

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **December 7, 2014** ✠

St. Andrew of Milan

St. Philothea of Turnovo (1060)

St. Nilus of Stolbensk (1554)

Advent: The Nativity Fast



SAINT NICHOLAS

✠ **Wed. December 10 6:30pm ~ The Akathist of Thanksgiving**

⇒ ***Please keep your Building Fund Pledge promises!***

➤ **IOCC Collection – \$1,000.00**

**O Holy Father Nicholas,
Pray unto God
for us!**

United Appeal Fund

- Beginning in January: One Sunday a month will be designated as a "United Appeal Sunday." An extra basket will be out that Sunday. The money collected goes to the United Appeal Fund, and then can be sent to IOCC, or to other charity needs.

ON HUMILITY ~ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867)

If any man will come after Me, announces Holy Humility, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me (Matt. 16:24). Otherwise it is impossible to be a disciple and follower of the One, Who humbled Himself even unto death, and death on the Cross. He is seated on the right hand of the Father. He is the New Adam, the Progenitor of the race of the holy tribe of the Elect. Faith in Him grants entry into the number of the Elect; election is accessed by holy humility; it is sealed with holy love.

Grace-filled humility is invisible, as is its Provider, God. It is enclosed in silence, simplicity, sincerity, naturalness, in freedom. False humility always has a contrived appearance; it is always publicizing itself.

False humility loves scenes; through them it deludes and self-deludes. The humility of Christ is clothed upon with a garment and coat (see John 19:24), - in the most natural clothing; covered by this clothing it is not recognized and not noticed by men.

Humility is a pledge in the heart, holy, an unnamed possession of the heart, a Divine faculty born in an imperceptible manner in the soul, which comes from the fulfilling of the Gospel commandments.

Do you wish to achieve humility? Then fulfill the Gospel commandments, for in doing so it will rejoice in your heart; make it your own, holy humility, or rather make our Lord Jesus Christ your own.

The beginning of humility is poverty of spirit; the middle of progress therein, which exceeds every thought, is attainment of the peace of Christ; and its end or perfection is the love of Christ.

Humility is never roused to anger, it never gives in to man-pleasing, it never succumbs to sorrow, it fears nothing. Can one succumb to sorrow, who seasonably considers himself worthy of every affliction?

Can one be fearful of misfortunes, who seasonably has committed himself to afflictions, regarding them as the means of his salvation?

Those who pleased God loved the words of the Good Thief, who was crucified alongside the Lord. In their afflictions they customarily cried out, **We receive the due reward of our deeds; remember us, O Lord, in thy Kingdom** (see Luke 23:41, 42).

They met every affliction with the thought that they were worthy of it (see Abba Dorotheus, second teaching). For these words of humility, a holy peace enters into their hearts. It offers the cup of spiritual comfort at the bed of the sick, and in prison to those detained there, and to those persecuted by men and those persecuted by the demons.

The cup of comfort is offered by the hand of humility even to one crucified on the cross; but the world can only offer him **vinegar mingled with gall** (Matthew 27:34).

The humble man is incapable of harboring malice or envy; he does not have enemies. If someone causes him some annoyance, he sees this man as an instrument of right judgment or of the providence of God. The humble man surrenders himself wholly to the will of God.

The humble man lives not according to his own life, but by God. The humble man is alien to self-reliance, and for this reason he constantly seeks God's aid, and constantly abides in prayer. The fruit-bearing branch is bowed down to the ground, weighed down by the quantity and heaviness of its fruit. The branch without fruit grows upright, exalting in its fruitless twigs.

The soul, which is rich in the Gospel virtues, is plunged deeper and deeper into humility, and in very deeps of this sea it finds precious pearls, the gifts of the Spirit.

Pride is the truest sign of an empty person, a servant of the passions, a sign of a soul in which the teaching of Christ finds no place at all. Do not judge a person by his externals; one cannot determine whether a person is proud or humble by the externals. **"Judge not according to appearance," but "ye shall know them by their fruits"** (John 7:24; Matt. 7:16). The Lord tells us to recognize people by their actions, their conduct, and by consequences which derive from their actions.

"What does it mean to believe?" asked one of the great men who pleased God. He replied: "To believe means to abide in humility and mercy" (Abba Poemen the Great).

Humility hopes on God, and not on itself or on men, and therefore in its behavior it is always simple, straightforward, firm, majestic. The blinded sons of this world call this pride.
- St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

A Sermon on The Feast of St. Nicholas

By Fr. Andrew Phillips, Felixtowne, England

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Some time ago I remember overhearing a child ask her mother: 'Mummy, why does Father Christmas have a beard? And why does he wear such funny clothes?' Her mother could give no adequate answer, quite simply because she was not an Orthodox Christian. All Orthodox should know the answer to the child's questions. Father Christmas, or Santa Claus, has a beard and wears such unusual clothes because he is the folklore version of an Orthodox bishop - St Nicholas.

Who was St Nicholas?

Born at the end of the third century, in about 280, Nicholas was a very devout young man who, still quite young, became a Bishop and then the Archbishop of the then great city of Myra, which is in the province of Lycia in Asia Minor, which is now called Turkey. There he was renowned for his charitable deeds. There he set up orphanages, hospitals, hostels for the mentally ill, fed the starving in famine, and set up a drainage system so that his people would not die from the diseases incurred by poor hygiene. There he freed captives unjustly imprisoned, saved sailors in stormy seas, redeemed young girls who were bound for child prostitution. In everything he did, he wanted to show that our destiny is not to live as animals, but as the children of God.

This is why, as one of the 318 Fathers present at the First Universal Church Council which took place in the year 325 in Nicea, he could not support the blasphemies of Arius. This Arius was a philosopher, as we would say today, 'a clever fellow' and stood up at that Council and said that Christ is not the Son of God. Like all who make the wrong choices, that is 'heretics' in the language of the Church, in talking about the Person of Christ, Arius talked of himself. For like every single heretic in Church History, Arius replaced the understanding of God, theology, with the understanding of his own self, psychology. Not being able to accept God through Faith, they replace the transcendent Revelation of God, the Reality beyond their tiny minds, with the fruit of their own fertile imaginations and make God into sinful individuals like themselves. Arius indeed was not the Son of God. However, if we were to believe his words that Christ is not the Son of God, then of course Orthodox Christianity would no longer be the one, unique soul-saving Faith, but just another vain philosophy, a mere religion.

So it was that when this Arius blasphemed at the First Council, St Nicholas stood up and slapped him across the face. The other Fathers were horrified by St Nicholas' violent action, defrocked him and sent him away. St Nicholas did not justify himself by saying that he was trying to silence the demonic blasphemies of Arius, by saying that he was trying to bring this arrogant man to his senses, by saying that if Arius were right, then mankind was condemned to live as animals. Instead he accepted this punishment with humility. However, many of the Fathers that night had a dream of St Nicholas and a vision of Christ and his Most Holy Mother returning to the Saint his episcopal vestments. This was a Divine vindication of the action of the Saint and indeed he was quickly reinstated as Archbishop of Myra.

If we were to read the life of St Nicholas up until his repose, we would find that it runs to many pages. But if we were to read his life since his blessed repose, we would find that it runs to many, many books. His life since his death is much longer than his life before his death. For he is one of those many Saints who has continued to work miracles among all peoples and among all generations up until the present age.

True, today the once great city of Myra is no more. In what is now a Muslim country there stand only the ruins of the great Cathedral of St Nicholas and the ruins of the buildings he had raised up (in a town called Demre). But St Nicholas is still venerated there, even by Muslims. Indeed he is venerated all over the world, by Orthodox and Non-Orthodox alike.

Of St Nicholas' latest miracles we would quote only one, which came to our attention from a sure source only recently. It was a few years ago, in the 1980's, that a Russian nuclear submarine was in trouble in the Pacific Ocean. Its engine had stopped and refused to restart. Even in those Soviet times, however, one of the young sailors remembered that his grandmother had told him that St Nicholas always protects sailors. And, despite everything around him, he remembered to pray to St Nicholas at that moment. And through his prayers the engine started up again, over a hundred sailors were saved and the world preserved from untold pollution. St Nicholas is among us still today, here and now, preserving all who pray to him from danger and evil.

Finally, there is one question about St Nicholas which we must answer. Why does everybody love St Nicholas? Why is he so popular? Why do Muslims venerate him? Why do even Protestants dedicate chapels to him? Why do Catholics revere him and guard his relics in Bari in Italy? The answer is simple:

Everybody loves St Nicholas, because St Nicholas loves everybody!

Holy Father Nicholas, pray to God for us! Amen.

Wheat & Chaff

✦ It should not frighten you that in the Church the bad are many and the good few. For the Ark, which in the midst of the Flood was a figure of this Church, was wide below and narrow above, and at the summit measured but one cubit (Gen. 6:16). And we are to believe that below were the four-footed animals and serpents, above the birds and men. It was wide where the beasts were, narrow where men lived; for the Holy Church is indeed wide in the number of those who are carnal minded, narrow in those who are spiritual. For where she suffers the morals and beastly ways of men, there she enlarges her bosom. But where she has the care of those whose lives are founded on spiritual things, the she she leads to the highest place; but since they are few, this part is narrowAnd so the more the wicked abound so much the more must we suffer them in patience; for on the threshing floor few are the grains carried into the barns, but high the piles of chaff that are burned with fire.

St. Gregory Dialogos (+604)

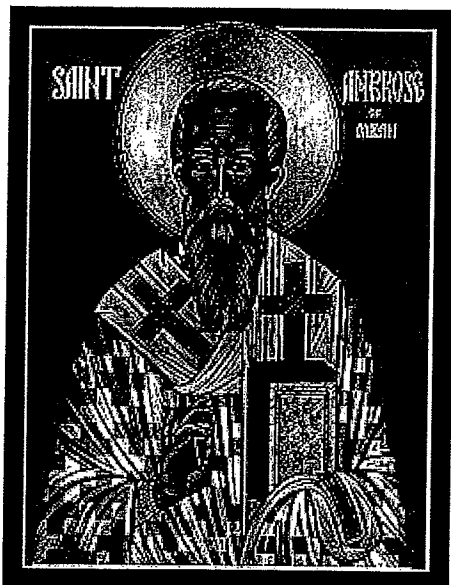
The Offspring of Pride

✦ Concerning the anger which dominates you, the Holy Fathers say that it is the offspring of pride. You have pride, as it seems (unfortunately all of us do to a greater or lesser extent), so for this reason you get angry. If you had humility you would not get angry. One who has humility and meekness not only never gets angry, but also has patience. Pray not once but many times and ask God with ardent faith to give you humility, and when you ask it with faith He will give it to you. Because we are easily inclined to anger and to other sins, the enemy deceives us as the all-wicked one that he is. Whenever, as a man, you happen to get angry, or to sin in a small or large matter, repent at once and seek forgiveness with your heart from the all-compassionate God. Then He will forgive you, after you confess your sin with repentance.

Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980) - Paternal Counsels - Volume I

⇒ **The worst tempered people I have ever met were those who knew that they were wrong. ~ David Letterman**

St Ambrose the Bishop of Milan



Commemorated on December 7

Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, was born in the year 340 into the family of the Roman prefect of Gaul (now France). Even in the Saint's childhood there appeared presentiments of his great future. Once, bees covered the face of the sleeping infant. They flew in and out of his mouth, leaving honey on his tongue. Soon they flew away so high that they could no longer be seen. Ambrose's father said that the child would become something great when he reached manhood.

After the death of the father of the family, Ambrose journeyed to Rome, where the future Saint and his brother Satyrus received an excellent education. About the year 370, upon completion of his course of study, Ambrose was appointed to the position of governor (consular prefect) of the districts of Liguria and Aemilia, though he continued to live at Mediolanum (now Milan).

In the year 374 Auxentius, the Arian Bishop of Mediolanum, died. This led to complications between the Orthodox and the Arians, since each side wanted to have its own bishop. Ambrose, as the chief city official, went to the church to resolve the dispute.

While he was speaking to the crowd, suddenly a child cried out, "Ambrose for bishop!" The people took up this chant. Ambrose, who at this time was still a catechumen, considered himself unworthy, and tried to refuse. He disparaged himself, and even tried to flee from Mediolanum. The matter went ultimately before the emperor Valentinian the Elder (364-375), whose orders Ambrose dared not disobey. He accepted holy Baptism from an Orthodox priest and, passing through all the ranks of the Church clergy in just seven days, on December 7, 374 he was consecrated Bishop of Mediolanum. He dispersed all his possessions, money and property for the adornment of churches, the upkeep of orphans and the poor, and he devoted himself to a strict ascetic life.

Ambrose combined strict temperance, intense vigilance and work within the fulfilling of his duties as archpastor. St Ambrose, defending the unity of the Church, energetically opposed the spread of heresy. Thus, in the year 379 he traveled off to establish an Orthodox bishop at Sirmium, and in 385-386 he refused to hand over the basilica of Mediolanum to the Arians.

The preaching of St Ambrose in defense of Orthodoxy was deeply influential. Another noted Father of the Western Church, St Augustine (June 15), bore witness to this, having accepted holy Baptism in the year 387 by the grace of the preaching of the bishop of Mediolanum.

St Ambrose also actively participated in civil matters. Thus, the Emperor Gracian (375-383), having received from him the "Exposition of the Orthodox Faith" (De Fide), removed, by

decree of the Saint, the altar of Victory from the halls of the Senate at Rome, on which oaths were wont to be taken. Displaying a pastoral boldness, St Ambrose placed a severe penance on the emperor Theodosius I (379-395) for the massacre of innocent inhabitants of Thessalonica. For him there was no difference between emperor and commoner. Though he released Theodosius from the penance, the Saint would not permit the Emperor to commune at the altar, but compelled him to do public penance.

The fame of Bishop Ambrose and his actions attracted to him many followers from other lands. From faraway Persia learned men came to him to ask him questions and absorb his wisdom. Fritigelda (Frigitil), queen of the military Germanic tribe of the Markomanni, which often had attacked Mediolanum, asked the Saint to instruct her in the Christian Faith. The Saint in his letter to her persuasively stated the dogmas of the Church. And having become a believer, the queen converted her own husband to Christianity and persuaded him to conclude a treaty of peace with the Roman Empire.

The Saint combined strictness with an uncommon kindness. Granted a gift of wonderworking, he healed many from sickness. One time at Florence, while staying at the house of Decentus, he resurrected a dead boy.

The repose of St Ambrose, who departed to the Lord on the night of Holy Pascha, was accompanied by many miracles. He even appeared in a vision to the children being baptized that night. The Saint was buried in the Ambrosian basilica in Mediolanum, beneath the altar, between the Martyrs Protasius and Gervasius (October 14).

A zealous preacher and valiant defender of the Christian Faith, St Ambrose received particular renown as a Church writer. In dogmatic compositions he set forth the Orthodox teaching about the Holy Trinity, the Sacraments, and Repentance: "Five Books on the Faith" (De Fide); "Explication of the Symbol of the Faith" (Explanatio Symboli); "On the Incarnation" (De Incarnationis); "Three Books on the Holy Spirit" (De Spiritu Sancto); "On the Sacraments" (De Sacramento); "Two Books on Repentance" (De Paenitentia). In writings about Christian morality, he explained the excellence of Christian moral teaching compared to pagan moral teaching.

A well-known work of St Ambrose, "On the Duties of the Clergy" (De Officiis Ministrorum) evidences his deep awareness of pastoral duty. He stresses that those who serve in the Church should have not only the proper knowledge of Church services, but also the proper knowledge of moral precepts.

St Ambrose was also a reformer of Church singing. He introduced antiphonal singing (along the Eastern or Syrian form) into the Western Church, which became known as "Ambrosian Chant." He also composed twelve hymns which were used during his lifetime. The hymn, "Thee, O God, we praise" (Te Deum), attributed to St Ambrose, entered into the divine services of the Orthodox Church (Molieben).

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A true story about the sufferings of the Greek Orthodox people who lived under the Soviet Communists along the coast of the Crimean Sea:

There is one grandmother, Sophia by name, whose family had a large Icon of Saint Nicholas. The local Communists permitted them to keep this icon so long as they could pay a monthly tax. Many times the family went without food in order to have the money to pay the tax, but in **their great love for Saint Nicholas**, they would not give up the icon.

The father of one of the parishioners of Saint Mark's was the warden of the **Church of Saint Nicholas**, and one day he was arrested and imprisoned in a basement that had one window up very high, through which a little light could enter. From that little window he could see the bell tower of their own Greek parish Church of Saint Nicholas, and every day when the sun rose, he would pray to Saint Nicholas.

The Communists were very rude and very cruel to the prisoners. At times they would beat them and try to force them to sign false confessions that they were counter-revolutionaries, but this man would always address them politely in turn, never becoming angry or using abusive language. This impressed them, and they asked him, "But we are persecuting you and beating you, and yet you pray for us." "Yes," he answered, "because that is how we have been taught." They asked, "And do you hope to be saved?" He replied, "You can't do anything, unless God permits it. Right now, while I am talking to you, you could drop dead, if God did not permit you to live. So whatever God permits, we accept, because we believe in God and we know that God loves us."

Although they would take people out every day and shoot them, this man survived, and in time he was released. He attributed that to Saint Nicholas.

St. John of Kronstadt – On Anger

Why does a man sometimes suddenly get into such a frenzy that he becomes, violently angered, speaks quickly, abruptly and incoherently, wrings his hands, tears his hair, or in his passion strikes others, foolishly breaks everything that falls into his hands, and behaves like a madman, or like one infuriated? Evidently because in his heart the sub-celestial spirits of evil are working, instigating men to every wickedness, and breathing evil and destruction upon all and everything. **Why are there both suicides of all kinds, as well as murderers of others? From the working of the immemorial suicide and murderer — the devil — in the hearts of suicides and murderers.** This is why Christ, the Savior, and the Christian Faith command everyone to have that meekness and humility which do not allow the spirits of evil and pride, seeking the death of all and each one, to work in the hearts of true Christians. The Lord says: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." The wrath of man is a terrible unnatural phenomenon in a man; it is often aroused in the heart by the most unimportant causes — mostly through the self-love or pride concealed in our heart. We must remember that "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

This and That

- "Do we think of religion as a way graciously to include God in our life and allow Him the courtesy of an occasional greeting?... Any god that can be destroyed is simply an idol, no matter how elaborately it may be constructed – artistically, intellectually or psychologically."

~ Mother Raphael of Holy Myrrhbearers, Otego, NY

"The sin was not that man neglected his religious duties. The sin was that he thought of God in terms of *religion*, i.e., opposing Him to *real life*." - Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*

By every measure we are not a progressing society, but a crumbling one. And the very people who have presided over the destruction of the family are now asking to be put in charge of human sexuality.

-Fr. Stephen Freeman

"...the fruit of this technological and scientific progress is that sexuality may now be divorced from both fertility and commitment, [and] we are all at liberty to be uncommitted, sterile, and promiscuous.

- Fr. Andrew Morbey

- Bernard of Clairveux, in "On Loving God", talks about the kind of person who takes comfort in the thought of God. He would say that there's a kind of Christian that is afraid of God, afraid of being punished by God, so he can never be comforted by God. Another kind of Christian wants something material from God, and so will be inconsolable because of his love for the world. But there is a kind of Christian who wants God Himself, and so is actually able to be comforted by the thought of God, and that thought alone.

- **Einstein is quoted as saying: " For some people there are no miracles. For others, all of life is a miracle."**

Homosexuality: Although there is much more open discussion about homosexuality in the twentieth century than in previous times, there is definite reference to it in ancient writings. The frequently used synonym, sodomy, comes from the apparent homosexual activity among men of Sodom (Genesis 19), and the severity of strictures set forth in the Holiness Code, with nothing short of the death penalty being imposed, suggested that the need for discipline must have been great, (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13). The Old Testament understood normal sexual intercourse as not only a way of expressing a loving relationship, but also as a divinely appointed way of procreating new life.

In the New Testament, St. Paul condemns male prostitutes and homosexuals (I Corinthians 6:9-11). In the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans (Romans 1:24-32), he also judges it as unnatural. Homosexuals are included elsewhere among the immoral persons who, St. Paul says, deserve judgement by God (I Timothy 1:10). There is no example in all of the New Testament of approval, acceptance, or even tolerance of homosexuality.

Throughout Christian history, this disapproval has continued to be the case. In the patristic era freedom from homosexuality was seen as a mark of the Christian's ethical superiority to the wanton way of life that converts had left. Patristic thinking, like Scriptural references, were directed to the practice of homosexuality, not to the desire itself. The Orthodox Church does not condemn the person who keeps this propensity in check, and ministers to homosexuals who wish to find release from this inclination.

+ **Bishop Alexander Mileant of Buenos Aires**