

# *The Shepherd*

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## FROM THE FATHERS

“ADAM, God’s first-formed man, transgressed: could He [God] not at once have brought death upon him? But see what the Lord does. In His great love towards man, He casts him out of Paradise, for because of sin he was unworthy to live there; but He puts him to dwell over against Paradise: that seeing whence he had fallen, and from what and into what a state he was brought down, he might afterwards be saved by repentance.”

SAINT CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, + 386 A.D.

“IS IT NOT evident that the Lord Jesus is angry with us when we sin in order that He may convert us through fear of His indignation? His indignation, then, is not the carrying out of vengeance, but rather the working out of forgiveness, for these are His words: ‘If thou shalt turn and lament, thou shalt be saved.’ He waits for our lamentations here, that is, in time, that He may spare us those which shall be eternal. He waits for our tears, that He may pour forth His goodness. So in the Gospel, having pity on the tears of the widow, He raised her son. He waits for our conversion, that He may Himself restore us to grace, which would have continued with us had no fall overtaken us. But He is angry because we have by our sins incurred guilt, in order that we may be humbled; we are humbled, in order that we may be found worthy rather of pity than of punishment.”

SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN, + 397 A.D.

“ALMIGHTY GOD has allowed His chosen to succumb to certain sins. This is so that He may restore hope of forgiveness to

others, who are under sin's domination, if they will only rise up to Him wholeheartedly: for then God can open up for them the way to heaven through sorrow and repentance. Let us then embrace sorrow, let us rid ourselves of our sins by tears and fruits worthy of repentance. We must not squander the time that has been granted us. We see so many of the freshly washed clean of the wrongs they have done: what else do we have in them except a pledge of the compassion from on high!"

**ST GREGORY THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, +604 A.D.**

"SINCE THE WORD of God though His descent to us has brought the kingdom of heaven close to us, let us not distance ourselves from it by leading an unrepentant life. Let us rather flee the wretchedness of those who sit 'in darkness and the shadow of death.' Let us acquire the fruits of repentance: a humble disposition, compunction and spiritual grief, a gentle and merciful heart that loves righteousness and pursues purity, peaceful, peace-making, patient in toil, glad to endure persecution, loss, outrage, slander and suffering for the sake of truth and righteousness. For the kingdom of heaven, or rather the King of heaven - ineffable in His generosity - is within us; and to Him we should cleave through acts of repentance and patient endurance, loving as much as we can Him Who so dearly has loved us."

**SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS, + 1360 A.D.**

"REMEMBER, O my soul, the terrible and frightful wonder: that your Creator for your sake became Man, and deigned to suffer for the sake of your salvation. His Angels tremble, the Cherubim are terrified, the Seraphim are in fear, and all the heavenly powers ceaselessly give praise; and you, unfortunate soul, remain in laziness. At least from this time forth arise and do not put off, my beloved soul, holy repentance, contrition of heart and penance for your sins."

**VEN. PAISIUS VELICHKOVSKY, + 1794 A.D.**

"LET US MAKE a promise to ourselves, that from this day, from this hour, from this very moment we shall strive to love God above all, and fulfil His holy will!"

**VEN. HERMAN OF ALASKA, + 1794 A.D.**

ON the first Saturday of the Church month of February this year, we have one of the two preeminent **Soul Sabbaths** in the whole year, and so it seems appropriate to include the following instructive teaching:-

## PRAY FOR THE REPOSED

### HIEROMARTYR JOHN OF RIGA

+ 1934 A.D.

THE DEATH of people who are close and dear to us is one of the most difficult trials sent to us by the Lord God during this temporary life. There are no tears more bitter than the tears of a mother for the beloved child of her heart who goes to the grave before his time. What sorrow can we compare to the sorrow of widows and orphans? Nonetheless, our Lord and Saviour turns to these people, the most unfortunate ones in the eyes of the world, saying respectfully, "Weep not!" The Apostle Paul commands these sorrowing ones, saying, "Do not sorrow!"

What does this mean? Of course, it does not mean that we should forget those dear loved ones of ours who have departed, that we should cast them out of our hearts. No, we should love them after their death just as we loved them in life. However, we should not sorrow over their death. Death does not separate us who are Christians from communion in love with those who are dear to us. The Lord Himself has given us the very grace-filled means needed to have communion with them. The first among these means is prayer. Prayer is the best means for spiritual communion among people who are still alive. The Apostle Paul besought the believers to pray continually for him in order that the Lord would grant him strength and power to preach. Likewise, Saint Paul prayed for others that the Lord would confirm them in the Faith and in a Christian life. There is no doubt that the prayers of believers strengthened the Apostle and that his prayers strengthened them.

We find an amazing example of the power and action of mutual prayer in the Acts of the Apostles. While Saint Peter was in prison sleeping between two guards, prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him (Acts 12:5). What was the result of this prayer? During that very night, the Angel of the Lord appeared in the prison, awoke the sleeping Apostle, and led him out of prison.

The power and action of prayer for the souls of the departed is even greater than prayer for the living. There is no greater comfort than prayer and no greater joy than joy in the Lord for those who are separated from their bodies. It is unjust, as some think, to assume that the needs of our departed brethren are unknown to us. However, this is not true. The spiritual needs of the dead are the same as the spiritual needs of the living. The dead need the mercy and goodness of the Heavenly Father, forgiveness and remission of sins, grace-filled help from God in the fulfilment of all good desires, and the peace and ease of the heart and conscience. These things are most important both for the living and the dead. *Give rest, O Lord, to the souls of Thy departed servants* is the continual prayer and best intention of our Mother Church for the souls of Her departed. We should also beseech the Lord with this intention for the departed souls of our own loved ones.

It could be that some soul bound himself with earthly attachments, with earthly cares, and could not be free of them after death. Earthly thoughts about home and cares, about acquiring things, might still tug at this soul, torture him, and not allow him the freedom to strive with heart and soul towards God. We should pray that the Lord will grant rest to such a soul in the quiet harbour of His Kingdom. We should pray that the Lord will destroy and burn up in the fire of His Grace the memory of his earthly cares. We should pray that the Lord will warm this soul with love and with the desire for eternal treasure, that the Lord will give rest to this soul in the sweetest hope of eternal blessedness.

Perhaps, having confessed at the hour of death, some soul did so quickly, in a confused manner. This soul might have

forgotten something because of troubled feelings, and he now grieves over this. Perhaps, this soul did not have time to offer God true repentance, to fully cleanse his sins by tears of compunction. Perhaps, the awareness of unconfessed and unforgiven sins tear and torture this soul. Pray for this soul who is suffering. Pray that the Lord God might comfort him with the protection of His inextinguishable mercy. Pray that this soul might receive, albeit at this late hour, remission of sins because of his sincere remorse.

Who can enumerate all those bonds with which our soul might bind itself in this lifetime and by which it might remain bound for eternity. One might have been envious of his neighbour in the depths of one's soul and bound himself thus. Another person might have mocked the weakness of His neighbour and become, according to the words of the Lord, worthy of Hell. Another person might have lied and as a result became the son of the father of lies. *If Thou shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, O Lord, who shall stand?* (Ps. 129:3). Therefore, no matter how holy a man's life might be, no one can be sure that he will pass into the next world completely reconciled with God. No man can say that the prayerful intercessions of those brethren who are left alive are unnecessary for him.

Was not the repentance of Saint Ephraim the Syrian sincere and deep? Even he, sensing that his end was near, besought his brethren, "O Brothers, accompany me into the world above with prayers, psalms, and offerings. Remember me on the fortieth day after my death; because prayers and offerings made by the living help the departed."

Works of charity are another means of communion with the departed. "If you desire to honour the dead, offer a gift for him. Honour him by good works, charitable offerings, and services" (St John Chrysostom). Send gifts for the reposed through the hands of the poor and the hopeless. In the name of the reposed, do acts of charity to the best of your ability and be assured that your gift will be received by God. Our Lord Jesus Christ has assured us that our gifts will be received, saying, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye*

*have done it unto Me* (Matt. 25:40). Can it be that He Who is all-powerful will remain in debt to us? If you give food and drink to the hungry and the thirsty in His name, then the Lord will fill the soul of your departed brother with the appearance of His light-bearing and joy-filling Image.

It could be that the soul of your relative is ashamed before the holy Angels because of his lack of good deeds and because of his wretched sins, and he hides in darkness and in murky depths from the face of God. Clothe the naked; wash the feet of the tired; receive and give rest to the traveller in the name of such a soul; and the merciful Lord will vest this soul in the garment of His mercy, will adorn it in the robe of His justification, will wash its sinful filth in His Most Precious Blood.

It could be that the soul of your friend bound by sins languishes in a dungeon without the vision of God's face. Hurry to a prison and assuage the heart of a suffering prisoner in the name of your departed friend. The Lord will send His bright Angels to comfort the soul of your sorrowing friend, to strengthen him with hope, and make him rejoice in the promise of God's mercy.

It could be that a soul has left this world for the spiritual world without having drawn close to the holy inhabitants of that world through prayer; he may have appeared in that higher sphere as one entering a strange and unfamiliar land and may not find any spiritual 'relative' in this upper Sion. Take in the stranger; give rest to the beggar; give him a place to rest his head, and the Lord will grant the soul, for whom you do this, one of the bright dwellings in His Father's mansion. The souls of the righteous will receive this soul in bright and joyful communion. Saint John Chrysostom says, "If we desire to relieve the sufferings of a sinner, let us do acts of mercy in his name. Though he be unworthy, the Lord will comfort and pity him."

When we pray for the reposed and do charitable works in their name, it is necessary, brethren, to reflect on our own death while there is still time. We should prepare now so that we will not pass into the future life of torture bound by bonds of sin. No



matter how short or how long the Lord has determined that we will live on earth, there is no doubt that our entire present life is a road leading to death and to the threshold of eternity. There is nothing better or of more value for us to acquire than a peaceful, blameless, repentant, and Christian end to our life. He who has lived piously will repose piously. He who has lived with the Lord will die with the Lord. He who zealously serves the Lord before death will be with the Lord after his repose. *Where I am, there shall also My servant be* (John 12:26). For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so they also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.



THE FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF GREAT LENT

SAINT PHILARET OF NEW YORK,  
THE NEW CONFESSOR  
+ 1985 A.D.

SO HERE, beloved, the First Week comes to a close. Coming to an end is also the preparation of those who will partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ during Divine Liturgy either tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, on Sunday. And now, those who will, must first confess their sins, so that the holy Mystery of Repentance can occur, which usually precedes the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist. I should note that in the good old times in Mother Russia we did not prepare as we do today. Firstly, it was not the norm at all that a person must prepare for Communion once a year, like it is now. It was customary to commune every Lenten period: Great Lent, St Peter's fast, Dormition and Nativity fasts, and during long Lenten periods they would commune twice, or even more; many zealots did so even more often, besides the regular Lenten periods, during the Twelve Great Feasts, the feast day of their own parish, on their names-day and birthday, *etc.* Communing once a year was permitted (as an exception)



only for those who, due to life circumstances or other acceptable reasons, could not do so more often than once a year. But that was the way of life in our ancient Russian past. Even in more recent decades, sadly, this pious way of life began to change: that which was the exception became almost the rule - most people considered it fully acceptable to commune only once a year, during Great Lent.

Of course, in today's distorted life circumstances, in a way, this is good, since many do not even commune for years at a time, making various excuses: there's no time, some circumstances are in the way, my way of life doesn't permit it... Against all such excuses, Saint Theophan the Recluse in his time said: "If you had enough desire - all your hindrances would be set aside," or as he would say, "Stomp your foot and say 'this will be so,' and all temptations, all obstacles will clear from your path."

So a person prepares to make confession, prepares to stand before the Cross and the Gospel. A person making genuine confession beholds before him the Life-Giving Cross and the Holy Gospel. The Gospel is the book containing the Law of God, the commandments of the Lord. It reminds the repentant sinner that he constantly violates this Law, and for this reason he comes to confession, to repent of this violation, all the transgressions that are clearly stated in this very Book. The Life-Giving Cross reminds him of the Bloody Price with which the Lord saved mankind. If there were no Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, no amount of repentance would remove our guilt for our sin: guilty? - then you must answer; sin? - then you must pay.

But the Lord by His mercy loved us sinners so much that He brought Himself to sacrifice for our sins. He took upon Himself the sins of mankind, had them nailed to the Cross, as we say in our prayers, and by this sacrifice created salvation for all of humanity. It is not for the sake of our prayers of repentance, but for the sake of the achievement on the Cross of His Only-Begotten Son that God the Father will accept our repentance, and we will be cleansed of our sins, after which we are prepared to receive the Holy Gifts.

At confession, first of all, beware of hiding anything; fear it like fire. Better not to go to confession at all than to hide something, because you will not be forgiven for a single sin then, but you will add one more, most grievous and most terrible sin. He who hides his sin during confession does not only deceive himself, but lies to the Holy Spirit; he mocks the grace of the Lord which is received by those who confess in earnest. Terrible is the fate of that person. Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky) of blessed memory in his works clearly pointed out that those who remain silent about their sins during confession sometimes end their lives as did Judas - by suicide.

If a person making confession hides something, or tries to deceive his spiritual father, he will not be forgiven his sins. Your spiritual father, by the power granted to him by God, forgives sins. Saint Theophan the Recluse says: "The humble pastor of the Church does not grant release of your sins by his own power, but he does it by the power which abides in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself." The power which works through the pastor of the Church is revealed to us by the Lord Himself, Who gave him this power. The Lord said to the Apostles, and through them to the pastors of the Church: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). What exceptional, terrible power and what responsibility is borne by the humble pastor of the Church; this power is not held by any earthly ruler, by no temporal sovereign. This is the power of our very Saviour and the Chief of our salvation, which is shared with the pastors of the Church.

But if you should think to lie during confession, or hide something, then the words the pastor speaks may differ from the decision of the Saviour Himself, for the pastor does not know that you lied and may say "I forgive and absolve you," but the Lord may not forgive and absolve you, for He knows that you lied during confession!

But if during confession you hide nothing and earnestly admit everything, then remember that this is not the only important

thing. Did you bring to the Cross and to the Gospel humble contrition for your sins? This is what we so often lack, yet this is so crucial! As a sinful servant of the Church, I more than once, while hearing the confession of the repentant, witnessed them in tears for their sins, the floor before the trestle stand would literally be sprinkled with their tears. How some people are able to repent! Often, a person comes to confession with a slumbering conscience, his soul remaining unawake; he says a few customary words and leaves unhealed... *Vladyka* Antony says about this: "If a person comes to confession with such a sleeping soul, without a sense of repentance and sorrow for his sins, then the state of his soul could be even sadder and more dangerous than that of the greatest sinner, who may have sinned horribly but who then suffers and is contrite over his sins."

Come to confession with contrition, with the recognition of your faults, with regret that you had sinned so much; remember how the Lord, through His Providence, His blessedness, His sovereign Hand halted you, led you away from sin, yet you pushed His Hand away, did not heed His law, ignored His warnings, and stubbornly sinned and sinned...

And if you lack such repentant awareness and sorrow - then bring to the Lord at least the sad admission of your inability to repent. Repent of this to God. You may have sinned, but you are unable to repent - at least confess this inability with humility, the Lord will not reject even this meek confession and will grant you His grace.

The Holy Fathers say that he who truly repents, confesses all and gives the Lord the promise to correct his life. We sinners have an uncounted number of transgressions, but this is why mankind is given a time to prepare for confession, for this the Church calls upon him for redoubled prayer and fasting, so that, by concentrating, he discerns what is in his soul, and, beholding it, realises his sin, his main weakness - almost every one of us has this.

As we prepare for confession it is important to take into account that which most of all burdens and binds our soul, so

that if our spiritual father asks, “What is your greatest sin?” we can immediately answer.

At the same time, never doubt, whatever our sins, however bad they are, that if we earnestly and humbly repent, the Lord, Who said “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Jn 6:37), will not drive us away, but grant us mercy and forgiveness. Amen.



## From the Writings of the Reposed Athonite Elder, Priestmonk Arsenii *On the Remembrance of Death*

A MAN is like a burning candle; one breath and the candle is extinguished! And then what awaits us? However we pay little attention to this question, although we of necessity are always approaching it. One after another we are all rehoused there. Remembering this inescapable transfer, that is remembrance of death, is as the great teacher of the Church Saint Basil the Great said: “the grace of God in this regard is a great leveller,” for this remembrance sobers us, protects us from obsessing about worldly vanities, and cools the ardour of our passions.

The great ascetic Saint Isaac the Syrian makes this assessment: “Satan greatly abhors this thought [of death] and makes war upon it with all his might to expunge it from man’s heart. And if it were possible, he would give a man dominion over the whole world, could he but by this distraction erase this thought from his mind for the cunning one knows that if this thought abides in a man, his mind will no longer remain on this earth of delusion, and his machinations against him will not touch him.” The word of God confirms exactly the same thing: “Remember thine end, and thou shalt not sin unto the ages” (Sirach 7:36).

Thus we see that the remembrance of death in its charac-

teristics, as an unremitting striving for attention in the mind, is not essentially different from all the other strivings of the soul towards the future eternal life, therefore also it is the target of all the powers of the tempter devil, which aim to deflect the attention of the Christian, and to focus him on the concerns of life or to disseminate the vain affairs of the present world. Thus it is that the Venerable Isaac says: “And if it were possible, he would give a man dominion over the whole world, could he but by this distraction erase this thought from his mind.” And if he could, the holy father emphasises, he would do it gladly.

See what nets are strewn around us, see what strivings we must employ on the way of our earthly life, even as the holy Apostle says: “See then that ye walk circumspectly” (Eph. 5:15). Yet we are careless, light-hearted and do not even think or reflect upon what our enemy the devil is doing with regard to each of our inclinations and our thoughts, nor that he, the all-evil one, strives relentlessly to bring about our destruction.

His satanic evil knows no bounds; burning therewith he thirsts for the destruction of the souls of men; “as a roaring lion,” he “walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Ptr 5:8). And people, stuck fast to what is earthly with all their hearts, grant the devil full freedom and even become his accomplices in their own destruction! Let everyone reconsider, enter within himself, and he will be convinced of the truth of what has been said.

...to be continued with “On Prayer.”



“THEN [after death] we will require many prayers, many helpers, many good deeds, and a great protection from the angels on the journey through the spaces of the air. If when travelling in a foreign land or a strange city we are in a need of a guide, how much more necessary for us are guides and helpers to guide us past the invisible dignities and powers and world rulers of this air who are called persecutors, publicans, and tax collectors by the Holy Scriptures.” - Saint John Chrysostom.

# An Example of True Repentance

## From the Desert Fathers

THE PARENTS of a young girl died and she was left an orphan; she was called Paisia. She decided to make her house a hospice for the use of the fathers of Scetis. But in the course of time her resources were exhausted and she began to be in want. Some wicked men came to see her and turned her aside from her aim. She began to live an evil life to the point of becoming a prostitute. The fathers, learning this, were deeply grieved and they called John the Dwarf and said to him, "We have learned that this sister is living an evil life. While she could she gave us charity, so now it is our turn to offer her charity and to go to her assistance. Go to see her then and according to the wisdom that God has given you, put things right for her." So Abba John went to see her and said to the old doorkeeper, "Tell your mistress I am here." But she sent him away saying, "From the start you ate her goods and see how poor she is now." Abba John said, "Tell her I have something that will be very helpful to her." The doorkeeper's children mocked him saying, "What have you to give her that you want to meet her?" He replied, "How do you know what I am going to give her?" The old woman went up and spoke to her mistress about him. Paisia said to her, "Those monks are always going about around the Red Sea and finding pearls." Then she got ready and said to the doorkeeper, "Please bring him to me." As he was coming up, she got ready for him and lay down on the bed. Abba John entered and sat beside her. Looking into her eyes, he said, "What have you got against Jesus that you behave like this?" When she heard this she became completely rigid. Then Abba John bent his head and began to weep copiously. She asked him, "Why are you crying, Father?" He raised his head, then lowered it again weeping and said to her, "I see Satan playing in your face, how should I not weep?" Hearing this she said, "Father, is it possible to repent?" He replied, "Yes." She said, "Take me wherever you wish." "Let us go," he said, and she got up and went with him. Abba John noticed that she did not make any arrangements about her

house; he said nothing but he was surprised. When they reached the desert the evening was drawing on. He made a little pillow in the sand and marked it with the sign of the cross, saying, "Sleep here." Then he did the same for himself a little further on, said his prayers and lay down. Waking in the middle of the night, he saw a shining path reaching from heaven to her and he saw the angels of God bearing away her soul. When he saw that she was dead, he threw himself downward on the ground praying to God and he heard this: "One single hour of repentance has brought her more than the penances of many who continue without showing such fervour in repentance."



## THE COMING MONTH

IN FEBRUARY this year as always we have the **Great Feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple**, and also this year we have the last two of the four Sundays which direct us to the fast of **Great Lent**. The first of these four Sundays, that of the Publican and Pharisee, warns of a danger in our fasting; that we should not do it as if it were an achievement, something to boast about, or as if it were a mark of our religious rectitude, but humbly, meekly. The Venerable Theodore the Studite expresses this beautifully. He says: "Fasting is good if it possesses its own special characteristics, which are to be peaceable, meek, well-established, obedient, humble, sympathetic and all the other forms of virtue. But the devil hurries to suggest the opposite to fasters and to make them insolent, angry, bad-tempered, puffed up, so as to produce hurt more than gain. But let us not be ignorant of his plans, but continue our path peaceably, gently, meekly and steadfastly bearing with one another in love, knowing that this is what is acceptable to God; for though you bend your neck double like a hoop and smother yourself with sackcloth and ashes, if these qualities are lacking to you, you would not be well-pleasing to Him." These are words we should take to heart as we approach and as we keep the fast.

The Great Feast of the Meeting itself is a beautiful link



between the Gospels concerning our Saviour's infancy and the coming of His Passion, for when the All-holy Mother of God presented her Son to the Righteous Simeon the God-receiver he spoke these words of prophesy: "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). Saint Cyril of Alexandria wisely interprets this: "Meaning by the sword the pain which she suffered for Christ, in seeing Him Whom she brought forth crucified; and not knowing at all that He would be more mighty than death, and rise again from the grave. Nor should you wonder that the Virgin knew this not, when we shall find even the holy Apostles themselves with little faith thereupon."

**Our Holy Father Nicolas, Enlightener of Japan** (3<sup>rd</sup> / 16<sup>th</sup>) was born on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1836, in the village of Beryoza, Smolensk District, into the family of a poor deacon named Dimitry Kasatkin. The child was baptised with the name John. He later won a scholarship to attend the St Petersburg Theological Academy, where he graduated with honours in A.D. 1860. After reading accounts of his countrymen's travels in Japan, John first considered missionary work in that far-off country. In 1860 the Russian consul to Japan made a request of the Holy Synod to send a pastor "who might be useful not only with his religious activities, but one who with his scholarly efforts and his personal life would be capable of giving the Japanese and foreigners as well a good understanding of our clergy." That request was passed on to the Theological Academy. Among its graduates was John Kasatkin. Learning of the consul's letter, John Kasatkin petitioned the rector to tonsure him a monk and appoint him to the Russian Consulate in Japan. There was no objection to his request. In June 1860, he was tonsured with the name Nicolas. The very same month, he was ordained a priest-monk, and became a monastic missionary. In July, the young hieromonk left for his assignment in the city of Hakodate, Japan. He later recollected, "I dreamed a lot about my Japan. I imagined it to be like a bride waiting for me with a floral bouquet in her hands. When news of Christ flooded through its

darkness, everything would be renewed. How disillusioning it was for me to arrive in Japan and see something the complete opposite of what I had imagined! I arrived, looked around, and saw that my bride was asleep, and was not even thinking about me.” Since long before, the Japanese had had a low opinion of everything foreign, and had held firmly to their own customs. Christian ethics were completely alien to the Japanese people. One can readily see that in the Samurai code: in the event of dishonour, the Samurai was obliged to commit suicide, *hara kiri*. Of course, to them Christians worshiping Christ, One Who had been crucified, seemed simply horrible. Even more so was their affirmation that this Person, who had been condemned to a disgraceful death, was God! Travel across Siberia delayed Fr Nicolas’ voyage to Japan, a fortuitous event, for he met another renowned Orthodox missionary, Saint Innocent Veniaminov (1797-1878). The missionary bishop, later to be known as the “Apostle to America,” shared his insights from nearly forty years of experience in the Far East and Alaska. He emphasised that the Bible and the Liturgy should be translated as soon as possible, and the importance of being familiar with the native culture. Bishop Innocent even gave Fr Nicolas a new cassock, indicating that the Japanese would not believe that God is Almighty if His evangelist looked like a beggar. For eight years, the young missionary studied Japan. Everything interested him, its language, its customs, and its moral code. By 1868 he spoke rudimentary Japanese, and acquired a better understanding of Japan’s history than did the Japanese themselves. Apparently the early years of his mission served only to confirm that sad idea of his mission being humanly impossible. After eight years, the Orthodox missionary’s flock in Japan consisted of a mere twelve people. Toward the end of his life, however, in Japan there were already 266 communities, with a bishop, an archbishop, 35 priests, 116 preachers, and approximately 33,000 laypeople. Among the first Japanese people to be converted to Orthodoxy by Fr Nicolas was Sawabe. That Saul-turned-Paul was a Shinto priest who was held in universal respect and lived in complete material contentment. He once happened to visit the young priest only to express his scorn for and hatred of the

Christian Faith. He began his discussion with pointed ridicule, but in the course of the talk became progressively more reflective. The next day Sawabe returned, and at the conclusion of the discussion asked to begin studying Christian teachings. He brought a brush and ink to the first lesson. Fr Nicolas would relate the story of the Old Testament, and Sawabe would record it in kanji hieroglyphs. One year later, Sawabe brought his friend Dr Sakai to see Fr Nicolas. Another year later, another physician, Dr Urano, joined them. Much later, during their baptism (Fr Nicolas was in no hurry to baptise them, for he wanted to afford his disciples the opportunity to better learn and accept the truths of that new Faith), they were given names of Apostles, Paul, James and John. In 1870, Fr Nicolas was appointed director of the newly re-established Japanese Orthodox Mission. In 1871, persecution against the Christians began in that land. Paul Sawabe was incarcerated along with another eight Orthodox believers. Over one hundred people were called in for questioning. Soon, however, everything changed. The old anti-Christian directives were rescinded. Fr Nicolas set about building churches and schools, and later, a religious school as well. He translated religious service books into Japanese, and compiled a glossary of theological terms. By then, there were already 4,000 believers. John Sakai was ordained a deacon. Five years later, Nicolas became the first bishop of Tokyo, where he erected the Cathedral Church of Christ's Resurrection. The Russo-Japanese War began. In an epistle to the Japanese Orthodox, the holy Hierarch Nicolas wrote, "It pleased God to permit a rift between Russia and Japan. May His holy will be done... Brothers and sisters, do everything required of you as loyal citizens in these circumstances..." As a Russian patriot, he no longer served public Divine Services, at which prayers for Japanese victory were offered. During the War, Bishop Nicolas was the only Russian at the Mission. He visited his compatriots who were prisoners of war, and did everything he could to assist them. Meanwhile, during the War, his Japanese flock grew ever larger. In 1905, 627 people were baptised! In 1906, the Holy Hierarch was rewarded for his ascetic labours by being raised to the rank of Archbishop. Despite this clear evidence that the

higher ecclesiastical authorities were well disposed toward him, he remained to the end of his days the image of absolute humility, never extolling himself over anyone in any way. The following words are recorded in his diary: “I bow down before glorious eldership, and reproach myself for my own, petty inspiration to work, and even in that, only that little work, without regard to everything else in the world. What poverty and narrowness of nature! I can see that I am of use only to Japan, to an insignificant corner of the world!” On 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1912, in his 70<sup>th</sup> year, the holy Hierarch peacefully departed to the Lord. He became the first European to be buried in the ancient cemetery of Tokyo. From his repose to the present, Saint Nicolas has been venerated in Japan as a great righteous one and prayerful intercessor before God. The Resurrection Cathedral in Tokyo is popularly known as “Nikolai-do.”

Our holy **Father Parthenius, the Wonderworker of Lampsacus** (7<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup>) was the son of the deacon Christodulus from Melitopolis on the Hellespont. Although illiterate, he listened attentively to the reading of Holy Scripture in church, and he did his best to put what he heard into practice. Working as a fisherman, he would give whatever he earned from the sale of his catch to the poor, keeping nothing for himself. His charity became well-known in the area, and Philetus, the Bishop of Melitopolis, obliged him to accept ordination to the priesthood, with a commission to traverse the diocese visiting the Christians in their homes. The grace of God brought forth abundant fruit in him through many miracles and healings. One day, he met a man on the road whose eye had been dislodged by the horn of a bull. He restored the eye to its socket and healed the wound. On another occasion, he cured a woman of a fatal cancer solely by the sign of the Cross. Then again, when a mad dog attacked him, he brought the creature down dead with a simple puff of his breath. Confronted by so many indications of divine favour, Ascholius, the Metropolitan of Cyzicus, consecrated him Bishop of the city of Lampsacus, which was still in the depths of idolatry. By means of fasting, prayers and inspired words, and

through the example of his evangelic way of life, the Saint succeeded in converting the city. When he visited the court of Saint Constantine the Great he was authorised to destroy the pagan temples of Lampsacus and given funds to build a church. On the completion of the building, a large stone was being brought to cover the altar when the envious devil caused the oxen to go out of control, resulting in the death of the driver who was crushed beneath the wheels of the cart. The Saint immediately addressed a fervent prayer to the Lord, and the dead man was restored to life. Saint Parthenius was the loving father and the very providence of his city. He unfailingly healed every illness, making the doctors superfluous, to their great vexation. As light scatters darkness, at his coming the demons took flight. One day he commanded a devil to depart from a poor man, but the evil spirit entreated him, "Give me a place where I can live until the time of the dread Judgement or, at least, let me inhabit swine" (cf. Matt. 8:32). "By no means," the Saint replied, "but when you come out of this unfortunate there is someone else waiting for you." "Who is that?" "It is me! Come and dwell in me!" The evil spirit fled at these words, crying out as though scorched, "How could I enter God's house? Great is the power of Christians!" One day Parthenius went to Heraclea, the chief city of Thrace, whose Bishop Hypatian was very ill. God revealed to the Saint that avarice was the true cause of his disease. "Get up," he told the prelate. "You're not suffering from a bodily illness but from a spiritual one. Let the poor have the goods that you're withholding from them and you'll get better." Conscious of his sin, Hypatian offered all his goods for Parthenius to distribute to the needy. "But no," said the man of God, "since God grants you strength, it is up to you to give the poor what they have a right to." The Metropolitan then had himself carried to the Church of Saint Glykeria, the patroness of the city, and he distributed all his possessions to the needy assembled there. Three days later he was restored to health. While staying at Heraclea, Saint Parthenius healed other sick people, and

blessed fields and crops, predicting exactly what their yield would be. On taking leave of the Metropolitan, the Saint indicated that his own death was near at hand and he named his successor. Soon after returning to Lampsacus, he rendered his soul unto God, bequeathing to his flock the sweet savour of his miracles and the example of his holy life. As soon as they heard the news, all the bishops of the region hastened to pay their respects at his funeral and to send up to God fervent prayers of thanksgiving.

Our **Venerable Mothers Marana and Kyra** (28<sup>th</sup> Feb / 13 March) were recorded as having defeated all the others in the contests of endurance. Their fatherland was Beroea, their stock the glory of their fatherland, and their upbringing appropriate for their stock. But despising all this, they acquired a small open place in front of the town, and entering within it, walled up the door with clay and stones. For their maidservants who were eager to share this life with them they built a small dwelling outside this enclosure, and in this they told them to live. Through a small window they kept a watch on what they are doing, and repeatedly roused them to prayer and inflamed them with divine love. They themselves had neither house nor hut, but lived in the open-air. A small window was made for them, through which they took in the food they needed and talked with the women who come to see them. This was only permitted in the season of Pentecost; during the rest of the time they embraced the quiet life. It was Marana alone who talked to visitors; no one ever heard Kyra speak. They wore irons, and carried such a weight that Kyra, with her weaker body, was bent down to the ground and quite unable to straighten her body. They wore mantles so big as to trail along behind and literally cover their feet and in front to fall down right to the belt, literally hiding at the same time face, neck, chest, and hands. Bishop Theodoret of Cyrus begged them to take off the iron weights, and they complied while he was briefly with them. In this way they lived for forty-two years; and despite having

contended for so long a time, they loved their struggle as if they had only just entered on the contests. For contemplating the beauty of the Bridegroom, they bore the labour, and pressed on to reach the goal of the contest: the Beloved standing and pointing to the crown of victory. Because of this, in suffering the assaults of rain and snow and sun they felt neither pain nor distress, but from apparent afflictions reaped joy of heart. Emulating the fast of the inspired Moses, three times they spent forty days without food. Three times also they emulated the abstinence from eating of the godly Daniel, completing three weeks and only then taking nourishment. On one occasion, out of a desire to behold the sacred places of the saving sufferings of Christ, they hastened to Jerusalem, enjoying no nutriment on the way. It was after reaching that city and accomplishing their worship that they partook of food, and then they returned completing the journey without food. Conceiving a desire to behold as well the shrine of the triumphant Thecla in Isauria, so as from all sources to kindle the firebrand of their love for God, they journeyed both there and back without food - to such a degree had divine yearning driven them, so much had divine love for the Bridegroom driven them. By such a way of life they have adorned the female sex, becoming models for other women.



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

**PASTORAL VISIT OF METROPOLITAN  
AMBROSE OF METHONI**

OUR BISHOP, **Metropolitan Ambrose**, paid a brief visit to England. He spent one day in London and then came to



Saint Edward Brotherhood on Friday, 17<sup>th</sup> / 30<sup>th</sup> December and spent some time attending to the pastoral needs of parishioners. On Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> December / 1<sup>st</sup> January, the Sunday of the Genealogy of our Saviour, he celebrated the Parish Divine Liturgy, assisted by **Archimandrite Daniel, Fr Borislav Popov and Priestmonk Sabbas**. His Grace mentioned with sadness in his sermon how the celebration of the Nativity has been replaced for so many people by a Mid-Winter Festival, and that even nominally Orthodox societies have accepted this. After the Parish Breakfast, where he mingled among the people, Metropolitan Ambrose was taken back to London by **Anastasia Panagiotidou** and family. He spent one more day in London, returning to the continent on the Tuesday.

## ***CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION***

FOR BOTH the Vigil service and the Divine Liturgy for the Great Feast of the Saviour's Nativity the church was packed. Assisted by Fr Borislav, Archimandrite Daniel served at the Vigil, and they and Fr Sabbas concelebrated the Divine Liturgy together. Instead of a sermon, Fr Daniel read the **Synodal Message from our Bishops**. After the Liturgy, participants made their way to the **Lord Pirbright Hall** on Pirbright Green where we held our celebratory Parish Breakfast together. We were joined there by several people that we know in the area, and the foods were brought by members of our congregation. During the celebration, a concert was held, starting with the **Sunday School children** singing English carols. They also put on a short and edifying play, and then **Teodora Sion** gave a beautiful recital playing the flute. Lastly, one after another, **Greek, Romanian and Bulgarian parishioners** sang carols from their homelands. The Bulgarians did so in their colourful traditional national costumes and accompanied by a drum! The Greeks and Romanians, obviously being more reticent in disposition, did theirs simply dressed as peoples from commuter-land! The sweet voice of Woking, **Ann Tilbury**, who writes a weekly column in the **Woking News & Mail**, was one of the guests, and she has given us quite a write-up in the 19<sup>th</sup> January paper.

## ***THEOPHANY CELEBRATION***

UNDOUBTEDLY one of the most beautiful and significant services for the **Theophany Great Feast** is the **Vespertal Liturgy of Saint Basil** served after the **Royal Hours** on the eve of the feast, and this year quite a number of our parishioners attended. Priestmonk Sabbas served, and in the evening Fr Daniel served the Vigil service for the feast. On the day of the feast itself, Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> / 19<sup>th</sup> January, Frs Daniel, Borislav and Sabbas served together, and after the service parishioners made their way in car convoy to the home of **Robin and Mary Haigh**, on the banks of the Abbey River in Chertsey, where from **Saint Edward's Bridge** the Great Blessing of Waters was celebrated again. Then the Haighs, showing us extraordinary hospitality, provided refreshments in the early medieval barn that lies on their property, aided this year by some of our parishioners. Although very cold, the weather was bright, crisp and dry. Apparently it has been found that some of the timbers in the barn were taken from a tree that was growing two thousand years ago, at the time of our Saviour. And the site of our ceremony is, of course, very near that of the monastery founded there in Saxon times by St Erkenwald, and where in the late ninth century approximately ninety monks were burned in their monastery by invading Vikings, and thus died as martyrs.

## ***BURIAL AT SAINT EDWARD'S***

ON 16<sup>th</sup> January, **Theodora Zygkostioti** was laid to rest in Saint Edward's cemetery. Her funeral had been held in the **Church of Sts Panteleimon and Paraskeve, Harrow**, and both were served by the **Priestmonk Eugenios**. May the handmaid of God, Theodora, find rest with the Saints and ***Memory Eternal.***

## ***HAND PAINTED ICON***

AN ICON of the **Venerable Martyr Evgenia** (feast day: 24<sup>th</sup> December) has been donated to our church by **Alexandra Galbeza** of Sunbury-on-Thames.

## ***VISITORS***

ON 6<sup>th</sup> January, **Lynn Driver** brought the **Shepperton Walking Group** to see the cemetery and they called in to visit our church during their visit.

On 16<sup>th</sup> January, **Jon Leech** of the **Brookwood Cemetery Society** and a teacher from **Woking High School** brought a group of photography students to visit the cemetery and they asked also to visit the church.

## ***THE BROTHERHOOD'S ORTHODOX AID FUND***

DURING 2022, civil year reckoning, our **Orthodox Aid Fund** donated a total of **£15,974.08** to various church, humanitarian, cultural and environmental causes. Of this amount **£5,782.43** was given to various missions and causes within our four sister Churches, the Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian and Russian **Traditionalist Orthodox Churches**, and **£5,264.70** was donated to the relief of the conflict-torn Ukraine for humanitarian aid to the peoples suffering there.

## ***Practical Tip***

MAKE SURE that your parish office has your full contact details, name, address, telephone numbers and email address. It would seem that any committed Christian would do this, but it seems that many do not. I remember years ago when many Russians did not do so because they were afraid that they would be tracked down and might be sent to the Soviet Union because of the Yalta Agreement, but such fears should not be prevalent today and it may be that there is an emergency and a priest is needed, but he does not have the information necessary to contact you or reach you.