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## St. Nicholai of Žiča on Socio–Political Topics

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**Abstract:** The advice of St. Bishop Nicholai of Ohrid and Žiča (1881–1956), written nearly 100 years ago rings evermore true as it did during that period of history. With all the troubling current events in our world, we need a reference point to focus both our perspective and response to them.

**Key words:** Bishop Nicholai Velimirovich (1881–1956), *Prologue of Ohrid*, Anarchy, Tyranny, Apostasy, Conquest, Freedom and Slavery, Good Citizens, Leaders, Peace, Ruling Over Others, Society.

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In our day and age, the advice of St. Nicholai of Žiča written nearly 100 years ago rings evermore true as they did during that period of history. With all the troubling current events in our world, we need a reference point to focus both our perspective and response to them. The sage wisdom and keen spiritual insight of St. Nicholai has been both a comfort and an inspiration to me over the years.

In compiling for myself, a topical index of subjects contained in the *Prologue of Ohrid*, the following categories appear under the general heading of Socio-political: (*In alphabetical order*) Anarchy and Tyranny, Apostasy, Conquest, Freedom

and Slavery, Good Citizens, Leaders, Peace, Ruling Over Others, Society, and The Will of the People.

Since the *Prologue* has been presented in multiple languages, and in multiple editions, the references will simply be given according to the dates of the calendar year and whether the reference may be found in the Reflection or the Homily of that day.<sup>1</sup>

May we be comforted, inspired, enlightened, and warned by these prophetic words of Bishop St. Nicholai.

## **On Anarchy and Tyranny**

We see much today in terms of mob rule, with rioting, looting, random vandalism, protests, and the like. Many world leaders are accused of being tyrants by their detractors. In this homily, St. Nicholai helps us to focus our definitions in terms of anarchy as mob rule and tyranny as one ruling over many by force and offers the practice of catholicity and mutual obedience as the solutions to such extremes.

### **July 11, Homily: About obedience and humility**

“Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves, unto the elder. Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility” (1 Peter 5:5).

Here is the principle of the true catholicity of Orthodoxy! It is based on the unconditional obedience of the younger toward the elders and on reciprocal obedience of equals among themselves, and on the humility of both the elders and the younger. Humility is a good word but better still is the word humbleness and the best word is “humble-mindedness”: in essence, humble-mindedness corresponds exactly to the Greek word which the apostle used in his epistle and humble-mindedness signifies lowly thoughts about oneself and higher thoughts about God and con-

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<sup>1</sup> With a view to the possibility of some future critical study, in the bibliography at the end of this review, we will add references to several editions of the *Prologue of Ohrid* in Serbian and English.

stant admission of one's helplessness, one's ignorance, one's viciousness, one's unworthiness and constant recognition of God's power, God's wisdom, God's mercy and God's dignity.

God is the only King of mankind. That is why God opposed the wishes of the Israelites that a king be appointed for them from among the people. God rules and men serve God. Those who rule and those who submit are equally the servants of God. When it is known and recognized that God is King and that all men are servants of God then, by this, the foundation of catholicity is established, the foundation of the angelic society. Upon this foundation then is built the House of God, the angelic society, with the help of the obedience of the younger toward the elders and on reciprocal obedience of peers among themselves and upon the humble-mindedness of all. In this manner, two terrible evils are avoided in the world: tyranny, i.e., one ruling over many by force, and anarchy, i.e., mob rule, thereby avoiding mono-tyranny or poli-tyranny.

The principle of catholicity is an organic principle, i.e., the principle of life. This is the principle of mutual service, mutual help and mutual love. Brethren, may God endow us with wisdom to have recourse toward this saving principle in our lives.

Lord Jesus, obedient and humble Lover of Mankind, implant and confirm in us obedience to Your law and mutual obedience out of love and humble-mindedness toward Your unutterable power and wisdom. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

In this reflection, St. Nikolai observes that a weak man usually protects himself by hypocrisy and the strong man protects himself by tyranny.

**August 01, Reflection:**

A weak man usually protects himself by hypocrisy and the strong man protects himself by tyranny. That no man can defend his life before God either by hypocrisy or by tyranny is clearly shown to us by the exam-

ple of the holy elder Eleazar and King Antiochus. When the tyrannical king brought Eleazar to trial and compelled him to eat pork if he desired to save his life, Eleazar adamantly rejected that. Then some of Eleazar's friends handed him a piece of other meat, not swine's meat, begging him to eat that in the presence of the king and the people in order to safeguard both his life and his conscience. The elder refused this offer saying to his friends: "Hypocrisy is not becoming to me, an old man, to the scandal of many young people." The elder Eleazar was slain in the body, but he saved his soul.

The punishment of God came upon the tyrannical King Antiochus while he was still living. A dreadful disease from within overcame him and his body swarmed with worms and the stench from his body spread afar. In his despair, the king remembered the shedding of the innocent blood of thousands and thousands of human beings who, by his order, were unmercifully murdered and frightened of God, he began to confess the one God whom, before that, he persecuted by persecuting His faithful ones. However, heavenly mercy did not manifest itself on him.

## **On Apostasy**

In this homily, St. Nicholai warns that whenever the faithful alienate themselves from God, God weaves a whip from the unbelievers to bring the believers to their senses.

**May 13, Homily: About how God uses the unbelievers in order to punish the believers**

"Nebuchadrezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant" (Jeremiah 25:9).

Is not this a difficult saying? Who can be fed by it? The pagan king, the idolatrous king, the Lord call him His servant. If the servant of God is one who knows the True God and who adheres to the law of God, how then can one be a servant of God who does not know the True God and who does not adhere to the law of God? Truly, the true servant of God

is he who knows the True God and who keeps the law of God but when he, to whom God has given the knowledge about Himself and His law, perverts knowing into unknowing and law into lawlessness, then God takes as His servant that ignorant one so as to punish the apostates. For, an apostate from god is worse than a pagan and an apostate from the law of God is lower than an idolater by birth.

Therefore, when Israel, as the ancient Church of God, alienated itself from God and the law of God, God chose Nebuchadrezzar for His servant to punish Israel, the Apostate.

Therefore, when the Christian peoples in Asia and Africa through numerous heresies alienated themselves from God, God took as His servant the Arabs to punish Christians in order to bring them to their senses.

And when the Christian peoples in the Balkans alienated themselves from God and God's law, God invited the Turks as His servants to punish the apostates that by punishment to bring them to their senses.

Whenever the faithful alienate themselves from God, God weaves a whip from the unbelievers to bring the believers to their senses. And, as the faithful consciously and willingly turn away from God, so the unbelievers unconsciously and unwillingly become servants of God; the whip of God.

But God takes the unbelievers only temporarily in His service against the believers. For the land of Nebuchadrezzar, the same Lord says, He will visit it for its lawlessness and “make it perpetual desolations” (Jeremiah 25:12), then will a servant against a servant be found? For God did not take the Babylonians for a servant because of their goodness and faith, rather because of Israel's wickedness and unbelief.

O Righteous Lord, help us by Your Spirit Most-high, to always adhere to You, the One, True God and Your own saving law. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

In this homily, St. Nicholai recalls the apostasy of Jerusalem at the time of Christ, again warning that when believers fall away from the Faith: they become worse than the unbelievers who never knew the true faith.

**August 19, Homily: About the power of the Lord and the weakness of idols**

“Behold, the Lord rideth upon a light cloud and shall come into Egypt: And the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence” (Isaiah 19:1).

Fleeing from King Herod, the “Pharaoh” of Jerusalem, the Lord came to Egypt. The true Israel is not reckoned according to the place, but according to the spirit and deeds. At the time of the birth of the Lord, greater evil [Herod] reigned in Jerusalem than had ever reigned in the Egypt of the Pharaohs—as it often happens when believers fall away from the Faith: they become worse than the unbelievers who never knew the true Faith. Such is the case in our days, with the rulers in Russia who apostatized from Christ. [This was written in 1928 — Ed.] At that time, Egypt was a kinder and more hospitable place for the Savior of the world than was Jerusalem. Compare the words of the prophet with the words of the angel in Righteous Joseph’s dream: Arise, and take the young Child and His mother and flee into Egypt (Matthew 2:13), and immediately you will be convinced that the words of Isaiah do not refer to anyone other than Christ the Lord. You will be convinced of this even more when you hear the words of the other prophet who says: Out of Egypt I called My son (Hosea 11: 1).

What does “a light cloud,” on which He [the Lord] will come to Egypt, signify? This signifies the body of the Lord, in which He clothed His divinity, for the body of man is as a dense cloud in which the soul resides. Therefore, this is the prophetic vision of the Incarnate Lord. Some interpreters also think that “a light cloud” signifies the Most-pure Mother of God who, by long fasting and prayer and other asceticism, made her body as light as a cloud. The body of the Theotokos was “light as a cloud” especially because of her overcoming of the passions that weigh down the human body.

O All-merciful Lord, Who desires salvation for all mankind, and does not look to see who is a Jew and who is an Egyptian: save and have mercy on us, for we continuously hope in Your Name. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

## Conquest

In this homily, St. Nicolai reminds us that Christ conquered the world and the Christian Faith is the ultimate conquest over the fallenness and corruption of this age.

### January 15, Homily on the victorious faith

“And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (I John 5:4).

Christ the Lord conquered the world. That, brethren, is also our victory. The apostles conquered the world and that is our victory. The saints, virgins and martyrs conquered the world and that is our victory. Brethren, there is nothing more powerful in the world than the Christian Faith. The swords that struck this Faith became blunt and broken, but the Faith remained. The kings who fought against this Faith were smothered under the anathema of their evildoings. The kingdoms that waged war against this Faith have been destroyed. The towns that rejected this Faith lay demolished in their ruins. The heretics who corrupted this Faith perished in soul and body, and under anathema they departed from this world, but this Faith remained.

Brethren, when the world pursues us with its temptations—the temptation of external beauty, the temptation of riches, the temptation of pleasure, the temptation of transient glory—with what shall we resist and by what shall we be victorious, if not by this Faith? In truth, we prevail by nothing except by this invincible Faith, which knows of something greater than all the wealth of this world.

When all the temptations of this world reveal the opposite side of their faces—when beauty turns into ugliness, health into sickness, riches into poverty, glory into dishonor, authority into humiliation, and all-blossoming physical life into filth and stench—by what shall we overcome this grief, this decay, this filth and stench, and preserve ourselves from despair, if not by this Faith? In truth, by nothing except this invincible Faith, which teaches us eternal and unchangeable values in the Kingdom of Christ.

When death shows its destructive power over our neighbors, over our relatives and our families, over our flowers, over our crops, over the works of our hands, and when it turns its irresistible teeth even on us—by what shall we conquer the fear of death, and by what shall we unlock the doors of life, stronger than death, if not by this Faith? In truth, by nothing except this invincible Faith, which knows about the resurrection and life without death.

O Lord Jesus, Conqueror of the world, help us also to conquer the world by our faith in Thee. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

## **Freedom and Slavery**

In this homily, St. Nicholai turns the worldly definitions of freedom and slavery on their heels and points us to true freedom in Christ.

### **January 16, Homily on how we are all free only if we are slaves of Christ**

“For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise, also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant (I Corinthians 7:22).

The great news that Christianity daily announces to the world is that a thing is evaluated at its full value not according to its external appearance, but by its essence. Evaluate things not according to their color and



shape but according to their meaning. Evaluate a man not by his position and property but by his heart—in which his feelings, his reason and his will are united.<sup>2</sup>

According to this (which is always a new teaching for the world), he who is outwardly enslaved is not a slave, and he who possesses outward physical freedom is not free. According to worldly understanding, a slave is one who enjoys the world the least, and a free man is one who enjoys the world the most. According to Christian understanding, a slave is one who enjoys the least from the living Christ, while a free man is one who enjoys the most from the living Christ.

Further, according to worldly understanding, a slave is one who carries out his own will less frequently and the will of others more frequently, while a free man is one who carries out his own will more often and the will of others less often. However, according to Christian understanding, a slave is one who carries out his own will more often and the will of God less often, while a free man is one who carries out the will of God more frequently and his own will less frequently. To be a slave of the Lord is the only true and worthy freedom of man—and to be a slave to the world and to one's self, to sin and vice, is the only fatal slavery. A man might think of kings on their thrones: are there any men on earth more free? Yet, many kings were the most base and the most unworthy slaves of the earth. Of shackled Christians in the dungeons, a man might think: are there any slaves on earth more miserable? However, the Christian martyrs in the prisons felt like free men, and they were filled with spiritual joy! They chanted Psalms and raised up prayers of gratitude to God. Freedom that is tied to grief and sorrow is not freedom, but slavery. Only freedom in Christ is tied to unspeakable joy. Lasting joy is the mark of true freedom.

O Lord Jesus, the only Good Lord, Who grantest us freedom when Thou bindest us more strongly to Thyself, make us Thy slaves as soon as possi-

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<sup>2</sup> This is likely an indirect reference to the human **heart** (feelings), **mind** (reason), and **will**, which is a common theme in St. Nikolai's writings.

ble, that we would cease to be slaves of cruel and unmerciful masters. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

In the following homily, St. Nicholai describes how the mind and freedom are inseparable, observing that when the mind loses its absolute guiding power over the soul, then there arises in the soul many disparate guiding principles—which bring about confusion, chaos and destruction. In addition, he alludes to the Prayer of the Office of the 6<sup>th</sup> Hour, encouraging us to nail our minds to Christ as to a cross in order not to lose or abuse our God-given freedom.

**July 05, Homily: About sobriety of mind**

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13).

Brethren, the mind is the guide of the soul and adviser to the soul. God gave the animals only a soul [an irrational soul], and that is why He did not give them freedom but guides them with His mind. God gave man a soul [a rational soul] and a mind—and with the mind, freedom. The mind and freedom are inseparable. Thus, all the tales of certain philosophers—concerning how man truly has a mind but does not possess freedom—are vain. It is clear from daily experience that freedom is an inseparable companion of the mind. Yet, as man does not possess a perfect mind, so he does not possess perfect freedom, but stands under the direction and guidance of God. God alone has a perfect mind and perfect freedom. We, therefore, are only the “image and likeness” of the mind and the freedom of God. We possess a mind sufficient to know the will of God and enough freedom to be able to decide to fulfill the will of God. When the mind loses its absolute guiding power over the soul, then there arises in the soul many disparate guiding principles—which bring about confusion, chaos and destruction.

What is the meaning of the apostle's words: Gird up the loins of your mind and be sober? They mean: "Do not allow your mind to fantasize but concentrate the mind on contemplating the Law of God." They also mean: "Do not allow your mind to abuse your God-given freedom, by plunging the soul into slavery to the flesh, the world and the devil; but nail the mind to Christ as to a cross, so that your soul may resurrect in Christ." Further, they mean: "Close your mind off from all self-willed imaginations, by which it becomes intoxicated and falls prey to the devil; and keep the mind girded in the narrowness of your heart, where it will become sober through prayer, and pure through tears." It means, in essence: "Train your mind not to misuse your freedom by reviling the Living and Merciful God and by deadening you soul through the passions."

O Lord Jesus, Mind of God and Wisdom of God, help us to gird our minds, that we may think only of what is from You and what is Yours—that our minds may lead our souls soberly to salvation. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

We usually think of slavery as coming only from an external force motivated by greed and gluttony. In light of the dreadful judgement, however, St. Nikolai warns against vain extravagance, spiritual nothingness, and wayward women, as the main causes for slavery, bondage, and the destruction of the State.

**August 11, Homily: About how ugliness comes with sin**

"Instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness ...and burning instead of beauty" (Isaiah 3:24).

This is the word about extravagant and wayward women, about the daughters of Zion who have become haughty and "walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go and making a tinkling with their feet" (Isaiah 3:16). What was it that made the Hebrew women proud? Was it virtue? Virtue never made anyone proud for, in fact, virtue is a cure against pride. Was it the strength of a

people and the stability of the State? No, on the contrary, the prophet exactly foretells the imminent bondage of the people and the destruction of the State.

And, as one of the main causes for slavery and destruction, the prophet cites vain extravagance, spiritual nothingness and wayward women. What, therefore, made them so proud and haughty? Ornaments and embroideries stranded beads and necklaces, trinkets and hairpins, garters and girdles, perfumes and rings, quivers and mirrors. Behold, this is what made them proud and haughty! Exactly, all of this is an expression of their ignorant pride but the true cause of their pride is spiritual nothingness. From spiritual nothingness comes pride and that external melange [mixture] of colors which women drape over their bodies is only an obvious manifestation of their ignorant pride. What will become of all this in the end? Stench, disheveledness, baldness and burning. This will occur when the people fall into bondage. As usually happens: first, the spirit is enslaved by the body and then the body is enslaved by an external enemy.

Thus, that will be even then when the inescapable conqueror of our bodies comes death. Sweet smells will not help in the grave, the kingdom of stench. Neither will there be a need for girdles for a naked spine [skeleton]. Neither will braided hair save the skull from baldness nor all the beauty from the black remains of burning. This is the inescapable fate of the most beautiful, the healthiest the wealthiest and the most extravagant women. But this is not the greatest misfortune. The greatest misfortune is that the souls of these women with their stench, disheveledness, baldness, and burning will come before God and before the heavenly hosts of the most beautiful of God's angels and righteous ones. For the stench of the body connotes the stench of the soul from depraved vices; a disheveled body connotes the insatiability of the soul for bodily pleasures; the baldness of the body connotes the baldness of the soul of good works and pure thoughts; burning of the body connotes the burning of the conscience and the mind.

O, how dreadful is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos; dreadful then and even dreadful today; dreadful, because it is true.

O, Lord Holy and All-pure, help the women who make the sign with Your Cross, that they may remember their souls and to cleanse their souls before Your Righteous Judgment, so that their souls, together, with their bodies do not become eternal stench. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

St. Nikolai reminds us that true equality is achieved through baptism, and how the proud and the lowly are all as one — equal in baptism.

**August 23, Homily about John the Precursor [the Forerunner] and how Isaiah prophesied concerning him**

“The voice of him that cries in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3).

When a king wants to visit a certain place, he sends before him in advance his heralds. To an unusual king an unusual herald is appropriate. The herald of Christ the King in the wilderness was Moses; in Jerusalem, the Prophets; in Nazareth, the Archangel; in Bethlehem, the Magi of the East; on the Jordan, John. Not one king in the history of mankind has had such heralds. St. John the Baptist was also as unusual and special as were the other heralds of Christ. He was the voice crying in the two-fold wilderness: in the wilderness of Jordan and in the human wilderness.

Just as the wilderness of Jordan was fruitless and dry, so the wilderness of the human spirit, was unfruitful and dry. John was not able to make the human wilderness green and fruitful, but he cleared and plowed it and, in that way, was preparing the earth and leveled it [the earth] for the great Sower Who, by His coming, brings with Him the seed and the rain to sow the seed of knowledge and the rain of grace from on high to make it green and be fruitful. By repentance, John prepared the way and by baptism in water, made the path straight. The way and the paths these are the souls of men. By repentance, the souls of men were prepared to receive the seed of Christ and by baptism in water to bury that seed deep in the earth of their heart. The proud and the lowly when they are

immersed naked in the water are all as one, equal in their nothingness before the majesty of the All-glorious Christ the Savior: “Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low” (Isaiah 40:4). The word here is not about earthly valleys and hills but of lowly and proud men. As corpses in the grave are all the same before the eyes of a living man, thus all sinners, lowly and proud, slaves and masters are equal before the living God.

Such a wondrous vision was seen by Isaiah, the son of Amos, the prophet of the living God, the one and true God.

O Lord, Heavenly King, to Whom the heavenly hosts worship day and night, look down once again upon our nothingness and because of Your humiliation and passion for us, save us. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

## **Good Citizens**

In this reflection, St. Nicholai asserts that a country receives its value from good citizens. When we reverse this formula, thinking that men exist for the sake of the country, man is basically reduced to a machine whose value is based on production.

### **February 16, Reflection:**

The most important thing in a meadow is grass. In a field, it is wheat. In a garden, it is vegetables. No one boasts about the enclosure of the meadow more than they do the hay in the meadow. Nor does anyone boast more about the shed in the field than they do the wheat in the field. Neither does anyone boast of the ditches more than they do the vegetables in the garden. Why do people boast about their countries; the roads throughout the country; the demarcations and boundaries of a country and cities throughout the country and everything else that is not more important from the enclosures of the meadows, neither the shed in the field, neither the ditches in the garden when it is

compared to the main crop, i.e., with man? Men do not exist for the sake of the country but the country exists for the sake of men. Christ did not come to save countries, but men. A country receives its value from good citizens. And what do evil people receive from a great country? Thorns in a spacious field.

## Leaders

In this homily St. Nikolai reminds us that God used King Nebuchadnezzar to mow down evil among the disobedient Jews, but Christ plucked out evil by the roots.

**May 15, Homily: About the prophesied and actual destruction of the idols of Egypt**

“And the houses of the gods of the Egyptians shall burn with fire” (Jeremiah 43:13).

Who will burn them? “Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon my servant,” said the Lord. This prophecy came true. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Egypt and he destroyed the houses of the false gods by fire; the idols of the Egyptians. He burned them but he did not destroy them forever. For after that came the destruction of Babylon, again according to the prophecy of the holy Prophet Jeremiah and Babylon became and, even until today, remains “heaps, a dwelling place for dragons, an astonishment and a hissing, without an inhabitant” (Jeremiah 51:37).

But, in a tradition which was recorded by St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, there remained the other prophecy of Jeremiah about the final destruction of the idols of Egypt: “All the idols will fall,” says this prophecy, “and all that is made by hand will be destroyed at the time when the Virgin Mother comes here with the young Child born in a cave and placed in a manger.” And this prophecy was preserved by the pagan priests themselves who, from the time of Jeremiah, introduced the custom of depicting the Virgin as she reclines on a bed and her young Child wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.

Nebuchadnezzar, the servant by God's permission, could only have mowed evil but not pluck it out by the roots. But mowed evil, like mowed grass, grows again. When the Lord came to earth, He plucked out evil by the roots. Nebuchadnezzar, the servant, burned the temples and the idols but the temples were also rebuilt and new idols were made for they were not plucked out from the souls of men.

When the Lord came and began His reign in the souls of the Egyptians, the temples and idols fell forever. So it is the same with the disobedient Jews who waged battle against God. Nebuchadnezzar, the servant, had taken them into bondage for seventy years and the offended Lord scattered them throughout the entire world where many of them find themselves in dispersion today even after two-thousand years. This scattering of the Jewish people throughout the entire world was clearly prophesied by Jeremiah. And so, time justified the prophet of God in all his words.

O All-seeing Lord, grant us that we adhere to the words of Your true prophet. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

St. Nicholai observes how apostasy begins with leaders and equates a nation with the body of a man, illustrating how pain and faintheartedness in the head is felt throughout the body. He also observes that it is more difficult for the heart (i.e., the people) to separate from God than the head (leaders).

**August 04, Homily: About the sickness of apostasy (of leaders)**

“The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint” (Isaiah1:5).

Brethren, God, the God of Sabaoth, is the source of health. Go out to the heights of God, you whose heads are troubled by superfluous works and still more by superfluous concerns and be imbued with health which comes from God, only from God. A sick head those are the leaders and the elders of the people and a faint heart- those are the people. The prophet presents an entire people as one body and shows how even with the body of a people, the same thing happens as with body of a man, i.e.,



when one organ of the body is sick, then only that organ is sick, but from the sickness of this one organ, the entire body feels faint.

So, it was with the people of Israel: the head was sick and from a sick head, the heart is faint. The leaders and the elders of Israel abandoned the law of God and followed their senses as their guides. Their sensual mind, tarnished, overly tarnished from the various worldly influences, they took as their direction for a correct life instead of the law of God. They fell into the hopeless darkness of idolatrous errors. And from the insanity of the head, the heart was faint. It is more difficult for the heart to separate from God than it is for the head, it is more difficult for a people to separate from God than their elders, but when the head remains sick for a long time, then the heart is faint and yields. From corrupt leaders, even a people finally stray from the path.

This is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, the true prophet. Indeed, a true vision, both for then and for now, for the people of Israel and for the people of today. Brethren, look at the people whom you know best and you alone judge, is the head sick and is the heart faint?

O Lord, true and just, enlighten the head of every people with Your light and strengthen with Your might the heart of every people, so that our enemies will not rejoice and say that You have abandoned us. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

In this homily St. Nikolai describes the difficulties and dynamics which arise when children lead (oppression) and women rule (disorder.)

**August 10, Homily: About the weakness of sinful ones**

“As for my people, children are their oppressors and women rule over them” (Isaiah 3:12).

All that is of God is most beautiful and most wise. Everything created by God travels obediently along the path for which God has ordained it.

The stars move, animals live and the atmospheric currents conform — all according to the order established by God. Only man, the most intelligent creature, frequently falls into ignorance and leaving the path of God, invents new paths according to his thinking. Because of that, it could happen that instead of the elders, children become leaders and instead of the husbands, wives begin to rule. When children rule oppression reigns and when women rule, disorder usually reigns. When this is permitted by God because this does not occur without the sin of a people and without the permission of God then the people find themselves under punishment for their sins, in the same way as when war comes and the enemy subdues the land, for all oppression is war and every disorder is a punishment for sin.

Just as oppression and disorder are able to reign in a nation so, in the same way, they are able to reign in the soul of man. Immature and impious thoughts represent children and physical sensual theorizing, represent women. When immature and impious thoughts prevail, then they oppress man and drag him from evil to evil as when children judge; and when physical theorizing prevails over the spiritual, masculine wisdom, which is from God, then they rule over man as an evil woman. Under “women”, the prophet understands not only females, but also men with women’s weaknesses.

So that children’s ignorance and women’s whims do not overtake man, or a nation, it is necessary to strictly adhere to the law of God, prescribed by God for men as all created things adhere to the law of God, prescribed for them by God.

O Lord, Creator and our Lawgiver, illumine us and strengthen us. Illumine us with the grace of the Spirit that we may always know Your law and strengthen us with the power of the Spirit to always adhere to Your law. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

In this Reflection, St. Nicholai speaks of a faithful and God-fearing Ruler who is steadfast and has zeal for the sanctity of the Faith.

**September 17, Reflection:**

A faithful and God-fearing ruler is a true blessing for all people. King Vatslav of the Czechs was such a ruler. His zeal for the sanctity of the Faith and his steadfastness remind us of the ancient ascetics. During the day he devoted himself to the affairs of the state, and at night to prayer. In winter, he often walked barefoot to the church for Matins with his old servant Podivoi. He often prepared and baked prosphora himself, especially when he desired to receive Holy Communion.

Because of his care for the Faith, many churches were built, in which daily services to God were celebrated. He especially concerned himself with the poor and needy. He was a lover of peace, yet also a great and fearless hero. When the neighboring Prince Radislav attacked the Czech lands, Vatslav sent him a letter asking why he was waging war. The proud Radislav replied that he wanted Vatslav to cede all the Czech lands, and his throne, to him. Vatslav promptly amassed a large army and confronted his enemy. Yet, pondering on the two powerful armies, he mourned that so many men would die, and sent a message to Radislav: “The quarrel is between you and me; you desire to rule the land of the Czechs and I will not yield. Agree to resolve this matter with a duel between the two of us. Why shed so much blood in a battle between two armies?” Prince Radislav agreed to this duel and was defeated by Vatslav. On his knees, he begged him for forgiveness.

St. Nikolai reminds kings and judges to serve God with fear and rejoicing since their service in the field of this life is the labor of a hireling.

**October 03, Homily on fear and joy in God**

Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice in Him with trembling (Psalm 2:11).

The prophet of God speaks these words to earthly kings and judges, for they are inclined to pride and lasciviousness born out of the power and riches that are given to them. O you kings and judges-cloths of dust be-

neath the feet of God—do not forget that you are only the servants of God, hirelings from today until tomorrow! Of what does a hireling think, digging in the field all day? About the pay that he will receive in the evening. Of what is the hireling proud? Not of his labor, but rather his pay. In what does the hireling rejoice? In his labor, his sweat, or his pay? Naturally, in his pay. O kings and judges, your service in the field of this life is the labor of a hireling. Therefore, with fear serve your Lord, who hired you: for you know not how your Lord will evaluate your labor in the end, or what pay He will render unto you. Serve with great humility, saying to yourself: We are unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10). Whether you will receive a reward or punishment when you go down into the grave and come before the King and Judge is uncertain. Therefore, fear must fill all the days of your service.

Rejoice in Him with trembling. Rejoice with a pure and holy joy, as the angels rejoice in the living and unapproachable God. The joy of Paradise is fragrant with purity and sanctity; but the malicious joy of hades is accompanied by rebellious laughter. Therefore, the joy of Paradise is eternal, while the laughter of hades is turned to rage and groans.

Serve with fear, for the Lord is just; rejoice with trembling, for the Lord is exalted and holy.

O Lord our God—just and exalted, awesome and holy—all of our life on earth is service to Thee and joy in Thee. If we do not serve Thee, we serve our own destruction; and if we do not rejoice in Thee, we rejoice in our own evil works. We worship Thee and pray Thee to help us, that our service be directed by fear of Thee, and that our joy be purified by our trembling before Thee. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

## **Peace**

St. Nicholai speaks of godless peace and exhorts leaders against seeking peace with injustice against justice.

**March 13, Homily: About the reconciliation of the wicked for the sake of evil**

“Herod and Pilate became friends that very day, even though they had been enemies formerly” (St. Luke 23:12).

In His shame and humiliation, the Just Man does good to His enemies. He reconciles them. It is true, in this case, that their reconciliation did not imply mutual cooperation for some good deed but mutual persecution of the Just One. At least the flame of hatred between them was extinguished and died out. That was the reward of the Just One. Pilate and Herod were enemies. On that day, when the Savior was brought for judgment, before the one and the other, they [Pilate and Herod] were reconciled. The Prince of Peace brought peace between the quarreling parties; peace which helped to hew out a cross for Him. But He also comes to be a willing sacrifice for the sins of many.

Even today common enemies make peace among themselves when they find it necessary to attack and condemn the Lord. There are many who kill one another until you mention the Name of the Lord to them. As soon as they hear that Name, they gradually make peace among themselves for the sake of attacking that Holy Name. It is easier for the unjust to tolerate the unjust than it is for them to tolerate the just. It is easier for the unjust to come to an understanding and reconciliation with the unjust than with the just.

Even in some countries, the most quarrelsome parties seek reconciliation among themselves when it is deemed necessary to decide what place should be given to the Lord Jesus Christ in the State, either to render Him the first place, which is befitting to Him, or the last place? To these questions sworn enemies reconcile among themselves in order that our Lord will be given the last place only. So, also, it was with the quarreling parties of Pharisees and Saducees who were reconciled and entered into a partnership against Christ.

Why is it that the Most Pure and the Most Needed had to be awarded the last place? Because, according to their thinking, the first place would

then be reserved for them. The same incentive was there between sworn enemies, the Pharisees and Saducees, when it was deemed necessary to seek to put Christ to death. The same incentive was the occasion that caused the reconciliation between Pilate and Herod when it was deemed necessary to judge that Christ had to be put to death.

O my brethren, let us not ever seek peace with injustice against justice. Rather, let us always seek peace with God, and that with a clear conscience.

O God, help us so that we may always possess such a peace. To You all glory and thanks always. Amen.

St. Nicholai observes the destructive power of peace and prosperity without God. More specifically, he speaks of physical peace without interior peace, and physical feasting without interior prosperity.

**June 03, Homily: About the peace of the simple and the prosperity of the fools**

“For the turning away of the simple shall slay them and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them” (Proverbs 1:32).

Does peace kill? Yes, godless peace kills. Does prosperity destroy? Yes, prosperity without God and contrary to the laws of God can destroy. Simple are they who seek such a peace and they who run after such prosperity are fools. For, in essence, they do not seek peace but rather the sword and are not running after prosperity but rather after destruction. What is the peace of the simple and what is the prosperity of fools? The peace of the simple is physical peace and the prosperity of fools is physical feasting. King Herod wanted such a peace and he was consumed by worms. Jezebel wanted such a prosperity and dogs consumed her.

By what name would we call a man who, in deciding to build a house, thinks that he will place the roof in the air first and afterward erect walls and then lay the foundation of the house? We would call him a simple-

ton and a fool. Much the same are all those who are attempting to establish peace in the world without interior peace and to establish exterior prosperity for men without interior prosperity. The Christian Faith is the only one which builds from the foundation and the foundation is Christ, a firm and indestructible rock. Thus, the Christian Faith for the peace and prosperity of men builds on Christ. An internal, blessed and joyful peace is built on Christ the Lord and on this peace, external peace is built. So also is true and lasting prosperity. It is still better to say that true peace and true prosperity is like a well-built house and external peace and prosperity are like the external adornments of the house. However, if the adornments fall, the house will stand but if the house is destroyed, will the adornments then hang in the air?

O my brethren, the Christian teaching is the only reasonable teaching about peace and prosperity. All else is madness and foolishness. For, how could the servants build a mansion on the estate of the Master without permission of the Master and without His help?

O Lord, the source of eternal true peace and true prosperity, save us from the peace of the simple and the prosperity of fools. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

## **Ruling over Others**

St. Nikolai exhorts kings that inasmuch as a man is elevated by power and authority over people, so much closer should he be to God than the people over whom he is elevated.

### **June 08, Homily: About the King of kings**

“By Me kings reign and princes decree Justice. By Me princes rule and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. I love them that love Me” (Proverbs 8:15-17).

Let not a king think that he rules by his wisdom and power for he will be mocked by the weak and the foolish. Let a ruler not think that he estab-

lishes justice among the people by his intelligence and will, that he not think foolishness, which is even absurd for children. Let princes, rulers and judges not think that they rule according to someone else's will and mercy contrary to God's will and mercy for all those who forget God will be fatally damaged upon the ice on which they are sliding.

'I love them that love Me,' says the Lord. This, the Lord speaks in the first place to the kings, princes and judges of mankind. For, if they love the Lord, they are very dear to the Lord. If they love the Lord, the people over whom they rule and judge win love Him also. And, if the people love the Lord, they will love their kings, princes and judges. Inasmuch as a man is elevated by power and authority over people, so much closer should he be to God than the people over whom he is elevated.

O my brethren, the Lord was crucified on a Cross for us and, by this, He showed His love for us. He Who was crucified for us truly loves us more than he who merely rejoices with us at the table. And yet when we love so many of our friends with us at the table, how then should we not love Him Who, out of love for us, was crucified on the Cross?

O Blessed Lord, open for us our spiritual sight that we may see the entire immeasurable depth of Your love and that we may be inflamed with love toward You! To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

## Society

St. Nicholai applies this verse not only to the Kingdom of God, but also to the principal on which the most prosperous human society is built. He also warns how the Devil can twist these words (word for word) to the destruction of our neighbors.

**January 09, Homily: About the concern for the salvation of our neighbors**

"No one should seek his own advantage, but that of his neighbor" (I Corinthians 10:24).



This is the principle of the saints of God, both now, at one time, always and forever. This is the principle on which society is built. Upon this principle can be established the most perfect, the most God-pleasing and the most prosperous human society. This is the saving principle for every type of difficulty with which contemporary men struggle, struggle without victory and without hope. The holy soul is concerned with where the homeless will spend the night, how the hungry will be fed, how the naked will be clothed. The soul is concerned and prays to God that their neighbors be saved; that their hearts be filled with love toward God; that their minds be directed toward God; that the wicked turn from the path of wickedness; that those wavering in the Faith be strengthened; that those who are strengthened be sustained; that those who have died see the Face of God; that the living be written in the Book of Life in the Kingdom of Light.

Therefore, be careful brethren, how even in like manner, word for word, can sound the destructive and antisocial principle of the devil. This principle of the devil says: no one should look at their own body to preserve it in purity from sin, but rather everyone should look at the bodies of others in order to ruin and to destroy them. That no one should look at his own soul, how to save it, rather everyone should look at the soul of someone else in order to blacken it, to curse it, to impoverish it and to destroy it. Let no one look at his house, in order to build it, and renew it rather let everyone look at the home of another in order to burn it and demolish it. No one should look at his granaries in order to fill them, rather, one should look at the granaries of others in order to steal from them and to empty them. See, brethren, how this principle can be either a principle of good or a principle of evil; a sharp two-edged sword; an angel or Satan. See how this principle in the satanic spirit and form has taken momentum on all sides today!

O Lord, Holy Spirit, Who has released these holy words in the world through the tongue of the apostle of God as bright rays of the sun to illuminate and not to burn us, help us now to fulfill them in the proper heavenly sense to the glory of the Triune God and for the salvation of our souls. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

## Will of the people

St. Nicholai warns that the Lord will not save people against their will reminding us that the principle of salvation is that men voluntarily consent to salvation on the part of God.

### February 16, Homily: About that awesome stone

“Everyone who falls on that stone will be [dashed] smashed to pieces” (St. Luke 20:18).

The Lord Christ is the corner stone. Judas fell on that stone and was smashed. Herod fell on that stone and he was smashed. Julian the Apos-tate fell on that stone and he was smashed. Arius fell on that stone and he was smashed. The deniers and scoffers of Christ fell on that stone and were smashed as clay pots of a potter.

This stone fell on Sodom and Gomorrah and Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. This stone fell on Egypt and Egypt was destroyed. This stone fell on Jerusalem and Jerusalem was destroyed. This stone fell on the Jewish people and the Jewish people were scattered into pieces. This stone fell on many sinful generations and empires and those sinful generations and empires fell apart into dust and ashes.

The Lord forgave sinners seventy times seven but beyond that if sinners remain sinners, will the Lord save them against their will? He will not, for that is not the principle for the salvation of men. The principle of sal-vation is that men voluntarily consent to salvation on the part of God. If men seventy times seven and more do not desire to be saved by God, then God will not save them. Then men will be smashed against that stone around which they cannot pass and are destroyed by that stone, which they have raised to cast far away from themselves. Can it be said that God is unmerciful Who saved the penitent thief on the cross? Can it be said that He is unjust when He handed over the thief to destruction who mocked Him even in the last hour of death?

O Lord Almighty, save us! To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

As a relevant addendum to these passages from the *Prologue of Ohrid*, I would like to conclude this reflection on St. Nikolai's sayings concerning Socio-Political topics with a sobering excerpt from his Holy Week Homily, where St. Nikolai seems to make reference to the fallacy of Marxist Philosophy.

### The Gospel on God Among the Criminals

*(An excerpt from St. Nikolai's Sermon for Great and Holy (Good) Friday, Homilies, Vol. 1)*

The sixth and seventh criminals are those who hang, each on his cross, on Golgotha, one at Christ's right hand and one at His left, as Isaiah the prophet foresaw and foretold: "He was numbered with the transgressors." (Is. 53:12) One of these criminals, even in his death-throes, is blaspheming, but the other is praying. Here are two men in the same predicament: both of them nailed to a cross, both at the point of leaving this world and looking for nothing more from it. But what a great difference! **Here is the answer to all who say: place people in the same material circumstances, give them all the same honor and possessions, and they will all have the same spirit.** One criminal, near his last breath, mocks the Son of God: "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us!" (Luke 23:39), but the other begs the Lord: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." (23:42) The pain of crucifixion kills the one in both body and soul, but although it kills the other's body, it saves his soul. Christ's Cross is a scandal to the one, but salvation to the other.<sup>3</sup>

May we learn from St. Nikolai's wise sayings that it is not impossible to speak to the social and political upheavals of our

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<sup>3</sup> Nikolai Velimirovic, Bishop of Ochrid, *Homilies: A Commentary on the Gospel Readings for Great Feasts and Sundays Throughout the Year. Volume 1: Great Feasts, Lent, Eastertide and Pentecost*, translated by Mother Maria [Rule], introduction by Kallistos (Ware), Bishop of Diokleia (Birmingham, England: Lazarica Press, 1996), 197.

time, and may we also imitate his style of indirect reference to current events, always leading the faithful to draw their perspectives from the Holy Scriptures, from Christ and His Church, leading to the Kingdom of God not of this world.

Through the intercessions of our Holy Father Bishop Nicholai, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us.

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