



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **January 29, 2012** ✠

33rd Sunday after Pentecost

Zacchaeus Sunday

St. Ignatius the God-bearer of Antioch (110 AD)

St. Andrei Rublev, Iconographer (1430) / The Holy New Martyrs of Russia (20th C)

✠ Tues. Jan. 31 6:30pm ~ Inquirer's Class

✠ Wed. Feb. 1 6:30pm ~ Vespers - Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple

✠ Thurs Feb. 2 10:00am – Divine Liturgy – Feast of the Presentation

⇒ Today:

🔔 The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony 🔔 ~ Theodore Reese & Caterina Wesson

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

A Physician Sent by Christ...

✠ "If you call to mind the one who has grieved you, or slighted you, or harmed you, you should regard him as a physician sent by Christ and as a benefactor; for the distress, which you experience when you recall him, shows that your soul is sick. If you were not ill, you would not be suffering. You ought, therefore, to thank your brother and pray for him, since it is from him that you learnt of your infirmity; and accept his behavior as a therapeutic medicine which Jesus has sent you. If, instead, you are aggrieved at your brother, it is as if you are saying to Jesus: 'I do not want to accept Thy remedies; I wish, rather, to putrefy from my wounds.'" ~ An Anonymous Elder

On The Death of a Loved One

"For where tears are-- or rather, where miracles are, there tears ought not to be; not where such a mystery is celebrating. Hear, I beseech you: although somewhat of the like kind does not take place now, yet in the case of our dead likewise, a great mystery is celebrating. Say, if as we sit together, the Emperor were to send and invite some one of us to the palace, would it be right, I ask, to weep and mourn? Angels are present, commissioned from heaven and come from there, sent from the King Himself to call their fellow servant, and say, do you weep? Do you not know what a mystery it is that is taking place, how awful, how dread, and worthy indeed of hymns and praises? Would you learn, that you may know, that this is no time for tears? For it is a very great mystery of the Wisdom of God. As if leaving her dwelling, the soul goes forth, speeding on her way to her own Lord, and do you mourn? Why then, you should do this on the birth of a child: for this in fact is also a birth, and a better than that."

- St. John Chrysostom, Homily 21 on Acts 9

Pearls of the Holy Fathers 5:1

The devil, with all his powers, "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). So you must never relax your attentiveness of heart, your watchfulness, your power of rebuttal or your prayer to Jesus Christ our God. You will not find a greater help than Jesus in all your life, for He alone, as God, knows the deceitful ways of the demons, their subtlety and their guile.

St. Hesychios the Priest

When the soul humbles herself the enemy is vanquished, and the soul finds deep rest in God.

St. Silouan the Athonite

If you wish to pray as you ought, imitate the guitar player; bending his head a little and inclining his ear to the strings, he strikes the strings skillfully, and enjoys the melody he draws from their harmonious notes.

St. Callistus the Patriarch

It is no loss that you have prayed without using artificial techniques to engraft the prayer; for such techniques are not indispensable. What is important is not the position of the body but the inner state. Our whole aim is to stand with attention in the heart, and look towards God, and cry out to Him.

St. Theophan the Recluse

Awesome is the man who conceals the greatness of his labor by self-reproach; at such a one the angels marvel.

St. Isaac the Syrian

Wherefore, children, let us not faint nor deem that the time is long, or that we are doing something great, 'for the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward.' Nor let us think, as we look at the world, that we have renounced anything of much consequence, for the whole earth is very small compared with all of Heaven.

St. Anthony the Great

Keep hell's torments in mind; but know that your Helper is at hand. Do nothing that will grieve Him, but say to Him with tears: 'Be merciful and deliver me, O Lord, for without Thy help I cannot escape from the hands of my enemies.' Be attentive to your heart, and He will guard you from all evil.

St. Isaiah the Solitary

Prepare yourselves for labors and for fasting and for spiritual deeds and for many sorrows, for we must enter into the Kingdom of God through much tribulation.

St. Sergius of Radonezh

If a person wants God to hear his prayer quickly, then before he prays for anything else, even his own soul, when he stands and stretches out his hands towards God, he must pray with all his heart for his enemies. Through this action God will hear everything that he asks.

Abba Zeno

It is impossible for sin to enter the heart without first knocking at its door in the form of a fantasy provoked by the devil.

St. Hesychios the Priest

Forgive me, O my brethren, because I see that I am going backwards rather than forwards. ~

Abba Joseph

That which delights the outer man does most harm to the inner man, and the more one's fleshly substance is kept in subjection, the more purified is the reasoning soul.

St. Leo the Great

Struggle until death to fulfill the commandments; purified through them, you will enter into life.

St. Thalassius of Libya

THE MEETING OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE

Celebrated February 2nd – From the Prologue of Ochrid



The fortieth day after His birth, the All-Holy Virgin brought her Divine Son into the Temple of Jerusalem, in accordance with the Law, to dedicate Him to God and to purify herself. "Consecrate to me every first-born that opens the womb among the Israelites both of man and beast, for it belongs to me" (Exodus 13:2). "Tell the Israelites: when a woman has conceived and gives birth to a boy, she shall be unclean for seven days, with the same uncleanness as at her menstrual period. On the eighth day, the flesh of the boy's foreskin shall be circumcised, and then she shall spend thirty-three days more in becoming purified of her blood; she shall not touch anything sacred nor enter the sanctuary till the days of her purification are fulfilled. If she gives birth to a girl, for fourteen days she shall be as unclean as at her menstruation, after which she shall spend sixty-six days in becoming purified of her blood. When the days of her purification for a son or for a daughter are fulfilled, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the meeting tent a yearling lamb for a holocaust and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. The priest shall offer them up before the Lord to make atonement for her, and thus she will be clean again after her flow of blood. Such is the law for the woman who gives birth to a boy or a girl child" (Leviticus 12:2-7). Even though neither the one nor the other was necessary, nevertheless the Lawgiver did not, in anyway, want to transgress His own Law whom He had given through Moses, His servant and prophet. At that time, the high-priest Zaccharias, the father of John the Forerunner [Precursor], was on duty in the Temple["serving as a priest before God in the order of his division" St. Luke 1:8]. Zaccharias placed the Virgin, not in the temple area reserved for women but rather in the area reserved for virgins. On this occasion, two unusual persons appeared in the Temple: the Elder Simeon and Anna, the daughter of Phanuel. The righteous Simeon took the Messiah in his arms and said: " Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (St. Luke 2: 29-32). Simeon also spoke the following words about the Christ-child: "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel" (St. Luke 2:34). Then Anna, who from her youth served God in the Temple by fasting and prayers, recognized the Messiah and glorified God and proclaimed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem about the coming of the long-awaited One.

Troparion – tone 1

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos full of grace! From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, Enlightening those who sat in darkness! Rejoice and be glad O righteous elder, you accepted in your arms the Redeemer of our souls, Who grants us the resurrection!

Kontakion – tone 1

By Thy Nativity Thou didst sanctify the Virgin's womb, and didst bless Simeon's hands, O Christ God. Now Thou hast come and save us through love, grant peace to all Orthodox Christians, O only Lover of men!

The Pharisees present in the Temple, who having seen and heard all, became angry with Zacharias because he placed the Virgin Mary in the area reserved for virgins and reported this to King Herod. Convinced that this is the new king about whom the Magi from the east spoke, Herod immediately sent his soldiers to kill Jesus. In the meantime the Holy Family had already left the city and set out for Egypt under the guidance of an angel of God. The Feast of the Meeting of our Lord in the Temple was celebrated from earliest times but the solemn celebration of this day was established in 544 AD during the reign of Emperor Justinian.

Concerning the Virgin Birth

According to the Law, "Every male child that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord." Only with Christ did this literally occur. He Himself opened the womb of the Virgin at birth, while all other wombs which have born a child have first been opened by a man.



- Blessed Theophylact

On Anger

"Abba Hyperechios said: 'He who does not control his tongue when he is angry will not be able to control his passions either.'"

"An Elder was asked: 'What is anger?' And he replied: 'Quarreling, lying, and ignorance.'"

"Anger is a passion full of shame and insolence, which is followed by grief and regret; and grief devours the heart of one who has fallen into it." (An anonymous desert Father)

"Just as wood causes a fire to flare up, and if we do not throw enough of it on the fire, it goes out, so also does it happen with the passions; that is, there are certain causes, which - if cut off - no longer activate the passions. For example, the causes of anger are: giving and taking; wanting to do one's own will; taking delight in teaching and showing off to other people; and thinking oneself to be intelligent and wise. If one cuts off these causes, the passion of anger is weakened."

Blessed Abba Sergios

"One who gets angry and does not recognize his fault - but becomes still angrier, because he regrets that he did not say more than he did when he was upset - is called contentious. In his soul, strife never abates; and at the moment of strife, the agitation of his heart gives way to remembrance of wrongs, distress, and wickedness. And after this, the strife and agitation caused by anger increase and multiply within him. That is, strife is aroused and it continues spreading until it completely dominates the hapless man and demonizes him. But may Jesus Christ, our good Master and Lord, deliver us from the lot of such people."

Blessed Abba Sergios

"We are in need of much prayer and understanding, if we are to repel the various machinations of the Devil. For sometimes he makes someone upset over nothing, while at other times he offers [one] a plausible pretext for thinking that he was right to be angry; and he suggests all of these things to the soul out of his hatred for mankind. The man who truly desires to traverse the way of the Saints is a complete stranger to anger against anyone. As St. Macarius the Great says: It is unbecoming for brothers to get angry at - or to cause anger in - another."

Blessed Abba Sergios

Humble Yourself – Justify Your Neighbor

✠ That which plays the most important role in the spiritual struggle is for a person to learn to humble himself, reproach himself, and justify his neighbor. Whoever has learned this philosophy is surely gathering already the most sweet fruit of freedom from passions. Otherwise, he will drag his passions along with him to his great and constant grief.

My child, reproach yourself constantly. Do not consider yourself to be right; whenever you hear something bad being said about you, say, "My brothers are right; that is how I am. I deserve even more slander because of my sins."In short, humility in everything.

St. Symeon the New Theologian says clearly that no one is able to glorify God on his own, but it is the grace of Christ, which has taken abode in him, that glorifies and hymns God and prays within him. It is a sign that the grace of God has visited the soul when one prays with fear and reverence, standing with much orderliness and giving great attention to what one is praying.

Elder Ephraim

The Holy New Martyrs of Russia

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints," so proclaims the Prophet David in Psalm 115. Furthermore the sanctifying words of our Savior are recorded in all four Gospels, "whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." Our holy Orthodox faith teaches that the Church itself is built upon the blood of the martyrs. From the earliest days of the Church the memories and earthly remains of the martyrs have been reverently treasured as Grace-bearing vessels of the Holy Spirit.

Today the Church remembers all of the saints martyred under the communist yoke in Russia. How wonderful yet how terrible it is that our own century has added tens of thousands of martyrs to the heavenly Church. How many of today's survivors of this terrible, satanic social experiment even personally knew one or more of the New Martyrs! How unprecedented is this phenomenon in the 2000 year history of the Church! In the words of the late Hieromonk Seraphim of Platina, the ever-near memory of the Russian martyrs should, "serve to wake us out of our sleep of self-satisfaction and all-too-often pretended (or at least untested) Christianity!"

But why is Tsar Nicholas and his family included in the ranks of the saints? The answer is two-fold. Firstly, as the anointed head of the Russian nation, it is fitting to honor the Royal Family as the Passion Bearers for the whole, suffering Russian people, just as Princes Boris and Gleb were canonized in 1015, "not for martyrs for the faith, but victims in a political quarrel", thus, "by their innocent and voluntary suffering they had shared in the Passion of Christ." (Ware, *The Orthodox Church*). More importantly, yet less palatable for us Americans, is the ominous fact that the late Tsar, as leader of the last stronghold of authentic Christian civilization, was the final restraining power against the spirit of Antichrist (II Thess. 2:7-8).

On this feast of the New Martyrs, let us at the same time shed tears of joy, sorrow and repentance; joy that our merciful God has given them the Kingdom and us the liberty to honor them in comfort and freedom, tears of sorrow that our own human race can commit such atrocity against its own, and tears of repentance that He will kindle in our hardened hearts even a tiny spark of the righteousness which our brothers and sisters the New Martyrs of Russia have revealed to us, unworthy inheritors of authentic Christianity in the latter days!

Holy New Martyrs of Russia pray to God for us!

-Subdeacon Ephraim
Rivers

The fundamental task of the servants of the coming Antichrist is to destroy the old world with all its former concepts and "prejudices," in order to build in its place a new world suitable for receiving its approaching "new owner" who will take the place of Christ for people and give them on earth that which Christ did not give them...

One must be completely blind spiritually, completely alien to true Christianity not to understand all this!

The Western Attitude Towards Russia Serge Trikovic

The unforgivable sin of the Russians, in the eyes of the Western media elite, is that they are still defined by their ethnic, cultural and religious identity.

“It sounds paradoxical,” said Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, referring to the Western attitude toward Russia, “but there was more mutual trust and respect during the Cold War.” His correct hint is that the regimes in Brussels and Washington detest a post-Soviet Russia—the state that no longer is subservient, as it had been in the 1990s, but reviving its patriotic and Christian roots—more than the Cold War leaders of the West hated the USSR.

...The similarity of reactions to Russia on the right and left ends of Europe’s media spectrum reflects the perception that Russia belongs to a tradition that is both alien and unworthy of multiculturalist tolerance. This is an unreasoning phobia that goes beyond mere rhetoric. Its cause is not in a misunderstanding of the Russian mindset and tradition but, quite the contrary, it is due to the accurate assessment by the media class that Russia as such is an obstacle to the realization of their political, economic, and ideological preferences in the modern world.

The assorted editorialists and talking heads are following in the footsteps over 800 years old, of the sack of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204. The Franks did not understand, or care, that the New Rome on the Bosphorus was the guardian and protector of the West against the same enemy we all face today. Their insistence on Byzantium’s submission to the Western political and cultural model opened the way for the Jihadist onslaught against Europe that did not stop until it reached Vienna in 1683.

The unforgivable sin of the Russians, in the eyes of the Western media elite, is that they are still defined by their ethnic, cultural and religious identity. In spite of almost a century of horrendous ordeals and tribulations, Russia is still a recognizable nation, rooted in the continuity of its culture, faith, and collective memories—perhaps the last major European nation which is still recognizably itself.

By contrast the Western postmodern multiculturalism has numerous secondary manifestations (one-worldism, inclusivism, antidiscriminationism) that demand engagement abroad and wide-open immigration doors at home. In either case the impulse is neurotic and its justification is gnostic. It reflects the collective loss of nerve, faith, and identity. It produces cultural and demographic consequences unprecedented in history. It is built on the arrogant conviction that neo-liberal ideology contains the blueprint for the solution to the dilemmas and challenges of human existence, that certain enlightened abstractions—democracy, human rights, secular humanism etc.—can and should be spread across the world, and are capable of transforming it....Its fruits are in the Christophobic “liberal democracy” of our own time.

The cultural roots of the Western media elite are no longer discernible in what they cherish but in what they reject: they hate European societies founded on national and cultural commonalities, with stable elites and constitutions and independent economies. They regard all permanent values and institutions with open animosity, which is why they support the amorphous fluidity of the European Union. They oppose democracy in post-communist Eastern Europe because it may produce governments that will base the recovery of those ravaged societies on the revival of the family, sovereign nationhood, and the Christian Faith.

They therefore support political parties and NGOs (non-government organizations) all over Eastern Europe that promote the entire spectrum of postmodern *isms* that have atomized the West for the past four decades: the embrace of deviancy, perversion, and morbidity as the litmus test of “Western” credentials...

No Man puts a piece of new cloth unto an old garment...nor do men put new wine into old bottles.

What does the Saviour wish to teach us by this comparison? By this comparison the Lord taught that strenuous labors, without the spirit of true life, brings no benefit to our moral character, but rather, confusion and corruption. A repentant sinner is given grace, which forms in him a determination to please the Lord, without sparing his own life. All labors are useful to a person with determination. However, should a person who lacks it, attempt on occasion, for example, to impose a fast on himself, he will strain and strain harder, but then he gives up his efforts. And after this his life becomes even worse.

SAINTS UNDER PRESSURE

Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon

One does not have to live very long, I think, to perceive a certain perverseness about this world, life's strange but innate contrariness that cripples man's stride and corrodes his hope. Indeed, in terms of plain empirical verification, few lines of Holy Scripture seem supported by more and better evidence than Saint Paul's testimony that "creation was subjected to futility" (Rom. 8:20).

This dark sense of things is what the ancient Greeks called "tragedy," a subject they appear to have pondered more than most. The root word for this expression means "goat" (*tragos*), an animal commonly associated with stubbornness, mischief, aberrance, and even damnation (Mt. 25:32-33).

The Greeks observed that however slight the flaw in the fabric of a human life, implacable *tragodia* seemed ever able to spy it out and rip that life to shreds. They transmitted endless stories illustrating this theme.

In one such account, the hero Theseus, returning to Athens after slaying the Minotaur on Crete, neglected to alter his ship's sail from black to white, the color that his father Aegeus had instructed him to hoist, on his return, to signify his victory. When Aegeus, waiting on the shore, beheld instead the black sail atop his son's returning ship, he rashly presumed that Theseus had perished, and not waiting for confirmation of the matter, he flung himself in despair from a high precipice and was dashed to death on the rocks below. Thus, poor Theseus, though triumphant over the menacing Minotaur, returned only to find that a more formidable and relentless foe, impossible either to envision or resist, had turned his brief joy into lasting sadness (Plutarch, *Lives*, "Theseus" 22). The impetuosity of his father had conspired with his own slight and momentary inattention to devour the substance of his hope. Once again, the smallest flaw in his life's fabric became the entrance point of tragedy.

But even without the dramatic pangs of tragedy, the Greeks realized, life in this world was usually hard, very often a struggle, even kind of combat. Young people needed to learn this lesson early, a net that explains why Homer's *Iliad*, which portrays life as a battlefield, served as an essential text of classical Greek education. The truer and deeper warfare portrayed in the *Iliad*, after all, is the struggle to excel, to be virtuous, *aristevein* (*Iliad* 6.208; 11.784). (Classical Greek education's other essential text was Homer's *Odyssey*, which sketches life as a journey.)

Classical paganism's greatest moral effort to deal with the toughness of life, including its tragic sense, was the philosophy known Stoicism. The Stoic, realizing that most events in life – virtually all things outside himself – lay beyond his ability to control, resolved to bring discipline and serenity into his soul by putting aside his passions, bridling the reckless ambitions of his mind and will, and striving for inner freedom. One of the more notable Stoics, Epictetus, remarked that it was solely by abandoning the desire to master things outside himself that a man could gain mastery within himself. Only this inner mastery could mitigate the trials and misfortunes of life.

Holy Scripture, tracing all evil in the world, including especially death, to man's infidelity to God, normally uses the experience of evil the occasion for calling man to repentance. This theme appears repeatedly in the Bible's historical and prophetic books. Job and Qoheleth, along with some of the psalms, do include speculation about the structure of tragedy, but this line of thought remains exceptional in Holy Scripture.

More prominent is the theme of the Cross, which provides the key, not to unlock the correct explanation of evil, but to open a door to ultimate deliverance. It is the promise of the Cross that "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Short of that eschatological exchange of sorrow for joy, however, the Bible never essays to diminish the stark seriousness of human suffering. Certain pages of Holy Scripture, were they understood apart from themes like divine providence and the abiding primacy of grace, would be unbearably dark. The saints, in short, seem to live ever under pressure.

ON THE FOOTSTEPS OF KOLLYVADES¹

Fr. Eusebius,² throughout his priestly life, struggled to dissolve the superstitions and false ideas against frequent Holy Communion. Always he emphasized the imperative need, but also the requirements, for frequent participation in the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist:

"Man is called to approach the Chalice of Life regularly. The priest intones: 'With the fear of God, with faith and love DRAW near' – not DEPART! We partake of Christ Crucified and Resurrected...and enjoy from here the joy of heaven, for 'the Kingdom of God is within you' (Lk. 17:21).

¹ *Kollyvades* refers to the traditionalists, originally monks of the Holy Mountain, who insisted on performing memorials for the dead on Saturdays – as had been the practice from the beginning and not on Sundays, the day of the Resurrection. Together with this, they practiced frequent – almost daily – communion and a strict adherence to the canons and traditions of the Church. Such figures included at the beginning Saints Nicodemus the Hagiorite, Macarius of Corinth, Athanasius Parios, Arsenius, Cosmas Aitolos and many more. Today's flowering of monasticism on Mt. Athos, and even here in America, is directly related to the *Kollyvades* movement.

² The Very Reverend Archimandrite Eusebius Giannakakis (1910-1995), a contemporary holy Elder, is featured on a recent publication (in Greek) under the title *Hieromonk Eusebius Giannakakis: "Earthy Angel and Heavenly Man"*. It is hoped this volume will soon be translated into English for the benefit and spiritual edification of our faithful.