

# *The Shepherd*

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## **Homily on the Day of the Lord's Ascension**

ARCHPRIEST RODION PUTYATIN, +1869 A.D.

*"So then after the Lord had spoken unto them,  
he was received up into heaven."* (Mark 16:19).

YOU, Christian listeners, after your death, do you want to go to Heaven, to the Kingdom of Heaven, where our Lord Jesus Christ is now? Of course, you say: We want this. What shows that you want this? Whoever wants something, thinks about it; but do we often think of Heaven? Whoever wants something, talks about it; but how often do we talk about Heaven? Whoever desires something, works for that, labours; but are we working for Heaven, are we labouring? Whoever desires something, asks God most of all for it; but do we ask God most of all for the Kingdom of Heaven when we pray? And now, have we come to the temple of prayer for the Kingdom of Heaven? Ah, listeners, in our life it is almost impossible to see that we want to be in Heaven.

What do we want? Where will we be after death? In the future life there are only two divisions, two places: Heaven and Hell, the Kingdom of Heaven and darkness, and, therefore, whoever does not ascend to Heaven after death will fall into Hell. Without a doubt, we do not want to be in Hell. May the Lord God deliver everyone from the place prepared for the devil and his aggression! So what do we want? What do we care about, why do we work, why do we worry? We don't know ourselves! Yes! Our life sometimes bears little resemblance to the life of rational beings, even less resembles the life of the followers of Christ. What kind of followers of Christ are we when we do not strive to where He, our Lord, is now? What kind of rational beings are we when we don't want to ponder, to think about where we will be after death?

We may think about our salvation, want salvation, but to achieve it, we cannot without Thy help to us, O Lord!

Christ Jesus, who ascended into Heaven, give me understanding by Thy grace, for I do not know what I am doing; and whether I want it or not, save me, guide me on the path to Thy Heavenly Kingdom. Amen.



## **The Fruits of Pentecost in the Life of the Believer**

SAINT INNOCENT, BISHOP OF ALASKA, LATER  
METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW, + 1879 A.D.

WHILE WALKING the path of Christ, you should not rely only on yourself. If Jesus Christ, our Great Benefactor, had not given us help every step of the way, no one could have reached salvation. Even the Apostles, when left to themselves, were unable to follow Jesus and faintheartedly dispersed. But when on Pentecost they received help from Above, they joyfully followed His path, and then neither dangers nor difficulties nor death itself could discourage them.

What is this help given by Jesus Christ to Christians? This help is the Grace of the Holy Spirit. God's grace surrounds us, and with it the Lord draws us to Himself. All who wish can receive this help and become filled with it.

The Holy Spirit, being God, equal to the Father and the Son, is the source of life and strength. He gives to believers wisdom, inner peace and inspiration, not according to their merits but for Jesus Christ's sake. How the Holy Spirit helps us, what are His gifts, and how one should attract His Grace will now be explained in accordance with the Holy Scriptures.

1. When descending upon a Christian, the Holy Spirit gives him faith and light. No one can have a true living faith without the Holy Spirit. Even a person most learned in Scriptures is totally blind without His enlightenment. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit can make even the lowest simpleton wise and disclose God's mysteries to them.

2. Descending upon a Christian, the Holy Spirit brings true love which warms his heart. This love inspires a person to do good deeds, so that for him there is nothing impossible or terrifying anymore.

God's commandments, which appeared to be difficult before, now become easy. Faith and love, gifts from the Holy Spirit, are such powerful means that the person possessing them can easily and joyfully follow the path of Jesus Christ.

3. The Holy Spirit corrects a worldly outlook and attitude, so that a Christian is no longer overwhelmed by the temptations of this passing world. Gratefully using what God has bestowed, a true Christian does not become attached to anything temporary but considers himself a stranger in this world and wishes most of all to be in contact with God. On the other hand, a person without the grace of the Holy Spirit, despite all his learning and capabilities, always remains a worshipper of the world and a slave of the flesh.

4. The Holy Spirit gives a Christian wisdom. This is illustrated very obviously in the case of the Holy Apostles. Because of their low social position, they were the most simple and unlearned of men. However, after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them on the day of Pentecost, they received such wisdom and power of speech that even philosophers and orators could not stand up to them. The Holy Spirit always teaches Christians what they must do, and when and how they should act. Thus guided by the Holy Spirit, they will always find the time and the means for the salvation of their soul. Amid all the turmoils of the world and in spite of being busy, they will be able to collect their inner self to be with and pray to God. Whereas a non-spiritual person, cannot focus or pray sincerely, even in church.

5. The Holy Spirit gives Christians true joy and undisturbable peace. They feel this peace and joy even during external difficulties and in times of trial. People, on the other hand, who do not have the Holy Spirit, can never truly rejoice or attain inner peace. When they enjoy themselves, they find their joy is transient, frivolous and pitiful, and on occasion even sinful. After their revelry, a boredom greater than ever before fills their heart. Similarly, when a non-spiritual person feels tranquillity, this is not a true spiritual peace but a sort of dozing or apathy. Woe to the people who do not awaken in time and do not start being concerned with the salvation of their souls! They will remain spiritually dead even while alive physically.

6. The Holy Spirit gives true humility. Even the most intelligent people, if they do not possess the Holy Spirit, cannot know themselves well enough, because their internal illness and spiritual poverty are hidden from them. When they do something good or act honestly, they become haughty, look down on others, and even judge those who

in their opinion are inferior to them. Through their own blindness, many self-satisfied falsely righteous ones did not ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and strengthening, and consequently, perished. The Holy Spirit always comes to those who ask for enlightenment and help. As a bright ray of sun penetrates the darkness, enhancing the smallest details found within, so does the Holy Spirit, having descended upon people, disclose to them all the weakness and wretchedness of their soul. Enlightened by the Heavenly light, Christians can no longer boast about their good works, because they realise their soul needs healing and complete renewal. This realisation makes them more humble, and they begin to repent and decide to live more carefully. They stop relying on themselves and ask God for guidance and help.

7. The Holy Spirit grants true fervent prayer. Until they receive the Holy Spirit, people cannot pray in a manner truly pleasing to God because they cannot control their scattered thoughts and feelings. Christians in whom the Holy Spirit resides, however, vividly feel the presence of God; their prayer flows evenly, and they know how and for what to ask God. In this inspired state, they can beseech God for anything, even the seemingly impossible.

This is a short list of the most needed gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In summary, it is impossible to enter the Kingdom of Heaven or even come close to it without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we should implore the Holy Spirit with all earnestness to come dwell in us and help us, just as He helped the Holy Apostles. In order for the Holy Spirit to be kind toward us, to descend and reside within us, it is important to know what draws Him to us and what pushes Him away.

Jesus Christ said that the Holy Spirit “bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh” (Jn. 3:8). This means that a person cannot force the Holy Spirit to come to him or predict the time when He may decide to do so. You can only feel His touch when this happens. Indeed, the book of Acts states that when the Holy Apostles and other Christians received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, it was always unexpectedly. He seldom descends immediately on those beseeching Him but does so when it suits Him, as God, to do so. No one should attempt to foretell when or what gifts, if any, he will receive or to consider himself worthy of His descent! The Grace of the Holy Spirit is a gift of His endless mercy. And gifts by definition are given when it suits the

giver, and only those deemed suitable by the giver.

It is the Holy Spirit Himself Who established within the Church the means of distributing His blessings to the faithful: the Holy Mysteries and other liturgical services. Non-Orthodox Christians are sadly mistaken when they assert that they can always, whenever it suits them, receive the Holy Spirit through well-known means (which are unfortunately also used during spiritual seances and pagan mysteries). Those who dare to orchestrate these means will not only remain empty of the divine gifts but also commit a terrible sin against the Holy Spirit.

Anyone who considers asking the Holy Spirit for beneficial gifts must know that these gifts are meant only for those who possess true faith. Indeed, the Lord first of all enlightened the Apostles with the true doctrine and then bestowed upon them the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the Apostles did not bestow beneficial gifts upon newly-baptised Christians immediately, but only after a certain period of testing and affirmation in the true faith. That is why the Lord called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Truth, and His Church, the beatified community of the faithful, is called in Scripture “the pillar and ground of the truth.”

Therefore, when a Christian, humbly and obediently, has accepted Christ’s faith in all its purity, without any corrections or misinterpretations, then the following are the requirements to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

- Purity of heart and chastity
- Humility
- Listening to the voice of God
- Prayer
- Self-denial
- Reading the Holy Scriptures
- Sacraments of the Church, especially Holy Communion.

To receive gifts from the Holy Spirit, you must, first of all, cleanse your heart of sin, self-love, and pride. The Holy Spirit always surrounds us and wishes to fill us, but the evil nesting within us, like a wall, impedes His path. Any sin keeps the Holy Spirit away from us, but carnal impurity and pride are especially offensive to Him. So, if we do not want the Holy Spirit, Whom we received in Baptism, to depart from us, or if we have pushed Him away through our sinful life and now want Him to return, here is what we must do:

1. Cleanse yourself with repentance and sincere confession. Then

shun all sinful thoughts and wishes. In view of the terrible lewdness of contemporary society, a Christian must protect himself from all that may pollute his soul and keep his flesh from lustfulness. Indeed, our body was designed to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. When a person is clean internally and externally, the Holy Spirit settles within him. In the presence of chastity, the only obstacle for the Holy Spirit is your pride in your righteousness and your regard of His gifts as your just reward. If you have unfortunately defiled yourself, then stop sinning and repent. With a contrite heart regret that you have offended God, your most loving Father, and strive to live with greater vigilance. Then even you will be able to receive the Holy Spirit.

2. One of the surest ways of attracting the Holy Spirit is by humility. Even if you are an honest, just, good, and merciful man, in a word, even though you may have achieved much goodness, keep considering yourself as an unworthy servant of God. Indeed, if we examine our good works more closely, we will see that none of them are completely beyond reproach. For example, if we give alms or help someone, how often do we add conceited, regretful, self-interested, judgmental, or other such unkind thoughts to our alms or help. Of course, every good deed always remains good, even when it is imperfect. It can be likened to gold which has value even before it is purified. But as gold becomes more precious when an experienced craftsman purifies and works it, so let us entrust our good deeds to the Heavenly Master that He will make them even more valuable.

Thus, if you wish your good deeds to please God, do not boast about them. You are not the master but only an apprentice. As craftsmanship gives value to gold, so a pure and unselfish Christian love, which stems from the Holy Spirit, gives value to our good deeds. Everything that is done without Christian love, i.e., without the Holy Spirit, is not yet a fully valued good deed. Without the Holy Spirit a person remains poor and pitiful.

But humility consists not only of realising your unworthiness but also of bearing the various sorrows and adversities of life with patience and without grumbling, considering them as sent or allowed by God for our benefit. Do not say, "How unfortunate I am!" But say, "I deserve a still greater punishment for my sins!" And ask God not so much to deliver you from adversities as to give you patience and courage to bear them.

3. The Holy Spirit can also be received by listening attentively to the voice of God. God speaks to us by means of the internal voice of



our conscience and through external circumstances. It is very important to develop sensitivity in order to hear more clearly what God suggests to us. He, as a most loving Father, cares for you. Daily He calls you to Himself, warns you and enlightens you. For instance, are you unhappy, has someone offended you, has misfortune befallen you, or are you ill? In these things you can hear the voice of God, calling you to repent and improve. In time of sorrow, instead of seeking help from others or consoling yourself by frivolous distractions and amusements, turn to God and seek guidance and help from Him alone.

Or suppose that you are prospering and living well and that everything flows smoothly. Consider this also to be the voice of God. Here God teaches you to be as merciful to those in need as He is merciful to you. It is dangerous and sinful to ignore the voice of God, to remain unrepentant and unimproved during times of hardship, to fail to thank God, or not to help others when you have plenty. Even more ruinous is to do the opposite of that to which God is leading us: to grumble and become embittered in difficult circumstances or to forget God and live only for pleasure in fortunate surroundings. What might then result is that God, after repeated teachings, will turn away from you as from a stubborn child and will abandon you to your own desires. Then passions will easily overcome you, your intellect and conscience will become dulled, and you might reach a point at which you will justify even your vilest crimes as natural and common human weakness. In order to avoid such a fall, it is necessary to become sensitive to the voice of God in the Holy Spirit and to follow His admonitions.

4. The Holy Spirit can be received through prayer. Prayer is the simplest, surest, and most available means to receive the Holy Spirit. Because we are composed of body and soul, they both should participate in prayer. The primary elements of prayer are concentration and sincerity, which are attained by inner effort. Nevertheless, the body should not remain uninvolved; it can and must assist the soul in prayer by standing in reverence, making prostrations, making the sign of the cross, raising the hands, and reading the prayers aloud. Other favourable external conditions also help in prayer: solitude, silence, ikons with burning lampadas before them, incense, and when in church, church art and architecture along with soft and harmonious singing, beautiful ceremonies, etc.

But to achieve concentration and warmth during prayer is not easy. Here, first of all, it is important to establish a regular time for



prayer (for instance, mornings and evenings), and to develop stability and patience. You should constantly overcome haste, distraction, indifference and insincerity. In addition, you must strive to warm your heart with love for God. Only a sincere prayer brings comfort and peace to the heart. Much effort is necessary in order to learn to pray properly, and, as we well know, all the righteous ones strove throughout their lives to learn the art of prayer. Nevertheless, your personal effort is not enough. It is the Holy Spirit who makes our prayer to be fervent and to come from the bottom of our heart. This was well known to the saints who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, stood day and night in prayer in sweet rapture, failing the while to notice the time fleeting away.

Pray even though at first your prayer may be weak and imperfect because of your sinfulness and estrangement from God. Pray with diligence and fervour; train yourself to be sincere in your conversation with God. Thus, little by little you will learn to pray and will start to feel a sweet comfort. The Holy Spirit will have mercy on you and will come and reside in you if you show faithfulness in your efforts at prayer.

The Holy Scripture teaches: “Pray without ceasing” (1Thess. 5:17). How is this possible for people living in a secular world? If you are to pray all the time, how then are you to perform your other duties? The advice of perpetual prayer is directed not toward outward but toward inner prayer. If desired, you can turn to God internally whether you are alone or with others. Only he who does not want to pray will not find time for prayer.

5. Fasting and works of mercy aid prayer. The Fathers of the Church recommend: “If you want your prayer to fly up to God, then give it two wings, fasting and almsgiving.”

What is fasting and why is it necessary? Fasting is a voluntary self-restriction in food, drink, and pleasure. The purpose of fasting is to quiet or calm and lighten the body and to make it obedient to the soul. Overfilled flesh demands comfort and rest, disposing us to laziness, which hinders prayer and meditation. In the manner of an unbridled servant, the well-fed body rises up against its master, the soul, and wants to rule over it. While fasting, you should limit not only the type of food (dairy and meat products) but also its amount, restricting yourself to the minimal needs of the body. Then your fasting will be useful.

While fasting outwardly you should also fast internally, restraining your tongue from sinful, idle chatter and moderating your

desires and your anger while driving off unkind thoughts and impure fantasies. Experience shows that there is nothing harder than to stop the wandering of thoughts and to direct your mind to thoughts of God and prayer. This may be likened to the taming of wild horses who have long been stubborn and unruly.

Non-spiritual people do not even suspect how difficult it is to control the wandering of thoughts. Being occupied with worldly affairs, they consider their thoughts to be busy with worthwhile concerns. Only when they begin to strive toward a spiritual life and try to reflect on spiritual topics, do they begin to notice that their thoughts are murky. This is somewhat like the waters of a shallow lake. As long as its surface remains undisturbed, it looks clear; but when it is stirred, the silt from its bottom darkens the water, making it appear murky. Likewise, in the depths of our heart there lie various passions. Like silt, they rise and darken the soul when a Christian attempts to expose and struggle with them. As the Holy Fathers have explained, when people turn to God, the devil strives to darken their soul with bad thoughts and feelings in order to confuse them and distract them from their good intentions. But do not yield to his snares, and do not stray from the path of salvation. Remember that no one can simultaneously think about two subjects. If you occupy your mind with good thoughts (reading spiritual books or studying some worthwhile subject), the bad ones will not be able to linger in your mind.

Love reveals itself in works of mercy. Among such works are to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to visit and help the sick and the imprisoned, to give refuge to the homeless, and to be concerned about orphans. All this should be done with sincere and unselfish love, without any boasting or expectations of gratitude. The Saviour teaches regarding this: “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly” (Matt. 6:3-4).

6. The Holy Spirit may be received by piously reading and listening to the Holy Scriptures. Being the Word of God, they hold a great treasury of spiritual enlightenment and wisdom. The Holy Scriptures are one of God’s greatest blessings, which can be used by anyone wishing to do so. In them, the divine wisdom is presented in such an easy, approachable manner that even the simplest and most uneducated person can understand it. Many cases are recorded throughout Church history and in the lives of the saints, in which the simplest of

people, while studying Holy Scripture, were enlightened, became pious, and received abundant gifts of the Holy Spirit even while some scholars and intelligentsia read the Holy Scripture and became confused and fell into heresy. The difference was that while the first read it with simplicity of heart, seeking in it spiritual direction, the second approached it with criticism, attempting to uncover inconsistencies. Considering themselves wise and all-knowing, these last succumbed to pride and even became false teachers. Be aware that our small and imperfect intellect cannot encompass God's wisdom. God enlightens those who with a pure and kind heart turn to Him in search of enlightenment. Therefore, in reading the Holy Scriptures, lay aside all worldly wisdom and inquisitiveness. Submit to the word and the will of Him who speaks to you through Holy Scripture, and beseech Jesus Christ to enlighten you and show you the path to salvation.

There are many other books besides Holy Scripture that are beneficial for reading: the works of the Holy Fathers, the lives of the saints, inspirational stories, sermons, and other praiseworthy writings of Orthodox authors. From the books available to you, read those that are based on Holy Scripture and are in accord with the teaching of the Orthodox Church. Beware of those poisoned by heresies and non-Christian ideas.

7. Communion is another source for receiving the Holy Spirit. Regarding it, Jesus Christ said: "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood," he hath eternal life, "and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54-56). When Christians partake of Holy Communion they unite inexplicably with Jesus Christ and start partaking of His divine life. Therefore, you must go to Communion with faith, having cleansed your soul by repentance, with a realisation of your unworthiness, and with the hope of God's mercy. Since God is one and indivisible, when Christians accept Jesus Christ into their heart, they accept the Holy Spirit and the Heavenly Father at the same time and thus become a living temple of God.

As witnessed in the Acts of the Apostles and other ancient Christian writings, the faithful of the first centuries took Communion every Sunday, which then was called the Lord's day. Undoubtedly, because of this constant communion with Jesus Christ, they were as "of one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). My God, what a difference there is between them and us. How many among us seldom partake of Holy Communion, sometimes avoiding it for years!

Those who neglect to take Holy Communion do not love Jesus

Christ and will not receive the Holy Spirit, and consequently will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. So, for the sake of your salvation, partake of Communion as often as possible. The Body and Blood of Christ is a true cure for many spiritual and bodily infirmities. And who among us is perfectly healthy? Who would not want to receive helpful relief? The Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is the nourishment which sustains us on the path to the Kingdom of Heaven. Is it possible to complete a long and difficult journey without sustenance? The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is the holiness bestowed on us by Jesus Christ Himself for our sanctification. Who would refuse to be a partaker of such holiness? Therefore, do not be lazy in stepping up to the Chalice of Life, but approach it with faith and fear of God.

In summary, these are the means of receiving the Holy Spirit: purity of heart, chastity, humility, listening to the voice of God, prayer accompanied by fasting and charity, reading Holy Scripture, meditation, and partaking of Holy Communion. Of course, each of these individually is effective for receiving the Holy Spirit, but it is best to resort to all of them for our salvation.

To this it is necessary to add that if we somehow fall into sin and thereby distance ourselves from the Holy Spirit, we should not despair and think that we have irrevocably lost all blessings, but let us quickly prostrate ourselves before God with deep repentance and prayer, and the All-merciful Holy Spirit will again return to us.

From Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven.



## POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

A REPLY about the dress code for church attendance, answered interlinearly; our correspondent's thoughts in italics, our replies upright:-

***About the skirt wearing, I don't know how long I can put up with doing this. Western women now wear trousers even to important functions.***

Western women also get drunk, take drugs, commit adultery, lie, cheat, steal and murder, wear too much make-up, play cards, gamble, etc. But nowhere in our belief-system is there any suggestion that we should follow the ways of Western women, or of the World. Rather exactly the opposite!

***So do the Chinese and some Indians.***

From what I know of Orthodoxy, nor is there any suggestion we should follow the Chinese or Indians, who, by and large, seem to have not adopted any form of the Christian faith. I had always understood that our role models were the Saints.

***I would never wear them in church out of respect however.***

But you are in God's presence everywhere and isn't your home a "little church" - it is meant to be. Why haven't you made it one? Of course there are occasions when it is reasonable for women to wear trousers if their work or their leisure activities require that.



## **THE COMING MONTH**

IN MAY this year, we celebrate the two Great Feasts of the **Ascension of our Saviour** on Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> / 25<sup>th</sup>, and that of **Pentecost** on Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> / 28<sup>th</sup>. On the next Sunday after Pentecost we celebrate the fruits of that wondrous out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, the **Sunday of All Saints**. On the very next day we begin the **Apostles' Fast**. This manifests our eagerness to be counted among that company in the life of the Age to Come, and our readiness to begin the struggle that that will entail.

There are four fasting periods in the Church Year. The first before the Nativity lasts forty days, that before Pascha is actually two fasts joined together, Great Lent and Holy Week. Together they last forty-eight days. The fast before the Dormition of the Mother of God in August lasts fourteen days. This fast, that of the Holy Apostles, is the only one to vary in length from year to year. This is because it begins on a day determined according to the Paschal cycle of services, the Monday that falls after the first Sunday after Pentecost, and it ends on a day determined by the monthly calendar of saints' days, the eve of the feast of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Thus it can be as short as eight days when Pascha is late, or as long as forty-two days when it is early. This means that in those congregations that have adopted the New Calendar, it can disappear altogether

- one of the indications that their practice is mistaken. This year the Apostles' Fast lasts thirty days.

During the Apostles' Fast on Wednesdays and Fridays we keep a strict vegan diet, allowing seafoods other than fish itself as the sole exception to this. To these days the monastics and lay people who have received a blessing add Mondays also. On these days alcohol and oil are also not permitted. On Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, we keep the same basic rule, but are allowed alcohol and oil. And on Saturdays, the Sabbath, and on Sundays, the Lord's Day, and on the Feast of the Birth of the holy Prophet and Forerunner and Baptist John (24<sup>th</sup> June / 7<sup>th</sup> July) we are also permitted fish.

We must of course remember that this period of fasting, like the other three, is not simply a time to go on a special diet. Many people who have no belief in God or any interest in Him keep more strenuous dietary regimes, and for a multitude of reasons, some sensible and some simply based on conceits. Our dietary regulations are to teach us self-control and discipline in our lives, to bring the reality of our need to prepare for the feasts into our everyday lives (even into the kitchen), and to aid those more important aspects of our preparation: prayer, spiritual reading, almsgiving and care for our neighbours, preparation for confession, and resolving to amend our way of life.

Our **Holy Father John of Beverley** (7<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup>), whose feast day falls on the same date as that of the Appearance of the Holy and Precious Cross over Jerusalem, was born at Harpham, a village in the province of the Deirans, which comprised Yorkshire, Lancashire, and the rest of the kingdom of Northumbria, on the south side of the Tyne; what lay beyond it being called Bernicia. An earnest desire to devote himself to the service of God drew him as a young man into Kent, where he made great progress in learning and piety, in the renowned school of Saint Theodore of Tarsus, the Archbishop of Canterbury, under the direction of the holy abbot Adrian. Afterwards returning into his own country, he entered the men's monastery under Saint Hilda at Whitby and struggled there. Upon the death of Eata, he was made bishop of Hexham. What time he had to spare from

his ministry, especially during the days of Lent, he consecrated to prayer and stillness; retiring for that purpose into the churchyard of Saint Michael's, beyond the river Tyne, about a mile and a half from Hexham. He was accustomed to take with him some poor person, whom he served during that time. Once in the beginning of a Lent, he took with him a dumb youth, who never had been able to utter one word, and whose head was covered with hideous scabs and scales, without any hair. The saint caused a cell to be built for this sick youth within his enclosure, and often admitted him into his own cell. On the second Sunday he made the sign of the cross upon his tongue, and loosed it. Then he taught him to say Yea, or Yes; then the letters of the alphabet, and afterwards syllables and words. Thus the youth miraculously and through Saint John's immense pastoral care obtained his speech. Moreover, by the saint's blessing the remedies prescribed by a physician whom he employed, the boy's head was entirely healed, and became covered with hair. When Saint Wilfred returned from banishment, Saint John yielded up to him the see of Hexham, but some time after, upon the death of Bosa, a man of great sanctity and humility, as Bede testifies, he was placed in the archiepiscopal chair of York. The Venerable Bede, who received ordination as a deacon and as a priest at his hands, gives ample testimony to his sanctity, and relates the instantaneous cure of the sick wife of a neighbouring thane or lord, by holy water. Several other miracles performed by him are recorded in the testimony of Bercthun, abbot of Beverley, and Herebald, abbot of Tinmouth, who had oftentimes been eye-witnesses of them. Saint John made frequent retirement his delight, to renew thereby his spirit of devotion, lest the dissipation of exterior duties should extinguish it. He chose for his retreat a monastery which he had built at Beverley, then a forest, now a market town, twenty-seven miles from York. This monastery, according to the custom of those times, he erected for the use of both sexes, and put it under the government of his disciple, Bercthun, first abbot of Beverley, which was then called Endeirwood. In A.D. 717, being much broken with age and fatigues, he resigned his bishopric to his chaplain, Saint Wilfrid the Younger,



and having ordained him bishop of York, he retired to Beverley, where he spent the remaining four years of his life in the punctual performance of all monastic obediences. He reposed on the 7<sup>th</sup> May, 721. The monastery of Beverley having been destroyed by the Danes, King Athelstan, who had obtained a great victory over the Scots by the intercession of Saint John, founded in his honour, in the same place, a collegiate church of canons. King Henry V attributed to the intercession of this saint the glorious victory of Agincourt, on which occasion a synod, in 1416, ordered his festival to be solemnly kept over all England. Four books of the miracles wrought at the relics of Saint John of Beverley, written by eye-witnesses, were produced by later scholars. His sacred relics were honourably translated into the church by Alfric, archbishop of York, in A.D. 1037, a feast in honour of which translation was kept at York on the 25<sup>th</sup> October. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, 1664, the sexton, digging a grave in the church of Beverley, discovered a vault of freestone, in which was a box of lead, containing several pieces of bones, with some dust, yielding a sweet smell; with inscriptions, by which it appeared that these were the mortal remains of Saint John of Beverley. These relics had been hidden in the beginning of the reign of Edward VI. They were reinterred in the church.

The **Holy New Martyr John of Walachia** (12<sup>th</sup> / 25<sup>th</sup> May) was born into a poor family in Oltenia during the time of Prince Matthew Basarab (1632-1654), who was a prolific builder of churches. His nephew Constantin Serban (1654-1658) succeeded him, followed by Mihnea III Radu (1658-1659). The latter took power with the help of the Turks. Walachia had been a tributary principality to the Ottoman Empire for about two hundred years already and many princes used to gain the throne by offering large sums of money to the Sultan. Mihnea probably took his throne through the same method, but shortly after he did not want to accept the heavy taxes imposed on the country by the Turks. So he made an alliance with the prince of Transylvania George Rakoczy II and the prince of Moldova Constantin Serban (the former ruler in Walachia) against the Ottomans. Shortly thereafter, in 1658 he ordered the killing of a squadron of two thousand Turkish soldiers, and attacked and

destroyed some ports and bridges on the Danube. His attack was coordinated with similar rebellions in Moldova and Transylvania. In the spring of the following year the Turks invaded Moldova and Transylvania. Mihnea reported some small victories against the invaders but finally fled into Transylvania where he died from poisoning. On their way back, the Turks crossed Walachia in the valley of Jiu and took many prisoners. Among the prisoners was our Saint John, who was then fifteen years old. A band of Turks seized him with many young people as slaves. The Turks divided the slaves among themselves once they had crossed the Danube, and John became the property of a soldier who found John to be handsome. The captives endured hunger, thirst, beatings, and fell prey to the shameful sexual desires of their masters. One day the soldier who owned him tried to force John into a lustful act, but he resisted. He even tried to tie John to a tree in order to rape him, but the young man escaped and struck the soldier, killing him. John fled, but other soldiers caught him and bound him with chains and brought him to Constantinople. The journey took several months, and the Turks subjected him to torture along the way. They led John to the Grand Vizier, who decided to give him to the wife of the soldier he had killed, so that she would decide what to do with him. The widow decided to keep him because of his handsome appearance. The next two years and a half he remained as a slave in her house and she tried to seduce him, but he resisted, even though she promised that she would take him as her husband and give him a good status, as long as he would accept to convert to Islam. He refused her offer and the woman decided finally to send him to prison and put him on trial for the murder he committed. In the prison he prayed unceasingly to Christ, in order to strengthen him to keep his faith during the tortures. Even here the widow came daily in order to persuade him, but he did not accept to renounce the faith of his ancestors. The courageous youth told her, "I would rather die for Christ than become a Turk and marry you." Finally, John was taken out of the prison and brought to a place called Parmak-Kapi, near Bezesteni, the great bazaar of the merchants, in the Galata quarter of Constantinople. There he

was hanged on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1662, being not yet eighteen, and by this means John received the crown of martyrdom. It is not known what happened to his sacred relics. His life was written by a scholar of the Œcumenical Throne, named John Karyophylis, and printed in Venice in 1799 by Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite. The Life of the Saint was introduced into the Greek Menologion in 1843 on the day of his death, 12<sup>th</sup> May. The same happened three years later, in 1846, in his native land.

Our **Holy Father Nicolas the Mystikos** (16<sup>th</sup> / 29<sup>th</sup> May) is considered one of the most remarkable patriarchs of the Œcumenical Throne, who played an important rôle in the public and ecclesiastical life of the Roman Empire of Byzantium. Born in A.D. 852, he came from an illustrious Roman family of southern Italy and was a relative of Patriarch Photius, who was his teacher and role model. Having received an excellent education, and having been a fellow student of the Emperor Leo IV the Wise, he was honoured by the Emperor with the office of *mystikos* (*mystikos* is often mistranslated in English as mystic; a more literal translation of *mystikos* would be secretary), and served as the Emperor's personal consultant. He was a successor of Anthony II on the Patriarchal Throne, and continued the policy of Saint Photius to reorganise the Œcumenical Patriarchate which then consisted of 624 Metropolises and Dioceses, and raise its influence, in particular through missionary activity to the people at the northern border of the Empire. The first period of his patriarchate (901-907) was terminated due to the notorious issue of the fourth marriage of Emperor Leo VI. The Emperor wished to enter a fourth marriage with his mistress Zoe Karbonopsina, to make lawful the rights of his succession to the fruit of their relationship, the future Constantine VII, since he had not been able to beget children with his previous three wives. Nicolas excluded the possibility of a fourth marriage, but allowed for the baptism of Constantine, on the condition that Zoe would be removed from the Palace. Leo, having accepted this condition, restored Zoe back into the Palace three days after the Baptism, and was married to her with the blessing of the priest Thomas. Nicolas did not recognise this marriage; he excommunicated the priest Thomas,

and forbade the Emperor entry into the church. For this the Emperor had Nicolas removed from his see and confined in the Monastery of Galakrion in the region of Chalcedon, although he managed to submit a written resignation from the Patriarchal Throne (1<sup>st</sup> February, 907). Euthymius became Patriarch, and accepted the fourth marriage recognising it according to *oikonomia*. During the period of his illness and before his death, Emperor Leo VI requested the return of Nicolas to the Patriarchal Throne, and his wish was fulfilled by his brother and successor Alexander. Euthymius was removed from the Patriarchal Throne, but upon the return of Nicolas there were significant reactions. A protracted struggle with the supporters of Euthymius followed, which did not end until the new Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos promulgated the Tomos of Union on 9<sup>th</sup> July, 920. It was at this time that a synod condemned the fourth marriage of Emperor Leo, proclaiming it uncanonical. In the meantime Alexander had died in 913 after provoking a war with Bulgaria, and the underage Constantine VII came to the Throne. Saint Nicolas became the leading member of the seven-man regency for the young Emperor, and thus had to face the advance of Simeon I of Bulgaria on Constantinople. Patriarch Nicolas negotiated a peaceful settlement, crowned Simeon Emperor of the Bulgarians in a ceremony outside Constantinople, and arranged for the marriage of Simeon's daughter to Constantine VII. This unpopular concession undermined his position, and by March 914, with the support of the *magistros* John Eladas, Zoe Karbonopsina overthrew Nicolas and replaced him as foremost regent. She revoked the agreement with Simeon, prompting the renewal of hostilities with Bulgaria. With her main supporter Leo Phokas crushingly defeated by the Bulgarians at the Battle of Acheloos in 917, Zoe started to lose ground. Embarrassed by further failures, she and her supporters were supplanted in A.D. 919 by the admiral Romanus Lekapenos, who married his daughter Helena Lekapene to Constantine VII and finally gained the Imperial Throne the following year. The Patriarch Nicolas came to be one of the strongest supporters of the new Emperor, and took the brunt of renewed negotiations with the Bulgarians until his death. The

letters of Nicolas to Simeon are outstanding documents of the political theory and practice of the Roman Empire of Byzantium. The Patriarch presented his political theory and urged Simeon to respect the peace between the members of the same Church and avoid bloodshed between spiritual brothers. Saint Nicolas reposed on 11<sup>th</sup> May 925, and was laid to rest in the Monastery of Galakrinon. He has been remembered by the Church as one of the greatest patriarchs who sat on the Ecumenical Throne. He was proclaimed a saint and is celebrated on 16<sup>th</sup> May. His most important works are his letters, which show the personality and erudition of this great patriarch. He also wrote a homily on the sack of Thessaloniki by the Arabs in A.D. 904. Finally, during his patriarchate, the Menologion of Saints' Lives by Saint Simeon the Translator was begun.

Our **Venerable Father Vincent of Lerins** (24<sup>th</sup> May / 6<sup>th</sup> June) was born in Toulouse, Gaul. He was the brother of Saint Lupus, Bishop of Troyes, who was a companion of Saint Germanus of Auxerre. Vincent was first a soldier, and he informs us that having been some time tossed about in the storms of a bustling military life, he began seriously to consider the dangers with which he was surrounded, and the vanity and folly of his pursuits. He desired to take shelter in the harbour of faith, calling it the safest refuge from the world. His view in this resolution was, that he might strenuously labour to divest his soul of its passions, of pride and vanity, and to offer to God the acceptable sacrifice of a humble and Christian spirit, and that being further removed from worldly temptations, he might endeavour more easily to avoid not only the wrecks of the present life, but also the burnings of that which is to come. Thus by avoiding the concourse and crowds of cities, he could follow without distraction the Psalmist's admonition, "Be still, and know that I am God." The place he chose for his retirement was in a small remote island (now known as Isle Saint-Honorat), and in the renowned Monastery of Lerins he was tonsured a monk and ordained a priest. He considered that true faith is necessary to salvation no less than virtue, and that the former is the foundation of Christian virtue, and he grieved to see the Church at that time pestered with numberless heresies, which sucked

their poison from their very antidote, the Holy Scriptures, and which, by various wiles, spread on every side their dangerous snares. To guard the faithful against the false and perplexing false teachers, and to open the eyes of those who had been already seduced by them, he, with great clearness, eloquence, and force of reasoning, wrote a book, which he titled, *A Commonitory Against Heretics*, which he composed in 434, three years after the Third Œcumenical Synod of Ephesus had condemned the Nestorians. He had chiefly in view the heretics of his own times, especially the Nestorians and the Apollinarians, but he confuted them by general, clear principles, which overturn all the heresies. Out of humility, in this book he adopted the pseudonym Peregrinus, to express his being a pilgrim or stranger on earth, and one by his monastic state, in a more particular manner, estranged from the world. He styles himself “the least of all the servants of God, and less than the least of all the saints, unworthy to bear the holy name of a Christian.” Without identifying by name Augustine the Bishop of Hippo, Saint Vincent condemns his doctrine of grace and predestination. Saint John Cassian had written his refutations before, and Saint Vincent after, the condemnation of Nestorius at the Third Council in A.D. 431, and the death of Augustine in A.D. 430. Saint Vincent reposed in peace about the year 445. His relics are preserved at Lérins. He wrote the Commonitory as an aid to distinguish the true teachings of the Church from the confusions of heretics; his most memorable saying is that all Christians must follow that faith which has been believed “everywhere, always, and by all.” In his great work, the Saint tells us that we may discover the truth first through reading Holy Scripture, for that is the basis of everything. Yet, he points out men may differ in their interpretation of Holy Scripture. How may we know which interpretation is the correct one? We know by consulting the writings of authorities within the Church, the great Saints and Church Fathers, and this we do carefully. Vincent offers three tests of accurate, Orthodox Scripture interpretation: 1. Universality, meaning the entire Church adheres to the teaching; 2. Antiquity, meaning the Synods and Fathers determined the teaching to be Orthodox;

and: 3. Consent, meaning that bishops harmoniously consulting one another agree the teaching is true. Saint Vincent observes that souls which have lost the anchorage of the Catholic faith, “are tossed and shattered with inward storms of clashing thoughts, that by this restless posture of mind they may be made sensible of their danger; and taking down the sails of pride and vanity which they have unhappily spread before every gust of heresy, they may make all the sail they can into the safe and peaceful harbour of their holy mother the Catholic Church; and being sick from a surfeit of errors, may there discharge those foul and bitter waters to make room for the pure waters of life. There they may unlearn well what they have learned ill; may get a right notion of all those doctrines of the church they are capable of understanding, and believe those that surpass all understanding.” He further explains: “In ancient times, our forefathers sowed the seeds of the wheat of faith in that field which is the Church. It would be quite unjust and improper if we, their descendants, gathered, instead of the genuine truth of wheat, the false tares of error. On the contrary, it is logically correct that the beginning and the end be in agreement, that we reap from the planting of the wheat of doctrine the harvest of the wheat of dogma. In this way, none of the characteristics of the seed is changed, although something evolved in the course of time from those first seeds and has now expanded under careful cultivation. What may be added is merely appearance, beauty, and distinction, but the proper nature of each kind remains.” His defence of the traditions of the Fathers and his condemnation of innovation and novelty in the Church are as appropriate today as they were in his time: “The Church of Christ, zealous and cautious guardian of the dogmas deposited with it, never changes any phase of them. It does not diminish them or add to them; it neither trims what seems necessary, nor grafts things superfluous; it neither gives up its own nor usurps what does not belong to it. But it devotes all its diligence to one aim: to treat tradition faithfully and wisely; to nurse and polish what from old times may have remained unshaped and unfinished; to consolidate and to strengthen what already was clear and plain; and to guard what already was confirmed and defined. After all,



what have the synods brought forth in their decrees but that which before was believed plainly and simply, might from now on be believed more diligently; that which before was preached rather unconcernedly might be preached from now on more eagerly.” By teaching in this way, Saint Vincent remained in the spirit of the Apostle Paul: “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust” (1Tim.6:20).



*NEWS 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**, was unable to be with us on Palm Sunday, as he had hoped, because his recovery from his recent operation was slower than anticipated, but although still rather frail he came for **Thomas Sunday**, 10<sup>th</sup> / 23<sup>rd</sup> April. **Alexander Rattray** kindly brought him from Heathrow on the Saturday, and His Grace was present with us at Vespers. On Sunday morning he concelebrated the Divine Liturgy with **Archimandrite Daniel, Priestmonk Sabbas and Fr Borislav Popov**. At the Little Entrance he awarded Fr Sabbas the *palitza / epigonation*. This represents a shield, originating from the thigh shield worn by soldiers during the days of the Roman Empire. It symbolises two things; first that the celebrant is a soldier of Christ, and second it reminds us of the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph. 6:17) and thus that the wearer should defend the Faith by smiting all that is erroneous. After the consecration of the Divine Gifts, **Sub-deacon Ioan Turcu** was led to the Metropolitan by Fr Sabbas, and subsequently ordained to the sacred ministry of the diaconate. Before this sacred mystery was celebrated, Metropolitan Ambrose gave a long and instructive talk on the significance of this ministry. Fr Ioan then assisted at the distribution of the Holy Gifts and at the end of the

service, after the Metropolitan's sermon on the day's Gospel reading, Jn 20:19-31, a photograph was taken of the Metropolitan with his assisting clergy, and the newly-ordained **Fr Deacon Ioan, his diaconissa Georgette and their family**, and the rest of the congregation. We ask our parishioners and friends to remember Father Ioan and Diaconissa Georgette and the family in their prayers each day that they may be strengthened and guided aright.

## ***NEW ICONS DONATED TO OUR CHURCH***

HAND-PAINTED ICONS of the holy **Hieromartyr Antipas of Pergamon, Saint Melania the Roman, Saint Teodora of Sihla and the Child Martyr Filofei of Romania**, have recently been donated to Saint Edward's. The first was painted by the Sisters of the **Convent of Saint Philothei in Sweden** and donated by **Anthony and Procla Bell**. The other three were painted in Romania and donated by **Alexandra Galbeaza**. May our Saviour ever have mercy on the donors through the prayers of His holy ones.

## ***VISITORS***

ON Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> March, **Fr John Somers** again arrived in England, this time with his son **Daniel**. They first made a pilgrimage to Durham and Lindisfarne and then came to Brookwood for the Vigil of Saint Edward the Martyr on 30<sup>th</sup> March, n.s. On the following day, the day of the feast, Fr John celebrated the Lesser Blessing of Waters and presided at the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts. Later in the day he visited East Anglia to take the Holy Mysteries to **Valentina Meade** and returned to us for the Sunday Liturgy, at which he preached. On the Monday morning he and Daniel returned to the United States.

ON 28<sup>th</sup> March, **Margaret Hobbs** of **Brookwood Cemetery Society** brought a group of about eight people to see the church, as part of their walk around the cemetery.

ON Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> April, **Emmanuel Wedlock** brought a party of about twelve pilgrims to pray at the shrine of Saint Edward. They arrived during Vespers and, after the service and being shown the church, they were offered hospitality in the exhibition room. They had earlier that day visited Corfe, where Saint Edward was slain, and had been on a walk in honour of the Martyr.

ON Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> April, **Fr Matthew Homes** of the **Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church, Erdington, Birmingham**, visited Saint Edward's, accompanied by two pilgrims. Simultaneously, **Archpriest Samir Gholam** and his family visited us from the **Saint George Antiochian Orthodox Church in London**.



## Practical Tip

DAILY it becomes more and more clear that societal norms are breaking down at an alarming rate. This in the midst of wars and rumours of wars, a proliferation of natural disasters, and environmental concerns. In the world around us there seem to be two differing reactions to this: protest activities and agitation on the one hand, and from the more conservative types and perhaps the more senior people, quiet grumbling and an almost gloating obsessive interest in marking every apparent evil and every decline in societal norms. But we, as Orthodox Christians, should always bear in mind that there is indeed a third way, one that is brought to our attention several times a day in our church services. It is the way we should strive to follow. In the oft-repeated “Grant this” litany, we have the petition, “Things good and profitable for our souls, and peace for the world, let us ask of the Lord.” So the starting point is the “things good and profitable for our souls,” and these we first have to seek by prayer, repentance, amendment of life, and then the world will become a better place, even if only one person does it. It is not at the moment, because both the protest activists and the grumblers are seeking to put everyone else right, but not themselves.



“ILLNESS is a great gift from God. The only thing that man can give to God in return is his pain.”

FROM “AN ATHONITE GERONTIKON.”