



## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ April 1, 2012 ✠

### St. Mary of Egypt

## ✠ Sixth Week of Great Lent ✠

- ✠ Wed. April 4, 6:30pm ~ Presanctified Liturgy
- ✠ Fri. April 6, 6:30pm ~ Presanctified Liturgy of Lazarus



Lazarus,  
come forth!

## Holy Week 2012

### ✠ Palm Sunday Services ✠

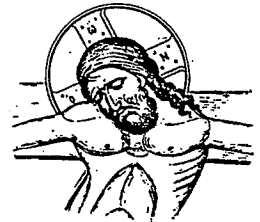
- ✠ Sat. April 7 - 9:30am Lazarus Saturday Divine Liturgy  
⇒ **Lazarus Saturday Parish Workday**
- ✠ Sat. April 7 - 6:00pm ~ Palm Sunday Vespers  
✦ Blessing of Palms and Willows ✦
- ✠ Palm Sunday ~ April 8 – 8:00am Matins /10:00am Divine Liturgy

- ✠ April 8 ~ 5:00pm Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 9 & 10 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins

- ✠ April 11 - Holy Wed 6:30pm Holy Unction
- ✠ April 12 - Holy Thurs 10:00am Mystical Supper Liturgy

### ✠ Holy Friday Services ✠ April 13 ~

- ✠ 10:00am Royal Hours
- ✠ 4:00pm Vespers – Shroud to the Tomb
- ✠ 7:00pm Lamentations at the Tomb  
✦ All Night Vigil at the Tomb ✦



- ✠ Holy Saturday ~ April 14 10:00am Divine Liturgy –  
⇒ Pascha Preparation following – help needed

- ✠ Holy PASCHA ✠ Begins Saturday, April 14 at 11:30pm
- ✠ Pascha Sunday April 15 3:00pm ~ Paschal Agape Vespers
- ✠ Bright Monday April 16 10:00am Divine Liturgy w/ Procession



✠ "The commemoration of Christ's saving Passion is at hand, and the new, great spiritual Passover, which is the reward for dispassion and the prelude of the world to come. Lazarus proclaims it in advance by coming back from the depths of Hades and rising from the dead on the fourth day just by voice and command of God, Who has power over life and death (cf. Jn. 11:1-45)."

St. Gregory Palamas

## St. Tikhon the Confessor, Patriarch of Moscow and Enlightener of North America ~ April 7

✠ Born in 1865 in the region of Pskov, our Father among the Saints Tikhon was tonsured a monk in 1891 and ordained to the priesthood in the same year. In 1897 he was consecrated Bishop of Lublin, and a year later appointed Bishop of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, with his see extending to all of North America from 1900 onwards. He did much to unite the Orthodox Christians of a great many ethnic backgrounds in North America, so that there was indeed one flock under one shepherd. In 1907 he was made Archbishop of Yaroslavl and Rostov, and in 1913, Archbishop of Lithuania. In 1917, when he was Metropolitan of Moscow, he was elected to be the first Patriarch of Russia in over 200 years, in times that could not have been more difficult. After the Revolution of 1917, the persecution of the Russian Church by the atheist government grew more bold and more fierce with every year. By nature a meek and peace-loving man, Tikhon sought to determine, while giving only to God that which is God's, what could be given to Caesar to preserve peace and avoid the shedding of blood. At his departure on the feast of the Annunciation in 1925, Saint Tikhon made the sign of the Cross thrice, pronouncing the words, "Glory to Thee, O God!" Because of the many unspeakable sufferings he endures as Patriarch, he is honored as a Confessor.

*Note: St. Tikhon's repose was on the Feast of the Annunciation, which is commemorated in the Old Calendar on April 7.*

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### Humble and Joyous

**"The humble shall see this and be glad; And you who seek God, your hearts shall live."**

~ Psalm 69:32

There is an important lesson here and in other places of God's Word, namely that **humility and gladness go together**. What do the humble and the joyous have in common? They both look up. The humble are those who don't look down on anyone. The truly humble look up all the time. They have to look up, because their eyes are on God, and He's above them. The joyous are always looking up as well, otherwise they wouldn't be rejoicing. The joyous are believing the Good News, so they rejoice!

The prideful, however, are those who think they're above everything else and so they look down on people. The prideful are connected to the others who look down, the cynical, the doubting, the despairing, the depressed, the sorrowful and the hopeless. **In the same way that the humble and the joyous go together, so do pride and despair**. Humility leads to joy. Pride leads to despair. Let's get our eyes off ourselves, off of our problems, off of the world around us. Let's fix our eyes on our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior and the Redeemer of our souls. Those who look up in humility, also look up in joy! Together, let's fix our eyes on Him as we approach Holy Week and be glad!

~ Fr. Nicholas Louh, St. John's Orthodox Church, Jacksonville, FL

### Not Depending on Money

✠ Whether we go to Paradise or to hell doesn't depend on if we have a lot, or a little, of money, but the way we use the money we have. **Money, possessions and all material goods are not our own, but God's. We simply are responsible for the way in which they will be used.** We must know that God will ask an account from us for every last cent, whether or not we used it according to His will.

~ Blessed Elder Porphyrios of Athens (+1991)



## *Lenten Reflection*

### *Confession that Leads the Inward Man to Humility*



Turning my eyes carefully upon myself and watching the course of my inward state, I have verified by experience that I do not love God, that I have no religious belief, and that I am filled with pride and sensuality. All this I actually find in myself as a result of detailed examination of my feelings and conduct.

And so, I do not love God. For if I loved God I should be continually thinking about Him with heartfelt joy. Every thought of God would give me gladness and delight. On the contrary, I much more often and much more eagerly think about earthly things, and thinking about God is labor and dryness. If I loved God, then talking with Him in prayer would be my nourishment and delight and would draw me to unbroken communion with Him. But, on the contrary, I not only find no delight in prayer, but even find it an effort. I struggle with reluctance, I am enfeebled by sloth, and am ready to occupy myself eagerly with any unimportant trifle, if only it shortens prayer and keeps me from it. My time slips away unnoticed in futile occupations, but when I am occupied with God, when I put myself into His presence every hour seems like a year.

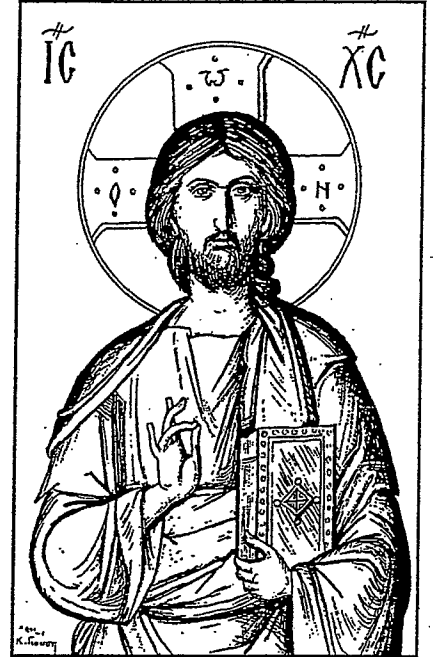
If one person loves another, he thinks of him throughout the day without ceasing, he pictures him to himself, he cares for him, and in all circumstances his beloved friend is never out of his thoughts. But I, throughout the day, scarcely set aside even a single hour in which to sink deep down into meditation upon God, to inflame my heart with love of Him, while I eagerly give up twenty-three hours as fervent offerings to the idols of my passions. I am forward in talk about frivolous matters and things which degrade the spirit; that gives me pleasure. But in the consideration of God I am dry, bored and lazy.

Even if I am unwillingly drawn by others into spiritual conversation, I try to shift the subject quickly to one which pleases my desires. I am tirelessly curious about novelties, about civic affairs and political events; I eagerly seek the satisfaction of my love of knowledge in science and art, and in ways of getting things I want to possess. But the study of the Law of God, the knowledge of God and of religion, make little impression on me, and satisfy no hunger of my soul. I regard these things not only as a nonessential occupation for a Christian, but in a casual way as a sort of side-issue with which I should perhaps occupy my spare time, at odd moments.

To put it briefly, if love for God is recognized by the keeping of His commandments: *If ye love Me, keep My commandments*, says our Lord Jesus Christ. And I not only do not keep them, but even make little attempt to do so, then in absolute truth the conclusion follows that I do not love God. That is what Basil the Great says: *"The proof that a man does not love God and His Christ less is the fact that he does not keep His commandments."*

I do not love my neighbor either. For not only am I unable to make up my mind to lay down my life for his sake (according to the Gospel), but I do not even sacrifice my happiness, well-being and peace for the good of my neighbor. If I did love him as myself, as the Gospel bids, his misfortunes would distress me also, his happiness would bring delight to me too. But, on the contrary, I listen to curious, unhappy stories about my neighbor and I am not distressed; I remain quite undisturbed or what is still worse, I find a sort of pleasure in them. Bad conduct on the part of my brother I do not cover up with love, but proclaim abroad with censure. His well being, honor and happiness do not delight me as my own, and, as if they were something quite alien to me, give me no feeling of gladness. What is more, they subtly arouse in me feelings of envy or contempt.

I have no religious belief. Neither in immortality nor in the Gospel. If I were firmly persuaded and believed without doubt that beyond the grave lies eternal life and recompense for the deeds of this life, I should be continually thinking of this. The very idea of immortality would terrify me and I should lead this life as a foreigner who gets ready to enter his native land. On the contrary, I do not even think about eternity, and I regard the end of this earthly life as the limit of my existence.



The secret thought nestles within me: Who knows what happens at death? If I say I believe in immortality, then I am speaking about my mind only, and my heart is far removed from a firm conviction about it. That is openly witnessed to by my conduct and my constant care to satisfy the life of the senses. Were the Holy Gospel taken into my heart in faith, as the Word of God, I should be continually occupied with it, I should study it, find delight in it and with deep devotion fix my attention upon it. Wisdom, mercy, love, are hidden in it; it would lead me to happiness, I should find gladness in the study of the Law of God day and night. In it I should find nourishment like my daily bread and my heart would be drawn to the keeping of its laws. Nothing on earth would be strong enough to turn me away from it.

On the contrary, if now and again I read or hear the Word of God, yet even so it is only from necessity or from a general love of knowledge, and approaching it without any very close attention, I find it dull and uninteresting. I usually come to the end of the reading without any profit, only too ready to change over to secular reading in which I take more pleasure and find new and interesting subjects.

I am full of pride and sensual self-love. All my actions confirm this. Seeing something good in myself, I want to bring it into view, or to pride myself upon it before other people or inwardly to admire myself for it. Although I display an outward humility, yet I ascribe it all to my own strength and regard myself as superior to others, or at least no worse than they. If I notice a fault in myself, I try to excuse it, I cover it up by saying, "I am made like that" or "I am not to blame." I get angry with those who do not treat me with respect and consider them unable to appreciate the value of people. I brag about my gifts: my failures in any undertaking I regard as a personal insult. I murmur, and I find pleasure in the unhappiness of my enemies. If I strive after anything good it is for the purpose of winning praise, or spiritual self-indulgence, or earthly consolation. In a word, I continually make an idol of myself and render uninterrupted service, seeking in all things the pleasures of the senses, and nourishment for my sensual passions and lusts.

Going over all this I see myself as proud, adulterous, unbelieving, without love to God and hating my neighbor. What state could be more sinful? The condition of the spirits of darkness is better than mine. They, although they do not love God, hate men, and live upon pride, yet at least believe and tremble. But I? Can there be a doom more terrible than that which faces me, and what sentence of punishment will be more severe than that upon the careless and foolish life that I recognize in myself?



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Through the forgiveness of sins in confession, the past is no longer an intolerable burden but rather an encouragement for what lies ahead. Life acquires an attitude of expectation, not of despondency; and confession becomes the way out of the impasse caused by sin. In this respect, repentance is also an eschatological act, realizing in our very midst, here and now, the promises of the age to come. Looking backwards would seem to imply the fate of Lot's wife (Genesis 19.26); "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9.62). God Himself is revealed *before* us and walks *in front* of us. "One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead" (Philippians 3.13).

This sacred image of Christ's paschal victory reveals the mystery, the sacramental blessing, of our salvation. And in that mystery lies our most fervent hope, and with it, the object of our deepest longing.

## **SAINT MARY OF EGYPT**

*Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (†2003)*

We keep today the memory of Saint Mary of Egypt in the gradual progression from glory to glory which Lent is, and which must lead us step by step to facing the supreme glory of the Divine Love crucified, the sacrificial love of the Holy Trinity.

Saint Mary of Egypt was a sinner, someone whose sin was known to everyone and not to God alone; perhaps she was the only one who was least of all aware of it because sin was her life. And yet, one day, she wanted to go and venerate an icon of the Mother of God in a church. The supreme beauty of womanhood in the Mother of God reached her heart, touched it. But when she came to the gate of this church, a power prevented her from crossing the threshold. The Publican had been able to stand there because his heart was broken; Mary of Egypt had no broken heart, and the entrance of the church was forbidden to her. And she stood there, aware that what she was, was incompatible with the holiness of the Presence, the presence of God, the presence of the Mother of God, the presence of all that is holy on earth and in heaven.

And she was so profoundly shaken by this experience that she left all that had been her life, retired into the desert, and with a life which the service books define as 'extreme', fought to conquer her flesh, her soul, her memories – everything that was sin, but also everything that could lead her away from God. And we know how glorious her life was, the kind of person she became.

What lesson can we receive from her life? How often is it that we have knocked at the door of God in the way in which Mary tried to come into His presence? How often have we tried to pray, to be in His presence in silence? How often has our longing been to God, and how often have we felt that between our prayer and Him, between our silence and Him, between our longing and Him there was a barrier which we could not pass? We were crying, praying into an empty sky, we were turning towards icons that were silent; all we could perceive was the Divine absence, and an absence so frightening, because not only could we not reach Him, but we perceived that unless we reached Him, our soul was laid waste, there was within us nothing but emptiness, an emptiness that if it continued, if it became our definitive condition would mean more than death – ultimate separation.

But how often also has God knocked at the door of our heart! You remember the word of the Book of Revelation: "I stand at Thy door and I knock..." (Rev. 3:20). How often has God, in the words of the Gospel, in the events of our life, in the weak promptings of our soul, in a whispering of the Holy Spirit, in all the ways in which God tries to reach us – how often has He knocked at this door, and how often have we made sure that this door does not open! Either didn't we simply care to open it because we were busy with things that mattered to us at that

moment more than His interrupting, disturbing presence; and how often did we refuse to open the door because the coming of the Lord to us would have meant the end of things which were precious to us, which mattered to us...And the Lord stood knocking, and the door was shut in His face: exactly in the same way in which every door was shut in the face of the Mother of God and Joseph on the night of the Nativity.

We may not be aware of it with the intensity which should be ours; and yet for each of us, simply, the proof of it is that we are here, and millions of other people at some moment have suddenly perceived the presence of God, have heard His knocking, have let perhaps the door ajar, have listened to what He was saying, had a moment of elation, a moment when suddenly we came to life, and then we shut the door again. We chose our aloneness, we chose to be without Him, and what we imagined to be 'free' from Him: we are never free; we are never free not because He enslaves us, not because He hunts us down. We are never free because He is ultimately in the end the only supreme longing of our whole being, because He is the fullness of life, the glory of life, the exultation of life for which we long and which we try to glean right and left in vain.

Mary of Egypt confronted with the Divine absence, with God's refusal to allow her into His presence, confronted with a shut door within herself felt that unless the door opened, everything was vain. And she turned away from everything that stood between her and God, and life, and fullness, and exultation.

Isn't she for us an example, a call, an image of what could be the life of each of us? But we may say, Yes, this applied to her, she was a prospective saint...Each of us is called to commune with God in such a way, that God and each of us should become one, that each of us should become partaker of the Divine nature, a living member, a brother, a sister, a limb of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, a son and a daughter of the Living God! This is our vocation; but can that be achieved by our own strength? No, it cannot! But it can be achieved by God in us if we only turn to Him with all our mind, all our heart, all our longing, determinably, yes: it is determination, and it is longing, a passionate, desperate longing...And then – and then all things become possible. I have said so often that when Saint Paul asked God for strength to fulfill his mission, the Lord said to him, *My grace sufficeth unto thee, My power deploys itself in weakness...*(II Cor. 12:9). And at the end of his life, having fulfilled his vocation, Paul, who knew what he was saying, said, *all things are possible unto me in the power of Christ Who sustains me...*(Phil 4:13). All things are possible, because God does not call us to more than can be achieved by Him with us and in us.

How much hope, how much inspiration can we find in each of the Saints of God, as frail as we are, and in whom the power, the glory, the victory, the life unfolded itself, deployed itself gloriously!

Let us once more receive inspiration from what we hear, receive inspiration from what we meet face to face in the Gospel, in Holy Communion, in prayer, in the silence in the presence of God. And let us move one step more forward towards the vision of the love of God made manifest in Holy Week, in the last steps of the way of the Cross, in the final victory of crucified Love, and in the victory of the Resurrection of God. Amen.

**As a bubble on the water is lost, thus everything of this world is corrupted. (St. Paisy Velichkovski)**

**FR STEPHEN FREEMAN**

## **The Practice of the Faith ... From Glory to God for All Things Blog**

In secularized culture, religion is not eliminated – it is placed at a remove. The remove in which religion is placed is anywhere that does not matter, anywhere that does not touch our daily lives. The secular genius of the modern world (including America) was its contention that religion and belief are the same thing. The acquiescence of believers to this arrangement was, in effect, an agreement to render their faith impotent. The fatal flaw in this agreement can be summed up simply: true religion is not a set of beliefs – it is a set of practices.

We believe in prayer – but we do not pray. We believe in forgiveness – but we do not forgive. We believe in generosity – but we do not give. We believe in truth – but we lie. Again, the manner of our failures goes beyond mere hypocrisy. The divorce between belief and practice is a cultural habit reaching far beyond religion. There is a radical division between thought and action throughout most of our culture. The frequently indistinguishable character of the contemporary Christian from the contemporary unbeliever bears witness to a deeper problem.

The practice of Christianity has been increasingly banned from the public square. We have agreed to privatize our faith. What we believe has become a matter of “conscience,” rather than the offensive matter of practice. The Reformation largely erased the outward forms of the Christian life: feast days; pilgrimages; vestments, etc. The Reformers were correct that the inward life of the Spirit was far more important than the ephemeral forms in which it was exhibited. However, they failed to notice that with the disappearance of the outward forms, the disappearance of the inward life would pass without notice. Today, the outward debauchery of Mardi Gras is the legacy of an abandoned Ash Wednesday. Christian practice is reduced to drunkenness (no American city seeks to ban Mardi Gras for its religious content – the practice of drunkenness is not as offensive as a Christmas Creche).

Early Christianity was surely marked by practices: without them, there would have been no need of martyrdoms in the arenas of the Roman Empire. Early Christianity was not a set of beliefs – philosophies were cheap and plentiful in ancient Rome. It was the Christian refusal to offer worship to the Emperor and the gods of the Empire that brought them to the arena. They refused to engage in the practices of the pagan state.

Whatever we profess as Christians can be acted upon and practiced – or it is a useless profession. Christ’s parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25 confronts Christians with their practices: feeding the hungry; visiting the prisoners; clothing the naked; giving drink to the thirsty. No mention is made of Creed. It is not that belief is unimportant – but the dogma of the faith undergirds and informs our practice of the faith. “Faith without works is dead,” because it is no faith at all.

The heart of the Orthodox faith (both dogma and practice) is found in its proclamation of union with Christ. “God became man so that man could become god,” in the words of St. Athanasius. Human life was intended to be lived in union with God. In the Genesis story of the fall we learn the essential character of our brokenness: we severed our communion with God and turned towards the path of death and destruction. The nature of sin lies precisely in its movement away from union with God. The path of salvation is precisely the path of union with God. This is made possible by Christ’s union with humanity. He took our broken condition upon Himself – trampling down death by death in His crucifixion and descent into Hades – He raises us up in His resurrection to the path for which we were created. From glory to glory we are changed into His image as we live in union with Him.

This is more than a doctrinal story – it is also a description of the practice of the Christian faith. We love because we live in union with Christ, “who loved us and gave Himself for us.” We feed the

hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoner because in doing so we do this to Christ. Every practice of kindness and mercy is an act of union with Christ. The Church's life of feasts and fasts, sacraments and services are the practice of worship – the life of union with Christ. They are not religious entertainment nor mere educational events: they are the visible manifestation of the inner life of God in man.

Christians in this world are “as the soul is to the body,” in the words of a second-century Christian writer (Epistle to Diognetus). As such, they are the life of this world. The presence of practicing Christians is properly the presence of the Kingdom of God. The in-breaking of the Kingdom in this world is a disruption of the culture of death initiated in the fall. The world's love affair with death is and should be threatened by the manifestation of the Kingdom. This is only true as Christianity is practiced. That Christians “believe” something is no threat whatsoever unless that belief is made manifest in practice.

The proposed constitution of the European Union (to give an example) offers religious freedom to individuals. Orthodox Christians have complained that such “freedom” was guaranteed under Communism – but that in the name of protecting individuals, parents were forbidden to teach the faith to their children. The Christian faith is practiced as a community. An agreement to define the faith as an individual matter is an agreement to destroy Orthodoxy. The world's onslaught of Christian practice is subtle and relentless. Christians would do well to practice their faith and refuse devil's bargain offered by modern states.

We are called to a life in union with the true and living God. That life infuses every action of the day – every breath we take. Anything less is an agreement with the enemy to place our God at arms length and to serve a god who is no God.     ✠ ✠ ✠

⇒ ... The focus on a forensic model of salvation (Christ paid the debt) made the inner life of less interest within Protestantism. If one's sins are forgiven by God and we are admitted to heaven – of what concern is the inner life? The evolution of Western monasticism away from the contemplative life of prayer (as well as the growth of scholasticism) weakened the primary means of remembrance of the ascetical life. The virtual disappearance of fasting within Catholic devotional life is but one example of this weakening.

What remains within Western Christianity is the theological life of the mind (doctrine) and the inner life of a modern secularist. Popular books on Christian spirituality are largely Christianized versions of the psychological self-help genre. The three-fold dynamic of purification, illumination and theosis (the traditional Orthodox description of stages within the spiritual life) is foreign to Western ears and unknown to most modern Christians.

⇒ ... In the near decade-and-a-half that I have been Orthodox, I cannot recall ever being asked, “How do you feel about that?” It is not a wrong question, but one that simply doesn't come up much in Orthodox conversation. The Tradition of the Church is not set by feelings (at least officially). Neither is the Church a therapy group (officially). But I sometimes suspect that conversation is neglecting an important question – and that many Orthodox Christians are avoiding asking themselves an important question. “How do you feel about that?” is more than modern psycho-babble. It has a proper place within traditional asceticism.

... “How do you feel about that?” remains a good question. Responsible spiritual growth requires that Christians slow down and look within. It is not enough to hold opinions. In the teaching of the fathers, opinions are generally worthless: they are manifestations of an unruly will and disordered passions. “Why do I value my opinions so strongly?” is a good question. “Why do the opinions of others make me angry?” is at least as good. Both questions require that we look at our “feelings,” for both of them have to do with the energy we invest in certain forms of thought. To leave such things unattended is to hand ourselves over to spiritual slavery.     ~ Fr. Stephen Freeman