



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ August 19, 2012 ✠

Postfeast of the Dormition

Old Calendar Transfiguration

Martyr Andrew Stratelates



⇒ – Parish Council Meeting today

⇒ Dates Ahead:

Next Sunday, Aug. 26 – Lauren Wells - baby shower

Sept. 1 – Joseph Preston Baptism ;

Sept. 8 – Nativity of the Theotokos & Maxim Landar Baptism ;

Sept. 14 – Feast of the Elevation of the Cross

Sept. 15 – Saturday night Psalm-a-thon ;

Sept. 16 – Church School begins / Junia Boyer - baby shower

Sept. 30 – Annual Parish Meeting / Oct. 28 - 35th Anniversary Banquet

Sons of His Mother

✠ Just as we all receive of His fullness, so do we all partake of the immaculate flesh of His all-holy Mother which He assumed, and so, just as Christ our God, true God, became her son; even so we, too - O, the ineffable love for mankind! - become sons of His Mother, the Theotokos, and brothers of Christ Himself, as through the all-immaculate and ineffable marriage which took place with and in her, the Son of God was born of her, and from Him in turn, all the Saints.
~ St. Symeon the New Theologian

A Remembrance of Elder Joseph the Hesychast (+August 15, 1959)

Father Joseph the Hesychast is one of the most striking Athonite personalities of this century. Thanks to his disciples who transmitted and applied his teaching and his way of life to ever-growing communities, he can justly be considered the principal author of the present restoration of the tradition of the *prayer of the heart*.

Coming to Athos at the age of twenty-three, nourished by the accounts of the great ascetics of earlier times, he looked immediately for a spiritual father who would teach him the *science of sciences*. But he could find no one at all. After a brief stay at Katounakia with an ascetic, he came to rest with Father Arsenius, his faithful companion in asceticism, in a wretched hut at the skete of Saint Basil. In fact, the two stayed at the hut only during

the coldest months of winter; the rest of the year—for about ten years—they spent in rocky caves in the cliffs of Athos, sustaining themselves with a little dry bread and devoting all their time to prayer.

Father Joseph never allowed himself any relaxation in his asceticism, in spite of a deplorable state of health that brought him little by little to a condition of semi-paralysis. Since, however, his younger disciples could not endure the austerity of the caves, he decided at last to move his community to a more accessible place, New Skete. It is there that, a little later, he gave his soul back to God—a true martyr. Throughout his life, because of his sacrifice, God accorded him many spiritual gifts: visions of light, appearances, clairvoyance and discernment of thoughts. After his death, the Holy Spirit bore witness to His presence in breathing from his remains a sweet perfume.

We present here a few stories from his life as they have been reported by his disciples, some of whom are still living:

At the beginning of his sojourn on Athos, not having found a spiritual father, Father Joseph lived for some time close to the cave of Saint Athanasius the Athonite, a short distance from Great Lavra. There he led a very austere life, and once succeeded in standing for eight days while neither eating nor sleeping. He used to say, 'No ascetic practice brings so many blessings as the deprivation of sleep. Truly, vigil dissolves the body.'

During this period, in spite of all his efforts, he could not get past the stage of vocal prayer. As soon as he would stop repeating aloud "*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me . . .*" his concentration would break up in different thoughts. One day, as he was looking toward Athos to ask the Mother of God to help him in his distress, he saw suddenly a flash of light, accompanied by a violent wind, burst forth from the chapel of the transfiguration which is located on the peak of the mountain. The radiance bent in an arc from its point of origin directly to Father Joseph, penetrating right to his heart: "I immediately felt altogether transformed. I was filled with light and could no longer feel whether I had a body or not. At that point, the prayer began to repeat itself in my heart with the steadiness and regularity of a clock.' He re-entered his cave and sat down, his chin upon chest, to follow the prayer in his heart. But then he was carried off in ecstasy. He felt he had found himself transported to heaven, to a place where there reigned an indescribable calm and peace. One thought alone came to him "Oh God, make it so that I never return to the world, but stay here always, with you." From that time on the prayer never stopped resonating in his heart.

When he met his companion in asceticism, Arsenius (+ 1983) on the day of the feast of the Transfiguration on the summit of Athos, he told him: 'You're the one I've been looking for!' Arsenius replied: "Me, too." They began to live together keeping throughout the week a strict fast and complete silence. Whenever they left the "desert" to go on foot to Karyes-about a ten-hour hike-they would walk over two hundred yards apart from each other in order not to talk. After quickly dealing with their business at Karyes, they would return the same way they had come-without even taking water or the - least offer of food. On returning to the hut at Saint Basil, they would say: "Through love for Christ, let us eat today!"

One feast day, Father Arsenius left in order to take part in the service at a neighboring house. Father Joseph preferred to remain in the hut to avoid any distraction. "All that evening, he recalled, "I had the insistent thought that all the other fathers were going to take communion while I, because of my sins remained unworthy of it. While I was seated trying to concentrate on the prayer, this idea wouldn't go away. It kept increasing in me an intense desire for the Bread of life. I was blaming myself for such distraction when, suddenly, I sensed a presence close to me. I opened my eyes and there, in the darkness, I saw an angel whose radiance filled the whole place with light, light as of another world. He held in his hand a sparkling vase. He opened it carefully, approached me and made me communicate of the Body of the Lord with fear and great devotion. Then he looked at me with a modest smile, closed the vase, and ascended to heaven through the roof as he had come. My heart burned with love for Christ, such that nothing worldly came to trouble me."

His love for the Mother of God and his confidence in her were limitless. He once said: "When I was in the cave near Little Saint Anne's, the temptations and afflictions would multiply, and my sole consolation was our holy Mother. One day, I went to our little chapel where this little icon was once [the icon that he wore always]. I stood in prayer before her, asking and crying out: 'Come quickly to help me, oh compassionate one, because you can do so whenever you want . . . ' I then saw the icon shine with a blinding light, then the face of the Mother of God increased to life-size. It was no longer an image, but the Virgin Queen herself who was present. She held the Lord in her arms, a suckling child, and said in a voice sweeter than honey, more fragrant than perfumes:

"Haven't I told you to put your trust in me? Why are you so discouraged Here, take Christ!' Our most sweet Jesus then extended His hand and caressed, three times, my brow and head. My soul filled immediately with

light, and with a boundless love, so much so that I could no longer remain standing. I fell on the ground and kissed devoutly the place where the Queen of the world had stood."

He said once more: "The most fearsome form of the passion of sleep is when Grace retires from us, and when negligence and obscurity take hold of us, not letting the least consolation shine through ... One day, I was roughly tested by this passion. I was struggling not to give way and was nearly at the end of my strength. Then I interrupted my struggle to cry to the Lord with tears: 'Lord, are they going to overcome me?' Immediately, I heard a soft voice deep within me: "Will you not endure even this for love of me?" My sorrow disappeared suddenly like a cloud vanishes before the sun, and, tears in my eyes, I jumped with joy like a child: 'Yes, Lord, for you! Come and help my weakness!'"

Concerning the divine light, Father Joseph said: "Compared to the divine light, the light of the world-even the noon-day sun-is only darkness. A strange thing: at that time there takes place a communion, a union of the Infinite and Uncreated with men who are created and limited. By His energies, the latter are truly transformed into *gods and sons of the Most High*. It is then alone that man can understand, and be assured in all his being, that he is the image and likeness of God Himself Every limitation of time and of space disappears. He soars above duration and space, and finds himself immersed in peace. He feels that he has become like God in Whom he participates by grace of His energies. He feels that he is god in the bosom of God, without knowing how this has come to pass or to what degree. He forgets everything about his former state and his origins. He knows only God Who envelopes him, and how sweet He is. He no longer doubts, is no longer astonished, no longer searches out meaning, but rejoices fully in a measureless happiness that no longer seems strange to him, but rather something which is proper and natural.'

So it is that, day after day, for a thousand years, the angels have not stopped inscribing in the book of heaven the wonderful actions of the servants of God.

■ taken from *The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain*
by Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin

ON THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN – Part 4

Elder Porphyrios of Athens (+1991)

Children are not edified by constant praise

Children are not edified by constant praise. They become self-centered and vain. All their lives they will want everyone to be praising them constantly, even if they are being told lies. Unfortunately, nowadays all people have learned to tell lies and the conceited accept those lies as their daily sustenance. 'Say it, even if it's not true, even if it's ironical,' they say. God does not want this. God wants truth. Unfortunately, not all people understand this and they do the very opposite.

When you praise children constantly and indiscriminately, they fall prey to the temptations of the evil one. He sets the mill of egotism in motion, and accustomed as they are to praise from their parents and teachers, they make progress at school perhaps, but what is the gain? In life they will be egotists and not Christians. Egotists can never be Christians. Egotists desire to be praised constantly by everyone, for everyone to love them and for everyone to speak well of them, and this is something that our God, our Church and our Christ do not want.

Our religion does not wish for this kind of upbringing. On the contrary, it wants children to learn the truth from an early age. The truth of Christ emphasizes that if you praise a person you make him an egotist. An egotist is mixed-up and is led by the devil and the evil spirit. And so, growing up in the spirit of egotism, his first task is to deny God and to be a badly adjusted egotist in society.

You must tell the truth for a person to learn it. Otherwise you sustain him in his ignorance. When you tell someone the truth, he finds his bearings, he takes care, he listens to other people and he restrains himself. And so to a child also you must tell the truth and scold it so that it knows that what it is doing is not good. What does Solomon say? He that spares the rod hates his son, but he that loves him chastens him diligently. I don't mean, of course, for you to beat the child with a stick. Then we overstep the bounds and produce the opposite result. By praising our children from an early age we lead them to egotism. And you can hoodwink an egotist, provided you tell him how good he is and inflate his ego. And so he tells you, 'This person who praises me is good.' These things are not right. Because such a person grows up with egotism, confusions arise within him, he suffers and he doesn't know what he is doing. The cause of psychological instability and disorder is egotism. This is something that psychiatrists themselves, if they explore the matter, will discover, namely, that the egotist is sick.

We should never praise and flatter our fellow men, but rather lead them to humility and love of God. Nor should we seek to be loved by flattering others. Let us learn to love and not seek to be loved. Let us love everyone and make sacrifices, as great as we are able, for all our brothers and sisters in Christ, without expecting praise and love from them in return. They will do for us whatever God inspires them to. If they are Christians, they will give glory to God that we helped them or spoke a good word to them.

This is also the way you should guide the children at school. This is the truth. Otherwise they grow up maladjusted. They don't know what they are doing and where they are going, and we are the cause of it, on account of the way we have brought them up. We have not led them to truth, to humility and to the love of God. We have turned them into egotists and look at the result!

There are also, however, children who come from humble parents who spoke to them from an early age about God and about holy humility. These children do not create problems to their fellow men. They do not get angry when you point out their error, but try to correct it and pray that God may help them not to become egotists.

When I went to the Holy Mountain I lived with exceedingly saintly elders. They never said to me, 'Well done.' They always counseled me how to love God and how to be always humble, to invoke God to fortify my soul and to love Him greatly. I didn't know what 'well done' was, nor did I ever desire it. On the contrary, I was distressed if my elders didn't scold me. I said to myself, 'Heavens above, I haven't found myself good elders!' I wanted them to correct me, to censure me and behave strictly towards me. If a Christian were to hear what I'm saying now, what would he say? He would be taken aback and reject it. But nevertheless that is what is right, humble and sincere.

My parents never said 'well done' to me either. For that reason, whatever I did, I did selflessly. Now that I hear people singing my praises, I feel very bad. There's something that kicks in protest when other people say to me, 'well done', the fact that I learned humility did me no harm. And why do I not want to be applauded now? Because I know that praise makes a person empty and expels the grace of God. The grace of God comes only with holy humility. A humble man is a perfect man. Is that not a fine thing? Is that not true?

If you tell this to anyone they will immediately say, 'What a piece of nonsense! If you don't praise your child he won't be able to do his schoolwork or anything. 'But that happens because that's what we're like, and we have made our children the same. In other words, we have strayed from the truth. Egotism evicted man from Paradise; it is a great evil. Adam and Eve were simple and humble; that's why they lived in Paradise. They didn't have egotism. They did, however, have the 'primal nature', as we call it in theological language. When we say 'primal nature' we mean the gifts of grace that God bestowed on man in the beginning when He created him, namely, life, immortality, consciousness, freedom of will, love, humility, etc. Through flattery, however, the devil managed to delude them. They became filled with egotism. The natural state of man as created by God, however, is humility. Egotism, on the contrary, is something unnatural, an illness and contrary to nature.

When we, with our laudations, create this 'superego' in the child, we inflate its egotism and we do it great harm. We make the child more susceptible to demonic influence. And so, as we bring it up, we steadily distance it from the values of life. Don't you believe that this is the reason why children go astray and people rebel? It is the egotism that their parents have implanted in them from an early age. The devil is the great egotist, the great Lucifer. In other words, we live with Lucifer inside us, with the devil. We don't live with humility. Humility is from God; it is something essential for the human soul. It is something organic. And if it is missing, it is as if the heart were missing from the human organism. The heart gives life to the body and humility gives life to the soul. With egotism a person is given over to the part of the evil spirit, that is, he develops with the evil spirit and not with the good spirit.

This is what the devil has succeeded in achieving. He has turned the earth into a labyrinth so that we are unable to come to an understanding with one another. What has happened to us without our realizing it? Do you see how we have been led astray? We have turned our world and our age into one large psychiatric hospital! And we don't understand what's gone wrong. We all ask, 'What's become of us, where are we going, why have our children taken off, why have they left their homes, why have they resigned from life, why have they given up their studies? Inside me why is all this happening?' The devil has succeeded in concealing himself and in making people use other names. Doctors and psychologists often say when someone is tormented, 'Ah, this person has a neurosis or is suffering from anxiety.' They don't accept that the devil is inciting and arousing egotism in the person. But yet the devil exists and is the spirit of evil. If we say he doesn't exist, it is as if we are rejecting the Gospel that speaks of him. He is our enemy, our adversary in life, the contrary of Christ, which is why he is called the Anti-Christ. Christ came to earth to release us from the devil and to grant us salvation.

VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY, by Protopresbyter Michael Polsky

The Words of Holy Hieromartyr Methodius, Bishop of Patara (+312)

“The holy Mother of God clearly fulfilled that which was written in images by the Prophet Isaiah” (6, 6-7).

“Awesome, in very truth, is the mystery fulfilled in thee, O Virgin Mother, spiritual throne, glorified and made worthy by God. Thou hast brought forth before the eyes of those in heaven and earth, a preeminent wonder Blessed art thou among women, and well-blessed for through thee the earth hath been filled with the sacred glory of God... the Ark of the Covenant prefigured thee ... For if to the Ark which was the image and type of thy sanctity, such honor was paid of God that to no one but to the priestly order only was access to it open, or ingress allowed to behold it, the veil separating it off and keeping the approach thereto as that of a queen, what and how great veneration is due to thee from us who are the least of creation, to thee who art indeed a Queen, to thee the Living Ark of God the Lawgiver, Who made of thee a heaven that contains Him that cannot be contained? For since thou, O All-holy one, hast dawned as a bright day upon the world, and hast brought forth the Sun of Righteousness, that hateful horror of darkness hath been chased away...”

“What shall I say to thee, O Mother-Virgin and Virgin Mother? Thy work is not merely human, and the praise due thee is higher than that of man. My dismal poverty will be clothed upon with the glorification of thee from the Spirit, as I offer thee thine own.... And so, receive, O most well disposed Lady, precious gifts fitting only for thee, O thou who art exalted above all generations and who art more honorable than all created things, both visible and invisible.”

“Blessed of the Lord is thy name, full of Divine grace, O thou who gayest birth to God and enlightenest the faithful.... Thou hast lent to God, Who stands in need of nothing, that flesh which He had not, in order that the Omnipotent One might become that which it was His good pleasure to be. What is more glorious than this? What is more sublime than this? He Who fills earth and heaven, Whose are all things, hath become in need of thee, for thou hast lent to God the flesh which He had not. Thou hast clothed the Almighty One with the beauteous panoply of the flesh, through which He hath become visible and accessible to me. And I, in order that I might freely approach to behold Him, have received that by which “all the fiery darts of the wicked shall be quenched” (Eph. 6:1 6). It is wondrous and most fair, O Mother and handmaid of God! It is wondrous and most fair, O thou to whom the Creditor of all is a debtor He Who said, “Honor thy father and thy mother” (Ex. 20:12) will have most assuredly, as Himself willing to be proved by such proofs, kept inviolate that grace, and His own decree towards her who ministered unto Him that birthing to which He voluntarily stooped, and will have glorified with a Divine honor her whom He, as being without a father, even as she had given birth without a husband, Himself had recorded as mother. Even so must these things be!”

“Time would fail us, and future generations too, to render thee fitting salutation as the Mother of the King of the Ages (1 Tim. 1:17), even as somewhere one of the sacred Prophets says, teaching us how incomprehensible thou art: “How great is the house of God, and how vast is the place of His majesty! He is great and hath no end, high and unmeasurable” (Baruch 3:24-25). For truly this prophecy and truly this most true saying concerns thy greatness, for thou alone has been deemed worthy to share with God the things of God; thou alone hast borne Him in the flesh, Who is the Only-Begotten of God the Father, begotten co-eternally of Him. **So do they truly confess who hold fast to the right Faith.**”



WHAT DO THE COLOR CHANGES MEAN IN THE CHURCH?

By Archpriest Joseph Hirsch

This will seem like a strange way to begin an answer, but, when my son began Karate lessons, I discovered that there were a number of ranks in the ancient sport, each of which was accompanied by its own peculiarly colored belt. The first belt he received was white and these were followed, in turn, by yellow, green, blue, purple, brown and black. My son explained that, while the colors might vary from sport to sport, they derived from the changes in appearance of a new "white" belt as it is worn over many years.

The connection with your question is this: the original church vestments worn by clergy were all white. The undergarment or STICHARION was and is, simply, "The Robe of Light" or baptismal robe. Over this, were worn the ordinary street clothes of the first through third century lower social classes. The FELONIAN or PLANETA was a form of "poncho" worn over the head. The DALMATIC or Deacon's Sticharion (Named for the wool of the province of Dalmatia from which it was woven) was a form of TUNIC or large outer shirt, etc.

We know that special clean clothes of these kinds were kept at the place of worship, so that the Bishop, Presbyters, Deacons and other ministers could be fastidiously dressed. In time, it seems, these garments would age and discolor so natural dyes seem to have been used to render the old gray vestments more seemly. It must be remembered that, for most of Church history, most parishes could only afford two or three sets of vestments so, few if any parishes had all of the possible colors.

The Orthodox service books direct that the brightest vestments, usually white, should be worn for the highest festive days and second best sets for lesser feasts. It is sometimes directed that a dark vestment (dark red, blue, purple, violet or even brown) should be worn. I understand that black did not enter as a

liturgical "Color" until the reign of Tsar Peter when it may have been imported from the Roman Catholic color scheme, which had only become standardized itself after the Reformation. As artificial dyes made more brilliant colors possible, it was probably natural that meaning would be attached to the various colors and that Altar and Analo covers would also be made in matched sets.

Today, most parishes use White for Holy Pascha and the Pentecost season. Red is normally used for the Holy Apostles and other Martyrs. Light blue is often used for feasts of the Holy Theotokos, Green for the Feast of Pentecost and Sundays following and Dark Blue, Violet, Purple or Black for the Lenten Season. Additionally, Gold or Red are sometimes used for Autumnal weeks after Pentecost while many Greek Churches follow the Roman practice of wearing Violet for the pre-Christmas fast and some traditions use Red for the Sunday of the Holy Cross in Lent and Green for the Sunday of Palms. Bright Red or Red and White are also not uncommon usage for Pascha.

In any case, the colors are intended to be evocative of the theme or mood of the feast or season. White is light, Green is life, Red is blood, Violet is mourning, etc. When we enter the Temple and see a change in color, it should be one more lure to draw our attention towards God. I might add the note that every Sunday is a "Little Pascha" and that White or at least Bright Vestments are always appropriate on Sundays. It is also good to recall that White is the original color of all vestments. My son reminded me that the oldest and most venerable teachers of Karate wear simple white belts. We should also aspire so to pass through all of the ordeals and trials of this earthly struggle, that, at the end, our garments (Our spiritual robes) may be "White with wear".

How does a person become bad? – From forgetting that God is over him...

~ St. Ambrose of Optina