



How I Can Change my Life... Now!

Of all the periods given to us by our Mother Church, this is the one that affords us the best opportunity for life changing ACTION. The Church takes lent so seriously that the Fathers have designated four Sundays of **pre-preparation** (the start of the Triodion) before the actual 40 days of Lent, to **prepare** us for the life-saving Passion of Our Lord and His glorious Resurrection.

Why is this period life-changing for me? Because it is a refocusing of my life, a journey of discovery into my innermost being to discover who I am and the true life I was created for. It is a chance to deepen my knowledge of God, and work towards purification with courage and commitment.

Man was created for Paradise, to have knowledge of God and be in communion with Him. However, sin has deprived him of that blessed life, and his life on earth is in exile. Our Saviour, Jesus Christ, has opened the door of Paradise to everyone who follows Him and His Church by revealing the beauty of the Kingdom.

How does Lent help us to know God more? To paraphrase theologian Alexander Schmemmann from his book 'Great Lent Journey to Pascha': "Lent is the school of repentance that every Christian must go to every year to deepen his faith, to re-evaluate and if possible to change his life - a rediscovery of the **Orthodox** way of life".

The purpose of Lent is not to force on us rules and obligations to follow, but rather to **soften** our hearts to experience communion with God. It is a spiritual challenge which requires a **response**, a **decision**, a **plan**, a **continuous** effort. To **focus** on God and less on ourselves **through** fasting, repentance, almsgiving, prayer, silence, forgiveness and increased Liturgical worship.



Part of the Lenten journey is a daily examination of our hearts. A time when we look at bad habits and passions that we need to overcome - gluttony, vainglory, pride etc. Do we indulge ourselves and put our needs before those of the other? Are we kind to the poor, respectful to our teachers, parents, elders, spouses, children?

Fasting, longer services, confession, abstinence, increased private prayer and spiritual reading during this time, is designed to reign ourselves in. Like an athlete who is preparing for a marathon and watches what he

eats, drinks, how he exercises, what he abstains from.

Silence is especially needed at this time: "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 45:10). To stand in our icon corner and offer prayer and worship, to empty ourselves of things of this world, and focus on the reciting of the Jesus Prayer and the Prayer of St Ephraim.

A **challenge** for us could be to participate more in the liturgical life of the Church. Great Lent has its own liturgical book – The Lenten Triodion (which can be accessed on the internet as well as www.ematins.org, another resourceful site). No longer can we say that we don't understand the liturgical language of the Church. It is deep, inspiring, meaningful and is waiting for us to discover its richness and beauty! All the theology of our Orthodox Church is expressed in its beautiful hymnography and worship. The spirit in which we attend Church should be one of **discovery**, of entering another world, rather than an obligation to be fulfilled.

We need to remember that OUR actions determine our salvation. God does not force Himself upon us. Let us pray from the heart, give from the heart, fast from the heart.

ΚΑΛΗ ΣΑΡΑΚΟΣΤΗ!



«Χαίρε λουτήρ έκπλύνων συνείδησιν»

Τη συνείδηση μας την φύτεψε μέσα μας ο Θεός Δημιουργός. Είναι η φωνή του Θεού στα βάθη του είναι μας. Ο νόμος του Θεού είναι **«γραπτός ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις»** όλων (Ρωμ Β'15).

Όμως, ποιός δεν το ξέρει – πολλές φορές σκοτίζεται η συνείδηση. Άνθρωποι γεμάτοι από προκατάληψη, επηρεασμένοι από ιδεολογίες διάφορες, πάμπολλες και διεστραμμένες, άνθρωποι που δουλεύουν στα πάθη τους τα σκοτεινά και φθοροποιά. Όλα αυτά αμβλύνουν και αλλοιώνουν τη φωνή της συνείδησης. Και ενώ το παράπτωμα είναι ολοφάνερο, ακούμε τον παρεκτρεπόμενο να λέει:

– Δεν έχω τύψεις, δεν με ελέγχει η συνείδησή μου γι' αυτό που κάνω!

Στ' αλήθεια πόσοι άνθρωποι θα μπορούσαν να υποσχεθούν πως έχουν καθαρή συνείδηση; Ιδιαίτερα σ' ένα κόσμο σαν τον σημερινό όπου τα πάντα αυτονομούνται και δικαιολογούνται. Η συνείδηση έχει καταντήσει από καθάριο κρύσταλλο σε γυαλί θαμπό. Από καθρέπτης φωτεινός σε σκουριασμένο και σκοτεινό γυαλί.

Ο Χριστός στην επί του όρους ομιλία Του λέγει: **«εἰ οὖν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοὶ σκότος ἐστὶ, τὸ σκότος πόσον;»** (Ματθ. ΣΤ' 23). Δηλαδή, εάν λοιπόν εκείνο που σου εδόθη – η συνείδηση – για να μεταδίδει φως σε σένα, γίνει σκοτάδι, σε πόσο σκοτάδι θα βυθισθής; (Ερμ. κ. Τρεμπέλα).

Τρομερό το κατάντημα. Όμως υπάρχει ελπίδα. Γιατί όση σκουριά και νά' χει συσσωρευτεί στην επιφάνεια του καθρέπτη, όσο και νά' χει πωρωθεί η συνείδηση από τη πλάνη και την αμαρτία, όσο και νά' χουμε σπρώξει στο υποσυνείδητο όλα όσα μας ενοχλούν και αποστρεφόμαστε, όμως κάποια σπίθα μικρή, από το έλεος του Θεού, παραμένει. Και μέσα από τη στάχτη, φωνούλα μικρή εξακολουθεί να προκαλεί, να ελέγχει, να αποζητά το δίκιο και την αλήθεια. Να ποθεί κάθαρση και συγχώρηση. Αν ο άνθρωπος εξακολουθεί να αδιαφορεί σ' αυτή τη φωνούλα, τότε οι συνέπειες είναι φοβερές.

Η συνείδηση αρρωσταίνει. Το καρκίνωμα του άγχους εμφανίζεται. Καταθλίβεται η ψυχή και βασανίζεται και υποφέρει από νευρασθένεια, αλλοίμονο, και ψυχασθένεια. Ποιός θα σώσει την ψυχή μας; Ποιός θα γιάνει την πληγή της; Ποιός θα την καθαρίσει από τη μαυρίλα και τον ρύπο της αμαρτίας;

Ο στίχος του Ακαθίστου ύμνου **«χαίρε λουτήρ έκπλύνων συνείδησιν»** απευθύνεται στην Υπεραγία Θεοτόκο, τη Μητέρα του Κυρίου, αλλά και Μάννα όλων των πιστών. Την προσαγορεύει σαν λουτήρα που



πλένει και καθαρίζει τη ψυχή απ' όλα εκείνα που λερώνουν και βασανίζουν τον άνθρωπο. Είναι φανερό πως εδώ υπονοείται το **Λουτρό της Εξομολογήσεως**, το μόνο ικανό να φέρει τη πολυπόθητη ΚΑΘΑΡΣΗ. Και όταν η εξομολόγηση είναι αποτέλεσμα «καρδιάς συντετριμμένης» τότε ακολουθεί η Θεία Κοινωνία. **«τὸ αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ...καθαριεὶ τὴν συνείδησιν ὑμῶν ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων»** (Εβρ. Θ' 14).

Ο ιερός υμνωδός του Ακαθίστου ύμνου ατενίζει προς την Παναγία. Τη βλέπει **να βαστά μέσα της τον Χριστό** που πρόκειται να χύσει το αίμα Του (που είναι δικό της αίμα) για μας τους αμαρτωλούς. Και με τη ποιητική του φαντασία την ονομάζει λουτήρα εκπλύνοντα συνείδησιν.

Όλοι εμείς που κατά τη διάρκεια της Αγίας και Μεγ. Τεσσαρακοστής κάθε Παρασκευή θα της απευθύνουμε εκείνα τα πολλαπλά – όπως της πρέπει – **«χαίρε»**, μην αμελήσουμε αυτό το Λουτρό. Να μην ανεχθούμε μήτε και τη μικρότερη ακαθαρσία. Τότε μαζί με το «χαίρε» προς την Παρθένον, ας ευχηθούμε να χαίρει και η αναγεννημένη και κεκαθαρμένη ψυχή μας. ❖

FROM THE SAINTS OF OUR CHURCH

Saint Polycarp

Commemorated on February 23rd

Born in Ephesus around 70 AD, St Polycarp was raised by a devout Christian noblewoman, Callista, who received Polycarp in her care when his parents were martyred. Polycarp was, from a young age, generous in spirit and thirsty to serve those around him in Christ's name. He became the disciple of St John the Theologian alongside Saints Bucolos and Ignatius. Together they preached the Word until Bucolos was appointed bishop of Smyrna, with Polycarp as his assistant and later, his successor. Polycarp performed many miracles during this time: a huge fire was extinguished and a famine was broken with his prayers. This converted many pagans in the Church of Smyrna.

In 154, Polycarp, now a well-seasoned bishop of over fifty years, travelled to Rome to address Pope Anacletus in the wake of a controversy concerning the date of Easter. Polycarp corrected those who had been following the heresies of Valentinus and Marcion. When Polycarp returned to Smyrna, the churches of Asia came under the attack of Proconsul Stratius Quadratus. Polycarp was captured and thrown into the stadium in front of the Proconsul and a crowd of shouting pagans who demanded he be set on fire. After refusing to deny Christ, Polycarp calmly undressed, and when the soldiers began to nail him to the stake, Polycarp said to them, "Let me be. For he who gives me the strength to endure the flames will also help me to remain steadfast at the stake". The wood around him was lit, but the flame did not touch Polycarp, instead forming a wall around him. Because of this, the executioner was instructed to stab him. Polycarp bled so much that the fire was put out, and he gained the incorruptible crown of martyrdom. This early Christian era was wrought not only with persecutions from the pagan world, but also with heresies from within the Church. Polycarp, with other true disciples of Christ, firmly stood by the Apostolic Christian Faith through uncertainty, adversity, and finally death. ✠



Miracles of our Times

Living Next Door to a Saint

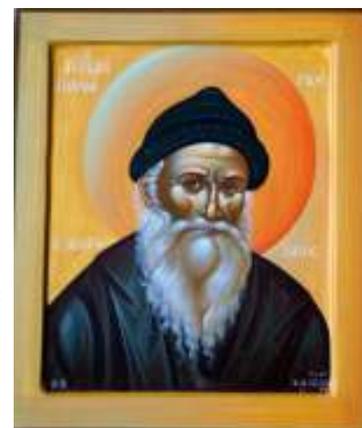
How many of us can say with certainty that we live next door to a Saint? Elder Porphyrios of Kavsokalivia, who passed away in the Lord in 1991, was recently canonized a Saint of the Orthodox Church by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople on November 27th 2013. He was a truly great Saint of our times who lived amongst us!

A man who lived for many years very near to the home of the Saint, and whose wife had become paralyzed, went to see him one day. When he entered the place in which the Saint lived, he was told that the Elder had left for Mt Athos. This man was so devout that he was not upset at hearing this, but said: "That's all right. It is enough just to come here to the place where he, a Saint, lives and breathes. That's plenty for me!"

When he returned back to his wife, to his astonishment, he found her not only standing up, but carrying out regular duties in the kitchen, no longer paralyzed! With amazement, he asked her what had happened. She told him that while he was away, at some instant she became able to stand up! This instant was exactly when he was at the home of the Saint!

The man's faith was so great, that through the honour he showed to a living Saint of our Church, God made Him worthy of so great a miracle!

Source: Elder Porphyrios - Testimonies and Experiences, by Klitos Ioannides. Published by the Holy Convent of the Transfiguration of the Savior, Athens, 1997. ✠



FROM THE HOLY FATHERS...

St John Climacus – On Fasting

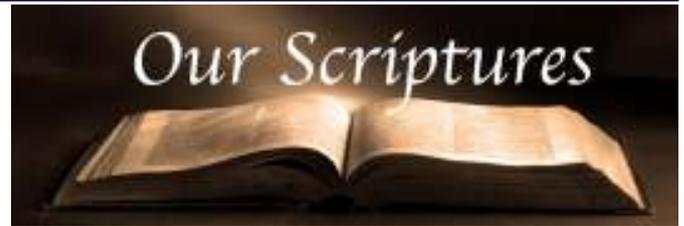
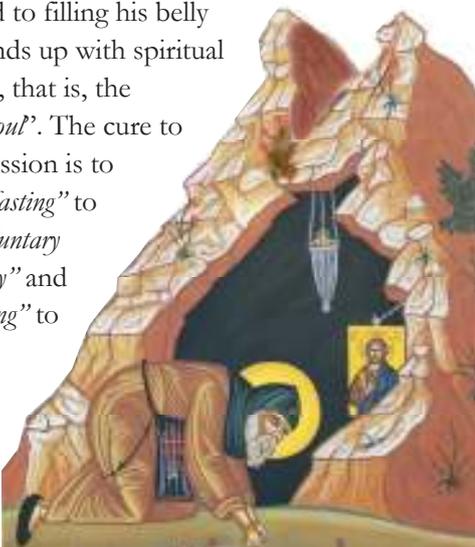
“Eat, drink, and be merry”, these are the words of the rich man in the parable recorded in Luke 12:16-21, but God replies saying: “Fool! This night your soul is required of you”. So what is wrong with enjoying the good things in life, after all, the rich man worked hard to fill his barns didn’t he?

In *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Saint John Climacus explains that it is not food but rather finding comfort in food or over-eating which is evil. That is gluttony, “the prince of passions”, which enters a person through the nature of foods, and whose offspring are fornication, hardness of heart, sleepiness, “laziness, talkativeness, familiarity in speech, jesting, facetiousness, contradiction, a stiff neck, obstinacy, disobedience, insensibility, captivity, conceit, audacity, boasting, after which follows impure prayer, whirling of thoughts...”. From these, he concludes, proceed “waves of filth [and] depths of unknown and unnamed impurities”.

On the other hand, fasting is “the prevention of lust, the uprooting of bad thoughts, deliverance from dreams, purity of prayer, the light of the soul, the guarding of the mind, deliverance from blindness, the door of compunction, humble sighing, glad contrition, a lull in chatter... health of body, agent of dispassion, remission of sins, the gate of Paradise and its delight”.

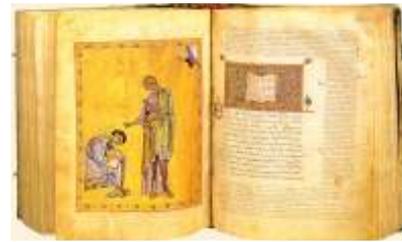
As we approach the Feast of Pascha, St John notes that “the slave of his belly calculates with what dishes he will celebrate the feast, but the servant of God considers with what graces he may be enriched”. Moreover, he states that insensibility is “the friend of a full belly” and causes its subjects to be “completely stony, hard and darkened” when they stand at prayer, and to feel nothing when they see the holy altar.

Thus, the glutton not only misuses the occasion of the Feast, which is meant primarily for spiritual nourishment, he looks forward to filling his belly and ultimately ends up with spiritual malnourishment, that is, the “deadening of the soul”. The cure to this insatiable passion is to use the “stone of fasting” to quench “the involuntary burnings of the body” and the “pencil of fasting” to inscribe in us a reminder to be constant in vigil and prayer. ❖



Gospel Reading March 23rd (Mark 8: 34-38)

Sunday of the Holy Cross



The Lord said: “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”. (8:34).

What does it mean to take up your cross and follow Christ? Our cross is our conscience. In turn, our conscience is a receptacle of God’s word. If we listen to the word of God that knocks at our door, then we open the door. But if we ignore it, then Christ has no way of entering into our heart.

Our cross is a burden, just as Christ’s cross was a burden for Him. But it is also our source of salvation. If we refuse to lift up our cross, then we refuse to struggle. But why do we need to struggle? The answer can be understood by looking at life without Christ. Where would we be, what would be doing? If the answer is that we would be living in sin, then we should ask ourselves, “Do I want to be living in sin?” If the answer is yes, then we can stop there and everything becomes easy. We can sit back, put our feet up and enjoy the ‘good’ things this world has to offer. But if we answer with a “no”, then we must put some hard work into establishing a relationship with Christ.

We must make a decision about which master we wish to serve. Our hearts will tell us whether we should pick up our cross or leave it by the wayside.

The life of the Christian is not easy. How is it possible for the athlete to win the medal without breaking a sweat? The Kingdom of Heaven weighs more than all the medals in this world. But life is not a game or a race. The Christian needs no incentive. Christ asks us to love Him as He loves us, and if this is the case, then we can become like St Paul who was full of joy in his sufferings and be grateful to God for giving us a cross. ❖

Questions & Answers

A clergyman of our Archdiocese answers ...

What is the Kingdom of Heaven that Christ spoke of?

The first answer that comes to mind is that Jesus is referring to Heaven, where hopefully we will go after we die. Indeed, nothing is more important than this, the purpose of our life is to get to Heaven. We all get stressed over many things, but if we could only see things clearly, then we would realise that by far the most important matter for all of us is to be close to God and to get to Heaven, and many of the things that we stress about are not as important as they seem. We may fail in many things in this life, if however we end up in Heaven, then our failures do not really matter, or, we may be very successful in a worldly sense, if however we are not spiritually healthy, then we have not really achieved anything. As Jesus said, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37).

If deep in our heart we understood how important this issue is, then we would leave no stone unturned in our effort to get to Heaven. As Apostle Peter put it: “Be even more diligent to make your call and election sure.” (2 Peter 1:10). No one is saying that we should ignore the non-spiritual aspects of life, what we are saying is that we need to give priority to the spiritual, indeed, if we do this, then other problems often sort themselves out. As Jesus said, “Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’... But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mat. 6:31-33).

If we read the Bible carefully, we realise that when Jesus referred to the “Kingdom of Heaven”, he had in mind not just where we go after we die. Jesus said, “There are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power” (Mark 9:1). If one reads the Bible carefully, and if one has also read other spiritual books by Church Fathers and other holy authors, and in particular if one has lived the life of the Church, then one comes to the realisation that the Kingdom of Heaven can be experienced from now - we can get a glimpse, a foretaste of Heaven even from this life.

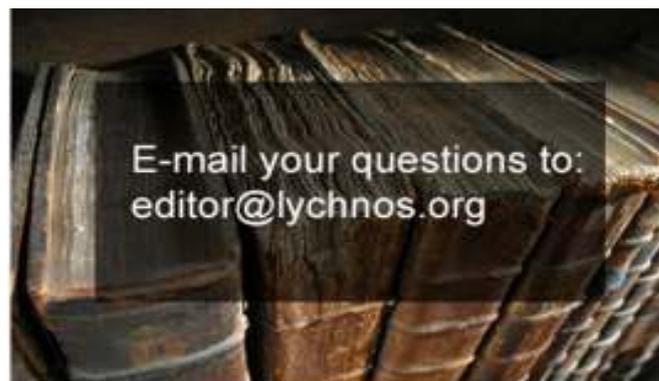
In the Gospel we read the following amazing words: “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the



kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ... For indeed, *the kingdom of God is within you*’ (Luke 17:20-21).

Such words of Christ are extremely deep and important. What this is all about is something that transcends logic and reason. Through genuine prayer of the heart; by truly participating in the Sacraments of our Church; by genuinely and fervently participating in the Liturgy and other Church services; we can get a glimpse, a bit of an experience of the Kingdom of Heaven. Even if just a glimpse, it is enough to overwhelm us, you come out of such experiences wanting to love, to forgive, you feel humble and sorry for your sins, you want to try as hard as you can to live according to God’s words, you experience the “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7).

† Fr D. K. ✠



«Γίνεσθε δὲ εἰς ἀλλήλους χρηστοί» (Εφ. Δ' 32)

Ο Απόστολος Παύλος μας προτρέπει να γινόμαστε συνεχώς και πάντοτε αγαθοί και ευεργετικοί μεταξύ μας. Ο χρηστός άνθρωπος είναι ο άνθρωπος αυτός που η παρουσία του προσφέρει στον πλησίον του το απαραίτητο, το **αναζητούμενο**. Ο χρήσιμος, είναι καρπός της χάριτος του Παναγίου Πνεύματος. Ο άνθρωπος που εργάζεται με επιμέλεια και προσοχή την πνευματική του κατάρτιση, αυτομάτως και κατά φυσική συνέπεια γίνεται εύχρηστος. Δηλαδή, γίνεται απαραίτητος και χρήσιμος. Γίνεται, θα λέγαμε, «**τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς**»... και «**τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου**» (Ματθ. Ε' 13-14). Ο χρηστός άνθρωπος έχει πάντοτε μπροστά του την εικόνα του Θεού σαν Πατέρα, γι' αυτό και παραδίδει ολοκληρωτικά τον εαυτό του στα χέρια του Θεού! Τους συνανθρώπους του τους βλέπει σαν εικόνες του Θεού. Στο αίτημά τους να συμβαδίσει μαζί τους ένα χιλιόμετρο, ο χρηστός άνθρωπος προσφέρεται να κάνει δύο: «**καὶ ὅστις σε ἀγαρεύσει μίλιον ἓν, ὕπαγε μετ' αὐτοῦ δύο**» (Ματθ. Ε' 41).

Είναι χρέος και καθήκον όλων μας, να πλησιάσουμε όλους – όποιοι κι αν είναι - ως εικόνες Θεού! Να τους βοηθήσουμε ν' ανοίξουν τις καρδιές τους και να συμμερισθούμε τα προβλήματά τους και τις δυσκολίες τους, κι ότι άλλο τους βασανίζουν. Να τους γλυκάνουμε λίγο με τα λόγια μας και με το παράδειγμά μας! «**χαίρειν μετὰ χαιρόντων καὶ κλαίειν μετὰ κλαιόντων**» (Ρωμ. ΙΒ' 15). Τον χρηστόν άνθρωπον τον χαρακτηρίζει η αγαθοσύνη... με τα λόγια του, τις πράξεις του, το παράδειγμά του.

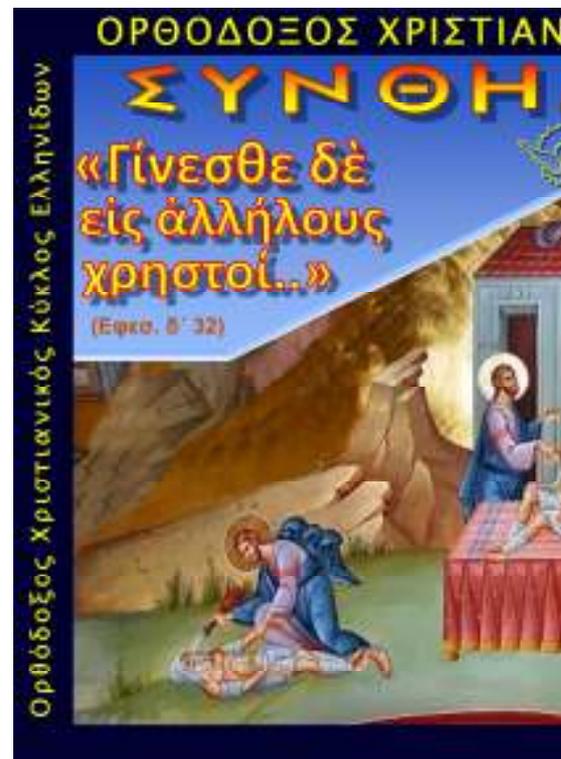
Υπενθυμίζει τον τύπον του ανθρώπου που ιδιαίτερα επαίνεσε ο Κύριος: «**ἴδε ἀληθῶς Ἰσραηλίτης, ἐν ᾧ δόλος οὐκ ἔστι**» (Ιωάν. Α' 48). Ο πλησίον, όπως παρουσιάζεται στην καθημερινότητα της ζωής, είναι μία μεγάλη πρόκληση για τον Χριστιανό. Καλείτε ο Χριστιανός να ξεπεράσει τις κοινωνικές ή ότι άλλες προτιμήσεις και προτεραιότητες έχει, για να φανεί στην πράξη ὄργανο της αγάπης του Θεού. Ο πλησίον μας είναι ο ίδιος ο Θεός! Ο χρηστός άνθρωπος έχει αγαθή συνείδηση, που την φροντίζει και τρέφει με τη χάρη του Θεού στα Μυστήρια της Μετανοίας και της Θείας Ευχαριστίας. Επίσης το να γίνουμε χρηστοί, σημαίνει άσκηση στη καθημερινή μας ζωή. Από κει που μας τοποθέτησε η χάρις του Θεού. Όπου χρειάζεται για να καταθέσουμε την βιωματική μαρτυρία μας σαν χριστιανοί. Είναι ανάγκη να φύγουμε από το τι θέλω εγώ και να πάμε στο τι θέλει ο Θεός από εμάς - στο τι ανάγκη υπάρχει για να προσφέρουμε στους άλλους!

Η λέξις «**εγώ**» χρειάζεται ν' αλλάξει και να γίνει «**εσύ Θεέ μου**»... Η πνευματική ζωή δεν είναι μόνο προσευχή, μελέτη, ή να πηγαίνουμε στην εκκλησία... αλλά είναι, κι' όλα τ' άλλα πράγματα... που ο Θεός μας παρουσιάζει να γίνουμε χρήσιμοι στους άλλους γύρω μας.

Γίνονται εύχρηστα σκευή στα χέρια του Θεού και δεν έχουν καμμία δυσκολία να γίνουν υπηρέτες – διάκονοι στους άλλους - όπως ο ίδιος ο Κύριος: «**οὐκ ἦλθε διακονηθῆναι, ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι**» (Ματθ. Κ' 28).

Η θυσία για τον αδελφόν μας, είναι μίμηση Χριστού! Είναι σημαντικό να μάθει κανείς να χαίρεται με το να δίνει. Ο Χριστός συγκινείται όταν αγαπάμε τον πλησίον μας πιο πολύ από τον εαυτόν μας, και μας γεμίζει με θεία ευφροσύνη. Ο Χριστός μας έδειξε το τέλει παράδειγμα. Δεν περιορίστηκε στο «**ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν**» (Μαρκ. ΙΒ' 31), αλλά θυσιάστηκε για τον άνθρωπο. Η θυσία που κάνουμε δια της προσφοράς στον συνάνθρωπό μας, κρύβει την μεγάλη μας αγάπη για τον Χριστό. Προσφέρω, είναι αναμφίβολα η ομορφιά της ζωής, ο ατίμητος πλούτος της. Ο Απ. Παύλος υπογραμμίζει και προτρέπει: «**πᾶν ὅτι ἔαν ποιῆτε, ἐκ ψυχῆς ἐργάζεσθε, ὡς τῷ Κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις**» (Κολασ. Γ' 23). Δηλαδή, καθετί που κάνουμε, να εργαζόμαστε πρόθυμα και με την καρδιά μας, σαν να εργαζόμαστε στον Κύριο και όχι σε ανθρώπους. Η πραγματική αγάπη, είναι πάντοτε συνυφασμένη με **την προσφορά, τη θυσία, την ανιδιοτέλεια**. Ας θυμηθούμε την απέραντη αγάπη στον πλησίον, που έδειξε ο «**Καλὸς Σαμαρείτης**» στη Παραβολή του Ευαγγελίου!

Αυτό το Μεγαλείο της ασύλληπτης προσφοράς, το ζήσαμε τις μέρες των Χριστουγέννων, στο αληθινό Μυστήριο της Κενώσεως του Θεού. **Ο Θεός γίνεται άνθρωπος για να μπορεί ο άνθρωπος να γίνει Θεός!**





St. Paul’s counsel to the Ephesians delivers a direct and powerful message to his spiritual children: ‘and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you’ (Eph 4:32). With this year’s *synthima*, we are called to challenge ourselves in *christotis*. Experientially, *Christotis* means to make room in my own life for Christ to come in, and transform me from my old self. Literally, ‘*χρηστοί*’ means, ‘honourable, virtuous, moral’. Elsewhere, it translates as useful, helpful, obliging, or benevolent. Beyond logically understanding what *christotis* means, our challenge is to ask ourselves if we have experienced *christotis* in our everyday life. Have we been moved by Christ’s mercy for us, and has this motivated us to be kind, forgiving, and sacrificing for others? St Paul is strongly advising his spiritual children to **become christoi**. So we may assume that this does not come easily, but in order to acquire this virtue we need to work at it, and we need grace and humility. We need to have mentors who inspire *christotis* in us, and then we can become examples of *christotis* for others. St Ignatius of Antioch points out such a virtue strengthens the bond of unity between Christians and in this way Satan’s power is confounded.

So how can we acquire this virtue? St Paul gives us the answer. He tells us to avoid all those ills which grieve the Spirit of God, to put off the old self, and put on the new. He teaches us to be approachable and gentle, leaving anger, bitterness, wrath and slander with malice behind. If we are merciful, and serene and take the initiative to reach out to others, our approachability will overcome the shyness and fear of those for whom we reach out to. Often those who are not receptive to the Christian message can be moved by acts of love. As Archbishop Anastasios of Albania said in an address to the World Council of Churches: ‘Many of those who deny or resist the name ‘God’ indirectly accept His other name: Love’.

Humility in Christ is the only way in which the secret of spiritual radiance can be revealed as *christotis*. When humility is missing, then kindness does not differ from a worldly type of humanitarianism. Deeply humane people, who love humanity passionately, have so much sorrow for the world that they rebel against God, because they ascribe the world’s ills to Him. The Orthodox view of *christotis*, however, differs from this worldly kindness. It is expressed through the lives of saintly souls who are close to God’s love, who live a life of repentance and asceticism, and have the “type of love that suffers in this world of sin, but is triumphant in eternity”, according to St Chrysostom. These souls struggle to discard their old self, and when repentance reaches a certain stage of fulfilment, they then experience grace, and the love of Christ begins to become active within them and flows out to all humanity. Then, as St Silouan says: ‘the saintly soul does not see the world with his physical eyes but with the spiritual, and he deeply empathises with all that humanity suffers with a

Christian conscience, because he sees that each person’s soul is priceless’.

St Paul and St John Chrysostom showed us *christotis* when they stated that they were willing to sacrifice their souls and bodies for their spiritual children. St Paul writes: ‘Who is ill, and I am not ill with him?’ (2 Cor: 11:29), and St John Chrysostom in Homily 44, like St Paul, writes: ‘I would prefer to lose my sight, to be blind, if that would save your souls.’ Further, St Chrysostom reminds us that Christ is the prototype of *christotis* since He became poor for us, went on the Cross, in the Tomb, and pleaded to the Father for our sake... He did everything to save us. So what more do we want he asks? So those who are aware of God’s mercy express their gratitude through *christotis* by being ‘ambassadors for Christ,’ and in this way they allow God to make His appeal through them. So what they do and say will be edifying for their neighbours since they will say only good things and nothing more. St Ignatius points out: ‘it is better to keep quiet and **be**, than to make fluent professions and **not be**’. He reminds us that ‘what Christ achieved with His silences was well worthy of the Father. A man who has truly mastered the utterances of Jesus will also be able to apprehend His silence, and thus reach full spiritual maturity, so that his own words have the force of actions and his silences the significance of speech’.



Προσευχή και Νηστεία

Τώρα που πλησίασε η Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή, η ερώτηση που προβάλλει είναι: Τι είναι τελικά η νηστεία; Και μια άλλη εξίσου σημαντική ερώτηση: Να κάνω νηστεία, αφού δεν μπορώ να κόψω τα πάθη μου και της αμαρτίες μου; Τι είναι νηστεία; Είναι αποχή τροφών. Δεν τρώω και δεν πίνω κάποιες συγκεκριμένες τροφές. Ωραία. Άλλα αυτό γίνεται και στη δίαιτα. Και εκεί ο γιατρός απαγορεύει να φάμε διάφορες τροφές. Σωστά. Συνεπώς υπάρχουν κοινά ανάμεσα στην νηστεία και στην δίαιτα.

Υπάρχει όμως και η διαφορά. Η δίαιτα είναι σεβαστή και επιβάλλεται πολλές φορές για ιατρικούς λόγους. Η νηστεία είναι εντολή του ίδιου του αγίου Θεού. Ο Χριστός νήστευε. Η νηστεία είναι απόδειξη ότι αγαπώ τον Θεό. Η νηστεία είναι δείγμα για το ότι περιμένω τον Θεό. Δεν στερούμε τις τροφές, αφού με γεμίζει η αγάπη του Θεού και η προσευχή.

Αξίζει δηλαδή να αγωνίζεται η ψυχή, περιμένοντας, νηστεύοντας, με ταλαιπωρία πολλές φορές και κόπο, για να φανερώσει στο Χριστό ότι τον περιμένει, επειδή τον αγαπάει. Δεν νηστεύουμε λοιπόν για να χάσουμε βάρος αλλά για να αποκτήσουμε μια βαθύτερη σχέση με τον Θεό.

Γι' αυτό και η νηστεία πρέπει να γίνεται με πνεύμα ταπείνωσης και με χαρούμενη διάθεση «Όταν νηστεύετε, να μη γίνεστε σκυθρωποί...» (Ματθ. ΣΤ' 16). Εκτός όμως από της τροφές, νηστεία είναι: Οτιδήποτε μπορούμε να στερηθούμε προσωρινά, παίρνοντας τα μάτια μας από τα πράγματα αυτού του κόσμου, και να εστιάσουμε την προσοχή μας στο Θεό (Α' Κορ Ζ' 1-5).

Και τώρα η δεύτερη ερώτηση: Αξίζει να κρατάω την νηστεία, όταν δεν εγκρατεύομαι από τα άλλα; Μα, και βέβαια αξίζει. Αξίζει, γιατί δείχνει ότι έχω διάθεση για αγώνα, αλλά ακόμα δεν κατάφερα να κόψω όλα τα επιβλαβή πάθη μου που αμαυρώνουν την ψυχή μου. Αξίζει γιατί καλλιεργώ μέσα μου την ελπίδα ότι με τον λίγο αυτόν αγώνα μου, έστω και σιγά σιγά, θα με δει ο Θεός και θα με λυπηθεί και θα με βοηθήσει να βγω νικητής από αυτή τη μάχη.



Αξίζει, έστω και λίγο, και σιγά σιγά, να μαθαίνουμε να ζούμε ολιγαρκείς. Και αξίζει πολύ, να ΕΛΠΙΖΟΥΜΕ στο ότι ο ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ μας βλέπει και ακούει την ειλικρινή και εκ' βάθους καρδιάς προσευχή μας, διότι η ταπεινή και αγνή από κάθε ανθρωπινή σκέψη προσευχή, όταν συνοδεύεται και από την ανάλογη πνευματική και υλική νηστεία, δείχνει ότι αγαπούμε τον Χριστό και τον προσμένουμε.

Προσευχή είναι η επικοινωνία με τον Θεό. Είναι μια συνομιλία του ανθρώπου με το Θεό, στην οποία ο μιν άνθρωπος μιλάει με λόγια, ο δε Θεός ανταποκρίνεται σ'αυτον με τα πράγματα. Δηλαδή

παρέχοντας άφθονα και πλούσια πνευματικά και υλικά αγαθά που έχει ανάγκη ο άνθρωπος.

Όλα αυτά δείχνουν την αναγκαιότητα, δύναμη και αξία της προσευχής, αν λάβει κανείς υπόψη του ότι και οι άγιοι άνδρες εργάστηκαν την αρετή και κατόρθωσαν τα μεγάλα έργα και θαύματα με την προσευχή. Γι' αυτό την είχαν ως κύριο έργο τους και θεωρούσαν μεγάλη ζημιά να την παραλείψουν ποτέ. Σαν απόδειξη αυτού, μεταξύ των πολλών άλλων, έχουμε και τους δυο μεγάλους προφήτες, Δαβίδ και Δανιήλ.

Το τέλει όμως παράδειγμα με το οποίο διδασκόμαστε την σπουδαιότητα και αναγκαιότητα της προσευχής, μας το έδωσε ο Ίδιος ο Χριστός. Προσευχόταν ο Κύριος μόνος Του. Πολλές φορές μάλιστα διανυκτέρευε στην προσευχή. Και όχι σπάνια αναχωρούσε πολύ πρωί σε έρημους τόπους για να προσευχηθεί.

Παραγγέλλει δε και σε μας να προσευχόμαστε: «γρηγορείτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν» (Μαρκ. ΙΔ' 38) και «Αἰτεῖτε, καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν, ζητεῖτε, καὶ εὕρησεται...» (Ματθ. Ζ' 7).

Και όχι μόνο μας παραγγέλλει ο Χριστός να προσευχόμαστε, αλλά μας έδωσε τύπο προσευχής, σύμφωνα με το πνεύμα του οποίου έχουμε καθήκον να προσευχόμαστε. Ο τύπος δε αυτός είναι η προσευχή του «Πάτερ ημών», η οποία επειδή μας δόθηκε από τον Κύριο, ονομάζεται Κυριακή προσευχή. ❖



Psalm 22:1

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

This verse is the start of a powerful and prophetic Psalm. It is well known because these are words spoken by Christ on the Cross. It is easy to misinterpret their meaning that God is absent for no reason. It is impossible to explain completely why Christ said these words, because our Church regards the Lord’s death on the Cross a great mystery. We will, however, attempt to receive an insight into this mystery.

In the days of Christ, when a Rabbi quoted the first verse of a Psalm, it was understood that he was alluding to the whole Psalm. If we read this Psalm it is clear that Jesus Christ implies that He is the righteous man reciting Psalm 22.

We can be enlightened into the meaning of this verse by studying the word ‘abandon’, which in Hebrew (*‘azav’*) is only used in one other place in the Scriptures. This is Genesis 2:24 - “That is why a man abandons his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh”. This means that a man shall abandon or separate from his parents in order to cling, attach and join with his wife.

Christ is abandoned because He is the Bridegroom and we are His sinful Bride. Jesus Christ, at the time of His Crucifixion, was completely alone; abandoned by God His Father, abandoned by his beloved disciples,

abandoned by the Jews,
abandoned by the Romans, even by the Angels - everything and everyone, and becomes one flesh with us, His sinful bride. He dies so that she may live and so that the bridegroom’s Father may become our Father.



Liberation of the Israelites from Egypt – the Passover

The Passover, one of the most important festivals in Judaism, is the commemoration of the liberation of Israel from Egypt after 430 years of slavery. However the Passover (‘Pascha’ in Greek) is also the root of the Christian



celebration of Easter. What is it that links our celebration of Christ’s Resurrection with this Jewish festival?

The initiation of the Passover is described in the 12th chapter of Exodus, where Pharaoh refuses to grant freedom to Israel, even after Moses announces to him that the tenth and most terrible plague is about to afflict every home in Egypt. And so Moses prepares the people of Israel with the instructions given to him by God. Each family must sacrifice a young lamb, a perfect lamb without blemish, and sprinkle its blood over the door of their home. This will protect their firstborn sons from the plague of death that will pass through Egypt that night. At midnight, the Egyptians force the Israelites to leave Egypt after suffering the terrible death of all their firstborn. The Israelites flee from Egypt with haste, without even having time to leaven their bread, but they are full of gratitude to God for delivering them from death and slavery.

The Jews continued to celebrate the Passover every year as a reminder of their liberation. We as Christians also celebrate a new Passover, the fulfilment of the Passover in Christ.

Christ is the perfect and blameless lamb who is sacrificed to deliver us from death. St John Chrysostom explains that while the Old Testament Passover freed us from a temporary enemy in Pharaoh, and gave us a temporary homeland in the Promised Land, Christ’s sacrifice saves us from the eternal enemy, the Devil, and opens to us the eternal homeland of His heavenly Kingdom.

The blood of the lamb also clearly prefigures the Holy Eucharist, which saves us from the death of sin and the slavery of our passions. Thus each of us must undergo a personal Passover, in which we flee from the bondage of the noetic Egypt, that is, sin, and turn to our Saviour Jesus Christ who sacrificed Himself for us in order to transport us from death to eternal life.





What we Hear in Church



Service of the Great Canon of St Andrew

St Andrew of Crete (660-740 AD) was a bishop, born in Damascus, who served the Church in various ways until being sent to Crete, which was his final place of office. He is counted as one of the most prolific and important hymnographers of the Orthodox Church, traditionally being known as the first hymnographer to write the type of hymn known as the *κανόνα* (canon).

Amongst his works are major hymns sung on the feasts of Christmas and of the Holy Apostles, Saints Peter and Paul. His most well known work though, is the Great Canon that is chanted in part each evening during the first Week of Lent at the *απόδειπνος* (Compline service) and in its entirety at the Matins Service of Thursday of the Fifth week of Lent.

Canons are short hymns written in groups called odes (ὠδὲς), which follow the meter and tune of a prototype called the *heirmos* (εἰρμὸς).

The Great Canon consists of 280 canons grouped in 9 odes, 250 written by St Andrew and another 30 added later in honour of the Saint himself, Saint Mary of Egypt, the Holy Apostles, the Holy Trinity and the Theotokos.

There is one major overarching theme - repentance. Unlike many other hymns and services of Great Lent which act as general reminders and motivators to repent, the Great Canon deals with the themes of repentance, sinfulness and God's mercy in a penitential and personal way.

Indeed, each of the 230 canons that St. Andrew wrote is written in the first person e.g. *"More than all have I sinned; I alone have sinned against You. O God my Savior, have compassion upon me, Your creature."* or *"Christ became a child and shared in my flesh; and willingly He performed all that belongs to my nature, only without sin. He set before you, my soul, an example and image of His condescension."*

To take part in this service is to experience the personal character of repentance in the Orthodox Church. We all stand alone before God in the sense that God does not judge us in comparison with others.

As Fr Hopko writes *"Each human being is personally judged according to God's righteous judgement, which applies strictly to that person alone. Standing before God, one does not look at others. One looks only at God".*¹



1. Ch. 10 "More than All have I sinned" from 'The Lenten Spring' Fr. Thomas Hopko SVSP 1983



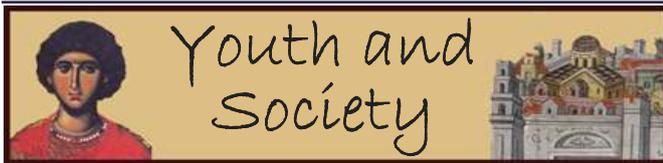
The origins of the Akathist Hymn



There are many varied stories as to the origins of the Standing Praises to the Theotokos, or Akathist Hymn, but the sources seem to agree that it began in the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, in 626 AD. The city of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire was unusually free of defence that year. The emperor had taken almost all the soldiers into the East where he was defending the empire from the unceasing attacks by Persian troops. This was a necessary strategic move, but it left Constantinople open to attack – and it was attacked by the Avars, nomadic tribes from the Russian steppes. For months, the people of Constantinople were under siege, forced behind the city walls by enemy ships in the harbour and enemy soldiers on land. Their sources of food began to dry up and the people knew that they were outnumbered, and desperate. Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople, along with the clergy, took up an Icon of the Theotokos and began to march along the city walls, chanting and censuring. They were not expecting a miracle, only hoping to bolster the spirits of the people. However, before the eyes of the City, a miracle occurred. In the bay of the Golden Horn, filled with enemy ships, a tornado appeared. The ships were torn to pieces, and the remaining attackers fled for their lives.

The Patriarch led the people into the small Church of the Theotokos at Blachernae, on the Golden Horn. Here they prayed all night. Their gratitude made it possible for them not only to chant praises to Panagia without sleeping, but also to stand for the whole night. Some of their praises still appear in our Akathist Hymn, but most were composed by St Romanos the Melodist many generations later. If there is one theme to the Akathist, it is to 'Rejoice!' – the timeliest reminder of all during the period of Great Lent.





13. FREEDOM - Reality or Fantasy

The dominant dream of young people is to be free. There is no nation on earth, the history of which does not include a fight for freedom, and this fight almost always is spearheaded by its younger generation. At the personal level, young people want to be free of any constraint, as they feel that this path will advance themselves, and achieve great things in this world.

What would be your response, if someone tells you, to really be free you have to submit yourself to some form of discipline, you have to sacrifice part of your freedom! The famous French philosopher, Alexis Carrel, says such sacrifice is necessary if you really want to create a successful life. If you disagree, look at the behaviour of nature.

The vine tree has to be pruned, so as to bring forth grapes. The pruning reduces its mass, its beautiful bloom, but without it, the vine cannot produce its fruit. An atheist was complaining to St. Augustine that religion restricts the pleasures and enjoyment of life. The saint said: the wings of the swallow add some weight to its body. But look, it does not stay on the ground, but flies and traverses the atmosphere with amazing freedom and speed.

What would you say about the traffic lights and the traffic signs? They are there to protect us from the danger of collisions, falling into a cliff or killing others. They at times block the street, so we can remain safe and free!

The restrictions of the faith, do exactly what the traffic lights do -- they keep us safe and free. They are the strong wings of the swallow which lift us up from the suffocating atmosphere of sin, into the heavens of freedom. Because truly free, is the one who has the will to live according to the commands of the Spirit. The Christian is the only free person among the slaves of sin and depravity. ✠

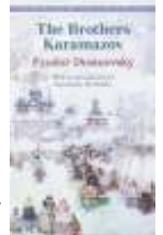


The Brothers Karamazov

by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Published by Bantam Classics; Reissue ed - April 1, 1984.

The Brothers Karamazov, as the title suggests, is a story that revolves around a family of three brothers and their wayward father. The story begins with an explanation of the family history that formed the events that take place in the novel, and this introductory section ends with the two older brothers, Ivan and Dimitri, living lives outside of the town of their birth, whereas Alyosha, the youngest brother, has become a novice in the town's local monastery. The central events in the book then take place as a sort of "family reunion" begins, with the older brothers returning to the town.



In this tale, Dostoevsky has essentially painted a picture of the human being and his relation to his fellow man, from the depths of his sinfulness to heights of his ability to forgive and to love. Dostoevsky achieves this through his exceptional characters who may seem at first to be over the top or crazier than "normal" people, are actually ordinary humans who have had their inner selves expanded as if under the microscope. This can be observed in the characters of Ivan and Dimitri. Dimitri is at heart a good man, who understands that sin is evil, and yet he so often falls into its vices because of his boisterous and rollercoaster like attitude to life. Ivan on the other hand, plays the "Intelligent Man" filled with wisdom and ideas and yet he has an ongoing internal struggle with the very nature of evil and sin that threatens to drive him mad.

By far the most profound moments throughout Dostoevsky's novel are to be found within the discourses that occur between characters, often merely used as a way to express an idea that a character has about an aspect of life. Many of these discourses relate to the future of humanity in relation to faith and the human spirit, and are eerily prophetic in their accuracy.

While the novel at times can be difficult in its complexity, the grains of pure Orthodox Spirituality that can be found within are definitely worth reading. ✠

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NEWS and VIEWS

Summer Camps

During January and February, the boys' and girls' Ομάδες (Orthodox youth groups) of Sydney, as well as the men of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society, all held their annual camps at Mangrove Mountain, about 90 minutes north of Sydney. The boys' camp took place over 15-19 January, with 50 boys attending along with 9 leaders. The program over 5 days involved a Divine Liturgy at Pantanassa Monastery, Bible studies, talks by guest speakers and various sports and games. The girls' camp was held over 20-24 January, with 35 girls and 10 leaders in attendance. Highlights of their camp included the Divine Liturgy officiated by Abbot Eusebios of Pantanassa Monastery, as well as a visit to Holy Cross Monastery. The men's camp took place on the weekend of the 31 January – 2 February, and included Vespers and Divine Liturgy services at Pantanassa Monastery. The theme of all the camps was "Be good to one another" (Eph 4:32). ❌



Participants of the men's camp at Pantanassa Monastery, following the Divine Liturgy Service.



The boys listening to a talk at their camp.



Participants of the girls' camp along with Fr Eusebios and Fr Nectarios of Pantanassa Monastery.

Ακούτε το ραδιοφωνικό πρόγραμμα
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5:30 μ.μ. στο Galaxia FM 151.850 (scanner)

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3:30 μ.μ. στο Radio Club AM 1683

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