



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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June 18, 2017

All Saints of America

Martyr Leontius at Tripoli (73 AD)

The Apostle's Fast continues ...



Happy Father's Day! Many Years to all our Fathers!

Memory Eternal to all our departed Fathers!

✠ Tuesday, June 20, 6:30pm - Inquirer's Class

➤ Diocesan Assembly July 25 – 27, 2017 - Chattanooga, TN

The St. Symeon Choir will sing the Hierarchical Liturgy on Wednesday, July 26.

Being Faithful in a Little

It's a human impulse to want the best and greatest when we see it, but we forget that there are other things we need to do before we're ready to achieve that level. We think we're ready for great achievements before we've even attended to little things which somehow seem beneath us. ... But this of course is to forget the words of the Lord Who says in the Gospel that *he who is faithful in a little is faithful in much*. The Greek text is interesting here because the word for *in a little* is in the singular. "He who is faithful *in one little thing*," as it literally says, is faithful in much. This doesn't always come through in the standard English translations and I take this to mean that the person who is faithful in one little thing will somehow acquire a skill set, or discipline, or ethos. Faithfulness in one little thing will somehow result in faithfulness across a broad spectrum.

Sometimes I think there are no great things; there are only little things and if we could attend to them then the great things would follow. The most obvious example is something like fasting, which is not exactly little, but it's one thing. If a person could be faithful to the discipline of fasting, which seems simple in a way, and acquire that discipline, think of the power he would have in other areas—to withstand temptations, to not allow certain thoughts in his mind or react to certain impulses like anger or lust or pride or things like this. We can't possibly begin to take up the struggle against these greater sins and temptations and all the rest if we haven't been able to do that on a micro-level. I think if you do it on the micro level you'll find that the big things don't seem so big or powerful anymore, because you're acquired strength of soul or stability or discipline of character which can be applied across a whole range of experiences or phenomenon.

~ Fr. Maximos Constas

✠ Nothing comes without effort. The help of God is always ready and always near, but is given only to those who seek and work, and only to those seekers who, after putting all their powers to the test, then cry out with their whole heart: "Lord, help us." ~ St. Theophan the Recluse

✠ Storms are stirred up also in the Saints, but those are of another nature, they have another purpose: sometimes a trial helps them become more holy, or it is for their greater glory, or it is so that they may glorify God more, or it has to do with the storms raised against Orthodoxy, etc.

~ Elder Ephraim

This and That

A Gentleman

"To ignore, to disdain to consider, to overlook, are the essence of the gentleman," wrote the philosopher William James. What an archaic notion that has become. Now grievances must be made known, openly and insufferably. And bully if your displeasure gains online prominence!

A society where everyone's every quibble takes center stage is hardly a society. It's a gathering of one-man shows, dedicated to self-performance. This could exist only in an era of extreme decadence.

Thomas Jefferson recognized that democracy demands politeness, which he called a "first-rate value." Manners are the grease of social interaction; thus, collective decision-making can't be made without respectable deference to others. If we can't agree on urbane protocol, we certainly can't agree on public policy. Gentility is like law without government enforcement. It is an extension of the greater good that is supposed to guide democratic lawmaking. The more isolated people are, the more willing they are to sell away their fellow citizens' rights.

Taylor Lewis, *The Crude Shall Inherit the Earth*

The abolition of the family was, indeed, a goal of the Bolsheviks. However, it proved rather disastrous such that even they had to change it. Nature, with its consequences, is on the side of traditional marriage. Of course, the silliness of our political culture is that the more they themselves mess things up, the more they argue that they need more money to fix the mess, which is done by making it worse. So long as people continue to believe that the "remedies" are, in fact, "remedies," instead of being the disease, we'll get the same nonsense.

There are many things families need. They need two biological parents, when possible. They need work – real work for real pay with none of the whining about the "market" that we hear from the champions of freedom (who do not whine when a rigged market rewards some with vast fortunes for little to no work). They need ample time from parents and extended family. We learn many things outside the classroom. We need more basic education and much less politically motivated nonsense in schools. They need models of noble, heroic human suffering for the sake of Christ – love in action. They need much less distraction and nonsense – such as games, pornography, etc. They need some protection from the endless manipulation of marketing. Children should not be the object of consumerism. Teenagers need adults – they do not need other teens so much. They are struggling to learn how to become adults. Other teens cannot teach you how to become an adult. The American cult of youth is insanity...Families need less debt – and students need no debt.

– Fr. Stephen Freeman

Does it only mean what we say it means?

At the heart of this (sexual identity) debate are rival ideas of what man is, and beyond that, what matter is. You cannot get more radical than this. Does matter have intrinsic meaning, or does it only mean what we say it means? If it has intrinsic meaning, then how can we know what that meaning is? If it doesn't have intrinsic meaning, then are there any limits on how we treat it? These metaphysical questions entail the anthropological question, "What is man?" Is there a givenness to human nature, and if so, what is it? If there is not, then what is wrong with a biological male declaring that he is a female, despite what his genes and his body testify? Is reality merely a human construct?

– Rod Dreher

One way or the other....They were "born that way" or ... and yet gender fluidity and transgenderism both assert that your biological sex is a choice that can change from one day to the next. The two ideas are at odds and their promoters haven't squared the contradiction as yet.

– Internet comment

"... The great appeal of multiculturalism is that it absolves you from having to know anything about other cultures: If they're all equally valid, what's the point? Slap on the COEXIST bumper sticker and off you tootle.

– Mark Steyn

Do the Saints pray for us?

✠ “Do the Saints whom we call upon, pray for us? They certainly pray for us! If I, a sinful man, a cold-hearted, sometimes wicked and malevolently disposed man, praying for others who have instructed, or have not instructed me to pray for them, and do not doubt do not weary of saying their names during prayer, although sometimes not heartily, then will not God’s Saints, those lamps and torches, burning in God and before God, full of love for their earthly brethren — pray for me and for us when we call upon them with faith, hope and love, according to our strength? They, our speedy helpers, pray also for our souls, as our Divinely-enlightened Mother, the Holy Church, assures us. Pray, therefore, undoubtedly to God’s Saints, asking their intercession before God on your behalf.

They hear you in the Holy Spirit. When you sincerely pray, the Holy Spirit breathes in you, He Who is the Spirit of Truth and sincerity. The one same Holy Spirit is in us and in the Saints. The Saints are holy through the Holy Spirit, Who sanctifies them and eternally dwells in them.”
~ St. John of Kronstadt

St. Innocent: His Life and Legacy*

By Paul Garrett

Record keeping two hundred years ago was insufficiently meticulous to say whether Thekla Popov was delivered of her first-born son on August 26 or September 11 in 1797. His birth into the clerical estate, however, virtually guaranteed his future: he would one day succeed his father, Eusebius, as a parish sacristan in the obscure village of Anga, near the provincial town of Irkutsk, deep in the interior of Siberia. When Eusebius died prematurely in 1803, the obscurity and destitution to which John seemed destined appeared all the more certain. None could have guessed that the five-year-old orphan, who was taken in by his uncle, Deacon Dimitri, in order to ease the burden on his widowed sister-in-law, would receive a scholarship to study theology, and prosper at seminary in Irkutsk; that he would marry and graduate in 1818; and that after his ordination to the priesthood on May 18, 1821, he would receive the best pastoral assignment in the diocese.

Unalaska, Sitka—An Apostolic Ministry

In 1823, no one could have foreseen that Fr. John, whose surname had been extended to Veniaminov-Popov while in seminary, would forsake comfort and popularity in Irkutsk for a post on a volcanic island in the northern Pacific Ocean, serving an impoverished people evangelized rapidly before he was born, but then virtually untended for decades. The young priest himself was incredulous that he could even consider such a thing. He would later reflect on the circumstances of his going to Unalaska Island:

I was among those called to the ministry, but being terrified by its difficulties, I grew faint-hearted and evaded it. Our merciful Lord, however, did not allow my carnal, earthly will to contradict his heavenly destinies. The bishop himself called the ministry he set before me apostolic, but I paid no attention to its importance. Then, in the presence of my bishop, the simple tales of our countryman about the Aleuts' zeal for the Christian faith changed all my thoughts in a single moment and kindled in me a flaming desire to go to America. Even more amazingly, I had heard these tales before, but only it was then,

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in the presence of the one who had the power to invoke the Grace of God, that it acted upon me, and my desire was irresistibly drawn to the precise place that I previously had fearfully and stubbornly evaded.

Those who waved farewell to Fr. John, his young wife Catherine, their infant son, and other family members, as the currents of the Lena River swept them off towards the Pacific, would not have doubted that this gifted clergyman would succeed in the difficult path he had chosen, but surely they could not have imagined the spectacular measure of his success. Using the carpentry skills he had honed from childhood, he built the physical church on Unalaska. Using the pastoral skills he had developed in his first parish assignment, he built a spiritual church, deepening the sincere but immature faith which the Native Aleuts preserved since their baptism in 1795 by Heiromonk Macarius. Using his keen intelligence and insight, he realized that only by mastering the Aleut language and fully appreciating their culture could he bring the Gospel alive for them. The fruits of his collaboration with his Creole mentor Ivan Pankov were translations of the Gospel of St. Matthew and an original composition, *The Pathway into the Kingdom of Heaven*.

Few who, on August 1, 1824, saw Paul Bunyan in a cassock set foot on Unalaska to begin his work, could have foreseen that within ten years he would beg to retire from his post for reasons of health. By 1834, however, none would doubt why he needed relief. Fr. John had not contented himself to sit at home, celebrating services, administering sacraments, learning Fox Aleut, translating the Gospel, and gathering meteorological data (a hobby which eventually won him membership in the Russian Academy of Sciences). Instead, he endured the frigid waters to visit parishioners living on the smaller islands of the Aleutian chain, thereby crippling his legs with arthritis, and, when opportunities arose, extended his travels up the peninsula, to the remote Pribilofs, and up the Nushegak River, penetrating the interior of the continent. In every way he served above and beyond the call of duty.

From 1834 to 1838 he served in the relative comfort of Sitka (New Archangel), the colonial capital, ministering to the still-hostile Tlingit Indians, studying their language and ways, and editing his by-now extensive writings. In 1836 he visited Fort Ross on the northern California coast. He then dispatched his family to Siberia while himself taking ship around the world to St. Petersburg in order to lay before the Holy Ruling Synod a comprehensive report on the state of the Alaskan mission and a plea for a major upgrade in its financial support and staffing. As his ship slipped out of Alaskan waters, he could not foresee that he would never see Catherine's face again.

For five months he was the toast of St. Petersburg and Moscow, as the social elite could not get enough of his stories of far-off lands. His bubble burst in November of 1839 as word reached the northern capital that Catherine had died and was buried in Anga. Knowing firsthand the grief of orphanhood, the widower wanted only to race across Siberia to be with his children. Tsar Nicholas, however, took a personal interest in his family's plight and arranged for their care and education. He accepted Fr. John's proposal to upgrade the support given the American Church, but took it one step further by creating a diocese and on December 1, 1840, directed that the newly-tonsured Fr. Innocent would serve as its first hierarch.

Bishop of the Far East and America

By December 15, 1840, when Innocent was consecrated to the episcopacy, few would doubt that his second ministry in Alaska would be memorable, but even he thought that the title Bishop of Kamchatka, the Kuril, and the Aleutian Islands was an hyperbole. By the time he reached Sitka on September 25, 1841, with a retinue considerably enlarged by successful recruitment in Irkutsk, it was clear that the Alaskan Church was destined swiftly to expand. A

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Pastoral School was instituted to train the Natives who could best provide the permanent, resident clergy needed to prevent reversion to shamanism. Lay ministers granted extraordinary powers augmented their ranks as the inland river systems were increasingly penetrated and successfully evangelized. Soon it was clear that the 45-year-old bishop's title was, in fact, too narrow rather than too broad. A 12,000 mile tour of the entire diocese in 1842-43 showed great spiritual potential among the Aleuts, Tungus, and Chukchi, and great challenges among the Tlingits, Koryaks and Russians; everywhere the task was complicated by poor transportation and communications over vast distances and severely limited funds.

Five years into his episcopacy, Alaska seemed so well established that the now-famous Bp. Innocent could confidently shift his focus to the expanding Asian flock. In 1842 Ayan was added to his diocese, and the visionary bishop, more quickly than his sovereign, realized the economic value to Russia of the fertile Amur River Valley. For six years he lobbied energetically for its annexation from China. By the time this occurred in 1858, Innocent was two years an Archbishop and charged with the care of an estimated 200,000 migrant reindeer herders inhabiting the 440,000 square-mile region of Yakutia. 1852 marked the last time he was able to visit his first flock in Alaska. The See and seminary were transferred to Asia. In 1859 Innocent was given permission to consecrate an auxiliary bishop for Sitka; Bp. Peter operated with far more autonomy than was usual for vicars in the Russian Empire. A second vicar for Yakutia allowed the Archbishop to concentrate his labors in Amuria.

By 1864, at age 67 and beginning to feel his years, Archbishop Innocent could not conceive how his eventual successor would manage his massive diocese. He feared how the Holy Synod, left to its own devices, would handle its unavoidable dismemberment if he did not arrange matters prior to his demise. He began soliciting for the creation of independent dioceses for Yakutia and Alaska, suggesting a succession of candidates, each better-prepared by experience to replace him. In 1867 provision for the Alaskan parishes grew crucial. As the colony was sold to the United States, Russian nationals (including clergy) fled home fearing the dark days of military occupation to come. Innocent viewed the sale as a providential means of expanding Orthodoxy into the heart of the New World provided the See be transferred to San Francisco, staffed with a hierarchy and clergymen celebrating, preaching, and teaching in English. For several decades, however, the work he had done declined back towards the state it had been in at his coming to Unalaska in 1821.

Because blindness was hereditary in his family, Innocent felt the days of his active ministry to be numbered. Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow promised him accommodations in the capital if and when his retirement became necessary.

Metropolitan of Moscow

Innocent did indeed go to Moscow, significantly blind, but far from retired, on January 19, 1868, for he succeeded Philaret as Metropolitan of Moscow following the latter's death. Otherwise vigorous at age seventy, Innocent threw himself into tending his sophisticated flock and endeavoring to invigorate the sluggish administrative apparatus of the Church. As his eyesight continued to decline, he was frustrated at his inability to push through programs designed to fight secularism and modernism, to upgrade parish finances, and to restore monasticism to vitality.

In 1872 failed cataract surgery left Innocent nearly totally blind (he celebrated the golden jubilee of his ordination to the priesthood, bandaged, in a Moscow hospital bed), but he was still denied retirement by a Tsar who valued his services too highly. Forced to end his lifelong travels and to depend totally on his vicars to administer the diocese, he nevertheless was able in 1869 once more to savor victory as Tsar Alexander II chartered the Russian Missionary So-

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ciety. From the 470 charter members over whom Innocent presided at the first meeting in the capital, the Society quickly expanded to include chapters in dioceses throughout the Empire. Members dedicated themselves to supporting missionary work by their prayers and by their rubles.

When, ten increasingly frustrating years later, on March 31, 1879, Metropolitan Innocent died peacefully in his home, no one could fail to marvel how God had guided him along the paths he was to follow. As they carried his earthly remains to the grave, the most spiritually-perceptive among the mourners might have had an inkling that one day he would be recognized for his sanctity in life, but none would survive the horrors of the 20th century to see that event accomplished on October 6, 1977. Likewise, none could have foreseen how their late Metropolitan's legacy would be preserved in his first diocese in the decades that would intervene.

Legacy

In the four decades which separated Innocent's repose from the watershed events of 1917, North American Orthodoxy expanded in ways even St. Innocent could not have foreseen. The systematic preaching in English for which he called, in fact, played an insignificant role. New York succeeded San Francisco as the nature of the flock changed. Mass immigration from Eastern Europe and the Levant had scarcely begun in 1879, and most of the newcomers from those regions were Greek-Catholics, unaware of the affinity of their form of faith with that of the Russian Tsar, and systematically trained to fear and oppose his subjects. St. Innocent could not have predicted that the number of churches and clergy to be maintained would rapidly outgrow the means of his Missionary Society (and indeed the Imperial treasury) to support them. Probably least of all could he have imagined that his successors would accept as an unspoken norm the image of his tireless, selfless labor among the flock.

In 1858 Archbishop Innocent had to concede that not every bishop would want to ride around on horseback through grime and forests or wander about in tents. As great a figure as Metropolitan Philaret had reminded him of the inconvenience of spending over one-third of any given year on the road, and had chided the great missionary not to generalize on the basis of his own extraordinary experiences and practices. Innocent thus could well have expected that the hierarchs dispatched to America would conform to the comfortable Old World model, but the colorful travelogues published almost every year in the pages of the Russian Orthodox American Messenger demonstrate how bishops Nicholas, Tikhon, Raphael, Platon, and Evdokim had taken to heart their greatest predecessors' fundamental thesis that, no matter how difficult it may be, it is imperative that a bishop visit his diocese (and every part thereof, if possible). Had they not done so, had they elected to live as comfortable, aloof prelates rather than active, selfless missionaries, Orthodoxy in North America might not have outlived its first Archpastor. ■

St. Innocent of Alaska

A Christian's duty is to "take up his cross." The word cross means sufferings, sorrows and adversities. To take up one's cross means to bear without grumblings everything unpleasant, painful, sad, difficult and oppressive that may happen to us in life. . .without expecting any earthly reward in return, but bear it all with love, with joy and with courageous strength.

It's a good desire to bring beauty into the world. Music is a gift from God. Read St. Basil's first homily on the Psalter which has a very beautiful and fairly well-known passage on the theological basis of music, which he says is a gift to the Church from the Holy Spirit. To play like them you first have to spend a lot of time practicing scales. Just the wish or desire is not enough. You can't just sit down and play like a virtuoso because you think you'd like to do that. It takes a lot of hard work. You hear people say today that there's no such thing as innate genius—everything is quantified, and they say it takes 10,000 hours to acquire mastery or genius in a particular area. It's no mystery—it's simply hard work. Some people are obviously smarter than others but with 10,000 hours of work I believe just about anybody could become a master of just about anything. — Fr. Maximos Constas

ON THE VALUE OF THE PSALMS

From St. Basil the Great's Sermon on Psalm 1

When, indeed, the Holy Spirit saw that the human race was guided only with difficulty toward virtue, and that, because of our inclination toward pleasure, we were neglectful of an upright life, what did He do? The delight of melody He mingled with the doctrines so that by the pleasantness and softness of the sound heard we might receive without perceiving it the benefit of the words, just as wise physicians who, when giving the fastidious rather bitter drugs to drink, frequently smear the cup with honey.

Therefore, He devised for us these harmonious melodies of the psalms, that they who are children in age, or even those who are youthful in disposition, might to all appearances chant, but in reality, become trained in soul. For, never has any one of the many indifferent persons gone away easily holding in mind either an apostolic or prophetic message, but they do chant the words of the Psalms, even in the home, and they spread them around in the market place, and, if perchance, someone becomes exceedingly wrathful, when he begins to be soothed by the psalm, he departs with the wrath immediately lulled to sleep by means of the melody.

A psalm implies serenity of Soul; it is the author of peace, which calms bewildering and seething thoughts. For, it softens the wrath of the soul, and what is unbridled it chastens. A psalm forms friendships, unites those separated, conciliates those at enmity. Who, indeed, can still consider as an enemy him with whom he has uttered the same prayer to God? So that psalmody, bringing about choral singing, a bond, as it were, toward unity, and joining people into a harmonious union of one choir, produces also the greatest of blessings, love.

A psalm is a city of refuge from the demons; a means of inducing help from the angels, a weapon in fears by night, a rest from the toils of the day, a safeguard for infants, an adornment for those at the height of their vigor, a consolation for the elders, a most fitting ornament for women. It peoples the solitudes; it rids the market places of excesses; it is the elementary exposition of beginners, the improvement of those advancing, the solid support of the perfect, the voice of the Church. It brightens Feast days; it creates a sorrow which is in accordance with God. For, a psalm calls forth a tear even from a heart of stone.

A psalm is the work of angels, a heavenly institution, the spiritual incense.

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (17)

Blessed is the man who realizes his weakness, for this knowledge becomes the foundation, the root and the beginning of every boon. For as soon as a man understands and truly feels his weakness, he immediately puts a restraint on the vain pride of his soul which obscures reason, and thus he gains protection.

St. Isaac the Syrian (7th C)

This is why I always say to you: when a passion arises, when it is young and feeble, cut it off, lest it stiffen and cause you a great deal of trouble. It is one thing to pluck out a small weed and quite another thing to uproot a great tree.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza (4th C)

It is written that the Son of Man is coming 'with His angels in the glory of the Father' (Matt. 16:27). Similarly, in those found worthy, the Word of God is transfigured to the degree to which each has advanced in holiness, and He comes to them with His angels in the glory of the Father.

St. Maximus the Confessor (7th C)

Lord, show us mercy that we may meet there where God is seen face to face, where those who see are made alive, comforted in joy, gladness and eternal bliss! There do men shine like the sun, there is true life; there, true honour and glory, there gladness and joy; there true blessedness and all that is eternal and endless. Lord, let Thy mercy be upon us for we put our trust in Thee.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1775)

Let us, when we come to the feast, no longer come as to old shadows, for they are accomplished, neither as to common feasts, but let us hasten as to the Lord, Who is Himself the Feast.

St. Athanasius the Great (4th C)

Just as the soldier and the hunter when they go to fight are not concerned about knowing whether others are wounded or saved, but each one fights on his own account, so must the monk be.

Apophthegmata Patrum (Anonymous Sayings of the Fathers)

If you are the active secretary of a diocesan council, the manager of a candle factory or take part in the administration of a seminary, all these respected labors are worth nothing in comparison with returning even one soul from the path of perdition into the way of salvation.

Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky (20th C)

A wise man pays careful attention to himself, and by freely choosing to suffer escapes the suffering that comes unsought.

St. Thalassius of Libya (5th C)

There is nothing which even Satan fears so much as prayer that is offered during vigilance at night. And even if it is offered with distraction, it does not return empty, unless perhaps that which is asked for is unsuitable.

St. Isaac the Syrian

It is shameful to be proud of the adornments that are not your own, but utter madness to fancy one deserves God's gifts. Be exalted only by such achievements as you had before your birth. But what you received after your birth, as also birth itself, God gave you. Only those virtues which you have obtained without the co-operation of the mind belong to you, because your mind was given you by God. Only such victories as you have won without the co-operation of the body have been accomplished by your efforts, because the body is not yours, but a work of God.

St. John of the Ladder (7th C)

From my youth, O Saviour, I have rejected Thy commandments; all my life have I passed in passions, carelessly and idly; wherefore, I cry, O Saviour: Save me even at the end.

St. Andrew of Crete, *Great Canon* (8th C)