

The Shepherd

*An Orthodox Christian
Pastoral Magazine*

VOLUME XLIII

NUMBER 10

JUNE 2023





FROM THE FATHERS

“WHEN in His Grace God sees that self-esteem has begun little by little to creep into your thoughts and that you have begun to think highly of yourself, He at once permits the tests and trials to increase and grow stronger until you understand your own weakness and, full of humility, turn to God and take refuge in Him. In these ways you grow to spiritual maturity, with faith and hope in the Son of God, and you are raised up towards the realm of love.”

VEN. ISAAC THE SYRIAN, + C. 550 A.D.

“THE PRIEST must warn [his flock] particularly persistently against the spirit of self-justification, which is one of the principal enemies of our salvation. Some people accepted the preaching of our Saviour and His Apostles, and others rejected it. Within both groups there were great sinners and people of righteous life. What were the spiritual qualities which caused them to accept or reject the Gospel of salvation? It was almost always this: whoever had the spirit of self-justification and considered himself a decent enough person rejected the preaching of repentance, the preaching of the Gospel; and whoever considered himself a guilty sinner before God and men accepted it and was saved, like Zacchaeus, like the Wise Robber on the cross. It is the same with Christians who have come to believe. The difference between those who are being saved and those who are perishing, or are far from salvation, lies not so much in the number of their sins, but in the inclination, or lack of it, to admit that they are guilty and sinful.”

THE EVER-MEMORABLE METROPOLITAN ANTONY
(KHRAPOVITSKY), + 1936 A.D.

The Mystery of the Rapture

The Deifying Experience of the “Rapture” of the Apostle Paul “to the Third Heaven,” that is, “to Paradise”

(2 Cor. 12:2-4)

I. The “revelation” of the Apostle Paul

1. The Holy Apostle Paul, in the third and final part of his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, vigorously defends his Apostolic dignity against his enemies, the false teachers.
2. In this endeavour, he is compelled to sing his own praises, comparing himself to those false teachers, while at the same time admitting with humility that “that which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly.”
3. Having mentioned his unselfishness in the exercise of his ministry and having enumerated his Apostolic works and afflictions, he concludes by citing the special gifts that he has received from God, to wit, the “visions and revelations of the Lord.”
4. Although he had been vouchsafed “revelations,” of surpassing number and majesty, he does not advert to all of these “revelations,” but only to one; nor does he say directly that it was he who received it, but speaks humbly about a putative third person: “I knew a man in Christ,” “I knew such a man,” “of such an one will I glory.”
5. It is also noteworthy that this “revelation” took place “above fourteen years ago”; and yet, the Holy Apostle kept this a secret and no one else knew of it. He now divulges it out of necessity, in order to defend his God-given Apostolic dignity and to confirm the faithful in the face of false teachers.
6. The Holy Apostle describes “such a man” as “caught up to the third heaven,” that is, “caught up into paradise,” and states that he himself does not know, but only God knows, whether “the man who was caught up” was in the body at that time or out of the body, in ecstasy: “whether in the body, I cannot tell; or

whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth.”

7. The insistence of the God-bearing Paul on this issue shows, firstly, that it was he alone who received the “revelation,” and, secondly, emphasises that while the “rapture” indeed occurred, the manner of its occurrence was unknown to him, just as he was also unaware of the nexus between his soul and body when it occurred.

8. The Saints assure us that this admission of the Holy Apostle Paul regarding his ignorance of the manner of his “rapture,” and also his unawareness of the nexus between soul and body during this event, is not due solely to humble-mindedness, ‘but also, in truth, he did not know what it was, and even if, hypothetically, he wanted to say what it was, he did not know what to say;’ for after the ‘ineffable enlightenment’ and the ‘inexpressible radiance’ of the ‘rapture,’ he who was deemed worthy of this mystery, upon returning to himself, ‘then recognised that during that time he was outside himself, that he experienced something extraordinary and above his own nature, and that, in truth, he did not know whether he ‘was in the body or out of the body.’

II. The kinds of “heavens”

1. However, we have the following question: Since Holy Scripture frequently makes mention of more than one heaven, what was this heaven to which the Holy Apostle was suddenly transported by Divine Grace? Was it perhaps the natural and perceptible, that is, created heaven, the air, or the starry sky, the firmament? Was it perhaps the intelligible heaven, where the Bodiless Angelic Powers abide? Was it perhaps the “Paradise of [our] God,” that is, the dwelling of the Righteous and the saved, where they eat “of the Tree of life?” Or, finally, was it perhaps, in a general sense, the abode of God, where there exist His “high and uplifted Throne” and His Kingdom?

2. In the first place, it is very important for us to realise that in Oriental cosmology, and in the cosmology of popular Judaism, there was a widespread belief in multiple, successive “heavens.” In the New Testament, there are passages which may well be allusions to the seven or three “heavens” of the Jews.

3. In Jewish texts not belonging to the Canon of the Old Testament (Apocalypses & Rabbinical traditions), there is a prevailing notion of multiple layers of “heavens” above the earth. Thus, there are references to three “heavens,” five “heavens,” seven “heavens,” and one “heaven.”
4. While we are on the subject of these popular conceptions of the Hebrews, it should be noted that they locate Paradise either in the third “heaven” or in the seventh “heaven.”
5. With regard to the kinds of “heavens,” a general, but clear and fundamental distinction is introduced by the sacred Psalmist: “The heaven of heavens is the Lord’s, but the earth hath He given to the sons of men.” Above the physical heaven there exists the “heaven of heavens,” which constitutes the abode of the Lord and which is thus named in condescension to our understanding, for, to be sure, the “abode” of God is not localised; the “heaven of heaven,” the very “dwelling-place” of God, is, according to Saint Augustine, “inconceivable and invisible, beyond language and beyond comprehension;” it is “heaven,” which conceals “the light which is beyond beginning, beyond comprehension, beyond language, and beyond being” and “is exalted most wondrously above every heaven.”
6. The purpose of these characterisations, with the intensive prefix “beyond” (ὕπερ), is evidently to emphasise God’s absolute transcendence. The supracelestial “abode” of the Lord and the earthly abode of man express, on the one hand, the uncreatedness, the unapproachability, and the royalty of the Divine Nature, and, on the other hand, the createdness, the approachability, and the servility of man and nature.
7. This transcendence of Our Lord is suggested when we characterise Him as “the Most High” and believe that God is He “Who dwelleth on high,” that is, Who dwells in the heights of the “heavens.” This place “on high” is located “far above all heavens,” is established in some sense above all of the “heavens,” and it was there that our Great High Priest and Saviour Christ “ascended” after His Ascension, “that He might fill all things.”
8. In other words, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and God, did not simply enter into one of the “heavens,” but passed through all of them, was exalted above them all, “ascended far

above all things, to that place beyond which there is nothing else,” and sat on the Father’s Throne, now in the flesh, in order to fill all things with His presence and His Theanthropic gifts.

9. This truth, that which is properly called “Heaven,” in which God alone exists and dwells, and which “is not a localised heaven, but the essential [true] preëminence and state of God,” was revealed to us by the incarnate God the Word: “And no man hath ascended up to Heaven, but he that came down from Heaven, even the Son of man which is in Heaven.”

10. This supremely unapproachable and supremely incommunicable “Heaven” is, therefore, the exclusive “dwelling-place” of God the Father, of the Incarnate Word, and of the Holy Spirit, Who was sent “from Heaven” at Holy Pentecost: “with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven.” This “Heaven” conceals ‘the light which is beyond beginning, beyond comprehension, beyond language, and beyond being’ inasmuch as ‘no one knows the Father, save the Son and their Spirit; and no one knows the Son, save the Father and their Spirit; just as, therefore, no one knows the Spirit, save the Father and the Son, Whose Spirit He is.’

11. It should, however, be made clear that while “Heaven,” as the abode of Our Lord, emphatically underscores the transcendence of the Divine Nature, at the same time it expresses the omnipresence of God, and also the nearness of His presence through His uncreated Energies. Men have the feeling that Heaven encompasses them on all sides, that they are within it, that it is near them, and that it provides them with its gifts.

12. In truth, this feeling of ours about the perceptible heaven, that is, that it in some sense “loves” us and “embraces us,” is reflected in Our Lord. In other words, Heaven is an image of God, within Whom we exist, without, to be sure, sharing in His Nature. Nevertheless, we commune with Him by Grace, sharing in His gifts, His uncreated Energies: “That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being.”

13. Thus, the perceptible heaven, and also, more generally, the concept of “Heaven,” in which God exists, reminds us of, or renders perceptible to us, our relationship with the Lord, the relation

between uncreated and created, unapproachable and approachable, incommunicable and communicable, distance and proximity.

14. This distinction also constitutes a reply to the hermeneutical dilemma that arises when certain passages of Holy Writ appear, at first sight, to be mutually contradictory, such as, for example, the following:

Distance: "The heaven of heavens is the Lord's, but the earth hath He given to the sons of men."

Proximity: "I am a God nigh at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off... Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord."

III. The "spacious" House of the Father

1. The Holy Apostle Paul, therefore, did not enter into the "supremely unapproachable" "Heaven of heavens," that exclusive abode of God, since Our Lord has prepared other "dwellings" for men, as the Divine Chrysostom says: He did not make only one heaven, but also another one, showing from the outset that He was not abandoning us to the earth, but would translate us thither; for if He were not intending to translate us thither, why would heaven have been created? This realm was not of any use to Him, for He is not in need of anything. But, since He willed to translate thither those of earth, He prepared dwellings for them.

2. Did the Holy Apostle, then, perhaps enter into these "dwellings," into the "city to come," which is "better" and "heavenly," the commonwealth which is "in heaven," "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem"? The City of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, is that "place," that "house," that "tabernacle," in which, after our resurrection, "bearing the image of the heavenly," that is, having acquired a "qualitative" similarity to Our Lord - "as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly" - we shall henceforth dwell for eternity as the "People of God"; then the Lord will be with us, in our midst, eternally!

3. However, this "place," in which, being henceforth "heavenly," we shall "dwell" with our Saviour - "that where I am, there ye may be also" - this "House of the Father," wherein there "are many mansions," is not defined spatially, but figuratively. In other words, after our resurrection, we will not be "flesh and

blood;” we will neither be marked by “corruption” and “mortality,” nor will the experience and limitations of perceptible reality any longer be in effect, since “we shall all be changed,” shall “put on” “incorruption” and “immortality,” and shall have become uncreated according to Grace.

4. This preternatural relationship with the Heavenly Father through our elder Brother Jesus Christ makes us His kinsmen, vouchsafes us to be His children, to be His “friends and neighbours,” whom He “summons” to “rejoice” with Him over the salvation “of His sheep which were lost.” Since, therefore, we will all together make up the Heavenly Family, it is natural that we shall abide in a common “house,” which has many “mansions,” many rooms, many “apartments;” the different orders of the inhabitants of heaven, the “friends” and “neighbours,” suggest that each of them - in proportion to the purity and illumination that he was vouchsafed in his earthly life - dwells in a corresponding “mansion,” that is, enjoys a corresponding degree of communion with God and of heavenly glory.

5. The Saints assure us that “the many mansions signify the different degrees of honour in that one eternal life.” They also indicate the spaciousness of “heaven,” since it can encompass or contain both the Holy Angels and the Saints and the Righteous from all the ages until the consummation, who, while preserving their personality and individuality, will each have his own “portion” in the Kingdom of Heaven.

6. Abba Isaac the Syrian explains that our Saviour characterises as “many mansions of the Father” the distinctions and differences of spiritual gifts, that is, “the noetic levels of those who dwell in that realm,” on the basis of which they will enjoy the corresponding delight. Just as each person delights in the sensible sun according to the acuity of his vision and perception; and just as when a single lamp shines in a house, the radiance is different, although the light is not divided into many different beams of brightness, so also in the age to come, all of the Righteous will dwell without distinction in a single realm, but each will receive illumination from the one noetic Sun according to his own spiritual level, and gladness as from one air, one place, one dwelling, one vision, and one outward

appearance.

7. However, this difference in “noetic levels” and “spiritual gifts” in the heavenly “mansions” will not be visible, lest those who are “inferior” should feel distress and anguish at the exceeding Grace of those who are “superior.” And no one will see the spiritual level of his neighbour, be he either superior or inferior, lest, on seeing the exceeding Grace of his neighbour and his own deficiency, this become for him a cause of distress and anguish. God forbid that this should be so, where there is neither sorrow nor sighing. Rather, each person, according to the Grace given him, according to his spiritual level, will rejoice within himself. The inner vision of all is one, and the joy is one.

8. Saint Cyril of Alexandria summarises these ideas very beautifully: ‘When [the Lord] teaches that Heaven is very spacious,’ ‘it seems likely that, in saying that there are many mansions, He wishes also to indicate the different grades of honour, implying that each one who desires to live a life of virtue will receive, as it were, his own place and the glory that befits his accomplishments.’

9. Holy Scripture also gives us a panorama of this wondrous future state: ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them’; ‘In My Father’s house are many mansions’; ‘I go to prepare a place for you’; ‘that where I am, there ye may be also’; ‘that ye may behold My glory, which the Father hath given Me’; ‘and so shall we ever be with the Lord.’

10. It is, therefore, clear that then, in the “House of the Father,” we shall not be simply and solely in the same place as our Saviour, but also in the same state; we shall not be merely spectators of His glory, but actually partakers and sharers of it; then Christ will be “complete,” for He will be together with all of His members, which constitute His Church, “which is His Body.” He is the Head, and we are His members; He is the “firstborn,” and all of us, who are like Him according to Grace and united with Him, will form the “assembly of the firstborn;” then Our Lord will be made wondrous and glorified in each of His members separately, and every member will also be made wondrous and glorified in Christ.

11. We shall then experience the promised mystery in its fullness: 'At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you'; 'I am by nature in the Father; for I am the Fruit and genuine Offspring of His Essence, subsisting in Him and existing from Him, Life from Life;' 'and He is also Himself in us; for we have all been made partakers of Him, and have Him in ourselves through the Spirit.'

12. However, in speaking of the "House of the Father" and the "Tabernacle of God," in which we shall dwell with the Lord eternally, we should never forget, on the basis of what we have said previously, that the Divine Essence is unapproachable and incommunicable: "No man hath seen, nor can see" God; "No man shall see the face of God, and live;" "No man hath seen God at any time;" "No man hath beheld God at any time."

13. This inability of ours to "see" God emphasises, we repeat, the unapproachability of God's Essence; the "dwelling-place" of God is the "Light," and this is "unapproachable;" but if His "dwelling-place" is "unapproachable," how much more unapproachable, and therefore incomprehensible, is He Who dwells therein?

14. The commentary of the Divine Chrysostom on this Apostolic idea is very apposite: He did not say, 'being unapproachable Light,' but 'dwelling in unapproachable Light,' so that you might learn that if the house is unapproachable, how much more is God, Who inhabits it. He said these things, not so that you might suppose that God occupies a house or a place, but so that you might become all the more abundantly aware of His incomprehensibility. But neither did he say 'dwelling in incomprehensible Light,' but rather 'dwelling in unapproachable Light,' which is far greater than incomprehensible Light.

15. And yet: while God is "beyond all things," while He exists "beyond all being and human conception," and is He Whom "no man hath seen, nor can see," in the future life those who are uncreated according to Grace, the "heavenly ones," will see Him "face to face." To be sure, even in this life "the pure in heart" see God, albeit "through a glass, darkly," whereas then "we shall be like Him" and "shall see Him as He is."

16. Now, is it possible for God to be seen "as He is"? The "manifestation" of our Saviour in the last times will be the revelation,

not of His Divine Essence and Nature, but of His Divine Glory; we shall see Him in the uncreated Light of His Grace, and “then shall we appear with Him in Glory,” that is, “in that Glory which is to be given to us by participation, through emanation, in the Glory that exists and will be beheld in Christ.” God becomes visible and comprehensible only by Grace to those deemed worthy to become like Him, that is, to become “partakers of the Divine Nature.”

17. The pious, those who live a God-pleasing life ‘receive in the present life a pledge and prelude of the hoped-for deification in the age to come,’ ‘and will receive perfect and complete deification after death and after the general resurrection, when they will be able... to enjoy that sweetest and indescribable beauty of God and to delight for evermore in the effulgence and luminescence that radiate from the Divine beauty, being vouchsafed to behold God face to face.’

18. Christ prayed before His Passion with astonishing intensity and insistence to His Heavenly Father: Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My Glory, which Thou hast given me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world. For us to be in the same place as Christ and for us to be in Christ does not constitute a tautology. Presence in the same place - “that where I am they also may be with Me” - attests to the distinction and incommunicability of the Divine and human natures, whereas “to be with Christ” attests to communion and union of God and men according to Grace in the vision of the Glory of our Saviour Christ, to participation and communion in uncreated Glory.

19. This is the Kingdom of God, the “vision of God face to face,” for it is “truly the greatest glory to behold His [Christ’s] Glory,” since “this is complete rest, to look upon the Son of God. This, at all events, is what causes us to be glorified, as Paul says: ‘with unveiled face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord.’”

20. We shall, therefore, see our Saviour “as He is,” but not “as He is in His Essence and Nature:” ‘God forbid! This is impossible for any generated or created nature of Angels and men alike;’ ‘We shall not see the invisible Nature of God, nor shall we become identical with Him, but we shall see the Glory of God, and in

general the Divine Attributes [Energies]; it is according to these that we can become like Him,' 'as gods by Grace like Him Who is God by Nature.'

21. Since, therefore, "that superessential and infinite Essence and Nature of God are not only imparticipable by creatures, but also invisible, and not only invisible, but also incomprehensible and in every way inconceivable and unsearchable," for this reason, the expression of the Holy Apostle Peter, "partakers of the Divine Nature," means that Christians who have been purified and perfected through faith and a virtuous life are to commune of, and participate in, the Divine Perfections, Energies, Powers, Graces, and generally, in the Attributes of God, which the Chief Apostle calls the Nature of God. For these are united with the Nature of God and are inseparable therefrom, and, consequently, are essential and natural properties of God. For natural properties, too, are called 'nature.' And, just as the Divine Nature is eternal and uncreated, so also are they coëternal with God and uncreated. Therefore, by communing of these natural perfections of God [that is, the Divine Attributes], those who have been purified are deified and become gods by Grace, now as by a pledge, but then more perfectly and more explicitly, as we have said.

22. Precisely because the natural perfections of God, to wit, the Divine Attributes, are in general called the Divine Nature, *qua* essential and natural properties of God, for this reason the deifying Grace of God, that is, "the deifying gift of God," His Divine Energies, are called by the Holy Fathers "Divinity," wherein we participate and which we see, whereas the Lord, Who bestows this Grace, is assuredly above this "Divinity," remaining incommunicable, unapproachable, and incomprehensible.

23. This truth, that is, the difference between the incommunicable Divine Nature and the communicable Divine Energies, is very pointedly emphasised by Saint Maximus the Confessor: "God is infinitely exalted, infinitely many times, above all beings, whether they participate [that is, creatures] or are participated in [that is, the Divine Energies]." The initiate of hidden mysteries, Dionysius the Areopagite, confirms this experiential knowledge of the Church: He Who is beyond all existing things trans-

Thus, this preternatural reality of reigning and sitting together with our Saviour Christ on the same Throne, where the Glory of the Lamb will be the Light of the New Jerusalem - a Light which will be reflected in the deified, and will transform them “into the same splendour” “from glory to glory” - this is the Kingdom of Heaven: The Kingdom of God is the imparting, according to Grace, of the good things [natural perfections] that belong naturally to God.

25. This is precisely what is meant in the Book of Revelation: in the New Jerusalem, the worshippers of the Lamb “shall see His face; and His name shall be upon their foreheads.”

... to be continued in the next issue.

*To save space we have omitted all the footnotes & biblical references, but these may be found if you go to the **Oropos and Fili website** from which we took the article (https://www.hsir.org/Info_en/New.html), click on “Theology,” then “Studies” and thirdly “Hermeneutics.”*



THE COMING MONTH

PASCHA this year was relatively early and so there are no Great Feasts celebrated in June. The month starts in the week following **All Saints Sunday**, and thus when the Pentecostarion period has already come to an end. We do, however, have two Sunday commemorations which follow on from All Saints. Sunday 5th / 18th June is the **Sunday of All the Saints Who Shone forth on the Holy Mountain Athos**, and the next Sunday is a celebration **All the New Martyrs Who Suffered under the Turkish Yoke**. Following the introduction at the 1917–18 Local Council of the Orthodox Church of Russia, of the feast of **All Saints of Russia** for the first of these Sundays, many other nations have introduced such celebrations of the Saints of their particular countries. This trend has had the rather sad side effect of stressing national identity, whereas as Orthodox Christians, rather than rejoicing in our own particular

national identity, we surely hold as much more significant the fact that we belong to the New Nation named after Christ (Contakion of the Holy Cross) - something truly to give thanks for.

Regarding the celebration of the **Saints of Athos**, we have this beautiful record of a monk's comforting experience: "One day after Vespers was over the elder went to his cell to continue praying on his own. While doing that, he marvelled at the thought that everybody - all two thousand or so monks of the entire Athonite peninsula - was praying during that very moment. Then, he wondered what the Holy Mountain looked like under such intense prayer. At that very moment he experienced himself being catapulted by the Holy Spirit high up in the air. It was as if he were looking down from an aeroplane. From that high point, he saw the Athonite peninsula spurting out flames like an active volcano, as if the entire mountain was on fire. Some of the flames went straight up to heaven. Others seemed weak, like the flame of a small candle, while yet others were flickering and barely visible. Yet, there was one, this elder claimed, that was like a fiery river that went straight up. He then overheard a voice coming from heaven saying: 'What you have witnessed is the Holy Mountain and these are the prayers of the monks that go up to God.' Then the elder asked: 'And whose prayer is this great river of fire?' God replied that it was the prayer of a certain abbot of a certain monastery, whose name cannot be revealed since this abbot is still alive" (Excerpted from *Gifts of the Desert: The Forgotten Path of Christian Spirituality*). Let us earnestly ask the prayers of the Athonite saints for ourselves, even if our prayers to them are also "flickering and barely visible."

The Ever-Memorable iconographer and writer **Photios Kontoglou** speaking for the peoples of South-eastern Europe who were for centuries subject to Ottoman rule, says this of the **New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke**: "Our saints, who were martyred while we were enslaved under the Turks, were humble, simple, spoke little, and with the fire of faith in their breasts, they were guileless and uneducated, since the only thing they knew to say before the angry judge was: 'I was born a Christian, and a Christian I will die!' Young people, lads in their prime

years, went willingly to deliver themselves for the name of Christ, and instead of a betrothal they were slaughtered like lambs or hung with the noose around their necks. And for the unbelievers to terrorise them more, they would slowly cut their necks with the blunt of the knife, or they would separate them by hanging them with rotten rope that would easily cut in order to hang them again. And the only things the majority of them knew of our Religion were the words of Christ, who said: 'Whoever confesses Me before men, I will confess before My Father Who is in heaven. And whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny before My Father Who is in heaven.' As well as the following words spoken by our Lord: 'Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul,' and: 'Whoever loses his life for my name, he will live in eternal life.' O! What height and how much spiritual decorum our race had, at a time we dare to say was illiterate and barbaric. We, of today, are the barbarians, who are not in a position to feel as we ought the nobility and the greatness of the sacrifice for the name of Christ, which they offered with their bodies, those lion-souled ones, of whom the Evangelist John says were not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but were born of God. Let this generation of ours, the 'sinful and adulterous,' make themselves to be clever where there is no room at all to be clever, and let them mock those who gave their blood for their faith in Christ with the hope of eternal life. The day will come when they will give a defence both in this world and in the other, and then they will understand the darkness in which they were found to be." Kontoglou's rebuke and implied call to repentance applies of course not only to the peoples who stem from South-eastern Europe, but to very many of us contemporary Orthodox Christians.

Among the other Saints we celebrate in June, we have:-

Our **Holy Father Boniface of Crediton, Apostle of Germany** (5th / 18th). He was born, most likely in Crediton, in the last quarter of the seventh century, and at his Baptism named Winfrid. When he was young, his chief delight was to hear holy men converse about God and heavenly things. The

edifying deportment and holy instructions of some monks, who happened to come to his father's house, gave him a strong desire to devote himself to God as a monastic. His father exerted his whole authority to divert him from his inclination to a monastic life, until being visited by a dangerous sickness, he acknowledged in it the hand of God, chastising him for opposing his son's vocation, which he then left him free to pursue. Winfrid was educated from thirteen years of age in the monastery of Escancester, or Exeter, under the holy abbot Wolphard. To his school studies of grammar he joined assiduous, devout observance of monastic discipline, even before he had been tonsured. After he had spent there some years, the reputation of the schools and discipline of the monastery of Nutcell, in the diocese of Winchester, under the learned abbot Winbert, drew him to that house. He made an extraordinary progress in learning, and was appointed by his abbot to teach others. At thirty years of age he was ordained priest, and from that time was chiefly employed in preaching the word of God to the people, and in the care of souls. Such was his reputation, that he was entrusted by his superiors with an important commission to Brithwald, archbishop of Canterbury, by which means that prelate and the religious king Ina became acquainted with him, and the bishops of the province from that time invited him to their synods, that they might be assisted by his learning and advice in their deliberations. Burning with zeal for the divine honour and the salvation of souls, the saint never ceased to bewail the misfortune of those nations which lay benighted by idolatry. Having long implored the light and blessing of heaven, he, with the blessing of his abbot, went to Friesland to preach the Gospel in A.D. 716. But a war breaking out between Charles Martel, mayor of the French palace, and Radbod, King of Friesland, threw insuperable difficulties in his way. However, he advanced as far as Utrecht, and addressed himself to King Radbod, but without success, and he was obliged to return to England. The abbot Winbert dying soon after, Winfrid was unanimously chosen abbot. He did all that he could to decline this promotion. Though he was not able then to prevail, he shortly after persuaded Daniel, the bishop of Win-

chester, to allow him to retire and appoint another in his place. He set out for Rome in A.D. 719, and presented himself to pope Gregory II, asking his blessing to preach to the pagan peoples. The pope gave him a commission to preach the Faith to the people of Germany. He gave him many holy relics and his blessing, and letters of recommendation to all Christian princes in his way. The holy missionary set out to Germany, travelling through Bavaria into Thuringia; there he began his apostolic ministry. He not only baptised great numbers of converts, but also brought the Christians he found to reform many irregularities. Winfrid hearing soon after that, by the death of Radbod, Charles Martel was become master of Friesland, and that a door was there opened for the preaching of the Gospel, he hastened thither, and joined with Saint Willebrord to great benefit. Seeing that Saint Willebrord intended to make him his successor as Bishop, he was alarmed and left. From Friesland he went into Hesse and part of Saxony, and wherever he came, baptised many thousands of idolaters, destroyed temples, and built churches. He acquainted pope Gregory with his success, by a letter which he sent by one of his fellow-labourers, and, at the same time, consulted him upon several difficulties that had occurred. The pope gave glory to God, and congratulated him in a letter, in which he commanded him to return to Rome. Winfrid immediately obeyed the order, and arrived there in A.D. 723. Gregory consecrated him Bishop and changed his name of Winfrid into that of Boniface. The saint returned to Hesse, continued his spiritual conquests, and cut down a tall oak consecrated to Thor, the timber of which he employed in building a chapel. He founded many churches, and a monastery at Orfordt. The harvest growing daily upon his hands, he procured a new supply of labourers from England, whom he stationed in Hesse and Thuringia. In A.D. 732, when Gregory III. succeeded in the pontificate, Boniface sent messengers to Rome, to consult him upon several difficulties. Gregory showed these deputies great respect, and sent by them a pall for St. Boniface, to be used by him only when he celebrated the divine mysteries, or consecrated bishops. He at that time constituted him Archbishop and primate of all Germany, with power to

erect new bishoprics where he should see it expedient. The saint went himself to Rome for the third time in 738 to confer with the Pope about his mission. He was received as a living saint, and granted further honours. On his return he was called to Bavaria by the duke Odilo, to reform several abuses. Finding only one bishopric in that country, namely, Passaw, he established three others, Saltzburg, Freisingen, and Ratisbon. The holy primate soon after established three new bishoprics, at Erford for Thuringia, at Baraburg for Hesse, since translated to Paderborn, and at Wurtzbourg for Franconia: he added a fourth at Achstat in the palatinate of Bavaria. About that time there was regime change in France and Carloman became mayor and prince of Austrasia, or Lorraine, and that part of Germany which was then subject to France. His chief aim was to achieve by peace the happiness of his people, to protect religion and to cultivate the useful arts. He bent his whole authority to second the zeal of our saint in all his undertakings. At that time two impostors were stirred up by the devil to disturb the infant church of Germany. In a council Saint Boniface condemned them both in A.D. 742; and the sentence of our saint and his council was afterwards confirmed by the pope in a synod at Rome. St. Boniface held another council in 743 at Leptines in the diocese of Cambray. The Prince Carloman finding him a man full of the science of the saints, and of the Spirit of God, listened to his advice in all things relating to the salvation of his soul. By the saint's pious discourses, his heart was daily more and more inflamed with divine love, till despising the world in the height of its glory, he recommended his estates and his son Drogo to Pepin the Short, his younger brother, and severed all his ties with the world. He went to Rome and dismissed his attendants. There he received from the hands of pope Zachary the monastic tonsure, and at Mount Soracte founded a monastery called Saint Sylvester's. Rome's proximity drew so many visitors, especially among the French lords who lived in that city, that to avoid this distraction, by the advice of the pope, he withdrew to Mount Cassino, where he lived several years with great fervour and humility. He chose and discharged with great cheerfulness the meanest offices, often served in the

kitchen, kept the sheep of the monastery, and worked like a day-labourer in the garden. In this he had before his eyes the example of many English-Saxon kings who had done the same. Carloman was doubtless encouraged by these heroic examples. Being sent into France for certain affairs of his monastery, he died holily at Vienne in A.D. 755. His brother, Pepin the Short, became mayor of the palace for the whole kingdom, till, in 752, he was chosen king by the unanimous consent of the whole nation. The new king, desiring to be crowned by the most holy prelate in his dominions, insisted upon the ceremony being performed by St. Boniface. This was done at Soissons, where our saint presided in a synod of bishops. St. Boniface, in his first council in Germany, is styled legate of St. Peter, and he appears to have been legate of the apostolic see in France. In 746, he entreated Pope Zachary to send a bishop legate into France, that he might be eased of that burden. The pope refused to grant this request, but allowed him, by a singular privilege, to choose whom he thought best qualified to be his successor in Germany after his death. The saint had been some years archbishop of Germany before he fixed his metropolitan see in any particular city. Cologne was at first judged the most proper, it being then the metropolis; but Gervilio, the bishop of Mainz, having been deposed in a council, that city was chosen and thus was made the metropolitan church of all Germany. To assist him in planting the spirit of meekness and Christian piety in a fierce and uncivilized nation, Saint Boniface invited over from England many holy men and religious women. Among these were Saints Wigbert, Burchard, Willibald and Lull; and among the holy virgins were Saints Lioba, Thecla, Walburga, Bertigita and Contruda, to whom he committed the direction of several nunneries which he erected in Thuringia, Bavaria, and other places. In A.D. 746 he laid the foundation of the great abbey of Fulda, which long continued the most renowned seminary of piety and learning in all that part of the world. Saint Boniface founded a monastery at Fridistar in honour of Saint Peter; another at Hamenburgh in honour of Saint Michael, and one at Ordorfe in honour of the same Archangel, in all which the monks gained their livelihood by the labour of their hands. The

pastoral care of so many churches did not hinder this holy man from extending his zeal to remote countries, especially to that which gave him birth. Ethelbald, king of Mercia, was a lover of justice, and liberal to the poor, but sullied these virtues by abominable lusts, abstaining from matrimony that he might wallow in filthy incontinency, and his scandalous example was imitated by many of his courtiers. The saint, touched to the quick at the news of such scandals, in 745 wrote to this prince a strong remonstrance and exhortation to repentance. There are indications that he became a sincere penitent. He was slain soon after, in 755, by Beornred, a rebel. Saint Boniface wrote a circular letter to all the clergy, monastics and people of England, beseeching them to join in holy prayer, to beg of God to show His blessing upon the labours of all those who were employed in working to bring souls to His saving knowledge and holy love. He often desired books to be sent him from England, especially the works of Bede, whom he calls a lamp of the church. He entreated the abbess Edburga to send him the epistles of St. Peter written in letters of gold to inspire carnal men with the greater respect, and to satisfy his devotion to that Apostle, whom he calls the patron of his mission. Writing to the abbot Aldherius, he begs that the souls of those missionaries who were lately deceased be commemorated. In several other epistles he mentions the mutual bond of charity between the missionaries abroad and the priests and monks in England, that they should reciprocally pray for their deceased brethren. In a letter to a nun, he mentions how much he had to suffer in his mission from the pagans, from false Christians, and even from ecclesiastics of debauched morals. Yet his ardour made him continually to thirst after greater sufferings, and especially the honour of laying down his life for the love of Him who died for us. In a letter to Cuthbert, Archbishop of Canterbury, treating of the duties of pastors, he says, "Let us fight for the Lord in these days of bitterness and affliction. If this be the will of God, let us die for the holy laws of our fathers, that we may arrive with them at the eternal inheritance. Let us not be dumb dogs, sleeping sentinels, hirelings that fly at the sight of the wolf, but watchful and diligent pastors, preaching to the great and small, to the

rich and poor, to every age and condition, being instant in season and out of season." In his homilies, he most frequently inculcates the obligation and sanctity of the baptismal vows. This apostle of so many nations thought he had yet done nothing, so long as he had not spilled his blood for Christ, and earnestly desired to attain to that happiness. Making use of the privilege which pope Zachary had granted him of choosing his successor, he consecrated Saint Lull, an Englishman, formerly monk of Malmesbury, Archbishop of Mainz, in A.D. 754, leaving him to finish the churches which he had begun and encouraging him to apply himself strenuously to the conversion of the remaining idolaters. The saint would not allow himself any repose so long as he saw souls perishing in the shades of darkness, and his extreme desire of martyrdom seemed to give him foresight of his approaching death. Having therefore settled his church and put all things in the best order possible, he set out with certain zealous companions to preach to the savage infidel inhabitants of the northern parts of East-Friesland. Having converted and baptised some thousands among them, he appointed the eve of Whitsunday to administer to the neophytes the sacrament of confirmation in the open fields in the plains of Dockum, near the banks of the little rivulet Bordne. He pitched a tent there, and was waiting in prayer the arrival of the new converts, when, behold, instead of friends, a band of enraged infidels appeared on the plain all in arms, and coming up, rushed into his tent. The servants that were with the holy martyr were for defending his life by fighting, but he would not suffer it, declaring that the day he had long waited for was come, which was to bring him to the eternal joys of the Lord. He encouraged the rest to meet, with cheerfulness and constancy, a death which was to them the gate of everlasting life. While he was thus employed, the pagans attacked them sword in hand, and put them all to death. Saint Boniface suffered in his seventy-fifth year, on the fifth of June, in the year of Christ 755. With him were martyred fifty-two companions, of whom the principal persons were Eoban, bishop; Wintrung, Walter and Adelhere, priests; Hamund, Strichald and Bosa, deacons; Waccar, Gunderhar, Williker, and Hadulph, monks; the rest

were laymen. The barbarians expected to have a great booty of gold and silver from the baggage of the holy martyrs, but found nothing in their trunks but relics and books, which they scattered about the fields, or hid in ditches and marshes. Some of these things were afterwards found, and of them three books are still preserved in the monastery of Fulda. The body of Saint Boniface was first carried to Utrecht, thence to Mainz, and lastly to Fulda, where it was laid to rest by St. Lull, as the saint himself had desired. Through his intercessions an abundance of miracles have been wrought through the generations.

The **Venerable Theophanes and the Righteous Pansemni of Antioch** (10th / 23rd): St Theophanes was born in Antioch, to unbelieving parents, but this did not prevent him from becoming a Christian believer at an early age, though he was not baptised. When he was fifteen years old, his parents insisted he take a wife. Being married for three years, he was widowed. Now unencumbered, Theophanes hastened to a church and received the Mystery of Holy Baptism. Then he built a narrow cell near Antioch, where he enclosed himself and expelled all his passions that dominated his body and soul, and excelled in the virtues. After some time, Theophanes learned that in the city dwelled a harlot named Pansemni, who brought ruin to many men. Grieved in his heart over this calamity, both on behalf of the woman and her male admirers, Theophanes entered into deep prayer, whereupon he was enlightened to ransom Pansemni and take her as his wife. Therefore, he removed his hair shirt and donned expensive apparel. Theophanes visited his father to reveal his intentions in taking a second wife, and the father gladly gave his son ten gold coins. He then visited Pansemni in her home and was invited to dine with her. After engaging in conversation, Theophanes bluntly asked Pansemni how long she had been involved in her indecent vocation. Unoffended, she said it had been for twelve years. She also added that of all her admirers, Theophanes was by far the most handsome. Unaffected by the compliment, since he desired to preserve the purity of his soul and body, he told her: "I desire and intend to take you in honourable marriage." Pansemni was pleased by his proposal, reasoning that it was a

singular token of esteem for her. Theophanes gave her his ten gold coins and told her to hasten in the preparations for the wedding. He returned to his cell outside the city. While Pansemni prepared for their marriage, Theophanes also made preparations for Pansemni by building her a cell not far from his own. Not long after, he returned to the city and visited her, but this time he placed a condition on her: unless she accepted the Christian faith, they would be unable to cohabit. Pansemni initially found this condition difficult to accept, so she requested time to consider. A week later Pansemni heard someone speaking about the future judgement, how the righteous would enjoy eternal life and the blessings that come from it, while the unrighteous would receive eternal condemnation. Her conscience became censured by this, and the grace of God moved her to profound contrition, allowing her heart to be transformed. She rejected her polytheism, and assented to the teachings of the Gospel. Seeking the perfect path of piety, Pansemni resolved to enter the ranks of the newly-illumined, and received Holy Baptism. Her new path in life moved her to free her retinue of servants and handmaids, and she gave everything she received and had acquired through her disreputable occupation to the Church of God for suitable distribution. Pansemni, therefore, bidding farewell to the pleasures of this world, devoted herself to qualities her name implied, that is, to be all-modest. Having nothing left in the world, she hastened to Theophanes who brought her to the cell he built for her. Inflamed with divine love, she sought to contemplate the beauty of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, the fairest among men, and sought union with Him intensely and with longing. She kept watch over her thoughts and guarded her heart in this endeavour, and through asceticism of the body and soul, her labours attracted divine grace, gaining spiritual regeneration and victory. She had such an outpouring of divine grace that she was able to dispel demons and heal diverse passions and illnesses. And this was done in a very short time, since the devout and venerable Pansemni lived only fourteen months after Baptism, and she was translated to the Heavenly Bridegroom on the same day the venerable and wonderworking Theophanes reposed.

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

**VISIT OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP SERAPHIM OF
SOZOPOL, BULGARIA**

ON FRIDAY 29th April / 12th May, **His Grace, Bishop Seraphim of Sozopol** and an altar server, **Dimitar Batakiev**, arrived in England from Bulgaria and were met at Heathrow by Priestmonk Sabbas and brought to Brookwood. On his arrival Bishop Seraphim gave us an icon of Saint Clement of Ochrid, a present sent us by **Metropolitan Photiy of Triaditsa**, a phial of Bulgarian rose oil, and a package of gifts from **Abbess Seraphima and the Convent of the Protection of the Mother of God at Knyazhevo**. On the following day, the feast of the Holy Apostle James the son of Zebedee, after Matins, His Grace celebrated the hierarchal Divine Liturgy at Saint Edward's, assisted by **Archimandrite Daniel, Priestmonk Sabbas** and **Deacon Ioan Turcu**. After the breakfast, Frs Sabbas and Niphon took the Bishop and Dimitar to Winchester to visit the Cathedral. The enthusiastic and knowledgeable guide, **Tim Manners-Rice**, gave our visitors a tour of the Cathedral, its undercroft, and the Shrine of Saint Swithun, and he showed them the famed Winchester Bible. They arrived back at Brookwood just in time for Vespers. On the next day, the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, following Matins the Bishop again celebrated with the same clergy as the previous day, this time joined also by **Fr Borislav Popov**. At the buffet-style Parish Breakfast His Grace met and spoke with numbers of the parishioners and after Vespers he gave a talk, followed by questions and answers, about the witness of the Old Calendarist Church in Bulgaria and its monastic life. Then Fr Borislav and **Presbytera Marina** took our two guests to their home in Chatham. On the next day, Fr Borislav's nameday, they visited Rochester Cathedral, where they heard a talk on Saint Paulinus of York and Rochester, after whom the Popov's son has recently been named when he received the tonsure as a rasophore monk at Brookwood. Later they travelled to Canterbury where they met our parishioner, **Dr Christopher Russell**, who took them to the Cathedral and the Abbey ruins. They also visited St Martin's Church where Saint Augustine had first served, but unfortunately it was closed on that day. Dr Russell also kindly arranged for them to

have lunch at the university. On the Tuesday His Grace left to travel to America via Iceland, and Dimitar returned to Bulgaria. Our thanks particularly to the Popovs and Dr Russell for their help in showing our guests hospitality.

OTHER VISITORS

ON Tuesday, 12th / 25th April, the **High Sheriff of Surrey, Mr Timothy Wates**, accompanied by his son and a previous **High Sheriff, Shahid Azeem**, came to see the church, accompanied by **Ian Tomes**, Woking Borough Council's strategic asset manager, and **Avril Kirby**, the Brookwood Cemetery manager.

On Friday 15th /28th April, **Ian Tomes** led a group from the **Busbridge and Hambledon Church, Godalming**, to see the cemetery and they called in to see Saint Edward's Church.

ON Sunday, 8th / 21st May, we had two visitors from Warminster visited our church and stayed for the Parish Breakfast and Vespers. In our travels visiting the sick, about three weeks ago we stopped at a fish & chip shop in **Warminster, Wiltshire**, to get a quick meal. The young lady who served us, **Amy**, asked about the Orthodox Church and for our address, saying she would come and visit us. She did not want to take payment for our purchase, but we insisted that she did, and so we suggested she bring it back when she visited, thinking that was perhaps very unlikely. However on 21st May, she and her husband turned up and she had a small envelope with our payment in it which she deposited in our almsbox at the back of the church! The guests stayed for some time and asked many questions about our Faith.

ON the same day the **Rev'd Andreas Sistig**, incumbent of **St Anne's Church, Bagshot**, brought a small group of his parishioners to attend our Vespers service. Afterwards they were given a brief tour of the church and taken to the exhibition room for refreshments.



“WE SHOULD SHUN loose speech like an asp's venom... for it can plunge us into total forgetfulness of the inner struggle.”

SAINT HESYCHIUS THE PRIEST, 8TH OR 9TH CENTURY