

**CHRIST IS RISEN!
HE IS RISEN INDEED!**



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **May 10, 2015** ✠

Fifth Sunday of Pascha

Holy Apostle Simon the Zealot

Christ is Risen!

Indeed He is Risen!

Happy Mother's Day!

Many Years! To all our Mothers, Grandmothers and *Godmothers!*
Memory Eternal to all our departed Mothers and Grandmothers!

O Pascha, holy Pascha!
So profound and
inexpressible in words is the
joy in you! Our happiness,
our consolation is in you.
Without you the soul would
not know the fullness of
Churchly celebration: for
there is no Christ without His
glorious Resurrection!

✠ *St. Alexander Hotovitsky*



- **Note: Inquirer's Class – Tomorrow Night, – 6:30pm**
- **No Wednesday Service**

- ✠ **Next Sunday, May 17 - 2:00pm: Marriage Blessing – Thomas and Anastasia Taylor**
- ✠ **Thurs. May 21 – Feast of the Ascension**
- ✠ **Sunday, May 24 – Sacrament of Marriage – Kassiane Kirchner and Joseph Mabry**
- ✠ **Sunday, May 31 - Feast of Pentecost**
- ✠ **Sunday, June 7 - Sacrament of Marriage – Georgia Carter and Euphrosynus Briggs**
 - **Note: Fr. Benedict Crawford will serve Liturgy and the Marriage**

A Mother is Born!

The relationship between mothers and their first-born child is absolutely unique. Think about this: on the day a first child is born, two birthdays are established and should be celebrated. First, it is, of course, the birthday for the new child.

But, it is also the birthday of another new person: a mother. The moment a child is born, which in medical terms is called "parturition," a mother is born also. Mother's Day is indeed a birthday celebration. A mother is born at childbirth. The baby Jesus "gave birth" to the Theotokos – Mary, the Mother of God, just as she gave birth to baby Jesus. Two new, miraculous creations emerged out of one event. Indeed, with every birth, two new lives are born – a baby, who is wholly without worries, and a mother, who will never again be without worry. There is nothing else like feeling the wonder of new life coming from within.

Ask any new mother, who has been transformed into a wholly new being by the arrival of one tiny new being. This morning, we celebrate an important, albeit often unnoticed birthday: the birthday of a new creation that issues from the flowing waters of new life – the birthday of mothers at childbirth. GLORY TO GOD!

Rejoice, O Bride of God, who carried in your womb the healer of the human race. Rejoice, O mystical Rod that blossomed the flower that will never wilt. Rejoice, O Lady, through whom we are filled with joy and inherited eternal life. Most holy Theotokos, intercede to God for us! Happy Mother's Day to all Mothers, Grandmothers, and Godmothers! ~ Fr. George Tsahakis, Atlanta, GA

Has Pascha changed the way you live?

Last month we were blessed to come together and celebrate another Pascha – the Feast of Feasts – the Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We prayed, we sang, we lit our candles, and we feasted. But has your life changed at all? Other than spending a few hours in Church during Holy Week, is your life different this month than it was last month? If the answer is, “NO,” then you’re missing something in the celebration of Pascha.

As Orthodox Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ, the Eternal Incarnate Word of God, took on human flesh, lived as a human being for thirty-three years, was crucified, died and was buried, and was RESURRECTED on the Third Day – all so that death no longer had any power over the rest of us humans. This is the Good News that we sing at every service for forty days after Pascha.

Christ is Risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!

For the first Christians, this Good News gave a new hope that life, despite its challenges (and there are many) is greater than what we experience on Earth. Life begins here on the Earth, but last for all eternity (thanks to Pascha) with God in Heaven. This new hope changed the way the first Christians lived their daily lives. It changed the way the first Christian interacted with other members of society. It changed the way the first Christians understood the Love of God. Has it changed you?

The Christian Way of Life, the Orthodox Way, is a life dedicated to living in total communion with God AT ALL TIMES. It is a life in which God’s love shines in the way we interact with others. Do we use guilt, shame, force, or otherwise trick others into certain behaviors or situations? God would never use guilt or shame to force us to love Him. OR do we show respect for the freedom of others and live OUR lives honoring God. Do we share our financial blessings with those who are in need? Do we share our time with others who are lonely? Do we share our knowledge with others who are struggling? The first Christians were known for the love and assistance they shared with others, including the very enemies who were killing them.

The first Christians lived a life that was radically different than at any other time in human history BECAUSE of Pascha, and the hope that the Good News offered. The Good News hasn’t changed....has it changed you? ~ Fr. Athanasios Haros, Holy Transfiguration Church, Florence, SC

The Description and Appearance of Jesus Christ

Concerning the God-man, the Son and Logos of God, the Evangelists and Apostles wrote about His works in the world in the Divine Gospels. They recorded the accounts of His transfiguration, His crucifixion, His resurrection and His ascension up to heaven. But there were many other private individuals of that period, not followers of Christ, who wrote a more detailed account concerning the life of the Lord. One who wrote about the character, appearances, form and figure of Christ which is worthy of mention, is the Roman Puplius Lentulus who lived during the days of our Lord, residing in Jerusalem at that time. He wrote a letter to the Roman senate which is as follows:

"In those days there appeared a young man, who is still living, a youth that has great power and whose name is Jesus Christ. The populace calls Him a strong prophet and His disciples call Him, Son of God. He raised the dead to life; and cures the sick of every type of disease. The youth is tall but well proportioned. The countenance of His face is both serious and active, so that those who look at Him love Him, and yet in another way, they are afraid of Him.

The hair on His head is the color of wine down to the beginning of His ears, lacking brilliance. It is smooth from the beginning of His ears to His shoulders, then twisted and brilliant from the shoulders down, where it hangs divided according to the custom of the Nazarenes. His forehead is smooth and clean, His face without blemish decorated with a light pink color.

His appearance is polite and joyful, His nose and mouth are altogether blameless. His beard is thick being of the same color as His hair, and is also divided in two, while His eyes are blue and filled with extreme brilliance. When He scolds He is fearful; when He teaches and advises, He is attractive and beloved.

Wonder is the grace of His face and dignified. Not once was He seen laughing, but He was often seen crying. According to the height of His body, His hands being very straight and His arms graceful, and according to His generation, He is the fairest of all men."

Translated from Greek by John Mastrojohn, 1933

It Is Also a Great Delight to Envision the Physical Appearance of Christ

By St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel

Let me say this too. Even the mere envision of the physical appearance and the beauty of the divine face of Jesus brings inexpressible delight so that you will want to say enthusiastically: "You are all sweetness, O Savior; You are all desire and appeal; You are all insatiate; You are all beauty irresistible." Also you will want to say: "You have attracted me with desire, O Christ, and You have transfigured me with your divine love." Moreover, you will want to say with St. Paul: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? "

"Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. 8:35) Also you will want to ask the question of the bride: "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" (Song of Solomon 3:3) And you will want to say many other words of love.

Think of those most pure eyes of Jesus, so calm, so sweet; the straightness of His nose; the somewhat chestnut-colored and at the same time golden hair and beard of His; His great and joyous

forehead; the blended color of His calm and royal face; His fine, long fingers and his perfectly shaped hands; His moderate stature, and simply all of the other symmetry and grace, which shone in all His members. Jesus was so beautiful that, as Lentulus, that officer who had seen the Lord with his own eyes in Jerusalem, wrote to the senate in Rome, there has never appeared on earth another person more beautiful than Jesus. Foreseeing this beauty, Prophet David wrote: "You are the most beautiful of the sons of men" (Ps 45:2). Aquila rendered this line, "You are adorned with beauty by the sons of men." Symmachus rendered it: "Among the sons of men You are good in beauty." The bride in the Song speaks lovingly to Him: "Behold, You are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely (Song 1:16) This is why the people could not be satisfied when looking upon Him, nor did they want to take their attention away from Him.

St. John Chrysostom explaining this passage "When Jesus saw great crowds around Him" (Matt. 8:18), wrote: "The people were really attracted to Him and they loved Him and marveled at Him, desiring always to be looking upon Him. Who would want to leave while He was doing these marvelous deeds? Who would not want to simply get a glance at the face and the mouth that as saying such wonderful things? He was not so wonderful only when He was doing wonders, but even when He was just looked upon, simply He was just full of grace." This is what the Prophet David meant when he said that He was the most beautiful among the sons of man.

Now if the physical body of sweetest Jesus was so beautiful then when He was bearing a corruptible body, how much more beautiful is it now that it has become incorruptible and glorified and His divine face is shining in heaven infinitely more brightly than the sun? This is why St. John Chrysostom has sought with his eloquent homilies to move us to do everything we can so that we may achieve and enjoy the most sweet vision of the glorified and most beautiful and most desired divine face of Jesus.

For if one is to be deprived of the vision of that most beautiful and most desired face of Jesus, this is truly a worse calamity than a thousand hells. For as St. John Chrysostom wrote:

"Even if we experience a thousand hells, none of these will be anything like the experience of seeing the calm face of Jesus and His serene eyes turn away from us as being unable to endure looking upon us."
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Elder Porphyrios Quote from Pascha Liturgy Sermon

"Christ is new life. How can I say it? Christ is everything. He is Joy, He is Life, He is Light. He is the True Light Who makes man joyful, makes him soar with happiness; makes him see everything, everybody; makes him feel for everyone, to want everyone with him, everyone with Christ. When we find some treasure or whatever else, we don't want to tell anybody. The Christian, on the other hand, when he finds Christ, when he knows Christ, when Christ dwells within his own little soul and he feels Him, he wants to shout and tell it everywhere; he wants to talk about Christ, say what Christ is, he wants to say: *Love Christ and put nothing before His love.* Christ is Everything. He is the source of life, the ultimate desire, He is everything. Everything beautiful is in Christ."

Elder Porphyrios Bairaktaris (+1991)

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Xristos Anesti! Alithos Anesti!

Christos Voskrese! Voistinu Voskrese!

Christos a Inviat! A Deverat a Inviat!

AL Maseh Qam! Haqqan Qam!

Christ est Ressuscite! En verite il est Ressuscite!

Christus ist Auferstanden! Wahrhaft Auferstanden

LET US PURIFY OUR SENSES

The mysterious stillness of the Paschal night...the heart is seized by a familiar joy in anticipation of "meeting Christ". The air is cool, the streets deserted...A gentle light like the dawn descends upon the soul and a pleasant warmth embraces the heart. There, the candles grow brighter, illumining the faces. It seems as if one actually hears the distant song of the angels in heaven. Closer and closer their singing inclines towards the earth:

"Thy Resurrection, O Christ our Savior, the angels in heaven sing..."

Trembling with unearthly rapture, the soul strains to approach Christ...And then a new song loudly bursts forth, a song of victory: "Christ is risen from the dead..."

The angels in heaven sing and people on earth join their voices:

"Enable us on earth to glorify Thee in purity of heart!"

All genuine, exalted and holy joy related to the glorification of God is possible only where the heart is pure. From a pure heart the angels glorify God; from the depths of a pure heart the Most-Holy Theotokos cried out: "My soul rejoiceth in God my Savior!"(Luke 1:47).

Do we have such purity of heart that we can rejoice in the Lord's Resurrection and fittingly glorify Him? Alas! At one time our soul was clothed in a divinely woven garment of absolute cleanliness and purity, but of our own free will we ripped, soiled and flung aside this bright vesture, and our soul was darkened, our heart became sullied with sins and passions, our vision became clouded; cast down, and no longer reflected that radiant joy.

It is true that deep within the soul, like a precious treasure, there remain traces of its pristine beauty and innocence; but even these are constantly being forfeited, scattered along the road of life. Set amidst the world's deceptions, our life is like a sea agitated by a storm; now our passions, now the evil spirits, rise over us like raging waves in a mighty effort to engulf our soul and deprive us of that precious treasure of the heart. It is a rare individual who has not suffered shipwreck in this world and whose "treasure" has not been destroyed. But the unfailing love of the Heavenly Father for the sake of the Redeemer extends to us a helping hand; and, having granted us purity and innocence in the Mystery of Holy Baptism, restores them again and again in the Mysteries of Confession and Communion through which we are united in the most intimate way possible with Christ our Savior.

The Divinely-wise Fathers of the Church also call the Feast of Pascha a Mystery. On this Feast we spiritually and even bodily, as it were, partake of the joy of the Resurrected Christ; when the cleansing and renewing grace of God makes itself felt in the soul, awakening its pure feelings and exalted actions from the heart; when we must make a special effort to glorify the Lord "in purity of heart to meet Him coming forth from the grave.

But again and again we ask ourselves: how is it possible to acquire that blessed purity of heart when we are constantly sinning, constantly defiling ourselves, constantly faced with our moral corruption? "Who shall be pure from uncleanness?" asked the righteous Job, and then answered: "Not even one; if even his life should be but one day upon the earth"(Job 14:4). "We are all unclean!" cries out the Prophet Isaiah(Is. 64:6). The pure eye of the All-Holy God detects
Let Us Purify Our Senses (cont.):

perverseness even in the pure and holy angels (Job 4:18). What then can we say about ourselves who drink iniquity like water! (Job 15:16). Where can we obtain purity of heart? How can we acquire it here on earth when even the angels in heaven do not possess it in full measure? It cannot be that the Lord would demand from us what is impossible, when, for example, He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt.5:8). This means that to achieve purity of heart is possible for us.

In the Paschal Canon we sing, "*Let us purify our senses, and we shall see Christ, shining with the unapproachable light of His Resurrection...*"

It is difficult for us to thoroughly cleanse our heart and soul from all sinful impurity. Nevertheless, on this Bright Feast we can - we must - "purify our senses" in some measure, so as to "behold Christ", to see Him in the glorious light of the Resurrection, to sense in our hearts that grace-filled brightness.

"*Let us purify our senses!*" Here we have in our hearts malice, pride, envy, vainglory and the like. Let us cast them out of our souls, at least during this Light-bearing Festival; let us forget about these dark feelings; let us unburden ourselves of the heaviness that comes with the remembrance of wrongs; and let us feel how pleasant, how joyous and bright the soul becomes the soul becomes without them! Then Christ will be resurrected in our souls, and we shall clearly hear Him say "Rejoice!" And then we shall truly behold Him in the wondrous light of His Resurrection.

"*Let us purify our senses!*" How easy it is to do this, especially now when the mysterious grace-filled power of the Feast and the wondrous enchantment of the Paschal service wholly embrace our souls, transport our hearts to heaven and raise us up to God. Who has not experienced this Paschal feeling? Whose soul has not been carried far from earth into the ineffable Paschal night? Whose heart has not been melted by the Divine Paschal Service? Who has not forgiven his brother at the time of Paschal greeting? It is not in vain that this Light-bearing Feast makes such a deep impression upon the soul during childhood, preserving itself through the period of youth and reviving in old age. And with the remembrance of this Feast, one is always seized with wonderment, as if the angels are singing in heaven, and a holy joy fills the heart.

"*Let us purify our senses...!* On the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ let us experience that grace-filled state which comes with a pure heart, and let us try to recapture this feeling at other times in our life; let us chase away from our souls malice, cunning, jealousy, and other evils; and let us cleanse our hearts from movements of the passions. In so doing, we shall approach Christ, with each day, each hour, until, on that day when we depart from this earth, He greets us with the word, "Rejoice!" and later says to us, "You good and faithful servant, enter you into the joy of your Lord!"(Matt.25:12). Amen.

-Orthodox America: Translated from the Russian periodical "Kormchi",
Moscow, April 13, 1913.

Saint Bede: "From the beginning of the world's creation until this time, the course of time was so divided that day preceded night, according to the order of its primeval making. On this night, because of the mystery of our Lord's resurrection, the order of time was changed. He rose from the dead during the night, and on the following day He showed the effect of His resurrection to His disciples....Most properly was night joined to the light of the following day, and the order of time so settled that day would follow night. It was once appropriate that night follow day, for by sinning the human race fell away from the light of paradise into the darkness and hardships of this age. It is appropriate that day follow night now, when through faith in the resurrection we are led back from the darkness of sin and the shadow of death to the light of life by Christ's gift." ["Hom. II.7 on the Pascha Vigil," *Homilies on the Gospels*, Bk. Two, 59.]

The Satisfaction of Pious Preening – *Compassion and Vainglory*

"If you're trying to prove your heart is in the right place, it isn't."

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the Latinate word "compassion" means, literally, "suffering together with another"- it's the "feeling or emotion when a person is moved by the suffering or distress of another, and by the desire to relieve it." Note that suffering together does not mean suffering identically. The compassionate person does not become hungry when he meets or thinks about a hungry person, or sick in the presence of the sick. Rather, compassion means we are affected by others' suffering, a distress that motivates us to alleviate it. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in *Emile*, "When the strength of an expansive soul makes me identify myself with my fellow, and I feel that I am, so to speak, in him, it is in order not to suffer that I do not want him to suffer. I am interested in him for love of myself."

We can see the problem. The whole point of compassion is for empathizers to feel better when awareness of another's suffering provokes unease. But this ultimate purpose does not guarantee that empathizees will fare better. Barbara Oakley, co-editor of the volume *Pathological Altruism*, defines its subject as "altruism in which attempts to promote the welfare of others instead result in unanticipated harm." Surprises and accidents happen, of course. The pathology of pathological altruism is not the failure to salve every wound. It is, rather, the indifference – blithe, heedless, smug, or solipsistic – to the fact and consequences of those failures, just as long as the empathizer is accruing compassion points that he and others will admire. As philosophy professor David Schmidtz has said, "If you're trying to prove your heart is in the right place, it isn't."

Indeed, if you're trying to prove your heart is in the right place, the failure of government programs to alleviate suffering is not only an acceptable outcome but in many ways the preferred one. Sometimes empathizers, such as those in the "helping professions," acquire a vested interest in the study, management, and perpetuation - as opposed to the solution and resulting disappearance - of sufferers' problems. This is why so many government programs initiated to conquer a problem end up, instead, colonizing it by building sprawling settlements where the helpers and the helped are endlessly, increasingly co-dependent. Even where there are no material benefits to addressing, without ever reducing, other people's suffering, there are vital psychic benefits for those who regard their own compassion as the central virtue that makes them good, decent, and admirable people - people whose sensitivity readily distinguishes them from mean-spirited conservatives. "Pity is about how deeply I can feel," wrote the late political theorist Jean Bethke Elshtain. "And in order to feel this way, to experience the rush of my own pious reaction, I need victims the way an addict needs drugs."

It follows, then, that the answer to the question of how liberals who profess to be anguished about other people's suffering can be so weirdly complacent regarding wasteful, misdirected, and above all ineffective government programs created to relieve that suffering - is that liberals care about helping much less than they care about caring. Because compassion gives me a self-regarding reason to care about your suffering, it's more important for me to *do* something than to *accomplish* something. Once I've voted for, given a speech about, written an editorial endorsing, or held forth at a dinner party on the salutary generosity of some program to "address" your problem, my work is done, and I can feel the rush of my own pious reaction. There's no need to stick around for the complex, frustrating, mundane work of making sure the program that made me feel better, just by being established and praised, has actually alleviated your suffering.

This assessment also provides an answer to the question of why liberals always want a bigger welfare state. It's because the politics of kindness is about validating oneself rather than helping others, which means the proper response to suffering is always, "We need to do more," and never, "We need to do what we're already doing better and smarter." That is, liberals react to an objective reality in a distinctively perverse way. The reality is, first, that there are many instances of poverty, insecurity, and suffering in our country and, second, that public expenditures to alleviate poverty, insecurity, and suffering amount to \$3 trillion, or some \$10,000 per American, much of it spent on the many millions of Americans who are nowhere near being impoverished, insecure, or suffering. If the point of liberalism were to alleviate suffering, as opposed to preening about one's abhorrence of suffering and proud support for government programs designed to reduce it, liberals would get up every morning determined to reduce the proportion of that \$3 trillion outlay that ought to be helping the poor but is instead being squandered in some way, including by being showered on people who aren't poor. But since the real point of liberalism is to alleviate the suffering of those distressed by other's suffering, the hard work of making our \$3 trillion welfare state machine work optimally is much less attractive – less gratifying – than demanding that we expand it, and condemning those who are skeptical about that expansion for their greed and cruelty. ~ William Voegeli, Senior Editor, *Claremont Review of Books*; excerpt from a speech delivered at Hillsdale College, October 9, 2014, *Imprimis*, Oct. 2014.

On Prayer – Elder Ephraim of Katounakia (+1998)

"My child, you are amassing treasure when you say the Jesus Prayer; it's like putting gold in your wallet."

He (the Elder) always preached and displayed obedience. When he was asked: "Elder, how can we achieve prayer, how can we achieve grace?" he always answered: "When the vessel of your soul is clean, then it will be filled by God's grace itself."

"Obedience gives birth to prayer and prayer gives birth to Theology", he used to say.

"How should we say the Jesus prayer, Elder? Should we say the entire phrase "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me"?"

"No, no, this is tiring. It suffices to just say the words, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me". If you progress in prayer, you will omit other words, too, because of the desire in your soul. You will probably end up saying just "Jesus, have mercy upon me" or "Sweetest Jesus, have mercy upon me". You will be crying out, full of yearning, only the name "Jesus, Jesus..." If you are blessed to still progress, then you will find yourself absolutely speechless, as if in rapture, feeling the fervor of divine grace."

"In which mood should we be praying, Elder? In a mood of glorifying God, of rejoicing, compunction, gratitude, sorrow or repentance? How?"

"In whatever mood your soul is in at that specific moment. If you feel joy, then you should pray with joy, if you feel repentant, then pray with repentance."

"What if the soul is in no mood for prayer, or the mind does not concentrate on praying?"

"The mind is always like that. It wanders around. Our duty is to bring our mind back on prayer. We start the Jesus prayer in a whisper or loudly until our mind is collected and starts paying attention to the prayer. Then, we pray inwardly, without whispering. Everyone learns this by experience though.

As for the mood, if we do not have it, then we create it. We bring to mind some spiritual

images that may touch our soul; for example the Crucifixion of the Lord, which makes us think how much the God-Man Himself suffered for us, wretched people. I myself have used the following image several times: I imagine that the second coming of Christ is here and He is departing with His people. They are leaving me behind and I'm in danger of being separated from Christ and His Kingdom for eternity. Then; my child, tell me: is it possible not to be in the mood for prayer? If you reach that point, you cry inwardly "My Christ, save me" and you cannot stop your tears streaming from your eyes".

"So, Elder, we should have such images in mind while repeating the Jesus prayer?"

"No, no. We use this thought only at the beginning, just to warm up the soul. When we say the Jesus prayer, we say it slowly and consciously. We have nothing on our minds, neither words, nor faces, or even images".

"Elder, how can we realize that we are making progress in prayer?"

"The first thing that prayer brings is joy. You feel like a prince. Then you are enriched in tears. You want to embrace the whole world, both animate and inanimate. All people seem like angels to you. Besides, Apostle Paul says that the fruit of the Spirit is: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22)".

"Should we pray with improvised words, Elder?"

"I do it quite often. The improvised prayer, as well as the spiritual images and visions we mentioned previously, help the soul reach a state of grace; even the quietest chant, hymn, or spontaneous words, may help the soul reach high spiritual states. In that case, we do not need all these things; we put them aside and pray just by saying the Jesus prayer with ardor, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me". Other times, when we are in a good spiritual state, we yearn to chant from the bottom of our heart; or when our soul is suddenly filled with spiritual thoughts, we wish to improvise with our prayer. Then, we should let our soul quench its thirst".