



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✦ June 5, 2016 ✦

Sixth Sunday of Pascha

The Blind Man

St. Dorotheos of Tyre (362) St. Dorotheos of Palestine (6th C)

St. Theodore Yaroslavich, older brother of St. Alexander Nevsky (1233)

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

✦ Sacrament of Holy Matrimony: Anastasia Fecanin and Daniel Johnson

> Today, 3:00pm

✦ Wed. June 8 6:30pm – Vespers – Feast of the Ascension

✦ Thurs. June 9, 10:00am – Divine Liturgy ~ Feast of the Ascension

✦ Holy Baptism ~ Saturday, June 18, 3:00pm ~ Child Peter Ruthertford

> Children's Summer Retreat ~ Saturday, June 25:

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.

Trampling Down Death ~ St. Ephraim the Syrian

"Our Lord was trampled on by Death; and in His turn trod out a way over Death. This

is He Who made Himself subject to and endured death of His own will, that He might

cast down Death against his will... For in that very thing by which Death had slain Him

[i.e., the body], in that as armor He bore off the victory over Death. But the Godhead

concealed itself in the manhood and fought against Death, Death slew and was slain.

Death slew the natural life; and the supernatural life slew him. And because Death

was not able to devour Him without the body, nor Sheol to swallow Him up without the

flesh, He came unto the Virgin... With the body then that was from the Virgin, He

entered Sheol and plundered its storehouses and emptied its treasures... For He Who

is the Medicine of life flew down from heaven, and was mingled in the body, the mortal

fruit. And when Death came to feed after his custom, the Life in His turn swallowed up

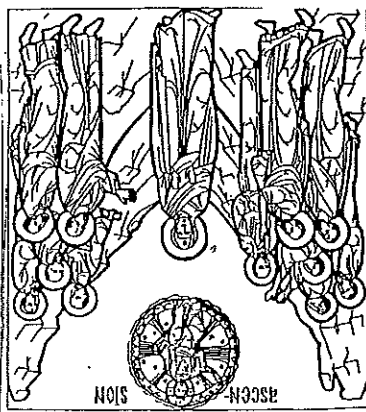
Death. This is the food that hungered to eat its eater. So then, by one fruit which Death

swallowed hungrily, he vomited up many lives which he had swallowed greedily. The

hunger then which hurried him against one, emptied out his greed which had hurried

him against many. Thus Death was diligent to swallow one, but was in haste to set

{over}



Sheol were coming forth at His cry. This is the fruit that cleft asunder Death who had swallowed it, and brought out from within it the Life in quest of which it was sent. For Sheol hid away all that she had devoured. But through One that was not devoured, all that she had devoured were restored from within her. He, whose stomach is disordered, vomits forth both that which is sweet to him and that which is not sweet. So the stomach of Death was disordered, and as he was vomiting forth the Medicine of life which had sickened it, he vomited forth along with it also those lives that had been swallowed by him with pleasure.

"This is the Son of the carpenter, Who skillfully made His Cross a bridge over Sheol that swallows up all, and brought over mankind into the dwelling of life. And because it was through the tree that mankind had fallen into Sheol, so upon the Tree they passed over into the dwelling of life. Through the tree then wherein bitterness was tasted, through it also sweetness was tasted; that we might learn of Him that amongst the creatures nothing resists Him. Glory be to Thee, Who didst lay Thy Cross as a bridge over death, that souls might pass over upon it from the dwelling of the dead to the dwelling of life!" [Homily On Our Lord, § 2, 3, in Nicene, 2^o Ser., XIII:306, 307.]

The Way of the Cross

At the heart of modernity is an assumption that all suffering is bad and that the relief of suffering is the definition of the good and the useful. It then follows with a utilitarian ethic of alleviating suffering. This is not the classical Christian account of the world. Relieving suffering can be a good thing, but is not the highest good or the definition of the good. The Good is God alone and union with Him. And this, in the Christian account, actually requires suffering. Some suffering is inevitable and inescapable. The Way of the Cross does not describe how to be rid of suffering, but how to rightly bear suffering in such a way that it is redeeming. It was in this manner that slaves became saints.

This is a very different account of the world. I do not argue that the suffering of a transsexual is illegitimate. I'm sure it's real. The Christian answer to that legitimate and real suffering differs from that of modernity. It's that simple.

Hetero's are not free from suffering, in the classical model. Indeed, monasticism, so absolutely integral to the Orthodox Faith, has a way of obliterating the social concept of gender in asceticism. Your life stuff is the stuff that shapes your asceticism. Your asceticism is part of the Cross. If you don't take up this Cross, then you'll have to take up some other Cross. But there is no true Life without a Cross.

Removing the Cross, in the long run, becomes demonic, though that does not immediately seem apparent. "Come down from the Cross," is a taunt thrown at Christ. "Take up your Cross and follow me!" is His response.

The Subject of Prayer

+ Fr. Nicholas Deputatov

Archpriest Nikolai Deputatov was a profoundly thinking theologian and one of the leading ecclesiastical writers of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, having written mainly, on aspects of Christian life and piety. He served in the Russian Imperial Army. After the Revolution he emigrated to the eastern borders of Russia. In 1938 he completed his theological studies in Harbin, China. He was a great admirer and was well versed in the writings of the holy Fathers, in particular St. Theophan the Recluse, upon whose writings he based his Candidate's Thesis for his theological degree. He was in the Australian — New Zealand Archdiocese — 1970's.

Philosophizing is by far easier than praying. Satan is self - opinionated and encourages those who rely on their own wisdom. On self-willed theorizing and the grasping of "the great mysteries" he traps, confuses and destroys human souls. The greatest advantage of prayer is that it replaces all that we have. This is the most profound content that is hidden in prayer: faith, devotion, salvation. Whoever strives to pray with one's whole heart is already saved. Prayer - is a half-way to God. Through prayer, a blessed power by way of a harmony of sacred words, pours into our hearts. Prayer brings divine joy.

If philosophers, rationalists and materialists do not believe and do not pray, this does not mean that they have advanced very far, or soared very high, "but it means they have stepped away from human nature, distorted and disfigured themselves, as though they have gouged their eyes out or cut off their noses" (Bishop Theophan). The Apostles regarded prayer, together with the teaching of the word of God, their main concern. "Prayer is the highest of virtues, the root and foundation of a life striving for salvation" (St. John Chrysostom).

Christians, in prayer, find solace and help in all difficulties of life, in every need and misfortune. And thus, perish self-pity! Let us compel ourselves to prayer. If we continue to pray, even under duress, then idleness and our negative attitude to prayer will begin to dissipate and with God's help, will completely disappear and could be replaced by a strong spiritual inspiration. "One monk was constantly overcome by the devil before prayer. He would feel hot and cold, begin to feel ill - he was ready to die. What did he do? Well, my soul, he said! The time has come to die. Let us pray for the last time, and shed our tears before God. Forcing himself, he stood to pray. His head was aching, but he continued... He finished reading the typica, and the pain disappeared... The next day, the same happened. Then he understood from where the temptation comes, and from then on he never left the reading of prayers - no matter what the distraction was" (Bishop Theophan).

The soul, just like the weather, experiences sunny days and dull days. It is within our power to attune our soul so that unceasingly, the sweetest heavenly melodies will be heard. Unconsciously the words of the poet come to mind: "The sounds of the heavens could not be replaced by the sorrowful songs of earth." True prayer cannot exist without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The impact of the Spirit, the Comforter on the heart — therein creates touching sighs, sacred strings and desired prayer. This kind of birth process of prayer, heartfelt and sweet, is a unique, heavenly joy... If fervent intercessors cease to exist, then the world will perish through great disasters. "The world is upheld by the prayers of holy people," attests *starets* (spiritual Elder) Silouan, "from the time I came to know God, my soul longs for Him, and nothing makes me more joyous on earth than this. There is only one joy for me — God. He — is my joy, my strength; He is my wisdom, my wealth... From the sweetness of God's love, the soul forgets all earthly things, regarding these as debris and ash..."

The Jesus Prayer holds a pre-eminent place... It is directed to place us into God's presence without any thoughts, only the understanding of that miracle that we are here and God is present with us. With the Jesus prayer there is nothing and no-one, except God and us. It is a good companion, friendly, always close and totally personal, in spite of the seeming monotony when repeated. In joy or in sorrow, when it becomes habitual, the Jesus Prayer becomes a strength, revitalizing the soul, always a ready answer to any call from God. Without prayers and hope, the world will suffocate in its own hatred and will become weary from suffering. In vain the voices cry out, the weeping eyes await the light. The night grows darker... And without Christ, the day will not come to replace the night...

One Athonite *starets* pleaded the Theotokos for two years to grant him a prayerful flame in his heart, and this was granted. *Starets* Ambrose of Optina was transfigured during noetic prayer. His face lit up and it gave out an unusual radiance. From the writings of St. Isaac Syrian, one *starets* was only conscious of himself at prayer, up to the first Glory (of the 3rd psalm), and then immersed himself in the contemplation of God, and very noetically, in silence, prayed to God at some length, standing motionless and not feeling any drowsy. This blessed gift the *starets* received after 30 years of feats, sorrows and deprivations. In this way the feats of martyrs, saints and the righteous with the help of the grace of God, are higher than exceed the natural powers of people.

A fellow countryman, visiting St. Seraphim asked if he wanted to send anything to his family. St. Seraphim answered, pointing to the icons of the Savior and the Virgin Mary: "This is my family." True prayer filled with humility and love of God and other people, together with the partaking of the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist, makes the communicant a dweller of the spiritual, heavenly world. True, heartfelt prayer banishes in us loneliness, despondency, hopelessness. It invigorates our spirit, arouses energy, makes us forget insults and disappointments, even in great misfortunes. It develops patience, endurance and consoles with hope in God. The devout are always full of vitality and are cheerful. There is no sorrow that prayer cannot allay. Prayer — is a key that opens the doors to God's mercy, and is a proven means of obtaining temporary and eternal joy.

Cremation:

Incinerating Every Human Trace of Our Dearly Departed

Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus, Greece

The city of Athens recently put out an invitation for bids for a building to house the first crematorium, and the western port city of Patra is now planning the same. Thankfully, through all these troubles, hierarchs of the Church of Greece have raised their voices and proclaimed the eternal truths of Orthodox Christianity.

In regards to this latest battle over the dignity of the human body, Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus, ever-faithful and never fearful to boldly stand for Orthodox salvific truths, has released a missive to his diocese, published on the website of the Monastery of the Pantocrator near Thessaloniki, explaining the Orthodox respect for the body, and the Church's consequent stand against cremation. Given the firmness of Orthodox conviction on the matter, Met. Seraphim declares that neither funeral nor memorial service be permitted in his diocese for one who has chosen cremation for himself.

It is a known fact that certain indigenous circles of internationalist mockery, who, ignoring the long-standing Christian tradition of our spotless faith have been penetrating every form of mass media and through them, the conscience of contemporary man, poisoning it and buckling the foundations of the faith. As such, the indifference regarding the faith and Christian traditions, under the influence of the aforementioned, is putting down roots in the morally listless and religiously sick consciences.

Having perceived the signs of the times, and the twists and turns of those moving suspiciously against Her, and in order to safeguard Orthodox tradition today now that the procedure of cremation of the deceased is being fully materialized and suitably prepared, our Holy Church, as a caring mother, has enlightened Her Christ-named flock in an appropriate manner (with Her Encyclical No. 2959/29.10.2014), for the instruction of the saints and the edification of the Body of Christ—per the God-inspired words of the Apostle Paul (Eph. 4:12)—and has stressed to Her members the spiritual dimensions and consequences of such a choice in the spiritual life of the faithful, by having rejected the cremation of the deceased as an act that is incompatible to Her tradition, thus demarcating Her faith and Her respect for the human person, and by extension, for the human body, which is a temple and a dwelling of the Most Holy Spirit.

Pursuant to the government's proposal per Article 21 "Choice of burial place" in the Legislative Plan titled "Measures for the acceleration of the Governmental opus and other provisions," whereby, through the generalized formulation of the provision it becomes compulsory to respect the wish of the deceased either for an ecclesiastical funeral service and in special cases for the cremation of their body, we would detail the following: the human body is an icon of the immortal soul and a projection of eternity in this world. The burning of the body constitutes an iconoclastic act, which offends the faith in the eternality of the Church. The process of a body's deterioration should be a natural one, and never forced. Nature undertakes the deterioration of the body. Burning it is perpetrating an act of violence on the body. The experience of the Church, which originates from the honoring of holy relics, demonstrates that relics are spiritually alive, which is why the Church regards burial as an eternal value, whereas cremation is not regarded as a personal right for the faithful members of the Church, inasmuch as it is considered a clearly nihilistic act that denotes the end of a person, whereas, to the contrary, burial marks the hope and expectation of the Resurrection.

Regardless of the arguments it may be based on, the cremation of the deceased resides outside Orthodox truth which has been defined by the Apostolic word:

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. It [the body] is sown in corruption, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in strength; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. Thus it is written: "The first man, Adam, was made a living soul;" the last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15: 42-45).

With the cremation of the deceased, society has subscribed to its nullification. What kind of relationship can a society have with life when a society does not accept man in his sickness, his weakness and his death; when a society incinerates its dead; when a society destroys the remembrance of their lives and the reminder to Her members; when a society regards man's beginning an artificial and selective one and his death a final and irrevocable one; when a society denies the breath of the eternal and entraps itself in the asphyxiation of the ephemeral? There have been atheists who have sought to preserve their societies' memory of their terrestrial "gods," by actually embalming their bodies, as in the cases of Lenin and Mao Zedong.

The result of humanism without God, of civilization without values, of nihilism without a purpose, and the result of atheism's confusion, has been the riddance of the person—the incineration of even the last vestige of him. The cremation of the deceased leads to the cremation of human dignity. Most assuredly, the re-kindling of the entire matter through the relevant Legislative Plan will lead to an attempt to gradually deaden people's sensor of faith.

The meaning of "eternity" is being distanced from our life experience. Every single thing that reminds one of it and discreetly underlines it is gradually becoming undesirable to accept and bothersome in practice. A contemporary thinker has asserted in an article of his—with regard to the anti-metaphysical furor which we are observing—that the professed, modernizing mentality of recent years is an "anti-metaphysical, monomaniacal complex" seated within a "tortuous psychological insecurity."

Practical and the utilitarian perceptions have prevailed and have numbed the spiritual and experiential dimensions of events. The true and the beautiful have become subjugated to the nakedness and the harshness of rationalistic practice.

The detailed reference by the four Evangelists on the interment of our Lord's Body also proves its importance in an undeniable manner.

The same is observed in the hymnography and the hymnology for the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, for Basil the Great, Venerable Ephraim, the Holy Martyrs—and naturally for all the faithful—in the sublime funeral services.

Celebrations for the translation of precious relics and the Tradition and experience of the Church are unshakable proofs of the respect shown to the human body which comprises a human being's one hypostasis. As such, incineration of that body is evidence of a latent disdain for it and disbelief in the resurrection of dead bodies, an anti-Christian belief in the transmigration of souls, or the denial altogether of the existence of the soul. Consequently, our holy Church is justified in proclaiming that the incineration of the deceased body is an actual denial of the Resurrection and a provocative proclamation of a nihilistic bent.

The funeral service is inextricably linked to the visible presence of the human body, not a heap of ashes. All of the troparia hymns speak of the "reposed" or "asleep" person, not an incinerated one, when bidding them the last farewell, and when burying their body, not ashes. Hence it is easily deduced that it is not possible to perform a funeral service, either prior to a cremation, or after it, given that in the former case a burial will not follow, and in the latter, there will be no body to bury.

Uninfluenced by the secular spirit, the Church will continue to inter and bury the bodies of Her faithful, which may well also be relics, given that the incorruptibility of relics and their potential to work miracles are both proof of man's thesis, as the grace of God can also permeate the entire human body.

The choice to cremate is a sin, and is proof of an erroneous relationship with the Church. Every deviation from Her teaching is an alienation from the grace of the living God. For those who choose cremation of their dead body—and more so with a public statement of disbelief in eternal life, or with disrespect and disregard for the Church—we are justified in asserting that there is absolutely no reason for the celebrating of a funeral service or a memorial supplication, because the Church is obliged to respect the rejection of Her teaching by the deceased himself, and not the relatives' possible desire (usually for social reasons) to hold a funeral or memorial service.

These services presuppose faith and hope in the afterlife by the deceased and his respect for the Church. Services are not held for social purposes; they entail prayers and extensive supplications before God by the Church, who expresses Her love for the departed person as faith in the Lord, as hope for salvation, as desire for his partaking in the resurrection for eternity, and as Her petition for the forgiveness of his sins by the Lord.

How can we chant "Blessed is the path that you walk on ..." to someone who declares faith in his post-mortem nonexistence?

Consequently, it is impermissible for our Most Holy Church to diminish the absolute character of this teaching of Hers, given that any possible related act would weaken Her relationship with the Truth.

Accordingly, in our God-saved Metropolis and with absolute respect—both towards the free choice of free persons, but also towards the commandments and the dogmas of our Most Holy Church—we hereby make known to everyone that we will not be permitting the performing of funeral or memorial services to whoever wittingly chooses the cremation of his body, thus, in effect, denying the Resurrection of the dead. This is the most silencing response to all the sycophantic rumors that the Church's negative stance supposedly involves financial reasons.

God was the reason of true faith and good behavior and of the knowledge of technology among people.

While people continually felt God above them, before them, and around them, in the same way air and light is felt, they attributed and dedicated all their technological works and handiwork to Him, their Lord and Creator.

When the feeling of God's presence became dulled and spiritual vision darkened, that is when pride entered into tradesmen and technologists, and they started to give glory exclusively to themselves for their buildings, handiwork and intellectual works, and began to misuse their work that is when the shadow of cursedness began to fall on technology.

+ St. Nikolai Velimirovich, from the Complete Works of Bishop Nikolai [in Serbian], Book 12, p. 23. Translated from the Serbian by Marija Miljkovic.

Practical Tips for Families from Mother Christophora of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Ellwood City, PA

Four pointers that can be helpful in building healthy Orthodox families, parishes, and monasteries:

1. Respect. Everyone is made in the image and likeness of God! This is a very holy and serious fact. Respect others. No two people are the same and we should stop trying to make other people like ourselves.

2. Frustrations. Do not take out your frustrations on those near and dear to you. This is such a common temptation—to hold in our anger or frustration towards other people or circumstances, but then to “release” it on those whom we love. Perhaps we do this because we feel most “safe” with our loved ones, but it is in no way the right thing to do.

3. Time. All in all, we are given precious little time on this earth. Yet we spend so much of it being “busy” with things we think are so necessary, all the while neglecting spending time with those dear to us.

4. Inheritance. What do we really pass on to our children? You might think it is the house or the bank account or the stock, but it really, the best inheritance we can give our children is our own spiritual life. What was our relationship with God? How did we face life’s ups and downs? What was our moral character? This is what we really “leave” to our children. Let us make St. Paul’s words to Timothy our own: “I am reminded of your sincere faith: a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you” (2 Tim. 1:5). In a similar vein, a monk was asked recently what is the best thing that parents can do for their children, and he replied that the parents should love each other!

The dynamic between the life of asking, seeking, knocking, and the life within a received Tradition is easily lost on us.... The truth is that there is no possibility of truly seeking until we stand within a Tradition. Orthodoxy, more than a set of answers, is the living communion with the life of those who have shown that there are answers. They are markers of the pathway that rescue our searching from vanity and delusion. To a large extent, the monastic presence in Orthodoxy exists to preserve this dynamic.

— Fr. Stephen Freeman

“With the skyrocketing rise of pornography and other forms of sexual addiction — something that is not only frightening in its pervasiveness but also touches every church and nearly every family, both in its adults and children — authentic ministries that speak to how we can be free of such addictions and made whole in Christ are desperately needed.”

~ Fr. Andrew Damick

“The world that denies the existence of God, or that puts Him safely far away on a pedestal “up in Heaven,” depends on labels. If I don’t see God in the other, then I need to know what categories that person fits into in order to know how to relate to that person. And I need the entire legal system to codify the treatment of those categories. “Gender”, however carefully defined, becomes another category of labels (along with “income”, “race”, “education”, “religion”, etc.) whose every nuance takes us further from seeing the image of God in the individual.

Without God my criteria for action become: What will others think of me, and how can I get what I want/deserve? “. . . There is a drive to please, to make room for all possible demands.

But a Christian puts God first (and only!) and sees God’s image in each individual person. “There is a spiritual question in all of this. It has to do with our fundamental orientation towards reality itself. . . . Classical Christianity . . . prefers to treat the things in our lives that are received as the gifts of a good God.” And these gifts include all the people in our lives.”

— Rdr. Arsenios