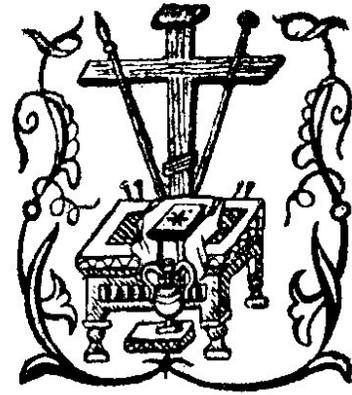


St. Cyril Orthodox Church

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www.stcyril.us · (281) 298-3232

+ **October 3, 2021** +
15th Sunday after Pentecost.

Hieromartyr Dionysius, Bishop of Athens (+96)



MANY YEARS to **Matushka Anna Crawford**, who celebrates her birthday on Wednesday.

DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY THIS WEEK in Miami Lakes, Florida, which Fr. Benedict is required to attend. Because of that, there will be no weekday services this week.

TREASURER UPDATE – For September, we received \$10,260, including a grant of \$1,667 from the OCA and of \$1,900 from the Diocese of the South. Our expenses were \$11,908.

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Spiritual Counsels from the Life of St. Nephon

1. How should a person avoid becoming proud if people often praise him?

St. Nephon had now reached the height of virtue. His ascetic labors were admirable. Many hastened to meet him and seek his advice. Thus once a brother came and said to him: “I’m greatly amazed, Father, that you are not proud when everyone honors you!”

“Do you know, my son,” the saint said to him, “why I am not proud?” “No, Father. If I knew, I wouldn’t have asked your holiness.”

“Listen then: Two, three, and four times every day I bring to mind my sins, which I’ve committed without fear of God. The more I think about them, the more my soul feels a bitter pain, because I don’t feel I have ever done anything pleasing to God. For that reason, I don’t become proud. And when I hear praise and acclaim, I reproach both myself and the praise. Let’s say, for instance, that you praise me once or twice a week. But I continually, every day, become disgusted with myself I insult and reproach myself and consider myself a dead dog, full of worms and stench.”

2. Why does God allow good people to be despised?

“Tell me, Father,” the brother continued, “why do most people hate the virtuous? Some despise them: and others are scandalized by them. Some praise them, but the majority criticize them.”

“My son, the righteous have a lot to gain from these criticisms. They adorn them just like the stars adorn the firmament. Once I saw a devout man win fifty crowns in a single day.”

“Tell me,” the brother begged, “how did he win them?”

“This man was kind and very meek. He did a lot of good deeds for his neighbors and loved them all as though they were God's angels. But they were confused by the evil one and hated him as if he were a criminal. And since the devil was used to speaking ill of the saints through the mouths of sinners, that is what happened in this case. Some people said he was wicked, and others said that he had fallen into heresy. So what did that blessed man do? He prayed and said: ‘Lord have mercy on all those who hate, envy, and speak ill of me. Let none of these brothers suffer evil because of me, the sinner, either now or in the future, nor at the time of death, nor on Judgment Day. But I beg You, crush and dissolve the evil plans of the devil, because You know, O Lord, Lover of mankind, that it is the devil who rouses them up against me. I implore You, therefore, my God just as You did not turn away from me, the profane, as often as I have sinned and run to Your compassion to ask forgiveness, so also do not turn way from these Your holy servants who now speak evil of me, but make them holy with Your Holy Spirit.’”

“This is what that righteous man said, my dear brother, in his prayer for his enemies and slanderers. Well, then, as many times a day he would force himself and beg God for their salvation, that's how many times an angel would come down from heaven and 'set upon his head a crown of precious stone.’”

“For this purpose, my brother, the Good God often allows the faithful to be insulted and slandered, so that they may increase their crowns to ten thousand and inherit His Kingdom.”

3. That we can be saved without going to live as a monk or hermit

Then the brother said to him: “But why is that many virtuous people never do anything bad, and yet the people are scandalized with them and say, for example: If he wanted to be saved, it would be better if he had gone to live alone in the wilderness. Those who are conceited and men pleasers live in the cities solely to enjoy the glory of men.”

And the saint answered him: “It's not the *place*, my son, that saves, but the *means*, the *diligence*, the *willingness*, and the *watchfulness* of each person. Pay attention, and I will give you many examples: Just as Moses assures us, **Enoch** was one of the first people who pleased God. But he also had a wife and children, and the most amazing thing is that he lived among impious people. But what a special friend of God **Abraham** also proved to be! He also had a wife and 318 relatives and servants, plus countless gold and silver. Nevertheless, none of these proved to be an obstacle to his salvation. As a matter of fact, he excelled in piety and love toward God. But think also of where **Lot** lived! In the midst of Satan's temptations, in the midst of the men of Sodom! He saw their indecent sins, but he didn't judge anyone, that is

why God loved him and did not deprive him of His Kingdom. Later, **Job** had royal wealth and incomparable glory, wife and children and servants, and yet he too achieved his salvation in the same way. What can one say about **Isaac** and **Jacob** and **Joseph** and many, many others? It was not by means of the external surroundings of their lives that these pleased God.”

“But remember **Daniel** and the **three young men**! One in the den, the others in the furnace, they all prayed and God heard them at once. **Jonah** was heard from inside the belly of the sea beast, and the **thief** on the cross with one prayer opened Paradise. Not to mention from the Old Testament **Hezekiah**, **Manasseh**, **David** and **Rahab**.”

“You see then, my son, all of these pleased God in different places and in different ways. So I believe, you've received an answer also to this question of yours: Salvation exists everywhere for a person who struggles, for God is everywhere.”

4. Another reason why God allows pious people to be despised.

“As for the other question you had, why the pious are liked by some and not by others, pay attention so that I may explain it to you with many examples: Don't you see, for example, that God sends rain, but it isn't pleasing to everyone? One says, ‘It will cause damages;’ the other, ‘Glory be to God who gave a little water for the earth to drink!’ If we have a winter with cold and frost, then the poor who are cold and shiver say, ‘Ah, why does God send the cold?’ The rich, however, are happier then, because they have all the means to fight the frost: wine, bread, meats, fire, warm clothes, and everything which delights the body.

“But why do we need all these examples? It is enough that we remember one: Our Lord and God became man and associated with the ungrateful, He who is full of grace. He did infinite good to the human race: He chased away demons, cleansed lepers, gave sight to the blind, supported the lame, restored the paralytics, raised the dead, associated with tax collectors, reformed prostitutes, fed countless numbers with a few loaves of bread, and so much more that a mortal man cannot describe. *But what recognition and reward did our Lord receive for all this?* Some said, ‘This man is not from God; others said that He is a Samaritan, and still others that he had a demon.’ One debased Him, another struck Him, others flogged Him and spat on His immaculate face, and finally they crucified Him. *If, then, He Who created us could not please all people, how could the pious, especially since there are so many people?*”

“Remember the righteous Abel, who even though did no harm to Cain, the latter was envious of him and, with the cooperation of the evil one, killed him. Think then: If at a time when there were only two brothers on earth, the virtuous Abel did not succeed in avoiding the envy of the wicked brother, how can someone avoid it now in the midst of such crowds? Surely that is impossible. And therefore it is written: ‘My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation’” (*Ecclesiasticus 2:1*).

Part 4: Thoughts about Our Thoughts from Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica

From the book *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*

(22) “Our plans and interests often interfere with our lives. We make all these plans, believing that we will never succeed in anything unless we arrange everything meticulously. We truly must try to do everything as our conscience tells us, but we must not do anything in haste. It is when we are in a hurry that the enemy traps us. In haste we cannot be aware of whether we have said something to offend our fellow man or whether we have ignored him, because we have no time to think of him; we are too busy with the plans inside our head. In this manner it is easy to sin against our neighbor. And when we sin against our neighbor, we are actually sinning against God, for God is everywhere. He dwells in the souls of each and every one of us. Our relationship toward our fellow men defines our relationship toward God.”

(23) “When we are among a large number of people, for example at our workplace, people often argue there, especially at large meetings. It is always best to keep silent at large gatherings. Let the others bring out their suggestions. We should keep silent. If you absolutely must say something, then say it so as not to offend anyone’s dignity. It is better not to become involved. Mind your own business and try to keep your peace.”

(25) “When we pray without attentiveness, then we are not praying in spirit and in truth, or in our thoughts. However, when we are attentive to what we ask for in prayer, we are concentrated on the words we speak and on that which we are asking for.”

(26) “The Holy Fathers say that everyone, when they pray to God, can find a word that can touch their hearts, whether it be in the Psalter or in some soul-edifying book.”

(27) “There are very few people who come to their senses, very few who understand life. We pray with our lips only, and we hurry through our prayers to ‘get it over with’ as soon as possible, and then we lose peace. Fasting and prayer are a means of embellishing our soul and bringing it back to its original state.”

(28) “The Holy Fathers have taught us how to fast. Those who are physically weak and sick do not need to fast; they can partake of Holy Communion without fasting. But we who are physically healthy must prepare for Communion by fasting. This means that we eat less and only certain kinds of food, for by doing so we discipline our bodies and our thoughts. When the body is humbled, our thoughts become more peaceful, too. This is the purpose of fasting.

God is present in a mysterious way in every being, most especially in the heart, which is the center of life. It is impossible to unite with God when the stomach is full, for a full stomach causes many cares and worries. All our thoughts, all our emotions, and all our will must be concentrated. When they are not, we are restless and lose our peace.”