

ASCETICALLY SPEAKING, pp. 29-30

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SERMONS (HOMILIES) ALWAYS ON THE LORD'S DAY

Egeria's (4th century) Description of the Divine Liturgy as this Nun Observed it on her Pilgrimage

Morning Services

XXV. 1 Now at daybreak because it is the Lord's Day every one proceeds to the greater church, built by Constantine, which is situated in Golgotha behind the Cross, where all things are done which are customary everywhere on the Lord's Day. But the custom here is that of all the priests who take their seats, as many as are willing, preach, and after them all the bishop preaches, and these sermons are always on the Lord's Day, in order that the people may always be instructed in the Scriptures and in the love of God. The delivery of these sermons greatly delays the dismissal from the church, so that the dismissal does [not] take place before the fourth or perhaps the fifth hour.

LENTEN FASTS IN 4th CENTURY JERUSALEM

Egeria

XXVII And when the Paschal days come they are observed thus: Just as with us forty days are kept before Easter, so here eight weeks are kept before Easter. And eight weeks are kept because there is no fasting on the Lord's Days, nor on the Sabbaths, except on the one Sabbath on which the Vigil of Easter falls, in which case the fast is obligatory. With the exception then of that one day, there is never fasting on any Sabbath here throughout the year. Thus, deducting the eight Lord's Days and the seven Sabbaths (for on the one Sabbath, as I said above, the fast is obligatory) from the eight weeks, there remain forty-one fast days, which they call here Eortae, that is Quadragesimae.

DAVID'S AND THE OTHER GREAT SAINTS' WRITINGS

Elder Barsanuphius of Optina

I don't wish to say that reading the works of our great writers is a sin - but there is reading more profitable and edifying. In the first place, there is the reading of the Psalter – this book was written by the holy King and Prophet David at the urging of the Holy Spirit. The Prophet David himself says, *my tongue is the pen of a swiftly writing scribe* (Ps. 44:1). And the Lives of the Saints are indispensable

readings, which act beneficially upon the soul, especially if you read them in Slavonic.

OPTINA MONASTERY

Elder Barsanuphius of Optina

Our holy Monastery attracts many worshippers. And one often hears the opinion that whoever visits Optina even once will gravitate towards it with his whole soul.
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Our Monastery has neither wonder-working icons nor glorified relics; but here, it seems, the whole earth is covered with the blood and sweat of the holy Elders, and their prayers send down grace upon the souls of believers. Even our Vladyka who, being a bishop, has visited many monasteries, has said there is something special in Optina.

In Russia there are not many sketes.... But our Skete is the only one in which there are very rarely outsiders in the church - and then, only for the Liturgy. But we always celebrate Matins only with our skete family. Our skete church makes a powerful impression on the visitor: such singing of ancient chants, moving services, the absence of people. The monks each have their specific places in which they regularly stand. Special also is the sound of the skete bells - quiet and monastic. One pious man once donated a bell to us weighing 5.400 pounds, but it never made it to the Skete and was taken away. The very largest we have weighs 1,400 pounds.

WE CAN BE SAVED ANYWHERE!

Elder Barsanuphius of Optina

Yes! It's hard to be saved in the world. St. Nicholas, the Archbishop of Myra in Lycia, went to the desert to labour there in fasting and prayer, but the Lord didn't bless him to remain there. Appearing to the Saint, the Lord commanded him to go to the world. *This is not the field upon which you will bring forth fruit for me,* said the Saviour. Saints Thaisia, Mary of Egypt and Eudocia likewise did not live in monasteries. It's possible to be saved anywhere, only don't leave the Saviour. Cling to the robe of Christ, and Christ will never leave you.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A BISHOP TO BE A CHURCH FATHER!

Dr. Father Michael Azkoul

But, as we know, the universal Church has anointed many Christian writers beneath the rank of bishop as 'Fathers of the Church,' such as Sts. Justin Martyr, Macarius of Egypt, Hesychius of Jerusalem, Maximus the Confessor, Ephraim

the Syrian, John of Damascus, John Cassian etc. In truth, then, any man can be a Father of the Church if his life is characterised by holiness and his doctrine by apostolic orthodoxy.

BAR YOURSELF FROM RATIONALISING

Patriarch Jeremias II, the Illustrious

Let us accept, then, the traditions of the Church with a sincere heart and not a multitude of rationalisations. For God created man to be upright; instead they sought after diverse ways of rationalising (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Let us not allow ourselves to learn a new kind of faith which is condemned by the tradition of the Holy Fathers. For the Divine Apostle says, *if anyone is preaching to you a Gospel contrary to that which you have received, let him be accursed* (Galatians 1:9).