



November 29, 2009
25TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
FEAST OF THE HOLY APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST MATTHEW

RESURRECTIONAL TROPARION - TONE EIGHT:

You did descend from on high, O Merciful One! You did accept the three day burial to free us from our sufferings! O Lord, our Life and Resurrection: Glory to You!

ST. MATTHEW TROPARION – TONE THREE:

With zeal, you followed Christ the Master, who in His goodness appeared on earth to mankind. Summoning you from the custom house, He revealed you as a chosen apostle: the proclaimer of the Gospel to the whole world! Therefore, divinely eloquent Matthew, we honor your precious memory! Entreat merciful God that He may grant our souls remission of transgressions.

RESURRECTIONAL KONTAKION - TONE EIGHT:

By rising from the tomb You did raise the dead and resurrect Adam. Eve exults in Your Resurrection, and the world celebrates Your Rising from the dead, O greatly Merciful One!

ST. MATTHEW KONTAKION – TONE FOUR:

Casting aside the bonds of the custom house for the yoke of justice, you were revealed as an excellent merchant, rich in wisdom from on high. You proclaimed the word of truth and roused the souls of the slothful by writing of the hour of judgment.

HYMN TO THE MOTHER OF GOD – TONE SIX:

Steadfast Protectress of Christians and constant advocate before the Creator, do not despise the cry of us sinners; but in your goodness come speedily to help us who call on you in faith. Hasten to hear our petition and to intercede for us, O Theotokos, for you always protect those who honor you!



EPISTLE & COMMENTARY

THE PROKIMENON IN THE 8TH TONE:

Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God!

And in the same tone:

Their proclamation has gone out into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the universe!

EPHESIANS 4: 1-6

Brethren, I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

I CORINTHIANS 4: 9-16

(for the Apostle and Evangelist Matthew)

Brethren, for I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things until now. I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

THE ALLELUIA VERSES:

- 1) *Come let us rejoice in the Lord! Let us make a joyful noise to God our Savior!*
- 2) *The heavens shall confess Your wonders, O Lord, and Your truth in the congregation of Your saints.*

COMMENTARY on I CORINTHIANS 4: 9-16,

by His Grace, Maxim, Bishop of the Western American Diocese

The Lord, as the Incarnated Love of God, did nothing else apart from taking upon Himself our Death. The life, that God gives us in Christ, is the life which passes from the death of Christ Himself; it is not an easy life and cannot be gained without the experience of death. That is why St Paul writes these moving words referring them to the Apostles, and through the Apostles the Church transfers them to her Saints, to her Martyrs, and to her Ascetics. This is because they, exactly like Christ, took upon themselves the death of others so that the others might live. This is a reality that applies to all, especially those who gave the gift of

a spiritual father. Spiritual fathers want to give life, life everlasting to others, and they die daily. If they do not die, everlasting life cannot be born in their spiritual children. The Lord says that if the grain of the wheat does not fall to the earth it dies, it cannot bring the fruit. However, when it falls to the earth and dies, then the fruit that it brings is hundredfold.

Let us at least make ourselves grateful, at least glorify God, at least acknowledge Him, to admit that we exist because others sacrifice themselves, as was first the Lord Himself; to admit that whatever true life we have and are able to receive is owed to the death of others. And, as far as possible, we ourselves can do the same for others by mortifying ourselves, our selfishness and all the passions that result from this. By cultivating love inside us, we are ready (at least to some degree) to die so that others can live.

GOSPEL & COMMENTARY

LUKE 10: 25-37

At that time, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Jesus, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind', and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus answered and said, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

MATTHEW 9: 9-13 (for the Apostle and Evangelist Matthew)

At that time, as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. "But

go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

COMMENTARY on LUKE 10: 25-37

This famous pericope of the Good Samaritan is commonly read only as how we are supposed to care for our neighbor. While this is true, as Christ Himself implores the lawyer to go and do likewise, this parable says more about the mission of Jesus Christ as the Son of God than how we are to treat one another.

Reading this parable as teaching about the nature of the Son of God, one can easily see that the Priest and the Levite, remnants of the Old Covenant, do not possess the Power of God necessary to heal the man. Reinforcing this point rhetorically, Christ describes these characters as "going down that road." If one is familiar with the geography of the roads between Jerusalem and Jericho, to go down the road implies that they were going away from the Temple of Jerusalem. Thus, they had already finished their "work" at the Temple and would not have had to worry about the laws regarding blood. There was plenty of time to go through the rites of purification necessary for cleansing oneself after coming into contact with blood. Essentially, they should have had time to help someone in need. Yet, they could not.

Also one hears that the man was "going down" that road, away from Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the Scriptural representation of the habitation of God. Turning away from Jerusalem is turning away from God: the essence of sin. One can easily infer that the man was going down the road of sin. Thus, the wounds are not only physical, but spiritual, making the law irrelevant. Only God can forgive sins.

The Samaritan, the outcast, the despised one of the tale, is Jesus Christ. He is the one with the power to heal the man with both physical and spiritual wounds. He sacramentally pours oil and wine on the wounds. Both heal physically and spiritually. Oil softens tissue, protects against infection, and is used in the spiritual regeneration of Holy Unction; wine disinfects, helps to ease pain, and, as the Blood of Christ, the Son of God, has the power to heal spiritually in the forgiveness of the man's transgressions.

The only way to truly "go and do likewise" is to participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and become like Christ through communion with Him. Thus, Christ's entreaty is truly to deny the self, take up your cross, and follow Him.

SPIRITUAL ARTICLES

From *The Prologue* for Nov. 16/Nov. 29 by St. Nikolai Velimirovic:

The Holy Apostle Matthew the Evangelist

Matthew, son of Alphaeus, was a tax collector when the Lord saw him in Capernaum and said: Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him (Matthew 9:9). After that, Matthew prepared a reception for the Lord in his home and thus provided the occasion for the Lord to express several great truths about His coming to earth. After receiving the Holy Spirit, Matthew preached the Gospel to the Parthians, Medes and Ethiopians. In Ethiopia he appointed his follower Plato as bishop, and withdrew to prayerful solitude on a mountain, where the Lord appeared to him. Matthew baptized the wife and the son of the prince of Ethiopia, at which the prince became greatly enraged and dispatched a guard to bring

Matthew to him for trial. The soldiers returned to the prince saying that they had heard Matthew's voice, but could not see him with their eyes. The prince then sent a second guard. When this guard approached the apostle, he shone with a heavenly light so powerful that the soldiers could not look at him; filled with fear, they threw down their weapons and returned. The prince then went himself. Matthew radiated such light that the prince was instantly blinded. However, the holy apostle had a compassionate heart; he prayed to God, and the prince was given back his sight. Unfortunately, he saw only with physical eyes and not spiritual eyes. He arrested Matthew and subjected him to cruel tortures. Twice, a large fire was lighted on his chest, but the power of God preserved him alive and unharmed. Then the apostle prayed to God and gave up his spirit. The prince commanded that the martyr's body be placed in a lead coffin and thrown into the sea. The saint appeared to Bishop Plato and told him where the coffin bearing his body could be found. The bishop retrieved the coffin with Matthew's body from the sea. Witnessing this new miracle, the prince was baptized and received the name Matthew. After that, the prince left all the vanity of the world and became a presbyter and served the Church in a God-pleasing way. When Plato died, the Apostle Matthew appeared to the presbyter Matthew and counseled him to accept the episcopacy. He accepted the bishopric and, for many years, was a good shepherd until the Lord called him to His Immortal Kingdom. St. Matthew the Apostle wrote his Gospel in the Aramaic language. It was soon after translated into Greek and the Greek text has come down to us, while the Aramaic text has been lost. It is said of this evangelist that he never ate meat, but only vegetables and fruit.

The Venerable Sergius of Malopinega

Sergius was a Russian parish priest who lived a God-pleasing life and served for sixty-two years in the province of Vologda. He peacefully entered into rest in the Lord on November 16, 1585, at the age of ninety-two.

HYMN OF PRAISE

The Holy Apostle Matthew the Evangelist
To His Holy Apostle Matthew,
The Lord appeared in the land of the blacks,
Giving great comfort to the tortured warrior,
And great strength to his heroic soul.
The Lord gave him a staff from His hand,
And told Matthew to plant it in front of the church.
He told him that it would grow green with life and blossom with various colors,
And bear sweet fruit for everyone to enjoy.
A spring would flow from beneath its roots—
A spring of cool water for those who thirst.
The face of whomever would partake of it with thanksgiving
Would shine with a wondrous light.
The apostle did as the Lord said,
And the wood budded forth, and was adorned with blossoms,
And living water flowed from its roots,
And the church was filled with a multitude of people.
Whoever was sick, was healed;
Whoever was healthy, became healthier still.
The blacks were blessed, their faces radiant,
And this fierce people became God's vineyard.

O wondrous tree, would that we could have it!
But we do have it, brethren; all of us have it!
It is Christ the Lord, the Lord of Hosts—
He is the Tree of Life; by Him we are saved.

REFLECTION

Does the Lord's command about ceaseless prayer that men ought always to pray (Luke 18:1), apply only to monks or to all Christians in general? If it applied only to monks, the Apostle Paul would not have written to the Christians in Thessalonica to pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17). The Apostle repeats the Lord's command, word for word, and issues it to all Christians without distinction, whether monks or laymen. St. Gregory Palamas lived a life of asceticism for some time as a young hieromonk in a monastery in Beroea. The elder Job, a well-known ascetic whom everyone respected, lived in that monastery. It happened that, in elder Job's presence, St. Gregory quoted the Apostle's words, asserting that ceaseless prayer is the obligation of every Christian and not just for monks. However, elder Job replied that ceaseless prayer is the obligation of the monk only, and not for every Christian. Gregory, as the younger of the two, yielded and withdrew in silence. When Job returned to his cell and stood at prayer, an angel in great heavenly glory appeared to him and said: "O Elder, do not doubt the truthfulness of Gregory's words; he spoke correctly and you should think likewise and pass it on to others." Thus, both the Apostle and the angel confirmed the commandment that all Christians must pray to God without ceasing. Not only without ceasing in church, but also without ceasing in every place and at all times, and especially in your heart. For if God does not for a moment tire of giving us good things, how can we tire of thanking Him for these good things? When He thinks of us without ceasing, why do we not think of Him without ceasing?

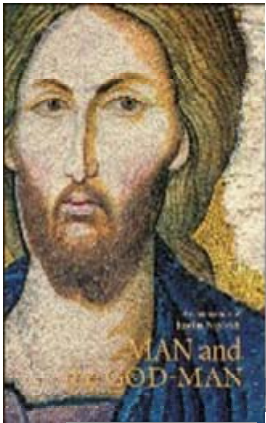
IMPORTANT REMINDERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



2010 Wall Calendar

The Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Western America is pleased to announce the publication of a beautiful, full-color, bilingual (English, Serbian and Greek) Wall Calendar, which has been compiled and designed by Bishop Maxim, and printed in Serbia. This high quality, bilingual (English, Serbian and Greek) Calendar is adorned with striking full-color icons by Fr. Stamatis Skliris, a parish priest in Athens who is renowned as an iconographer and as a writer and lecturer on Byzantine iconography. Highly recommended! 27 pages.

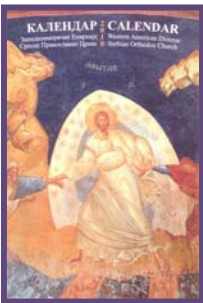
Retail price: \$20.00



MAN AND THE GOD-MAN by Archimandrite Justin Popovic

This newest publication of our Sebastian Press Publishing House is now available for purchase online at: http://www.westsrbdio.org/ads/man_and_the_godman.html

Retail Price: \$20.00



2010 POCKET DIOCESAN CALENDARS NOW AVAILABLE

Be sure to watch for your order in the mail. If you have not already received them, you will shortly! Contact the Diocesan office if you have any questions.

Retail Price: \$5.00

FIRST ANNUAL PAN-ORTHODOX CLERGY RETREAT - December 1-3

All Clergy of our Diocese are invited to participate in the first Annual Pan-Orthodox Retreat to be held at St. Nicholas Ranch in Dunlap, CA. For more information visit: <http://www.westsrbdio.org>

ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY - January 28-30, 2010

Mark Your Calendars

Saint Simeon Serbian Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, Nevada will host the Annual Diocesan Assembly on January 28-30, 2010.

For **Continual Education in Liturgy and Theology**, we recommend the following article: http://www.westsrbdio.org/pdf/Archm.Justin_on_Saint_Issak.pdf

We will offer the article here in sections on a weekly basis; today is the Final Part.

The Theory of Knowledge of Saint Isaac the Syrian

works”.²²⁷ He is woven through with humility and mercy, with repentance and love. He has a heart filled with love for every creature. “What is a merciful heart?” “It is”, St. Isaac replies, “a heart burning with love towards the whole of creation: towards men, birds, animals, demons, and every creature. His eyes overflow with tears at the thought and sight of them. From the great and powerful sorrow that constrains his heart and from his great patience, his heart contracts, and he cannot bear to hear or see the least harm done to or misfortune suffered by creation. Therefore he also prays with tears incessantly for irrational beasts, for opponents of the truth, and for those who do him harm, that they may be preserved and receive mercy. He also prays for the reptiles with great sorrow, a sorrow that is without measure in his heart and which likens him to God”.²²⁸

When, by an evangelical asceticism, someone moves from the temporal to the eternal, when he lives in God and thinks in Him, when he speaks “as of God” (II Cor. 2:17), when he looks on the world *sub specie Christi*, then the world is shown to him in its primordial beauty. With the gaze of a purified heart, he penetrates the crust of sin and sees the divinely made core of creation. The contemplation of the Holy Trinity, essentially mysterious and unknowable, is manifested by the ascetic of faith in this world of transient and limited realities through love and mercy, through meekness and humility, through prayer and toil for each and all, through rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep, through suffering with those who suffer and repenting with the penitent. His life in this world reflects his life in that other world of mysterious and invisible values. His thoughts and acts in this world have their roots in the other world, and it is from the other world that they draw their life-giving and wonder-working strength and power. If one were to trace any one of his thoughts, feelings, acts, or ascetic practices, one would be brought to the Holy Trinity as the primary source of them all. All things come to him from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. We have the most beautiful example of this in St. Isaac himself, that great ascetic of the Holy Trinity who, with St.

²²⁷ *Homily* 5, p. 30.

²²⁸ *Homily* 81, p. 306.

Symeon the New Theologian, was able, with the help of grace and ascetic experience, to give us the most convincing justification of the truth of the Triune Godhead and of the Godlike trinity of man's personal being.

Conclusion

St. Isaac's theory of knowledge is dominated by the conviction that the problem of knowledge is fundamentally a religious and ethical problem. From its inception to its infinite fulfillment in grace, knowledge depends on the religious and ethical content and quality of the person, and above all on the religious and ethical culture and development of man's organs of knowledge. One thing is certain: that knowledge, on all levels, depends on man's religious and moral state. The more perfect a man is from the religious and moral standpoint, the more perfect is his knowledge. Man has been made in such a way that knowledge and morality are always balanced within him.

There is no doubt that knowledge progresses through man's virtues and regresses through the passions. Knowledge is like a fabric woven by the virtues on the loom of the human soul. The loom of the soul extends through all the visible and invisible worlds. The virtues are not only powers creating knowledge; they are the principles and source of knowledge. By transforming the virtues into constituent elements of his being through ascetic endeavor, a man advances from knowledge to knowledge. It could even be possible to say that the virtues are the sense organs of knowledge. Advancing from one virtue to another, a man moves from one form of comprehension to another.

From the first virtue, faith, to the last, which is love for all, there extends one unbroken path: asceticism. On this long path a man forms, transforms, and transfigures himself through the grace of his ascetic endeavors. In this way he heals his being from the sicknesses of sin and ignorance, restoring the integrity of his person, unifying and making whole his spirit.

Healed and made whole by the religious and moral power of the virtues, a man gives expression to the purity and integrity of his person particularly through the purity and integrity of his knowledge. According to the evangelical, Orthodox understanding found in St. Isaac the

Syrian, knowledge is an action, an ascesis, of the whole human person, and not of one part of his being—whether it be the intellect, the understanding, the will, the body, or the senses. In every act of knowledge, in every thought, feeling, and desire, the whole man is involved with his entire being.

Healed by the grace of ascetic endeavor, the organs of knowledge bring forth pure and healthy knowledge, the “sound (literally *healthy*) doctrine” of the Apostle (I Tim. 1:10; II Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). At all stages of its development this knowledge is “full of grace”, for it is a product of the working together of man’s voluntary ascesis and God’s grace-filled power. The whole of man shares in it with the whole of God. For this reason St. Isaac speaks continually of the recollection, the “gathering in” of the soul, the mind, and the thoughts, a recollection that is achieved by the practice of the evangelical virtues.

But these virtues differ from those of other religious and philosophical ethics, not only in their content but also in their method. The evangelical virtues have a specific content linking God and man, and their own specific method of working. In His incomparably perfect Divine-human, or “theanthropic”, person the God-man Jesus Christ both showed and proved that this method, this Divine-human way of life, is the only natural and normal way of life and of knowledge. The man who makes this way of faith his own finds in it also a way of knowledge. That which is valid for faith is valid also for the other godly virtues: love, hope, prayer, fasting, meekness, humility, and so forth; for each of these virtues becomes, in the man who lives in Christ, a living, creative force of life and knowledge.

In this theanthropic way of life and knowledge, there is nothing that is unreal, abstract, or hypothetical. Here all is real with an irresistible reality, for all is based on experience. In the person of Christ the God-man, transcendent, divine reality is shown forth and defined in an utterly empirical way. By His Incarnation Christ has given to human flesh the most subtle, the most transcendent, the most perfect reality. This reality has no bounds, for the person of Christ is limitless. It follows that human personality has no bounds, nor has men’s knowledge, for it is said and commanded: “Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). This means that the only bounds of human personality and knowledge are the limitless bounds of God.

The person of Christ the God-man presents in itself the perfect, ideal reality of theanthropic monism: a natural passage from God to man, from the supernatural to the natural, from immortal life to human life. Such a passage is also natural for knowledge when, by the bridge of faith, hope, and love, it passes from man to God, from the natural to the supernatural, from the mortal to the immortal, and from the temporal to the eternal, thus revealing the organic unity of this life and the life to come, of this world and the other, of the natural and the supernatural.

This knowledge is an integral knowledge, for it rises on the wings of the divine and human virtues and passes without hindrance through the barriers of time and space, entering into the eternal. It is of this integral knowledge that St. Isaac is thinking when, in defining knowledge, he says that it is “the perception of eternal life”, and when, defining truth, he calls it “the perception of God”.

That which is true for the virtues is true also for knowledge. As each virtue begets other virtues, and begets knowledge, so each sort of knowledge begets another. One virtue produces another and sustains it, and the same is true of knowledge.

The more a man exercises himself in the virtues, the greater becomes his knowledge of God. The more he knows God, the greater is his asceticism. This is an empirical and pragmatic path. “If any man will do His (God’s) will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God” (John 7:17). In other words: it is by living the truth of Christ that one comes to know its veracity and uniqueness. This is truly an empirical, experimental, and pragmatic path. The knowledge of the truth is not given to the curious, but to those who follow the ascetic way. Knowledge is a fruit on the tree of the virtues, which is the tree of life. Knowledge comes from asceticism. For the true Christian, Orthodox philosophy is in fact the theanthropic ascesis of the intellect and of the whole person. Here, those arresting words of the Savior are especially significant: “Him who hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have” (Luke 8:18).

Looked at in the light of St. Isaac’s theory of knowledge, naive realism is both tragically and lethally simplistic. It can give no real knowledge of the world, for it makes use of sick and corrupt organs of knowledge. By contrast, theanthropic realism gives a real knowledge of the

world and of the truth that lies therein, for it uses organs of knowledge that have been purified, healed, and renewed and can see into the very heart of all that is created.

Rationalism considers the understanding to be an infallible organ of knowledge. Therefore, in relationship with the whole human person, it appears as an anarchic apostate. It is like a branch that has cut itself off from the vine, which can have no full life or creative reality on its own. It is in no state to come to a knowledge of the truth, for in its egocentric isolation it is divided, scattered, and full of gaps. Truth, by contrast, is given to an intellect that has been purified, enlightened, transfigured and deified by the action of the virtues.

Philosophical criticism is almost exclusively occupied with the study of the organs of knowledge in their psychic and physical state as given in the merely human realm. To this it adds the study of the categories and conditions which are the premises of knowledge. But it pays no attention to the need for the healing and purification of the organs of knowledge. Therefore philosophical criticism cannot by itself come to a knowledge of the truth, for it is nothing more than a cautious rationalism and sensualism.

Philosophical idealism is based on transcendental realities and criteria, but is in no state to prove their existence. Founded on transcendental ideas, it is nevertheless unable to attain to the knowledge of the truth so necessary to human nature or to quench, even in part, the thirst for eternal truth and enduring realities.

All that these various *epistemological* systems are unable to give to man is given by Orthodox philosophy with its grace-filled, ascetic theory of knowledge. Here, eternal Truth Himself stands before human knowledge in the fullness of His infinite perfection, giving Himself to enlightened and grace-endowed man. For it is in the person of Christ the God-man that transcendental, divine truth comes to man. In Him

virtues, make the Lord Jesus Christ the soul of his soul, the heart of his heart, and the life of his life.