



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ January 23, 2011 ✠

Sanctity of Life Sunday

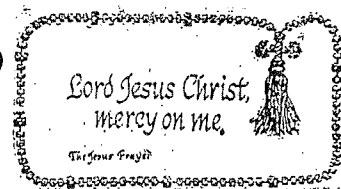
Hieromartyr Clement of Ancyra &

Martyr Agathangelos (296)

St. Paulinus of Nola (431), St. Gennadius of Kostroma (1565)

Staretz John Krestiankin of the Pskov Caves (2006)

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. ~ Psalm 19



⇒ **Tues. Jan. 25 6:30pm Inquirer's Class (final of series)**

The Christian Struggle is glorious!

✠ The Christian struggle is glorious; for the prize is not something ephemeral, but it is eternal glory in Heaven! Blessed is he who is wise in God, for no account will be demanded of him, and he will not find himself in a difficult position when God calls him to give an account for his time on earth.

Elder Ephraim

Incentive, Trial, Training or Recompense

✠ Accidental occurrences, whether good or evil, befall a man as an incentive, or a trial, or for training, or as a recompense. The occurrence which is an incentive is good; the trial is considered evil (by men); but the occurrences for training and for recompense are both (good and evil). There are no chance occurrences, for nothing fortuitous happens to a man, whether good or evil.

St. Isaac the Syrian (7th C - Remembered January 28)

REFLECTION – On Transgressing Love of Parents

How will one who transgresses love toward his parents raise himself toward love for his enemies? Love for one's parents - this is the main and fundamental school of love. Without this school, one can go no further. The Serbian King Dragutin rose up against his father with an army in order to sit on his father's throne. But it so happened that he later broke his leg, and this awakened in him pangs of conscience which did not leave him in peace until his death.

Dragutin withdrew from the throne and relinquished his authority to his younger brother Milutin, and began to widely distribute alms, build churches, and perform other good works. In addition to this, he lived a strict life of asceticism in secret. He girded himself with a belt of reeds around his body, dressed in coarse sackcloth, and prayed to God at night in a secretly dug grave. This penitent king did all this only that God would forgive him the sin of lack of love toward his parents, and God forgave him.

St. Nikolai of Ochrid

REFLECTION - On the Holy Martyrs

Many holy martyrs joyfully received their executioners who were seeking them, and treated them hospitably in their homes while they themselves prepared for death. To entertain one's mortal enemies - is this not an expression of great love toward one's enemies? When King Sapor harshly tortured Acyndinus, Pegasius and others with them, he suddenly went mad, became dumb and unable to speak, and began to claw his face with great fury. Seeing his tormentor in such despair, St. Acyndinus wept and prayed to God for the king and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, speak!" and the king's tongue was loosed and he began to speak. Here is an example of true love for one's enemies! **St. Nikolai of Ochrid**

HOMILY ~ About Peace between the Wolf and the Lamb

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid." (Isaiah 11:6)

Thus, the true Prophet foretold the truth. And he further added: "The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; ...and the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Isaiah 11:6-7). And the child will place his hand in the hole of a poisonous snake [asp] and the snake will not harm him. Brethren, when will this wonder occur? This has already occurred when Christ the wonder-worker appeared on earth. This is a reality of Paradise, which was restored among men with the coming of the Savior upon earth. The Prophet speaks enigmatically but, nevertheless, clearly; enigmatically, for the Prophet does not speak about wild beasts but of men; for his prophecy was clearly fulfilled in Christ's Church. Men, who by their habits, were as wolves, wildcats, lions, bears, oxen, lambs, kids and serpents all stand before the Child of Bethlehem equalized by faith, tamed by grace, illumined by hope and softened by love.

The Prophet further foretells why this will take place. "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). When viewed physically, every man is earth. The man who believes in Christ and, in truth follows after Christ, becomes full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea, which is filled with water. Such were many individuals. Such were even entire companies of ascetics in Egypt, on the Holy Mountain [Athos], on Cyprus, in Russia, in Armenia and in other places.

But this is not all. The knowledge of the Lord has spread today throughout the earth. Holy Scripture is distributed throughout all nations. There are few corners of the earth where the Gospel of Christ is not read, where the name of God is not known and where the Bloodless Sacrifice of the Lord is not offered. Some deny Christ, others embrace Him, some abandon the true Faith and others embrace the true Faith. And thus continues the one struggle throughout the entire world in the sign of the Lord Jesus. The overly-filled waters pour out and flow into empty valleys; the empty valleys become filled and are made equal with the high waters. Everything is not glowing in the world as we Christians wish it to be, but the prophecy of the Prophet Isaiah was gloriously fulfilled most clearly and was accomplished. O how wonderful is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, the true Prophet.

O, miracle-working Lord, tame the beastly nature of those men and people who are not yet tamed by the power of Thy love; that we all may be fruitful from Thine abundance; that we all may be glorious from Thy Glory, and alive, O Lord- alive from Thine Immortal life! To Thee be glory and thanks always. Amen.

I want to reach my goal and be united to God

✠ A person does not need erudition and great knowledge to achieve purity. When I reflect that I have sacrificed everything in order to reach this goal, I cannot make excuses to justify myself. **If we make excuses, we are defeating the purpose.** It is not so much a question of whether or not the other person is at fault, as it is whether or not I really love my brother, or whether or not I feel that my heart is heavy. It is my fault; I need to change my soul and love him, even though within myself I feel bitterness towards him because he reproved me once or because he does not think well of me. If I have a dark and somewhat bitter image of him within myself, this burdens only me. That brother may indeed be thus inclined towards me; but thinking like this does not help me reach my goal. No matter how that brother is disposed towards me, if I want to reach my goal and be united to God, I must see him differently. For this reason the Fathers never justified people, especially monks, if they had something against someone.

~ Elder Ephraim

Blessed Xenia of St Petersburg

Saint Xenia lived during the eighteenth century, but little is known of her life or of her family. She passed most of her life in Petersburg during the reigns of the empresses Elizabeth and Catherine II.

Xenia Grigorievna Petrova was the wife of an army officer, Major Andrew Petrov. After the wedding, the couple lived in St Petersburg. St Xenia became a widow at the age of twenty-six when her husband suddenly died at a party. She grieved for the loss of her husband, and especially because he died without Confession or Holy Communion.

Once her earthly happiness ended, she did not look for it again. From that time forward, Xenia lost interest in the things of this world, and followed the difficult path of foolishness for the sake of Christ. The basis for this strange way of life is to be found in the first Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:18-24, 1 Cor. 2:14, 1 Cor. 3:18-19). The Lord strengthened her and helped her to bear sorrow and misfortune patiently for the next forty-five years.

She started wearing her husband's clothing, and insisted that she be addressed as "Andrew Feodorovich." She told people that it was she, and not her husband, who had died. In a certain sense, this was perfectly true. She abandoned her former way of life and experienced a spiritual rebirth. When she gave away her house and possessions to the poor, her relatives complained to the authorities. After speaking to Xenia, the officials were convinced that she was in her right mind and was entitled to dispose of her property as she saw fit. Soon she had nothing left for herself, so she wandered through the poor section of Petersburg with no place to lay her head. She refused all assistance from her relatives, happy to be free of worldly attachments.

When her late husband's red and green uniform wore out, she clothed herself in rags of those colors. After a while, Xenia left Petersburg for eight years. It is believed that she visited holy Elders and ascetics throughout Russia seeking instruction in the spiritual life. She may have visited St Theodore of Sanaxar (February 19), who had been a military man himself. His life

changed dramatically when a young officer died at a drinking party. Perhaps this officer was St Xenia's husband. In any case, she knew St Theodore and profited from his instructions.

St Xenia eventually returned to the poor section of Petersburg, where she was mocked and insulted because of her strange behavior. When she did accept money from people it was only small amounts, which she used to help the poor. She spent her nights praying without sleep in a field outside the city. Prayer strengthened her, and in her heart's conversation with the Lord she found the support she needed on her difficult path.

When a new church was being built in the Smolensk cemetery, St Xenia brought bricks to the site. She did this in secret, during the night, so that no one would know.

Soon her great virtue and spiritual gifts began to be noticed. She prophesied future events affecting the citizens of Petersburg, and even the royal family. Against her will, she became known as someone pleasing to God, and nearly everyone loved her. They said, "Xenia does not belong to this world, she belongs to God." People regarded her visits to their homes or shops as a great blessing. St Xenia loved children, and mothers rejoiced when the childless widow would stand and pray over a baby's crib, or kiss a child. They believed that the blessed one's kiss would bring that child good fortune.

St Xenia lived about forty-five years after the death of her husband, and departed to the Lord at the age of seventy-one. The exact date and circumstances of her death are not known, but it probably took place at the end of the eighteenth century. She was buried in the Smolensk cemetery. By the 1820s, people flocked to her grave to pray for her soul, and to ask her to intercede with God for them. So many visitors took earth from her grave that it had to be replaced every year. Later, a chapel was built over her grave.

Those who turn to St Xenia in prayer receive healing from illness, and deliverance from their afflictions. She is also known for helping people who seek jobs.

A Blessed Mother Xenia. pray unto God for us!

WHAT WE SEE - WHAT THE LORD SEES

In the Old Testament book of 2 Samuel, chapter 12 (In the Orthodox Bible, that would be "2 Kings 12,"), we see the Prophet Nathan talking to King David. Nathan was clearly favored by God and was the one who anointed David as the King.

In this particular scene, Nathan is giving David a narrative of a poor man who owned a little ewe lamb, from whom the lamb was unjustly taken by a wealthy, more powerful, man. Upon hearing the shocking story, David became very upset and in his anger he wanted to know the identity of the offending party in order to bring down upon the brute the quick and severe punishment that was his due. Until, that is, the moment when Nathan answered: "You are the man!"

Nathan said this because David was guilty of having arranged the untimely death of one of his military leaders, Uriah, in order to have Uriah's wife Bathsheba. What the King saw was Bathsheba's physical beauty and then he designed his elaborate scheme to have her. However, what David did not see was his offense before God.

Until the moment, when the Prophet told him his story, David thought he was in the clear. Through Nathan, though, God told him otherwise. David then repented for his sinfulness (and composed the 50th [51st] Psalm).

Up until Nathan's revelation, David only saw what he had wanted to see. He did not see his sin, as we often do not see our own sins. Yet, the Lord sees everything. What does Christ see when He looks at each of us, for whom He sacrificed Himself that we may be freed of sin?

This past Sunday, we had a visitor in our midst; he was in town for the Steelers-Saints game that evening. For those who saw him and recognized him, there was some excitement (maybe even more than he wanted). It was not the first time we welcomed to our Cathedral someone who was well known.

Typically, at such times, much attention is given because their presence is out of the ordinary. Yet, how often are we just as excited simply to be in the house of the Lord, standing in His mystical presence? Is it possible that Jesus has become too ordinary?

In reality, when the spiritual excitement is missing, the problem is not with Jesus but with the unexcited one! In such a person, the purity of their faith has become polluted; rather than their heart being uplifted by His grace, it has become cluttered and bound by daily concerns, leaving no place for the Word of God to take root.

Unless we see for ourselves what the Lord sees in us, we leave our soul at risk! In fact, what we see needs to be aligned with what our Lord wants us to see. Let His presence bring us that unrestrained and liberating joy, filling our hearts with the anticipation of the Lord's boundless blessings and infinite Grace!

Fr. Anthony Stratis, HOLY TRINITY, New Orleans, LA

Troy Polamalu says 'Kala Christougena!'

Friday, January 07, 2011

By Ann Rodgers, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Theodora Polamalu, Paisios Polamalu and Troy (Tryphon) Polamalu

The most famous Orthodox Christian in Pittsburgh, if not the nation, has a greeting for his fellow believers today: "Kala Christougena!" said Steelers safety Troy Polamalu. That's Greek for "Merry Christmas!"

Mr. Polamalu and his wife, Theodora, actually celebrated Christmas 13 days ago, but they keep the same Orthodox traditions as those who observe today. Most Orthodox celebrate on Dec. 25, but many Slavic churches tie liturgy to the old Julian calendar, which is 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar. The Greek Orthodox Church and some others have adopted the Gregorian calendar -- except at Easter.

"We all celebrate Easter on the same day," said Mr. Polamalu, 29. Orthodoxy is the Eastern wing of the earliest Christian church, which split into the Orthodox and Catholic churches in 1054.

He and Theodora converted to Orthodoxy about five years ago. His background was Catholic and Protestant, hers Muslim and Protestant. They were Christians in search of a deeper, more consistent experience of God.

"Orthodoxy is like an abyss of beauty that's just endless," he said. "I have read the Bible many times. But after fasting, and being baptized Orthodox, it's like

reading a whole new Bible. You see the depth behind the words so much more clearly."

That fasting is a Christmastime difference between Eastern and Western Christians. While many Americans pile on the food from Thanksgiving to Christmas, Orthodox Christians start fasting Nov. 15 or 28.

"Christmas Lent" or "Winter Lent" lasts 40 days, broken by a feast on Christmas, said the Rev. Stelyios Muksuris, administrative assistant to Metropolitan Maximos of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Pittsburgh and professor of liturgy and theology at Ss. Cyril & Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary. Slavic Orthodox keep a strict fast, abstaining from meat, dairy products, oil and fish for 40 days. Greeks usually permit fish, cheese and oil for the first few weeks, then fast strictly for the last two, he said.

Mr. Polamalu is of Samoan heritage, and belongs to the Greek church, but fasts like a Russian.

His consists of a "fast from dairy, from meat and from oil for 40 days -- as well as from sex," he said. "It's to prepare you for the birth of Christ, of God incarnate."

Fasting doesn't affect his football fitness, he said. "When you fast, you can eat extremely healthy by eating a lot of light food, like fruits and vegetables."

There are other aspects to fasting. "Maybe not watching as much TV, or not getting caught up in idle talk or different things, in order to keep you spiritually healthy," he said.

The most important Orthodox fast is Great Lent, for 50 days before Easter.

When he has kept longer fasts "I have never felt more spiritually strong," he said. Referring to great theologians of the early church, he said, "The church fathers have said that when you eat gluttonously or you eat a lot of meat, your passions get stronger, so your inclination toward sinning becomes stronger. ... [Fasting] really does soften your passions. It gives you spiritual insight."

In Orthodox theology "passions" are negative impulses -- such as sadness or greed -- that can harm the soul.

He doesn't claim that practicing the faith improves athletics. The player known for crossing himself on the field has seen his faith grow more from his injuries than his interceptions.

"When I got injured, I learned so much from it spiritually, just thanking God for the health that I had when I was healthy," he said.

"People have this idea that the more pious and devout I am, the more successful I am, which is very dangerous. If you look at faith in that way, you're bound to fail at both -- spiritually and in your career."

As the Polamalus build Christmas traditions for their children, Paisios, 2, and Ephraim, 3 months, "It's become less about Santa Claus and more about the birth of Christ and the celebration of the Virgin birth," he said.

They spent Christmas Eve at an Orthodox monastery. The service lasted several hours, ending at 1 a.m. It was entirely chanted.

"Orthodox chanting is non-emotional, it's

very monotone," said Mr. Polamalu, who also calls it "the most beautiful thing."

"It's the perfect environment for prayer," he said. "Chanting in Greek ... is like a beautiful opera, but way better. You have candles, not [electric] lights. It's dark. You have the women sitting on the left and the men sitting on the right. Everything is to keep your mind focused on God. ... To me the most beautiful thing anyone on earth can experience, other than maybe marriage and child-bearing, would be the Orthodox Liturgy."

Before he became Orthodox, he said, songs in church sometimes moved him to tears. He now distrusts those passing feelings.

"I'd start crying and feel 'This is awesome.' If I'd had a Red Bull, I'd feel it even more. If I'd had breakfast, I'd feel good. If I didn't have breakfast, I didn't feel anything, I was grumpy," he said.

"It was a very superficial experience. I was thinking, 'God, why did I not feel you today?' because I wasn't feeling the music today. Orthodoxy is very sensitive to that, to take the emotion out of it, to really go after the heart."

The difference between the heart and emotion, he said, is like the difference between the deep love he has for his wife and their daily ups and downs.

"I could say, emotionally, I'm mad and sad with my wife. But that has nothing to do with how much I love my wife within my heart," he said.

"Before we were Orthodox we were able to separate our spiritual lives and our daily lives. Now that we're Orthodox, because of the prayer life that is required ... and the fasting, it consumes your life. It's the number one thing in your life."

“THINK OF YOUR CHILDREN”

FAMILY OF THE NATION’S LARGEST PRIVATELY OWNED ABORTION CHAIN, DIES IN MONTANA PLANE CRASH, 500 FEET AWAY FROM THE “TOMB OF THE UNBORN”

By Gingi Edmonds (www.gingiedmonds.com), Media Advisory, Mar. 24, 2009, Christian Newswire; Gingi Edmonds is a freelance pro-life activist, writer and photographer based out of Hanford, California. Gingi writes a bi-monthly ProLife Opinion Column.

Some of you may have seen the major news story of the private plane that crashed into a Montana cemetery, killing 7 children and 7 adults.

But what the news sources fail to mention is that the Catholic Holy Cross Cemetery owned by Resurrection Cemetery Association in Butte—contains a memorial for local residents to pray the rosary, at the “Tomb of the Unborn.” This memorial, located a short distance west of the church, was erected as a dedication to all babies who have died because of abortion.

What else is the mainstream news not telling you? The family who died in the crash near the location of the abortion victim’s memorial, is the family of Irving “Bud” Feldkamp, owner of the largest for-profit abortion chain in the nation.

Family Planning Associates was purchased four years ago by Irving Moore “Bud” Feldkamp III, owner of Allcare and Hospitality Dental Associates and CEO of Glen Helen Raceway Park in San Bernardino. The 17 California Family Planning clinics perform more abortions in the state than any other abortion provider—Planned Parenthood included—and they perform abortions through the first five months of pregnancy.

Although Feldkamp is not an abortionist, he reaps profits of blood money from the tens of thousands of babies that are killed through abortions performed every year at the clinics he owns. His business in the abortion industry was what enabled him to afford the private plane that was carrying his family to their week-long vacation at The Yellowstone Club, a millionaires-only ski resort.

The plane went down on Sunday, killing two of Feldkamp’s daughters, two sons-in-law and five grandchildren along with the pilot and four family friends. The plane, a single-engine turboprop flown by Bud Summerfield of Highland, crashed into the Catholic cemetery and burst into flames, only 500 feet from its landing destination. All aboard were killed.

The cause of the crash is a mystery. The pilot, who was a former military flier who logged over 2,000 miles, gave no indication to air traffic controllers that the aircraft was experiencing difficulty when he asked to divert to an airport in Butte. Witnesses report that the plane suddenly nosedived toward the ground with no apparent signs of a struggle. There was neither a cockpit voice recorder nor a flight data recorder onboard, and no radar clues into the plane’s final moments because the Butte airport is not equipped with a radar facility.

Some speculate that the crash was due to ice on the wings, but this particular plane model has been tested for icy weather and experts have stated that ice being the cause is unlikely.

In my time working for Survivors of the Abortion Holocaust, I helped organize and conduct a weekly campaign where youth activists stood outside of Feldkamp’s mini-mansion in Redlands holding fetal development signs and raising community awareness regarding Feldkamp’s dealings in child murder for profit. Every Thursday afternoon we called upon Bud and his wife Pam to repent, seek God’s blessing and separate themselves from the practice of child killing.

We warned him, for his children’s sake, to wash his hands of the innocent blood he assisted in spilling because, as Scripture warns, *if you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you.* (Ezek 35:6)

A news source states that Bud Feldkamp visited the site of the crash with his wife and their two surviving children on Monday. As they stood near the twisted and charred debris talking with investigators, light snow fell on the tarps that covered the remains of their children.

I don’t want to turn this tragic event into some creepy spiritual ‘I told you so’ moment, but I think of the time spent outside of Feldkamp’s—Pam Feldkamp laughing at the fetal development signs, Bud Feldkamp trying not to make eye contact as he got into his car with a small child in tow—and I think of the haunting words, ‘Think of your children.’ I wonder if those words were haunting Feldkamp as well as he stood in the snow among the remains of loved ones, just feet from the ‘Tomb of the Unborn?’

I only hope and pray that in the face of this tragedy, Feldkamp recognizes his need for repentance and reformation. I pray that God will use this unfortunate catastrophe to soften the hearts of Bud and Pam and that they will draw close to the Lord and wash their hands of the blood of thousands of innocent children, each as precious and irreplaceable as their own.

I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then. (Deut 30:19).



Do not be one who holds his hand out to take, but shuts it when it comes to giving. If your labor has brought you earnings, pay a ransom for your sins. Do not hesitate to give and do not give with a bad grace, for you will discover who He is that pays you back a reward with a good grace. Do not turn your back on the needy, but share everything with your brother and call nothing your own. For if you have what is eternal in common, how much more should you have what is transient!

The Didache, c. AD 100

For Sanctity of Life Sunday...

Signs of Life "Every child matters."

"A person's a person no matter how small." Dr. Seuss - "Horton Hears a Who"

"I am boggled at how in one breath you can call killing a baby 'murder' and in the next breath you can justify this murder because you don't want to tell others what to do. I cannot fathom how someone can say that life is precious and should be protected, then turn around and support the 'choice' to destroy that very life."
Brian Kemper, minister

Academy Award winning actress Patricia Neal was asked by an interviewer what, if anything, she would change in her life:

"If there is one thing I wish I had the courage to do all over in my life, I wish I had the courage to have that baby (the child she aborted). Alone in the night for over 40 years I have cried for my child."

In an article entitled "100 Million Missing Girls," Boston Globe columnist Jeff Jacoby describes the practice of aborting unborn girls in societies as varied as South Korea, India, Japan, China, Singapore and some of the former Soviet republics. He notes, "It is not the material poverty that leads these cultures to blithely accept the killing of their very youngest girls. It is the poverty of *values*, an ancient prejudice that views daughters as a financial burden, rather than a blessing to be cherished."

-Boston Globe, 3/14/10

Rep. Chris Smith, in a speech opposing the Obama health care bill stated:

"Abortion is a serious, lethal violation of human rights – and now we are being compelled to subsidize it. Slaughtering innocent children must never be construed as 'health care.' True health care reform respects, protects, and enhances human life."
-January, 2010

As we struggle to "fix Social Security," how few public officials consider the millions of potential workers who have been lost to abortion? Unborn babies grow up to be economic contributing adults, helping support through their work the generation of workers now retired.

Some signs from last year's March for Life:

"Honk If You Were Once a Baby"; "Every Time a Baby is Aborted, Love is Denied"; "Right to Choose/That's a Lie/Unborn Babies Don't Choose to Die."

In 2009, the U.S. approved "ethically acceptable human cell lines," so called because they were obtained from "extra fertility clinic embryos with parental consent.

"Classifying embryos as "surplus" is a flawed argument. There is no such thing as a surplus child, who doesn't matter. Every child matters. It is never ethical for parents to give consent to destroy their own children. Calling it ethical doesn't make it so."
- Rev. Ted Pacholczyk

Who can comprehend the talents and gifts lost due to more than 52 million Americans aborted since 1973 (Roe v. Wade)?