



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **March 9, 2014** ✠

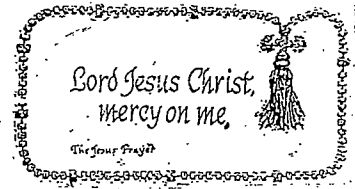
Sunday of Orthodoxy

Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebastia (320)

St. Caesarius, Brother of St. Gregory (369)

St. Jonah of Novgorod (1470)

The whole earth
is the living icon
of the face of God.
– St. John of Damascus



Second Week of Great Lent

- ✠ **Tuesday March 11 6:30pm Inquirer's Class – Church tour**
- ✠ **Wednesday March 12 6:30pm - Presanctified Liturgy – St. Symeon**
- ✠ **Friday March 14 6:30pm – Presanctified Liturgy {Potluck Supper on Friday}**

+ **Children's Lenten Retreat – Saturday, March 29 10:00am - 5:00pm** for all Sunday School children from Kindergarten through Middle School. The theme is "The Sundays of Lent." Children's confessions will be available during the day and Children's choir will sing for Vespers that night.

Volunteers and helpers will be needed.

+ **Youth Trip to Atlanta – March 29 with Fr. Deacon - youth group to visit Atlanta Orthodox churches**

The Fidelity of the Fathers

"Therefore, whatever has been sown by the fidelity of the Fathers in this husbandry of God's Church, the same ought to be cultivated and taken care of by the industry of their children, the same ought to flourish and the same ought to advance and go forward to perfection. For it is right that those ancient doctrines of heavenly philosophy should, as time goes on, be cared for, smoothed, polished; but not that they should be changed, not that they should be maimed, not that they should be mutilated. They may receive proof, illustration, definiteness; but they must retain withal their completeness, their integrity, their characteristic properties."

~ **St. Vincent of Lerins**

A Catholic Knowledge

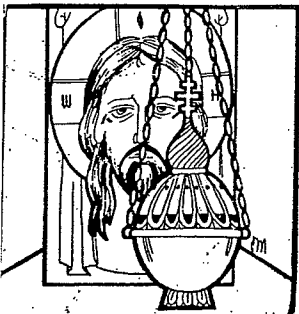
"It is impossible for someone to acquire a catholic knowledge of the spirit except by being incorporated into the life of the Church. The entire significance of the perseverance of Orthodoxy through the centuries lies exactly in the numerical identity of the Church, in her uniquely catholic, universal, and continuous existence, with an uninterrupted and continuous hierarchical succession, with the performance of the mysteries, with the communion of the faith, and by the action of the One Spirit and one grace in all of these. This is none other than the unity of the Body of Christ, the unity of the house of God, in which all who have fallen asleep in the faith and piety presently live and dwell along with all the Saints and holy Fathers."

~ **St. Justin Popovich**

On being steadfast in the Faith

"The Faith which I was taught by the Holy Fathers, which I taught at all times without adjusting according to the times, this Faith I will never stop teaching. I was born with it and I live by it."

~ **St. Gregory the Theologian**



Orthodox Practice - On Kissing the Holy Icons

As a boy St. Seraphim would humbly place his candle not right next to an icon but somewhat off to the side. Our veneration of icons should reflect a similar spiritual sensitivity and a sense of our unworthiness before God and His saints.

Traditionally, we venerate an icon by making the sign of the cross and bowing from the waist, the right hand extended to touch the floor. We repeat this, kiss the icon and then make the sign of the cross and bow a third time. It is improper to kiss the face on an icon as this implies a presumptuous familiarity. We should bear in mind that the honor accorded the icon redounds to the prototype, and were the person depicted to come into our midst, awed by their sanctity we should not dare to kiss them on the cheek but would bow down and kiss their feet. If the image is depicted in full stature, we kiss the feet; if half-stature - the hand; in the case of the Icon "Not-Made-By -Hands" (Christ's head on a napkin) or the head of St John the Baptist, we kiss the hair.

Needless to say, leaving lipstick smears is not only grossly irreverent, it is also disrespectful of others venerating the icon. (Blessed Archbishop John forbade women wearing lipstick to kiss the cross or approach the chalice.)

(Compiled from *The Shepherd*, October 1991, and *Blagovestnik*, Parish Bulletin of the Holy Virgin Cathedral in San Francisco, November 1989).

The Teaching on the Veneration of Icons

✦ Pictoriality is inseparable from the Gospel narration, and, vice versa, the Gospel narration is inseparable from pictoriality. What the word communicates through sound, the painting shows silently through depiction. ***Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787)***

✦ "Holy icons have been used in churches, and the faithful have venerated them as early as Apostolic times. Very many recount this. Together with them, the Seventh Ecumenical Council also put to shame every heretical blasphemy. This Council explains in a most clear manner how one ought to venerate the holy icons, and it gives over to excommunication those who render worship to icons as to God... Together with them, we also give over to excommunication those who render either to a saint, or to an icon, or to the Cross, or to the relics of the saints, or to the sacred vessels, or to the Gospel, or to anything else whatsoever in heaven, on the earth or in the sea such honor as is proper only to the One God in Trinity ... as well as those who call the veneration of icons idolatry and therefore do not venerate them, do not honor the Cross or the saints, as the Church has commanded."

Epistle of the Eastern Patriarchs (1848)

✦ Stand before an icon of the Savior, as before the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who is invisibly omnipresent and through His icon is present in that place where it is located. Stand before an icon of the Mother of God, as before the Most Holy Virgin herself, but preserve thy mind from visualization. There is the greatest difference between being in the Lord's presence and standing before the Lord, and imagining the Lord. The perception of the Lord's presence brings a saving fear to the soul, introduces a saving feeling of reverence into the soul, while imagining the Lord and His Saints communicates to the mind materiality, leads it to a false, proud opinion of itself, leads the soul to a false state - the state of self-delusion.

St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) (1867)

✦ A small image, in the presence of the warmth, of faith and reverence, in the presence of purity of mind and chastity of body, in no way differs from a large image; therefore, be attentive, render worthy honor to the Saints and to their sacred countenances, whether they be small or large.

Athonite Patericon

How to Prepare for a Salvific Confession

From *The Path to Salvation*, by St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894) {pgs. 178-187}

Resolve to abandon sin and please God!

For a salvific confession, one must prepare himself sufficiently. Proceed with reverence and faith!

1) Firmly convinced of the necessity of this Sacrament, go to it - not as though it were some new part of your life or just a simple custom, but with complete faith that for you as a sinner, this is the only possible way to be saved. By skipping it, you will be numbered among the condemned, and, consequently, you will be outside of any mercy. By not entering this clinic, your spirit will not regain its health and you will remain as you were, sick and disturbed. You will not see the kingdom if you do not enter it through the door of repentance.

2) By these convictions engender the desire for this Sacrament. Go to it not as to the slaughter, but as to a fountain of blessings. Whoever vividly represents to himself the fruit born in us through Confession could not but long for it. A man goes to it all in wounds from head to toe, and he returns from it healthy in all his members, alive, strong, and with a feeling of safety from future infection. He goes there weighed down by a heavy yoke - the whole sum of past sins on him. It torments him and deprives him of all peace. He returns light, joyful, and with a consoling disposition of spirit that he has received a charter of complete forgiveness.

3) Shame and fear will come up - let them! That is why this Sacrament was created, to bring shame and fear upon us - and the more shame and fear, the more it will save us. Desiring this Sacrament, desire great shame and great trembling. If someone wants to be healed, does he not know how painful the treatment is? He knows, but resolving to be healed, he also determines to endure the attendant pain in the hope of recovering. And you, when you were tormented by the feelings of regret that came upon you and you rushed to come closer to God, did you not say: "I am ready to endure anything, only have mercy on me and forgive me!" Well, now it is happening according your wish. Do not be upset over this shame and fear; they are bound up with this Sacrament for your own good. By having burned again in them, you will become morally stronger. You burned already more than once in the fire of repentance - burn some more. Then you burned alone before God and your conscience, but now burn before a witness appointed by God, in witness of the sincerity of that solitary burning, and perhaps to complete its lack. There will be a judgment, and at it will be shame and fear without hope. Shame and fear at confession pay for the shame and fear *then*. If you do not want the latter, go through with the former.

Besides, it always happens that; according to the measure of the trembling that the penitent goes through, he overflows with consolation at the confession. This is where the Savior truly shows Himself to be the Comforter of the laboring and heavy laden! By sincerely repenting and confessing the heart learns this truth by experience, rather than by faith alone.

4) Then, again recalling all the sins you have committed and renewing the now ripened, inner commitment not to repeat them, rise up in the living faith that you stand before the Lord Himself Who receives your confession; and tell everything that burdens your conscience, without holding anything back. If you have approached it with the desire to shame yourself, you will not cover yourself, but will express as fully as possible your disgraceful weakness for sins. This will serve to satiate your humbled heart. You must be sure that every sin you have told is torn from the heart, for every hidden sin remains there even more to your condemnation, because the sinner stood with his wound near the Doctor that heals all things. By hiding the sin, he closed the wound without regretting that he torments and disrupts his soul. In the story of Blessed Theodora, who passed through the toll-houses, it is written that her evil accusers did not find in their scrolls those sins that she had confessed. The angels later explained to her that Confession wipes away sin from every place that it had been

recorded. Neither in the book of the conscience, nor in the book of the living, nor with the evil destroyer is it attributed to that person - Confession wiped away these lines. Tear out all that burdens you without hiding anything.

The point to which you need to bring the revelation of your sins is so that the spiritual father has a precise understanding of you; so that he sees you as you are, and, in giving absolution he absolves you and not someone else; so that when he says:

"Forgive and absolve this penitent for the sins he has committed," nothing remains in you that would come under this category. He does well who, having prepared for Confession for the first time after a long period of residing in sins, finds some opportunity to have a preliminary discussion with the spiritual father, and tells him the entire history of his sinful life. This will remove the danger of forgetting or omitting anything in confusion during the confession. Everyone must concern himself with a complete revelation of his sins. The Lord gave the authority to absolve sins not automatically, but under the condition that they be repented of and confessed.

5) Now the confession is over. The spiritual father lifts his epitrachelion (stole), covers the head of the penitent with it, and keeping it in his hand, pronounces the absolution of all sins, making the sign of the Cross on the head. What occurs at this moment in the soul is well-known to everyone who sincerely repents. Streams of grace pour from the head into the heart and fill it with joy. This is not from human beings, not from the penitent, not from the absolver - this is the mystery of the Lord - Healer and Comforter of souls.

Sometimes it happens at this time that some hear clearly in their hearts a divine word to strengthen and inspire them for future works. This is a sort of spiritual weapon entrusted by Christ the Savior to the person who now enters the ranks of those warring in His name. Whoever has heard such a word, let him treasure it later, to comfort and inspire him - comfort, because it is clear that the confession has been received when it has pleased the Lord to enter into a sort of discussion with the penitent; inspire, because in the hour of temptation all he has to do is remember it, and strength comes from somewhere to resist! With what do warriors in battle inspire themselves? With a word spoken by the commander that affected him powerfully. It is the same here.

6) With this everything is done. All that remains is to fall at God's feet with feelings of thankfulness for His unspeakable mercy, and kiss the Cross and Gospels as a sign of your vow. Go unwaveringly along the path shown to you in the Gospels, with the commitment to follow Christ the Savior, as described in the Gospels, under His blessed yoke, only now taken upon yourself. Having completed this, go in peace, with the intention to intently act according to what you have promised, remembering that the judgment over you from now on will be from your own words. You have made a promise - keep it. It has been sealed by the Sacrament, and therefore you must be ever more faithful to it, so that you do not fall again into the ranks of those who have wasted grace.

7) If the spiritual father gives you a penance, accept it with joy. If the spiritual father does not give you one, then ask to. This will be not only a send-off to you as you depart on good path, but also a shield and protection from outside attacks on your new way of life.

Here is what the Patriarch Constantinople wrote in answer to the Lutherans:

"We accompany the absolution of sins with penances for many respectable reasons. First of all, so that through voluntary suffering the sinner will be freed here from onerous involuntary punishment there, in the next life, for the Lord grants mercy to nothing more than He does suffering, especially voluntary suffering. St. Gregory also says that God's love is granted for tears. Secondly, it is in order to destroy in the sinner those passionate desires of the flesh which give birth to sin, for we know that opposites cure. Thirdly, it is so that the penance would serve as a bond or bridle for the soul, and not allow it to again take up those same vices from which it is still being cleansed. Fourthly, in order to accustom it to labor and patience, for virtue is a matter of labor. Fifthly, it is so that we will see and know whether or not the penitent has truly come to hate sin."

{to be continued}

THE DISPUTE OVER HOLY ICONS

Disputes concerning the Person of Christ did not cease with the council of 681, but were extended in a different form into the eighth and ninth centuries. The struggle centered on the Holy Icons, the pictures of Christ, the Mother of God, and the saints, which were kept and venerated both in churches and in private homes. The Iconoclasts or icon-smashers, suspicious of any religious art which represented human beings or God, demanded the destruction of icons; the opposite party, the Iconodules or venerators of icons, vigorously defended the place of icons in the life of the Church. The struggle was not merely a conflict between two conceptions of Christian art. Deeper issues were involved: the character of Christ's human nature, the Christian attitude towards matter, the true meaning of Christian redemption.

The Iconoclasts may have been influenced from the outside by Jewish and Muslim ideas, and it is significant that three years before the first outbreak of Iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire, the Muslim Caliph Yezid ordered the removal of all icons within his dominions. But Iconoclasm was not simply imported from outside; within Christianity itself there had always existed a 'puritan' outlook, which condemned icons because it saw in all images a latent idolatry. When the Isaurian Emperors attacked icons, they found plenty of support inside the Church.



The Iconoclast controversy, which lasted some years, falls into two phases. The first period opened in 726 when Leo 111 began his attack on icons, and ended in 780 when the Empress Irene suspended the persecution. The Iconodule position was upheld by the seventh and last Ecumenical Council (787), which met, as the first had done, at Nicea. Icons, the council proclaimed, are to be kept in churches and honored with the same relative veneration as is shown to other material symbols, such as the 'precious and life-giving Cross' and the Book of Gospels. A new attack on icons, started by Leo V the Armenian in 815, continued until 843 when the icons were again reinstated, this time permanently, by another Empress, Theodora. The final victory of the Holy Images in 843 is known as 'the Triumph of Orthodoxy', and is commemorated in a special service celebrated on 'Orthodoxy Sunday', the first Sunday in Lent. The chief champion of the icons in the first period was St John of Damascus (?675-749), in the second St Theodore of Stoudios (759-826). John was able to work the more freely because he dwelt in Muslim territory, out of reach of the Byzantine government. It was not the last time that Islam acted unintentionally as the protector of Orthodoxy.

One of the distinctive features of Orthodoxy is the place which it assigns to icons. An Orthodox church today is filled with them: dividing the sanctuary from the body of the



building there is a solid screen, the iconostasis, entirely covered with icons, while other icons are placed in special shrines around the church; and perhaps the walls are covered with icons in fresco or mosaic. An Orthodox prostrates himself before these icons, he kisses them and burns candles in front of them; they are censed by the priest and carried in procession. What do these gestures and actions mean? What do icons signify, and why did John of Damascus and others regard them as important?

We shall consider first the charge of idolatry, which the Iconoclasts brought against the Iconodules; then the positive value of icons as a means of instruction; and finally their doctrinal importance.

(1) The question of idolatry. When an Orthodox kisses an icon or prostrates himself before it, he is not guilty of idolatry. The icon is not an idol but a symbol; the veneration shown to images is directed, not towards stone, wood, and paint, but towards the person depicted. This had been pointed out some time before the Iconoclast controversy by Leontius of Neapolis (died about 650): We do not make obeisance to the nature of wood, but we revere and do obeisance to Him who was crucified on the Cross ... When the two beams of the Cross are joined together I adore the figure because of Christ who was crucified on the Cross, but if the beams are separated, I throw them away and burn them.' Because icons are only symbols, Orthodox do not worship them, but reverence or venerate them. John of Damascus carefully distinguished between the relative honor of veneration shown to material symbols, and the worship due to God alone.

(2) Icons as part of the Church's teaching. Icons, said Leontius, are 'opened books to

remind us of God'; they are one of the means which the Church employs in order to teach the faith. He who lacks learning or leisure to study works of theology has only to enter a church to see unfolded before him on the walls all the mysteries of the Christian religion. If a pagan asks you to show him your faith, said the Iconodules, take him into church and place him before the icons. In this way icons form a part of Holy Tradition.

(3) The doctrinal significance of icons. Here we come to the real heart of the Iconoclast dispute. Granted that icons are not idols; granted that they are useful for instruction; but are they not only permissible but necessary? Is it essential to have icons? The Iconodules held that it is, because icons safeguard a full and proper doctrine of the Incarnation. Iconoclasts and Iconodules agreed that God cannot be represented in His eternal nature: 'no one has seen God at any time' (John I, 18). But, the Iconodules continued, the Incarnation has made a representational religious art possible: God can be depicted because He became human and took flesh. Material images, argued John of Damascus, can be made of Him who took a material body: Of old God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was not depicted at all. But now that God has appeared in the flesh and lived among humans, I make an image of the God who can be seen. I do not worship matter but I worship the' Creator of matter, who for my sake became material and deigned to dwell in matter, who through matter effected my salvation. I will not cease from worshiping the matter through which my salvation has been effected.'

The Iconoclasts, by repudiating all representations of God, failed to take full account of the Incarnation. They fell, as so many puritans have done, into a kind of dualism. Regarding matter as a defilement,

they wanted a religion freed from all contact with what is material; for they thought that what is spiritual must be non-material. But this is to betray the Incarnation, by allowing no place to Christ's humanity, to His body; it is to forget that our body as well as our soul must be saved and transfigured. The Iconoclast controversy is thus closely linked to the earlier disputes about Christ's person. It was not merely a controversy about religious art, but about the Incarnation, about human salvation, about the salvation of the entire material cosmos. God took a material body, thereby proving that matter can be redeemed: 'The Word made flesh has deified the flesh,' said John of Damascus. God has 'deified' matter, making it 'spirit-bearing'; and if flesh has become a vehicle of the Spirit, then so - though in a different way - can wood and paint. The Orthodox doctrine of icons is bound up with the Orthodox belief that the whole of God's creation, material as well as spiritual, is to be redeemed and glorified. In the words of Nicolas Zernov (1898-1980) - what he says of Russians is true of all Orthodox:

[Icons] were for the Russians not merely paintings. They were dynamic manifestations of man's spiritual power to redeem creation through beauty and art. The colors and lines of the [icons] were not meant to imitate nature; the artists aimed at demonstrating that men, animals, and plants, and the whole cosmos, could be rescued from their present state of degradation and restored to their proper 'Image'. The [icons] were pledges of the coming victory of a redeemed creation over the fallen one . . . The artistic perfection of an icon was not only a reflection of the celestial glory - it was a concrete example of matter restored to its original harmony and beauty, and serving as a vehicle of the Spirit. The icons were part of the transfigured cosmos.'

JK

From the Fathers

When a man walks in the fear of God he knows no fear, even if he were to be surrounded by wicked men. He has the fear of God within him and wears the invincible armor of faith. This makes him strong and able to take on anything, even things which seem difficult or impossible to most people. Such a man is like a giant surrounded by monkeys, or a roaring lion among dogs and foxes. He goes forward trusting in the Lord and the constancy of his will to strike and paralyze his foes. He wields the blazing club of the Word in wisdom.

*St. Symeon the New Theologian,
The Practical and Theological Chapters*

In Christianity truth is not a philosophical concept nor is it a theory, a teaching, or a system, but rather, it is the living theanthropic hypostasis - the historical Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Before Christ men could only conjecture about the Truth since they did not possess it. With Christ as the incarnate divine Logos the eternally complete divine Truth enters into the world. For this reason the Gospel says: "Truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

St. Justin Popovich

Faith and love which are gifts of the Holy Spirit are such great and powerful means that a person who has them can easily, and with joy and consolation, go the way Jesus Christ went. Besides this, the Holy Spirit gives man the power to resist the delusions of the world so that although he makes use of earthly good, yet he uses them as a temporary visitor, without attaching his heart to them. But a man who has not got the Holy Spirit, despite all his learning and prudence, is always more or less a slave and worshiper of the world.

*St. Innocent of Irkutsk
Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

St. Nikolai on Fasting

Gluttony makes a man gloomy and fearful, but fasting makes him joyful and courageous. And, as gluttony calls forth greater and greater gluttony, so fasting stimulates greater and greater endurance. King David practiced fasting for so long that he himself said: *My knees are weak through fasting* (Psalm 108:23). When a man realises the grace that comes through fasting, he desires to fast more and more. And the graces that come through fasting are countless. By fasting, a man lightens both his body and his spirit from the weight of darkness and grossness. His body becomes light and vigorous, and his spirit is bright and clear.

By fasting, a man lifts his soul above its earthly prison and penetrates through the darkness of animal life to the light of God's kingdom, to his own true homeland.

Fasting makes a man strong, decisive and courageous before both men and demons.

Fasting also makes a man generous, meek, merciful and obedient.

By fasting, Moses was made worthy to receive the commandments from God's hands.

By fasting, Elijah closed the heavens, so that there was no rain for three years; by fasting, he called down fire from heaven onto the idol-worshippers, and by fasting made himself so pure that he was able, on Horeb, to talk with God.

By fasting, Daniel was saved from the lion's den, and the Three Children from the burning fiery furnace.

By fasting, King David lifted up his heart to the Lord, and God's grace descended on him and he sang the sweetest and most surpassing of prayers that any man, before the coming of Christ, has ever raised to God.

By fasting, King Jehoshaphat crushed his enemies, the Ammonites and the Moabites (II Chronicles 20:23).

By fasting, the Jews were saved from persecution by Haman, the imperial deputy (Esther 4:3).

By fasting, the city of Nineveh was saved from the destruction that the prophet Jonah had prophesied for it.

By fasting, John the Baptist became the greatest of those born of woman.

Armed with fasting, Saint Anthony overcame all the hordes of demons and drove them from him. What? Only Saint Anthony? An uncountable army of Christian saints, both men and women, have purified themselves by fasting, strengthened themselves by fasting and become the greatest heroes in human history. For they conquered that which it is most difficult to overcome -- themselves. And, in conquering themselves, they conquered the world and Satan....

And finally, did not the Lord Jesus Christ begin His divine ministry of the salvation of mankind with a long, forty-day fast? And did He not, in this way, clearly show that we must make a serious beginning to our life as Christians with fasting? First, the fast, and then all the rest comes together with, and through, the fast. By His own example, the Lord showed us how great a weapon fasting is. With this weapon, He vanquished Satan in the wilderness, and with it He was victorious over the three chief satanic passions with which Satan tempted Him: love of ease, love of praise and love of money.¹