



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com &
birminghamorthodox.com

✠ May 6, 2012 ✠

The Fourth Sunday of Pascha

Righteous Job the Long-Suffering

St. Micah, Disciple of St. Sergius of Radonezh (1385)

St. Job, Abbot and Wonderworker of Pochaev (1651)



Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

✠ Wed. May 9 6:30pm Midfeast of Pentecost – Vespers & Blessing of Water

✠ Baptisms in May - Saturdays at 3:00pm

May 12 - Jesse Boyer and Kathryn Potts

May 19 - Baby Mary Reed

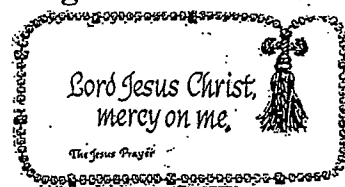
May 26 - The Batton Family: Aimee (Mary), James, Tristan (Michael) and Baby Mary
& Ailene Keeton

⇒ Pepper Place – This Saturday, May 12 – 7:00am to 12Noon

Baked goods, ethnic foods, interesting food items are needed – the fruit of our own labors – not bought items. We hope to commit to 2 Saturdays per month through the Summer. All proceeds go to the Building Fund. **YOUR COMMITMENT is NEEDED!**

⇒ Yard Sale – Friday and Saturday ~ June 8 & 9

Start bringing in items after May 20. Jackie Eastman & Elaine Michaels are contacts.



HOMILY ~ About Christ in the Hearts of the Faithful

"And that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." (Ephesians 3:17)

That person does not have Christ who only has Him on his tongue. Neither does that person have Christ who has Him only on paper. Neither does that person have Christ who has Him only on the wall. Neither does that person have Christ that has Him in the museum of the past. That person, in truth, has Christ who has Him in his heart. For Christ is Love and the throne of love is the heart.

If Christ is in your heart then, for you, He is God. If He is only on your tongue, or on paper or on a wall, or in the museum of the past and even though you call Him God, for you, He is but a toy. Beware then, O man, for no one can play around with God without punishment. ~~The heart apparently is a narrow organ, but God can dwell in it. When God dwells in it, then it is filled and overly filled and nothing else can position itself in it.~~ If, however, the whole world were to settle in it, it remains empty without God.

Brethren, let Christ, the Resurrected and Living Lord, pour faith into your hearts and your hearts will be filled and overly filled! He cannot enter and dwell into your hearts except through your faith!

~ St. Nikolai of Serbia, from the Prologue

THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

By Saint Cyprian of Carthage, from a letter written to a new convert, around 246 A.D.



I promise to share with you the grace God in His great mercy has shown me, and to tell you as simply as I can what I have experienced since I was baptized. Until that time, I was still living in the dark, knowing nothing of my true life. I was completely involved in this world's affairs, influenced by all its changing moods and troubles, and

exiled from the light of truth.

I had indeed been told that God offered men and women a second birth, by which we could be saved, but I very much doubted that I could change the kind of life I was then living. Frankly, I could not see how a person could cast off his fallen nature, and be changed in heart and soul while he still lived in the same body as before. How was it possible, I asked myself, to change the habits of a lifetime instantaneously.

How can one suddenly rid oneself of accumulated guilt and break with sin that has become so deeply rooted in one's life? Can a man whose life has been characterized by feasting and luxury, learn frugality and simplicity in a single moment? A person who craves public distinction and honor cannot bear to be passed over and unnoticed.

Another who is accustomed to throngs of flattering attendance, takes it a terrible penance to be left alone. Is every species of temptation suddenly to lose its force? Should we no longer feel the enticement of wine and good living, where pride no longer swells our heads or anger blazes our breasts? Shall we no longer be troubled by covetousness or cruelty or ambition or lust?

These were my thoughts. My past life was so burdened with so many sins, that I saw no way ever to be rid of, that I had grown accustomed to giving way to my weakness. I despaired of ever being any better. Consequently, I simply humored my evil inclinations, and made no attempt to combat them.

But at last I made up my mind to ask for Baptism. I went down into those life-giving waters, and all the stains of my past were washed away. I committed my life to the Lord. He cleansed my heart and filled me with His Holy Spirit. I was born again, a new man.

And then in a most marvelous way, all my doubts cleared up, I could now see what had been hidden from me before. I found that I could do things that had previously been impossible. I saw that as long as I had been living according to my lower nature, I was at the mercy of sin, and my course was set for death. But that by living according to my

new birth in the Holy Spirit, I had already begun to share God's eternal life.

You know, as well as I do, what sins I died to at that moment, just as you know the gifts the Holy Spirit gave me with my new life. I have no desire to boast, but it is surely right to thank God for His free gift. It was through faith in Him, that I received the power to break with the sins into which my own folly had led me.

We have received the seal of the Holy Spirit. Our task now is to preserve the integrity of what we have received by living a truly Christian life. We must give time to prayer, and to the study of scripture. Now speaking to God; now listening to His word to us, and letting His teaching mold us. He has enriched us with a treasure no one can take away.

We have eaten and drunk at His heavenly banquet, and can never again know the pinch of poverty.



I want you to know this, that Jesus Christ our Lord is Himself the true Mind of the Father. By Him all the fullness of every rational nature is made in the image of His image, and He Himself is the head of all creation, and of His body the Church. *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* (Col. 1:15-18)

Therefore we are all members one of another (Eph. 4:25), and the body of Christ, and the head cannot say to the feet, "I have no need of you," and if one member suffers, the whole body is moved and suffers with it. But if a member is estranged from the body, and has no communication with the head, but is delighted by the passions of its own body, this means that its wound is incurable, and it has forgotten its beginning and its end.

And therefore the Father of creatures, moved with compassion towards this our wound, which could not be healed by any of the creatures, but only by the goodness of the Father, sent forth to us His Only-begotten, who because of our bondage took upon Himself the form of a bondservant, and gave Himself up for our sins, for our iniquities humbled Him, and by His wound we are all healed. And He gathered us out of all regions, till He should make resurrection of our hearts from the earth, and teach us that we are all of one substance, and members one of another.

Therefore we ought greatly to love one another. For he who loves his neighbor, loves God; and he who loves God, loves his own soul.

St. Anthony the Great (+356)

Elder Paisios – A Question on the Salvation of Our Soul

From the book, Spiritual Awakening

— Geronda, some feel certain of their salvation and others have doubts. What is the proper stance?

— The goal is for people to observe God's commandments. The spiritual person must attain such a spiritual condition that even if God does not grant him Paradise, he will not be disturbed. We must realize well that today we are alive, tomorrow we may be gone, and we must be concerned how to be near Christ. Those who have by God's Grace realized the vanity of this life have actually received the greatest gift; it is not necessary to be able to foresee the future, for it is enough to have the foresight to prepare for the salvation of the soul, and to take the best possible spiritual measures to be saved. You see, Christ did say, *The value of one soul is greater than the whole world*. The value of one soul is infinite! This is why the salvation of one soul is an extremely important matter!

— Does this mean, Geronda, that one shouldn't have the hope of salvation and the fear of damnation?

-- If someone has the hope of salvation, he will not have the fear of damnation. And for someone to have the hope of salvation, he will have to be somewhat sorted out. The person who is struggling to the best of his abilities, who has no desire to live a disorderly life, but who in the course of the struggle for faith and life falls and rises again and again, God will never abandon. And if he has the slightest will not to grieve God, he will go to Paradise with his shoes on. The Benevolent God will surprisingly push him into Paradise. God will ensure He takes him when he is at his best, in repentance. He may have to struggle all his life, but God will not abandon him; He will take him at the best possible time.

God is Kind; He wants all of us to be saved. If only a few were to be saved, why then was Christ crucified? The gate into Paradise is not narrow. There is room for all those who bow humbly, and are not puffed up with pride, as long as they repent, and give the burden of their sins to Christ; then there is plenty of room to pass through the gate. We also have the excuse that we are earthen vessels; we are not purely spirit like the Angels. But we are inexcusable when we do not repent and do not approach our Savior humbly. The thief on the cross simply said, "Forgive me" and he was saved. Salvation depends on the second, not the minute. Man can be saved with a single humble thought, or with a proud one lose everything. We should be saved for the sake of philotimo itself (= self-sacrificial love). There is no greater pain for God than to see man in hell.

I think that gratitude for God's many blessings and a humble demeanor with love toward His images, our fellow human beings, together with a philotimo-filled struggle, are enough to keep our soul at peace in this life and the next.

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Full of Grace

✕ In the case of the body I said that she who is ungraceful cannot become graceful; but in the case of the soul, I say the opposite: the graceless soul can become full of grace...For grace of soul is supplied out of our own moral choice. ~ St. John Chrysostom

This and That

⇒ H.L. Mencken, on religious modernists: "(They) have tried to get rid of all the logical difficulties of religion, and yet preserve a generally pious cast of mind. It is a vain enterprise. What they have left, once they have achieved their imprudent scavenging, is hardly more than a row of hollow platitudes, as empty of psychological force and effect as so many nursery rhymes. They may be good people and they may even be contented and happy, but they are no more religious than Dr. Einstein. Religion is something else again—in Henrik Ibsen's phrase, something far more deep-down-diving and mud-upbringing."

⇒ In some senses, America is not technically a Christian nation at all, and yet, in others, the importance of Christian principles in the birth of America becomes clear in the writings of even the most deistic and agnostic of the Founding Fathers. The universal significance of Christianity in our culture is stark. What Christians throughout America regard as legitimately Christian or diabolically un-Christian viewpoints, especially as they relate to government policies as important as war, affects us all. That cannot be denied....American Christians have, by and large, transformed faith in God into faith in the American nation-state, especially as it regards war. —Anthony Gregory

Hugo Grotius's Just War Theory, as it pertains to both just cause and just practices in war. War must have:

⇒ "Just cause (correct intention [self-defense] with an objective, proportionality (grave enough situation to warrant war), reasonable chance for success (attainable objectives), public declaration (fair warning, opportunity for avoidance), declaration only by legitimate authority, and last resort (all other options eliminated). Furthermore, even a justly started defensive war must be conducted only against legitimate targets and must respect the doctrines of proportionality and the fair treatment of prisoners."

Private Morality?

⇒ The American theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, commonly states that "there is no such thing as private morality." It is inherently the case that morality is a matter of behavior between people. A "private morality" is no morality at all. To believe that the unborn have a right to life but to refuse to insist that such a right be observed by all, is, in fact, to declare that there is no such right. If there is a "right," then it is immoral not to demand that everyone accept such a right.

~ Fr. Stephen Freeman

Right where we are wrong...

⇒ G. K. Chesterton, from his 1926 book, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, is quoted: "We do not really want a religion that is right where we are right. We want a religion that is right where we are wrong," and "We do not want, as the newspapers say, a church that will move with the world. We want a church that will move the world."

⇒ The state has replaced God in the lives of most in the West (whether consciously or unconsciously). This is not to say that the role of the state is expressed patriotically. However, the public discourse of the state is the prime arbiter for moral practice, for most people's world-view, etc. We are secularized with little idea of where God fits in at all. ~ Fr. Stephen Freeman

⇒ We must understand that the dominant authorities in . . . the major foundations, the media, the schools, the universities, and most of the system of organized culture, including the arts and entertainment—not only do nothing to conserve what most of us regard as our traditional way of life, but actually seek its destruction or are indifferent to its survival. If our culture is going to be conserved, then we need to dethrone the dominant authorities that threaten it. ~Patrick Buchanan

St Alexis Toth

the Confessor and Defender of Orthodoxy in America

Commemorated on May 7

Our holy Father Alexis, the defender of the Orthodox Faith and zealous worker in the Lord's vineyard, was born in Austro-Hungary on March 18, 1854 into a poor Carpatho-Russian family. Like many others in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Toths were Eastern Rite Catholics. Alexis' father and brother were priests and his uncle was a bishop in the Uniate church. He received an excellent education and knew several languages (Carpatho-Russian, Hungarian, Russian, German, Latin, and a reading knowledge of Greek). He married Rosalie Mihalich, a priest's daughter, and was ordained on April 18, 1878 to serve as second priest in a Uniate parish. His wife died soon afterwards, followed by their only child - losses which the Saint endured with the patience of Job.

In May, 1879, Fr Alexis was appointed secretary to the Bishop of Presov and also Administrator of the Diocesan Administration. He was also entrusted with the directorship of an orphanage. At Presov Seminary, Father Toth taught Church History and Canon Law, which served him well in his later life in America. St Alexis did not serve long as a professor or an administrator, for the Lord had a different future planned for him. In October, 1889 he was appointed to serve as pastor of a Uniate parish in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Like another Abraham, he left his country and his relatives to fulfill the will of God (Gen 12:1).

Upon his arrival in America, Father Alexis presented himself to the local Roman Catholic diocesan authority, Archbishop John Ireland, since there was no Uniate bishop in America at that time. Archbishop Ireland belonged to the party of American Catholics who favored the

"Americanization" of all Roman Catholics. His vision for the future was founded on a common faith, customs, and the use of the English language for everything except liturgical celebrations. Naturally, ethnic parishes and non-Latin rite clergy did not fit into this vision. Thus, when Father Toth came to present his credentials, Archbishop Ireland greeted him with open hostility. He refused to recognize him as a legitimate Catholic priest or to grant permission for him to serve in his diocese.

As a historian and professor of Canon Law, Father Toth knew his rights under the terms of the Unia and would not accept Archbishop Ireland's unjust decisions. In October of 1890, there was a meeting of eight of the ten Uniate priests in America at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania under the chairmanship of Father Toth. By this time the American bishops had written to Rome demanding the recall to Europe of all Uniate priests in America, fearing that Uniate priests and parishes would hinder the assimilation of immigrants into American culture. Uniate bishops in Europe refused to listen to the priests' pleas for help.

Archbishop Ireland sent a letter to his parishes ordering their members not to attend Father Toth's parish nor to accept any priestly ministrations from him. Expecting imminent deportation, Father Toth explained the situation to his parishioners and suggested it might be best for him to leave and return to Europe.

"No," they said. "Let's go to the Russian bishop. Why should we always submit ourselves to foreigners?" It was decided to write to the Russian consul in San Francisco in order to ask for the name and address of the Russian bishop. Ivan Mlinar went to San Francisco to make initial

contact with Bishop Vladimir; then in February, 1891 Father Toth and his church warden, Paul Podany, also made the journey. Subsequently, Bishop Vladimir came to Minneapolis and on March 25, 1891 received Father Toth and 361 parishioners into the Orthodox Church of their ancestors. The parishioners regarded this event as a new Triumph of Orthodoxy, crying out with joy: "Glory to God for His great mercy!"

This initiative came from the people themselves, and was not the result of any coercion from outsiders. The Russian Orthodox Church was unaware of the existence of these Slavic Uniate immigrants to America, but responded positively to their petition to be reunited to the Orthodox Church.

The example of St Alexis and his parish in returning to Orthodoxy was an encouragement to thousands of other Uniates. The ever-memorable one was like a candle upon a candlestick giving light to others (Mt 5:15), and his flock may be likened to the leaven mixed with meal which leavened the whole (Mt 13:33). Through his fearless preaching he uprooted the tares which had sprung up in the wheat of true doctrine, and exposed the false teachings which had led his people astray. Although he did not hesitate to point out errors in the doctrines of other denominations, he was careful to warn his flock against intolerance. His writings and sermons are filled with admonitions to respect other people and to refrain from attacking their faith.

While it is true that he made some strong comments, especially in his private correspondence with the Church administration, it must be remembered that this was done while defending the Orthodox Church and the American Mission from unfounded accusations by people who used much harsher language than Father Toth. His opponents may be characterized by intolerance, rude behavior, unethical methods and threats against him and his parishioners. Yet, when Father Alexis was offended or deceived by other people he forgave them, and he would often ask his bishop to forgive his

omissions and mistakes.

In the midst of great hardships, this herald of Godly theology and sound doctrine poured forth an inexhaustible stream of Orthodox writings for new converts, and gave practical advice on how to live in an Orthodox manner. For example, his article "How We should Live in America" stresses the importance of education, cleanliness, sobriety, and the presence of children in church on Sundays and Holy Days.

Although the Minneapolis parish was received into the Orthodox Church in March, 1891, it was not until July, 1892 that the Holy Synod of Russia recognized and accepted the parish into the Diocese of Alaska and the Aleutians. This resolution reached America only in October, 1892. During that time there was a climate of religious and ethnic hostility against the new converts. Father Alexis was accused of selling out his own Carpatho-Russian people and his religion to the "Muscovites" for financial gain.

In reality he did not receive any financial support for a long time, for his parish was very poor. Until his priestly salary began to arrive from Russia, the righteous one was obliged to work in a bakery in order to support himself. Even though his funds were meager, he did not neglect to give alms to the poor and needy. He shared his money with other clergy worse off than himself, and contributed to the building of churches and to the education of seminarians in Minneapolis. He was not anxious about his life (Mt 6:25), what he would eat or drink or wear. Trusting in God to take care of him, St Alexis followed the admonition of Our Savior to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt 6:33). So he bore the tribulation, slander, and physical attacks with patience and spiritual joy, reminding us that "godliness is stronger than all" (Wisdom of Solomon 10:12).

Bishops Vladimir, Nicholas, St. Tikhon, and Platon recognized the special gifts of Father Toth, so they often sent him forth to preach and teach wherever there were people of Slavic background. Even though he was aware of his

shortcomings and inadequacies, yet he was obedient to the instructions of the bishops. He did not hesitate or make excuses, but went immediately to fulfill his mission. St Alexis visited many Uniate parishes, explaining the differences between Orthodoxy, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism and Uniatism, stressing that the true way to salvation is in Orthodoxy.

Like Josiah, "he behaved himself uprightly in the conversion of his people" (Sir 49:2). He was instrumental in the formation or return of seventeen parishes, planting a vineyard of Christ in America, and increasing its fruitful yield many times over. By 1909, the time of his blessed repose, many thousands of Carpatho-Russian and Galician Uniates had returned to Orthodoxy (an estimated 35,000 or more). This was a major event in the history of the North American Mission, which would continue to shape the future of Orthodoxy in this country for many generations to come. Any future growth or success may truly be regarded as the result of Father Alexis' apostolic labors.

Who can tell of the Saint's spiritual struggles? Who can speak of the prayers which his pious soul poured forth unto God? He did not make a public display of his piety, but prayed to God in secret with all modesty, with contrition and inward tears. God, Who sees everything done in secret, openly rewarded the Saint (Mt 6:6). It is inconceivable that St Alexis could have accomplished his apostolic labors unless God had blessed and strengthened him for such work. Today the Church continues to reap the fruits of his teaching and preaching.

Father Alexis' efforts did not go unrecognized in his own lifetime. He received a jeweled miter from the Holy Synod, as well as the Order of St Vladimir and the Order of St Anna from Czar Nicholas II for distinguished service and devotion to God and country. In 1907, he was considered as a candidate for the episcopal office. He declined this honor, however, humbly pointing out that this responsibility should be given to a younger, healthier man.

At the end of 1908, St. Alexis' health began to

decline due to a complication of illnesses. He went to the seashore in southern New Jersey in an attempt to regain his health, but soon returned to Wilkes-Barre, where he was confined to bed for two months. The righteous one reposed on Friday, May 7, 1909 (April 24 on the Old Calendar), the feast of Sts. Sava and Alexius the Hermit of the Kiev Caves. St Alexis' love and concern for his spiritual children did not cease with his death. Before closing the account of his life, it would be most appropriate to reveal but one example of his heavenly intercession:

In January, 1993 a certain man prayed to St. Alexis to help him obtain information about his son from whom he had been separated for twenty-eight years. Placing his confidence in the Saint's boldness before God, he awaited an answer to his prayer. The very next day the man's son telephoned him. It seems the young man was in church when he was suddenly filled with an overwhelming desire to contact his father. He had been taken to another state by his mother, and she changed his name when he was a child. This is why his father was unable to locate him. Having learned from his mother that his father was an Orthodox Christian, he was able with the help of an Orthodox priest to obtain his father's phone number in a distant city. As a result of that telephone call, the young man later visited his father, who rejoiced to see what sort of man his son had become. The father gave thanks to God and to St. Alexis for reuniting him with his son.

St Alexis was a true man of God who guided many Carpatho-Russian and Galician (Western Ukraine) immigrants through the dark confusion of religious challenges in the New World and back to the unity of the Orthodox Church through his grace-filled words and by his holy example. In his last will and testament St. Alexis commended his soul to God's mercy, asking forgiveness from everyone and forgiving everybody. His holy relics now rest at St Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania where the faithful may come to venerate them and to entreat St. Alexis' intercessions on their behalf.

The Cross - Not an Accident

~ Fr. Anthony Salzman, Athens, GA

During this Paschal Season we celebrate Christ's Passion and Resurrection. On Holy Thursday we read the Twelve Passion Gospels and walked with Our Lord on the road to Golgotha. The Cross is the critical event in the history of the world, on which all of eternity hinges, because this signifies the re-opening of the Gates of Paradise.

This is the moment Christ descends into Hades and sets free the captives; for Death cannot conquer Life. The Cross however is not an anomaly, a one-time event out of character with the nature of who God is in His essence. The Cross is His MO, His modus operandi. The Cross represents the giving of oneself for the other; the laying down of your life no matter what the cost; the doing for another what they cannot do for themselves. Sometimes truth and love are seen as opposites, but they are sides of the same coin. The Cross was an act of Truth and Love. The 'Truth' that God 'Loves' us enough to die for us.

Anselm's theory that Christ had to die to pacify the wrath of a Holy God, i.e. the Father killed the Son in anger, as a substitute for us, just makes no sense to Orthodox Christians. Rather it is the act of God to do for us what we could not do for ourselves, that is to conquer Death by Death and restore us to eternal Life with Him. This has great implications for us who are created in the Image of God, and asked to become like Him through our life on earth.

The Cross for us is to constantly yield our will to God and offer ourselves to our neighbor for their edification. If this at times feels like death, it is because it is a death of sorts. It is dying to ourselves in order to benefit the other. It is a subtle moment when we choose not to in conscious or unconscious ways, but it is a decision we make hundreds of times a day. Myriads of opportunities are presented to each of us to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him. We see a person in need, we lash out at our spouse, we criticize our children, our employer or our parents, we eat the last piece of cake, we don't pick up trash, dirty laundry or misplaced items, we indulge our eyes, our appetites, our fantasies, our greed.

In avoiding the opportunity for self sacrifice we fundamentally avert the Cross of self-denial and as a result deny God and become prisoners of self. St. Paul tells us he "dies daily" and that means that this is a daily reality that he must embrace if he is to live in "God's likeness".

Even after many years of 'following' Christ my heart resists dying to self. I make a better lawyer than I do a Christian because I can come up with all kinds of excuses and justifications to avoid doing what I know I should. I long to be supple and compliant as it is written in Proverbs 21:1-3 "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes. Every man's way is right in his own eyes; but the LORD weighs the hearts."

To do righteousness and justice is desired by the Lord more than sacrifice. The Cross inevitably leads to Resurrection, but it comes through dying to our own will. This is a mystery but it is the equation for God-like existence. The way of the Cross is a way of being that characterizes God's essence. It is not morbid or evil or oppressive but it is the foundation of joy, love, peace and goodness.

Christ is Risen!