

The Shepherd

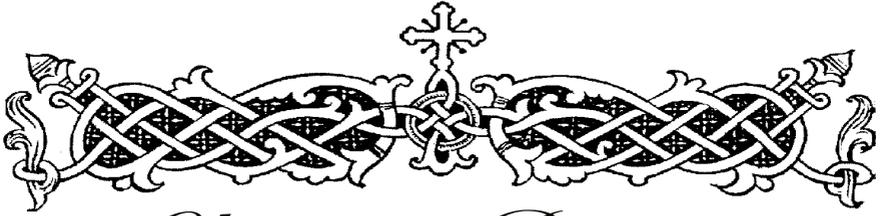
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Christ is Risen!

Truly He is Risen!

We greet all our readers with this most joyous pascal greeting, hoping that your hearts and minds will abound in this joy not only on the night of Pascha itself, which falls this year on 30th March according to the Orthodox Church calendar, but that it will abide there long after to lighten your way and give you spiritual direction. But, as Pascha falls right at the end of March, in this issue our main homily treats of the days which lead up to the Saviour's Resurrection, leaving us to concentrate on teaching regarding His victory over sin and death in our April issue.



FROM THE FATHERS

‘O NEW and unheard of happening! He is stretched out upon a Cross Who by His word stretched out the heavens; He is held fast in bonds Who set the sand a bound for the sea. He is given gall to drink Who has given us wells of honey. He is crowned with thorns Who has crowned the earth with flowers. With a reed they struck His head Who of old struck Egypt with ten plagues, and submerged the head of Pharaoh in the waves. That countenance was spat upon at which the Cherubim dare not gaze. Yet, while suffering these things, He prayed for His tormentors, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He overcame evil by goodness.’

SAINT AMPHILOCHIUS OF ICONIUM, + C. 400 A.D.

THE IMMORTAL MEAL

By Archbishop Innocent of Cherson

Come, ye faithful, let us raise our minds on high and enjoy the Master's supper and the immortal meal in the upper room...

Irmos of the Ninth Ode of the Canon for Holy Thursday.

AT LAST the holy Church has a spiritual meal and feast! For a long time the preparation and the fast has extended; after which we have both food and drink uncommon! For a worldly meal or supper satisfy us and delight us for a while, and then often burden us and always give place to a renewed hunger. Here, whoever tastes worthily of the immortal meal does not hunger unto the ages.

For our Master, in that He loves mankind, cannot bear to see His servants an-hungered. He knows that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, and so at the end of the course of the fast, He Himself prepares a feast: the Master's supper and the immortal meal. Besides granting peace to, and encouraging, those that hunger, this supper serves as the His farewell, Who laid it on.

For it was necessary for Him to leave all and to go on a long journey; it was necessary for Him to be apart and not for a short time. How was He to share the last minutes with those close to Him, with His friends and His associates? How could He not leave something to them in His memory? All the more reason for us to hasten to this festive meal! Come and enjoy!

Let us all come to this supper, for although it is said, raise our minds on high, this is not said as an impediment, because what is presented at the supper is in its very nature exalted, so that he who is prostrate will not be able to touch what is offered with his lips. And besides there are no special stipulations. It says only, 'faithful'. Without faith how could one come here, where without faith it is impossible to take one step.

But is it hard to have faith where the Master and Lord of all rules and where, for this reason, omnipotence is in operation? Then abandon all fear and perplexity, ascend to the upper room,

and let he who can enjoy; let him who is incapable of this, at the very least, look upon what is set forth there, who receives and how, and what follows from what is offered and received?

When even was come, He reclined [at table] with the twelve disciples (Matt. 26:20). Thus Saint Matthew begins his record of the Lord's festive meal. It is known in what circumstances it was held; it was required by the law on this day to eat the paschal lamb in memory of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Thus one might say that this meal was prepared already by Moses, through his law concerning the Passover; but the Lord imbued it with another meaning and name, making immortal that which was mortal. In what way? – Let us see.

Now, let us turn our attention to who sat at that meal. He reclined with the twelve. This means that, for all of us, our Apostle, Saint Andrew the First-Called, sat there, he to whom our country is indebted for the first preaching of Christ.¹ In his person, all of us as it were reclined at the Lord's table of immortality.

But if He reclined there with the twelve, it means Judas was also there. How could he be accepted at that table? In just the same way that even now all unrepentant sinners are allowed at it, manifesting the abundance of the kindheartedness and generosity of the Master of the household, and as a demonstration of the fact that, while we are yet on the earth, this possibility is open to all. At the heavenly Supper, there will only be the wise virgins; but here the doors are not even shut to even the most foolish.

The betrayer also received, like the other Apostles, but for him that participation brought about a contrary effect, in the very same way as the one and the same light of the sun is light and a comfort for one with healthy vision, but for one sick there is a great darkness and it is a torment.

How then did that supper begin? After a long journey it was fitting that the feet of those who had come to the supper be washed. What prompted this? There was no servant there. It would have been for him to do this, but who? The one who was

¹ This refers to the fact that St Andrew preached in regions which were subsequently incorporated into the Russian Empire, and by tradition reached the site of the future city of Kiev, and Archbishop Innocent was, of course, addressing Russians.

the least, and who was the least? The future eagles of theology were still only fledglings. Instead of the humility which they would later manifest before the face of the whole world, there now arose a contention: who was the greater? Maybe on account of this contention they would abandon the whole idea. No, it was not abandoned. The Master of the household Himself made up that which was lacking in the children of the house.

He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments, and took a towel and girded Himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded (Jn 13:4-5). Everyone obeyed; only Peter objected: 'Thou shalt never wash my feet!'

In vain! Had he earlier taken the towel and washed the feet of the Teacher and his fellow disciples, then again he would have heard: 'Blessed art thou, Simon, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father, Which is in the heavens' (Matt. 16:17).

But now, although a praiseworthy feeling is expressed in his words, these words arose from that same flesh and blood, and still were unable to inherit the Kingdom of God. For this reason it was said now, and not earlier or at some other time: 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me.'

Now there was no further hindrance. Now the feast began that joy might be manifest! And it has begun. The lamb is consumed, the bitter herbs tasted, the unleavened bread eaten, the cup of thanksgiving is drained, the old covenant is fulfilled.

All that which was mortal has been eaten a thousand times and not once was a soul satisfied.² Where then was the Immortal Meal? Where the hospitality of the Master?

Do not lose interest or be afraid! He Who fed the five thousand with five loaves, the Same will also feed us. If He receives even those who are not invited, how much the more will He not turn away those who are invited. Come, ye faithful, let us enjoy!

As they (the disciples) were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take and eat, this is My Body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying: Drink ye all of it; for This is

² This refers to the Old Testament Passover.

My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins' (Matt. 26:6-28).

So, mark what we will be treated to: not bread, but the Body; not wine, but Blood! This is Body; this is Blood – and whose body and blood? That of our Saviour – My Body, My Blood. Whoever could hold to this belief, were it not for the fact that He Himself told of it, were it not that the Apostles heard it from His Person? But how are we to use this food?

How our Master loves us! Seeing that all meals end in decay and do not make us immortal, He brought in the victuals and drink of immortality. They could only be composed of the Flesh and Blood which, alone in the whole world, were not subject to dissolution, but, on the contrary, had the power to give life, and He did not grudge either His Body or His Blood, but offered them at the Supper; He offered them not to His disciples only, but in their persons to all peoples.

The first to receive for us was St Andrew, but he did so that the same might faithfully be handed down to each of us. And to whom did he not hand it down? Let everyone come, to every church Repast, which is that same Body and that very same Blood, of which the Apostles partook.

But how should we approach this table? How should we taste the Body? How drink the Blood? This is not in our nature. Our Founder knew this and had concern for our weakness.

What is eaten is Body, but its appearance is of bread; what is drunk is Blood, but its appearance and taste is of wine. Thus, it is that, in condescending to our nature, each time not one but two miracles are worked: the bread and the wine are transformed into the Body and Blood, and those Things which have been transformed maintain their former appearance, so that, in this way, there is a place, on our part, for faith.

In truth, that one may delight at this table, it is not fitting to have a base mind. For this it is fitting that with the mind one should fly to the heights of the Saviour's love for us, Who laid down His life for us.

But it is not learning which, in this instance, gives us such exaltation of mind, but faith: 'If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established' (Esaias 7:9).

Thus let us be believing, approaching the table of the Body and Blood; let our mind not descend into a gully, questioning, ‘How can this man give us His flesh to eat?’ (John 6:52), or, like the heretics, doubting that under the appearance of bread and wine the Body and Blood might be concealed.

With man this is impossible, but with our Saviour, Who is God and man, all things are possible. Furthermore, it would have been unworthy of Him to offer bread alone or wine alone, for every one of us can do that a hundred times. For Him, as God, something greater was fitting, and He did the very greatest thing, for greater love hath no one than He Who layeth down His life for His beloved. Amen.



Questioning the Calendar

By Monk John

The German Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad under Metropolitan Mark publishes a bimonthly periodical in German and Russian. For over 45 years it has provided edifying spiritual reading along with diocesan news. Almost every issue includes an instalment of the commentary on the New Testament by St. Justin (Popovich) of Chelie, translated from Serbian. The first issue for 2025 includes St. Justin’s commentary on the Gospel of John 2:12-3:21 (pp. 12-17).

In the same issue (pp. 21-29) we find a report delivered by Archimandrite Justin (Rauer) to a seminar held in Munich in December, 2024, under the title ‘About the Calendar Question’. This report raises a number of questions which require clarification. The following notes are offered here to the reader with this good intention.

1. The author writes: ‘According to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke the Mystical Supper was the Passover meal. But according to the Gospel of John, Jesus was crucified on the day of the feast of Pascha’ [p. 22b & 25b].

All of the New Testament references to the Mystical Supper state that our Lord took ‘ἄρτος’, that is leavened bread – not the unleavened azymes [ἄζυμα] prescribed by the Old Testament law for the Passover (Mt. 26:26; Mk, 14:22; Lk. 22:19, 24: 30; Jn. 13:18; I Cor. 11:23).

The Synoptic Gospels tell us the Mystical Supper was held on the day of unleavened bread [ἀζύμων] when the Passover [Πάσχα] was sacrificed (Mk. 14:1; Lk. 22:1; Mt. 26:17; Mk. 14:12; Lk. 22:7). On the day before the Passover meal all leavened food was removed, since only unleavened bread [ἄζυμα] was permitted for the seven days of the Passover; so it became known as the day or feast of unleavened bread.

The Biblical day begins in the evening. Good Friday began on the evening of Great Thursday, when our Lord and His disciples gathered in the upper room for the Mystical Supper. Our Saviour was betrayed, tried and convicted by the Sanhedrin during the night; in the morning He was brought before Pontius Pilate and condemned to crucifixion.

The Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world gave Himself over to be sacrificed on the Cross when the Paschal lambs were being slain in the Temple. In the evening, He was laid to rest in the tomb, as the Jews gathered in their homes for the Passover meal. This is the Great Sabbath (Jn 19:31); ‘this is the blessed Sabbath, this is the day of rest, on which the Only-Begotten Son of God rested from all His works’ (Doxology at Praises, Matins, Great Saturday).

In the Synaxarion for Matins of Great Thursday in the Greek Triodion we read:

Since the Hebrew Pascha was to be sacrificed on Friday, and the typos [the foreshadowing of the Old Testament law] was to give way to the Truth, that is for our Pascha Christ to be sacrificed, our Lord Jesus Christ, acting in advance, as the divine Fathers say, celebrated it with the Disciples on the evening of Thursday. For this evening and all of Friday are viewed as one day by the Hebrews...Note, that this was not the Passover meal of the law; for it is a supper, with reclining and leavened bread and sauce, whereas there [for the Old Testament Passover] everything was roasted on fire and with unleavened bread...The persons who brought Him, it says,

did not enter the Prætorium so as not to be defiled, so that they could eat the Passover. So one might conclude that perhaps the High Priests and Pharisees acted then contrary to the Law, postponing the Passover, as the divine Chrysostom says, which they were supposed to eat that night, but which they put off in order to put Christ to death. When they were supposed to eat it is shown by Christ by the supper, which He ate at night, revealing the Mystery of what is more perfect. For, as has been stated, the typos [the foreshadowing of the Old Testament law] was to be replaced by the Truth. Now John says that all this occurred on Thursday and Thursday night before the feast of the Passover. For this reason we celebrate, commemorating these fearsome and unspeakable works and deeds with fear and trembling.

The reference to St. John Chrysostom in the Synaxarion is somewhat misleading, so we add his commentary on the relevant verse [Jn. 18:28]:

But what is this, ‘That they might eat the Passover’? For He had done this on the first day of unleavened bread. Either he calls the whole feast ‘the Passover,’ or means, that they were then keeping the Passover, while He had delivered it to His followers one day sooner, reserving His own Sacrifice for the Preparation-day [Friday], when also of old the Passover was celebrated. But they, though they had taken up arms, which was unlawful, and were shedding blood, are scrupulous about the place, and bring forth Pilate to them (Homily 83 on the Gospel of John).

2. The author writes [p.29a]: ‘The day “of the victory of the sun over darkness” [the winter solstice], according to observations at that time, came on December 25. It is interesting, how the Emperor Constantine gradually comes to Christianity by identifying *Sol Invictus* with Christ.’

Perhaps it should be pointed out that St. Constantine’s vision of the Cross bore the message: ‘In this sign conquer.’ The Holy Cross became the standard carried before for his army; it was under the sign of the Cross that they won their stunning victories over the champions of idolatry.

The Orthodox Church reveres St. Constantine the Great as an equal to the Apostles; he declared Christianity a *‘religio*

licita’, granted the Church a privileged position in the Empire, laid the foundations of the Constantinian era and in order to bring peace and unity to the Church, summoned the First Holy Ecumenical Council in Nicæa in 325.

3. While the official Acts of this Council have been lost and much concerning the Council’s consideration of this question remains unclear, the author quotes [pp. 23b-24a] one of the sources preserved by early Church historians relating the Council’s decision concerning the celebration of Holy Pascha, the ‘Letter of the Emperor Constantine from Nicæa to the Bishops who were absent from the Council’:

*The question relative to the day for the celebration of Pascha was also discussed, and it was universally decided that it is good for all Christians, in whatever land they may dwell, to celebrate the feast of salvation, the most holy Pascha **on one and the same day** [emphasis ours]. For what can be more beautiful and triumphant than when the feast, through which we receive the hope of immortality, is celebrated by all with one accord and in the same manner? ...First of all, it was found to be particularly unworthy to celebrate this, the holiest of all festivals, by following the practice of the Jews.*

After discussing other related matters, the author concludes: ‘Paschal Sunday is the first Sunday after the first full moon (more precisely, after the 14th day of the lunar month), after March 21. So, the earliest date for Pascha is March 22 and the latest date is April 25’ [p.27a].

Two points must be clarified for an accurate designation of the day for the celebration of Holy Pascha according to the Paschalion.

4. First, the question of astronomical phenomena.

The author writes: ‘The dates of the full moon and the March equinox used for the dating of Pascha are ecclesiastical dates, and not astronomical...Moreover, astronomical dates change with time, but the Church fixed this occasion on March 21 in its calendar’ [p.27a].

A specific calendar date, March 21 according to the Julian Calendar – not constantly changing astronomical phenomena –

sets the dates between which the Sunday of Holy Pascha can occur and divides the successive years of the Paschalion.

The Old Testament Law sets the date of the Passover at the time of the barley harvest in Palestine, when a sheaf of the first fruits were offered, while at Pentecost, the first fruits of the wheat harvest were offered (Lev. 23:10-11, 15-17). There is no reference to the vernal equinox, for which no word exists in Biblical Hebrew.

In the fourteenth century it was already observed in Constantinople that March 21 was no longer the date of the vernal equinox. The question of 'correcting' the calendar met the reply that the purpose of the calendar is to provide for the celebration of the feasts by Christians everywhere 'on one and the same day'.

Now there are Orthodox churches on all the continents. The Nativity of Christ is celebrated by the Aleuts in freezing darkness, awaiting the end of the long arctic night; in Antarctica, on the windswept ice in the middle of the antarctic day; in Congo, where there is virtually no difference in the length of days and nights throughout the year, the celebration comes in the steamy heat at the height of the rainy season. Those who remain faithful to the Church calendar continue to celebrate everywhere 'on one and the same day'.

5. Next and more important, according to the Paschalion, Holy Pascha is celebrated a) on the first Sunday, b) after March 21 according to the traditional [Julian] calendar, c) after the *Nomikon Pascha*.

The author devotes 2½ columns [pp. 27b-28b] to 'The Jewish Calendar', even though he has already quoted St. Constantine's declaration rejecting: 'the practice of the Jews...' However, he omits St. Constantine's explanation which follows:

For we have it in our power, by rejecting their custom, to prolong for the ages to come the observance of a more valid order, which we have observed from the very time of the [Lord's] Passion to the present.

The *Nomikon Pascha* is not mentioned anywhere in the article, but this is exactly the 'more valid order, which we have observed from the very time of the [Lord's] Passion to the present'.

The Orthodox Church's Eternal Paschalion, with the Great Indiction, developed by the Church of Alexandria, employs an ancient, traditional method to determine the date of the Nomikon Pascha, i.e. the Old Testament Passover. This involves both the solar calendar (dates of the month) and the lunar calendar (days of the week).

In his 'Report' to the Commission on the Question of the Calendar Reform, in St. Petersburg, May 1899, Prof. V.V. Bolotov of the Theological Academy explains that the day of Holy Pascha was designated by the Holy Fathers just as it had been designated in the days of Jesus Christ, without the errors which characterized Jewish practice in the third and fourth centuries. We might add that the Commission decided to retain the Julian Calendar in Russia.

This explains the date of Holy Pascha for the year 2026.

The astronomical full moon of March 20/April 2 comes on Thursday before Lazarus Saturday, the date of Pesach for contemporary Judaism.

For the Gregorian calendar, the date of the vernal equinox, March 8/21, divides the years; March 20/April 2 is the date of the first full moon, and the first Sunday is March 23/April 5, the Sunday before Holy Pascha.

According to the Orthodox Paschalion, Holy Pascha is to be celebrated a) on the first Sunday, b) after March 21, c) after the Nomikon Pascha, which in 2026 comes on March 24/April 6 (Great Monday). Holy Pascha is to be celebrated on March 30/April 12, the second Sunday after the astronomical full moon.

Someone might object that because of the discrepancy accumulated over the centuries between ecclesiastical dates and the phases of the moon, the 'outdated' Paschalion sets the date for Holy Pascha a week too late.

Without going into technical details, a spot check with the tables of the moon published by *Apostolike Diakonia* of the Church of Greece in the *Mega Orologion*, the astronomical dates appear to coincide with the ecclesiastical dates used in the Paschalion for setting the date of the Nomikon Pascha.

The astronomical tables were prepared by the Observatory in Athens, with the note that the indicated dates may be one day off.

So it seems the discrepancy with the phases of the moon accumulated over seventeen centuries amounts to less than one day.

In the following year, 2027, Holy Pascha is to be celebrated on April 19/May 2, which is a) the first Sunday, b) after March 21, c) after the Nomikon Pascha, which in 2027 comes on April 12/25 (Palm Sunday). The Jewish Pesach, with the full moon, comes on April 9/22. The Gregorian calendar places the celebration on March 15/28, the first Sunday after the preceding full moon, well ahead of everybody.

6. The problems confronted for the adoption of the universal date of Holy Pascha in Syria are presented and reference is made to the First Canon of the Synod of Antioch in 341 [p.25], which severely condemns those ‘who presume to set aside the decree of the holy and great Synod which was assembled at Nicæa in the presence of the pious Emperor Constantine, beloved of God, concerning the holy and salutary feast of Pascha.’

To his discussion of the problems that arose with the Roman Church [p.26a], it might be added that the discrepancies were resolved when St. Leo the Great adopted the Alexandrian Paschalion in 454. The author notes that when confusing situations arose later, they were usually resolved by applying the Alexandrian Paschalion. It seems the Celts, out in the fog on the very edge of the world, were among the last to accept the common Paschalion.

The author concludes this discussion by noting: ‘However, the Church endeavoured “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3)’, and adds: ‘choosing peace by making compromises, although without a complete agreement on the question’. With these words he glosses over the all of the following 7th point.

To be concluded in the next issue.



THE VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

BY PROTOPRESBYTER MICHAEL POLSKY

Continuation from the previous issue.

3. The Earthly and the Heavenly Church

We see that the Church, in both her earthly and heavenly states, is in reality the living Body of Christ, yet it is only a body when all her members, heavenly and earthly, are to be found in full mutual unity and have a living empathy and interaction between each other. If this living and complete bond does not exist between the heavenly and the earthly, the Church is not, and cannot be, the living Body of Christ.

The Word of God confirms that the purpose of Christ's coming was our salvation, that is, that the heavenly and the earthly Church should be united in the one Body of Christ under His one headship. And God 'hath gathered together in one the heavenly and the earthly under the head of Christ'.

Further, God 'raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavens'. He set Him 'far above all ... and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come, ... hath set Him above all, as the Head of the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all' (Eph. 1:10, 20-23). 'God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth' (Phil. 2:9-10).

With whom we, as members of the earthly Church, are united in the heavens, the Word of God shows in detail:

Ye are come unto Mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem and to the innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the Church of the firstborn, which are written in the heavens, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men who have achieved perfection, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling... (Heb. 12:22-24).

And the thousands of angels and the assembly of the firstborn, and the souls of the righteous, who have achieved salvation, are made close to us through Christ, Who 'hath redeemed us from this vain age', and exalted us in Himself to this His Kingdom. 'For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell, and, having reconciled all things, whether they be earthly or heavenly, to Himself through Him, having made peace through Him, by the blood of His cross' (Col. 1: 9-20). Thus we are made 'fellow citizens with the saints and those who are of God' (Eph. 2:19).

In this way, as it is with the members of the heavenly Church, so it is with those of the earthly: 'we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another' (Romans 12:5). The heavenly and earthly Church are not separated; together it is the fulness and the one Body of Christ.

It is only with such an organic, full, living understanding of the Church as the living Body of Christ – in which all the members are in living communion, and with the Church, heavenly and earthly, comprising one whole, inseparably bound in Christ, a body wherein the members feel for one another – that the veneration of the All-holy Virgin and all the saints is possible.

4. The Saving Ministry of the Saints

A multitude of holy people of various conditions and callings have been saved in the Church and achieved the Kingdom of God. But the majority of those who have been saved have found salvation through repentance and the forgiveness of their sins, through the virtues of a believing heart, which have enabled them to make their own the blessedness of life eternal and to be known to God, the one Judge of all.

And there are in the Church saints, who in saving themselves, greatly ministered unto the salvation of other people: by the example of their lives, their labours, the grace-granted gifts of wonder-working; direction, teaching, and by their powerful prayers to God for people: 'We have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office' (Romans 12:4). According to the grace granted us, we have different gifts: preaching, ministry, instruction, exhor-

tation, distribution, leadership, beneficence, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, of faith, healing, wonder-working, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues...(cf. Romans 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-12).

All these are different gifts of one and the same Holy Spirit Who abides in the Church, unto the profit of the Church. The Holy Spirit is everywhere present, in every place, and in Him all Heaven, with all the angels, the saints and the All-holy Virgin, are close to us.

By the Holy Spirit holy people on earth behold the secret and hidden things, and by Him they see and know everything in heaven. Peace and love, mercy and every grace of help proceed from God alone, as from a spring, and all the saints draw from this spring, being God's ministers. The holy Apostles were only the instruments of God's power:

'God wrought not a few miracles by the hands of Paul', 'as testimony unto the word of His grace, He wrought signs and wonders by their hands', 'by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people' (Acts 19:11; 14:3; 5:12). Thus does the word of God bear witness to the one glory of God and to His one power, which acts through people who have yielded themselves unto Him as 'instruments of righteousness' (Romans 6:13).

The Apostle Peter heals the lame man, and says: 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' And further to the people:

Why marvel ye at this, or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or piety we made this man to walk? ... And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is of Him hath given him this healing in the presence of you all (Acts 3:6, 12, 16).

Besides the Lord Jesus Christ, 'there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). And the All-holy Virgin, the holy angels and holy people, both in heaven and on earth, bear witness only to this saving Name, serving Him alone, and from Him only they draw forth everything needful for our salvation.

For a man who is parched and is perishing in a waterless desert, salvation consists only in a spring of water. But if he himself cannot get to that water, and someone else brings it to him, even though the water is essentially his saviour, yet because without its being brought to him he would have perished, he must needs reckon the bringer as his saviour too. Of such a man one can say that he saved you from death, even though without the water he himself could not have been saved, but also the water without such a man conveying it would also not have saved the man's life.

Christ in the Holy Spirit is a spring of water for life eternal. In such a way (as above) holy people save us, as ministers of God by the grace-filled gifts of God, by their prayers to God, by their labours for our salvation in Christ. Their every act in God and for God, and from God, is as if from the source of salvation.

When the Apostle says, 'that I might save some of them' (Romans 11: 14), he means salvation in the name of Christ, and not in his own name. 'He (the Apostle) shall tell thee the words by which thou shalt be saved with all thy household' (see Acts 10). He laboured by the grace that was with him (1 Cor. 15:10) for your salvation. And if thus it was from the apostle it was necessary to expect salvation for oneself, nonetheless it was not from any other but from one in Christ, and by no other powers other than those of Christ.

Thus the Lord is the source of water, which alone saves all, the very power of salvation unto life eternal, but of this power the holy Apostles and others, their successors and holy people, perfected in their deeds, are the conveyors, and thus they are shown to be many secondary saviours.

There is one Father, one Teacher and Leader, one Saviour and Intercessor and Mediator, even the Lord, but there are also lesser and secondary intercessors and mediators, and fathers, and teachers, and leaders, who are ministers of the One, who are indispensable for the salvation of the people and who are commissioned and appointed by the Lord. There is a prayerful 'intercession of the many' (see 2 Cor. 1:11).

Some 'fathers, teachers and leaders' (Matt. 23:5-10) act for their own glory, for human glory, and in their own name (John 7:18; 12:43; 5:43); and there are others — fathers, teachers, and

leaders — who act to the glory of God and in the name of Christ (1 Cor. 4:15; 12:28).

These last do not do damage to the glory of God, but they serve only that glory and not themselves, and they are glorified by God Himself with His glory. ‘Them that glorify Me, I will glorify,’ (1 Kings [Samuel] 2:30). ‘Father, the glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them’ (John 17:22).

Wherefore, ‘we bless them which endure’ and have them ‘for an example’ for ourselves (James 5:10-11). We must ‘remember them which have the rule’ over us and ‘follow their faith’ (Hebrews 13:7). Such are those holy people who are not on earth but who live in the memory of the members of the Church and never will be forgotten because of their service for the salvation of the people.

But that which they manifested while on earth has ascended with them into heaven and continues to be manifest on earth in those acts of grace-filled aid for the people. And on their ascension into heaven, that glory, which holy people had while on earth, grows even greater thanks to their unbroken granting of help, and the holy Church ‘glorifies’ these saints on earth, commending her faithful sons to their prayers and their grace-filled aid, and calling the faithful to flee unto their help and to working with them the works of our salvation.

5. Prayerful Calling Upon the Saints

It is good to have for oneself the bold, holy prayers of the righteous, of those who have been pleasing unto God and are able to receive everything from God according to their petitions.

Holy people, like ‘the angels of God in the Heavens’, are members with us of the one Body of the Church, they empathise with us, rejoice with us, feel for us; they see everything, they hear everything and they hear our prayers and supplications addressed to them, and they offer up the prayers of the people at the Throne of God.

The ‘vials of incense’ which they offer up at the Throne of God, are actually the prayers which had been directed to them with the petition that they make intercession before God. These prayers of the saints (that is, of the elect, of those people or

Christians set apart unto God yet still living on earth – see Eph. 1:1 and elsewhere), the saints which are in heaven are aware of, that they themselves might offer them up unto God, joined with their own most powerful intercession. Through the saints that are in Heaven, the prayers of the earthly reach God.

If even before the coming of Christ and the glorification of the saints in Him, the Prophet Samuel appeared at the unlawful summons of sinful people and showed that he knew everything about Saul (1 Kgs [1 Samuel] 28:14), how do the holy ones not hear the holy prayers of the people and their petitions for grace-filled spiritual help?

The testimonies of the Word of God have shown us that all those ‘who are absent from the body are present with the Lord’; that they all abide with God and that they really live, empathising and working with those on earth, as members of the one body; that the Church is truly the heavenly and earthly living Body of Christ precisely because of this very bond and mutuality between her members; that the spirits of the saints in heaven, which are addressed by us in prayers and glorified in their festival commemorations, both hear and receive our prayers, and that they work with us that live on earth for our salvation through those same prayers, and through the powers and gifts which for our sake they have received from God.

And we bear the names of the saints as a memorial before God: ‘Remember Abraham Isaac and Israel’, ‘for David’s sake’ and for the sake of the other saints, help us (Ex. 32:13; 3 [1] Kgs 11:12), because ‘the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears are opened unto their supplication’ (1 Peter 3:12).

The Christian can pray, ‘My God, save me.’ But in the prayer, ‘My God, for the sake of the prayers of Thy saints, save me’, there is more sincerity, more humility, a depth of feeling and a complete defence against pride creeping in if the prayer is successful, a firm foundation for spiritual advancement.

In this way, prayer to God, addressed via the holy God-pleasers, stands nearer, closer, to God, and it throws a bridge over the abyss that exists between God and sinners, it humbles the soul of the sinner himself and invokes upon him the good pleasure of God.

In their humility, true Christians do not hope on their own prayers, but on the prayers of the saints, and thus they do not

think anything of themselves, and they do not glory in the strength of their own prayers but in those of the saints; they account themselves nothing, they flee from conceit, and thus they are saved. For this reason the prayer of the true Christian is always seasoned with hope in the concurrent intercession before God of the saints, especially of those to whom he turns to underpin and support his prayers.

The mediation of the saints not only does not hinder or obscure prayers to God, but it actually surmounts every impediment to prayer to God, it removes all the barriers caused by the sin which disturbs the sinner, and it gives wings to prayer. In praying to the saints, a man does not place his hope only in man and put him in place of God, which would be worthy of the curse (Jer. 17:5), but rather he places all his hope in God alone, Who is close to His holy ones and not to sinners, for again we repeat, 'the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears are opened unto their supplication.'



THE COMING MONTH

MARCH, this year, contains the most important celebrations of the whole year. At the beginning of the month we have the Sunday of the Worship of the Cross (2nd/15th); on the 13th/26th we have the Thursday of the Great Canon, followed two days later by the Saturday of the Laudation of the Theotokos. At the end of the month we have Lazarus Saturday (22nd March/4th April), Palm Sunday (23rd March/5th April) and then Great Week during which we celebrate the Great Feast of the Annunciation of the Theotokos (25th March/7th April) which falls on Great Tuesday; the feast of the Lord's Pascha, falls on 30th March/ 12th April.

There is a tendency, particularly among contemporary Orthodox, to think of the services as a duty or obligation. It is perhaps because of this that many people attend church, but do not begin to participate. It is also, I suppose, a concept borrowed from the heterodox West. But it is oppressive. Rather we should

think of the services and the church commemorations as a gift. They lead us to return to something deeper within ourselves, and they illumine us with understanding of God's love for us, calling us to respond with love and thus raising us from preoccupation with worldly things to the heavenly.

Of course, this does not happen automatically. Something else is required. That something is attentiveness. In the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete, we hear how Ismael was driven out as the child of a bond-woman, and we are called to take heed lest the same thing happen to us. Yet often in church, we allow ourselves to become children of a bond-woman, of a mind that has become a slave to the passions or to distractions, to fantasies and fears. Thus, it follows that in celebrating these Divine services we are required to engage in a struggle, a struggle to free ourselves from that captivity of mind and heart.

On 19th March/1st April we commemorate the **Holy Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria and those with them**. Chrysanthus was born in Rome, the only son of a nobleman from Alexandria named Poleon. As a child, he lacked for nothing, receiving the finest education. He came across several books which mentioned Christianity, and being a bright and curious student, decided to learn more about this "new" religion.

Chrysanthus obtained a copy of the Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, which he read, and through which he was converted to Christianity. He found a teacher, a priest named Carpophorus, who instructed him further and baptised him. Poleon was deeply distressed by his son's conversion. He attempted to make him recant his faith through various forms of temptation, including providing several prostitutes for him.

Chrysanthus, for his part, rejected them, maintaining his chastity and dedication to our Saviour. His father then arranged an honourable marriage for Chrysanthus, but to one named Daria, a virgin-priestess of Athena, the pagan goddess, hoping that she would draw him away from Christ.

Out of obedience, Chrysanthus agreed to marry, but only after convincing his betrothed that they should live in virginity following marriage. Daria also wished to maintain her chastity, and rather than drawing Chrysanthus away from Christianity, she was brought to Christ by his example and his exhortations.

Thereafter many in Rome were converted by the witness of Chrysanthus and Daria, and the Emperor Numerian became troubled by this. He ordered that the two be arrested and tortured until they denied their faith. Both were horribly tortured, but demonstrated great endurance and faith in the Lord, so much so, that their torturer, Claudius, converted to Christianity, as did Hilaria, his wife, and their sons Jason and Maurus. For this Claudius was drowned, both his sons were beheaded, and his wife was hanged at the gallows. Thus they received the crowns of martyrdom.

Chrysanthus was thrown into a large cesspit; however, even there a bright light shone upon him, and the awful stench was replaced with the sweet fragrance of heaven. All who witnessed this were amazed. Daria, for her part, demonstrated such endurance under torture that those present cried out, 'Daria is a goddess!' The torturers then despatched Daria to an house of ill repute. But a lion was also sent there by God to protect her. All who tried to defile the saint were cowed by the lion, and while they were in this fearful state Daria told them of Christ and converted them from the ways of uncleanness to the way of salvation.

As the public torture of the Saints was ineffectual and gaining more support for the Christians, the Emperor ordered them to be buried alive in a great pit with heavy stones placed upon them to crush them. Both were slowly crushed to death.

Following their martyrdom in A.D. 284, Christians began meeting together for prayer in a cave near the place of their deaths. Once while they were thus praying, local pagans rolled a large stone across the entrance to the cave, sealing the Christians within, leading to their martyrdom as well. Eventually, a church was built over the spot, where the two great martyrs were venerated. Their relics were translated to the Via Salaria Nova in Rome.



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

CHRISMATION

ON 17th/30th January, **Christina Demosthenis** was received into the Church of the GOC by Holy Chrismation; the mysterion was celebrated by **Priest Evangelos Liassi** and took place at the candidate's home due to her poor health. Christina is the grandmother of Yiannis and Michelle Paracharalambous who were received into the GOC last September. We congratulate the newly-chrismated Christina.

NEW CATECHUMEN

ON Sunday 19th Jan/1st February, the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee, **Ben Selby** of Aldershot made his catechumen vows at the end of Divine Liturgy receiving the new name **David** in honour of the Prophet and King. May David be blessed to complete his catechumenate and to receive Holy Baptism.

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

THIS YEAR the Sunday after Theophany fell on the feast of Saint Tatiana of Rome (12th/25th January); this year marks the 50th anniversary of **Archimandrite Alexis'** ordination to the priesthood by Saint Philaret of New York on Saint Tatiana's day in 1976. **Metropolitan Ambrose of Methoni** sent a letter of congratulation in which he also thanked **Tanya James** for all the hard work she had done for the Convent of the Annunciation and, in particular, looking after the sisters in their declining years. Tanya also baked a traditional iced and decorated English fruit cake to celebrate Fr. Alexis' anniversary.

VISITORS TO THE BROTHERHOOD

On the Sunday of the Prodigal Son (26th Jan/8th Feb), **Archimandrite Christodoulos** visited the Brotherhood and concelebrated at the Divine Liturgy. Fr. Christodoulos last visited in January 2020 and is a stalwart of our Church; it was good to see him again. He is the spiritual father of some of our parishioners.

On Wednesday 28th January Priest **Roman Verevkin**, a clergyman of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA-A) under Metropolitan Agathangel visited from Tuymen, Russia. Metropolitan Agathangel did not accept the submission of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad to the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007; his clergy and faithful have suffered much for their confession of traditional Orthodoxy. Fr. Roman prayed at the shrine of Saint Edward the Martyr and was given hospitality in the Exhibition Room.

GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

Archimandrite Adrian and **Fr. Menas** of Holy Ascension Skete, Maine, sent the Brotherhood some hardbound copies of the Akathist to the Saint Symeon the God-receiver which they had composed together with a booklet of Prayers of Saint Isaac the Syrian; we are grateful for their kindness.

Dymphna Thompson gave a hand-painted icon of Saint Dymphna as a gift to the church; the icon was painted by the sisters of the Convent of St. Philothei in Sweden; we thank her for her generosity.

SAINT TRYPHON GARDENING GROUP

On Saturday 24th January, a number of volunteers spent a day helping in the garden and grounds surrounding the church. We are very grateful for their continued and energetic help.



Practical Tip

AT PASCHA, let us be especially attentive to take to heed the teaching contained in the verse from the paschal canon: 'Let us partake of the new fruit of the vine of divine gladness.' Very often, people celebrate Pascha as a kind of folk festival, a time of joyous, raucous merry-making, even drunkenness, completely forgetting that it is a time of divine gladness. Our rejoicing should be spiritual, not carnal. That does not mean that we have to be puritanical and po-faced. There is none of that in Orthodoxy. However, we have struggled through the fast, not to abandon everything spiritual on the night of Pascha, but rather that we should enjoy the spiritual reality the more deeply; we should make glad for the victory of Christ over sin, death and the devil. We do not do that by sinning, pleasing the devil, and inviting our own spiritual death.



'IF you cannot go to Church, either because the Church is far away or because you are prevented by illness or some other reasonable cause, at the very least you should go every Sunday and every feast day, in order to hear the Divine words of the Gospel and to pray in common to God. For it is indeed a great reproach to Christians that other peoples, as soon as they rise from sleep, go to their altars and worship and pray to their false gods, while Christians, who worship the True God, do not go to their Divine Temples and Holy Churches in order to pray and render due worship, adoration and honour to God as befits His servants. I fear, I fear lest pagans, Turks, Jews, and other people will appear, in this regard, more righteous than Christians, while Christians will be condemned for surpassing the pagans themselves in wickedness.'

VEN. NICODEMUS OF THE HOLY MOUNTAIN,
+ 1809 A.D.