

ST. PETER

ST. PAUL



Fire & Light

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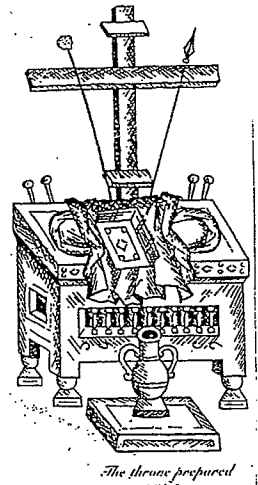
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✠ July 1, 2012 ✠

Holy Wonderworkers & Unmercenaries,

Sts. Cosmas and Damian, Martyrs at Rome (284)

St. John of Rila, Bulgaria (946 -Translation of Relics, 1470)



HOMILY ~ About the spirit of the world and the Spirit from God

"We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God" (1Cor. 2:12).

Brethren, the spirit of this world is the spirit of pride and cruelty and the Spirit of God is the Spirit of meekness and gentleness. The apostle of God asserts that the followers of Christ did not receive the spirit of this world rather the Spirit "which is of God" i.e., who proceeds from God the Father as a sweet-smelling fragrance as from flowers and as a good fragrance pours out on the soul of man making it mighty, bright, peaceful, thankful and pleasant.

Men by nature are meek and gentle. Tertullian writes: "the soul of man by nature is Christian." But, by the spirit of this world, it is irritable and enraged. The spirit of this world made wolves out of lambs, while the Spirit Who is from God makes lambs out of wolves.

The Apostle still adds that we received the Spirit of God "that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Corinthians 2:12). Therefore, that we may know what is from God in us and what is not from God and that we may sense the sweetness of that which is from God and the bitterness from that which is not from God, rather from the spirit of this world. As long as man is outside of his nature, beneath his nature, he considers bitterness as sweetness and sweetness as bitterness. But, when by the Spirit of God he returns to his true nature, then he considers sweet as sweetness and bitter as bitterness.

Who can return man to God? Who can heal man of poisonous sinful bitterness? Who can teach him by experience to distinguish true sweetness from bitterness? No one except the Spirit Who is from God.

Therefore brethren, let us pray that God grants us His Holy Spirit as He granted the Holy Spirit to His Apostles and Saints. And when that Holy Spirit of God enters into us, the Kingdom of God has arrived in which is all sweetness itself, only good, only light, only meekness and only gentleness. O Holy Spirit, the Spirit of meekness and gentleness, come and abide in us!

Despondency is Our Enemy

✠ "It is often the case that we fail to keep God's commandments and find ourselves despondent, unable to make progress in the battle over our sins. The same sins seem to constantly plague us. Despondency is our enemy, for it is the tool the demons use to keep us distracted from the goal. They want us to give up the battle. Holiness does not come easily but requires true struggle. When you fall, get up again. If you fall again, get up again, ever keeping your eyes on God Who will help you overcome your sins. Pray for God's help each time you start anew, even if you start a hundred times in a given day. Progress towards holiness comes each time we get up and start anew. Each step we take towards God brings us closer to our goal."

--Abbot Tryphon

According to Our Good Will

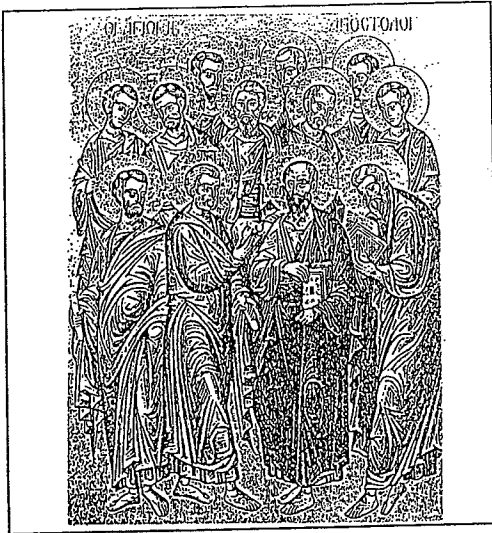
Brethren, what does it mean at the Mystical Supper when the Lord washed even the feet of Judas and when Judas received a piece of bread from the Lord, it says: "Satan entered him" (St. John 13:27). O what dreadful words! O what a horrible punishment upon the traitor of God! Brethren, does that not mean that when we reject God, Who washes and feeds us, the Spirit of God departs from us and, in His place, Satan settles in? O what a stern meaning! O what a terrible reminder to all of us who are baptized! The Holy Spirit settled in us during our baptism and made us a temple for Himself. But, the Holy Spirit does not dwell in us by force but rather according to our good will. If we transgress against Him, He departs from us and in place of Him, Satan enters and our physical temple is transformed into a pigsty.

In what way do men grieve the Holy Spirit? The Apostle who commanded that we not grieve the Spirit of God immediately adds, by what means is the Spirit grieved: "All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking (swearing) and all malice. All of that to be put away from you" (Ephesians 4:31), says the Apostle. In other words, the Spirit of God is grieved by our every sin. Let every sin be put away from us and the Spirit of God will be joyful and by Him we will be rejoicing. When we have an important guest in our home we endeavor to do everything that is well pleasing for that guest. Can there be a greater guest than the Holy Spirit of God? Since He is our greatest and most desired guest, we need to invest the utmost effort to please Him. We know with what we please the Spirit of God - with the same, with which we please Christ the Lord. The Lord said: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (St. John 14:15). He who, therefore, keeps the commandments of Christ has love toward the Son and toward the Holy Spirit. He who pleases the Son, keeping His commandments, also pleases the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Apostle especially recommends: "be you kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another" (Ephesians 4:32). If we are kind, if we are tenderhearted [merciful], if we forgive one another, by this we please the Spirit of God Who is a guest in our hearts. The Spirit of God then rejoices in us and our entire being trembles from certain inexpressible joy.

The love of God, as a fragrant oil, is shed abroad in our hearts by no other than the Holy Spirit, the All-gentle and All-powerful Spirit. Completely undeserved by us, the Spirit of God is shed abroad in us: the love of God in our hearts in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Chrismation. However, in time we neglect this love and by sin we alienate ourselves from God and fall into the disease of spiritual paralysis. And the Holy Spirit unwilling to abide in an impure vessel, distances Himself from our heart. When the Holy Spirit distances Himself from us, then joy, power, peace and courage also departs from us immediately. We become sorrowful, weakened, disturbed and fearful. But the All-good Spirit of God only distances Himself from us but does not abandon us completely. He does not abandon us but He offers to us who are sick, remedies through the Mystery of Repentance and the Mystery of Holy Communion. When we again cleanse ourselves through the Mysteries [Sacraments] of Repentance and Communion then He, the Holy Spirit of God, again abides in us and the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. We fall, we rise, we fall and we rise! When we fall, the Spirit of God stands by us and raises us if we desire to be raised. However, when we are raised, the Spirit of God stands within us all until we, by sin and foolishness, do not desire to fall. Thus, we in this life interchangeably become a fertile field and a wilderness, sons of repentance and prodigal sons, fullness and emptiness, light and darkness. **St. Nikolai of Serbia**

"It is a fearful thing to hate whom God has loved. To look upon another – his weaknesses, his sins, his faults, his defects – is to look upon one who is suffering. He is suffering from negative passions, from the same sinful human corruption from which you yourself suffer. This is very important: do not look upon him with the judgmental eyes of comparison, noting the sins you assume you'd never commit. Rather, see him as a fellow sufferer, a fellow human being who is in need of the very healing of which you are in need. Help him, love him, pray for him, do unto him as you would have him do unto you."

~ St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1783)



ON THE TRUE WITNESS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES

The Blessed Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos (1989) once had two or three visitors. One of them was an avowed "atheist" who rejected the Resurrection of Christ and he asked the Elder how he could believe in the Resurrection without having seen it. The Elder replied:

"No I did not see all these things. However, others saw them: the Apostles...[and] with the Apostles one of three things happened. Either they were deceived, or they deceived us, or they spoke the truth.

Let's take the first case. It is not possible for the Apostles to have been deceived, because whatever they mention they did not learn from others. They themselves were eyewitnesses...Furthermore they were not at all prone to hallucinations nor did they have any psychological predisposition to accept the event of the Resurrection. On the contrary they were dreadfully unbelieving! [Remember they didn't believe Mary Magdalene (Mk. 16:11) and the Myrrhbearers (Luke 24:11); they didn't believe the two disciples who met Christ on the road to Emmaeus (Mk. 16:13). Some did not believe even though they saw Him before them (Mt. 28: 17), Others would not believe unless they touched His very wounds! (John 20:25).]

And something else. What were the Apostles before Christ called them? Were they perhaps glory-loving politicians or visionaries of philosophical or social systems...? Anything but! They were illiterate fishermen. And the only thing which interested them was to catch a fish to nourish their families. For this reason also, after the Lord's Crucifixion, despite all they had heard and seen, they returned to their boats and nets. There was not in them...even a trace of predisposition of all that was to follow. And only after Pentecost, "when they received power from on high," did they become teachers of the world.

The second case: Did they possibly deceive us? Did they possibly tell us lies? But why should they deceive us? What would they gain with the lies? Possibly money? High positions? Glory? For someone to say a lie, he awaits some benefit. The Apostles, however, preaching Christ and Him crucified and

resurrected from the dead, secured only these things for themselves: hardships, toils, whippings, stoning, shipwreck, hunger, thirst, nakedness, danger from thieves, jailing, and finally death. And they suffered all this for a lie? It is too completely foolish to even think of!

Consequently neither were they deceived nor did the Apostles deceive us. However the third case remains. That they told us the truth. Furthermore...The Evangelists are the only ones who really wrote true history. They relate the events and only these. They don't proceed to any personal judgment. They don't praise anyone, they don't criticize anyone, they don't make any attempt to enlarge a certain event, or to wipe it out or put down some other one. They let the events speak on their own. ...

[And we today] ...live the miracle of the Church of Christ [because of the witness of the Apostles]...When Christ said about His Church that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her" (Mt. 16:18), His followers numbered only a few tens of people. Since then about two thousand years have passed. Empires have dissolved, philosophical systems have been forgotten, world theories have crumbled; the Church of Christ, however, remains unshakable---despite the constant and dreadful persecutions against her. Is this not a miracle?

■ from *Counsels for Life: From the Life and Teachings of Father Epiphanius Theodoropoulos*

LET US ALSO REMEMBER HERE...

...how the Apostles, the most holy and selfless men in the history of the world died and finished their earthly course:

PETER (commemorated June 29th and January 16th) was crucified upside down.

ANDREW (November 30th) was crucified.

JAMES the Son of Zebedee (April 30) was beheaded.

JOHN the Theologian (Sept. 26th & May 8th) died in a wondrous way, the only one of the Apostles to end his life in peace).

PHILIP (November 14th) was crucified.

BARTHOLOMEW (June 11th & Aug. 25th) was crucified, then flayed and beheaded.

THOMAS (October 6th) was pierced with five spears.

MATTHEW the Evangelist (Nov. 16th) was burned by fire.

JAMES the Son of Alphaeos (Oct. 9th) was crucified.

THADDEUS (or Jude the brother of James) (June 9th) was crucified.

SIMON the Zealot (May 10th) was crucified.

MATTHIAS (August 9th) was stoned then beheaded with an axe when dead.

PAUL (June 29th) was beheaded.

O, Holy Apostles of Christ, intercede for us!

ON THE GLORIOUS JOURNEY OF THE APOSTLES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

Peter, here makes disciples in Rome; Paul there evangelizes the world. Andrew of Greece disputes with the wise; Simon teaches God to the barbarians. Through baptism, Thomas whitens the Ethiopians; James honors the cathedra of Judea. Alexandria along the Nile embraces the throne of Mark; Luke and Matthew write the Gospels. For years John, theologizes and afterwards, alive serves Ephesus. Bartholomew teaches self-control to the Lycaons; Philip, working wonders, saves Hierapolis. They all did everything everywhere without ceasing; they left immortal dust in tombs, now healers, later sitting as judges of the world. To this one approaches a lame man, who swift of foot returns; to that one comes a paralytic, who is commanded to take up his pallet. Another calls the dead, and they are quick to obey; another's mere shadow banishes illness. The name of another causes demons to fear, and their clothing imparts healing. For they were disciples of Him whose hem a woman touched and stopped her sea of flowing blood. Glory be to Him unto all ages!

■ Saint John Chrysosotomos



This and That

Nothing about Separation of Church and State

The First Amendment does not marginalize religion in this country. It was designed to allow religion (specifically Christianity) to flourish without any federal government interference. At the time the Constitution was passed many of the original 13 states had established churches. It was proposed and passed to prevent any debate over a federally established church. The Constitution holds nothing about separation of Church and State. Many of the authors of those documents specifically recognized the need for religious faith and the importance of faith in creating and maintaining a self-governing people.

The only normal form of speech that is curtailed by statute these days is religious speech. The only form of religious speech that is curtailed (by and large) is Christian speech. In fact, for many, Christian speech is now 'hate' speech. Porn, on the other hand, is given free reign. Unfortunately the 1st Amendment is without exception: "The Congress shall make NO LAW..

Another interesting way around the religious freedom protection is licensing standards for various professions, most notably at this time psychology. There have been folks who have been kicked out of graduate psychology programs or denied the required professional certificate to practice because of their Christian beliefs concerning homosexuality. Since the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment extended the Bill of Rights to the States and their laws, such actions are clearly un-Constitutional, but they are allowed as the enforcement of 'professional standards'.

While Jesus Christ in the Church does indeed trump all, the ordering of our lives earthly lives and the consistency and the justice of the law is important. However, there is no justice before the law without a common cultural understanding of what is permissible and what is not. We have long ago lost that common understanding. Therefore the law has become a weapon against virtue in many cases, and legal proceedings have regressed to a form of trial by combat.

The supposed separation of church and state that is now read into the Constitution is used to protect the state from the church. The amendment was designed to limit the power and authority of the federal government not allow the federal government to oppress and suppress any the Christian faith as it is now used.

Michael Bauman

On Faith

"It strikes me as odd that the free exercise of religious faith is sometimes treated as a problem, something America is stuck with instead of blessed with," Romney said. "Perhaps religious conscience upsets the designs of those who feel that the highest wisdom and authority comes from government. "

On Syria

Against Assad's regime are the United States, the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Qaida, the Turks and Saudis and Sunni states of the Persian Gulf. On Assad's side are his 300,000-strong army, the Alawite Shia in Syria, Druze, Christians and Kurds, all of whom fear a victory of the Brotherhood - and Russia, Iran and Hezbollah. How much treasure should be expended, how much American blood shed so the Muslim Brotherhood can depose the Assad dynasty, take power and establish an Islamist state in Syria?

~ Patrick Buchanan

It is eerily reminiscent of Zbigniew Brzezinski's 1979 "brilliant idea" to train, arm and equip Islamic fundamentalists as a tool against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The fruits will be the same. A post-Assad Syria—however fragmented—would become a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism and Jihad terrorism.

– Serge Trikovic

Iconoclasm

~ Fr. Stephen Freeman

...There is a strange spirit of iconoclasm (the Greek for "icon smashing") and it breaks out now and again across human history. It is not just a short period in Byzantine history successfully resisted by the Orthodox but a strange manifestation of human sin that has as its driving force and hence allurements, the claim that it is defending the honor of God.

The icon smashers are as varied as certain forms of Islam or certain forms of Puritanism (and some of its Protestant successors). Some icon smashers direct their attention to pictures or statues, per se, while others turn their attention to even ideological icons such as honoring certain days and holidays. Those Christians who rail against the date of Christmas belong to this latter group of iconoclasts.

What is striking to me is that iconoclasm has almost always accompanied revolutions. I suppose those who are destroying the old and replacing with the new have a certain drive to "cleanse" things. Thus during China's Cultural Revolution, books, pictures, older faculty members, indeed a deeply terrifying array of unpredictable things and people became the objects of the movement's iconoclasm. As in all of these revolutions – iconoclasm kills.

In Christian history the first recorded outbreak of iconoclasm was the period that gave the phenomenon the name – during the mid-Byzantine Empire. Like later incarnations of this spirit of destruction, the icons themselves were only one thing to be destroyed – those who sought to explain and defend them became objects of destruction as well. Thus we have the martyrs of the Iconoclast Heresy.

During the Protestant Reformation iconoclasm was a frequent traveler with the general theological reform itself. Thus statues, relics, furniture – all became objects of destruction (as well as people). Some of this was state sponsored (as was the original iconoclastic period).

...The plain truth of the matter is that God is an icon-maker. He first made man "in His own image." And in becoming man, the man he became is described as the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). The same God who gave the commandment to make no graven images, also commanded the making of the Cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, as well as the images of angels woven in the curtain of the Tabernacle. He commanded the making of the image of the serpent, lifted on a staff, that brought healing to all who looked on it (an Old Testament prefigurement of the crucified Christ).

In the better than 16 years or more that I have known Archbishop DMITRI of Dallas (my retired Archbishop), I have heard him warn repeatedly that the greatest danger in the modern world is the attack on man as the image of God. That God became man in order to unite man to God is the only sure Divine underwriting of human worth. We have value because of the image we bear.

There is a restraint that is inherently involved in offering honor. Orthodox Christian living requires that we know how to worship God with what is due to Him alone, but at the same time to know how to honor those things that are honorable without giving them what belong to God alone. It is easy to say "give honor to God alone," but this is contrary to the Scriptures in which we are told to "give honor to whom honor is due" (Romans 13:7 and also see Romans 12:10). We cannot honor God by destroying the very images He has created (and here I include the saints who could not be what they are but by God's grace).

There is within iconoclasm, a spirit of hate and anger. Without them destruction would not be so easy. But it is also the case that such spirits are not of God – though they are easily attributed to zeal or excused as exuberance. Iconoclasm is not the narrow way, but the wide path of

destruction. It is easy to declare that all days are the same and that no days should be considered holier than others. It is easy to check out the historical pedigree of every feast of the Church and declare that some had pagan predecessors. Of course some had pagan predecessors – as did every last human being. If the Church has blessed a day and made it to be a day on which an action of Christ or an event in His life, or a saint of the Church is to be honored and remembered, then it is acting well within the Divine authority given it in Scripture (Matt. 18:18).

More importantly, we will grow more surely into the image of Christ by imitating his actions and learning to build up rather than to smash. Giving place to anger and the spirit of iconoclasm, in all its various guises, has never produced saints – but only destruction that has to eventually give way to something more sane. It is interesting that the Puritan reign in New England (as a matter of historical fact) was, by its third generation, weakening and looking for something different. The “Great Revivals” that swept through those places did not leave a lasting religious legacy other than the cults that sprang out of the “burnt-over district” in Upstate New York, and a growing secularization that sought freedom from the iconoclastic regime of its ancestors. Our modern American world is an inheritor of that secularization.

The only image that needs to be discarded is the one we have of ourselves as God. We are not Him. Worship God. Give honor to whom honor is due.

Fr. Stephen Freeman, Glory to God for All Things Blog

HOMILY ~ About how the Idol-worshippers will be put to shame

"As the thief is ashamed when caught, so shall the house of Israel be ashamed: They who say to a piece of wood, 'You are my father' and to a stone 'You gave me birth:' They turn to Me their backs, not their faces; yet in time of trouble they cry out, 'Rise up and save us !' " (Jeremiah 2: 26-27).

In truth brethren, they will all be put to shame who do not see beyond wood and stone and, who in their ignorance, say that man is composed entirely of plants and minerals and the same thing occurs to him as with plants and minerals. With their backs turned to the Creator, they are unable to see anything other than creation and, forgetting the Creator, they proclaim creation the Creator. They say that nature created and gave birth to man, that is why man is lesser than nature, lower than nature, the servant in the lap of nature, a slave on the chain of nature and a dead man in the grave of nature. They who speak like that will be shamed when they fall into misfortune and cry out to God: "Rise up and save us!"

Why do they cry out to God "Rise up" as though God is lying down? God is not lying down, but stands; stands and waits to be of service to everyone who, with faith and humility, request a favor from Him. But those who have become enamored with wood and stone, while they have trusted in their own power, have overturned Him in their lives and excluded Him from their lives. That is why when they are pressured by difficulties, they cry out to Him: "Rise up!"

But the Lord is meek and rises and comes to the aid of every penitent. Let the sinner truly repent and casting off his sinful love, return to God in love and God will help him. Let him turn his back on dead wood and stone and turn his face to the Living God and God will redeem him. For the Almighty is not vengeful and vindictive. Neither did He create man for death, but for life. O brethren, let us not seek help in the helpless nor life in the lifeless. Let us turn our heads toward our living Creator Who gave us a face more radiant than the face of every earthly thing. Let us turn from the western ways to the eastern path, for on this path is salvation. Just let us hasten before our last day on earth is sunk into the darkness of the west.

O Ascended Lord, raise our minds to Heaven. Cleanse them from the darkness and unburden them of the earth, O our Light-bearing Creator! *To Thee be glory and thanks always! Amen.*