

The Shepherd

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Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!



FROM THE FATHERS

“WHY DID HE rise in the flesh in which He suffered, unless to show the resurrection of the flesh? And wishing to confirm this, when His disciples did not know whether to believe He had truly risen in the body, and were looking upon Him and doubting, He said to them, *Ye have not yet faith, see that it is I*; and He let them handle Him, and showed them the prints of the nails in His hands. And when they were by every kind of proof persuaded that it was Himself, and in the body, they asked Him to eat with them, that they might thus still more accurately ascertain that He had truly risen bodily; and He ate honeycomb and fish. And when He had thus shown them that there is truly a resurrection of the flesh, wishing to show them this also, that it is not impossible for flesh to ascend into heaven (as He had said that our dwelling-place is in heaven), He was taken up into heaven while they beheld, as He was in the flesh.”

HOLY MARTYR JUSTIN THE PHILOSOPHER, + 166 A.D.

“AS JONAS spent three days and as many nights in the whale’s belly, and was delivered up sound again, so shall we all, who have passed through the three stages of our present life on earth - I mean the beginning, the middle, and the end, of which all this present time consists - rise again. For there are altogether three intervals of time, the past, the future, and the present. And for this reason the Lord spent so many days in the earth symbolically, thereby teaching clearly that when the forementioned intervals of time have been fulfilled, then shall come our resurrection, which is the beginning of the future age, and the end of this.”

HIEROMARTYR METHODIUS OF OLYMPUS, + c. 311 A.D.

“NOW SINCE you are celebrating holy Pascha, you should know, brethren, what the Pascha is. Pascha means the crossing-over, and so the festival is called by this name. For it was on this day that the Children of Israel crossed over out of Egypt, and the Son of God crossed over from this world to His Father. What gain is it to celebrate unless you imitate Him Whom you worship; that is, unless you cross over from Egypt, that is, from the darkness of evildoing to the light of virtue, from the love of this world to the love of your heavenly home?”

SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN, + 397 A.D.

“LET GOD’S PEOPLE then recognise that they are a new creation in Christ, and with all vigilance understand by Whom they have been adopted and Whom they have adopted. Let the things, which have been made new, not return to their ancient instability; and let him who has *put his hand to the plough* not forsake his work, but rather attend to that which he sows than look back to that which he has left behind. Let no one fall back into that from which he has risen, but, even though from bodily weakness he still languishes under certain maladies, let him urgently desire to be healed and raised up. For this is the path of health through imitation of the Resurrection begun in Christ, whereby, notwithstanding the many accidents and falls to which

in this slippery life the traveller is liable, his feet may be guided from the quagmire onto solid ground, for, as it is written, *By the Lord are the steps of a man rightly directed, and His way shall he greatly desire. When the just man falleth he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth his hand* (Ps. 36:23-24).”

SAINT LEO THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, + 461 A.D.



Homily on the Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women On Spiritual Deadness

SAINT IGNATIUS BRIANCHANINOV, +1867 A.D.

THE GOSPELS have told us today¹ about the exploits of the holy women who followed the God-Man during His earthly wanderings. They witnessed His sufferings and were present at His burial. The burial took place on Friday evening. While the Jews' wrath was pouring out like the fiery lava of Aetna not only upon the Lord, but upon all of those close to Him; while the holy Apostles were forced to hide or observe the extraordinary events only from a distance; while only John, the beloved disciple who leaned upon the breast of the Lord, feared nothing and remained always near the Lord, the secret disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, who had always concealed his heart's allegiance due to persecution from the Sanhedrin, suddenly disregards all the obstacles, hesitations, and anxiety that had bound and worried him until then, and he appears before cold, cruel Pilate to beg the body of the One who was shamefully executed. He receives the Lord's body and buries it with reverence and honour.

The Gospels imply that Joseph's deed was big-hearted and courageous. That is truly what it was. In the presence of the

Sanhedrin which had committed deicide, in the very Jerusalem that had participated in that deicide, a member of the Sanhedrin takes the body of the God-man killed by men down from the tree and carries it to the garden located near the city gates and walls. There, in quiet and solitude, under shady trees, he places the body by which the bodies and souls of all mankind are redeemed in a new tomb hewn from a solid rock, with an abundance of fragrances and oils, and wraps it like a precious treasure in fine, clean linen. Another member of the Sanhedrin also took part in the Lord's burial. This was Nicodemus, who came to the Lord by night and acknowledged that the Lord was sent from God. Having rolled a great stone to the door of the grave - as the Gospel calls the low opening to the cave - Joseph has satisfactorily finished his service and so he departs. The Sanhedrin followed Joseph's movements. Seeing him gone, it took care to set a guard at the grave and place a seal on the stone which covered the entrance. The Lord's burial was witnessed by both His friends and His enemies. Although some members of the Sanhedrin in their frenzy and rage committed a great evil, they unconsciously brought a great sacrifice (*cf.* Acts 17:18): through the slaughter of the all-pure Sacrifice they redeemed the whole human race, ended the fruitless number of transformative sacrifices, and made these sacrifices and their very institution superfluous. Other members of the Sanhedrin, representatives of all the righteous people of the Old Testament, served with a God-pleasing intention and disposition of soul in the burial of the Redeemer of mankind, and by this action ended and placed a seal upon the pious works of the sons of the Old Testament. From this point begins the exceptional service of those of the New Testament.

The holy women show no less courage than the selfless Joseph. Present at the burial on Friday, they did not deem it permissible on the Sabbath, the day of rest, to disrupt that peace in which the body of Christ rested in sacred darkness and reclusion within the sepulchral cave. The women were intent upon pouring out their zeal for the Lord by pouring myrrh upon His body. When they returned from the burial on Friday, they

immediately bought a goodly amount of aromatic substances and waited for the break of the day which follows the Sabbath, Sunday. On that day, as soon as the sun shone forth, the pious women went to the grave. On the way they remembered that a large stone had been rolled to seal the grave. This worried them, and the women began to say amongst themselves, "Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us?" (Mk. 16:2). The stone was very great. Having arrived at the tomb, they saw to their amazement the stone was rolled away. A light-bearing mighty angel had rolled it away; at the Lord's resurrection, he had descended from heaven to the grave which had encompassed Him Whom the heavens cannot encompass, stunned the guards with terror, broke the seal, and rolled away the stone. He sat on the stone, waiting for the women's arrival. When they came, he announced the Lord's resurrection to them, telling them to inform the Apostles. For their zeal for the God-man, for their resolve to render honour to the all-pure body that was guarded by the military guard, which the Sanhedrin in their hatred sharply watched, the holy women were the first among humans to receive exact and sure testimony of Christ's resurrection; they were made the first strong preachers of the resurrection, as ones who heard about it from the lips of the angel. The all-perfect God is impartial: for Him all people are equal. And those people who strive toward Him with great self-denial are made worthy of a special abundance of Divine gifts and spiritual elegance.

"Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us?" These words of the holy women have their own mysterious meaning. They are so edifying that love of neighbour and a desire for his spiritual benefit will not allow us to be silent about it.

The tomb is our heart. The heart was once a temple, but it became a tomb. Christ enters it by means of the mystery of Baptism, in order to dwell in us and work in us. Then the heart is consecrated as a temple to God. We steal from Christ the possibility to work in us and enliven our "old man," and this always follows its attraction to our fallen will, our reason poisoned by falsehood. Brought in by Baptism, Christ continues to abide in us, but He is as if wounded and mortified by our behaviour.

The temple of God not made by hands is turned into a cramped, dark tomb. A very great stone is rolled over its entrance. The enemies of God set a guard over the tomb, and seal its entrance blocked by the stone. They seal the stone to the cave so that in addition to the stone's great weight, this famous seal forbids anyone to even touch the stone. The enemies of God themselves watch over the preservation of this deadness! They have thought it through and set up all these obstacles in order to forestall the resurrection, to prevent it, and make it impossible.

The stone is the soul's illness by which all the other spiritual illnesses are guarded incurably and which the holy Fathers call insensibility.² Many will say, what sort of sin is this? We have never heard of it. According to the Fathers, insensibility is the deadening of spiritual feelings, the unseen death of the human soul with respect to spiritual things in a life that is flourishing with respect to material things. From a long-term physical sickness all strength can become exhausted and the body's abilities withered; then the illness cannot find any more food, and ceases to torment the body's constitution. It leaves the sick man alone and wasted, as if dead and incapable of movement due to the debilitating suffering, the terrible, dumb morbidity that is not expressed by any particular suffering. The same thing happens to the human soul. Long-term slackness of life amidst continuous distractions, constant voluntary sins, forgetfulness of God and eternity, inattention or only superficial attention to the Gospel teachings removes from our spirit any inclination toward spiritual things, and deadens it to them. Although they continue to exist, they cease to exist for our spirit because its life has ended for them - all its strength is directed toward the material, the temporal, the vain, and the sinful.

Everyone who wants to dispassionately and seriously investigate the state of his soul will see the illness of insensibility in it; he will see its broad significance, its gravity and consequence, and will have to admit that it is the manifestation and witness of his deadness of soul. When we want to study the Word of God, what boredom hits us! Everything we read seems hard to understand, not worthy of attention, and strange. How quickly we want

to be free of that reading! Why is this? Because we feel no affinity for the Word of God.

When we rise for prayer, what dryness and coldness we feel! How we rush to finish our cursory, completely distracted prayer! Why? Because we are estranged from God: we believe in God's existence with a dead faith; He does not exist to our sensibility. Why have we forgotten eternity? Are we excluded from the number of those who must enter into its boundless realm? Doesn't death stand before us face to face, as it does for all humans? Why is this? It is because we do not want to think about eternity; we have lost the precious foretaste of it, and acquired a false perception of our earthly sojourn. This false perception imagines that our earthly life is endless. We are so deceived and distracted by this false perception that we conform all our actions to it, bringing all the potential of our soul and body as a sacrifice to corruption, not caring at all about what awaits us in the other world. After all, we must inevitably become permanent inhabitants of that world.

Why does idle talk, snide laughter, judgment of our neighbours and derision of them gush forth from us as from a well-spring? Why do we spend so many unburdened hours in empty amusements, cannot get enough of them, are always leaping from one vain pastime to another, but we do not want to dedicate even the tiniest bit of time to reviewing our own sins and lamenting over them? Because we have acquired an affinity for sin, for everything vain, for everything that brings sin into a person, and by which sin is preserved within a person. Because we have lost our affinity for all exercise that brings God-beloved virtues into us, that multiplies and preserves them. Insensibility is rooted in the soul by the world which is at enmity with God, and by the fallen angels at war with God, with the aid of our own free will. It grows and gathers strength through a life according to the principles of this world; it grows and gathers strength when we follow our fallen reason and will, when we abandon service to God, and because we serve Him carelessly. When insensibility stagnates in the soul and becomes a property of it, then the world and its rulers place a seal on the stone. This seal

consists in the concourse of the human soul with fallen spirits, in the spirit's assimilation of human impressions wrought upon him by fallen spirits, and in its subjection to the aggressive influence and domination by these outcast spirits.

“Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us?” This is a question filled with anguish, sadness, and perplexity. Those souls feel this anguish, sadness, and perplexity that have directed themselves toward the Lord, leaving behind service to the world and sin. Before their gaze is revealed the sickness of insensibility in all its horrifying enormity and gravity. They desire and pray with contrition, exercise themselves in the reading of the Word of God beyond all other reading, and abide in constant awareness of their sinfulness, in constant mourning over it. In a word, they desire to become part of God and to belong to Him. They meet an unexpected resistance in their own selves that is unknown to those who serve this world: insensibility of heart. The heart stricken by its former careless life as by a mortal wound does not discover any signs of life. In vain does the mind gather thoughts about death, about God's judgment, about the multitude of its sins, about the torments of hell, about the sweetness of Paradise; in vain does the mind strive to beat upon the heart with these reflections - the heart remains devoid of feeling for them, as if hell, Paradise, God's judgment, sinfulness, and the state of fallenness and demise have no relation whatsoever to the heart. It is asleep in a deep sleep, the sleep of death; it is asleep, drunken with sinful poison. “Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us?” This stone is very great.

According to the teachings of the holy Fathers, in order to conquer insensibility a person must have constant, patient, uninterrupted action against that insensibility; he must have a constant, pious, and attentive life. Such a life beleaguers the life of insensibility; however this death of the human spirit cannot be put to death through human efforts alone; insensibility is destroyed by the action of divine grace. An angel of God, at God's command, comes down to help the labouring and troubled soul, rolls away the stone of hardness from the heart, fills the heart with compunction, announces to the soul the resurrection, which

is the usual result of continual compunction.³ Compunction is the first sign of a heart revived toward God and eternity. What is compunction? Compunction is a person's feeling of mercy and compassion toward himself, toward his grave state, his fallen state, a state of eternal death. Holy Scripture writes of the people of Jerusalem who were brought to this state by the preaching of the Apostle Peter and were inclined to accept Christianity that they were "pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37).⁴

The Lord's body had no need of the myrrh-bearers' fragrant myrrh. Any anointing with myrrh was forestalled by the resurrection. But by their timely purchase of myrrh, their early arrival at the first rays of the sun to the life-giving tomb, their disdain of any fear brought on by the Sanhedrin's wrath and the militant soldiers guarding the tomb and the One interred there, the holy women showed and proved by experience their heartfelt dedication to the Lord. Their gift turned out to be unnecessary. It was rewarded a hundredfold by the appearance of the angel, up to then invisible to them, and by the announcement that could not be anything but bountifully true - that the God-Man has risen and resurrected mankind with Himself.

Our dedication of our life and all our strength and abilities to the service of God are not needed by God for Himself; they are needed by us. We bring them like myrrh to the Lord's tomb. We should buy myrrh, our good intentions, in timely fashion. We should renounce from our youth up all sacrifices to sin; and with the price of this we shall buy myrrh, our good intentions. It is not possible to unite the service of sin to the service of God; the former is destroyed by the latter. We should not allow sin to deaden in our spiritual affinity toward God and all things divine! We should not allow sin to mark us with its impressions, or to forcibly prevail over us.

Whoever enters into the service of God from the very days of an unspoiled youth and remains in this service with constancy submits himself to the endless influence of the Holy Spirit, marks himself with the all-holy, grace-filled impressions that emanate from the Spirit, acquires in good time a vibrant knowledge of Christ's Resurrection, comes alive in spirit in Christ,

and becomes chosen by God to be a preacher of the resurrection to his brothers and sisters. Whoever has become a slave to sin through his ignorance or inclination, who has entered into concourse with fallen spirits, has become one of their number, who has lost in his spirit the connection to God and to the dwellers of heaven; let him heal himself with repentance. Let us not put off our healing from day to day, so that death might not creep upon us unawares and take us suddenly, so that we would not be proved incapable of entering the habitations of unending rest and festival, so that we would not be cast down as useless chaff into the fires of hell that burn eternally but do not consume. The healing of old illnesses does not happen so quickly and conveniently as ignorance might imagine. There is a reason why God's mercy grants us time for repentance; there is a reason why all the saints begged God to give them time for repentance. Time is needed to erase the sinful impressions; time is needed for us to be marked by the impressions of the Holy Spirit; time is needed to cleanse us from defilement; time is needed to clothe ourselves in the garments of virtue, to adorn ourselves in the God-beloved qualities that adorn all those who dwell in heaven.

Christ is resurrected in the person who is prepared for it, and the tomb, the heart, again becomes a temple of God. "Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God" (Ps. 3:7); in Thy mysterious and yet essential Resurrection is my salvation. Amen.

1 Mark 15:43–16:8.

2 *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Homily 18.

3 *The Ladder*, Homily 1.

4 The Church Slavonic Scripture uses the phrase *umilashesya serdtsem*, which means they became contrite in heart.



"AN EGG, which is merely a symbol of resurrection, cannot take the place of actually partaking of the Resurrection in the Divine Liturgy, and the distribution of eggs before the Liturgy would be an act of disdain for the Divine Mystery and a deception of the faithful."

ST JOHN OF SHANGHAI THE WONDERWORKER,
+1966 A.D.

The Joy of Christ's Resurrection

SAINT PHILARET THE NEW CONFESSOR, OF
NEW YORK, + 1985 A.D.

THE HOLY APOSTLE and Evangelist John the Theologian, speaking in his Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ's last farewell talk with His disciples, cites the Saviour's words: "Ye now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

That farewell talk at which these words were said took place during the Mystical Supper, before the Saviour's journey to suffering. In this talk the Saviour encouraged and fortified His disciples before those great and at the same time terrible events that were to take place in the night of His suffering – His travails and death for the salvation of the world. Whoever reads or listens piously and attentively to the Gospel narrative on this talk, sees not only the divine depth of its content, but also its very special nature. Reading or hearing it, one could think that it was not the Saviour Himself who was embarking upon suffering, but rather His disciples - so agitated and upset were they, and so majestically calm was He, - knowing and seeing in advance all that He would have to undergo and suffer in just a few hours' time. As a loving Father and a concerned Teacher He fortifies His beloved and loving children, and as a good Shepherd He prays to His Father for them...

At that time all that their Lord and Teacher knew was not yet revealed to the apostles, but from His words and actions they clearly and undoubtedly felt that some terrible event was approaching, and that some kind of danger threatened their Teacher. It is for this reason that, comforting and encouraging them, the Lord says to them: "Ye now have sorrow, but I will see

you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”

The hour of Christ the Saviour’s redemptive suffering finally arrived, and His sorrowful prediction came to pass: “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone.” The apostles became afraid and abandoned their Teacher, and were themselves left alone. Inexpressible sorrow filled their souls, and darkness enveloped them. They loved their Lord with all their soul, all their heart, all their strength, all their thoughts, in the entire world there was no one and nothing more precious to them than He, and with His death the sun seemed to stop shining for them, and the world became empty, cold, and dark.

But then, Christ arose! The miracle of miracles occurred! There came the day of which in deep antiquity King David sang; “This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us rejoice in it!” And the Church joyfully proclaims: “Now all is filled with light: the heavens, and the earth, and the netherworld; let all creation celebrate Christ’s resurrection, in which it is affirmed.” The feast of feasts and the triumph of triumphs!

The Holy Gospel tells us that the first word which the Lord said to the myrrh-bearing women who saw Him after His resurrection was an appeal to joy. “Rejoice!” He told them, and bright joy filled their souls. But He also knew what sorrow and grief had taken hold of those whom in His love and compassion He had called His brothers, His beloved disciples.

And thus, on this very day of His resurrection, He appears to them as they are gathered together. “And the disciples rejoiced, seeing the Lord,” notes the holy Evangelist John. What the Saviour had prophesied to the apostles at the Mystical Supper now came to pass - their souls were filled with the joy of His resurrection. Now no one could take away this joy from them, and they spread this joy to all of mankind. For in their preaching they primarily stressed the fact that they were witnesses to His resurrection, and the book of the Acts of the Apostles specifically points out that the apostles testified to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ with great power.

To this joy of Christ's resurrection the Holy Church also summons all of us by saying: "Come, let us rejoice in the Lord Who hath destroyed the dominion of death." Before Christ's resurrection the "dominion of death" was indestructible; death lorded it over all living beings, and had the last word in regard to every living being by terminating its life. But the resurrected Christ trampled down death by death, destroyed its power, shattered the dominion of death, and now for every Christian believer death is only "eternal rest in blessed dormition" or, according to St. Basil the Great, "a passage from sorrow to that which is beneficial, sweet, comforting, and joyous." This is what the Conqueror of hell and death granted to us through His resurrection. Come then, let us rejoice in the Lord!

And let nothing darken or take away from us the joy of the bright feast, of the great triumph of our Faith, which is "the victory that overcometh the world" (1 Jn 5:4). Let dark clouds gather over the world. Let life become more disturbing and tense, and let our planet become like a powder keg thanks to the latest technological discoveries, ready to blow up any minute and destroy all existence. Let the world, which is getting farther and farther away from God and His truth proceed to its inevitable and inescapable end. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be," the Conqueror of death and hell says to us (Rev. 22:11-12).

Before embarking upon His mankind-saving endeavour, Christ warned His disciples, and through them all of us who believe in Him: "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). He makes everyone who truly believes in Him a participant in this victory. And this victory is the victory of His Resurrection, the victory of life over death, of good over evil, of light over darkness. Let each faithful soul see Him, the Master of life and the Conqueror of death, through the eyes of faith, and let it rejoice with the triumphant joy of His Resurrection, and this joy no man will take away from it for ages unto ages! ***Christ is Risen!***

From the Writings of the Reposed Athonite Elder, Priestmonk Arsenii

On the Path to the Heavenly Kingdom

IN the present age, we are all standing at a trader's stall, and every hour we may gain something or lose something. The grace of God, which has provided us with ordinances, reason and freewill, awaits only our word to lead us into the heavenly kingdom. This path is difficult especially at the beginning, but the further one takes it then the more and more it becomes acceptable, for God grants comfort to the soul that loves Him, as the Bridegroom does to His bride, granting succour, which immeasurably flows forth from Him Who grants succour to the whole world, in the way that the Psalmist describes: *How sweet to my palate are Thy sayings! More sweet than honey to my mouth* (Ps. 118:103).

Some make a good beginning, fervently striving towards the Jerusalem on high, the city of the great King, but meeting some temptation on the way, they weaken in the good course they have taken; but time flies swiftly, and for each of us the end of our earthly journey draws nigh. If we think of this more often and more deeply, we will constantly force ourselves to live in a God-pleasing manner. It is not to no purpose that the holy Fathers tell us that remembrance of death is always indispensable. Blessed is the man who every day awaits death; he is dead to the world but has arisen unto God; nothing earthly disquiets him, it does not frighten him; it does not concern him. He has dedicated himself wholly unto God and fully believes that God will take care for all his needs. But we must not conclude from this that we should live hands free in a careless manner; no, rather we must work according to our strength and abilities to

meet bodily requirements, but we must not put our heart into this labour and must remain indifferent to all that is worldly, not rejoicing over successes nor crying over losses. Then only will we be able to please God, then only will our heart be able to steadfastly be attached to the Lord and work for Him alone, and only then will our spiritual eyes be opened and we shall recognise the vanity of this age and worthily value the high honour and the blessedness to which we are called, and be worthy to be not only Christians but even children and friends of God: *Ye are my friends* (John 15:14).

Finis.



THE COMING MONTH

THIS YEAR, the Church calendar month of April opens with the most holy days in the Christian Year, the first being **Holy and Great Friday**, and the **Lord's Pascha** falling on the third day of the month. Above we have included two homilies by great saints of our Church which elucidate the immense significance of these celebrations for us as Christians. Anything that we, weak ones, might add here will seem banal, and so it is perhaps best simply to repeat the invitation the holy Apostle Philip addressed to Nathanael: *Come and see* (John 1:46).

Throughout the forty days of Pascha, the following feast of the Ascension and the seven days of Pentecost, - that is, until 28th May / 10th June this year, we have no strict fasts days. So wine and oil are permitted every day, and during this period we do not make full prostrations in church. The one exception to this is that at Vespers on the Day of Pentecost we prostrate during the reading of the Three Kneeling Prayers. During the first week of Pascha, Bright or New Week, and during the week following the Great Feast of Pentecost, no fasting is enjoined at all. In the remaining weeks we do again start Wednesday and Friday fasting, and for the monastics and those blessed to do so Mondays as well.

Our holy Father Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, that great pillar of Orthodoxy, explains these customary usages beautifully. He writes: "This corruptible must put on incorruption,

and this mortal must put on immortality' (1 Cor. 15: 53). The Lord's resurrection has procured this bounty for us, and that is why it is the only feast we keep for so many days, seeing that it is immortal, indestructible and eternal, and thus prefigures the future blessedness of the saints, whence pain, sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Es. 35:10). In that place inspired, unchanging joy and celebration will be unceasing, for it is the dwelling place of those who truly rejoice. For this reason the grace of the Spirit ordained that before this present season we should pass the holy forty days in fasting, vigil, prayer and all kinds of training in the virtues. Through those forty days He shows that in this world the life of those being saved consists only of repentance and a way of life pleasing to God. By means of these fifty days through which we are now passing, however, He demonstrates the ease and enjoyment which await those who have lived here and now in struggles for God's sake."

Among the Saints we celebrate:-

Our **Holy Father Celestine I, Pope of Rome**, whose feast day falls on 8th/21st, the same day this year as we celebrate the Life-Giving Spring of the Most Holy Theotokos. He was a zealous champion of Orthodoxy, who lived during the reign of the Emperor Theodosius the Younger. A Roman from the region of Campania, nothing else is known of his early history except that his father's name was Priscus. He is said to have lived for a time at Milan with Saint Ambrose. The first known record of him is in a document of Pope Innocent I from the year 416, where he is spoken of as Celestine the Deacon. In A.D. 418 Saint Augustine wrote to him in very reverential terms; they seemed to have formed a strong friendship as indicated from other later letters. The virtuous life of the Saint and his authority as a theologian won him the general esteem and love of the clergy and people. After the death of Saint Boniface, Celestine was chosen to be the Bishop of Rome. He became Pope on 10th September, 422. At this time, the heresy of Nestorius emerged. At a local Synod in Rome in 430, Saint Celestine denounced this heresy and condemned Nestorius as a heretic. After the Synod, he wrote a letter to Saint Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria, stating that if Nestorius did not renounce his false teachings after ten days, then he should be deposed and excommunicated. He also sent a series of letters to Constantinople and Antioch, in which he unmasked and denounced the Nestorian heresy. Though he did not attend personally, he sent delegates to the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431, in which the Nestorian

teachings were condemned. Four letters written by him on that occasion, all dated 15th March, together with a few others, to the African bishops, to those of Illyria, of Thessalonica, and of Narbonne, are extant in retranslations from the Greek, the Latin originals having been lost. Pope Celestine actively condemned the Pelagians and was zealous for Orthodoxy. He sent Palladius to Ireland to serve as a bishop in A.D. 431, and Saint Patrick was sent there to do missionary work. Pope Celestine strongly opposed the Novatians in Rome; as Socrates Scholasticus writes, “this Celestine took away the churches from the Novatians at Rome also, and obliged Rusticula their bishop to hold his meetings secretly in private houses.” He was zealous in refusing to tolerate the smallest innovation on the constitutions of his predecessors. As Saint Vincent of Lerins reported in 434: “Holy Pope Celestine also expresses himself in like manner and to the same effect. For in the Epistle which he wrote to the priests of Gaul, charging them with connivance with error, in that by their silence they failed in their duty to the ancient faith, and allowed profane novelties to spring up, he says: ‘We are deservedly to blame if we encourage error by silence. Therefore rebuke these people. Restrain their liberty of preaching.’” Saint Celestine reposed on 26th July, 432. He was buried in the Cemetery of Saint Priscilla in the Via Salaria, but his sacred relics, subsequently moved, now lie in the Basilica di Santa Prassede. This translation of his relics took place on 6th April, 820, which is why his feast came to be celebrated at this time.

Our Venerable Mother Anthousa of Constantinople (12th / 25th) was born an Imperial Princess, the daughter of the Iconoclast Emperor Constantine V Copronymos and his third wife Eudokia. She and her twin brother, the future Emperor Leo the Khazar, were born on 25th January, 756 or 757. Constantine had previously tortured the holy Abbess Anthousa of Mantineon because she venerated the holy icons. During a campaign in Paphlagonia, he had her brought before him again, promising her even harsher torments if she did not come around to his way of thinking. She remained steadfast in defending the icons, however. Constantine told her that his wife was having difficulty in her pregnancy, and he asked her to pray for the Empress. She agreed to do so, and told him that his son and daughter would be born safely, and even spoke about their future life. Empress Eudokia’s daughter was given the name Anthousa, in thanksgiving for the safe delivery of the twins. When Saint Anthousa of Mantineon’s prediction was fulfilled, she was allowed to return to her convent, where she died in ripe old age. When the younger Anthousa grew up, the Emperor

began to urge his daughter to marry. But from her youth Anthousa yearned for monasticism and refused to consider his suggestions. After the death of her father in A.D. 775, this fragrant fruit from a putrid root shared her possessions with the poor, and used her wealth to adorn many churches and fund charity organisations. She became a mother to orphans, and was also a protector of widows. She devoted herself entirely to a life of piety, constantly offering prayers to the Lord and reading the Holy Scriptures. The devout Empress Eirene, wife of Leo the Khazar, regarded Anthousa with love and esteem and invited her to be a co-regent. Anthousa, however, did not desire any worldly honours. Since she lived at the palace, she wore clothes befitting her position as an emperor's daughter, but underneath her finery she wore a coarse hair-shirt. As an ascetic in the palace, she had a strict diet and only drank water. Desiring a life of solitary asceticism, Anthousa entered the Monastery of Saint Evthymia, and received the monastic tonsure from Saint Tarasius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. She founded the Evmeneia or Homonoia Monastery at Constantinople, which was known for its strict way of life. Saint Anthousa was an example of humility to the other nuns. She did hard work, she cleaned the church, and carried water. She never sat at the table during meals, but served the sisters instead. She made sure that no one left the monastery in need. The humble and gentle ascetic lived until the age of fifty-two, and died peacefully in 808 or 809.

Our **Venerable Father Alexander of Oshevensk** (20th April / 3rd May) was born on 17th March, 1427, the feast day of Saint Alexis the Man of God, after whom he was named. He was born some distance from Belozersk, several months before the death of the Venerable Cyril of Belozersk, with whom he was bound together by later spiritual connections for his whole life. He was the fifth son of the rich landowner Nikephor Osheven and his spouse Photini; he was a long-awaited child and was born through the fervent prayers of Photini. The Mother of God Herself together with the Venerable Cyril of Belozersk appeared to her and promised the birth of a son through the intercession of the Venerable Cyril. Although Alexis was the youngest son, his parents saw him as their successor and someone to care for them in their old age. In childhood they taught the boy his letters and spoke of him as an enterprising landowner. When he was eighteen they naturally sought to arrange a marriage for him, but with the permission of his parents, he went off to pray at the Kirillo-Belozersk Monastery and remained there. The abbot Cyril loved the youth for his humility and soon suggested to him to take monastic vows. But

Alexis refused, having decided to test himself. Having studied Holy Scripture, he served the brethren as a novice for six years and only then did he accept monastic vows, being given the name Alexander. During this period his parents settled in the village of Volosovo. Then Nikephor sought of the Novgorod boyar Ioann a place for settling near the River Churiuga, and this grew into a town, named Oshevsk. Alexander asked of the abbot permission to receive from his parents their final blessing and forgiveness, so that afterwards he might go into a solitary life. The abbot did not give permission to the young monk at once. He warned him about the dangers of wilderness life. But the Monk Alexander feared the renown as an ascetic that he had among the brethren, and he requested a second time to be released from the monastery. Finally, the abbot gave his blessing. Greeting him with joy, the father suggested to the son that he settle at the River Churiuga and promised to assist in the building of a monastery. The Monk Alexander took a liking to the place. He set up a cross as foundation of the future monastery and gave a vow to dwell there until the end of his life. After this Alexander returned to the Kirillo-Belozersk Monastery and for some time he did obedience in the choir, the kitchen and the bakery. They ordained him deacon. Finally, when Alexander went to the abbot for the third time and told him how a miraculous voice had called him to found a monastery, and how he had vowed to dwell at that place, the abbot released him, blessing him with the icons of the Mother of God the Directress and Saint Nicolas the Wonderworker. Father Alexander dedicated the chosen spot with the icons, and received from his father supervision for building a church, and he himself set off to the Archbishop of Novgorod, Jonah. Archbishop Jonah ordained him presbyter and appointed him abbot of the monastery. The boyarina Anastasia and her son Yurii were prepared to offer the monastery the whole district, but Alexander accepted a deed for only the necessary ground. The new church was dedicated to Saint Nicolas. With determination and energy the monk began to work at organising the monastery. An elder, who had accompanied him from the Kirillo-Belozersk Monastery, was not able to endure the harsh wilderness life and went back, but little by little brethren gathered. The Saint introduced a strict rule of common life, which required complete silence in the church and at refectory when saint lives were read, in monks' cells there was to be no idleness, and at the time of fulfilling obediences it was necessary to do the Noetic Prayer or recite Psalms. "Brethren," said Alexander, "let us not shirk work nor the way of sorrow. You know, that the way of sorrow leads

to the Heavenly Kingdom. Live in mutual love and humility. God is love, and He loves the humble.” Many even from among the layfolk came to him and put themselves under his spiritual guidance. Two of the Saint’s nephews became monks at his monastery, but offended one of the brethren, the monk Ambrose. Father Alexander gently calmed the pious brother, but his nephews cooled in their zeal for asceticism and they left the monastery. Grief over the salvation of his spiritual children wrecked the health of the saint. He lay down and was not able to lift up his hand nor his head, nor even to utter a word. In such a state of exhaustion Alexander prayed to the Venerable Cyril, his spiritual father. Cyril appeared in a white robe and, signing the sick man with the sign of the cross, he said: “Grieve not, brother! I will intercede and you shall be well. Only forget not your vow, nor leave this place. I shall assist you.” Having fallen asleep, the monk regained his strength and in the morning went to church. To encourage the brethren he told them about the visit of the Venerable Cyril. The Saint struggled for twenty-seven years in the monastery he had founded, and reposed peacefully on 20th April, 1479. After the death of Saint Alexander, the monastery began quickly to go into decline, but he did not cease to care for it. Once, the monastic attendant Mark had a vision in a dream: the monastery was full of people; a grey-haired elder in bishop’s garb signed with a cross those working on the building. Another elder, with a long beard, sprinkled with holy water; and a third, of moderate stature with blond hair, censured; a fourth one, a youth, followed after them at a distance. The third elder - this was Alexander of Oshevensk - explained that Saint Nicolas the Wonderworker and the Venerable Cyril of Belozersk helped him, and the youth standing at the distance was the chanter Matfei, who was soon tonsured under the name Maxim and chosen abbot of the monastery, as predicted in the vision of Alexander. The monk Maxim was appointed as abbot by the Archbishop of Novgorod Sergei, and he restored the monastery. He was the monastic head until A.D. 1525. At the time of the building of a new church in the name of Saint Nicolas, during an appearance of Venerable Alexander and on his direction, his relics were found incorrupt. His icon was then painted in accord with how he appeared as a monk and in accord with the accounts of those who knew the elder. Saint Alexander appeared to Saint Diodorus of George Hill in the seventeenth century when his Holy Trinity Monastery ran out of supplies, and the brethren complained that there was nowhere to buy food in the wilderness. Saint Alexander reminded Diodorus of how the Lord had fed the five thousand in the

wilderness, and ordered him to go fishing. Saint Diodorus, fearing that the vision was a demonic delusion, ignored it. When Saint Alexander appeared a third time, Diodorus, wishing to test him, asked him to say a prayer. Saint Alexander recited “It is Truly Meet,” and his face shone with a radiant light. The Saint revealed himself as Alexander, the abbot of Oshevensk Dormition Monastery, and repeated his order to go fishing. Obeying this, the monks went out and caught many fish.

Our Holy Father Stephen, Bishop and Enlightener of Perm (26th April / 9th May) was born in 1340, the son of a cleric, Simeon, and his wife Maria. When Maria was only three, Blessed Prokopy, fool-for-Christ of Ustiug, foretold that she would give birth to a great hierarch. From childhood Saint Stephen was marked by exceptional abilities: only a year after beginning his studies he became canonarch and reader at his father’s church. At the same time there blossomed in his heart a yearning to please God. He was still quite young when he entered the monastery of Saint Gregory the Theologian in Rostov where he was tonsured and ordained a hieromonk. When he was not busy with his obediences, he studied the Scriptures and Greek. He became inspired with the idea of bringing the light of Christ to the pagan Ziryan who inhabited the distant land of Perm on the western edge of the Ural mountains. In preparation for this work, he studied the Ziryan language and, after composing an alphabet based on their monetary symbols, he translated the sacred texts into that language from Greek. The head of the Moscow diocese at that time, Bishop Gerasim, blessed the young missionary and gave him the necessary church utensils, while the Tsar provided him with a letter of safe conduct. The preaching progressed slowly. The pagans would have killed the Saint had they not been held back by fear, knowing that he carried a letter of safe conduct. On his part, Stephen tried not to miss any gathering of people as an opportunity to preach the Gospel. Gradually the pagans began to engage in religious debates with him. They could not comprehend his meekness, and suspected that it was a form of craftiness. The young missionary was grieved by the Ziryan’s hostile attitude, but he was patient in his labours and God answered his prayers and touched the hearts of the pagans with His grace; they began coming in crowds, asking for Holy Baptism. The Saint’s success angered the old wizard Pamoï who began to reproach the Ziryan for having abandoned their ancient beliefs and listened to the young Christian. “Go,” they told him, “argue with him, not with us.” The wizard proposed to the Saint a test by fire and water to determine whose religion was better. The Saint replied: “You desire that which

exceeds my humble powers, but I trust in the compassion and mercy of the All-powerful God. May those who witness the miracle be confirmed in their faith, and may you and your idols be forever disgraced!” A hut was set on fire, and the Saint, having prayed and having asked the people for their prayers, turned to the wizard: “Let’s go together, hands joined as promised.” But Pamoï was terrified; even the jeering crowd couldn’t persuade him to go in. They proceeded to the trial by water. On the river two holes were cut into the ice; they were to enter through one hole and come out through the other. When the wizard again refused, the crowd cried out demanding his death. Saint Stephen interceded to save his life, ordering him only to leave forever the land of Perm. And that was the last anyone heard of him. In A.D. 1383 Stephen was made the first bishop of Perm. He provided a strong foundation for the fledgling Church, founding many churches and monasteries, establishing schools for future clergy, teaching them himself, and showing an example of active charity in caring for the poor and unfortunate. When there was a famine in the area he collected bread and distributed free of charge. He sought the reduction of taxes and protected his flock from oppression by secular authorities. Once, when Saint Stephen was passing near Saint Sergius’s monastery on his way to Moscow, he stopped and turned in the direction of the monastery with the words: “Peace to thee, my spiritual brother!” Seeing this with his spiritual eyes, Saint Sergius, who at that moment was sitting in the refectory with his monks, arose, said a prayer and bowed in Saint Stephen’s direction, saying as he did: “Rejoice also, thou pastor of Christ’s flock, and may the blessing of the Lord be with thee!” Saint Stephen reposed in A.D. 1396 while in Moscow on church business. He was buried in one of the Kremlin churches, a fact which greatly saddened his orphaned flock. The monk Epiphanius described their grief in his epic “The Lamentation of the Land of Perm” which forms the basis of the present Life: “...Had we lost but gold and silver, these we could regain. But we shall never find another like you What right does [Moscow] have? She has her own metropolitans and hierarchs; we had but one, and she has taken him for herself. And now we do not even have a bishop’s grave. We had only one bishop; he was our lawmaker, our baptiser, our apostle, our preacher, our confessor...”



POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

“DURING our lessons with Fr. John [Somers] he said that only the Baptism done by an Orthodox priest is the true one. Catholics or Anglicans or other Christian religions don't baptise anyone because only Orthodox have the true knowledge of God. My question is when my Goddaughter, X, was baptised by you, she couldn't enter the baptismal bath because of her infirmity, so the part with the Holy Water was skipped and she was received by chrismation. Is chrismation only enough to be baptised? Because her baptism in the Anglican or Catholic church wasn't a Baptism.” - B.M., Woking.

THAT was using what we call *œconomia*. Fr John is absolutely right. [Although in an extreme emergency even an Orthodox layman may baptise]. We say in the Creed, I believe in ONE Baptism, that is the ONE Baptism of the ONE Church, which we also confess in the Creed. Have you never heard it said in church? But rather than preclude people from becoming Orthodox, if a person is infirm, with the blessing of the Bishop, one can receive them by Chrismation if they have received a form of baptism from those outside the Church, and when they are chrismated they receive the grace of Baptism.



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

MONASTIC TONSURE

ON THE FEAST DAY of the **Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste**, Wednesday, 9th / 22nd March, with **Metropolitan Ambrose's** blessing, **novice Paul** was tonsured rasophore monk at Saint Edward Brotherhood by **Priestmonk Sabbas**. At his tonsure he was named Paulinus after **Saint Paulinus of Rochester**, feast day 10th / 23rd October. As is our custom here, eight names were put into a small dish and placed on the Holy Table the night before, and one was drawn during the tonsure service, and so his name was chosen.

NEW CATECUMENS RECEIVED

ON the Sunday of Orthodoxy (20th February / 5th March) **Clare Thompson from Thame** made her vows as a catechumen, and was received by **Archimandrite Daniel**, being given the name Dymphna in honour of the **Virgin Martyr Dymphna of Geel** (feast day - 15th / 28th May).

AND on the **Sunday of the Holy Cross**, Fr Daniel received **Noah Seeback of West Horsley** into the catechumenate. He is named after the Old Testament **Righteous Noah** (feast day - second Sunday before Christmas). Pray that they both remain steadfast and true, and in due time be united to the Holy Church through the mystery of Holy Baptism.



Practical Tip

REMEMBER, because of its importance, we celebrate Pascha for forty days and it is immediately succeeded by two other Great Feasts of the Church Year, the Ascension and Pentecost. This last feast, the fiftieth day, we are reminded in the Gospel reading of that day is “the last day, that great day of the feast” (Jn 7:36). Try and keep these festal days as such. Many in our times do seem to make some efforts in the lenten fast, but when Pascha falls, after a day of excitement and then perhaps a few days of overindulgence they appear to almost lapse, so any gain made in the fasting period is straightway lost. Throughout the fifty days between the day of Pascha and that of Pentecost, the Church has a series of commemorations, to deepen our understanding of the significance of the festivals. Make good use of them, that your faith does not remain shallow and ineffectual.



“He who is not zealous for salvation is a non-participant in salvation.”

SAINT THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE, + 1894 A.D.