



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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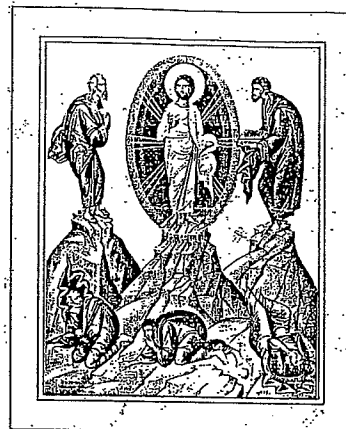
✠ **August 11, 2013** ✠

Postfeast of the Transfiguration

Hieromartyr Euplus of Catania (304)

Virgin-Martyr Susanna and Hieromartyr Pope Gaius of Rome (295)

St. Niphon, Patriarch of Constantinople (1508)



⇒ **Inquirer's Class – Tuesday August 13, 6:30pm**

✠ **Wednesday, August 14, 6:30pm Vespers – Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos**

✠ **Thurs. August 15, 6:00am Divine Liturgy – Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos**

⇒ ***Many Years! Newly Illumined Child Emilia Colvin!***

⇒ **Church-Friendly Loans:**

Did you know you can invest your money in the Church? The Diocese of the South, which will be assisting us with our building project payments, has a program for individual investors. One can invest in the Diocese – in the work of Christ's Holy Church – and receive 4.25% interest - far better than returns on ordinary bank investing. And you don't have to wait 6 months or a year to withdraw your money. You can withdraw it as needed at any time. And, your money is going to help churches like ours and being used to do God's work in the world! Think about it. There is currently a balance of over a million dollars invested with the Diocese by faithful individuals over the course of the past year. Even friends of members have invested. It's a move that is good business and good Godly stewardship at the same time.

Then there's this bank...

The Eternal Savings Bank

✠ "Whoever does not humbly accept a reproof or remark will be continually flogged by his egoism, laid into by other people, and pummeled by the devil --- who will fling him from one temptation to another, in order to make him indignant, even to the point of losing his soul. Therefore, we should accept criticism, even if we were not to blame at the time but were in the past, and were then compensated; or we were never to blame but God allowed it, that we might deposit a few cents in His eternal savings bank."

~ **Blessed Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos**

Elder Tadej of Serbia: *There is no such thing as an atheist...*

✠ There are some that say that they are atheists, but there is no such thing as an atheist.... No such thing. Even the devil believes and trembles (cf. James 2:19), but he refuses to do good. There is no such thing as a person who does not believe in God, and there is no rational being on earth that does not long after life with all his heart. We will give anything to live eternally, and we all long after perfect love, love that never changes but lasts forever. God is life, He is love, peace, and joy. There are those who oppose Him, but they can do nothing to hurt Him. **It is we who complicate our own lives with our negative thoughts (*Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*).**

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (12.2)

So long as we are on earth, we must learn to wage war with the enemy. **St. Silouan**

A holy man who had seen someone in the act of committing a sin wept bitterly and said, "He today, and I tomorrow. In truth, even if someone commits a sin in your presence, do not judge him, but consider yourself a worse sinner than he." **Apophthegmata Patrum**

Do not make light of a fall even if it be the most venial of faults; rather, be quick to repair it by repentance, although many others may commit a large number of faults, slight and grievous, and remain unrepentant. **St. Basil the Great**

What shall I say about dogs who have a natural instinct to show gratitude and to serve as watchful guardians of their masters' safety? Hence Scripture cries out to the ungrateful, the slothful, and the craven: "Dumb dogs, not able to bark." To dogs, therefore, is given the ability to bark in defense of their masters and their homes. Thus you should learn to use your voice for the sake of Christ, when ravening wolves attack His sheepfold. Have the word ready on your lips, lest, like a silent watch-dog, you may appear because of your unfaithfulness to abandon the post entrusted to you.

St. Ambrose of Milan

The disciple of a great elder was once attacked by lust. The elder, seeing this in his prayer, said to him, 'Do you want me to ask God to relieve you of this battle?' The other said, 'Abba, I see that I am afflicted, but I see that this affliction is producing fruit in me; therefore ask God to give me endurance to bear it.' And his Abba said to him, 'Today I know that you surpass me in perfection.'

Apophthegmata Patrum

The proof of holiness is not to make miracles, but to love others as oneself; moreover, to believe truths about God, and to think better things of one's neighbor than of oneself. For true power is in love, not in the showing of miracles . . . It is not miracles, but love alone that indicates true servants of God.

St. Gregory the Great

It is better to be satisfied with less and to preserve one's freedom of spirit. **Bishop Damascene**

The Lord says: 'In your patience possess ye your souls' (Luke 21:19). He did not say: in your fast or in your vigil. By patience I mean that patience which is of God and is the queen of virtues and the basis of manly valor. It is in itself peace amid strife, stillness in the midst of storm and an impregnable position for those who have acquired it. He who has attained it in Christ cannot be harmed by any weapons, or javelins, or attacking armies, or even the hosts of demons or the legions of hostile powers.

St. Gregory of Sinai

Do not be concerned about anything, only about your own sins. **St. Paisy Velichkovsky**

A woman knows she has conceived when she no longer loses any blood. So it is with the soul, she knows she has conceived the Holy Spirit when the passions stop coming out of her.

Abba Longinus

Observe your thoughts, and beware of what you have in your heart and your spirit, knowing that the demons put ideas into you so as to corrupt your soul by making it think of that which is not right, in order to turn your spirit from the consideration of your sins and of God.

Abba Elias

Oh, how blissfully happy is the soul with God! The Church, truly, is an earthly Paradise!

St. John of Kronstadt

Our Lady, the Most-Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

In the New Testament, death is known as "falling asleep." For this reason, the Virgin Mary's death is called the "Falling Asleep of our Theotokos."

When did our Theotokos, fall asleep? Tradition and written accounts tell us that our Panagia lived 11 years after the Transfiguration of our Lord. For 3 years after His death she visited the temple. When she was 49, Christ ascended into Heaven. At the age of 60 she fell asleep.

She always lived in the Holy Land, where the God-Man our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ taught the glory of the word for the salvation of humankind and was triumphantly resurrected from the dead.

Our Panagia very often visited the Mountain of Olives where our Lord ascended to heaven. There she prayed to our Heavenly Father and to Her Son.

Three days before she fell asleep, an Angel came from Heaven and notified her that this event would take place in her life. It is said that the Archangel Gabriel, who had earlier brought her the news that she was to bear Christ, also came to tell of her falling asleep. Our Panagia was told not to be disturbed, but she should accept this with humility and with the new meaning of her falling asleep, followed by a life in Heaven together with Her Son.

There was no disturbance or sadness found in the heart of our Panagia. Instead her heart flooded with happiness and the desire she had to be close to Christ. Before, however, she announced the Holy event, she climbed for the last time to the Mount of Olives so she could say her prayers. It is said that on the way up the mountain she was greeted by the trees having their branches turned downwards as if they were bowing. In the future this would be the explanation that is given, that even the outside world without souls showed respect to the Panagia, who gave her entire life for the life and wishes of our Lord.

After she prayed on the mountain, she returned to Jerusalem to begin the preparations for her falling asleep. She lit candles in her house and invited all of her Christian friends, at which time she announced that she would be falling asleep. They all cried at the thought of her leaving them.

There, after a short while, many gathered miraculously from all over the world. They were taken by a Holy Cloud, brought to Gethsemane and to the house of the Theotokos. This was done according to the will of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, with whom all is possible.

Together with the other Disciples of Christ, the Holy Cloud also brought forth to the Holy City Dionysios Areopagitis, St. Timothy, and other Holy Hierarchs.

Since many who gathered began to cry once they learned of our Panagia falling asleep, She said to them: "Oh, those who are disciples of Christ and our Lord, do not have sadness at my falling asleep." And in a short time there appeared the inflamed speaker

of the Scriptures, the Apostle Paul, who with much respect bid goodbye to our Panagia and spoke great words of praise for her.

At this point, in one moment of atmospheric silence, the Theotokos said goodbye to everyone and asked our Lord for peace for the world.

She took her final stance in this life, that is in the "deathbed." She showed the inspiration and illumination that she had in her Holy soul that went to Heaven. She went to take her position next to the Throne of our Lord, close to her Son. Her funeral was a procession in the evening. The Apostles held the casket with others leading the procession chanting hymns. Above the human hymns there was also heard hymns chanted from Heaven. The harmonious voices heard from Heaven were from the Angels and the Bodiless Powers. The disciples of Judas, the unceasing enemies of Christ and the Panagia, organized themselves against the procession and tried to vehemently throw down the Relics of the Panagia. What occurred at this point was a great miracle.

It was not possible for our Lord to allow the Holy Body of His Mother, the Body that bore the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to be tossed to the street by those who were disrespectful. The justice from our Lord saw those who dared to be disrespectful to be blinded. One of the disciples of Judas, who went so far as to try to knock over the casket, was met with even stronger punishment. Not only was he blinded, he also had his hands cut off by an angel and stuck on top of the casket where he had dared to place his hands. This action saw him feeling contrition for his actions, made him believe in Christ and allowed himself to become close with the Mother of God. After he sought confession, he was healed. It is said that he received one small piece of the Panagia's clothing, and that through his faith, it allowed him to be healed of his blindness and severed hands. This piece of the Panagia's clothing also healed all of those who consequently were blinded, then believed and regained their sight. May these 15 days of prayer and fasting, bring us closer to Christ and His Holy Mother!

Fr. Christos P. Mars, Annunciation Cathedral Atlanta, GA

St. Gregory Palamas – On the Dormition

But now the Mother of God has her dwelling in Heaven whither she was today translated, for this is meet, Heaven being a suitable place for her. She "stands at the right of the King of all clothed in a vesture wrought with gold and arrayed with divers colors" (*cf. Ps. 44:9*), as the Psalmic prophecy says concerning her. By "vesture wrought with gold" understand her divinely radiant body arrayed with divers colors of every virtue. She alone in her body, glorified by God, now enjoys the celestial realm together with her Son. For, earth and grave and death did not hold forever her life-originating and God-receiving body - the dwelling more favored than Heaven and the Heaven of heavens. If, therefore, her soul, which was an abode of God's grace, ascended into Heaven when bereaved of things here below, a thing which is abundantly evident, how could it be that the body which not only received in itself the pre-eternal and only-begotten Son of God, the ever-flowing Wellspring of grace, but also manifested His Body by way of birth, should not have also been taken up into Heaven?

THE WAY TO THE KINGDOM?

~ Fr. Paul Costopoulos, HOLY TRINITY/HOLY CROSS Cathedral

"Blessed is the Kingdom..." The words are familiar to all of us. They constitute the intonation of the opening of every Liturgy. The words identify for us the goal of every liturgical experience; namely, encounter with God in His Heavenly Kingdom. Interestingly, the goal is one toward which we aspire both in this life and in the life to come even as did Abba Joseph.

Abba Joseph was a spiritually erudite man who lived in the third century. He was a desert father whose life was characterized by ascetic feats of fasting, prayer and worship. His story is told by the ancient writing of the Desert Tradition.

When the impending hour of Joseph's death was drawing near, we are told, Abba Joseph sent word to a friend named Abba Theodore. He wanted Abba Theodore to come see him before he died. Abba Theodore, however, was unable to immediately go because of other pressing obligations. He therefore sent word back to Abba Joseph saying, "I shall come if you wait until Saturday. But if you die before, I shall see you in the world to come.

The "world to come" about which Abba Theodore spoke is that which is attested to by the Divine Liturgy; namely, the Kingdom of God. Evidently, not only did he know the way to the Kingdom of God, but like other Fathers, Abba Theodore knew how to get there. What is the way to the Kingdom of God? How does one get there?

The answers to the questions are presented to us by the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah is a prophet who lived in the 7th and 8th centuries BC. In Isaiah 35:8-10, he points out that the way to the Kingdom of God is a three-fold way. Inferred in this way are the actions one must take to traverse the way to reach one's destination. The way, Isaiah states, is a holy way. It is a harmless way. And it is a happy way.

The way to the Kingdom of God is a way of holiness. This way clearly implies that to attain the Kingdom of God one must aspire toward holiness through fasting, prayer, worship and participation in the life of the Church as did the desert fathers such as Abba Theodore and Abba Joseph. This way, of course, is consistent with what St. Peter writes in I Peter 1:16, "As He who called you is holy, be holy yourself, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I myself am holy.'" Holiness, St. Maximus the Confessor tells us, comes by the grace of God.

In addition to being a holy way, the way to God, says Isaiah, is a harmless way. This does not mean that heaven's way is not fraught with persecution and at times martyrdom. Rather it means that if we put our trust in God, He will see us through difficult times, comforts us, and delivers us from adversity. Jesus Himself says as much: "Come unto me you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest..." (Matt. 11:28).

Finally the way to God is a happy way. Happiness and peace are as a result of redemption and forgiveness of sins. Redemption and forgiveness necessitate faith and continual repentance. That the redeemed and forgiven will be blessed both in this life and in the life to come is attested to by Isaiah. "They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" he states in Isaiah 35:10.

"If you wait until Saturday, I shall come," Abba Theodore said to Abba Joseph. "But if you die before, we shall see one another in the world to come." There is a world to come. It is the Kingdom of God spoken of by the Liturgy and Holy Scriptures. It is a Kingdom as the funeral Kontakion tells us where there is "no sorrow, suffering or sighing but life everlasting." To attain the Kingdom of God one would do well to remember that the way to the Kingdom as Isaiah tells us is a holy way, a harmless way, and a happy way necessitating, as St. Theophan the Recluse tells us, the grace of God, faith, and observance of God's commandments. Toward the end of attaining the Kingdom is the end toward which we must address ourselves.

This and That

The West, I think, would not have quite as much prominence (as compared to the Orthodox East) except for a certain military, economic and technological advantage that has erected empires and forced colonization. It is also useful in these historical matters to reflect on the fact that the wealth of the West was originally constituted by its plunder of Byzantium – bringing home wealth on the order of 100 times the annual income of the marauding states (such as Venice). This same wealth financed the Renaissance which was possible because the intelligentsia of Byzantium had fled to Italy to escape the Turks. The West has also maintained a propaganda front from nearly the 13th century to lessen the importance of Byzantium and its contribution to history. In short, the “West,” is a tissue of lies.

Fr. Stephen Freeman

Scientism that has abandoned the quest for understanding the visible creation in favor of evangelizing in favor of the philosophy of naturalism has fallen prey to the *nothing* that the father of lies loves. Science ruled by the iconoclasm of philosophical naturalism is as tyrannical as the iconoclastic Protestants... There is in modern thought “the unholy trinity of philosophical naturalism, egalitarianism and individualism that is fueled by pride, licentiousness and gnostic delusion.” ~ Michael Baumann

My work as a Biblical Anthropologist is one of the factors that convinced me that Orthodoxy is the true Faith. True scientific inquiry requires objectivity and objectivity makes discovery possible. The same can be said for spiritual objectivity, to the degree that we can achieve it.

Alice C. Linsley

When a school system’s emphasis shifts from helping students learn *how* to think, to teaching them *what* to think, the dumbing down process is well under way.

– Patrick Buchanan

The concluding paragraphs of the Manhattan Declaration on Christian Morality:

“Going back to the earliest days of the church, Christians have refused to compromise their proclamation of the gospel. In Acts 4, Peter and John were ordered to stop preaching. Their answer was, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” Through the centuries, Christianity has taught that civil disobedience is not only permitted, but sometimes required. There is no more eloquent defense of the rights and duties of religious conscience than the one offered by Martin Luther King, Jr., in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail. Writing from an explicitly Christian perspective, and citing Christian writers such as Augustine and Aquinas, King taught that just laws elevate and ennoble human beings because they are rooted in the moral law whose ultimate source is God Himself. Unjust laws degrade human beings. Inasmuch as they can claim no authority beyond sheer human will, they lack any power to bind in conscience. King’s willingness to go to jail, rather than comply with legal injustice, was exemplary and inspiring.”

“Because we honor justice and the common good, we will not comply with any edict that purports to compel our institutions to participate in abortions, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide and euthanasia, or any other anti-life act; nor will we bend to any rule purporting to force us to bless immoral sexual partnerships, treat them as marriages or the equivalent, or refrain from proclaiming the truth, as we know it, about morality and immorality and marriage and the family. We will fully and ungrudgingly render to Caesar what is Caesar’s. But under no circumstances will we render to Caesar what is God’s.”

“Our only job in life to try and love God as much as He seems to love us.” ~ Internet comment

The following story took place in Russia in the late 1930s. It is recounted at greater length in the book, Father Arseny, published in Moscow (in Russian) in 1993.

A young girl named Maria was walking to the railway station late one night, on the way to her home in Moscow after spending the evening in the country with friends. Her way lay through a forest, where she was accosted by two youths. They grabbed her, threw a jacket over her head, and threatened her at knifepoint, saying they would kill her if she screamed. The taller of the two sent his friend to stand watch, threw Maria on the ground and began to rip her clothes off.

Maria was a believer and she began to pray. In her confused and terrified condition the only prayer she could remember was a kontakion to the Mother of God: "To you, our Queen, leader in battle and defender, we your people, delivered from all peril, offer hymns of victory and thanksgiving, O Theotokos. Since you

possess invincible power, set us free from every calamity, that we may cry to you: Hail, O Bride without Bridegroom!" Maria said this prayer under her breath, over and over.

Her assailant asked her, "What are you muttering?" Then he looked up and seemed to see something behind her. He pulled Maria up, dragged her to another spot and threw her down again. She continued to pray. Again he looked up, with an expression of terror. Then he told Maria to get up, gave her her clothes to put on, and escorted her all the way to her home in Moscow, where he left her at the door. Maria went in and gave thanks before her icon of the Mother of God for her inexplicable deliverance.

A year later, Maria had an unexpected visitor. She recognized him immediately as the young man who had attacked her. He came into her room and, seeing the icon of the Mother of God, cried out, "It's her!" Then he begged Maria to forgive the great wrong he had done her, and left.

Some time afterwards,

during World War II when everyone in Moscow was starving, the young man appeared at Maria's home again, bringing food. He came several times on the same errand, but Maria could not overcome her hatred toward him. Finally, at her mother's urging, Maria agreed to listen to what the young man, whose name was Andrei, had to say.

Andrei told Maria that when he was about to rape her, after he heard her praying, he looked up and saw a woman standing behind her, warning him off with a commanding gesture. After he had taken Maria to another place, he saw the woman again, this time stretching her arm over Maria. Andrei was terrified and decided to let Maria go. But afterwards his conscience tormented him until he finally got up the courage to go to her and ask her forgiveness. When he went to her home and saw the icon of the Mother of God on her wall, he immediately recognized it as the woman he had seen in the forest. After that, he found out everything he could



about the Mother of God and eventually became a believer.

Maria's mother heard this story and said to her, "This wonderful vision was granted to Andrei, not to you. He would never have been granted such a miracle if he were not really a good person at heart." Maria had to agree with her mother, and finally was able to grant Andrei the forgiveness he had been begging for so long. ☒ ☒ ☒

On Thoughts, Fantasies, and Distractions

Each one of us needs to attend to himself, to his work, and primarily to his heart -- to see if he has remembrance of God, death, hell, heaven, and every other beneficial divine recollection. The fact that we do not have spiritual consolation is due to our daydreaming and lack of introspection along with remembrance of God. Your thoughts should revolve upon yourselves; give spiritual work to your mind, and do not let it wander about here and there. Force yourselves a little to be silent; do not speak unnecessarily; pray constantly; criticize yourselves internally--do not justify yourselves. In conclusion, without compelling and constraining ourselves, nothing spiritual can be accomplished. **Elder Ephraim**

"When the Lord renders to each his due reward, He does not consider the amount given but the amount left."

Blessed Theophylact (Explanation of the Gospel of St. Luke)

What did the Protestant Reformers say about the Theotokos?

Martin Luther: "In this work whereby she was made the Mother of God, so many and such good things were given her that no one can grasp them.... Not only was Mary the mother of Him who is born [in Bethlehem], but of Him who, before the world, was eternally born of the Father from a Mother in time and at the same time man and God." ... "It is an article of faith that Mary is Mother of the Lord and still a virgin.... Christ, we believe, came forth from a womb left perfectly intact." (Weimer, *The Works of Luther*, English transl. by Pelikan, Concordia, St. Louis, v. 7. p. 572., v. 11, pp. 319-320; v. 6, p. 510.)

John Calvin: "It cannot be denied that God in choosing and destining Mary to be the Mother of His Son, granted her the highest honor.... Elizabeth calls Mary Mother of the Lord, because the unity of the person in the two natures of Christ was such that she could have said that the mortal man engendered in the womb of Mary was at the same time the eternal God. ...(Calvini Opera, Corpus Reformatorum, Braunschweig-Ber un, 1863-1900, v. 45, p. 348, 35.)

.... "There have been certain folk who have wished to suggest from this passage [Matt 1:25] that the Virgin Mary had other children than the Son of God, and that Joseph had then dwelt with her later; but what folly this is! For the gospel writer did not wish to record what happened afterwards; he simply wished to make clear Joseph's obedience ... Our Lord Jesus Christ is called the firstborn. This is not because there was a second or a third, but because the gospel writer is paying regard to the precedence. Scripture speaks thus of naming the first-born whether or no there was any question of the second." (Sermon on Matthew 1:22-25, published 1562.)

Ulrich Zwingli: "It was given to her what belongs to no creature, that in the flesh she should bring forth the Son of God. (Zwingli Opera, Corpus Reformatorum, Berlin, 1905, in Evang. Luc., Op. comp., v. 6, I, p. 639.) ... "I firmly believe that Mary, according to the words of the gospel as a pure Virgin brought forth for us the Son of God and in childbirth and after childbirth forever remained a pure, intact Virgin." (v. I, p. 424)

John Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism: "... born of the blessed Virgin Mary, who, as well after as before she brought Him forth, continued a pure and unspotted virgin." - The works of the Rev. John Wesley, Volume 15 by John Wesley, Joseph Benson, Published by Thomas Cordeux, London, 1812, "A Letter to a Roman Catholic" page 110

✘ Self-importance, when rooted by habit in the mind, cannot be destroyed by one man...or in a short time... A strong and vigorous treatment is necessary to get at the root of the complaint.
~ St. Basil the Great

✘ Look straight up to God: *He* will praise you. But the man whom He approves must not seek honor from mortals....But God brings great advantage to the one whom He approves. Therefore, let us seek after His praise.
~ St. John Chrysostom