



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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**September 18, 2016**

**Postfeast of the Elevation**

**of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross**

St. Eumenius of Gortyna, Crete (7<sup>th</sup> C)

When, on this day, we look at the precious Cross of Christ, in faith let us adore it, let us rejoice, and embrace it ardently, beseeching our Lord, Who of His own choice gave Himself to be crucified on it, to make us worthy of adoring His most precious Cross so that, free from all defilement, we may attain the day of Resurrection!

- Matins of the Feast

**Annual Parish Meeting today ! / Inquirer's Class – Tuesday, September 20**

**† Iconography work continues... / Next Saturday night – Psalm-a-Thon is back !!!**

### **Orthodox Christians – the True Materialists** ~ Fr. Stephen Freeman:

The universe exists as an act of communion. Communion is the proper form of true existence. The veneration of icons, rightly understood, draws us back to the true understanding of our place within creation. Indeed, an icon can only be seen if it is venerated. Creation is not an abstraction. It is real and true and can be known in its very materiality. Modern man is often called a materialist. He is nothing of the sort. He is a hedonist. The material world is merely an occasion for seeking pleasure, but the pleasure is an abstraction, not an act of communion. The idea is the thing.

**Orthodox Christians are the true materialists, for we proclaim and honor the glorious wonder of matter and the promise of the life of communion. Spirit is not the opposite of matter, and material is not the opposite of spiritual.** Creation is not the mere arena of our salvation – it is an eager participant, groaning for its fulfillment (Romans 8:21-23). Icons are a means of communion with Christ and the saints who have gone before. But their veneration also teaches us the truth of our existence and how to rightly live in the world. For creation itself is icon and sacrament, God's gift in a good world.

Comparing an icon to the Eucharist came up during the Iconoclast debate. And this is what was said. The Iconoclasts said that the Eucharist is the only icon of Christ. The Orthodox responded that the Eucharist is not an icon, "but the thing itself." The Eucharist is really and truly the Body and Blood of Christ, regardless of what we might perceive.

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### **A Daily Cross**

If you would be victorious, taste the suffering of Christ in your person, that you may be chosen to taste His glory. For if we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified with Him. Blessed are you if you suffer for righteousness' sake. Behold, for years and generations the way of God has been made smooth through the Cross and by death. The way of God is a daily Cross. The Cross is the gate of mysteries.

**St. Isaac the Syrian**

## **Elder Joseph of Optina (+ 1901 – Spiritual son of Elder Ambrose of Optina)**

### **Instructions - II**

He said, "At the present time many suicides are taking place, not only from disbelief, but also from lack of patience. They do not want to endure anything. If the Lord had not given man the natural desire to live, then almost all would kill themselves. St. Basil the Great wrote about a pagan philosopher who said, 'Previously, I wanted everything to go my way, but seeing that nothing was done as I wanted, I began to wish that everything be done as it is done; so it was that everything started to be done as I wanted.' You see, even the pagan actually realized the truth that one inevitably must endure everything that happens. All the Saints asked God for patience, which means they also had need of it."

Once, a penitent asked the Elder himself to reveal the man's hidden sins which the man did not want to confess himself. The Elder answered, "No, this must not be done. Everyone must confess and repent on his own, or else he will receive no benefit. As for forgotten and undisclosed sins, one must endure everything that comes to pass. Batiushka Amvrosy never revealed hidden sins except in very rare and special cases, when he saw that the person might die without having repented."

The Elder Joseph here verifies the Church's teaching that if we suffer here in this life, it is for the cleansing of hidden or forgotten sins, of which we, as mortals, have a multitude. He emphasizes that if we are patient in these afflictions permitted by God, if we "endure everything that comes to pass," we shall receive forgiveness and healing from God.

Someone complained of being continually sick. The Elder said, "There's nothing to be done. Obviously, the Lord wants to save us and cleanse us from the defilement of sin. Although it is not easy to endure the cauterization of our wounds, nonetheless one must endure everything for the sake of spiritual well-being. If we live an uncorrected life, then let us have a contrite and repentant heart over it. The Lord will regard this and not deprive us of His mercy."

"Our path is one of sorrows. We will travel thereon until we reach our appointed fatherland – eternity. In the world (as contrasted to the monastery) there are more sorrows. Although we have our share of them too, they are not like those of the world, for ours (monastics) are for the sake of God. Only it is sad that we take little care for eternity and will not endure patiently the smallest reproach. We ourselves exaggerate our sorrows when we begin to complain. One must have patience and courage in all things. They will be for us like the anchor of a boat which keeps it from being smashed against a rock during a storm."

The Elder said, "No one knows what is hidden within a man. For this reason the Apostle also says, 'Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not despise him that eateth.' A person appears to be fulfilling everything, but perhaps he is doing it coldly or is exalting himself. Another fulfills nothing, yet he reproaches himself, repents, humbles himself, and gives thanks to God for everything."

The Elder was told of a woman who died without the Holy Mysteries because she did not want to receive Holy Communion from the priest in her parish about whom she knew many bad things. The Elder grieved over the deceased and said that one should not be disturbed by a priest's life, since his hand only performs the actions, but it is grace that perfects the Mystery.

"You ask me to give you directions on deliverance from distraction in prayer. It is impossible for us sinful people not to be distracted in prayer. Nevertheless, one must try with all one's ability to collect one's thought and to enclose it in the words of the prayer, that is, to penetrate into every word of the prayer. Let no one be disturbed by coldness and hard-heartedness, but while acknowledging oneself as unworthy of consolation and compunction, one must force oneself to pray. If prayer is cold, it does not mean that it is displeasing to God. Sometimes, such prayer can take the place of struggle if a person humbles himself and condemns himself in everything before God." †

# **Ethics and Technology**

*by St. Nikolai Velimirovich*

**“Evil does not come from unfeeling, dead technology, but from the dead hearts of people.”**

Originally, religion was the mother of ethics and technology. First of all, religion was a torrential spring flowing from hidden depths, ethic a life carrying river, and technology with the help of artistic channels, carried the water from this river into all the arteries of man's life.

God announced to man the law of faith, the law of behavior, and the knowledge of technology.

By the directions of God, Noah built a boat that traveled one of the longest journeys in the history of navigation.

By God's inspiration Bezalel was filled with wisdom in understanding, in knowledge, and all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship. (Exodus 31:1-11)

In the same way, the Temple of Solomon, one of the greatest architectural wonders of the old world, was built by people taught by the Spirit of God and directed by the hand of the Lord. This is the witness of the Holy Scriptures.

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.

Many complain against technology.

Many accuse modern technology for all the woes in the world.

Is technology really to blame, or those who create technology and use it?

Is a wooden cross to blame if somebody crucifies someone on it?

Is a hammer to blame if a neighbor breaks his neighbors skull?

Technology does not feel good or evil.

The same pipes can be used for drinking water or the sewer.

Evil does not come from unfeeling, dead technology, but from the dead hearts of people.

Completely conscious of the presence of God and without any pride, Noah built a wondrous ship that was for his salvation and of the new mankind that was to be born.

In a darkened consciousness regarding God's presence, people filled with pride agreed among themselves, "Let us build a city and a tower whose top shall reach heaven, and make a name for ourselves." That was the building of the tower of Babel.

When King Solomon finished building the glorious Temple of God, he lifted up his hands to heaven, and in humbleness cried out, " Behold, heaven and the heavens above the heavens I cannot comprehend you, let alone this Temple I have built."

This wondrous Temple lasted for eleven generations. It was destroyed to dust and ashes when the godless descendants of King Solomon in deed, turned it from a "house of prayer, into a house of trade."

Not to the credit of technology did the Temple remain standing for centuries, nor to the blame of technology did it vanish from the face of the earth.

Technology is deaf, mute, and unanswering. It is completely dependant on ethics, as ethics on faith.

Well known is the Biblical story of King Nebuchadnezzar. He built the city of Babylon with palaces, and hanging towers, with such technological workmanship and beauty as the world till then had not seen. The King looked down at the city he had built, standing on the roof of his palace and said pridefully, " Is this not Babylon the Great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" While he was yet speaking these conceited words, God smote him with insanity and he became insane, and in insanity he lived for seven years like a beast among the beasts of the forests.

His city Babylon the Great became a heap of rubble and was sneered at, and was a desert without any inhabitants, exactly how the Prophet Jeremiah prophesied. (Jeremiah 51:37)

Wherever the fear of God vanishes, and the moral law of God is trampled, that is where the mountain of human technology falls into the dust from which it was built.

...Why are so many glorious civilizations buried deep beneath the earth that on top of them the plowers plow the ground not even realizing that their towers and bones are lying beneath the plowed ground?

How is it that out of all the glorious marble buildings of the Greeks nothing is left but the Acropolis?

How has the earth dared to conceal from the sun and the eyes of men the titanic temples in Balbekka and Egypt, as well as the glorious cities Egbata, Perzopolis, Tyre, Sidon, and Troy, that now cows peacefully graze on top of them, and pigs bellow, and shepherds build stables from the scattered marble? Why did the proud cities and temples and castles of King Montezuma vanish without a trace? Also the kingdoms of the very cultured Incas and Peruvians? What unmerciful hand rolled mounds of mud over all these human constructions, who by their strength and design, and beauty, could compete with the best modern constructions?

Why are there breaks and not continuity in the civilizations of mankind?

It is because none of them were pleasing to the One Holy God.

None of those buried civilizations were destroyed by time nor by the lack of solid technological construction, but by sin against holy faith and holy ethics.

Instability of ethics and not technology buried them all in deep darkness.

"And you O Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades." This prophecy of Christ, in the days when Capernaum shined with glory, like a fairytale city beside a lake, was fulfilled. It was so dreadfully fulfilled, that when a traveler finds himself among the thorns and snakes, where once the rich and proud city of Capernaum exalted itself, frightfully asks, " Is it possible that this loathsome place was once a dwelling place of men?"

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## Can One Be Saved Living in the World?

(Taken from "Semya Pravoslavuago Khristianina" - *The Family of an Orthodox Christian*, 3rd edition, reprinted by Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY, 1958)

It is not infrequent that pastors of the Church hear from you, O pious listeners, a reply such as:

"How can we be saved, O Father! If we lived in a monastery or in a desert, then it would be different. But here, sometimes even if one wants to pray and to think about one's sins, there is no time. Either someone calls you on the shop floor or we are occupied with domestic matters. Distant are we sinners from salvation! It is difficult for us to be saved in the world!"

But let me tell you, O pious listeners, that you are just as close to salvation as those who live in monasteries and in deserts. It is possible for you also to care for your souls, just as those who have dedicated their whole lives to the service of God alone. **For daily cares do not destroy us, but our own malicious will: Neither place nor priestly rank saves us, but faith and good works.** Of course, in the world there are more temptations and obstacles to salvation than in monasteries and hermitages -- but the more difficult the battle, the greater the victory. The more dangerous the feat, the shinier the crown. It is not difficult to fast when food and drink are scarce, but it is glorious to withhold from gluttony and drunkenness when food and drink are offered in great abundance. It is not particularly virtuous to not chase after money when one does not need to support a family, but it is remarkable to see a poor person who is not greatly concerned about money when he has a wife and children to support. It is not we, O children, who are the first in the world and it is not we who will be the last. How many there are like you, often even illiterate, who were saved and are in paradise -- in the House of our Heavenly Father. Have courage, struggle, do not give in to the temptations and trials of the world, do all things in accordance with the Laws of God and you will be saved.

One city dweller when speaking with St. Niphon described all the difficulties of salvation, just as you do to your pastors and said that to be saved it is necessary to go away to a monastery or a desert and become a monk, for in the world one cannot be saved.

"O Child," answered the Saint, "the place neither saves nor destroys, only our deeds save us or destroy us. There is no benefit from a holy place or a priestly rank for him who does not fulfill the commandments of the Lord.

"King Saul lived amidst royal splendor and perished; King David lived amidst the same splendor and earned a crown. Lot lived in the midst of the lawless in Sodom and was saved. Judas was numbered among the Apostles and inherited gehenna. Whoever says it is impossible to be saved having a wife and children only flatters his own foolishness and vices. Abraham had a wife and children, three hundred and eighty slaves, much gold and much silver, yet this did not prevent him from acquiring the name 'friend' of God. How many servants of the Church and desert lovers have been saved! How many noblemen and soldiers, how many tradesmen and landowners, how many in the midst of busy capital cities and secret chambers have been saved! But on the other hand, in those very same positions and under the same conditions, in the very same places at the very same time countless people have perished. From kings to slaves there are children of the Kingdom of Heaven and from kings to slaves there are children of death. O child of the Church of Christ, do not be attracted to the things of this world neither with your mind nor your heart. In all places can be found the salvation of our God and in all places one can fulfill His Holy Will. The Lord will embrace a righteous soul equally -- from a throne, from a plow, from an altar and from a battlefield. And so, if you live in the world do not become despondent. If you have sinned you can again draw near to Him through repentance. You must do what is given to you in your calling where the Lord has placed you. Be pious and love your fellow man and you will be saved. He who has left for the solitude of the desert, but not cast off his evil deeds and evil will, will surely perish."       ✘ ✘ ✘

## **Sin and Repentance** from "The Freedom of Morality" by Christos Yannaras

In the Orthodox Church, sin is identified not with transgression and guilt, but with failure and "missing the mark". The idea cultivated in western Christendom, which identified sin with legal transgression and salvation with individual justification and atonement, linked Christian ethics in people's minds with a host of psychological complexes offering no way of escape. The striving for individual justification and atonement leaves man still enslaved to his autonomous individuality, separated from the possibility of life and existence....The egocentric fear of transgression, and the tendency to gloss over sin or to reach an accommodation with it are extensions and consequences of the psychological guilt complex, and neither has any place in the spiritual climate of Orthodox ethics.....

In man's sin, in his failure to be what he is called to be, the Church sees an affirmation of the truth of the person: personhood is affirmed even in man's capacity to say no even to life and existence itself, to say no to God, although relationship and communion with Him are all that makes existence into a hypostasis of life. In man's sin, the Church sees the tragic adventure of human freedom....Sin is the measure of our awareness of separation from God, of separation from life – it is the measure of our conscious recognition of death... Thus sin becomes a starting point for repentance, metanoia. This word in Greek means "change of mind", in other words a change in man's whole attitude....

Christ's assumption of human nature is an event which brings the Church into being. What Christ has assumed is all of us who make up the body of the Church, burdened as we are with daily failure: and He shows us to be partakers in His life, in His own mode of existence....Participation in the theanthropic (divine-human) Body of Christ, in the existential unity of the communion of Saints, is not secured by individual merit or the objectivity recognized "virtues" of the individual: it is secured by repentance, by the new attitude of trust in God.....

Repentance is a change in our mode of existence: man ceases to trust in his own individuality. He realizes that existing as an individual, even a virtuous individual, does not save him from corruption and death, from his agonizing existential thirst for life. This is why he takes refuge in the Church, where he exists as someone loving and loved. He is loved by the Saints, who give him a "name" of personal distinctiveness and take him into the communion of their love despite his sinfulness; and he himself strives to love others despite their sinfulness, to live free from the necessities of his mortal nature. He struggles to overcome his individual resistances, his individual wishes and autonomous impulses, not in order to "improve himself" individually, but in order to measure up to the "frenzied love" of Christ and the Saints, to the preconditions required for personal life as opposed to natural survival.

## **The Church - The Ark of Salvation**

“Wayfarers, behold the ark! When the flood came, Noah was saved in a secure ark.

The flood of madness and sin continues incessantly. Therefore, the Lover of Mankind constructed the ark of salvation. Ask for His ark, and you will soon be entering it. Do not let yourselves be led astray by the multitude of variegated vessels, decorated and adorned on the outside. Ask about the power of the engine and about the skill of the captain. The most powerful engine and the most skilled helmsman are to be found in the ark of Christ. This is the all-seeing, all-powerful, Holy Spirit himself.

Neither let yourselves be led astray by those who invite you into their tiny and new rowboats, or those who offer you private rowboats just for yourselves. The journey is distant and the storms are dangerous.

Neither let yourselves be led astray by those who say that on the other side of the ocean there is no new land, no new world, and that there is no reason to prepare for a distant voyage. They invite you to go fishing on the shore. To such a little extent do they see or know. Truly, they are setting out for destruction, and are inviting you to destruction as well.

Do not allow yourselves to be deceived, but rather ask about His ark. Even though it may be less dazzling to the eyes than others, nevertheless it is strong and secure. Even though it does not have many variegated banners, except the sign of the cross, know that your life is safe aboard it.

And on a sea voyage the first and primary concern should be that the life of the passenger is safe. If you believe in Christ the Savior, O Christ-bearers, you also believe in His work. His work is the Church, the Ark of Salvation. Aboard it are sailing the hosts of the saved and of those being saved.

The Lord founded this work of His on faith, as strong as rock. Just as He said and prophesied: ‘On this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Matt. 16:18). And truly, up to the present day they have never prevailed, nor will they from this day forward.

The Church is called the body of Christ. ‘You are the body of Christ’ (Rom. 15:5; 1 Cor. 12:27). Therefore, there is only one Church. For there cannot be two bodies under one head, and Christ is called the head of the Church (Col. 1:18). Therefore: one Christ, one head, one body – one Church.”

(St. Nikolai Velimirovich, *The Faith of the Chosen People*, pp 69-71)