



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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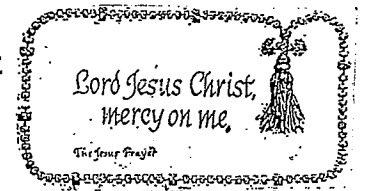
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✠ **September 23, 2012** ✠

**Conception of the Holy Glorious Prophet
Forerunner and Baptist John
Virgin Martyr Raissa of Alexandria (308)**

“Truth is not just an abstract idea, sought and known with the mind, but something personal - even a Person- sought and loved with the heart - Jesus Christ”

~ Fr. Seraphim Rose



- ⇒ Pepper Place this Saturday!
- ✠ October 7 – Annual Parish Meeting
- ✠ Oct. 28 - 35th Anniversary Celebration

*Congratulations to Andrew & Lauren
on the birth of Lucy!*

The Conception of St. John the Baptist

September 23

This came to pass fifteen months before the birth of Christ, after the vision of the Angel that Zacharias, the father of the Forerunner, saw in the Temple while he executed the priest's office in the order of his course during the feast of the Tabernacles, as tradition bears witness. In this vision, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias and said to him, "Thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John" (Luke 1:13). Knowing that Elizabeth was barren, and that both he and she were elderly, Zacharias did not believe what the Angel told him, although he had before him the example of Abraham and Sarah, of Hannah, mother of the Prophet Samuel, and of other barren women in Israel who gave birth by the power of God. Hence, he was condemned by the Archangel to remain speechless until the fulfillment of these words in their season, which also came to pass (Luke 1:7-24).

The Jesus Prayer, at first

✠ At first the practice of the Prayer of Jesus appears to be extraordinarily dry and seems to promise no fruit. As the mind strives to unite with the heart, it meets at first with impenetrable darkness and gloom, hardness and deadness of the heart, which is not quickly aroused to sympathy with the mind. This should not cause despondency and cowardice; it is mentioned here since to be forewarned is to be forearmed. The patient and diligent worker will not fail to be satisfied and consoled; he will rejoice at an infinite abundance of spiritual fruits such as he can form no conception of in his carnal and natural state. **St. Ignatius Brianchaninov**

Songful Living ~ A word from Saint Alexandra, Tsaritsa and New Martyr

✠ We must see to it that our pleasing of others always ministers to their good in some way, edifies them, adds something to their character, and makes them braver, truer, and happier.

The world is full of discouraged people, and we have the power to say a hopeful word or do a kindness which will drive the discouragement from their hearts and move them again, with strength for brave, victorious, and songful living. Love is the greatest thing in the world. We are bound so to live that we shall do hurt to none, but shall edify - add something to the life of everyone.

This and That

Voting God out...

The authors of the Democratic Party platform inadvertently revealed to the world the sea change that has taken place in that party we once knew. For the first time -- and in the longest Democratic platform in history, 26,000 words -- there was not a single mention of God, the Creator, whom Thomas Jefferson himself, father of the party, proclaimed to be the author of our right to life and liberty. The convention had approved the new platform, but when a firestorm erupted, a panicked Barack Obama hastily ordered "God" reinstated.

But when the amendment was offered to the convention by its chairman, Antonio Villaraigosa, the idea of restoring the name of God to the platform was hooted, jeered and booed by half the delegates on the floor, who three times howled, "No!"

The omission of God is being called an oversight....Still, why would Democrats do something so seemingly stupid, something that will inevitably cause a backlash among believers?

Answer: Millions of Democrats are themselves offended when God is included, because for them, the God of the Old and New Testaments is an impediment to *the progressive march of mankind*.

Some atheists place a belief in God or Christ as the Son of God on a par with believing in Santa Claus. Others regard religion and especially fundamentalist faith as an often-destructive force because of what they believe it has produced over the centuries -- intolerance, inquisitions, massacres, martyrdoms, religious wars. Among the evils a deep belief in the God of the Torah and New Testament has produced, they argue, is the systematic persecution of homosexuals.

~ Patrick Buchanan

Rioting for Allah

⇒ There are insane Muslims, as there are insane Christians and insane Jews, but the hundreds of thousands of Muslims who have temporarily abandoned their daily lives to show their hatred of the United States are neither insane nor disgruntled film critics. They may not all watch CNN or read a newspaper, but they know that the US government has been regularly killing Muslim civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Many American's believe it's different when we do it, of course, because we believe in democracy, human rights, and the liberation of women, but in the eyes of these poor benighted Muslims, a dead child is a dead child.

This is not to make light of Islamic traditions that justify violence and terrorism. Much of what *The Innocence of Muslims* (film blamed for riots) depicted, in its clownish and degrading way, has history on its side. The Christian (and now post-Christian) West has been at war, on and off, with Islam for over a millennium, and so long as there are believing Muslims, the struggle will continue.

That is why the Americans pin their hopes on the degrading effects of the consumerism that has destroyed our own civilization... They cannot understand the religious motivation of Muslim men and women, because they have no religion of their own.

~ Thomas Fleming

⇒ The Islamic world, especially across the Arab region, is undergoing a transformation, a Great Awakening. Muslims from Nigeria to Mali to Ethiopia to Sudan to the Maghreb and Middle and Near East are growing more militant and more hostile toward Christianity and other faiths. And as we are not going to change our position on Israel, or our culture, such as it is, or our First Amendment, clashes between us are inevitable.

~ Patrick Buchanan

ON THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN – Conclusion

Elder Porphyrios of Athens (+1991)

The conclusion is that we need to teach our children to live humbly and simply and not continually to seek praise and applause. We need to teach them that there is humility and that this is the healthy state of life.

The mind-set of our contemporary society does harm to children. It is based on another psychology and another theory of education that is addressed to the children of atheists. This frame of mind leads to complete disregard for the consequences of one's actions. And you see the results in our children and young people. Young people nowadays say, 'You need to understand us!' But we mustn't go to them. On the contrary, we need to pray for them, to say what is right, to live by what is right, and proclaim what is right, and not conform ourselves to their way of thinking. We mustn't compromise the magnificence of our faith. We cannot, in order to help them, adopt their own frame of mind. We need to remain the people that we are and proclaim the truth and the light.

The children will learn from the Holy Fathers. The teaching of the Fathers will instruct our children about confession, about the passions, about evils and about how the saints conquered their evil selves. And we will pray that God will enter into them.

BIOGRAPHY of Elder Porphyrios

Elder Porphyrios was born in the village of Aghios Ioannis in the province of Karystia on the Greek island of Evia (Euboea) on the 7th February 1906. The name he received at birth was Evangelos. His parents, Leonidas and Eleni Bairaktaris, were poor farmers and had difficulty in supporting their large family. For this reason his father left for America where he worked on the construction of the Panama Canal.

Young Evangelos was the fourth child of the family. As a boy he looked after sheep on the hills and had completed only the first class of primary school when, at the age of seven, he was obliged on account of his family's extreme poverty to go to the nearby town of Chalkida to work. He worked there in a shop for two or three years. Thereafter he went to Piraeus to work in a general store owned by a relative.

At the age of twelve he left secretly to go to the Holy Mountain. His longing was to imitate Saint John the Hut-dweller whose life he had read and for whom he felt a special affinity. The grace of God led him to the hermitage of Saint George in Kavsokalyvia where he lived in obedience to two elders, natural brothers, Panteleimon, who was a father confessor, and Ioannikios, who was a priest. He devoted himself with great love and in a spirit of utter obedience to the two elders who had a reputation for being exceptionally austere.

He became a monk at the age of fourteen and took the name of Niketas. Two years later he took his final monastic vows of the Great Schema. Shortly thereafter God granted him the gift of clear sight.

At the age of nineteen he became very seriously ill and was obliged to leave the Holy Mountain. He returned to Evia where he went to live in the Monastery of Saint Charalambos at Levka. A year later, in 1926, and at the age of twenty, he was ordained priest at the Church of Saint Charalambos in Kymi by the Archbishop of Sinai, Porphyrios III, who gave him the name Porphyrios. At the age of twenty-two he became a confessor and spiritual father. For a time he was parish priest in the village of Tsakei in Evia.

He lived for twelve years in the Monastery of Saint Charalambos in Evia serving as a spiritual guide and confessor and then for three years in the deserted Monastery of Saint Nicholas in Ano Vatheia.

In 1940, on the eve of Greece's entrance into the Second World War, Elder Porphyrios moved to Athens where he became chaplain and confessor in the Polyclinic Hospital. He himself said that he served there for thirty-three years as if it were a single day, devoting himself untiringly to his spiritual work and to easing pain and suffering.

As of 1955 he made his home in the tiny Monastery of Saint Nicholas in Kallisia on the foothills of Mount Penteli. He rented this monastic dependency along with the surrounding area from the Penteli Monastery and worked the land with great diligence. At the same time he carried out his copious work of spiritual guidance.

In the summer of 1979 he moved to Milesi, a village some thirty miles north of Athens and overlooking his native Evia, with the dream of founding a monastery there. To begin with he lived in a caravan under exceedingly adverse circumstances and later in a simple room constructed from breeze blocks where he endured without complaint his many health troubles. In 1984 he moved into a room in a wing of the monastery which was under construction. In spite of the fact that the elder was seriously ill and blind, he worked constantly and unstintingly for the completion of the monastery. On the 26th February 1990 he was able to see his dream becoming reality when the foundation stone of the church of the Transfiguration was laid.

During the final years of his earthly life he began to prepare himself for his death. His desire was to return to the Holy Mountain and to his beloved Kavsokalyvia where, secretly and silently, just as he had lived, he would tender up his soul to her Bridegroom. He was often heard to say, 'My desire now that I have grown old is to go and die up there.'

So it was that he came to his saintly end in his hermitage in Kafsokalyvia on the morning of 2nd December 1991. The last words that were heard to pass from his lips were the words from our Lord's high-priestly prayer which he loved so much and repeated so often: "that they may be one."

REFLECTION – Be Patient and Merciful Toward the Sinner

We must be patient and merciful toward the sinner if we wish that a long-suffering [patient] God be merciful to us. The great compassion of Blessed Alexander, the Patriarch of Antioch, had become proverbial. One of his scribes stole several gold pieces and fled to Thebaid. However, some robbers captured him in the wilderness and they took him with them. Learning of this, Alexander sent the robbers eighty-five gold pieces as a ransom. That is why it was said: "The mercy of Alexander cannot be overcome by any sin." St. John the Merciful One writes: "The long-suffering [patience] of God is unchangeable and His mercy is kind...How many criminals are there who go out to kill and rob that He conceals in order that they may not be captured and placed under tortures? Pirates sail the sea and God does not order the sea to drown them. How many falsely swear by Holy Communion and He tolerates not repaying them for that with evil? Robbers steal on the road and He does not give them over to the beasts to tear them to pieces...Libertines go off with prostitutes and He tolerates them. Why all of this? Because He waits for repentance and conversion. Truly, God does not want the destruction of a sinner...That is why, brethren, let us be ashamed before the most lenient Lord God."

THE INEVITABILITY OF SUFFERING

By New Martyr Archbishop John of Riga.



A Latvian by birth, Archbishop John began his pastoral work in Russia where he inspired such love and devotion in his flock, that when the Communist revolution struck and trouble began, volunteers from among the workers organized a guard to watch over him day and night. Seeing in him a bold accuser of the new regime, the Bolsheviks never left

the Archbishop in peace; he was constantly followed and several attempts were made on his life.

In 1921, at the persistent entreaty of the Latvian Orthodox Patriarch Tikhon, blessed Archbishop John returned to his native Latvia. Under his guidance life was restored to the much suffering Latvian Orthodox Church. Here too he continued to speak fearlessly, his voice sounding forth like an alarm bell; the image of Golgotha often appeared in his sermons. He never forgot the persecuted Orthodox in Russia and conducted a ceaseless open battle against the Soviet atheist regime. In turn, his political enemies did not forget him.

During the night of October 11th, 1934, Archbishop John ascended his own Golgotha. He was tortured and burned alive in the attic of the cathedral. Over 100,000 people accompanied the coffin to the cemetery, a living glorification of this beloved archpastor and chief confessor of the Latvian Orthodox Church.

† † †

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. [Mt 16:21.23]

† † †

Like a thunderclap from a clear sky, so was the impression made upon the disciples by this revelation of the Lord concerning the sufferings which awaited him. Earlier He had told them that His path was also their path. *You will be hated for My name's sake. The servant is not greater than his master. He who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.* And in the lives of Christ's true disciples there is a time of suffering the Passion, when each must enter his own Jerusalem, ascend his Golgotha, and the fateful Cross, and rake up the fateful cup, even unto death.

Even the sons of this world have their Golgotha. Unforeseen and uninvited, suffering enters the house. You must suffer whether you like it or not. The bitter "must"...

This "must" is bitter even for the faithful disciple of Christ. And the cross of suffering frightens even him. In his soul

is heard the voice of Peter: *Be merciful to yourself; do not let this happen; defend yourself.* And this is not surprising, for after all, the great Sufferer Himself prayed: *If it be possible, take this cup from Me.* This is an altogether necessary "must", and we are powerless to stand against it.

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things. If the way of the Lord led to Jerusalem, if His fate was to be decided by the scribes, the Pharisees, the elders, then it was natural that He had to suffer and be killed.

This Jerusalem towards which Christ directed His steps was not the heavenly Jerusalem, but an earthly city, full of the spirit of this world which had fallen away from its God, not recognizing, not comprehending the visitation of the Lord. This is the same Jerusalem which at the altar of the Lord, killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to it...

And the world, my brothers, even unto this day, stands on that same foundation. Perhaps it does not have the same outward appearance. Nowadays they do not crucify people on crosses, as they did Jesus Christ; they do not beat people with staves as they did Peter and John; nor are people stoned like Stephen. People have become too indifferent towards faith to suffer for its sake. Our path is less rocky, and whoever murmurs at the harshness and the evil of this world should know that he is far from suffering unto blood.

Nevertheless, now as never before, the words of the Lord contain a sacred truth: *If you were of the world, the world would love you, but because you are not of this world but I took you from the world, the world despises you.* It cannot do otherwise. The natural desire of man's heart is to live at peace with everyone. Youthful hearts often make decision for an unconcerned faith within themselves: "I want to get along with everyone, I mustn't antagonize anyone." But even the most well-intentioned man soon realizes that this is impossible. Even the meekest lamb is sure to meet on his way the ferocious wolf who says: "You are a thorn in my side."

He who believes must confess his faith. He who desires to serve God in the world must act according to his faith, but every confession inevitably arouses antagonism, and every action is sure to meet with hostility. To see that his honest persuasion and strivings are not recognized by the world, that his good deeds are everywhere met with opposition, that there where he sows only love he must reap evil—this is obviously very grievous to the follower of Christ. And he is often ready to ask together with his Master: "What evil has been done you?" or "How have I offended you?"

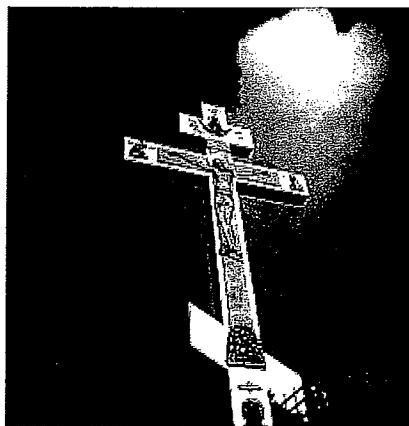
The truth which you proclaim and which you confess and which the world cannot gainsay; or the righteousness manifest in your life which silently reproaches the world; or the peace of the Lord written on your face which the world cannot forgive; or the heavenly other-worldliness of

your behavior which shames and accuses their earthly way of life. This is how you have offended the world. And the world would sooner pardon you of ten vices and crimes... which set you on a level with otters, than forgive one good deed which elevates you above the rest.

Why did Cain murder Abel? Because Cain's actions were evil and the actions of Abel were good and righteous. Why did the scribes and Pharisees condemn the Saviour? Because He was light, and darkness cannot abide the light.

Do not be surprised, then, my dear brothers, if the world hates you. This is nothing unusual. Do not let the evil mockings and vicious hatred of evildoers lead you astray. Go along the straight road with the name of the Lord through the world which lies in evil and think to yourself: I must follow the straight road and the world cannot do otherwise.

It would not be the world if it did not prefer the lies of its errors to truth, egoism to love, its laziness to zeal for God, worldly vanity to righteousness. I am not a disciple of Christ, not His soldier, if I do what is pleasing to everyone, if I go along the broad path together with the crowd instead of keeping to the narrow path where there are few travelers. And so, let us step forward in the name of the Lord with the full realization that "I must".



There is another aspect of this "I must." When the Son of Man told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and there suffer much and die, He was aware that this was necessary for Himself. Because *He was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, God raised Him up and gave Him a name which is above every name.* If the Heavenly Father so willed that even His Only-begotten Son would drink from the cup of suffering, is it for us sinners who are so imperfect to shun this cup of suffering, this school of suffering, when we are such a long way from perfection and still have so much to learn in order to become worthy disciples of the great Sufferer?

Some think: "How much more fervently and more willingly I would serve my Lord if only my life's path were easier, if it weren't so thickly strewn with sharp rocks." In saying this, you yourself obviously do not know who and what you are, what is beneficial for you and what is harmful, what you need and what you don't need.

It is true when they say that a man tolerates least of all his own well-being. Days of happiness, days of success, when everything goes according to one's wishes—how many times have such days woven a fatal net which captures man's soul? What dissoluteness grows in man's heart, like rust on the blade of a battle sword when it lies unused, or like a garden

which becomes overgrown if not tended by the gardener's shears.

Tell me, O Christian, what preserves you from the haughtiness which so easily penetrates even the strongest hearts, even the hearts of Christ's disciples? Is it not the cross and suffering? What humbles the passionate inclinations of the flesh which so quickly and easily spread in times of well-being and prosperity, like insects in a swamp on a sunny day? What teaches you to shun this uncleanness? Is it not the rod of misfortunes and sorrows? What arouses you from the sleep of self-assurance in which we are so easily lulled to sleep by times of earthly happiness? Or what is more conducive to lazy vegetation than cloudless, carefree days of prosperity? At such times, isn't a storm to be welcomed? What will draw you out of the dangerous state of insensibility? Will not sorrows? Will not illness? What tears us away from our worldly attachments, the love for the world and all that is

in it? Is it not necessity and misfortunes? Do not trials teach us to take life more seriously? Do not sorrows teach us to be prepared for death?

Wild brambles in the heart cannot be uprooted without the pruning shears of the heavenly Gardener, and the good fruit of truth and righteousness will not grow without the rain of tears and sorrows. True obedience cannot be experienced other than by the drinking of the bitter cup of grief, when one can only say: *Not my will, but Thine be done, Father...* And

submission to the will of God is never seen so clearly as in days and hours of storm, when in the midst of threatening and frightful waves the Christian gives himself totally into the hands of Him Whose very hands hold these tempests and waves.

When can the steadfastness, courage and strength of a soldier of Christ be better demonstrated than when trials and obstacles must be turned into Christian deeds, than in the war against evil or in times of danger? All the noble strength of the Christian soul, of the Christian character, shines forth most brightly in times of distress, misfortune, and suffering. All the miracles of God's grace are most evident in times when the waters of grief and misfortune flood our souls and we are forced to recognize our helplessness, our weakness, and thus in turn we surrender all our strength and understanding to Almighty God.

And are you going to ask, what for? And why? When God Himself chastises and calls you to account? Or, when the Lord sends you to the school of the Cross, will you say: "I have no need of its teachings?" Rather, you must say: "I need this; I must go to this school of the Cross; I must suffer with Christ in order to be raised with Him. When the Lord

chastens me, I must think and feel like a child chastised by the loving right hand of the Lord, like a grape vine under the gardener's pruning shears; like iron beneath the smith's hammer, like gold in the purifying furnace, like a cluster of grapes beneath the burning rays of the sun. This 'I must' is of God, and I must not shrink from it."

Even the ancient Greeks and other peoples bowed before the divine will, before sacred duty, before the immutable destiny and man's dependence upon the divine. The submission of one's will before this divine "I must," the exact fulfillment of the decrees of the divine will, in the wise this was called 'wisdom', in heroes it was 'courage', in the righteous it was 'sanctity'. How much more willingly must we Christians fulfill our duty when we know that we are not being led by a blind faith, but by the good will of the Father which led even Christ to Golgotha and the Cross, but through Golgotha and the Cross to the glorious Resurrection. And so we must put our trust in Him even when we cannot comprehend the meaning of this guidance. Mankind would have been deprived of so much goodness, such glory and blessedness, if the Saviour had hearkened to the voice of Peter: "Defend yourself."

Let each soul bow before the divine "I must," for the will of God is good, perfect, guiding all to salvation. And you, O son of dust and corruption, bend your neck under His almighty hand before which your strength is as nothing; trust to Divine wisdom, before which your light is but a dark shadow; give yourself over to the fatherly guidance of Him Who desires, not enmity and sorrows, but peace and blessedness for all men and all mankind. When you submit your thoughts and your will to this thought and will, then no cup will be for you too bitter, and no cup too heavy; you will be able to bear it; no path too narrow you will be able to follow it; no trial will tempt you beyond measure; you will be able to withstand it. Such is the will of God.

If you are surrounded by your wife, your children, friends, and everyone you love, and if they try to persuade you to have pity on yourself, not to destroy yourself—pay no attention to their tears and their pleadings; point to the heavens and say: "Do not burden my heart; so it is pleasing to God and I must; you are reasoning according to man's wisdom and not the wisdom of God." And if from your own heart cries out the voice of flesh and blood and begins to persuade you: "this cannot happen to you, defend yourself," turn away from this counsel of your own heart and follow after that which glorifies God..

We can more easily bear our afflictions if we keep in mind the example of our Saviour. See with what peaceful and holy determination He goes to meet His passion. And then follow Him along the path of the Cross until, with His last breath, you hear from His lips the Divine words: *It is finished*. And then ask yourself: aren't you drawn by this example? Doesn't

this make clear the commandment, *He who wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me?* Doesn't this lead you to the conviction of that disciple who said, *I cannot wear a crown of roses when my Saviour is wearing a crown of thorns?*

At the cross of Christ, even the most suffering soul among us can find consolation: I have endured and even now endure much, but my Divine Saviour endured still more. If you find this example too lofty, read what the holy Apostle St. Paul says: *Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.* (2 Cor II:25-27). See what he endured for Christ's sake; how many times he was beaten, stoned, imprisoned... and then understand how far we are from him.

Everywhere the Cross is the sign of Christianity. A Christian can simply not be without his cross.

Amen.



Death itself, which once was man's chiefest terror, has been overthrown, and now that which was once the object of hate and loathing is preferred to life. These are the achievements of Christ's presence; these are the tokens of His power. For it was not one people that He saved, as when through Moses He divided the sea and delivered Israel out of Egypt and the bondage of Pharaoh (cf. Ex. 14:16); nay, rather He rescued all mankind from the corruption of death and the bitter tyranny of sin; not leading them by force to virtue, not overwhelming them with earth or burning them with fire, or ordering the sinners to be stoned, but persuading men by gentleness and long-suffering to choose virtue and vie with one another and find pleasure in the struggle to attain it.

St. John of Damascus



A humble man does not dare even to pray or petition God about something, and does not know what to ask for; he simply keeps all his senses silent and waits only for mercy and for whatever the Most Worshipful Majesty may be pleased to send him. When he bows down with his face to the earth, and the inner eyes of his heart are raised to the gates of the Holy of Holies, where He dwells Whose abode is darkness, before Whom the Seraphims close their eyes, he dares only to speak and pray thus: "May Thy will be done upon me, O Lord!" (St. Isaac the Syrian)⁸³⁴

Our Holy Mother, St. Syncletike of Alexandria – On Illness

"Many are the snares of the Devil. Has he not succeeded in moving souls to evil through poverty? He offers wealth as the bait. Has he not achieved what he wants through insults and taunts? He tempts one with praise and glory. Has he overcome anyone by way of his health? He infects one's body with disease. When he is unable to deceive us through pleasures, he endeavors to lead the soul astray by way of unwanted pains."

"He [the Devil] inflicts very grave illnesses on us, by God's permission (cf Job 1:12), in order to becloud our love for God and diminish our zeal. But even if your body: is lacerated, burns with the severest fever, or is parched with uncontrollable thirst, if - as a sinner - you endure these things, [then] bring to mind the eternity of Hell, the everlasting fire, and the unbearable torments; and you will not become fainthearted in the face of present tribulations."

""Rejoice, because God has visited you; and keep repeating this consolatory phrase, saying with the Prophet: 'The Lord hath chastened me sore, but He has not given me over unto death of sin' (cf. Psalm 117[118]:18). Were you like iron in your steadfastness? Then through the fire of tribulations, you lose the rust of your passions. Are you righteous, and yet you are ill? Do not be perturbed, for you are progressing from great achievements to still greater achievements. Are you like gold? Then you will prove more brilliant through the fire of afflictions."

"Has a messenger of Satan been given to you in the flesh (II Corinthians 12:7)? Then rejoice. See whom you have come to resemble: the great Paul --- the luminary of the inhabited earth. Are you tormented by fever? Are you racked by the cold? Keep in mind that - after you have passed through fire and water - you will find refreshment ready for you as well (Psalm 65[66]:12). Having experienced what preceded - that is, the ordeal of fire and water - expect what follows --- that is, rest and refreshment from the Lord."

"Why do I call them superfluous? I should say, rather, that illness is the best and most effective remedy for overcoming the carnal mind {Romans 8:6-7). Hence, the greatest asceticism [spiritual self-discipline] is to endure diseases with patience; and to give thanks to God for these afflictions."

"Is our entire body suffering from illness? This is how our inner man gains perfect health. Let us, therefore, not be dismayed when we fall ill, but let us give thanks to God, Who arranges all things for our benefit; and Who oftentimes, through the temporary sickness of our perishable body, bestows eternal health and salvation upon our immortal soul."

REFLECTION - On Bodily Health

Bodily health is undoubtedly a gift from God. But bodily health is, by no means, the greatest good of this world as many people speak and write about. For whatever kind of bodily health it is, it is transitory; and that which is transitory cannot be called the greatest blessing for man. Intransient values are more precious than transient values, as eternity is more precious than time. Intransient values enter into the framework of the health of the soul. Father John of Cronstadt writes: "Oh, I myself feel, that when I am completely healthy and, when by labor do not exhaust myself, then I am dying in the spirit and there is no kingdom of God within me, then my body controls me and the devil controls the body."

~ St. Nikolai of Serbia, from the Prologue