



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **October 30, 2011** ✠

20th Sunday after Pentecost

Hieromartyr Zenobius & his Sister Zenobia (285)

Apostles Tertius, Mark, Justus and Artemus of the 70

St. Joseph I, Patriarch of Constantinople (1283)

Slander is the work
of Satan; let it belong
to him alone.

You speak only good
of your neighbor.

--Met. Gregory of
St. Petersburg (19th C)

✠ **Many Years!** Newly Illumined Lucas Liliac! And welcome to the Corneas!

⇒ **No Weekday Services**

⇒ **NO VESPERS** – Saturday, November 5

✠ **Sun. Nov. 6 2:00pm ~ Holy Matrimony ~ Michael Harper and Karen Franklin**

⇒ **Parish Workday** – Saturday, November 12 ~ 10am to 4pm

✠ **New Inquirer's Class** – Tuesday, November 15 6:30pm to 8:00pm

HOMILY ~ On How Only the Foolish Deny God

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

They are corrupt. They have done abominable works" (Psalm 14:1).

The mind is the rudder of man's entire being. It counsels, persuades and guides. Both the soul and the body act according to the mind. If the mind is upright before God, then the whole man is upright. If the mind is iniquitous before God, the whole man is iniquitous. Even if someone merely thinks, "There is no God," the thought immediately manifests itself in his deeds. Evil thoughts come first and evil deeds inevitably follow. Do you see how well the inspired Prophet knows the nature of man? First, he underlines the cause, then he cites the consequences. **Evil deeds necessarily proceed from evil thoughts. That is why, brethren, you should not believe those who say: "I do not believe in God, but I do good deeds."**

First of all, he who does not believe in God does not know what good is, nor can he differentiate good from evil. By his disbelief, a man cuts himself off from the greatest Good and the Source of every good! The godless cannot distinguish good from evil, for only in the light of God's Law can one determine precisely what is good and what is evil.

However, it can also be that those who merely say they believe in God do corrupt and hateful deeds, acknowledging God with their lips but denying Him in deeds. It is good to confess God with your lips, but that is a long way from being enough! One must also acknowledge Him with the heart, and confirm one's faith by good deeds. Even so, it does happen that a man believes in his heart, and confesses with his lips, and still sins. This happens either from the weakness of the will or from the devil's arrows. Let such a one repent, and he will be forgiven immediately. Repentance is salvific even for the godless; how much more so for a believer? As long as a man is on earth, he has a chance for repentance. But who can be certain that his time will extend beyond this night? Hence, delaying repentance is utter foolishness.

O most gracious Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God; help us to repent as Thou dost help us to breathe. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen. ~ **St. Nikolai of Serbia, from the Prologue**

Wisdom of St. John of Kronstadt – Remembered October 31

“Why is it necessary to pray at home and go to church to attend Divine services? And why it is necessary for you to eat and drink and walk in the fresh air every day or to work every day? In order to support the life of the body and strengthen it. It is also absolutely necessary to pray in order to support and stimulate the life of the soul, to strengthen the soul which is sick with sins, to cleanse it.”

“Truly the Temple is heaven upon earth; for where the throne of God is, where the awesome mysteries are celebrated, where the angels serve together with men, where the Almighty is unceasingly glorified, there is truly heaven and the heaven of heavens. And thus let us enter the Temple of God with the fear of God and with a pure heart, laying aside all passions and every worldly care, and let us stand in it with faith and reverence, with understanding attention, with love and peace in our hearts, so that we may come away renewed, as though made heavenly; so that we may live in the holiness natural to heaven, not binding ourselves by worldly desires and pleasures.”

“Your soul seeks true life and its natural food. Go to the Church; she will give you this in plenteousness. She affords us peace and blessedness through her Divine services and especially through the Sacraments.”

“How do we maintain connection with the spiritual world, with the heavenly Church? By calling upon them in prayer, by keeping the feasts instituted in their honor, and by the Church services. How do we maintain connection with the departed? By means of prayers for them, especially when united with the offering of the bloodless sacrifice. How do we maintain union with living Christians and all men? Again, by means of prayers for them all in God’s Temple and even at home.”

“When you look at the candles and lamps burning in church, rise in thought from the material fire to the immaterial fire of the Holy Spirit, for our God is a consuming fire. When you see and smell the fragrant incense, rise in thought to the spiritual fragrance of the Holy Spirit, for we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ. Also, in contrast think of the spiritual stench, which is sin and endeavor to be filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit.”

“In the Church especially is accomplished the mystery of cleansing from sins. Reverence, therefore, the place where your soul is cleansed from all impurities, where you are reconciled to God, where you receive the true life of the spirit.”

“You gaze on the icon of the Savior and see that He looks at you from it with the brightest eyes; this look is the image of how He actually looks upon you with His eyes, that are brighter than the sun, and sees all your thoughts, hears all your heartfelt distress and sighs.”

“The voice of the readings in church, the hymns, prayers and supplications, is the voice of our own souls, pouring forth from the acknowledgment and feeling of our spiritual needs and requirements; it is the voice of all mankind acknowledging and feeling its poverty, its accursedness, its sinfulness, the necessity of a Savior, the necessity of gratitude and praise, for the innumerable benefits and the infinite perfections of God. Wonderfully beautiful are these prayers and hymns; they are the breathing of the Holy Spirit.”

A Comparison of Roman Catholic Spirituality and Orthodox Spirituality

All the deviations of the Roman Catholic confession from the ideals of the ancient, undivided Church could not but affect its spiritual life. M.V. Lodyzhensky, in the second volume of his "Mystical Trilogy", compares the spirituality of the Eastern and Western Churches using the examples of Venerable Seraphim of Sarov and Francis of Assisi. This is not by chance, since in the West the sanctity of Venerable Seraphim is thought to resemble the righteousness of the friar of Assisi. Here are the main conclusions at which Lodyzhensky arrives in his comparison:

"In the mystic of the East, in the person of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, we see an example of man's complete regeneration... ..that the super-consciousness of the ascetic of the East is concentrated in his flaming heart. There - within himself - he perceives the fire of the Godhead, he perceives Christ. This feeling of his inner unity with God descends upon him naturally and freely, as a direct result of growth, as a result of work on himself on the path of humility and repentance. According to the mysticism of the East, all these descents of higher perceptions are for the humble man beyond expectation, for the ascetic, in accordance with his humility, does not even feel himself worthy of this" (Mystical Trilogy, v. 2 - "Light Unseen", Petrograd, 1915, pages 156-157 [in Russian]).

The spiritual vision of the ascetic of the East is turned toward his inner world, according to Christ's word, "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). The source of the spirituality of the western saints is different. Again Lodyzhensky:

"St. Francis, in his notion of Christ, was struck most of all by the earthly life of Christ, by His image of suffering. This impression came to Francis from without, and Francis thirsted for visions of the suffering Christ. Proceeding from an external impression, from an image of Christ and His sufferings, the mysticism of St. Francis developed. This resulted in the mysticism of Francis having to deviate toward the imagination and sensuality, for, if Christ was for Francis an object, if he came to a notion of Christ from an external impression, one of the means for developing this mysticism was the stimulation of the imagination toward this external impression. And if the imagination was stimulated, then sensuality also had to be affected" (ibid., page 157).

The spirituality of Francis of Assisi is characteristic of the spirituality of the whole Roman Catholic Church. It is all sensual and oriented toward the Savior's external feat. This does not mean that the Orthodox Church does not impart significance to this feat; but she always seeks the inner meaning of this feat, its inner light and repose. It is not superfluous here to touch upon the question of hesychasm and the place of Saint Gregory Palamas in confirming this Orthodox teaching.

The Greek word "hesychia" signifies peace, repose. The hesychast monks, besides various other spiritual exercises, uninterruptedly practiced the Jesus Prayer, that is, they continually repeated the words: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Such praying not infrequently was accompanied by special bodily techniques, for example, by prostrations, by a bent over posture of the body while sitting, by rhythmical breathing.

Monks who had long practiced such prayer attained a lofty state of spirit, perceived the manifest grace-filled presence of God in their hearts and in a radical manner eliminated from their consciousness not only sinful, but all involuntary notions and feelings; they were wholly absorbed in contemplating God. The hesychast monks who were successful in this prayer not infrequently received gifts of prophetic clairvoyance, and they promoted the enlightenment of the people surrounding them and of those who resorted to their spiritual help. In a word, the influence of these monks, who lived mainly on Athos, was very powerful during the epoch of Gregory Palamas.

In the thirteenth century, when rationalism, emanating from the Latin West, began to spread, certain theologians raised their voices against the hesychasts.

The main thing against which the rationalists rose up was the faith of the ascetics that they could be deemed worthy of true divine communion and that that spiritual light which illumined them interiorly was that very same light that transfigured Christ on Mount Tabor.

The opponents of the hesychasts asserted that the Essence of God is unapproachable for man, and that God, only as it were from afar, illumines

chiefly the thoughts of men and in this way directs human behavior.

Hierarch Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, came out in defense of the hesychasts. He declared that the practice of the hesychasts was an ancient Christian phenomenon, that there were no innovations here whatsoever and that drawing near to God in prayer had its basis in the mysteries of the Church, through which man receives the seed of true grace.

But Palamas' main contribution to theology was his teaching on the divine energies. He demonstrated that if communion with the Divine Essence Itself is unattainable, all the same, man has the possibility of genuine divine communion and contact with God, since God, out of love for man, communes with him through His special energies or powers.

According to the teaching of Gregory Palamas, God has, as it were, two forms of existence: one form is the proper life of the Godhead, which is inaccessible to us, and His Essence; the other is God's constant advertence toward His creation. Thus, we can commune with God, Who is turned toward us through his energies, and obtain from Him various grace-filled gifts.

The teaching of Gregory Palamas, expounded by him in the fourteenth century, explained and consolidated the teaching of the ancient Fathers of the Church, who had written that man is created for transfiguration, for deification. By this teaching, faith in the efficacy, in the reality of the whole sacramental life of the Church and of prayers was strengthened.

The sensuality of Roman Catholic spirituality is particularly striking in its prayers and ecclesiastical art. Let us compare the well-known prayer of Ignatius of Loyola, which is revered in the Catholic Church to the same degree that the Lenten prayer of Venerable Ephraim the Syrian, "O Lord and Master of my life...", is revered by us. Here is the prayer of Ignatius of Loyola:

Soul of Jesus, sanctify me,
Body of Jesus, save me,
Blood of Jesus, grant me rest,
Water from the side of Jesus, cleanse me,
Sufferings of Jesus, strengthen me,
O good Jesus, hear me.

Let us compare an Orthodox prayer, taken from the Akathist for Communion of the Holy Mysteries (First Ekos), analogous to this Catholic prayer:

Jesus, burn up the thorns of my many transgressions.

Jesus, create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.

Jesus, bring my poor soul out of the prison of the passions.

Jesus, destroy in me unclean thoughts and evil lusts.

Jesus, direct my feeble steps on the path of Thy commandments.

Jesus, God of my heart, come and unite me with Thee forever.

The manifest spiritual difference, which is noticed in these prayers, strikes one to an equal degree while examining the sacred art of the West and East.

In the Orthodox notion, the icon depicts the world glorified; in it there ought not be anything earthly or worldly. Therefore, the techniques of depiction are altogether different from those that are used in realistic painting.

Rome has completely departed from classical Byzantine fundamentals. This was expressed particularly forcefully during the epoch of the Renaissance. The very philosophical direction of this period hymns man's egoism and powerfulness, his self-perception in the surrounding and material environment. As a result, the ecclesiastical art of the West also headed along this path - along the path of free creativity, independent of the Church and its enactments. A free attitude toward Church ideas and the mixing of Church traditions with contemporary reality resulted in Western religious art allowing, by striving toward human earthly beauty and sensuality, the distortion of the sacred image.

That which the ancient Church so painstakingly avoided - the influence of antique pagan painting and realism - was in full measure reborn in Western Christianity and has covered the walls of the largest Catholic churches and cathedrals. Naked bodies, contemporary dress and decor became the norm, while spiritual beauty was brought down to something worldly and everyday.

Fr. Victor Potapov – St. John the Baptist Cathedral, Wash. D.C. *Parish Life* Bulletin, June 1997

On Monasticism (excerpt)

By + Archbishop Averky of Jordanville

Are monastics egotists?

An analysis of “the accusations which both liberal Protestants, who nonetheless call themselves Christians, and atheistic communists, raise against monasticism:”

As we have already said, in essence all these accusations boil down to this: **that the monks are egoists, thinking only of themselves, retreating from the world, not wishing to serve the people, and therefore nothing profitable can be expected of them.**

Those who say these things must needs first of all explain what they understand by egoism, and then analyze how their understanding of egoism actually corresponds with the facts. There are, of course, monks who are egoists, just as there are people who are egoists, because monks are people, and nothing human is alien to them, but this goes without saying. We are speaking of the idea of monasticism itself. Can it possibly be called egoistic?

What is egoism?

The meaning of egoism derives from the Latin word, *ego*, which means “I.” From this it follows that **egoism is the serving of the “I” - oneself, the pleasing of oneself.** The egoist is a man places his “I” in the very first place and more than anything else in the whole world cares about his own **personal** wellbeing.

But can every concern about one’s own “I” be called egoistic?

Those who assert this fall into a grave deception, for they broaden the meaning of egoism to such limitless extents that there could be in the soul of man no place left for any other feeling than the egoistic, and then, willy-nilly, to a man all the behaviour and even all the secret movements in the soul of every man would come under the heading egoistic.

Facts. Why, for instance, does a good person try to do good for other people? Isn't it because doing good works brings him some inner satisfaction, that he finds doing good pleasant? But if such is the case, and we are to be guided by the above-mentioned broad understanding of egoism, the good person is without any doubt an egoist, because he does good, because it brings him some satisfaction, because it suits his particular "I." If we pose the question with this negative inclination, then in the whole world there is nothing at all but egoism, and this egoism would define every acceptable impulse, from which the actions of man proceed, both alike the bad and the good.

Thus we would come to such an absurd conclusion, if we were directed by the broad "logic" of the enemies of monasticism!

But, of course, in reality it is not so. By the term "egoism," we must understand only the serving of one's own sinful "I," the service of the old man, which we are commanded to withdraw from, with its passions and lusts. Egoism is the service of one's pride, one's self-love, which are exactly the very vices in the human soul, against which the monks are directed to struggle with the greatest force.

It is true that there is sometimes involved a subtle egoism, almost artfully hidden, but one can expose this. But to consider the good aspirations of the human heart as egotistical of themselves: this is, of course straining things, and is absolutely absurd.

Let us now settle the question fundamentally. Do good or evil aspirations lie at the basis of the idea of monasticism?

What do the monks strive for? What is considered to be the essential disposition for a monk? **"The mind and heart constantly abiding in God with the renunciation of everything,"** - this is how His Grace, Bishop [now Saint] Theophan the Recluse defines the essence of monasticism. Consequently, the true monk is one who is prepared to renounce everything in the world, only so that with the mind and heart he might constantly abide in God. He leaves everything that would disturb his drawing near to God. The principle desired aim in his life is this: striving towards God for union with God.

Might one call this striving evil, and, consequently, egoistic? Of course not! This striving towards God, because it requires one to recognise and expel even the slightest shadow of that subtle egoism, is **not simply the self-willed**

striving of man, but it fully accords with the will of God, for it was nothing but the accomplishment of this most important task which was decreed for man by the Divine Will Itself at his very creation.

God created man solely out of His love, and He settled him in Paradise, so that man might eternally be blessed in union with Him. But by the malice of the devil, man who had been created for the blessed life, did not hold to the height, fore-ordained for him. Sin, having gained entry through the breaking of God's commandment, though he was present in Paradise, distorted and deformed his nature which had been like unto God, so that instead of finding his delight in God, man began to find delight in serving the passions which he experienced. Instead of God, his very own sinful "I" occupied his soul: pride and self-love. Thus egoism entered his soul. The lot of human life from that time has been suffering. But God did not leave man to perish in this deplorable state. From that time, all human history is the unremitting Providence of God towards mankind, aiming to bring back man to Himself, to deliver him from suffering and return him to the blessedness that he had lost. It was precisely for this reason that the Son of God became man, and came down to earth, was crucified on the Cross, and rose again to **"that He might draw all men to Himself,"** that he might call man to union with God again, and grant him the grace-filled strength for this. It was concerning this that He so touchingly and expressively prayed at the Mystical Supper in what is called His High Priestly Prayer: **"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their words; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us"** (John 17:20-21).



*"IF ANY BISHOP or Presbyter shall refuse to welcome back anyone returning from sin, but, on the contrary, rejects him, let him be deposed from office, since he grieves Christ, Who said, *There is joy in heaven over a single sinner who repenteth.*"*

CANON 52 OF THE 85 APOSTOLIC CANONS

AN APPEAL FOR THE ALL-AMERICAN COUNCIL (excerpt)

by David Barrett

As Fr Georges Florovsky once said, "The Orthodox have lost the scriptural mind!" What is needed over and above any plans, pamphlets, and programs, is a return to that "one thing needful!"

The central core of our Orthodox Faith, the nexus that is the root of our theology, and the foundational cornerstone upon which our Church is built, is the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father, Who was sent by His Father as the Life of the world! "For, God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life!" (Jn 3:16) Christ is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6). It is only through Him that we can have life: "And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God [the Father] and Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent!" (Jn 17:3) It is only through Christ that we can come to fully know God the Father: "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him!" (Mt 11:27)

Yet, how and in what manner do we come to know Christ? The answer is provided by St Paul, and is "the center of the center" of our Faith: "We preach Christ Crucified" (1 Cor 1:23). For us, that is not only the crux of the matter, but the complete content of everything: "For, I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him Crucified!" (1 Cor 2:2) The Crucifixion of this 1st century Jew, in a garbage dump outside of Jerusalem for six hours on a specific Friday, is the total and absolute content of what we believe and what we preach! The Cross is the center of everything: It adores our churches; we wear It around our necks; we bless ourselves and others with Its sign; we bow down and worship before It (the hymn, "Before Your Cross"); It has two of Its own feast days: the 3rd Sunday of Great Lent (at Lent's center, to show that the Cross is the center of our Faith), and 14 September (at the beginning of the Church New Year, to show us that we begin our life of Faith with the Cross); It is placed at the highest point on our churches, at the tops of our domes and cupolas! We bless everything with the sign of the Cross: water, wheat, wine, oil, bread, our bodies, our food, our churches, our

homes, any and all items that are blessable (Bibles, books, chalices, choir stands, automobiles, etc.). As the hymns of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September) tell us, the Cross is called the invincible Weapon, the Adversary of devils, the Glory of martyrs, the true Ornament of the saints, and the Haven of salvation! And, it leads us to the Kingdom of God, the only place of authentic joy. As our liturgical hymns proclaim, "Through the Cross, joy has come to all the world!"

If, then, the Cross is the center of our Faith, the way to know God through Christ, and the road to the Kingdom, how do we travel that road in "this world?" How, with Christ as the Head of His Body the Church, do we become authentic members of that Body? Christ Himself provides the answer: "any one would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me!" (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23) In St Luke's Gospel, the addendum is "take up his cross daily." We must daily surrender our will to the Father, as Christ did Himself ("Your will be done," said by our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, and included in the Lord's Prayer). This is enumerated many times by no one less than St Paul himself: "For, if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we will certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him" (Rom 6:5-6); "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20); "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Gal 5:24); "But, far be it from me to glory, except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Gal 6:14). It is this path that we took at our Baptism, and we need to daily actualize this in our lives: "We were buried, therefore, with Him by Baptism into death so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we, too, might walk in newness of life!" (Rom 6:4)

This, then, is the life we are called to. And, more importantly, this is how we daily actualize the life we are given by God. It is the center of our Orthodox Faith. May all of us, and especially those participating in our upcoming All-American Council, live the life of the crucified Christ, so that we may bear witness to the Kingdom of God, for the life of the world!