

# *The Shepherd*

*An Orthodox Christian  
Pastoral Magazine*

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VOLUME XLVI

NUMBER 10

JUNE 2026

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## FROM THE FATHERS

‘CERTAIN BRETHREN went to visit Abba Pœmen, and while they were sitting with him, they praised a certain brother, saying, “He hates evil things.” Abba Pœmen said to the one who spoke with him, “What is hatred of evil things?” Now the brother was astonished, and he found nothing to say; he rose up and threw himself down before the Elder, saying, “Tell me what the hated of evil things is.” And the Elder said unto him, “The hatred of evil things is for a man to hate his own sins, and to justify those of his neighbour.”’

### ABBA PŒMEN † FIFTH CENTURY A.D.

‘REMEMBRANCE OF WRONGS is the consummation of anger, the keeper of sins, hatred of righteousness, ruin of virtues, poison of the soul, a worm in the mind, shame of prayer, stopping of supplication, a turning away from love, a nail piercing the soul. It is a pleasureless feeling cherished in the sweetness of bitterness, continuous sin, unsleeping transgression, hourly malice. This dark and hateful passion, I mean remembrance of wrongs, is one of those that are produced but have no offspring. That is why we do not intend to say much about it. He who has put a stop to anger has also destroyed remembrance of wrongs since offspring can only come from a living parent. He who has obtained love has banished revenge, but he who broods in hatred stores up for himself endless sufferings.’

### SAINT JOHN OF THE LADDER † 649 A.D.

‘IF SOME UNEXPECTED TRIAL comes upon you, do not blame him through whom it came, but seek the reason for its coming; and you will be corrected. For, whether through this

person or another, you had to drink the bitter cup of the judgments of God.’

### SAINT MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR † 662 A.D.

‘ALTHOUGH the commandment of love for God is as far superior to the commandment of love for God’s image (man) as God is superior to His image, yet the commandment of love for our neighbour serves as a foundation for the commandment of love of God. He who has not laid the foundation labours in vain to construct a building; it cannot possibly stand without the foundation. By love for our neighbour we enter into love for God. A Christian’s love for God is love for Christ, and love for our neighbour is love for Christ in our neighbour. By loving our neighbour – by loving him in the Lord, that is, as the Lord commands us – we acquire love for Christ, and love for Christ is love for God.’

### SAINT TIKHON OF ZADONSK † 1783 A.D.

‘HUMAN LIFE is not made ugly by the absence of equality, but by the absence of love and spiritual understanding in men.’

### SAINT IGNATIUS OF THE CAUCASUS † 1867 A.D.

‘AS SOON as you turn away, however slightly, from God, and no longer place your trust in Him, things go awry; for then the Lord withdraws, as though saying: “You have put your trust in something else – very well, rely on that instead.” And whatever it may be, it proves utterly worthless.’

### SAINT THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE † 1894 A.D.

‘DO NOT LOOK at what other people are doing, but heed what the word of God teaches. Thus we shall avoid the temptations of the world. Much peace have they that love Thy law, O Lord, and for them there is no stumbling-block. O Christian, love the Law of God and the temptations of the world shall not harm you.’

### SAINT NIKOLAI OF ŽIČA † 1956 A.D.

# Saint John the Evangelist does not allow one to say: Believe any way you wish, only love

By Saint Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894)

THE HOLY APOSTLE and Evangelist John the Theologian, the beloved disciple of the Lord, is above all an example and a teacher of love. Love breathes through his Gospel; lessons about love fill his epistles, and his life serves as a striking example of love.

He expounded on all the mysteries of love – its source, its movement in deeds, and its culmination – and where it leads all that follow it to the heights. On this subject of love St. John is especially well known, and no matter who would begin to reflect upon love he would immediately bring to mind St. John as the model of love and turn to him as to a teacher of love.

Now let us examine how contemporary wise men have made use of this teaching. They possess a special kind of vain wisdom called ‘indifferentism’ by which they reason and say: ‘Believe as you like, it makes no difference – just love everyone like brothers, be charitable to them, and have a good influence on them.’

They point out that the Evangelist John the Theologian writes only about love. For him love is light and life and all perfection. According to his words the person who does not love walks in darkness, abides in death, and is a murderer (see 1 Jn. 3:15; 1 John. 1:6). It is well known that when St. John grew old and was unable to walk they carried him to church. There he only admonished, ‘Brethren! let us love one another’ (1 John 4:7). So much did he value love. They tell us that we also should love like that and only love, believing any way we wish.

I myself have had to listen to such ‘wisdom’. Perhaps you have also had to listen to, or will hear, something similar to this. Let us contrast their false teaching with the true teaching of St. John the Theologian, and then protect our thoughts from

wavering from the fundamentals of Christian good sense into the vain wisdom of the ‘indifferent ones’.

These so-called ‘wise’ people desire to build everything without God – their external welfare and their morality. From this they strive wherever possible to craftily weave a school of thought where there is no need to talk about God. And they beat their drums about love. They tell us to love one another, and here there is no need to think about God. It is especially on this point where the Holy Evangelist routs them.

Although St. John continuously, and exactingly, reminds us to love one another, he also places love in such a close bond with God, with love for God and the knowledge of God, that it is impossible to separate them.

Behold where St. John’s love originates: ‘Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.’ And he adds, ‘Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another’ (1 John 4:10,11).

According to his reasoning, our mutual love must be built up by the action of faith in the Lord, Who came to save us, and consequently it is not all right to believe as you want. Further he teaches, ‘Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God’ (1 John 4:7). ‘If we love one another, God dwelleth in us’ (1 Jn 4:12). ‘God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him’ (1 John 4:16).

You see, he does not say a word about love without speaking about God and the Saviour. Love is from God, and leads to God. Thus he who says that he loves his brother, and does not know and love God and the Saviour, is a liar and the truth is not in him (see 1 John 4:20, 2:4).

Therefore it is possible to summarise the entire teaching of the Holy Evangelist on love in the following words: in order to love your neighbour you must love God, and in order to love God, you must, of course come to know Him within yourself and especially in His salvific activity on us. We must know and believe.

What does the will of God consist of? In faith and love. Thus the commandment says: ‘That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another’ (1 John 3:23). It

does not only command us to love but to believe in the Lord, and in such a way that faith is the source of love.

If one were to gather into one all the places where St. John the Evangelist speaks only of love, one could still not conform his teaching to the false reasoning: ‘only love and believe as you want’.

Besides his teaching on love, he also speaks of faith, independent of the law of love. Behold how he categorically rejects those who say, believe as you want. What does he preach about from the very first verses? –

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3).*

The most important point with St. John, and all the Apostles, is the teaching about communion with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, from which proceeds communion of the faithful with one another. How can we have the one without the other? Further, St. John asks the question: ‘who is a liar?’ and answers thus:

*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father... Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God (1 John 2:22, 23; 4:15).*

The whole matter is summed up in confessing the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and to be God. How then could one possibly say: ‘Believe any way you want’? Then there follows the warning:

*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Herein know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is*

*of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:1-3).*

He who says, 'Believe as you want' does not confess Jesus Christ, for if he did confess Christ he would not speak thus. Therefore he cannot be from God. Where then is he from? – truly from the antichrist.

Finally, the Holy Evangelist describes the whole essence of Christianity thus: 'And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life' (1 John 5:11-12).

Who possesses the Son of God? Those who believe in His name. Therefore he says, and writes: 'unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life' (1 John 5:13).

Consequently, he who does not believe in the Son of God does not have eternal life. Could it possibly make no difference how one wants to believe? No.

*We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us light and understanding, that we may know the true God, and that we may be in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life (1 John 5:20).*

These excerpts should be enough, I suppose, to show the 'Indifferentists' that in vain do they seek to find support for their lie in the teaching of St. John the Theologian. It is more than likely that they make such claims without having ever read St. John's holy and divinely inspired writings, but rather quote him based on rumours about his overflowing love. Let them even now find something else besides the above argument, to defend their teaching to us believers.

One word alone from the beloved disciple is sufficient to discredit their teaching and, without any doubt, to confirm our belief explicitly in that which was given to us by the Lord through the Holy Apostles and preserved by the Church.

I would only add the following consideration to the decisive words of the Apostle and Evangelist John. Having estranged themselves in their minds from the Lord, these unbelievers

grasp at acts of charity whose source and support are precisely love. They act in this way only to be founded on something without the assurance that they have found a solid basis. If only they had a clear understanding of how it is indeed possible for man to act in a fruitful way, they would never remain fixed on their teaching.

The essence of the matter is – that we are not in the proper state. Therefore we cannot act in the right way. In order for us to act in the correct way we must enter into the right state. By our own powers we are not capable of doing this.

The Lord, having come to the earth, lifted up man to the right state. He did not lead man into this state for His own sake but rather that man would accept from Him renewed humanity and thus gain the possibility of acting properly. We obtain this state through Holy Baptism, for those who are baptised into Christ have put on Christ.

From the time of Baptism we become one with the Lord and begin to live His life and act by His power. Those who would claim love or the right action (for love is the fullness of the law) should first accept all the premises of Christianity in order to be able to walk rightly and deny their own falseness. This is impossible without faith, for faith is the root of Christianity and the beginning of everything. The Lord Himself says this:

*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except ye abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned (John 15:4-6).*

When someone begins to expound to you about love or fruitful action independent of true belief, tell him: Wait! – first believe correctly. By faith acquire all the salvific precepts of Christianity. Through them be united with the Lord, make your life and strength depend on Him like you would on an injection for your health and then you will begin to act in a fruitful way.

It is a fact that the witness to a righteous life is fruitful activity in love, but, in order to attain it and to remain in it, one

must accept all of God's Truth with faith and pass through all of God's sanctifying actions [on one's self]. Only under these conditions, i.e., by abiding in True Love, may we 'grow up into Him in all things, Who is the head, even Christ' (Eph. 4:15).

We could summarise thus: he who does not have the right Faith cannot enter into the proper state, and he who does not enter into the right state cannot properly act. Now do you see how one cannot say: 'Believe as you wish, only love'?

Faith is not only the image of the knowledge of God and of our relationship to Him; it also includes all the salvific institutions [not just the Church as establishment but all that is contained within the Church for salvation] given by God. These salvific institutions maintain active faith.

Our so-called wise men might not actually be opposed to Christian teaching, but, more than anything else, they are repulsed by Christian institutions. Since these institutions are nothing more than faith in reality and in action, then their main sin is that they do not want to act in the spirit of the Faith.

One is only amazed at how these people so persistently expound about deeds and labours but remove themselves from activity in the realm of holy Faith. There is something amiss here. Surely they are acquainted with the laws of logical thought. There is such duplicity here that one must assume that they are not in fact doers, but are acted upon – they are the tools of a foreign spirit, and such a spirit that is itself foreign to Truth.

Brethren, having understood this, let us guard ourselves from the evil reasoning of this world. Only those who have never tasted the Truth can waver in it. Let us fulfil with humility and in the spirit of truth all that our holy Faith demands. Then we will have, and carry within, a witness which will bring to naught all false arguments from without. May the Lord illumine us by His Truth. Amen.

*Originally published in 'Orthodox Life' Vol. 46, No. 6,  
November-December 1996*



# THE INSTITUTION OF THE SAINT PETER'S, DORMITION AND NATIVITY FASTS

**By Archbishop Benjamin of Nizhegorod and Arzamas**

Before all else, we must know why, for just and important reasons, the other fasts, that is the Saint Peter's, Dormition and Nativity fasts, were instituted in ancient times. In the Prophet Zacharias (8:19), it is written:

*Thus saith the Lord All-Sovereign: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and good festivals, and ye shall rejoice; and truth and peace shall ye love.*

Here the Lord God institutes four fasts, corresponding to the four seasons of the year, for the House of Judah, that is, for us, the Christians. For we are the New House of Judah. Our Lord Jesus Christ was incarnate in the House of Judah, and those that believe in Him are given power to become His children, and for this reason we refer to ourselves as the House of Judah. In the year there are four seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter; and the Great Fast, that is the holy and great forty-days, is offered by us in springtime as a gift to the Lord God, as a tithe [tenth] of the whole year, and it is, according to the prophecy of Zacharias, the first fast.

The second fast is kept at the time when the holy Apostles fasted, immediately after the Holy Spirit had come down upon them, and it is called by the Orthodox Saint Peter's [or Apostles'] Fast, because we keep this fast until the day of the holy Chiefs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. It was not arbitrarily that the Church appointed this fast. It follows the example of the Apostles themselves, who, after the reception of the most holy and life-creating Spirit, which illumined and rejoiced them spiritually, with fasting and prayer dispersed from Jerusalem to preach the Gospel (see Acts 13:2). And we, who keep this fast, imitate them, who are the instructors and enlighteners of our

souls, and we offer a summertime gift to the Lord God and communicate of the all-immaculate Mysteries of Christ unto the salvation of our souls and bodies.

The third fast, the autumn one, is in honour of the Dormition of the Mother of God in imitation of her and as an expression of love for her. It begins on the 1st August and continues until the 15th. The Mother of God herself prepared for departure to eternal life, continually fasting and praying, as the Church writers testify. Therefore the Church has appointed that we fast and prepare for communion of the all-immaculate Mysteries of Christ until the day of the Dormition of the most holy Theotokos. Also, thereby we offer an autumnal sacrifice to the Lord God; we thank Him for all His benefactions, and in very deed we testify to our true love of the All-pure Virgin Theotokos.

The fourth fast, the winter one before the Nativity of Christ, is kept in remembrance of the fact that the Son of God, in His ineffable kind-heartedness to the race of man, was well-pleased to be made man, that He might deliver us from slavery to the devil, reconcile us with the Father and, by His advent, grant us all that was needful for salvation.

In commemorating these unspeakable benefactions of His, the holy Eastern Church gives her sons the precept to fast and to communicate of the all-pure Body and Blood of Christ during the fast before the Nativity of Christ in the same way as in the other fasts. Observing these four fasts we fulfil the prophecy of Zacharias concerning the four fasts quoted above, and we do this as of a precept and command of God, in thanksgiving to the Lord for everything, and to dedicate to Him the commencement of each of the four seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter.

Furthermore in making ourselves pleasing to God through prayer and fasting, we simultaneously battle against the enemy of our souls, who, in Christ's words, doth not come out, except by prayer and fasting (Matthew 18:21). In reply to the question, 'When did the forty-day fast (before Christmas), that of the Apostles and of the Theotokos originate, and who passed down this tradition?' Saint Simeon of Thessalonica says the following in his 54<sup>th</sup> answer:

*These fasts (with the exception of the forty days) were instituted according to ancient tradition, as custom bears*

*witness, and they were an ancient practice, for which cause they are referred to in the roll of union (this roll was published in the collection of canons), and in the typicon of Jerusalem, which was compiled by the divine Sabbas [the Sanctified] and John, the theologian from Damascus.*

Both these fathers and teachers of the Church contributed to this typicon, the first after the Fourth Œcumenical Council, and the latter between the Sixth and the Seventh. For, when, because of the invasion of the heathen, the typicon of the divine Sabbas was destroyed, the great John restored it and rewrote it according to the ancient order.

Each one of these fasts has its own significance. The forty-day fast (the Nativity fast) signifies the fast of Moses, who, having fasted forty days and nights, received the Law inscribed on tablets of stone. We, however, fast forty days, and receive the Living Word, not inscribed on tablets of stone, but born and incarnate of the Virgin, and we communicate of His supremely divine flesh. The fast of the Apostles was appointed in their honour, and appropriately so, because, on the one hand, we have been deemed worthy of many good things through them, and, on the other, because they were for us teachers of fasting, restraint and obedience even unto death.

Furthermore, according to apostolic tradition, recorded by Clement, after the descent of the Spirit [Pentecost-Trinity] we must keep festival for one week, and then fast so that we do not weaken ourselves through repletion of food, but that rather through the fast we might learn to honour those things handed down from His Apostles.

The August (Dormition) fast was established in honour of the Mother of God the Word, who, learning of her demise, fasted and prayed as always, and this for our sakes, for being holy and all-immaculate, she had no need to fast; thus especially did she pray for us, when she was about to pass over from this life to the future one, when her blessed soul was, through the Divine Spirit, united with her Son. And we should fast and hymn her, imitating her life, that we might move her to prayer for us. Some also say that this fast was instituted on the occasion of the two feasts, the Transfiguration [6<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> August] and the Dormition [15<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup>]. And I also count it essential to

commemorate both these feasts; the one has imparted to us sanctification, and the other the propitiation and economy for us.

Similarly, in reply to Photius' query, Balsamon testifies that these three fasts (the Nativity, Saint Peter's, and the Dormition), although they originated within the Church at an unknown time and according to an unrecorded tradition, were confirmed by a Council at Constantinople. At this council the question was posed, 'Must one keep the fast in August?' To this question a reply was given.

Originally the fast was at a different time, but so that it should not coincide with the fasts of the pagans, it was transferred; and furthermore many people to this day fast during this fast. To this question and answer, Balsamon appends an interpretation:

*They once asked about this fast at the Council, presided over by our most sovereign and most august Emperor, in the presence of the most holy Patriarch Kyr Luke and the other hierarchs found there. Some said that one did not have to keep this fast, on account of its translation (explained above). To the contrary, others affirmed that when the holy council plainly says that this fast existed in former times, then we must indispensably keep it, even though it is not known whence and how it was handed down. The Patriarch and the hierarchs proclaimed that the fast of August must be observed irrevocably, and the record of their decision was appended to the roll of union (published in the collection of canons), which also allows the thrice-married to receive the Divine Holy Things [Communion] thrice a year, at Pascha, at the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, and at the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, on account of the fact that these feasts are preceded by fasts, after which the Mystery [sacrament] was imparted to them. There then arose some doubt about the number of days in this fast, which had nowhere been registered, but the most holy Patriarch said that although there was no written record of the number of days in the Dormition fast, as neither was there for the fast before the Nativity of Christ, yet we must follow the*

*unwritten church tradition and fast from the first day of August and from the fourteenth day of November. And thus it was resolved. But when I myself considered, whence and in what way these two fasts (the fast of the Dormition of the most holy Theotokos, and the fast of the Nativity of Christ our God) were handed down; whether they were on a par which those established for the Apostles and the feast of the Transfiguration; and whether we must keep these fasts and for how many days, I came to this conclusion – that these fasts for the four feasts must be kept unalterably. Although the number of the days in them is not the same as that in the Great Forty-days [Lent], yet before these feasts, everyone, monastics and the faithful, must indispensably fast, lest they be in danger of cutting themselves off from the community of the Orthodox Christians. The monks, however, moved by the rules of their founders, must fast even more, that is from the feast of All Saints and from the fourteenth day of November, for they are required to follow the rules which their founders required, for this is a right and saving deed.*

*Editor's Note:* A large portion of the article above is a quotation from Theodore Balsamon. Our readers might be interested to know that he was one of the most renowned canonists. He was born in Constantinople, where also he was educated, and where he became a deacon of the Great Church. In 1193 he was elected Patriarch of Antioch, and, because of his comprehension of law and his fame as a canonist, it was thought to make him Patriarch of Constantinople. However, at about this time the Imperial City fell to the Crusaders (1204 A.D.) and the Patriarchate of Constantinople went into exile; a Latin Patriarch was installed in Constantinople. From Balsamon's many works, the most renowned is his commentary on the Nomocanon of Patriarch Photius. His work carries authority within the Greek and Russian Churches to this day.



# THE VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

BY PROTOPRESBYTER MICHAEL POLSKY

*Completion:*

## VII. THE HISTORY OF THE VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

In the Sacred Scriptures there is only recorded as much as is absolutely necessary, for they were written by the Holy Spirit through members of the Church, the holy Apostles, and for the Church; they remain and are preserved only in the Church, and in the Church there eternally abides the Holy Spirit Which leads us into all truth, and for that reason it is the Church that is 'the pillar and ground of truth' (1 Jn 2:20; 2 Cor. 3:31; 1 Tim. 3:15).

Thus what is recorded about the All-holy Virgin in the Sacred Scriptures was fully sufficient until the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in the Church, which revealed everything concerning her in its fulness and in all its details. And the Holy Spirit disposes all things in the Church for the salvation of the people, and revealing in its fulness the significance of our salvation, He 'ordained' that the Church venerate the All-holy Virgin, recognise her 'great things' (Luke 1:49) and her part in our salvation, and her grace-filled and prayerful aid for us in this work of salvation.

According to the letter, there is little written in the Word of God about the All-holy Virgin Mary, but according to the spirit and its significance for those who are 'ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit' (2 Cor 3:6), sufficiently much is written.

One must attribute significance to every word of Scripture, for every word is eternal, and there is nothing in any word that is fortuitous or superfluous, and, under the illumination of the Church by the Holy Spirit, the meaning and spirit of each and every word is manifest as immeasurably great and true.

How the holy Apostles revered the All-holy Virgin is witnessed by the Word of God. The holy Apostles, who themselves wrote the Scriptures of the New Testament, knew

that 'the Mighty One' had 'done great things' to the Virgin Mary, and that she was to be 'blessed' or glorified by 'all generations'. They themselves saw her moral character and the 'blessedness' of her 'that believed, that there should be a performance of those things which were told her of Lord'; they themselves observed 'the lowliness' of the 'handmaiden' of God, upon which 'the Lord looked.' And they honoured her as 'blessed among women', for she had prevailed on her Son to work His first miracle, and so had brought them, the Apostles, to faith in Him!

She was the senior and head among them with regard to faith and according to all the good works of salvation. Having taken hold of her words that 'all generations shall call me blessed' they were the first and could not but reverence and glorify her. She was warmly loved by her Divine Son and was given as mother to the beloved disciple and was thus made a warmly loving mother of all of them, the holy Apostles, binding them into one family, bound by the bond of love.

The holy Apostles knew that when she was with them in this life she continued 'in prayers and supplication' and aided them by her prayers, that she had not lost this gift at her transfer to the heavens, to the Lord, and that there too she helps them. Only with the words, 'Rejoice, full of grace!' could they greet her in this life, and so they hymn her after her dormition. They could not do in life, other than how they had written.

The details of the holy Apostles' reverent disposition, and that of the original Christian community, to the All-holy Virgin are hidden, and for no other cause than because of the humility of the Virgin.

True humility strives to hide itself in obscurity. The disposition of women was by preference modest, and enjoying any glory among the community was alien to them. Humility, as an essential mark of the All-holy Virgin's character, is exclusively stressed by the holy Apostles and Evangelists. The Lord 'looked upon the lowliness of His handmaiden' in her youth, even before His incarnation. But what transpired with regard to the lowliness [humility] of the Virgin after the Nativity?

See, she was made the dwelling-place of God. The Power of God came to that which could receive It and could become the

bush which burned with the fire of the Divinity and was not itself burnt. She met with God face to Face and remained alive. And if one only considers and presents clearly to oneself how God might abide in one and be borne in oneself on earth, just as the All-holy Virgin bore and bears the All-Sovereign of all creation, then one would be filled with horror, and from such 'great things' might fall into the great abyss of humility and in the unbearable abasement cry out with Peter the Apostle: 'Depart from me, O Lord! for I am a sinful man' (Luke 5:8).

Such a thing would be simply unbearable. Lest it be destroyed, the pure and holy cannot be touched, even to the very least degree, to the sin that darkens. But the All-holy Virgin received within herself this same unbearable fire of the Godhead. And it is completely comprehensible to every mortal, that humility can grow from great things according to the measure of those great things. Wherefore, after the Nativity, the All-holy Virgin became a thousand times more profound in her humility than before the Nativity; she grew therein so that she might preserve the Grace, which she had 'found' with God in the days of her youth.

If the Lord forbade people to speak about Him (Matt. 9:31; Mark 7:36), so not desiring to become known and not receiving glory from men (John 7:3; 5:41), then how could His holy Mother direct the Apostles to glorify her and say more than she herself had allowed them to report?

But the Lord said of Himself. 'If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me.' 'This He said, signifying what death He should He die' (John 12:32-33). Being glorified on earth, having completed His work, and particularly after death, He drew them to Himself when He granted people remission of sins and opened the doors of Paradise.

And there can be no other regard for the All-holy Virgin than that of the Church of Christ. Although she spent her time in humility, this does not mean that she should not be glorified. Although she was concealed in obscurity, it is not impossible to find her. Although she was strictly silent about herself, yet guided by the Holy Spirit, we can come to appreciate her greatness, which was granted her from the Lord, and to bless her. 'He that humbleth himself shall be exalted' (Luke 14:11).

Such was the honour accorded the All-holy Virgin in the first, Apostolic age after the Nativity of Christ, as is delineated by the exalted words and characteristics of the Sacred Scriptures themselves. The humility of the Virgin when living on earth enshrines this reverence due her.

The honour accorded the All-holy Virgin, which is already recorded in the words of the Apostle-Evangelists, gradually spread in the second century. The holy Martyr Justin the Philosopher, Tertullian, and St Irenaeus of Lyons magnify the All-holy Virgin Mary; they recognize her significance for all mankind as the second Eve.

Most importantly they witness the saving significance of her ministry: through Mary 'disobedience was made strengthless,' that which was being led away to destruction was by her 'brought to salvation,' 'the sin of the one was bathed in the good of the other,' 'mankind was saved through the Virgin,' the Virgin 'through her obedience became a cause of salvation for herself and for the whole race of man.' This is what they say of her, these men of the second century.

Comparison of Mary with Eve according to the word of God and deducing the saving significance of her ministry for the race of man had Apostolic authority, for the Apostles saw in Christ the second Adam. Fittingly Saint Irenaeus was, according to Papias of Hierapolis, the disciple of the holy Apostle John the Theologian.

In the third century, Origen, Saint Gregory the Wonderworker and the holy Martyr Methodius of Patara commemorate the 'blessedness' of the All-holy Virgin as her glorification. In the brief reference that 'all those in whom Christ lives are sons of Mary,' Origen accounts her the Mother of all Christians. Then Saint Gregory cannot find any 'like her in all generations', he sees in her 'the whole treasury of graces', he marvels at 'her spiritual virtues', and most importantly, he believes that she 'delights the souls that glorify her'. Saint Methodius says directly:

*We pray thee, most exalted of all and one deemed worthy of maternal honour and boldness, do thou constantly remember, O All-holy Theotokos, us who praise thee and with reverent doxologies honour thine ever-living and undefaceable*

*memory. And thou, Elder Simeon worthy of honour,...be also an intercessor for our race before God the Saviour.*

In the fourth century, amidst the quantity of testimonies we have concerning the worthiness of the All-holy Virgin, as being the Mother of Life, a Prophetess, Ever-Virgin and sinless, Saint Gregory the Theologian's testimony concerning the holy Martyr Justina is extraordinarily important; therein the martyr, being stalked by a certain pagan, called upon the aid of the holy Virgin Mary to protect her virginity, with the result that this pagan was converted to Christ and subsequently they both received martyric deaths.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa tells of a vision of Saint Gregory the Wonderworker in which the holy Apostle John the Theologian fulfilled the assignment of the Lord's Mother. Both Gregories speak of this as being something which happened a century before them.

Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus, confirming the honour accorded the All-holy Virgin as 'the Mother of Life and of all the living', in his time fought against some Mary-worshipping heretics, the 'Lappiditrians', who used to offer the Virgin Mary a kind of shortbread in the form of a sacrifice and 'attempted to establish her in place of God'. 'Mary is not God,' he said, 'We must honour Mary. We must render worship to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but no one must worship Mary.'

In the fifth century, Saint Cyril of Alexandria highly glorified the Virgin Mary, as did Saint Peter Chrysologus and Saint Proclus. 'There is nothing in the world that can compare with the Theotokos' — we can use these words of Saint Proclus to characterize the veneration of the Virgin Mary of the Fathers of this century.

We can trace the naming of the All-holy Virgin as *Theotokos* [she who gave birth to God] back to the third century to the persons of Origen and Saint Methodius. But it was in the fifth century, in 431, at the Third Œcumenical Council in Ephesus, that this title that had derived from antiquity was confirmed by the universal voice of the Church, itself directed by the Holy Spirit, as exactly expressing the dogma concerning the one Divine Person of the Son of God in two natures: Divine and human.

The Son of God was born before the ages of the Father according to His Divinity, and in these last days was born of Mary the Virgin according to His human nature, being in two natures one and the same God. In one Divine Person two natures are conjoined, and for that reason the All-holy Virgin gave birth to God and not just a man; she gave birth to God, although in His human nature.

This most holy dogma is called the ‘refutation’ of the heretics, those who distort the teaching concerning our salvation in Christ when speaking of the Son of God, and naturally this inevitably touches upon His mother. But in speaking of Him, to Whom the All-holy Virgin gave birth according to His humanity, the Council proclaimed that she is actually the Theotokos, as until that time the whole Church had believed, except for the heretics who attempted to name her ‘*Christotokos*’. The glory of the All-holy Theotokos is completely bound up with the glory of her Son and God, and inasmuch as one glorifies the Lord and His saving incarnation, one must also glorify her.

Thus the holy Church honoured and ‘called blessed’ the All-holy Virgin Theotokos uninterruptedly from the days of the Apostles for the course of five centuries.

In the second, third and fourth centuries, the holy Church honoured the All-holy Theotokos in exactly the same way as she does today. All the existing evidences of this veneration, data from the very first century, from the Apostles in the Gospels, reveals this as a most widespread and established practice. Saint Justin in the East, Tertullian in Africa, Saint Irenaeus in Gaul, Saint Methodius in Asia Minor, as well as Saint Ephraim on the banks of the Euphrates, speak of the veneration of the All-holy Virgin not as something new for their particular local church, but as something recognised, and they speak of her as honoured by all. They speak of what had been previous to them and the situation in their own time regarding their local confessions.

However, the Holy Fathers only wrote about the necessities that arose in their time, about their circumstances, and about the questions that arose; they did not set forth systematically all that concerned the teaching, the practice and the life of the

Church of their period; yet they had much to say about this [the veneration of the Mother of God] in speaking of other things, incidentally, in fragments and in separate phrases.

The voice of the Œcumenical Church, at the Third Œcumenical Council, only gave expression to the veneration of the Mother of God, which had been normative and established of old in the Church, by defining the Virgin as Theotokos. But for this to be said and for it to express the generally held opinion, it was necessary that in all the preceding centuries and in the life contemporary with the Council, there should have been a corresponding universally held confession. And it is just such a confession in the greatness of the All-holy Virgin, in her heavenly glory and in her prayerful and grace-filled heavenly power that the Church has always held, as the works of the holy Fathers of the Church of the first centuries of Christianity demonstrate.



## THE COMING MONTH

IN JUNE there are two principal feast days, the **Birth of St John the Baptist** (24<sup>th</sup> June/7<sup>th</sup> July) and the **Martyrdom of the Holy Chiefs of the Apostles Peter and Paul** (29<sup>th</sup> June/12<sup>th</sup> July). This latter feast should be particularly honoured by Orthodox Christians in this country, because Sts Peter and Paul are the patron saints of our capital city, London.

The Cathedral of the city is, of course, dedicated to St Paul, a dedication which stretches back well into times when the Orthodox Faith was proclaimed in this land; and the Abbey at Westminster, another foundation which predates the schism of the Roman Catholics from Orthodoxy, is dedicated to St Peter. Both of these festivals are usually celebrated among the Orthodox with a Vigil Service, although they do not rank among the Twelve Great Feasts.

St John's Birth comes just at the point in the year when the days begin to get shorter, reminding us of his own words regarding the Saviour of the world: 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3:30). Reminding us of this prophetic word, the days after the Birth of the Baptist decrease, and after the Birth of Christ they increase. The feast is kept for two days according to current practice, being combined on the second day with the commemoration of the Martyr St Febronia of Nisibis. This year, this second day of the festival falls on a Sunday and so the services appointed for the Resurrection are also chanted then. The feast of the Apostles is also kept for two days, the second day being a commemoration of the Twelve Apostles.

Among the Saints celebrated in June we have:

**Venerable Martyrs Archelaea, Thekla and Susanna** (6<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup>) lived in a small community of consecrated virgins, the precursors of nuns, in the environs of Rome. When the persecution of Diocletian was raised against the Christians, adopting male attire they left the Imperial City and settled near Nola, so as to be more hidden. However, even in hiding their Christian compassion compelled them to continue acts of mercy to those in need and they were granted the gift of healing. This ministry brought many to Christ, but it also betrayed the sisters to the authorities. They were arrested and cruelly tortured. As the leader Archelaea was subjected to particularly cruel torments. Finally they were beheaded with the sword and gained crowns of martyrdom. Their sacred relics were later taken to Salerno.

**New Martyr the Priest Alexander** (8<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>): When numbers of the hierarchs and clergy in Russia protested against the impious alignment of the official Church with the Soviet State by Metropolitan Sergius, who had usurped the primacy of the Russian Church, the Metropolitan retaliated by issuing a decree in which all those who disagreed with his policy were automatically proclaimed 'counterrevolutionaries'. As such they were arrested by the GPU agents and sentenced to incarceration in concentration camps.

One such clergyman was the Priest Alexander, about whom we have only the briefest, but the most moving, memorial, a few

sentences recorded by N Urusova and quoted in *Russia's Catacomb Saints*. These lines read:

*A certain anti-Sergianist priest, Father Alexander, every day would come to work early [this was in the camps -ed.], at dawn, and on a tree stump, kneeling would serve the Divine Liturgy. Several people saw how a beam of light descended from heaven and entered his chalice, transfiguring him and those around him.*

On the same day we celebrate **Saint Dionysius of Suzdal**. He had become a monk in the Kiev Caves Monastery, and then lived for a period as a hermit in a cave near Nizhnii Novgorod. Disciples gathered, and a second 'Caves Monastery' was founded there on the banks of the Volga.

Saint Dionysius was a contemporary of the great Saint Sergius of Radonezh and they counselled each other; he also became renowned even outside his own monastery for his strenuous defence of Orthodoxy against the heresy of the Strigolniki. (In many ways these heretics were an early Russian version of what the West would call Protestants.)

Saint Dionysius was well versed in the Scriptures and was able with both love and meekness to counter the false teachings of these deluded ones. In 1374, he was consecrated as Bishop of Suzdal by the Metropolitan, Saint Alexis of Moscow, and was later raised to the rank of Archbishop. Subsequently he was elected Metropolitan of the Russian Church and made a journey to Constantinople to obtain the blessing of the Patriarch, for at that time the Russian Church was not yet independent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

On his return to Russia, he was apprehended in Kiev, which was then part of a greatly enlarged Lithuania, and was imprisoned there. He was never to see Russia again. The Lithuanians kept him a prisoner until his death, and so he was also unable to take up his obedience as primate of the Russian Church. However, he used his prison cell as a monastic cell, and ended his earthly course in 1385. His relics were placed in the caves of Saint Antony at Kiev.



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

## **CHRISMATION**

On 3<sup>rd</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> May **Ivan Tsenkov** was received into the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece by Holy Chrismation. The mystery was celebrated by **Priest Borislav Popov**. On the following day, the Sunday of the Blind Man, **Ivan** and **Evelin** were united in holy matrimony; we wish them both a truly Christian and blessed future.

## **NEW CATECHUMEN**

**David Halligan** made his catechumen vows on the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman (27<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> May) receiving the new name Alexis in honour of St Alexis the Man of God (17<sup>th</sup>/30<sup>th</sup> March); we wish Alexis a good journey to Holy Baptism.

## **TWO FUNERALS**

The funeral of **Leonora Hoble**, the mother of our architect Irina Aldersley, was held on the feast of Mid Pentecost which, this year, coincided with the Feast of the Great Martyr George 23<sup>rd</sup> April/6<sup>th</sup> May. The funeral was served by **Priestmonk Sabbas** and **Priest Gabriel Lawani**. Following the funeral and interment a generous meal was provided by the family and many friends who attended the service. Leonora was a faithful member of the parish for many years; may her memory be eternal and her rest with the saints.

The funeral of **Constantine Lambouras** was held in the Greek Orthodox Church in Margate on 25<sup>th</sup> April/8<sup>th</sup> May; he was buried with his predeceased wife Mariam who died last May. A memorial service was served at the graveside by

Archpriests Joseph Skinner and Stephen Platt (MP) and then by Priests Dimitrios Kontelidis and Piotr Prokopczyk (EP). The mourners were then given hospitality in the Old Mortuary.

### ***GIFTS TO THE CHURCH***

**Sisters Justina** and **Eupraxia** of the Convent of St. Elizabeth, Etna, California donated a beautifully embroidered icon of St. Edward the Martyr and a framed print of the saints of Northumbria (Sts. Oswin, Edwin and Oswald) both of which were made by the sisters of their convent.

**Alexandra Galbeza** donated an icon of Sts. Justin and Theodora which was painted in Romania

A mounted print of St. Mark of Ephesus was given by the American pilgrim **Noah Constantinou**.

### ***SAINT TRYPHON GARDENING GROUP***

The gardening group met on Saturday 25th April and Saturday 23rd May and did a lot of work in the vegetable patch and around the church borders; we are most grateful for their continued support and care.

## **Practical Tip**

IN MANY CHURCHES, when the faithful receive the Holy Mysteries, they afterwards kiss the bottom rim of the Chalice. However, for the rest of the service, after receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, you do not kiss the hand of the priest. At the end of the Divine Liturgy, according to the Brookwood practice, the priest stands at the door of the church with his hand raised giving a blessing; we do not kiss the priest's hand at this point, or engage him in conversation; we cup our hands, as if to receive a blessing, and greet the priest with a small bow and walk past. Remember also that priests should not give blessings when seated or when a bishop is present. Do not ask a blessing from a priest when it is not appropriate, practical or considerate to do so! Finally, we do not greet each other with a kiss in church; save this kind of greeting for after the service.