



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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November 6, 2016

St. Paul the Confessor,

Archbishop of Constantinople (350)

St. Luke, Monk of Sicily (820), St. Barlaam of Khutyn, Novgorod (1192)

St. Luke, Steward of the Kiev Caves (13th C), St. Herman of Kazan (1567)

New Martyrs of Sarov: Anatole, Basil, Hierotheus, Isaac, and Rufinus (1927-40)



† **Tues. November 8 6:00am Divine Liturgy: St. Michael and the Holy Archangels**

† **Wed. November 9 6:30pm Akathist to St. Nectarios the Wonderworker of Pentapolis**

† In the mercy of God, the little thing done with humility will enable us to be found in the same place as the Saints who have labored much and been true servants of God.

~ St. Dorotheos of Gaza

On the Soul: If human beings...could see their inner ugliness, they would not pursue external beauty. When our souls have so many stains—so many smudges—are we going to be concerned, for instance, about our clothes? We wash our clothes, we even iron them and we are clean outside; while inside—well, do not ask!

~ St. Paisios the Athonite (1994)

† The gates of hell prevail against everyone who is off the Rock – the Faith - of Christ, and thus is outside the Church. But the gates of hell will have no power against Christ's Church.

† Never separate yourself from the Church. For nothing is stronger than the Church. Your only hope is the Church; your salvation is only inside the Church, your refuge is the Church. She is higher than the heavens, and wider than the whole earth. She never grows old, but is always full of vigor and vitality. Holy Scripture (which would not even exist were it not for the Church), when pointing to her strength and stability, calls her an unshakable mountain.

St. John Chrysostom

God is the source of our existence and our continued being. Union with Him is the ultimate path to eternal being. This is His purpose for us and His continuing commitment. When we broke communion (through breaking the commandment), we separated ourselves from the very Source of life (this is St. Athanasius' contention). Having done so, we move back towards our nature, which came from nothingness. God created all things from nothing. If He does not sustain us, we would indeed cease to exist. It was not the specific knowledge of good and evil that was poisonous. It was, however, the only tree given in the Garden that was not given to us for food. As such, we could not give thanks for it and eat it. You can only give thanks for what you have been given, not for what you have stolen. In that manner, we ate without communion, without connection or reference to God.

– Fr. Stephen Freeman

One will possess the Holy Spirit only in proportion to his reverence for and adhesion to the Church of Christ. St. Augustine (5th C)

The Holy Fathers on Thoughts (IV)

Q: Tell me, my Father, what it means to pay heed to one's thoughts? Should one be occupied with this at a definite time? And how does one do this?

A: The Fathers have assigned a time for paying heed to one's thoughts saying: "In the morning test yourself, how you spent the night; and in the evening likewise, how you spent the day. And in the middle of the day, when you are weighed down by thoughts, examine yourself."

"Saints Barsanuphius & John: Guidance Toward Spiritual Life

The influx of evil thoughts is like a flowing river. They contain the suggestion with which later there occurs a sinful identification, which covers the heart like a deluge of water.

St. Gregory of Sinai

The Law says about a bull which is given to goring other bulls: "If men have protested to the owner and he has not destroyed the animal, he shall pay" (Exodus 21:36). You should apply this to your thoughts and impulses. Sometimes during a meal the impulse of self-esteem springs up inside you, urging you to speak at the wrong moment. Then angelic thoughts protest within you and tell you to destroy this impulse to speak. If you do not resist the impulse by keeping silent as you should, but allow it to come out into the open because you are puffed up by delusion, then you will have to pay the penalty. As a punishment you will perhaps be tempted to commit some grave sin; alternatively, you may experience severe bodily pain, or be involved in violent conflict with your brethren, or else suffer torment in the age to come. We shall have to give account for every idle and conceited word spoken by our ill-disciplined tongue. Let us guard our tongue, then, with watchfulness.

St. John of Karpathos "The Philokalia Volume I

The heart which is constantly guarded, and is not allowed to receive the forms, images and fantasies of the dark and evil spirits, is conditioned by nature to give birth from within itself to thoughts filled with light. For just as coal engenders a flame, or a flame lights a candle, so will God, who from our baptism dwells in our heart, kindle our mind to contemplation when He finds it free from the winds of evil and protected by the guarding of the intellect.

St. Hesychios the Presbyter

The whole essence and effort of the devil is to separate and remove our attention from God and entice it toward worldly concerns and pleasures. He works interiorly, in the heart, suggesting good works and resolutions and reasonable, or rather unreasonable, thoughts. We must not pay the slightest attention to these things. The spiritual combat consists in keeping the mind fixed on God, in not entertaining or approving impure thoughts, and in not paying any attention to the phantasms which the detestable, diabolic picture maker stirs up in our imagination. **St. John Chrysostom**

Those pursuing the spiritual way must always keep the mind free from agitation in order that the intellect, as it discriminates among the thoughts that pass through the mind, may store in the treasuries of its memory those thoughts which are good and have been sent by God, while casting out those which are evil and come from the devil.

St. Diadochos of Photiki

True wisdom is gazing at God. Gazing at God is silence of the thoughts. Stillness of mind is tranquility which comes from discernment.

St. Isaac the Syrian

Understand this, that the more you struggle and endure in serving the Lord, so much your mind and thoughts become limpid. For our Lord Jesus Christ has said, Every branch in me which [does not] bear fruit, I prune it, that it may bear more fruit. Only want to be saved; because the Lord loves and co-operates with those who are pressing forward to find salvation **St Ephraim the Syrian**

THE HOLY ANGELS

The angels of God have been commemorated by men from the earliest times, but this commemoration often degenerates into the divinization of angels (II Kings 23:5). Heretics always wove fantasies around the angels. Some of them saw the angels as gods and others, if they did not so regard them, took them to be the creators of the whole world. The local Council in Laodicea, that was held in the fourth century, rejected in its 35th Canon the worship of angels as gods, and established the proper veneration of them.

In the time of Pope Sylvester of Rome and the Alexandrian Patriarch Alexander, in the fourth century, this Feast of the Archangel Michael and the other heavenly powers was instituted, to be celebrated in November. Why in November? Because November is the ninth month after March, and it is thought that the world was created in the month of March. The ninth month after March was chosen because of the nine orders of angels that were the first created beings. Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of the Apostle Paul (that Apostle who was caught up to the third heaven), writes of these nine orders in his book : "*Celestial Hierarchies.*" These orders are as follows: six-winged Seraphim, many-eyed Cherubim, godly Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels and Angels.



The leader of the whole angelic army is the Archangel Michael. When Satan, Lucifer, fell away from God, and carried half the angels with him to destruction, then Michael arose and cried to the unfallen angels: "Let us give heed! Let us stand aright; let us stand with fear!", and the whole angelic army sang aloud: "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory!" (See on the Archangel Michael: Joshua 5:13-15 and Jude 9).

Among the angels there rules a perfect unity of mind, of soul and of love; of total obedience of the lesser powers to the greater and of all to the holy will of God. Each nation has its guardian angel, as does each individual baptized Orthodox Christian. We must keep in mind that, whatever we do, openly or in secret, we do in the presence of our guardian angel and that, on the Day of Judgment, a great multitude of the holy

angels of heaven will be gathered around the throne of Christ, and the thoughts, words and deeds of every man will be laid bare before them.

May God have mercy on us and save us at the prayers of the holy Archangel Michael and all the bodiless powers of heaven. Amen.

Dancing with the Angels ~ A Prayer of St. Thalassios of Libya

"O Christ, Master of all, free us from all destructive passions and the thoughts born of them. For Thy sake we came into being, so that we might delight in the Paradise which thou hast planted and in which Thou hast placed us. We brought our present disgrace upon ourselves, preferring destruction to the delights of blessedness. We have paid for this, for we have exchanged eternal life for death. O Master, as once Thou had looked on us, look on us now; as Thou didst become man, save all of us. For Thou didst come to save us who were lost. Do not exclude us from the company of those who are being saved. Raise up our souls and save our bodies, cleansing us from all impurity. Break the fetters of the passions that constrain us, as once Thou had broken the ranks of the impure demons. Free us from their tyranny, so that we may worship Thee alone, the eternal Light, having risen from the dead and dancing with the angels in the blessed, eternal and indissoluble dance! Amen."

Imitate the Prayer of the Angels

✘ Pray for the purification of each and every person so that you may imitate the prayer of the angels in your life. Yes, the angels don't pray for themselves. This is how I pray for people, for the Church and for the body of the Church. The moment you pray for the Church, you are released from your passions. The moment you glorify God, your soul is calmed and sanctified by divine grace. This is the art I want you to learn. Elder Porphyrios, from *Wounded by Love*

Communion from an Angel

The holy Macarius (of Egypt) told me this also, for he was a priest: "I had noticed that at the time of the distribution of the Mysteries (Holy Communion) I never had to give the Sacrament to Mark the Ascetic, but rather an angel administered to him from the altar. I say only the wrist of the heavenly minister's hand." This Mark was a young man who knew by heart the Old and New Testaments. He was as gentle as can be and reserved in his manner.

Palladius, *Historica Lausaica*

⇒ **"Do not neglect prostration.** It provides an image of man's fall into sin and expresses the confession of our sinfulness. Getting up, on the other hand, signifies repentance and the promise to lead a life of virtue. Let each prostration be accompanied by a noetic invocation of Christ, so that by falling before the Lord in soul and body you may gain the grace of the God of souls and bodies."

Theoleptos, *Metropolitan of Philadelphia*

✘ "Sometimes God allows for a relative or a fellow worker to cause us problems in order to exercise **our patience and humbleness**; however, instead of being grateful for the chance God gives us, we react and refuse to be cured. It is like refusing to pay the doctor who is giving us a shot when we are ill."

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain

Praying the Jesus Prayer for Someone

✘ "Pray for those who make accusations against you. Say, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me', not 'have mercy on him', and your accuser will be embraced in this prayer. Does someone say something to you that upsets you? God knows it. What you have to do is open your arms and say, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me', and make your accuser one with yourself. And God knows what is torturing your accuser deep inside of him and, seeing your love, he hastens to help. He searches the desires of hearts. What is it that Saint Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans? He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because in accord with God He makes intercession for the Saints."

Elder Porphyrios, from *Wounded by Love*

Much Talk About Love (2)

~ A Conversation with Fr. Maximus (Metropolitan Athanasios of Cyprus) on love with author Kyriacos Markides and some friends in the book *Inner River* (pps. 262-277)

"Love can get severely distorted if energized while under the dominance of lowly passions."

"How so?"

"By idolizing human creations, such as various philosophical systems. People give themselves to such things with loving abandon. Love, you see, has as its central characteristic the giving of yourself to another. In this case you turn what you love into an idol."

"Even people that I love?" Emily asked.

"Even people that one loves, of course. Anything. It could be your wife or husband, your children, your political or religious ideology, your intelligence, your position in society, your scientific knowledge, your wisdom, your wealth, your youth. In short, a myriad of things could become idols for you."

"It is clear that people can fall into idolatry when they worship created things, such as their political beliefs or their cleverness and intelligence," I commented. "We all know people who are enamored of their own shrewdness, knowledge, and intellectual prowess. Their entire presentation of self is about feeling superior to those who aren't as clever as they are. We see such phenomena everywhere, particularly in academic circles. But what if love is directed toward other human beings? How could that become idolatrous?"

"All human beings, you see, have inside them the pure, unadulterated, and passion-free love that is characteristic of Divine Grace. When your love is directed toward others, it is this divine love that bursts forward. However, when it gets mixed up with lowly passions, then serious problems may emerge."

"In what way?"

"To repeat once again, love in itself has great power. I should also add that it is potentially very dangerous," Fr. Maximos said cryptically.

"Dangerous!?"

"Yes. It can bring you to God's throne and destroy you at the same time, if you're not vigilant."

"That's why the holy elders teach that while love is the greatest of virtues, discernment is even greater," interjected Stephanos, who, like his wife, Erato, was steeped in Orthodox spirituality and had absorbed Fr. Maximos's teachings on the subject in a real and practical way."

"Exactly!" Fr. Maximos exclaimed. "Discernment should guide and have authority over love."

"I'm not sure I follow," I said.

"Lack of discernment can lead a person to adventures that at first may appear innocuous and praiseworthy," Fr. Maximos responded.

"Perhaps giving an example of what you have in mind will make things clearer for us," I suggested.

Fr. Maximos nodded. "I encounter this problem all the time during confessions. Let's say that a family man, motivated by sheer compassion, is ready to offer his time and energy to help a woman friend in trouble. She may be experiencing a personal crisis, a family or professional problem, or whatever. The male friend, however, although motivated by good, loving intentions, lacks discernment. He isn't aware that he is not liberated from his personal desires and passions. Therefore, he is not conscious of the fact that there is a danger lurking there. He may lose control of the love that motivates him to help his friend. He is also not aware that the vulnerable woman is herself not passion-free. He may say to himself, 'Well, I don't feel anything personally.' Okay, you may not feel anything personally, but are you aware of how the other person feels? Are you aware of the strength and endurance of the soul of the other person? So without discernment, convinced that he is motivated by unadulterated, altruistic love, he volunteers to become a good listener to her problems and to help her bear her cross. Things, however, can get messy, and another kind of love between them begins to emerge, with tragic consequences for everybody. You understand what I am talking about, right?"

"It's a very common problem among psychotherapists and their clients," I said. "Psychiatrists even have special terms for when clients fall in love with their therapists and vice versa. They are transference and counter-transference, a major risk of that otherwise professional relationship. Yes, things can get messy."

"Such problems emerge because the psychotherapist suffers from lack of discernment. He has not healed himself from his own lowly passions in order to offer the kind of selfless assistance that's required of him as a true psychotherapist," Fr. Maximos replied and went on.

"I have known many cases of the kind of love that started with good intentions and ended up in family tragedies. And the cause of all this suffering was the absence of discernment. Okay, you try to assist the other person. But are you sure you are capable of doing so? Or are you sure the person you are trying to rescue will not bring you down with him or her?"

Abba Isaac the Syrian gives a very telling example of this. He says that if you notice someone is about to drown in the river and out of love you extend your hand to pull him out, the likelihood is that he will pull you in, without intending it, of course. The result is that both of you will drown. It is more prudent to give him your cane instead and try to pull him out. If you succeed, great. If not, you can let him take the cane with him, but at least you will be saved."

"Abba Isaac wished not to put limits to love," Fr. Maximos hastened to add, "but rather to stress the importance of discernment when we are dealing with the power of love. Love is truly without limits. But if you think you can love without discernment, then you are bound to suffer great spiritual damage. Many times out of real love you must make the other person experience even sadness and disappointment. You may have to cause the other person to shed tears and deprive him of many things. For if you do not do that, you may destroy the other person."

"This is particularly true with parenting. I notice indiscreet love in the way many parents relate to their children. Parents often-times ruin their children from excessive love. Their deep love prevents them from practicing discernment that could offer real and healthy pedagogy to their children. A common problem is that they set no boundaries or limits."

"Setting limits is often difficult and painful," Emily said. "Of course, usually children don't like rules and regulations. They don't like boundaries. Parents often rationalize by saying, 'Well, they're just kids, they want to play, they want to run around.' Limits are painful for young people who cannot understand the logic for such restrictions. Setting limits is, of course, also painful for parents. It isn't easy to hear children cry because parents impose restrictions on them. So, out of love, the parents give in and lift those limits. They tell their children, 'Don't cry and I will buy you this or that' or 'We will

do what you want.' Children, therefore, learn that whenever they want something, all they have to do is cry."

"So, yes, it is love that motivates parents to act that way. They are ready to die for their children, to become doormats for them. This is the nature of love."

"Self-sacrifice," Emily added.

"That's what it is. Love in itself has all these characteristics, including offering yourself totally to the other person. However, it is discernment that will put everything in its proper place and create healthy boundaries so that the flame of love does not burn both people and things. It is similar to machines that get destroyed when the electrical current is too powerful for them."

"If you offer more love than the others can hold, you can ruin them. They cannot contain it. They cannot function. They are paralyzed."

"That's when love becomes dangerous, the bread and butter of great literature," I mused: "Well, of course it's dangerous, regardless of how beautiful and perfect it may be. It is truly the most perfect and priceless expression of our existence. After all, love is our true nature, our real self. God, motivated by love, created everything for us and offered Himself as a sacrifice to show His infinite love for us humans. Therefore, love is the deepest motivation of every human being."

"We're often ready to give our lives for those we love," Emily commented.

"Absolutely. This brings to my mind what a young woman told me the other day. 'When I became a mother,' she said, 'I realized for the first time that I could give my life for another human being, my child. I don't think,' she admitted, 'that I could die for my husband. I may love him and tell him that I love him unto death, but I am not sure if I can die for him. It is iffy.' "

Fr. Maximos paused as we laughed. "Motherhood, you see, has this inner quality. You notice it with animals, the way mothers are protective of their offspring. Have you ever seen a mother hen turn ferocious against intruders to protect her chicks? When we were kids, we were scared of them charging after us!"

"So discernment places even love within boundaries in order to contain it," I concluded.

"No. A better way of putting it, is that discernment channels love in a healthy direction. If love tricks you and gets attached first to something other than God, then you have a problem, a spiritual problem. Yes, love is indeed fire that can burn you if you lack discernment. Actually, all the virtues are dangerous in the absence of discernment. Discernment is the steering wheel that guides all the virtues without exception."

"You see, it is important to know that love is the highest virtue, because people often destroy themselves or get traumatized in the name of love. But as the holy elders taught us, what makes all the virtues function perfectly is discernment. It is discernment that offers us right judgment about everything. When studying the lives of saints, you realize that they are characterized by such great discernment that they are not vulnerable to being swept away by human sentimentality, whether positive or negative."

"How can one develop discernment?" Emily asked.

{to be continued}

This and That

“One who has more humility has more spiritual substance. The prideful person has no inner substance. He is hollow — like an un-ripened stalk of wheat that stands tall, while the ripened stalk bends its little head. Not only is he in the dark, he is also inwardly disquiet and outwardly agitated and clamorous. For when there is pride, everything one does is merely a balloon inflated by the devil — who then pierces it with a needle, so that it breaks and makes a lot of noise. Pride is dishonorable, such a terrible thing, as it even turned angels into demons! Pride brought us down from Paradise to earth; and from earth, it is now trying to send us to hell.”

St. Paisios of Mt. Athos

It is not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers to every question, but to make us progressively aware of a mystery. God is not the object of our knowledge but the cause of our wonder.

Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia

R.C. Archbishop Chaput Address at the University of Notre Dame 2016 Catholic Bishops' Symposium, “Reclaiming the Church for the Catholic Imagination.”

C.S. Lewis said that Christianity is a “fighting religion”—not in the sense of hatred or violence directed at other persons, but rather in the spiritual struggle against the evil in ourselves and in the world around us, where our weapons are love, justice, courage and self-giving. ...by now many of us Catholics are largely assimilated to, and digested by, a culture that bleaches out strong religious convictions in the name of liberal tolerance and dulls our longings for the supernatural with a river of practical atheism in the form of consumer goods.

...But as Tocqueville warned, the more we try to enforce a radical, unnatural, egalitarian equality, the more “totalitarian” democracy becomes. ...For all of its greatness, democratic culture proceeds from the idea that we're born as autonomous, self-creating individuals who need to be protected from, and made equal with, each other. It's simply not true. And it leads to the peculiar progressive impulse to master and realign reality to conform to human desire, whereas the Christian masters and realigns his desires to conform to and improve reality.

If men and women are really made for heroism and glory, made to stand in the presence of the living God, they can never be satisfied with bourgeois, mediocre, feel-good religion. They'll *never* be fed by ugly worship and shallow moralizing. ...The Church and American democracy are very different kinds of societies with very different structures and goals. They can never be fully integrated without eviscerating the Christian faith.... Americans have never liked history. The reason is simple. The past comes with obligations on the present, and the most cherished illusion of American life is that we can remake ourselves at will. But we Christians are different. We're first and foremost a communion of persons on mission through time – and our meaning as individuals comes from the part we play in that larger communion and story.

Alms: You give to your own when you give alms. The poor man is closer to you than all your goods, even as God, the Creator of all men, values each man as being far more precious than all his goods. If you have been given wealth, it has been given to you as a test. It is to test your heart; to let God and the hosts of heaven see if you have understood from whom your wealth comes and why it has been given to you. Truly blessed are you if you understand that your wealth comes from God and belongs to God. Blessed are you if you count the poor as your own family, as members of your own household, and share with them that which God has entrusted to you. ~ **St. Nikolai Velimirovich**