



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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St. Thomas Sunday

St. George the Great-Martyr

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Do not forget God, letting yourself be seduced by vain distractions. You will be able to rely on His word in difficult days, because prayer will keep you safe in His continual presence. Remain constantly before His face, think of Him, remember Him in your heart. Otherwise, if you only meet Him from time to time, you risk losing your close friendship with Him.

~ St. Isaac the Syrian

HOMILY~ About Repentance and the Forgiveness of Sins

"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name" (St. Luke 24:47).

This is the final instruction of the Savior to the holy Apostles. In these words as in the shell of a walnut, is contained the Gospel of reconciliation between God and men. What does God seek from men and what does God give them? He seeks repentance and He grants forgiveness of sins. He seeks little but He gives all. Let men only repent for committed sins and let men cease to sin and men will receive all from God; all; not only all that their hearts could desire rather even more, much more. In truth, to the righteous everything is promised. The righteous will be the inheritors of the Kingdom of God, they will be the sons of God, and they will be the children of light, the children of immortality, companions to the angels, brothers of Christ. The righteous will have an abundant life, an abundance of peace, an abundance of wisdom, an abundance of power and an abundance of joy. The righteous will have all, for all has been promised to them.

Let men only repent and they will receive all. Let the beggar only cleanse himself, bathe himself and clothe himself in purity before the doors of the royal court and he will be immediately ushered into the royal court and he will be met and embraced by the King and he will have all. He will live with the King, sit at the royal table; he will have all, all, all!

O my brethren, these are not only words rather this is the living and holy truth. For we know that many penitents, both female and male, received all of this, which was promised. Many have appeared from the other world and have proved the truth of these words, witnessing how they now live as royal sons and daughters. But they repented promptly; and there remains time for us to repent if we desire to be together with them as the heirs of the Kingdom.

- St. Nikolai of Serbia, from the Prologue of Ochrid

- If, then, the time of this life is time for repentance, the very fact that a sinner still lives is a pledge that God will accept whoever desires to return to Him. Free will is always part and parcel of this present life. And it lies within the power of free will to choose or to reject the road of life or the road of death; for it can pursue whichever it wishes. Where, then, are the grounds of despair, since all of us can at all times lay hold of eternal life whenever we want to?

~ St. Gregory Palamas

St. Chrysostom teaches us that the ancient (Old Testament) Saints did not become hopeless and despairing when the events in their temporal life seemed to contradict the promises of God.

“The righteous ones of old did not inquire into how - and in what manner - the promises [of God] would come to pass. And when they perceived everything to be in a desperate state according to human reasoning, they were not thrown into confusion, nor were they troubled. Rather, they endured all things with nobility — having the power of Him, Who made the promises, as a great proof of the things to come. And in the face of adverse events, they did not fall into despair. For they clearly knew that - since God is inventive and wise, after things had been despaired of - they could be restored to a state better than before, and the things that had been promised could be brought to fulfillment with great ease.”

“Therefore, beloved one, you too, if your afflictions come to an end in the present life, glorify God. If your life ends in difficulties, even then, be thankful and do not be scandalized — recognizing clearly the infinite providence of God, which cannot be explained, and knowing that everything will receive its appropriate end, either in the present life or the life to come. If someone hears about the future and - being faint-hearted - is in a hurry to see it come to pass here, we will tell him that the true life and the things that are constant and immovable are waiting for us there. The present things are the road, but those are the homeland. The things of the world are like spring flowers, while those to come are like immovable rocky peaks. There, are crowns and compensations without end; there, are prizes and rewards; there, are intolerable punishments and torments for those who have done evil.”

“‘But,’ you will say, ‘in that day, what awaits those who are scandalized?’ You do not speak about those who are shining even more brightly. On the contrary, those who have worn a mask and are now put to shame, these you bring before us. Do you not see gold being purified? Lead being tested? The chaff being separated from the wheat? The wolves from the sheep? The counterfeit from those living piously? Therefore, when you see the offenses of the former, consider the good repute of the latter.”

“Some have stumbled, but many more have stood firm; and have brought about a greater reward for themselves, not being overthrown either by the power of those who plot against them or by the difficulty of the times. And let those who are scandalized consider themselves. The Three Youths were torn away from the priests, the temple, the altar and all the other concerns of the law, and were abandoned in the midst of a foreign land, and yet they observed the law with great precision. Likewise, [King] David and many others. Some were carried off into captivity and were not harmed at all, while others stayed at home and had the benefit of everything in their homeland; yet they stumbled and were condemned.”



St. Symeon the New Theologian (+1022) On The Day of Resurrection

Brethren and fathers, already Pascha, that joyful day, that day of all gladness and delight, the day of Christ's Resurrection, has arrived in the circle of the year. But rather, it happens daily and eternally in those who know its mystery, and so has filled our hearts with unspeakable joy and gladness. Likewise, it has broken off the labor of the all-holy Fast, or, rather, it has perfected our souls and encouraged them as well. So, as you see, it has come and invited all the faithful together to rest and to thanksgiving. Let us therefore give thanks to the Lord, Who has brought us over the sea of Lent, and led us with joy into the harbor of His Resurrection.

But if you will, let us look and carefully examine what is the mystery of that Resurrection of Christ our God which takes place mystically in us at all times, if we are willing. Christ our God was hanged on the Cross and nailed upon it the sin of the world. He tasted death and went down to the uttermost depths of hell. Again, He returned from hell into His own spotless body, from which He had in no way been separated as He descended there, and forthwith He arose from the dead. After that, He ascended into Heaven with great glory and power. So, likewise, as we have now come out of the world and entered into the tomb of repentance and humiliation by being assimilated to the sufferings of the Lord, He Himself comes down from Heaven and enters into our body as into a tomb. He unites Himself to our souls and raises them up, though they were undoubtedly dead, and then grants to him who has thus been raised with Christ that he may see the glory of His mystical Resurrection. Christ's Resurrection is thus *our* Resurrection, and His glory is *our* glory!

Most men believe in the Resurrection of Christ, but very few have a clear vision of it. Those who have no vision of it cannot even adore Christ Jesus as the Holy One and Lord. As it is written, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" and elsewhere, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth." That most sacred formula which is daily on our lips does not say, "Having *believed* in the Resurrection of Christ," but "Having *beheld* the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the Holy Lord Jesus, the only Sinless One." How then does the Holy Spirit urge us to say, "Having *beheld* the Resurrection of Christ," which we have not seen, as though we had seen it, when Christ has risen once for all a thousand years ago, and even then without anybody's seeing it?

Surely Holy Scripture does not wish us to lie? Far from it! Rather, it urges us to speak the truth, that the Resurrection of Christ take place in each of us who believes, and that not once, but every hour, so to speak, when Christ the Master arises in us, resplendent in array and flashing with the lightnings of incorruption and Deity. For the light-bringing coming of the Spirit shows forth to us, as in the early morning, the Master's Resurrection, or, rather, it grants us to see the Risen One Himself! Those to whom Christ has given light as He has risen, to them He has appeared spiritually. He has been shown to their spiritual eyes. When this happens to us through the Spirit, He raises us up from the dead and gives us life. He grants us to see Him Who is immortal and indestructible! More than that, He grants clearly to know Him Who raises us up and glorifies us with Himself, as all the Divine Scriptures testify.



The most significant occurrence in the history of the Jewish nation was its liberation from Egyptian slavery in the time of the prophet Moses, some fifteen hundred years before Christ. This liberation became commemorated in the feast of the Jewish Passover with other related events: the angel's slaying of the Egyptian first-born and the "passing over" of the Jewish infants, whose houses had signs made with the blood of a Paschal lamb; (The word "Pascha" means "to pass by." the miracle of the march through the Red Sea and the loss of the Egyptian army pursuing the Hebrews; and then the receiving of the Law (the Ten Commandments) on Mount Sinai by the Jewish people and the establishment of the Covenant with God, after which the Jewish nation was considered God's chosen people. Since then, in celebrating Passover and following their ancestors' traditions, the Hebrews symbolically make an offering of a Paschal lamb.

In the coincidence of the death and the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ with the celebration of Passover, one ought to see God's sign of a profound inner relationship between these two events. We now shall examine these two events side by side.

Passover Events	Pascha Events
The immolation of the chaste Paschal lamb and the salvation of the Jewish first-born by its blood.	The immolation on the Cross of the Lamb of God, by whose blood are saved the new first-born (Christians).
The miraculous march of the Hebrews across the Red Sea and their liberation from Egyptian slavery (Ex. 14:22).	The administration of the sacrament of Baptism by water and the freeing from the power of the devil (1 Cor. 10:1-2; see also Romans, chapters 6 and 7).
The legislation on Mount Sinai on the 50th day after the departure from Egypt and the establishment of the union (covenant) with God.	The descent of the Holy Spirit onto the Apostles on the 50th day after the Pascha feast and the institution of the New Testament (Acts 2).
The relishing of manna miraculously sent by God (Ex. 16:14).	The relishing of heavenly bread: the Body and Blood of Jesus at the Liturgy (John, ch. 6).
The 40-year-long wandering through the desert and different trials of the Jews.	The difficulties and trials of life which every Christian has to undergo.
The erection of the copper serpent, which saved bitten Hebrews from venom when they looked at it (Num. 21:9).	Freedom from the bite of the spiritual serpent-devil through the power of the Cross (John 3:14).
The entrance of the Hebrews into the land promised to their fathers.	The promise of a new heaven and a new earth where truth shall dwell (2 Peter 3:13).



We see from this comparison of the two Paschal events how the ancient Passover anticipated the great spiritual changes which have taken place in the lives of men after the Resurrection of our Savior. That is why the Apostles, in celebrating the New Passover, affirmed: "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us!" (1 Cor. 5:7). ✠ ✠ ✠

A Paschal Letter of Exhortation

From "A Priest's Reminiscences", *Nadezha*,
(Spiritual Stories & Sermons) No.13, 1986
(translated in *Orthodox America*)



Christ is Risen!

In greeting my true friends with these joyful tidings, there are so many bright and kindly wishes that my heart desires to convey. But of all these wishes there is one which I have especially chosen to communicate here, for I consider its fulfillment your most important concern.

On this chosen and holy day, I want your hearts to affirm that which once the blessed Psalmist voiced. Loving the Lord with all his mind and all his soul, he said: "With my whole heart have I sought after Thee, cast me not away from Thy commandments" (Ps.118: 10). In celebrating the Light-bearing Resurrection of Christ, it is my earnest desire that you surrender yourselves entirely to our Savior - giving to Him your whole heart, all your love and your soul's principal endeavor. This is my fervent wish for you, my friends, because "the love of Christ constraineth us...for Christ died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again." (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

I once visited a spiritual man especially dear to me and found him wiping tears from his eyes. When asked the cause of his weeping he burst into fresh tears, and it was a few minutes before he could answer. "I am crying on account of a growing awareness of Christ's grief over the increasing coldness manifest towards Him in the hearts of men. I see believers who come to pray a little, to repent a little, to bring a meager offering. But I rarely see any souls truly dedicated to Him. I don't see any believers who have wholly given themselves over to Him. If it grieves me to see how many - who consider themselves believers - abbreviate their responsibilities towards Him and hurry away from His Liturgy to the marketplace of earthly life, how then must He look upon such Christians?"

There is no doubt but that we live in times of spiritual impoverishment and disregard for truth. People feel no regret in abandoning their first love (Rev.2:4). Not so very long ago one could meet everywhere Christians of burning faith. Today's believers prefer to hide their little faith and to conceal it from the eyes of strangers. Inexplicable, unconquerable fears have seized the hearts of the Orthodox faithful. Obsessed by such fears, people are afraid to wear crosses, afraid to make the sign of the Cross in front of others. And when the godless ones begin to utter profanities in the company of such Christians, there is no longer anyone who will stand up to them. Surrounding us today is a sea of the most shameless vulgarity directed against that which we hold most precious, and this vulgarity not only meets with no rebuff from us, but even receives indirect support: not only do we keep silent in the face of such abuse, but we adopt an air of casual indifference which only encourages the impious.

And how little there is among contemporary believers in the way of deeds of love and Christian compassion. There is a sad story. A poor man prayed that the Lord might help him. As he was praying the Lord appeared to him and gave him a small silver coin, saying, "Do not be offended at My giving you so little. I Myself receive even less from people nowadays."

When we hear such words of admonition, we usually respond by excusing ourselves: "Forgive me, but that's just the way I am." But is this *really* the way you should be, my

friend? Think, were you always like this? If you changed from better to worse, is there any reason why you cannot change from worse to better? If you have changed for the worse through the power of sin, why can't you change for the better through the invincible power of Christ's Resurrection?! Has your heart shrunk in its capacity to love God? Does not the life-creating, almighty power of the Resurrected Christ rest upon you? Is it not through His power that you live and have your being to this very day? Change yourself, my dear friend - you who have been signed by the unapproachable light of His Resurrection, and place your whole heart at the feet of your Lord. If you neglect to do this, what kind of Pascha can you expect? You will only grieve Him with your celebration.

Through many profound and sorrowful reflections we are given to know the circumstances of our Savior's burial. How few were those servants of His who gathered to take Him down from the Cross, to wrap Him in the shroud, to prepare His tomb and to give Him the last kiss. Where were all those to whom He gave sight, those whom He cleansed of leprosy, whom he fed, whose lips He made to speak? Where was Jairus' daughter? Where was the paralytic from the sheep's pool, and the blind Bartimeus? Where was the one born blind from birth whom the Lord healed? The man with the withered arm? The deaf and dumb man, the possessed Gadarene, and the many others who believed on Him? The news of what had happened to their Benefactor had at that time spread throughout all Judea. Why didn't all these believers hasten to give witness of their love for the Crucified One? Was it not because they were afraid, because they preferred their own concerns; because they shunned such a difficult exploit, because, although they believed in Him, they had not yet given Him their hearts?

Then there came into the world the power of His Resurrection, His victory which conquered the world. And just see, my friend, what this victory has accomplished. How many people have loved Him with their whole heart, their whole soul, and have given their whole life to Him?! Just look at the multitude of His Saints! Can you even begin to number all His Martyrs, all His Righteous Ones, all those shining lamps which burned with love for Him in all nations and all ages? Can you recount all their ascetic labors, their deeds of spiritual valor and Christian charity which they performed by means of His power working through them?

And you, my friend, unite yourself to this glorious and immense company of Christ's true followers and slaves. Celebrate the day of His bright Resurrection as it was celebrated by those who pleased Him. Remember that you will truly experience the New Passover of Christ only then when your whole heart is full of love for Him. "If a man love Me," He says, "he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and He will come unto him, and make Our abode with him," (John 14:23)

In your celebration of Pascha, may His blessed Name be preserved in your hearts. May your lips sing His praises unceasingly, and may your eyes behold continually His Most Pure Face and His Heavenly Glory! †

Our Sweet Jesus

✠ "Take as an example our sweet Jesus, Who was obedient to His beginningless Father unto death on a cross. He gave His body over to scourges, His cheeks to slaps, and He did not turn His face away from spitting. Do you see, my sister, how much love the compassionate Lord showed to us? So let us give up our will as well; let us forgive those who wrong us. Then with boldness we shall say, 'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors' (Mt 6:12)." **Elder Joseph the Hesychast - *Monastic Wisdom***

"Да воскреснет Бог! и расточатся врази Его..."

Христос Воскресе! Воистину Воскресе!

On the Grace of God and Human Efforts (2)

St. Barsanuphius on Synergy ~ St. Barsanuphius the Great (6th C)

Q: A certain Christ-loving man asked the Elder: "God has created man free, and He Himself says: *Without Me you can do nothing* (Jn. 15:5). I ask you, how can one reconcile freedom with the fact that without God one can do nothing?"

A: God created man free so that he might incline toward the good; but inclining toward it by his free will, he is in no condition to perform the good without the help of God, for it is written: *It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God Who showeth mercy* (Rom. 9:16) And so, when a man bends his heart towards the good, and calls on the help of God, then God, heeding his good fervor, will grant him strength for doing good; and in this fashion there is at the same time both one and the other: both freedom of man, and the help given him from God; for the good proceeds from God but it is performed through His Saints. And thus God is glorified in all, and glorifies them. (*Guidance Toward Spiritual Life: Answers to Questions of Disciples, 770*)

St. Gregory Palamas on Free Will ~ St. Gregory Palamas ca. 1296-1359

If, then, the time of this life is time for repentance, the very fact that a sinner still lives is a pledge that God will accept whoever desires to return to Him. Free will is always part and parcel of this present life. And it lies within the power of free will to choose or to reject the road of life or the road of death that we have described above; for it can pursue whichever it wishes. Where, then, are the grounds of despair, since all of us can at all times lay hold of eternal life whenever we want to? (*To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia, 17*)

St. Justinian on Faith, Works and Unity ~ St. Justinian the Emperor ca. 483-565

We understand that the source of the infirmity of our common nature is human weakness, and it affects even those who are strong in mind; but to be made sound in the knowledge of the true faith, and to embrace the unity and peace of the Church we attribute to grace. (*Letter to the Monks of Alexandria Against the Monophysites*)

The Crown of Choice ~ Clement of Alexandria 150-215

Above all, Christians are not allowed to correct with violence the delinquencies of sins. For it is not those that abstain from wickedness from compulsion, but those that abstain from choice, that God crowns. It is impossible for a man to be steadily good except by his own choice. For he that is made good by compulsion of another is not good; for he is not what he is by his own choice. For it is the freedom of each one that makes true goodness and reveals real wickedness. Whence through these dispositions God contrived to make His own disposition manifest.

The Brass Wall ~ Abba Poemen the Great, 4th C

The will of man is a brass wall between him and God, and a stone of stumbling. When a man renounces it, he also says to himself, 'In my God, I pass over the wall' (Ps. 18:29). Therefore, if righteousness is united with the will, a man can labor successfully. (*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*)

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (16 – Part 2)

Whatever we do without prayer and without hope in God, turns out afterwards to be harmful and defective. St. Mark the Ascetic

If you wish to correct anyone from his faults, do not think of correcting him solely by your own means: you would only do harm by your own passions, for instance, by pride and by the irritability arising from it; "but cast thy burden upon the Lord," and pray to God "Who trieth the hearts and reins," with all your heart, that He Himself may enlighten the mind and heart of that man. St. John of Kronstadt

One of the Fathers asked a young brother, saying, "Tell us, O brother, is it good to hold one's peace or to speak?" Then that young brother spake unto him, saying, "If the words [to be said] be useless, leave them [unsaid], but if they be good, give place to good things, and speak them. Yet, even though the words be good, prolong not thy speech, but cut it short, for silence is best of all."

Paradise of the Fathers

Be slow and dull for idle talk, but knowing and wise in hearkening to the saving words of the Holy Scriptures. St. Basil the Great

Simplicity is given by the Spirit of God. Man cannot obtain anything himself if God does not give it to him. He will give it if you will be like a child, who receives everything simply and who lives by his feelings. We who know a lot and understand a lot are confused and divided by our knowledge.

Elder Gabriel of Pskov and Kazan

Every temptation and disturbance of the enemy are consumed by prayer. Elder Hilarion

The Saints all said: "I shall suffer torments in hell" — even though they performed great miracles. They had learned by experience that if the soul condemns itself to hell, but trusts the while in God's compassion, the strength of God enters into it, and the Holy Spirit bears clear witness of salvation.

St. Silouan of Mt Athos

Dwelling with the mind and heart in Heaven and in God — that is the chief fruit, that is the end of prayer. The repulsion and defeat of the enemies which oppose the attainment of this end is a secondary matter; it should not deflect to itself all our attention lest the realization and consideration of victory should give entry to pride and self-confidence and we suffer a crushing defeat through our very victory.

St. Ignaty Brianchaninov

Read holy writings, reflect upon them, absorb all that is useful, applying it to your life and to your soul.

St. Theophan the Recluse

Unlike animals which after death disappear, human beings were created for more than life on earth. We were created for a life with God and in God, a life which would last not just a hundred or a thousand years, but for all eternity. Only those, however, who are Christians are capable of this life with God. That is, only those who rightly believe in Jesus Christ. St. Innocent of Alaska

Know this, brethren: do not creep out of the church before the dismissal prayer, for he who exits from the divine chant or converses or whispers has been seduced by demons, as the Divine Scriptures bear witness.

St. Joseph of Volokolamsk

Anyone who bears humiliation, scorn, and punishment can be saved. Sayings of the Fathers

I entreat you: labor in your prayers and do not grow faint, and let us allow God to take care for us.

St. Alexander of Svir

You wish to live while you are asleep! Go, and labor. Go, and work. Go, seek, and ye shall find. Awake and stand up. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Paradise of the Fathers