

From the Sermons of Saint John.

Contents: On the fall of Man. On holiness. Lay up treasures in Heaven. The Church as the Body of Christ. The Cross, preserver of the universe. What do we mean by the word "Orthodox"?

On the Fall of Man.

(6 March 1954)

THE WORLD WAS CREATED GOOD and called to the joy of life in union with the Source and Creator of life, the Lord God. The first to sin and to be torn from this union were angels. The angelic realm was split: some remained with God; others, in their pride, desired to live their own life, independent of God. The angelic world was split and sin was born there, but the earthly world remained good. And then the devil, which means "the one cast down from heaven," began to strive to join the earthly realm to himself. The highest creation on earth, man, had been given a commandment by God not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Why was the commandment given?

This tree was just like all the others, and in itself it had no outstanding characteristics. No, the knowledge of good and evil was not in the tree itself, and not for this reason was the commandment given. The Lord gave it because man was created free, and the Lord desired of man a free-willed striving and longing for union with God. The commandment was given because only through its fulfillment could man express his free will striving toward God and love for Him. And blessedness consists simply of communication with God through love of Him. The devil is burdened by his separation; he is perpetually in a state of wrath and vengeance, and it comforts him to attract others. The devil never appears as his true self, but takes on various appearances. Then, in paradise, he took on the appearance of a serpent, and gave man the idea that the commandment had not

been given for the expression of man's love for God, but rather that man would not become like God. The devil planted the thought that the command was issued, not out of God's love, so that man would dwell in God's love, but because God desired to dominate, and to prevent man from being as God, and from coming to know the endless and limitless joy of being.

When man came to believe this diabolical idea, he was instantly separated from God. Everything changed, and man could no longer enjoy life in God and speak with God freely and straightforwardly as children speak. There was no peace, no joy, and man began to hide from God. Everything changed: the link between God and man was destroyed and nature ceased to heed man. Weeping entered the world, and the soul became burdened.

On Holiness.

(18/31 May 1953)

HOLINESS IS THE FRUIT of man's efforts and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Holiness is reached by him who wears a cross and in the name of Christ wages warfare against the obstacles to holiness, obstacles to becoming akin to Christ. These obstacles are sins, sinful habits, firmly rooted in the soul. Struggle against them is the major work of a Christian, and in so far as he purifies his soul, so far will he receive of the Holy Spirit.

St. Seraphim taught the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, and he genuinely acquired it, for the Most Holy Mother of God recognized him as being her own. And the faithful, sincere seekers of the Truth and Light, as was Motovilov, because of their reverence, saw how this great God pleaser shone with the light of holiness.

How varied are the paths of saints! At the throne of God, in front of everyone is the Most Holy Mother of God, more glorious than the seraphim and all the angels

and archangels who stood firm, faithful to God through the fearful struggle that was raised against God by the most radiant of them all, Lucifer, which means Light-bearer, who is now the devil, in other words, the one cast down to the deepest darkness. In this struggle the bright angels came so close to God that it is already impossible for them to step back or separate from Him.

All the pleasers of God are like the angels in their love and devotion. They, just as the angels, waged war against the dark forces and became strengthened in love of God. All of the prophets of the Old Testament lived in such a struggle. Godlessness prevailed, the Law of God was forgotten. The world persecuted them because they interfered with its sinful life. They hid in the "depths of the earth." The world hated them. The prophet Isaiah was sawed in two by a wood saw, the prophet Jeremiah was trampled in a swamp. And in such surroundings they stood fast in faith and devotion. All of the righteous ones were sorrowful in the world because they were strangers to the sinful world. All of the apostles suffered in one way or another. Righteous men left for the desert. What made them saints? Suffering? Not suffering alone makes saints, but striving towards God, love of God, and the labor of overcoming obstacles to holiness, which is the fruit of man's labor and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Lay up Treasures in Heaven.

(22 February/7 March, 1954)

THE LORD SPEAKS to all people of all times and races, and tells them something clear and well-known. Today a person is alive, but tomorrow he dies and everything that he has is lost to him. But the soul, which moves the body, continues to live and it is either comforted and happy, or sad and burdened. Man is created thus; the body must live as the soul desires. At the moment of death the soul continues to live without the body. Everything will perish except that

which the soul has gathered through love and prayer. Everything virtuous done by a man is written in the soul and will not be taken from him. While a person is alive, he finds himself paying attention to many things: clothing, health, his job, studies. There are times when he is concerned only with the thought of war or a failed harvest - of everything that is necessary for life on earth.

So, too, in spiritual life there are times of special attention to what is needful for the soul. Such is Great Lent - a time of special attention, examination, of the freeing of spiritual forces. Fasting is established by the Holy Spirit. Righteous men, striving towards God, through life experience came to know the meaning of fasting and to bear witness that without fasting there can be no spiritual life. All the various attacks of the devil, all his temptations, everything concerning the diabolic world, is cast aside - becomes powerless and is shamed - when a person firmly follows the words of the Savior Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ: *"... This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting"* (Matt. 17:21).

Now is a time of fasting, a suitable time for cleansing the soul. This is the most important thing, for a soul to be able to accept the grace of God, so that those treasures will be stored up in the soul, which will not be taken from it. And then the path of its life will be straight; in the soul there will be peace and joy.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

The Church as the Body of Christ.

"And He (Christ) is the of the body, the church (Col. 1:18),

"which is His body, the Fullness of Him the that Filleth all in all (Eph. 1:23)

IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES the Church is repeatedly called the Body of Christ. *"Who (Paul) now rejoice in my sufferings for you... for His Body's sake, which is the Church"* (Col. 1:24), the Apostle Paul writes about himself.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, says he, are given by Christ *"...for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ"* (Eph. 4:11-12).

At the same time, bread and wine are made into the Body and Blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy, and the faithful partake thereof. Christ Himself ordained it so, communicating His apostles at the Mystical Supper with the words, *"Take, eat; this is My Body; . . . Drink ye all of it; For this is My Blood of the New Testament"* (Mat. 26:26-28).

How is the Body of Christ at the same time both the Church and the Holy Mystery? Are the faithful both members of the Body of Christ, the Church, and also communicants of the Body of Christ in the Holy Mysteries?

In neither instance is this name "Body of Christ" used metaphorically, but rather in the most basic sense of the word. We believe that the Holy Mysteries which keep the form of bread and wine are the very Body and the very Blood of Christ. We likewise believe and confess that Christ is the Son of the Living God, came into the world to save sinners, and became true man, that His flesh, taken from the Virgin Mary, was true human flesh; body and soul. Christ was a true man, in

all respects like man, except sin, and at the same time remaining true God. The Divine nature was neither diminished nor changed in the Son of God in this incarnation, likewise the human nature was not changed at this incarnation, but retained in full all human qualities.

Unchanged and unconfused forever, indivisibly and inseparably, Godhead and manhood were united in the One Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Son of God became incarnate to make people partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter. 1:4), to free them from sin and death, and to make them immortals.

Uniting ourselves with Christ, we receive divine grace, which gives human nature strength for victory over sin and death, and the Lord Jesus Christ has shown people the way to victory over sin by His teaching, and he grants them eternal life, making them partakers of His eternal kingdom by His Resurrection. In order to receive that divine grace from Him, the closest possible contact with Him is necessary. Drawing all to Himself by His divine love, and uniting them unto Himself, the Lord has united to each other those who love Him and come unto Him, uniting them into one Church.

The Church is unity in Christ, the closest union with Christ of all who rightly believe on Him and love Him, and all their union is through Christ.

Now the Church consists of both her earthly and heavenly parts, for the Son of God came to earth and became man that He might lead man into heaven and make him once again a citizen of paradise, returning to him his original condition of sinlessness and wholeness and uniting him unto Himself.

This is accomplished by the action of divine grace granted through the Church, but effort is also required from man himself. God saves His fallen creature by His own love for him, but man's love for his Creator is also necessary, and without it salvation is impossible for him. Striving toward God and cleaving unto the Lord

by its own humble love, the human soul obtains power to cleanse itself from sin and to strengthen itself for the struggle toward full victory over sin.

And the body partakes in that struggle, being now the vehicle and instrument of sin, but fore-ordained to be the instrument of righteousness and the vessel of holiness. God created man, breathing divine breath into the animate body created earlier from the earth. The body was to have been an instrument of the spirit, subject to God, for through it the human spirit manifests itself in the material world. The spirit reveals its properties and qualities through the body and its separate members which God gave it, as to His own image, because the body, as a manifestation of the image of God, both is called and very truly is "our beauty created in the image of God" (sticheron from the Funeral Service).

When the first-created people fell away in spirit from their Creator, the body, hitherto subject to the spirit and obtaining its directions through the soul, ceased to be subordinate to it and began to strive to dominate it. In place of the law of God the law of the flesh began to rule man. Sin, having cut man off from God, the source of life, has rent man himself asunder, and violated the union of spirit, soul and body, and death has entered into him. The soul, not surrounded now by the streams of life, could no longer transmit them to the body, which in turn became corruptible; and languor became the lot of the soul.

Christ came to earth to restore anew the fallen image and return it to union with Him Whose image it is. Uniting man unto Himself, God thus restores him to his original goodness in all its fullness. Granting grace and sanctification to the spirit, Christ also purifies, strengthens, heals and sanctifies the spirit and the body.

"But he that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit (with him)" (1 Cor. 6:17). The body, then, of the man who has been united unto the Lord must be an instrument of the Lord, must serve for the fulfillment of His will, and become a part of the Body of Christ.

For the full sanctification of man, the body of the servant of the Lord must be united with the Body of Christ, and this is accomplished in the mystery of Holy Communion. The true Body and the true Blood of Christ which we receive, becomes a part of the great Body of Christ.

Of course, for union with Christ, the mere conjoining of our body with the Body of Christ does not suffice. The consumption of the Body of Christ becomes beneficial when in spirit we strive toward Him and unite ourselves with Him. Reception of the Body of Christ, with aversion to Him in spirit, is like the approach to Christ of those who struck Him, mocked Him and crucified Him. Their approaching Him served not for their salvation and healing, but for their condemnation.

But those who partake with piety, love and readiness to bring themselves to serve Him, closely unite themselves with Him and become instruments of His divine will.

"He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him," said the Lord (John 6:56).

Uniting with the Risen Lord and through Him with the entire eternal Trinity, man draws from It power for eternal life and himself becomes immortal. *"As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me even he shall live by Me"*(John 6:57).

All who believe in Christ and are united unto Him by giving themselves to Him, and by the reception of divine grace, conjointly constitute the Church of Christ, the Head of which is Christ Himself, and they who enter into her are her members.

Christ, invisible to the bodily eye, manifests Himself on earth clearly through His Church just as the unseen human spirit manifests itself through its body. The

Church is the Body of Christ both because its parts are united to Christ through His divine Mysteries, and because through her Christ works in the world.

We partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, in the holy Mysteries, so that we ourselves may be members of Christ's Body, the Church.

This is not accomplished instantly. Fully abiding in the Church is already victory over sin and complete purification therefrom. To some degree everything sinful estranges us from the Church and keeps us out of the Church. This is why, in the prayer read at Confession over every penitent, we have the phrase: "reconcile, and unite unto Thy Holy Church." Through repentance a Christian is cleansed and united closely to Christ in partaking of the Holy Mysteries, but later the grime of sin again settles upon him and estranges him from Christ and the Church, and therefore repentance and Communion are again necessary. As long as the earthly life of a man endures, up to the very departure of the soul from the body, the struggle between sin and righteousness goes on within him. However high a spiritual and moral state one might achieve, a gradual, or even headlong and deep fall into the abyss of sin is always possible. Therefore, communion of the holy Body and Blood of Christ, which strengthens our contact with Him and refreshes us with the living streams of the grace of the Holy Spirit flowing through the Body of the Church, is necessary for everyone. How very important communion of the Holy Mysteries is we see from the life of St. Onuphrius the Great to whom, as well as to other hermits dwelling in the same desert, angels brought Holy Communion; and in the life of St. Mary of Egypt we read that her final wish, after many years of desert life, was the reception of the Holy Mysteries. The lives of St. Sabbatius of Solovki and a multitude of others tell us similar things. Not in vain did the Lord speak and say: "*Amen, amen, I say unto you, except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you*" (John 6:23).

To partake of the Body and Blood of Christ is to receive in oneself the Risen Christ, the Victor over death, granting to those with Him victory over sin and death. Preserving in ourselves the grace-filled gift of Communion, we have a guarantee and foretaste of the blessed, eternal life of the soul and body.

Up to the very "Day of Christ," His Second Coming and the Judgment of the whole world, the struggle of sin with righteousness will continue, individually in each person and collectively in all mankind.

The earthly Church unites all who are reborn through Baptism and who have taken up the Cross of the struggle against sin, and who follow after Christ the contest-master of this struggle. The Divine Eucharist, the offering of the bloodless sacrifice and partaking thereof, sanctifies and strengthens its partakers and makes those who receive of the Body and Blood of Christ true members of His Body, the Church. But only with death is it determined whether a man remained a true member of the Body of Christ to his last breath, or whether sin triumphed in him and drove out the grace binding him to Christ and received by him in the Holy Mysteries.

He who, as a member of the earthly Church, has reposed in grace goes over from the earthly Church into the heavenly Church. But he who has fallen away from the earthly Church will not enter into the heavenly, for the Church in this world is the way into the heavenly.

The more one is found to be under the influence of the grace of Communion and the more tightly one has united himself to Christ, the more one will find pleasure in communion with Christ and in His coming Kingdom.

Therefore, it is important to partake of the Mysteries of Christ just before death, when the lot of a man is determined forever. It is necessary to try to receive just before death, if there be even the smallest possibility of this, to beseech the Lord

to find us worthy of this, and to take thought for others, so that they may not be deprived of Communion before the end.

Inasmuch as sin continues to operate in the soul until death, so the body is liable to the consequences and bears in itself the seeds of disease and death, from which it is freed only when it decays after death, and then rises, at last free of them in the general resurrection. He who unites himself in spirit and in body with Christ in this life will be with him in spirit and in body in the life to come. The grace-filled streams of the life-creating Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ are the well-spring of our eternal joy in converse with the risen Christ and in the contemplation of His glory.

The same consequences of sin, not yet driven out finally from the human race, operate not only in individual people, but through them they are manifested in the earthly activity of entire sections of the Church. Heresies and disputes arise constantly, tearing away part of the faithful. Misunderstandings between local churches or parts of them have troubled the Church since antiquity, and prayers for their cessation are constantly heard in the divine services. "We pray for the unity of the churches," "unity to the churches" (Resurrection canon, Triadic, Tone 8), "dissensions of the Church set aright" (Service to the Archangels, 8 November, 26 March, 13 July) and similar prayers in the course of centuries have been offered by the Orthodox Church. Even on Holy and Great Saturday, before the Epitaphion of Christ, the Church pronounces: "O most blameless, pure Virgin who didst bring forth the Life, stop the scandals of the Church, and grant peace as thou art good" (last verse of the stasis of the Lamentations).

Only when Christ appears on the clouds will the tempter be trampled down, and all scandals and temptations disappear. At that time the struggle between good and evil, between life and death will cease, and the earthly Church will merge with the Church Triumphant in which God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

In the Kingdom of Christ to come, there will no longer be need for receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, for all who have been vouchsafed it will be in closest converse with Him and will enjoy the pre-eternal light of the Life originating Trinity, experiencing that blessedness which no tongue can express, and which is incomprehensible to our feeble mind. For this reason after partaking of the Holy Mysteries at Liturgy, in the altar is always pronounced the prayer which we sing on Paschal days: "O Christ, Thou great and most sacred Pascha! O Wisdom, Word and Power of God! Grant us to partake of Thee more fully in the unwaning day of Thy kingdom" (Paschal Canon, 9th Ode).

The Cross, Preserver of the Universe.

IN THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL (9:6) it is said that when the Angel of the Lord was sent to punish and destroy the sinning people, it was told him not to strike those on whom the "mark" had been made. In the original text this mark is called "tau," the Hebrew letter corresponding to the letter "T.," which is how in ancient times the cross was made, which then was an instrument of punishment.

And so, even then was foretold the power of the Cross, which preserves those who venerate it. Likewise by many other events in the Old Testament the power of the Cross was indicated. Moses, who held his arms raised in the form of a cross during the battle, gave victory to the Israelites over the Amalekites. He also, dividing the Red Sea by a blow of his rod and by a transverse blow uniting the waters again, saved Israel from Pharaoh, who drowned in the water, while Israel crossed over on the dry bottom (Exodus, chs. 14:17). Through the laying on of his hands in the form of a cross on his grandsons, Jacob gave a blessing to his descendants, foretelling at the same time their future until the coming of the "expectation of the nations" (Genesis, ch. 48).

By the Cross, the Son of God, having become man, accomplished our salvation. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross (Phil. 2:8). Having stretched out His hands upon the Cross, the Savior with

them, as it were, embraced the world, and by His blood shed on it, like a king writing with red ink, He signed the forgiveness of the human race.

The Cross of the Lord was the instrument by which He saved the world after the fall into sin. Through the Cross, He descended with His soul into hell so as to raise up from it the souls who were awaiting Him. By the Cross, Christ opened the doors of paradise which had been closed after our first ancestors had been banished from it. The Cross was sanctified by the Body of Christ which was nailed to it when He gave Himself over to torments and death for the salvation of the world, and it itself was then filled with life-giving power. By the Cross on Golgotha, the prince of this world was cast out (John 12:31) and an end was put to his authority. The weapon by which he was crushed became the sign of Christ's victory.

The demonic hosts tremble when they see the Cross, for by the Cross the kingdom of hell was destroyed. They do not dare to draw near to anyone who is guarded by the Cross. The whole human race, by the death of Christ on the Cross, received deliverance from the authority of the devil, and everyone who makes use of this saving weapon is inaccessible to the demons. When legions of demons appeared to St. Anthony the Great and other desert-dwellers, the saints guarded themselves with the Sign of the Cross, and the demons vanished. When there appeared to Saint Symeon the Stylite, who was standing on his pillar, what seemed to be a chariot to carry him to heaven, the Saint, before mounting it, crossed himself. It disappeared, and the enemy, who had hoped to cast down the ascetic from the height of his pillar, was put to shame.

One cannot enumerate all the separate examples of the manifestation of the power of the Cross in various incidents. Invisibly and unceasingly there gushes from it the divine grace that saves the world.

The Sign of the Cross is made at all the Mysteries and prayers of the Church. With the making of the Sign of the Cross over the bread and wine, they become

the Body and Blood of Christ. With the immersion of the Cross, the waters are sanctified. The Sign of the Cross looses us from sins. "When we are guarded by the Cross, we oppose the enemy, not fearing his nets and barking." Just as the flaming sword in the hands of the Cherubim barred the entrance into paradise of old, so the Cross now acts invisibly in the world, guarding it from perdition.

The Cross is the unconquerable weapon of pious kings in the battle against enemies. Through the apparition of the Cross in the sky, the dominion of Emperor Constantine was confirmed and the persecution against the Church. The apparition of the Cross in the sky in Jerusalem in the days of Constantius the Arian proclaimed the victory of Orthodoxy. By the power of the Cross of the Lord, Christian kings reign and will reign until Antichrist, barring his path to power and restraining lawlessness (Saint John Chrysostom, Commentary on 2 Thes. 2:6-7).

The "*sign of the Son of Man*" (Matt. 24:30), that is, the Cross, will appear in the sky in order to proclaim the end of the present world and the coming of the eternal Kingdom of the Son of God. Then all the tribes of the earth shall weep, because they loved the present age and its lusts, but all who have endured persecution for righteousness and who called on the name of the Lord shall rejoice and be glad. The Cross then will save from eternal perdition all who conquered temptations by the Cross, who crucified their flesh with its passions and lusts, and took up their cross and followed their Christ.

But those who hated the Cross of the Lord and did not engrave the Cross in their soul will perish forever. For "the Cross is the preserver of the whole universe, the Cross is the beauty of the Church, the Cross is the might of kings, the Cross is the confirmation of the faithful, the Cross is the glory of angels and the scourge of demons" (Octoechos: Exapostilarion, Monday Matins)

What do we mean by the word "Orthodox"?

SHORTLY AFTER THE DOCTRINE of Christ began to be propagated among the Gentiles, the followers of Christ in Antioch began to be called Christians (Acts 11:26). The word "Christian" indicated that those who bore this name belonged to Christ: belonged in the sense of devotion to Christ and his Doctrine. From Antioch the name of Christian was spread everywhere.

The followers of Christ gladly called themselves by the name of their beloved Teacher and Lord; and the enemies of Christ called His followers Christians by carrying over to them the ill-will and hatred which they breathed against Christ.

However, quite soon there appeared people who, while calling themselves Christians, were not of Christ in spirit. Of them Christ had spoken earlier: "*Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven*" (Matt. 7:5). Christ prophesied also that many would pass themselves off for Christ Himself: "*Many shall come in my name, sayings I am Christ*" (Matt. 24:5). The Apostles in their epistles indicated that false bearers of the name of Christ had appeared already in their time: "*as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists*" (1 John 2:19).

They indicated that those who stepped away from the doctrine of Christ should not be considered their own: "*They went out from us but were not of us*" (1 John 2:19). Warning against quarrels and disagreements in minor matters (1 Cor. 1:10-14), at the same time the Apostles strictly commanded their disciples to shun those who do not bring the true doctrine (2 John 1:10). The Lord, through the Revelation given to the Apostle John the Theologian, sternly accused those who, calling themselves faithful, did not act in accordance with their name; for in such a case it would be false for them.

Of what use was it of old to call oneself a Jew, an Old Testament follower of the true faith, if one was not such in actuality? Such the Holy Scripture calls the synagogue of Satan (Apocalypse 2:9).

In the same way a Christian in the strict sense is he only who confesses the true doctrine of Christ and lives in accordance with it. The designation of a Christian consists in glorifying the Heavenly Father by one's life. "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16). But true glorification of God is possible only if one rightly believes and expresses his right belief in words and deeds. Therefore true Christianity and it alone may be named "right-glorifying" (Orthodoxy). By the word "Orthodoxy" we confess our firm conviction that it is precisely our Faith that is the true doctrine of Christ. When we call anyone or anything Orthodox, we by this very fact indicate his or its non-counterfeit and uncorrupted Christianity, rejecting at the same time that which falsely appropriates the name of Christ.