

MADE PERFECT IN FAITH

A SECOND VOLUME



Protopresbyter James Thornton

CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST
ORTHODOX STUDIES

Made Perfect in Faith

A Second Volume

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**More Sermons on the Lives and Works
of the Holy Church Fathers**

by
Protopresbyter James Thornton



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To my spiritual son Reader Peter Avisov

“A touchstone of true Orthodoxy is the love for Christ’s Saints.”

Hieromonk Seraphim of Platina

About the Author

The Very Reverend Dr. James Thornton serves the Holy Trinity Eastern Orthodox Church in Oxnard, California, a parish of the American Exarchate of the Orthodox Church of Greece, Holy Synod in Resistance. He holds the Diploma and Licentiate in Orthodox Theological Studies from the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, where he is a Research Associate, and a Doctorate in Advanced Pastoral Studies from the San Francisco Theological Seminary. In recognition of his unselfish and dedicated service over the years, Father James was raised to the rank of Protopresbyter by Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna in 2008. He and his wife, Presbytera Elizabeth, live in Southern California.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This second volume of sermons on the lives and works of the Holy Church Fathers was delivered at Holy Trinity Eastern Orthodox Church in Oxnard, California beginning December 14, 2008. They were delivered intermittently, as time allowed, during the following two and a half years. It is my sincere hope that these Lives will inspire those who read them with a renewed fervor for our Orthodox Christian Faith and with the desire to emulate these holy men.

As was the case with the first volume, I have been somewhat expansive in my use of the term “Church Father,” passing beyond the usual conventions to include several men who expressed their Christlikeness in ways other than the written word. I have striven also to include men from both East and West, to demonstrate the catholicity of Orthodoxy.

I wish to thank my wife of more than forty years, Presbyteria Elizabeth, for her patience and kindness during the time this book was being written, and for her many helpful suggestions. I wish to thank my spiritual Father, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna, whose enthusiasm for this project was a major motivation, encouraging me and pushing me towards completion. I wish to thank the Faithful of Holy Trinity Eastern Orthodox Church for their love and attention, which has also been a powerful motivator. My thanks go as well to our Church Starosta, Michael Avisov, and his wife, Vivian Avisov, who have been so wonderfully kind to me, making me an honorary member of their family, and to their son, my faithful friend and loyal spiritual son, Reader Peter Avisov (to whom I have dedicated this book), without whose diligence and support I would fulfill my duties as Rector of Holy Trinity Parish with much greater difficulty. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Paul Golubovs and his wife, Vera Gor, who gifted me with several volumes of patrological works, thus helping me tremendously in completing this book. Finally, I thank the Very Reverend Archimandrite Dr. Akakios, the Reverend Hieromonk Gregory, the Reverend Hieromonk Dr. Pat-

apios, and the other Fathers of the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery for their tireless efforts in proofreading, editing, and arranging the index of this volume.

*Protopresbyter James Thornton
Feast of Saint Glycerie of Romania, 2011
Holy Trinity Eastern Orthodox Church
Oxnard, California*

Sermon I

Saint Dionysios the Areopagite, Bishop of Athens

Five years ago, while serving at the parish of the Protection of the Holy Virgin Mary in Los Angeles, I embarked upon a series of sermons on the Holy Church Fathers in which I began with the life and teachings of the Apostolic Father, Saint Clement of Rome, who lived in the first century, and continued during the following year until the lives and teachings of fifty Holy Church Fathers had been presented. We investigated the lives of such men as Saint Athanasios the Great, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian, Saint John Chrysostomos, Saint Gregory the Dialogist, Saint Photios the Great, passing through time, century after century, until we came to our own time.

Here, we discovered that, even in the twentieth century, God had not forsaken His people and had favored us with numerous great Holy Fathers and Doctors¹ such as Saint John the Wonderworker of San Francisco, Saint Nicholas of Ohrid and Žiča, Saint Justin of Ćelije, and Saint Philaret, Metropolitan of New York, a veritable modern Pillar of Orthodoxy who departed this life only in 1985 and who, I should mention, was particularly fond of this very parish of the Holy Trinity in Oxnard, California. We shed light also on the fact that, during the first millennium, Western Europe too brought forth great Church Fathers, thereby underscoring the true universality of Orthodoxy.

It was the intention, when this series was undertaken, to teach the Orthodox Faith and Orthodox way of life through the medium of the lives and works of these holy men, learning, as we went along,

¹ The word “doctor” is associated in our time most generally with medical practitioners. However, the word is derived from the Latin, *docēre*, which actually means “to teach.” Thus, the highest academic degree is a doctorate. In relation to the Saints the title signifies a great Church Teacher, a Saintly Teacher of the Orthodox Faith.

MADE PERFECT IN FAITH

In this homiliary, Father James Thornton introduces fifty-two of the greatest Fathers of the Orthodox Church. And rightly are these men venerated as *Church* Fathers, for, as Father James demonstrates, they are the very embodiment of Orthodox Christianity as the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: they are *one*, in that together they preserved the unique truth of Christianity with a consensus indicative of “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16); they are *holy*, in that they led exemplary lives of virtue, synergistically participating in the deifying Energies of God; they are *catholic*, in that each in his own time and place manifested the totality of Orthodoxy in its therapeutic wholeness; and they are *Apostolic*, in that they were the historical successors to and the spiritual continuators of the life of discipleship into which the Lord initiated His first followers. Eschewing the dry language of history and the recondite language of theology alike, Father James opts to present his subjects in the pious language of hagiography. He thus renders the Church Fathers immediately accessible to all, challenging us to ask ourselves about them, in our own spiritual lives: “Seest thou how faith wrought with...[their]...works, and by works was faith made perfect?” (St. James 2:22).

Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna



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