

# Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

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## The Fifteen Sunday after Pentecost (09.17.2023.)

### Matthew 22:35-46

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions. **(KJV)**

Jesus is very clear in the present Gospel about loving God with all the heart, mind and soul. The believer is dedicated to the Lord fully at Baptism. The remaining days of earthly life are to be lived in God-pleasing ways.

God knows the contents of the heart mind and soul. If love of God fills the heart, mind and soul, this love will be evident in daily relationships and actions.

The fruits of a person's life will reveal the extent God is loved.

God's Holy Church nourishes the believer's love of God. The Church guides the believer through the journey of life from the Baptismal font to departure from his life.

Developing and maintaining full of love God requires making conscious decisions. The heart, mind and soul must value and seek God for the believer to love God completely.

Love of God is inseparable with love of neighbor. The First Epistle of St. John States: "And this commandment have we from him, That he who **loveth** God **love** his **brother** also. " (I John 4:21)

Honest self-examination will reveal if we love God completely with our heart, mind and soul. A similar self-examination will determine the degree we love the people that are part of our daily lives.

The effort we put forth in life to grow in Christ can lead to an increase in love of God and in love of neighbor. Seeking to grow in Christ and to have greater love in our heart, mind and soul requires significant effort.

A willingness to make conscious decisions to follow Christ's teachings is necessary to grow in love for Christ and for the people in our daily lives. Opening our heart, mind and soul for Christ to fully enter and be welcomed is necessary.

Recognizing personal sinfulness and a willingness to repent facilitates growth in Christ. Being open and acknowledging Christ's love fosters love for Christ and love for others.

Being fervent in Christ in prayer will bring change in the way daily life is lived. Seeking Christ's help in daily relationships to improve will bring eventual progress.

Today's Gospel originates from the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel has lasting value. The degree that the Gospel leads to change in each believer's life is determined by the personal action taken.

Believers desiring to grow in Christ will pray for an increase in love for God in the heart, mind and soul. Believers wanting to please God will pray fervently for God's help in improving daily personal relationships.

Life's journey is relatively long. Living to seventy or eighty years is mentioned in the Psalms. (Ps 89/90:10) Growth in Christ throughout life is expected. Maturing in Christ is an expectation for believers.

The Church provides the environment for continuous learning and growth. The Church provides the opportunity for complete unity with Christ and neighbor. God's help is necessary for the growth. God is always present to provide the help.

The journey from the Baptismal font to departure from this life is intended to occur in and with the Church. Believers do not journey alone. Believers benefit from the prayers and participation of others in the Church.

Believers' prayers are intended to benefit others as well as the self. Unity with Christ and with others in Christian love is expected. Looking to God for direction in prayer will reveal the paths to follow and the decisions to make.

Life unfolds at each moment. God is ever-present to help the believer to understand the unfolding and to guide the believer. Constant prayer keeps the believer united with the Lord God and is reassuring.

God's presence is verifiable throughout the day for believers with eyes to see. God's presence is encouraging to believers to go forward in hope when life is difficult.

The Church brings the Gospel to believers throughout the year and throughout life until the glorious Second Coming. God does not leave believers alone. God is with each believer throughout life.

God is present and offers eternal life. The way daily life is lived determines the outcome when earthly life comes to an end. Love of God and love of neighbor opens the door for life eternal.

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**The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost. Holy Hieromartyr Babylas. Prophet Moses.  
Hieromartyr .Peter of Dabar-Bosnia. September 4/17, 2023. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania.  
Father Rodney Torbic**

# PRAYER, TEMPERANCE, AND THE BATTLE AGAINST EVIL

## The Beauty of Virginity, Part 4

### Prayerful appeal to God

St. Gregory the Theologian says of himself:

I seek help everywhere, and everywhere I'm amazed, and I again turn my gaze to Thee, my God, the Lamp of our souls, enlightening pure hearts and making man a partaker of Divinity! Have mercy on me, strengthen me first of all in hope of salvation; fill the fading lamp in my soul with oil that it might shine with a new radiance, and I will enter with it into eternal life. Deliver me from sorrow and lead me into blessed peace, for Thou hast already tamed my heart with sorrows, as a rider tames a wild horse galloping through the thickets. Thou hast tempted me aplenty with sorrow, in punishment for my sins, and with the humiliation of my pride: For often Thy goodness makes us proud and reliant upon ourselves. My afflictions themselves can serve to teach the good and the bad alike how insignificant is our life. But this is a secret hidden in the depths of Thy wisdom; and therefore, whether it is good or evil that serves to instruct us, we must receive it all for good, although we cannot penetrate into the causes of everything that happens to us.

Scripture also points to this: *For it is a token of His great goodness, when wicked doers are not suffered any long time, but forthwith punished* (2 Macc. 6:13), for such suffering serves for their enlightenment, not their destruction.

According to the word of the Lord: *Ask, and it shall be given you* (Mt. 7:7). We must ask for deliverance from evil desires that weigh us down and not doubt in the good providence of the Physician of our souls. He Who heals spiritual ailments doesn't heal you from visible evils so that external healing might not cause you to be infected internally with pride and conceit, condemnation, and contempt for others—so that instead of the cup of salvation you're not given deadly poison.

But being at a loss, you ask: "What remains to be done?" Be patient, pray, and hope in the mercy of God; for we are told to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thess. 5:17); *In your patience possess ye your souls* (Lk. 21:19). And the Prophet David says: *Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and let thy heart be strengthened, and wait on the LORD* (Ps. 26:14). For the eyes of the Lord are turned upon those who await His mercy to protect them. Always have a heart that hungers and thirsts for a righteous life and, according to the word of the Lord, you will be satisfied—you will see God's righteousness (cf. Mt. 5:6).

There will come a time when the Lord will say: "Do you want to be healed?" And you, having a good desire, will say: "I do, Lord!" (cf. Jn. 5:6-7). And the Lord will give you according to your

desire—you will be chaste.<sup>[1]</sup> Only, don't inflame your spiritual wounds, and even more so don't violate your virginity, even if carnal thoughts greatly enfeeble your soul. Remember that those who live according to the flesh cannot please God—they think about the flesh and don't submit to the law of God (Rom. 8:5-8), whereas *he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit* with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17).

### Temperance in food and drink

If you want to enter into the joy of the Lord and live eternally with Him, be zealous to emulate the Apostle Paul who says: *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection* (1 Cor. 9:27). Although abstinence from carnal lust is a difficult virtue, it's still possible, and it gives the one who loves it an inexhaustible source of consolation in God. For if a man wishes to enjoy spiritual benefits, let him try to kill the desires of the sin-loving flesh within himself, to exhaust the external man; and to this end, let him imitate St. Ephraim the Syrian, who says: "I torment that which torments me."

*Every man that striveth for the mastery*, says the Apostle Paul, *is temperate in all things* (1 Cor. 9:25); imitating them, you not only don't eat anything that fattens the body, but neither do you drink water beyond measure, so as not to burden your heart and not separate yourself from the labor of prayer and vigilance. For prayerful vigilance uproots carnal passions, compels us to preserve the purity of virginity, and implants hope and love for God in our hearts. "He who loves God," says St. Maximus the Confessor, "will live the angelic life on Earth in fasting and vigils, in prayerful singing."

### Refraining from evil

An excellent means of adhering to virginity is to point to the vice of sensuality, committed in various ways—not only by copulation with the flesh of another, but also without it. It's not only the soul of such a wicked man that perishes, but his body is also deprived of vigor and strength; he loses his memory and good sense—even his vision and hearing are damaged by such actions, which are an abomination before God and man. Nothing so delights the God-defying spirit as this most painful and grave sin for the soul. And the Spirit of God doesn't depart from anyone so much as from a fornicator and indulger in self-pleasure.

Therefore, it is said: *For into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter; nor dwell in the body that is subject unto sin* (Wis. 1:4). Thus, having lost Divine reason, man becomes like cattle in his senses, falling into many iniquities and the snares of the enemy, like a stupid imbecile, and becomes completely incapable of pleasing God. Scriptures says rightly that neither fornicators nor self-gratifiers will inherit the Kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10).

The Apostle Paul also advises not to associate with fornicators, or with idolaters: We shouldn't even eat with them (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9–11). There's an important reason for this, which can be understood from the following example.

In the Kiev Caves Lavra, around the year 1140, there lived Hieromonk Onesiphor. He had a spiritual son and friend—one monk who appeared to be a faster but in fact lived impurely. But this was hidden from his spiritual father. And then, although healthy, he suddenly died—and no one could draw near to his body because of the stench coming from him. Standing a way off, they

could barely sing the usual hymns over him, and plugging up their noses, they carried and placed him in a cave. Many times a cry was heard, as though someone were being tortured. St. Anthony appeared to Onesiphor and threateningly said: “Why did you put such a vile, iniquitous man here? He has desecrated this holy place.” The next night, Monk Onesiphor again heard: “Immediately throw him out for the dogs to eat; he’s not worthy to be here.” From this you can see how the secret iniquity of the fleshly man is repugnant to God and His saints! Not only the soul, but also the dead body of a fornicator is unbearable for them. And the Apostle Paul says rightly: *Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body* (1 Cor. 6:18).

## Conclusion

We must know that without God’s grace, no one can preserve the purity of virginity; and it’s not given to the negligent: We have to have fervent love for studying God’s wisdom, for eating and drinking in moderation, and for placing labors of vigil and prayer upon the body. Without this, there will inevitably be a battle with the lust of the flesh, being overcome by and falling into sinful impurity. The saints observed that for pride and the condemnation of others, man is allowed to suffer an attack from a thorn in the flesh; and that for the preservation of purity, frequent Confession and Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ are very useful.

*St. Stephan of Fileika*

*Translation by Jesse Dominick*

## Services this Week

- ❖ **Thursday 09.21.2023. - The Nativity of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary - 09:30 AM Divine Liturgy**
- ❖ **16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost - before Exaltation - 09.24.2023. - 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy - The Kolo Srpskih Sestara will be celebrating their Slava, The birth of The Theotokos, with the blessing of the Slavski kolac and zito.**