



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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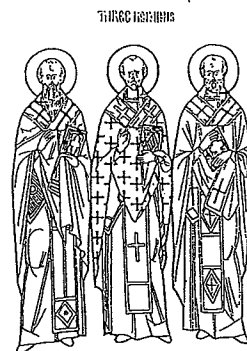
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✠ **January 25, 2015** ✠

Zacchaeus Sunday

New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia

St. Gregory the Theologian (389)



➤ **Today : *Our final Sunday in the Old Church....***

➤ **Temple Opening Prayer Service at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy**

✠ **Wed. January 28, 6:30pm ~ Final Inquirer's Class**

✠ **Moving to the New Temple Next Weekend**

➤ **Helpers will be needed Jan. 29 and 30, in the evening.**

In the New Temple:

✠ **Baptism – Sat. January 31, 3:00pm Baby Victoria Wells**

✠ **Baptisms – Sat. February 7, 3:00pm Baby Mikhail Landar and Mikhail Ghilan**

✠ **Baptisms – Sat. February 21 3:00pm Adults – William Knarr, James (John) Fuller, Kristin (Anastasia) Taylor, Jason (Michael) Land**



Next Great Feastday:

✠ **Monday, February 2 10:00am Divine Liturgy – Feast of the Entrance of Christ in the Temple**

'Thank God for the little old ladies.'

A minister once shared that a friend of his visited the Soviet Union in the 1970s. Upon his return, he announced that the Church behind the Iron Curtain was mostly "irrelevant because the only people there are little old ladies."

The minister later shared, "Looking back now at the collapse of Communism, the difficulties of rebuilding Orthodox Russia after a long period of spiritual bankruptcy, I hope my friend would now say, 'Thank God for the little old ladies.' Their existence provided a continuing, visible, political rebuke to the Soviets." It would be wonderful if our witness was as effective as that of those little old ladies. That is our task, and what a joyous, challenging task it is. Living daily with Christ and His Church, or more correctly knowing that Christ lives with each of us daily; we find others – that they, too, may come and see!

~ Fr. George Tsahakis, Atlanta

✠ **The Church and its divine services are an embodiment and realization of everything in Christianity. Here, in words and actions, are told the entire economy of our salvation, all of Sacred and Church history, all the goodness, wisdom, faithfulness and immutability of God in His deeds and promises, His truth, holiness and eternal might. Here we encounter a wonderful harmony in everything and an amazing logic both in the whole and in the parts. It is the divine wisdom, accessible to simple, loving hearts. – St. John of Kronstadt**

A Testimony Concerning St. Paisios of Mt. Athos

A police officer from Thessaloniki tells the following story: "On June 8, 1986, while on duty near the Central Hospital of Thessaloniki, I was wounded by a Molotov cocktail. I sustained very serious burns. At Hippocrates Hospital, where I was taken, they left me, supposing that death was coming soon. I remained alive, but I lost all sense of my surroundings.

"From the moment Pappoulis (Elder Paisios) learned of it, he said, 'He'll suffer a lot, but he'll live.' A few days later I regained my senses somewhat.

"One day, however, I felt that I was dying, and I said to the nurse, 'Sister — I'm dying, I'm dying.'

"I started ascending, leaving the earth, traveling amidst the stars and then the galaxies. This is how I interpreted what was happening to me as it was taking place.

"I kept ascending and ascending, and a light, something like a lit candle, went before me. All of a sudden the voyage came to a stop. I started moving in the reverse direction, towards the earth. I found myself in the hospital having had a tracheotomy performed, with doctors standing around me looking at me.

"Five months later, I met Pappoulis at Souroti. He embraced me and kissed me, and I began telling him how I died. He interrupted me saying, 'My boy, we went to the other life and back together. I was right next to you. Didn't you see me?'

"Then I understood what the light I had seen was."

One man relates: "I went to see the Elder after Pascha in 1992 . A few months beforehand my daughter Maria had reposed after a bout with cancer. Fr Paisios led me into the church, where I venerated the icon of the Panagia (Theotokos), and then he said to me: "Listen. . . I celebrated Pascha with Maria and many other souls". I looked at him in the eyes and he said to me again, "Yes, that's right."

From Saint Paisios of Mt. Athos (+1994):

"This grass is an icon; this stone is an icon; and I can kiss it, venerate it, because it is filled with God's grace. The world is not for us to take things from, but a place where we cast off our passions and desires."

Union with God

✠ Union with God cannot exist otherwise than by participation in the Holy Spirit, diffusing in us the sanctification proper to Himself, imprinting and engraving on our souls the divine likeness. Accordingly, we are all one in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit; one, I say, in unity of relationship of love and concord with God and one another ... one by conformity in godliness, by communion in the sacred body of Christ, and by fellowship in the one Holy Spirit and this is a real, physical union.

~ St. Cyril of Alexandria

There is a single energy of God and the Saints. They are living icons of Christ, being the same as He is, by grace rather than by assimilation. ~ St. Maximos the Confessor (Jan.21)

Prepare yourself for your set times of prayer by unceasing prayer in your soul, and you will soon make progress.

~ St. John Climacus

The Monk-Martyrs of Oranki Monastery



In Russia there are millions of martyrs, victims of Communism. Here, as narrated by a Romanian priest, Father Dimitrie Bejan, is a very special account of many thousands of Orthodox who had been killed in such significant circumstances. This Romanian father witnessed with his own eyes the uncovering of thousands of holy relics in a prison camp on the site of an old monastery named Oranki, and then, in the late 1940's, he met a Russian monk, Teodot, the only survivor and witness to that massacre of 11,000 monks and priests that happened at that Oranki monastery, not far from the Volga River. In 1918, these monks had been given by the Communist's 24 hours to choose between Communism and our Lord Jesus Christ. They decided in ten minutes. After that decision, for one long month, these martyrs dug their own graves while they were executed one by one, that is 300 to 500 every day. Their bishop had told these monks and priests: "Brothers, it is time to wear the wreath of martyrdom. Are you with Satan or with Christ?" How strong was their faith! Not even one deserted! But God wanted that one alone to escape by running away, and later on to meet Father Dimitrie Bejan to tell this extraordinary story. This is His Divine will!

From the book: Bucuriile suferinței: Evocări din trecut, I, (The Joys of Suffering: Memories from the Past), by Preot Dimitrie Bejan, FEP (Tipografia centrală) Cartea Moldovei, Chișinău, 1995.

The book was put together from a series of audio taped conversations with Fr. Bejan. *Translated into English by Vlad Protopopescu.*

Fr. Bejan's Interview with a group of Romanian Intellectuals:

Q: Tell us something about the camp at the Oranki Monastery and about the monks who were martyred there by the Communists.

A: Oranki was the monastery of Russian nobility, in the centre of Russia, near the Volga . In the year 1918 the communists abolished it and transformed it into a prison camp for monks, where they interned 11,000 monks from all the monasteries in Russia. There were there hieromonks and parish priests and a bishop.

In 1918 a Communist military delegation arrived from Moscow and asked them:

"Are you with us or not? You have 24 hours to answer!"

And the Bishop told them:

"It's too long a time till tomorrow. You will have the answer in 10 minutes!" And turning to the monks he asked them: "Brothers, you have the opportunity to become martyrs for Christ! Do you want to unite with the Communists? Or do you want to give your life for Christ and be counted in the host of holy martyrs? Don't be afraid! Christ is with us! Christ calls us to Him!"

And all shouted with one voice: "We want to die for Christ!"

And so all were shot with the machine gun in the head, for a month, 300-500 a day, and then

dumped in a ravine on the Monastery's grounds. Some of them were digging the trench, then they were shot; others covered them with earth and continued digging and then it was their turn to be shot; they did this until they buried them all. At the very end they shot the Bishop and buried him sitting on a small stool among the killed monks.

It was a mass massacre, unique in the history of the contemporary Church, of which nobody said or wrote anything yet. I am the only Orthodox priest alive, eye witness of the discovery of the relics of those holy martyrs of Oranki, where I was a military priest/prisoner of war between 1942-1948. I have written a book called Oranki about this phenomenon, which is now ready for print in Bucharest . [Note: The book was published in Bucharest in 1998.]

In the Oranki camp were 14,000 prisoners from Stalingrad , Romania , Germany and other European nations, and we needed latrines. The commander summoned some soldiers to dig a big trench behind the church, above a ravine. Digging there, they came upon the bones of those monks. The soldiers came to me and said: "Father Bejan, we found a trench full of bodies of monks shot in the head piled one upon the other, all in monastic garb. What should we do?" I told them to continue digging and see what else they could find. After a while they came back to me.

"Father Bejan, we found an old priest and he is not decayed, sitting on a small stool among the other monks. You can see well how he was shot in the head. He has on the neck a chain with a Cross and a metal icon with the Mother of God!"

"Brothers", I told them, "go to the commander and report this. This is a great miracle! All those monks with their incorrupt bishop are Saints, mucenici [in Romanian mucenic = martyr] killed by the Communists in 1918-20. We must stop making a latrine here!"

On a small stool was seated an archbishop, abbot of a monastery, or a bishop. I knew that immediately because he wore an engolpion and a Cross like the bishops.

The Cross was stolen by the diggers. They cut it and shared it among themselves. I managed to save the engolpion, but it was eventually taken by the commander of the camp. I called him to the site. He said: "Why is he sitting on a chair? Take him out and bury him somewhere like all people!" And he gave me the task to do it.

I went to the camp workshop and they made a solid oak chair. I sat him on the chair and fastened him. I sprinkled him with holy water from head to toe, sprinkling all the skeletons that were around as well. Then I buried him after the custom for bishops, near a fountain in the yard of the Monastery.

He was a Saint by all accounts!

This fountain is an izbuc [Romanian for a source that throws water up intermittently]. Water comes up according to the virtues of the people who take water. In the summer, on the day of the Transfiguration (6 August), many old priests, former prisoners in Siberia , many of them disabled, come and serve the Holy Liturgy there. We participated also.

At the commanders request we made a strong case of oak to protect the body. And I saw a miracle. He had been shot in the head, but when we took him out from among the other corpses, his incorrupt body relaxed at once as if he died just then.

I told this story to two young Russian intellectuals, one of them of Romanian background, and they were deeply impressed. They went to Oranki to check for themselves. But they could not approach

the place because in the place where the prisoner camp was it is now a women's prison and they were not permitted to go anywhere close. They tried to get permission for the exhumation of the bodies, but this is a very big thing! To exhume 11,000 skeletons and to bury them like Christians! It is the work of an entire village, what am I saying, more than that. Think of it, 11,000 bodies of monks make a whole army! This is the army of the Heavenly King! Saints of the Christ!

When we found them, we put them back. Of course, we made the latrines somewhere else. And things remained like that in God's mercy and knowledge. The two students went there and did some digging and they found exactly what I told them. They found the bones but not the bishop, because they did not dig exactly according to my indications. They had the permission to dig only to two meters depth. They covered all the bones. They came back to me and confirmed my sayings. They still don't have much religious freedom. The communist spirit is still strong.

Q: When did you find the relics?

A: I found them in the year 1942, in autumn. But they had been executed in 1918. Then all the priests and monks in Russia had been asked by the Communists: "Are you with us or not?" All had answered: "No, we stay with Christ!" Then they were shot on the spot, as I told you already.

Q: It means then that these bones are the relics of Saints!

A: Of course! True martyrs, like in the time of the Roman persecutions. Eleven thousands martyrs in all! Only monks and priests were there with this saintly bishop at their head. Not a single politician. Not since the Roman persecutions have so many martyrs been killed as under the Communists.

There was the custom at Oranki that every year on the 6th of August, the Feast of the Transfiguration, veteran priests, old and disabled, former political prisoners in Siberia, would perform the Divine Liturgy at the fountain, with all of us present. They were all priests with saintly lives. Near that fountain I buried the relics of that saintly bishop. I regret that I forgot his name.

Q: Have the authorities permitted the two youths to take any of the bones of the martyrs from Oranki?

A: No, nothing! Only to ascertain that here they were. Authorities pretended to know nothing. Why would they be concerned?

I sent them to an eyewitness from there, I don't know whether he is still alive. In 1918 a rassofo monk managed to escape and he was making a living being a miller in the woods. He had a mill and people were going to his mill to grind their oats, because there was no maize, nor millet. His name was Teodot. I contacted him in 1944-45 and he gave me all the information about the mass murder, after we had found the bones. He was the only survivor. How did he manage to escape, I don't know. He was a local. He might have known where to hide.

Q: How did you meet this monk Teodot?

A: It was a cold winter and we had been taken into a big forest to the north of the camp to cut firewood. As I was walking through the forest I came about a small house on the bank of a small river. I knocked at the door and an old bearded Russian opened the door asking me who I was and what I wanted.

I told him that I was a Romanian prisoner of war and an Orthodox priest. He had not seen a priest

in thirty years. It was in the middle of the forest. He was living Christianity very well there at the mill. I was a stranger to him but soon he trusted me. He was a simple monk. He could not do anything as a priest, but he knew all the Order of Services. He had a book from which he did his Canon, in the evening after work.

He was very pious. I don't think that he is still alive. Every time I was going there he was kneeling and enjoining me to do the same. We would pray together. He was saying what he could remember. We managed to get a Tchaslov [Romanian Book of the hours - horologian] from a Russian.

The first time we met, he asked me: "Are you an Orthodox priest?" And he started crying.

"Yes", I answered.

"Then let me tell you a secret: I am a monk from the Oranki Monastery. My name is Teodot and in 1918, when I was young, I ran away not to be killed. I built this house and a water mill in this woods. I haven't seen an Orthodox priest since I escaped from Oranki."

I told him how I discovered the trench with the shot monks and I asked him:
"What happened there, because I found a big trench full on dead monks?"

He told me crying:

"When the atheist Communists came to power they rounded 11,000 monks and priests from all the monasteries and gathered them at Oranki; I was there. One day a group of cavalry men came to the Monastery and asked us: 'You come with us?' But the bishop and all the monks answered: 'We don't want to go with you, because you are atheists! We want to die for Christ!'

"I managed to escape. The soldiers put the monks to dig a trench along of hundreds of meters and during the next month they shot them all; the last being the bishop. They were digging the trench and covering the bodies with earth. But they were full of faith in Christ and were fasting and praying until they were all shot."

Q: Can those monks martyred for Christ be considered saints? And all the other Christians killed by the atheists during Communism, can they be counted as saints and martyrs?

A: Yes! All in mass! There are holy martyrs, priests and monks from Oranki. This is because they preferred death to abjuration. And in our country, in the woods and mountains, priests have been shot. They can be counted as national and Christian martyrs.

Q: What more beautiful memories do you have of the Russian people and how would you characterize this great Christian Orthodox people, always tortured by extremes?

A: Russians, in their vast majority – despite all the persecutions and left without priests and churches – have remained faithful to the "Pravoslávníe" (Orthodox) Church, and women carried on the tradition of this great Church. Presently, Orthodoxy is reborn in Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, Siberia and the Caucasus. There are more priests, churches reopen, and many more are built... There is still a long way until this Church who gave so many Martyrs, will be totally reborn, and we will be able to say firmly: "The Pravoslávníe Church is totally reborn like the Phoenix from its ashes".... In our country, the monasteries and faithful women have saved the Orthodox Faith. To them belongs all the merit.

This and That

By what authority...?

The rise of the modern period brought a number of new assumptions including new claims regarding history. The Protestant Reformation was more than an argument about the nature of Scripture – it was also an argument about the nature and place of history. The assault on the authority of the Church required (and still requires) a substitute. By what authority is the Church to be judged defective? By what authority (greater than the Bishops' and the Pope's) can it be reformed? Scripture is one obvious answer – with the lingering question of authoritative interpretation.

The modern believer struggles with doubts because he struggles within a false consciousness. The character of salvation does not fit the model of the modern consciousness. The Church, for example, teaches Christ's descent into Hades in a manner that is completely comparable to Christ's crucifixion, though it can in no way be described or discerned in the manner of a historical fact. But it is just as essential to the faith.

It is very common in the modern period to describe something as being "out of the Middle Ages," and in so doing somehow remove it from the Modern World as if it did not belong. This, of course, removes the Modern World from responsibility for stuff it doesn't like. – Fr. Stephen Freeman

No "Dialogue" on Settled Church Teaching

The fact of the matter is we don't "dialogue" about matters that are settled Church teaching. We can certainly explain Church teaching, even on controversial issues, to make it clear to inquirers, but we don't engage in a dialogue on settled subjects. Should we "dialogue" about whether Icons are appropriate for use during worship and prayer? No, this was settled by the Church long ago.

Should we "dialogue" about whether abortion is acceptable sometimes, even for a young 16-year-old mother who is 6 months pregnant and scared? No, this young mother needs tender love and support, but there is no "dialogue" about whether she should be able to abort the baby.

Should we "dialogue" about whether Christ is fully man and fully God? No, this is clear teaching from the Church. For these same reasons, there is no need to "dialogue" with our modern culture or society about "questions and issues that are a priori presumed to contradict or challenge [our Church's] living tradition..."

We can explain the Church's teaching on the matter, for example if two men who are "married" in secular society have questions about Church teaching on homosexuality, we can and should make effort to explain our faith and Church teaching on the matter. But there is no role whatsoever for a "dialogue" to take place with these men over whether, as "married" homosexuals they can partake in the sacramental life of the Church as active homosexuals. – Internet Commentator

"In his wartime broadcasts [C. S. Lewis] had made the distinction between a purely civil marriage and the sacrament of the Church. 'There ought to be two distinct kinds of marriage,' he had said: 'one governed by the State with rules enforced on all citizens, the other governed by the Church with rules enforced by her on her own members. The distinction ought to be quite sharp, so that a man knows which couples are married in a Christian sense and which are not.'" - Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings*

Education – Minimum Requirements...

Whether a student is black, white, orange or polka-dot and whether he's poor or rich, there are some minimum requirements that must be met in order for him to do well in school. Someone must make the student do his homework. Someone must see to it that he gets eight to nine hours of sleep. Someone has to fix him a wholesome breakfast and ensure that he gets to school on time and respects and obeys teachers.

Here's my question: Which one of those basic requirements can be accomplished through a presidential executive order, a congressional mandate or the edict of a mayor, a superintendent of schools or a teacher? If those basic requirements aren't met, whatever else that is done in the name of education is for naught.

~ Walter Williams

The Final Message of Newly Canonized Saint Paisios of Mt. Athos (+1994)

First we believe in God, and later we love God and His image, mankind. Faith increases with prayer. "Increase our faith (Luke 17:5)."

I've come to see that all evil comes from disbelief. When man doesn't believe in God, he wants to revel away his life, so he gives himself over to every kind of sin.

Man must grasp the deeper meaning of life: that this life is for us to get ready for the next one. At this point, just like a traveler needs a guide to reach his destination, one must find a guide, [a spiritual father] for the heavenly journey. Then, the guide will give him a program: a little reading and a little prayer, so the person will avoid occasions to sin and the worldly mindset, which is the worst thing of all. And, in this way, his heart will be in Christ.

We must struggle with eager goodness to save ourselves so we won't sadden Christ. Christ will say to us, 'My child, I did so many things to save you. I poured out my blood and endured so much suffering. And you — what did you do for your salvation?'

Each person must find and sanctify their calling. Everyone who's diligent will be successful, wherever they may be, whether they're married or monks.

We should prefer afflictions and see them as better than pleasures. A lot of times bitter medicines are better than sweet ones, because they heal. Suffering gives birth to true joy.

What hinders spiritual progress is that people focus on other things instead of what benefits them spiritually.

For us to pray in our hearts, pain for the state of the world today has to enter into us. Today the time has come for the sheep to be separated from the goats, the faithful from the faithless. Later we'll be tested and persecuted for our faith, and then you'll be able to tell the copper from the gold.

When someone grieves from suffering for others, feeling their pain, making their problems his own, then he has a martyr's reward. How full of grace are people who sacrifice everything! They don't have any problems, and their face shines because they have divine joy all the time.

The entire foundation of the spiritual life is for people to think of others and put themselves last, not to think of themselves. When we put ourselves in another person's shoes and understand them, then we're Christ's kin.

The grace of God is a valuable thing. It won't come and dwell within someone unless it finds that person in agreement with God according to the Spirit and he exhausts every human effort. What we want, though, is for divine grace to come and free us from our weaknesses without a struggle. In order for the Holy Spirit to dwell in man, it takes a lot of self-denial, a lot of eager goodness, humility, nobility, and sacrifice. The aim of the spiritual life is not pleasure. Christ has put the outlet in, but our cords have gotten rusty, so they can't receive divine grace. To clean the cords, we have to struggle to know ourselves, to cut off our passions, and to acquire the virtues, and then God's grace will visit us. To Him be the glory and the dominion unto the ages. Amen.