



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **July 14, 2013** ✠

Holy Fathers of the

First 6 Ecumenical Councils

All Saints of Britain and Ireland

While the hot restlessness of heretics stirs up questions about many things belonging to the Catholic Faith, in order to provide a defense against these heretics we are obliged to study the points questioned more diligently, to understand them more clearly, and to preach them more forcefully; and thus the question raised by the

adversary becomes the occasion of instruction.

-St. Augustine of Hippo

⇒ **Inquirer's Class – Tuesday, July 16, 6:30pm ~ with Fr. Ignatius**

Sunday of the Holy Fathers

On the Sunday that falls from the 11th to the 17th of July, we chant the Service to the Holy and God-bearing Fathers who came together in the First 6 Ecumenical Councils, that is: the First Council, of the 318 Fathers who assembled in Nicaea in 325 to condemn Arius, who denied that the Son of God is consubstantial with the Father; the Fathers of the First Council also ordained that the whole Church should celebrate Pascha according to the same reckoning; the Second Council, of the 150 Fathers who assembled in Constantinople in 381 to condemn Macedonius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit; the Third Council, of the 200 Fathers who assembled in Ephesus in 431, to condemn Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who called Christ a mere man and not God Incarnate; the Fourth Council, of the 630 who assembled in Chalcedon in 451, to condemn Eutyches, who taught that there was only one nature, the divine (and not the human) in Christ after the Incarnation, and Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria, who illegally received Eutyches back into communion and deposed St. Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople, who had excommunicated Eutyches; the Fifth Council in 553, of the 165 who assembled in Constantinople for the second time to condemn Origen and Theodore of Mopsuestia, the teacher of Nestorius; the Sixth Council in 680, of the 170 who assembled in Constantinople for the third time, to condemn the Monothelite heresy, which taught that there is in Christ but one will, the divine, an attempted modification of the Monophysite heresy. The Holy Fathers affirmed the Gospel Christ: One Divine Person in two natures, divine and human.

Let Your Light So Shine

✠ The Lord says to His disciples, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven' (Matt. 5:16). He does not say this to urge them to show off, but to urge them to organize their lives as is pleasing to God. Just as light effortlessly attracts people's gaze, so a way of life pleasing to God draws their minds along with their eyes. We do not praise the air which shares in the brilliance of the sunlight, but the sun which is the source of this brilliance and bestows it on us. Even if we do praise the air for its brightness, we praise the sun much more. So it is when someone makes the brilliance of the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2) visible through his virtuous deeds. As soon as anyone looks at him, they are immediately led towards the glory of the Father in Heaven of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. ~ **St. Gregory Palamas**

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (12)

My children, being a Christian is not an indifferent thing. Exert yourselves, "fight the good fight", give yourselves a little labor in order to find much comfort. "Lay hold of eternal life", run "towards the goal, towards the prize of the heavenly calling." "Learn to do good", be brave in the Lord, arm yourselves with great strength, "for we fight not against flesh and blood, but against evil demons" and against the passions of the flesh.

St. Hypatius

Man is like a tree; physical work is the leaves and guarding what lies within is the fruit. Now it says in the Gospel, "Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:10). Clearly, then, all our care should be about the fruit, that is, about guarding the mind. But we also need the protection and adornment of leaves, that is, physical work.

Abba Agathon

Earthly and temporal things fade away with the flesh; but those which are divine and intellectual, and that benefit the soul, are firmly established, and their possession cannot be shaken.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

Let us not grow weary of laboring and sowing the seeds of virtue, that we may be able to harvest joy in the future.

St. Hosius

Let us shun loose speech like deadly poison.

St. Hesychius the Priest

A person who approaches a fountain marvels at the endless stream of water always gushing forth and bubbling out; never could he say that he has seen all the water. In the same way, the person looking at the Divine, invisible beauty will always discover it anew, since it will be seen as something newer and more wondrous in comparison to what he had already comprehended.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

God does not allow the same warfare and temptations to this generation as He did formerly, for men are weaker now and cannot bear so much.

St. Anthony

Judge no one and love especially those who tempt you. If you think deeply, you will find that it is they who lead us to achievement.

St. Barsanuphius

Whoever loves tribulation will obtain joy and peace later on.

Abba Elias

To preserve heedfulness one must retire into oneself, according to the word of the Lord: "Salute no man by the way" (Luke 10:4), that is, do not speak without need, unless someone run after you to hear from you something profitable.

St. Seraphim of Sarov

If you find yourself in a monastery, do not go to another place, for that will harm you a great deal. Just as the bird who abandons the eggs she was sitting on prevents them from hatching, so the monk or the nun grows cold and their faith dies, when they go from one place to another.

Mother Synclctica

When you take food to nourish your body, you can scarcely be induced to leave the table before you have fully satisfied your need and, except for an urgent reason, you will not readily do so. How much more eagerly ought you to linger over spiritual nourishment and strengthen your soul with prayer; for the soul is as far superior to the body as Heaven is above the earth and Heavenly things above those of earth.

St. Basil the Great

Counsels of Romanian Elder Justin (Pârvu)

Fr. Justin (Pârvu) was born in the village of Poiana Largului, Romania, on February 10, 1919; he entered the monastery of Durău in 1936, and in 1939 he enrolled in the Theological Seminary in the Cernica Monastery. He served as a chaplain on the Eastern Front during World War II from 1942-1944, but was imprisoned for political and religious reasons between 1948 and 1964. In 1966 Fr. Justin was received into Secu Monastery, and in 1975 he transferred to Bistrita Monastery. In the autumn of 1991, he placed the foundation stone of Petru Vodă Monastery, where he lived and served as abbot, and in 1999 he began the restoration of a convent for nuns in Paltin. From the end of March 2013, the stomach cancer that he had secretly suffered for several years metastasized, provoking further medical complications that after martyric torments caused Archimandrite Justin's departure to a better world. Fr. Justin is considered the last of the Romanian elders of the period of communist repression to depart this world. May God give rest to his soul!

Counsels of the Elder

Love the poor and co-suffer with them, so that God may have mercy on you also.

Do not rebuke those who sorrow at heart, that you might not be punished with the same rod, and so that when you begin to seek for one that would have mercy on you, you might not find that there he is not there!

Remember that you also bear a mortal body, and do good to all without exception.

Discernment is higher than all other virtues.

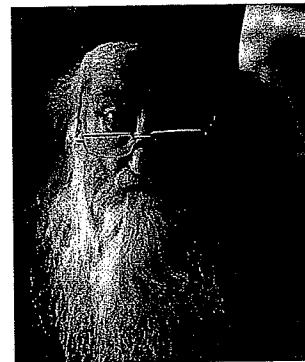
Do not reproach anyone for their sins, but consider yourself responsible for everything, even for your neighbor's sins.

It is better to be despised than to despise. It is better to be insulted than to insult another. Do not live with a proud person, so that your soul would not lose the grace of the Holy Spirit and thus become the habitation of evil passions.

He who flees the vain glory of this world feels the glory of the future life in his soul. Hate repose and a comfortable existence, so that you might preserve your thoughts in tranquility. Avoid meeting excessively with others and take care for your own soul, so that you might preserve peace of soul.

Avoid small sins, so that you might not fall into greater ones. It is more profitable to resurrect your soul from the passions, contemplating the Divine, than it is to raise the dead.

Many have done amazing deeds, raised the dead, and labored in asceticism; in order to bring the lost to the path of salvation they worked great miracles. Many have been brought to God through their efforts. Later, however, those who raised the dead have fallen into shameful passions. By their sinful deeds, which became known, they have led many into temptation. In reality they themselves were sick, but instead of caring for their own spiritual health, they threw themselves into the open sea of this world in order to heal and save the souls of others, thereby ruining both their hope and their souls.



Archimandrite Justin (Parvu).

Whoever hates the seduction and distraction of the mind that comes in worldly affairs will see his Master and Lord within his heart.

So that the Lord might pay attention to our virtues, they must be accompanied by physical temperance and a pure conscience.

It is better to live with eagles than with the greedy and insatiable.

It is better to live with a crippled and outcast person than with a proud one.

It is better to be persecuted than to persecute; it is better to be crucified than to crucify; it is better to be insulted than to insult; it is better to be slandered than to slander.

Self-justification has no place in the life of a Christian, and can be found nowhere in Christ's teachings.

If you love meekness, you will see peace within your soul. And if you become worthy to acquire peace, you will rejoice in any trial.

God forebears all our infirmities, but He cannot bear one who murmurs all the time, and He punishes him in order to correct him.

The lips and the heart that give thanks to God in any trial or temptation receive His blessing and Divine grace.

God's grace is preceded by humility of wisdom, but God's punishment is preceded by high-mindedness.

When your life is according to God, do not be saddened over afflictions and your ferocious passions, for God will take them from you one fine day. Neither fear death, because God has prepared future goodness in order to make you higher than death.

No Tongue, No Eyes, No Ears

✘ **Concerning humility, 'It has no tongue in order to speak against someone for being careless, or someone else for being contemptuous; nor does it have eyes with which to notice another's faults; nor, again, does it have ears to hear that which does not benefit the soul. Neither does it have anything against others, except one's own sins. Instead, it renders one peaceful with all people for the sake of God's commandment, and not merely some friendship. For, if one fasts six days out of seven and is entirely given to great toils and commandments, all of that person's toils outside this way of humility are in vain.'** ~ St. Isaiah of Scetis (5th C)

Useful Activity

✘ **The demons prompt people to arm themselves against the man of prayer, to judge him for the strangeness of his behavior and for the meagerness of his useful activity. They accuse him of idleness, hypocrisy, and sham sanctity; they attribute evil and perfidious intentions to him, as well as depraved actions...Knowing the primary cause of these temptations, let us, in accordance with the Gospel commandments and the Holy Fathers, pray for our neighbors who sin in ignorance and by being enticed, and God will destroy the snares of the demons.**

~ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (1867)

2011 Archpastoral Letter on Marriage by Metropolitan Jonah

Beloved Fathers, brothers and sisters in Christ,

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:6-10)

In our own lifetimes we were blessed by an act of prophetic witness in July 1992, when the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America issued the magnificent "Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life." Two decades later we Orthodox who live in the diocese that includes our nation's capital city need to be reminded of some of the moral verities contained in the Affirmations. It should be obvious to any attentive observer that those verities are under increasing assault by the intellectual, social, and cultural elites in this country—and even by many of our public officials, particularly in the federal government headquartered here in Washington, DC. More alarming is the erosion of those moral verities within some of our Orthodox congregations.

The dire need to preserve and protect the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception has been the focus of the annual encyclical of the OCA primate for Sanctity of Life Sunday each January for many years. I wish to remind you, in the prophetic spirit of the apostles, that the Holy Mystery of Matrimony and the moral limits of human sexuality are ancient traditions of the Church not subject to whatever winds of change may be blowing through our society at the moment.

The 1992 Affirmations enunciated clearly and forcefully the following principles and guidelines among others:

- God wills that men and women marry, becoming husbands and wives. He commands them to increase and multiply in the procreation of children, being two joined into "one flesh" by His divine grace and love. He wills that human beings live within families (Genesis 1:27; 2:21-24; Orthodox Marriage Service).
- The Lord went even further to declare that people who look at others in order to lust after them in their hearts have "committed adultery" (cf. Matthew 5:27-30).
- Christ's apostles repeat the teachings of their Master, likening the unique marriage between one man and one woman to the union between Christ and His Church which they experience as the Lord's very body and His bride (Ephesians 5:21-33; 2 Corinthians 11:2).
- Marriage and family life are to be defended and protected against every open and subtle attack and ridicule.
- Sexual intercourse is to be protected as a sacred expression of love within the community of heterosexual monogamous marriage in which alone it can be that for which God has given it to human beings for their sanctification.
- Homosexuality is to be approached as the result of humanity's rebellion against God, and so against its own nature and well-being. It is not to be taken as a way of living and acting for men and women made in God's image and likeness.

- Men and women with homosexual feelings and emotions are to be treated with the understanding, acceptance, love, justice and mercy due to all human beings.
- People with homosexual tendencies are to be helped to admit these feelings to themselves and to others who will not reject or harm them. They are to seek assistance in discovering the specific causes of their homosexual orientation, and to work toward overcoming its harmful effects in their lives.
- Persons struggling with homosexuality who accept the Orthodox faith and strive to fulfill the Orthodox way of life may be communicants of the Church with everyone else who believes and struggles. Those instructed and counseled (sic) in Orthodox Christian doctrine and ascetical life who still want to justify their behavior may not participate in the Church's sacramental mysteries, since to do so would not help, but harm them.

Our life in Christ is constituted by repentance. If we are to be faithful Christians, we must be constantly turning toward God, away from our sins and passions, realizing the seriousness of our sin in a spirit of repentance, and striving to change our lives. We cannot approach the Holy Mysteries without living a life of repentance, and examining our consciences and confessing our sins. When we have fallen, we repent, and try to stop our sinful behavior. Otherwise, we risk communing unto judgment and condemnation. This discipline of the Christian life leads to salvation, enlightenment and the healing of our souls. We must be faithful to that discipline of life, if we are to call ourselves Orthodox Christians.

In light of the above, what Orthodox Christian in good conscience would dare to approach the chalice containing the life-giving Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Our Lord, while refusing to acknowledge, confess, and eradicate from his or her life sins against authentic Christian marriage, including fornication, homosexual activity, or adultery? Which sexually active couples co-habiting without the Orthodox sacrament of marriage can expect the Church to bless their unholy union and welcome them to the life-giving Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Our Lord, unless they find separate accommodations and cease their fornication and get married in the Church?

We are all called as Christians to live a life of chastity, pleasing to the Lord, married or single. If we are Christians we are all called, whatever our attractions or past habits, to the same saving discipline that will heal our souls. Otherwise we are living in hypocrisy, a living death; just as when we judge others struggling with their sins. This has been delivered to us from the Apostles and Holy Fathers, and remains unchanged to this day.

The Orthodox teaching on chastity and Christian marriage is a fundamental element in Christian life and discipline. We are called to conform our lives to the Church and its disciplines, not alter the teachings of the Church to fit either a cultural fad or our own passions. Where we stand against the prevailing cultural trends, we must stand fast, because we know that obedience to the Church's teaching leads us to communion with God and eternal life; and disobedience leads to alienation from God, spiritual death.

As the Lord proclaims in the Gospel of St. Luke, "Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required. . ." (Luke 12:48, RSV). We Orthodox Christians have been granted eternal life as a free, unmerited divine gift. Virtuous struggle against sexual temptations is hardly too much for the Lord to ask of us. The Lord honors the genuine intent of those who, with humility and repentance, so struggle, even as He judges those who, moved by a spirit of pride and defiance, persist in the spiritual delusion that unnatural or unholy sexual activity can be blessed. I have already instructed the clergy of our Archdiocese to honor their ordinations by acting in full accordance with our uncompromising Orthodox moral tradition. I expect all of us faithful to honor our baptism and unique calling as Christians. These teachings are not onerous, but rather, part of the light yoke and easy burden of being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

Islam and the Vacuum

Joseph Sobran, August 29, 2006

A Christian recently kidded a Jewish friend thus: "Nobody would call Jews stupid. So why did the early Zionists, wanting to escape anti-Semitism, choose to build a Jewish state in, of all the places on earth, a region whose prevalent religion is profoundly hostile to Jews?"

The Jew shrugged ruefully: "Next stop, Mars."

I became disillusioned with the State of Israel a quarter of a century ago. Yet today I can only pity the Israelis as they face the wrath of a resurgent Muslim fanaticism.

Yes, the Israelis have committed their own sins and mistakes. Tact has never been their long suit. Like our own government, they have needlessly inflamed the Muslim world to the point of murderous fury.

Maybe their worst miscalculation has been to underestimate the depth of that hostility. Most Jews, in Israel as elsewhere, are essentially secularized Westerners who find it hard to believe that religion can be a decisive force in politics.

Religion has long since been "tamed" in the West, segregated from political affairs, especially international ones. In 1936, when the white men of Europe were preparing for another huge and fratricidal war, Islam was not a player. Europeans assumed that the Muslim countries were too backward ever to recover their former glory (though Hitler would later make alliances with some Muslims, finding their attitude toward the Jews to his liking).

But in that year, the reactionary Catholic Hilaire Belloc reminded his readers that only Islam had ever come near to destroying Christian civilization and that it had done so fairly recently (while the English were settling in America); and he warned that it might yet revive and renew its assault.

Belloc was ignored. But what sounded far-fetched in 1936 is now starting to sound prophetic. Belloc was strangely like another Catholic of our own day, whose dire predictions have repeatedly survived mockery and come to pass: Patrick Buchanan.

Belloc had a gift for seeing patterns in history that were invisible to complacent liberal opinion, which expected progress in the form of continued secularization. As science and reason advanced, religion would die out and peace would ensue.

It hasn't quite worked out that way. As Belloc observed, Islam still retains its fervor, tenacity, and resistance to conversion. Today we are shocked to find that young men born and raised in Western countries can become fanatical terrorists, willing to kill and die for Islam. The ancient desert faith erupts unnervingly in the heart of civilized London.

That faith began with an ignorant, semiliterate, but extremely eloquent Arab around the year 622. Mohammed claimed to follow in the traditions of Judaism and Christianity and to supersede both religions, but his attempts to convert Jews failed when Jews found his understanding of their religion ridiculous. The same happened when he approached Christians. His initial friendliness to both faiths turned to bitter hostility.

Mohammed's conception of Allah was a severe one: an almighty and arbitrary deity (though "compassionate" and "merciful"), not a loving Father in Heaven. Mohammed rejected the doctrine of

the Trinity, which he absurdly misapprehended, thinking Christians believed that the three Persons were God the Father, Jesus the Son, and Mary the mother of Jesus. Nobody knows where he got this idea, but he denied Jesus' divinity while honoring him as a prophet. (Curiously, Mohammed accepted the Virgin Birth, and he both affirmed and denied the Resurrection.) Believers in the Trinity, he taught, will be damned.

It is often remarked that Mohammed's Allah is even more remote and forbidding than John Calvin's God, more disposed to condemn than to forgive. Even without the doctrine of Original Sin, arbitrary punishment and predestination seem to be at the heart of Islam. The inscrutable will of the Almighty is not bound by any natural law intelligible to humans; if he commands murder, murder becomes a duty. Divine might is right. Allah is free even to contradict himself.

Fortunately for Islam, Mohammed was a better warrior and statesman than theologian, and in making converts he used the sword and tax incentives to supplement persuasion. In a few generations Islam had conquered not only the Middle East, but lands as remote as Spain.

Will it conquer again? It remains a fighting faith, demographically expansive, facing a depopulated religious vacuum in what used to be Christendom.

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No Mere Opinion

Hilaire Belloc, who (in his book *The Great Heresies*) long ago predicted today's Islamic revival, also observed (in *Survivals and New Arrivals*) that Protestantism had turned religion into a matter of mere opinion, a private option of the individual. Those who see religion this way are bound to find Islam hard to comprehend.

When an ancient Roman asked if you were a Christian, he wasn't asking your opinion about Jesus; he was asking whether you belonged to a certain quite visible society and practiced its rites.

Joseph Sobran

Progressivism – A Materialist Vision

Christianity's secular counterpart – Progressive morality – has impressive fluency in the language of human compassion in which ideas that are inimical to the Christian moral tradition are hidden. It confuses believers and convinces secularists and lies at the root of much internal dissent in the historic Christian churches.

When human dignity ceases to be the source and focus of thought on cultural issues the moral foundations of culture are undermined. One reason why the Church Fathers were clear on the moral status of the unborn child (today they would be branded as "haters") is that they understood if the unborn child was seen as a commodity, any kind of cruelty could be justified in the end. They fought for the elevation of human morality. Today we fight against its devolution.

People have natural dynamism because they are created in the image and likeness of God – an insight that can only be grasped and responsibly applied if one first believes that all people have inherent value and dignity. This moral vision is the legacy of the Christian moral tradition comprehensively understood.

This understanding is a threat to the Progressive vision however, because it lays bare the materialist vision of man (man is a biological machine, a better society is achieved by manipulating the mechanisms of state) that lies at its center. The reason for the confusion between the materialist (Progressive) and Christian vision is that the materialist vision borrows the language of the Christian tradition thereby making it appear that the ideas it champions are indeed Christian and thus in accord with cultural history.

Fr. Hans Jacobse, *Orthodoxy Today*