

The Shepherd

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FROM THE FATHERS

“DO NOT always be wanting everything to turn out as you think it should, but rather as God pleases and then you will be undisturbed and thankful in your prayer.” ABBA NILUS.

“TO DIE to one’s neighbour is this: To bear your own faults and not to pay attention to anyone else, wondering whether they are good or bad. Do no harm to anyone, do not think anything bad in your heart towards anyone, do not scorn the man who does evil, do not put confidence in him who does wrong to his neighbour, do not rejoice with him who injures his neighbour. This is what dying to one’s neighbour means. Do not rail against anyone, but rather say, ‘God knows each one.’ Do not agree with him who slanders, do not rejoice at his slander and do not hate him who slanders his neighbour. This is what it means not to judge. Do not have hostile feelings towards anyone and do not let dislike dominate your heart; do not hate him who hates his neighbour. This is what peace is: Encourage yourself with this thought, ‘Affliction lasts but a short time, while peace is forever, by the grace of God the Word. Amen.’” ABBA MOSES.

“AN ELDER said: ‘If you see somebody who has fallen into the water and you can help him, reach out your staff to him and pull him out. If you cannot pull him out, only leave him your staff. If you give him your hand and cannot pull him out, he will pull you down and both of you will die.’ This he said to those who thrust themselves forward to help somebody in temptations beyond their capacity.” ANON.

“A BROTHER came to see Abba Macarius the Egyptian, and said to him, ‘Abba, give me a word, that I may be saved.’ So the old man said, ‘Go to the cemetery and abuse the dead.’ The brother went there, abused them and threw stones at them; then he returned and told the old man about it. The latter said to him, ‘Didn’t they say anything to you?’ He replied, ‘No.’ The elder said, ‘Go back tomorrow and praise them.’ So the brother went away and praised them, calling them, ‘Apostles, saints and righteous men.’ He returned to the elder and told him, ‘I have complimented them.’ And the elder said to him, ‘Did they not answer you?’ The brother said ‘No.’ The old man said to him, ‘You know how you insulted them and they did not reply, and how you praised them and they did not speak; so you too, if you wish to be saved, must do the same and become a dead man. Like the dead, take no account of either the scorn of men or their praises, and you can be saved.”

“AMMOUN (of the place called Raithu) brought this thought to Sisoës: ‘When I read Scripture, I am tempted to make elaborate commentaries and prepare myself to answer questions on it.’ He replied, ‘You don’t need to do that. It is better to speak simply, with a good conscience and a pure mind.”

“THE DESIRE for possessions is dangerous and terrible, knowing no satiety; it drives the soul which it controls to the heights of evil. Therefore let us drive it away vigorously from the beginning. For once it has become master it cannot be overcome.” ABBA ISIDORE OF PELUSIUM.

“TO GO against self is the beginning of salvation.”

ABBA EVAGRIUS

“A BROTHER asked Alonius, ‘What is humility?’ The hermit said, ‘To be lower than brute beasts and to know that they are not condemned.”

QUOTES FROM THE DESERT FATHERS

The Orthodox Witness of a Contemporary Saint and Confessor

† BISHOP KLEMES OF GARDIKION

(NOW METROPOLITAN OF LARISSA & PLATAMONAS)

This article is the greater part of a longer one entitled "Ecumenism in the Homestretch and the Orthodox Witness of a Contemporary Saint and Confessor," which first outlines the growth of the heresy of Ecumenism and its increasing incursion into the Churches of World Orthodoxy. It was an address before a Synodal Gathering of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece at the Port Authority of Piræus in 2015. For brevity's sake, we have omitted the footnotes. The first section, which we have also largely omitted, ends thus:-

OUR LORD Jesus Christ, the sole and invincible Head of our Holy Church, did not leave His inheritance unprotected during that critical period. It was precisely then that He put "on a candlestick" an earthly Angel, a heavenly man, shining with right Faith and transparent virtue, appointing him to take up the burden and responsibility of denouncing what was happening, confronting these events from a theological and canonical standpoint, and with sorrow, love, sobriety, wisdom, and spiritual sensitivity to set before all those held fast in the grip of ecumenism the account that they must give on earth and in Heaven.

However, before my necessarily concise presentation of his Divinely inspired witness and confession of the Faith, let us see in brief what manner of man Metropolitan Philaret was.

He then continues:-

II The Holy Metropolitan Philaret

This elect, faithful, and prudent Steward of the Grace of God was chosen by Divine Providence, at a time when the ecumenism of Rome, Geneva, and Constantinople, and also of Moscow, had become brazen and was luring the Orthodox ecumenists into a pitiful fall, to be the voice of the Truth and of the conscience

of the Orthodox Church, and to confess this before the entire world, as a last-ditch attempt to ward off the downfall of the Latin-minded and their flocks.

Georgiy Voznesensky (as he was known in the world) was born in pre-Revolutionary Russia in Kursk, in 1903. His father was a clergyman, Protopresbyter Nikolai, a pious and educated man. He had four siblings. He grew up in a pious and Church-centred atmosphere. In 1909, the family moved to Blagoveschensk, in the missionary territory of the Far East, on the border of Manchuria, China. Subsequently, from 1918-1920, in view of the Soviet occupation of the region, the family of the future Saint relocated to Harbin, Manchuria. There, his mother Lydia reposed in 1921, when he was eighteen years old. Georgiy studied electromechanical engineering at the city Polytechnic, from which he graduated in 1927, and worked for a short time as a teacher. Thereafter, he took classes in pastoral theology until 1931 at the newly established theology department of the Russian Institute in Harbin.

That same year, he was ordained a priest and tonsured a monk with the name “Philaret.” He was truly a friend of virtue, with his asceticism, abstinence, and compassion. He lived the monastic life with integrity, shepherded the rational flock with love, liturgised with compunction, preached Grace-filled sermons, diligently instructed the youth, gave alms to those in need and support to the infirm and elderly, and was in general a man of faith who gave of himself. He was a clergyman who made no compromises, who lived and breathed the unconditional love of God, fought against lukewarmness in matters of Faith and virtue, and imparted Christian hope as an antidote to despair and depression.

He underwent severe tribulations, first from the pagan Japanese, who occupied Manchuria from 1932-1945. They wanted to force the Orthodox Russians to bow to a statue of one of their deities, which they set up opposite the Saint Nicolas Orthodox Church, and only after this to enter the church. The Saint, by then an Archimandrite, staunchly resisted their syncretistic machinations and suffered ill-treatment for so doing: they beat

him on his face, seriously injuring one of his eyes, and burned his back with an electric iron, and it was only by a miracle of Saint Nicolas that he was saved from martyrdom. Thereafter, he bore the marks of our Lord Jesus on his ascetic body.

From 1945 onwards, the Saint suffered further tribulations from the atheistic Soviets, who drove out the Japanese and occupied Harbin. At that time, they attempted to entice the Russian émigrés into taking Soviet passports and returning to the alleged Soviet “paradise.” Archimandrite Philaret again put up resistance and refused to accept the lies of the Soviets or to commemorate them at the Divine services, although during that period, for the sake of his flock, he maintained the appearance of belonging, albeit under duress, to the Moscow Patriarchate. He denounced the atheists in his sermons and maintained a correspondence with the ecclesiastical administration of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. The Soviets arrested him several times and beat him, in order to intimidate him.

In October 1960, they tried to burn him alive while he was asleep in the house in which he lived, opposite the church, but yet again he was preserved as though by a miracle, sustaining severe burns, wounds, and a ruptured spinal column. On at least two other occasions they attempted to murder him, but God rescued him. On account of his struggles to confess the Faith, God granted him the gift of his prayers being heard in response to various requests from the pious faithful, who hastened with confidence to their good Shepherd.

Only in 1962 did Archimandrite Philaret succeed in escaping with his flock from Manchuria in Communist China, and in reaching Australia via Hong Kong. In Australia, he was received into the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

The following year, 1963, at the request of his flock, he was consecrated Bishop of Brisbane, Australia, at the age of sixty. In 1964, he took part for the first time in a Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in North America, at a time when the resignation of the very elderly First Hierarch, Metropolitan Anastassy, had caused a split within the Hierarchy, which was

divided into two factions with an equal number of votes, each tenaciously supporting a different candidate. At that critical moment, the holy Archbishop John of Shanghai and San Francisco, quite evidently inspired by God, proposed, as a way out of the impasse, that Philaret, the youngest of the Bishops, be appointed First Hierarch and Metropolitan. This is, in fact, what took place, although the newly elected felt - as he said - as if they were leading him to a firing-squad, on account of the heavy burden that they were entrusting to him against his will. The outgoing and aged Metropolitan Anastassy enthroned him as Metropolitan and First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, the third in succession.

Thereafter, Metropolitan Philaret threw himself into a titanic struggle for the confession of Orthodoxy, for the preservation of unity and peace in his Synod through a balancing of different and opposing tendencies, for the severance of his Synod's communion thitherto with the so-called official Orthodox Churches, and also for the provision of protection for beleaguered brethren such as ourselves, the Greek Old Calendarists. First and foremost he defended the Confessors of the Catacomb Church inside the then Soviet Union, that is, the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Russia who did not recognise the Sergianist Moscow Patriarchate, which had by then also become involved in ecumenism.

It should be noted that the holy Metropolitan Philaret, together with his Synod, officially recognised the Hierarchical Consecrations of us, the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece, which were performed by Hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1960 and 1962, and in 1969 entered into full Eucharistic communion with our Holy Synod, of which Archbishop Auxentios was then the President, thereby dispelling the artful and malicious dismissal or discrediting of us by various New or Old Calendarists who were at odds with us.

The Holy Metropolitan maintained his lofty spiritual way of life and temperament: he was always prayerful, unfailing in carrying out his liturgical duties, and was especially resolute in warring against sinful passions: "Take a knife and cut it out," he

would say about every passion, whatever it might be, that impeded anyone's spiritual progress.

However, it is for his struggle against the pan-heresy of ecumenism throughout the last twenty years of his life until his repose in 1985 that he was chiefly distinguished, and therein lay his enduring greatness and uniqueness. He was truly an ardent Zealot of Orthodoxy, without fanaticism or extremism. He was steadfast and consistent, a man of moderation and balance, irreproachable, gentle and restrained, with great and unfeigned humility. In short, he was a man who imparted Grace and benediction.

III The Orthodox Witness of the Holy Metropolitan

Philaret against Ecumenism

Let us review very succinctly the most important confessional documents, which remain to this day unrivalled monuments of true Patristic Orthodoxy.

- Immediately after the Lifting of the Anathemas, Metropolitan Philaret sent an epistle to the ecumenist Patriarch Athenagoras in 1965, in which in a spirit and a tone of firmness, replete with confessional candour, he emphasised, "as the leader of the free part of the Russian Church," that it is not possible to make decisions regarding Western Christians which are not concordant with the teaching of the Holy Fathers, and especially Saints Photius the Great and Mark of Ephesus. He also denounced the Lifting of the Anathemas and demonstrated its illicitness and invalidity, since it betokened, in essence, a levelling of truth and error. The Saint dauntlessly proclaimed that no union with the Roman Catholics is possible until they renounce their new doctrines - for since the eleventh century they have added a multitude of errors and heresies to the Faith - and fully accept Orthodox teaching. But it is evident from their own documents that the Papists understood dialogue as a plan for our incorporation into the Roman Church or as the restoration of communion in some fashion, which would leave unaltered their teaching about the position of the Pope in the Church. For this reason, Saint Philaret exclaims that it is not possible for such a betrayal

of Orthodoxy to enter into our midst! He appealed to Athenagoras to put an end to the scandal arising from his chosen path of an ecumenical compromise union with the heterodox without their full unanimity in the truth.

This marvellous epistle went unanswered, since the Patriarch and those with him had already chosen their irreversible and reprehensible course.

- There followed, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 1969, an epistle to Archbishop Iakovos of America decrying his ecumenist actions and ideas, consonant with those of Athenagoras, which were plainly un-Orthodox and contrary to the Sacred Canons. Saint Philaret stresses with limpid clarity that public joint prayer is the culmination of the conversion to the Church of those outside her, as a manifestation of an already existing unity in the Faith, and not as a means to the discovery or attainment thereof. It is obvious, as the holy Metropolitan writes, that the statements of Patriarch Athenagoras, which constitute the precondition for Iakovos' ecumenical actions, aim at a putative recovery of the "undivided Church," something which demonstrates their belief in the heretical "branch theory," with a concomitant acceptance of the alleged "division of the Church," and their view of sacred dogmas as being of secondary importance and as irrelevant to one's belonging to the True Church. The organisation of ecumenical joint prayers on this corrupt and heretical basis represents a distortion of the doctrine of the Church. For this reason, Saint Philaret concluded: "You are uniting [pay heed: not "you will be united," but "you are uniting"] with the heterodox, not in truth, but in disregard for it"!

- In July of the same year, 1969, the holy Metropolitan Philaret addressed his famous "First Sorrowful Epistle" to the Primates and all the Hierarchs of the official Orthodox Churches, following the convocation of the Fourth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968. Saint Philaret writes out of a sense of responsibility, lest he incur the charge of betraying the Truth through silence and lest he hear from the Lord on the Day of Judgment that he saw the peril of ecumenism threatening the Church, and yet failed to

warn her Bishops of it. It was shocking to contemplate what transpired at Uppsala, given that the error of ecumenism received official endorsement from the local Orthodox Churches. The inclusion of the Orthodox as “organic members” of the World Council of Churches does not justify their participation therein, supposedly for reasons of witnessing to the Truth or of engaging in mission among the other confessions; rather, it unites them with these confessions, such that all of the decisions of this ecumenical organisation are made in the name of all, both Orthodox and heterodox. The Orthodox are now merged into one mass with the Protestants. The use of the singular number in documents, whenever the Church is mentioned (“The Church teaches...,” etc.), references at times to a “Universal Church,” and the general idea, in terminology and in documents, of an internal unity that supposedly exists between the so-called Churches, in spite of their external divisions, exposes the primary task of ecumenism, which is that internal unity be expressed and experienced also externally.

However, the Holy Fathers and the Sacred Canons did not enter into organic unions with heretics, but anathematised them. The heretics are not sanctified by the contemporary mixture of things unmixable, while those who are Orthodox only in name are estranged from the unity of Catholic Orthodoxy. The Protestants and Roman Catholics of our day are not any nearer to the Church than were the Arians or the Semi-Arians of the fourth century, even though today social relations of a different kind exist among people. Ecumenical relations are antithetical to the nature of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church and function as a form of spiritual poison; for this reason the Divine sword is raised to separate those who remain loyal to the traditional Faith from those who have embarked on the new course of ecumenical unity.

Finally, Saint Philaret addressed an appeal and plea to the Bishops of world Orthodoxy to rise to a defence of the purity of the Orthodox Faith.

- On the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 1972, in his wonderful “Second Sorrowful Epistle” Metropolitan Philaret addressed

himself again to the same recipients. In it, he observes with unspeakable distress that the official Churches have been unrepentantly traversing the same path of falling away from the Truth. Nonetheless, he writes what he writes in order to reveal to what an abyss of ecclesiological heresy those who participate in the ecumenical movement are succumbing, since ecumenism is unquestionably a dangerous heresy, which aims at the disappearance of the True Church in the ocean of heretical communities. He deems the responsibility of the official Orthodox to be prodigious, since they renounce the True Church - "old," in their view - of the Holy Apostles and Fathers as they enter into communion with heresy. The first-fruits of all these are found in the tendency, since the beginning of the twentieth century, towards innovation and modernism, for the sake of adjusting Church life according to the principles of social life and of human weaknesses and passions. It was on this basis that the so-called Pan-Orthodox Congress of Constantinople convened in 1923 and adopted the Western calendar, as well as the Western Paschalion. That uncanonical and hasty reform brought about a rupture in the unity of the liturgical life of Orthodox Christians in different countries and introduced chaos and anomalies. It was this reform that paved the way and laid the foundations for a revision of the entire order and life of the Orthodox Church, which had been blessed by Holy Tradition and sealed by the decisions of the Œcumenical and local Synods. Thus, the modernists and revisionists reached the point of talking about almost "perfect communion" with the heterodox. In spite of the alleged lifting of the Anathemas, the Papists were, and are, heretics, even though the manner of their reception into the Church has varied from place to place and from era to era. The ecumenists are now pressing ahead also with interfaith dialogue, with thousands of ideas for a putative new world order and prosperity, while the church that they are constructing is the "lukewarm" Church of Laodicæa, concerning which the Lord expresses His abhorrence in the Book of Revelation.

- In 1975, Metropolitan Philaret was compelled to write another text, regarding the so-called "Thyateira Confession," which had just then been published by Archbishop Athenagoras

(Kokkinakes) of Thyateira and Great Britain, with the approval of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople under Patriarch Demetrios, in order to show that this ecumenist and official Confession is completely heretical in spirit, since it exhorts to joint prayer and sacramental intercommunion with heretics of every stripe, whom it recognises fully and incorporates into the Body of the Church, without defining any boundaries for her!

From these documents the position of the holy Metropolitan Philaret is clear: the True or Genuine Church is not outmoded, as the ecumenists maintain. Rather, it is precisely they who depart from her, constituting, with their heretical confrères, a “new” church, which possesses only an external and formal similarity to the truly Orthodox Church.

However, these appeals and pleas from Saint Philaret were truly voices crying in the wilderness of indifference or ecumenist minimalism (or, perhaps, excess!). None of the Primates who received these brilliant documents responded to them, with the exception of a few isolated Hierarchs, who urged their Synods to undertake a serious examination of the issue of ecumenism, though without any follow-up.

The holy Metropolitan’s endeavour to confess the Faith had one final chapter: in August of 1983, in Montréal, Metropolitan Philaret and his Synod yet again denounced the apostasy of ecumenism, which precisely during that time, at the Sixth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, was openly passing from inter-Christian to interfaith ecumenism, regarding this apostasy as a harbinger of the Antichrist. In the end, the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, under Metropolitan Philaret, issued its well-known anathema against ecumenism in the form of the Branch theory of the invisible Church, and of a failure to distinguish the Mysteries of the Church from those of heretics, and also against those who knowingly communed with ecumenists under the pretext of brotherly love.

It should be clearly understood that this last step did not come as a bolt from the blue: for twenty whole years Metropolitan Philaret had expended every effort to demonstrate, in a

profound, sober, and spiritual way, and with due substantiation, the perniciousness of the heresy of ecumenism. After all of these efforts, and in view of the still greater and even obstinate persistence of the leaderships of the official Orthodox Churches therein and of their unrepentant falling away from Orthodoxy, the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad took the ultimate step of anathematisation, in order to protect the flock of that Church and to set before all Orthodox throughout the world their enormous responsibility, on which their spiritual future would hinge, and also, we would submit, their eternal inclusion with those inside or those outside the Church of the Firstborn, near to or far away from the Saints, with Christ or with the adversary.

We think that, in the wake of all these considerations, it should be evident that it is literally a matter of life and death to remove ourselves at all costs from communion with the Latin-minded and syncretistic ecumenists, whoever they may be and whatever position they may hold, and likewise to join ourselves to the Body of Genuine Orthodoxy, which confesses the True Faith, for any hope of salvation and for the sake of avoiding eternal condemnation and perdition.

IV The Proven Sanctity of Metropolitan Philaret and the Sacred Legacy of His Faith and Life

Metropolitan Philaret lived a life equal to the Angels and reposed on the Feast of the Archangels-according to the Church Calendar-in 1985, at the age of eighty-two. Thirteen years later, in 1998, his tomb was opened, so that he could be placed in a marble sepulchre, and his sacred relics were found to be incorrupt, exuding the fragrance of Heaven, as an indisputable token of Divine mercy and good pleasure, primarily for his courageous Confession, and assuredly also for his God-pleasing life.

In spite of the falling away of his successors in 2007, when they entered into communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, and thereby with fallen world Orthodoxy, his Russian brethren who were the continuators of his legacy, under Metropolitan Agafangel, formally proclaimed his sanctity in November 2008,

in New York, an event in which I had the great blessing of participating personally, together with His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methoni, as representatives of the Hierarchy under the blessed Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili (†2013).

Miracles were recorded while the Holy Metropolitan Philaret was alive and have been recorded since his repose, even to this day. However, the greatest miracle - we believe - is his unwavering Confession, which he bequeathed to us and which it is up to us to preserve at all costs, notwithstanding our unworthiness and weakness.

The last thing that he wrote before his blessed repose is entitled “Hold That Fast Which Thou Hast,” a verse from the Book of Revelation, which is the Lord’s exhortation to the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia. Metropolitan Philaret was the embodiment of this spirit of preserving what has been handed down with fidelity and steadfastness and of confuting the spirit of the ecumenists, who embody lukewarmness and an unacceptable witches’ brew of syncretism, for which the Angel of the Church in Laodicea is reproved, with the threat that God will spew him out, since he ought to have been hot or cold, and not lukewarm.

Ecumenism is a loathsome mixture of lukewarmness, the very spirit of the “Apostasy” that aims to lead astray even the elect. For all who are embroiled in this apostasy or who follow such an erroneous path out of imprudence or cowardice the possibility of repentance always remains open, according to the Lord’s salvific exhortation: “Be zealous therefore, and repent.”

By the Grace of God we belong to the small flock which maintains our Holy Faith free from innovation, as it has received it from that contemporary Father of the Church, the holy Hierarch Philaret the New Confessor, as a way of thinking and as a rule of Church order. This, moreover, is the true meaning of the Apostolic Succession that we possess, which is certified and confirmed by the Saint in question and by his Synod.

Experiencing the miracle of our Union in the Genuine Orthodox Church since last year, and being in communion with Genuine Orthodox of other nationalities, with the prospect of a

yet broader proclamation of our Confession of the Orthodox Faith and of a joint condemnation of the cacodoxy of ecumenism on the basis of the 1983 Anathema, we entrust ourselves to the protection of our Lady, the Theotokos, and to the prayers of all the Saints from ages past, and especially of the boast of contemporary Orthodoxy, the holy Metropolitan Philaret, so that in unity and unto death we might maintain inviolate the precious treasure of the Faith, bearing witness thereto through a life consistent with our Confession and allowing the “Light of Christ” to become manifest and to shine “upon all,” to the glory of His Holy Church. Amen!



THE COMING MONTH

JULY is a rare month in which we have no Great Feasts and no special fasting days except the usual weekly ones of Wednesdays and Fridays, and for the monastics Mondays too. This in its way gives us a period of rest, and like all things in the ordering of our church life is a blessing.

Among the saints and miracles we celebrate this month, we have:-

On 8th / 21st July, the feast day of the Great Martyr Procopius and of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God, the **Miracle of the Bleeding Icon of the Mother of God in Torginskoye**. In 1922, after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, the Red partisans defeated the Whites (Tsarist forces) and imposed a new order. The customs and traditions of the people began to be eliminated. In the Cossack village of Torginskoye, near Nerchinsk, they shut down the parish church and nailed boards to its doors. This was a renowned church throughout the Trans-Baikal in the region of Zabaykalsky, due to its miraculous icon of the Mother of God, which was honoured not only by the Cossacks, but also foreigners. The church celebrated its feast on the 8th July. Crowds of believers flocked from throughout the region. After the Supplications, all would go outside the church and process the sacred

icon through the surrounding villages. This no longer took place, having been eliminated by the soviets. That year a terrible drought had fallen on Zabaykalsky. The earth split due to the heat, and springs, rivers and wells had dried up. Leaves from the trees yellowed and withered as if a fire had passed through. The crops in the plains had also dried up. The feast was approaching, when the Mother of God 'Torginskoye' was celebrated, and the folk assembly, the white bearded Cossacks, listened sullenly to Stepan Kamenschikov, the former red partisan and now secretary of the village, say: "Well comrades, you believe we have a drought because the authorities have forbidden the procession of the icon of the Mother of God; because it has forbidden the seedy priests from making the people dizzy, and because it nailed boards to the church." "Stepan!" yelled an old guardian of the church. "This year we want to process the icon of the Mother of God over our fields. Nothing bad will happen. Ask permission, therefore, from those responsible." "Fine comrades. Since you insist so much, I will act according to your desire. However do not expect rain. In this way you will understand that God does not exist." The request was made by the secretary, and a positive response was given by the members of the GPU. The joyous news, that they would celebrate again like the good old days and process the miraculous icon over the fields for rain to come, spread like lightning. The next morning a crowd of people gathered at the church and the surrounding area. They all came in their festive outfits, while the bell ringers set the celebratory tone for the day. Tension came from the presence of agents from the GPU with their caps and ironic stance. Soon the Cossacks left the church holding the heavy canopy with the icon of the Mother of God. This was followed by the priests with their brocaded vestments. The people knelt. The large icon with its precious gems and the radiant eyes of the Mother of God passed in front of the faithful. At some point those radiant eyes met the stern gaze of Kamenschikov and they shook him. He felt as if they were looking at him in the depths of his soul. But he acted as if indifferent. He fixed his cap and began to smoke. The Supplication had begun, and Fr John prayed: "Give water to the thirsty earth, O Saviour!" How much the people longed for nature to give them beneficial gentle rain! The unbearable heat had reached a point of madness in that hour. The priests sprinkled holy water on the yellowed wheat and parched earth.

By the evening they processed the icon of the Mother of God through all the fields and made incessant supplications, while the crowd followed tirelessly over hills, roads and slopes. Kamenschikov rode on his horse, smiling ironically. Eventually he threw his cigarette and muttered angrily: "I will show you who is your Christ and Mother of God." Now the procession reached the village houses of Torginskoye. Right in the middle was the home of Kamenschikov. At the door his elderly mother was waiting reverently. "Old woman!" he yelled at her, "don't dare to allow this gypsy in our yard." "What words are these, Stepan? Have you gone mad?" she protested. Then clouds appeared in the sky, and continued to grow. The priest stood for the usual prayer. Then Stepan, bright red, ran to him shouting: "Enough comedy! Comrades, gather around this old trunk! Now I will show you there is no God or Mother of God." Saying this, he grabbed Fr John by the beard and shoved him violently. The white bearded man fell to the earth, while the gold cross he held fell from his hand. Kamenschikov kicked the cross with his boot and then pulled out his sword and struck the icon with all his might. The people were shocked. A moment later people began to scream: "Blood! Blood! Miracle! Miracle!" Stepan looked around enraged. "Why are they yelling?" he said to himself. "Stepan!" shouted his furious mother. "That is a deadly sin! Look at our Lady!" He looked at the icon and froze. From the right cheek of the Mother of God ran drops of blood. It ran down and covered its silver covering. Suddenly, as if in a foreign voice, Kamenschikov himself shouted: "Tears! Tears!" From the large eyes of the Mother of God ran large, clear tears like diamonds. And immediately after there began to fall from the sky blessed rain. It rained continuously for three days. The rain fell relentlessly on the thirsty ground, and the earth greedily sucked the life-giving water. As the fourth day dawned a bright sun appeared in the sky. Its shine showed the people the miracle of life and renewal. The Mother of God "Torginskoye" worked its miracle. The members of the GPU, humiliated, again sealed the church and eventually stole the sacred icon bringing it to a distant city. However, the biggest miracle took place with Kamenschikov, the atheist Bolshevik. With her blood and tears the Mother of God watered his unfaithful and thirsty soul, and she did not tarry to bring forth the fruits of faith and repentance. Eight years later, Stepan was a Christian and on the run from the authorities.

He went back to his home, where a trap had been laid for him. He wanted to see his mother one more time. When his mother saw him at the door of her home she shouted “ambush!” and was shot for trying to warn her son of the trap. Soldiers were hidden inside the house waiting for him. He managed to flee and escape to China, arriving in Harbin in the summer of 1932, hoping to return to Russia to serve the Church. The Torginskoye icon was a copy of the Albazinsk icon of the Mother of God, otherwise known as the Mother of God of the Sign, where she is depicted with Saint Nicolas of Myra and Saint Mary of Egypt. Historically, it was known to help bring rain in times of drought in the surrounding area after a procession was made, with recorded instances in the late 19th century. It remained in the closed church in Torginskoye until 1929, when the director of the museum of Nerchinsk, Pulyaevsky, saved it from a pile of discarded church property, and at the request of the faithful brought it to the Cathedral of the Resurrection in Nerchinsk, where it remained until this church was closed in 1930. This is when the icon was taken to a “distant city” and its location remains unknown today.

Our Venerable Father John the Much-Suffering, Recluse of the Kiev Caves (18th / 31st July), pursued the ascetic life at the Kiev Caves Lavra, accepting many sorrows for the sake of virginity. The ascetic recalled that from the time of his youth he had suffered much, tormented by fleshly lust, and nothing could deliver him from it, neither hunger nor thirst nor heavy chains. He then went into the cave where the relics of Saint Antony rested, and he fervently prayed to the holy Abba. After a day and a night the much-suffering John heard a voice: “John! It is necessary for you to become a recluse, in order to weaken the vexation by silence and seclusion, and the Lord shall help you by the prayers of His monastic saints.” The saint settled into the cave from that time, and only after thirty years did he conquer the fleshly passions. Tense and fierce was the struggle upon the thorny way on which the monk went to victory. Sometimes the desire took hold of him to forsake his seclusion, but then he resolved on still greater effort. The holy warrior of Christ dug out a pit and with the onset of Great Lent he climbed into it, and he covered himself up to the shoulders with earth. He spent the whole of Lent in such a position, but the burning of his former

passions did not leave him. The enemy of salvation brought terror upon the ascetic, wishing to expel him from the cave: a fearsome serpent, breathing fire and sparks, tried to swallow the saint. For several days these evil doings continued. On the night of the Resurrection of Christ the serpent seized the head of the monk in its jaws. Then Saint John cried out from the depths of his heart: "O Lord, my God and my Saviour! Why hast Thou forsaken me? Have mercy upon me, only Lover of Mankind; deliver me from my foul iniquity, so that I am not trapped in the snares of the evil one. Deliver me from the mouth of my enemy: send down a flash of lightning and drive it away." Suddenly a bolt of lightning flashed, and the serpent vanished. A Divine Light shone upon the ascetic, and a Voice was heard: "John! Here is help for thee. Be attentive from now on, that nothing worse happen to thee, and that thou dost not suffer in the age to come." The saint prostrated himself and said: "Lord! Why didst Thou leave me for so long in torment?" "I tried thee according to the power of thine endurance," was the answer. "I brought upon thee temptation, so that thou mightest be purified like gold. It is to the strong and powerful servants that a master assigneth the heavy work, and the easy tasks to the infirm and to the weak. Therefore pray to the one buried here (Moses the Hungarian), he can help thee in this struggle, for he did greater deeds than Joseph the All-Comely." The monk died in the year 1160, having acquired grace against profligate passions. His incorrupt relics rest in the Caves of Saint Antony. We pray to Saint John for deliverance from sexual impurity.

The Holy, Glorious Prophet Elias the Thesbite (20th July / 2nd August) is one of the greatest of the prophets and the first dedicated to virginity in the Old Testament. He was born in Tishba of Gilead into the Levite tribe nine hundred years before the Incarnation of the Word of God. Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus gives the following account about his birth: "When Elias was born, his father Sobach saw in a vision angels of God around him. They swaddled him with fire and fed him with flames." The name Elias (the Lord's strength) given to the infant defined his whole life. From the years of his youth he dedicated himself to the One God, settled in the wilderness and spent his whole life

in strict fasting, meditation and prayer. Called to prophetic service, which put him in conflict with the Israelite king Ahab, the prophet became a fiery zealot of true faith and piety. During this time the Israelite nation had fallen away from the faith of their Fathers, they abandoned the One God and worshipped pagan idols, whose worship was introduced by the impious king Jereboam. Jezebel, the wife of king Ahab, was devoted to idol worship. She persuaded her husband to build a temple to the pagan god Baal, which led many Israelites away from the worship of the true God. Beholding the ruin of his nation, the Prophet Elias began to denounce King Ahab for impiety, and exhorted him to repent and turn to the God of Israel. The king would not listen to him. The Prophet Elias then declared to him, that as a punishment there would be no rain nor dew upon the ground, and the drought would cease only by his prayer. Indeed, the word of Elias was a torch (Eccles. 48:1). The heavens were closed for three and a half years, and there was drought and famine throughout all the land. During this time of tribulation, the Lord sent him to a cave beyond the Jordan. There he was miraculously fed by ravens. When the stream Horath dried up, the Lord sent the Prophet Elias to Sarephta to a poor widow, a Sidonian Gentile who suffered together with her children, awaiting death by starvation. At the request of the prophet, she prepared him bread with her last measure of flour and the remainder of her oil. Through the prayer of the Prophet Elias, flour and oil were not depleted in the home of the widow for the duration of the famine. By the power of his prayer the prophet also performed another miracle: he raised the dead son of the widow. After the end of three years of drought the Merciful Lord sent the prophet to appear before King Ahab, and promised to send rain upon the earth. The Prophet Elias told the king to order all of Israel to gather upon Mount Carmel, and also the priests of Baal. When the nation had gathered, the Prophet Elias proposed that two sacrificial altars be built: one for the priests of Baal, and the other for the Prophet Elias who served the True God. Elias told them to call on their gods to consume the sacrificial animals with fire, and he would call on his. Whichever was first to send fire on the sacrifice would be acknowledged as the

true God. The prophets of Baal called out to their idol from morning till evening, but the heavens were silent. Towards evening the holy Prophet Elias built his sacrificial altar from twelve stones, the number of the tribes of Israel. He placed the sacrifice upon the wood, gave orders to dig a ditch around the altar and commanded that the sacrifice and the wood be soaked with water. When the ditch had filled with water, the prophet turned to God in prayer. Through the prayer of the prophet fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, and even the water. The people fell down to the ground, crying out: "Truly, the Lord is God!" Then the Prophet Elias had all the pagan priests of Baal put to death, and he began to pray for rain. Through his prayer the heavens opened and an abundant rain fell, soaking the parched earth. King Ahab acknowledged his error and repented of his sins, but his wife Jezebel threatened to kill the prophet of God. Elias fled into the Kingdom of Judea and, grieving over his failure to eradicate idol worship, he asked God to let him die. An angel of the Lord came before him, strengthened him with food and commanded him to go upon a long journey. The Prophet travelled for forty days and nights and, having arrived at Mount Horeb, he settled in a cave. The Lord told him that the next day he would stand in His presence. There was a strong wind that crushed the rocks of the mountain, then an earthquake, and a fire, but the Lord was not in them. The Lord was in "the voice of a gentle breeze." He revealed to the prophet that He would preserve seven thousand faithful servants who had not worshipped Baal. Later, the Lord commanded Elias to anoint Eliseus into prophetic service. Because of his fiery zeal for the Glory of God the Prophet Elias was taken up alive into Heaven in a fiery chariot. The Prophet Eliseus received Elias's mantle, and a double portion of his prophetic spirit. According to the Tradition of Holy Church, the Prophet Elias will be the Forerunner of the dread Second Coming of Christ. He will proclaim the truth of Christ, urge all to repentance, and will be slain by the Antichrist. This will be a sign of the end of the world. The life of the holy Prophet Elias is recorded in the Old Testament books (3 Kings; 4 Kings; Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 48: 1-15; 1 Maccabees 2: 58). At the time of the Transfiguration,

the Prophet Elias conversed with the Saviour upon Mount Thabor (Mt. 17: 3; Mark 9: 4; Luke. 9: 30). Orthodox Christians of all times, and in all places, have venerated the Prophet Elias for centuries. The first church in Russia, built at Kiev under Prince Igor, was named for the Prophet. After her Baptism Saint Olga built a church of the holy Prophet Elias in her native region, at the village of Vibuta. In iconography the Prophet Elias is depicted ascending to Heaven in a fiery chariot, surrounded with flames, and harnessed to four winged horses. We pray to him for deliverance from drought, and to ask for seasonable weather.

Our **Venerable Mother Anna of Levcadia** (23rd July/ 5th August) lived during the time of Emperor Theophilus the Iconoclast (829-842) and was the daughter of a wealthy and prominent family. Anna possessed abundant spiritual beauty but also spiritual gifts, as she concerned herself with seeking knowledge of the Lord. She inherited a great family fortune on her parents' death, and distributed a portion of this to the poor. But a wicked Hagarene fell in love with this beautiful maiden and travelled to Constantinople and asked for her hand in marriage, gaining permission to do so from Emperor Basil I the Macedonian (867-886). Anna did not wish to marry him, so he resorted to threats, and with tears Anna prayed to God to be released from this temptation. Indeed, God answered her prayers, and the Hagarene soon died. Anna then entered a church dedicated to the Theotokos, where she devoted herself to the strictest ascetic discipline and prayer, becoming mere flesh and bones. Thus, after fifty years of toil, and after a short illness, she gave up her blessed soul to God. Her honourable relics, buried in a family plot, when uncovered, were found to be incorrupt, exuding a divine fragrance, and worked many and varied miracles.



“ONE should not seek among others the truth that can be easily obtained from the Church.”

HOLY HIEROMARTYR IRENÆUS OF LYONS, + 202 A.D.

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

“QUICK question: the children and I have been reading something every day before prayers. On and off we have read bits from ‘The Apocalypse.’ They like the imagery in particular. In 13:17 the verse implies that at the point that no one can buy or sell without submitting to the Antichrist that there is nothing else that can be done other than die from want of necessities. Is this the correct, sober interpretation? If not, what could be done?” - M.S., by email.

FIRST thing Monday morning and high theology! Well, I avoid the Apocalypse as the Fathers deliberately did not place any readings from it in our services knowing that it was likely to be misinterpreted by the simple. And I am the simple. Also I would be very careful about reading it with children; there are many more suitable things. Saint John of the Ladder also says somewhere that a slave of the passions should not touch theology. The only thing I can say is that Archbishop Averky comments on that verse: “The seal of the beast will spread everywhere, in buying and selling, so that those who do not receive it will suffer a violent death from the want of necessities.”



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

BURIAL AT SAINT EDWARD'S

ON Tuesday, 4th June, **Adamantios Kourides**, who had often attended our services, but remained committed to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, was laid to rest in our cemetery. The service was conducted by **Father Constantine Litvinenko**

of the community of the **Holy Trinity in Guildford**, and about two dozen people attended. May Adamantios find rest and may his bereaved relatives and friends be comforted.

ICONS GIVEN TO OUR CHURCH

TWO icons have recently been given to Saint Edward's church. **Michael and Margaret Woodrow of Liphook**, who recently made a pilgrimage to the holy places of Bulgaria, brought back and kindly donated an **icon of the Mother of God of the Three Hands** from the **Troyan Monastery**. And in Romania **Presbytera Cristina Ciubotariu** painted an icon of **Saint Niphon of Constantiana** and this was purchased and given to us by **Ovidiu and Monica Ciobanu of Basildon** - Presbytera is their sister-in-law. May these saints ever pray for the people who have kindly donated their icons to our church and for their loved ones.

CATECHUMEN CLASSES

AS most of you know, we hold catechumen classes - informal talks with an opportunity to ask questions - most Saturday evenings at 5 p.m. We call them catechumen classes, but you do not have to be a catechumen to come. Any enquirer may join them if they wish, and indeed any of the Orthodox can as well. This last point perhaps needs stressing. We notice time and time again that many of the people who were brought up in Orthodox families and cultures particularly have little idea about what the Church teaches and believes, and seem simply to rest on the very withered laurel that they were brought up Orthodox! In the last few weeks we had a parishioner who has been taking Communion here for years, presumably without a qualm, express surprise that our Church is the Catholic Church! How else had they expected that they and their children could be saved?

VISITORS

ON Thursday, 6th June, **Kim Lowe** of the **Brookwood Cemetery Society** brought twenty members of the **Probus**

Club in Guildford to visit the church.

ON Wednesday, 19th June, **Geoff Gilborson** brought a small group of walkers to see the church. And, as usual, there have been numerous individual visits by various people exploring the cemetery or looking at churches.



Practical Tip

NEVER ask advice of someone lacking the competence to give you beneficial recommendations. This is true in daily life, but even more particularly so in our spiritual lives. The priests have a blessing to help you in this way, and although they may not be particularly learned, their advice will be aided by grace. Among the laymen, ask someone, if you have to, who is leading a committed Church-centred life, and not just someone who comes to church. Be especially wary of self-opinionated and therefore often delusional self-appointed teachers, spokesmen and leaders. Just recently I had someone tell me of the advice given them by someone who has never served in any ministry in the parish, not even as a candle-bearer, who has in fact never lived within a parish, or applied themselves to any work to help the parish, and who is sadly for them to all intents and purposes a Visitor Orthodox. The recommendations that they gave were, as one might have expected, unhelpful. An earlier generation would have been told this in their early childhood at home, but of course that does not happen these days.



“WE abide in God insofar as we do not sin.”

VEN. BEDE OF JARROW, + 735 A.D.