

Pastoral Care Concerning Death through the Funeral Service of the Orthodox Church*

By Archim. Cherouvim Veletzas**

Introduction

«βροτοῖς ἅπασι καθθανεῖν ὀφείλεται,
κοῦκ ἔστι θνητῶν ὅστις ἐξέπίσταται
τὴν αὔριον μέλλουσαν εἰ βιώσεται
τὸ τῆς τύχης γὰρ ἀφανὲς οἷ προβήσεται,
κάστ' οὐ διδακτὸν οὐδ' ἀλίσκεται τέχνη»¹.

In this excerpt from Euripides's *Alcestis*, the tragic poet connects death, which is the common fate of all humans, with life, and especially with the present, with today – tomorrow is unknown and unfathomable. Thus, the mystery of death is somehow identified with the mystery of life, and is inextricably linked to the primordial philosophical question: “Who am I? Where do I come from and where am I going?” Even nowadays, the answer to this question remains humanity's unsolvable riddle; it determines the course of all philosophical and religious thought and, consequently, defines the way people live their lives. Modern technology, with its cutting-edge applications in medicine and, even more so, AI, attempts to overcome death and, in a way, make humans immortal, surpassing their biological limits. Although this endeavor

* The present article constitutes a revised version of a paper delivered at the conference organized by the Institute for Studies in Eastern Christianity in New York on 19 December 2022, on the theme: “Death, Dying, and End of Life”.

** Archim. Cherouvim Veletzas holds an M.A. in Christian Archaeology and Art from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and an M.A. in Orthodox Theology from the University of Fribourg (Switzerland).

1. Euripides Ἄλκηστις, vv. 782-786.

overlooks man's second constitutive part, namely the soul, with all that this entails, the spring that moves it concerns its dual nature; for man was created from matter and spirit, and he is destined not to die, but to live eternally. This dual nature of man, which places him both inside and outside the world, within and beyond history, has been a common observation since prehistoric times and has determined the course of various civilizations. And if, ultimately, what the ancient philosopher sought was humankind's well-being («εὖ ζῆν»), resulting in bliss beyond the grave, for Christians it extends to «κατὰ Θεὸν ζῆν», in the light of the Resurrection: «εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς οὐκ ἐγήγερται, κενὸν ἄρα τὸ κήρυγμα ἡμῶν, κενὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν» (“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith”)².

1. The Mystery of Death and Orthodox Theology

As the late Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Christodoulos, notes, “The anticipation of death undoubtedly creates fear in most people. This is true both for those who are expecting it and for those who see it coming, even if it is directed at someone else [...]. Truly, what is the meaning of death? The answers to this question vary, as they depend on people's ideological, religious, ethical, and philosophical positions. There are many who see death as the natural biological end of life, which is the opposite of the latter's beginning and peak [...]. For Christians, of course, it is not the indisputable end of a journey; rather, it is both an end and a beginning. The end of an earthly journey and the starting point of another one, characterized by a different dimension”³.

The venerable Ephrem the Syrian, speaking about this subject, observes that «μέγα καὶ ἄδηλον τὸ τοῦ θανάτου μυστήριον, καὶ οὐδεὶς αὐτὸ διηγήσασθαι δύναται: φορικτὰ καὶ φοβερά, ἅπερ τότε ἡ ψυχὴ ἐπίσταται, ἀλλ' οὐδεὶς ἐξ ἡμῶν ταῦτα ἐπίσταται, εἰ μὴ μόνον οἱ ἐκεῖ προλαβόντες

2. 1 Cor. ιε' 14.

3. Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Christodoulos, *Ἱατρικὰ Ἀνάλεκτα – Ὁμιλίες πρὸς Ἱατρούς*, Holy Metropolis of Kaisariani and Hymmittos Publications, Kaisariani 2009, pp. 180-181.

εἰ μὴ μόνοι οἱ τὴν πείραν αὐτῶν λαβόντες»⁴. Summarizing in a few lines the teaching of Holy Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers, we briefly note that God created all things very good: «καὶ εἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς τὰ πάντα, ὅσα ἐποίησε, καὶ ἰδοὺ καλὰ λίαν»⁵. As the creator of good, it is impossible for him to be the cause of evil – much less of death: «Ὁ Θεὸς θάνατον οὐκ ἐποίησεν οὐδὲ τέρπεται ἐπ' ἀπωλεία ζώντων»⁶. The cause of death is Adam's disobedience – the sin: «ὥστερ δι' ἐνόσ ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθε καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διῆλθεν, ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον»⁷. As St. Gregory the Theologian explains, «Ἐπεὶ δὲ φθόνῳ διαβόλου, καὶ γυναικὸς ἐπηρεία, ἦν τε ἔπαθεν, ὡς ἀπαλωτέρα, καὶ ἦν προσήγαγεν, ὡς πιθανωτέρα (φεῦ τῆς ἐμῆς ἀσθενείας! ἐμὴ γὰρ ἡ τοῦ προπάτορος), τῆς μὲν ἐντολῆς ἐπελάθετο τῆς δοθείσης, καὶ ἠττήθη τῆς μικρᾶς γεύσεως· ὁμοῦ δὲ τοῦ τῆς ζωῆς ξύλου, καὶ τοῦ παραδείσου, καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ τὴν κακίαν ἐξόριστος γίνεται, καὶ τοὺς δερματίνους ἀμφιέννυται χιτῶνας, ἴσως τὴν παχυτέραν σάρκα, καὶ θνητὴν, καὶ ἀντίτυπον καὶ τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκει τὴν ἰδίαν αἰσχύνην, καὶ ἀπὸ Θεοῦ κρύπτεται. Κερδαίνει μὲν τι κἀνταῦθα, τὸν θάνατον, καὶ τὸ διακοπῆναι τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, ἵνα μὴ ἀθάνατον ᾗ τὸ κακόν. Καὶ γίνεται φιλανθρωπία, ἢ τιμωρία. Οὕτω γὰρ πείθομαι κολάζειν Θεόν»⁸. Consequently, «χρησίμως καὶ σφόδρα φιλανθρώπως ὑπὸ θεοῦ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὸ τοῦ θανάτου μυστήριον ὠκονομήθη διὰ τὸ καὶ κακίαν ἐπέχειν καὶ πόνων φέρειν ἀνάπαυλαν»⁹. And the Resurrection of Christ, after God the Word's Incarnation and Passion, was the release from death: «Νυνὶ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἐγένετο. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ δι' ἀνθρώπου ὁ θάνατος, καὶ δι' ἀνθρώπου

4. Ephrem the Syrian, *Λόγος εἰς τοὺς ἐν Χριστῷ κεκοιμημένους*, Ἔργα, vol. 6, Perivoli tis Panagias Publications, Thessaloniki 1995, pp. 98-99.

5. *Gen.* 1, 31.

6. *Book of Wisdom* 1, 13.

7. *Rom.* 5, 12

8. St. Gregory the Theologian, *Λόγος με' Εἰς τὸ ἅγιον Πάσχα*, PG 36, 633.

9. Olympiodoros of Alexandria the Deacon, *Σχόλια εἰς τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Ἰώβ*, Ursula Hagedorn (ed.), *Olympiodor Diakon von Alexandria. Kommentar zu Hiob*, [Patristische Texte und Studien, 24], Walter De Gruyter, Berlin 1984, p. 49.

ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν. ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν, οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται»¹⁰.

2. The Pastoral Dimension of the Funeral Service

One of the most important aspects of the Orthodox Church's teaching is that all believers are members of one body, the body of Christ, with Christ himself as its head and source of life, following the example of the vine: «καθὼς τὸ κλήμα οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ, ἐὰν μὴ μένη ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλω, οὕτως οὐδὲ ὑμεῖς, ἐὰν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένητε. ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα»¹¹. Since «Ἡμῖν δὲ σύμφωνος τῇ γνώμῃ ἡ εὐχαριστία καὶ ἡ εὐχαριστία βεβαιοῖ τὴν γνώμην»¹², this faith is mainly expressed through participation and reception of the Holy Communion: «τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστὶ; τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστίν; ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἐν σώμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἐσμεν· οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν»¹³. Consequently, human life's manifestations are not private events but experiences shared by the entire community of believers. For this reason, there is no such thing as a “private Divine Liturgy”; in the past, almost all the sacred mysteries were performed with the participation of the entire congregation, even during, shortly before or immediately after the Divine Liturgy, a practice which in some cases is still followed today. Therefore, “for the Orthodox tradition, death is not an individual matter and is not suppressed”¹⁴; thus, according to the rule we mentioned, the funeral service could not be omitted, which

10. 1 Cor. 15, 20-22.

11. John 15, 4-5.

12. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Κατὰ αἱρέσεων*, ch. 7.

13. 1 Cor. 10, 16-17.

14. Protopr. V. Kaliakmanis, «Τὸ μυστήριο τοῦ θανάτου στὴν Ὀρθόδοξη Θεολογία», in: *Τὸ μυστήριο τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν λατρείαν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, Πρακτικὰ Θ' Πανελληνίου Λειτουργικοῦ Συμποσίου Στελεχῶν Ἱερῶν Μητροπόλεων, Συνεδριακὸν Κέντρον Θεσσαλίας* (Βόλος, 5-7 Νοεμβρίου 2007), Communication and Education Service of the Church of Greece Publications, Athens 2009, pp. 69-76, here p. 73. See https://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/liturgical/kaliakmanis_tha_natos.html#_ftn1 [15.12.2022].

is often preceded by the Divine Liturgy in the church where the departed is laid to rest, especially in the case of a clergyman or monk.

Of course, the worship of the Orthodox Church is not limited to prayer, whether it be supplication, doxology, or thanksgiving; it simultaneously aims “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” («πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ»)¹⁵, something that is achieved through preaching, readings, and hymns. More specifically, the funeral service includes prayers and supplications for the repose of the deceased, presents to the living the Church’s teaching on death through a series of solemn hymns, and finally, with readings from the New Testament, it instills comfort and hope in the mourners.

3. The Funeral Service’s Typical Patterns (structure)

In the current *Euchologion* of the Orthodox Church, there are variations of the service for the departed, depending on whether they are clergy, monks, lay people, infants, or even if the funeral coincides with Holy Week. In this paper, we will limit ourselves to the service for lay people, which, in any case, is the best known to the faithful. From the study of patristic literature and surviving manuscripts, it appears that this is a very ancient ceremony. Professor Ioannis Fountoulis concludes that the funeral vigil was the first funeral service¹⁶. Even nowadays, in the order of the *Euchologion*, before the Funeral Service is performed, an all-night vigil is prescribed at the home of the deceased or in the church, during which, if

15. *Ephes.* 4, 12.

16. Io. Fountoulis, *Παννυχίς*, Thessaloniki 1969, p. 12, quoted by Protopr. Them. Christodoulou, «Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία στὴ χειρόγραφη παράδοση τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ εὐχολογίου», in: *Τὸ μυστήριο τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν λατρείαν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, Πρακτικὰ Θ’ Πανελληνίου Λειτουργικοῦ Συμποσίου Στελεχῶν Ἱερῶν Μητροπόλεων, Συνεδριακὸν Κέντρον Θεσσαλίας* (Βόλος, 5-7 Νοεμβρίου 2007), Communication and Education Service of the Church of Greece Publications, Athens 2009, pp. 139-163, here p. 149 note 25. See https://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/commitees/liturgical/christodoulou_them_nekrosim.html#_ftn25 [15.12.2022].

the deceased was a monk or lay person, the *Book of Psalms* is read or, in the case of a cleric, the Holy Gospel.

In terms of form and content, the Funeral Service for lay people includes the following distinct parts:

a. *Antiphones*. This is a selection of verses from *Psalms* 118 («*Μακάριοι οἱ ἄμωμοι ἐν ὁδοῦ...*»), divided into three groups. Each verse is followed by a short hymn – in the first and third antiphons, “Alleluia” («*Ἀλληλουῖα*»), and in the second, “Have mercy on me, Lord” («*Ἐλέησόν με, Κύριε*»). Each antiphon is followed by a prayer for the repose of the departed. Here, the dead person prays to God through the mouths of the faithful and humbly begs Him to teach him His commandments, to keep him safe, and to have mercy on him, like a lost sheep.

b. *Benedictions*. Six hymns, preceded by the verse from *Psalms* 118: «*Εὐλογητὸς εἶ, Κύριε, διδάξόν με τὰ δικαιώματά σου*». In the first three, the deceased prays again, seeking God’s mercy, while in the following verses the people implore the Lord for the repose of the deceased’s soul.

c. *Funeral hymns of the Paraklētikē* and in the eight tones, twelve in total. Here, the faithful contemplate the mystery of death and offer renewed prayers to God for the repose of the departed.

d. The *Beatitudes*, verses from the “Sermon on the Mount”¹⁷, followed by hymns of supplication to God for the repose of the deceased.

e. *Readings from the New Testament*¹⁸. Both are related with the resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming and the eternal life.

f. *Prayer* and blessing for the repose of the dead.

g. *Dismissal* and the last kiss. Usually, before the dismissal, the presiding clergyman addresses the mourners with instructive and consolatory words.

17. *Matth.* 5, 3-12.

18. Paul: *1 Thess.* 4, 13-17 and Gospel: *John* 5, 24-30.

4. Theological and Education Content of the Funeral Service

The texts that are part of the funeral service contain profound theological messages, presenting the teachings of the Church on death, that is, from the creation of man to Christ's Second Coming, in an accessible way to the faithful. Of particular importance are the troparia from the *Paraklētikē*, a work by St. John of Damascus. Although some researchers consider that he did not contribute anything new to theological thought¹⁹, we believe that St. John of Damascus bequeathed to us at least two incomparable theological works, with roughly the same content and significance, but in different forms. While the *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως*²⁰ remains to this day the most complete and reliable manual of the Orthodox Church's dogmatic theology, the *Παρακλητική*²¹ is in many ways its poetic and hymnological equivalent, accessible and easy to remember by the faithful because of the form of the hymns, their brevity, and their constant repetition throughout the liturgical year, every eight weeks. It is remarkable that in his poetic-hymnological work, St. John of Damascus condenses the writings of the great Fathers of the Church and the ascetic literature beloved by monks, often quoting expressions from them almost verbatim.

a) Thus, beginning with man's creation, he says: «Ἀρχή μοι καὶ ὑπόστασις, τὸ πλαστοουργόν σου γέγονε πρόσταγμα· βουληθεὶς γὰρ ἐξ ἀοράτου τε, καὶ ὁρατῆς με ζῶον συμπῆξαι φύσεως, γῆθέν μου τὸ σῶμα διέπλασας, δέδωκας δέ μοι ψυχὴν, τῇ θείᾳ σου καὶ ζωοποιῶ ἐμπνεύσει. Διό, Χριστέ, τὸν δοῦλόν (τὴν δούλην) σου, ἐν χώρᾳ ζώντων, ἐν σκηναῖς δικαίων ἀνάπαυσον».

This troparion refers directly to the following excerpt from St. Gregory the Theologian's *Εἰς τὸ Ἅγιον Πάσχα*: «Τοῦτο δὴ βουληθεὶς ὁ τεχνίτης ἐπιδείξασθαι Λόγος, καὶ ζῶον ἐν ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων, ἀοράτου τε λέγω

19. This is not the right time or place to analyze the reasons why we consider this view to be incorrect.

20. P. B. Kotter (ed.), *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 2, [Patristische Texte und Studien 12], Walter De Gruyter, Berlin – New York 1973, pp. 3-239.

21. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Octoechos_\(liturgy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Octoechos_(liturgy)).

καὶ ὄρατῆς φύσεως, δημιουργεῖ, τὸν ἄνθρωπον· καὶ παρὰ μὲν τῆς ὕλης λαβὼν τὸ σῶμα ἤδη προϋποστάσης, παρ' ἑαυτοῦ δὲ πνοὴν ἐνθείς (ὃ δὴ νοεράν ψυχὴν καὶ εἰκόνα Θεοῦ οἶδεν ὁ λόγος), οἷόν τινα κόσμον ἕτερον, ἐν μικρῷ μέγαν, ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἴστησιν, ἄγγελον ἄλλον, προσκυνητὴν μικτόν, ἐπόπτῃν τῆς ὄρατῆς κτίσεως, μύστιν τῆς νοουμένης, βασιλέα τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς, βασιλευόμενον ἄνωθεν, ἐπίγειον καὶ οὐράνιον, πρόσκαιρον καὶ ἀθάνατον, ὄρατὸν καὶ νοούμενον, μέσον μεγέθους καὶ ταπεινότητος, τὸν αὐτὸν πνεῦμα καὶ σάρκα πνεῦμα διὰ τὴν χάριν, σάρκα διὰ τὴν ἔπαρσιν· τὸ μὲν, ἵνα μένη, καὶ δοξάζῃ τὸν εὐεργέτην· τὸ δέ, ἵνα πάσχη, καὶ πάσχων ὑπομιμνήσκηται, καὶ παιδεύηται τῷ μεγέθει φιλοτιμούμενος· ζῶον ἐνταῦθα οἰκονομούμενον, καὶ ἀλλαχοῦ μεθιστάμενον, καὶ πέρας τοῦ μυστηρίου, τῇ πρὸς Θεὸν νεύσει θεούμενον»²².

b) For the original sin and its consequence, death: «Κατ' εἰκόνα σὴν καὶ ὁμοίωσιν, πλαστοουργήσας κατ' ἀρχὰς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἐν Παραδείσῳ τέθεικας κατάρχειν σου τῶν κτισμάτων, φθόνῳ δὲ διαβόλου ἀπατηθείς, τῆς βρώσεως μετέσχε, τῶν ἐντολῶν σου παραβάτης γεγονώς· διὸ πάλιν εἰς γῆν ἐξ ἧς ἐλήφθη, κατεδίκασας ἐπιστρέφειν, Κύριε, καὶ αἰτεῖσθαι τὴν ἀνάπαυσιν».

Again, the source of this hymn is the same discourse by Gregory the Theologian: «Τοῦτον ἔθετο μὲν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ, ὅστις ποτὲ ἦν ὁ παράδεισος οὗτος, τῷ αὐτεξουσίῳ τιμήσας, ἵν' ἦ τοῦ ἐλομένου τὸ ἀγαθὸν οὐχ ἦττον ἢ τοῦ παρασχόντος τὰ σπέρματα, φυτῶν ἀθανάτων γεωργόν, θείων ἐννοιῶν ἴσως, τῶν τε ἀπλουστέρων, καὶ τῶν τελεωτέρων, γυμνὸν τῇ ἀπλότητι, καὶ ζωῇ τῇ ἀτέχνῳ, καὶ δίχα παντός ἐπικαλύμματος καὶ προβλήματος· τοιοῦτον γὰρ ἔπρεπεν εἶναι τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς· καὶ δίδωσι νόμον, ὕλην τῷ αὐτεξουσίῳ. Ὁ δὲ νόμος ἦν ἐντολή, ὧν τε μεταληπτέον αὐτῷ φυτῶν, καὶ οὐ μὴ προσαπτέον [...]. Ἐπεὶ δὲ φθόνῳ διαβόλου, καὶ γυναικὸς ἐπηρεία, ἦν τε ἔπαθεν, ὡς ἀπαλωτέρα, καὶ ἦν προσήγαγεν, ὡς πιθανωτέρα (φεῦ τῆς ἐμῆς ἀσθενείας, ἐμὴ γὰρ ἢ τοῦ προπάτορος), τῆς μὲν ἐντολῆς ἐπελάθετο τῆς δοθείσης, καὶ ἠττήθη τῆς μικρᾶς γεύσεως· ὁμοῦ δὲ τοῦ τῆς ζωῆς ξύλου, καὶ τοῦ

22. Cf. St. Gregory the Theologian, *Λόγος ΜΕ', Εἰς τὸ ἅγιον Πάσχα*, PG 36, 632.

παραδείσου, και τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ τὴν κακίαν ἐξόριστος γίνεται, και τοὺς δερματίνους ἀμφιέννυται χιτῶνας, ἴσως τὴν παχυτέραν σάρκα, και θνητὴν, και ἀντίτυπον και τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκει τὴν ἰδίαν αἰσχύνην, και ἀπὸ Θεοῦ κρύπτεται. Κερδαίνει μὲν τι κἀνταῦθα, τὸν θάνατον, και τὸ διακοπῆναι τὴν ἀμαρτίαν, ἵνα μὴ ἀθάνατον ᾗ τὸ κακόν. Καὶ γίνεται φιλανθρωπία, ἢ τιμωρία. Οὕτω γὰρ πείθεται κολάζειν Θεόν»²³.

c) That death is an unfathomable mystery: «Ὅντως φοβερῶτατον τὸ τοῦ θανάτου μυστήριον, πῶς ψυχὴ ἐκ τοῦ σώματος, βιαίως χωρίζεται ἐκ τῆς ἀρμονίας, και τῆς συμφυΐας ὁ φυσικώτατος δεσμός, θείῳ βουλήματι ἀποτέμνεται. Διὸ σε ἰκετεύομεν· Τὸν μεταστάντα (τὴν μεταστᾶσαν) ἀνάπαυσον, ἐν σκηναῖς τῶν δικαίων σου, ζωοδότα φιλάνθρωπε».

This hymn reminds us of a discourse by Ephrem the Syrian: «Οὐχ ὄρας πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς τοὺς τελευτῶντας και ψυχορράγουντας, πῶς παρακαθήμεθα; Οἷα φοβερὰ τότε ὀρώμεν γινόμενα; Πῶς συνέχονται; Πῶς ταράττονται; Πῶς στενάζουσιν; Οὐχ ὄρας πῶς ἰδρῶσι ψυχρὸν και πικρὸν, ὡς οἱ ἐν ἀγρῷ θερισταί; Πῶς τὸ ὄμμα περιστρέφουσιν ὧδε και ὧδε; Πῶς οἱ μὲν τοὺς ὀδόντας τρίζουσι; Πῶς θαμβοῦνται; Πῶς θορυβοῦνται; Πῶς οἱ πολλοὶ τὰς τρίχας αὐτῶν κατατίλλουσι; Πῶς τῆς κλίνης ἀναπηδῶσι φεύγειν βουλόμενοι, μὴ δυνάμενοι δέ; Ὅρωντες ἅπερ οὐδέποτε ἑώρακασιν, και ἀκούοντες ὑπὸ τῶν ἐξουσιῶν, ἅπερ οὐδέποτε ἤκουσαν, και πάσχοντες, ἅπερ οὐδέποτε ἔπαθον. Ζητοῦντες λυτρούμενον, και οὐδεὶς ὁ ρυόμενος· ζητοῦντες συνοδεύοντα, και οὐδεὶς ὁ συνοδεύων· ζητοῦντες παρακαλοῦντα, και οὐδεὶς ὁ τολμῶν»²⁴.

d) For the dying person's agony: «Οἶμοι, οἶον ἀγῶνα ἔχει ἡ ψυχὴ, χωριζομένη ἐκ τοῦ σώματος! Οἶμοι, πόσα δακρύει τότε, και οὐχ ὑπάρχει ὁ ἑλεῶν αὐτήν! Πρὸς τοὺς Ἀγγέλους τὰ ὄμματα ῥέπουσα, ἅπρακτα καθικετεύει, πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τὰς χεῖρας ἐκτείνουσα, οὐκ ἔχει τὸν βοηθοῦντα. Διὸ, ἀγαπητοί μου ἀδελφοί, ἐννοήσαντες ἡμῶν τὸ βραχὺ τῆς ζωῆς, τῷ μεταστάντι (τῇ μεταστάσει) τὴν ἀνάπαυσιν, παρὰ Χριστοῦ αἰτησώμεθα, και ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν τὸ μέγα ἔλεος».

As St. Nillos the Ascetic notes, «ὅτε τῶν ἀπαιτούντων τὴν ψυχὴν ἐπιστασία φοβερὰ συνέχει φρίττουσαν αὐτήν πρὸς τὴν ἐξοδὸν και

23. *Op.cit.*, PG 36.632-633:

24. Ephrem the Syrian, *Λόγος εἰς τοὺς ἐν Χριστῷ κεκοιμημένους*, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

δείματα και σχήματα φοβερώτατα, ὅτε δαίμονες ὀνειδίζοντες τὴν ἁμαρτίαν και πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς ἔλκουσιν ἀπειλοῦντες εἰς ἀμειδῆ και σκυθρωπὰ χωρία, ὡς πρὸ τῆς βασάνου τὴν κατάπληξιν ἱκανὴν εἶναι πρὸς κόλασιν, ὅτε συνείδησις ἐπιστρέφουσα πρὸς τὰ πεπλημμελημένα τρέμει τὴν πρὸς ἀξίαν τῶν ἡμαρτημένων περιμένουσα κόλασιν. ἔνθεν γὰρ ἰδρῶτι κεῖται τὸ σῶμα διάβροχον σημεία δεικνύον τοῦ ἔνδον καμάτου και τῆς ἀδήλου ταραχῆς τὰ ὀρώμενα παρέχεται πρόδηλα τεκμήρια»²⁵.

e) For the futility of the earthly life: «Πάντα ματαιότης τὰ ἀνθρώπινα²⁶, ὅσα οὐχ ὑπάρχει μετὰ θάνατον, οὐ παραμένει ὁ πλοῦτος, οὐ συνοδεύει ἡ δόξα· ἐπελθὼν γὰρ ὁ θάνατος, ταῦτα πάντα ἐξηφάνισται. Διό, Χριστῷ τῷ ἀθανάτῳ Βασιλεῖ βοήσωμεν Τὸν μεταστάντα (τὴν μεταστᾶσαν) ἐξ ἡμῶν ἀνάπαυσον, ἔνθα πάντων ἐστὶν εὐφραينوμένων ἡ κατοικία».

The futility of the earthly life and goods has been pointed out many times by our Lord Jesus Christ, both in the Sermon on the Mount, where he says: «Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σῆς και βρῶσις ἀφανίζει, και ὅπου κλέπται διορύσσουσιν και κλέπτουσιν· θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ, ὅπου οὔτε σῆς οὔτε βρῶσις ἀφανίζει, και ὅπου κλέπται οὐ διορύσσουσιν οὐδὲ κλέπτουσιν· ὅπου γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θησαυρός ὑμῶν, ἐκεῖ ἔσται και ἡ καρδιά ὑμῶν»²⁷, as well as in the parables of the foolish rich man²⁸ and of the rich man and poor Lazarus²⁹.

f) That Christ's Passion and Resurrection are the antidote of death: «Ὁ θάνατός σου, Κύριε, ἀθανασίας γέγονε πρόξενος· εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐν μνήματι κατετέθης, οὐκ ἂν ὁ Παράδεισος ἠνέωκτο, διὸ τὸν μεταστάντα (τὴν μεταστᾶσαν) ἀνάπαυσον ὡς φιλόανθρωπος».

The wording of this hymn has probably been taken from the following passage by St. Theodoret of Cyrhus: «Υἱάσει ἡμᾶς μετὰ δύο ἡμέρας,

25. St. Neilos the Ascetic, *Πρὸς Ἀγάθιον*, PG 79.860.

26. Cf. *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 1, 2: «Ματαιότης ματαιότητων, εἶπεν ὁ ἐκκλησιαστής, ματαιότης ματαιότητων, τὰ πάντα ματαιότης».

27. *Matth.* 6, 19-21.

28. *Luke* 12, 13-21.

29. *Luke* 16, 19-31.

ἐν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστησόμεθα. Οὐ δεῖται γὰρ εἰς θεραπείαν χρονικῆς περιόδου, ἀλλ' ἀθρόαν παρέξει τὴν ὑγίειαν αἰνίττεται δὲ διὰ τούτων καὶ τὴν διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν γενομένην τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἀνάστασιν, ἣ τῆς κοινῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐγένετο πρόξενος, καὶ πᾶσιν ἡμῖν δεδώρηται τὴν τῆς ἀθανασίας ἐλπίδα, διὰ τῆς εἰς τὸν Θεὸν ἐπιγνώσεως ἐγγινομένην»³⁰.

g) For the future resurrection of all human beings: «Ὡς ἄνθος μαραίνεται, καὶ ὡς ὄναρ παρέρχεται, καὶ διαλύεται πᾶς ἄνθρωπος, πάλιν δὲ ἠχούσης τῆς σάλπιγγος, νεκροί, ὡς ἐν συσσεισμῶ, πάντες ἀναστήσονται πρὸς τὴν σὴν ὑπάντησιν, Χριστέ ὁ Θεός· τότε, Δέσποτα, ὄν (ἦν) μετέστησας ἐξ ἡμῶν, ἐν ταῖς τῶν Ἁγίων σου κατὰταξον σκηναῖς, τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ σοῦ δούλου (τῆς σῆς δούλης) Χριστέ».

We could argue that the last hymn summarizes the apostolic reading of the sacred service, which, incidentally, occupies a prominent position, along with the Gospel passage. In it, the Apostle Paul urges us not to grieve like other people, that is, non-Christians, who have no hope. For if we believe that Christ has died and risen from the dead, in the same way God will raise the dead through Jesus Christ, when the trumpets sound, and draw them close to Him, together with those who did not have the time to taste death. In the Gospel passage, the Lord tells us that whoever hears His words and believes in God has eternal life and will not be judged, but has already passed from death to life. For when the time comes, He Himself will call the dead, and they will come out of their graves; those who have done good deeds will rise to find eternal life, and those who have done evil ones will rise to be judged.

Epilogue

To summarize, we observe that, for the Orthodox Church, the death of a believer is an event that concerns its entire congregation. Physical death is considered to be a falling asleep; the body is buried with honor

30. The wording of this hymn has probably been taken from the following passage by St. Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Υπόμνημα εἰς τοὺς δώδεκα Προφῆτας*, PG 81, 1581.

and reverence, as that of a righteous person, and with humility before the mercy and greatness of God. In the funeral service, the congregation of the Church prays to God for the repose of the departed, reflects on the mystery of death, and is taught that, while grief for the departure of a beloved brother is natural and justified (after all, even Jesus, the God-man, wept at the sight of the dead body of His friend Lazarus), grief and despair are not appropriate for Christians, since the end of this life is in reality a passage from death to true life, in the light of Christ's Resurrection and His eternal kingdom.