

the

ORTHODOX EVANGELIST



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

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Rejoicing When Heaven Rejoices

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

Many priests and theologians speak today on Orthodox spirituality. They write articles about it. They teach about the spirituality of the Church Fathers. “Spirituality” is taken as kind of spiritual lifestyle. To be sure, there is

something legitimate about talking about the “spirituality” of the Orthodox Church, as being different from the other churches. Yet there is a danger in viewing the Christian life of rebirth and growth as a genus of spirituality. The Lord has given me a new awareness of the temptation so rampant in the church today of turning the Christian experience into a spiritual abstraction or into a religious system.

What I am trying to say is that rather than speak of “Orthodox spirituality,” why not speak of the Orthodox believer's relationship to Jesus Christ and of his walk in the Holy Spirit? Rather than talk constantly about the “spiritual life” of a man or woman, why not talk about his or her personal relationship with God?

Even the expression “spiritual renewal” is religiously ambiguous and fails to carry across its direct relevance to one's personal life of faith in Christ. After all, there are many types of supernatural manifestations. The demonic that originates from Satan is just as spiritual and supernatural as that which has its origin in God. Orthodoxy for the Church Fathers was essentially a personal experience of Christ. Theology was personal and existential. In other words dogma was the affirmation of a personal

experience of redemption in Jesus Christ.

The correct genus of spirituality is not the answer to our need in this critical hour that the Church faces today. The desperate need among our people is that of knowing Christ in a personal relationship and the power of His resurrection. God desires to lead His people into a direct communion with His Son, Jesus. He seeks to restore the preeminence of Jesus Christ in the life of the believer and the corporate life of the Church.

Heresy is the lack of this personal experience.

It is the failure to come into the fullness of the divine life of Jesus. Heresy is putting the abstract over and above the real thing. It is intellectualizing the Gospel and failing to subject the intelligence to the inner vision of Jesus Christ. Heresy in the last analysis is the absence of communion and contact with the real Christ.

Abstract religion is not what God offers His people in the person of His Son, Jesus. Jesus came into the world and offered His life as a ransom for sinners. He makes Himself available to the believer. He desires that we give

Him an opportunity to abide within us and to manifest Himself to us. Jesus seeks to come into the heart of every man and woman who will receive Him as personal Savior and Lord.

Your relationship with Jesus by necessity has to be a love relationship. He loves you and you love Him. What did you say Jesus? “He who loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him” (John 12:21). And Jesus isn't talking to a group of mystics when He says this. He is addressing Himself to every ordinary believer and every single child of God. His word is not intended only for those who have mystical leanings. It is meant to be received by everyone who knows the first commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy strength and with all thy soul.”

Stop making a Protestant out of Jesus! Bishops and Priests need to stop connecting the born again experience in the Holy Spirit a heretical Protestant teaching! Stop calling the emphasis on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ a Baptist doctrine or a Billy Graham idea.

I will never forget the time I was interrupted by a board member as I was giving my sermon from the pulpit in a Detroit church where I was filling in for the vacationing Greek priest. He walked down the aisle, coming directly toward the pulpit and, with the congregation looking on, he deposited a small note on the ledge of the pulpit. As I lowered my eyes to catch a glimpse of the message, a knot came to my throat. It read: “Terminate the sermon and let's get on with the Liturgy!”

Following the Liturgy I was approached by some board members at the coffee hour and was told in effect that I was not welcome in that church again. “We want Orthodox sermons in this

church. If we wanted Billy Graham sermons, we know where to find them.” It was painful for me, since my own father was the founding pastor of that church and in my youth I had served as the choir director, cantor and youth leader.

Reverend Fathers: Stop knocking the evangelists that God has raised up to proclaim the Gospel throughout the land and the world! Fear God and His judgment! Be humble enough to see God's love manifested through the ministries of others, despite their human shortcomings. REJOICE that Christ is being proclaimed! REJOICE that souls are being saved! REJOICE that people are hearing the Gospel of salvation preached! REJOICE that the seed is planted!

The Lord tells us to sow the seed and not worry about the harvest. That is in His hands. He alone gives the increase. It is neither Billy Graham nor you or I that does the saving. It is the Holy Spirit that convicts hearts and saves souls. The harvest always comes in God's own timing so that the glory and credit goes to Him and not to us. How about trusting the wisdom of God?

St Paul says: “I Therein do rejoice, yea and will rejoice” (Phil. 1:18). What is Paul rejoicing about? What's the occasion of his joy? It is that “Christ is preached”! He does not make that joy contingent on who happens to be doing the preaching neither the character of the preacher nor his motives or methods. Most people in church today judge one another on what their name is, or who they are, instead of whether they witness to Christ and further the cause of His Gospel. The first question they probably ask is: is this person Orthodox? If they had the Holy Spirit dwelling in them they would be more interested in what they are saying and teaching and would judge them on the

basis of their witness. If they were possessed of God's Spirit they would look for their credentials in the very testimony which they bring to others. Christ is preached!

That's what counts.

That's what is important! Paul realized that some in the church at Philippi were exploiting his confinement in the prison of Rome. They found a chance to minister during his prolonged absence and because of the lack of his immediate supervision and exercise of his apostolic authority. Some began to preach just out of spite for Paul. They were rubbing salt in his wounds.

“The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds.” “Some of the brethren indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will. But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the Gospel.” Despite all the envy and the self-seeking spirit that was behind some of the preaching of the Gospel, the very fact that Christ was preached was enough to satisfy him and make him rejoice. It was his profound and boundless love for Jesus Christ that could make him say: “What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and therein do I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice!”

Some people in the church are uptight about methods that are unfamiliar. They don't listen to what is being said. They are not paying attention to whether or not Christ is preached and His name lifted up and the power of His Holy Spirit is released. They are inflexible about the style and manner of preaching and bringing people into an experience with Christ.

During one of my outreaches to Greece, I was even accused by the church officials of preaching “in a heretical manner.” I was condemned by the powers that be for the informality of my messages and the spontaneity of my prayers. Men and woman were being loosed from bondages of sin and disease. Many were receiving Christ as their personal Savior. The power of God was being manifested in marvelous ways. Souls were leaping out of Hell and moving into Heaven.

Yet, all of these wonderful happenings did not impress the officials. They did not rejoice that the Gospel had being preached. They were not happy with Heaven that souls were being saved. They were not listening to what God's servant was preaching. All they could see was Eusebius Stephanou and the fact that he was from America, an intruder who had no business preaching in Greece. All they could focus upon was the fact that he was doing things that were never done before in Greece. That he was drawing men and woman by the hundreds from all over the greater Athens area and filling the auditoriums of the city in a way no other priest had done. They were not moved over the many testimonies of the people that were blessed.

Dear friend, you need to reflect the mood of Heaven, if the kingdom of Heaven is truly within you. If Heaven rejoices over the preaching of Christ, you should naturally rejoice. You will join in that chorus of praise. You have no business feeling differently. You have no right to harbor any feelings other than those of the angels in Heaven.

Above all, you have no business feeling uptight, envious, displeased or disturbed when Christ is preached. If you do, then Christ does not live in you.

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You are not in the flow of His will. You are not one of His. You are of your father, the Devil, and you have the desires of your father (John 8:44).

Our Father God explicitly commands: "Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost" (Luke 15:6). Only the Devil feels sorrowful and gets disturbed when Christ is preached. He will resort to subtle means of either silencing the messenger of God or of casting discredit on him or on his status in the Church. They may say something like this: "He is not Orthodox", "He is not one of us", His status in the Church is irregular". He is Catholic. He is a Protestant evangelist, Alter calls are not Orthodox." Such a negative attitude indicates outright resistance against the Holy Spirit. It is the exact opposite of the attitude and feelings of the angels in Heaven.

You may remember from Scripture the time when one of Jesus' disciples told Jesus: "Master, we saw one casting out demons in Thy name and we forbid him, because he did not follow with us." The reply of Jesus was not intended only for that one disciple, but for believers of every generation, and for you and me. Remember what Jesus said? ***"Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us"*** (Luke 9:49-50).

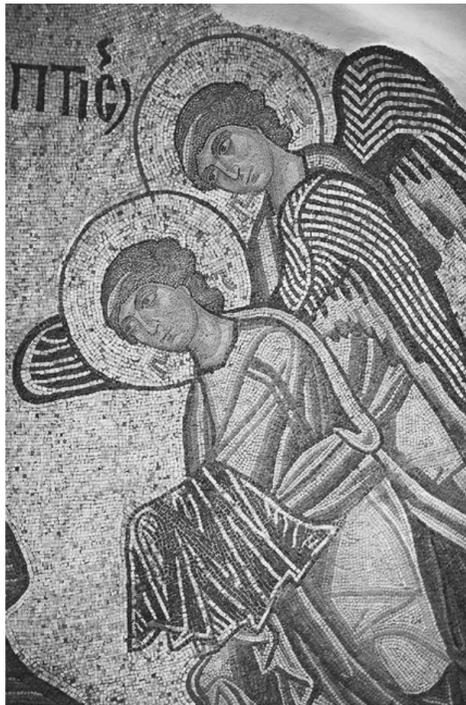
The Lord's word stands today as it did over 2000 years ago. "Forbid him not!" Don't knock the evangelists! Don't criticize them. Don't try to undermine their credibility and authority! Don't forbid your people from getting blessed by their message. "Forbid him not!" Why? "For he that is not against us is for us." Do you wish to oppose those who are for Christ?

The Apostle Paul was not whitewashing all the motives or methods of others who were ministering the word in the church of Philippi. It is a fact that some envied him as well as others in the church. Some were ever divisive and tried to break believers away from him. Some were taking malicious advantage of his imprisonment in Rome. What was his reaction? One of phenomenal humility.

So long as Christ was being proclaimed and souls were being saved, he was willing to surrender even personal recognition and to endure injustice. Can we say what St. Paul said: "Whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

What is more important?

People getting spiritually fed and going to Heaven, or holding on to church attendance? The facts show that more and more Orthodox are finding Christ outside of the Orthodox Church. People that have been hearing sermons for years suddenly begin



giving personal testimonies of a born-again experience and of a new awareness of Christ that they never had before. And all this as a result of their attending some evangelistic prayer meeting held outside of their own Orthodox Church.

Space does not allow me to get into a discussion on ecclesiology in this article. I simply reaffirm what the Holy Spirit is saying through the mouth of John the Divine. Whoever preaches that Jesus is come in the flesh is of God. If he is of God, who are you to

reject him? What right do you have to reject him, regardless what church he happens to belong to? Don't set up your own standards in the place of God's ordinance and law. That's dangerous. God will be against you.

What's going on? What's happened to our church? When people can't find Jesus Christ in a born-again experience in their own Orthodox Church, the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the very Mother Church of Christendom, then the Orthodox Church must certainly be spiritually bankrupt. Then it's time for some serious re-evaluating of the way our church is ministering to her people. Then the lord must be trying to tell us something.

It's almost becoming the general rule today. You have to go to some meeting and service outside the Orthodox Church in order to get fired up for the lord Jesus Christ. It might be time to re-examine some familiar practices and the religious routine upon which we have been relying and which we have been honoring as "Orthodox" and sacrosanct. We might discover that they're just not doing the job.

May the lord touch the hearts of more of our priests to boldly step out in faith and give Christ the opportunity to release the power of His Holy Spirit. God is speaking to priests through the increasing number of testimonies of born-again members of their parish. Praise God that some of them are listening and yielding humbly to His will. God is opening up to them a new and exciting ministry. Their own personal lives are being transformed. Their ministry is being blessed richly with many, new and exciting discoveries.

It only takes a little yielding to see miracles happen. When we let God have His way in our life and our ministry there is no limit to the joys and wonders that follow. ***"Joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety nine just persons, which need no repentance"*** (Luke 15:7).

The Road Less Traveled

by Joseph Abbate / President

As we travel the road of Lent and into Pascha, let us be mindful of all that Jesus had suffered for us. It was not an easy road he traveled. As many of you who have been with this ministry for many years now also know that the road Fr. Stephanou walked on was the same difficult path of our Lord and Savior. He truly endured much heart-ache through the years.

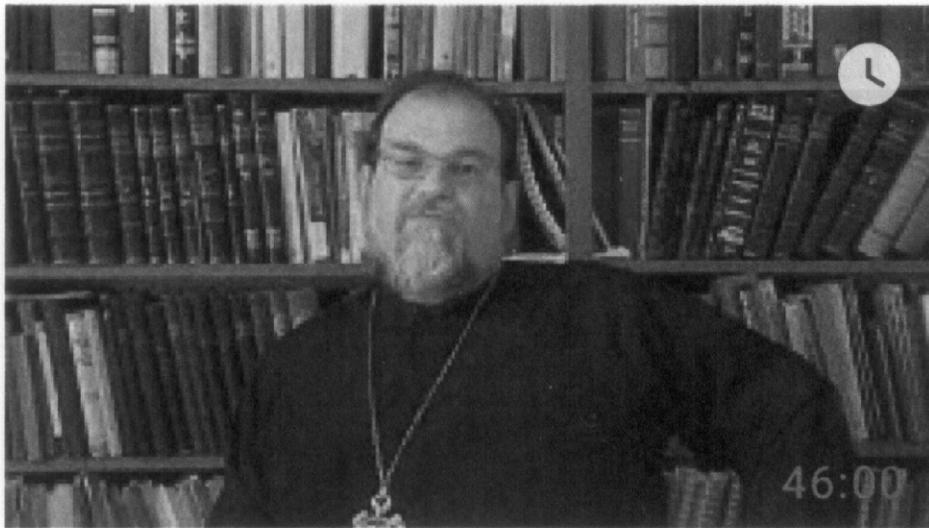
Though, through the past few Newsletter editions, we have published some powerful theological teachings of Fr. Stephanou, His main goal was to bring our Orthodox theology down to earth so every man and woman could understand it. The message of the Gospel is simple. It can be capsulized by one scripture verse: *“for God so loved the world”*. Fr. Stephanou wanted the Orthodox people to feast upon the “whole loaf” (as he used to put it), of God's provision for them. Those who had known Fr. Stephanou were also aware of his sufferings. Nevertheless, he had undergone these trials because he had a burden for his fellow Orthodox people.

Therefore, we are happy to inform you of a number of video programs we have recently placed on the YouTube internet channel. I know that you will be very blessed to see Fr. Stephanou and hear his voice again. His powerful teachings once

again declared in the power of the Holy Spirit! One of our videos is of the ministry of Father Stephanou. We have just begun to upload his original Logos Outreach television programs which were originally broadcast in the 1970s. I still remember watching them when they



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were originally broadcast on channel 38 in Chicago. I was only nine years old back then, yet, Father's teachings still grabbed my attention.

You may be able to view these wonderful video teachings by typing **saint symeon ministry** onto the YouTube search engine. You may also get there by visiting out ministry

website at: www.stsymeon.org and going to the video section there. You will see our **Saint Symeon Ministry** Icon on YouTube which you may click onto to view all of our videos.

Let us never forget that it is only because of God's great love for us that Jesus endured all of the terrible sufferings which we reflect upon during Holy Week. **It was only through Jesus' suffering upon the Cross that we can gain salvation and the resurrection.**

One particular scripture verse stands out for me during this time of year. Saint Paul stated: *“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings”* (Phil. 3:10). St.

Paul could only say this because he had experienced it first-hand. We cannot fully experience the power of Christ's resurrection without first sharing in His sufferings. As we reflect upon Christ's sufferings, let us also be mindful of the many Christians around

the world who are also suffering for the name of their beloved savior Jesus Christ. Observing the recent news events taking place today, it may not be out of the question that Christians here in America may possibly also suffer for His name one day.