

THE ORTHODOX SURVIVAL COURSE

Lecture Ten: What do we do now?

Overview: Where are we now?

- We have traced some philosophical, social, and religious movements up to the present day which have given birth to the chaos we see happening around us.
- We must be aware of where we are at and face the world squarely and realistically without being freaked out or becoming unbalanced people.
- The signs of the times:
 - The abnormality of the world: Never has there been the acceptance of such weird and abnormal behavior as we see today.
 - Wars and rumors of wars: The increasing hostility and power of destruction.
 - Widespread natural disasters: Disease, Tsunamis, Earthquakes, etc.
 - Increasing centralization of information and power over the individual: The current mining of every person's data, location, preferences, etc. and the increasing obligations one must meet in order to participate in society.
 - Multiplication of false Christs and false Antichrists: Those who show forth "signs and wonders," attracting mass followings.
 - Obsession with signs and wonders: Obsession with alien-life forms, spirits, and extra-ordinary experiences.
 - The return to idol worship and the worship of the self.
 - Persecution.
- The world we live in has been allowed by God and we have been born into it at this time for our own salvation, so we must realistically know our struggles and fight back with an Orthodox approach.
 - "The life around us, abnormal though it is, is the place where we begin our own Christian life. Whatever we make of our life, whatever truly Christian content we give it, it still has something of the stamp of the "me generation" on it, and we have to be humble enough to see this. This is where we begin." -Fr Seraphim Rose

Who Is Our Enemy?

- *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:11-13).*

- St Paisios warns us not to waste our time looking into secret societies or who is behind the curtain, because we know who is the head of all these schemes: the devil. Therefore, we must combat this enemy.
- “The world can only accept Antichrist, now or at any time.” Fr Seraphim Rose
-

Methods of Combat

- Asceticism: Taking off the false mask of the world
 - Recognize the falseness of the world, shed it, and suffer for it.
- Watchfulness: Nepsis (vigilance) and Hesychia (silence)
 - This is not an outward attentiveness, but an inward one.
 - “More importantly, the Pharisees and Sadducees should have been watching for the inward signs. If their hearts had been right with God, and if they had not been merely trying to fulfill the outward commandment of the law, their hearts would have responded and recognized God in the flesh when He came. And many of the Jews did—the apostles, the disciples, and many others.” -Fr Seraphim Rose
 - St Basil and Peter of Damascus considered this virtue a fundamental Christian practice and necessary for salvation because it is how we give heed to God.
 - Watchfulness is a pre-requisite of prayer and entrance into the spiritual life.
 - “To the extent that our inner life is in a state of discord and dispersed among many contrary things, we are unable to participate in the life of God. We desire opposing and contrary things, and we are torn apart by the relentless warfare between them, and this is called the ‘discord’ of the mind, a condition that divides and destroys the soul. As long as we are afflicted by the turmoil of our thoughts, and as long as we are ruled and constrained by our passions, we are self-fragmented and cut off from the divine Unity.”-St Symeon the New Theologian
 - The characteristics of watchfulness (Fr Maximus Constas)ⁱ:
 - (1) the awakening of the rational principles that God has placed in the soul;
 - (2) vigilant stewardship over the movements of the mind, which govern the movements of the body and society as a whole;
 - (3) the awareness of the mind’s (or soul’s) priority over the body, and of the beauty of God over sensory pleasure;
 - (4) an engagement with reality and a rejection of mental fantasies;
 - (5) self-examination and the refusal to meddle in the affairs of others; and
 - (6), not least, the very knowledge of God, insofar as the “self” is the image of God, a connection with which Basil concludes the entire sermon: “Give heed, therefore, to thyself, that you may give heed to God.”
- Prayer
 - The Jesus Prayer burns demons and we need to cultivate it in this time.
 - A rule:

ⁱ «Πρόσχε σεαυτῶ»: *Attentiveness and Digital Culture*, Fr. Maximos Constas (2015)

- “Set aside half an hour of the twenty-four to say the Jesus Prayer. Whenever you are able, but the evening is best. Say it without using the prayer rope—in supplication, pleading and with tears: “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me”. Cultivate this and you will see the fruit it will bring. From half an hour it will become an hour. And guard this hour. Whether the phone is ringing, or you have this task you need to do now, or you’re sleepy, or some blasphemy is confronting you. Nothing, Turn off the phone. Finish your tasks. Do this half hour and you’ll see. You’ve planted a little tree, and tomorrow or the day after it will bear fruit. St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil began like this and became luminaries for the whole world. St. Symeon the New Theologian had experiences of the uncreated Light while still a layman. He was a layman. How many laymen appear as such, but deep down are monks” +St. Ephraim of Katounakia
 - “In these last days, when the breath of the Antichrist pollutes land and sea and every breath of life, God fans the activity of noetic prayer in the bosom and heart of the Church like a refreshing dew of grace, like the breeze heard by the Prophet Elias (3 Kings 19:12), as an antidote for the health and salvation of soul and body in the days that are upon us and those to come.” -Elder Ephraim of Arizona
- Be immovable yourself and in your community
 - Preserve your faith unto the shedding of blood.
 - The Antichrist is not to be found in the deniers, but in the small affirmers, whose Christ is only on the lips.” -Fr Seraphim Rose
 - “Hold onto your faith firmly and remain immovable in the traditions of the divine fathers, for we have arrived at the age that even the strong in faith are lost. Toil by studying and learning, for everything good is achieved with hard work and suffering. We shall not feel the labor of virtue when we consider the clouds of martyrs and saints and in the future we shall be glorified...”-Elder Philotheos Zervakos
 - Preservation in community will be the safety net against the apostasy and the ongoing degradation of society.

Where Do We Fight?

- Firstly, the battlefield is the heart.
- Do we run to the wilderness?
 - It is an option, but one should never think he cannot be saved in a city, especially within a spiritual community. However, it takes diligence, strength, prayer, and love for our neighbor.
- Find healing in the spiritual hospital.
 - In the Church we find true meaning and the false and harmful things of this world are shed off.
 - We can conquer our passions that plague us and become new transfigured people.
 - In the sacraments of the Church we realize our full potential and accept a divine call to transfiguration.