



Theotokos of Vladimir

## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 854-4235

Visit [stsymeon.com](http://stsymeon.com)

✠ **August 26, 2012** ✠

**Vladimir Icon**

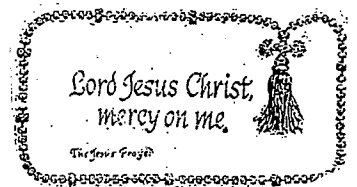
**of the Most-Holy Theotokos (1395)**

**Martyrs Adrian & Natalia of Nicomedia (311)**

**St. Maria of Diveyevo, Fool-for-Christ (1931)**

Everything is beautiful in a person when he turns toward God, and everything is ugly when it is turned away from God.

~ Fr. Pavel Florensky (20th C)



- ⇒ Today: Building Committee Meeting / Lauren Wells - baby shower
- ✠ Tues. August 28 6:30pm Vespers – Beheading of St. John Baptist

#### ⇒ Dates Ahead:

- ⇒ This Saturday, Sept. 1, 3:00pm – 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

*Olive Oil Donations Needed:  
Plain, not extra virgin  
& not "pomace," please...*

- Sept. 16 – Church School begins / Junia Boyer - baby shower
- October 7 – Annual Parish Meeting / Oct. 28 - 35th Anniversary Banquet

✠ "Anyone who desires to know the truth ought to turn to the Church, since through Her alone did the Apostles expound the Divine Truth. She is the door to life."

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

✠ "The First and most essential means of making peace with those who offend and persecute us is to pray for them according to the Commandment of Christ."

St. Leo of Optina

#### **A Measure of the Joy of Paradise**

✠ The Apostle Paul says that faith is believing in the things we don't see, not merely in the things we do see. When we place our future in God's hands, we oblige Him to help us. Absolute trust in God is born of faith, with which we pray in secret and enjoy the fruit of hope. It is a constant prayer which brings divine results at the right time. It is then that man lives an angelic life and bursts out in praise, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord*. For man can make of his life a life in Paradise, if he trusts God, praises Him for everything and accepts Him as a Loving Father guiding his life. Otherwise, he can make his life hell. It is a wonderful thing for man to be able to experience from this life a measure of the joy of Paradise.

– Elder Paisios (+1994)

#### **With each prayer they are seriously wounded...**

✠ You don't see how, with every prayer you utter, many demons fall and turn back. You only see how much you are wounded. Know that they also are being beaten, and flee. Each time we show patience, they flee in leaps; and with each prayer they are seriously wounded. So, in time of war, don't expect that - while you are firing bullets and cannonballs - they'll retaliate with Turkish Delight and chocolates.

- Elder Joseph the Hesychast (+1959)

## **Pearls of the Holy Fathers 7:2**

✠ A heart that has been completely emptied of mental images gives birth to divine, mysterious intellections that sport within it like fish and dolphins in a calm sea. The sea is fanned by a soft wind, the heart's depth by the Holy Spirit. 'And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: "Abba, Father"' (Gal. 4:6). St. Hesychios the Priest  
Pray that you may be granted the grace to read the Fathers with the right understanding, the grace to live up to the standards they put before you, and the grace to clearly see your own frailty. You will not long be left wanting and waiting. God will give you help.

St. Macarius of Optina

✠ I beg you all, I entreat you, my dear brethren, consider the Lord's precepts and the teachings of our holy Fathers. Those shining lights wrote nothing they had not first practiced, and by practicing it succeeded in it.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

✠ Spiritual reading and prayer purify the intellect, while love and self-control purify the soul's emotional aspect. Impel your intellect continually to prayer and you will destroy the evil thoughts that beset your heart.

St. Thalassius of Libya

✠ Practice silence, be careful for nothing, give heed to your meditation, lie down and get up in the fear of God, and you will not need to fear the assaults of the impious. Apophthegmata Patrum

✠ A warrior is rewarded for having stood up for his homeland against the enemy. But the enemy of our souls is infinitely more dangerous than all the enemies encountered in ordinary battles.

Father Alexei of Bortsurmany

✠ The enemy lurks like a lion in his den; he lays in our path hidden traps and snares, in the form of impure and blasphemous thoughts. But if we continue wakeful, we can lay for him traps and snares and ambushes that are far more effective and terrible. Prayers, the recitation of psalms and the keeping of vigils, humility, service to others and acts of compassion, thankfulness, attentive listening to the words of Scripture — all these are a trap for the enemy, an ambush, a pitfall, a noose, a lash and a snare.

St. John of Karpathos

✠ As the body cannot live without air, so the soul cannot live the true life without the Holy Spirit. By means of a pure and abstentious life try to be continually with God, for without Him, the soul dies!

St. John of Kronstadt

✠ The Lord says: 'In your patience possess ye your souls' (Luke 20:19). He did not say: in your fast or in your vigil. By patience I mean that patience which is of God and is the queen of virtues and the basis of manly valor. It is in itself — peace amid strife, stillness in the midst of storm and an impregnable position for those who have acquired it. He who has attained it in Christ cannot be harmed by any weapons, or javelins, or attacking armies, or even the hosts of demons or the legions of hostile powers.

St. Gregory of Sinai

# The Sack of Constantinople

By Nicholas A. Cooke

Communicant of St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church, Concord, CA

Orthodox Church in America

---

Did you know that the classical Gothic Cathedral of Notre Dame in Amiens, largest in France, was built to contain the head of St. John the Baptist, stolen during the commission of one of the greatest crimes in history: the Sack of Constantinople by the Latin West at the time of the Fourth Crusade (1204 AD)? It is but one of the countless examples of treasures looted from that Orthodox city after its capture. This is an account of that event, telling what has to be told, about which the Orthodox Church long has been silent.

The Crusades were fought with several aims in mind: to free the Holy Land, to stop the spread of Islam, and to unify the Eastern and Western Churches. They failed in all of these: the holy places remained under Mohammedan control, Islam extended its influence, and a deeper wedge was driven between the two churches. If anything, the Crusades hastened the demise of the Byzantine Empire and its ultimate fall into Moslem hands. Overall, the Crusades had a devastating effect on the Orthodox Church.

Pope Innocent III called the Fourth Crusade in 1196. Essentially, it was a French enterprise, supported by Swabians, and later, by Venetians. Because Mohammedan power had shifted from Palestine to Cairo, the objective was to take Egypt. This meant launching a maritime campaign, requiring ships and related supplies, which the French did not have. They turned to Venice, ruled by the aged, blind doge Enrico Dandolo, who hated the capital city and envied its wealth and success in commerce. Constantinople and Venice were old rivals.

Dandolo persuaded the Crusaders to move on Constantinople instead of on Egypt by offering to advance the 85,000 silver marks needed for ships. All conquests and loot were to be divided evenly. The French agreed. Here the Crusade turned away from the control of the pope and into the hands of schemers, politicians, and adventurers. The Greeks themselves were not entirely blameless in the plot against the city. The Emperor Isaac had been deposed by his brother, Alexius III. Isaac's son, Alexius (the Younger), sat down with Dandolo and the Crusaders and made them an offer: he would pay 200,000 silver marks, put up an army to fight against Islam, assign 500 knights for life to guard the Holy Land, and he offered the submission of the Eastern Church in exchange for help in regaining the throne. Later, when it came time to pay, Alexius could not raise the money. The Crusaders were infuriated and used this as another excuse to attack the city. In any event, the original intent of the Crusade was forgotten, and the armies stood before Constantinople. Inside the walls most of the inhabitants were Orthodox Christians. Outside the walls the men wore crosses on their mantles and called themselves Christians. It was Holy Week of the year 1204.

Their own historian wrote that the Crusaders never had imagined that there could be a city like this anywhere in the world. These men, who came from mud huts with thatched roofs, gaped in astonishment. Here it was: the imperial city, called "Tsargrad" by the Russians, greatest in the world, hub of culture and commerce, center of the civilized world. Here was more wealth than in all of Europe put together. This was the inheritor of the Roman Empire. Here was a city of churches, monasteries, palaces, towers, forums, arenas, bazaars, baths, libraries and monuments. Here stood Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), crowning glory of the city, marvel of the world, built by Justinian six centuries earlier. The Theotokos being the patron and Protectress of the city, over a hundred churches were dedicated in her name. Her maphorion (veil), which twice had saved the

city: once from the Avars and once from the Russ', was kept in the Blacharnae Church, as was her wonder-working Icon. The Theotokos' belt (zone) was preserved in the Chalkprateia Church in the copperware district. In the center of the city stood the Church of the Holy Apostles, built as a shrine for St. Luke, and which also was the custodian of the relics of Sts. Timothy and Andrew, as well as the head of St. John the Forerunner, in whose name there were some 35 churches. St. John Chrysostom was brought to this church from far-off Armenia for burial eight centuries earlier. Elsewhere were the relics of St. Stephen and St. James, as was the wood of the True Cross found by St. Helen. The Pantocrator Monastery was the guardian of the Icon of the Theotokos of Nicopeia, which preceded the emperor into battle. At Blacharnae stood two gigantic pillars, on the tops of which sainted stylites in past centuries had spent the remaining years of their lives in prayer and meditation. Throughout the city were numerous other churches and monasteries which guarded the many relics of Apostles, Martyrs and Church Fathers. Such was the city before which the western armies stood in awe and disbelief.

After receiving absolution, the Crusaders attacked. Constantinople fell after three days of the final, furious attack by land and by sea. Once inside the walls, the Crusaders began an orgy of carnage, brutality and vandalism not seen in Europe since the barbarians invaded seven centuries earlier. No one was spared: not bishop, priest, nun, man, woman or child. Few women escaped being violated, whether at home, in the street, or in the convent. Fires were started throughout the city. The butchery ended only when the Crusaders were so tired that they no longer could lift their swords. Then began looting and profanation on a scale unparalleled in history. A mob rushed into Santa Sophia. With the Image of the Pantocrator looking down upon them from the great dome, they broke up the altar for its gold content, smashed the icons, threw the Holy Gifts to the floor, seized the church vessels for their Jewels, and tore mosaics and tapestries from the walls. Horses and mules were brought into the church the better to carry off the sacred vessels, gold, silver, and whatever else they could gather. Drunken soldiers drank from chalices and ate from patens while riding asses draped with priestly vestments. A mocking prostitute was placed on the Patriarch's chair to dance and sing obscene songs. This pattern of pilferage and desecration was repeated in churches, monasteries and palaces throughout the city. The tombs of the emperors were rifled, and all of the classical statues and monuments which had survived from ancient Greece and imperial Rome were destroyed. One writer wrote that never in history had so much beauty, so much superb craftsmanship been so wantonly destroyed in so short a space of time. What was not carried off was burned, smashed, melted down for its precious metal content, or stripped for its jewels.

After the killing, after the city had been subdued, there began a slow and steady removal of treasures out of the Orthodox temples and into the cathedrals, churches, monasteries, convents, cities and towns of Latin Europe. Some of these items had been venerated, cherished, and protected for centuries, others for a millennium. Now they were being carted away from over a hundred and fifty churches: altars, altar screens, tabernacles, antimins, icons, icon frames, processional, pectoral and altar crosses, gold and silver chains, panagias, mitres, croziers, chalices, patens, star covers and spears, Gospels, Epistle books, ladles, church plate, censers, votive lights, relics, candelabra, epitaphia, fans, reliquaries, vestments, banners, manuscripts, miniatures, ivories, carvings, mosaics, thrones, tapestries, furniture and architectural items. Cartloads of gold and silver from Santa Sophia found their way into the Vatican treasury. Constantinople had become the gold mine which supplied Latin Christendom.

The wealth was so great that the looting continued for sixty years. A century earlier, after the First Crusade, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Edessa were similarly stripped for a period of forty years. Now it was happening to the imperial city. A scandalous traffic in relics was started. The head of St. John the Baptist was carried off to Amiens. Amalfi, Italy took the head of St. Andrew the First-Called from the Church of the Holy Apostles, along with a set of heavy bronze doors. The bishop of Soissons shipped home the head of St. Stephen and a relic of St. John. The remains of St.

Clement, pillaged from the Church of St. Theodosia, were taken to Cluny. St. Albans received the relics of St. Marina. Halbstadt claimed the relics of St. James. The True Cross was divided up among the barons, with a portion sent to the pope, and another fragment taken to Paris. A priceless gold and enamel reliquary encrusted with jewels, containing a fragment of the Wood wound up in a nunnery in Steuben. King Louis IX of France paid 10,000 silver marks for the "true" Crown of Thorns, for which he built St. Chapells in Paris.

Gone was the maphorion of the Theotokos, as was her zone and the wonder-working icon. Gone or destroyed--the relics of St. Luke and St. Timothy; no trace of the relics of St. John Chrysostom. An altar cloth with the relic of St. Paul was missing. Nothing is known of the stone seat of St. Mark.

The Venetians were the most discriminating--they knew exactly what to take. From the Monastery of the Pantocrator they appropriated a group of exquisite gem-crusted enamel cameos, (a vast collection of panagias), to enhance the Palo D'Oro, an elaborate Byzantine bejeweled gold screen which was used in the Cathedral in Venice to cover the relics of St. Mark. (We will recall that St. Mark was stolen from Alexandria in the ninth century). They also carried off the Icon of the Theotokos of Nikopeia, as well as a relic of St. Stephen (the feet already were in Venice). The golden tabernacle from the Church of the Holy Apostles, a replica of the church itself, was added to their booty. Venice's prized possessions are the four magnificent gilded bronze horses, cast in Constantine's time, which once stood in the Hippodrome; today, except when removed for cleaning, they stand atop the gallery of St. Mark's basilica. The porphyry statue of four tetrarchs, taken from a palace, stands in a corner of St. Mark's treasury.

Venetians valued craftsmen, and they took away the best: goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewel workers, iconographers, woodcarvers, stone and glass workers. Much of the Venetian glass technique so famous today originated in Constantinople. St. Mark's contains the finest collection of Byzantine craftsmanship in the world. It includes 32 Byzantine chalices, plus assorted relics, reliquaries, altar pieces, Gospels, Jewels, vestments, manuscripts and church plate. The collection includes the Veroli casket, the finest Byzantine carved ivory in the world, and the Psalter of Emperor Basil.

Dandolo sent home shiploads of mosaics, panels, stones, pillars, precious marbles, columns of rare stones and the many building components which have gone into creating the texture of the city which today is Venice.

Pope Innocent was very distressed when he heard about the outrages in Constantinople. He denounced the perpetrators harshly, and excommunicated most of them. The Pope was unaware that, before the attack, his legate had absolved the Crusaders from their original vows. Later, when confronted with the possibility that he might have a unified Church on his hands, Innocent acquiesced and went along with the reality that what was done was done. He did nothing to stop the flow of desecrated wealth into Latin cathedrals and churches.

Baldwin of Flanders was put on the throne and a Latin kingdom was established in the East. A Venetian replaced the Patriarch. Orthodox bishops were deposed and replaced by Roman prelates. Pressure was put on priests to submit to the papacy, but they resisted firmly. There was no union.

Dandolo demanded for Venice "one half and one quarter of the Roman Empire" as its share of conquered lands. Along with other territories, Venice took over all of the Greek islands, which it was to rule for four centuries. On Crete all of the churches were seized, the bishops were thrown out, and the priests forced to submit to Latin prelates. The Greek language was forbidden in the churches. A precious relic, the head of St. Titus, was taken away to Venice (A century earlier, Venetians carried off the head of St. Isidore from the island of Chios, and the relics of St. Donatus from the island of Cephalonia, as well as a marble slab on which Christ was supposed to have

stood.). The looting continued on the islands as on the mainland. The Empire was being stripped bare.

Enrico Dandolo performed his final and lasting profanation of Hagia Sophia by being buried there. Recently, when asked whether he knew the location of Dandolo's tombstone, a Greek scholar replied, "Yes, I go there to spit on it".

## **Epilogue**

One might ask, "Why bring up something which happened so long ago? It is past history." The answer is simple. These church items were not taken from a dead, vanquished emperor; they were taken from a living, active, performing Orthodox Christian Church. They were stolen from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in whose care they were placed. The Patriarchate of Constantinople still exists. It is a viable, active body which has been functioning without interruption since it was founded by the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 AD. This is not the first time such depredations had taken place. Of the five sees extant after the Second Council, three of them: Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople all had been violated by the one which was accorded primacy (Rome), but which demanded supremacy.

It is easier to report on these deplorable events than it is to suggest what to do about it. Picketing Latin institutions with placards and chanting slogans would be foolhardy and non-productive. After all, the problem is not entirely that of the Orthodox Church. Someone does have a problem. Whoever possesses these articles is a receiver of stolen goods. Moreover, they are a receiver of stolen goods obtained by murder, rape, and desecration--not an enviable position in which to be, especially if such a holder happens to be a Christian church. Unfortunately, there is little to indicate that "the West", to use a general expression, even realizes the enormity that has taken place in Constantinople so long ago.

The Orthodox Church long has been accustomed to suffering in silence. Perhaps it is time we learned a lesson from other religions or nations: that when a calamity befalls you--be sure that the world never is permitted to forget. A great injustice persists, even after almost eight centuries: sacred Orthodox items are being held by the Roman Church, items acquired under most evil and distressing circumstances. This is what we must never let the world forget, by one means or another. Perhaps one day, by the grace of God, this great wrong will be made right.

In the meantime, scientists tell us that Venice slowly is sinking into the Adriatic. It deserves to do so. Perhaps it is trying to hide from its sins.

---

---

## **Like Ships at Sea...**

✘ The present temporal life is like the sea, and we are the ships. Just like ships at sea, we don't encounter only peace; but many times we meet with strong winds and great storms: scandals, temptations, sicknesses, sorrows, distress, persecutions and various dangers. We must not, however, lose courage. We must be bold, courageous and faithful. If we lose courage in the face of dangers, as timid humans of little faith, let us call upon Christ as Peter did; and He will reach out His hand and help us.

**Blessed Elder Philotheos of Paros (+1980)**

## **How to Learn God's Will**

✘ When you want to learn the will of God, abandon your own will completely -- along with every other thought or plan; and, with much humility, ask God in prayer for His understanding. ...

~ Blessed Elder Joseph the Hesychast (+1959)

# **The Relationship Between Saving Faith and Good Works**

BY FR. JOHN PARKER - Special to The Charleston Post and Courier- Sunday, July 22, 2012

**“No one can be saved without good works.” Such a statement can cause Reformation-attached Christians to shudder. After all, among their perpetual mottos is Ephesians 2:8: “God has saved us not by works, but by grace, so that no man may boast.” And more specifically, Romans 3:28: “Man is justified by faith, apart from works of the law.”**

**Faith/works is an ongoing debate in some circles. It is certainly a perennial question: What is the relationship between individual, saving faith and good works? But then, how does our answer apply to the “routine drudgery of everyday existence” as one of my teachers described daily life?**

**Very simply, the longest-standing Christian interpretation teaches us that “works of the law” as St. Paul described them (circumcision, for example) do not save in and of themselves, that is, mechanically. There is, in fact, a New Testament distinction between ritual acts of the law and doing good deeds.**

**Salvation begins, technically, with ritual acts (baptism); and it is without good deeds that no one is saved. But the mystery of salvation is only fully realized with the companion statement “and no one is saved by them.” So, as St. James teaches, “faith without works is dead.” Or as Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” — among the greatest of which is to love even one’s enemy, blessing those who curse us.**

**To oppose faith and good works is as silly as to ask the question, “Do I have to kiss my wife?” After all, I told her that I love her on the day I was married, and she has a ring to remind her. Anyone who is married — or even has had any significant relationship — knows that “without works, it is dead.” But the kiss or a bouquet of flowers do not buy her affection; rather, they demonstrate mine.**

**In a relationship, if there is truly love, there will be outward signs of that love, not simply a once-and-for-all statement about it. A relationship of love is alive, organic. It is not legalistic or mechanical. For examples of the former, ask anyone married for 50 years or more. For the latter, ask a divorce lawyer.**

**More to the point, a biblical example might help. Once, Jesus was walking and talking with his students and followers and he told them, “When I was sick you visited me, when I was naked you clothed me, when I was in prison you visited me, when I was thirsty, you gave me drink.”**

**His followers, baffled, asked him, “When did we do these things?”**

**Jesus told them, “When you did it to the least of these (the poor, the needy, etc.) you did them to me.”**

**The good works done by the disciples evidently weren’t done because they were trying to score points for themselves, temporally or eternally. Clearly, they didn’t even know or remember that they had done them. Why? Because such actions naturally flowed from their transformed humanity. They were simply loving and serving others as their master, Jesus, was loving and serving them and others.**

**Christianity calls its voluntary adherents to some rather unique actions. “Serve one another” is not unique to Christianity. “Lay down your life for another” is not unique to Christianity. Love, forgive and serve your enemy — who else believes that? In our day-to-day lives, the outward expression of our firm, individual faith, confirmed and grounded in the community of the Church, is to be demonstrated by acts of love and self-sacrifice, even to the least deserving, even to our enemies. This is precisely because, as Christians, each of us is the least-deserving enemy of God, demonstrated by our repeated turning away from his living, loving ways, tireless mercy and eternal long-suffering.**

**Fr. John Parker is pastor of Holy Ascension Orthodox Church in Mount Pleasant, S.C. (a Charleston suburb).**

## More Lifelines:

**A child's upbringing commences at the moment of its conception. The embryo hears and feels in its mother's womb. Yes, it hears and sees with its mother's eyes. It is aware of her movements and her emotions, even though its mind has not developed. If the mother's face darkens, it darkens too. If the mother is irritated, then it becomes irritated also. Whatever the mother experiences – sorrow, pain, fear, anxiety, etc. – is also experienced by the embryo.**  
**Elder Porphyrios of Athens**

--As certain scientists pursue unproductive stem cell research which kills human embryos, all people need to remember:

"No objective, even though noble in itself, such as a foreseeable advantage to science, to other human beings or to society, can in any way justify experimentation on living human embryos or fetuses, whether viable or not, inside or outside the mother's womb."

(Gift of Life, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1987 from pamphlet "Life Matters: Embryo Research," published by UCCB)

--"No amount of good social policy, such as programs that feed the hungry and shelter the homeless—as vitally important as they are—can make up for bad policies concerning the protection of life itself. Without the fundamental right to live, the right to not be killed, no other rights are meaningful. In fact, without life no other rights can exist."

(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Respect Life pamphlet, 2006)

--Between 1990 and 2008, abortions in the United States fell 25%. During this period of dramatic decrease in the number of abortions, Planned Parenthood was increasing the number of abortions performed at its facilities by 157% ! At the average rate of \$400 for each abortion, Planned Parenthood is making big money from the deaths of unborn children.

(National Right to Life fundraising letter, December 2011)

--"Once we remove the principle 'Thou shalt not kill' from our civil law, those on the fringes of society become extremely vulnerable. The only difference between euthanasia and abortion is geography (the nursing home as opposed to the womb) and the size of the victim."

(Msgr. William Smith, professor of moral theology)

—To bring about the death of a person in order to ease his or her suffering is always wrong. It is always "a serious violation of the law of God because it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person."

(The Gospel of Life Encyclical of Pope John Paul II)

--There are many fathers denied the privilege of raising a child because of abortion. "Abortion leaves indelible footprints in the texture of masculinity, in the recesses of a man's heart, and in his reproductive history. A father is a father forever, even of a dead unborn child."

(The Hollow Men": Male Grief and Trauma Following Abortion", pamphlet by Vincent M. Rue, PhD)

— What have we done to our children by legalizing abortion and championing it? The daily abortion stories, polls, editorials, and stories showing how the "abortion rights" movement is faring—all this has drummed into our children's heads the idea that human life is not special, is not sanctified, is not a life formed by God but a fertilized ovum that makes demands and can be removed.

(Peggy Noonan, "Abortion's Children, New York Times, 1/22/98)