



CATECHETICAL HOMILY Patriarch Bartholomew



“The arena of virtues has opened ;
let those who wish to compete enter.”

(Triodion Sticheron, Cheesefare Sunday)

Beloved brothers and sisters, dear children in the Lord,

Our Lord Jesus Christ grafts us into His body, inviting us to become saints, “just as He is holy.” (1 Peter 1.16) Our Creator wants us to be in communion with Him in order to taste His grace, which is to participate in His sanctity. Communion with God is a life of repentance and holiness ; whereas estrangement from God, or sin, is identified by the Church Fathers with “evil of the heart.” Sin is not natural, but derives from evil choice” (Theodoret of Cyrus, Dialogue 1, Immutabilis, PG 83.40D) or from the evil spirit, since “no one sins, who promises faith,” according to Ignatius of Antioch, the “God-bearer.”

Holiness is a quality that belongs to the Lord as “the one, who offers and is offered, who receives and is distributed.” The celebrant of the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist, by divine grace offers to the faithful “the holy things for the holy people,” the body and blood of Christ ; and he immediately receives from the Orthodox faithful the response to this offering : “One is holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father, “who is eaten but never consumed ; who sanctifies those who participate.”

In our struggle to achieve “likeness” to God, for which we were created, namely holiness, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Orthodox Church, which aspires exclusively and solely to our salvation, “rightfully proclaimed” one season as a period of special prayer and supplication in order to calm the passions of our soul and body.

This season commences tomorrow as a salvific preparation for the “great and most sacred Pascha of Christ.” We are referring to Holy and Great Lent, which we must live “by offering prayer and seeking forgiveness,” in order truly to taste Pascha “with all the saints,” by becoming “saints,” by confessing before God and people that we are “clay vessels” that are shattered on a daily basis by the evil one, always “falling and rising.” That is to say, we must admit our human imperfection and failure, as well as our insignificance before God, by repenting and repeating day-in and day-out, at all times and in all places - even as we are made “holy” through baptism

- that “one is holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father.”

Therefore, we call upon all Orthodox Christian faithful - clergy, monks and nuns, as well as all our brothers, sisters and children in the Lord - to transform our life at all times, but particularly during this period of Holy and Great Lent, into a loving effort of preparation before our neighbor so that we might share more vividly from now in the Lord’s Kingdom, the “new Pascha,” whose light never sets. We invite everyone to a life of holiness and spiritual struggle so that the possibility of transcending sin may be granted to the whole world and to us as a “good gift” and “perfect gift.” For “everyone that is born



from God does not sin . . . and cannot sin, for that person is born of God." (1 John 3.9-10)

Let us enter, then, with all our soul, without sorrowful faces but instead rejoicing and delighting, into this spiritual arena of virtues ; and let us arm ourselves "with the brightness of love, the splendor of prayer, the purity of chastity, and the strength of valor" in order to journey with the Lord, even as we pray that "He may not overlook us when we are in danger of alienating ourselves from Him." (Hymn from the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross) Rather, may He render us worthy "to reach His holy resurrection on the third day, which shines incorruption through the world." (Poem by Theodore, Service on Monday of the 1st Week of Lent)

Beloved brothers and sisters, children in the Lord, Holy and Great Lent is a period of preparation and repentance as the voice of our conscience, which is internal and inexpressible, our personal judgment. When it finds us doing wrong, it protests vehemently inasmuch as "nothing in the world is more violent than our conscience," according to the experienced herald of repentance, St. Andrew of Crete. Thus, each of us must be at peace with our conscience in order that "we may offer a mystical sacrifice in the fire of our conscience," surrendering our passions and offering them as an oblation of love toward our fellow human beings, just as the Lord gave Himself up "for the life and salvation of the world." Only then will forgiveness rise from the tomb for us as well ; and only then shall we live in mutual respect and love, far from the horrific crimes that we witness plaguing the entire world today. In this struggle, we have as our allies and intercessors all the saints and especially our all-holy Mother of God, who through her prayers "washes our conscience."

Wherefore, we urge and beseech you, as the spiritual father of all our Orthodox faithful throughout the world, to run with eagerness the race that opens up before us tomorrow in the arena of virtues, "neither thinking nor practicing sinful things." Let us rather walk with God's grace in order to cleanse our conscience "with the good option" of repentance in the conviction that heaven and earth, as well as all "things visible and invisible" will ultimately emanate the light of our Lord's resurrection.

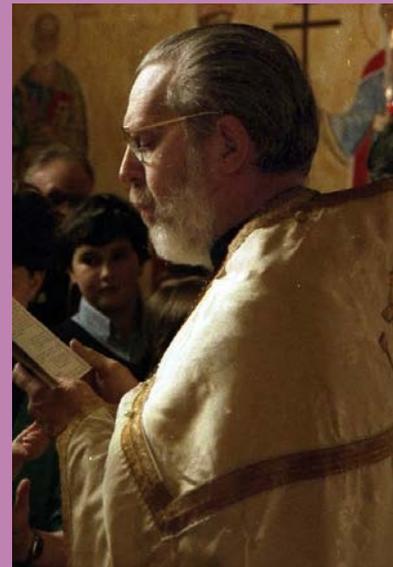
If we stand and behave righteously "before the doors of the Lord's temple," then we shall be vested with the bright robe of Christ's imitation and be rendered worthy of the "new drink" that comes from the source of incorruption. Then we shall taste the joy of the radiant tomb of the Lord and be swept inside the Church "to the very depths of the altar," where "the awesome mysteries are celebrated." May it be so.

+ Bartholomew of Constantinople

ARCHPRIEST PIERRE TCHESNAKOFF FELL ASLEEP IN THE LORD ON MONDAY 23RD FEBRUARY.

For all the Orthodox in the West he was a real missionary. During the 1970s and 80s he regularly served the communities of Le Mans, Rennes and Tours, uniting all the faithful in the west for the great feasts, Christmas, Pascha and Pentecost. It was under his impulse that the Orthodox Fraternity of the West was born.

He could measure the route which Orthodoxy has taken from Brest to Poitiers and he saw the creation of the new parishes which exist today as well as the foundation of the Monastery of St Silouan.



His funeral took place in the beautiful chapel of Plumaudan on Tuesday 3rd March. In response to the wishes of Fr Pierre, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts was celebrated the day before.

His family and a group of close friends surrounded the priests who had come to celebrate, Fr Eugène Czepiuk, representing Archbishop Job who was unable to be there, Fr Jean Roberti, Fr Jean-Michel Sonnier, rector of the parish of Dinan-St-Brieuc, Fr Serge Sollogoub and Deacon Jean Drancourt.

He was buried in the cemetery of Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, beside his wife Irene.

Mission is part of the obligation of every Christian received at the time of their baptism by the reading of the last verses of the Gospel according to St Matthew, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."; we could doubt it, reading the great classical works of the presentation of Orthodoxy, maybe with the exception of that of Timothy Ware (1968 and 1997), which doesn't even mention it. However, that doesn't mean that the different Orthodox Churches do not take an interest, only that they do it differently to other western confessions: Roman Catholics have their orders of missionaries like the Jesuits and Protestants with their missionary Societies. In fact, until the 19th century, the Orthodox Churches did not have structures dedicated to mission. Mission was carried out by inspired people such as Saint Stephen of Perm who went alone to Christianize the Permiens or the Zyrianes at the end of the 14th century. Later, the Church, in particular the Russians created missionary structures following the example of the Catholics and the Protestants. Everyone knows about the famous Imperial Mission to Palestine whose title shows both religious and political aims, but which played a considerable role in supporting the Arab Orthodox.

Nevertheless, individual missions continued, such as that of Fr Spiridon in the prisons of Tsarist Russia (*My missions in Siberia*, 1950). Today there also exists a lot of missionary activity in Africa which continues that of Constantinople. In contrast to this official, recognized missionary activity, there exists a more modest and often more discreet dimension which we could call

active presence which consists of simply being in a place, a region, and bearing witness.

Of the latter type of mission one of the best examples in France was without any doubt Fr Pierre Tchesnakov who has just left us. Pure product of the Russian emigration, he went through the Cadet Corps, was an engineer at the OCDE, then a priest in Paris. He was touched by a call from one of the faithful from Brittany during the first Congress of Orthodox Youth who asked the priests to concern themselves with the numerous faithful dispersed throughout this immense region. Having a vague project to settle in this province for his retirement, he answered favourably to this request, spending many years travelling from Paris to the different towns in Western France (Caen, Le Mans, Rennes and Tours). He managed, bit by bit, and not without difficulty, to unite the Orthodox of Calvados, Sarthe, Mayenne, Ille and Vilaine and Côtes-d'Armor for church services in French. Some communities were organised, and some parishes which were dying out like Caen and Tours took on new life, new ones were created such as Lannion, Le Mans and Rennes. This vast work took place without clashes, by complete openness to every request whether from an individual or a community. Fr Pierre was not a great theologian, neither was he a great preacher, he was just simply present, ready to respond to the needs of each and that until the end of his life. It was his mission whose fruits we do not cease harvesting.

Fr. Jean Roberti (Rennes)



impression of being loved more than the others although he distributed to each the love of God with the same intensity. If today I have inherited a flourishing Deanery, it is thanks to the relentless work of Fr Pierre, it is he who constructed the beautiful edifice which is the Church in the West of France. He gave all his physical effort, his time, without counting it... and consoled the suffering.

In that sense he has been for me the model of an ideal priest, a real icon of the compassion of Christ. Right from the beginning of the foundation of the Monastery of St Silouan he came to encourage me and his loving presence has never

MESSAGE OF FATHER SYMEON (COSSEC)

Dear Friends,

Today we direct our fervent prayers for the repose of the Soul of the servant of the Lord, Archpriest Pierre. I would have loved to have been with you today but my schedule prevents me. I owe much to Fr Pierre, because he was for me a model, a reference, a beaming lighthouse in the way that he carried out his priesthood. With very great humility and with unequalled devotion he led his flock with particular attention to each individual. His love was limitless and everyone had the

ceased to be a comfort for me during the inevitable tests of such an adventure.

With you all I give thanks to God for the gift that the Lord has given us, has given the whole church and to each one of us in particular. Let's pray for his eternal rest, but do not hesitate to ask for his help, his intercession, because today he has not abandoned us, but he carries us all in his big heart towards Him who he loved so much and to whom he gave his life. Let us say with him, with the same force of faith with which he was filled: "Christ is Risen!"