



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 854-4235

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✠ February 12, 2012 ✠

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

St. Meletius of Antioch (381) St. Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow (1378)



Looking Ahead towards Lent:

- ✠ Next Saturday, Feb. 18 10:00am ~ Memorial Saturday Liturgy
 - ✠ Next Sunday, Feb. 19 Meatfare Sunday – Dinner after Liturgy
 - ✠ Mon. Feb. 20- 25 * Cheesefare Week *
 - ✠ Sun. Feb. 26 – Forgiveness Sunday
 - ✠ Mon. Feb. 27 – Great Lent Begins ...
 - ✠ GREAT CANON OF ST. ANDREW – Nightly - Feb. 27 thru Mar. 1 - 6:30pm
 - ✠ Fri. Mar. 2 6:30pm First Presanctified Liturgy
 - ✠ Sun. Mar. 3 ~ Sunday of Orthodoxy – Vespers at the Cathedral
 - ✠ Sat. Mar. 10 – 11:30am ~ Lenten Retreat at St. Symeon's
- * Dr. Tristan Englehardt *



Perseverance

✠ An essential property of prayer is perseverance. When you feel dryness, hardness, do not give up praying. For persevering and struggling against insensibility of heart, the mercy of God - which consists in compunction - will descend upon you. Compunction is a gift of God that is given to those who "persevere in prayer" (see Romans 12:12; Col. 4:2), which constantly increases in them and leads them to spiritual perfection.

~ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (1867)

For no one knows anything...

✠ "Wisdom does not consist in speaking; wisdom means knowing the time when you should speak and when to reply as necessary. Make it seem that you know nothing, although you have knowledge, so as to avoid great distress; for he who appears to have knowledge lays burdens on himself. Do not boast about your knowledge, for no one knows anything." ~ Abba Isaiah

✠ Nothing is more pitiful, nothing more dangerous than to be one's own spiritual director.

~ St. Dorotheos of Gaza (6th C)

⇒ When you want to help people, you tell them the truth. When you want to help yourself, you tell them what they want to hear. Both politicians and intellectuals have made their choice...

Thomas Sowell

Whether a person goes to church regularly or not, does not depend on how far he lives from church, but rather how far he lives from God. ~ anon.

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

Through the Parable of today's Gospel, our Savior has set forth three things for us: the condition of the sinner, the rule of repentance, and the greatness of God's compassion. The divine Fathers have put this reading the week after the Parable of the Publican and Pharisee so that, seeing in the person of the Prodigal Son our own wretched condition -- inasmuch as we are sunken in sin, far from God and His Mysteries -- we might at last come to our senses and make haste to return to Him by repentance during these holy days of the Fast.

Furthermore, those who have wrought many great iniquities, and have persisted in them for a long time, oftentimes fall into despair, thinking that there can no longer be any forgiveness for them; and so being without hope, they fall every day into the same and even worse iniquities. Therefore, the divine Fathers, that they might root out the passion of despair from the hearts of such people, and rouse them to the deeds of virtue, have set the present parable at the forecourts of the Fast, to show them the surpassing goodness of God's compassion, and to teach them that there is no sin -- no matter how great it may be -- that can overcome at any time His love for man.

Soul Saturday

Through the Apostolic Constitutions (Book VIII, ch. 42), the Church of Christ has received the custom to make commemorations for the departed on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after their repose. Since many throughout the ages, because of an untimely death in a faraway place, or other adverse circumstances, have died without being deemed worthy of the appointed memorial services, the divine Fathers, being so moved in their love for man, have decreed that a common memorial be made this day for all pious Orthodox Christians who have reposed from all ages past, so that those who did not have particular memorial services may be included in this common one for all. Also, the Church of Christ teaches us that alms should be given to the poor by the departed one's kinsmen as a memorial for him.

Besides this, the next day on Sunday we remember the Second Coming of Christ, and since the reposed have neither been judged, nor have received their complete recompense (Acts 17:31; II Peter 2:9; Heb. 11:39-40), the Church rightly commemorates the souls today, and trusting in the boundless mercy of God, she prays Him to have mercy on sinners. Furthermore, since the commemoration is for all the reposed together, it reminds each of us of his own death, and arouses us to repentance.

Cultural Marxism

I use the phrase Cultural Marxism to describe what Antonio Gramsci had in mind for the West, after he went to Russia. He saw Lenin's Soviet Union as a failure, in that, while the regime had total power and the obedience of its citizens, the people were terrified of it and gave it no loyalty, allegiance or love. And eventually the Soviet Union would and did collapse, as did Mao's China. Gramsci believed in the cultural approach. He believed that, through a long march through the institutions of the West, Marxists could overturn Christianity, the heat shield of the West that made people automatically reject Marxism. If you could extirpate Christian culture from the heart of Western man, with the "acids of modernity," destroy this heat shield, people would embrace Marxist ideas and you could advance your ideology, and the people would be more receptive to it.

What we call Cultural Marxism has certainly been more successful than the economic Marxism of the 19th century and the Leninism associated with it. I have used this term Cultural Marxism along with other terms -- socialism, secular humanism. Basically it is a political ideology, a set of ideas, antithetical to traditional, Judeo-Christian beliefs and ideas predominant in this country up until the middle of last century.

By Patrick Buchanan

Typical Stumbling Blocks' to Faith in the modern mind...

Responses given by Fr. Alexander Elchaninov, *The Diary of a Russian Priest (1937)*

1. *'All men are egoists, all deeds are egoistic, even when they seem good and unselfish: for everyone who performs a good action obtains satisfaction and pleasure from it.'*

If I get satisfaction from a good deed, this is an unforeseen and unexpected result, and it does not mean that I do good in order to obtain this satisfaction. There are many impulses and actions totally devoid of selfishness—performed, that is to say, without any calculated desire to receive a reward; in such cases, a person would hardly refuse to perform the good deed, just because he knows beforehand that it will bring him nothing.

2. *'The saints are egoists, they think only of their salvation.'*

This is not true. Saints are people who are attracted by the Divine. Can you find fault with a plant because it is attracted to the light?

3. *'Asceticism is useless. My body does not trouble me, therefore I need not struggle against it. The main thing is to love God and my neighbor, whereas asceticism is an unnecessary preoccupation with oneself.'*

If the flesh hindered St. Seraphim, the Buddha, and even Christ, why then does it not hinder you? It is because you do not know yourself nor your sins; you are not conscious of any spiritual goal, towards which you direct your efforts. In order to love God and your neighbor, you must have a feeling for them and be refined by asceticism.

Asceticism is necessary first of all for creative action (of any kind), for prayer, for love—in other words, it is needed by every man throughout his entire life.

4. *'Why does God fail to relieve our sufferings?'*

The greatest sufferings are those caused by sinful anger, self-love, jealousy, the desire for revenge; every sin results in pain and grief ('tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil', Rom.2:9). Is God to blame for these sufferings? Do we wish that sin should not bring suffering, that there should be no need to atone for sin, that the world should be drowned in sin? Our sins burn us and are consumed by grief.'

So Much as Our Weakness Can Bear

✠ "Of God we speak not all we ought (for that is known only to Him), but so much as the capacity of human nature has received, and so much as our weakness can bear. For we explain not what God is but candidly confess that we have not exact knowledge concerning Him. For in what concerns God to confess our ignorance is the best knowledge. Therefore 'magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His Name together' (Ps. 34:3), - all of us in common, for one alone is powerless; nay rather, even if we be all united together, we shall yet not do it as we ought. Even if all the Church throughout the world, both that which now is, and that which shall be, should meet together, they would not be able to worthily sing the praises of their Shepherd."

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

"The spirit of rebellion that characterizes the modern world — the Satanic *Zeitgeist* that worships the individual will and resents tradition, inherited wisdom, and authority — has no place in the Church."
— Internet comment

On Reading the Scriptures

Which are not written "To Whom it May Concern..."

"St. Irenaeus believed there was an unbroken line of tradition from the Apostles, to those they mentored, and eventually down to himself and other Christian leaders. The Gnostics interpreted the Scriptures according to their own tradition. "In doing so, however," Irenaeus warned, "they disregard the order and connection of the Scriptures and ... dismember and destroy the truth." So while their biblical theology may at first appear to be the precious jewel of orthodoxy, it was actually an imitation in glass. Put together properly, Irenaeus said, the parts of Scripture were like a mosaic in which the gems or tiles form the portrait of a king. But the Gnostics rearranged the tiles into the form of a dog or fox.

As a pastor, then, St. Irenaeus wrote "Against Heresies" in order to describe the heresies that were threatening his congregation and to present the Apostolic interpretation of the Scriptures. He revealed the cloaked deception for what it was and displayed the Apostolic Tradition as a saving reminder to the faithful." ~ Quoted from [Christianity Today's Church History site](#).

St. Irenaeus (bishop of Lyons), it is worth noting, knew St. Polycarp, who knew St. John. Thus he was third-generation in the life of the Christian Church.

St. Irenaeus' contention that those who are not in the line and community of the Christian Tradition are not able to properly interpret Scriptures (in a Christian manner) is dramatically important. It sets the Scriptures in a non-objective context. The Scriptures are not "self-interpreting," as some modern Protestants would contend, neither is their reading and interpretation a matter of reason or historical knowledge. Their reading is ecclesiastical, traditional, liturgical or, in Irenaeus' language, "according to the Apostolic hypothesis." In short, the Scriptures are understood within the life of the Church and cannot be rightly read in any other manner. St. Paul's letters are written to Churches or individuals holding positions within the Church. None of his letters are addressed, "To Whom it May Concern."

In St. Paul's letter to the Colossians he states, "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea" (Col 4:16 KJV). The Scriptures are to the Churches, read within the Churches, and interpreted within the life of the Churches. - Fr. Stephen Freeman, *Glory to God for All Things Blog*

Revealing who the Christian is...

If those who fear God lacked the various trials and temptations, some of us would have ended up in satanic pride; others in debauchery worse than Sodom; others in the darkness of unbelief and impiety, and so forth. So then, it is to afflictions that we owe this little piety of ours, as well as our hope of salvation.

One who is physically ill abhors the bitter medicines and painful operations. However, he endures patiently, knowing that the physician effects his health through these things. And when he gets well, he renders many thanks to the physician for the good which he did, and no longer remembers the pain because it has passed.

We should also understand spiritual matters in the same way. All the various afflictions make the one afflicted abhor them, but they result in the cure of the soul's spiritual members. And if those afflictions had not been sent by God, the great Physician, that sickly member of the soul would have constantly grown worse, and then the soul would have been poisoned and suffered spiritual death, which is separation from God. Therefore, we ought to thank God in every situation so that we do not fall away from piety.

The Apostle James teaches us beautifully concerning this matter: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." (James 1: 2-3). Temptations attest to the inner state of each person. When many kinds of storms appear, it is then that the nautical experience of the captain shows. And Godly afflictions reveal who the Christian is.

Elder Ephraim

What Is the Mark of the True Christian?

Compiled by St. Anastasius of Sinai

~ John Sanidopoulos, Mystagogy Blog – April 27, 2010

St. Anastasius was a priest and abbot of Mt. Sinai. His zeal for true faith led him to travel through Egypt, Arabia, and Syria to combat the errors of the Acephalites and Eutychians (Monophysites). His writings show not only a thorough command of Holy Scripture and a wide knowledge of the writing of the Church Fathers and other Christian writers, but also classical erudition and a solid grounding in Aristotelian philosophy. Of his prolific output the most important works are *Guide Against the Acephalites* and *Answers to Questions*. It is from the latter that the present passage is translated. St. Anastasius died in great old age in 686.[1]

QUESTION: What is the mark of the true Christian?

ANSWER: Some say correct faith and pious works. Jesus, however does not define the true Christian in these terms. It is possible for one to have faith and good works, and to be conceited over these and not to be a perfect Christian. A Christian is a veritable dwelling place of Christ, held together by good works and pious beliefs. True faith, without works is dead, as are works without faith. We must, therefore, use every effort to keep ourselves clean from foul deeds so that it may not be said of us They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him (Titus 1:16), wherefore the Lord says If a man loves Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love Him, and We will come unto him and make Our home with him (John 14:23).

Do we not learn from this that the house of the soul is built through correct belief and good works, and thus God dwells within us. I will dwell in them, He says, and walk in them (II Cor. 6:16). The Apostle also points this out when he says Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates (II Cor. 13:5)? Will not the devil then know whether or not the Master of the house, Christ, is inside your mind? When he sees you angry, or shouting, or using oaths, or foul language, or blaming someone, or abusing him, or finding fault, or reproaching someone, or condemning, or hating, or treating someone unjustly, or being conceited, or boasting, or being elated, or not praying habitually and remembering death, then he knows that God, your protector and provider is not inside your soul. And so, the evil one enters like a thief, not finding the divine light in your heart, and he loots the house of your soul, and your last state becomes worse than your first.

From Deuteronomy: And now, Israel, what does the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God (Deut. 10:12).

From David: Ye that love the Lord, see to it that ye hate evil (Ps. 96:10); The Lord preserveth all that love Him, but all the sinners shall He utterly destroy (Ps. 144:20). And: for not a God that willest iniquity art Thou. He that worketh evil shall not dwell near Thee, nor shall transgressors abide before Thine eyes (Ps. 5:2, 3).

From Isaiah: And the Lord has said, This people draw nigh to Me with their mouth, and they honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me: but in vain do they worship Me (Is. 29:12). They seek Me day by day, and desire to know My ways, as a people that had done righteousness, and had not forsaken the judgment of their God (Is. 58:2), says the Lord, and: When ye stretch forth your hands, I will turn away Mine eyes from you, for your hands are full of blood. Wash you, be clean; remove your iniquities from your souls before Mine eyes; cease from your iniquities; learn to do well; diligently seek judgment, deliver him that is suffering wrong, plead for the orphan, and obtain justice for the widow (Is. 1:15-18).

From Solomon: The ways of an ungodly man are an abomination to the Lord; but He loves those that follow after righteousness (Prov. 15:9). And: By alms and by faithful dealings sins are purged away; but by the fear of the Lord every one departs from evil (Prov. 15:27).

From Sirach: Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath happened unto me? for the Lord is longsuffering, He will in no wise let thee go... and say not, His mercy is great; He will be pacified for the multitude of my sins: for mercy and wrath come from Him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners (Sir. 5:46). As His mercy is great, so is His correction also: He judgeth a man according to His works... for every man shall find according to his works (Sir. 16:12-14).

From the *Apostolic Constitutions*: "Therefore let him who is to be baptized be a stranger to wickedness, abstaining from sin, a friend of God, an enemy of the devil, an heir of God, a co-heir of Christ, renouncing Satan and his demons and his works, chaste, pure, holy, a lover of God, a son of God, praying as a son to the Father and saying thus as is the custom of the faithful: Our Father, Who art in heaven,... [2] So that he may not call God Father unworthily, and be reproached by Him, as Israel, the first born son who once heard that A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I am a father, where is mine honor (Mal. 1:6)? For the glory of fathers is the holiness of their children, and the honor of a master is the fear of his servants. [3]"

From St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Lord's Prayer*: "He Who is good does not have the nature to become the father of an evil will, nor the Holy One of one polluted in his life; nor He Who is changeless of one constantly changing; nor He Who is Life of one dead through sin; nor He Who is pure and untainted of one disfigured by disgraceful passions; nor the bountiful one of a miser; nor He Who is found in every good, in any way of those who are involved in evil. If anyone looking at himself sees that he still needs cleansing and he recognizes his conscience as being full of defilement and evil crimes, and, before cleansing himself of these and similar evils, he insinuates himself into God's family by calling Him Father, being unrighteous, he calls on the Righteous One, being impure he calls the Pure One Father, his words would be insult and mockery, as if he were naming God as the Father of his own vileness. For the word father indicates the cause of the one who comes to exist through him."

"Therefore a man who with a bad conscience calls God his father does nothing other than blame God as the author and cause of his own wickedness. But light has not fellowship with darkness, says the Apostle. Light rather associates itself with light, the just with the just, the incorrupt with the incorrupt. Their opposites, however, relate to their own kind. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit (Matt. 7:18)."

"If then someone who is slow of heart and seeks after lying, as Scripture says, dares to use the words of the prayer, let him know that the father he calls is not the heavenly one, but rather, the infernal one, for he is a liar and become the father of lies, within whomever they be. He is sin and the father of sin. For this reason those who are subject to passions are called children of wrath, and the apostate from Life is called the son of perdition.

"Would you like to know the properties of the evil character? They are envy, hate, slander, conceit, avarice, passionate lust, and the sickness of megalomania. These and suchlike characterize the form of the adversary. If someone whose soul is infected with such stains were to call on the Father, what sort of father would hear him? Clearly the one who has kinship with the one who calls on him, and this is not the heavenly one, but the infernal one. The one whose family features he bears will recognize the family relationship. Thus the prayer of an evil man, as long as he persists in his wickedness, becomes an invocation of the devil. When he has abandoned his wickedness and lives innocently, his voice will call on the good Father."

The same Gregory, *To the Monk Lybbius*: "If someone puts on the name of Christ, but does not show a life corresponding to that name, he makes a lie of the name. For neither is it possible for the Lord not to be justice, purity and truth, and estrangement for every evil, nor is it possible for a Christian not to show that he partakes of those qualities."

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechism*: "It is of no benefit to us to be called Christians if we do not correspond in our deeds. For it is written: If ye were Abraham's children ye would do the works of Abraham (John 8:39)."

St. John Chrysostom, *On St. Matthew*: "Whoever calls God Father, with this small word, confessed the remission of sins, the redemption from punishment, justification, sanctification, liberation, adoption as son, kinship with the Only-Begotten, and the bestowal of the Spirit. Nor is it possible for someone to call God Father, if he is not a partaker of all those good things, and has not become a son of God. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God (Rom. 8:14). Thus whoever calls God Father should demonstrate appropriate behavior so as not to appear unworthy of the kinship. No man can serve two masters... God and mammon (Matt. 6:24)."

"Do not philosophize too much, for God has declared it once and for all and said that it is impossible for service of one to be compatible with service of the other. So do not say it is possible. For, when one tells you to seize (others' property) and the other tells you to free yourself of what you have; one says to be chaste, the other to fornicate; one says to eat and drink, the other to fast and exercise self-control; the one to despise things of this world, the other to cleave to them; the one to marvel at marble walls and buildings, the other not to value these things but rather to pursue philosophy, how is it possible for these to be compatible with each other?

"He here calls mammon a master, not because of its own nature, but because of the wretchedness of those who bow and submit to it. Thus the Apostle calls the belly a god, not because of any worthiness of such a mistress, but from the wretchedness of those who serve her."

{ to be continued }

A QUESTION ABOUT TITHING

Why does the Orthodox Church endorse tithing? The reason I ask this is that although 10% is required in Old Testament times, so is stoning for adultery and other rules we don't follow now. How do we tell what is valid today and what is not?

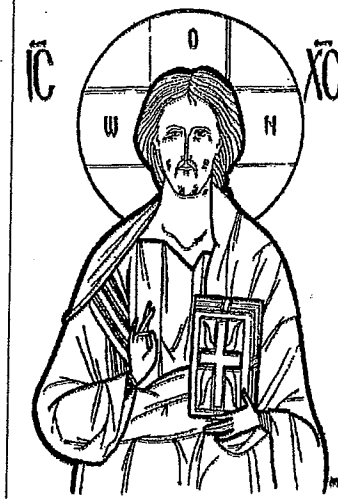
Tithing, as you correctly observe, is the Old Testament injunction to set aside 10% of all one possesses for the work of the Lord. Many Christians, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, strive to achieve this level of giving, even though its origin is in the Old Testament and there are those who would say that the New Testament maxim would be to recognize that all we possess is in fact the Lord's and that we should return to Him all that we have, or at least the first portion of our treasures.

Even though tithing is from the Old Testament, it should not be seen as something that should not be practiced, such as stoning. Would one also recommend that Christians ignore the Ten Commandments because they are found in the Old rather than New Testament? Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. That which was worth saving from the Old Covenant was incorporated into the New.

In looking at the reality of some of our parishes – especially those with 50 members or less – tithing might be a reasonable means of keeping the parishes properly funded and, in some cases, alive. The "I'll give a buck a week" attitude in a small parish will ensure that there are not enough funds to keep the doors open, much less support a priest.

The thing that is critical is not the percentage – or the origin of the maxim – but, rather, that one is giving the first and the best of one's resources to the work of the Church – in honesty and out of a sense of thanksgiving to God for His many blessings. Remember the widow who only gave two coins was blessed because she gave everything she had to God. She overshot the tithe by 90%!

Fr. John Matusiak



SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

"Let each of you regularly on the first day of the week set aside a proportion as God has prospered him."

1 Corinthians 16:2

"What shall I render to the Lord for all He has given me?"

Psalms 116:12

"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Matthew 16:26

DETERMINING YOUR WEEKLY OFFERING

If Annual Gross Income Is:	3%	5%	7%	10%	12%	15%
20,000	\$12	\$19	\$27	\$38	\$46	\$58
30,000	\$17	\$29	\$40	\$58	\$69	\$87
40,000	\$23	\$38	\$54	\$77	\$92	\$115
50,000	\$29	\$48	\$67	\$96	\$115	\$144
60,000	\$35	\$58	\$81	\$115	\$138	\$173
75,000	\$43	\$72	\$101	\$144	\$173	\$216
100,000	\$58	\$96	\$135	\$192	\$231	\$288