

The Shepherd

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FROM THE FATHERS

‘THERE is no spiritual excellence greater than that of a man who does not despise his companion.’

ABBA THEODORE 4TH CENTURY

‘IF SOMEONE should succeed in upsetting a humble man by an attack or injustice visited upon him, he immediately takes refuge in prayer, by which he quickly soothes his heart. And not this alone, but, at the very moment that he becomes upset, he vehemently censures himself, continually checking himself and saying to his soul: “Why, my wretched soul, are you acting crazy? Why have you become upset, like those who foam at the mouth? With precisely this upset you show that you are ill; for, if you were not ill, you would not have felt pain. Why, hapless soul, have you forsaken self-reproach for the condemnation of your brother, since it was he who revealed your illness, which was hidden within you and of which you were ignorant until now?”’

ABBA EVAGRIUS 4TH CENTURY

‘IF ONE BRINGS to mind someone who has caused him upset, ridiculed him, hurt him, or has in any way caused him some evil, he should think of him as a physician and from the depths of his heart thank him for these things. If, however, he entertains in his mind thoughts against such a person, then he is giving thought, like the demons, to something contrary to his soul.’

ABBA ZOSIMAS 6TH CENTURY

‘WHEN THEN we are brought under the necessity of finding fault with anyone, let us first consider whether the sin be such as we have never had; secondly that we are yet men, and may fall into it; then, whether it be one that we have had and are now without, and then let

our common frailty come into our mind, that pity and not hate may go before the correction.’

BLESSED AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO † 430 A.D.

‘WE THE FAITHFUL, should look upon all the faithful as one single being, and should consider that Christ dwells in each of them. We should have such love for each of them that we are willing to lay down our lives for him. Nor should we ever think or say that anyone is evil: we should look on everyone as good, as I have already said. Even should you see someone overwhelmed by some passion, execrate not him but the passions that fight against him. And if he is mastered by desires and prepossessions, have even greater compassion for him; for you too may be tempted.’

ST SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN † 1022 A.D.

‘IN REGARD to our relations with our neighbours, according to God’s commandments we must always show love. Toward those who live near us, let us show love in word and deed insofar as it never violates our love for God. And toward those who are far away from us, we should stretch out spiritually our love toward them as we drive away from our hearts every kind of evil opinion of them. We should bow our souls reverently before them and fulfil the desire to serve them sincerely. If the Lord sees us acting thus, He will forgive us our sins and He will accept our prayers as a worthy sacrifice, and shower upon us His mercies.’

VENERABLE NEIL SORSKY † 1508 A.D.

‘EVEN AS YOU FORGIVE offences against yourself, you must also courageously fight those who hurt those who are weaker, and those who destroy the churches of God and His ordinances. Remember that you can and must only forgive debts owed to you, which are the offences done to you, but you have no right to forgive other debts and you must combat transgressors. The holy fathers tell us: “He who defends one who is offended has God on his side.”’

FATHER GEORGE CHEREMETIEFF † 1971 A.D.

On the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ

Homily on the Day of the Lord's Transfiguration

By Saint Ephraim the Syrian

OUR SAVIOUR led the Apostles up into the mountain to show them the glory of His Divinity and to grant them to know that He is the Redeemer of Israel, as He had declared through the Prophets, and so that they would not be tempted concerning Him, when they would see His voluntary Passion, which He was to suffer for our sakes in His human nature. For they knew Him as a man, but they did not comprehend that He was God. They knew that He was the Son of Mary, a man, living with them in the world.

And on the mountain He gave them to comprehend that He is the Son of God, and God. They saw that He ate and He drank, that He was wearied and that He rested, that He became tired and that He slept, that He experienced fear and that He poured forth sweat, but all of this did not correspond to His Divine nature, but pertained only to the human.

Therefore He led them up into the mountain, so that the Father might proclaim His Son, and so that He might show them that He was in actuality the Son of God, and God.

He took them up into the mountain and He showed them the glory of His Divinity before the Resurrection so that when He rose from the dead in the glory of His Divine nature, they would understand that He had not received that glory as a reward for this feat, or as one who had been in need of such glory, but that before the ages the glory had been His together with the Father and of the Father, as He Himself said when going to the voluntary passion: 'O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was' (John 17:5).

Thus this glory of His Divinity, invisible and hidden in the human nature, was manifested to the Apostles on the mountain. They saw

His face shining like lightning, and His clothes white as light. The disciples beheld two suns: the one was visible to them and was shining upon the world from the firmament, and the Other manifested His face to them alone. His clothing appeared white as light, because from His whole Body the glory of His Divinity poured forth, and in all the members of His flesh the light shone forth.

It was not as with Moses; it was not something exterior to Him that lightened His flesh with splendour, but rather the glory of His Divinity pouring forth from Him; His light rose up from within Him and in Him was it concentrated; it did not transfer from Him to something else, thus leaving Him; it did not strike Him from the side so as to adorn Him, and it was not something borrowed for Him. Nor did it show them the whole abyss of His glory, but only as much as the pupils of their eyes could apprehend.

‘There appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him’ (Matt. 17:3). Thus the ascent of the mountain was a joy to the prophets and the Apostles. The prophets rejoiced seeing His humanity, which they had not known; the Apostles rejoiced seeing His Divinity which they had not apprehended. And when they heard the voice of the Father, bearing witness to the Son, they understood thereby what had not formerly been clear to them: that He had become man.

Together with the voice of the Father, the glory of His body, with which unalterably and unconfusedly the Divinity was united in Him, and which glory had become manifest, bore testimony to them. And the testimony was sealed by three voices, that of the Father, as well as those of Moses and Elias, who stood before Him as servants.

They looked one upon another, the prophets upon the Apostles and the Apostles upon the prophets. The leaders of the Old Testament and the leaders of the New Testament beheld each other there. Moses the holy beheld the sanctified Simon. The steward of the Father’s house saw him who had given lodging to the Son. The one had divided the sea, so that the people might cross between the billows; the other had proposed a tabernacle so that he might build the Church. Elias looked upon John; he who had ascended in a fiery chariot upon him who had leaned upon the burning breast. Thus this mountain became an image of the Church, and Jesus unites therein the two Testaments which the Church accepts, and He gave us to comprehend that He

Himself is the Giver of both Testaments: the one received His mysteries and the other manifested the glory of His works.

And Peter said: 'Let us make here three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias' (Matt. 17:4). Simon was sent to build the Church in the world, and behold he makes three tabernacles on the mountain, because he still regarded Jesus as a man and places Him on a level with Moses and Elias.

But the Lord immediately shows him that He does not require his tabernacles, because He is the One Who for the course of forty years provided a tabernacle of cloud for his forefathers in the wilderness. 'For as he yet spoke, such a bright cloud overshadowed them' (Matt. 17:5). Behold, Simon, a tabernacle made without travail, a tabernacle which protects from the heat and in which there is no shadow, a tabernacle which is like lightning and radiant.

While the disciples yet wondered, the voice of the Father was heard from the cloud: 'This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him' (Matt. 17:5). The Father speaks of the Son, not separating Him from the glory of the Divinity. For the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit are of one Nature, one Power, one Essence and one Kingdom.

He addresses the One with a name which is not exalted, but is awesome in its glory. Mary also calls Him Son, Who in His human body is not separated from the glory of His Divinity. For One is God, Who was manifest in the world in the body. His glory proclaims His Divinity which is from the Father, and His body proclaims His human nature which is from Mary, for both natures have been united in the one hypostasis.

The Only-Begotten of the Father is the only One born of Mary. And whosoever would separate the natures in Him will themselves be separated from His Kingdom, and whosoever should confuse them will have no part in His life. Whosoever denies that Mary gave birth to God will not see the glory of His Divinity; and whosoever denies that He bore flesh free from sin, such a one will not be granted salvation and life, which are granted through His body. His deeds themselves and His Divine powers instruct those of sound judgment that He is true God. And His sufferings show that He is true man. And if this does not convince those who are weak of understanding, then they shall be given over to punishment on His dread day.

If He were not flesh, then for what reason did Mary bring Him forth? And if He were not God, Whom did Gabriel name as Lord?

If He were not flesh, then who lay in the manger? And if He were not God, Whom then did the Angels who had come down glorify?

If He were not flesh, who was bound in swaddling clothes? And if He were not God, Whom did the shepherds adore?

If He were not flesh, whose hands and feet were pierced with nails? If He were not God, why was the veil of the Temple rent in twain, and the rocks split asunder, and the graves opened?

If He were not flesh, who cried out 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me' (Matt. 27:46)? And if He were not God, Who said, 'Father, forgive them' (Luke 23:34)?

If He were not flesh, who was crucified on the Cross with the thieves? And if He were not God, Who said to the thief, 'Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43)?

If He were not flesh, to whom did they offer the gall and vinegar? And if He were not God, at Whose voice did Hades tremble?

If He were not flesh, whose side was pierced with a spear, and blood and water flowed forth? And if He were not God, Who broke the gates of Hades and burst the bonds, and by Whose command did the dead held captive there come forth?

If He were not flesh, whom did the Apostles see in the Upper Room? If He were not God, Who entered there, the doors being closed?

If He were not flesh, in whose hand did Thomas feel the wound of the nails and in whose side that of the spear? And if He were not God, to Whom did Thomas cry out, 'My Lord and My God' (John 20:28)?

If He were not flesh, who ate by the Sea of Tiberias? And if He were not God, by Whose decree were the nets filled?

If He were not flesh, who did the Angels and Apostles see received into Heaven? And if He were not God, to Whom were the Heavens opened, Whom did the Powers worship with trembling, and to Whom did the Father say, 'Sit Thou on My right hand' (Heb. 1:13), as even David says, The Lord said unto my Lord: 'Sit Thou at My right hand' (Ps.109:1) and so on? And if He were not God and man, then, as a consequence, our salvation would be false, and the proclamations of the Prophets false too.

Yet the Prophets abode in the truth and their testimonies are not lies. For what they were commanded, that they spoke through the Holy

Spirit. For this reason also the chaste John, who leaned upon that flaming breast, confirming the prophetic saying, theologising in the Gospel, instructs us, and says: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:1, 3, 14).

The One Who is of God, God the Word, the Only-Begotten Son of the Father, of one essence with the Father, the One Who is from the One Who is, the pre-eternal Word, inexpressibly begotten of the Father without mother before all ages, the Same in the last days was born of a daughter of mankind, from Mary the Virgin without father; He was born God incarnate, bearing in Himself flesh taken from her, made man, which formerly He was not, and remaining God, which He was, so that He might save the world.

Translated from a Russian version published in 1984 in the Troitskii Calendar of the Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville.



The Value of Obedience

Bishop Chrysostomos of Christianoupolis

An address delivered on the occasion of the annual reception honouring the Name Day of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili. First published in *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 9, 1992

Your Eminence, our Spiritual Father:

Entreating your heartfelt blessing that the Grace of the Lord might strengthen me in the task which I am at this moment undertaking, I would like, as an introductory note, to say the following. Many times in the past, words about obedience have been spoken from this podium, these words based on patristic texts, the lives of the saints, and our own humble experience as monastics.

This evening, however, may we be allowed to consider the value of

obedience neither from the perspective of patristic texts nor with our own words. Let it suffice that we learn about this subject from a very virtuous and holy monk who has lived the greatest part of his life as one under obedience. He is well known for his true obedience, an obedience filled with self-denial, sacrifice, and reverence for his elder. For reasons of discretion, we shall not here divulge his name or the place where he lives as a monk.

From a recorded talk by the Elder, however, we will take several selected quotations which will help us to understand in a more profound way four basic and essential characteristics of blessed obedience. To these passages we might assign the following titles:

- **One thought, a single thought alone, can separate us from our Elder.**
- **Do nothing which is hidden from or in opposition to the spirit of your Elder.**
- **Take care not to bring distress to your Elder.**
- **It is necessary to have faith in your Elder.**

The advice which we shall hear from this virtuous monk is genuine, based on experience, filled with spiritual power and simplicity, and flavoured with the salt of Grace. It is advice which a disciple needs in order to be made firm in the holy contest of obedience – obedience principally to one’s spiritual father, but extending also to all of one’s brothers.

For true submission in Christ so adorns a disciple with the blessed character of obedience that he is always obliging, humble, obedient to all, and filled with joy; indeed, the little child of the Gospels. With regard to such humility, I would like to offer a characteristic example from our own times:

A monk once visited the Elder Silouan of Mt. Athos. The holy Elder asked the monk how he was. The monk, his face filled with joy, responded:

‘I feel great joy.’

‘And why are you so joyful?’

‘All of the brothers love me.’

‘And why do they love you?’

‘Because I am obedient to all of them. When they send me off to do something, I say, “May it be blessed.”’

But let us now hear the vivifying words of the virtuous Elder:

One thought, a single thought alone, can separate us from our Elder.

A single thought can separate us from our Elder. I remember one Saturday when I went to my Elder to liturgize. The previous Tuesday I had entertained a thought in my mind which was contrary to the elder’s thinking. Moreover, I was correct, and not my Elder, as the eventual outcome of the matter revealed. But when I went to him, he said: ‘Father, you had a thought which separated you from me. Correct this.’ Between Tuesday and Saturday, I had forgotten about it, so I asked my Elder what the thought was. He answered me: ‘I do not know. Search your thoughts today, yesterday, and the day before yesterday and you will find it.’ But I still could not remember it. Having finished the Divine Liturgy, I finally remembered the thought which had been contrary to the Elder’s opinion and about which I had been right. Nonetheless, God confirmed the Elder and not the disciple.

If some disciple comes to you and tells you about something he is thinking, never consider him right in this. He has strayed from his elder. He has become a deserter. Tell him to do obedience to his Elder. The place where God has put him is where he will be saved. The patron saint of his monastery will save him, it being sufficient that he show patience and do obedience.

Do nothing which is hidden from or in opposition to the spirit of your Elder.

And do not wander far from the protection of your Elder. Anything that you wish to do, let it be known to your Elder. Do nothing in secret. Last evening we were given apricots. This brought to mind one of my errors. Since we have a garden, I had asked someone to bring me a tree from the city.

I had no sooner set out to plant it than my Elder said to me: ‘Come up here. What are you doing there? Nothing will grow there where you are planting.’ So it was. The Elder was not in agreement with what I was doing. In seven years, I produced only one blossom, since I did not have the agreement of my Elder.

Take to yourself your Elder's spirit.

'Elder, shall I do this?' Keep your eyes fixed on the Elder's spirit. 'Do it, my child, you have a blessing.' Have no fear, it will work out. If the Elder has any objection to something, abandon it, or you will come to naught, as did I not only with my apricots, but with apples, too. I planted three apple trees. My Elder's spirit was the same: 'You are always messing with trees. You never learn.' The trees did not grow at all and I was obliged to pull them out.

The same thing happened to my grapevines. When your Elder is not in agreement with what you are doing, know that you will fail. Do you want to have success? Test to see that the will of your Elder and your intention are in agreement. If they are, then have no fear. You will succeed. If the Elder has reservations, then do not force him. Fathers, I tell you this from experience.

I once pushed my Elder with regard to a certain thing. For two years or more I was punished for this. I have reached the point of saying that anyone who pushes his Elder to do something which his disciple wants, but which the Elder does not want, becomes a second Judas. I tell you this from bitter experience.

Take care not to bring distress to your Elder.

Believe me, I am speaking to you from experience. I am speaking with you sincerely. A disciple who has reached the perfection of obedience has no fear of God. Nor does he fear the Judgment or the Second Coming. He fears only bringing distress to the soul of his Elder. An Elder is God made visible.

Should you bring distress to your Elder, you cause distress to God. If you give rest to your Elder, you comfort God. So it is that the Holy Fathers knew and taught that obedience is life, whereas disobedience is death. Neither Holy Communion, struggles, acts of hospitality, nor noetic prayer suffice here. In the sight of obedience, all of these are rendered null. Even if you should commune ten times a day and lack obedience, you are headed for Hell.

It is a great thing to bring comfort to the soul of your Elder. Thus you also comfort the soul of Christ. Once I did something against my Elder's wishes and the result was that God fled from within me. Of such subtle import is an Elder.

When I was a laymen, a student in high school, we had a contest in mathematics one day. (I was a good student in mathematics). That morning I had a disagreement with my father. In the contest, I solved the problem we were given, finding the result to be a fraction. However, I was told that I must find a whole number (4). I tried two or three times to do so, but I always came up with the fraction '12/3'. Since I had caused grief to my father that morning, something prevented me from seeing that I had to reduce the fraction. And imagine, I was just a lay man.

If you have some thought, tell it to your Elder and listen to what he tells you. It will be from God. His advice may seem to you amiss. But it is not. The devil twists things, so that we will not deny our own wills and have absolute trust in our Elder. Otherwise, if we persist in our thought, all that we have expended to come to the monastery is but a waste.

It is necessary to have faith in your Elder.

Question: The tempter many times puts various ideas into our heads about different issues, presenting them in such a way that we think that we are right and others are wrong. He also at times causes us to get into our minds that our Elder and the other Fathers are doing us some injustice. How can we get such things out of our minds?

Answer: You have lessened your faith, efforts at self-denial, and your love for your Elder. That is why we are hurled into such conflict. When, however, we believe that our Elder is the mouth of Christ, then we will not be beset by doubts. Sometimes the thought comes to us that our Elder is not endowed with discretion, etc. But if you see an error in your Elder, know that you are the guilty one; for your faith in him has been diminished. If the All-Holy Mother of God were to appear to you and say something, would you say: 'No, Mother of God, it is not so'? Of course not. Thus it is with your Elder.

You will say to me: 'How can I attain to self-denial and faith in my Elder?' We need to force ourselves. We must cultivate these kinds of thoughts about our Elder: 'I have come here to be saved by the prayers of my holy Elder. When the Elder stops praying for me, I am bound for Hell. The Elder's prayer will save me.'

With these kinds of thoughts you establish yourself on firm foundations. You are established on rock. If you should lose trust in your Elder (because the Elder is this or that), then you are not in a

good state. And if this should go on for one, two, four, or five years, then all is lost, finished. You will forget your monastery and see it only in a distant way. For this reason, always listen to every word of your Elder – on every subject, whether spiritual, administrative, or whatever. And always, in whatever you do, find a saint who can help you in this.

But beware. The saint does not come first, and afterwards your elder. If you do not do obedience to your Elder, not even the saint can help you. Always say, first of all, ‘Through the prayers of my holy father...’ Are you going into the city or somewhere else? Have no fear. Are you cooking? ‘Through the prayers of my holy father...’ And wherever you go, do this.

Do you know what power this prayer has? In time you will understand what power the invocation of your Elder’s prayer has. An Elder has power even in the other life. He can from this life save the soul of one who did not live correctly and whom the elder fears might have lost his soul.

I tell you this with certainty: A monk who does perfect obedience achieves the state of passionlessness not only spiritually, but bodily. However, take care. I am not speaking of obedience with rewards – like the Elder who once told his disciple to make something sweet, but whose disciple answered: ‘I will not make something sweet unless you get me some shoes.’ Thus he dashed everything monastic.

Briefly, then, these are the things that a virtuous disciple from our time counsels. A monk must be found in such continual vigilance that he will accept not even a single thought which can separate him from his Elder. As well, he must take care not to do anything which is hidden from or in opposition to the spirit of his Elder. He must struggle never to bring even the slightest distress to his Elder and to have steadfast faith in him.

When a disciple, by means of prayer and daily practical exercise, cultivates these four things, it is certain that he will be endowed with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and, indeed, sweetness in his thoughts.

‘Believe me’, the elderly, virtuous disciple whom we have quoted says, ‘believe me: when a man is obedient, he has such sweetness in his thoughts that he says: “I want nothing else. May this be my lot in Paradise.”’

Your Eminence, our spiritual Father:

We ask for your heartfelt prayers, that we might be made strong in this contest of obedience within the bounds which we have just described. The soulful blessings of your love are much needed by us, for we have deep knowledge of the power of an Elder's blessing and what great security a disciple senses thereby in every circumstance of this life and even at the hour of his death.

We are told in the writings of the Fathers that a certain monk, who was not mindful of his spiritual duties, reached the hour of his death. But his soul would not depart. He was uneasy, perturbed, irritated, and making an uproar. The spiritual Fathers of the Skete read the prayers for the departure of the soul from the body. Nothing. The turmoil and the struggle of the moribund monk grew worse. So, the Fathers asked the monk's Elder to do the following: 'Put your hand on the head of your disciple and tell him: "My child, John, yield to death, and I will take upon myself your burden, then distribute alms by offering all night vigils and giving prayer-ropes to poor ascetics. As well, I will do prostrations on your part to any one you might have offended."'

As soon as the Elder placed his hand on the monk's head and said these words, the monk became completely quiet and gave up his soul peacefully.

Now, to show even more clearly the power of the blessing of one's spiritual father, allow me to cite yet another characteristic incident.

In the Skete of Kaposokalyvia [on Mt. Athos], at the *kalyve* [a small monastic house] dedicated to the Entrance of the Theotokos, an elder, Gregory by name, had a disciple who, just before he died, said to his revered Elder:

'Elder, the demons came and asked why I did not do my canon on such-and-such days.'

'Just tell them,' the Elder said, 'that I will take your omissions upon myself.'

The disciple smiled with satisfaction and died in peace.

Your Eminence, our Spiritual Father:

Beseeching yet once again your invaluable and saving prayers and blessings for our perfection in Christ, we feel at this moment a need to thank you for all of the sacrifices and labours to which you have continually subjected yourself for our own salvation. Forgive us, for many times we are lured away by our weaknesses and bring you dis-

tress. We beg you to have patience and not to cease in your God pleasing efforts for our salvation.

Allow us, finally, with all of our hearts to wish that the Grace of God might keep you always ‘in safety, honour, and length of days, rightly dividing the Word of Truth’, through the intercessions of our Ever-Blessed Lady, the Theotokos, the holy and glorious Martyrs and Protectors of our monastery, Saints Cyprian and Justina, and of all the Saints, that we might enjoy together in the other world the protection and guidance of your fatherly love and blessings.

I have erred, forgive me.



THE PRAYER WHEN A CHILD IS NAMED ON THE EIGHTH DAY AFTER BIRTH

ARCHBISHOP BENJAMIN OF NIZHEGOROD &
ARZAMASS

The priest makes the sign of the cross upon the forehead, lips and breast of the infant and says this prayer:

Let us pray to the Lord.

O Lord our God, we pray unto thee, and we beseech thee, and implore thee, that the light of thy countenance may be shown upon this Thy servant (*Name*); and that the cross of Thine Only-begotten Son may be graven in his (her) heart, and in his (her) thoughts : that he (she) may flee from the vanity of the world and from every evil snare of the enemy, and may follow after thy commandments. And grant, O Lord, that Thy holy Name may remain un-rejected by him (her); and that he (she) may be united, in due time, to thy holy Church; and that the dread Mysteries of Thy Christ

may be administered unto him (her): That, having lived according to thy commandments, and preserved without flaw the seal, he (she) may receive the bliss of the elect in thy kingdom; through the grace and love towards mankind of Thine Only-begotten Son, with Whom also Thou art blessed, together with Thine all-holy, and good, and life-giving Spirit, now, and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Then, taking the infant in his arms, he stands before the doors of the church, or before the holy image of the Most Holy Theotokos, and makes the sign of the cross, saying:

Rejoice, thou who art full of grace, O Virgin Theotokos, for from thee hath risen the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, enlightening those in darkness. Rejoice thou also, O righteous Elder, as thou receivest in thine arms the Redeemer of our souls, who also granteth unto us the Resurrection.

The Signing of the Infant with the Cross Refers to the Catechuminate.

The signing, by which we mean the making of the sign of the Cross and the giving of a Christian name, is the reception of the infant into the catechuminate so that, in due time, he might receive the grace of Baptism. For the catechumens are always brought into the church and prepared for Baptism by the hearing of the word of God and by the sign of the Cross. With this thought in mind, the Blessed Augustine announced to the catechumens themselves:

Ye who possess the seal of faith, receive the word of God, as the food appropriate for you. Thereby the Lord Himself will grant you increase. For ye have not yet been born again by Holy Baptism, but ye have been conceived by the sign of the Cross in the womb of Holy Mother Church.

The Power and Advantage of the Sign of the Cross.

This same Augustine bears witness that the infants, who have only just come into the world, are immediately signed with the Cross, and he says of himself: 'I was signed with the sign of the Cross and steeped in salt (Christian teaching) even from the very womb of my mother.' The power and advantage of such a signing is explained by the same

writer: 'The catechumens have the sign of the Cross on their brow, consequently they belong to the great house (of God) and are freed from servitude.'

Infants Receive Their Names on the Eighth Day.

Newborn infants often quickly die. For this reason, the Greek pagans used to give the newborn their names no earlier than the seventh day. Aristotle says: 'many infants die before the seventh day, therefore newborn infants are only given their names when there is some greater hope that they will continue in life.' The Athenians waited for this until the ninth day.

The same day was appointed for the naming of infants among the Romans; for this reason the ninth day or the celebration on the ninth day after a birth was dedicated to a goddess called Nundina, and the day itself was considered illustrious (Lustricus) and was kept as a feast, set aside for the cleansing of a baby of the male sex; but for a female the eighth day was appointed.

However, in the Old Testament, the most exalted of Lawgivers, God Himself, chose the eighth day for the cleansing of the Jewish infants (males) from ancestral sin by the cutting off of an extremity of the flesh in the rite of circumcision, and for the naming of the child.

It was on the eighth day that Christ Himself, Our Saviour, receiving the name that corresponded to His person and His calling, was well-pleased to be sealed with the sign of circumcision and to receive His name.

The Christians, remembering this first sacred mystery and the earnest of our redemption, took this as an example and name their children also on the eighth day and after the naming count them among the living. Saint Simeon of Thessalonica says:

On the eighth day, the infant is brought to God, and before the doors of the church (for he is not yet sanctified or baptised) the priest signs him on the brow, the lips and the chest, and through sacred prayer gives him the name, which his parents desire; in this name he is baptised. Thus it was also with the Lord, for when He was circumcised on the eighth day, He was named Jesus. We do not have circumcision, because our Saviour Himself fulfilled for us all the demands of the Law and

delivered us from the works of the Law. There has been granted us another circumcision, for it is in every way such, and that is Divine Baptism, whereby the flesh is not circumcised, but sin is excised.

The Significance of the Eighth Day.

The same writer then explains the mystical thought and meaning of the eighth day in detail:

On the eighth day the Jews performed the circumcision; but now we, the faithful, receive a name on the eighth day and also are signed on the eighth day for renewal. For when seven days are finished, then in this life there are no more appended in the weekly reckoning, for the weekly cycle is complete. From the eighth day a new reckoning begins which serves as a symbol of the Resurrection and a foreshadowing of life eternal. For it was on the eighth day [i.e. Sunday] that the Lord rose, and we look for the last day, that of eternal life, which, as we have been instructed, will be without end. On this same eighth day the Jews were circumcised, at least the males of them only who received the seal in their sensual member, and this was thus incomplete; on the one hand the Resurrection at the end of the 'week' of this present age was thus foretold, and on the other hand by the circumcision itself there is represented that the lusts of the flesh were once cut short and incorruptible life established – although they did not fully comprehend this and did not think of the true circumcision, which is the excision of sin, which is achieved in Holy Baptism, which suggests that the whole human nature was once incorrupt and whole and that there was nothing rotten therein. Furthermore, he who is circumcised mars the body and thus does not maintain his nature in its fullness. Just as we are not born passionless, this being born from the lusts of the flesh remains with us. However, through Baptism we are granted a birth not from the lusts of the flesh, nor from the lusts of man, but from God; this is the rebirth from the laver of regeneration. For these reasons the infant receives its name on the eighth day like the Saviour, Who was given the saving name, Jesus.

Having in this manner received a name on the eighth day, the infant is attached to the Church and numbered among the choir of the catechumens.

The Sign of the Cross is Signed Upon the Brow, Lips and Chest.

The various parts of the infant are signed with the sign of the Cross. Saint Simeon of Thessalonica says:

The priest signs the infant upon the brow because of the mind; upon the lips because of words (speech) and breathing, and upon the heart on account of the life forces, that he might thus continue under the grace-filled protection until saving Baptism...Being sealed and having had the sacred prayer read and thus offered to the Lord, and being signed with the Cross upon the brow, as I said, on account of the mind, upon the lips because of the words, and on the heart because of the life forces, being granted a name written in the Book of Eternal Life, the infant is taken back to his mother.

Thus the Church in the last prayer confirms the signing of the Cross on the brow and lips, praying: ‘Let the light of Thy countenance be signed upon this Thy servant (Name)’ and confirming the sign of the Cross on the breast, She prays: ‘that the Cross be signed upon his (her) heart and understanding;’ and for the confirmation of the name given, She asks ‘Grant, O Lord, that Thy holy Name remain unrejected by him (her).’

The Sign of the Cross is a Seal.

Having preserved the seal unbroken [also from the Prayer]. The sign of the Cross imparted to the soul of the believer before Baptism, is called by Saint Gregory the Theologian and by Saint Basil the Great a seal. In like manner the sign of that same Cross placed upon the catechumen and upon a newborn infant is also called a seal. In this prayer the Church beseeches God that He keep both seals unbroken.



THE COMING MONTH

THE LAST MONTH of the Church Year, August, brings festivals of glory. In the first, the **Transfiguration**, we see the glory of the Divinity of our Saviour shining forth from His human form, and in the second, the **Dormition**, we see that glory shared by one who had become a god by grace, the Most Holy Theotokos, the Mother of God.

Thus at the end of the year we see the end of our calling. Yet how seldom do we have this end in view! Often we are neglectful of our religious calling. Or we might ascend a step or two on the ladder and see our rôle as simply fulfilling certain religious requirements. Annually by the celebration of these two festivals, the Church calls us to look up and see that we are called to a greater glory.

At the end of the month, although it is not numbered among the Twelve Great Feasts, we also have the feast of the **Beheading of Saint John the Baptist**, and so we are reminded that we can only begin to aspire to attain that greater glory, by putting off the delights of this world (the partying of Herod and Herodias) and its sinfulness (their adultery and drunkenness), and by becoming confessors in word and deed, as did the Forerunner, of the righteousness of Christ.

Among the Saints celebrated in August we have the **Holy Myrrh-bearer Salome** (3rd/16th) who is numbered among the women who were the first witnesses of the Saviour's resurrection from the dead. As we learn from the Gospels, she was the wife of Zebedee and the mother of the Holy Apostles James and John. She was also the daughter of Saint Joseph the Betrothed and the sister of Saint James the Brother of God, who, after the Day of Pentecost, became the first Bishop of Jerusalem. She was thus one of the 'sisters' of the Saviour, mentioned in Matthew 13:56 and Mark 6:3, which perhaps explains her boldness with the Saviour (Matthew 20:20-21).

The **Holy Martyrs Florus and Laurus** (18th/31st) were brothers according to the flesh and they worked as stonemasons. They lived in Illyria and they were commissioned by the local prince to build a pagan temple. The pagan priest came to watch the proceedings, and it happened that as the brothers worked a splinter of stone flew into the eye of the young son of the priest and left him

blinded in that eye and bleeding. Naturally the priest was greatly disturbed and wanted the brothers punished, but the brothers told him that if he believed in the God Whom they worshipped, his son would be restored to health. They then prayed and made the sign of the Cross over the poor boy's eye, and he was instantaneously healed. The priest and his son were baptised seeing this miracle, and both subsequently died as martyrs themselves.

Florus and Laurus completed the temple, then raised a Cross above it and had it consecrated as a Christian church. Hearing this the prince had them thrown into a dry well and buried there alive. They thus completed their martyric course victoriously in the second century. Generations later, after Saint Constantine the Great had freed the Church from persecution, their sacred relics were retrieved and found to be incorrupt. They were taken to Constantinople, the new Imperial City.

Venerable Sigfrid of Wearmouth (22nd August /4th September). Little is known of the early life of this father, except that he was a monk at Wearmouth, a man of holy life and well versed in the Holy Scriptures. When Saint Easterwine died, his brethren elected him to be their superior. At that time Saint Benedict Biscop, their elder, was away, making a pilgrimage to Rome, but he had entrusted the houses at Wearmouth and Jarrow to Saint Ceolfrid, who endorsed the election. Saint Sigfrid lived a strictly ascetic life, but his physical health did not correspond with the vigour of his soul, and he fell seriously ill with a deterioration of the lungs.

When Saint Benedict Biscop returned to the monastery, Sigfrid was already confined to his cell by illness. However, the health of Saint Benedict then began to decline, and for three years both Abbots suffered infirmity, giving the brethren examples of patient endurance in suffering. However, their illnesses grieved the two fathers in one respect, because, being confined to their beds, they missed each other's company, and so Saint Sigfrid requested the brethren to carry him to the bedside of Saint Benedict. There they were able to embrace each other in Christian love and to strengthen each other with spiritual counsels. Two months later, in 688 A.D. Saint Sigfrid died, to be followed after another four months by Saint Benedict Biscop.

The Holy Martyrs Adrian and Natalia and those with

them (26th August/8th September). When they were martyred, Adrian and Natalia had been married for only just over a year. Adrian was a pagan, but his young wife was secretly a Christian.

During the reign of the impious Emperor Maximian and the persecution of the Christians raised by him, twenty-three Christians were found hiding and were arrested and taken in for interrogation. Adrian's duty it was to supervise the cross examination, but he was touched by the martyrs' steadfastness, how peaceful and meek they appeared even when threatened with terrible tortures, and so he began to ask them about their hope and about their Faith. They told him of the blessedness of the elect in the heavens, and hearing this Adrian suddenly turned to the scribe recording the proceedings, and ordered him, 'Put my name down among the Christians.'

When the Emperor heard this, he thought Adrian had lost his senses, but on questioning him he came to the conclusion that he would not be shaken. Natalia rejoiced exceedingly to hear of her husband's conversion, and came to visit him in prison, and encouraged him when he was put to torture. Adrian and the twenty-three were eventually put to death by having their limbs broken by hammers, and so received the crowns of martyrdom.

Natalia collected their sacred remains and gave them reverent burial. Sometime later, Adrian appeared to her, bathed in heavenly glory, and called her to come and enjoy that same glory, and she peacefully gave her soul into the hands of her Saviour, being re-united to her young husband.

The **Holy Hieromartyr Kuksha** and the **Venerable Pimen** (27th August/9th September) were monks in the Kiev Caves Monastery. Saint Kuksha was granted to preach to the pagan Wallachians, and journeyed among them, teaching them and baptising them. Some pagans, resenting his mission, fell upon him and slew him and so he died as a martyr. At the moment that he died, Pimen the Faster was praying in church in Kiev, and he saw in the spirit the martyrdom of his brother and friend. He cried out: 'Our brother Kuksha has this day been slain for the Gospel.' Immediately as he had said this, he himself breathed his last in the year 1113 A.D, so that he entered into the heavenly realms with his beloved brother.

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

CHRISMATION

On Sunday 8th /21st June, **Andrew Last** was received into the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece. The celebrant of the mystierion was **Priest Evangelos Liassi**. We wish Andrew a good struggle and Many Years!

BAPTISM

On Saturday 14th/27th June **Mark Slater** and **Edward Whicker** were baptised, the celebrant being **Priestmonk Sabbas**; the mystierion took place between Matins and the Divine Liturgy at which both the newly-baptised received their first Holy Communion. The Godparents of Mark were **Joshua Bailey** and **Alexandra Galbeaza** and Edward's Godparent was **Anthony Bell**. Edward and Mark stayed at the Brotherhood for the week after their baptism. May they remain firm in their path to salvation.

BAPTISM AND MARRIAGE

On Sunday 29th June /12th July **Daniel** and **Emily Burford** and their two young children, **Lily** and **Jonah** were baptised; the celebrant was **Priest Evangelos Liassi**. The Godparents were **Deacon Ioan Turcu**, **Presbytera Loukia Liassi**, **Rafail Mazmanides** and **Andreea Turcu**. On the following Sunday afternoon the wedding of Daniel and Emily took place whilst they were still in their baptism robes – the witnesses were Mark Slater and Osyth Thompson. We wish the Burford Family a blessed and salvific path to Paradise.

NEW CATECHUMEN

On Sunday 6th/19th July **Adam Smith** pronounced his catechumen vows receiving the name **Laurence** after the Holy Martyr and Archdeacon Laurence of Rome. We pray that the new catechumen will remain firm in his good resolve.

NEW ICON

The church has been given an icon of Saint Eustati of Chepelare, the New Confessor (7th/20th April) painted by the Sisters of the Saint Philothei Convent in Sweden. Saint Eustati, a Confessor for Orthodoxy, reposed in 1952 and was glorified by the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria in 2024. The large and beautiful icon was paid for by our pious Bulgarian Parishioners: **Plamen Monovski, Pavel Tosev, Rosen Valchanov, Maren and Zornitsa Daraktchiev, Yordanka Kalnakova, Elena Matthews, Nedelya Nenova and Valentina Alexandrova.**

VISITING ARCHIMANDRITE

On Sunday 15th/28th June **Archimandrite Christodoulos** of Kalamata visited the Brotherhood and concelebrated at the Divine Liturgy. Fr. Christoloulos is a long-standing clergyman of the G.O.C. and serves regularly in Germany. He is the spiritual father of some of our parishioners.

VISITORS

On Thursday 16th July **Geoff Quick** of Farnham University of the Third Age brought a group of eleven people to see the church. They showed a lively interest and asked many questions.

BROOKWOOD CEMETERY SOCIETY AGM

The **Brookwood Cemetery Society** held their Annual General Meetings in the Old Mortuary at the Brotherhood on Saturday 27th June. There were slightly fewer people in attendance than normal due to the hot weather, but the meeting was ably

chaired by **Kim Lowe**; the Society provided light refreshments for the participants.

SAINT TRYPHON GARDENING GROUP

On Saturday 4th July the Gardening Group spent a day working at the Brotherhood – as always we are grateful to them for their keen support.

Practical Tip

SOMETIMES, rarely these days it seems but it does happen, someone gets the idea that they should increase their spiritual endeavours. This is good and excellent, but should be undertaken with a blessing, and seriously, not simply as a fad. Furthermore they often think that the first step is to say extra prayers, keep extra fasts, make vows, do some spiritual exploit – think of St Peter desiring to walk on the waters. All this can be beneficial and is perhaps needed by most Orthodox Christians living in the West today – all of us do so little. But we often forget a preliminary first step. We have to strive to give love to our neighbours. It is little use fasting like the Pharisee, if we neglect taking the old lady down the street to church or for a doctor's appointment; it is little use spending an extra hour in reading prayers if we leave someone in need of a helping hand or a visit when they are sick; making extra prostrations will not of great benefit to us if we fail to show love to our children by admonishing them and instructing them in the Faith. There is little use in our lighting candles before our icons, if we dishonour our spouses, or consistently cheat our employers by using their time, facilities and materials for our own purposes. We are not saved by 'religious' practices devoid of efforts to live according to the principles of our Faith, but by love: first and pre-eminently by God's love for us, and to a little extent, but an important one, by the love that we show Him and His icons, our neighbours.

