

Sunday of Orthodoxy

By BISHOP JOHN OF AMORION

Today, from the smallest Orthodox chapel in Alaska to the Ecumenical throne of Constantinople, the triumphs of Orthodoxy are being extolled!



What are some of these triumphant events in the life of the Holy Orthodox Church?

At the outset, it is the triumph of Orthodoxy against the persecutions of Christians during the first four centuries! It is the triumph of Orthodoxy over the heresies of the first eight centuries which plagued the Christian Church! It is the triumph of Orthodoxy over the iconoclasts who prohibited the veneration of holy icons! It is the triumph of the Orthodox Church over the 400 years of Ottoman rule of Orthodox nations!

To these triumphs of the Orthodox Church the pages of history acknowledge and pay tribute. These triumphs are not mere rhetorical expressions. History bears witness to the persecutions of Christians by the Roman emperors. Ten in all were these persecutions, but they failed. As a result of these persecutions, Christianity was made known to every common man of the Roman Empire. As a result of the persecutions, sympathy resulted for the cause of Christianity. As a result, the number of Christians was increased a hundredfold.

Also, history testifies that Orthodox Christianity triumphed not only over its external enemies, but also against her internal enemies – the heretics. The heresies of Arias, Nestorios, and iconoclasm, among a few. How did Orthodoxy deal with these internal enemies of the Orthodox Church? Through the convening of Ecumenical Councils, the Orthodox Church triumphed once again, beginning with the first in 325 A.D. and the seventh in 787 A.D. – both held in the city of Nicaea, Asia Minor.

The last heresy that plagued the Christian Church was that of iconoclasm, meaning that icons were not to be venerated. So much so, that in 726, the Byzantine Emperor Leo the Isaurian issued an edict ordering that icons be removed from all the churches and homes. It was the seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 that upheld the use of icons and their veneration, as well as that of the Holy Bible, Cross, relics, etc. In the case of icons, the veneration paid to the image depicted in the icon passes to its prototype, that is, to the person depicted on the icon.

Thus, on this Sunday of Orthodoxy, which was first established on March 11, 843, at the convening of the Local Council of Constantinople by the Byzantine Empress Theodora, the widowed wife of the last iconoclastic Emperor Theophilos of Amorion, we are invited to rejoice in the glorious triumphs of the Holy Orthodox Church as recorded in the annals of history.

Let us rededicated ourselves to perpetuating the teachings and traditions of the Orthodox faith by living our Orthodox faith with conviction and not be merely nominal Orthodox Christians.

Let us accept the challenge of today’s commemorative observance of Orthodox Sunday by propagating our Holy Orthodox faith in this great nation of ours by truly being witnesses of our Orthodox legacy and declaring to all “Come and see” (John 1:47).

Bishop John of Amorion is a retired bishop of Atlanta. He lives in Tucker, Ga.

Bishop John’s latest book



Glory to God: Personal Reflections of Bishop John Amorion: Volume 6: Journeys, Homilies and Reflections, Eastern Christian Publications, 2010.

Editor’s Note: The following letter was written by Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain congratulating retired Bishop John of Amorion on the publication of the most recent volume of his collected writings, “Glory to God.”

Dear Brother in Christ, I was delighted to receive your most recent publication, “Glory to God,” containing personal reflections, accounts of your travels and addresses that you have given. I notice that it is the sixth volume of your collected works.

While many of your articles in the first part of the book are of a more personal nature, the first item (an overview of the efforts being made for Church unity) is of considerable significance in that it refers to a number of events that are not particularly well known. Of especial interest is the reproduction of the photography of the Roman Pope, Paul VI, kissing the feet of the late Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, since the photography of this event that is normally depicted (and which was used by the Vatican City’s post office for one of its stamps) is that of their embrace.

The references to your journeys to the site of the see from which you take your title, and to the details of the excavations, the finds and the resulting understanding of life in Amorion, make for extremely interesting reading.

Your reference to the problems being faced by those in the United States who wish to put Christ back in Christmas is one that is being faced here as well. ...

Congratulations on your erudition and on your wise thoughts about so many of the problems facing us today. ...

+ Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateir

DIVINE GRACE PART VIII

Shadow and Reality

Parents should shower grace, not praise, on their children

To be on the spiritual path means seeking the Lord in your heart, through fulfilling the commandments.

To try to discover the meaning of the commandments through study and reading, without actually living in accordance with them, is like mistaking the shadow of something for its reality.

– St Gregory of Sinai

Trust in God gives perfect security.

– Geronta Porphyrios

By SR. JOANNA

A teenage boy lay mortally ill in an Athens hospital, as acute peritonitis from a ruptured appendix progressed into septic shock. His father, a University of Athens medical professor, and mother, a well-known contract attorney, had nowhere left to turn, when the telephone rang.

“Don’t worry – we’re going to save him!”declared the famous Geronta Porphyrios, and hung up. The mother says the teen’s miraculous recovery perceptibly began in that moment.

The charismatic Geronta Porphyrios was only 12 years old when irrepressible zeal led him to secretly abandon the world to become a monk on Mount Athos.

While yet a teenager, astonishing gifts of divine grace resulted from an ecstatic experience in church very early one morning. Suddenly he could discern others’ thoughts, watch events unfolding in other places – and other times – and see into the depths of the earth.

Ordained at age 20 as a member of St. Catherine’s Monastery brotherhood by Archbishop of Sinai Porphyrios III, the young priestmonk quickly became recognized as a pnevmatoforos (spirit-bearing) confessor – one who can discern the will of God in any situation.

Enamored of nightingales’ arias in remotest wildernesses, he abandoned himself to the love of Christ by taking a posting, on the eve of Nazi occupation, to Athens’ frenetic city center. For the next 35 years the elder served as chaplain of Omonoia Square’s Polyclinic Hospital.

Lacking even a first grade education, he almost didn’t get the job, even though he casually engaged astrophysicists and other experts in technical scientific discussion.

Physicians sought refuge in his help, for Geronta Porphyrios would supply an elusive diagnosis, and the proper course of treatment, in medical terminology. He was not known to make a mistake.

Even after he finally withdrew to calmer surroundings and was overcome by illnesses, pilgrims ceaselessly streamed to the light of his divine inspiration.

“Most advice and criticism does children a great deal of harm,” he counseled parents, stressing that over-protection, pressure and constant praise cause them to become lethargic and egotistical and, eventually, to rebel.

Even when parents’ goal is something virtuous, like persuading children to go to church, he said, such efforts ultimately fail.

“It is not sufficient for parents to be devout. They mustn’t oppress children to make them good by force. ... We may repel our children from Christ when we pursue the things of our religion with egotism.”

“What does your child see in you?” he asked parents. “How do you live, and what do you radiate? Does Christ radiate in you? That is what is transmitted to your child. This is where the secret lies.”

“The more you love your children with human love,



Photo by Bruce M. White Photography

Holiness will shower grace on children when parents struggle to live in the joy of Christ, said Geronta Porphyrios. Above, the evocative Sinai icon of Panagia Pelagionitissa dates from the 15th century.

As St. Catherine’s elected Dikaiois, Geronta Pavlos has been responsible for the spiritual life of the monastery for four decades. He represents the Archbishop during his frequent unavoidable absences, and oversees the daily worship services and large monastery garden. The hesychast geronta, devoted to ceaseless “prayer of the heart,” also responds to the spiritual needs of countless Orthodox pilgrims, both within the monastery and throughout Greece and Cyprus. His insightful spiritual guidance is in constant demand.



Sr. Joanna has been associated with St. Catherine’s Monastery since 1990 through its dependent monasteries in Greece and Sinai, most recently the historic Red Sea hermitage of Hamman Mousa (Springs of Moses), where the Hebrew people camped during the Exodus after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea.

which is often pathological, the more ... their behavior will be negative. But when the love between you and your children is holy and Christian love, then you will have no problem.”

Therefore, ardently pray for children then advise. “Better yet, pray instead of speak. Words hammer at the ears but prayer goes to the heart.” When necessary though, tell a child the truth, without fear of imposing on his will.

And, rather than constantly praising them, teach children to trust in God, by encouraging them to pray for His help in developing their God-given talents.

“Praise makes a person hollow and expels the grace of God. ... The great secret for children’s progress is humility.”

Cutting to the heart of America’s perennial moral crisis over which kind of parental “human love” leads to successful adulthood – promoting academic supremacy, free-spirited childhood, or “something in-between” – Geronta Porphyrios again supplies the “elusive diagnosis,” with the illuminating clarityof the God-bearing Orthodox fathers.

Expressing Christian instead of human love, “raise your children to be Christians, not maladjusted egotists.” Then they will achieve not only “success” but the happiness it was supposed to bring.

“The child who trusts in God has perfect security.”

Geronta, Fr. Porphyrios stresses that if you pressure

children with a lot of advice, they will rebel.

Look, these things depend on love. By showing love we win the child’s trust, so that he will pay attention to what we say. If love exists, the other feels it and listens to you.

“A child feels the spiritual caress of its mother’s prayer in the depths of its soul, and is drawn to her,” he says.

But we have to be careful about the meaning of “pressure” For instance, if you say with the spirit of love, “Come, my child, it’s time for church, which is a good thing for you” – is that pressure? But if you say, “If you don’t go to church you won’t eat today”... that would be shameful.

The point is for children to understand that their parents are speaking from love, not willfulness.

What’s best is to engage the child’s personal sense of honor (filotimo) so that he comes to feel, “I want to do this on my own, not because my mother says to.”

Therefore, children need to see in us the consequences of the life in Christ. And they need to see that we ourselves are the first to act on what we say, that we get up early to go to church.

Geronta Porphyrios says knowing how to behave toward children is an art.

It’s not just what you will say, but how you will say it – a difficult thing.

Through our love, God will reveal what we should do in

any situation. What matters is that our motivation is love rather than egotism. ...

“Spiritual love” rather than “human”. ... Could you explain this further?

A love often exists which is not pure love in Christ. With this pathological love, when the child demands something which is not in accordance with the will of God, you will give in to him, you will grant all his desires in order to not upset him.

Whereas with true, authentic love, you will upset him, for his good, to avoid his being harmed by sin.

You set “the will of God” as a safety zone, whereas our society typically considers “the good of the child” with reference only to the latest theories.

Today some parents consider it a kindness to leave their children home from church on the premise “they are tired” but it is not a kindness.

Back in the villages, nothing was known about “pedagogy.” Once the bell rang for church, immediately our parents said, “Get up to go to church!” Self-rule didn’t exist.

But isn’t that what Geronta Porphyrios said is wrong?

A little force is necessary, not a lot – just to the point where it’s helpful. But not to insist beyond that.

Why do many young people not come to church today?

Often because they were not accustomed to as little children.

St. John Chrysostom says children’s souls are soft like wax, and retain the impressions of good teachings like wax retains the impression of a seal after it hardens. ...

Yes, but it’s not only that. Sometimes they were taken to church but stopped going on their own.

Sometimes a person falls into some sin, and afterwards when his conscience bothers him, he thinks, “What’s the point in going to church since I’ve fallen into sin? Am I going to mock God?” This is wrong, but it often happens.

What would you say to this person?

That God doesn’t reject us. That we ourselves may leave His side, but on His part He accepts us. He doesn’t cast us out – it’s enough for us to approach Him.

Inflating a child’s ego with indiscriminate praise leads him away from God though, since trusting only in himself he loses his respect for God, parents and everyone, according to Geronta Porphyrios. What is “indiscriminate” praise?

We won’t tell the child, “How great, how smart you are!” But we can encourage him by saying, “You did well. God helped you; with the strength of God you accomplished it.” A person needs to hear a “well done!”

“We’ve made all the mistakes,” ruefully says a mother of teens, “what do we do now?”

Correct them with repentance: “Forgive me, my God, I made a mistake.”

And the child who has taken the wrong road?

The same thing for the mother applies to the child. Freedom – to set out on the spiritual path, to commit ourselves and our children to the love of Christ – is never lost.

(Geronta Porphyrios’ verbal counsels “On the upbringing of children”, have been published in English under the title “Wounded by Love.”)

DIVINE GRACE PART IX

Serving the Mystery of Life: Parenting without anxiety

The degree of negligence or diligence with which a man tries to attain to Christ's stature reveals what stage he has reached ... whether he is in his spiritual infancy or has achieved maturity.

— St Gregory of Sinai

“Don’t you mothers know your children are not your own? They belong to God!” With unusual intensity, the spiritual father tried to win yet another over-anxious young mother back to her more tranquil senses.

Twenty years later the mother, architect Sevasmia Kyriakides, reveals, “I have never forgotten those words of Fr. Pavlos, and still work every day to apply them.

“How true,” she adds, “the child is only entrusted to you because somebody must care for it, but it isn’t yours! It isn’t enough just to raise the child. Your constant goal must be to raise it as a child of God. This is the ideal you must serve.”

“But, most mothers, what do we say? ‘Be a good person, work hard, make a lot of money, start a family. ...’ We never say ‘Become a person of God in order to find the essence of life.’”

“When the child is little you can guide it by the hand. But when it grows up, and you see that no matter what you do it will leave far from you and your influence ... this is the greatest difficulty, because we Greek mothers don’t want to let go.”

The renowned Geronta Porphyrios agreed: “Mothers know how to express anxiety, offer advice and talk incessantly, but they haven’t learned to pray. ... Prayer is required, with faith, and without anxiety – along with a good example.”

Greek motherhood without anxiety – on which earth?

“Not only is anxiety wrong, it doesn’t bring good results,” states Geronta Pavlos of St. Catherine’s Monastery at Mount Sinai in Egypt.

What is the secret ingredient that impels faith beyond the gravitational forces of earthly stress?

It is more than just resolute conviction, says St. Neilos of Sinai. The mark-



Bless the Lord, all his angels... his servants, who do His will. The 13th century Sinai icon of Archangel Michael seems to express the words of St. Philotheos of Sinai: “Let us unhesitatingly trust in Him, and in what He says; and let us wait daily on His providence towards us.”

er of genuine faith is *patient trust in God’s help.*

What could better explain the following words of Geronta Porphyrios: “With faith, anxiety dissolves. What is it that we say? We commend our whole life to Christ our God.”

The holy angels pray for us, says St. Neilos, when we truly pray, bringing us great assurance – provided that we do not negligently turn to wrong thoughts – *most* inappropriately, he adds – “just when the angels are toiling on our behalf!”

“Christ inclines His head toward the patient soul” who is confidently awaiting His help, “and the calm soul becomes the dwelling of the Holy Trinity.”

After all, spiritual maturity is not achieved by having attained to the stature of Christ – but simply by trying to.

Ultimately, parents’ struggle to follow the saints’ counsel which works towards their own sanctification – the greatest help of all to their children, according to Geronta Porphyrios.

On the same page with psychologists who warn there is no way – humanly speaking – to protect even the best

adjusted children from harmful peer pressure, the elder says neither good advice, coercion, logical arguments nor threats help children with their inner problems.

However, Geronta Porphyrios is writing a much different book. ... “The sanctity of the parents releases children from their problems. Children want to have saintly people by their side ... who will pray for them.”

“Say, *Lord Jesus Christ, give Your light to my children. ... You gave them to me, but I am weak and unable to guide them, so, please, enlighten them.* And God will speak to them. ... Fervent prayer releases the child from whatever is oppressing it.”

Geronta, how do children belong to God?

Doesn’t God determine life? He wants a woman to have a child, for a boy or girl to be born, and gives this. The woman who becomes a mother serves this mystery which is called life. But God directs it, as the ruler and source of life.

Having brought the child into the world, she wants it to be healthy, handsome, intelligent. ... But often God allows that the child is not well. This is a great trial, especially for the mother.

Instead of agonizing, she should pray for the child, remembering that God knows best. In order to preserve the precious peace of one’s soul, wise saints say, “When things don’t come as we want them, let us want them as they come.”

A child was asleep in a boat, when the waves became rough and dangerous. Alarmed, the others woke him. “Get up and pray, we’re being lost!” And the child answered, “At the helm is my father. ...”

With that spirit – that God knows what He allows for our good – we also should accept whatever comes.

What is the best way to protect children from negative outside influences?

The child’s best protection is our own example of the Christian life. The strongest influence on the child is the one he receives at home. We adults

must not give a wrong example of the life in Christ.

A father says to his child, “Be careful, don’t learn to smoke because it’s bad for soul and body – and he himself smokes! This kind of teaching is not going to have any result.

Whereas, when the child sees that our words have consequence in our own personal life, we will see a good result. So, first we must give the example of our own life to our children ... without unfair expectations, however. We adults often make the great mistake, when we hear the children have done something wrong, of becoming very angry – forgetting we did worse things at their age! Overlooking this, we demand of them to be angels.

No matter what they do, we must stand by them with authentic Christian love. When necessary and they are receptive, we counsel them. And we pray for them.

God will not abandon the child – at the appropriate moment He will help it.

Does one have to be a saint for his prayer to really make a difference?

When the soothsayer Balaam was on his way to curse the Israelites, in the Old Testament, God had a donkey speak in order to stop him. Having used words from the mouth of a donkey to accomplish His purpose, God doesn’t ask us to be saints in order to pray – it’s enough that we pray from our hearts. Naturally, he who prays from a pure heart is heard more.

Children are much pressured by school and activities ...

Those things are external. Peace of soul is an interior situation that we experience within ourselves. Nobody can enter inside our soul unless we open the door to him.

Children should try to learn without letting anxiety and hopelessness take hold of them from fears of the future – it’s not the end of the world if you don’t achieve the highest level, the best job ...

If God doesn’t allow you to be accepted to the college of your choice, the one that does admit you, accept it as

given to you by God.

What goal do you recommend to young people?

To try to get an education, because that is a provision in today’s world.

But education must be in God, focusing on the soul as well as the mind, because developing the mind without the soul is worthless, even if one should be a university professor.

“Education of the mind and cultivation of the soul” work together, to help us know God, says St. John Chrysostom. But how is the soul cultivated?

By living honorably with God, fulfilling His commandments. By believing, attending church, and being honest and righteous in one’s life – by seeking to have our entire life in harmony with the will of God.

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Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!



Detail of an icon of the Passion and Resurrection by a 17th century iconographer, which was discovered on the island of Patmos in 2004.

Holy Pascha 2011

My Beloved Christians,

Pascha is a feast for our hearts, a celebration for our souls. Today, repentance is embraced with grace and forgiveness. Hope overcomes despair and heavenly joy replaces grief.

May your souls, hearts, and minds be filled with peace and love, and may our joy in Christ and His Resurrection be a true witness of the new life we have in Him.

I offer to you and your families my deepest wishes and blessings with paternal love in the Risen Lord,

† **DEMETRIOS**
Archbishop of America



GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA