



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

April 2, 2017

St. Mary of Egypt

St. Titus the Wonderworker (9th C)

Sixth Week of Great Lent



Lazarus,
Come forth!

- ✘ Wed. Apr. 5 ~ 6:30pm – Presanctified Liturgy
- ✘ Fri. Apr. 7 ~ 6:30pm - Presanctified Liturgy
- *Many Years! Newly Illumined Child Lydia Cole!*

Holy Week 2017 Schedule

- ✘ Saturday, April 8 10:00am ~ Lazarus Saturday Divine Liturgy
- Parish Workday following Divine Liturgy & Lunch



Sat. April 8, 6:00pm: **Palm Sunday Vespers w/ Blessing of Palms**

- ✘ Sun. April 9 **Palm Sunday Matins & Divine Liturgy**

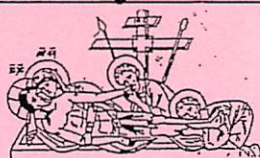
- ✘ Palm Sunday Evening - 5:00pm ~ First Bridegroom Matins
- ✘ April 10/11 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins
- ✘ April 12 - Holy Wednesday 6:30pm Holy Unction
- ✘ April 13 - Holy Thursday 10:00am Mystical Supper Liturgy
- 6:30pm 12 Passion Gospels



- ✘ **Holy Friday Services** ✘ April 14 - 10:00am Royal Hours

- 4:00pm Vespers – Shroud to the Tomb
- 7:00pm - Lamentations at the Tomb

✦ *Youth All Night Vigil at the Tomb* ✦



- ✘ Holy Saturday ~ April 15 ~ 10:00am Divine Liturgy
- ✘ The Blessed Sabbath ✘

- ✘ **Holy PASCHA** ✘ Begins Saturday, April 15 at 11:30pm

According to Our Free Will ~ St. Athanasius the Great (373)

✘ Let us, therefore, in the faith of the disciples, hold frequent converse with our Master. For the world is like the sea to us, my brethren, of which it is written, 'This is the great and wide sea, there go the ships; the Leviathan, which Thou hast created to play therein. ' We float on this sea, as with the wind, through our own free-will, for every one directs his course according to his will, and either, under the piloting of the Word, he enters into rest, or, laid hold on by pleasure, he suffers shipwreck, and is in peril by storm. (*Letters 19.7*)

St. John Cassian writes of the struggle with the spirit of lust:

“Struggle with the spirit of lust is a bitter struggle; longer than other struggles; a daily struggle victoriously accomplished completely only by a small number of people. This struggle begins with the first mature growth and does not cease until all other passions are defeated. In this struggle, a two-fold weapon is necessary. For the achievement of this perfect and pure chastity bodily fasting alone is not sufficient (although fasting, before everything else is necessary): along with this, meekness of the spirit and unremitting prayer is necessary against this most impure spirit [lust].”

“After that, continual study of Holy Scripture together with prudent mental exercises and after that physical labor and handiworks, all of which keeps the heart from lusting and restores it to itself and, above all, profound and true humility without which victory over any passion can never be achieved. Victory over this passion [lust] is conditioned with the perfect purification of the heart from which, according to the words of the Lord, flows the poison of this sickness [lust]. “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (St. Matthew 15:19). One must have stable humility and patience in the heart as well as careful protection of oneself from anger and other passions during the course of the day. For in as much as the fire of anger enters in us, afterward so much easier, does the ember of passions penetrate us. It is interesting that even many other great spiritual fathers bring into causal tie the passion of anger and the passion of lustful desire from which follows, that the most angry ones are the most lustful ones.”

On Sin ~ Fr. Stephen Freeman

...Sin as “impurity” has a content that is more than external – it’s not simply a juridical problem. Say you have two men. They are twins. One robs a bank, the other gives to the poor. One is impure and the other is righteous. But if we examine them, how do they differ from one another. In a juridical analysis, we might say that one is guilty, the other innocent. But St. Athanasius describes sin as a process of corruption, of decay, at work in us – dragging us toward non-being. Though these two men may not differ in an outward way, they do differ on the level of their existence (in the imagery of St. Athanasius). One has a process of corruption at work in him, he is moving toward non-being. The other has the process of life at work in him, he is moving toward true being (eternal life).

When we say sin is an “impurity” – it really is. Not just a juridical problem, but a true stain, a darkness of non-existence dragging us toward that non-being (this again is the imagery of St. Athanasius).

These images are not opposed. But I think the juridical language needs to be understood in more concrete terms (as St. Athanasius does) and not interpreted as merely describing a legal status. Just as St. Justin describes the virtues as “grace-filled energies,” so lawlessness is the absence of grace-filled energies. Without the grace-filled energies of God, we move towards non-existence. God alone sustains us in being. To break communion with God, to become lawless, is to live apart from Him.

REFLECTION from St. Nikolai of Serbia

✠ An artist is one who, from crude and shapeless stone, carves and shapes forms similar to living creatures. An artist is one who weaves a multi-colored blanket from the wool of sheep. An artist is one who builds a magnificent palace out of earthly bricks. But **what kind of artist on earth can be compared to Christ the Artist**, who from illiterate men creates wise men, who from fishermen creates apostles, who from cowards creates heroes, who from the immoral creates Saints? But all must be given over to the hand of the artist, in order to be fashioned into that which the artist knows and is capable of doing. All things, in truth, must be given over to the hand of the artist. Even men must give themselves over to the hand of Christ, in order for Him to carve, to weave or to build that which only He knows and is capable of. Nineteen past centuries witness to us, that all of them who did not protest [against Him] but rather gave themselves over to Christ the Artist and from the boorish and the ignorant became angel-seeing children of God.

St. Mary of Egypt: Light of Repentance

OF ALL THE BRILLIANT LIGHTS OF REPENTANCE, there is no example so dramatically pure and cleansing as Saint Mary of Egypt. Through holy repentance, she, a most sinful harlot, became a woman and servant of the Lord, most pure.

At an early age, she began the life of a debauchery, making herself a slave to her lustful desires. After many years spent serving the devil, she saw a crowd preparing for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (This is in the 5th century when the original Cross was still in possession by the Church in its entirety. Now there are fragments here and there.). Seeing an opportunity to continue her wicked life she entered the pilgrimage boat and journeyed to the Holy City. On the day of the Feast, three times she tried to enter the Church, but was held back by a mighty force each time. Exhausted, she realized then that her unclean life prevented her from entering the Holy Church. With tears from a heart newly opened, she turned to the Icon of the Mother of God on the porch of the Church, lamenting over her sins. And the merciful Theotokos allowed her to enter the Church to see and venerate the Life-giving Cross and then the Pure Virgin guided her to the desert to begin a life of profound repentance.

With great joy, St. Mary hastened into the Jordan desert with three loaves of bread. There she prayed, fasted, and struggled with the passions which tormented her for seventeen years. After many years the monk Father Zosimas found her emaciated by fasting and darkened by the sun. Saint Mary told him that she had been laboring in the desert for forty-seven years. Being led by the hand of the Mother of God, she told him how the loaves of bread lasted but a few years, from then on, she lived only by trusting in God. When passionate thoughts would assail her, she would throw herself down upon the hot desert earth weeping over the memories of her sinful life. There she would lie until a sweet light from Heaven fell upon her humble, suffering soul.

Amazed at the purity of her life, the greatness of her asceticism, and the grace of her words, Father Zosimas fell upon the ground before her. Many wonderful and beautiful miracles followed until her blessed repose; and in these things, the world is shown by her the beautiful and holy life open to all who desire to repent. While there is still time, let us all repent with this harlot made holy, so that we may become as she was when she went to her Lord, and not as she was when she served the devil.

Through the prayers of our Holy Mother Mary, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us!

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FOR CONSIDERATION – The Sufferings of the Holy Ones

Why is so much said and written about the sufferings of holy men and women? Because these Saints are counted as victors — and how can there be victory without struggle, pain and suffering? In ordinary, earthly warfare no man is reckoned as victorious and heroic who has never been in battle, who has not endured and suffered to a very considerable extent. All the more is this so in spiritual warfare, where the truth is clear and where self-assertion is not only of no use but is a real hindrance. He who knows no struggle for the sake of Christ, either with the world or with the devil or with his own self - how can he be counted among Christ's soldiers? How, indeed, among Christ's fellow victors?

Saint Mary of Egypt spoke of this gigantic struggle to the Elder Zosimas: "For the first seventeen years in this wilderness, I struggled with my mindless passions as with fierce beasts. I wanted to eat meat and fish, which I had eaten abundantly in Egypt. I wanted to drink wine, and did not even have water here. I wanted to hear lustful songs. And I wept and smote my breast. I prayed to the pure Mother of God to remove these thoughts from me. When I had wept enough and done enough smiting of my breast, I then saw a light that flooded over me from all sides, and was filled with a wonderful peace."

A Miracle of St. Xenia

About fifteen years ago, I heard this story about an event that took place in Northern California—an unusual story, about a miracle of St. Xenia of Petersburg. Nun Nina, now Abbess Nina of St. Nilus Skete in Alaska, had heard it from Fr. John Hardenbrook, who at the time was the rector of a church in Santa Cruz County. I wrote it down immediately, but unfortunately the notebook I wrote it in is located somewhere far away from me now, and I am writing it again from memory—so that people might know that Blessed Xenia the fool-for-Christ of St. Petersburg helps people everywhere, even people who previously knew nothing about her. She helps not only those who have prayed to her, but even those who will pray to her.

This priest, Fr. John, served in a parish that consisted of former Evangelical Christians who had embraced Orthodox Christianity. There was a time when their flourishing community was not Orthodox, and all kinds of people came to them to hear their Christian message. One day, a young man rode up to the church on his Harley Davidson. His appearance betrayed the life of a prodigal, but he was sincerely interested in hearing about Jesus. A relationship formed with the Fr John, now an Orthodox priest (who told this story), and the young man began to gradually change his ways. He had given up one vice after another when the pastor told him that his “biking” would have to go if he wanted to truly follow Christ. This was too much for the newly-born Evangelical to bear, and he left the community and his pastor’s care, never intending to return.

Our biker rode off on his Harley Davidson, and soon had a terrible accident, which cost him his legs. Eventually he landed back in the company of his old “friends”, in a run-down apartment in a low-rent neighborhood in the bad part of a crime-ridden city. One evening, as he and his companions were abusing drugs and alcohol in a particularly vigorous way, he slipped over the edge and lost consciousness. The others were also far from sober and took him for dead. Not understanding clearly what they should do, and as usual avoiding all contact with the police, they simply dragged his limp, legless body to the street and threw him into the nearest garbage dumpster. In there, the next morning, he came to his senses. It was a rude awakening indeed to find himself in a dumpster, wallowing in refuse. Climbing dazedly out of that would-be coffin, he sat down on the curb, thinking the darkest thoughts. “So, this is what I have come to. Useless, human trash. Thrown away like garbage.”

Sunk in these pessimistic thoughts, he was suddenly stirred by the presence of an old lady in tattered clothes—what people call a “bag lady”. She was coming closer to him with a fierce, accusatory expression. “You know where to go,” she said, pointing at him. “So, go there!” At that moment the man remembered his former pastor, and the church where he had almost reformed. Determined to find it again, he made his way back to the town where it is located.

When he returned to that church it was different. There were gold domes with crosses on the roof, and the interior was completely changed. No pews; and there was a sort of screen at the front, with strange images of holy people. He looked around in wonder, when his gaze caught the image of a woman—the very “bag lady” who had told him where to go in that hour of dire depression. It was Holy Blessed Xenia, the Fool-for-Christ of Petersburg.

He met his old friend, now an Orthodox priest in a cassock, wearing a cross. He received holy Baptism himself, and began to live the life of a dedicated parishioner, this time truly transformed.

I do not know what has come of this man since. I have no reason to believe that he is anywhere other than at that parish, but as I have said, this story was related to me fifteen years ago. However, the fact remains that this miracle of St. Xenia happened to person who knew nothing of her, who lived in a place very far from Russia, and when he needed it the most.

Pornography is an Affliction for Young Men. And it's Been

Mainstreamed. By Fr. Johannes L. Jacobse, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* February 12, 2017

It comes from the depths of hell to destroy their characters before they can grow into a healthy sense of who they are.

I am old enough to remember the sexual revolution and its dubious promises that once moral restraints on sexual behavior were removed, a new golden era would dawn in which everyone would live happily, carefree and satisfied.

It didn't turn out that way. Today I deal with the destruction that revolution caused and try to bring healing to men damaged by it.

I mentor young men, and I see how the mainstreaming of pornography has hijacked their journey from adolescence to adulthood.

Growing up is a difficult process, fraught with all sorts of emotional turmoil that tempt young men to look toward pornography for relief. Once the seeking of relief becomes habitual — and this can happen quickly — the necessary experiences that boys require to become men are often thwarted. Tension is resolved not by learning how to master the problems of life, but by ever deeper retreat into sexual fantasies.

Today this affects more of our young men than we can count. In my experience, the consumption of pornography is nearly universal among young men, and the effects are never neutral. Researchers indicate that only 3 percent of boys and 17 percent of girls have never seen pornography. The internet now makes it available anytime and anywhere. First exposure most often occurs during adolescence, when the brain is still forming and very impressionable by graphic images.

It's difficult to calculate in hard numbers how profitable the porn industry is. Before the internet, access to pornography was controlled, by locating distribution in seedy neighborhoods; under those limitations the price could be kept high, leading to substantial profits. Since expansion into the internet, access to porn is as close as the click of a mouse, and content is increasingly free. In the last 30 years, American porn studios have declined from 200 to 20, and direct worldwide revenue has dropped from between an estimated \$40 billion and \$50 billion to about three quarters of that.

Free access also means that porn has gone mainstream and become a commodity. The only accurate measurement we have of porn consumption is internet click rates or Google searches. Profits are decreasing while porn is proliferating. Mindgeek, one of the world's biggest online purveyors of pornography, reports that it serves more than 100 million visitors a day, who consume 1.5 terabytes of pornography per second — enough to download 150 feature films.

In earlier generations, viewing pornography was seen as shameful. That's why porn shops were located in the unsavory parts of town. Pornographers were met with scorn. Today, all that might seem quaint, even ignorant — but it concealed a wisdom that we are only now beginning to rediscover. One reason for those earlier restrictions was the fear that porn would “corrupt youth.” This was laughed off as archaic, rigid, even unhealthy. We are finding out the hard way that our elders were right.

Young men ask me what I think of porn, and I mince no words. Porn comes from the depths of hell, and is calculated to destroy the characters of young men before they even have a chance to grow into a healthy sense of who they are and what they can become. Once your mind becomes pornified, I tell them, two things gradually happen: You lose any higher sense of self, and your relationships become distorted.

The vast majority of pornography users are men, but women are also injured by the epidemic. Wives report feeling betrayed when their husbands use porn — much like actual adultery. Women enter marriage seeking respect, companionship, partnership, honesty and romantic love. The world of pornography consists of exploitation, voyeurism, objectification and detachment. Counselors report that porn use increasingly contributes to divorce.

A coarsening of the heart fosters a coarsening of the culture. When more and more young men are conditioned to approach sex as casually as drinking a glass of water, young women are pressured to join in and many do. Porn is a driver of this shift. Where it will lead as the “hookup” generation gets older is anyone’s guess. But the collapse of sexual mores doesn’t bode well for the stability of society in the long run.

We don’t need a library of psychological studies to confirm these kinds of elementary truths. Generations before us intuitively understood them. That’s why they restricted pornography to places where only the chronically addicted would seek it out. Today we blindly lead our children to a pit of destruction, believing our ignorance of the wisdom practiced in earlier generations is somehow virtuous.

How does pornography harm our young people? (Warning: frank language ahead.) The road from adolescence to adulthood is an arduous one filled with many kinds of emotional upsets. A young man can find relief in masturbation, but most soon learn that such comfort is fleeting and does not resolve the problems that need attention — or at least that is the way it used to be.

Porn has become so pervasive that it is now increasingly difficult to escape the escapist pattern of behavior. Pornography is a sexual stimulant used to compel masturbation. Initially, young men use it to flee what appear to be insurmountable emotional pressures. As the behavior continues, it becomes a compulsive habit that retards maturation.

It works a lot like drug use. Give me a young man who has a problem with drugs and wants to get clean, and the first question I ask is when he began using drugs. That tells me when maturation stopped and where to locate the problems that led to the drug use. Only when those problems are dealt with can the flourishing begin that young men yearn for.

These days, I ask: When did you first start using porn?

How does healing occur? The truth is that young men long to become stable and mature. Once they begin grappling with the hold pornography and its attendant behaviors have over their lives, something remarkable occurs. They start to experience what a healthier interior life (heart, soul and mind) feels like, and they want more of that feeling.

I tell young men that the journey of self-discovery is the most exhilarating adventure a man can undertake. This journey never ends. I also tell them to resist all false promises that can imprison the soul. The lies are like a cupful of sand given to a thirsty man. Choose the water.

We begin this journey together, but eager young men learn fast. All most need is a road map, encouragement and accountability.

Sexuality is closely tied to creativity. Flourishing first occurs when the young man morally reorients himself so that his creativity can be expressed in ways that conform to his native gifts and talents. This requires a counselor or spiritual director like me who can discern what the gifts are and guide the young man toward them.

Often the young man lacks confidence because the porn habit prevented him from experiencing the testings that otherwise would have forged it. Nevertheless, once the creativity that was previously dissipated in porn connects with success, the logic of moral self-control becomes self-evident.

Not all young men succeed. Once I was contacted by a young man who longed to serve in the Coast Guard. He needed to finish college first. He could have succeeded, but in the end he was unwilling to undergo the struggle to overcome the habituation that was holding him back.

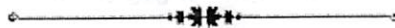
Had he been born a generation earlier, he might have avoided the conflict altogether.

Pornography is a problem few people want to face, mainly because we don't know how to deal with it. The Republican Party correctly called it a "public health crisis" in its 2016 platform. Defenders of porn cite First Amendment protections to fight off restrictions on porn distribution.

But porn is much more than speech. And it is not the kind of "idea" the First Amendment was established to protect. We don't give cigarettes and alcohol to minors. Why do we stand idly by while the merchants of porn ply them with their toxins?

Young men grow up. But if the porn cycle is not broken — and in many cases it isn't — they grow up to be man-boys. Then the pathology infects families and children.

This poisoned fruit of the sexual revolution may be with us for generations.



The Rev. Hans Jacobse is an Orthodox priest in Naples, Fla. He grew up in Minnesota and began his ministry in Minneapolis.

From the Desert

A brother asked one of the Fathers, "What shall I do? My thoughts are always turned to lust without allowing me an hour's respite, and my soul is tormented by it." He said to him, "Every time the demons suggest these thoughts to you, do not argue with them. For the activity of demons always is to suggest, and suggestions are not sins, for they cannot compel; but it rests with you to welcome them, or not to welcome them. Do you know what the Midianites did? They adorned their daughters and presented them to the Israelites. They did not compel anyone, but those who consented, sinned with them, while the others were enraged and put them to death. It is the same with thoughts."

The brother answered the elder, "What shall I do, then, for I am weak and passion overcomes me?" He said to him, "Watch your thoughts, and every time they begin to say something to you, do not answer them but rise and pray; kneel down, saying, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.'"

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (15.2)

An elder was asked, "Why are we thus warred against by the demons?" He said, "Because we have cast away our arms; I mean, contempt of honors, humility poverty, and endurance."

Apophthegmata Patrum (Anonymous Sayings of the Fathers)

If you are a Christian, no earthly city is yours. Of our City "the Builder and Maker is God." Though we may gain possession of the whole world, we are withal but strangers and sojourners in it all! We are enrolled in Heaven: our citizenship is there! Let us not, after the manner of little children, despise things that are great, and admire those which are little!

St. John Chrysostom

The mind that realizes its own weakness has discovered whence it might enter upon salvation and draw near to the light of knowledge and receive true wisdom which does not pass away with this age.

St. Gregory Palamas

The man who is deemed worthy to see himself is greater than he who is deemed worthy to see the angels.

St. Isaac the Syrian

The enemy rejoices over nothing so much as over those who do not manifest their thoughts [to their spiritual father].

Abba John the Short

It is dangerous to assume that our dreams are revelations; this leads to spiritual pride. Ponder calmly: is it likely that a heart and mind, both fully under the influence of all the wildest human passions, can truly mirror divine revelations? Does not such an assumption betray undue reliance on your own worthiness? For who can esteem himself worthy of such grace?

St. Macarius of Optina

For 'what hast thou that thou hast not received?' Do not these things pass like a shadow? Is not this home of yours but dust and desolation? Are not all these things false? Are not the treasures of the world mere vanities? Are you not yourself just ashes? Look into the tombs of men and take note that nothing will remain of you but bones and ashes. Look inside, I repeat, and tell me who in there is rich and who is poor? Distinguish now between the needy and the powerful. Naked we come into this world and naked we leave it. There are not distinctions discoverable among the bodies of the dead, unless, perchance, it may well be that those of the wealthy give forth a stronger odor because they were bloated with luxurious living.

St. Ambrose of Milan

A brother asked Abba Poemen a question and said unto him, "What shall I do? For my thoughts disturb me, and they say unto me, 'Thy sins have been forgiven thee,' and they make me to pry into the shortcomings of the brethren." Then Abba Poemen spake to him about Abba Isidore, who dwelt in a cell; and the disciple came to the elder, and finding him weeping, said unto him, "My father, why weepest thou?" And the elder said unto him, "I am weeping for my sins." Then the disciple said unto him, "And hast thou any sins, father?" And the elder said unto him, "Indeed I have, my son, and if I were permitted to see my sins, not three or even four men would suffice to weep with me for them." Then Abba Poemen said, "Thus it is with the man who knoweth himself." ~ Paradise of the Fathers

He who wishes to tear up the account of his sins and to be inscribed in the Divine book of the saved, can find for this purpose no better means than obedience.

Sts. Kallistus and Ignatios