

the

ORTHODOX EVANGELIST



“Do the work of an evangelist” - 2 Tim 4:5

Summer 2019

Vol. 53 No 2



Enjoying our full inheritance in Jesus Christ

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

The Lord is showing me that far too many in our Orthodox Churches enjoy only a small portion of what He wants and always offers to give His children. He has been teaching me in a marvelous way that He stands on His promises and answers the

prayers of those who believe in His word in persistent faith. Until now, belief for me that God answers prayer was only a theological proposition and to talk about it was merely pious rhetoric. In my earlier years, I had never seen faith in the power of prayer actually exemplified as a constant attitude of daily living and as a moral approach to facing problems, either at home during childhood, in seminary, or in my working relations with fellow-priests and with my superiors.

Entering into a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit helps the believer to understand that God is a bountiful Father and that he is His child. But His bounty and goodness is enjoyed by man only in the measure that he expects in faith to receive it and believe that he is entitled to it. The gift of the Holy Spirit is never forced on us. It is ours to the extent that we meet God's conditions: confessing humbly our total dependence on Him and releasing our faith in His promises.

In all my years of being a priest, I must confess that only now do these words of Christ communicate any real meaning

to me: *“If you then, being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him”* (Luke 11:13). One of the blessings that result from coming into a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit is the new awareness of the Lord's promises for all our needs, whether they are physical, spiritual or emotional needs.

You begin to see with your own eyes the sick miraculously healed and the oppressed delivered from Satan – not at some overseas shrine, but in the midst of a modest gathering of ordinary believers whose hearts are inflamed with a love for Jesus. Theology comes after the experience of faith and submission to God's will. It comes not to elicit faith, but to reinforce and direct the faith and experience what is already there.

Our Lord never intended His Church to offer His people only words. It is no wonder that many of our young people are turned off by much of our intellectual and moralistic preaching. Are they not entitled to see Jesus Christ in action? Do we not owe it to them to offer what, after all, is but their

inheritance as children of God and members of the Body of Christ?

A church that contents itself with apostolic dogma but expresses no concern or apostolic enthusiasm for ministering to the sick and demon oppressed is a church in which Jesus Christ does not exercise complete lordship. It is a church which lacks Christ-like compassion for those in distress.

The victory we have in Christ over Satan should not only be regulated to the future event of His second coming. Christian believers have already been given spiritual authority over Satan and his demons. Jesus took our curse and sickness to the cross, and with His stripes we are healed. Our bodies, though still mortal, are temples of the life-giving Holy Spirit and under the ownership of Jesus Christ. As members of His body, they must naturally be free from oppression and disease, enjoying complete health and well-being. The victory over the enemy is a present reality to have and enjoy. The resurrection power of Christ should be present in the midst of His people in the here and now.

Unhappily, Satan has succeeded in convincing many clergy and laity in the Church that the miraculous and victorious power in Christ is only for the very few; that the Lord did not intend everybody in the Church to have access to it. The result has been a fatalistic view of living in defeat and contending ourselves with admiring and praising the few anchorites who were able to make it thanks to their special calling.

The Orthodox Church is not

the church chiefly of ascetics and monks (though we duly render to them deserving honor) with all the rest of us, the masses in the church, as second-class members of the Body. As the Apostolic Church, **she is the church of the saints in the sense of all believers who have separated themselves from the life of sin.**

“Saint” as the believer who lives in the world but is set apart from the world needs to be restored to the consciousness of the church. For the Church to reject “saints” while they are alive and to canonize them, sing their praises and build temples of worship to their honor after they are dead and safely buried away is a mockery of sainthood. St. Nectarius, Metropolitan of Pentapolis, was maligned and persecuted primarily by priests and high-ranking bishops, while he was living, is a fresh and living example of this tragedy.

Enjoying our Inheritance Through the Sacraments

We Orthodox are not only blessed in the rich history and heritage we have inherited, but we are also blessed through the Holy Sacraments which are provided in our Church parishes. The question is, are the Sacraments doing the Christian believer any good? The fault, of course, does not lie with the Church or the sacraments. The fault lies with those who misunderstand Orthodoxy and misapply her Sacramental teachings. The traditional belief that sacraments, like Baptism and Communion, are valid apart from the disposition of the recipient has been carried to dangerous extremes. I don't intend here to question this doctrine of the validity of sacraments *ex opera operato*. But I do want to caution

that it engenders the temptation of neglecting the inner state of the person who is either being baptized or who is receiving the Holy Communion. It can lead so easily to religious apathy and barren formalism, especially where infant Baptism is the general rule. **After all, the sacraments do not operate like magic. It requires spiritual commitment and especially a state of repentance on the part of the Christian believer.**



This is specifically why during the Divine Liturgy that the priest exclaims: *“The Doors, The Doors, in Wisdom let us be attentive.”* This was the time that the early Church had the catechumens leave the church building just before the Divine Communion, or the liturgy of the Eucharist had started. It is also important to note the epistle and gospel readings were done prior to the Eucharist specifically to prepare the believer for the Communion.

As Father Maxym Lysack wrote: *“The Liturgy represents the final stage of evangelism, appropriate to those who have repented and have been initiated*

into the Church. In short, the Liturgy is for the evangelized, not for evangelism. This is why the Liturgy was celebrated in two parts: the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. The latter was for the converted and initiated only.” He concludes: *“When evangelism does not precede the Liturgy, the worshipping community that results is ill-equipped to comprehend, Much less participate in, that which is happening around it.”* (Liturgy for the Evangelized). Sacraments exercise a beneficial virtue on us only insofar as we have abandoned ourselves to Jesus Christ and accepted to be governed by His Holy Spirit. It is an appalling fact that all too many “members” of the Church who receive the Holy Communion or merely attend the Divine Liturgy are deep in unrepented sin.

Obviously not only do these unrepentant persons fail to receive any of God's redeeming grace, but they incur greater divine wrath. How can a person, baptized but now a sinner and unrepentant, expect any good to come upon them just by being in Church and close to the Holy things when they are living in a state of spiritual death, that is, separation from God's Holy Spirit? The word of scripture warns us that *“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace”* (Rom. 8:6).

God cannot and will not force His love upon us. He will not coerce us with His Holy Spirit. He expects us to open when He knocks at the door of our heart. He seeks out the sinner in mercy in order to embrace Him in love and to bestow upon him His forgiving grace.

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Published quarterly by the Orthodox Brotherhood of St Symeon the New Theologian, Inc. St. Symeon Office: 276 N. Holiday Road, Miramar Beach, Florida 32550 Phone: (850) 654-2771. Past issues available upon request.
Email: st-symeon-nt@cox.net Web site: www.stsymeon.org.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL, STILL THE NEED OF THE MOMENT

By. Rev. Dr. Timothy Cremeens

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It's been 47 years since Fr. Eusebius had his life-transforming encounter with the Holy Spirit during Great Lent of 1972. It was during this same period that I responded to the Gospel message one Sunday evening, on March 12, and committed my life, as a 13-year-old boy, to follow Jesus Christ on the path to the Kingdom of Heaven. Fr. Eusebius never looked back and neither did I.

A lot has happened in the Church and in the world over the last 47 years. Fr. Eusebius has gone on to his eternal rest and I am now a 60-year-old priest in the Orthodox Church. In 1986 our lives crossed paths. I was serving as assistant pastor of First Assembly of God in New Milford, Connecticut, and some friends of mine, Peter Gilquist, Gordon Walker and several other former leaders in Campus Crusade for Christ, were exploring the Eastern Orthodox Faith. I read with interest, in the pages of *AGAIN* magazine, their slow but steady journey to the Orthodox Church. At the same time, I was on my own journey, looking for the "Apostolic Church".

While doing some research on the worship of the early Church I came across a book, *The Orthodox Church*, written by Fr. John Meyendorff. I literally knew nothing about Orthodoxy. My impression was that the Orthodox were those bishops who wore funny hats. Reading the book actually raised questions that I didn't even know I had. I contacted the local Greek Orthodox priest, Fr. Peter Karloutsos, who agreed to teach me about the Faith. Since I was Pentecostal many of my questions about the Orthodox

Church centered around its beliefs about the Holy Spirit. I was convinced that if the Orthodox Church believed that the spiritual gifts (*charismata*) were no longer present and active in the Church, like many other Evangelical Protestant churches, then I would go looking for the "Apostolic Church" someplace else.



I was pleasantly surprised however, when Fr. Peter one day handed me a stack of magazines entitled *The Logos*. In these pages I was introduced to a man who would become, and still is, my patron Saint, Symeon the New Theologian. As I read the words of this amazing man, I recognized the same Holy Spirit who I had encountered over the years, but in a deeper, clearer and more profound way. Also, in the pages of *The Logos* I read the testimonies of hundreds of Orthodox clergy and laity who likewise had encountered Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in life changing ways and read how these encounters caused the Orthodox Christian Faith of their childhood to come alive and their love for Orthodox worship, prayer and spirituality to increase and

deepen.

As a result of watching the joy of my Campus Crusade for Christ friends, when they finally were received into the Orthodox Church in 1987, and reading the articles and testimonies in the pages of *The Logos*, as well as my own prayer, study and friendship with other Orthodox Christian Believers, I too was received into the Orthodox Church. On Palm Sunday, April 12, 1987, Fr. Peter Karloutsos, pastor of Assumption Greek Orthodox Church in Danbury, Connecticut, received me into the Orthodox Church by holy Chrismation. Demetrios Nicholoudakis (now Fr. Demetrios) served as my godfather.

A lot has transpired in my life over the last 32 years, since coming into the Orthodox Church. I attended St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary and was ordained a priest in 1992. Since my ordination I have served parishes in Connecticut, Arkansas, Virginia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and now Alabama. Over the years I have served Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Albanian, Carpatho-Russian, Greek and predominantly American Convert communities. In all the diverse cultural Orthodox parishes I have served it has been my experience that there is still ONE PRIMARY need among the Orthodox Christians in America. While Orthodox unity is important it is still not the major need of the Orthodox people. The ONE, NEEDFUL thing is SPIRITUAL RENEWAL!

What do I mean by SPIRITUAL RENEWAL? I mean that every man, woman, young person and child, who personally claims to be an Orthodox Christian, needs to have a P E R S O N A L and EXPERIENTIAL encounter with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit! As St. Symeon the New Theologian teaches, the sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation, in and of themselves is not enough. St. Symeon the New Theologian is clear, we can be Baptized and yet through spiritual neglect the Grace given to us at Baptism can be covered over and almost destroyed through continual sin and a lack of repentance.

Many hundreds and thousands of children are Baptized annually in the Church and yet many of them languish spiritually because of neglect. They are Baptized but never Evangelized! After the initial visit to the Divine Liturgy and reception of the Holy Eucharist, they are many times not present again for months or even years and this is seen as normative. This is NOT normative, rather, it is a grave sin. The Baptized child grows up not knowing Jesus Christ, not hearing the Gospel, not receiving the Holy Body and Blood of Christ. They grow in their teenage years and they encounter the temptations of the world with no spiritual fortification. They fall into grave sins and the grace of their Baptism becomes choked by unconfessed sin!

It is the same with the sacrament of Chrismation. They receive the "seal of the gift of the

Holy Spirit" but it is obvious by the choices of their lives that the Grace of the Holy Spirit is absent in their lives. As St. Symeon the New Theologian teaches, some claim that the Spirit is like a coat that surrounds them, BUT, if that coat (the presence of the Holy Spirit) is not felt in their lives then what is the use in having a certificate that says they were Chrismated. Beloved of the Lord, the Sacraments are NOT MAGIC! As the prayers of the Baptism service say we must "Increase the grace" given to us at Baptism. We must "walk" in the Spirit and not fulfill the lust of the flesh.



Dear friends, I am especially grieved by the hundreds and thousands of Baptized/Chrismated Orthodox teenagers, college age and young singles, who, while technically being "Orthodox" have fallen into the grave sins of fornication, drug and alcohol abuse, addiction to pornography, homosexual activity or mesmerized by the world's offer of materialism and business success. All the while they are lauded by their "Orthodox parents and peers" and in some cases even

rewarded and honored by the leaders of the Orthodox Church. This is tragic and souls will suffer hell because of these lies.

My prayer is that we somehow can reverse this "culture of religiosity" and the only way it can be done is if we recognize the problem. More money won't solve it. Jurisdictional unity won't heal it. New Archdiocesan or Diocesan leadership won't do it.

Dearest Brothers and Sisters, only Spiritual Renewal will change it. Call it by whatever name you want; revival, renewal, restoration or revitalization, it all comes down to the same thing:

Jesus Christ, and His holy Gospel must become real, personal and the priority in the lives of every Orthodox Christian, from Patriarch to Parishioner, and the Holy Spirit must be given His rightful place as the One Who empowers the Church to do its work.

May it be our solemn and heart-rending prayer in this new season of Pentecost, that Pentecost become an experience rather than an event in the life of the Church!

