

SOBORNOST

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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
Vespers 5 PM

Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10 AM

**March 16, 2025 – 2nd Sunday in Great Lent (Saint
Gregory Palamas) | Martyr Sabinas of Hermopolis**

By Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov

Today, on the second Sunday of Great Lent, we celebrate the memory of Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, who lived in the fourteenth century. He is known for his defense of the Hesychasm of Athonite monks and the Orthodox understanding of prayer against the attacks of theologians who were influenced by Western scholasticism.

Most of us, living in the world as we do, know very little about the Hesychast controversy, the works of Saint Gregory, or about the practice of Hesychasm. This is not because Orthodox theology and praxis is somehow more complicated than other areas of human knowledge and experience. We are often very successful at learning highly complex subject-matters, mastering very sophisticated skills, and becoming experts in our area of work or study. Yet, when it comes to prayer, too many Christians spend very little time and effort to learn about it and to practice it.



It is hardly surprising, therefore, that among the multitude of very accomplished experts on a variety of subjects that attend our churches, very few are experts in prayer.

We often think of prayer as a compilation of formulas that have to be pronounced or tasks that have to be fulfilled: certain prayers in the morning, others in the evening, and different ones before communion. The goal of such exercises is rarely very lofty—usually people say prayers to quiet their own conscience: “I have fulfilled my morning obligation or “I have fulfilled my pre-communion obligation”—and they feel better about themselves. When prayers are missed, we feel guilty: “I have not done what I was supposed to do.” Prayer becomes a life-long conversation with one’s own self, but not with God.

Sometimes we want something, so we remember that there is a God, and we decide to make a deal with Him. We say a certain formula and expect that God will feel obliged to deliver. If it is something that we really want and we are not sure that He will feel obliged enough, we may lengthen our plea by putting in some extra prayers and readings, by doing a little extra to get something a little bigger. We try to manipulate God in the same way that a dog tries to manipulate its owner into throwing an extra biscuit or two by doing an extra trick. The only problem is that God did not die on the cross in order to get Himself a pet.

Prayer is not a formula to manipulate God into doing something for us, nor is it an obligation that was placed on us to fulfill. God knows what we need for our salvation much better than we do, and He delivered us from all bondage, including the burdens and obligations of the Law. Yet we see that the saints of both the Old and New Testaments prayed to God, Christ Himself spent time in prayer every chance He had, and the Church teaches us to do the same. Why is prayer so important?

In the same way that we cannot manipulate God, He does not want to manipulate us. He wants us to enter into communion with Him; He wants to live in us (Gal. 2:20), and us to live for Him (2 Cor. 5:15) and with Him (Rom. 6:8); “the Son of God became man so that we might become God” (St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* 54). He wants our hearts, not our tricks aimed at getting a few extra biscuits. He needs us to be co-laborers with Him in the task of our salvation (1 Cor. 3:9). He wants to give us life abundantly (John 10:10), but He needs us to live it. And the breath of life in God is prayer.

Prayer is the communion of the Person of God with the person of man; and without our participation in it, this communion becomes impossible. Just as a close relationship between two people is impossible when one gives all, but the other is only interested in exchanging Christmas cards, a life with God is impossible when

He gives us all of Himself, but we are only interested in giving Him a few minutes of recitations each day. Prayer is not what is written on a page in a book, but that which is written in our hearts. Perhaps this is why the most common and most meaningful prayer has always been the simple Jesus prayer: “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.”

Prayer is not a mindless recitation of printed symbols, but a devotion of mind and heart. When we read or hear about the prayer of the mind that enters the heart, we are faced with the rejection of a purely mechanical recitation of words. We would find it unacceptable to offer a mindless recitation of words to our friends and loved ones; how dare we offer it to God day after day?!

The experience of the Athonite Hesychasts shows that through prayer we enter into communion with the very uncreated energies of God, or the direct way that God relates to the world and acts in it—not through created mediators, but directly enters into a relationship with us. And it is our response that makes this relationship possible. Look at the prayers that the Church offers to us as the morning and evening rules. Pay close attention to the words. They were composed by people whose hearts were ablaze with love for God, who responded to God’s gift of life with giving their own lives to God. Their prayers are not offered to us for recitations, but to guide our hearts and lives in the same direction, in the footsteps of the Fathers. We are to take these words written by other people and make them our own, coming directly from our hearts.

But this is not yet the life of prayer. If prayer is the breath of life, then it is impossible to live just by breathing for a few minutes twice a day. Apostle Paul instructs us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Many have said that this is impossible: how can one do anything without ceasing? But do we not breathe without ceasing? The saints who devoted their lives to God found that not only it is possible to pray without ceasing, but that it is unceasing prayer that makes life in God possible. The more we allow our soul to breathe prayer, the more alive in God it becomes.

Perhaps we cannot expect to spend our lives in solitude and contemplation, as do the Athonite Hesychasts. But we can and should make prayer both a state of our being and an active way of life in God. We do not have to study the works of Saint Gregory Palamas to make the simple Jesus prayer—“Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”—a part of everything we do throughout the day. We can apply effort to pay more attention to every word in our morning and evening prayers, to make them our own, and to try to pattern our own spiritual life after the model offered to us by the Fathers.

The breath of prayer is just as vital to the spiritual life as the breath of air is to the physical life. But just as a physical illness takes time and effort to heal, the spiritual illness caused by the lack of prayer will also take time and effort to recover. That is why it is so important to begin immediately, not tonight or tomorrow, but right now. When the Ethiopian eunuch learnt about Christ, he exclaimed to Philip: “See, *here is* water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36) What hinders us from taking a breath of life this very moment?—“If you believe with all your heart, you may” (Acts 8:37).

Today’s Epistle Lesson – St. Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews 1:10-2:3 EOB

Brethren, of the Son he says, “You, Lord, in the beginning, laid the foundation of the earth. The heavens are the works of your hands. They will perish, but you continue. They all will grow old as a garment; as a mantle, you will roll them up, and they will be changed; but you are the same. Your years will not fail. Indeed, to which of the angels did he ever say, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet? Are the angels not all ministering spirits, sent out to serve for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? Therefore, we should pay greater attention to the things that we were taught, for fear that we may drift away. Certainly, if the word spoken through angels proved reliable and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation! It was first announced by the Lord himself, and it is confirmed to us by those who heard him.

Today’s Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 2:1-12 EOB

At that time, when Jesus returned to Capernaum, it was heard that he was in the house. Immediately, many people gathered so that there was no more room, not even around the door. As Jesus was preaching the word to them, four men came, carrying a paralytic to him. Since they could not come near Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof where he was. When they had broken it up, they let down the mat which the paralytic was lying on. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” But there were some of the scribes sitting there, and they reasoned in their hearts, “Why does this man speak blasphemies like that? Who can forgive sins except God alone?” Immediately, Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were reasoning within themselves in this way. He asked them, “Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to tell the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed, and walk?’ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” - he said to the paralytic - “I tell you, arise, take up your mat, and go to your house!” The man arose, and at once took up the mat, and went out in front of everyone. The people were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The invisible serpent, the originator of evil, is inventive, versatile and extremely skillful in contriving wickedness. He has means to hinder our good purposes and actions as soon as they begin. But if he fails to prevent them initially, he sets up other devices by which he can render them useless once they are underway. If he is unable to make them worthless when they are half way to completion, he knows other tricks and ways to invalidate them even once they are finished, and makes them a source not of reward but of harm to all but the most careful. First of all he points out how laborious and difficult to accomplish virtue is. In this way he fills us with laziness and despair, as though we were attempting difficult and impossible things and were therefore incapable of putting our intentions into action. Then he engenders disbelief in the rewards which God has promised to those who struggle.

But we, brethren, should rise above this trap by our soul's courage, eagerness and faith. We should bear in mind the fact that just as the earth cannot yield worthwhile fruit without labor, so the soul cannot acquire anything which pleases God or leads to salvation without spiritual struggles. But while it is possible to find earth which is unsuitable for cultivation, every human soul is naturally suited to virtue. As we are all unavoidably condemned, however, by the judgment given against our forefather, to live by labor and toil, let us turn necessity into an honor and willingly offer to God what is ours not by our own will. Let us give up transitory things in exchange for things that endure, and receive what is beneficial in exchange for what is harmful, transforming short-lived toil into a means to gain eternal ease. If we labor here for the sake of virtue we shall certainly attain to the rest promised in the age to come. He who promised is trustworthy and is at hand to help all who readily take on the struggle for virtue. If He who can do all things gives us His help, is anything impossible to achieve?

When we remember this and eagerly apply ourselves to virtuous actions, the evil one, knowing that nothing can be good unless it is done in a good way, strives to persuade us not to accomplish any good work with the object of pleasing God or of winning His approval, but to look for other people's approval. By this means he can deprive us of our reward from God and of all spiritual and heavenly honors. Let us frustrate these efforts of his by considering the great recompense stored up for those who live as God pleases, and how insignificant other people's approval is. Not only is it not worth mentioning in comparison with the great and holy glory to come, but it is also insufficient reason to neglect and waste our flesh.

Even after suffering this defeat, the originator of evil undermined us with pride, the last and worst abyss. He suggests conceited thoughts and persuades us to boast as though we had managed to be virtuous through our own ability and intelligence.

But let us remember that the Truth says, “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5), and fend off all the evil one’s schemes. Let us do good works in a good way, with appropriate humility. If someone has a jar of precious perfume, whether he pours it out on to dung, or pours dung into the jar, he ruins and destroys the perfume. Be aware that, in the same way, whether someone rejects and discards virtue by his inaction, or mixes evil with his virtuous actions, he equally ruins and destroys virtue.

I am speaking to your charity on this subject in this present season of fasting, so that we may observe it together for our own sake unalloyed with anything evil. Fasting was of no benefit to that Pharisee in the Gospel, even though he always fasted two days a Week, because he had adulterated it with pride and condemnation of his neighbor. Not that this means fasting is unprofitable. Moses, Elijah and the Lord Himself showed how beneficial it is for those who fast properly in a way pleasing to God.

Moses fasted for many days. Awaken your minds, I entreat You, and lift them up at this opportune time, in company with Moses when he went up the mountain towards God. In this way may you start off afresh on your ascent, and be lifted up together with Christ, who did not merely go up a mountain but up to heaven, taking us with Him. Moses fasted for forty days on the mountain and according to the Scriptures he saw God, not darkly but face to face. He talked to Him as someone would speak to his friend. He learned from God and taught everyone about Him: that He is He Who eternally Is and will never cease to be, that He summoned what did not exist into existence, brought all things out of non-being and will not let them fall back into non-existence. In the beginning He brought the whole visible creation out of nothing all at once, just by a nod and His will....

At the creation first one thing was brought into existence, then another, then another and so on in turn. Last of all came man, who was worthy of God’s greater honor and consideration both before and after his creation. All the visible world was made before him for his sake. Immediately after the foundation of the world, before he existed, the kingdom of heaven was made ready for him. A divine Counsel concerning him preceded him, and he was created by God’s hand and in His image. He did not take his whole being from matter or the visible world, like the other living creatures did, but only his body. His soul he took from the heavenly realms, from God Himself when He breathed life into him in a way that defies description. Man was a great wonder surpassing all else, towering above everything, superior to all. Man was capable of knowing God, as well as receiving Him and declaring Him, and was most certainly the highest achievement of the Creator’s sublime majesty. He had paradise for his home, specially planted by God. There it was his lot to have sight of God, speak to Him face to face and

receive a counsel and commandment from Him concerning the fasting appropriate to that place. If he kept and observed this, he would remain free from death, toil and pain for ever.

Alas, he chose the treason of the serpent, the originator of evil, in preference to this commandment and counsel, and broke the decreed fast. Instead of eternal life he received death and instead of the place of unsullied joy he received this sinful place full of passions and misfortunes, or rather, he was sentenced to Hades and nether darkness. Our nature would have stayed in the infernal regions below the lurking places of the serpent who initially beguiled it, had not Christ come. He started off by fasting and in the end abolished the serpent's tyranny, set us free and brought us back to life, as Moses foretold. After fasting on the mountain Moses received tablets, the work of God, and later received again, on a second set of tablets, the law written by the finger of God. He instructed the holy nation in the law and by his work he hinted at, and showed a glimpse of, Christ's future ministry. As Moses appeared as the liberator and savior of Abraham's race, so later Christ did the same for the whole human race.

Elijah, when he too had fasted forty days, saw the Lord on the mountain, not in fire, as the elders of Israel had earlier, but passing beyond the fiery vision by his God-pleasing fast, he saw the Lord in the sound of a light passing breeze. He had approached more closely to our Lord's words, "God is a Spirit: and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). For the sound prefigured the Truth and the preaching of Him who is Truth Itself, which rang out round all the ends of the earth, and the passing breeze prefigured the Spirit and grace.

From this vision while fasting Elijah also received power to anoint a prophet in his stead and bestow upon him a double portion of the grace he possessed, and to mount up above the earth in mid-air. This pointed clearly towards Christ's ascension from earth to heaven which was to happen later. While Christ Himself was fasting in the wilderness, He defeated our tempter by force and took away his power against mankind. Having at last put down his tyranny, he set our nature free and handed him over for sport to all those willing to live according to His Gospel. In this way He fulfilled the words of the prophets and by His works inscribed grace and truth upon the symbolic events which took place in ancient times.

You see the benefits of fasting, and how it has made us worthy of so many great gifts? Even from its opposite, unlimited eating and self-indulgence, it is possible to see the advantage of fasting. For the last two weeks our city was given over to gluttony and lack of self-restraint, and straight away we had troubles, shouting, fights, disturbances, shameless songs and obscene laughter. But this week when

the fast came it made everything more honorable. It took us away from frivolity's expensive cares, stopped us tolling for the sake of our useless stomachs, set us instead to works of repentance and persuaded us not to labor for the food which perishes but for the food which endures to eternal life.

Where now are the slaughter of animals, the aroma of roasting meat, the variety of sauces and the cooks' best endeavors? Where are the men who run around the streets and pollute the air with their impure voices? Where are those who beat the drum and make music around houses and tables, and their devotees who join in with applause and eat their fill of the food set before them to the accompaniment of kettledrums and flutes? Where are those who spend their days and nights at parties, who are always looking for places to drink, who keep each other company in drunkenness and the shameful acts that result from it? Once the fast was proclaimed all these evils went away and all things good took their place. Instead of disgusting songs, mouths now sing holy psalms. Instead of obscene laughter, there is salutary sorrow and tears. Instead of undisciplined outings and wanderings, everyone takes one and the same way to Christ's Holy Church. If unlimited eating produces a dense swarm of sins, fasting is the root of all virtues and the foundation of God's commandments.

Lack of self-control is actually an evil both ancient and modern, though it did not precede its antidote, fasting. By means of our forefathers' self-indulgence in paradise and their contempt for the fast already in existence there, death entered the world. Sin reigned and brought in the condemnation of our nature from Adam until Christ.

The flood covered the whole earth because of the self-indulgence of Adam's descendants in this world of ours and their disdain for the chastity which came before. In those days God said to Noah, "My Spirit shall not abide in these men, for they are flesh" (cf. Gen. 6:3 LXX). The deeds of those who are flesh are none other than unlimited eating, drunkenness, sensual pleasure and the evils that spring from them. Because of the abominable depravity and self-indulgence among the men of Sodom, fire fell on them from heaven. "Behold", says the prophet Ezekiel, "this was the iniquity of the men of Sodom, in fullness of bread they committed abomination" (cf. Ezek. 16:49-50). By means of this abomination, ignoring human nature they fell into unnatural unions. What deprived Esau, Isaac's firstborn, of his birthright and his father's blessing? Of course it was lasciviousness and an unreasonable demand for food. Why were Eli's sons condemned to death, and why did he meet a violent death at the news of the death of his children, whom he had not disciplined with proper care? Surely it was because they took the meat from the cauldrons before the time and used it. Also, the whole Hebrew nation, while Moses was fasting on the mountain for their sake, were indulging themselves to their own

detriment. They ate and drank and rose up to play, as the Scripture says (Exod. 32:6), and their sport was worshiping an idol, for it was then that the incidents surrounding the fashioning of the calf took place among them.

Sensual pleasure causes ungodliness as well as sin, but fasting and self-control result in the fear of God as well as virtue. Fasting must be accompanied by self-control. Why? Because eating our fill, even of humble foods, is a hindrance to the purifying mourning, godly sorrow and contrition in our souls, which bring about unswerving repentance leading to salvation. For without a contrite heart we cannot really lay hold of repentance. It is the restriction of self-indulgence, sleep and the senses according to God's will that crushes our hearts and makes us mourn for our sins.

When that rich man in the Gospel said to himself, "Eat, drink and be merry" (Luke 12:19), the wretch made himself fit for the eternal flames and unfit for this present life. Let us, on the contrary, brethren, tell ourselves to be temperate, to fast, to keep watch, to be restrained, to be humble and to suffer hardship for our salvation. Then we shall finish this present life in a good way pleasing to God and inherit the blessed life without end.

May we all attain to this by the grace and love towards mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory, might, honor and worship, together with I his Father without beginning and the life-giving Spirit, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Gregory Palamas, Homily 6 "On Fasting"

Holy 40 Martyrs of Sebaste

The Nile River, as a trial by water, Sabinos put to shame with his manliness.

On the sixteenth Sabinos was hence carried away.

Saint Sabinos was from the city of Hermopolis in Egypt and came from a wealthy aristocratic family. He was distinguished for his blameless life and deep faith.

When Emperor Diocletian (284-305) initiated a persecution against the Christians, the governor Arrianos sought to arrest Sabinos. This was because Sabinos was held in high esteem and honor by the Christians of the area, and he was known for exceeding the other Christians in his zeal for the Christian faith. He therefore fled with other Christians outside the city and stayed in a small house.

His hiding place was revealed by a certain ungrateful beggar who had brought him food. Sabinos used to feed him and help him with money, but the man betrayed him for two pieces of gold. The Saint was seized with six other Christians by soldiers and brought before the governor in Antinopolis. There he confessed his faith in Christ, and was ordered to be tortured. First he was hung in the air and

skinned entirely of his flesh. Then his tormentors burned his fleshless body with lit torches. Remaining firm in his faith, he was then ordered to have a rock tied around his neck and thrown into the Nile River. This took place in the year 287, when the Holy Sabinos received the crown of martyrdom by drowning. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Venerable Eusebia, Abbess of Hamage

Eusebia, the eldest daughter of SS. Adalbald ([2nd February](#)) and Rictrudis ([12th May](#)); great-granddaughter of St. Gertrude the Elder ([6th December](#)); sister of SS. Maurontius ([9th January](#)), Clotsindis ([30th June](#)), and Adalsindis ([25th December](#)). When St. Eusebia was still quite young her father was murdered and her mother sent her to the Hamage Abbey (Abbaye d'Hamage), where her great-grandmother, St. Gertrude the Elder ([6th December](#)), was the founding abbess. when St. Gertrude reposed St. Eusebia was elected to succeed her, even though she was only twelve years of age. St. Rictrudis, realising that St. Eusebia did not have the experience to be an abbess, took over Hamage, merging it into her own Abbey of Marchiennes (later known as the Abbey of SS. Rictrude and Peter of Marchiennes / Abbaye Sainte-Rictrude et Saint-Pierre de Marchiennes). All the nuns were moved from Hamage to Marchiennes, resulting in a fair bit of dissent amongst the nuns from Hamage. In time St. Rictrudis blessed Hamage nuns return to Hamage with St. Eusebia as Abbess. The time at Marchiennes served St. Eusebia well, as she had grown in wisdom and spirituality. St. Eusebia served as the second Abbess of Hamage until her repose in 680. (*from drjohnhutchisonhall.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

Martyr [Papas](#) of Lycaonia (305).

St. [Serapion](#), archbishop of Novgorod (1516).

Apostle [Aristobulus](#) of the Seventy, martyr-bishop of Britain (1st c.).

Ven. [John](#) of Rufinians (unk)

Hieromartyr [Alexander](#), pope of Rome (119).

Martyr [Julian](#) of Anazarbus (305).

Hieromartyrs [Trophimus](#) and Thalus, presbyters of Laodicea (300).

Venerable [Christodulus](#), wonderworker of Patmos (1093).

Martyr [Romanus](#) at Parium on the Hellespont.

10 [Martyrs](#) in Phoenicia (Greek).

St. [Pimen](#), Fool-for-Christ and Enlightener of Dagestan, and his companion Anton Meskhi, the Censurer of Kings (13th c.) (Georgia).

St. [Demetrius](#) the Devoted, King of Georgia (1289)

St. [Ambrosi](#) (Khelaia) the Confessor, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia (1927)

[Finian](#) (Finnian) Lobhar (the Leper), Abbot and Founder of Innisfallen, Disciple of Saint Brendan (c. 560)

St. [Abban](#) mac ua Cormaic (Abbanus) of Kilabban, Leinster(5th c.)

[Kirin](#) (Kyrin, Kyrstin, Curitan, Boniface), Bishop of Ross, Scotland (630)

Columba, Virgin and Martyr in England (?)

St. [Patrick](#) of Auvergne, bishop of Malaga (307?)

St. [Abban](#) of Magheranoidhe/Murneave/Murnevin (620)

St. Abram, priest-hermit of Edessa (6th c.)

St. Yungourian, monk of St-Gildas de Rhuys (Brittany)

St. [Agapitus](#), bishop of Ravenna (4th c.)

St. [Dentlin](#) (Dentelin, Denain), young son of Sts. Vincent and Waldetrudis (7th c.)

St. [Gregory](#) Makar, bishop of Nicopolis, later hermit of Pithiviers (c. 1000)(France)

St. [Heribert](#), Archbishop of Cologne (1022)

Hieromartyr [Hilary](#), bishop of Aquileia, w/ deacon Tatian, Felix, Largus, and Denis (c. 284)

St. [Megingaud](#) (Mengold, Megingoz), bishop of Wuerzburg) (794)

Synaxis of the Venerable [Fathers of the Kiev Caves](#) Lavra (2nd Sunday of Lent)

Social Team for March 23

Team 10 is up next week – Mary Watts, Veronica & Chris Parsons, Jonathan Doyle. 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, 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, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)