

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

**ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE**

SERVICES

**Wednesdays in Great Lent: Liturgy
of Presanctified Gifts 6 PM**

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

**April 14, 2024 – 4th Sunday in Great Lent (St. John
Climacus of Sinai)**

By St. Luke the Surgeon, Bishop of Simferopol

Today we celebrate the memory of our venerable father John of the Ladder. Saint John belonged to a very noble family and received a high education for that time, but he despised everything and in his youth he went to Mount Sinai, and lived for forty-five years in the wilderness, at the foot of this mountain.

The Church honors his memory, because he wrote a book of great significance for the entire Christian world, which is called The Ladder. In this book, Saint John expounded the doctrine of all Christian virtues and the means of ascending their steps to perfection. Much could be said about this holy book, but today we will talk about what extremely strongly hinders us on the path to salvation - about the word.

The holy Apostle James speaks about our language, about our word: “See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (James 3:5-6). Fire destroys our



property, fire instills great confusion and fear in our hearts; and behold, the holy apostle James compares our unbridled tongue to a fire. Our whole life becomes anxious and painful, for the very evil and impious tongue is kindled from hell.

“For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:7-10). Our mouths, which touch the holy Chalice, perceiving the immortal and life-giving Body and Blood of Christ, should not be so defiled. Along with good words, with words of love, words of damnation condemned by God should not flow out of our mouths.

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers,” urges Saint Paul (Eph. 4:29). The holy apostle James testifies: “If anyone thinks that he is pious, and does not bridle his tongue, he deceives his heart, and his piety is empty” (James 1:26).

There are many among us who consider themselves pious, but do not bridle the tongue; there are many who, returning from the temple of God, where they listened to the words of Christ and even partake of the Blood and Body of Christ, spew out evil and unkind words to their neighbors.

And how many of us are those whose mouths are not protected by anything, but constantly, incessantly talk, chattering and chattering from morning to night. And, of course, in this chatter there is an infinite number of empty, idle, evil words. But the Lord Jesus Christ Himself told us: “I tell you that for every idle word that people say, they will give an answer on the Day of Judgment: for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37).

Truly pious people are always deeply concentrated, stay in self-awareness, look into their hearts. Chatty lips not only talk endlessly, but spew out "the poison of asps" (Ps. 139:3) - poisonous words of condemnation, slander and gossip, disgusting curses. And the Lord Jesus Christ strictly forbade any, even the least rude, swear word: “If anyone says to his brother 'raka' (i.e., an empty person), he is subject to the judgment of the Sanhedrin, and whoever says 'fool', he is subject to fiery hell" (Mt. 5:22). You see what an unconditional demand for the purity of our language the Lord Jesus Christ makes to us.

Unfortunately, there are many slanderous people among Christians, many who slander their neighbors. And the holy apostle Paul, speaking of those who do not inherit the kingdom of heaven, about thieves, adulterers, idolaters, puts

blasphemers on a par with them: "Blasphemers will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:10).

Even if we carefully and strictly refrain from the most disgusting curses, from the most rotten words, from condemning our neighbors, from slander and gossip, then we are all guilty of idle talk. We talk empty talk always, everywhere and all places. And here is what the holy apostle Paul says to Timothy: "O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge." "Shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness" (I Tim. 6:20 and II Tim. 2:16), that is, he forbids him even to be present at any idle talk.

And what is the "contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge", from which Saint Paul commanded Timothy to leave? These are the disputes that are so willingly carried on about all sacred subjects by people who consider themselves "authorities" in these matters, consider themselves highly educated, who, in fact, are completely empty in spiritual terms.

Idle talk and vain talk deeply devastate the soul. We seriously harm ourselves not only when we ourselves utter rotten and empty words, but also when we listen to such words coming from other people's lips. There are many who like to listen to gossip, slander and curse against their neighbors; they are just as guilty before God as those whom they listen to.

Refraining from evil words, idle talk, vain talk and accustoming oneself to silence is a difficult task. Many ascetics have worked hard all their lives to curb their tongue, strictly watched it, protected it in every possible way, but often it, like a fish out of their hands, slipped out of their power, for the tongue is slippery and extremely mobile. Many refused to speak at all and became silent. And the Venerable Abba Agathon, in order to conquer his tongue, to protect it, to wean it from chatting idly, carried a pebble under his tongue for three years. You see the importance attached to the word by the saints, and we need to take their example.

Often when reading proverbs, the following words are heard: "By the blessing of the righteous, the city rises, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed" (Prov. 11:11). What does it mean? How can it be? This is not an exaggeration, but a profound truth. The power of the human word is enormous. It is able to leave a deep, indelible mark on the hearts, it creates or destroys, depending on what it is filled with - love and goodness or, on the contrary, enmity and evil.

If the blessing of the righteous spreads over the city, if their holy words penetrate into the hearts of people, then the city rises, has spiritual well-being, and, consequently, material well-being also grows and increases. If, however, the mouths of the wicked defile the hearts of those around them, like foul fumes that

infect the air, then the whole spiritual life of the people is spoiled. Such a city can literally fall into disrepair.

Our responsibility for every rotten word is terrible and great, because with these unclean words we poison not only ourselves, but also the hearts and minds of our neighbors.

At each Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts you hear the holy song: “Let my prayer rise....” With deep compunction, you listen to the words: “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.” But for many, the matter is limited only to this emotion, they leave the temple, and it gradually goes out of them; they forget that it is necessary not only to ask God to “set a guard over my mouth,” but also to try all their lives to curb the ungodly tongue, in which may the Lord our God Jesus Christ help us all. Amen. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Today’s Epistle Lesson – St. Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews 6:13-20 EOB

Brethren, when God made a promise to Abraham, since he could swear by no one greater, he swore by himself, saying, “I will surely bless and multiply you.” Thus, having patiently endured, Abraham obtained the promise. Humans swear by someone greater and in every dispute they have the oath is final to get things settled. In this way, being determined to show more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable nature of his purpose, God intervened with an oath. And so, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, may we have a strong encouragement, since we have sought refuge and taken hold of the hope set before us. We have this hope as an anchor of the soul, a hope which is both sure and solid. It reaches beyond the veil where as a forerunner Jesus has entered for us, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Today’s Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 9:17-31 EOB

At that time, In the crowd, someone said, “Teacher, I brought you my son who has a mute spirit. Wherever the spirit seizes him, it throws him to the ground and my son foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they were not able.” Jesus answered him, “Unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to me.” They brought the son to him, and when he saw Jesus, the spirit immediately convulsed the boy who fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. “Often, it has thrown him both into the fire and into water, in order to destroy him. But if you are able to do anything, have compassion on us and help us!” Jesus said to the man, “If you are able! All things are possible to the one who believes!” Immediately the father of the child cried out

with tears, "I believe! Help my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to him, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" The spirit cried out, convulsed greatly, and came out of the boy. He became as dead, so much that most of the people said, "He is dead!" But Jesus took him by the hand, raised him up; and the boy stood up. When Jesus entered into the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" He answered, "This kind can come out by nothing, except by prayer and fasting." They left that place and passed through Galilee, [and] Jesus did not want anyone to know it. He was teaching his disciples and told them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and when he is killed, he will rise again on the third day."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Proomion - God, you accepted innocent Isaac as a perfect sacrifice, an unstained offering, unbloody, presented by his father on behalf of sons who love you. You made his decision of devotion a triumph by saving the old man from losing his son, Lord of Pity, Giver of Blessings, and the Savior of our souls.

Though I am young, I wish to imitate you, Abraham, as you climb the mountain, but my legs are numb. Even if the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. O my soul, behold Abraham and be bold: he put off his old age and became young; his legs did not weaken, his backbone was firm. He did not know the place, but went off at the command of the Leader who had marshaled him, because he alone is the Savior of our souls.

Your faith was your strength. So your desire to complete the plan of the one who commands you was great. Let us all listen to what the Commander ordered you to do: "Take the child of your loins, the comfort of your old age – sacrifice him to me." O what pain Abraham felt at that word. God was not satisfied by just saying, "child"; no, he chafed the heart of the old man – yet he alone is good, the Savior of our souls.

The command was harsh, but you were sharp to obey, for God was more dear to you than your son. So you did not quibble with the demand. How did you not say, "Why did you not call me the 'murderer' not the 'father' of my son, Lord? Say what I am. Do not call me what I once was. For a very short span I carried the name 'father' for eternity I will be hailed as 'son-killer,' although you alone are good, the Savior of our souls."

“When they see me sacrificing my son, what will people think, that I am mad – O God – or have lost my mind? Who will praise the mockery of my golden years, when he hears how I slew, with my own hands, the boy whose fingers I hoped would close my eyes? I dressed him as an infant. How can I bind him as a victim? I watched him gambol, blessing you for your gift. I cannot sacrifice the child I raised, because you alone are good, the Savior of our souls.”

“O my son, whenever I look on your beauty, I am full of joy; but when I hear the Master's command, my laughter turns to pain, dissolves in tears. Mercy – O God – the hand of your father, your sacrificer, will silence the tongue with its childish lisp! Sarah will not gently close your eyes in sleep! I am about to freeze your rosy lips in death, because I obey the command of him who gave you, for he alone is good, the Savior of our souls.”

“My hand is numb, petrified to pick up the knife. How will I rouse it, instruct it to kill – not God's usual gifts, calves – but my own son? Who forces me to be so harsh, so ruthless – I who used to show generous hospitality to all; I once welcomed and fed unknown visitors. How can I, your father, destroy my heir? Who will not flee from speaking with me, although you alone are good, the Savior of our souls?”

“O Lord, Sarah will hear all your commands, learn of your plan. I can imagine her saying, 'If he who gives has also taken, why bother to give? Old husband, let me keep my child with me. When your Commander wants him, he can inform me. He once announced our boy's birth through an angel; when he wishes his death, he can inform me again. I do not trust you with the child, shall not give you him, sine He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.'”

“Whatever brief time of life is left, I shall live with my son. After I die, do what you will with him. Do not abandon me now, do not kill me with pain, I beg you. O my husband, his coming to us was hardly expected; we had this child from my womb beyond all hope. So, if we lose now what we received then, why should I have conceived, why nursed him? Why give him back in his prime to the Giver, who alone is good, the Savior of our souls?”

“Get away from me! I am holding in my arms my womb's pain! I want to be filled with him! If your Commander needs a sacrifice, let him have a sheep. Isaac my son, how could I watch your blood – O God – pouring out on the ground? Never! He will kill me first; only then will he sacrifice you: the mother before the child; I first, then you! I would die before I watch you sacrificed, because He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.”

“When an angel told of your marvelous birth, I laughed. When the word became fact, I rejoiced. But in a flash my joy has turned into tears. You are my light, the shimmer in my eyes; you are my star, son. I look at you and glow. You are the perfect fruit of my womb! You are the purple cluster of a blooming vine! Your father will never act, never crush you, because He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.”

“You will grow, my son, to be the prop of my old age; your children will be the support of my final days. When I see the harvest of your loins, I will die happily. May you close my eyelids for the final time. May you, may your children lead me to the bosom of our ancestors. May you, first fruit of my bed, weep at my bier. But may I never ever mourn your death or hear your father called a murderer, because He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.”

“Here I interpose a reply: 'Wife, do not say such things! Do not anger God! He is not seeking what is not his. What he once gave, now he will take away. Do not defile the burnt offering with your wails. Do not weep; you will pollute my sacrifice. God wants our child – who will hinder him? He has the power to slay him in your embrace; so, show your consent; send him off, because He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.’”

“You and I will dampen all the earth with our tears, but there will be no profit for us in this. When God has proposed, who dares oppose? Do you think you are the only parent of our son? Is he not also my child, the one you bore? I planted his seed; I shall harvest his death. This is what the Master of the Universe ordered, when he demanded our blessed treasure from me, although He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.”

“Again, Lord, imagine Sarah's answer to my defense: 'If the Lord wants you to live, he will order that you live. May the Lord who lives forever not wish to slay you. My son, I will add to your glory. Since I brought you forth, a gift of my womb, I am blessed by the Giver. Now march forth, Isaac, and be God's victim, with your father – I mean your murderer. But somehow, I have faith. Fathers do not kill, because He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.’”

“As you leave me, your mother, may you find God the Father. He will return you, sacrificed but alive, to me – if not in this world, then in the world to come. Isaac, embrace your mother, who will never enjoy the fruits of her pain. Father, son, farewell!” Sarah might have said something like that – and old Abraham probably added other arguments. But neither of them loved Isaac more than the Lord, because He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.

Father Abraham loaded the kindling wood on his son, and Isaac carried it poised on his shoulders. Now, let every faithful hearer understand this mystery: They came to the place the Lord had ordered; and then, the most faithful father, as if he foresaw what would happen, said to the group, “Stop here. I shall go ahead with Isaac and return.” These very words soon became fact. Because He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.

Abraham revived his numb legs with faith; then, with a sword in his right hand, he began to grasp Isaac. His son's words, however, moved the father to pause: “Father, tell me, who are you going to sacrifice? I have the wood, you the fire and sword. Where is the sheep?” The father's heart shuddered at these words of Isaac. Who was ever so hard that he would not soften? Yet the words did not soften, but stiffened him, although He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.

“My abiding Commander will see to it, son, if he wants a victim. Let us lend a hand to him.” Isaac replies, “Are you honing that knife for my throat? My father, the altar looks like a tomb! In a dark glass I see you binding and killing me! If my vision is true, tell me. You will not slay an unwilling victim if you find that I, your son, am a propitious sacrifice, since He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.”

Then faithful Abraham ignored these words of Isaac and set the relentless ritual of sacrifice in motion. The father bound the feet of the son he sired: “By the hands with which I tie, he shall die. Writhe as he must, it will not deflect my thrust.” But the sword hand, poised to strike, was stopped dead. Isaac did not struggle, for God was calling him to prefigure another sacrifice to come, since He alone is good, the Savior of our souls.

God, who fathoms the abyss, gazed down from heaven and called out to his just servant: “Abraham, loyal Abraham, stay your hand! I wished to test you. I was not sure about you before. Now I see your fidelity – which shall be an example to all the ardent devotees of my true ways, to the end of ages, since my son is destined to glorify my name.” He gives all blessings, the Savior of our souls.

“Do not slay your son. Now I know you fear me; for on my behalf, you did not spare your son. Take him and return – just as you predicted.” When Abraham heard this he said, “You did not stop me for some blemish in the victim? You were not turned away by some act or word? Was there deceit on my lips? Since you test my heart, make me completely pure, command me to sacrifice, for you give all blessings, the Savior of our souls.”

God spoke: “Stay your hand. Your faith, as I wished, is pure; and so, in your deeds, I foreshadow my plans. Clearly you are meant to be a die-model of me, loyal Abraham. Do you wish to see how your deeds form an impression of the future? This is why I led you up the mountain, to show you. Thus, just as you did not spare your son on behalf of me, I will not spare my Son on behalf of everyone. I offer him to be sacrificed for the world, for He gives all blessings, the Savior of your souls.”

“Just as your son Isaac carried wood on his shoulders, so my Son will carry his cross. Your heroic devotion has revealed even the future to you. Now look at the ram caught in the thicket of wood. See how he is fixed there and grasp the mystery: He is fastened there by his two horns; these horns prefigure the hands of my crucified Son. Sacrifice the ram to me, and I shall guard your son, for I am the giver of blessings, the Savior of your souls.

When Sarah saw the spared “victim” returning with Abraham, she embraced Isaac and danced for joy: “O my son, let him who has shown you to me take my soul!” Lord, may you also give such joy to us, your faithful followers. Your hands, like horns, were fixed to the wood of the cross. Do not turn away or regard our petitions as nothing. You were crucified for us; do not slay us in your anger. God the Father, intercede with your Son on our behalf, for you are the giver of blessings, the Savior of our souls.

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion 41 “Abraham and Isaac”*

[*This kontakion was traditionally recited on the fourth Sunday of Great Lent.*
- Ed.]

Faith and Works: An Orthodox Philokalic Perspective

By Dr. George D. Panagopoulos

(continued from last week) **5. Hesychasm and the Life of the New Testament**

This naturally leads us to the following thoughts. The fulfillment of the old Law in the new life of grace by the Holy Spirit, in the Church of the Incarnate Word, had been prophetically announced by the Prophets of ancient Israel. Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of the eschatological era, during which the divine will shall be written no longer on stone tablets but by the Spirit in the renewed hearts of flesh of the members of the people of God, the people of the New Testament (Jer. 38:31-35; Ez. 36:24-27 and 18:31).

This is exactly the truth that the Philokalic Fathers emphasize from experience. Symeon the New Theologian identifies the difference between the New Testament and the Old Testament in that in the Church of the New Testament grace does not

"speak" to believers, so they do not learn what is good through letters and inscriptions, but in their hearts from the Holy Spirit are "secretly initiated in the divine by the light of the word and the word of light." And here we could speak of a Philokalic interpretation of the Pauline testimony of 2 Cor. 3:18: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Unraveling the "cord of three strands" of the noetic state, Gregory of Sinai (*Philokalia* IV, 34) will answer similarly: "... thus the nous, when it is purified and returns to its former value, sees God and receives the divine meanings from Him. And instead of a book, he has the Spirit, instead of a reed, the intellect and the tongue... immersing the intellect in fire, and making it a light, He writes the words in the Spirit in the pure hearts of the listeners."

Isaac the Syrian (*Ascetic Works*) living within the mystery of Pentecost and knowing beyond knowledge and understanding the uncreated divine maxims and wills can confirm the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in the life of the true Israel of the New Testament in Christ:

"To the extent that a person accepts the Paraclete, he is bound to the divine Scriptures... when the power of the Spirit rests on the psychic power it is energized in him, then instead of the law of the Scriptures, the commandments of the Spirit take root in the heart. And then he secretly learns from the Spirit, and does not depend on the help of sensible matter."

Saint Sophrony of Essex will say the same again in simpler wording:

"Through the coming to us of the Light of Christ, His few commandments, engraved on the heart and mind, abolish all other laws, including the Mosaic one...."

The ascetic struggle, therefore, has, in addition to a negative one, an extremely positive dimension. Saint Maximus the Confessor emphasizes this positive side, without deviating from the teaching of Venerable Mark. The "eyes of faith" are the observance of the divine commandments, i.e. the divine statutes, which are understood as divine light (cf. "for your statutes are a light upon the earth"):

"When by neglecting the commandments a person blinds the eyes of faith that are within him, then he is certainly doomed, for he no longer has God watching over him. For if Scripture calls the energies of the Spirit the 'eyes of the Lord' (Deut. 11:12), the person who does not open those eyes by fulfilling the commandments does not have God watching over him. God watches us only when through fulfilling the commandments we are illumined by the energies of the Spirit, for He

has no other eyes by which He looks down on those who dwell on earth" (*Philok.* II 135; cf. 2 Peter 1:9).

In order to understand the meaning of these words of Saint Maximus, we need to remember that the "commandments of God" are understood as divine wills or otherwise uncreated divine energies, which for our weakness, are given to us in a linguistic formulation accessible to us. Similarly, the observance of the divine commandments, as from the reason just mentioned above, cannot be understood in an Orthodox manner except as a secret communion with God.

Among many, I single out and recall the excellent position of Saint Maximus, according to which God himself is hidden in every commandment, so by observing them we come into communion with God: "The Word of God the Father secretly exists in each of the situated commandments... The one who accepts a divine command and does it, receives the Word of God in his heart."

The same conception is formulated by Saint Isaac the Syrian in his following quote: "The commandments of God are greater than all the treasures of the world. And the one who dwells among them finds God."

Finally, I again invoke the testimony of Saint Sophrony of Essex, who in his work *On Prayer* (158) writes: "The dazzling light of divinity is reflected on our level in the form of commands: "love your enemies, ... be perfect, as your Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:44).

In another wording: "In the commandments the life of God Himself is revealed." The commands are offered to us in the form of sentences contained in the sacred texts of our faith about our weakness. Nonetheless, they are a manifestation of God's uncreated will. To the saints, the transmission of the divine will takes place without verbal forms and meanings in the charismatic state of the vision in God. (Cf. Zech. 1:6: "Yet surely My words and My statutes, Which I commanded My servants the prophets..."; John 6:63: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life"; Ecclesiastes 12:13: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man's all").

God commands the "law" of salvation in the Spirit. This means: a) that the commandments are a mystagogic revelation of the divine being, but also a manifestation of the perfect man (G. Mantzarides); b) that the acceptance and observance of the divine commandments is a charismatic event, which consumes our freedom; c) the formation of virtues through the commandments is a secret "place" of communion with God.

In this sense, faith is a divine gift (and not a meritorious work). Good works as an expression of faith likewise have a charismatic character, without, however,

abolishing human free will. Maximus, in turn, illuminates this theonomic understanding of the secret unity of faith and works as follows:

"Blessed is he who knows in truth that we are but tools in God's hands; that it is God who effects within us all ascetic practice and contemplation, virtue and spiritual knowledge, victory and wisdom, goodness and truth; and that to all this we contribute nothing at all except a disposition that desires what is good" (*Philokalia* II 133).

The same truth will be expressed by the same Saint in different, but identical terms (Maximus likes to change terms), when he talks about the unity of *theoria* (faith) and *praxis* (asceticism) as the mystery of salvation. The "*theoria*" is experienced as a "mystagogical act" (hence asceticism has a sacramental character!), the "*praxis*" is an "active *theoria*" (justifying faith is not dead, but alive, justifying and saving).

6. Conclusions in the Form of an Epilogue

Guided by a Philokalic thread, I tried to briefly outline the relationship between faith and works (or *theoria* and *praxis*) from a soteriological point of view (justification as illumination and glorification as deification). From the previous analysis it became, I think, obvious:

a) Philokalic piety has nothing to do with any version of the "ethics of meritorious works" nor is it "prayerful" according to a conception that distorts prayer into an autonomous human work and betrays ignorance of its charismatic identity: "Grace is not only faith, but active prayer" (Saint Gregory of Sinai, *Philokalia* IV, 54). "Justification" is understood as the illumination of the heart, the first resurrection of the "hidden things of the heart" of man, and is achieved by the grace of God in the "person of Jesus Christ" through "justified faith" within the body of the Church. Grace does not exclude, but heals and activates human free will in order to preserve the treasure in the measure of the working of the divine "commandments", which are understood as a means of secret communion with God, an extension and concretization of baptismal grace. Consequently, good works cannot be considered "meritorious", nor can they provide psychological "certainty" of salvation which would undermine the living Christian hope in God's mercy and the lifelong "repentance" necessary for all.

b) The ascetic life constitutes the heart of the true worship of God "in Spirit and truth" in the Church of the New Testament and an expression of the prophetic and apostolic spirit. That is why it is time to realize the importance of hesychasm as the "habitat" par excellence of Orthodox doctrine.

c) To the extent that even in the Orthodox Church the "Philokalic consciousness" is lost or even recedes, to the extent that the organic relationship of "*theoria* and

praxis" is ignored, with the resulting "hesychastic verification" of doctrine, and its importance for the treatment of human existence from selfishness, then the risk of discounting "institutionalism" is more than visible. Then healing in the life of Christ is replaced by a set of religious "duties" to which only hypocrites respond and from which mainly "Christianized Pharisees" emerge... (from *johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Saint Martin the Confessor, Pope of Rome

Our Holy Father Martin the Confessor, Pope of Rome, was a valiant defender of the Roman Church who suffered greatly in order to preserve the divinity of Christ against the Monothelite heresy during the seventh century.

Born in Tuscany, Martin was highly educated and joined the clergy of the Church of Rome. As a priest he represented the See of Rome in Constantinople. After the death of Pope Theodore I in 649, Martin was chosen to succeed him. Martin became pope on July 5, 649. He appointed John, Bishop of Philadelphia (Amman), to be Administrator of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem after the death of Patriarch Sophronios, who had died in 638. Martin, as Pope, justified this appointment "by the apostolic power which came from Jesus Christ through Saint Peter."

During his papacy, the Monothelite heresy began to flourish. The heresy advanced the teaching that Christ had two natures but one will, contrary to the Orthodox position that He had two wills - human and divine. The heretics were able to find adherents in high levels of society, such as Emperor Constans (641–668) and Patriarch Paul of Constantinople (641–654). Emperor Constans even published a book titled *Pattern of Faith (Typos)* that all people were forced to read. The book supported the heresy. When Pope Martin read the book, he staunchly supported Orthodoxy and even convened the Lateran Synod with one-hundred and five bishops at Rome in order to condemn the Monothelite heresy. At the same time, the pope wrote a letter to Patriarch Paul imploring him to adhere to the purity of the Orthodox Faith and to counsel the emperor to renounce this heretical sophistry.

This letter angered both the emperor and the patriarch. When the emperor learned this, he sent the military commander Olympius to kill the pope. Since the commander was too scared to assassinate the pope himself, he hired someone to perform the deed. The hired assassin became blinded upon approaching Saint Martin and was unable to kill him. The military commander fled from Rome in fear and soon died in battle against the Saracens.

The emperor continued his pursuit to eliminate the Saint by hiring another military commander named Theodore to accuse him of collaboration with the Saracens and that he did not honor the All-Pure Mother of God. When the commander arrived in

Rome and read the accusation against him, Pope Martin responded that this was slanderous and that he has no association with the Saracens, the adversaries of Christianity. "As regards the All-Pure Mother of God; if one does not honor her and does not confess her and does not reverence her, let him be cursed in this world and in the next."

The arrest orders were found impossible to carry out for a considerable period of time, but at last Martin was arrested in the Lateran on 17 June 653 along with Saint Maximus the Confessor. The commander resorted to capturing Martin at night and bringing him to the island of Naxos in the Aegean Sea. Subsequently he was brought to Constantinople with two other Bishops, where he arrived on 17 September 653. During the course of nearly three years, Martin was starved and abused by prison guards.

The Saint was brought to trial, weak and ill from the abuses he endured in prison, and stood against false witnesses who claimed he was treasonous to another group of peoples. The judge condemned the Saint without hearing his defense. Unable to bare the tortures anymore, the Saint said, "The Lord knows what a great kindness you would show me if you would deliver me quickly over to death." Many believed the false witnesses and jeered him as he was brought to prison, shouting "Anathema to Pope Martin!", while those who believed the Saint were not able to bear seeing him so humiliated and fled in tears. Martin was to be deposed from his rank and executed.

Two years prior to Pope Martin's death, the repentant Patriarch Paul died. When the emperor visited him before his death, Paul turned his head toward the wall and wept, confessing that he had greatly sinned against Pope Martin and begged the emperor to release him. The emperor again sent a notary and other persons to the Saint in prison to interrogate him. The Saint answered, "Even if they cripple me, I will not have relations with the Church of Constantinople while it remains in its evil doctrines." His death sentence to exile was carried out at Cherson in the Crimea, where he arrived on 15 May 655 with the two other Bishops. Saint Martin died due to hunger and sickness on September 16, 655. The two other Bishops also died in exile. Pope Martin's relics were interred in the Church of the Most Holy Theotokos outside Cherson and later brought to Rome. He is considered the last Pope to die by martyrdom. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

New Martyr Sergius and New Hiero-Confessor Alexander

These two saints are among the New Martyrs of Russia commemorated on April 14 (Old Calendar). New Martyr Sergius Trofimov was martyred on Lazarus Saturday, 1918 by Latvians at Holy Cross Monastery in Nizhny Novgorod for attempting to prevent them from looting the monastery.

Alexander Vasilyevich Orlov was born in 1878 in the village of Makkoveevo (now the village Syntul) of the Kasimov district in the Ryazan province to the family of teacher Vasily Orlov. Soon after the birth of his son, Vasily Evdokimovich Orlov was ordained Deacon at the Holy Protection Church in the village of Makkoveevo. After graduating from a parish school and a theological school, Alexander from 1905 began to serve as a chanter in the Protection Church in his native village. After being married he was ordained a Deacon to this church in 1919.

Deacon Alexander often visited the well-known ascetic in those parts, who lived in the village of Anemnyasevo in the Kasimov district, Blessed Matrona (Matrona Grigorievna Belyakova; commemorated on July 16/29). She advised him to be ordained a priest to the temple located four kilometers from Anemnyasev.

In January 1932, Archbishop of Ryazan Juvenaly Maslovsky (Hieromartyr, who in the world was known as Yevgeny Alexandrovich Maslovsky; commemorated on October 11/24) ordained Deacon Alexander as a Priest to the Church of the Great Martyr Paraskeva in the village of Sheyanka of the Kasimov district, and from that time on he became a confessor Blessed Matrona, who was then sixty-two years old. Father Alexander came to her to serve on the Great Feast Days prayer services, gave her communion once every six weeks, and sometimes anointed her with Holy Unction.

At the age of seven, Matrona fell ill with smallpox and completely lost her sight, and when she was ten years old, she was unjustly and cruelly punished by her mother. The Queen of Heaven appeared to the girl and consoled her. Matrona told her mother about this vision, and she beat her with even more cruelty. From that day on, the girl could neither walk nor sit, but only to lie down and endured many sorrows from close relatives, finding all consolation in prayer to God. For this extraordinary feat, patience and humility, the Lord endowed her with the gifts of clairvoyance and healings, and over time, through her prayers, many people began to be comforted and healed.

Blessed Matrona treated the clergy and monastics with great respect and love, as people who had a special service to God, and she loved Father Alexander in particular. Exhausted for many years from illness, one day she felt especially unhealthy and, anticipating the imminence of her death, asked to be read the Canon for the Departure of the Soul; at the end, with sadness and thoughtfulness, she said that now she didn't feel sorry for people as much as she used to now that all earthly life was moving away from her. "And now I don't feel sorry for anyone, I don't feel sorry for anyone," the blessed woman repeated several times, "only Father Alexander is a little, a little sorry."

In 1934, Father Alexander was transferred to the Trinity Church in the village of Gus-Zhelezny. Subsequently, giving a characterization of the priest, the chairman of the village council wrote that Father Alexander performed services in the church without asking permission from the village council, served a prayer for rain, walked on Easter with a procession across the square and preached with "evasion against Soviet power... I often went to the house of the church headman, who was anti-Soviet."

In June 1935, officers of the NKVD of the Kasimov district began a case against Blessed Matrona and her admirers, and in this regard, on July 1, 1935, Father Alexander was arrested. He was imprisoned in the Butyrka prison in Moscow and immediately interrogated.

The investigator demanded that the priest tell everything he knows about Blessed Matrona. Father Alexander replied that Blessed Matrona enjoys great authority among believers and is visited by many people from various places; he himself is amazed at her patience, intelligence and wisdom of the advice she gives to visitors.

"Do you admit your guilt in the fact that you glorified Matrona Belyakova for counter-revolutionary purposes, carried out anti-Soviet agitation among believers and spread false rumors about war and the inevitable death of Soviet power?" the investigator asked him.

"I admit my guilt in glorifying Matrona. I really honor her and live by her advice. I told the believers about this and advised them to go to her for advice. I don't plead guilty to anti-Soviet agitation and spreading false rumors," the priest replied.

"We know that in order to glorify Matrona Belyakova, who lives in the village of Anemnyasevo, you told believers about her righteous life, about her wise advice and advised the sick to turn to her as she could heal diseases. Tell me, did you carry out the mentioned activities to glorify Matrona?"

"I, as the confessor of Matrona, visited her, knew about her pious life and wisdom, so I really told the faithful about her as a blessed and righteous woman who could give wise advice on all life issues and who has the ability to miraculously heal diseases. At the same time, I advised believers and especially the sick to go to her and receive healing from their illness."

"Tell me, what advice did Matrona give her admirers?"

"In my presence, Matrona advised her admirers to go to church more often, to pray more, to serve prayer services to the saints of God. She advised to lead a sober life. Respect parents and elders. What advice Matrona gave on the question of joining collective farms, I do not know, since in my presence there was no talk on this topic."

In the indictment, the investigator wrote that the priest, "being a member of a counter-revolutionary group, for counter-revolutionary purposes actively glorified 'Blessed Matrona' Belyakova, organized pilgrimages of believers to her and performed secret services in her apartment."

On August 2, 1935, a special meeting under the NKVD sentenced priest Alexander Orlov to five years in a forced labor camp. He served his punishment in the Solovki (1935-1937) and the Sosnovets camps (1937-1940).

During his imprisonment, his wife and daughter moved to the village of Mitino in the Kasimov region and began to help at the church in honor of the icon of the Mother of God "Joy of All Who Sorrow". When Father Alexander was released from prison in 1940, before going to his family, he went to one of his parishioners, who lived in a neighboring village - ragged, hungry, barely alive, and, without going inside the house, asked him to make a bed for him on the rug outside the door, as all his clothes were full of lice. After washing himself in the bathhouse and recovering somewhat, he headed to Mitino. When he approached the church, there was an all-night vigil on the feast of the Holy Foremost Apostles Peter and Paul, and at that time his wife came out of the church with a censer in her hands, intending to light the coals as much as possible before the beginning of the polyeleos. The priest greeted her, but during his imprisonment he changed so much, that his wife did not recognize him, and Father Alexander, crying bitterly, said: "Apparently, I will not live long, that you came out to meet me with a censer." Then his wife recognized him and also wept.

Father Alexander began to serve as the second priest in the Joy of All Who Sorrow Church. Being in poor health from childhood, he was even more exhausted by his health issues in the camp. He lived less than a year after returning from prison. On April 27, 1941, the priest went to the window in the room where he lived, and when he saw someone, he wanted to meet him, sighed - and reposed.

Father Alexander was buried at the sanctuary of the Protection Church in the village of Makkoveevo. On December 27, 2000 the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church canonized him as a Holy Confessor. The relics of the priest Alexander (Orlov) were found on August 21, 2001 and are still in the Protection Church in the village of Syntul. *(from kuzl.pstbi.ccas.ru & johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Also Commemorated Today

New Monk-martyr [Marcellinus](#) of Sarov (1932)

New Hieroconfessor [Macarius](#), Schema-bishop of Malovishery (1944)

New Hieroconfessor priest [Theodore](#) (Rafanovich) of Khymy (1975)

Martyrs [Anthony](#), [John](#) and [Eustathius](#) of Vilnius (Lithuania) (1347).

Martyr [Ardalion](#) the Actor, who suffered under Maximian (3rd c.).
Martyr [Azat \(Azades\)](#) the Eunuch and 1,000 Martyrs in Persia (341).
["Vilna"](#) Icon of the Mother of God.
Monk-martyr [Christopher](#) of Mar Sabbas (797).
Apostles [Aristarchus](#), [Pudens](#), and [Trophimus](#) of the Seventy (*Greek*).
New Martyr [Demetrius](#) of the Peloponnesus, who suffered at Tripoli (1803)
Saint [Vsevolod III Yuryevich the Big Nest](#), (Demetrius in holy baptism), Great Prince of Vladimir (1212) .
St. [Abundius](#) the Sacristan of Rome (564)
St. [Tassach](#) of Raholp, Bishop
Martyrs [Domnina](#) and 10 companions, martyred with St. Valentine, bishop of Terni (269?)
St. [Lambert](#) (Lambertus), Archbishop of Lyon (688)
Martyrs [Tiburtius](#), Valerian and Maximus of Rome (3rd c.)

Social Team for April 21

Team 3 is up next week – Pani Stacy, Victor Barzykin, Tatiana 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, Tina Crull, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Johnson family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine & the Holy Land, the newly reposed handmaiden of God Mary Diane David, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)