

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205
Church Tel. 205-930-9681 / 205-907-9447

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✠ **May 29, 2016** ✠

Fifth Sunday of Pascha

The Samaritan Woman

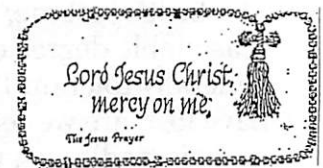
Virgin Martyr Theodosia of Tyre (308)

Blessed Constantine, the last Byzantine Emperor, martyred by the Turks (1453)

Blessed John of Ustiug, Fool-for-Christ (1494)

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

✠ **Sacrament of Holy Matrimony: Anastasia Fecanin and Daniel Johnson**
Next Sunday, June 5, 3:00pm



➤ **The Children's Summer Retreat ~ Saturday, June 25 at church:**

The theme will be "Old and New," and will focus on Old Testament stories and how they are fulfilled in the New Testament. In addition, there will be a focus on the Trisagion Prayers, and Vespers that night will feature a Children's Choir and Children as Readers! Helpers are needed. Please contact Dunia Ritchey if your child will attend or if you can help.

The Temple of His Body ~ St Cyril of Alexandria {commentary on St. John's Gospel}:

For observe how, by unexpectedly entering when the doors were shut, Christ showed, once more, that He was by nature God, and no other than He Who had recently dwelt among them; and also, by laying bare the wounded side of His Body, and by showing the print of the nails, He gave us complete satisfaction that He had raised that Temple of His Body which had hung upon the Cross, and had restored to life that Body which He had worn, thereby subduing death, which is due to all flesh, inasmuch as He was by nature Life and God.

What need, then, was there for Him to show them His hands and side, if, as some perversely think, He did not rise again with His Body? And, if He wished His disciples not to entertain this idea concerning Him, why did He not rather appear in another form, and, disdain the likeness of flesh, conjure up other thoughts in their minds? But, as it is, He thought it of so great importance that they should be convinced of the Resurrection of His Body, that, when the time even seemed to call Him to change His Body into some form of ineffable and surpassing Majesty, He resolved in His Providence to appear once more as He had been of old, that He might not be thought to be wearing any other form than that in which also He had suffered crucifixion. For that our eyes could not have endured the glory of the holy Body, if Christ had chosen to reveal it unto the disciples before He ascended to the Father, is easily to be inferred, when we reflect upon His transfiguration on the Mount before the holy disciples.

For the blessed Matthew the Evangelist writes, that Jesus took *Peter, and James, and John, and went up into the mountain, and was transfigured before them: and His Face did shine as lightning, and His garments became white as snow,* and they could not endure the sight, but fell on their faces.

Very appropriately, then, our Lord Jesus Christ, as He had not yet transformed the Temple of His Body into its due and proper majesty, still appeared in His original shape, not wishing the belief in the Resurrection to be transferred to another form or body than that which He had received from the Holy Virgin, in which also He was crucified, and died, according to the Scripture.

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Russia and the US Today (from two Orthodox commentators)

Rod Dreher: Have we so internalized the progressive notion that the public square should be purged of Christian values that we don't recognize a pre-modern relationship of mutual support between state and church where it still (or rather, again) exists? It's great fun for (literally) holier-than-thou Christians to condemn the **Constantinian symphonia**, which was the bedrock of Christendom for a millennium and a half. Sure, it was not without its problems. (Attention trolls! Feel free to insert references to the Inquisition, the Crusades, pogroms, and witch-burnings here.) But in the broad history of Christianity, there have essentially been two, and only two, conditions for the Church:

Condition 1. A cordial church-state relationship, usually in the form of an established church, whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant; less commonly in an informal symbiosis, of the sort that existed in the U.S. from the disestablishment of state churches in the early 19th century to just a few decades ago.

Condition 2. Some form of marginalization, if not outright persecution by anti-Christian rulers. Maybe it's just me, but Condition 1, adapted to a given country's culture and traditions, with a reasonable degree of forbearance, seems preferable. America used to be a pretty straight-laced though generally tolerant Protestant country. That was a pretty good deal, but now it's gone. Given what we have lost, are we really so smugly superior to Russians' recovery – after unimaginable persecution – of their traditions, which are not the same as ours?

No one truly familiar with the resurgence of the Orthodox Church in Russia can regard it as anything less than a miracle. Not coincidentally, with it has come something approximating the pre-modern church-state symphony. Today Russia is the only major power where the state is openly supportive of the Church and where the state, though formally nonsectarian, openly promotes Christian values as public policy. (The only other Christian country that comes close is Poland, which is a respectable country but has not been a major power for some time.)

James Jatras: ...Looking at the trends in our own country... do we even appreciate what it means to see a Christian country where the government is not indifferent or antagonistic towards the Church but is its supporter and ally? As I recently wrote (with Fr. Victor Potapov and Fr. Alexander Webster): 'Whatever criticisms one might have of the symphonia model [in Russia], blanket condemnation is hardly appropriate as we witness the trend in our own country, where Christianity is increasingly marginalized, moral vices are officially promoted as virtues, and abortion "rights" and homosexual "rights," in particular, are now key components of U.S. foreign policy . . .'

<http://www.aoiusa.org/patriarch-kirill-and-russian-orthodoxy-deserve-respect-not-insults-an-open-letter-to-george-weigel/>

...I can understand that progressives of various stripes hate Russia. She was offered the "opportunity" to serve as guinea pig for the most horrendous experiment in godless social transformation in recorded history. She failed, or rather the experiment failed. Russia has reemerged as a conservative society that is very different from ours in some respects (itself intolerable to some of the social engineers from NED, Open Society, and Planned Parenthood) but remarkably like what she was before 1917. Why is that so bad? Isn't that what a Russian post-communist rebirth should look like? Or put another way, as we Americans accelerate our own descent into something like what the Russians experienced after 1917 (in spirit though hopefully not in the methods), maybe a little comparative perspective is in order? Especially from self-declared conservatives?

HOMILIES - From The Prologue on the Resurrection of Christ

About the Church as the Body of the Lord

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (St. John 2:19).

Thus spoke the Lord to the Jews about "the Temple of His body" (St. John 2:21). The Lord did not rebuke them for that but that which He spoke, occurred. The Jews destroyed His body but He restored it again and raised it in glory and power. The wicked punished God with destruction but God reprimanded the wicked by restoration. It is satisfying to the wicked ones to be able to show their power by killing but, to God, there was joy to show His power by giving life. There is nothing as short-lived as the triumph of evil nor nothing as lasting as the triumph of truth.

"Destroy this temple." The Lord referred to His body as the Church. Destroyed, that Church was crowded into a dark tomb and by means of a heavy stone prevented light from having access to it. But, that Church was not in need of the light of the sun. It had its own light, its own Sun of Righteousness, Who shone from within. The tender Heavenly Hand removed the stone from the tomb and the Lord resurrected in glory and in power. That which once occurred to the All-Pure Body of Christ, occurred many times later to the Church of the holy ones on earth. The enemies of the Church cruelly persecuted and tormented it, demolished it and buried it in darkness. But, the Church after such bruises and confinement, resurrected again with greater glory and power.

Just as the Church of His Body resurrected, so it will at the end of time, the Church of His holy ones will resurrect in fullness and perfection.

O Resurrected Lord, do not give us over to decay and eternal death, but resurrect us to life eternal! To Thee be glory and thanks always! Amen.

About Living Hope

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who in His mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

Brethren, who has dead hope and who has living hope? He who hopes in dead things has a dead hope. He who hopes in the Living God has a living hope. Further, he who hopes in himself and in other people has a dead hope. He who hopes in the Living God has a living hope. Further, he who hopes in luck and well-being in this brief earthly existence and does not extend his hope beyond the grave, has a dead hope. He who hopes in the Resurrection and eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven has a living hope. Truly, a living hope is better than a dead hope; as life is better than death; as light is better than darkness; as health is better than sickness; as understanding is better than ignorance.

But, Who brought and showed man that living hope; Who, and how? The Apostle Peter gives an answer to that question: Our Lord Jesus Christ and that, by His resurrection from the dead. No one else but the Lord Jesus Christ and by nothing else than His own Resurrection from the dead.

By His Resurrection, the Lord gave wings to the pathetic hopes of man, extended him beyond the grave and showed him the goal, purpose and fruit beyond the grave. All of this is not confirmed by a credulous man but by an Apostle who wavered for a long while in his faith and who denied Christ three times. That is why St. Peter's witness of the resurrected Lord and the significance of His Resurrection is inexpressibly priceless for us...

O Resurrected Lord, Victor over death, uproot from us dead hope and plant a living hope in us through the prayers of St. Peter, Thy great Apostle. To Thee be glory and thanks always! Amen.

This and That

Against Utopia ~

Winston Churchill in *"Fifty Years Hence"*: "I read a book the other day which traced the history of mankind from the birth of the solar system to its extinction. There were fifteen or sixteen races of men, which in succession rose and fell over periods measured by tens of millions of years. In the end a race of being was evolved which had mastered nature. A state was created whose citizens lived as long as they chose, enjoyed pleasures and sympathies incomparably wider than our own, navigated the inter-planetary spaces, could recall the panorama of the past and foresee the future."

"But what was the good of all that to them? What did they know more than we know about the answers to the simple questions which man has asked since the earliest dawn of reason - 'Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? Whither are we going?' No material progress, even though it takes shapes we cannot now conceive, or however it may expand the faculties of man, can bring comfort to his soul. It is this fact, more wonderful than any that Science can reveal, which gives the best hope that all will be well."
~ Winston Churchill

Nine years after writing this, Churchill became the leader of his country, and he had put in front of him a proposal for a peace conference that had been arranged by Mussolini. At that moment, Britain stood alone in the West in opposing Nazi Germany, whose forces vastly outnumbered those of the British. Germany had conquered France, and was threatening to cross the Channel and take England. Some in Churchill's war cabinet thought dealing with Hitler was the only sensible thing to do, but not Churchill. Here is what he said when the issue came to a head in a fateful cabinet meeting on May 28, 1940:

"I am convinced that every man of you would rise up and tear me down from my place if I were for one moment to contemplate parley or surrender. If this long island story of ours is to end at last, let it end only when each one of us lies choking in his own blood upon the ground."

And the cabinet members rose as one and cheered, even those who had just spoken in favor of the peace conference. Knowing the horrors of modern war, Churchill hated and feared war all his life. Yet he made this speech to rally his cabinet, as he would rally the British nation, to war. Why? Because he was possessed of the knowledge of the nature of the human being - the fact that we are made in God's image to confront the eternal questions from inside a mortal body, and that our rights to our property and our rights to conscience and religious liberty are aspects of the two parts that integrate to make the human being. Churchill thought the human being was a thing produced by nature and by God and that no man, not even Adolf Hitler with his vast divisions, could ever conquer that. He fought for that belief. I think we are going to have to fight for it too.

~ Larry Arnn, President of Hillsdale College, *Imprimus*, December 2015

➤ **The moral faddism of modern liberalism:** "which infallibly gravitates to the abnormal against the normal: abortion, "gay rights," and sexual license in general, with government throwing its weight on the side of each new fad that comes along."

Their moral faddism, with all its morbid energy, is a given; it has no limits except those imposed by political prudence. They disagree among themselves only about how far to go at a given moment, but the open-ended logic of their positions is clear enough. Today they take positions nobody imagined 20 years ago; who knows what they'll be calling for 20 years from now?

The hive-like moral conformity of the intellectuals is among the wonders of the modern world. They are positively attracted to perverse ideas like same-sex "marriage." Never mind that this never even occurred to the sodomites of antiquity, who understood perfectly well that the point of marriage was to care for children: As soon as the notion was proposed amongst us, the putatively enlightened rallied unanimously to it.

You don't have to be very conservative to have qualms about suddenly discarding old traditions and institutions in deference to the latest bright idea. But we've succumbed to the shibboleth of "change" without stopping to ask what is being changed into what.
- **Joseph Sobran**, November 4, 2004, *The Party of Abnormality*

If God is Dead...

By Patrick J. Buchanan

In a recent column Dennis Prager made an acute observation.

“The vast majority of leading conservative writers ... have a secular outlook on life. ... They are unaware of the disaster that godlessness in the West has led to.”

These secular conservatives may think that “America can survive the death of God and religion,” writes Prager, but they are wrong. And, indeed, the last half-century seems to bear him out.

A people’s religion, their faith, creates their culture, and their culture creates their civilization. And when faith dies, the culture dies, the civilization dies, and the people begin to die.

Is this not the recent history of the West?

Today, no great Western nation has a birthrate that will prevent the extinction of its native-born. By century’s end, other peoples and other cultures will have largely repopulated the Old Continent. European Man seems destined to end like the 10 lost tribes of Israel — overrun, assimilated and disappeared.

And while the European peoples — Russians, Germans, Brits, Balts — shrink in number, the U.N. estimates that the population of Africa will double in 34 years to well over 2 billion people.

What happened to the West? As G. K. Chesterton wrote, when men cease to believe in God, they do not then believe in nothing, they believe in anything.

As European elites ceased to believe in Christianity, they began to convert to ideologies, to what Dr. Russell Kirk called “secular religions.”

For a time, these secular religions — Marxism-Leninism, fascism, Nazism — captured the hearts and minds of millions. But almost all were among the gods that failed in the 20th century.

Now Western Man embraces the newer religions: egalitarianism, democratism, capitalism, feminism, One Worldism, environmentalism.

These, too, give meaning to the lives of millions, but these, too, are inadequate substitutes for the faith that created the West.

For they lack what Christianity gave man — a cause not only to live for, and die for, but a moral code to live by, with the promise that, at the end a life so lived, would come eternal life. Islam, too, holds out that promise.

Secularism, however, has nothing on offer to match that hope. Looking back over the centuries, we see what faith has meant.

When, after the fall of the Roman Empire, the West embraced Christianity as a faith superior to all others, as its founder was the Son of God, the West went on to create modern civilization, and then went out and conquered most of the known world.

The truths America has taught the world, of an inherent human dignity and worth, and inviolable human rights, are traceable to a Christianity that teaches that every person is a child of God.

Today, however, with Christianity virtually dead in Europe and slowly dying in America, Western culture grows debased and decadent, and Western civilization is in visible decline.

Rudyard Kipling prophesied all this in "Recessional":

"Far-called our navies melt away; On dune and headland sinks the fire: Lo, all our pomp of yesterday/Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!"

All the Western empires are gone, and the children of once-subject peoples cross the Mediterranean to repopulate the mother countries, whose native-born have begun to age, shrink and die.

Since 1975, only two European nations, Muslim Albania and Iceland have maintained a birthrate sufficient to keep their peoples alive.

Given the shrinking populations inside Europe and the waves of immigrants rolling in from Africa and the Middle and Near East, an Islamic Europe seems to be in the cards before the end of the century.

Vladimir Putin, who witnessed the death of Marxism-Leninism up close, appears to understand the cruciality of Christianity to Mother Russia, and seeks to revive the Orthodox Church and write its moral code back into Russian law.

And what of America, "God's country"?

With Christianity excommunicated from her schools and public life for two generations, and Old and New Testament teachings rejected as a basis of law, we have witnessed a startlingly steep social decline.

Since the 1960s, America has set new records for abortions, violent crimes, incarcerations, drug consumption. While HIV/AIDS did not appear until the 1980s, hundreds of thousands have perished from it, and millions now suffer from it and related diseases.

Forty percent of U.S. births are out of wedlock. For Hispanics, the illegitimacy rate is over 50 percent; for African-Americans, it's over 70 percent.

Test scores of U.S. high school students fall annually and approach parity with Third World countries. Suicide is a rising cause of death for middle-aged whites.

Secularism seems to have no answer to the question, "Why not?"

"How small, of all that human hearts endure, That part which laws or kings can cause or cure," wrote Samuel Johnson.

Secular conservatives may have remedies for some of America's maladies. But, as Johnson observed, no secular politics can cure the sickness of the soul of the West — a lost faith that appears irretrievable.

Monastic Practices for Everyday Living

From a nun at Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Ellwood City, PA

While all people have a calling to return to the Father by renouncing sin and turning their lives towards God, there are many and various paths to holiness, to union with God. Some people seek God through the monastic life which is a radical step of separation from the world. More, however, live Christianity through their life in the parish church and in the community of marriage and family. Others remain single in the world as they strive to keep the commandments of Christ.

All of us can learn from one another. As nuns, we often observe visiting mothers, marveling at the obedience demanded of a mother as she answers every need of her children. Likewise we hope that our Christian life as organized and lived in the monastery can also offer inspiration to those in the world. **We would like to mention here five monastic practices that may be helpful to others wherever they may be called to live their Christian life.**

Begin each day by turning to God.

Monasteries throughout the world organize their daily life around the prayer rhythm of the Church. We start each day praising God, turning to Him in prayer. This beginning shapes our day. In the world we are taught to “start the day right” by eating a particular brand of breakfast cereal, listening to a certain local news program, showering with aroma therapy body wash, or savoring a new brand of cappuccino. All these things are supposed to make us “feel good.” And yes, they very well may contribute to a sense of well-being, but turning to God to start the day is not dependent on our feelings. Whatever condition we find ourselves in—emotionally, physically, spiritually—we are guaranteed that our day will begin right if we turn first to Christ. He, unlike us, is constant!

For those in the world with jobs, families, and very demanding schedules, this does not mean you need to leap out of bed and spend 45 minutes in your prayer corner doing prostrations. Of course, everyone’s prayer rule needs to be appropriate for life’s circumstances, but we can all train ourselves to remember God. The Lord’s Prayer or a short saying such as “Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee,” or the Jesus Prayer can be said silently in those first few minutes of each day when we become aware that we are awake. This requires of us a cutting of our fallen will. Even nuns, if we are honest, must admit that there are days we would rather stay in bed or go straight to the coffee maker.

Instead of carrying on an endless monologue in our minds: “O no, the alarm I am going to be late, what am I going to wear— it’s raining!” have a dialogue with Christ. Just talk to Him! Say, “Lord, I really don’t feel grateful for this day—help me to change!” Because of His steadfastness, we will begin to discover that falling into His arms with our whole ungrateful selves is far better than falling back into our pillows. We acknowledge His strength and our weakness, thus beginning to learn humility, and perhaps experiencing an inkling of His unfathomable love.

Whatever we do can be done as an offering to God.

Everything in the monastery is done with a blessing by the abbess who represents Christ to the sisters. A blessing is both permission and prayer, a reminder that we are always in the presence of God. All of us can offer everything we do to God, recognize that we can do nothing without Him, and then be blessed with Christ’s presence as we move through our day. Try saying simply, “Lord, be with me!” or “Lord, help me to do this task to Your glory!” or “Lord, have mercy!” before doing anything whether it be starting the dinner dishes or sitting down to check your email. Then say, “Thank you, God,” when you have finished. Desiring that He be with us throughout the day, talking with God will become a habit and our relationship with Him will begin to deepen.

Everything ordinary is a potential opening to encountering God.

In the monastery we do a lot of cooking and dish washing. These activities sound pretty ordinary, not what one may imagine as “spiritual experiences.” But really, everything ordinary is a potential opening to encountering God. Holy tradition tells us that the Virgin was spinning when Gabriel appeared to her to announce the Child she would bear. The Apostles were mending their fishing nets when they were called by Christ. Our work is sanctified by God when we offer ourselves to God, when we say yes to Him—whether it is grocery shopping, taking the kids to the orthodontist, or doing yard work. Whatever we find ourselves doing, Christ is with us. Our daily life is not separated from our spiritual life and our prayer is not separated from our work. There is one Christian life whether lived in the monastery or in the world, and this life encompasses our whole life. Reading about the extraordinary lives of the saints who labored in fasting, in caves, standing in prayer for days, can lead us to falsely assume that extreme ascetical feats are somehow necessary in order to lead a spiritual life. Simply living in community, striving to be obedient to the commandments of God in the workplace, growing in love with your spouse, making the sacrifices that are necessary to raise your children—when offered to God, these ordinary activities become encounters with God.

All work and all workers are important and necessary.

In our competitive American society, we are taught that it is good to be the best. Not necessarily “be all that you can be.” but be better than your peers, strive for the top position. In the monastery, all work and all workers are of equal importance. St. Paul speaks at length to the Corinthians about the importance of every member of the Church to its life by using the example of the body: “if the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the smelling?” (I Cor. 12:14-26) Every sister, lay worker, and guest is of equal value in the eyes of God, and every obedience is necessary for the community as a whole to function smoothly.

An example to illustrate this is the institution of a large hospital. Our society has a tendency to be very impressed with all the surgeons and the highly-trained physicians that work in that environment. But could they do their work without the staff that cleans the operating room, or the clerical workers that keep track of the paper work, or the assembly line workers that make the medical equipment and all the building materials? There is a practically endless list of people, each with a task that is absolutely necessary to make the hospital run smoothly.

Take spiritual coffee breaks.

In a traditionally structured workplace, research has clearly shown that coffee breaks benefit the workers and the business. Employees after 10 or 15 minutes of a change of routine return to their jobs refreshed and more energized, and are more productive. Contrary to popular opinion, even in the monastery we can feel overwhelmed. We find in the monastery that if we break from our work and take a few minutes to read the Psalms or any Scripture, this is very beneficial. When you read from the Old or New Testament it can have a very calming effect, even if your reading is unfocused. For the first few minutes or pages, it is often hard to pay attention, being distracted by the details of whatever project is at hand. But if we do not give up, soon things will change — we start to calm down and gradually become absorbed in the words.

These practices are simple, but decidedly not simplistic. Indeed they are foundational to growing in Christ. It can be helpful to work on them one at a time. You may choose to commit to learning one for several months to a year before going on to another. In this way they become second-nature, aiding us in an ever-deepening relationship with Christ. Know that you will be challenged: the flesh will say, “Tomorrow is soon enough.” The world will do its best to distract you and make you forget. The devil may say, “These practices are for children — you deserve more.” However it is our own experience that when we steadily and daily seek to give our life to God, we have an ever-deepening experience of His presence in our lives. More and more we are able to “taste and see how good the Lord is.”