



Festal Homily of His Eminence, Bishop Auxentios of Etna and Portland
delivered at Great Vespers for the Patronal Feast
of Sts. Cyprian and Justina
Saturday, October 1, 2023 (Old Style)
Phyle, Athens, Greece

“The Diabolical Folly of Our Generation and How it can be Exorcised”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Your Eminences, Your Graces, Reverend Fathers and Mothers, and pious laity, many thanks are owed to our All-Good God, Who has counted us worthy once again to celebrate the memory of our Saints and Patrons, the Holy Hieromartyr Cyprian and the Holy Virgin-Martyr Justina!



First, duty obliges me to convey to His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian and to the elect Brotherhood of this Monastery warmest congratulations on their Patronal Feast, entreating their Saints to continue their intercessions and preserve His Eminence and the Brotherhood in health and length of days, for the glory of our Lord and His Holy Church! I convey these sentiments not only on behalf of Abbot Akakios, Abbess Elizabeth, and all of our community in Etna, but especially on behalf of His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius, who has great love for Metropolitan Cyprian and this Monastery. May our Lord establish you and preserve you for many years!

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In preparation for my trip to this Monastery, which is a second home to me—for in fact it was here that I received the Great Schema—, I had

the opportunity to review a sermon that our ever-memorable Metropolitan Chrysostomos gave for this same Feast, in 2017. His Eminence had little more than a year remaining in this “vale of tears,” and in this sermon one can sense that more than ever he had set his gaze on eternity and spoke more plainly than ever about our troubled times.

The central thesis of His Eminence’s talk was that the atheism of our era was qualitatively different from what the Holy Apostles and Holy Fathers confronted and opposed in earlier eras, even if those heroes of the Faith used the same word to describe the errors of their antagonists. Modern atheism, His Eminence maintained, was born of a demonic betrayal of the fundamental God-given gifts of reason and reflection, and therefore, he argued, it should be called “irrationality,” something unworthy of man, more appropriate to animals, and, of course, a delight to the demons.

The ancient conflicts that the Church faced were, in fact, over belief systems. Frequently they arose from an improper use of reason, either through a self-reliant trust in one’s own speculative powers or through an arrogant rejection of instruction and correction by the Church. As we know, in the sorcerer Cyprian, the Church confronted one of the pre-eminent masters of the pagan spiritual arts, a man who had dedicated himself to what he thought was the highest power in the universe. And it was the humiliation of that power by the humble and pure maiden Justina that crumbled the foundations of Cyprian’s “spiritual universe” and opened for him the doors of repentance and enlightenment.

While His Eminence assuredly gave such belief systems no credit, he still maintained that these ancient heresies were in some way more elevated than what we see in modern atheism, which categorically rejects what lies beyond the human senses. The former was often informed by diligent reasoning, reflection, and practice, and almost universally took God (or a mistaken notion of a supreme being) as the starting place for any system of thought and code of ethics, laboring, despite fatal errors, to reach a universal truth. Our contemporary atheism, on the other hand, takes man as the starting and the end point for any discussion. As a consequence, truth is no longer honored as an absolute, worthy of pursuit. It is trivialized as subjective and even arbitrary. The same holds for morality. Without a God Who is Truth Himself and holds man accountable, in our modern era everything is possible and, increasingly, permissible. Man, His Eminence said, has thrown away his rationality,

which originally distinguished him from the animals. He now lives just like the animals, bringing on himself the reproach of his wise forebears, wallowing in an “unexamined life that is not worth living.”

Elaborating on the demonic victory apparent in contemporary life, His Eminence invoked a wise judge who had once confided to him that, after all his years of service in a court of law, he had come to the demoralizing conclusion that all of the conflict he had seen in his courtroom was motivated either by money, sex, or revenge. It is a stark and sad commentary. But if one observes our culture carefully, it is hard to argue otherwise.

Today, all peoples clamor for money, hoarding more than they could ever rightly need and without the least concern for the poor. As our youth consider their vocations, the first concern is almost always their salary, which everyone treats as the measure of success. Rarely does one hear anyone say that a meaningful life is the first concern or that it is enough to be able to provide for one’s needs.

Similarly, carnality is touted as the essence of human relationships. Youth indiscriminately engage in intimate relations, with multiple partners and no regard for fidelity, let alone the sanctity of marital bonds. In America, the current generation is defined by the “hookup culture,” meaning that every social encounter is expected to progress swiftly to an indiscriminate carnal relationship without emotional or spiritual consequences, to be repeated with new partners as often as possible.

And conflicts swirl through every facet of our culture. Nothing can be discussed without strife and a struggle to defeat and humiliate one’s opponent. Politics, religion, history, sports, and even the so-called “hard sciences” are full of personal or ideological confrontations, with each side demonizing its opponents and not resting until it has been thoroughly defeated, humiliated, and banished.

Considering these problems and the background of the banishment of God from any discussion or consideration, it was His Eminence’s estimation that our whole society was in need of exorcism. And therefore it was, for him, a great mercy of God that this Monastery and place of refuge should have been established and our Saints, the illustrious Hieromartyr Cyprian and Virgin-Martyr Justina should, according to the Providence of our Lord, be made known and glorified in precisely these dark times. Their intercessions and powerful exorcism are needed not just for those openly tormented by demonic possession, but for the

whole of humanity, which has lost all reason and any thought for its Creator.

If we will be honest, it is not just the atheists who are in need of exorcism and deliverance from evil. We too, though we call ourselves Christian and Orthodox, are under the spell of the dark powers at work in our world.

We hoard our money and possessions, and begrudge anything asked of us by the Church or our neighbor. If we see someone suffering in poverty, we instantly conjure up “evil surmisings” about what kind of sluggards or sinners they must be to suffer such deprivation, justifying, thereby, our stinginess.

We look on one another with “the lust of the eyes,” succumbing to fornication and adultery in our hearts. If our children want to dedicate themselves to a life of purity at a monastery, we consider it a fate worse than death.

And we make a mockery of our Lord’s teachings about love, loving those who love us, just as do the sinners, but being fully content to preserve our disdain or estrangement from our enemies.

About this last matter, the struggle to love our enemies, His Eminence never slackened his admonitions. He noted that Saint Justina saved her would-be enemies, Aglaïdas and the sorcerer Cyprian, by her perseverance in purity and prayer. Moreover, her victory over Satan was accomplished not only by her preservation of her purity, but also by her love and forgiveness for her enemies, who were redeemed from Satan’s clutches through her virtue.

How, then, are we to be exorcised of this world’s pervasive evils? We must use our God-given faculties, and in particular our reason and conscience, as they were intended, to recognize truth and take appropriate action. In the Church’s language, this means repentance and return, like the prodigal son who “came to himself” and returned to his father, or like Saint Cyprian, who gathered his books and magical implements and brought them to the Church to be burned.

It is not enough, then, for us simply to understand the diabolical folly of our generation. Many do so, but resign themselves to following the crowd. This is, again, atheistic foolishness that defies our God-given reason and returns us to an unworthy, animal-like existence. We have no justification for despair over the difficulty of this task. Many of the heroes of our faith endured years of torture and solitary imprisonment,

finding, nevertheless, Divine assistance and consolation in their struggle. We, by contrast, have strong communities of support and sacred refuges, like this Monastery, where the Grace of our Saints is palpable and quick to come to our aid.

So let us hearken to the teachings of the Church, the counsel of our spiritual Fathers, and the promptings of our conscience, and make the effort to do as they say. Resist the Devil, says the Apostle James, and he will flee you. With our small efforts, cloaked in the humble recognition of our frailty and prayerful invocation of our Saints' assistance, our Lord will be quick to send His Grace to strengthen us and help us bear fruits worthy of repentance.

Most of all, let us be patient and meek in our afflictions. With our Lord's meticulous attention to the needs of every soul, His Eminence noted that Providence ordains just the right time for each of us to suffer reproaches, slanders, and trials, often at the hands of others. These are meant for a cleansing of the passions of our souls. Moreover, if we will accept these chastisements as deserved and bear them with gratitude, they will prepare crowns for us and even win our brothers.

On the other hand, if we chose to grumble or, God forbid, fight with our would-be enemies, we please no one but the Devil himself. Such a course puts us in defiance of our Lord's own course in this world, where He humbled and emptied Himself into our humanity, even to the point of unjust suffering and death. If we defy that example, do we really have the right to call ourselves "Christian"? Do we not, in fact, consign ourselves to the crowd of God-deniers around us, the contemporary atheists who chart their course simply by base passions and chafe, rebel, and go to war with the smallest provocation?

A wise man once said war is easy, peace is difficult.

Tru Christian peace does indeed require much of us. As the Apostle notes, "wars and fightings" spring from the lusts that war in our members. We must, therefore, persevere in prayer, beseeching our Lord and the Saints for the uprooting of our passions, as did the pure Virgin-Martyr Justina.

Finally, we must humble and submit ourselves to one another. His Eminence taught us that, in the throes of strife, we must remind ourselves that what is right is not always what is good. To accept blame or to let someone else prevail in an argument—as we say, to "swallow" a difficult situation—may hurt our pride a little. But the establishment of

peace in our household, with our neighbor, or in our community is far more valuable and pleasing to our Lord and surely follows the path of the peacemakers who were blessed by our Lord.

May our beloved and rightly-honored Saints Cyprian and Justina deliver each and every one of us from the spirit possessing and tormenting this “evil generation.” May they renew an upright and reasonable spirit within us, helping us to repent and to return to the path our Lord Himself walked and set before us, that we might heed His counsel and resist the passionate promptings of our fallen nature. And so let us meekly forbear and submit to one another, preserving peace and harmony, and fleeing strife. In sacrificial love for our brother, whether he be friend of foe, let us be merciful.

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Once again, I wish His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian and the Brotherhood many years and the continued protection and assistance of their and our Patrons, Saints Cyprian and Justina. And may our Saints bless all of you who have kept the vigil with us, granting peace to your homes and every good thing to your loved ones. Many Years!

And forgive me.