

THE APOSTLE
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
OCTOBER 2020
SAINT MARK ORTHODOX CHURCH
OF IRVINE

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Pastor's Corner

From Desire to Necessity

Fr. Stephen Freeman

I recently re-watched one of the most eye-opening programs on the 20th century, The Century of the Self (BBC 2002). It looks at the development of advertising, particularly the theories and work of Edward Bernays. You've seen his work, but you didn't know it. He was one of the pioneers of modern advertising as well as modern government propaganda. Particularly in the 1920's, he played a key role in moving America from a need-based economy to desire-based consumerism. One result was a flourishing and growing wealth across the land (except for the collapse in the Great Depression). America moved past the Depression through the efforts of the war economy of the 40's. However, our desires were unleashed again in the post-war world and have never looked back. It was a simple formula: create desire and then fulfill it. The result is "happy people."

Of course, happy people have a difficult time when their desires are

thwarted. It's a hard habit to break. I recall my childhood visits to my mother's family home. Her parents were farmers. They had 12 children, my mother being the 5th in line. All of them grew up doing work on the farm, my mother was among those who picked cotton in the field. Her stories remind me of scenes from *Places in the Heart*. In the Great Depression, flour sacks were intentionally printed with pleasant floral designs, making them excellent material for home-made dresses. Listening to my mother describing flour-sack dresses sounded exotic (as did a Christmas that consisted of a single orange). My grandparents' home was a haven of necessities. I really cannot recall anything superfluous.

The house had five rooms and no indoor plumbing until the mid-60's. It was heated with a single coal-burning stove in the front room. It was peopled, during my visits, with a crowd of happy people (my generation, being the offspring of 12 children, became a large, rowdy crowd of boys and girls). Sunday afternoons seemed to be a time when the larger part of the family would descend on the homestead, food in hand and conversations at the ready. My grandfather sat largely silent, chewing his tobacco, and occasionally entertaining the children with wild stories from his imagination (most involving my grandmother).

The farm was just over 100 acres, with a creek along the back that provided hours of entertainment. At some point after dinner, the men all seemed to gather on the porch to smoke and talk, the women remained inside where laughter constantly interrupted their conversations. Strangely, these people-of-necessity were happy.

Desires, in our modern parlance, were known by the ancients as the "passions." Interestingly, the word for "passion" comes from a root that means to "suffer." These universal experiences of longing, imagination, craving, and the like, were seen as alien to our well-being and afflictions to be moderated and even silenced. In Orthodox tradition, there is a goal, expressed in Greek as "apatheia" ("passionlessness"). Yes, that's our word "apathy." It does not mean "not caring," but being free from the bondage of the ever-nagging sound of desires hounding our lives.

Our consumerist culture is, as is well described in the video referenced above, intentionally designed to nurture the passions. Indeed, it is structured in such a way that the failure of the passions would result in financial ruin. We live in a world that cannot exist unless we are all governed by our passions. To be an Orthodox Christian inevitably sets you on a

collision course with the culture. Everything within our daily lives, indeed, a major portion of our opinions and thoughts are all the result of the reign of our passions. This has become such a dominant force in our lives that it is accurate to say that we imagine our passions to actually constitute our identity. That is a lie.

The popular meme runs, “Follow your passion!” as if we were ever doing anything else. In many cases, this is a mantra that will do little more than offer justification for immoral choices. The successful actress who confessed (with pride) that she had an abortion in order to obtain a particular part in a production has “followed her passion.” Our passions justify nothing. We become like those whose sad excuse for their actions was, “I was just following orders.”

True necessity is not passion, nor is it driven by the passions. We need to eat. We need to be clothed. We need shelter. We need family and friendship. We need work. We need meaning. We need love. We need beauty and transcendence. None of these things are passions, though the passions can easily distort them. The monastic life is, in many ways, a life reduced to necessity. It seems that living within the range of necessity makes it possible to discover the “one thing needful.” It deeply assists, as

well, in discovering the truth of our identity. The soul is not the product of passions, but the image of God. To see the soul clearly, without distortion, is to see the face of God, or, at least, its reflection.

This understanding undergirds all of the Church’s disciplines. We fast, we pray, we give alms, we subdue the “flesh” (meaning the passions) that we might know God. We do not know God simply by being hungry, or tired from prayers, or poor, but we will not know God if we constantly obey our passions and shape our lives by their unnecessary demands. This does not bode well for the faith in our modern context.

Jesus said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

And those who heard it said, “Who then can be saved?”

But He said, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” (Lk 18:24-27)

This, strangely, is good news. What feels like necessity in our lives might very well be little more than a passion. And, if it is a passion, we can be free

of it. If God sets us free from such things – then we will be free, indeed.

Start slow. Be generous. Share your stuff. Take joy in the satisfaction of a true need and make it possible for others to do the same. Christ said, “God knows that you have need of these things.” (Matt. 6:32) There is a happiness born from the simplicity of our needs. The happiness demanded by the passions is always fleeting, never satisfied. Those who have created the culture of passionate desire need and intend for the objects of desire to always be just beyond our reach. They have erected a level of hell and call it paradise.

From www.pravmir.com

**Feasts, Special Services and Events for
October 2020**

October 11, Annual Parish Meeting (online)

November 2020 Advanced Calendar

November 8, Feast of Holy Archangels Michael & Gabriel

November 21, Feast of Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

Advent Fast begins November 15

November 30, Feast of Holy Apostle Andrew

Selected Saints of the Month

**October 6
the Holy Apostle Thomas**

The Holy and Glorious Apostle Thomas was born in the Galilean city of Pansada and was a fisherman. Hearing the good tidings of Jesus Christ, he left all and followed after Him. The Apostle Thomas is included in the number of the holy Twelve Apostles of the Savior.

According to Holy Scripture, the holy Apostle Thomas did not believe the reports of the other disciples about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:25).

On the eighth day after the Resurrection, the Lord appeared to the Apostle Thomas and showed him His wounds. “My Lord and my God,” the Apostle cried out (John 20:28). “Thomas, being once weaker in faith than the other apostles,” says Saint John Chrysostom, “toiled through the grace of God more bravely, more zealously and tirelessly than them all, so that he went preaching over nearly all the earth, not fearing to proclaim the Word of God to savage nations.”

Some icons depicting this event are inscribed “The Doubting Thomas.” This is incorrect. In Greek, the inscription reads, “The Touching of Thomas.” In Slavonic, it says, “The Belief of Thomas.” When Saint

Thomas touched the Life-giving side of the Lord, he no longer had any doubts.

According to Church Tradition, the holy Apostle Thomas founded Christian churches in Palestine, Mesopotamia, Parthia, Ethiopia and India. Preaching the Gospel earned him a martyr's death. For having converted the wife and son of the prefect of the Indian city of Meliapur [Melipur], the holy apostle was locked up in prison, suffered torture, and finally, pierced with five spears, he departed to the Lord. Part of the relics of the holy Apostle Thomas are in India, in Hungary and on Mt. Athos. The name of the Apostle Thomas is associated with the Arabian (or Arapet) Icon of the Mother of God (September 6).

October 24

The Holy Martyr Arethas and those with him.

The Martyr Arethas and with him 4299 Martyrs suffered for the Lord Jesus Christ in the sixth century. Arethas was prefect of the Christian city of Negran in Arabia. The Arabian (or Omirite) king, Dunaan, who was Jewish, decided to eliminate Christianity from the land. He issued an edict that all followers of Christ were to be put to death.

Because the inhabitants of Negran remained faithful to the Lord, Dunaan came with a large army to destroy the city. At the city walls of Negran the king's heralds announced that Dunaan would only spare those who renounced Christ and referred to His Cross as a "sign of malediction."

Not daring to assault the Christian city by force, Dunaan resorted to a ruse. Dunaan swore an oath that he would not force the Christians into Judaism, but would merely collect a tribute from Negran. The inhabitants of the city would not heed the advice of Saint Arethas, and putting their trust in Dunaan, they opened the city gates.

The very next day Dunaan gave orders to light an immense fire and throw all the clergy of the city into it in order to frighten the rest of the Christians. 427 men were burned. He also threw the prefect Arethas and the other chief men into prison. Then the oppressor sent his messengers through the city to convert the Christians to Judaism. Dunaan himself conversed with those inhabitants brought from the prisons, saying, "I do not demand that you should renounce the God of heaven and earth, nor do I want you to worship idols, I want merely that you do not believe in Jesus Christ, since the Crucified One was a man, and not God."

The holy martyrs replied that Jesus is God the Word, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Who for the salvation of mankind was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. Those suffering said, “We shall not abjure Christ, since He is Life for us. To die for Him is to find Life.”

More than four thousand Christians, men, women, both the aged and children, from the city of Negran and surrounding villages suffered martyrdom for Christ.

Parish & Organization News

All of our Organization activities are suspended until the State restrictions on gatherings is lifted.

<p>Kathy Skaff 10/9 Mireille Moubayed 10/26 Maria Toubbeh 10/1 Anthony Turk 10/3 Courtney Wilde 10/29</p>

<p>Saad & Samar Elsayegh 10/13 Spiro & Samira Fasheh 10/10 Robert & Kimla Ranney 10/13 Manuel & Georgette Salameh 10/8 Theodore & Kathy Skaff 10/16</p>

*BUY SCRIP! Our Ladies Guild buys scrip from many and various stores and restaurants (see list included in this bulletin) at a 3 to 10% discount. When you buy the scrip, which is accepted just like cash at the issuing store, the parish benefits. You pay no more for these goods and services and are making a **donation** to our parish. **Contact Saeda Turk Saedaturk@aol.com to order and arrange pick up of the scrip. at the coffee hour.***

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

- James Bahbah 10/15
- Ibtisam Betar 10/13
- Lana Chami 10/23
- George Chala 10/24
- Sue Dabbah 10/29
- Sara Fortuna 10/27
- Trevor Fortuna 10/13
- Jillian Goson 10/7
- Ehab Hanna 10/24
- Lylac Joellson 10/18
- Kathrina Khamis 10/27
- Jabra Khamis 10/12
- Elyas Khury 10/7
- Lewis Malouf 10/7
- Elizabeth Mamey 10/3
- Joseph Munayyer 10/16
- Joanna Novac 10/5
- Joseph Richards 10/19
- Souad Saadeh 10/10
- Sylvia Saba 10/10
- Angelika Schorr 10/14

*The Apostle is a monthly newsletter of St. Mark Antiochian Orthodox Church. **Parish Organizations are to submit articles by the 15th of the month to the Church office (949-851-8933)***

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