



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **September 29, 2013** ✠

St. Cyriacus the Hermit, of Palestine (556)

St. John of San Francisco ~ Uncovering of his relics (1993)

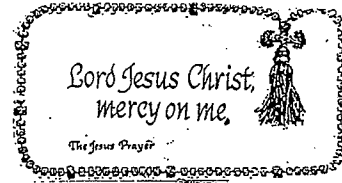
New Hieromartyr John, Archbishop of Riga, Latvia (1934)

When the Jesus Prayer is absent, all manner of harmful things assail us, leaving no room for anything good in the soul. But when our Lord is present in the Prayer, everything alien is banished.

~ St. Gregory Palamas

⇒ Inquirer's Class – Tuesday, October 1, 6:30pm

On Being in Church – St. John of Kronstadt



"When you look at the candles and lamps burning in church, rise in thought from the material fire to the immaterial fire of the Holy Spirit, for our God is a consuming fire. When you see and smell the fragrant incense, rise in thought to the spiritual fragrance of the Holy Spirit, for we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ. Also, in contrast think of the spiritual stench, which is sin and endeavor to be filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit."

"In the Church especially is accomplished the mystery of cleansing from sins. Reverence, therefore, the place where your soul is cleansed from all impurities, where you are reconciled to God, where you receive the true life of the spirit."

"The voice of the readings in church, the hymns, prayers and supplications, is the voice of our own souls, pouring forth from the acknowledgment and feeling of our spiritual needs and requirements; it is the voice of all mankind acknowledging and feeling its poverty, its accursedness, its sinfulness, the necessity of a Savior, the necessity of gratitude and praise, for the innumerable benefits and the infinite perfections of God. Wonderfully beautiful are these prayers and hymns; they are the breathing of the Holy Spirit."

"Believe as undoubtingly that God sees you, as you believe that your father, or anyone else standing face to face with you, sees you, only with this difference, that the Heavenly Father sees everything that is in you, entirely what you are. A lively sense of God's presence is a source of peace and joy for the soul. Doubt in His presence produces distress, affliction and oppression. Heartfelt prayer is the source of peace of heart, whilst insincere, superficial, inattentive prayer wounds the heart."

"You gaze on the Icon of the Savior and see that He looks at you from it with the brightest eyes; this look is the image of how He actually looks upon you with His eyes, that are brighter than the sun, and sees all your thoughts, hears all your heartfelt distress and sighs."

✠ **The words of the Saints are words of God and not of men. Let him put them in his heart and keep them securely, since God's words are words of life and he who has them within himself and keeps them has eternal life.**

~ St. Symeon the New Theologian

October 1 – The Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos

The Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos: "Today the Virgin stands in the midst of the Church, and with choirs of Saints she invisibly prays to God for us. Angels and Bishops venerate Her, Apostles and prophets rejoice together, Since for our sake she prays to the Eternal God!"

This miraculous appearance of the Mother of God occurred in the mid-tenth century in Constantinople, in the Blachernae church where her robe, veil, and part of her belt were preserved after being transferred from Palestine in the fifth century.

On Sunday, October 1, during the All Night Vigil, when the church was overflowing with those at prayer, the Fool-for-Christ St Andrew (October 2), at the fourth hour, lifted up his eyes towards the heavens and beheld our most Holy Lady Theotokos coming through the air, resplendent with heavenly light and surrounded by an assembly of the Saints. St John the Baptist and the holy Apostle John the Theologian accompanied the Queen of Heaven. On bended knees the Most Holy Virgin tearfully prayed for Christians for a long time. Then, coming near the Bishop's Throne, she continued her prayer.

After completing her prayer she took her veil and spread it over the people praying in church, protecting them from enemies both visible and invisible. The Most Holy Lady Theotokos was resplendent with heavenly glory, and the protecting veil in her hands gleamed "more than the rays of the sun." St Andrew gazed trembling at the miraculous vision and he asked his disciple, the blessed Epiphanius standing beside him, "Do you see, brother, the Holy Theotokos, praying for all the world?" Epiphanius answered, "I do see, holy Father, and I am in awe."

The Ever-Blessed Mother of God implored the Lord Jesus Christ to accept the prayers of all the people calling on His Most Holy Name, and to respond speedily to her intercession, "O Heavenly King, accept all those who pray to You and call on my name for help. Do not let them not go away from my icon unheard."

Sts Andrew and Epiphanius were worthy to see the Mother of God at prayer, and "for a long time observed the Protecting Veil spread over the people and shining with flashes of glory. As long as the Most Holy Theotokos was there, the Protecting Veil was also visible, but with her departure it also became invisible. After taking it with her, she left behind the grace of her visitation."

At the Blachernae church, the memory of the miraculous appearance of the Mother of God was remembered. In the fourteenth century, the Russian pilgrim and clerk Alexander, saw in the church an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos praying for the world, depicting St Andrew in contemplation of her.

This Orthodoxy

According to Saint Anastasios the Sinaite, one of the earliest Fathers of the Church, "Orthodoxy is a true conception about God and creation." Orthodoxy, i.e. right belief, is the truth itself. According to the confession of Christ Himself ("I am the way, the truth, and the life"), He is the truth incarnate. We can find and can know the truth only in the person of Christ; therefore we can be saved only in Christ.

According to the aforesaid, Orthodoxy – Truth – is identified with Christ, Who is the Eternal Truth. And due to the fact that God the Trinity is the source of truth, His mode of existence is also truth, the fundamental and eternal Orthodoxy, which men have been called to follow in their own lives.

After man's fall, he lost God's Grace, i.e. he fell from communion with God, the Truth. The descendants of the first Adam, in order to restore communion with God, must come into communion with the new Adam, i.e. Christ. Man's salvation is possible only in Christ.

Orthodoxy is the holy Tradition of our Church, the truth about God, man, and the world that was delivered to us by God Incarnate Himself. Orthodoxy is the right faith and right worship of God. Orthodoxy is the pure Christianity, the real Church established and preserved by Christ for the salvation of mankind.

But what is the truth that Christ offered us? And where does this truth remain unadulterated, pure, and unconfused? The answer is found in the Holy Bible, where the Church itself is called "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3.15).

Man comes to truth, i.e. to Christ (incarnate Orthodoxy) in His body, the Church. Man's redemption, his return to and union with God and his final salvation take place in the Church. The Church was founded in the world because only in it can man find again his real existence and communion with God and the rest of the world. Man thus finds in the Church the meaning of life, his destiny, and moreover real communion with other men and the rest of creation. According to the apostle Paul, the Church is "His body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1.23).

The salvation that Christ granted to us through His Crucifixion and Resurrection, is continued in the Church. That is why Blessed Augustine called the Church "Christ extended into the ages". That means that the Church is Christ, Who, even after His Resurrection and Ascension, continues saving the world through the Holy Spirit. Humanity continuously finds God in the Body of Christ, in the Church. "That is why we cannot separate Christ from the Church. There can be no Church without Christ. The truth that exists outside the body of Christ, the Church, is like gold dust in the mud. It is nothing else than sporadic beams of divine presence within the condition of fallen man and his inability to rise and be saved".

Christ as entire truth – Orthodoxy – leads us to our salvation through His Church. Therefore, the Church is the foundation of the truth. If one wants to know Christ authentically, in His catholicity and fullness, one must necessarily resort to the Church. "Outside the Church, even in the so-called "Christian" heresies, there is the inability to find the whole Christ. Without the Church we cannot truly know Christ. Likewise, without the Church we cannot fully understand the Holy Scriptures, that is her Bible, her own possession and Tradition. But it is also true that, in order to know Christ in the Church, the Church existing here and now must express the true Christ in His fullness. Otherwise the true Christ remains unknown and inaccessible and man remains outside salvation, which is the exact condition found in the various heresies. Only in the true Church does man authentically meet Christ and is saved.

The Church, according to one of the Holy Fathers, is “the gathering of the Orthodox people.” It is impossible to think of the Church without Orthodoxy; and within this framework we can understand the Church as tradition, which is a divine process and dynamic movement of God in history. The Romanian theologian Dimitri Staniloae says that, “Orthodoxy is a living condition, the ceaseless life of the Church.”

“The Church always considered it her highest responsibility and obligation to maintain, in the Holy Spirit, the Apostolic Faith unadulterated and unfalsified. If the Church had not remained faithful to the truth of her existence, she could not have remained faithful to herself and retained her identity. The contents and the substance of the Church is Orthodoxy.”[4]

This responsibility of the Church to maintain the truth through Tradition is not something abstract. The Church takes care that each of her children remains in the truth, in “orthodoxy” and “orthopraxis” (right-faith and right-works).

“Every Christian within the Church must not only simply believe, but believe in one God; not only believe in a supreme and invisible power, but in God the Trinity, Who revealed Himself in Christ. Likewise, he must not simply love, but love his God by loving his fellow man. The Church is obliged to maintain this orthodoxy of faith and life and to communicate it to the world through her mission and witness.”[5]

Having the above in mind, we can easily understand why the Church rejected all those who tried to falsify or refused to accept the truth of the Church, those who tried to add to or omit something from the Truth, which is Christ Himself. The Church rejected them as heretics not because she lacked love for men, but, on the contrary, because of excessive love for them, for those outside the Church, far off from the truth. The Church cannot compromise or sacrifice the truth and the Orthodox faith, because she will lose her identity and catholicity. “The Christian of every age must accept everything that Christ revealed and that His body (the Church) delivers. He must accept the whole truth and not a “minimum” of it. The Catholicity and Orthodoxy of the Church are preserved only in the fullness and wholeness of faith. The Church is Catholic inasmuch as it is Orthodox, because only then does she preserve the fullness of the truth in Christ.”[6]

Nowadays, of course, we are used to simplifying things and to being indifferent to the Truth of the Church. Being superficial and frivolous, we give attention to outer forms and we claim that it is enough if there is a common acceptance of a basic faith, and everything more is useless. Doctrines and Canons are made by men and they must be put aside “for love’s sake”.

“Doctrines, however, as rules of faith do not destroy the unity of the Truth. They create the boundaries of Orthodoxy, of the Church, so that the Church, as Orthodoxy, can be distinguished from heresy.... For the Church, the foundation of faith is one: the fullness of truth in Christ.”[7]

For the Church, therefore, one thing is needful: to retain the truth unadulterated, as she received it. For this purpose the Church mobilized all her powers to fight against heresy, which was her most threatening enemy. The persecutions never threatened the Church’s unity or maintenance of the truth. On the contrary, they sometimes helped her gather her powers. However, heresy many times caused her trouble. For heresy, which is nothing but removal from the truth, threatens the Church’s own identity and existence, it threatens the Truth, by threatening to sever the Truth and to divide Christ. But a Christ Who is not entire and undivided, Who is not the whole, “incarnate truth”, is not the Christ that saves. Heretics did not reject the whole truth, they did not refuse Christ, but they did not accept Him entire, but only a part of Him. Arius e.g., did not refuse Christ’s humanity but he refused His divinity. Others accepted His divinity and refused His humanity. But none of them accepted Christ

entire and undivided.

“The truth of the Church is fullness, a unity that must always remain undivided and unsevered. **Heresy, however, tries to subject the truth of the ecclesiastical tradition to the criteria of fallen man. For the heretic renders himself judge and criterion of the revealed truth. For this reason, most heretics of every era are rationalists.** A heretic (who becomes a heretic because previously he has been **affected by pride, which fills him with confidence in his own reason and thought**) cuts himself off from the life-giving, Divine Grace and attempts to be saved by his own power, by **his own self-made “truth”**, not by the God-given Truth. Heresy unavoidably leads to a humanistic religiousness.”[8]

So the struggle of all the Holy Fathers against the different heresies aimed at retaining the truth completely – which is an indispensable presupposition for salvation – in order to keep every man in the Ark of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. We could say that this struggle is their greatest offering to the Church. That is why they never consented to co-exist with heretics in a “minimum” of faith and to be satisfied with holding a part of the truth, but they struggled to keep it whole and undivided, for only then could they stay within Truth and obtain their salvation. The method, nowadays, in which differences are not mentioned and common points are emphasized, was never accepted by the Fathers as a starting-point for theological disputes with heresies. On the contrary, they constituted Ecumenical Synods and they struggled not for a “minimum” of faith, not to find out what is common between them and the heretics, but rather to mark out what separates, what teachings of the heretics sever the truth and, consequently, the unity of faith.

Otherwise, if the Church were indifferent to retaining the Faith and the Tradition, as she received them, pure and unadulterated, then it would not be the Church of Christ, His Body, but a human organization or a political ideology, striving for political or humanistic purposes, and not in anyway related to Christ, His sacrifice on the Cross, and His Holy Resurrection and victory over sin, death and the devil.

To those who attack the Church of Christ by teaching that Christ’s Church is divided into so-called “branches” which differ in doctrine and way of life, or that the Church does not exist visibly, but will be formed in the future when all “branches” or sects or denominations, and even religions will be united into one body; and who do not distinguish the priesthood and mysteries of the Church from those of the heretics, but say that the baptism and eucharist of heretics is effectual for salvation; therefore, to those who knowingly have communion with these aforementioned heretics or who advocate, disseminate, or defend their new heresy of Ecumenism under the pretext of brotherly love or the supposed unification of separated Christians, ANATHEMA!

Letter to an Inquirer

Dear _____,

Orthodoxy knows no parallel to the Papacy. All its bishops are equals. The Orthodox Church, following the way of the Apostles, is conciliar by nature. Each local church is self-governing, united around its bishops, but sharing the common faith and communion with the other local Orthodox churches. Christ is the only Head of the Church. He requires no “Vicar on earth”, which would imply His absence, a vicar being one who takes the place of one who is absent. The authority holding Orthodoxy in unity is an *inner* one – the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit, guiding fallible human leaders in council to maintain “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3:5). Rome does not understand us on this. They are convinced we need a human locus of authority, i.e., we need a Pope. They’ve been trying to give us one for several centuries! We decline, still.

The infallible Papacy is seen by Orthodox *not* as a “conservative” phenomenon, but in fact as an innovation, a later development and novelty unknown to the first millennium of Church life. (Orthodoxy recognizes several early Popes as saints of the Church universal). The Orthodox Church likewise does not need the Papacy to secure the “deposit of faith”, as they say. We have Holy Tradition. Holy Tradition, that which is “passed on” from generation to generation, is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit working in a divine-human partnership within the whole Church, especially in the Saints who have reached such a level of personal purity and spiritual advancement so as to be truly guided by God to strengthen the Body of Christ in the Truth.

Orthodoxy speaks of prayer, of mystical encounter with God beyond mere rational, intellectual categories. The Latin Church got side-tracked through medieval scholasticism – a system which, borrowing Aristotelian philosophical categories, assumed the human mind capable of contemplating mysteries through sheer intellectual capability and effort. To this day, it tends to be far more rationalistic, analytical, and legalistic than Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy says that the intellect is a great gift from God which must be purified and directed. The mind’s ultimate knowledge is in mystical union with God through prayer and the sacraments, since God is the Source of all Truth. The mind (Gr.: *nous*) is the higher part of the soul, but it too is fallen in its nature. Our perception is distorted by sin. The mind is restored to its rightful prominence when it contemplates God and encounters God in mystical prayer. This is the true satisfaction of the thirst for all human knowledge. Augustine said, “the heart is restless until it rests in God”. The Fathers taught that the heart must be united with the mind in order for the soul to meet God. This is an action of prayer, study and obedience.

Protestantism, the offspring of Rome, is still closer to the Latin Faith it cast off, than it is to ancient Orthodoxy. It is the rationalistic approach to faith reduced down to a pulpit and pews: to lecturers and listeners and endless “Bible studies,” which lead only to further and further disagreement and fractioning over what is believed. There are, as a result, the thousands of Protestant denominations, which are primarily an American invention, by the way. The Reformers never refuted the underlying premises of rationalistic scholasticism (which you could call “theology confined by philosophy”). There is another side of Protestantism, which when it wearies of rationalism, gives way to a sea of irrational emotionalism, hyper-enthusiasm, “charismatic” outpourings and sentimentality of Pentecostalism. Western Christendom seems to swing on a pendulum between the extremes of excessive authority and rationalism to hyper-emotionalism and unbridled freedom. The West, with its endless “movements” and reformations is constantly in flux between these reactionary extremes. Orthodoxy maintains a balance between authority and freedom through the mystical path of Divine contemplation, as handed down by the ancient Fathers of the early Church.

It is the Western Church which has planted the philosophical seeds which ultimately gave birth to the modern secular world we know today. Modern man, with his autonomously capable mind has “rationally” and even, “scientifically” come to the conclusion that, despite growing evidence to the contrary, he can do fine on his own, without a need for God. He may even choose to deny God’s existence.

Secularism confines God to a private devotional sentiment at best, leaving no room for God to interfere in “real life,” including the real life of an individual human soul. Orthodoxy invites man to an encounter of his whole being, body and soul, with the True and Living God, an encounter which should touch, shape, effect and transfigure every corner of one’s existence, over time. Most moderns don’t have the heart (or stomach) to face up to the real God, in the way Orthodoxy directs us. It requires too much. It’s easier to rest on intellect or emotion. The Church takes to heart Christ’s words from the Gospel: “Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

May God help you to draw near to Him, mind, body and soul!

This and That

The Crusades

One of the purposes of the Crusades was to force the Eastern Orthodox to submit to the papacy. In every place they conquered the Crusaders threw out the Orthodox Bishops and put in Latin Bishops in their place. In 1098 the Crusaders conquered Antioch and deposed the Greek Orthodox Patriarch and put a Latin Bishop in his place and tried to force the Orthodox in Antioch to submit to Roman domination. Rome continued to appoint a Latin Patriarch of Antioch until 1953. When they took Jerusalem they did the same thing and created the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which still exists. In 1204 they took over Constantinople and established a Roman Catholic Latin Empire in which the Orthodox were forced to submit to Rome. I am shocked that any Orthodox Christian could defend the Crusades. The Orthodox of the Middle East were victims of the Crusades.

As an Orthodox Christian I resent being blamed for the Crusades. The Crusaders were Roman Catholics who tried to force Orthodox Christians to submit to papal domination. Read about the Fourth Crusade and what they did to the Orthodox Christians of Constantinople. Today if you want to see the glory of the Byzantine Empire, you have to go to Venice or other Western European cities, because the Western Crusaders took everything they could steal from the Orthodox. Even one of the most frequently seen Christian symbols in the Philippines, the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, now in a shrine in Manila was stolen by the Crusaders from a Greek island. Fr. John W. Morris

Bowing to the State

"Throughout time and space, the State has always sought total control over its subjects. And it insists those subjects put it first in their loyalties, too. Whether it was early Christians in Rome who died because they bowed only to Jesus Christ, not the emperor, or modern Christians in the former Soviet Union tortured to death in gulags for the same "crime," Leviathan does not change. And American rulers are now openly demanding the same loyalty.

A Christian photographer in New Mexico declined to accept as clients two lesbians who wanted her services at their wedding. The lesbians sued, of course, despite suffering no damages whatsoever: sinful photographers abound, and they found another happy to accommodate them. Nonetheless, New Mexico's gowned clowns (judges) ruled that "...there is a price, one that we all have to pay somewhere in our civic life... The [photographer and her husband] have to channel their conduct, not their beliefs, so as to leave space for other Americans who believe something different."

And so Christians are "compelled by law to compromise the very religious beliefs that inspire their lives."

Becky Akers

"Everything depends on marriage, because it is the fundamental unit of society, the original and best department of health, education and welfare, supplying what every other institution in society needs, depends on, for its own flourishing, but which none of those institutions can supply for themselves."

Robert P. George, Princeton U.

"We should get rid of the idea that mommies can be good daddies and daddies can be good mommies."

Ryan T. Anderson

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

~ C.S. Lewis

Statement on Marriage by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

Translated by John Sanidopoulos, Mystagogy Blog

On September 7, 2013, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visited the Holy Cathedral of St. Symeon in Tallinn, Estonia. Early that afternoon, His All-Holiness presided over Vespers Service in the same church, at which time he delivered the Homily. Below is an excerpt of this Homily, in which he addressed the topic of the relationship between Church and Family, and in turn condemned homosexual marriage as an innovation foreign to the Orthodox ecclesiological mindset and way of life.

“The Church, my beloved parents and children, and subsequently the family, which consists lawfully and by the command of God of men and women, and the children acquired, is not a foundation or association or a simple organization, but a Body, as it is wonderfully depicted by the Apostle Paul. And this parallelism is accurate and true. Church and marriage. Husband and wife. Body and its members.

This community, signified in the Mysteries and in the obedience of Faith, both in the Church and in the family, is sanctified and mystagogued through the Mystery of Marriage, which, according to the Fathers, is a mystery of co-creation, and the ontological link of love with the Head of the Body, to ensure health and life, which is salvation and sanctification.

As in our Orthodox Church, where no member is forgiven to deal with things in a peculiar form and at one’s discretion and to prey on the proper operation and sincere communion of the love and unity of faith of the other members, or despise and ignore them, because they create cancerous disorders, agitations, dissensions, schisms, and heresies. This applies as well to the miniature church, the family, in which is required compassion, love and unity for the structure to be built, in which the father, the mother and the children have a place inter-embracing one another’s gifts, responsibilities and rights, and they are “individually members of it”.

God blesses our every effort towards the fulfillment of His will, and every struggle in life, according to one’s faithfulness in each and every talent. It suffices to realize in time our given talents and gifts and therefore our obligations for our every personal role, which God expects us to live out in the ecclesiastical and familial body as Orthodox Christians, activating its divine-human nature, within the framework of our God-given limits and conditions. For God created man “male and female”, that we might not imitate those who “*exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised*” (Romans 1:24-26).

To our Lord Jesus Christ, Who blessed families through the Mystery of Marriage at Cana of Galilee and changed water into wine, that is, into joy and feasting, and to His Body, the Orthodox Church, the partnering of the same sex is unknown and condemned, and they (*Christ and the Church*) condemn the contemporary invention of “mutual cohabitation”, which is the result of sin and not the law of joy, and by their actions the “females exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error” (Romans 1:26-28).

Let this not also be born in you, Orthodox Estonians, brethren and children.”