



by Saint Ambrose of Optina

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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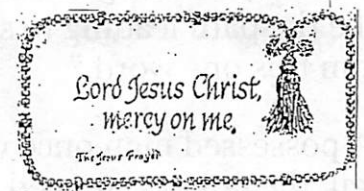
**Hieromartyr Hierotheos,
Bishop of Athens (1st C)**

St. Paul the Simple & St. Ammon of Egypt,

disciples of St. Anthony the Great (350)

St. Gurius, Archbishop of Kazan (1563)

St. Barsanuphius, Bishop of Tver (1576)



✠ *Many Years! Newly Illumined Child Helen Morrow!*

➤ **Iconography Scaffolding goes up tomorrow!**

➤ **New Parish Council: Jonathan Boyer, Ignatius Burton, James Gordon, Columba Spence, Helen Ritchey, Mary Potts, & Andrew Wells**

On Christian Hope

✠ "The misfortunes of Christians arise from their not having Christian hope. A man feels the oppression of sin in his heart the weariness and anguish of sin: if he has not Christian hope in his heart, what does he do? He has recourse to artificial means to drive away the oppression and weariness, to culpable distractions, and not to Christ, Whose 'yoke is easy' for our heart and Whose 'burden is light' (Mt. 11:30), not to prayer, not to repentance for his sins, not to the Word of God, which 'is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, comfort' (II Tim. 3:16; Rom. 15:4). So it happens in most cases. Hence the necessity for worldly people to have theaters and a multitude of other amusements. Some have recourse to suicide. The experience of obtaining that which we pray for greatly strengthens Christian hope in our heart. And he who is attentive to himself will easily observe this experience."
~ **St. John of Kronstadt (*My Life in Christ*)**

✠ Kindheartedness (mercifulness) does not judge anyone, loves enemies, lays down its soul for others, and makes a person like unto God. This stage is again blessedness (Matt. 5:7). The heart which is embraced by mercy cannot have any thoughts of evil; all its thoughts are of goodness. Such a heart, in which only good stirs, is a pure heart, capable of Divine vision. Blessed are the **pure in heart**: for they shall see God (Matt. 5:8). They asked one of the great teachers of monasticism, "What does a pure heart mean?" He replied: "A heart which, like the Divinity, is moved by a measureless feeling of mercy towards all that is created" (Ven. Isaac the Syrian).

~ **St. Ignatius Brianchaninov**

COUNSELS FOR LIFE FROM THE FATHERS...

Nothing is more ruinous than talkativeness and more harmful than an uncontrolled tongue; and nothing is more destructive and disorganizing to the treasure of the soul. For whatever we succeed in building in ourselves every day is destroyed by much talking, and what we collect together with great labor our soul dissipates again through this disease of the tongue. What can be worse than this (uncontrolled tongue)? It is an irresistible evil. It is imperative to put a limit to it, to curb and restrain it and, I should say, to force it to serve only what is needful. Who can express all the harm to the soul which arises from an uncontrolled tongue?

- **Saint Philotheos of Sinai**

Teachings from Elder Ephraim:

That we must guard what we say, for we can cause others to commit grave sins with just a few words

“... We must pay close attention to our tongue (to know when we must speak and what we should say), because we are not spiritual people and we continually err. *‘It is better to fall from a height than from the tongue’* [Wisdom of Sirach 20:18]. A person is better off falling from a great height and breaking his head and his legs, which are body parts that can be healed, than falling from the tongue, which commits grave mistakes and which is capable - with a single word - to lead another person even to suicide. When we criticize and ridicule someone, we can push him to despair. Additionally, with a single word from us, he can take the path leading to sin. We often argue: *‘That’s all I said ...’* Yet, look at what resulted from this one word.”

“A possessed man once visited the Monastery of Simonopetra [on Mt Athos]. After the vigil, the fathers stepped out for a short break onto the deck, and he was there as well. In order to lay blame on a virtuous ascetic from Katounakia, the devil succeeded in doing the following. The possessed person approached the monk and said: *‘My thoughts are telling me to jump off the balcony.’* The monk took this as a joke and responded: *‘Why don’t you go ahead and jump then?’* That’s all it took! The possessed person leaped off the balcony and killed himself! The monk assumed that he was joking, when - in fact - he was speaking seriously. Thereafter, the monk’s conscience bothered him for years on end. The devil would have killed him one way or another, but he tricked the monk in order to torment him for the rest of his life. See how a single word alone caused him such anguish!”

“Something similar takes place with women who are contemplating abortion. Such women frequently seek advice from a friend: *‘What should I do?’* Their friend replies: *‘Why do you want to keep it? You already have many children. Why don’t you have an abortion?’* This gentle push was all she needed. She had already made up her mind halfway; the other lady added the remaining half with her advice, and so the pregnant woman proceeds to abort the child and to commit murder. Unquestionably, the other woman is responsible for half the murder as well!”

“Similarly, certain mothers, with no mind, give the following advice to their daughters if - by chance - they make a mistake: *‘We will be humiliated. Go ahead and get rid of it.’* The young girl then proceeds to kill the baby. Who is responsible for this sin? The mother who gave such advice! Do you see what type of harm one word can cause? This is why it is necessary to pay extreme attention to everything we say. How much does the devil try to destroy us!”

St. Seraphim of Sarov (Little Russian Philokalia Vol. 1):

✠ "When someone receives something Divine, in his heart he rejoices; but when he receives something diabolic, he is disturbed. The Christian heart, when it has received something Divine, does not demand anything else in order to convince it that this is precisely from the Lord; but by that very effect it is convinced that this is heavenly, for it senses within itself spiritual fruits: love, joy, peace, and the rest (cf. Gal. 5:22)."

We should always be turning the Name of Jesus Christ round the spaces of our heart, as lightning circles round the skies before rain. This is well known by those who have spiritual experience in inner warfare. Let us conduct this mental war in the following order. The first thing is attention; then, when we notice a wicked thought draw near, let us wrathfully hurl a heartfelt curse at it. The third thing is to turn the heart to the invocation of Jesus Christ and pray Him to disperse forthwith this phantom of the demons, lest the mind run after this fantasy like a child attracted by a skilful juggler...

Let us compel ourselves to call: "Lord Jesus Christ!" Let our throat be exhausted (lose its voice), but may our inner eyes never cease to look on high, waiting like David in hope for our Lord God (Ps. lxxix. 3)....

If we always remember the parable of the unjust judge which our Lord gave for our instruction, showing that we must always pray and not give way to despair (and act accordingly), we shall reap benefit and be avenged...

- Saint Hesychios of Jerusalem (+432)

If there should come a suggestion of the enemy in the form of some passion or through evil thoughts, he who practices the Jesus Prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me) calls by it to Christ against such ruses, and the devil with his suggestions withers. If, through his weakness, he falls by a thought or a word, by anger or by the concupiscence of the flesh, then he supplicates Christ, confessing his fault with repentance. If he becomes the prey of despondency which oppresses his spirit and heart, then he cleaves to the thought of death, of gehenna, of God Who is present near him; and after occupying himself for some time with these thoughts, he invokes Christ. After which, having obtained peace in the struggle, he prays anew to Christ so that He may grant him mercy for his voluntary and involuntary sins. With simplicity, both in the hour of battle and when the soul is at peace, he hastens upward towards Christ, and Christ becomes all to him in everything that happens to him, whether it be good or evil.

- Elder Basil of Poiana Marului (+1767)

More than a well-lighted window, a man must seek after the company of holy men, so that he can see his heart, as if reading a clearly written book, and thus come to perceive the idleness in his way of life by contrast with their lives. For many are the traits of virtuous men, which bear witness to the purity of their souls- such as the subtle look that a godly way of life imprints on the face, the style of dress, the simplicity of character, humility in speech, the absence of an inquisitive tone in their words, the prudence of their expressions, the piety of their manner; all these things benefit greatly those who attend to them and engrave on their souls the immutable archtypes of virtue.

- Abba Palladios

Abba Tithoes said: "To withdraw to a remote place is for a man to close his mouth regardless of where he is."

+ + +

Abba Poimen said that someone once asked Abba Paisios: "What should I do, since my soul is insensitive and does not fear God?" Abba Paisios answered him: "Go and cleave unto a man who fears God; by your association with him, you will also learn from him to fear God."

BE CAREFUL NOT TO DESPAIR...

...As a spiritual father I advise you, whenever you sin, to be careful not to despair but to run to the spiritual doctor to confess and seek a cure: the mercy of God. The Lord came into the world to save not the righteous, those who are healthy in soul, but the sinners, those who are ill. He will receive these with great love and mercy as He received the prodigal son, the prostitute, the thief, the publican, and millions of sinners who were saved by repentance and confession. I leave you this paternal counsel: never, never despair whenever you sin, but have confidence and hope in the immeasurable mercy of God. Repent and confess, and you will be saved. The grace, peace, mercy and blessing of God, the protection and aid of the Panagia and of all the Saints, and my blessing be with you.

- from a letter of Blessed Elder
Philotheos Zervakos (+1980).
to one of his spiritual children.

FROM VARIOUS POEMS OF IOAN ALEXANDRU (A Contemporary Romanian Orthodox Poet)

Love is...
The only dogma beyond dispute for anyone,
No one can gainsay it,
And which for twenty centuries has imprisoned
The wound of Jesus in my flesh...

That which the spirit cannot conceive
By love alone I can glimpse...

Thanks to the vision, at last face to face,
The day will come when I may worship Thee,
When I may embrace in my arms of ice
Him Who with His fire devours us...

In the universe it can never be
that a people without love can take root...

...my people could never know how to live
Deprived of Saints and bones...

NOTHING IS FEARFUL TO HIM WHO RELIES ON GOD

A sermon of by Saint John Maximovitch, Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco, to his Orthodox flock in Shanghai, 1937.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. (Pss 138:7-10)

† † †



These divinely inspired words of David the Psalmist should be particularly kept in mind today when the entire world is wavering, as it were, and the news about all kinds of tribulations, perils and disasters are brought to us daily.

No sooner does one's attention stop to consider what is happening in one country, than it is deflected by even more severe events which have unexpectedly flared up

in another place; before one has time to grasp them, still new events draw one's attention to a third place making one forget the two former ongoing disasters.

Useless are the conferences where the representatives of different countries try to find the cure for common disasters. They keep reassuring themselves and the others, saying: *Peace, peace! when there is no peace.* (Jer 8:11).

Calamities show no sign of stopping in the countries where they are raging, but they suddenly strike in places where it was considered to be safe. Those who escape from some perils run into others, which are often even worse. *It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.* (Amos 5:19); or, as another prophet said: *And it shall be that he who flees from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit, and he who comes up from the midst of the pit shall be caught in the snare; for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth are shaken.* (Isa 24:18).

Similar things happen in our days. Those setting out to work at peace suddenly become the victims of military actions, which arose where they were least expected. Those escaping from the dangers of war suffer from natural disasters of earthquakes or hurricanes.

Many find their death where they hoped to be safe from it. Others, however, are prepared to better expose their life

to danger, than to languish in the places considered to be safe, in anticipation of some other calamities which might strike there. It seems there is no place on the earth which could be regarded a peaceful refuge from the world disasters. People are faced with political, economic and social woes. *In perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils amongst false brethren,* said Apostle Paul (2 Cor 11:26).

To these perils, today we should add the particularly terrible "perils in the air."

When the Preeminent Apostle himself was exposed to all the perils named by him, he had a great consolation. He knew that he was suffering for Christ, and that Christ would reward him for his endurance: *For I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day.* (2 Tim 1:12). He knew that the Lord, if need be, will give him strength to endure even greater perils, and bravely said: *I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me.* (Phil 4:13).

Our present day disasters are terrible for us because they befall us not as a result of the strength of our faith but because we do not endure them for Christ. Hence we do not set our hopes on being crowned for them.

We are made helpless in the struggle with adversities because we are not strengthened by the power of Christ, and rely not on God, but on human power and means. We forget the words of holy Scripture: *Trust ye not in princes, in the sons of men, in whom there is no salvation ... Blessed is he of whom the God of Jacob is his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.* (Pss 145:3, 5), and: *Except the Lord build the house, in vain do they labour that build it.* (Pss 126:1).

We try to find a firm foundation apart from God, and the prophet's words come to pass: *Therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach ready to fall, a bulge in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant.* (Isa 30:13). Woe to those who lean on such walls! Just as the falling wall crushes those who are leaning on it, so are perishing, along with their false hopes, those who relied on them. Those hopes turn out to be a *staff of reed.* (Ezek 29:6).

Things are different with those who seek God's help. *Our God is refuge and strength, a helper in afflictions which mightily befall us. Therefore shall we not fear when the earth be shaken, nor when the mountains be removed into the heart of the sea.* (Pss 45:1-2).

He who relies on God fears nothing. He will not fear an evil man. *The Lord is my light and my Saviour; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?* (Pss 26:1). He is not afraid of the horrors of war. *Though a host should array itself against me, my heart shall not be afraid; though war should rise up against me, in this have I hoped.* (Pss 26:3). He is calm when living at home. *He that*

dwelleth in the help of the Most High shall abide in the shelter of the God of Heaven. (Pss 90:1). He is ready to travel by sea. *In the sea are Thy byways, and Thy paths in many waters.* (Pss 76: 19). Daringly, as if on wings, he will fly through the air into distant lands, saying: *Even there shall Thy hand guide me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.* (Pss 138:9). He will *not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the thing that walketh in darkness, nor for the mishap and demon of noonday.* (Pss 90:5-6).

He is not afraid of death, *for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* (Phil. 1:21). *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God"* (Rom 8:35-39).

The Lord says: *Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am."* (Isa 58:6-9).

O Lord, teach me to do Thy will and hear me on the day when we will call on Thee! Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us according as we have hoped in Thee.

Amen.



DIFFICULTIES IN CHILDBEARING

Translation by Fr. Luke Hartung from the book: "Family Life" by Elder Paisios the Athonite, published by the Sacred Hesybastirion of St. John the Evangelist, Souroti, Greece.

—Geronda, if a woman is not Orthodox, and if she is not able to conceive a child, is it alright for her to wear the belt we have blessed on the holy relics of St. Arsenios? ^[1]

—Does she believe in the power of the Saint or does she think that it will help in some magical way? If she believes in the Saint, it's alright for her to wear it.

For some women who aren't able to conceive children, the spiritual laws are at work, because they didn't start families when they should have. They become very picky, "No, he has this problem and the other guy has these problems." So, they make a promise to someone; but then they see someone

else, so later they say "no" to the one to whom they had originally made a promise—and he, instead of seeing it as a blessing that she left him, goes and commits suicide. What kind of family is a woman like this going to make? Other women aren't able to have children because in their younger years they lived a wild life. Then others are troubled by their diet. Many foods contain lots of drugs and hormones.

There are also couples who, as soon as they marry, immediately want to conceive a child; and if they are held up a little they begin to be tormented. But how are they going to have a child while they are full of grief and stress? If they get rid of the grief and stress, and get their lives in order spiritually, then they'll have a child.

Sometimes God is intentionally slow in giving a child to a couple. Look at Saints Joachim and Anna, the holy ancestors, and the Prophet Zacharias and Saint Elizabeth. In their old age they were given a child, in both cases in order to fulfill God's pre-eternal plan for the salvation of all mankind.

Couples should always be ready to accept the will of God in their lives. Whoever entrusts himself to God, He will not abandon. We do so little, yet look at how much God does for us! With such love and open-handedness He gives us everything! Is there anything that God is not able to do? One couple had five children; but when their children grew up, they all moved away and settled elsewhere, leaving their parents all alone. So they decided to have one more child, to have with them in their old age. And even though the woman was at an age when it was humanly impossible to conceive, they had great faith in God and brought forth a son. So they had their youngest son, whom they had raised and cared for, with them in their old age.

The matter of childbearing is not dependant only upon man, but upon God as well. When God sees humility in a couple who has difficulty conceiving children, He won't just give them one child. He is able to give them a large family. However, when He sees stubbornness and egoism, if He grants them their request, He will give in to their stubbornness and egoism. They must entirely give themselves over to God saying, "My God, You know what is best for me; *Thy will be done.* (Mt 6:10)." Then, that for which they ask will be done. Because when we say *Thy will be done*, and dedicate ourselves in faith to God, then the will of God happens. But we on the one hand say *Thy will be done*, and on the other hand persist in wanting our own will. What can God do then?

† † †

[1] As referred to in his life, in cases of infertility Saint Arsenios would bless a little rope and give it to women to wear so as to be released from infertility. Elder Paisios told us in similar situations to bless a little ribbon upon the holy relics of St. Arsenios and give it to such women to wear.

This and That

We're closer to the situation of the early Church than we are to the glory of Byzantium or even the new-found zeal of Russia or Georgia or Serbia. Nevertheless, in the time of the early Christians, pagans had never been told that God loves them....I was reading Constantine Cavarnos' excellent little book, *Ecumenism Examined*. Somewhere along the way he mentioned that soul-sickness entails the decay of our ability to discern good from bad, right from wrong, beauty from ugliness, truth from falsehood. Discernment and discrimination are fundamental to the Christian life. And if we truly believe the Church to be a hospital, we must not only admit that we are sick, but that our care be entrusted to those trained in the medical arts; that there is a course of treatment, and a criteria for being healed.

- A priest of the Church

“For millions of people drugs now have the role, previously played by religion and high culture, of assuaging doubts and questions about the human condition, life, death, the beyond, the sense or senselessness of existence.”

- Mario Vargas Llosa

If your only goal is ensuring that support for traditional marriage diminishes as rapidly as possible, applying constant pressure to religious individuals and institutions will probably do the job. .. The conjugal, male-female view of marriage is too theologically rooted to disappear, but its remaining adherents can be marginalized, set against one other, and encouraged to conform. – Ross Douthat

The lines are drawn and there is no convincing those who see nothing but moralistic judgement, but rather judgmentalism from those who defend real marriage. ...A faithful, loving Christian marriage is a powerful witness. That is precisely what the homosexual activists wish to destroy. Since marriage is an icon of the Church the destruction of marriage is also an attack on the Church. So a proper proclamation of marriage which includes our people modeling and embodying it is crucial. It is also a direct affront to the arrogant state. – Michael Baumann

When the Church overlooks moral abuses, the world castigates it for failing in its duty. But when the Church defends morality, it is labeled anachronistic and oppressive. If faithful Christians are to be damned by the world either way, it should be for defending morality, since that is pleasing in God's eyes.

- Bill Congdon

Nothing has shaken me more ... than the utter indifference or even hostility to the achievements of the past and the need to preserve and pay them honor of many educated young people in Britain and France. Nor is this indifference or hostility spontaneous; rather, it has been programmed into them by indoctrination that the past is nothing but the slave trade and the oppression of women. Moreover, their visual education has been crude, as a visit to any modern toy shop or modern municipal playground will confirm. Aesthetically illiterate and ideologically convinced that the past was nothing but a moral mistake that they will correct, it is little wonder they do not care for the fabric of the past or worry much about its disappearance.

- Theodore Dalrymple

One of the greatest tragedies of this Post-Modern Age is the utter rejection of the value of human life as being made in the image and likeness of our God. In a world obsessed with meaninglessness and “science” as the end all be all, how can we, who think ourselves the result of mutated pond scum, as Evolution Theory holds us to be, understand our true place and worth in the communion of the Saints?

- Nicholas Griswold

On Orthodox Evangelism

Fr. David Moser (Idaho)

“The first and most important thing to remember is that we do not bring anyone into the Church – its not our job. We do not attract people to the faith, we do not convince people of the Truth, we don’t do any of that. God is the One Who attracts people, Who brings them in the door, Who convicts their hearts, Who brings them to repentance, Who convinces them of the Truth! We do none of this. Too often, the individual person is made responsible for doing God’s task; but in attempting to do God’s work, he neglects his own!”

“What is our task? Our task is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, our task is the working out of our salvation, our task is to repent and weep for our sins, our task is to enter the Kingdom of God. This more than anything else is what we must do. This is an evangelistic task – indeed the primary evangelistic task. There are other *tasks*, however, which derive from this one, which are a bit more specific to *evangelism*. It is God who brings people to the door of the Church and who convinces them that they should enter – however, we must keep the door to the Church open and visible! Hence, Orthodox evangelism must center on the Church – the beauty of the building, the beauty of the services, the frequency and availability of the services. Orthodox evangelism is served by beautiful icons, gold onion domes and crosses rising against the sky, the smell of incense, the pious and holy singing of the services.

“Orthodox evangelism is served by our visibility as Orthodox Christians in the world: the clothing of the clergy (and in these days the modest and humble clothing of the laymen as well); the sign of the cross as we pray at each juncture of our lives – beginning and ending a task, eating and finishing a meal, starting and ending a trip, etc. Orthodox evangelism is the keeping of icons in our homes, in our offices, in our cars. Orthodox evangelism is keeping the fast without excuses or compromises. Orthodox evangelism is setting our priorities to forgo the allures of the world in order to be at divine services whenever they are held. Orthodox evangelism is denying ourselves and bearing our cross. Orthodox evangelism is keeping the door of the Church open and visible. While the Holy Spirit is the one who draws the world to Himself, it is you and I who keep the doors of the Church open and who welcome all who come.”

“The second specific task that we as Orthodox Christians have in evangelism is the practical expression of God’s love to mankind. Orthodox evangelism is greeting visitors as they come to the Church and then modeling (neither instructing nor condemning the visitor) for them proper behavior and demeanor in the Church. Orthodox evangelism is hospitality offered to share meals, to provide shelter and clothing as needed. Orthodox evangelism is to pray for our neighbor and to love our neighbor as ourself. Orthodox evangelism is going to the soup kitchen and serving there – Orthodox evangelism is giving to the poor without regard for ‘*how the money will be used*’. Orthodox evangelism is visiting the sick in hospitals and praying for them. Orthodox evangelism is going to the prisons and offering comfort and kindness to the imprisoned. Orthodox evangelism is loving your enemies... If we all did these things, then our Churches would be open and filled with light and glory – drawing all who see Her by the grace and action of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. We don’t have to preach on street corners, we don’t have to have ‘*events*’ or revivals or seminars as evangelistic tools. We simply have to be Orthodox Christians - ‘*to the max*’ - without reservation or compromise. That is Orthodox evangelism!”

St. John Chrysostom:

“God does not force anyone, and if He desires and we do not want it, then our salvation is impossible, not because His desire is powerless, but because He does not force one who does not want it.”