



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447

Visit [stsymeon.com](http://stsymeon.com)

✠ **February 8, 2015** ✠

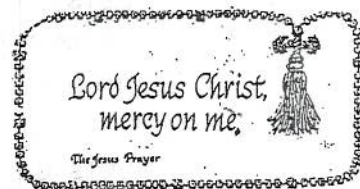
**Sunday of the Prodigal Son**

Postfeast of the Entrance of Christ  
into the Temple

Great -Martyr Theodore the General (319)

Holy Prophet Zechariah (520 BC)

O Jesus my God,  
accept me also now  
in repentance  
as Thou did the  
Prodigal Son!  
I have lived  
all my life in  
carelessness  
and provoked Thee  
to anger!



✠ **Many Years! Newly Illumined Children Michael Landar and Mikhail Ghilan!**

✠ **Sat. Feb. 14 10:00am Memorial Saturday Divine Liturgy**

➤ **Next Sunday is Meatfare Sunday – Meatfare Supper after Liturgy**

✠ **Adult Baptisms – Sat. February 21 3:00pm ~ William Knarr, James (John) Fuller, Kristin (Anastasia) Taylor, Joanna (Georgia) Carter and Jason (Michael) Land**

➤ **Note: Monday, February 16 – Episcopal Election Meeting in Miami, FL**  
Father will be away from Feb. 16 - 20

## **On the Prodigal Son ~ From a letter of Elder Ephraim**

You should approach the divine Mystery with much compunction, contrition, and awareness of your sins. Great is the mercy of God, Who condescends to enter within you without abhorring the multitude of your sins. Instead, out of boundless love and affection He comes to sanctify you and count you worthy to become a child of His and a co-heir of His kingdom.

Unworthily I serve the Liturgy to my God. The office is holy and awesome. Every day I offer the Lamb of God as a sacrifice pleasing to God, the Blameless One to the Blameless Father and God, in order that He be merciful to us for everything through which we grieve Him, the most good God, Who sacrificed His Son for us. Oh, my God, your beloved Son for us! Who are we to deserve such a supreme sacrifice? "When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son." (Rom.5:10) The image of the Prodigal Son, who squandered the property of his father, shows us very clearly the reason why Christ died.

Wholeheartedly thank God, Who loves you---as I can see---very much. For if He did not love you, you would not be as you are. You think that you are lost, etc., but spiritually I see that you are very well off. Just do not despair; do not lose hope. He who has hope will by no means be put to shame.

Even if someone is covered by an abyss of sins, if he repents and does not lose hope, the devil fears him, because the paternal heart of the Heavenly Father yields when His Prodigal Son says, "I have sinned." He runs first, embraces him, kisses him, and kills the fatted calf in celebration, for His son was dead and is alive again. (Lk.15:19-24). The despair of the sinner is completely unjustified. Is a handful of sand ever able to cover the ocean? ✠ ✠ ✠



## **Saint Cyril of Alexandria on Proper and Improper Explanations of the Parable of the Prodigal Son.**

Some hold that the two sons signify the Holy Angels, and we the dwellers upon earth: and that the elder one who lived soberly represents the company of the Holy Angels while the younger profligate son is the human race. With this explanation I do not agree. For if we refer the upright son to the person of the Holy Angels, we do not find him speaking such words as become them, nor sharing their feelings towards repentant sinners who turn from an impure life to that conduct which is worthy of admiration. For the Saviour of all saith that there is joy in heaven before the Holy Angels over one sinner that repenteth. But the son who is described to us in the present parable as being acceptable unto his father, and leading a blameless life, is represented as being angry, and as even having proceeded so far in his unloving sentiments as to find fault with his father for his natural affection for him who was saved. For he would not go into the house, being vexed at the reception of the penitent almost before he had come to his senses, and because there had even been slain the calf in his honor, and his father had made for him a feast. But this, as I said, is at variance with the feelings of the Holy Angels, for they rejoice and praise God when they see the inhabitants of the earth being saved. For so when the Son submitted to be born in the flesh of a woman at Bethlehem, they carried the joyful news to the shepherds saying, Fear not, for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy that shall be to all the people, that there is born to you today in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And crowning Him who was born with lauds and praises, they said, Glory to God in the highest, and upon earth peace among men good will...

What then is the object of the parable? Let us examine the occasion which led to it; for so we shall learn the truth. The blessed Luke a bit earlier said of Christ the Savior of us all that all the publicans and sinners drew near Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured saying, this man receiveth sinners and eateth with them. Therefore, as the Pharisees and Scribes made this outcry at His gentleness and love to man, and wickedly blamed Him for receiving and teaching men whose lives were impure, Christ thus set before them the present parable, to show them clearly this very thing, that the God of all requires even him who is thoroughly steadfast, and firm, and who knows how to live in holiness, and has attained to the highest praise for sobriety of conduct, to be earnest in following His will, so that when any are called unto repentance, even if they be men highly blameable, he must rejoice and not give way to an unloving vexation on their account.



- **St. John Chrysostom's Homily for Holy Thursday:**
- **"O my beloved and greatly-desired brethren who have gathered in the Holy Church of God, in order to serve the Living God in holiness and righteousness, and, with fear, to partake of the holy, most-pure, and immortal, awesome Mysteries of Christ:** Harken unto me who am lowly and unworthy. For it is not I who am speaking to you and instructing you; rather the grace of the Most-holy and Life-giving Spirit; for I speak not from myself, but as I have been instructed by the divine canons, and the God-bearing Fathers, as the Church received instruction from the divine Apostles who received their wisdom from God, so do I myself speak, who am lowly and least of all.
- I give counsel to everyone among you, whether man or woman, whether great or small, to anyone of you that may be guilty of sin, convicted by your own counsels, that first you must repent and confess your sins, that you may dare, considering yourself unworthy, to approach and touch the Divine Fire Itself. For our God is a consuming Fire, and they, therefore, who with faith and fear draw near to the God and King and Judge of us all, shall burn and scorch their sins; and It shall enlighten and sanctify their souls. But It shall burn and scorch with shame, the souls and bodies of them that draw near with unbelief.
- **Therefore, many among you are ill and sleep in sickness, that is, many are dying unconfessed and unrepentant.** And furthermore, my brethren, I beseech you, and I say: no one that swears oaths, nor a perjurer, nor a liar, nor one that finds fault with others, nor a fornicator, nor an adulterer, nor a homosexual, nor a thief, nor a drunkard, nor a blasphemer, nor one that envies his brother, nor a murderer, nor a sorcerer, nor a magician, nor a charmer, nor an enchanter, nor a robber, nor a Manichean, shall, unconfessed and unprepared, approach, touch, or draw near the dread Mysteries of Christ, for it is terrible to fall into the hands of the Living God. For the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the joints and marrow and bones, and thoughts and hearts. See, therefore, my brethren, that no one approach, unrepentant or unprepared or unworthily, to partake of His dread and most-pure Mysteries. For He Himself saith: I am He, and there is no god besides me; I kill, and I make alive; neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand; for I, Myself, am King forever: to Whom is due all glory, honor, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages, Amen."

---

## On Homosexuality

### From the Synodal document: "Synodal Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life"

These affirmations on marriage, family, sexuality, and the sanctity of life were issued by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America on the occasion of the Tenth All-American Council, Miami, Florida, July, 1992:

.....  
 Created to know God's divinity and power through creation, human beings have refused to acknowledge God, to honor and thank Him, and to obey his divine teachings. Through their rebellion "they became futile in their thinking and their senseless hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21).



Therefore, as the apostle Paul continues to teach, "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error" (Romans 1:26-27).

Homosexual acts, like adulterous and incestuous behavior, are condemned in the Law of Moses. Those who do these things, both men and women, are, according to God's Law of the Old Covenant, to be put to death (Leviticus 18:6-23; 20:10-21).

According to the Apostle Paul, those engaging in homosexual acts, with fornicators, adulterers, idolaters, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers and robbers, will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Christians come from all these categories of evil doers who have, voluntarily and involuntarily, been caught up in the sin of the world. They are those who through their personal repentance and faith in Christ, their baptism and chrismation, and their participation in Holy Communion, have been "washed...sanctified...and made righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Orthodox Baptism and Chrismation Service).

Jesus teaches mercy and forgiveness for all sinners, but the Lord does not justify sin. When the Son of God pronounces divine pardon to those caught in evil he always charges the forgiven sinner to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

Convinced of these God-revealed truths, we offer the following affirmations and admonitions for the guidance of the faithful:

Homosexuality is to be approached as the result of humanity's rebellion against God, and so against its own nature and well-being. It is not to be taken as a way of living and acting for men and women made in God's image and likeness.

Men and women with homosexual feelings and emotions are to be treated with the understanding, acceptance, love, justice and mercy due to all human beings.

People with homosexual tendencies are to be helped to admit these feelings to themselves and to others who will not reject or harm them. They are to seek assistance in discovering the specific causes of their homosexual orientation, and to work toward overcoming its harmful effects in their lives.

Persons struggling with homosexuality who accept the Orthodox faith and strive to fulfill the Orthodox way of life may be communicants of the Church with everyone else who believes and struggles. Those instructed and counseled in Orthodox Christian doctrine and ascetical life who still want to justify their behavior may not participate in the Church's sacramental mysteries, since to do so would not help, but harm them.

Assistance is to be given to those who deal with persons of homosexual orientation in order to help them with their thoughts, feelings and actions in regard to homosexuality. Such assistance is especially necessary for parents, relatives and friends of persons with homosexual tendencies and feelings. It is certainly necessary for pastors and Church workers."

**<http://oca.org/holy-synod/statements/holy-synod/synodal-affirmations-on-marriage-family-sexuality-and-the-sanctity-of-life#Homosexuality>**



## **“Men Have Forgotten God” – The Templeton Address (excerpt)**

### **– Alexander Solzhenitsyn**

---

More than half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: **Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.**

Since then I have spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of our Revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous Revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: **Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.**

What is more, the events of the Russian Revolution can only be understood now, at the end of the century, against the background of what has since occurred in the rest of the world. What emerges here is a process of universal significance. And if I were called upon to identify briefly the principal trait of the *entire* twentieth century, here too, I would be unable to find anything more precise and pithy than to repeat once again: **Men have forgotten God.**

The failings of human consciousness, deprived of its divine dimension, have been a determining factor in all the major crimes of this century. The first of these was World War I, and much of our present predicament can be traced back to it. It was a war (the memory of which seems to be fading) when Europe, bursting with health and abundance, fell into a rage of self-mutilation which could not but sap its strength for a century or more, and perhaps forever. The only possible explanation for this war is a mental eclipse among the leaders of Europe due to their lost awareness of a Supreme Power above them. Only a godless embitterment could have moved ostensibly Christian states to employ poison gas, a weapon so obviously beyond the limits of humanity.

The same kind of defect, the flaw of a consciousness lacking all divine dimension, was manifested after World War II when the West yielded to the satanic temptation of the "nuclear umbrella." It was equivalent to saying: Let's cast off worries, let's free the younger generation from their duties and obligations, let's make no effort to defend ourselves, to say nothing of defending others—let's stop our ears to the groans emanating from the East, and let us live instead in the pursuit of happiness. If danger should threaten us, we shall be protected by the nuclear bomb; if not, then let the world burn in Hell for all we care. The pitifully helpless state to which the contemporary West has sunk is in large measure due to this fatal error: the belief that the defense of peace depends not on stout hearts and steadfast men, but solely on the nuclear bomb...

Today's world has reached a stage which, if it had been described to preceding centuries, would have called forth the cry: "This is the Apocalypse!"

Yet we have grown used to this kind of world; we even feel at home in it.

Dostoevsky warned that "great events could come upon us and catch us intellectually unprepared." This is precisely what has happened. And he predicted that "the world will be saved only after it has been possessed by the demon of evil." Whether it really will be saved we shall have to wait and see: this will depend on our conscience, on our spiritual lucidity, on our individual and combined efforts in the face of catastrophic circumstances. But it has already come to pass that the demon of evil, like a whirlwind, triumphantly circles all five continents of the earth...



In its past, Russia did know a time when the social ideal was not fame, or riches, or material success, but a pious way of life. Russia was then steeped in an Orthodox Christianity which remained true to the Church of the first centuries. The Orthodoxy of that time knew how to safeguard its people under the yoke of a foreign occupation that lasted more than two centuries, while at the same time fending off iniquitous blows from the swords of Western crusaders. During those centuries the Orthodox faith in our country became part of the very pattern of thought and the personality of our people, the forms of daily life, the work calendar, the priorities in every undertaking, the organization of the week and of the year. Faith was the shaping and unifying force of the nation.

But in the 17th century Russian Orthodoxy was gravely weakened by an internal schism. In the 18th, the country was shaken by Peter's forcibly imposed transformations, which favored the economy, the state, and the military at the expense of the religious spirit and national life. And along with this lopsided Petrine enlightenment, Russia felt the first whiff of secularism; its subtle poisons permeated the educated classes in the course of the 19th century and opened the path to Marxism. By the time of the Revolution, faith had virtually disappeared in Russian educated circles; and amongst the uneducated, its health was threatened.



Fyodor M. Dostoevsky

It was Dostoevsky, once again, who drew from the French Revolution and its seeming hatred of the Church the lesson that "revolution must necessarily begin with atheism." That is absolutely true. But the world had never before known a godlessness as organized, militarized, and tenaciously malevolent as that practiced by Marxism. Within the philosophical system of Marx and Lenin, and at the heart of their psychology, hatred of God is the principal driving force, more fundamental than all their political and economic pretensions. Militant atheism is not merely incidental or marginal to Communist policy; it is not a side effect, but the central pivot.

The 1920's in the USSR witnessed an uninterrupted procession of victims and martyrs amongst the Orthodox clergy. Two metropolitans were shot, one of whom, Benjamin of Petrograd, had been elected by the popular vote of his diocese. Patriarch Tikhon himself passed through the hands of the Cheka-GPU and then died under suspicious circumstances. Scores of archbishops and bishops perished. Tens of thousands of priests, monks, and nuns, pressured by the Chekists to renounce the Word of God, were tortured, shot in cellars, sent to camps, exiled to the desolate tundra of the far North, or turned out into the streets in their old age without food or shelter. All these Christian martyrs went unswervingly to their deaths for the faith; instances of apostasy were few and far between. For tens of millions of laymen access to the Church was blocked, and they were forbidden to bring up their children in the Faith: religious parents were wrenched from their children and thrown into prison, while the children were turned from the faith by threats and lies...

For a short period of time, when he needed to gather strength for the struggle against Hitler, Stalin cynically adopted a friendly posture toward the Church. This deceptive game, continued in later years by Brezhnev with the help of showcase publications and other window dressing, has unfortunately tended to be taken at its face value in the West. Yet the tenacity with which hatred of religion is rooted in Communism may be judged by the example of their most liberal leader, Krushchev: for though he undertook a number of significant steps to extend freedom, Krushchev simultaneously rekindled the frenzied Leninist obsession with destroying religion.

But there is something they did not expect: that in a land where Churches have been leveled, where a triumphant atheism has rampaged uncontrolled for two-thirds of a century, where the clergy is utterly humiliated and deprived of all independence, where what remains of the Church as an institution is tolerated only for the sake of propaganda directed at the West, where even today people



are sent to the labor camps for their faith, and where, within the camps themselves, those who gather to pray at Easter are clapped in punishment cells—they could not suppose that beneath this Communist steamroller, the Christian tradition would survive in Russia. It is true that millions of our countrymen have been corrupted and spiritually devastated by an officially imposed atheism, yet there remain many millions of believers: it is only external pressures that keep them from speaking out, but, as is always the case in times of persecution and suffering, the awareness of God in my country has attained great acuteness and profundity.

It is here that we see the dawn of hope: for no matter how formidably Communism bristles with tanks and rockets, no matter what successes it attains in seizing the planet, it is doomed never to vanquish Christianity.

The West has yet to experience a Communist invasion; religion here remains free. But the West's own historical evolution has been such that today it too is experiencing a drying up of religious consciousness. It too has witnessed racking schisms, bloody religious wars, and rancor, to say nothing of the tide of secularism that, from the late Middle Ages onward, has progressively inundated the West. This gradual sapping of strength from within is a threat to faith that is perhaps even more dangerous than any attempt to assault religion violently from without.

Imperceptibly, through decades of gradual erosion, the meaning of life in the West has ceased to be seen as anything more lofty than the "pursuit of happiness," a goal that has even been solemnly guaranteed by constitutions. The concepts of good and evil have been ridiculed for several centuries; banished from common use, they have been replaced by political or class considerations of short lived value. It has become embarrassing to state that evil makes its home in the individual human heart before it enters a political system. Yet it is not considered shameful to make daily concessions to an integral evil. Judging by the continuing landslide of concessions made before the eyes of our very own generation, the West is ineluctably slipping toward the abyss. Western societies are losing more and more of their religious essence as they thoughtlessly yield up their younger generation to atheism. If a blasphemous film about Jesus is shown throughout the United States, reputedly one of the most religious countries in the world, or a major newspaper publishes a shameless caricature of the Virgin Mary, what further evidence of godlessness does one need? When external rights are completely unrestricted, why should one make an inner effort to restrain oneself from ignoble acts?

Or why should one refrain from burning hatred, whatever its basis—race, class, or ideology? Such hatred is in fact corroding many hearts today. Atheist teachers in the West are bringing up a younger generation in a spirit of hatred of their own society. Amid all the vituperation we forget that the defects of capitalism represent the basic flaws of human nature, allowed unlimited freedom together with the various human rights; we forget that under Communism (and Communism is breathing down the neck of all moderate forms of socialism, which are unstable) the identical flaws run riot in any person with the least degree of authority; while everyone else under that system does indeed attain "equality"—the equality of destitute slaves. This eager fanning of the flames of hatred is becoming the mark of today's free world. Indeed, the broader the personal freedoms are, the higher the level of prosperity or even of abundance—the more vehement, paradoxically, does this blind hatred become. The contemporary developed West thus demonstrates by its own example that human salvation can be found neither in the profusion of material goods nor in merely making money.

This deliberately nurtured hatred then spreads to all that is alive, to life itself, to the world with its colors, sounds, and shapes, to the human body. The embittered art of the twentieth century is perishing as a result of this ugly hate, for art is fruitless without love. In the East art has collapsed because it has been knocked down and trampled upon, but in the West the fall has been voluntary, a decline into a contrived and pretentious quest where the artist, instead of attempting to reveal the divine plan, tries to put himself in the place of God. Here again we witness the single outcome of a worldwide process, with East and West yielding the same results, and once again for the same reason: Men have forgotten God.



## *This and That*

### **Mercy and Justice**

...Ultimately rule of law is about establishing and enforcing when necessary a set of shared standards of conduct with a shared understanding of the consequences. Law codes derived from religion have been historically popular because, in part, the religion offers an authority outside any particular community or tribe or person.

The culprit is egalitarianism: No hierarchy of value even when it regards human life; no common standards; no common code of behavior; no common consequences; no sense of accountability to anyone else or anything higher. Might becomes right. Tribalism returns.

**In modern culture the tribe has become the individual. I can and should be able to do anything I want is the fundamental assumption.** Even when the vestiges of the rule of law tell me I can't, such imposed restraint makes no sense and simply builds anger and resentment even when it appears to be successful. Sooner or later that anger and resentment explode individually or more corporately. Any expression of authority in such a morass is looked upon with distrust and more anger, even when the authority is not out of line. At the same time, it also makes enforcement of what law remains much more likely to be violent and capricious.

**Diversity in and of itself is not the problem, that is too simplistic. In the environment of radical egalitarianism it does add fuel to the fire. Secularism has no legitimate source of authority. It can appeal to only two sources: the will of the people or simple force. The first leads to mob anarchy. The second to tyranny.**

...In the course of justice, none of us should see salvation. Justice is a bloody mistress in the hands of men. Righteousness on the other hand is an entirely different matter.

As Christians we are called to seek righteousness, not justice: Mercy and justice in the same soul is like the man who worships God and idols in the same temple. Mercy is in contradiction with justice. Justice is the return of the equal. Because it returns to man that which he deserves and it does not bend to one side neither is it partial in the retaliation. But mercy is sorrow that is moved by grace and bends to all with sympathy and it does not return the harm to him who deserves it although it overfills him who deserves good. ... "And as it is not possible for hay and fire to be able to exist in the same house, the same way it is not possible for justice and mercy to be in the same soul. As the grain of sand cannot be compared with a great amount of gold – the same way God's need for justice cannot be compared with his mercy. Because man's sin, in comparison to the providence and the mercy of God, are like a handful of sand that falls in the sea and the Creator's mercy cannot be defeated by the wickedness of the creatures." (St. Isaac the Syrian)

**The real rule of law is founded on mercy and righteousness, not justice.** We are each and all accountable to each and all and God for the content of our lives and how we impact one another but we must be aware at the same time that "I am the greatest of sinners." If we cannot learn to not only articulate that vision in words but live it out in our life (personally and corporately) or at least make serious efforts to, we will face the one judge with only darkness and blood to offer.

Michael Baumann

---

Only a minor part of the reason for Islam's rise in Western Europe has to do with the large-scale immigration of Algerians, Turks, and so on, and their subsequent non-amalgamation into the general population. The larger point is that the Muslims who came and began to populate the continent with their own kind found there a steadily enlarging spiritual vacuum.

The Cathedrals and churches were open for business, yes; but it was tourists who more and more filled them, and not in a spirit of worship either. More like a mood of dutiful curiosity. An increasingly secular Europe has for decades seen Islam not as an oppositional force in cultural and spiritual terms, but, rather, as one more mode of expression: all the more deserving of tolerance, possibly, on account of one-time Christian proclivities for butting in with the Gospel, wherever and whenever.

~ William Murchison