



## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ November 8, 2015 ✠

Holy Archangel Michael

& Synaxis of the Holy Archangels:

Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Salaphiel, Jegudiel,

Barachiel, Jeremiel and the other Bodiless Powers

➤ We remember today Elder Iakovos of Euboea (+1991) and Priest-Confessor Fr. George Calciu (+2006)

Today, 2:00pm: Spence Marriage Blessing, *with pig roast reception!*

Tomorrow: Inquirer's Class – 6:30pm

Wednesday, November 11, 6:30pm Akathist to St. Nectarios (remembered Nov. 9)

Saturday, November 14 – 3:00pm: Holy Baptism – Baby Elizabeth Murphree

➤ Next Sunday, November 15 – The Nativity Fast begins (fasting table)

## THE ANGELS AS STARS IN HEAVEN

By St. John of Kronstadt (+1908).

*Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire*

[Pss 104:4]

These are the words of the King and Prophet David. With these words, he said that God created the wisest minds, the fleshless spirits, servants loyal to Him, who burn with eternal love for God, fulfill God's will and abide in the unapproachable light of the Throne of Glory. The Lord created the angels as wise, powerful, eternally holy, pure and within Divine truth. Ponder this, dear brothers and sisters, delve into this with your minds. The Lord divided all the angels into nine orders, or ranks: Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers, Authorities and others; they all obey each other—the lower orders obey the higher orders. In the likeness of the heavenly hierarchy, the Lord established three ranks in the Church Militant: the bishops, priests and deacons, who also obey each other.

God created an innumerable multitude of angels. When you came to liturgy this morning, maybe someone among you looked into the sky and saw how many stars fill the heavens. There are so many stars that it seems that the sky is filled with poppy seeds. No mortal can count them all. Likewise, one cannot count the number of holy angels. One star shines brighter, another less so, but each of them is greater than our world, larger than the Earth; this is known and has been proven.

The countless multitude of angels abide in the heavens, in the presence of God, fulfill God's will and eternally glorify God.

Some of them are appointed by God to humans, these are our guardian angels who protect people throughout their lives, from baptism until death, keep evil away from them and direct them to all truth and goodness. If a person lives righteously, lives well, he will feel this himself. Think, dear brothers and sisters, how close the angels are to us!

You know or have heard of the miracle performed by Archangel Michael. A few impious people had decided to kill St. Archippus and the destroy the church he built; they channeled a great river towards the church, but Archangel Michael appeared to Archippus, consoled him, split a cliff asunder, and directed the river towards the rocky chasm, so that the water did not flood the church, and the church and Archippus were saved.

Angels are not prone to sin, they cannot even think sinful thoughts—their notions and desires are pure. They are imparted with all perfection, they are always wise, always strong, always good. They firmly established themselves in love for God, in holiness and truth and do not fall into sin, only some of them, a third overall, saddened the Lord with their disobedience and could no longer be citizens of the heavens; they were cast down by God.

And you, my friends, should emulate the angels loyal to God, and after being citizens of the earthly fatherland, you will become co-citizens with them of the heavenly fatherland. Emulate the angles, especially since you are created in the image of God; this gift is common to angels and men. Honor the angels, my friends, imitate their holiness, their love and devotion to God, and you will be worthy of the blessed live in heaven together with them. Amen.

## The Church – Hospital or Hotel?

Fr. John Dresko, Las Vegas, NV

What is a hospital? First of all, no one goes to a hospital unless they think they have an illness that needs to be treated by means other than that available to them in everyday life. If one has cancer, one doesn't just sit at home waiting for it to get better. To say that the Church is a hospital means that we call those who are afflicted to come for treatment. Father John rightly states that we are all afflicted with one illness or another. The difference in our world today, and where he is totally remiss in making such blanket statements is that those who come to the Church today very often think their affliction is normal, acceptable and in no need of treatment.

If I go to a hospital, I may have an idea of what's wrong, but I do not go to the doctor and tell him what's wrong. I wait for a diagnosis. And when the diagnosis is given to me, I can deny it and refuse treatment, in which case I will leave the hospital. I can argue with the doctor about the severity of my illness, making treatment problematic. Finally, I can tell the doctor what course of treatment he must prescribe for me. "No, I'm sure it's just a headache not a brain tumor, and all I need is some aspirin and not surgery and chemo." All those courses of action mean that I will continue to live with my illness, get worse, and then die.

But I have another choice. I can go to the hospital with my complaints and sincere concern for my safety, health and well-being. I can let the doctor tell me what's wrong, then follow the course of action that is prescribed. Then I stand a reasonable chance of being healed. The Church stands ready and able to welcome anyone who wants to limp in with their afflictions and prescribe the medicine that our Lord, the Fathers, 2,000 years of Holy Tradition and the Scriptures have given to us. Anyone who avails him or her self of this treatment will find life. Those who don't...

I don't go to a hospital looking for a comfortable room, with great restaurants and room service, expecting to have the staff ready to cater to my every whim. For that, I go to a hotel. I pick and choose the size, the style, the comfort level, the price, and the city and neighborhood. I go to a hospital to be healed. There is no confusion in the

teachings and the life of the Church. Whether my sin is gluttony, anger, sexual activity outside the God-given state of monogamous male-female marriage, or any other sin, if I think I can come to the Church and remain in my sin with no fight whatsoever, justifying and excusing my sin, I am deluded. If the Church allows me to remain deluded, She has not proved her love for me.

We live in a very challenging time. We must carefully ensure that no poison (in the name of the Church!) seeps into the well from which our people are drinking deeply. Our young people have a very difficult time connecting personal actions, morality, and faith, with Truth. Ironically, some, while claiming that we must change, actually just parrot what they hear every day: "you can come to Christ and the Church and remain completely unchanged. " All of us have to fight our passions every single moment and repent when we fail. St. Paul reminds us:

**"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away. For of this sort are those... [who are] always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2 Timothy 3:1-6)**

Does "from such people turn away" sound like "no conditions"? If we throw around sentences like "I love you just the way you are" without clarification on what that love entails, we are not a hospital. We are simply a hotel, and the worst kind of hotel that is rented by the hour. We can, however, follow St. Paul's continuing advice to Timothy: "...you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

*This Archpastoral letter is not applicable directly to OCA clergy, but certainly bears witness to the Church's faith and practice.*

## **Metropolitan Joseph of the Antiochian Archdiocese Archiepiscopal Directive on So-called "Same-Sex Marriage"**



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America  
October 29, 2015

*Christ is in our Midst!*

*At the recently concluded meeting of the hierarchs of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, the attached directive was reviewed and approved for distribution to all of our clergy and laity.*

### **Prologue**

The holy Church offers to her spiritual children the tender and sweet milk of the Gospel and the nourishing and substantive meat of spiritual guidance, encouragement, discipline, and reproof, so that Her children may flourish "in the fatherly adoption." Ours is a

Christian culture with all of the components of instruction and guidance, so that no one may depart from the ecclesiastical garden of delights without nourishment suitable for him.

### **The Economy of Salvation**

Thanks be to our all-merciful God, the One who created the ages and founded the earth upon the seas and crowned all of His creatures with Man himself to tend the garden of paradise and to raise creation to participate fully in the divine life which is unending and ever-new. Man fell from this ancestral glory due to his own vain pursuit of sensual pleasure and plunged himself headlong into death. This flight from the true life, inspired by empty pride, constitutes the chief force leading man to ruin. But God did not leave man to such a state: rather, He prepared the way in the Economy of salvation by sending the Law-giver, Moses, with the commandments, then the holy Prophets who applied that law and pointed to the Christ. Finally, in the last days, He sent His unique Son, the eternal LOGOS of the Father, "born of a woman, under the Law," that He might fulfill the divine Economy and effect the redemption of fallen man. Jesus, the "Son of man" (ben-Adam), the Lord, the God-man (theanthropos), "became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

### **Jesus Christ is the Way**

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ not only showed us the way of life, but He himself is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." In Him do we find the fulfillment of created nature in the crowning of that nature given in the first six days of creation (Genesis chapter 1) with the transcending power of the New Man of the "eighth day", of the Kingdom of God. In Christ, then, all that is natural according to creation is elevated and transfigured by the uncreated Light of the Master who was transfigured in glory on Tabor. In the words of the Apostle to the nations, St Paul, "all things that are reprov'd by the light are made manifest; for everything being made manifest is light."

## **The Mission of the Church**

The Church speaks in the name of the Lord both to her spiritual children and also prophetically to the world. When we speak to our children we speak not only pragmatically but on a higher level, as from the age to come, since we do not treat earthly things only, but heavenly. When, however, the Church speaks to the world, she calls for sobriety and reminds lost man of his conscience, so that mankind may not sink into self-forgetfulness and oblivion. The paschal message to the world is that "Light has come into the world," the paschal light of the new day in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But when the world turns a deaf ear, the Church still reminds it of its own nature given by God in the beginning of creation.

## **The status of so-called "same-sex marriage" and the reason for this Directive**

It is this "beginning" which is often forgotten these days. As manifest by the recent U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in a 5-4 split-decision (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 26 June, 2015), now well-known to all, a significant cap-stone was placed upon the rapid movement in our country toward a re-definition of marriage, which, of course, in the Church we consider to be unacceptable. To be precise, the Supreme Court's decision does not make any new law. However, it rules as non-binding any law which limits the legal definition of marriage to that of an exclusive union of one man to one woman. In the light of these facts, we issue this Archbishopial Directive in order to underscore the natural definition of marriage as a word to our "parish"; namely, the region of North America, so that all people may be summoned back to God-given common sense. But we also offer comfort to our spiritual children, all the Orthodox faithful of our own Archdiocese, as well as the entire pan-Orthodox faithful of our sister jurisdictions in order to show the "more excellent way."

## **Natural Creation and so-called "same-sex marriage"**

Based, then, upon natural creation, even as our Lord Jesus Christ did as reported in the holy Gospels, cited at the heading of this Directive, the Church recognizes the word, "marriage," as designating only one datum: the fleshly union of one man and one woman, "just as Adam and Eve in the beginning of the world" (ancient betrothal, Service of Matrimony) in an exclusive way, allowing no others. It is this exclusive union of love which alone is fertile and thus the nursery of the human race until the end of time. Any other so-called "marriage," including so-called "same-sex marriage," is a forgery and death-dealing sterile and doomed to frustration and the ruin of body and soul of its participants. Therefore, the Church cannot recognize or countenance any other definition of marriage by any human law, since any such "law" contrary to God's own created ordinance cannot stand as law, but is and will be a dead letter. "There is a way which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof is death." This, then, is the Church's word to our North American people.

## **Marriage in the New Creation**

Beyond this, in the Gospel, we see the meaning of marriage expressed in terms which elevate its primacy to the highest form of community. St Paul, in teaching his children, said that he had "betrothed (them) to one spouse, that (he) might present (them) a chaste virgin to Christ." And St John the Theologian closes his revelatory vision with these beautiful words which are the call for the coming of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ: "the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'" Therefore, marriage for the Church is not defined by nature only, but rather is transfigured into the true marriage, the marriage of the eschaton, in the words of St Paul: "(marriage) is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."

## **Specific Directives to Clergy and Laity**

In the saving light of this holy doctrine, then, I set forth the following directives, in concert with my brother diocesan bishops, which must be adhered to by all of the sacred clergy and the faithful laity in every capacity within our Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

- 1. At this time, and until further directives are given, no priest may refuse to sign a marriage license for a couple who are otherwise qualified and blessed by that priest to receive the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.** It is not yet clear that the act of signing a marriage license exposes the clergyman to litigation forcing him to act contrary to our stated purposes as a Church.
- 2. No clergyman may solemnize the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony upon persons of the same sex.** In cases where the sex (male or female) of either of the prospective marriage partners is disputed, the priest must consult with his diocesan bishop and receive specific instructions for proceeding. In short, only one male and one female (both otherwise meeting the canonical requirements; namely, at least one of them being an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the Church, and the other being a recognized Christian according to the terms of baptism) may be married canonically.
- 3. No clergyman may stand present in any so-called "same-sex marriage" ceremony, even as a non-participating guest, regardless of location. Nor may he attend a reception for such, since his presence at this event or others like it, will appear to condone or even bless the event.**
- 4. Any couple which is eligible to receive the Mystery of Holy Matrimony in the Orthodox Church and who have availed themselves of a civil marriage (that is, solemnized by the secular state authority) and who express their desire for the Sacrament itself ("crowning") must be carefully screened.** The priest must secure a copy of their marriage license and/or certificate. This must be reviewed and a copy maintained within the parish marriage records. Only after the pastor is satisfied that all civil laws (in agreement with the Church's doctrine) have been complied with may he then consider the couple for the great blessing of marriage crowning in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.
- 5. Any Orthodox Christian who chooses to undergo marriage solemnities of any kind outside of the Orthodox Church voluntarily separates himself (herself) from communion with the holy Orthodox Church.** Therefore, any such person is no longer in good standing with the Church and therefore may not receive holy Communion, nor serve as sponsor at baptism, nor hold any parish church office. This applies in all cases; first of all, of course, to such cases in which such a person enters into a false union of "same-sex marriage," so-called, as well as a union with a person of the other sex, outside of the Church.
- 6. If your parish has a policy of renting out any premises for public use, you may be at risk for litigation, due to the state of legal affairs which the Supreme Court ruling poses.** Therefore, this Archdiocese strongly recommends that the parish council consult with a local attorney, in concert with communications between the pastor and his diocesan bishop, regarding the regulation of this matter.
- 7. Though all the clergy of this God-protected Archdiocese are directed to avoid any condoning or encouraging or supporting in word or action of so-called "same-sex marriage," we remind our pastoral clergy that we all have a calling to reconcile all men to Christ.** Therefore, all persons who come to us must be treated with respect and dignity. Pastoral communications in personal contact with persons who profess to be homosexual must be positive and compassionate. Any of our spiritual children, the Orthodox faithful, who come to us as pastors to

discuss their own personal struggle with homosexuality, must be treated with care as children needing the therapy of the Gospel. The pastoral relationship is basic for us, who are called to "seek out the lost sheep."

In closing I direct any specific question regarding the contents of this directive, or regarding this area as a whole, to be sent in writing to the diocesan bishop, along with a courtesy-copy to the Archdiocesan chancery in Englewood. Once I have viewed and digested all of your questions, concerns, and requests, I will take whatever actions may be deemed most pastoral and needful for our common good and salvation. I remain

Your father in Christ,

**+Joseph**

**Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America**

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Fr. Stephen Freeman: **What good is a compass that points to self?**

Autonomy, being "self-ruled," is the heart of our contemporary delusion. We have seen this taken to extremes in the recent past. Fundamental givens in life, such as gender and race, are now seen by some as subject to choice. Self-definition ("How I identify") has become the latest demand in the Modern Project.

....Givenness is both at the heart of reality and at the heart of the Orthodox Christian Faith. It is at the heart of reality: we do not bring ourselves into existence. Just as our life is a gift, our body is a gift, so our meaning and place in the world are a gift. In none of these things are we self-created.

It is at the heart of our faith: the spiritual expression of embracing the givenness of life is thanksgiving. All that we have, we have received as a gift. The right response to a gift is to give thanks. Everything else is a hardening of the heart.

A necessary delusion of the self-creation of meaning, is that the things we can *choose* are actually the *source* of our meaning. And so we invest education, career, family and the like with an ultimacy that does not belong to them. Indeed, it is a form of idolatry.

The classical Christian life is born of humility and thanksgiving. It is an acknowledgement that we belong to something greater than ourselves and not of our own making. Only with such an acknowledgement do we treat everything and everyone around us with the proper respect and dignity. For if my life is not my own creation, then neither is your life my creation.

Keeping the commandments is not a bad place to start. Keeping them is a recognition that there is something greater than my own self. I yield before the law of God. But there is indeed something greater. More than the commandments, there is the radical abandonment of our self for the sake of the Kingdom. There is more than just adhering to a godly standard. The one who gives Himself completely to Christ has set himself in the position that Christ and His Pascha alone will make sense of his life.

"What good is a compass that points to itself? It means nothing. It is a compass for people who are going nowhere."

# **Greetings by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk to the Participants of the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church on the “Vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world” (The Vatican. 20th October 2015)**

Your Holiness! Your Beatitudes, Eminences and Excellencies!

On behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus I extend fraternal greetings to you on the occasion of the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church on the theme of the family.

In our restless and disturbing world the human person needs a firm and unshakeable foundation upon which he can rest and upon which he can build his life with confidence. At the same time, secular society, aimed primarily at the gratification of individual needs, is incapable of giving the human person clear moral direction. The crisis of traditional values which we see in the consumer society leads to a contradiction between various preferences, including those in the realm of family relationships. Thus, feminism views motherhood as an obstacle to a woman's self-realization, while by contrast having a baby is more often proclaimed as a right to be attained by all means possible. More often the family is viewed as a union of persons irrespective of their gender, and the human person can 'choose' his or her gender according to personal taste.

On the other hand, new problems are arising which have a direct impact on traditional family foundations. Armed conflicts in the contemporary world have brought about a mass exodus from areas gripped by war to more prosperous countries. Emigration often leads to a disruption of family ties, creating at the same time a new social environment in which unions of an inter-ethnic and inter-religious nature arise.

These challenges and threats are common to all the Christian Churches which seek out answers to them, proceeding from the mission that Christ has placed upon them – to bring humanity to salvation. Unfortunately, in the Christian milieu too we often hear voices calling for the 'modernization' of our ecclesial consciousness, for the rejection of the supposedly obsolete doctrine of the family. However, we ought never to forget the words of St. Paul addressed to the Christians of Rome: 'And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God' (Rom. 12: 2).

The Church is called to be a luminary and beacon in the darkness of this age, and Christians to be the 'salt of the earth' and 'light to the world'. We all ought to recall the Savior's warning: 'If the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men' (Matt. 5: 13-14). The salt which has lost its savour are those Protestant communities which call themselves Christian, but which preach moral ideals incompatible with Christianity. If in this type of community a rite of blessing of same-sex unions is introduced, or a lesbian so called 'bishop' calls for the replacement of crosses from the churches with the Muslim crescent, can we speak of this community as a 'church'? We are witnessing the betrayal of Christianity by those who are prepared to accommodate themselves to a secular, godless and churchless world.

The authorities of some European countries and America, in spite of numerous protests, including those by Catholics, continue to advocate policies aimed at the destruction of the very concept of the family. They not only on the legislative level equate of the status of the same-sex unions to

that of marriage but also criminally persecute those who out of their Christian convictions refuse to register such unions. Immediately after the departure of Pope Francis from the USA, President Barack Obama openly declared that gay rights are more important than religious freedom. This clearly testifies to the intention of the secular authorities to continue their assault on those healthy forces in society which defend traditional family values. Catholics here are found at the forefront of the struggle, and it is against the Catholic Church that a campaign of discrediting and lies is waged. Therefore courage in vindicating Christian beliefs and fidelity to Church tradition are particularly necessary in our times.

Today, when the world ever more resembles that foolish man 'which built his house on the sand' (Matt. 7: 26) it is the Church's duty to remind the society of its firm foundation of the family as a union between a man and woman created with the purpose of giving birth to and bringing up children. Only this type of family, as ordained by the Lord when he created the world, can forestall or at least halt temporarily modern-day society's further descent into the abyss of moral relativism.

The Orthodox Church, like the Catholic Church, has always in her teaching followed Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition in asserting the principle of the sanctity of marriage founded on the Savior's own words (Matt. 19: 6; Mk. 10: 9). In our time this position should be ever more strengthened and unanimous. We should defend it jointly both within the framework of dialogue with the legislative and executive branches of power of various countries, as well as in the forums of international organizations such as the UN and the Council of Europe. We ought not to confine ourselves to well-intentioned appeals but should by all means possible ensure that the family is legally protected.

Solidarity among the Churches and all people of good will is essential for guarding the family from the challenges of the secular world and thereby protecting our future. I hope that one of the fruits of the Assembly of the Synod will be the further development of Orthodox-Catholic co-operation in this direction.

I wish you peace, God's blessing and success in your labors.

### **Wisdom of St. John of Kronstadt – *My Life in Christ***

“Why is it necessary to pray at home and go to church to attend Divine services? And why it is necessary for you to eat and drink and walk in the fresh air every day or to work every day? In order to support the life of the body and strengthen it. It is also absolutely necessary to pray in order to support and stimulate the life of the soul, to strengthen the soul which is sick with sins, to cleanse it.”

“Truly the Temple is heaven upon earth; for where the throne of God is, where the awesome mysteries are celebrated, where the angels serve together with men, where the Almighty is unceasingly glorified, there is truly heaven and the heaven of heavens. And thus let us enter the Temple of God with the fear of God and with a pure heart, laying aside all passions and every worldly care, and let us stand in it with faith and reverence, with understanding attention, with love and peace in our hearts, so that we may come away renewed, as though made heavenly; so that we may live in the holiness natural to heaven, not binding ourselves by worldly desires and pleasures.”

“Your soul seeks true life and its natural food. Go to the Church; she will give you this in plenteousness. She affords us peace and blessedness through her Divine services and especially through the Sacraments.”