



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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✠ **August 18, 2013** ✠

### **Postfeast of the Dormition**

Martyrs Florus & Laurus of Illyria (2<sup>nd</sup> C)

St. John of Rila, Bulgaria (946) St. Arsenios of Paros, Greece (1877)

We the faithful hymn you,  
O pure one, praising  
thy Dormition!  
For you have been  
translated from the earth,  
going from life to life!  
In Heaven you pray to God,  
that the human race may be  
delivered from misfortune!

⇒ Inquirer's Class – Tuesday August 20, 6:30pm

✠ Wed. August 21, 6:30pm Akathist of the Dormition

## **The Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist**

A priest lived in a village of Greece who was very virtuous. His name was Pelagius and he had great love for the Most-Holy Theotokos. But the devil hated him for his piety and planted the seed of disbelief in his mind about Holy Communion. He thought "How is it possible for the bread to become the Body of Christ and the wine to become the Blood of Christ!?"

Because of these thoughts of disbelief, he became very despondent and he refused to consult anyone for spiritual advice. But because of his great love for the Holy Mother he went to her asking her to resolve his doubts. One day when he was performing the Divine Liturgy, at the point of the service where the priest intones "Especially for our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever virgin Mary," the consecrated host suddenly disappeared from before him. Pelagius looked all around the altar table but could not find it. He yelled out in fear, "My dearest Holy Mother, I know that Jesus is disgusted with me because of my disbelief and that is why He disappeared before my very eyes so that I cannot receive Holy Communion because I am unworthy. I beg you to ask Him to forgive me."

He then suddenly saw before him on the Holy Altar the glorious Queen of Heaven holding the Divine Child in her lap and saying to him: "This Child is the Creator of the universe. He is the Son and Word of God. He is perfect God and perfect man. He died on the Cross for the salvation of the world and He rose from the dead. He now daily condescends to come down to us in a miraculous way in the form of bread and wine. He does this as an expression of His love for humanity. He offers Himself for the sanctification of souls of all people. Touch Him therefore without fear so that you may be assured that He is truly flesh and blood, just as I gave birth to Him. This is what happens every time you celebrate the Divine Liturgy. But since it is impossible for human nature to eat raw flesh and drink blood, our great God offers them to us in the form of bread and wine. This makes it possible for people to commune the elements with desire and longing. You therefore should commune the bread and wine with reverence and faith, for anyone who receives Holy Communion worthily partakes in the divine glory of Christ."

In saying these words, the Holy Mother placed her infant Child on the altar table, humbly kissed Him and disappeared. The priest then, with fear and joy, took in his hands the Holy Child; he reverently kissed Him and determined that He was truly a living child of flesh and blood. He then placed the child on the altar, fell to his knees and prayed crying; "I believe Lord, and confess that Thou art the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary. I thank Thee for the grace that I, the unworthy one, received today and I entreat Thee to forgive me for my disbelief. Now make me worthy to consume Thee not as a child but as consecrated Bread." After he prayed with faith, he stood up and saw before him the consecrated Bread as it was before. He received Communion with joy and he continued throughout his life to celebrate the Holy Sacraments with greater piety. ✠ ✠ ✠

## The America of 2013

American Thinker | Steve McCann

Americans take great umbrage whenever they, as a society, are portrayed by the residents of other nations as self-centered, avaricious and overbearing. While an egregious exaggeration in the past, is it an accurate description now? Who are the American people today and what sort of country is the United States in 2013?

How does one describe a society wherein a majority of the people, and their elected leaders, have embraced the following mindset?

- a) The United States can commit to unlimited government spending as the long-term future of the nation is immaterial and will take care of itself.
- b) Based on 66 years of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity, the good times will never end and America will under no circumstance experience massive national adversity as there is a bottomless pit of money to be siphoned from an equally bottomless pit of wealth.
- c) Since the dollar is the international reserve currency, the United States, in order to cover its massive budget deficits, can arbitrarily create trillions of dollars out of thin air regardless of any consequence for the nation or the global economy.
- d) There are no limits to personal behavior and the arcane concepts of decency, honor and integrity are from a bygone era.

In just four years the United States has accumulated nearly \$6 Trillion in debt. The national debt is now \$16.5 Trillion or 32.5% of the world's total indebtedness (the U.S. accounts for 5% of the global population and 20% of the annual Gross World Product). Further, the total unfunded liabilities (state, local and federal) of the U.S., as of 2012, exceed \$238 Trillion, or 3 times the annual Gross World Product (total economic activity of all the countries on earth). The United States is, today, the most indebted and bankrupt nation in the history of mankind.  
~ Orthodoxytoday.org

America has a severe educational problem: It is full of people, many of them in prominent positions, who have been educated beyond their intelligence. In fact, such people are more prominent as leaders in most American institutions than people of knowledge and character.

Another educational problem: several million people who have been made unemployable by being sent to college, for which they were unqualified...And being exposed to professors who are part of the education problem above.  
- Clyde Wilson

The federal takeover of education and medicine a half-century ago, known as "the Great Society," has been a colossal failure if its goal was a better society. It has, however, made a lot of people richer than they were and provided politicians with endless opportunities for benevolent posturing, bribery, and patronage.  
- Clyde Wilson

Culturally, the U.S. is already a Third World country. Just watch a few hours of daytime television. Or experience the raucous noise of public places. Or take a look at your local magazine rack.  
- Clyde Wilson

You know things are finished for Christians when the only thing they are allowed to hear about is what St. Paul said no Christian should even talk about.  
- Robert Reavis

## **On Fasting and Communion – + Patriarch Pavle of Serbia (+ 2012)**

*Lessons from a Monastery, by Matushka Constantina*

What Holy Communion means to the spiritual life of a Christian is described in the words of our Lord: "I am the living Bread which came down from Heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."

With deep faith in these words of the Lord, the early Christians anxiously approached Holy Communion, not because of some requirement, but from an immediate awareness that there was no spiritual life without Him. Just as one is not ordered to breathe, but spontaneously knows that without air he would suffocate and die. The early Christians attended all the Sunday and Holiday liturgies and at the Deacon's invitation - with the fear of God and with faith, draw near, all the faithful lined up and received Holy Communion. They were convinced that they were attaining the deepest mystery of our faith and the holiest gift of God's mercy. They tried to approach the all-holy and most pure God in Holy Communion with purity of heart and soul.

They were called "holy" and they were truly holy for they protected themselves from every sin and they knew that "he who sins is a slave to sin," that sin turns a person away from God, corrupts the soul and makes it incapable of receiving Holy Communion. One who fell into sin would immediately raise himself up through Confession, cleansing his soul so that he would not commune unworthy. "For he who unworthy eats and drinks the Bread and Cup of life drinks condemnation." At that time the early Christians kept all the tradition of the fast, understanding that fasting is a holy institution from the Old Testament. God ordered the fasting periods as an everlasting plan. In the New Testament Jesus Christ Himself fasted and taught His Disciples to fast. The Apostles and Saints also kept this. The fasting periods were practiced at certain times as needed and Communion was administered regularly in the fasting seasons as well as when meat and dairy foods were used. During the fasting seasons they fasted and communed, during non fasts, they ate and communed just like the clergy do today. In the early Church there was no special preparation for Communion, nor was a fast considered as the only means for Communion. The preparation for Holy Communion was life-long process of keeping the commandments and guarding against all sin.



For the first 300 years of the persecution of the Christian Church, this was the procedure kept by the clergy and laity and only those who had deep faith in the Heavenly Kingdom were ready to sacrifice all to obtain salvation. Christian morality at that time was on a high level. Then after freedom was declared in the year 313 under the rule of King Constantine, there was a movement in the Church of those "who did not find their treasures hidden in the field and were not ready to sell everything to buy that field" (St. Matthew 13:44). At this behavior the level of morality of the Christians fell to a low standard. Many still approached Holy Communion regularly but without a serious commitment to Him. Others began to delay their trip to the Holy Chalice with the excuse of not enough preparation. But

the effort of soul cleansing was only from time to time for a few days before Holy Communion. Even this practice became harder for them and they further delayed their preparation and their receiving of Communion until it happened that they communed only four times a year and it gradually became even less.

In view of this situation, according to St. John Chrysostom, the Church established the forty day Fast before Christmas and Pascha. Realizing the danger that comes from such habits, the Holy Fathers

ordered forty days of fasting that we all cleanse ourselves carefully through prayer, charity, fasting, vigils and tears. In this manner we may approach Holy Communion with a clear conscience as much as possible. As for the others, the Church Fathers say that they must make every effort, not only before Holy Communion, but always to live a Godly life in order to receive.

When the question arises as to whose position is the correct one, those who commune infrequently or those who commune regularly? St. John answers that neither one is the answer, but only they who take Communion with a clear conscience, a clean heart and spotless life. These people may approach at all times and those who do not measure up to this - not even once. This will only bring on them condemnation, judgment and suffering.

Of all the methods to cleanse the soul for this most important union with Christ in receiving His Body and Blood, our people see only the physical fast. Many priests pose before the faithful just one question - did you fast? When they answer positively, he allows them to approach, as if that one thing is of major importance. Everything else is secondary as does he value the magnitude of what he is receiving, does he know the Creed, the basic prayers, is his tongue and mouth clear of lies, cursing and filthy language, and is he in a quarrel with someone? Fornication, adultery, frequenting fortune tellers, sorcerers and wearers of the evil eye should be asked. Do women practice abortion? Do they regularly pray, read the Bible and meditate?

Pastors must avoid the mechanical approaches and insist that the faithful come as often as possible and commune at each liturgy with constant preparation and vigil over their souls. The spiritual father knows the spiritual condition of each member of his flock. To one he advises to come more often during fasting seasons, he could tell some to fast two or three days, to others seven days and to some to come always without fasting.

It goes without saying that our faithful should be instructed towards frequent Communion, but under the condition of constant guard over the purity of soul, keeping spiritual fasts, guarding the heart, eyes, ears and senses of everything sinful and not only by observing physical fasts...

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## **A Prayer in Suffering**

"The dark clouds of trouble gather above me, O Lord, and the grief of torments terrifies me. Although I find myself in a state of suffering, I do not complain against You, O Good One, for You are my support and the unshaken rock upon which I place my hope. You know, O God, the cause of my wretchedness and sorrows, and You continue to look after me. Even in my suffering I know that You love me, and it is this very knowledge that strengthens me. Thus, hoping in Your very love and goodness, I shall not allow these assaults to overcome me; instead, I will fight with courage, and confident in Your help, I shall be victorious. It is You Who guide the world and the fate of mortals; thus direct the ship of my life which is assailed by the waves of temptation, so that it may reach the calm harbor. Alone, I fight in vain against the tempests of life, for without You I can do nothing. I therefore flee to You, O Good One, and I pray: Come to my aid and save me by Your might, just as You once saved Peter who came to You upon the water. Stretch out Your hand to me as You did to him, O Lord of mercy, and do not delay. Amen."



{21 August}

## ST ABRAHAM OF SMOLENSK

Saint Abraham's parents were wealthy citizens of Smolensk in Russia. They had twelve daughters but no sons. The pious couple begged God to give them a son and the Lord heard their prayer and gave them a holy son.

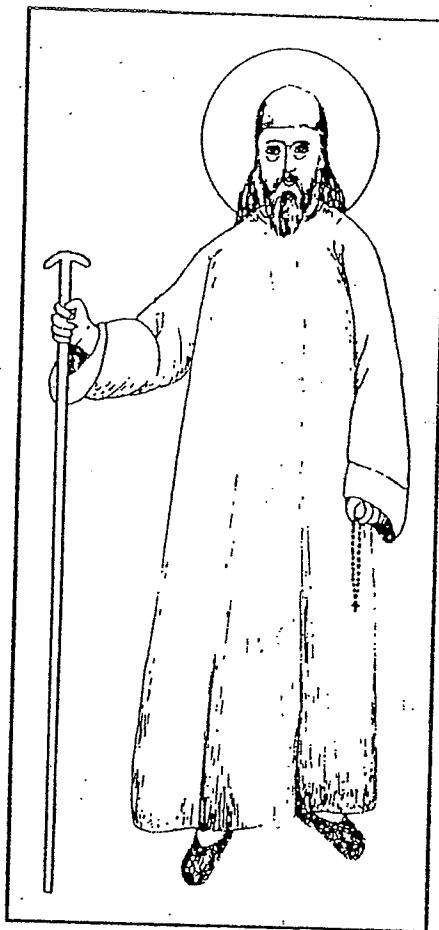
When the child was born, there was great rejoicing in the household. The great mystery of baptism was served on the holy baby and special care was given to his spiritual development. Abraham received an excellent education as well and he grew in spirit and knowledge. From his early youth, this chosen one of

God showed signs of his high calling. He deeply loved the Divine Services in church and confessed and sincerely repented for each sin he committed. He began to fast and pray very strictly so that he would not fall into the passions of youth, and he resolved that, with God's help, he would become a monk. His parents tried to force him to marry but the holy youth refused and only increased his spiritual struggle more. His parents, who were already elderly when he was born, soon reposed in the Lord and Abraham quickly gave away his inheritance to the poor. He dressed in rags and himself became poor in the world so that he might become rich in the Lord. By God's will, the young man entered the Monastery of the Most Holy Theotokos some distance from Smolensk.

In the monastery, the saint patiently and meekly passed through the monastic obediences. This monastery had a good library and Abraham was able to read the lives of the desert fathers and the great Fathers of the Church. He especially liked the books by Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Ephraim of Syria. Just as a bee gathers sweet nectar from flowers, so Saint Abraham gathered spiritual sweetness from sacred books. When the abbot saw the pure life of the saint, he had him ordained to the priesthood.

Saint Abraham was a great struggler. By means of obedience, meekness, prayer and fasting, he grew in holy humility and purity of heart. As a result of this, God gave him many gifts of Grace and spiritual understanding. Saint Abraham received the gift of eldership from God, and many people began to come to him for advice and help. Everyone who came to him received great benefit from the wise words of this chosen one of God.

Of course, satan hated the blessed elder and tried to destroy him. By the devil's inspiration, some monks began to cause trouble for the saint. They stirred up all kinds of unpleasantness and spite for the meek elder but he peacefully endured it all, and lovingly prayed for those who offended him. For five years, the patient saint endured all slanders and attacks and continued to comfort and teach



*Saint Abraham*

all of God's people who came to him. Seeing the saint's meekness and patience, the evil monks became filled with an even greater malice. They began to slander him once more.

Finally, these evil people took their slanders to the abbot. Prompted by the devil, he believed them and turned against Saint Abraham. The abbot was already jealous of the saint and now he began to hate him, and even drove him out of the monastery.

The innocent servant of Christ meekly left the monastery and returned to the city of Smolensk and entered the small, poor monastery of the Honourable Cross. When people heard that the saint was in the city, they began to flock to him to hear his blessed words. Many men entered the little monastery as monks and it began to grow and thrive.

Here again, envy and jealousy overcame some of the people. Slanders began to be heaped upon the blessed elder and many were turned against him. This time, the slanders and envy were so great that the saint's enemies dragged him through the streets and demanded that he be cast out of the city. There was no end to the insane slanders which evil people brought against Saint Abraham. Finally, the bishop of the city was forced to call Saint Abraham before a church court to hear the charges against him. The bishop did not believe the charges brought against the saint, and he reproached the accusers who had appeared in court. Still, these evil people could not be silenced and they aroused such disorder and anger in the city that it was necessary for the bishop to send Saint Abraham away in order to restore peace in the city. Thus, it seemed that falsehood had triumphed.

Saint Abraham was sent back to his first monastery and forbidden even to serve the Holy Liturgy. The blessed one, however, only rejoiced in his soul that God had sent these trials to teach him greater humility. Never the less, Christ loving people still came out to see the saint and seek his counsel, but again, evil people submitted to the power of envy. This time, they even set up a road block on the way to the monastery and tried, by force, to keep people from coming out to the saint.

In the meantime, God gave a revelation to Blessed Father Lazar of Smolensk. He revealed to the priest that a drought would descend on the city and its environs until the people repented of their sins against God's chosen one. Blessed Lazar related this prophecy to the bishop and the prophecy was quickly fulfilled. The drought was terrible indeed. Fields, gardens and orchards dried up and died, and there was almost no drinking water left. Bishop Ignaty and his clergy went all around the city with crosses and holy water, blessing the gardens and wells and beseeching the Lord to send rain; God would not accept their prayers and again He sent a prophecy through His servants. The prophet came to the bishop and said: "Do you know, Vladika, why the Lord does not heed our prayers? Truly, it is because Blessed Abraham has been innocently condemned and forbidden to serve the Divine Liturgy. If this righteous one will pray for rain, then God will answer his prayers."

The bishop immediately sent for Saint Abraham and asked him to serve the Liturgy and prayers for rain. Moreover, Bishop Ignaty humbly begged the saint to forgive him, saying, "Forgive me, servant of Christ, for in ignorance I have sinned by listening to slanders. Pray to God for us. Ask the Lord for rain that He might have mercy on us. For, the Righteous Judge has punished us on your account. Forgive us!"

Saint Abraham humbly replied, "Who am I, a sinful person, that the Lord would punish people on my account? And who am I to ask the Lord for rain? You, O bishop, pray for your spiritual flock, and I will pray together with your other children in obedience to your command." The saint prayed together with everyone else, and God heard his righteous prayers and the drought was ended.

After this, most of his slanderers repented. Saint Abraham was made abbot of his own monastery and struggled for fifty years in holy monasticism. God glorified

## REMEMBERING OUR FATHER'S WILL

Very Rev. Fr. George Tsahakis

When we read the account of creation in Genesis, we find that at the end of each day God looked over His work and "saw that it was good." (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25)

There was one exception; after God created man He declared, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." What's interesting is that after creating the woman, God looked at Adam and Eve and saw that His work was not just good – it was "very good."

Fathers, love in marriage is the culmination and crowning point of God's creation and the key to being a genuine husband. In turn, it paves the way for fathers to be loving, caring, and supportive of their children.

Hebrews 13:4 reflects this divine image of the Sacrament of Marriage: "Let marriage be held in honor by all..." The Greek word for honorable – *timios* – means held as of great price, esteemed, precious – the same word used to describe precious stones like diamonds, rubies, and emeralds.

But anything with that potential for beauty also has incredible potential for pain and brokenness. We don't have to go very far in Holy Scripture – Genesis 2 to Genesis 3 – to learn that the enemy of our souls has unleashed all of his power and strength to steal, kill, and destroy our relationship with God and each other.

**In many homes, it seems that Satan is winning the war: Bliss has turned into brokenness.**

A golden wedding ring feels like a "band of bondage." And it seems that everything in life competes for our affection in love and marriage. It's easy to find ourselves empty and exhausted – just trying to get by. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her..." (Ephesians 5:25). In effect, a husband is challenged to be "overcome" with love for his wife. Unfortunately for his wife, a husband's professed love can feel more like being ravaged than delighted.

In this context, consider the outcome of healthy versus unhealthy love that a husband and father has the power to offer – "overcoming with love" or "ravaging" his wife and children: One discusses; one distances. One rages; one disengages. One escalates; one escapes. And relief rarely comes.

How do we stop the insanity of our destructive behavior? In basketball, when a player is struggling with his shot, a good coach will move him to the foul line to focus on the fundamentals of shooting.

**Likewise, in our family relationships, we need to get back to the heart of it all – love! Maybe you have lost that "loving feeling." Remember, loving is a choice. A choice each of us makes every day.**

After God created the man and the woman, He gave a life-long guideline for every marriage.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (2:24) **Leave and cleave...**

Leave – choice "to leave behind, to abandon, and to forsake."

Cleave – choice "to be adhered firmly and closely or loyally and unwaveringly."

The result of the choice a husband makes is found in the last phrase of Genesis 2:24 – "and they shall be one flesh." In Hebrew, the concept is that a man and a woman then become so united that they are literally woven together as one. And the union cannot be divided without wounding both individual parts. It becomes a bond of intimacy so strong that there is no fear in their love – only a freedom to love and to be loved. And this love overflows to their children, their household, and all their earthly pursuits.

Husbands, consider the simple joy of knowing there is someone who wants to kiss you, to hold you, and most importantly, to be one with you. This is our Heavenly Father's Will for all husbands, fathers, and their beloved families – let us love each other like He desires. Amen!

**Elder Nikon of Russia (+1963)**

## **What is the Essence of Christianity?**

**This - that the All-mighty, All-knowing Creator of the Universe has such love and compassion for man, such care for him and his salvation, that He gave up His Only-Begotten Son to shame, the Cross and death.**

He cares not only for mankind as a whole, but for every person individually; each and every minute He holds him in His hand, protecting him from visible and invisible foes, granting him wisdom through other people, books, and life's circumstances. If it is necessary to chastise a person in order to instruct him or to prevent him from falling into a worse mishap, He does so with mercy, and, if a person is able to accept this in the right spirit, He rewards him greatly, as though He feels sorry for having issued the punishment. Those whose inner vision has begun to clear can see God's amazing Providence over man in things both great and small. And so it is. If for man's sake God sacrificed that which He loved most - His Son - then how can He begrudge anything? Even the whole universe is nothing compared to such a sacrifice.

The Lord does not hold back anything, especially from those who yearn for Him, who try to keep His word, who feel compunction after every committed sin, seeing this as a breach of His will, as inattentiveness towards Him, as ingratitude and lack of love towards Him. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

The Lord rejoices over every person who longs for Him immeasurably more than a mother rejoices over displays of love from her own child. For this reason, do not fear the future. "God is with us" today, tomorrow and always. Fear only to grieve Him through some form of sin. If in our weakness we fall into some wrong, let us repent and the Lord will forgive us, as long as we do not consciously choose evil, attempt to justify ourselves or murmur against God. Fear nothing. Be bold to bring to the Lord all your troubles, confusion, fears, hurts from the demons and people. He both desires and knows how to relieve you of these and to free you from them when this will be most beneficial for you.

Do not trust in yourself and in people. Trust in God's word, the Gospel. Study the Gospel through your own life experience. Life in Christ will give you such fullness, such an understanding of everything, such spiritual joy, steadfastness - that the life of worldly people will seem (as indeed it is) of little value, uninteresting, impoverished, pitiable, frivolous, full of insignificant squabbles, unhappiness and often great misfortunes. You are fortunate. Treasure this. Thank God for this, and He will multiply His goodness towards you many times over for your gratitude, as much as you are able to contain.

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Comment:

**"The reality is that no one outside of the Orthodox Church cares what we think on this or any other issue. We have little or no effect on American culture. Instead, we must concentrate on teaching our people, especially our youth, what we believe about sex and marriage, so that they will not be led astray by the anti-Christian culture in which we live. That does not mean that we should remain quiet, but it does mean that we cannot expect society to receive our call or society to repent and return to Christian morality with anything except ridicule and eventually persecution. Our Church has lived under persecution most of its existence and I have no doubt are entering into a new era of persecution in this country."**

**– Fr. John W. Morris**