

Anxiety must be the normal state of the natural man in this world. But the forms of our anxieties change. Sometimes personal, at other times, shared: anxieties are fluid, flexible; they alter with the shifting winds of this life. Those crowds of the poor, the ordinary people of Palestine who gathered about Our Lord, whilst He poured forth words that described life in the kingdom of God, they had their own anxieties; the very basic concerns of those who eked out a living, scratching around, just in order to survive. *'Do not be anxious about your life,'* He tells them. *'What you shall eat or what you shall drink; nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not the soul more than food, and the body more than clothing?'*

The Heavenly Father, Christ taught them, who also knew when a sparrow fell to the ground, knew their anxieties. Man, who once tasted the Tree of Life in Paradise, now needed earthly bread; the one who in another time drank from the well of the Spirit, could now perish from lack of water; He who was once clothed in glory, had now to wrap his nakedness in skins and coverings.

And we, who are of the same race, consubstantial; of one essence with the fallen Adam, we too become preoccupied with the anxieties of our own age. We might not face the challenges of living as a Judaeon peasant of the first century Roman Empire yet close the supermarkets for three days and watch the people tremble! A terrorist incident occurs, and one become suspicious of the stranger who shares the journey on public transport. Modern means of travel spreads a virus about the globe in the twinkling of an eye, and the fear of contagion locks people away in their homes. *'I'll put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes,'* says Shakespeare's character, Puck [A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 2, Scene 1]. This wretched virus has done the same, tying people down with the girdle of anxiety.

But our times have no single worry; these days are blessed with a veritable abundance of things you can fret about; so many subjects to occupy the mind on sleepless nights! Anxieties social, environmental, racial, political, sexual, ideological, educational,

economic, demographic: has a generation ever had such superabundance from which to draw its concerns? But modern Man is still the same fallen Adam and he is trapped in a paradox. All his attempts to escape his condition, all his efforts to save himself and prolong his life, are the very devices that add to the quotient of our anxiety. Truly it would be ironic if it were not so tragic, but it is our very success in lengthening our days that presents us with our own destruction. Why do so many focus on Climate Change, (as engendered by man's greed and the over-use of fossil fuels) when the cruel fact is, it is the sheer number of us on the planet that would have brought about this state of affairs. It is the fact of our individual survival for so long that adds to our anxieties. And why have we survived? For two reasons in our recent history, two means of progress in fighting off death. It seems peculiar to admit it, but the invention of inoculation against disease and the discovery of antibiotics are the root causes of our anxieties over Climate Change. Think about that paradox! The very weapons we wield to preserve countless lives, have increased the number of those making demands on our natural resources, and so paving the way for the destruction of our species. Thus, we are caught in a classic '*Catch 22*' situation: we have been very successful in reducing child mortality through medical science, only to face ourselves with the Nemesis of greater demands for fossil fuels

And what of those who place their faith in technology, the very fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? They talk now of *Transhumanism*; that in due time Artificial Intelligence will be so advanced we shall be able to surpass the limits of our own physical bodies. Perhaps your physical body might be replaced by replaceable bionic parts, making you superhuman. Or you might become a disembodied mind altogether, amidst a bank of minds, experiencing an artificial consciousness in a virtual, anxiety free world forever. But here again, Adam relives the same entrapment, the same beguilement he knew in Paradise, making himself god by his own will. Saved by our own efforts alone? What do we, the Orthodox, see here but an old heresy rearing its head once again: *Palagianism*, the heresy of Palagius (c 355 - 420AD) that first emerged here, in Britain, falsely teaching that we save ourselves by our own will, without the need for grace.

But to deify ourselves is not within the realm of Man. Yet what does our Faith proclaim, what do we preach? Is it not eternal life through repentance and being joined to Christ-God? Yes indeed, and more. Not just resurrection from the dead but *Theosis*; acquiring the Divine nature, the transfiguration of Man. As St Peter tells us, '*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*' [2 Pet.1:3-4] This is our destiny, this is our escape from death: sharing in the life of the Life-giver, eternal communion in the mystery of the Holy Trinity and one another.

But this newness of life is not our lone achievement, for all we do in this life which is not blessed in God can only be infected with Sin. No matter how useful or even necessary for a time, the gospel does *not* call to ever increasing worldly knowledge, nor to progress in techniques, advancement in an ever-changing Science, nor better and better systems of social organisation: the gospel calls us to repentance, to the life of ascetic struggle, seasoned with grace through the Holy Mysteries.

But we need to know this; we need to perceive the realities of our condition. No wonder that today in the gospel Christ tells us that the eye is the lamp of the body. But He means here a parable for the mind's eye; the light of the body reflecting the soul's enlightenment. Yet this is why no man can save his own soul, for unredeemed, no man can possibly see the spiritual realities of his condition.

Even with our brains, being the size they are, we cannot even rely upon our own reasoning. '*And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his stature?*' [Matt.6.27] says our Lord. The ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, once wrote the famous *Analogy of the Cave* [The Republic, book vii] Imagine a group of people brought up from birth, chained in a cave. The only thing they see are shadow images cast onto the walls and they presume that these are the only reality. When one of them escapes he discovers the outside world

and returns to enlighten his fellows in the cave, telling them that they have been obsessed with fantasies. They, of course, turn on him and reject him. Plato used this analogy to illustrate how the philosopher is mocked by those who reject his vision of the ideal *forms of reality*, as he called them. We might use his analogy to describe the darkened eyes of man without Christ who, St John tells us, '*Was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.*' [Jn.1:9]

But if these eyes represent how we see life, it is the heart that is central in Orthodox Christian thinking. This follows on in harmony with the ways that biblical writers talk of the heart of man. '*A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things,*' says our Lord in Matthew. [Matt.12:35] '*And an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.*' In our understanding of man, the mind is contained in the heart. To experience this is healing, this is the reintegration of the fractured, fragmentary mind of the fallen Adam, as the fathers who practised the *Prayer of the Heart* have taught us. If you want the theological term it is called the *Nous*. The *Noetic* is the highest and central faculty of our spiritual existence. It is not identified with but is symbolised by that heart of flesh, beating in your breast. And if any are imagining that this is just so much fanciful speculation, think of those young people whom, we are told, have increased levels of mental disorders, aggravated by the current panic. Whatever has fractured their psychological state, their cure too is to be found in Christ, liberating the mind in its understanding of what it means to be human, and purifying the heart from the effects of sin.

*'If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!'* Christ tells us today. Our end is to be free of this darkness; it is to unite how we think, our inner emotional reactions, our will. And what is it that interrupts the unification of our thinking, emotional reactions and will, but Sin? Have we not all been there? Our higher self, our mind, knows what is good, what is right, but the power of our will has as much strength as a wet paper bag! For the weight of the passions within tear us apart. Thus, the unity of the heart is broken. Have you not discovered this in the current fast? Have you not missed the means of grace? Has poverty of spirit not driven you to seek first the

kingdom; have you sought comfort in your grief or hungered and thirsted after righteousness, seeking the vision of God in a pure heart? Today, we listened to Our Lord teaching us at the Sermon on the Mount, yet so many of us, cut off still from the bread of heaven, we can yet complete the fast today and enter into the joy of the two great pillars of the Church on the feast of the Apostles, tomorrow.

Let us open our eyes once again, as they were once before, when we were chrismated after baptism and our eyes were anointed by the Spirit, sealed off from the phantasms of this world. As we sing in the first ode of the Paschal Canon, *'Let us purify our senses and we shall behold Christ, radiant with inaccessible light of the Resurrection, and shall hear Him saying clearly, "Rejoice!" As we sing the triumphant hymns!'* And the blessed Paul tells us himself today in the Apostolos, *'Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.'* [Rom.5:2]