

“КРАСНОЕ СОЛНЫШКО”

“SUNSHINE”

CHURCH BULLETIN

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH “ST. VLADIMIR”, HOUSTON

OCTOBER 2009



THE PROTECTION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD



**“Today the faithful celebrate
the feast with joy
illuminated by your coming,
O Mother of God.
Beholding your pure image
we fervently cry to you:
“Encompass us beneath
the precious veil of your protection;
deliver us from every form of evil
by entreating Christ,
your Son and our God
that He may save our souls.”**

Tropar of the Feast

“Dear Brothers and Sisters, in just several days we will celebrate the Feast of the Protection of our Most Holy Lady the Birth-Giver of God and Ever-Virgin Mary. Pokrov!

As you probably know on the day of Pokrov our Most Holy Virgin miraculously appeared during an All Night Vigil in a church in Constantinople.

Try to imagine a Church full of people sending up their fervent prayers to God. The candlelight is gently bouncing off the beautiful mosaics and icons. The smell of incense fills the air, as the Clergy and the people pray for the world and everything in it.

As you lift up your eyes towards the heavens in prayer you see a blindingly beautiful lady floating gracefully through the air. Holding your breath, not able to speak you come to the realization that the lady you see before you is none other than the Mother Of God Herself.

This was what St Andrew the Fool for Christ saw on this day. He saw the Most Holy virgin resplendent with heavenly light and surrounded by an assembly of the saints. He saw St. John the Baptist and the Holy Apostle John the Theologian with the Queen of Heaven.

The Most Holy Virgin descended and on bended knees tearfully prayed for all Christians. Then rising up, she came towards the Throne of the Bishop and continued her prayer.

She took her veil and spread it over the people praying in the church. She spread the veil over them, guarding them, shielding them, protecting them from all enemies, both visible and invisible. St. Andrew the Fool for Christ looked on trembling as the Virgin extended her protection to the worshippers of Constantinople, and through them to all Orthodox Christians. The veil in her hands gleamed “more than the rays of the sun”. It shown with the light of salvation, a light of comfort, a light of faith, hope and love.

The Ever Virgin Mother of God asked that her son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ accept her prayers. “O heavenly King”, she implored, “accept all those who pray to You and call on my name to help. Do not let them go away from my icon unheard.”

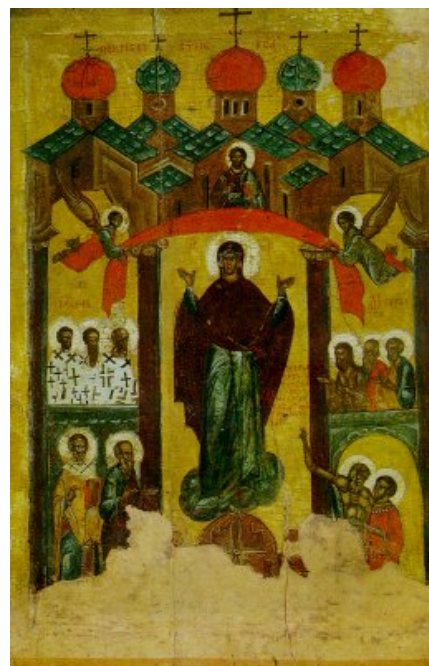
The Holy Mother of God wasn't only praying for the people in Constantinople that day. She was praying for all of us. She was praying for every one of you present here today. She was praying for the Ukrainian people.

The protection of the Holy Virgin was needed because of an attack on a large Kyivan fleet headed by Pagan Princes Askold and Dir. The Veil of the Holy Virgin was dipped into the waters of the sea at the Blachemae Church and the enemy scattered.

So awed was the Kyivan Prince Askold, that He believed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and was Baptized. He became the first Kyivan Prince to accept Christianity even before St. Volodymyr the Great.

Our Most Holy Mother of God, today we pray to you, we implore you to assist us, intercede for us, and protect us from our enemies.

Amen.”



*Written by Fr. Roman Tarnavsky
www.ukrainianorthodox.org*



Saint Romanos the Melodist
Commemorated October 14

The popular patron of church singers, St. Romanos, was born in the town of Emesa in Syria in the latter part of the fifth century. Whether or not his Jewish parents converted to Christianity is uncertain; Romanos himself was baptized as a young boy and developed a great love for the house of God. When he came of age he served as a verger, lighting the lamps and preparing the censer. After moving to Beirut, he was ordained to the diaconate and assigned to the Church of the Resurrection. He had a rather mediocre voice, but his pure and simple heart was filled with love for God, and to assist at the church services gave him the greatest joy.



During the reign of Emperor Anastasios (491-518), the young deacon moved to Constantinople. He led an ascetic life of prayer and fasting, but in his humility he thought of himself as being rather worldly. He had a special love for the Mother of God, and would go at night to pray in the Blachernae Church, which housed the precious omophorion of the Holy Virgin. The saintly Patriarch Euthemios loved Romanos for his many virtues, and paid him the same wage as those singers and readers who were more educated and more talented. The latter resented this and derided Romanos for his evident lack of musical and theological training. Romanos himself was painfully aware of these defects; he longed for a melodious voice worthy of leading the faithful in praising God.

It was the day before the Feast of Our Lord's Nativity, and Saint Romanos was assigned to lead the singing that evening at the All-night Vigil. He was responsible not only for the singing but also for the text of the hymns. After everyone had left, he remained in the Blachernae Church and tearfully entreated the Mother of God to help him. Exhausted, he fell asleep with his sorrow. In answer to his prayer, the Mother of God appeared to him in a dream. She handed him a scroll and said to him gently, "Here, eat this." Romanos did so and awoke, overcome with joy and the lingering presence of the heavenly visitor.

When it came time that night for him to sing, Saint Romanos received the patriarch's blessing and, vested in a special garment reserved for the principal singer, he stepped onto the ambo. He began to sing: "Today the Virgin gives birth to Him Who is above all being . . ." The emperor, the patriarch, the clergy- the entire congregation listened in wonder at the profound theology and the clear, sonorous voice which issued forth. They all joined in the refrain, "A new-born Babe, the pre-eternal God." Later, Saint Romanos told the patriarch about his vision, and the singers who had made fun of him prostrated themselves in repentance and humbly asked the Saint's forgiveness.



It should be noted that the kontakion as we know it today-a short hymn honoring and describing a particular feast or saint-is only the prologue or proemion of a full kontakion which, at the height of its development in the sixth century, was a poetic sermon composed of from 18 - 30 verses or *ikoï*, each with a refrain, and united by an acrostic. When it was sung to an original melody, it was called an *idiomelon*. Originally, Saint Romanos' works were known simply as "psalms," "odes," or poems. It was only in the ninth century that the term *kontakion*-from the word *kontos*, the shaft on which the parchment was rolled-came into use.

With the Nativity Kontakion, which has been dated to the year 518, Saint Romanos began a period of prolific creativity. Altogether, he wrote as many as one thousand kontakion, celebrating feasts and saints throughout the liturgical year. In the words of one scholar, Saint Romanos' compositions successfully combined "the solemnity and dignity of the sermon with the delicacy and liveliness of lyric and dramatic poetry."

Because Saint Romanos is commemorated on the same day as the feast of Protection, he commonly appears as a central figure in the icon of that feast, even though there is no historical connection (the event celebrated by the Protection icon occurred in the tenth century). Although in more recent icons Saint Romanos is depicted as a deacon standing on the ambo, Russian church musicologist Johann von Gardner points out that in the

oldest icons he is more accurately portrayed wearing the short red tunic of a singer and standing on a raised platform in the middle of the church.

www.roca.org



Andrew, Fool-for-Christ-sake

October 15 (Oct.2 old calendar)



A rich man named Theognostus, was serving as a bodyguard in Constantinople under the Emperor Leo the Great (886-912). Among his slaves there was Andrew, a Slav by birth. He was a calm and kindhearted young man. Theognostus liked him and took care of his education. Andrew frequented the church of God, studied the Scriptures diligently and liked to read the lives of Saints. Gradually the desire to devote himself totally to God grew stronger in him and following a sign from above he took upon himself a very difficult and unusual ascetic feat of fool-for-Christ, that is he started acting as if he was insane.

Acting insane, Andrew was brought to the Saint Anastasia church to be taken care of. Saint martyr Anastasia appeared to him in a dream and encouraged him to continue his ascetic feat. So Andrew was faking madness to the extent that he was regarded hopelessly insane and they drove him away from the territory of the church. After that Saint Andrew lived in the streets of the capital going around hungry and half-naked. Most people shunned him, some would mock and beat him up. Even the beggars to whom he gave his last coins would despise him. But Saint Andrew endured all his sufferings humbly and was praying for those who hurt him.

Yet, it was not always that Andrew pretended to be insane; talking to his spiritual father or to his disciple - a wealthy young man Epiphanius - Saint Andrew would remove the mask of folly, and then his holy wisdom and extraordinary spiritual beauty would be revealed. For the life of deepest humbleness and spiritual purity, God endowed Saint Andrew with the gifts of discernment and prophecy. Epiphanius learned a lot from his saint fool-for-Christ teacher who also predicted that with time Epiphanius would become an Archbishop and a famous preacher. The prophecy came true.

Once Saint Andrew, like the Supreme Apostle Paul, was taken to the third Sky and heard the unspoken words there that cannot be heard by people (1Cor. 2:9). There he had the honor of seeing Lord Jesus Christ himself, angels and many Holy Saints, yet he was surprised not to see the Most Holy Virgin. He asked where She was and they told him that She went down to the world of many sufferings to help people and to console those in sorrow.

Some time later Saint Andrew was also blessed with the vision of Most Holy Theotokos in the Vlahern church of Constantinople. This significant event of Her appearance is commemorated during the feast of the Protection of Holy Theotokos. When Saint Andrew and Epiphanius were praying in church, all of a sudden the dome of the church seemed to be opened and Saint Andrew saw the Holy Virgin surrounded by many angels and Saints. She was praying and extending Her homophor over those in prayer. "Do you see the Sovereign Lady of all?" - Andrew asked his disciple as if he could not believe his eyes. "I do, holy father and I am awed" - said Epiphanius.

Andrew, the fool-for-Christ, went into rest at the age of 66 in the year 936. His life was described by the presbyter of Saint Sofia church, who was a spiritual father to Saint Andrew and his disciple Epiphanius.



Sts. Cyprian and Justina the Martyrs of Nicomedia

"Hieromartyr Cyprian, Virgin Martyr Justina and Martyr Theoctistus suffered for Christ at Nicomedia in the year 304.

"St Cyprian was a pagan and a native of Antioch. From his early childhood his misguided parents dedicated him to the service of the pagan gods. From age seven until thirty, Cyprian studied at the most outstanding centers of paganism: on Mount Olympus, in the cities of Argos and Tauropolis, in the Egyptian city of Memphis, and at Babylon. Once he attained eminent wisdom in pagan philosophy and the sorcerer's craft, he was consecrated into the pagan priesthood on Mount Olympus. Having discovered great power by summoning unclean spirits, he beheld the Prince of Darkness himself, and spoke with him and received from him a host of demons in attendance.

After returning to Antioch, Cyprian was revered by the pagans as a prominent pagan priest, amazing people by his ability to cast spells, to summon pestilence and plagues, and to conjure up the dead. He brought many people to ruin, teaching them to serve demons and how to cast magic spells.



The holy virgin Justina lived in Antioch. After turning her own father and mother away from pagan error and leading them to the true faith in Christ, she dedicated herself to the Heavenly Bridegroom and spent her time in fasting and prayer. When the youth Aglaides proposed marriage to her, the saint refused, for she wished to remain a virgin. Agalides sought Cyprian's help and asked for a magic spell to charm Justina into marriage. But no matter what Cyprian tried, he could accomplish nothing, since the saint overcame all the wiles of the devil through her prayers and fasting.

Cyprian sent demons to attack the holy virgin, trying to arouse fleshly passions in her, but she dispelled them by the power of the Sign of the Cross and by fervent prayer to the Lord.

Even though one of the demonic princes and Cyprian himself, assumed various guises by the power of sorcery, they were not able to sway St Justina, who was guarded by her firm faith in Christ. All the spells dissipated, and the demons fled at the mere mention of the saint's name.

Cyprian, in a rage, sent down pestilence and plague upon Justina's family and upon all the city, but this was thwarted by her prayer. Cyprian's soul, corrupted by its domination over people and by his incantations, was shown in all the depth of his downfall, and also the abyss of nothingness of the evil that he served.

"If you take fright at even the mere shadow of the Cross and the Name of Christ makes you tremble," said Cyprian to Satan, "then what will you do when Christ Himself stands before you?" The devil then flung himself upon the pagan priest who had begun to repudiate him, and attempted to beat and strangle him.

St Cyprian then first tested for himself the power of the Sign of the Cross and the Name of Christ, guarding himself from the fury of the enemy. Afterwards, with deep repentance he went to the local bishop Anthimus and threw all of his books into the flames. The very next day, he went into the church, and did not want to leave it, though he had not yet been baptized.

By his efforts to follow a righteous manner of life, St Cyprian discerned the great power of fervent faith in Christ, and made up for more than thirty years of service to Satan. Seven days after Baptism he was ordained reader, on the twelfth day, sub-deacon, on the thirtieth, deacon. After a year, he was ordained priest. In a short time St Cyprian was elevated to the rank of bishop.

The Hieromartyr Cyprian converted so many pagans to Christ that in his diocese there was no one left to offer sacrifice to idols, and the pagan temples fell into disuse. St Justina withdrew to a monastery and there was chosen Abbess.

During the persecution against Christians under the emperor Diocletian, Bishop Cyprian and Abbess Justina were arrested and brought to Nicomedia, where after fierce tortures they were beheaded with the sword. St Cyprian, fearful that the holy virgin's courage might falter if she saw him put to death, asked for time to pray. St Justina joyfully inclined her neck and was beheaded first.

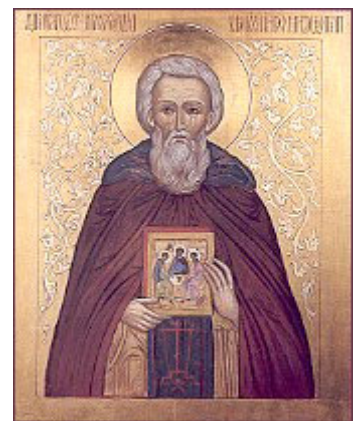
The soldier Theoctistus, seeing the guiltless sufferings of St Justina, fell at Cyprian's feet and declared himself a Christian, and was beheaded with them."



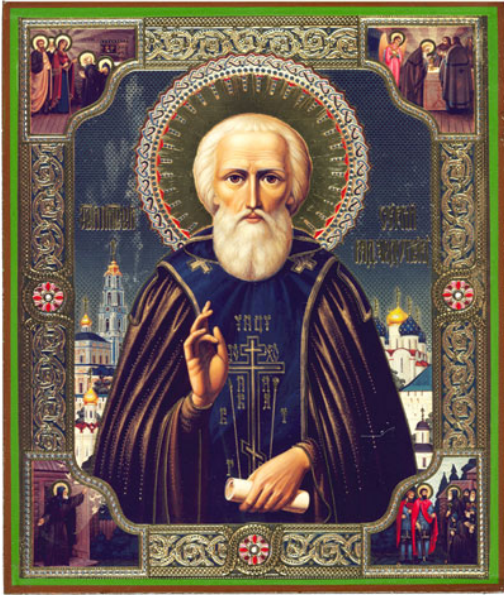
Saint Sergius of Radonezh (1319-1392)

The name of Saint Sergius evokes not only an edifying and joy-inspiring page of Russia's history, but is also a bright trait of the Russian people's moral content," – writes the famous historian Klyuchevsky. Saint Sergius of Radonezh – a spirit of simplicity and modesty, a quiet recluse, a modest abbot, a mentor and comforter. What manner of struggle sanctified his name to such a degree?

The Lord sent His chosen one at the difficult time not only of Russia's outward enslavement, but also of its inner decline, profound despondency and spiritual collapse. The Venerable one was born under the Tatar yoke – a time when the nerves of all Russians still bore the painful impress of the horror caused by that national catastrophe, which resulted not only in material, but also in moral destruction, and for a long time subjected the populace to a stupefying torpor. To cast off the barbarian yoke once and for all, to establish a durable, independent state, and to induce non-Russians into the fold of the Christian Church, Russian society itself had to rise to the level of these great objectives, to uplift and strengthen its own moral powers, which had been abased by a century of bondage and despair.



It is to this moral instruction of the people that St. Sergius dedicated his life, to this end applying the means of a moral discipline accessible and comprehensible to all men – a living example, a visible embodiment of moral rule. He began with himself, and by a lengthy period of solitude, full of labors and privations, in the midst of a primeval forest, he prepared himself to become a guide for others.



The name of Sergius of Radonezh “transcends the boundaries of time,” writes Professor Klyuchevsky, because in its significance the task he undertook went far beyond the framework of his era, and by its beneficial activity profoundly impressed the life of succeeding generations. This task – the strengthening of the Russian state under a single authority at a time of fratricidal civil strife, oppression and subjection to the khans – was the fulfillment of the testament given to the hierarchy of the Russian Church by that saint of ancient Russia, the Metropolitan Peter, who had prophetically blessed the then small town of Moscow as the future ecclesiastical and governmental capital of the Russian land. St. Sergius was not a politician, just as he was not a “prince of the Church”; he was a teacher, an encourager, a peace-maker. At a difficult juncture in time, he blessed Prince Dimitri to wage a terrible war for Orthodox Russia, and gave him two schema-monks, Peresvet and Oslabya. The schemamonks, arrayed not in helmets and armor, but in their

monastic garb replete with white crosses, gave the army of Prince Dimitri the appearance of a sacred crusade. During the battle, the Venerable one himself prayed in church, and “seeing’ the course of the battle, commemorated those who had fallen.

Worshipping the life-giving Trinity, the consubstantial and indivisible Trinity, Who is the beginning, source and well-spring of life, the Venerable one built a church to the All-holy Trinity. He saw it as a summons to unity for the Russian land, according to his biographer Epiphanius, “so that by gazing constantly upon it, we might conquer the fear created by the hated divisions of the world.” The extensive hospitality commanded by St. Sergius, gifts of all sorts, beginning with bread and ending with the healing of body and soul – all of this became a favorable condition for “gazing” at the church of the All-Holy Trinity and contemplating within it the prototype of Divine unity.

Thenceforth, the names of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius became indivisibly linked in the Russian Orthodox conception. The Russian people did not forget the one who taught them to worship the Holy Trinity: soon after the saint’s death, a monastery dedicated to the Holy Trinity was built at the site of his birth (the Varnitsky Monastery near Rostov); its main church contained a side-chapel dedicated to St. Sergius. One may even say that it became a rule to build Holy Trinity churches with St. Sergius side-chapels.

The Lavra of the Holy Trinity, founded by the Venerable one, became the spiritual center, the heart, of Russian Orthodoxy. In 1892 Klyuchevsky wrote: “These monuments do not feed the people’s vanity, but rather the idea of descendants being responsible before their great ancestors, for the moral sense is a sense of duty. When we honor the memory of St. Sergius, we examine our-selves, we review our own moral stock which had been bequeathed to us by the great founders of our moral order, and we replenish it, filling up what had been expended. The gates of the Lavra of St. Sergius will be shut and the lamps which burn over his tomb will be extinguished only when we completely squander this stock without replenishing it.” And such a time did come! The Lavra was destroyed and was closed for many years when “Tatars and Mongols of our times” captured it. All its treasures were confiscated. The relics of the Venerable one were rummaged through (as were others all over Soviet Russia). Everything was mocked, defiled. Yet the lamps have been lit anew over the tomb of the Venerable one, and the Trinity-Saint Sergius Lavra now shines in golden splendor, reminding us of St. Sergius’ great, selfless, inspired service to the homeland, his spiritual stature and dedication to the Faith.

For future generations, St. Sergius became an eternal companion and guide. “He uttered few words, but gave the brethren a far greater example by his works,” – Epiphanius says of the saint. He left no writings behind him, but his spiritual contribution to the history of the Russian Church and to Russian culture is remarkably great. The disciples of the Venerable one received, in addition to the usual monastic pursuits, a blessing to undertake special ministries to the Church: the copying of manuscripts, iconography, church building. In an ancient account of the saint’s death, he is called “the initiator and teacher of all the monasteries in Russia.” And truly, no fewer than one fourth of Russia’s monasteries were founded by his closest disciples. St. Sergius, during his early wanderings, and countless future generations of his spiritual children after him, carried with them Russian enlightenment, Russian culture, the Russian ideal, and spiritual beauty.

Saint Sergius, wonderworker of Radonezh

On October 8th (September 25th, old style) the Church commemorates the great Russian wonderworker, Saint Sergius of Radonezh.

In 1314 the righteous noble couple, Cyril and Maria, who lived near Rostov the Great, gave birth to a son, Bartholomew. The infant refused his mother’s milk on Wednesdays and Fridays, and also on those days when Maria ate meat. At the age of seven Bartholomew was sent to school together with his brothers Stephen and Peter. In spite of his diligence, learning came poorly to Bartholomew, and he tearfully prayed for the gift of “understanding book learning.”



One day Bartholomew saw a monk standing under an oak tree and praying. After finishing with his prayers, the elder gently asked the youth: “What do you want, child?” Bartholomew replied: “Pray to God for me and ask Him to open up my mind to book learning.” The elder prayed, then gave the youth a piece of prosfora and said: “Take this, child, and eat. It is given to you as a sign of God’s grace and for the sake of understanding the Holy Scriptures.” The monk then visited Bartholomew’s house, blessed his parents and commanded Bartholomew to read the Psalter. The boy began to fluently read the psalms.

Young Bartholomew meets a holy monk

In 1328 Cyril and Maria moved to Radonezh. Bartholomew’s brothers chose married life, while he had the sole desire to leave the world and dedicate himself to God. Shortly before their death, the saint’s parents became monastics. Having become widowed, Stephen also entered the holy orders. After burying their parents, Bartholomew and Stephen went into a deep forest several miles away from Radonezh, where they built a monastic cell and a small church in honor of the Holy Trinity. Soon afterwards, unable to endure the difficulties of solitary dwelling, Stephen departed for Moscow and entered the monastery of Theophany.

On October 7, 1337 Bartholomew was ordained a monk with the name of Sergius. News of the new monk Sergius spread all over the environs and soon 12 brothers gathered around him. Several cells were built around the church and were surrounded by a high fence to protect them against wild animals. This was the beginning of the future Trinity-Sergius Lavra (1337). For a long time there was no abbot, nor priest. Due to his great humility, St. Sergius declined to be ordained a priest. He joined the others in building cells, baked bread, cooked the food, sewed clothes and shoes for the brothers, carried water. In 1354, after

persistent pleas from the other monks, he became a priest and was given the rank of abbot. He served the Divine Liturgy every day.



St. Sergius' labors with his monks

The number of brothers increased. Many laymen began settling around the monastery, attracted by rumors of the abbot's gift of miracle-working. By his prayers a spring of water welled up at the walls of the monastery, a dead youth was resurrected, a nobleman possessed by demons was made well. The Lord also glorified His righteous servant with the gift of clairvoyance.

Once St. Stephen, hierarch of Perm and a close friend of St. Sergius, traveled to Moscow. Passing close by to the monastery, he stopped, said a prayer and bowed down towards the monastery with the following words: "Peace be with you, spiritual brother." At that time St. Sergius was eating with the brothers. Seeing his friend with his spiritual eyes, he, too, said a prayer, bowed in the direction of St. Stephen and replied: "May you also rejoice, shepherd of Christ's flock, and may the peace of God be with you!" The brothers were quite amazed, but afterwards the saint explained to them the meaning of his words and named the place where St. Stephen had stopped.



St. Sergius' vision of birds

One night, while standing in prayer, the saint heard a voice calling him and saw a wondrous light shining from heaven and a multitude of beautiful birds. The mysterious voice said: "The Lord has accepted your prayer for your spiritual children. Thus will the number of your disciples multiply and will not become scarce even after you pass away; they will be adorned with great virtues if they follow in your steps." This happened even during the saint's

lifetime. His disciples established numerous monasteries all over Russia.



St. Sergius' monastery was a haven for wanderers, the poor and the sick, who received lodgings and food there. In the words of the first writer of the life of St. Sergius, "the hand of Sergius was stretched out to the needy like a great river." His disciples saw an Angel concelebrating the liturgy with their abbot, they saw fire surrounding the altar and St. Sergius, and fire entering the Holy Chalice as the saint took communion.

St. Sergius miraculously calls forth water.

The Holy Theotokos

One night St. Sergius, together with his cell attendant, St. Micah, was honored by a visit from the Holy Mother of God, accompanied by the apostles Peter and John. The Holy Virgin said: "*Fear not, My chosen one, I have come to visit you. Your prayer on behalf of your disciples has been heard; do not grieve also for your monastery: from now on it will have abundance in everything, not only during your lifetime, but even after your departure to the Heavenly Realm. I will never abandon this place and will always protect it.*"

In 1380, while preparing for his campaign against Mamai, the holy Prince Dimitri Donskoy visited the monastery of the Life-giving Trinity and received St. Sergius' advice and blessing. The saint said: "Go



forth, my lord, fearlessly! The Lord will help you against the godless enemy. You shall conquer your enemies.” To aid the Prince in battle, St. Sergius also gave him two of his schema-monks - Alexander (Peresvet) and Andrei (Oslabya) - former warriors.

On September 8, 1380, on the day of the Nativity of the Holy Mother of God, the Russian army defeated the Tatars on the Kulikovo field, making the first step towards liberating Russia from the Tatar yoke. While the battle was in progress, St. Sergius gathered all his monks in the church and prayed to the Lord for success in battle, and afterwards offered thanks to God for the victory that had been granted.



St. Sergius was a great peacemaker among the warring Russian princes, convincing them with his meek and humble words to accept the sovereignty of the prince of Moscow.

St. Sergius blesses Prince Dimitri

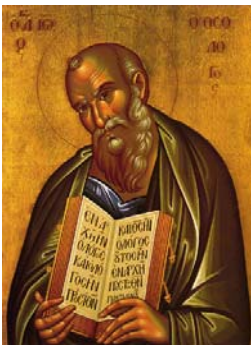
Six months before his death St. Sergius was granted a revelation of it. He gathered his monks around him, handed the administration of the monastery over to his disciple, St. Nikon, and gave himself over to solitude. Before his departure from this world, he once again gathered his monks and instructed them to remain in faith and unity, to preserve spiritual and physical purity, to have great love among themselves, to refrain from evil desires and passions, to keep moderation in food and drink, to espouse hospitality, to be humble and shun earthly glory and vanity. The saint then partook of the Holy Mysteries and quietly said: “Into Thine hands I give up my spirit, o Lord.” Immediately an indescribable fragrance issued from his body, while his face shone with heavenly rapture. This took place on September 25, 1392.

On July 5, 1422 the fragrant relics of the saint were uncovered and found to be incorruptible. They were placed in a new casket and set in the wooden church, from whence they were transferred to the Trinity Cathedral which was later built by St. Nikon, where they remain up to this day, giving comfort and healing to all who venerate them.

© Copyright 2004 by 'Orthodoxy and the World' www.pravmir.com
Source: www.holy-transfiguration.org



The Falling Asleep of St. John the Evangelist and Theologian



This Apostle was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and was the son of Zebedee and Salome, and the brother of James the elder. First a fisherman by trade, he became an Apostle and the beloved Disciple of Christ. Only he of all the Disciples followed Him even to the Cross, and was entrusted with the care of our Saviour's Mother, as it were another son to her, and a brother of Christ the Teacher. After this, he preached throughout Asia Minor, especially in Ephesus. When the second persecution against the Christians began in the year 96 during the reign of Domitian, he was taken in bonds to Rome, and there was cast into a vat filled to the brim with boiling oil. Coming forth therefrom unharmed, he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Returning again to Ephesus after the death of the

tyrant, he wrote his Gospel (after the other Evangelists had already written theirs) and his three Catholic Epistles. In all, he lived ninety-five years and fell asleep in the Lord during the reign of Trajan in the year 100.



He was called Theologian because he loftily expounded in his Gospel the theology of the inexpressible and eternal birth of the Son and Word of God the Father.

It is for this cause that an eagle—a symbol of the Holy Spirit, as Saint Irenaeus says—is depicted in his icon, for this was one of the four symbolic living creatures that the Prophet Ezekiel saw (Ezek. 1:10).

HOMILY **on prayer inspired by love**

Sanctify them by Thy truth. Thy word is truth (John 17:17).

When a mother is led to death, she worries more about the children whom she leaves behind than about herself. Such is the bond of great love. The Lord Jesus Christ had an even greater love for His disciples than that of a mother for her children. Going to His death, the Lord prayed to His heavenly Father for His disciples. He prayed, not because He lacked power to help them, but prayed to the Father to show the unity of His being with, and love for, His Father. But why did He then ascribe Truth to the Father, when before that He referred to the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17), saying to the disciples: The Spirit of Truth ... will guide you into all truth (John 16:13)? To demonstrate the equality of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Did He not first say of Himself: I am the Truth (John 14:6)? And, afterward, did He not call the Holy Spirit the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth? And He now ascribes truth to the Father as well: Sanctify them by Thy truth! He who would see any contradiction in this does not comprehend God as Unity and Trinity—Unity of Essence and Trinity of Persons. In that He ascribes truth as something essential to each Person of the Divine Trinity, the Lord demonstrates the equality of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For if one Person of the Divine Trinity would possess less truth, He would be lesser, in Essence, than the other two Persons. With a lessening of truth, there is also a lessening of power, love and wisdom. Therefore, the Lord referred to Himself, the Father, and the Holy Spirit as Truth, so that men would know and believe in Their complete, essential unity. Therefore let none of the faithful be deluded by any lie asserting an inequality of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Everyone should endeavor to wipe his heart clean of sin, as one cleans a mirror: only then can we truly perceive the great truth of the equality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

O Triune and Divine Truth, enlighten us with Thyself, and save us.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.



St. Paisius Velichkovsky (+1794)

There are three aspects of St. Paisius' life for which we venerate him: his personal holiness, his revival of monasticism and spirituality in Romania and Russia; and his translation from Greek into Slavonic and Romanian of many writings by the greatest Orthodox masters of prior centuries, edited into a collection which would be called the Philokalia ("Love of the Good"). For these reasons, he is a pivotal figure in Orthodox Church history.

St. Paisius grew up in a devout family, a reminder to us that Christian families are where saints are born and nurtured to begin their journey to heaven. Even as a child, St. Paisius had a profound inner spiritual

life and love for God, which his parents and the general atmosphere of his household strongly encouraged. He loved church services and reading spiritual books, especially the lives of the Saints.

When he was 13, he went to the Kiev Theological Academy. But he longed for the monastic life and so, following the voice of his heart, he became a monk when he was 19. He wandered to Moldavia (northern Romania), where there were then a great many holy elders and hesychastic sketes. There he learned under his Elder Basil of Poiana Marului, the important lessons of obedience, humility and the practice of the "Prayer of the Heart."



Seeking further spiritual wealth, he went to Mt. Athos in northern Greece, which was, and still is, the greatest center of Orthodox monasticism. There he labored faithfully and was tonsured into the Lesser Schema, the secondary level of monastic obedience. Recognizing his gifts for spiritual leadership, other monks gathered around him. They insisted he become their priest. He was ordained a priest and always celebrated the Divine Liturgy profoundly with tears of joy and compunction. Soon there were many monks in his brotherhood, composed of Slavs and Romanians. They had to move to find a place to develop their brotherhood. Eventually, with a blessing, they were invited to take over Neamt Monastery in Moldavia, which grew to become the spiritual center of Romanian Orthodoxy, amongst many great spiritual monasteries. St. Paisius was tonsured to the Great Schema, the highest level of monastic order, and elevated to Archimandrite, the highest honor of monastic priesthood. His personal holiness,

and gifts of spiritual counsel, and administrative leadership resulted in his monastery growing to 1,000 monks, making it then the largest Orthodox monastery in the world.

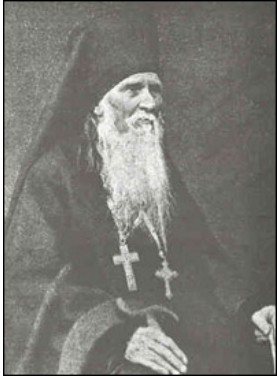
While on the Holy Mountain, St. Paisius had gained great spiritual wisdom from reading the Church Fathers and observing the life of the Athonites. He was moved to translate and edit the Patristic writings, especially their writings on the Jesus Prayer and the ascetic practices, necessary to acquire the heights of inner illumination and union with God. He would continue his own personal translation work, despite all his responsibilities as abbot and elder, until his last days. Neamt Monastery became a center for this sacred scholarly work, as St. Paisius attracted to his monastery and encouraged a whole army of gifted monastic translators who translated previously unknown works of the Fathers and liturgical services from Greek into Romanian and Russian. St. Paisius' collection, *The Philokalia*, profoundly contributed to the subsequent flowering of monasticism and spirituality in Russia and Romania in the 19th century.

In Russia, the spiritual life of the monasteries had been in decline for a century due to the harsh laws and interfering policies of Tsars Peter and Catherine, which severely restricted monasteries and the life of the Church. The famous Optina Monastery, southwest of Moscow, grew and flourished in the early 19th century as a direct result of St. Paisius' guidance through those taught by his disciples who settled there and developed the tradition of eldership. Optina, in turn, played a vital role in Russian spiritual revival through the 19th century, and into the 20th. It cultivated several revered elders (startzi) who offered spiritual direction to those monastic and lay people, including the great 19th century Russian writers such as Dostoyevsky, who came from across Russia for their blessing, prayers and counsel.

Through the prayers of our Holy Father Paisius, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us!



Assembly of the Holy Optina Elders



On October 23rd (the 10th, old style) the Church commemorates the assembly of the holy Optina elders, and among them the holy elder Ambrose, who died on precisely that day in 1981.

Venerable Ambrose of Optina.

The venerable Ambrose of Optina was born Alexander Grenkov in 1812, in the family of church sacristan Mikhail Grenkov. In his youth, while studying at the Tambov Theological Seminary, Alexander became terribly ill and gave a vow, if he regained his health, to enter a monastery. But becoming well, the lively and sociable youth did not hurry to fulfill his vow. However, new health problems reminded him of his promise, and in 1839 he entered the Optina Hermitage in the Kaluga province, becoming a disciple of the famous elder Leo. From him the young novice gained the experience of the great saints of antiquity in acquiring grace. In 1845 he fell prey to a new and severe illness, which because monk Ambrose's cross to the end of his life. Soon he began to help the elder Macarius as a confessor, began to see people, to participate in the hermitage's publishing efforts. After the repose of the elder, hieroschemamonk Macarius, in 1860, St. Ambrose became the brothers' spiritual advisor.

Thousands of believers from all corners of Russia came to the clairvoyant elder for advice. He was visited and engaged in spiritual discussions by the writers Dostoyevsky, Solovyev, Leontyev, Aleksey Tolstoy, Leo Tolstoy... The venerable elder never allowed himself to say a vain or wrathful word, but spoke only for the purpose of correction or spiritual guidance. From the Lord he received the gifts of healing and clairvoyance. Never refusing to help those in need, the holy elder could appear to people who entreated him at a distance, in dreams and face-to-face. He became a great intercessor for the Russian people, having transformed thousands of human destinies by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Ambrose reposed on October 10, 1891 in the Shamordino convent which he had founded. His relics remain at the Optina Hermitage.

The Optina elders.



The elders of the Optina Hermitage gave grace-filled advice to people of all stations in life, including great Russian writers and statesmen. In the 19th – early 20th century the monastery renewed the ancient ladder of eldership, which allowed entire generations of people to ascend into the Heavenly Kingdom. The Optina elders were healers, clairvoyants, comforters, accusers.

“The widespread stabs of the young generation at great activity for the benefit of mankind are similar to a person's not graduating from high school and yet dreaming of becoming a professor in a university... One must first avoid evil himself, and only then concern himself with the benefit of others,” – wrote elder Ambrose at the end of the 19th century. There words, as well as everything that has been said and written by him and other Optina elders, sound extraordinarily applicable to our own times.

The elders taught people to live not according to their passions, but according to the commandments. “The zeal which wishes to destroy great evil without appropriate preparation is a great evil in itself,” – said the elder Joseph, a disciple of Saint Ambrose.

The Optina elders were the defenders and invariable champions of the Orthodox faith. “Apostle Paul writes: ‘I have stayed the course and kept the faith.’ This means that it is a very difficult task... Children, guard the holy faith, which is a priceless treasure, for with it you will enter the Kingdom,” – instructed the elder Barsonuphius.

From Optina proud mankind was called to embrace humility. “People are truly losing their minds if they rely on their minds and expect everything from them. Our teacher is humility. God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble,” – declared the elder Anatoly on the eve of the revolution.

The rules of life that were offered to people could be followed in any rank or profession on earth. “Holiness is simplicity, presented to people in a reasonable manner. Good sense is higher than all virtues,” – such was the spiritual testament left us by the last elder, Saint Nectarius, on the eve of his repose in 1928.

Excerpts from the instructions of Saint Ambrose

The counsels and instructions with which the elder Ambrose healed all those who came to him with faith, were offered by him either in private conversations, or in general to all those who surrounded him, in the most simple, terse and often joking manner. It should be noted that a joking tone in the elder’s instructional speech was his trademark.



“How should we live?” – the elder was bombarded from all sides with this universal and highly important question. As was his wont, he responded jokingly: “To live means not to grieve, not to judge anyone, not to offend anyone, and show respect to all.” Such a tone often caused frivolous listeners to smile. But if one ponders this instruction more deeply, one can find in it a profound meaning. “Not to grieve,” i.e. for our hearts not to be burdened with the sorrows and misfortunes that are man’s inevitable lot on earth, but to direct our hearts to the sole source of eternal sweetness – to God; in this manner, even when faced with innumerable and varied misfortunes, man can comfort himself by humbling himself and finding inner peace. “Not to judge,” “not to offend,” – there is nothing more common among men than being judgmental and offensive – those twin offspring of destructive pride. Of themselves they are sufficient to push a man’s soul down to the depths of hell; but, by the way, they are often not even considered to be sins. “Show respect to all” – echoes the apostle’s commandment: to honor each other with dignity and respect (Romans 12:10). Gathering all these ideas into one, we see that in the abovementioned saying the elder primarily preached humility – the basis of spiritual life, the source of all virtues, without which, according to St. John Chrysostome, it is impossible to be saved.

When asked the general question: “How should we live?” – the elder sometimes answered in a slightly different way: “We should live without hypocrisy, conduct ourselves in an exemplary manner, and thus we will be on the right track, otherwise we will lose the game.”

“We must, - the elder also said, - live on this earth like a spinning wheel: it slightly touches the earth at only one point, while all the rest tend to go upward; while we lay down on the ground and are unable to get up.” And these instructions, too, urged people to strive to attain humility.

COUNSELS OF THE OPTINA ELDERS

Counsels of the venerable Elder Leo



Try to be more attentive to yourself instead of judging the actions, behavior and attitude of others towards you; if you do not see love in them, it is because you yourself have no love within you.

Wherever there is humility, there you will find simplicity, and this God-given manifestation does not test His providence.

God does not disdain prayers, but sometimes does not grant the desires expressed therein, specifically in order to have things come out better, in accordance with His Divine intent. What would happen if the All-knowing God completely fulfilled our wishes? I believe all human beings would eventually perish.

Those who live without being attentive to themselves will never be the recipients of grace.

If you do not have tranquility within yourself – know that you are lacking humility. This the Lord showed to us in the following words, which at the same time demonstrate where one should look for tranquility. He said: Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble in heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls (Matt. 11:29).

Counsels of the venerable Elder Moses



If you show mercy towards others – mercy will be shown to you.

If you co-suffer with the suffering (this does not seem to be difficult) – you will be listed among the martyrs.

If you forgive your offenders, not only will all your sins be forgiven, but you shall be the children of the Heavenly Father.

If you pray for salvation from the bottom of your heart, even a little bit, – you shall be saved.

If you berate yourself, accuse and judge yourself before God for your sins, of which you become aware through your conscience, – you shall be justified.

If you confess your sins before God, for that you shall earn forgiveness and recompense.

If you sorrow over your sins and feel remorse, or give way to tears, or even just sigh, your sighing will not be concealed from Him: “Not a single teardrop, nor any part of a teardrop,” – says St. Simeon, – “is hidden from Him.” And St. John Chrysostome says: “Even if you just lament over your sins, He will accept it as part of your salvation.”

Examine yourself daily: what did you sow for the next life – wheat or chaff? Having tested yourself, set yourself towards improvement on the following day, and spend your entire life in this manner. If the day was spent poorly, so that you did not offer even a decent prayer to God, nor felt any remorse of heart, nor humbled yourself in thought, nor showed mercy to anyone, nor gave any charity, nor forgave your offenders, nor bore any insult, but on the contrary, you did not restrain yourself from anger, did not restrain yourself in word, food, and drink, or immersed your mind in unclean thoughts, – having examined all this in good con-science, condemn yourself and prepare on the following day to be more attentive towards good and more cautious towards evil.

Counsels of the venerable Elder Macarius



...To your question as to what constitutes happiness in life – whether it is grandeur, glory and wealth, or a quiet, peaceful family life, – I will tell you that I agree with the latter, and I will also add that a life spent with a pure conscience and with humility brings peace, tranquility, and true happiness, while wealth, honors, glory, and high position are often the cause of many sins and do not bring happiness.

People for the most part desire and seek well-being in this life, and tend to avoid sorrows. This seems to be good and pleasant, but constant well-being and happiness are harmful to a person. He falls into various passions and sins and offends the Lord, while those who lead a life of sorrow attain salvation, and for this reason the Lord has called a merry life the broad path: “the wide gate and the broad path lead to destruction, and many there are which follow it” (Matt. 7:13), while the life of sorrow He called “the strait gate and the narrow way which lead unto eternal life, and few there are that find it” (Matt. 7:14). Thus, out of His love for us and seeing its possible benefit for those who are worthy of it, the Lord leads many people away from the broad path and places them on the narrow and sorrowful path, in order to arrange their salvation through their endurance of illnesses and sorrows, and to grant them eternal life.

...You not only wish to be good and not do anything bad, but you also wish to see yourself as such. The desire is laudable, but the wish to see one’s own good qualities provides food for vanity. Even if we acted sincerely and correctly in all things, we still would have to regard ourselves as unworthy servants. However, being faulty in all things, we must not consider ourselves to be good even in our thoughts. For this reason we are embarrassed instead of being humble. For this reason God does not give us strength for the execution of things, in order for us not to have pride in ourselves, but to attain humility. And when we do attain it, then our virtues will be strong and will not allow us to be vain.



... We, weak-minded people, thinking to arrange our possessions, bustle around, despair, deprive ourselves of rest, only in order to leave our children a good estate. But do we know whether it will be of benefit to them? A foolish son is not helped by wealth – it only serves to lead him into immorality. We

must concern ourselves with leaving our children the good example of our lives and rearing them in the fear of God and His commandments – that is their primary treasure. When we seek the Kingdom of God and His truth, all that is needful here will also be added (Matt. 6:33). You will say: but we cannot do this, the modern world requires different things now! All right, but have you borne your children for this world only, and not for the hereafter? Comfort yourself with the word of God: if the world hates you, know that it hated Me before it hated you (John 15:18), while the carnal mind is enmity against God: it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Rom. 8:7). Do not desire earthly glory for your children, but that they may be good people and obedient children, and when God grants it – kind spouses and tender parents, concerned for those serving them, loving to all, and tolerant of their enemies.

... You wish to get nearer to God and attain salvation. That is the responsibility of all Christians, but it is done only through the keeping of God's commandments, which consist entirely of love for God and neighbors, and even stretch to love for one's enemies. Read the Gospel and there you will find the way, the truth, and the life; preserve the Orthodox faith and the canons of the Holy Church; study the instructions contained in the writings of church pastors and teachers, and arrange your life according to these teachings. However, rules of prayer alone will not help us do good... I advise you to pay as much attention as possible to works of love for your neighbors, to your relations with parents, spouses, and children, and try to bring up your children in the Orthodox faith and good morality. The holy Apostle Paul, enumerating the different type of virtues and labors of self-sacrifice, says: "Even if I do such-and-such, but have no love, there is no benefit to me."



From the Fathers:

St. Poemen the Great

"A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable."

St. Gregory the Great

"Every day you provide your bodies with good to keep them from failing. In the same way your good works should be the daily nourishment of your hearts. Your bodies are fed with food and your spirits with good works. You aren't to deny your soul, which is going to live forever, what you grant to your body, which is going to die."

St. Paisius Velichkovsky

"Remember, O my soul, the terrible and frightful wonder: that your Creator for your sake became Man, and deigned to suffer for the sake of your salvation. His angels tremble, the Cherubim are terrified, the Seraphim are in fear, and all the heavenly powers ceaselessly give praise; and you, unfortunate soul, remain in laziness. At least from this time forth arise and do not put off, my beloved soul, holy repentance, contrition of heart and penance for your sins."

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

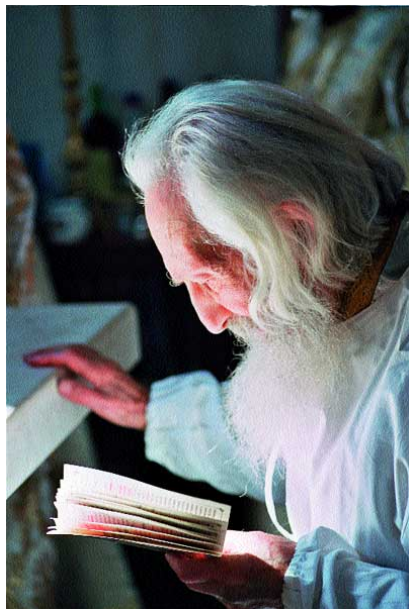
"Prayer does not consist merely in standing and bowing your body or in reading written prayers....it is possible to pray at all times, in all places, with mind and spirit. You can lift up your mind and heart to God while walking, sitting, working, in a crowd and in solitude. His door is always open, unlike man's. We can always say to Him in our hearts Lord , Lord have mercy."

St. John of Kronstadt

The candles lit before the icons of the Theotokos are a symbol of the fact that She is the Mother of the Unapproachable Light, and also of Her most pure and burning love for God and Her love for mankind.

His Holiness Patriarch Pavle of Serbia – ON PRAYER

Prayer as the Essential Need of Man



Prayer is the pious direction of man's soul to God, or the communication of the heart with God, through which God is represented before man as man pours the feelings of his soul before Him. It is the lifting of the mind and the heart to God and with it man is carried to the angelic choir and becomes a member of their blessedness. Prayer is the incense most acceptable to God, that most secure bridge for the passage over the tempting waves of life, the indestructible stone of all who believe, the peaceful landing place, the divine garment which clothes the soul with great goodness and beauty. Prayer is the mother of all good deeds, the keeper of the cleanliness of the body (chastity), the seal of maidenhood, the secure fence against our eternal enemy, the devil. It drives away enemies through the name of Christ, since there is no means powerful in the heavens or on the earth. Prayer is the fortification of the world pleading for God's mercy for our sins, that landing place which the waves cannot destroy, the enlightenment of the mind, the axe to spare destruction of sadness, the breeding of hope assuaging the wrath, the advocate to all those who are undergoing trial, the joy of those who are

in prison, the salvation of those who are dying. It made the whale become the home of Jonah, it brought Ezekiel back to life from the doors of death, and it converted the flames to dew for the Babylonian youths. With prayer St. Elijah closed the heavens so that the rain did not fall for three years and six months (James 5:17). When the apostles themselves were unable to cast out the unclean spirits, Christ told them, "This one cannot go out, except by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21).

There is nothing more precious in man's life than prayer. It makes the impossible, possible; it makes the difficult, easy; the uncomfortable, it makes comfortable. Prayer is as important to man's soul as breathing. Who does not pray is deprived of conversation with God and is similar to the tree that bears no fruit and is cut and cast into the fire (Matt. 7:19).

"When you direct your mind and thoughts to the heavens," says St. Makarios the Great, "and want to unite yourself unto the Lord, then a great multitude of evil spirits, like a black cloud, lingers over you, that it might deter your path to heaven. But, just as the old walls of Jericho fell by the power of God, so too will these stones of evil which are deterring your mind be destroyed by the power of God. When you are in prayer, remember before whom you stand. Be deaf and dumb to everything that surrounds you, invoke the Lord for help and He will help you. It's necessary to uproot all feelings of wrath and to completely cleanse ourselves of murderous feelings of bodily desires, regardless of who they might be directed to."

*Patriarch Pavle
Pravoslavlje No. 936*



The Myrrh-streaming Icon of the Iveron Mother of God

November 11/24

**Rejoice, Keeper of the Portal most gracious,
who dost open to the faithful the doors of Paradise**
(Akathist refrain)

The Tradition

The original Miraculous Icon of the Iveron Mother of God is on Mount Athos, the famous center of Orthodox monasticism (known also as Agion Oros - Greek for the "Holy Mountain"). By tradition, it was painted by the apostle and evangelist Luke.

In the 9th century, this Icon was in the possession of a widow who lived in Nicea. This town in Asia Minor no longer exists, but in its time it was the venue for two Ecumenical Councils; the first, which composed the first eight articles of Nicene Creed, and the seventh, which reinstated the veneration of icons after a lengthy struggle with the iconoclast heresy, which had erroneously equated the veneration of icons to idol worship.

It was during the reign of the iconoclast Byzantine emperor Theophilus that soldiers came to the house of the widow, where in a small chapel the Iveron Icon of the Mother of God occupied a place of honor. One of the soldiers struck the Icon with his sword, and immediately blood began to flow from the gashed cheek of the Virgin. Shaken by this miracle, the soldier instantly repented, renounced the iconoclast heresy, and entered a monastery. On his advice, the widow concealed the Icon in order to avert its further desecration. After praying for guidance before the Icon, the widow put the Holy Image into the sea. To her immense surprise and joy the Icon did not sink but, remaining upright, drifted away in a westerly direction.

Fleeing persecution, the widow's son left Nicea and went to Mt. Athos where he led a saintly life as a monk to the end of his days. There he recounted the story of how his mother had set the Holy Icon upon the waves, and this story was handed down from one generation of monks to another.



Many years later this Icon appeared on the Holy Mountain ("in a pillar of fire" as Athonite tradition recounts) from the sea, close by the Iveron monastery. At that time the holy monk Gabriel was one of the brotherhood in this monastery. The Mother of God appeared to him in a vision and directed him to convey to the abbot and brothers of the monastery that She wished them to have Her Icon as their help and salvation. She told Gabriel to approach the Icon on the waters without fear and take it with his hands. Obedient to the words of the Mother of God, says Athonite tradition, Gabriel "walked upon the waters as though upon dry land," took up the Icon and brought it back to the shore. The icon was then brought into the monastery and placed in the altar. On the next day the Icon disappeared from the sanctuary, and was found on the wall beside the monastery gate. It was returned to the altar, but the next day it was again found by the gate. This recurred several times, until the the Holy Virgin revealed to the monk Gabriel that it was not Her wish for the Icon to be protected by the monks, but that She wished to protect them. After this, a church was built near the monastery gate where the Icon resides to this day. In connection with the name of the monastery the Icon came to be known as the "Iveron" Mother of God, and because of its

location, the "Portaitissa," or "Gatekeeper." In addition to many miraculous hearings, the Holy Virgin demonstrated Her protection of the Iveron Monastery during various assaults by Saracen pirates.

News of this wonder-working Icon reached Russia through pilgrims who had visited Mt. Athos. In the 17th century Archimandrite Nikon of Moscow (later to become Patriarch) asked the abbot of the Iveron monastery to send a copy of the Icon to Russia, and this request was fulfilled. The copy of this Icon also began to work miracles and a special chapel was built for it next to the Kremlin walls in Moscow, where it was especially revered by the Russian people until the Revolution of 1917. The chapel was destroyed by the Bolsheviks and the fate of the Icon is not known.

The Contemporary Miracle

In 1982, a Chilean convert to Orthodoxy, Jose Munoz, in the company of two friends, embarked from Canada to the ancient bastion of Orthodox monasticism, Mt. Athos, on a pilgrimage. An art teacher by profession, he is also an iconographer, and therefore wished to visit some of the sketes (small monastic communities dependent upon one of the 20 major monasteries of Athos) and monasteries which specialize in icon painting. One of the friends who had accompanied Jose decided to become a monk and remained on Mt. Athos in one of the smaller sketes; Jose and his other companion directed themselves towards the Danilov skete, where icons are painted in the ancient Byzantine style using the egg tempera technique.

After eight hours of climbing uphill on rough terrain, they were very tired and decided to stop at a skete which they could see on the the Mountainside below. This skete, dedicated to the Nativity of Christ, is very poor and its 14 monks keep a strict monastic rule. The abbot, Fr. Klimentos, greeted them warmly and offered traditional Athonite hospitality. Then he took them to see the skete's icon-painting studio.



As soon as he entered the studio, Jose felt an immediate and indescribable attraction to a copy of the Iveron Icon of the Mother of God which hung on one of the walls. As he later explained, his heart felt as though it had 'leaped or turned over. " He asked whether he could buy this Icon, but was told repeatedly that it was one of the first icons which had been painted at this skete (by one Fr. Chrysostomos in 1981) and was not for sale at any price.

That night at a divine service in the church of the skete, during the singing of the angelic hymn to the Theotokos "It is Meet" (one of the chief prayers of the Orthodox Church to the Mother of God), Jose fell to his knees and begged the Mother of God to make it possible for him to take the Icon back with him into the world, where "we have need of You." Immediately he felt an assurance that somehow his prayer would be answered. The next morning, as Jose and his friend were about to depart, the abbot appeared holding the Icon and said to

Jose that it pleased the Mother of God for Her Icon to go with him to North America.

Jose and his companion went down the mountain and took the the boat towards Daphne, a port on the western shore of the peninsula. On the way, Jose heard a strong inner voice which bade him: "Go to the Iveron monastery and touch your Icon to the original wonder-working Iveron Icon." This they did.

Upon arrival at the Iveron monastery they waited three hours before a monk came to open the church which houses the original "Portaitissa." Jose asked that the protective icon case be opened so that his Icon could be placed upon the original Portaitissa in order to be directly blessed by the Mother of God. The

monk was surprised, but agreed to Jose's request when it was explained to him that Jose and his companion wished to take the blessing of the Mother of God to the West where Her intercession is much needed.

Returning to his home in Montreal, Canada, Jose placed the Iveron Mother of God in his icon corner, where he also kept relics of the saints from the Kiev Caves monastery and of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth (one of the New Martyrs of Russia).

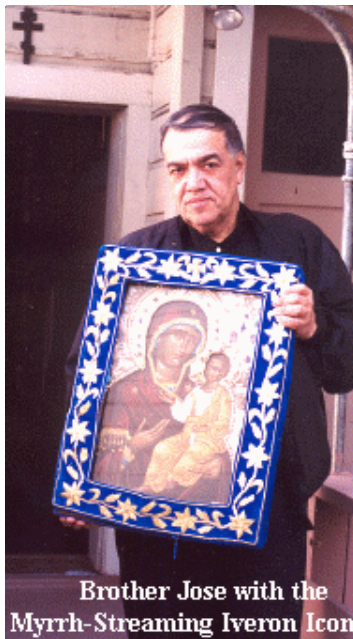
Jose began to read a daily Akathist (hymns of praise) before his newly-acquired Icon. At about 4 a.m. on Nov. 24, 1982 (three weeks after his return from Mt. Athos), Jose woke up to the smell of a very strong fragrance, as though someone had spilled a bottle of exquisite perfume. He thought at first that the fragrance emanated from the relics but later, when he stood before the Icon to say his morning prayers, he saw that the hands of the Mother of God were streaked with oil. Jose assumed that a friend who was sharing the house had spilled some oil onto the Icon while adjusting the flame of the vigil lamp hanging before it, but the friend denied touching the lamp. When Jose wiped the Icon, he discovered that it was the source of the wonderful fragrance which had by now filled the whole house.

Upon the advice of a local Orthodox clergyman, the Icon was taken to church and placed on the altar. During the entire liturgy, myrrh flowed from the hands of the Christ Child. Since that time, with the exception of several days during Holy Week, when the Icon is absolutely dry, the myrrh has continued to flow almost uninterruptedly. (Holy Myrrh is a sweet, fragrant oil which was used in the Old Testament for the anointing of kings. In contemporary Orthodox church practice, a newly born Christian is anointed with Holy Myrrh during which the words "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" are said by the priest.)

In the years since, Jose has traveled to many cities and parishes where the Icon has been venerated to the great joy and consolation of the faithful.

Wherever the Icon goes, there are always many questions. Some people initially have doubts. A scientist in Miami was astounded to see that the back of the Icon remained perfectly dry. He later surreptitiously chipped off a small piece of the board on which the Icon is painted for scientific analysis: it was found to be ordinary pine wood, nothing more.

At some times the myrrh flows in greater abundance than at others. During the consecration of a bishop in Montreal there was such an outpouring of the myrrh, that it streamed down from the analogion (lectern on which icons are kept in Orthodox churches) onto the floor. On another occasion, in Florida, the myrrh was seen to rise forth from the hands of the Mother of God and the Christ Child as though it were being pressed from within. Nobody has any power to regulate the flow of the myrrh, it moves to the will of God and His Most Pure Mother.



Brother Jose with the Myrrh-Streaming Iveron Icon

The Icon is kept in a frame about two inches deep and measures about 12 X 18 inches. At first the myrrh flowed only from the hands of the Mother of God, from the star on Her left shoulder and, occasionally, from the hands of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet in March 1985, during a Lenten service, even the frame and glass of the Icon began to exude myrrh in such quantities, that the cloth of the analogion on which it lay was totally saturated. There is always a layer of cotton wool at the base of the Icon to absorb the myrrh: pieces of this cotton are distributed to the faithful.

Although there have already been several cases of physical healing (not only among Orthodox, but Catholics and Protestants, too), the purpose of the Mother of God seems to be directed more at the healing

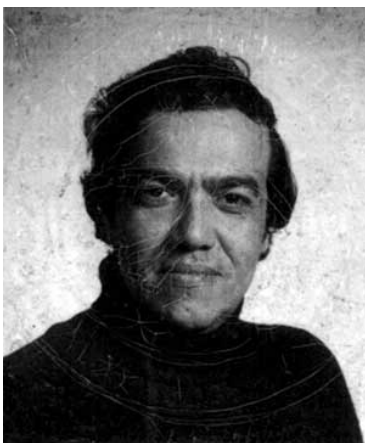
of souls. Many who have stood before the Icon have testified to this, experiencing not only compunction and repentance, but consolation at the same time.

As mentioned earlier, the flow of myrrh ceases during Holy Week. It ceases on Holy Monday. After the liturgy on the morning of Great Saturday, a light dew of myrrh forms on the Icon, its case and protecting glass. During Matins (the midnight service at which the glorious Resurrection of Our Lord is proclaimed), when the procession of clergy and faithful, holding icons and banners, leaves the church, the Icon begins to exude myrrh in such quantities, that it covers the hands of the person who is carrying it.

This is not the first time that the Orthodox Church has witnessed such a miracle. In the 19th century the Surety-of-Sinners Icon in Moscow exuded myrrh with which the sick were anointed and received healing. Earlier, there was a myrrhstreaming icon of the Mother of God in the Tolga monastery in Yaroslavl, and there have been others.

What is the meaning of this extraordinary manifestation of God's grace in our time? It has been observed that in the history of the Church such miracles have occurred in times of great tribulation; we saw this in the Apostolic times, and, more recently, in Russia, where the Church has suffered cruel persecution for 70 years. The miracles strengthen the faithful and prepare them to endure trials. The appearance of the myrrh-streaming Icon in our time may well signify a period of further great trials for the Russian Orthodox Church and, at the same time, offer consolation that the Mother of God will be a Protectress of the faithful: Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.

Least Among the Brethren



Jose Munoz formed the desire to become a monk while still a boy in Chile. He became converted to Holy Orthodoxy as a youth and began to lead a monastic life as best he could within the confines of the world, although he did not enter a monastery. Later he moved to Canada and continued to observe this way of life. When the miracle of the myrrh-streaming occurred, Jose vowed that he would never seek worldly gain from the Icon. Therefore any collections taken up during church services at which the Icon is present are sent to the poorest monasteries and sketes on Mt. Athos and/or to help those persecuted for their faith in the Soviet Union and their families. Jose never accepts any money for himself while traveling with the Icon, although he is forced to take much time off from his teaching and icon painting, which are his only sources of gainful employment.

When asked why he thinks he was chosen for such a miracle, Jose replies that, knowing his many weaknesses, he is at a loss to explain this; he feels that perhaps it was because God often reveals himself through the very least of His servants, and that as a convert, he feels himself to be the "least among the brethren." He regards himself not as the owner, but merely the custodian of the Icon, which properly belongs to the entire body of the faithful. From his childhood his mother, who is a devout Roman Catholic, taught him to love the Most Pure Virgin, therefore he always prayed to Her, though never asked Her for any signs or miracles.

Glory be to Our Lord Jesus Christ for manifesting through Jose, the 'least of His servants,' the wonder-working Iveron Icon of the Mother of God!

Washington, D.C., 1986



The Holy Unmercenaries

The Holy Unmercenaries are physicians who in their lives on earth worked to heal all without concern for gain; and who since their repose continue to heal by their prayers those who call on them in faith.



The Holy Unmercenary Saints

- Sts. Kosmas and Damian of Asia Minor - (November 1/14)
- Sts. Kosmas and Damian of Rome – (July 1/14)
- Sts. Kosmas, Damian, Leontios, Anthimos, and Eutropios of Arabia - October (17/30)
- Sts. Cyrus and John – (January 31/February 13, June 28/July 11) (the latter celebrates the translation of their relics)
- St. Tryphon – (February 1/14)
- St. Julianos – (February 6/19)
- St. Mokios – (May 11/24)
- St. Thallaleos - May 20/June 2
- St. Sampson the Innkeeper - (June 27/July 10)
- St. Ermolaos – (July 26/August 8)
- St. Panteleimon the Great-martyr - (July 27/August 9)
- Sts. Anikitos and Photios – (August 12/25)
- St. Diomedis – (August 16/29)

Additional Saints (that are not usually grouped as Unmercenaries in iconography, etc., but might be considered as such)

- St. Luke the Apostle, Evangelist and Physician – (October 18/31)
- St. Luke Archbishop of Simferopol the Surgeon – (June 11/24)
- St. Agapit the Righteous Unmercenary of the Kiev Caves – (June 1/14)

The following Saints are not referred to anywhere else as Unmercenaries, however, they are wondrous healers of afflictions of soul and body, so they deserve honor and supplication.

- St. Antipas the Hieromartyr - April 11/24 (Healer of Teeth)
- St. Charalambos - February 10/23 (Protector against gastric distress and dysentery, infectious diseases, and regrettable (depressing) thoughts and protector of flocks and shepherds, trees, protector of marble-workers)
- St. Blaise (Vlassios) - February 11/24 (Healer of Throat Ailments)
- St. Spyridon - December 12/25
- St. Modescus (Modestos) - December 16/29 (Protector against diseases of animals and against locusts, protector of plows)
- St. Artemios - October 20/January 2 (Protector against psychiatric, neurotic, intestinal and hernia problems)

The Orthodox celebrate no less than three different sets of saints by the name of Cosmas and Damian, each with its own distinct feast day:

- Saints Cosmas and Damian of Cilicia (Arabia) (October 17) Brothers, they were beaten and beheaded together with three other Christians: Leontius, Anthimus, and Eutropius.
- Saints Cosmas and Damian of Asia Minor — alternately, of Mesopotamia (November 1) Twin sons of Saint Theodota. Died peacefully and were buried together at Thereman in Mesopotamia.
- Saints Cosmas and Damian of Rome (July 1) Brothers, they were martyred outside Rome by a jealous pagan physician during the reign of the Roman Emperor Carinus (283–284).

Orthodox icons of the saints depict them vested as laymen holding medicine boxes. Often each will also hold a spoon with which to dispense medicine. The handle of the spoon is normally shaped like a cross to indicate the importance of spiritual as well as physical healing, and that all cures come from God.

Life of the Saints Cosmas and Damian of Cilicia (Arabia)

The holy brothers Cosmas and Damian were born in Arabia, who believed in Christ. They traveled through the cities and the villages, preaching Christ and healing the sick.



The saints would not take any sort of payment for the services they rendered, hence their category "Divine Unmercenaries" which means "Free of charge Physicians".

In the gulf of Iskanderon (Cilicia), where they practiced their careers and earned a great reputation, pagans seized the holy physicians and led them before the Prefect Lysias.

For their refusal to renounce their Christian faith, Lysias ordered the saints to be brutally beaten, and then cast into the sea. An angel of God rescued them from the sea and brought them to shore.

Then the pagans beheaded the saints along with 3 other Christians: Leontios, Anthimos, and Eutropios.



Holy Apostle & Evangelist Luke



The holy, glorious and all-laudable Apostle and Evangelist Luke is the author of the Gospel of Luke, the companion of the Apostle Paul (Phil 1:24, 2 Tim 4:10-11), and is numbered among the Seventy Apostles. He was a native of Syrian Antioch and a physician, and is the founder of iconography.

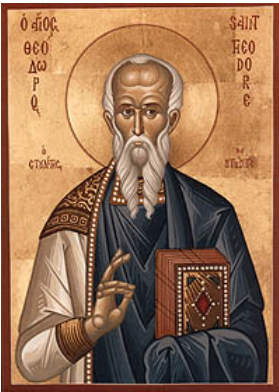
His emblem is the calf, the third symbolical beast mentioned by Ezekiel (1:10), which is a symbol of Christ's sacrificial and priestly office, as pointed out by St. Irenaeus.

His feast days are celebrated on October 18/31; on April 22/May 5 with Apostles Nathaniel and Clement; on June 20/July 3 on which day his relics, among others, were translated to the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople; and on January 4/17, the synaxis of the Seventy.



How to Pray

St Theodore the Studite's "Letter to the Nun Anna":



I thought that my blessed mother had died; but, it seems, she is still on earth. For what more could she have done than you in showing me a mother's care? But though I am a sinner, I trust in the Lord that he will repay you with no ordinary grace for what you have done for my unworthiness and grant you the attainment of what you long and ask for. But enough of what has been done. For I dealt with all that in my previous letter. But you, on the other hand, have increased rather than exhausted your generosity. And so how could we not now remember your piety. With clothes, a sacred offering, food and drink you have astounded us from every side. So now put an stop to your gifts, and be confident of your reward from God. For he was no liar who said that he rewards even a cup of cold water. [Cf. Matthew 10,42]

You say you are grieved by your concern for your child, which leaves you no leisure for the necessary care for the soul. But God is perfectly well able to look after the affairs of the good child and to let you have leisure in all things to occupy yourself with what is profitable for the soul, so as to dispose you with a ready heart for your departure from the body. You are not able, because of the sickly condition of your body, to fast and afflict yourself harshly. Bear this without grieving, bringing what you can to the Lord and filling up what you lack in ascetic practices by an abundance of humility.

You ask to be taught how you ought to pray. The Lord himself taught us this through the invocation 'Our Father', and that we should not ask for anything temporary, but for his kingdom and eternal justice. Moreover it has been ordained by the Fathers that first should come thanksgiving to God; next confession of our sins to him; and so a request for their forgiveness, and intercession for the other things that bring salvation.



So, when you are about to pray, give thanks to the Lord and Master that he brought you out of nothing into existence; that he redeemed you from every error, calling you and counting you worthy to become a partaker in the knowledge of himself, free from pagan, free from heretical error. Next that he prepared you for the monastic life, which equals that of the Angels, after the enjoyment of life in the world. The thought of all this is enough to soften the soul to compunction and the outpouring of tears. From all this comes enlightenment of heart, sweetness of spirit, desire for God. When this is present in the heart, there comes the rejection of every evil. When you have thus given thanks to God, confess to him like this, 'You know, Master, how many sins I have committed against you, and how many I commit each hour', as

you reckon up this sin and this offence and the ones committed in knowledge and in ignorance. But do not recall in any detail the ones that by being clearly remembered harm the soul. [Cf. The Ladder 28,58] And from this the grace of humility will dawn for you, with a broken heart [Cf. Psalm 50,18] and fear of God's recompense. After this, ask, groan, implore your Lord for forgiveness of these sins and strengthening for the future to please him, saying, 'My Lord, Lord, may I no longer anger you, may I no longer love anything but you, alone truly to be loved. And should I anger you again, falling down I implore your compassion, that I may be given strength from now on to please you.' And if anything else comes to your

mind that is good to be accomplished, ask for it fervently. And after this call upon the holy Mother of God to have mercy on you, the holy Angels, and the Angel you have as the guardian of your life, that he may watch over you and protect you, the Forerunner and the holy Apostles, all the Saints and those whom you usually call on especially, and the one whose memory is kept that day. These then are the things, it seems to me, which hold the power of prayer, even if each person doubtless prays with other words and not the same as these, because people who pray do not always say the same things themselves, but the power, as I reckon, is always the same. So may you be kept safe as you pray for what is necessary, and become better each day, and through a strict way of life present your entire self well-pleasing to the Lord.

I am especially struck by these lines: "You are not able, because of the sickly condition of your body, to fast and afflict yourself harshly. Bear this without grieving, bringing what you can to the Lord and filling up what you lack in ascetic practices by an abundance of humility."



“The Orthodox Christian Family”

On Marriage and Family Life

Excerpts from notes made by the Royal Martyr Empress Alexandra Fedorovna



Children and their upbringing

There is no stronger emotion than the one which grips us when we hold our children in our arms. Their helplessness touches the noble strings within our hearts. Their innocence represents a purifying force for us. When there is a newborn in the home, the marriage itself seems to be reborn. The child causes the married couple to become closer than ever before. Silent strings in the heart suddenly come alive. The young parents are faced with new goals, and new desires appear. Life immediately acquires a new and deeper meaning.

A sacred burden is placed in their hands, an immortal life which they must preserve, and this imbues the parents with a sense of responsibility, causes them to think deeply. “I” is no longer the center of the universe. They have a new purpose to attain, a purpose great enough to fill up their entire life.

Our children naturally bring along with them a multitude of cares and concerns, and for this reason there are people who look upon the appearance of children as a misfortune. But it is only cold egotists who can look upon children in such a manner.

It is a momentous thing to take upon oneself the responsibility for these tender young lives, which can enrich the world with beauty, joy, and power, but which can also easily perish; it is a momentous thing to nurture them, form their character, – this is what one should think about when establishing a home. It should be a home in which children will grow up to a sincere and noble life, grow up for God.

No treasures in the world can replace for man the loss of truly incomparable treasures – his own children. There are things which God gives often, and others that are given only once. The seasons of the year pass and return again, new flowers bloom, but youth never comes twice. Childhood and all its possibilities are given only once in a lifetime. Whatever you can do to adorn it, do it quickly.

Parents should be what they wish their children to be – not in words, but in deed. They should teach their children by the example of their own life. The greatest treasure that parents can leave their children is a happy childhood, with tender memories of father and mother. It will lighten the forthcoming days, it will preserve them from temptation, and it will help them face the harsh realities of life after they leave the parental roof.

May God help each mother understand the majesty and glory of her forth-coming endeavor, when she holds at her breast her infant, whom she must nurture and bring up. As far as children are concerned, the parents’ duty is to prepare them for life, for any trials that God may send them. While the parents are

alive, the child will always remain a child for them and should treat his parents with love and respect. The children's love for their parents is expressed in complete trust in them. A real mother finds importance in everything in which her child is interested. She listens just as willingly to his adventures, joys, disappointments, achievements, plans, and dreams as other people listen to a romantic narrative.



The holy Royal Family

Children should learn self-denial. They cannot have everything they want. They should learn to reject their own desires for the sake of other people. They should also learn to be solicitous. Careless people always cause harm and pain, perhaps not intentionally, but simply through negligence. Not much is needed to show concern – a word of encouragement, a little bit of tenderness when the other person seems sad, timely assistance to the one who is tired. Children should learn to be of use to their parents and to each other. They can do this without demanding excessive attention, without fussing others. As soon as they grow up a bit, children should learn to be self-reliant, to make do without the help of others, in order to become strong and

independent.

Parents are sometimes at fault for excessive anxiety or non-intelligent and constantly irritating counsels, but sons and daughters must agree that at the base of all this excessive fussing lies deep concern over them.

A noble life, a strong, honest, serious, and God-pleasing character – such is the parents' highest reward for all the exhausting years of selfless love. May children live in such a manner that parents in their old age can be proud of them. May children fill their declining years with tenderness and affection.

Over each one of us always soars our invisible Guardian Angel.

SONNET XLIII

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the end of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, – I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! – and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

(This famous sonnet by the English poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning describes extraordinarily well in verse form that same noble and beautiful love, of which the Empress-Martyr Alexandra speaks in her excerpts.)



Her wondrous Protection



In holy Byzantium the great Patriarch
Is praying in the church of Vlachernae.
Together with him prays wise Leo-monarch,
Entreating deliverance from the enemy.
There fool-for-Christ Andrew bows down to the floor

In front of the Most-pure One's icon,
His disciple Epiphanius stands at the door
In silent but ardent entreaty.
A heavenly flame suddenly lit up the church,
And a great miracle then took place there:
In sacred majesty, amid hosts of the cherubim,
The Mother of God appeared there.
The people so ardently praying in church
She covered with Her lightning veil...
"Do you see, do you see?" – cried out Andrew the blessed,

His weary eyes joyously shining.
In reply Epiphanius said: "Father, I do!
I see that the Most-holy Virgin
With Her wondrous Protection delivers us from evil,

From the enemy's terrible ire."
And abandoning camp, the vile Saracen
Fled from the walls of Byzantium:
The attack of the savage infidel hordes
Was foiled by an unseen barrier.
Now ever since Christ's immutable law
We received from the hands of Byzantium,
We, too, from that ancient immemorial time
All pray to the great Virgin Mary...



- Elder Nikolay Guryanov





ONLY THERE

Only there, beyond the heavens,
In the boundless azure heights
Peace and truth are brightly shining,
Joined in beauty's single light.
Only there, beyond the moonlight,
There exist no tears or grief,
Nor the agony of searching
For embodiments of dreams.
How rebellious, dark, and dismal
Is our hopeless, dreadful age,
Where contemporary mankind
Struggles, caught up in deceit,
Where life's meaning is forgotten,
Where the Lord is put aside,
Where malicious hate for others
O'erwhelms the human heart,
Where pursuit of wealth and riches
Leads along the world's wide course,
While Christ's persecuted adepts
Try to tread the narrow path.
Only there, beyond bright sunlight,
Shall we see the radiant Light,
And in seeking Truth eternal,
Only there reply we'll find.

*- Princess N.V. Ourousoff
Translated by Natalia Sheniloff*





On inner peace

(Precepts of Saint Seraphim of Sarov)

Inner peace is attained through affliction. The Scriptures say: We went through fire and through water, but Thou broughtest us out into a tranquil place (Psalm 66:12). Those who wish to please God must follow a path of many sorrows. How do we dare venerate the holy martyrs for the tortures they suffered for God's sake, when we ourselves cannot endure even a single spark?

Nothing promotes the attainment of inner peace as much as silence and a continuous discourse with oneself, and rarely with others. Nothing is more excellent than peace in Christ, as it entirely destroys the warfare of the evil spirits of the air and the earth. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against the evil spirits in high places (Eph. 6:12).

The mark of spiritual life is one's immersion into oneself and the hidden struggle within one's heart. The grace of God envelops such a person, and at first he remains in a state of peace, and then by means of it he transitions to an other-worldly state, i.e. he is at peace by being of good conscience, and he is in an other-worldly state when his mind contemplates the grace of the Holy Spirit within himself.



Do we not rejoice upon seeing the sun with our physical eyes? Even more joyous is the sight of the Sun of truth – Christ the Lord – in the mind's eye! In such a case we rejoice with the joy of angels. The Holy Fathers, being in a state of peace and enveloped by the grace of God, lived for a long time.

When a man attains a state of peace, he can radiate from himself the light of illumination of the mind unto others. This peace the Lord Jesus Christ left to His disciples before His death as some priceless treasure, saying: Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you (John 14:27). Thus we must focus all our thoughts, wishes and actions upon the attainment of the peace of God, and to always exclaim with the Church: O Lord our God, grant peace unto us (Isaiah 26:12).

On preserving inner peace

One must try hard to preserve this inner peace and not be offended by insults from others; to this end we shall restrain ourselves from anger and by means of attention shall guard our mind and heart from wavering unnecessarily.

Insults from others should be borne with complete indifference, and we should place ourselves in such a mood as though these insults have nothing to do with us whatsoever. Such an exercise can bring tranquility to our heart and make it the residence of God Himself.

We see an example of such meekness in the life of St. Gregory the Wonder-worker, from whom a certain fallen woman publicly demanded payment for the sin he had supposedly committed with her, while he, in

no way angered at her, humbly said to a friend of his: quickly give her the price she asks. As soon as the woman took the unlawful payment, she became possessed by a demon; the saint then exorcized the demon from her by prayer.

If it is impossible not to be upset, then we must at least curb our tongue, as King David says: I was agitated and spoke not.

In this case we can use the examples of St. Spyridon of Tremithon and St. Ephraim the Syrian. The first bore an insult in the following manner: as he once entered the palace at the behest of his king, one of the servants, believing St. Gregory to be a beggar, laughed at him, did not allow him to enter the palace, and even slapped his cheek. St. Spyridon, being of a mild nature, turned the other cheek to him in accordance with the words of the Lord.

St. Ephraim, while fasting in the desert, was once deprived of food in the following manner: his disciple, while carrying the food to him, unexpectedly broke the vessel along the way. Seeing his disciple greatly saddened, the saint said to him: “Do not sorrow, brother; if the food did not wish to come to us, we shall go to it.” And then the venerable saint went, sat down near the broken vessel, and picking up the food, proceeded to eat it. In this manner he showed himself to be totally without anger.

As far as anger management is concerned, we can learn from the life of St. Paisius Velichkovsky, who prayed to the Lord Jesus Christ to free him from wrath. The Lord said to him: “If you want to overcome anger and fury, do not wish for anything, do not hate anyone, do not humiliate anyone.”

To preserve inner peace, we must chase away dejection and sustain a joyous spirit. To preserve inner peace, we must completely avoid judging others. Inner peace is preserved through compassion towards others and through silence. A person who remains in such a state receives divine revelations.



To avoid judging others, we must pay attention to ourselves, we must refuse to hear bad things about others, and we must be indifferent to all that surrounds us.

To preserve inner peace, we must draw into ourselves more frequently, and ask ourselves: at what point am I? At the same time we should make sure to have our physical senses, especially sight, serve our inner man and not distract our soul with sensual objects, for gifts of grace are given only to those who labor internally and guard their souls.

On spiritual labors

We should never undertake spiritual labors beyond our means, but should make sure that our friend, i.e. our body, is faithful and capable of doing good. We should follow the middle road, without veering either right or left; we should give spiritual things to our spirit and bodily things to our body, whatever is needed for sustaining our temporal life. We must also not refuse our social life that which it lawfully demands from us, according to the Scriptures: Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's (Matt. 22:21).

We must be lenient towards our soul's frailties and imperfections, and we must bear our failings just as we bear the failings of others; however, we should never fall into idleness, but should constantly spur ourselves to do better.

Whether you overindulged in food or did something else that stems from human frailty, – do not add harm to injury, but bravely spurring yourself to correction, try to preserve your inner peace.

Our bodies, becoming exhausted from work and illness, should be moderately fortified by sleep, food and drink, irrespective of time. Immediately upon resurrecting the daughter of Jairus, our Lord Jesus Christ commanded that she be given food.

We must credit the Lord with all our successes and say together with the prophet: Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory (Psalm 113:9).

It is a great feat for man to keep himself chaste until the age of 35, i.e. the middle of his earthly life, and many are unable to remain virtuous during those years, but are deflected from the path of virtue into passion and desire; on the other hand, many others amassed numerous virtues in their youth, but being at mid-life and subjected to temptations from the evil spirits, are unable to withstand the torment and lose all their virtue. In order to avoid such transformations, we must place ourselves as though on a scale and watch ourselves attentively through-out our entire life.



New column: Elders

Elder Porphyrios



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

Young Evangelos was the fourth child of the family. As a boy he looked after sheep on the hills and had completed only the first class of primary school when, at the age of seven, he was obliged on account of his family's extreme poverty to go to the nearby town of Chalkida to work. He worked there in a shop for two or three years. Thereafter he went to Piraeus to work in a general store owned by a relative. At the age of twelve he left secretly to go to the Holy Mountain. His longing was to imitate Saint John the Hut-dweller whose life he had read and for whom he felt a special affinity. The grace of God led him to the hermitage of Saint George in Kavsokalyvia on the wooded slopes of the south-eastern extremity of Mount Athos where he lived in obedience to two elders, natural brothers, Panteleimon, who was a father confessor, and Ioannikios, who was a priest. He devoted himself with great love and in a spirit of utter obedience to the two elders who had a reputation for being exceptionally austere.

He became a monk at the age of fourteen and took the name of Niketas. Two years later he took his final monastic vows of the Great Schema. Shortly thereafter he was granted the gift of clear sight. At the age of nineteen he became very seriously ill and was obliged to leave the Holy Mountain. He returned to Evia where he went to live in the Monastery of Saint Charalambos at Levka. A year later, in 1926, and at the age of twenty, he was ordained priest at the Church of Saint Charalambos in Kymi by the Archbishop of

Sinai, Porphyrios III, who gave him the name Porphyrios. At the age of twenty-two he became a confessor and spiritual father. For a time he was parish priest in the village of Tsakei in Evia.

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

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

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

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

During the final years of his earthly life he began to prepare himself for his death. His desire was to return to the Holy Mountain and to his beloved Kavsokalyvia. So it was that he died in his hermitage in Kavsokalyvia on the morning of 2nd December 1991

.....
Elder Porphyrios – from the book “Wounded by Love”

“On the Upbringing of Children”

A child needs to be surrounded by people who pray and pray ardently.



Most advice and criticism does a great deal of harm. You do not need to say a lot to children. Words hammer at the ears, but prayer goes to the heart. Prayer is required, with faith and without anxiety, along with a good example.

One day a mother came here distraught about her son. He was very mixed-up. He stayed out late at night and the company he kept was far from good. Every day things were getting worse. The mother was overcome by anxiety and distress. I said to her: ‘Don’t say a word. Just pray.’

We agreed that between ten and ten fifteen every evening we would both pray. I told her to say not a word and to leave her son to stay out till whatever time he wanted, without asking him, ‘What sort of time is this to come home? Where were you?’, or any such thing. Instead she would say to him as lovingly as

possible, ‘Come and eat, there’s food in the fridge.’ Beyond this she was to say nothing. She would behave towards him with love and not stop praying.

With children what is required is a lot of prayer and few words

All things are achieved through prayer, silence and love. Have you understood the effects of prayer? Love in prayer, love in Christ. That is what is truly beneficial. As long as you love your children with human love –which is often pathological –the more they will be mixed-up, and the more their behavior will be negative. But when the love between you and towards your children is holy and Christian love, then you will have no problem. The sanctity of the parents saves the children. For this to come about, divine grace must act on the souls of the parents. No one can be sanctified on his own. The same divine grace will then illuminate warm and animate the souls of the children.

Pray, and when you have to, speak to your children with love. Lots of prayer and few words. If you are constantly lecturing them, you’ll become tiresome and they’ll feel a kind of oppression. Prefer prayer and speak to them through prayer. Speak to God and God will speak to their hearts. That is, you should not give guidance to your children with a voice that they hear with their ears. You may do this too, but above all you should speak to God about your children. Say, “Lord Jesus Christ, give Your light to my children. I entrust them to You. You gave them to me, but I am weak and unable to guide them, so, please, illuminate them”. And God will speak to them.

This is the most perfect way –for the mother to speak to God and for God to speak to the children. If you do not communicate in this way, constant lecturing becomes a kind of intimidation. And when the child grows up it begins to rebel, that is, to take revenge, on its father and mother who coerced it. One way is the perfect way – for the mother and father’s holiness and love in Christ to speak. The radiance of sanctity and not human effort makes for good children.



Love Is Before All Things

Spiritual struggle is frequently counter-intuitive – and is almost always learned from those who have walked its paths successfully before us. The following is a small passage from the teachings of the Elder Porphyrios. Its wisdom speaks for itself. If you would gain the victory in spiritual struggle, then above all things, seek to love.

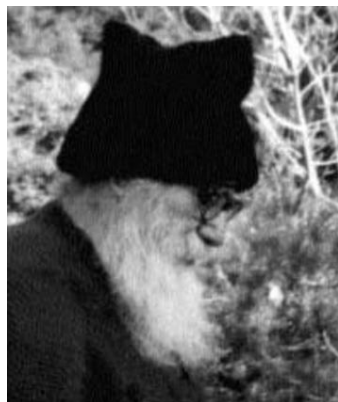
Forget about all your weaknesses so that the adverse spirit does not realize what is going on and grab you and pin you down and cause you grief. Make no effort to free yourself from these weaknesses. Make your struggle with calmness and simplicity, without contortion and anxiety. Don’t say, “I’ll force myself and I’ll pray to acquire love and become good.” It is not profitable to afflict yourself to become good. In this way your negative response will be worse. Everything should be done in a natural way, calmly and freely. Nor should you pray, “O God, free me from my anger, my sorrow, etc.” It is not good to pray about or think about the specific passion; something happens in our soul (when we do) and we become even more enmeshed in the passion. Attack your passion head on, and you’ll see how strongly it will entwine you and grip you and you won’t be able to do anything.

Don’t struggle directly with temptation, don’t pray for it to go away, don’t say, “Take it from me, O God!” Then you are acknowledging the strength of the temptation and it takes hold of you. Because, although you are saying “Take it from me, O God,” basically you are bringing it to mind and fomenting even more. Your desire to be free of the passion will, of course, be there, but it will exist in a hidden and

discreet way, without appearing outwardly. Remember what Scripture says, Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Let all your strength be turned to love for God, worship of God and adhesion to God. In this way your release from evil and from your weaknesses will happen in a mystical manner, without your being aware of it and without exertion.

This is the kind of effort I make. I have found that the bloodless mode is the best mode of sanctification. It is better, that is, to devote ourselves to love through the study of the hymns and psalms. This study and preoccupation directs the mind to Christ and refreshes my heart without my realizing it. At the same time, I pray, opening my arms in longing, love and joy, and the Lord takes me up into His love. That is our aim – to attain to that love.

From Wounded by Love: the Life and the Wisdom of the Elder Porphyrios



"This is the way we should see Christ. He is our friend, our brother; He is whatever is good and beautiful. He is everything. Yet, He is still a friend and He shouts it out, 'You're my friends, don't you understand that? We're brothers. I'm not...I don't hold hell in my hands. I am not threatening you. I love you. I want you to enjoy life together with me.'"

"Christ is Everything. He is joy, He is life, He is light. He is the true light who makes man joyful, makes him soar with happiness; makes him see everything, everybody; makes him feel for everyone, to want everyone with him, everyone with Christ."

"Love Christ and put nothing before His Love. Christ is Everything. He is the source of life, the ultimate desire, He is everything. Everything beautiful is in Christ."

"Somebody who is Christ's must love Christ, and when he loves Christ he is delivered from the Devil, from hell and from death."

Elder Porphyrios



MISCELLANEOUS

PARISH ANNOUNCEMENTS

ATTENTION!

On **November 1st, 2009**; we are going to have an **Extraordinary Meeting of All Parishioners & Members of St. Vladimir Church in Houston.**

The Meeting will be held **at the Church Hall at 1:00 P.M.**

ВНИМАНИЕ!

1- го ноября в 1:00 дня состоится Собрание всех членов и прихожан церкви "Св. Владимира" в церковном зале!



To All Parishioners:

Re: Extraordinary Meeting of All Parishioners of St. Vladimir Church in Houston, Texas

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Beloved Parishioners of St. Vladimir Russian Orthodox Church in Houston, Texas, with the blessing of our Rector, Reverend Father Lubomir and agreement of the Church Council we invite you to participate in the requested Extraordinary Meeting of All Parishioners which is scheduled for November 1, 2009, in the Church Hall at 1:00 P.M.

The topic we are going to inform, discuss and vote on is the idea of building a "Russian Spiritual & Cultural Center and the Center of Economical Development" in Houston, Texas under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Synod. The outcome of the meeting should give Father Lubomir a clear indication of the Parishes' wish that he pursue the idea with the appropriate Church personnel and prospective sponsors.

According to our Bylaws, in order to be eligible to vote, you have to become a dues paying member first. However, everybody who is a Parishioner has an equal chance to express his or her opinion during this meeting.

Please make sure that you mark your calendar, November 1, 2009 and arrange your personal time in such a way that will allow you to come and attend the meeting.

We look forward to seeing you then!

With Love in Christ,

Rev. Lubomir Kupec, Rector & Church Council

Всем прихожанам:

Черезвычайное собрание всех прихожан церкви Святого Владимира в городе Хьюстоне штата Техас.

Дорогие братья и сестры,

Возлюбленные прихожане русской православной церкви Святого Владимира в г. Хьюстоне штат Техас, по благословению настоятеля иерея Любомира и с согласия церковного комитета мы приглашаем Вас принять участие в чрезвычайном собрании, которое состоится 1 Ноября 2009 года в церковном доме в 13:00 часов.

На собрании будет обсуждаться и выноситься на голосование вопрос о строительстве «Русского православного духовного и культурного центра и центра экономического развития» в г. Хьюстоне, штат Техас, под покровительством Синода русской православной церкви. По результатам собрания иерей Любомир должен получить однозначное понимание позиции прихожан по этому вопросу и представить ее полномочным служителям церкви и будущим спонсорам.

В соответствии с церковным Уставом голосовать на собрании могут только уплатившие взносы прихожане. Однако, все члены прихода церкви Св. Владимира имеют право выразить свое мнение и участвовать в обсуждении.

Пожалуйста, не забудьте отметить в календаре 1 Ноября 2009, 13:00 и постарайтесь найти время чтобы прийти и участвовать в собрании.

До встречи!

С любовью во Христе,

Настоятель иерей Любомир и церковный комитет

.....

HOLY BAPTISM

Welcome to the Holy Orthodox Faith
through the Holy Mysteries of Baptism and Crismation *Sofia*,
daughter of Tatiana and Alexander Kolchinsky.



CHURCH WEDDING

Congratulations and Best Wishes to the newlyweds *Elena & Bryan Arenary*.
We wish them a long and happy life in the Holy State of Matrimony.

God grant you many years!



GIFT OF MINSK ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD!



Our Church has recently received as a gift a copy of this beautiful Minsk icon of the Mother of God.

"Minsk" Icon
13/26 August

This icon is very ancient; according to tradition it was written by the Evangelist Luke. At the end of the 10th century it was translated, together with other Greek (style) holy icons, by the Equal-of-the-Apostles Great Prince Vladimir from the Greek city of Korsun (Khersones) to Kiev. In Kiev it was installed in the church dedicated to the Nativity of the Mother of God, which was called "The Tithe" Church, since the Grand Duke granted one tenth of all his holdings to support it. The Icon remained in Kiev for over 500 years, and was glorified by many miracles. Around the year 1500, during the civil war between the Volga and Crimean Tatars, Kiev was looted. The church of "The Tithe" was also ransacked and an insolent Tatar pried the rich riza from the miracle-working icon, discarding the icon itself into the Dnieper River. It seemed that the ancient holy icon had been lost, but after a certain time the icon revealed itself in the Svislochi River, opposite the ancient castle of the Minsk princes. It came to be noticed because a pillar of light emanated from it, and reached into the heavens. The icon was placed in the castle's Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God. This happened on August 13 by the old calendar. Since then it was decided to celebrate the Icon on that day.

In 1616 the icon fell into the hands of Uniates, who took it from the Orthodox church of the Nativity of the Mother of God to the Uniate Monastery of the Holy Spirit. In 1839, a bishop's Cathedra was inaugurated in Minsk, with the Uniate Holy Spirit Cathedral being the main holy place.

The icon remained almost until the 1930s in this Cathedral, which was barbarically blown up in 1936. Not long before the destruction of the church, the icon was placed in the Museum of Regional Ethnography.

In 1941, after the Red Army had retreated, a pious Orthodox resident of Minsk managed to get the miracle-working image from the German Occupation authorities. The artist and iconographer, G. Wier, restored the icon and gave it to the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul on the Nemig (The Church of St. Catherine). After the closing of that church in 1945, the Icon of the Mother of God was moved to the Holy Spirit Cathedral in which it has been reverently kept to this day.

The Holy Icon of the Minsk Mother of God has lived through many evil times. People of many generations have venerated it. The Mother of God remembers all those who asked Her intercession in times of need and sorrow. The Lord saved Her miraculous icon "revealed on the waters of the Svislochi," for us sinners as well. Let us pray, dear brothers and sisters, to our Most Holy Lady Theotokos, that She strengthen us with Her prayerful intercession before the throne of the Most High.



SCENTED OIL FOR HOME LAMPS AND LAMPADAS SALE!

Please visit our Church kiosk. We now sell small bottles of lamp oil for your home prayer needs. This is the purest, cleanest and longest burning liquid candle fuel available. Fund goes directly for the Sisterhood account.

MANY THANKS!

The stairs to the choir loft and the room upstairs are now ready!
Thank you very much again to all involved!
Good job friends!



From the Editor:



There are many people who work and give their time and energy for the wellbeing of our Church and the parishioners to feel welcome there. There are people who when notice something is necessary for example for the Church school without more comments, just bring it next time when visit the Church. Or just provide a portable lamp with batteries for Fr. Lubomir to read better the names when prays on the evening Moliebens as is getting darker. There are people who bring to the students in Sunday school home-made sandwiches, or drinks and sweet treats. There are people who bring flowers in the Church and just leave them in front of the icons. People who for example bring a new chair for some of our not very young parishioners singing at the choir loft to rest from time to time. Who just water the lawn and flowers outside when is time for it. Without reminder. Who are ready always to stay longer, to help somehow, and to give a joy to the others with their work. People who are attentive, humble and who care.

These people, our brothers and sisters, parishioners of St. Vladimir Russian Orthodox Church are always there when is necessary. No matter of work, family and everyday challenges of the life. Sometimes we do not know their names, sometimes they do not want to be noticed. We only can see that someone has already done this. But God knows everything what they do what they think and how they care.

To these our brothers and sisters - our deepest bows with respect, gratitude and love. God bless you!

Thank you to everyone who gives, works and prays for the upkeep of our church.

May the Lord reward you for your care of His holy house and of His people here in Houston, Texas!

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR EVERYTHING!



Posted by the Senior-Sister Ekaterina.

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

