

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **October 26, 2014** ✠

Holy Great-Martyr Demetrios the Myrrhstreaming of Thessalonica (306)

✠ **Tues. Oct. 28 6:30pm Inquirer's Class**

⇒ **No Wednesday Service**

⇒ **Many Years! ~ Newly Illumined: Ephraim Reese and Patrick Skinner!**

⇒ **Today: Baby Shower for Tatiana Landar / Next Sunday – for Blair Boyer**

Faith and Works

✠ "Faith without works and works without faith will both alike be condemned, for he who has faith must offer to the Lord the faith which shows itself in actions. Our father Abraham would not have been counted righteous because of his faith had he not offered its fruit, his son. He who loves God both believes truly and performs the works of faith reverently. But he who only believes and does not love, lacks even the faith he thinks he has; for he believes merely with a certain superficiality of intellect and is not energized by the full force of love's glory. The chief part of virtue, then, is faith energized by love."

St. Diadochos of Photiki

The Causes of Bad Thoughts

✠ "Know that, in general, bad thoughts derive from two causes, one external and the other internal. The external cause of bad thoughts is the sensible objects of the five senses, that is, those things seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched, like bad and indecent and theatrical sights, obscene words and lewd songs, scents and colognes and perfumes, luscious foods and pleasurable drinks, fine and soft clothes and comfortable mattresses. All these things cause passionate and hedonistic thoughts in the soul, and then sinful and death-bearing thoughts. Thus, the Prophet Jeremiah on one hand says: "**Death has come up into our windows**" (Jer. 21:9), the windows meaning the five senses. On the other hand, Gregory the Theologian rather interpreted this saying in broader terms: "And it is kept until the fifth day (that is, the sacrificed Paschal Lamb), perhaps because the Victim, of Whom I am speaking, purifies the five senses, from which comes falling into sin, and around which the war rages, inasmuch as they are open to the incitements to sin." **St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mt.**

From the Desert ~ Go on Living!

✠ "Some people are so upset by their struggles that they do not even want to carry on living, and they consider death as something pleasant that will deliver them. This happens to a person through faint-heartedness and great ignorance --- not knowing the terrible need that the soul has when it escapes from the body. It is a great philanthropy of God, brethren, to be in this world, but we - not knowing how things are there - consider the things which we suffer here as a burden; but this is not so. Recall the teaching in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, where a very diligent brother [said to] a certain Elder: 'My soul wishes for death.' The Elder said to him: 'This happens because your soul wants to escape its sorrow, and does not know that the future sorrow will be much worse than this one.'"

This and That

"From Bratislava to Bucharest to Belgrade, the acceptance of deviancy, perversion, and morbidity is the litmus test of an aspirant (nation's) clubbability" (ed: i.e. to be accepted into the EU and into the modern project, laying aside the past and tradition, "all permanent values and institutions").

—Srda Trikovic, Chronicles

Same-sex marriage is a radically new notion... This should not be surprising, since homosexuality itself, as a thing parallel to heterosexuality, is a recent invention. Homosexual activity may be as old as civilization, but the idea of a category of person whose sexual identity is primarily defined by same-sex attraction, yet who is otherwise quite like the mainstream of society, is of recent vintage.

— Daniel McCarthy

To extend marriage rights to same-sex couples requires a radical redefinition of what marriage is, a redefinition that has, for all intents and purposes, no precedent in our society — and for that matter, no precedent anywhere, ever. Even polygamous civilizations, such as traditional Islamic civilization, do not recognize same-sex marriage. — Rod Dreher

From time out of mind, the idea that marriage constitutes the union between one man and one woman has been the unquestioned standard in our civilization. Same-sex marriage has only been on the national radar since 1993, when a Hawaii court ruled that the state had to demonstrate just cause for why marriage ought to be denied to same-sex couples. That was fewer than 20 years ago, and in that time, support for same-sex marriage has increased at a pace that is nothing short of revolutionary. According the trajectory of polling, at some point in the next few years, what had been the settled view of the nature of marriage for millennia will have been rejected by a majority of the American people. Whether this is a good or a bad thing, all must agree that it is a revolutionary thing.

This stunning victory has been achieved by mounting an all-out assault on tradition. It wouldn't have succeeded had the tradition not been hollowed out by the (hetero)sexual revolution, of course, but that's an argument for another thread. The point is, the marriage innovators assaulted the settled tradition — and have just about won. But here's the thing: they won in part by framing their own assault on tradition as self-defense. This is what it means when same-sex marriage advocates talk about attempts by marriage traditionalists to attack their families and their rights. It's brilliant propaganda, because it paints people who preferred the status quo into culture-war aggressors, rather than those who are actually aggressing against the settled tradition.

The point is not that the pro-SSM folks are wrong, or that they're right. The point here is that they are by any rational measure the culture-war aggressors, but paint themselves as the victims of a right-wing assault. It's brilliant propaganda.

...Note well the principles that follow. It will help you make sense of events, especially media coverage of them:

The First Law of the Culture War: Conservatives are always and everywhere the aggressors.

The Second Law of the Culture War: The existence of conservative values, traditions, and institutions constitute acts of aggression.

—Rod Dreher

The Dead Sense and Know Good Works Done for Them

The dead sense and know good works done for them. Of this a Christian must have no doubt. Good works flow like an electric current through the whole heavenly world. An imperial official, Magistrian, was sent by the Emperor on an important errand. On his journey, he saw a dead man lying naked. He was distressed at this and, taking off his tunic, wrapped the man in it and buried him.

After a certain time, a misfortune overtook Magistrian: he fell from his horse and broke his leg. He lay sick in bed for a long time. At one moment, a number of doctors were gathered around him in consultation over his condition, and they decided that the leg must be amputated.

That night, Magistrian could not sleep, but spent the hours sighing and weeping. At midnight, a man suddenly appeared to him and asked him: "Why are you crying?" When Magistrian explained, the unknown man stretched out his hand to the injured leg, and it became whole.

"For God's sake, tell me who you are!", cried Magistrian. To this the unknown man replied: "Look carefully; isn't this your tunic? In response to your good deed, God has sent me to heal you. Give your thanks to God!"

From the Prologue

The Persistent "Night of the Dead"

I stopped to investigate the roots of "Halloween" and to reflect on some of the images and practices surrounding that "holiday." I found myself wondering why this celebration of the Night of the Dead has persisted so strongly for thousands of years, especially among people who call themselves Christians.

At Halloween, we see ghosts, ghouls, monsters, demons, partly decomposed bodies emerging from oozing graves—all nightmarish images of death. It seems that the whole idea of death has been perverted here—it's something evil, ugly and frightening—even though the Christian Faith teaches something quite different about death.

Most Halloween practices are traced to the pre-Christian, Celtic people's celebration of the eve of the festival of Samhain, the Lord of the Dead. The Celts lived in what is now the British Isles and France. On October 31st, Druids, the Celtic priests, would perform a variety of pagan rituals to appease the Samhain and the evil spirits of the dead which were thought to rise on that night. Bonfires for animal and human sacrifices, charms, spells and other magic were used to protect the living and predict the future. The festival was also blended with partying to honor the sun god in thanksgiving for the harvest.

Eventually, the Celts accepted Christianity, and, as usual, the evangelizers attempted to Christianize the pagan beliefs and rites. Instead of banning

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by Matushka Margaret Kappanadze

bonfires, it was taught that these fire rituals (nix the sacrifices!) would protect the Christian Celts from the Devil. When the celebration of All Saints' Day was established on November 1st, October 31st became the eve of that feast—thus All Hallows (Saints) Even (Evening) or Hallowe'en.

But the pagan beliefs were never eradicated, and they continued when witchcraft and superstition flourished during the Dark Ages. Then, magic was used to enhance or appease (as the need arose) the effects of the powers of the gods of nature. Witches accepted Halloween as one of their "Sabbaths" when they gathered to celebrate and to practice their craft. Although not technically Satan worshippers, they were regarded by the Church

as associated with the Devil. (And why not? Indeed, if magic has any effect—good or bad, White or Black—its power surely comes from evil.)

Though the Roman Church tried to stamp out witchcraft, pagan customs on the Night of the Dead were kept alive in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and other places, and they were eventually brought to the United States. To this day, in certain Roman Catholic cultures, Christians go to the cemeteries on the Eve of All Saints' to await the arrival of the spirits of their departed relatives. Sometimes, they offer food to please them or to bribe the demons to stay away. These practices are often related to the Roman Catholic belief that

some souls go to Purgatory before they're sent to their final resting places. Those souls are unhappy, unsettled and tortured; and they need to be prayed out of that place.

Here are some of the age-old Halloween practices kept alive today:

- **Jack-o-Lanterns**—made to represent mysterious flames burning over bogs and marshes in Britain (possibly ignited methane gas). These lights were suspected to be the souls of sinners condemned to walk the earth. Carrying around your own Jack-o-Lantern (made from a turnip or a beet in the old country) might protect you from these tortured souls.
- **Ghosts**—spirits of the dead which return, especially on Halloween. Since an unhappy ghost is supposedly a dangerous, or even a deadly one, food was put out to appease them, fires were lit to guide them or chase evil ones away, and costumes were donned to frighten them away.
- **Trick-or-Treating**—visiting house-to-house and exchanging “soul cakes” for promises to pray for the souls of the dead—especially to pray them out of Purgatory. Add to this good doses of mischief and spooking.
- **Bonfires**—used to offer animal or human sacrifices to the Lord of the Dead to appease him and/or to frighten away evil spirits. Christians used them to chase away the Devil as well as evil spirits.
- **Witches, screeching owls, black cats, bats**—all associated with evil for centuries.

Compare these Halloween goings-on with what the Orthodox Church teaches us about death. Death is, since Adam and Eve and the Fall, an event which is the result of fallen human nature. It is a consequence of sin. It is also a time of rest from a busy, burdensome and temptation-filled life in “the world” where we were not meant to live. The body goes back to the earth and the soul goes to some place of rest to await the Second Coming of Christ. Orthodox Christians don't believe in a Purgatory for souls in a separate category.

Christ came to reverse that separation —“trampling down death” by

“Of course we believe that the souls of the dead will rise, but not to wander around and spook us once a year!”

His own death and Resurrection. Because of Christ's resurrection, death has no victory, no sting (1 Cor. 15:55)—no hold over us; and it's not to be feared by those trying to live a Christian life.

Of course we believe that the souls of the dead will rise, but not to wander around as ghosts and spook us once a year! The coming universal resurrection of the dead was prefigured to us at the resurrection of Lazarus. St. Paul preached this (1 Thess.) so that we would not be “ignorant concerning those who are asleep.” And, by the way, the Orthodox Church celebrates the feast of All Saints on the Sunday after Pentecost. (See you at Vigil on the Eve of All Saints Day!)

When Christ returns to earth in His glory, all of the dead will rise, our souls will be reunited with our bodies (in a glorified state) and we will all go to meet our Savior in the clouds to be judged and sent to our eternal “homes.” This judgment is, indeed, a frightening prospect for those of us who recognize that we turn away from Christ all too frequently. But death and judgment are not the horrifying nightmare represented at Halloween to Christians who have hope and who struggle daily to repent and to follow Christ, Who *is* Life!

Many people teach that Halloween celebrations are innocent and fun doings—playing pranks, collecting treats, having a good scare, and celebrating the harvest, too. If we believe this, we should investigate the meaning of what we're doing. Do we just participate in one-more-excuse-to-party without knowing what it's all about? Don't forget what Dad said about jumping off a bridge just because someone else does it!

Is dabbling in pagan customs and surrounding ourselves with pagan images that represent a totally perverted teaching of death really so innocent? Remember when, as a child, you would make a silly or frightening face? If an adult was present, they'd be sure to tell you that if you didn't stop it your face would freeze like that! (I've never known

that to happen, although I've seen a few adults who seem to have had years of practice in making their faces look negative, nasty, unkind, and just plain miserable!) It seems, however, that preserving these ugly pagan practices of darkness, evil and fear will definitely make a permanent impression on our minds, hearts and our faith.

Why do we go to such lengths to practice something we don't even believe in? To what good end? Is it really innocent? Maybe the “Trick” is on us because we now live in a society that is witnessing the erosion of differences between good and evil, right and wrong. Does the Devil want us to believe, starting at a very young age, that in evil and darkness there's innocent and harmless fun? YOU BET! After all, if sin wasn't so much fun, didn't taste, feel and sound so good, we wouldn't have to worry!

Two truths remain. First, evil is to be regarded as a very serious and real danger. We may not believe that unsettled souls are lurking and need to be chased away, but demons *are* lurking. And how do Christians chase them out? Not by silly Halloween trappings, but, in Christ's own words, “by prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:21). Second, Death is not to be feared as an ugly and hopeless event by those who live in the Light of Christ.

We take great pains to protect our children and ourselves from disease and harm. We teach the good nutrition, hygiene and personal safety. We discourage them from engaging in fornication, substance abuse and other immoral and dangerous acts. Why do we allow them to dabble in darkness? Even if Halloween was good, clean, innocent fun, to what benefit, spiritual, intellectual or otherwise, is this for a Christian? Let's teach our children to surround themselves with what is good and to “walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). Let's show them that the hope of the Christian life is to be delivered from death into life with God for eternity!

October 26: The Holy Great-Martyr Demetrios



This glorious and wonderworking saint was born in Thessalonica of noble and devout parents. Implored of God by childless parents, Demetrios was their only son, and so was raised and educated with great care. Demetrios's father was a commander in Thessalonica. When his father died, Emperor Maximian appointed Demetrios as commander in his place. As he appointed him, Maximian, an opponent of Christ, particularly recommended that he persecute and exterminate the Christians in Thessalonica. Demetrios not only disobeyed the emperor but openly confessed and preached the Lord Jesus Christ in the city of Thessalonica. When the emperor heard of this he became furious with Demetrios. Then, when he was returning from battle against the Sarmatians, Maximian stopped at Thessalonica to investigate the matter. The emperor summoned Demetrios and questioned him about his faith. Demetrios openly acknowledged his Christian Faith to the emperor and also denounced the emperor's idolatry. Maximian cast Demetrios into prison. Knowing what was awaiting him, Demetrios gave all his goods to his faithful servant Lupus to distribute to the poor, and joyfully awaited his imminent suffering for Christ the Lord. An angel of God appeared to him in prison, saying: "Peace be to you, O sufferer of Christ; be brave and be strong!" After several days, the emperor sent soldiers to the prison to kill Demetrios. The soldiers found the saint of God at prayer and ran him through with lances. Christians secretly took his body and honorably buried it. Healing myrrh flowed from the body of the martyr of Christ, curing many of the sick. Soon, a small church was built over his relics. An Illyrian nobleman, Leontius, was afflicted with an incurable illness. He hastened, with prayer, to the relics of St. Demetrios and was completely healed. In thanksgiving, Leontius erected a much larger church on the site of the old church. The saint appeared to him on two occasions. When Emperor Justinian wanted to translate the relics of the saint from Thessalonica to Constantinople, flaming sparks sprang from the tomb and a voice was heard: "Stop, and do not touch!" And thus, the relics of St. Demetrios have remained for all time in Thessalonica. As the protector of Thessalonica, St. Demetrios has appeared many times, and on many occasions has saved Thessalonica from great calamity. His miracles are without number. The Russians considered St. Demetrios to be the protector of Siberia, which was conquered and annexed to Russia on October 26, 1581.

REFLECTION

A miracle of St. Demetrios of Thessalonica:

St. Demetrios was a commander of Thessalonica during his life and remained so after his repose. People have felt his presence in Thessalonica, especially in times of great calamities. He protects the city, wards off misfortunes, repels invaders, and helps all who invoke his name. Here is a wonderful example of his unusual aid to people in need. Once, the barbarians attacked Thessalonica and were unable to overtake it. Infuriated at this, they pillaged the countryside and bound and carried off two beautiful maidens whom they gave as a gift to their prince. These maidens knew how to embroider well. When the prince saw their handiwork, he said to them: "I hear that there is a great god in your land, Demetrios, and that he works great miracles. Embroider his face on this linen." The maidens told him that St. Demetrios was not a god but rather God's servant and the helper of Christians. At first, they refused to embroider the face of the saint, but when the prince threatened them with death, they carried out the command and completed the task by St. Demetrios's Day. On the eve of the feast, they looked at their embroidery and wept sorrowfully, as they had to spend the feast day in slavery and had to give that embroidered image of their beloved saint to an impious barbarian. Both maidens prayed to St. Demetrios to forgive them. Then St. Demetrios appeared to them and took them both away, as an angel had once taken the Prophet Habakkuk. He brought them to Thessalonica and set them in his church. A solemn all-night vigil was being celebrated, and many people were there. When they learned of the miraculous rescue of these Christian maidens, all glorified God and St. Demetrios, His great servant and commander.

Our Judicial Dictatorship ~ Patrick J. Buchanan, October 10, 2014

Do the states have the right to outlaw same-sex marriage? Not long ago the question would have been seen as absurd. For every state regarded homosexual acts as crimes.

Moreover, the laws prohibiting same-sex marriage had all been enacted democratically, by statewide referenda, like Proposition 8 in California, or by Congress or elected state legislatures. But today rogue judges and justices, appointed for life, answerable to no one, instruct a once-democratic republic on what laws we may and may not enact.

Last week, the Supreme Court refused to stop federal judges from overturning laws banning same-sex marriage. We are now told to expect the Supreme Court itself to discover in the Constitution a right of men to marry men and of women to marry women.

How, in little more than half a century, did the American people fall under the rule of a judicial dictatorship where judges and justices twist phrases in the Constitution to impose their alien ideology on this once-free people?

What brings the issue up is both the Court decision on same-sex marriage, and the death of my friend, Professor William J. Quirk, of the South Carolina University School of Law.

In "Judicial Dictatorship" (1995), Bill wrote of the revolution that had been imposed against the will of the majority, and of how Congress and the people might rout that revolution.

The instrument of revolution is judicial review, the doctrine that makes the Supreme Court the final arbiter, the decider, of what the Constitution says, and cedes to the Court limitless power to overturn laws enacted by the elective branches of government.

Jefferson said that to cede such authority to the Supreme Court "would place us under the despotism of an oligarchy." Was he not right?

Consider what has transpired in our lifetime.

The Supreme Court has ordered the de-Christianization of all public institutions in what was a predominantly Christian country. Christian holy days, holidays, Bibles, books, prayers and invocations were all declared to be impermissible in public schools and the public square. **Secular humanism became, through Supreme Court edict, our established religion in the United States.**

And the American people took it. Why was there not massive civil disobedience against this anti-Christian discrimination, as there was against segregation? Why did Congress, which has the power to abolish every federal district and appellate court and to restrict the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, not act? Each branch of government, wrote Jefferson, is "independent of the others and has an equal right to decide for itself what is the meaning of the Constitution in the cases submitted to its action." "No branch has the absolute or final power to control the others, especially an unelected judiciary," added Quirk.

.... Ultimately, the failure is one of conservatism itself. Indeed, with neoconservatives in the van, the GOP hierarchy is today in headlong retreat on same-sex marriage. Its performance calls to mind the insight of that unreconstructed Confederate chaplain to Stonewall Jackson, Robert Lewis Dabney:

"American conservatism is merely the shadow that follows Radicalism as it moves forward towards perdition. It remains behind it, but never retards it, and always advances near its leader. ... Its impotency is not hard, indeed, to explain. It is worthless because it is the conservatism of expediency only, and not of sturdy principle."

THE MYSTERY OF BAPTISM

By Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, from "Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: A Concise Exposition," St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press, 1994.

The Establishment of the Mystery of Baptism

In the first place in the series of Mysteries of the Holy Church stands the Mystery of Baptism. It serves as the door leading into the Kingdom of Grace, or the Church, and it grants access to participation in the other Mysteries. Even before the establishment of the Mystery of Baptism, the Lord Jesus Christ in His conversation with Nicodemus indicated the absolute necessity of it for salvation: *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven.* When Nicodemus expressed his perplexity, How can a man be born when he is old, the Saviour replied that the new birth would be accomplished by water and the Spirit: *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.* (Jn 3:3-6)

The establishment of this grace giving Mystery occurred after the Resurrection of Christ. Having appeared to His disciples, the Lord said to them that He had received from His Father all authority in Heaven and on earth, and He continued: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the World.* (Mt 28:19-20) And to this He added: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.* (Mk 16:16).

On the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, when after the speech of the Apostle Peter his listeners asked what they should do, the Apostle Peter said to them: *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* In the same book of the Acts are recorded several instances of baptism performed by the Apostles. Thus, the Apostle Peter baptized Cornelius (ch. 10), the Apostle Paul baptized Lydia and those of her household (ch. 16), as well as the guard of the prison with his whole household.

The Meaning of the Mystery

The mystical grace-given aspect of baptism is indicated in the above-cited passages of Sacred Scripture; baptism is a

new birth, and it is performed *for the salvation of men* (Mk 16: 16). Moreover, setting forth the grace-given significance of Baptism, the Apostles in their Epistles indicate that in it we are *sanctified, cleansed, justified*; that in baptism we *die to sin* so as to walk in renewed life; we are *buried with Christ*, and we arise with Him. Christ loved, the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word (that is, baptism with the utterance of the words instituted to accompany it: Eph 5:25-26). *Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God* (I Cor 6:11).

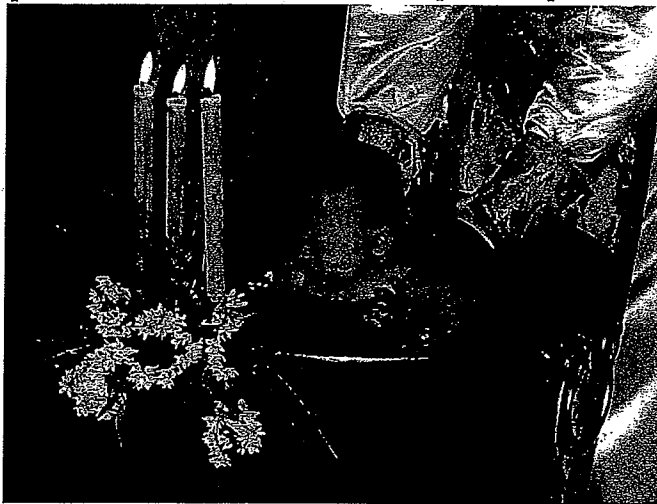
We are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4), baptism is called the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5). As for the subjective side—the state of soul of the person being baptized—it is indicated by the Apostle Peter, who calls baptism the promise of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet 3:21). Through baptism at the same time one is joined to the Church.

The Means of the Performance of the Mystery

The comparison of baptism with a washing by water, with the grave, and other such things indicates that this Mystery is to be performed through immersion. The Greek word βαπτίζω (vaptizo) itself signifies "to immerse." Concerning the baptism of the eunuch by Philip, we read in

the book of Acts: They went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip (Acts 8:38). As an exception, the Church acknowledges the Christian martyrdom of the unbaptized as a "baptism of blood." Baptism by sprinkling the Church acknowledges but does not approve it; it is considered as being not canonical.

The immersion in water is done three times with the pronouncement of the words: *"The servant of God (name) is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,"* in accordance with the commandment given by Christ Himself (Mt 28:19). Thus was it performed in the ancient Church. The Epistle of the Apostle Barnabas already mentions this, and Tertullian directly indicates that *the manner of baptism is prescribed*, indicating the words of the Savior concerning baptism; Tertullian also testifies to the triple immersion and likewise indicates one particularity:



that the one being baptized is asked to renounce satan and his angels, and then to confess the Faith.

In certain passages of Sacred Scripture there is mention of baptism *in the Name of the Lord Jesus* (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48). According to the interpretation of the ancient Fathers, the expression *in the Name of the Lord Jesus* means *according to the command and tradition of Christ*, or as a testimony of one's faith in Christ. Thus, this expression does not deny the fact of baptism *in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*, as it has seemed to certain historians of Christianity who are of the "rational school." It is entirely natural that the writer of the book of Acts, the Holy Apostle Luke, and St. Paul as well (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 1:13), when speaking of baptism, *in Christ* have in mind the differentiation of this baptism from the baptism of John or anything similar to it; baptism, *in Christ* is THE baptism into Christianity. Thus even now there is sung at Baptism, "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27).

The Indispensability of Baptism

Since in baptism a man receives (in place of the old existence he had) a new existence and life and becomes a child of God, a member of the Body of Christ or the Church, an inheritor of eternal life, it is therefore evident that baptism is indispensable for all, including infants, so that growing in body and spirit they might grow in Christ. In the Apostolic Scriptures many times there is mention of the baptism of whole families (the house of Lydia, the house of the prison guard, the house of Stephan—1 Cor 1:16), and nowhere is it mentioned that infants were excluded from this. The Fathers of the Church, in their instructions to the faithful, insist upon the baptism of children. St. Gregory the Theologian, addressing Christian mothers, says, *Do you have an infant? Do not give time for harm to increase. Let him be sanctified in infancy, and from youth dedicated to the Spirit. Do you fear the seal because of the weakness of nature, as someone fainthearted and small in faith? But Anna even before giving birth promised Samuel to God, and after his birth she quickly dedicated him and raised him for the sacred garment, without fearing human weakness, but believing in God.*

However, it is indispensable in this matter that the persons who offer the infant for baptism should recognize all their responsibility for the raising up of the baptized infant in Christian faith and virtue. We read an instruction concerning this, for example, in the work *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, known under the name of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, which has always been highly respected by the Church: *It was pleasing to our divine instructors to allow infants also to be baptized, under the sacred condition that the natural parents of the child should entrust him to someone among the faithful who would instruct him well in divine subjects and then take*

care for the child as a father, given from above, and as a guard of his eternal salvation. This man, when he gives the promise to guide the child in pious life, is compelled by the bishop to utter the renunciations and the sacred confession.

How important for us is this instruction which comes from the ancient Christian Church! From it we see what responsibility the sponsor or godfather of the baptized person takes upon himself. How careful the parents of the child must be in choosing a sponsor! Of course, in a normal Christian family, the parents themselves usually teach their children the truths of faith and their moral duty. But the contemporary breakup of the foundations of social life compel one to be on guard so that the child will not remain without Christian guidance. And even under favorable conditions, a sponsor should keep close spiritual contact with his godchild and be ready at any needful moment to come to him with heartfelt Christian help.

The tenth paragraph of the Symbol of Faith reads: *I confess one baptism for the remission of sins.* This signifies that baptism in the Orthodox Church, as a spiritual birth, if it has been performed as a sacred rite correctly through triple immersion in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, cannot be repeated.

Baptism: the Door to the Reception of Other

Grace-giving Gifts

As we see from the above-cited statements of the holy Apostles, and likewise from the whole teaching of the Church, baptism is not only a symbol of cleansing and washing away the defilement of the soul, but in itself is the beginning and source of the Divine gifts which cleanse and annihilate all the sinful defilements and communicate a new way of life. All sins are forgiven, both original sin and personal sins; the way is opened for a new life; opened is also the possibility to receive the gifts of God.

Further spiritual growth depends upon the free will of man. But since temptation is capable of finding sympathy in the nature of man who from the day of his first fall into sin has had an inclination to sin, therefore moral perfection cannot be accomplished without battle. A man finds help for this inward battle in the whole grace-given life of the Church...



Against impure thoughts, use the spiritual sword: the name of [Jesus]. You must offer repentance to the Lord, and you must not hide anything from your spiritual father. Wounds that are exposed heal quickly.

St. Joseph the Hesychast (+1959)