

# *The Shepherd*

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## FROM THE FATHERS

“THE SEASON of Lent, when compared to the whole year, may be likened to a storm-free harbour, in which all who are sailing together enjoy a spiritual calm. For the present season is one of salvation not for monks and nuns only, but also for lay people, for great and small, for rulers and ruled, for emperors and priests, for every race and for every age. For cities and villages reduce their hubbub and bustle, while psalmody and hymns, prayers and entreaties take their place, by which our good God is propitiated and so guides our spirits to peace and pardons our offences, if, with a sincere heart, we will only fall down before Him with fear and trembling and weep before Him, promising improvement for the future... I, since I have been placed at your head, honoured brethren, will also talk to you briefly. Fasting then is a renewal of the soul, for the holy Apostle says, *Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward is being renewed day by day.* And if it is being renewed, clearly it is being made beautiful according to its original beauty; made beautiful in itself, it is being drawn lovingly to the One Who said, *I and the Father will come and make our dwelling with him.* If then such is the grace of fasting, that it makes us into a dwelling place of God, we must welcome it, brethren, gladly, not grieving at the plainness of the diet, for we know that the Lord, though he is able to nourish lavishly, made a banquet for thousands in the wilderness from bread and water. Also because what is unusual, with enthusiasm becomes acceptable and painless. Fasting is not defined by foods alone, but by every abstinence from evil, as our godly fathers have explained. And so, I beg you, let us abstain from despondency, idleness, sluggishness, jealousy, strife, maliciousness, self-indulgence, self-reliance; let

us abstain from destructive desire which the many-shaped serpent lays before us when we are fasting. Let us listen to the one who says, *The fruit which slew me was beautiful to behold and fair to eat*. And observe: he says beautiful to behold, not beautiful by nature. For just as if someone taking a pomegranate decked out with a scarlet rind should find it rotten, in the same way pleasure feigns untold sweetness, but when it is plucked it is found more bitter than gall, or rather, than a sharpened two-edged sword which devours the soul it has captured. This is what our forefather Adam suffered when he was tricked by the serpent; for when he touched the forbidden food, he found death instead of life. This too is what all they have suffered who from then until now have been similarly deceived by the dragon. For just as he, who is darkness, transforms himself into an angel of light, so he knows how to transform bad into good, bitter into sweet, dark into light, ugly into beautiful, deadly into life-giving; and so the all-evil one does not cease to lead the world astray at every opportunity. But let us at least, brethren, not be led astray by his manifold deceptions, nor suffer the fate of the birds who greedily approach what seems to be food and fall into the hunter's trap. Let us rather look on the outer coverings of evil as dung and when with the mind we have looked on evil in its nakedness we shall flee from it at once. In addition let us welcome the times of psalmody, be enthusiastic for hymnody, attentive to the readings, making prostrations according to the given measure at each hour; working with our own hands, because working is good and because one who does not work is not judged worthy of eating. Let us bear one another's burdens, for one is weak and another strong, making use of food and drink and the other necessities with moderation, so that there is no provoking to jealousy among evil people, but zeal in goodness. In everything be good to one another, compassionate, reasonable, obedient, full of mercy and good fruits, and the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and thoughts. And now, may you be found worthy without condemnation to reach the supreme day of the Resurrection, and in the age to come at the resurrection of the dead to gain the kingdom of heaven in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom be the glory and the might, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

VEN. THEODORE THE STUDITE, + 825 A.D.

# On the Inevitability of Suffering

NEW HIEROMARTYR JOHN, ARCHBISHOP  
OF RIGA, + 1934

*FROM that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go into Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and to be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be done unto Thee." But He turned, and said unto Peter, "Get thee behind Me, Satan! Thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that are of God but those things that are of men" (Matt. 16:21-23).*

This revelation of the Lord concerning the sufferings which awaited Him, struck His disciples like a thunderclap from a clear sky. Earlier, He had told them that His path was also their path: *The servant is not greater than his master. He who doth not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.* And in the lives of Christ's true disciples there is a time of suffering passion when each must enter his own Jerusalem, ascend his Golgotha and the fateful cross, and take up the fateful cup—even unto death.

Even the sons of this world each have their own Golgotha. Unforeseen and uninvited, suffering enters the house. You must suffer whether you like it or not. The bitter "must." This "must" is bitter even for the faithful disciple of Christ. And the cross of suffering frightens even him. In his soul is heard the voice of Peter: have mercy on yourself, do not let this happen, protect yourself. And this is not surprising, for after all, the Great

Sufferer Himself prayed: *“If it be possible, take this cup from Me.”* This “must” is altogether necessary and we are powerless to stand against it.

*“From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples that He must go into Jerusalem, and suffer many things...”* If the way of the Lord leads to Jerusalem, if His fate is to be decided by the Scribes, the Pharisees, the elders, then it is natural that He must suffer and be killed. This Jerusalem towards which Christ directed His steps is not the Heavenly Jerusalem, but an earthly city filled with the spirit of this world, which had fallen away from its God, not recognising, not comprehending the visitation of the Lord.

This is the same Jerusalem which, at the altar of the Lord, killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to it. And the world, my brothers, even unto this day stands on that same foundation. Perhaps it does not have the same outward appearance. Nowadays they do not crucify people on crosses as they did Peter, nor are people stoned like Stephen. People have become too indifferent towards faith to suffer for its sake.

Our path is less rocky and whoever murmurs at the harshness and the evil of this world should know that he is far from suffering unto blood. Nevertheless, now as never before, the words of the Lord contain a sacred truth: *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.* It cannot do otherwise.

The natural desire of man’s heart is to live at peace with everyone. Many a youthful heart has decided to follow the path of reliance on oneself: I want to get along with everyone; I must not antagonise anyone. But even the best-intentioned soon realise that this is impossible. Even the meekest lamb is sure to meet on his way a ferocious wolf that says: “You are a thorn in my side.”

He who believes must confess his faith. He who desires to serve God in this world must act according to his faith. But every confession inevitably arouses antagonism and every action is

sure to meet with hostility. To see that his honest persuasion and striving are not recognised by the world; that his good deeds are everywhere met with opposition; that there where he sows only love, he must reap evil - this is obviously very grievous to the follower of Christ. And he is often ready to ask, together with his Master: "What evil has been done to you? Or how have I offended thee?"

The truth which you proclaim and which you confess and which the world cannot gainsay, or the righteousness manifest in your life which silently reproaches the world, or the peace of the Lord written on your face which the world cannot forgive, or the heavenly otherworldliness of your behaviour which shames and accuses their earthly way of life - this is how you have offended the world. And the world would sooner pardon you of ten vices and crimes which get you on a level with others, than forgive one good deed which elevates you above the rest. Why did Cain murder Abel? Because Cain's actions were evil and the actions of Abel were good and righteous. Why did the scribes and Pharisees condemn the Saviour? Because He was Light, and darkness cannot abide the light (cf. Jn 3:16-21).

Do not be astonished then, my dear brothers, if the world hates you. It is to be expected. This is nothing unusual. Do not let evil mockings and the vicious hatred of evil doers lead you astray. Go along the straight road with the Name of the Lord, through the world which lies in evil, and think in yourself: I must... and the world cannot do otherwise. It would not be the world if it did not prefer the lies of its errors to truth; egoism to love; its laziness to zeal for God; worldly vanity to righteousness. I am not a disciple of Christ, not His soldier, if I do what is pleasing to everyone, if I go along the broad path together with the crowd instead of keeping to the narrow path where there are few travellers.

And so let us step forward in the name of the Lord with the conscious awareness that "I must."

There is another aspect to this "I must." When the Son of Man told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and there to

suffer much and to die, He was aware that this was necessary even for Himself. Because *He was obedient unto death, even death on the Cross, God raised Him up and gave Him a name above every name.* If the Heavenly Father so willed that even His only-begotten Son would drink from the cup of suffering, is it for us sinners who are so imperfect to shun this cup of suffering, this school of suffering, when we are such a long way from perfection and still have so much to learn in order to become worthy disciples of the Great Sufferer?

Some think: How much more fervently and willingly I would serve my Lord if only my life's path were easier, if it were not so thickly strewn with sharp rocks. In saying this, you yourself obviously do not know who and what you are, what is beneficial for you and what is harmful, what you need and what you do not need. It is true when they say that a man tolerates least of all his own well-being. Days of happiness, days of success, when everything goes according to one's own wishes-how many times have such days woven a fatal net which captures the soul? What dissoluteness grows on man's heart, like rust on the blade of an unused battle sword, or like a garden which becomes overgrown if not tended by the gardener's shears. Tell me, O Christian, what preserves you from haughtiness which so easily penetrates even the strongest hearts, even the hearts of Christ's disciples? Is it not the cross of suffering? What humbles the passionate inclinations of the flesh which so quickly and easily spread in times of well-being and prosperity, like insects in a swamp on a sunny day? What teaches you to shun this uncleanness? Is it not the rod of misfortunes and sorrows? What arouses you from the sleep of self-assurance, lulled to sleep as we so easily are by times of happiness? Or what is more conducive to a routine of laziness than cloudless, carefree days of prosperity? At such times a storm can only be regarded as a blessing. What will draw you out of the dangerous state of insensibility? Will not sorrows? Will not illness? What tears us away from our worldly attachments, the love for the world and all that is in it? Is it not necessity and misfortunes? Do not trials teach us to take life more seriously? Do not sorrows teach us to be prepared for death? Wild brambles of the heart cannot be uprooted without

the pruning shears of the Heavenly Gardener and the good fruit of truth and righteousness will not grow without the rain of tears and sorrows. Nowhere can true obedience be better tested than in the bearing of the bitter cup of sorrows, when one can only say: not my will, but Thine be done, Father. And submission to God's will is never manifested so clearly as in days and hours of storm when in the midst of menacing and frightful waves the Christian gives himself totally into the hands of Him Whose very hand holds these waves and tempests.

When can the steadfastness, courage, and strength of a soldier of Christ be better demonstrated than when trials and obstacles must be turned into deeds, than in the war against evil, or in times of danger? All the noble strength of the Christian soul, of the Christian character shines forth most brightly in times of distress, misfortunes and sufferings. All the miracles of God's grace are most evident in times when the waters of grief and misfortunes flood our souls and we are forced to recognise our helplessness, our weakness and draw all strength and understanding from Almighty God.

Or, when God Himself chastises you and calls you to account, are you going to ask "what for" and "why"? Or when the Lord sends you to the school of the Cross, will you say: "I have no need of its teachings?" Rather you must say: "I need this; I must go to this school of the Cross; I must suffer with Christ in order to be raised with Him. When the Lord chastens me I must think and feel like a child chastened by the loving right hand of the Lord, like a grapevine under the pruning shears of the gardener, like iron beneath the smith's hammer, like gold in the purifying fire. This 'I must' is of God and I must not shrink from it."

If you, my friends, agree with what I say, here in the house of God, then hold onto this principle when you are visited by grief, and yours becomes the way of the Cross. These are basic truths which must be repeated before each bed of sickness and with each student entering the school of sorrows. Pastors know this. He who preached these truths a thousand times to others must repeat them for himself in every situation. Thou, Lord, help us to understand more fully and to plant deep within our-



selves this lesson of the divine “I must.”

Even the ancient Greeks and other people bowed before the divine will, before sacred duty, before immutable destiny, man’s dependence upon Providence. The submission of one’s will before this divine “I must,” the exact fulfilment of divine decrees—in the wise this was called wisdom; in heroes, it was courage; in the righteous, sanctity. How much more willingly must we Christians fulfil our duty when we know that we are not being led by blind faith, but by the good will of the Father which led even Christ to Golgotha and the Cross, but through Golgotha and the Cross to the glorious Resurrection. And so we must put our faith and trust in Him even when we cannot comprehend the meaning of the guidance. Mankind would have been deprived of so much goodness, such glory and blessedness, if the Saviour had hearkened to the voice of Peter: defend yourself.

Let each soul bow before the divine “I must;” for the will of God is good, perfect, guiding all men to salvation. And you, O son of dust and corruption, bend your neck under His almighty hand before which your strength is as nothing. Trust to divine wisdom before which your light is but a dark shadow. Give yourself over to the fatherly guidance of Him who desires not enmity and sorrows, but peace and blessedness for all mankind. When you submit your thoughts and your will to His thought and will, then no cup will be too bitter for you, and no cross too heavy. You will be able to withstand it. Such is the will of God.

If your spouse, children, friends, and everyone you love surround you; if they try to persuade you to have pity on yourself, not to destroy yourself—do not regard their tears, do not listen to their pleadings. Point to the Heavens and say: “Do not burden my heart; thus it is pleasing to God and I must. You are reasoning according to man’s wisdom and not God’s.” And if from your own heart there cries out the voice of flesh and blood, and begins to persuade you: this cannot happen to you; defend yourself—turn away from this counsel of your own heart and follow after that which glorifies God.

We can more easily bear our afflictions if we keep in mind

the example of the Saviour. See with what peaceful and holy determination He goes to His Passion. And then follow Him along the path of the Cross until with His last breath you hear from His lips the divine words: *It is finished*. And then ask yourself: are not you inspired by this example? Do you not understand now the commandment: *he who wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow after Me*? Do you not share the conviction of that disciple who said: I cannot wear a crown of roses when my Saviour is wearing a crown of thorns? At the Cross of Christ even the most suffering souls among us can find consolation. I have endured, and even now endure much, but my Divine Saviour endures still more.

And if you find this example too lofty, read what the holy Apostle Paul says: *Thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness* (2 Cor. 11:23-30). See what he endured for Christ's sake, how many times he was beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and then understand how far we are from him.

Everywhere the Cross is, it is the sign of Christianity. A Christian cannot be without his Cross. Amen.



“ONLY FAITH that all does not end with this earthly existence gives us power not to chain ourselves to this earthly life by all means, and for its sake to come into all manner of baseness, degradation and humiliation. Only a man of deep and sincere faith can be truly free. Dependence on the Lord God is the only dependence that does not degrade a man, nor turn him into a pitiful servant. But, on the contrary, it exalts him.”

HOLY NEW MARTYR ALEXANDER MEDEM, +1931A.D.

# A MEDITATION UPON DEATH

SAINT IGNATIUS OF THE CAUCASUS, +1867 A.D.

DEATH, that fate of all men upon the earth, a fate inevitable for all! We shrink from it as from a most cruel enemy. We bitterly lament those who have been taken by it. Nevertheless, we lead our life as if it were not, as if we were eternal upon the earth.

My grave! O, why do I forget you? You await me, you wait and no doubt I shall become your inhabitant. O, why do I forget you? And why do I act as if the grave were the lot only of others, but not at all that of mine own?

Sin has taken away and does ever remove from me the knowledge and perception of every truth. It deprives and banishes from my thoughts any recollection of death, of that event so tangibly true and important for me.

In order to remember death, one must lead a life in conformity with the commandments of Christ. Christ's commandments purify the mind and heart, mortify them to the world, and renew them for Christ. A mind once detached from earthly passions begins often to turn its gaze towards its mysterious passage into eternity, towards death. A purified heart begins to perceive its death ahead of time.

The mind and heart when detached from the world strive towards eternity. As soon as they have loved Christ, they have an unquenchable thirst that they might stand before Him, yet nevertheless tremble at the hour of death, contemplating the majesty of God and their own nothingness and sinfulness. For them death seems both a fearful feat, and also that coveted deliverance from earthly captivity.

If we find ourselves unable to desire death by reason of our coldness towards Christ and on account of our love towards things corruptible, then let us at least use remembrance of death as a bitter medicine against our sinfulness since "remembrance of mortality" - that's what the Holy Fathers call this remembrance - as soon as it has been assimilated by the soul, cuts off its friendship with sin with all its sinful pleasures.

Only he who has become familiar with the thought of his end,

said one holy father, can put an end to his sin. *In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin* (Sirach 7:40).

Rise from your bed as if rising from the dead. Lie down upon your bed as if you were lying in your grave. Sleep is an icon of death, and the darkness of night - a harbinger of that sepulchral darkness after which the light of resurrection shall shine - a light joyous for the servants of Christ, but terrifying for His enemies.

A thick cloud, although it consists of nothing other than thin layers of moisture, covers the light of the sun. So likewise do bodily delights, distraction, and frivolous earthly cares block eternity in all its majesty from the gaze of the soul.

In vain does the sun shed its light in clear skies for eyes struck by blindness. So also, it is as if eternity does not exist for a heart possessed by earthly passion, passion for all that is great, glorious, and sweet upon the earth. *Cruel is the death of sinners* (Ps. 33:22). It comes to them at a time completely unexpected for them. It comes to them, but they have not made any preparation either for death or eternity. They have not even acquired any clear conception of either of these matters. Death snatches unprepared sinners from the face of the earth upon which they have only angered God and sends them eternally to the dungeons of Hell.

Do you wish to remember death? Maintain strict moderation in food, clothing, and with respect to all your household possessions; take heed lest objects of necessity become objects of luxury. Meditate upon the law of God day and night, or as often as is possible, and thereby you will remember death. Remembrance of death will be accompanied by torrents of tears, repentance of one's sins, the intention to correct oneself, and with many fervent prayers.

Who among men has remained upon the earth that he might live forever? Not one. And in this too I will follow my fathers, forefathers, brothers, and my relatives. My body shall retire into the black grave, and my lot will be hidden from those who remain upon the earth by an impenetrable mystery.

My relatives and friends shall mourn for me, perhaps, they shall even weep bitterly. Afterwards, though, they shall forget. So likewise, there have been countless thousands of people, mourned and then forgotten thereafter. They are all numbered

and remembered by the one and all-perfect God alone.

Scarcely had I been born, scarcely had I been conceived, when death had set his seal upon me. "He is mine," said he, and immediately he made ready his scythe for me. From the very beginning of my existence, he has been swinging his scythe about. Any minute I could be made the victim of death! There have been many near misses, but a sure swing and blow are inevitable.

Death looks upon all the earthly works of men with a cold smile of contempt. The builder builds his massive building, the painter has yet to finish his masterpiece, the genius has come up with sweeping plans, and desires to bring them to fruition. Death comes, unexpected and inexorable, and reduces all his intentions to naught.

Pitiless death, conquered by Christ, reveres only the servant of Christ; he respects only that life which is in Christ. Often a heavenly messenger announces to the servants of the Truth their imminent passing into eternity and their blessedness therein. Those who have prepared for death with their life, having the consolation both of the witness of their conscience and of the promise that is from above, peacefully and with a smile on their lips fall asleep into the long sleep of death.

Has anyone ever seen the body of a righteous man, separated from its soul? You will notice no stench issuing forth from his body, nor is it frightening to approach it. At his burial sorrow is dissipated by some kind of incomprehensible joy. Sometimes his facial features, frozen as they were at the last moments of the departure of his soul, rest in a very deep calm, and sometimes upon his countenance shines the joy of a most sweet greeting and encounter with the angels and choir of the saints sent from heaven to receive the souls of the righteous.

O, that I might remember my death! Come unto me, O bitter, yet just and profitable remembrance. Deliver me from sin! Guide me onto the path of Christ! And let my hands thereby grow lax in every empty, vain, and sinful undertaking.

O, that I might remember my death! And may vainglory and love of pleasure flee from me. I shall remove from my table luxurious dainties, put off my pompously splendid garments, and put on a mourning garment. Then I shall mourn myself whilst

still alive, I who have been marked a dead man since my birth.

“And so,” says the remembrance of death, “remember and mourn for yourself while yet among the living. I have come to grieve you beneficently and have brought with myself a host of thoughts which are of great profit to the soul! Sell what you have in excess, and the price thereof distribute unto the poor. Send thereby your treasures to heaven according to the Saviour’s will. They will meet their owner there, multiplying a hundredfold. Shed ardent tears and pour forth fervent prayers for yourself. Who can with such care and diligence remember you after death as you yourself can before your own death? Entrust not your salvation to another when you yourself can do this most necessary thing! Why do you chase after corruption when death most assuredly shall deprive you of all that is corruptible? He [death] is the executor of the commands of the all-holy God. Should he but hear the command, forthwith does he rush with lightning speed to the execution thereof. He shall pay no regard for the rich, nor the noble, whether he be hero or genius, neither shall he spare youth, beauty, nor earthly happiness; all alike shall he send into eternity. The servant of God enters into the bliss of eternity, but God’s enemy - into eternal torment.”

“Remembrance of death is a divine gift,” said the holy fathers. It is given to those who keep the commandments of Christ in order to perfect them in their holy struggle of repentance and salvation.

Grace-given remembrance of death is preceded by one’s own efforts to remember death. Force yourself often to remember death; assure yourself of the undoubted truth that you shall certainly - at a time yet unbeknown to you - die, and the remembrance of death will begin to come of its own accord; an incredibly profound and striking remembrance of death will begin to manifest itself before your mind’s eye. It will deal mortal blows to all your sinful undertakings.

Such a spiritual gift is foreign to the lover of sin. Even when he stands before the grave itself, he ceases not to give himself over to the sinful pleasures of the flesh. He remembers not death, though it stands before him face to face. On the contrary the servant of Christ, even whilst in the magnificent chambers [of kings], remembers the grave that awaits him, and sheds forth salvific tears on behalf of his soul. Amen.

# THE COMING MONTH

THIS YEAR Pascha falls very late, on Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> April / 5<sup>th</sup> May, and so the feast of the **Forty Martyrs of Sebaste** (9<sup>th</sup> / 22<sup>nd</sup> March) falls within the first week of Great Lent, which is normally kept as one of the strictest of weeks of fasting, but because of the Martyrs' feast this year we are permitted wine and oil on the Friday, their feast day, even in that week. The Synaxarion of the Martyrs tells us: "These Holy Forty Martyrs came from various lands. All were soldiers under a general, during the reign of Emperor Licinius (308-324). Having been captured then examined on account of their Christian faith, first they were bound in chains and fetters and thrown in prison, then they were struck with stones in their faces and mouths. However, when the stones were hurled, they did not come into contact with the Martyrs, but they turned back and struck the ones who threw them. Then on a day when it was cold and very icy, especially in Sebaste where it is distinctly cold, these blessed Martyrs were condemned to be placed naked in the lake of the city. Because one of the forty, due to the weakness of his soul, went to the nearby bath that was lit, and as soon as the heat of the bath hit him he died, one of the guards, - his name was Aglaius, - who was keeping watch outside, seeing this, entered of his own accord into the lake, and by replacing the deserter, he established himself among the Holy Martyrs. He did this for the following reason: When the man who was weak in soul went to the bath, the guard saw a heavenly light that encircled the Holy Martyrs. He simultaneously saw bright crowns over the heads of each one. Only one of them was without a crown. At dawn, because the Saints were faint yet alive, their legs were crushed, therefore they delivered their souls into the hands of God, and received the unfading crowns of martyrdom. There was much desire among the Christians at that time to die for Christ, and they made this manifest. One of the Martyrs among the forty, who was young in age and named Meliton, had not yet died. Therefore the tyrant ordered that his legs not be crushed, but to leave him be, thinking that because he was young and physically

strong, he could yet live, and turn from his faith in Christ. Wherefore when his mother saw that he was still alive, she feared that due to his youth and love for life he may give in to fear, and thus be found unworthy of the honour and rank of his fellow soldiers. Standing beside her son, she stretched out her hands, and with signs, glances, and every possible word and way she tried to impart courage and bravery in his heart, saying: ‘My sweet child, child of the Heavenly Father, endure yet a little more, that you may become a perfect Martyr of Christ. Do not fear the torments, for behold Christ stands by as an invisible helper. Yet a little more, my child, and you will receive no more sorrow and no more pain. All the torments have passed, all the terrible things you conquered with your bravery. After these things you will receive joy, pleasure, relaxation, gladness, and good things that you will enjoy, reigning together with Christ, and you will become an intercessor to Him on my behalf, your mother.’ When the God-loving mother saw the soldiers placing the relics of the Saints on the wagon, and her son was left behind in the hopes that he may live, for this reason the good and brave mother, thinking that for her son to live would be more of a death, decided despite the weakness of her womanhood, and forgetting the affections of motherhood, lifted her son on her shoulders, and followed behind the wagon with strength of soul. The blessed one made it known that she did not want to see her son alive, but to see him die for Christ. When she saw that her son delivered his soul as he was being carried on the shoulders of his mother, then she felt liberated of her concerns, and danced and leaped for the joyous end of her son. Thus she brought his relic to the place where the other relics of the Saints were, and she placed her beloved child there among the other soldiers, that his body may not be separated from the bodies of the Saints, whose soul she numbered with their souls. When the soldiers lit a large fire, they burned the bodies of the Saints. Whatever remained, they threw maliciously into the lake, that they may not be taken by the Christians. But by divine economy, the holy relics came to a bank of the river, therefore they were taken up by the Christians, giving to the Orthodox an inviolate treasure.” On the Mystagogy site, John Sanidopoulos tells of a



strange miracle of the Martyrs: “According to the Russian pilgrim Vasily Barsky, who visited Mount Athos twice (1725 and 1744), when Emperor Romanos went to Mount Athos with the Patriarch of Constantinople to consecrate the newly-built church of the Holy Forty Martyrs at Xeropotamou Monastery in the tenth century, while it was being sprinkled with holy water by the Patriarch and he was proclaiming the names of the Forty Martyrs, a miraculous sign took place. Below the Holy Altar, a large mushroom with forty roots and forty heads sprung up, and it wrapped itself around the Altar. This astonished everyone and they glorified God, for they realised it was done in honour of the Holy Forty Martyrs. The miracle was not a singular event, but it took place every year on the feast of the Holy Forty Martyrs. Barsky says that he not only heard this from the oral tradition of the monks, but he also read about it in Greek and Bulgarian manuscripts. During the reign of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259-1282), a union took place between the Orthodox and the Latins at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274. The Emperor replaced Joseph with John Bekkos as Œcumenical Patriarch (1275-1282) to promote the union. Among those who did not accept the union were certain monastics of Mount Athos. Crusader soldiers were therefore dispatched to Mount Athos to ensure they accept the union or face dire consequences. Many monks of Mount Athos still refused to accept the Union of Lyons, so the Crusaders had many of them tortured and killed. Among the well-known martyrs of this time are the 26 Martyrs of Zographou, Saint Cosmas the Protos, and monks from Iveron and Vatopaidi monasteries, among others. However, when the Crusaders came to Great Lavra and Xeropotamou, they were welcomed with incense, for these monks had heard of the fate of their fellow monastics, and they became cowards in the face of having to suffer for their faith. Escorting them to the Church of the Holy Forty Martyrs, there was a concelebration of the Divine Liturgy, and to express their obedience to the terms of the union, the monks communed with the Crusaders and Unionists. Having communed together, suddenly a great earthquake struck the Monastery of Xeropotamou. The church and walls of the Monastery fell, and many of the cells were destroyed. Struck

by fear, the Crusaders left Mount Athos after this, and the other monasteries were spared. Many years passed before the Church of the Holy Forty Martyrs at Xeropotamou was rebuilt, and this took place during the reign of Emperor Andronikos. However, the mushroom never sprouted again on the feast of the Forty Martyrs, for they had given ‘what is holy to dogs.’ Instead, the spot below the Holy Altar remained empty, in remembrance of the miracle which used to take place, as well as to remind them to never betray the Orthodox faith again.”

The **Venerable Gertrude of Nivelles** (17<sup>th</sup> / 30<sup>th</sup> March) was the daughter of the Frankish nobleman Peppin of Landen. Gertrude’s mother, Itta of Metz, was likely acquainted with Amandus, the Bishop of Maastricht. When the court moved to Neustria, Peppin and his family moved with the king’s court. Thus, Gertrude became introduced to politics during her childhood in the royal court. Gertrude’s biography begins with her father hosting a banquet which the king attended when Gertrude was ten years old. At this feast, the king asked Gertrude if she would like to marry the son of a duke of the Austrasians. Gertrude declined and lost her temper and flatly rejected him with an oath, saying that she would have neither him nor any earthly spouse but Christ the Lord. Marriage alliances were important in this era so the girl’s personal feeling mattered little. The mention of Gertrude’s decided rejection of her Austrasian suitor is unique for the era and shows her character. Peppin returned to the east in 640, taking Gertrude with him. Soon after, he himself died. The Faith was not at all widespread in Gertrude’s time. It was only the development of cities and the initiative of bishops that led to a vast movement of evangelism, and a flowering of monasteries in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were constant requests by suitors who wished to gain wealth and power by marrying Gertrude. Itta pondered daily on what was to become of her and her daughter. However Bishop Amandus came to Itta’s house, preaching the word of God. At the Lord’s bidding, he asked whether she would build a monastery for herself and Christ’s handmaid, Gertrude. Itta founded Nivelles, a double monastery, one for men, the other for women. However, after they entered the religious life, Gertrude and her mother

suffered no small opposition from the royal family. The Vita describes how Itta, in order to prevent violent abductors from tearing her daughter away by force, shaved her daughter's hair, leaving only a crown shape. This action, the western tonsure, marked Gertrude for a life of religious service. Upon Itta's death at about the age of 60 in A.D. 652, twelve years after the death of her husband Peppin, Gertrude took over the monastery. At this time, Gertrude took the whole burden of governing upon herself alone, placing affairs of the family in the hand of good and faithful administrators from the brothers. Gertrude, by temperance of character, the sobriety of her heart and the moderation of her words, anticipated maturity. She was an intelligent young woman, scholarly and charitable, devoting herself to the sick, elderly, and poor, and she knew much of the Scripture by memory. Gertrude also memorised passages and books on divine law, and she openly disclosed the hidden mysteries of allegory to her listeners. Her Vita describes Gertrude as building churches, and taking care of orphans, widows, captives, and pilgrims. Upon becoming abbess, Gertrude obtained through her envoys men of good reputation, relics of saints and holy books from Rome, and from regions across the sea, experienced men for the teaching of the divine law and to practice the chants for herself and her people. She welcomed foreigners, lay or religious. She especially welcomed Irish monks who, since the sixth century, had travelled to evangelise. Among the numerous pilgrims that visited the monastery of Nivelles were the two brothers, Foillan and Ultan, both Irish monks on their way from Rome to Peronne, where their brother Furse, lay buried. Before the foundation of Nivelles, Irish monks led by Foillan travelled to Francia, from Furse's monastery in Ireland to escape pagan raids. They were received by Erchinoald, then Mayor of the Palace, but were later expelled by him and moved to live with Itta and Gertrude. Grimoald, Gertrude's brother, and the Pepinids (relatives and supporters of Gertrude's father, Peppin) were happy to accept them and built the monastery of Berbrona, often referred to as Fosses, for them with the help of Itta and Gertrude. Sometime later, Foillan went on a journey, after serving at Nivelles. After only a day of travelling, Foillan and his

three companions were betrayed and murdered by an evil man who offered them shelter for the night in his house and then sold their belongings. Upon learning that Foillan did not reach his destination, the brothers of his monastery began to search for him. However, it was Gertrude who succeeded in finding Foillan's body seventy-seven days after he was murdered, on the anniversary of his brother Furse's death. The four bodies were immediately brought to Nivelles. Dido, Bishop of Poitiers, and Gertrude's brother, Grimoald I, himself now Mayor of the Palace and a man of illustrious standing, arrived by divine intervention at Nivelles shortly before the bodies, and the two men carried Foillan into Nivelles on their own shoulders. Foillan's body was then taken to his own monastery and when noblemen had flocked from all sides to meet him and carried him on their own shoulders he was buried at Fosses. The first miracle attributed to Gertrude took place at the altar of the holy Hieromartyr Pope Sixtus II as Gertrude was standing in prayer. She saw descending above her a flaming pellucid sphere such that the whole basilica was illuminated by its brightness. The vision persisted for about half an hour and later was revealed to some of the sisters at the monastery. A second miracle took place as the anonymous author of her Life and his friend were peacefully sailing over the sea on the monastery's business. An incredible storm blew up and a sea monster appeared, causing great despair as the sailors turned to their idols, as paganism persisted at that time. In desperation, the author's friend cried out to Gertrude to save himself and his companions from the storm and monster. Immediately the storm subsided and the monster dived back into the deep. Before her death, Gertrude appointed her niece Wulfetrud as Abbess of Nivelles. Wulfetrud's position was precarious because her father, Grimoald I, had usurped his position. It was out of hatred of her father that kings, queens, and even priests wished to drag her from her place and steal Wulfetrud's property. Wulfetrud was only twenty years old at the time. Wulfetrud's appointment was a testament to Gertrude's power and influence within the abbey and the Church itself. Wulfetrud kept her position through the grace of God. At the same time, however, Gertrude was unable to help Grimoald or his daughter

against Clovis II. The Saint is portrayed as leading a devout life until her death. It is possible that after taking the tonsure in ca. 640, she never left the monastery cloister, thus escaping politics and local affairs. Gertrude is described as exhausted by a life of charity, fasting and prayer at the end of her short life. On account of her abstinence and keeping of vigils, her body was sorely exhausted with serious illness. After relinquishing her role as abbess, spending her time praying intensely and secretly wearing a hair shirt, Gertrude felt the time of her death approaching and asked a pilgrim from the Fosses monastery when she would die. This pilgrim is commonly believed to be Ultan, Foillan's brother. Ultan prophesied that Gertrude would die on 17<sup>th</sup> March, the very next day, and also the feast day of Saint Patrick. Furthermore, Ultan prophesied that "she may pass joyously because blessed Bishop Patrick with the chosen angels of God... are prepared to receive her." True to the prophecy, Gertrude died the next day after praying all night and taking Communion. Shortly after her repose, the monk Rinchinus as well as the author of the Vita noticed a pleasant fragrance in her cell by her body. Just before her death in A.D. 659, Gertrude instructed the nuns at Nivelles to bury her in an old veil left behind by a traveling pilgrim and in her own hair shirt. She died in poverty at the age of thirty-three years. Gertrude's choice of burial clothing is an expression of humility and piety. The haircloth and veil in which Gertrude was interred became relics. Saint Gertrude is the patron saint of the City of Nivelles. The towns of Geertruidenberg, Breda, and Bergen-op-Zoom in North Brabant, also are under her patronage. The legend of Gertrude's vision of the ocean voyage led her to be as well the patron saint of travellers. In memory of this event, medieval travellers drank a so-called "Sinte Geerts Minne" or Gertrudenminne before setting out on their journey. Her attention to the care of her garden led to her assistance being invoked by gardeners, and also against rats and mental illness.

The **Holy New Martyr Myron the Tailor of Heraklion, Crete** (20<sup>th</sup> March / 2<sup>nd</sup> April) was born into a pious Orthodox Christian family in Mega Kastro (present day Heraklion), headed by his father whose name was Demetrius. Myron

was a sober and serious young man who earned his living by working as a tailor. Myron's habits and demeanour were such that he became the envy of the Muslims, who also thought he was extremely handsome. Therefore a number of Muslims set out to find a way to cause him to abandon Orthodox Christianity and accept Islam. One day the Muslims found a young boy and convinced him to declare that Myron had molested him. This charge gave the Muslims the excuse they needed to apprehend and bring Myron before the kadi. Their concocted story was repeated before the kadi who asked Myron if the charge against him were true. Myron immediately answered it was false because he was not guilty of molesting the young Muslim boy. The Muslims present however shouted at the top of their voices that the charges were true and that Myron deserved to die. The kadi then said to Myron he had two choices: convert and save his life or remain an Orthodox Christian and suffer death. Myron replied that he was unwilling ever to deny his faith and the name of Christ. On the contrary he was ready to receive as much punishment as they would inflict on him for the love of Christ. He was born an Orthodox Christian and he was ready to die as an Orthodox Christian. Hearing this response, the kadi ordered Myron be beaten and placed in gaol. When he was brought back for the second interrogation, the same witnesses came forward and repeated their charges and demanded his punishment. Meanwhile the kadi began flattering Myron, promising him many rewards and honours if he converted, but also a very painful death if he refused. Others present asked Myron to take pity on his youth and beauty and invited him to come over to Islam and live a happy and glorious life. Myron's response to this was that he would never change his faith and he would die as an Orthodox Christian. Seeing his resolve, the kadi immediately sentenced Myron to death. On the way to his execution, which was to take place outside of the city, Myron greeted all the Orthodox Christians he met and said to them, "Brethren, forgive me and God will forgive you." Among those following along the way was Myron's father whose tears overwhelmed him. So when they reached the place of execution, Myron asked and was given permission to go to his father. He fell at his father's feet and

began kissing them, consoling him and asking him for his paternal blessing. Myron then turned to the executioners and told them to complete their task. Myron's death followed swiftly by hanging. As he remained on the scaffold, a heavenly light was seen bathing Myron's body. Thus Myron the Tailor from Mega Kastro, Crete, sacrificed his life for the love of Jesus Christ in his home city on 20<sup>th</sup> March, in the year 1793.



## POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

I RECEIVED an email last week which was a complete hotchpotch of mistakes, and I think deserves some reply for all, because it clearly showed how we have to first establish the facts before jumping to conclusions and spreading panic. So many of us do so, having started with wrong premises. Our correspondent started with expressing horror that the Church of Greece had accepted the marriage of same-sex couples. This was blatantly untrue! The state accepted them not the Church, neither the State (New Calendarist) Church nor the Traditionalist Church. In fact in their discussions on the matter, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis spoke to the cabinet of Greece about the bill on same-sex marriage and adoption. In his speech, he acknowledged the Church's perspectives but emphasised that the state's decisions are distinct from theological beliefs. Representatives of the State Church have in fact raised objections to this decision, and for this they are to be praised, although it is rather sad that on this one issue they did so when they have accepted other innovations not only in secular society but in their Church itself, which adulterate our sacred traditions and confession of the Faith. Our correspondent then went on to express alarm that our community was now within the Church of Greece and would thereby be required to follow that course. As our community is within the Synod of Bishops of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece this is of course a complete *non sequitur*, and one is left just wondering why someone attending our church for years had not noticed we were not in the State

Church of Greece. Had they thought we were, did they remain with us because they were willing to accept hierarchs involved in ecumenism and other departures from Church Tradition? And again one wonders why the issue of same-sex marriages ranked pre-eminently in their minds above the adulteration of other fundamental Church beliefs.



*NEWS from the Richmond Diocese  
of the Church of the Genuine  
Orthodox Christians of Greece*

**BAPTISM AT SAINT EDWARD'S**

ON Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> January / 3<sup>rd</sup> February, the Baptism of **Mariam**, the infant daughter of **Pavel and Stephanie Tosev** of **Chatham**, Kent, was celebrated at Saint Edward's Church. Mariam's grandfather, **Fr Ivan Tosev** visited from Bulgaria to be the celebrant of the holy Mysterion. The godmother is **Procla Bell**, and after the service a reception was held for the participants in the Mortuary hall. **Presbytera Ariadna**, Fr Ivan's wife, and their son **Pencho** from Bulgaria also took part in the celebration. On the following day, Fr Ivan concelebrated the Parish Liturgy with **Archimandrite Daniel**, **Priestmonk Sabbas** and **Fr Borislav Popov**, and Mariam was imparted the Holy Mysteries for the first time by her grandfather, before Fr Daniel took over to do so for the rest of the congregation.

**ICON DONATED TO THE CHURCH**

A HAND-PAINTED ICON of the **Holy Hieromartyr Pancratius of Taormina in Sicily**, feast days 9<sup>th</sup> / 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb-ruary and 9<sup>th</sup> / 22<sup>nd</sup> July, has been donated to our church by **Alexandra Galbeaza**. The icon was painted in Bucharest and is currently being framed with others at **Easels in Chobham**.



## VISITORS

ON Tuesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> January, the **Priest Michael Hilaris** from the **Saint Demetrius Church in Athens** visited us accompanied by a small party of pilgrims.

On Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> February, the **Monks Hiacynth and Hierotheus from Romania** visited us.



## Practical Tip

A SIMPLE but important point: When you ask the advice of another or ask them to explain something, **listen** to what they are telling you. That might seem obvious, but if we watch ourselves we shall see that often, instead of doing this, we listen to what we think they ought to be saying or what endorses what is our own opinion on the matter, and so we gain nothing by the endeavour.



“THE PROUD sin greatly who, after studying secular literature and having turned to the Holy Scriptures, consider all that they say to be the Law of God, and do not endeavour to come to know the thoughts of the prophets and apostles, but seek out from the Scriptures inappropriate texts for their own thoughts, as if this were a good work, and not the most defiled kind of study: to distort the thoughts of Scripture and submit them to their own intentions, in spite of obvious contradictions... It is proper to children and charlatans to try to teach that which they themselves do not know.”

VEN. JEROME OF STRIDONIUM, +420 A.D.

“TO THE EXTENT to which a man cuts off and humbles his own will, he proceeds toward success. But insofar as he stubbornly guards his own will, so much does he bring harm to himself.”

VEN. EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN, +379 A.D.