

## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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✠ **March 15, 2015** ✠

**Third Sunday of Great Lent**

**Sunday of the**

**Precious and Life-Giving Cross**

Martyr Agapius and his companions in Palestine (303)

**The Fourth Week of Lent:**

✠ **Wed. March 18, 6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy**

✠ **Fri. March 20, 6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy (w/Lenten Supper)**

✠ The knowledge of the Cross is concealed in the sufferings of the Cross. And the more our participation in its sufferings, the greater the perception we gain through the Cross.

~ St. Isaac of Syria

**Repentance** – *from the very beginning, a call to repentance...*

*'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'* (Matt.3:2). With these words, first uttered by St John the Baptist, Jesus Christ began His own mission (Matt.4:17). Christianity was from the very beginning a call to repentance, to conversion, to a 'change of mind' (metanoia). A radical transformation of one's entire way of life and thought, a renovation of the mind and senses, a rejection of sinful deeds and thoughts, a transfiguration of the human person: these are the main elements of Christ's message.

The pattern for repentance is set by Jesus Christ in His Parable of the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:11-24). Having lived a sinful life 'in a far country', that is, far away from God, the prodigal son, after many tribulations, comes to himself and decides to return to his Father. Repentance begins with his conversion ('came to himself'), which is then transformed into determination to return ('I will arise and go'), and finishes with his return to God ('he arose and came'). This is followed by confession ('Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you'), which results in forgiveness ('Bring quickly the best robe'), adoption ('this my son'), and spiritual resurrection ('was dead, and is alive again'). Repentance is therefore a dynamic process, a way towards God, rather than a mere act of recognizing one's sins.

Every Christian has all of his sins forgiven in the Sacrament of Baptism. However, 'there is no man who shall live and sin not'. Sins committed after Baptism deprive the human person of the fullness of life in God. Hence the necessity of the 'second Baptism', the expression used by the Church Fathers for repentance, emphasizing its purifying, renovating and sanctifying energy.

**The Sacrament of Penance (Confession) is spiritual healing for the soul.** Every sin, depending on its gravity, is for the soul either a small injury, a deep wound, sometimes a serious disease, or perhaps even a fatal illness. In order to be spiritually healthy, the human person must regularly visit his father-confessor, a spiritual doctor: 'Have you sinned? Go to Church and repent in your sin... Here is a physician, not a judge. Here nobody is condemned, but everybody receives forgiveness of sins', says St John Chrysostom.

– **Bishop Hilarion Alfayev**

"In all travels and movements;  
in all our coming in and going  
out; in putting on our shoes;  
at the bath; at the table;  
in lighting our candles;  
in lying down;  
in sitting down; in whatever  
employment occupies us,  
we mark our forehead  
with the sign of the Cross."

~ Tertullian (220 AD)



## *This and That*

**The Irony of Rebellious Art** – There is the great irony in the popular art of the last sixty years. Its forms thrive on rebellion and the overturning of conventional limits and expectations and even of morality. Popular art often seeks to break conventional patterns and to ignore what society expects. Singers cry out for personal freedom. Painters disregard normal rules of color and perspective and form in order to transgress a boundary. Writers sketch narratives that investigate the immoral or amoral, or sometimes abandon standard narrative altogether.

But the irony is that for such art to work, in order for it to make a statement, such rules and boundaries and markers have to be in place. If one wishes to deface a wall with graffiti or some other outrageous markings, the wall must be there to be defaced; you can't deface a wall that doesn't exist. If one wishes to scale a barbed-wire fence marked "no trespassing" and wave his arms and say, "Look at me," there must be a fence to scale. If one wants to sneer at conventional rules of behavior, there must actually be rules that govern how most people act. If you going to be a freak, you need to be surrounded by ordinary people so you can stand out.

**No More Limits – No More Art** - The problem for popular art today is that, increasingly, there is nothing to rebel against. The structures of morality and societal norms have almost completely disappeared. When there is only freedom, there is left only the celebration of self, the attaining of what one wants, not the hoping for it or the experience of being denied it or the longing for what one cannot have. Art becomes the expression of pleasure. With the horizon of unacceptable behavior forever receding into the distance, the limits and burdens of life are no longer available as subjects for artistic lament or rebellion, and so they get replaced by self-absorbed celebrations of whatever one self-indulgently chooses. And that does not produce art; it produces pornography.

Paul Alms, (Touchstone)

Rod Dreher:

We are fast reaching — and in many places have reached — a point where what traditional Christianity teaches about homosexuality may not be said or thought in the public square, no matter how peacefully expressed.

(The challenge is to) remember what it means to be a Christian in an era of mass conformity and mass forgetfulness. If we are not possessed by our orthodox religion — we will be possessed by our culture. We, the church, have allowed ourselves to be possessed by a spirit of mammon, of nationalism, and of a desire for comfort above truth.

**...Put bluntly, given the dynamics of our rapidly changing culture, I believe it will be increasingly difficult to be a good Christian and a good American.** It is far more important to me to preserve the faith than to preserve liberal democracy and the American order. Ideally, there should not be a contradiction, but again, the realities of post-Christian America challenge our "outdated" ideals.

**Scripture no longer holds a place of central authority within Western culture** and natural law arguments have been lost in a constant battle of science and counter-science. Everything seems to have been swallowed by a popular acceptance of radical Nominalism: anything can be whatever we want it to be. The wanting is the thing. But sexual relationships (and all relationships) lose the possibility of well-being in a world where whatever we want is, in fact, the case. For relationship is inherently about the Other, and if the Other is simply what I want, then the Other serves only as an extension of the ego... The modern project has reduced sexual existence to mere identity, a vehicle for the ego. Ovum and sperm have been objectified, becoming simple biological materials to be manipulated in a lab.

– Fr. Stephen Freeman

# The SIGN of the CROSS

In the course of history no symbol has expressed the mentality of Christians more faithfully than the cross. The cross is the concrete expression of the Christian mystery, of victory through defeat, of glory through humiliation, of life through death. It is the symbol of a God who became man to die as a slave to save creatures. It is the symbol of a life that is not afraid to look to the height and breadth and depth of things because in every direction its arms remain outstretched.

It is interesting to note that long before Christ the symbol of the cross was held in high esteem and venerated by many pagan cultures as a sacred sign of the stability and integrity of the universe pointing to the four directions of the compass and gathering to itself the entire cosmos. More amazing still this ancient symbol would in the "fullness of time" become the instrument of redemption and the means of the glorification of the Son of Man as St. John Chrysostom says: "I call him king because I see him crucified: it belongs to the king to die for his subjects." Crucifixion, death, salvation, kingship, glory - the cross!

Because the pagan world could not and would not understand such a deep mystery, such "foolishness," the early Christians hesitated to use the cross openly as the sign of the new faith. When it did appear it was usually disguised as an anchor or was amid vines. With the liberation of the Church from persecution under the Emperor Constantine, however, the cross slowly emerged as the sign of the Christians. Eusebius relates that the cross even supplanted the Roman eagles on the military standards — *En touto nika* (Gain the victory with this).

Despite their reticence to use the cross as a public symbol before the fourth century, the Christians did make wide use of it as early as the second and third centuries to sign themselves on the forehead. In the second century Tertullian reports: "In all our travels and movements, in all our coming and going out ..... whatever employment occupies us, we mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross." "Let us not be ashamed to confess the Crucified," writes St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century. "Let the cross be our seal, made with boldness by our fingers on our brow and in everything ...."

By the sixth century in the East, probably due to the raging Monophysite heresy which denied the double nature of Christ of both God and man, two fingers began to be used to trace the sign of the cross, now no longer only on the forehead but more boldly with a larger sign made on the

body. The succeeding centuries saw further modifications emanate from Eastern tradition because of a desire to profess more explicitly the belief in the triune God and the double nature in Christ. The thumb and two fingers were extended to symbolize the Trinity while the ring finger and the little finger were folded back on the palm to profess the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

This newer usage also spread to the Western Church where we read Pope Leo IV writing in the middle of the ninth century instructed his clergy: "Sign the chalice and the host with a proper cross...with two fingers outstretched and the thumb hidden within them, by which the trinity is symbolized. Take heed to make this sign rightly." In the thirteenth century Pope Innocent III directed most explicitly that the sign of the cross be made with three fingers from the forehead to the breast and from the right to the left shoulder, the actual way it still is made by the majority of Eastern Christians. The Western Church retained this ancient form until about the fourteenth century when gradually the open hand was introduced and the sign began to be made in an inverted fashion from left to right, perhaps mistakingly following the lead of the priest who in blessing inverts his movement so it would be seen correctly by the congregation before him.

Eastern Orthodox place great emphasis on the sign of the cross as a profession of faith in the three basic doctrines of Christianity: the Holy Trinity, the dual nature of Christ, and the mystery of Redemption. This act of faith in the teachings of Christianity is also an act of consecration to God of all human activities thoughts, affections, actions.

The gesture is presently made by joining the fingers (thumb, index and middle finger together and erect: third and little finger down on the palm) and lifting the hand first to the forehead, then to the heart, to the right and left shoulder. In the Scriptures right always represents good and left evil and in the Creed the Son is said to sit at the right hand of the Father - thus signing of the right shoulder first. Eastern Christians sign themselves often especially at every mention of the Holy Trinity and in conjunction with the metany or bow made to reverence holy things such as the altar or an icon.

The sign of the cross is a symbol of faith, a sign that shall be contradicted, a standard to lead on toward final victory as St. John of Damascus teaches: "For wherever the sign shall be, there also shall He be."

### SIMPLIFYING OUR LIFE

By Elder Paisios the Athonite.

Once, when I was staying with a friend in Athens, he asked me to receive a family man, who could only see me in the morning—at dawn—because that was the only time he had available. He arrived in a cheerful mood, praising God in every other word. He was full of humility and simplicity, and begged me to pray for his family. This brother, who was about 38 years old, had seven children. At home, they were eleven souls; because his parents lived with them, and they all shared the same room. He spoke with great simplicity: — The room fits us all if we stand up, but it is a bit tight if we lie down. Thank God, we are now constructing a shed to use as a kitchen; and we are doing fine. Father, at least we have a roof over our head, while other people live in the open air.

The man was an ironer. He lived in Athens and had to leave everyday before dawn, [in order] to arrive in Peiraeus in time for work in a dry-cleaning shop. He was suffering from varicose veins, as a result of having to stand up all that time, and his legs bothered him a lot; but his love for his family made him forget his pain and discomfort. In fact, he pitied himself constantly for not having, as he said, any love in his heart, because he did not do any acts of Christian charity; and praised his wife for being charitable. Apparently, besides taking care of her children and her parents-in-law, she would wash the clothes of some elderly men in the neighborhood, tidy up their homes, and even cook a little something, like soup, for them.

You could see divine Grace depicted on the face of this good family man. He had Christ in his heart and was full of joy, just like his one-room house was filled with heavenly bliss. Compare this man with people who do not have Christ in their heart: they are filled with anxiety. Take two of them and try to fit them in a house large enough for eleven people: they will not find a way to fit.



*The thought of death is like a cold shower  
that quenches the coals of the passions.*

— Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic

### RAISING CHILDREN

By St. Porphyrios the Kapsokalyvite (+1991).

What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home. The parents need to devote themselves to the love of God. They need to become saints in their relation to their children through their mildness, patience and love. They need to make a new start every day, with a fresh outlook, renewed enthusiasm and love for their children. And the joy that will come to them, the holiness that will visit them, will shower grace on their children. Generally the parents are to blame for the bad behavior of the children. And their behavior is not improved by reprimands, disciplining, or strictness. If the parents do not pursue a life of holiness and if they don't engage in spiritual struggle, they make great mistakes and transmit the faults they have within them. If the parents do not live a holy life and do not display love towards each other, the devil torments the parents with the reactions of the children. Love, harmony and understanding between the parents are what are required for the children. This provides a great sense of security and certainty.

A psychological state is created in a child as a result of its parents that accompanies it throughout its life. Its later behavior and its relationships with others are directly connected with the experiences that it carries with it from its childhood years. The child grows up and develops, but at bottom it does not change. This is manifested even in the smallest expressions of life. For example, you get a craving for food and want to eat. You take something and eat it, then you see something else and you want that. You feel hungry and think that if you don't eat you'll feel faint and you'll start to tremble. You're afraid you'll lose weight. This is a psychological state that has its explanation. Perhaps you never knew your father or your mother, and you feel deprived and hungry, poor and weak. And this psychological reality is expressed by way of reflex as a weakness of the body.

Parents, especially the mother, often cause hurt to a child for some act of misbehavior by scolding it excessively. The child is then wounded. Even if you don't scold the child outwardly but bristle with anger inwardly or look fiercely at the child, the child understands. The child believes that its mother doesn't love it and asks, 'Do you love me, Mummy?' The mother answers, 'Yes, dear,' but the child is not convinced. It has been wounded. The mother loves it, she'll caress it later, but the child will pull its head away. It refuses to be caressed, regarding this as hypocrisy because it has been wounded.

Another thing that harms children is over-protectiveness, that is, excessive care or excessive anxiety and worry on the part of the parents.

# St. Paisios of Mt. Athos (+1994) ~ On Sin and Repentance

*Spiritual Struggle – pps 158-161*

## Observing and Knowing Ourselves

— **Geronda, is it better for one to discover his failings on his own, or to be told by others?**

— A person should search within and discover his failings and defects on his own. But especially when others point them out, he shouldn't react badly, but rather accept it gladly and be grateful. One may believe that he sees and knows himself well, but he may be seeing himself as he would like to be and not as he really is.

— **Geronda, can others see myself better than I do?**

— One can, if he wants to, see his self better on his own. That is, he can better locate some reaction of his, some fault, and so on, and then discover the cause, while another person will only draw conclusions about us based on his assumptions.

— **Geronda, is it possible for one to attempt to see himself as he really is and yet be unable to do so?**

— Yes, if his attempt to do so contains pride, he will not be able to see the real self

## Let us Mirror Ourselves in Others

A person can see himself better when he mirrors himself in others. God has granted each and everyone of us the virtue or gift that we each need for our particular progress, regardless whether it is actually used or not. If the gift is used, one can achieve perfection. The failings and defects also are ours; whether we acquire them from our own neglect or inherit them from our parents, each one of us must undertake the necessary struggle to be released from them. Until we uproot our defects, we should mirror ourselves in the defects of others and examine where we stand. **For other people are a mirror in which we see ourselves.** For example, if we see a certain failing in another person, we should immediately say, "Let me see, could I possibly have this same defect also?" And when we see that we have it, then we can struggle to cast it out.

— **But, Geronda, if my thought tells me that I don't have this same defect, what should I say to myself?**

— You should say, "I have other more serious defects; this failing is very small compared to my own." For even if your failings and defects are sometimes smaller, you may bear greater responsibility for them. By examining ourselves in this manner, we can see that we have greater defects than the next person. Then we can also take notice of the virtues of others. "Let me see, do I have this virtue? No, I don't. Look at how far I still am from where I should be!" One who works this way stands to benefit from all things, changes for the better and achieves perfection. Such a person benefits from the Saints, from those who struggle, even from worldly people. On seeing a worldly person who is selfless and sacrifices himself, one can be motivated to say, "Do I have such love? No, I don't, and I'm supposed to be a spiritual person!" And so he tries to imitate even the worldly person in whatever good he sees in him. Each one of us has a great deal of spiritual work to do. Our Benevolent God wisely provides everything for our good.

## He Who Knows Himself Well Has Humility

— **Geronda, I usually recognize pride only after I've already fallen into some error.**

— The goal is to recognize pride before you fall. When someone tells you that you have done something well, do not feel satisfaction: Discount it, **don't let any praise stick to you.**

— **What will help me in this?**

— Knowing yourself. If a person has self-knowledge, the work is done. Then any praise received is

like a foreign body, it doesn't stick to him. For example, when one knows he is a gypsy, no thought of being a king will be able to stick to him. And you, if you imagine yourself to be a princess, certainly will have a screw loose.

— **Would it help me if I'm prepared in advance to reject all praise?**

— This of course should be the case, but sometimes you're ready and sometimes you're not. The goal is to know yourself. If you do not know your old self, then you don't humble yourself and you can't split your personal atom in order to enter into the spiritual orbit, so you simply remain static, stuck on your worldly merry-go-round.

— **Geronda, is it possible to misread myself?**

— We are not talking about misreading one's self. One who knows himself well has humility. And when a person humbles himself, the Grace of God will surely come.

Someone who does the proper inner spiritual work in order to understand himself, is like the miner who digs deeply and discovers metals in the depths of the earth. The deeper one probes in discovering and learning himself, the more he feels unworthy and becomes humble, but the hand of God constantly lifts him. And when one finally comes to know himself, his humility will be permanent. That's when the Grace of God is integrally secured and one is not vulnerable to pride.

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**The Weak Traits of Our Character – St. Paisios of Mt. Athos**

*Everything comes to the surface...*

— **Geronda, does it help me to grieve much for a mistake I have made, such as speaking badly to a Sister?**

—Yes, it helps, but be careful not to go overboard. Have some grief, but rejoice as well for the opportunity provided for you to see your illness and heal it. Reason this way: "I must have had some passion inside of me to cause me to speak badly and behave this way, and God provided the opportunity for it to emerge so I could see it and correct it." Of course, you will ask forgiveness from the Sister. Falls like that help you become aware of yourself. Everything comes to the surface, and gradually good work is done on our selves. You see, even doctors give patients certain substances which will heighten the symptoms of an illness and help them make a better diagnosis. They may, for example, prescribe a dose of sugar and do a blood test to observe how the sugar level is affected in the blood.

In the spiritual struggle we need to recognize the weak traits of our character, our failings and defects, and then to attempt to strike against them. Even in warfare, when we do reconnaissance and locate the points where the enemy is or where he might strike from, we remain vigilantly attentive to that area. For when you know exactly where the enemy is, you can then move with certainty. You spread out the map and say, "The enemy is here and here; we must move fast to take this and that position. We will request reinforcements from here and we will need these weapons there." In other words, you are able to set a plan of action in motion. But in order to discover where the enemy is, you need to be uneasy, you must search; you can't be asleep.

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### **A Prayer of Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk**

"Give me ears to hear Thee, eyes to see Thee, taste to partake of Thee, sense of smell to inhale Thee. Give me feet to walk unto Thee; lips to speak of Thee, heart to fear and love Thee. Teach me Thy ways, O Lord, and I shall walk in Thy truth. For Thou art the way, the truth and the life."

## THE ESSENCE OF HUMILITY

By Bishop Alexander (Mileant), translated by Fr. Sergiy Kisselev.

The Holy Scripture teaches that humility is the essential virtue, without which it is impossible to bear any good fruit at all. Our Lord Jesus Christ began His Sermon on the Mount with a call to humility, saying: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 5:3). As the common poor realize they are in need of everything, so does the one poor in spirit see himself as imperfect and in need of divine assistance. Being conscious of this, in turn, attracts God's mercy, which makes him abundantly rich.

Unfortunately, most "worldly" people underestimate and even despise the virtue of humility. They tend to think that while preaching humility, Christianity is degrading the human person and obliterating one's natural feeling of dignity. Humility, they say, deprives one of an active attitude in life, extinguishes all initiative and nurtures a servile mindset. Such an erroneous notion of humility is only rooted in a lack of spiritual knowledge.

The essence of humility is best illustrated in the Gospel. Let's take the example of the healing of the Roman centurion's servant. In one of His visits to Capernaum, Jesus Christ was approached by a Roman centurion (an officer in modern terms), who had the following request: *Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented,* to which the Saviour, Who never declined anyone's wish, promised that He would visit his home and heal the servant. Every believing person would have rejoiced at such a promise. But the centurion's reaction was far from average: *Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.* The centurion's profound faith and humility moved the Lord to such an extent that not only did He immediately heal his servant, but also made him an example for others, saying: *I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.* (Mt 8:6-13).

Having heard of the numerous healings that the Saviour had performed, the centurion acquired an intense faith in His almightiness. Without denigrating his dignity in any way, he realized, at the same time, that he was unworthy to demand any kind of special attention toward his person, all the more so being a pagan and a foreigner. He also remembered that if he, being a common man, is unquestionably obeyed by his minors, so much the more everything will obey the will of the One sent by God. The acknowledgment of the divine almightiness, on the one hand, and of one's imperfection, on the other, are the basis of the attitude which is called humility.

When man, led by a deep faith, encounters the Creator's infinite power, he cannot help perceiving his smallness and weakness, seeing himself as a tiny insect on the shore of a boundless ocean. This is why in the presence of God humility

is but the most natural feeling. Vanity and pride can only exist in the one who, being removed far from God, is comparing himself to other minute creatures like himself.

Sound faith, according to the word of the Saviour, is capable of *moving mountains* (Mt 17:20)—not due to some kind of supernatural power that comes along with such faith, as certain sectarians will teach, but because it is capable of attracting the divine power—and the latter can do the impossible. For this reason all known examples of a firm and wonder-working faith are, at the same time, examples of a profound humility: the woman suffering from hemorrhage (Mk 5:25-28), the mother from Canaan (Mt 15:22-28), and many others. The stronger one's faith is, the more humble he is; and vice versa, a proud person cannot possess a profound faith, being all absorbed in one's self. Being spiritually weak, he is therefore unquiet and easily scared, although he might do his best in order to conceal it.

Spiritual and lay literature alike have known many examples of great and gifted personalities. Many gifted people realized that they were only too far from the measure of perfection or knowledge that they were capable of achieving. Knowing this did not, to the least extent, make them feeble or low-spirited. On the contrary, it gave them more incentive to pursue excellence. To think that humility kills one's initiative, giving him an inert and servile disposition, is to miss the essence of Christianity. The latter's decisive trait is that it calls the man to perfection by way of ascension from the present state, which is damaged by sin, to a likeness of God, as is said: *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* (Mt 5:48). The self-sufficient proud man is in fact the most wretched one, because he is so blind he cannot even perceive his misery (Rev 3:17).

Finally, the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Who had descended from the skies, the word of Whom was the immediate law for the whole of nature and for the immaterial spirits as well, Who brought the dead back to life, is, at the same time, the greatest example of humility. Who could ever be higher than Him, the Creator of everything visible and invisible alike? And yet He was always the example of obedience towards His earthly "parents," He was obedient towards the lay authorities, He paid taxes, and He meekly forgave His enemies. Striving towards humility, we are doing so in the steps of our Saviour, Who left us His commandment: *Take My yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* (Mt 11:29).

The Elder Siluan wrote: "When the soul sees the Lord in the Holy Spirit, how much He is meek and humble, then she becomes humble herself. It is a special state that no one is able to describe, since it is only known by experience in the Holy Spirit."

According to the holy Abba Dorotheos, there exist two types of humility: "The initial humility consists of consid-

ering one's neighbor more clever and better than oneself... The other kind consists in that one should attribute all his accomplishments and benefits to God and not to himself—this is the perfect humility of the saints. It is found naturally within the soul due to the fulfilment of God's commandments. The branches of a tree that have a lot of fruit hanging on them bow downwards. A branch devoid of fruit is stretching right up. There are also trees that bear no fruit while their branches grow straight up, but as soon as someone, by tying a stone to the branch, bows it down, then it will start bearing fruit. So does the soul, when it humbles itself, become fruitful, and the more it bears the fruit of good deeds, the more does it humble itself. The saints give us the same example: the more they got close to God, the more they saw themselves as sinful and unworthy."

Thus, humility is the most precious virtue without which it is impossible to achieve anything righteous. The holy John of the Ladder says: "If pride has turned some of the angels into demons, than there is no doubt that humility can make angels out of demons. Therefore, have courage, ye the fallen, placing your hope in God!"



On the day of Pentecost our Lord solemnly sent down to the disciples in a tempestuous wind the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire which alighted on each of them and entered within them and filled them with the fiery strength of divine grace which breathes bedewingly and acts gladdeningly in souls which partake of its power and operations (cf. Acts 2:1-4). And this same fire-infusing grace of the Holy Spirit which was given to us all, the faithful of Christ, in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, is sealed by the Sacrament of Chrismation on the chief parts of our body as appointed by the Holy Church, the eternal keeper of this grace. It is said: *The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.* On what do we put this seal if not on vessels containing some very precious treasure?

St. Seraphim of Sarov

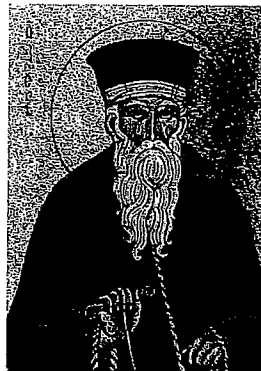


Of old God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was not depicted at all. But now that God has appeared in the flesh and lived among men, I make an image of the God who can be seen. I do not worship matter but I worship the Creator of matter, who for my sake became material and deigned to dwell in matter, who through matter effected my salvation. I will not cease from worshipping the matter through which my salvation has been effected. (St. John Damascene)<sup>388</sup>

Matter is endowed with a divine power through the prayer made to those who are depicted in image. (St. John Damascene)<sup>389</sup>

## NOTHING SMELLS WORSE THAN PRIDE

By St. Kosmas Aitolos.



There was a virtuous hermit who frequently prayed to God, and who received revelations of many divine mysteries. One day he set out from his hermitage to travel to a distant region. Along the way, he met another man who was journeying in the same direction. This individual was actually an angel, but the hermit did not realize this and assumed he was a regular human being.

As they journeyed together, along the path they encountered a dead horse. The hermit covered his nose and held his breath; the angel did not. A short while later, they came across a dead calf. The hermit again covered his nose and held his breath; the angel did not. Not long after, they found a dead dog in their path. The hermit covered his nose and held his breath; the angel did nothing.

Eventually they approached a certain village where they crossed paths with a beautiful young lady, who was wearing extravagant clothing and ornate jewelry, and taking great pride in her appearance. The angel then immediately covered his nose. When the hermit witnessed this, he stopped and asked, "Who are you? Are you an angel, a human being, or a demon? ... We passed by a dead horse that stunk, but you did not cover your nose. We also passed by the dead calf and dog, and I did not see you cover your nose. Now that we passed by such a beautiful young lady you decided to cover your nose and hold your breath?"

Then the angel revealed himself to the hermit and replied, "Nothing smells as bad as pride does to God." Having said this, the angel disappeared.

The hermit then returned back to his hut and began weeping for his sins, beseeching God to protect him henceforth from the devil's traps, and not allow him to fall into the sin of pride and thus lose his soul.



Today the Lord is born, the life and salvation of mankind; today a reconciliation is made of Divinity to humanity and of humanity to Divinity; today all creation has leapt for joy; those above sent toward those below; and those below towards those above; today occurred the death of darkness and the life of humanity; today a way was made toward God for man and a way for God into the soul.

St. Macarius the Great