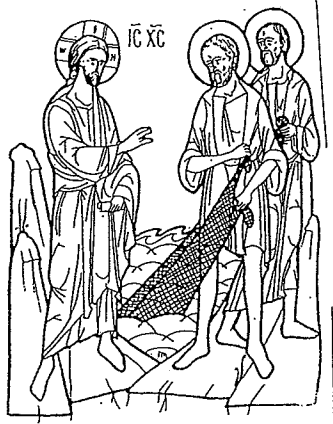


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✠ **November 30, 2014** ✠

Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called

Advent: The Nativity Fast

Fill your soul with Christ,
with divine longing, with joy.
The joy of Christ will heal you.
~ Elder Porphyrios



✠ **Friday, December 5 6:30pm ~ Vespers – Feast of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra and Lycia**

✠ **Saturday, December 6 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy – Feast of St. Nicholas**

⇒ *Please keep your Building Fund Pledge promises!*



Incarnation Thoughts

✠ "The Divine Logos, who once for all was born in the flesh, always in His compassion desires to be born in spirit in those who desire Him. He becomes an infant and molds Himself in them through the virtues. He reveals as much of Himself as He knows the recipient can accept; He does not diminish the manifestation of His own greatness out of lack of generosity but estimates the receptive capacity of those who desire to see Him."
St. Maximos the Confessor

✠ "The Word appropriates to Himself the attributes of humanity: for all that pertains to His holy flesh is His: and He imparts to the flesh His own attributes by way of communication in virtue of the interpenetration of the parts one with another, and the oneness according to subsistence, and inasmuch as He Who lived and acted both as God and as man, taking to Himself either form and holding intercourse with the other form, was one and the same. Hence it is that the Lord of Glory is said to have been crucified (cf. I Cor. 2:8), although His divine nature never endured the Cross, and that the Son of Man is allowed to have been in heaven before the Passion, as the Lord Himself said (cf. Jn. 3:13)."
St. John of Damascus

~ The sign of the Cross as a blessing from a priest or a bishop is an expression of the blessing or of the favor of God to a human being in Christ and for Christ's sake. What a joyful, significant, and precious ceremony this is! Blessed are all who receive such a blessing with faith! How attentive should the priests themselves be in bestowing their blessing upon the faithful! "And they shall put My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:27).

– St. John of Kronstadt

Beneath thy Compassion, we take refuge virgin Theotokos; despise not our prayer in our necessity, but deliver us from harm, O only pure and only blessed one! Most holy Theotokos, save us!

Everyone Capable of Thanksgiving is Capable of Salvation

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann was the Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary from 1962 until his death in 1983. Hundreds of SVOTS alumni were trained under his keen mind, warm humor, and guiding principle: "A seminarian should know only three paths: to the classroom, to the library, and to the chapel." Father Alexander celebrated the Divine Liturgy for the last time on Thanksgiving Day, 1983. This is the homily he delivered on that day:

Everyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation and eternal joy.

Thank You, O Lord, for having accepted this Eucharist, which we offered to the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and which filled our hearts with the joy, peace and righteousness of the Holy Spirit.

Thank You, O Lord, for having revealed Yourself unto us and given us the foretaste of Your Kingdom.

Thank You, O Lord, for having united us to one another in serving You and Your Holy Church.

Thank You, O Lord, for having helped us to overcome all difficulties, tensions, passions, temptations and restored peace, mutual love and joy in sharing the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Thank You, O Lord, for the sufferings You bestowed upon us, for they are purifying us from selfishness and reminding us of the "one thing needed;" Your eternal Kingdom.

Thank You, O Lord, for having given us this country where we are free to worship You.

Thank You, O Lord, for this school, where the name of God is proclaimed.

Thank You, O Lord, for our families: husbands, wives and, especially, children who teach us how to celebrate Your holy Name in joy, movement and holy noise.

Thank You, O Lord, for everyone and everything.

Great are You, O Lord, and marvelous are Your deeds, and no word is sufficient to celebrate Your miracles.

Lord, it is good to be here! Amen.

How can we serve the Church?

... To the question of how we can serve the Church, the answer is simple: by active obedience to Her. Active obedience to Her is a life according to the rules of the Church, observance of moral laws, zealous attendance at church services, prayer at home, a Christian foundation and direction in home life.

- Fr. Michael Pomazansky

Leaving Mary Out

Fr. Stephen Freeman, August 14, 2014

Decades ago, when I was in seminary (Anglican), a professor told me that he did not believe in angels. I was surprised and asked him why. He responded that he “did not think they were necessary...that anything angels did could be done by the Holy Spirit...” While this is obviously true, I noted that angels are found throughout Scripture, and that “necessary” was not a theological category – and that he himself was not necessary for that matter. The story had a happy ending...but has always remained with me as an example of how people sometimes go wrong theologically.

The Virgin Mary is among those theological matters that many Christians find “unnecessary.” She is not only unnecessary to them, but positively bothersome and considered a possible distraction from Christ Himself. “You’re worshipping Mary,” goes the charge. And the option then becomes to leave her out (other than when she is needed to play her annual part for the Christmas pageant). But leaving Mary out is not an option for the Christian Gospel.

It is true that Mark’s gospel barely makes mention of her. But the Church has never declared that any single gospel is sufficient to the faith – indeed it has proclaimed that such an idea would be heretical (cf. Marcion’s Canon). The New Testament does not proclaim Christ apart from Mary – she is essential to the Gospel.

The notion of a bare minimum gospel, or a least common denominator gospel, is a strange idea. In our modern culture, the ability to reduce anything to 140 characters is an asset. But truth cannot be expressed in such a manner, and certainly not in its fullness.

A driving force behind much of modern reform (and for the past 500 years) has been a desire to simplify. Thomas Cranmer boasted of having simplified the Church liturgy to a single book, noting that prior to his work, an entire book was required just to find out what had to be used from the many other books:

His single Book of Common Prayer is one of the masterpieces of English literature and a marvel of Christian piety. It was also, however, a drastic reduction in the tradition (a reduction vastly increased three years later in his second prayer book). Today, Cranmer’s original work would be considered a heavy burden by many, too restrictive for worship...

True human life has a fullness about it that is irreducible. A life must be lived and experienced, never just extracted. That fullness of life requires the complete range of our experience and existence. The Gospel is not a message within human experience – it is the summary and the whole of human experience. The Gospel is the universe, rightly understood.

[God has] “made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him.” (Eph. 1:9-10)

...We decidedly do not worship Mary. We honor her because she is Theotokos (Birth-Giver of God). Orthodoxy traditionally incorporates all of its doctrinal beliefs within the worship life of the Church (Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi – the “Law of Prayer is the Law of Faith). Thus reference to Mary as Theotokos is always included in the prayers of the Church. **The experience surrounding this was that those who refused to call her “Theotokos” did so because they denied the truth of Christ as “fully God and fully Man.”** The ironic term “Theotokos” expresses this very thing.

But we believe she is truly holy, filled with the Holy Spirit and worthy of honor beyond any other created thing. The language of the Church does no more than give her than honor. We do not (and it would be absurd) restrict all language to what is found in Scripture.

In our culture, mostly driven by Protestant history, almost nothing is given honor (including God). The culture of honor and humility that marks Orthodox worship and its language (which is simply traditional Christian worship), is often misinterpreted by those whose ears have been formed by the honor-bereft culture of the modern world.

No Orthodox Christian would ever think Mary is a God or that she is worshipped. But neither would they be comfortable with any slight directed towards her.

Proskynesan is used two ways in Scripture: it can mean *worship* (it literally means to bow the knee), but it also can mean the mere *honor* (to bow before a king, etc.). The first of many examples would be in Gen. 37:10, Jacobs brothers bowing before him (in the Greek LXX).

In the 8th century, struggling to give verbal expression to the traditional practices of the Church, (honoring saints, relics, icons, etc.), the Church refined the use of language and chose the word *proskynesan* to express the relative veneration (honor) that is proper to honorable things (saints, icons, etc.). And it chose the word *latreia* to have the restricted meaning of worship that is due to God alone. English, traditionally, did not always translate or make this distinction very well. Thus in the old English (Anglican) marriage service, the groom said to his bride, "With my body I do thee worship..."

This refinement in language has often been required in the life of the Church. In the Councils regarding the Holy Trinity, the words *ousia*, *hypostasis*, *homoousios*, etc., were given careful meanings in order to express what the Church had always believed. We do this sort of thing in English from time to time.

St. Paul says, "Give honor to whom honor is due." But the principle applies. The Church says of Mary that she is worthy of "hyperdulia" or "hyper honor" meaning, an honor greater than any other creature. But she is only a creature and cannot and must not be worshipped. She has nothing that was not given to her from God. What she brings to God is her humility and her obedience. But her humility and obedience were only perfectly human humility and obedience. Nothing more. Who else will be called blessed by all generations? She is the "lowly" whom God has exalted.

My experience has shown me that those who will not or do not honor Mary, inevitably have a very shrunken version of the gospel itself (and therefore of Christ). "The good things God has prepared for those who love Him" is often a mystery, but a large scope of that mystery is hidden from those who will not accept the life and Tradition of the Church and insist instead on later man-made rules regarding Scripture and authority.

✘ **The Virgin, the Birth, the Body, then the Cross, the death, the visit to the lower world; these things are our salvation.** For the sake of mankind the Son of God was born of the Virgin and of the Holy Spirit. In this process He ministered to Himself; by His own power - the power of God - which overshadowed her He sowed the beginning of His body, and entered on the first stage of His life in the flesh. He did it that by His incarnation He might take to Himself from the Virgin the fleshly nature, and that through this commingling there might come into being a hallowed Body of all humanity; that so through that Body which He was pleased to assume all mankind might be hid in Him, and He in return, through His unseen existence, be reproduced in all.

St. Hilary of Poitiers (368)

HOW EACH OF US CAN AND OUGHT TO SERVE THE CHURCH

+ Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky (+1988)

IF WE LOVE the Church, if She is dear to us, then how can each of us serve Her? And if someone were to ask you: "How have you served Her? What activities can you boast of?"

When this question was put to the holy Apostle Paul and he had to defend his authority before the Corinthian Christians, he answered in this way: "I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities" (11 Cor. 11:30). Glory in our infirmities? Without question, the humble realization of our infirmities is beneficial for each of us, but how can we serve the Church in this way? At the same time, the holy Apostle insists on his answer and explains: "For When I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. 12:10).

Furthermore, this is no paradox, no play on words, no contradiction. The Apostle shows no trace of being "imaginative" or "witty." He writes from the fullness of his heart, from deep conviction. His meaning is direct. He speaks of the Christian principle of life.

Christianity upset the usual concepts dominant in the world, and in particular the concept of power. According to Christianity, power is what "seems" to the world to be impotence, what appears to its short-sighted view to be a contemptible weakness. Christian power is meekness. Meekness is the law of the new life and action, under whose banner the Gospel declared war on the world: "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek - is this not infirmity (weakness) in the usual human understanding?

Yes, "in the world," without Christ, without faith, outside the Church and apart from Christianity, one cannot pit meekness and spiritual poverty (humility) against the mighty, against all that has power and authority in the world; nor can they oppose the proud power of the will, so often brutal, hardened, and harsh. They cannot stand against sheer physical power, the power of naked force; nor can they withstand the power of a refined and clever mind or the power of the simple majority. How is it possible to take up arms against the entire arsenal of this world armed only with the weapons of "meekness and temperance, purity and chastity, love of brother and the poor, of patience and vigilance," as we hear, for example, in the prayer to St. Job of Pochaev, one of the strugglers for the life, rights, and dignity of the Orthodox Church in Western Russia against Roman Catholicism.

But He of Whom the prophet said "A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench" (Es. 42:3), Who bore His obedience, being obedient even unto death, even to the death on the Cross: He, our Lord, stated even before His sufferings on the Cross: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The meek Christian virtues are a mighty power in God's world - they are an artery by which the power of God comes down into the world. In order to understand this, we must pull back the veil from our own personal world-view. A veil usually hangs before our mental eye that limits our thoughts and our actions in earthly life. But when we pull back the veil, before us open perspectives of eternity, with faith in the immortality of our soul, with faith in God, with faith in the radiant Kingdom of eternal life.

In the face of eternal life, concepts are completely changed: much that is great becomes of no consequence, and the insignificant becomes great. He who believes and beholds the Kingdom of God with spiritual eyes is like a giant whose head reaches the heavens. Who has strength enough to throw him down? They can slay his body, they cannot kill his soul and spirit. The words of St. Paul can be applied to such spiritual giants: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any

other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Here there is an authentic feeling of his power, which the Apostle expresses in the words: "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Rom. 15:1).

And so two contradictory laws of life stand against one another, two kingdoms: the kingdom of the meek and the kingdom of the powerful. The kingdom of the meek is forced to wage war against the kingdom of power while located in the midst of it and surrounded on all sides by the kingdom of power and force.

The struggle continues. It is difficult for the Church. It is not surprising that the human powers of the Church weaken towards the end of the struggle. But the end has been written beforehand in heaven: victory is on the side of the Kingdom of the meek. And should it not turn out this way by the laws of logic? For the Church has been standing against the kingdom of the world for two millennia now. If meekness were not power, then how could she have survived for even the shortest time in the struggle?

Still, there come moments in the history of the Church when Her powers, exposed to popular view, weaken in the struggle. Why? Is this because the meek Christian weapons turn out to be useless or insufficient? No! This happens when, under the influence of discouragement and weakness of faith, those who serve the Church forget their true armament and adopt a foreign kind. The evil world urges its own weapons on them: worldly power, force, deceit. If those who serve the Church yield to the enticement, they weaken and bring Her internal sufferings as well. History gives us sufficient examples of this sort.

The world creeps into the Church by an even simpler method: by human passions, self-love, and ambition, love for the first place, insistence on one's own will. The world of the proud creeps in with the wish to submit the Church to one's own plans, to make her an instrument that is political, national, even partisan. It creeps in through indulging our weaknesses of the flesh, through replacing authentic virtues with seeming ones; in a word, through the help of those powerful, poisonous means which are called the spirit of flattery (or deceit).

By nature the Church is meek and it is easy to insult Her. If we attentively read the history of the Church, we can see how many have insulted Her from within, entering into Her very heart and thus all the more painfully wounding Her.

Someone may think: this is a peculiar little handful of Orthodox scattered over the far ends of the earth. What kind of social force do we represent? ... In answer to such a thought, we must remember that the power of the Church is not in numbers.

Of course, the fullest form of serving the Church is for a person to give himself to Her completely for his entire life as a pastor or in another life of service, close to the pastorate. But we must not feel that only the ordained servants of the Church are called to be Her soldiers while the others are only observers - some sympathetic, others critical.

Each of us has a place in the ranks of the soldiers of the Church, and the forms of participation in service to the Church are varied. The Apostle writes: Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called (I Cor. 7:20). Translating this quotation into contemporary concepts, we can say that there does not exist a constructive, honest profession and a social position where a good person could not at one time or another contribute his good mite to the work of the Church. Look at how the fruits of pagan higher education were used to great advantage by the great hierarchs Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom. What a precious heritage they gave to the Church!

{to be continued}

WHY STUDY THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES?

By Blessed Hieromonk Seraphim Rose.



The subject of this article is watching for the signs of the times.

First of all, we have to know what is meant by the phrase "signs of the times." This expression comes straight from the Gospel, from the words of our Savior in Matthew 16:3. Christ tells the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to Him, *Ye can discern the face of the sky*, that is, tell what the weather will be; *but*

can ye not discern the signs of the times? In other words, He's telling them that this has nothing to do with science, or with knowing our place in the world, or anything of the sort. It's a religious question. We study the signs of the times in order to be able to recognize Christ.

During the time of Christ, the Pharisees and Sadducees did not study the signs of the times in order to see that Christ had come, that the Son of God was already on earth. There were already signs that they should have recognized. For example, in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, there is a prophecy concerning the seventy weeks of years, which means that the Messiah was to come about 490 years from the time of Daniel. Those Jews who read their books very carefully knew exactly what this was all about, and at about the time that Christ came they knew that it was time for the messiah.

But this is an outward sign. More importantly, the Pharisees and Sadducees should have been watching for the inward signs. If their hearts had been right with God, and if they had not been merely trying to fulfill the outward commandment of the law, their hearts would have responded and recognized God in the flesh when He came. And many of the Jews did—the apostles, the disciples, and many others.

This same passage in the 16th chapter of St. Matthew speaks further about signs. Our Lord told the Jews, *An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah.* The events of the Old Testament contain prefigurations of events in the New Testament. When Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale, this was a prefiguration of our Lord's being three days in the tomb. And this sign—the sign of Jonah—was given to the people of Christ's time.

Our Lord was telling the Pharisees and Sadducees that an evil and adulterous generation seeks for spectacular events,

that is, fire coming down from heaven, or the Romans being chased away, angels manifesting themselves and banishing the foreign government of the Romans, and things of that sort. Christ told them this kind of sign would not be given. An evil and adulterous generation seeks after this, but those who are pure of heart seek rather something more spiritual. And the one sign that is given to them is the sign of Jonah. Of course, it is a great thing that a man should be three days in the grave and then rise up, being God.

Thus, from our Savior's words, we know that we are not to watch for spectacular signs, but we are rather to look inwardly for spiritual signs. Also, we are to watch for those things which according to Scripture must come to pass.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!



Your greatest joy is to have a son who sanctifies the Precious Gifts, whose honor it is to forgive sins, and who intercedes constantly for your family. Had he become a king, he would not have obtained the glory of a priest. During the Divine Liturgy the priest is higher than the angels because even the angels at that hour tremble as they serve at the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

Elder Amphilokhios of Patmos (+1970)

The priest's cassock is superior to trousers. A cassock has double grace!

Blessed Papa Dimitri Gagastathis (+1975)

When one bishop asked Hieromonk Callistratus, the saintly abbot of the Monastery of Mileseva, "What is the most important thing for a priest?", he answered, "The most important thing for a priest is to communicate—first with the Master, afterwards with the lords of the Master's servants, and finally with the Master's servants. The Master is He who is called the Christ, the lords of the Master's servants are the Saints, and the Master's servants are the people of this world. For it has been said, he who communicates only with the Master's servants does not care about the Master, and provokes the wrath of the Master."

St Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956)

God lights the priest up as a lamp and places him upon the lamp stand of His light-bearing throne.

Saint Isidore of Pelusium (+449)

Question put to a Monastery Newsletter editor in England:

“You always list people whom you ask prayers for separately as Orthodox and non-Orthodox. Why? Do you think that there are two classes of people?”

WE DO NOT THINK of people in classes at all, especially in the religious sphere, but of course we recognize that there is a difference between a baptized, chrismated and communicant Orthodox Christian and one who is not. If it were not so, we would not have become Orthodox ourselves. That distinction was foreshadowed in the Old Testament dispensation, with the distinction between the Jews, the people of Israel, and the Gentiles or nations. It exists, as the Gospels make clear (Matt. 16:13-16, Mark 7:27, John 3:3, John 4:22-24, John 15:1 - 9, etc.), in the New Testament dispensation in which we now live, the Orthodox being the people of the New Israel.

However, the reason that we list the Orthodox separately from the non-Orthodox has little to do with simply marking distinctions. It is because the Church prays differently for the Orthodox and for the non-Orthodox. For instance, in the Divine Liturgy, at the proskomedia (the service of Preparation) we take particles of prosphora and place them on the diskos (plate) with the Lamb and the particles that have been placed there in commemoration of the Saints. Such particles are only taken for Orthodox Christians, because they only can participate in the Eucharist. The prepared diskos at the end of the proskomedia is an Icon of the Church, with the Savior surrounded by the Saints, the faithful departed and the members of her company still struggling in this earthly life.

Similarly, the Church only permits us to serve memorial services for the Orthodox, for the content of many of the prayers would make no sense if applied to someone outside the Church.

These disciplines themselves are manifestations of the Church's love for the people who are prayed for. Her ministry of prayer is a healing ministry. If you went to a physician with a foot badly infected with gangrene and he advised amputation, you would not be surprised and might later be thankful to him for saving your life; but if he advised amputation when you went to him with a bout of flu or for whatever complaint you sought his help, you would know that he was a quack. Doctors wisely suit the treatment to the disease, and the Church does the same.

It may be that a particular priest out of ignorance, to curry favor with certain people in his congregation or, worse, thinking himself to know better than the Church and to be more kindly than She, might serve a Panikkhida for a non-Orthodox or commemorate them in the proskomedi or perform some other inappropriate prayer, but, just as it is advisable to choose a physician who follows professional good practice, so it is spiritually wiser to follow the Church's disciplines, which are manifestations of her Christ-centered love and channels of His love towards us.