



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **June 15, 2014** ✠

All Saints Sunday

Holy Prophet Amos (8th B.C.)

St. Jerome of Stridonium (420)

Great-Martyr Tsar Lazar of Serbia (1389)

St. Jonah, Metropolitan of Moscow (1461)

✠ At all times indeed, but especially then when I reflect upon the achievements of the Saints, it comes over me to feel despondency concerning my own condition, because we have not even in dreams experienced the things among which those men spent their whole lives, not paying the penalty of sins, but always doing rightly and yet always afflicted...

~ St. John Chrysostom

Sts. Peter and Paul Fast ~ June 16 to 28

Happy Father's Day!
Many Years!

To all the Fathers of our community and to all our Fathers everywhere!

Memory Eternal to all our departed Fathers!

For Consideration – On this Sunday of All Saints

Fr. Mark Andrews

Man is, for the most part, an adaptable creature. It is a trait which generally works to advantage, especially in today's mobile society. In spiritual life, however, this same adaptability has wrought great harm. We have become accustomed to behavior and morals which wouldn't have been tolerated just decades ago. Sins become scarcely noticeable habits, "life-styles". We feel comfortable in the world, as fallen as it is, as far removed from its original pristine beauty, and we are quite attached to it and to its pleasures. God created us for Paradise, but we have made this world our home.

A true Christian is *not of this world*. Here we are supposed to feel like strangers, pilgrims; we are called to be citizens of Heaven. How can we weaken our attachment to this world and stimulate our longing for the next? We have become so well adapted, so integrated into the ways of this world that the image of Paradise has all but faded away; we are scarcely aware of

Whenever the Holy Spirit is present, He makes men of gold out of men of clay.

St. John Chrysostom

its loss. If we would but listen to its piercing echo in Adam's lament: "Woe is me, a sinner! What has happened to me? Alas, what was I and what have I become! What have I lost, what found? Instead of Paradise, this perishable world. Instead of God, and life in the company of angels, the devil and demons of impurity. In the place of rest, hard labor; in the place of gladness and joy, the sorrows and tribulations of this world; instead of peace and endless felicity, fear and tears of sorrow. In the place of virtue and justice, injustice and sin. Instead of goodness and dispassion, evil and passion; instead of wisdom and intimacy with God, ignorance and exile; instead of detachment and freedom, a life full of worries and the worst kind of slavery. Woe, Woe is me! How, created a king, have I become in my folly a slave of passion? How can I have embraced death instead of life through my disobedience? Alas! What has happened to me, pitiful that I am, because of my thoughtlessness? What shall I do? War and confusion beset me, illness and temptation, danger and shipwreck, fear and sorrow, passion and sin, bitterness and, distress. What shall I do? (St. Peter of Damascus, "The Eight Stages of Contemplation" in the *Philokalia*)

Expelled from Paradise, Adam and Eve spent the rest of their lives in tearful repentance. "How could they lack occasion always and constantly to weep?" writes St. Symeon the New Theologian. "They would think of the gentle Master, that unutterable delight, the unspeakable beauties of those flowers, that life free from all cares and toil, and how the angels ascended and descended to them..." The measure of their grief reflected the greatness of their loss, for God had made them a kingdom in which they should live "a life of happiness and prosperity." St. John Damascene describes the garden of Eden as "a very storehouse of joy and gladness of heart ... : it is temperate and the air that surrounds it is the rarest and purest: evergreen plants are its pride, sweet fragrances abound, it is flooded with light, and in sensuous freshness and beauty it transcends imagination: in truth the Place is divine... (*Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* XI)

Still more grievous than their exile from the garden was the disfigurement of their souls, for man's condition before the Fall "joined together moral purity, clarity of mind, the perfection of first-created nature, and nearness to God, with a general spiritual childlikeness." (*Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*). In Paradise Adam delighted his mind with celestial beauty. After his transgression, on the other hand, his thoughts became base and material, and the simplicity and goodness of his mind were intertwined with evil worldly concerns" (St. Macarius of Egypt).

The purpose of Christ's coming was to restore human nature to its primal beauty and to open again the gates of paradise. Those who left this

world to follow Christ, the saints, regained Adam's blessed state in Paradise and experienced "the unspeakable bliss of them that behold the infinite goodness of [the Lord's] countenance" (Morning Prayers). Protomartyr Stephen saw the heavens opened and beheld the glory of God (Acts 7:56); the Apostle Paul was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words (II Cor. 12:14); Blessed Augustine, having broken his youthful attachment to sin, enjoyed such sublime communion with God as to write: "all my abundance, which is not of my God, is poverty" (*Confessions*); St. Symeon described the ecstasy of being filled with divine Light: "It cast out every earthly desire... Besides, there was poured into my soul in unutterable fashion a great spiritual joy and perception and a sweetness surpassing every taste of visible creation, together with a freedom and forgetfulness of all thoughts pertaining to this life" (*The Discourses*). Having been lifted up into the heavenly abodes, Saint Seraphim of Sarov exclaimed to his friend Motovilov, "Oh, if only you could know what joy, what sweetness await the souls of the righteous in heaven, then you would be determined in this temporal life to endure any sorrow, persecution and calumny with gratitude." And St. John of Kronstadt-, who likewise experienced the unutterable joys of heaven while still on earth, wrote in his diary, "All earthly bliss passes away, of itself, and through the vicissitudes of life; whilst the joys of heavenly bliss will never end, never pass away. Is it not then worth while to despise all the enjoyments of this transitory world, and of this still more fleeting life, in order to strive with the whole heart after spiritual and abiding joys?"

We who have little experiential sense of such heavenly delights find it painfully difficult to set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:2). We have, however, the example of the Saints, who have tasted the sweetness of Paradise, and they can inspire us and give encouragement to detach ourselves from this present world-whose prince is satan, seek *first* the kingdom of God. For this purpose many have secluded selves in monasteries, their progress hastened by the common and concentrated effort. Even for those of us yoked together with families and jobs, a certain detachment is necessary, a withdrawal from worldly affairs. We must streamline our lives in order to introduce a great measure of stillness wherein we can listen to God. Above all, we must constantly check the alignment of our hearts, for, as St. John of Kronstadt explains:

"That to which a man turns, that which he loves-that he will find. If he loves earthly things, he will find earthly things, and these earthly things will abide in his heart, will communicate their own earthiness to him, and will find him; if he loves heavenly things, he will find heavenly things, and they will abide in his heart, and give him life."

This and That

"Apathy can be overcome by enthusiasm, and enthusiasm can only be aroused by two things: first, an ideal, which takes the imagination by storm, and second, a definite intelligible plan for carrying that ideal into practice....As human beings, we are endowed with freedom of choice, and we cannot shuffle off our responsibility upon the shoulders of God or nature. We must shoulder it ourselves. It is our responsibility....Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder....I do not believe that civilizations have to die because civilization is not an organism. It is a product of wills." ~ Arnold J. Toynbee

John Adams, founder of our country and our second President, envisioned our Constitution as a net, but a net not strong enough to hold us together if Americans lost their religious and moral substance. In a speech to Congress he also underscored the importance of the religious nature of the oath of office:

"Because we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions, unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge and licentiousness would break the strongest cords of our Constitution, as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other. Oaths in this country are as yet universally considered as sacred obligations. That which you have taken, and so solemnly repeated on that venerable ground, is an ample pledge of your sincerity and devotion to your country and its government."

— John Adams, in his first presidential address to Congress on Nov. 23, 1797

We have a judiciary so wrapped in analytic reasoning that it can no longer recognize the consequences of its decisions that will redefine words whose meanings have been understood for thousands of years....

— Internet commentator

Playing at God

....**There are two philosophies, two mindsets, or two creeds, and only two: the traditional one and the modern one. Indeed, there are those who claim man is a creature of his own making, whose nature is to make his own nature, but there are also those who maintain man has a Maker and, for his own good, must live within the bounds of the nature his Maker has endowed him with.** This does not mean he is not free, but that the meaning of his freedom is that each man can be held responsible for what he does, and is the only one to be blamed for the evil that befalls him if he strays from his own nature.

Thus, there is another science besides the modern one, which, up until Descartes, was by no means considered as belonging to a realm of knowledge different from, and even less opposed to, the realm of philosophy, but merely complementary. For the goal of all possible knowledge was to reach beyond the veil of appearances (phenomena) to the hidden reason why all things are as they are. Nothing exists in vain, without reason; the old Aristotelian principle was the supreme principle upon which all science was erected. Hence the wisest of wise men could write that stones fall because their natural location is on the ground.

At this point one can hear the modern scientist laughing his head off. But can he really escape such evidence as the one presented, for instance, by modern biology, a science that cannot but conjure up some sort of finality when it tries to explain how an organ is built to fulfill its function?

...Philosophy is the love of wisdom, not the possession of wisdom. What moderns cannot understand, because they are obsessed with reaching absolute freedom, is that for centuries it had seemed only normal to think of the world not as some meaningless, though fortunately regular, assemblage of atoms one could manipulate at will, but as a cosmos: a carefully crafted work of art combining the richest variety of parts with their perfect unity so as to obtain the beauty emanating from perfect harmony. **How could one hope to understand any part of the universe unless it was presupposed to have a function, an end within it?**

Hence the crucial point: Even if men failed to determine the end of any given object, they were given the only master key that could open all doors.

Claude Polin, Chronicles, May 1, 2014

To have a god of your own making gives you a hell of your own choosing.

Are We What We Believe? by Protopresbyter Fr. Themistokles Mourtzanou

Christians today often feel isolated from society and the world. We believe that being a Christian is a status that is an occasion for rejection, contempt or indifference.

Christianity is now considered an ideological system, a religion, useful for society and for some people, but *not* an essential component of human identity. Many do not believe in the Resurrection of Christ, which is key to the faith, or even if they believe, it only has theoretical validity. It does not transform their lives, but merely gives it a past in regards to the ideological parts, and also a future, as people want to believe that after our death there is some sort of life, and maybe we will return at some point, when evil and death have ended in this reality.

When the Disciples of Christ began to preach the Gospel and the Resurrection to the Jews, the first Christians gathered in the Temple of Jerusalem to hear the teaching, but also to rejoice in the miracles that took place from the Apostles in the name of Christ. The Book of Acts at this point notes the following: "No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people" (Acts 5:13). Of those who were in the Temple, no one dared join them, but the people greatly respected them. This sentence is a consolation for us today, because it shows the attitudes of people have not changed. Although the Jews believed in the God of the Old Testament, we would say they were religious, they understood that the faith in Christ could not go unnoticed, and though it gave another dynamic and meaning to life, they did not dare to approach and adhere to the Apostles. They were curious to hear, but did not dare join the Church. They did not dare to accept the truth, being those who crucified Christ. And though they felt within themselves that life in the world was changing, they did not want to take the big step to surpass themselves and their mindset, but they remained with the old.

This attitude against the Resurrection, against Christ, against the Church has survived throughout the centuries by those who believe that faith in Christ should be confined within the limits of religion, and they do not dare to approach the entrance to a relationship of life and truth with Him in the Church.

They are observers of the life that Christ brought.

They are those who are possessed by a spirit of compromise with the world and its reality and do not want to dare take the great plunge to taste another life.

They are those who are cowards inside, because they do not want to break with the established attitudes that prefer their faith to be a religious ideology, harmless to the processing of life into a miracle of love, eternity and light.

They are those who operate by rationality, who want evidence to justify their faithlessness or faith, yet without being ready to accept the change.

They are those who defer their problems to the future, because their living concerns prevail, or their secular goals, or the joy of their earthly life.

They are, lastly, those who deny the Resurrection, who refuse to accept that God exists and loves humanity so much, that He became obedient unto death in order to conquer death.

"They were highly regarded by the people." If you do not belong to any of the previous categories, then this plea is for us a great challenge. They held the Apostles and the Christians in great esteem. Even though they did not unconditionally accept their faith, they saw their lives, which were in accord with the way taught by Christ. They saw the love they had. They saw their humility. They saw their

participation in worship. They saw their sacrifices for others. They saw the truth that emitted from their life. They saw their determination of faith. They saw their prayers. They saw the grace of God. They saw the dynamism the teachings of the Gospel brought and their continuous preoccupation with it. They saw the feeling of the presence of Christ within their hearts, that transformed their lives. They saw the miracles. They saw God being glorified. They saw that their faith was not confined to a religious ritual. In other words, they saw their authenticity and originality. They were what they believed! For this reason, even those who were the least trained, or most simple, held the Christians in honor.

In a time of questioning, indifference, exclusion, and the restriction of Christianity to a religious ritual or an entrapment of a social welfare mechanism in favor of the weak, our faith is the power that consoles us for that function as a "remnant" that still loves the Risen Christ. For He is the Alpha and the Omega of our lives, even though our sins plague us and inflict us. And our faith in Him crystallizes our life. **We are what we believe. If we try to follow this path, then the life of the Church will have meaning not only for us, but also for those who refuse it or who dare not to take the great plunge, by accepting the Resurrection as the only proposal of life that redeems and gives meaning to yesterday, today and unto the ages for all of human life.**

Translated by John Sanidopoulos, Mystagogy Blog

Actions Speak Louder...

"One of the major findings of the National Study of Youth and Religion is that American teenagers are actually very good at practicing the faith that their parents teach them: not what parents say they believe, but what they *actually believe as evidenced by actions*.

Considering this reality, it is hardly surprising that, over time, many emerging adults drift away from their family's Christian roots, choosing to marry outside their church or even Christian faith itself. Yet their doing so is not actually a departure from or a change in their religious convictions: it is merely an alignment of certain external practices (e.g., what they do on Sundays or Easter) with the actual religious beliefs they have held since their teenage years.

...The actual doctrine of family and local church, as taught to most young people in word and especially deed, ends up driving the next generation from the Church, not because the Church is out of touch with the broader society but because the local church never actually taught and lived by the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the first place."

Traditionalists have been saying substantially this for quite some time. ***Orthopraxis matters***. We should not judge the Tradition by the culture, but the culture by the Tradition. If it's been the Orthodox way across cultural lines since time immemorial, there is no good reason to change it to accord with a decadent culture, whatever "it" is.

God is always there for those who have *Philotimo**

"Those who are sensitive and have *philotimo*, and observe everything with precision, are usually wronged by the insensitive ones; due to the constant concessions they make for them out of love. However, God's love is always on their side. Oftentimes, they wrong themselves due to their hypersensitivity --- overemphasizing their minor sins, or bearing the burden of the faults of others; but once again, God comforts them with His heavenly kindness and - at the same time - strengthens them spiritually."

~ **Blessed Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos**

* - ***This awesome Greek word is used by the Blessed Elder to express unconditional and selfless love.***

The Wisdom of the Saints

"The Angry God" ~ St. Isaac of Syria (7th C):

"That we should imagine that anger, wrath, jealousy or such like have anything to do with the divine Nature is something utterly abhorrent for us: no one in their right mind, no one who has any understanding (at all) can possibly come to such madness as to think anything of the sort about God. Nor again can we possibly say that He acts thus out of retribution, even though the Scriptures may on the outer surface posit this. Even to think this of God and to suppose that retribution for evil acts is to be found with Him is abominable."

Do not steal anything from anyone, and take nothing, and be content with what you earn by your own labors. Be diligent and avoid idleness. For as diligence is pleasing to God, so idleness on the contrary, as a source of every evil, is a sin very offensive to God. ~ **St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1779)**

My child, bear your cross, and know that all we have suffered is known to God, and as a true Father, He tries in every way to form Jesus Christ within us. He wants us to suffer because He knows what is prepared in the heavens for His suffering children. But if He did not send us afflictions, He would do them injustice, because they would be deprived of the ineffable blessings of Heaven. The more we suffer, the more beautifully our crown of glory is woven!

Elder Ephraim of the Holy Mountain

When God created Adam he did not give him bodily wings like the birds but prepared for him in advance **the wings of the Holy Spirit** - the wings he desires to give him in the Resurrection - to lift him up and carry him wherever the Spirit wishes. Saintly souls receive these wings even now when they take flight in the Spirit toward heavenly thoughts.

St. Macarius the Great (5th C)

And, therefore, pray in spite of the fact that you do not experience in prayer any consolation or pleasure - but only labor - pray, and pray diligently with all possible fervor, train yourself in prayer and in conversation with God; try as far as possible to collect and control your wandering thoughts, and little by little you will feel that it is becoming easier and easier for you, and then you will experience delightful consolations. If you are sincerely earnest, the Holy Spirit, seeing your efforts and the sincerity of your desire, will soon help you; and then He will enter within you and will teach you to pray true prayer.

St. Innocent of Alaska (1879)

Everything will be given...

True hope seeks the Kingdom of God alone and is convinced that everything earthly that is necessary for this transitory life will unfailingly be given. The heart cannot have peace until it acquires this hope. It gives peace to the heart and brings joy to it.

St. Seraphim of Sarov

St. Dorotheos of Gaza – Two Kinds of Humility

"Just as there are two kinds of pride, there are two kinds of humility. The first kind of humility is to consider one's brother to be wiser than oneself and to surpass one in all things. The second kind of humility is to attribute all of our achievements to God. This is the perfect humility of the saints. It grows naturally within the soul through the keeping of the commandments. In order to clarify this, let us take the example of trees. ... In some kinds of trees, if the branches are allowed to grow freely, they rise upward without producing any fruit; but if someone takes a small stone and binds it to a branch, pulling it down, then the branch will bear fruit. It is similar with the soul. When it humbles itself, it bears fruit; and the more fruit it bears, the humbler the soul becomes. The more the saints approach God, the more they see themselves as sinners."

Some Teachings on Prayer ~ St. Theophan the Recluse (1891)

Some of the most profound insights on prayer ever written come from the pen of the 19th century Russian Orthodox Bishop, St. Theophan the Recluse. Resigning from his episcopal see in order to pursue a lifelong dream of solitude, prayer and study, St. Theophan spent the last 28 years of his life in a monastery, living in virtual reclusion.

It was here that he spent his days worshipping, studying and carrying on a large correspondence with people all over the Church. The wisdom expressed in his letters has become a treasure of modern Orthodox spirituality. Here is sampling of extracts from some of his letters on prayer.

Spiritual Coldness

You have correctly determined that the enemy of our fundamental striving for prayer, and therefore, our chief enemy, is a spiritual cooling. Oh, what a bitter and wretched state it is! But realize that not all decrease in the heat of fervor is pernicious chill. Some comes from weakness, other from illness of the body. Neither is bad; both will pass.

Disastrous cooling down is caused by falling away from God's will, through our own willful passion for anything ungodly. Willful passion runs counter to our conscience, which tries to enlighten and to keep us from ungodly desires. Willful passion kills the spirit and cuts off spiritual life. This you must fear most of all – as fire, as death itself. Willful passion is caused by a loss of the fear of God and by inattention to oneself. These, then, you must watch for in order to avoid such a terrible evil. As for those times when a cooling down comes involuntarily, due to sickness or weakness of body, one law applies: Endure, without changing your appointed rule of prayer, even if it is completely without savor. For those who endure patiently, cold feelings pass, and the usual warm and heartfelt fervor quickly returns.

Please, hold it in your mind and make it a rule, never to let cooling arbitrarily steal away your fervor. In case of unavoidable cooling, make it another rule to drag and to keep dragging through your established prayer rule, with the assurance that this dry performance of deeds will soon bring back life and warmth to your prayer.

The Jesus Prayer

Zealous Christians have a certain technique that they apply to secure the continual remembrance of God more firmly. It is the constant repetition of a short prayer, the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me." If you haven't heard this, then listen now. If you never done this, begin now. We must continue to hold our attention on God during the day. To support our attention we remember God through the Jesus Prayer. At times it is very fruitful to substitute a few Psalms for the short prayer, Psalms you have reflected upon and memorized. You can do this during free moments and throughout the day's activities. Repeating memorized Psalms is an ancient Christian custom.

You write that you are having trouble controlling your thoughts; they scatter easily, and praying does not proceed as you wish; and that, during the day, in the midst of work and association with others, there is little remembrance of God. Instantaneous prayer life is impossible. You must make a strong effort to control your thoughts, at least to some degree. Prayer does not come about as you expect – by just wishing for it, and suddenly there it is. This does not happen.

Forcing Oneself to Pray

St. Macarios the Great of Egypt wrote: "One must force oneself to pray, even if one has no spiritual prayer. In such a case, God seeing that a man earnestly is striving, pushing against the will of his heart (that is, his thoughts), He grants him true prayer." By true prayer, St. Macarios means the undistracted, collected deep prayer that occurs when the mind stands unswervingly before God. As the mind begins to stand firmly before God, it discovers such sweetness that it wishes to remain in true prayer forever, desiring nothing more.

I have stated more than once exactly what efforts must be made: Do not allow your thoughts to wander at will. When they do involuntarily escape, immediately turn them back, rebuking yourself, lamenting and grieving over this disorder. As St. John of the Ladder says: "**We must lock our mind into the words of the Prayer by force.**"