

Inscape June 2016

© Stillpoint Contemplative Ministries

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and communion with the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

CONTINUATION: A CHRISTIAN NEW AGE CONSCIOUSNESS

This month of June we celebrate the Ascension of Our Lord (9th), Father's Day and the Glorious Feast of Pentecost (19th), Holy Spirit Day (20th), and the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul (29th). This year, the Apostle's Fast involves only three days since the date of Pascha was celebrated May 1st.

The Church is the sacrament of Christ as risen and visible today to the world. Jesus risen is the Head of the Church. We are His members. It is fitting, therefore, this month to continue our topic of last month of Christian New Age Consciousness. It is through the risen Jesus that His Spirit is released into our lives so that we can with increasing awareness live already in the new age as a part of Christ's new creation "Whoever from now on is a follower of Christ is a new creation; old things have passed away; and all things have become new through God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; for God was in Christ, who has reconciled the world with his majesty, not counting their sins against them; and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:17-19). Only the Spirit can give us ever increasing faith, hope and love in order that we live in the very life of Christ as Saint Paul teaches: I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me! (Galatians 2:20).

We encounter the risen Jesus and recognize Him as truly God and man, both natures (divine and human) united in the one person of our Lord and God and Saviour...Jesus Christ. God reveals His loving mercy and redemption to us through the sacraments, in the Church's teachings and worship, and as living within us individually and in our community as we love others with Jesus' very love, His Spirit working in us.

How consciously are you living each thought, word and deed in the new age Jesus risen is bringing you through the continued outpouring of His Holy Spirit? Do you really want to be reborn, not only by water but continuously by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3,5)? "But what about you? "Who do you say I am?" (Mark 8:29).

ENTERING INTO A CHRISTIAN NEW AGE CONSCIOUSNESS

We saw in last month's teaching how Christians should be challenged by the contemporary New Age Movement to search more deeply into Christianity in order to enter into a new age of Christian consciousness. Such a Christian consciousness has always been in the Body of Christ, but in our contemporary society we are being called to reformulate in what this ancient Christian wisdom consists and how we can live in such heightened awareness as did the early Christian communities. We now participate in the dynamic living tradition of the Christian Faith.

With so much talk and writing today about consciousness expanded to a oneness with God and the universe, we may well ask: Just what is consciousness? Is it something intellectual that we can acquire by taking a seminar or reading a self-help book, thus raising our mental and spiritual level? Is it merely a higher state of neural functioning? And if so, are there techniques to develop such functioning? Or is it an Inner Light on which we focus in order to see objects in greater detail, as with bifocals, as with progressive lenses, to aid our

limited vision? “The Word was in the beginning, and that very Word was with God, and God was that Word. The same was in the beginning with God. Everything came to be by his hand; and without him not even one thing that was created came to be. The life was in him, and the life is the Light of Men. And the same light shines in darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it” (John 1:1-5).

AWARENESS LEVELS

Dr. Arthur Diekman (clinical professor of psychiatry; 1929-2013) defines consciousness as “awareness” rather than the things of which we are aware. Carl Jung uses the analogy of an island to describe the gradual unfolding of our consciousness. The island slowly emerges out of a dark sea. The higher the top of the island, the greater conscious vision is possible, but the island is still totally rooted in the bottom of the sea. A conscious or “spiritual” person would be psychologically open to a clear view of all that is related to his or her own being.

The reason we should have some clear ideas about consciousness is that our level of conscience affects our personal spiritual lives. Christianity preaches that God is love and that we become both human and godly by living in greater and greater conscious love for God and neighbor. To the extent that our behavior is unconscious, our values are merely ideals, abstracted and removed from our life situation. A low level of conscious awareness of who we are prevents us from moving into greater oneness with God and neighbor in love.

Ultimate, conscious love, a free gift of yourself to another, is the “sacred time,” the seventh day of rest, the entrance into the reign of Heaven where levels of consciousness continually develop into higher levels of unity in love, along with new awareness of our own uniqueness in that very unity. Humanity advances from glory to glory. This advance never ceases!

A NEW CREATION

He allows us by the infusion of faith, hope and love to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who became flesh through the Ever-Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit, died for love of us and rose from the dead. The Heavenly Father raised Him up in glory, bringing His humanity into a newness of life within the Trinity, but also bringing us members of His Body into a new age, a new creation. “He who was seated on the throne said” ‘See I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

This Holy Spirit released by the risen Jesus into our hearts (Romans 5:5) is able to transform us into fully developed human beings, as we live every thought, word and deed in, with and for Christ. “If, then, any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old state of things has gone; wonderful to tell, it has been made over, absolutely new! All this comes from the action of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has entrusted us with this ministry of reconciliation. We know that God was truly reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not reckoning against men their sins, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 17-19).

JESUS—GOD’S SACRAMENT TO US

When the Son of God became man for love of us, the second person of the Trinity becomes personally man. This man also personally God. In Christ Jesus is total humanity and total divinity. As a human man, He acts out His divine life in accordance to His human existence. “He who sees me sees the Father” (John 14:9). Everything He does as man is an act of the Son of God. It is a divine act in human form; a sign and an incarnation in human

activity of divine Trinitarian life. Jesus' human love and signs or actions are human embodiments of God's self-emptying love.

Christian New Age thinking, therefore, centers upon the historical Jesus Christ as the visible "re-presentation" of God's Trinitarian love for us human beings. Without belief in the revealed mystery of Jesus Christ as both God and man, there can be no authentic Christianity.

Because His saving acts of preaching, healing, performing miracles, His sufferings and death, His resurrection and exaltation by the Father in glory with His outpouring of His Spirit are acts of a divine person, they have divine power to redeem or save us. Since these acts were done in and through His visible, material humanity, they are sacraments. Orthodox Theology reveals to us that all "sacraments" are none other than an "Encounter with Christ."

The Good News that is made possible through our belief in Jesus' resurrection through the release of His Spirit is that Jesus still lives among His followers who, as living members in Christ, form the Body of Christ, His Church. He who is the primary sacrament (The Sacrament of Sacraments—the Eucharist) makes it possible for us Christians to encounter Him in and through the Church's sacraments. Now we have The Way in the risen Lord Jesus, God-Man, to touch God and become divinized by the Spirit's gift of grace which sanctifies us.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The first step into the New Age that the risen Jesus makes possible for us is made when we Christians receive the initiation into Christ's Body in the sacrament of Baptism; truly a "hymn of entry." We become the Temple of the All-Holy Adorable Spirit, living members inserted into the resurrection of Jesus so that we Passover from the death of God's Trinitarian life to enter into Christ's new life. "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 13:3). "You are, in fact, all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, since all of you who have come to Christ by baptism have clothed yourselves with Christ...You are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's then you are the offspring of Abraham, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:27,29).

The total presence of the Trinity lives within us in all its fullness from the first moment of our Baptism. Yet we promise in Baptism to renounce Satan and all his wiles which means that living in the Christian New age is much more than a Gnosticism that reveals that we have always been gods. It demands on our part a continuous inner attentiveness (nepsis, vigilance, watchfulness) to battle the forces of darkness within us and around us in our surrounding environment. It means that we are also to put on the mind of Jesus and live according to His values. "Renew yourselves constantly by spiritual considerations and put on the new self, created after the image of God in the justice and holiness that comes from truth" (Ephesians 4:17-24). "Do not imitate the way of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, that you may discern what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace which is given to me, to all of you, not to think of yourselves beyond what you ought to think; but to think soberly, every man according to the measure of faith which God has distributed to him" (Romans 12:2-3).

REDEEMING POWER OF CHRIST THROUGH THE SACRAMENTS

The baptized are redeemed or brought back. The Good Shepherd finds and returns the sheep to the fold. Christians now belong to Christ and are possessed by Him. To be possessed by Christ is no longer slavery but true freedom, since Christians now live in the eternal life of God Trinity through the mystery of Christ's death, resurrection and through the outpouring of the Spirit and are really children of God and heirs to the Kingdom (1 John 3:1).

We Christians in Baptism and Chrismation are “signed” or stamped with the Seal of the Holy Spirit. “That we should become the first to trust in Christ, to his honor and his glory. In whom, you also have heard the word of truth, which is the gospel for your salvation; in him you have believed, so you are sealed with the Holy Spirit that was promised. Which is the pledge of our inheritance, for the salvation of those who are saved and for the glory of his honor” (Ephesians 1:12-14). The risen Jesus gives us in Baptism his Holy Spirit. “...for by one Spirit we were baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). It is the work of the Spirit to begin and carry on the rest of our human lives the work of transforming us intrinsically into the image (icon) and likeness of Christ. “It is God who has established us firmly along with you in communion with Christ, and has anointed us, and stamped us with his seal, and given us the Spirit as the first installment of what is to come” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

The other sacraments are given as encounters with the risen Jesus Christ in certain times of our earthly journey, yet they only unfold the seeds of divinization (theosis) planted in us in our first Baptism. Chrismation gives us the full power of a matured Christian. We are now to be adults as we receive a fuller release of the Holy Spirit to make us witnesses in the world of the New Age in which Christians live in Christ Jesus.

In the Holy Eucharist we receive the Precious Body and Sacred Blood of Jesus The Lord as He prolongs His death and resurrection in us for the healing of our soul and body. In the sacrament of Confession (Reconciliation) we are not only forgiven our sins, but Jesus touches us in a deep healing of the roots of our sinfulness. “Reconcile and Restore (him or her) to the Unity of Your Holy Orthodox Church, through Christ Jesus our Lord. May Our Lord Jesus Christ, heal you of all your infirmities, and absolve you of all your sins, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” (Priest’s Prayer for God’s Forgiveness). In marriage (The Crowning Ceremony...The Servant of God is crowned and united to the Handmaiden of God, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. O Lord our God, crown them in glory and honor!) a baptized man and woman are joined by Jesus Christ in a grace-bestowing life-long union. This gives them grace to love each other and the children coming from that marriage as Jesus loves and gives himself to his Church (Ephesians 5:28-29). There are no vows in the Crowning Ceremony.

In the Sacrament of Ordination, Jesus shares His priesthood of the New covenant with certain “called” human persons through the laying on of a bishop’s hands and prayer. This allows the priest to be a principal minister of most of the other sacraments and the preacher of the Divine Word. As we face any form of sickness or infirmity and even possible death, the Anointing of the Sick and the Suffering aids us both to a healing on the body, soul and spirit levels and above all to a happy and peaceful death. “For a Christian ending of our life, without pain and shame, peaceful, and for a good account at the fearful judgment seat of Christ, let us pray to the Lord” (Petition at the Litany of Supplication during Divine Liturgy). Saint James describes this sacrament as the anointing with oil to heal the body and to forgive sins (James 5:13-16).

CHRISTIAN PRAYER

Growth in greater Christian consciousness of living in the New Age of the risen Lord comes in prayer through the infusion of the Holy Spirit to new levels of greater surrender to Jesus as Lord of our lives. We cannot live in and with Christ in every human event without increasing by the help of the Spirit’s faith, hope and love in deeper union with Him as immanently dwelling within us. This is done through growth in deeper prayer. “O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk. But give rather to me the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see

my own sins and transgressions, and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou, unto the ages of ages. Amen. (Lenten Prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian).

God has placed within our consciousness a burning desire to enter into greater union with our Creator and thus with all other human beings, our co-creators. It is a desire to live forever in God's sacred time (kairos), to pray always with the Holy Spirit who prays within us (Romans 8:26-27). We cannot enter into God's sacred time and space unless God leads us into His divine presence by the Spirit. Only in and through the Spirit of God's perfect and eternal love are we able to penetrate into God's innermost mystery and rest in complete communion and union with God and with neighbor.

TO PRAY ALWAYS

Through discipline and grace we learn to live more and more consciously in the presence of God and to "pray always" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). A strong desire to live in harmony with God's will is necessary for a life of prayer. Not only should we strongly desire to remain in the presence of God, but such a desire must be accompanied by an uprooting of the false ego, in thoughts, words and deeds. Saint Paul insists that we should be ready to bring into captivity and obedience to Jesus Christ every thought and every imagination (2 Corinthians 10:5).

When our consciousness of God's loving presence becomes not so much *our own doing*, but rather a state of *being*, more or less continuous, then we enter into true harmony with our real self and are enjoying the seventh day of rest, in which we even now share in God's eternal life. This is already to live in the New Christian Age!

In this prayer of the "heart", the grace of God has filtered down into our consciousness and has become the sole determinant of every thought and action. True love has conquered the heart and we wait in peace to see what line of action or thought would be most in accord with the will of God, who has so completely loved us into being. "You brought us out of non-existence into being, and, when we had fallen away from You, You raised us up again, and left nothing undone to lead us back to heaven and bestow upon us Your future kingdom" (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom). Such a state of bliss can come only gradually as we struggle in each moment to bring all inordinate attachments or desires under the one desire to live in God's love and in unity with all other beings.

CRASHING DOWN OUR IDOLS

To enter into such intimate and abiding union with the Indwelling Trinity necessitates our stripping away all our idols and knocking down our golden calves by going into the desert of our inner poverty. Prayer becomes an "aweful waiting," a receptivity to God's word that comes when we are emptied of our own words. Only God's Word is true and is capable of transforming our darkness into the Light of Christ which shines for all.

As we descend more deeply within ourselves, God reveals our abyss of nothingness. Death to our self-reliance and pride can occur only when we are helpless in darkness, standing before a doorless wall. The acknowledgement of emptiness must be made before the vessel can be filled. The Spirit of the risen Jesus pours into the deepest levels of our consciousness (Romans 5:5). We know God as loving, dwelling within our "hearts" as personalized Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our lives become transformed as we encounter the Trinity in the sacramentals of the raw stuff that makes up our actual, historical world in each moment.

We *inscape* into the heart of matter and find there the heart of God's uncreated energies of love operating unto our eternal happiness in each moment. Matter, work in the world, our contemporary history, sex and marriage must be seen positively as drenched with God's

loving, creative powers and providential care. The material world is now the help God intended it to be as He continues to create it through His Logos, His divine Word. The active and contemplative lives are now a single life of loving God within us and everywhere around us.

Jesus commissioned His disciples not merely to announce the Good News about the coming of the Kingdom of God, but to bring His healing love and power to all humankind (Mark 16:16-18). We will respond differently to Christ's command to share ourselves and our possessions with others who have less than we do, depending upon our charisms and our "place" within the Body of Christ, the Church.

THERE IS ONLY CHRIST

An expanded consciousness in contemplative prayer begins as we enter deeply into the material world around us, for we see "only one Christ; he is everything and he is in everything (Colossians 3:11). The "unified field" Einstein vainly looked for in the world of phenomena exists only in Christ-consciousness. The beginning of our search is our end, and the end is the beginning. Love is the umbilical cord between us and the created Universe.

Through our humble and feeble prayers, may God continue to grant his loving mercy to all His creation.

Father John Michael Zboyovski