

# The Shepherd

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## FROM THE FATHERS

“CORRUPTION ceasing and being put away by the grace of Resurrection, we are henceforth dissolved for a time only, according to our bodies’ mortal nature; like seeds cast into the earth, we do not perish, but sown in the earth we shall rise again, death being brought to nought by the grace of the Saviour.”

SAINT ATHANASIUS THE GREAT, + 373 A.D.

“HE DEALS a death-blow here to those who depreciate the physical nature and revile our flesh. It is not flesh, as he would say, that we put off from ourselves, but corruption. The body is one thing, corruption is another. Nor is the body corruption, nor corruption the body. True, the body is corrupt, but it is not corruption. The body dies, but it is not death. The body is the work of God, but death and corruption entered in by sin. Therefore, He says, I would put off from myself that strange thing which is not proper to me. And that strange thing is not the body, but corruption. The future life shatters and abolishes not the body, but that which clings to it, corruption and death.”

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, + 407 A.D.

“PEOPLE were triply separated from God; by nature, by sin and by death - yet the Saviour made them to attain to Him perfectly and to be immediately united to Him by successively removing all obstacles. The first barrier He removed by partaking of manhood, the second by being put to death on the cross. As for the final barrier, the tyranny of death, He eliminated it completely from our nature by rising again.”

SAINT NICOLAS CABASILAS, + 1392 A.D.

# Homily on the Sunday of the Myrrh Bearing Women. On Spiritual Deadness

SAINT IGNATIUS OF THE CAUCASUS, +1867 A.D.

THE GOSPELS have told us today<sup>1</sup> about the exploits of the holy women who followed the God-Man during His earthly wanderings. They witnessed His sufferings and were present at His burial. The burial took place on Friday evening. While the Jews' wrath was pouring out like the fiery lava of Etna not only upon the Lord, but upon all of those close to Him; while the Holy Apostles were forced to hide or observe the extraordinary events only from a distance; while only John, the beloved disciple who leaned upon the breast of the Lord, feared nothing and remained always near the Lord. The secret disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, who had always concealed his heart's allegiance due to persecution from the Sanhedrin, suddenly disregards all the obstacles, hesitations, and anxiety that had bound and worried him until then, and he appears before cold, cruel Pilate to beg the body of the One who was shamefully executed. He receives the Lord's body and buries it with reverence and honour.

The Gospels imply that Joseph's deed was big-hearted and courageous. That is truly what it was. In the presence of the Sanhedrin which had committed deicide, in the very Jerusalem that had participated in that deicide, a member of the Sanhedrin takes the body of the God-man, killed by men, down from the tree and carries it to the garden located near the city gates and walls. There, in quiet and solitude, under shady trees, he places the body by which the bodies and souls of all mankind are redeemed in a new tomb hewn from a solid rock, with an abundance of fragrances and oils, and wraps it like a precious treasure in fine, clean linen. Another member of the Sanhedrin also took part in the Lord's burial. This was Nicodemus, who

came to the Lord by night and acknowledged that the Lord was sent from God. Having rolled a great stone to the door of the grave (“door” is what the Gospels call the low opening to the cave) Joseph has satisfactorily finished his service and so he departs. The Sanhedrin followed Joseph’s movements. Seeing him gone, it took care to set a guard at the grave and place a seal on the stone which covered the entrance. The Lord’s burial was witnessed by both His friends and His enemies. Although some members of the Sanhedrin in their frenzy and rage committed a great evil, they unconsciously brought about a great sacrifice (cf. Acts 17:18): through the slaughter of the all-pure Sacrifice they redeemed the whole human race, ended the fruitless number of transformative sacrifices, and made these sacrifices and their very institution superfluous. Other members of the Sanhedrin, representatives of all the righteous people of the Old Testament, served with a God-pleasing intention and disposition of soul in the burial of the Redeemer of mankind, and by this action ended and placed a seal upon the pious works of the sons of the Old Testament. From this point begins the exceptional service of those of the New Testament.

The holy women show no less courage than the selfless Joseph. Present at the burial on Friday, they did not deem it permissible on the Sabbath, the day of rest, to disrupt that peace in which the body of Christ rested in sacred darkness and reclusion within the sepulchral cave. The women were intent upon pouring out their zeal for the Lord by pouring myrrh upon His body. When they returned from the burial on Friday, they immediately bought a goodly amount of aromatic substances and waited for the break of the day which follows the Sabbath, ... Sunday. On that day, as soon as the sun shone forth, the pious women went to the grave. On the way they remembered that a large stone had been rolled to the grave. This worried them, and the women began to say amongst themselves, Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us? (Mk. 16:2). The stone was very great. Having arrived at the tomb, they saw to their amazement the stone rolled away. A light-bearing mighty angel had rolled it away: at the Lord’s resurrection, he had descended from heaven to the grave which encompassed Him Whom the heavens

cannot encompass, stunned the guards with terror, broke the seal, and rolled away the stone. He sat on the stone, waiting for the women's arrival. When they came, he announced the Lord's resurrection to them, telling them to inform the Apostles. For their zeal for the God-man, for their resolve to render honour to the all-pure body that was guarded by the military guard, after which the Sanhedrin in their hatred sharply watched, the holy women were the first among mankind to receive exact and sure testimony of Christ's resurrection; they were made the first strong preachers of the resurrection, as ones who heard about it from the lips of the angel. The all-perfect God is impartial: for Him all people are equal. And those people who strive toward Him with great self-denial are made worthy of a special abundance of Divine gifts and spiritual elegance.

Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us? These words of the holy women have their own mysterious meaning. They are so edifying that love of neighbour and a desire for his spiritual benefit will not allow us to be silent about it.

The tomb is our heart. The heart was once a temple, but it became a tomb. Christ enters it by means of the mystery of Baptism, in order to dwell in us and work in us. Then the heart is consecrated as a temple to God. We steal from Christ the possibility to work in us and enliven our "old man," whenever follows its attraction to our fallen will, our reason poisoned by falsehood. Brought in by Baptism, Christ continues to abide in us, but He is as if wounded and mortified by our behaviour. The temple of God not made by hands is turned into a cramped, dark tomb. A very great stone is rolled over its entrance. The enemies of God set a guard over the tomb, and seal its entrance blocked by the stone. They seal the stone to the cave so that in addition to the stone's great weight, this famous seal forbids anyone to even touch the stone. The enemies of God themselves watch over the preservation of this deadness! They have thought through and set up all these obstacles in order to forestall the resurrection, to prevent it, and make it impossible.

The stone is the soul's illness by which all the other spiritual illnesses are guarded incurably and which the holy fathers call

insensibility.<sup>2</sup> Many will say, what sort of sin is this? We have never heard of it. According to the fathers, insensibility is the deadening of spiritual feelings, the unseen death of the human soul with respect to spiritual things in a life that is flourishing with respect to material things. From a long-term physical sickness all strength can become exhausted and the body's abilities withered; then the illness cannot find any more food, and ceases to torment the body's constitution. It leaves the sick man alone and wasted, as if dead and incapable of movement due to the debilitating suffering, the terrible, dumb morbidity that is not expressed by any particular suffering. The same thing happens to the human soul. Long-term slackness of life amidst continuous distractions, constant voluntary sins, forgetfulness of God and eternity, inattention or only superficial attention to the Gospel teachings removes from our spirit any inclination toward spiritual things, and deadens it to them. Although they continue to exist, they cease to exist for our spirit because its life has ended for them - all its strength is directed toward the material, the temporal, the vain, and the sinful.

Everyone who wants to dispassionately and seriously investigate the state of his soul will see the illness of insensibility in it; he will see its broad significance, its gravity and consequence, and will have to admit that it is the manifestation and witness of his deadness of soul. When we want to study the Word of God, what boredom hits us! Everything we read seems hard to understand, not worthy of attention, and strange. How quickly we want to be free of that reading! Why is this? Because we feel no affinity for the Word of God.

When we rise for prayer, what dryness and coldness we feel! How we rush to finish our cursory, completely distracted prayer! Why? Because we are estranged from God: we believe in God's existence with a dead faith; He does not exist to our sensibility. Why have we forgotten eternity? Are we excluded from the number of those who must enter into its boundless realm? Doesn't death stand before us face to face, as it does to all people? Why is this? It is because we do not want to think about eternity; we have lost the precious foretaste of it, and acquired a false percep-

tion of our earthly sojourn. This false perception imagines that our earthly life is endless. We are so deceived and distracted by this false perception that we conform all our actions to them, bringing all the potential of our soul and body as a sacrifice to corruption, not caring at all about what awaits us in the other world. After all, we must inevitably become permanent inhabitants of that world.

Why does idle talk, snide laughter, judgment of our neighbours and derision of them beat forth from us as from a well-spring? Why do we spend so many unburdened hours in empty amusements, cannot get enough of them, are always leaping from one vain pastime to another, but we do not want to dedicate even the tiniest bit of time to reviewing our own sins and lamenting over them? Because we have acquired an affinity for sin, for everything vain, for everything that brings sin into a person, and by which sin is preserved within a person. Because we have lost our affinity for all exercise that brings God-beloved virtues into us; that multiplies and preserves them. Insensibility is rooted in the soul by the world which is at enmity with God, and by the fallen angels at war with God, with the aid of our own free will. It grows and gathers strength through a life according to the principles of this world; it grows and gathers strength when we follow our fallen reason and will, when we abandon service to God, and because we serve Him carelessly. When insensibility stagnates in the soul and becomes a property of it, then the world and its rulers place a seal on the stone. This seal consists in the concourse of the human soul with fallen spirits, in the spirit's assimilation of human impressions wrought upon him by fallen spirits, and in its subjection to the aggressive influence and domination by these outcast spirits.

Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us? This is a question filled with anguish, sadness, and perplexity. Those souls feel this anguish, sadness, and perplexity that have directed themselves toward the Lord, leaving behind service to the world and sin. Before their gaze is revealed the sickness of insensibility in all its horrifying enormity and gravity. They desire and pray with contrition, exercise themselves in the reading of the

Word of God beyond all other reading, and abide in constant awareness of their sinfulness, in constant mourning over it. In a word, they desire to become part of God and to belong to Him. They meet an unexpected resistance in their own selves that is unknown to those who serve this world: insensibility of heart. The heart stricken by its former careless life as by a mortal wound does not discover any signs of life. In vain does the mind gather thoughts about death, about God's judgment, about the multitude of its sins, about the torments of hell, about the sweetness of paradise; in vain does the mind strive to beat upon the heart with these reflections - the heart remains devoid of feeling for them, as if hell, paradise, God's judgment, sinfulness, and the state of fallenness and demise have no relation whatsoever to the heart. It is asleep in a deep sleep, the sleep of death; it is asleep, drunken with sinful poison. Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us? This stone is very great.

According to the teachings of the holy fathers, in order to conquer insensibility a person must have constant, patient, uninterrupted action against that insensibility; he must have a constant, pious, and attentive life. Such a life beleaguers the life of insensibility; however this death of the human spirit cannot be put to death through human efforts alone - insensibility is destroyed by the action of divine grace. An angel of God, at God's command, comes down to help the labouring and troubled soul, rolls away the stone of hardness from the heart, fills the heart with compunction, announces to the soul the resurrection, which is the usual result of continual compunction.<sup>3</sup> Compunction is the first sign of a heart revived toward God and eternity. What is compunction? Compunction is a person's feeling of mercy and compassion toward himself, toward his grave state, his fallen state, a state of eternal death. Holy Scripture writes of the people of Jerusalem, who were brought to this state by the preaching of the Apostle Peter and were inclined to accept Christianity, that they were pricked in their heart (Acts 2:37).<sup>4</sup>

The Lord's body had no need of the myrrh-bearers' fragrant myrrh. Any anointing with myrrh was forestalled by the resurrection. But by their timely purchase of myrrh, their early



arrival at the first rays of the sun to the life-giving tomb, their disdain of any fear brought on by the Sanhedrin's wrath and the militant soldiers guarding the tomb and the One interred there, the holy women showed and proved by experience their heartfelt dedication to the Lord. Their gift turned out to be unnecessary. It was rewarded a hundredfold by the appearance of the angel, up to then invisible to them, and by the announcement that could not be anything but bountifully true - that the God-Man has risen and resurrected mankind with Himself.

Our dedication of our life and all our strength and abilities to the service of God are not needed by God for Himself - they are needed by us. We bring them like myrrh to the Lord's tomb. We shall buy myrrh - our good intentions - in a timely fashion. We shall renounce from our youth up all sacrifices to sin; and with the price of this we shall buy myrrh - our good intentions. It is not possible to unite service to sin to service to God: the former is destroyed by the latter. We shall not allow sin to deaden in our spirit affinity toward God and all things divine! We shall not allow sin to mark us with its impressions, or to forcibly prevail over us.

Whoever enters into service of God from the very days of an unspoiled youth and remains in this service with constancy submits himself to the endless influence of the Holy Spirit, marks himself with the all-holy grace-filled impressions that emanate from the Spirit, acquires in good time an active knowledge of Christ's Resurrection, comes alive in spirit in Christ, and becomes chosen by God to be a preacher of the resurrection to his brothers and sisters. Whoever has become a slave to sin through his ignorance or inclination, who has entered into concourse with fallen spirits, has become one of their number, who has lost in his spirit the connection to God and to the dwellers of heaven - let him heal himself with repentance. Let us not put off our healing from day to day, so that death might not creep upon us unawares and take us suddenly, so that we would not be proved incapable of entering the habitations of unending rest and festival, so that we would not be cast down as useless chaff into the fires of hell that burn eternally but do not consume. The healing of old illnesses

does not happen so quickly and conveniently as ignorance might imagine. There is a reason why God's mercy grants us time for repentance; there is a reason why all the saints begged God to give them time for repentance. Time is needed to erase the sinful impressions; time is needed for us to be marked by the impressions of the Holy Spirit; time is needed to cleanse us from defilement; time is needed to clothe ourselves in the garments of virtue, to adorn ourselves in the God-beloved qualities that adorn all those who dwell in heaven.

Christ is resurrected in the person who is prepared for it, and the tomb, the heart, again becomes a temple of God. Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God (Ps. 3:7); in Thy mysterious and yet essential Resurrection is my salvation. Amen.

Translation by Nun Cornelia

1 Mark 15:43-16:8.

2 The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Homily 18.

3 The Ladder, Homily 1.

4 The Church Slavonic Scripture uses the phrase *umilashesya serdtsem*, which means they became contrite in heart.



# THE COMING MONTH

MAY this year falls completely with the radiant feast of Pascha, which lasts forty days, and among the feasts we celebrate during the month we have:

Our **Venerable Father Theodosius, Abbot of the Kiev Caves Monastery** (3<sup>rd</sup> / 16<sup>th</sup> May) was the Father of cenobitic monasticism in Russia. He was born at Vasilevo, not far from Kiev. From his youth he felt an irresistible attraction for the ascetic life, and led an ascetic lifestyle while still in his parental home, wearing chains under his clothing. He disdained childish games and attractions, and constantly went to church. He asked his parents to let him study the holy books, and through his ability and rare zeal, he quickly learned to read the books, so that everyone was amazed at his intellect. When he was fourteen, his father died and he remained under the supervision of

his mother, a strict and domineering woman who loved her son very much. Many times she chastised her son for his yearning for asceticism, but he remained firmly committed to his path. At the age of twenty-four in 1032, he secretly left his parents' home, and Saint Antony at the Kiev Caves blessed him to receive monastic tonsure with the name Theodosius. After four years his mother found him and tearfully begged him to return home, but the Saint persuaded her to remain in Kiev and to become a nun in the Monastery of Saint Nicolas at the Askold cemetery. Theodosius toiled at the monastery more than others, and he often took upon himself some of the work of the other brethren. He carried water, chopped wood, ground up the grain, and carried the flour to each monk. On cold nights he uncovered his body and let it serve as food for gnats and mosquitoes. His blood flowed, but the Saint occupied himself with handicrafts, and sang Psalms. He came to church before anyone else and, standing in one place, he did not leave it until the end of the service. He also listened to the readings with particular attention. In 1054 Theodosius was ordained hieromonk, and in 1057 he was chosen abbot. According to the Primary Chronicle: "...the monastery was completed during the abbacy of Barlaam... When Barlaam had departed, the brethren... visited the aged Antony with the request that he should designate a new abbot for them. He inquired whom they desired. They replied that they required only the one designated by God and by his [Antony's] own selection. Then he inquired of them: 'Who among you is more obedient, more modest, and more mild than Theodosius? Let him be your abbot.' The brethren rejoiced... and thus they appointed Theodosius to be their abbot." The fame of his deeds attracted a number of monks to the monastery, in which he built a new church and cells, and he introduced the cenobitic rule of the Studion Monastery written by Saint Theodore the Studite, a copy of which he commissioned at Constantinople. This rule spread to all the monasteries of Russia. Again, according to the Primary Chronicle: "When Theodosius took over in the monastery, he began to practice abstinence, fasting, and tearful prayer.... He also interested himself in searching out monastic rules. There was in Kiev at the time a monk from the Studion

Monastery named Michael, who had come from Greece.... Theodosius inquired of him the practices of the Studite monks. He obtained their rule from him, copied it out, and established it in his own monastery to govern the chanting of monastic hymns, in making reverences, reading of the lessons, behaviour in church, the whole ritual, conduct at the table, proper food for special days, and to regulate all else according to prescription. After obtaining all this information, Theodosius thus transmitted it to his monastery, and from the latter all others adopted the same instruction. Wherefore the Monastery of the Caves is honoured among the oldest of them all.” As abbot, Theodosius continued his arduous duties at the monastery. He usually ate only dry bread and cooked greens without oil, and spent his nights in prayer without sleep. The brethren often noticed this, although the Saint tried to conceal his efforts from others. No one saw when Saint Theodosius dozed lightly, and usually he rested while sitting. During Great Lent the Saint withdrew into a cave near the monastery, where he struggled unseen by anyone. Shutting himself up in a cave, he took a little bread with him, and the door was covered with earth from the outside, and the monastery’s brothers communicated with him only in extreme need through a small window, and then only on Saturday or Sunday. His attire was a coarse hair shirt worn against his body, which his disciple Nestor described as “appearing on him like a royal purple robe.” He looked so much like a beggar that it was impossible to recognise in this old man the renowned abbot, deeply respected by all who knew him. Once, Theodosius was returning from visiting the Great Prince Izyaslav. The coachman, not recognising him, said gruffly, “You, monk, are always on holiday, but I am constantly at work. Take my place, and let me ride in the carriage.” The holy elder meekly complied and drove the servant. Seeing how nobles along the way bowed to the monk driving the horses, the servant took fright, but the holy ascetic calmed him, and gave him a meal at the monastery. Trusting in God’s help, the Saint did not keep a large supply of food at the monastery, and therefore the brethren were in want of their daily bread. Through his prayers, however, unknown benefactors appeared at the monastery and furnished the

necessities for the monks. The Great Princes, especially Izyaslav, loved to listen to the spiritual discourses of Saint Theodosius. The Saint was not afraid to denounce the mighty of this world. Those unjustly condemned always found a defender in him, and judges would review matters at the request of the abbot. He was particularly concerned for the destitute. He built a special courtyard for them at the monastery where anyone in need could receive food and drink. Under Theodosius, the construction of the catholicon was started in honour of the Dormition of the Theotokos. He is also known as the founder and leader of one of the first ecclesiastical libraries in Russia, the Library of the Kiev Caves Lavra. Sensing the approach of death, Theodosius peacefully fell asleep in the Lord in the year 1074. He was laid to rest in a cave which he dug, where he secluded himself during fasting periods. The relics of the ascetic were found incorrupt by the brethren of the monastery, on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1091, and he was glorified as a saint in 1108. The relics were transferred to the main catholicon of the monastery, which had been consecrated in 1089 and as it had been established by the Saint, a second annual feast day was established in commemoration of the event. Of the written works of Saint Theodosius six discourses, two letters to Great Prince Izyaslav, and a prayer for all Christians have survived to our time. The Life of Theodosius was written by Saint Nestor the Chronicler, a disciple of the great Abba, only thirty years after his repose.

The **Great Miracle of the Panagia of Kassopitra** in Kerkyra (Corfu) in 1530 (8<sup>th</sup> / 21<sup>st</sup> May). The Monastery of Panagia Kassopitra was built before 1706. The feast of the Monastery is celebrated on 8<sup>th</sup> May to commemorate the healing of the blind Stephen, which occurred at that place in 1530. A young peasant named Stephen went to the city of Kerkyra for certain business that he had there. There he met other young men from the countryside whom he knew, and they decided to go home together. On the way they met other young people who were bringing flour from the mill to their homes. The companions of Stephen decided to forcibly take this flour, and urged Stephen to help in the theft. Stephen not only refused to participate in this evil act, but urged the others to abandon their plan as well. Despite this

the theft took place and the one who was punished was the innocent Stephen. This was because the victims lodged a complaint to the authorities, and the perpetrators went into hiding while Stephen did not hide, having not committed the crime. For this reason he walked freely back to the city one day and they arrested him. He was brought before Symeon Leone who ordered that either his hand be cut off or his eyes removed for the crime, leaving to innocent Stephen the choice; he chose the second. Now blind, Stephen was led by his mother to the Church of Saint Lazarus to beg for mercy. Yet in the city Stephen encountered derision, so they decided to go away from the city and arrived in Kassiopi. Arriving at the church of the Theotokos, there they asked the guardian monk for hospitality. The monk allowed them to stay the night in the church. During the night, while Stephen was numb from the pain, he felt someone pushing his eyes hard, and he awoke screaming. He then saw a Woman bright beyond measure, who then disappeared immediately. He then woke up his mother to tell her of his vision, and revealed to her that he could now see. Hearing the cries of Stephen, the monk ran to the church. Amazed, the monk went to the city and proclaimed the miracle. Symeon Leone himself went to the Monastery to see the miracle, and upon seeing Stephen's new eyes and the scars from the heated iron that had previously removed the old ones, he begged for forgiveness for his unjust punishment. It should also be noted that before the miracle the eyes of Stephen were brown, but after they became blue, and he would show his brown eyes which were preserved in liquid to prove he had a new pair of eyes.

Our **Venerable Father Shio of Mgvime** (9<sup>th</sup> / 22<sup>nd</sup> May) was an Antiochian by birth, and was among the Thirteen Syrian Fathers who preached the Christian Faith in Georgia. His parents were pious nobles who provided their son with a sound education. When the twenty-year-old Shio heard about the great ascetic labours of Saint John of Zedazeni and his disciples who laboured in the wilderness, he went in secret to visit them. Saint John promised to receive Shio as a disciple, provided his parents agreed to his decision. But when Shio returned home he said nothing to his parents about what had transpired. Time

passed and Shio's parents both entered the monastic life. Then Shio sold all his possessions, distributed the proceeds to the poor, widows, orphans, and hermits, freed all his family's slaves, and returned to Saint John, who received him joyfully, tonsured him a monk, and blessed him to remain in the wilderness. He laboured there with Saint John for twenty years. Then John was told in a divine revelation to choose twelve disciples and travel to Georgia to increase the faith of its people. Shio was one of the disciples chosen to follow him on this holy mission. The holy fathers arrived in Georgia and settled on Zedazeni Mountain. Then, with the blessings of Catholicos Evlavius and Father John, they dispersed throughout the country to preach the Word of God. At his Elder's command, Saint Shio settled in the Sarkineti caves near Mtskheta and led a strict ascetic life. There was no water there and many wild animals made their home in the caves, but the privations and tribulations he encountered did not shake Saint Shio's great faith. Like the Prophet Elias, Shio received his food from the mouths of birds that carried it to him. Once, after Shio had prayed at length, a radiant light appeared suddenly and the Most Holy Theotokos and Saint John the Baptist stood before him. After this miraculous visitation Saint Shio began to pray with even greater zeal, and he would spend hours alone in the wilderness. Another time, Saint Evagre (at that time ruler of Tsikhedidi and military adviser to King Parsman) went hunting in the Sarkineti Mountains. There he encountered Saint Shio and, astonished by his piety, resolved to remain there with him. The news of the ruler's conversion soon spread through all of Georgia, and many people flocked to witness the venerable father's wondrous deeds. Many remained there with them, following Saint Evagre's example. Once Saint Shio prayed to God to reveal to him the place where He desired a church to be built. He placed a lump of hot coal in his hand and sprinkled incense on it, as though his hand were a censer. Then he followed the smoke as it swirled up from the hot coal. In the place where it rose straight up like a pillar, he took his staff and marked the ground where the church would be built. When King Parsman heard about his military adviser's radical change of life, he was deeply disturbed and wandered into the

wilderness to find him. But when he witnessed the divine grace shining on Saint Shio's face, he took off his crown and knelt humbly before him. Shio reverently blessed the king, helped him to stand up, and replaced the crown on his head. Following the king's example, all the royal court came to receive Shio's blessing. A certain nobleman with an injured eye knelt before Saint Shio, touched his eye to the holy father's foot, and received healing at once. At another time King Parsman asked Saint Shio if there was anything he needed, and he answered, "O Sovereign King, God enlightens the hearts of kings. Do that which your heart tells you!" In response, the king donated much wealth for the construction of a church in the wilderness: the lands of four villages, a holy chalice and discos, a gold cross, and an ornately decorated Gospel that had belonged to the holy king Vakhtang Gorgasali (+502). When construction of the church was complete, the king travelled there in the company of the Catholicos, several bishops and Saint John of Zedazeni. The hierarchs consecrated the newly built church, and a monastic community soon grew up on its grounds. Eventually, the number of monks labouring at King Parsman's monastery grew to nearly two thousand. Many people visited this place to receive Saint Shio's wonderworking blessings, and they were healed from many diseases. Saint Shio performed many miracles: Once a wolf that had been prowling the monastery grounds ravaged a herd of donkeys. When Saint Shio heard this, he prayed to God to transform the wolf into the protector of the herd. From that time on the wolf grazed peacefully among the other animals. With the blessings of both his teacher, John of Zedazeni, and the Catholicos of Georgia, Saint Shio gathered his disciples, advised them on the path they should follow, appointed Evagre his successor as abbot, and went into reclusion in a well that he had dug for himself. There Saint Shio spent fifteen years in prayer and fasting. Finally, when God revealed to him that his death was approaching, Saint Shio partook of the Holy Gifts and lifted up his hands, saying, "O Lord, receive the soul of Thy servant!" Later, during one of the Persian invasions, the soldiers of Shah Abbas uncovered the holy father's relics and carried them back to Persia. In the same year Persia was ravaged by a terrible



plague, and the frightened invaders returned the holy relics to the Shio-Mgvime Monastery. The 19<sup>th</sup> century historian Marie Brosset wrote that every year prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, on Cheese-fare Thursday, the relics of Saint Shio rose up out of the ground from the place of their burial. Those who approached them in faith and reverence received healing of their afflictions. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Persian Shah Nadir invaded Georgia. Hearing about this miracle and becoming convinced of its truth, the enraged Shah assailed the monastery and destroyed the shrine containing the saint's holy relics. A group of Christians later gathered Saint Shio's holy relics and reburied them in their former place, but to this day they have never risen again.

The **Holy Confessor John the Russian** (27<sup>th</sup> May / 9<sup>th</sup> June) was born in Little Russia (Ukraine) around 1690, and was raised in piety and love for the Church of God. Upon attaining the age of maturity he was called to military service, and he served as a simple soldier in the army of Peter I and took part in the Russo-Turkish War. During the Prutsk Campaign of 1711 he and other soldiers were captured by the Tatars, who handed him over to the commander of the Turkish cavalry. He took his Russian captive home with him to Asia Minor, to the village of Prokopion. The Turks tried to convert the Christian soldiers to the Moslem religion with threats and flattery, and those who resisted were beaten and tortured. Some, alas, denied Christ and became Moslems, hoping to improve their lot. Saint John was not swayed by the promise of earthly delights, and he bravely endured the humiliation and beatings. His master tortured him often in the hope that his slave would accept Islam. John resolutely resisted the will of his master saying, "You cannot turn me from my holy Faith by threats, nor with promises of riches and pleasures. I will obey your orders willingly, if you will leave me free to follow my faith. I would rather surrender my head to you than to change my faith. I was born a Christian, and I shall die a Christian." His bold words and firm faith, as well as his humility and meekness, finally softened the fierce heart of his master. He left John in peace, and no longer tried to make him renounce Christianity. The saint lived in the stable and took care of his master's animals, rejoicing because

his bed was a manger such as the one in which the Saviour was born. From morning until late evening the saint served his Turkish master, fulfilling all his commands. He performed his duties in the winter cold and summer heat, half naked and barefoot. Other slaves mocked him, seeing his zeal. Saint John never became angry with them, but on the contrary, he helped them when he could, and comforted them in their misfortunes. The saint's kindness and gentle nature had its effect on the souls of both the master and the slaves. The Agha and his wife came to love him, and offered him a small room near the hayloft. John did not accept it, preferring to remain in the stable with the animals. Here he slept on the hay, covered only by an old coat. So the stable became his hermitage, where he prayed and chanted Psalms. John brought a blessing to his master simply by living in his household. The cavalry officer became rich, and was soon one of the most powerful men in Prokopion. He knew very well why his home had been blessed, and he did not hesitate to tell others. Sometimes John left the stable at night and went to the church of the Great Martyr George, where he kept vigil in the narthex. On Saturdays and Feast days, he received the Holy Mysteries of Christ. Despite his own poverty, he always helped the needy and the sick, and shared his meagre food with them. One day, the officer left Prokopion and went to Mecca on pilgrimage. A few days later, his wife gave a banquet and invited her husband's friends and relatives, asking them to pray for her husband's safe return. John served at the table, and he put down a dish of pilaf, his master's favourite food. The hostess said, "How much pleasure your master would have if he could be here to eat this pilaf with us." John then asked for a dish of pilaf, saying that he would send it to his master in Mecca. The guests laughed when they heard his words. The mistress, however, ordered the cook to give him a dish of pilaf, thinking he would eat it himself, or give it to some poor family. Taking the dish, John went into the stable and prayed that God would send it to his master. He had no doubt that God would send the pilaf to his master in a supernatural manner. The plate disappeared before his eyes, and he went into the house to tell his mistress that he had sent the pilaf to his master. After some time, the master

returned home with the copper plate which had held the pilaf. He told his household that on a certain day (the very day of the banquet), he returned from the mosque to the home where he was staying. Although the room was locked, he found a plate of steaming pilaf on the table. Unable to explain who had brought the food, or how anyone could enter the locked room, the officer examined the plate. To his amazement, he saw his own name engraved on the copper plate. In spite of his confusion, he ate the meal with great relish. When the officer's family heard this story, they marvelled. His wife told him of how John had asked for a plate of pilaf to send to his master in Mecca, and how they all laughed when John came back and said that it had been sent. Now they saw that what the saint had said was true (Compare the story of Abacum, who miraculously brought a dish of pottage to Daniel in the lions' den [Dan. 14:33-39]). Toward the end of his difficult life John fell ill, and sensed the nearness of his end. He summoned the priest so that he could receive Holy Communion. The priest, fearing to go to the residence of the Turkish commander openly with the Holy Gifts, enclosed the life-giving Mysteries in an apple and brought Them to him. John glorified the Lord, received the Body and Blood of Christ, and then reposed. The holy Confessor John the Russian went to the Lord, Whom he loved, on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1730. When they reported to the master that his servant John had died, he summoned the priests and gave them the body of John for Christian burial. Almost all the Christian inhabitants of Prokopion came to the funeral, and they accompanied the body of the saint to the Christian cemetery. Three and a half years later the priest was miraculously informed in a dream that the relics of Saint John had remained incorrupt. Soon the relics of the saint were transferred to the church of the holy Great Martyr George and placed in a special reliquary. The new saint of God began to be glorified by countless miracles of grace, accounts of which spread to the remote cities and villages. Christian believers from various places came to Prokopion to venerate the holy relics of Saint John the Russian and they received healing through his prayers. The new saint came to be venerated not only by Orthodox Christians, but also by Armenians, and even Turks, who prayed

to the Russian saint, “Servant of God, in your mercy, do not disdain us.” In the year 1881 a portion of the relics of Saint John was transferred to the Russian monastery of the holy Great Martyr Panteleimon by the monks of Mount Athos, after they were miraculously saved by the Saint during a dangerous journey. Construction of a new church was begun in 1886, through the contributions of the monastery and the inhabitants of Prokopion. This was necessary because the church of the holy Great Martyr George, where the relics of Saint John were enshrined, had fallen into disrepair. On 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1898 the new church dedicated to Saint John the Russian was consecrated by the Metropolitan John of Caesarea, with the blessing of the Œcumenical Patriarch Constantine v. In 1924, an exchange of the populations of Greece and Turkey took place. Many Moslems moved out of Greece, and many Christians moved out of Turkey. The inhabitants of Prokopion, when they moved to the island of Evvia, took with them part of the relics of St John the Russian. For several decades the relics were in the church of Saints Constantine and Helen at New Prokopion on Evvia, and in 1951 they were transferred into a new church dedicated to Saint John. Thousands of pilgrims flocked here from all the corners of Greece, particularly on his feast, 27<sup>th</sup> May. Saint John’s help is sought by travellers, and by those transporting things. The Saint has performed many wonders since his blessed repose. A descendent of the Agha told many of the following miracle: “My children would only live for a short time, and would die while yet infants. Their unfortunate mother, after she had lost hope in the wisdom of medicine, fled without my knowledge to the relics of the slave John, so that he might grant her a little child which would not die while yet young, so that we also might rejoice to see it as a young man or even a young girl ... In truth the righteous John heard the supplication of my wife. God granted us a strong little boy whom we called [in Turkish], as you know, *Kole Guvan Oglu* (that is, Son of [*oglu*] the Slave [*kole*] John [*Guvan*]), and he lives through the power of God and the prayers of John even until today.” Several times Saint John has appeared in dreams and visions warning of impending dangers. Once he warned some Greek school children

that the roof was about to fall; they had time enough to jump underneath their desks and when the roof fell, its beams came down upon the desks without striking even one of the children. More recently we have heard about the miraculous healings of two severe cases of meningitis: one a 19-year-old shepherd boy in southern Greece and the other a 3-year-old boy in London.



## POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

*“I HAVE a question. There is a Greek Orthodox church in XXX, which I was looking forward to going to, but when we entered there, I thought I was in a [Roman] Catholic church. The people were all seated, and the ladies were not wearing scarves on their heads. There was almost no room for standing, but we did for a while, then decided to leave. Apparently some still attend the service (last part of it), and take Communion without having confessed, or read any preparation prayers. Do you think that's acceptable? We will need your blessing to go there.” - M.B. by email.*

MANY THANKS for your letter and your observations about the Greek parish in XXX. In part this is why we are with the Traditionalist Orthodox. It is not simply a matter of the policies of the hierarchs, although those are of paramount importance. It is also that, perhaps through the negligence of those hierarchs, there is at all levels a slipping away from Orthodox faith and practice. Many churches now seem to run simply on the maxim of ethnic identity, and matters of Faith and practice play a very inferior rôle. Thus Orthodoxy dies. But it is not only the Greeks who are travelling down this road, so be careful not to blame them particularly. In fact be extremely careful not to judge the people in that church. Poor things have not been instructed and perhaps not pastorally cared for. I remember years ago, at Pascha urging our, then largely convert, congregation, to show a little more enthusiasm and explaining that the Greeks call coming up to receive the paschal light “the rush,” as I had been told among traditionalist Greeks when in America, whereas our English people were, of course, more reticent! I had to change my tune after visiting my mother once and seeing on the television much the same as you saw.

Women (mostly), heads uncovered, sitting in pews watching the priest and a couple of helpers standing by the *epitaphios*, as if they were simply spectators and not participants in the liturgy. A rather depressing let down. Regarding receiving Holy Communion: of course, no one should do so without proper preparation, without being present and praying at the whole Liturgy (in fact one should also attend or read at home the Vespers and Matins of that day as well), without fasting and prayer, without frequent confession. To do so is inviting spiritual danger. Regarding your particular situation: I cannot direct you, because you must ask your own spiritual father. However, in the Liturgy we are exhorted several times to confess “with one mind,” to glorify “with one mouth and one heart,” etc. How then can you partake of the Holy Mysteries if you do not find yourself to be in one mind and heart with the participants there and with their hierarchs commemorated in that Liturgy? I would think it impossible.



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

**ARCHPASTORAL VISIT**

OUR BISHOP, **Metropolitan Ambrose of Methoni**, came to England to celebrate the **Great Feast of the Annunciation**, which this year fell on the **Sunday of the Worship of the Holy Cross**, 25<sup>th</sup> March / 7<sup>th</sup> April. He was met at Gatwick on his arrival in this country on Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> April, by **Priestmonk Sabbas** and brought to the Brotherhood. On the Friday he celebrated the **Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts** with us. It was rather nice to have a quiet service like this with him, and at the end of the Liturgy he preached about that Liturgy

and its compiler, **Saint Gregory the Great, the Dialogist**. After the communal breakfast, Metropolitan Ambrose and the other trustees of the former Convent in Brondesbury Park held a very constructive meeting with **Roger Harrison** and **James Gardiner** of the charity, **Gerald Palmer Eling Trust**, which has been aiding our efforts. In the evening he also participated in the **Acathist** service and at the end of that again preached on its significance. On the Saturday morning, His Grace attended the Divine Liturgy but did not serve. At the Vigil service for the Great Feast in the evening he was assisted by **Father Borislav Popov**, Fr Sabbas and **Deacon Ioan Turcu**. They again served together at the parish Divine Liturgy on the feast day itself, and again His Grace preached on the meaning of the two celebrations. At the Parish Breakfast, Metropolitan Ambrose met and spoke with the parishioners and several newcomers to our church, and then spent some time counselling some of the people in private. In the early afternoon, he left for London, and he returned to Greece on the Tuesday just after noon. Metropolitan Ambrose is hoping to visit us again over the weekend of Myrrhbearers' Sunday, the third Sunday in Pascha (weekend of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> May on the civil calendar). We will circulate further details when we have them.

## ***CHRISMATION AT BROOKWOOD***

ON the Sunday of Orthodoxy, 11<sup>th</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> March, **Laura Lock of Farnham** was received into our Church by the mystery of Chrismation, having made her confession and the appointed vows. Formerly she had belonged to the New Calendarist Church of Romania. The mystery was celebrated between Matins and the Divine Liturgy so that she could partake of the Holy Mysteries with us for the first time on that important feast day. The celebrant was **Priestmonk Sabbas**, and **Rima Lewis** stood as her sponsor. Pray that the Saviour bless Laura, who is named for the Holy Martyrs Florus and Laurus, and Rima to remain faithful to their life's end.

## ***FUNERAL AT SAINT EDWARD'S CHURCH***

ON Tuesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> / 16<sup>th</sup> April, parishioner **Robert Castle** was laid to rest in Saint Edward's Cemetery after a funeral in our church, served by Priestmonk Sabbas. Robert, who was named after St Robert of Salzburg, had converted to Holy Orthodoxy in 2018, and was the husband of **Elizabeth**, the only parishioner here who has been with us consistently since the Brotherhood was founded in 1982. Throughout that time she has been one of our trustees and for much of the forty-two year long period she was also the treasurer of the trust. A goodly number of family, friends and parishioners attended the funeral. In his last years Robert was seriously incapacitated, but was often brought to church for the quieter weekday Liturgies, and in his last days was visited by our clergy almost daily in hospital. May his rest be with the Saints and his Memory Eternal, and may his loved ones be comforted by our Saviour in their bereavement.

## ***GIFT OF AN ICON***

ROBERT'S hand-painted icon of his name saint, Saint Robert of Salzburg, was kindly donated to Saint Edward's Church by Elizabeth, after his death. It had been painted for him by the sisters of the Holy Convent of Saint Philothei in Sweden when he became Orthodox.

## ***VISITORS***

FATHER JOHN SOMERS and his son Joseph stayed with us from 30<sup>th</sup> March till 3<sup>rd</sup> April and he celebrated the Divine Liturgy with our clergy on the Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas.

THE **Rev'd Josh Bailey**, an Anglican clergyman from **Bungay**, stayed with us from Monday, 1<sup>st</sup> April till Thursday 4<sup>th</sup>, and attended all the Divine services assiduously and fully.

**Antoine Doucet** from our parish in Meudon, France, stayed with us from Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> April until Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup>. He helped with our workload, and on departing he left us a very generous donation, so generous in fact that we were left with the im-



pression that he thought our modest guest accommodation here was The Ritz, rather than, as it actually is, The Pitz!

## Practical Tip

THE CHURCH is consecrated to the worship of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and therefore conversations therein should be kept to an absolute minimum, simply essential warnings or instructions. We can greet our neighbours and friends there outside after the service. A slight nod is all one should allow oneself, certainly not shaking hands and then chatting. Engaging in long conversations with others is wrong and causes great harm, and yet especially when on occasions when people arrive before the service begins they tend to do this. It is spiritually harmful for a number of reasons. First, the service of the Angels continues in the church at all times and we should therefore be reverently silent. Secondly, our conversation easily and freely flows into gossip, and then we fall into judging and other sins. Thirdly we are distracting the people in the church who are striving to be reverent. We are also giving the young and new-comers a bad example and teaching them to be irreverent. If you come early, sit quietly and say your own prayers, or look at the holy icons and learn who they represent and reflect on their lives and witness and beseech their prayers and help. If you have children, point them out to the children. The icons are not there just for decoration!



“LET US REJOICE in it (Pascha) even more, but in the Pascha that happens every day. What is that Pascha? Washing away of sins, compunction of the heart, tears of the vigil, a clear conscience, mortification of our earthly elements - lust, lasciviousness, fornication, passions, evil desires, and all other manner of evil. Whosoever accomplishes all of that celebrates Pascha not once a year, but every day.”

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