



## *Fire & Light*

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

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✠ **January 22, 2012** ✠

32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

### **Sanctity of Life Sunday**

**Holy Apostle Timothy of the 70 (96 AD) Monk-Martyr Anastasios of Persia (628)**

✠ **Memory Eternal!** – Newly Departed Victoria Wells

**Memorial Service Tonight – 7:00pm (Visitation 5:00pm to 7:00pm)**

**Funeral Tomorrow, Jan. 23, 10:00am / Burial at Forest Crest Cemetery**

- ⇒ **Tues. Jan. 24 6:30pm ~ Inquirer's Class**
- ⇒ **Wed. Jan. 25 6:30pm ~ Akathist to St. Xenia**
- ⇒ **Next Sunday ~ ~ Sunday, January 29, 3:00pm ~**

**The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony : Theodore Reese & Caterina Wesson**

⇒ **Lenten Retreat at St. Symeon's – Saturday, March 10 – Dr. Tristan Englehardt**



In Him (Christ) is my joy  
even if He chooses  
to send me some suffering,  
because I aspire to be  
purified as gold in the fire.

~ St. Gregory the Theologian

### **Like us in all things...**

✠ "The word became flesh (that is, man), that the flesh might become God by grace; and He became like us in all things, that we might become like the Word in all of the virtues. And - to pass over many things - for our sake, He accepted dishonor, insults and scourging. He was spat upon, mocked, jeered and finally crucified, pierced in His side by a spear, died and descended into Hades. ... He who preserves these thoughts in his heart with love, and is not inclined to forget them, will not be overcome by the passion of bitterness and anger. For through the humility of Christ, on which he constantly ponders, the foundations of the passion of pride will be undermined; and the entire edifice of iniquitous anger will easily and automatically come tumbling down."

"What heart, no matter how stony or hard it might be - when it constantly recalls the great abasement of the Godhead of the Only-Begotten, which came about for our sake, and the patience which He showed in so many sufferings - will not feel contrition, will not be humbled, will not experience compunction, and will not become earth and ashes and trampled underfoot by every man? What anger or bitterness could overcome such a contrite heart? I believe, therefore, that unless the mother of evils, forgetfulness, drives these salvific thoughts from his heart, a man will never be overcome by anger."

**The Evergetinos (Sayings of the Fathers)**

### **Daily Martyrdoms**

✠ If you endure the daily ascesis (spiritual struggle), every time you coerce your soul to bear a cold word, a derision, a reproach, you become a confessor. Every time you have patience, you receive a crown, and it is considered by God to be a daily martyrdom for you.

~ Blessed Elder Joseph the Hesychast (1959)

### **Our Thoughts Become Reality**

✠ Everything, both good and evil, comes from our thoughts. Our thoughts become reality. Even today we can see that all of creation, everything that exists on the earth and in the cosmos, is nothing but Divine thought made material in time and space. ~ Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2003)

## This and That

The things that have forever constituted civilization—respect for learning whether one had it or not, wide reading, careful use of language, manners, such notions as “lady” and “gentleman”—these are now held in contempt.

Fred Reed

### “Elitism”

It could become dangerous to speak correct English. It would indicate Elitism... “Elitism” of course means only the principle that the better is preferable to the worse, but society today, except in matters of football, believes the worse to be preferable to the better. One does not readily imagine a quarterback being urged to lower his passing percentage so as not to wound the self-esteem of his colleagues.

Fred Reed

“Diversity” has become a religion, the new religion of our elites, and it is an ideology not terribly tolerant of dissent.

Patrick Buchanan

A time was when the cultivated could play an instrument, paint, knew something of mathematics and much of languages, traveled, could locate France, attended the opera and knew what they were attending. They wrote clearly and elegantly, this being a mark of civilization. ~ Fred Reed

Women’s head coverings are found on their heads. You may not see it in your parish, but if not, ask the women. However, St. Paul does not say “Be not deceived brethren, no woman who does not cover her head in Church will inherit the Kingdom of God.” He *does* say that about those who engage in homosexual sex. And so while head coverings are definitely part of the Tradition of the Church, violating that Tradition is not on the same level as murder, adultery, idolatry, or sodomy.

Fr. John Whiteford

The life issues – abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research – put us in touch with one aspect of humanity: They show us what we are capable of when we lose our moorings, when we are not guided by clear thinking on right and wrong.”

- Rev. Richard Doerflinger

Nobody is a nobody; nobody is unwanted. All are wanted by God, and therefore to be respected, protected and cherished by us.

- Rev. Richard Neuhaus

Writing a tribute to a Down Syndrome child who died at 16, Lisa Laughlin said: “I believe she came to earth to teach us a lesson – the lesson of unconditional love... She needed to remind us not to judge one another but to accept one another exactly as we are.

This is the paradox of American’s unborn: No life is so desperately sought after, so hungrily desired, so carefully nurtured. And yet no life is so legally unprotected, and so frequently destroyed.

- Ross Douthat – NY Times columnist, 1/3/11

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Since Roe v. Wade, the number one cause of death in the African-American community is abortion.... One third of the present population – 13 million.

- Martin Holley

Abortion has become the personal and social eraser of choice for our unwanted, ill-timed and ‘defective’ offspring. With mainstream mental professional associations advising that abortion is psychologically safe, women and men have embraced abortion as a stress reliever... Yet the evidence is mounting that abortion carries serious and significant mental health risks.

## ABORTION AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

By Joe Sobran, "Sobran's Newsletter," August 24, 2000.

In his famous essay "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell analyzed the corrupting influence of dishonest politics on the way we speak and think. There is no better example than the effect abortion has had on our language.

Though abortion—including the killing of viable infants at the verge of birth—is now a sacrament of the Democratic party, nobody admits to being "pro-abortion"; they are "pro-choice." This is an obvious lie. The right to choose anything presupposes the right to live. The child, fetus, embryo, or whatever you want to call the entity growing within its mother's womb has no "choice" about being killed. It will never have a choice about anything.

The pro-abortion side is pro-abortion in the same way that advocates of slavery were pro-slavery. "Oh," they protest, "but we don't insist that everyone get an abortion; we only want people—that is, mothers—to have a choice!" Then nobody was pro-slavery either, since nobody insisted that every white man own a slave; they were "pro-choice." They wanted each white man to be "free" to decide whether to buy slaves; or they wanted every state to decide whether to permit slavery. Of course they overlooked the obvious fact that the slaves themselves had no choice; in their minds this was irrelevant.

The bad conscience of the pro-aborters shows in their studious avoidance of the word kill to describe what abortion is. Why be coy about it? We don't mind speaking of "killing" when we kill lower life forms. Lawn products kill weeds; mouthwashes kill germs; insecticides kill bugs; mousetraps kill mice. If the human fetus is an insignificant little thing, why shrink from saying an abortion kills it? But the pro-abortion side prefers the evasive euphemism that abortion "terminates a pregnancy."

As Orwell noted, dishonest people instinctively prefer the abstract to the concrete. Abstract language avoids creating unpleasant mental images that might cause horror and shame; concrete language may remind us of what we are really doing. This is why military jargon dehumanizes the targets of bombs and artillery: so that soldiers and pilots won't vividly imagine the men, women, and children they are killing. Part of the job of military leadership is to anesthetize the consciences of fighting men. And political leaders (who usually start the wars in the first place) do their part by describing the bombing of cities as "defending freedom."

In the modern world people are trained to avoid looking directly at the effects of violence they commit or sanction. If possible, the killing is delegated to specialists, who themselves are increasingly remote from their victims—as in recent U.S.

bombings of Iraq and Yugoslavia, where American casualties were nearly zero. Most of us don't mind if our military kills people on the other side of the world; we feel no pain, even vicariously. We may even buy the official explanation that our bombs are "preventing another Holocaust." It may seem otherwise to the Iraqis and Slavs on whose homes those bombs are falling.

But just as the news media refrain from showing us what those bombs actually do, they never show us what an abortion looks like. They even refuse to carry ads by abortion opponents, on grounds that pictures of slaughtered fetuses are in "bad taste." They certainly are in bad taste; all atrocities are. But the media are willing to show some atrocities, as in the killing fields of Rwanda a few years ago. Since we're forever debating abortion, why not let us see one? Why the blackout?

The answer, of course, is that the news media themselves are pro-abortion. They adopt the dishonest language of the pro-abortion side: pro-choice, fetus, terminate, and—my favorite—abortion provider (to make the abortionist sound like a humanitarian).

A few years ago NBC produced a sympathetic movie about a woman seeking an abortion—Norma McCorvey, the "Roe" of "Roe v. Wade." But when Mrs. McCorvey later changed her mind and became an active opponent of abortion, did NBC do a sequel? Unimaginable.

We have to keep our guard up at all times against political language, especially in seemingly bland journalism, that is subtly infected with propagandistic purposes.



Unfortunately, western rationalism has had its influence on certain Eastern Orthodox leaders—who are members of the Eastern Orthodox Church only in body. In spirit, they really belong to the West, which they consider to "reign" over the secular world. But if they were to view the West spiritually, to see it in the light of the East, in the light of Christ, then they would be able to discern its spiritual twilight. For the light of the intelligible Sun—the light of Christ Himself—is disappearing in the West, and a deep darkness is slowly setting in.

And all these gatherings and interreligious conferences are the work of the evil one; the leaders are engaging in endless discussions on issues that need no discussion, issues that even the Holy Fathers never addressed in the past. All these are meant to confuse and scandalize the faithful, and drive some into heresies and others to schisms, so that he [the evil one] can gain more ground. Ah! The misery and confusion they [i.e., the conferences, such as those of the WCC] bring to people!

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

## A LIVING ANGEL WITH THE GIFT OF INSIGHT

*From "Ascetics in the World," a publication of the Sacred Monastery of St. John the Forerunner, Metamorphosis, Chalkidiki, Greece.*

In September of a certain year, there was a great deal of turmoil observed in the Department of Oncology of the University Hospital of Rion. Little Dimitri was asking urgently for the Hospital's priest. He was insisting on immediately receiving Holy Communion...

He was 13. He had been in that specific clinic for about one and a half years. A minor headache had led him there. The doctors had diagnosed brain cancer. His native town was Fieri of Albania; his parents unbaptized. They had lived in Patrae for several years. Shortly after his admission to the Hospital, the young boy had asked to be baptized. He had heard about Christ, and wanted to become a "child" of His. He was baptized, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," after the necessary catechesis of course.

Everyone in the clinic was extremely fond of him. The cancer had progressed considerably and had by now deprived him of his sight. He was entirely unable to see, anything and anyone. But he could listen, with the utmost and amazing patience. He never complained. He would say that God loved him very much. He prayed, and would ask his parents to do the same.

All those who visited him could perceive that there was something different in that boy. He spoke constantly about God. He was always courteous and happy. His face shone. He wanted to partake of the Precious Gifts frequently. When his mother would sometimes be in another area of the clinic, he would shout out to her:

"Mother, come quickly! Papa is coming, with Christ! He is coming up the stairs! Come and get me ready!"

And that was exactly what would happen: the priest would come, and he would find little Dimitri sitting upright in his bed, with his mouth wide open and crossing himself with reverence. Even though he never knew the exact time of the priest's arrival, he could "see" him coming, with his gift of insight; this was despite the two closed doors that came between his room and the corridor that the priest was coming from. This has been verified by the pious Mrs. Maria Galiatsatou, who had volunteered to look after that boy.

"Mrs. Maria, I want to tell you something," he said to her one day. "When Papa comes together with Christ, I can see him approaching as he walks up the stairs, and next to him are two tall, beautiful people with pure white gowns, who lean towards the Holy Chalice to protect it, with their arms outstretched."

One time, when the doctor asked him: "How are you, my little Dimitri?"

He replied: "Mister Doctor, can I tell you something privately? I am just fine. But you shouldn't worry so much because your wife went away. God will be with you, because you are a good person."

The doctor remained frozen for an instant. No-one else knew about the grievous incident that had occurred the previous day at his place: that his wife had abandoned him, to be with another man....

"Now that is a child of God" was what those who had met him would say.

The last time that he received Holy Communion, he was unable to sit up in his bed, but he did receive Christ with joy and longing as he lay there.

"Thank you very much," he whispered and then went to sleep forever. When the priest went to the morgue the next day to read the Trisagion Prayer over little Dimitri, he remarked:

"It's the first time in my life that I have seen a corpse like this. His face was smiling...it was aglow.... and it had the colour of amber (the color of a reposed saintly person, Ed.)."

His parents came to love Christ very much, and they now want to be baptized also...

May we all be worthy of little Dimitri's intercessions!



Have patience, my children, do not lose your courage in the struggle, and do not let your knees weaken under the pressure of temptations, for our good God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength. Why do you give room to Satan to war against you with greater intensity? Have faith in God, and whatever He permits will be to our advantage. Do we perhaps know better than He?

Cast your care upon the Lord, and He will take care of you. Do not put forth your will, for faith is the offspring of grace and divine visitation. Has not each one of us experienced personally miracles of God's divine providence? Didn't divine grace visit N? If you had not sacrificed yourselves, would N be in the army of Christ now? Didn't Christ sacrifice Himself for us? Certainly! And had He not given Himself to death on the Cross, we would not be what we are by divine grace.

This shows that things that are very good, those that are on a higher spiritual level, are bought with blood. But their reward is so great that it cannot be measured, and their glory is equal to the angels!

I feel for you, and this is why I also suffer. In times of temptation, man forgets everything and is brought to a state that he did not want in times of peace.

Elder Ephraim, "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

## **Just once, I'd like to see a TV Interview go more like this:**

Host: You are a Christian pastor, and you say you believe the Bible, which means you are supposed to love all people.

Pastor: That's right.

Host: But it appears to me that you and your church take a rather unloving position when it comes to gay people. Are homosexuals welcome to come to your church?

Pastor: Of course. We believe that the Gospel is a message relevant for every person on the planet, and we want everyone to hear the Gospel and find salvation in Jesus Christ. So at our church, our arms are outstretched to people from every background, every race, every ethnicity and culture. We're a place for all kinds of sinners and people with all kinds of problems.

Host: But you said there, "We're a place for sinners." So you do believe that homosexuality is sinful, right?

Pastor: Yes, I do.

Host: So how do you reconcile the command to love all people with a position on homosexuality that some would say is radically intolerant?

Pastor: (smiling) If you think my position on homosexuality is radical, just wait until you hear what else I believe! I believe that a teenage guy and girl who have sex in the backseat of a pick-up are sinning. The unmarried heterosexual couple living down the street from me is sinning. In fact, any sexual activity that takes place outside of the marriage covenant between a husband and wife is sinful. What's more, Jesus takes this sexual ethic a step further and goes to the heart of the matter. That means that any time I even lust after someone else, I am sinning. Jesus' radical view of sexuality shows all of us up as sexual sinners, and that's why He came to die. Jesus died to save lustful, homo- and heterosexual sinners and transform our hearts and minds and behavior. Because He died for me, I owe Him my all. And as a follower

of Jesus, I'm bound to what He says about sex and morality.

Host: But Jesus didn't condemn homosexuality outright, did He?

Pastor: He didn't have to. He went to the heart issue and intensified the commands against immoral behavior in the Old Testament. So Jesus doesn't just condemn adultery, for example, as does one of the Ten Commandments. Jesus condemns even the lust that leads to adultery, all with the purpose of offering us transformed hearts that begin beating in step with His radical demands.

Host: You say he condemned adultery, but he chose not to condemn the woman caught in adultery.

Pastor: That's right, but He did tell her to "go and sin no more."

Host: But who are you to condemn someone who doesn't line up with your personal beliefs about sexuality?

Pastor: Who am I? No one. It's not all that important what I think about these things. This conversation about homosexuality isn't really about my personal beliefs. They're about Jesus and what He says. I have no right to condemn or judge the world. That right belongs to Jesus. My hope is to follow Him faithfully. That means that whatever He says in regard to sexual practices is what I believe to be true, loving, and ultimately best for human flourishing – even when it seems out of step with the whims of contemporary culture.

Host: But you are judging. You are telling all the gay people watching this broadcast that they are sinners.

Pastor: I'm not singling out gay people. I'm pointing to Jesus as the answer to all sexual sinfulness.

Host: But you are referring to gay people. Why are you so focused on homosexuality?

Pastor: (smiling) With all due respect, you are the one who brought up this subject.

Host: Are you saying that you can't be gay and Christian?

Pastor: No. I'm saying that you can't be a genuine Christian without repentance. Everyone – including me – is guilty of sin, but Christianity hinges on repentance. We agree with God about our sin, and we turn from it and turn toward Christ. When it comes to Christianity, this debate is not about homosexuality versus other sins. It's about whether or not repentance is integral to the Christian life.

Host: But do you see why a homosexual watching this might think you are attacking them personally? You're saying that something is wrong with them.

Pastor: I think Jesus' teaching on sexuality shows us that there is something wrong with all of us – something that can only be fixed by what Christ did for us on the Cross and in His Resurrection. That said, I understand why people might think I am attacking them personally. Most people with same-sex desires believe they were born with these tendencies. That's why they often see their attraction as going to the very core of who they are, and so they identify themselves with the "gay" label. So whenever someone questions their behavior or desires, they take it as an attack on the very core of their being. That's usually not the intent of the person who disagrees with homosexual behavior. But that's the way it is perceived. I understand that.

Host: If it's true that a person is born with one sexual orientation or another, then how can it possibly be loving to condemn one person's orientation?

Pastor: Well, we really don't know for certain about sexual attraction being innate and set from birth. All we have is the testimony of people who say that they've experienced same-sex desires since childhood. Christianity teaches that all people are born with a bent toward sin. It's possible that some people will have a propensity toward alcohol abuse or angry outbursts, while others may have a propensity toward other sins. Regardless, Christians believe people are more than their sexual urges. We believe that human dignity is diminished

whenever we define ourselves by sexual urges and behaviors. Consider this: married men are sometimes attracted to multiple women who are not their wives. Does this mean they should self-identify as polygamists? Not at all. And surely you wouldn't consider it hateful for Christians to encourage married men not to act on their desires in an effort to remain faithful to their spouses. It is the Christian way, after all.

Host: No, but it still seems like you are telling people not to be true to who they are.

Pastor: It only seems that way because you believe sexual desire reflects the core of one's identity. It would help if you and others who agree with you would understand that in your putting pressure on me to accept homosexual behavior as normal and virtuous, you are going to the very core of my identity as a follower of Jesus Christ. The label most important to me is "Christian." My identity – in Christ – is central to who I am. So I could say the same thing and call you intolerant, bigoted, and hateful for trying to change a conviction that goes to the core of who I am as a Christian. I don't say that because I don't believe that's your intention. But neither should you think it's my intention to attack a homosexual person or cause them harm merely because I disagree.

Host: But the problem is, your position fosters hate and encourages bullying.

Pastor: I recognize that some people have mistreated homosexuals in the past. It's a shame that anyone anywhere would mock, taunt, or bully another human being made in God's image. That said, I think we need to make one thing clear in regard to civil discourse: To differ is not to hate. I hope we can still have a real conversation in this country about different points of view without casting one another in the worst possible light. The idea that disagreeing with homosexual behavior necessarily results in harm to gay people is designed to shut down conversation and immediately rule one point of view (in this case, the Christian one) out of bounds. As a Christian, I am to love my neighbor and seek his good, even when I don't see eye to eye with my neighbor. Furthermore, the picture of Christ on the Cross dying for His enemies necessarily affects the way I think about this and other issues. ~ Source unknown



## HAVING COMPASSION

By St. John Cassian (*The Philokalia Vol. 1; Faber and Faber pgs. 105-106*).

There was once a very zealous brother who was greatly troubled by the demon of unchastity. He went to a certain father and confessed his private thoughts to him; but this father, being inexperienced, became angry when he heard about them and told the brother that he was contemptible and unworthy of the monastic habit for having entertained thoughts such as these.

When the brother heard this, he lost heart, left his cell and set off back to the world. Through God's providence, however, Abba Apollos, one of the most experienced of the elders, chanced to meet him and, seeing him over-wrought and very despondent, asked him why he was in this state. At first the brother did not reply because he was so depressed but, after the elder had pleaded with him, he told him what was wrong, saying: "Because I was often troubled by evil thoughts, I went to tell them to the elder; and as he said I have no hope of salvation, I have given up and am now on my way back to the world."

When Abba Apollos heard this, he comforted and encouraged him, saying: "Do not be surprised, my child, and do not lose hope. I too, old and grey as you see me, I am still troubled much by these thoughts. Do not be discouraged by this burning desire, which is healed not so much by human effort as by God's compassion. Please do this for me: go back to your cell just for today."

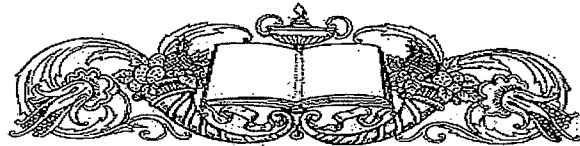
This the brother did; and Apollos, after leaving him, went to the cell of the elder who had caused his despair. Standing outside he implored God with tears and said: "O Lord, who puts us to the test for our own benefit, let this elder be given the brother's battle, so that in old age he may learn through experience what he has not been taught over these many years: how to feel sympathy with those who are under attack by the demons."

As he finished his prayer, he saw a dark figure standing near the cell shooting arrows at the elder. Wounded by the arrows, the elder at once began to stumble back and forth as though drunk. Unable to withstand the attack, he finally left his cell and set off for the world by the same road that the young monk had taken.

Seeing what had happened, Abba Apollos confronted him, and asked him where he was going and why he was so troubled. Although he realized that the holy man knew what was wrong with him, he was too ashamed to say anything. Abba Apollos then said to him: "Return to your cell, and in the future recognize your own weakness. The devil has either not noticed or has despised you, and so not thought you worth fighting. Not that there has been any question of a fight: you could not stand up to his provocation even for a

day! This has happened to you because, when you received a younger brother who was being attacked by our common enemy, you drove him to despair instead of preparing him for battle. You did not recall that wise precept: "Deliver them that are being led away to death; and redeem them that are appointed to be slain" (Prov 24:11). You did not even remember the parable of our Savior, which teaches us not to break a bruised reed or quench smoking flax (Mt. 12:20). None of us could endure the plots of the enemy, or allay the fiery turmoil of our nature, if God's grace did not protect our human weakness. Seeing, then, that God has had this compassion for us, let us pray to Him together and ask Him to withdraw the whip with which He has lashed you. *For he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole.* (Job 5:18)."

After Abba Apollos had said this and had prayed, the attack which had been launched against the elder was at once suspended. Finally, Abba Apollos advised him to ask God to give him *the tongue of the learned* so as to know how to speak a word in season. (Isa 50:4).



### ST. HERMAS

One of the Seventy, he is mentioned in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (16:14). A Greek by birth, he spent a long time in Rome. He was bishop in Philippoupolis, and finished his life a martyr. He compiled the very instructive book "The Shepherd" through revelations from angels of God.

Hermas was a rich man, but fell into extreme poverty through his own sins and those of his sons. A man appeared to him, clad in white and with a staff in his hand, and told him that he was the angel of repentance, sent to him before the end of his life. The angel gave him twelve "commandments."

1. To believe in God.
2. To live in simplicity and innocence.
3. To love truth and flee from falsehood.
4. To guard his thoughts in chastity.
5. To learn patience and magnanimity of soul.
6. To know that a good and an evil spirit attend every man.
7. To fear God, but not the devil.
8. To perform every good deed and to restrain himself from every evil one.
9. To pray to God in faith from the depths of his heart, so that his prayer might be heard.
10. To preserve himself from melancholy, the daughter of doubt, and from anger.
11. To try true and false prophecies.
12. To preserve himself from every evil desire.

## St. John Chrysostom : On Social Justice

*St. John sounds as if he is speaking to our current society today.*

***"The only way to achieve true justice is to change people's hearts first—and then they will joyfully share their wealth."***

"Should we look to kings and princes to put right the inequalities between rich and poor? Should we require soldiers to come and seize the rich person's gold, and distribute it among his destitute neighbors? Should we beg the Emperor to impose a tax on the rich so great that it reduces them to the level of the poor, and then to share the proceeds of that tax among everyone? Equality imposed by force would achieve nothing, and do much harm.

Those who combined both cruel hearts and sharp minds would soon find ways of making themselves rich again. Worse still, the rich - whose gold was taken away - would feel bitter and resentful; while the poor - who received the gold from the hands of soldiers - would feel no gratitude, because no generosity would have prompted the gift. Far from bringing moral benefit to society, it would actually do moral harm. Material justice cannot be accomplished by compulsion, a change of heart will not follow. The only way to achieve true justice is to change people's hearts first—and then they will joyfully share their wealth."

St. John Chrysostom (+407)

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### A Teaching of Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain

"You must look after the purification of your soul on a daily basis. Do your spiritual work and say the Jesus Prayer. Your thoughts, will and desires are where your mind is. The submission of our spirit is the most important thing. In order to acquire a virtue, we must be humble and careful, so we can detect its opposite evil, and then pray to Christ to help us get rid of it. We don't need to try too hard or be concerned how, when and in what way our heart will be able to acquire this virtue."

*-Father, when we read the writings of the Fathers of the Church, we notice the following phenomenon: some Saints say that praying is of utmost importance, and others talk about obedience or voluntary poverty. It is hard for someone to understand exactly what Christ is asking from us. When we think we must apply all these virtues at the same time, then we despair, as it is impossible to struggle for all of them at once. Our endeavor becomes a lot easier, when we realize that the acquisition of these virtues is the result of a single struggle. Could you please help me understand what exactly I should do in order to find the way leading to Christ?*

#### **The Elder responded:**

"Purification, divine justice, humility, love, obedience, voluntary poverty, and all virtues are one and the same. Christ wants us to eliminate our will to zero. If you obtain a single one of these virtues, bear in mind, the rest are found in the one you just acquired; the same thing applies to our passions; one passion includes all others. Purification requires the soul to be pure and clean from our own will; divine justice is the abandonment of our own will to the will of God; humility is to humble our will and elevate God's will; obedience means not to have a will and thus obey other people; prayer means to take our mind off our wishes and desires and concentrate on God. So, you see whichever virtue you apply, you are led to the same result, that is to the elimination and purification of your own will. Man will spiritually progress and be benefited only when he manages to eliminate his will to zero. When the Americans want to send a missile to space, they do the same thing; they count from ten to zero. When they reach zero, the missile is fired. The same applies to our soul; when our wills are eliminated to zero and our soul is cleansed, then it is elevated towards God!"