

The Shepherd

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FROM THE FATHERS

“DAVID always gives the most joyful meaning to feasts, tuning his dulcet harp to the requirements of the festival. So let this same prophet delight us on the great feast of Pentecost, too, picking out the melody of wisdom on the strings, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let him speak to us through that divine melody, entirely appropriate to this feast: *Come let us raise our voices in joy to the Lord.*”

SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA, + 395 A.D.

“IN GRACE, when the Saviour came to the saving Baptism, the Father from above witnessed to the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove was there. This Spirit, today, in the form of fire, descended upon each of the Apostles. Do you see that the Apostles are even thrones? For *God*, it says, *sitteth upon His holy throne* (Ps. 46:8). This Spirit killed Ananias the liar. This Spirit apportions the charisms of goods, *distributing to each as He willeth* (1 Cor. 13:11). By this Spirit was Paul the Apostle filled. He darkened Elymas the magus. This Spirit did Gabriel announce to Mary, saying: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee* (Lk. 1:35). May He even now come upon us and bless us.”

SAINT PROCLUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE, + 447 A.D.

“LET US with one mind be incited to pay reverence to Pentecost, exulting in honour of the Holy Spirit, through Whom

the whole Catholic Church is sanctified, and every rational soul quickened; Who is the Inspirer of the Faith, the Teacher of Knowledge, the Fount of Love, the Seal of Chastity, and the Cause of all Power. Let the minds of the faithful rejoice, that throughout the world One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is praised by the confession of all tongues, and that that sign of His Presence, which appeared in the likeness of fire, is still perpetuated in His work and gift. For the Spirit of Truth Himself makes the house of His glory shine with the brightness of His light, and will have nothing dark nor lukewarm in His temple.”

SAINT LEO THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, + 474 A.D.

“CONSIDER, my beloved, the change the Holy Spirit wrought in the hearts of the Apostles, who in the beginning were so fond of life, such lovers of the flesh, and such cowards, that in order to protect their lives, one of them deserted his Teacher during His Passion and ran away naked: *And there followed Him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body... And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked* (Mk. 14:51-52). Another one denied Him, and all the rest departed: *And they all forsook Him, and fled* (Mk. 14:50). And because they were like frightened hares, they remained locked up in the upper room out of fear and didn't dare go outside for nearly the entire period of the fifty days after the Resurrection. But after the Holy Spirit descended upon them, He changed the weakness of their hearts into courage and bravery. Then they went outside like fearless lions and preached the crucified Jesus before all the multitudes of people with open faces, with brave chests, and with courage and boldness without flinching before either threats, or lashings, or torments and tortures, or death itself. But they longed for these things like delights and revelries and they exceedingly rejoiced upon receiving them: *And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name* (Acts 5:41).”

VEN. NICODEMUS OF THE HOLY MOUNT, + 1809 A.D.

CONSCIENCE, AN EXTRAORDINARY GIFT FROM GOD!

THE CONSCIENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON US IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

An extraordinary gift from God Himself to us is our conscience. When God created us, He implanted something extraordinary, something that sets us apart from all of His other creatures here below, our conscience. It is that divine spark within us that distinguishes right from wrong, good from evil.

When you see an act of kindness, your conscience rejoices, when you witness injustice, your conscience cries out in protest, you know without having to think that this is wrong; when you speak a lie, your conscience whispers its disapproval. Your body reacts, you feel an invisible weight in your throat; you know it is wrong. Yet, in our world of the end times, people are beginning to change. Some claim to be Christians, but no longer blink their eyes and sin with an ease that shocks. They have become desensitised, complacent, and apathetic in the face of moral transgressions, they no longer hesitate, no longer feel the pangs of guilt, and no longer seek the path of repentance.

This is a dangerous situation, in which society is leading towards this transformation. To lose the conscience that convicts us of sin is to drift perilously away from the teachings of Christ. It is to abandon something essential to our Faith. We must recognise that a Christian without a conscience that convinces him of sin is a Christian in crisis. It is a crisis that must not be ignored.

It is a sign that we have strayed far from the path of righteousness, virtue and pity and that we have allowed the world to dull our moral senses. It should jolt us, it should make our hearts heavy, our souls to ache and our conscience to scream out in protest. It should drive us to our knees in repentance, seeking forgiveness and redemption.

Sin should never become a casual affair, a mere afterthought in our lives. People are beginning to change tremendously. We

must resist this descent into moral oblivion.

The Christian conscience is not a passive bystander. It is an active unyielding voice that must declare when we are in the wrong. It must admonish us against committing sins, like adultery, or any other transgressions of God's commandments.

THE SEARED CONSCIENCE

The lack of conscience leads to a road on which we depart from the Faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of the devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having our conscience seared with a hot iron. A seared conscience marks out hardened criminals and deceitful individuals; unfortunately, many people within the Church today are also at risk of experiencing this spiritual condition.

Our conscience is a built-in system of self-governance that helps us to know when we have done something wrong. Yet, people are beginning to change and destroy this inbuilt system and to come to a state where a person's conscience becomes insensitive or calloused, due to repeated exposure to deceitful teachings and constant sinful behaviour. Sin becomes a habit.

THE IMPACT IN THE HEART

This results in a cold heart, a heart of stone that feels nothing, and a conscience that is willing to reject the revealed truth and embrace falsehood, leading to a lack of moral sensitivity, and an inability to discern right from wrong. It is a sobering thought that even those who profess faith in Christ can find themselves on the dangerous path towards a seared conscience. We are witnessing a subtle, yet significant shift in our society, where moral standards are being redefined and compromised. We are witnessing the prophecies of the last days where "people will have a heart of stone" and the coming of "the great apostasy, they will easily sin."

CHANGING THE PERCEPTION OF RIGHT AND WRONG

People are changing their perception of right and wrong, embracing behaviours and attitudes that were once considered sinful and destructive, immoral and damaging to others, and

completely forbidden. And now those same behaviours are celebrated, worshipped, and adored. The society we live in is searing the consciences of the people of this world in these last days; it is almost as if Satan is getting more and more aggressive. It is as if while we, the Christians, live within Christ and Christ is reflected within us, they live within evil, and evil is reflected in them, and this will result in a demonised society.

We are now living in a society that considers good as evil and evil as good. One area where this change is becoming evident is sexual morality. Society's view of sexual morality is regressing rapidly with premarital sex, extramarital affairs, and various forms of sexual perverted immorality becoming increasingly accepted and even celebrated - an upside-down world.

All Christians, especially us the Orthodox, must be vigilant and not succumb to these cultural shifts, for they have the potential to sear our conscience and lead us astray. As a Christian, your reference point should not be the culture or society you live in. Your reference point as a believer should be the Word of God, the teaching of the Church.

TRUTH AND HONESTY – DECEPTION

Moreover, people are beginning to change their approach to truth and honesty. We live in a world where deception and dishonesty are prevalent, and the line between truth and falsehood is often blurred. It has become commonplace, and we see it in our daily lives nowadays, to twist the truth or manipulate its underlying basis to suit one's agenda and this even extends to a stage where the seared conscience has no standards, no boundaries and doesn't hesitate to execute such immoral behaviour even when it is directed against the clergy.

We have reached the stage where manipulation, twisting truth (deception), and lies come easily in a cunning deceitful way even towards a priest or a monk, with no hesitation, with a complete lack of fear of God, Who knows the truth and is watching the sinful act.

Deception reaches the stage where the fabrication of stories

is made to destroy someone's good reputation and image or even worse to destroy lives, yet it is executed with ease as the conscience is seared. In the modern world this is so common that it has been studied and given officially the title "character assassination." How heartless and merciless one must be to fabricate a story that destroys someone's life, while at the same time, the person, who lied and fabricated the lie, roams free and enjoys life? This is a clear example of a seared conscience, a clear example of the last days, of the great apostasy and the heart of stone. The deceitful actions reflect a heart hardened by wickedness and relentlessly pursuing its own selfish desires, ultimately leading to destruction, wicked intentions, ready to lead us to our demise without a hint of remorse.

As followers of Christ, we must strive to cultivate a conscience that is alive and sensitive to God's guidance, rejecting the ways of a seared conscience, applying great compassion and kindness, a soft heart with love for our brethren.

The world today is filled with people who will gladly betray our trust, exploit our vulnerabilities, and lead us astray. People that manipulate others for their own benefit. They may appear friendly, charming, and trustworthy, kind. But underneath their facade lies a heart callous and indifferent to the harm they inflict; they think they are clever but are simply cunning people driven by evil.

We must be on guard, brothers and sisters in Christ. The path of a seared conscience is a path of spiritual death through submission to evil. It numbs us to the voice of God, dulling us to the consequences of our actions and the damage we inflict upon others, which is one of the most sinful actions, as Christ taught us to first love God and then love others as we do ourselves and so it obliterates the most important precepts of Christianity and the law of God. We must refuse to be the means of the devil's working upon humanity, to be the devil's tools.

As Christians, we must actively resist the allure of a seared conscience and instead, pursue a vibrant, sensitive conscience that aligns with the heart of Christ. If we commit a sin, or we do anything evil, that should bother us instantly and put us into a

state of unease. That should disturb our conscience as Christians, our hearts should hurt.

Never, ever get to the point where you commit sin or do something evil and are not disturbed, and if you see this happen you must alert yourself to steer the wheel in the opposite direction. Unfortunately, this becomes more and more often nowadays; for example, a man initially burdened by guilt and shame cheats on his wife in the beginning, and the weight of his adultery troubles his soul, but over time, and through repeated acts of betrayal, his conscience becomes calloused, his conscience becomes harder and this sin becomes an apathetic habit. He returns home, deceiving his wife, while her heart breaks in anguish. Yet, his seared conscience renders him indifferent to her broken heart and tears. He no longer feels the conviction that pierced his heart once because his continuous sin has desensitised his moral compass and his heart has become hard as a stone as the prophecies of the last days describe. As followers of Christ, we are called to a higher standard. We must guard our hearts and minds against this erosion of truth lest our conscience become seared, and our integrity is lost.

THE IMPACT OF MATERIALISM AND VANITY

And a seared conscience leads to another downfall: people are beginning to change their attitudes towards material possessions and wealth. The pursuit of material gain has become an all-consuming passion for many, often at the expense of others and at any cost.

Greed and materialism are pervasive in the desire for more, making us numb to the needs of the poor and marginalised, whilst at the same time focussing on our appearance reaches extreme limits and leads to an extreme expense with not even a single guilty thought for people suffering severely. The more we serve the evil of greed, the deeper we go, reaching to a point that we manipulate and use people towards our own profit. We must embrace a mindset of generosity and stewardship and resist the allure of worldly possessions that we don't even want to share with our brethren.

Alas, some of us fall into a trap because we give a tiny amount at some point to help others or even make a regular donation to a charity, fooling ourselves that this is enough and we can continue leading that selfish materialistic life with a good conscience. Here comes the evil spirit of deception fooling us, putting our conscience at ease, leading it to be seared eventually.

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Furthermore, a seared conscience begins to change people's approach to forgiveness and reconciliation as the heart has become cold. Bitterness and resentment are taking root in many hearts, foiling the healing and restoration that comes through real truthful forgiveness.

We must be careful not to allow our hearts to become callous, but instead cultivate a spirit of forgiveness, following the example of Christ Who forgave us while we were yet sinners. Nor should we fall into the evil trap of declaring "I have forgiven them," whilst our actions show the exact opposite, to not want them in our lives or to not want to talk to them, to not have any involvement with them reaching to the extent of not showing any kindness to them if they are in suffering, - a complete lack of feeling, and of course complete lack of love. In reality, we are fooling ourselves, sinking deeper into deception, and growing even more rooted in sin, willingly blindfolding ourselves.

APOSTASY

With a seared conscience, people are beginning to modify their commitment to God. We are becoming more lovers of pleasure than lovers of God. We are changing, becoming too busy for God or too tired for God. In our fast-paced, technology-driven world, the distractions and busyness of life can easily pull us away from cultivating a vibrant relationship with God. Neglecting prayer, having our minds getting lost in daily matters, having no time to think of God, ever getting more involved with worldly affairs, and developing wrong affinities can sear our conscience and leave us spiritually numb. The further a society

or a person moves away from God, the more they will become their own gods, with their own rules and laws in their lives according to their own self-centred considerations.

The more they start flouting all the aids that uplift them spiritually, such as fasting, attending the church services, constant communication with a spiritual father, frequent confession, observing the Church feasts, daily contact with God, receiving Holy Communion often, the more these aids will become an obstacle to the “free life” they desire. Then the ego and pride come forward, projecting the false image that their lives are not in their hands but others are controlling them, meaning the clergy, the law of God, the precepts of the Church, etc.

At the same time, socialising with the wrong people, whether work colleagues or social contacts, will have an additional negative impact. Listening to other people that are far from God, and views, deriving from yet another seared conscience damaged by modern worldly self-centred concepts and the present contemporary self-centred culture, has a severe additional negative impact, searing our conscience. We Christians must choose very carefully the people that we are going to socialise with and avoid having conversations that lead to sin.

THE LOVE OF DARKNESS – JUSTIFICATION OF SIN

One thing that sears people’s conscience is their love of darkness. People love darkness rather than light as is said in Saint John, chapter three. It shows that people often have a preference for the darkness, a life of sin and rebellion against the light, that represents truth, righteousness and God’s way.

This love for darkness can lead to a seared conscience in several ways, through rationalisation and justification. When individuals have a love for darkness, they tend to rationalise and justify their sinful actions and wrongdoing or wrong choices. They find ways to convince themselves that their behaviour is acceptable, even if it contradicts God’s truth and moral standards.

This continuous rationalisation and justification can sear their conscience over time, making them less sensitive to the

promptings of the Holy Spirit. Those who love darkness often engage in repeated sinful behaviour without genuine remorse or repentance.

They become desensitised to the moral implications of their actions, and their conscience becomes used to this constant repetition of sin, making it more difficult for them to recognise the gravity of their wrongdoing, rejecting conviction for sin and repentance.

The love for darkness can lead individuals to resist the promptings of the Holy Spirit. When confronted with their sin, they may choose to ignore or reject the prompting of their conscience, refusing to acknowledge their need for repentance and forgiveness, by continually rejecting the call to turn towards the light and seek reconciliation with God. Their conscience becomes increasingly seared, embracing deception and falsehood.

A love for darkness can make individuals susceptible to deception and falsehood. They sometimes willingly accept that distorted beliefs and false teachings are cultural norms that justify their sinful behaviour. The acceptance of falsehood can further numb their conscience, blinding them even more to the truth and hindering their ability to discern right from wrong. Ultimately, a love for darkness creates a seared conscience by eroding the individual's moral sensitivity and diminishing their ability to recognise and respond to God's truth. The conscience, designed to guide us towards righteousness, becomes callous and unresponsive due to persistent indulgence, sin and the rejection of God's light.

However, it is important to remember that God's grace and the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit can revive and restore a seared conscience through genuine heartfelt repentance, surrendering to God's transformative work, and aligning our hearts with His truth. We can experience the renewal of our conscience and a restoration of sensitivity to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

EPILOGUE

In these last days in which we are living, perilous times, as the prophecies mention, have come. People are lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, angry, unforgiving, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, intoxicated, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof: from such turn away (2 Tim. 3:2-5). In the times in which we live, we are witnessing an unprecedented moral and ethical rapid decline.

A significant sign is that the prophecies spoken of in the Scriptures are not just ancient words, but living breathing truths unfolding before our very own eyes. In the Epistles to Timothy, we find a mirror reflecting the current state of our society, where the behaviours and attitudes so vividly described by Saint Paul seem to leak from the pages of the Bible and are manifest in our daily lives. As we read, it becomes apparent that we are living in times marked by a profound self-centredness.

It's a theme that resonates deeply with our generation where the elevation of self above all else has become the norm. This self-love, which the Scripture warns us about, is not a healthy sense of self-respect, but a deep-seated narcissism that places individual desires above everything else.

Our society encourages us to love ourselves unconditionally, promoting the idea that such self-love is the foundation of a healthy personality, which is contrary to our Orthodox values and has led us to a culture, where excessive self-absorption and self-admiration prevail often at the expense of empathy and compassion for others. In this environment, the needs and well-being of family and community are frequently overshadowed by a pursuit of personal pleasure, and we are living in an age where people think the whole world revolves around them, where the attitude of me, myself and I alone, is the purpose of existence.

This selfishness manifests in various ways as described in the Epistles: individuals become lovers of themselves to the

detriment of their relationships and communities; concentrating on the body, health, strength and appearance, we become lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. And all this stems from our self-absorption.

Betrayal also arises when personal gain is valued over loyalty and trust. Being headstrong reflects an arrogance and stubbornness that disregards both the wisdom of others and also the needs of others, while the preference for pleasure over devotion to God highlights a profound misalignment of priorities, where transient joys and pleasures are pursued at the expense of eternal life.

We are living in an age where the transient joys of pleasure are elevated above communion with God. Men and women prioritise pleasure over their devotion to God. Sin and lust carry with them fleeting pleasures. People don't sin because it brings them pain; they sin because there's a temporary delight in wrongdoing. Sin can transport you to a place filled with implausible sunshine and roses, but only for a moment. When this moment passes, you are left with emptiness because sin can never bring fullness. The fixation on the here and now, on the material rather than the spiritual, leads many to choose the fleeting pleasures of sin over the promise of eternal life with God.

Some people acknowledge the reality of God and the need of salvation, but their love for sin and its immediate gratification causes them to turn away from God, pursuing a life of sinful pleasures instead, deluding themselves into believing it is all right with God.

The relentless pursuit of personal gain, often at the expense of others, verifies the prophetic warnings about a society losing sight of its moral compass; a relentless hunger for more becomes a never-ending cycle of emptiness.

We live in a society that calls the good evil, and the evil good, society that accepts, celebrates, and even promotes things that were once considered evil or even unimaginable and are still sinful in the eyes of the Lord.

Moreover, the prophecy speaks to a culture of boastfulness and pride, where individuals tout their achievements and status

with little regard for humility or grace.

This prevailing attitude not only distances individuals from each other, but also from God, creating a society that values accolades over acts of kindness and compassion. In this environment, the true essence of community support, family values, understanding and mutual respect becomes obscured by the shroud of arrogance and self-importance.

Scripture references to people being lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God ring eerily true in today's world, where the pursuit of momentary delights and sensory pleasures often takes precedence over spiritual discipline and devotion. May God be with us all and help us, and may we be all together in His kingdom one day.

Contributed by M. E., and slightly abridged and amended.



THE COMING MONTH

THE great celebration in June this year is, of course, the **Day of Pentecost** (10th / 23rd), not only one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Year, but one of the greatest of them - see the quotes from the Fathers above. On account of the prominence of the festival we keep the week following it as a fast-free week. Then on the following Monday we begin the fast to prepare for the commemoration of the **Holy Apostles Peter and Paul**. Unlike the other three fasting periods in the year, this fast varies in length as it begins on a date determined by the date of Pascha, and ends on one determined by the monthly cycle of commemorations. As Pascha was very late this year, the fast is very short, only eleven days. We hope this will encourage even those of you who do not eagerly keep the fasts as you should, and thus lose a blessing, to do so this year.

Among the Saints we celebrate this month, we have:-

Our **Venerable Mother Hieria of Nisibis** (3rd / 16th). In the town of Nisibis, on the border with the Persian Empire yet under Roman control, there was a convent of women containing fifty nuns under the direction of the deaconess Bryene. One woman brought up by her and well instructed in the monastic life was Febronia (25th June / 8th July). Febronia was Bryene's niece, and she was extremely beautiful, so that the eye could never be sated by gazing upon her. For this reason, Bryene was twice as strict with her, wanting to protect her from outside temptations. She only ate once every other day, she slept while sitting on a stool, and she spent much time studying Holy Scripture. On Fridays, when all the sisters were gathered in the place of prayer, Bryene used to tell Febronia to read the divine words to them. Because, however, young married women used to come to the place of prayer on Sundays and Fridays to hear the word of God, Bryene instructed Febronia to sit behind a curtain and read unseen from there. She never saw any worldly finery and did not know what a man's face looked like. But she was the subject of much talk throughout the entire town - people spoke of her learning, beauty, humility, and gentleness. When Hieria, who had been married to a senator, heard this, she was fired by divine love and became very eager to see Febronia. Hieria had not yet been baptised, and she was still a pagan. When she had only lived seven months with her husband, he died, leaving her a widow; for this reason she returned to her own town to her parents, who were also pagans. Hieria came to the convent and through the doorkeeper notified Bryene of her presence. When Bryene came out to her, Hieria fell down at her feet and did obeisance to her, grasping her feet and saying, "I adjure you by the God who made heaven and earth, do not repulse me, seeing that I am still a foul pagan and a plaything of the demons; do not deprive me of the chance to talk to and learn from the lady Febronia. Through you nuns I will learn the path of salvation and as I travel upon it I will discover what is in store for the Christians. Save me from the emptiness of this world and from the unclean worship of idols. You see, my parents are forcing me to marry again: the torment of the former error in which I have been living is quite sufficient for me to have to cope

with. Please let me acquire new life through the teaching and conversation of my sister Febronia.” As she spoke she drenched Bryene’s feet with her tears. Much affected and moved by this, Bryene said, “My lady Hieria, God knows that ever since I first received Febronia into my hands at the age of two - and it is now eighteen years that she has been in the convent - she has not seen the face of a single man or any worldly finery and clothing. Not even her governess saw her face from that moment onward, even though she often besought me, sometimes even bursting into tears, to allow her a glimpse. For I do not allow Febronia to have any association with laywomen. Nevertheless, in view of the love you have toward God and toward her, I will bring you in to her. But you must wear nun’s clothing.” When Bryene introduced Hieria under this guise to Febronia, the latter, on seeing the monastic habit, fell down before her feet, supposing that she was a nun from somewhere else who had come to her. After they had greeted one another and sat down, Bryene told Febronia to take the Bible and read to Hieria. As Febronia read, Hieria’s soul was so filled with sorrow and compunction as a result of the sight of Febronia and of the teaching that she heard that the two of them spent the whole night without any sleep: Febronia did not cease or tire from reading, and Hieria never had enough as she listened to her teaching, in tears while she groaned and sighed. When morning came, Bryene could scarcely persuade Hieria to return to her parents’ home. When they had bidden farewell to one another, Hieria left, her eyes brimming with tears. She went home and urged her parents to abandon the empty tradition of idolatry, and instead recognise God, the Creator of all. Afterward Febronia asked Thomais, who was next in authority to the abbess, “I beg of you, mother, tell me who is this stranger sister who was so given to tears as though she had never before heard God’s Book?” “Don’t you know who this sister is?” replied Thomais. “How could I, seeing she is a stranger?” said Febronia. “She is Hieria, the wife of a senator,” said Thomais, “who has just come to live here.” “Why did you deceive me, and not tell me,” said Febronia. “I addressed her as though she were a sister.” “These were the instructions of the abbess,” Thomais replied. Now it so happened that at that time

Febronia fell gravely ill and lay on her pallet at the point of death. When Hieria heard the news, she came along and did not leave Febronia's side until she had recovered from her illness. At that time Emperor Diocletian sent a detachment of soldiers to Assyria under the command of Lysimachus, Selenus and Primus with orders to destroy the Christian community. When the detachment of soldiers approached the convent, the inmates hid. Only Abbess Bryene, Thomais and Febronia remained. Eventually Selenus had Febronia fiercely tortured for refusing to deny her faith in Christ. She suffered unspeakable torments at his command. When Hieria learnt that Febronia was to be tried before the judge's tribunal, she gave a loud wail. Everyone in the house asked her in amazement what was the matter. "My sister Febronia has gone to the court house," she replied. "My teacher is on trial for being a Christian." Her parents tried hard to get her to calm down, but she lamented and wept all the more. "Leave me alone to weep bitterly for my sister and teacher Febronia," she begged them. Her words so affected her parents, they themselves started mourning for Febronia. Having asked them to allow her to go and see the contest, she set off with a number of servants and handmaids. As she came running in tears to the spectacle, she met on the road throngs of women also running and lamenting. She also came across Thomais, and having recognised one another, they came together, lamenting and weeping, to the site of the spectacle. As Selenus had Febronia mercilessly beaten and tortured, the crowd of people were unable to bear witness to such a horrid spectacle and left the scene of the torture, cursing Diocletian and his gods. When Thomais saw the terrible things that were happening to Febronia, she fainted, collapsing on the ground at Hieria's feet. Hieria herself cried out with a loud voice, "Alas, Febronia, my sister, alas my lady and my teacher. Today we have been deprived of your instruction, and not just yours, but also that of the lady Thomais, for here she is dead as well." When Febronia heard Hieria's voice as she lay on the ground, she asked the soldiers to bring some water for her face. They brought it at once and applied it to her face. This at once revived her and she asked to see Hieria. The judge, however, told her to stand up and answer his questions. Then he

put Febronia through even more severe tortures. Hieria shouted at the judge, "You are an enemy to the maintenance of mankind: are you not satisfied with the terrible things you have already brought upon this wretched girl? Are you not reminded of your own mother, who had the same body and wore the same sort of clothes as her? Are you not mindful of the ill-fated day when you were born, how you too received nourishment at those breasts flowing with milk? I am amazed that your savage and merciless heart has not been touched by such things. May the heavenly King not spare you as you have not spared this poor girl." The judge was enraged by her words and gave orders that she too be brought down to be tried. On hearing this, Hieria hurriedly came down, full of happiness, saying, "O God of Febronia, receive me too, a poor pagan, along with my lady Febronia." As she was making her way down, Selenus' friends advised him not to bring her down in public, otherwise the entire city would join her in martyrdom and the city would be lost. Selenus accepted the advice, and so did not make Hieria stand there in public; instead, flaring up in a rage, he simply addressed her: "Listen, Hieria, as the gods live, you have become the cause of many further sufferings for Febronia." Whereupon he ordered both Febronia's hands and her right foot to be cut off. The executioner immediately brought along a block, placed it under her right hand and struck it off with a single blow of the axe. He did the same with her left hand. Then the executioner placed the block under her right foot and brought down the axe, but failed to sever the foot; he struck a second time but failed again. The crowd in the meantime uttered gasps and groans. When he struck her the third time with the axe, he only just managed to sever Febronia's foot. The blessed woman's body was quivering all over, and she was on the point of expiring; nevertheless, she tried to put her other leg on the wooden block, asking for it to be cut off as well. When the judge saw what she was doing, he exclaimed, "Just look at the perseverance of the impudent woman," and in a great fury he told the executioner, "Cut it off." Finally, after spending some time in anguish, Saint Febronia was beheaded. When they had brought Febronia's mutilated body back to the convent, Hieria cried out over her: "I do homage to these holy feet that have

trampled upon the head of the dragon. Let me kiss the wounds and gashes on this holy body, for by means of them have the scars of my own soul been healed. Let me crown with the flowers of praise this head that has crowned our race with the beauty of these glorious achievements.” Large crowds of pagans came to believe in our Lord and were baptised. Lysimachus and Primus themselves were baptised, and renouncing the world, they went off with the abbot Marcellinus to live a life pleasing to Christ, completing their days in peace. Many of the soldiers believed in our Lord and were baptised, as were Hieria and her parents. Hieria left her parents, renounced the world, and went off to the convent, which she endowed with all that she possessed. She requested Bryene, asking her, “I beg you, mother, let your handmaid take the place of the lady Febronia: I will toil as she did.” So Hieria threw off all her jewellery, and she had the blessed girl’s coffin covered with gold and pearls all over. The bishop of the town built a splendid and beautiful shrine to the blessed Febronia, completing it in six years. It was his wish that her relics be enshrined there. When she had heard this, Bryene said, “I beg you, my lords, if it seems good in your eyes and if it seems good to the blessed girl herself, who am I to prevent it? Come in, then, and take her off.” The bishops came to say the prayers, whereupon Hieria started weeping and exclaiming, “Alas for us, you are depriving our convent of a great blessing today! Alas for us, today bereavement and affliction are come to our convent! Alas for us, we are handing over our pearl!” She came sobbing to Bryene, saying, “What are you doing, mother? Why are you depriving me of my sister for whose sake I left everything to take refuge here with you?” Bryene, seeing Hieria in such a state, asked her, “Why are you crying, my daughter Hieria? If she wants to go, she will go.” When the bishops had finished praying and everyone had said “Amen,” they approached to take up the blessed martyr’s coffin. At that moment there was a clap of thunder in the sky, and all the people fell down in fright. Then after a while they put out their hands to take the coffin, but this time there was a great earthquake, so that they imagined the entire town would be ruined. The bishops and all the people thus realised that the holy martyr did not want to leave her convent.

Sorrowfully, the bishops said to Bryene, “If the blessed woman does not want to leave the convent, let her give us just one of her limbs that were cut off as a blessing: we will take it and be off.” So they did. And Saint Hieria lived in the convent the rest of her life, and she reposed in peace.

The **Holy Apostle Jude** was one of the Twelve Disciples of the Lord, and his feast day falls on the same day as that of Saint John of Shanghai the Wonderworker and of the Venerable Paisius the Great of Egypt (19th June / 2nd July). Although he bears the same name as Judas Iscariot who betrayed the Lord, in English his name has been shortened to Jude, while Judas is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name Judah. The New Testament uses various names. “Jude of James” is mentioned twice in the New Testament: in the lists of Apostles in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13. The Epistle of Jude states that it was written by “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James” (Jude 1:1). This James was the brother of Jude, and of the Lord, and the first Bishop of Jerusalem, who was martyred by being thrown from the pinnacle of the Temple. The Gospel of John also once mentions a disciple called “Judas, not Iscariot,” who asks Jesus, “Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” (John 14:22). This is often accepted to be the same person as the Apostle Jude. In the apostolic lists of Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18, Jude is omitted, but there is a Thaddeus (or in some manuscripts of Matthew 10:3, “Lebbaeus who was surnamed Thaddaeus”) listed in his place. This has led many Christians since early times to harmonise the lists by positing a Jude Thaddeus, known by either name. This is made plausible by the fact that Thaddeus seems to be a nickname. While Lebbaeus means ardent, for Jude united himself to Jesus with all his heart. Thaddaeus means “he who gives praise,” for he glorified and rendered praise to Christ. Thaddeus, one of the Twelve Disciples, is often seems indistinguishable from Thaddeus of Edessa, one of the Seventy Apostles who converted Edessa and delivered the image of Christ Not-Made-With-Hands to King Abgar and is celebrated on 21st August. Jude was the son of Joseph, who was betrothed to the Theotokos, whose real mother was Salome, daughter of Haggai, the son of Barachiah, a brother

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist and Forerunner. In John 7:5 we are told that Jude, being one of the brothers of Christ, did not initially believe in the message of Christ. John 14:22 may indicate that Jude did come to believe in Christ's message before His Holy Passion. Conscious of his former sins of lack of faith and brotherly love, he later wrote: "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James" (Jude 1:1), not daring to call himself a brother of the Lord, but instead confessing that He was the Lord incarnate without an earthly brother according to the flesh. Jude married a woman named Mariam, and we are told by the historian Eusebius that during the reign of Dometian (81-96) two grandsons of the Apostle Jude were brought before the Emperor himself, who based on the slanders of heretics was afraid they posed some political danger to him. When the Emperor examined them and saw that they simply toiled in the working of the land, he set them free as they posed no danger to him. The historian Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos writes of Jude: "The divine Jude, who had the dual title of Thaddaeus and Labbaeus, the son of Joseph and brother of James who was cast down from the pinnacle of the Temple of Jerusalem, preached the Gospel and disseminated Christianity first in Judaea, Galilee, Samaria, Idumaea, then in Arabia, Syria and Mesopotamia. Finally, he came to the city of Edessa, which belonged to King Abgar, where the Gospel had been preached before him by another Thaddaeus, one of the Seventy Apostles. There, the Apostle Jude set about and completed what had not been finished by that Thaddaeus." Labouring in this manner for the enlightenment of the pagan peoples and converting them from their former superstitions to the light of the true knowledge of Christ, he made his way to the lands around Mount Ararat, where he converted a multitude of people to Christianity. Having stirred up the pagan unbelievers, there they seized him and subjected him to tortures. Then they hung him up and shot arrows through him. In this way he delivered his soul into the hands of God, and received from Him the unfading crown of martyrdom.



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

**GREAT LENT & PASCHA AT SAINT
EDWARD'S**

This year, we rather hobbled through Great Lent and Great Week at Saint Edward's, as three members of our small brotherhood were ill on and off, but through God's grace we managed to complete the course, and we managed to celebrate the Divine Liturgy every day during Bright Week.

NEW CATECHUMEN

ON Thomas Sunday, 29th April / 12th May, between Matins and the start of the Divine Liturgy, **Maria Marquelia Velazquez Morales**, a former Roman Catholic, made her vows as a catechumen, and was received as such by Priestmonk Sabbas. She was named **Marcella** after the holy **Virgin Martyr Marcella of Chios**, feast day 22nd July / 4th August. Though a native of Mexico, she has been staying in England with her daughter, **Stefanie Toseva**, and this was done by arrangement with her priest there, **Fr Ignacio**.

VISITATION OF METROPOLITAN AMBROSE

HIS GRACE, **Metropolitan Ambrose of Methoni**, visited us again over the weekend of Myrrhbearers' Sunday. He was met at Gatwick by Priestmonk Sabbas on Thursday 16th May and brought to Brookwood. On the next day in the morning he visited the house we are hoping to purchase to provide guest accommodation for the clergy and faithful visiting the Brotherhood (see below). And in the afternoon a meeting of the trustees of the former Convent in London was held along with their

accountant, **Darren Harding**. On the Saturday, the feast day of the holy Great Martyr Eirene, the Metropolitan attended the Divine Liturgy and partook of the Holy Mysteries but did not himself serve. In the afternoon, assisted by Priestmonk Sabbas and Deacon Ioan Turcu, he celebrated the **Baptism of Marcella**, with **Maria-Preposturosa Rattray** standing as her godmother. Immediately after the Baptism and Chrismation, Marcella was imparted the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ for the first time. This was so arranged so that the next day, as planned, she could return to Mexico. Then her family provided a celebratory meal in our old Mortuary. We are extremely grateful to **Larisa Bouaka** for informing us that the Baptism had been arranged here. On the Sunday itself His Grace celebrated the Divine Liturgy, assisted by **Archimandrite Daniel** and Frs Sabbas and Ioan, and at the end preached on the significance of the Gospel. At the parish breakfast, as well as at various other opportunities during his visit, he circulated among the people and talked with numbers of the parishioners. In the early afternoon, he introduced the talk given by **Alexei Bushunow** about the work of the **Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary in Etna**, California, of which Alexei is the **Communications and Development Director**. While here His Grace was greeted by **Fr Adrian Narita** of the **Patriarchal Romanian Church** in this country and his parishioners, who had come to serve a memorial service at the grave of one of their people laid to rest here. Thereafter he went to London, where he met **Bishops of the Romanian Old Calendarist Synod** who were visiting England for the consecration of their church at **Naphill, High Wycombe**, and where he attended to several business matters before returning to Greece. He is planning to visit us again in August.

PROPOSED GUEST ACCOMMODATION

FOR many years now our Brotherhood has felt the lack of accommodation for overnight guests and visiting clergy. We have always been unable to put up women, and in the past few years have only been able to provide one blow-up bed in the

exhibition room for male visitors. With the sale of the property of the former **Convent at Brondesbury Park, NW6**, the trustees there generously agreed to fund our purchase of a house to fill this need, and naturally our first thought was “The Lodge” on Cemetery Pales, directly opposite the entrance to Saint Cyprian’s Avenue, which has been vacant for a long period, but apparently Woking Borough Council has other plans for that property. However, one has been found in nearby Pirbright, which would be eminently suitable and has much more potential than the Lodge would have, and in which we could have a private chapel furnished with the fittings from the former Convent chapel to continue its existence. An offer has been made and accepted, and a building surveyor engaged to report on the property. Before this, after a Liturgy served here at Saint Edward’s, all the directors of the **King Edward Orthodox Trust**, and the **trustees of the former Convent** with the exception of the Bishop and Fr Nippon, were able to view the house before the offer was submitted, and during Metropolitan Ambrose’s recent visit, he and Fr Nippon were kindly shown round by the present owner. A rare occurrence, but all eight people involved were enthusiastic about the prospects for our community. We ask your prayers that this project may be brought to a successful conclusion, so that we can better care for our people, especially as so many of them now live far away from Brookwood.

PILGRIMAGE

A **PILGRIMAGE** to **Lindisfarne and Durham** (now fully booked up) has been arranged for our parishioners and friends, and will take place between 18th June and 22nd June. **Father Daniel** was hoping to join the pilgrims in Durham, but unfortunately because of medical appointments this will now not be possible. **Fr John Somers**, however, will lead the pilgrims.

NEW ICON FOR THE CHURCH

OUR newest catechumen, **Osyth Thompson**, has donated a beautiful hand-painted icon of her name saint, St Osyth of

Chich, to Saint Edward’s Church. It had been painted by the sisters of the **Convent of Saint Philothei in Sweden.**

VISITORS

IN addition to all those mentioned in the postings above, **Paraschos Anastassiades** brought a coach full of fifty-three pilgrims from the **London Greek Orthodox churches** (Thyateira Archdiocese) to the shrine of Saint Edward the Martyr later on the afternoon of Myrrh-bearers’ Sunday. They prayed before the shrine and spent about an hour in the church.



Practical Tip

WHEN in church, try to be unobtrusive. Do not wear flashy or eye-catching clothes; they do not have to be extremely sombre and should not be - we are not Puritans! - but they should be restrained. Do not wear clothes, or more especially these days allow your children to wear them, that are noisy, flash lights or otherwise distract people from their prayers. Do not move around unnecessarily, and, if you have to, walk quietly, not thrashing about and disturbing others. Recently, it seems, two or three women have come to our church on horseback, which is lovely - horses are delightful animals, - but then they seem, from what we hear in the altar, to bring the horses into the church. That is a step too far! The baseline is that the church is a place of prayer, and we should always show consideration for our brothers and sisters there who are trying to pray, even if, as so often happens, we are not that inclined to do so ourselves and are looking for distractions.



“BE STILL, and know that I am God” - Psalm 45:10