

THE THOUGHTS OF MY HEART

Obama and Abortions

BY Fr. Seraphim Majmudar, November 2008.

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My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Christ is in our midst! He is and ever shall be!

I hope you and your families are well during this season of the Nativity Fast. I am writing to you simply to share the thoughts of my heart, which has been heavy of late. Please forgive these unsolicited remarks-I offer them with humility and love, trusting that you will receive them with the same.

For some years now, I have had a growing sense that our common enemy, the devil, has sharpened his attacks against us, the faithful in Christ. I have felt that he has done more than just attack each of us in the midst of our own struggles and passions; he has been trying to tear us away from the very basis of our Faith: The eternal value of human life. It seems that he and his demons have been doing this on a massive scale, attempting to encompass the entire Church, if that were possible.

This feeling became very powerful during my recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was there, in an apartment overlooking the Sea of Galilee, that I watched the results of the US national elections. I am sorry to say that as I took a walk along the shore, I literally felt sick in my bones. This is not because I hate Mr. Obama (I don't) or because I am a partisan Republican (I am not). It is because it seemed that I just watched millions of Americans say definitively by their votes on national, state and local levels-that the legalized slaughter of four thousand Americans every day

(commonly called "abortion") was simply "one issue among many"; that there are just as many important issues such as the Iraq war, the economy, health care, foreign policy and the environment-and to vote for otherwise undesirable candidates simply because they claim to be "Pro-Life" is foolish, "single-issue" voting.

Please understand that I am not trying to be political. Indeed, there is nothing "political" whatsoever about the legalized slaughter of millions of

innocent children! It has nothing to do with Democrat, Republican, Liberal or Conservative-but that is how the demons want us to think about it. They want us to think that the most serious spiritual crisis of our generation is simply "one issue among many." It is, in my poor and inexperienced opinion, a massive deception on a scale that perhaps only saints could begin to understand.

On the Mount of Temptation, the devil offered the entire world to Christ if He would only worship him. We might ask: why didn't He? Imagine if Christ had said "Yes, I will worship you", then the entire world would have been (presumably) under Christ's benevolent rule. He could have ended suffering, poverty and war. All of this in exchange for a simple act of worship? It seems that the Lord could have brought about a "greater good" and yet did not.

All simply to avoid worshiping the devil? How would that matter in comparison to ending so much misery? The Gospel's answer is simple: that the real enemy of mankind is death, not suffering. If Christ had brought about "global hope" by worshiping Satan, what would have changed? Nothing! Man's greatest fear is death, and that would have remained as strong as ever. How nice can an earthly paradise be if we know that death awaits each one of us? The devil, in his arrogance, thought that Christ could be deceived, so he tempted Him with the same kind of Utilitarianism that he is bringing about in our time: ie., "let's work together to bring about the most good for the most people." The danger with this approach is that it is abstract: "good" is an abstraction, and it is measured statistically-not personally. The utilitarian universe is cold, impersonal and "just," because "goodness" is an idea, and not a Person.

But the root of our Gospel faith is the Life of Persons: the Life of the Father, the Life of the Son, and the Life of the Holy Spirit. Everything derives from that: The holy fathers of the Seven Councils did not argue about health care or foreign policy-they defended the truth about the Persons of the Holy Trinity. We might be tempted to think that they wasted their time, wondering why they spent so much energy on seemingly arcane theological fineries, when they should have been in their own towns, helping people and "doing good."

But this is precisely the point: How does good come about in the world? The holy fathers wanted nothing else than the Good. They would not settle for an earthly kind of "good," because "only one is Good: that is God." On the Mount of Temptation, Christ knew that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights," and not through shrewd government policy, or even "people getting together for good." Goodness comes into the world when Christ God comes into the world: It is not an abstraction, it is a Person, the Beloved of the Father. This is the teaching of the holy fathers, and they were willing to suffer torture and death to preserve it.

The Lord said that the "sons of this age are more shrewd than the sons of light," and I fear that we are being tempted to think that we can bring

goodness into the world through shrewdness, and not by grace.

Again: what is our starting point? It is the Person of Jesus Christ, the source of Life and every goodness. We are Orthodox Christians because we believe that goodness is a gift, that life comes into the world through our loving relationship with Jesus Christ. He sends the Comforter to His people, the New Israel. He does not sit back in Heaven and wonder if we will somehow figure out how to do good in this world. He fills real persons with the Holy Spirit, and those real persons bring life to the world-real persons like St. Silouan, who carried the burden of the entire world's pain in his soul, and exchanged it for life and mercy from the Holy Spirit. This is how to bring goodness into the world!

The Lord creates every child to do the same thing St. Silouan did. So every time one of them is murdered, the world is deprived of an infinite blessing from God. What if Christ had been aborted? Or Panagia? Or St. Silouan?

The devil wishes to steal our inheritance in Christ by convincing us that it is foolish or irresponsible to "reduce" things to a single issue like this. But what would St. Paul say right now? Would he say, "Beloved brethren: Abortion is a fact; you're not going to change it simply by changing the law. Work towards changing the underlying societal factors, and hope that you can reduce the overall number of abortions through smart and realistic policy."? Never!

Would St. John Chrysostom say, "Yes, abortion is bad, but there are lots of other problems in the world. In fact, most of those children would lead miserable lives of neglect, abuse and poverty; for them, it's probably better to get it over with quickly anyway." Impossible!

Thinking like this is a direct denial of God's goodness in creating every human being-because it is a denial of hope, which can only be found in Jesus Christ. And this is what it is all about, isn't it? It is a question about hope: in my sorrow, in the world's misery, is there really reason to hope? We think it over: Maybe it is better not to have lived-and therefore, not suffered-than to have lived and suffered? But by professing faith in Christ, we have the audacity to hope that the answer is yes. I say it again: By our faith in Christ, we make the outrageous claim that life-no matter how "horrible"-is worth living.

As St. Paul already observed, to the unbelievers, this is foolishness! Why? Because the world in its shrewd hopelessness cannot believe this. Ultimately, the world is simply trying to make the best of what it sees as an inherently meaningless situation. But if nothing is inherently meaningful, nothing can be inherently precious. "Good"-the abstraction-becomes simply that which is agreed upon as good. That essentially means, to use Joseph Campbell's phrase, "Follow your bliss". The legal corollary is to make sure that your bliss doesn't interfere in anyone else's bliss. Hence, we cannot interfere with a woman's right to her own bliss, because it is her body, and therefore her bliss.

But we of the household of Faith say, "No! Life is inherently precious, because Jesus Christ is Life, and the Light of men. He dwelt in the

Virgin's womb for nine months" - and therefore, we cannot deliberately take the life of a person that Jesus Christ created. He is the Lord of Life and Death, and He alone. Some may say that we cannot attempt to "legislate morality", even if we are personally Pro-Life. But how is protecting innocent children from murder "legislating morality"? If four thousand American schoolchildren were being abducted and murdered every day, would it be "legislating morality" to try to stop it? Moreover, if you or I had our own child murdered, would we be comforted being told "well, we are succeeding in diminishing the overall child murder trend nationwide.

Statistically, "the pattern is approaching positive results." None of us would. Why? Because we know instinctively that life is not about statistics-it is about real, unique and living persons, just as our faith is not abstract, but about Real, Living Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Others may feel that trying to change the law won't do any good. But what is the law? It is, ultimately, a set of promises to God. Laws are born of our freedom: In our freedom, we make laws, and thereby tell the Lord, "These are the ways in which we bind ourselves freely to Thy precepts, O Lord." Remember Psalm II8: I will run the way o/thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart. (Pss II8:32).

Law is an expression of our freedom as persons, and is a direct expression of the measure with which we wish to be measured. We may not be able to stop wars, famines or disease-indeed, the Lord said these things would remain until His Second Coming-but God did give us the freedom to choose our own laws. Why? Because by freely ordering our earthly laws according to God's Law, we freely love God. Without freedom, there is no love. If we allow laws that destroy innocent human beings, then we are freely hardening our hearts before God. We cannot serve God and mammon. And on the Day of Judgment, what will really matter? The only thing that will matter is that we have soft hearts before Christ-that He knew us because we freely put our hope in Him, and not in the sons of men.

This is why the issue of abortion is so central: It is always presented, even by those of the Pro-Death position, as a question of freedom. Cain in his freedom killed his brother Abel; but did freedom give birth to love? No! Freedom gave birth to death. So the supposed "freedom of choice" is anything but true freedom. It is slavery to death disguised as freedom.

The problem, for many, is the "hiddenness" of the child in the womb. Is it a person? Is it just a ball of tissue? When does the soul enter it? But it is precisely this hiddenness that gives us the freedom to love these children, and to love the Lord who made them. Inside the hiddenness lies the freedom. We don't hear their silent screams, but we defend them anyway. By loving them without sensing them, we fulfill the Lord's word to Thomas: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.

The great irony now is that we are faced with the "Freedom of Choice Act-FOCA", which President-elect Obama has pledged, on record, to sign

into law. I leave it to you to read about FOCA and its potentially devastating spiritual consequences. I beg each and everyone of you to do whatever you can to stop this monstrous attempt on the lives of thousands of innocent children.

I also ask you to commit to one concrete way you can help defend His innocent ones: Whether in the effort to block FOCA or other legislative efforts; to volunteer at a local pregnancy help center and offer hands-on kindness and love to real women in crisis; to pray for and console the women who have already aborted children; to speak up in your parishes and communities ("Blessed are those who so do and so teach... "); to donate money and time in whatever way possible; to offer support to families you know who have adopted children-and recognize them to be the heroes that they are. Most of all, I ask every one of you to search your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into His Truth, and to protect you from the deception of the evil one.

If every Orthodox Christian in the United States took this approach, is it not certain that God would fill our hearts-and purses-with everything we need to accomplish it? The Lord already said yes to this: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you."

Beloved brothers and sisters, let us stand firm for the Gospel in these dangerous times! Glory to Jesus Christ, our Hope and our Life!

Forgive me a sinner,

Unworthy Priest Seraphim Majmudar, Silikou, Cyprus.



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