

## Whom Christ loves, angels love too

It is a wonderful truth that the angels in heaven love our children – indeed, all children – and we can take great comfort that at the moment of our baptism, when we are received into the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and He provides each one of us with a guardian angel. This angel remains with us throughout our lives, watching over us, in the same way that we each benefit from the prayers and loving care of our patron saint, after whom we are named at our baptism. The hosts of heaven love and care for us!



Archimandrite Nektarios Serfes

I would like to now share with you the daily prayer to our guardian angel:

### Prayer to the Guardian Angel

*O Holy Angel of God, guardian and protector of my soul and body, pray that I may be forgiven for every transgression I have committed this day.*

*Deliver me from all evil influences and temptations, so that I may not anger my God by any sin. Pray for me that the Lord may make me worthy of His grace and to become partaker of His eternal kingdom. With the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of all the Saints. Amen.*

To be great partakers of the eternal kingdom that our God has promised to us, we must begin with prayer, offering our true love for Him and those who dwell within His Kingdom. Because of our Lord's great and eternal love for us, He has ordered His holy angels to be our guardians, as we read in St. Matthew chapter 18, when in response to the question "Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus took a little child and said, "Unless you are converted and become as little children you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

In verse 10 Jesus goes on, "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven." Our Lord Jesus in this verse makes it absolutely clear that in heaven the angels have been assigned to us and that these angels are always in His presence. Christ also identified Himself with little children, saying in verse 5, "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me."

We have the assurance, then that since our Lord God loves us, He loves all of the children, your children – every child, everywhere! Every child is protected under the wings of a guardian angel and their patron saint. When your child is going through any difficulty or having any health problems, our Lord God is quick to respond. "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (St. Matthew 19:14). Here is the foundation of spiritual education and Christian understanding – letting the children come to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is because of His arms wrapped around each child in love that the angels love and protect children.

So when your beloved child walks out the door of your house, or goes to school (including Sunday school) or goes outside to play, be assured that our Lord God watches over your beloved child, just as He has commanded both the child's guardian angel and patron saint to do.

Even as we get older, what continues to remain in us and with is the love of Lord God. He never leaves us or forsakes us. He continues to watch over us, even in the most difficult times, whether in illness, or during any of life's struggles. God is with us and cares about us. What a loving God we have, who sends us not only the comfort of the Holy Spirit, but even provides us with the further blessings of a guardian angel and our patron saint, whose prayers for us are always rising to the throne of grace!

Let us then walk with our God, our guardian angel, and our patron saint, and ask for their guidance and strength. Humbly in Christ our Lord, +Very Rev. Archimandrite Nektarios Serfes, Boise, Idaho.

## OCF receives generous grant

FISHERS, Ind. – Orthodox Christian Fellowship recently was awarded a matching grant of \$35,000 from the Lilly Endowment.

The grant is part of the Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation (PETV).

In the past year OCF has been able to add several new service learning programs with the support of the Lilly Endowment. One of these programs, Just Love, is an inner-city immersion program designed to allow students to spend a day serving the poor of their city, learn about the complexity of poverty and the challenges facing the poor, and understand how Christians should respond.

Another new program these funds will support is Pilgrimage for Justice. This yearly event brings students together from throughout North America to experience and reflect upon some of the harsh realities of injustice in the world, such as human trafficking and homelessness. The first pilgrimage was held in June of this year and involved simulated activities, reflective exercises and prayer.

To participate in the matching grant, contact Presbytera Shyla Hadzellis, development director, at shyla@ocf.net or (713) 962-0623.

*Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) is the official collegiate campus ministry program under SCOBA.*

A single oil lamp lights the Byzantine icon of the Panagia of the Life-Giving Spring, the only flicker of light in the most ancient chapel of St. Catherine's Monastery. The quiet glow on the icon invites one to become a

### HOLY LIGHT OF SINAI



Sister Joanna

privileged guest in the secret world of the saints, there, to exchange illness for health, confusion for light, burdens for freedom. One other guest waits to share in the mystery, the monastic confessor, sitting unobtrusively off to the side, listening for an inner perception that will provide the few words of life that are all one needs. The icon encourages heartfelt confidence, but what truths lead beyond the surface of everyday existence to the place where solutions are transfiguring not temporary, therapeutic not palliative?

**Geronta, our Lord says, "The truth shall set you free."** "The truth of the Gospel," the confessor, St. Catherine's Father Pavlos, responds. "Freedom is a basic element of the Orthodox faith and a major one, such as love. God gave this freedom. And God Himself doesn't impinge on it. Therefore if you or I don't want to approach God, He doesn't take us by force. He leaves us to do as we want. This is a major point. On the other hand, in the opposite case of the evil one, the devil, if you give him power he doesn't depart from within you. He keeps hold of you. He doesn't respect your freedom at all.

To us, freedom chiefly means for someone to become freed from the passions, from sin. Because if someone lives in an environment that has full freedom, such as America, where real freedom exists, but he is enslaved by the passions in sin, that person is not really free, he is a slave, of the passions.

In our church, there is great emphasis on the need for us to become freed from the passions. It is the greatest servitude, the heaviest servitude, to be a slave of the passions. If we as persons shall become freed from the passions, from sin, then we will live in true freedom, in whatever environment we find ourselves.

**What is the difference between a passion and a sin?**

It's the same thing, but the passion is something that has greater hold on you in terms of time. Sin is something we do once, but the passion is a condition that has become permanent within us.

**A sin we do many times?**

Yes, it continues ...

**In America, it is usual to use the word "passion" to praise someone; we say someone has a "passion for music," for instance. We consider it a good thing to have a passion. We even use this method of speech to identify ourselves – "his passion is cooking."**

Yes, in Greece too that's common. It is something excessive, one loves something to extreme.

**Then how is a good passion distinguished from a bad one?**

The sinful passion is something that transgresses the commandment of God. And the other isn't right. For instance, to have a passion for music – it isn't a transgression of the law of God, but it isn't good.

**Why?**

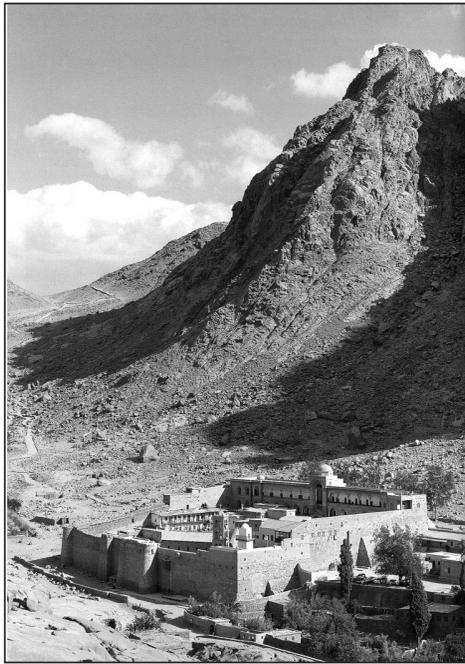
The extreme? When one eats to the extreme ... he will get sick! (laughingly)

**Where then should our excessive love be?**

Our love is where God wishes it. Does God want a particular thing? That which God wishes, that is where we must go to extremes, with much love.

**Is it possible that we often give our love to other things**

## Freedom from Sin



Bruce M. White Photography

**The oldest monastic community in the world is at St. Catherine's Monastery, built around the Burning Bush at the base of Mount Sinai by the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century. Countless generations of holy ascetics struggled to free themselves from the passions in this revered center of Orthodox spirituality.**

The airplane, in order to overcome the earth's gravity, in the beginning, at take-off, puts out all its power in order to lift off the ground. And then, once it achieves altitude, it goes more easily, you see? It's the same thing for a person. In order to escape the pull which sin has, to put off the weight which is pressing him down, requires strength, much strength, and decision and will. It's not an easy thing.

As St. Catherine's elected Dikaioi, **Geronta Pavlos** has been responsible for the spiritual life of the monastery for four decades. He represents the Archbishop during his frequent unavoidable absences, and oversees the daily worship services and large monastery garden. The hesychast geronta, devoted to ceaseless "prayer of the heart," also responds to the spiritual needs of countless Orthodox pilgrims, both within the monastery and throughout Greece and Cyprus. His insightful spiritual guidance is in constant demand.



**Sr. Joanna** has been associated with St. Catherine's Monastery since 1990 through its dependent monasteries in Greece and Sinai, most recently the historic Red Sea hermitage of Hammam Mousa (Springs of Moses), where the Hebrew people camped during the Exodus after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea.

**as a surrogate for spiritual life, to fill the void within us because we don't love God as we should?**

Yes, yes, many times, yes.

**We have a lot of love in America for pets, for instance.**

Yes. Or a mother can love her child excessively, with passion – that is damaging. Not only does it not help the child, it can hurt him when love is pathological.

**Why don't we give our love to God as we should? What makes us prefer to give it elsewhere?**

Because – what did you say previously? – other things have taken the place that God should occupy. Those things are easier. Also, they please the emotions, or they please physically. Whereas, doing the will of God many times requires toil on our part, and pain, don't you see?

**Maybe we think we are not able to know God, or are not worthy.**

No, that's not it. The point is that our love for God is

expressed with our keeping His commandments. And often those commandments seem heavy to us. Whereas, the other is easy, it's not heavy.

**Is it really a heavy thing for us to keep the commandments of God?**

Many times, isn't it?

**But doesn't Christ say, "My yoke is easy and My burden light"?**

It becomes light with the Grace of God, when a person has the will and decides to do that which God wills, saying, "Whether it's easy or difficult I will do it" – then it becomes easy.

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**In America, a viewpoint is circulating that we cannot come to know God. Many people say they believe in a "higher power" that exists but that they cannot gain knowledge of.**

Certainly, we may not be able to understand God, because God is infinite, but we can have interaction with Him, communication with Him. With prayer, with the keeping of His commandments – these bring fellowship with Him, communication. God wants this. And it is easy.

**How then does one get his spiritual airplane off the ground?**

With our own effort, first and foremost, by wanting to. By understanding that in serving sin, our passions, we have lost our freedom. We must understand that, and want to break free from this slavery. And then, with the Grace of God, we will progress. We will struggle according to our strength as people, waging our spiritual campaign, and with the help of God we will arrive at freedom.

**Tell us more about this goal, Geronta.**

We must become simple, humble people, because in the final analysis it is to those souls that God goes, to the humble ones ... and there He finds rest. The heart which is humble becomes the throne of God. And then, if God comes and dwells inside us – from that point on, things [chuckles happily], are directed in another direction.

**How then do we understand we are serving sin, our passions?**

When a person does evil, he (still) has the voice of God inside him, the conscience, as we say. And it tells him, "You didn't do well; that which you did wasn't good." The person might try to fool his conscience, to say, "It wasn't bad, it was OK." But the conscience continually speaks to him from within – the voice of God inside of us – and when we go and confess and say our sin, then it stops. So it's an alarm that rings, and when the owner goes and turns it off, it stops. It's the same thing – the voice of God within us is an alarm that God has put there.

**We read in Holy Scripture very clearly about Holy Communion but not about the Mystery of Confession.**

Look then, this is a fundamental principle, but Holy Scripture doesn't express it with the word "confession." It expresses the Mystery with the word "repentance." "Repent," didn't our Christ say continually? The message of our Christ was "repentance." Therefore, confession is the Mystery of Repentance. Now, our Christ, when He met His disciples after the Resurrection, told them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them." That is to say, he wanted a person to enter the process, the ordained confessor. Not that he forgives the sins – God forgives sins. But in confession the spiritual father fulfills the command of God.

Many times people make a mistake and say to the confessor, "Read me a prayer" and they mean confession. It isn't however; the prayer is another thing. Confession is repentance – contrition in the depths of the heart.

**We thank you very much, Geronta.**

To God the thanks. May all these things be to all our benefit, both to us and to all of you, because you live in a great desert, the desert of the cities, as we say, That desert is difficult. This one, ours here, is an easier desert. *O Theos mazi sas.* May God be with you.

*(Geronta Pavlos' insights on confession, on St. Catherine's miraculous history, on the spiritual struggle and its gifts will be continued in the following articles in this series.)*