

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 854-4235

Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **August 5, 2012** ✠

Prefeast of the Transfiguration

Martyr Eusignius of Antioch (362)

St. Nonna, Mother of St. Gregory the Theologian (374)

St. John of Neamts, the Chozevite (1960)

Come, let us transform
ourselves with a higher
transformation!
Let us prepare ourselves
for tomorrow,
To ascend the holy mountain
of God,
To behold the glory of
Christ!

- Vespers of August 5

✠ **This Week: Tomorrow – 10:00am Divine Liturgy – Feast of the Transfiguration**

✠ **Wed. Aug. 8 6:30pm Vespers ~ St. Herman of Alaska**

✠ **Fri. Aug. 10 6:30pm Paraklesis (Supplicatory Canon) to the Theotokos**

WORSHIP ~ O Come, let us worship!

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Early Church was that its membership was a worshipping community first and foremost. Whatever sprang from the life of the Early Church was in direct result to its allegiance to God and its effort to do His will. Collective worship, therefore, was an essential part of everyone's life in the Early Church. It bound each individual to the worshipping community. In short, collective worship defined each member's "Christian identity." We must recognize the importance of collective worship to our life today. Here, at our Church, we are a worshipping community. This means that just as the Holy Spirit affected the mind and heart of the Early Church, it affects our 21st century community's life. As a community, if we do not pray together, how can we possibly be moved collectively by God?

We should be increasingly concerned with our attendance. We should seek to understand the real reasons why Christians have been gathering collectively for centuries. We must address some of the shallow excuses that we at times use to avoid worship with our Church family. Recognize that irregular attendance on Sundays reflects our less than faithful commitment to Jesus Christ. Just as we quickly seek to repair an unreliable car, so must we seek to improve our participation in worship. The solution is simple: ask questions and participate frequently. For just as a reliable refrigerator can make a difference, just as a reliable car is a necessity, so too can interest and participation make a difference in our individual and collective spiritual development.

Will you lead your children to Christ or will they languish without God in their lives? The decision rests entirely on all those who are involved with the children: parents, Godparents, and grandparents. ~ Fr. Andrew Maginas, St. Catherine G.O. Church, West Palm Beach, FL

Let us Attend

✠ Let us attend to ourselves, brethren, let us learn self-control while we have time. Why do we neglect ourselves? Let us be doing something good all the time so that we may find help in the time of trial. Why do we fritter away our lives? We are always hearing a great deal about the spiritual life and we don't care about it, we even despise it. We see our brethren snatched away from our midst and we don't abstain [from passion and excess] even when we know that in a little while we too shall be near death.

~ St. Dorotheos of Gaza

The Dormition Fast

The Theotokos, the Virgin Mary, was "blessed among women," and she was chosen "to bear the Savior of our souls." We, therefore, as Orthodox Christians, consider her to be the Queen of all the Saints and the Angels.

Knowing that she holds such a high place in the Kingdom of Heaven and that she is eternally present at the throne of God interceding for mankind, we, as good Orthodox Christians pray for her love, guidance, and protection. We should never forget to ask for her intercessions in times of sickness and danger, and we should constantly thank her for her care and her prayers in our behalf.

Every year the Orthodox Church sets aside the first fourteen days of August in honor of the Virgin Mary. This fast period is climaxed on August 15th, when the Church gathers to celebrate the Great Feast of the Dormition (Falling-Asleep) of the Theotokos.

So why do we fast before Dormition? In a close-knit family, word that its matriarch is on her deathbed brings normal life to a halt. Otherwise important things (parties, TV, luxuries, personal desires) become unimportant; life comes to revolve around the dying matriarch.

It is the same with the Orthodox family; word that our matriarch is on her deathbed, could not (or at least should not) have any different effect than the one just mentioned. The Church, through the Paraklesis Service, gives us the opportunity to come to that deathbed and eulogize and entreat the woman who bore God, the vessel of our salvation and our chief advocate at His divine throne. And as, in the earthly family, daily routines and the indulgence in personal wants should come to a halt. Fasting, in its full sense (abstaining from food and desires) accomplishes this. Less time in leisure or other pursuits leaves more time for prayer and reflection on she who gave us Christ, and became the first and greatest Christian.

In reflecting on her and her incomparable life, we see a model Christian life, embodying Christ's retort to the woman who stated that Mary was blessed because she bore Him: blessed rather are those who hear His word and keep it. Theotokos did this better than anyone! As Fr. Thomas Hopko has stated, she heard the word of God and kept it so well, that she of all women in history was chosen not only to hear His Word but give birth to it (Him). So while we fast in contemplation of her life, we are simultaneously preparing ourselves to live a life in imitation of her. That is the purpose of the Dormition Fast. This period is also a good time to prepare and partake of the Sacrament of Holy Confession.

✠ Let us, then, cry out loudly with Peter's words, "Lord, save us!" And if we are willing to receive Christ into our ship; that is, to have Him dwell in our hearts; we shall immediately find ourselves at the land to which we are hastening. What land is that? Clearly, it is the promised land, heaven, the land of the meek, of them that refrain from evil. With them, then, may we also be vouchsafed to enter that land and be heirs of its good things; in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom be glory and dominion, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

-St. John Chrysostom

REFLECTIONS OF THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION **By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos**

The Transfiguration of Christ on Mt. Tabor took place a little before His Passion, forty days before the passion and crucifixion, to be exact. Moreover, the purpose of the Transfiguration was to confirm the Disciples in the faith that this was the Son of God, so that they would not be weakened by the things that they would see in those days. This truth is seen in the troparia of the Church. In one we sing: "Before Thy precious Cross and Thy Passion, taking with Thee those among Thy holy disciples that Thou hadst specially chosen, Thou hast gone up, O Master, into Mount Tabor". And in the Kontakion of the feast it says: "...that when they saw Thee crucified, they might know that Thy suffering was voluntary, and might proclaim unto the world that Thou art truly the Brightness of the Father".

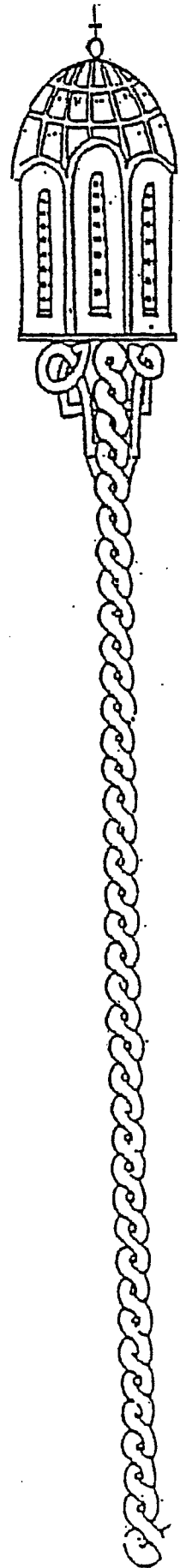
So, canonically Christ's Transfiguration should be celebrated in the month of March, corresponding to the time of the year when Easter is celebrated. But since this time coincides with the period of Lent and could not be celebrated festively, the feast was transferred to the sixth of August. This date is not chosen at random, as it is forty days before the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 September), which is similar to Good Friday.

The events of the feast are preserved in all three synoptic Gospels, for the Transfiguration is a central event in the life of Christ and contains many theological messages. (Matt. 17, 1-8, Mark 9, 2-8, Lk. 9, 28-36).

The Transfiguration of Christ is a crowning event in the life of the Disciples which relates to Pentecost, for it is a great experience of God. To be sure, there is a difference between the Transfiguration and Pentecost, in that at the Transfiguration the Disciples were not yet members of the deified Body of Christ, as they became on the day of Pentecost.

However, there are also other events in the life of Christ which constitute a transfiguration, when the Disciples were granted to see some rays of Christ's divinity. I shall cite two of these events.

One was the calling of the two Disciples to whom St. John the Baptist pointed out Christ. The Disciples had no sooner heard the Worthy Forerunner saying: "behold the lamb of God", than they followed him. And then "Jesus turned, and seeing them following, asked them what they were looking for. To their question about where he was staying, He invited them to come there with Him. And the Evangelist notes: "So they went



and saw where he was staying, and remained with him that day” (Jn. 1, 35-39). The fact that Christ turned His face and saw them means that He revealed the glory of His face to a small degree, which prompted them to want to stay with Him. Christ’s home is the light, for He is God “dwelling in unapproachable light”, and the fact that they stayed in his home that day means that the Disciples stayed a whole day in the vision of the uncreated Light.

Thus we understand that the calling of the Disciples was not a simple invitation to which they responded because they had great ardour, but it was a fruit of the vision and revelation. And it shows, as St. Theophylaktos says, that it is to those who follow Christ that He shows His face, the glory of His face, since if one does not actively follow Christ, one cannot attain the vision of God, for “how can he who has not purified himself and followed in purity be illuminated with knowledge?”

The second case is the calling of the Disciples, among whom was the Apostle Peter. Christ met them after the unsuccessful fishing and told them to cast their nets into the lake again. When against all expectation they caught many fish, Simon Peter threw himself at the feet of Christ and said: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man”. And Luke the Evangelist justifies him: “For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken” (Lk. 5, 1-11). The Apostle Peter’s sense that he was a sinful man was a fruit and result of the amazement, and of the ecstasy in which he was left by the miracle. It was an experience of the glory of God, the sense of the presence of the Son and Word of God, but also of his own impurity, his sinfulness. If this event is compared with parallel apocalyptic events in the Old and New Testaments it shows that it is an amazement coming not from external events, but from a revelation of the glory of God.

2.

The word ‘transfiguration’ means change of form. In other words, at a certain moment Christ revealed what He had been concealing, He manifested the glory of the divinity with which His human nature was united from the moment of His conception in the womb of the Theotokos. Through His great love for mankind Christ concealed what He always had, in order that the Disciples should not “be burned” by reason of their unfitness, because they had not yet been prepared.

At that moment Christ was transfigured, “not assuming something that he was not, nor changing into something which he was not, but manifesting what he was to his own disciples” (St. John of Damaskos). Essentially, when we speak of the Transfiguration we mean that He manifested the glory of His divinity, which He kept unseen in the visible body, because men were not able to face it.



ON THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN - Part 3

Elder Porphyrios of Athens (+1991)

With children what is required is a lot of prayer and few words

All things are achieved through prayer, silence and love. Have you understood the effects of prayer? Love in prayer, love in Christ. That is what is truly beneficial. As long as you love your children with human love - which is often pathological - the more they will be mixed-up, and the more their behavior will be negative. But when the love between you and towards your children is holy and Christian love, then you will have no problem. The sanctity of the parents saves the children. For this to come about, divine grace must act on the souls of the parents. No one can be sanctified on his own. The same divine grace will then illuminate warm and animate the souls of the children. People often telephone me from abroad and ask me about their children and about other matters. Today a mother phoned me from Milan and asked me how she should behave towards her children. What I said to her was this:

'Pray, and when you have to, speak to your children with love. Lots of prayer and few words. Lots of prayer and few words for everyone. We mustn't become an annoyance, but rather pray secretly and then speak, and God will let us know in our hearts whether the others have accepted what we have said. If not, we won't speak. We will simply pray mystically. Because if we speak we become an annoyance and make others react or even infuriate them. That is why it is better to speak mystically to the heart of others through secret prayer rather than to their ears.

Pray and then speak. That's what to do with your children. If you are constantly lecturing them, you'll become tiresome and when they grow up they'll feel a kind of oppression. Prefer prayer and speak to them through prayer. Speak to God and God will speak to their hearts. That is, you shouldn't give guidance to your children with a voice that they hear with their ears. You may do this too, but above all you should speak to God about your children. Say, "Lord Jesus Christ, give Your light to my children. I entrust them to You. You gave them to me, but I am weak and unable to guide them, so, please, illuminate them." And God will speak to them and they will say to themselves, "Oh dear, I shouldn't have upset Mummy by doing that!" And with the grace of God this will come from their heart.

This is the most perfect way - for the mother to speak to God and for God to speak to the children. If you do not communicate in this way, constant lecturing becomes a kind of intimidation. And when the child grows up it begins to rebel, that is, to take revenge, so to speak, on its father and mother who coerced it. One way is the perfect way - for the mothers and father's holiness and love in Christ to speak. The radiance of sanctity and not human effort makes for good children.

When the children are traumatized and hurt on account of some serious situation, don't let it affect you when they react negatively and speak rudely. In reality they don't want to, but can't help themselves at difficult times. They are remorseful afterwards. But if you become irritated and enraged, you become one with the evil spirit and it makes a mockery of you all.

The sanctity of the parents is the best way of bringing up children in the Lord.

We must see God in the faces of our children and give God's love to our children. The children should learn to pray. And in order for children to pray they must have in them the blood of praying parents. This is where some people make the mistake of saying, 'since the parents are devout and pray, meditate on Holy Scripture and bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, it is natural that they will become good children.' But nevertheless we see the very opposite result on account of coercion.

It is not sufficient for the parents to be devout. They mustn't oppress the children to make them good by force. We may repel our children from Christ when we pursue the things of our religion with egotism. Children cannot endure coercion. Don't compel them to come with you to church. You can say, 'Whoever wants can come with me now or come later.' Leave God to speak to their souls. The reason why the children of some devout parents become rebellious when they grow up and reject the Church and everything connected with it and go off to seek satisfaction elsewhere is because of this pressure which they feel from their 'good' parents. The so-called 'devout' parents, who were anxious to make good Christians of their children with their human love, pressurized their children and produced the opposite result. The children are pressurized when they are young, and when they reach the age of sixteen, seventeen or eighteen years old, they end up the opposite of what was intended. By way of reaction they start to mix with bad company and to use bad language.

When children grow up in an atmosphere of freedom and at the same time are surrounded by the good example of grown-ups, they are a joy to see. The secret is to be good and saintly and to inspire and radiate. The life of the children seems to be affected by the radiation of their parents. If the parents insist, 'Come on now, go and make confession, go and receive Communion', and so on, nothing is achieved. But what does your child see in you? How do you live and what do you radiate? Does Christ radiate in you? That is what is transmitted to your child. This is where the secret lies. And if this is done when the child is young, it will not be necessary for it to undergo 'great travail' when it grows up. Solomon the Wise uses a beautiful image about exactly this subject, underlining the importance of a good start and good foundations: He who Wisd. 6:14 seeks her [Wisdom] early shall have no great travail; for he shall find her [DC] sitting at his doors. The person who 'seeks her early' is the person who occupies himself with Wisdom from an early age. Wisdom is Christ.

When the parents are saintly and transmit this to the child and give the child an upbringing 'in the Lord', then the child, whatever the bad influences around it, will not be affected because by the door of its heart will be Wisdom - Christ Himself. The child will not undergo great travail to acquire Wisdom. It seems very difficult to become good, but in reality it is very easy when from an early age you start with good experiences. As you grow up effort is not required; you have goodness within you and you experience it. You don't weary yourself; it is yours, a possession which you preserve, if you are careful, throughout your life.

What is true for parents is also true for teachers. With prayer and sanctity you can also help children at school. The grace of God can overshadow them and make them good. Don't attempt with human methods to correct bad situations. No good will come of this. Only with prayer will you produce results. Invoke the grace of God on all the children - for divine grace to enter their souls and transform them. That is what it means to be a Christian.

Adults can transmit your anxiety to the children, without realizing it, and this affects them. With faith anxiety dissolves. What is it that we say? 'We commit our whole life to Christ our God.'*

Testimonies about St. Herman of Alaska

Archpriest Prokopy Povarnitsyn

CONVERSER WITH ANGELS

AT THE END OF THE 1930's and the beginning of the 1940's, when the Russian Orthodox Church in America was under the Synod Abroad, I spent more than three years as a pastor in Alaska, where right and left I heard a great number of stories about Father Herman, the Wonderworker of Alaska. People told of his ascetic life, of his miracles, many cases of miraculous help from the water of his spring, from placing earth from his grave on diseased places, cases of sight restored to the blind, of the healing of every kind of cripple, and so on. Of course, one doesn't remember everything. It was a long time ago, and for some reason I didn't write anything down then. I remember very well that a great deal was said. I myself spoke with those who had received miraculous help by the prayers of God's Saint.

While I was serving in Kodiak as a priest, the Aleuts there also told me much about Father Herman and of this the following two incidents stand out sharply in my mind; as I recall, I've never come across them anywhere in print, but they seem nonetheless quite authentic.

Sweet Singing

The Aleuts related that when Father Herman was still alive and lived on Spruce Island, the local inhabitants used to go to the Elder for some reason or other. And more than once it happened thus: They approached the chapel where he celebrated Divine services, and they heard superb choral singing, a multitude of voices singing. They wondered where the people had come from. And all this time the singing was dearly audible, and such harmonious, sweet singing... They opened the door into the little chapel, and there Father Herman stood alone reading, chanting half- aloud, celebrating the Lord's service. And of course he was alone and there was no one there with him. Father Herman was not a priest, and he could only read and sing as on the cliros. And such a thing was noticed more than once. It was Angels of God who sang with him praise to the Lord.

In the biography of Father Herman there occurs this incident. The Elder was asked: "How do you live alone in the forest, Father Herman? Don't you become bored?" He replied: "No! I am not alone there! God is there, as God is everywhere. Holy Angels are there. And can one become bored with them? With whom is converse better and more pleasant, with men or with Angels? Of course, with Angels!"

A Miraculous Feast

"He answered and said unto them, give ye them to eat... And they did all eat, and were filled."
~ St. Mark 6: 37, 42

THE ALEUTS TOLD ME also the following incident, which took place on Spruce Island not long before Father Herman's death. Two American natives came to the Elder on the island, either hunters or fishermen. In any case, they came to look at the Elder, because much was said about him even during his lifetime. They were very hungry and, having greeted the Elder asked him to feed them. The Elder readily agreed, but told them that they would have to wait a little, to which they agreed. Father Herman went to the little canal not far from his cell, which flowed into the creek, and that into the ocean. The Elder went down to the water and caught a little fish with his hands. He brought it to his cell and began to prepare it. The natives, seeing that one such little fish would hardly satisfy their hunger, called the Elder's attention to this. But the Elder only replied that they should not worry. And what happened? When the meat was ready and the Elder served it to them, he not only fed them until they were full, but there was a great deal left over from this little fish. Astonished and miraculously fed, they left and told many people of this. And this story came down to me. Everything set down here I personally, being for three years in Alaska, heard from the local Aleut inhabitants.

Archpriest Prokopy Povarnitsyn, June 16, 1967
St. Tikhon of Kaluga, San Francisco, California

Testimonies about St. Herman of Alaska

Serge Yanovsky, whom St. Herman converted back to Orthodoxy

SAINT HERMAN'S EARTHLY CASTLE

WE HAVE RETURNED from a 200-mile trip to the islands and to the coasts of our colonies. One of the most pleasant memories which we brought back from this trip was that of Father Herman, who has been living among the Indians now for forty years and has devoted himself completely to his civilizing mission. The vigor and liveliness of his mind, and his profound and true piety made him an amiable and instructive companion, and I regretted having to part with him.

The worthy clergyman was sent to the then still heathen Aleuts on the island of Kodiak in 1795. This territory, which is quite rightly called Land of Hunger, suffers from a severe climate. The mountains are bare, and the coasts and the inland are covered with virgin forests and swamps.

In 1795, a Mission of several clergymen settled in Kodiak. One of them became a victim of his own zeal. When he was on his way to visit some poor villagers, he was swallowed up in the swamp. Another one was sent back because of poor conduct. Father Herman kept faithfully to his post.

It was difficult to get to Herman. We had to force our way through the forest, where the storm had broken the dry branches of the trees and scattered them around and had uprooted many trees. In the middle of the island we found a half-collapsed hut. There he stood, a little old man of 76, bent over, with dazzling white beard and hair, and bright lively eyes which, however, were almost completely deprived of sight. He had a clear voice full of liveliness, which was the reflection of the nimbleness of a refined mind. His movements were energetic, as of a man thirty years old. He had a sense of humor, and it was difficult to understand how he could have retained so much elasticity and interest in everything after having lived forty years in solitude.

I expressed my wish to visit his hut. Herman remarked, laughing, that the sight of his castle would be too imposing. The hut stands in a clearing and is just about to fall to pieces. The inside corresponds to the outside. One enters through a kind of anteroom which is blocked up by a pile of wood and various other things. The main room is just as dark as the first room. There is a wooden bench along the walls all around the room, in the Russian manner. An oven of huge dimensions is a little sunk in; a leather cushion on its side serves as a bed. The blankets and the mattress are not there; the window-sill of the only window serves as the dining table. A table and a wooden bowl complete the household furniture, together with some cracked earthenware. In one corner one sees an old library, consisting of religious books which are approved by the Greek Orthodox Church. The books are torn from much usage.

Outside the hut there is a small field, which the Father cultivates and which furnishes potatoes, turnips, and radishes. It is two miles to the beach, and Herman has to carry all the seaweed from there himself, which he uses as fertilizer. The dry branches lying around supply him with firewood, and this excellent man assured us that no prince in his castle could be a more absolute lord than he is, and that he has everything in abundance. We saw some bread lying on the breadboard, and its origin was not quite clear to us. Herman told us that he dries potato slices on the oven and grinds them to flour in a little hand-mill. His bread had a quite good taste...