

THE SOWER OF GOOD SEEDS.



## *Fire & Light* St. Symeon Orthodox Church

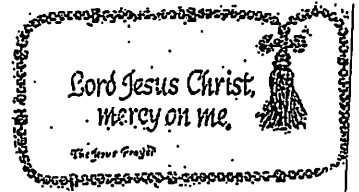
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**October 23, 2016**  
**Holy Apostle James,**  
**Brother of the Lord**

Find a place in your heart  
and speak there with the Lord.  
It is the Lord's reception room.  
Everyone who meets the Lord  
meets Him there. He has fixed  
no other place for meeting  
souls.

~ St. Theophan the Recluse



† Tues. October 25, 6:30p ~ Inquirer's Class (Final in Series)

† Wed. October 26, 6:30pm Akathist to St. Xenia

### Sleep Aids

Always let the remembrance of death and the Prayer of Jesus, being of single phrase, go to sleep with you and get up with you; for you will find nothing to equal these aids during sleep.

~ St. John Climacus

### On How Grace Operates in the Mysteries ~ St. Nicholas Cabasilas (1391)

The Holy Spirit grants to those who partake of the sacred offerings the remission of sins of their sins. "Let not this grace be removed from these offerings because of my sins." There are two ways in which grace operates in the precious offerings; first, by grace they are sanctified, and secondly, by grace we are sanctified through them.

The working of grace upon the offerings — the first of which we spoke — cannot be invalidated by any human evil. Since the consecration of the offerings is not the work of human virtue, it cannot be hindered in any way by the wickedness of men.

But the second, **the working of grace within us, demands our co-operation**, and as a result, our negligence can impede it. In other words, grace will sanctify us through the sacred offerings if it finds us ready and fit for sanctification; if it should, on the other hand, find us unprepared, not only do we reap no benefit, but we suffer grave harm and loss. (*A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, 34)

### On Anger

† Never correct someone with anger, but only with humility and sincere love. When you see anger ahead, forget about correcting for a moment. When peace has returned, then your powers of discernment are functioning properly and then you can speak beneficially. Since man was created rational and gentle, his is corrected far better with love and gentleness. An angry and irritable man is not accepted into the Kingdom of God even if he raises the dead. Therefore, suppress anger with all of your might, and you will find it weaker the next time.

~ Elder Joseph the Hesychast (1959)

† We should try to have good thoughts which will radiate from us. A meek and humble person is always very pleasant to be with, for he emanates peace and warmth. That person may not say a single word, yet we rejoice to be in his presence.

~Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica (2003)

## ***This and That***

➤ ***On Rioting:*** This is what happens in a world without fathers. When there is no discipline, adulthood is perpetual adolescence... The blog Handle's Haus has a very stark and disturbing take on this phenomenon:

"The problem is that while "poverty" does not cause crime, idle hands are the devil's workshop, and a heavy-concentration of young men who are either not willing or able (or both) to hold down a job and get busy raising a family is a well-established recipe for disaster that was known to the ancients since time immemorial. This problem exists in our pockets of crime, no one has any good and politically-palpable idea of what to do about it, and the accelerating three legged stool of immigration, automation, and globalization is making it increasingly worse."

Handle goes on to blame boredom for the drug war and says mass incarceration is your only option when dealing with a generation that's never known discipline. It's not a revolution. It's fatherless kids looking for something to do.

Gavin McInnes

➤ The creep of moral relativism in America has been steady for many decades, increasing in speed to the point that the "slouching toward Gomorrah" has become a sprint. The notion that there is objective truth or absolute morality has been universally panned to the point that everything is tolerated except standards of right and wrong. "Everyone decides for himself what is right, especially when it comes to sex" is the mantra of today's culture.

For years, Christians in particular have been attacked and silenced as they've tried to challenge the immorality that is pervasive in today's society. When they tell people casual sex is wrong, they get the inevitable, "You have no right to tell me what I can or can't do." If they oppose sexual immorality in any form, including adultery, they're maligned as sanctimonious puritans by lovers of libertinism.

How ironic, then, that a culture which rejects moral standards has suddenly become so pure and pristine, sitting in judgment of someone they deem too immoral ...

As a logical person, I have to ask these paragons of newly found virtue where this standard by which they've judged is found? If morality is relative to each individual—a purely subjective experience—by what standard are they judging? Obviously, in such a secular climate, there can't even be a "standard."

Why should anyone listen to people who out of one side of their mouths declare the death of objective moral standards yet out of the other condemn someone for violating objective moral standards?

Those who are complaining today have no basis for their moral outrage. That's because their secular amoral worldview rejects any basis for that moral judgment. Any argument they make against "immorality" is stolen, or at least borrowed for expediency, from a religious worldview they have soundly rejected.

The fact of the matter is that Judeo-Christian ethics have been driven from our culture and declared a dinosaur from an ancient past. Right and wrong, virtue, morality, goodness—these have been rejected in pop culture, our education system, the media, and politics. We have been told repeatedly that character doesn't matter because everyone's values are different. All that matters is an ideological agenda and the power that goes with it.

– Denise McCallister

➤ It is particularly galling to see the selective resurrection of Victorian values from the same crowd that has been pushing transgender locker rooms on the world, in an effort to destroy the last shred of girls' innate sexual modesty.

– Heather MacDonald

➤ They aren't outraged because they're decent. They're using our decency as a pawn in their quest for political power.

– Rebecca Teti

✘ The Orthodox Christian life is deeply radical. It is so radical that most, especially me, shy away from the implications and requirements on the way we live. God forgive me. ~ Internet comment

## **The Holy Fathers on Thoughts (II)**

*Where do thoughts come from? What to do with them?*

### **St. Paisios on Negative Thoughts**

† A married man came to me to discuss the problems he was facing with his wife and how her behavior has affected his thoughts. I immediately started finding excuses for his wife's behavior. In the end, I told him that he should glorify God for the wife He gave him, and he is the one responsible for destroying their loving relationship. I made him question his behavior and love his wife again, by convincing him that he is in the wrong, and that he should get rid of all his negative thoughts. I did exactly the same thing with his wife, when she came to see me. I also scolded her, so both of them got rid of their negative thoughts, and ended up loving each other again. Moreover, they also understood why I scolded them, as they realized that my only aim was to bring them back together."

† "Thoughts are like airplanes flying in the air. If you ignore them, there is no problem. If you pay attention to them, you create an airport inside you and permit them to land!"

† "Whenever the mind is carried away and sinks down into self-conceit, whenever it imagines that it can do something on its own in this struggle, then the Unseen Grace which illumines it is immediately taken away and it is soon left empty. Straightaway it receives the proof of its own weakness, for the passions hurl themselves upon it like wild dogs seeking to devour it. It is wholly at a loss and, having no where to run for safety, it takes refuge through humility in the Lord Who has the power to save it."

**St. Symeon the New Theologian**

† If a man wants to realize his weakness from the actual experience of his life, let him, I do not say for many days but even for one day, observe his thoughts, words and actions - what he thought, what he said, what he did. He will undoubtedly find that the greater part of his thoughts, words and actions were sinful, wrong, foolish and bad. This experiment will make him understand in practice how inharmonious and weak he is in himself. And if he sincerely wishes himself well, this understanding will make him feel how foolish it is to expect anything good from himself or to rely on himself alone.

**Unseen Warfare: Chapt. 2**

† A contemporary father used to tell us: If we put a young child in a pastry shop situated at the top of a ravine and open all the doors, there will be no danger that the child will go out of the shop and be killed, because his attention will be on the sweets. It is the same for the mind. It stays attached to what is sweetest to it. For this reason we should constantly exercise our minds spiritually.

**Athonite Gerontikon**

*On Worry:*

† If the head of a family is burdened with cares and worries about the future of his family, he will have no peace. All the members of the family will feel his unrest. They will know that something is wrong, but they will not know exactly what. We can see how much our thoughts influence others.

Misunderstandings in the family also happen because of our thoughts. ~ **Elder Thaddeus of Serbia**

† A man who wishes to test the evil demons and to gain experience in discrimination of their wiles must observe his thoughts and notice on what they lay emphasis and what they let pass, which of them and in what circumstances is particularly active, which follows which, and which of them do not come together; and he must seek from Christ Jesus to be delivered of it all. The demons are very angry with those who actively practice virtues with understanding (bringing all things to light), for they wish 'to shoot secretly at the upright in heart' (Ps. 10:3).

**Abba Evagrius the Monk**

## **The Holy Fathers on Thoughts (II, p.2)**

† An Athonite elder said, "Let us build a factory of good thoughts. If a factory produces bullets and we feed it with iron, it will make bullets. If the factory makes chalices and we feed it with gold, it will produce gold chalices. If we feed it with iron, it will make chalices of iron. Whatever thoughts we put in our minds, that is what we will get.

**Athonite Gerontikon**

† At every moment we need to have wakefulness, recollected thoughts, and a careful watch on the intellect. This applies above all when we stand before God in spiritual ministry, speaking in a hidden way, in prayer, with God's majesty: at such a time it is appropriate that we stand with a wakeful and attentive mind, combining a sense of awe and trembling with the spiritual fervor of joy and deep love.

**The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life**

† Be attentive to the thoughts of the mind. If some evil thought passes through you, do not get upset, for it is not the transient thoughts of your mind that the knowledge of the Lord of all observes, rather He looks at the depths of the mind to see if you take pleasure in that evil thought which resides there; for hateful thoughts float over the surface of the mind, but it is the senses that are lower down which can chase away hateful thoughts, which the Lord of all examines. He does not judge what just passes over the mind, but rather the thoughts that are lower down than those hateful ones, namely those which appear in the depths of the mind, which can drive them away with its hidden hand. For He does not pardon the thoughts which spring up from the depth of the mind, for it is they which should be chasing away those which pass over the surface of the mind; He judges those thoughts which have a passage into the heart.

**John the Solitary, in The Syriac Fathers**

† Disciplined piety feeds the soul on holy thoughts. What can be more blessed than to imitate on earth the chorus of the angels; to begin the opening day with prayer, honoring the Creator with hymns and songs; and when the sun is up to turn to work, always accompanied by prayer, and to season one's labors with singing? Cheerfulness and freedom from sorrow are the gifts which the soul received from the singing of hymns.

**St. Basil the Great: Letters**

† ...If evil thoughts have not been uprooted from the heart, they are bound to manifest themselves in evil actions.

**St. Philotheos of Sinai**

† Try to make your intellect deaf and dumb during prayer, you will then be able to pray.

**Evagrius the Solitary, "On Prayer," in the Philokalia**

† Do not befoul your intellect by clinging to thoughts filled with anger and sensual desire. Otherwise you will lose your capacity for pure prayer and fall victim to the demon of listlessness.

**St. Maximos the Confessor (First Century on Love no.49)**

† Everywhere and always God is with us, near to us and in us. But we are not always with Him, since we do not remember Him; and because we do not remember Him we allow ourselves many things which we would not permit if we did remember. Take upon yourself this task -- to make a habit of such recollection. Make yourself a rule always to be with the Lord, keeping your mind in your heart, and do not let your thoughts wander; as often as they stray, turn them back again and keep them at home in the closet of your heart, and delight in converse with the Lord.

**St. Theophan the Recluse**

† Has some good thought come to you? Have you felt some good impulse or inclination in your heart? Stop! Check it with the Gospel.

**St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov)**

# Do You Care Too Much?

Fr. Stephen Freeman

What do you care about? Are there issues and situations that trouble you and serve as emotional triggers? Do you care about things that are beyond your control? Does this make you feel powerless and frustrated? It is more than possible that you care too much. More than that, it is possible that caring itself is distorted in our culture. To the point, "caring" can easily be sinful if it is rightly understood. The Christian life is not defined by caring.

The Broadway musical, *Hair*, had a song about "caring" that captures the plaintive feelings and ironies of modern culture. Three Dog Night turned it into a hit:

How can people be so heartless? How can people be so cruel? Easy to be hard, Easy to be cold.

How can people have no feelings? How can they ignore their friends? Easy to be proud.

Easy to say no.

Especially people who care about strangers, Who care about evil and social injustice, Do you only care about the bleeding crowd? How about a needy friend?...

A recent television news conversation included a reporter haranguing a guest for not caring about a particular problem. The guest kept bringing the conversation back to the question of "what would you actually suggest we do" (the problem was an intractable issue that did not admit of a solution). But the reporter was deeply exercised that the guest somehow "didn't care."

Caring is the popular word for "sentiment." Sentiment is simply a set of feelings we might have about any particular thing. Like anger, sentiment is only useful if it is geared towards action. Anger is a proper emotion, quite short-lived when it is healthy, that triggers our adrenal glands, jarring the body into action. As a long-term emotion, anger is deeply destructive. Sentiment, in its popular form, is almost useless. It carries just about as much real information as preferences in fashion and the like. But it is often used to substitute for actual moral goodness. This is destructive in a manner similar to long-term anger.

Sentiment became a "thing" somewhere in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a *modern* phenomenon. The 18<sup>th</sup> century had been a time in which reason was exalted over all things, including feelings. Emotional displays were discouraged. In the Protestant religious world of Europe, Church became a dry exercise in moral instruction. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a reactionary swing in the other direction in which feelings came to predominate. The great revival movements through the first half of that century were utterly centered in feelings. Art as well came to be thought of as something that should provoke feelings. The dry precision of Bach's classical compositions can seem almost mechanical when compared to the extremes of Beethoven's romanticism. In the world of popular culture, Beethoven won the argument long ago. We are no longer a culture of intellect, but a society of sentiments.

**For the believer, this becomes a very important question. We are nowhere commanded to "feel" anything.**

**The love for neighbor that Christ demands is not measured by how intensely we think or feel. It is a matter of what we do. It is not that emotion has no place in our life, but it was never meant to occupy a central position. In strong measure, it is almost always delusional.**

When someone tells me that they “feel strongly” about something, I understand what they mean. On the one hand, it means that their mind has become captive to a set of sentiments. On the other hand, it might very well mean that they actually do nothing with regard to what they “care” about. Modern culture is filled with people who “care” about all kinds of things. Some of the things they “care” about are even worthy of care. But “caring” is only a measure of an internal, subjective experience. It is in no way an indicator of what you might do in your life.

I have noticed over the years that almost everybody has an opinion (a set of “feelings”) about money, particularly what *other people* do with their money. Only the briefest excursion onto social media will reveal all kinds of “feelings” about money (and everything else). It is very easy to find people who believe that there are those with too much money who should give it to the poor. But this in no way indicates that the person involved actually does anything about the poor themselves. They may even have a sense of identity tied up with caring for the poor. But that will again not be an indicator of their level of action.

Many will describe such a situation as “hypocrisy” – claiming to care about something but doing nothing. Perhaps it

is. But this is not a helpful analysis of what is taking place. The issue isn't simply that we care and do nothing – it's that we place such value in the notion of caring itself. What does “caring” mean?

Emotions are good things. Happiness, sadness, empathy, etc. are all extremely important in the human life. However, there is a place within our experience that is the primary location of caring: the passions. The passions are habits of our soul and body that are largely experienced in a passive manner. We do not *choose* them – we *experience* them. Experience is perhaps not a strong enough word. We not only experience them, we often cannot help but experience them. In their most destructive forms, we can be *enslaved* to our passions. Many (if not most) of our desires are passion-driven. We not only want to eat, we want to eat too much and we want to eat the wrong things. And the *wanting* can be overwhelming. These are not experiences rooted in decisions. Indeed, we discover that try as we might, our choices often have little power over our passions.

Our sentiments work very much in this manner. Many of the things that we feel about most deeply, lie somewhere outside the realm of our choices. Indeed, many times we are unable to remember how we came to feel so strongly about something. We often experience such sentiments in a *shared* manner – having a sense of identity and belonging attached to how we feel. We like people who *feel* the same way as we do. We may even think (or feel) that people who do not feel as we do are somehow lacking or corrupt. Our sentiments are extremely vulnerable to

manipulation. *And this is their deep value in our culture.*

We are living as consumers and users. It's not always clear for whose sake it is that we live as consumers, though I suggest that one should follow the money. We should understand that it really doesn't matter what we consume, so long as we consume. And just as the tracking algorithms that currently follow our behavior (and therefore send us more of what it is we like), so our affinities and sentiments are tracked as well. And our sentiments are used, as is our consumption.

Our sentiments *can* be used because we experience them, not as a matter of freedom, but as a matter of the passions. Once I engage something on the level of sentiment, I can only free myself from its movements with real effort. Various "loyalties" in our lives: sports, politics, brand names, causes, etc., become the fulcrums from which our consumption is leveraged. But, just as the lyric from *Hair* complains, our sentiments generally result in nothing more than a set of feelings and a set of buying habits. They are little more than the emotional noise of a consumer culture.

The Christian life is not supposed to be lived without feeling. But having the right emotions, in the right manner and for the right reason is a very difficult thing. And this spiritual life of the emotions is made all the more difficult by cultural assumptions that tell us that our "feelings" (sentiments) are important, and that they just happen; and that they are actually the result of freedom and decisions.

If you are passionate about an issue, ask yourself why. And don't just answer, "Because it's important!" Such an answer only means that your passion is really strong.

Ask yourself, "What would happen if I wasn't here to care about this?" (Because you won't be).

...We have come to believe that we are responsible for all things and that it is our task to control them. We have also come to believe and accept that unless we feel strongly about some things, then they will be neglected or ignored and the important outcomes that we desire (or feel so strongly about) will not happen.

This, of course, is a formula for anxiety: I should care greatly about things over which I am powerless. It is little wonder that modern people are anxious and angry. And those who would have power over us need do nothing more than make us feel that we are heard and that they are doing something important. We'll send them our money, or buy what they are selling, etc.

This is a sham existence. **We are not measured by how we feel about things. What judgment we find from God is only about what we have done or not done. It doesn't matter if you "care about" the poor and are "deeply committed to just wages," etc. It does matter what you do with your neighbor. Share what you have, be kind and forgive everyone for everything.**

**By God's grace, our emotions can be healed over time and not be subject to every emotional fashion and cause that blows our way. God give us grace!**

## **Apostle James, the Brother of the Lord ~ October 23**

Holy Apostle James, the Brother of God (Adelphotheos) was the son of Righteous Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos (December 26). From his early years James was a Nazarene, a man especially dedicated to God. The Nazarenes vowed to preserve their virginity, to abstain from wine, to refrain from eating meat, and not to cut their hair. The vow of the Nazarenes symbolized a life of holiness and purity, commanded formerly by the Lord for all Israel. When the Savior began to teach the nation about the Kingdom of God, St James believed in Christ and became His apostle. He was chosen as the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

St James presided over the Council of Jerusalem and his word was decisive (Acts 15). In his thirty years as bishop, St James converted many of the Jews to Christianity. Annoyed by this, the Pharisees and the Scribes plotted together to kill St James. They led the saint up on the pinnacle of the Jerusalem Temple and asked what he thought of Jesus. The holy Apostle began to bear witness that Christ is the Messiah, which was not the response the Pharisees were expecting. Greatly angered, the Jewish teachers threw him off the roof. The saint did not die immediately, but gathering his final strength, he prayed to the Lord for his enemies while they were stoning him. St James' martyrdom occurred about 63 A.D.

The holy Apostle James composed a Divine Liturgy, which formed the basis of the ~~Liturgies of Sts Basil the Great and John Chrysostom~~. The Church has preserved an Epistle of St James, one of the books of the New Testament.

In 1853, Patriarch Hierotheus of Alexandria sent to Moscow a portion of the relics of St James. The Church distinguishes between the holy Apostle James the Brother of God, and St James the son of Zebedee (April 30) and St James the son of Alphaeus (October 9).

### **Troparion to St. James — Tone 4**

As the Lord's disciple thou didst receive the Gospel, O righteous James; / as a Martyr thou hast unfailing courage; / as God's brother, thou hast boldness; / as a hierarch, thou hast the power to intercede. / Pray to Christ God that our souls may be saved!

### **Kontakion to St. James — Tone 4**

When God the Word, the Only-begotten of the Father, / came to live among us in these last days, / He declared thee, O venerable James, to be the first shepherd and teacher of Jerusalem / and a faithful steward of the spiritual Mysteries. / Therefore, we all honor thee, O Apostle!