

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447

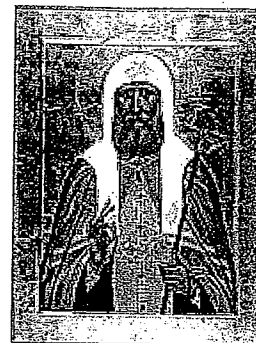
Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **October 6, 2013** ✠

The Holy Apostle Thomas

St. Innocent, the Evangelizer

of the Aleuts & the Apostle to America (1879)



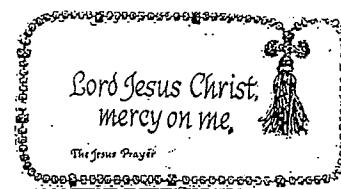
St. Innocent ~ October 6

St. Tikhon – October 9

✠ **Many Years! Newly Illumined Child Gleb Akhrymuk !**

⇒ **Inquirer's Class – Tuesday, October 8, 6:30pm – Church tour**

⇒ **Note: There's no water in the Hall this week due to construction.**



HOMILY ~ On the Kingdom Not of this World

My Kingdom is not of this world. (John 18:36)

He who has great wealth also has little wealth. Therefore, let no one think that Christ the Lord does not have royal authority over this world, even though He told Pilate: My Kingdom is not of this world. He who possesses the eternal also rules over the temporal. Here, the Lord speaks of His Eternal Kingdom, independent of time, decay, injustice, illusion and death. It is as if someone were to say: "My wealth is not in paper but rather in gold." If he has gold, can he not afford paper? Is not gold worth more than paper? Therefore, the Lord does not tell Pilate that He is a king, but on the contrary says that He is a higher King than all earthly kings, and that His Kingdom is greater, more powerful and more enduring than all earthly kingdoms. He is indicating His principal Kingdom, upon which all earthly kingdoms depend, in time and in space.

"My Kingdom is not of this world." This does not mean that He has no power over this world, but on the contrary confirms His awesome power over this world. All His works on earth manifest His unparalleled, lordly power over the world. Tell me, in what other king's presence is the wind quieted and the sea calmed? And have you forgotten His words in Gethsemane? Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:53). And just one angel has greater power than all the universe!

The Lord of the soul is also the Lord of the body. The Lord of eternity is also the Lord of time. The Lord of the greatest good is also the Lord of the lesser good. Brethren, nothing can escape the power of the Almighty Jesus Christ our Lord, Who by His own will suffered for us, and by His own power rose from the grave.

- St. Nikolai of Serbia, from the Prologue

~ **St. Isaac of Syria, The Ascetic Homilies 27:**

- "God's recompense to sinners is that, instead of a just recompense, God rewards them with resurrection."

- "If zeal had been appropriate for putting humanity right, why did God the Word clothe himself in the body, using gentleness and humility in order to bring the world back to his Father?"

- "Let us not be in doubt, O fellow humanity, concerning the hope of our salvation, seeing that the One who bore sufferings for our sakes is very concerned about our salvation; God's mercifulness is far more extensive than we can conceive, God's grace is greater than what we ask for."

Pearls of the Holy Fathers {13}

If you see a man pure and humble, that is a great vision. For what is greater than such a vision, to see the invisible God in a visible man? St. Pachomius the Great

If prayer is cold, it does not mean that it is displeasing to God. Sometimes such prayer can take the place of struggle if a person humbles himself and condemns himself in everything before God. St. Joseph of Optina

He who always concentrates on the inner life becomes restrained, long-suffering, kind and humble. He will also be able to contemplate, theologize and pray. That is what St. Paul meant when he said: 'Walk in the Spirit' (Gal. 5:16).

St. Maximus the Confessor

When shall we fully acknowledge the necessity for our temporal and eternal good — to live in accordance with the Gospel? But now how few there are who even read the Gospel! St. John of Kronstadt

As long as a young girl is living in her father's house, many young men wish to marry her, but when she has taken a husband, she is no longer pleasing to everyone; despised by some, approved by others, she no longer enjoys the favor of former times, when she lived a hidden life. So it is with the soul; from the day when it is shown to everyone, it is no longer able to satisfy everyone. Abba Arsenius

Since this 'land' consists of such beautiful works, how much more truly the heavenly country must also consist of such; for the other is ever new, and grows not old. For this 'land' passes away, as the Lord said; but that which is ready to receive the saints is immortal. St. Athanasius the Great

Concerning the various kinds of food: we should take a little of everything, even sweets. This is a wise rule, says Gregory of Sinai. We should never pick and choose or push our food aside, but should thank God for everything and perfect ourselves in humility. We shall thus avoid the pride which disdains the good fruit created by God. St. Nilus Sorsky

For this, the Only-begotten Son of God took on the form of our weakness; for this, the Invisible not only appeared visible, but even despised; for this, He bore mockeries and insults, derisions and disgrace, suffering and torments, namely, that the humble God could teach man not to be proud. Therefore, how great a virtue is humility, when Christ, Who was great beyond measure, was made small, even unto suffering, in order to teach this virtue truly? St. Gregory the Great

One who desires salvation must first of all suffer at the hands of other men all vexations and insults and ignominies, and other tribulations, in the likeness of our Lord, and come in this manner to perfect silence, which is hanging on the Cross — in other words, complete mortification. St. Barsanuphius the Great

**Glorification of St Innocent, the
Metropolitan of Moscow and Enlightener
of the Aleuts, and Apostle to America
{October 6}**

St Innocent, Metropolitan of Moscow, Enlightener of the Aleuts and Apostle to America (in the world John Popov-Veniaminov), was born on August 26, 1797 in the village of Anginsk in the Irkutsk diocese, into the family of a sacristan. The boy mastered his studies at an early age and by age seven, he was reading the Epistle in church. In 1806 they sent him to the Irkutsk seminary. In 1814, the new rector thought it proper to change the surnames of some of the students. John Popov received the surname Veniaminov in honor of the deceased Archbishop Benjamin of Irkutsk (+ July 8, 1814). On May 13, 1817 he was ordained deacon for the Irkutsk Annunciation church, and on May 18, 1821, he was ordained priest.

The missionary service of the future Apostle of America and Siberia began with the year 1823. Father John spent 45 years laboring for the enlightenment of the peoples of Kamchatka, the Aleutian Islands, North America, Yakutsk, the Khabarov frontier, performing his apostolic exploit in severe conditions and at great risks to life. Saint Innocent baptized ten thousand people, and built churches, beside which he founded schools and he himself taught the fundamentals of the Christian life. His knowledge of various crafts and arts aided him in his work.

Father John was a remarkable preacher. During the celebration of the Liturgy, memorial services and the all-night Vigil, he incessantly guided his flock. During his time of endless travels, Father John studied the languages, customs and habits of the peoples, among whom he preached. His work in geography, ethnography and linguistics received worldwide acclaim. He composed an alphabet and grammar for the Aleut language and translated the Catechism, the Gospel and many prayers into that language. One of the

finest of his works was the Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven (1833), translated into the various languages of the peoples of Siberia and appearing in more than 40 editions. Thanks to the toil of Father John, the Yakut people in 1859 first heard the Word of God and divine services in their own native language.

On November 29, 1840, after the death of his wife, Father John was tonsured a monk with the name Innocent by St. Philaret, the Metropolitan of Moscow, in honor of St. Innocent of Irkutsk. On December 15, Archimandrite Innocent was consecrated Bishop of Kamchatka, the Kurile and Aleutian Islands. On April 21, 1850 Bishop Innocent was elevated to the rank of archbishop.

By the Providence of God on January 5, 1868, St. Innocent succeeded Metropolitan Philaret on the Moscow cathedra. Through the Holy Synod, Metropolitan Innocent consolidated the secular missionary efforts of the Russian Church (already in 1839 he had proposed a project for improving the organization of missionary service).

Under the care of Metropolitan Innocent a Missionary Society was created, and the Protection monastery was reorganized for missionary work. In 1870 the Japanese Orthodox Spiritual Mission headed by Archimandrite Nicholas Kasatkin (afterwards Saint Nicholas of Japan, (February 3) was set up, to whom St. Innocent had shared much of his own spiritual experience. The guidance by St. Innocent of the Moscow diocese was also fruitful, by his efforts, the Church of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos was built up into the Moscow Spiritual Academy.

St. Innocent fell asleep in the Lord on March 31, 1879, on Holy Saturday, and was buried at the Holy Spirit Church of the Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra. On October 6, 1977, St. Innocent was glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church. His memory is celebrated twice during the year: on March 31, the day of his blessed repose, and on October 6, the day of his glorification.

Self-Offering Provides Divine Oxygen by Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos

"If man is to understand whether or not he is making spiritual progress, he must first look within himself to see if he rejoices when he gives and not when he receives..."

When we do not expect repayment of any kind for our kindness, then our spiritual reward remains pure. Christ did everything for us and we crucified Him. What is it that we say in our hymns, Instead of the manna I offered them, they gave me gall to drink. Let us always try to do good without expecting anything in return.

He Who Gives Receives Divine Joy

Two joys exist for man. One is the joy of receiving and the other is the joy of giving. The special joy one feels when giving cannot be compared with the joy one feels when receiving. If man is to understand whether or not he is making spiritual progress, he must first look within himself to see if he rejoices when he gives and not when he receives; if he's upset when receiving and joyful when giving. Then again, if he's working properly spiritually, he will rarely ever remember the good he has done, but will never forget even the smallest good done to him. He can never ignore the smallest benefaction of others. He may have given an entire vineyard to someone and forgotten about it. But if the other person gives him just one bunch of grapes from that same vineyard, he will never forget it. Or he may have given someone many valuable carved wooden Icons and forgotten about it. But if the receiver later reciprocates by giving him a small Icon made of plastic, he is moved by the gesture, even though it is of such insignificant value, and, out of gratitude, he's already thinking how to repay the favor.

He could give away even an entire Chapel along with the plot of land and still put it out of his mind. **In other words, the correct spiritual approach is to forget the good you do to others and to remember the good others do to you.** When someone reaches this state of spiritual being, then he is indeed human, a man of God.

But, on the other hand, if someone constantly forgets the good done to him by others and only remembers the good he has done to others, this work is contrary to what Christ seeks from us. But even if one thinks, "You gave me so much and I gave you that much. . . ." This, too, is an unacceptable mentality, grocer-like. I try to give to the person who has the greatest need. I don't reckon things according to a bargaining mentality: he gave me these books and now I owe him the same amount which I must pay in order to be even. Or, if others don't give to me, I won't give them anything either. This too is nothing more than a human form of justice.

He who receives experiences human joy. But he who gives experiences divine joy.

Divine joy comes to us by giving. Someone, for example, gives me a book. He now rejoices spiritually, divinely, and I, who receive the book, rejoice humanly. When I, too, give the book, I too will rejoice divinely, while the other person who receives it will rejoice humanly. But if he, too, goes on to give it, then he, too, will rejoice divinely, and so on. Do you see how with one thing alone many people can rejoice both humanly and divinely?

One must learn to rejoice by giving. When he rejoices by giving, he is properly placed and is networking with Christ; he has divine Grace. When he gives or offers something, the joy he feels provides him with divine oxygen. When someone rejoices when he receives or when others are sacrificing themselves for him, this type of joy is full of an asphyxiating stench. The people who offer themselves unconditionally, without any consideration for themselves, will be the ones who will judge us in the future. What wonderful joy these people experience! These are the people Jesus Christ protects. But most people, unfortunately, are only happy when they receive things, so they deprive themselves of any divine joy and remain tormented. Christ is moved when we love our neighbor more than ourselves, and He fills us with divine gladness. You see, He did not restrict Himself to *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*, but went on to sacrifice Himself for mankind.

"The End Times and Now"

St. Ambrose, Elder of Optina

"My child, know that in the last days hard times will come; and as the Apostle says, behold, due to poverty in piety, heresies and schisms will appear in the churches; and as the Holy Fathers foretold, then on the thrones of hierarchs and in monasteries there will be no men to be found that are tested and experienced in the spiritual life. Wherefore, heresies will spread everywhere and deceive many. The enemy of mankind will act skillfully, and whenever possible he will lead the chosen ones to heresy. He will not begin by discarding the dogmas on the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ, or the Theotokos, but will unnoticeably start to distort the Teachings of the Holy Fathers, in other words the teachings of the Church herself. The cunning of the enemy and his "ways" will be noticed by very few -- only those that are most experienced in spiritual life. Heretics will take over the Church, everywhere, and they will appoint their servants, and spirituality will be neglected. But the Lord will not leave His servants without protection. Truly, their real duty is persecution of true pastors and their imprisonment; for without that, the spiritual flock may not become captured by the heretics. Therefore, my son, when you see in the Churches mocking of the Divine act, of the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and of God's established order, know that the heretics are already present. Be also aware that, for some time, they might hide their evil intentions, or they might covertly deform the divine Faith, so that they better succeed by deceiving and tricking the inexperienced.

They will persecute pastors and the servants of God alike, for the devil who is directing the heresy cannot stand the Divine order. Like wolves in sheep skin, they will be recognized by their vainglorious nature, love for lust, and lust for power. All those will be betrayers, causing hatred and malice everywhere; and therefore the Lord said that one will easily recognize them by their fruits. The true servants of God are meek, brother-loving and obedient to the Church (order, traditions).

At that time, monks will endure great pressures from heretics, and the monastic life will be mocked. The monastic families will be impoverished, the number of monks will decrease. The ones remaining will endure violence. These haters of the monastic life, who merely have the appearance of piety, will strive to draw monks to their side, promising them protection and worldly goods (comforts), but threatening with exile those who do not submit. From these threats, the weak at heart will be very humiliated (tormented).

If you live to see that time, rejoice, for at that time the faithful who possess no other virtues will receive wreaths for merely remaining steadfast in their faith, according to the Word of the Lord, "Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will confess before My Heavenly Father". Fear the Lord, my son, and don't lose this wreath so as to not be rejected by Christ into the utter darkness and eternal suffering. Bravely stand in faith, and if necessary, joyfully endure persecutions and other troubles, for only then will the Lord stand by you...and the holy Martyrs and the Confessors will joyfully watch your struggle.

But, in these days, woe be to monks tied to possessions and riches, and who, for the sake of love of comfort, agree to subjugate themselves to the heretics. They will lull their conscience by saying: we will save the monastery, and the Lord will forgive us. Unfortunate and blinded, they are not even thinking that through heresies and heretics the devil will enter the monastery, and then it will no longer be a holy monastery, but bare walls from which Grace will depart forever.

But God is more powerful than the devil, and will never abandon His servants. There will always be true Christians, till the end of time, but they will choose lonely and deserted places. Do not fear troubles, but fear pernicious heresy, for it drives out Grace, and separates us from Christ, wherefore Christ commanded us to consider the heretic and let him be unto thee as a heathen man and publican. And so, strengthen yourself, my son, in the Grace of Christ Jesus. With joy, hasten to confession and endure the suffering like Jesus Christ's good soldier who was told: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the wreath of life".

October 10

26 Monk-Martyrs of Zographou of Mt Athos

In July of 1274, the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII accepted a union with the Roman Church at Lyons, France. Faced with dangers from Charles of Anjou, the Ottoman Turks, and other enemies, the emperor found such an alliance with Rome expedient. The Union of Lyons required the Orthodox to recognize the authority of the Pope, the use of the Filioque in the Creed, and the use of azymes (unleavened bread) in the Liturgy. Patriarch Joseph was deposed because he would not agree to these conditions. The monastic clergy and many of the laity, both at home and in other Orthodox countries, vigorously opposed the Union, denouncing the emperor for his political schemes and for his betrayal of Orthodoxy.

On January 9, 1275 a Liturgy was celebrated in Constantinople in which the Pope was commemorated as "Gregory, the chief pontiff of the Apostolic Church, and Ecumenical Pope." The emperor's sister remarked, "It is better that my brother's empire should perish, rather than the purity of the Orthodox Faith." Recalling the infamous Crusade of 1204 when Latin crusaders sacked Constantinople, many of the people also preferred to submit to the infidels than to abandon the Orthodox Faith.

Twenty-six martyrs of Zographou Monastery on Mt. Athos were among those who were persecuted by Emperor Michael VIII Paleologos (1261-1282) and Patriarch John Bekkos (1275-1282) because they would not obey the imperial command to recognize the Union of Lyons. They steadfastly kept the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, and fearlessly censured those who accepted Catholic doctrines.

When the authorities came to Mt. Athos to enforce the imperial policy, the monks of Zographou shut themselves up in their monastery. From the tower they reproached those in favor of the Union, calling them lawless men and heretics. The attackers set the monastery on fire and burned the twenty-six martyrs alive.

The names of the martyrs are: Igumen Thomas, the monks Barsanuphius, Cyril, Micah, Simon, Hilarion, James, Job, Cyprian, Sava, James, Martinian, Cosmas, Sergius, Menas, Joasaph, Joannicius, Paul, Anthony, Euthymius, Dometian, Parthenius, and four laymen who died with them.

✠ God's Saints had 'the eyes of their understanding enlightened,' and with these eyes they clearly saw the wants of our sin; we should ask, for what we should give thanks, how we should praise the Lord, and they left us the most perfect examples of prayers of various kinds. O, how beautiful these prayers are! Sometimes we do not feel and do not know their value, while we well know the value of food and drink, of fashionable attire, of well-furnished rooms, of theaters, of music, of worldly literature, especially of novels — that fluent, empty mass of words — and alas! we trample underfoot the precious pearls of prayer; and while everything worldly finds a welcome, wide shelter in the hearts of most people, prayer, alas, does not find even a narrow corner in them, cannot get into them. And when it begs us to let it in, it is thrust out like a beggar, like the man who had not a wedding garment.

✠ "My soul is in God, as a fish in water or a bird in the air, surrounded by Him upon all sides at every time; it lives in Him, it moves in Him, it rests in Him and finds freedom in Him."

St. John of Kronstadt

On the Presuppositions of our Personal Salvation

**Elder Cleopa of Romania (+1998),
*The Truths of Our Faith, P. 154***

Inquirer: Father, earlier you spoke about our "personal salvation." Can you tell me more about this?

ELDER CLEOPA: Some religious confessions teach that personal salvation presupposes the action of Divine Grace alone, according to Calvin, or the grace of faith, i.e. of trust in God, according to Luther, by which the "merits" or virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ are conferred upon man. Therefore, to give a general outline, there are Protestant Christians who believe that salvation stems only from faith and that on the part of man himself there is placed no condition or requirement for his salvation.

Our Church, however, teaches that 'our personal salvation is neither a gift, nor a simple work, but rather a process and an undertaking that matures or develops gradually and is realized in the co-operation of two persons: God and man. On the part of God, Divine Grace (His uncreated Divine Energy) is offered to us, while for man's part, faith and righteous deeds are necessary. Consequently, the prerequisites for our personal salvation are the following: the Divine Grace or uncreated Divine Energy of God and the faith and virtuous deeds of man.

Our objective salvation is realized only in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whereas our personal or subjective salvation, which in the language of the New Testament is called "righteousness," "holiness," or "salvation" (in the narrow sense), is realized as a continuance of this objective salvation, with our personal energy or activity acting in co-

operation with Divine Energy or Grace.

On the part of God, Divine Grace is absolutely necessary, for we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and we are justified by His grace, redeemed in Christ Jesus. "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure." "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and not that of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not by works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath beforehand ordained, that we should walk in them." **Phil.2:12-13**

From this it is clear that divine Grace is necessary for our personal salvation. This truth is also evident in the words of the Lord: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." **(See Eph. 2:8-10, , John 15:5-7)**

Hence, the Grace of God is for us the fluid that runs from vine to the vine branch. On the part of man, saving and actualized faith is necessary, i.e. "faith which worketh by love." (Gal. 5:6) Without this contribution of man's, salvation is not held out for any man. Conscious faith in God, without good deeds, the demons, too, possess, for they also "believe and tremble." **(James 2:19)**

Holy Scripture itself makes clear that good works are necessary for salvation. Holy Scripture is filled with passages which refer to good deeds as a necessary prerequisite of our salvation. **(See Matt.25:34, John 5:29, Rom. 2:6-13, 2 Cor. 5:10, James 2:14-26, Rev. 20:12)**

Natural and Sacramental Marriage, an Orthodox Christian Perspective

by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

We can now return to the Sacrament of matrimony. We can now understand that its true meaning is not that it merely gives a religious "sanction" to marriage and family life, reinforces with supernatural grace the natural family virtues. Its meaning is that by taking the "natural" marriage into "the great mystery of Christ and the Church," the sacrament of matrimony gives marriage a *new meaning*; it transforms, in fact, not only marriage as such but all human love.

It is worth mentioning that the early Church apparently did not know of any separate marriage service. The "fulfillment" of marriage by two Christians was their partaking of the Eucharist. As every aspect of life was gathered into the Eucharist, so matrimony received its seal by inclusion into the central act of the community. And this means that, since marriage has always had sociological and legal dimensions, there were simply accepted by the Church.

Yet, like the whole "natural" life of man, marriage had to be *taken into the Church*, that is, judged, redeemed and transformed into the sacrament of the Kingdom. Only later did the Church receive also the "civil" authority to perform a rite of marriage. This meant, however, together with the recognition of the Church as the "celebrant" of matrimony, a first step in a progressive "desacramentalization." An obvious sign of this was the divorce of matrimony from the Eucharist.

All this explains why even today the Orthodox rite of matrimony consists of two distinct services: the Betrothal and the Crowning. The Betrothal is performed not inside the Church, but in the vestibule. It is the Christian form of the "natural" marriage. It is the blessing of the rings by the priest and their exchange by the bridal pair. Yet from the very beginning this natural marriage is given its true perspective and direction: "O Lord our God," says the priest, "*who hast espoused the Church as a pure Virgin* from among the Gentiles, bless this Betrothal, and unite and maintain these Thy servants in peace and oneness of mind."

For the Christian, *natural* does not mean either self-sufficient – a "nice little family" – or merely insufficient, and to be, therefore, strengthened and completed by the addition of the "*supernatural*." The natural man thirsts and hungers for fulfillment and redemption. This thirst and hunger is the vestibule of the Kingdom: both beginning and exile.

Then, having blessed the natural marriage, the priest takes the bridal pair in a solemn procession into the church. This is the true form of the sacrament, for it does not merely symbolize, but indeed is the entrance of marriage into the Church, which is the entrance of the world into the "world to come," the procession of the people of God – in Christ – into the Kingdom. The rite of crowning is but a later – although a beautiful and beautifully meaningful – expression of the reality of this entrance.

~ Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, pages 88-89

✠ St. John Chrysostom suggests active use of *spiritual drugs* in Christ. His primary therapeutic guideline is awareness of the omnipresence of God. Nothing destroys people more than unawareness and the criminal forgetfulness of God. But nothing saves him more than seeing the All-good Lord noetically, Who was Crucified for us and Rose from the dead, and to call upon His All-holy Name.

~ Archimandrite Sarantis Sarantou, Marousi, Greece