

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **November 15, 2015** ✠

Advent: The Nativity Fast

St. Paisius Velichkovsky

of Moldavia & Mt. Athos (1794)

“The divine Logos, when He became man, said, 'My Father is working even now, and I am working' (Jn. 5:17). The Father approves this work, the Son properly carries it out, and the Holy Spirit essentially completes both the Father's approval of it all and the Son's execution of it, in order that the God in Trinity might be 'through all and in all things' (Eph. 4:6)...

~ St. Maximos the Confessor

➤ *Many Years!* Newly Illumined Child Elizabeth Murphree!

Tomorrow: Inquirer's Class – 6:30pm

✠ **Wednesday, November 18, 6:30pm Akathist of Thanksgiving**

✠ **Friday, November 20, 6:30pm ~ Great Vespers – Presentation of the Theotokos**

✠ **Saturday, November 21 10:00am Divine Liturgy – Feast of the Presentation**

of the Theotokos in the Temple

Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov: An excerpt from the homilies of Elder Zosima

“**Look at the worldly and at the whole world** that exalts itself above the people of God: are the image of God and his truth not distorted in it? They have science, and in science only that which is subject to the senses. But the spiritual world, the higher half of man's being, is altogether rejected, banished with a sort of triumph, even with hatred. The world has proclaimed freedom, especially of late, but what do we see in this freedom of theirs: only slavery and suicide! For the world says, 'You have needs, therefore satisfy them, for you have the same rights as the noblest and richest of men. Do not be afraid to satisfy them, but even increase them'—this is the current teaching of the world. And in this they see freedom. But what comes of this right to increase one's needs? For the rich, isolation and spiritual suicide; for the poor, envy and murder, for they have been given rights, but have not yet been given any way of satisfying their needs. . . Taking freedom to mean the increase and prompt satisfaction of needs, they distort their own nature, for they generate many meaningless and foolish desires, habits, and the most absurd fancies in themselves. They live only for mutual envy, for pleasure seeking and self-display.” (313-314)

“**Very different is the monastic way.** Obedience, fasting, and prayer are laughed at, yet they alone constitute the way to real and true freedom: I cut away my superfluous and unnecessary needs, through obedience I humble and chasten my vain and proud will, and thereby, with God's help, attain freedom of spirit, and with that, spiritual rejoicing! Which of the two is more capable of upholding and serving a great idea—the isolated rich man or one who is liberated from the tyranny of things and habits? The monk is reproached for his isolation: 'You isolate yourself in order to save your soul behind monastery walls, but you forget the brotherly ministry to mankind.' We shall see, however, who is more zealous in loving his brothers. For it is they who are isolated, not we, but they do not see it. Of old from our midst came leaders of the people, and can they not come now as well? Our own humble and meek ones, fasters and keepers of silence, will arise and go forth for a great deed. The salvation of Russia is from the people.” (314)

“**Brothers, do not be afraid of men's sin, love man also in his sin,** for this likeness of God's love is the height of love on earth. Love all of God's creation, both the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love animals, love plants, love each thing. If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in things.” (318-319)



Mr Alexander Fecanin
St Symeon the New Theologian Choir
3101 Clairmont Ave S, Birmingham, AL 35205

August 19, 2015
08/031

Dear Alexander and Choir Members

Glory to Jesus Christ!

I am writing at this time to express my gratitude for your dedication and the selfless offering of your talents and gifts during the 18th All American Council. The opening liturgy on Sunday, aided by your beautiful voices was a true manifestation of the beauty of our Orthodox Liturgical tradition. Our gathering in council would not have been possible without your participation prior to and during the council. Thank you for your hard work and dedication to the Orthodox Church in America.

I am sure you will agree that this council was a tremendous moment for the life of our Church. Clergy, monastics laity, youth and even those not present have all expressed enthusiasm for the revitalization of our community as it works to become a truly local church here in North America.

Finally, please accept my gratitude for the CD of your choir. I encourage you to continue in your good service to the Orthodox Church and never forget that your service to Our Lord is truly an awesome responsibility.

Once again, thank you for your contribution in expanding the mission.

Asking for our Lord's continued blessing upon you and your good work, I remain,

Yours in Christ

+ TIKHON
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

Who Are My Enemies?

We should not fear an external enemy; our enemy is within ourselves. —St. John Cassian

We often hear prayers and Psalms which ask God to deliver us from our “enemies”. Who are these enemies? We don’t mean enemies like opposing political parties or governments which oppose our way of life and political ideas.

The enemy of Christians is anyone or anything which prevents us from being the best Christians we can be. So the first enemy is Evil — the devil. We know that the devil always lies to us, to seduce us, to distract us from following Christ, or to coerce us into being lazy and indifferent towards the work of our soul and its eternal salvation.

The second enemy is more difficult to acknowledge, because it is *ourselves!* We have passions, bad habits, slothfulness, boredom and depression which inhibit us from consistently pursuing the Christian life. Often we can’t see these things in us because we’re so close to them, and they are so much part of who we are. More often than not, when we catch an honest glimpse of them, we choose to make excuses for ourselves. We fail to recognize how harmful our passions and sinful habits are to us. They can blind us to the truth.

Another enemy within is fantasy and excessive imagination. This can lead to delusion and the unwillingness to accept reality, or minimally to dissatisfaction with our lives as they are, and to the complaining and whining which undermine our capacity for spiritual peace and contentment.

Then there is the “we know better” attitude which few of us might articulate openly, but is a pervasive underlying assumption in our modernist society. A *modernist* is someone who believes that these are the best and most advanced of times, and that our generation is wiser than and superior to the ancients (or at least to the previous generation, since a modernist sees little value in gazing too far into history). (A modernist in the Church is a spiritual and practical disaster because the teachings of Orthodoxy are so rooted in Tradition handed down through generations, that if a person does not hold that Patristic heritage handed down to him in the Church as sacred, he will just drift into inventing a new and strange religion of his own, devoid of power and unable to save men’s souls.) Because of the technological advances of our age, that automatically qualifies each of us as smarter than those before us who lacked cars, computers, TVs, etc. We know better than the Fathers, Saints, Prophets and Apostles, since they were “simple” men and we and our problems are “complex”... Those of us locked into the “we know better” attitude are out of touch with reality and are as deluded as anyone has ever been. We miss the truth before our face that, whether it’s a short walk in the woods or the long march of human history, you have to remember where you’ve been to figure out where you are and to know where you’re going, or you’re doomed to get lost!

For example, as Advent approaches, the Holy Church teaches us that the best way to prepare for Christmas is *fasting*, but we say, with our actions, if not with our mouths, that the Church, which has been around for 1900 years, knows nothing, and even if the Church says to fast for 40 days in imitation of our Lord, we know better... A spiritual feast needs a spiritual preparation, but we would rather celebrate some other kind of feast with the children of this age, instead of a churchly feast with the saints well-pleasing unto God of every generation.

Let’s pray that God will not only open our eyes to see the works of the devil, but will help us to see our own attitudes, weaknesses and sins so we can recognize reality and the real state of our souls and that we might grasp what times we are in. May the Lord give us the armor of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of prayer, as we prepare for our Lord’s Holy Nativity in the flesh.

+ E. Oley (1998)

The church is the house of prayer. By taking care to establish it, you have shown that you have need and desire for prayer. What should you do hereafter? In the matter of establishing a church, there remains only the addition of that for which it was established, that is, the evoking within yourselves of an ever-increasing desire to pray — and actually to start praying. So, get involved in prayer.

- St. Theophan the Recluse

"WHADDYAMEAN FASTING? IT'S THE HOLIDAYS!"

by Marek Simon, Assistant Directory of Antiochian Village Camp

Christmas parties, good ole' St. Nick, & shop, shop, shop! Our Christmas list is prepared well in advance and -look out! - lights and trees up in November! These are a few things that begin to consume many of our minds as the holiday season approaches. We can't wait until Christmas and the array of fashionable clothes, iPhones, and decisions, decisions! LCD or Plasma? Mac or Windows? And who knows what else! It's a time to eat, drink and be merry, right? But wait a minute. Did I hear someone say that we are supposed to be fasting???

For us Orthodox Christians, November 15 marks the beginning of a 40-day fast that concludes on the Feast of our Lord's Nativity (a.k.a., Christmas). The Nativity Fast is a time of preparation for the birth of our Lord. We are taught to fast from meat, dairy products and fish. Let's be honest. Many of us go to schools and live in homes where we do not observe any sort of fast during this time, and for those of us who do, it's pretty difficult to say the least! How can we possibly go to a Christmas party and not eat meat or cheese or drink eggnog?

Why would someone choose to fast during this time when it seems like everyone else is doing the opposite? In reality, the answer is pretty simple: Jesus Christ. We are taught to fast during this time, not as a punishment or because the Church doesn't want us to have fun, but because the Church is concerned with one thing and one thing only, our salvation.

Think about it. The world we live in today teaches us to continually seek to do one thing- love ourselves. Jesus Christ, through the Church, teaches us to continually seek to do another thing- love our neighbor. Society teaches us to order the best-tasting, most expensive steak. Christ teaches us to forget about the steak, eat a plate of spaghetti or some lentil soup, and use the money to

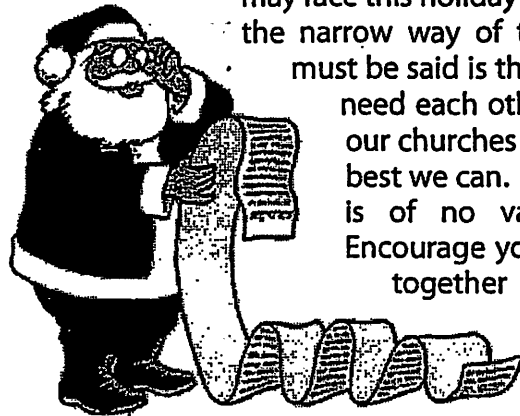
buy a meal for someone who hasn't eaten in days. Society teaches us to spend time and money on Christmas trees, Christmas lights, and expensive gifts. Christ teaches us to be a tree that bears fruit, to be a light in the darkness, and to put on the gifts of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, & self-control (Gal 5.22-23).

There are no easy answers to the situations we may face this holiday season if we choose to follow the narrow way of the Gospel. One thing that must be said is that we cannot do it alone. We need each other! Our friends, families and our churches should be fasting together as best we can. We also need prayer. Fasting is of no value unless we pray also. Encourage your family and friends to pray together at meals and even ask your priest if he will have extra services during the fasting period. Perhaps most importantly, talk with your

priest or spiritual father about how to approach the Fast. He will be your guide and source of wisdom to help during this time.

Each day is an opportunity for us to choose to live as a Christian and accept the responsibility that goes along with it. Rather than just spending hours at the mall looking for the perfect gift, we could spend a couple of hours serving at a soup kitchen and a few dollars on clothes for people who cannot afford to clothe themselves. What a wonderful project this would be for your OCF group this fasting season.

We are all quite capable of fasting beginning November 15. As stated above, talk to your priest about how to start, especially if you've never done it before. Approach the days ahead not as the 'holiday season', but as preparation for a 'Holy Day', the day of the birth our Lord. May Christ strengthen and guide you in the upcoming months!



The Nativity Fast

begins on November 15th and concludes at the Divine Liturgy on Christmas day, December 25th. This 40-day fast is given to prepare us for the celebration of the Lord's birth in the flesh. During this time we should not only modify our diet so we can modify the movements of our hearts, but we should also seek to avail ourselves of the Sacraments of Holy Confession and Communion.

Do Infants Go to Hell if They Die Before Baptism?

The Doctrine of Original Sin Re-examined

Archpriest Panayiotis Papageorgiou, Ph.D. | December 6, 2013, Pravmir.com

The doctrine of Original Sin (ed. as conferring *Original Guilt*) has been circulating for about 1600 years but it is not supported scripturally or theologically by the tradition of the Early Christian Church. It is a theological development mistakenly introduced by St. Augustine. (1)

Question: What happens to children if they die before baptism? Are un-baptized babies condemned? Once, a lady came to my office to talk to me about the sadness she was experiencing for many years; she had had five miscarriages and was mourning the loss of her children. Her biggest difficulty with the issue, she explained, was that her children were condemned to hell because they were never baptized. I asked her how she had come to that conclusion and she answered that she was taught early in her life that all people who die and have never been baptized go to hell, even infants, because of “original sin”.

The two questions I would like to raise here today are (1) “Where has this idea come from?” and (2) “Is this the teaching of the Ancient Christian Church?”

Historically speaking, this idea was propagated through the centuries by the Roman Catholic Church. They received this teaching from the great saint and doctor of the Western Church, Augustine, who had based his anthropology on the concept of “traducianism”.

According to the philosophical concept known as “traducianism” human souls, like human bodies, are derived from the seed of the father, hence the father may transmit to his children even his own sins. This idea is clearly found in Tertullian and also in Ambrosiaster’s (2) commentary on Romans, which appeared during the papacy of Damascus (366-384). Augustine was influenced in his theory of human nature by both St. Ambrose and Ambrosiaster. It was Ambrosiaster’s commentary, however, that played a decisive role in Augustine’s theory of “original sin.” It was here that Augustine found not only the traducianist concept but also the idea of sinning in massa, in other words, that the whole human race has sinned through Adam and is condemned through his sin.

Unfortunately, Augustine knew little Greek (3) and seems to have failed to understand clearly the teaching of the Greek Fathers who lived before him. Even though he had read some of the texts, which would have corrected his error on this issue, he failed to reach the same conclusions.

Augustine believed that all human beings have sinned in Adam “in massa” and are thus condemned along with him. He believed that the fallen human condition and the original sin of Adam has defiled (contaminavit) all humanity and that this defilement is propagated through the act of procreation. He believed and taught that every human being born into the world inherits through the seed of his father the sin and **guilt** of Adam – the “Original Sin” – and is thus condemned to hell, unless he/she is baptized.

St. John Chrysostom, on the other hand, following the Tradition of the Greek Fathers before him, saw the transgression of Adam as the cause of our present fallen condition, i.e. the fallen human nature, where all are bound by weaknesses, shame, fear, suffering and “many natural shortcomings”, but above all that we are bound by death. Chrysostom believed that we have been condemned to this condition due to Adam’s transgression, but not as a punishment, rather out of the mercy and the providence of God. Not only did we not lose from this, he claims, but in fact we have gained. This condition has become for us a training ground (didaskaleion) for virtue, so that we can become capable of receiving the future gifts of God. Chrysostom rejects the idea that we are responsible for and being punished for Adam’s sin, as absurd. We are only responsible, he explains, and punished for the sins we commit ourselves “willingly.”

With regard to baptism, Chrysostom agrees with infant baptism, not because there is a need to cleanse a child from the sin and guilt of Adam, nor because infants have sins of their own, but because through baptism they will receive sanctification, justification, sonship, inheritance, brotherhood with Christ, become members of Christ and a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. He says nothing about the forgiveness of the sin of Adam, which a child may be bringing with it. In fact, nowhere in the texts, which I have examined, including those quoted or referred to by Augustine in "Contra Julianum Palagianum," have I found any indication, in the mind of Chrysostom, of the existence of the notion of the propagation of the "first sin" through the act of procreation.

From the examination of the text of "Contra Julianum" it seems to me that Augustine had read these same texts, but either misunderstood or completely ignored the passages, which explicated clearly the position of Chrysostom on the issue. The reason for this was probably because he was already convinced of the correctness of his own belief. It is also possible that in his own mind he thought he was protecting the memory of St. John from a possible association with the Pelagian heresy (there are some indications of this in his comments). In so doing, however, he established in the West a teaching of "Original Sin" not completely in line with the Patristic tradition (at least of the East), which was to have a lasting effect on the Western Church, being accepted by Catholic and Protestant theologians alike until our times.

There are obviously serious intellectual difficulties with Augustine's teaching. As Prof. Gerald Bonner points out: "It is not clear by what justice humanity can share in Adam's guilt when it existed only in potentiality in his loins at the time of the Fall. It is also difficult to see why the children of the baptized should inherit a guilt from which their parents have been cleansed. Finally, it has been argued that Pope Zosimus' condemnation of Pelagianism in his Tractoria did not constitute a complete endorsement of the Canons of Carthage of 418, which represent Augustine's doctrine in its most rigorous form." (4) In other words, Bonner, a Roman Catholic Theologian, questions this theology on three levels: The injustice inherent in this concept, the lack of consideration of the effects of baptism on the parents, and finally, the legality of such a doctrine on the basis of the non-endorsement of the Canons of Carthage of 418 by Pope Zosimus.

I would like to take this a step further and point to an important modern theological development in the West, which has its roots in Augustine's doctrine of original sin; this is the more recent doctrine-made-dogma of the "Immaculate Conception" of the Virgin Mary. It seems to me that, it was mainly the need of Roman Catholic theology to cleanse the Mother of God from Augustine's "inherited guilt" that led to the proclamation and final establishment of this new dogma. Had this notion of transmission of defilement and guilt from Adam to his descendants not been so strong in the West there would have been no need for such a theological development.

In conclusion:

I offered the lady who had the five miscarriages the theology of St. John Chrysostom as a more reasonable alternative to what she had known so far and which was so troubling to her. I explained that God is just and would never condemn anyone for someone else's sin. I argued that, if human judges, who are sinful and imperfect, would never do such a thing, how could God, Who is the supreme source of all justice? I pointed to St. Chrysostom's reassurance that children are innocent and God receives them as such: In Homily 28 on Matthew, he quotes the Wisdom of Sirach 3:1: "the souls of the just are in the hand of God," and concludes that "so also are the souls of children, for they also are not wicked." (In Homily 28, II-III, On Matthew, P.G. 57, 353) The woman left with a smile on her face. She found peace and comfort in the reasonable teaching of the Orthodox Church.

NOTES: 1. See Fr. P. Papageorgiou, "Chrysostom and Augustine on the Sin of Adam and its Consequences," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol 39, no 4 (1995): 361-378.

2. Ambrosiaster is an unknown writer from the fourth century, whom St. Augustine thought to be St. Ambrose of Milan and thus treated his writings as authoritative. Because of that, modern scholars named him "Ambrosiaster".

3. In his "Confessions", Augustine reveals that he had difficulty with, and in fact despised the Greek language.

4. Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's theology on 'Adam,'" in *Augustinus-Lexicon*, vol. 1, edit. by Cornelius Mayer (Stuttgart: Verlag Publishers, 1986), col. 83

Wisdom from the Life of St. Paisius Velichkovsky (+1794)

St. Paisius Velichkovsky, searching for a monastery to live in, went to Kiev where he happened to meet his sister-in-law, the widow of his older brother Archpriest John. She informed him of his mother's sorrow when he left Kiev, and her mind seemed to be affected by her grief. Then one day an angel appeared to her and told her that instead of loving the Creator with her whole heart and soul, she loved His creation (her son) more. Because of this excessive love, the angel went on, she was thinking of starving herself to death, which would result in her eternal condemnation. The angel said that by God's grace, her son would become a monk, and that she should also renounce the world and become a nun. After this, she became calm and accepted God's will. She entered a convent and was tonsured with the name Juliana. After about ten years, she departed to the Lord.

While at Kiev, St. Paisius (named Platon before his tonsure) met two monks from Romania who were about to return to their country. After crossing the border into Moldavia, they came to the Skete of St Nicholas, which is called Treisteny, around 1745. The Elder of the Skete, Hieroschemamonk Michael, was away on business in Ukraine, so Platon and his companions were welcomed by the Superior, Fr Demetrius. Platon was placed under a general obedience and given a cell near the Skete, from which the church was visible.

As he was sleeping one night, the semantron (a wooden board hit with a hammer) was sounded calling the monks to Sunday Matins, but Platon did not hear it. He woke up and ran to the church, only to find that the Gospel had already been read, and the Canon was being sung. In his grief and shame, he did not enter the church, but returned to his cell and wept bitter tears. After the Liturgy, when it was time for the meal, the Superior and the Elder were surprised that Platon had not been seen at the services. The Elder ordered that the meal be delayed while he sent a Fr Athanasius to find out what had happened to Platon. Fr Athanasius found him and asked why he was weeping. With difficulty, Platon was able to tell him the cause of his sorrow. Fr Athanasius tried to console him and urged him to come to the Skete, where the others were waiting for him. Finally, he was persuaded to go.

Seeing the brethren at table but not eating, Platon fell down before them weeping and asking forgiveness. The Elder and the Superior lifted him up and heard from Fr Athanasius the reason for his sorrow. The Elder told Platon not to grieve so over something that had happened involuntarily, and did his best to console him. From that time, however, the Saint would not sleep lying down in bed, but sitting up on a bench.

Humility and Grace ~ Elder Paisios of the Holy Mt. (+1994)

✘ God wants and desires only one thing from us: our humbleness. He does not need anything else; just to humble ourselves, so He can make us partakers of His divine grace, which was granted to us through the mystery of holy Baptism. Although we did not love Him yet, neither had we struggled to acquire His grace, He gave it to us as a gift out of His extreme kindness. He is only asking from us to humble ourselves and respond out of gratefulness and appreciation to His love. Thus, divine grace, which abides in us, will be activated and function accordingly. It will make us love God and get to know Him; it will do everything for us, if only we humble ourselves and allow for it to act. The only obstacle to the energy of God's grace is our pride, our lack of humility.

The Winter Fast

And hence, we warn you, beloved, in fatherly affection, to make this winter fast fruitful to yourselves by bounteous alms, rejoicing that by you the Lord feeds and clothes His poor, to whom assuredly He could have given the possessions which He has bestowed on you, had He not in His unspeakable mercy wished to justify them by their patient labor, and you for your works of love. Let us there fast on Wednesday and Friday, and on Saturday keep Vigil with the most blessed Apostle Peter*, and he will deign to assist with his own prayers our supplications and fastings with alms.

~ St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome (+461)

** He mentions the Apostle's intercession probably because he was preaching in St. Peter's Basilica, the Saint of the Church aiding the congregation there.*

The True Manna

✘ It is a marvelous thing that God rained manna on the fathers, and that they were fed by daily nourishment from Heaven. Therefore, it is said 'Man hath eaten the bread of Angels' (Ps. 77:25). Yet all those who ate that bread died in the desert but this food which you receive, this 'living bread, which came down from Heaven,' furnishes the substance of eternal life, and whoever eats this bread 'will not die forever'; for it is the Body of Christ. ~ St. Ambrose of Milan (5th C)

Sons of His Mother

✘ Just as we all receive of His (Christ's) fullness, so do we all partake of the immaculate flesh of His all-holy Mother which He assumed, and so, just as Christ our God, true God, became her son; even so we, too - O, the ineffable love for mankind! - become sons of His mother, the Theotokos, and brothers of Christ Himself, as through the all-immaculate and ineffable marriage which took place with and in her, the Son of God was born of her, and from Him in turn, all the Saints.

~ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *On the Mystical Life*, Vol. I

Our Little Effort

We must not despair when we struggle and continuously see nothing but the slightest progress. We all do nearly nothing --- some a little more, some a little less. When Christ sees our little effort, He gives us an analogous token; and so our nearly nothing becomes valuable, and we can see a little progress. For this reason we must not despair, but hope in God.

Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

Perfect Humility

The man who has succeeded in recognizing the measure of his weakness has attained to perfect humility and knowledge of God. For this reason, being ever moved to thanksgiving, he continually abounds in the gifts of divine grace. A mouth which always gives thanks to God receives God's blessing; and a heart that abides in continuous gratitude to God always receives an increase of grace. Humility precedes grace, just as pride runs before temptation.

~Abba Isaac

The Waves of Temptation

No matter how much the waves of temptation rise up against your soul, always hasten to Christ! The Savior will always come to your aid and will calm the waves. Simply believe that the Lord has providentially arranged such experiences for your soul's healing. Do not reject them, trying to seek your own bodily peace and imaginary tranquility; for it is better to be shaken, and yet endure. If you will gain an insight from this, it will greatly lighten your struggle; and you will gain more peace than if you do not.

St. Leo of Optina (+1841)