



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **May 17, 2015** ✠

Sixth Sunday of Pascha

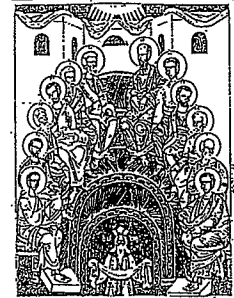
Apostle Andronicus of the 70 and St. Junia (58 AD)

St. Jonah, Archpriest of Odessa (1924)



Christ is Risen!

Indeed He is Risen!



✠ Today - 2:00pm: Marriage Blessing – Thomas and Anastasia Taylor

The Feast of the Ascension

✠ Wed. May 20 – 6:30pm ~ Vespers w/ Litiya – Feast of the Ascension

✠ Thurs. May 21 – 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy - Feast of the Ascension

✠ Sunday, May 24 – 3:00pm ~ Sacrament of Marriage:

Kassiane Kirchner & Joseph Mabry

✠ Sunday, May 31 - Pentecost

✠ Sunday, June 7 - Sacrament of Marriage – Georgia Carter and Euphrosynus Briggs

➤ Note: Fr. Benedict Crawford will serve Liturgy and the Marriage

Indeed, the Lord is Risen!

Indeed the Lord is Risen! "He is Risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him." (Mark 16:16) "The Lord is Risen indeed" (Luke 24:34) Christ is Risen! we cry out over and over again as we celebrate this momentous historical event—the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There has been nothing else in human history that has gripped human imagination as powerfully as the life, death and resurrection of this Jewish man called Jesus. Generation after generation we stand in awe in front of the mystery of these events.

The greatest appeal of Jesus is actually found in his teachings: He turned upside down everything that his contemporaries had known. He taught equality for men and women of all social states in a society of many inequalities. He taught love, caring and forgiveness in a world of revenge, selfishness and self gratification. He taught a peaceful resolution of conflicts in a world where the powerful always trampled upon the powerless. He was a revolutionary without weapons. His positions challenged the status quo of his time so much so that the leadership of His people sought to eliminate Him to utter extinction. His condemnation on the Cross was supposed to bring about His ultimate humiliation so that no one would ever remember Him. What they did not take into account, however, was His

This and That

~ **Politics follows culture. And the cultural revolution of the '60s is triumphant.** Traditional Christianity, driven out of schools and the public square, is being whipped back into the churches and told to stay there. America has gone over to the revolution. Looking back, the sweep of the capitulation becomes stark.

First came the plea of atheists not to have their children forced to participate in prayers at school. Fair enough. Americans do not believe in compelling people to do as they disbelieve.

Then followed the demand that no child be exposed to prayers or religious books, including the Bible, nor have any day or week set aside as a holiday if connected to Christianity.

Out went Christmas and Easter. In came winter break and spring break. Coaches of high school teams were ordered to dispense with prayers before games. The coaches complied.

No matter what the majority wanted, the minority prevailed, thanks to a Supreme Court whose dictates were never challenged by democratically elected presidents or Congresses, nor ever defied by a Christian majority.

In the sexual revolution there came first the plea that abortion in extreme cases be decriminalized, then legalized, then subsidized, then declared a right. From crime to constitutional right in two decades! Under Obamacare, Christian businesses must dispense abortion-inducing morning-after pills to employees. Next came the demand that homosexuality be decriminalized and then that this, too, be declared a constitutional right. And so it went.

Soon, same-sex marriages will likely be declared a right hidden in the Constitution and entitled to all the privileges and benefits accorded traditional marriages. Next, those who refuse to provide services to same-sex weddings will become the criminals. Thus does biblical truth become bigotry in today's America.

– Patrick Buchanan

~ **If all we have is this world, then the moral life becomes a matter of will to power.** Power holders, and those contending for power, rarely come right out and say what they're after, and they aren't necessarily aware of what they're doing. In fact, I believe most people today who oppose laws and principles that orthodox Christianity upholds, and who say that Christians don't have the right to "force their beliefs" on others really believe that they are pushing for something that's either morally neutral or morally good. They do not intend to deceive, but they are deceiving themselves.

What is so frustrating in dealing with these folks is their unwillingness to recognize that they are, in fact, forcing their values on those who disagree. Culture and civilization is only possible when you have a code that says, of some behavior, "Thou shalt not." ... There can be no meaningful appeal to morality outside of belief in some sort of metaphysics. This is why the Marxists made History into a godlike force. This is why New Atheists worship Science.

They need a god in which to ground the moral claims they wish to make, is the point. But they deny God's existence. Grabbing a man off the street and dressing him like the king does not make of him a monarch, though.

– Rod Dreher, *The Secret God of the Secularists*

~ We Christians have always been called to the Cross and the rather brief respite (of sorts) in Western secular democracies is nothing but that - a respite. Those who govern always seek power. Eventually, the Christian's understanding of God overall will come into conflict with that power. The only reason, in my opinion, that it has not done so more quickly in the west is because of the adaptation of Christian doctrine to the ways of the world. Sooner or later, however, such adaptation and abandonment stops.

- Michael Baumann

~ ... You can't have a debate about marriage without a definition of what marriage is.

"When you have a gnostic philosophy that ignores the very fabric of reality -- and it is wed to a coercive state -- it's hard to know where to go."

- George Weigel

real power. What they ignored was His ability to bend the laws of nature. What they did not believe was that He was indeed God. Their biggest fear, that He might rise from the dead, came true, in the end, to their great horror.

Although his teachings still retain the greatest of appeals, the power of his Resurrection is the primary reason why Christianity still exists today. Christ's Resurrection is the most significant part of the Gospel (the Good News). It was in the Resurrection that Christ's divine nature was fully revealed. It is through the Resurrection that those who unite with Him are able to become free even if they remain slaves physically. It is in the Resurrection that one could be rich on this earth even if he has few possessions. The appeal of Christianity was great to the people of that time who lived under oppressive and difficult conditions because of the hope of the Resurrection, proclaiming with St. Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead " (1Pete r 1:3) .

Christianity continued to remain appealing through the centuries to all people who experienced oppression and suffering: It was in the celebration of the Resurrection that the Greek people found hope while under the domination of the Turks for 400 years. It was the hope of the Resurrection that kindled the spirits of the Christians of Russia and other countries during those oppressive years of communism.

Christ is Risen, my brothers and sisters! Let us look with a renewed heart and mind at this momentous event. During these difficult and uncertain times the power of God is revealed again through the resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. In Him is the Hope. In Him is the Love. In Him is the Life. Amen!

Fr. Panyiotis Papageorgiou, Holy Transfiguration Church, Marietta, GA

Unseen martyrdom

From the blog of [Holy Nativity Church](#) in Langley, BC.

"This is the fiercest struggle, the struggle that resists a man unto blood, wherein free will is tested as to the singleness of his love for the virtues....It is here that we manifest our patience, my beloved brethren, our struggle and our zeal. For this is the time of unseen martyrdom..."

What is this struggle that St. Isaac speaks of and how can it be overcome? Is it some dread mysterious experience that only the very holy or only monastics or only spiritually advanced strugglers experience? No, not at all. St. Isaac names two specific areas or perhaps better, arenas, in which this fiercest of struggles attacks believers, all believers, the young and the old, the spiritually advanced and the spiritually negligent, the married and the monastic. **These two areas are, first, the struggle to maintain chastity and, second, the struggle with the feeling of abandonment.** Let's take a closer look at these two areas of struggle and St. Isaac's advice on how not to be overcome by them.

What is chastity and how do we maintain it? Chastity refers to moral purity generally, but specifically to sexual purity. It does not necessarily refer to sexual abstinence. The hymns of the Church refer to Sts. Joachim and Anna as “chaste” even though they were evidently sexual active: they are the parents of our Mother Mary, God’s Birthgiver. Rather, chastity, when it is referring specifically to sexual activity, is referring to properly ordered sexuality. The struggle with chastity is the struggle with disordered passion. Disordered sexual passion is desire that is inappropriate, untimely or perversely directed. And keep in mind that the word “perverse” doesn’t mean “bad,” but rather means “twisted,” diverted from it’s appropriate use and purpose. **So when we speak of perverted sexual desires, we do not mean bad sexual desire, for sexual desire of itself is good as God created it. We are talking about sexual desire wrongly guided or directed, sexual desire that is uncontrolled.**

Every human being, in my experience, struggles or has struggled with maintaining chastity. Tolstoy in the beginning of Anna Karenina says, “All happy families resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” I think something similar can be said about chastity. We all know, at least approximately, what chastity looks like, but each one of us struggles to maintain it in his or her own way. Our struggles to maintain chastity are intensely personal, as personal as our own story, our childhood experiences and traumas, our secret indulgences and the bad habits of thought and action and the degree to which we have or have not resisted them. Each person struggles to maintain chastity resisting his or her own perversions.

But it’s not that sexual perversions are that unique. There is nothing new under the sun. It is rather that each person experiences his or her struggle uniquely, the particular form of the twisting or perversion he or she suffers from being influenced by a myriad of factors from DNA to social conditioning, from childhood experiences to the availability and kinds of pornography or other models of

immorality. All of these influence the exact sorts of perverse desires any one of us may experience and how each of us then struggles to maintain chastity. However, and this is very important, everyone struggles or has struggled to maintain chastity—you are not the only one. Your struggle almost certainly is in secret, the unseen martyrdom as St. Isaac says, but your struggle in this area one of the common human struggles.

The second arena St. Isaac points out as giving us the fiercest spiritual struggle is when we feel abandoned, abandoned by people, but most importantly, abandoned by God. Sometimes this feeling of abandonment is manifest as despondency or depression and is accompanied by a strong urge to give up, to just sit and do nothing, or not to get out of the bed in the morning. However, sometimes the feeling of abandonment manifests itself as an urge to cast off restraint, to give oneself over to wine, women and song; to eat, drink and be merry. And while both of these symptoms or manifestations of the feeling of abandonment are dangerous, the most dangerous in my opinion is when the feeling of abandonment leads to cynicism. A depressed Christian or an unrestrained Christian are both spiritually ill, but they are both usually aware of their sickness and, if they are willing, are relatively easy to help. **I say relatively easy because even though both depression and licentiousness can have many possible causes and take a long time to understand and overcome, people who have the spiritual disease of cynicism often do not even realize that they are sick.**

A Christian who is cynical may consider him or her self to be in many ways a model Christian, a leader, someone who sees clearly and knows the dark side of every Christian leader, institution or tradition. Cynicism is very difficult to heal because it is very difficult for the cynical Christian to admit that he or she is very sick. But once recognized as a spiritual illness, cynicism can be healed. Keep in mind that the root of cynicism, very often, is the feeling of abandonment. Christians, Orthodox

Christians, become cynical often because the people or institutions they had relied on failed them in some serious ways. They then become cynical because God seems to have abandoned them, God seems far away, God does not seem to come to their aid, does not help them in the ways they thought He would. But because they do not want to give up faith completely, because they perhaps cannot give up faith, they cope with their pain and the incongruities of their religious experience through cynicism.

And so the cynical Christian is stuck in a kind of eddy at the side of the River Life. He or she moves in little circles, making what she or he considers to be insightful, cynical comments on the River as it passes by. But the cynic is stuck, not going anywhere out of fear, fear which can be seen only as they are willing to look deeply into themselves.

The Christian cynic fears that the shadows he or she has focused on for so long are all that exist, that the Light has abandoned them. So what do we do then? How do we keep from being overcome by these struggles, these, "fiercest struggles" of the Christian journey, whether they be struggles to maintain chastity (in all of its various and possible forms) or struggles with abandonment issues (again, in any of its various forms or manifestations)? According to St. Isaac, all of these struggles are won or lost through thoughts and habits, and it is the struggle not to give in to our perverse sexual thoughts and the thoughts generated by (and generating) feelings of abandonment that he calls "the unseen martyrdom." But how do we control our thoughts and habits?

St. Isaac compares vice, be it sexual perversion or the depression, lack of restraint or cynicism that come from feelings of abandonment, to a potted plant or tree that one waters regularly. If you want the tree to die, you have to stop watering it. The more you water it by thinking about it, actively remembering it and doing it (in your mind, with your body or with your words), the stronger the tree becomes. The stronger the tree becomes, the harder it is to kill it. That is, the more you give in to thoughts that lead to sexual perversion, depression, lack of self control or cynicism, the more you

associate that vice with yourself, the more you associate that vice with who you really are, who you think you really are. Often when people say to me, "That's just the way I am," I am tempted to say back, "No, that just the way you have become." Actually, I seldom say that because the person I am talking to is not yet at a place where he or she can hear it, but it is true nonetheless.

But just as it is true that we become who we are (or we think we are) by means of accepting certain thoughts as though they were our own, we can also become who we want to be, who we really are, by rejecting thoughts, by resisting images and turning our attention away from thoughts that lead us where we don't want to go. I cannot become you, nor you me. We can only become ourselves, our best selves, our selves in Christ. And what St. Isaac seems to be saying is that our broken selves, our selves driven to unchaste thoughts and actions, our selves suffering from and trying to cope with feelings of abandonment, our broken selves are not who we have to be. Who we have become is not who we have to be. We can change, but change does not come easily or quickly. Habits of thought and action that have taken years to develop, with also take years to overcome. St. Mary of Egypt, for example, lived a life of wantonness for seventeen years, and so we read in the story of Her life that for Her first seventeen years in the desert, she suffered greatly with a desire to drink wine and to sing lewd songs. It took a while, after she ceased her immoral behaviour, a long while, for the habit of immoral thought to change.

So we too must struggle with thoughts. We too may find ourselves, like St. Mary of Egypt, struggling for days at a time with impure thoughts or with fears that God has rejected us. We too, for example, may be constantly tempted to make cynical comments, to think the worst of others, or to doubt whether it all makes any difference. We may be tempted to stay in bed, not to get out of our chair, not to brush our teeth (someone once told me that, that was how he knew he was struggling with depression: he didn't want to brush his teeth). However we personally experience this fiercest struggle of the Christian life, this unseen

martyrdom, we must each through patience, through long suffering, learn to do battle in our minds, for there and only there will the battle be won.

There are two techniques that I have found helpful in this unseen martyrdom.

The first is recommending by St. Isaac in homily 32: “Be on you guard against idleness.” St. Isaac goes on to point out that on the day of judgement, God will not judge us regarding our idleness, regarding what we did not accomplish (contrary to what the cultural theology of our capitalist society teaches us: God is not concerned with what we do or do not accomplish). Rather, God will judge us because by abandoning what He had given us to do to keep our minds active and busy in healthy pursuits, we have become idle thus opening “the door to the demons.” That is, the perverse thoughts and feelings of abandonment are able to enter our mind because we are not keeping our mind busy with what God has given us to do. In the case of the hermit monk (the specific person St. Isaac is addressing) this would be psalmody, prayers and handiwork. In the case of a mother or father, avoiding idleness may have more to do with caring for family members and their needs, along with personal spiritual disciplines.

You see disciplines like saying the Jesus Prayer, cleaning the house, or paying attention to your spouse and children are not only good in themselves, they are also good in that they keep our minds and hearts from being idle, thus limiting the ability of the evil one to plant perverse thoughts in our minds. And even when perverse or depressing thoughts and feelings enter our minds, we do not have to identify with them, we do not have to claim the thoughts or feelings as our own. Rather, we can say to ourselves, “Oh, that old thought again.” Or, “Oh, I know what that yucky feeling is and where it comes from.”

And this leads me to the second helpful technique. It is something I picked up a long time ago from reading the life of St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis used to refer to his own body as “brother ass.”

For example, if he were hungry, he would sometimes say, “brother ass needs to be fed.” He also said things like (and here I don’t remember the exact quotation), we must be gentle with brother ass, but not allow him to lead us. In other words, when our mind or body is experiencing urges or feelings that we do not want, but that we cannot seem to control, it is helpful to give these thoughts or feelings a name and then to deal with the thought or feeling as though you were dealing with someone or something else, not yourself, but someone or something that has sort of hitch hiked a ride on you. If I have a cynical thought, I can say to myself, “Oh, that’s my high school science teacher talking again.” Then I can separate that thought from myself and move on to think more clearly about the matter. St. Paul uses this very technique in his epistles when he talks about the old man and the new man, the old Adam and the new Adam.

When I am able to separate a depressing thought from myself by naming it, I am then more easily able to dismiss the thought—or at least to corral it somewhat, to put it in a box for a while so that I can ask myself more helpful questions such as, “what does Faith say?” or “What is the least I can do?” or “Is this lustful thought really loving?” or “what else could I be doing right now?” Taking the time to ask these questions often opens a door of escape, a door by which I can free myself for a moment from the thoughts that are oppressing me.

What does martyrdom look like? We all know about the martyrdom of blood, but few of us know about the unseen martyrdom, “the fiercest of struggles,” as St. Isaac calls it. Every Christian is called to martyrdom, called to be a witness for Christ (after all, the word “martyr” comes from the Greek word that means to be a witness). Some are martyred publicly through the shedding of their bodily blood; most of us, however, are called to the unseen martyrdom, to “the struggle that resists to the shedding of blood [unseen].” Most of us take our stand for Christ in the arena of our mind, with our thoughts, and through the bloody inner struggle to learn to control them.



THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD INTO HEAVEN

When the day of the Jewish Pentecost drew near, the disciples of Christ returned from Galilee to Jerusalem. On the fortieth day after the resurrection of Jesus Christ they were all together in one house. Jesus Christ appeared to them and spoke with them saying, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs shall accompany those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Then the Savior said to the disciples that soon the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and until that time He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem. He said, "I send the promise of My Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high; for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Conversing with the disciples, the Savior led them out of the city as far as Bethany, to the Mount of Olives. The disciples, overjoyed with the words of the Savior, surrounded Him and started to ask, "Lord will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" The Savior said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

When He had said this, Jesus Christ lifted up His hands and blessed His disciples. While He blessed them, He parted from them and He was lifted up to Heaven, and soon a cloud took Him out of their sight. Thus our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ascended in His physical body to Heaven and sat down at the right Hand of God the Father. His human soul and body took on the indivisible glory

with His divinity. In His divinity, He always is and will be in Heaven and everywhere.

The disciples worshipped the ascended Lord and for a long time continued to stand and gaze into Heaven after Him. Then two angels in white robes appeared before them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into Heaven? This Jesus, Who was taken up from you into Heaven, will come to earth in the same way (that is, in the flesh), as you saw Him go into heaven."

After this the disciples of Jesus Christ returned to Jerusalem with great joy and stayed there together, awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit. All of them, together in soul, spent the time in prayer and were continually in the Temple of God, praising and thanking God. With them were several women and Mary, the Most-holy Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, with their relatives. In those days the apostles, prayerfully, by casting lots, chose from among the other disciples of Christ the twelfth apostle, Matthias, to take the place of Judas the betrayer, who perished.

Ascended into Heaven, Jesus Christ, according to His own promise, invisibly always comes to earth among those who believe in Him and will come again to earth in visible form to judge the living and the dead, who will then rise from the dead. After this will begin the life of the next age, another, eternal life which for true believers and pious people will be completely blessed, but for disbelievers and sinners will be a time of great torment.

Troparion

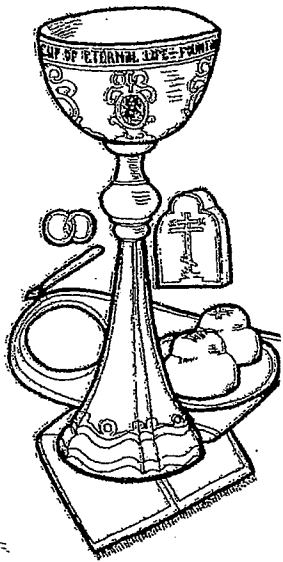
Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, granting joy to Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. Through the blessing they were assured that Thou art the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world!

Kontakion

When Thou didst fulfill the dispensation for our sake and unite earth to heaven, Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, not being parted from those who love Thee, but remaining with them and crying, "I am with you and no one will be against you!"

The Chalice of Life ...

Repentance, Confession, the study of Sacred Scripture and the holy personal struggle against everything contrary to the will of God must go first in order for one to approach the Chalice of Life...



“What saves is for the Christian to live continually the sacramental life: to confess and commune every Sunday... When will one have fewer sins in order to be able to approach the holy Chalice: when he communes three or four times a year or every Sunday? For if he communes frequently, he watches more and is more careful not to fall into transgressions. He is careful and watchful both, before and after Holy Communion...

“The place of the faithful is such in the Church that the priest cannot celebrate the Divine Liturgy without at least one faithful present. And we have many things proving the need for Holy Communion. During Lent, the Church celebrates the Divine Liturgy every Saturday and Sunday. Why then decree the Presanctified Liturgy? So that our faithful may commune more frequently. And all Christians, priests, deacons and laity, should rejoice seeing many receiving Christ often!”

From the Prologue:

REFLECTION – The most angry, the most lustful...

St. John Cassian writes of the struggle with the spirit of lust in this manner: “Struggle with the spirit of lust is a bitter struggle; longer than other struggles; a daily struggle victoriously accomplished completely only by a small number of people. This struggle begins with the first mature growth and does not cease until all other passions are defeated. In this struggle, a two-fold weapon is necessary. For the achievement of this perfect and pure chastity bodily fasting alone is not sufficient (although fasting, before everything else is necessary): along with this, meekness of the spirit and unremitting prayer is necessary against this most impure spirit [lust]. After that, continual study of Holy Scripture together with prudent mental exercises and after that physical labor and handiworks, all of which keeps the heart from lusting and restores it to itself and, above all, profound and true humility without which victory over any passion can never be achieved. Victory over this passion [lust] is conditioned with the perfect purification of the heart from which, according to the words of the Lord, flows the poison of this sickness [lust]. “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (St. Matthew 15:19). One must have stable humility and patience in the heart as well as careful protection of oneself from anger and other passions during the course of the day. For in as much as the fire of anger enters in us, afterward so much easier, does the ember of passions penetrate us. It is interesting that even many other great spiritual fathers bring into causal tie the passion of anger and the passion of lustful desire from which follows, that the most angry ones are the most lustful ones.

To avenge himself...

Even the devil, having lost the knowledge of God, and so inevitably becoming ignorant in his ingratitude and pride, cannot of himself know what to do. On the contrary, he sees what God does to save us and maliciously learns from this and contrives similar things for our destruction. For he hates God and, being unable to fight Him directly, he fights against us who are in God's image, thinking to avenge himself on God in this way.

–St. Peter of Damascus