

Holy Words:

Truth, Lies and Icons by Fr. Stephen Freeman

As verbal beings, we live in a world of icons. We experience the world in an iconic fashion. A major difficulty for us is that we have lost the vocabulary of iconic reality. We have substituted the language of photography. The dissonance between reality and our photographic assumptions has led us to doubt both. Man is an iconographer and needs to re-learn what that means.

Franz Kafka famously wrote: “The Lie has become the World Order.” It was a sobering estimate (by an unbeliever) of the nature of human reality. Lying, simply not telling the truth, can seem a minor thing. But Jesus and the New Testament seem to pay a great deal of attention to lying, and treat it quite seriously. There is more here than the mere abrogation of a moral tenet. It is a concern with something more “Kafkaesque.”

The nature of truth and lies becomes clear if they are thought of in terms of *being*. The Church describes God as the “author of our being.” In the writings of the Fathers, being itself, simple existence, is seen as a good thing, the first of all created good things. God brings us into existence saying, “It is good.” More than that, the Fathers teach that it is God’s will that we grow towards “well-being,” with the ultimately goal of “eternal being.” This, in terms of existence, is the path of salvation. And this understanding reveals the nature of a lie: it has no true existence. That which is not true not only has no existence, but its very purpose is to obscure or destroy that which indeed has true existence. Fantasy and imagination, even though they have no true existence, are by no means inherently false. Only those forms which seek to distort, deny or destroy that which truly exists can be called “lies” rather than “fantasy” or “imagination.” But this makes speech *about* reality (that which truly exists) very significant. The most obvious thing we can say is that reality itself and speech about reality are not the same thing. They are, however, deeply connected.

In classical philosophy, the school of thought that describes words as only “in our heads” is called Nominalism. The names (*nomina*) of things are described as nothing more than thoughts. Those who argued otherwise (there are various types of such arguments) are called Realists. Orthodoxy, in its classical form, has always espoused some form of Realism. There is a relationship between words and thoughts and that to which they refer that is greater than simply being something “in our heads.”

One of the places where this debate took shape was in the debate over the veneration of icons. It is clear that images had played a role in the life of the Church from very early times. That role was not questioned or explored until the 7th and 8th centuries. The debate was about more than the mere making of images. A greater and more pressing question was the *veneration* (giving honor) to the images themselves. St. Basil the Great stated a clear connection between the image and the subject of its image: “*Honor given to the image is referred to its prototype.*” Thus the honor given to an *icon* of Christ was, in fact, honor given to Christ Himself.

St. Basil’s statement was something of a simple assertion, without elaboration. But in the 8th and 9th centuries, St. Theodore the Studite developed a much more careful treatment of the question. He described an icon as a “hypostatic representation,” that is a representation of the personal or particular characteristics of its subject (the personal is always considered *particular* rather than *general* or *abstract*). He further taught that what is represented is “hypostatically” present in the image. The image does not *become* what is represented – that would be a presentation of its essence. Instead, it *makes present* what is represented, i.e., the Person.

St. Theodore’s treatment thus used the language that the Church had developed for speaking about the Holy Trinity, as well as the Person and Natures of Christ to speak about the Holy Icons. It is a treatment that is often forgotten or neglected.

St. Theodore’s teaching on this question manages to avoid Nominalist solutions. He does not say, “It’s just a picture.” He does not say, “It’s only connection to what is depicted is in the mind.” Like all of the Fathers, he is a Realist. There is a true,

even *ontological*, relationship between the icon and its subject. But he avoids charges of “magic” by maintaining that what is represented is only hypostatically present.

His explanation makes it possible to say, “The man in the picture is Peter.”

Turning back to language, the same understanding says that words matter. They have an actual relationship with the reality of which they speak and it matters. Fr. Georges Florovsky once said that “doctrine is a verbal icon of Christ.” Or, as the Seventh Council said, “Icons do with color what Scripture does with words.”

Of course, the palette of language is far richer than the palette of the artist. Words have “shades” of meaning and subtle hues that an artist should envy. But, in the teaching of the Orthodox faith, words have a grounding in reality beyond psychology.

Some have said that the modern world is inherently Nominalist. We believe that our words are only words, and only have meaning because we say or think they do. The “reality” they describe is, therefore, in our minds. There was a school of thought (Idealism) that held that there is no objective reality outside the mind, or certainly that it cannot be proved. That extreme position has never gained acceptance.

However, the modern sociology of knowledge, in which perceptions, prejudice, etc. are given a dominant and controlling position, yields something of the same effect. Conversation begins to falter in the face of withering doubts about the reality or trustworthiness of anything in our heads.

Words have something of a sacramental relationship with the reality they represent. Or, to be more precise, they have an *iconic* relationship with reality. Icons are not photographs, nor can words ever serve as photographic or holographic substitutes.

But icons also carry more information than photographs and are able to make associations and connections that reveal the truth of reality (its foundational reality) far more profoundly than is possible in a photograph. Words have that same ability. Take the poetic sentence:

What rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

No photograph (and perhaps no icon) could carry as much information as this combination of words from Yeats’ “The Second Coming.” The many associations of “beast” (including the Beast of Revelation) do not “approach” – they “slouch.” It carries overtones of “slither” (and the serpent of the Garden) as well as other emotional content. And so the analysis would continue. It is a phrase that lives in my mind, capturing a reality both present and yet to come.

And this brings us back to lying. The struggle to speak the truth transcends mere morality. At its most fundamental level, it is a struggle to rightly relate to and participate in reality itself. To “live a lie” borders on not living at all – and is a synonym for hell.

To claim that the reality of our words lives only in the mind is itself a “lie” (not an intentional one, but simply not true). And even the photographic presentation of reality (as in all literalisms) fails to rise to the status of truth.

The Fathers held that the world-to-come (the *Eschaton*) was the *truth*. The Old Testament, they said, was a *shadow*, while the New Testament was an *icon*.

As verbal beings, we live in a world of icons. We experience the world in an iconic fashion. A major difficulty for us is that we have lost the vocabulary of iconic reality. We have substituted the language of photography. The dissonance between reality and our photographic assumptions has led us to doubt both. Man is an iconographer and needs to re-learn what that means. The result can be a movement towards the truth and a renewed confidence in our speech.

On this Sunday of Orthodoxy, speak the truth. Reveal that which is hidden by living in union with the truth. Refuse the lie. Refuse to participate in the lie.

Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox

Church

25636 N. Mosiertown Rd Crossingville, PA 1641

Archpriest Fr. Daniel Mathewson – *Rector*

V. Rev. David Smoley – *Retired Lord’s Day – 3-17-2019 Parish phone: 814-734-3801*

Find us on the Web at: www.orthodoxcrossingville.org

GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST! GLORY BE FOREVER!

FIRST SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT — Tone 1. Sunday of Orthodoxy. Ven. Aleksy (Alexius) the Man of God (411). Ven. Macarius, Abbot and Wonderworker of Kalyázinsk (Tver’—1483). Martyr Marinus. St. Patrick, Bishop of Armagh, Enlightener of Ireland (ca. 461).

PLEASE INCLUDE THESE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN YOUR DAILY PRAYERS: Those in need – Fr. Samuel, Fr. Andrew, Fr. David, Fr. Anthony, Mat. Gail, Mat. Donna, Mat. Pirsilla, George, Paul, Pearl, William, Terry, Mary B., Rich A., Karen, John, Mary, Stavros, Theona, Nickolas, Timothy, Theresa, Judy, Delani, Jeremiah, Megan, Mary, Timothy [The Homebound](#)... Ann, Tanya, Richard, Helen, Ruth, William, Claudia... [Travelers](#)... Dankos, Rachockis, Deminenkos, ... [Catechumens and Inquirers](#) – Grace, Christian, Bill, Kathy ... [Military servers](#)... Greg ... [Newly Departed](#) – Anna Anderson, Rodney Senyo, Josephine Olvnik, Marilyn Filipos, Irene Hoover... [Departed Orthodox](#) Jeff, Catherine, John B., John S., Nickoli, Ann, Katherine, Vernon, Paul, James, Andrew, Peter, Paul, Margaret, Michael Mary Ann, Timothy... [Special requests](#)... Gilbert, Anthony, Ian, Paul, Daleen, James, Sean, Liam, Bill, Wesley, Zera, Kim, Jim, Margaret, Loren, Nick, Russell, Julia, Shelby, Anna (Depaerted)

Holy Hymns:

Tone 1 Troparion (Resurrection)

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews, while the soldiers were guarding Thy most pure body, Thou didst rise on the third day, O Savior, granting life to the world. The powers of heaven therefore cried to Thee, O Giver of Life: “Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ! Glory to Thy Kingdom!// Glory to Thy dispensation, O Thou who lovest of mankind!”

Tone 2 Troparion (Sunday of Orthodoxy)

We venerate Thy most pure image, O Good One; and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ our God. Of Thy good will Thou wast pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh and deliver Thy creatures from bondage to the Enemy. Therefore with thankfulness we cry aloud to Thee: “Thou hast filled all with joy, O our Savior,// for Thou alone hast come to save the world.”

v. For His mercy has been established upon us, and the truth of the Lord abideth forever

Tone 8 Kontankion (from the Lenten Triodion)
No one could describe the Word of the Father; but when He took flesh from thee, O Theotokos, He accepted to be described, and restored the fallen image to its former state by uniting it to divine beauty.//

v. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

Tone 3 Troparion
We confess and proclaim our salvation in words and images. Holy Bishop Patrick, / Faithful shepherd of Christ's royal flock, / You filled Ireland with the radiance of the Gospel: / The mighty strength of the Trinity! / Now that you stand before the Savior, / Pray that He may preserve us in faith and love!

v. Now and Ever and unto ages of ages

Tone 4 Kontankion
From slavery you escaped to freedom in Christ's service: / He sent you to deliver Ireland from the devil's bondage. / You planted the Word of the Gospel in pagan hearts. / In your journeys and hardships you rivaled the Apostle Paul! / Having received the reward for your labors in heaven, / Never cease to pray for the flock you have gathered on earth, / Holy bishop Patrick!

Tone 4 Prokeimenon (Song of the Fathers)
Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers, and praised and glorified is Thy name forever! (Song of the three Holy Children, v. 3)
v: For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us! (v. 4)

Tone 4 Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!
v: Moses and Aaron were among His priests; Samuel also was among those who called on His Name. (Ps 99/100:6)
v: They called to the Lord and He answered them. (Ps 99/100:6)

Holy Scripture:

Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-12:2 (Epistle)

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made

strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

John 1:43-51 (Gospel)

The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

UPCOMING

Today – Procession with Icons --following Divine Liturgy
---Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and classes

---There will be an **altar servers** meeting TODAY following Divine Liturgy. Any servers in the altar or holding candles in the nave.

This Week - Wed. Mar.20th Presanctified Liturgy 6:30pm
Catechumens Class – A discussion on Holy Icons
Fri. Mar. 22nd Presanctified Liturgy- (bring a Lenten dish to share to all Friday PS) 6:30pm

Holy Services:

Sun. Mar. 24th Great Vespers w/lytia and blessing of bread 4:00pm
Mon. Mar. 25th DIVINE LITURGY for ANNUNCIATION -9:30am
Wed. Mar. 27th Presanctified Liturgy 6:30pm
Catechumens Class – Hesychia and the Knowledge of God.
Fri. Mar. 29th Presanctified Liturgy 6:30pm
(Fri. Mar. 29th-31st Young Adult Retreat at Camp Nazareth)

Holy Actions:

+Missions Team The Team will continue to collect food pantry items for Edinboro University Food pantry. See Anna R. or Debbie K. for more details.

---Also, There are OCMC summer mission trip scholarships available for anyone interested. See board in hall for more information on trips or see www.ocmc.org

+Parish Council Meeting: Tuesday, March 19th - 6:00pm
+Design Team will meet on Sunday March 24th
+Hospitality Team will meet on Tuesday, April 2nd - 12-1pm

+Orthodox Education Team- CGS will continue on Sunday During Great Lent for the younger classes. Tammy will be here with a pasankey egg making table. The Team is sponsoring a Visual Orthodox Art Event where artistic talents can be displayed. Artists are asked to create an original piece of art in any style or medium. The Theme will be "God's Creation: Family"
+ Quarterly Ministry Team Meeting- Sat. May 18th

Holy Events:

+A new Parish Directory draft is in process just checking for accuracy and a couple of additions. (Next week release date)

+Youth and Young Adult 17-35 Lenten Retreat at Camp Nazareth MARCH 29th- 31st Cost: 75\$

+A Parish Family Lenten Retreat will be held on Saturday, April 6th –Divine Liturgy - 9am -Retreat to follow, confession will be available for families and youth following the retreat – Great Vespers will be at 4pm.