



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **June 1, 2014** ✠

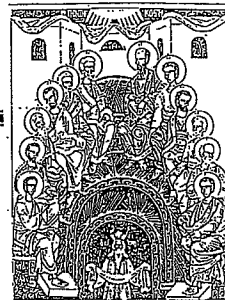
Sunday of the Fathers Postfeast of the Ascension St. Justin the Martyr (166 AD)

Ascension Troparion - Tone 4

Thou hast ascended in glory,
O Christ our God!
Granting joy to Thy disciples
By the promise of the Holy Spirit
Through the blessing,
they were assured,
That Thou art the Son of God,
The Redeemer of the world!

⇒ No Services this week. Father Alex is away during the week.

- **Next Sunday is the Feast of Pentecost:+**
- **Vespers with Litiya Saturday, June 7, 6:00pm**
- **Sunday Matins and Divine Liturgy – 8:30am and 10:00am**
- **+ The Kneeling Vespers of Pentecost, after Liturgy**



St. Nikolai: ~ On How Strangers Become Members of the Household

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the Saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, it seemed that only the Jews were close to God and that the pagans were farther away from God. But as a matter of fact, the Jews and the pagans were equally estranged from God, and from true reverence for Him. Then He came, Christ the Savior, and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh (Ephesians 2:17) and by that, brought both Jews and pagans by one Spirit unto the Father (Ephesians 2:18).

In the new creation, or the new man, or the Church of God, the Spirit is one; and everyone who enters the Church of God receives this Spirit, so that no matter how much the Church increases in members, there always remains the one Spirit of God; and no matter how many nations or tribes or races enter the Church of God, the Spirit does not change, but remains forever and ever, one and the same Spirit. That is why pagans are not strangers and foreigners in the Church, but are fellow-citizens with the Saints, and of the household of God, as are all other members of the Church. For the Church is founded on holiness, and her cornerstone is the Saint above Saints, and according to the plan, all of her members should be holy. All those who lived before Christ but expected Christ and hoped in Him, as well as those who lived after Christ, and who recognized Christ as Lord, Son of God, Savior, Redeemer, Resurrector and Judge, are also called Saints. Sin separates and alienates from God, but through the Lord Jesus Christ, division and alienation have vanished, and all the faithful - whether former Jews or pagans - became members of the household of God, by and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

O my brethren, the Lord Jesus Christ gave us something greater and more precious than this life: He gave us peace and friendship with God, and this is greater and more precious than life in alienation from God! Amen!

On Prayer in Church:

- **St. Euphrosynus of Pskov (15th C) believed in the importance of communal prayer to such an extent that he said that one “Lord have mercy” sung in church was more powerful than reciting 12 Psalms in one’s personal prayer.**

WISDOM, ANCIENT AND MODERN

Love for God begins to manifest itself, and to act in us, when we begin to love our neighbor as ourselves, and not to spare ourselves or anything belonging to us for him, as he is the image of God: "For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, Whom he has not seen" (I Jn. 4:20).

▪ *St. John of Kronstadt*

Where Christ is, there is His Church.

▪ *St. Ignatius of Antioch*

Death may take loved ones out of sight but it certainly does not take them out of mind, or out of heart. We continue to love them and think of them as we believe they continue to love and think of us. In Christ, all are living.

▪ *Fr. Anthony Coniaris*

Pray not only for yourself, but for all the faithful, for the whole body of the Church without separating yourself from other believers, pray in a state of union with them as a member of Christ's Church...Prayer for others is beneficial for the one who prays: it purifies the heart, strengthens faith and hope in God, and stimulates love for God and neighbor.

▪ *St. John of Kronstadt*

The church is for us an earthly heaven, where God Himself abides and looks upon those standing there. Therefore, we must stand orderly in church, with great reverence. Let us love the church and be zealous towards it. It is a comfort and consolation for us in times of sorrow and of joy.

▪ *St. Hilarion of Optina*

In the Church are found all our blessings, our hopes and expectations, our peace, our joy, together with cleansing and sanctification. It is there that the truth of the future resurrection, of the victory over death, is so often announced. Who that lives a blessed life would not love the Church with all his heart! Everything that is best, most exalted, most precious, holy, wise, and blessed is found in the Church.

▪ *St. John of Kronstadt*

God's Saints value more than any of us the great act of the redemption of mankind by God, the descent of the Son of God from Heaven, His teaching, likewise His sufferings, death, burial, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven; for they spent all their lives in working out their own and others' salvation, sincerely, firmly, faithfully, with their whole hearts; for the sake of their own and others' salvation, they renounced themselves, fasted, prayed, watched, wrestled, labored in deed and word with their intellect and pen. But we do not understand how to value such great acts; we are cold, distracted, heedless, and are more occupied with the visible world and of its goods, which are but smoke.

St. John of Kronstadt

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

By Fr. Michael Pomazansky (+1988).

Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Likewise, His Body, the Church, proclaims the same faith, adheres to the same dogmas and performs the same Mysteries as those instituted by the Apostles and preserved by God's grace through the members of the Church to the present day.

With so much talk today among the heterodox concerning the "unity of the Church" and the "coming together of the Body," it is important that Orthodox understand the teaching of the Church on this matter. Below is an excerpt from the forthcoming book, Dogmatic Theology, by Fr. Michael Pomazansky which gives a concise explanation of the Orthodox definition of the "oneness" of the Church and contrasts this with popular misconceptions of those outside the Church.

† † †

The unity of the Church follows of necessity from the unity of God; for the Church is not a multitude of persons in their separate individuality, but a unity of the grace of God, living in a multitude of rational creatures, submitting themselves willingly to grace...

Alexei Stepanovich Khomiakov

[Russian intellectual and religious writer of the 19th century]

† † †

The ninth Article of the Symbol of Faith indicates the four basic signs of the Church: *We believe ... in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.* These attributes are called essential, that is, those without which the Church would not be the Church.

In the Greek text the word "in One" is expressed as a numeral (εἰς μίαν, eis mian). Thus the Symbol of Faith confesses that the Church is one: (a) it is one as viewed from within itself, not divided; (b) it is one as viewed from without, that is, not having any other beside itself. Its unity consists not in the joining together of what is different in nature, but in inward agreement and unanimity. *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* (Eph 4:4-6).

Depicting the Church in parables, the Saviour speaks of one flock, of one sheepfold, of one grapevine, of one foundation stone of the Church. He gave a single teaching, a single baptism, and a single communion. The unity of the faithful in Christ comprised the subject of His High-Priestly Prayer before His sufferings on the Cross: the Lord prayed *that they all may be one.* (Jn 17:21).

The Church is one not only inwardly, but also outwardly. Outwardly its unity is manifested in the harmonious confession of faith, in the oneness of Divine services and Mysteries, in the oneness of the grace-giving hierarchy, which comes

in succession from the Apostles, in the oneness of canonical order.

The Church on earth has a visible side and an invisible side. The invisible side is: that its Head is Christ; that it is animated by the Holy Spirit; that in it is performed the inward mystical life in sanctity of the more perfect of its members. However, the Church, by the nature of its members, is visible, since it is composed of men in the body; it has a visible hierarchy; it performs prayers and sacred actions visibly; it confesses openly by means of words, the faith of Christ.

More than any other aspect of the Church, the close bond between the Church of Christ on earth and the Church of Christ in heaven distinguishes the Orthodox Church from all other Christian confessions. For how can one speak of a single body if its members are not in harmony one with another? And this harmonious existence is not only with those present bodily in the Church today, but also with those who have gone before and who now belong to the Church triumphant.

The Apostle instructs those who have come to believe in Christ and have been joined to the Church as follows: *Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant.* (Heb 12:22-24). We are not separated from our dead brothers in the faith by the impassable abyss of death: *they are close to us in God, for all live unto Him.* (Lk 20:38). The Church hymns this relationship in the kontakion of the feast of the Ascension of the Lord: *"Having accomplished for us Thy mission and united things on earth with things in heaven, Thou didst ascend into glory, O Christ our God, being nowhere Separated from those who love Thee, but remaining ever present with us and calling: I am with you and no one is against you."*

The holy Apostles, departing from this world, put off the earthly body, but have not put off the Church body. They not only were, but they also remain the foundation of the Church. The Church is *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.* (Eph 2:20). And, being in Paradise, they continue to be in communion with believers on earth.

In this bond of the Church with the saints, and likewise in the Headship of the Church by the Lord Himself, may be seen one of the mystical sides of the Church. *By Thy Cross, O Christ, there is a single flock of angels and men; and in the one assembly heaven and earth rejoice, crying out, O Lord, glory be to Thee.* (Wednesday Matins, Tone 1).

The Orthodox teaching of the Church, which in itself is quite clear and rests upon Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, is to be contrasted with another concept which is widespread in the contemporary Protestant world and has penetrated even

into Orthodox circles. According to this different concept, all the various existing Christian organizations, the so-called "confessions" and "sects," even though they are separated from each other, still comprise a single "invisible Church," inasmuch as each of them confesses Christ as the Son of God and accepts His Gospel. The dissemination of such a view is aided by the fact that side by side with the Orthodox Church there exists outside of her a number of Christians that exceed by several times the number of members of the Orthodox Church. Often we can observe in this Christian world outside the Church a religious fervor and faith, a worthy moral life, a conviction—all the way to fanaticism—of one's correctness, an organization and a broad charitable activity. What is the relation of all of them to the Church of Christ?

Of course, there is no reason to view these confessions and sects as on the same level with non-Christian religions. One cannot deny that the reading of the word of God has a beneficial influence upon everyone who seeks in it instruction and strengthening of faith, and that devout reflections on God the Creator, the Provider and Saviour, have an elevating power there also. We cannot say that their prayers are totally fruitless if they come from a pure heart, for *in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* (Acts 10:35).

The Omnipresent Good Provider God is over them, and they are not deprived of God's mercies. They help to restrain moral looseness, vices, and crimes; and they oppose the spread of atheism. However, all this does not give us grounds to consider them as belonging to the Church. Already the fact that one part of this broad Christian world outside the Church, namely the whole of Protestantism, denies the bond with the heavenly Church, that is, the veneration in prayer of the Mother of God and the saints, and likewise prayer for the dead, indicates that they themselves have destroyed the bond with the one Body of Christ which unites in itself the heavenly and the earthly. Further, it is a fact that these non-Orthodox confessions have "broken" in one form or another, directly or indirectly, with the Orthodox Church, with the Church in its historical form; they themselves have cut the bond, they have "departed" from her. Neither we nor they have the right to close our eyes to this fact.

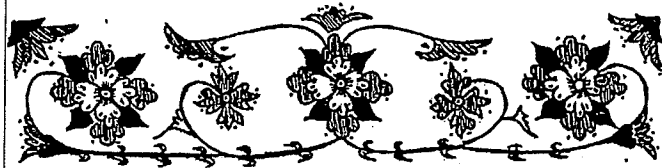
The teachings of the non-Orthodox confessions contain heresies which were decisively rejected and condemned by the Church at her Ecumenical Councils. In these numerous branches of Christianity there is no unity, either outward or inward—either with the Orthodox Church of Christ and/or between themselves. The supra-confessional unification (the "ecumenical movement") which is now to be observed does not enter into the depths of the life of these confessions, but has an outward character. The term "invisible" can refer only to the Heavenly Church. The Church on earth, even though it has its invisible side, like a ship a part of which is

hidden in the water and is invisible to the eyes, still remains visible, because it consists of people and has visible forms of organization and sacred activity.

All of such "uniting" and "equalizing" views indicate a forgetfulness of the principle that there can be many teachings and opinions, but there is only one truth. And authentic Christian unity—unity in the Church—can be based only upon oneness of mind, and not upon differences of mind. *The Church is the pillar and ground of the Truth.* (1 Tim. 3:15).

Note also that in speaking of the Church, we must be careful not to pass judgment either on those within her fold, nor on those still outside, for God alone knows the secrets of the hearts of men. In his book, "The Church Is One," Alexei Khomiakov writes:

"Inasmuch as the earthly and visible Church is not the fullness and completeness of the whole Church which the Lord has appointed to appear at the final judgment of all creation, she acts and knows only within her own limits; and, according to the words of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:12) does not judge the rest of mankind; and He only looks upon these as excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves. The rest of mankind, whether alien from the Church, or united to her by ties which God has not willed to reveal to her, she leaves to the judgment of the Great Day. The Church on earth judges for herself only, according to the grace of the Spirit, and the freedom granted her through Christ, inviting also the rest of mankind to the unity and adoption of God in Christ; but upon those who do not hear her appeal she pronounces no sentence, knowing the command of her Saviour and Head, *not to judge another man's servant.* (Rom 14:4)."



By means of the priesthood God accomplishes great and redeeming works among mankind: He purifies and sanctifies people, animals, and elements; He delivers people from the villainous works of the devil; He renews and strengthens; He converts bread and wine into the purest Body and Blood of the God-Man Himself; He marries people and makes marriage honorable and the nuptial bed pure; He absolves sins, heals illness, converts earth into heaven, unites heaven with earth, the human being with Himself; He joins angels and men in one gathering. What do they not lack, the people who have no priesthood? They are deprived of salvation. It is not in vain that the Lord, the Accomplisher of our salvation, is called the Chief Priest.

St John of Kronstadt (+1908)

Stand Firm

Or End Up on the Wrong Side of Eschatology

by Anthony Esolen, *Touchstone Magazine*

One day, said St. Jerome, the world awoke and groaned to find itself half Arian. It was the reasonable position of the time, bearing all the marks of historical inevitability. It shrugged away the most challenging points of Christology, for if Christ was but a creature, a Platonic demiurge, we need not puzzle our minds over how God might be both one and three. We need not be stunned into reverence by the words, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," since the Word was, in a sense, already "flesh."

Arianism was an easy slide. Most of the bishops leaned that way; it was the way of the well-stuffed. But Athanasius rose up *contra mundum*, the single-minded saint whom his opponents derided and often exiled for his bigotry. Athanasius was on the wrong side of "history." Good for him; Christians must always so station themselves. Our Lord was murdered on Calvary by the great dead historical hulk called the Roman Empire.

Praise God for the Mule

Chesterton noted with his usual acuity that people who sneer at the Arian controversy—battles over a diphthong, said Gibbon—do not know what was at stake. If we believe that "God is love," not that God happens to favor us, but that in his inner life God is himself love, we owe that belief to the inflexible fidelity of Athanasius. The Christian faith could and did baptize much of the ancient pagan world. The rider upon the racing horse can lean in one direction and then in another. But sometimes a failure of the breadth of a hair can be fatal. There is no such thing as a little bit of adultery or apostasy. An innocent man's life cannot be sacred on every day of the year but one. To give up the Trinity is to give up Christ, and to give up Christ is to give up all. We might as well worship the unapproachable deity whom Chesterton called "the lonely god of Omar."

If Athanasius was mulish, let's praise the Lord for the mule, who knows what he must not do and who will not do it—who will sooner starve where he stands than move one inch. We may never budge one inch on what is essential. We will not tell a lie, even to please the world and win us the accolades of faculty bishops and historians everywhere. We will not move.

In our day, the issue is not Christology. We're not so sophisticated in our heresies. The issue is sex. We're encouraged to pretend that the child-making act is not essentially ordered to child-making. We must pretend that it's only the friction of erogenous flesh. We must pretend that a man can be made into a woman by a saw and a trowel, and a woman into a man by pinning the tail on the donkey, or by just *thinking* it is so. We must pretend that a child in the womb is just some stuff or other. We must pretend that boys and girls do not deserve a married father and mother, promised to one another for life. If we are Christian, we must say to Christ, "Thus far and no farther! You can have all the world, but these few inches are mine."

Demands of the New Religion

Now let us be quite clear. We have not chosen this fight. The new religion has come to us, and it demands total submission. It demands *that we cease to worship God, and that we cease to tell the truth*. We have come to the cleft in the road, what Lewis called the great divorce. God will, if we allow him, heal our evil ways; Jesus came to call sinners. But God can no more accept evil in his household than he can cease to be God. He is holy. He will wash our grubby robes white in his blood, but Truth cannot lie. He cannot declare the unclean to be clean. He can only make it clean by his grace.

The new religion of sex requires us to take down the Cross and erect something else. We must not do so. It requires us to abandon our fellow men to lusts that destroy the common good, as even sociologists, often the slow kids on the block, have begun to see. We must not do so. It requires us to subject our bodies to the phantasms of homeless postmodern man. We must not do so. It requires us to avert our eyes as our little brothers and sisters are dismembered. We must not do so. It requires us to wink as the minds of children are subjected to confusion in order to ratify the choices of adults. We must not do so. It requires us to subordinate political liberty to sexual license. We must not do so.

It requires us to spit upon the Cross, to sink our fingers in the blood of innocent children, to harden our hearts against the crushed lives of brothers and sisters who learn to their dismay that Priapus is a stupid and stupefying idol. It requires us to like ourselves rather than love our neighbors. It requires us to tell a deadly lie.

Raise One Sword

We must not do so. *We shall not do so*. Truth is truth to the end of time. Even if the battle appears lost, let each Christian raise one sword at least against the lie. Even if the fight is fierce, the warfare long, let each Christian remember that our Captain triumphed in and through the hour of his utter defeat upon Calvary. We set our faces like flint. While there is breath in our lungs and blood in our hearts, we will not cease to tell the truth, and we will not bend one inch in homage to the idol.

The Lord does not require that we win. He requires that we be steadfast. The battle is not ours but his. Yet let us not suppose that we are doomed to lose this fight. The gates of hell are not iron; the gates of hell are straw. For a vanguard has gone before us that our opponents cannot see, whose very existence they do not suspect. It is that great cloud of witnesses—and *they are armed in the full array of God*.

Anthony Esolen is Professor of English at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island, and the author of *The Ironies of Faith* (ISI Books), *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Western Civilization* (Regnery), and *Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child* (ISI Books). He has also translated Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (Johns Hopkins Press) and Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (Random House). He is a senior editor of *Touchstone*.

THE SECOND COMING AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RESURRECTED BODIES

From the book "Saint Symeon, the New Theologian" by Niketas Stethatos.

One day, while he (Saint Symeon) was saying his prayers with a pure heart and conversing with God, he noticed that the air began to illuminate his mind; although he remained in his cell, he began to feel as though he was somehow transported within an open space. It was dark outside, the night was already at hand, when a radiance suddenly began to glow from up high, just like the morning light at dawn. What a truly scary vision befell the poor man! And his living quarters—along with everything in them—vanished completely from sight, making him believe that he was not inside his cell.

He was absolutely overwhelmed by a divine ecstasy, and was fully aware of that light with his mind, as it approached him. The light grew steadily stronger, and made the air seem even brighter than before, and he felt that his entire self—along with his body—had now gone beyond all worldly things.

But, because that light continued to shine more and more, making it seem like a sun shining at mid-day, he felt as though he were actually standing inside that light, and that his entire being, together with his body, was filled with joy and tears, that were generated by the sweetness of that light's presence. He also observed that the same light, in some wondrous kind of way, came in contact with his body, and gradually permeated its members. The surprise brought about by this vision drew him away from the previous state of theory and left him feeling only this exquisite sensation that was taking place inside him. He watched as that light slowly penetrated his entire body, his heart and his inner most depths, making his whole existence like a fire and light.

And just as with his living quarters, so did he now lose every sense of form, of place, of weight and of bodily shape, and his tears ceased to fall. Then he heard a voice from within the light, saying to him: *It has been decided, that in this same manner shall the Saints be transformed, who will be living and will still be here, during the hour of the final trumpet, and thus transformed, they will be taken up to the heavens, just as the Apostle Paul says.*

After remaining in this state for many hours, the blessed Symeon in his secret and incessant praise to the Lord, and fully comprehending the glory that had enfolded him, as well as the eternal bliss that was to be bestowed on the Saints, began to wonder and ask himself: "Will I ever return to the previous condition of my body, or shall I live like this continuously?" No sooner had he made this thought, than he immediately began to feel that he was moving

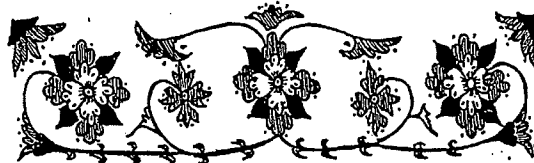
about with his body like a shadow or a spirit. He realized that he had become (as we said, with his body as well) a light without a form; something entirely incorporeal. He continued to feel that he possessed a body, yet without its material dimensions, and more like a spiritual one. In other words, he felt as though he lacked all weight or mass whatsoever, and was amazed, how he could have a body and yet seem bodiless.

And the light that spoke inside him, said to him once again: *Thus will all the Saints be enrobed without the flesh after the resurrection, in the future age, with spiritual bodies that are either lighter and finer and more ethereal, or, denser and heavier and more earthen, which will be the determining factor for each one with regard to their stance, their order and their closeness to God.*

After hearing these things, and having seen the inexpressible divine light, the God-sighting and God-possessed Symeon thanked God, Who glorified our species and made it to partake of divinity and His kingdom, and returned once again to his former state, and found himself again inside his cell, in his previous, human condition. However, he reassured with oaths all those whom he trusted to reveal his secrets, that "for many days after, I could still feel that lightness of body, without feeling any exertion, or hunger, or thirst."

Given that he partook of these things in the Spirit and was filled with the divine charismas of the Spirit (and of course having fully cleared his mind of all impurities), he was given to see such visions and breathtaking revelations by the Lord, as had the Prophets of old.

Thus, with his apostolic mindset (because his existence was guided and moved by the divine Spirit) he was also given the orator's charisma, hence whenever words came forth from his mouth—albeit illiterate—he also theologized. With his divinely inspired writings, he teaches the faithful the precision of the pious lifestyle. Having reached spiritual heights such as these, he began to compose ascetic essays, set out in chapters according to the various virtues and the vices that contravened them, by drawing from his own personal ascetic life and the divine knowledge that was bestowed on him, and describing in detail the monastic life for those who practice it, thus becoming to the Israelite nation of monkhood a river of God, full of spiritual waters.



Being slain for the sake of one's brethren is the best possible weapon for delivering them from servitude to the traducer, the devil, and preparing their souls to accept God. Who desires the salvation of all.

Righteous Elder Sophrony of Essex (+1993)

On the Wondrous Sojourn of the Son of God -from the Prologue

"I came forth from the Father and am come into the world;
again, I leave the world and go to the Father" (John 16:28)

These words, my brethren, are of fateful importance for us. For of all things in this world, the most important is to know: Is there a God, and is there life after death? These words are more precious than any pearl on this earth, more precious than the sun and the stars, for these words were pronounced by Him Whose testimony is more truly to be trusted. Truly, these words are the source of the greatest joy for us who are plunged into a despair whose end is death. They testify that there is a God, and that there is life after death. "I came from the Father" - that means, before all else, that there is a God from Whom the Lord Jesus comes; "and I go to the Father" - that means that God is the Father to Whom the Son of God returns. Both these quotations mean, also, that there is eternal life and that death does not mean our annihilation. For the Lord pronounced these words as He drew near to His own death.

O sweet and wonderful tidings! That which the hearts of all men and races anticipated dimly through the ages, the Lord has testified to as fact and truth.

These words also confirm the unity of the Father and the Son, and the divinity of our Lord and Savior. God has visited us, my brethren, the Most High God, the holy, mighty and immortal God. That is the peak of our comfort and our joy.

O Lord Jesus, Son of God, witness of the truth of all good after which our hearts yearn day and night; sanctify us, strengthen us and make us immortal. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

On Why God Hides Encouraging Signs from us

A disciple once asked St. Leonid of Optina why after years of struggle he found himself worse instead of better, i.e., more inconsiderate, colder of heart, etc. St. Leonid's response is very enlightening:

"Very few have flown up in a short time on the wings of faith and virtue into the spiritual heaven or have sensed in themselves the undying pledge of hope and the betrothal of future glory. ... There are others who will never sense this during their whole life on earth; they will not sense it according to the dispensation of our heavenly Protector, God, who always provides what is best for us. For we, infants in our understanding of the judgments of Him that directs the world, often ask of Him such tools which in their own right and power are for our salvation, but we would put them to entirely detrimental use because of our inexperience. Therefore, the loving Father of Lights hides from certain pious people the gifts which are for the salvation of some, but to others bring perdition."

"What would happen if God, Who knows all things, completely fulfilled our every wish? I think, but I'm not saying for certain, that everyone in the world would perish. Even though He does not reject the prayers of His chosen ones, God still does not at all times fulfill their desires. And this only in order to arrange everything in a *better way*, in keeping with His divine intent...**Just because you see yourself making no progress does not mean that you are not making any progress at all.** Such feelings can plant sincere humility in your heart. And when you have the genuine awareness that you are deprived of spiritual fruit, then make an unfailing effort to force your striving for God. ... When we have had no success in the virtues, there is no closer means for salvation than humbleness of mind. Haughtiness even when joined to the virtues is offensive to God; but a meek thought will not be forgotten before God."

--from the counsels of St. Leonid of Optina

"Cast thy care upon the Lord" (Ps. 54:25)...This means living simply and placing all your hope in the Lord, not worrying about what someone else did, or about what will happen and how. When King David thought and reasoned in human terms, he came to a hopeless state, not finding any consolation: *My soul is troubled greatly* (Ps. 6:2). But when he placed all his hope in God he was comforted: *I remembered Thy judgments of old, O Lord, and was comforted* (Ps. 118:52). -St. Ambrose of Optina