

THREE HIERARCHS



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ January 30, 2011 ✠

The Three Holy Hierarchs :

St. Basil the Great,

St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom

New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, under the Communist Yoke

St. Hyppolytus of Rome (3rd C)



Feast this Week:

✠ Tues Feb. 1 6:30pm Vespers ~ Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple

✠ Wed Feb. 2 10:00am Divine Liturgy ~ Presentation of Christ

The Communist Persecution – Some Statistics:

Before the Communist Revolution in Russia of 1917, according to the official data of that time, there were 51,918 churches in Russia, besides oratories and home chapels (20,287).

In 1941, according to foreign information, only 4,225 churches remained. Only 20 monasteries were left out of 1025, and that number is even doubtful. No ecclesiastical academies (4), seminaries (54) or diocesan schools (150) were left at all. Only some 5,665 clergymen remained at liberty in 1941 out of 70,000 members of the clergy and 30,000 monks. It was announced in 1930 by the NKVD (early KGB) that 42,800 clergymen had died in prisons and in concentration camps, from hardships and executions. In 1987, there were 6,800 churches and 19 monasteries open.

⇒ Today, there are over 28,000 churches and 735 monasteries re-established.

Our Holy Father, St. John Chrysostom – His Final Years

The time had come at last for the crafty Eutropius to implement his plan. His search for a new archbishop to fill the enormously important See of Constantinople had finally come to an end. Presbyter John (later known as "Chrysostom") from Antioch, a man with great influence and popular appeal, would surely serve his devious purposes well.

Here, thought Eutropius, is a

man whose persuasive powers could provide tremendous political clout if channeled in the right directions. And Eutropius intended to see to it that those talents would not go to waste.

His plan, though simple in design, had been contrived to overcome two difficult obstacles in bringing John to Constantinople. The first was John's instinctive humility. He would undoubtedly refuse the prestigious office. The

second, and perhaps most serious, was the unwillingness of the inhabitants of Antioch to part with their beloved preacher.

At Eutropius's instruction, an official in Antioch invited the unsuspecting Chrysostom to visit a martyr's shrine with him outside the city. This pious task pleased the preacher and he consented immediately. But once outside the city, Chrysostom was seized by government officials and whisked

away by chariot. The only stops while on their way to Constantinople were to trade horses and chariots. The entire trip had been precisely planned and was carried out without incident.

As the imperial chariot entered the city it drew mixed reactions. The people rejoiced, for many of them knew of Chrysostom and had heard him preach. The rival candidates, however, displayed anger, dismay, and obvious envy. One of them, Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria, declared that he would have no part in the consecration.

Eutropius's reply to Theophilus was swift. "You *will* consecrate Him!" To back up this demand, Eutropius produced a written list of charges brought against Theophilus by various parties. Theophilus quickly changed his mind in order to have the charges dropped. Thus on February 26, 398, John Chrysostom became the twelfth bishop of the See of Constantinople.

AN UNCOMPROMISING ARCHBISHOP

Chrysostom's experience in Antioch had prepared him for the scenes he now faced as archbishop. Not only were the people of Constantinople accustomed to living in luxury, but even the clergy had become caught up in the affairs of the world and the pursuit of pleasures.

For the next six years Chrysostom devoted himself completely to preaching and ruling his see with all diligence. As had been the case with numerous martyrs before him, his efforts were rewarded with opposition on all sides. He did not receive proper recognition until after his

death. Chrysostom's actions alienated him from many of the clergy in Constantinople, from the neighboring bishops, and from the imperial court. This opposition sprung up not because he sought power or his own glory, but because he was uncompromising in his standard of Christian life and faith.

His immediate reforms took place among the clergy. Rather than feasting sumptuously, as his predecessor had done, he almost always ate alone. He curtailed the

ONCE MORE THE GREAT STONES OF THE CATHEDRAL REVERBERATED WITH HIS ELOQUENT SPEECH.

entertainment and feasting which the clergy had enjoyed at the table of the wealthy. He suspended many for worldly conduct and removed some of these from the Eucharist. Some had even gone so far as to have young women whom they called "spiritual sisters" living with them. This was intolerable to Chrysostom and he exacted proper discipline and conduct from all his clergy. Dismayed at his actions, many began to look for an opportunity to oppose him.

With his clergy in check for the time being, he soon gained the admiration of the people by his eloquent sermons. Both the Emperor Arcadius and the Empress Eudoxia respected him. He poured his energies into the welfare of the people. For a time he enjoyed popularity and unrivaled power.

After the death of Eutropius, the real power over the emperor

was his wife, Eudoxia. She maintained a display of zeal for the church, attending regularly, going on frequent pilgrimages, and donating liberally. These pretenses, however, did not protect her from Chrysostom's criticism of her lifestyle of inordinate luxury. Thus, after a time, the empress also became his enemy. In the end she became one of the chief players in his downfall.

The neighboring bishops likewise grew to oppose Chrysostom. They felt that he had gone beyond his legitimate authority by mingling in their affairs. Chief of these was Theophilus, who had been coerced into consecrating the archbishop.

THE ARCHBISHOP'S FIRST EXILE

Still nursing his dislike for Chrysostom, Theophilus now saw his chance for revenge. With the help of Eudoxia and the enemy clergy, Theophilus called a synod known as the Synod at the Oak. Though Chrysostom was summoned several times, he did not attend. False charges, including immorality and treason, were brought against him. In his absence he was convicted of these charges, and Eudoxia used her influence on the emperor to have him banished.

This first exile was not lengthy. The people of Constantinople dearly loved Chrysostom, as had those of Antioch. After his departure, the city erupted into a state of near insurrection. Several of the clergy who had opposed him now changed their minds. If the anger of the people was not enough, an earthquake rocked Constantinople and seemed to strike most severely in the em-

ress's bed chamber. The empress was terrified and immediately had Chrysostom recalled.

As Chrysostom neared the city, throngs came out to meet him. Once inside the gates the people carried him to the church. They seated him in his episcopal chair and insisted that he give them an address. The golden-mouthed preacher did not disappoint them, even on such short notice. Once more the great stones of the cathedral reverberated with his eloquent speech.

A momentary calm once more enveloped Constantinople. The archbishop seemed reconciled to the empress, and Bishop Theophilus had retreated back to Alexandria. It did not take long, however, for Chrysostom to renew his moral and ecclesiastical reforms. The peace was short lived. Before long the old irritations ruptured again.

Two months after his recall, the empress, ever desirous of admiration, had a silver statue of herself erected in front of one of the churches of the city. Chrysostom attacked this move in a sermon commemorating John the Baptist. It was reported to Eudoxia that Chrysostom had compared her to Herodius in the Gospel account used in his sermon.

A SECOND EXILE, AND DEATH

The empress exploded with anger. She demanded his removal, and the timid Arcadius reluctantly gave the order. But Chrysostom refused to leave the church and continued to preach to his flock. Just before Easter in A.D. 404, he was dragged from the cathedral by soldiers while he was conducting a baptismal service. It was a

night of terror and bloodshed for the Christians of Constantinople. The archbishop was imprisoned and exiled later that year. This second exile would be his last.

If Eudoxia hoped to silence Chrysostom through this forced exile, her plans were soon stymied. Even in exile he kept up with a constant stream of correspondence from clergy, deacons, and laity. While corresponding, he exerted as much or more influence as he had from the throne.

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The empress, ever jealous, was angered over the influence wielded by this banished man. She ordered him moved to a more remote part of the empire. Archbishop John, already weakened by his strenuous labor as bishop in exile, never completed the journey. He died on the way, after having traveled three months on foot while in bad health.

Saint John Chrysostom has lived in the hearts of the saints throughout the centuries. He is remembered for his treatises, letters, and about six hundred homilies and commentaries. He is also known for the liturgy which today bears his name. Although it is not known whether he is the actual author of the liturgy, it was unquestionably the liturgy in use at Constantinople during his era.

SAINT CHRYSOSTOM'S TRIUMPHANT RETURN

The story of the twelfth bishop of Constantinople does not end with his death in exile. A sense of the cruelty and injustice with which he had been treated grew throughout Christendom. He became even more honored and admired after his death than during his lifetime. In A.D. 438 Proclus, one of Saint John's disciples who was now archbishop, obtained permission from the emperor to have Chrysostom's relics returned.

As the crowd had greeted him on his return from the first exile, so now, and in greater numbers, the people turned out to meet his relics. They were there to welcome home their beloved and much wronged spiritual father. The young emperor, Theophilus II, humbly met the returning relics. While bowing, he asked forgiveness from heaven for the injuries his parents had inflicted upon the saint. Thus Saint John's remains were finally laid to rest beside the other emperors and patriarchs who were entombed beneath the altar of the Church of the Holy Apostles.

His is a sad story, oft repeated in the course of history. It is the story of goodness and virtue all but overlooked in the corruption of one age, only to be recognized and honored in the next. May his memory be eternal!



Al Rung
Saskatoon, Sask.
CANADA

THE MEETING OF OUR LORD IN THE TEMPLE – FEAST OF FEBRUARY 2ND

Forty days after His birth in the flesh, Christ was Presented at the Temple in accordance with legal Convention. And because there in the Temple He Was received by persons moved by the Spirit, and Especially because Symeon took him into his arms, This feast is also called a Meeting.

The Church appointed this great feast of the Lord and the Mother of God to be celebrated on the 2nd of February, because it is the 40th day after the 25th of December, when the Nativity of Christ in the flesh is celebrated. In this way the year is divided by the turning points in the divine economy and blesses them. At the same time it makes it possible for man to be initiated into the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God.



The event of the presentation of Christ in the Temple on the 40 day after His birth is described only in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2:22-39.

The Meeting of Christ shows that Christ is the Life and Light of men and that man should aim to attain this personal light and personal life. The Church sings, by way of exhortation, "Illuminate my soul and the light of my senses, that I may see Thee in purity; and I will proclaim that Thou art God."

In order for anyone to proclaim God, he must see Him clearly. But in order to see God one must previously be illuminated, shine in soul and bodily senses. Then the Feast of the Meeting of Christ also becomes a feast of every believer.

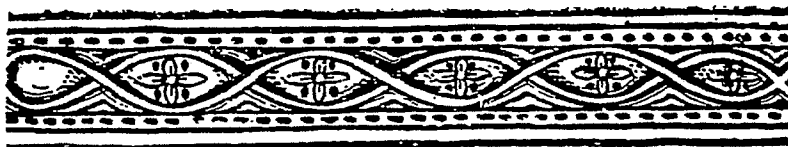
The Feast is celebrated to the "leave-taking," on February 9th. During this festal period the tropar and kontakion of the feast is sung/said with the daily rule of prayer and at meals. The tropar before the meal and the kontakion after the meal. They replace the usual meal prayers.

Tropar Tone 1

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, Full of Grace!
From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God,
Enlightening those who sat in darkness!
Rejoice and be glad, O righteous elder;
You accepted in your arms the Redeemer of our souls,
Who grants us the Resurrection!

Kontakion Tone 1

By Thy Nativity, Thou didst sanctify the Virgin's womb!
And didst bless Symeon's hands, O Christ God.
Now Thou hast come and saved us through love,
Grant peace to all Orthodox Christians,
O only Lover of Man!



Abortion and the Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church was founded by Jesus Christ and the Apostles, and bears witness to that continuous and unbroken Christian Faith. The precepts of the Orthodox Christian Faith mandate the protection of innocent human life, especially that of the unborn child. The Church has always regarded abortion as murder, and as such, takes a very active role in opposing legalized abortion.

The personhood of the unborn is considered to exist from conception and has never been questioned in our theology. Indeed, conception has been always recognized as the time when the soul is uniquely brought into being and simultaneously united with the body.

The Christian Church from its inception, to which the Orthodox Church bears living witness, expressed a distinct and fundamental horror of abortion, at whatever stage of pregnancy. It never ceased to regard abortion as abhorrent and an abomination before God, and always considered it to be the killing of a human being. The loss of the life of the unborn child was regrettably tolerated only in cases where the life of the mother was in jeopardy. With the modern advancements we have in medical technology today, this tragic situation is rarely encountered.

In the early centuries of the Church, Her moral teachings were universally embraced, holding sway over almost the whole of Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Africa, from Hadrian's Wall to the frontiers of the Persian Empire. Indeed, the Orthodox Church's teaching can be traced to the earliest Christian document, the Didache (late 1st Century) and was constantly reiterated through the following centuries in Patristic writings and Canon Law. It was finally compiled in the Photian Collection, which was adopted as the official ecclesiastical book of canons of the Orthodox Church in 883 A.D.

If we turn to the Orthodox liturgical cycle of Feasts, the consciousness of the personhood of the unborn is striking. This is manifest in three days on the Church calendar. The first we shall consider is the celebration of the conception of St. John the Baptist by St. Elizabeth (September 23). In this Feast we sing:

"Rejoice, O barren one, who had not given birth; for behold you have clearly conceived the one who was about to illuminate the whole universe, blighted by blindness. Shout in joy, O Zacharias, crying in favor; truly the one to be born is a Prophet of the Most High!"

Although St. John the Baptist was yet in the womb, he is considered a full person. The second Feast to be considered is that of the Conception of the Theotokos by St. Anna (December 9). At this Feast the Kontakion proclaims at Vespers:

"Behold the promises of the Prophets are realized for the Holy Mountain is planted in the womb, the Divine Ladder is set up, the great Throne of the King is ready, the place for the passage of the Lord is prepared . . ."

There can be no question that although the parents of St. John the Baptist and the Theotokos (Virgin Mary) had no inkling of God's Great Plan for Salvation, God was involved in the conception of each; it is notable that both Saints, Elizabeth and Anna were advanced in years and barren. It is a sobering thought of how God's Plan is being affected by the countless unborn

who have been aborted - never to uniquely participate in that Plan.

The quintessential Feast that illustrates the consciousness of the Church on the importance of the person from the moment of conception is the Annunciation (March 25). This Feast is so important that a Divine Liturgy is to be served even when it falls on Great and Holy Friday! The Troparion of the day makes a profound statement:

"Today is the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the eternal mystery! The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of grace..."

This is a far cry from the present cry, "who knows when life begins" or, "it is a blob of tissue" or a "product of conception." At the Great Compline the hymnography states makes this astonishing claim:

"...O marvel! God has come among men; He who cannot be contained in a womb; the timeless One enters time...For God empties Himself, takes flesh, and is fashioned as a creature, when the angel tells the pure Virgin of her conception. . . "

This is not sung at the Feast of our Lord's Nativity but at His *conception*!!! "Viability" and "quickenings" are utterly irrelevant. If we further consider the following passage in Luke 1:41, we find another astonishing image of the scriptural consciousness of the personhood of the unborn:

"And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb"

Here we have the image of the unborn St. John the Baptist recognizing the unborn Messiah - a fetus greeting a fetus! This is more than a literary device as some would have us believe, but illustrates the narrator's perception, or consciousness of the uniqueness of an unborn human. Although we celebrate the birth of St. John the Baptist, the Theotokos, and the Lord Jesus himself, we also celebrate their conception which is their entry into time and the physical world - the "fullness of time" as called by St. Paul.

A more profound point to this all is that these Feasts, especially the Annunciation, point to the Incarnation. By taking on our humanity from the moment of conception, existing in the pre-natal condition in the womb of the Theotokos, experiencing birth, living through infancy to adulthood, and finally dying, God sanctified every moment of human existence - from conception to death.

There is more to this - God also completely identifies with us in our fallen suffering nature, and by dying for us on the Cross, He expresses His solidarity with us: whether we are a zygote, embryo, fetus, infant, child, adolescent, adult, or elderly: human existence is a continuum from conception, and - yes - beyond death to life eternal in the Lord!

The Orthodox Church has had a long history of outspoken condemnation of abortion which dates from Apostolic times. The aforementioned illustrate the Tradition from which Church teaching on the uniqueness and sanctity of human life, born and unborn sprang from - it was no vacuum! We either belong to the Kingdom of God or to the "World" . . .

Abortion is not a political issue, but is a theological and moral issue which has become politicized!

From www.oclife.org Orthodox Christians for Life. The Church and Abortion

St. Theophan the Recluse on Prayer

From the Letters of St. Theophan - Part III

A Prayer Rule of Brief Prayers

You may substitute prostrations and the Jesus Prayer and your own words of prayer for your whole prayer book rule.

Stand and begin to do prostrations by saying, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me," or some other prayer expressing your needs, or by glorifying God or thanking Him. To avoid laziness, you must repeat a definite number of prayers, or set a specific length of time for prayer, or both.

Such a prayer rule is imperative because we have a certain, strange quirk about us. When we are busy in the world, hours pass as minutes. But when we stand at prayer, a minute does not go by, and it seems as though we have prayed for hours. Time distortion brings no harm when we complete a full, established prayer rule from our prayer book. But when we pray with only prostrations and the brief prayer, such distortion can be a great temptation and can cause us to stop prayer, having only begun, leaving us with the delusion that our prayer was completed as prescribed. To avoid falling into this kind of deception, the good men of prayer invented the prayer rope. **The prayer rope is used by those who plan to pray independently of the prayer book.** It is used by saying, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," and pulling one knot through your fingers.

Say it again and move another knot, and so on with each prayer. You may make the Sign of the Cross and a bow from the waist or to the ground as you desire, at each prayer. Or for small knots, you may do a bow from the waist; large knots, prostrations. The whole rule consists of a fixed number of prayers and prostrations, interspersed with prayers in your own words.

Speeding up the repetition of prayers and prostrations is another danger. After you determine a set number of prayers, it is a good idea to guard yourself from haste by setting a definite length of time in which to complete the prayer rule. If you find you have rushed the prayers, fill the time with more prayers and prostrations.

The Startsi [Elders] who still live among us in hermitages and special cells, at Valaam and Solovki for instance, do all their services on the prayer rope... Reading this, don't think that I am pushing you toward monasticism. I myself first learned of prayer with the prayer rope, not from a monk, but from a layman, for many lay people pray this way. And you too will profit by this. When prayers from the prayer book become tedious and uninspiring, you may use the prayer rope for a day or two, then return to your memorized prayers.

Again I repeat: The essence of prayer lies in lifting the mind and heart to God. Prayer rules are only aids to this end. We weak ones cannot do without them.

Hard Work is Essential (from Letter 48)

You write that you are having trouble controlling your thoughts; they scatter easily, and praying does not proceed as you wish; and that, in the midst of the day, in the midst of toil and association with others, there is little remembrance of God. Instantaneous prayer life is impossible. You must make a strong effort to control your thoughts, at least to some degree. Prayer does not come about as you expect -- by just wishing for it, and, suddenly, there it is. This does not happen.

Forcing Oneself to Pray (from Letter 48)

You have the book of discourses by St. Macarius of Egypt. Kindly read the 19th discourse, concerning a Christian's duty to force himself to do good. There it is written, **"One must force oneself to pray, even if one has no spiritual prayer."** And, **"In such a case, God, seeing that a man earnestly is striving, pushing himself against the will of his heart (that is, his thoughts), He grants him true prayer."** By true prayer, St. Macarius means the undistracted, collected, deep prayer that occurs when the mind stands unswervingly before God. As the mind begins to stand firmly before God, it discovers such sweetness, that it wishes to remain in true prayer forever, desiring nothing more.

I have stated more than once exactly what efforts must be made: Do not allow your thoughts to wander at will. When they do involuntarily escape, immediately turn them back, rebuking yourself, lamenting and grieving over this disorder. As St. John of the Ladder says, "We must lock our mind into the words of prayer by force."

The most helpful idea is to attend church frequently. There, prayers come more readily because all is directed to that end, but this is not very practicable for you. So, labor at home to accustom yourself to pray attentively and **try to remain in God's presence the rest of the time,** as much as possible.

Preparation for Prayer (from the same Letter)

"Consider prayer the central labor of your life and hold it in the center of your heart."

Do this also. Prepare yourself to stand properly before God—don't just jump into prayer after gossiping and gadding about or doing house chores. Schedule the time and rouse the urge to pray precisely at that hour. Another opportunity may not come.

Don't forget to re-establish your sense of spiritual need. Bring your need for God to the front of your mind, then begin to draw your mind into your heart by organizing your thoughts into prayer and calling forth your desire to find their fulfillment in God.

When the heart is conscious and feels the need for prayer, then the attentive heart itself will not let your thoughts slide to other matters. It will force you to cry out to the Lord in your prayers. **Most of all, be aware of your own helplessness: were it not for God, you would be lost.** If someone who is doomed to disaster were to stand before the one person who, with a glance, could save him, would he look here and there for his salvation? No, he would fall down before him and beg mercy. So it will be when you approach Him in prayer with an awareness of all-encompassing peril and the knowledge that **no one can save you but God.**

All of us have this little sin hanging about us. Though we make painstaking preparations for every other task (no matter how trivial), we do not prepare for prayer. We take up prayer with flighty thoughts, willy-nilly, and rush to get it over with, as if it were an incidental, though unavoidable, bother—and not the center of our life, as it should be.

Without preparation, how can there be a gathering of thought and feeling in prayer? Without preparation, prayer proceeds shakily instead of firmly. No, you must determine to deny yourself this little sin and under no circumstance allow yourself to come to prayer with your heart and mind unprepared, your thoughts and feelings scattered in a dozen directions. Such a careless attitude toward prayer is a crime, a serious one—a capital one. **Consider prayer the central labor of your life and hold it in the center of your heart.** Address it in its rightful role, not as a secondary function! Work! God will be your helper. Take care to fulfill your prayer rule. If you begin to fulfill it, soon, very soon, you will see the fruits of your labor. Strive to experience the sweetness of pure prayer. Once experienced, pure prayer will draw you on and enliven your spiritual life, beckoning you to more attentive, more difficult, and ever-deepening prayer. {To be continued}