

## 2. THE CONDITIONS OF MODERN LIFE



There are, of course, definite reasons for this. The conditions of the world today are quite different from what they were in the past. The whole phenomenon of the apostasy, of the falling away from the truth, means that people do not know how to accept the Gospel freshly. They have already heard about it and have been inoculated against it. Therefore, very few of them—when they hear the message of Orthodoxy—come.

Another thing in the air today that is different from earlier times is this "Mickey Mouse" atmosphere. It is the lack of seriousness that one sees in the air, in just everyday customs. For example, when people part, they say, "Take it easy"—the sort of thing that indicates: "Relax, take it easy, there's nothing important going on. Just go along with whatever happens." We used to say things like: "God be with you." "Goodbye" even comes from the word "God".

The young people of today are very much absorbed in the whole fantasy world of television. "Mickey Mouse's" place is even called Disneyland, Disney World. Our whole spiritual and sober outlook is affected by this—even religious views. [Next...](#)

There is a very sincere fundamentalist Protestant in Florida who has a big parcel of land right next to Disney World, and who is going to make a replica of the Temple of Jerusalem, in order to attract the people going to Disney World to come over there for a spiritual thing, on the same level. They'll be saying "ah!" and "ooh!"—It will be the same thing as all the fairy castles they saw in Disney World. This whole atmosphere—this unreal, movie-type atmosphere is very much in, not only the air, but our very homes. It affects the whole seriousness of life, the way children are brought up—though children are obviously not brought up anymore. The whole idea of bringing them up, of raising them in a certain mold, is gone now. They just raise themselves, go into whatever influences are around, and the result is something very unserious. This is the chief reason why, when young people become independent, so many of them simply go crazy and get involved with various wild religions and drugs, why they run into crime and all kinds of mad things. In childhood they never had down-to-earth contact, either with spiritual life or simply with the seriousness of living from one day to the next. That is one of the chief things that makes our times different and much more difficult for spiritual efforts. Another thing is all the modern conveniences which surround us and which, without a doubt, depersonalize and cause people to be less concerned for each other, more concerned about things, gadgets. The very idea of the telephone means that you can instantly have contact with someone for the sake of a message—nothing personal about it. If you have to go to great lengths to get to him, your soul is different than it would be if you just had to dial a number. All this makes our times different and very unfavorable to any kind of spiritual activity such as apostleship, missionary activity, leading just an ordinary spiritual life, monastic life and the rest.

Something else also is in our air which we Orthodox Christians have to be mindful of, and that is the weight of tradition. If we accept all that the Church hands down to us simply as something already accomplished, something given to us without our effort, as if it is just there and we can

## 2. In Step With Sts. Patrick and Gregory of Tours

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take it for granted—this already deadens us spiritually, because everything that is high must be fought for, must be struggled for. That is one reason why modern conveniences only depersonalize. The whole effort to make everything more convenient takes away the element of struggle, which is the fabric, the fiber of life.

With all these things in view, the whole of modern life becomes extremely oppressive. For a long time now, as far back as William Butler Yeats, seventy-five years ago or so, everything in the modern age had been accomplished and done, all the seeds had been sown. The twentieth century can add almost nothing of its own. It has only put into effect that which has already been sown in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The result was that there was nothing more to do. Everything is done, it's hopeless. As William Butler Yeats, a sensitive Irish poet, expresses it in his poem *The Second Coming*:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand  
The Second Coming! Hardly are these words out  
When a vast image of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?

This is a kind of factual view of life: the worst people are simply immersed in evil deeds and the best people are going frantic, because there is no more spirituality left, there is nothing left to strive for, everything is taken away, materialism is triumphing, there is no hope for the world, and "the beast slouches toward Bethlehem to be born"—the vision of Antichrist. The world is going hopelessly down and there is no hope of getting out. *In Step With Sts. Patrick and Gregory of Tours*

*A Homily by Fr. Seraphim Rose of Platina*