

The Shepherd

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FROM THE FATHERS

“LET OUR PRAISE be in God, and not of ourselves; for God hates those that commend themselves. Let testimony to our good deeds be given by others, as it was in the case of our righteous forefathers. Boldness, and arrogance, and audacity belong to those that are accursed of God; but moderation, humility, and meekness to such as are blessed by Him.”

HOLY HIEROMARTYR CLEMENT OF ROME, + 99 A.D.

“TRUE HUMILITY does not say humble words, nor does it assume humble looks, it does not force oneself either to think humbly of oneself, or to abuse oneself in self-belittlement. Although all such things are the beginning, the manifestations and the various aspects of humility, humility itself is grace, given from above. There are two kinds of humility, as the holy fathers teach: to deem oneself the lowest of all beings and to ascribe to God all one’s good actions. The first is the beginning, the second the end.”

VEN. GREGORY OF SINAI, + 1346 A.D.

“IN ANSWER to your question as to what constitutes a happy life, whether splendour, fame and wealth, or a quiet, peaceful, family life, I will say that I agree with the latter, but will add the following: A life lived in humility and with an irreproachable conscience brings peace, tranquillity, and true happiness. But wealth, honour, glory and exalted position often serve as the

cause of a multitude of sins, and such happiness is not one on which to rely.”

VEN. MACARIUS OF OPTINA, + 1860 A.D.

“NOTHING is more opposed to God than pride, for self-deification is concealed in it, its own nothingness or sin. Thus more than anything humility is acceptable to God, which considers itself nothing, and attributes all goodness, honour, and glory to God alone. Pride does not accept grace, because it is full of itself, while humility easily accepts grace, because it is free from itself, and from all that is created. God creates out of nothing. As long as we think that we can offer something of ourselves, He does not begin His work in us. Humility is the salt of virtue. As salt gives flavour to food, so humility gives perfection to virtue. Without salt food goes bad easily, and without humility virtue is easily spoiled by pride, vainglory, impatience, and it perishes. There is a humility which a man gains by his own struggles: knowing his own insufficiency, accusing himself for his failings, not allowing himself to judge others. And there is a humility into which God leads a man through the things that happen to him: allowing him to experience afflictions, humiliations, and deprivations.”

SAINT PHILARET OF MOSCOW, 1867 A.D.

“GOD descends to the humble as waters flow down from the hills into the valleys.”

RIGHTEOUS JOHN OF CRONSTADT, + 1908 A.D.

“THE ONLY HOPE of salvation from the delusions and the heresies, the innovations and the traps of wicked people and of the devil is prayer, repentance and humility.”

ELDER JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST, + 1959 A.D.

A Commentary on Psalm 130

SAINT HILARY OF POITIERS, 369 A.D.

*O Lord, my heart is not exalted, nor mine eyes
become lofty.*

THIS PSALM, a short one, which demands an analytical rather than a homiletical treatment, teaches us the lesson of humility and meekness. Now, as we have in a great number of other places spoken about humility, there is no need to repeat the same things here. Of course we are bound to bear in mind in how great need our faith stands of humility when we hear the Prophet thus speaking of it as equivalent to the performance of the highest works: *O Lord, my heart is not exalted*. For a troubled heart is the noblest sacrifice in the eyes of God. The heart, therefore, must not be lifted up by prosperity, but humbly kept within the bounds of meekness through the fear of God.

Nor have mine eyes become lofty. The strict sense of the Greek here conveys a different meaning; οὐδὲ ἐμετεωρισθησαν οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου, that is, have not been lifted up from one object to look on another. Yet the eyes must be lifted up in obedience to the Prophet's words: *Lift up your eyes and see who hath displayed all these things* (Es. 40:26-Septuagint). And the Lord says in the Gospel: *Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white unto harvest* (John 4:35). The eyes, then, are to be lifted up: not, however, to transfer their gaze elsewhere, but to remain fixed once for all upon that to which they have been raised.

Then follows: *Nor have I walked in things too great or too marvellous for me* (v.2). It is most dangerous to walk amid mean things, and not to linger amid wonderful things. God's utterances are great; He Himself is wonderful in the highest: how then can the psalmist pride himself as on a good work for

not walking amid great and wonderful things? It is the addition of the words, which are above me, that shows that the walking is not amid those things which men commonly regard as great and wonderful. For David, prophet and king as he was, once was humble and despised and unworthy to sit at his father's table; but he found favour with God, he was anointed to be king, he was inspired to prophesy. His kingdom did not make him haughty, he was not moved by hatreds: he loved those that persecuted him, he paid honour to his dead enemies, he spared his incestuous and murderous children. In his capacity of sovereign he was despised, in that of father he was wounded, in that of prophet he was afflicted; yet he did not call for vengeance as a prophet might, nor exact punishment as a father, nor requite insults as a sovereign. And so he did not walk amid things great and wonderful which were above him.

Let us see what comes next: *If I were not humble-minded but exalted my soul* (v.3). What inconsistency on the Prophet's part! He does not lift up his heart: he does lift up his soul. He does not walk amid things great and wonderful that are above him; yet his thoughts are not mean. He is exalted in mind and cast down in heart. He is humble in his own affairs: but he is not humble in his thought. For his thought reaches to heaven, his soul is lifted up on high. But his heart, out of which proceed, according to the Gospel, *evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings* (Matt. 15:19), is humble, pressed down beneath the gentle yoke of meekness. We must strike a middle course, then, between humility and exaltation, so that we may be humble in heart but lifted up in soul and thought.

Then he goes on: *As one weaned from his mother, so wouldest Thou requite my soul* (v.3). We are told that when Isaac was weaned Abraham made a feast because now that he was weaned he was on the verge of boyhood and was passing beyond milk food. The Apostle feeds all that are imperfect in the faith and still babes in the things of God with the milk of knowledge. Thus to cease to need milk marks the greatest possible advance. Abraham proclaimed by a joyful feast that his

son had come to stronger meat, and the Apostle refuses bread to the carnal-minded and those that are babes in Christ. And so the Prophet prays that God, because he has not lifted up his heart, nor walked amid things great and wonderful that are above him, because he has not been humble-minded*** but did lift up his soul, may reward his soul, lying like a weaned child upon his mother: that is to say that he may be deemed worthy of the reward of the perfect, heavenly and living bread, on the ground that by reason of his works already recorded he has now passed beyond the stage of milk.

But he does not demand this living bread from heaven for himself alone, he encourages all mankind to hope for it by saying: *Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for evermore* (v.4). He sets no temporal limit to our hope, he bids our faithful expectation stretch out into infinity. We are to hope for ever and ever, winning the hope of future life through the hope of our present life which we have in Christ Jesus our Lord, Who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

Footnote:

*** Usually this word means "disposed to be humble" but in this instance it clearly means "minded, or concerned, about lowly, worldly things." How strikingly different from most of us!



“MEEKNESS is an unchangeable state of mind which remains the same in honour and dishonour. Meekness is the rock overlooking the sea of irritability which breaks all the waves that dash against it, remaining itself unmoved. Meekness is the buttress of patience, the mother of love and the foundation of wisdom, for it is said, *The Lord will teach the meek His way* (Ps. 24:9). It prepares the forgiveness of sins; it is boldness in prayer, an abode of the Holy Spirit. *But to whom shall I look*, says the Lord, *to him who is meek and quiet and trembles at my word* (Es. 66:2). In meek hearts the Lord finds rest, but a turbulent soul is the seat of the devil.”

VEN. JOHN OF THE LADDER, + 649 A.D.

John is the Voice, Jesus is the Word

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, + 430 A.D.

JOHN is the voice, but the Lord is the Word Who was in the beginning. John is the voice that lasts for a time; from the beginning Christ is the Word who lives for ever. Take away the word, the meaning, and what is the voice? Where there is no understanding, there is only a meaningless sound. The voice without the word strikes the ear but does not build up the heart.

However, let us observe what happens when we first seek to build up our hearts. When I think about what I am going to say, the word or message is already in my heart. When I want to speak to you, I look for a way to share with your heart what is already in mine.

In my search for a way to let this message reach you, so that the word already in my heart may find place also in yours, I use my voice to speak to you. The sound of my voice brings the meaning of the word to you and then passes away. The word which the sound has brought to you is now in your heart, and yet it is still also in mine.

When the word has been conveyed to you, does the sound not seem to say: The word ought to grow, and I should diminish? The sound of the voice has made itself heard in the service of the word, and has gone away, as though it were saying: My joy is complete. Let us hold on to the word; we must not lose the word conceived inwardly in our hearts.

Do you need proof that the voice passes away but the divine Word remains? Where is John's baptism today? It served its purpose, and it went away. Now it is Christ's Baptism that we celebrate. It is in Christ that we all believe; we hope for salvation in him. This is the message the voice cried out.

Because it is hard to distinguish word from voice, even John himself was thought to be the Christ. The voice was thought to

be the Word. But the voice acknowledged what it was, anxious not to give offence to the word. I am not the Christ, he said, nor Elias, nor the prophet. And the question came: Who are you, then? He replied: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord.” The voice of one crying in the wilderness is the voice of one breaking the silence. Prepare the way for the Lord, he says, as though he were saying: “I speak out in order to lead Him into your hearts, but He does not choose to come where I lead Him unless you prepare the way for him.”

What does prepare the way mean, if not “pray well”? What does prepare the way mean, if not “be humble in your thoughts”? We should take our lesson from John the Baptist. He is thought to be the Christ; he declares he is not what they think. He does not take advantage of their mistake to further his own glory.

If he had said, “I am the Christ,” you can imagine how readily he would have been believed, since they believed he was the Christ even before he spoke. But he did not say it; he acknowledged what he was. He pointed out clearly who he was; he humbled himself.

He saw where his salvation lay. He understood that he was a lamp, and his fear was that it might be blown out by the wind of pride.



“THE LORD did not come to make a display. He came to heal and to teach suffering men. For one who wanted to make a display, the thing would have been just to appear and dazzle the beholders. But for Him Who came to heal and to teach, the way was not merely to dwell here, but to put Himself at the disposal of those who needed Him, and to be manifested according as they could bear it, not vitiating the value of the Divine appearing by exceeding their capacity to receive it.”

SAINT ATHANASIUS THE GREAT, + 373 A.D.

From the Writings of the Reposed
Athonite Elder, Priestmonk Arsenii

The Carnal Passions

Temptations of a carnal nature are brought about thus: the enemy, choosing an appropriate time, introduces a lascivious thought. The person thus tempted, although he might feel a certain fleshly warmth in following up what has been presented to him, if he sincerely loves God and knows that such things grieve Him, then calls upon the help of His holy name, fiercely rises up against this thought and completely expels it. The enemy, having made several attempts and seeing that they are futile, will finally leave the man alone.

However, if the person tempted, although he withstands the lascivious thought, but does not do so with sufficient resolution, and does not stoutheartedly cast its enticing sweetness out of his heart, this shows that he barely loves God and hardly fears Him, but rather is overcome by love of pleasing his flesh, and this even more the case when at such a time he does not call upon God's help.

The enemy indefatigably follows everyone and lights the fires of temptation, and they, poor things, fall. Even though he is then shown up, this is of no profit, there is another fall, and another and so on. God seeing that the person loves the sweetness of sin more than Him, as his Redeemer, He nonetheless does not want that person to perish and He threatens him with the fear of eternal punishment and issues various guidelines.

If thereafter, that man, captivated by the sweetness of sin, is not softened thereby, then the Lord, seeing the uselessness of these grace-filled reprimands, permits the enemy to act, and then

the unhappy man becomes his captive, fulfilling his will without any contradiction, although he sees that leads him into hades.

From thinking this over, it is obvious that the possibility of deliverance from carnal temptations consists in calling upon the help of God at the very first lascivious thought, and not allowing the sweetness of sin to settle in your heart for a minute but with indignation to cast it out, and then you will easily and quickly be freed from this shameful passion.

There are people who have a natural inclination towards carnal passions, but if they love God and have the fear of God and beseech God and force themselves to abstention, then they too will be victorious over the raging of carnal passions. Love of God and fear of God, as also all the virtues, are given a person who seeks after them, not just in words but in deeds, as it is said, “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt. 11:12).

After someone indulges in carnal sins, the enemy usually comforts the fallen person with these arguments, that the Lord is merciful, that He gave the precept that we forgive seventy times seven times, and more of the same ilk. In this way the sinner does not receive the means for correction, does not feel contrition for his fall as he should, does not beseech God as he must needs do, and from this the fear of God is not given birth within him and so he is content to be subjugated by the enemy. If carnal passion, this evil weakness, is not met with decisive opposition, then that person is inevitably destroyed. Eating an over-sufficiency of food and having soft beds contributes much to the raging of this destructive passion, whereas restraint and resting on something firm always suppress the passion-loving flesh.

In “The Exposition of the Teachings of the Orthodox Faith,” it states that loss of hope in the mercy of God, as also despair, are equally mortal sins, and this is wholly true for the consequences of both are fatal.

... To be continued with “The Remembrance of Death.”



The Theotokos, the Consoler

In January, 807 A.D., the Algerian pirate-thief Vardouhan, was using the island of Milos as a base for his attacks, and with his seventeen ships ravaged the Aegean Islands, the coast line of Thrace and of Asia Minor.

This month he decided to turn against Mount Athos. He prepared ten ships, took two hundred pirates with him and set off for the Monastery of Vatopaidi.

On 21st January, they anchored at the monastery's small port at dawn. They went on land, hid and waited for the monastery's gates to open, to make their invasion. The monks had just finished their morning service and went to their cells to rest. The Elder remained in church to continue praying.

Suddenly he heard a voice coming from the icon of the Theotokos: "Do not open the gates today. Climb the walls and chase the pirates away."

Bewildered, he turned to look at the Theotokos. Then he saw another astonishing miracle. The faces of the Panagia and of the Holy Child had come to life. That same moment the Infant Jesus stretched out His hand and covered His mother's mouth. Then He turned his face to her and said: "No, Mother, let them be punished as they deserve."

Then the Theotokos took hold of her Son's hand, turned her face a little to the right and repeated: "Do not open the monastery's gates today."

The Elder, shocked, gathered all the brothers and told them all the wonders that he had seen and heard. With awe they noticed that the holy faces in the icon had changed position and expression. After they had thanked the Panagia for her salvific divine providence, they climbed the walls. It was time. The pirates with ladders and axes were getting ready to climb up.

The Elder stood firm on the battlements, he let them come closer. Then he held high the Holy Cross and gave the signal to drive back the pirates. Immediately ten pirates fell dead, some were wounded and the rest re-embarked in their ship and left.

The monks with great emotion went to the church to thank the Theotokos once more. Since then, and unto this day, the icon has taken on a new name, Consoler, that is one who consoles, to remind us of that miraculous event.

An article sent us by the sisters of the Convent of the Holy Angels, Afidnai, Greece.



THE COMING MONTH

IN January the preeminent festival is, of course, the **Great Feast of the Theophany**, principally the celebration of our Saviour's Baptism in the River Jordan. During the day's celebration we have two Great Blessings of the Waters, one served in the church so that parishioners may take the blessed waters to bless themselves and their homes, and one traditionally served at a lake, river or pond, or at the seaside. The Brookwood community travels for this to Chertsey to bless the Abbey River at the site of the monastery founded by Saint Erkenwald in the seventh century and where subsequently in A.D. 871, the Abbot, Saint Beocca, and ninety of the monks were slain by the Vikings. We are grateful to **Robin and Mary Haigh** for permitting us to do this every year on the quayside which adjoins their home, and then for the kindness of providing refreshments for our people in the medieval monastic barn that stands on their property.

Concerning the Blessing of the Waters, **Saint John of Shanghai** teaches: "On Theophany, the Day of the Lord's Baptism, every year a great miracle is performed. The Holy Spirit, coming down upon the water, changes its natural

properties. It becomes incorrupt, not spoiling, remaining transparent and fresh for many years. This Holy Water receives the grace to heal illnesses, to drive away demons and every evil power, to preserve people and their dwellings from every danger, to sanctify various objects whether for church or home use. Therefore, Orthodox Christians with reverence drink Holy Water - a great *Agiasma* (holy thing), as the Greeks call it. One should always have at home enough Theophany water to last the whole year, and make use of it at every need: in cases of illness, leaving on a journey, whenever one is upset, students prior to examinations, etc. People who drink a little Holy Water daily, before eating any kind of food, do well. It strengthens the powers of our soul, if it is done with prayer and reverence, and one does not merely expect a mechanical result from it. Every priest should take care to bless a sufficient quantity of water for his church, so that it will be on hand for the course of the whole year for every need and to be given out to those who ask for it; and parishioners should provide themselves at Theophany with Holy Water for the whole year and even so that it can be kept for future years.”

On 9th / 22nd January we celebrate the **Holy Martyr Polyeuctus**, the first martyr in the Armenian city of Melitine. He was a soldier under the Emperor Decius and he later suffered for Christ under the Emperor Valerian. The Saint was a friend of Nearchus, a fellow-soldier and firm Christian, but Polyeuctus, though he led a virtuous life, remained a pagan. When the persecution against Christians began, Nearchus said to Polyeuctus, “Friend, we shall soon be separated, for they will take me to torture, and you alas, will renounce your friendship with me.” Polyeuctus told him that he had seen Christ in a dream, Who took his soiled military cloak from him and dressed him in a radiant garment. “Now,” he said, “I am prepared to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.” Inflamed with zeal, Polyeuctus went to the city square, and tore up the edict of Decius which required everyone to worship idols. A few moments later, he met a procession carrying twelve idols through the streets of the city. He dashed the idols to the ground and trampled them underfoot. His father-in-law, the magistrate Felix, who was

responsible for enforcing the imperial edict, was horrified at what Polyeuctus had done and declared that he had to die for this. “Go, bid farewell to your wife and children,” said Felix. Paulina came and tearfully entreated her husband to renounce Christ. His father-in-law Felix also wept, but Polyeuctus remained steadfast in his resolve to suffer for Christ. With joy he bent his head beneath the sword of the executioner and was baptised in his own blood. Soon, when the Church of Christ in the reign of Constantine the Great had triumphed throughout the Roman Empire, a church was built at Melitine in honour of the holy Martyr Polyeuctus. Many miracles were worked through the intercessions of Saint Polyeuctus. In this very church the parents of Saint Euthymius the Great prayed fervently for a son. The birth of this great luminary of Orthodoxy in the year 376 occurred through the help of the holy Martyr Polyeuctus. Saint Polyeuctus was also venerated by Saint Acacius of Melitine, a participant in the Third Œcumenical Synod, and a great proponent of Orthodoxy. In the East, and also in the West, the holy Martyr Polyeuctus is venerated as a patron saint of vows and treaty agreements.

On 13th / 26th January we celebrate our **Holy Father Hilary of Poitiers** (c. 300 – 368 A.D.), and such a great teacher of Orthodoxy in the West that he known as the “Athanasius of the West.” Hilary was born at Poitiers, a town in west central France at or near the end of the third century. His parents were of noble lineage, and he received a good education, including some knowledge of Greek, which had already become somewhat rare in the West. While he was still young, Christianity became the officially supported religion of the Roman Empire, and he later studied the Hebrew Bible and the writings of the emerging New Testament canon. Hilary, thus, abandoned his Neo-Platonism for Christianity. Together with his wife and daughter (known to us as Saint Abra), he received Holy Baptism. Little is known regarding the Christian community in Poitiers at this time, but Hilary’s erudition, character, and social standing were such that he won the respect of the local church. Although still a married man, in his early fifties he was unanimously elected bishop, c. A.D. 353. At the time, Arianism had a strong foothold in the

Western Church, especially in Gaul, where Arian Christians had often been the first missionaries to reach the formerly pagan lands. The Emperor Constantius II, meanwhile, sought to end the controversy by supporting the moderate faction now called “Semi-Arians” and denounced the adamantly anti-Arian position represented by Saint Athanasius the Great. A strong proponent of the Orthodox christology promoted by Athanasius, Hilary undertook the task of defeating the Arian view, which he considered to be a heresy that undermined the concept of Jesus’s Divinity and misunderstood God’s plan of salvation. He refused to endorse the Emperor’s wish that Athanasius be condemned and worked to rally the supporters of the Nicæan Council. One of Hilary’s first steps in this campaign was to encourage the remaining non-Arian bishops in Gaul to excommunicate the important Semi-Arian Bishop Saturninus of Arles, together with his supporters Ursacius and Valens, on grounds of heresy. Hilary also wrote to Emperor Constantius II in protest against actions taken against the defenders of Athanasius, some of whom had been forcibly removed from their bishoprics and sent into exile. The probable date of this letter, titled, *Ad Constantium Augustum liber primus*, is A.D. 355. His efforts, however, resulted in failure. Constantius summoned the synod of Biterræ (Béziers) in A.D. 356, with the professed purpose of settling the longstanding disputes once and for all. The result was that Hilary, who still refused to denounce Athanasius, was banished by imperial decree to Phrygia, Asia Minor, where he spent nearly four years in exile. From exile, Hilary continued to direct the non-Arian Christians in his diocese and devoted himself to writing on the theological matters which so troubled the Empire and himself. During this period he prepared two of his most important contributions to dogmatic and polemical theology. His *De synodis* (also called *De fide Orientalium*) was an epistle addressed in A.D. 358 to the Semi-Arian bishops in Gaul, Germany and Britain. In this work he analysed the professions of faith uttered by the eastern bishops in the councils of Ancyra, Antioch, and Sirmium. While he criticised them as being in substance Arian, he sought to show that sometimes the difference between the doctrines of certain

heretics and orthodox beliefs was basically a semantic one. *De synodis* was harshly criticised by some members of Hilary's own anti-Arian party, who thought he had shown too great a forbearance towards the Arians. He replied to their criticisms in the *Apologetica ad reprehensores libri de synodis responsa*. In *De trinitate libri XII*, composed in 359 and 360, he attempted to express in Latin the theological subtleties elaborated in the original Greek works dealing with the Trinity - the first Latin writer to attempt this task. In A.D. 359, he attended the convocation of bishops at Seleucia Isauria, where he joined the *Homoousian* [i.e. Orthodox] faction against the Semi-Arian party headed by Acacius of Caesarea. From there he went to Constantinople, and, in a petition personally presented to the Emperor the following year, repudiated the accusations of his opponents and sought to vindicate the Nicene position. Acacius, however, triumphed, as a new council of bishops held at Constantinople issued a compromise creed as a substitute for the formulas of both the Nicene and Arian parties. Although affirming the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the council adopted what its opponents called a firmly "Semi-Arian" position: "We affirm that the Son is like the Father." This was totally unacceptable to Hilary, and his repeated demands for a public debate with his opponents even after the matter had been settled to the Emperor's satisfaction proved so troublesome that he was sent back to his diocese. He appears to have arrived at Poitiers about A.D. 361, within a very short time of the accession of Julian the Apostate. Arriving home, Hilary continued fighting both outright Arianism and the Semi-Arian formula within his diocese for two or three years. He also extended his efforts beyond Gaul. In A.D. 364, he impeached Bishop Auxentius of Milan - a man high in the imperial favour who had been the disciple of Ulphilas, the Arian missionary to the Goths - as a heretic. Summoned to appear before Emperor Valentinian I at Milan to justify his charges, Hilary failed to prove his charges to their satisfaction, and was expelled from Milan and returned to Poitiers. In A.D. 365, Hilary published the *Contra Arianos vel Auxentium Mediolanensem liber*, against both Auxentius and Arianism in general. He also wrote the highly polemical *Contra*

Constantium Augustum liber, in which he declared that Constantius II had been an antichrist, a rebel against God, and “a tyrant whose sole object had been to make a gift to the devil of that world for which Christ had suffered.” The later years of Hilary’s life were spent in comparative quiet, devoted in part to the preparation of his expositions of the Psalms (*Tractatus super Psalmos*). He also may have written a number of hymns, and is sometimes regarded as the first Latin Christian hymn-writer, but none of the surviving compositions assigned to him is indisputable. He also composed his *Commentarius in Evangelium Matthaei*, an allegorical exegesis of the Gospel of Matthew and his now lost translation of Origen’s commentary on the Book of Job. Toward the end of his episcopate and with the encouragement of his disciple Martin, the future bishop and wonderworker of Tours, he founded a monastery at Ligugé in his diocese. He reposed in A.D. 369. For his labours and confession of the Faith, Saint Hilary of Poitiers holds the highest rank among the Latin writers prior to Ambrose of Milan. By Saint Augustine of Hippo he was called “the illustrious doctor of the churches.”

On the same day we celebrate our **Venerable Father Saint Maximus Kavsoalyvites (i.e. the Hut-Burner)**. He was educated at the church of the Most Holy Theotokos at Lampsakos. At seventeen years of age he left his parental home, became a monk, and passed his obedience under Elder Mark, the finest spiritual instructor in Macedonia. After the death of his teacher, the saint pursued asceticism under the guidance of several desert Fathers of extremely strict life. When he was in Constantinople, Saint Maximus was constantly at the Blachernae church of the Most Holy Theotokos, as though he had taken up his abode there. From his youth, Saint Maximus had a great love for the Mother of God. He persistently entreated Her to grant him the gift of unceasing mental prayer. One day, as he was venerating her icon, he felt a warmth and a flame enter his heart from the icon. It did not burn him, but he felt a certain sweetness and contrition within. From that time, his heart began to repeat the Jesus Prayer of itself. In this way, the Virgin

Theotokos fulfilled his request. Saint Maximus fulfilled his obedience in the Lavra of Saint Athanasius on Mount Athos. In order to conceal his ascetic deeds of fasting and prayer, and to avoid celebrity, he behaved like a fool. One day, he had a vision of the Mother of God, who told him to ascend the mountain. On the summit of the Holy Mountain, he prayed for three days and nights. Again, the Most Holy Theotokos appeared to him surrounded by angels, and holding Her divine Son in Her arms. Prostrating himself, the saint heard the All-Holy Virgin speak to him, "Receive the gift against demons... and settle at the foot of Athos, for this is the will of My Son." She told him that he would ascend the heights of virtue, and become a teacher and guide for many. Then, since he had not eaten for several days, a heavenly bread was given to him. As soon as he put it in his mouth, he was surrounded by divine light, and he saw the Mother of God ascending into Heaven. He told his vision to a certain Elder living by the church of the holy Prophet Elias at Carmel. He was sceptical, but the saint turned his disbelief to good. He pretended to be slightly crazy in order to conceal his prodigious ascetic deeds, privations, his hardship and solitude. Saint Maximus did not live in a permanent abode, but wandered from place to place like a lunatic. Whenever he moved, he would burn his hut down. Therefore, he was called "Kavsokalyvites," or "Hut Burner." Those on the Holy Mountain, knowing of the extreme deprivations and sorrows of Saint Maximus, for a long time regarded him with contempt, even though he had attained the height and perfection of spiritual life. When Saint Gregory of Sinai arrived on Athos, he encountered the holy fool. After speaking to him, he began to call him an earthly angel. Saint Gregory persuaded Saint Maximus to stop behaving like a fool and to live in one place so that others might benefit from his spiritual experience. Heeding the words of Saint Gregory and the advice of other Elders, Saint Maximus selected a permanent dwelling in a cave near the renowned Elder Esaias. Hearing of his gift of clairvoyance, the Byzantine Emperors John Paleologos and John Kantakouzenos visited him and were surprised by the fulfilment of his predictions. Theophanes, the abbot of Vatopedi monastery, wrote about Saint Maximus: "I invoke God

as my witness, that I myself saw several of his miracles. Once, for instance, I saw him travel through the air from one place to another. I listened as he made a prediction concerning me, that first I would be an abbot, and then Metropolitan of Ochrid. He even revealed to me how I would suffer for the Church.” Saint Maximus abandoned his solitude only just before his death, and settled near the Lavra of Saint Athanasius, where he surrendered his soul to the Lord at 95 years of age in 1354 A. D. After his repose, as in life, Saint Maximus was glorified by many miracles.

On 14th / 27th January, we have **Saint Nina, Peer of the Apostles, Enlightener of Georgia**. She was born in Cappadocia, and was a relative of Great Martyr George and the only daughter of a widely respected and honourable couple. Her father was a Roman army chief by the name of Zabulon, and her mother, Sosana, was the sister of Patriarch Juvenal of Jerusalem. When Nina reached the age of twelve, her parents sold all their possessions and moved to Jerusalem. Soon after, Nina’s father was tonsured a monk. He bid farewell to his family and went to labour in the wilderness of the Jordan. After Sosana had been separated from her husband, Patriarch Juvenal ordained her a deaconess. She left her daughter Nina in the care of an old woman, Sara Niaphor, who raised her in the Christian Faith and related to her the stories of Christ’s life and His suffering on earth. It was from Sara that Nina learned how Christ’s robe had come to be in Georgia, a country of pagans. Nina began to pray fervently to the Theotokos, asking for her blessing to travel to Georgia and be made worthy to venerate the Sacred robe that she had woven for her beloved Son. The Most Holy Virgin heard her prayers and appeared to Nina in a dream, saying, “Go to the country that was assigned to me by lot and preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will send down His grace upon you and I will be your protectress.” But the blessed Nina was overwhelmed at the thought of such a great responsibility and answered, “How can I, a feeble woman, perform such a momentous task, and how can I believe that this vision is true?” In response, the Most Holy Theotokos presented

her with a cross of twined grapevines and proclaimed, "Receive this cross as a shield against visible and invisible enemies!" When she awoke, Nina was holding the cross in her hands. She dampened it with tears of rejoicing and tied it securely with strands of her own hair. Nina related the vision to her uncle, Patriarch Juvenal, and revealed to him her desire to preach the Gospel in Georgia. Juvenal led her in front of the Royal Doors, laid his hands on her, and prayed, "O Lord, God of Eternity, I beseech Thee on behalf of my orphaned niece: Grant that, according to Thy will, she may go to preach and proclaim Thy Holy Resurrection. O Christ God, be Thou to her a guide, a refuge, and a spiritual father. And as Thou didst enlighten the Apostles and all those who feared Thy name, do Thou also enlighten her with the wisdom to proclaim Thy glad tidings." On her way, Nina visited Rome, where she met and baptised the princess Rhipsime and her nurse, Gaiana. At that time the Roman Emperor was Diocletian, a ruler infamous for persecuting Christians. Diocletian had fallen in love with Rhipsime and resolved to marry her, but Saint Nina, Rhipsime, Gaiana, and fifty other virgins escaped to Armenia. The furious Diocletian ordered his soldiers to follow them and sent a messenger to Tiridates, the Armenian king, to put him on guard. King Tiridates located the women and, following Diocletian's example, was charmed by Rhipsime's beauty and resolved to marry her. But Saint Rhipsime would not consent to wed him, and in his rage the king had her tortured to death with Gaiana and the fifty other virgins. Saint Nina, however, was being prepared for a different, greater task, and she succeeded in escaping Tiridates' persecutions by hiding among some bushes. On her way to Iberia (Georgia), passing through Anatolia into the Caucasus, Nina managed to convert some villages in Anatolia and Armenia. She reached the borders of the ancient Kingdom of Iberia in c. 323 A.D. Saint Nina was greeted by a group of Mtskheta shepherds near Lake Paravani, and she received a blessing from God to preach to the pagans of this region. She placed a Christian Cross in the town of Akhalkalaki and started preaching the Christian faith in Urbnis. She travelled to Mtskheta with a group of Georgians who were making a pilgrimage to

venerate the pagan idol Armazi. There she watched with great sadness as the Georgian people trembled before the idols. She was exceedingly sorrowful and prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, send down Thy mercy upon this nation...that all nations may glorify Thee alone, the One True God, through Thy Son, Jesus Christ." Suddenly a violent wind began to blow and hail fell from the sky, shattering the pagan idols. The terrified worshipers fled, scattering across the city. Saint Nina made her home beneath a bramble bush in the garden of the king, near the family of the royal gardener. The gardener and his wife were childless, but through Saint Nina's prayers God granted them a child. The couple rejoiced, declared Christ to be the True God, and became disciples of Saint Nina. Wherever Saint Nina went, those who heard her preach converted to the Christian Faith in great numbers. Saint Nina even healed the terminally ill Queen Nana after she declared Christ to be the True God. King Mirian, a pagan, was not at all pleased with the great impression Saint Nina's preaching had made on the Georgian nation. One day, he resolved to kill all those who followed Christ. According to his wicked scheme, even his wife, Queen Nana, would face death for failing to renounce the Christian Faith. But in the midst of the hunt he was on at the time, it suddenly became very dark. All alone, King Mirian became greatly afraid and prayed in vain for the help of the pagan gods. When his prayers went unanswered, he finally lost hope and, miraculously, he turned to Christ: "God of Nina, illumine this night for me and guide my footsteps, and I will declare Thy holy name. I will erect a cross and venerate it and I will construct a church for Thee. I vow to be obedient to Nina and to the Faith of the Roman people!" Suddenly the night was transfigured, the sun shone radiantly, and King Mirian gave great thanks to the Creator. When he returned to the city, he immediately informed Saint Nina of his decision. As a result of the unceasing labours of Equal-to-the-Apostles Nina, Georgia was established as a nation solidly rooted in the Christian Faith. Saint Nina reposed in the village of Bodbe in eastern Georgia and, according to her will, she was buried in the place where she took her last breath. King Mirian later erected a church in honour of Saint George over her grave.



Evil in Others: Understand it

RIGHTEOUS JOHN OF CRONSTADT, + 1908 A.D.

SOMETIMES we think that anger is a fair reaction to something bad. **But the idea that a passion could ever be fair is a total and deadly lie.**

When someone is angry at you, remember that this evil feeling is in him. He's just fooled by the devil and is a suffering instrument in his hand.

Pray that the enemy leaves him and that God opens his spiritual eyes, which have been darkened by the evil spirit. Pray to God for all people enslaved by passions because the enemy is acting in their hearts.

Perhaps you hate your neighbour, despise him, don't want to talk to him peacefully and lovingly because he has been rude, arrogant, or disgusting in his speech or manners. You may despise him for being full of himself or proud or disrespectful.

But you are to blame more than he is. *Physician, heal thyself!* (Luke 4:23). So, teacher, teach yourself.

This kind of anger is worse than any other evil. How could evil be chased out by another evil? How can you take a needle from the eye of another person while having a log in your own? Evil defects must be fixed with love, kindness, resignation, and patience.

Admit yourself to be the worst of all sinners, and believe it. Consider yourself the worst one, chase away any boldness, anger, impatience and fury; you may start helping others. Be indulgent about the defects of others, because if you see their faults all the time, there will be continuous enmity.

The sinners wrought upon my back: they lengthened out their iniquity (Psalm 128:3). *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you* (Matt. 6:14).

We can feel from time to time the most perfect love for God without loving each other. This is a strange thing, and only few care about it.

But love for our neighbour will never come without our own effort. **A real Christian doesn't have any reason to be angry about anybody.**

Anger is the devil's deed. A Christian should have only love inside and since love doesn't boast, he shouldn't boast or have any bad thoughts towards others.

For example, I must not think about another person that he is evil, proud etc; and I must not think that if I forgive his offence he would laugh at me or upset me again. We must not let evil hide in us under any pretence. Evil and anger usually have many different veils.

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

Reply to A.R.: "I WAS SLIGHTLY perplexed by your letter because you say that you are a friend of our parishioner, L., and we have no one in our church of that name, and then you state that the Greek Church states that the Mother of God was free from any sin, which is not correct. Perhaps L. gave you this impression, but it is not Orthodox teaching. As with any church or communion not everyone who claims to be an adherent is necessarily *au fait* with what that communion teaches. So perhaps L. has given you a wrong impression. What you say regarding the Scriptures and the teaching of the Blessed Augustine is substantially correct. This is one reason why the Orthodox Church rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine, a modern one, of the Immaculate Conception. In fact we believe that that teaching demeans her, because it makes her something of a puppet. Saint Ignatius of the Caucasus says clearly: 'Despite the righteousness and the immaculateness of the life which the Mother of God led, sin and eternal death manifested their presence in her.' Saint Ephraim the Syrian tells us that Mary was purified when Christ came and dwelt in her womb. She herself speaks of the Lord as her Saviour. We do, however, believe that

the Mother of God has become sinless, through the mercies and the lovingkindness of her Son. Perhaps this is where L. was confused. Each one of us as Christians hopes to achieve that situation in Christ. I hope this helps you a little and gives you a better insight into the teachings of the Orthodox Church. If you need any further help or have any more questions, please do not hesitate to write. I realise that this response may not be very full, but it is difficult to know exactly how to reply not knowing anything of your religious or educational background. If you wish to understand more, we do have a booklet by Saint John of Shanghai, called 'The Orthodox Veneration of Mary, the Birthgiver of God,' which may help you. It runs to just over 80 pages, so is not long.



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

BAPTISM AT SAINT EDWARD'S

AFTER VESPERS on the **Great Feastday of the Entry of the All-Holy Mother of God into the Temple**, 21st November / 4th December, **Laurence**, the infant son of **Gregory and Marina Ferguson** was baptised at Saint Edward's Church. The celebrant of the Mysterion was **Father Borislav Popov**, the baby's grandfather, and the Godparent was **Rafail Mazmanidis**. Immediately after the Baptism and Chrismation, the Holy Mysteries were imparted to the newly-enlightened Laurence, who is named after **Saint Laurence the Archbishop of Canterbury**. The following Sunday, at the end of Matins and before the Divine Liturgy, the **churching prayers for Marina** were read, again by Father Borislav. Pray for Rafail that he may fulfil his responsibilities diligently, for Laurence that he may remain steadfast and true all the days of his life, and for his parents

that they may bring him up to love and serve our Saviour.

NEW ICONS FOR OUR CHURCH

A LARGE and very beautiful icon of the **Circumcision of our Saviour** (feast day: 1st / 14th January) has been donated to our church by **Mrs Anne van der Lee** of **Crandall**, Hampshire.

A smaller icon has also been painted of **Saint Oswald of Worcester and York**, to match the icon we have of Saint Dunstan. Both were painted by the sisters of the **Convent of the Holy Angels, Afidnai**, Greece. **Matt Moore** of **MRM Studios** in Aldershot is preparing to produce icon cards of the larger icon for us.

Sofia Popova has kindly given us a copy of the icon of **All the Nordic Saints** which the **Convent of Saint Philothei** in Sweden has in its chapel. The sisters of the Convent explained that it includes not only those saints from Scandinavia, but also saints from Finland and Iceland.

FR THOMAS'S VISIT TO GREECE

AT THE END of November, **Fr Thomas** spent a week in Greece to help the sisters of the **Holy Angels' Convent** set up a bookbindery. Unfortunately while there he came down with Covid, but through God's mercies he was able help the nuns and returned to us safely, if unwell.

Practical Tip

FOLLOWING ON from a thought expressed in our "Points from Correspondence," always ask advice on church matters from someone competent to give that advice. Very often we have found that people come with some sort of trouble or a query, and tell us that X or Y in the congregation advised this or that, but you would not, when feeling desperately ill, go to the doctor and then ask the other people in the waiting room what they advised about your condition, so why do the same thing with something much more serious, your spiritual condition? We cannot pretend that the clergy are infallible and here we have, as I suspect in many places, no God-bearing Elders; they may not be learned, but they do have a blessing to guide and inform people and therefore the counsel they offer is not simply from self-opinion or from their own conceits, but is covered by that blessing.