

ANTICHRIST AND THE COMING APOSTASY



The Perceptible Universe as a Revelation about Its Creator

The unbegotten and uncreated God, living in Holy Trinity, being all powerful and wholly perfect, is entirely self sufficient and had no need of created beings. His infinite

love, however, longed to have participants in His eternal blessedness. For this reason, God prepared His Heavenly Kingdom and created the celestial beings.

Love is not coercive, it does not force love from others. All of God's celestial beings, the angels, were made by Him with free wills. This was necessary so that they could render true voluntary love to their Creator, rather than a mindless, senseless obedience.

One of the most radiant and powerful of these angels, Lucifer, exercising his free will, chose instead to adore himself rather than God. Because of this self-love he became self-willed, and being self-willed he became ambitious and decided to create a new kingdom in opposition to God's kingdom, daring to usurp God's place and power. The consequences of this rebellion are well known to all. Lucifer and his minions were cast out of heaven and today remain as the implacable enemies of God and all His creation. The temptation and disobedience of Lucifer infected many of the angelic beings so that the new kingdom of evil was populated with these devotees of the prince of darkness, the demons.

Those angels who remained resolute during the destructive temptations were fortified by God's help and became everlasting sons of truth.

Because of the Creator's love the celestial kingdom could not remain lacking and in order to complete its fulfillment God created a new creature, man. Adam and Eve were brought out of nothing into a cosmos specifically created for them, the jewels in the crown of God's creation.

The magnificence of the Creator was manifest even in the basic formless, invisible atoms which served as the material for founding all nature and man himself.

The Creation

We are ignorant of the initial condition of the universe or for how long the elements existed in chaos, for Sacred Scripture initiates history when the Life-giving Holy Spirit moved across the face of the deep, ordering the world. The history of the visible world begins with the disposition of these simple particles.

That the elements by which we are today surrounded consisted in the very beginning of nothing more than formless particles is clear from the word of God: "When as yet He had made neither land nor streams nor the mass of the earth's soil"

(Prov. 8:26). Scientific natural discoveries have confirmed this testimony that the elements of the world are composed of a singular material type, i.e., they have a singularity of nature. These petty, tangible particles were made by the Creator with strength of action unfathomable to us. Consequentially they formed in their unions, couplings and divisions, a numberless variety of forms and bodies in nature.

Light's physical creation with energies emanating from it occurred on the first day of creation at God's word: "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). On creation's fourth day the light gathered into great bodies which were to rule the lesser bodies taken from them; to rule by the means of attraction, to heat and illuminate them. These great bodies are the stars of which the sun is one.

The "waters" of the great atomic "ocean," submitting to the Divine command and the action of the Holy Spirit, divided and ordered into diverse great bodies in turn dividing into a multitude of planets and like bodies on creation's second day.

A mixture and evaporation of the waters from the oceans which covered the land created air, clouds and fresh water on the third day. Divine might cast the continents up from the oceans in great upheavals. Of special significance is the third day of creation because on that day vegetation started on the earth, producing the first and most perfect fruit for the use of those inhabiting nature. From then on the earth like a benevolent mother spent her energy mightily for the benefit of humanity and all living creatures.

This will continue until the end times when the earth is weakened and depleted by the neglect of man in its cultivation and use. Poor and feeble then, it will with difficulty provide for humanity although it will continue a yield until the end time as the Sacred Scripture says: "As long as the earth lasts, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, they will never cease" (Gen. 8:22). The end time will come upon the earth and find her producing her final harvest for mankind.

The end of this universe will not be destruction but a restoration and renewal: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had vanished, and there was no longer any sea" (Rev. 21:1). Its restored properties will eternally serve for the renewal of the creatures of the new life.

The Miracle of Light

On the fourth day the lustrous beginning commenced. The great bodies of the cosmos, clothed in shining radiance, are arranged to rule smaller ones and to clothe them with light on the side turned towards their radiance, leaving the side turned away in darkness.

No area is deprived of the opportunity of receiving the benefits and illumination poured forth from the sun, for the lesser bodies were given rotary motion on sloping axes and an annual migration around the central sphere from which they emanated. By these dual motions the planets have changes of season, of days, of nights, all of which are vital for their temporary existence; for the revitalization of their weakened states and to ensure that nature continue its temporary tasks.

By way of these movements every place on earth's surface receives the actions of the solar rays. Of course there is diversity in the strength of the rays for they are either direct or indirect depending on the various belts on the terrestrial surface, receiving more or less light and heat.

This merely natural phenomenon reveals that the Creator has shown us an image of the Divine Light in the miracle of mere physical light. Sentient, intelligent creatures are by themselves dark (i.e., not being the source of light). Only upon the reception of inner illumination and warmth from the Spirit do they stop being in darkness and approach the moral beauty which was intended for them according to the *economia* of the Divine plan.

The division of white light into the seven various bright colors represents for us the seven blessed gifts of the Holy Spirit which strengthen the soul through the Sacred Mysteries of the Church so that the soul might grow in all virtues for the glory of God. Each visible object manifests to the eyes a hue according to that object's own inner ability to reflect a ray of the spectrum of seven colors.

Thus it is with man's spirit. Of itself it is dark and would remain dark were it not for the Divine gift of Grace which enables man's soul to receive this blessed Light and warmth from the Creator. The light of the human soul, like lunar light, is reflected from that Spiritual Sun, the Sun of Truth. Without this gift the soul would remain dark, despondent, desperate and evil.

Since no point on earth is deprived of life giving solar rays so likewise no intelligent creature is denied, if he so desires, receiving the life giving Spiritual Sun, the very Creator and Savior of mankind.

Adam the first man turned away from the Sun of Truth and sank into a state of moral darkness. From then until the time of the coming of Christ, the Never-setting Sun, only a few people turned towards this Light. Mankind became so inured to the moral darkness that was more convenient for evil that he actually liked his chains and shackles. Those choosing light over darkness lamented over the spectacle of God's created image enslaved by dark immorality. These holy people longed for the promised time when the Beatific Light would shine and be available to all who had not yet utterly lost the capability of accepting the Light of Truth.

How truly blessed our own age has been in comparison with the centuries before the promised Light, Jesus Christ. In Orthodox Christian lands which had long been converted to the Light of Truth the peoples had the possibility to be raised accepting the Light. In the heterodox countries of the West this is not the case where we are surrounded by the darkness of those who have not only rejected Christ and His Orthodox Church, but actually struggle against Her. We are immersed in customs and traditions which are completely antagonistic to the Holy Orthodox Church and for this matter we must more closely embrace the traditions of Orthodox Christianity in order to really accept the Light of Truth..

Obviously this has never been without a struggle that we receive the bounty of Christ. There has always been an invisible warfare. But where is the arena of this struggle? Where must we go to fight the battle? The arena is actually within us. We comprehend it in our feelings, thoughts, intentions and sensations. Darkness manifests itself in words and actions which mirror our real state, a state so foreign to the one intended for us by Christ the Sun of Truth, in our thoughts, words and actions.

It pleased the almighty Creator of the universe to plot out in visible instances the mysteries of the invisible world, of how once a multitude of "stars" fell from heaven so even as now a multitude of souls are falling away from the Holy Orthodox Church. At the same time, regardless of the casualties that fall away, we are reassured by the Creator Himself that no hostile force or forces will ever be able to destroy the Church even until the end of time.

The New Babylon

Regardless, as the time of the glorification of the Holy Church approaches a new edifice will be raised in the world, one contradictory to the truth of Christ's Foundation; this is the mysterious Babylon. The efforts of the ancients who fantasized immortalizing themselves on earth, of making a name for themselves, are being repeated. Contemporary Chaldeans, just as the ancients, do not scheme to have their names written in heaven but rather of establishing a name and a monument of their exploits here on earth.

Here is a New Babylon in the essence of the word: amalgamating truth and falsehood. Substituting the luminous light of the teaching of the Holy Church, founded on the Sacred Gospels, the Prophets, Apostles, Fathers of the Church and the Councils, these *nouveau* Babylonians pant for apostate beliefs and the darkest philosophical systems in which truth is mixed with lies and cobbled together with error. This way of thinking is the basis of the New Babylon. One can surmise what eventually will evolve from all this by observing those man-concocted societies which lead to the utter confusion of people's understanding, exactly as happened with ancient Babylon.

Therefore the same identical fate awaits this New Babylon as befell the old one, even though both claimed and claim to be grasping for heaven. This tower of erroneous teaching springs up not merely daily but even hourly. Truly great is the peril of becoming lost on the path of salvation due to the spreading debris from all this Babylonian construction of an edifice for the dreamers who endeavor to inscribe their names here on earth.

Where can one flee to from all this dust that blinds to the truth and suffocates with falsehoods? Where besides that peaceful haven eternally open, to the Sanctuary erected not by men's hands but by the Creator of the universe Himself? Where else if not to the True Orthodox Church of Christ? How more blessed it is to be a humble servant in God's house than to be a prestigious and famous architect in this New Babylon which will only end in utter ruin and perdition.

The Heavenly Kingdom

Viewing the celestial stars which illuminate the night and guide sailors to safe harbors, our minds are drawn to that unique constellation of spiritual stars known as the Fathers of the Church, for they light up the night of the present darkness and assist the soul to its port of destination, the Heavenly Kingdom. The Holy Fathers instruct us

in the art of finding the path of salvation amidst the ever thickening dust cloud created by the Babylonian construction.

Obviously the Heavenly Kingdom awaiting all those who persevere is beyond human comprehension; nevertheless God's ways are not entirely hidden from us. We must believe in the eternal bliss of the future as if we had observed it, heard it and understood it with our intellect, for everything in nature points the way and indicates the reality of the Heavenly Kingdom. The debilitating racket of the sea of life can easily distract our concentration from the Kingdom of God and cement our minds down to this earthly level so much so that we simply stop thinking about the future. Our feeble faith grows remote from that faith which is a foretaste of the bliss of the future life and we often feel an unaccountable dread at the thought of death, eternity, at the ultimate passage to the other world. This simply doesn't happen if the mind is accustomed to being there with God instead of here in the world.

A condition of sin hinders much of the liberty which is natural in the relationship of innocent children with their parents, when guilt repels the children away from parental love. To delight in the expectation of eternal blessedness it is necessary to be as innocent children, removed from sin and all that is vain and worldly, particularly removed from the pride of life. Only when sin and worldly considerations no longer keep us from the Father does the impossible become possible and that which "the eye has not seen nor the ear heard" (I Cor. 2:9) and what has not even occurred, becomes accepted by the innermost self, cleansed by the tears of repentance.

Embracing by thoughtful faith the joy of the life to come provides a great contentment as the goal of life on earth becomes clearer. All this troubling existence becomes easier to live with patience in the expectation that the end is near when the rewards of perseverance will not only make one forget these sufferings but even regret that there were not more of them. In all life's misfortunes and uncertainties it is not easy to be philosophical about heavenly matters, but in those pauses which are offered from the tribulations of life's path, it is vital to talk about the heavenly and to pray about the blessedness of the Kingdom of God. In order to realize the spiritual warfare within oneself it is necessary to ask Christ our God and Savior for mercy. Blessed are those who have the habit of praying constantly; blessed are they whose second nature is prayer so that even their breath praises God. The sweetest name of Jesus Christ must always and everywhere be on our lips, in our breathing, even in our sleep.

In our times the mysteries of nature are being revealed constantly. Does this not speak most eloquently to the unity of the Creator, about the unity of the Lord and Master, the Perfecter and Provider of all? Where is there more tranquility and peace than in the natural universe? Whose family has such good order as there where the limitless Father arranges all matters Himself? Evidently good order is only possible where there is One Master and supervisor.

Nature also reveals to us the unfathomable mystery of the Trinitarian unity of the Creator. The stamp of this mystery lays written deep within the nature of all creatures as a fundamental consciousness which glorifies the All Holy Trinity. God's omnipresence is visible in His creation. Look at the heavens full of numberless bodies held in the universe by an unseen hand. Examine closely around you and ask: whose hand does not tire of maintaining the universe in which all the bodies are spherical and expand out from the center in a great sphere? All these spherical bodies having no visible point of beginning or ending reflect the omnipresence, beginninglessness and limitlessness of God.

A task like this is only possible for an All-perfect Spirit, the Creator of everything. Actually the Creator has Himself inscribed the image of His beginninglessness and Divinity upon a plethora of creatures of which some are so minute as to fill a glass of water with many millions. To maintain everything God must be All-mighty, All-present and All-knowing.

The Unseen World

The Holy Church teaches that the spiritual world contains two types of spirits: God's angels who during Lucifer's revolt chose willingly to remain obedient to the Creator thereby keeping their status forever and the demons that although created good chose instead to be eternally evil by following Lucifer in his revolt against God.

Both the angels of God and the demons are called "angels" (ἄγγελοι) since the name corresponds to an office, that of "messengers," rather than the nature of beings. The Sacred Scriptures also use this title in referring to prophets and apostles who were sent as messengers to announce the will of God.

The sole motive for the creation of the cosmos was God's desire to have recipients of His boundless love and mercy as the Holy Church teaches. Likewise the purpose and aim of the cosmos is the Creator's glorification. God, All-powerful and All-perfect, does

not need anything. He existed timelessly before the cosmos and could have continued had He not condescended to create beings.

It was God's desire that men should appear as images of Himself, tasting the delight of existence and becoming sharers of His blessedness. Consequently men appeared as intelligent inheritors of God's glory and kingdom by the grace of adoption. In this realm the source of blessedness is from a shared living with the Most-blessed God Himself, in eternal participation of the Divine Glory as much as it is possible for a creature. Knowing the innermost depths of each individual, God will fulfill every mind and soul which thirsts for truth and goodness. Measuring the perfection attained by mortals corresponds to the degree of one's love for the Creator and the more one strives to live as His image and likeness becomes perfect in obedience to His holy will.

Conversely, moral beings turning away from their purpose for existence, i.e. the glorification of their Creator, acquire an opposite condition. This condition is an everlasting, moral death of most fierce torments which results from leaving God, life's Source and Blessedness. The natural phenomenon of the total eclipse of the sun is an image of this eternal death. Although a rare occurrence of only a few minutes it nonetheless leaves a profound image on all life.

If a solar eclipse were to last indefinitely then every living thing would be liable to degeneration and the decomposition of death. All life would begin to return to that dust from which it was created. The gradual, agonizing, deteriorating death would be compounded by much suffering as everything alive, initially confused at the onset of the eclipse, awaited annihilation.

Of course for the moral there is a "Spiritual Sun," the Source of life and blessedness, God Who Himself called all creation from non-existence to existence. Consequently for the moral ones who live both a spiritual and physical life, a total eclipse of the "Spiritual Sun" would result in unavoidable suffering and decay. Such suffering cannot be temporary in the spiritual realm precisely because the soul is immortal. This state of eternal suffering is considered a second death, everlasting torment, an unquenchable fire and sleepless worm.

As a result the Last Judgment will afford to some the Kingdom of Blessedness in the light of God's face, but to others a total eclipse of God's countenance from Whom flows all life and blessedness.

The Holy Orthodox Church has always believed that hell's torments will be everlasting, understanding that such torments are for those who are expelled from God's presence after the final General Judgment. This dogma was formally expressed at the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople (553 A.D.)

Satan and His Angels

It is evident that since God is All-perfect everything He created was good because He could not create evil. So where did evil come from? Precisely from the pride of that most exalted spirit who nurtured such a megalomaniacal self opinion that he thought to be equal with his very Creator. Desiring to realize this equality he lured a multitude of spirits to follow him in revolt against the Will of God.

Cast out from God's presence and becoming the Prince of Darkness, the Devil longed to increase his followers by luring the first humans, Adam and Eve, into disobedience and thus expanding his terrestrial principality. Christ's Church from antiquity has taught that this lofty spirit's *pride* was the cause of the origin of evil in both the physical and spiritual world.

Humanity's eternal salvation is connected closely with the overthrow of the Devil, Satan, and the eradication of evil from the world. Evil's originator, God's and humanity's enemy, spoken of in the Sacred Gospel as "... a murderer from the beginning, who does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a falsehood he speaks what is natural to him, for he is a liar himself and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

The denial of a real Devil and evil spirits, i.e. the demons, has always existed. This extremely dangerous error leads humanity into a condition of moral carelessness and ultimately to its own destruction. Actually it is the Devil himself who inspires humanity in this disbelief. Irrevocably the demons have lost any love towards God and thus they have lost divine knowledge which is good and true.

Why can't the demons repent? Simply because there are degrees of remorselessness beyond which there is no return to goodness: "For when people have once been enlightened, when they have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit, when they have experienced the goodness of God's word and the spiritual power of the age to come, and then after all this have fallen away, it is impossible to bring them afresh to repentance" (Hebrews 6:4-6). These angels, not subject to our human

temptations, deliberately fell being seduced by the mendacious philosophy that absolute freedom is inconceivably more desirable than obedience (the same spurious philosophy which gave birth to Protestantism). This fraudulent concept so hardened them that they actually preferred their disobedient passions to the blessedness of the angels standing humbly, meekly and lovingly before the throne of God.

Such a bitter blunder shows that even exalted beings that have lost the light of Divinity become blind to the understanding of truth. Higher than man's spirit, these beings were given higher abilities and powers to stand resolutely in the truth as well as a higher comprehension of goodness and the will of God. Regardless, the disastrous blunder triumphed and consequently reverting to the truth was no longer possible. Their evil state was beyond remedy because these lofty beings fell due to a stubborn and adamant revolt against the Divinity Himself. Christ, warning humanity against such utter hardness and irreparable evil, told the Pharisees "... every sin and blasphemy of man can be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven" (Matthew 12:31).

Intelligent creatures' nature contains within itself a basic need of worshipping God, an inborn instinct of the grandeur of God and the comprehension that God is the Author of all life. To willingly blind oneself to this reality one must brutally subjugate one's nature since this understanding does not easily disappear and so an infernal force is needed to eternally expel this consciousness and this is the sin that is unforgivable. We become the enemies of God when we revolt and erase the very awareness of Him from our souls.

Loathing of God is unforgivable, not because the mercy of God is limited, but rather because man's rejection of God can reach a point of no return, of no repentance. The rejection of the Holy Spirit prevents any repentance that comes only through the Holy Spirit. An intelligent man's spirit is only able to soften by the Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit; otherwise it can only remain in the eternal darkness of pride.

The Book of the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian, i.e. Revelation, reveals to us the magnitude of the enmity between the Devil's principality and the Kingdom of God: "After that there appeared in heaven: a woman robed with the sun, beneath her feet the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was about to bear a child, and in the anguish of her labor she cried out to be delivered. Then a second sign appeared in heaven: a great, fiery red dragon with seven heads and ten horns. On his heads were seven crowns, and with his tail he swept down a third of the stars in the sky and hurled

them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that when her child was born he might devour it. But when she gave birth to a male child, who is destined to rule all nations with a rod of iron, the child was snatched up to God and to His throne. The woman herself fled into the wilderness, where she was to be looked after for twelve hundred and sixty days in a place prepared for her by God. Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but he was too weak, and they lost their place in heaven" (Revelation 12:1-8). The Holy Fathers teach that in the final days Satan will be permitted to make war against God's saints, and the Holy Church (i.e., the Woman clothed with the Sun) will flee to the wilderness. During these final times Satan will kill them. Consequently the Holy Church, now few in number, will return to the catacombs and be severely persecuted. This monstrous persecution, far worse than Rome's, will continue for three and a half years ending with Christ's glorious Second Coming: "When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be let loose from his prison, and he will come out to seduce the nations in the four quarters of the earth. He will muster them for war, the hosts of Gog and Magog, countless as the sands of the sea. They marched over the breadth of the land and laid siege to the camp of God's people and the city that He loves. But fire came down on them from Heaven and consumed them. Their seducer, the Devil, was flung into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been flung to be tormented day and night forever. I saw a great white throne, and the One Who sits upon it. From His presence earth and heaven fled away, and there was no room for them anymore. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne; and books were opened. Then another book, the Book of Life, was opened. The dead were judged by what they had done, as recorded in these books" (Revelation 20:7-12).

Of course the Church of Christ has always been persecuted by the Prince of this world but not so clearly foretold.

During the first centuries the Church endured blatant physical persecution which resulted in the triumph of the Church. The following centuries presented subtler but extremely more dangerous circumstances for the Church in the erroneous teachings, the heresies. Initially Satan attacked the lives of the members of the Church and then the dogmas of the Faith, with the intent to divide and then to destroy the beliefs necessary for salvation. In both periods there were many souls who abandoned the Holy Church, joining Satan's ranks but this second period finished with the triumph of Orthodoxy.

Another clearly defined period began with the rise of the false prophet Muhammad (570-632 A.D.), Satan's warrior, and again the Church was openly physically persecuted. The entire Orthodox Christian population in some areas of the East was slaughtered for not renouncing Christ. It is of interest that the Islamic Conquest of the Orthodox Christian world occurred at approximately the same time that the novel and greatest heresies were appearing in Western Europe, i.e. firstly Papism and then the quasi-pagan Protestant sects ending in the satanic cult of Freemasonry. Here were utilized simultaneously both former types of oppression (physical and doctrinal) against the Holy Church.

Following closely behind the third was a fourth sinister oppression against the Holy Church. Satan began leading humanity, already steeped in these new heresies, into the anarchist and social revolutionary movements, upending every social order on earth, endeavoring to throw the world into a state of utter confusion, setting the stage for Antichrist and the militant goal of eradicating Christianity.

Satan's various temptations are endless and difficult for the human mind to comprehend. The Sacred Scriptures state that he "has blinded" their minds "to prevent them from seeing the light shed by the glad tidings of the glory of Christ Who is the image of God" (II Corinthians 4:4), whereas with others upon whom the light has already shown, "the Devil comes and carries away the word from their hearts lest they believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12), so, as with the Long Suffering Job, he persecutes some with tribulations, shackles and imprisonment "Do not be afraid of the sufferings to come. The Devil will throw some of you into prison, to be put to the test, and for ten days you will be hard pressed. Be faithful till death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

To defend oneself against these attacks one must keep a constant sense of repentance, prayer, fasting and spiritual vigilance over one's heart. Our Savior Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to "be vigilant and pray in order not to fall into temptation" (Matthew 26:41).

For the past decades many have stopped hoping on God's Kingdom and have instead embraced artificial ways of acquiring an earthly paradise. Anarchy and social revolution are the gifts of Satan to realize this. "Freedom," "brotherhood," "equality" and "the unity of mankind" are the slogans that Satan has supplied in order to lure gullible people into these movements. How many have already and now are following these useless slogans not realizing their origins nor noticing the actual manifestations of

these seemingly humanitarian movements? How obviously they are but pawns of the Prince of this world, led on by artificial seductions to that inevitable anarchy which will bring about that ultimate tormentor of humanity, the Antichrist.

The Beginning of the End of this World and of the Earthly Pilgrimage of Christ's Church

Sacred Scripture and the Holy Fathers of the Church teach that the end of the world and the Second Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ will be announced by a great spread of visible apostasy, lawlessness and disrespect among all nations, the completion of the Evangelical preaching to all the peoples of the world including the Jews in a restored Israel, severe physical misfortunes and the coming of the Antichrist and his struggle with the Holy Church of Christ.

Once the Apostles asked their divine Master, "Tell us, when will this happen? And what will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3).

The Savior answered: "Take care that no one misleads you. For many will come claiming My name and saying, 'I am Christ,' and many will be misled by them. The time is coming when you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed. Such things are bound to happen; but the end is still to come. For nation will go to war against nation, kingdom against kingdom; there will be famines and earthquakes in many places. All these things are the first birth pangs of the new age. You will then be handed over for punishment and execution; all nations will hate you for your allegiance to Me. At that time many will fall from their faith; they will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many; and as lawlessness spreads, the love of many will grow cold. But whoever endures to the end will be saved. And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the earth as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:4-14).

The Holy Fathers of the Church explain how these words apply to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as a prototype of the greater tribulation in the future when the entire fury of this prophecy will be manifested in the last times. The destruction of Jerusalem was emblematic of the end of the world and horrible as it was, it was but a shadow of what awaits mankind at the very end.

The interpretations of the Holy Fathers of the Church must be followed to observe the end signs of the world in these dire words of the Savior. We conclude from them that in the last times humanity's lawlessness will reach its limit. The world will be ruled by evil and hate. Among people there will be neither love nor compassion; love will wither away; not utterly of course but certainly frigid in the majority of men. Violent hatred for others and self-love will motivate doing harm to those near.

Many of the faithful will additionally weaken in their faith and will become followers of deceivers and pseudo-prophets, the forerunners of Antichrist. Impiousness and lawlessness will become so prevalent that people will be oblivious to the threatening signs of the world's end sent by God in the forms of physical catastrophes and ultimately the Antichrist.

"As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. In the days before the flood they ate and drank and married, until the day that Noah went into the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man comes" (Matthew 24:37-40).

The Savior clearly explains in these words the state of humanity at the end of time. Immediately before the flood we know that men's disorder and impiousness was boundless; men were gluttons of the basest pleasures and blind and unfeeling to anything spiritual. The same will be the case before the end of the world. Unlimited lasciviousness, debauchery, gluttony and drunkenness will be the rule, paralyzing man's mind to the point that the tribulations sent by God as warnings (i.e., famine, earthquakes, plagues and ultimately the enormous agony of Antichrist) will illicit no reaction of fear or regret from those drunk in their own dissipation.

The Holy Apostles teach that in the end times the different heresies will proliferate and strengthen as disbelief increases. Humanity, deaf and blind morally, will be insensitive to all that concerns its salvation. People will freely embrace everything false and utterly forget Christ and His Law. All possible vices and untruths will be embraced by the world.

The Holy Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Thessalonians that when the Antichrist appears he will be allowed to ensnare many: "All the deception that sinfulness can impose on those doomed to destruction, because they did not open their minds to love of the truth and so find salvation. That is why God puts them under a compelling delusion, which makes them believe what is false, so that all who have not

believed the truth but made sinfulness their choice may be brought to judgment” (II Thessalonians 2:10-12).

The Apostle instructs in his letter to Timothy: “Remember the final age of this world is to be a time of turmoil! People will love nothing but self and money; they will be boastful, arrogant and abusive; disobedient to parents, devoid of gratitude, piety, and natural affection; they will be implacable in their hatreds, scandalmongers, uncontrolled and violent, hostile to all goodness, perfidious, foolhardy, and swollen with self-importance. They will love their pleasures more than their God. While preserving the outward form of religion, they are a standing denial of its power. Keep clear of them” (II Timothy 3:1-5).

Obviously vices have always been in the world but in the latter days their hold over humanity will be complete, so that humanity, desensitized, will suppress any good intentions and chase after the passions. After the Gospel has been preached in the whole world there will no longer be any excuse for humanity at the Dreadful Judgment.

The World’s evangelization will be finished with the preaching of the Gospel to the Jews in a restored Israel. Reading the words of the Lord in Matthew 24:14, “And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the earth as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come,” we see that the world’s completed evangelization is the sign of the end of the ages and the second glorious coming of Christ. Nonetheless most of humanity, deaf and dumb to the preaching of the Gospel, will not listen but refuse the truth, instead listening to the voice of the passions.

The Appearance of Antichrist



At the culmination of all this, God will allow the entry of Antichrist into the world, the last and most unusual opponent of Christ and His Holy Church. The history of the Church of Christ is full of opponents who have attempted to destroy the Faith of Christ:

Nero, Valerian, other emperors, Muhammad, all the false teachers and prophets from Simon Magus to the present day. However, in the final times a unique, infinitely stronger opponent of Christ, the Antichrist, will arise. This will be the final and severest attack of the Devil against the Church. Describing the final times before the end of the world, the Savior said: "If anyone says to you then, 'Look, here is the messiah,' or 'There he is,' do not believe it. Impostors will come claiming to be messiahs or prophets, and they will produce great signs and wonders to mislead, if possible, even God's chosen. See, I have forewarned you. If therefore they tell you, 'He is there in the wilderness,' do not go out; or if they say, 'He is there in the inner room,' do not believe it" (Matthew 24:23-26).

According to St. John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.) as well as other Fathers of the Church, Christ is speaking specifically about Antichrist's coming before the end of the world as well as about the false prophets. Additionally, there are certain passages in the Epistles of the Apostles teaching about the Antichrist. The Apostle John the Evangelist lucidly shows that Antichrist must come before the end of the world: "Children, this is the last hour! You were told that the Antichrist was to come. Well, many antichrists have already appeared, proof to us that this is indeed the last hour" (I John 2:18). The Holy Apostle Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians likewise speaks about the Antichrist: "Now about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He is to gather us to Himself: I beg you, my friends, do not suddenly lose your heads, do not be alarmed by any prophetic utterance, any pronouncement, or any letter purporting to come from us, alleging that the Day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way. That day cannot come before the final rebellion against God, when wickedness will be revealed in human form, the man doomed to destruction" (II Thessalonians 2:1-3).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386 A.D.) as well as other of the Church Fathers refer the prophecy of Daniel to the Antichrist who must come before the world's end and rule the Jews: "The explanation he [Daniel] gave was this: 'The fourth beast signifies a fourth kingdom which will appear on earth. It will differ from the other kingdoms; it will devour the whole earth, treading it down and crushing it. The ten horns signify ten kings who will rise from this kingdom; after them will arise another king, who will be different from his predecessors; and he will bring low three kings. He will hurl defiance at the Most High and wear down the holy ones of the Most High. He will have it in mind to alter the festival seasons and religious laws; and the holy ones will be delivered into his power for a time, and times, and half a time. But when the court sits, he will be deprived of his sovereignty, so that it may be destroyed and abolished forever. The kingly power, sovereignty, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be

given to the holy people of the Most High. Their kingly power will last forever, and every realm will serve and obey them" (Daniel 7:23-27).

After Antichrist's reception by the Jews as their long awaited Messiah and becoming their king, he will commence his struggle with the Church of Christ. Denying the Lord Jesus Christ's divinity, he will attempt to destroy His Church and Holy Mysteries, substituting himself as a god and demanding that people worship him as God. The Lord teaches this clearly when He said: ". . . Take care that no one misleads you. For many will come claiming My name and saying, 'I am the Messiah,' and many will be misled by them" (Matthew 24:4-5).

St. John Chrysostom explains: "Antichrist will not suggest that he was sent from the Father or even by His will but to the contrary, with violence he will seize everything that does not belong to him and claim to be God himself. This is Christ's meaning when he said that the Antichrist "will come in My name."

The Holy Fathers teach that every minute in Antichrist's life will be controlled by Satan. This control will manifest itself from his very conception and birth. St. Ephraim the Syrian (306-373 A.D.) writes: "In truth, the devil's instrument will be born of a defiled virgin" and St. John of Damascus (645-749 A.D.) concludes: "The man will be born of prostitution."

The Holy Fathers Irenaeus of Lyons ((2nd century A.D. – c. 202), Hippolytus of Rome (170-235 A.D.), Ambrose of Milan (337-397 A.D.) as well as Jerome (347-420 A.D.) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) all mention that the Antichrist will be a Jew of the Tribe of Dan.

In the *Synaxarion* for Meat-fare Sunday we read: "The Antichrist will appear as St. Hippolytus says, born from a defiled supposed virgin from among the Jews of the Tribe of Dan. This excerpt from the *Triodion* of the Great Fast is based on the Word of God:

1) The prophecy of Jacob the Patriarch concerning his sons, the founders of the tribes of Israel, contains that of Dan, which relates to the Antichrist: "Let Dan be a viper on the road, a horned snake on the path," (Genesis 49:17).

2) The prophecy of Jeremiah states: "The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan; the neighing of their stallions the whole land trembles. The enemy come; they devour the land and all its store, city and citizens alike" (Jeremiah 8:16).

3) The Book of Revelation which lists the remnant of all the tribes of Israel which are sealed by the angel for salvation, markedly excludes Dan: "I heard how many had been marked with the seal – a hundred and forty-four thousand from all the tribes of Israel: twelve thousand from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand from the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand from the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand from the tribe of Joseph, and twelve thousand from the tribe of Benjamin" (Revelation 7:4-8).

According to the Holy Fathers, Satan will endeavor to give the Antichrist all the indications and signs of the return of the Son of God on earth. This is stressed in *The 150th Word to Catechumens* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem; *Word 39* of St. Ephraim the Syrian; *A Short Exposition of the Divine Dogma* of Blessed Theodoretos; and the *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* by St. Hippolytus of Rome.

Obviously the seeming similarities of the Antichrist with Christ will only be superficial since the sham life of Antichrist will instead be an intransigent rebellion against Christ and His Church. Externally this pseudo likeness will be evident even at the birth of Antichrist. Because Christ was born of the All-pure Virgin, Satan will introduce his special instrument from an impure woman who only claims to be a virgin. However, she will be full of every perversion and diabolical defilement.

One must assume that since Our Lord remained in obscurity till His thirtieth year that the Antichrist will do so likewise. Just as Christ commenced His salvific mission by preaching and working miracles, so the Antichrist will begin his iniquitous design by deceiving humanity with his false message and with extravagant demonstrations of pseudo miracles; also, as Our Lord revealed Himself the Messiah by His public triumphant entry into Jerusalem's temple on Palm Sunday so will the Antichrist in turn enter into the restored temple in Jerusalem and take up his throne there.

In *The Last Days of the Earthly Life of Jesus Christ* by Archbishop Innokenty of Kherson (1800-1857) he states that the entry of Christ into Jerusalem was "a general demonstration to the Jews that Jesus Christ is indeed their Messiah. Christ's own words before the gate of Jerusalem provide an undeniable testimony: 'If only you had known this day the way that leads to peace! But no; it is hidden from your sight.' (Luke 19:42).

In their rejection on that day of their Messiah the fate of the people of Israel was decided forever.”

When the Antichrist on that future day goes into Jerusalem the fate of contemporary humanity will also irrevocably and eternally be decided. Indeed, blessed are those who, at that God-given time of conscious choice, are able to clearly see Satan’s servant the Antichrist with the inescapable perdition awaiting him and all those who acknowledge him.

In conclusion, as Our Lord revealed Himself to the world in His work as Prophet, King and High Priest, so the Antichrist will ape the threefold authority in his own person and do his pernicious task as teacher of humanity, as king of a universal kingdom and as the highest priest of all religions, demanding worship as God himself.

The Era of Antichrist

Antichrist’s life and activity can be seen in three periods:

The First Period of Antichrist, beginning the day of his birth till his debut will pass unnoticed. St. John of Damascus writes that “The Antichrist will be raised in secret” (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4, ch. 26).

The Second Period of Antichrist’s life will commence with his ostentatious emergence as universal teacher or prophet. It is likely that his activity will begin during a world conflict when humanity will have grown exhausted from war and suffering, seeing only him in league with unseen powers as the solution. A master plan for the resolution of the world crisis will be offered by the Antichrist successfully on the basis of the establishment of a social and political uniform world structure.

Exhausted and bored of the agitation of war and strife, spiritually blind humanity will be utterly oblivious to this sly trap of the most mercilessly constant slavery. Instead, humanity will proclaim these solutions of Antichrist to be those of an erudite and wise genius.

The publicity worldwide of Antichrist as a sage genius, a refreshingly new leader and humanity’s savior will resound throughout the world in a matter of moments. St. Ephraim the Syrian in his *Word 16* writes: “Vile demons spread over the universe will agitate a common rapturous attraction to him (i.e., the Antichrist).”

Antichrist will abstain from any violent methods during the initial stages of his activity but will try to gain the confidence and devotion of humanity through deceit and the dramatic but hypocritical masquerade of virtue. Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) writes: "He will throw a shining veil of goodness and truth over the Mystery of Iniquity." "The Antichrist will appear in such a way as to deceive everyone. Appearing humble, meek, a hater of unrighteousness (according to him), avoiding idols, preferring piety, goodness, philanthropy, extremely handsome, steadfast, kind to all and especially esteeming the Jewish people who have waited so long for his coming ... He will cunningly please everyone so that humanity will quickly love him; he will refuse gifts and never speak angrily or appear somber, but with an affability set about duping humanity until he is enthroned.

In the rich ascetical lives of the saintly strugglers we read of how when the dark demon is unable to defeat the spiritual athlete because of his constant resistance that he resorts to a more powerful demon that appears in the form of an angel of light: "And no wonder! Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light, so it is easy enough for his agents to masquerade as agents of good. But their fate will match their deeds" (II Corinthians 11:14-15). This "angel of light" attempts to implant confidence and even sympathy towards himself in the spiritual athlete, thereby enticing him to his destruction. Consequently we can easily see how quickly the bright appearance of Antichrist will attract general devotion.

This deception's result will be that from humanity: "... will arise a clamor to invite Antichrist. Humanity will voice the appeal of urgently needing such an ultimate genius, one who would so elevate material progress to such a high level as to bring prosperity to all the earth" (*Works*, vol.4, p. 313, Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov, 1807-1867).

Antichrist's hypocrisy will extend so far during this period that he will not only actually tolerate Christianity but even also patronize it. Superficially he will act to imitate Christ. Most Christians not rooted in the Church's spiritual understanding but rather in that which passes as the wisdom of the world will not notice his deceitfulness and will assume Antichrist to be Christ in His Second Coming.

The monks of the Solovetsky Monastery relate the answer of the holy Elder Zosima (+1478) given to his spiritual children when they questioned him on how to recognize the Antichrist when he comes. He replied: "When you hear that Christ has come to the earth or has appeared on earth then know that it is Antichrist." Another answer is

equally precise: “Man’s world will fail to recognize the Antichrist; it will acknowledge him to be the Christ, the Messiah, it will announce him as Christ ... But it will be needless and impossible for men to report to each other of the Son of God’s coming. Christ will appear suddenly; He will appear in His power to all men and the world at the same instant” (*Works*, Vol. 4, p. 275, Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov).

Our Savior said: “If anyone says to you then, ‘Look, here is the Messiah,’ or ‘There he is,’ do not believe it. Impostors will come claiming to be messiahs or prophets, and they will produce great signs and wonders to mislead, if possible, even God’s chosen. See, I have forewarned you. If therefore they tell you, ‘He is there in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or if they say, ‘He is there in the inner room,’ do not believe it. Like a lightening flash, that lights the sky from east to west, will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:23-27).

Antichrist will perform many incredible miracles to deceive humanity. The Holy Apostle Paul says: “Then it will be revealed, the wicked one whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of His mouth and annihilate by the radiance of His presence. The coming of the wicked one is the work of Satan; it will be attended by all the powerful signs and miracles that falsehood can devise, all the deception that sinfulness can impose on those doomed to destruction, because they did not open their minds to love of the truth and so find salvation. That is why God puts them under a compelling delusion, which makes them believe what is false, so that all who have not believed the truth but made sinfulness their choice may be brought to judgment” (II Thessalonians 2:8-12). St. Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386 A.D.) teaches: “Being the Father of Lies he will fool the masses into believing that they have witnessed a corpse resurrected that is not and the crippled cured and blind seeing when nothing has been done” (*Catechetical Lectures*, 15, 14).

Every action of Antichrist, from his teaching and brilliance, his pseudo miracles and including his dramatic deceptive life, all will have only one goal: to grasp all worldly power over humanity in his own hands. Acquiring Jewish popularity will be the first step on this path. Every conceivable effort will be made by Antichrist to convince the Jews to accept him as their long promised Messiah. He will triumph in perfecting the Jewish government as well as realizing their ancient dream of rebuilding the Temple of Solomon. After these accomplishments: “He will be forced by men to be proclaimed king and the Jewish masses will love him; he will restore Jerusalem and will rebuild the temple for them” (*Synaxarion of Meat-fare Sunday, Triodion of the Great fast*).

The Two Prophets

However, Antichrist's efforts to be believed as the true Messiah will encounter unexpected and miraculous opposition in the persons of two Old Testament prophets. Those two, who by God's will had not tasted death but were instead taken up into heaven for a time, will reappear on earth before the world's end to fulfill their mission and suffer death. The names of these two holy prophets are Enoch and Elias. In the latter days they will be sent by the Lord into Jerusalem to give people an ultimate and miraculous warning against the fraud engulfing them. For three and a half years they will convict all of Antichrist's falsity unhindered, precisely during that second period when he will be plotting the seizure of world power. Unable to remove his mask of meekness and goodwill towards even enemies, Antichrist will be powerless to move violently against the Holy Prophets.

Some incorrectly attempt to interpret this miraculous appearance of Enoch and Elias allegorically. Sacred Scripture and Church Tradition both speak pointedly of their real arrival on earth seven years before the world's end, of their resurrection and translation into heaven:

"I will give my two witnesses authority to prophesy, dressed in sackcloth, for those twelve hundred and sixty days.' They are the two olive trees and the two lamps that stand in the presence of the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to injure them fire issues from their mouths and consumes their enemies; so shall anyone die who tries to do them injury. These two have the power to shut up the sky, so that no rain falls during the time of their prophesying; and they have power to turn water into blood and to afflict the earth with every kind of plague whenever they like. But when they have completed their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will wage war on them and will overcome and kill them" (Revelation 11:3-7).

The Prophet Malachi names one of the witnesses: "Look, I shall send you the Prophet Elias before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Malachi 4:5).

St. Ephraim the Syrian (*Word on the Coming of the Lord*) and St. John of Damascus (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*) both definitively teach that we must understand these two "witnesses" before the world's end to be the Holy Prophets Enoch and Elias.

Our Orthodox service books express this tradition of the Holy Church by asserting the literal prophetic understanding of God's word concerning the real and by no means

allegorical arrival of Enoch and Elias: "Seven years before (the world's end), as Daniel foretold, Enoch and Elias will come preaching to them that they reject him (the Antichrist); Antichrist will torture and behead them" (*Synaxarion* of Meat Fare Sunday, *Triodion* of the Great Fast).

Yet again in the service of the Holy Glorious Prophet Elias, in the verses for "Lord I have cried unto Thee," we chant: "Elias the Thesbite, having been made incorruptible in order to not taste death until you have preached the end to all," and the *Troparion* of the Prophet calls Elias "The second Forerunner of the coming of Christ." In the *sedalion* after the *polyelion* we chant: "... the Prophet and Forerunner of the coming of Christ, Elias most glorious" (*Menaion*, July 20).

In the *Menaion* it says: "The Holy Prophet Elias in a fiery chariot was taken up in the flesh and is alive until even now, preserved by God in the mansions of paradise. The three Apostles saw him in the flesh at the time of the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor, and will be seen by mortal men again in the flesh before the Lord's Second Coming on the earth. Once having fled Jezebel's sword he will suffer from the sword of Antichrist at that time, not only as a prophet but as a martyr and found worthy of great glory by the Man-befriending God." "Elias will come with Enoch before Christ's second coming, to convict Antichrist's utter impiety and to comfort pious believers" (*Prologue*, July 20).

In spite of all these warnings the majority of humanity, due to their naturally carnal minds, will besides not only not comprehending the whole lie of Antichrist's superficial behavior but even engulf him with their acclaim and adulation. "Once the nations and people see such virtues and abilities (of the Antichrist), unanimously they will have one idea: to proclaim him ruler, reasoning among themselves "Will ever any other such an excellent and truthful man be found?" (St. Ephraim the Syrian).

So profoundly will the Antichrist dazzle the world with his calculated behavior, portraying himself as the divine messenger, the prophesied Messiah that the Jews, before all others, will acclaim him their ruler, completely ignoring those warnings against him made by the Holy Prophets Enoch and Elias.

The Third Period

The Third Period and the final acts of Antichrist will start with the complete appropriation of all worldly power into his hands. The circumstances of general

destruction of the nations brought on by a world war will immeasurably simplify this. The only conceivable way to avoid future wars and commence a peaceful blossoming of exhausted humanity will be seen in a world administration under Antichrist.

Antichrist's coming into world power on a devastated earth ruined by warfare is described by the word of God: "ten kings who will arise" (Daniel 7:24). Seven of these kings will have "the same thoughts" as the Antichrist and will "submit their might and rule to him." The remaining three kings will try to keep their freedom so that Antichrist must defeat them in battle.



After the victory of Antichrist over these three "kingdoms," thereby removing these obstacles from his way to world domination, the Book of Revelation describes him as a red beast having ten horns (the ten kingdoms) and seven heads (the seven kings who submitted voluntarily and act as his delegates in their countries): "He took his stand on the seashore. Then I saw a beast rising out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads; on the horns were ten crowns, and on each head was a blasphemous name" (Revelation 13:1; see commentaries by St. Irenaeus of Lyons and St. Cyril of Jerusalem).

The absolute world power of the Antichrist is spoken of in the Book of Revelation: "It was also allowed to wage war on God's people and to defeat them, and it was granted authority over every tribe, nation, language and race" (Revelation 13:7). Even though ordinary human cooperation and means will be of use, the real source of his success will not come from them. "His power will be great, and he will work havoc untold; he will succeed in whatever he does. He will work havoc on the mighty nations and the holy people" (Daniel 8:24). The authority and power of Antichrist will be received from Satan. "The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but its feet were like a bear's and its mouth like a lion's. The dragon conferred on it his own power, his throne, and great authority" (Revelation 13:2). The only way to explain Antichrist's amazing success in so rapidly grasping power over the earth and his extraordinary unassailable strength is the constant cooperation of Satan with him.

Alexander D. Belyaev in his *Concerning the Atheist and Antichrist* writes: "Antichrist will function by means of the power and miracles of Satan, and this power will be very great ... he will oversee many mighty assistants ... with speedy means of communication and coordinated methodology it will be possible for him to cause world revolution instantaneously" (vol. 1, p. 765).

The world wide acceptance of Antichrist as ruler will happen simultaneously with the unanimous agreement of his sole spiritual leadership of all religion. Vladimir Soloviev conjectures in his last work *Three Conversations* that Antichrist, having acquired power, will summon something akin to a general church council represented at by all religions. At this convention in Jerusalem the Antichrist will unite all under his direction and control. His particular attention will be directed at the various Christian denominations, promising protection and patronage in exchange for his leadership. St. Ephraim the Syrian writes: "He will trumpet himself just as his minions have flaunted him; he will declare himself the Preacher and Founder of the true understanding of God. Those ignorant of Christianity will vacuously consider him the Representative and Protector of true religion and will align with him. He will tout himself the long promised Messiah and the children of earthly wisdom will acclaim his explanation. Due to his fame, power, cordial demeanor and phenomenal development of world resources, they will proclaim his divinity and become his accomplices" (*Word 106*, Part 2. cf. Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov, vol. 4, p. 301).

It is extremely important to understand that all the Holy Fathers consider the central cause of humanity's rapid enslavement under Antichrist to be the absence of any spiritual comprehension as well as a complete submersion in worldly matters. Spiritual

comprehension can only germinate and grow under the conditions of true spiritual life, preserved and cultivated by genuine Orthodox Christians (as opposed to the nominally “Orthodox”), only even a small portion of which will remain truly Orthodox Christians to the end, living a spiritual life in accordance with the Sacred Canons of the Holy Church and be fully armed to realize the traps and cunning of the Antichrist.

With subtlety the Antichrist will replace worship of himself, the man-god, in place of the worship of the God-man, Jesus Christ. He is portrayed in Sacred Scripture as: “... the adversary who raises himself up against every so-called god or object of worship, and even enthrones himself in God’s temple claiming to be God” (II Thessalonians 2:4) and “The beast was allowed to mouth bombast and blasphemy, and was granted permission to continue for forty-two months. It uttered blasphemies against God, reviling His name and His dwelling-place, that is, those who dwell in heaven” (Revelation 13:5-6).

“Obviously the Antichrist cannot constantly just sit in the temple. This will be done on only the most special, solemn and important occasions – for example at the proclamation of his divinity and world rule. In any case he will have made his point by sitting in the temple only once. Additionally, he will cause his image to be set up in all houses of worship, Christian as well as non-Christian, so that it is worshipped as representing his divinity. In a short matter of time the overt worship of the “divine” Antichrist will commence in these houses of worship” (*Concerning the Atheist and Antichrist*, Belyaev, Vol. 1, p. 384).

The Evangelist John the Theologian states that the Antichrist will work miracles: “It worked great miracles, even making fire come down from heaven to earth, where people could see it” (Revelation 13:13). “Scripture indicates this sign as the greatest of Antichrist’s miracles which will be in the air. This magnificent and horrifying marvel will principally affect the sense of sight, possessing and deceiving it” (Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov, vol. 4, p. 302). Worked by the might of Satan, the signs of Antichrist will irresistibly influence the spectators. “Mankind will not understand the fact that these ‘miracles’ have no positive, intelligent purpose, that they are a twisted, evil and pointless drama, able to amaze, to shock the mind into unconsciousness, to deceive, defraud and captivate by enchanting vacuous performances” (Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov, vol. 4, p. 300).

Men, because of their spiritual blindness and the triumph of their carnal nature, having witnessed these “miracles,” will immediately declare these manifestations of

demonic power to be the ultimate manifestation of Divine power; in ecstasy they will embrace Antichrist as God. “His threatening and marvelous miracles will terrify them. Antichrist will satisfy foolish curiosity and superstition by means of these, thereby undermining human knowledge. Humanity led by its fallen nature, foreign to the Light of God, will easily submit to the deceiver” (Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov, vol. 4, p. 302, cf. Revelation 13:8).



Satan’s power over terrestrial kingdoms is mentioned several times in Sacred Scripture. Our Savior Himself calls the Devil “the Prince of this World.” The Evangelist John the Theologian writes: “The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but its feet were like a bear’s and its mouth like a lion’s. The dragon conferred on it his own power, his throne, and great authority” (Revelation 13:2). Satan’s power is intensified by falsehood, delusion and violence. However, Our Lord Jesus Christ came to testify to His power by a voluntary selfless act and His filial obedience to His Father. What Christ rejected in the wilderness the Antichrist will instead accept and make real. The Antichrist will receive all dominion over the world from Satan in exchange for total capitulation to him. Others will be rewarded by him with this same infernal power depending on just how much they have embraced Satan’s will.

In one of his God-inspired sermons St. Ephraim the Syrian writes: “I shall painfully begin my sermon with sighs concerning the present world’s end and of the most shameless and outrageous snake who will lead the world into turmoil and will establish fear, cowardice and horrendous disbelief in men’s’ hearts. He will cause miracles, signs and terrible sights to lead astray even the elect if possible: “Impostors will come

claiming to be messiahs or prophets, and they will produce great signs and wonders to mislead, if possible, even God's chosen" (Matthew 24:24), deceiving everyone by fraudulent signs and apparent miracles performed by him. By God's permission he will be allowed to receive the world because impiety will have covered the earth and every horror will be committed everywhere. Because of the godlessness of humanity and since humanity longed to abandon God and love the Evil One, the Most Pure Master will allow this so that the world should be tempted by the Father of Lies.

"Oh my brothers! The contest will be enormous in those days, especially for the faithful, when signs and miracles will be performed by this snake himself; when he will appear in terrible apparitions as God – he will soar about in the air and all the demons, seemingly angels, will magnify the tormentor. Mightily screaming, he will change his face and dismay all of humanity. My brothers! Who will then be on their guard, unshakeable, having souls faithfully awaiting the Second Coming of the Only-Begotten Son, our True God – when he sees the unmentionable afflictions coming from every direction upon each and every soul and from which there will be no relief, no respite at all, neither on land or sea, who will persevere when he witnesses the whole earth in distress, everyone seeking refuge in hiding in the mountains and many starving to death, others melting like beeswax from thirst and no one to give pity; when he beholds every eye swollen with tears asking plaintively 'Is God's Word to be found anywhere on the earth?' and hearing the answer, 'No! Nowhere!'

"Who will survive this unbearable suffering when he witnesses the gathering of humanity from the ends of the earth to gaze upon the tormentor, worshipping him and crying out with exhaustion: 'You are our Savior!?' Nature will rebel, the sea and earth dry up, rain will not fall from heaven, vegetation will wither, and all life in the east of the earth will flee west and all in the west flee east because of the terrible fear. However, the shameless one having power now will set loose the demons to all the earth to preach: 'Our Great King has gloriously appeared! Come and see him!' Who will have such an uncompromising soul so as to endure all these many temptations? As I said, where will any such man be found whom all the angels would bless?" (*Concerning the Antichrist*).

Antichrist, now having obtained worldly power, will suddenly change his behavior. Replacing his hypocritical and careful demeanor towards humanity and his false toleration of his enemies, he will now mercilessly persecute all believing Orthodox Christians who refuse to worship him as a god. "He will hurl defiance at the Most High and wear down the holy ones of the Most High. He will have it in mind to alter the

festival seasons and religious laws; and the holy ones will be delivered into his power for a time, and times, and half a time.” (Daniel 7:25) “When the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he went in pursuit of the woman who had given birth to the male child. But she was given the wings of a mighty eagle, so that she could fly to her place in the wilderness where she was to be looked after for three and a half years, out of reach of the snake. From his mouth the snake spewed a flood of water after the woman to sweep her away with its deluge. But the earth came to her rescue: it opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon spewed from its mouth. Furious with the woman, the dragon went off to wage war on the rest of her offspring, those who keep God’s commandments and maintain their witness to Jesus” (Revelation 12:13-17). “It uttered blasphemies against God, reviling His name and His dwelling place, that is, those who dwell in heaven. It was also allowed to wage war on God’s people and to defeat them, and it was granted authority over every tribe, nation, language and race” (Revelation 13:6-7). Public Orthodox Christian worship, i.e. the Divine Liturgy, will have to stop. Beyaev writes: “Antichrist and his followers will destroy the books of Sacred Scripture, hunt down and torture those preaching the Word of God and celebrating the Divine Services. They will monitor so that the Holy Eucharist cannot be celebrated anywhere. All the same, the preaching of God’s Word, the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and the other sacred services will not be stopped” (ibid. p. 346), but they obviously will occur in hiding as in the first centuries of Christianity and in the Catacomb Church in Russia.

The Antichrist will also have an effective helper in persecuting the Christians and compelling them to worship him as God. This helper of the Antichrist is called the “second beast” in Sacred Scripture because of his cruelty and mercilessness, The Evangelist John the Theologian writes: “When I saw another beast; it came up out of the earth, and had two horns like a lamb’s, but spoke like a dragon. It wielded all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship this first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed ... By the miracles it was allowed to perform in the presence of the beast it deluded the inhabitants of the earth, and persuaded them to erect an image in honor of the beast which had been wounded by the sword and yet lived. It was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that it could even speak and cause all who would not worship the image to be put to death” (Revelation 13:11-12, 14-15).

“The trial of God’s saints will be terrible: the persecutor’s evil hypocrisy and ‘miracles’ will increase so as to trick and dupe them. These subtle persecutions and barriers masked with clever ingenuity and the boundless means of the torturer will put

them in the most difficult circumstances and their small number will seem insignificant compared to multitudes of humanity ... popular contempt, hatred, calumny, oppression, violent murder will be their common fate ... Antichrist's enemies will be considered rebels, enemies of the common good and public order, they will suffer both covert and open persecution, torture and execution ..." (Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov, vol. 4, p. 302-303).



The first murders of Antichrist will be his accusers, the Holy Prophets Enoch and Elias: "But when they have completed their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will wage war on them and will overcome and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, whose name in prophetic language is Sodom, or Egypt,

where also their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days people from every nation and tribe, language and race, gaze upon their corpses and refuse them burial. The earth's inhabitants gloat over them; they celebrate and exchange presents, for these two prophets were a torment to them. But at the end of the three and a half days the breath of life from God came into their bodies, and they rose to their feet, to the terror of those who saw them. And a loud voice from heaven was heard saying to them, 'Come up here!' and they ascended to heaven in a cloud, in full view of their enemies. At that moment there was a violent earthquake, and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake; the rest, filled with fear, did homage to the God of heaven" (Revelation 11:7-13).

The Conversion of the Jews

An astounding occurrence will result from the miraculous resurrection and heavenly ascension of these two holy prophets. A sizable number of the Jews will convert to Christ. Blessed Theophylaktos the Bulgarian writes about this: "Elias will come as a forerunner of the Second Coming and bring all the obedient Jews to faith in Christ, leading those who had fallen away from Him to their paternal inheritance as it were." This assertion is based on these prophecies:

1) "Look, I shall send you the Prophet Elias before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will reconcile parents to their children and children to their parents, lest I come and put the land under a ban to destroy it" (Malachi 4:5-6).

2) "On that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of Jacob, will lean no more on him who scourged them; without wavering they will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob, to God their strength. Israel, your people may be many as the sands of the sea, but only a remnant will return. The instrument of final destruction will overflow with justice," (Isaiah 10:20-22).

3) "But about Israel Isaiah makes this proclamation: 'Though the Israelites be countless as the sands of the sea, only a remnant shall be saved,'" (Romans 9:27).

4) "But I shall pour a spirit of pity and compassion on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then they will look on Me, on Him Whom they have pierced, and will lament over Him as over an only child, and will grieve for Him bitterly as for a firstborn son. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning over Hadad-rimmon in the vale of Megiddo" (Zechariah 12:10-11).

5) "For if you [converted Gentiles] were cut from your native wild olive and against nature grafted into the cultivated olive, how much more readily will they, the natural olive branches [the Jews who will be converted], be grafted into their native stock! There is a divine secret here, my friends, which I want to share with you, to keep you from thinking yourselves wise: this partial hardening has come on Israel only until the Gentiles have been admitted in full strength;" (Romans 11:24-25).

The Jews conversion to Christ will cause the most intense hatred for all Orthodox Christians from the Antichrist. "So when you see 'the abomination of desolation', of which the Prophet Daniel spoke, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judaea must take to the hills. If anyone is on the roof, he must not go down to fetch his goods from the house; if anyone is in the field, he must not turn back for his coat. Alas for women with child in those days, and for those who have children at the breast! Pray that it may not be in winter or a Sabbath when you have to make your escape. It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again" (Matthew 24:15-21) for "It was also allowed to wage war on God's people and to defeat them, and it was granted authority over every tribe, nation, language and race" (Revelation 13:7).

Only due to the brevity of Antichrist's reign will a small remnant of the faithful be saved. "If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Matthew 24:22).

Antichrist's dominion over the world will last for three and a half years. "From the time that the sacrifice was taken away and the abomination of desolation was prepared to be given, there are one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days" (Daniel 12:11). This is the same time period given in Revelation 13:5: "The beast was allowed to mouth bombast and blasphemy, and was granted permission to continue for forty-two months."

Nothing human will be able to stand up against the Antichrist. Only Our Lord Himself will vanquish him at His Glorious Second Coming. Then will be the frightening Judgment of Christ and the world's end: "Then will appear in heaven the Sign that heralds the Son of Man. All the peoples of the world will make lamentation, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. With a trumpet blast He will send out His angels, and they will gather His chosen from the four winds, from the farthest bounds of heaven on every side" (Matthew 24:30-31);

“When the Son of Man comes in His Glory and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne, with all the nations gathered before Him. He will separate people into two groups, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; He will place the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘You have My Father’s blessing; come, take possession of the Kingdom that has been ready for you since the world was made. For when I was hungry, you gave Me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger, you took Me into your home; when naked, you clothed Me; when I was ill, you came to My help; when in prison, you visited Me.’ Then the righteous will reply, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw You hungry and fed You, or thirsty and gave You drink, a stranger and took You home, or naked and clothed You? When did we see You ill or in prison, and come to visit You?’ And the King will answer, ‘Truly I tell you: anything you did for one of My brothers here, however insignificant, you did for Me.’ Then He will say to those on His left, ‘A curse is on you; go from my sight to the eternal fire that is ready for the devil and his angels. For when I was hungry, you gave Me nothing to eat; when thirsty, nothing to drink; when I was a stranger, you did not welcome Me; when I was naked, you did not clothe Me; when I was ill and in prison, you did not come to My help.’ And they in their turn will reply, ‘Lord when was it that we saw You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and I nothing for You?’ And He will answer, ‘Truly I tell you: anything you failed to do for one of these, however insignificant, you failed to do for Me.’ And they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous will enter eternal life” (Matthew 25:31-46); “Look, he is coming with the clouds; everyone shall see Him, including those who pierced Him; and all the peoples of the world shall lament in remorse. So it shall be. Amen” (Revelation 1:7); “I saw a great, white throne, and the One Who sits upon it. From His presence earth and heaven fled away, and there was no room for them anymore. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne; and books were opened. Then another book, the Book of Life, was opened. The dead were judged by what they had done, as recorded in these books. The sea gave up her dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead in their keeping. Everyone was judged on the record of his deeds. Then Death and Hades were flung into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death; into it were flung any whose names were not to be found in the Book of Life” (Revelation 20:11-15); “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had vanished, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne: ‘Now God has His dwelling with mankind! He will dwell among them and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There shall be an end to death, and to mourning and crying and

pain, for the old order has passed away!’ The One Who sat on the throne said, ‘I am making all things new!’ (‘Write this down,’ He said, ‘for these words are trustworthy and true.’) Then He said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water from the spring of life as a gift. This is the victor’s heritage; and I will be their God and they will be My children. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, and the obscene, the murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars of every kind, the lake that burns with sulphurous flames will be their portion, and that is the second death” (Revelation 21:1-8). “The beast was taken prisoner, along with the false prophet who had worked miracles in its presence and deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire with its sulphurous flames. The rest were killed by the sword which came out of the rider’s mouth, and the birds all gorged themselves on their flesh” (Revelation 19:20-21). “Their seducer, the Devil, was flung into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been flung to be tormented day and night forever” (Revelation 20:10).

The Revelation of the Evangelist John the Theologian along with the Prophecy of Daniel and the writings of the Apostle Paul reveal to the world that the son of destruction will not only be a political leader but also the founder of a new religion with himself as its God just as Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, Who was promised to the Jews by the prophets of old. Judaism’s triumph will be enormous, for there will be a standing order to celebrate the Jewish Sabbath and follow the Judaic Law. The numberless sects, like lost sheep, will gravitate to Antichrist their new shepherd in the recently constructed Temple in Jerusalem. Seated on the throne of David, this self-proclaimed Messiah for whom the Jews had so long been waiting will receive divine worship. Simultaneously Orthodox Christian sanctuaries will be closed after an idol of Antichrist – a life size speaking statue – has been placed in them. The Prophet Daniel called this “the abomination of desolation.” After this the Bloodless Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist will cease to be publicly celebrated anywhere on earth.

We read in the Book of Revelation how an angel cries to those in Christian areas who have apostatized from the True Church of Christ. In it the angel recalls the creation and He Who created everything, Who took on flesh and lived among men, Whose glory was visible, the glory of the Only Begotten Son of the Father – the Son Who descended to earth in order that because of His worthiness all could obtain grace. By that time though people will have rejected Divine Grace and ignored the Holy Mysteries, voluntarily attracted like moths to the spurious signs of the fraudulent “Christ” and false prophet.

When the Divine Liturgies cease in the earthly Church, when everything comes to pass, Our Lord's Second Coming will immediately follow. Our Lord warns: "Remember, if the householder had known at what time the burglar was coming he would not have let his house be broken into. So hold yourselves in readiness, because the Son of Man will come at the time you least expect Him" (Luke 12:39-40). In that time truly no one will imagine that the world is coming to an end or realize in what moment the Son of Man will come and consequently humanity will be caught off guard. The plagues will have ceased that were caused by the two Prophets as well as the presence of the accusers themselves will have by then vanished from the earth – those two aggravating Prophets who berated Antichrist's devotees, alerting the revelers of their fate. Earthly progress will have advanced to such heights and the battle against disease and illnesses achieved such success that it will seem as if death itself had been eradicated. However, the vessels of wrath will be suddenly poured out upon Antichrist's followers: sores and ulcers will torment those having the mark of the beast and all the waters turned to blood throughout the earth. Where will all the famed doctors and scientists be after that? Where will the missionaries of materialism be then? Neither in progress, nor in books, nor in medicine will there be any help or relief. When humanity's abandonment of God has reached its limit during the rule of the son of perdition, this decomposing illness will descend upon his followers, the final Sodomites, exactly as quickly as destruction fell down on the former Sodomites. The Gospel cautions: "So too in the days of Lot, they ate and drank, they bought and sold, they planted and built; but on the day that Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained from the sky and made an end to them all. It will be like that on the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:28-30).

The end of Antichrist and his followers will be terrible. In the Book of Revelation we read how on the great day of the Lord, that Satan, Antichrist and his deputy will send demons to summon all the world's rulers together for an enormous battle. As soon as this massive army has been gathered at Armageddon the seventh wrath of God will engulf the earth: a tremendous lightening storm with thunder, explosions and a tremendous earthquake of inconceivable strength – an earthquake so powerful that islands will sink and mountains leveled flat. Humanity's pride will instantaneously crumble to rubble and disappear – the great production centers, of culture, art and knowledge, everything which humanity worshipped instead of God.



The Last Judgment

The Last and Dreadful Judgment will now happen. Frequently Our Savior taught about the final, universal judgment over mankind – both in parables and conversations absolutely clear in their meaning. He said: “For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will give everyone his due reward” (Matthew 16:27); “Again, the Father does not judge anyone, but has given full jurisdiction to the Son” (John 5:22); and “As Son of Man He has also been given authority to pass judgment” (John 5:27). According to the teachings of their Lord the Apostles verified that the Son of God will judge the whole world: “For we must all have our lives laid open before the tribunal of Christ, where each must receive what is due to him for his conduct in the body, good or bad” (II Corinthians 5:10). The Apostle Paul writes in another place: “So pass no premature judgment; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what darkness hides and disclose our inward motives; then will be the time for each to receive commendation from God” (I Corinthians 4:5). St. Paul writes: “In the obstinate impenitence of your heart you are laying up for yourself a store of retribution against the day of retribution, when God’s just judgment will be revealed, and He will pay everyone for what he has done. To those who pursue glory, honor, and immortality by steady persistence in well-doing, He will give eternal life; but the retribution of His wrath awaits those who are governed by selfish ambition, who refuse obedience to truth and take evil for their guide. There will be affliction and distress for every human being who is a wrongdoer, for the Jew first and for the Greek also; but for everyone who does right there will be glory, honor, and peace, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. God has no favorites” (Romans 2:5-11). Also from the Apostolic Epistles: “but they [the pagans] will have to give account of themselves to Him Who is ready to pass judgment on the living and the dead” (I Peter 4:5); “But judgment has long been in preparation for them [the false prophets]; destruction waits for them with unsleeping eyes” (II Peter 4:5); and “It is just that God should balance the account by sending affliction to those who afflict you, and relief to you who are afflicted, and to us as well, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in blazing fire. Then He will mete out punishment to those who refuse to acknowledge God and who will not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the penalty of eternal destruction, cut off from the presence of the Lord and the splendor of His might, when on the great day He comes to reveal His glory among His own and His majesty among all believers; and therefore among you, since you believed the testimony we brought you” (II Thessalonians 1:7-10). From this clear scriptural evidence as well as other places we learn of humanity’s final universal judgment and of what sort it will be. Everyone who has lived from the beginning of the world without exception, the evil and the good, Orthodox Christians and unbelievers, all will be judged. This judgment will be final. The fate of humanity as well as the fallen angels will be decided: “Remember too

those angels who were not content to maintain the dominion assigned to them, but abandoned their proper dwelling-place; God is holding them, bound in darkness with everlasting chains, for judgment on the great day” (Jude 6). The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will be the Judge of the world. He Who proclaimed the good news of God’s Law and fulfilled it perfectly; giving of Himself and in His divinity taking the form of a servant, redeeming humanity by His sufferings and death, will appear majestically in His divinity and judge all mankind.



Knowing the secrets of men’s hearts, the Lord will judge not only the actions which we have done or omitted during our earthly lives, but even our words, thoughts, intentions and desires. Then will all our most secret thoughts be exposed for all to see. The Lord will reward everyone according to his actions because His judgment will be righteous and impartial. Some will hear: “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘You have My Father’s blessing; come take possession of the Kingdom that has been ready for you since the world was made” (Matthew 25:34). The others will hear: “Then He will say to those on His left, ‘A curse is on you; go from My sight to the eternal fire that is ready for the devil and his angels”” (Matthew 25:41). St. Ephraim the Syrian

writes: “Then all mankind will see itself between condemnation and the Kingdom, between death and life, sorrow and joy, and everyone will stand before the Throne of Judgment looking down with terror. Everyone will be questioned and tried strictly, especially those of us who have been careless in our lives, which will cause all to ponder their actions. Good and bad, each individual will clearly see all his actions. Those whose lives were good will joyously go to their judgment hoping in obtaining their promised crowns. If any individual has serious sins which he has not repented before leaving this life then he will be sickened at heart when reproached by these sins confronting him and will moan, “Why did I the wretch not struggle with them but instead wasted what time I had playing games and consequently became a plaything of sin? Why didn’t I repent before Him Who takes away the sins of the world but instead spent my years in denial? What am I to do? The time for repentance is gone.’ Pondering all this they will suddenly hear the dreadful voice of the Judge crying out and saying: ‘Show your actions and receive your reward!’ Then all the orders of mankind will come forward to give homage to the Lord – bishops, priests, deacons, all the orders of the Church, as the Apostle said: ‘As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be brought to life; but each in proper order: Christ the firstfruits, and afterwards, at His coming, those who belong to Christ’ (I Corinthians 15:22-23). Then the rulers, the wise, the rich, all will quake with terror realizing that their actions will be revealed to angels and to men and that they will certainly reap what they sowed. After everyone has been judged, all earthly power and authority abolished and the enemies of God placed under His feet; then finally, as the Lord said: “He will separate people into two groups, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; He will place the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left’ (Matthew 25:32-33). Then there will be a separation: parents from children, fathers from sons, mothers from daughters, friends and relatives from one another. Cheating spouses who have not kept their marital bed pure will be separated. However I will be silent about much in describing this because fear holds me back” (*Sermon on the Honorable and Life-giving Cross and on the Second Coming*).

Everlasting Bliss and Everlasting Suffering

Once the last and complete sentence at the universal judgment has been passed then the everlasting bliss of the righteous will commence in the Kingdom of Heaven, as well as the everlasting suffering of sinners in hell, “In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and there, far away was Abraham and Lazarus close beside him” (Luke 16:23), a dreadful place of every kind of suffering and punishment, where only confusion, horror and anarchy replace any joy or hope of salvation “It is better for you to enter into life maimed than to keep both hands and go to hell, to the unquenchable

fire ... it is better to enter life crippled than to keep both your feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes your downfall, tear it out; it is better to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell, where the devouring worm never dies and the fire is never quenched" (Mark 9:44, 46-48). Everlasting separation from God, the loss of every divine gift, a tortured conscience, endless scorn and shame, reproach, cursing and hatred from those who have been lured into sin by the condemned – all of this in "the place of wailing and grinding of teeth" (Matthew 22:13). On the other hand a great reward is prepared for the righteous. They will be led into a place of ultimate perfection and beauty mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures: "Jesus answered, 'truly I tell you: today you will be with me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:43); "This is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, may Your name be hallowed,'" (Matthew 6:9) and "Blessed are the poor in spirit; the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs" (Matthew 5:3). The righteous will enjoy the sight of God here: "At present we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but one day we shall see face to face. My knowledge now is partial; then it will be whole, like God's knowledge of me" (I Corinthians 13:12). The glory and majesty of God will become truly apparent to the righteous that will see everything lofty, sacred and perfect, immersed in Divine Grace. Contemplating this will cause total satisfaction for their hearts, minds and wills, the endless source of joy and bliss which is their heritage. The righteous will observe the universe in its correct form; will fully understand the mystery of redemption and will delight in the fullness and perfection of God's knowledge, as the Apostle Paul said. God's beloved, they will themselves come to perfectly love Him in holiness. "When they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry; they are like angels in heaven" (Mark 12:25). The multitudes of angels will welcome the righteous as brothers, sharing with them their love and gratitude towards the Creator: "No, you have come to mount Zion, the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, to myriads of angels, to the full concourse and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of good men made perfect," (Hebrews 12:22-23). Every righteous one will be united in an indivisible loving union with all the saints: "Many, I tell you, will come from east and west to sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 8:11). All these will comprise Christ's one flock: "There will then be one flock and one Shepherd" (John 10:16), or one family united in pure love: "May they all be one; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, so also may they be in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21).

Humanity's enemies, those demon spirits of malicious hatred who lured men to their deaths and to hell, will then receive their just reward for having caused the deaths of each and every person in the cruelest ways. They presented their tempting



murderous sin to innocent children as well as the elderly crowned with virtues in order that after their deaths they could have their souls as trophies in their war with God. However the plague of death will not continue forever. "Death is swallowed up; victory is won!" 'O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?'" (I Corinthians 15:55). The Evangelist John the Theologian tells us: "The Sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead in their keeping. Everyone was judged on the record of his deeds. Then Hades and Death were flung into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:13-14).

The Evangelist John continues: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had vanished, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne: 'Now God has His dwelling with mankind! He will dwell among them and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them'" (Revelation 21:1-3). He Who abides in unapproachable light will establish a celestial place where He will live together with men. Whereas before He had revealed Himself vaguely, seemingly remote and obscure, where only by faith the heart's innermost voice had recognized His presence in the Church, in the Holy Mysteries, Who expected from us constant struggles of faith, hope and love towards Him in our subjection of ourselves struggling with sin. But the Blessed will see God not in obscurity but face to face on the Holy Mountain, in the Heavenly Tabernacle, where all tears will be dried and the heart filled with inexpressible joy at the sight of the perfect, unearthly beautiful, heavenly Paradise. At the burial of the All-Holy Theotokos, the Ever-virgin Mary, the vision of the heavenly flowers fills us today with unimaginable consolation. Such celestial sounds and words cannot be compared to anything earthly no matter how seemingly perfect and beautiful they appear to us. The Apostle Paul bears witness to this who himself was caught up in Paradise. Who can imagine what a grateful heart will experience when at last it sees the Savior Himself face to face knowing that this contemplation will never end? For then "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There shall be an end to death, and to mourning and crying and pain, for the old order has passed away!" (Revelation 21:4).

Glory to God!

Compiled by a monk of the Orthodox Church.