

Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 7

1 “Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. 6 “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. 7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! 12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. 13 “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. 15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them. 21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ 24 “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” 28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Gospel of St. John, Chapter 17

1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

6 “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. 8 For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. 9 “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. 10 And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. 12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. 20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. 24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

I Corinthians Chapter 15

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. 12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But

if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. 16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. 29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? 30 And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? 31 I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" 33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." 34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame. 35 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" 36 Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. 37 And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. 38 But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. 39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. 40 There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. 50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must

put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Ephesians Chapter 4

1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. 7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. 17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. 26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. 28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. 29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and

evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Hebrews Chapter 1

1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. 5 For to which of the angels did He ever say: “ You are My Son, Today I have begotten You”? And again: “ I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son”? 6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: “ Let all the angels of God worship Him.” 7 And of the angels He says: “ Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire.” 8 But to the Son He says: “ Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” 10 And: “ You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail.” 13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: “ Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

St. Steven (St. Simon the Monk) the First Crowned King of Serbia
(Commemorated on September 24)
(from http://www.saintsteven.org/wp/life_of_saint_steven.html)

During the 12th and 13th centuries, the Nemanjic dynasty ruled Serbia. Saint Steven was the middle son of his devout parents, the Grand Zhupan—a title of nobility among medieval Slavs—Stefan Nemanja and his wife, Princess Anna. When his father became aged and abdicated his title in 1196, he chose Stevan as his successor. In the presence of the lords and nobleman of all ranks assembled together with the bishops of the Church, Nemanja called his son Steven before him, blessed him and gave him the scepter of rule. Having done this, Nemanja took monastic vows, receiving the name Simeon, and together with his youngest son Sava, spent the rest of his life in peace and monastic tranquility at the great spiritual center of Hilandar, a monastery which they established on Mount Athos in 1199. A year later, on February 13, 1200, the monk Simeon departed this life, and the Council of monks of the Holy Mountain immediately canonized him a saint.

When he came to the throne, Steven ruled with competence and love—protecting those who were oppressed, feeding the poor, giving abundant alms to the elderly and helpless, treating his royal subjects as brothers and children—mindful that he must give account of his deeds at the Last Judgment. He was a devout

Christian and wise and peace loving ruler. He protected the Holy Orthodox Faith from heresies and built many churches and monasteries. It was one of the most productive periods in Serbian history. It remained a time of peace and harmony until a dispute arose between Steven and his brother Vukan, prince of Zeta and Hum. Their brother Sava, being politically astute and a quintessential diplomat, became known as a “peacemaker” for reconciling his brothers. Steven wrote to his brother Sava on Mount Athos, asking him to return to the fatherland and bring with him the body of their father, Simeon, which had been entombed at Hilandar. It was his hope that the prayers and presence of his saintly father would bring God's mercy on them. Sava, anxious to comfort and settle the dispute between his brothers, as well as to fulfill the dying behest of his father, returned to Serbia with Simeon's relics. For Vukan and Steven, it was this event that turned discord into peace, sorrow into joy, and dissonance into brotherly love.

The affection between them was even greater than before, and peace and well-being again reigned in Serbia. Later Sava, the great enlightener and teacher, became the first Archbishop of Serbia.

On the feast of the Ascension of Our Lord in 1220, as Archbishop, Sava assembled the authorities of the Church and state at the Zicha Monastery founded by his brother Steven. In a salient ceremony following the Holy Liturgy, Archbishop Sava crowned his brother Steven, “First Crowned King of Serbia.” Working together, Sava and Steven carefully honored all precepts of the Orthodox Faith as they administered the internal structure and international posture of both the Church and State. These two saints, the First Archbishop and First Crowned King elevated Holy Orthodoxy to great glory among the Serbian people.

As he grew aged, Steven sought to follow in the footsteps of his father and younger brother by taking monastic vows. To fulfill his wish, Saint Sava tonsured Steven a monk before his death, and gave him the name Simon. Steven entered into rest as the monk Simon on September 24, 1224. His miracle-working body rests today alongside his father and mother in the Studenica Monastery in Serbia.

On October 6, 1968, in a ceremony of historic significance, two small particles of the relics of Saint Steven (Simon the monk) were placed in a reliquary and entrusted to Saint Steven's Cathedral. Taken with awed reverence, far from the time and land of Saint Steven's birth, these wonderworking relics will always grace the Cathedral in Alhambra that bears his honored name.

St. Spyridon the Wonderworker and Bishop of Tremithus

Commemorated on December 12

(from <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>)

Saint Spyridon of Tremithus was born towards the end of the third century on the island of Cyprus. He was a shepherd, and had a wife and children. He used all his substance for the needs of his neighbors and the homeless, for which the Lord rewarded him with a gift of wonderworking. He healed those who were incurably sick, and cast out demons.

After the death of his wife, during the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337), he was made Bishop of Tremithus, Cyprus. As a bishop, the saint did not alter his manner of life, but combined pastoral service with deeds of charity.

According to the witness of Church historians, St Spyridon participated in the sessions of the First Ecumenical Council in the year 325. At the Council, the saint entered into a dispute with a Greek philosopher who was defending the Arian heresy. The power of St Spyridon's plain, direct speech showed everyone the importance of human wisdom before God's Wisdom: "Listen, philosopher, to what I tell you. There is one God Who created man from dust. He has ordered all things, both visible and invisible, by His Word and His Spirit. The Word is the Son of God, Who came down upon the earth on account of our sins. He was born of a Virgin, He lived among men, and suffered and died for our salvation, and then He arose from the dead, and He has resurrected the human race with Him. We believe that He is one in essence (consubstantial) with the Father, and equal to Him in authority and honor. We believe this without any sly rationalizations, for it is impossible to grasp this mystery by human reason."

As a result of their discussion, the opponent of Christianity became the saint's zealous defender and later received holy Baptism. After his conversation with St Spyridon, the philosopher turned to his companions and said, "Listen! Until now my rivals have presented their arguments, and I was able to refute their proofs with other proofs. But instead of proofs from reason, the words of this Elder are filled with some sort of special power, and no one can refute them, since it is impossible for man to oppose God. If any of you thinks as I do now, let him believe in Christ and join me in following this man, for God Himself speaks through his lips."

At this Council, St Spyridon displayed the unity of the Holy Trinity in a remarkable way. He took a brick in his hand and squeezed it. At that instant fire shot up from it, water dripped on the ground, and only dust remained in the hands of the wonderworker. "There was only one brick," St Spyridon said, "but it was composed of three elements. In the Holy Trinity there are three Persons, but only one God."

The saint cared for his flock with great love. Through his prayer, drought was replaced by abundant rains, and incessant rains were replaced by fair weather. Through his prayers the sick were healed and demons cast out.

A woman once came up to him with a dead child in her arms, imploring the intercession of the saint. He prayed, and the infant was restored to life. The mother, overcome with joy, collapsed lifeless. Through the prayer of the saint of God the mother was restored to life.

Another time, hastening to save his friend, who had been falsely accused and sentenced to death, the saint was hindered on his way by the unanticipated flooding of a stream. The saint commanded the water: "Halt! For the Lord of all the world commands that you permit me to cross so that a man may be saved." The will of the saint was fulfilled, and he crossed over happily to the other shore. The judge, apprised of the miracle that had occurred, received St Spyridon with esteem and set his friend free.

Similar instances are known from the life of the saint. Once, he went into an empty church, and ordered that the lampadas and candles be lit, and then he began the service. When he said, "Peace be unto all," both he and the deacon heard from above the resounding of "a great multitude of voices saying, "And with thy spirit." This choir was majestic and more sweetly melodious than any human choir. To each petition of the litanies, the invisible choir sang, "Lord, have mercy." Attracted by the church singing, the people who lived nearby hastened towards it. As they got closer and closer to the church, the wondrous singing filled their ears and gladdened their hearts. But when they entered into the church, they saw no one but the bishop and several

church servers, and they no longer heard the singing which had greatly astonished them."

St Simeon Metaphrastes (November 9), the author of his Life, likened St Spyridon to the Patriarch Abraham in his hospitality. Sozomen, in his CHURCH HISTORY, offers an amazing example from the life of the saint of how he received strangers. One time, at the start of the Forty-day Fast, a stranger knocked at his door. Seeing that the traveller was very exhausted, St Spyridon said to his daughter, "Wash the feet of this man, so he may recline to dine." But since it was Lent there were none of the necessary provisions, for the saint "partook of food only on certain days, and on other days he went without food." His daughter replied that there was no bread or flour in the house. Then St Spyridon, apologizing to his guest, ordered his daughter to cook a salted ham from their larder. After seating the stranger at table, he began to eat, urging that man to do the same. When the latter refused, calling himself a Christian, the saint rejoined, "It is not proper to refuse this, for the Word of God proclaims, "Unto the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15).

Another historical detail reported by Sozomen, was characteristic of the saint. It was his custom to distribute one part of the gathered harvest to the destitute, and another portion to those having need while in debt. He did not take a portion for himself, but simply showed them the entrance to his storeroom, where each could take as much as was needed, and could later pay it back in the same way, without records or accountings.

There is also the tale by Socrates Scholasticus about how robbers planned to steal the sheep of St Spyridon. They broke into the sheepfold at night, but here they found themselves all tied up by some invisible power. When morning came the saint went to his flock, and seeing the tied-up robbers, he prayed and released them. For a long while he advised them to leave their path of iniquity and earn their livelihood by respectable work. Then he made them a gift of a sheep and sending them off, the saint said kindly, "Take this for your trouble, so that you did not spend a sleepless night in vain."

All the Lives of the saint speak of the amazing simplicity and the gift of wonderworking granted him by God. Through a word of the saint the dead were awakened, the elements of nature tamed, the idols smashed. At one point, a Council had been convened at Alexandria by the Patriarch to discuss what to do about the idols and pagan temples there. Through the prayers of the Fathers of the Council all the idols fell down except one, which was very much revered. It was revealed to the Patriarch in a vision that this idol had to be shattered by St Spyridon of Tremithus. Invited by the Council, the saint set sail on a ship, and at the moment the ship touched shore and the saint stepped out on land, the idol in Alexandria with all its offerings turned to dust, which then was reported to the Patriarch and all the bishops.

St Spyridon lived his earthly life in righteousness and sanctity, and prayerfully surrendered his soul to the Lord. His relics repose on the island of Corfu (Kerkyra), in a church named after him (His right hand, however, is located in Rome). His memory is also celebrated on Cheesefare Saturday.

Greatmartyr Catherine of Alexandria

Commemorated on November 24 on the Slavic Calendar

Commemorated on November 25 on the Byzantine Calendar

(from <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>)

The Holy Great Martyr Catherine was the daughter of Constus, the governor of Alexandrian Egypt during the reign of the emperor Maximian (305-313). Living in the capital, the center of Hellenistic knowledge, and possessed of a rare beauty and intellect, Catherine received an excellent education, studying the works of the greatest philosophers and teachers of antiquity. Young men from the most worthy families of the empire sought the hand of the beautiful Catherine, but she was not interested in any of them. She told her parents that she would enter into marriage only with someone who surpassed her in nobility, wealth, comeliness and wisdom.

Catherine's mother, a secret Christian, sent her to her own spiritual Father, a saintly Elder living in a cave outside the city, for advice. After listening to Catherine, the Elder said that he knew of a Youth who surpassed her in everything. "His countenance is more radiant than the shining of the sun, and all of creation is governed by His wisdom. His riches are given to all the nations of the world, yet they never diminish. His compassion is unequalled."

This description of the Heavenly Bridegroom produced in the soul of the holy maiden an ardent desire to see Him. "If you do as I tell you," said the monk, "you will gaze upon the countenance of this illustrious man." In parting, the Elder handed Catherine an icon of the Theotokos with the divine Child Jesus on Her arm and told her to pray with faith to the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the Heavenly Bridegroom, and She would hear Catherine and grant her heart's desire.

Catherine prayed all night and was permitted to see the Most Holy Virgin, Who said Her Divine Son, "Behold Thy handmaiden Catherine, how fair and virtuous she is." But the Child turned His face away from her saying, "No, she is ugly and unbelieving. She is a foolish pauper, and I cannot bear to look at her until she forsakes her impiety."

Catherine returned again to the Elder deeply saddened, and told him what she had seen in the dream. He lovingly received her, instructed her in the faith of Christ, admonished her to preserve her purity and integrity and to pray unceasingly. She then received the Mystery of holy Baptism from him. Again St Catherine had a vision of the Most Holy Theotokos with Her Child. Now the Lord looked tenderly at her and gave her a beautiful ring, a wondrous token of her betrothal to the Heavenly Bridegroom (This ring is still on her hand).

At that time the emperor Maximian was in Alexandria for a pagan festival. Therefore, the celebration was especially splendid and crowded. The cries of the sacrificial animals, the smoke and the smell of the sacrifices, the endless blazing of fires, and the bustling crowds at the arenas defiled the city of Alexandria. Human victims also were brought, the confessors of Christ, those who would not deny Him under torture. They were condemned to death in the fire. The saint's love for the Christian martyrs and her fervent desire to ease their sufferings compelled Catherine to speak to the pagan priest and to the emperor Maximian.

Introducing herself, the saint confessed her faith in the One True God and with wisdom exposed the errors of the pagans. The beauty of the maiden captivated the emperor. In order to convince her and to show the superiority of pagan wisdom, the emperor ordered fifty of the most learned philosophers and rhetoricians of the Empire to dispute with her, but the saint got the better of the wise men, so that they came to believe in Christ themselves. St Catherine made the Sign of the Cross over the martyrs, and they bravely accepted death for Christ and were burned alive by order of the emperor.

Maximian, no longer hoping to convince the saint, tried to entice her with the promise of riches and fame. Receiving an angry refusal, the emperor gave orders to subject the saint to terrible tortures and then throw her in prison. The Empress Augusta, who had heard much about the saint, wanted to see her. She prevailed upon the military commander Porphyrius to accompany her to the prison with a detachment of soldiers. The empress was impressed by the strong spirit of St Catherine, whose face was radiant with divine grace. The holy martyr explained the Christian teaching to them, and they were converted to Christ.

On the following day they again brought the martyr to the judgment court where, under the threat of being broken on the wheel, they urged that she renounce the Christian Faith and offer sacrifice to the gods. The saint steadfastly confessed Christ and she herself approached the wheels; but an angel smashed the instruments of execution, which shattered into pieces with many pagans standing nearby.

Having beheld this wonder, the Empress Augusta and the imperial courtier Porphyrius with 200 soldiers confessed their faith in Christ in front of everyone, and they were beheaded. Maximian again tried to entice the holy martyr, proposing marriage to her, and again he was refused. St Catherine firmly confessed her fidelity to the heavenly Bridegroom Christ, and with a prayer to Him she herself lay her head on the block beneath the executioner's sword.

The relics of St Catherine were taken by the angels to Mount Sinai. In the sixth century,, the venerable head and left hand of the holy martyr were found through a revelation and transferred with honor to a newly-constructed church of the Sinai monastery, built by the holy Emperor Justinian (November 14).

St Catherine is called upon for relief and assistance during a difficult childbirth. Pilgrims to her monastery on Mt Sinai are given souvenir rings as a remembrance of their visit.

Equal of the Apostles Helen, the Mother of the Emperor Constantine

Commemorated on May 21

(from <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>)

Saint Helen was the mother of St Constantine the Great, and was probably born at Drepanum (Helenopolis) in Asia Minor to parents of humble means. She married Constantius Chlorus, and their son Constantine was born in 274. Constantius divorced her in 294 in order to further his political ambition by marrying a woman of noble rank. After he became emperor, Constantine showed his mother great honor and respect, granting her the imperial title "Augusta."

After Constantine became the sole ruler of the Western Roman Empire, he issued the Edict of Milan in 313 which guaranteed religious tolerance for Christians. St Helen, who was a Christian, may have influenced him in this decision. In 323, when he became the sole ruler of the entire Roman Empire, he extended the provisions of the Edict of Milan to the Eastern half of the Empire. After three hundred years of persecution, Christians could finally practice their faith without fear.

The emperor deeply revered the victory-bearing Sign of the Cross of the Lord, and also wanted to find the actual Cross upon which our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. For this purpose he sent his own mother, the holy Empress Helen, to Jerusalem, granting her both power and money. Patriarch Macarius of Jerusalem and St Helen began the search, and through the will of God, the Life-Creating Cross was miraculously discovered

in 326. (The account of the finding of the Cross of the Lord is found under the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 14). The Orthodox Church commemorates the Uncovering of the Precious Cross and the Precious Nails by the Holy Empress Helen on March 6.

While in Palestine, the holy empress did much of benefit for the Church. She ordered that all places connected with the earthly life of the Lord and His All-Pure Mother, should be freed of all traces of paganism, and she commanded that churches should be built at these places.

The emperor Constantine ordered a magnificent church in honor of Christ's Resurrection to be built over His tomb. St Helen gave the Life-Creating Cross to the Patriarch for safe-keeping, and took part of the Cross with her for the emperor. After distributing generous alms at Jerusalem and feeding the needy (at times she even served them herself), the holy Empress Helen returned to Constantinople, where she died in the year 327.

Because of her great services to the Church and her efforts in finding the Life-Creating Cross, the empress Helen is called "the Equal of the Apostles."

**From Fr. Thomas Hopko, "The Orthodox Faith: An Elementary Handbook on
the Orthodox Church--Volume 2: Worship--The Divine Liturgy"**

Small Entrance

During the singing of the third antiphon, whether it be the Beatitudes or the Troparion of the day, the so-called Small Entrance is made. The Small Entrance is the solemn procession of the clergy to the altar led by the Book of the Gospels. If the bishop is celebrating, the Gospel Book is brought out to him in the center of the church in the midst of the people where he has been standing from the beginning of the liturgy.

After the exclamation: **Wisdom! Let Us Attend!** the clergy enter the royal gates of the iconostasis while all sing the Hymn of Entrance: *O come, let us worship and fall down before Christ. O Son of God ... Save us who sing unto Thee: Alleluia.*

A special line is added before the final phrase of the entrance hymn at each liturgy, proper to the celebration. Thus, for example, on the Lord's Day this line would always be, **Who rose from the dead.**

If the priest is serving the Divine Liturgy alone, or with a deacon, the Small Entrance is made by the clergy circling the altar table and coming to the middle of the church with the Gospel Book in order to enter through the royal gates of the iconostasis accompanied by the Hymn of Entrance.

The Small Entrance is the first significant movement of the Divine Liturgy. It follows the primary liturgical action which is the gathering of the faithful into the one community of the Church of God. The Small Entrance is the movement of the entire Church through its Head Jesus Christ, in the person of the celebrant, to the altar which symbolizes the Kingdom of God. It is the movement made possible by the Gospel of Christ, the Way to the Kingdom. It can only be accomplished by following Jesus, the Living Word of God in human flesh. (*John 1:1-18*)

There can be no approach to God the Father but through Christ, the Son of God. (*John 14:6*) There can be no communion with God the Father except by the fulfillment of his commandments which are given by Jesus and proclaimed in the words of his Gospel. Thus it is the Gospel of Christ, the Son and Word of God, which takes us into the realm of the

Father and into the eternal life of the Blessed Trinity whose Kingdom we enter and experience in the Divine Liturgy of the Church.

Technically speaking, the Small Entrance is not completed when the clergy enter the sanctuary and stand before the altar table. It is completed only with the singing of the **Thrice-Holy Hymn** during which the clergy proceed to the place behind the altar table (called the **High Place**), at which time the chief celebrant turns and blesses the people with the solemn biblical greeting: **Peace be, unto all!**

While the clergy are still before the altar table, the people sing the **troparia** and **kontakia** of the day. These are hymns which praise the saving events or holy persons celebrated liturgically at the particular gathering. On Sundays these songs always praise Christ's resurrection from the dead.

While these hymns are being sung, the celebrant of the liturgy prays before the altar for the general absolution and forgiveness of sins of the entire assembly so that all of the people might be made worthy by God "to stand before the glory of Thy holy altar and to offer worship and praise which are due unto Thee." There then follows the singing of the Thrice-Holy Hymn of the angels which perpetually resounds in the presence of the Kingdom of God. **Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal! Have mercy on us! (Isaiah 6:1-5)**

This version of the Thrice-Holy Hymn is of very ancient origin. It is a hymn to the Holy Trinity in whose presence the Christians now find themselves at the liturgy. It is within the presence of the Kingdom of God that men are made competent by Christ and the Holy Spirit to hear, to understand and to do the Word of God which will be announced to them from the throne of the Father.

**From Fr. Thomas Hopko, "The Orthodox Faith: An Elementary Handbook on
the Orthodox Church--Volume 2: Worship--The Divine Liturgy"**

Offertory: Great Entrance

It is now time for the sacrificial offering to God. There is only one true and acceptable offering with which God is pleased. It is the offering of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God Who offers himself eternally to the Father for the sins of the world.

In Christ men can offer themselves and each other and all men and the entire world to God. Christ has united all things in himself, and has taken all things upon himself. Thus, in and through him, men can offer all that they are, and all that they have, to God the Father. They can do this because they are in Christ, and have received the Holy Spirit from him.

At this moment in the Divine Liturgy the celebrant prays for himself, confessing his personal unworthiness and affirming that the only Priest of the Church is Jesus: For Thou art the One who offers and the One who is offered, the One who receives and the One who is given, O Christ our God...

The altar table, the icons and all of the people are incensed once again as the Cherubic Hymn is sung: Let us who mystically represent the cherubim and sing the Thrice-holy Hymn to the life - creating Trinity, now lay aside all earthly cares.

The Gifts of bread and wine which stand for Christ, and in him, for all men and the entire world of God's creation - for Life Itself - are now offered to God. They are carried in solemn procession from the table of oblation, into the middle of the church, and through the royal doors of the iconostasis to the altar table. This procession is called the Great Entrance as distinct from the Small Entrance that was made earlier with the Book of the Gospels. In some Orthodox Churches the offertory procession of the Great Entrance is made around the entire nave of the church building, and so it is actually of greater length and solemnity than the small procession with the Gospel Book.

During the offertory procession of the Great Entrance, the celebrant once again prays to God on behalf of all with the prayer of the Crucified Thief: Remember, O Lord in Thy Kingdom... The bread and wine are placed on the altar table and

the people conclude the Cherubic Hymn: That we may receive the King of all who comes invisibly upborne by the angelic hosts. Alleluia.

At this time the celebrant quietly recites verses which call to remembrance the absolute perfection and total sufficiency of Christ and his self-offering. For the Lord who "fills all things" with himself makes even his tomb "the fountain of our resurrection."

The Cherubic Hymn and the meditative verses of the celebrant just mentioned are a late addition to the Divine Liturgy. They were added in the imperial era of Byzantium in order to enhance the essential liturgical act of the offertory which is the movement of the Church offering itself to God the Father through its, Head, High Priest and King Jesus Christ who is also the Suffering Servant, the Lamb of God and the New Passover; the sole sufficient sacrifice which is perfect, total and fully acceptable to the Father.

In the liturgical offertory, the faithful give themselves in sacrifice to God together with Christ. They do so through the Holy Spirit as those who have died and risen with Christ in baptism. In order for the liturgical act of offering to be genuine and true, it must be the living expression of the Church's constant and total self-offering to God. If each member of the Church is not in perpetual sacrifice with Christ to the Father and is not "bearing his cross" by the power of the Spirit, the offertory entrance of the Divine Liturgy becomes a sterile symbol devoid of reality. As such it is done not as a movement towards God, but unto condemnation and judgment.

Thus, once again a litany is chanted and a prayer is made that God would be merciful, because of the sacrifice of Christ, and would accept his people and their offering in spite of their sins; and would allow them worthily to offer the Gifts and to receive Holy Communion with God.

O Lord God Almighty, who alone art holy, who acceptest the sacrifice of praise from those who call upon Thee with their whole heart. Accept also the prayer of us sinners, and bear it to Thy holy altar, enabling us to offer unto Thee gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our sins and for the errors of the people. Make us worthy to find grace in Thy sight that our sacrifice may be acceptable unto Thee, and that the Good Spirit of Grace may dwell upon us, and upon these Gifts here offered, and upon all Thy People...

At this time in the Divine Liturgy the gifts of money for the work of the Church, the propagation of the Gospel and the assistance of the poor and the needy are collected and offered to God.

**From Fr. Thomas Hopko, "The Orthodox Faith: An Elementary Handbook on
the Orthodox Church--Volume 4: Spirituality-- Prayer, Fasting, and Alms-Giving "
Alms-Giving**

In Christ's teaching, alms-giving goes together with fasting and prayer. We have seen that this is also the teaching of Isaiah (See [Fasting](#)) and of the Old Testament generally. When one prays and fasts, one must show love through active generosity to others.

Beware of practicing your piety before men, in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do...that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:1-4)

As with fasting and prayer, the gifts of help to the poor must be done strictly in secret, so much so that one should, as it were, even hide from himself what he is giving to others, not letting one hand know what the other is doing. Every effort must be made, if the gift will be pleasing to God, to avoid all ostentation and boastfulness in its giving.

As we have already seen, there is no real love if one does not share what he has with the poor. *...if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (1 John 3:17)*

Such was the command of the law of Moses as well. *If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart, and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and it be sin in you. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land. (Deuteronomy 15:7-11)*

Such also was the teaching of Wisdom. *The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends. He who despises his neighbor is a sinner, but happy is he who is kind to the poor. He who mocks the poor, insults his Maker, he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 14:20-21, 17:5)*

According to St. John Chrysostom, no one can be saved without giving alms and without caring for the poor. St. Basil the Great says that a man who has two coats or two pair of shoes, when his neighbor has none, is a thief. All earthly things are the possessions of God. **"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell in it."** (Psalm 24:1) Men are but stewards of what belongs to the Lord and should share the gifts of His creation with one another as much as they can. To store up earthly possessions, according to Christ, is the epitome of foolishness, and a rich man shall hardly be saved. (cf. Luke 12:15-21)

How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 15:24-27, Matthew 19: 23-26, Mark 10:23-27) Woe unto you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full now, for you shall hunger. (Luke 6:24-25) For He who is mighty...has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He sent away empty. (Luke 1:53)

The reason why a rich man can hardly be saved, according to Jesus, is because when one has possessions, he wants to keep them, and gather still more. For the **"delight in riches chokes the word of God, and so it proves unfruitful"** in man's heart. (Matthew 13:22, Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14)

According to the apostle Paul, the "love of money" - not money itself - is the "root of all evils." *There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6:6-10, cf Hebrews 13:5-6)*

The apostle himself collected money for the poor and greatly praised those who were generous in giving. *The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, but he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide...so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." (Psalm 112:9) You will be enriched in every way for great generosity which...will produce thanksgiving to God... (2 Corinthians 9:6-12)*

The spiritual person must share what he has with the poor. He must do so cheerfully and not reluctantly, secretly and not for the praise of men. He also must do so, as the poor widow in the gospel, not out of his abundance, but out of his need. *And Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And He called His disciples to Him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living."* (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:2)

Giving alms, therefore, must be a sacrificial act if it has any spiritual worth. One cannot give merely what is left over when all his own needs are satisfied. One must take from oneself and give to others. In the spiritual tradition of the Church it is the teaching that what one saves through fasting and abstinence, for example during the special lenten seasons, should not be kept for other times but should be given away to the poor.

In recent times the teaching has developed that the spiritual man should work within the processes and possibilities of the free societies in order to make a social structure in which the poor will not merely be the object of the charity of the rich, but will themselves have the chance to work and to share in the common wealth of man. In this way the poor will have dignity and self-respect through assuming their just place as members of society. "We do not want hand-outs," say the poor, "we want to be able to learn and to work for ourselves." The spiritual person is the one who works to make this happen; and it is right and praiseworthy to do so. The only temptations here would be to have this attitude and to undertake this action without personal sacrifice, and to think that when such a "just society" will exist - if it ever will - all of men's problems will be solved. The spiritual decadence of many wealthy persons demonstrates that this is not the case. Thus the words of Christ remain forever valid and true: *"...the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me...if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, and follow me."* (Matthew 19:21, Mark 14:5-7, Luke 18:22, John 12:8)

The one who is truly perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect is the one who gives all for the sake of others, in the name of Christ, with Him, and for His sake. Such a person is most truly living the spiritual life.