

The Shepherd

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FROM THE FATHERS

‘KNOWING THEN the greatness of the priests’ danger, treat them with much consideration, for as Paul goes on to say: “They watch for your souls”, and not simply this, but as “having to render an account of them”. Because of this, you must treat them with honour. And should you join with others to insult them, then neither will your own affairs prosper. For as long as the helmsman is in good heart, those on board are safe. But if he be grieved by their abuse, and by their hostile behaviour, he can neither keep a good watch, nor perform his task properly, and unwillingly involves them in many disasters. And so likewise the priest. If he is held in honour by you, he will be able to take care of what relates to yourselves. But if you throw them into despondency, weakening their hands, and making them easily overcome, you expose both them and yourselves to the waves, however courageous they may be.’

ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM † 407 A.D.

“TWO ARE BETTER than one”, says Scripture (Eccles. 4:9). That is to say, ‘It is better for a son to be with his father, and to struggle with his proclivities with the help of the Divine power of the Holy Spirit.’ He who deprives a blind man of his leader, a flock of its shepherd, a lost man of his guide, a child of its father, a patient of his doctor, a ship of its pilot, imperils all. And he who attempts unaided to struggle with the spirits is slain by them.’

VENERABLE JOHN OF THE LADDER † 603 A.D.

‘SHOULD ANYONE in his presumption think that even without the prerequisite struggles and virtues he is able to see things according to their true nature, there is nothing strange in this. For presumption can make even the blind think they can see, and foolish men boast when they have nothing to boast about. Yet if it were easy to see things according to their true natures merely by thinking about them in an abstract way, then inward grief and the purification that comes from it would be superfluous; and so would the many forms of ascetic labour, as well as humility, supranatural grace, and dispassion. But this is not the case at all. For often this capacity to see things according to their true nature comes more readily to simple people, to those whose intellects are free from the hustle and wiliness of this world, once they had submitted themselves to an experienced spiritual father.’

VENERABLE PETER OF DAMASCUS † 12TH CENTURY

‘YOU SHOULD strive to have a spiritual father throughout your life and to confess to him every sin and every evil thought and to receive from him healing and remission. For they have been given the power to bind and to unbind souls, and whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever they unbind on earth will be unbound in heaven. This grace and power they have received from Christ, and so you should obey them and not gainsay them, lest you bring destruction upon your soul. For if a person who gainsays his natural parents in matters not interdicted by the divine law is, according to the Law to be put to death, how will he who contradicts his spiritual fathers not expel the Spirit of God from himself and destroy his soul? For this reason be counselled by your spiritual fathers and obey them till the end, so that you may save your soul and inherit eternal and untarnished blessings.’

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS † 1359 A.D.



NOTES ON SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

The precepts outlined in the paragraphs below have been taken from instruction given to the sisters of the Convent of the Annunciation in Willesden, during their days of training in the Holy Land under the direction of Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles and the late Father Lazarus (Moore). They were preserved in the notes of one of the sisters and prepared for publication by Mrs. Tanya James. This article was first published in the June 1996 issue of 'The Shepherd'.

THE NEED OF A SPIRITUAL GUIDE

THE YOUNG TOBIAS, when told to set out on his journey, said, 'I have no knowledge of the way.' His father Tobit replied: 'Go and seek one man to guide thee.' Do you wish to set out on the way of God? Find some man to guide and conduct you. You will never find out the will of God so surely as by the way of humble obedience, so much recommended and practised by all the holy fathers.

The world defames the good life and especially spiritual guidance, saying that it is wretched and unbearable to be 'under the will of another'. But the Holy Spirit assures us by the mouth of all the Saints, and our Divine Saviour does by His own, that the good life is sweet, happy and agreeable (Matt. 11:28-30), in fact a triumphant progress from strength to strength, from victory to victory. Thanks be to God Who in Christ ever leads us in His triumphal procession (2 Cor. 2:14).

THE GOOD OF A SPIRITUAL GUIDE

A faithful friend is a strong defence; and he that hath found him hath found a treasure. A faithful friend is a medicine of life; and they that fear the Lord shall find him (Ecclesiasticus 6:14,16).

Those divine words refer to life, as you see, and chiefly to eternal life, for which it is necessary to have a faithful friend to

indicate our delusions from the evil one. He will be a treasure of wisdom in our affliction, in our doubts, in our sorrows and in our falls. He will serve as a medicine to ease and heal our hearts in our spiritual sicknesses. He will keep us from evil and, if we stumble and fall, he will lift us up and set us on our feet again – our two feet, of love of God and of our neighbours, by which we run to our heavenly home.

But who will find this friend? God has given us the answer: They that fear the Lord, that is to say, the humble, who sincerely desire their spiritual progress, and who fear to displease their Lord. As it is so important to go with a good guide on this holy journey, pray to God with great earnestness to provide you with one, and have no doubt; for even if He has to send an Angel from heaven as He did to Tobias, He will give you one that is good and faithful and suitable to your needs.

HOW TO REGARD YOUR SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

This guide ought always to be an Angel in your eyes; that is to say, when you have found him, do not look upon him as a mere man, but put your trust in God, Who will bless and speak to you by means of this man and will put into his heart and mouth whatever is necessary for your salvation and happiness. ‘A priest is an angel and not a man,’ says Father John of Kronstadt.

THE CHOICE OF A CONFESSOR

Let those that are at peace with thee be many, but thy counsellors one of a thousand (Ecclesiasticus 6:6).

Though you may have many teachers in Christ, you should only have one father for the direction of your soul. Bearing in mind that God chooses the weak to be vessels of His grace that all the glory may go to Him (cf. 1 Cor. 1:27).

Choose if possible a confessor who is not afraid to humiliate his penitents, and who takes care at the same time to support them in the war to the death against their corrupted nature and passions. Pray to God to give you such a guide, and when you have found him, thank God and remain constant and do not seek for any others, but go on your way humbly and trustfully, sure of a prosperous journey.

DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS TOWARDS THEIR SPIRITUAL FATHER

1. Faith

If you know the gift of God and Who it is that speaks to you by the mouth of the priest, you would always listen to him as to an Angel given you by God to guide you to Heaven. Faith is a gift of God, obtained by prayer. Even our Lord Jesus Christ could do nothing when people had no faith in Him.

2. Respect

You should think of your confessor as a Judge, Physician and Representative of God, as well as a Shepherd, Guide and Father. Your confidence must be combined with a holy reverence for him. In a word, this friendship must be strong, holy and spiritual.

3. Humility

This will prevent you from regarding rebuffs, reproaches or marks of indifference as a great misfortune. You will desire healing, sanctification and direction rather than comfort and tender words.

4. Simplicity

The more you become like a little child, the more you will enter into the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory, and the more will the confessor be your father. You must have an open heart with him, and tell everything with all frankness and simplicity.

5. Constancy

You should confess only to your own spiritual father and, without previously asking his blessing, should never think of confessing to another priest. This is because

- (a) penances (such as deprivation of Holy Communion) may have been given of which the other priest knows nothing;
- (b) spiritual food and direction should be regular and

progressive, and another priest cannot know where you stand and what you need in the same way;

(c) it is more crucifying to repeat our sins and show our wounds and weaknesses to the same priest, and therefore that act of confession is a more purifying process and a means to greater grace, for only if we suffer with Christ are we glorified together (Rom. 8:17).

6. Obedience

Love is shown by obedience. We should follow the advice of the Mother of God: 'Whatever he saith, do it.' (John 2:5).

7. Prayer

The more you offer fervent prayer to God for your spiritual father, the more abundant will be the light and grace which God will give for the direction of your soul.

CONCLUSION

Let those who complain that they do not meet with direction much as they desire, turn to their own hearts. The confessor will be judged at the Supreme Tribunal if he has carried out the work of God carelessly. But how many Christians will have to answer for want of faith, humility and obedience which they have shown in their relations with their spiritual father.



FROM THE SACRED CANONS

‘THERE ARE MANY persons, not of good character, who think that they have a right to bring charges against the Fathers and Bishops on any grounds. Such people must not be given credence.’

Canon 8 of the 141 Canons of the Holy Regional Council of Carthage, 418/419 A.D.

THE VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

BY PROTOPRESBYTER MICHAEL POLSKY

Continuation from the previous issue.

4. The Virgin Mary – an example of making salvation our own.

TWICE THE LORD POINTED OUT that only those blessed people, who like His mother heard the word of God, kept it and fulfilled it (Mark 3:35; Luke 11:28), could be His kinsmen and mothers. And the one, who 'kept' all the words of the Lord, 'treasuring them up in their heart' (Luke 2:51), the one who 'found grace with God' (Luke 1:30) in fulfilling the commandments regarding faith, obedience, humility, selflessness, and love, has been made manifest as an example of making the salvation, which the Lord offered for us, our own.

The making of the salvation of Christ our own begins on earth; actually it originates with the Virgin Mary, who, as Mother of the Saviour, served at His incarnation. From her, first of all, saving faith and every virtue were offered to God. She received Christ, just as everyone always should receive Him, in her soul, and in her virtues. She is an example of the building up of the human soul, so that it might be the temple and home of God, and she was the first to achieve this. Every soul is a bride of Christ, fore-ordained for its Heavenly Bridegroom, and like the first bride, the Virgin Mary, it must be well-appointed for the reception of God.

The Most Holy Virgin by faith and through the Holy Spirit received within herself the Word of God, and carried Him within herself and nourished Him. And every soul, called to salvation, receives within itself the word of God, and carries that which has been conceived from faith and through the Holy Spirit, and by the mind and will nourishing it, and by fulfilling it and keeping it, it incarnates Christ within itself and within all its life. Thus it gives birth to Christ in itself, often in the torments of the struggle with sin, it represents Him to itself, likening itself to Him, building itself on Christ. Just as the

Church gives birth to every soul in Christ, so every soul gives birth to 'an infant of the male sex' (Rev. 12:5), that is to Christ Jesus in itself, and both the one and the other, the soul and the Church, correspond to the Virgin. And in all, the soul gives birth in Christ by the Spirit of God.

The Virgin Mary is an example of bearing God, of communion with God in the moral sense, on account of her faith, humility and every virtue.

5. The Virgin Mary and the Church.

The Virgin Mary, as the one who gave God the nature common to mankind and who ministered unto the salvation of all men, is the second Eve, the new mother of all mankind and the intercessor of the whole race of man. The All-holy Virgin has granted the whole race of man rebirth with God.

Christ received a body from the Virgin Mary. And the Church is also the body of Christ. Thus the Church and the Virgin Mary are close in essence and one in nature. For this reason both the Church and the Virgin are called Bride of Christ.

The Virgin Mary is a member of the Old Testament Church; she is the summation and final fruit of that Church and the intercessor for that Church. Thus Christ was incarnated in the Church and from the Church, and thus the Church in the Virgin Mary and through this Virgin, is the Bride and Mother of Christ. For that reason the Church is described as giving birth to Christ (Rev. 12:1-6; Es. 26:18-19).

The Church, the one body of Christ, is a complete, unbreakable union of earthly and heavenly members. In the Virgin Mary, through the descent into her and the abiding in her of the Son of God, there comes about a uniting of the earthly and the heavenly, or the human with the Divine. And for this reason in prayerful supplication to the saints the All-holy Virgin takes first place, for she is the bridge, the link between the earthly Church and the heavenly, in actuality a ladder from earth to heaven, upon which God came down, and on which we ascend. To the Virgin, as to the place where the heavenly was united to the earthly, we most especially resort for help in our ascent from earth to heaven, that is in the work of our salvation.

The Church is the union of people with God. In the Virgin there came about the first and original union of God with man.

Thus it is an undoubted fact that the All-holy Virgin Mary is manifest as the representative and personification of the whole race of man in its entirety, and thereafter, more particularly, of the chosen people of God that is of the Old Testament Church, and finally of the New Testament Church both earthly and heavenly.

The holy Apostle John the Theologian gives this the greatest emphasis. He, one of the Evangelists, proclaims the Saviour's last wish from the Cross concerning his Mother. His charge concerning His Mother has the greatest significance for the holy Apostle John, as expressing a concern not only for her personally.

The Son of God and Son of Mary establishes St. John along with Himself as a son of Mary on earth. But just as the Mother of the Lord is manifest as the representative and personification of the Church, His body, then in the same sort as St. John is manifest as a deputy or proxy for the Lord on earth for His Church. That this is so is clear from the fact that the Lord granted His 'Revelation' and gives directions to the seven local Churches and to the fullness of the constitution of the universal Church directly through John.

In the Book, 'Revelation' or 'Apocalypse', there are traced through the Apostle the future courses of the Church of Christ on earth. By this same deputy of Christ in the Church, it is shown that the holy Apostle was made a son of the Virgin Mary by the Lord's direct command. Evidently, 'the disciple, whom Jesus loved' (John 21:20) had a special place among the Apostles. Just as His care with respect to His Mother placed a trust on St. John, so by His care for the whole Church and the direct transmission of His will concerning her the Lord granted him a special commission.

As an analogy of the relationship of the Apostle John to the Mother of the Lord – he is a son of the Church and the Church his mother; but on that son a special commission had been given regarding the Mother, such as could only come from the Son of the Virgin and the actual Head of the Church, Christ, Who is organically bound to her by nature. In view of his special

relationship to the Mother of the Lord, St John was also made a special guardian of the Church by the Lord, and it was not in vain that the Lord said of him: 'If I will that he tarry till I come' (John 20:22), that is until the Second Coming of the Lord. And in the heavens he remains such a deputy [of the Lord].

In this way, the last concern of the Lord on the Cross for His Mother is a concern for His Church, just as His Mother is a personification and representative of the Church.

Besides this, the holy Apostle John depicts the Church in 'Revelation' in the form of a Woman, who has recently given birth, just as the All-holy Virgin Mary gave birth to a Son.

In the twelfth chapter, he depicts the Church of Christ in the image of a woman, 'clothed in the sun, under her feet the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars'. The image of a woman, of a bride, of a virgin, and the image of a man or a bridegroom are the usual images for the Church and for God or Christ in the Sacred Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments (Es. 54:5; 65:5; Jer. 31:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9).

Here then, at the close of church history and at the end of the world, the glorious Church is found in the grievous torment of giving birth to her people in Christ (Gal. 4:19) for the life of the age to come. And as at the birth of Christ Himself, the devil chased Him in the figure of Herod, so now 'the dragon stood before the woman, when she was about to give birth, for to devour her Infant.' And then 'she brought forth a man Child, Who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne.' And now, in this image, the churchly people of God, which rules over all peoples, will be caught up to the throne of God.

The woman, the bride of the Lamb, represents the earthly and the heavenly Church together, the holy city of God (Rev. 21:9). In the image of the woman, the Mother of the Lord, St. John depicts the Church; and in the image of the Church of the last times he depicts the All-holy Virgin.

This is what the holy Apostle John made of his closeness to the Mother of his Lord, who became according to the Lord's desire his own mother. As her faithful son, he was not able to speak of her personally because of her humility, other than speaking in imagery and in a veiled way in his book.

The veneration of the All-holy Virgin, factually, in actuality, is the authentic confession of the Church, which is the one, heavenly-earthly, living body of Christ. To revere the All-holy Virgin means actually to abide in the body of the Church of Christ: not to separate the heavenly Church from the earthly, to have a bond with heaven, to confess the true Church, in which all the members compassionate for and work for one another, in reality.

Veneration of the All-holy Virgin is the preeminent confession of the unity of the Church, as the heavenly-earthly body of Christ, and of one's own communion with the heavenly Kingdom.

6. The Glorification of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:46-55).

Only one who recognises the 'greatness' of the All-holy Virgin, 'which the Mighty One hath done' to her could 'call her blessed'. If the Lord has done great things for her, then we must recognise this greatness, be aware of it and in turn confess it, and we must glorify both Him, Who gave this greatness, and the one to whom He gave it, and all the more so in that she to whom He gave this greatness had truthfully foretold that they would glorify her for that greatness.

That greatness consists in the fact that the Lord, wishing to be incarnate 'looked upon the lowliness' of her, that is on the spiritual perfection of the Virgin, and was incarnate precisely of her. He did 'great things' for her by His incarnation and through the glory that this has among the peoples. By humility, as one who flees glory, by remaining unknown and making oneself nothing – things which seemingly contradict 'being called blessed of all generations' – in these things the glorification consists. Thus did the All-holy Virgin herself explain the term 'called blessed', saying 'He hath looked upon the lowliness of His handmaiden; for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed'

'To call blessed' – In Greek *makarizo*: 'to bless, to consider blessed', which means also 'to glorify'. 'All generations shall call me blessed.' The veneration of the All-holy Virgin will live throughout all generations and tribes, not just for a day but perpetually, and not just in such a way that all bless her and she does not hear this; not at all, the perpetual blessing will impart

unto her joy like unto the joy that was the original cause of her blessedness, the incarnation of God the Word, imparted unto her. Concerning the incarnation of the Son of God she will rejoice eternally. This is joy in the glory of God.

Once she received the angelic greeting: 'Rejoice, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee,' and she cried out, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.' The all-holy Virgin now abides in the eternal joy of paradise with God, and neither previously nor after this is there any greater joy for her, than the people's repetition for her of the angelic salutation. At this greeting she responds and hastens with goodwill and mercy. The Virgin Mary has been lifted up to heaven in joy and to our aid.

To be completed in the next issue.

Explanation of the Pentecost Icon

Once, when He descended and confounded the tongues, the Most High divided the nations and when He divided the tongues of fire, He called all men to unity; and with one accord we glorify the All-holy Spirit.

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST falls exactly fifty days after Pascha; the word 'Pentecost' means 'fiftieth' in Greek. On this day, fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ the Holy Spirit came down on the apostles in the form of tongues of fire. On this feast we celebrate not only the descent of the Holy Spirit but also the whole mystery of the Trinity.

The icon of Pentecost is not a painting of the events in the room where the apostles received the Holy Spirit. We can see this clearly by the fact that St. Paul is shown on the icon; he was not even a Christian at the time of Pentecost. St. Paul is painted to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit came down on the whole Church and not just on the twelve apostles.

The twelve apostles sit on a semi-circular bench indicating the unity of the Church. Each, however, is painted in a different



Icon painted by the Sisters of the Convent of Saint Elizabeth, Etna, California,
www.conventofsaintelizabeth.org

posture to signify the different gifts of the Holy Spirit that St. Paul describes:

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

The group of the apostles are painted in inverse perspective (the figures at the back of the icon are larger than those at the front). This is to show that the Church is not an ordinary organisation, but a divine-human organism: the Body of Christ.

The top space on the bench is left unoccupied symbolising Christ the Head of the Church which is His Body (see Col. 1:18). The Church, however, existed before Pentecost because the angels are members of the Church. This spiritual church became the physical Body of Christ when Christ took flesh of the Virgin Mary and became man. This is the reason why the Incarnation (when the Son of God put on flesh) is mentioned so often in the hymns of Pentecost.

From the 17th century, particularly in Russian icons, the Mother of God began to be shown in this seat. In doing so, iconographers were probably trying to emphasise that the Mother of God was present at Pentecost (see Acts 1:14), but there is also a possibility that this practice started due to western influence.

The semicircle at the top of the icon represents the vault of heavens and the twelve rays coming from it represent the tongues of fire descending on the apostles. In some icons these rays reach down right on to the apostles' heads. In others, a small tongue of fire is drawn within the halo on each apostle and the rays are cut short. Western religious pictures of Pentecost usually depict flames or fire but this is not found in Orthodoxy.

At the time of Pentecost some of the people present thought that the apostles were drunk when they heard them speaking in foreign languages (see Acts 2:13). We should mention briefly that the Protestant charismatic practice of ‘speaking in tongues’ has nothing to do with Pentecost. The gift of ‘speaking in tongues’ is the gift of speaking a foreign language fluently without studying it. Those Protestants that utter nonsense words, grunts or animal noises believe that they are ‘speaking in tongues’ but they are not! This strange behaviour is not actually new at all – sects in the early centuries of Christianity did it too. It is either caused by mass hysteria, fakery, or some form of demonic activity. It has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit.

In ancient icons the watchers in the room were represented as people of different races dressed in their traditional national costume. Over them was written: ‘Peoples, Races and Tongues’ (Rev. 7:9). In newer Orthodox Pentecost icons, this group of people are represented by the figure of the king at the bottom of the icon. The inscription above the man is ‘Cosmos’ which is a Greek word meaning ‘world’ or ‘universe’. In the sense that it is used in the Pentecost icon, ‘cosmos’ means ‘peoples of the world’. The black background behind this figure signifies the darkness of the world before the coming of the Holy Spirit. The figure is painted as an old man to signify that he had been made old by the sin of Adam. The crown represents sin which had ruled over the world, and the cloth containing the twelve scrolls represents the teaching of the apostles.

A few artists place the Mother of God at the bottom of the icon instead of the King, but this is not Orthodox. On the most basic level, by replacing the symbol of the unenlightened nations with the Mother of God, these artists are intimating that the Theotokos who is ‘full of grace’ is on the same level as unbaptised and unconverted idolaters.

Iconography has changed in style over the centuries. For example, although most iconographers today paint in the Byzantine style, this style was used very rarely in 19th century Greece and Russia. The idea of ‘correct’ iconography is therefore a myth because there are so many variations. St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, for example, states that some older Pentecost icons had the Prophet Joel instead of the King Cosmos. This is because the Prophet Joel foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit

at Pentecost when he prophesied: 'I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh' (Joel 2:28). This prophecy of Joel is read on Pentecost Vespers on Saturday evening.

Having said that, placing the Mother of God at the bottom of the icon is an innovation, done to illustrate a modern theory rather than Scripture. Artists that do this have undoubtedly been influenced by the teachings of Sergius Bulgakov who believed that the Mother of God received spiritual rebirth at Pentecost. According to Bulgakov, 'with Pentecost, the work of the Divine Motherhood can be considered completed.'¹ In other words, the Mother of God replaces the old man because she is being 'completed' by Pentecost.

Bulgakov believed in Divine Motherhood because he also believed in Sophia. The ideas of Bulgakov are both confused and confusing, but, in summary, he believed in a fourth person of the Holy Trinity which he called 'Wisdom' or 'Sophia' that supports and animates the universe and is a mediatrix between God and creation. He also thought that the Mother of God was the 'full revelation of Sophia in a human being'² the 'personal incarnation of the Church' and the 'focus of the whole creaturely world'.³

Orthodox theologians such as Saint Seraphim of Sofia and Saint John of Shanghai criticised Bulgakov for his views and asserted that he was in danger of confusing the Holy Spirit with the Mother of God.⁴ Bulgakov was condemned by both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Church Abroad for his teaching on Sophia. Of course, there is no basis anywhere in the services of Pentecost for these heretical ideas.

In this modernist icon the Mother of God holds twelve 'seeds of the Word' instead of twelve scrolls. According to the artists, the Mother of God transforms the teachings of the apostles represented by the scrolls into the seeds of faith. Can there be any doubt that the Mother of God in this icon represents Sophia?

¹ S. Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2009) p.69

² *Ibid.* p.69

³ *Ibid.* p.101

⁴ Schemanun Seraphima (trans.), Saint Seraphim of Sofia (Etna: CTOS, 2008) p. 39

The Orthodox Church honours the Mother of God in the proper fashion and never confuses her with the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit, not an imaginary ‘Sophia’ that transformed the apostles and enabled them to convert the unbelieving nations. This is why we chant the following Prokeimenon on Pentecost and on every feast of the apostles: ‘Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world’ (Psalm 18:4).

On the Feast of Pentecost we commemorate the manifestation of the Church to the world; the traditional Pentecost icon illustrates the coming of the Divine Spirit that united those who were formerly divided and made them wise with the knowledge of the Trinity. This same grace of the Holy Spirit that was poured out on the apostles at Pentecost is still being poured out on us today.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, that fills all things and is everywhere present, a Treasury of good things, the Giver of life and our Comforter as Saint Seraphim of Sofia explains:

*The Grace of the Holy Spirit in its various and wondrous manifestations gives birth within us to the bliss of the Kingdom of God. For this reason, it is our true Christian joy. Our Lord and Saviour did not call the Holy Spirit ‘The Comforter’ in vain. This very name informs us that only through the Holy Spirit are we able to have real consolation in all of our misfortunes and through His Grace to receive while still here (on earth) access to all of the joys of the Kingdom of God.*⁵

The iconographer Leonid Ouspensky describes the Pentecost icon as ‘an image of the inner life of the Church’.⁶ The Church is the Body of Christ, and He is her Head; the grace of the Holy Spirit that the apostles received as they gathered together is the same grace that we receive in the Mysteries of the Church. It is this grace that calls us into the unity of one nation named after Christ.



⁵*Ibid.* p.163

⁶L. Ouspensky, V. Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood: SVS Press, 1982, p. 208

THE COMING MONTH

MAY THIS YEAR covers a period which sees us complete Pascha, celebrate the **Great Feasts** of the **Ascension of the Lord** and **Pentecost-Trinity** and enter the **Fast of the Holy Apostles**. All of these things are appointed according to the year's paschal cycle of services, services which, as the name implies, depend upon the date of the movable feast of Easter. At the same time, of course, there are commemorations which are ordered according to the days of the month, the Menaion.

On the day before the Ascension, we have the **Leavetaking of Pascha**, and in many churches the services for that day are celebrated in the same way as they are in Bright Week, with the doors open, no readings from the Psalter and the chanting of the paschal hymns. The day ends, of course, with the Vigil Service for the Ascension.

The Feast of the Ascension always falls on the Thursday of the sixth week of Pascha, forty days after the festival itself. The event which it celebrates is recorded in two of the Gospels (Mark 16:16-20; Luke 24:50-53) and in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (1:4-12), when the Risen Saviour was parted from His disciples and ascended into the Heavens to be seated on the Throne of the Most High.

For us the significance of the festival is that, just as in the previous festival, Our Lord opened unto us the way of resurrection through His resurrection, so as a Forerunner now He opens to us the way into Heaven.

Ten days after Ascension, we have the feast of Pentecost, the culmination of the cycle of feasts which centre on Easter. This, the eighth Sunday of Pascha, starts for us a new creation. In the beginning, in six days God created all things and rested the seventh day.

The figure of the eighth day is used throughout Scripture as one of the life of the age to come, of the resurrection. Both because of the fact that Christ rose from the dead on a Sunday,

and because it is the 'eighth day' we keep Sunday as the day of Resurrection, the Lord's day. Now, we have the eighth 'eighth day', and we celebrate a new order of creation here on earth: the inauguration of the New Testament Church, life lived in the Holy Spirit.

On this day at Vespers, for the first time since Pascha, we hear the prayer, 'Heavenly King', which from now on it used again every day to begin all our prayers and services. We begin thus because, as the priest prays each day at Matins (in the twelve secret prayers, read during the recital of the Six Psalms): 'We know not what we should pray for as we ought, if Thou, O Lord, guide us not by Thy Holy Spirit.'

The second day of the feast is kept as **Holy Spirit Day**, and the Vespers for this day is often joined to the Sunday Liturgy, because in it there are three long prayers read by the priest, while he and the people kneel down. They are called the **Kneeling Prayers**, and again this is the first time since Pascha that we have kneeled in church or in our prayers. The prayers ask the blessing of the Holy Spirit on all aspects of our life, and for His grace to be poured out upon the faithful departed.

This takes up a thought emphasised by the fact that the Saturday before the day of Pentecost is kept as a **Soul Sabbath**, a day on which the faithful departed are commemorated. The New Testament Church, inaugurated at this festival, the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of the Creed, is thus shown to embrace both those who are struggling for their salvation within the Orthodox Church here on earth, and those who have already ended their earthly course. We pray for each other and share our blessings, as beloved members of one loving family.

Such is the solemnity of this festival that we have a fast-free week following Pentecost-Trinity Sunday. The next Sunday is kept as that of **All Saints**, and then on the very next day, the Monday, we begin the fast that leads up to the commemoration of the martyrdom of the holy **Chiefs of the Apostles Peter and Paul**, on 29th June/12th July.

The fast not only prepares us for the feast of the Apostles, but it reminds us that the Apostles themselves trained for their

Apostolic ministry by prayer and fasting (see Acts 13:1-3). In keeping this fast, we are following their example, just as we follow their Faith.

Among the Saints in May we commemorate:

The Holy New Martyr Ahmet the Calligrapher (3rd/16th May) was a Turk living in Constantinople. He was unmarried but had two Russian-born slaves, one an older woman and one younger. The older one would go as often as she could to church and would bring back holy water and antidoron as a blessing for the younger one.

On the occasions when she partook of these holy things, Ahmet noticed that her breath smelt particularly sweet and he marvelled at that sweetness. He therefore asked what she had been eating and she confessed that she had taken nothing special, only the bread blessed by the Orthodox priests.

Ahmet was curious to know how this blessed bread could have such a fragrance, and he arranged with one of the priests that he should be permitted to watch the Divine Liturgy from a hidden place when the Patriarch was serving. On the appointed day, he dressed as did the Christians and went to watch.

The Lord, Who desires the salvation of all men, worked a second miracle. Not only had he permitted Ahmet to sense the spiritual fragrance of holy things, but when he entered the church he saw the Patriarch bathed in a heavenly light as he came through the doors to bless the people, and as he blessed rays of light came from his hands and alighted on the heads of the faithful, but not upon his own head. Each time the Patriarch blessed this happened, and the blessed one realised that it was because he was not of the household of Faith that the blessing did not descend upon him. Thus, he came to believe, sought instruction in the Orthodox Faith and was in due time baptised.

For a period, he remained a secret Christian because it was a capital offence for a Moslem man to convert to Christianity, but once when he was entertaining his Turkish friends at home, they began to discuss what was the greatest thing in the world. Each had an opinion, but when it came time for Ahmet

to speak, filled with holy zeal, he could no longer hide his Faith and proclaimed that the greatest thing in the world was the Faith of the Christians.

At first his friends were aghast at what they considered his foolishness, but when they saw he was in earnest, they were filled with wrath against him and dragged him off to the judge. On the latter's orders he was beheaded on 3rd May, 1682, and thus died as a Christian Martyr. We do not know his baptismal name, because he had had to keep his conversion secret, but through his martyrdom he has added a new name to the canon of Christian names.

His life also shows us what grace is given us, if only we were to see it, in even the seemingly inconsequential rites and practices of the Church. How often we receive the antidoron at the end of the Liturgy, as if it were at best just a symbol and at worst just a custom to which we give no thought. Yet its blessing revealed the fragrance of the Christian Faith to this man, whose heart must have been good ground upon which the seed of faith might fall.

The Hieromartyr Mocius (11th/24th) was a presbyter in the town of Amphipolis in Macedonia, and he suffered during the reign of Diocletian. During the celebration of a pagan festival in his town, the Saint was inflamed by zeal, and called upon the participants to abandon the worship of their idols and to turn to the True God. He was set upon and beaten, and eventually given over to torture in an attempt to make him deny the Saviour.

Finally he was sent to the town of Byzantium - it was a custom at that time to send prisoners to other towns, where it was thought that without local support they would more readily weaken and abandon their principles. In Byzantium, St Mocius was beheaded and gained the crown of martyrdom.

When, subsequently, the Emperor St Constantine the Great re-founded Byzantium as his imperial city, renaming it Constantinople, a church was built at the place where St Mocius had contested for the faith.

The New Hieromartyrs Pachomius of Chernigov and Avercius of Zhitomir (15th/28th May) were brothers

according to the flesh, and the elder, Peter, was a pupil at the Kazan Theological Academy, when its rector was the Ever-memorable Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky), later First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, and it was by Metropolitan Antony that he was tonsured a monk and renamed Pachomius. He was consecrated Bishop in 1911, and at the Great Council of the Russian Church of 1917-18 he delivered a report concerning the procedures for electing a Patriarch.

After the Revolution, such was his zeal to comfort his flock, that he visited all the churches in his diocese travelling on foot. Eventually he was arrested to be released in 1923, but he was not permitted to return to his diocese.

His younger brother, Procopius, was teaching New Testament at Vilna Theological Seminary, and was subsequently tonsured with the monastic name of Avercius and made Bishop of Zhitomir.

When in 1927, Metropolitan Sergius issued his infamous declaration, the two brother Archbishops were among the first to raise their voices in protest, against this betrayal of the Church's integrity. They were arrested, and Archbishop Pachomius was sent to the Solovki concentration camp, and transferred in 1931 to the Mai-Guba slave-labour camp where they were building the Baltic-White Sea Canal. This broke his health and the next year he was sent to a camp for invalids at Kuzema.

Both Bishops disappeared into the 'Soviet vastnesses' and died in the late thirties as confessors of the Faith. They are commemorated on 15th May because it is the nameday of the New Hieromartyr Pachomius, the festival day of Saint Pachomius the Great.



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

VISIT OF METROPOLITAN AMBROSE

His Eminence Metropolitan Ambrose visited the Brotherhood for Great Week and Pascha. He arrived on Monday of Great Week, 24th March/6th April having been driven from the airport by **Deacon Ioan Turcu**. On the same evening, the Metropolitan served the Litia for the Great Feast of the Annunciation, being in prayerful attendance for the remainder of the vigil.

The Divine Liturgy of the Feast saw the ordination to the diaconate of **Subdeacon Alexandru Radu Pop**. Many relatives and friends of Fr. Alexandru were present for this joyous occasion. It was the first time that many of our congregation had witnessed an ordination to the diaconate. We pray that Fr. Alexandru will be a support and help to Fr. Simion as already they are establishing a place of regular worship. May God grant him many years!

For the rest of Great Week, Metropolitan Ambrose lead all the Divine services of the Lord's Passion, giving a homily at each of them, often an explanation of the meaning of the Gospel, or the events taking place. At the meals after the services the Metropolitan was able to talk to visitors and parishioners and answer questions about our faith and give advice to those who asked for guidance or consolation. Very many people attended the Holy Week services, the church often being packed.

The Metropolitan led the evening Paschal service, the church being full of worshipers, assisted by **Priestmonk Sabbas, Priest Borislav Popov, Priest Gabriel Lawani, Priest Evangelos Liassi and Deacon Ioan Turcu**. The traditional parish breakfast was held around the paschal bonfire. In the afternoon Metropolitan Ambrose led the Agape Vespers service before returning to London.

His Eminence expressed the desire for us to see Pascha next year, as we are living in truly apocalyptic times. May God grant us this blessing.

DECORATED EPITAPHIOS

Vasili and **Evphi Kalkanteras**, as is customary, with the assistance of a team of volunteers, decorated the epitaphios with a beautiful floral display, the cost of which was covered by a collection in the parish. We are grateful for their kindness and the generosity of the volunteers and donors. May God bless them.

DECORATING WORK

On Monday 7th /20th April the construction company **Eikon Building Ltd**, led by **Daniel ‘Mushroom’ Ciupercovici**, began work on painting the new house; they also plan to paint the church and to do various remedial works.

ICON CARDS

The icon of the Sayings of Christ (Matthew 25:40) painted by the Sisters of the Holy Angels Convent, Afidnai, Greece is now available as a card (A6 30p each; A5 90p each). This beautiful icon encapsulates the practical aspects of the Christian life. The icon cards were printed by **Constantin Danila** of **Conprint**, Guildford, and we are grateful for his excellent work.

Practical Tip

REMEMBER that from Pascha until the Vigil for Pentecost, the prayers, ‘Glory to Thee, O God, Glory to Thee’ and ‘Heavenly King, O Comforter’ are omitted both in our prayers at home and in church. They are replaced until the leave-taking of Pascha by the Paschal Troparion: ‘Christ is risen from the dead, by death hath He trampled down death, and on those in the graves hath He bestowed life.’ During the festal period of the Ascension, our prayers begin with ‘Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.’