

# SOBORNOST

**St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church**

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## **SERVICES**

**Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM**

**Great Vespers 5:00 PM**

**Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM**

**Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM**

**August 28, 2022 – 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**

**Abba Moses the Black**

*You affirmed the saying and died, Moses the Black, "Men see with the eyes, God with the heart." You were buried on the twenty-eighth Moses the Ethiopian.*

By Bishop Palladius of Helenopolis

Moses was a black man, an Ethiopian by race, the slave of a certain prominent civic official. This official got rid of him because of his lax morals and thievery. Some say that he had even committed murder, and I must be quite frank about the depth of his depravity in order to emphasize the heroic virtue of his repentance.

They say that he became the head of quite a large band of robbers. Among his other evil deeds it is said that he became very hostile and vindictive towards a certain shepherd, who together with his dogs had become an obstacle in his way when he was trying to carry out a raid. He vowed to kill him, and went off to find out where the shepherd was feeding his flocks. When he was told that the shepherd was on the other side of the Nile he swam across holding his two-edged sword between his teeth and carrying on his head the tunic he had been wearing, even though the Nile was in flood at the time and over a mile wide. The shepherd had time to hide away in a cave while he was crossing, and when Moses could not find



him he killed four prime rams, tied them together with a rope and swam back over the Nile. When he got to a certain small village he skinned the rams, ate the best parts of the meat, exchanged the skins for wine, drank about eighteen Italian measures of it and then set out to walk the fifty miles back to where he had left his band.

This robber chief later was overcome by remorse through something which happened to him, joined a monastery and did penance according to the measure of his crimes.

Among other things told about him it is said that four robbers burst in upon him in his cell, not knowing who he was. Blessed Moses succeeded in tying them up like a bundle of straw, and carried them on his shoulders to the door of the church. "I took these men in the act of attacking me, but since I may not do harm to any human person, what do you think should be done to them?" Having been captured thus by Moses, they confessed their sins to God. When they realized that this man was Moses, who had been the famous leader of a robber band, they glorified the name of Christ, renounced the world also, inspired by his change of heart, and ended up as most exemplary monks. "If this enormously strong man could so fear God that he turned his back on his robbery," they thought, "why should we delay in seeking our own salvation?"

The demons then began to rise up against Moses the Blessed (for so we must call him), by driving him continually to violent thoughts of fornication. Up till then, so he told us, he had not been tempted by anything very much to make him renounce his calling. He went to the great Isidore in Scete and told him about his battle with fornication.

"Don't worry too much, brother," the holy man replied. "They are only just beginning, but they attack the more vigorously if there is a prior welcome for them. A dog who goes into a butcher's shop to gnaw a bone will not stop doing so if he is always made welcome. But if the shop is shut and no one gives him anything he is left hungry but comes no more. So if you keep on being continent, mortifying your members which are on earth, allowing no entry to anything which might give rise to disordered gluttony, the demon will find things difficult. If there is no one to give him food he will go away."

Moses the servant of Christ went back and from then onward shut himself up in his cell, testing himself to the limit, abstaining from food to the extent that he ate nothing but twelve ounces of dry bread, working constantly and saying fifty prayers a day.

After a while, however, although his body became somewhat emaciated, he still remained over-stimulated, especially in his dreams. He got up and went to see a

certain well-respected holy monk and said to him, "What shall I do, abba? The dreams pour out from my spirit into the darkness of my mind as if I am still taking pleasure in the things I was once used to." "You have not turned your mind away from the visions which come into it," the holy man said, "and that is why they still continue. Follow my advice and undertake a few vigils, pray judiciously, and you will soon be free from these things." Moses listened to these words coming from the mouth of an acknowledged expert, went back to his cell and decided to do what his own conscience prompted, namely to go all night with sleep, and not to prostrate himself under the pretext of praying, in order to banish the tyranny of sleep.

He spent six years standing up in the middle of his cell, without shutting his eyes, praying earnestly to God, but he still was not able to overcome his intemperate desires.

After this he thought up another method of living a hard life. This adversary of Satan would go by night to the cells of those monks who had grown old in the practice of their way of life and who were no longer able to carry water for themselves without help. He would take their water jars without anyone knowing and fill them with water. They had some distance to go to get water in these places, for some it was two miles, for others five, for some only a half. The demon noticed what he was doing and decided that he could put up with the tenacity of this athlete no longer. So one night he hit him in the back with a club as he was bending over the well to fill the jar of one of the monks, and left him there for dead, ignorant of who or what it was that had hit him. Next day another monk came to draw water and found him lying there lifeless. He went to tell Isidore, that great presbyter of Scete, who came with some others, picked him up and took him into the church. For a whole year he lay there grievously ill, with body and soul scarce hanging together.

Then Isidore that fine priest of Christ said to him, "Brother Moses it is time you stopped fighting with the demons and carrying on the battle in this particular way. You need some moderation in your way of life." "I will not stop fighting with them," he replied, "until the fantasies of my dreams stop." "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" said Isidore the presbyter, the servant of Christ, "your foul dreams will stop from this moment of time, so that with a good and faithful conscience you can receive the Sacraments. But don't boast about this as if it were through your own efforts that your desires have been tamed. It is God who has shown his power in you, to your great benefit, lest you should fall into an overrated opinion of yourself."

At this Moses returned to his cell and lived more quietly, having taken up a more moderate way of life. After two or three months the blessed Isidore asked Moses whether the demon had been giving him any more trouble, to which he replied, "From the moment when the servant of Christ prayed for me nothing of that sort happened any more." But this holy man was found worthy of being given grace in his fight against the demons. He became as free from the attentions of demons as of flies in wintertime.

Such was the holy ascetic life lived by the indomitable athlete, Moses the Ethiopian, who was numbered among the great. He became a presbyter and died in Scete aged seventy-five, leaving behind him seventy-five disciples.

From *The Lausiac History*, Bk. 8, Ch. 22.

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 9:2-12 EOB**

Brethren, If to others, I am not an apostle, yet at least for you I am one! You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. My defense to those who question me is this: Have we no right to eat and to drink? Do we not have the right to take along a sister – a wife – even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Kephaz? Or is it only Barnabas and I who are obliged to work? What soldier ever serves at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who feeds a flock and does not drink from the flock's milk? Do I speak these things according to human ways? Does not the law say the same thing as well? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it for the oxen that God shows care, or does he say these things for our benefit? Yes, it was written for us, because whoever plows and whoever threshes should do so with the hope to have their share {of a harvest}. If we sowed to you spiritual things, is it [such] a great thing if we reap your material things? If others partake of this right over you, should we not even more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we bear all things, so that we may cause no hindrance to the Good News of Christ.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 18:23-35 EOB**

The Lord said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who wanted to settle his accounts with his servants. When he began the settlement, someone was brought in who owed him ten thousand talents. But because the servant could not pay, his lord gave orders that he be sold, with his wife, children, and all that he had, so that payment may be made. At this, the servant fell down on his knees before him, saying: 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will repay you all!' The lord of that servant, moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. However, that servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants who owed

him one hundred denarii. He grabbed him and took him by the throat, saying: 'Pay me what you owe!' And so, his fellow-servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying: 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you!' But the first man would not [have compassion] but went off and had him cast into prison, until he should pay back what was due. When his [other] fellow-servants saw what had been done, they were extremely distressed and came to their lord to report all that had taken place. Then, his lord summoned the [first] servant and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should not you also have had mercy on your fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on you?' His lord was angry and delivered him to the jailers until he would pay all that was due. This is how my heavenly Father will also treat you if you do not each forgive each other from your hearts."

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

Abba Moses gave the following seven precepts to Abba Poemen, which if followed will lead to salvation by anybody whether they be in the cenobium, or in solitude or in the world:

1. In the first place, as it is written, love God with all your heart and with all your mind.
2. Love your neighbor as yourself.
3. Bring to death all evil in you.
4. Do not judge your brother in any dispute.
5. Do no evil to another person.
6. Before departing this life cleanse yourself of every fault of mind or body.
7. Always be of a humble and contrite heart.

These things can be achieved by anyone who thinks of his own sins and not his neighbor's, and trusts in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns world without end. Amen.

– From the Sayings of the Egyptian Fathers

## Creation and the End of Ages

By Archimandrite Ephraim of Vatopaidi

Man has been trying to make sense of the creation ever since antiquity as it is manifested in the teachings of many religions and philosophies. Generally, we may say that ancient Greek philosophers have offered three explanations as to the creation of the world: a) the Stoics and the Epicureans advocated that the world was self-existent, autonomous and eternal, b) the Pythagoreans argued that the physical elements and laws were divine and c) the Aristotelians attributed the cause of the creation to a god "who was the first mover, unmoved". We may also

argue that all subsequent theories, whether hailing from scientific or philosophical/religious circles, are divided into the following three main categories: the materialists, the pantheists and the theocrats.

However, we derive from the Scriptures definite proof that God created the entire physical and non-material world not from previously existent matter but "from what was not" (2 Maccabees 7:28) and that the Lord lives in the world (see Psalms 138:7-10) and He is not an unmoved being. These are the basic dogmas of our Church. God the Word created every living being: "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3). The creation of the world from nothing does not mean that that which was created subsequently becomes autonomous and independent. It means that God and the world are two different entities which are connected with unbreakable bonds. The uncreated Lord is the only uncreated cause and the world is the created outcome. When the Lord said "Let there be light" and "it was so" or when He said "let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens" and "it was so" or when He finally created everything that was made "and it was very good" He did not withdraw from the world (see Genesis 1:3-31).

The Triune God created the world in His infinite goodness and wisdom. The word 'kosmos' (world) means 'kosmima' (jewel); a jewel is an artifact which causes pleasure even to the artist. Of course the self-sufficient Lord does not need such gratification, but He wished and became Creator in an outward expression of His excessive love (which is other than the love which exists among the Persons of the Trinity).

The Lord's presence is continuous throughout the universe; just as with His creative energy He brought all beings into being 'from what was not', through His 'cohesive and observational' energy He maintains all beings 'into existence' (St Gregory Palamas: *Writings*). The Lord's cohesive and observational or providential uncreated energy determines all physical and spiritual laws which govern the material and the spiritual worlds. The Lord's uncreated energy as a cause becomes created as an outcome and is 'altered' into various kinds of created powers like physical force, motion, heat, chemical and nuclear power.

The creation is the result of the divine will - which for the Triune God is the same for all three Persons - and not the product of divine substance, otherwise pantheism would govern the universe (St John of Damascus: *On the Orthodox Faith*). The Triune God through His uncreated energies is connected to the entire creation. As St Gregory Palamas says, the simple beings (the non-living) participate in the substance-creating energy of the Lord; living beings (animals, plants) also participate in His life-giving energy; additionally, rational beings participate in His

wisdom-giving energy. Only angels and men, who attain deification, participate in His deifying energy (St Gregory Palamas: *Writings*).

The Lord first created the spiritual, invisible world, which includes the myriads of angels and then the material world, which became visible through His Word. Finally, He created man, the crown of creation, who as St John of Damascus says, is made of visible and invisible substance. For this reason St Gregory Palamas describes man as "the major in a small world".

Human nature was not created by command like the rest of the visible and invisible creation where the Lord "spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Psalm 33:9). In order to create man all three Persons of the Holy Trinity came together and said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Thus the Lord and Creator Himself took dust from the ground and created the body and breathed into his nostrils 'the breath of life', namely divine Grace, His uncreated deifying energies. Thus man has acquired "an abundance of life" (John 10:10) more than any other being; namely, his adoption. St Gregory Palamas says that "'the image' of man is higher than 'the image' of angels. Man's soul is the only one with intellect, word and life-giving spirit. Because the angels do not possess a material body they do not have a life-giving spirit which would give life to the attached body, like humans have" (St Gregory Palamas: *Writings*, Chapters 38-39).

The creation is a mystery for man; a mystery which encompasses the creative and providential presence of the Lord in the world and at the same time proves His divine greatness. Man has the ability to penetrate this mystery and comprehend the love, all-wise and special providence the Lord has for His creatures. Thus, he may choose to live in constant communion with the Lord by giving thanks and glory to the One, who because of His excessive love, gives him everything and especially his deification, namely his 'likeness'.

According to Christian anthropology, Adam, the first man, having been placed in Paradise, was given the command to 'work and keep it' and govern over the entire material creation 'freely'. In order to preserve the necessary reliance on the Lord-Creator, man was issued with a prohibition; namely not to eat from a certain fruit, in order to test his free will. Adam, being free, did not keep this command and as theology says 'the forefathers sinned' or 'fell'.

Many explanations are given as to what caused man's fall. One of the most distinctive, which is harmonized with patristic tradition, is the explanation given by St Irenaeus of Lyon. He argues that Adam was like an infant, who was placed in Paradise in order to grow into adulthood by exercising his free will. After his creation, man had to be raised, grow up, multiply and gain spiritual strength before

being glorified through his deification. However, he was deceived and acted wrongly. For this reason repentance was given to him as an opportunity to return to Paradise. This was something which was not given to the 'fallen angels', who became demons; namely specific evil and crafty beings.

After the fall, the forefathers, Adam and Eve, 'were clothed with garments of skins' (Genesis 3:21); namely with corruption, mortality and with the blameless passions: hunger, thirst, sleep and pain. The powers of their soul were also diffused. 'The image' was blackened and man's spiritual energy, with which he was united with the uncreated deifying energy, was hidden. Thus, divine Grace, as a deifying gift, withdrew until the time man was to recall it through repentance. Repentance is an act of man's free will; the latter remained intact.

Let us cite here the Catholic and Protestant views of the fall. The Catholics believe that after the fall, man was left with 'the image' untarnished but lost the special supra-natural (created) Grace he had acquired from God to attain 'the likeness'. It is from this point onwards that logic prevails in the western theological and social circles. The Protestants on the other hand believe that human nature was totally perverted after the fall, even as to 'the image'. Thus they advocate the premise on the 'absolute predestination'.

The fall of man, who was the 'crown of creation', has caused the fall of the entire creation which "has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth" (Romans 8:22). This explains the main teaching of our Church, which views the creation as a whole, which is being guided towards perfection and deification; man and nature together. Man and nature are not distinct in the design of the creation. Therefore man has a duty to maintain a good relationship with the rest of the creation. The fact that man remains in the fallen condition perilously prolongs the world enduring in the same condition. Thus man contributes to the perversion and degradation of nature. Therefore, the fall has not only distorted man existentially and morally but also his very same environment.

Thus the person who has an unclean heart relates towards other human beings in a way which serves his passions and acts wrongly towards nature, by abusing it. Christ himself reveals: "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7:21-22). Man's heart is full of passions because he does not strive for virtue, neither does he obey the Lord's commands. St Gregory Palamas stresses: "The mind which has rebelled against God either becomes beastly or diabolical; having rebelled against the laws of nature man does not put a limit to his pleasure" (St Gregory Palamas: *Homilies*). Abba Dorotheos says that a proper conscience defines a person's relationship with



others, but also with the rest of the creation. Thus in his Homily on the Conscience he says: "To have a proper conscience towards material things means that one does not abuse anything, neither does he let it perish nor throws it away" (Abba Dorotheos: *Ascetic Works*, Teaching 3).

Nowadays we have reached such a level of irrationality, such a degree of lack of conscience and such an extensive state of rebellion that the entire human race is threatened with partial or total extinction from a nuclear disaster as a result of war or nuclear accident; from the depletion of the ozone layer as a result of the increase of harmful substances in the air and from the increased desertification and the pollution of waters.

For example, it is said that the constantly increasing average temperature of the earth causes the melting of the ice in the poles. If the polar ice melts the average level of the oceans will rise by 70 meters and areas which are inhabited by a quarter of the earth's population will be submerged in water. It is estimated that every year, 24 billion tons of soil is lost from all continents. During the last few decades the volume of soil lost was equal to the farming land of the entire United States. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) estimates that desertification costs some 40 billion dollars a year. Almost all subsoil waters in Europe have been polluted by substances harmful to man, making them undrinkable. This is the direct result of the over fertilization of farmlands because of intensive farming. The ongoing successes in Genetics which may culminate in human cloning will cause terrible moral and social consequences. Nuclear waste is increasing so much that the United States alone has massed seven hundred thousand tons of depleted uranium, which has become very costly to store and thus it is being used in the creation of bombs....

Throughout history, mankind has experienced ecological disasters which have been described in the Holy Scriptures. It is worth turning our attention to the causes of these disasters and not to the historical events themselves. In the God inspired passages of the Holy Scriptures, the incarnate Word-God and the Fathers of the Church refer to the various causes and their effects and not to the precise way they took place and progressed; they talk about the causation of beings and not their substance. The latter is something immaterial for the Holy Scriptures and the Patristic Tradition but not for science which treats it as its main subject. Scientific method, relying on the rational faculties of man, contributes towards the development of the material knowledge of substances. Theology, however, which relies on the experiences of the saints and especially on the perception of God exclusively through the mind - as defined by the Patristic writings -, leads man to experience the Uncreated One.

The greatest ecological disaster described in the Scriptures is the flood during Noah's times; it took place because "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Man rebelled absolutely against God and against anything which had to do with his spiritual existence. Because of the prevailing wickedness those days, which was the result of man abusing his freedom, the Lord is forced to say: "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh" (Genesis 6:3).

By 'flesh' it is meant 'man's carnal attitude, his beastly and full of passions life'. Thus the flood was not imposed by the Lord as a punishment but was caused by the comprehensive rebellion of mankind. There is a similar situation in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the conversation between Abraham and God, it is revealed that not even ten righteous people could be found in these cities, which would have aborted their destruction (Genesis 18:20-33). However, in the case of Nineveh, peoples' repentance annulled the city's destruction (Jonah 3:10). That is, man's good intention cooperates with God's will to shape history. The Lord is not the Judge, the Critic. We must not view the Lord through the prism of legal justice.

In the Old Testament we have many passages regarding the end of ages, describing the signs of those times in the writings of the prophets: Amos, Joel, Nahum, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. However, Jesus, the only Savior of mankind, gives an account of the hardships and the destruction which will precede the end of ages. This has been handed over to us by the Evangelist Matthew, and the Evangelists Marc and Luke, the Lord's disciples. Similarly Peter and Paul, the Apostles, inform the faithful about the circumstances which will prevail during the end of ages and Christ's Second Coming.

If one studies the passages in the Old and the New Testament which we have mentioned, he will recognize that during those days there will be a general apostasy similar but greater than Noah's times, since the 'son of lawlessness', Antichrist, will reign for a short time. The last book of the New Testament, the Revelation, describes the events which will take place during the end of ages. However, because it is a prophetic book, it remains indecipherable to the many, sealed with 'seven seals' (Revelation 5:1). Only those who themselves possess the prophetic charisma are able to comprehend other prophets; therefore, the only authentic explanation of the Revelation is given by the Fathers of our Church.

We will not give an explanation of the Revelation, here; neither will we refer to the specific events mentioned, whether they have already taken place, or determine the time they will happen, since this does not have such significance for theology, neither does it affect our salvation. Because of its contents, this book attracts the interest of both the faithful and the heathen and intrigues them to examine it. For

instance, from 1970 to 1987, 700 papers were presented on the issue. One can only imagine how many more presentations were written after the Gulf War in 1991. We, however, will only focus on the main figure of the Revelation, Christ, 'the Alpha and the Omega' (Rev. 22:11) and the main event which is the establishment of God's kingdom, namely the regeneration whereby 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Rev. 21:1) will be established.

The forthcoming ecological disasters will take place not because God will inflict them but because man is abusing his freedom. The human race will become perfectly irrational and there will be a general apostasy. The cause of such irrationality, partly seen today, is man's unclean mind. St Maximus the Confessor stresses that the misuse of thoughts causes the abuse of things (St Maximus the Confessor: *Chapters on Love* 2, 78). Indeed, man during the end of ages will be constantly abusing things as well as the world itself.

God will not inflict punishment. We must abandon the notion of a vindictive God. "God is love" (1 John 4:8). "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14) so "that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14). The purpose and the cause of the divine incarnation, as well as Christ's emptying Himself on the Cross, was to abolish death, corruption and the Devil, who is the father of deceit and of all sin. According to Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) Christ, through His sacrifice on the Cross, does not gratify divine justice but "saves the sheep that went astray" (Matthew 18:11), reconciles man with God and grants him deification. St John Chrysostom says that the Lord was never vindictive but it is us, humans, who are spiteful. The Lord does not need anything. He does not offer salvation in order to gain something. He offers salvation because he loves man; and He loves him because He wants to. He saves man by the free and operative love of the body of Christ. In other words, He saves us through His Church.

In the Church one experiences the end of ages as time at hand. He experiences the Kingdom of God through the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Particularly during the Holy Eucharist, the entire creation participates and is being offered to the loving Lord for 'the unity of all' and not just the faithful, the saints or the angels. The Divine Liturgy is not only about the salvation of the soul. The priest or the congregation does not supplicate for the Lord's grace in order to sanctify his soul alone but he also prays for his material needs and for the rest of the creation. "For favorable weather, an abundance of the fruits of the earth and temperate seasons. For travelers by land, sea, and air, for the sick, the suffering, the captives, and for their salvation. For peace of the whole world." By praying for the whole world during the Divine Liturgy and by giving thanks for the creation, it is demonstrated that the world has never stopped being God's world. It also indicates that who we are, what

we do, the natural environment in which we live in, can and must go through the hands of the priest as 'anaphora' ('offering') to the Lord, so that it does not remain deformed by sin but is regenerated into 'being good always', as St Maximus the Confessor says.

Whoever has been initiated into the mystery of the Divine Liturgy experiences it with awareness and full consciousness and comprehends that eternal life will be an incessant Divine Liturgy, a feast of the resurrection. After His Second Coming, Christ, 'the Lamb' according to the Revelation, will reign jointly with all the saints and all those saved. According to St Nicholas Cabasilas: "He will be a God amongst gods; beautiful amongst the beautiful, leading the chorus" (St Nicholas Cabasilas: *The Life In Christ*). Man, as a person, can never become a non-being or be led into a non-existence. St Symeon the New Theologian says that the Second Coming will take place primarily for the people who gratify their passions and live in sin and not for the saints who already experience the presence of Christ (St Symeon the New Theologian: *Moral Issues*).

Hell and Paradise do not exist because of God but because of man. Indeed, Hell and Paradise exist as two ways of living but God did not cause their creation. God Himself is paradise for the saints and those saved; the same God is hell for the sinners. That is, both the righteous and the sinners will perceive God and will have their nature regenerated as an eternal entity, but the sinners will not be able to participate in the bliss and glory of the Lord. In other words, human will and freedom will not be restored; the Lord will not infringe upon man's freedom. Righteousness indicates that the soul is healthy; sin is a sign of disease. Therefore, it is not God who punishes; rather, man has not been healed during his abode on earth.

In His Second Coming, Christ will not only restore human nature but the entire creation. Since the rest of the creation fell because of man, it will be regenerated by the sanctified man. When man attains sanctification, his surrounding environment is also sanctified. We find many such examples in the lives of the saints. A lion was attending the needs of St Gerasimos of Jordan; St Seraphim of Sarov was feeding a bear as if it was a tame lamb; Elder Paisios the Hagiorite was known to be keeping company with snakes and other wild animals.

Along with the resurrection and regeneration of man, nature will also be absolved of corruption. According to St Symeon the New Theologian, nature will become non-material and eternal. "During the regeneration, nature will become a non-material abode, beyond human perception" (St Symeon The New Theologian: *Moral Issues*, 1, 5).

God has created time, space and substance "from what was not"; these will be regenerated into eternity "beyond perception" in the kingdom of God; they will be eternal, immaterial and incorruptible. All these gifts are granted to man by the love of the Lord. However, if man is to receive the Lord's love, his heart must be open to Him. And that which will open a person's heart is humility. The more humble one becomes, the closer he comes to the Lord. The more one comprehends the Lord, the more humble he becomes. At the same time, the more selfish one is the further away from God he turns. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). If man properly appreciates the love of the Lord, he will be enthused to fight "the good fight" (1 Timothy 6:12) so that not only will he attain eternal life in the kingdom of God, but he will also show his love for his brethren and his respect for the environment while still alive.

The righteous always respect the environment. St Silouan the Athonite writes: "Our heart must sympathize and not only love our brethren but also ache for every being, for everything the Lord has created. Behold! this is a green leaf and you have cut it off for no reason. Even though it is not a sin, how can I say it, it causes an ache; the heart which has learnt to love, feels even for the leaf and for the entire creation" (Arch. Sophrony: *St Silouan the Athonite*). Blessed Elder Joseph the Hesychast viewed nature as an instrument which gives thanks to the Lord. He wrote: "It is nice here after spring, that is, from Easter up to the Feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos in August. The pretty rocks and the rest of the creation carry on theologizing, as theologians without voice - each with its own voice or its lack of it. If you touch a small twig, it immediately cries out very loudly with its natural fragrance: 'Ouch! You don't see me, but you've hurt me!' And so on.... Everything has its own voice. As soon as there is a breeze, everything moves in harmony with each other and offer melodic praises to the Lord" (Elder Joseph: *An Expression of Monastic Experience*).

He who has been cleansed from passions through divine Grace and has attained illumination "is watchful and somber in every circumstance". He becomes a perfect person and is able to deal successfully with the issues of our times, especially with that of the environment. However, reading from the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers, he recognizes that one day this world will end when Christ will regenerate it during His Second Coming. According to the Revelation, He will regenerate it into the city of the Lord, where the temple and the light will be the Lamb Himself (Revelation 21:22-23).

Let us, therefore, be spiritually prepared at every moment of our lives; so that we are able to cry along with St John the Theologian and the writer of the Revelation: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

# The Holy Prophetess Anna As A Model For Our Lives

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

The Prophetess Anna was an important figure of the Old Testament. She was the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher and she was made worthy of the highest honor to see the Son and Word of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, incarnate. The Prophets of the Old Testament saw God the Word without flesh, since all the appearances of God in the Old Testament were of the fleshless Word, and they prophesied His incarnation and awaited Him.

The Prophetess Anna was made worthy to see Christ when the Panagia with Joseph brought Him to the Temple, as a forty-day-old infant, according to the provisions of the Law of the Old Testament. When Symeon the Just received Christ into his arms, as it was informed to him from the Holy Spirit, namely that he would not die before he saw Christ, and said: "Now let Your servant depart in peace, Master, according to Your word...", then the Prophetess Anna began to sing and glorify God with a loud voice, and spoke of the "Child" to all who were awaiting redemption in Israel. As the sacred hymnographer says characteristically, the Prophetess Anna, full of devotion and spiritual rejoicing, sang to Christ and referred to events which would take place in His life, and she magnified the Theotokos as well. "Holy Anna, sober in spirit and venerable in years, with reverence hypophesied the Master freely and openly in the Temple; and proclaiming the Theotokos, she magnified her before all who were present" (*Megalynarion*).

Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite, commenting on the above hymn, among other things, said the following remarkable words:

1. That "this Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, full of jubilation, prayed and sang to God loudly, and those present listened, in contrast to Anna the mother of the Prophet Samuel, who prayed in silence."

Both of these types of prayer are accepted by the Church. When we pray in private we have the ability to pray in silence, with the nous and the heart. But in assemblies of worship, namely the Sacred Services and the Divine Liturgy, the hymns and prayers are chanted and read loudly for all to hear, that all present may be involved.

2. That it is one thing to *prophesy* (προφητεύω) and another thing to *hypophesy* (υποφητεύω). To prophesy means to talk about events that will take place in the future, after a long time, while to hypophesy means to speak of events that have taken place or are taking place or for events that will take place after a short period of time.

The Prophetess Anna was made worthy to see the "salvation of God" at eighty-four years old. She was married at a young age, but she lived with her husband only seven years and after remained a widow. All the remaining years of her life, until deep old age, she devoted to the worship of God, and spent the years of her life in the Temple with prayer and fasting, "worshiping night and day". The life and deeds of the Prophetess Anna give us the opportunity to emphasize the following:

Any ministry in the Temple of God, and the Church in general, when it is done freely and above all with love and taste, it becomes a source of inspiration, blessing and spiritual elation. Because, when a person does not feel oppressed, but does whatever they do to the glory of God, only because they want to and they love it, that is they do it with their heart, with a pleasant disposition without resentment and complaining, then they attract the Grace of God, which descends into the heart and causes sweetness, joy, peace and spiritual exaltation. Especially, when they are accustomed to praying during their ministry, then the years of their life are sanctified and they feel inner fullness and spiritual joy. With a pleasant inner disposition, even the mandatory becomes optional. When someone considers their ministry within the Church as a blessed work and not as a coercive work, then their thoughts remain pure and their soul is full of peace. Besides, it is noticed that the greater the love, the less one feels fatigued and the greater the inner peace and joy.

The Prophetess Anna continued to minister in the Temple until deep old age, without considering it a toil or tiresome, because she loved God very much. The result of her love towards God was love towards her fellow men, inner fullness and a sense of meaning in life. This should be an example to all of us, who become tired at the slightest, become resentful, feel oppressed and are tormented by thoughts of flight and abandonment from the effort and struggle. Most of us do not know, unfortunately, how to utilize the time of our lives and we waste it purposelessly, as if we could rediscover it. The years of our lives are few and measured and we must utilize them with works of love and sacrificial ministry and with prayer. Basil the Great tells us that if we lose money we can rediscover it, but "if we lose years, we are not able to find them again" and that "the time for prayer is throughout one's life".

It is indeed gratifying the fact that nowadays there are people who exist, who despite their advanced age have youthful zeal and use their free time in the best way, to volunteer themselves to the ministry of God and "neighbor". These people are graced by God for the environment where they live, and for all those who befriend them, being a spiritual oasis in the desert of today's friendless society, and they are a source of inspiration, joy and blessing. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

## Social Team for September 4

Team 1 is up next week - Hanbury, P. Blaydoe, Chumak. Thank you!

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***In Your Prayers – Please Remember...*** His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Dcn. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine, the newly reposed servants of God Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, Sarah Comfort and BJ Weber, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)