



HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **May 26, 2013** ✠

Fourth Sunday of Pascha

Apostles Carpus & Alphaeus of the 70

St. Augustine of Canterbury (605)

New George of Sofia (1534) St. Innocent of Cherson (1857)

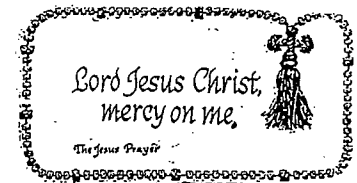
Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

⇒ **New Inquirer's Class – Begins Tuesday, June 11, 6:30pm**

✠ **Feast of Ascension – June 13** ✠ **Feast of Pentecost – June 23**

The Resurrection of Christ

Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos of Nafpaktos, Greece



“We do not believe in social revolutions, because the greatest good in the world came from the Resurrection and not from any human social revolution.”

The Resurrection of Christ is the greatest event in history. It is what distinguishes Christianity from every other religion. The other religions have mortal leaders, while the head of the Church is the Risen Christ. The Resurrection of Christ is the renewal of human nature, the recreation of the human race, the living of eschatological reality. When we speak of the Resurrection, we do not separate it from the Cross, for the Cross and the Resurrection are the two poles of the redemptive experience, just as we pray in the Church, “through the Cross joy is come into all the world. Ever blessing the Lord, let us sing His Resurrection”, or just as we sing “We venerate Thy Cross, O Christ, and we glorify Thy Holy Resurrection”.

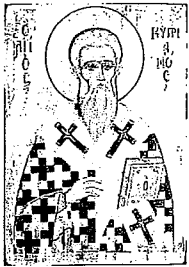
In the Church we constantly speak of Christ's Resurrection, which has great significance for the life of the believer. We do not believe in social revolutions, because the greatest good in the world came from the Resurrection and not from any human social revolution. Even if we correlate the Resurrection with true revolution, we find ourselves in the truth, from the point of view that through Christ's Resurrection man returned to his original position and rose still higher. The word for revolution is derived from a verb which means to come back to the former position. This rectification, the restoration of man took place through the Resurrection of Christ.

The Apostle Paul clearly proclaimed: “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile” (1 Cor. 15:17). The truth and power of the Faith is due to the shining fact of the Resurrection of Christ. Without this, the Christians are “of all men the most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:19).

The Resurrection of Christ is celebrated by the Church from the moment of His descent into Hell, where He freed the souls of the righteous of the Old Testament from the power of death and the devil. It is in this way that our Church celebrates it. In the liturgical texts it is seen clearly that the celebration of the Resurrection begins from Good Friday, as we see in the Great Saturday Matins, in which the funeral procession takes place. And the homilies of the Fathers on Good Friday are actually homilies

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)

of Resurrection and victory.

This is also seen in the holy iconography of the Resurrection. The Church decided to regard the Descent into Hell as a true Icon of the Resurrection. To be sure, there are also icons which depict Christ's appearing to the Myrrh-bearing Women and the Disciples, but the Icon par excellence of the Resurrection is the shattering of death, which took place at Christ's Descent into Hell when His soul with its divinity descended into Hell and freed the souls of the righteous people of the Old Testament, where they were waiting for Him as their Deliverer.

The portrayal of the Resurrection by the Descent of Christ into Hell is done for many and serious theological reasons. First, because, no one saw Christ at the moment when He rose, because He came out of the tomb of the sepulchre "of a sealed tomb". The earthquake which happened and the descent of the angel that lifted the tombstone took place in order for the Myrrhbearing Women to be assured that Christ had risen. Secondly, because when Christ's soul with its divinity descended into Hell, it crushed the power of death and the devil, because by His death He conquered death: It can be seen clearly in the Orthodox tradition that by Christ's death the power of death was completely destroyed.

Moreover, in the Church we sing: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death...". His triumphal victory over death took place precisely at the moment when Christ's soul, united with divinity, abolished death. Thirdly, by His descent into Hell, Christ released Adam and Eve from death. Thus, just as by Adam came the fall of the whole human race, because he is our first ancestor, so through the raising of Adam we taste the fruits of the Resurrection and salvation. Because of the unity of human nature, what happened to the Forefather happened to the whole of human nature.

For these reasons the most characteristic image of the Resurrection of Christ is considered to be His Descent into Hell, because furthermore...the essence of the Feast of the Resurrection is the death of death and the destruction of the devil: "We celebrate the death of Death, the annihilation of Hell", we sing in the Church. The destruction of Hell and the death of death is the deepest meaning of the Feast of the Resurrection.

The Joyful Sorrow of Pascha

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos

Christ is Risen!



One of the strongest and most expressive words encountered in our tradition is the word "joyful-sorrow" (χαρμολύπη). All things in our life are mixed with sorrow and joy. Life is not a theater with scenery changes, but an experience that is both joyful and sorrowful, where sorrow turns to joy and at the point where joy culminates, sorrow emerges, due to the mortality of our passionate nature.

We encounter this word "joyful-sorrow" in the 6th century book of Saint John of Sinai titled *The Ladder*, where we are urged to acquire "the blessed and joyful sorrow of holy compunction" which can "present you a cleansed offering to Christ" (Step 7). It can be an ascetic experience, but also one of the world, since we all live in the desert of the city, often called Christian society.

The word "joyful-sorrow" can be considered synonymous with the word "crucified-risen Pascha" (σταυροαναστάσιμο Πάσχα) which shows how on Great Friday everyone can rejoice in the putting to death of Hades and death, and on the Bright Day, Pascha, there can be sorrow for a beloved person who is being swallowed by death, that hungry beast, which continues to gobble people up and in the present time and split a community of loving persons.

One daily lives this experience of "joyful-sorrow" on a personal existential level, within ones family, community, or national space. Lately we are living this on the economic level, because on the one hand we are facing an existential crisis, and on the other hand we are looking forward to the experience of love, affection, solidarity and existential freedom from the enslavement of false ideologies that disorient a thinking person. We hope to experience the truth that a person is not what one has, but has that which is, and this is the glory of our timeless traditions.

We also lately experience this in the intense criticism of the Church. No one is unaware that there do exist triggers for such criticism, because various people of the Church, even the great dignified clergy, do not fully express the ethos and life of ecclesiastical experience. But this criticism also, even the points where the Church bears no responsibility, the Church accepts, like any mother who accepts with love the outbursts of her children, whether responsible or not. The Church is the mother of the Orthodox people, who accepts all the reactions of her children with love, affection and forbearance, offering the caress of familiarity, the smile of loving affection, and the bowels of compassion...

Still, this "joyful-sorrow" appeared this past Holy and Great Week and culminated on Pascha. The Church showed that its wealth is not in salaries and dividends, but in her theology, her culture, her hymnography, her gatherings of worship, which are directed through its timeless Tradition. In this Week the Church showed her wealth which is Her Bridegroom, who arrived out of "passionate love" to be stripped, humiliated and crucified, without reciprocating in the least, and without uttering a word, and in the end He rose, without fanfare or theatrics, without terrorizing His crucifiers and the guardians of His Tomb, without punishing the irresponsible and unjust political power, headed by Pilate, and without being triumphant over His Resurrection or pulverizing the religious leaders who pretended piety. Still, the wealth of the Church is the harlot woman, who showed exuberant love to Christ, changing one erotic love for another erotic love, who knew how to love exuberantly, with an overflow of love and works and not in a way of conventional life. Her wealth is also the crucified robber who was able to recognize the divinity within the humiliating Cross and became a great empirical theologian.

The Church experiences this crucified-risen life, she lives her own joyful-sorrow, and in this way she guides her children, even the most "unruly". She is still the mother of the people, who bears with pain the pregnancy with her children, and is in pain at their birth, feeds them from her breast, and sacrifices herself for their growth, and sometimes accepts with love and forbearance the tantrums of their pain. The Church resembles the Fools for Christ, who although they were laughed at by all, they lived internally complete and gave of their greatness, even in their extreme obscurity. She lives the apparent weakness of the Crucifixion with the completeness of the Resurrection.

With this joyful-sorrow of Pascha, we experience the celebration of the crucified-risen "Pascha the Lord's Pascha", exchanging the embrace of love and sending out greetings to everyone saying:

"Christ is Risen, my joy!"

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Source: Paremvasi, "Η χαρμολύπη τής Πασχαλιάς", April 2010. Originally it appeared in the newspaper Απογευματινή (4/9/2010). Translated by John Sanidopoulos, Mystagogy Blog.

To gain wealth and glory...

✠ If worldly men risk death in order to gain wealth and glory -- things corruptible and vain -- and often fail, why do you consider the sacrifice of your lives so great a thing, when thereby you acquire with certainty inexhaustible riches and an everlasting Kingdom, and become heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ? (Rom 8:17).

St. Macarios of Corinth (18th C)

Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi (1921-2009): Fatherly Teachings



- O All Merciful Lord, You who have not despised us in our deficiencies, but instead wore our nature and lowered Yourself to our level and even down to Hell to pull us out of there. Please transfer unto us the essentials of Your love, O All Merciful, and banish the malicious wickedness which the enemy has pressed inside us!

- Every Crucifixion is followed by the Resurrection, like spring follows winter. But if our times are only the preamble of what is coming, how much more difficult will the future be?

- Man's divided personality which was the result of the expulsion from Paradise, creates divisions and separations. This is the whole point: To be able to stand other people's weaknesses and not to judge them, no matter who he is and what he believes in. He needs our forbearance and our patience.

- The various temptations neither get sleepy nor tired! Even though they are always beneficial, they are intense and tiring. It is only after our souls open up with the love for trials and head towards humility, that temptations somehow become more tolerable and even desirable.

- Had we been able to use self-contempt we would perhaps be able to derive some benefit, because nothing happens without God.

- There is scorching heat in the world, inside us and outside, morally and physically. The All-Merciful Lord forced even nature to comply with human purposes, in order to show responsibility in human intentions.

- Distress is everywhere, temptations have increased during our difficult times and everywhere you go you hear cries of anguish. We pray, but for whom first, for how much and when? May the Lord have mercy on all of us!

- Beware, believe, pray and get on with the struggle. There are difficult times ahead. May our Lord save us from the events which will take place to tempt those living on earth.

- This is the great injury which befell on man: he lost his faith as a basis and as a principle. Therefore he has no recourse to remedy!

- Everything is resolved by patience and perseverance. The more people forget the meaning of the Cross, the more wickedness increases and is amplified by the different pressures which occur both naturally and by various means. Blessed is he who remains alert and prays.

- What can one say about temptations? Which ones? The present, or those coming? The present ones have either passed or are still at work, but they are softer than those on the way and therefore, we must realize that it is necessary to be prepared more now than we have done in the past.

- We now live in the times for which the Fathers prophesied that "those living on earth will be tempted". Everything points to the fact that we must love Christ and understand the meaning of the Cross, which nowadays has special relevance.

- All that is human is changing and shifting and transformed... but we remain the same and sometimes we fight with.... ourselves.

- Persecution and sorrow are distinctive of our times, in this unjust world we live in. These are not even the preamble of what the future has in store for us in order to promote social justice. Therefore, do not wonder why all these are taking place, but face everything with perseverance, patience and prayer.
- In each and every day there are temptations, sicknesses, divorces and adventures. One hears of them and is constantly distressed! What has the world come to, by denying God! We have become a jungle, a human butcher shop. May the Lord have mercy on us!
- I am watching how evil has assumed an immense force which consumes everything day by day. Sin is not only committed but has control over and has everything enslaved. How much care and courage we need!
- We need to have courage and turn wholeheartedly and firmly towards God because it won't be long when even the prudent and the sensible will be deceived.
- No one should be afraid of wickedness which is spreading in the world, because the Lord will not leave His own children alone, even if the evil is becoming more organized. "The One who is inside us is greater than the one who is in the world".
- Do not be scared. You will not be lost. The Grace of our Jesus will not abandon us neither will the prayers of our fathers and our elders.
- *I remain with you day and night, I hold you in my arms and I suffer for you. I am watching over you and pray, weeping for you, my children.*
- Since you are under the law of obedience do not be afraid of temptation. What will they do to you? They only throw droplets and spit at you! Do not be frightened. You will neither rescind your vows nor will you abdicate.
- Mankind, especially today, seeks mercy. Of course nowadays there are very few people who have mercy. But again, there were never that many in the first place. We are all sitting inside God's palm, Who is full of love. Let Him do unto us whatever He wishes.
- Blessed is he, who did not permit his enthusiasm to cool down.
- Blessed is he, who did not permit his faith diminish towards his Elder.
- Faith, devoutness, self-denial and respect for the Elder. The more you have the more you get.
- The Devil has lost all restraint and moves freely with his own worshippers, whether they are found in politics or inside the Church. Who can describe those events that are in store for us? We need courage and patience.
- When the times of 'fat cows' (good times) are here, the 'thin cows' (difficult times) are just around the corner! But here the issue is deeper. When in practice there is real contact among people with the same thinking, they all necessarily participate in the events and suffer in the same way and to the same extent. This cannot be done in any other way.

Rod Dreher - Is Christianity Wrong about Sex?

"...the final triumph of the Sexual Revolution and the dethroning of Christianity..."

It seems that when people decide that historically normative Christianity is wrong about sex, they typically don't find a church that endorses their liberal views. They quit going to church altogether.

This raises a critically important question: is sex the linchpin of Christian cultural order? Is it really the case that to cast off Christian teaching on sex and sexuality is to remove the factor that gives—or gave—Christianity its power as a social force?

The magnitude of the defeat suffered by moral traditionalists will become ever clearer as older Americans pass from the scene. Poll after poll shows that for the young, homosexuality is normal and gay marriage is no big deal—except, of course, if one opposes it, in which case one has the approximate moral status of a segregationist in the late 1960s...Put bluntly, the gay-rights cause has succeeded precisely because the Christian worldview has dissipated in the mind of the West. Same-sex marriage strikes the decisive blow against the old order...

In the modern era, we have inverted the role of culture. Instead of teaching us what we must deprive ourselves of to be civilized, we have a society that tells us we find meaning and purpose in releasing ourselves from the old prohibitions. **To be modern is to believe in one's individual desires as the locus of authority and self-definition.**

Gradually the West lost the sense that Christianity had much to do with civilizational order...In the 20th century, casting off restrictive Christian ideals about sexuality became increasingly identified with health. By the 1960s, the conviction that sexual expression was healthy and good—the more of it, the better—and that sexual desire was intrinsic to one's personal identity culminated in the sexual revolution, the animating spirit of which held that freedom and authenticity were to be found not in sexual withholding (the Christian view) but in sexual expression and assertion. That is how the modern American claims his freedom.

Ours is a particular kind of "revolutionary epoch" because the revolution cannot by its nature be institutionalized. Because it denies the possibility of communal knowledge of binding truths transcending the individual, the revolution cannot establish a stable social order. As Rieff characterizes it, "The answer to all questions of 'what for' is 'more'."

Our post-Christian culture, then, is an "anti-culture." We are compelled by the logic of modernity and the myth of individual freedom to continue tearing away the last vestiges of the old order, convinced that true happiness and harmony will be ours once all limits have been nullified.

Gay marriage signifies the final triumph of the Sexual Revolution and the dethroning of Christianity because it denies the core concept of Christian anthropology. In classical Christian teaching, the divinely sanctioned union of male and female is an icon of the relationship of Christ to His Church and ultimately of God to His creation. This is why gay marriage negates Christian cosmology, from which we derive our modern concept of human rights and other fundamental goods of modernity. Whether we can keep them in the post-Christian epoch remains to be seen.

It also remains to be seen whether we can keep Christianity without accepting Christian chastity. Sociologist Christian Smith's research on what he has termed "moralistic therapeutic deism"—the feel-good, pseudo-Christianity that has supplanted the normative version of the faith in contemporary America—suggests that the task will be extremely difficult.

Conservative Christians have lost the fight over gay marriage and, as we have seen, did so decades before anyone even thought same-sex marriage was a possibility. Gay-marriage proponents succeeded so quickly because they showed the public that what they were fighting for was consonant with what most post-1960s Americans already believed about the meaning of sex and marriage. The question Western Christians face now is whether or not they are going to lose Christianity altogether in this new dispensation.

St. Nikolai from The Prologue:

HOMILY ~ About the Works of Christ

"For the works which the Father has given Me to finish - the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me" (John 5:36).

Brethren, what are those works of Christ? Those are the works of the Householder Who had returned from a journey and found the home robbed and desolate. Those are the works of the Physician Who entered into the most contaminated hospital and brought medicines and began to heal. Furthermore, those are the works of the King Who returned to his country and found it divided and ruined and his subjects as slaves in a strange land. Those are the works of the elder Brother who journeyed to a distant land to seek his younger brothers who, wandering and prodigal impoverished and became wild. Those are also the works of the Healer, Shepherd, Hero and Provider. Truly, these are not minor works! The average man with the greatest worldly knowledge, skill and courage would not be able to accomplish even in three-thousand years; those works which Christ completed in three years. Not only one man, but all men of all times, together, would not be able to complete the works of Christ for all eternity.

How did the Lord complete so many works? He completed them with the aid of five main miracles: Humility, Words, Deed, Blood and Resurrection.

What do the works of Christ witness? First, the works witness that the earth did not send Him, but Heaven; Second, that an angel did not send Him, but the Heavenly Father Himself; Third, that, for such works no one is sufficient except Him Who is as great as God, Who is as wise as God, as almighty as is God, as merciful as God; Yes, Who Himself is equal to God.

O, how all of our works are insignificant compared to the works of Christ! With only one kernel of Christ's goodness and zeal, diligence and truthfulness can we complete our work perfectly. Grant us that kernel, O Lord Jesus, for we cannot either find this kernel on earth nor deserve it!

About Judgment and Condemnation

"Whoever believes in Him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned" (John 3:18).

He who believes in Christ the Lord is not condemned for he alone judges himself and directs his footsteps toward the light, which goes before him. As a man in profound darkness who adjusts his footsteps according to the candle in his hand, thus, is the one who believes in Christ, i.e., who has embarked after Christ as after a light in the darkness of life.

He who does not believe "has already been condemned." That is, he who does not have a guide on the unknown path just as soon as he took the first step, lost his way and strayed. Who does not believe in Christ is condemned to ignorance, to weakness, to anger, to staggering along the crooked and winding road and intertwining roads, to vice, to despair, and perhaps even to suicide. He is condemned in two worlds: in this world to a senseless physical and deceiving existence and in the other world, to eternal damnation! O how dark is the path of the children of unbelief and how deep is the abyss between their every first and third steps!

Before all else continually pour out prayer, give thanks to God for all that would befall you. If you would fulfill all that is commanded, you will receive the inheritance "What the eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart what God has prepared" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

~ **St. Nikolai**

Inhale Jesus; Exhale Jesus

Yes, my child, love humility above all, and then you will obtain Jesus, Who is lowly in heart, as an everlasting possession in your soul. Inhale Jesus; exhale Jesus, and then you will know what Jesus is! Where is earthly love then! Is it possible for a firebrand to fall upon a parched forest and for anything to survive? The same thing happens with the twigs of human thoughts when the love of Jesus falls upon them.

~ **Elder Ephraim**