



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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**February 12, 2017**

### **Sunday of the Prodigal Son**

St. Meletius of Antioch (381) St. Urban, Pope of Rome (230)

St. Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow (1378)

Miraculous Appearance of the Iveron Icon of the Theotokos (10<sup>th</sup> C)

I have recklessly forgotten  
Thy glory, O Father!  
And among sinners I have  
scattered the riches which  
Thou gavest to me!  
And now I cry to Thee  
like the Prodigal:  
I have sinned before Thee,  
O merciful Father!  
Receive me a penitent  
and make me as one  
of Thy hired servants!

- *Kontakion*

- No Inquirer's Class this week. Father is away at the Diocesan Pastoral Conference.
- Next Sunday is Meatfare Sunday – *Parish Meatfare Dinner!*
- 40<sup>th</sup> Day Memorial for Fr. Ignatius Crockett – Saturday, Feb. 18, 5:00pm
- Looking Ahead: Great Lent begins with Forgiveness Sunday, February 26

### **Without Grace**

† Without the grace of God there can be no obedience on man's part; nor is man ever abandoned by that Good, without which no good can be done. And if carrying out God's commands proves difficult or impossible for a man, he has no other course but to return to Him who commands, and who gives His precept so that He may excite desire and provide help, as the Prophet says: "Turn your thoughts to God and He will nourish you." Or is anyone so insolently proud, is anyone so unscathed, does anyone presume himself so immaculate, that he has no need of any renewal? Such a conviction were utterly erroneous, and that man has grown old in excessive vanity who believes that amid the temptations of this life he has been free of every wound. **St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome (461)**

### **Nothing Worthy without Repentance**

In the spiritual life we can do nothing worthy without repentance, but the Lord has much mercy on us because of our intentions. He who compels himself and holds on to repentance until the end, even if he sins is saved because he compelled himself, for the Lord promised this in the Gospel. **St. Mark the Ascetic**

**If we desire to acquire faith** -- the foundation of all blessings, the door to God's mysteries, unflinching defeat of our enemies, the most necessary of all the virtues, the wings of prayer and the dwelling of God within our soul -- we must endure every trial imposed by our enemies and by our many and various thoughts. Only the inventor of evil, the devil, can perceive these thoughts or uncover and describe them. But we should take courage; because if we forcibly triumph over the trials and temptations that befall us, and keep control over our intellect so that it does not give in to the thoughts that spring up in our heart, we will once and for all overcome all the passions; for it will not be we who are victorious, but Christ, who is present in us through faith. **St. Peter of Damascus**

**On Evil:** Those who have realized how dangerous and evil is the life they lead, the devil succeeds in keeping in his power mainly by the following simple, but all powerful suggestion: "Later, later; tomorrow, tomorrow..." ~ **St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite (1809)**

## *This and That*

“In broad strokes, militant secular progressives are hell-bent on subverting the cherished moral virtues of life, family, chastity, work, responsibility, and piety. America is drowning in a sea of idolatrous self-worship, pursuing a modern version of ‘bread and circuses’ through increasingly violent and vulgar forms of entertainment and self-expression, a permanent welfare state from cradle to grave, abortion on demand, unrestricted sex, artificially constructed sexual identities, and publicly sanctioned ‘marriages’ between persons of the same sex—a contra naturam abomination that even ancient Rome at its worst moments never imagined.”

Fr. Alexander Webster

R.C. Archbishop Chaput of Philadelphia: “In Philadelphia, I’m struck by how many women I now see on the street wearing the hijab or even the burqa. Some of my friends are annoyed by that kind of “in your face” Islam. But I understand it. The hijab and the burqa say two important things in a morally confused culture: “I’m not sexually available;” and “I belong to a community different and separate from you and your obsessions.” I have a long list of concerns with the content of Islam. But I admire the integrity of those Muslim women.”

In our own time, the so-called digital revolution, in communications especially, is the most spectacular example in human history of a total absorption with means to the exclusion of everything else. It has never occurred to the scientists and technicians responsible for this revolution to ask whether people really have enough of importance to say to one another to justify the astronomical investment in time, talent, technique, and money that the development of the new technology requires. Nor did “anyone” (whoever “anyone” may be) - ever consider whether such a thing as too much communication, or over-communication, could be possible...When everyone seems to know everything, one suspects that one really knows nothing—partly because one doesn’t know what to believe; partly because one cannot possibly discover the truth for oneself; and, again, in part because one suspects or actually assumes that the people in control have the dirt on everyone and are withholding it.

Chilton Williamson

There is no possible perfection on earth because Man creates ever new dissatisfactions for himself. His desires are contradictory: He wants peace and excitement, stasis and novelty, freedom and limits, appetite and its satisfaction, his cake and to eat it. The total number of satisfactions can therefore increase without a decrease in the amount of dissatisfaction. That is why the process of reform will never be done. No sooner is one alleged injustice, unfairness, or obstacle to contentment removed, than another is found equal to the last, especially where there is no religious belief and no real struggle for existence...Satisfaction of desire is never as satisfying as it is expected to be and brings its own dissatisfaction.

Theodore Dalrymple

It isn't about overcoming the struggles but recognizing the blessings in the struggles themselves when rightly approached. Our culture today is an emphasis on avoiding struggles, as if that's life's expectation. We are a spoiled generation who think ourselves entitled to the blessings that we have received rather than recognizing that those blessings are only the result of those who came before us facing and accepting those struggles. *“More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...”* (Romans 5:3)

- Internet comment

It is very difficult to “empty” one’s self on the one hand if you are simultaneously “filling” one’s self with the other. It seems the oft misunderstood bumper sticker which reads “Let go and let God” is true. As my late spiritual father once told me the biggest obstacle in my path to theosis was not Satan; it was me. My daily struggle is in large measure confronting the myriad subtle ways I try and control the “process” in the faithless belief that my desires for my well-being will somehow be a safety net just in case God doesn’t come through the way I think He should. Faith is lived out by those who have come to see that they really \*don’t\* have to worry about the morrow... ~ Gregory Manning

# “THE HOUSE OF GOD AND THE CHURCH SERVICES”

By Priest N. R. Antonov (20<sup>th</sup> C) (excerpt, from The Shepherd, March 2003)

## The Changeable Parts of the Services

In church we read and chant selected sections from the Sacred Scriptures and prayers that were composed by pious Christian writers and hymnographers. These and other hymns and prayers, which are found in the order of the church services, are employed to depict and to glorify events in the three liturgical cycles: the daily, the weekly and the yearly. Very simply, the readings and chanted portions from the sacred books themselves are named after the books from which they are taken; thus psalms are taken from the Psalter, prophecies from those books penned by the Prophets; and Gospel readings from the Gospels. The changeable parts of the services are made up of various hymnographical compositions to be found in various church service books, and they are known by a number of designations. The most important of them are the following:

**1) The Troparion** is the theme hymn which briefly depicts the life of the Saint or the events of the Feast. As examples we have: “Thy Nativity, O Christ our God” ....., “Thou was transfigured on the mountain, O Christ God,” “The truth of things Hath revealed thee to thy flock as a rule of faith, an icon of meekness....” There are various explanations for the derivation of the word Troparion: a) it may derive from the Greek word *tropos*, which means way, mode or image, because it depicts the manner of life of the saint or describes the Festal events; b) it may be from *tropaion*, a trophy or emblem of victory, because it serves as such verbally; c) *tropos* may be used to indicate the metaphorical comparison of the subject with the attributes of some other, and in

troparions the Saints, for instance, might be compared to the sun, the moon or the stars; d) it may even derive from the word *trepo*, indicating changing or turning, because in chanting them often the chant is taken up first by one choir then by the other, changing and turning between the two.

**2) The Kontakion** (from the word *kontos* - short) is a short hymn which sets out the distinguishing mark of the event or Saint celebrated. Others suggest that the name derives from the material on which in early days they were inscribed, and indeed scrolls of parchment, inscribed on both sides were known as kontakions. The kontakions are distinguished from the troparions not only by the form of their composition but also by the place that they are appointed to be chanted in the divine services. As examples of kontakions, we have: “Today the Virgin gives birth”.. “To thee, the Champion Leader ...”

**3) The Magnification** is a hymn sung in praise of the Saint or Feast. In the Russian practice it is sung by the clergy during the All-night Vigil before the Icon in the center of the church, and then repeated by the choirs. In the Greek usage, there is a short hymn which serves a similar purpose, called the Megalynarion, which is sung during the Divine Liturgy almost immediately before the petition, “Having remembered all the saints” (Litany before the Lord’s Prayer). Its form is not the same as the Russian Magnification.

**4) The Stichera or Verses** (from the Greek word *stikhos* - verse) are compositions made up of a series of verses, which are composed in a common metrical form and usually interspersed between Scriptural verses. In each of these verses there is some principal thought which refers to the event or Saint being celebrated.

For each day there are several of these series of verses and they are designated by the place in which they are used in the divine services. There are the stichera, for instance, on "Lord, I call upon Thee," and those on the Praises at the end of Matins. Also there are Scriptural verses near the end of Vespers and Matins to which stichera are appointed, and so these are called the Aposticha (meaning "on the verses") or in the more common Russian form, "the verses on the verses." In certain places in the divine services, - for instance on Lord, I call upon Thee," - the number of stichera chanted is an indication of the importance of the feast being celebrated, thus, there might be ten verses for a very important commemoration, eight, six or even just three. To help the chanters, in the service books between the scriptural verses, it is indicated where one would start chanting the stichera on each of these occasions. If more verses are needed than are available, some are repeated.

**5) The Theotokion** is a verse whose principal subject is the Theotokos, the Mother of God. It is chanted after the Doxastichon in a stichera series, or after troparions. (The Doxastichon is the verse that comes after "Glory to the Father" - from the Greek, *doxa*, glory). On "Lord, I call," on Saturday evenings for the Feast of the Resurrection (and again on Friday evenings - the Leavetaking of that week), we chant the Dogmatic Theotokion. This derives its name from the fact that it clearly expresses the dogma (teaching) of the Incarnation of the Word of God from the All-holy Virgin. There are dogmatic Theotokions in each of the eight tones (melodies). There are also Stavro-Theotokions; these are chanted in the services for Wednesday and Friday and refer to the Mother of God at the Cross of her Son (from the Greek, *stavros*, cross).

**6) The Akathist** - a long composition of twelve alternating Kontakions and ikoses (in this case,

hymns of praise), the first pair being repeated at the end. The word *akathist* means "not sitting," because in church one stands while it is being chanted. The only Akathist appointed to be read in church is the original one, that to the Mother of God, which is used in Great Lent, but there are Akathists to the Savior and to various Saints and Icons. In relatively modern times, when attendance at the daily appointed services in church has dwindled, the chanting of akathists has become immensely popular among the Slavic Orthodox. It has been suggested that this is because the laudatory exclamations within the ikoses are short and much more readily understood by the laity than the more complicated poetic and grammatical forms in other types of hymnography.

**7) Antiphons** are hymns for which two choirs chant verse by verse alternately.

**8) The Prokeimenon** - this is a word which could be translated *prelude*. It means that which comes before, and it consists of two (or more) Psalm verses which are appointed before the reading of the Epistle and Gospel, or in Vespers before the Old Testament readings (Actually at Vespers, there is a prokeimenon every day, even though on most days no Old Testament readings are appointed). The prokeimenon verses reflect the essential message of the commemoration and act as an introduction to the scriptural readings. There are daily prokeimenons appointed for Vespers and the Liturgy, and festal ones, used in Matins and again in the Liturgy. To give an idea of the type of thing appointed - on Feasts of the Apostles we use the verse, "Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth...", and for the Theotokos, we use, "I shall commemorate thy name in every generation and generation" (see also Luke 1:48).

**9) The Communion Hymn** is a verse chanted very slowly during the communion of the clergy and before that of the laity.

**10) The Canon** is a long composition written in honor of a Feast or Saint, which is chanted and read at the Matins and sometimes at Compline. The word, *canon*, from the Greek, means a *rule*. A Canon is divided into nine odes, although usually the second one is missing because it is only used in Great Lent. Each ode is again divided into several distinct parts. The first of these is the *Irmos*, which is sung and which properly sets the form for the following verses within the ode. These other hymns are called *troparions*, or simply verses. Between these verses, there are short refrains. The first of these address the principal subject of the Canon (e.g. "Glory to Thy holy Resurrection, O Lord;" "Most holy Mother of God, save us;" "Holy Hierarch N, pray unto God for us!").

The penultimate one is "Glory to the Father,..." and the last one (which is usually addressed to the Theotokos), "Now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen." The number of verses on each ode varies, but often canons are combined, and the rank of the Feast will indicate how many verses are to be read on each ode.

The nine Biblical Odes of the Old and New Testaments form the basis of the form of the Canon. In olden times, these nine Biblical Odes were used in the church services, but now except the second one in Great Lent, the actual scriptural texts are omitted and only the hymns based on them chanted. The first of the Biblical odes is the song of the God-seer Moses, sung when he had brought his people across the Red Sea (Exodus 15:1- 19). The second, used only in Lent, because of its more penitential nature is also the composition of Moses, written after the Law had been written (Deut.32:1-43). The third is the song of the

Prophetess Hannah (1 Kings 2:1-10), the fourth that of Habbakuk the Prophet (Hab. 3:2-19), the fifth that of Isaias (Is.26:9-10); and the sixth that of Jonah (Jon.2:3-10). The seventh ode is the Prayer of the Holy Three Children (Dan. 3:26-56), and the eighth is their Hymn (Dan 3:57-68). The ninth is the only one to come from the New Testament and is the Song of the Theotokos, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) to which is joined Zacharias' Prayer (Luke 1:68-79). Originally, verses from these Biblical songs were read or chanted between the verses of the special compositions for each day. This is done only in Great Lent now, and then not fully, although the Magnificat is usually chanted before the reading of the ninth ode of the canon in Matins. The refrains, mentioned above, now replace the scriptural verses.

After the recital of all the verses on each ode of the canon, the *irmos* is chanted a second time, to bring that ode to a conclusion and descend to the next ode. These repeated *irmoses* are called *katavasia*, from the Greek, *I descend*. Often special ones are appointed appropriate to the Feast being celebrated or one shortly to be celebrated.

In its form and content, the canon forms one great poetic composition, and might be called a spiritual poem. In the whole sequence of the services for each Feast of the Church year and for each day of the year, it is probably in the Canon, read in Matins, that we are told the most about the day's celebration and in the most concentrated form.

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**The young novices Timothy and Jonah [the future Elder Moses of Optina and his brother] profited from the instruction of the ascetic elders of Sarov. Once Timothy heard the following wonderful exhortation from St. Seraphim, "While you are standing in church, you must say the Jesus Prayer. Then you will also hear the church service distinctly."**

## St. Paisios on Self-Love ~

### *On acquiring freedom from the slavery of our self-love*

*“[Geronda's response to the comment of someone who complained that, being weak physically, he was having difficulty with sacrifice and self-denial.] ‘A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise.’ (Psalm 50:17) You do not overcome self-love by lifting another's heavy load - this will not be asked of you by God, since you do not have the physical strength - but by humbling yourself and bearing a remark or injustice. And if you add to that just a little bit of physical effort out of love and good will, do you realize how much God helps then?”*

“Physical effort subjects the body to the spirit. Fasting and vigils and every ascetic practice, when done out of love for Christ and in conjunction with the struggle to cast out the passions of the soul, are helpful. For if one does not struggle to uproot the passions of the soul - pride, envy, anger - and practices only one form of bodily asceticism, he will nurture his passions with pride.

“Self-love is to do the will of the old man within you; that is, to love that old man within. Gluttony and egoism, obstinacy and envy — all have self love as their source. And so you see that one person seeks to accommodate only himself out of self-love, without any regard for others. Another person makes meticulous arrangements for his food, his sleep, so that nothing disturbs his well-being.

Another desires to be taken into account, to be held in esteem. If he is slighted in the very least, if he doesn't get his way, he reacts badly. He thinks: *‘Why aren't they taking me into consideration? I'll show them!’* Indeed, self-love is a terrible thing!”

“The will contains our self within it; it has self-love. Whoever doesn't investigate whether that which comforts him also comforts someone else, starts by making commands like: *‘I want this; I want that,’* or *‘Why didn't you do this for me? Why didn't you give that to me?’* will, in the end, be found to have been directed by the devil.”

“If one places his self in all the things he wants, can he also have room for Christ? When he does not have his own self, and - instead - has the One, the most important, that is, Christ, then he has everything. One who does not have Christ, has nothing. If a person throws away his own self, God will give him everything in a marvelous way.”

“When I say to throw away the self, I mean to throw away our passions — to be divested of the old man within. For a grown person who is aware of the consequences, it is rather grave to say: *‘I cannot throw away my own self.’* If someone were to tell you: *‘Take a sledgehammer and knock down this wall,’* when you are only used to using a pen to write, then it is justifiable for you to say: *‘I can't do that.’* But you don't need physical strength for divesting yourself of the old man within. All you need is humility.”

“Normally, we should give our body only what it needs. Desire is one thing; need is quite another. It is one thing to want to please the body, and another thing to give the body what it needs. ... If a person limits his intake, then he can easily practice self-control. Otherwise he will become a slave to his stomach, which will then require being full.”

“Nowadays, there is a greater or less degree of self-love in most people. The spirit of sacrifice does not exist. Another spirit has entered our life: *‘Let nothing bad happen to me.’* Do you know how much pain I feel when I see how people are? Recently, when I was at the hospital, I saw how a bed-ridden patient was transferred to another room. There was a male nurse who did not assist at all, even though that was his job. *‘I can't do it. My back is hurting me,’* he said, with such an air of indifference! My, my, to see such an inhuman human.”

It is from this earthly life that we begin living either Paradise or Hell.”

## A letter from prison ~ New Martyr Valeriu Gafencu of Romania

January 29, 1946

Life is something other than what people imagine. Man himself is something other than what he imagines himself to be. The Truth is something other than what the human mind imagines. I want to be sincere and open, down to the deepest fibers of my soul. From the very moment in which I first set foot in prison, I wondered why I was locked up. In the realm of social life, regarding my relations with the world in which I lived, I was always considered to be someone very good, an example of moral conduct. If I entered into conflict with anyone, it was only for the sake of Truth. After much struggle and unrest, after much pain, when the cup of suffering had filled up, there came a holy day, in June 1943, when I fell to the ground, on my knees, my forehead to the floor, my heart crushed, in an outburst of tears. I asked God to grant me light. On that day, I had lost all confidence in Man. I realized perfectly well that I was in truth, so why then was I suffering? In all my soul full of spirited self-assurance there had remained only love. No one understood me.

In my prolonged weeping I started to do prostrations. And suddenly—O, Lord! How great art Thou, O Lord!—I saw my entire soul filled with sins. I found within myself the root of all human sins. Oh, so many sins, and the eyes of my soul hardened by pride had not seen them! How great is God! Seeing all my sins, I felt the need to shout them out loud, to cast them away from me. And a deep peace, a deep wave of light and love poured into my heart. As soon as the door opened, I left my cell and I went to those whom I knew loved me the most and to those who hated me and had sinned the most against me and I confessed to them openly and plainly, “I am the most sinful man. I don’t deserve the trust of even the lowliest of men. I am blessed!” Everyone was dumbfounded. Some of them looked at me with contempt, others with indifference, and some looked at me with a love that they themselves would not have been able to explain. Only one single person said to me, “You deserve to be kissed!” But I fled back quickly to my cell, buried my head in my pillow and continued weeping while thanking and glorifying God.

On that day, I began a conscientious struggle with sin. If you could only know how difficult the war with sin is! I want you to know that I struggled very much with sin not only here, but also when I was free. [Here he testifies that, although he was tempted physically, he did not fall, but remained pure.] In prison, I examined my soul and I realized that, even though I had not sinned in deed, I had sinned in word and especially in thought. After a deep examination of conscience, I went to a priest and confessed. My confession unburdened me. And I carry on a continuous struggle. The struggle does not cease with death. Without repentance no one can take even one step forward. Anyone who flees from the reality of his own soul is a liar. What is life? It is a gift from God that is given to us in order to purify our souls from sin and to prepare ourselves, through Christ, to receive eternal life. What is Man? A being created through the limitless love of God and to whom God gave the choice between holiness and death. Be very careful! In social life, people regard each other and judge each other not according to what they are in essence, but according to what they seem to be in form. Have no illusions about Man – anyone who does will suffer bitterly—but love Him. Only one is perfect, only one is good, only one is pure: Christ-God! And now: What is the Truth? The Truth is Christ, the Word of God. Seek to draw near to Christ sincerely and leave the world and its sins in peace!

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**Be attentive to your thoughts which are passionate because of your imagination; drive them away immediately as soon as they show themselves**, for if they remain there is danger: death to the wretched soul! Likewise, drive away shameful thoughts with anger and with the Prayer; the Prayer is fire that burns the demons and they flee. Be attentive to your mouth, and firstly to your mind; do not let evil thoughts start conversation for you. Let not your mouth say words which will possibly wound your brother.

~ Elder Ephraim of Philotheou

## The Holy Fathers on Thoughts (VI)

Let us remind ourselves of the manner in which the temptations of the enemy act. The sweep of the enemy's sword is the introduction of a thought into heart: the devil expects that the heart will respond to it, and on this assumption proceeds to build up a strong temptation. For example, you think of a person who has offended you: this is the sweep of the enemy's sword. When the heart responds to this thought by harboring an unpleasant feeling toward the offender, this means the sword has penetrated as far as the soul and as wounded it. Immediately the enemy closes with the soul and stirs up there a storm of enmity and revengefulness. But when the heart is always ready to forgive offenses, keeping itself in a state of serene meekness and peace towards everyone, then no matter how vividly the enemy presents the idea of the offender to the soul, there is no response in the heart; and so the enemy will have no opening through which to introduce his temptation. The sweep of his sweep sword will rebound from the heart as from a warrior clad in armor.

~ **St. Theophan the Recluse** (The Art of Prayer)

The most important work in the spiritual struggle is to enter the heart and there to wage war with Satan; to hate Satan and to fight him by opposing his thoughts. If a man keeps his body outwardly free from lust and corruption, and yet inwardly commits adultery before God, by fornication in his thoughts, then there is no profit whatever in keeping the body pure. ~ **Nicephorus the Solitary**

My child, do you want to crush the head of the serpent? Openly reveal your thoughts in confession. The strength of the devil lies in cunning thoughts. Do you hold on to them? He remains hidden. Do you bring them to the light? He disappears. And then Christ rejoices the prayer progresses, and the light of grace heals and brings peace to your nous and heart. **Elder Joseph the Hesychast**

"God listens, not to our voice, but to our heart. He does not need to be prodded with shouts, since He sees our thoughts. **St. Cyprian of Carthage**

One man received a thought and accepted it without examination. Another received a thought and tested its truth. Which of them acted with greater reverence? **St. Cosmas Aitolos**

Like a young calf which, in its search for grazing, finds itself on a ledge surrounded by precipices, the soul is gradually led astray by its thoughts. When a thought lingers within a man, this indicates his attachment to it; but when it is quickly destroyed, this signifies his opposition and hostility to it.

Having hidden your virtue, do not be filled with pride, imagining you have achieved righteousness. For righteousness is not only to hide your good actions, but also never to think forbidden thoughts.

Do not ask how a poor man can be self-indulgent when he lacks the material means. For it is possible to be self-indulgent in a yet more despicable way through one's thoughts.

In our ascetic warfare we can neither rid ourselves of evil thoughts apart from their causes, nor of their causes without ridding ourselves of the thoughts. For if we reject the one without the other, before long the other will involve us in them both at once.

When you are wronged and your heart and feelings are hardened, do not be distressed, for this has happened providentially; but be glad and reject the thoughts that arise within you, knowing that if they are destroyed at the stage when they are only provocations, their evil consequences will be cut off; whereas if the thoughts persist the evil may be expected to develop. **St. Cosmas Aitolos (1779)**

Prayer is the laying aside of thoughts. ~ Evagrius Ponticus