



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE OF ARCHBISHOP JOB OF TELMESSOS

"Thou hast assumed a body of lowly clay, O Christ. By sharing our humble flesh, Thou hast made our race partakers of divinity. By becoming mortal man yet remaining God, Thou hast raised us from death to life. Holy art Thou, O Lord!" (3rd Ode of the first Canon of the Feast).

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, beloved in Christ,

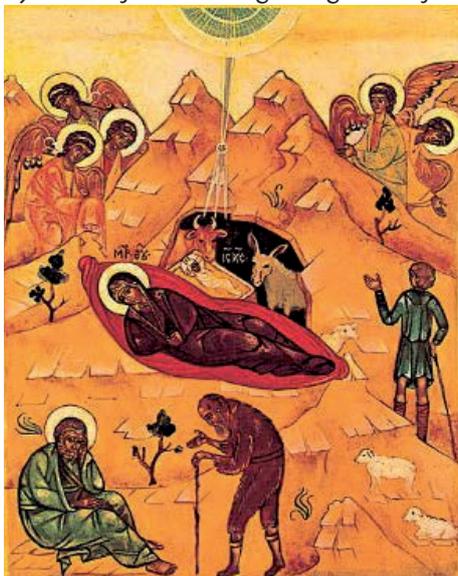
With these words, St. Cosmas of Maiuma, the author of the first Canon sung at Matins on this bright Feast today, reminds us that the event we are celebrating is profoundly linked to the creation of humans and the very goal of our being as intended by Divine Providence from all eternity. Indeed, God at the very beginning created human beings for participation in the Divine Life. According to the Book of Genesis, man was created in the image and likeness of God (*Gen. 1:26-27*). Commenting on this passage from the first Book of the Old Testament, St. Irenaeus of Lyons tells us that «*the image of God is the Son (Col. 1:15), in Whose image man was made. For this reason He was made manifest in recent times, to make it clear that the image was like Him*» (*The Preaching of the Apostles 22*). However, Christ imprinted upon us not only the image of God, but also the ability to attain the true likeness of God which allows us to achieve the ultimate goal of human life, which is not only deliverance from sin but participation in the Divine Life.

Thus, the desire to commune with the Divine Life and «*become god*» is in itself neither foolish nor a sin, as it is willed by the Creator Himself, provided this is carried out «*by grace*» and is done according to the will of God, and not according to by selfish and arrogant human will. According to St. Simeon of Thessaloniki, human sin consisted not in this purpose of our existence, but in the way of its realization, the fact that we have been «*seduced by the desire to be equal to God, aspiring to become immortal gods before our time*», that is to say prematurely, before the Incarnation of the Word of God, in Whom «*we are now raised and live, and participate in God's gifts and are gods*». So «*our desire to become gods by the transgression of the commandment was folly, because it was impossible for us, creatures, to become gods*» but thanks to the Incarnation of the Word of God which we celebrate this day, our salvation is realized as is also the goal of our existence, the very reason why «*He was intimately united to us through that which was done for us and died for us in the flesh, which was the pinnacle of*

His kindness, and by His death, He gave us immortality and glory of divinity» (*De sacra Liturgia 99. PG 155, 297D -300A*).

Today's Feast brings us this significance and retains all this relevance. It is not merely the memorial of an historical event of the past, but the uninterrupted celebration of the Divine Economy of salvation for all of us. However, as St. Nicholas Cabasilas writes, «*this is precisely the work of the economy that has been prepared for humans. For here God was not content to communicate only a part of His goodness to human nature, while retaining for Himself the largest share, but rather all the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9), the very richness of His nature which He has infused into it*» (*The Life in Christ, I, 28-29*).

To celebrate the Nativity of Christ today means for us a response and a responsible attitude to flee from evil, sin and the spirit of division, to gather together around Christ in His Church which is His Body, through the celebration of the Holy Mysteries. As Cabasilas remind us, «*being united with Christ is possible for those who go through everything which the Savior endured, experiencing everything He experienced and becoming everything he has become. He, therefore, has joined together a flesh and blood pure from all sin; being Himself God by nature from the beginning, He deified*



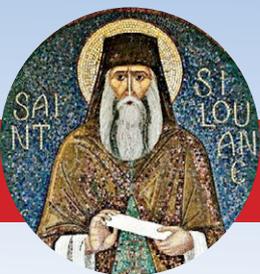
that which He became later, that is to say human nature; to complete this, He also died because of His flesh and rose again. Whoever wishes to be united to Him must partake of His flesh, participate in His deification and share in His burial and resurrection» (*The Life in Christ, II, 2*).

All this became possible thanks to the incarnation of God and the Sacraments of the Church which continue and actualize this for us. It is thanks to Him Who was born in Bethlehem for our salvation that we can rise from our human lowliness and remedy the shortcomings of our smallness, to inherit the great promises and fully realize the purpose of our existence. For, as the Apostle Peter exhorts and reminds us, «*as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.*» (*2 Peter 1:3-7*).

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, beloved in Christ. It is for this reason that on this festive day I urge you, in my turn, to maintain unity among yourselves in the Body of the Church and to cultivate love for God and neighbor in your heart. At the same time I offer you my best wishes on the occasion of the Nativity of Christ and the New Year, imploring upon you all God's blessings and wishing that «*the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*» (*1 Thess. 5:23*).

*† Job, Archbishop of Telmessos,
Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,
Paris, The Cathedral of Saint Alexander
December 25, 2013/ January 7, 2014*

Monastery - Monastic life



MONASTERY OF SAINT SILOUAN

Three years after the canonization of Saint Silouan, an orthodox monastery opened in France in 1990 and placed under his protection. On August 1 1990, its hegumen and founder, archimandrite Symeon, with the blessing of his Bishop and of Archimandrite Sophrony, founder of the Saint John the Baptist monastery in Maldon (Essex), of blessed memory, started this spiritual adventure. Two novices, a man and a woman, joined him.

The monastery settled in an old farm which needed to be thoroughly renovated. The old barn was first transformed into a church, then, progressively the other buildings: a house for the monks, another for the nuns and the commons: a refectory, a kitchen, a library, several workshops and guest rooms (about fifteen). A small wooden bell tower was built. At the moment, the community counts fourteen members.

The Liturgical prayer brings the whole community together and lends rhythm to the daily life: at 18.00 (Midnight service and Matins or Divine Liturgy), at 17.30, Vespers. All services are celebrated in French; the Divine Liturgy is preceded by the Hours four times a week – on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays – and at 10.00 on Sundays, and the Service of Jesus' Prayer on Monday morning. An acathist to the Mother of God on Wednesdays and a panikhid for the dead on Saturdays are celebrated at 12.30. Our monastery is cenobitic (communal), living along the spiritual tradition of our Fathers, continually transmitted since then. And we strive of course to

learn from the teachings of Saint Silouan and his disciple, Father Sophrony.

Saint Silouan was born in Russia in 1866. At the age of 26, he went to the Saint Panteleimon monastery, one of the twenty one monasteries of Mount Athos. He was a very humble man. The depth of his spiritual life only transpired through the few monks in his surroundings. He died in 1938.

Two points are salient in his teachings. Firstly, his intercession for the whole world. «*I pray Thee, O merciful Lord, for all the peoples of the earth, that they may come to know Thee by the Holy Spirit*», a recurrent theme in his pages. Secondly, the love for one's enemies, which he sets as the absolute criteria of correctness of Christian spiritual life according to the Gospel.

Our hegumen has welcomed those men and women who asked to be received in this monastery. So our community brings together monks and nuns of several nationalities. This is not the result of a deliberate choice. That is how God meant this place to be. Monastic life is one, a ferment of unity. It has always been prophetic, an affirmation of the Kingdom and a sign of questioning *this world*. Our specific nature is perhaps a prophetic sign *for our time*.

Among the income sources of the monastery, there are the traditional monastic crafts: painting and sticking of icons, candle manufacturing, *tchoki*, jams, and the sale of books and religious objects.



*Mémoire éternelle !
The servant of God
mother Thais fell
asleep in the Lord
the 17th December
2013 at the
Monastery of Saint
Silouan.*

Mother Thais was born on March 23 1921 in Oostende, Belgium. Having lost her mother at the age of 12, she had to take care of her youngest brother and of the household, which prevented her from getting any formal education after primary school. But her spontaneous intellectual curiosity and numerous readings largely compensated for this. In 1945, she entered a cloistered religious community in Liège, Belgium, the Sœurs du Saint-Sacrement ("sisters of the Blessed Sacrament"), and became a nun. She left the convent in 1965 after having taught novices of her Congregation for three years in Washington. Her spiritual quest intensified and she started living as a hermit in 1966 in a small village in the Ardèche. Accepted in the Orthodox Church in 1968, she resumed her hermitic life under the spiritual guidance of His Eminence Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh. In 1971, she settled in a cave at 1200 m altitude in the Alpes de Haute Provence, above Digne, to live a life of asceticism and prayer. Living in absolute poverty and complete surrender to God, she made a living by making *tchotkis* and embroidered icons. Her presence had an important influence in the region and many people appreciated her humble simplicity and her particularly warm welcome. In 1991, aged 70, after twenty years in this hermitage dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, living in the mountains became too difficult and she was then welcomed in the Saint Silouane convent where a small « isba » became her last abode. Only two years before her death was she settled with the community because of her old age. She fell asleep in the Lord on December 17, 2013. Eternal memory!

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THE MONASTERY OF THE PROTECTION OF THE THEOTOKOS

After the revolution the Russian Orthodox emigrates, in particular in France, sought various ways to create a monastic life. In 1946, just after World War II, four sisters – three Russian and one Greek – were donated a big estate in Burgundy. There they founded a monastery placed under the Protection of the Mother of God. The main house was arranged for the welcoming of pilgrims. The aisles were progressively transformed. In the first place, a church was founded, dedicated to the Mother of God. Then the nuns converted more rooms into cells, a vast refectory, a kitchen and a library. The community of sisters grew up, as well as the attendance of the celebrations from the outside. This is why in 2003 a spacious church was built in the monastery's upper garden, dedicated to the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus-Christ.

The first hegoumen, mother Eudoxia, as well as the second one, mother Theodosia, were among the very first sisters of the monastery. They asked mother Olga to carry on their task. It is mostly thanks to Mother Olga that the monastery hosted sisters of different nationalities. With a great courage she led the monastery until November 2013, when God called her to Himself at the age of 98. Mother Olga had prepared and trained one of the monastery's sisters, mother Colomba, to take over her obedience.

During the celebrations we sing mostly in Slavonic. Readings are in different languages, essentially in Slavonic and French.

The monastery is under the protection of the Mother of God, but it also has other protectors: saint Seraphim of Sarov (the chapel in the bottom part of the garden), the apostle Jude (the first liturgy celebrated in the monastery coincided with his day), saint venerable priest Alexis of Ugine (who was



canonised in 2004, and whose relics rest in our new church).

Above all the world needs prayers, and the calling of the monk is to pray for the world. But in order to attain this elevated purpose, we a long way to prepare ourselves, along which a deep repentance and a genuine obeisance

are indispensable. The great monastic Tradition is essentially centred on the inner life: it means struggling with evil thoughts through work for the propitiation of our passions and the purification of our hearts. All this has, of course, only one motivation – our love for God; and it is feasible only thanks to His help and His grace.

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Translation of a letter written by mother Eudoxia, the first hegoumen and founder of the monastery, while in Switzerland under medical treatment.

My dear sisters,
[...] I deeply regret not to be present for our patronal Festival; I hope to be with you spiritually through the Holy Communion [...]
Perfection cannot exist on earth, but if the desire for Christ and His Kingdom brings together even a small group of persons under the Protection of the Queen of Heaven, we must thank God for this and take care of the monastery. "Where two or three » have gathered together in God's name, our Lord is in their midst. Our time is a difficult one, we have trouble staying united; the powerful enemy, the devil, does everything to destroy us, to break up the spiritual bond between persons; this is why it has always seemed to me particularly important precisely to strengthen these bonds. The very foundation of this bond is love and patience; it marks the threshold of the Kingdom of God; monasticism is one of the paths leading to the Christian perfection, i.e. to the Kingdom of God. I do not know what each of us is capable of separately; but our common life under the Protection of the Holy Shroud of the Mother of God is necessary to ourselves as well as to those whom Our Lord brings to us. It is our service to God, and it is our service to the world...

October 1956

SAINT PORPHYRIOS HIS SAINTHOOD WAS DECLARED BY THE SYNOD OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE ON NOVEMBER 27TH, 2013. HE WAS BORN FEBRUARY 7 IN THE LITTLE VILLAGE OF ST. JOHN KARYSTIA, IN THE PROVINCE OF EVIA (GREECE) AND DIED DECEMBER 2, 1991 AT MOUNT-ATHOS. FOUNDER OF THE MONASTERY OF THE TRANSFIGURATION IN MILESI HE HAD THE GIFT OF CLAIRVOYANCE. THROUGH HIS ROLE AS SPIRITUAL FATHER, ELDER PORPHYRIOS BECAME KNOWN TO AN EVER-WIDER CIRCLE OF ORTHODOX FOLLOWERS. SEVERAL COMPILATIONS OF STORIES AND SAYINGS ATTRIBUTED TO HIM HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED.



Those people who live all on their own in a cave, do they help the Church? Yes. The monks in their caves help the Church in a mysterious way. It is possible, that someone living in a cave, without growing trees, or cultivating a garden or doing anything obvious to help the lives and progress of others, nonetheless creates, grows, and so comes to deification in that cave. The ascetics stay in their cave to avoid anything that might distract them from their spiritual lives. Through their life of struggle and purity they help the Church. And I want to tell you something that may seem to you an exaggeration. But I want you, my children, to believe me. It is about the contribution made by the prayer of the monk. Listen carefully.

Let us suppose that there are seven preachers, all theologians, all leading a holy way of life. Their oratorical skills are without compare. Each one is in charge of a parish of ten thousand parishioners.

Every year some seventy thousand people listen to the words of these preachers. These listeners are overwhelmed in their thousands. They convert, they join themselves to Christ. Whole families are saved this way. But a single monk, unseen by anyone, sitting in his cave, through his humble prayer has far greater influence. One man, in contrast to these seven, achieves more important results. That is how I see it. I am sure of it. Such is the significance of the prayer of a monk. He is alone in his cell, but the waves of his prayer reach out to all, even far away. Through his prayer the monk shares in the problems of people and works miracles. It is thus that his contribution is more important than that of the most honourable preacher.

*Elder Porphyrios from Kausokalibia;
Life and Speeches,
edition of monastery of Chrysopegi
Greece, copyright 2008*

MONASTICISM IN THE WORLD

« God writes straight with crooked lines! »
+Nun Thaïs; Monastery Saint Silouan

To speak of the monasticism in the world is no easy task... it is even awesome! I take the risk only by obedience. Please consider that what follows engages only the author, as it is the result of my sole miserable experience. We do not want to burden uselessly the text. Therefore we shall use the general expression of "a monk in the world" when speaking of monks as well as nuns living in town, i.e. outside a monastery.

Allow me first of all to mention the late nuns Catherine and Agnes (de Giers) as well as nun Nina (Ovtracht) who worked during many years... in the world... for the sake of our Archdiocese. In particular they taught catechism classes for a great number of

children (including your unworthy servant!) in the parish school of our dear Alexander Nevsky Cathedral.

May their memory be eternal!

To speak of monasticism in the world means first of all to posit that a real monastic life goes in coenobitic monasteries, under the guidance of a wise and balanced Elder, striving to reach eremitism – the life "alone with the only One".

Let's take this opportunity to put an end to the widespread idea that a monk living alone in town, outside a community, is a hermit.

Far from it!

A hermit *physically* lives apart, in a faraway, even inaccessible, place, in a complete solitude, never in the middle of a city!

For a monk to live in the world can only be accidental, after a hegoumen and/or a bishop has given his blessing to someone who has at least a minimal monastic experience, who has lived in a coenobitic community and has experience enough of it.

Indeed, you need to have experienced the crucible of a community life, its joys and ordeals revealing your weaknesses. Indeed they are and will remain during all your life the meeting ground with God.

Why?

Because, until we experience a community life, we are ready to believe that we are, for example, humble, sociable, gentle, generous, ascetic, detached, etc. But, inevitably, the time comes when we discover that we are proud, asocial, choleric, harsh, egocentric, glutton, and that so many things of the world hold us back...

But it is the rule of the game: the sole and only way having proved efficient is the "fire" (sometimes as a sweet warmth, sometimes... an intense burning pain!) of the coenobitic experience with asceticism, obeisance and renouncement of one's own will. If a person becomes a monk and never lives in a monastery, he/she will certainly consider his/her state through the prism of an illusion, which spiritually is very dangerous. God knows that it must not be taken lightly

Concretely, what does it mean, to be a monk in the world?

To be a monk in the world means, evidently to observe the monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obeisance :

As for poverty and obeisance, no worry: in our Archdiocese we are in good hands!

As for chastity, it is indispensable to observe a strict asceticism, by rejecting all thoughts suggested to us, as we learn from the monastic tradition. *"Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation"* (Mt, 26:41)

To be a monk in the world means, among other obedience, to have a civil work: i.e. to have an employer and colleagues to whom we must obey.

To be a monk in the world means, being part of a parish (as a cleric, a cantor or anything else); with an Archbishop, a Rector and... parishioners to whom we must also obey.

To be a monk in the world means, relying on the Holy Spirit, with abandon and trust, to be able to "juggle" with all this!

To be a monk in the world means, means living in poverty from our work, not thanks to donations (although these are scarce – even non-existent – nevertheless they may from time to time be accepted with gratitude and gratefulness! Get the message! ...)

To be a monk in the world means, having a minimal a social life; without becoming a socialite.

To be a monk in the world means, being simple in all, i.e. making simplicity our asceticism... and we do know that the world and simplicity do not get together well!

To be a monk in the world means, being connected with a monastery.

To be a monk in the world means, accepting not to be considered as such; not to be understood, either by monasteries or by faithful. But to this you were prepared by the catechesis in the monastic tonsure rite: *"You will be abused (...); you will be persecuted, tormented by many bitter ordeals. They are the characteristic signs of life according to God. And when you will have endured all these sufferings, rejoice, because your reward in Heaven will be great."*

To be a monk in the world means, being twice as watchful in our spiritual struggle and our discernment of all that we experience day by day; indeed we cannot depend on the grace of the fraternal community life to steer us and put us right when necessary.

To be a monk in the world means, sticking firmly to our praying rule, as it is the cement of our life.

To be a monk in the world means, imitating Christ, who withdrew "apart"; therefore it decidedly means being able to "keep cell" very regularly; as the Holy Fathers tell us, the cell teaches us everything, and we are much better when we go out than when we went in.

To be a monk in the world means, trusting an Elder to guide us.

To be a monk in the world means, humbly and patiently persevering in following Christ across the spiritual desert of the city: *"Christians are known indeed to be in the world, but their godliness remains invisible."* ((*Epistle to Diognetus*, 6:4)

Finally, to be a monk in the world means remembering that Elder Stratoniceus (a reputed hermit of the Caucasus) said once to Saint Silouan the Athonite « *that the day will come when monks will work for their salvation in civil clothes* » (Elder Silouan, monk of the Mount-Athos).

Now, enough chit-chat... May God forgive me!

I would have been far wiser if I had followed the advice of Father Alexander Schmemmann :

« [...] pray and gain inner peace [...] Be always simple, clear and joyful. Do not give lessons. Avoid like the plague all these "spiritual debates" and all these chats on religious subjects [...] » !

(*The Journals of Alexander Schmemmann*)

Hieromonk Éliée (France, Paris)

