



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

✠ August 10, 2014 ✠

The Dormition Fast

Postfeast of the Transfiguration

Hieromartyrs St. Lawrence the Archdeacon

and St. Sixtus, Pope of Rome (258)



This Week -

+ Memorial Service – Wed. Aug. 13 – *Phillip Poole* – Memorial meal to follow

+ Memorial Service - Thurs. Aug 14 5:30pm *Emmanuel* – Tatiana Predescu's father
{Before Dormition Vespers}

+ Memorial Service – Fri. Aug. 15 – *Alexandra Sharifulina*

+ Feast of the Dormition of the Most-Holy Theotokos

+ Thurs, August 14 ~ 6:30pm Vespers with Litiya

➤ All- Night Vigil with Lamentations to the Theotokos

+ Dormition Divine Liturgy – Fri. August 15 6:00am

NOTE: New Inquirer's Class – Begins Tuesday, August 19 (not the 12th)

>Looking Ahead: ~ Church School Resumes – Sunday, September 14 – Feast of the Cross

~ Annual Parish Meeting – Sunday, September 21

Meet it is to Magnify Thee! ...

From Apostolic times and to our days all who truly love Christ give veneration to Her Who gave birth to Him, raised Him and protected Him in the days of his youth. If God the Father chose the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Her, and God the Son dwelt in Her, submitted to Her in the days of His youth, was concerned for Her when hanging on the Cross - then should not everyone who confesses the Holy Trinity venerate Her?

Still in the days of Her earthly life the friends of Christ, the Apostles, manifested a great concern and devotion for the Mother of the Lord, especially the Evangelist John the Theologian who, fulfilling the will of Her divine Son, took Her to himself and took care of Her as for a mother from the time when the Lord uttered to him from the Cross the words: "Behold thy mother."

The Evangelist Luke painted a number of icons of Her, some

(p.3)



This and That

- ... **We don't actually make the world a better place. We save some lives and this is good.**

It was good even before we began believing in myths such as a better world. A difference, however, is that those myths have been the source of more human suffering than almost anything else in human history. I am suggesting that for Christians, the commandments of Christ (love God, love your neighbor) is enough without falling into the trap of modernity's mythology. That mythology makes us into the fools of politicians and manipulators, whose alliance is ultimately with the evil one. If making the world a better place were a proper goal, Christ would have given it to us. It is not. It is idolatry.

I do not think these observations are sad. It is modernity's madness, murder and mayhem in the name of all of its better worlds that is sad. I am speaking of the beauty of God's commandments and the simple life of loving God and loving our neighbor without subscribing to the mythical lies of the evil one.

I think we should go about living our lives as faithfully as possible, committing their outcome and the outcome of history to God. God certainly "so loved the world." But He did not put us in charge of the world. It is a sort of "Babel Syndrome" as I described recently that is at work in modernity. The belief that we can control the outcomes of history is novel, wrong, and productive of evil rather than good. Of course, the defenders of modernity point to every material success to justify their program. They dismiss their failures by blaming them on poor planning, poor funding, etc. and even religion! Again, there is no argument from me on the goodness of technology used in accordance with God's commandments, nor with research, etc. But the assumptions of modernity are not required for any of those things.

Fr. Stephen Freeman

~ Any split in the Church will be what it has always been: those who serve God and those who serve mammon. Jesus calls all to repentance while standing ready to forgive everyone everything. It is common to nurse a favorite sin, walling it off from His grace. That can be dealt with pastorally. When anyone demands that we join them on the battlements to help protect their favorite sin then they are demanding that we participate in their refusal. I have been angry for as long as I can remember. I could easily contend that I was born angry, there may even be a genetic predisposition to anger. Still it is a sin that is indicative of a disordered will I must take into confession.

~ All are welcome (in the Church) who wish to live a life of repentance in accordance with the truth revealed in the Church. There are many other places where no such requirements exist.

– Michael Baumann

The twentieth century Russian philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev on Freedom: Freedom, in his words, "presupposes the existence of truth, of meaning, of God." Truth and meaning liberate, and liberation leads to truth and meaning." And that true freedom "must also be love, and love must be free."

Unless and until Americans forsake mindless consumerism, nihilistic self-gratification, and allowing the corporate media to do their thinking for them, they will never attain to the true freedom spoken of by Berdyaev. Americans must realize that their true enemies are neither manufactured terrorists nor a revived Russia, but their own amoral, decadent elites, and even more so their own complacency and sloth.

– Daniel Spaulding, *Soul of the East Blog*

"Social Justice" by Walter Williams: "I keep what I earn and you keep what you earn. If you believe that you deserve some of what I earn, please explain why."

"When lies have been accepted for some time, the truth always astounds with an air of novelty."

~ St. Clement of Alexandria

together with the Pre-eternal Child, others without Him. When he brought them and showed them to the Most Holy Virgin, She approved them and said: "The grace of my Son shall be with them," and repeated the hymn she had once sung in the house of Elizabeth: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior."

However, the Virgin Mary during Her earthly life avoided the glory which belonged to Her as the Mother of the Lord. She preferred to live in quiet and prepare Herself for the departure into eternal life. To the last day of Her earthly life She took care to prove worthy of the Kingdom of Her Son, and before death she prayed that He might deliver Her soul from the malicious spirits that meet human souls on the way to heaven and strive to seize them so as to take them away to hades. The Lord fulfilled the prayer of His Mother and in the hour of Her death Himself came from heaven with a multitude of angels to receive her soul.

Since the Mother of God had also prayed that she might bid farewell to the Apostles, the Lord gathered Her for Her death all the Apostles, except Thomas and they were brought by an invisible power on that day to Jerusalem from all the ends of the inhabited world, where they were preaching, and they were present at her blessed translation into eternal life.

The Apostles gave her most pure body over for burial with sacred hymns, and on the third day they opened the tomb so as once more to venerate the remains of the Mother of God together with the Apostle Thomas, who had arrived then in Jerusalem. But they did not find the body in the tomb and in perplexity they returned to their own place; and then, during their meal, the Mother of God Herself appeared to them in the air, shining with heavenly light, and informed them that Her Son had glorified her body also, and She, resurrected, stood before His Throne. At the same time she promised to be with them always.

The Apostles greeted the Mother of God with great joy and began to venerate her not only as the Mother of their beloved Teacher and Lord, but also as their heavenly helper, as a protector of Christians and intercessor for the whole human race before the Righteous Judge. And everywhere the Gospel of Christ was preached, His Most Pure Mother also began to be glorified....

The end of the earthly life of the Most Holy Mother of God was the beginning of Her greatness. "Being adorned with Divine glory" (Irmos of the Canon of The Koimisis), She stands and will stand, both in the day of the Last Judgment and in the future age, at the right hand of the throne of her Son. She reigns with Him and has boldness towards Him as His mother according to the flesh, and as one in spirit with Him, as one who has performed the will of God and instructed others (Matt. 5:19). Merciful and full of love, She manifests her love toward Her Son and God in love for the human race. She intercedes for it before the Merciful One, and going about the earth she helps men.

Having experienced all the difficulties of earthly life, the Intercessor of the Christian race sees every tear, hears every groan and entreaty directed to Her. Especially near to Her are those who labor in the battle with the passions and are zealous for a God-pleasing life. But even in worldly cares She is an irreplaceable helper. "Joy of all who sorrow, and intercessor for the offended, and feeder of the hungry, consolation of travelers, harbor of the storm-tossed, visitation of the sick, protection and intercessor for the infirm, staff of old age, Thou art the Mother of God on High, O Most Pure One." (Service to the Panagia Odigitria)....

There is no intellect or words to express the greatness of Her Who was born in the sinful human race but became "more honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim." "Seeing the grace of the secret mysteries of God made manifest and clearly fulfilled in the Virgin, I rejoice; and I know not how to understand the strange and secret manner whereby the Undefined has been revealed as alone chosen above all creation, visible and spiritual. Therefore, wishing to praise Her, I am struck dumb with amazement in both mind and speech. Yet still I dare to proclaim and magnify Her. She is indeed the Heavenly Tabernacle." (Oikos from the Feast of the Entrance into the Temple).

Every tongue is at a loss to praise as is due; even a spirit from above is filled with dizziness, when it seeks to sing Thy praises, O Theotokos. But since Thou art good, accept our faith. Thou knowest well our love inspired by God, for Thou art the Protector of Christians, and we magnify Thee." (Irmos of 9th Ode, Feast of Theophany).

- from the writings of Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco on the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God.

PRAYER TO THE MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD IN TIME OF SORROW

Most Holy Mother of Christ, Most Pure, Most Blessed, Mother of God, see how Satan strikes me like sea waves against a ship!

He pursues me by day and torments me by night.

I have no peace--my soul sways--my spirit trembles.

Make haste, illustrious Lady, and help me!

Beseech the sweet Lord to have mercy on me and forgive the sins I have committed. O Most Holy Mother of Jesus, thy loving kindness is great and the greatest adversary to the power of hell.

Even when the most grievous sinner falls into hell's inferno, shoved by diabolic power, if he cries out to thee, thou art ready to deliver him.

Deliver me also. See how Satan wants to make me stumble and annihilate my faith, but I place my trust in the Lord.

Glory be to thee, more holy than the Cherubim and Seraphim, forever!

AMEN.

Genuine and False Experiences of the Grace of God (Conclusion)

False experiences of the Grace of God

People have false experiences of God when they believe that by themselves, with their own powers, in heresies, in groups, in religious gatherings, outside the Church, they can receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. They gather and some new "prophet" acts the leader and they believe they are receiving the grace of God.

It happened that I was present at a gathering of Pentecostals in the United States in 1966 while I was there. Their "church" was a hall of a school. First someone started to play some music with soft and gentle sounds, which as it went on it was becoming progressively more intensive, deafening and frantic so that it caused excitement. The music finished and the preacher started. He too started gently and as he continued he would scream louder. At the end he too created an excited atmosphere. And then when all the people suffered from auto-suggestion and hysteria, they started to scream and move their hands and give out unintelligible shouts. I felt that the Spirit of God was not there, which is a Spirit of peace and not of disturbance and excitement. The Spirit of God does not come with artificial and psychological ways. Instead I felt sorry for the children that were there with their parents for they could suffer the consequences of this mass neurosis.

Other experiences in heretic gatherings are not only psychological. They could be demonic. The devil manipulates the seeking of such experiences by some people and presents them different signs which are not of God but theirs - diabolical. They cannot understand that they are victims of the devil.

They believe these signs are heavenly and from the Holy Spirit. The devil also can give them some prophetic capability as he gives to the "mediums". The Lord has however forewarned us, "There will rise false Christs and false Prophets and will give you great signs and wonders, insomuch that if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect (Matt. 24:24), They won't simply do miracles and wonders, scary signs. Like the Antichrist when he will come he will not do bad things. He will do benefactions, healing of the sick and other impressive things to deceive the people, if possible even the elect, to believe him as savior and follow him.

That is why we must be careful. Everyone who can do signs and prophecies is not always from God. Again as the Lord says: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in Your name? And in Your name cast out devils? And in Your name done many wonderful works? And then will I say unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me you that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22-23).

I knew a young man who was led astray by occult and Pentecostal heresies, who confessed that the different experiences he had when he was a member of these heresies, were diabolical.

A previous Pentecostal man for example confessed that at the Pentecostal gatherings, when some "prophetess" would prophesy, he felt a demonic disturbance and that when he tried to say the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me the sinner", the speaking in tongues would start and drown him, impeding him from saying the prayer.

Because the devil transforms to an angel of light, we must be careful with experiences. The Apostle John advises us: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). Not all the spirits are from God. Those who have the Apostle Paul's gift of discernment of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10) can discern the spirits if they are from God or if from the devil. The Confessors of the Church have this gift. That is why when we have such problems we must seek our Confessor and he will determine the source of every experience.

Even the monastics can be deceived. We have cases at the Holy Mountain where monks were deceived by such experiences. For example, an angel appeared to a monk - while it was the devil - and told him: "Come to the peak of Athos to show you great miracles". He guided him there and he almost fell over the cliff, had he not invoked divine help. He made the mistake to believe the vision as if of God when he shouldn't have. The monastics know when they have a vision they must tell it to their Elder and he will tell them if it is from God or from the demons. Where there is pride, therefore, deceit is very possible.

About Pentecostals

The experiences of the Pentecostals are not from God. For this, not only are they not helped to come to Church but instead they are driven away from the Church. For only the devil is interested in driving people out of the Church.

If the Spirit of God existed in these groups, there would have been a union, there would have been one Church and not so many different and opposing groups.

Also, some of the demonstrations that take place at their gatherings, such as trembling, dropping to the ground as if dead, screaming unrecognizable sounds, are not from the peaceful Spirit of God. Similar phenomena we find in idolatrous religions. There are also many similarities with the Spiritualist phenomena.

What now with the sought after gift by them of "speaking in tongues"? In truth, in the New Testament there is reference to "speaking in tongues". The Holy Apostles on the day of Pentecost spoke the tongues of the people who had come for pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to teach them the Good News. The gift of speaking in tongues is a grace given by God to the Apostles for a specific purpose: To convert the non-Christians to the Christian faith. The Holy Apostles, when speaking in tongues, did not speak meaningless sounds like demoniacs. They spoke tongues, not any tongues, but the tongues of those who were in Jerusalem and could not speak the Jewish language, so that they could hear of the greatness of God and believe. So the meaningless cries have no relation to the gift of "speaking in tongues" which the Pentecostals maintain.

The Orthodox Church is the place of the genuine experience of the Grace of God

The Church of Pentecost is our Orthodox Church. And why is she? Because she is the Church of the Incarnation and Humanity of Christ, of His crucifixion death, His Resurrection, and of Pentecost. When from the complete work of Christ we isolate only one part, we overemphasize it and falsely explain it, this becomes one-sided and a heresy. Only the Church that accepts and lives the whole work of Christ, including Pentecost, is the true Church of Pentecost. Can there be a Resurrection without a Cross? Unless man crucifies himself with fasting, prayer, repentance, humility, asceticism, could he see God? The Cross precedes in the life of Christ and of the Christian and the Resurrection and Pentecost follows. They want a Resurrection and spiritual gifts without crucifying themselves through repentance, asceticism, fasting and obedience to the Church. That is why they do not comprise the Church of Pentecost.

At every Divine Liturgy of our Church we have Pentecost. How does the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ? Don't they become through the descent of the Holy Spirit? There is Pentecost! Every Holy Altar of the Orthodox Church is the table of Pentecost. At every baptism we have Pentecost. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, man becomes a Christian and becomes one with the Body of Christ. Every tonsuring of a Deacon, Priest, and of course a Hierarch is a new Pentecost. The Holy Spirit descends and makes a man a liturgist of God.

Every confession of a Christian is Pentecost. The moment the Christian kneels to his Confessor and with humility tells him his sins with repentance and the Confessor reads him the blessing of forgiveness, he is forgiven by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

At every gathering and at every Mystery of the Church it is a continuation of Pentecost, because they are performed in the presence of the Holy Spirit. For this almost all Services, the prayers and the Mysteries of the Church, begin with a prayer: "Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of truth... come and abide in us...." We ask the Paraklete to come, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. And He comes. Wherever the Orthodox Church meets, the true Church of Christ, there also is the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Every Saint of our Church is a Spirit-bearing man, full of the gifts of the Holy Spirit - a man of Pentecost.

The Lord's Prayer requests: "Thy Kingdom come" meaning: "May the grace of Thy Holy Spirit come". The kingdom of God is a grace of the Holy Spirit. So with the "Our Father" we seek the Holy Spirit.

The prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner", this too is done through the grace of the Holy Spirit. For as the Apostle Paul says: "No one can say Lord Jesus, if not from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). No one can invoke Jesus Christ but only through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, only the Holy Water of the Orthodox remains unspoiled. Those who have Holy Water at your home, you know that no matter how old it is, it never spoils.

This is our faith, the true and Orthodox one.

To depart from this faith and follow some American recent "saviors" who believe that the Church starts with them, just imagine what demonic conceit they have! The Church exists for two thousand years and they say that from them, the Pentecostals and other heretics, begins the true faith.

In these very critical times, any Orthodox Christian who keeps his Orthodox faith in Christ, will receive great blessing and great reward from our Holy God. And this because in this evil and corrupt time he was not led astray by the contemporary idolatry and the false gods, he did not bend a knee to them but remained steadfast and immovable in our Orthodox Faith.

All of us who are within the Church, we shall repent, we shall confess, we shall be forgiven and God shall have mercy on us. Outside the Church who will save us? What Holy Spirit will forgive our sins and which Church will intercede after our death for our souls? Therefore, any Orthodox who dies Orthodox should know he/she has a hope of salvation. However, anyone who departs from the Church, even if he believes he has done good works, has no hope of salvation.

For this, brethren, let us remain in our Orthodox Church faithful and immovable with a holy stubbornness to our end so that we may all have, with the grace of God and the blessing of the Theotokos, hope for our salvation.

+ + +

It is a marvelous thing that God rained manna on the fathers, and that they were fed by daily nourishment from Heaven. Therefore, it is said 'Man hath eaten the bread of Angels' (Ps. 77:25). Yet all those who ate that bread died in the desert but this food which you receive, this 'living bread, which came down from Heaven,' furnishes the substance of eternal life, and whoever eats this bread 'will not die forever'; for it is the Body of Christ.

~ St. Ambrose of Milan

Why People Become Orthodox

by Fr. Stephen Freeman ~ Journey to Orthodoxy Website:

<http://journeytoorthodoxy.com/2014/07/30/why-people-become-orthodox/>

Now this is indeed a presumptuous title for a post – as if there were only one reason that people convert to the Orthodox Faith. There are certainly many reasons, nuanced by the various personalities that come. And do they ever come!

I was asked: *“What sort of Evangelism Events do you have at St. Anne (Oak Ridge, TN)?”*

I had to confess that other than making ourselves accessible and somewhat “convert friendly” our only method is, “We answer the phone.” (And without a secretary that is not always certain.)

I could also say in a manner that avoids the topic, that people come for a variety of reasons. This is true but indeed avoids much of the obvious.

Several things of note among the many converts we have at St. Anne:

1. They believe the Orthodox Faith to be the truth.

This is the reason I have stated for my own conversion. After every conversation, argument, etc. After every article and book, the simple fact is that I believe the Orthodox faith, including its ecclesiology to be the truth. I am willing to defend my acceptance of that, but the only defence that matters is the one I shall have to give on Judgement Day, and I believe that I will sit before a judge who Himself is the head of the Orthodox Church. The serious question will be: “What have you done with the faith I gave you?”

2. We looked at the other “options” and found them wanting.

Many Orthodox converts have looked elsewhere first. Perhaps even hoping that elsewhere would answer their questions and supercede the necessity of becoming Orthodox. But I think for those who become Orthodox, elsewhere just did not do the trick. There is a neatness and tidiness, for instance, about Roman Catholic ecclesiology. In fact, I think it's so tidy that it is man's invention and not God's. But you can argue with me about that some other time. I can hardly think of a situation in which God has been so tidy elsewhere. Why should it only be ecclesiology?

3. “Deep calls unto deep” (Psalm 42:7)

There is an indescribable element of the heart in Orthodoxy. Despite many of its obstacles, individuals find themselves drawn here as the only answer to the depths of their heart. Everything else is rationalized, modernized, clinicalized. Orthodoxy, almost because of its strange rationality is the only thing that answers that deeper call. This has certainly been true of my own journey.

4. The tidiness and the untidiness.

There is a “tidiness” in Orthodox faith and belief, and yet that same security and assurance is coupled with an untidy approach (we call it “*economia*”) without which it would be impossible to know salvation (other than in a highly sterilized world of annulments and legal dispensations).

5. The saints.

There are marvelous saints in many places and yet the lives and teachings of many of the Orthodox saints, including the ones of the past century, seem to say, “This is home, come here.”

6. God told me to do this.

(No comment needed)

~ Reader Comment: *“Reality - Orthodoxy gives you a real view of yourself in relation to an Almighty Creator and teaches you how to act appropriately.”*