



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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June 25, 2017

Virgin-Martyr Fevronia of Nisibis (304)

Sts. Peter & Fevronia of Murom (1228)

St. Nikon of Optina (1931)



- ✘ **Tuesday, June 27, 6:30pm - Inquirer's Class**
- ✘ **Wednesday, June 28, 6:30pm Vespers - Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul**
- ✘ **Thursday, June 29, 6:00am Divine Liturgy - Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul**

- **Diocesan Assembly July 25 – 27, 2017, Chattanooga - Visit dosoca.org / Conferences**
The St. Symeon Choir will sing the Hierarchical Liturgy on Wednesday, July 26.

On Prayer – “Lord, as You know, and as You will”

Some young brothers gathered around St. Macarius one day and asked him to teach them how to pray. “The greatest mistake we make in praying,” he replied, “is verbosity. It is sufficient for one to learn to elevate his mind to the heavenly and say with all his soul: ‘Lord, as You know and as You will, have mercy!’ This is prayer. Again, when he feels the attack of the devil strongly upon him, or the rebellion of the lower passions, let him run with faith to the Heavenly Father and let him cry to Him, not with his mouth, but with his heart: ‘Lord, help me!’ He knows the way to help a soul which draws near to Him with trust.”

~ From the “Evergetinos” on Passions and Perfection in Christ”

St. Paisios responds to the question: ‘Geronda, when I recognize the virtues of others, does this indicate humility on my part?’ “Of course it does. When you show respect and love for another virtuous person, this shows that you have humility and you truly love virtue. This is also a sign of spiritual progress. You do not consider your own good traits as being significant, but you see the slightest positive trait of another as being far superior to yours. In other words, you always appreciate the good qualities of others. That is when the Grace of God comes in abundance.”

No Excuse

“Provided they live a worthy life, both those who choose to dwell in the midst of noise and hubbub and those who dwell in monasteries, mountains and caves can achieve salvation. Solely because of their faith in Him God bestows great blessings on them. Hence those who because of their laziness have failed to attain salvation will have no excuse to offer on the Day of Judgment. For He who promised to grant us salvation simply on account of our faith in Him is not a liar.”

St. Symeon the New Theologian (1022)

Fr. Thomas Hopko: Advice to someone about a difficult decision:

“You cannot “figure out” what to do. You can only pray and take counsel and beg the Lord for illumination about what you must do, and how you must do it. The “solution”, so to speak, has to be “revealed” to you from Above. And only you can decide what that solution is on the basis of what you come to see in the light of God’s enlightening of your mind and heart, together with the best practical advice that you can get regarding properties, possessions, business, children, etc.”

About St. John the Forerunner and how Isaiah Prophetesied Concerning Him

"The voice of him that cries in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Isaiah 40:3)

When a king wants to visit a certain place, he sends before him in advance his heralds. To an unusual king an unusual herald is appropriate. The herald of Christ the King in the wilderness was Moses; in Jerusalem, the Prophets; in Nazareth, the Archangel; in Bethlehem, the Magi of the East; on the Jordan, John.

Not one king in the history of mankind has had such heralds. St. John the Baptist was also as unusual and special as were the other heralds of Christ. He was the voice crying in the two-fold wilderness: in the wilderness of Jordan and in the human wilderness. Just as the wilderness of Jordan was fruitless and dry, so the wilderness of the human spirit, was unfruitful and dry. John was not able to make the human wilderness green and fruitful, but he cleared and plowed it and, in that way, was preparing the earth and leveled it [the earth] for the great Sower Who, by His coming, brings with Him the seed and the rain to sow the seed of knowledge and the rain of Grace from on High to make it green and be fruitful.

By repentance, John prepared the way and by baptism in water, made the path straight. The way and the paths these are the souls of men. By repentance, the souls of men were prepared to receive the seed of Christ and by baptism in water to bury that seed deep in the earth of their heart.

The proud and the lowly when they are immersed naked in the water are all as one, equal in their nothingness before the majesty of the All-glorious Christ the Savior: "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low" (Isaiah 40:4). The word here is not about earthly valleys and hills but of lowly and proud men. As corpses in the grave are all the same before the eyes of a living man, thus all sinners, lowly and proud, slaves and masters are equal before the living God. Such a wondrous vision was seen by Isaiah, the son of Amos, the Prophet of the living God, the one and true God!

O Lord, Heavenly King, to Whom the heavenly hosts worship day and night, look down once again upon our nothingness and because of Thy humiliation and Passion for us, save us!

✘ If you do not feel like praying, you have to force yourself. The Holy Fathers say that prayer with force is higher than prayer unforced. You do not want to, but force yourself. The Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force.

St. Ambrose of Optina (1879)

The Jesus Prayer, at first

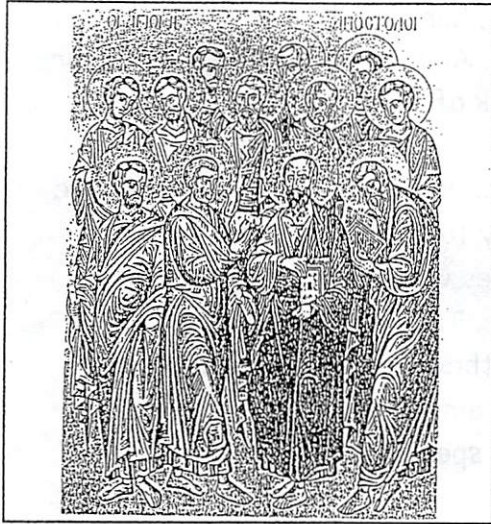
✘ At first the practice of the Prayer of Jesus appears to be extraordinarily dry and seems to promise no fruit. As the mind strives to unite with the heart, it meets at first with impenetrable darkness and gloom, hardness and deadness of the heart, which is not quickly aroused to sympathy with the mind. This should not cause despondency and cowardice; it is mentioned here since to be forewarned is to be forearmed. The patient and diligent worker will not fail to be satisfied and consoled; he will rejoice at an infinite abundance of spiritual fruits such as he can form no conception of in his carnal and natural state.

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

Songful Living ~ A word from Saint Alexandra, Tsaritsa and New Martyr

✘ We must see to it that our pleasing of others always ministers to their good in some way, edifies them, adds something to their character, and makes them braver, truer, and happier.

The world is full of discouraged people, and we have the power to say a hopeful word or do a kindness which will drive the discouragement from their hearts and move them again, with strength for brave, victorious, and songful living. Love is the greatest thing in the world. We are bound so to live that we shall do hurt to none, but shall edify - add something to the life of everyone.



ON THE TRUE WITNESS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES

The Blessed Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos (1989) once had two or three visitors. One of them was an avowed "atheist" who rejected the Resurrection of Christ and he asked the Elder how he could believe in the Resurrection without having seen it. The Elder replied:

"No I did not see all these things. However, others saw them: the Apostles...[and] with the Apostles one of three things happened. Either they were deceived, or they deceived us, or they spoke the truth.

Let's take the first case. It is not possible for the Apostles to have been deceived, because whatever they mention they did not learn from others. They themselves were eyewitnesses...Furthermore they were not at all prone to hallucinations nor did they have any psychological predisposition to accept the event of the Resurrection. On the contrary they were dreadfully unbelieving! [Remember they didn't believe Mary Magdalene (Mk. 16:11) and the Myrrhbearers (Luke 24:11); they didn't believe the two disciples who met Christ on the road to Emmaeus (Mk. 16:13). Some did not believe even though they saw Him before them (Mt. 28: 17), Others would not believe unless they touched His very wounds! (John 20:25).]

And something else. What were the Apostles before Christ called them? Were they perhaps glory-loving politicians or visionaries of philosophical or social systems...? Anything but! They were illiterate fishermen. And the only thing which interested them was to catch a fish to nourish their families. For this reason also, after the Lord's Crucifixion, despite all they had heard and seen, they returned to their boats and nets. There was not in them...even a trace of predisposition of all that was to follow. And only after Pentecost, "when they received power from on high," did they become teachers of the world.

The second case: Did they possibly deceive us? Did they possibly tell us lies? But why should they deceive us? What would they gain with the lies? Possibly money? High positions? Glory? For someone to say a lie, he awaits some benefit. The Apostles, however, preaching Christ and Him crucified and

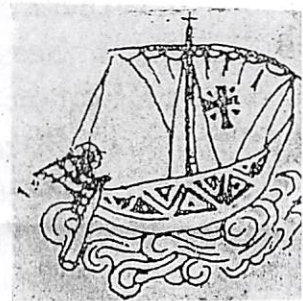
resurrected from the dead, secured only these things for themselves: hardships, toils, whippings, stoning, shipwreck, hunger, thirst, nakedness, danger from thieves, jailing, and finally death. And they suffered all this for a lie? It is too completely foolish to even think of!

Consequently neither were they deceived nor did the Apostles deceive us. However the third case remains. That they told us the truth. Furthermore...The Evangelists are the only ones who really wrote true history. They relate the events and only these. They don't proceed to any personal judgment. They don't praise anyone, they don't criticize anyone, they don't make any attempt to enlarge a certain event, or to wipe it out or put down some other one. They let the events speak on their own. ...

[And we today] ...live the miracle of the Church of Christ [because of the witness of the Apostles]...When Christ said about His Church that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her" (Mt. 16:18), His followers numbered only a few tens of people. Since then about two thousand years have passed. Empires have dissolved, philosophical systems have been forgotten, world theories have crumbled; the Church of Christ, however, remains unshakable---despite the constant and dreadful persecutions against her. Is this not a miracle?

■ from *Counsels for Life: From the Life and Teachings of Father Epiphanius Theodoropoulos*

LET US ALSO REMEMBER HERE...



...how the Apostles, the most holy and selfless men in the history of the world died and finished their earthly course:

PETER (commemorated June 29th and January 16th) was crucified upside down.

ANDREW (November 30th) was crucified.

JAMES the Son of Zebedee (April 30) was beheaded.

JOHN the Theologian (Sept. 26th & May 8th) died in a wondrous way, the only one of the Apostles to end his life in peace).

PHILIP (November 14th) was crucified.

BARTHOLOMEW (June 11th & Aug. 25th) was crucified, then flayed and beheaded.

THOMAS (October 6th) was pierced with five spears.

MATTHEW the Evangelist (Nov. 16th) was burned by fire.

JAMES the Son of Alphaeos (Oct. 9th) was crucified.

THADDEUS (or Jude the brother of James) (June 9th) was crucified.

SIMON the Zealot (May 10th) was crucified.

MATTHIAS (August 9th) was stoned then beheaded with an axe when dead.

PAUL (June 29th) was beheaded. *O, Holy Apostles of Christ, intercede for us!*

Hidden in Plain Sense

- Fr. Stephen Freeman, September 3, 2014 ~ *Glory to God for All Things* Blog

Regardless of the tools and methods used in interpreting the Scriptures, the Church Fathers had a common assumption – they agreed that the truth was *hidden behind* the letter of the text. They believed that something was hidden and that it was God Himself who had done the hiding. There were a variety of methods employed for revealing what was hidden, some more concerned about the text itself than others.

Many modern believers and scholars see such methods (allegory, typology, etc.) as somehow suspect. Today, if there is something hidden behind the text – it is the historical event that gave rise to the text. Modern studies are almost all geared towards the discerning of the historical record. It is assumed by these studies that historical is the same thing as real, and therefore the same thing as true. And so we have all sorts of Jesus books: *The Real Jesus*, *The Jesus Nobody Knows*, etc. All of these works treat the Scriptures as material to be mined in order to reveal the truth about Jesus.

There is also a championing of the “plain sense” of Scripture by some. Occasionally this comes with great disdain for others who seem to be needlessly complicating the reading of God’s word. This plain sense reading is marked by a deeply democratic sense of humanity and its relationship with God. The argument is that since God has come to save every person, then He would surely have made His word available and accessible to each. Any assertions that obscure the meaning of Scripture (or make it unnecessarily complicated) are thus contrary to God’s plan of salvation.

It is interesting to note that among the plain-sense readers are those who subscribe to Dispensationalism, a belief that there are different periods in history and that God has spoken and acted in different ways according to those periods of time. The great common man’s resource for this reading is the Schofield Bible (J.I. Schofield’s annotated commentary edition of the King James Version). Dispensationalism is the home of the “Left Behind” Rapture teachings popular in Evangelical circles (as well as the source of modern Israel’s support within the Evangelical world – making it one of the few, perhaps the only, hermeneutical method influencing American foreign policy).

Though the method of Dispensationalism is a complicated pattern for reading, it remains quite accessible even to those with little formal education. It has the added advantage of providing explanations for all apparent contradictions within the Scriptures themselves. The violence expressed by the God of Israel contrasted with the virtual pacifism of Christ is relegated to different periods of time. Most alarming (for me) is the relegation of Christ’s commandments to a “kingdom period” rather than the present. The demands of forgiveness and radical generosity will some day be fulfilled, but not now (conveniently).

The democratization of interpretation dates back to the Protestant Reformation and its desire to overthrow the Catholic Church (or any Church) as the locus of teaching authority. If the Scripture is to be the source of authority, then it has to be universally available. If the Scriptures were to have a voice of their own, only their plain sense could speak to all.

It is necessary within this view to remove layers of mystery and hidden meanings. Meanings that are hidden and made known only to a few create a spiritual hierarchy and suggest that all believers are not spiritually equal.

But, of course, democracy and the spiritual equality of all believers is not supported within the Scriptures themselves. They are assumptions of the modern period that force the Scriptures into a role they were never supposed to play. It is the *Church* that is called the "Pillar and Ground of Truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

The requirements of a plain sense of Scripture have also contributed to a "plain sense" of the world, the de-sacralization of reality that is a hallmark of modern secularism. The world has become a text, readable by all in its plain sense. And though tools such as microscopes and telescopes may be required to see the plain sense of all things, and though mathematical skills may be required to expound that plain sense, nevertheless, the world remains inert. It is a stable text without mystery.

Among the most important aspects of spiritual equality presumed in the plain sense reading, is that the inner state of the reader makes no difference. *The reader does not need to change in order to see the plain sense.* Seeing the truth is an *objective* experience, open to all, regardless of their inner state.

This, of course, is deeply contrary to the account within the Scriptures themselves. It is not only clear that not all of Christ's hearers understand what He says to them, but that He *purposefully obscures what He says*:

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.' (Mat 13:10-15)

Even the disciples do not understand until after the Resurrection (and it should be noted that it required a miracle):

Then He said to them, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. (Luk 24:44-45)

The Disciples of Christ are given an understanding that does not automatically (or objectively) belong to all. This, of course, is highly undemocratic. This same hierarchical view persisted, as evidenced in the creation of the diaconal ministry:

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Act 6:2-4)

The Christian meaning of the Scriptures is hidden beneath their plain sense (though it certainly can agree with the plain sense). That meaning requires, even of Apostles, that they "give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word."

It is deeply worth noting, if only for the sake of honesty, that the notion of the “plain sense” of Scripture, open to all believers, is a modern fiction. It serves to underwrite a modern theory of democratic Christianity that has never been more than a notion ventured forward in argument – for even the staunchest Protestants admit some level of training for their ministers and repeatedly create hierarchies despite their best efforts to the contrary.

But it is also worth admitting, for the sake of our salvation, that the Scriptures are often opaque and refuse to yield their treasure. We need teachers and those who have given themselves “continually to prayer.” The work of the Fathers is a living testimony to treasures given to us by God. More than that, their transfigured lives are a revelation of the very work of salvation God means to accomplish within us.

It makes plain sense to acknowledge this.

✠ ✠ ✠

Sola Scriptura ~ Fr. Stephen Freeman

A fair amount of Protestant thought, or what became Protestant thought, was derived from the debates with Islam. Yes, the whole *Sola Scriptura* idea was borrowed from Islam. There are many ways in which, philosophically, Protestant thought is little more than Christianized Islam.

But they persist in these slanders (of traditional Christianity) because it suits their own needs to defend themselves. But the proof is in the pudding. They produce no saints. They do not build civilizations. They build consumer republics with ugly buildings and empty people. They erect an indoor stadium and put on expensive entertainments and think themselves superior to those who built cathedrals and civilizations and who evangelized the world, and preserved the Scriptures and even preserved all knowledge (every scrap!) of the civilizations before Christianity.

These modern people have made the world dumber, less interesting, and filled with a nightmare emptiness. The modern, secular world is not the creation of atheists. It is the creation of Protestants. The atheists are their offspring.

It breaks my heart to say things like this – but it is true. These are historically verifiable facts. Even many Protestant thinkers agree with me about this. Except those who only repeat slanders and compound the ignorance of those who want to learn the truth.

The Reformation uncoupled the faith from Tradition and started down a road the created modernity. I don't think Luther or Calvin had any such thing in mind. In fact, I think very few did. **Contemporary Christianity is a far remove from anything the Reformers dreamed of. But it was a product of their work. They dismantled some things and unleashed certain forces that swept away Classical civilization. Modernity is a bad by-product of a flawed theology.** Unintended consequences perhaps. But compounding it today are Christians who have so changed the faith that it now underwrites modernity itself. The sons and daughters of Luther and Zwingli, Calvin and Cranmer preside over moribund churches that bless the unthinkable.

Reader Comment:

Access to the Scriptures has never been greater and yet many copies of the Bible are doing nothing more than taking up valuable space. There is something about scarcity that makes things valuable. In my mind the (medieval) peasants were much more eager to hear the Word read to them in pre-access times than congregants of today.

On Eternity

All the events of our life we must see in the prism of eternity. Then we can discern their real dimensions.

- **Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos**

"Do you know what eternity is? Eternity is beginning without end. That is, once it begins, it never ends....All the ages from the foundation of the world to the end are as the smallest speck in comparison to the whole world, or as a minute in comparison to thousands of years. There are two eternities: ... Fortunate eternity is full of joy and everything good, and is eternal life.

Unfortunate eternity is full of torment, sorrow ... and everything evil, and is eternal death. Let us repent, therefore, and wash away our sins with tears --- that we may avoid the unfortunate eternity and enter into eternal life and the Kingdom of God."

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

✧ Oh, if you could only know what joy, what sweetness await the souls of the righteous in heaven, then you would be determined in this temporal life to endure any sorrow, persecution or calumny with gratitude. If this very room were full of worms, and if these worms were to eat our flesh throughout our whole earthly life, then with utmost desire we should consent to it, if only not to be deprived of that heavenly joy which God has prepared for those that love Him. There, there is no sickness, no sorrow, no lamentation; there is sweetness and rejoicing unutterable; there the righteous will shine like the sun."

St. Seraphim of Sarov

✧ Constant fervent prayer brings us the most sincere and firm conviction of the immortality of our soul, and of the bliss of the future immaterial world; for we derive all the delights of prayer from God the Spirit. We borrow all the power of prayer from Him, and also by His grace from the Mother of God (it is she who saves our souls from misfortunes, who gives us peace, joy and new life), and from the angels and saints.

St. John of Kronstadt

✧ Let us imagine that God tells us to choose one of the two: either to suffer for one day so that we be healthy and happy for the rest of our lives, or to rejoice and feast for only one day and be unhappy and sick from then on. What would we choose? The first offer, undoubtedly - to be in suffering only one day and live with joy for the rest of our life. Is it not the same way with our life now? Our earthly existence is like a day in comparison to eternity. How much better it is to suffer a little and to endure our sorrows without grumbling, so that we will be in the place of joy in the world beyond! St. John the Chrysostom, amazed at the mercy of God's will for us, says: 'He has determined the toils for here where life is short, and He has kept the crowns for the future where life is eternally young and unending!'"

Fr. Seraphim Aleksiev

What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.

- Crowfoot, Blackfoot warrior (1890)

✧ **The Romanian Elder Dionysios Ignat of Mt.Athos was asked,** "At your patriarchal age of almost eighty years, what spiritual counsel do you give your holiness' spiritual children?"

"I remind them of the hymn that is chanted in church: 'Love God and your soul shall live.

Do not honor anything more than His love.'"

"What good deeds are most necessary for us to obtain our salvation?"

"The fulfillment of the divine commandments, the pure confession of our sins under the epitrachilion of the father confessor, without even one thought concealed in the heart, and communing the Body and Blood of the Lord with contrite tears, which affix the seal on our prayer received in Heaven."

✧ Pious exercises nourish the soul with divine thoughts. What state can be more blessed than to imitate on earth the choruses of angels? To begin the day with prayer, and honor our Maker with hymns and songs? As the day brightens, to betake ourselves, with prayer attending on it throughout, to our labors, and to sweeten our work with hymns, as if with salt? Soothing hymns compose the mind to a cheerful and calm state.

St. Basil the Great