

*We would like to welcome all parish visitors and invite you to join us after the Liturgy for Coffee hour.*



# Orthodox Church of the Mother of God OCA – Diocese of New York-New Jersey

V. Rev. Dr. Matthew Searfoorce, Rector

Sub-Deacon Edward Dawson      Sub-Deacon Vlashi

Parish Council President: Trudy Ellmore      Parish Council Vice President: Holly Dawson



**Sunday, October 11, 2015**

**Tone 2**

Gospel: Luke 7:11-16

Epistle: II Corinthians 11:31-12:9

*19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (3<sup>rd</sup> of Luke); Commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council*



**Glory to  
Jesus Christ!**

**Glory  
Forever!**

*Commemoration of the  
Holy Fathers of the  
Seventh Ecumenical  
Council*

*Most glorious are You, O Christ our God!  
You have established the Holy Fathers as lights on the earth!  
Through them you have guided us to the true faith!  
O greatly Compassionate One, glory to You!*

## **Today the Church Remembers**

**19<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost — Tone 2. Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council.**  
Holy Apostle Philip of the Seventy, one of the Seven Deacons (1st c.). St. Theophanes the Confessor and Hymnographer, Bishop of Nicæa (ca. 850). Ven. Theophanes, Faster, of the Kiev Caves (Near Caves—12th c.). Ven. Leo of Optina (1841). Synaxis of the Optina elders. Martyrs Zenaïs (Zinaïda) and Philonilla, of Tarsus in Cilicia (1st c.).

## **Weekly Bulletin Sponsors**

### **For Health of:**

**Sub-Deacon Edward**, on his birthday, offered by his family.

### **In Eternal Memory of:**

**Theodore Prinz**, offered by his daughters Lore Stefy & Nelly Freed.

### *Liturgical Schedule:*

#### **Sunday, October 11<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am: Sunday School  
9:40 am: Hours  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

#### **Saturday, October 17<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm: Vespers

#### **Sunday, October 18<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am: Sunday School  
9:40 am: Hours  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

#### **Saturday, October 24<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm: Vespers

#### **Sunday, October 25<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am: Sunday School  
9:40 am: Hours  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

### *Readings:*

**Epistle:** II Corinthians 11:31-12:9

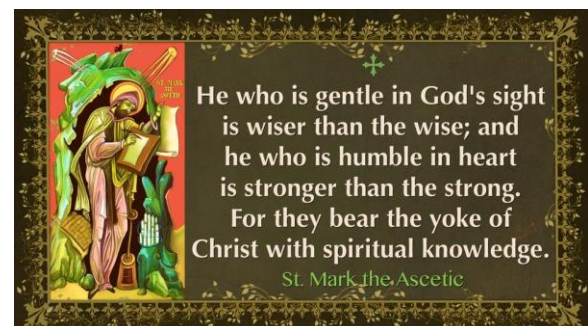
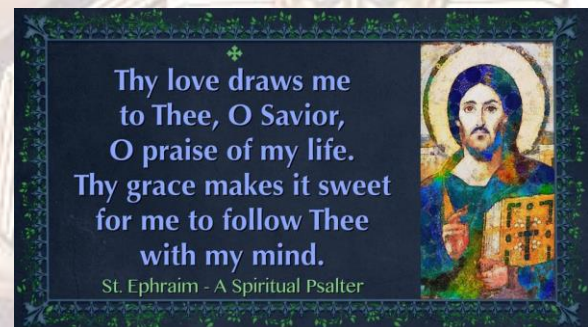
**Brethren,** the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed for ever, knows that I do not lie. At Damascus, the governor under King Ar'etas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands.

I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a

thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

**Gospel:** Luke 7:11-16 (3rd Sunday of Luke)

**At that time,** Jesus went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"







**Bulletin Sponsor:** Use the sign-up sheet at the candle stand for the health of, eternal memory of or a Pannikhida for a loved one or friend, for a donation of \$10. Sponsors will be remembered during Divine Liturgy for the day/week that you signed up for.

**Memorial Candles:** Candles be purchased at the candle stand, suggested donation of \$10 for a large one and \$2 for a small one.

**Private Confessions:** Can be heard a half hour before any service. See Father Matthew for other times and **General Confession:** Will be at 9:45 am on the first Sunday of the month.

**Pannikhida Service:** The third Sunday of each month there will be a Pannikhida after Divine Liturgy. If you would like your loved ones to be remembered please give a list of names to Father Matthew before that Sunday for those to be remembered in the month.

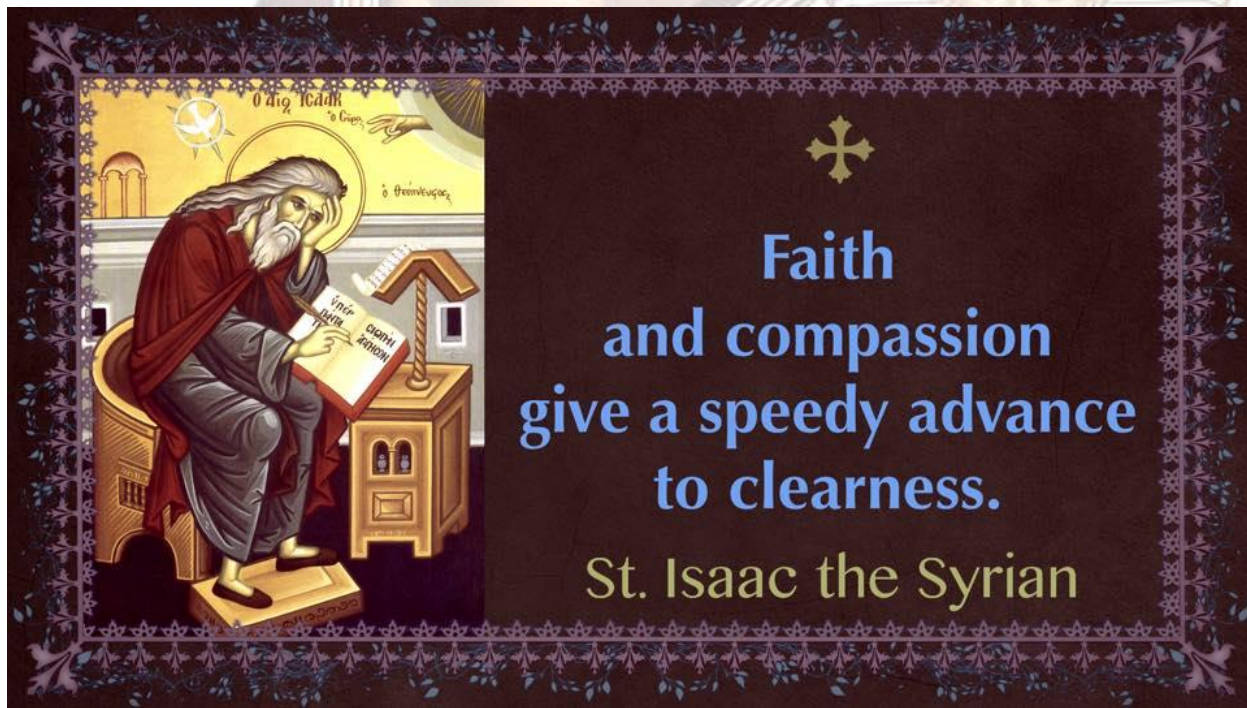
**Special Announcements** for the bulletin can be submitted by E-Mail:

[Bulletin@ChurchMotherOfGod.org](mailto:Bulletin@ChurchMotherOfGod.org)

**The Living Clean Group** of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Friday from 8-9:15 pm downstairs in the community room.

**The Grey Book Step Meeting Group** of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Tuesday from 7-8:00 pm downstairs in the community room.

**There will be a 40 day Pannikhida Service for Elena (Helen) Wolfe on October 25<sup>th</sup> with a dinner to follow.**



### ***Commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council***



Today the Church remembers the 350 holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council under the holy Patriarch Tarasius (February 25).

The Synod of 787, the second to meet at Nicea, refuted the Iconoclast heresy during the reign of Empress Irene and her son Constantine Porphyrogenitos.

The Council decreed that the veneration of icons was not idolatry (Exodus 20:4-5), because the honor shown to them is not directed to the wood or paint, but passes to the prototype (the person depicted). It also upheld the possibility of depicting Christ, Who became man and took flesh at His Incarnation. The Father, on the other hand, cannot be represented in His eternal nature, because "no man has seen God at any time" (John 1:18).

In Greek practice, the holy God-bearing Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council are commemorated on October 11 (if it is a Sunday), or on the Sunday which follows October 11. According to the Slavic MENAION, however, if the eleventh falls on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, the service is moved to the preceding Sunday.

### ***Prayers by the Lake, St. Nikolai Velimirovich, XXVI:***

Arise all you creatures and serve the Living Lord who cares about you. Worship Him and serve Him, for no one greater than He has visited you in this vale of fear and tears.

Servants come and make themselves lords. The Lord came and made Himself a servant. Servile lords strive to lord it over as many people and creatures as possible, while the lordly Servant strives to serve as many people and creatures as possible.

Arise, O lilies of the field, and give off your fragrance, for His holy mouth mentioned your name.

Arise, O stone and rock, and worship Him, for His holy feet walked over you.

Arise, O desert, and rejoice, for He sanctified you with His longest and most mysterious prayers.

Arise, O wheat and grapevine, for He blessed you especially among all created things. Arise and bless Him.

Arise, O fish, and glorify the Lord, for He was hungry and you nourished Him.

Arise, O water and skies, and serve Him, for by His power He cleansed you and calmed you.

Arise, O sycamore tree, and clothe yourself in silk, for in you He saw a sinner and saved him.

Arise, O sheep and oxen, and be filled with awe, for in your lowly stable He was born.

Arise, O birds, and sing, for He raised you up as an example for men.

Arise, O oil, and burn before His throne, for when He was anointed with you He felt joyful and saved a sinful woman.



Arise, O thorns and reed, and be filled with shame, for you caused Him pain.

Arise, O iron and wood, and repent, for even unwillingly you caused Him torments on the cross.

Arise, inhabitants of cities, and weep, for you did not believe in Him.

Arise, O leaders of the people, and sprinkle yourselves with ashes, for you passed judgment over Him.

Arise, O paupers, and embrace Him, for He is your wealth.

Arise, O kings, and lay down your crowns before Him, for He alone has taught you true wisdom concerning primacy and leadership.

Arise, O sinners, and start sobbing before Him, for only His hand does not cast a stone at you.

Arise, O righteous, and be vigilant, for your loader is coming to you.

Arise, all you stars, and begin to dance, for your Lightgiver goes to visit you.

Arise, O universe, and begin to hum the Lord's hymn, for the living Lord who cares about you has entered you.

### *Sayings of the Ascetics of the Orthodox Church, XXV:*

#### **Christ and Us**

The flood of temporal things draws us after itself, but in this flood there is, as it were, a full-grown tree: our Lord Jesus Christ. He took flesh, died, and ascended to heaven. It is as if He agreed to be in the flood of the temporal. Is this stream dragging you headlong? Hold on to Christ. He became temporal for you, so that you might become eternal, for He became temporal in such a way that He remained eternal. What difference is there between two men in a prison when one of the is a convict and the other a

visitor! Sometimes a man comes to visit his friend, and it seems that both are in prison, but there is a great difference between them. One of theme is held there because of guilt, while the other has come out of love for mankind. Thus it is with our mortality: guilt holds us here, but Christ had come out of mercy. He came freely into bondage, and not as a convict.

St. Augustin, Sermons on I John, II.10

### *The Prologue of Ohrid*

*St. Nikolai Velimirovic*

#### **1. The Holy Apostle Philip**

Philip was born in Palestinian Caesarea. He was married and had four daughters. All four were endowed by God with the gift of prophecy, and all four were vowed virgins for the sake of Christ. When the holy apostles chose deacons, Philip was chosen with Stephen and the others. He served the needy and widows with great diligence. When the persecution of Christians began in Jerusalem, Apostle Philip found refuge in Samaria, and there preached the Gospel and gave witness by many miracles: driving out demons, healing the sick, and so forth. Seeing the miracles of the holy apostle, Simon the Magician was baptized. St. Philip also baptized the eunuch of Queen Candace. After that, an angel of God suddenly and invisibly translated him to Azotus, where he taught, preached and converted many to Christ. Philip was appointed Bishop of Tralles. He reposed peacefully in deep old age, and took up his habitation in the joy of his Lord.

#### **2. The Commemoration of the Seventh Ecumenical Council**

The Seventh Ecumenical Council was held in 787 A.D. at Nicaea during the reign of the devout Empress Irene and her son, Constantine, in the time of Patriarch Tarasius. This Council finally confirmed the veneration of icons, justifying it by Holy Scripture, by the witness of the Holy Fathers, and by the undeniable example of miracles manifested through the holy icons. Adding to examples of miracles previously

cited, Bishop Constantine of Cyprus recounted this: One day, a certain shepherd from the town of Constantia drove his flock to pasture, and there saw an icon of the Most-holy Theotokos, all decorated with flowers by the faithful. "Why render so much honor to a rock?" said the shepherd, who had obviously been brought up in iconoclasm. He struck the icon with his iron shepherd's cane, and damaged the right eye of the image of the Mother of God. As soon as he turned away, he stumbled over that same cane and gouged out his own right eye. Thus injured, he returned to the city, crying out tearfully that the punishment of the Theotokos had befallen him. This Council also decreed that the holy relics of a martyr be placed, without fail, in the Antimension.<sup>\*)</sup> Three hundred and sixty-seven Fathers participated in this Council. May the Lord also have mercy on us and save us by their prayers.

### **3. The Venerable Theophanes the Branded**

Theophanes was a confessor and writer of canons. He was born in Arabia of wealthy and pious parents. With his brother Theodore (December 27), he was tonsured a monk in the Monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified. As they were very educated monks, Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem sent them to Emperor Leo the Armenian, to justify and defend the veneration of icons. The iniquitous emperor harshly tortured these holy brothers and cast them into prison. Later, the iconoclastic Emperor Theophilus resumed their torture and commanded that words of mockery be branded on their faces, to expose them to the ridicule of the world. When the iconoclastic controversy was resolved, Theophanes was freed, and shortly thereafter was consecrated a bishop. He died peacefully in the year 847 A.D., having suffered for the holy icons for a total of twenty-five years. He wrote 145 Canons. He entered into the eternal joy of his Lord.

### **4. Saint Nectarius, Patriarch of Constantinople**

As a layman and a high-ranking court official, Nectarius was unanimously chosen as patriarch

in 381 A.D., succeeding St. Gregory the Theologian. He was distinguished by profound understanding, tact and zeal for the Church. He reposed peacefully in the year 397 A.D.

### **5. The Holy Female Martyrs Zinaida and Philonilla**

Zinaida and Philonilla were sisters by birth, and were born in Tarsus. They are called the kinswomen of St. Paul the Apostle. Remaining virgins, they renounced the world for the sake of Christ, and, withdrawing to a cave, lived the ascetic life. They were knowledgeable in medicine and healed many of the sick. Because of her great fasting, Philonilla especially was vouchsafed the gift of miracle-working. Certain unbelievers attacked them one night and stoned them to death.

#### **Hymn of Praise**

#### ***The Venerable Theophanes the Branded***

Theophanes of St. Sava's, a great ascetic,  
Profound theologian and glorious  
hymnographer,  
A sufferer for Christ, a confessor of the Faith,  
An adornment of the Church, a Father of  
Orthodoxy:  
He left his cell for the sake of obedience,  
And from his silence, stepped out into the world  
once again,  
To persuade the evil emperor of the truth;  
And he witnessed that truth to the emperor.  
St. Theophanes traded a quarter century for true  
happiness,  
Though he passed this time in suffering most  
dire,  
And in the dank prison  
Wore the brand of suffering on his face.  
But, inspired by the Spirit, this saint of God  
Also infused these years with chants sublime,  
Glorifying the Lord and the saints of God  
With fervent hope, love and faith.

#### **Reflection**

Just as, by God's providence, the power of miraculous healing is given to blessed water or sanctified oil, so this same power is also given to icons. St. Athanasius the Great cites one



wonderful example of the miraculous power of holy icons: In the town of Beirut, there lived a Christian in a rented house. In moving out of the house, he forgot an icon of the Saviour. Then a Jew moved into that house. There were many Jews in that town who were particularly embittered against the Christian Faith. Consequently, when the icon was found in the house, the Jews carried it to their gathering place and mocked it, as their ancestors had once mocked the living Saviour. The Jews also did to the icon what their ancestors had done to the Saviour: they pierced the hands and feet with nails, wiped vinegar on the lips of the image on the icon, and mocked the image of the Saviour in every way possible. Finally, one of them took a spear and struck the divine image under the rib. But oh, the wonder--blood and water flowed from the image's wound as they had from the living body of the crucified Lord. The Jews' terror cannot be described. However, they brought a vessel to catch the blood, and brought many of the sick, blind, deaf, lame and insane to the icon. As soon as the Jews anointed the ailing with this blood, they were healed. The whole town gathered to see this miracle and all glorified Jesus Christ, the true God; and all the Jews in that town came to believe in the living and life-giving Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Contemplation**

Contemplate the numerous unrighteous acts of the people of Israel, and the numerous punishments that God visited upon them (II Kings 24):

1. How the princes of the people often turned away from God, and did that which is evil in the sight of God;
2. How God punished the people in order to correct them;
3. How finally, under the evil King Jehoiachin, the Israelites were taken into the Babylonian captivity.

### **Homily: on the voice of the Lord upon the waters**

*The voice of the Lord is upon the waters (Psalm 29:3).*

*The voice of the Lord* was heard over Jordan, when St. John baptized the Saviour. On the Sea of Galilee, when there were storms and winds, *the voice of the Lord* was heard, and the tempest was calmed and the winds ceased. *The voice of the Lord* was heard at the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee, and the water was changed into wine. *The voice of the Lord* was heard at the Red Sea, and the sea parted and a path was opened for the people of God. *The voice of the Lord* was heard in the wilderness, and water flowed from a dry rock. Given all this, what does *the voice of the Lord is upon the waters* mean? It means that the element, water, is the work of God; and through it, God works miracles when He wills, and how He wills. No less are the other elements the work of God: fire, air and earth. And God is Lord over them all, and through them He works miracles when He wills, and how He wills.

God the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of fire at Pentecost. In the furnace at Babylon, the flames lost their power at the sound of *the voice of the Lord*, and did not harm the blessed children. Fire was sent down from heaven to consume the sacrifice of Gideon (Judges 6). Elias brought down fire from the heavens (II Kings 1:10). The bush burned and was not consumed (Exodus 3). Fire from heaven came down and consumed Elias's sacrifice to God (I Kings 18:38). A fiery pillar went before the Israelites (Exodus 13, 14). All of this was according to the word of the Lord.

The earth opened up and swallowed the unrighteous Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16:32). The earth opened and hid Elizabeth and the infant child John from the sword of Herod. The earth quaked when the Lord breathed His last on the Cross, and the graves opened up (Matthew 27:51-52). The Lord ascended into the heavens through the air (Luke 24:51). The holy apostles were carried through the air to Jerusalem, from various parts of the world. An angel took the Prophet Habakkuk to Babylon through the air in an instant (Bel and the Dragon 1:35). And all of this was in accord with *the voice of the Lord*: by the Lord's command. When will men be as obedient to *the voice of the Lord* as the irrational elements of nature are? Then again, "the waters" is to be interpreted as meaning "men"--men who

are obedient to *the voice of the Lord*--the apostles and the saints. Like water, they covered the earth with the preaching of Christ our God. Like water, they assuaged the thirsty world with the effusion of the fountain of eternal life, and the world was restored and blossomed. Upon them, just as upon ordinary water, numerous miracles were manifested; for they were submissive to the will of God, obedient to the voice of God, just like water.

O Lord Jesus Christ, help us to be obedient to Thy voice. Help us to be ashamed before lifeless elements that obey Thee better than we do.

**To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.**

*Thoughts for Each Day of the Year  
According to the Daily Church  
Readings from the Word of God  
By St. Theophan the Recluse*

The fundamental, original commandment is: love! It is a small word, but it expresses an all-encompassing thing. It is easy to say: you must love, but it is not easy to attain love to the necessary degree. It is also not exactly clear how to attain it; this is why the Saviour surrounds this commandment with other explanatory rules: *love as thyself; and as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise*. Here is shown a degree of love that one can call boundless; for is there any limit to one's love for oneself? And is there any good which one would not want for himself from others? Meanwhile, however, the instructions are not impossible to fulfil. The matter depends upon having perfect compassion toward others, to fully transfer their feelings to yourself, to feel the way they feel. When this occurs, there will be no need to point out what you must do for others in a given situation: your heart will show you. You must only take care to maintain compassion, otherwise egoism will immediately approach and return you to itself and confine you in itself. Then you will not lift a finger for another, and will not look at him, though he might be dying. When the Lord said: *love thy neighbor as thyself*, He meant that our neighbour should be in us, that is, in our heart, instead of our own selves. If our "I" remains in there as before, we

cannot expect anything good to come of it.

*The Domestic Church  
The incubator for a life of righteousness*

The incubator for a life of righteousness prior to electricity and central heating, most families gathered in parlors, spending evenings with reading, sewing, and family conversations. The notion that everyone would retreat to bedrooms, kitchens, or dens, separating themselves from other family members, was unthinkable. The communal nature of the family was natural. I can remember, as a child (this really dates me), sitting together with my brother and my parents, listening to radio dramas. Before the coming of television, families would gather for evenings in the living room, where children would play with Lincoln Logs, or play board games with their parents. Evenings spent together as family is important, for these moments not only build a bond between parents and their children, but serve as important times in which to share family values. The old saying that "a family that prays together, stays together" was a truism that is often forgotten. I remember, as a boy of six, a Catholic family living next to us who had a small family chapel, complete with altar, statues, and candles. Every evening they would all gather in that little chapel to pray the rosary. As a protestant boy, I remember wishing we had a chapel as well. Family meals are also important times for building strong moral and spiritual foundations in children. Sitting around the dinner table is a great time for parents to develop strong bonds of trust with their children. Dinner is a perfect time for talking to your children about their friends, or school activities, or recounting the homily from the Sunday Liturgy. Family members dispersing throughout the house for the evening, can end up functioning as autonomous entities, and family bonds are unlikely to develop in a healthy manner. The domestic church, which is such an important element of the Orthodox Christian tradition, cannot be developed in a family where meals, prayers, and social life are all in separate parts of the house. Parents, in their capacity as shepherds and nurturers, have the God given responsibility to make sure the home is an incubator for a life of righteousness, and where



the Orthodox faith can take root. It is in such households that these children, in turn, learn how to be good parents to their own future children. Hebrews 10:24-25: "... and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another ..."

With love in Christ,  
Abbot Tryphon

### *Coffee with Sister Vassa – Daily Reflection*



### **Victory of the Weakest**

*“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory.”* (Mt 12:20; cf. Isaiah 42:3)

Here the Evangelist Matthew quotes a prophecy of Isaiah, describing Christ’s healing ministry to the crowds that were following Him wherever He went. The Lord did not turn away even the weakest, the most sinful, the most disparaged, like the harlots and tax-collectors, or others considered “hopeless cases.” They are likened in this passage to a “reed” or very thin branch that is “bruised,” but not entirely broken, and a “wick” not aflame but still “smoldering.”

Today I find great consolation and encouragement in this gentle image. It describes our Lord’s humble openness to those of us who are no great pillars of spirituality; to those of us

who have no great “flame” of desire and love for God’s “justice.” I need not be discouraged in the weakness of my resolve today. I can take heart and bring the little I have to the table, taking small steps every day, in a bit of prayer, a bit of contemplation of His word, and doing the next right thing as best I can. I make a beginning today, and let Him do the rest. Because I have a Lord Who takes my bruised and smoldering bit of “justice” and brings it through to “victory.”

### *Why Orthodox Christianity should not change with the times (St. Theophan the Recluse)*

It reached my ears that, as it seems, you consider my sermons very strict and believe that today no one should think this way, no one should be living this way and therefore, no one should be teaching this way. “Times have changed!”

How glad I was to hear this. This means that you listen carefully to what I say, and not only do you listen, but you are also willing to abide by it. What more could we hope for, we who preach as we were ordered and as much we were ordered?

Despite all this, in no way can I agree with your opinion. I even consider it my duty to comment on it and to correct it, since – even though it perhaps goes against your desire and conviction – it comes from something sinful, as though Christianity could alter its doctrines, its canons, its sanctifying ceremonies to answer to the spirit of each age and adjust itself to the changing tastes of the sons of this century, as though it could add or subtract something.

Yet, it is not so. Christianity must remain eternally unchanging, in no way being dependent on or guided by the spirit of each age. Instead, Christianity is meant to govern and direct the spirit of the age for anyone who obeys its teachings. To convince you of this, I will put forward some thoughts for you to consider.

Some said that my teaching is strict. First of all, my teaching is not my own, nor it should be. In this sacred office nobody should, nor even can,

preach his own teaching. If I or someone else ever dare to do so, you can put us outside the Church.

We preach the teachings of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, of the holy Apostles, and the Holy Church, which is guided by the Holy Spirit. At the same time, we make sure to do everything possible to keep these teachings whole and inviolate in your minds and hearts. Every thought we present and every word we use, we do so very carefully, so as not to overshadow this brilliant and divine teaching in any way. Nobody can act differently.

...a single raising of your mind to God, and a single humble genuflection to His glory and in His honor has infinitely more value than all the treasures of the world... --St Nicodemos and Theophan the Recluse (Unseen Warfare: Chapter 20)

Such a law that calls for each man's preaching in the Church to be "God-sent," was established at the creation of the world, and should thus remain valid until the end of the world. The Prophet Moses, after the delivery of the commandments from God Himself to the people of Israel, concluded: "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you." (Deut. 4:2)

This law of constancy is so unalterable that the Lord and Savior Himself, when He was teaching the people on the mountain, said: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished." (Math. 5:17-18)

Then He gave the same validity to his teaching, before interpreting the commandments in the spirit of the gospel, by adding: "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." (Math. 5:19)

This means that anyone who wrongly interprets the commandments of God and lessens their validity, will be an outcast in the future life. This is what He said at the beginning of His preaching. He assured the same thing to Saint John the Theologian, the beholder of ineffable revelations, to whom He described the final judgement of the world and the Church, indicating in the Apocalypse (Book of Revelations): "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book." (Apoc. 22:18-19)

From the time of His first appearance in the world until the Second Coming, Christ has given the Holy Apostles and their successors the following law: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." (Math. 28:19-20)

That means "for you to teach, not what anyone else could possibly imagine, but what I ordered, and this to the end of the world." And He adds: "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen." (Math. 28:20)

The Apostles received this law and sacrificed their lives in order to keep it. And to those who wanted to keep them from preaching what it was they preached under the threat of punishment and death, they replied: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20)

This clear law was delivered by the apostles to their successors, was accepted by them, and has timeless effect in the Church of God. Because of this law, the Church is the pillar and the ground of truth. Can you see then what an inviolable steadfastness it has? After that, who would be so bold as to stubbornly disturb or move anything in Christian doctrine and law?



Next listen to what is said of the Prophet Ezekiel who for seven days was in the ecstasy of prayer and after seven days heard the word of the Lord: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman to the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth" (Ezek. 3:17), and he declared to the people: Here is the law for you! If you see a wicked person committing iniquity and you do not tell him: leave your iniquity and change your way, "that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand." (Ezek. 3:18) Conversely, "if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul." (Ezek. 3:19-21)

What a strict law! And though it sounds in the consciences of all pastors during their election and consecration, when a heavy yoke is put on them, namely the instruction of the flock of Christ that He entrusted to them, big or small, not only to guide it but also to preserve it. How could anyone be so bold, to pervert everything in the law of Christ, when this involves the destruction of both pastors and flock?

If the saving power of this teaching depended on our opinion of it and our consent to it, it would make sense for someone to imagine rebuilding Christianity according to human weaknesses or the claims of the age and adapt it according to the sinful desires of his heart. But the saving power of Christian law does not at all depend on us, but on the will of God, by the fact that God Himself established precisely the exact path of salvation. Beyond this there is no other way, nor could it exist. Therefore, anyone who teaches in any other way, is deviating from the true path and is destroying himself and you. What logic is there in that?

Notice how strict judgment was mentioned when something similar happened to the nation of Israel during the difficult years of their captivity. Some prophets out of pity for the suffering and sick talked to the people, not as the Lord had ordered, but as their heart dictated. Concerning them the Lord gave the following commands to Ezekiel: "And you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own minds. Prophesy against them and say, Thus says the Lord God: Woe to the women who sew magic bands upon all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature, in the hunt for souls." (Ezek. 13:17-18) This means: Woe to those who order any kind of special treatment and suggest such leniency, so no one feels the slightest displeasure, either from those on top or those at the bottom, not caring whether this is for their salvation or destruction, whether it is pleasing to God, or repulsive. Woe to them, because "thus says the Lord God...your pillows and veils," namely your candied and comforting teaching, "upon which there you are perverting souls, I will tear from your arms and I will let their souls that you are perverting, go away..." (Ezek. 13:20-21) from this teaching of yours and I will destroy you corrupters.

This is the benefit of this special treatment and leniency, such as you want to hear from preachers! When you put all this deep in your heart, it is not right for you to want us to make any concessions in Christian doctrine, having the wrong desire to be pleased by us. On the contrary, you are obliged to persistently demand from us to remain true to doctrine, as strictly and firmly as possible.

Have you ever heard of the indulgences of the Pope of Rome? Here is what they are: special treatment and leniency, which he gives defying the law of Christ. And what is the result? From all of this, the West is corrupt in faith and in their way of life, and is now getting lost in its disbelief and in the unrestrained life with its indulgences.

The Pope changed many doctrines, spoiled all the sacraments, nullified the canons concerning the regulation of the Church and the correction

of morals. Everything has begun going contrary to the will of the Lord, and has become worse and worse.

Then came along Luther, a smart man, but stubborn. He said, "The Pope changed everything as he wanted, why shouldn't I do the same?" He started to modify and re-modify everything in his own way, and in this way established the new Lutheran faith, which only slightly resembles what the Lord had commanded and the Holy Apostles delivered to us. After Luther came the philosophers. And they in turn said, "Luther has established himself a new faith, supposedly based on the Gospel, though in reality based on his own way of thinking. Why, then, don't we also compose doctrines based on our own way of thinking, completely ignoring the Gospel?" They then started rationalizing, and speculating about God, the world, and man, each in his own way. And they mixed up so many doctrines, that one gets dizzy just counting them.

Now the Westerners have the following views: Believe what you think best, live as you like, satisfy whatever captivates your soul. This is why they do not recognize any law or restriction and they do not abide by God's word. Their road is wide, all obstacles displaced. Their way is broad, all the obstacles taken out. But the broad road leads to perdition, according to what the Lord says. This is where leniency in teaching has led! Lord, save us from this broad way! But it is better to love each difficulty that the Lord has appointed for our salvation. Let us love Christian doctrines and let us compel our mind with them, pushing it not to think otherwise. Let us love Christian morals and let us compel our will in them, forcing it to lift the light yoke of the Lord humbly and patiently. Let us love all Christian rituals and services which guide us, correct us, and sanctify us. Let us compel our heart with them, encouraging it to convey its desires from the earthly and perishable, to the heavenly and imperishable.

Let us confine ourselves as though in a cage. Or better, let us drag ourselves, as if we were passing through a narrow passage. Let it be

narrow, so no one can deviate neither to the right left, nor the left. Yet undoubtedly, through this narrow way we will obtain the kingdom of the heavens in return. For as you know, this kingdom is the kingdom of the Lord. The Lord laid this narrow way and said, "Follow exactly this route and you will obtain the kingdom of heaven. "Could anyone then doubt whether the traveler will get to his destination? And what mind would one have who starts wanting all kinds of annulment of the commandments, when by doing this he would immediately lose his way and be lost?

Once you have fully understood this assertion, do not worry if something in our teaching seems to be strict. The only thing you should strive for is to carefully make sure if it is from the Lord. And after you have made sure it is from the Lord, accept it with all your heart, no matter how strict or obliging it may be. And not only avoid wanting special treatment and leniency with doctrine and the ethics, but even flee from all these, as though fleeing from the fire of Gehenna. Those who cannot escape from this are those who think up such things and with them lure those who are spiritually weak to follow them. Amen.

December 29, 1863 Sunday after Christ's Birth

Taken from the website of the Holy Monastery of Pantokrator (Melissohori, Greece).  
Originally from: St. George (periodical) 1995, vol. 20.

"The goal of human freedom is not in freedom itself, nor it is in man, but in God. By giving man freedom, God has yielded to man a piece of His Divine authority, but with the intention that man himself would voluntarily bring it as a sacrifice to God, a most perfect offering. "

St. Theophan the Recluse



## OCTOBER - 2015

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group mtg	3 6:30 Vespers
4 9:40 Hours 9:45 Gen'l Confession 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social	5	6 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	7	8	9 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group mtg	10 6:30 Vespers
11 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social	12	13 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	14	15	16 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group mtg	17 6:30 Vespers
18 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social	19	20 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	21	22	23 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group mtg	24 6:30 Vespers
25 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy / 40 <sup>th</sup> Day Pannikhida for Helen Wolfe	26	27 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	28	29	30 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group mtg	31 6:30 Vespers