



St. Cyril of Jerusalem Orthodox Church

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+ February 9, 2020 +

Sunday of the Tax Collector & the Pharisee

Martyr Nicephorus of Antioch (+257)

Uncovering of the Relics of St. Innocent of Irkutsk (1805)

FAST FREE WEEK

Let us lay aside all earthly ideas of honor, offenses, affronts, unfairness, human laws, and human justice at the foot of the Cross. Let us learn holy silence from the Lord Jesus Christ, who was not treated fairly by the world. Why should we expect otherwise for ourselves?

- St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

PASTORAL CONFERENCE – Fr. Benedict will be away this week in Miami, Florida, attending a three-day pastoral conference. He can be reached by text, phone, or email.

HOUSE BLESSINGS will continue *next* week. Please speak with Fr. Benedict to schedule a house blessing, if possible before the beginning of Lent (March 2).

COFFEE HOUR – We will have **potluck meals** in the hall for Feb. 23 (Meatfare Sunday) and March 1 (Cheesefare Sunday). This is a chance to clear out your refrigerator to prepare a meat dish for Feb. 23 and a cheesy dish for March 1. Dessert & salad will be provided for Meatfare, and dessert for Cheesefare.

LOOKING AHEAD: February 23 – Meatfare Sunday.

March 2 – Beginning of the Great Fast.

March 25 – Feast of the Annunciation.

April 17 – Great and Holy Friday.

March 1 – Forgiveness Sunday.

March 8 – Sunday of Orthodoxy.

April 12 – Palm Sunday.

April 19 – Holy Pascha.

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Forming Young Souls

Not too many years ago a young monastic aspirant went to Mount Athos. In talking with the venerable abbot of the monastery where he wished to stay, he told him, “Holy Father! My heart burns for the spiritual life, for asceticism, for unceasing communion with God, for obedience to an Elder. Instruct me, please, holy Father, that I may attain to spiritual advancement.” Going to the bookshelf, the Abbot pulled down a copy of *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens. “Read this, my son,” he said. “But Father!” objected the disturbed aspirant. “This is heterodox Victorian sentimentality, a product of the Western captivity! This isn't spiritual; it's not even Orthodox! I need writings which will teach me *spirituality!*” The Abbot smiled, saying, “Unless you first develop normal, human, Christian feelings and learn to view life as little Davey did – with simplicity, kindness, warmth, and forgiveness – then all the Orthodox 'spirituality' and Patristic writings will not only be of no help to you – they will turn you into a 'spiritual' monster and destroy your soul.”

Fr. Seraphim Rose, a well-known spiritual father of our time, saw the wisdom behind this approach mentioned above. In an essay entitled “Forming the Soul” he carefully articulated the Orthodox philosophy behind it:

“The education of youth today, especially in America, is notoriously deficient in developing responsiveness to the best expressions of human art, literature, and music. As a result, young people are formed haphazardly under the influence of television, rock music, and other manifestations of today's culture (or rather, anti-culture); and, both as a cause and as a result of this-but most of all because of the absence on the part of the parents and teachers of any conscious idea of what Christian life is and how a young person should be brought up in it-the soul of a person who has survived the years of youth is often an emotional wasteland, and at best reveals deficiencies in the basic attitudes towards life that were once considered normal and indispensable.

“Few are those today who can clearly express their emotions and ideas and face them in a mature way; many do not even know what is going on inside themselves. Life is artificially divided into work (and very few can put the best part of themselves, their heart, into it because it is 'just for money'), play (in which many see the 'real meaning' of their life), religion (usually no more than an hour or two a week), and the like, without an underlying unity that gives meaning to the whole of one's life. Many, finding daily life unsatisfying, try to live in a fantasy world of their own creation (into which they also try to fit religion). And underlying the whole of modern culture is the common denominator of the worship of oneself and one's own comfort, which is deadly to any idea of spiritual life.”

Even many Orthodox, whether “cradle” or “convert,” are crippled or at least spiritually underdeveloped because they are simply unprepared for and unaware of the real demands of spiritual life.

“In our own day,” Fr. Seraphim pointed out, “the chief ingredient missing from the ideal harmony of human life is something one might call the emotional development of the soul. It is something that is not directly spiritual, but that very often hinders spiritual development. It is the state of someone who, while he may think he thirsts for spiritual struggles and an elevated life of prayer, is poorly able to respond to normal human love and friendship; for 'If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?'(I John 4:20).

“In a few people this defect exists in an extreme form, but it is present to some extent in all of us who have been raised in the emotional and spiritual wasteland of our times.

“This being so, it is often necessary for us to humble our seemingly spiritual impulses and struggles to be tested on our human and emotional readiness for them. Sometimes a spiritual father will deny his child the reading of some spiritual book and give him instead a novel of Dostoyevsky or Dickens, or will encourage him to become familiar with certain kinds of classical music, not with any 'aesthetic' purpose in mind – for one can be an 'expert' in such matters and even be 'emotionally well-developed' without the least interest in spiritual struggle, and that is also an unbalanced state – but solely to refine and form his soul and make it better disposed to understand genuine spiritual texts.”

What Fr. Seraphim said here of spiritual fathers is even more true of natural parents, for the “formation of the soul” should begin in early childhood. During a lecture at the 1982 St. Herman

Pilgrimage, Fr. Seraphim gave parents some practical advice on how to use whatever is positive in the world for their children's benefit:

“The child who has been exposed from his earliest years to good classical music, and has seen his soul being developed by it, will not be nearly as tempted by the crude rhythm and message of rock and other contemporary forms of pseudo-music as someone who has grown up without a musical education. Such a musical education, as several of the Optina Elders have said, refines the soul and prepares it for the reception of spiritual impressions.

“The child who has been educated in good literature, drama, and poetry and has felt their effect on his soul – that is, has really enjoyed them – will not easily become an addict of the contemporary movies and television programs and cheap novels that devastate the soul and take it away from the Christian path.

“The child who has learned to see beauty in classical painting and sculpture will not easily be drawn into the perversity of contemporary art or be attracted by the garish products of modern advertising and pornography.

“The child who knows something of the history of the world, especially in Christian times, and how other people have lived and thought, what mistakes and pitfalls people have fallen into by departing from God and His commandments, and what glorious and influential lives they have lived when they were faithful to Him – will be discerning about the life and philosophy of our own times, and will not be inclined to follow the first new philosophy or way of life he encounters. One of the basic problems facing the education of children today is that in the schools they are no longer given a sense of history. It is a dangerous and fatal thing to deprive a child of a sense of history. It means that he has no ability to take examples from the people who lived in the past. And actually, history constantly repeats itself. Once you see that, it becomes interesting how people have answered problems, how there have been people who have gone against God and what results came from that, and how people changed their lives and became exceptions and gave an example which is lived down to our own times. This sense of history is a very important thing which should be communicated to children.

“In general, the person who is well acquainted with the best products of secular culture – which in the West almost always have definite religious and Christian overtones – has a much better chance of leading a normal, fruitful Orthodox life than someone who knows only the popular culture of today. One who is converted to Orthodoxy straight from 'rock' culture, and in general anyone who thinks he can combine Orthodoxy with that kind of culture, has much suffering to go through and a difficult road in life before he can become a truly serious Orthodox Christian who is capable of handing on his faith to others. Without this suffering, without this awareness, Orthodox parents will raise their children to be devoured by the contemporary world. The world's best culture, properly received, refines and develops the soul; today's popular culture cripples and deforms the soul and hinders it from having a full and normal response to the message of Orthodoxy.

“Therefore, in our battle against the spirit of this world, we can use the best things the world has to offer *in order to go beyond them*; everything good in the world, if we are only wise enough to see it, points to God, and to Orthodoxy, and we have to make use of it.”

Remembered today:

St. Nicephorus of Antioch (+257)

The Holy Martyr Nicephorus lived in the city of Antioch in Syria. In this city lived also the priest Sapricius, with whom Nicephorus was very friendly, so that they were considered as brothers. However, at some point they quarreled because of some disagreement, and their former love changed into enmity and hate.

After a certain time Nicephorus came to his senses, repented of his sin and more than once asked Sapricius, through mutual friends, to forgive him. Sapricius, however, did not wish to forgive him. Nicephorus then went to his former friend and fervently asked forgiveness, but Sapricius completely refused.

At this time, the emperors Valerian (253-259) and Gallius (260-268) began to renew the persecution of Christians, and one of the first brought before the court was the priest Sapricius. He firmly confessed himself a Christian, underwent tortures for his faith and was condemned to death by beheading with a sword. As they led Sapricius to execution, Nicephorus tearfully asked his forgiveness saying, “O martyr of Christ, forgive me if I have sinned against you in any way.”

But the priest Sapricius remained stubborn, and even as he approached death he refused to forgive his fellow Christian. Seeing the hardness of his heart, the Lord withdrew His blessing from Sapricius, and would not allow him receive the crown of martyrdom. At the last moment, he suddenly became afraid of death and agreed to offer sacrifice to idols. In vain did Saint Nicephorus urge Sapricius not to lose his reward through apostasy, since he already stood on the threshold of the heavenly Kingdom.

Saint Nicephorus then said to the executioner, “I am a Christian, and I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. Execute me in place of Sapricius.” The executioners reported this to the governor. He decided to free Sapricius, and to behead Nicephorus in his place. Thus did Saint Nicephorus inherit the Kingdom and receive a martyr’s crown.

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Sayings of Elder Pachomios of Chios (+1905)

Christ accepts whatever good you do for your brothers as done on His behalf.

Virtue without humility is not virtue.

We should say the Jesus prayer humbly, as if whispering it into His ear.

It is impossible for God not to show mercy to one who is genuinely striving to be saved.

Nothing so helps a person to flee sin as the thought of death.

