrian

Frequent Prayer

Fire makes iron impossible to touch, and likewise frequent prayer renders the intellect more forceful in its warfare against the enemy. That is why the demons strive with all their strength to make us slothful in attentiveness to prayer, for they know that prayer is the intellect's invincible weapon against them.

-St. John of Karpathos

The Worst Punishment

The worst punishment you should wish on your enemies, but also the most charitable, is that they may see themselves as they really are. Self-knowledge can be either a curse or a blessing, depending on whether you are humble enough to accept it.

Joseph Sobran

Explaining the Monastic Witness to a Skeptical Christian

Igumen Phillip (Speranza), OCA, Canada

The monastic witness (when actually lived, mark you!) is of more importance than ever in the world of instant gratification, self-obsession, self-indulgence, self-will, and self-worship. It's NOT about sex; it's about Jesus Christ, and about bearing living witness to the fact that knowing "Him and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil.3:10) is more than worth the loss of personal autonomy, the personal intimacy of spouse and family, financial prosperity, personal ownership of anything, professional success, etc. The monastic vocation, as ordinary Christian life kicked up several notches, is supposed to be one of witness, example, and encouragement.

An example: for me as a monastic, it's always Lent, in the sense of abstinence from meat. Nothing special about that; it's been that way in East and West from the beginning of monasticism (cf., e.g., St. Benedict's Rule, chap.36). But the value to the Body of Christ at large is twofold: a kind of intercessory prayer and expiation for those who do not fast at all, and an encouragement to embrace the appointed fasts ("If I can do without meat all the time, surely you can forego it for Lent, right?") And with the willing embrace of personal asceticism comes the real beginning of the journey to that "holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb.12:14).

Not that such witness is always wanted or appreciated. A couple of years ago a parent told a monk of my acquaintance that he was "a failure" in that parent's eyes; that with his education etc., he could be out making 100K a year (in her eyes, still big money!). Instead, he had willingly embraced poverty and detachment. So he was a failure, a disappointment, to that parent.

And admittedly, bearing proper monastic witness doesn't happen automatically. Good monastic formation is crucial, and finding that here in North America isn't easy. Here in

Canada we are blessed with Igumen Gregory (Papazian) as a "maker of monks" who turn out not only well-disciplined but joyful. There may be others, laboring in obscurity; I don't know, but I pray so. But what true monasticism has to offer to the Church and to the world is companions on the journey who, having walked the path ahead at least a little, know the way and want to share it.

And engagement with the world in order to help the world find the way out of its perpetual mess is part of what Orthodox monasticism has been about from the get-go. The monastery is not a fortress against everybody "out there;" it is, as St. Benedict puts it so succinctly, "a school for the Lord's service" (Prologue) to which the people "in the world" can repair from time to time for spiritual rest, refreshment, and renewal.

And there's much more than one could add. I would simply urge you to garner your ideas on monasticism from more authentic sources, e.g., the Desert Fathers, St. Basil the Great, the Rule of St. Benedict, or The Athanasian Rule. I would also urge you not to confuse either Gnosticism or Irish Jansenism (or both) with genuinely Orthodox theology, which teaches that sexuality is a good and precious gift of God. Otherwise, what would be the point of the monastic offering back to God as a gift?

....A vital point: monastics are not hidden away from the world's insanity because monastics do not and cannot "escape the world"....nor are they supposed to !!!

We take the world with us into monastic life, and that in two ways. Firstly, we take with us that part of the world that has made its home in each of us; and that is our spiritual battlefield. What we escape in this regard is the distractions the world provides to lure us away from that battle. The silence in which we are at least supposed to spend most of our time provides no hiding place and no diversion from

"the world, the flesh, and the devil" that have become all too comfortable in each of us, fallen creatures that we are. Till our dying moment we remain only too familiar with the world's insanity, because it is a perennial and perpetual crop of dandelions on the lawn of our soul.

Secondly, we take the world and its insanity with us because we embrace the ministry of praying for a world that does not pray for itself and for people who do not pray for themselves. We are called to move away from the embrace of a specific family so that we can become open to and embrace in our hearts the entire human family as the object of our loving and prayerful concern.

Please consider these words of the late Mother Mary Francis, C.P.P., former abbess of the Poor Clare monastery in New Mexico. And yes, I know she wasn't Orthodox; but her grasp of the monastic vocation is surpassed by very few.

"Most persons in the world," she writes in *A Right to Be Merry* (1956), "are willing to applaud those who serve God in His members. One wonders why they are so perplexed, even outraged, at those who choose to serve God in Himself (p.59)...It is only in leaving the world that we are sufficiently purified to take the whole world into our hearts. The unique vocation of the cloistered contemplative is to be entirely dedicated to the service of mankind because she is utterly given to God (p.60)...When Martha served, our dear Lord found no fault with her. She was rendering Him a very perfect service in the vocation to which she was called. It was only when she turned an accusing eye on Mary that our Lord rebuked her (p.138)...Who knows how many chasms of sin are leaped, how many hatreds wilt, how much anguish is softened and consecrated in the world because some have stepped out of the world to begin the work of eternity beforehand (p.153)..." Now there's a monastic spirit!!!

...The dualism you think you see in the existence of monasticism simply doesn't exist

in monasticism itself. "Spiritual" versus "less spiritual" is a judgment no sane monastic would dare to make. If such nonsense exists in the mind and heart of a monastic, that poor soul is suffering prelest' (delusion) and needs to be shaken from it good and hard. The Desert Fathers address that spiritual illness very specifically, with stories of how certain monks who thought themselves oh-so-holy had that delusion ripped from them by angels showing them local villagers far holier than they. And a monk thinking that monasticism is a better way FOR HIM than life outside the monastery is no different from the guy who's still in love with the woman he married 30 years ago and wouldn't trade her for anything or anybody on the planet. It's called loving one's vocation and appreciating it as a gift of God.

Your apparent insistence that we are all called to the same way of living out our relationship with Christ and the Body of Christ is, alas, contrary to the Scriptures. Note, for example, that in Matthew 19:11-12, the Lord Himself says that celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom is for "only those to whom it has been given" and that "he who is able to accept it, let him accept it." Note also that while "holding all things in common" (Acts 2:44) was the practice of the most of the early Church, it was not mandatory, because Ananias and Sapphira still had control over their property if they wanted it (Acts 5:4); and it certainly did not remain parish practice (cf. your own check book), but does remain as a fundamental part of coenobitic monasticism. Take another look at 1 Cor.12:1-30, about "diversities of gifts...diversities of ministries...diversities of activities..."

As for the monastic habit, my rabid curiosity wonders if you have the same objection to wedding rings. Those bits of metal also set certain people apart from the rest of the crowd and are visible proclamations of their specific vocation, right? Further, I must suggest that your issue with the habit fails to factor in the way the physical is meant by God's designing to work with and to reinforce the spiritual. That's why the Lord gave us a sacramental life: the Spirit acting in and through the matter

which is so essential to our human nature. (And given that right now it's 90 Fahrenheit and humid, I'm certainly not defending the habit because it's comfortable!)

As for serving God in His members and in Himself, the Divine Liturgy contains both elements. Worshipping God is serving God in Himself; reading the Scriptures to the assembly, preaching, administering Holy Communion, etc. are serving God in His members. A monastic getting up while the world is still asleep to praise God and pray for that world is serving God in Himself; the nurse caring for a feverish patient at 3:00am is serving God in His members. Obviously, there's some cross-over; but the point is that both are necessary and both are valid. Remember about Martha and Mary; both served the Lord, but in rather different ways, according to their respective calls, talents, and gifts.

I would ask you also to consider the fact that even before Anthony and Paul went out in the Egyptian desert, forms of monastic life existed in the Church and continue to this very hour; God continues to sow new monastic vocations in human hearts; God's Church continues to bless monastic life; and members of the Church continue to find pilgrimages to monasteries and interaction with monastics sources of spiritual nurture. That monasticism may not be your calling from God doesn't invalidate it.

Your confusion between The Way and monasticism as one method of living The Way is painfully evident. Is every believer called to leave all (father, mother, brothers sisters, wife, children, houses, lands, etc.) to follow Him (Mark 10:28ff)? Is every believer to sell all his possessions and give to the poor (Matt. 19:21)? Is every believer to renounce marriage for the sake of the Kingdom (Matt. 19:12)? Yet from the beginning and down to the present moment, some were and are called to do exactly that - to follow Christ in exactly that way. That the Lord chooses some to follow Him in that way a.) is His business and His

sovereign choice; b.) does not make them better or holier or more spiritual per se; it just means He's given them a job, a function, a calling, that differs from yours.

And whatever in the world makes you think that monastics (or clergy, for that matter) love the gift more than or other than the Giver? And whatever in the world makes you think that I or anyone else is so deluded as to believe I deserve even my next breath, much less a priestly or monastic vocation or any other gift of God? Everything is a gift of grace! Take a gander at John 7:24. Besides, love for one's vocation does not preclude love for God but is a subset of it; it's an expression of love for God in His wisdom and providence, by which He has led me to the place He knows to be right (hardly comfortable, but right) for me. Does loving the spouse God has given rob God of any of the glory and/or love due to Him? If so, why does the Word of God command spouses to love each other (cf. Eph. 5:21ff)?

And of course it's not the habit, or the tonsure, which makes the monk interiorly...

Look: if this is about somebody telling you that being non-monastic is somehow second-best, then call 'em, write 'em, email 'em or carrier-pigeon 'em and tell 'em they're being very silly and need to stop it at once. They're just plain wrong. In 1 Cor. 7:7 the Apostle says plainly that "each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that." Period. If they don't like it, tell 'em to take it up with Paul and/or his Lord.

If, on the other hand, you are saying to monasticism and monastics in general, not just "I" but "we the Church" "have no need of you" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:21), well....the Apostle corrects that error too, does he not? As for the rest of it, I am content simply to accept and teach what the Church accepts and teaches...largely because I've discovered that when I try to be wiser (or smarter or holier) than the collective wisdom of the Church, I'm headed over a cliff at warp speed.

Elder Sophrony of Essex and Other Faiths

- There is a great difference between East and West. A Westerner who is baptized Orthodox for many years will be within the Orthodox Church under the guidance of an experienced Spiritual Father to obtain a pure Orthodox phronema (culture) and ethos.

Until then, he cannot and must not play the teacher to people who have Orthodox bones, who were born and raised as Orthodox.

That is why there cannot be a "Union of Churches". With discussion and acquaintance can be made that can help the "political", without harming Orthodoxy. But the "union of Churches" is difficult, if not impossible. Those who speak of "union of Churches" do not know the mindset of the heterodox nor the height of Orthodoxy. Some of the heterodox hate the Orthodox. Proof is that if some Westerner becomes a Buddhist or Marxist, his household does not extract him from the family, but if he becomes Orthodox, then they extract him. If this mindset did not exist, then many Westerners would become Orthodox.

- I do not want, at least now, the "Union of Churches", because the Romans (Latins) will not change, and the Orthodox will not be corrupted.

For a Muslim to become a Christian, he must wait until he receives great Grace, so that he is prepared to be martyred for Christ. If he does not receive this Grace, let him wait.

- Someone passed sequentially through Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and black magic. In all these religions at the same time he did magic. As soon as he became Orthodox, he wanted to practice along with this magic, but he was unable to do it. From this he realized that magic is the foundation of all religions and that religions are dead, their leaders are dead, but Christ is the living God.

- For many years exorcisms must be read for those who came from doing magic. This is what the early Church did.

- Buddhism has some truths, but it has one human truth, which reaches to "zero", that is, with concentration-meditation man reaches the non-being from which we came from. It is an existential suicide. Christ leads us to theosis, to communion with the Triune God.

- Some say that Buddhism has nothing to do with demonism. However, those who speak thus know Buddhism only from books and speak theoretically. Action is different.

- Some say that meditation brings them a certain peace. Externally this appears good, but these people are possessed by conceit and this results in carnal warfare. Even if they leave Buddhism, they again have carnal warfare. This shows the satanism of this method.

- There is a difference between Buddhist and Orthodox asceticism. In Buddhism they try to make a disclaimer and they reach nirvana. They confuse a reflection with mystical vision. They see created light with their mind. This was best done with Plotinus, in Neo-Platonism. The Fathers know this, and we can call it the "cloud of unknowing", but they went beyond this and reached the vision of the uncreated Light. Then they experience that the Light comes from a Person and not from an idea, and they feel a personal relationship with God and, at the same time, there develops a great love for God and the whole world until martyrdom and "self-hatred".

New St. Porphyrios: When our soul is sanctified, it shines with goodness

A human being has such powers, that he can transmit good or evil to his environment. These are very delicate matters. They require great care.

We must see everything in a good manner. We should not think anything evil about others. And even a glance and a sigh can affect our fellow man. And the slightest indignation brings evil. Let us have goodness and love within our soul, let us transmit these.

Let us pray that we not be indignant towards men who hurt us. Only let us pray for them with love. Whatever our fellow man does, let us not think evil of him. Always let us pray lovingly. Always let us think of the good.

We must never think regarding the other that God will give them some evil or punish them for their sin. This thought brings a very great evil, without us perceiving it.

Many times we are indignant, and we say to the other: "Do you not fear the righteousness of God, do you not fear that He will punish you?"

Other times we further say: "God cannot even punish you for that which you have done", or, "My God, do not do evil to that man for that which he did to me", or, "May he not suffer the same lot".

In all of these cases, we have deep within us the desire that the other be punished. Instead, however, of confessing our anger at their offense, we use another way of showing our indignation, appearing to entreat God for him. Thus, however, in reality we are cursing our brother.

And if, instead of praying, we say: "may you find it from God, that God might repay you for the evil you have done", then again we are praying for God to punish him.

Furthermore, when we say: "regardless, God sees everything", the state of our soul works in a mysterious way to bother the soul of our fellow man and he suffers evil. Do you understand, therefore, how our evil thoughts, our evil disposition bothers others? Because of these, we must find the way to purify the depth of ourselves from every evil. When our soul is sanctified, it shines with goodness. We silently sent out our love without saying words.

Christ never wants evil. Instead, He commands: "Bless those who curse you..."

It's clear that God expects us to raise our children as members of His Kingdom. He expects that they will cooperate with Him and ultimately be saved, that they will be the children of light. Just substitute: instead of "children," "people": that we will be *people of the light*, and inherit that which comes from Christ Himself; that they will die to the old Adam and be raised in Christ and will become Christ-like.

+ Fr. Alexander Atty

And that's what a good parishioner should be like: never give up. No matter what sin you possibly could do, you can't give up! And don't let anyone tell you it's worthless. The devil thinks differently than you and I do, by the way. He'll put into your brain—and mine also—that you can't win. You're not going to win. You're not going to win, and he says it so often in so many different ways that you begin to believe him, and you wave the white flag and you surrender and you say, "Everybody else is doing it. Why shouldn't I?" +Fr. Alexander Atty

A PRAYER OF SAINT MACRINA ON THE LAST DAY OF HER LIFE

Thou, O Lord, by Thy grace, has loosed us from the fear of death. Thou hast made the beginning of true life the end of this present life.

Thou, for a time, giveth rest unto our bodies with the sleep of death, and again Thou will raise us up at the last trumpet.

Thou givest our earthly elements, which Thou hast fashioned with Thine own hands, to the earth for safekeeping.

Again Thou shalt take from the earth that which Thou hast given, and transform with incorruption and grace our mortal and unsightly remains.

Thou hast delivered us from the curse and from sin, becoming, on account of Thy love, a curse and sin.

Thou hast broken the heads of the dragons who on account of disobedience, swallowed up man.

Thou hast opened the path of resurrection unto us and crushed the gates of Hades and destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

To those that revere Thee, Thou hast given a sign, that of Thy honorable Cross, to destroy the enemy and to protect our life as a shield.

To Thee, my God, was I spoken for from my mother's womb; and my soul doth love Thee with all my strength.

It is to Thee that I have consecrated my body and my soul from my youth to the present.

Do Thou give me an angel of light, to guide me to the place of rest, in the bosom of our holy Fathers.

O Thou Who didst meet the flaming sword and establish in Paradise the thief who wast crucified with Thee and place himself under Thy compassion, remember me also in Thy Kingdom.

I, too, was crucified with Thee; and I nailed down my flesh with the fear of Thee, for of Thy judgments am I afraid.

Let not the dread chasm separate me from the elect. Neither let the reproachful devil oppose me in the way; nor let my sin be found before Thine eyes, if, on account of our weak nature, I sinned with a word or with a deed or with a thought.

O Thou Who hast authority to forgive sins, pardon me, that I might be refreshed and found before Thee when I put off this body, without any spot in the comeliness of my soul; but receive my soul into Thy hands, pure and blameless, as incense before Thee.

-St. Macrina is the sister of St. Basil the Great (July 19)