

## CHAPTER 3

### The Orthodox Cycle of Life

#### *A. Orthodox Baptism*

Great indeed is the Baptism which is offered you. It is a ransom to captives; the remission of offenses; the death of sin; the regeneration of the soul; the garment of light; the holy seal indissoluble; the chariot to heaven; the luxury of paradise; a procuring of the kingdom; the gift of adoption.<sup>102</sup>

The Mystery of Orthodox Baptism has been terribly misunderstood and misrepresented in Orthodox theological and spiritual thinking, particularly among Orthodox in the West. Roman Catholic and Protestant influences have greatly blurred the true meaning of what Baptism is and what it does for the believer. In fact, many nominal Orthodox Christians think of Baptism as some quaint initiation rite. But as Saint Cyril tells us, the Mystery of Baptism transforms the entire person—body and soul—, so that after Baptism we embrace a new life, spiritually restored to the state of innocence and purity for which God created us. Every sin is washed away by Baptism and every demon which has a hold on our hearts is literally drowned in the Baptismal waters. Immediately after coming up from the water of regeneration, before we even have an opportunity to think a sinful thought, we are sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit by the anointing of Holy Chrism. This anointing is not a mere symbolic gesture, but as Saint Cyril says, "...to you not in a figure, but in truth; because ye were truly anointed by the Holy Ghost.... For this holy thing is a spiritual preservative of the body, and a safeguard of the soul."<sup>103</sup>

Baptism and Holy Chrismation actually insure a person against internal demonic influence. The demons can always at-

<sup>102</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Sacraments*, p. 50.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

tack us from without, but after a person is Baptized and Christened, the demonic powers are limited in their ability to harm us from within—unless, of course, we are so unwise as to invite them back through evil thoughts and deeds. Our souls are completely cleansed of all stain by Baptism. We are restored, again, to purity. This has always been the greatest promise of Christianity: that if we “put off the old man with his deeds...the new man” will be “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him Who created him.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, we must never enter into Holy Baptism lightly, nor should we Baptize our children without careful consideration for their moral and spiritual instruction. After all, this cleansing is offered to us only once in our lifetime. If we soil this pristine garment through carelessness or spiritual indolence, we can cleanse it only with the bitter tears of repentance.

*Orthodox Baptism for Converts.* The Church was, in a sense, founded by converts. On the day of Pentecost, “about three thousand souls”<sup>105</sup> were Baptized, most of them adults and older children. These people all heard the Gospel (“Good Tidings”) from Saint Peter and made a conscious and voluntary decision to follow Christ and be “born of water and the Spirit.”<sup>106</sup> They were among the first members of the Christian Church. From that day until the present, there have been millions upon millions of souls who have received the regeneration of Baptism as adults, often after leading completely dissolute and vile lives. In response to this fact, the Church required very early on that a person who seeks to be united to Christ enter into a period of study, the catechumenate, in order fully to understand the seriousness of his commitment to God.

Unless a person is prepared to live as an Orthodox Christian for the rest of his life, Orthodox Baptism can leave him in the sad state referred to by our Lord:

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<sup>104</sup> Colossians 3:9–10.

<sup>105</sup> Acts 2:41.

<sup>106</sup> St. John 3:5.

He that is not with Me is against Me: and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.<sup>107</sup>

If a convert lightly dismisses his responsibilities towards God as an Orthodox Christian, then he is inviting true spiritual disaster upon himself and his family. This is particularly true of those who choose to be Baptized as adults. We will have no excuse on the Dread Day of Judgment, should we refuse to take upon ourselves the light yoke of living an Orthodox Christian life. And the condemnation that we invite on ourselves we will invite on our families, for having led them away from the Faith by our poor example. For this reason, the final decision to become an Orthodox Christian should, for an adult, be made only after a period of serious study and preparation.

*The Catechumenate.* When an individual, having sought the Truth, comes to believe that it resides in Orthodoxy, he should discuss his interest with an Orthodox Priest. The Priest will recommend reading material and should be available to discuss this material with the individual. Should no Priest be available locally, one can correspond by letter with a Church or monastery for guidance. Unfortunately, this guidance may be sometimes difficult to find. This is a sadly confusing time in the history of the Church, and the Church in America is a weak and fragmented institution. Those seeking the Truth in America must be very discerning and patient. Because there is no national Church in North America, many different ethnic groups have established ecclesiastical organizations in this country. This diversity opens the door to charlatans and spiritual frauds who prey upon the ignorant. Thus there are many innocent people who have been victimized by would-be elders or quasi-Orthodox gurus, who

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<sup>107</sup> St. Luke 11:23-26.

often take a few pieces of Tradition and make up their own brand of Orthodoxy—some of it under the ægis of “established” and “official” jurisdictions or the authority of self-proclaimed guardians of “canonicity.”

In such a circumstance, the best gauge any sincere person can use is his own conscience, but this must be an *informed* conscience. Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) once wrote that those who wish to know the Truth

...must seek out the will of God in Scripture for themselves....  
With weeping and heartfelt groanings implore God not to allow you to turn aside from His all-holy will and follow a fallen human will, your own or that of your neighbour—your [spiritual] adviser.<sup>108</sup>

It is better to listen to the dictates of conscience and continue to seek the Truth elsewhere. That is why God gives us a conscience: to protect us from ourselves and the chicanery of others. Also, even if we are Baptized and received into a particular group, this does not relieve us of our responsibility to the Truth. If the situation in which we find ourselves violates the Law of God or our God-given common sense, we have an obligation to act in accordance with the Truth, at all costs.

After having made contact with a Priest, a catechumen should study the catechetical materials recommended. Once a person becomes a catechumen, he should begin to incorporate the various aspects of Holy Tradition into his everyday life. He should begin to attend both Vespers and Divine Liturgy every weekend. This is also the time to establish a routine of prayer and fasting. We should begin to thank God for His bounty to us at each meal. We should set up an Icon Corner and maintain a vigil lamp. All of these things will make a catechumen’s study of the Church much more relevant to his life, since, to be meaningful, Christianity requires more than simple study of the believer:

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<sup>108</sup> [St.] Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov), *The Arena*, trans. Archimandrite Lazarus (Jordanville, ny: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1982), pp. 48–49.

One of the differences between the eloquent philosophy of the Greeks and the faith of Christians is that the Greeks' philosophy can be clearly expressed in words and comprehended through reading, whereas the Christian faith cannot be fully expressed in words, and still less comprehended by reading alone. For the exposition of the Christian faith, the example of its expounder is indispensable; and for its comprehension and assimilation, both reading and the practice of what is read are necessary to the reader. When Patriarch Photius read the writings of St Mark the Ascetic on the spiritual life, he noticed a lack of clarity in the writer, about which he very sagely remarked: 'This does not proceed from any obscurity of expression, but comes about because the truths here expressed are better understood by practice (rather than through words), and I cannot comprehend them through words alone... and this,' he added, 'is not the case with these homilies alone or this writer alone, but is so in all the works that seek to expound the laws of asceticism, which are better understood in action.'<sup>109</sup>

The ancient tradition reflected in Saint Cyril of Jerusalem's writings shows us that people originally entered into a catechumenate at the beginning of the Great Fast. They would spend the entire period preparing for Great Saturday, when they were Baptized and Chrismated, during the day, in order to commune for the first time that night at the Paschal Liturgy. This is not a rule strictly observed in present times, but it is an ideal which we should emulate, whenever possible.

*Preparing for Baptism.* As we have noted, a catechumen should observe all of the fasting rules of the Church prior to Baptism. For the Baptism itself, a catechumen should prepare in the same way that he would for Holy Communion. Married couples should, of course, abstain from marital relations at this time as well.

*The Baptismal Service.* The Baptismal Service consists of three parts: Exorcisms, Baptism, and Chrismation. During the Exorcisms, the Priest reads a series of prayers which ask God to expel every demonic influence or spirit which has a spiritual

<sup>109</sup> *The Prologue*, Vol. 2, pp. 354-355.

hold on the candidate for Baptism. At one point, the Priest breathes on the person saying, "Expel from him (*her*) every evil and impure spirit which hideth and maketh its lair in his (*her*) heart."<sup>110</sup> Baptism is a serious assault against the demons, and the Service makes it very clear Whom the person is accepting and whom he is rejecting. Thus, three times the Priest asks the catechumen: "Dost thou renounce Satan, and all his Angels, and all his works, and all his service, and all his pride?"<sup>111</sup> And the catechumen answers, "I do,"<sup>112</sup> each time. This portion of the Service is extremely important, especially in these times. Many people have become involved in various occult practices. Though these things are at times done with innocent intentions or out of ignorance, demonic powers are able to enter into a person and even act through him as a consequence of such activities. The pre-Baptismal Exorcisms are quite essential in such circumstances.

The Exorcisms are immediately followed by a declaration of faith in Christ, after which the catechumen recites the Symbol of Faith (the Nicene Creed). The Symbol expresses the Church's understanding of Who Christ is and what He did for us. By reciting the Symbol, the catechumen is making a personal statement of his Faith before God. After the Exorcisms, the Priest blesses the Baptismal water, whether in the font or in a stream, in preparation for the Baptism. These prayers contain very clear statements as to the true nature of the spiritual assault which Baptism is:

We pray thee, O God, that every aerial and obscure phantom may withdraw itself from us; and that no demon of darkness may conceal himself in this water; and that no evil spirit which instilleth darkening of intentions and rebelliousness of thought may descend into it with him (*her*) who is about to be baptized.

...Wherefore, O Lord, manifest thyself in this water, and grant that he (*she*) who is baptized therein may be transformed;

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<sup>110</sup> *Service Book*, p. 273.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

that he (*she*) may put away from him (*her*) the old man which is corrupt through the lusts of the flesh, and that he (*she*) may be clothed upon with the new man, and renewed after the image of him who created him(*her*)....<sup>113</sup>

The Priest then blesses olive oil, “the token of reconciliation and of salvation from the flood,”<sup>114</sup> part of which is then used to bless the water and part of which is used to anoint the person being Baptized. After the anointing, the catechumen is fully immersed in the water three times. Complete immersion is very important, since any part of the body which is not immersed is not cleansed and is subject to demonic attack. In the days of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, when there were Deaconesses to Baptize women, even adults were often Baptized naked. But in these times, without a female Diaconate, it is neither practical nor spiritually correct to do this. Our understanding of the body and the impurity—sad to say!—which we find even among Christians dictates that we Baptize people modestly (in decent swimwear, for example).

Immediately after the Baptism, the newly illumined Christian dons a pure white robe with red Crosses emblazoned on the back and each breast (or, in the case of an infant, new white clothes). The following *troparion* is sung, as this is done: “Vouchsafe unto me the robe of light, O thou who clothest thyself with light as with a garment, Christ our God, plenteous in mercy.”<sup>115</sup> The Priest then anoints the newly illumined Christian with Holy Chrism, so as to grant him the fullness of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. In the earliest times, the Apostles themselves laid hands on each person that was Baptized into the Faith, as described in the Acts of the Apostles:

Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them,

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 278–279.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were Baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.<sup>116</sup>

As the Church grew, it became physically impossible for an Apostle or Bishop personally to lay hands upon each new convert without there being a long delay. So the Church began to bless a special mixture of oil and spices, called “Chrism,” which, when applied by an Ordained Priest and accompanied by specified prayers, functions in the same way as a physical laying on of hands. New Chrism is periodically blessed and the old Chrism added to it, thus perpetuating a chain of blessing reaching all the way back to the Early Church.

The brow, the eyes, the nostrils, the lips, the ears, the breast, both hands, both feet, and between the shoulders are anointed with the Holy Chrism. Every part of the body which interacts with the physical world is “sealed,” as it were, with the Gift of the Holy Spirit, rendering the individual immune to internal demonic assault. A small amount of hair is also cut from the head of the newly Baptized person to signify his new commitment. There remains thereafter the lifelong task of maintaining this purity by seeking God with one’s whole being and strengthening the flesh through prayer, fasting, and full participation in the spiritual life of the Church; in short, by living a truly Orthodox life.

*Infant Baptism.* Because of the transforming power which resides in the Mystery of Baptism, Orthodox Christians seek to have their children Baptized very young, usually after the child is forty days old. The purpose of child Baptism, too, is the regeneration of the individual, for sin is not just a set of “wrong acts,” but a condition which besets human beings from the very moment of birth. Children, too, are stained by the ancestral sin of Adam and Eve and need the enlightenment of the Mystery of Baptism. One major advantage of infant Baptism is that the

<sup>116</sup> Acts 8:14-17.



Church provides a sponsor for the child who agrees to take responsibility for the child should anything happen to the parents. To sponsor a child at Baptism means that, should the child be left an orphan, the sponsor would be expected to take the child into his home and raise him to adulthood. The Godparent is also responsible for the child's spiritual development and is even expected to remind the child's natural parents of their responsibilities, should they become lax in their instruction of the child. The responsibilities of a sponsor are awesome and demanding. A sponsor must, therefore, be a sober Orthodox Christian and an upright person.

In the West, where heterodox sects and cults have proliferated, infant Baptism is often condemned. It is argued that a child is either without sin and not in need of Baptism—a clearly wrong teaching—or that he is unable to benefit from Baptism because he cannot “understand” it. With regard to the latter argument, we must keep in mind that Holy Baptism itself, not the preparation for it that we appoint for adult converts, enlightens our spiritual faculties and gives us understanding. A child who is Baptized is enlightened and thus grows in Christian knowledge, benefited by the good guidance of his Christian parents. To believe that spiritual enlightenment depends on a mature human intellect is to believe that retarded children or the feeble of mind cannot benefit from the Mysteries of the Church—an impious idea at best. With regard to the Roman Catholic practice of sealing infant baptisms with “confirmation” at the “age of reason,” this is an illogical practice that is wholly inconsistent with ancient custom and which many Latin theologians decry for the very reasons that we Orthodox also dismiss sectarian arguments against infant Baptism.

### *B. Marriage and Family Life*

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and the two shall be one flesh.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Genesis 2:24.

Traditional Orthodox family life is a truly beautiful expression of the way that Orthodox Christians live in the world, but not of it. Unfortunately, this way of life is very difficult to observe in the West, precisely because those who choose to live it usually have very little in common with Western values and generally retreat into ethnic enclaves to survive. This leaves many sincere Western converts in the difficult position of trying to adopt a way of life for which they have no model. Though this situation is clearly not ideal, there is no reason for despair. When we seek to adapt our lives to a traditional Orthodox standard, we must always remember that this standard is based on the teachings found in Holy Scripture. Saint Paul, especially, understood the tremendous influence that family life has on the life of the Church. This influence can be ultimately traced to the relationship which God created for husband and wife. In a Christian family, two people surrender their individual egos to one another, in order to become a single identity greater than the sum of the two parts. This model is then extended as children are added to the family and families become communities, which ultimately form a society. Saint John Chrysostomos exhorts us to understand this fact:

The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together. Men will take up arms and even sacrifice their lives for the sake of this love.... Because when harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the household is kept in order, and neighbors, friends, and relatives praise the result. Great benefits, both for families and states, are thus produced. When it is otherwise, however, everything is thrown into confusion and turned upside-down.<sup>118</sup>

When we marry as Orthodox Christians, we agree to submit our lives to God and to our spouses. This extends to our personal possessions as well. Everything that we have and everything that we are become communal. Holy Matrimony is a Mystery of the Church, not a simple contract to be broken when

<sup>118</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage*, pp. 44-45.

it is no longer convenient or personally profitable. If we are not ready and willing to enter into a marital relationship with a sense of true commitment, personal sacrifice, and spiritual purpose, we would do well not to marry at all. Of the necessary sacrifice of our personal will, Saint John Chrysostomos writes:

After marriage, you are no longer two, but one flesh, and are your possessions still divided? Love of money! You have both become one person, one organism, and can you still say, 'my own'? This cursed and abominable phrase comes from the devil. Things far nearer and dearer to us than material possessions God has made common to all: we can't say, 'my own light, my own sun, my own water.' If all our greater blessings are held in common, why should money not be? ...Above all, remove from your soul this notion of 'mine' and 'yours.'<sup>119</sup>

This is the first step that a man and wife must take before they can hope to have anything resembling a Christian marriage. An Orthodox Christian home is modeled on the relationship between Christ and the Church. Each person has a specific function in the family unit, and all of these functions are important for a stable family relationship.

### *The Husband.*

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.<sup>120</sup>

The rôle of the husband and father has been blurred and distorted in the modern world. This rôle is often minimalized or even forgotten. The selfish attitudes which led to the American phenomenon of "no-fault divorce" have also eroded our understanding of what a man's responsibilities to his family are. If a man chooses to marry a woman in the Orthodox Church, he should do so with the full intention of taking the lead in the growth and development of the spiritual life of his family. He

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>120</sup> Ephesians 5:25, 28.

should voluntarily take on the responsibility of setting up an Icon Corner, arranging for the necessary materials to keep the vigil lamp lit, organizing and leading the family in prayer on a daily basis, seeing to it that the family attends Divine Services regularly (which includes regular Confession and reception of the Holy Mysteries), and ensuring that the children are properly instructed in the Faith. In short, the husband should feel himself no less responsible for the spiritual life of his family than that of his wife. In fact, he should, again, take the lead in building up a Christian home. This is one of the most significant ways that a man can demonstrate his love for his wife. A deep spiritual life at home creates the atmosphere of stability and love which most women crave and in which most men thrive.

A husband's love must be sacrificial and it must be openly expressed to the wife. Women require affection and stability, in order to feel secure in the marriage relationship. Most men do not naturally express their feelings of love with the same comfort as women. Saint Paul's admonition that men should love their wives focuses on the demonstration of that love; for left to themselves, most men often take it for granted that their feelings are understood. Saint Chrysostomos also speaks to this issue:

Finally, never call her [the wife] by her name alone, but with terms of endearment, honor, and love. If you honor her, she won't need honor from others; she won't desire praise from others if she enjoys the praise that comes from you. Prefer her before all others, both for her beauty and her discernment, and praise her. She will in this way be persuaded to listen to none that are outside, but to disregard all the world except for you. Teach her to fear God, and all other good things will flow from this one lesson as from a fountain and your house will be filled with ten thousand blessings.<sup>121</sup>

One sure way to have a home full of love and joy is for the husband to express his love openly. But this love must be sacrificial, even in the face of suffering poverty, serious or debilitating ill-

<sup>121</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage*, p. 63.

ness, or death. A man must seek to emulate in his love for his family the love that our Lord showed for the Church: a love which led Him to the Cross.

*The Wife.*

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church: and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.<sup>122</sup>

These verses are often cause for a great deal of controversy in these times of self-love. Modern society has been preaching for the last fifty years that we must look out only for ourselves and force all of those who enter into our lives, be they husbands, wives, children, or even God, to take a place behind the goal of self-fulfillment. The major goal of the Orthodox Christian family, however, is precisely the subduing of the self in favor of the family unit. This submission is expected not only of the wife, but of all members of the family. It is, indeed, a submission required not only of the wife, but of the husband: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."<sup>123</sup> Many men conveniently forget this verse when demanding some form of strict obedience from their wives, a demand that often rises from nothing more than their selfish desires to dominate another person. In a healthy Orthodox family, all members of the family unit submit themselves to the Will of God by actively seeking what is best for the family and never seeking what is best for any particular individual. The husband may have the responsibility for leading the family through its sojourn on this earth; but this is because in any organization, someone must make decisions and take final responsibility for them. Though a wife should follow her husband's lead in all things, in order to see that the family functions well, she should do so by assisting her husband in making intelligent and rational decisions which are in accor-

<sup>122</sup> Ephesians 5:22-23.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 21.

dance with the teachings of Christ.

Saint Paul's admonitions to both the husband and the wife point to an interesting psychological fact: neither men nor women are naturally inclined to give their partners what they need most. As we have noted, women naturally seek to be loving and nurturing. They crave this kind of attention. Such attention does not come naturally to most men; rather, they must be taught to be openly loving with their wives. By the same token, what men crave most from those around them is respect. A man will actively seek out this respect wherever it may be found. This is why Saint Paul emphasized the submission of wives to their husbands. The best way to keep a man focused on his family is for the wife to give him this respect. Her respect for him will inspire his love for her, thereby fulfilling her needs as well. This is an interesting balance which God has created. The more the man loves his wife, the more she respects him. The more she respects him, the more he will love her. This is the cycle which produces relationships that endure for a lifetime:

As a man is to his wife, so Christ is to the Church. Man is the head of woman, and Christ is the Head of the Church. A woman obeys her husband, and the Church obeys Christ. A man loves his wife as his own flesh, and Christ loves the Church as His Own flesh. A man loves his wife as he does himself, and the wife is in awe of her husband. Christ loves the Church as His Own self, and the Church is in awe of Christ...<sup>124</sup>

This is the basis of an Orthodox Christian marriage. To settle for anything less is to deny ourselves a tremendous blessing from God.

### *The Children.*

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.<sup>125</sup>

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment

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<sup>124</sup> *The Prologue*, Vol. 2, p. 238.

<sup>125</sup> Proverbs 22:6.

with promise:) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.<sup>126</sup>

Herein are described the responsibilities that each person shares in an Orthodox Christian home. Both the parents and the children must conform themselves to these rôles in order for the family to function as God intends. The primary responsibility for this proper functioning rests on the parents. If they choose to nurture a child at home, in an atmosphere of humble piety and sincere love for God, the child will grow up with a deep respect for God and the Church. This means that from the moment the child is born, his life should revolve around a daily cycle of prayer, fasting, and regular attendance at Divine Services. The child's earliest memories should be those of prayer, simple love, and Orthodox living. If a child has always fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, for example, the very idea of breaking a fast will be repugnant to him at a later age. Small children love rules and become quite incensed if those rules are broken. Combined with the good example of parents who follow the Church's traditions, this natural instinct can serve to instill in them a true love of the Orthodox way of life.

In these times, the cult of material gain and self-indulgence has chosen to portray children as a burden. The demands placed on all members of this society to meet some mythical standard of affluence have convinced the majority of couples that both the husband and the wife must seek employment outside the home. Multiple children are more expensive to care for in such circumstances and thus, because of the materialistic focus of the parents, children are viewed as burdensome. In Orthodox families, children are considered a blessing. The children are nurtured within the home, even if that means a lower standard of living for the family. The natural dynamics of Orthodox family life work diligently to focus the parents' energies on the children and one another, rather than on the self. Thus material gain and self-satisfaction are of less importance. This traditional Orthodox way of life is the surest way to a life which is pleasing to

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:1-3.

God. Saint John Chrysostomos tells us:

Pray together at home and go to Church; when you come back home, let each ask the other the meaning of the readings and prayers. If you are overtaken by poverty, remember Peter and Paul, who were more honored than kings or rich men, though they spent their lives in hunger and thirst. Remind one another that nothing in life is to be feared, except offending God. If your marriage is like this, your perfection will rival the holiest of monks.<sup>127</sup>

As Orthodox children grow and mature, we must constantly seek to inspire them by reading aloud from Scripture and from the Lives of the Saints. As they enter school they need to be challenged to live their Faith by keeping the fasts and by praying. Modesty and sobriety should be encouraged. All of these things combine in a child's life to strengthen his faith and deepen his love for God, the Church, and the family:

Concern for spiritual things will unite the family. Do you want your child to be obedient? Then from the beginning bring him up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Don't think that it isn't necessary for a child to listen to the Scriptures; the first thing he will hear from them will be, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and immediately you will begin to reap your reward. Don't say, 'Bible reading is for monks; am I turning my child into a monk?' No! It isn't necessary for him to be a monk. Make him into a Christian! Why are you afraid of something so good? It is necessary for everyone to know Scriptural teachings, and this is especially true for children. Even at their age they are exposed to all sorts of folly and bad examples from popular entertainments. Our children need remedies for all these things! We are so concerned with our children's schooling; if only we were equally zealous in bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord! And then we wonder why we reap such bitter fruit when we have raised our children to be insolent, licentious, impious, and vulgar.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.



If we choose the path of least resistance and go along with the world's attitudes, our home lives will reflect the chaos of ideas and beliefs in the world. If we follow the Orthodox standards of family life, we will raise happy, pious, and well-adjusted children.

With regard to children and discipline, two important Scriptural passages should guide us: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes"<sup>129</sup> and "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying."<sup>130</sup> These verses have been misquoted by many people—particularly Protestant Fundamentalists—and used as an excuse to abuse and mistreat children as a matter of course. Such abuse has nothing to do with the Patristic understanding of discipline in the family. There are times, particularly with small children, when a quick swat on the rear or a paddling is necessary. This is the "rod" of which Scripture speaks and which we use in the Orthodox home. Unfortunately, this way of discipline has been all but lost on the children of this generation. Parents opt for the path of least resistance when their children are small, only to languish in a home full of contention, loutishness, and self-loathing when these children reach adolescence. Children have a deep need for restraints, and they are sorely troubled when they cannot find them. Without limitations on their behavior—limitations at first reinforced by controlled and limited physical force—, they cannot define who and what they are and how they fit into the world. Children who have no self-control and who have not been taught restraint inwardly dislike themselves. Indeed, they find it very difficult to develop self-respect.

In the end, an Orthodox man and woman must look upon their children as a Divine gift—as a precious treasure loaned to them by God. If they are careful to rear their children in piety and with discipline, parents will gain the favor of God and, to be

<sup>129</sup> Proverbs 13:24.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 19:18.

sure, His aid in their task of looking after the family. Addressing men, Saint John Chrysostomos assures us of these truths about the family and its worth before God:

Therefore, let us be greatly concerned for our wives and our children, and for ourselves as well, and as we educate both ourselves and them let us beg God to help us in our task. If He sees that we care about this, He will help us; but if we are unconcerned, He will not give us His hand. God helps those who work, not those who are idle. No one helps an inactive person, but one who joins in the labor. The good God Himself will bring this work to perfection, so that all of us may be counted worthy of the blessings He has promised, through the grace and love for mankind of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, with Whom, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, honor and power to the Father, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.<sup>131</sup>

### *C. An Orthodox Approach to Death*

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?<sup>132</sup>

Death, for an Orthodox Christian, is not considered the end of existence. Rather, it is a transition to eternal existence. We are all eternal creatures, and the experiences of countless Saints and pious Orthodox from the time of the Apostles up to this present day serve to confirm this fact. We were never intended to die. That is to say, our souls were never intended to separate from our bodies, as they do in this life. This is why death is so traumatic to us. We instinctively feel revulsion and pain at this unnatural separation. Saint John of Damascus wrote of this in an *idiomelon* for the Service for the Departed:

Truly most frightening is the mystery of death, how the soul is violently separated from its concord with the body and, by divine decree, the most natural bond of their cohesion is severed. Wherefore, we implore Thee, O Giver of Life Who lovest mankind, to grant rest to the departed one in the dwellings of the righteous.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>132</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:55.

According to accounts both from Orthodox sources and secular researchers in the last twenty years, the soul, immediately after death, maintains a complete awareness of who and where it is. It continues to function as though it were in a body, since it contains within itself, in fact, the personality and all of the attributes of the human being. Its bond with the body is a strong one that is only broken slowly, as it begins to function in eternal existence and in the spiritual realm.

From Apostolic times, the Church has also understood a direct connection between this world and the next. Thus it has developed very specific Services and traditions surrounding the parting of the soul from the body. These Services fulfill the double purpose of helping to assuage the grief of those left behind and of assisting the soul through its most difficult passage from this world to the next. The Church prescribes that, in addition to a Funeral Service, periodic Memorial Services be celebrated for the soul. Saint Macarios inquired of an Angel who often accompanied him about the significance of these Services. The Angel replied thus:

‘When, on the third day, the body is brought to the Temple [Church], the Soul of the dead man receiveth from his Guardian Angel relief from the grief which he feeleth at parting from his body. This he receiveth because of the oblation and praise which are offered for him in God’s Church, whence there ariseth in him a blessed hope. For during the space of two days the Soul is permitted to wander at will over the earth, with the Angels which accompany it. Therefore the Soul, since it loveth its body, sometimes hovereth around the house in which it parted from the body; sometimes around the coffin wherein its body hath been placed: and thus it passeth those days like a bird which seeketh for itself a nesting–place. But the beneficent Soul wandereth through those places where it was wont to perform deeds of righteousness.’<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Constantine Cavaros, *The Future Life According to Orthodox Teaching*, trans. Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos and Archimandrite [Bishop] Auxentios (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1983), p. 21.

<sup>134</sup> *Service Book*, p. 612.

Here again we are told that during the entire time of preparation for burial, the soul of the departed one is still here in this world, usually present at the Funeral Service. The soul is in a position to see all that is going on, for good or for ill. This helps to explain the Orthodox custom of showing respect for the body of the dead. This respect is not idle or empty, but affords, like the Funeral Service, comfort and assistance to the departed person's soul, giving it hope for what lies ahead. The actual burial itself is done very quickly, usually after the body has rested in state overnight.

Some of the Church's service books give detailed descriptions of what death entails for the Christian. We read in one such book the following:

'On the third day He who rose again from the dead commandeth that every Soul, in imitation of his own Resurrection, shall be brought to heaven, that it may do reverence to the God of all. Wherefore the Church hath the blessed custom of celebrating oblation and prayers on the third day for the Soul.

'After the Soul hath done reverence to God, He ordereth that it shall be shown the varied and fair abodes of the Saints and the beauty of Paradise. All these things the Soul vieweth during six days, marvelling and glorifying God, the Creator of all. And when the Soul hath beheld all these things, it is changed, and forgetteth all the sorrow which it felt in the body. But if it be guilty of sins, then, at the sight of the delights of the Saints, it beginneth to wail.... After having thus viewed all the joys of the Just for the space of six days, the Angels lead the Soul again to do reverence to God. Therefore the Church doth well, in that she celebrateth service and oblation for the Soul on the ninth day.

'After its second reverence to God, the Master of all commandeth that the Soul be conducted to Hell, and there shown the places of torment, the different divisions of Hell.... Through these various places of torment the Soul is borne during thirty days, trembling lest it also be condemned to imprisonment therein.

'On the fortieth day the Soul is again taken to do reverence to God: and then the Judge determineth the fitting place for its incarceration, according to its deeds. Thus the Church doth rightly

in making mention, upon the fortieth day, of the baptized dead.<sup>135</sup>

The place where the soul is sent on the fortieth day is called the “Middle State.” Here souls experience a foretaste of Paradise or Hades as they will know them after the General Resurrection and the fearful Last Judgment. Saint Nectarios of Aegina refers to this Middle State as follows:

In this state the souls of the righteous have a foretaste of the blessedness prepared for them, while the sinners experience to a certain extent the eternal and complete suffering that awaits them.... The righteous in Heaven and the sinners in Hades have only a foretaste of the blessedness or suffering that awaits them.<sup>136</sup>

The state of the soul is not fixed in the Middle State, but can be influenced and improved—even in Hades—by the prayers and offerings of faithful believers on this earth. This Middle State should not be confused with the Latin innovation of purgatory. The purgatorial flames and torments sometimes described in medieval literature are a complete myth, according to Orthodox teaching. The souls of the dead are not cleansed or purged of their iniquities by many years of burning torment. Once the soul parts from the body, the ability of the soul to change its own status disappears. Only the prayers of the Faithful can assist the soul after death. The soul experiences torment only in Hades, and then purely as a result of the sins it committed in earthly life. No other torment is permitted or even necessary. Saint Mark of Ephesus said of this: “For if the remission of sins is accomplished for the sake of prayers, or merely by the Divine love of mankind itself, there is no need for punishment and cleansing (by fire).”<sup>137</sup>

With specific regard to the prayers that can be offered for those in the Middle State, we should note that offering prayers

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 612–613.

<sup>136</sup> Cavarnos, *Future Life*, p. 30.

<sup>137</sup> Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose), *The Soul After Death* (Platina, ca: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1980), p. 212.

and memorials for the righteous is also a way for us to help our own spiritual lives. This is made evident in the life of Saint Athanasia the Abbess:

St Athanasia the Abbess (April 12th) commanded her nuns to prepare a table for the poor and needy for forty days after her death. The nuns observed this only for ten days, then stopped it. The saint then appeared, accompanied by two angels, and said to the nuns, 'Why have you not carried out my instructions? Know that by alms and the prayers of the Priest for the souls of the departed during the forty days, the mercy of God is invoked. If the departed souls are sinful, they receive through these alms God's forgiveness of their sins; and, if they are sinless, then they are efficacious for the forgiveness of those who do the alms.' She is, of course, thinking here of alms and prayers linked with a great love for souls of the departed. Such alms and prayers are indeed of help.<sup>138</sup>

*When Death Approaches.* What should we do for an Orthodox friend or loved one as he is nearing death? Our first consideration should be to see that the dying person communes, if at all possible. The Service of Anointing can also be conducted, but this Service is properly meant for the healing of disease and for the recovery of health. If death seems inevitable, we should accept it and look after the dying person's soul. Seeking after miracles in such situations can often violate our Christian understanding of death, which is not a fearful thing for those who have prepared for it. Thus, when a dying person communes, after confessing his sins, his soul is cleansed of all which might imperil it. He departs for eternal life without fear and with great joy and hope.

*After Death Occurs.* Once a person has died, a Priest should be called to read the prayers for the departure of the soul from the body. There is no rush to say the "Last Rites," a purely Roman Catholic innovation which grew out of a distortion of the Service of Anointing. The body should not be embalmed, for

<sup>138</sup> *The Prologue*, Vol. 3, p. 15.

which reason it is best to arrange for burial as quickly as possible—preferably the next day after death. A major problem with embalming is the proper disposal of the blood, which must be treated with great care if the person has communed. But embalming is also an unnatural procedure which seeks to “preserve” the body after the soul has departed. When the day of the General Resurrection arrives, no amount of embalming fluid will in any way assist Christ in raising a dead body anew. In most states in the United States, there is no legal requirement for embalming, although there are authorities who might attempt to convince the family that there is. In the face of such resistance, the family should simply insist that the wishes of the deceased and his family be observed. As well, unless it is required by law, the family should not allow an autopsy. Such procedures violate the sanctity of the body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. If circumstances require one, it should be as limited as possible.

As soon as possible after death, the body should be taken to the funeral home, washed, and clothed in simple clothes, such as those suitable for attending Church. If the deceased was an adult convert to Orthodoxy, he should be buried in his Baptismal gown, which can be placed over other clothing, if desired. The family should select a simple wooden casket—nothing elaborate or ostentatious. After the body is placed in the casket, it should be covered by a *savanon*, or burial shroud, which has a depiction of the Burial of Christ on it. If possible, the body should then be taken immediately into the Church, feet first, and placed in the center of the Church with the deceased facing the Altar. The Psalter should be read continuously over the body all night, until the time of the Funeral.

During the Funeral, mourners should avoid excessive emotional displays. Wailing and loud sobbing should be avoided, as this shows disrespect for the deceased and is inappropriate for a Christian, who looks to the afterlife with anticipation. After the Funeral is finished, the body is taken out from the Church, feet first, to the graveyard for burial. After the burial, the family should arrange for a meal for those attending the Funeral. If a

meal is not possible, then the family should at least offer traditional hospitality: a small glass of brandy and a sweet or cookie. For the first week after the death, members of the community should take food to the family of the departed, so that they will be better able to cope with their grief and be relieved of the burden of preparing meals.

Memorial Services should be held on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after death, as well as on the anniversary of the person's death and on his Name Day. As many Churches and monasteries as possible should be contacted to offer prayers for the deceased. His name should also be submitted for commemoration at as many Divine Liturgies as possible. These commemorations are very important, as each commemoration is a real blessing for the soul as he or she, completing the cycle of Orthodox life, confronts our Lord at the throne of His glory.