

The Descent of the Holy Spirit—Pentecost



## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 205-930-9681 / 205-907-9447

Visit [stsymeon.com](http://stsymeon.com)

✠ May 31, 2015 ✠

## Pentecost

~ Fast-Free Week ~

Against impure thoughts,  
use the spiritual sword:  
the name of Jesus.  
You must offer repentance  
to the Lord, and you must  
not hide anything  
from your spiritual father.  
Wounds that are exposed  
are quickly healed.  
~ St. Joseph the Hesychast

Apostle Hermas of the 70, Martyr Hermias of Comana (160),  
New Hieromartyr Nicholas, Deacon of Lesbos, finding of Relics (+1463 – 1960)

✠ Next Sunday, June 7 - 3:00pm ~ Sacrament of Marriage  
~ Georgia Carter and Euphrosynus Briggs ~ By Fr. Benedict Crawford

\* Fr. Alexander will be away Sunday, June 7. The Sts. Peter & Paul Fast begins June 8 and goes through June 28 (fish permitted on all days except Wed. & Fri.)

### On the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the age:

~ Re: The contrast is between the actual Holy Spirit as Divine Person – one of the Holy Trinity – and thus outside human knowledge and “progress”, and the “holy spirit” as a *principle*, a principle of reform, of movement, of progress – that ever moving human target... The second holy spirit is called “person”, but not really (except in an egocentric way), as he seems more like a liturgical functionary that “blesses” whatever movement, reform seems to be, well, needing to be “blessed” at that moment. In that sense the second “holy spirit” seems much smaller, much more dependent on the human or group mind of the age, he is more an “engine of reform” rather than God - Divine Person outside all time, all “reform”, etc. To be succinct, this second holy spirit looks, swims, and quacks like the “spirit of the age”...

~ Concerning the very real questions the Church must engage in every time and place: The Holy Spirit engages these very real questions and concerns by being the Truth that is beyond each question, concern, time and place. One does not address such questions with the “spirit of the age”, that is self-referential. It is of the ego. When one does address the spirit of the age with the spirit of the age, you simply get more spirit of the age...obviously.

- Internet discussion

### Did you fall? Get up!

✠ "When the devil knows that God is going to show mercy on a soul and relieve it of the passions, either through His word or one of His servants [a Saint, angel or a holy person], then the devil makes the burdens of the soul heavier with the passions, and its struggle more violent. Knowing this, the Fathers fortified man through their teaching; and they do not allow him to be afraid. One says: 'Did you fall? Get up! And if you fall again, get up again. ... Another says: 'The strength of those seeking to obtain the virtues is this: When they fall, they must not be saddened; but must - once again - be diligent.' Briefly, each one of [the holy Church Fathers] - in their own way - offers a helping hand to those who struggle with the enemy --- and are afflicted."

- St. Dorotheos of Gaza

"Woe to you who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" Woe to you who call sin virtue, and virtue sin. Woe to you who call love hatred, and hatred love. Woe to you who call foolishness wisdom, and wisdom foolishness. Woe to you who call falsehood truth, and truth falsehood.

~ Isaiah 5:20

## ***This and That***

Leo Tolstoy said, "The only certain happiness in life is to live for others." It is when we see the world with a larger level than self. It is when we become concerned with others that we find the depth of God's love for our lives.

He who has so little knowledge of human nature as to seek happiness by changing anything but his own disposition will waste his life in fruitless efforts and multiply the grief which he purposes to remove.

Samuel Johnson, 19<sup>th</sup> century English Intellectual, who had severe physical handicaps

## **No Moral Equivalency**

A vision that sees a moral equivalency between what Christians did centuries ago and today's Islamic savagery is quite prevalent in academia. It's part of what's worshipped on most college campuses as diversity and multiculturalism...

At the very heart of multiculturalism is an attack on Christianity. Much of that attack has its roots among hypocrites in the intellectual elite.

...Western values are by no means secure. They're under ruthless attack by the academic elite on college campuses across America. These people want to replace personal liberty with government control; they want to replace equality with entitlement; they want to halt progress in order to worship Mother Earth. As such, they pose a far greater threat to our way of life than any Islamic terrorist or group. Visions of multiculturalism and diversity are a cancer on our society. We stupidly fund them with our tax dollars and generous charitable donations.

Islamists and leftists attack not only Christianity but also free market capitalism. They do so because Christian nations, which have a great measure of economic liberty, have been at the forefront of the struggle for personal liberty and private property rights for centuries. Personal liberty and private property are anathemas to people who want to control our lives. That is part and parcel of the multicultural and diversity movements infecting the Western world.

— Walter Williams

## **Remember Kosovo**

In March, 1999, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair sent NATO to bomb Serbia, because, they lied, the Serbs were committing "genocide" against ethnic Albanians in the secessionist province of Kosovo. David Scheffer, US ambassador-at-large for war crimes [sic], claimed that as many as "225,000 ethnic Albanian men aged between 14 and 59" might have been murdered. Both Clinton and Blair evoked the Holocaust and "the spirit of the Second World War". The West's heroic allies were the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), whose criminal record was set aside. The British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, told them to call him any time on his mobile phone.

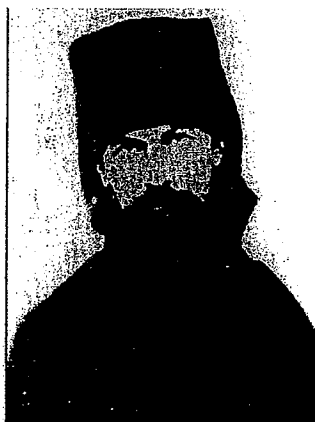
With the Nato bombing over, and much of Serbia's infrastructure in ruins, along with schools, hospitals, monasteries and the national TV station, international forensic teams descended upon Kosovo to exhume evidence of the "holocaust". The FBI failed to find a single mass grave and went home. The Spanish forensic team did the same, its leader angrily denouncing "a semantic pirouette by the war propaganda machines". A year later, a United Nations tribunal on Yugoslavia announced the final count of the dead in Kosovo: 2,788. This included combatants on both sides and Serbs and Roma murdered by the Albanian KLA. There was no genocide. The "holocaust" was a lie. The Nato attack had been fraudulent.

~ Nebosija Malic

# HOMILY ON PENTECOST

- Archbishop Theophan of Poltava (1872-1940)

***We celebrate Pentecost, and the descent of the Spirit, and the appointed day of promise, and the fulfillment of the hope. And such a mystery! both great and venerable! (Sticheron)***



We should view the descent of the Holy Spirit not only as a miracle glorifying the Apostolic Church, but also as an event directly related to our salvation. The present Feast is not simply a recollection of the past, but a continuation of the

apostolic preparation to receive the Holy Spirit, Who continually blows where He wishes. We call upon the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, in prayer, that He would come and abide in us, as once He descended and abode in the Holy Apostles. But in order for our prayer to be heard we must know for what we should ask, Here we would not dare speak of the nature of the Holy Spirit, as the third Person of the Holy Trinity, Who proceeds from the Father and abides in the Son; only the Spirit of God Himself, Who knows the deep things of God (I Cor: 2:10-11), knows the mysteries of His being and reveals them to those worthy of this knowledge. The Spirit, sent through the Son from the Father (John 15:26) in salvific gifts and actions to the souls of men, is the only subject which is discernible to our reason, we who merely have the first-fruits of the Spirit (Romans 8:23). The activity of the Holy Spirit on man's soul is an unapproachable mystery, though it is real and discernible for those who are attentive to themselves. The activity of the Spirit is like the wind, discernible in those movements which the Holy Spirit initiates but not in those movements which comprise the Spirit

*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit (John 3:8).*

What are the most discernible changes which indicate the movement of the Spirit of God in person's soul? There are moments when a man who is devoted to the world and the flesh awakens from the spell by which he is held captive. He sees clearly that his past life is a chain of deceptions, weaknesses, and crimes betraying God. His deeds are the seeds which naturally lead to future punishment; even his good deeds will not stand up to the test before the vision of the Eternal Judge. Having seen this clearly, he judges himself; he trembles in all his being; and, having lost all hope in his own powers, he turns to God for help. This inclination towards repentance is nothing less than the "mighty wind" which precedes the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2). What is this, if not the fear of the Lord which we receive in the womb, which is, as the Prophet says, the Spirit of God's salvation (Isaiah 26:18)?

Blessed is the man who submits to this pull, to the attraction of the Spirit of God! This attraction of God's Spirit will lead him by the narrow way of self-denial (Matt. 7:14) and force him to pull up that which he formerly sowed and destroy that which he built. It will teach him to suffer and rejoice in these sufferings (Col 1:24); to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts (Gal. 5:24) in order to completely deliver the (human) spirit into the hands of God. Little by little, the mighty wind turns into those gentle groanings which cannot be uttered, by which the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us (Rom. 8:26) by that living voice by which He cries out in our hearts, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6). Then a person can fulfill Christ's command to pray without ceasing (Luke 18:1). He cannot achieve this state by his own power due to a tendency towards distraction, ignorance of both the true nature of things and the form of true

prayer. Through labor and unceasing prayer, spiritual concentration is developed by which the Christian enters into his inner chamber with the door shut (Matt. 6:6), there to wait for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4). He does not yield to entertainments, like those lovers of the world who, bound by senseless pleasures, rarely return to themselves; rather, he brings himself into captivity to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:5), with all his desires and strivings reaching upward where his life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3), or else he rests within himself, where Grace will finally open to him the Kingdom of God (Luke 17:21). If one firmly resolves to forever remain in this state of inner prayer, inner watchfulness, and detachment from self, then it is only a matter of time before the thirsting desert of the soul will flower as the lily (Isaiah 35:1). Through the corruptible covering of the old man the new man will gradually bud forth, created in the likeness of God, in righteousness and in the image of truth (Col. 3:9). The Spirit of holiness will breathe in all of his talents and activities.

Grace transforms in a devoted man all that it touches, turning it into a priceless treasure; the spirit of spiritual wisdom shines in his mind; the spirit of freedom moves in his will, a will which has become alien to the manipulation of the passions; the spirit of peace rests in the depths of his heart, that Spirit which passeth all understanding (Phil. 4:7).

How much more one could say! Nothing can compare to the happiness of being a vessel, a habitation, an instrument of God's Spirit! This is true, heavenly blessedness on earth! This is the mystery which contains all that man's spirit seeks and about which the whole creation growneth and travaileth (Rom. 8:22).

O Lord! Who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed (Isaiah 53:1)? The world cannot grasp this mystery. The world considers the gift of the Spirit to be a rare manifestation. There are among Christians those who consider the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be so unusual that if they

do not detect them outright they consider these gifts to belong to another generation in ancient times. They do not reflect on spiritual renewal, being satisfied with an empty hope in Christ's works [as if this was sufficient, or even with their own righteousness.

This is a sad sign of the times!

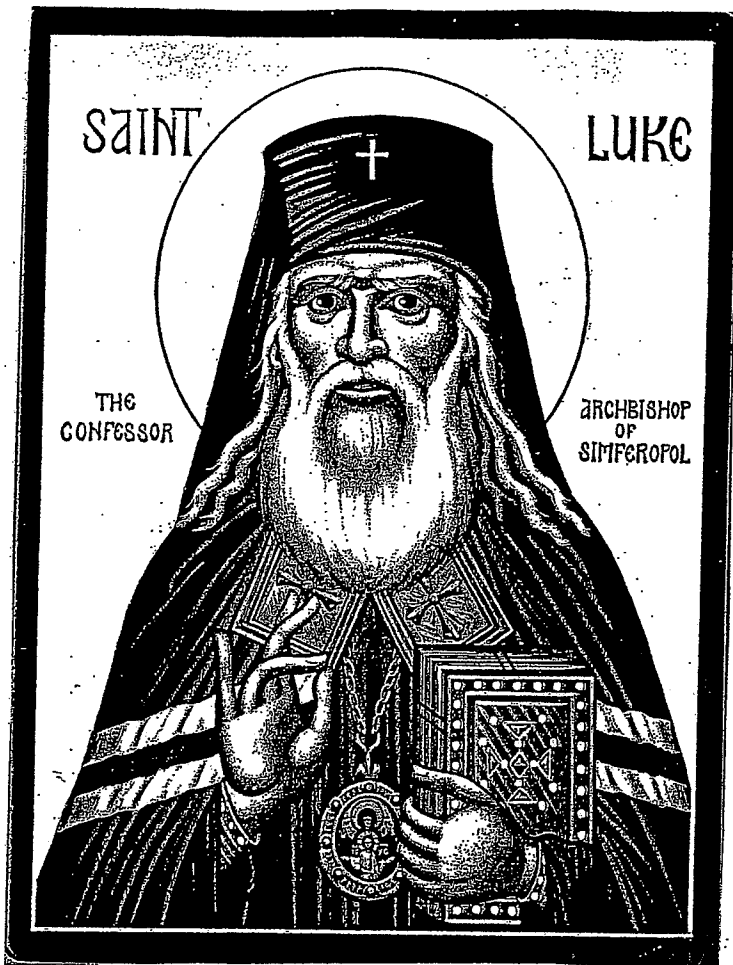
If people do not take note of the activity of the Holy Spirit then they either have eyes that do not see, or the very question: when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8) is soon to be answered and the world is at its last breath. The world knows what happened when an angered God exclaimed: My Spirit shall certainly not remain among these men forever because they are flesh (Gen. 6:3). Then not only sinful mankind, but all creation, having unwillingly fallen away into senselessness, was destroyed by the avenging waves of the flood. There remains yet another warning: the time will come for the river of fire at the Last Judgment.

As long as God preserves our existence, O Christians, and the good estate of His Church, we cannot doubt that the Spirit of God abides in the Church. As during the creation of the world the Spirit hovered over the waters, so now He hovers above the re-creation of man [by Grace], and by His life-creating radiance gives fruit to man's Grace-filled renewal. Let us give ourselves over to His all-powerful activity; let us bring Him our thoughts and desires out of the confusion of the world and the flesh; let us cry out from the depth of our apostasy, so that His Grace may descend upon us through the good will of that Redeemer Whom we have acquired [in Baptism]. May He cleanse, illumine, renew, sanctify, and save our souls! Amen.

**Archbishop Theophan of Poltava,  
Varna, Bulgaria, 10 June, 1929**

✠ ✠ ✠

*From Orthodox Life, 1995*



ST. LUKE OF SIMFEROPOL (1877-1961)  
Archbishop - Surgeon - Confessor

St. Luke was a world-famous pioneering surgeon, confessor, archbishop and miracle-worker.

He suffered under the Soviets and was arrested three times and sent into exile. Eleven years of his life was spent in this way.

St. Luke was an outspoken bishop who spoke against the atheists. He served the church as a priest for 2 years and a bishop as 38 years.

Despite his tortures and exiles, St. Luke honorably served the welfare of all Russian citizens.

For 42 years he served as a surgeon and was renowned for his exceptional skills.

His life is an example of love and self-sacrifice.

- 1877 Born as Valentine Yoino-Yassenetsky in Kerch in the Crimea
- 1898 Student at St. Vladimir's University in Kiev
- 1903 Medical Doctor
- 1904 Married Anna Lanskaya, St. Luke had 3 sons and 1 daughter
- 1904 Doctor in Far East in Russo-Japanese War
- 1916 Doctorate Degree in Medicine
- 1917 Moved to Tashkent
- 1921 His wife Anna reposed
- 1921 Ordained a priest
- 1921 Short Arrest
- 1923 Consecrated Bishop
- 1924 Arrested and exiled to Siberia
- 1926 Settles in Tashkent
- 1930 Arrested and exiled to White Sea area
- 1933 Freed
- 1935 Works in Taskent Institute of Emergency Aid
- 1937 Arrested and exile to Krasnoyarsk
- 1941 Appointed consultant for all Krasnoyarsk regional hospitals and Chief Surgeon of Evacuation Hospital
- 1942 Exiled ended, made Archbishop and care for Krasnoyarsk Diocese
- 1944 Receives Stalin Award for pioneering surgical work
- 1944 Transferred to Tambov Diocese and Military Hospital in Tambov
- 1946 Transferred to Crimea Diocese
- 1946 Ends surgery due to eye sight problems
- 1955 Becomes totally blind
- 1961 On June 11th, reposes in the Lord at age of 84
- 1996 Glorified as a saint of the church

# The Saints Who Reign on High

From the Profession of Faith at Chrismation...

"I believe and confess that it is proper to reverence and invoke the Saints who reign on high with Christ, according to the interpretation of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Church; and that their prayers and intercessions avail with the beneficent God unto our salvation. It is well-pleasing in the sight of God that we should do homage to their relics, glorified through incorruption, as the precious memorials of their virtues."

It is this area of the Church's Life, the Saints, that our Orthodox practice is most severely challenged in our Protestantised culture. It may even be that in unconscious ways, our own Orthodox life is itself conditioned by this marginalization of the Holy Ones. So, what of the Saints according to Orthodox teaching?

Firstly it is necessary to appreciate that the Saints personalise Christianity. There are versions of Christianity around which reduce Church life to a set of doctrines, good in themselves, but because they are not enfolded in the lives of real people, such Christianity remains, abstract, dry, formal, conceptual. Think back to your time at school. I guess it's not the lessons you remember directly, rather the teachers who, for you, embodied and made accessible what they taught. So it is with Saints. If you want to know who the Holy Spirit is, read the account of Motovilov's conversation with Fr. Seraphim. If you want to understand the place of monasticism in the life of the Church, read St. Athanasios' Life of St. Antony the Great. If you value the healing work of God, don't even read about it, just invoke the prayers of St. Panteleimon, St. Swithun or some other unmercenary healer. The Saints make real, vivid and personal what we believe and how we live by those beliefs. Secondly, the Saints warm the fellowship of the Church. Being the friends of God, they are our friends as well. As friends, we should get to know them, develop a personal relationship with them. We can do this in ordinary tangible ways. Their icons are our portals into their fellowship. Their incorrupt remains are memorials of a faith and a life that is literally death-destroying by the power of God. Their prayers, when invoked, avail with God for our salvation. They are mighty intercessors before the Lord and many are the miracles that have been wrought by their prayers. It is right that we should develop personal attachments to those particular Saints who speak to us, those to whom we feel drawn. In this way is the Church built up within one fellowship, the Communion of Saints, here and beyond the grave.

Thirdly, the Saints provide us with living testimonies of a redeemed humanity. They show that Christian perfection is not an absurd or inaccessible goal. They are the ones whom God has touched and made whole. They shine with the uncreated light of the Godhead, irradiating their humanity with the new life of the Kingdom against which even death itself has no power. They are mirrors, as we behold them, of what we could be. They inspire us towards this goal, theosis, the promise of a new humanity, a New Creation, transcending even the biological necessities and chances of evolution towards something sublime and true, the Love of God made visible, the birth pangs of a new age in which God shall be all and in all.

Who then could do without the Saints? No-one truly calling themselves Christian. The Saints are the keys toward the re-conversion of these islands to Christ. Let us honour them in our generation that others by their example, fellowship and prayers may also become friends of God.

**Fr Gregory, a British Priest**

The Abbot of Simonos Petras, Archimandrite Aimilianos was once speaking to his monks who were all sat around him: "Is there one thing, one core problem, whose solution would provide the desired answer to all our problems?"

Yes. Absolutely...

But allow me to use an example to better explain this:

You come to talk to me choked in your problems. You're sick, you sinned, you plummeted beyond imagination, they've expelled you from your monastery, you've been told you have cancer and you'll die.

I speak to you, and after listening to me you utter with tears:

"Elder! My problem is solved...!"

Solved? How so?

The cancer is not healed, surgery is still required, and you will certainly die; on top of that your monastery has expelled you. How is your problem solved? And yet you resolutely affirm that it has been solved.

Indeed... It is solved. It's solved since your internal state has changed, what you now experience is wholly different. Divine energy enlightened you inside now, and you felt it in your bones that your problem is utterly solved...

Our problems are never solved, since others cause them and they are fashioned by external circumstances. However, our problem is not the others, but my relationship with God: myself and God. Once this is settled, there is no longer a problem.

Like when it's dark, I stumble over the seats and fall upon you because I see nothing; yet the instant that light enters, I start moving with ease and without tripping over things; so it becomes when this relationship with God is re-established like this. Our human condition remains exactly the same, I'm still the one who I was, yet the solution has now clearly transpired. Now I see things differently.

Though I see you, I am now apprehending God.

I might recognize for instance, that you don't love me, but I'm not in the least bothered. I'm rejoicing inside now. God unquestionably remains invisible, transcendent, but He is now the God that's known to me, I no longer have troubles concerning the knowledge of God, He enters inside of me and the divine becomes my own content. The truth of this revelation is experienced as my personal God-bearing; I genuinely live this, it's opened my eyes.

Moreover, this new vision reveals the meaning of beings, of angels, of doctrines... but also the meaning of what is coming to pass in me, the meaning of my illness, everything... This communion of divine Energy is my secret spiritual marriage. And it is nothing other than the reawakening of unceasing 'spiritual watchfulness': communion with the ceaselessly monitored (monitored by me) Holy Spirit."

✘ ✘ ✘

✘ **Christ will give us all riches. When there is even a little egotism, however, nothing occurs. When God does not give us something which we are persistently asking for, He has His reason. God has His "secrets". If you do not show obedience (to your priest or spiritual father), and you don't have humility, the prayer (i.e. "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me") does not come, and there is a fear of delusion.**

~ St. Porphyrios of Mt. Athos (1991)

## Grace ~ The Wisdom of the Holy Fathers

✠ The Holy Spirit preached concerning Christ in the Prophets; He wrought in the Apostles; He to this day seals the souls in Baptism. And the Father indeed gives to the Son; and the Son shares with the Holy Spirit. For Jesus says, 'All things are delivered to Me of My Father' (Mt. 11:27); and of the Holy Spirit He says, 'When He, the Spirit of Truth, shall come,' and the rest... 'He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it to you' (Jn. 16:13-14). The Father through the Son, with the Holy Spirit, is the giver of all grace; the gifts of the Father are none other than those of the Son, and those of the Holy Spirit; for there is one Salvation, one Power, one Faith; One God, the Father; One Lord, His only-begotten Son; One Holy Spirit, the Comforter. And it is enough for us to know these things; but inquire not curiously into His nature or substance: for had it been written, we would have spoken of it; what is not written, let us not speculate on; it is sufficient for our salvation to know, that there is Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. **-St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

✠ The Spirit does not take up His abode in someone's life through a physical approach; how could a corporeal being approach the Bodiless one? Instead, the Spirit comes to us when we withdraw ourselves from evil passions, which have crept into the soul through its friendship with the flesh, alienating us from a close relationship with God. Only when a man has been cleansed from the shame of his evil, and has returned to his natural beauty, and the original form of the Royal Image has been restored to him, is it possible for him to approach the Paraclete. Then, like the sun, He will show you in Himself the image of the invisible, and with purified eyes you will see in this blessed image the unspeakable beauty of its prototype. **-St. John Chrysostom**

✠ All knowledge, strength and virtue are the grace of God, as are all other things. And through grace He has given all men the power to become sons of God (cf. John 1:12) by keeping the divine commandments. Or, rather, these commandments keep us, and are the grace of God, since without His grace we cannot keep them. We have nothing to offer Him except our faith, our resolution and, in brief, all the true dogmas that we hold with firm faith through the teaching we have heard (cf. Rom. 10:17). **-St. Peter of Damascus**

✠ "The light" already 'shines in the darkness' (Jn. 1:5), both by day and by night, both within and without - within in our hearts (II Cor. 6:16), without in our minds. It shines on us without evening, without change, without alteration, without form. It speaks, works, lives, gives life, and changes into light those whom it illuminates. We bear witness that 'God is light' (I Jn. 1:5) and those to whom it has been granted to see Him have all beheld Him as light, because the light of His glory goes before Him, and it is impossible for Him to appear without light. Those who have not seen His light have not seen Him, for He is the Light, and those who have not received the Light have not yet received grace. Those who have received grace have received the Light of God and have received God, even as Christ Himself, who is the Light, has said, 'I will live in them and move among them' (II Cor. 6:16). **-St. Symeon the New Theologian, Discourses**

✠ We often receive through prayer that which we have asked for, especially when we pray for that which relates to the salvation of our soul; it is necessary to ascribe this directly to God and His grace, and not to chance. How can there possibly be any chance in the Kingdom of the Almighty God? Nothing can really happen without His will, as 'without Him was not anything made that hath been made' (John 1:3). **-St. John of Kronstadt**