



Χριστὸς ἀνέστη!
Ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη!

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **May 15, 2016** ✠

**The Holy Myrrhbearing
Women**

St. Pachomius the Great (346)



Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Where is He sending His Disciples?

✠ For the sake of Thomas, Christ again comes to the disciples and tells him: "Put your fingers in My wounds." Then Thomas sees the truth of the Resurrection in his own personal experience. Christ and His disciples show the ultimate meaning of His Resurrection: Christ is risen, but His wounds remain. Christ is risen, but His hands are pierced. Christ is risen, but there is a gaping wound in His side. Again He speaks these words to them: "Go, I send you."

Where is He sending His disciples? To what is He sending His disciples? He is sending them on the very same path of the cross. He is sending them to follow Him. He is sending them to attain the same Resurrection, the same Pascha – and in the same way He did, through Golgotha. So if we, like the Apostle Thomas, accept Christ's wounds along with His Resurrection; if we accept this pierced side with joy, then, I think, our word about Christ's Resurrection, our word about life in Christ, will immediately take on both truth and power.

The Lord shows the Apostle Thomas His perforated hands and His pierced side, and we can no longer think that nothing has happened. We know that Christ is risen and we believe that He will never leave us. But the path onto which He is sending us is the same path by which a disciple follows His Teacher to the end. We know from the Acts of the Holy Apostles and the history of our Church what this apostolic path is, and we know how the Apostles proclaimed Christ by their life, their death, and their resurrection.

~ from a homily by Archpriest Alexei Uminsky

God: Who can be happy without Me?

Do you desire good for yourself? All good is in Me. Do you desire blessings? All blessings are in Me. Do you desire beauty? What is lovelier than I? Do you desire noble birth? What birth is more noble than that of the Son of God and the Virgin? Do you desire rank? Who is of higher rank than the King of Heaven? Do you desire glory? Who is more glorious than I? Riches? All riches are in Me. Wisdom? I am the Wisdom of God. Friendship? Who is a greater friend than I - I who laid down my life for all? Help? Who can help but I? Happiness? Who can be happy without Me? Do you seek consolation in distress? Who will console you but I? Do you seek peace? I am the peace of the soul. Do you seek life? In Me is the fount of life. Do you seek light? I am the light of the world.

~ St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (+1775)

THE LORD DESCENDS INTO HELL

An Ancient Homily on Holy Saturday, from the Synaxarion of the Lenten Triodion and Pentecostarion, Fr. David and Mother Gabriela, editors, HDM Press, Rives Junction, MI, 1999 pp. 160-161.



Something strange is happening—there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised

up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.

He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: *My Lord be with you all.* Christ answered him: *And with your spirit.* He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: *Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.*

I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated.

For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth. For your sake, for the sake of man, I became like a man without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden.

See on my face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in my image. On my back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your

back. See my hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree.

I slept on the cross and a sword pierced my side for you who slept in paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side has healed the pain in yours. My sleep will rouse you from your sleep in hell. The sword that pierced me has sheathed the sword that was turned against you.

Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven. I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am life itself am now one with you. I appointed cherubim to guard you as slaves are guarded, but now I make them worship you as God. The throne formed by cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager. The bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.



The candles burning on the altar represent the non-created Light of the Trinity, for the Lord dwells in an unapproachable light. They also represent the fire of Divinity which destroys our ungodliness and sins.

The candles lit before the icons of the Saviour signify that He is the *True Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world* (Jn 1:9); at the same time, He is a Fire which engulfs and revives our souls and bodies.

The candles lit before the icons of the Theotokos are a symbol of the fact that She is the Mother of the Unapproachable Light, and also of Her most pure and burning love for God and Her love for mankind.

The candles lit before icons of saints reflect their ardent love for God for Whose sake they gave up everything that man prizes in life, including their very lives, as did the holy apostles, martyrs and others. These candles also mean that these saints are lamps burning for us and providing light for us by their own saintly living, their virtues and their ardent intercession for us before God through their constant prayers by day and night. The burning candles also stand for our ardent zeal and the sincere sacrifice we make out of reverence and gratitude to them for their solicitude on our behalf before God.

St. John of Kronstadt

Christ is Risen! Let us forgive all!

This year, the words of the closing hymn of the Resurrection Matins service really spoke to my heart. It is: a call to heart-centered intimacy; a call to forgive everything - past and present - in the spirit of the never-ending JOY of our Savior's Holy Resurrection, even to those who hate us.

Well, then, should not this Christ-centered call apply also to family members and friends with whom we are currently - at best - 'benignly rejecting', and - at worse - festering bitterness and/or contempt? My brothers and Sisters in the risen Lord Jesus, how can we expect our Lord to - as another Resurrection hymn states - "make our lives peaceful", if we continue to show Him our contempt through the way we treat those closest to us?

What a glorious time this is for us to let go of our anger, harshness and judgment of those whom we feel have offended us, rejected us, been cruel to us --- even for years? And here is the most effective way to do this: We must pray that our Lord Jesus will grant us His grace to take full blame for the conflict, and not expect any apology from the other party --- even if, by the standards of this fallen world, we were ones being "wronged". In this way, my beloved sojourners on the sea of life, we will be victorious, even if the other person chooses to reject our efforts. I have total confidence in the truth of what I am sharing with you, because I have frequently read about these things in the teachings of our holy Church Fathers, and in the lives of our Saints; and actually have seen living results of it in my 37+ years of service to our Lord Jesus and His Church.

When we surrender our wills to Christ in this manner, then He will give to our hearts at least these two things: His peace, "which surpasses all understanding"; and a love for the other person that is no longer me-centered and conditional, but Christ-centered and unconditional! And then we will experience and inward freedom, that words cannot circumscribe!

However, we cannot approach the other person with any hidden agenda; or our efforts will bear no good fruit. A story from the Desert Fathers will clearly illustrate this: Once two monks at a Monastery became quite angry with one another, and begin to harbor resentment for one another. One of the monks decided to make an attempt at reconciliation with his brother. However, on the way to speak with him, he allowed the devil to fill his thoughts with memories of the unkind things the other had said to him, and to put in his mind that: if he asked for forgiveness, then the other monk had to do likewise. Thus, the reconciliation attempt failed completely.

Therefore the monk went to his Spiritual Father, who explained to him that his hidden agenda made it *impossible* for God's grace to enter into the conversation. Therefore, he instructed his spiritual child to pray fervently for God's grace; and to approach his brother --- unconditionally, and willing to accept full blame for the loss of their friendship. Approaching his brother's cell in this manner, armed him with God's grace, their division was destroyed!

O my dear and blessed brothers and sisters in the Risen Lord, think of what healing power would start taking place within ourselves, our families, our parishes, even our Nation, if you and I choose to follow this path during the next 38 days --- if we too would "forgive all by the Resurrection!"

Truly He is Risen!

Your servant in Christ,

+Fr. Demetrios Carellas, Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery, Saxonburg, PA

Distracting us from the Depths (excerpt)

Prayer of the Heart in an Age of Technology and Distraction ~ Fr. Maximus Constas

Before we can talk about deeper things like the life of prayer we need to talk about what prevents us from a life of prayer, and one of the major obstacles in our path is the phenomenon of distractions. A few years ago I heard someone say in Greek something that was quite memorable: “Every depth has a surface, but not every surface has a depth,” and this is why we should not pay so much attention to surface appearances but rather to the depth of things. This is especially important for us as I see our culture becoming more superficial. We’ve lost the sense that there is a tremendous depth to life and to the human person, and everything has become very shallow and superficial and we’re now seduced and bewitched by surface appearances.

It’s all the more remarkable that people like us should have been seduced by surface appearances because in the history of civilization there have been no greater viewers of images than the Byzantines, the Orthodox. Of All people, the Orthodox were the most intelligent and sophisticated viewers of images. We live in a society saturated with images now and we’re not very sophisticated or critical viewers—we tend to be distracted by any passing image, and there are thousands of them everywhere. So, “every depth has a surface, but not every surface has a depth,” which is why we shouldn’t allow ourselves to become fixated on surfaces, but attend to the depths of things.

However, attending to the depths, is not easy, because we have a problem that prevents this from happening. The mind of man as we currently know it is a thing disordered, confused, and we find it hard to focus. We’re easily distracted. It becomes very difficult for us to get past the surface of things, so I think it’s within everyone’s experience that distractions take us away from our depth either by preventing us from engaging the depth altogether, or having found the depth they immediately pull us out of it, and out from the place of the heart, which is the core of our being, of our body. St. Gregory Palamas calls the heart the body within the body. Distractions pull us away from this and send us into exile. If we exist in a realm of distractions and allow ourselves to be pulled about by one sensation after another it will become increasingly difficult to get back to that body within the body, and we’ll live outside ourselves and become oblivious to the fact that we have a depth. There are people who don’t even understand that they have depth. “The original sin of the mind is distraction,” someone once said. Had Adam and Eve been able to stay focused on what they were told we wouldn’t be in the state in which we find ourselves.

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Do We Believe in God?

Fr. Stephen Freeman, Glory to God for All Things Blog

Belief is a strange thing. It rests like an idea in our mind. We can examine it, walk around it, argue it, and change it or reject it. But as an idea, belief really isn't such a big thing. It is probably quite correct to say that most of the things we "believe" make no difference whatsoever. This is especially true of what most people mean when they say, "I believe in God."

Belief in God, the Christian God, not only carries consequences, but *only matters as it carries consequences*. Classically, it can be described as "keeping the commandments." There is a particular aspect of such belief (and the commandments) that I think is largely ignored, even though it goes to the very heart of believing in the Christian God. It is, in effect, what I call the "secular option."

A simple way of considering any matter in the light of this belief is by asking the question, "How would what I'm thinking be different if there really were a God and everything He said is true?" That might sound too obvious. However, for years I have watched otherwise faithful Christians act as if there were no God, particularly when it comes to things that matter to them or that feel somehow endangered. This has sometimes been called, "practical atheism."

I believe it is a particularly attractive temptation for Americans because we are such a practical people. Our culture, formed and shaped by modernity, is deeply "utilitarian." We can justify doing almost anything "because it works." When problems arise, we try to fix them. This same drive, in the life of the Church, can often lead to practical atheism.

Obviously, "fixing things" is not inherently sinful. But fixing things as a matter of utility is. The Christian life is properly led in obedience to Christ's commandments. We do things because doing them is an obedience to Christ Himself. The drive to practicality often carries within it a certain amount of "necessary evil." We do a bit of harm in order to arrive at a greater good. This is atheism, regardless of the greatness of the good. We find ourselves trying to do the "heavy lifting" for God, because, we do not trust that He'll do it Himself. This is the inherent temptation of "making a better world." We have no such commandment from God. Every atheist regime that has existed has done so in the name of a better world.

I have served as a parish priest for around 35 years. The microcosm that is a parish is filled with temptations. There are problems that beg to be fixed (most of them are associated with one or more personalities). As a young priest, I fancied myself to be a "problem solver." A good parish, I thought, was a happy parish. Conflict and crisis were things to be managed. I even took a number of courses in seminary that were focused on "management." And this, I believe, was the secular option, the breeding ground of despair and unbelief.

Why despair and unbelief? Despair is the absence of hope. Management is the antithesis of hope. It is rooted in persuasion and control. Problems are obstacles to success. The management of what is, essentially, an all-volunteer membership is a never-ending battle. At some point, exhaustion wins out. Unbelief is always at hand for the manager. Cynicism easily takes hold, as the reality of parish life repeatedly fails to meet all hopeful expectations. In the face of failure, the manager begins to wonder where God is in the midst of everything, or even whether there is a God in the midst of everything.

However, consider St. Paul's assessment of the Church:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things— and the things that are not— to bring to nothing the things that are... (1Cor. 1:26-28)

Parish managers inevitably tend to minimize the sick in order to take advantage of those who are most well. However, the Fathers say that the Church is a hospital, which means that it is full of sick people. The very constitution of the Church stands in the way of success.

This is the point. Winning and success are nothing of great value. Only faithfulness to God matters. What, in fact, counts for “success” in the Kingdom of God may very well be judged as abject failure by the world. It has repeatedly been the case throughout the history of the Church that the work of a saint is only made manifest after their death. The work of the Kingdom is hidden, unseen by those who dare to judge.

This requires belief in God. More than that, it requires belief in the Crucified God. As frightening as it may sound, every failure, every collapse has the potential of the Cross. If, as the Elder Sophrony says, “The way down is the way up,” then the weak and the sick are much further on the road to salvation than all the others. It has always struck me as odd that we hear in Christ’s words “take up your Cross and follow me,” an admonition to a bold effort of strength, echoed in the words of the old Anglican Prayer Book description of the baptized life: “...manfully to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto his life’s end.” This phrase always caused me to picture the Church as an army of Cross-wielding soldiers, smashing everything that got in their way. That, of course, is true. But the army and the smashing are extremely paradoxical. Smashing frequently looks like losing, and the army a rag-tag group of wounded stragglers.

I especially see despair and unbelief come to the fore when people turn their attention to the Church in its larger aspects. We can grasp, perhaps, that God works victory through our own weakness, but we cannot abide that weakness when we see it in leaders or in the structures they inhabit. For some reason, the higher we look in the ranks of the Church, the less tolerant we become of the weakness and foolishness that are the chosen lot of all Christians. Bishops and Synods trundle along, Holy and Great Councils falter, all accompanied by the calumny and condemnation of others. The Book of Acts glosses over the first Council in Jerusalem, and portrays the steady hand of St. James who stands up and says, “It is my judgment...” and peace ensues. Of course, the letters of St. Paul provide ample evidence that peace did not ensue, and we can assume that the meeting in Jerusalem was bumpier than reported.

The Holy Glorious and All-Laudable Apostles themselves were not able to effectively manage the smooth operation of the Church. However, we can assume that they knew better. St. Paul certainly did. He described the Apostles as the “scum of the earth” (περικαθάρματα τοῦ κόσμου).

We are saved only through the Cross. There is no salvation in strength, only in weakness. We will either come to know God in the communion of His sufferings (Phil 3:10) or we will never know Him. We either believe in the Crucified God or we believe in no God at all.

The commandments of Christ point us in that direction: Do not render evil for evil. Do not resist evil. Bless those who curse you.

To this I would add, “Do not judge the failings of others, for God has chosen such to lead you into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

This and That

Porn America

Re: our diminishing ability to speak about sex in moral terms. We are at a place in our culture in which sexual morality has been reduced to consent. Our society has embraced total sexual license. If anyone suggests any other moral norm beyond consent, they are dismissed as a puritanical, repressive throwback.

...I am not being hyperbolic when I call porn use a civilizational calamity. The sexual revolution promised us more sex and more pleasure. It has actually delivered to us a generation of men who think of women as objects to be used and abused for their sexual pleasure. It has not given us men who know what virtue and honor are. It doesn't teach men to pursue their joy in self-sacrificially loving and being sexually faithful to one woman for life. It teaches young men to use women for sex and then to discard them when they become unwilling or uninteresting. This means that it has given us a generation of young men completely unprepared for marriage and for fatherhood.

It's not merely that so many young men are unprepared for marriage. They are unprepared for dinner and a movie. We have sown to the wind. We are reaping the whirlwind—especially our daughters, who are less likely than ever to find a man who hasn't been corrupted by this....I don't know of any other problem that has done more to subvert manhood and marriage than porn use. It is killing us.

...The only way to counter this darkness is with the light of truth. We were not made for illicit sex. We were made for God. And what so many people are seeking in illicit sexual pleasure can never be found there. No matter how deep you go into the rabbit hole of porn, you aren't going to find "it." You will just become a shell of what God made you to be. By pursuing darkness, you become darkness.

The only way out of this is to realize that God made us and our sexuality for a purpose. God made us for Himself—to know Him and to be known by Him. He wants us to see that the only way to think correctly about pornography is within the moral universe that He Himself has created. That means understanding pornography as a great evil that can only be broken through the power of the gospel.

– Denny Burk

Rod Dreher:

The problem seems to be the same across the board, for conservatives and liberals alike: no one has any understanding or ideal of masculinity. No one has any conception of what masculine interests are, how they connect to responsibilities, or what the appropriate give-and-take between men and society should be. "Men" hardly exist as a category—they're basically being written out of our conceptual vocabulary. Conservatives and liberals alike are steeped in ignorance and confusion on this subject. The consequences are vast: school shootings, terrorism, the breakdown of the family, all of these things intersect with the demise of masculinity in some way. A lot of behavior that our society currently deems "irrational" and inexplicable suddenly becomes sensible when you have some functional understanding of masculinity.

A classic example is the fact that conservatives..., when they lament porn, usually do so by remarking on how it leads to the objectification of women, may contribute to sexual violence, etc. The main concern, which conservatives and liberals shared, seemed to be that men would watch porn and go out to commit sex crimes, or something.

But the actual problem is more like the opposite, and is much worse. Porn actually leads to what you could call a dissociated sexuality. The problem is that it disconnects a man from the world, by misdirecting his sexual energies. This ultimately leads to a lack of interest in the real world, an inability to be motivated by it. How many young men do you know who seem disaffected, unmotivated, apathetic, aimless, irritable? Yeah, it's porn. In every single case. This is a subtle but incredibly consequential effect, especially across an entire society.

Paschal Greetings from Around the World

Language	Greeting	Response
Aleut:	Khristus anahgrecum!	Alhecum anahgrecum!
Albanian:	Krishti U Ngjall!	Vertet U Ngjall!
Anglo-Saxon:	Crist aras!	Crist sodhlice aras!
Arabic:	El Messieh kahm!	Hakken kahm!
Armenian:	Kristos haryav ee merelotz!	Orhnial eh harootyunuh kristosee!
Bulgarian:	Hristos voskrese!	Vo istina voskrese!
Byelorussian:	Khrystos uvaskros!	Saprawdy uvaskros!
Chinese:	Helisituosi fuhuole!	Qeshi fuhuole!
Coptic:	Pchristos aftooun!	Alethos aftooun!
Czech:	Kristus vstal a mrtvych!	Opravdi vstoupil!
Danish:	Kristus er opstanden!	Ja, sandelig opstanden!
Dutch:	Christus is opgestaan!	Ja, hij is waarlijk opgestaan!
English:	Christ is risen!	Indeed He is risen!
Eritrean-Tigre:	Christos tensiou!	Bahake tensiou!
Estonian:	Kristus on oolestoosunt!	Toayestee on oolestoosunt!
Ethiopian:	Christos t'ensah em' muhtan!	Exai' ab-her eokala!
Finnish:	Kristus nousi kuolleista!	Totistesti nousi!
French:	Le Christ est ressuscite!	En verite il est ressuscite!
Gaelic:	Taw creest ereen!	Taw shay ereen guhdyne!
Georgian:	Kriste ahzdkhah!	Chezdmарidet!
German:	Christus ist erstanden!	Wahrlich ist er erstanden!
Greek:	Christos anesti!	Alithos anesti!
Hebrew:	Ha Masheeha houh quam!	Be emet quam!
Hungarian:	Krisztus feltamadt!	Valoban feltamadt!
Ibo (Nigeria):	Jesu Kristi ebiliwo!	Ezia o' biliwo!
Indian (Malayalam):	Christu uyirthezhunnettu!	Theerchayayum uyirthezhunnettu!
Indonesian:	Kristus telah bangkit!	Benar dia telah bangkit!
Italian:	Cristo e' risorto!	Veramente e' risorto!
Japanese:	Christos fukkatsu!	Jitsu ni fukkatsu!
Korean:	Kristo gesso!	Buhar ha sho nay!
Latin:	Christus resurrexit!	Vere resurrexit!
Latvian:	Kristus ir augsham sales!	Teyasham ir augsham sales vinsch!
Norwegian:	Christus er oppstanden!	Sandelig han er oppstanden!
Polish:	Khristus zmartwyckwstal!	Zaprawde zmartwyckwstal!
Portugese:	Cristo ressuscitou!	Em verdade ressuscitou!
Romanian:	Hristos a inviat!	Adeverat a inviat!
Russian:	Khristos voskrese!	Voistinu voskrese!
Serbian:	Cristos vaskres!	Vaistinu vaskres!
Slovak:	Kristus vstal zmr'tvych!	Skutoc ne vstal!
Spanish:	Cristo ha resucitado!	En verdad ha resucitado!
Swahili:	Kristo amefufukka!	Kweli amefufukka!
Swedish:	Christus ar upstanden!	Han ar verkligen upstanden!
Syriac:	M'shee ho dkom!	Ha koo gam!
Tlingit:	Xristos Kuxwoo-digoot!	Xegaa-kux Kuxwoo-digoot!
Turkish:	Hristos diril - di!	Hakikaten diril - di!
Ugandan:	Kristo ajukkide!	Kweli ajukkide!
Ukrainian:	Khristos voskres!	Voistinu voskres!
Welsh:	Atgyfododd Crist!	Atgyfododd yn wir!
Yupik:	Xris-tusaq Ung-uixtuq!	Iluumun Ung-uixtuq!