



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **October 14, 2012** ✠

Holy Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council (787)

St. Paraskeva (Petka) of Serbia, whose relics are in Iasi, Romania (11th C)

Martyrs Nazarius, Gervase, Protase, & Celsus of Milan (68 AD)

St. Nikola Sviatosha, Prince of Chernigov & Wonderworker of the Kiev Caves (1143)

✠ **Sunday, October 21: The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony :**

Anna Catherine Condra and Curtis Theophan Rutherford

⇒ **Sunday, October 28: 35th Anniversary Celebration - Liturgy & Banquet**

Guest Speaker - Fr. Jacob Myers - and bringing blessings from St. John of San Francisco for Saturday, October 27.

Historic Vote – *May it be blessed !*

At St. Symeon's Annual Parish Meeting last Sunday, October 7, we voted to approve building plans for a new church and for the renovation of existing facilities. The present church would be the fellowship hall and the fellowship hall would become a church school building.

Commendations to our entire Building Committee, and especially to Deacon Ephraim and Helen Ritchey for their presentations. The Building Committee includes them, as well as Gregory Gilbert, Jonathan Boyer, Martha Condra, John Sakmar and Adam Colvin.

⇒ **The new Parish Council** includes Subdeacon Innocent Krause, Reader James Gordon, Helen Ritchey (treasurer), Nicholas Wells, Gregory Gilbert for another term, joined by new members Jonathan Boyer and James Potts.

⇒ ***Many Years to John Boyer, stepping down after 35 years of service!***

Inspire our Children

✠ "One must inspire the children themselves to good deeds. At first one must order them to do good deeds, and then guide them into doing them themselves. The most ordinary good deeds in this regard are: almsgiving, compassion, mercifulness, yielding to others, and patience. It is not difficult to train them to do these things. Opportunities for them occur every minute; one has only to use them."

St. Theophan the Recluse (1894)

Afflictions

✠ "Let us learn - therefore, as rational people - that the Lord brings afflictions upon us for our benefit, producing many good results in us through them: first, the uncovering of evil thoughts that secretly preoccupy us; after these thoughts have been uncovered, the acquisition of true and unfeigned humility; and finally, the disclosure of our vain conceit. ..." **St. Mark the Ascetic (5th C)**

⇒ **Thoughts :** "Fight always with your thoughts and call them back when they wander away. God does not demand of those under obedience that their thoughts be totally undistracted when they pray. And do not lose heart when your thoughts are stolen away. Just remain calm, and constantly call your mind back." ~ **St. John of the Ladder (7th C)**

Pearls of the Holy Fathers – 8:2

Everything in the Gospel and the Church is the breath of the Spirit of Truth; it is spiritual peace, life and sweetness.

St. John of Kronstadt

The demons are sleepless and immaterial, death is at hand, and I am weak. Lord, help me! Do not let Thy creature perish, for Thou carest for me in my misery.

St. Peter of Damascus

You cannot destroy the passions on your own, but ask God, and He will destroy them, if this is profitable for you.

St. Anatoly of Optina

The soul that really loves God and Christ, though it may do ten thousand righteous deeds, esteems itself as having wrought nothing, by reason of its insatiable aspiration after God. Though it should exhaust the body with fastings, with vigils, its attitude towards the virtues is as if it had not yet even begun to labor for them.

St. Macarius the Great

It is very important to know how we should pray. What is the right way? You can learn it from the Publican; and do not be embarrassed to have as a teacher one who had mastered the art so well that only a few simple words were enough for him to obtain perfect results. . . He called himself wretched, he beat his breast, he did not presume to raise his eyes to Heaven. If you pray as he did, your prayer will become lighter than a feather. For if this way of praying could justify a sinner, how much more easily will it lift a just man to the heights!

St. John Chrysostom

Honor flees away from before the man that runs after it; but he who flees from it, the same will it hunt down, and to all men become a herald of his humility.

St. Isaac the Syrian

I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, "What can get through from such snares?" Then I heard a voice saying to me, "Humility." St. Anthony the Great

This is the mark of Christianity— much a man toils, and however many righteous deeds he performs, to feel that he has done nothing, and in fasting to say, "This is not fasting," and in praying, "This is not prayer," and in perseverance at prayer, "I have shown no perseverance; I am only just beginning to practice and to take pains"; and even if he is righteous before God, he should say, "I am not righteous, not I; I do not take pains, but only make a beginning every day." St. Macarius the Great

A greedy appetite for food is terminated by satiety and the pleasure of drinking ends when our thirst is quenched. And so it is with the other things. . . But the possession of virtue, once it is solidly achieved, cannot be measured by time nor limited by satiety. Rather, to those who are its disciples it always appears as something ever new and fresh.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

Observe your thoughts, and beware of what you have in your heart and your spirit, knowing that the demons put ideas into you so as to corrupt your soul by making it think of that which is not right, in order to turn your spirit from the consideration of your sins and of God.

Abba Elias

Have unfeigned love among yourselves, keep the tradition, and may the God of peace be with you and confirm you in love.

St. Paul of Obnora

Sitting at meals, do not look and do not judge how much anyone eats, but be attentive to yourself, nourishing your soul with prayer.

St. Seraphim of Sarov

ETERNITY HIDDEN IN THE MOMENT

Elder Arsenius (Papacioc) of Romania (+July 21, 2011)

"If you're a lover of God, He's aware of everything, and the more you commend yourself to His will, the more He protects you. However, even more importantly, you must love God and your neighbor without fail. And you can't say that your neighbor is your enemy. These spiritual dispositions would come like lightning through my heart and mind. Still, without a doubt, these were things that kept you present at every moment." (While in communist prison - a term used by Fr. Arsenius referring to a state of a continuous awareness of God's presence and watchfulness.).

"However, all this is not possible without sacrifice. It's not possible without a cross; this happened [to me], this I recommend, and I long to live this way at all costs. The cross means to bear what you don't like! The big mistake of people in the world is that they don't tolerate suffering and don't understand that it's the only action, the only concern, the only living experience that's set against everything that's evil, [that delivers them] from being under the reign of the devil. He who runs away from persecution runs away from God, says St. Theodore the Studite. The Church needs persecutions, because they wake you, they keep you present, and it's a battle."

"You couldn't reach concord with them [the persecutors]—you just had to confront them. The confrontation was such: 'I'm not on your side, for you to make a rag and a demon out of me!' Aiud had another section called Zarca. It was no joke; it was death without a doubt. It was a regime of extermination. Many would ask me if some miracle happened (in prison). First of all, a miracle is not the work of man; it's a divine act to encourage you, to save you.

"And I would answer, 'Miracles did take place!'

"What miracles?' the curious ones would ask.

"The fact that no miracles occurred!'

"However, to be starving and beaten for years and to live up to these days— isn't that a miracle?! That I had signs ... that the human being is divine and complex – this is something else.

Pride Incapacitates

In the same way that a plague-like and deadly disease does not destroy only one member of the body, but the entire body, so also pride incapacitates and destroys not just part of the soul, but the entire soul. Although each of the other passions disturbs the soul, they fight only against their contrary virtues; and strive to overcome those virtues. For example: gluttony endeavors to destroy abstinence; fornication, chastity; avarice, non-acquisitiveness; anger, meekness; and the other forms of vice, their contrary virtues.

Abba Cassian

Pride – is a like a harsh tyrant...

When pride masters our wretched soul, it is like a harsh tyrant; who, having captured a great and lofty city, destroys it completely and razes it to its foundations. The Angel who fell from heaven on account of his pride bears witness to this. Although he was entirely light, and was for this reason called 'Lucifer', he became darkness on account of his haughtiness; and, being cast down into Hades, inherited unquenchable fire and unending torment --- instead of Heavenly glory.

Abba Cassian

Deceitful Fantasies

The demons always lead us into sin by means of deceitful fantasies. Through the fantasy of gaining wealth they led the wretched Judas to betray the Lord and God of all; through the deceit of worthless bodily comfort and esteem, gain and glory they put the noose around his neck and brought him to age-long death. The scoundrels requited him with precisely the opposite of what their fantasy, or provocation, had suggested to him.

St. Hesychios the Priest

On the Miracles of Christ - *Psychosomatic?*

More from an interview with Dr. Gary Collins, PhD, a Christian clinical psychologist in Chicago, by Lee Strobel, in his book, *The Case for Christ*, p. 149.

"Some people have tried to shoot down these miracles that supposedly help authenticate Jesus' claim to being the Son of God," I said, pulling out a book from my briefcase. I read him the words of skeptic Charles Templeton:

"Many illnesses, then as now, were psychosomatic, and could be "cured" when the sufferer's perception changed. Just as today a placebo prescribed by a physician in whom the patient has faith can effect an apparent cure, so, in an early time, faith in the healer could banish adverse symptoms. With each success the healer's reputation would grow and his powers would, as a consequence, become more efficacious."

"Does this," I demanded, "explain away the miracles that supposedly back up Jesus' claim to being the Son of God?"

Collins' reaction surprised me. "I wouldn't have a whole lot of disagreement with what Templeton wrote," Collins replied.

"You wouldn't?"

"Not really. Might Jesus have sometimes healed by suggestion? I have no problem with that. Sometimes people can have a psychologically induced illness, and if they get a new purpose for living, a new direction, they don't need the illness anymore."

"The placebo effect? If you think you're going to get better, you often do get better. That's a well-established medical fact. And when people came to Jesus, they believed he could heal them, so he did. But the fact remains: regardless of how he did it, Jesus did heal them."

"Of course," he quickly added, "that doesn't explain all of Jesus' healings. Often a psychosomatic healing takes time; Jesus' healings were spontaneous. Many times people who are healed psychologically have their symptoms return a few days later, but we don't see any evidence of this. And Jesus healed conditions like lifelong blindness and leprosy, for which a psychosomatic explanation isn't very likely."

"On top of that, he brought people back from the dead—and death is not a psychologically induced state! Plus you have all of his nature miracles—the calming of the sea, turning water into wine. They defy naturalistic answers."

A Wonderful Mystery

✠ All of life is a wonderful mystery known only to God. In life, there is not just an accidental chain of events – everything is providential. We do not understand the meaning of this or that event. Before us is a multitude of boxes, but no keys. There were once such people who could open them...

St. Barsanuphios of Optina (1911)

Bow your neck to the Yoke of Christ

The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the violent, for they bear it away, as the Gospel says (Matt. 11:12). By 'violence' is meant the affliction of the body which Christ's disciples voluntarily underwent by denying their own will, refusing rest to the body, and in following the commandments of Christ. If then, you desire to win the Kingdom of God, you must become then a man of violence. Bow your neck to the yoke of service to Christ.

St. Basil the Great (4th C)

Can Syria's Christians Survive?

Bill Spindle and Sam Dagher, August 11, 2012, *The Wall Street Journal*

In the land of St. Paul's conversion, ancient Catholic and Orthodox communities are finding themselves on the wrong side of an increasingly sectarian conflict.

Near the Syrian city of Aleppo, the Church of St. Simeon the Stylite commemorates the 5th-century ascetic who became an ancient sensation by living atop a tall pedestal for decades to demonstrate his faith. Krak des Chevaliers, an awe-inspiring castle near Homs, was a fortress for the order of the Knights Hospitaller in their quest to defend a crusader kingdom. Seydnaya, a towering Orthodox monastery in a town of the same name, was probably built in the time of Justinian.

A nun there spoke about Syria's current crisis from within a candlelit alcove this week, surrounded by thousand-year-old votive icons donated by Russian Orthodox churchgoers and silver pendants in the shape of body parts that supplicants have sought to heal—feet, heads, legs, arms, even a pair of lungs and a kidney.

"It's not a small thing we are facing," she said, speaking as much about the country as her faith. "We just want the killing to stop."

Few places are as central as Syria to the long history of Christianity. Saul of Tarsus (*St. Paul*) made his conversion here, reputedly on the Street Called Straight, which still exists in Damascus. It was in these lands that he conducted his first missions to attract non-Jews to the nascent faith.

A century ago, the Levant supported a population that was perhaps 20% Christian. Now it is closer to 5%. Syria today hosts vibrant, if dwindling, communities of various ancient communities: Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox (*Monophysites-ed.*), Syrian Catholics, Greek Catholics (*Melkites*) and Armenian Orthodox (*also Monophysites*),.

But Syria's Christian communities are being severely tested by the uprising that has racked the country for more than a year. They think back to 636, when the Christian Byzantine Emperor Heraclius saw his army defeated by Muslim forces south of present-day Damascus. "Peace be with you Syria. What a beautiful land you will be for our enemies," he lamented before fleeing north to Antioch. In the 8th century, a famed Damascus church was razed to make way for the Umayyad Mosque—today one of Islam's holiest sites.

Not a few Christians in modern-day Syria worry that the current crisis could end the same way for them if Bashar al-Assad and his regime are defeated by the rebel insurgency.

In many ways, it is an odd concern. Christians and Muslims have lived side-by-side with minimal friction during the decades of Assad family rule. Historically, local Christian communities have sometimes even welcomed Muslim overlords when they freed them of heavy-handed rule from Constantinople or Rome. In many places the two groups continue to reach out to each other even now. Even rebel extremists say that they don't have anything against Christians, either.

Yet as the conflict inside the country takes on ever-stronger sectarian overtones, as Christians largely side with the regime or at least decline to actively oppose it, some of the oldest Christian communities on earth are feeling squeezed.

"We have been leading a life that has been the envy of many," says Isadore Battikha, who until 2010 served as the archbishop of Homs, Hama and Yabroud for the Melkite Greek Catholic church. "But today fear is a reality."

Bishop Battikha is among the many staunch supporters of President Assad in the Christian church hierarchy.

From the very start of the current conflict, history and religion have played a key role in fueling passions on both sides in Syria. And this has become more pronounced as the conflict dragged on, turning bloodier and more vicious.

One of the oft-repeated assertions made by the Syrian regime plays effectively on ancient rivalries. The conflict, it says, is an attempt by neo-Ottomans in Turkey and expansion-minded Muslim ultraconservatives from Saudi Arabia—known as Wahhabis—to gain a foothold in Syria.

This narrative, one of majority Sunni Muslims overwhelming and dominating minorities, is now a staple of nightly news bulletins on Syrian state television. The regime knows well how this message resonates with Christians and other minorities.

The Ottomans, Turks who ruled Syria from 1516 until World War I, relegated Christians to a second-class citizen status. They were allowed to practice their religion and govern themselves in matters that didn't concern the Muslims. But they were also required to pay special taxes, and there were plenty of restrictions on them when it came to interactions with Muslims. Wahhabism, the ascetic and harshly conservative form of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia, is even tougher on Christians...

The main target of the most sectarian-minded rebels isn't Christians. It is the Alawites, the minority group to which the Assad family belongs. Alawites, who make up about 12% of Syria's population, about the same as Christians, are a heterodox sect that branched off from Islam. They are considered by Muslim extremists to be heretical, far worse than Christians.

Nonetheless, many Christians fear any government that replaces the Assad regime might be dominated by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood that could relegate them back to second-class status. They also worry their communities could be devastated in the crossfire between Syria's largely Sunni Muslim insurgency and the well-armed Alawite regime, just as Christians in neighboring Iraq have suffered mightily in the sectarian wars there over the past decade.

The expansion of the conflict to Syria's two biggest cities, Damascus and Aleppo, has amplified the fears of the Christians. They are under pressure from both the regime and rebels to take sides and make their allegiances known. Those who want to avoid taking sides are leaving.

For the time being many Christians, like Muslims and other refugees, have relocated to areas where they feel safer within Syria or in neighboring Lebanon. So far, the pattern in neighboring Iraq—where many Christians have left for good to Western countries—hasn't emerged.

The clearest examples of Christians taking the side of the regime have been in Homs. In the town of Qusayr, southwest of Homs, one Christian family helped aid the security forces by taking up arms and manning checkpoints. The result was a backlash against all Christians there, and the town has largely emptied of Christians since then.

Father Paulo Dall'Oglio, an Italian Jesuit priest who lived in Syria for three decades but was expelled by the regime in June, says many members of the church have long-standing ties with the regime and intelligence services that have shaped their stance.

"Many Christians in Syria believe that there's no alternative to the Bashar Assad regime," says Father Dall'Oglio.

Some Christians, though, are striving to bridge that divide, attempting to reach out to the opposition and rebels, or at least cross the sectarian gulf that increasingly separates them.

Father Vasilios Nassar, a Greek Orthodox priest from the central city of Hama, was shot and killed by government snipers in January while he was helping evacuate the wounded in clashes in one neighborhood, Christian activists say.

They say the snipers probably mistook him for an Islamist fighter because of his beard and black robes. His church said he was killed by "an armed terrorist group."

Caroline, a Christian activist who asked to be identified by only her first name, was arrested by security forces in April in Damascus while distributing chocolate Easter eggs to the children of Christian, Sunni and Alawite families displaced by the fighting in Homs.

Paper strips bearing passages from the Quran and the Bible were attached to the eggs. Caroline said this act was part of her attempts to chip away at the barriers now separating Syria's religious groups because of the conflict.

Previously she made it a point to assist the wives and children of men killed in fighting in the predominantly Sunni town of Douma outside Damascus, handing out food provisions and cash envelopes.

She had also sought meetings with church leaders to ask them "not to impose one position on all Christians." She said the majority either scolded her for being against the regime or refused to meet with her.

Father Nawras Sammour, a 44-year-old Jesuit from Aleppo, runs a nationwide relief program known as Jesuit Refugee Services. The group is currently providing assistance to 6,000 Syrian families across the country who are displaced by the violence—Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Druze, Alawite as well as Christian.

He believes only by reaching out across religious divides will Christians continue to be a vibrant presence in these ancient lands. He recognizes the challenges, and says he understands Christian concerns.

"Look at Iraq, look at Egypt," he says, listing neighboring countries where political upheaval and the replacement of an authoritarian ruler with an Islamist resurgence has pummeled long-standing Christian communities. "But despite this we have to build bridges. These are the principles of the gospel. We can't just pick a side and go with them."

Alexander Haddad, a 66-year-old resident of the mountain hamlet of Maalula, is concerned about the fate of his ancient Christian community, but he takes the long view. Like other residents of the town, he speaks a variant of Aramaic, the language used by Jesus himself.

"A lot of people have passed through this country—the Byzantines, the Muslims, Tamerlane, the Mongols, the Ottomans," said Mr. Haddad, seated in the shadow of the Orthodox Convent of St. Thekla, the feminine hero of the biblical legend, the Acts of Paul and Thekla.

"Jesus was from just to the south. St. Paul came to Maalula," he says. "Christianity is very strong here."

The Irreconcilable Conflict By Patrick J. Buchanan, September 18, 2012

*"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
"Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat."*

Thus did Kipling, the Poet of Empire, caution the British about the Eastern world the Victorians and Edwardians believed to be theirs.

And with that world so inflamed against us, perhaps we should inspect more closely our irreconcilable conflict -- what Harvard's Michael Ignatieff calls "the fatal dialectic between Islamic rage and Western free speech." Consider first American values, as seen from an ACLU point of view.

Our establishment holds that not only is there to be a wall of separation between church and state, all symbols of religious belief are to be expunged from public institutions and the public square.

And what do devout Muslims believe? That there is no God but Allah, that Muhammad is his Prophet, that sharia shows the way to a moral life in this world and paradise in the next. Many Muslims put their Islamic faith ahead of their national identity and forbid preachers from other religions from coming into their countries to convert their young. Apostasy is treason to Allah. Heresy has no rights.

From America's schools, religion has been relentlessly purged. No prayers, no Bibles, no Christian symbols, no Ten Commandments. And into these godless madrassas of modernity has come compulsory sex education starting in the early grades, with condoms handed out to the sexually active.

Devout Muslims demand that children be immersed in their Islamic faith in their schools and believe that teachers who condone or encourage sexual activity among their young are and should be treated as perverts.

In Charlotte, the Democratic Party came out for "marriage equality" and subsidized abortions into the ninth month of pregnancy with the woman the sole decider as to whether the unborn child lives or dies.

In many Muslim countries, men caught in homosexual activity risk mutilation and women's rights do not exist. What do we think is going to

happen to those girls' schools in Afghanistan when we come home and the Taliban return?

When we proclaim that our First Amendment protects Quran-burning and denigrating the Prophet in books, magazines, videos and films, devout Muslims reply unapologetically: Under Quranic law, we kill people like that.

In America, Christians have futilely protested insults to their faith from "artists." Muslim protests appear more effective, as Salman Rushdie, the Danish cartoonist who portrayed Muhammad with a bomb for a turban and Theo van Gogh, ritually slaughtered in Holland, could testify.

We preach pluralism. Some Muslim countries take the same attitude toward religious pluralism as Henry VIII and Torquemada. In our own country in 1844, the founder of Mitt Romney's faith discovered that Protestant America was not all that tolerant, when a mob lynched him right there in the land of Lincoln.

Our elite believe in a new trinity of equality, democracy and diversity.

Our Founding Fathers who created this republic did not believe in democracy. When did we come to worship this idol? Wrote T.S. Eliot:

"The term 'democracy,' as I have said again and again, does not contain enough positive content to stand alone against the forces that you dislike - it can easily be transformed by them. If you will not have God (and He is a jealous God), you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin."

Worldwide, there are a billion and a half Muslims. Their numbers are exploding, while the post-Christian West stares at demographic death by century's end.

While we remain infinitely superior militarily and materially, what will be the ultimate outcome of the clash of civilizations? Kipling's prediction:

"And the end of the fight is a tombstone white with the name of the late deceased,
"And the epitaph drear: 'A Fool lies here who tried to hustle the East.'"