



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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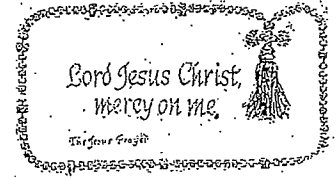
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✠ **November 2, 2014** ✠

**Martyrs Acindynus, Pegasius, Athonius,
Elpediphorus, Anempodestus of Persia (341)**

“STOP pleasing yourself and you will not hate your brother; stop loving yourself and you will love God.”

~ St. Maximus the Confessor



✠ **Tues. Nov. 4 6:30pm Inquirer's Class**

⇒ **Note: No Wednesday Service**

⇒ **Today: Baby Shower for Blair Boyer**

✠ **Sat. Nov. 8 10:00am Divine Liturgy – St. Michael and the Archangels**

+ As a creature of Almighty God, you exist in this world solely in order that – through all you do, by the totality of your life, your entire being – God's great and holy name may be glorified!
~ St. Innocent of Alaska

Christ Became Like One of Us

✠ “It was on account of this reason that He (Christ) became as we are, that He might make us brothers and free men. 'To all who received Him,' Scripture says, 'He gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God' (Jn. 1:12, 13). For the Word of God the Father was born according to the flesh in the same way as ourselves, so that we too might be enriched with a birth which is from God through the Spirit, no longer being called children of flesh but rather, having been transformed into something that transcends nature, being called sons of God by grace. For the Word, by nature and in reality the only-begotten and true Son, became like one of us.”
St. Cyril of Alexandria (444)

Be Merciful

✠ “The Lord Himself said: 'Be merciful, just as your heavenly Father also is merciful' [Luke 6:36]. He did not say: 'Fast as your heavenly Father fasts', neither did He say: 'Give away your possessions as your heavenly Father is without possessions'; but he did say: 'Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful'. This is because this virtue - above all - emulates God and is a characteristic of Him.

Therefore, as we have said, we must always be diligent in that aim, and act in knowledge; because there is a difference in the aims of [one giving] mercy. There is the person that offers mercy, because he wants his field to be blessed, and God blesses his field. Another person practices mercy so that his boat should be saved, and God saves his boat. Someone may also show mercy because of his children, and God protects his children. Another shows mercy to be glorified, and God glorifies him.”

St. Dorotheos of Gaza (5th C)

Holy Books

✠ “JUST as you take care to find food, clothing, shoes, and whatever is necessary for your body which is perishable, take care to acquire holy books, which are useful, profitable, and necessary for your soul, which is immortal. Listen to what the golden-voiced clarion of the Church, the luminary of the oecumene, St. John Chrysostom, says: 'Let us not neglect to acquire for ourselves spiritual books. Where there are spiritual books, diabolic action is driven away and there occurs great consolation of virtue. Reading such books constitutes great security, guarding us from sinning.... It is not possible to be saved without enjoying spiritual reading continually.'”

~ Blessed Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+ 1980)

“The way down is the way up.” - Fr. Stephen Freeman

I will use the Apostle Paul as an example: He was an upright, moral man prior to becoming a Christian. He kept the Jewish Law in the strictest possible manner as a member of the Pharisees. He was not a hypocrite. But neither did he know the true and living God. When he was converted on the road to Damascus, he did not suddenly take up a new moral code. He abandoned his moral ways and set himself on the road of grace. That path was one he described as “weakness.” He humbled himself. He emptied himself. He submitted to beatings and scourgings. He endured shipwrecks and the false accusations of his enemies.

But he is not a moral hero, or an example of great human achievement. What we see in his outward Christian life, is also the shape of his inmost heart. There, too, he strained towards what was impossible and beyond human reach. He pushed beyond what could be known in cause and effect. What he found was the very mystery of the Kingdom – union with God.

The result of this inward emptying can be seen in the fullness of grace God bestowed upon him. Miracles were worked even by cloths that had simply had contact with him. He raised the dead and cast out demons. He became so closely united to Christ that he could tell others to live as he lived.

From the outside, this manner of life can easily be mistaken for some version of moral psychology. But it is nothing of the sort. It is the impossible become reality, by the utter dependence upon the God of grace. As God told St. Paul, “My grace is enough.”

Moving from the psychological life to the spiritual life is often counter-intuitive. It sounds like it won't work. To a certain degree it involves quitting. We quit trying to be good, and seek only to empty ourselves to God. The goodness of our lives thus becomes God's goodness, and not our own.

The moral/psychological life is often one that cycles between effort, failure, shame and remorse only to begin again with renewed effort and promises of a better outcome. Some Christian lives never leave this cycle. It can be sheer misery. Most often it leads to disappointment and a quiet resignation to something less.

At first, embracing a spiritual life can feel like embracing failure. Indeed, it is embracing failure and weakness. The Elder Sophrony taught, “The way down is the way up.” It is, strangely, the only spiritual path that would actually be open to all believers. The worst of us can fail. Some of us learn to be very good at it! Prayer as the emptying of self in the presence of God is a very different thing than great athletic efforts of well-kept rules.

+ "The recovery of spiritual sight and the healing of physical blindness have much in common. Some of those whose bodily eyes were blind received their sight at once, like the man who heard and immediately saw and was healed (Lk. 18:35-43). Others recovered their sight gradually, as in the case of the man, who, before he was completely cured, said, 'I see men as trees, walking' (Mk. 8:22-26). It is the same with those whose spiritual eyes are healed. Whereas some recover instantly, others are healed in stages."

~ **St. Gregory Palamas**

Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow on Homosexual Marriage

In the Kazan Cathedral in Moscow, Patriarch Kirill, Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, warned against the extraordinary rise in many western countries of the homosexual movement. Kirill said that the trend of legalizing "gay marriage" is "a very dangerous sign of the apocalypse." It "means people are choosing a path of self-destruction," he said.

He said he supports the recently passed national ban on homosexual propaganda that has prohibited the Gay Pride festivities that have become a prominent feature of national life elsewhere.

"Lately, we have enormous temptations, when a number of countries opting for sin is approved and justified by the law, and those who, acting in good conscience, are struggling with such laws imposed by a minority, being repressed," Kirill said.

He added that everything must be done to prevent the approval of sin "on the spaces of Holy Russia." Otherwise, "the people are embarking on the path of self-destruction".

The sermon came the Sunday following the passage in Britain of the Cameron government's so-called "equal marriage" bill. Religious leaders and democracy campaigners both strenuously warned the government that its passage would seriously threaten foundational democratic freedoms.

Colossal forces have set out "to convince us all that the only value is the freedom of choice," said the Patriarch, "and no one has the right to infringe on that value, even when a person chooses evil, even when a person chooses a socially dangerous behavior."

Even the most perfect laws, however, cannot eradicate corruption, lies, evil and confrontation, he said: "These can be eradicated only by the person who has made a free choice in favor of the good."

In recent months, Kirill's has emerged as the strongest and most uncompromising religious voice in Europe against the apparently unstoppable political juggernaut of the international homosexualist movement. His comments yesterday follow his warning at a meeting in Moscow in May this year with Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjorn Jagland, where he said, "Today we have a very dangerous development, the laws regarding same-sex marriages and adoption of their children which go against the moral nature of man."

"If people choose this lifestyle," the Polish news service Interfax quoted him saying, "it is their right, but the responsibility of the Church is to say that it is a sin before God".

What the Russian Orthodox Church is concerned about, Kirill said, "is not the fact of the existence of this sin – it has always existed. But we are deeply concerned that for the first time in the history of the human race sin is being justified by law. This opens up the prospect of a dangerous development, which will contribute to the moral degradation of society."

Patriarch Bartholomew on Homosexual Marriage

On September 7, 2013 His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visited the Holy Cathedral of St. Symeon in Tallinn, Estonia. Early that afternoon, His All-Holiness presided over Vespers Service in the same church, at which time he delivered the Homily.

Below is an excerpt of this Homily, in which he addressed the topic of the relationship between Church and Family, and in turn condemned Homosexual Marriage as an innovation foreign to the ecclesiological mindset and Christian way of life.

The Church, my beloved parents and children, and subsequently the family, which consists lawfully and by the command of God of men and women, and the children acquired, is not a foundation or association or a simple organization, but a Body, as it is wonderfully depicted by the Apostle Paul. And this parallelism is accurate and true. Church and marriage. Husband and wife. Body and its members. This community, signified in the Mysteries and in the obedience of Faith, both in the Church and in the family, is sanctified and mystagogued through the Mystery of Marriage, which, according to the Fathers, is a mystery of co-creation, and the ontological link of love with the Head of the Body, to ensure health and life, which is salvation and sanctification.

As in our Orthodox Church, where no member is forgiven to deal with things in a peculiar form and at one's discretion and to prey on the proper operation and sincere communion of the love and unity of faith of the other members, or despise and ignore them, because they create cancerous disorders, agitations, dissensions, schisms, and heresies. This applies as well to the miniature church, the family, in which is required compassion, love and unity for the structure to be built, in which the father, the mother and the children have a place inter-embracing one another's gifts, responsibilities and rights, and they are "individually members of it". God blesses our every effort towards the fulfillment of His will, and every struggle in life, according to one's faithfulness in each and every talent.

It suffices to realize in time our given talents and gifts and therefore our obligations for our every personal role, which God expects us to live out in the ecclesiastical and familial body as Orthodox Christians, activating its divine-human nature, within the framework of our God-given limits and conditions. For God created man "male and female", that we might not imitate those who "exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised" (Romans 1:24-26).

To our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed families through the Mystery of Marriage at Cana of Galilee and changed water into wine, that is, into joy and feasting, and to His Body, the Orthodox Church, the partnering of the same sex is unknown and condemned, and they condemn the contemporary invention of "mutual cohabitation", which is the result of sin and not the law of joy, and by their actions the "females exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error" (Romans 1:26-28).

Papism as the Oldest Protestantism

by St. Justin (Popovich, +1979)

“What are... the fruits of the God-Man society [the Church]?—Saints, Martyrs, and Confessors. That is its goal, that is its meaning and design, that is the proof of its indestructible strength. Not books and libraries, systems and cities—all things that are here today and gone tomorrow. The various pseudo-Christian humanisms fill the world with books, while Orthodoxy fills it with the hallowed.”

In the European West, Christianity has gradually transformed into humanism. For a long time and arduously, the God-Man diminished, and has been changed, narrowed, and finally reduced to a man: to the infallible man in Rome and the equally "infallible" man in London and Berlin. Thus did papism come into being, taking everything from Christ, along with Protestantism, which asks the least from Christ, and often nothing. Both in papism and in Protestantism, man has been put in the place of the God-Man, both as the highest value and as the highest criterion. A painful and sad correction of the God-Man's work and teaching has been accomplished. Steadily and stubbornly papism has tried to substitute the God-Man with man, until in the dogma about the infallibility of the pope—a man, the God-Man was once and for all replaced with ephemeral, "infallible" man; because with this dogma, the pope was decisively and clearly declared as something higher than not only man, but the holy Apostles, the holy Fathers, and the holy Ecumenical councils. With this kind of a departure from the God-Man, from the ecumenical Church as the God-Man organism, papism surpassed Luther, the founder of Protestantism. Thus, the first radical protest in the name of humanism against the God-Man Christ, and his God-Man organism—the Church—should be looked for in papism, not in Lutheranism. Papism is actually the first and the oldest Protestantism.

Papism indeed is the most radical Protestantism, because it has transferred the foundation of Christianity from the eternal God-Man to ephemeral man. And it has proclaimed this as the paramount dogma, which means: the paramount value, the paramount measure of all beings and things in the world. And the Protestants merely accepted this dogma in its essence, and worked it out in terrifying magnitude and detail. Essentially, **Protestantism is nothing other than a generally applied papism**. For in Protestantism, the fundamental principle of papism is brought to life by each man individually. After the example of the infallible man in Rome, each Protestant is a cloned infallible man, because he pretends to personal infallibility in matters of faith. It can be said: Protestantism is a vulgarized papism, only stripped of mystery (i.e., sacramentality), authority and power.

Through the reduction of Christianity, with all its eternal God-Man qualities, to man, Western Christianity has been turned into humanism. This may seem paradoxical, but it is true in its irresistible and un-erasable historical reality. Because Western Christianity is, in its essence, the most decisive humanism; and because it has proclaimed man as infallible, and has turned the God-Man religion into a humanist religion. And that this is so is shown by the fact that the God-Man has been driven to the heavens, while his place on earth has been filled with his replacement, Vicarius Christi—the pope. What a tragic piece of illogic: to establish a replacement for the everywhere-present God and the Lord Christ!

...Humanistic Christianity is actually the most decisive protest and uprising against the God-Man Christ and all the Evangelical, God-Man values and norms. And even here is evident European man's favored tendency, to reduce everything to man as the fundamental value and the fundamental measure. With the reduction of Christianity to humanism, Christianity has been no doubt, simplified, but also at the same time—destroyed!

In a broader historical perspective, the Western dogma about man's infallibility is nothing other than an attempt to revive and immortalize dying humanism. It is the last transformation and final glorification of humanism. After the rationalistic Enlightenment of the 18th century and the shortsighted positivism of the 19th century, nothing else was left to European humanism than to fall apart in its own impotence and contradictions. But in that tragic moment, religious humanism came to its aid with its dogma about the infallibility of man saved European humanism from imminent death. And, although dogmatized, Western Christian humanism could not help absorbing all the fatal contradictions of European humanism, which are united in one single desire: to exile God-Man from the earth. Because the most important thing for humanism is for man to be the highest value and the highest measure. Man, not God-Man.

According to our own Orthodox feeling: Christianity is only Christianity through the God-Man, through His God-Man ideology and God-Man methods. That is the fundamental truth for the sake of which no compromises can be made. Only as the God-Man is Christ the highest value and the highest measure. One should be truthful and consistent to the end: if Christ is not the God-Man, then he is the most impudent fraud, because he proclaimed himself as God and the Lord. But the Evangelical historical reality irrefutably shows and proves that Jesus Christ is in everything and in all things the perfect God-Man. Therefore, one cannot be a Christian without a belief in Christ as God-Man and in the Church as His God-Man Body, in which He left His entire Miraculous Person. The saving and life-giving power of Christ's Church lays in the eternally-living and all-present personality of the God-Man. Any substitution of the God-Man with a man, and any winnowing of Christianity in order to pick out only that which pleases a man's individual preference and reason, turns Christianity into shallow and impotent humanism.

The outstanding importance of Christianity for making lies in its life-giving and unchangeable God-Manhood, by which it models humanity as a whole, bringing it from the darkness of non-being to the light of Pan-being. Only by its God-Man power is Christianity the salt of the earth, the salt that saves man from rotting in sin and evil. If it dissolves into various humanisms, Christianity becomes bland, becomes salt that has turned flat, useless, fit to be tossed out and trod on.

Any tendency or attempt at a Christianity united with the spirit of the times, with ephemeral movements and regimes of certain historical periods, takes away from Christianity that specific worth which makes it the singular God-Man religion in the world. **In the Orthodox philosophy of society, the rule above all rules is this: do not accommodate the God-Man Christ to the spirit of the times, but rather accommodate the spirit of the times to the spirit of Christ's eternity—Christ's God-Manhood.** Only in this way can the Church preserve the life-giving and irreplaceable personality of the God-Man Christ and remain a God-Man society, in which people fraternize and live with the help of Divine love and justice, prayer and fasting, meekness and humbleness, goodness and wisdom, charity and faith, love of God and love of one's brother, and all the other Evangelical virtues.

According to the God-Man philosophy of life and the world, man, society, nation, and state are to accommodate themselves to the Church as the eternal ideal, but the Church must never accommodate itself to them—much less submit to them. A nation has true worth only inasmuch as it lives the Evangelical virtues and incarnates in its history the God-Man values. What applies to the nation, applies to the state as well. The goal of the nation as a whole is the same as the goal of the individual: to incarnate in one's self Evangelical justice, love, sanctity; to become a "holy people"—"God's people"—which in its history proclaims the Divine values and virtues (1 Peter 2:9-10; 1:15-16).

They will ask us: where are the concrete fruits of this God-Man society? How was it that precisely on the field of Orthodoxy's radiation came about the appearance of "the most radical secularism in human history?" Does there not also exist an Eastern "Humanism" (for ex. Caesaro-papism, etc.)? The success of atheistic social humanism on the soil of Orthodoxy: is that not proof of the "inability of Orthodoxy" to solve the most elementary social problems?

It is a fact that this world lies in evil and sin. The reduction of everything to man is in fact the atmosphere in which sinful human nature and man in general—no matter where he is located—lives and breathes, and something toward which they strive. It is, therefore, no wonder that the tides of this sinfulness, just like the tides of European pseudo-Christian poisons, from time to time wash over the Orthodox peoples as well. However, one thing is irrefutably true: the Orthodox Church has never ecclesiologically dogmatized any sort of humanism, whether we are talking about Caesaro-papism or any other "ism." With the strength of its genuine and uncorrupted God-Manhood and Evangelical truthfulness, and through its constant call for repentance regarding everything that is not from God-Man, it has preserved, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the wisdom and the chastity of its heart and its soul. And by this it has remained and continues to be the "salt" of the earth, man and society.

...The Orthodox Church has proclaimed no poison, no sin, no humanism, no earthly social system as dogma—neither through Councils, nor through the "Body" of the Ecumenical Church. While the west, alas, does nothing but that. The latest proof: the Second Vatican Council.

The Orthodox Faith: in it, repentance is a necessary holy virtue; and it always calls for repentance. In the West: the pseudo-Christian faith in man does not call for repentance; on the contrary, it "clerically" obligates a maintaining of its fatal-to-man homo-idolization, its pseudo-Christian humanisms, infallibilities, heresies, and it pridefully considers that in no case are these things for which one should repent.

Contemporary atheistic social humanism—ideologically and methodologically—is in everything a fruit and an invention of pseudo-Christian Europe, wed with our own sinfulness. They ask us: how did it arrive on the soil of Orthodoxy? It is God trying the endurance of the righteous, visiting the children for the sins of their fathers, and announcing the strength of His Church by taking it through fire and water. Because, according to the words of the wise-in-God Macarius of Egypt, that is the only path of true Christianity: "Wherever the Holy Spirit is, there follows, like a shadow, persecution and battle... It is necessary that the truth be persecuted."

What are, on the other hand, the fruits of the God-Man society?—Saints, Martyrs, and Confessors. That is its goal, that is its meaning and design, that is the proof of its indestructible strength. Not books and libraries, systems and cities—all things that are here today and gone tomorrow. The various pseudo-Christian humanisms fill the world with books, while Orthodoxy fills it with the hallowed. Thousands and hundreds of thousands, even millions of martyrs and newly martyred, fallen for the Orthodox Faith—there is the fruit of God-Man society. Thus does the famous Francois Mauriac, a Roman Catholic, on the dark horizon of the contemporary world, with each day more and more pushed into the darkness of born-in-Europe, soul-losing homo-idolatry, see only one bright spot, that gives hope for the future of this world: the bathed in the blood of the martyred and newly-martyred faith. The Orthodox Faith.

But in the West? They neither know the Church, nor the path, nor the way out of the hopelessness; all is sunk in soul-losing idolatry, in love of pleasure, love of self, and love of lust. Hence in Europe we see the renaissance of polytheism. The "False Christs," false gods that have flooded Europe and are exported from it to all the marketplaces of the world, have for their main assignment the killing of the soul in man—that unique treasure of man in all the worlds, and in that way make impossible the very possibility of a genuine society. This is not a judgment of Europe but a heartfelt prayerful call to the solitary path of salvation, through repentance. ✘ ✘ ✘

Suspicion – St. Dorotheos of Gaza

"When I was present in the coenobium (monastic community), I was tempted to find out the inner disposition of someone through his gestures. Just such a thing happened to me. I was once standing still when a woman carrying a pitcher passed in front of me. I do not know how I was carried away, and stared into her eyes. Immediately, my thoughts told me that she was a prostitute. As I told that to myself, I was greatly troubled; and I referred the whole thing to the Elder, Abba John, in this manner: *'Master, if - without wanting to - I see someone's gesture and my thoughts tell me his inner disposition, what should I do?'* The Elder replied: *'What! Surely it happens that a person may have a natural defect and manage to overcome it through inner struggle! It is impossible to learn the state of a person's soul from that. Therefore, never trust your suspicions; for even a straight rule can be made crooked by a crooked one. Suspicions are not true, and harm us.'* From that time on, even if my mind told me that the sun was the sun and darkness was darkness, I would not believe it.

Nothing is graver than suspicions. They are so harmful that if we keep them for a long time, they convince us that we clearly see things that do not exist and have never happened."

"I will tell you a wonderful thing that I witnessed when I was in the coenobium. There we had a brother much troubled by this passion. He was so easily persuaded by his own suspicions, that he was certain that all of his suspicions were just as his thoughts dictated to him; and it could not possibly be otherwise. As time passed, the evil progressed; and the devil misled him so much that he once went into the garden to spy (He always eavesdropped and spied.). He thought that he saw one of the brothers stealing figs and eating them. It was Friday and not yet the second hour [8 AM].

Having persuaded himself that what he saw was a reality, he left in silence; and watched again, during the Eucharistic gathering, to see what the same brother would do about Holy Communion.

When he saw the brother washing his hands to enter and take Communion, he ran and said to the Abba: *'Look at that brother who is going to take Holy Communion with the other brothers. Order that it not be given to him. I saw him stealing figs from the garden this morning and eating them!'*

Meanwhile, this brother entered into the holy offering with great compunction. He was one of the devout. When the Abba saw him, he called him --- before he reached the priest who was distributing Holy Communion. He took him aside and said to him: *'Tell me, my brother. What have you done today?'* The brother was surprised and said: *'Where, Master?'* The Abba said: *'In the garden, when you were there this morning, what did you do there?'* The surprised brother said again to him: *'Father, I was in neither the garden - nor, indeed, the monastery - this morning, for I have only just come back from the road. Immediately after the dismissal of the vigil, the steward sent me on an errand far away.'* The errand to which he referred was many miles away, and he arrived just in time for the Eucharist."

"The fathers say many similar things to protect us from the harm that suspicion does for us.

Therefore, brethren, let us try not to trust our suspicions, with all our strength. For there is nothing more than this that distances a person from taking care of his own sins, or from always being curious about what does not concern him. No good comes from it, rather manifold troubles and afflictions come from it. They leave a person no time to acquire fear of God. If, therefore, suspicions are sown in us through our own evil, let us immediately transform them into good thoughts. Then, we will not harm ourselves. Suspicions are evil, and they never allow the soul to find peace."

✠ "DO NOT START examining the deeds of people, do not judge, do not say 'Why is it this way?' 'What is this for?' It is better to say to yourself, 'What does their work have to do with me? I will not answer for them at the Dread Judgment of God.' Divert every thought of yours from judging the deeds of people, and pray fervently to the Lord that He help you in this, because without the help of God we can do nothing good, as the Lord Himself said, Without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

St. Ambrose of Optina (+ 1891)