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A Few Days Before Easter: ‘In your light we shall see light’ (Vasilios Grillas, Theologian)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The long and holy periods of spiritual reflection never pass without a barrage of temptations. The holy fast and the increase in prayer don't escape the snares of Lucifer. When Christ Himself spent forty days in fasting, prayer and reflection, He, too, was subjected to the temptations of the devil.

Given this- the fact that Christ Himself was tempted by the devil- it's not at all strange that those who follow in His footsteps, in the path of the Gospel, will also be on the receiving end of a host of traps cunningly set by the devil. Indeed, the harder Christians try in this effort, the more the devil attempts to blow them off their course towards perfection in Christ. This is clear from the details of the thousands of martyrdoms the Church can point to in the books of the Lives of the Saints. These aren't mere words for us to pass the time. They're the experiences recorded from the progression of the body of the Church and it's a mistake to overlook their veracity.



Even more important in all this is the knowledge we have in abundance from the Fathers, which tells us that, in order to achieve his goals, the devil is capable of transforming himself into an angel of light. In other words, he can appear as a saint in order to deceive us. He can even use something apparently holy to fool our mind and hurl us from the path to salvation.

The devil uses one such tactic on the most holy day for the Church: Holy and Great Saturday. Not just any day, but the day on which, 'we celebrate the burial of the divine Body and the descent into Hades of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, through which He recalled our human race from corruption and transferred it to eternal life'. That is, at the very hour when the divine body of Christ is being buried and He is descending into Hades, in order to trample upon the devil and abolish

death, the devil wastes no time. He insists on setting traps in order to overcome any soul he can ensnare. And he does so very cunningly, through a holy vehicle. Thus it is that, in recent years, the Holy Light, from Christ's Holy Sepulchre has become a trap in the hands of the devil.

For some years now, every Great Saturday, every Easter, we have the same issues. Quarrels erupt, differences and divisions are expressed, all surrounding the Holy Light. And suddenly, on the holiest day of the Church year, instead of falling to our knees and praising Christ, we're in revolt, instead of being resurrected, we're conjuring up philosophical theories which are foreign to both the theology and experience of the Church regarding the Holy Light.

Thousands of questions are aired. Is it actually the Holy Light? If it is, is it created or uncreated? Does it burn or not? If it doesn't burn, for how long does it not burn? And if it does burn, does it do so as any ordinary flame would?

And the absurdity of this old-wives' theology expands into profanity: is it really the Holy Light or is it produced by some secret patent guarded in the depths of ages past? Maybe there's some secret crypt in the Holy Sepulchre where the necessary implements are kept so that each new Patriarch can work his magic tricks? Is it the Holy Light or a machination passed down from one patriarch to the next in order to guarantee an annual miracle?

And the questions proceed to utter banality. Why should a Light be received with the honours accorded to a head of state? [The Holy Light is brought to Greece from Jerusalem and is received by an honour guard, as are wonder-working icons from abroad, as if they're paying a 'state visit']. Why should we spend so much on bringing the Holy Light when there are people who are dying on the islands and in remote areas and there are no emergency services? And what's all this fuss about the Holy Light, which is no different from the Olympic flame? And suppose it goes out on the way, what then? And if we don't have the Holy Light in our parishes, do we have the Resurrection as normal?

Thousands of arguments about the substance surrounding the issue. But not a single question about the actual essence of the event, which is that Christ rose from the dead!

Lots of people give their opinions, some for, some against bringing the Holy Light. Flawed positions on both sides, because of lack of experience, because of an inability to relate the symbol to the existential experience of dogma. In brief: many theories on both sides, in the absence of conclusions about the sure way for

Christians to go forward with Christ.

If anyone were to ask my opinion on the matter, as God is my witness, I wouldn't know what to say. And I'm happy about that. Not because I don't have an answer, but because I've a path before me to tread and to find an answer. But the more you seek a real answer in the Church, the more you're in the Church and that makes me happy. The Church sanctifies all things. It's my life from His Life, my suffering from His Suffering and my resurrection from His Resurrection. Is that not enough?



Personally, and I confess this in the middle of Lent, whether the Church says 'Christ has risen' to me with the Holy Light or with a lighter from the nearest corner shop, I'll be just as convinced about the Resurrection. The Church sanctifies everything. The light is the symbol. The light is the means. The light is the vehicle. But the essence of the symbol, the means and the vehicle lies in decoding what is symbolized, what brings you to the means and what draws you as a vehicle. It's not the light that sanctifies you. What sanctifies you is the effort to be in an active relationship with the unwaning light of the Resurrection. And this Light finds its place every day in the Holy Chalice and rests triumphantly on the altar of every parish, every chapel, every monastery.

That the Holy Light comes to Greece is a phenomenon instituted only in recent years. When I was a boy, in my village, the holy light was taken from the icon-lamp on the altar. That was the light which our humble and saintly priest entrusted us with as a blessing of the Resurrection, to take back home. To resurrect everything: us, the walls of the house, our gardens, our animals, our dead. And we'd take it at 'Come and take the light...', worried whether we'd get it home in the middle of the night to light the icon-lamp- which we'd extinguished- in our icon-corner. To light the lamp anew, with a fresh wick, and to hear 'Christ has risen' ringing throughout the house from mouths which had just communed, from bodies which had completed the course of ascetic effort and had become one in body and blood with the risen Christ. From human beings who had understood simply and calmly their relationship with Christ: 'in your light shall we see light'. How much more light do you want in order to be saved? Is infinite not enough?

Our lives have changed. The minds of people today have been overfed and the human brain has become over-developed. A mere glance at today's achievements demonstrates our power in this regard. But our hearts are underfed and our human sensibilities have become under-developed. A mere glance at today's human practices shows our weakness in this regard. In reality, we've broken the link between mind and heart and so our human presence appears, superficially, to be of substance, but it actually frequents insubstantial haunts. It's in vain that the Gospel of the Resurrection says: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it' (John 1, 1-5). Surely not in vain, but in this integration of disintegration, how will you recognize the Resurrection and feel the Holy Light?

One last point. When Christ was tempted by the devil, He didn't start a conversation with him. On the contrary, He was staggeringly blunt: 'Get behind me, Satan' (Matth. 4, 10). Perhaps this is a good tactic as regards the snares of the devil concerning the Holy Light.

It may be that we should just return to the icon-lamp on the holy altar as the source of the Easter light. If we did, we Christians wouldn't be making demands for miracles to justify our faith nor would others be scandalized by our attitude.

The Holy Light will always be Holy and Light. What matters is the candles we transfer it onto. Christ deserves the very best candle: our self. So that we can say, as Christians: 'Christ, I melt for you'. Or to put it a little more theologically: 'You

have smitten me with yearning, Christ and with your divine love you have altered me. With immaterial fire, burn away my sins and make me worthy to be filled with the delight that is in you, so that I may magnify your two comings, Good Lord'.