



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 205-930-9681 / 205-907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **March 27, 2016** ✠

Second Sunday of Lent

St. Gregory Palamas

St. Matrona of Thessalonica (4th C) St. Rupert, Bishop of Salzburg (718) St. Anthony of Tobolsk (1740)
Glykophylousa ("Sweet-Kissing") Icon of the Mother of God



Third Week of Great Lent

- ✠ Wed. March 30 ~ 6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy (no meal)
- ✠ Fri. April 1 ~ 6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy (Lenten Potluck Supper)

- Saturday, April 9 ~ Children's Lenten Retreat: 10:00am to 5:00pm
- Saturday, April 16 ~ Adult Lenten Retreat 10:00am – 4:00pm - Fr. Demetrios Carellas of Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery, Saxonburg, PA

St. Gregory and the Theotokos

✠ "The God-bearing St. Gregory (Palamas) says beautifully that the Theotokos made God into the Son of man, and men into sons of God. Thus she made earth into heaven, deified humanity and honored the nature of women. The Theotokos marked out the citizens of the earth and destined them to become heavenly beings.

~ Monk Moses of Mt. Athos (+2011)

"Prayer without Ceasing" ~ Is Necessary For All Christians

St. Gregory Palamas

Let no one think, my brother Christians, that it is the duty only of priests and monks to pray without ceasing, and not of laymen. No, no; it is the duty of all of us Christians to remain always in prayer.

For look what the most holy Patriarch of Constantinople, Philotheus, writes in his life of St. Gregory of Thessalonica. This Saint had a beloved friend by the name of Job, a very simple but most virtuous man. Once, while conversing with him, His Eminence said of prayer that every Christian in general should strive to pray always, and to pray without ceasing, as Apostle Paul commands all Christians, "Pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17), and as the prophet David says of himself, although he was a king and had to concern himself with his whole kingdom: "I foresaw the Lord always before my face" (Psalms 15:8), that is, in my prayer I always mentally see the Lord before me. Gregory the Theologian also teaches all Christians to say God's name in prayer more often than to breathe.

{continued on p. 3}

This and That

The function of memory is not only to preserve, but also to throw away. If you remembered everything from your entire life, you would be sick.
~ Umberto Eco

The Evil One is always trying to maliciously turn us away from what is superior, to engender in us charming things, and to tie us up in them with hardly any chance of getting loose. [He wants to get us] wound up in those attachments so dear to men full of vanity. He suggests to us the deep and multifaceted extent of the sciences, the multitude of knowledge associated with them, as he suggests to others wealth and false glory, and fleshly pleasures, so that we keep ourselves busy all our life chasing after these things and not having enough strength to firmly undertake the kind of education that purifies the soul [and leads] to the knowledge of the mysteries of God.
Jean-Claude Larchet

Technology is cumulative: the more you have the more you can build on what you've got. Art, beauty, ethics, morality, *not so*. We have better paint. We have better plaster than Michelangelo did. We do not have better artists than Michelangelo. The fact that we have better paint does not make Michelangelo obsolete.
Rev. Guy Consolmagno

I hate it when all the mechanics of fasting eclipse the spirit of the fast and it's relation to benefitting the impoverished and training the will.
- a priest of the Church

One does not need to theorize how to view and engage secular modernity if one daily concentrates on self-sacrifice, prayer, and simply doing the work of God and disciplining the body and mind to order themselves according to their place and heritage.
- Caleb Stegall

At the heart of a conservative is the natural inclination to suspect that abstract ideas that do not reflect long-held tradition nor find their grounding in higher authorities are bogus. Abstract, catch-all answers are always the seed of heresy.
- Aaron Wolf

Christ was human too. Sin is not an inherent part of human nature. We do not sin because we are human. The old excuse for sin and failure "I'm only human" is a terrible blasphemy against God who made man in His own image. Sin is a corruption of human nature, a parasite on it, not an inherent part of it.
- Fr. Justin Frederick

Modernity, which had seemed on the verge of providing universal security, liberating human beings from all forms of oppression, and producing an unprecedented human thriving, had in fact ended in a barbarism almost unknown in previous human experience. The tools that had been universally regarded as the source of human flourishing had been the source of unparalleled human destruction. And finally, the politics of human liberation had proved to be the means to human enslavement and degradation. The horror evoked by these cataclysmic events was so overwhelming that it called into question not merely the idea of progress and enlightenment but also the idea of modernity and the conception of Western civilization itself. ~ Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*

"I am afraid we are inclined to accept as wisdom what is only knowledge, and to accept as progress things that are nothing more than change. True progress must bear some relation to man's character. It must have its roots in the heart."
- Abraham Lincoln

So, my Christian brethren, I too implore you, together also with St. Chrysostom, for the sake of saving your souls, do not neglect the practice of this prayer. Imitate those I have mentioned and follow in their footsteps as far as you can.

It Only Appears to Be Difficult at First

At first it may appear very difficult to you, but be assured, as it were from Almighty God, that this very name of our Lord Jesus Christ, constantly invoked by you, will help you to overcome all difficulties, and in the course of time you will become used to this practice and will taste how sweet is the name of the Lord. Then you will learn by experience that this practice is not impossible and not difficult, but both possible and easy. This is why St. Paul, who knew better than we the great good which such prayer would bring, commanded us to pray without ceasing. He would not have imposed this obligation upon us if it were extremely difficult and impossible, for he knew beforehand that in such case, having no possibility of fulfilling it, we would inevitably prove to be disobedient and would transgress his commandment, thus incurring blame and condemnation. The Apostle could have had no such intention.

Moreover, bear in mind the method of prayer – how it is possible to pray without ceasing, namely by praying in the mind. And this we can always do if we so wish. For when we sit down to work with our hands, when we walk, when we eat, when we drink we can always pray mentally and practice this mental prayer – the true prayer pleasing to God. Let us work with the body and pray with the soul. Let our outer man perform his bodily tasks, and let the inner man be entirely dedicated to the service of God, never abandoning this spiritual practice of mental prayer, as Jesus, God and Man, commanded us, saying: "*But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret*" (Matthew 6:6).

The closet of the soul is the body; our doors are the five bodily senses. The soul enters its closet when the mind does not wander hither and thither, roaming among things and affairs of the world, but stays within, in our heart. Our senses become closed and remain closed when we do not let them be attached to external sensory things, and in this way our mind remains free from every worldly attachment, and by secret mental prayer unites with God its Father. "And thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly," adds the Lord. God who knows all secret things sees mental prayer and rewards it openly with great gifts. For that prayer is true and perfect which fills the soul with Divine grace and spiritual gifts. As chrism perfumes the jar the more strongly the tighter it is closed, so prayer, the more fast it is imprisoned in the heart, abounds the more in Divine grace.

Blessed are those who acquire the habit of this heavenly practice, for by it they overcome every temptation of the evil demons, as David overcame the proud Goliath. It extinguishes the unruly lusts of the flesh, as the three men extinguished the flames of the furnace. This practice of inner prayer tames passions as Daniel tamed the wild beasts. By it the dew of the Holy Spirit is brought down upon the heart, as Elijah brought down rain on Mount Carmel. This mental prayer reaches to the very

throne of God and is preserved in golden vials, sending forth their odors before the Lord, as John the Divine saw in the Revelation, "*Four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of the saints*" (Revelation 5:8).

This mental prayer is the light which illumines man's soul and inflames his heart with the fire of love of God. It is the chain linking God with man and man with God. Oh the incomparable blessing of mental prayer! It allows a man constantly to converse with God. Oh truly wonderful and more than wonderful – to be with one's body among men while in one's mind conversing with God. Angels have no physical voice, but mentally never cease to sing glory to God. This is their sole occupation and all their life is dedicated to this.

So, brother, when you enter your closet and close your door, that is, when your mind is not darting hither and thither but enters within your heart, and your senses are confined and barred against things of this world, and when you pray thus always, you too are then like the holy angels, and your Father, Who sees your prayer in secret, which you bring Him in the hidden depths of your heart, will reward you openly by great spiritual gifts.

But what other and greater rewards can you wish from this when, as I said, you are mentally always before the face of God and are constantly conversing with Him – conversing with God, without Whom no man can ever be blessed either here or in another life?

Finally, my brother, whoever you may be, when you take up this book and, having read it, wish to test in practice the profit which mental prayer brings to the soul, I beg you, when you begin to pray thus, pray God with one invocation, "Lord have mercy," for the soul of him who has worked on compiling this book and of him who helped to give it to the public. For they have great need of your prayer to receive God's mercy for their soul, as you for yours. May it be so! May it be so!

St Gregory Palamas, from "Early Fathers From the Philokalia," translated from the Russian text, "Dobrotolubiye," by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, eighth edition, (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1981), pp. 412 - 415

✠ "By telling His mother to become mother to John, it is as if Christ is speaking also to us. We are to make His mother our mother. St. John - in turn - is urging us to become His brothers, and to all have the same loving mother: the Mother of the Savior. In order to become her children, we are called to take her into our *'home'*: to appropriate [seize] her as our own mother; to love her and her godly virtues; and to imitate her life, so that in us also - within us - there may be born the Christ Who is the Life, the Light and the Salvation of the world."

- **St. John of Damascus (7th C)**

✠ "Protestant Christians are, unfortunately, deprived of all these gifts - of the protection, the consolation and assistance of the Theotokos - by not calling upon her, by not honoring her and by - instead - ignoring her. We Orthodox Christians love her and honor her, of course, but the best honor that we can offer her, according to St. John Chrysostom, is for the one who praises her to acquire her mentality and her way of life.

~ **Monk Moses of Mt. Athos (+2011)**

The Heart in Orthodox Spirituality

+ Reprinted from *Life Transfigured*, Vol. 12, #2, 1980 / – A journal of Holy Transfiguration Women's Monastery

Work has been done on translating and publishing the writings of the Philokalia into English. Under the influence of this literature, many people are now speaking about the "Prayer of the Heart." "The Jesus Prayer," but few know the true meaning of the heart in spirituality.

Usually people think of the heart as the place of emotions, feelings, and sentiments—good or bad. In this sense, we use the expressions "to say from the heart," or "heartless man." or "he speaks from the fullness of his heart." Christ Himself used popular expressions: "From man's heart come both good and evil."

In the Bible the notions of heart and soul are often interchangeable. Why? Every emotion, whether it is joy or pain, comes out of the heart and returns to it; they affect the heart as a physiological organ, "keep watch over your heart, since here are the well-springs of life" (Prov. 4:23). Thus, because of these many meanings, the symbol "heart" has become a simple and practical metaphor.

The heart is well-defined in spirituality

In the Bible, as well as in the writings of the holy Fathers, particularly those of the Philokalia, the heart is not a physiological organ, but rather it is something more profound. In the expressions, "the heart of things," "the heart of the sea," "the heart of the matter," the heart indicates something deep—a mystical center, inaccessible to our understanding.

It is impossible for an individual to penetrate into someone else's heart, for man's depth is beyond our understanding. We often actually fear to even attempt to look into the abyss of our own being. Socrates said, "Know yourself,"

but people are afraid to try, for man is such an awesome reality.

In speaking about this mystical center of the human personality, Christ said, "What gain then, is it for a man to win the whole world and lose his soul? And indeed what can a man offer in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:36-7) But man cannot look into the depth of his being if he is not a religious man, for the heart is the center of all religious experience.

The holy Fathers understand the sense of the heart as the existential center of our being—our conscience, our soul. The human soul has no limit, just as an atom has no limit; therefore, "heart" in the Philokalia is not to be understood as the soul, but rather as the impenetrable *center* of the soul. Some of the Church writers use the expression, "heart of divinity," calling it the "abyss." It is in this sense that the Psalmist says, "deep is calling to deep" (Ps. 42:9).

In this impenetrable abyss we meet God

We cannot meet God outside of ourselves because God is not located in time or space. We encounter Him only in the depth of our being. St. Paul says that God within us is the One who urges us to pray, and that it is He Who makes us "cry out Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). Without this, we would not even know how to pray.

When Scripture calls man the icon of God, it is not used figuratively, but is in truth a fact. The Spirit of God is in us, and the seal of our personality is God. We exist as individuals because He exists in us. God dwells in us through the Holy Spirit, just as He dwelt in the Holy Virgin. It is for this reason that the Virgin Mary is the image of the Church: "The temple and the entrance, the chamber and throne of the King art thou, O all-honorable Virgin" (Apostikha, Saturday Vespers, Tone 5).

"Thou art a sanctified temple, a spiritual paradise" ("All of Creation Rejoices in Thee" of the Liturgy of St. Basil).

The Mother of God is a model of life for us because she is a temple as we also are temples of God, for St.

Paul says. "You are God's temple" (I Cor. 3:16).

Descending into the heart in prayer

When the holy Fathers say that in prayer we should gather the mind, close it and keep it in the heart, they are telling us to descend into the depths of our soul wherein lies the throne of Divinity. To bring the mind down to the heart means liberating oneself from the slavery of external pre-occupations which hinder our concentration in God. Though there is a technique for the Jesus Prayer, it must be understood that this prayer is an existential state of our whole being.

In the homilies of St. Macarius the Great, he affirms that Adam's expulsion from Paradise is his expulsion from himself—that is, from his interior temple. Instead of fixing his attention within himself in God, he turned toward things outside of himself; these in turn tainted him by their form, taste and color.

According to the holy Fathers, the art of prayer is the method of descending into oneself where God dwells, for man is the bearer of God. **St. John Chrysostom says, "Keep the name of the Lord Jesus in your heart, that the heart may encompass Him and He encompass you. In this way, man and God are one."**

When the mind's concentration is in the heart, calling upon the name of Jesus Christ, one's entire being becomes transfigured under the action of divine Grace which is an uncreated energy of the same essence with God. It is the light of Tabor which emanates from Jesus Christ. The hesychastic Saints have felt and seen this radiance. Each of us possess this light, but wrapped in a veil of sin.

✠ "THE CHRISTIAN has great, spiritual, divine enjoyments. Fleshly delights must always be subjected to these higher delights; and when they hinder the latter they must be checked or suppressed. It is not to afflict man that food and drink are at certain times and seasons forbidden him by the Church, not to limit his freedom, as worldly people say. It is done to afford him true, lasting and eternal delights; for this reason meat or flesh food, and wine and spirits are forbidden during Lent, so that the heart of man, who is very dear to God, should cling to God alone, and not to anything perishable, to anything unworthy of Him."

~ St. John of Kronstadt (1908)

When men love each other in the spiritual sense, not sensually, they actually recognize God dwelling within the other. As we greet someone, we worship God, for man is the icon of God. But when we express hatred for someone, we have become an iconoclast, for we hate the image of God—which is man. Man is a living icon. Each man is a separate depth, but Christian love is a bridge uniting these abysses. Even the sinner is a temple of the living God, but it is a desecrated temple which must be repaired and rededicated through penitence.

The inner Liturgy of a Christian is parallel with the Liturgy in the Church. They occur simultaneously, exactly in the same way as the celestial Liturgy parallels the Liturgy at the altar. The holy Fathers speak of the altar of the heart and the interior Liturgy in which man is not the priest, the Priest is God Himself. Man is a divine temple through prayer, for in prayer he is filled with the divinity as Christ Himself is within his heart.

In the Apostolic Fathers, especially the Shepherd of Hermas, we find the heart of man as a garden of Paradise. They imagine that there are palaces, towers, parks, etc. in the heart, but all these figures must be understood in a spiritual sense.

Christ says that the heart can be both paradise and hell at the same time, because, according to the holy Fathers, paradise and hell are not geographical places, but rather states of mind. Some theologians affirm that the torments of hell are possible only because of God's presence in man's heart—even in hell. Otherwise remorse would be impossible—it is a possibility only because man has both God and the devil present and can compare the two.

The American poet and Orthodox convert, Scott Cairns writes in a chapter of *God For Us: Rediscovering the Meaning of Lent and Pascha*:

.... At first, I was surely among the crew that Father Alexander Schmemmann acknowledges when he writes (in his amazing and very helpful book, *Great Lent*), "For many, if not for the majority of Orthodox Christians, Lent consists of a number of formal, predominantly negative, rules and prescriptions.... Such is the degree of our alienation from the real spirit of the Church that it is almost impossible for us to understand that there is 'something else' in Lent—something without which all these prescriptions lose much of their meaning."

Father Schmemmann goes on to explain that this "something else" is another disposition altogether. He characterizes it as an "atmosphere," a "climate," and "a state of mind, soul, and spirit." In my own experience—which, as I say, required some years of practice before I so much as noticed—Lent can become an incentive and a powerful means by which we can enter the kingdom of God, even as we abide here on earth.

This disposition is the *harmolype*—the "bright-sadness"—of which the fathers and the mothers speak. Even in the dryness of our desert journey, we are offered a sustaining taste of the sweet, the living waters. Even amid the gloom, we apprehend a glimmer of the light.

This bright sadness permeates much of the wonderful poetry of the the Lenten Triodion. These hymns fill our liturgical services with a sadness that is at once bitter, as we consider the wretched state we find ourselves in, and yet leavened with joy, the bright promise of God's presence and forgiveness.

Bright sadness is connected with tender-heartedness, that is, compassion, a compassionate heart, from out of which a loving gaze embraces the suffering of others. What begins as something inward, and deeply personal - being touched by the poetry and melodies of bright sadness - is meant to be a source or well-spring of empathy, of mercy and forgiveness, of loving acts.

Father John Breck wrote in a meditation many years ago:

Bright sadness may be the most powerful and important experience we can know. It brings to our mind and heart, in the most direct and personal way, the ultimate purpose of our life and the object or end of our most passionate desire. It reminds us of who we are, as beloved children of God, created in His image and invited to glorify and enjoy Him forever.

That conflicted emotion of bright sadness is a blessed gift, bestowed by the God who loves us with a "love without limit." It comes to us through our ascetic struggle during the Lenten season, as it does through the solemn beauty of the Church's liturgical services.

But it can come to us as well when we observe it in the people around us: people with whom and for whom we pray, people who in many cases pray for us without our being aware of it. We find that bright sadness in communion with them, in hearing their stories, in sharing their hopes, fears and longings. We find it through being attentive to the beauty and truth of their life and their unique presence.

The Elder Paisios once said that for love to blossom in the heart, we must pray with pain of heart. In explaining this he noted that when we hurt some part of our body - our hand, for example - all our attention and energy focuses on where we hurt. So too it is a hurting and broken heart that focuses our spiritual attention. When asked what can we do if, in fact, we are not suffering and our heart is not hurting, the elder relied: 'We should make the other's pain our own! We must love the other, must hurt for him, so that we can pray for him. We must come out little by little from our own self and begin to love, to hurt for other people as well, for our family first then for the large family of Adam, of God.'

Thoughts on Spiritual Vigilance

The following are short, succinct teachings from the Desert Fathers on the subject of vigilance, that is, the need always to be guarding one's soul against temptation and recognizing that the spiritual life is a constant struggle from which we cannot rest. They are all from anonymous fathers.

1. An Elder said, "Every evening and every morning a monk ought to render an account of himself and say to himself, 'What have we not done of what God does not want, and what have we done of that which God wills?' In this way he must live in repentance. This is what it means to be a monk, and this is how Abba Arsenius used to live."

2. An Elder said, "He who loses gold or silver can find more to replace it, but he who loses time cannot find more."

3. An Elder said, "Just as no one can cause harm to someone who is close to the king, no more can Satan do anything to us if our souls are close to God, for truly he said, 'Draw near to me, and I shall be near to you.' But since we often exalt ourselves, the enemy has no difficulty in drawing our poor souls into shameful passions."

4. An Elder said to a brother, "The devil is the enemy and you yourself are the house. The enemy never stops throwing all that he finds into your house, pouring all sorts of impurities over it. It is your part not to neglect throwing them outside again. If you do not do this the house will be filled with all sorts of impurities and you will no longer be able to get inside. But all that the other begins to throw in, you should throw out again little by little, and by the grace of Christ your house will remain pure."

5. One of the old men said, "When the eyes of the ox are covered he turns the mill, but if they are not covered he does not turn it. Even so does the devil. If he succeeds in covering a man's eyes he weakens him and leads him to commit all kinds of sin, but if a man's eyes are full of light it is easy for him to flee from the devil."

6. An Elder said, "Having arisen in the early hours, say to yourself, 'Body, you must work to feed yourself; soul, be vigilant in order to receive the inheritance.'"

Starting Over: What to Do After Sinning

All of us, from time to time, fall into sin and seemingly lose all the progress we have made in living the spiritual life. The Desert Fathers give us many examples in their teachings, though, of how a person can regain their spiritual progress after repentance:

A certain brother fell into temptation, and through tribulation relinquished the garb of monkhood; and he wished to begin to renew his ascetic life, but he saw the great difficulty of the matter, and he drew back, and said, "When shall I ever find myself in the same condition as I was formerly?" And through fear he did not begin his work, and he went and made the matter known to an Elder, and the Elder said, "The matter is thus: There was a certain man who possessed an estate, and he held it to be of no account and did not cultivate it, and it became full of tangled undergrowth and thorns. Now one day he remembered it, and he sent his son, and said unto him, 'Go, clean the estate.' And when he had gone and seen the abundance of the undergrowth he was afraid, and said to himself, 'When shall I be able to