



Presentation of Our Lord—Encounter of Simeon

Fire & Light St. Symeon Orthodox Church

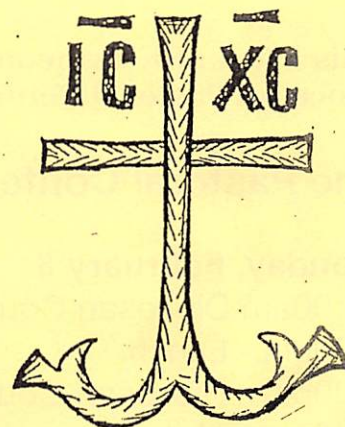
3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 205-930-9681 / 205-907-9447

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✠ February 7, 2016 ✠

**Postfeast of the
Meeting of Christ in the Temple
St. Parthenius of Lampsacus (4th C)**



~ We welcome ~

**His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon,
Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada!**

➤ ***Eis Polla Eti Despota! Many Years!***

Diocesan Clergy Pastoral Conference – February 8-11

The Conference features daily evening and morning services, beginning Monday evening which all are welcome to attend.

**Note: Tuesday, February 9, 7:30am ~ Divine Liturgy with His Beatitude
(See schedule on back)**

**Memorial Services – Thursday, February 11, 6:30pm ~ Child Jonathan Boyer (1 Year)
- Monday, February 15, 5:30pm ~ Fr. Demetri Edwards (40th Day)**

➤ Next Weekend, February 12-13 – Fr. John Behr, Dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary, will give three talks at Samford University, titled "What Protestants Need to Know about Orthodoxy." Tickets are \$10 in advance, \$20 at the door. Visit the Theopolis Institute website.

Know Thyself

✠ "The value of all the knowledge of the world does not exceed the worth of one insight into ourselves. For, on the one hand, an insight into ourselves will, as a matter of course, bring humility and make it a state of being; and then the grace of God will abide continually. On the other hand, there is fear that much knowledge will puff up our head --- turning it into a balloon that runs the risk of either bursting in the air (schizophrenia), or tumbling to the ground (pride) and shattering it to pieces. That is why knowledge must follow the fear of God and keep pace with our actions, so that balance exists..."

St. Paisios of Mt. Athos (+1994)

Our Words

✠ One deeply thinking pastor, contemporary to us, writes the following on idle talk, among other things, 'How heedlessly, how carelessly we use our words, which should be highly valued as a great gift from God! But on the contrary, what do we least esteem, if not the spoken word? In what are we fickle, if not the spoken word? What do we throw out every minute, as though it were dirt, if not the spoken word? O Christian! Value your words, be attentive to them!'"

Abbess Thaisia of Leushino, Letters to a Beginner (1915)

This Week, St. Symeon's hosts the clergy of the Diocese of the South for the annual Diocesan Pastoral Conference (and Diocesan Council Meeting on Monday)

The Pastoral Conference Schedule – Note liturgical service times in bold –

Monday, February 8

11:00am Diocesan Council Meeting at St. Symeon Church

1:00pm - Lunch

2:00pm - Diocesan Council Meeting

5:30pm - Vespers

6:30pm – Dean's Meeting / Dinner out

Tuesday, February 9

**7:30am - Divine Liturgy – Leavetaking of the Presentation of Christ ~
His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon presiding**

9:30am – Breakfast

10:30am - First Session with Dr. Stephen Muse

1:00pm - Lunch at St. Symeon's

2:30pm - Second Session

5:00pm - Vespers

6:00pm - Dinner at St. Symeon's

7:30pm – Administrator and Clergy Gathering

Wednesday, February 10

8:00am - Matins

9:30am - Breakfast

10:30am – Third Session with Dr. Stephen Muse

12Noon - Lunch at St. Symeon's

1:30pm – Fourth Session

5:00pm - Vespers

6:00pm - Dinner at St. Symeon's

Thursday, February 11

8:00am – Matins

9:30am – Breakfast

10:30am – St. Symeon's Building Program Presentation

The Spirit of Prayer for a Beginner

Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) of the Caucasus, 1807-1867

{Editor's Note: St. Ignatius' concept of a "beginner" is a little more advanced than our own; but perhaps rather than trying to comprehend all that he writes here at once, we would more profitably use it as a reference and continually return to it.}

INTRODUCTION

HERE WE OFFER teaching on the quality of prayer proper to one who is beginning to go to God by way of repentance. The main thoughts are each set forth separately so that they may be read with great attention and more easily retained in the memory. The reading of them, by feeding the mind on truth and the heart on humility, may supply the soul with due direction in the labor of prayer, and serve as a preparatory study to it.

1. Prayer is the lifting up of our requests to God.
2. The foundation of prayer is that man is a fallen being. He strives to regain the happiness which he once had but has lost, and therefore he prays.
3. Prayer's haven is God's great mercy towards the human race. For our salvation, the Son of God offered Himself to His Father as a propitiatory sacrifice of reconciliation. For this cause, if you wish to engage in prayer, banish doubt and duplicity (See James 1:6-8). Do not say to yourself, "I am a sinner. Will God really hear me?" If you are a sinner, then those comforting words of our Savior refer precisely to you: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13).
4. The following things serve as a preparation for prayer: an unfilled stomach, the cutting off of cares with the sword of faith, the forgiveness from the sincerity of one's heart of all offenses, thanksgiving to God for all the adversities and sorrows of life, withdrawal of oneself from all distraction and from daydreaming, reverent fear (awe) which is so natural for the creature to have when he is permitted to hold converse with his Creator through the Creator's unutterable goodness to the creature.
5. The Savior's first words to fallen mankind were "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17).
6. True prayer is the voice of true repentance. When prayer is not animated by repentance, then it does not accomplish its purpose, then it does not win God's favor. He will not disregard "a broken spirit, a heart that is broken and humbled" (Ps. 50:17).
7. The Savior of the world calls the poor in spirit blessed, that is, those who have a humble idea of themselves, who regard themselves as fallen creatures who are here on earth in exile, outside their true home, which is Heaven. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," those who pray with a deep realization of their destitution, "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." "Blessed are they that mourn" in their prayers, from a sense of their destitution, "for they shall be comforted," with the Holy Spirit's gracious comfort which consists in Christ's peace and in love for all one's neighbors in Christ. Then no neighbor, not even the most malicious enemy, is excluded from the all-embracing love of the one who is praying. Then he who prays becomes reconciled to all the most oppressive circumstances of earthly life.
8. In teaching us how to pray, the Lord compares a praying soul to a widow wronged by a rival who pesters persistently a just and impartial Judge (Luke 18:1-8) [The widow in the parable pesters an

unjust judge of course, but St Ignatius takes us quickly on to the end of the parable where we stand before God, the Judge Who loves us - ed.]. Do not let the disposition of your soul differ from this model. Let your prayer be, so to speak, a constant complaint against sin which does violence to you. Look into yourself, reveal yourself by attentive prayer and you will see that you are precisely a widow in regard to Christ on account of the sin that dwells in you, which is hostile to you and which causes inner conflict and suffering, and which estranges you from God.

9. "All the day long I went with downcast face" (Ps. 37:6), says David of himself, meaning of course that he spent the whole day of his earthly life in blessed sorrow over his sins and defects.

10. "Serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice in Him with trembling" (Ps. 2:11), says the Prophet, while another Prophet says in the name of God, "To whom shall have regard, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word?" (Is. 66:2). The Lord "hath regarded the prayer of the humble, and hath not despised their supplication" (Ps. 101:17). He it is "who giveth life," that is salvation, "to the contrite heart" (Is. 57:15).

11. Even though a person has reached the very summit of the virtues, yet unless he prays as a sinner, his prayer is rejected by God (See St Isaac the Syrian, ch. 55).

12. On the day when I do not weep for myself, said a blessed practiser of true prayer, I consider myself in a state of self-delusion. (These are the words of a certain Fr. Athanasius to a visitor in 1829. He lived as a hermit in a tower of the Svensk monastery in the diocese of Orloff - footnote).

13. Even though we may have endured many exalted struggles or works, said St John Climacus, yet they are stale and spurious unless at the same time we have a painful sense of repentance (See The Ladder, step 7:64).

14. Sorrow for sin is a precious gift of God. He who carries it in his heart with due care and reverence carries a holy treasure. It replaces all bodily penances if one has insufficient strength to perform them. On the other hand, from a strong body labor is required as well as prayer; without labor the heart will not be contrite and the prayer will be feeble and false (See St Isaac the Syrian (ch. 89 & 11).

15. A sense of penitence keeps the person who prays from all the snares of the devil. The demon flees from strugglers who radiate the fragrance of humility which is born in the hearts of the penitent.

16. Offer to the Lord in your prayers child-like lisping, the simple thought of a child - not eloquence, not knowledge and reasoning. "Expect ye be converted" - as from paganism or Mohammedanism, from your complexity, duplicity and hypocrisy - "and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3), the Lord has told us.

17. An infant expresses all its desires by weeping. And let your prayer always be accompanied by weeping. Not only in the words of prayer, but also in the silences of prayer, let your desire for repentance and reconciliation with God, your extreme need of the mercy of God, express itself in weeping.

18. The value of prayer consists only in its quality, not in its quantity. Quantity is laudable when it leads to quality. Quality always leads to quantity. Quantity leads to quality when the person praying prays attentively (see The Ladder, step 28:21).

19. The quality of true prayer consists in the fact that the mind during prayer is attentive and the heart sympathizes with the mind.

20. Enclose your mind in the words of your prayer and keep it attentive. Have your eyes downcast, or closed. This will assist the union of the mind with the heart. Say the words with extreme unhurriedness and you will more easily enclose the mind in the words of the prayer. Do not let a single word of your prayer be said without attention.

21. When the mind is enclosed in the words of the prayer, it draws the heart into sympathy with it. This sympathy of the heart with the mind expresses itself in compunction. Compunction is a pious feeling that consists of sorrow combined with gentle, meek comfort. (See St Mark the Ascetic: He who thinks he can be justified by works).

22. An essential property of prayer is perseverance. When you feel aridity, hardness, do not give up praying. For persevering and struggling against insensibility of heart, the mercy of God, which consists in compunction, will descend upon you. Compunction is a gift of God that is given to those who "persevere in prayer" (see Romans 12:12; Col. 4:2), which constantly increases in them and leads them to spiritual perfection.

23. The mind, when engaged in attentive prayer to the invisible God must itself be invisible, as an image of the invisible Deity. That is, the mind should not produce within itself, or out of itself, or before itself, any kind of form. It must be completely formless. In other words, the mind should be completely void of all imagery, however holy and harmless that imagery may appear to be (Sts. Kallistos and Ignatius, word 73; The Ladder, step 28:42).

24. During prayer, do not seek raptures and ecstasies; do not put your nerves into motion; do not heat your blood. On the contrary, keep your heart in profound peace, into which it is brought by a sense of repentance. Material fire, the fire of fallen nature, is rejected by God. Your heart needs purification by penitential weeping and penitential prayer. And when it is purified, then God Himself will send down into it His all-holy spiritual fire (see The Ladder 28:45).

25. Attention in prayer brings the nerves and the blood into tranquility; it also helps the heart to immerse itself in repentance and remain therein. Peace of heart is not disturbed by the Divine fire if it descends into the cenacle of the heart wherein are gathered Christ's disciples - thoughts and feelings borrowed from the Gospels. This fire does not burn or heat; on the contrary it bedews and cools it, and reconciles the person with all people and with all circumstances, and draws the heart into unutterable love for God and one's neighbor (St. Maximus Kapsokalivites: Conversation with St Gregory of Sinai).

26. Distraction robs prayer. When you have prayed with distraction, you feel within yourself an inexplicable dryness and emptiness. From this state is born coldness towards God, accidie or despondency, darkening of the mind, weakening of faith, and thence deadness with regard to the eternal, spiritual life. And all this, taken together, is a clear sign that such prayer is not accepted by God.

27. Reverie in prayer is even more harmful than distraction. Distraction makes prayer fruitless, while reverie serves as a cause for false fruits - self-deception and (thus named by the Holy Fathers) diabolical delusion. By imprinting and holding in the mind representations of objects of the visible world and representations of the invisible world formed by fancy, the mind is made as it were material and transferred from the Divine sphere of Spirit and Truth to the sphere of matter and error. In this sphere the heart begins to sympathize with the mind, not with spiritual feelings of repentance and humility, but with carnal feeling, a feeling due to nerves and blood, and an untimely and disorderly feeling of delight such as is improper for sinners, a wrong and false feeling of imaginary love for God. Criminal and abominable love is imagined holy by those unskilled in spiritual experiences, while in

actual fact it is only the disorderly feeling of a heart not purified of passions, which takes pleasure in vainglory and sensuality caused by reverie. Such a state is a state of self-deception. If a person lingers in it, the forms that appear to him become extremely vivid and attractive. When they make their appearance, the heart begins to be warmed and delighted unlawfully or, according to Holy Scripture, to commit fornication (Ps. 72:25; etc). The mind regards such a state as a state of grace, a Divine favor. Then he is near to passing into obvious diabolical delusion, in which the person loses self-control and becomes a toy and laughing-stock of the evil spirit. From imaginative prayer, which reduces man to such a state, God turns away with anger. And on a person who prays in that way the sentence of Scripture is fulfilled: "Let his prayer become sin" (Ps. 108:6).

28. Reject apparently good thoughts and apparently bright ideas that come to you during prayer, which distract you from prayer (St Simeon the New Theologian: The First Way of Prayer). They come from the realm of misnamed reason, and they are mounted on vainglory like riders on horses. Their dark faces are muffled so that the mind of the person praying may not recognize them as its enemies. But it is just because they are hostile to prayer, draw the mind away from it, lead it into captivity and hard slavery, strip and devastate the soul, that they can be recognized as enemies from the realm of the prince of this world. Spiritual knowledge, knowledge of God, aids prayer, concentrates the person within himself, immerses him in attention and compunction, brings to mind reverent silence, fear and wonder, which are born of a sense of the presence and greatness of God. This sense or awareness in due time can be increased greatly, so that prayer becomes for the person praying the awful tribunal of God (The Ladder, Step 28:1).

29. Attentive prayer, void of distraction and imagery, is a seeing of the invisible God which draws to itself the sight of the mind and the desire of the heart. Then the mind sees unseeingly, and is fully satisfied with its unseeing which is above all vision. The reason of the blessed unseeingness is the infinite fineness and incomprehensibility of the object to which one's sight is directed. God, the invisible Sun of Righteousness, sends forth rays invisible yet clearly perceptible to the soul's sense. These invisible rays fill the heart with a wonderful peace, faith, courage, meekness, mercy, and love for one's neighbor and for God. By these effects seen in the inner chamber of the heart, the person knows beyond a doubt that his prayer has been accepted by God. Then he begins to believe with a living faith and to trust firmly the Lover and Beloved. This is the beginning of the soul's revival for God and for a blessed eternity.

30. The fruits of true prayer are a holy peace of soul combined with a calm, silent joy devoid of imagery, self-esteem and passionate impulses and movements; a love for one's neighbors which in the matter of love makes no distinction between good and bad, worthy and unworthy, but intercedes and prays to God for all as for oneself, as for one's own members. From such love for one's neighbor is born the purest love of God.

31. These fruits are God's gift. They are attracted to the soul by its attention and humility; they are kept by its fidelity to God.

32. A soul continues in fidelity to God when it rejects every sinful word, deed and thought, and when it immediately repents of those sins into which it is drawn by its frailty.

33. We prove that we desire to acquire the gift of prayer by our patient sitting with prayer at the doors of prayer. For our patience and persistence we receive the gift of prayer. "The Lord," says Scripture, "gives prayer," that is a gift of grace "to him that prayeth" patiently and contributes merely his own effort.

34. For beginners short and frequent prayers are more profitable than long prayers separated from one another by a considerable space of time. (St Dimitry of Rostov: The Interior Man).

35. Prayer is the highest exercise of the mind.

36. Prayer is the head, chief, source and mother of all the virtues.

37. Be wise in your prayer. Do not ask in it for anything vain or corruptible, remembering the Savior's precept: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things," that is, all that you need for this temporal life, "will be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

38. When you intend to do anything, or want anything, and also when you are in difficult circumstances, offer your thought in prayer to God - ask for what you consider that you need and would benefit you. But leave the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of your request to the will of God, with faith and hope in the omnipotence, wisdom and goodness of God's will. This excellent way of prayer was given us by Him who prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup assigned to Him might pass. "Yet not My will," He concluded His prayer to the Father, "but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

39. Offer humble prayer to God for the good works and pious labors that you do; purify and perfect them by prayer and repentance. Say of them in your prayer what righteous Job said in his daily prayer for his children: "Lest perhaps my children have sinned and have thought evil in their heart against God" (Job 1:5). Evil is cunning. It mixes with virtue unnoticeably, defiles and poisons it.

40. Renounce everything so as to inherit prayer and, lifted up from the earth on the cross of self-denial, surrender to God your spirit, soul and body, and receive from Him holy prayer which, according to the teaching of the Apostle and the Universal Church, is the action of the Holy Spirit in men, when the Spirit dwells in a man (Rom. 8:26).

CONCLUSION

HE WHO IS NEGLIGENT in the practice of attentive prayer blended with repentance cannot make spiritual progress or expect spiritual fruits. He is in the darkness of the many-headed hydra of self-deception. Humility is the one altar on which men are permitted to offer sacrifices of prayer to God, the one altar from which sacrifices of prayer are accepted by God. Prayer is the mother of all true and divine virtues. Any spiritual progress is utterly impossible for him who rejects humility, or who is not concerned to enter into holy alliance with prayer. Exercise in prayer is the Apostle's will. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17), the Apostle tells us. The practice of prayer is our Lord's own command, a command combined with a promise. "Ask," the Lord invites us, orders us, and it will be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it will be opened unto you" (Matt. 6:7). Prayer "shall not slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 120:4), until it shows to him who has loved it, and has constantly practiced it, the palace of eternal delights, until it brings him to Heaven. There it will be transformed into an unceasing sacrifice of praise. This unceasing praise will be offered, will be uttered incessantly by God's elect from the constant sense of beatitude in eternity, which sprouts here on earth and in time from the seeds of repentance sown by attentive and fervent prayer. Amen.

First published in "Orthodox Life," November-December issue, 1950 and re-published in The Shepherd, March 2003.

You receive the Cup which seemingly comes from the hands of man. What is it to you whether the bearer of the Cup acts righteously or unrighteously? As a follower of Jesus, your concern is to act righteously; to receive the Cup with thanksgiving to God and with a living faith; and courageously to drink it to the dregs.

+ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Cup of Christ*

In the beginning, envy is revealed through inappropriate zeal and rivalry, and later by fervor with spite and the blaming of the one who is envied.

+ St. Ambrose of Optina

Hymns of the Feast

The Presentation of Christ in the Temple - February 2

In days of old on mount Sinai,
Moses saw the back of God
And was counted worthy in darkness
And a storm of wind
To hear faintly the Divine voice.
But now Simeon has taken God in his arms,
Who for our sakes took flesh without change!
Joyfully he hastens to depart to the life eternal,
And therefore he cries aloud:
Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in
peace!

- Matins Kathisma Hymn

Let the choir of angels be amazed at this
wonder!
And let us mortals raise our voices in song!
As we behold the ineffable condescension
of God!
Aged arms now embrace Him before Whom
The powers of heaven tremble:
The only Lover of mankind!

- Matins Kathisma Hymn

Simeon was amazed when he beheld
Incarnate the Word that is without beginning,
Carried by the Virgin as on the throne of the
cherubim;
The Cause of all being, Himself become a
Babe;
And he cried aloud to Him:
The whole world has been filled with Thy
praise!

- Matins Canon - Ode 4

Let us run to the Theotokos in our desire to
behold her Son being brought to Simeon.
The bodiless powers, looking at Him from on
high, were filled with amazement, saying:
Now we see wonderful and marvelous things,
past all understanding and telling!
The One Who created Adam is carried as an
Infant!

He Who cannot be contained is embraced by
the arms of the Elder.
He Who rests uncircumscribed in the bosom of
His Father, is voluntarily circumscribed in flesh,
But not in Divinity,
As the only Lover of mankind!

- Ikos of Matins

And a sword shall pierce thy heart, O all-pure
Virgin,
Simeon foretold to the Theotokos,
When thou shalt see thy Son upon the Cross,
The One to Whom we cry aloud:
Blessed art Thou, O God of our fathers!

Matins Canon – Ode 7

Fulfilling the written law,
The Lover of man is now brought into the
Temple!
And Simeon receives Him in his aged arms
crying aloud:
Now let me depart into the blessedness of the
world to come!
For I have seen today wrapped in mortal flesh,
The One Who is Lord of life and Master of
death!

- Praises of Matins

Not parted in Thy Divinity from the bosom of
the Father,
Thou wast made flesh according to Thy good
pleasure!
Upheld in the arms of the Virgin,
Thou wast committed to the hands of Simeon,
the Receiver of God,
Though Thou dost uphold the whole world with
Thine hand!
Therefore he cried out with joy:
Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,
for I have seen Thee, O Lord!

- Praises of Matins

O Christ our God, Thou hast been pleased to
rest this day in the arms of Simeon the Elder
As upon the chariot of the cherubim:
Now deliver us who praise Thee from the
tyranny of passions, and save our souls!

- Praises of Matins