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ΑΥΧΝΟΣ

A GREEK ORTHODOX PERIODICAL

Ο Θρίαμβος της Αναστάσεως

*«Πού σου θάνατε το κέντρον;
Πού σου Άδη το Νίκος;
Ανέστη Χριστός,
και σύ καταβέβλησαι.
Ανέστη Χριστός
και πεπτώκασι δαίμονες...
Ανέστη Χριστός
και νεκρός ουδείς επί μνήματος»*

Τα θριαμβευτικά αυτά λόγια του φλογερού Χρυσορρήμονα διακηρύττουν σ'όλους το μέγεθος της Νίκης του Κυρίου εναντίον του διαβόλου και του θανάτου. Είναι μια νίκη χειροπιαστή. Με τη συντριβή του θανάτου και την Ανάσταση του Κυρίου άρχισε μία νέα ζωή για το κόσμο. Εκεί που βασίλευε η νέκρωση της αμαρτίας ξεπήδησε η νέα ζωή του Πνεύματος. Εκεί που η φθορά κατέτρωγε τη ζωή και τη πλάση, άνθισε η αφθαρσία της ζωής. Μια υπέροχη εποχή αιώνιας πνευματικής Άνοιξης αντικατέστησε τη βαρυχειμωνιά της αμαρτίας. Εκεί που το Βασίλειο του κακού έκανε αφόρητη τη ζωή, έπνευσε με την Ανάσταση, η ζωογόνος αύρα της Χάριτος του Κυρίου. Η κτίση όλη λούσθηκε από την ευωδία της αγιότητας, και η Εκκλησία η Ορθόδοξη σαν καινούργιος ουρανός καλύπτει όλη την οικουμένη.



Η εξουσία πέρασε οριστικά στα χέρια του Ιησού. Το είπε ο Ίδιος μετά τη θριαμβευτική Του Ανάσταση στους Αποστόλους Του: «Εδόθη μοι πάσα εξουσία εν ουρανών και επί γής» (Ματθ. 28: 18). Δηλαδή, μου δόθηκε και σαν ανθρώπου κάθε εξουσία στον ουρανό και στη γή. Εξουσιάζω τα πάντα. Επίγεια και επουράνια.

Ποιός άλλος ποτέ τόλμησε να κάνει τέτοια δήλωση; Ποιός ιδρυτής θρησκείας; Ποιός πολιτικός αρχηγός; Μόνος ο πρᾶος και ταπεινός Ιησούς άφησε να βγούν από τα άγια χείλη Του με τρόπο ήρεμο και μεγαλειώδη αυτά τα συγκλονιστικά λόγια. Και δέν ήταν μόνο λόγια. Ανταποκρινόταν και μέχρι σήμερα, ανταποκρίνονται πλήρως στα πράγματα. Από την ώρα που πάτησε με το θανατό Του τον Άδη και τον θάνατο και άφησε αδειανό το τάφο Του, εξουσιάζει τα πάντα. Πίσω και πάνω απ'όλους αυτούς που φαίνονται και νομίζουν πιθανόν και οι ίδιοι, ότι ρυθμίζουν τίς τύχες του κόσμου, εξουσιάζει και κυβερνά Εκείνος, που είναι «Ο Κύριος των Κυρίων και Βασιλεύς των Βασιλέων» (Αποκ. 17:14).

Βέβαια ο θριαμβευτής του Θανάτου εξουσιάζει με τρόπο εντελώς διαφορετικό από το τρόπο που εξουσιάζουν οι άνθρωποι. Αυτός κυβερνά με πραότητα, με αγάπη, με δικαιοσύνη και με σεβασμό στην ελευθερία των υπηκόων Του. Στήνει το Θρόνο Του στις καρδιές μας, σ'όσους Τον πιστεύουν και τον δέχονται Σωτήρα τους. Στις καρδιές που ζούν σύμφωνα με το θέλημα Του και τις εντολές Του. Στις καρδιές που γεμίζουν με την παρουσία Του και δεν διστάζουν να ομολογήσουν ότι είναι δικές Του όπου κι αν ζούν.

Όμως ο θριαμβευτής Κύριος της ζωής και του θανάτου ενδιαφέρεται και για τις καρδιές που Του αντιστέκονται. Ακόμα και γί'αυτούς που Τον πολεμούν είτε φανερά, είτε κρυφά. Δίνει και σ'αυτούς δείγματα της κυριαρχικής παρουσίας Του. Δεν έχει σημασία αν δεν Τον πιστεύουν και δεν υποκύπτουν προς το παρόν όλοι. Το μέλλον ανήκει σ'Εκείνον που νίκησε το θάνατο και θριαμβευτικά ανεστήθη.

Έτσι και φέτος, στις Ορθόδοξες εκκλησίες μας θα ξαναδούμε τον θριαμβευτή του Θανάτου να κατέρχεται στο σκοτεινό Άδη και με τη Θεϊκή ακτινοβολία Του να ποδοπατεί το κράτος το Θανάτου. Το ανεξιχνίαστο μυστήριο της Αναστάσεως συντελείται μέσα μας μυστικά, εάν το θέλουμε.

Ο αναστημένος Κύριός μας ενώνεται με τις ψυχές μας και ανίσταται ανασταίνοντας κι εμάς. Ο Σταυρός και η Ανάσταση έχουν αδιάκοπη επικαιρότητα. Άραγε είμαστε έτοιμοι να συναντηθούμε μαζί Του;

Yesterday I was
crucified with Him;
today I am glorified
with Him; yesterday I
died with Him; today
I am made alive with
Him; yesterday I was
buried with Him;
today I rise with Him.

In the great festal hymns of the Orthodox Church we often hear the word 'today'. We hear it at: Christmas, 'Today the Virgin...'; Theophany, 'Today the Jordan is turned back...'; and on Holy Thursday, 'Today is hung upon the Cross...'. Pascha is no different, with the hymnology constantly emphasising that the events did not just happen in the past but are still present.

The hymns of Pascha take us to Jerusalem and back to the time of the Resurrection, but also bring Jerusalem and the Resurrection to us. Many people ask how it would have felt to be present at the Crucifixion or the Resurrection, but the services of Holy Week don't just teleport us there, they allow us to live the events of Holy Week. We are crucified and resurrected alongside Christ.

St Gregory the Theologian said as much in his first Oration, 'Yesterday I was crucified with Him; today I am glorified with Him; yesterday I died with Him; today I am made alive with Him; yesterday I was buried with Him; today I rise with Him.'

This understanding of Pascha in no way detracts from the historical events. It is written in the Creed and recited at each Divine Liturgy that Christ 'was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate and suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day according to the Scriptures.'

We confess that these events really happened. They are not merely symbols or allegories. They are not just a ritual or cultural custom.

And yet, Pascha transcends the historical plane. How could the Resurrection, where Christ trampled death by death, be contained within history alone? Much as death could not contain Christ, so Pascha cannot be contained by time and is instead experienced by the faithful at all times.

However, to have this experience of Pascha requires choice by us, a choice which God will bless. If we choose to give our hearts to Christ we can crucify our sins, passions, and all other things that lead us away from Christ, and be raised up to eternal life with Christ. St Gregory encourages us in this pursuit, 'Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become gods for His sake, since He for ours became Man.'

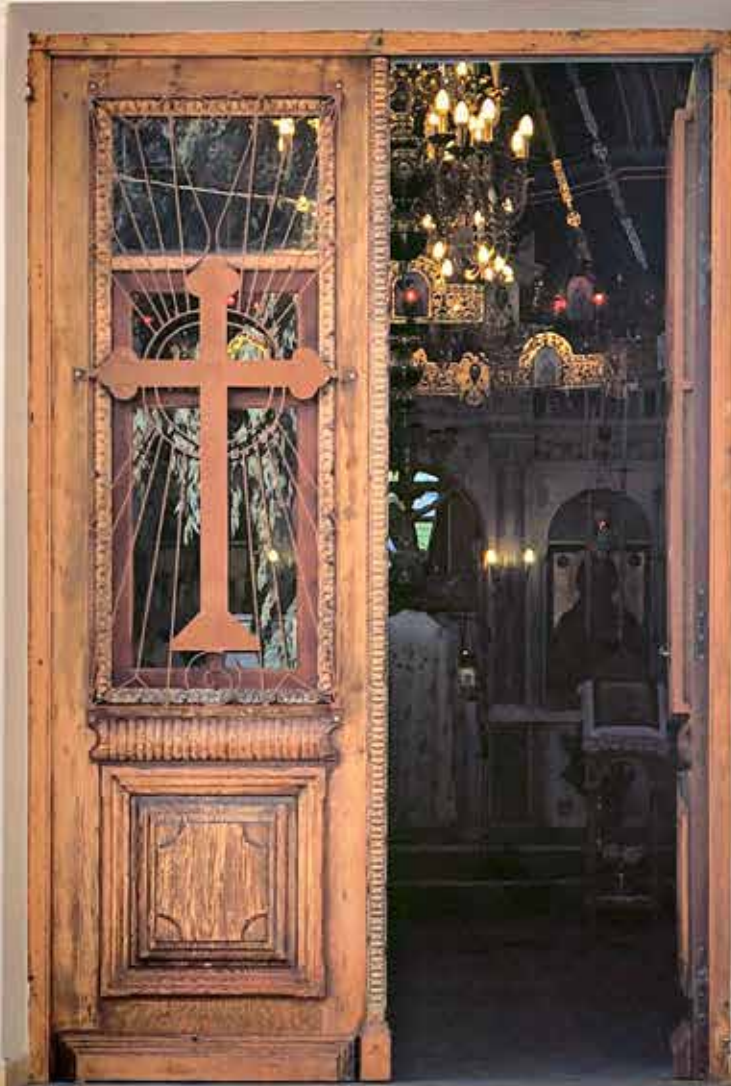
The 'sacred Pascha' has happened and continues to happen. It has been revealed to us as Orthodox Christians through the teachings and liturgical life of the Church. The sacred Pascha brings to mind the original Pascha, the Passover where Moses parted the Red Sea and crossed it when the Israelites fled from Egypt to reach the Promised Land.

Christ, in defeating death, has allowed us to pass from death to life in much the same way. He has made life accessible for us where previously we could not reach it. However, let us remember the words of the hymn and seize the opportunity 'today', while we can, and while we bask in the joy of the Resurrection.

Χριστός Ανέστη!
Christ is Risen!



The Depth of Our Life in Christ



Having prepared ourselves during Great Lent in accordance with our Orthodox Church's prescribed custom of prayer, fasting, spiritual readings, partaking in the sacraments, and attending as many church services as possible, we arrived at Palm Sunday, being at the beginning of the Passion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Hopefully we lived Holy Week with considerable contrition for the suffering of our Lord for the sins of each one of us, and arrived at the glorious day of His Resurrection, Pascha! The word is Jewish, and means passage, redemption, salvation. These three words indicate that we passed from the dominion of the devil, sin and death, into the freedom of the children of God (Romans 6:20).

It is a great blessing of God for a person to be a Christian, and at that, an Orthodox Christian. But such a blessing presupposes certain obligations and duties of ourselves towards our God, namely worship, repentance, and confession.

1. Worship of God is a most important obligation, especially during the Holy Liturgy which we should attend every Sunday, and where possible on week days. It is important to be present in Church during the Holy Liturgy and to take part in it. This means praying with the Priests and the Chanters the prayers that they are offering to God. In so doing, and in partaking in the offering of the Holy Eucharist, we receive the blessings of Jesus Christ which fill our hearts with divine peace and spiritual joy.

It was Jesus Himself who instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist by saying to His Disciples, 'Take, eat; this is My Body... Take, drink; this is My Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many' (Mark 14: 22, 24).

The worship of God implies a deeper understanding of the significance of the prayers and actions that take place during worship. During the 'Holy Anaphora,' which follows the Creed, the Holy Gifts are offered to God. The prayer at one point says, 'We further offer to You, this spiritual (logical, rational) worship..' This means that we should have a clear and full understanding of what happens at this point, and at every point of the Holy Liturgy. This understanding is a task and duty of every Orthodox Christian, and it should be done at home by reading relevant books that explain the meaning and significance of every detail during worship.

Also, if we have questions we should ask them of our local priest, our confessor, or a Christian friend. Whenever such questions arise they must be resolved as quickly as possible, to avoid uncertainty about our spiritual life.

Worship is not only focused on the Holy or Presanctified Liturgy, but also Vespers, the Paraclesis and Salutations to the Theotokos, Paraclesis to various Saints, and other individual prayers.

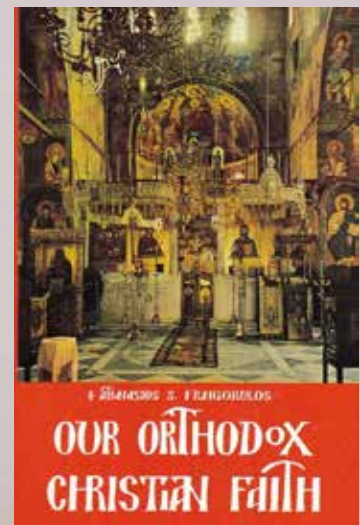
2. Repentance and Confession. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ died on the Cross so that the sins of all – of past, present and future

– may be forgiven. This forgiveness will happen if the person repents (i.e. recants for their previous sinful life, seeks forgiveness for their sins) and confesses them to a priest confessor of the Church.

This sacrament is the ultimate expression of the Love of our God for humanity. The person is relieved of their feelings of guilt and their disturbed conscience, whilst their new state of freedom from their past restores them to the position similar to that of an infant following baptism. This is why various Fathers of the Church have called confession the second baptism.

The sacrament of confession was established by our Lord Himself when He appeared to the disciples after His resurrection. He breathed onto them and said: 'If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; If you retain the sins of anyone, they are retained' (John 20: 22-23).

The person who repents and confesses their sins enters into a new life in Jesus Christ, who will be with them for evermore.



St Sebastian of Jackson

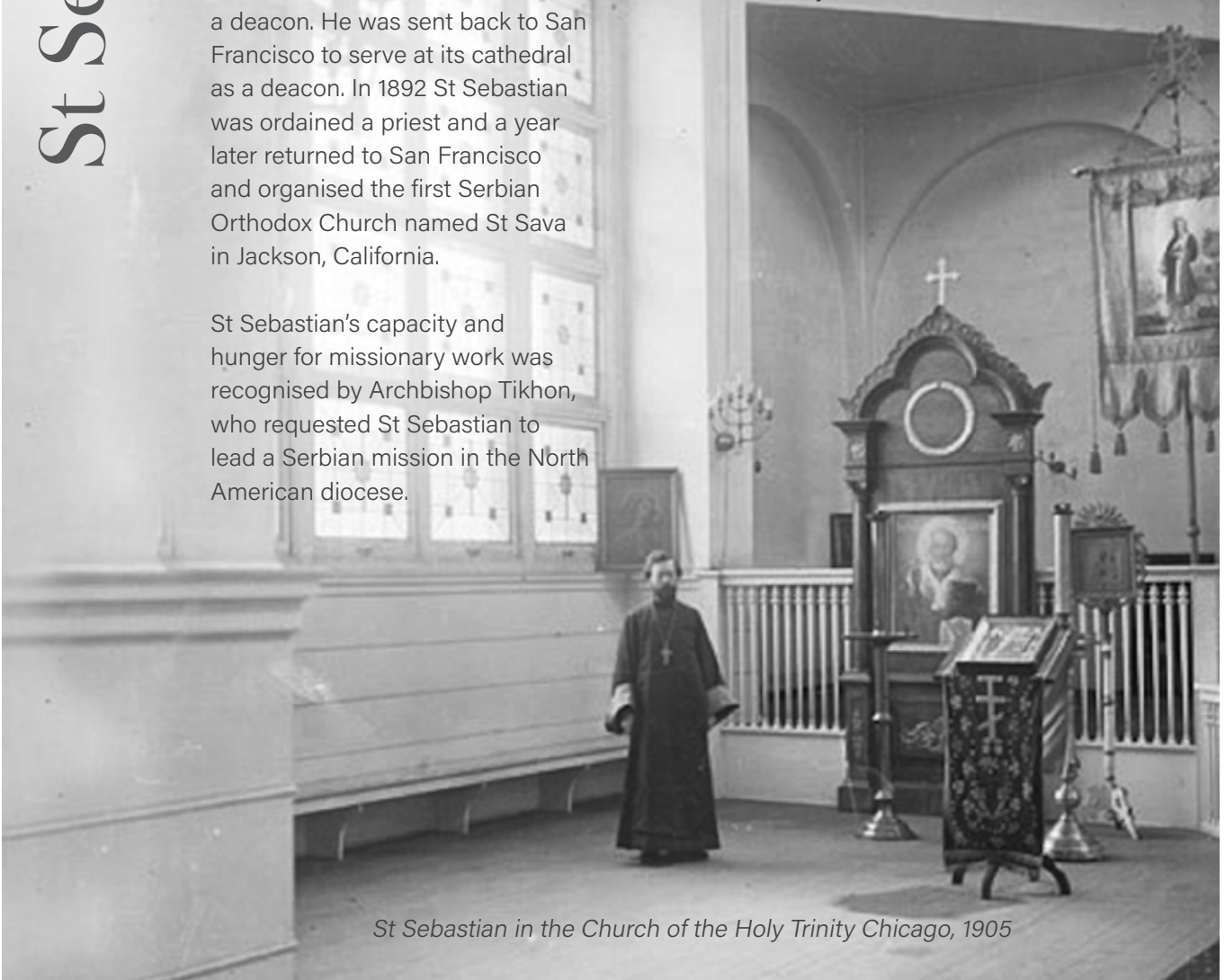
St Sebastian of Jackson is known for being the first American-born Serbian Orthodox priest, and a saint who worked tirelessly to unite the Orthodox people of America.

Born on 21 June 1863 in San Francisco, St Sebastian was a part of a devout Serbian immigrant family. After the completion of high school, St Sebastian's ministry work began. He was the reader and teacher in his local parish, and before making his journey to Russia he spent some time helping with parish ministerial work at Archangel Michael Cathedral in Sitka Alaska. In Russia, St Sebastian studied theology for three years, and upon the completion of his studies in 1887 he was tonsured a monk and ordained a deacon. He was sent back to San Francisco to serve at its cathedral as a deacon. In 1892 St Sebastian was ordained a priest and a year later returned to San Francisco and organised the first Serbian Orthodox Church named St Sava in Jackson, California.

St Sebastian's capacity and hunger for missionary work was recognised by Archbishop Tikhon, who requested St Sebastian to lead a Serbian mission in the North American diocese.

When he became a parish priest in Chicago he was elevated to Archimandrite on 15 August 1905. However, in 1910 St Sebastian asked for release from the Chicago parish, as his longing for missionary work was far from quenched. St Sebastian returned to Serbia, serving as a chaplain in the Serbian army during the Balkan Wars and WWI.

Aside from brief visits to the USA, St Sebastian thereafter spent the remainder of his life in Serbia, where he gave up his soul to the Lord in the Zicha monastery on November 30, 1940. Father Josiah Trenham notes that St Sebastian's modern canonisation is an example that achieving holiness is possible for each and every one of us.



St Sebastian in the Church of the Holy Trinity Chicago, 1905

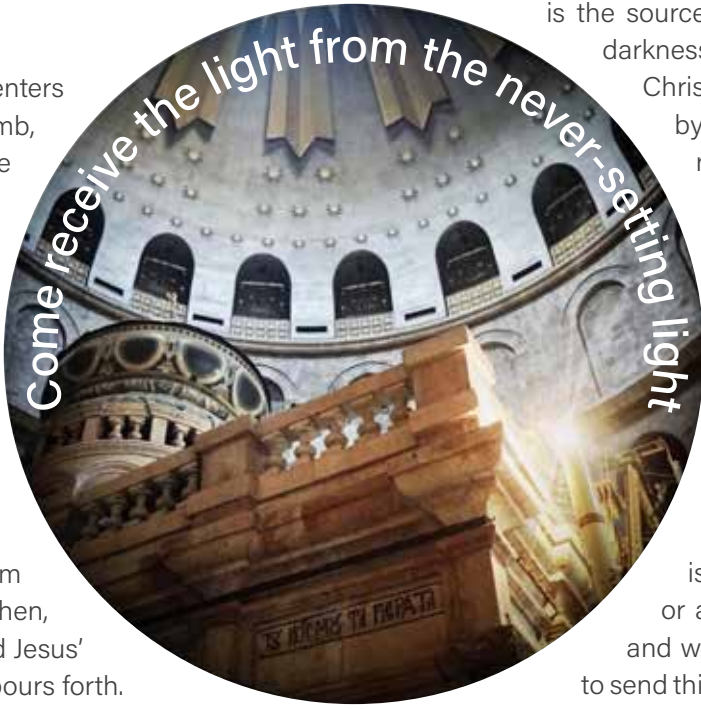


“What is the significance of the Holy Light?”

The Holy Light (το Άγιο Φως) refers to a miracle that happens every year at Pascha at the Cathedral of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The flame of the Holy Light lights up on its own, without a material flame source.

There are references to the miracle of the Holy Light from the fourth century AD, and it has been documented consecutively every year since 1106 AD. Each year, the miracle has occurred at the same time (in relation to Pascha), in the same manner, at the same place, and to the same person, being the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Before the Patriarch enters the shrine over Jesus’ tomb, the authorities check the tomb for any sources of fire and then seal it. They also search the Patriarch for any source of flame. The Patriarch then enters the shrine, at around midday on Holy Saturday, in utter reverence and holy fear. He says prayers that have been passed down to him from over the centuries. Then, from the stone that covered Jesus’ tomb, an indefinable light pours forth.



The light resembles a moist fire cloud around the stone and, from this, the Patriarch’s candles are lit. The Patriarch then comes out and the light is spread to everyone in the Holy Sepulchre. The unlit lamps hanging outside the shrine often light on their own. Sometimes the candles of worshippers light on their own too. The light does not cause burns in its initial stages. People hold it under their chins and they are not burned.

Light has special significance in relation to Pascha. Consider the following hymn; chanted when we receive the light at Pascha:

‘Come receive the light, from the never-setting light; and glorify Christ who has risen from the dead!’

In beholding the words of this hymn, we remember the words of Christ, ‘I am the light of the world’ (John 8:12). Light is the source of life; light means joy, illumination and warmth. Indeed, Christ as the Son of God is the source of life who dissipates the darkness, which is sin and death. Christ could not be contained by the darkness of death; he resurrected to give life to us who are in darkness.

Therefore, the Holy Light at the Sepulchre of Christ in Jerusalem is a repeating and living affirmation by Christ Himself about the events of the Resurrection. It is confirmation that our faith is alive; that it is not a theory or a myth. Despite our frailties and weaknesses, Jesus continues to send this message of ultimate hope.

The Holy Light is a re-living of His resurrection; the resurrection which gives us the opportunity for reunion with Him, our Creator, and the realisation of the promise to eternal life.

May the Holy Light inspire and strengthen us in our lives so that through our devotion to Christ we may live in this never-setting light.

The Icon of The Mystical Supper

A common icon found in our dining rooms is that of The Mystical Supper. The West calls it 'The Last Supper,' and its iconography focuses on the tragedy of the crucifixion, and the end of Christ's earthly ministry surrounded by deceit and betrayal. In contrast the Orthodox icon does not simply capture Christ's last meal with his disciples, but it also focuses on the institution of the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Through this mystery, Christ marks the beginning of a New Covenant which is to be repeated in remembrance of Him and offered up continually throughout the ages for the remission of sins and eternal life.

There are various versions of this icon which exist due to different iconographic traditions and interpretations. What is common to all such icons, however, is that the central figure is always Christ who is fully presented, usually a little larger than His disciples. Being a liturgical event, the icon places Christ as the head of the Church and the twelve disciples surrounding Him around the table as the body.

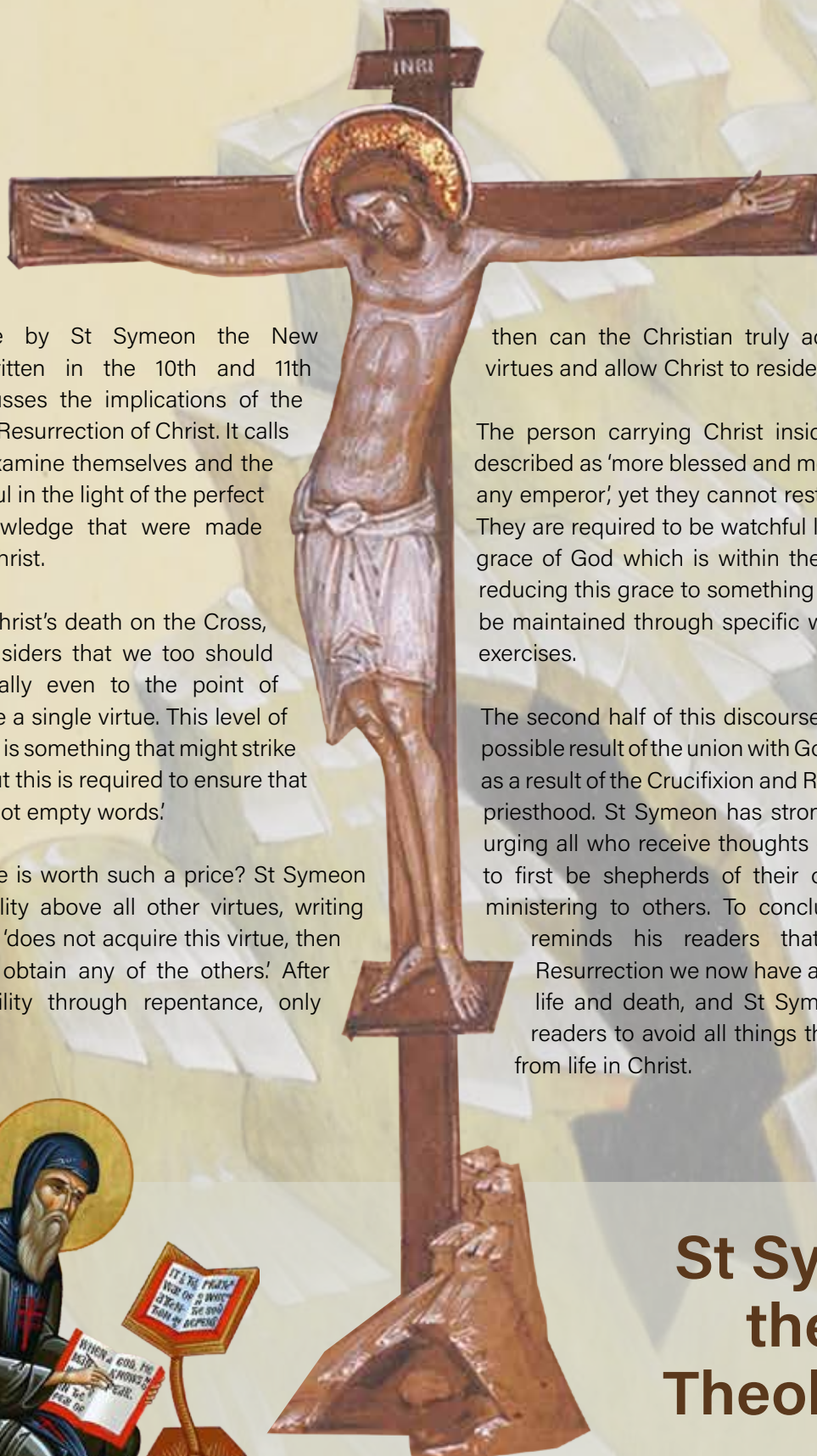
The table is usually filled with various utensils, wine, herbs and some bread in front of each of the disciples. It looks like a proper meal, however, we see Christ blessing the bread and wine with his right hand to mystically offer them as His own body and blood (Luke 22:18-20). For this reason, the table is depicted as round, having no end, to symbolise the eternal heavenly communion in the Kingdom of God.

With His left hand, Jesus is holding a scroll. This represents the establishment of the New Covenant with the Church and the fulfilment of the Old Covenant that had been given to the Israelites. This is supported by the absence of the Paschal lamb from the table which would have been the "main meal" of the Jewish Passover. Instead, Christ is present as the Paschal lamb and He seals the New Covenant with His own body and blood.

Apart from Jesus, the disciples do not have a halo given that the Holy Spirit had not yet descended upon them. St John the Theologian and Evangelist is always depicted reclining on Christ's breast as mentioned in his Gospel (John 13:23-26). This also reflects the common tradition which states that St John received the grace of theology when he leaned his head on Christ's heart. The other easily recognisable disciple, Judas Iscariot, is shown reaching over the table for the bowl to dip his bread in. Besides indicating his hidden greediness, this also shows how Jesus identified who would betray Him.

Finally, the background of the icon depicts some buildings which are covered with a red canopy to indicate that the event took place indoors. Symbolically it alludes to the secrecy of the Holy Mystery which we promise not to reveal to the enemies of Christ, nor to betray Him as did Judas, as is chanted in the communion hymn. Spiritually, this upper room is the raised intellect illuminated by the divine light of mystical knowledge, which is usually indicated by the lit candles found on the table.





This Discourse by St Symeon the New Theologian, written in the 10th and 11th centuries, discusses the implications of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. It calls the reader to examine themselves and the state of their soul in the light of the perfect virtue and knowledge that were made clear through Christ.

Reflecting on Christ's death on the Cross, St Symeon considers that we too should struggle spiritually even to the point of dying to achieve a single virtue. This level of spiritual warfare is something that might strike us as foreign, but this is required to ensure that 'our words are not empty words.'

But which virtue is worth such a price? St Symeon prioritises humility above all other virtues, writing that if someone 'does not acquire this virtue, then neither will he obtain any of the others.' After achieving humility through repentance, only

then can the Christian truly acquire the other virtues and allow Christ to reside within them.

The person carrying Christ inside their heart is described as 'more blessed and more glorious than any emperor', yet they cannot rest on their laurels. They are required to be watchful lest they lose the grace of God which is within them, and to avoid reducing this grace to something rational that can be maintained through specific works or spiritual exercises.

The second half of this discourse focuses on one possible result of the union with God made possible as a result of the Crucifixion and Resurrection – the priesthood. St Symeon has strong views on this, urging all who receive thoughts of such a calling to first be shepherds of their own soul before ministering to others. To conclude, St Symeon reminds his readers that following the Resurrection we now have a choice between life and death, and St Symeon exhorts the readers to avoid all things that take us away from life in Christ.



St Symeon the New Theologian on The Life-Giving Death of Christ

Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΑΜΦΙΛΟΧΙΟΣ

γεννήθηκε σε μια απλή ευσεβή οικογένεια στην Πάτμο στις 13 Δεκεμβρίου 1889. Σε ηλικία δεκαεπτά ετών ο Αμφιλόχιος έγινε δόκιμος στην Ιερά Μονή του Αγίου Ιωάννη του Θεολόγου και έπειτα εκάρη μοναχός.

Το 1913 θεωρώντας τον εαυτό του ανάξιο να χειροτονηθεί διάκονος, ο Αμφιλόχιος έφυγε και ταξίδεψε στους Αγίους Τόπους. Τελικά μετά την επιστροφή του δέχτηκε τη χειροτονία σε διάκονο και αργότερα σε ιερέα. Διακονούσε σε κοντινά νησιά εξομολογώντας και τελώντας τη Θεία Λειτουργία. Ήταν γνωστός για την αγάπη του που έδινε σε όλους.



Έλεγε:

«Όσο μπορείτε, προσπαθήστε να καλλιεργήσετε την αγάπη σας προς το ίδιο το πρόσωπο του Χριστού. Πρέπει να φτάσετε στο σημείο που κάθε φορά που αναφέρετε το όνομά Του, δάκρυα να τρέχουν από τα μάτια σας. Οι καρδιές σας πρέπει να καίγονται πραγματικά.»

Το 1935 ο Αμφιλόχιος εξελέγη ηγούμενος της Μονής του Αγίου Ιωάννη του Θεολόγου. Οι Ιταλοί κατέλαβαν την Πάτμο και προσπάθησαν να χειραγωγήσουν την εκκλησία. Φύτεψε τους σπόρους του μελλοντικού γυναικείου μοναστηριού του Ευαγγελισμού της Θεοτόκου: το πρώτο κτίριο στέγαζε ένα εκπαιδευτικό εργαστήριο πλεξίματος και υφαντικής, ένα πρόσχημα με το οποίο θα διδάσκονταν τα παιδιά ελληνικά.

Σε αντίδραση στις ενέργειες και την επιρροή του Γέροντα Αμφιλόχιου στον λαό, εξορίστηκε στην ηπειρωτική Ελλάδα από τους Ιταλούς.

Ο Γέροντας επέστρεψε το 1939 και ο λαός τον δέχτηκε με χαρά. Αφοσιώθηκε στη Μονή του Ευαγγελισμού και ίδρυσε ορφανοτροφείο με τη βοήθεια των μοναχών.

Το Άγιο Πάσχα του 1968 ο Γέροντας Αμφιλόχιος έλαβε προειδοποίηση για την κοίμησή του και του δόθηκε προθεσμία δύο ετών για να προετοιμάσει τον εαυτό του και τα πνευματικά του παιδιά. Μετά από σύντομη ασθένεια ο Άγιος Αμφιλόχιος κοιμήθη εν Κυρίω στις 16 Απριλίου 1970.



SAINT AMPHILOCHIOS

was born to a simple devout family in Patmos on 13 December 1889. At the age of seventeen Amphilochios became a novice at the Holy Monastery of St John the Theologian and was later tonsured as a monk.

In 1913 he fled to the Holy Land as he felt unworthy to be ordained a deacon but after his return he accepted ordination as a deacon and later the holy priesthood. He ministered to nearby islands hearing confessions and celebrating the Divine Liturgy. He was known for his love which he extended to all. He once said:

“As much as you can, try to cultivate your love towards Christ’s very person. You must come to the point that whenever you mention His name, tears run from your eyes. Your hearts must be truly burning.”

In 1935 Amphilochios was elected abbot of the Monastery of St John the Theologian. The Italians occupied Patmos and sought to manipulate the church. He planted the seeds of the future female Monastery of

the Annunciation of the Theotokos. The first building housed a training workshop for knitting and weaving, a guise under which to teach children Greek. In response to Elder Amphilochios’ actions, popularity, and influence over the people, he was exiled to mainland Greece by the Italians.

The Elder returned in 1939 and was joyfully received. He devoted himself to the Monastery of the Annunciation and with the nuns’ assistance established an orphanage.

On Holy Pascha of 1968, Elder Amphilochios received a forewarning of his repose and was given two years to prepare himself and his spiritual children. Following a short illness St Amphilochios peacefully reposed in the Lord on 16 April 1970.

DOXASTIKON OF SAINT GEORGE



This Doxastikon is chanted at the Matins service for St George, the Great-martyr, victory-bearer and wonderworker.

Although the Saint's feast day is normally celebrated on April 23, this date is moved to Bright Monday (the day after Easter) if it falls before Easter. In this way, the Church always celebrates St George's memory after Holy Pascha, which is why the chant commences with calling the faithful to 'be merry' given that 'Christ's resurrection has shone brightly.' In a similar manner to how Christ defeated death and brought us the joy of the resurrection, St George defeated the worldly tortures of Emperor Diocletian and brought us the joy of his example.

The remainder of the Chant then expresses why our Church has such great love and reverence for the Great martyr. As a 'good soldier' unafraid of his enemies, St George 'stood up manfully' towards the Emperor and

refused to denounce his faith even in the face of extreme pain and tortures.

These tortures included running wheels with knives over his body, beatings with metal whips, and the forced ingestion of poisons. None of these tortures had any effect, and the Saint's enduring faith put his adversaries 'utterly to shame.' This led to the conversion of many who witnessed it, including the Emperor's own wife. Ultimately, the great Saint knew that the 'clay vessel of his own body' was temporary, and by enduring the 'tortures' that were forced upon him without renouncing his faith, he 'exchanged' his earthly body for an eternal one.

St George is a great example about the power of Christ over this life, and the importance of focusing on our eternal soul. We pray to him in the concluding words: 'O victorious Martyr, earnestly entreat for the salvation of our souls.'



Spring is here: come, let us be merry. And Christ's resurrection has shone brightly: come, let us be joyous. The memory of the prizewinning Martyr has come upon us, gladdening the faithful.

Therefore, come all who are fond of feasts, let us celebrate it mystically. For as a good soldier, he stood up manfully against the tyrants and put them utterly to shame, and thus emulated the Passion of Christ the Savior. He had no mercy on the clay vessel of his own body, but rather taking it naked he reforged and exchanged it by means of tortures. Unto him let us cry aloud: O victorious Martyr, earnestly entreat for the salvation of our souls.



Habakkuk and Easter

In the festive Paschal service, during which the congregation is captivated in the joy of Christ's resurrection, we hear an interesting reference to the Old Testament. The fourth ode in the paschal canon of St John of Damascus tells us that the Prophet Habakkuk foretold of the Incarnation and the triumph of the Son of God. This arises in the third chapter of his Old Testament book, being the Hymn of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk wrote that God 'will be revealed when the time comes,' being in Christ's incarnation where he took on flesh and sanctified humanity. We then read that God 'shall be known between the two living creatures' (verse 2). Patristic commentary notes that this refers to two events: Firstly, the Metamorphosis of the Lord on Mt Tabor where Moses and Elijah stood on either side of Christ; and secondly, the Crucifixion where Christ was placed between the two thieves. Habakkuk further prophesies Christ's crucifixion: 'Horns will be in His hand, and He established a mighty love of His strength' (verse 4). This refers to the nails in Christ's hands, which shows us that He knew before His incarnation of the suffering that He would endure.

Habakkuk writes that the message of Christ 'shall go forth' (verse 5), foretelling not only the resurrection of Christ but also the apostleship that He entrusted to His followers in the spreading of the gospel. Through the resurrection of Christ, humanity is united in a singular triumph over sin and death. Habakkuk's prophesy that 'the nations melted away' (verse 6) is mirrored in St Paul's words that 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).



O LORD,
I HAVE
HEARD THY
SPEECH,
AND WAS
AFRAID.

Epistles

by Saint Paisios

This book contains a collection of six letters written by Elder Paisios (now St Paisios) to the Sisters at the Monastery of St John the Evangelist in Souroti. The letters were written between 1971 and 1975 to assist the Sisters in their spiritual struggle. However, they also have a more universal relevance and application to our lives.

The writing is in St Paisios' classic simple and engagingly direct style, whose gems can be seen in these three extracts.

Firstly, in speaking about the danger of being indifferent because we have not committed any 'major' sins, the Saint writes:

'Those who neglect their spiritual duties without excuse and show indifference to their minor sins will very soon be levelled like the trees that are brought down suddenly from an army of worms and not from a single axe.'

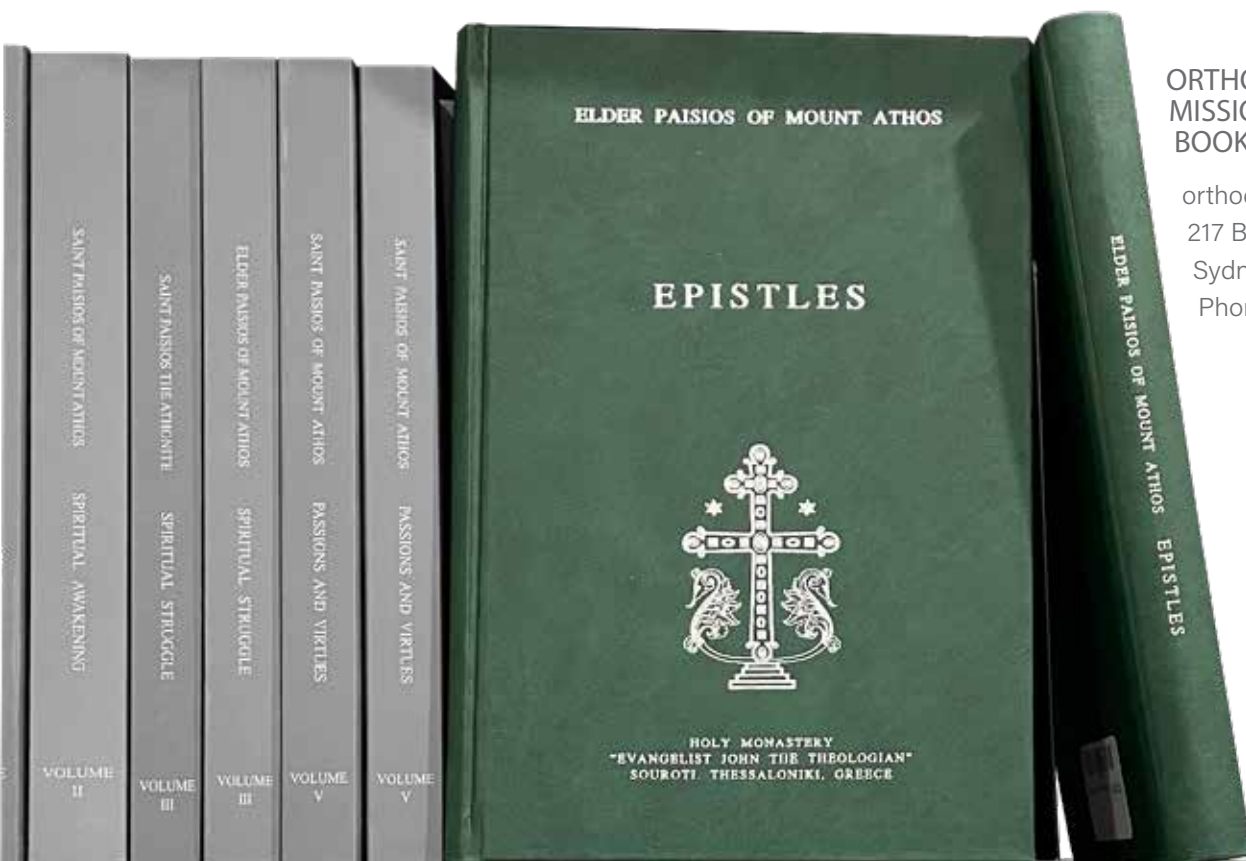
Secondly, in speaking about the importance of being under the guidance of a spiritual father, and avoiding the aim of 'over-spiritualising' ourselves with false zeal, the Saint writes:

'For the unripe melon does not become ripe by squeezing it, but rather ripens in its own time, and then its ripeness is revealed by the aroma alone. Those who struggle egotistically, with self-confidence, are tortured and then blown up by the mine of self-confidence.'

Thirdly, when explaining how to acquire humility, the Saint writes that we should aim to imitate the Earth as:

'It accepts with joy anything we throw away, good fruits as well as dirty trash, converts them quietly into vitamins and, with its fruits, offers them plentifully to both good and evil people without discrimination.'

The lessons in the book are not exclusively for monastics, although there are portions that are more directly targeted to those. Even in those instances, however, the reader can clearly see a strong underlying spirit of love and humility. In this sense, the book is much more than a mere educational experience, but rather provides an uplifting insight into the mind of a Saint.



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Η ΟΜΟΛΟΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΘΩΜΑ

Ο Απόστολος Θωμάς έλειπε από τήν σύναξιν τών μαθητών όταν παρουσιάσθη ό Σωτήρ, και δέν είδε τόν αναστάνα Κύριον. Όταν άργότερα ήλθε, τού έλεγαν γεμάτοι χαρά οί άλλοι μαθητές. «Εωράκαμεν τόν Κύριον», Θωμά, τόν είδαμε, μέ τά μάτια μας τόν είδαμε τόν Κύριον, αναστημένον, όλοζώντανον, πανένδοξον, τόν είδαμε τόν σταυρωθέντα και ταφέντα Διδάσκαλόν μας.

Τί κρίμα, τί κρίμα, Θωμά, πού άπουσίαζες. Θα άκουες τόν χαρμόσυνο χαιρετισμό του. Θα έλάμβανες, όπως και έμεις, τίς θείες δωρεές του. Και θα έγέμιζες πίστη και χαρά και εύφροσύνη. Άχ, Θωμά, τί έχασες, τί έχασες μέ τό να λείπης.

Αλλά ό Θωμάς μένει άσυγκίνητος. Δέν άκούει τίς βεβαιώσεις τών συμμαθητών του. Δέν πιστεύει τίς μαρτυρίες των. Δέν ίκανοποιείται από τήν χαρά τους. Ό Θωμάς θέλει ό ίδιος να ιδή, ζητεί ό ίδιος

αύτοπροσώπως να έρευνήση. Να ιδή μέ τά δικά του μάτια. Να ψηλαφήση μέ τά δικά του χέρια: «Εάν μή ιδω έν τοίς χερσίν αυτού τόν τύπον τών ήλων, και βάλω τήν χείρα μου εις τήν πλευράν αυτού, ού μή πιστεύσω». Τί δυσπιστία! Τί αύτοπεποιθήσις! Τί έπιμονή!

Και όμως ό Θωμάς, δέν είναι άπιστος από βαθύ έγωισμό και πείσμονα ίσχυρογνωμοσύνη. Δέν έπιμένει από κακία. Ό μελαγχολικός χαρακτήρας του, ή μεγάλη συμφορά και θλίψις διά τόν άδόκητο θάνατο τού προσφιλούς του Διδασκάλου, τά τρομερά και άπίστευτα για τή κακία τών ανθρώπων γεγονότα, τόν κάμνουν να στέκη διστακτικός και να δυσκολεύεται να πιστεύση τό πρωτάκουστο τής Άναστάσεως γεγονός.

Διά τούτο και ό Κύριος δέν τόν έγκαταλείπει. Τόν άφίνει για όκτώ ήμέρες να βασανίζεται μέσα σε πελάγη άπορίας και θλίψεως και πικρίας, και τούτο προς παιδαγωγίαν του διά τήν άδικαιολόγητη άπιστία του. Άλλά «μέθ ήμέρας όκτώ» έρχεται πάλιν ό Κύριος προς τούς μαθητάς του, πάλιν κεκλεισμένων τών θυρών. Τώρα όμως είναι και ό Θωμάς μαζί τους. Άφού και πάλιν τούς έδωκε τήν αναστάσιμη εύχή τής ειρήνης, καλεί τόν Θωμά να ψηλαφήσει και να ερευνήσει τίς πληγές και τη πλευρά Του. «Φέρε τόν δάκτυλον σου ώδε και ιδε τάς χείρας μου, και φέρε τήν χείρα σου και βάλε εις τήν πλευράν μου, και μή γίνου άπιστος αλλά πιστός».

Τί να καμη τώρα ό Θωμάς? Τό φώς τού αναστάνατος Χριστού έλαμψεν εις τήν καρδιά τού μαθητού. Ό άπιστος στερεώνεται εις τήν πίστη και τέλεια, ζωντανή, όλόψυχος και όλόθερμος ή όμολογία βγαίνει από τήν καρδιά τού μαθητού. «Ό Κύριος μου και ό Θεός μου!» Ό Κύριος δέχεται τού Θωμά τήν όμολογία. Άλλά ό μαθητής πρέπει και να

έλεγχθή. Τού άπευθύνει, λοιπόν, δίκαιο, αλλά και γλυκύ και ήρεμόν έλεγχο.

«Ότι έωράκάς με, πεπίστευκας, μακάριοι οί μή ιδόντες και πιστεύσαντες». Μακάριος είσαι και σύ, ό όποίος επί τέλους απέβαλες τήν δυσπιστίαν σου και έστερεώθης εις τήν πίστιν. Μακάριοι όμως εκατόν τοίς εκατόν είναι εκείνοι πού θα πιστεύουν, χωρίς να ζητούν έλεγχο και έρευνα τών θείων γεγονότων και άληθειών μέ τίς δικές των σωματικές αισθήσεις.

Τότε οί άνθρωποι, έβλεπαν μέ τά μάτια τους τόν Κύριο μαζί με τά θαυμαστά Του έργα. Τώρα δέν είναι δυνατόν να Τόν βλέπουν κατά τόν τρόπον εκείνον. Τώρα μία όδός σωτηρίας μένει. Η όδός τής πίστεως. Μή ζητούμε να έρευνούμε τόν Θεόν, να πιστεύσωμεν ψηλαφούντες, όπως ό Θωμάς. Η πίστις έχει μεγαλύτερη αξία, ίσχυρότερη βεβαιότητα από τίς αισθήσεις μας. Πίστευε όπως αύτήν τού Θωμά τήν όμολογία. Πίστευε άδιστακτα μέ όλη σου τήν ψυχή. Αύτή ή ζώσα και θερμή πίστις θα σε σώση. Τό είπε ρητώς ό αναστάς Κύριος: «Μακάριοι οί μή ιδόντες και πιστεύσαντες».



...and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead...



'...Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.' (Acts 1:11)

It is no coincidence that the icon of the Ascension portrays Christ in a manner which suggests He is both ascending and descending, in line with the above words spoken by the Angels to the Disciples at the Ascension.

Christ Himself proclaimed that He would 'come again in glory' and described the events that would surround His Coming, as the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke recount in similar detail. 'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats' (Mt. 25:31-32; see also Mk. 13:26, Lk. 21:27).

Christ's second Coming will be very different to His first, as He will come with great power and glory, meaning all will see Him and all will recognise Him.

The answer to the question of when Christ will come is not given. For, as Christ Himself emphasised, of



importance is not the time, but that it will happen. Hence, His repeated exhortations on the need for spiritual vigilance - 'Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is' (Mk. 13:33).

Christ as the Son of God is characterised not only by love, but also by justice or righteousness. He is the only 'righteous Judge' (2 Tim. 4:8); the 'one Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy' (James 4:12). The hymns and prayers of our liturgical services constantly remind us of our need for God's divine mercy which always accompanies His divine judgement: 'Do not enter into judgement with Your servant, for no one living shall become justified in Your sight' (Ps. 142:2).

Fortunately divine judgement does not function according to the rules of human justice. God's judgement or righteousness is not to be interpreted in a judicial, legalistic manner where punishment and

reward dominate. Rather, He attributes to each of us, that of which we are worthy and that which we have cultivated ourselves to receive. In actual fact, each of us is judged by our own works, actions, words and thoughts. These provide the basis 'for a good defense before the awesome judgement seat of Christ,' which we pray for at every Divine Liturgy.

When Christ comes again, every soul will rise to meet judgement. Christ says '...for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation' (Jn. 5:28-29).

The Creed presents the event of Christ's second Coming in a light that is jubilant and triumphant. He has promised each one of us: '...I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also' (Jn. 14:3). May this promise fill our heart with hope, consolation, and the fervent desire to respond with the joyful cry: '... come, Lord Jesus!' (Rev. 22:20)

In the next issue of 'Our Creed,' we will focus on the phrase '...and His kingdom will have no end.'

News & Events

Key Dates



Commencement of the 2022 Sunday School Year

Over the last 67 years Sunday Schools in Sydney have been organised and operated by the Greek Orthodox Christian Society, under the auspices of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia.

His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia blessed the beginning of the new Sunday School year on Saturday 5 March 2022 at the Greek Orthodox Christian Society. The Sunday School Teachers were inspired by the wise words and personal experiences shared by His Eminence and feel immense gratitude to have received his blessing and be strengthened for the year ahead.

The greatest gift we can give to our children is our Orthodox Christian Faith. Sunday School is vital in developing a child's knowledge and love for God and offers a friendly, supportive environment in which children can gain a deeper understanding of our faith.



Sunday School is offered on Sundays in every parish for children aged 4 to 18. For information on classes held at your local parish, please contact your local priest, or the Sunday School teachers, or email: sundayschool@lychnos.org.

MAY






1 Thomas Sunday Sunday after Pascha	8 Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearing Women John the Theologian
15 Sunday of the Paralytic Pachomius the Great	18  Wednesday Mid-Pentecost
22 Sunday of the Samaritan Woman	29 Sunday of the Blind Man

JUNE

1  Wednesday Dismissal Feast of Pascha	2 Thursday ASCENSION OF OUR LORD
5 Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council	12 PENTECOST
19 Sunday of All Saints 20-28 Apostles' Fast	29  Wednesday Peter and Paul, the Holy Apostles



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