

ORTHODOX WAY



ALL SAINTS OF RUSSIA ORTHODOX CHURCH DENVER, CO.

3274 E Iliff Ave Denver CO (303)757-3533
The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia

JANUARY 2014





ORTHODOX WAY

ALL SAINTS OF RUSSIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

Diocese of Western America
Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia
3274 E. Iliff Ave.
Denver, Colorado 80210
(303) 757-3533

Parish Clergy:

Archpriest Boris Henderson, Rector
Home (303) 753-1401 Cell phone (720) 244-3255
Priest Michael Preobrazhensky
Deacon Jan Veselak
Rdr. Timothy Henderson
Taper-bearer Vladimir Lander

Parish Staff:

Warden: Alexander Yaremenko
Treasurer: Larisa Anosov
Secretary: Igor Makarov
Choir Director: Mat. Natalia Henderson
Sisterhood President: Olga Afonin

Times of Divine Services:

Saturday 6:00 P.M. All-Night Vigil
Sunday 9:40 A.M. Hours
Sunday 10:00 A.M. Divine Liturgy

*For services on the Great Feasts, Saints' Days,
and the days of Great Lent,
check the monthly calendar.*

Namesdays

| Date | Baptismal name | Last name | First name |
|--------|----------------|--------------------|------------|
| Jan 2 | John | Ceitlin | Mark |
| Jan 4 | Anastasia | Damerau | Anastasia |
| Jan 6 | Eugenia | Ishu | Yevgenia |
| Jan 6 | Eugenia | Makeeva | Yevgenia |
| Jan 6 | Eugenia | Pokrovsky | Eugenia |
| Jan 6 | Eugenia | Skhodsky | Eugenia |
| Jan 8 | David | Moore | David |
| Jan 8 | David | Murphy | David |
| Jan 8 | David | Repnitskiy | David |
| Jan 8 | James | Carey | James |
| Jan 9 | Stephan, Rdr. | Stoyanov | Stephan |
| Jan 14 | Basil | Shepovalov | Vasily |
| Jan 14 | Basil | Vasileff | Vasil |
| Jan 15 | Seraphima | Rahe | Laura |
| Jan 15 | Seraphima | Veselak | Dimitria |
| Jan 24 | Michael | Baranoff | Michael |
| Jan 25 | Tatiana | Bakounina-Evernden | Taniana |
| Jan 25 | Tatiana | Solodunova | Tamila |
| Jan 27 | Nina | Dubrovina | Nina |
| Jan 27 | Nina | Szwec | Nina |
| Jan 27 | Nina | Trotsenko | Nina |
| Jan 30 | Antony | Repnitskiy | Antony |
| Jan 31 | Kyryll | Mather | Kyryll |

May God grant them many years!



Star marking the birthplace of Jesus Christ
in the Grotto of the Nativity, Bethlehem.

Слово в навечерие нового года

Святитель Иннокентий (Борисов), архиепископ Херсонский и Таврический

Настоящий вечер, братие, служит последним пределом прошедшего года: завтра мы пробудимся уже в новом лете. Но пробудимся ли? Все ли пробудимся? И сего не ведаем заподлинно: тем паче не знаем, что ожидает каждого из нас в наступающем лете. Продлится ли счастье тех, коим не остается ничего искать, кроме продолжения своих радостей? Осушатся ли слезы того, коему не остается



ничего желать, кроме конца страданий? Принесет ли земля плод утружденному делателю или погребет невозвратно в недрах своих семена, ей вверенные? Починут ли народы в мире, или новый вихрь брани возьмет лицо земли? Последует ли благорастворение воздуха, или какой-либо Ангел смерти придет паки одесятствовать грады и веси? Все это: и великое, и малое, и касающееся и целых народов, и нас с тобою, слушатель,—покрыто непроницаемой завесой, запечатано семью печатями.

Почему запечатано? Ужели невозможно было, чтобы человек и будущее знал так же ясно, как настоящее и прошедшее? Но пример многих святых мужей, кои, обладая даром прозорливости, видели будущее, самое отдаленное и случайное, показывает противное. Человек мог вместить способность провидеть будущее, но в настоящем состоянии своем не мог вместить ее без вреда для себя; потому и лишен ее на время.

В самом деле, братие, какая радость отцу семейства, окруженному веселящимися домочадцами, провидеть, что предмет его любви обречен в следующем году гробу? Какое утешение проповеднику слова Божия заранее знать, что все слова его останутся без действия над сердцами его слушателей? Какая польза любителю наук предвидеть, что он не окончит великого открытия, им начатого? Явно, что во всех сих и подобных случаях гораздо лучше не знать будущего.

«Но знание будущего,—скажешь,—полезно было бы для нравственности людей и спасало бы от страстей и грехов, не давая выходить из памяти концу нашей жизни». Но что для этой цели нужно знать из будущего, то нам все открыто, то мы все давно знаем. Нам особенно нужна для сего известность о нашей смерти. И что известнее сего? Не знаем только, когда умрем; но это еще более должно производить в нас спасительный страх и держать на узде наши страсти. Нам нужно еще знать, что будет с нами по смерти; и кто может сказать, чтобы это было неизвестно? Рай и ад, суд и награда открыты в Евангелии для всех и каждого. Не знаем только того, что служит предметом для любопытства: как например, когда последует кончина мира, где именно будет суд, как будут жить праведники. Но знание сих вещей ничего не прибавило бы к нашему спасению, а потому и не дано нам.

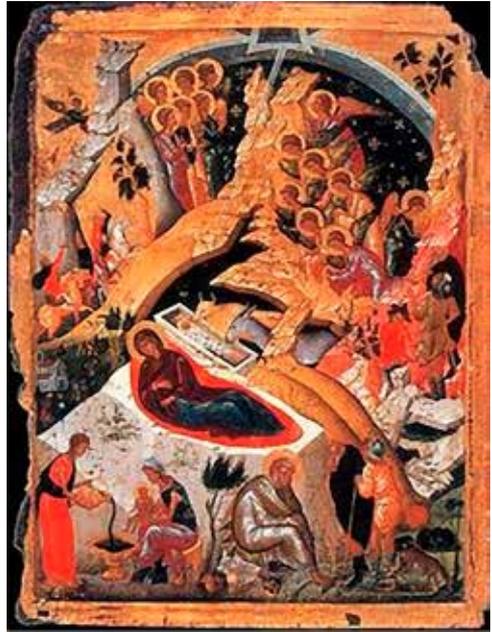
Но посмотрите, что взамен того дано всем! Дано все настоящее. Явно, что оно важнее и прошедшего и будущего, ибо от него зависит то и другое; и вот что есть самого важного во времени, то Господь времен предоставил каждому из нас. Действуй, как хочешь, распорядись, чем можешь, как угодно: исполняй закон или слушай страстей, признавай над собою Творца или отвергай Его Промысел, иди на небо или в ад—все это в твоей воле, от тебя зависит, тебе предоставлено. Тут само всемогущество Божие остается как бы без действия и нисколько не препятствует. Любовь Божия зовет постоянно к себе, действует в нашем разуме и совести, учит внешними событиями жизни, вразумляет гласом Пророков и Апостолов; но свобода наша пребывает ненарушимой—каждую минуту можем обратиться, куда хотим: к Отцу Небесному—или врагу нашего спасения. И что еще важнее, пользуясь хорошо настоящим, мы можем благотворно действовать и на будущее, ибо что сеется, то будет и пожато; даже на прошедшее воздействует, ибо если хорошо проводится настоящее, то этим изглаждается худое прошедшее.

Познаем же, братие, милость Божию к нам и наше преимущество; оставим покусение прозревать в будущее и мучить себя догадками: будем пользоваться тем, что нам предоставлено, употребляя настоящее время как должно. В награду за это мы спокойно будем идти навстречу всякому будущему. Принесет ли оно нам счастье с добродетелью — мы не ослепимся блеском его. Принесет ли несчастье при добродетели и чистой совести — мы равнодушно перенесем его и обратим к вечному благу нашей души. Придет ли за нами самый ангел смерти, — и он найдет нас с горящим светильником веры и любви. Аминь.

The Nativity of Christ

St. Theophan the Recluse

Glory to Thee, O Lord! Once again we greet the awaited bright days of Christ's Nativity. Let us be glad and rejoice. In order to raise our festivities to a higher level in these days, the Holy Church has intentionally instituted a fast before them—a certain amount of constraint, so that as we enter the festive period we might feel as though we were coming out into freedom. Nevertheless, the Church in no way desires that we give ourselves over to mere sensual delights and fleshly pleasures. Since the Church has from olden times called these days



sviatki (“holy days”), they require that our very rejoicing on these days be holy, as they are holy. So that those who rejoice might not forget themselves, the Church has placed a short hymn upon our lips to glorify the newborn Christ, by which the flesh is settled down and the soul is uplifted, showing the proper occupations for these days: “Christ is born, give ye glory,” and the rest. Glorify Christ; glorify Him, so that by this doxology your heart and soul might delight, and thereby silence any urge for various other deeds and occupations that might promise some kind of pleasure. Glorify Christ: this does not mean that you have to compose lengthy songs of praise to Christ—no. But if when contemplating or hearing about the birth of Christ the Savior, you involuntarily cry out from the depths of your soul, “Glory to Thee, O Lord, that Christ is born!”—this is sufficient. This will be a quiet hymn of the heart, which will nevertheless pass through to heaven and enter in to God Himself. Repeat a little more clearly to yourself what the Lord has wrought for us, and you will see how natural this exclamation now is. So that this might be easier for us, we shall compare it to the following incident:

A king promises freedom to a man who is imprisoned in a dungeon and bound with fetters. The prisoner waits a day, then another, then months, and years. He sees no fulfillment of the promise, but does not

lose hope, and believes in the king's words. Finally, he sees signs that it is coming soon. His attention increases—he hears a noise; someone is approaching with cheerful words. Now the locks fall and the liberator enters. “Glory to Thee, O Lord!” the prisoner involuntarily cries. “The end of my imprisonment has arrived, and soon I will see God's light!”

Or another incident: A sick man is covered with wounds and paralyzed in all his members. He has tried all medicines and has changed doctors many times. His endurance is exhausted, and he is ready to give himself over to despair. He is told, “There is one more very skilled doctor, who heals everyone from those very illnesses that you have. We have asked him to come, and he has promised to do so.” The patient believes them, hope springs up in him, and he waits for the promised one.... One hour passes, then another, and anxiety again begins to torment his soul. Finally, at evening, someone arrives.... The door opens, and the desired visitor enters.... “Glory to Thee, O Lord!” the sick man shouts.

Here is another example: A thundercloud hangs over the face of the earth, and it is covered with darkness. Thunder shakes the foundations of the mountains and lightening tears the sky from one end to the other. All are in fear, as if the end of the world had come. When the thunder passes and the sky clears, everyone breathes freely, saying, “Glory to Thee, O Lord!”

Bring these examples closer to yourself and you will see our whole history in them. The threatening clouds of God's wrath were over us. The Lord—the Peacemaker—has come, and has dispersed the cloud. We were covered with the wounds of sins and passions; the Healer of souls has come and healed us. We were bound by the fetters of slavery; the Liberator has come and released our fetters. Bring all of these examples closer to your heart and take them in with your senses, and you will not be able to refrain from exclaiming, “Glory to Thee, O Lord, that Christ is born!”

I will not try to convey this joy to you with my words; it is inexpressible by any words. The work that was accomplished by the Lord Who is born touches each one of us. Those who enter into communion with Him receive from Him freedom, healing, and peace; they possess all of this and taste of its sweetness. There is no reason to say, “Rejoice!” to those who experience this within themselves, for they cannot help but rejoice. But to those who do not experience it, why say, “Rejoice”? They cannot rejoice. No matter how much you say, “Rejoice at your deliverance,” to one bound hand and foot, he will not rejoice. Whence can the joy of healing come to one who is covered with the wounds of sin? How can one who is threatened by the thunder of God's wrath breathe freely? You can

only say to him, “Go to the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger, and seek deliverance by Him from all the evils that encompass you, for this Infant is Christ, the Savior of the world.”

I would like to see everyone rejoicing with this very joy, and not wanting to know any other joys; but not everything that comes from Israel is Israel. Now there will begin empty, wild merriment that inflames the passions.... No matter how much you tell these people to calm down, they only shut their ears and pay no heed. And they always bring these bright days of the Feast to such a point that the merciful Lord is compelled to turn His eyes from us and say: “All of your solemnities are an abomination unto Me” (cf. Is. 1:13-14)! Truly, many of our social festivities are really pagan abominations; that is, some of them are brought to us straight from the pagan world, while others, though they appeared later in time, are penetrated with the spirit of paganism. And it is purposely contrived for such festivities to appear in great quantities during the Feasts of Nativity and Pascha. By getting caught up in them we give the prince of this world—our tormentor, the enemy of God—an excuse to say to God, “Look what You’ve done for me with Your Nativity and Resurrection! They’re all coming to me!” But let the words of the Fiftieth Psalm be repeated more often in the depth of our hearts: That Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, and prevail when Thou art judged (Ps. 50:4).

Enlightened Europe is attracting us. Yes, the abominations of paganism that were almost completely cast out of the world were first restored there; they have now come from there to us. Having breathed in that hellish poison, we run around like madmen, forgetting our own selves. But let us remember the year of 1812—why did the French come to us then? God sent them to wipe out all the evil that we had imitated from them. Russia repented then, and God had mercy on her. But now it seems that we have forgotten that lesson. If we come to our senses, of course, nothing will happen. But if we do not come to our senses, who knows? Perhaps the Lord will again send similar teachers, so that they would bring us to our senses and place us on the path of correction. Such is the law of God’s righteousness: to cure someone from sin with the thing that enticed him into it. These are not empty words, but a matter that has been confirmed by the voice of the Church. Know, ye Orthodox, that God is not mocked. And knowing this, make merry and rejoice during these days with fear. Illumine the bright Feast with bright deeds, occupations, and festivities, so that all who look upon us would say, “They have holy days—not the kind of amusements practiced by impious and profligates who don’t know God.”

From *Thoughts for Each Day of the Year*
(St. Herman of Alaska Monastery: 2010).



Рождество Христово.

Фрески пещерного храма Каранлик в Кападокии (Гёреме, Турция), XI - XIII в.в.

Проповедь о Рождестве Христовом: Христов мир

Святой праведный Иоанн Кронштадтский

Слава в вышних Богу, и на земли мир, во человецех благоволение (Лк. 2: 14).

Это песнь Богу вочеловечившемуся, Младенцу Христу, воспетая сонмом ангелов на земле при Его Рождестве. Кратка песнь, но смысл и значение ее премудры и многосодержательны. В ней заключена и открыта нам тайна вочеловечения Сына Божия для спасения мира. Этой тайне, по словам Церкви, удивилось всякое естество ангельское.

Но где же мир на земле, который возвестили ангелы пастырям вифлеемским?

В самом Иерусалиме, граде Давидовом, в котором был храм живому Богу, не было мира. Когда волхвы, пришедшие с Востока в Иерусалим, спрашивали: «Где есть родившийся Царь Иудейский?» — то от одного этого известия пришел в смятение и Ирод-царь и весь Иерусалим с ним. Во всемирной державе Римской в то время не было мира. Современники в

мрачных красках описывают нравственное падение народов, искажение образа Божия в людях. Всякие скверна и беззаконие въявь творились. Идолопоклонство заменило служение единому Богу. Беззакония, срамоты, пресыщение, пьянство составляли блага земные, цель и стремления человечества. Вражда, междоусобицы, нестроение царили повсюду. Гордость, бесчеловечность, все виды порока растлевали общественную и семейную жизнь.

В последующие времена было не лучше. Страшные гонения на верующих во Христа в продолжение трех столетий залили всю землю кровью христианских мучеников: брат предавал брата на мучения, отец—жену и детей, дети—родителей. Человеческие отношения, кровные узы, родство—всё было поругано и попрано. И в самом Иерусалиме была мерзость запустения.

И в наши времена потрясаются общества и царства, продолжаются международные и междоусобные разногласия и войны, ереси и расколы, заговоры, преступные зловредные учения, усиливающиеся ниспровергнуть вековые государственные учреждения и основы общежития семейного, гражданского и религиозного.

Злодейство простирает святотатственную руку на помазанников Божиих, которым Самим Богом вручены народы. Изверги хотят на священном прахе их водворить безверие, разрушить государство, семью и закон под видом равенства и братства.

Где же мир на земле, возвещенный ангелами? Где же мир, принесенный Богочеловеком на землю? Где же мир, который возвещает Евангелие и проповедь апостолов, пронесенная ими из конца в конец земли, между всеми народами и царствами? В мире его нет: *мир весь во зле лежит*,—сказал апостол (1 Ин. 5: 19).

Вот тайна, воспетая ангелами: с пришествием Сына Божия на земле воцарен мир сначала в малом избранном стаде—в Церкви Его, в апостолах, которым Он многократно преподавал этот мир, а потом во всем царстве благодати или Церкви Его, распространившейся по всей земле.

Да, братья, на земле основано Господом целое царство мира Божия,—царство вечное, всемирное, благоустроенное, с законами, уставами, таинствами, с порядком служения, правилами жизни, отношениями взаимными. Это царство—есть святая, православная апостольская Церковь, в которой

почивают всегда мир и радость о Духе Святом, благодать Господа нашего Иисуса Христа и любовь Бога Отца.

Правда, Церковь Божия на земле всегда была под крестом, всегда гонима, озлобляема, но тем не менее она всегда обладала внутренним, богатным миром, даже среди величайших гонений, потому что в ней всегда был и будет Бог, избавляющий ее от всех бедствий, по слову Своему, что *врата ада не одолеют ей* (Мф. 16: 18).

И потому всякий истинно верующий и исполняющий заповеди Христовы человек, всякий истинно кающийся грешник, имеет внутри себя мир Христов, которого никакие внешние тревожения мира сего нарушить не могут, если он сам своей волей не вступит снова на путь беззакония и греха.

Поэтому если царства земные и вообще гражданские общества желают достичь и водворить мир, принесенный на землю Царем правды, мира и любви, господом Иисусом Христом, то они должны быть в тесном союзе с царством Господа, или с Церковью Его святою на земле, должны покоряться заповедям Иисуса Христа и уставам Церкви Его. А в случае их нарушения—немедленно исправляться, после искреннего признания своих ошибок и беззаконий. Члены государства, исповедующие христианскую веру, должны быть добрыми, честными и искренне преданными членами Церкви. Нарушение этого союза между Церковью и государством или его гражданами, пренебрежение верою, заповедями и Евангелием порождают безверие и всякие беспорядки в обществе, всякие пороки, повергают общества в нравственное или политическое бессилие, лишают его благословения небесного.

Наше Отечество, великая Россия, всегда была в тесном союзе с Церковью, и только в этом союзе она возросла, окрепла и взошла на высокую степень могущества и славы. Дай Бог, чтобы этот союз государства с Церковью—с этим царством мира—и впредь продолжался непрерывно! Тогда Россия всегда будет царством мира, и на ней будет почивать благословение Божие. Тогда никакая крамола в России не будет страшна, потому что не найдет нигде ни места, ни приюта.

Да воцарится в сердцах наших Христос Господь, и с Ним да царствует мир и благословение! Аминь.

Источник: pravoslavie.ru

Why Go to Church Every Sunday? (Part 2)

Fr. Daniel Sisoyev

Translation by Priest Sergii Alekseev

(continued from the December issue)

In the heart of our festal Divine Service is prayer and contemplation of the Holy Scripture, the reading of which in the church possesses a unique power. One ascetic saw tongues of fire rising up from the mouth of the deacon reading the word of God at the Sunday Divine Service. They were purifying the souls of the praying people and were ascending to Heaven. Those who say that reading the Bible at home is sufficient and, therefore, they do not need to go to church to hear the Word of God are mistaken. Even if they do open the Book at home, their distancing themselves from the assembly of the faithful in the church will prevent them from fully understanding the sacred text. It has been confirmed that those who do not partake of the Holy Communion are practically unable to understand God's will. No wonder! The Scripture is nothing other than instruction on how to receive Heavenly Grace. But if we simply read a set of instructions and do not try to, let us say, put a bookcase together or use a computer program, the set of instructions will remain unmastered and will be soon forgotten. It is well-known that our mind quickly filters out any unused information. Therefore, the Scripture is inseparable from the church community, for it was given solely to the Church.

And vice versa, those who attend the Sunday Divine Liturgy and then read the Scripture at home will comprehend meaning in it that they would never have comprehended otherwise. Often, it is precisely on the Church Feast Days that people learn the will of God about themselves. According to the words of St. John of the Ladder, "Although God always endows His servants with gifts, He does even more so on the yearly feasts of the Lord and the Mother of God" (To the Pastor, 3:2). It is not surprising that those who regularly attend church are somewhat different, both in outward appearance and in the disposition of their souls. On one hand, to them virtues become natural, while on the other hand, frequent confessions prevent them from falling into serious sins. In the life of a Christian, passions can intensify, for Satan does not want us—who were made from dust—to ascend to Heaven from which we had been cast down. For this reason Satan attacks us as his enemies. We, however, should not fear him; we should fight him and overcome him, for only he that overcometh shall inherit all things, says the Lord (Rev. 21:7). If the person says that he is a Christian but does not pray with his brothers, what kind of Christian is he? In the words of the greatest expert on Church

canons, Patriarch Theodore Balsamon of Antioch, “Such a person either does nothing regarding fulfillment of the Divine commandment about prayer and singing hymns to God, or he is not a believer. Otherwise, why would he for twenty days not want to be in church with Christians and have communion with God’s faithful people?” (*A reference to Church canons which stipulate that Christians who were absent from church on three consecutive Sundays are to be excommunicated. —Trans.*).

It is no accident that people we consider model Christians: Christians of the apostolic Church in Jerusalem, *Were together, and had all things common... And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people* (Acts 2:44-47). Their inner strength was a result of their being in one accord. They abided in the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit which was poured forth upon them in response to their love.

It is no coincidence that the New Testament directly forbids one to neglect assembling in church: *We shall not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but we shall exhort one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day [of the assembly] approaching* (Hebrews 10:25).

All the best things which made Russia holy, and which sustain other Christian nations, are provided by the Divine Services. In church we are delivered from the yoke of our vanity and we can break through from the shackles of crises and wars into God’s peace. And this is the only correct decision: not curses and revolutions, not malice and hatred, but church prayer and virtues can change the world. *For what Thou hast formed they have destroyed; and the righteous man, what hath he done? The Lord is in His holy temple* (Psalm 10:3-4), and the righteous one flees to the Lord to find refuge. This is not cowardice but wisdom and courage. Only a fool is going to try to stand up by himself against the onslaught of the evil of the entire world, be that terrorism or a natural disaster, revolutions or wars. Only the Almighty God can defend His creation. This is why a church has always been considered a place of safety.

Indeed, a church is Heaven’s embassy on the Earth where we pilgrims looking for the Heavenly city, receive support. *How Thou hast multiplied Thy mercy, O God! Let the sons of men hope in the shelter of Thy wings. They shall be drunken with the fatness of Thy house, and of the torrent of Thy delight shalt Thou make them to drink. For in thee is the fountain of life, in Thy light shall we see light* (Psalm 35:8-10).

I think it is clear that love for God is the reason for one’s striving to frequently visit the house of the Lord. But the second commandment

demands the same—to love our neighbor. Where else can we give our attention to what is most beautiful in a person? In a store, in a movie theater, or in a hospital? Obviously not. Only in the house of our common Father can we meet our brothers. Our communal prayer is going to be heard by God sooner, too, than a prayer of a proud loner. For Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself said: *If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them* (Matthew 18:19-20).

In church we distance ourselves from the hustle and bustle and are able to pray both about our own troubles and about the entire universe. In church, we pray to God asking Him to heal the diseases of our relatives, to free the captives, to preserve the travelers, to rescue to perishing. In church we are also in communion with those who have left this world but have not left Christ's Church. Whenever the departed visit the living they beg them to pray for them in churches. They say that every such a commemoration is like a birthday to them, but we often neglect that. Where then is our love? Let us imagine their condition. They have no bodies, they cannot receive communion, and they cannot do any good deeds (alms), either. They are waiting for support from their friends and relatives, but what they are getting are just excuses. It is the same as saying to your hungry mother: "Please forgive me, I am not going to give you anything to eat, because I badly need a nap". Do we not know that the church prayer is true food to the departed?

Besides, holy righteous men and women, worthily glorified, await us in the temple. Holy icons allow us to see them, their words are proclaimed during the service, and they themselves often visit the house of God, especially on their feast days. They pray together with us to God, and their powerful hymnology like eagles' wings bring up the church prayer directly to the Divine altar. And not only people but bodiless angels also participate in our prayer. People sing angels' songs (for instance, "Trisagion"), while angels sing along with us ("It is truly meet to bless Thee, O Theotokos"). According to the Church Tradition, an angel always stands over the Altar in the consecrated church, sending the prayer of the Church up to God, while a blessed spirit stands at the church entrance, watching over the thoughts of people entering and exiting the church. This presence is rather palpable. For it is not without reason that many unrepentant sinners do not feel good in the temple—it is the power of God rejecting their sinful will and the angels punishing them for their lawlessness. Such people, instead of ignoring the church, must repent and receive forgiveness in the Mystery of Confession and then remember to thank the Creator.

“Alright. One has to go to church, but why every Sunday? Do we need to be so fanatical?”

To put it briefly, one has to say that if the Creator commands, His creation has to answer with absolute obedience. The Ruler of all times has given us the days of our life. Is He not allowed to demand from us that we give Him four out of one hundred and sixty-eight hours of the week? Besides, the time we spend in church is for our own benefit. If a doctor prescribes some procedures for us, do not we try to follow all the doctor’s recommendations if we want to get well? Why do we then ignore the words of the Great Physician of souls and bodies?

Is following the Supreme Will fanatical? According to the dictionary, “fanaticism (from Latin *fanaticus*—extreme zeal) is a belief or a worldview taken to the extreme, intolerance to other points of view (for example, religious fanaticism).” Here we have to answer the question: What is the extreme degree? If it is something frenzied and ecstatic, then it is very unlikely that the people who go to church every Sunday tend to attack people in ecstatic joy or wrath. Sometimes, adhering to common sense is already considered extreme by some people. If not stealing and not killing is fanaticism then we are definitely fanatics. If the teaching that there is only one true path to one true God is considered fanatical, then we are fanatics. But with such an understanding of fanaticism the Heavenly Kingdom will be inherited only by the fanatics, because all the “normal” and “logical” are destined to the outer darkness, for God says: “*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. But as thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spite thee out of My mouth*” (Rev. 3:1516).

Let us think about the words with which we began our discussion:

“We need our sleep, then we need to spend time with the family, do things around the house, etc. And you want us to get up and go to church.”

Well, no one is forcing you to go to the early Liturgy, for in cities often both early and late Liturgies are served. As for the villages—nobody sleeps in in the countryside anyway (*where the farm work is to be done.*—*Trans.*). But in the city—nobody prevents you on Saturday evening after returning home from the evening service from spend time with your family, reading an interesting book, and, after the evening prayers, going to bed around 11 or 12 o’clock in order to get up on Sunday morning at 8:30 and go to church. Nine hours of sleep is enough to restore strength for most people. If it is not enough, you can make it up by taking a nap on Sunday afternoon. All our problems come not from going to church, but from the fact that the rhythm of our life does not correspond to the will of God, and it brings us to a state of exhaustion. Only communion with God—the Source of all

the powers of universe—can rejuvenate us both physically and spiritually. It is proven by experience that if you are exhausted by Saturday, Sunday Divine Services will fill you with inner strength. This strength is physical, too. For this reason the ascetics, who spent their lives in inhuman desert environments, lived to be 120 or 130 years old, whereas we can barely make it to 70 or 80. God gives strength to those who hope in Him and serve Him. A study was conducted before the revolution in Russia, which showed that greater longevity was enjoyed not by the nobility or merchants, but by priests, although they lived in far worse conditions than the first two classes. This is a palpable confirmation of the benefit of weekly attendance in the House of the Lord.

As for spending time with your family—what prevents you from going to church with the whole family? If the children are too little, then your wife and children can come to church a little bit later, and then all of you can go for a walk, have lunch, etc. Does this plan have anything in common with “spending time together”, when the entire family is sucked into the TV? Often those who do not come to church “because of the family” do not exchange a dozen words with that same family for the entire day.

As for the household chores: the Word of God does not allow us to do on Sundays anything beyond what is absolutely necessary. We must not clean the entire house on a Sunday, or dedicate the day to doing laundry, or canning fruits and vegetables for the whole year. The time of peace and calm lasts from Saturday evening till Sunday evening. All chores should be postponed till Sunday evening. The only kind of labor which is not only allowed, but prescribed for Sundays and feast days is acts of mercy. To clean the entire house of an old or sick person, to help in church, to provide food and clothing for an orphan or a large needy family—that is the only true and God-pleasing way of keeping the Lord’s Day holy.

“We cannot live through winter without canning produce from our garden; therefore we have to spend Sundays in the garden.”

I think the answer is obvious. Nothing prevents us from going to our local church, and still doing our work in the garden either on Saturdays or later on Sundays. This way our health will be preserved and the will of God will be honored. Even if there is no church nearby, we must dedicate Saturday evening and Sunday morning to prayer and Holy Scripture. Those who do not want to live by the will of God will harvest punishment. The hoped-for crops will be devoured by locusts, caterpillars, and diseases. When we need rain a draught comes, and when we need dry weather we get a flood. This way God shows everyone Who is Master in the world. Often God punishes those who transgress His will.

On the contrary, to those who follow the Divine commandment God sends unprecedented crops. For example, the crops in Optina Monastery exceeded those of its neighbors fourfold, although the same agricultural technology was used.

“I cannot go to church because it is too cold or hot; it is raining or snowing, I’d better pray at home.”

But, oh the wonder! The same person is ready in the rain to go to the stadium and route for his favorite team, to work in his garden, dance the night away at a party. He finds it beyond his strength to go to the house of God. Bad weather is always no more than justification for our lack of desire. Do we really think that God will hearken unto the prayer of the person who is not willing to sacrifice even in something little for Him?

Another objection is equally absurd:

“I am not going to church because you do not have pews and it is too hot. The Catholics have figured it all out much better!”

Of course, this objection cannot be taken seriously, but for many, comfort is more important than eternal salvation. Nevertheless, God does not desire peril even for an outcast, and Christ will not break a bruised reed and will not quench the smoking flax. As far as the pews go, they are not essential. If a person is sick nothing prevents him from sitting down on one of the benches at the back of the church. Moreover, according to the rule of Divine Services, at the festal evening service the faithful may sit seven times. And even if all the benches are occupied what stops you from bringing along a folding chair? Nobody will say a word. You will just have to get up for the reading of the Gospel, at the Cherubic Hymn, during the Eucharistic Canon and at about other ten most important moments of the service. I think this should not pose a problem for anyone. To those who cannot get up due to their health condition these rules do not apply at all.

Let me repeat it again: all these objections are ridiculous and they cannot be taken as a reason for disobeying the Divine commandment.

Neither can the following be an excuse:

“In your church everyone is so mean and grumpy. The old women hiss and deride people. And you call yourselves Christians? I do not want to become like you and for that reason I am not going to set my foot in church.”

Nobody demands from anyone to be mean and grumpy. Have you heard anyone in church making such demands? Do they ask you at the entrance of the church to put on boxing gloves? Do not hiss and do not deride people, and then you will be able to correct them. The Apostle Paul says:

“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? Before his own Lord he standeth or falleth” (Rom. 14:4).

Your objection would make sense if priests were teaching us to fight and to squabble. But this is not so. Neither the Bible, nor the Church, nor its ministers have ever taught that. To the contrary: in every homily and in every church hymn we are called to be meek and merciful. Therefore, others’ unfriendliness cannot be a reason for our not going to church.

We must understand that the people who come to church are not from Mars but from the same world we are from. They come from the same world where it is customary to swear. But in the temple you will not hear swearing. You could say that church is the only place out of bounds for swearing.

In the world it is customary to be grumpy and to pour out our discontent upon others, calling it a fight for justice. Don’t they do just that in doctors’ offices’ waiting rooms, where old women pick to pieces everyone from the president to the nurses? Do you think that on entering the church those people, as if from a touch of a magic wand, will immediately change and become as meek as sheep? No. God gave us free will, and without our effort nothing will change within us.

We are always in the Church only to a certain degree. Whenever this degree is great, the person is called a saint. At other times, this degree is small. At times a person holds on to the Lord only with his little figure. But we must remember that the only Judge and Appraiser is the Lord, not we. While there is still time there is hope. No one judges an entire movie before it is over—only certain episodes. Such episodes are saints. The Church is to be judged by Her saints, not by the people who are yet to complete the journey of their lives. Not in vain it is said that the end crowns every endeavor.

If the Church calls itself a hospital (in the prayer before the Confession, it says: “Thou hast come to the place of healing, may thou not depart unhealed”), can we expect the Church to be filled with healthy people? There are healthy ones, but they are in Heaven. The Church will be revealed in all its beauty only when everyone desiring healing starts using the treatment that the Church offers. Saints are the best evidence of God’s healing power acting in the Church.

Therefore, when in the church, we should not look at the people around us but at God, for we come not to the people in the church but to God.

(to be continued)

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