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Holy Righteous John of Kronstadt



I am all infirmity, all poverty. God is my strength.

This conviction is my greatest wisdom, which makes me beatific.

St. John's sermons

The features of St. John in church would not be complete if nothing were said about his sermons. At the end of Divine Liturgy, during the singing of "Blessed be the Name of the Lord," or post-communion prayer, St. John, picking up the small altar Gospel, would usually walk out to the ambo, read a few verses, and explain them in simple and clear words, calling all worshippers to a truly virtuous life. Many of St. John's sermons have been published. They are unpretentious. In them the Word of God speaks by itself, as it were, clothing itself in accompanying explanations, drawing their meaning closer to the understanding of the faithful. Much is to be gained from their reading, but this is far from imparting the force of action of the living word, as it was spoken by St. John himself from the ambo. It literally burnt, turning people to the path of salvation penetrating the most hardened sinners. Every preconception would vanish, every hostility was disarmed, every doubt evaporated in front of St. John, opening up the meaning of evangelical simplicity, which (words) found incarnation in him himself and were ready to be transformed into a miraculous force, witnessed by these very words...

Metropolitan Meletius, recalling his visit to St. John in 1901, on the verge of Great Lent, recounted a sermon, delivered by St. John on Final Judgement Sunday. 'This sermon was unforgettable. In it there was such conviction, such exact knowledge of what he was saying that, when, in describing the Final Judgement, he suddenly said to the people: 'You know that's how it is; that is exactly the way it is going to be,' all were filled with apprehension. That tone of voice, these prophetic words — impossible to forget.'

Similar insertions, involuntarily arising from the very heart, and producing an especially deep impression, at times simply shook his listeners, and at the same time singularly brought the reader or speaker nearer to

the worshippers. The same Metropolitan Meletius told of an earlier visit by him to St. John, in May 1899, when he was present during St. John's services on the feast of SS. Constantine and Helena. At Matins, St. John, naturally, read the canon. "He read so fervently and inspiredly, as though he were speaking on his own and from the bottom of his heart, with conviction pronouncing the written words. He stopped a couple of times, as if lost in thought for a second, and immediately confidently exclaimed: Yes, that's how it is, that's how it is."

A sea of miracles

St. John's miraculous power not infrequently also manifested itself in church — especially when those who were possessed by evil spirits were brought to the Chalice.



"A horrible impression was produced, recalls one dweller of Kronstadt, "by the sick possessed who were brought to Father John in the cathedral. During Father John's sermon, during the singing of the Cherubic Hymn, but especially during the singing in Great Lent of 'Now the heavenly hosts,' inhuman cries were emitted, wailings or barks. Some of the sick would fall to the floor; on the floor they were shaken or beaten. Once when Father John was giving Communion, I stood with my mother in the choir-place and saw how a few men led, or, more correctly, carried up, a woman to him. She kept propping her legs against each step. Her appearance was terrible. The handkerchief fell from the head. Her hair became dishevelled. She was waving her arms about and kept repeating all the time: 'I'll spit, I'll spit anyway.' When she was brought to the Chalice, Batiushka told them to let her go and not to support her. Those who accompanied her cautiously left her. Then Batiushka told the woman to cross herself. She crossed herself, this time correctly. Batiushka asked her what her name was. Father John gave her Holy Communion and, calmed, she walked away from

the Chalice, crossing herself and repeating: 'Glory to Thee, Lord, glory to Thee, Lord ...'"

St. John's miraculous power in all its potency was manifested, however, primarily outside the church — in those varied forms of intercourse with people, in which was passed each one of his days. Insofar as this power radiated from him in church, this remained unnoticed by worshippers — as the miracles were performed at a distance, by letters, telegrams, prayerful requests from all parts of vast Russia, streaking toward him at times without any outward sign.

There is a characteristic witness written down in Harbin by the author's wife, recorded then by her among many others for one local publication, devoted to St. John:

'This was — recalled Gouliaeff in tears — in 1903, in a small place called Emba, in the province of Sibir-Darya. Being a young man, I was working on the Tashkent Railways, engaged in making water pumps. That year we had a serious typhoid epidemic; I became ill and was transported to the contagious barracks, two miles from Emba, beyond the river. My condition was recognized as hopeless. My temperature rose to 42 degrees. I was unconscious almost all the time, became weakened to such an extent that I was quite incapable of lifting my arms from the blanket. In the words of the sick-nurses, I kept singing church songs in delirium, as our entire family was very religious. I was brought up on church singing, not liking worldly music. My father was a simple peasant, but there were also clergymen in our ancestry.

"I remember how I came to and felt that I was dying. I could not move my hands, could not cross myself. Helplessly, I wept, and began in tears to sing 'Heavenly King' as best I could ... Suddenly, halfway between the bed on which I was lying and the door, a priest in gold vestments appeared as if in a haze. He drew near to me, and I then saw perfectly clearly, lightly-flaxen hair, a ruddy face, and blue, infinitely kind eyes.

The priest leant over to me ...

"There is no need to cry; let's pray."

"And there and then he began to serve a molieben. He served neither quietly nor loudly, with great concentration, earnestly and heartfelt. I was looking at his kind face, examined, like a child, the patterns on his vestments, listened to his voice, and understood that it was Father John of Kronstadt who had come to me. With his coming my arm rose for the sign of the cross. Father John blessed me. I clung to his hand. The hand was warm and very soft. I remember this hand, as though it were with me now. Father John told me that I would recover, but that I should never forget to pray and thank God. Withdrawing, Batiushka also stepped away as it were to the door, into a white haze...

"From this moment my quick recovery began, incomprehensible to all. When my father came to visit me, I told him about the miracle I had seen, described the priest to him, and my father, who knew Batiushka personally, was amazed that I had described in such detail the entire person of Batiushka, having never seen him in real life. Even the barely noticeable wart near his eye, even the sound of his voice, the pattern on his vestments I described without a flaw. But the very fact of Batiushka's appearance to me was there and then explained to me by my father: at the most hopeless moment, he had sent a telegram to Father John in Kronstadt, asking him for his prayers. On the very day that Father John had appeared to me, he had served a molieben for my recovery."



Miracles were not exceptional phenomena in the life of St. John: he lived by a miracle and in a miracle. His very existence was a complete miracle — this constant movement, this restless activity with an almost total absence of rest and sleep for a man of exceptionally frail health, and this all the way up to an extremely old age! And his actual relations with people — this was a type of uninterrupted clairvoyance, constantly manifesting itself with people, miraculous by its very nature, and on top of that constantly and evidently surpassing "the order of nature!" And it is difficult to say in what the "miraculousness" was more marvelous: in the strikingly obvious, powerful, terrifying and shattering phenomena of healing miracles, or in manifestations of spiritual vision which were barely noticeable to the outward eye — in the finest and deepest influences on man's soul, of each individual person from the great mass of people who everywhere surrounded St. John. A word, a gesture, material aid,

hiding behind its outward (at times literally lifesaving) sustenance a deep, inner meaning as well, so that it appeared to have fallen from heaven after being prepared precisely to fulfill a certain need all of a sudden, even down to the most minute details; everything in St. John's activity was bestowed by grace. He lived and conducted himself among people like everyone else, without separating himself from them in any way and remaining in the most intimate contact with them, but he saw something different from what all around him could see — he looked upon earthly things with spiritual eyes... He saw the past and the future, read in the hearts of people, as in an open book, the most hidden thoughts... He also saw the forces of darkness which fill the element of the air... He even revealed this at times to people close to him... He

saw, for example, demons, swirling near funeral processions, accompanying the bodies of unrepentant sinners to their final resting place...

The descriptions of miracles performed by St. John are countless. To reproduce even the smallest number of them would take hours and thousands of pages.

"Shortly I was a witness to a miracle, performed by Batiushka in our house. A sick boy of our acquaintance was brought in from Petersburg. His leg was in splints! Batiushka served a molieben at our place, after the molieben took of the splints, instructed the leg to be bound up only by a bandage, and that very evening the boy was already playing with us, completely well. When Batiushka was asked what had been the matter with the child. Father John replied: 'It is necessary for the father to drink less, then the boy will recover.' It is true; the boy's father was a drunkard.

"And here is a second miraculous event also in our home. It happened one evening that Batiushka was saying a molieben in the sitting room. The room was illuminated by a lampada before an icon of the Mother of God, and by three candles lit up next to a water-filled vase, prepared to be blessed, and also by a lamp under a lampshade. I often happened to be present during Father John's moliebens, but this particular molieben remained in my memory for the rest of my life. Batiushka prayed with special fervor and confidently said:



'Queen of Heaven, we beseech you and you will help us.' There was no doubt that everything would be as Batiushka had requested. This evening he was serving at the request of students, friends of my elder brother. One of the students, looking sad, stood near the door. None of us knew the reason for his sorrow. When Batiushka had finished the molieben, he passed next to him into the front room, blessed him, and unnoticeably slipped him some money. When Batiushka left, the deeply moved student said that Batiushka had given him exactly the amount of money with which he had to pay his tuition fees. Were it not for his help, he would have had to leave the university. He had never spoken about this fact — the more remarkable was Father John's gesture.

"While here is a third occurrence, which did not take place in our house this time, but which also happened in front of my eyes. My sister and I were often in the Working House, playing with the children of those who worked there. But Mother did not permit us to enter the rooms of the visitors. Two ladies arrived from Siberia, or from the Urals, both very wealthy. They owned some sort of factories over there, but I cannot remember now. The ladies took a liking to my sister and me at our encounter with them in the garden and hallway, and they dragged us into their room. Soon the ringing of bells announced Father John's arrival. At the request of the newly arrived ladies, Batiushka said a molieben; one of the ladies gave Batiushka a parcel of money. Batiushka declined to accept it: 'Take it back,' he says, 'you will find it useful yourselves.' The lady began to assure him that to her the amount was so insignificant, there was no need even to discuss it. Batiushka did not take the money anyway. That very evening a telegram was received, announcing that all the factories and house had burnt down, and this parcel of money was useful to the bankrupt wealthy ladies for their return journey..."

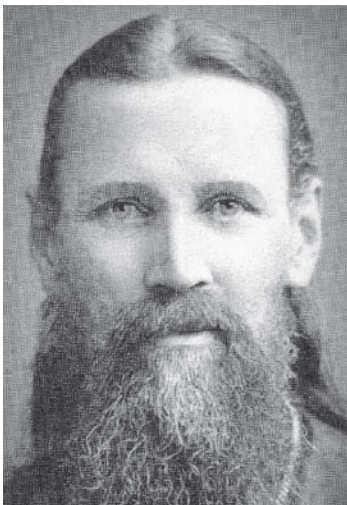
"My father had friends in his regiment, the two Eropkin brothers: Nicholas, an aide-de-camp at court, and Ipplit, a regiment commander (His Majesty's Cuirassier Guards). Once the elder brother, Nicholas, was visiting us, and suddenly had a strange and cruel attack — of what character, I am now unable to explain. But his condition was so serious that the doctor who was called did not allow him to be taken home, but made arrangements for the patient to remain lying in our house, without moving, in complete rest. A

separate room was made available to the patient, a consultation of the very best and well-known doctors was called. The patient's condition was diagnosed as very serious.

"A few days passed and Doctor Botkin warned my mother that within two or three days the officer would die and, probably, in a state of very stormy and violent agony, for which reason it was desirable to have some male nurses with him, who were physically very strong. Indeed the patient's fits kept becoming more turbulent. Just in case. Father called out a few cuirassier soldiers who had to remain in the kitchen.

"Mother suggested to my father to call upon Father John, requesting him to give the patient Holy Communion. This disconcerted my father, who knew Eropkin as a man who was not only an unbeliever, but who even made fun of believers. He was afraid the patient might be disrespectful toward Batiushka. But Mother reasoned thus: 'Father John must be pre-warned about everything, and then he will act as he sees fit.'

"Father John arrived the following day. Without inquiring about anything of my father, he immediately said: 'Well, show me to the patient; as for those who are sitting in the kitchen — send them home in peace...' This straight away astounded us, as we couldn't understand how he could have known about the cuirassiers, called out by Father just in case... Father John was led to the patient. Batiushka, upon entering, said:



"'Hello, Captain!'

"'Hello, Batiushka,' very calmly and respectfully replied the patient.

"'You're gravely ill. Are you receiving proper attention?'

"'Certainly, by the grace of His Majesty I am attended by the best doctors. I am not refused anything.'

"'Well, but the main medicine you have not yet taken! Christ's Holy Mysteries! Would you like to take Holy Communion?'

"'The patient replied that he had not been to Communion for over twenty years and considered this to be, for him, impossible.

"'The more reason for confession and Communion,' said Batiushka.

"'All right,' agreed the cavalry captain.

Batiushka stood near the patient's bed.

"Unforgettable is his conversation with God, flaming intensity, demanding intercession. After this, all of us left the room.

"After about half an hour, the door of the room opened and Batiushka loudly said, calling out to us:

"'Well, and now all of you come in and congratulate the patient... He has been honored to accept the Lord.'

"'All of us entered the room. The face of the cavalry captain was unrecognizable: it was radiant and peaceful.

"Mother invited Father John into the dining room for tea. Father John accepted and even promised to eat something.

"'And you, Captain, now go to sleep quite calmly and peacefully, like a child.' Tenderly he turned to the patient, looked at him even more tenderly, and silently went out.

"We walked through to the dining room.

"'Well, and now he will silently fall asleep forever,' Batiushka told us. By morning, the cavalry captain was no more."

The priesthood, in its highest manifestation — revealed in all its fullness and purity, in all its power, reached to the limit, that is what the world was shown by "Batiushka" John of Kronstadt. All that the Orthodox Church has been saying for two thousand years through the mouths of Her best teachers — was revealed to every gaze as a heart-moving, human phenomenon of a humble Russian "batiushka"...



The consciousness of one's infirmity in Christ — as a source of all-powerful strength! "If Christ is within you through frequent communion of the Holy Mysteries, then be all like Christ: gentle, humble, long-suffering, full of love, impartial to worldly things, contemplating of heaven, obedient, reasonable; have His Spirit within yourselves without fail, do not be proud, impatient, attached to the world, miserly and greedy for money."

"Be completely like Christ!" Living in Christ, St. John stopped considering his will as his own — being able to subject it to Christ! It is because of this that his prayer became all-powerful: "No matter how many times I might pray with faith, God always heard me and fulfilled my prayers," he testifies. While once, in conversation with relatives during a journey to Sura in June 1900, he thus explained his proximity to God.

In the person of St. John Christ walked through the Russian land. Never had Holy Russia received such an All-Russian incarnation of this encounter of hers with Christ — just before that terrible immersion into darkness, which was prophesied by St. John.

St. John has not abandoned Holy Russia even now, having moved on to the celestial world. But where is Holy Russia now? She no longer has a national-state embodiment: she lives in our hearts! And in each heart lives St. John. Next to St. Seraphim he has taken his place as our habitual pleader before God. Are there many such hearts? Are their ties with Christ strong? Upon this — only upon this! — depends the future of Russia and of the world! If Holy Russia does not grow again in our hearts into a world-shaping power — the Lord Himself is close, as Stern Judge — as we heard it from St. John.

The glorification of St. John calls us, all of us, in whose hearts Holy Faith has not died, to appeal:

Holy St. John, pray unto God for us!

*From "A Spiritual Portrait of Saint John of Kronstadt".
by Archimandrite Constantine (Zaitzev, 1888-1975)*



“ Kazan “ Icon of the Theotokos

In 1579, during the reign of Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible), who had subjugated the city of Kazan with the aid of God (for the city had been the capital of the Tatar Khan), the young maiden Matrona was shown in a dream the Mother of God who commanded her to go into the town and tell the Archbishop and the rulers about her Precious Image which was buried in the ground, and that they should come forth and bring the Holy Object from the depths of the earth; she was also shown the spot where the pearl of great price the Mother of God's miraculous Icon would be found. The young girl saw this vision not once, but repeatedly.

Matrona told her mother of the miraculous vision, but she did not pay any attention to the words of her young daughter. Finally the young maiden caught sight of the Icon in the flames of the kitchen fire, before which she heard a strange voice: If you do not relate My words, I will manifest Myself in another place, and you will be lost. At this time the mother listened to the words of her daughter about this awesome sight and went, together with her, to the Archbishop and the Governor of the city, but they did not want to believe them.



Having returned home, the mother of the young Matrona dug in the ground at the indicated place. Others joined her, but no one was able to find the Icon. The girl then began to dig at a spot where a stove had once stood, and others helped her. When they had dug up more than three feet, the miracle occurred, for the wondrous Icon of our Queen, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, together with the Pre-Eternal Christ Child, appeared. This miraculous Icon was covered with an old sleeve of cherry-red cloth; the Icon shone wondrously, as if it had just been painted, and the dust of the earth had in no way affected this miraculous Work.

With great honor the Icon was brought to the Church of St. Nicholas in Kazan, where a Molieben was sung by Archbishop Jeremiah. A Cross-Procession was assembled and made its way to the Annunciation Cathedral in the Kazan Kremlin. On the way, two blind men, Joseph and Nikita, were healed, making this only the first of the miracles which were to make this Icon famous throughout all Russia.

A copy of the Icon was written and sent to Moscow. Tsar Ivan commanded that at the place of the appearance, a church in honor of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God be constructed, wherein was placed the Holy Icon, and a woman's monastery was also founded there. Matrona and her mother, later received the tonsure at this Monastery. As the Holy Icon had been found on the Feast of St. Procopius the Martyr, July 8, the Church decreed that henceforth the Kazan Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos also be commemorated on that day.

Later, in 1612, during the Time of Troubles, the Kazan Icon was responsible for the deliverance of Moscow from the invading Poles. At the summons of then Patriarch Hermogenes (who was the Priest at the Church of St. Nicholas in Kazan when the Icon had first been found, and who later wrote an account of the Finding), the Russian people began to take measures to aid the homeland. At the Patriarch's request, the Kazan Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos was sent by Prince Dimitry Pozharsky from Kazan to Moscow.

Knowing that the invasion was on account of their sins, all the people and the militia took upon themselves a three-day fast, and with prayer entreated the Lord and His Most-Pure Mother for heavenly help. The prayers were heard. From Bishop Arseny (later Bishop of Suzdal) who was in captivity at the hands of the Poles, came news that in a vision there was revealed to him a change in the judgment of God to mercy, at the intercession of the Most-Holy Virgin. Heartened by the news, the Russian army, on October 22, 1612, freed Moscow from the Polish invaders. Thus a Feast in honor of the Kazan Mother of God was instituted for that date. And until our own times, this Icon is especially honored by the Russian Orthodox people.

The Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow

O Lady most holy and Theotokos, you who are more exalted than the cherubim and more honorable than the seraphim, O divinely-chosen Maiden, Joy of all who sorrow; grant consolation even unto us that are sunk in sorrow, for apart from you we have no refuge or assistance. You alone are Mediatress of our joy and, in that you are the Mother of God and mother of mercy, standing at the throne of the All-Holy Trinity, you are able to help us, for none that flee to you depart ashamed.

Therefore, hearken now in the day of our sorrow unto us who fall down before your icon and supplicate you with tears; drive away from us the sorrows and griefs that assail us in this temporal life and by your intercession may we not be deprived of eternal and never-ending joy in the Kingdom of your Son and our God.

From The Book of Akathists

Deep within the heart of the Church, in the place where sorrow and joy meet and where our bitter tears are kissed away by a mother's love, we encounter the Most Holy Mother of God. The Church in its devotion to the Ever-Virgin Mary has always known that she is a mystery and a gift given to us by God. The Theotokos is a mystery that can be experienced and encountered, and yet never explained or described in words of logic and science, and she is a gift that brings radiant joy and comfort in the midst of darkness and need. Through the centuries the Church has expressed its love for her through countless hymns, has praised her in its most exquisite poetry and song, and has portrayed her in its most beautiful and beloved icons. No other saint is the subject of so much devotion, and no other saint has so many miracles attributed him or her.

The Joy of All Who Sorrow is taken from a wonder-working icon known by that name that came from a hospital in twelfth century Kiev. This icon depicts the Blessed Mother of God—the most beautiful bloom of heaven—standing among the flowers of paradise. Appearing above her in the clouds is the Ruler of heaven and earth, her Son, and along the edges of the icon, framing the Theotokos on both sides, are supplicants—us—asking for her intercession. Her tenderness and loving-kindness are evident in her face and demeanor as she stands with her arms spread open and her head tilted as if listening to us.

We may discover how she is our joy in the midst of all sorrows. We may see that she can be for us both our joy in the midst of the physical and emotional pain and grief we suffer in this life, as well as our joy in the midst of the sorrow and burden of sin under which we struggle.



In every moment of our suffering, the Holy Mother of God is there. First and foremost she is there because she is also our mother, and she loves us with the all-embracing love of a mother. She is our mother because Christ gave her to us. As He lay dying on the Cross, Our Lord turned to His mother and to His disciple John, and to the latter He said, “Behold your mother” (John 19: 26–27). These words were spoken to St. John, and within the historical context of the event we can say that, on one level, Jesus was

placing His mother in the disciple's care, so that after His death she would not be without the assistance that a son can offer. But on a deeper level we can understand these words as being spoken to all believers. We can understand that through these words our Lord blessed the world with the gift of His mother, and that at the Cross she adopted all who are believers as her sons and her daughters¹.

However, long before the Cross, at the very moment of Jesus' conception, Mary in truth became our mother. When she became mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Mary became the mother of all humanity now re-created in Christ. She became our mother not just symbolically, but literally and in spiritual reality. This is because at His conception Christ took His humanity from Mary. When we share in the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we are united with Him and, through Him, we share with Him the mother from whom He took His very body and blood. This is a great mystery that is understood not through science but through the great wisdom of the heart.



Because Mary is our mother, she feels our pain. Because she is His mother, the Mother of God, she intercedes for us, bringing our pain into His presence, praying our prayers with love, bringing our needs into the unique relationship of love that a mother shares with her child, so that now our requests are spoken with her voice of love. Her intercession is unceasing and her love is without boundaries. Death does not separate her from us or end her intercession for us.

She stands in paradise now, directly before the face of God, speaking to Him face to face. She is in paradise, and yet among us, for her heart, though centered in God, yet holds us there with her too. She is our joy because in her love she hears our cries, shares our tears, and brings consolation in the midst of our suffering. She is our voice in heaven before God, a pure and unfailing voice, a tender and loving voice.

Mary also brings us joy by showing us how to endure and experience the trials of this life. She was an innocent woman barely out of childhood when she accepted God's call. What He asked of her was beyond words, beyond belief. Surely she knew it would also be difficult beyond anything imaginable, and yet she must have known just as surely that the grace of God would sustain her. We hear from her no word of complaint, never a word of real doubt, never a cry of despair. What do we hear in the Gospels of her? We hear her say, "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word,"² and later we hear "and His mother kept all these things in her heart."³ In utter humility she waits upon the Lord.

The Holy Mother of God prays incessantly for our salvation. But the intercession of the Virgin on account of our sinfulness must be properly understood. She herself does not forgive our sins; only God can do so. When she intercedes for us she raises us to her place before God and endows us with her powers, that is, with her grace and purity and holiness. But the Theotokos is more than mediator; she is also the icon of who we are to be, and in this we also rejoice. The image we see of ourselves in sin is misshapen and ugly. When we gaze on what we have become in sin we can only feel despair and loathing. But as we turn our gaze to the Virgin we see before us the vision of our destiny, if we receive the grace of salvation and re-creation offered to us in Jesus Christ. This is why God has created us, so that we may live in continual communion with Him and experience His presence intimately woven into our existence. Every human being is not fully human until he or she is also "full of grace."

For Christ to be planted and born within us should not be regarded as something extraordinary and reserved only for the very few, but is what should in fact be true for every Christian. Each of us is called to be in communion with God and to give birth to His presence in our souls. Mary shows us that this is

possible, and how it can be possible for us. With her example of absolute humility, devotion to God, steadfast faith, and fervent love, the Most Holy Mother of God leads the way for us out of the dark and wretched sorrow of our sins into the joy of God's continual presence. The Kingdom of Heaven is within us.

Reference:

1. "The Virgin Mary," in *The Celebration of Faith: Sermons*, vol. 3. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995, p. 36.
2. Luke 1:38.
3. Luke 2:51.



"Montreal" Iveron Myrrh-streaming Icon November 11/24

The Iveron Icon, which at present is preserved in a monastery on Athos, by tradition was painted by the Apostle and Evangelist Luke. In November 1982, a copy of the Iveron Icon of the Mother God began to stream myrrh in Canada. In 1983, the Icon was in Washington for the first time, and I then asked its guardian - the Spaniard José Muñoz - how he had received the Holy Object, and when it had begun to stream myrrh. Here are his own words, which were recorded during our conversation with him:



"Once during our pilgrimage on Athos, after several hours of walking, we got lost. It began to get dark. We needed quickly to find shelter for the night. Going along a path, we stumbled upon a small, poor scete. There the fourteen Greek monks of the scete were engaged in iconography. They received us very cordially. Having rested a little, we began to examine the icons of their work. One of my fellow-travellers, who spoke Greek, got into a conversation with the monks and told them who and from where we were. I, though, taking advantage of the moment, began more attentively to examine everything round about. Suddenly my gaze stopped at an icon of marvellous artistry with dimensions of approximately fifteen by twenty inches. I asked a monk if he could not sell it to me. He refused me, having explained that that image was the first which had been painted in that scete and therefore would not be sold. I could not tear my eyes from that wondrous icon. We stayed the whole night in the scete and in the morning stood through the Liturgy. During the singing of "It is truly meet", I begged the Queen of Heaven on my knees to let the Holy Image go with me... Bidding farewell in the morning, all the

monks accompanied us, but the hegoumen was not among them. And then at the last minute before our departure from the monastery we saw him: he quick descended the staircase with the wrapped-up icon in his hands. He came up to me and said: "Take it. I am gifting it to you. It must be with you." I offered to pay for the icon, knowing that the monks were needy; but the hegoumen said severely: "One must not take money for such a holy object!" I crossed myself, kissed the image and made a vow to myself that that image would never become the source of my enrichment....

"After this, we set out at once for Iveron Monastery in order to receive the superior's blessing and to touch the icon received by me to the Original, which is preserved in this famed monastery. But far from

everyone is allowed to approach and permitted to touch the ancient Wonderworking Icon. Glory be to God, we were permitted! In the chapel, we knelt and, gazing at the holy object, froze in prayer before the image of the Iveron Mother of God. The image was so majestic, so shiningly beautiful and radiated such spiritual power that it was difficult to gaze at it for long! A hieromonk helped me touch my copy to the Original.

"Soon after this we went home to Canada. We returned on 3 November 1982. I put the icon next to the relics of the saints of the Kiev Caves Lavra and the New-martyr Elizabeth Feodorovna, which had been received by me from the reposed Archbishop Leonty of Chile. A lampada flickered before it all the time, and each day before sleep I read Akathists to it. On the 24th of November, I was awakened at three o'clock in the morning by the powerful aroma of roses - the whole room was filled up by it. At first I thought that it emanated from the relics or from a spilt vial of perfume; but, on approaching the icon, I was struck! The whole icon was covered with oil - a fragrant oil! I froze on the spot at such a miracle!"

Soon after the beginning of the Iveron Icon's myrrh-streaming, news of it spread instantaneously around all the parishes of the Russian Church Abroad and other Orthodox Churches. Since 1982, the Icon has visited Orthodox parishes in many countries of the world. At the end of 1995, it was in Bulgaria, where more than sixty thousand of the faithful prayed before it, and each was individually anointed with its holy oil. Everywhere it has brought comfort and, by the prayers of the faithful, miracles.



St. Demetrius Saturday

On the Saturday before October 8/26 the commemoration of all Orthodox Christians who have died in faith and hope is made. This Saturday is called St. Demetrius from the commemoration near it of St. Demetrius of Salonika. The establishment of this commemoration belongs to Demetrius Donskoy, who after the Battle of Kulikovo on September 8, 1380 commemorated the fallen warriors and established this commemoration annually on the Saturday before October 8/26. Subsequently together with the warriors other deceased began to be remembered.

In the spiritual experience of the Russian Church, veneration of the holy Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessalonica is closely linked with the memory of the defense of the nation and Church by the Great Prince of Moscow, Demetrius of the Don (May 19).

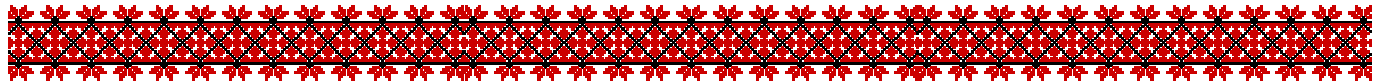


St Demetrius of the Don smashed the military might of the Golden Horde at the Battle of Kulikovo Field on September 8, 1380 (the Feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos), set between the Rivers Don and Nepryadva. The Battle of Kulikovo, for which the nation calls him Demetrius of the Don, became the first Russian national deed, rallying the spiritual power of the Russian nation around Moscow. The "Zadonschina," an inspiring historic poem written by the priest Sophronius of Ryazem (1381), is devoted to this event.

Prince Demetrius of the Don was greatly devoted to the

holy Great Martyr Demetrius. In 1380, on the eve of the Battle of Kulikovo, he solemnly transferred from Vladimir to Moscow the most holy object in the Dimitriev cathedral of Vladimir: the icon of the Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessalonica, painted on a piece of wood from the saint's grave. A chapel in honor of the Great Martyr Demetrius was built at Moscow's Dormition Cathedral.

The St Demetrius Memorial Saturday was established for the churchwide remembrance of the soldiers who fell in the Battle of Kulidovo. This memorial service was held for the first time at the Trinity-St Sergius monastery on October 20, 1380 by St Sergius of Radonezh, in the presence of Great Prince Demetrius of the Don . It is an annual remembrance of the heroes of the Battle of Kulikovo, among whom are the schemamonks Alexander (Peresvet) and Andrew (Oslyab).



Great – Martyr Demetrios of Thessalonica



Saint Demetrios was born in Thessaloniki, Greece in 270 AD. He came from a wealthy family and because he was athletic in appearance and heroic in spirit, he became a high-ranking officer in the Roman Army at a very young age. (This is why he is depicted in Byzantine icons in military dress, either standing or riding a horse.) He considered himself a soldier of Christ first, and a military soldier second. He spent most of his time as a devout missionary, preaching the Gospel at secret meetings and converting pagans to the Christian faith.

At one of these meetings, he was captured and placed in front of the Emperor Maximian, who wanted to learn the truth about the conversions. Saint Demetrios proclaimed his faith by saying: "...only in Christ do I believe." With that proclamation, Maximian ordered that Saint Demetrios be sent to prison and subjected to the cruelest tortures.

Even though Saint Demetrios was imprisoned, he did not stop preaching the gospel to those who came to see him. In jail, he was visited by his follower, Nestoras. Nestoras was a man of small stature and had come to ask for his beloved teacher's blessing to fight in the upcoming gladiator games. The emperor had decided to use the games as a duel between Christianity and paganism by challenging any Christian to a fight against the athletic giant, Leo.

With the blessing of Saint Demetrios, Nestoras fought and killed Leo. Enraged at the loss of his favorite gladiator, the emperor commanded that Nestoras be beheaded on the spot. Recognizing that Saint Demetrios was the inspiring power behind Nestoras, the emperor ordered that Saint Demetrios be executed by spear on October 26, 306 AD Christians buried the body of Saint Demetrios at the place of his execution and because of the beautiful scent that emanated from his tomb, he was named Mirovlitis or "The Myrrh Gusher".

The most ancient icons of Saint Demetrios may be found in his temple in Thessaloniki where he is the patron saint. This is not just because he was born and died there, but because the people believe it was his intervention that saved the city during many attacks by Slavic nations, Arabs, Saracens and others. Even

the liberation of Thessaloniki during the Balkan wars of 1912 coincide with the feast day of Saint Demetrios on October 26th.

In ancient times, the life of Saint Demetrios was commemorated with celebrations that lasted for months. These celebrations were accompanied by many events such as the famous market named "Demetria". Traders and business people from Europe, Egypt, Arabia and Libya came to deal and trade. The festivities were also attended by philosophers, learned men of the time and artists. To this day, Thessaloniki hosts Greece's largest international trade exhibition each year.

St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church



Synaxis of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and the Other Bodiless Powers

Commemorated on November 21/8

"The Synaxis of the Chief of the Heavenly Hosts, Archangel Michael and the Other Heavenly Bodiless Powers: Archangels Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Selaphiel, Jehudiel, Barachiel, and Jeremiel was established at the beginning of the fourth century at the Council of Laodicea, which met several years before the First Ecumenical Council. The 35th Canon of the Council of Laodicea condemned and denounced as heretical the worship of angels as gods and rulers of the world, but affirmed their proper veneration.



Over all the Nine Ranks, the Lord appointed the Holy Archangel Michael (his name in Hebrew means "who is like unto God"), the faithful servitor of God, as Chief Commander. He cast down from Heaven the arrogantly proud Lucifer and the other fallen spirits when they rebelled against God. Michael summoned the ranks of angels and cried out, "Let us attend! Let us stand aright before our Creator and do not consider doing what is displeasing unto God!"

According to Church Tradition, and in the church services to the Archangel Michael, he participated in many other Old Testament events.

During the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt he went before them in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Through him the power of the Lord was made manifest, annihilating the Egyptians and Pharaoh who were in pursuit of the Israelites. The Archangel Michael defended Israel in all its misfortunes.

He appeared to Joshua Son of Navi and revealed the will of the Lord at the taking of Jericho (Josh 5:13-16). The power of the great Chief Commander of God was manifest in the annihilation of the 185 thousand soldiers of the Assyrian emperor Sennacherib (4/2 Kings 19:35); also in the smiting of the impious leader Heliodorus (2 Macc. 3: 24-26); and in the protection of the Three Holy Youths: Ananias, Azarias and Misail, thrown into the fiery furnace for their refusal to worship an idol (Dan 3:22-25).

Through the will of God, the Chief Commander Michael transported the Prophet Habbakuk (December 2) from Judea to Babylon, to give food to Daniel in the lions' den (Dan. 14:33-37).

The Archangel Michael disputed with the devil over the body of the holy Prophet Moses (Jude 1:9).

The holy Archangel Michael showed his power when he miraculously saved a young man, cast into the sea by robbers with a stone about his neck on the shores of Mt Athos. This story is found in the Athonite Paterikon, and in the Life of St Neophytus of Docheiariou (November 9).

From ancient times the Archangel Michael was famed for his miracles in Rus. In the Volokolamsk Paterikon is a narrative of St Paphnutius of Borov with an account of Tatar tax-gatherers concerning the miraculous saving of Novgorod the Great: "Therefore Great Novgorod was never taken by the Hagarenes... when... for our sins the godless Hagarene emperor Batu devoured and set the Russian land aflame and came to Novgorod, and God and the Most Holy Theotokos shielded it with an appearance of Michael the Archangel, who forbade him to enter into it. He [Batu] was come to the Lithuanian city and came toward Kiev and saw the stone church, over the doors of which the great Archangel Michael had written and spoken to the prince his allotted fate, 'By this we have forbidden you entry into Great Novgorod'."

Intercession for Russian cities by the Most Holy Queen of Heaven always involved Her appearances with the Heavenly Hosts, under the leadership of the Archangel Michael. Grateful Rus acclaimed the Most Pure Mother of God and the Archangel Michael in church hymns. Many monasteries, cathedrals, court and merchant churches are dedicated to the Chief Commander Michael.

In old Kiev at the time of the accepting of Christianity, a cathedral of the Archangel was built, and a monastery also was named for him. Archangel cathedrals are found at Smolensk, Nizhni Novgorod, Staritsa, at Great Ustiug (beginning of the thirteenth century), and a cathedral at Sviyazhsk. In Rus there was not a city, where there was not a church or chapel dedicated to the Archangel Michael.

One of the chief temples of the city of Moscow, the burial church in the Kremlin, is dedicated to him. Numerous and beautiful icons of the Chief Commander of the Heavenly Hosts are also in his Cathedral. One of these, the Icon "Blessed Soldiery," was painted in the Dormition Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin. The saintly soldiers, Russian princes, are depicted under the leadership of the Archangel Michael.

We invoke St Michael for protection from invasion by enemies and from civil war, and for the defeat of adversaries on the field of battle. He conquers all spiritual enemies.



Select Quotes From St. John Chrysostom On The Benefits and Importance of Scripture Reading for Christians

"Let them hear, as many of us as neglect the reading of the Scriptures, to what harm we are subjecting ourselves, to what poverty." (Hom. XLVII On Matthew)

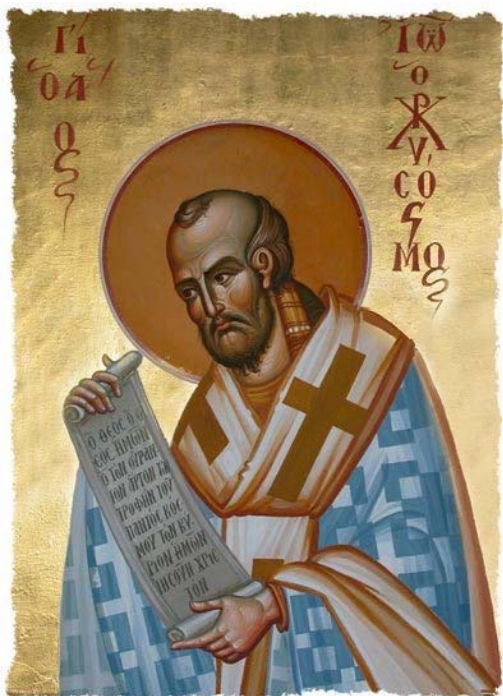
The Bible helps us to obtain our salvation. "Now if we are willing to examine the Scriptures in this way, carefully and systematically, we shall be able to obtain our salvation. If we unceasingly are

preoccupied with them, we shall learn both correctness of doctrine and an upright way of life. (Hom 53 On John)

Scripture reading sanctifies us. "Moreover, if the Devil does not dare to enter into the house where the Gospel lies, much less will he ever seize upon the soul which contains such thoughts as these, and no evil spirit will approach it, nor will the nature of sin come near. Well, then, sanctify your soul, sanctify your body by having these thoughts always in your heart and on your tongue. For if foul language is defiling and evokes evil spirits, it is evident that spiritual reading sanctifies the reader and attracts the grace of the Spirit." (Hom. 32 On John)

The Scriptures are a treasure and neglect of it causes harm. "It is not possible, I say not possible, ever to exhaust the mind of the Scriptures. It is a well which has no bottom." (Hom. XIX On Acts)

Knowledge of the Bible protects us and ignorance of it results in a multitude of evils. "This is the cause of all evils, the not knowing the Scriptures. We go into battle without arms, and how are we to come off safe?" (Hom. IX On Colossians)



The Bible is a medicine chest with remedies for grief and all troubles. "Listen, I entreat you, all that are careful for this life, and procure books that will be medicines for the soul... get at least the New Testament, the Apostolic Epistles, the Acts, the Gospels, for your constant teachers. If grief befalls you, dive into them as into a chest of medicines; take from there comfort for your trouble, be it loss, or death, or bereavement of relations; or rather do not merely dive into them but take them wholly to yourself, keeping them in your mind." (Hom. IX On Colossians)

The Bible is a treasury with remedies for every ailment. "Great is the profit to be derived from the sacred Scriptures and their assistance is sufficient for every need. Paul was pointing this out when he said, 'Whatever things have been written have been written for our instruction, upon whom the final age of the world has come, that through the patience and the consolation afforded by the Scriptures we may have hope.' (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11) The divine words, indeed, are a treasury containing every sort of remedy, so that, whether one needs to put down

senseless pride, or to quench the fire of concupiscence or to trample on the love of riches, or to despise pain, or to cultivate cheerfulness and acquire patience - in them one may find in abundance the means to do so." (Hom. 37 On John.)

Knowledge of the Scriptures allows us to bear difficulties. "For as the rich in money can bear fines and damages, so he that is rich in the doctrines of [Christian] philosophy will bear not poverty only, but all calamities also easily, more easily than that [rich] one." (Hom. IX On Colossians.)

Children must be instructed in the Scriptures, beginning with the learning of psalms and hymns. "But now your children will utter songs and dances of Satan, like cooks, and caterers, and musicians; no one knows any psalm but it seems a thing to be ashamed of even, a mockery and a joke. There is the treasury house of all these evils. For whatsoever soil the plant stands in, such is the fruit it bears; if in a sandy and salty soil, of like nature is its fruit; if in a sweet and rich one, it is again similar. So the matter

of instruction is a sort of fountain. Teach him to sing those psalms which are so full of the love of wisdom. When in these you have led him on from childhood, by little and little you will lead him forward even to the higher things" (Hom. IX On Colossians)

On the lack of attention paid when listening to the reading of Scriptures in church, when in fact it is not the clergy but God who addresses them. "They think that when they enter in here [the church], that they enter into our presence [the clergy], they think that they hear from us. They do not lay to heart, they do not consider that they are entering the presence of God, that it is He who addresses them. For when the Reader standing up says "Thus says the Lord", and the Deacon stands and imposes silence on all, he does not say this as doing honor to the Reader but to honor Him who speaks to all through him [the Reader]. If they knew that it was God who through His prophet speaks these things, they would cast away all their pride. For if rulers are addressing them, they do not allow their minds to wander, much else would they when God is speaking. We are ministers, beloved. We speak not our own things, but the things of God. Letters coming from heaven are read every day.... These letters are sent from God; therefore let us enter with becoming reverence into the churches and let us hearken with fear to the things here said." (Hom. IX On Thessalonians.)

The Scriptures were written for a purpose and it is a great evil to be ignorant of them. "From this it is that countless evils have arisen - from ignorance of the Scriptures; from this it is that the plague of heresies has broken out; from this it is that there are negligent lives; from this there are labors without advantage. For as men deprived of this daylight would not walk aright, so they that look not to the gleaming of the Holy Scriptures must be frequently and constantly sinning, in that they are walking in the worst darkness." (Intro. Hom. On Romans)

Ignorance of the Scriptures by Christians is a disgrace. "Is it not strange that those who sit in the marketplace tell the names, and races, and cities and talents of charioteers and dancers, even accurately state the good and bad qualities of horses, while those who assemble in this place [the church] understand nothing of what is taking place here and even are ignorant of the number of the [sacred] Books?" (Hom. 32 On John)

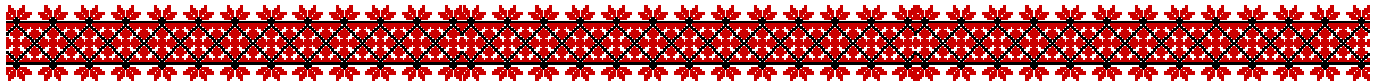
To those who say that there is no harm in worldly pursuits while neglecting the spiritual life. "Now I say this for there are some, much less responsive than this audience here, who do not become ashamed at my words, but even speak at length in defense of their behavior. And if you ask, 'Who is Amos, or Abias, or what is the number of the Prophets or of the Apostles?' they cannot even open their mouth. But with regard to horses and charioteers, they can compose a discourse more cleverly than sophists or rhetors. Furthermore, after all this they say: "What harm, now?" and "What loss?" Indeed, it is for this reason that I am groaning, namely because you do not know that the thing is harmful, and have no perception of the evil. God has given you a limited period of life to serve Him, and if you squander it vainly and fruitlessly, and to no purpose, do you still seek to learn what the loss is? If you completely squander your days entirely on Satan's pomps, do you consider that you are not doing anything wrong? Though you ought to spend your entire life in prayers and supplications, while actually you waste your life, fruitlessly and for your damnation, in shouting and tumult and base words and quarreling and unlawful pleasure and deeds of sorcery - even after all this do you ask 'What loss is there?' You are not aware that time must be expended more sparingly than anything else, If you spend gold, you will be able to replenish your supply, but if you lose time you will repair the loss with great difficulty for a small amount has been dispensed to us in the present life. Therefore, if we do not use it as we ought, what shall we say when we depart to the next life?" (Hom. 58 On John).



Prayer of Saint John Chrysostom Before Reading or Listening to the Word of God



O Lord Jesus Christ, open Thou the eyes of my heart, that I may hear Thy word and understand and do Thy will, for I am a sojourner upon the earth. Hide not Thy commandments from me, but open mine eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of Thy law. Speak unto me the hidden and secret things of Thy wisdom. On Thee do I set my hope, O my God, that Thou shalt enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of Thy knowledge, not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them; that in reading the lives and sayings of the saints I may not sin, but that such may serve for my restoration, enlightenment and sanctification, for the salvation of my soul, and the inheritance of life everlasting. For Thou art the enlightenment of those who lie in darkness, and from Thee cometh every good deed and every gift. Amen.



From the Editor:

On reading the Bible

I have heard a spiritual Father to say “*Read the scriptures regularly, keep the readings short so it can be done, don’t read when you’re likely to be tired*”, and so on.

He did not state how long, what to read every day exactly, to what to pay attention, he just pointed out that you just need to read it. You spend five, ten minutes or more with it a day and you just read it. A question arose about why this is so important.

I remembered this when recently I had read a story from the desert fathers I especially enjoyed it and it is related to the issue about reading the Bible:



“There’s a story in the desert fathers, how one fellow would be listening — they weren’t reading in those days because they didn’t all have books — but a man was listening every day to the reading of the Scripture in the gathering of the brothers (in the synaxis).

So he comes to the old guy one day and he says to him, “*I’m leavin’. This is a waste of time.*”

And the old guy says, “*Why?*”

He said, “*Because I can’t remember anything. I go in there and I hear this and the minute I go out and I can’t remember anything.*”

The old man says to him “*Well I tell you, before you leave, do something, okay? Do this: Get two buckets and put them by the door of your cell. Every day at the prayer of the hours you go to the spring and you fill up one of the buckets with water and then you pour the water out. But every day the same bucket. You fill it up and you pour it out.*”

So the guy says, “*Okay.*”

So after a year the old man comes back and he said, “*Did you do what I told you?*”

The guy says, “*Yes.*”

He said, “*Well, let’s look at the buckets.*” So the buckets are sitting there and he says, “*What’s in them?*”

He says, “*Nothing. They’re both empty.*”

Then the old man says, “*Why is one of them very clean and very nice and the other one is just filled with spiders and cobwebs and dust and dirt?*”

The young guy says, “*Well obviously, father, the clean one is the one that I filled up and poured out the water every day.*”

The old man said, “*There’s your answer: they’re both empty.*”

In other words, the word of God has to pass through us and cleanse us. But sometimes we may not retain it. And still we can be and remain cleansed. We always need to remember the words of St. John Climacus, also known as St. John of the Ladder, who said “*The remembrance of the word of God is not done by the brain, it’s done by the behavior.*”

So I think we need just to read it — just expose ourselves to it. And I would even say to people if you don’t understand something, let it go. Just let it go. Cling to the part that you do understand. And of course if you’re reading some Old Testament book that might be tough, at the opposite the psalms and the gospels, they are pretty straight forward ... and we’re more familiar with them. But we just need to keep repeating and repeating. Just keep reading the Bible.



Saint Paisius Velichkovsky

Our venerable father Paisius Velichkovsky led the renaissance in Orthodox monasticism in the late eighteenth century, helping the Church recover from the decline in monastic life and spirituality caused by the troubles and conflicts of the previous centuries. His effort was centered on the spirituality of the hesychastic tradition, which was expressed in the popularity of counseling by starets (elders) in nineteenth-century Russia. His feast is celebrated on November 30.



Saint Paisius Velichkovsky is the person who transmitted Eastern Orthodox staretsdom or the concept of spiritual guidance to the Slavic world.

A Ukrainian by birth, Pyotr Velichkovsky was born in Poltava, where his father, Ivan, was a priest. At the age of 17 he took monastic vows and went to Mount Athos, where he established a separate hermitage for himself and his followers. It is there that he came across the Greek tradition and practice of spiritual guidance through charismatic elders.

In 1764 Prince Grigore III Ghica of Moldavia asked Paisius to revive the monastic life in his country. Thereupon Paisius and 64 other monks went to Iași. While living in the principality, Paisius administrated several cloisters, notably the Neamț Monastery.

Paisius wrote theological epistles to his disciples and translated into Russian a great number of Greek theological writings, including the Philokalia. He exerted immense influence on the startsy of the Optina Monastery both through his translations and through his personal disciples, such as Feodor Ushakov. Paisius's translation of Philokalia was one of the favourite books of saint Seraphim of Sarov, who received blessing to go to Sarov for spiritual devotion from the Paisius's monastery close friend abba Dositheus near Kiev.

God's Commandments and the Holy Virtues Saint Paisius Velichkovsky

By what is sobriety of mind preserved? From whence does sleepiness and the coldness of our thought come which extinguish the holy warmth in the soul and fervor towards God?

This holy warmth is preserved by sober thought, warm zeal, so as manfully and patiently at every hour, with all one's power, to guard one soul from weakness. This zeal removes every opposition, drowsiness, laziness, weight, weakness, and despondency. This zeal is strengthened, is aroused, is enkindled, and is the defender of the house of virtues. At the same time, one must fulfill the usual bows or prostrations, handiwork, and be refreshed in the air, for from this there is great help and power against sleep, laziness, weight, and weakness. And in prayer one must stand in a fresh place that in cool, because then the blood does not circulate through the legs. This is not only for the infirm and those sickly of body, but for those who are healthy. In a warm room, on the other hand, one is attacked by drowsiness, sleep, weight, heaviness, weakness, and this hinders and overcomes the ascetic. Nothing so weighs upon solitary desert dwellers than these infirmities. Besides, be heedful to yourself. From tumult is born much speaking, idle talking. From idle talking, idleness. From idleness, laziness. From laziness, despondency. From despondency, sleep. And from sleep, the deprivation of good deeds. And then a man falls into every evil.



Beginning of the Nativity Lent



Soon we will enter the Nativity fast, and we thank God that once again we are going to prepare ourselves to participate in the mystery of the coming to earth of our Savior. In the words of St. Theophanus the Recluse, during Nativity lent we must partake of the Blood and Body of Christ, in order to comprehend with our entire being that the Word has become flesh, and that the Lord has taken on our flesh and blood, becoming one of us.

Now, while the Church is reminding us of the necessity for fasting and prayer, it would be well to note that although the Nativity fast is not so strict in terms of external demands, it still requires a reasonable attitude towards it. First of all, we must keep this fast of course, but as Saint Isaac the Syrian says, there is a proper measure of fasting. We must understand that all church regulations should accord with the measure of each specific individual, depending on his bodily strength, age, health and other characteristics.

St. Isaac says that inordinate fasting is more harmful than too little fasting. This refers primarily to those devotees of fasting who wish to quickly ascend to a very high degree, exhibiting outward abstinence that is, however, not counter-balanced by their inner spiritual state. Why is inordinate fasting more harmful than too little fasting? Because, says the holy one, from a state of inadequate fasting a man can still proceed to a correctly-established spiritual life, while the corruption of spirit that arises from immoderate fasting can lead to spiritual disorder which is much harder to rectify.

Lent, being a spiritual manifestation, always bares our perception of both good and evil, and so each one of us must remember that during lent there naturally arise special temptations, and we can either draw nearer to God or become alienated from Him as a result of the increase in the temptations we suffer. Saint Sincleticia says that external fasting which does not correspond to the measure of our spiritual state is more harmful than beneficial, because it primarily incites us to vanity and a feeling of superiority over others. That is to say, external fasting alone does not bring us closer to God and other people, but, on the contrary, alienates us from them. And all the other passions – irritation, anger, and everything else that is characteristic of us, can flare up very intensely during lent.

Thus, the main thing of which the Church reminds us during lent is that when we partake of bodily abstinence, our body, which separates us from the invisible world, becomes thinner and we become more sensitive to the spiritual world. And if our heart is not purified, then, naturally, our contacts with this spiritual world are primarily connected with the evil forces. This gives rise to all the temptations and passions which only proceed to increase during lent.

Let us ponder this. From year to year we are used to fasting too externally, too formally, often focusing only on keeping to a certain dietary regimen, without adding prayer and without delving deeper into a realization of our path to Christ, a realization of the mystery which is being revealed to us during this time. Christ truly approaches each one of us; therefore, let us realize that the worst thing that can happen to us is for us to be spiritually lukewarm, to be observing only a formal and external fast. Let us try to deepen our fast from the very beginning (and not only at the end), drawing nearer to Christ not only through the reading of the Holy Scriptures, not only through the reading of prayers and a more frequent attendance of church services (although all of it is essential and necessary), but specifically through a communion with the most important thing that there is in Christ – His love, His unity with the suffering and fate of each individual, so that the mystery of Christ's incarnation would become a living experience for us during this lent. Amen.

Why the Nativity Fast Has Been Established



The Orthodox Church prepares its faithful to welcome the Nativity of Christ in a worthy manner by means of a 40-day Nativity fast, which lasts from November 28th to January 6th (by the new calendar).

Besides generally known reasons, the Nativity fast is also undertaken by Orthodox Christians in order to venerate the suffering and sorrow undergone by the Holy Mother of God at the hands of the scribes and the Pharisees just prior to the sacred event of Christ's Nativity.

Holy Tradition tells us that shortly before the righteous Joseph and the Holy Virgin set off for Bethlehem, they were subjected to the following tribulation. A certain scribe by the name of Ananias, entering their home and seeing the Virgin pregnant, was severely distressed and went to the High Priest and the entire Jewish council, saying: "Joseph the carpenter, who has been regarded as a righteous man, has committed an iniquity. He has secretly violated the Virgin Who was given to him from the temple of God for

safekeeping. And now She is with child.” Then the High Priest’s servants went to Joseph’s house, took Mary and Joseph, and brought them to the High Priest, who began to denounce and shame the Most-blessed Virgin Mary.

But the Holy Virgin, crying in deep sorrow, replied: “The Lord God is My witness that I am innocent and have known no man.” Then the High Priest accused the righteous Joseph, but the latter swore on oath that he was not guilty of this sin. Yet the High Priest did not believe them and subjected them to the trial that was customary in those times, (when a woman suspected of violation was given to drink bitter water that had been cursed by the High Priest). However, the trial just served to confirm the innocence of the Holy Virgin and the righteous Joseph. All those present were amazed at this, unable to understand how a Virgin could simultaneously be with child and yet remain inviolate.

After that the High Priest allowed the holy couple to go home in peace. The righteous Joseph took the Virgin Mary and went to his house, joyously glorifying God. But this was not the end of the Holy Theotokos’ trials. It is well known that afterwards she shared with Joseph the toil of a three-day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. And in Bethlehem there was no place for the Holy Virgin either in an inn, or in some home, and since night was already approaching, She was forced to seek shelter in a cave which served as a resting place for cattle. In this humblest of shelters the Most-blessed Virgin remained in prayer and divine contemplation. It is here that She painlessly gave birth to our Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world.

We can see from all of the above that the days immediately preceding the Nativity were not days of rest and comfort for the Holy Mother of God. In those days She suffered various sorrows and trials, but did not leave off her prayers and contemplation. The Holy Church appeals to the faithful to participate, at least to some small degree, in the Holy Theotokos’ spiritual labor, constraining one’s flesh during the Nativity fast and nourishing one’s soul with prayer. However, the Church warns us that external fasting only is not enough. We must also apply ourselves to internal fasting, which consists of shunning malice, deceit, wrath, worldly bustle, and other vices. During this fast, as at all times, we must show works of love and mercy to our fellow beings, doing all we can to help those in need and in sorrow. Only then will our fasting be genuine and not hypocritical, only then will it be God-pleasing, and only then will we know the true joy of the bright feast of Christ’s Nativity.

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Memory Eternal

Communique regarding Patriarch Pavle of Serbia of blessed repose
15 November 2009

BELGRADE -- The head of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC), **His Holiness Patriarch Pavle**, has died in Belgrade at the age of 95, it has been announced.

The patriarch passed away at 10:45 CET on Sunday, at Belgrade's military clinic VMA, where he had been receiving medical treatment since November 2007. The clinic announced that he died in his sleep.

The bells of the Cathedral Church of St. Michael the Archangel are tolling today 15 minutes before each full hour to mark the passing. The government declared Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday to be days of mourning in Serbia.

The spiritual leader of the Serbian Orthodox Christians was born as Gojko Stojčević in 1914 in what is today Slavonia, Croatia. He became a monastic in 1948.

Nine years later, the Holy Assembly of Bishops elected Archimandrite Pavle as Bishop of Raška-Prizren.



He subsequently spent 33 years in Kosovo.

In December 1990, Pavle was chosen as the 44th patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC), replacing the ailing Patriarch German.

On November 15, 2009, at 10.45 at the Military Medical Academy in Belgrade, after receiving the Sacrament, Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgrade and Karlovac , Patriarch Pavle of Serbia reposed in the Lord.

From the funeral.

Here is a translation of a short article written in his honor by *Yuri Maksimov*:

“I have never personally seen Patriarch Pavle, although I have heard about him for a long time. I first visited Serbia in fall 2006. I very much wanted to see His Holiness, especially because, from what I knew, he was normally completely accessible. It was not that I expected to have an audience, but I hoped simply to look with my own eyes at a holy man of our time and receive his blessing, and this alone would be a joy. But this did not happen. In the fall of 2006 his health worsened, and in my later visits it grew still worse. I was clearly unworthy of seeing His Holiness, Pavle.

While in Serbia I heard many remarkable stories about him from trustworthy people, which I would like to share. His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle, is a unique phenomenon for our times; therefore, of course, it would be pointless to make him the measure for other patriarchs, just as it would be, for example, to make St Philaret the Merciful or St Alexei the Man of God the measure for the majority of contemporary laypeople. Everyone has his own standard and his own kind of podvig. It seems to me that one should simply rejoice that in our lifetime such a person was and is in the Orthodox Church.

It is well known that the Serbian Patriarch, even when taking up his high-ranking position, continued his ascetic podvigs and strove to live modestly – although for him this was all quite natural, without any deliberate affectation. He went around town by foot or took regular public transportation, among the throngs of people, was not acquisitive, and ate as little as the ancient desert fathers – simply because that was the way he was.

Mrs Jana Todorovic told me a story that concerned her sister. She was at a reception at the Patriarch's for some reason. Discussing business, she happened to look at the Patriarch's feet and was shocked at the sight of his shoes: they were old, had been torn and then repaired. The woman thought: "How shameful for us Serbs, that our Patriarch has to go around in broken shoes; couldn't somehow give him some new shoes?" The Patriarch said joyfully: "Look at what good shoes I have! I found them near the garbage cans when I went to the patriarchate. Someone had thrown them away, but they are real leather. I darned them a little bit and, look, they can still serve a long time."



Another story is connected with these same boots. A certain woman came to the patriarchate with the request to speak with the Patriarch concerning an urgent matter, about which she needed to speak with him personally. This request was unusual and she was not immediately admitted, but the visitor's persistence bore fruit, and an audience took place. Seeing the Patriarch, the woman said with great excitement that that night she had dreamed of the Theotokos, who told her to take money to the Patriarch so that he could buy himself new shoes. Saying this, the visitor took out an envelope full of money. Patriarch Pavle, not taking the envelope, responded affectionately: "At what time did you lay down to sleep?" The woman, surprised, asked: "Well... around eleven." "You know, I lay down later, around four in the morning," the Patriarch responded, "and I also dreamed of the Theotokos, who asked me to tell you to take the money and give it to those who really need it." He did not take the money.

Once, approaching the patriarchate building, His Holiness, Pavle, noticed many cars near the entrance and became interested in whose they were. He was told that these cars belonged to bishops. To this the Patriarch replied with a smile: "If they, who know the Savior's commandment about unacquisitiveness, have such cars, just imagine what kind of cars they would have if there this commandment did not exist!"

Once the Patriarch was flying somewhere on a visit. While they were flying over the sea the airplane went into a zone of turbulence and began to shake. A young bishop who was sitting next to the Patriarch asked what he would think if the airplane were to fall. His Holiness, Pavle, replied calmly: "With regard to myself personally, I would take this as an act of justice: I've eaten so many fish in my life that it would be no surprise if they were to eat me now."

It would not be a bad idea to cite a passage from a conversation between Nikolai Kokukhin and Deacon Neboisha Topolic:

"By God's mercy we have such a spiritual pastor as His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle... He leads an ascetic life and is a living example of an evangelical pastor. He lives in Christ in the full sense of this word... As an Orthodox monk he fasts, that is, does not eat meat, and keeps a very strict fast on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays... He serves the Liturgy every morning in a small chapel in the building of the patriarchate. There is no choir there, and only parishioners sing..."

"He vests himself before the service and unvests after the service, he Confesses and Communes parishioners himself. He has worn the same riasa and cassock from the time of his tonsure to the angelic order (and this was fifty years ago). He does not replace them. He washes, irons, and mends them himself. He prepares his own food. Once he told me that he had made himself a pair of good boots out of women's boots. He has all the instruments for fixing boots; he himself can fix any shoes. He frequently serves in different churches, and when he sees that a priest has a torn riasa or phelonion, he says to him: 'Bring it,

and I'll fix it'... Being around such a person is a great benefit for the education of the soul, for spiritual growth."

For all this, Patriarch Pavle is a doctor of theology (he received this before becoming Patriarch), and is the author of several books: a monograph on the monastery of St Joannicius of Devich and the three-volume *To Clarify Certain Questions of Faith*, several selections of which have recently appeared in Russian translation....

Patriarch Pavle was very close to the people, and the people loved him very much. He is a unique figure even for the Serbian Church and the next Patriarch, of course, will be different.

Here is a translation of words spoken by Predrag Miodrag, who knew the Patriarch well, taken from another short article about His Holiness:

"He is very accessible. When his sister was alive he frequently walked to her house by foot. He in general like to go about by foot, without an escort. Anyone can approach him and speak with him. He receives visitors every day at his residence. People go to him with their needs and their small questions, and he finds a comforting word of consolation for each of them.

He gets up very early and, when everyone is still sleeping, he serves the Liturgy, praying for the entire Serbian people. All Serbia is in his heart. He is small in stature, but great in spirit. He has thin fingers, but when he forms these fingers into the sign of the cross legions of demons flee; he wears thin cotton vestments, but beneath these vestments is hidden the soul of a brave warrior. The people say: "This is our angel, who protects and defends us."



To His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle, Memory Eternal!



Memory Eternal



On Thursday, November 19, 2009 35 year old Fr Daniel Sisoiev, a very active and straightforward missionary priest in Moscow, was gunned down by a masked gunman inside the St. Thomas Church.

Fr. Daniel leaves behind a wife and three children.

Below is a statement his wife issued.

On the Death of my Husband:

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your support and prayers. This is the pain which cannot be expressed in words. This is the pain experienced by those who stood at the Cross of the Saviour. This is the joy which cannot be expressed in words, this is the joy experienced by those who came to the empty Tomb.

O death, where is thy sting?

Fr Daniel had already foreseen his death several years before it happened. He had always wanted to be worthy of a martyr's crown. Those who shot him wanted, as usual, to spit in the face of the Church, as once before they spat in the face of Christ. They have not achieved their goal, because it is impossible to spit in the face of the Church. Fr Daniel went up to his Golgotha in the very church which he had built, the church to which he gave up all his time and all his strength. They killed him like the prophet of old – between the temple and the altar and he was indeed found worthy of a martyr's calling. He died for Christ, Whom he served with all his strength.

Very often he would say to me that he was frightened of not having enough time, time to do everything. He was in a hurry. Sometimes, as a human-being he exaggerated, he got things wrong, he tripped up and made mistakes, but he made no mistake about the main thing, his life was entirely dedicated to HIM.

I did not understand why he was in a hurry. The last three years he was busy serving, never taking days off or taking holidays. I moaned, just now and again I wanted simple happiness, that my husband and my children's father would be with my children and me. But another path had been prepared for him.

He used to say that they would kill him. I would ask him who would look after us. Me and the three children. He would answer that he would put us in safe hands. 'I'll give you to the Mother of God. She'll take care of you'.

These words were forgotten too soon. He told us which vestments to bury him in. Then I joked that there was no need to speak about that, we still did not know who would bury who. He said that I would bury him. Once our conversation turned to funerals, I don't remember the details but I did say that I had never been to a priest's funeral. And he answered that it did not matter because I would be at his funeral.

Now I remember many words which have gained a meaning. Now my doubts have dissolved, the misunderstandings have gone.



We did not say goodbye in this life, we did not ask each other forgiveness, we did not embrace one another. It was just another day: in the morning he went to the liturgy and I did not see him again. Why didn't I go to the church that day to meet him? I had thought of it, but I decided I had better get the evening meal ready and put the children to bed. It was because of the children that I did not go there. There was a hand that did not let me go. But the evening before I had gone to the church and met him. I had felt as if dark clouds were gathering over us. And in the last few days I had tried to spend more time with him.

Over the last week I had thought only about death and about life after death. I couldn't get my head around either the first or the second. That day my head was spinning with the words: 'Death is standing right behind you'. The last week everything was so hard, as if a huge load had been emptied out on top of me.

I am not broken. He is supporting me, I feel as if he is standing by me. Then we said so many affectionate words, which we had never said to each other in our whole life before. Only now do I understand how much we loved each other.

The memorial service for the forty days of Fr Daniel takes place on the eve of his namesday and the patronal feast of the future church, 29 December, and 30 December is the feast of the holy prophet Daniel. According to the prophecy of an elder, the church would be built but Fr Daniel would not serve in it. The second part of the prophecy has already been fulfilled.

Matushka Julia Sysoieva
Translated by Fr. Andrew Phillips

Can One Consider the Death of Father Daniel Sysoev to be a Martyrdom?

By Hieromonk Job Gumerov



Fr. Daniel Sysoev

Death is the last event in a person's earthly life. For a missionary, death is the last homily, the last message preached, the last witness for Christ, Whom the missionary loved with complete readiness to sacrifice his or her life for the sake of the triumph of the Faith. Father Daniel Sysoev[1] had prepared himself for this sacrifice long before. Even in his younger years when studying at the Moscow Theological Seminary where this writer taught Fundamental Theology, Father Daniel was pierced through with the fiery conviction that only Orthodoxy contained the fullness of saving truth. Possessed of great talents, as a seminarian he already knew the church canons, and passionately contested with students and instructors when they allowed themselves the slightest compromise. To people who were indifferent to the spreading and deepening of the faith, his aversion to compromise seemed strange; and some of them fell into judgment and condemnation—but his death as a priest in the church which he himself had built, gave proof of his earnestness, his zeal, his single-minded commitment to Jesus Christ and His Church.

From the very beginning of his priesthood, Father Daniel chose the most difficult form of ministry—missionary outreach, which was initiated by the Apostles. In the early Church, missionary work was identical with martyrdom. *“The martyrs were preachers of Christianity, continuers of the Apostolic ministry; and this mission they fulfilled precisely as martyrs*, that is, presenting themselves as witnesses.”* (Bolotov V.V., Lectures on the History of the Early Church. 1. The Post-Apostolic Church and the Roman Empire. in Russian). After the Bolsheviks seized power in 1918, their first blow was directed specifically against missionaries. Murdered were the missionary Bishop Ephrem Kuznetsov, Protopriests John Kochurov, John Vostorgov, Konstantin Golubev, diocesan missionary Nicholas Varzhansky and other such missionaries. [*martyrs: the Greek root $\mu\acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\upsilon\varsigma$ (martyr) means “witness”.]

Father Daniel Sysoev carried out his missionary activity among Muslims. His Evangelical preaching was very successful: He converted and baptized many people; he received death-threats in response. His answer to such threats was to preach Christ with still greater zeal. Therefore his death is a Christian sacrifice for the sake of the great cause to which he felt called by Jesus Christ. Such a death is an open and manifest victory, because *“warriors for Christ are not killed, but crowned”* (St Cyprian of Carthage, hieromartyr. Epistle 66).

The early Christians referred to the day of death of their brothers and sisters in the faith as their birthday—birth into a new life. With the coming to earth of the Savior, mankind's relationship with death was changed forever. *“If we believe in Christ, and if through faith in His word and promises we shall never die, then we ought with joyful daring to go to Christ, by Whom and with Whom we shall live and reign forever. It is through temporal death that we cross over to immortality; and eternal life can begin for us only after our departure from here. And this is not really a departure but only a crossing over or resettlement into eternity after our temporal sojourn on earth. Who would not hasten to cross over to that*

which is better? Who would not desire to be changed and transfigured according to the image of Christ and the sooner to partake of heavenly glory?" (St Cyprian of Carthage, hieromartyr. Book on Mortality).

To him (or her) who dedicates himself to the service of Christ are given various means to bring people to the Truth: preaching by word, and preaching by one's life as a living example of self-sacrificing service. These earthly labors for Father Daniel have ended. There remains the brightest and most powerful preaching: the preaching of death. *"From henceforth, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: Yea, saith the Spirit, they shall rest from their labours; for their works do follow them"* (Revelation 14:13).

[1] Fr. Daniel Sysoev was short dead in his church in Moscow on November 19th, 2009.

*Православие.Ру / Интернет-журнал, 29 ноября 2009 г.
<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/jurnal/32949.htm>*



The Orthodox Christian family

Part I - The children.

By Elder Paisius the Athonite



When your children are still little, you must help them understand the nature of goodness. And that is the most profound meaning of life.

The best parent is the one who has been spiritually rejuvenated himself and helps the spiritual renaissance of his children, in order to provide life in paradise for their souls.

The elder often pointed out that one must have absolute trust in God's Providence and not plan for children, because children are given by God. And He alone knows how many children to give, - He alone and no one else. Some people, of course, in view of life's hardships decide to have only one child, and so they take preventive measures. However, that is a great sin, because such Christians show that they believe they can settle their affairs better than God can.

Being proud, they underestimate God's Providence. But God sees both the spiritual state and the economic situation of such Christians, and much more besides, which we do not see and do not know. And if a family is poor and barely has sufficient means to raise one child, then the One Who knows all can take care of strengthening the family's economic situation.

To those who try to acquire children either through artificial insemination or through adoption, the elder explained that God had deprived them of children for their own good. And they should not try to obtain what they desire by human means, for subsequently they will learn that in not giving them children God had shown concern for their own welfare. We must always remember that only those affairs work out which are in accord with God's will and not with our stubbornness or our human pretensions.

To many people God has not given children on purpose, so that they would come to love the children of the entire world as their own. God deprived them of a lesser family in order to grant them the right - which He grants only to few - to belong to the great family of Christ.

The elder also reminded them of the righteous Joachim and Anna, who remained childless to a ripe old age, which at that time was considered to be undesirable, and they were consequently insulted by other people. God, however, knew that from them would be born the Holy Theotokos, Who, in turn, would give birth to the Saviour of mankind, our Lord Jesus Christ!

The elder often said that some parents set a goal of having many children and God, of course, allows them - because He respects the will with which He Himself had endowed man. But afterwards the parents of many children encounter numerous problems: overrating their strength they give life, for example, to eight, but as a result they are unable to cope with the multitude of concerns entailed in raising such a number of children.

The elder said that God Himself determines the number of children in a family: if He sees that the parents would be unable to raise another child, He immediately ceases giving them children. But those who strived to acquire children forcefully, the elder advised to leave the matter to God, for only He knew when the time was ripe. Some parents, though being spiritually unsettled, "pressure" God to give them a child when they feel like it. In His love God grants the child; however, they soon see that this child, growing up, becomes unsettled because he has inherited the passions of his parents, and the latter embark upon new and graver concerns, having acquired a child who - through no fault of his own - has inherited their passions, from which they did not think of ridding themselves before asking God so intensely for a child.

Thus, the elder believed that parents should place themselves completely in God's hands and not impede His will. Let the parents allow God to act in accordance with His will, and for that His grace and His blessing will dwell within their hearts and will envelop their family.

And God gave a great blessing to the first-created people - to be co-creators. Our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and so on - all the way from Adam and Eve - have been allowed by the Lord to be creators: they give us our bodies. From the moment that a child becomes conceived, the parents give him a body and God gives him a soul. As soon as a child is born, as soon as he is baptized, God gives him a guardian angel, and the child is protected by God, his guardian angel and his parents. As the children grow up, the parents become freed of responsibility to some degree. And when God takes the parents, the guardian angel naturally continues to protect the person, just as God does.

However, we see that many parents supposedly do not know this (or forget that there is God the protector, or that the guardian angel stands nearby) and they continuously worry so much about their children that they even become sick! But we, Orthodox Christians, by worrying we impede the action of divine Providence. Therefore, let the parents do everything they can for their children, but when they reach the limit, let them become humble and give their children over to God's care, for then God will be obliged to help their children.

And children nowadays do not understand even the simplest things; it does not matter that they did not understand when they were small, when their parents protected them by restraining them in a crib. But now, when they have grown up, they still do not understand that even now there should be some restraint, a certain limit on freedom. They do not understand this restraint, but it must be understood in order for them to become real adults, intelligent and mature; this restraint is needed for their own good: a gardener ties up a sapling not in order to destroy it, covers it with a net not in order to prevent it from growing, but to protect the sapling from being eaten by goats.

But what do some children do? They run like a heifer freed from restraint and think that they have really become free. And what is the result? The heifer either becomes strangled by his own rope, or falls into a chasm, or is eaten by wolves....

This is how arrogant children act nowadays: they seek this so-called freedom, but in the end this freedom leads them.... this same freedom which the West has, leads our children - where? Where have they gone to? How many times young men came to my cell.... miserable, destroyed by narcotics and wine. They ask for my help, the poor ones. And I have been able to help one or two - but my heart is torn apart for all of them....They seek help, but how can one help them all?

They destroy themselves, they destroy their parents! Therefore, you should understand the need for restraining these children... such a restraint is God's blessing. Be grateful to the parents who restrain you. And if, say, they put more pressure on you than is necessary, it is done only out of love. Out of love for you.

To be continued...

Why is absolutely impossible for Orthodox Christian to participate in celebrating Halloween

It is at this time of the year that the secular society in which we live is preparing for the festival of Halloween. Throughout the whole month of October, school children are engaged in various projects connected with the attributes of this festival: they draw witches, black cats, ghosts, make jack-o'lanterns, etc. For the entire month all the stores are overflowing with similar paraphernalia. Gradually a great excitement grows among the children, an expectation of joy, which culminates on the last day of the month in school parties, costumes, evening sorties for treats. This entire masquerade is presented to society as a fun-filled event, as a merry and innocent children's holiday.



But let us examine whether this holiday is really for children and whether it is really innocent. Let us look at why the Church forcefully tells us that is absolutely impossible for Orthodox Christians to participate in this event at an level. The issue involved is simple - faithfulness to God and to our holy Orthodox faith. Halloween has its roots in paganism and continues to be a form of idolatry in which Satan, the angel of death, is worshipped. As we know, our holy Church is founded upon the blood of martyrs, who refused to offer sacrifices or worship idols, even under the penalty of cruel torture and death. For this reason the Church calls us to follow their good example, to reject worship of the forces of evil in any way whatsoever, and to always remain faithful to God and the Church.

In order to understand why we cannot participate in the pagan festival of Halloween, we must understand its spiritual danger. For this we must turn to the history of this anti-Christian holiday. The feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times among the Celtic peoples of Great Britain, Ireland and northern France. These pagan peoples believed that physical life was born from death. Therefore, they celebrated the beginning of the new year in the fall (on the eve of October 31st and into the day of November 1st), when, as they believed, the season of cold, darkness, decay and death began. A certain deity, whom they called Samhain, was believed by the Celts to be the Lord of Death, and it was he whom they honored at their New Year's festival.

There were many diabolical beliefs and practices associated with this feast, which have persevered even to our times. On the eve of the New Year's festival, the Druids, who were priests of the Celtic cult, instructed the people to extinguish all hearth fires and lights. That evening a huge bonfire was ignited, upon which sacrifices of crops, animals and even human beings were burned in order to appease and cajole Samhain. It was also believed that Samhain, pleased by such offerings, allowed the souls of the dead to return to their homes for a festive visit on that day. Out of this grew the practice of wandering in the dark, dressed up in costumes imitating ghosts, witches, hobgoblins, demons and other evil spirits. In this manner the living entered into fellowship and communion with the dead by means of the magic ritual

act of imitation, through the donning of costumes and the wandering in the dark, just like the souls of the dead were believed to wander.

The dialogue of “trick or treat” is also an integral part of this system of beliefs and ritual practices. The Celts believed that the souls of the dead, having entered into the world of darkness, decay and death, i.e. into total submission to Samhain, were afflicted by the torture of great hunger. This belief gave rise to the practice of begging, which imitated what the souls of the dead were believed to be doing during their festive visit. It was further believed that if the souls of the dead or their imitators were not appeased with “treats,” i.e. offerings, then the wrath and anger of Samhain, whose servants the souls and their imitators had become, would be unleashed through a system of “tricks,” or curses.

From an Orthodox point of view, any participation in this ceremony is idolatrous and a betrayal of God and faith. For if we participate in this ritual imitation of the dead by dressing up in costumes, wandering in the dark or begging with them, then we willfully seek fellowship with their lord, who was not Samhain as the Celts believed, but Satan himself, the adversary of God. If we participate in the “trick or treat” dialogue, then we make our offering not to innocent children, but rather to Samhain, the Lord of Death, whom the children unwittingly serve by imitating the dead who wander in the dark.

There are other practices associated with Halloween which we must stay away from. As was said before, on the eve of the Celtic New Year the people were instructed to extinguish all fires and to gather around the sacrificial bonfire to pay homage to Samhain. Because this was considered to be a sacred fire, it was to be used to rekindle hearth fires and lights. Out of this arose the practice of the jack-o’lantern (in the USA - a pumpkin, in older days other vegetables were used), which was carved in imitation of a dead face and used to convey the new light and fire to the home, where the lantern was left burning throughout the night. By placing such pumpkins in or near our homes, we become participants in the pagan festival honoring Samhain. Orthodox Christians must in no way participate in these ancient Celtic rituals.

In olden times divination was also associated with this festival. After the sacred fire died out, the Druids used the remains of the sacrifices to foretell the events of the coming year. From that time Halloween forever became a night of sorcery, divination, ritual games and in later medieval times, Satan worship and black magic. In our days the so-called “church of Satan” openly proclaimed this day to be its major holiday, bearing witness to the fact that the essence of this pagan feast is metaphysical, satanic, destructive and blind evil.

The early Celtic Church, which was strictly Orthodox, attempted to counteract this pagan festival by establishing the Feast of All Saints on the same day. Faithful Christians attended a vigil service in the evening, which gave rise to the term Halloween (“All Hallow E’en” in Old English, i.e. the eve of All Saints’ Day). Those who remained pagan and, therefore, anti-Christian, and whose paganism had become deeply intertwined with the occult, Satanism and magic, reacted to the Church’s attempt to supplant their festival by increased fervor that evening. In the Middle Ages, Halloween became the leading occult holiday, and that night and the following day all sorts of witchcraft, sorcery and black magic were practiced. Many of these practices involved desecration and mockery of Christian beliefs. For example, costumes of skeletons were used to mock the Church’s worship of holy relics; holy items were stolen for sacrilegious and perverse use.

In modern Western society, the Church’s attempts to supplant this pagan festival with the feast of All Saints have obviously failed. On the contrary - in the United States, as we see, this holiday, brought over by the pilgrims and now enthusiastically supported by Protestant church groups, has become part and parcel of American society. Every year all the schools, all civic organizations, all entertainment programs on TV, the radio and in the press participate in an obligatory and mass celebration of Halloween, whose

practices are rooted in paganism, idolatry and Satan worship. How then did something so obviously contradictory to the holy Orthodox faith gain acceptance among Christians?

The answer to this is - spiritual apathy and indifference, which easily lead to a turning away from God. In modern society one is continually urged to disregard the spiritual roots and origins of secular practices under the guise of these practices being cute, entertaining and harmless. Behind such an attitude lies the beginning of a denial of the existence of spirits and, consequently, Satan himself.

But evil spirits do exist. Demons do exist. Christ came into the world to “destroy him that had the dominion of death, that is, the Devil.” We, as Christians, must realize that Satan is our real and fiercest enemy and, as the Scriptures tell us, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual hosts of wickedness.

(Excerpted from an article by Bishop Cyril of Seattle)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Let us abstain ourselves and protect our children from (even unwitting) participation in the terrible sin of idolatry and Satan worship. Teach your children. Tell them about the pagan and satanic roots of Halloween. Let them stay home and not go to school on that day, so as not to take part in preparations for this holiday. In the evening, when the streets are full of frenzied masqueraders, come to church together with your children. It is undoubtedly an act of Providence that on that day the church commemorates the eve of the feast of that beloved Russian saint, St. John of Kronstadt. The Lord gave us this church feast and this divine intercessor as a powerful weapon against Satan’s wiles.

On the terrible eve of Halloween, come to church in order to protect yourselves and your children from the forces of evil, and in order to acquire true joy and the grace of God in celebrating our great saint.



From the Fathers

Glory be to God that He has not left us comfortless but gave us the Holy Spirit on earth. The Holy Spirit teaches the soul ineffable love for mankind, and compassion for all who have gone astray.

St. Silouan the Athonite

"Christians, above all men, are forbidden to correct the stumblings of sinners by force...it is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice."

St. John Chrysostom

"If you see your neighbor sinning, take care not to dwell exclusively on his faults. Try to think of the many good things he has done and continues to do. Many times when we do this, we come to the conclusion that our neighbor is a far better person than we are."

St. Basil the Great

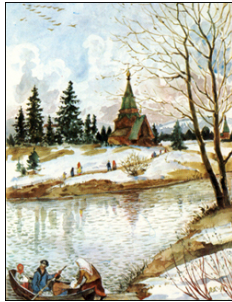


Spiritual Poetry

THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH

I saw God wash the world last night
With His sweet showers on high;
And then when morning came,
I saw Him hang it out to dry.
He washed each tiny blade of grass
And every trembling tree;
He flung His showers against the hills
And swept the rolling sea.
The white rose is a cleaner white;
The red, a richer red
Since God washed every fragrant face
And put them all to bed.
There's not a bird, there's not a bee
That wings along the way,
But is a cleaner bird or bee
Than it was yesterday.
I saw God wash the world last night;
Ah, would He had washed me
As clean of all my dust and dirt
As that old white birch tree!

- *W.L. Stidger*



TWILIGHT

The gloaming has already deepened,
But in the sky, above the weary earth,
The crimson gleam of sunlight glitters,
Reflected on the golden domes;

And summoning to dreams and prayer
All those who orphaned are and poor,
The crosses on the high bell towers
Continue shining here and there,

As though the sun's delay in resting
On every church's golden dome
Strives to remind us of the One
Who promised us the resurrection.

*Prince Vladimir Paley
Petrograd. February 1917.
Translated by Natalia Sheniloff*



NIGHTFALL

The evening sea bade the sunset farewell,
The surf sang a hymn to the forthcoming night,
An unearthly calm merged with silence on earth.
And Someone was lighting the stars in the dark,
And Someone was walking on waves as on ground,
Unseen, and unheard, and ethereal as air.
The swelling waves heeded the bodiless Spirit,
The cliffs in their deep granite dreams were all ear.
The evening sea seemed as though it were praying,
As though it appealed to the heavens from earth,
And in that immensity all that once happened
Revealed itself now in the silence of night.
The winds, and the waves, and the nocturnal cliffs,
As though merged together in one single swell,
Gazed deep into space beyond all earthly bounds,
Where the fathomless mystery of ages began,
Where the robes of the Lord shone with myriads of stars,
And the temple all glittered in bright starlit glory,
Where heaven and sea sang their eternal song,
And wave upon wave crashed its way to the shore.

- *V.N. Utrennev*

- *Translated by Natalia Sheniloff*

THE FOREST MONASTICS

Deep in the forest I recall one night.
A lonely skete gleamed like the Milky Way,
A single bell's ringing rose through the mist
And marked the passing of the dying day.
Beneath the benediction of the bell,
The pines, erect and tall, motionless stayed.
Before the ancient icons of the saints
The forest elders stood there long and prayed.
In that vast sea of forest peace, remain
The monks like forms of other-worldly life.
There is no grief, no groans of human pain,
No age-long enmities, no hurt, no strife.
All that is left behind, outside the Pale –
The agony of years, all gone to waste,
The tears. Abandoned also was the trail
Of days whose very trace is here erased.
And when again the sun sends forth its rays,
Into God's Garden, which no eye can see,
This forest turns. A myriad-voiced praise
Is raised and with the incense of each tree
Sent to the Sun of all Eternity.

- *V. Utrennev.*

Translated by Kosara Gavrilovic.

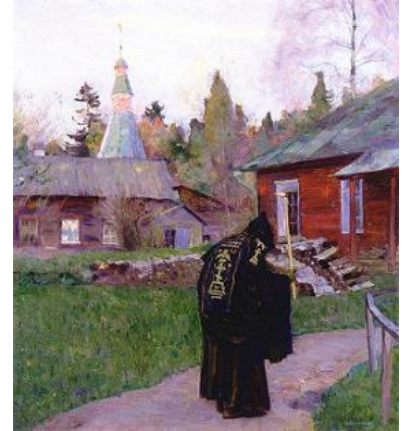


Teachings of the Fathers

On using time wisely

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven” (Ecc. 3:1)

The holy apostle Paul, warning us not to spend time in vain, lawfully instructs us to use each minute of our life wisely: “See then, – he says, – that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” In talking about “redeeming the time” the apostle makes us aware that time is used to purchase true blessings, just as money is used to acquire all that we need for physical life, and that, consequently, the proper use of time is very similar to the use of money in good hands. A wise master does not spend foolishly, totals up his assets properly, and assigns a special purpose to each sum of money. We should handle time in a like manner: assign hours and minutes for one or another good purpose; redeem each day by doing good deeds for ourselves or others; each year pass as many steps on the way to spiritual perfection as there are days in a year, and not waste a single hour needlessly, doing nothing, and least of all in using it for sinful deeds.



The day usually begins with our awakening from sleep. How should we look upon the moment of awakening? Just as we would look upon the moment of being born into the world or upon resurrection from the dead, because there is a great similarity between awakening from sleep and being born. When we are asleep, it is as though we do not exist. When we wake up from sleep, it is as though we are being born anew, we are coming alive, we are being resurrected.

The time immediately following sleep should, first of all, be spent in prayer. Each morning brings us the pious joy of glorifying God for the Creator’s having allowed us yet again to see His world, so beautifully designed for us. In beginning the day we are beginning a new life, and in life there are so many grounds for temptation and sin that a weak person absolutely cannot do without the help of God, which is acquired only through prayer. And secondly, time should be spent in reading the word of God: it is the book of life, it contains everything we need to know, to do, to hope for. In the words of St. John Chrysostome, it is God’s letter or epistle to mankind. Whoever does not nourish his soul with this celestial gift – starves his soul.

Afterwards comes the time for activity, time for work. Everyone has his own duties, his own affairs, his own job, his own diverse needs. But whatever they may be, there is one cardinal rule for all of them: “Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is,” i.e. at the beginning of each deed ask yourself whether or not it conforms to the will of God.

How should we spend the time of leisure or rest? In fulfilling the following words of the apostle’s instruction: “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to your-selves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” That is, if you like to read in your free time – read that which reveals to you the wisdom of God. Do you like to go out in society? Do so, but keep to pious discussion, wise conversation, good counsels and discourses. Do you like singing and music? Do sing, but particularly those songs which contain the outpourings of pure and lofty souls. Worldly songs can sometimes corrupt the soul by glorifying passions, vices, and human folly.

In other words, do what you always do, but in reverse: exchange the sensual for the spiritual, the body for the soul, the secular for the religious.



MISCELLANEOUS

PARISH ANNOUNCEMENTS

VLADIKA PETER'S VISIT IN HOUSTON



One of the highlights of this month for our Russian Orthodox Community at Houston is the visit of our dear Vladyka Peter, Bishop of Cleveland and Vicar of the Chicago Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. It is a true blessing to have Vladyka Peter in our Church. Vladyka Peter is accompanied by Rev. Deacon Alexander Kichakov from Chicago Cathedral Church, Reader Andrew Urtiev – Treasurer of the Chicago Diocese and Vladyka's personal assistant Nikolai Hantel.

The Rt. Rev. Bishop Peter will visit our Church for the Vigil on Saturday, November 21st . The service starts at 5.00 p.m. We will welcome Vladyka at the front door with bread and salt.

The Rector of our Parish Rev. Fr. Lubomir, the Church Council, "St Xenia" Sisterhood and all parishioners from "St. Vladimir" Church have the honor to invite Rev. John Whiteford - Rector of St. Jonah of Manchuria Church, Rev. George Dedouh, Rector of St. Elias Church, Rev. Sergei Capitan, Rector of Holy Archangel Michael Church, and all brothers and sisters, guests from the other parishes to join for the worship in our Church.

His Grace Bishop Peter will also visit St. Elias mission in Houston on November 22nd, 2009. He will celebrate the Liturgy in the morning at St. Elias Church. In the evening St. Elias community will then host a banquet in the honor of Vladyka Peter at Cleopatra Palace Banquet Facility at 5 PM. The banquet will take place at 3355 FM 1960 W. Houston, TX 77068.

FOR NEWCOMERS:

Welcome

Welcome! Thank you for joining us for prayer and praise! Your presence brings us joy.

Stewardship — freely contributing our God-given time, talent and treasure in gratefulness for all He has done for us — is how we support and maintain this house of the Lord. Our parish takes collections during services; also you may present your offerings at the beginning or at the end of the Divine Liturgy, or any time during other services to the people at the candle stand.

Communion literally means "having in common", or "spiritual unity." It is a sign that we already have in common "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" as one Church (Ephesians 4:5), for it joins us not only to Jesus Christ, but to each other as well (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Thus, only Orthodox Christians, prepared by self-examination and confession, prayer and fasting (1 Corinthians 11:27-32), may partake of it during the Divine Liturgy.

Please enjoy some light refreshments and informal fellowship with us after church during tea hours, movie presentations or regular birthday celebrations every month!

CONGRATULATIONS... TO



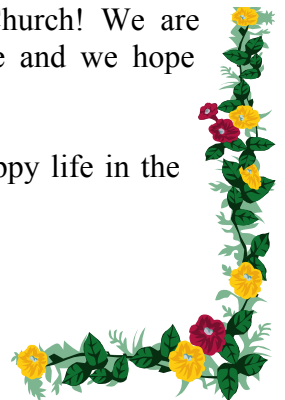
CHURCH WEDDING



Congratulations and Best Wishes to the newlyweds Maria and her husband Mr. Adachi who also was baptized in our Church a week ago! They came from San Antonio to marry in our St. Vladimir Church! We are very happy to have you here and we hope you will visit us frequently!

We wish them a long and happy life in the Holy State of Matrimony.

God grant you many years!



NEWS FROM THE CHURCH CHOIR

CHOIR DIRECTOR - George Tokarev



CHOIR

REHEARSALS

Choir rehearsals will be held every second Sunday of the month from now right after the Liturgy in the choir loft or in the parish house. If you would like to join the choir please come to one of the choir rehearsals and/or contact the choir director. The participation of the rehearsals is greatly appreciated.



“BLESSED HONEY” SALE FUNDRAISER

You can donate to our church by buying small jars of “Blessed honey” available at the kiosk. Donations go directly for the fund of St. Xenia Sisterhood. Thank you for your generosity!



BIRTHDAY LIST UPDATE:

In order to organize every month our Parish Birthdays celebrations I encourage you to e-mail me the date of your and your family members' birthdays. (marinova@bcm.tmc.edu) Thank you!

PHOTO GALERY



SPECIAL THANKS



Many thanks to all of you participating in the organization of the extraordinary meeting in our Parish!

Special thanks for all involved in the organization of Vladika Peter's visit!

Thank you to our altar helpers, readers and singers, who made so many efforts to celebrate a really beautiful all night vigil with Vladika!



Posted by the Senior-Sister Ekaterina.

(Some sources for this issue have been used from the web net as indicated)

