

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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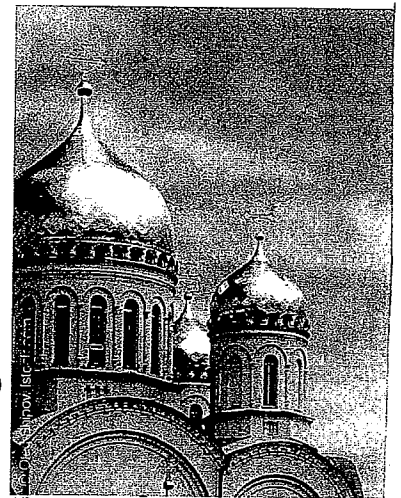
✠ **October 19, 2014** ✠

Holy Prophet Joel

St. John of Rila, Bulgaria (Relics – 946)

Martyr Varus of Egypt (307)

Blessed Cleopatra in Egypt (327)



Happy 37th Anniversary!!!

St. Symeon the New Theologian Church !!!

➤ *We thank all who contributed to the Banquet today! Many Years !!!*

This Week:

+ **Tues. Oct. 21 6:30pm** Inquirer's Class

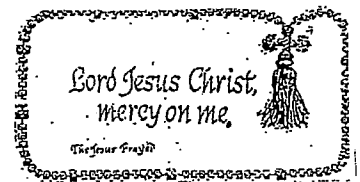
+ **Wed. Oct. 22 6:30pm** Vespers – Holy Apostle James, Brother of the Lord

+ **Baptisms** – This Saturday, October 25, 3:00pm ~

Infants Ephraim Reese and Patrick Skinner

⇒ **Next 2 Sundays: Baby Showers** ~

For Tatiana Landar on Oct. 26 and Blair Boyer on Nov. 2....All boys.



The Seed of the Word ~ St. Athanasius the Great

"The mind of man is prone to evil exceedingly; moreover, our adversary the devil, envying us the possession of such great blessings, goes about seeking to snatch away the seed of the word which is sown within us. Wherefore as if by His prophetic warnings He would seal up His instructions in our hearts as His own peculiar treasure, the Lord said, 'Take heed that no man deceive you: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am He; and the time draws near; and they shall deceive many: do not go after them' (Luke 21:8). This is a great gift which the Word has bestowed on us, that we should not be deceived by appearances, but that, however these things are concealed, we should all the more distinguish them by the Grace of the Spirit. For whereas the inventor of wickedness and great spirit of evil, the devil, is utterly hateful, and as soon as he shows himself is rejected of all men, - as a serpent, as a dragon, as a lion seeking whom he may seize upon and devour, - therefore he conceals and covers what he really is, and craftily impersonates that Name which all men desire, so that deceiving by a false appearance, he may thenceforth fix fast in his own chains those whom he has led astray."

On Baptism: St. Diadochos of Photiki writes: "For although Baptism removes from us the stain resulting from sin, it does not thereby heal the duality of our will immediately, neither does it prevent the demons from attacking us or speaking deceitful words to us. In this way we are led to take up the weapons of righteousness, and to preserve through the power of God what we could not keep safe through the efforts of our soul alone."

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (11. 2)

One must always remember that success in any aspect of the spiritual life is the fruit of the grace of God. Spiritual life comes entirely from His most Holy Spirit. We have our own spirit but it is void of power. It begins to gain strength only when the Grace of God flows into it.

St. Theophan the Recluse

Let us surrender ourselves, dearly beloved, to the will of God. **Elder Melchizedek**

This is the part of man, that whether he fasts, or keeps watch, or prays, or does some fine thing, he should ascribe all to the Lord, and say, "If God had not enabled me, I could not have fasted, or prayed, or gone out of the world." In this way, God, seeing your intention, that you ascribe to God the things that are yours, which you do of your own nature, bestows upon you in return the things that are His — the spiritual things, the divine and heavenly things. And what are they? The fruits of the Spirit, joy and gladness.

St. Macarius of Egypt

A swimmer dives naked into the sea until he finds a pearl; and a wise monk, stripped of everything, journeys through life until he finds in himself the Pearl, Jesus Christ; and when he finds Him, he does not seek to acquire anything else besides Him.

St. Isaac the Syrian

Away with arguments, where faith is required; now let dialectic hold her peace, even in the midst of her schools. I ask not what it is that philosophers say, but I would know what they do. They sit desolate in their schools. See the victory of faith over argument. They who dispute subtly are forsaken daily by their fellows; they who with simplicity believe are daily increased. Not philosophers but fishermen, not masters of dialectic but tax-gatherers, now find credence. The one sort, through pleasures and luxuries, have bound the world's burden upon themselves; the other, by fasting and mortification, have cast it off, and so sorrow now begins to win over more followers than pleasure.

St. Ambrose of Milan

All of our salvation consists of humility. **Holy New Martyr Elizabeth the Grand-Duchess**

In all respects belittle yourself before all men, and you will be raised above the princes of this age.

St. Isaac the Syrian

When communicating of the Holy Mysteries, say in your heart: "Come unto me, O Life-giver, to rescue me from the jaws of the serpent of hell, to cleanse me from the impurity of passions, to appease my troubled heart, to give life to my deadened soul, to rejoice my sorrowful and despondent spirit. Come to feed me, starving from sinful hunger; to clothe me, naked of every virtue; to strengthen me, the infirm; to honor me, the dishonored; to exalt me, the base one; to ennoble me, the despised; to enlighten my darkened soul. Thou bestowest every blessing upon me. I thank Thee, O Most Merciful One!"

St. John of Kronstadt

Nourish your soul daily with the words of life and with prayer and with every good work — just as we nourish the body with various kinds of food and drink by means of which our exhausted strength is renewed and our life is preserved.

St. Moses of Optina

Only he who himself has partaken of the heavenly gift and has been participant of the Holy Spirit, who has heard God's words and has felt the powers of the coming ages, is the possessor of a sound faith.

St. John of Kronstadt

Silence is a mystery of the age to come.

St. Isaac the Syrian

A Homily on the Sunday of Orthodoxy ~ Fr. Mark Andrews

...But appropriate for our Parish Anniversary...

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS: THE FEWEST OF ALL PEOPLE?

In the seventh chapter of the Book of Judges, there is the story of Gideon and his victory over the Midianites. Gideon had an army of 32,000 men to do battle with the Midianite army of 50,000. But the Lord said to Gideon, "Your army is too great. If you conquer Midian, it will seem like you did it with your own strength. Tell the cowards to go home." So Gideon sent the cowards away. 22,000 of them, more than two out of three!

But God was still not yet satisfied. "Your army is still too great. I will pick out your soldiers for you. Send them all to the river and watch them drink." Some of the men got down on their knees or stretched out and drank leisurely. Others, however, scooped up the water with their hands and lapped it up like dogs. And God said, "There is your army. Send the rest away." So Gideon counted up what he had left: three hundred men to do battle with 50,000! With the strength that is God's, Gideon and his three hundred men scattered the foe and crushed the power of Midian.

It may be that in our own day, as in the days of Gideon, God has seen fit to thin the ranks of his Church. We Orthodox are not many, especially here in America. Yet God always prefers to work with the few, be it the minority of his people or with a remnant of them. Noah and his family were a remnant out of the Flood. Ezra reports that only 42,000 people returned from the Babylonian captivity, and this after Shalmanezzer had obliterated the ten northern tribes and Nebuchadnezzar had depopulated the whole of Judah. Again, a remnant was all that returned. And that remnant rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with one hand and held a sword in the other, so great was the danger in their day.

Thus, if the Orthodox are not many, that in itself is no concern. Twelve men and seventy others spread the Gospel over the whole Roman Empire in a single generation. They were not many, but they were mighty men of faith. Our small numbers become a worry only if we are weak in faith. If we want our numbers to increase, we must recognize that quantity is dependent on quality. If we want the Church to grow, we must be people of faith first. If America is not beating down our doors to get in and receive our blessing and to share in our banquet, we must accept some of the responsibility for this. Of course, the Orthodox way of life will never attract those who live a worldly, pleasure-oriented life. But others must be able to look at us and say, "Here are Christian men and women!"

In humility we should consider the strength of our witness to those outside of the Church, especially on the Sunday when we celebrate the **Triumph of Orthodoxy**. If we look like the unchurched, if we act like them, and live like them, we are in no position to call them to something better!

The unchurched will say to us, "You are the Church that Christ established?"

"Yes."

"You have the fullness of the Faith? You partake of the Body and Blood of Christ?"

"Yes."

"Then why aren't you any better than the rest of the world? Why should I convert, stand through your long services and fast? It has no effect upon your life. Why should you think it will have an effect upon mine? It is much easier in other churches. They promise as much and ask a lot less."

Crowds of people went out into the desert to see the Forerunner. They went out into the desert to see our Lord. Thousands went to the holy monasteries to see the Elders. We do well to get our own people to come to Church in time to hear the Gospel on Sundays! Why?

If we are a minority in our day and in our communities, we must by all means be God's minority. We must be holy, witnesses to the Faith, doers of the Word, subjected to God, frequent at prayer, quick to forgive, loving one another, keeping the commandments, and above all, unafraid to shoulder the burden of the Cross, which is our lot as disciples of Christ. This responsibility is the common burden of everyone who calls himself Christian; it is shared by clergy and laity alike. The priests and bishops will not succeed without the prayers and the support of the faithful, and the faithful will not succeed without godly priests and bishops.

How will we bring others into the Church? By humbling ourselves, obeying God, and giving Him the glory. As Philotheos Zervakos, that great spiritual Father of our century, counsels: **"Walk courageously and bravely, eagerly and faithfully, clothed with weapons of light, faith, hope, humility, and love. By fixing your eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith [Heb. 12:2] you will defeat the three great enemies: the world, the ruler of the world, and the flesh, and all visible and invisible enemies. And when you win, do not say, "We won," because this expression is prideful. say, "Not us, but our faith in God." We are useless servants; Christ the true and perfect God and man won, and we did not do anything. By His grace and love for mankind may we all be saved."**

Indeed, brothers and sisters, this Holy Orthodox Faith we celebrate today is the Faith of Christ, the Holy Apostles, Fathers and all the Saints! It is truly the Ark of Salvation and the complete Revelation of God to Mankind! But is it our faith? Have we turned away from it? Have we lost the desire to become saints ourselves, to become the holy ones of God?

Until we present ourselves holy and blameless before God and man, we will not convince the world that our Orthodox Faith is the fullness of the Gospel of Christ, apart from which it is very hard to be saved!

The War of Thoughts by Elder Paisios from the book, Spiritual Struggle)

— **Geronda, my thought tells me, “You have not made any progress after all these years in the monastery.”**

— Tell me, what else does your thought tell you? It seems you pay a lot of attention to the devil who whispers things to you and tries to deceive you! Why do you believe the evil one? Why do you confuse yourself? Be at peace. You worry in vain and torment yourself without reason. The demon presents things in a confused and tangled manner. He fogs your mind with pessimistic thoughts in order to waste your time and distract you from prayer and attention to your daily tasks. Even if you are only a little confused, just enough to take away your desire to fight him, this alone is enough for him to be promoted to a higher rank. When working alone, try to follow this rule: Sing psalms, doxologies, and verbal or silent prayer of the heart, in order to avoid the murmur of thoughts. In other words, try to turn your thoughts to God. Since **the devil changes the subject of our thoughts in order to deceive us**, why shouldn't we do the same thing? I've told you this before. When I'm speaking with someone and am about to say something which may be useful to him, someone else will come to interrupt, or there will be some distracting sound or something else that forces me to stop. If the tempter the devil devises such machinations against us, why should we not similarly devise our own defensive mechanisms? You must be intelligently vigilant in outsmarting the little devil.

— **Geronda, I am troubled by sorrow, by listlessness... I am tormented by it.**

— This is martyrdom before the martyrdom! You are placing too much trust in yourself. Self-confidence. Certain sinister thoughts have become entrenched in you and this is why you are being thus tormented. You need to think straight. You have to remove the worn-out machinery of your mental factory and install good machinery. The best enterprise is for someone to establish a factory of good thoughts. Then, even bad thoughts will be transformed into good ones by his mind. For example, when you look upon a person as a soul, as an angel, you can ascend angelically to Heaven and your life becomes a festival. But if you look upon a person in a carnal way, you descend into hell.

— **Geronda, sometimes when I think of something good and positive, a sinister thought will soon come to destroy everything for me. Could it be that I don't do this from my heart?**

— The goal is to do it from your heart and, if you have a sinister thought, say, “This thought is a stranger; I must send it away. I have signed the eviction; it's gone, it's out of my mind.”

— **Geronda, when I have taken great effort in expelling a bad thought, how is it that it returns again after it's been dealt with?**

— Yes, the subject may have been dealt with, but the little devil has not finished. The devil never dies. An elder monk used to say, “If you kick a dog a couple of times, it will go away. But the devil does not go away; he persists with his attacks, here, there, everywhere I light a candle to the Saints of our Keili to make him go away, and the demons ask me, “Did you light the candle for us?” “You trash, why would I light a candle for you? I lit it for the Saints.” “Yes, but it was we who made you light it,” they tell me.

— **Geronda, when a misfortune happens to someone and he begins to say, “Why, o God, has this happened to me?” can that person be helped?**

— How can he be helped? The first thing is for a person to interpret everything with good and positive thoughts; only then can he be helped. Some people have a good machine, many prerequisites for a spiritual life, but their steering wheel is faulty and leads them in the wrong direction. If they turn the steering wheel in the direction of good thoughts, then they can proceed steadily in the right direction.

Cultivating Good Thoughts {Elder Paisios – continued}

— Geronda, do good thoughts come on their own, or do I have to cultivate them?

— You must cultivate them. Observe yourself, scrutinize yourself and, when the enemy sends you bad thoughts, try to expel them and replace them with good thoughts. When you struggle in this manner, the disposition of your soul will be cultivated and become positive and good. Then God, seeing your good disposition, will condescend to help you, and the evil thoughts will find no place in you to dwell. The evil thoughts will be expelled and then you will naturally have good thoughts. You will acquire a habit toward what is good, goodness itself will come into your heart, and then you will provide hospitality in your heart for Jesus Christ Himself. But this does not happen overnight; it takes time and a constant struggle for the soul to receive the crown of victory. Eventually the war will end for good, because such battles result from our disorderly inner state, which is exploited by the propaganda of the enemies.

Geronda, does this mean that those who have good thoughts have achieved this spiritual state of being through struggle?

— It depends. Some people have good thoughts from the start of their spiritual life and can thus advance readily. Others, on the contrary, while they may have good thoughts at the beginning, later on are not careful and vigilant, and start to have bad thoughts. Others, again, have sinister thoughts at first, but by being carefully observant of themselves and seeing how often they have fallen, lose their self-confidence and begin to have good and positive thoughts. Other people may have half good and half bad thoughts. Others have more good thoughts, while others may have more bad thoughts. For example, one who goes to become a monk, depending on the environment and the conditions under which he may have lived, will have both good and bad thoughts. He may have from ten to twenty percent of bad thoughts and even as much as eighty percent. But when he begins to do inner work, observing himself and dispelling the bad thoughts, he will cultivate good thoughts. Following this rule and effort, after a period of time, he will attain a state of having only good thoughts. The duration he had the bad thoughts in the world will determine the duration of the time required to dispel them. After that, gradually overtime, even good thoughts stop coming and an emptiness is attained. Then he goes through a period when he has neither good nor bad thoughts. This phase brings a certain inquietude in the soul and man begins to ask himself, "What is happening? What happens how? I had bad thoughts and they are gone; good thoughts came. Now I have neither bad nor good thoughts." After this emptiness, the mind is filled with the divine Grace, and divine enlightenment comes.

— Geronda, what is the nature of this fullness?

You cannot describe the brightness of the sun to someone who has not seen the stars. At least if one has seen the stars, you can describe to him something of the nature of the sun.

- Geronda, what can help us achieve this emptiness which you are speaking of?

— Spiritual study, unceasing prayer, silence, and ascetic discipline with *phitimo*. A soul who earnestly takes on the struggle against bad thoughts can attain to a more advanced state than another soul who may have had hardly any bad thoughts. That is to say, at first, she may have had ninety bad thoughts and only ten good ones, but because of her earnest struggle, she can achieve a better state than the other person who had ninety good thoughts and only ten bad ones. + + +

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Our Holy Father Symeon:

"Our holy Fathers have renounced all other spiritual work and concentrated wholly on this one doing, that is, on guarding the heart, convinced that, through this practice, they would easily attain every other virtue, whereas without it not a single virtue can be firmly established."

The Blind Faith Needed in Evolution

by Fr. Nikita Grigoriev, February 5, 2013

Evolution [also known as macro-evolution] is a philosophical idea and must only be accepted purely on [blind] faith. Evolution is not a science and is not based on a single fact or observation or on any scientific process. It is based on the entirely false idea of Malthus about the perpetual universal shortage of food, and on the completely false idea of Lamarck concerning the inheritance of physical changes by a new generation from a previous generation. These two pillars on which the fantasy of evolution was originally built, in and of themselves, are likewise, in no way scientific, but are purely abstract and philosophical.

Adaptation is often confused with evolution. Adaptation is a fact and it's quite real. Evolution is a myth and does not exist in reality at all, only in fantasy. There is a fine line separating them. Adaptation is when an individual or a species collectively changes to adapt to their environment. Such changes can be subtle or very striking. The changes are physical (phenotype) and, in the case of an individual, can be brought about in a direct response to a stimulus from the environment. An example of this is a suntan, or the strong right arm of a blacksmith, to use Lamarck's example. These are temporary adaptations of an individual and are definitely not inherited or passed on to the next generation.

The phenotype (physical characteristics) of the next generation individual are determined at birth by, and only by, the combination of genes that the individual received from his or her parents (genotype) at the time of conception. Now, in the case of a population (large number of individuals of a species), adaptation does have a genetic aspect. A population adapts to its environment by favoring those gene combinations within the species that produce individuals that are more adapted to their environment. This is like a special breed within a species. And this is a very important point: this group remains a breed within the species, not a new species.

Adaptation is a fact and it's quite real. Evolution is a myth and does not exist in reality at all, only in fantasy. The genotype (gene pool) of this breed is definitely skewed with a preponderance of gene combinations that produce the favored phenotype (physical characteristics) that is advantageous for surviving and thriving under these conditions. This is why St. Bernards and not Chihuahuas (both members of the species *Canis* – dog) are used for rescuing avalanche victims. Granted, dogs are bred “artificially” by humans to adapt them to special environments but they still remain dogs, and don't become a “new species”.

This is observed naturally among different “breeds” of humans, who are all nevertheless human and not some other “species”. Hence, aboriginal people who live in tropical areas generally have dark skin (high melanin for UV protection) and a higher surface area to volume ratio (tall and lanky – for easier heat dissipation). Conversely Inuits, the people of the Arctic regions, tend to have fair skin (low melanin – not much need for sun protection) but a considerably lower surface area to volume ratio (a propensity for portliness – for better heat retention).

So there certainly does seem to be a process in nature that also “breeds” species to adapt them to their environment. This is what Darwin called “natural selection”. This is all still “adaptation” not “evolution”. This natural process tends to “concentrate” certain gene combinations within the species that produce individuals that are more adapted to their environment. But these concentrations of certain genotypes within the gene pool of the species are just that: concentrations. When the conditions that favor this particular concentration of genes are removed, the concentration disperses and the “special breed” eventually ceases to exist, its genes becoming gradually diluted and dispersed throughout the vast general gene pool of their species at large. So far – so good. This is all solid science.

But the next step is where Darwin's cart goes completely off its rails. Darwin then made a leap of blind faith and this is where he, and all those who followed him, went off a cliff. Darwin assumed (he didn't observe – nobody has ever observed this) that these physical changes due to natural selection add up and eventually result in the formation of an entirely new species. This idea is called “evolution.” This is where it crosses over from “adaptation”, which is true science and which happens all the time, to “evolution”, which is not true but a fantasy based on thin air and pure speculation and never happens in reality.

(excerpt from Faith And Delusion, pp. 164-165)

The Purpose of Pornography

First Things, August 5, 2014, (excerpts)

A porn-saturated culture places pressure on women both to cling desperately to the vestiges of youth and... to become more compliant to the selfish sexual demands of men. Carl R. Trueman,

... Sexual activity as a means for preserving the myth of eternal youth is always going to involve the law of diminishing returns and thus ironically prove a powerful witness to its own falsehood. '

Carl R. Trueman

Since we no longer seek cosmic meaning or heroism in a "Great Chain of Being" as defined by our culture, because our culture no longer believes in a sentient, loving Deity, we may tend to seek it in our love partner. This partner always falls short of expectations, and so, in retaliation, we attack the partner, or resign ourselves in submission to keep the destructive relationship, or find a virtual substitute -- porn being ideally suited for this purpose since it makes no reciprocal demands. But porn fails all tests for cosmic meaning and personality development, and ends up demanding, like each summer's new roller coaster, higher highs and lower lows. Sex is reduced from a glory of nature to a selfish, isolated pastime.

~ Mark Phifer-Houseman

As a pastor who works with porn addicted young people and middle aged men, I see so many reasons folks are first drawn to porn as kids, then addicted.

1) The male brain is wired for new experiences and titillation, porn in that sense is just like horror movies, UFW martial arts, etc. People are addicted before they know it. Their brains crave the dopamine hit.

2) Life is boring to young people who are raised on entertainment on demand 24/7. Porn is exciting for a short while, just like a new video game, a new band to listen to, a new restaurant, a new cocktail, etc.

3) Transference beautification as Becker describes. **So much meaning must be cargoad in to sex now because heaven, sainthood, eternal bliss are disqualified from the outset of life in the culture. Sex, or making an impact to change the world are about all that is left for people to find meaning in.**

4) Desire for power over women by weak/dysfunctional/wounded men. This was so sadly made real in the Santa Barbara shootings this year. He felt entitled to sex, angry that no woman would sleep with him, therefore seeking revenge. Many guys I counsel are fundamentally angry about their ineptitude with women and turn to porn as a way to feel powerful and in control.

5) Boredom and monotony of marriage for many people. People long for being valued, celebrated, and touched. Most marriages fall short through sin, exhaustion, bitterness/unforgiveness, stress, and the continuous pressure of work, kids, in-laws, home repairs, etc. Porn provides an escape and a recollection even of the honeymoon years without involving emotional and physical adultery with another person.

6) Fear of death and the desire to feel eternally young.

7) No value or models of the wisdom journey for most adults in our culture. People get stuck developmentally and cannot get out of eternal puberty mindset.

~ Mark Phifer-Houseman