

## **Sayings of the Saints**

### **St. Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzen) on the Holy Trinity**

“No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One... When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light...When I speak of God you must be illumined at once by one flash of light and by three. Three in Properties, or Hypostases, or Persons...but One in respect of ... the Godhead. For they are divided indivisibly. and they are conjoined dividedly. For the Godhead is one in three, and the three are one...”

## **Orthopraxis**

### **Memorial Services**

Someone once asked “Why do we have Memorial services (*panikhidi*) on the third, ninth and fortieth days?”

Here is one answer from the Orthodox Service Book:

Saint Macarius of Egypt wanted to know what happened to the soul after death. An angel appeared to him in a dream and explained that the soul hovers around the body for hours and often days after death.

But if the person was someone who did good in life, the soul goes off to visit the places where good deeds had been performed. (This explains the custom in some places that when someone dies, you open the window of their room, so their soul can go out to visit those places where it did good deeds.) On the third day after death, the day of burial, the body is interred and the soul is presented to God. God instructs the soul and tells it to tour heaven for six days to see how the righteous live. On the ninth day after death, the soul returns to God, and He instructs the soul, this time sending it on a tour of hell for thirty days. On the fortieth day after death the soul is presented again to God, this time for

Judgment. For these reasons, we have memorial services on the third, ninth, and fortieth days.

See Appendix B of The Service Book, edited by Florence I. Hapgood.

## **Focus on the Faith**

### **Is Not the Body Still Holy After Death?**

By Priest Barnabas Powell

Pastor, St. Michael's Orthodox Church, OCA, Pueblo, CO

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Anything goes in Amsterdam. A recent Economist article describes how Dutch mortuaries are pioneering a novel field in alternative energy, one that gives new meaning to the phrase "people power." Since cremating corpses involves so much energy, crematory furnaces are being connected to municipal power grids lest any of this valuable resource go to waste. Some folks are literally dying to become cheap and renewable resources. There's just one catch. Waste emissions from the process aren't quite green enough for Dutch ecological sensibilities, so further research is needed to develop a truly "clean corpse" technology. This may seem an extreme scenario, but it's not far from where we've come in accepting a practice once considered anathema.

I've heard some unenlightened reasons for opposing cremation, such as the idea that God won't be able to reassemble scattered ashes at the Resurrection. Such nonsense not only calls into question God's power, it offends the memories of those killed in accidental fires or the horrors of war.

Since the Catholic Church stopped forbidding cremation in 1963, the Orthodox Church (along with Orthodox Judaism) has increasingly had to explain its own opposition not only to the general public, but to its own faithful as well. The Orthodox insistence on burial is founded on respect for the human body as God's handiwork. The biblical account of our creation in God's image doesn't apply only to our rational faculties,

## St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

but also to our physical being. The goodness of the created world, and of the body, is proven when Christ becomes flesh to redeem it.

The notion of an incarnate deity was anathema to the pagan Greco-Romans (along with Gnostics and other "dualists" both ancient and modern), who believed all things material were inherently corrupt and illusory, and only the immaterial had any redeeming value. They practiced cremation as a means of liberating the good soul from the bad body. Cremation meant destroying the soul's material prison, allowing it to escape.

Early Christians and Jews, on the other hand, venerated the bodies of the dead as still reflecting the sacredness of God. For those who celebrated the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, cremation became unthinkable. They treated their dead like Christ, anointing them with fragrant spices, wrapping them in burial shrouds and laying them in the earth. The places of the dead, catacombs became the gathering places for worship.

When they began suffering persecution, Christians carried away the bodies of their martyrs, kissing their bones and eventually making pilgrimages to their tombs. As church buildings appeared, martyrs' shrines were incorporated into them by placing their bones in the altar tables, an Orthodox practice to this day.

Few things seem more macabre to the enlightened mind than kissing the bones of the dead. Conversely, few things would have seemed more anathema to early Christians than burning a body, crushing its bones and scattering the ashes or keeping them in a jar.

Cremation, outlawed as a pagan desecration by a fifth-century imperial edict, is becoming the preferred method of body "disposal" even among Christians. Although hardly deliberate, strands of the ancient dualism do permeate a modern death. I once had to inform a woman who already had her husband's ashes in a box that I couldn't bury him. She didn't think a funeral was necessary anyway, since he was already partying in heaven. His soul was the "he," while his body was now insignificant.

As a seminary instructor of mine once quipped, "We live like hedonists and die like Platonists." We live as though our body is the essence of our being, but suddenly it becomes nothing when we die. It's not my intent to offend those who've had loved ones cremated, but to provoke thoughtful consideration of how we want to be treated when we die. Every method implies a belief about the meaning of the body, either that it is a divine icon or simply an empty shell.

## Parish Events

### Annual Festival Success

Our Annual Parish Festival in early October was a rousing success due to the hard work of so many people in the parish. According to the latest accounting by our Treasurer Paul Pilipenko, our net profit was \$7300 for everything but the bookstore and about \$850 for the bookstore. This was more than we expected. The list of people who gave of their time and money is practically endless. **Thank you to all of you from a grateful Parish!**

### Charities

We will be having a Charities meeting on November 7 after the liturgy to decide what we want to do as a Parish for Christmas. We also have some money in the Charities budget to be distributed and we would like to get your opinion as to how it should be spent. Please attend this meeting. If you want to be on the Charities committee in the future, please let us know.

### Homeless Shelter Dinners

Ann Worobey is again organizing First Sunday Dinners for the Homeless at the Sunnysvale Armory. Dinners will be prepared by volunteers from St Nicholas on December 6, January 3, February 7 and March 7. Ann has been under the weather lately so she can use all of our help.

### PLEASE SIGN UP FOR LUNCHESES