

Fr. Lawrence Con't

and He responds by forgiving and justifying us (see Luke 18:14). Justification therefore is not a single, once-for-all event. Through God's grace, we live under a continual outpouring of His justification and forgiveness, because we live in a constant state of repentance.

Secondly, we note that this justification and forgiveness is offered to us only on the basis that we forgive others. I suspect this is why the Lord referred to our misdeed as "debts" (Greek *opheilmata*), and not as (for example) transgressions or stains. For what is a transgression (Greek *paraptoma*)? It is going too far, going where you should not. If I put a sign on my lawn saying, "NO TRESPASSING", you walk on the lawn and through my front door, you are transgressing, going where you should not. The proper response to a transgression or a trespass is to back up and get out. You should not have gone where you went—so go away. And what is a stain (Greek *momos*)? A stain is a blemish, a blot. One removes a stain on a piece of clothing by bleaching it out, by intense washing. But a debt is more simply dealt with. If I have a debt of \$100—if I borrow \$100 from you and cannot repay you—the debt may be dealt with by a simple act of forgiveness. You may, if you wish, cancel the debt with a mere word, saying, "I forgive you the debt", so that I no longer owe you anything.

I suspect that this is why the Lord referred to our sins as debts—because He wanted us to forgive the debts that others have incurred with us. If a person sins against us and hurts us, he or she owes us spiritually. We can, if we wish, cancel the debt with a mere word, saying to them from the heart, "I forgive you". And this, the Lord says, is what we must do if we would be forgiven ourselves. There is no way around this; the requirement is absolute.

This is not because God is arbitrary or is playing games with us. It *would* be arbitrary if God made as a requirement for forgiveness that we stand on our heads, for there is nothing about standing on our heads that has anything to do with us being forgiven. It would be arbitrary if God made as a requirement for forgiveness that we paint our faces blue with woad, for the colour of our faces has nothing to do with our being forgiven. But there is everything having to do with our being forgiven in our forgiving others. For if we refuse to forgive others and clench

up our hearts against them, our hearts cannot receive God's forgiveness. A hard and clenched heart is closed, and our hearts must be open in order to receive God's forgiveness. To forgive and to be forgiven involve adopting the same inner posture of the heart.

This requirement is quite revolutionary. The story is told of a foreign missionary family living in an Islamic country. The wife of the missionary was visiting some Muslim women friends of hers, and they were talking about prayer. They asked her to share with them a Christian prayer, and all she could think of at the time was the Lord's Prayer. When she came to the part where it said, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us", they interrupted her, for they could hardly believe that they heard it correctly. "Let me get this straight", they seemed to say, "Are you saying that you believe God will only forgive you if you forgive others?" When she answered affirmatively, they were astounded. "There is nothing like that in Islam", they said. Nor, I might add, in any other place than in Christianity.

This petition for forgiveness reminds us of the constant need to both repent and forgive. God loves us, but He offers salvation and joy on no other basis.

The Patron Saint of What?

By Fr. Steven Kostoff

"He who dwells in peace collects spiritual gifts as it were with a scoop, and he sheds the light of knowledge on others." - St. Seraphim of Sarov

The students in my Christian Mysticism class at XU recently took their mid-term exam. One young woman in the class chose as one of her "identifications" to describe the life and contributions to Orthodox spirituality of St. Seraphim of Sarov. Many of you know of this great Russian Orthodox saint (+1833) and his incredible life and profound experience of God through his life of interior prayer. This young woman is a fine student and her answer was coming along fine until she added: "He is the patron saint of nuclear weapons!" That sentence jumped out at me as not only terribly inaccurate, but as completely incongruous when applied to St. Seraphim. The saint was something of a "pacifist" on the personal level *Con't pg 10*

at least, regardless of any loyalty he may have felt for the tsar. In one well-known incident from his life, he was badly beaten and left for dead in the forest (something like the fate of the good Samaritan in the parable). He was eventually discovered and brought to the monastery for care and recovery. St. Seraphim did recover, but he remained quite stooped over for the remaining years of his life, as he is often depicted in his icons. But the point being made here is that the saint refused to bring any charges against his assailants once they were apprehended. In the spirit of Christian charity, he simply forgave them. St. Seraphim, therefore, chose not to “nuke” the robbers.

Getting back to my student, I wrote in the margins something like: “I have never heard of this before!” But I made sure to ask her about her source for this rather absurd claim, because I had an uneasy feeling about where it may have come from. And sure enough, she told me that when she had - of course - “googled” St. Seraphim in preparation for the exam, she read about his patronage of nuclear weapons on a Wikipedia article about him. A different site she shared with me, a site that claims to keep track of news coming from Eurasia, had the following statement: “The Russian Department of Defense’s 12th Directorate, which is responsible for Russia’s nuclear weapons, has been assigned a patron saint by the Russian Orthodox Church: St. Seraphim of Sarov.” She was therefore simply passing on what she assumed was accurate information from these two sites. So now we have the utterly incoherent claim that this great “mystic,” who was actually transfigured before one of his disciples, is extending his heavenly “blessing” to nuclear bombs or, as we now like to call them, “weapons of mass destruction!” This is unfair to the legacy of the saint, and an embarrassing misappropriation of that legacy for the Orthodox Church or for any Orthodox Christian who would have to explain or apologize for it. According to the Gospel, a saint simply cannot be the “patron” of nuclear weapons! That is not simply a non-Christian attitude; it is an *anti-Christian* attitude.

Yet I have to admit that I am not *that* surprised. It has been some years now, but I distinctly recall a photograph that was circulating on the internet of a Russian bishop sprinkling missiles on a fighter jet with holy water. That was shocking, to say the least.

Within the post-communist Russian Orthodox Church there are definite signs of such an aberration. Key figures within the Church and a sizable portion of the faithful are nostalgically looking back to a “golden age” of the Church’s existence when Church and State were closely bound together in a vision usually described as “holy Russia.” After the horrors of the dreadful and deadly communist regime following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, such nostalgia is understandable. But that “golden age” never really existed in the harsh light of historical analysis. The scholar Dimitri Pospielovsky likened that era actually to a “golden cage.” The pre-revolutionary Russian Orthodox Church lacked any real independence under the Russian monarchy, having its status diminished to a position of compromised passivity dating back to the time of the ecclesiastical reforms of Tsar Peter the Great (who much preferred being called the “emperor”). Nevertheless, after the “gates of hell” were unleashed against the Russian Orthodox Church by Lenin and Stalin, and the militantly atheistic regime of communist totalitarianism, the former Church-State relationship that existed under the Romanov dynasty could only seem like a long-lost era of freedom of religious expression and a status worthy of eventual recovery. However, in both eras under discussion - pre and post communist - the Church suffers from this relationship, as a privileged position vis-a-vis the State comes at a heavy price: that of offering moral support to the State even when that support compromises the integrity and prophetic voice of the Church.

Another way of explaining this is to employ the phrase used by the scholar Fr. Cyril Hovorun from the title of his book *Political Orthodoxies - The Unorthodoxies of the Church Coerced*. As Fr. Cyril writes: “Modern political Orthodoxies can also be presented as ideologies dressed in the robes of theology ... The difference between the two is that for theology the unseen is the uncreated God, while for ideology, the unseen is the world of ideas confined to the human mind.” (p. 7) Only amidst such a confusion between theology and ideology could St. Seraphim of Sarov be designated the “patron of nuclear weapons.” After a book full of dreary case studies wherein this confusion is chronicled within the contemporary Orthodox world, Fr. Cyril offers a clear choice on this issue: “Political Orthodoxies distract the Church from its original Orthodoxy - bringing people *Con't Pg 11*

to God in the straight and unimpeded way. Deconstruction of false Orthodoxies is possible through the reconstruction of Orthodoxy as the apostles and the fathers of the Church taught and lived in it. An alternative to the politicization of the Church is the apostolic and patristic way of believing, behaving, and belonging.” (p. 200-201) It is not that difficult to embrace his conclusion.

It is my modest opinion, shared, I am certain, by many others - including Orthodox believers in Russia and elsewhere - that this poorly-conceived retrieval of the old Byzantine *symphonia* within the context of both a post-communist and postmodern world will not serve the Russian Orthodox Church - or any of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches - well. This lesson could have been learned from pre-revolutionary Russia, for the temptation to restore an idealized “status” to the Church as the moral and spiritual bulwark of the State confuses theology, ideology, nationalism in a way that only obscures the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Martyr Tatiana of Rome, and those who suffered with Her
Commemorated on [January 12](#)

The Holy Virgin Martyr Tatiana was born into an illustrious Roman family, and her father was elected consul three times. He was secretly a Christian and raised his daughter to be devoted to God and the Church. When she reached the age of maturity, Tatiana decided to remain a virgin, betrothing herself to Christ. Disdaining earthly riches, she sought instead the imperishable wealth of Heaven. She was made a deaconess in one of the Roman churches and served God in fasting and prayer, tending the sick and helping the needy.

When Rome was ruled by the sixteen-year-old Alexander Severus (222-235), all power was concentrated in the hands of the regent Ulpian, an evil enemy and persecutor of Christians. Christian blood flowed like water. Tatiana was also arrested, and they brought her into the temple of Apollo to force her to offer sacrifice to the idol. The saint began praying, and suddenly there was an earthquake. The idol was smashed into pieces, and part of the temple collapsed and fell down on the pagan priests and many pagans. The demon inhabiting the idol fled screeching from

that place. Those present saw its shadow flying through the air.

Then they tore holy virgin’s eyes out with hooks, but she bravely endured everything, praying for her tormentors that the Lord would open their spiritual eyes. And the Lord heard the prayer of His servant. The executioners saw four angels encircle the saint and beat her tormentors. A voice was heard from the heavens speaking to the holy virgin. Eight men believed in Christ and fell on their knees before Saint Tatiana, begging them to forgive them their sin against her. For confessing themselves Christians they were tortured and executed, receiving Baptism by blood.

The next day Saint Tatiana was brought before the wicked judge. Seeing her completely healed of all her wounds, they stripped her and beat her, and slashed her body with razors. A wondrous fragrance then filled the air. Then she was stretched out on the ground and beaten for so long that the servants had to be replaced several times. The torturers became exhausted and said that an invisible power was beating them with iron rods. Indeed, the angels warded off the blows directed at her and turned them upon the tormentors, causing nine of them to fall dead. They then threw the saint in prison, where she prayed all night and sang praises to the Lord with the angels.

A new morning began, and they took Saint Tatiana to the tribunal once more. The torturers beheld with astonishment that after such terrible torments she appeared completely healthy and even more radiant and beautiful than before. They began to urge her to offer sacrifice to the goddess Diana. The saint seemed agreeable, and they took her to the heathen temple. Saint Tatiana made the Sign of the Cross and began to pray. Suddenly, there was a crash of deafening thunder, and lightning struck the idol, the sacrificial offerings and the pagan priests.

Once again, the martyr was fiercely tortured. She was hung up and scraped with iron claws, and her breasts were cut off. That night, angels appeared to her in prison and healed her wounds as before. On the following day, they took Saint Tatiana to the circus and loosed a hungry lion on her. The beast did not harm the saint, but meekly licked her feet.

As they were taking the lion back to its cage, it killed one of the torturers. They threw *Con't Pg 12*

PREPARATION FOR THE BLESSING OF HOMES

Before the Priest arrives at your home, here are a few reminders on how to prepare:

- In the main room of the home, usually the kitchen or dining room, have placed on the table a white cloth, a candle and /or an Icon or cross. You may place a small container of Holy Water on the table. (Note: Father will be bringing his own.)
- Make a list of those living in the house including pets and all deceased you want prayed for.
- Turn off all TV's, radios, computers, etc. So as to keep focused on the blessing service.
- Make sure that pets are heeled or restrained so as not to get underfoot while Father goes through the home.
- In some customs, someone (usually a child) takes a candle and leads Father through the house while the rest follow.
- If you have any items to be blessed (Icon, Cross, etc.). Put them on the table where the blessing will take place.
- When the priest arrives, have everyone in the home gather around the table and join in the blessing. PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT.
- Invite friends or neighbors to participate and witness the beauty of this tradition.

NOTE: Remember, the invitation to the priest to come and bless your home is an invitation to ask for the mercy of God upon the household. The sprinkling of the Holy Water is a sign of God's presence in the home as an extension of His Holy House, the Church. It is a time to renew our commitment to God as we begin another year in His mercy and love for mankind.

Tatiana Con't

Tatiana into a fire, but the fire did not harm the martyr. The pagans, thinking that she was a sorceress, cut her hair to take away her magical powers, then locked her up in the temple of Zeus.

On the third day, pagan priests came to the temple intending to offer sacrifice to Zeus. They beheld the idol on the floor, shattered to pieces, and the holy martyr Tatiana joyously praising the Lord Jesus Christ. The judge then condemned the valiant sufferer to be beheaded with a sword. Her father was also executed with her, because he had raised her to love Christ.

BUILDING / RESTORATION FUND

Our 125th Anniversary is coming!

Fund Purpose: To collect funds to pay for the restoration, repair and beautification of the building and parish room. This will avoid using general funds which are earmarked for budgetary items.

Please consider contributing generously to the
Building/Restoration Fund.

Bishop Paul's Travel Schedule

St Gregory of Nyssa, Columbus, OH, January 10th to the 12th

- *Elevation of Fr. Stephen Frase and Fr. Matthew Moriak to Archpriests*
- *Ordination of Sub Deacon Peter Simko to the Diaconate*

St. Makarios Orthodox Mission, Chicago, IL, January 18th to 19th

- *Celebration of Patronal feast day*

Ss. Peter & Paul, Burr Ridge, IL, January 19th, 6 PM

- *Annual Pan Orthodox Sanctity of Life Service*

National Right to Life March, Washington DC, January 23rd to 24th

St. Nicholas Cathedral, Washington DC, January 24th to 25th

- *Consecration of Bishop-elect Alexis Trader to the Episcopacy*

St. George Cathedral, Chicago, IL, January 26th

Preparing Kids for Being Away from Home Part 4/ Mom and Dad can I have the Car or will you buy me one?

Use of the family car marks another area in life involving separation of older children from their parents. The issue of the car can involve many scenarios:

- Using it for an evening out with friends, or to drive to work.
- Taking a trip away from home for an overnight or longer. This may involve out of state travel.
- Older children may want their own car. I wonder if this so because it might be embarrassing to ride the school bus?

All of this assumes an older teen has passed their driving instruction course work and has gotten a license. Each of these scenarios is different and may require different ways for parents to address these issues with their growing children.

Responsible behavior and maturity are important things that need to be considered here.

Maturity is an important factor in all of the above scenarios; but more needs to be expected of a teen when it comes to out of state travel or purchasing their own car. First, I think that the use of the car apart from parents needs to link up with finding part-time work. If teens are going to use the car on a regular basis for going to work or social evenings, they (teens) should cover those expenses. They need to commit to no use of alcohol or drugs when they drive. If the need for a car is not that frequent, perhaps getting a job can be delayed for a short time, but it will need to be addressed.

To be mature and responsible means:

- Being able to take direction.
- Being able to follow the rules.
- Being consistent in the commitment/promises teens make to their parents.
- Being able to take responsibility for one's behavior

As for a teen having their own car, I am not a big fan of parents buying a car for their older kid. It seems pretty simple to me. One gets a job, saves money, and buys a used car. Kids may still be

carried on their parents' auto insurance policy, but the increase premium cost, and car maintenance costs need to be paid by the new car owner. Until then, kids just need to ride the bus to school.

For an older teen to take the car for overnight travel and possibly out of state, they need to demonstrate maturity and responsibility **over time** in how they drive (i.e. obeying the traffic laws with no tickets if possible), and living within the parameters they have worked out with their parents in the use of the car. Finally, an older teen needs to hold down a steady job before they can take the car on an out-of-state trip for a few days. However, if someone has gotten to the point that he or she has bought their own car and is responsible for taking care of it, this would seem to be a good indicator of maturity and an ability to handle a longer, out-of-state trip.

So what happens if or when the above things are not in place? I will pick up on this next week.

Blessed Feast of Theophany to you all!
The unworthy +Paul

January Special Collection

Marblehead, OH Police
Fr. Andrew serves as
Chaplain.



I AM A CHILD IN CHURCH

I do not contemplate theology in silence

I rarely enjoy stillness

I cannot practice total obedience

I am not satisfied only with what's right in front of me

INSTEAD, I LEARN MY FAITH

from copying the clergy's footsteps

from seeing the icons on the other side *again*

from joining the festal shouts, even when there are none

BUT MOST OF ALL

from the affection of my family

and the love and understanding of my parish family

and from the unending forgiveness for my mistakes.

LET ME WORSHIP

with all my senses,

singing and exalting Him above all forever.



An After-Communion Prayer to the All-Holy Theotokos

All-holy Lady Theotokos, light of my darkened soul, my hope, my shelter, my refuge, my consolation and my joy: I thank thee that thou hast accounted me worthy, although unworthy, to be a partaker of the immaculate Body and precious Blood of thy Son. But do thou, who gavest birth to the true Light, enlighten the mental eyes of my heart; O thou who didst bear the fountain of immortality, quicken thou me who lie dead in sin, O compassion-loving Mother of the merciful God, have mercy upon me, and grant me humility and contrition of heart, and meekness in my thoughts, and deliverance from the bondage of my vain imaginings. And account me worthy, even unto my last breath, to receive without condemnation the sanctification of the immaculate Mysteries, unto the healing of both soul and body. And grant unto me tears of repentance and confession, that I may hymn thee and glorify thee all the days of my life: for blessed and glorified art thou unto all ages. Amen.

What does it mean to travel
the road of the Cross of Christ
in your life, for your life?

**CrossRoad is an engaging
10-day summer institute for
Orthodox Christian high
school juniors and seniors of
all jurisdictions**



When: every summer

Where: Hellenic College Holy Cross Campus in Brookline, Massachusetts.

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Deadline: February 1

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Scholarships are available for all participants.

