



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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February 19, 2017

Sunday of the Last Judgment

Meatfare Sunday

Cheesefare Week

Apostles Archippus & Philemon of the 70 with Martyr Apphia (1st C)
 St. Dositheos of Gaza (7th C), St. Philothea, Nun-martyr of Athens (1589)
 St. Theodore of Sanaxar (1791)

The trumpet shall sound
 and the graves be opened!
 All people will rise in trembling!
 The righteous will rejoice,
 as they receive their reward,
 but the wicked will depart
 to eternal fire with wailing
 and horror. O Lord of glory,
 have mercy on us!
 Number us with those
 who love Thee, O Master!
 For Thou alone art good!

✠ Tues. Feb 21 6:30pm Inquirer's Class

✠ Wed. Feb 22 6:30pm Compline with Canon of Repentance

➤ Next Sunday is Forgiveness Sunday ~ Great Lent begins Monday, Feb. 27.

First Week of Lent – Mon-Thurs: Great Canon / Friday, Mar. 3 – First Presanctified Liturgy

On the Dread Judgment ~ St. John Maximovitch {1896–1966}

✠ The Prophet Daniel, speaking of the Dread Judgment, relates how the Ancient of Days, the judge, is on His throne, and before Him is a river of fire. Fire is a purifying element. Fire scorches sin, it burns it up, and woe also burns it up; if sin has become natural to a man, then it burns up the man himself as well.

That fire will flare up inside a man: on seeing the Cross, some will rejoice, while others will fall into despair, confusion, terror. In this way, men will immediately be separated. In the Gospel narrative, some stand to the right of the Judge, some to the left — their inner consciousness separated them. The very state of a man's soul casts him to one side or the other, to the right or to the left.

The more consciously and persistently a man strives toward God in his life, the greater will be his joy when he hears the words: "Come unto Me, ye blessed"; and conversely, those same words will call forth the fire of horror and torment on those who did not want Him, who fled or fought or blasphemed Him during their life.

The Dread Judgment knows no witnesses or charge-sheets. Everything is recorded in men's souls, and these records, these "books" are open. Everything becomes clear to all and to oneself, and the state of a man's soul assigns him to the right or to the left.

When the "books" are open, it will become clear to all that the roots of all vices are in man's soul. Here is a drunkard, a fornicator; some may think that when the body dies the sin dies as well. No; the inclination was in the soul, and to the soul the sin was sweet.

And if [the soul] has not repented of that sin and has not become free of it, it will come to the Dread Judgment with the same desire for the sweetness of sin and will never satisfy its desire. In it will be the suffering of hatred and malice. This is the state of hell. The "fiery Gehenna" is the inner fire; this is the flame of vice, the flame of weakness and malice.

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✠ If you do not feel pity for the sinner destined to suffer the pains of hell-fire, it means that the grace of the Holy Spirit is not in you, but an evil spirit. While you are still alive, therefore, strive by repentance to free yourself from this spirit.

St. Silouan the Athonite (1938)

This and That

- I don't know how you re-establish those social bonds (of a society) when we have created a culture of autonomous individualists who don't order their lives toward a common religion, or anything higher than what they desire. As sociologist Christian Smith and his colleagues put it, there is something deeply wrong with American culture today. We have eaten all our seed corn. Yes, we need a new politics, but politics can at best be only a partial answer to our crisis.... but can a nation in which nearly everyone has come to view freedom as the absence of restraint on the autonomous individual's will really bring itself to see human nature as it really is, much less develop policies and laws to account for that? I'm skeptical.
– Rod Dreher
- It may be argued against this position that Western culture was never deeply believing—at least not in the Christian manner which, in a number of its most persuasive varieties, encouraged the seeking after individual salvations at the expense of a collective one. Even so, Christian culture survived because it superintended the organization of Western personality in ways that produced the necessary corporate identities, serving a larger communal purpose institutionalized in the churches themselves. ... What binding address now describes our successor culture? In what does the self now try to find salvation, if not in the breaking of corporate identities and in an acute suspicion of all normative institutions?
Philip Rieff, in *The Triumph of The Therapeutic*,
- Islamic Sharia Law rejects freedom of speech as much as freedom of religion. It rejects the idea of equal rights between men and women as much as between Muslim and non-Muslim. It brooks no separation between spiritual life and civil society. It is a comprehensive framework for human life, dictating matters of government, economy; and combat, along with personal behavior such as contact between the sexes and personal hygiene. Sharia aims to rule both believers and non-believers, and it affirmatively sanctions jihad in order to do so.
– Andrew McCarthy, *Imprimus*

No Christianity without the Church

There is no imagined version of Christianity within the New Testament that exists outside the Church. Anyone who says that they have a "relationship with Jesus" and do not need the Church is in deep delusion. There is no such Jesus.

A not inaccurate polemic against this reductionist form of Christianity is to describe it as an increasing Islamification of the faith. I have written before of the influence of Islam on the notion of Sola Scriptura. Christianity, viewed as essentially an act of submission to God through Christ, is not Christianity. It is a Christianized Islam. It's useful. It need have none of the problems concomitant with a genuine historical Church. It is quite portable and can be kept entirely private, offering no disturbance to the structures and agreements of the secular world. Individual Christians are never a problem for the world. It's only when two or three of them gather together that they become dangerous.

The Church is the beginning and foretaste of the "all things" that are our salvation. Salvation, when understood properly, cannot be tied to an isolated verse. For example: He who believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16). This in no way is meant to say that simply belief and baptism are sufficient unto themselves for salvation. "As many as are baptized into Christ are baptized into His death," St. Paul says, "and raised in the likeness of His resurrection." Additionally, "...by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..." (1Co 12:13) Baptism is not an isolated event, or an act of magic. It is the gateway into the death and resurrection of Christ, while the Church is nothing other than the death and resurrection of Christ through time. And, in time, we shall see that everything was always the Church, from the first pronouncement, "Let there be light."

~ Fr. Stephen Freeman, An Unnecessary Salvation, Glory to God for All Things Blog

- But a "tolerant" society determined to tolerate the avowedly intolerant won't be in business for long... You can have pluralism or Islam, but not both.
– Mark Steyn

On Why God Made Those Who are to be Punished

St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359)

~ "He did not make them to be punished, but to be saved."

As for those who accuse God of calling people who were not going to act in obedience to Him, no doubt they would also have held Him responsible for the destruction of such people, had He not called them. He called them so that no one could say that He was the cause of their being punished. Why was it, then, that He created men who were to be damned? He did not make them to be punished, but to be saved, as is clear from the fact that He called them. If He wanted to damn anyone at all, He would not have called everyone to salvation. If God led me and called me to salvation through His goodness, but I turned out evil, ought my wickedness, before it even existed, to have overcome His eternal goodness and have thwarted it? That would be totally unreasonable. People who assert otherwise and make accusations against the Creator are actually saying that it was wrong to make human beings rational. For reason would be pointless without free choice and the power of self-governance. **How can someone have the freedom to choose and the power to act freely, unless he were able to do evil, should he so wish? If he could not be wicked, nor could he, presumably, be good.**

Anyone who states that God should not have made those people who will be punished, is also saying that He should not have made those who will be saved, or any rational free beings at all. As everything else was made for the sake of mankind, such a person is contending that God should not have created anything. Do you see the absurdity of this? God made the human race rational and free, and because of men's tendency to please themselves and the different uses to which they put their freedom, some were to become bad, and others good. What should God, Who is truly good, have done? Ought He not to have brought good men into being on account of those who would turn evil? That would be the greatest injustice imaginable. For even if there were only going to be one good person, it would not have been just to stop creating, since one who does God's will superior to innumerable sinners. (*Homily 41.5-6*)

Man's Freedom ~ Elder Sophrony of Essex 1896-1993

There is a domain in human life where a limit is set even to love — where even love is not supreme. This domain is freedom. Man's freedom is positive, real. It concedes no determinism (predestination) in his destiny, so that neither the sacrifice of Christ Himself nor the sacrifices of all those who have trodden in His footsteps lead necessarily to victory.

The Lord said, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth' (that is 'crucified on the Cross') 'will draw all men unto me'. (cf. John 12:32) Thus Christ's love hopes to draw all men to Him, and so reaches out to the last hell. There may be some — whether many or few, we do not know — who will meet even this perfect love, this perfect sacrifice, with a rejection, even on the eternal level, and declare, 'I want no part in it'. (It was this recognition of this abyss of freedom which prompted the Fathers of the Church to repudiate the determinist theories of the Origenists at the Fifth Ecumenical Council.)

What was made known to the Staretz (St. Silouan of Mt. Athos, Elder Sophrony's spiritual father) in his vision of Christ outweighed all doubt and hesitation. He knew that it was the Almighty God that had appeared to him. He was sure that the humility of Christ which he had come to know, and the love which filled him to the limits of his strength, were the action of God the Holy Spirit. He knew in the Holy Spirit that God is boundless love and mercy, yet knowledge of this truth did not lead him to conclude that 'anyway, we shall all be saved'. Awareness of the possibility of eternal damnation remained deeply engrained in his spirit.

Hell Fire ~ Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky, 1863-1936)

But what is the fire, making sinners burn? — First of all, it is the same fire, which will enlighten the righteous since the day, “when all deeds, good and evil, will be tried by fire,” as we read in the Canon to the Guardian Angel; it is like the Chaldean furnace: “A furnace once in Babylon, by divine decree, divided its action, burning up the Chaldeans but refreshing the faithful”. The fire burns the wood, hay and straw, but cleanses gold and silver. The sinners shall be cast “*into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (Math. 13:42-43). Similarly Apostle Paul tells about one and the same fire — the Divine touch — that influences different souls in a different way.

“Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:13-15).

In this sense the Lord is called as consuming fire in the Old and New Testaments. Isaiah calls Him eternal fire, eternal flame, which burns the sinners. “The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions” and further (Is. 33:14-15).

Do not you want to say that the lot of the righteous and sinful will be the same if to look at them from aside: it is the state of constant vision of God and the impossibility to hide from Him — but for one it will be the source of pleasure, and for others — of tortures, forthcoming from their hatred and powerless rage? — Or do you want to say that the eternal fire is nothing but the Divine presence, which is so hard to bear for His enemies? I did not mean “nothing but” but what was meant is “in the first place”. To say “nothing but” will be possible only in the case, when someone compares the eternal fire with material fire ... and only if it is possible to bring this idea together with that indisputable truth about the resurrection of the body, so precious for most ancient Christians and so obviously revealed to us through the Word of God.

But, in the vast course of dogmatics there is no expression of the holy Fathers about the material fire in hell. But, certainly, we would not dare to deny the presence of physical tortures there, — it is only easier to talk about the soul in respect of future life, than in respect of the resurrected body, for as well in this life the spiritual aspect is more understandable for us, then that of flesh and matter, as correctly states one Russian philosopher, who passed away long before. No one could yet define what matter is, and it is more difficult to imagine, which qualities of matter will definitely remain in the resurrected flesh.

(Life Beyond the Grave and Eternal Sufferings)

St. Ambrose of Milan ca. 338-397

That gnashing is not of bodily teeth, nor is that perpetual fire made up of physical flames, nor is the worm a bodily one. These things are spoken of, however, because, just as worms are born from massive overeating and fevers, so too, if anyone does not boil away his sins... he will be burned up in his own fire and devoured by his own worms. Whence also Isaias says: “Walk in the light of your fire, and the flame which you have ignited.” (Isa. 50:11) It is a fire which the gloominess of sins generates. It is a worm insofar as irrational sins of the soul stab at mind and heart and eat the guts out of your conscience.

(Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, 7.205)

THE WORLDLY MIND

Soul-Profiting Stories From Monk Savas (disciple of Elder Ephraim of Filotheou) from a homily he delivered at Panagia Prousiotissa Monastery in Lawsonville, NC on Saturday, February 12, 2000.

The mindset of the world is the cause of much evil and suffering. The worldly mind is worse even than the devil himself, in that it kills the soul slowly. The cause of this is frequent exposure of our minds to the ways of the world.

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain gave the analogy of the frog to demonstrate this. He explained that when you want to cook a frog, you do not directly throw it into a pot of boiling water. Rather, you gently place the frog into a pot of cool water set on a burner and slowly turn up the heat. Unknowingly the frog will adjust itself to the heat and without noticing will become cooked.

The worldly mind works the same upon us. The more we expose ourselves to its flames, the more silent our conscience becomes, and the more we are destroyed. Under such conditions, only a miracle can save us.

A theologian from Africa once told the following fable: Once upon a time there was a cat who was chosen to become King of a particular forest. Overjoyed upon his election, the cat dropped everything he was doing and accepted the great honor. Dignitaries came and sat the cat upon a luxurious carriage, crowned him with a magnificently brilliant crown, and processed the newly elected cat to his castle to be ceremoniously enthroned. Along the way the cat spotted some mice in the distance. Immediately the cat sprung from his carriage and chased the mice into the dense forest, losing his way back to the procession and the once in a lifetime opportunity to become King.

This is how the worldly mind works. The cat forgot his higher calling by succumbing to his old nature, in turn forfeiting his glorious throne. The mice in the story are vainglory, money, lust, and the pride of life, that is, all those things which prevent us from becoming inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal salvation.

A mother and her young daughter asked Fr. Savas a question one time while he was visiting a monastery in Toronto. The mother had requested Fr. Savas to admonish her daughter that dancing and going to dances were a sin.

Fr. Savas responded: "No, dancing is not a sin." Delighted in her victory, the daughter affirmed to her mother that she can go to dances on the monk's word and that she will be fine. As a last word, Fr. Savas gave an analogy which he learned from Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain. He said that when you take a very wet sponge and place it next to a fire, of course the wet sponge will be fine due to its dampness. Eventually however the sponge will dry up after time and exposure to such heat, and burn.

So it is with frequent exposure to dances. Initially you will be fine. As time goes on, however, and you keep going to dances, you will experience many soul destroying desires and eventually give in. He advised the girl to attend these dances with her parents.

THE ASCETIC AND THE ROBBER

From a handwritten Gerontikon of the Sacred Monastery Filotheou of the Holy Mountain, original source: "Hagiorite Witness," a quarterly publication of the sacred monastery of Xiropotamou, Holy Mountain, Issue No. 4, June-August 1989.

Our God is not a "Prosecutor" of His creatures; on the contrary, He seeks opportunities for their salvation. He is a God of love; a God Who deserves to be loved, even though His love is rarely reciprocated. God is also not "fair," at least in the human sense of justice. He "shortchanges" His creatures—and as a matter of fact in a scandalous manner—when He seeks to save them. That is our God! A God Who vindicates a robber out of the excess of His love and Who looks for opportunities in the unlikeliest of places, in order to display a love that annuls our own kind of "justice." The following story best exemplifies this love of our God and Creator.

There used to be an elderly recluse and anchorite, who lived an ascetic life in a desert for seventy long years, with fasting and celibacy and vigil. However, during all those years that he served God, he was not favoured with any vision or revelation by God.

This gave rise to concern, and the following thought entered his mind:

— Could it be that there is a reason I am not aware of, which makes my asceticism unfavorable to God, and my labours unacceptable? That must be the reason I am not able to have any revelation and see any mystery...

With these thoughts in mind, the elder began to beseech and ask the Lord even more fervently, by praying and saying:

— Lord, if my asceticism is favorable to You, and you have accepted my labours, this sinner and unworthy one beseeches You to favour me also, with just a droplet of one of Your gifts, so that I might be informed with the revelation of a mystery that You have heard my prayer, and thus spend my ascetic life informed and with confidence...

Having thus prayed, a voice sent by God came to the saintly elder, saying:

— If you indeed desire to see My glory, then go into the innermost depths of the desert, and mysteries shall be revealed to you.

As soon as the elder heard this voice, he immediately left his cell; but no sooner had he walked for some distance, he was approached by a robber, who, upon spotting the elderly Abba, rushed towards him, with the intent to murder him. As soon as he had grabbed hold of him, he said:

— It is a fortunate moment that I encountered you, old man; now I can complete my business and be saved. Because we robbers have this custom and this particular law and belief—that whoever is able to commit one hundred murders, will definitely go to heaven. Well, after having

strived so hard until this day, I have so far accomplished only ninety-nine murders, and, lacking only one more, I have taken a lot of trouble and care to complete the hundred, in order to be saved. Therefore, I am greatly indebted to you and I thank you, as on this day, because of you, I shall savour Paradise.

On hearing what the robber told him, the elder was taken aback and alarmed at this sudden and unexpected incident. So, he turned his mind's eye upwards towards God, and on thinking over what happened, said the following to Him:

— Was this the glory, my Lord and Master, that You promised to show me, Your servant? Was this the will that You inspired to this sinner—to leave his cell and to inform him with such a terrible mystery? Are You rewarding with such a reward the labours of my asceticism that I have borne for Your sake? Now I have truly realized, Lord, that all my labours were in vain; and that every one of my prayers has been regarded as a detestable abomination. However, I thank You for Your philanthropy, Lord, because you educate my unworthiness the way that You know—as befits me for my innumerable sins—and that must be why you delivered me into the hands of a robber and murderer.

Having said this, and feeling deeply troubled, the old man became thirsty, so he said to the robber:

— My child, because of my sinfulness, God has delivered me into your hands to be murdered, and thus your desire will be fulfilled in the manner that you desire, and I shall be deprived of my life—being the evil man that I am. For this, I beg you to do me one favour and a small errand and bring me a drink of water, then you may cut off my head.

On hearing these words by the elder, and in the desire to fulfil his business, the robber sheathed his dagger—which he had bared—then took out of his bosom a flask, which he took to a stream that was nearby and stooped down to fill it and bring it back to the elder to quench his thirst. And just as he was filling the flask, he drew his last breath and died on the spot.

Well, seeing that quite some time had passed and the robber did not reappear, the elder wondered to himself:

— Perhaps he was tired and lay down and fell asleep, and that is why he is delayed; so I am now permitted to leave and return to my cell. However, because I am also old, I am afraid, as I do not have enough strength to run, and because of my frailty, I shall tire quickly and he will overtake me. Then, having angered him in this way, he will want to torture me mercilessly, cutting me up into many pieces while I am still alive. Therefore I should not leave, but instead, I should go to the stream, and see what he is doing.

So the elder went forth, after making all these thoughts, and he discovered the robber laying dead; upon seeing him, he stood in wonder and surprise. Then lifting his arms up towards heaven he said:

— My merciful Lord, unless You reveal this mystery to me, I shall not lower my arms. Please therefore have pity on my troubles and reveal what this occurrence was about.

And with this prayer of the elder, an Angel of the Lord came to him and explained:

— Do you see this person, Abba, who lays dead before you? It was for your sake that he was gripped by sudden death, so that you would escape from being murdered. Now proceed to bury him as one who was saved. Because the obedience that he showed you—by sheathing his murder weapon in order to bring you a drink of water to quench the fire of your thirst—was the act that appeased God's wrath and rendered him accepted as a worker of obedience. Furthermore, his admission of the ninety-nine murders was taken into account as Confession. Therefore bury him, and count him among the saved. And know by this the ocean of God's philanthropy and compassion. Now return joyfully to your cell, and henceforth be more willing in your prayers and do not sorrow and say that you are a sinner and devoid of revelations. Behold, the Lord revealed a mystery to you. And know this also: that all of the labours of your asceticism are welcome before God, for there is no labour performed for the Lord's sake that does not appear before Him.

On hearing this, the elder buried the dead man as instructed. +



We can keep guard over the whole world by keeping guard over the atmosphere of heaven within us; for if we lose the Kingdom of Heaven, we will save neither ourselves nor others. He who has the Kingdom of God within himself will imperceptibly pass it on to others. People will be attracted to the peace and warmth in us; they will want to hear us, and the atmosphere of heaven will gradually pass on to them. It is not even necessary to speak to people about this. The atmosphere heaven will radiate from us even when we keep silent, or talk about ordinary things. It will radiate from us even though we may not be aware of it.

The Lord is present everywhere, and nothing happens without His will or His permission—either in this life or eternity. When we accept this idea, everything is made easier. If God would allow us to do everything the way we desire and when we desire, this would certainly result in catastrophe. One cannot even imagine the chaos that would occur.

— Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

Spiritual Cancer of Insensibility

“Insensibility both in body and in the spirit is deadened feeling, which from long sickness and negligence, lapses into loss of feeling.” ~ St. John Climacus (The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1991 rev. ed., p124).

First of all, let us think about what this word *insensibility* means. Sensibility, its opposite, is defined as the “capacity to feel physically or emotionally... sensitiveness” (Pocket Oxford Dictionary). Add the prefix “in” and it means lacking the capacity to feel, unaware, callused and lacking sensitivity. The Fathers unanimously warn us about this wily condition: it creeps into our life. We are often not aware of it—like a deadly cancer that is found suddenly, without warning and often too late. “Insensibility is negligence that has become habit” (ibid.).

Insensibility starts with a seemingly very small wound of negligence and if not treated by a spiritual physician can become a deadly habit to break. It can be likened to the way that a small mole on the skin that, often irritated, can suddenly turn into a deadly cancer. “This type of spiritual cancer... is caused by intemperance in little things.” (St. Dorotheos of Gaza, Practical Teaching on the Christian Life.)

To recognize when we are afflicted with this disease, we need only become aware of our own behavior. For example, it is possible to talk of temperance and self-control but be a glutton. Not only overweight people are gluttons—a person can be thin and still prefer variety of tasty foods or overeat beyond his actual need. The one who is afflicted with insensibility can talk of fasting, then overeat and repent—yet will give way again soon thereafter. Great Lent can help us become aware of how little food it takes to keep going or how food that is simple can equally satisfy the body’s needs. St. John of the Ladder gives us further examples of insensitivity:

“One can also teach meekness and during the teaching get angry. He might also teach what he knows about vigil yet sleeps on the spot or lie may stress obedience yet is the first to disobey. He may hear about death and the terrible judgement and even shed tears and with the tears still in his eyes eagerly go to a meal. It is like a wound that he wants to heal yet keeps irritating it” (Ladder, p.125).

And so this wound festers and grows like a cancer. What are the early warning signs of this dread spiritual disease? St. Dorotheos teaches,

“When somebody begins to say “What does it matter if I say that word? What does it matter if I eat that little thing? What does it matter if I pay attention to that?” From the “What does it matter?” for this and “What does it matter?” for that, one obtains the bad and malignant sore and starts to despise and trample on one’s own conscience in great and important matters. Thus, progressively one is in danger of falling into total insensibility (St. Dorotheos).

Familiarity and ease can also lead us down the same path. In today’s society, unfortunately we have largely lost a sense of reverence and respect for others. This can be seen in our addressing older people and even strangers on a first name basis, and this basic disrespect also extends to our peers. As we become desensitized in these ways, we may carry this attitude further toward our Lord and His Church. For example, how many of us can sense the holiness of a church when we enter it? How many are not bothered upon entering there inappropriately dressed? How many will, during a service of prayer, carry on a worldly conversation with each other instead of conversing with God? The Blessed Elder, St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain warns us:

“An attitude of familiarity and ease in the disciple is the greatest enemy, for it drives away piety and reverence. Insensitivity follows soon after along with rebellion and indifference, at first towards minor sins, for which he becomes accustomed to (sic) and regards as natural. As a result, he has no rest in the depth of the soul, but only anguish. Neither can he grasp what is wrong.”

There is just that gnawing sense that something is wrong with our society or maybe something is wrong with us. That “something” is the distance from God and most of us are so desensitized that we cannot begin to find the cause of this wound in our souls. We just feel a bitter need and emptiness inside which we try to fill with material things. We have forgotten how to be silent, how to seek the truth of our Lord, and how to turn away from all the distractions and noise our world now offers. Silence is one way back to the knowledge of God. Silence is very necessary for learning to speak to God and more importantly to hear Him. It can also increase our sensitivity to other people—when the heart and mind are quiet, we are better able to hear what the other is saying. For these reasons, the holy Fathers of the desert kept silence. Words that seem insignificant can often destroy silence. “First we speak a good word, then an idle one, and then soon after we are making a jesting word, then an ill-natured one” (Fr. Lazarus Moore, *Lecture on Monastic Life*, 1953). Little by little, we lose the grace of God’s presence, becoming insensitive to God and people.

We can avoid the disease of insensibility, whether we live in a monastery or in the world, by being watchful. If we desire this, all we need to do initially is to ask, and the Lord will help us. Do not do this lightly. When the help, the courage and the opportunities come to be cured of this terrible spiritual cancer, we must be ready and willing to take the medicine. Remember that as the cause of this illness can be varied so can the cure. But if we ask and then try even with a little effort on our part to live in temperance, watchfulness and silence, then we may come to experience the joy of our Lord even here on earth! ~ *Life Transfigured, Holy Transfiguration Monastery*, 2003

On Self-Mercy and Self-Condensation ~ St. John Chrysostom (347-407)

He says, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, (no longer of the Father; for not He laid the curse upon them, but their own works), into the everlasting fire, prepared, not for you, but for the devil and his angels.’ For concerning the Kingdom indeed, when He had said, ‘Come, inherit the kingdom, He added, prepared for you before the foundation of the world’; but concerning the fire, no longer so, but, prepared for the devil. I, says He, prepared the kingdom for you, but the fire no more for you, but for the devil and his angels; but since you cast yourselves therein, impute it to yourselves. And not in this way only, but by what follows also, like as though He were excusing Himself to them, He sets forth the causes. (*Homilies on Matthew, Homily 79*)

On the Ultimate Fate of the Passionate Soul ~ St. Maximus the Confessor (662)

If the soul, as I have said, uses its own powers properly, and if, consistent with God’s purpose, it passes through the sensible world by way of the spiritual principles that exist within it, so that with understanding it arrives at God. If, however, it makes the wrong or mistaken use of these powers, delving into the world in a manner contrary to what is proper, it is obvious that it will succumb to dishonorable passions, and in the coming life will rightly be cast away from the presence of the divine glory, receiving the dreadful condemnation of being estranged from relation with God for infinite ages, a sentence so distressing that the soul will not be able to contest it, for it will have as a perpetually relentless accuser its own disposition, which created for it a mode of existence that in fact did not exist.