



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

✦ **September 28, 2014** ✦

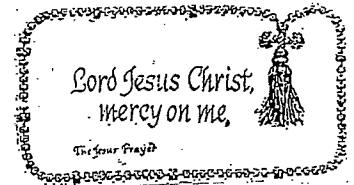
St. Chariton the Confessor,

Abbot of Palestine (350)

St. Wenceslaus, King of the Czechs (935)

When the Jesus Prayer is absent, all manner of harmful things assail us, leaving no room for anything good in the soul. But when our Lord is present in the Prayer, everything alien is banished.

~ St. Gregory Palamas



- **Tues. Sept 30 6:30pm Inquirer's Class**
- **Wed. Oct. 1 6:30pm Akathist to the Theotokos**
- **Many Thanks to all who helped at the workday yesterday!**

Patience!

"With regards to patience the Lord says, 'You will gain possession of your souls through your patient endurance' (Luke 21:19). He did not say "through your fasting" or "through your vigils". I refer to the patience bestowed by God, which is the queen of virtues, the foundation of courageous actions. It is patience that is peace amid strife, serenity amid distress, and a steadfast base for those who acquire it. Once you have attained it with the help of Christ Jesus, no swords and spears, no attacking armies, not even the ranks of demons, the dark phalanx of hostile powers, will be able to do you any harm."

~ St. Gregory of Sinai (12th C)

When a Christian exercises watchful care, he heals his soul and does not allow it to be lost. Do not let your soul go astray in matter, in the corruptible things of the world. Life has no value if we do not take care of the soul. Therefore do not let yourselves go astray and lose your soul. Read carefully the Gospels, because these were written with the grace and the glory of God, to be read by the faithful that their life might shine.

New Martyr St. Raphael of Lesbos (15th C)

A True Member

+ In order to be a true member of the Church, each of the faithful must humbly recognize both his own responsibility and his inadequacy, and be ever watchful to accept each and every one as a potential channel for the Holy Spirit. And every time human passions appear in the place of a prayerful waiting on the action of grace, perfection of unity remains impossible, and an intellectual or psychological struggle sets in between the members of the Assembly."

~ Archimandrite Sophrony of Essex (+1991)

A Necessary Condition for Communion

The contrition that comes from a sense of one's own sinfulness is a necessary condition for Communion. This does not, however, prevent the Christian from receiving the Eucharist as a celebration of joy and thanksgiving. By its very nature the Eucharist is a solemn thanksgiving, fundamental to which is praise of God. Herein lies the paradox and mystery of the Eucharist: it has to be approached with both repentance and joy. With repentance from a sense of one's unworthiness, and with joy at the fact that the Lord in the Eucharist cleanses, sanctifies and deifies the human person, renders him worthy in spite of his unworthiness. In the Eucharist not only the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, but also the communicant himself is transformed from an old into a new person; he is freed from the burden of sin and illumined by divine light.

Bp. Hilarion Alfayev

Whenever we tell people about our brother's guilt, God will do the same about ours.

~ St. Poemen the Great

This and That

- Our Christian values of meekness, love, forgiveness, limitless second chances, sometimes seem so inadequate to respond to our contemporary Zeitgeist. Kyrie eleison! Now it seems to me that there is no orthodoxy so strict and stern as the orthodoxy of The Left. - Monk James

All Sane People Knew...

From the beginning of recorded history down to, say, 20-30 years ago, all sane people knew that marriage was a bond between a male and a female, backed by their families, to produce grandchildren. Now, activists, legislators, and judges inform us that not only the churchmen and philosophers who taught this view but also the governments who enforced it were hopelessly wrong.

What does this say, first, about our attitude to government? After all, he our rulers could be so *wrong* about something so basic, how can they possibly expect us to believe them about this or that social policy or war? Second, what about other basic definitions and prohibitions, involving, say, incest, rape, armed robbery and murder? After all, those are just time-honored opinions put forth by philosophers and churchmen and enforced by legislators and judges. Surely, only a hardened bigot would not be open to a more enlightened opinion. - Thomas Fleming

- By all the normal rules of observation and inference Marxism was a fraud, just another 19th-century pseudoscience that only differed from competitors like August Comte's Positivism in the appalling human damage it had caused. Why prosperous, supposedly smart people in the graduate schools of Princeton, Yale, and UCLA would take up with Marxism is one of the puzzles of the age...

Whereas the Marxists strip literature of meaning by applying their own brand of reductionist analysis to it, the "deconstructionists" were taught, rather more simply though in impenetrably riddling English, that literature, like life, had no meaning at all. What both these parties had in common was their membership: ex-student rebels and baby boomers looking for a stick with which to beat the life out of anything coming to them with the label "traditional" attached to it. - Frank Brownlow, *Chronicles*

- The French Revolution:

...it is difficult not to see in that momentous event a turning point in the history of the Western world: Never before had there been so many men outwardly bent on radically changing the world. They were not merely intent on toppling a monarchical system; their unshakable faith in the democratic idea rested basically upon their conviction that democracy was the tool with which they could build a new world, and a perfect one at that, because for the first time in history men could build it together and on an equal footing without the hindrance of nefarious tyrants or even more nefarious superstitions. So much so that they had no qualms about being aggressive. They had a mission: to save a straying mankind from its own sins and to create a regenerated one, which meant declaring war upon the unfaithful—the rest of the world—as they actually did in 1792. The French Revolution erupted in the midst of Europe the way volcanoes are born, slicing through the crust of multi-secular societies, splitting their fabric. Never after was anything the same as before.

_ Washington's policy of backing Croatian, Bosnian Muslim, Albanian and Montenegrin separatists against the Serbs in Yugoslavia led to the tragedies of 1995 – a mass expulsion of Serbs from territories claimed by Zagreb and Sarajevo, in a repeat of the 1940s – and 1999, when NATO openly attacked Serbia in order to occupy its province of Kosovo... Interestingly, US insiders involved admitted that the 1999 NATO war had little to do with the "plight of Kosovo Albanians," but far more with "Yugoslavia's resistance to the broader trends of political and economic reform" – as well as that the ultimate target of this war of aggression wasn't Belgrade, but Moscow. - Nebosija Malic

_ Whereas elections once pitted the party of the working class against the party of Wall Street, they now pit voters who believe in a fixed and universal morality against those who see moral issues, especially sexual ones, as elastic and subject to personal choice. - Tom Edsall

~ "Hell," as Thomas Hobbes astutely noted several centuries ago, "is truth glimpsed too late."

Dialogue between an Elder and an Atheist: A Compelling Case for Christianity (Part 2)

- Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos (+1991)

First of all, He (Christ) proclaims that He is sinless: "Who among you shall accuse Me of sin?" (John 8:46). "The ruler of this world is coming, and he can find nothing in Me" (John 14:30). He also pronounces very high ideas of Himself: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12); "I am the way the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

But, apart from these, He also projects demands of absolute dedication to His Person. He even penetrates the holiest of man's relationships, and says: "Whosoever loves their father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me. And whosoever loves their son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). "I came to set a man against his father, and the daughter against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Matthew 10:35). He even demands a life and a death of martyrdom from His disciples: "They shall deliver you to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you shall be dragged before leaders and kings for My sake.... And brother shall deliver his brother to death and the father his son, and the children shall revolt against their parents and shall put them to death.... You shall be hated by everyone, for My namesake. And he that shall endure to the end, he shall be saved. Do not fear those who destroy the body.... Whosoever shall deny Me before mankind, I too shall deny him.... Whosoever has forfeited his soul for My sake, shall recover it" (Matthew 10:17, et al)

And now I ask you: Has anyone ever dared to demand for himself the love of mankind, forsaking their very life? Has anyone ever dared to proclaim his absolute sinlessness? Has anyone ever dared to utter the words: "I am the truth"? (John 14:6) No one and nowhere! Only a God can do that. Can you imagine your Marx uttering things like that? They would take him for a lunatic and nobody would be willing to follow him!

Now, just consider, how many people sacrificed everything for Christ's sake, even their very life, having believed in the veracity of His words regarding Himself! If His proclamations about Himself were false, Jesus would have been the most despicable character in history, for having led so many people to such a huge sacrifice! What ordinary man – no matter how great, how important, how wise he may be – would deserve such a tremendous offer and sacrifice? Well? No one! Not unless he were God!

In other words: Any ordinary man that would demand such a sacrifice from his followers would have been the most loathsome person in history. Christ, however, both demanded it, and achieved it. Yet, despite this 'achievement', He was proclaimed by the very deniers of His divinity as the noblest and holiest figure in history. So, either the deniers are being illogical when they proclaim this most loathsome figure as "holiest", or, in order to avoid any bad logic, and to rationalize the co-existence of Christ's demands and His holiness, they must concede to accepting that Christ continues to remain the noblest and holiest figure in mankind, but, only under the condition that He is also God! Otherwise, as we said, He would be, not the holiest, but the most loathsome figure in history, being the cause of the greatest sacrifice of all ages, and in the name of a lie! Thus, Christ's divinity is proved by His very deniers, on the basis of those very characterizations of His person!

Atheist: What you just said is really very impressive, but it is nothing but speculation. Do you have any historical facts that would confirm His Divinity?

Elder: I told you at the beginning, that the proofs of His Divinity are the supernatural events that took place while He was here on earth. Christ did not rest on the proclamation of the above truths

alone; He certified His statements with miracles as well. He made blind people see and cripples walk; He satisfied the hunger of five thousand men and manifold numbers of women and children with only two fish and five loaves of bread; He commanded the elements of nature and they obeyed; He resurrected the dead, amongst whom was Lazarus, four days after his death. But the most astounding of all his miracles was His own Resurrection.

The entire edifice of Christianity is supported on the event of the Resurrection. This is not my speculation. The Apostle Paul said it: "If Christ had not risen (from the dead), our faith would be futile". (1 Corinthians 15:17). If Christ did not resurrect, then everything collapses. But Christ was resurrected, which means He is the Lord of life and death, therefore God.

Atheist: Did you see all of this? How can you believe it?

Elder: No, I didn't see any of it, but others did: the Apostles. They in turn made this known to others, and they actually "signed" their testimony with their own blood. And, as everyone acknowledges, a testimony of one's life is the supreme form of testimony.

Why don't you likewise bring me someone, who will tell me that Marx died and was resurrected, and that he is willing to sacrifice his life in order to testify to it? I, as an honest man, will believe him.

Atheist: I will tell you. Thousands of communists were tortured and died for their ideology. Why don't you embrace communism in the same way?

Elder: You said it yourself. Communists died for their ideology. They didn't die for real events. In an ideology, it is very easy for deception to seep through; and because it is a characteristic of the human soul to sacrifice itself for something it believes in, this explains why so many communists died for their ideology. But that doesn't compel us to accept this ideology as something true.

It is one thing to die for ideas, and another to die for events. The Apostles didn't die for any ideas. Not even for the "Love one another", or any of the other moral teachings of Christianity. The Apostles died for their testimony of supernatural events. And when we say 'event', we mean that which is captured by our physical senses, and is comprehended through them.

The Apostles suffered martyrdom for "that which they heard", "that which they saw with their own eyes", "that which they observed and their hands touched" (1 John 1).[3]

Just like the clever speculation by Pascal, we say that one of the three following things happened to the Apostles: either they were deceived, or, they deceived us, or, they told us the truth.

Let's take the first case. It is not possible for the Apostles to have been deceived, because everything that they reported, was not reported to them by others. They themselves were eye and ear witnesses of all those things. Besides, none of them were imaginative characters, nor did they have any psychological inclination that made them accept the event of the Resurrection. Quite the contrary - they were terribly distrustful. The Gospels are extremely revealing in their narrations of their spiritual dispositions: they even disbelieved the reassurances that some people had actually seen Him resurrected.[4]

And one other thing. What were the Apostles, before Christ called them? Were they perhaps ambitious politicians or visionaries of philosophical and social systems, who were longing to conquer mankind and thus satisfy their fantasies? Not at all. They were illiterate fishermen. The only thing that interested them was to catch a few fish to feed their families. That is why, even after the Lord's Crucifixion, and despite everything that they had heard and seen, they returned to their fishing boats and their nets. In other words, there was not a single trace of disposition in these men for the things that were to follow. It was only after the day of Pentecost, "when they received strength from on high", that they became the teachers of the universe. {to be continued}

ARE CHRISTIANS PREPARED FOR PERSECUTION?

By James Hitchcock, professor of history at Saint Louis University.

From the Editor: Even though this article's author is a non-Orthodox Christian, his views correctly bring to attention the increasingly hostile environment within which Christianity exists today, even in the most democratic of all nations. It is certainly a timely reminder for all those whose duties include leading His flock. Christians all over the world are being subjected to an environment of increasing persecution which is abundantly evident domestically as well. The "free-minded" leaders of this persecutory movements carry on their work with complete disregard as to how this great nation was created and the Christian roots of America's forefathers.

† † †

Authentic religion, precisely because it penetrates so deeply into the being of its adherents, has the capacity to inspire either great love and devotion or great hatred, sometimes one transforming itself into the other. At certain times in history that suppressed hatred bursts out violently, in systematic and frenzied attempts to, as Voltaire is supposed to have urged, "Crush the infamous thing." Such was the French Revolution, the triumph of Communism in Russia, and other episodes.

While particular justifications are offered for this frenzy of annihilation—the privileges of the clergy, ecclesiastical wealth—beneath it all is something which no degree of "reform," nor attempts by Christians to be accommodating, could ever expunge. This something is the hatred of a system of beliefs which calls each man's life into question at every moment, which reminds people of the infinite God who judges their every action. It is this which finally is intolerable to a certain kind of mind, which senses that it will not be at peace with itself until every vestige of this transcendent claim has been eradicated.

The often sadistic violence of the French Revolution seemingly betrayed the cool rationality which the Enlightenment proposed. But not the least of the Enlightenment's inadequacies was that it did not understand the irrational forces which it was helping to unleash. Today the tradition of the Enlightenment appears to have reached its end in the murky half-light of "post-modernism." However, classical Enlightenment critiques of Christianity—that it is superstitious and repressive—are now invoked with more effect than at any time in the past two hundred years, and with the same potential for irrational violence.

Among the numerous "stories" which the media ignore are the acts of vandalism directed at churches, occurrences which seem to have become so common as to be treated almost routinely. To date this is about as far as the enemies of religion have gone in inflicting physical harm.

But the frenzied symbolic assaults on religion are numerous and frightening, revealing as they do the barely suppressed violence which its enemies harbor and which, it is fair to judge, they would eagerly act out in life if given the opportunity.

The hateful blasphemies of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in San Francisco are merely one example. Frenzied blasphemy—the mocking of sacred symbols, the association of those symbols with the sickest kind of pornography—reveals the depth of the violent hatred because it represents an assault in some ways worse than the desire to do bodily harm. It aims to annihilate the sacred core of the believer's very being. It is a mentality in which the actual killing of individuals would be almost an anti-climax.

It is one of the supreme ironies of an age awash in ironies that it is Christians who are now routinely accused of being hateful, of fomenting violence, even as the guardians of public opinion carefully conceal from view the true mentality of the anti-Christians. (Thus the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence are presented merely as a group of merry pranksters who do what they do in order to raise money for charity.)

One of the results of the style of [Roman Catholic] episcopal leadership which has prevailed in America for three decades is that much, although not all, of this hatred has been diverted away from the Roman Catholic Church and towards those Protestants who can be called Fundamentalists. It is now treated as merely self-evident that the latter are hate-filled and intolerant, while the Roman Catholic Church is assessed in each particular situation, showing promise of change in some areas, intransigent in others. More than one bishop has probably prayed quietly, "Thank God for Pat Robertson. Let them pick on him rather than me."

How is it possible that anti-Christian bigotry is so strong in a society which is apparently the most religious in the Western world? In part the answer is that the very strength of religion inevitably provokes hatred; where it is weak it is simply ignored. On the other hand, Christianity is also not perceived as truly powerful. Thus religion is hated for its alleged oppressiveness but at the same time is not feared, the classic predicament of those Western monarchies where revolution occurred (England in the 1640's, France in the 1790's, Russia in 1917).

The single greatest enemy of a vibrant Christianity in the United States is not its proclaimed opponents but the deep, seemingly ineradicable complacency of its own adherents, a complacency which is to a great extent abetted, even actively fostered, by the clergy themselves. Most American Christians, including some who are ostensibly orthodox, live by the assumption that one espouses a religion in order to make one's life richer and more satisfying. The ultimate test is whether, like everything in the culture is supposed to do, it makes the individual "feel good about himself."

Most professed believers cannot conceive of why it should ever be necessary to make sacrifices for their religion, which is why there is almost total indifference to the fate of persecuted believers during one of the great ages of religious persecution in the history of the world.

Christians are now completely on the defensive in Western society in terms of their beliefs. Public discussion of religion is often casually hostile, and those who profess to believe are often apologetic in the popular sense of that word. As the events at Littleton, Colorado showed, public agencies like schools are tolerant of all kinds of deviant behavior, even as they are increasingly vigilant against the "intrusion" of religion into the public square. While there may be no systematic pattern of discrimination in employment, it would be a brave (or foolish) person who would talk openly in a job interview about deeply held religious beliefs. In the academy, including institutions which are nominally Christian, such discrimination is often taken for granted.

This is merely the beginning of a process which is likely to get worse. Looking at the situation through purely human eyes, it is likely that, as the reality of this hostility finally begins to dawn on comfortable Christians, and the price of their faith keeps getting higher, most will simply fall away, abandoning a faith which has become a handicap instead of a support.

In an important sense the real battle now is not between believers and overt secularists but between orthodox and liberal Christians, a reality which is at its starkest in Protestantism but which is also present in the Roman Catholic Church [Ed., and in the Orthodox Church as well]. Because the Fundamentalists remind them of what they once were, and perhaps ought still to be, liberal Protestant leadership regards their orthodox fellow Christians as the single greatest enemy of the human race. People who boast of their ability to "reach out" towards the despised and rejected have been the most effective soldiers in the war to demonize and marginalize orthodox believers, to the point where the National Council of Churches [Ed., a very liberal organization] is a public apologist for religious persecution throughout the world. Liberal Christianity is finally at the point of abandoning any claim about the unique importance of Jesus Christ in the economy of salvation, and this will merely intensify its view of orthodoxy as dangerous.

Especially in view of the nation's apparent indifference (if not worse) to the scandalous behavior of its president, some orthodox believers are in a state of discouragement, to the point of urging withdrawal from the public square into a kind of monasticism which will try to keep the faith alive for a better day. But in this atmosphere it is well to recall the Church's wisdom that not all are called to the monastic life and that the degree to which the monks of the Dark Ages simply huddled in their monasteries has been exag-

gerated—many of them were missionaries, bishops, even royal officials.

One major argument for believers remaining active in the public sphere is the explanation (excuse?) which Evelyn Waugh gave for his seemingly un-Christian behavior—how much worse it would be if there were no active Christian presence. Those who know the truth have an obligation in justice to, for example, the unborn, which they are not free to abandon.

Those who advocate a strategy of quasi-monastic withdrawal also underestimate the strength of the enemy. Jerry Falwell said all that needs to be said on the subject when he explained that Evangelicals began entering politics because the government would not let them alone. There is no place in the modern world where anyone can hide.

Thus Christians are obligated to continue the public struggle, no matter how much obloquy [Ed., calumny] it continues to bring down on them, even as they are obligated to storm heaven with their prayers. A major need is preparing Christians to live in an environment of hostility, increasing discrimination, possibly even of persecution. But this is perhaps the most severe of the many pastoral tasks presently being neglected.



Above all, do not forget prayer. Kneel at night before the icons to say your prayers. Feel that you are condemned by your sins before the feet of Christ, and implore Him: *My Lord, Thou who became man for me, Thou wast reviled, Thou wast mocked, Thou wast spat upon, Thou wast scourged, Thou didst wear a crown of thorns, Thou wast crucified, Thou didst pour out Thy precious Blood, whereas I have defiled Thine image by my sins, I implore Thee and entreat Thee, condemn me not, give me time for repentance and confession, that I may weep for my sins. Help me, O my God, because, by myself, without grace, I can do nothing.*

Every night, before lying in bed to go to sleep, reflect on how your whole day passed. Think if you pleased or grieved God. Your conscience will inform you. If you are not pleased, say, "since I am not pleased with myself, how shall God be?" And try continuously to correct yourself, so that you will not grieve God. A conscience without censure is either pure, or callous and hardened.

Never despair. For God, there is no unforgivable sin. His compassion and mercy is an abyss. Pride and despair are from the devil. Why despair, since there is a God Who is long-suffering? Despair is a great sin, it is unbelief.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain on Confession

Through Confession, the wounds we experience in our spiritual struggle are healed.

"Do not fear. [The spiritual life] is a struggle, it's real warfare; and we're bound to suffer wounds. But they're healed through confession. ... When soldiers are wounded in the course of battle, they rush to the doctor, he binds their wounds, and they courageously return to the battlefield. In the meantime, they gain experience through their wounds, become more capable of protecting themselves, and avoid getting wounded again. The same holds true for us. When wounded in our spiritual struggle, we mustn't be discouraged. Instead, we should rush to the doctor - our Spiritual Father - show him our wounds, be spiritually healed and continue 'the good fight'. It's bad when we don't search out the fierce enemies of the soul - the passions - and don't struggle to cast them out."

"Confession is a Mystery [Sacrament]. You should go and simply tell your sins. After all, what do you think of yourself? Have you no stubbornness? Have you no egoism? Don't you hurt [other people's] feelings? What do you suppose that I go to confess? 'I got angry, I criticized...', and the priest reads the prayer of forgiveness. But even small sins have their own collective weight themselves."

"When a person does not confess the truth to the Spiritual Father, who therefore - in turn - cannot point out his error to help him, he ends up being harmed all the more; in the same way as the patient, who hides his symptoms and his disease from the doctor. Whereas when the penitent opens himself honestly, as he really is, then the Spiritual Father can get to know him better; and help him more effectively and positively."

"When I used to go to Fr. Tychon (a Russian Father of Mt. Athos) for Confession, I wouldn't have anything serious to confess; and he would advise me, 'There is sand, my son, there is sand!' The little sins accumulate and add up to make a sand dune that is heavier than any single big stone. Someone who commits one big sin thinks of it all the time, repents and is humbled. You have a myriad of small sins. But if you examine the conditions under which you were raised, and the conditions under which the other person was raised, you will see that you are worse off spiritually than the other person."

"When someone has been unjust, or has injured some other person with his behavior, he must first go to that person and ask humbly for forgiveness, reconciliation; and then go to confess his fall to his Spiritual Father and receive remission for his sin. This is how the Grace of God comes to us. If one confesses his sin to the Spiritual Father without first having asked for forgiveness from the injured person, he cannot find peace in his soul; because he has not yet humbled himself."

"You must also try to be specific in your confession. It is not enough to simply say, for example, 'I am jealous, I get angry,' and so on; but you should relate the actual and specific sin, in order to be helped. And when it is a very serious sin, ... you must give details of how you thought and how you actually acted. Otherwise, you are merely trying to mock Christ."

"Someone who does the proper inner spiritual work in order to understand himself, is like the miner who digs deeply and discovers metals in the depths of the earth. The deeper one probes in discovering and learning his self, the more he feels unworthy and becomes humble; but the hand of God constantly lifts him. And when one finally comes to know himself, his humility will be permanent. That's when the Grace of God is integrally secured, and one is not vulnerable to pride."

The Fathers - On Sufferings

St. Macarius of Egypt:

"Wherever the Holy Spirit is, there follows, like a shadow, persecution and battle... It is necessary that the truth be persecuted."

St. Maximos the Confessor

"The patient endurance of the Saints exhausts the evil power that attacks them, since it makes them glory in sufferings undergone for the sake of the truth. It teaches those too much concerned with a life in the flesh to deepen themselves through such sufferings instead of pursuing ease and comfort; and it makes the flesh's natural weakness in the endurance of suffering a foundation for overwhelming spiritual power. For the natural weakness of the saints is precisely such a foundation, since the Lord has made their weakness stronger than the proud devil."

Blessed Bishop Augoustinos Kantiotes' *Follow Me*

The world that lives far away from God hates you. It hates light and truth. The unbelieving, corrupt world never forgives you, because you say "no" to the nameless desires of this generation. You raise a lash, smite their evils, and brand their sins. If it were possible, they would crucify you in the town square!

Lies, intrigue, and slander are the rewards with which Satan fills your world. And what will you do? Will you seek revenge? Rather than sacrifice one iota of Gospel law, make sharp rebukes against error and evil, but be sympathetic and forgiving to people who hate you, raise you on a cross, and subject you to the most fearful martyrdom. Pray the Lord to give you forbearance to forgive them, so that you can repeat the words of the First-Martyr Stephen, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60). This will be the loftiest sermon of your life, and it cannot possibly leave souls unmoved. There are aromatic trees which when cut bathe the ax with fragrance. Faithful servants of the Lord, aromatic trees in Christ's Church, you also should bathe with the aroma of heavenly forgiveness the world which strikes you and crucifies you.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza - The Saints' Sufferings

"In truth, whatever we may suffer, we suffer for our sins. If the Saints suffered, they suffered for God's name; or to demonstrate their virtue for the benefit of many, or to gain greater reward from God. As for us wretches, how can we say this? We sin like this daily, and - in seeking to satisfy our passion - we abandon the right path which the Fathers spoke about --- that of self-accusation. Each one of us follow the wrong path, try - on every occasion - to put the case against our brother, and throw the burden of responsibility on him. Each one of us is negligent and keeps nothing, but we demand that our neighbor keeps the commandments."

From (*Unseen Warfare*)

"Watch yourself with all diligence, lest the enemy steals near and robs you, depriving you of this great treasure, which is inner peace and stillness of soul. The enemy strives to destroy the peace of the soul, because he knows that when the soul is in turmoil it is more easily led to evil. But you must guard your peace."