



## 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)

✠ April 17, 2016 ✠

### Fifth Sunday of Lent

St. Mary of Egypt

St. Makarios of Corinth (1805)



### Sixth & Final Week of Great Lent

- ✠ Wed. April 20 ~ 6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy
- ✠ Thurs. April 22 ~ 6:30pm Final Presanctified Liturgy ~ End of Lent

## Holy Week 2016 Schedule

Sat. April 23 10:00am ~ Lazarus Saturday Divine Liturgy

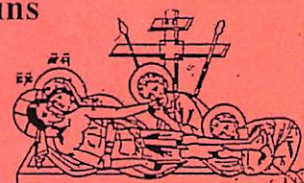
> Parish Workday following Divine Liturgy & Lunch

Sat. April 23 6:00pm:

- ✠ Palm Sunday Vespers w/ Blessing of Palms
- ✠ Sun. April 24 Palm Sunday Matins & Divine Liturgy



- ✠ Palm Sunday Evening - 5:00pm ~ First Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 25/26 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 27 - Holy Wednesday 6:30pm Holy Unction
- ✠ April 28 - Holy Thursday 10:00am Mystical Supper Liturgy  
6:30pm 12 Passion Gospels



✠ Holy Friday Services ✠ April 29 - 10:00am Royal Hours

- 4:00pm Vespers - Shroud to the Tomb

- 7:00pm - Lamentations at the Tomb

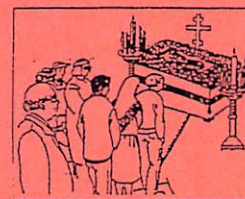
✦ Youth All Night Vigil at the Tomb ✦



✠ Holy Saturday ~ April 30 ~ 10:00am Divine Liturgy

✠ The Blessed Sabbath ✠

✠ Holy PASCHA ✠ Begins Saturday, April 30 at 11:30pm



### Bright Week

✠ Pascha Sunday May 1 ~ 3:00pm Paschal Agape Vespers

- ✠ Bright Monday May 2 ~ 10:00am Paschal Liturgy w/ Procession
- ✠ Bright Wednesday - May 4 6:30pm Bright Week Vespers
- Bright Friday Pascha Gathering at the Wells - May 6, 6:00pm



## FROM THE HOLY FATHERS

"IF everything that exists was made by God and for God, and God is superior to the things made by Him, he who abandons what is superior and devotes himself to what is inferior shows that he values the things made by God more than God Himself."

**St. Maximus the Confessor (+662)**

"Since I am not so proud as to pry into the gifts of God, **I cannot say why it is that some people appear to be naturally inclined to temperance** or silence or purity or modesty or meekness or contrition. Others have to fight hard against their own natures to acquire these, they have to force themselves on to the best of their ability, suffering occasional defeat along the way; and it seems to me that the very fact of having to struggle against their own natures somehow puts them into a higher category than the first kind."

**St. John Climacus**

### **The Best Road**

"Do you conceive of your Lord as less because... He shows that humiliation is the best road to exaltation (cf. Mt. 23:12); because He humbles Himself for the sake of the soul that is bent down to the ground, that He may even exalt within Himself that which is bent double under a weight of sin?... If so, you must blame the physician for stooping over suffering and putting up with evil smells in order to give health to the sick..."

**- St. John Climacus**

"**When Christ is in our heart**, we are contented with everything: what has been discomfort to us becomes the greatest comfort, what was bitter to us becomes sweet, poverty becomes our wealth, our hunger is satisfied, and our sorrow turns into joy! But when Christ is not in the heart, then the man is not contented with anything, he does not find happiness in anything: neither in health nor in comfort, nor in ranks and honors, nor in amusements, nor in rich palaces, nor in a luxuriously served table covered with all kinds of viands and drinks, nor in rich attire—in nothing. Ah! How necessary for us is Christ, the Life-giver and the Savior of our souls!"

**- St. John of Kronstadt**

"**Do not ever think that God does not hear you when you pray to Him.** He hears our thoughts just as we hear the voices and the words of one another. And, if He does not act immediately according to your prayer, i.e., either because you are praying to Him in an unworthy manner or because you ask something of Him which would be detrimental to you, or, because He, in His wisdom and providence delays the fulfillment of your petition until the proper moment."

**- St. John of Kronstadt**

### **On Evolution: St. John of Kronstadt**

"The Holy Scriptures speak more truly and more clearly of the world than the world itself or the arrangement of the earthly strata; the scriptures of nature within it, being dead and voiceless, cannot express anything definite. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Were you with God when He created the universe? "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counselor, hath taught Him? (Is. 40:13)" And yet you geologists boast that you have understood the mind of the Lord, in the arrangement of strata, and maintained it in spite of Holy Writ! You believe more in the dead letters of the earthly strata, in the soulless earth, than in the Divinely-inspired words of the great prophet Moses, who saw God."

### **And St. Justin Popovich (+1979):**

"This theology, which bases its anthropology on the "scientific" theory of evolution, is nothing but "contradictio in adjecto" (a contradiction of definition). In truth, it is a theology without God and anthropology without man."



**St. Justin (Popovich) of Čelije, Serbia,  
Confessor of Orthodoxy  
A Sermon on St. Mary of Egypt and the  
Fifth Sunday of Lent**

*(Translated by Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna from a  
Greek text of the original Serbian sermon, delivered in  
1965)*

IN THE NAME of the Father, the Son, and the  
Holy Spirit.'

Behold the fifth Sunday of the Great Fast—sealing  
a week of great vigils and ascetic works, a week of  
great lamentation and sighing—the Sunday of the  
greatest Saint among the female Saints, that of our  
Holy Mother, Mary of Egypt. She spent forty-seven  
years in the desert, and the Lord bestowed on her  
that which is only rarely given to certain Saints.  
For whole years, she tasted neither of bread nor  
water. To the question of Abba Zosima, she  
responded: *Man shall not live by bread alone* (Matt.  
4:4). God nourished her in a special way and  
guided her in the eremitic life, in the desert of  
struggles.

And what was the result? The Saint passed from  
the nether world into Paradise. She conquered the  
devil and ascended on high to God. How? With  
what? With prayer and fasting, by prayer and  
fasting. For fasting, fasting together with prayer, is  
a force that conquers all. A wondrous hymn from  
the Great Fast says: *Let us follow, through our  
fasting, the Savior of our souls, Who showed us victory  
over the devil.* By fasting, Christ showed to us  
victory over the Devil... To that end, there is no  
other weapon, no other means.

Fasting. Therein lies the means of victory over the  
devil, over every devil. Saint Mary of Egypt was an  
example of such victory. What a Divine power  
fasting is! Fasting is nothing other than the  
crucifixion of the body: to crucify the body, to  
crucify the very self.

As long as there is a Cross, victory is assured. The  
body of the former prostitute from Alexandria, of  
Mary, had been given over to the work of the devil.  
However, when she embraced the Cross of Christ,  
when she took this weapon into her hands, she  
conquered the devil. Fasting is the resurrection of  
the soul from among the dead. Fasting and prayer  
open the eyes of man, such that he might confront  
and truly know himself, to see himself. He then  
beholds that every sin in his soul is his grave, his

sepulcher and his death. He understands that the  
sin within his soul does nothing else but to  
transform to dead remains all that is of the soul:  
its thoughts, its feelings, and its intentions; a  
succession of tombs.

And then..., then there pours forth from him a  
wailing cry: *Before I perish utterly, save me.* That is  
our cry during this Holy Week: *Lord, before I am  
totally lost, save me.* It is thus that we have prayed  
this week to the Lord; such prayerful cries our  
Holy Father, Saint Andrew of Crete, has  
bequeathed to us in his Great Canon. *Lord, before I  
perish utterly, save me.* This cry applies to everyone,  
everyone who has sins. And who does not have  
sins? It is impossible to gaze on yourself and not to  
find somewhere, in some corner of your soul, not  
to locate in some deep place, some perhaps hidden  
sin. And... every sin for which you have not  
repented is your grave; it is your death. And you,  
in order to be saved and to resurrect yourself from  
your grave, must cry out with the prayerful wail of  
the Great Fast: *Lord, before I perish utterly, save me.*  
Let us not deceive ourselves, brothers, let us not be  
misled.

Even if one single sin should remain in your soul,  
and you do not repent and do not confess it, but  
tolerate it within yourself, that sin will lead you to  
the kingdom of Hell. There is no place for sin in  
God's Paradise. There is no room for sin in the  
Kingdom of Heaven. To be worthy of the Kingdom  
of Heaven, take care to banish from within you  
every sin, to uproot from within you, through  
repentance, every sin. For nothing survives the  
repentance of man. Such was the power given by  
the Lord to Holy Repentance.

Take heed! If repentance could save so fallen a  
woman as Saint Mary of Egypt once was, how  
could it not save other sinners, every sinner, and  
even the greatest sinner and wrongdoer? Yes, Holy  
and Great Lent is the battlefield of our fight, on  
which we Christians defeat the devil by fasting and  
prayer, defeat every sin, defeat all of the passions,  
and secure for ourselves immortality and eternal  
life. In the life of holy and true Christians, there  
are numberless examples demonstrating, indeed,  
that only with prayer and fasting can we Christians  
conquer the demons, all of those who beset us and  
wish to drag us down to the kingdom of evil, to  
Hell. This is Holy Fasting! It a fasting in our holy

virtues. Every holy virtue raises my soul and your soul from among the dead!

Prayer! What is prayer? It is the great virtue that resurrects you and me. Have you had occasion to rise up in prayer, calling upon the Lord to purify your soul of sins? If so, your tomb and my tomb open, and all that is dead is raised up. All that is sinful flees from one, all that draws one to evil disappears. Holy prayer resurrects each of us, when it is sincere; when it carries one's entire soul into Heaven; when you say to the Lord with fear and trembling:

*Look upon my graves, numberless are my sepulchres, O Lord! Within each of these graves, behold my soul, look upon my dead soul, far from Thee, O Lord! Say the word and resurrect my dead remains. For Thou, Thou O Lord, gavest us many Divine Powers to raise us up by Thy Holy Resurrection, by which we are lifted up from the grave of indolence.*

Indeed, by our sin, by our passions, we die spiritually. The soul expires when it is separated from God. Sin is a force that tears the soul from God. And when we love sin, when we love sinful desires, in truth we love our own death, our sepulchres, our fetid graves, in which our souls are decomposing.

Contrarily, when we are restored, when the thunderbolt of repentance strikes our hearts, then..., then our dead members are resurrected. Then our soul conquers all of those who are killing it; it defeats that creator *par excellence* of all that is sinful, the devil, conquering by the Resurrection of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Thus, for us Christians there is no sin is stronger than we. Be assured that you are ever stronger than any sin that might beset you, always more powerful than any passion that might assail you. How, you ask? By virtue of repentance. And what is easier than this? You can always within you, within your soul, cry out: *Lord, before I perish utterly, save me.* The help of God will never fail you. You will resurrect yourself from the dead and you will live in this world as someone coming from that world which has been resurrected, living a new life, the life of the Resurrected Lord, wherein one has all of the Divine Powers within one, such that no sin can ever again kill you. If you should perhaps fall again, you already know, you know

the weapon, you know the force by which you can be resurrected from among those dead. If fifty times a day you sin, if fifty times a day you bring shame on yourself, if you should dig fifty graves for yourself, simply cry out: *Lord, grant me repentance. Before I perish utterly, save me.* Our Good Lord, who knows the illness and weakness of the human soul and the human will, said: *Come, brother. Even if seventy times a day you should sin, still come and say: I have sinned* (cf. Matt. 18:21-22). This is what the Lord commanded to us ill and weak humans. Forgive sinners. For this reason, He said that there is great joy in Heaven, even if one sinner should repent on earth (see Luke 15:7). All of the heavenly world looks upon you and sees how you live on earth, brother and sister. Do you fall to sin and not repent?

The moment that you begin to repent, see how the Angels in Heaven rejoice and, as your heavenly brothers and sisters, dance... See today's great Saint, Mary of Egypt. Such a sinner! Out of her, the Lord made a holy being like unto the Cherubim. By repentance, she became an equal of the Angels, by repentance she was brought up from the Hell in which she lived and rose up all the way to the Paradise of Christ. No Christian is powerless in this world, even if he is assailed by the most horrific worldly sins and temptations. It is enough for a Christian simply not to forget his weapons: repentance, prayer, fasting; to give himself over to every ascetic work, to some virtue appointed in the Gospel, be it fasting, evangelical love, or mercifulness. Let us call to mind the great Saints of God; let us call to mind the great Saint who is celebrated today, the Holy Ascetic Mother, Mary of Egypt; and let us rest assured that the Lord will be an occasion of aid to us. Saint Mary experienced such wondrous help from the Most Holy Theotokos and was saved from her fearful Hell and from her fearful demons. The All-Holy Theotokos both now and at all times aids us in all of our evangelical virtues: in prayer and in vigils, in love, in tender mercy, in patience, and in every other virtue.

Therefore, never grow weary in your struggle and your war with your sins... In all of your difficulties and all of your falls, remember that cry of this week, which has the power to lift you up: *Lord, before I perish utterly, save me!*

## A Rule of Attention to Oneself

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St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (1867)

Written for a certain pious layman because of his desire to lead an attentive life in the world.

The heart of all exercises in the Lord is attention. Without attention all these exercises are sterile, dead. He who wants to be saved must so dispose himself that he can preserve attention to himself, not only in seclusion but also amidst distractions into which he is often drawn by circumstances against his will. Let the fear of God outweigh all other feelings on the scales of the heart; then it will be easy to preserve attention to oneself, both in the silence of a cell and amid noise surrounding one on all sides.

Wise moderation in food, lessening the heat of the blood; is of great benefit in preserving heedfulness; but heating of the blood-whether from unnecessary consumption of food, from excessive bodily activity, from the flaming of anger or vainglory, or from other causes-gives birth to a multitude of thoughts and fantasies, in other words, *distraction*. The Holy Fathers prescribe for the person who wishes to be attentive to himself first of all constant moderation in food (*Philokalia*, St. Philotheus of Sinai).

On awakening from sleep-an image of the awakening from the dead which awaits all men- direct your thoughts to God, offering as a sacrifice to God the first fruits of the thoughts of your mind before it accepts any vain impressions. In silence, having done all that is necessary for the body upon rising, carefully read the usual rule of prayer, concerning yourself not so much with the *quantity* of prayer as with the *quality* of it, i.e., that it be done with *attention* in order that the heart might come to life through prayerful compunction.

After the rule of prayer, again being mindful to preserve attentiveness, read the New Testament, concentrating on the Gospels. During this reading, diligently note all the promises and commandments of Christ, so as to direct your own activity-in thought, word and deed-according to them.. The amount of reading should be determined by the person's strength and circumstances. One ought not to burden the mind with extra reading of prayers and Scripture.. [which may lead to] frustration with pious exercises and despair. For the beginner the Holy Fathers recommend frequent prayers. but not lengthy ones. And when the mind attains spiritual growth, is strengthened and comes to adulthood, then it will be in a condition to pray without ceasing. To Christians who have attained perfect growth in the Lord the words of the Apostle Paul are applicable:

**I will, therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.** (I Tim. 2:8)

Enlightened by the Sun of Righteousness, our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of prayer and reading, let every man go about his daily work, preserving *attention* so that in all his deeds and words, in his whole being, there reigns and acts the all-holy will of God, revealed and explained to men in the Gospel commandments.

If free moments arise during the day, use them for reading with attention certain appointed prayers or passages of Scripture; use these to strengthen your spiritual powers, exhausted by activity amid the vain world if it happens that you say or do something contrary to the commandments of God, immediately treat the sin with repentance, and by means of sincere repentance return to God's path, from which you wandered by violating God's will. Do not stagnate outside God's path. Oppose the sinful thoughts, fantasies and feelings which occur with the faith and humility of the commandments of the Gospel, saying with the Holy Patriarch Joseph: How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? (Gen. 39:9). He who is attentive to himself must deny himself all day-dreaming, no matter how seductive and alluring; all day-dreaming is wandering of the mind outside truth<sup>1</sup> in a land of visions which do not exist and cannot come into existence, which captivate the mind and deceive it. The results of daydreaming are loss of attention to oneself, mental distraction and hardness of heart during prayer; hence-spiritual sickness.

In the evening? on going to sleep (an image of death for the life of that day); examine your actions during the day that has passed. Such an examination is not difficult for one who leads an attentive life, because attention destroys that forgetfulness which is so characteristic of a distracted person. And thus, recalling all your sins in deed, word, thought and feeling, offer repentance over them to God with the disposition and heartfelt promise of correction. Then, having read the rule of prayer, end with divine contemplation a day begun with divine contemplation.

(Reprinted from *Orthodox Life*, Nov-Dec., 1970)

➤ **From the Essays of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov**

✕ 'The world loves its own,' said the Savior. When the world hears the Word of God universally proclaimed in the spirit of this world, that is, when God's teaching is used merely as a mask to cover the teaching of this world, it is accepted with great acclaim. But when the world senses in the Word the presence of an other-worldly spirit, acting destructively upon the stronghold of this world, then it is seized with hatred and begins to persecute him who proclaims the Word

✕ "It is very dangerous to acquire wisdom which is not of Christ and, developing one's fallen nature, to be one in spirit with this world. Those who pursue this course unfailingly become seized with enmity towards the Holy Spirit...

✕ "The fruit of grace is accompanied by sweetness, consolation, tears in which sorrow is mixed with joy. immerse yourself in humility and love towards your neighbor, abandoning yourself. In this way you will find the Lord. It is of less use to know all about heaven and earth than to be aware of one's failings and sins. This latter knowledge is of such benefit, as well as being so lofty, that it is a gift of grace sent down by God. and cultivated by prayer.

"Some time ago the apostasy began to develop very rapidly, freely and openly. Its consequences are sure to be most grievous.

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"We Christians are not of this world and should not adapt to it. We have one duty: To be Orthodox Christians." We have one duty, to be Orthodox Christians, every day, not only on Saturday and Sunday. Every single hour. We must confess our faith everywhere throughout the length of our lives." - Bishop Mark of Berlin

## ON CHANGING OUR LIFE'S PATH...

The crown of true repentance is the *firm intention not to sin any more in the future*. There are people who confess only to be able to take communion. They are led by the thought that the taking of Communion without Confession is a heavy sin for the soul, but they do not make the decision in their hearts *to begin a new life*. They think "I will sin until the next Confession, and I will repent again; if there is Confession the sin is not so frightful." And some even hurry to commit the sins which they desire but have not yet committed before they confess, so that they can report them in the coming Confession. All this is loathsome and base before God! Confession is not beneficial to the one who consciously follows the sinful whimsies of his perverted will and transgresses God's commands on purpose. Such a man who creates sinful habits in himself later wonders in vain why, when he confesses, he cannot correct himself. He cannot correct himself because *he does not want to*.

Saint Basil the Great says: "It is not he who says: 'I have sinned,' but after that continues to sin that is confessing his sin, but it is he who, according to the words of the Psalm, has seen his sin and hated it. Of what use is the care of the doctor to the sick man when the one suffering from the diseases is holding steadfastly to that which is detrimental to life? In the same way, there is no use in forgiving the injustices of the man who continues to commit them. The one who continues to live in debauchery does not benefit from the loosing of the sin of debauchery. The wisest Home-builder of our life wants the one who has lived in sins and afterwards has given a vow to begin a new life, to put an end to his past and, after the committed sins, lay a beginning as a person ready for a new life through repentance."

In order for us to have true benefit from Confession, we must firmly resolve not to sin anymore in the future. True repentance, according to the Holy Fathers, is in exactly this, not to repeat your sin any more! "Whoever allows himself to sin arbitrarily, with the hope that he will repent," says St. Isaac the Syrian, "deals treacherously with God. Death strikes him unexpectedly, and he does not live to the time which he presumed to devote to virtue."

Again let us stress, in order for us to have true benefit from Confession, we must resolve not to sin in the future. True repentance, according to the Holy Fathers, consists precisely in not repeating the sin anymore. In order for this to happen, in Confession we must wish with all our heart to begin a new life in the future. If we have this saving desire, let us be confident that will help us by all means!

■ Archmandrite Seraphim Aleksiev (+1993)

### FOR CONSIDERATION...

In all the world, there is nothing more terrifying than man. The philosophy of man is unbearable, even to the mind of the angels, and it provokes sorrow in the hearts of the cherubim! The endlessness of man is bitter. Who is not embittered who has tasted with its senses its bitter knowledge? Let us be honest until the end: If the marvelous Lord and Savior Jesus Christ had not been resurrected, and with the light of His resurrection had not illuminated and given meaning to the endlessness of man, who could not consider the Creator of such a being, as is man, incomprehensible and not a God-man? Only the most Sweet Lord Jesus Christ, with His divine love sweetens the bitter mystery of the human being, filling it with His self, His life, and His endlessness. Where is the center of a human being? In the Resurrected and Ascended Lord Jesus Christ who "is seated at the right hand of God." (Col. 3:1). With the resurrected God-man, eternity became a common attribute of human life. Which human thought, desire, and feeling is now immortal? Only the thought in Christ, the desire and the feeling in Christ is immortal. Man is a Christian only if he thinks through Christ, believes, feels, and desires through Christ (see Phil 2:5).

■ Blessed Elder Justin Popovich (+1979)

Do not say, after spending a long time at prayer, that nothing has been gained; for you have already gained something. And what higher good is there to cling to the Lord and persevere in unceasing union with Him?

■ Saint John Climacos (+603)