



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **March 4, 2012** ✠

Sunday of Orthodoxy

St. Gerasimus of the Jordan (475)

St. Daniel, Great Prince of Moscow (1303)

~ **Second Week of Great Lent** ~

- ✠ **Tonight: 5:30pm ~ Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers at the Cathedral**
~ A Meal and Panel Discussion to follow – *"Faith and Healing"*
- ✠ **Tues. Mar. 6 6:30pm Inquirer's Class – Church Tour (final of series)**
- ✠ **Wed. Mar. 7, 6:30pm ~ Presanctified Liturgy**
- ✠ **Fri. Mar. 9, 6:30pm ~ Presanctified Liturgy**



✠ **Saturday, March 10 – Retreat: "Lent in a Post-Christian Age"**

Begins 11:30 ~ Prayer service

~ Dr. Herman (Tristram) Englehardt

12:00-1:00 Session 1

1:00-2:00 Lunch

2:00-3:00 Session 2

3:00-3:30 Coffee break/table discussion

3:30-4:30 Q&A session

4:30-5:55 Snacks and informal talk

6:00 – Vespers: St. Gregory Palamas

Dr. Englehardt is an MD &
PhD – a physician
and philosopher.

He is a tonsured Reader
at St. George Antiochian
Orthodox Cathedral
in Houston.

Synaxarion of The Triumph of Orthodoxy Sunday

I rejoice when I see the veneration due the icons once so ignominiously rejected.

On this first Sunday of Great Lent, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the Church of Christ celebrates the restoration of the holy and venerable icons by the Emperor Michael, the holy and blessed Empress Theodora and the Holy Methodius, Patriarch of Constantinople.

Through God's indulgence Leo the Isaurian, a swineherd and keeper of donkeys, inherited the scepter of the Kingdom. At that time Saint Germanus was at the helm of the Church. Leo sent for him and said, "Since it seems to me that there is no difference between the holy icons and idols, command that they be removed immediately from among us. Although if they are true likenesses of the saints, let them be hung higher on the walls so that we who are wallowing in sins do not defile them by venerating them." But the Patriarch responded thus to the Emperor's abomination, "O King, we have heard of someone who once raised his hand against the holy icons. He was called Conon. Could you be this man?" The emperor said, "I was so called as a child." (con't p. 3)



ON THE CHURCH

"I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Matt. 16:18

"(God the Father gave Christ) to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."

- Ephesians 1:22-23

The sea is the world, in which the Church is set like a ship tossed in the deep, but not destroyed, for she has with her the skilled pilot, Christ.

- St. Hippolytus of Rome (2nd C)

We should not seek from others the truth which can easily be received from the Church. For in her, as in a rich treasury, the Apostles placed in fullness all that belongs to the Truth, so that whoever wishes can receive from her the waters of life. She is the entrance to life.

- St. Irenaeus of Lyons (150)

How can we do other than respect the Church, even if only for having saved in her bosom an innumerable multitude of people, translating them into the abode of eternal peace and joy, forgetting them not, even after death, but remembering them until now upon earth, praising and glorifying their virtues as her true children? Where will you find a more grateful friend, a more tender mother?

- St. John of Kronsadt (1907)

Nothing is stronger than the Church. The Church is your hope, your salvation, your refuge. It is higher than the heavens, it is wider than the earth. It never grows old, but is always full of vigor.

- St. John Chrysostom (4thC)

The Earthly and The Heavenly Church

by + Fr. Michael Polsky

We see that the Church, in both her earthly and heavenly states, is in reality the living Body of Christ, yet it is only a body when all her members, heavenly and earthly, are to be found in full mutual unity and have a living empathy and interaction between each other. If this living and complete bond does not exist between the heavenly and the earthly, the Church is not, and cannot be, the living Body of Christ.

The Word of God confirms that the purpose of Christ's coming was our salvation, that is, that the heavenly and the earthly Church should be united in the One Body of Christ under His one headship. And God "hath gathered together in one the heavenly and the earthly under the head of Christ." Further, God "raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavens." He set Him "far above all...and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come...that set Him above all, as the Head of the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:10, 20-23) "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth" (Phil. 2:9-10).

With whom we, as members of the earthly Church, are united in the heavens, the Word of God shows in detail. "Ye are come unto Mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem and to the innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the Church of the firstborn, which are written in the heavens, and to God the Judge of all ("Pantocrator") and to the spirits of just men who have achieved perfection, and to Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling" (Heb. 12:22-24). And the thousands of angels and the assembly of the firstborn, and the souls of the righteous, who have achieved salvation, are made close to us through Christ, Who "hath redeemed us from this vain age," and exalted us in Himself to this Kingdom. "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell, and having reconciled all things, whether they be earthly or heavenly, to Himself through Him, having made peace through Him by the blood of His Cross" (Col. 1:19-20). Thus we are made "fellow citizens with the saints and those who are of the household of God" (Eph.2:19).

In this way, as it is with the members of the heavenly Church, so it is with those of the earthly: "we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom.12:5). The heavenly and earthly Church are not separated. Together it is the fullness and the one Body of Christ. It is only with such an understanding that the veneration of the All-Holy Virgin and all the saints is possible.

And since the Patriarch refused to obey the emperor, he deposed him and installed Anastasius, who sympathized with him. And so at that time began the struggle against the holy icons.

After this Leo Constantine Copronymus became heir to the kingdom as well as to the savage attacks against the holy icons. And what can be said about the number and kind of deeds that lawless man committed except that he came to a most shameful end. His son, whose mother was a Khazar, inherited the kingdom after him, and he also came to a bad end. Irene and Constantine then ascended the throne. At the direction of the holy Patriarch Tarasius they assembled the Seventh Council, and the holy icons were once more accepted by Christ's Church. After they relinquished the kingdom, Nicephorus ascended to the throne. After him there were Stauracius and then Michael Rhangabe, who were both iconodules (icon lovers).

The beast-like Leo the Armenian seized the throne from Michael, and, having been misled by an impious hermit, began the second iconoclasm. And once more the Church was bereft of Her beauty. Michael Amorius succeeded him, whose son Theophilus then for the second time directed this madness against the icons. For it was this Theophilus who gave many of the Holy Fathers over to torments and tortures, seeking the truth about the holy icons and believing whatever he would. "If there be anyone in the city intent on uprising, then he will be caught not long after I am told." And after reigning for 12 years, he was stricken with an intestinal disorder so that he desired to relinquish his life. His mouth opened so wide, that his internal organs were visible.

The empress was so upset at what had happened, that she could barely sleep. And in a dream she beheld the most pure Theotokos holding the pre-eternal Child, surrounded by most luminous angels. They were striking Theophilus her husband and humiliating him. Now when her dream had passed and Theophilus had come to his senses, he cried, "Woe is me in my wretchedness, I am struck for the sake of the holy icons." And immediately the empress held an icon of the Theotokos above him and entreated her with tears. And Theophilus, so inclined, saw that one of the clergy surrounding him had an engolpion, which he grabbed and kissed. Now as soon as his lips touched the icon, and he opened wide his mouth, he returned to normal and was relieved of the adversity and affliction and fell asleep, after confessing that it is good to venerate the holy icons. Then the empress, fetching the holy and precious images from her bedchamber, convinced Theophilus to kiss them and venerate them with all his heart. A short while afterwards Theophilus departed this life. Theodora then commanded that all who were in exile and in prison be freed. John was deposed from the patriarchal throne, since he was more a sorcerer and demon worshiper than patriarch. Then Methodius, a confessor of Christ, ascended the throne, having suffered much through having been closed up in a tomb alive.

While he was there, Ioannicius the Great, who was practicing asceticism on Mount Olympus, received a divine visitation. The great faster Arsaacius came to him and said, "God has sent me to you, that we might go to the righteous Isaiah the recluse in Nicomedia and learn from him what God desires and what is fitting for His Church." Now when they came to the venerable Isaiah, he said to them, "Thus saith the Lord: Behold, the end is approaching for the enemies of My image. Go to the empress Theodora and to the Patriarch Methodius and tell them: 'Cease to do what is not holy, and offer sacrifice to Me with the angels by venerating the countenance of My image and of the Cross'." Hearing this they immediately left for Constantinople and announced what had been said to Patriarch Methodius and all God's assembled people. The assembly then went to the empress and found her agreeable in all things, since this was the pious and God-loving tradition of the Fathers. The empress straightway brought out the image of the Theotokos for all to see, and venerating it, she said, "Let all be condemned who do not venerate the images, kissing them in love, not in worship as gods, but as images for the sake of the love of their archetypes. And they rejoiced with great joy. And in response she entreated them to pray for her husband Theophilus. Seeing her faith, they obeyed reluctantly. For Patriarch Methodius among the saints assembled all the people, priests and bishops and proceeded to God's Great Church. Among the assembled

were Joannicius the Great from Olympus, Arsaacius, Pancratius and the disciples of Theodore the Studite, and confessors Theophanes and Theodore Graptoi, Michael of the Holy City and Singelus and many others. And they prayed to God for Theophilus in tears all night long.

Now this took place throughout the first week of the Great Fast, with the empress Theodora herself, the women and all the people taking part. Having completed the prayers, the empress Theodora retired at dawn on Friday, and dreamed that she was at the foot of the Cross, and there were several people passing noisily by, wearing various instruments of torture. As she recognized the Emperor Theophilus among those being led with his hands bound behind his back, she followed the group and its guards. When they reached the brass gates, she saw a supernatural vision, a man sitting in front of the image of Christ and Theophilus brought before him. Reaching to touch his feet, the empress prayed for the emperor. He opened his mouth and said, "Great is thy faith, O woman. Know that because of thy tears and thy faith, as well as the prayers and petitions of My servants and My priests, I grant forgiveness to thy husband Theophilus." Then He said to the guards, "Loose him and give him to his wife." And taking him, she departed rejoicing in gladness. And immediately the dream left her.

Now Patriarch Methodius, while the prayers and petitions were being offered for him, had taken a new parchment scroll and written the names of all the heretical emperors, including Theophilus, placing it under the holy altar table. But on Friday he saw a great and terrible angel entering the temple, coming to him and saying, "Thy petition has been heard, O Bishop, and the Emperor Theophilus has received forgiveness. Trouble the Godhead about this no longer." And desiring to ascertain the truth of his vision the Patriarch descended from his place, and taking the parchment and unrolling it, he found (O, the judgments of God!) that all reference to the name of Theophilus has been erased by God.

Upon hearing this, the empress rejoiced greatly and requested the Patriarch to assemble all the people with the holy icons and crosses in the great church, so that might be adorned with the holy icons and God's new miracle could be known by all. And soon when all had gathered in the church holding candles, the empress arrived with her son. And a Litya was served there with the holy icons and the divine and precious wood of the Cross and with the sacred and divine Gospels. And leaving the church, calling out, "Lord, have mercy," they processed the agreed mile. Then they returned to the church, where Divine Liturgy was celebrated.

When the holy and precious icons were returned to their place, the holy men mentioned earlier and the pious Orthodox rulers were glorified, and those impious people who did not accept the honor of the holy icons were anathematized and condemned. And from that time these holy confessors appointed the annual commemoration of this solemnity, so that we might never again fall into a similar ignominy.

***O unchanging Image of the Father, through the prayers of Thy holy confessors,
have mercy on us! Amen!***

According to the Image of God

✠ So great was the honor and providential care which God bestowed upon man that He brought the entire sensible world into being before him and for his sake. The Kingdom of Heaven was prepared for him from the foundation of the world (cf. Matt. 25:34); God first took counsel concerning him, and then he was fashioned by God's hand and according to the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). God did not form the whole man from matter and from the elements of this sensible world, as He did the other animals. He formed only man's body from these materials; but man's soul He took from things super-celestial or, rather, it came from God Himself when mysteriously He breathed life into man (cf. Gen. 2:7).

St. Gregory Palamas

Archpastoral Letter of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah

Monday, February 27, 2012

The First Day of Great Lent ~ 2012

To the Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy, the Venerable Monastics, and the Christ-loving Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America.

Beloved in Christ:

“Enter again into Paradise!” So the Holy Church sings in the Kontakion at Lent’s mid-point. At a time of year that coincides with college students’ “spring break” –an occasion for riotous and prodigal indulgence in the pigpen of the passions – the Church offers us a very different image of paradise. Fasting, vigil, silence and prayer, denial of self and generosity to others: these are the labors by which we are invited and commanded to regain our true, paradisaal home.

In the three weeks that have led us to this great and solemn first day of the Fast, the Church has set before our spiritual eyes themes of exile. When our ancestors in the faith were led to captivity in Babylon, they wept; they hung up their lyres and said, “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither” (Psalm 136:4–5). The Prodigal Son, at the eleventh hour, was given the grace not to forget his father’s house, and so he set his feet on the path of return. Our father Adam and our mother Eve chose exile and hardship for themselves and all their descendants through their disobedience, and yet they – and we with them – are shown the way home: we see the doors of repentance thrown open, and our loving Father in Heaven keeping watch for our return with open arms.

In Holy Scripture, Jerusalem, the heart of the Promised Land and seat of the Temple, typifies the dwelling place of God among men. When the time came for our Savior to be received up, “He set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Making his way to the earthly Jerusalem, He was advancing toward suffering and ignominious death. Yet, “for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Cast out of the city, suffering outside the gate, He sanctified the people through His own blood. Therefore, the Apostle tells us, we also must “go forth to him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one to come” (Hebrews 13:12–14).

The exiles in Babylon refused to forget Jerusalem. Yearning to return to the land given by God to Abraham, they would not make themselves at home in Babylon. The holy Prophet Daniel and the Three Youths obeyed the dictates of their conscience, even in the face of harsh recrimination from a legal system hostile to righteousness. When opportunity arose, they did not shrink from speaking the truth to those who opposed it and, against all odds, God rewarded their faithful witness (v. Daniel 3 and 6).

If we wish to return home to our Father’s house, we first must face the fact that, no matter where we live, we are exiles. This means that if we strive to follow Christ, if we endeavor to pray and fast, to avoid idle talk, to silence our thoughts and find stillness in our hearts, to love our neighbors and our enemies, and to speak the truth without judgment to a crooked and perverse generation, then we must expect to suffer the same mockery and hatred from the powerful of this world that Christ suffered when He walked the earth. For He is the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith,” and He gives us the grace we need to prepare for the abuse that awaits us, whether

at the hands of men or from the devil and his angels. We must ready ourselves for the fight by laying aside "every weight and sin which clings so closely" (Hebrews 12:1). Great Lent is a strenuous period of training that makes us fit to persevere in a long and arduous trek home.

But the ascetic struggle of Lent is truly a foretaste of Paradise! The world pretends to offer happiness, but this is deception; in reality it gives us only a foretaste of hell. For too many Christians, though, the spiritual senses have grown so dull that the hellish pleasures of the world are more attractive than the Edenic delights of the Church and the Kingdom. We have lost the memory of Paradise; we have forgotten the spiritual Jerusalem; we have made for ourselves a comfortable home in this foreign land. So how then can we make a commitment to follow Christ to Jerusalem? What will motivate us to continue walking along the hard and narrow path to our true home?

"Do you want to be made well?" Our Savior addressed this question to the man who was paralyzed thirty-eight years (John 5:6). A similar question could be asked of us: "Do you want to go home?" The answer is not a foregone conclusion. "Do you want to return to your Father's house? Do you want to leave the pigpen of the passions? Do you want to be washed clean, filled with light, robed in dignity, and transformed with the glory of God?" Whether we know it or not, we respond yes or no to these questions every day of our lives, every hour, every minute. One moment we may set our face toward Jerusalem – to the Cross that awaits us there, and to the joy and glory that come only through the Cross – but the next moment we go running back to our comfortable passions and delusions. We waffle and vacillate, reassuring ourselves that before time has run out we will surely have made an irrevocable commitment to Christ.

And we hardly spare a thought for the alternative – it is too fearful to face. The captives in Babylon, the Prodigal, even Adam himself – for all of them, exile came to an end; they returned home; they entered again into Paradise. But last Sunday we were warned of the perilous alternative to repentance: unending exile from God and those who love Him. For no one, neither man nor angel, nor even God Himself, can force us to return from the foreign country against our will. God's arms are opened wide to embrace us – but He gives us the freedom to turn away. His face is warm with love and mercy – but we may close our eyes. Then nothing will be left for us but darkness, confusion, and never-ending despair.

In our Father's house are many dwellings, and Christ has gone ahead to prepare a place for us. He will come again and take us to Himself, that where He is, we may be also. We know the narrow way He has trod. He Himself is the way, and the truth, and the life (cf. John 14: 2–4). If we are with Him, we have nothing to fear!

At the last and great Day, at the end of the age, we will behold the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a Bride for her Husband (cf. Revelation 21). With joy we will enter in to celebrate an eternal Pascha – God with us and we with Him. He shall wipe away every tear from our eyes, and at long last we shall be home.

With every blessing for a peaceful and holy Fast, and with love in Christ,

J O N A H,

Archbishop of Washington,
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

How Are Our Hearts?

Recently, I searched the Internet for links to "Heart Health" and over 616,000,000 sites appeared. That's 616 million! After reading just a few of them, I realized how overwhelming the evidence is supporting the correlation between what we put into our bodies (diet, exercise, rest, supplements, etc.) and the health of our heart.

While God is certainly concerned with the well-being of our physical heart, it is the state of our spiritual heart that matters most. Our "kardia" (Greek) is the center and fountain of all spiritual life. In fact, the word "heart" is found in Holy Scripture nearly 900 times – more than money, or even Heaven.

Of all of those heart verses, one of my favorites is 2 Chronicles 16:9: "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose heart is true to Him." The Lord is diligently seeking men and women whose hearts are true. What does a true heart look like? Consider these qualities from God's Holy Scripture. A "true" heart is a:

- a broken and contrite heart – "...a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."
(Psalm 51:17)
- a clean heart – "Create in me a clean heart, O God..." (Psalm 51:10)
- a rejoicing heart – "...my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation" (Psalm 13:5)
- a serving heart – "...serve the Lord your God with all your heart..." (Deuteronomy 10:12)
- a pure heart – "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." (Matthew 5:8)

It is interesting that Jesus taught the essence of a person's heart is revealed by his spoken words — "The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks."
(Luke 6:45)

What do our words say about the kind of treasure we have stored in our hearts? When we speak, is it evident that our hearts are true in the eyes of the Lord? What are we "hiding" in our hearts? When life is not the way it is supposed to be, what does our speech say about the condition of our hearts?

How are our hearts? Are our "arteries" clogged from the pain and pressure of everyday life; from un-confessed sins, envy, bitterness, and limited or no spiritual exercise? Are we feeding on spiritual "fast food"?

I pray that during this period of Great and Holy Lent, we seek to improve our spiritual diet. Have we tried to feed the Word of God in our hearts? Likewise, when was the last time we saturated our hearts with regular and fervent prayer? During this special period, have we opened up our hearts so as to share our time and talents with those in need? Have we sought to purify our hearts by seeking God's forgiveness and those we have wronged, as well as forgiving those who have hurt us? In the remaining weeks of Great Lent, will we struggle to keep the Fast to discipline our hearts to over-come the temptations of this world?

"Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." (Hebrews 3:12)

As we continue our journey towards Holy Pascha, "let us approach with a true heart in full

assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:22)

“Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ.” (Philemon 1:20)

A heart that is “true” towards God will turn your life around. Why should we care?

St. Paul answered this question emphatically: “So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power for us who believe, according to the working of His great power.” (Eph. 1:18-19)

V. Rev. Fr. George Tsahakis, Atlanta

Every Action in Church

Every action in church should be taken with care. This is certainly true of those ministering at the altar, but is no less true of those in the congregation. Careless movement or anything that hints at lack of complete presence is to be avoided. On the other hand, there should not be a hint of showmanship or ostentatious movement either. Everything should reflect a great naturalness and great care. Every moment should be treasured as if there were no other, which indeed turns out to be the case. Casual attitudes should be avoided, since we are in the presence of the King of the universe. On the other hand, we should deal kindly with those around us, avoiding any movement or expression that could be regarded as judgmental, since tight-lipped, mean-minded religious practice is a very ugly thing.

It takes a great deal of effort to be able to remain present in the presence of God. This means that for most people the effort looks too demanding. There does not appear to be any payoff. Yet, at another level, this is the destination of the human being, the high point of existence. The odd thing is that it is not what we necessarily expect. We may assume, at least, that the experience is likely to be one highly charged with emotion. Such is not the case. In fact, the experience is rather beyond emotion, a place where emotion cannot reach. Emotion may take us there, but it cannot be at our arrival, nor can it be relied upon.

Archimandrite Meletios Webber, Bread, Water, Wine & Oil, p. 65

Traps

✘ All of us sin constantly. We slip and fall. In reality, we fall into traps set by the demons. The Holy Fathers and the Saints always tell us, “It is important to get up immediately after a fall and to keep on walking toward God.”

Elder Thaddeus of Serbia

Irritation

✘ Repress the feelings of irritation in your soul with love; deaden the powers of the senses with temperance; and let the power of thought soar with prayer. Then, the light of your soul will never dim.

St. Maximus the Confessor

Troubles

✘ “God rejoices more when we recognize Him by His mercy, than by His anger. However, there are very ungrateful and thoughtless people who never remember God when He grants mercy, but remember Him only when they have troubles and chastisements in life...”

St. Nikolai of Serbia

The Goodness of the Master

✘ All things are directed by the goodness of the Master. Nothing which happens to us should be received as distressful, although at present it affects our weakness. In fact, even if we are ignorant of the reasons for which each event is applied as a blessing to us from the Master, nevertheless, we ought to be convinced of this – that what happens is assuredly advantageous either for us as a reward for our patience, or for the soul which was taken up (in death), lest, tarrying too long in this life, it should be filled with the evil which exists in the world.

St. Basil the Great