

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **March 11, 2012** ✠

Sunday of

St. Gregory Palamas (+1359)

St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (+638, Biographer of St. Mary of Egypt)

St. George, Abbot of Sinai (7th Century, Brother of St. John Climacus)

If you do not feel like praying, you have to force yourself.

The Holy Fathers say that prayer with force is higher than prayer unforced. You do not want to, but force yourself. The Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force.

~ St. Ambrose of Optina

✠ **Third Week of Great Lent** ✠

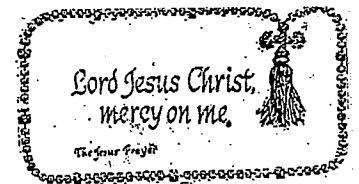
✠ **Wed. Mar. 14, 6:30pm ~ Presanctified Liturgy**

✠ **Fri. Mar. 16, 6:30pm ~ Presanctified Liturgy (Meal)**

⇒ **Welcome! Dr. Tristram (Herman) Engelhardt! ~ May God grant you *Many Years!***

NOTE: We now serve the Liturgy of St. Basil, as is designated for the Sundays of Great Lent.

✠ **Next Sunday is the Sunday of the Cross.**



"O wise Gregory, thou hast burnt up the error of the heretics, and has revealed in its true beauty the faith of the Orthodox, bringing light to all the world. Thou art triumphantly victorious, a pillar of the Church and a true bishop.

Never cease to intercede with Christ, that we may all be saved!"

~ Sessional Hymn, 2nd tone, from Matins for the Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas

The Benediction of Gentleness

✠ "Christ said, 'Whoever shall say to his brother "You fool" shall be guilty enough to go to the hell of fire' (Mt. 5:22). If, then, you can eradicate this evil, calling down upon your soul the benediction of gentleness, then glorify Christ, the teacher and ministrant of every virtue, without whom, as we have been taught, we can do nothing good. But if you are unable to bridle your temper, censure yourself whenever you lose it, and repent before God and before anyone to whom you have spoken or have acted evilly. If you repent at the inception of sin you will not commit the sin itself; but if you feel no pang in committing minor offenses you will through them fall into major transgressions."

~ **St. Gregory Palamas (The Philokalia Vol. 4)**

Not to Begrudge Nor to Rejoice

✠ The Christian ought not to begrudge another's reputation, nor rejoice over any man's faults; he ought in Christ's love to grieve and be afflicted at his brother's faults, and rejoice over his brother's good deeds. He ought not to be indifferent or silent before sinners. He who shows another to be wrong ought to do so with all tenderness, in the fear of God.

~ **St. Basil the Great**

St. John Chrysostom asked the question:

"What good is it for you to abstain from eating meat, when you devour the flesh of your neighbor with your gossip?"

A Meeting in Geneva ... On Fasting

A few years ago, in Geneva, there was a gathering of theologians and university professors in preparation for an international synod of bishops meeting. Noting that most people don't observe the fasts of Christmas, of the Holy Apostles and the Great Lent, they recommended doing away with the first two and reducing the Great Lent fast by two weeks.

~ Someone heard about this and responded to their recommendations:

"Don't you realize what you are doing? If someone is sick, he is allowed to eat; there is no rule against it. If someone is not sick but breaks the fast out of weakness, all he needs to do is humble himself and say 'Forgive me, Lord, I have sinned.' Christ will not condemn him for breaking the fast. If he is not sick, however, he should not break it. Of course, there are also those who don't care about fasting to begin with. So, everything falls into place. But if we do away with the Fasts in order to please those who don't care to keep them, what is going to happen with future generations? It could be that they will be better than us in observing the fasts! But still, what right do we have to do away with them especially since they pose no problems?"

"Catholics only fast for one hour before Holy Communion. Are we going to follow in that spirit, blessing our weaknesses and falls? We don't have the right to fashion Christianity according to our weaknesses. Even if those who observe the Fasts are few in number, we should still keep the order of the Church. If someone is sick, he should take his food, say yogurt, and eat it at home, where others cannot see him and be scandalized."

"We want to create our own Orthodoxy, according to our own standards, and interpret the Fathers and the Gospel as we please! Today, when we have so many highly educated Orthodox men and women, Orthodoxy should be a light to the world. Look at Saint Nicodemos the Haghiorite! One single man accomplished so much! He wrote so many books, all the Synaxaria of the Saints; entire libraries he knew by heart! And all that without photocopy machines and computers!"

"We should strive hard to be true Christians. This is how we will develop a spiritual sense, and come to feel pain in our hearts for Orthodoxy to fulfill our obligations... This is the foundation. If we are true Christians, we will care about everything that affects the Church; we will worry and pray for Her good. We should not wait for people to coax us, "Now you should care about this, later for that and so on." If we leave it to others, we will resemble a square wheel that will never turn on its own, and will need to be pushed all the time. The point is to turn on our own. Then, our turns will be beautiful and smooth like those of a well-rounded wheel. And if this happens, we will feel the movement coming from within, and God will inform our soul about many things, more than an educated person can ever reach on his own." (from an old Orthodox Tradition)

No Broad Way

✘ Nothing and no one can snatch out of God's hands a soul dedicated to His service. For God gives to such a soul for the time of its earthly pilgrimage a narrow path paved with diverse sorrows and deprivations, because it is impossible to come to God along a broad way...

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

In Check

✘ For so long as we have not uprooted our evil tendencies, may God give us the strength not to give them free reign but to hold them in check. For it is a very grave thing to let loose our passions and not to check them.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

The Teaching of St Gregory Palamas (whom we remember today)

Dr. Haralambos Boosalis, from the article *“Orthodox Theology: 2000 Years of Apostolic Tradition, pp. 17-18, Tikhonnaire 2000*

According to Orthodox theology then, the ultimate goal of man is deification through participation in divine grace. One of the main proponents of this teaching, who was forced to provide a clear, coherent and detailed theological defense in support of it, was St. Gregory Palamas, the Archbishop of Thessaloniki. He provides another example of how the Fathers utilized theological discourse within the bounds of Holy Tradition in order to defend the apostolic Faith regarding man's deification in Christ.

In the fourteenth century a controversy broke out involving a brilliant scholar/philosopher named Barlaam, who was an Orthodox monk raised and educated in Italy. He was eventually excommunicated by the Church. An *"arrogant and contentious scholar,"* Barlaam criticized the Church's understanding of the life of Christ, and attacked those who upheld the apostolic experience of man's deification. In particular he fought against St. Gregory of Palamas who defended the Church's teaching that both the human soul and body are created as one for the distinct purpose of deification through participation in divine grace.

In order to understand the patristic teaching on the deification of man, one must bear in mind two important theological distinctions. The first is the fundamental distinction between uncreated nature and created nature. "Uncreated" refers only to divine nature, i.e., to God Himself. Everything else that exists is created; it is the work of God, created out of nothing and dependent on God for existence.

The second distinction, which is found only in Orthodox theology, refers to the divine nature of God. This is the distinction between the *essence* of God and the *energy or energies* of God. God in His essence remains transcendent, inaccessible and incommunicable. In His energies, however, which are inseparable from His essence, God communicates Himself and grants His divine life, which sustains and sanctifies not only man but the whole of creation. This distinction is fundamental to the Orthodox Teaching of deification. Through the efforts of St. Gregory Palamas and a series of councils in the fourteenth century that upheld the authority of his writings, this teaching was established as a dogma of the Orthodox Church.

However, it must be noted that St. Gregory Palamas was not an innovator: he did not see himself as the author of this teaching. The distinction between divine essence and divine energies, as well as the teaching on the deification of man, is found throughout many writings of earlier Church Fathers, even though they may not have explained it with the same clarity and precision as did St. Gregory Palamas.

Man is called to become a "partaker of divine nature" as the Apostle Peter clearly teaches, *"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature."* (2 Peter 1:4) This is to be understood as participation in uncreated divine *energies* and not in the divine essence, which remains inaccessible and "non-participable". The belief that man becomes a partaker of the essence of God would lead to pantheism. St. Gregory Palamas clearly identifies divine grace with the uncreated energies of God. Elder Sophrony also states explicitly, *"Since grace is God's uncreated energy, the Orthodox understand it as Divinity...The grace that is Divinity hallows man, divinizes him, makes him into a god."* The Orthodox teaching on the deification of man through participation in uncreated grace is a decisive point of difference between the Christian East and non-Orthodox West.

The Orthodox Church challenges the believer to reach beyond the concept of salvation that predominates in the West. For the Orthodox Church, salvation is more than the pardon of sins. It is more than being justified, or acquitted for offenses committed against God. According to Orthodox theology, salvation certainly includes forgiveness and justification, but is by no means limited to them. For the Fathers of the Church salvation is the acquisition of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. To be saved is to be sanctified and to participate in the life of God - indeed to "become a partaker of the divine nature".

Forgiveness of sins is not the end of salvation; it is only the beginning. It should lead ultimately to the acquisition of divine grace, mystical knowledge of God and participation in the *charisma* of love for all mankind. In the words of St. Silouan the Athonite, "***I began to beseech God for forgiveness, and He granted me not only forgiveness but also the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Spirit I knew God...the Lord remembered not my sins, and gave me to love people, and my soul longs for the whole world to be saved and dwell in the Kingdom of Heaven, and see the glory of the Lord, and delight in the love of God.***"

In the person of St. Gregory Palamas we see once again how the Fathers pursued theological discourse not for the sake of mere speculation; rather their motivation was to expound and protect the teachings of Holy Tradition. They did not simply conjecture on hypothetical theories concerning God, man and the true significance of the life in Christ. They spoke from the depths of their own personal encounter with Him. They spoke with firm conviction from their own personal experience of communion with God in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.



✠ If only with firm resolve we begin to live according to God's law, we do not need to fear any sort of attack from those who do not understand. For to him who has truly begun to live according to God's law, all that happens to him at the hand of men, happens for his profit and to the glory of God.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956)

ON DEALING WITH THE ACCUSATIONS OF OTHERS

"Who can force a humble man to bring into his mind thoughts against anyone? For whatever grief a humble man suffers or hears about, he takes it as an opportunity to demean and to deride himself. And if someone should succeed in upsetting a humble man, he immediately takes refuge in prayer, by which he quickly soothes his heart. And not this alone; but, at the very moment he becomes upset, he vehemently censures himself, saying to his soul: 'Why, my wretched soul, are you acting crazy? Why have you become upset like those who foam at the mouth? With precisely this upset you show that you are ill; for, if you were not ill, you would not have felt pain. Why, hapless soul, have you forsaken self-reproach for the condemnation of your brother, since it was he who revealed your illness, which was hidden within you and of which you were ignorant until now?'"

---the spiritual teachings of Abba Zossima

✠ **Who has conquered the devil?** He who knows his own weaknesses, passions and shortcomings. Whoever is afraid of knowing himself remains far from knowledge, and he doesn't anything else except seeing faults in others and judging them. He doesn't see gifts in other people, but only shortcomings. And he doesn't see his own shortcomings, but only his gifts. This is truly the sickness that plagues us men of the eighth millennium (the end times immediately preceding the advent of the Antichrist): we fail to recognize one another's gifts. One person may lack many things, but many people together have everything. If we acknowledged this, we would have a great deal of humility, because God, Who adorned men in many ways and showed inequality in all of his creations, is honored and glorified, not as the unbelievers say, who toil trying to bring equality by overturning the divine creation. God made all things in wisdom". **Elder Joseph (+1959)**

ON THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN - Part 1

Elder Porphyrios of Athens (+1991)

A large part of the responsibility for a person's spiritual state lies with the family.

A child's upbringing commences at the moment of its conception. The embryo hears and feels in its mother's womb. Yes, it hears and it sees with its mother's eyes. It is aware of her movements and her emotions, even though its mind has not developed. If the mother's face darkens, it darkens too. If the mother is irritated, then it becomes irritated also. Whatever the mother experiences - sorrow, pain, fear, anxiety, etc. - is also experienced by the embryo.

If the mother doesn't want the child, if she doesn't love it, then the embryo senses this and traumas are created in its little soul that accompany it all its life. The opposite occurs through the mother's holy emotions. When she is filled with joy, peace and love for the embryo, she transmits these things to it mystically, just as happens to children that have been born.

For this reason a mother must pray a lot during her pregnancy and love the child growing within her, caressing her abdomen, reading psalms, singing hymns and living a holy life. This is also for her own benefit. But she makes sacrifices for the sake of the embryo so that the child will become more holy and will acquire from the very outset holy foundations. Do you see how delicate a matter it is for a woman to go through a pregnancy? Such a responsibility and such an honor!

I will tell you something about other animate and non-rational beings and you will understand what I mean. In America the following experiment was carried out: in two identical rooms which were kept at exactly the same temperature -flowers were planted in identical soil and watered in exactly the same way. There was, however, one difference: in the one room gentle, soothing music was played. And the result? The flowers in that room displayed an enormous difference in relation to the flowers in the other room. They had a quite different vitality, their colors were more attractive and they grew incomparably better.

What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home. The parents need to devote themselves to the love of God. They need to become saints in their relation to their children through their mildness, patience and love. They need to make a new start every day, with a fresh outlook, renewed enthusiasm and love for their children. And the joy that will come to them, the holiness that will visit them, will shower **grace on their children. Generally the parents are to blame for the bad behavior of the children. And their behavior is not improved by reprimands, disciplining, or strictness. If the parents do not pursue a life of holiness and if they don't engage in spiritual struggle, they make great mistakes and transmit the faults they have within them. If the parents do not live a holy life and do not display love towards each other, the devil torments the parents with the reactions of the children. Love, harmony and understanding between the parents are what are required for the children. This provides a great sense of security and certainty.**

The behavior of the children is directly related to the state of the parents. When the children are hurt by the bad behavior of the parents towards each other, they lose the strength and desire to progress in their lives. Their lives are constructed shoddily and the edifice of their soul is in constant danger of collapsing.

Let me give you two examples.

Two sisters came to see me. One of them had gone through some very distressing experiences and they asked me what was the cause of these. I answered them:

'It's because of your home; it stems from your parents.' And as I looked at the girl I said: 'These are things you've inherited from your mother.'

'But,' she said, 'my parents are such perfect people. They're Christians, they go to Confession, they receive Communion and we had a religious upbringing. Unless it is religion that is to blame...'

I said to them:

'I don't believe a word of all that you're telling me. I see one thing only, and that is that your parents don't live with the joy of Christ.'

On hearing this, the other girl said:

'Listen, Maria, the Father's quite right. Our parents go to Confession and receive Holy Communion, but did we ever have any peace at home? Our father was constantly complaining about our mother. And every day either the one refused to sit at the table or the other refused to go out somewhere together. So you see what the Father is saying is true.'

'What's your father's name?' I asked her, she told me.

'What's your mother's name?' She told me.

'Well,' I said, 'the feelings you've got inside you towards your mother are not at all good.' You see, the moment she told me her father's name I saw his soul, and the moment she told me her mother's name, I saw her mother and I saw the way her daughter looked at her. Another day a mother came to visit me with one of her daughters. She was very distressed and broke down in tears.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

'I'm in total despair over my older daughter. She threw her husband out of the house and deceived us all with a pack of lies.'

'What kind of lies?' I inquired.

'She threw her husband out the house ages ago and she didn't tell us anything. We would ask on the phone, "How's Tselios doing? ", and she would reply, "Oh, he's fine. He's just gone out to buy a newspaper." Each time she would think up some new excuse so that we wouldn't suspect anything. And this went on for two whole years. A few days ago we learned the truth from Tselios himself when we bumped into him by chance.'

So I said to her:

'The fault's your own. It's you that's to blame, you and your husband, but you most of all.'

'What do you mean!' she said indignantly. 'I loved my children to the point that I was never out of the kitchen. I had no life of my own at all. I took them to the church and I was always telling them the right thing to do. How can you say that I'm to blame?'

I turned to her other daughter who was with her and asked:

'What do you think about the matter?'

'The Father's right, Mom,' she said. 'We never ever enjoyed a single day when you weren't quarrelling with Dad.'

'Do you see then, how I'm right? It is you that are to blame. You traumatized the children. They are not to blame, but they are suffering the consequences.'

{to be continued}

This and That

On Syria: "And after seeing the atrocities visited upon the Christians in Iraq when Saddam went down, and on Copts when Mubarak went down, do we want to depose another secular dictator – only to empower another regime of Islamic fundamentalists?"
- Pat Buchanon

The most significant foreign event of the past year has been the misnamed Arab Spring...which has changed the geopolitical equation in North Africa and the Middle East to America's detriment. The United States is not "safer" with the predictable triumph of the Muslim Brotherhood and its various affiliates in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, and America will be even less safe if the relentless campaign against the Syrian regime is ultimately successful. Although clear to everyone but Obama, Muslim countries that oppose autocratic regimes stem not from secular reformers, but from true believers who accuse those regimes of betraying the "True Faith." ~ Srdja Trikovic

Not Charity: The liberal/totalitarian movement is an agenda which includes abortion, same-sex unions, redistribution of income, taking from the achievers to give to the occupiers...nationalization of everything for the good of the poor, enslaving a permanent underclass to government dependency...This is not charity.

Last week, the Komen Foundation, which funds breast cancer research, sought to extricate itself from the country's culture wars by severing ties to America's No. 1 abortion provider, Planned Parenthood.

As Professor Robert George writes, in 2010, Planned Parenthood sold 300,000 abortions at \$500 each, earning \$164 million. Nine of 10 pregnant women who come into its clinics are sold an abortion. Moreover, the organization is "under congressional and criminal investigation ... for allegations including failure to report criminal child sex abuse, misuse of health care and family planning funds, and failure to comply with parental involvement laws regarding abortions."

In the 1950s, such an institution would be regarded as organized crime and its officers and employees would be up on felony charges or sitting in a penitentiary. We live today in a different America.

Thus, the media-political-cultural elite came down on Komen with both feet, berating the foundation for abandoning women suffering from breast cancer, until Komen caved and restored the \$650,000 it contributes annually to Planned Parenthood, though that sum is not one-tenth of one percent of PP's annual budget. The Komen officer who advised the foundation to sever ties was cashiered on Feb. 7.
- Pat Buchanon

* On January 11, 2012, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously against the Obama Administration, which had argued that the government had the right to sue the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for violating anti-discrimination law in terminating one of its ministers. At oral argument, the Obama Administration lawyer told the justices that it should make no difference for purposes of anti-discrimination law whether an employer is religious or secular. Since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits sex discrimination in employment, the Obama Administration's argument was consistent with a claim that churches that refuse to ordain women violate anti-discrimination law.

- Also on, February 7, a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals overturned, two to one, the democratic decision of a majority of Californians who voted in 2008 to outlaw homosexual marriage.

What has happened to America in half a century seems, to many raised in that other America, like something out of Orwell.
- Pat Buchanon

Sermon of our Father among the Saints, John Chrysostom, On Holy Thursday

Compared with some of the great spiritual "luminaries" of our own time, this may seem a bit un-pastoral, but nevertheless, just as St. John has a homily for Pascha, he has a homily for Holy Thursday. Unfortunately, this homily is not heard by nearly so many people, because this service is not nearly so well attended, and it is often not read even for those who do attend... though it should be.

O my beloved and greatly-desired brethren who have gathered in the Holy Church of God, in order to serve the Living God in holiness and righteousness, and, with fear, to partake of the holy, most-pure, and immortal, awesome Mysteries of Christ: Hearken unto me who am lowly and unworthy. For it is not I who am speaking to you and instructing you; rather the grace of the Most-holy and Life-giving Spirit; for I speak not from myself, but as I have been instructed by the divine canons, and the God-bearing Fathers, as the Church received instruction from the divine Apostles who received their wisdom from God, so do I myself speak, who am lowly and least of all.

I know not your works; I consider not that which you have begun; and so, as one who fears God, I give counsel to everyone among you, whether man or woman, whether great or small, to anyone of you that may be guilty of sin, convicted by your own counsels, that first you must repent and confess your sins, that you may dare, considering yourself unworthy, to approach and touch the Divine Fire Itself. For our God is a consuming Fire, and they, therefore, who with faith and fear draw near to the God and King and Judge of us all, shall burn and scorch their sins; and It shall enlighten and sanctify their souls. But It shall burn and scorch with shame, the souls and bodies of them that draw near with unbelief. Therefore, many among you are ill and sleep in sickness, that is, many are dying un-confessed and unrepentant.

And furthermore, my brethren, I beseech you, and I say: no one that swears oaths, nor a perjurer, nor a liar, nor one that finds fault with others, nor a fornicator, nor an adulterer, nor a homosexual, nor a thief, nor a drunkard, nor a blasphemer, nor one that envies his brother, nor a murderer, nor a sorcerer, nor a magician, nor a charmer, nor an enchanter, nor a robber, nor a Manichean, shall, un-confessed and unprepared, approach, touch, or draw near the dread Mysteries of Christ, for it is terrible to fall into the hands of the Living God. For the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the joints and marrow and bones, and thoughts and hearts.

See, therefore, my brethren, that no one approach, unrepentant or unprepared or unworthily, to partake of His dread and most-pure Mysteries. For He Himself saith: "I am He, and there is no god besides me; I kill, and I make alive; neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand; for I, Myself, am King forever": to Whom is due all glory, honor, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages, Amen.

On the Jesus Prayer

✠ Let us enter into the words of St. Paul: "I had rather speak five words with my understanding than ten thousand words in a tongue" (I Cor. 14:15, 19). I am unable to express how fortunate we are that we have become worthy to utter these five words. What joy! "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner." Just think! O Lord! Whose Name am I pronouncing? That of the Creator, the Founder of everything, before Whom all heavenly powers tremble! Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God! Thou hast shed Thy blood for me, hast saved me, hast come down to earth. . . Put your understanding and heart together, close your eyes, raise you mental eyes to the Lord. . .

O sweetest and dearest Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God. . . . Elder Nazarius of Valaam (1809)