



## *Fire & Light*

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

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

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

Visit [stsymeon.com](http://stsymeon.com)

**October 9, 2016**

**St. Tikhon the Confessor,**

**Patriarch of Moscow,**

**Enlightener of North America (1925)**

**Holy Apostle James, Son of Alphaeus**



**This Week: Feast of St. Symeon**

**Tues Oct. 11 6:30pm Vespers – St. Symeon the New Theologian**

**Wed Oct. 12 10:00am Divine Liturgy – St. Symeon**

**Wed Oct. 12 6:30pm Inquirer's Class – Church Tour Night**

**O Holy Father  
Symeon!  
Pray unto God  
for us!**

Baptism – Saturday, October 15 - Child Mary Blake of Montgomery – 3:00pm  
(Mulders are Godparents)

**St. Symeon the New Theologian:**

† "If through fear of God you cut off your own will - inexplicably, for you do not know how this happens - God will give you His will. You will keep it indelibly in your heart, opening the eyes of your mind so that you recognize it; and you will be given the strength to fulfill it. The grace of the Holy Spirit operates these things: without it, nothing is accomplished."

**St. John Chrysostom ~ Homily VIII on I Corinthians 3:6-7**

"Let us then not merely keep hold of Christ, but let us be cemented to Him ... Let us cleave to Him by our works ... "

"He is 'the Head,' we are 'the body' ... He is 'a foundation', we are 'a building';  
He 'a vine', we 'branches'; He 'the Bridegroom' we 'the bride';  
He 'the Shepherd,' we 'the sheep,' He is 'the Way,' we 'they who walk therein.'  
Again, we are 'a temple,' He 'the indweller,' He the 'first-begotten,' we 'the  
brethren': He 'the Heir,' we 'the heirs together with Him' ... He 'the  
Resurrection,' we 'those who rise again'; He 'the light,' we 'the enlightened.'"

"All these indicate unity, and they allow no space, not even the slightest. For he who removes but to a little distance will go on till he has become very far distant." - St. John

**Hesychia**

† "People today are in need of Orthodox hesychia (silence), as defined by the holy Fathers and Orthodox theology. We live in an age of constant activity, gratification of the senses, uncontrolled imagination and speculations that wear people out. They are searching for inner stillness—hesychia—from the world of the senses and imagination, but also for theology—knowledge of God—to give their lives meaning."

~ Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Greece

## Pearls of the Holy Fathers {13-2}

This is the great work of a man: always to take the blame for his own sins before God and to expect temptation to his last breath.  
St. Anthony the Great

Who first cried that he should not be led to the punishment, afterward begins to cry more bitterly since he is delayed from the kingdom. For the mind contemplates what the choirs of angels, the very society of saints, and the majesty of inward vision of God might be like and it laments more being removed from these everlasting blessings than it cried earlier when it feared eternal punishment. So it happens that when the compunction of fear is perfect it draws the soul to the compunction of love.  
St. Gregory the Great

Those things which are of secondary importance, such as fastings, vigils, withdrawal from the world, meditation on Scripture, we ought to practice with a view to our main object, that is, purity of heart, which is charity, and we ought not on their account to drive away this main virtue.  
St. John Cassian

The trees which in winter nearly all look alike under the snow, blossom in spring. So shall it be with our bodies when they rise again. Now we do not clearly distinguish between good and evil, but in the resurrection all things will be clear.  
St. Tikhon of Voronezh

Go, make your thoughts like those of the evildoers who are in prison. For they are always asking when the magistrate will come, awaiting him in anxiety. Even so the monk ought to give himself at all times to accusing his own soul, saying, "Unhappy wretch that I am. How shall I stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ? What shall I say to Him in my defense?" If you give yourself continually to this, you may be saved.  
Abba Ammonas of Egypt

This alone is the fruit of the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, that we pass over into That which we receive, and bear with us in all things, both in our soul and in our body, Him in Whom we have died, been buried, and risen again.  
St. Leo the Great

A brother who shared a lodging with other brothers asked Abba Bessarion, "What should I do?" The Elder replied, "Keep silence and do not compare yourself with others." Abba Bessarion the Great

At the Last Judgment the righteous will be recognized only by their humility and their considering themselves worthless, and not by good deeds, even if they have done them. This is the true attitude.  
New Hieromartyr Barlaam of Russia

Death's awful mystery comes upon us suddenly, and soul and body are violently severed, divorced from their natural union by the will of God. What shall we do at that hour if we have not thought of it beforehand, if we have not been instructed concerning this eventuality and find ourselves unprepared?  
St. Nil Sorsky

Blessed is he who always has before his eyes that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 23:1), and keeps in mind that God is powerful to arrange for His servants as is pleasing to Him.  
St. Barsanuphius the Great



## **Glorification of St Tikhon the Confessor, Patriarch of Moscow, Enlightener of North America**

St Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and Apostle to America was born as Vasily

Ivanovich Belavin on January 19, 1865 into the family of Ioann Belavin, a rural priest of the Toropetz district of the Pskov diocese. His childhood and adolescence were spent in the village in direct contact with peasants and their labor. From his early years he displayed a particular religious disposition, love for the Church as well as rare meekness and humility.

When Vasily was still a boy, his father had a revelation about each of his children. One night, when he and his three sons slept in the hayloft, he suddenly woke up and roused them. He had seen his dead mother in a dream, who foretold to him his imminent death, and the fate of his three sons. She said that one would be unfortunate throughout his entire life, another would die young, while the third, Vasily, would be a great man. The prophecy of the dead woman proved to be entirely accurate in regard to all three brothers.

From 1878 to 1883, Vasily studied at the Pskov Theological Seminary. The modest seminarian was tender and affectionate by nature. He was fair-haired and tall of stature. His fellow students liked and respected him for his piety, brilliant progress in studies, and constant readiness to help comrades, who often turned to him for explanations of lessons, especially for help in drawing up and correcting numerous compositions. Vasily was called "bishop" and "patriarch" by his classmates.

In 1888, at the age of 23, Vasily Belavin graduated from the St Petersburg Theological Academy as a layman, and returned to the Pskov Seminary as an instructor of Moral and Dogmatic Theology. The whole seminary and the town of Pskov became very fond of him. He led an austere and chaste life, and in 1891, when he turned 26, he took monastic vows. Nearly the whole town gathered for the ceremony. He embarked on this new way of life

consciously and deliberately, desiring to dedicate himself entirely to the service of the Church. The meek and humble young man was given the name Tikhon in honor of St Tikhon of Zadonsk.

He was transferred from the Pskov Seminary to the Kholm Theological Seminary in 1892, and was raised to the rank of archimandrite. Archimandrite Tikhon was consecrated Bishop of Lublin, Poland on October 19, 1897, and returned to Kholm for a year as Vicar Bishop of the Kholm Diocese. Bishop Tikhon zealously devoted his energy to the establishment of the new vicariate. His attractive moral make-up won the general affection, of not only the Russian population, but also of the Lithuanians and Poles. On September 14, 1898, Bishop Tikhon was made Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska. As head of the Orthodox Church in America, Bishop Tikhon was a zealous laborer in the Lord's vineyard.

He did much to promote the spread of Orthodoxy, and to improve his vast diocese. He reorganized the diocesan structure, and changed its name from "Diocese of the Aleutians and Alaska" to "Diocese of the Aleutians and North America" in 1900. Both clergy and laity loved their Archpastor, and held him in such esteem that the Americans made Archbishop Tikhon an honorary citizen of the United States.

On May 22, 1901, he blessed the cornerstone for St Nicholas Cathedral in New York, and was also involved in establishing other churches. On November 9, 1902, he consecrated the church of St Nicholas in Brooklyn for the Syrian Orthodox community. Two weeks later, he consecrated St Nicholas Cathedral in NY.

In 1905, the American Mission was made an Archdiocese, and St Tikhon was elevated to the rank of Archbishop. He had two vicar bishops: Bishop Innocent (Pustynsky) in Alaska, and St Raphael (Hawaweeny) in Brooklyn to assist him in administering his large, ethnically diverse diocese. In June of 1905, St Tikhon gave his blessing for the establishment of St Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, PA.

In 1907, he returned to Russia, and was appointed to Yaroslavl, where he quickly won

the affection of his flock. They came to love him as a friendly, communicative, and wise archpastor. He spoke simply to his subordinates, never resorting to a peremptory or overbearing tone. When he had to reprimand someone, he did so in a good-natured, sometimes joking manner, which encouraged the person to correct his mistakes.

When St Tikhon was transferred to Lithuania on December 22, 1913, the people of Yaroslavl voted him an honorary citizen of their town. After his transfer to Vilnius, he did much in terms of material support for various charitable institutions. There too, his generous soul and love of people clearly manifested themselves. World War I broke out when His Eminence was in Vilnius. He spared no effort to help the poor residents of the Vilnius region who were left without a roof over their heads or means of subsistence as a result of the war with the Germans, and who flocked to their archpastor in droves.

After the February Revolution and formation of a new Synod, St Tikhon became one of its members. On June 21, 1917, the Moscow Diocesan Congress of clergy and laity elected him as their ruling bishop. He was a zealous and educated archpastor, widely known even outside his country.

On August 15, 1917, a local council was opened in Moscow, and Archbishop Tikhon was raised to the dignity of Metropolitan, and then elected as chairman of the council. The council had as its aim to restore the life of Russian Orthodox Church on strictly canonical principles, and its primary concern was the restoration of the Patriarchate. All council members would select three candidates, and then by drawing lots would reveal the will of God. The council members chose three candidates: Archbishop Anthony of Kharkov, the wisest, Archbishop Arseny of Novgorod, the strictest, and Metropolitan Tikhon of Moscow, the kindest of the Russian hierarchs.

On November 5, following the Divine Liturgy and a Moleben in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, a monk removed one of the three ballots from the ballot box, which stood before the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God. Metropolitan Vladimir

of Kiev announced Metropolitan Tikhon as the newly elected Patriarch. St Tikhon did not change after becoming the primate of the Russian Orthodox Church. In accepting the will of the council, Patriarch Tikhon referred to the scroll that the Prophet Ezekiel had to eat, on which was written, "Lamentations, mourning, and woe." He foresaw that his ministry would be filled with affliction and tears, but through all his suffering, he remained the same accessible, unassuming, and kindly person.

All who met St Tikhon were surprised by his accessibility, simplicity and modesty. His gentle disposition did not prevent him from showing firmness in Church matters, however, particularly when he had to defend the Church from her enemies. He bore a very heavy cross. He had to administer and direct the Church amidst wholesale church disorganization, without auxiliary administrative bodies, in conditions of internal schisms and upheavals by various adherents of the rebel "Living Church" renovationists.

The situation was complicated by external circumstances: the change of the political system, by the accession to power of the godless regime, by hunger, and civil war. This was a time when Church property was being confiscated by the Bolsheviks, when clergy were subjected to court trials and persecutions, and Christ's Church endured repression. News of this came to the Patriarch from all ends of Russia. His exceptionally high moral and religious authority helped him to unite the scattered and enfeebled flock. At a crucial time for the Church, his unblemished name was a bright beacon pointing the way to the truth of Orthodoxy. In his messages, he called on people to fulfill the commandments of Christ, and to attain spiritual rebirth through repentance. His irreproachable life was an example to all.

In order to save thousands of lives and to improve the general position of the Church, the Patriarch took measures to prevent clergy from making purely political statements. On September 25, 1919, when the civil war was at its height, he issued a message to the clergy urging them to stay away from political struggle. The summer of 1921 brought a severe famine to the Volga region. In August, Patriarch Tikhon

issued a message to the Russian people and to the people of the world, calling them to help famine victims. He gave his blessing for voluntary donations of church valuables, which were not directly used in liturgical services. However, on February 23, 1922, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (communists) published a decree making all valuables subject to confiscation.

According to the 73rd Apostolic Canon, such actions were regarded as sacrilege, and the Patriarch could not approve such total confiscation, especially since many doubted that the valuables would be used to combat famine. This forcible confiscation aroused popular indignation everywhere. Nearly two thousand trials were staged all over Russia, and more than ten thousand believers were shot. The Patriarch's message was viewed as sabotage, for which he was imprisoned from April 1922 until June 1923.

His Holiness, Patriarch Tikhon did much on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church during the crucial time of the so-called Renovationist schism. He showed himself to be a faithful servant and custodian of the undistorted precepts of the true Orthodox Church. He was the living embodiment of Orthodoxy, which was unconsciously recognized even by enemies of the Church, who called its members "Tikhonites."

When Renovationist priests and hierarchs repented and returned to the Church, they were met with tenderness and love by St Tikhon. This, however, did not represent any deviation from his strictly Orthodox policy. "I ask you to believe me that I will not come to agreement or make concessions which could lead to the loss of the purity and strength of Orthodoxy," the Patriarch said in 1924.

Being a good pastor, who devoted himself entirely to the Church's cause, he called upon the clergy to do the same: "Devote all your energy to preaching the Word of God and the truth of Christ, especially today, when unbelief and atheism are audaciously attacking the Church of Christ. May the God of peace and love be with all of you!"

It was extremely painful and hard for the Patriarch's loving, responsive heart to endure all the Church's misfortunes. Upheavals in and outside the Church, the Renovationist schism, his primatial labors, his concern for the organization and tranquility of Church life, sleepless nights and heavy thoughts, his confinement that lasted more than a year, the spiteful and wicked baiting of his enemies, and the unrelenting criticism sometimes even from the Orthodox, combined to undermine his strength and health.

In 1924, Patriarch Tikhon began to feel unwell. He checked into a hospital, but would leave it on Sundays and Feast Days in order to conduct services. On Sunday, April 5, 1925, he served his last Liturgy, and died two days later. On March 25/April 7, 1925 the Patriarch received Metropolitan Peter and had a long talk with him. In the evening, the Patriarch slept a little, then he woke up and asked what time it was. When he was told it was 11:45 P.M., he made the Sign of the Cross twice and said, "Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee." He did not have time to cross himself a third time.

Almost a million people came to say farewell to the Patriarch. The large cathedral of the Donskoy Monastery in Moscow could not contain the crowd, which overflowed the monastery property into the square and adjacent streets. St Tikhon, the eleventh Patriarch of Moscow, was primate of the Russian Church for seven and a half years.

On September 26/October 9, 1989, the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church glorified Patriarch Tikhon and numbered him among the Saints. For nearly seventy years, St Tikhon's relics were believed lost, but in February 1992, they were discovered in a concealed place in the Donskoy Monastery.

It would be difficult to imagine the Russian Orthodox Church without Patriarch Tikhon during those years. He did so much for the Church and for the strengthening of the Faith itself during those difficult years of trial. Perhaps the Saint's own words can best sum up his life: "May God teach every one of us to strive for His truth, and for the good of the Holy Church, rather than something for our own sake." ✠ ✠ ✠



**ST. AMBROSE of OPTINA**  
(1812-1891)  
FEAST DAY: 10 October



St. Ambrose is another saint who participated in the spiritual revival that was initiated by St. Paisius (Velichkovsky). The grandson of a priest, St. Ambrose had been close to the Church from childhood. He was well-educated, intellectually gifted, and was expected to hold a significant position in public life. But St. Ambrose's position was to be a humble monk, an Elder (*Starets*) at the Optina Monastery. It was the monastery (or hermitage) that contributed so much to the Russian spiritual revival, both through its printing of spiritual books, including the *Philokalia*, and through the leadership of its Elders. The 'Elder' - a spiritual guide who reveals God's will to those who turn to him for advice - plays a major role in Russian spirituality. It was St. Ambrose who was the primary model for Dostoevsky's "*Starets Zosima*" (Elder Zosima) in his great novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. In his almost 44 years as an Elder, Father Ambrose welcomed to his cell thousands of people from all stations of life, who came to him for guidance, including some of the noted public figures of the times, including Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, as well as poor, simple peasants. No matter who they were, they were Father Ambrose's beloved children, and he taught them all about the necessity of cultivating humility, patience, repentance, forgiveness and non-judgmental love as the foundations of spiritual life. He guided those who came to him to not give in to grief, sorrow and pain, but to see that problems in their lives were opportunities to grow and cultivate that which they lacked. As with all spiritual insight, it arose from his own inner struggles, especially with 45 years of sickness.

The future Wonder-worker was 27 when he arrived at Optina, fulfilling a vow he had made. For 7 years he was trained in humility and obedience by the first 2 Optina Elders, and was ordained priest. At the age of 34 he was appointed a Father Confessor. He then became so sick, he nearly died, and had to retire. He survived, but was sickly for the rest of his life. Two years later, he was able to start receiving the pilgrims who came to Optina for advice, and after another 12 years, when the second Elder died, Father Ambrose assumed the heavy burden of Chief Elder. Within two years, he was so weak, that he could no longer attend Divine Services, nor leave his cell all winter. Nevertheless, for almost 30 more years he continued to receive the people who came to him every day, from early morn till late at night. His heart was so filled with love for all, especially the most needy, that he solicited contributions from the wealthy to provide for the sick, orphans, widows and homeless, who were especially close to his heart. Never giving in to his pain and sickness, he allowed God's strength to fill him in his weakness, and he was given many spiritual gifts. He is a model for us of how to patiently accept the cross that we are given, and use it as a means of achieving inner transformation.

## **On Migrants and a Biblical Paradigm**

Archpriest Andrei Tkachev, Pravoslavie.ru

***“The Muslims of the 21st century have an accusation against Christians of the 21st century. The essence of this accusation is simple: Where is your sanctity?”***

From the Western Europeans' point of view, migrants from Muslim countries are unfortunate people who should be grateful to them, the Europeans, till their dying day for allowing them to live in such an Old World, manicured place. But from the Muslim migrants' point of view, Europeans are for the large part irreparably godless people, who for some incomprehensible reason have at their disposal unheard-of worldly goods. The divergence of views is very serious. The former say, “We take pity on you, and you should be grateful to us.” And the latter say (at least many of them do): “We hold you in contempt and are certain that people like you should not live.”

... On one side, the side of the indigenous Europeans, this will be a struggle for vague and lifeless liberal values that are tasteless as egg whites (tolerance, gender, phantom freedom). On the other side will be a concrete war waged by bearers of specific religious ideas for the triumph of their worldview (God permits, God forbids. That's all there is to it!). And, incidentally, there is a very clearly analogous biblical story for this modern phenomenon.

During the time of Joseph, the Jews entered Egypt as a large pastoral family trying to save themselves from famine. Over the next several centuries they grew to the scale of a large nation, no longer herding sheep but now enslaved and occupied with construction. (If you look at the ethnicity of the workers at Moscow construction sites you'll see yet another similar trait<sup>1</sup>). Then came the Exodus and wandering in the desert, during which the Jews became no longer shepherds or builders. They were wayfarers and warriors. Coming out of Egypt they died either as a punishment for complaining, or from natural causes. New people were born to replace the dead. These were destined to enter into Canaan. The people who occupied the Promised Land during the time of Joshua, son of Nun, had been torn from cultural creativity and sedentary life. They did

not build, nor sow, nor reap harvests, nor make crafts. They only travelled and fought wars. They were several generations of people who had completely forgotten what it means to work the land or to build!

Meanwhile they were foreordained to settle into lands where there were already houses and roads, orchards and vineyards, pools and wells. That is, the dusty pilgrim and yesterday's wanderer was willed by God to possess lands on which the plowman and vineyard keeper, smith and weaver, doctor and merchant had already lived for centuries.

True, the Jews had something that the Canaanites didn't. The Jews had a religious law received on Mt. Sinai; they had the commandment to fear the Lord throughout their days and to strive to observe everything that was written in the book of the Law. But the Canaanites had burgeoning depravity, just as sophisticated as it was vile. They had ritual prostitution, both female and male. There were sacrifices to demons, a pagan priestly caste, and festivals celebrated by orgies. They had bestiality, fortune telling, and communication with the dead. Shady groves were places of ritual debauchery, and in the valleys they could incinerate infants. They had everything that the Lord told the Jews about in the Scriptures: “Do not act according to the customs of the peoples in those lands. Do not repeat their abominations, for because of these abominations I am driving them from your face. Do not make drawings and cuts on your bodies. Do not call upon the dead. Have no sorcerers amongst you. Do not lie with a man as with a woman. Do not copulate with animals. If you shall do these things, and learn what you should not, then I will drive you also from this land flowing with milk and honey. Fear the Lord. And now go forth and take possession of the land, live in houses that you did not build. Eat the fruits that you did not plant.” The formerly Christian Old World is risking a repeat of this picture from sacred history in certain clearly drawn traits.

... For all the mistakes and errors the migrants' Muslim faith might have, by far not all of what they believe is false. What is false can only be seen in comparison with the Gospels. But in

comparison with the liberal catechesis and moral situation of the modern West, we see the falseness of the latter. The Muslim looks preferable. The Muslim believes in the future life, in heaven and hell. This is something unseen for him until the time of its reality. The European laughs everywhere at such "archaism". For the Muslim the body is what will resurrect on the Last Day. The body must not be defiled while alive or burned after death. For the European it is the other way around: Debauchery during one's lifetime is the norm, and after death—throw it into the fire with no thought for the resurrection. The Muslim does not value his own biological life above all, and he especially doesn't value the biological life of his ideological opponent. Above all for him are the laws of the Most High—as they have been explained to him. Therefore he is not afraid to die, or to kill. The post-Christian European knows no other values besides biological existence. Meeting face to face with a culture that looks differently at death is threatening and unbearable for the post-Christian European. So he loses the battle halfway down the road to this meeting.

Well, and the further it goes the worse it gets. Next come the issues of gender, childlessness, abortions, nudist beaches, and shameless women—everything that evokes hatred and religious wrath in the migrants. Yes, they came to a foreign country. They are "newcomers". But forget it. Enough. They've already arrived. "It is forbidden to sunbathe without a bathing suit in front of other people," they say as a noisy crowd of them arrives at the nudist beach with firearms. Now we have an argument going on with a deaf person. The European raises his eyebrow indignantly and says, "How dare you try to teach us? After all, we gave you shelter." At which Yusif or Ali reply unperturbed, "You are doing what is forbidden. You have no faith, no shame, no conscience. You didn't simply invite us here as guests. First you bombed our cities. Just wait and see—we will teach you yet to honor God." And no matter how sorry we may feel for Kurt or Fritz, we have to recognize some truth in Yusif and Ali's words.

... The situation can only be cured if Europe returns to its ancient Christian religiousness. Victory has to take place in the spirit. But this only antidote has to be recognized as

impossible. Europe does not have the strength for a Christian renaissance.

... The Muslims of the 21st century have an accusation against Christians of the 21st century. The essence of this accusation is simple: Where is your sanctity? Where are prayer and fasting? Where is respect for elders and a wife's obedience to her husband? Where is your youth: in smoke-filled clubs or in the gym? Where is compassion? Not just charity but compassion? Where is your knowledge of your own history? And if we are silent with shame in reply, they will say, "Look at us." They will show us their better traits, be silent about the bad ones, and we will fall into deeper silence. So we mustn't be silent. Our answer must be living and religious.

~ Archpriest Andrei Tkachev

=====

### **Our indifference to God's blessings**

"Although the Good God gives us: abundant blessings, acts always for our own good, and has made everything to be of service to us and sacrificed for us --- from plants to animals, whether big or small; and even though God Himself sacrificed His life to redeem man, many of us remain indifferent and wound Him with our great ingratitude and insensitivity. And all of this, even though He has given our conscience as an inheritance together with His other blessings." - St. Paisios of Mt. Athos

"To our shame, we must admit that in many Orthodox Christians the Orthodox Faith is not only absent in their heart, but it is also not on their tongue; among them it has vanished entirely, or has been turned into total indifference with regard to any religion whatever - Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish, Mohammedan, or pagan. We hear that one may please God in every religion, i.e., that every religion is supposedly pleasing to God, and that falsehood and truth, righteousness and unrighteousness are matters about which God does not care." - St. John of Kronstadt

My brothers, only the Orthodox Faith purifies and sanctifies human nature corrupted by sin, renews the decayed, enlightens the darkened, heals those wounded by sin, warms the frozen, and unites those separated from God. (*The Rush to Embrace by Fr. Alexey Young, p. 86*)