



■ On the Occasion of the Commemoration of the Three Holy Hierarchs (30 January)

Gratitude*

“Coming together, let us honor with hymns the three most great luminaries of the Three-Sunned Divinity; for they ceaselessly intercede for us to the Trinity.”

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THE WORK of the Saints in the world is the work of God in the world. And our gratitude towards them is gratitude towards God, Who filled them with Grace and showed them forth as ministers of our salvation.



Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostomos, by their lives and teachings, distinguished themselves as bulwarks of the Church and champions of Orthodoxy.

This is why all Orthodox Christians honor them and are grateful to them. And by our honor and gratitude to them, we honor and show gratitude to God, who appointed them as instruments of His Grace and preachers of His word.

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EVERYTHING achieved by the Saints was the work of God. Not because they did not work themselves. Not because they did

not offer themselves. But because the essence of their work was that they *emptied* themselves, that the Grace of God might be *contained* and abide in them. The nature of their offering was that they allowed their beings to operate as instruments of the Grace of God. This is how they achieved great things. And these things were great because these men did Divine deeds.

“All of the achievements of the Saints were clearly gifts of Grace from God. None of the Saints had the least thing other than the goodness granted to him. And this goodness was granted by God the Master according to the measure of his gratitude and goodwill. And what he acquired, he acquired only in so far as he surrendered himself to the Lord Who bestowed it.

(St. Maximos the Confessor, Chapters on Theology, 5, 29)

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WE OFTEN regard gratitude as being of secondary importance in Christian life, or even as being a simple element of good social behavior, without any particular religious significance. This is why we easily overlook or forget it.

But the matter is quite to the contrary. Gratitude is not exhausted at the level of good behavior, nor is it to be placed on the fringes of spiritual life, but it is the foundation of virtue and sanctity.

The virtue of a believer, as also the sanctity of a Saint, is commensurate with his gratitude to God; or, gratitude to God is the gauge by which God offers His gifts to man.

And this is the case, because gratitude is the gauge by which the *capacity* of man’s soul for Divine Grace is determined. It is the gauge of man’s faith; whoever does not have gratitude can not believe.

When Christ healed the ten lepers and heard “*thank you*” from only one, He said: “*Were there not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?*” By these words, the Lord is not castigating the bad behavior of the nine, but rather their *atheism*: “*There are not found that returned to give glory to God*” (St. Luke 17:18). They did not return to glorify God.

As for the one who came to say *thank you*, He did not praise him for his good manners, but said to him: “*Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole*” (St. Luke 17:19). His gratitude revealed his faith, and his faith saved him.

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HOW grateful are we to God?

How much do we thank him that we are people and not animals? Christians, and not members of some other religion? Orthodox, and not heterodox, and so on? How grateful are we for the Saints He has shown forth, for the Three Hierarchs, and for the vast multitude of other Saints, Martyrs, and Confessors who have struggled and handed down the Faith to us?

How grateful are we for these and so many of His other gifts to us? How grateful are we for all that we have and do not have?

Man has nothing of his own. All that he has, he received from God. "*What hast thou that thou didst not receive?*" writes the Apostle Paul. "*Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*" (I Corinthians 4:7).

Though man has nothing of his own, there is *something* that he can have as his own, and this *something* is gratitude. This, by itself, can make many other things his own. It can make his own all of the things entrusted to him by God: "*And what he acquired, he acquired only in so far as he surrendered himself to the Lord Who bestowed it.*"

Everything that we offer to God with gratitude becomes our own, while everything that we keep as our own, we arrogate to ourselves, forgetting the proprietorship of God, Who bestowed it on us. For there is nothing that we can offer to God that is not His own. Not even a grain of wheat is essentially our own. This is why, when we offer the bread and wine, which become the Body and Blood of Christ in the Divine Eucharist, we say: "*Thine own of Thine own do we offer unto Thee.*" And these meager gifts that we offer, having been blessed and sanctified, become our spiritual food.

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THE THREE Hierarchs, who, as *luminaries of the Three-Sunned Divinity*, displayed not themselves but rather God within the world, are models of gratitude.

Gratitude to God guided the conduct and love for man of St. Basil the Great. Gratitude to God inspired the struggles and the theology of St. Gregory the Theologian. Gratitude to God characterized the boldness and self-sacrifice of the holy Chrysostomos, who, dethroned and exiled, could face death with the words: "*Glory*

to God for all things.”

Veritably choked as we are in the goods that we have arrogated to ourselves from God and His creation, we are first and foremost called upon to become conscious of and experience this gratitude, which we so forget today, if we want our Christian name and Christian Faith to have some measure of assurance.



(*) **Source:** *Orthodoxos Martyria*, Cyprus, No. 41 (Autumn of 1993), publication lay-out ours.