



On the Anniversary of the Death of a Holy Figure in the Russian Diaspora
(† 31.3.1976)



HOLY ZEAL*

*"I am come to send fire on the earth.
And what will I, but that it be already kindled?"*

Luke 12:49

by Archbishop Averky
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THE CHIEF THING in Christianity, according to the clear teaching of the Word of God, is the *fire of Divine zeal*, zeal for God and His glory — the *holy zeal* which alone is able to inspire man in labors and struggles pleasing to God, and without which there is no authentic spiritual life and there is not and cannot be any true Christianity.

Without this *Holy Zeal* Christians are “*Christians*” in name only: they only “*have a name that they live,*” but in reality “*they are dead,*” as was said to the holy Seer of Mysteries John (Apoc. 3:1).

True spiritual zeal is expressed, first of all, in zeal for God’s glory, which is taught us in the words of the Lord’s Prayer which stand at its very beginning: *Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Those who are zealous for God’s glory themselves glorify God with their whole heart — both in thought and feeling, both by words and deeds and with their whole life — and naturally desire that all other people should glorify God also in the same way, and therefore they cannot, of course, endure with indifference when in their presence, in some way or other, the name of God is blasphemed or holy things are mocked.

Being zealous for God, they sincerely strive to please God themselves

and serve Him alone with all the power of their being, and they are ready to forget themselves all the way to sacrificing their very life in order to bring all men to the pleasing and the service of God. They cannot calmly listen to blasphemy, and therefore they cannot support communion with and have friendship with blasphemers and mockers of the Name of God and despisers of holy things.



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A STRIKING and extremely clear example of such fiery zeal for God's glory comes to us from the depths of antiquity of the Old Testament in a great Prophet of God, the flaming Elias, who grieved in soul when he saw the apostasy from God of his people, led by the impious King Ahab, who introduced into Israel the pagan worship of Baal in place of the true God.

"I have been very jealous for the Lord God Almighty — thus did he exclaim many times, expressing his grief — because the children of Israel have forsaken Thee: they have dug down Thine altars, and have slain Thy prophets with the sword, and I only am left, and they seek my life to take it" (3 Kings 19:10).

And behold, this *Holy Zeal* aroused him, by the power of the grace of God which reposed on him, as a chastisement of Israel which had apostatized from God, to "*close heaven*" (3 Kings 17:1; 18:42-45. James 5:17-18), so that there was neither rain nor dew *for three years and six months*.

This same zeal later aroused Elias to slay the false prophets and priests of Baal, after the miraculous descent of the fire from heaven on Mt. Carmel, so that these deceivers might no longer turn the sons of Israel away from the true worship of God (3 Kings 18:40).

By the power of the same Divine zeal, St. Elias brought down fire from heaven, which burned the captains and their fifties which had been sent by the king to size him (4 Kings 1:9-14).

That all this was in reality *Holy Zeal* which was pleasing to God is testified to by the fact that the Holy Prophet Elias did not die the usual death of all men, but was miraculously raised up to heaven in a chariot of fire, as if signifying his authentically fiery zeal for God (4 Kings 2:10-12).

But even then, in the severe Old Testament, the Lord Himself showed to

His true servant that one can have recourse to such severe measures only in extreme cases, for the Lord was not

"in the great and strong wind rending the mountains and crushing the rocks, and not in the earthquake, and in the fire, but in the voice of a gentle breeze" (3 Kings 19:11-12).

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THIS IS WHY, when James and John, who were especially fervent in their zeal for the glory of their Divine Teacher, wished to bring down fire from heaven, imitating the Holy Prophet Elias, so as to punish the Samaritans who did not desire to receive Him when He was walking through the Samaritan village to Jerusalem, the Lord forbade them to do this, saying:

"Ye know not of what spirit ye are, for the Son of Man came not to destroy the souls of men, but to save" (Luke 9:51-56).

And nevertheless (let immoderate lovers of peace pay heed!), the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who said, *"Learn of Me, for I am meek and bumble of heart"* (Matt. 11:29), found it sometimes necessary to manifest great strictness and have recourse to severe measures, teaching us also by this very fact, that meekness and humility do not mean spinelessness and should not yield before manifest evil, and that a true Christian should be far from sugar-sweet sentimentality and should not step away in the face of evil which presumptuously raises its head, but should always be uncompromising towards evil, fighting with it by all measures and means available to him, in order decisively to cut off the spread and strengthening of evil among men.

Let us recall with what harsh accusatory words the Lord addressed the spiritual leaders of the Hebrew people, the scribes and Pharisees, condemning them for hypocrisy and lawlessness: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"* and threatening them with God's judgment (Matt. 23:29).

And when words turned out to be insufficient, He applied action against the lawless ones in very deed. Thus, finding that in the Temple they were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and money-changers were sitting,

"When He had made as it were a scourge of little cords, He drove them all out of the Temple, the sheep also and the oxen, and the money of the changers He poured out, and the tables He overthrew" (John 2:14-15; Matt. 21:12-13).

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AND WE KNOW many other examples from sacred and Church history when mere words of persuasion turned out to be insufficient and in order to cut off evil it was necessary to have recourse to more severe measures and decisive acts.

But it is essential that in such cases there should rally be in a person *only pure and Holy Zeal for God's glory, without any admixture of self-love or any other strivings of human passions which only hide themselves behind a supposedly Holy Zeal for God!*

In the history of the Church, the great Hierarch of Christ Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia, whose memory we celebrate on December 6th according to our Orthodox calendar, has become glorious by just such an authentically *Holy Zeal*, with a decisive irreconcilability towards evil. Who does not know this wondrous Hierarch of Christ?

The most characteristic feature of St. Nicholas, which has given him such glory, is his extraordinary *Christian mercy*: the simple Russian people usually calls him "*Nicholas the Merciful,*" a title based on the facts of his life and the numberless cases of his help to men.

But once this great Hierarch, so glorious for his mercy toward his neighbor, performed an act which disturbed many and continues to disturb them even now, even though its authenticity is witnessed by the Church tradition contained in our iconography and Divine services.

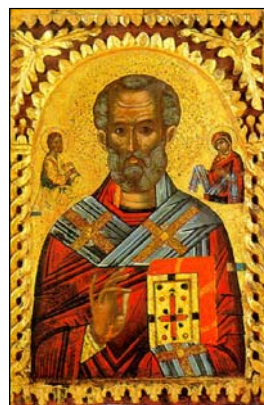
According to tradition, St. Nicholas took part in the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, which brought forth a condemnation of the heretic Arius, who denied the Divinity of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God.

During the disputes which occurred in connection with this, St. Nicholas could not listen with indifference to the blasphemous speeches of the arrogant heretic Arius, possessed by pride, who demeaned the Divine dignity of the Son of God, and before the whole Council he struck him in the face with his hand.

This evoked such a general consternation that the Fathers of the Council decreed that the bold Hierarch be deprived of Hierarchal rank.

But in that very night they were made to understand by a wondrous vision: they saw how the Lord Jesus Christ gave St. Nicholas His Holy Gospel, and the Most Pure Mother of God placed upon his shoulders the episcopal omophorion.

And then they understood that St. Nicholas was guided in his act not by any evil, passionately sinful motives, but *solely by pure, Holy Zeal for God's glory*. And they forgave the Hierarch, abrogating their sentence against him.



BY CITING such a picturesque example, we do not in the least wish to say that every one of us can or should follow this example *literally*: for this one must be himself just as great a holy Hierarch as St. Nicholas.

But this should absolutely convince us that we do not dare to remain indifferent or be unconcerned about the manifestations of evil in the world, especially when the matter is one of God's glory of our Holy Faith and Church.

Here we must show ourselves to be completely uncompromising, and we do not dare enter into any sort of cunning compromises or any reconciliation, even purely outward, or into any kind whatever of agreement with evil.

To our personal enemies, according to Christ's commandment, we must forgive everything, but with the enemies of God we cannot have peace!

Friendship with the enemies of God makes us ourselves the enemies of God: this is a betrayal and treason towards God, under whatever well-seeming pretexts it might be done, and here no kind of cunning or skillful self-justification can help us!

It is interesting to note how displeasing this act of St. Nicholas is to all the contemporary consenters to evil, these propagandists of a false "*Christian love*" which is prepared to be reconciled not only with heretics, persecutors of the Faith and the Church, but even with the devil himself, in the name of "*universal love*" and "*the union of all*" — slogans which have become so fashionable in our days.

For the sake of this, these consenters strive even to refute the very fact of the participation of St. Nicholas in the First Ecumenical Council, even though this fact is accepted by our Holy Church and therefore must be respected by all of us as reliable.

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ALL OF THIS happens, of course, because among contemporary people, even those who call themselves "Christians," there is no longer an authentic *Holy Zeal* for God and His glory, there is no zeal for Christ our Saviour, zeal for the Holy Church and for every holy thing of God.

In place of this there prevails a *luke-warm indifference*, an indifferent attitude to everything except one's own earthly well-being, with a forgetfulness of the just judgment of God which unfailingly awaits all of us, and of the eternity which will be revealed after death.

And without this *Holy Zeal*, as we emphasized at the beginning, *there is no true Christianity, no authentic spiritual life — life in Christ.*

That is why this has been replaced now by all kinds of cheap surrogates,

at times quite low ones, which however often answer to the tastes and attitudes of contemporary man.

And therefore such pseudo-Christians, skillfully covering up their spiritual emptiness by hypocrisy, often have great success in contemporary society, from which authentic spirituality has been rinsed out; while authentic zealots of God's glory are despised and persecuted as "*difficult people,*" "*intolerant fanatics,*" "*people who are behind the times.*"

And thus even now before our eyes is occurring the "*winning*": some will remain with Christ to the end, and some will easily and naturally join the camp of His opponent, Antichrist, especially when the hour of threatening trials will come for our faith, when precisely it will be necessary to show in all its fullness the whole power of our *Holy Zeal*, which is abhorred by many as "*fanaticism.*"

But at the same time one should no forget that, besides true *Holy Zeal*, there is also a *zeal without understanding* — zeal which loses its value because of the absence in it of a most important Christian virtue: *discernment*, and therefore, in place of profit can bring harm.

And there is likewise a false, lying zeal, behind the mask of which is concealed the foaming of ordinary human passions — most frequently pride, love of power and honor, and the interests of a party politics like that which plays the leading role in political struggles, and for which there can be no place in spiritual life, in public church life, but which unfortunately is often to be encountered in our time and is a chief instigator of every imaginable quarrel and disturbance in the Church, the managers and instigators of which often hide themselves behind some kind of supposed idealism but in reality pursue only their own personal aims, striving to please not God but their own self-concern, and being zealous not for God's glory but for their own glory and the glory of the colleagues and partisans of their party.

All of this, it goes without saying, is profoundly foreign to true *Holy Zeal*, hostile to it, is sinful and criminal, for it only compromises our Holy Faith and Church!

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AND SO, the choice is before us: are we with Christ or Antichrist?

"*The time is near*" (Apoc. 22:10) — thus did even the holy Apostles warn us Christians. And if it was "*near*" then, in Apostolic times, how much "*nearer*" has it become now, in our ominous days of manifest apostasy from Christ and persecution against our Holy Faith and Church?!

And if we firmly resolve in these fateful days to remain with Christ, not

in words only but in deeds as well, it is absolutely indispensable right now, without putting it off, to break off every bond of friendship, every form of communion with the servants of the approaching Antichrist, who has enlisted so many of them in the contemporary world, under lying pretenses of “*universal peace*” and “*prosperity*”; and especially must one free oneself unconditionally from every subservience to them and dependence on them, even if this might be bound up with detriment to our earthly well-being or even with danger for our earthly life itself.

Eternity is more important than our brief existence on earth, and it is precisely for it that we must prepare ourselves!

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AND THEREFORE, *ONLY Holy Zeal FOR GOD, FOR CHRIST, without any admixture of any kind of slyness or ambiguous cunning POLITICS, must guide us in all deeds and actions.*

Otherwise, a stern sentence threatens us: "*Because thou art neither hot nor cold, I will vomit thee out of My mouth*" (Apoc. 3:16).

"Be zealous, therefore, and repent!"

(Apoc. 3:19)

Amen.



(*) «*Orthodox Word*», Vol. XI, No. 3 (62), May-June 1975. English translation from Saint Elias Publications “*Faith and Life*,” No. 10, 1975.