

The Acquisition of the Kingdom

Christ says to Nicodemus, “*You must be born again (or born from above).*” This is not a reference to an emotional experience of conversion. It is a reference to the Kingdom of God birthed in us through Holy Baptism.

Nicodemus said to Him, “*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?*” Jesus answered, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*” (Jn. 3:4-6)

The Christian life is that which is “born of the Spirit.” The strange paradox that marks the commandments of Christ is a key to this manner of life.

- Forgive your enemies
- Give without expecting in return
- Lose your life rather than save it
- Resist not evil

None of these actions make sense in a Hobbesian world. Instead, we discuss the commandments as though they were ideals too difficult to achieve, but very noble in their sentiment. Hobbesian Christianity has its own commandments:

- Manage your enemies
- Give to those who deserve it
- Be careful with your life, it’s the only one you have
- Resist evil, and where necessary, kill it

It is in the life of obedience to Christ’s commandments, in the fullness of their paradox, that we are thrown into a radical dependence on the Spirit of Peace, the Kingdom of God birthed within us.

Jesus answered and said to him, “*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*” (Jn. 14:23)

Another way to describe this life is continual repentance. To repent does not mean to feel bad and ask for a moral reprieve, a relief from guilt. Repentance is a true change of mind/heart. That change is the rejection of life in a Hobbesian mode and the acceptance of life rooted and grounded in the Kingdom of God. That is the meaning of Christ’s words, “Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”

St. Paul has this in mind when he writes:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom 12:1-2)

In a time when the world is entering ever deeper into its madness, it is difficult for Christians not to be drawn in. The voices calling us to the barricades (on both the Left and the Right) easily describe their cause in Christian terms.

They fail to understand the fundamental nature of their own madness. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, when asked about how the tragedies of the Soviet Union occurred answered simply, “We have forgotten God.” When he was exiled to the West, he observed quietly for several years and then told us, “You have forgotten God.”

This is not a slogan for anyone’s political agenda. It is nothing other than the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. It is inaugurated (already) in the hearts and lives of faithful believers, manifest in the lives of the saints. Thousands of souls around us stand weary and hungry for salvation. Acquire the Spirit of Peace.

<http://orthochristian.com/114136.html>

EXCEPTS FROM THE BOOK, “HIS LIFE IS MINE”

Archimandrite Sophrony

Real prayer, of course, does not come readily. It is no simple matter to preserve inspiration while surrounded by the icy waters of the world that does not pray. Christ cast the Divine Fire on earth, and we pray him so to fire our hearts that we may not be overcome even by cosmic cold, that no black cloud block out the bright flame.

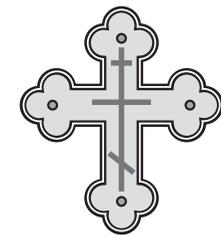
Of all approaches to God prayer is the best and in the last analysis the only means. In the act of prayer the human mind finds its noblest expression. The mental state of the scientist engaged in research, of the artist creating a work of art, of the thinker wrapped up in philosophy— even of professional theologians propounding their doctrines— cannot be compared to that of the man of prayer brought face to face with the living God. Each and every kind of mental activity presents less of a strain than prayer. We may be capable of working for ten or twelve hours on end but a few moments of prayer and we are exhausted.

Prayer can accomplish all things. It is possible for any of us lacking in natural talent to obtain through prayer supernatural gifts. Where we encounter a deficiency of rational knowledge we should do well to remember that prayer, independently of man’s intellectual capacity, can bring a higher form of cognition. There is the province of reflex consciousness, of demonstrative argument; and there is the province where prayer is the passageway to direct contemplation of divine truth.

At first we pray for ourselves; but when God by the Holy Spirit gives us understanding our prayer assumes cosmic proportions. Then, when we pray ‘Our Father’ we think of all mankind, and solicit fullness of grace for all as for ourselves. Hallowed be Thy Name among all peoples. Thy Kingdom come for all peoples that Thy Divine life may become their life. Thy will be done: Thy will alone unites all in love of Thee. Deliver us from evil—from ‘The murderer’ (John 8.44) who, far and wide, sows enmity and death. (According to our Christian interpretation evil—like good— exists only where there is personal form of being. Without this personal form there would be no evil—only determined natural processes.)

SS. Constantine and Elena Orthodox Church

July 8, 2018



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PARISH LIFE

JULY 8, 2018: 6TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: (TONE 5, MATINS GOSPEL 6)

8:40 am Matins

10:00 am Divine Liturgy

WEDNESDAY, JULY 11

(No service or study)

SATURDAY, JULY 14:

6:00 pm Great Vespers – Fr. Silviu Bunta serving
(no confessions this evening)

PRAY FOR THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND OF OUR PARISH:

Victor Cosgarea, Mark Galliher, Jay Hanko, Jan Isham, Alexandra Medard, Zachary Waltz, and Margaret Wey

PRAY FOR OUR CATECHUMENS:

Sophie Cannon and Miriam Fakhoury

LOOKING AHEAD...

Next Sunday's readings (7th Sunday after Pentecost/Fathers of the 4th Council; Tone 6, Matins Gospel 7): Romans 15:1-7, Titus 3:8-15; Matthew 9:27-35, John 17:1-13.

July 12–22

Pilgrimage to the Monastery of All Celtic Saints, Mull, Scotland

July 15–21

St. Johns Summer Camp, Rivervale Campground

July 23–27

Orthodox Church in America 19th All-American Council, St. Louis

Sunday, July 29

1:30 pm Mystery of Holy Baptism for Theo Feller (Lili Peterson's cousin)

August 1–14 Dormition Fast

Sunday, August 5

6:00 pm Vigil for the Transfiguration

Monday, August 6 – The Great Feast of the Transfiguration

8:00 am Divine Liturgy

PILGRIMAGE TO MULL MONASTERY

Fr. David will be leading a group of ten pilgrims to the Monastery of All Celtic Saints on Mull Island off the west coast of Scotland, from July 11 to July 22. We will pray, celebrate the Divine Liturgy and visit ancient monastic sites (including the famous settlement on the Isle of Iona) with Fr. Serafim Aldea, the founder of the Monastery, and hopefully help Fr. Serafim with projects related to the monastery properties.

Anyone interested in learning more about Fr. Seraphim and his work can visit the monastery website at mullmonastery.com (where you may read his



blog), listen to Fr. Serafim's podcast, "Through a Monk's Eyes" on Ancient Faith Radio, or view an informative video on YouTube, "The Return of Ancient Wisdom: Building the Monastery of All Celtic Saints after 1000 years."

Please keep our little band of travelers in your prayers: Fr. David, Mihaela Bennett, Bernadette Chilcote, Buck Hatcher, Sue McDonald, Sbdn. Max, Jackie and Matthias Murphy, Meghan Rockey and Rowan Kelley.

FR. SILVIU BUNTA SERVES NEXT WEEK

While Fr. David is away, on the weekend of June 14-15, Fr. Silviu Bunta has again offered to serve Vespers on Saturday and the services on Sunday. Fr. Silviu is once again willing to be available for confessions on Saturday for those desiring it; however, this is a special opportunity for our older Romanian parishioners to confess in their own language. He requests that these be limited to only those who cannot confess in English whatsoever, and that there be no confessions on Sunday morning. (Please note that he is unable to stay after Vespers.) If anyone is interested in making an appointment with him, please let Dn. Paul know right away (by Tuesday if possible).

VACATION CHURCH SCHOOL OPPORTUNITY

Joy of All Who Sorrow Church is inviting all Orthodox children (ages 4-12) to a one-day Vacation Church School in their hall on Thursday, July 26. Registration starts at 8:45 am followed by third hour morning worship, prayer and a short talk with the parish priest and protodeacon in the nave; the program ends at 3 pm. Participation fee per child is \$15 to cover food, crafts and games.

Classes are divided into two age groups: 4-7 and 8-12. This year's theme is Worship - why, when and how we worship God. The focus will be on prayer and the Divine Liturgy. If you are interested in having your child attend, please email or call Luchie James at luchie.james@att.net 317-494-1555, by July 16.

THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM IN A WORLD AT WAR

Fr. Stephen Freeman

The English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, described the world as composed of autonomous, competing self-interests. We are at war with one another, a reality, he said, that can only be controlled through external force. The state serves as the enforcer of a negotiated peace agreement, a social contract, in which we legitimize its use of force in order not to kill one another. Hobbes himself preferred a strong monarchy. Certain times in our culture feel more "Hobbesian" than others.

In a conversation with a young friend, I was told that "politics is the only way to get anything done." This is not true. Politics (the use of civil power) is a means to gain the upper hand in a Hobbesian struggle. It is war, fought by other means. It is for that reason that politics is a questionable activity for Christians. The victories achieved are often brief, and, depending on the opposition, only maintained by the continued use of force.

It is profoundly the case that civil (or military) force are not the tools of the Kingdom of God. It is among the many reasons why the Kingdom of God is not, and never can be a human project. The Kingdom of God is not a process or a progressive movement within history. The Kingdom exists utterly complete and finished. Indeed, this is the very point of the Kingdom. It is the will of God in its fulfillment, the true righteousness where everything has been (yes, has been) set right.

The Kingdom of God is the End of all things, the fullness of the age to come. What is little understood is that its "coming" should be thought of as its "touching" or "penetrating" our present age. And where that penetration occurs, its reality is made manifest. In Jesus Christ's earthly ministry, the Kingdom of God was personally present. Everything that surrounded Him, His miracles, His teachings, were manifestations of the Kingdom of God.

In the Eucharist, Orthodox Christians hear this:

It was You Who brought us from non-existence into being, and when we had fallen away You raised us up again, and did not cease to do all things until You had brought us up to heaven, and had endowed us with Your kingdom which is to come.

What Christ brought was not a set of ideas to be shared in the Hobbesian conflicts of this world. What He brought was the Kingdom itself and the means for our entrance into that Kingdom and for its life to be manifest in us. It has become commonplace for modern Christians to espouse some ideas based on Christian "moral principles" and to make them the guiding light for political projects, sometimes saying that they are "building up the Kingdom in this world" (or words to that effect).

If they could build the resurrection of the dead, then their words would have meaning. But they cannot. There is nothing in the character of the Kingdom that can be achieved by human efforts. Nothing.

It is this transcendent, eschatological life of the Kingdom into which we are Baptized, and it is its very life that is birthed in us. That new life is nothing less than the life of Jesus Himself. Learning to live from within that new birth of life is the proper nature and character of the Christian life. Christ did not come to reform the world: He came and brought a new world with Him.

When the Christian life is reduced to moral and political principles, it simply becomes one more warring voice within Hobbes' nightmarish description of life. This is true regardless of how noble our intentions might be. This is also deeply frustrating for us. The Christian life as moral and political principle does not require anything more than new opinions. It masquerades as renewal and change when it is nothing more than the same war fought by unbelievers.

St. Seraphim of Sarov famously said, "Acquire the Spirit of Peace and a thousand souls around you will be saved." He could have added that without that acquisition we cannot do anything of note for even a single soul.

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