

# *The Shepherd*

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# From the Fathers

“THE PRIMARY LESSON for life must be implanted in the soul from the earliest age. The primary lesson for children is to know the eternal God, the One who gives everlasting life.”

HIEROMARTYR CLEMENT, BISHOP OF ROME, + 99 A.D.

“LET NOTHING be taught to children except those things which nourish the soul and make one a better person.”

HIEROMARTYR CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE, + 258 A.D.

“IT IS NOT the amount of learning that must be our aim, but the quality of learning. Better to learn two verses with understanding, than a whole page with wandering thoughts.”

VEN. JOHN CASSIAN THE ROMAN, + 435 A.D.

“WE ARE SO concerned with our children’s schooling [and worldly success]; if only we were equally zealous in bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord... This, then, is our task: to educate both ourselves and our children in godliness; otherwise what answer will we have before Christ’s judgment-seat?”

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, + 437 A.D.

“WHEN YOU CUT a tree, its [lopped] branches dry up immediately, and if you water its root, the branches are filled with force. So you, parents, can be likened to a tree: you are the root of your children, and when you water yourself with fasting, prayers, alms and kind deeds, God preserves your children. If an apple tree gives sour apples, who is to blame: the apple tree or the apples? The apple tree. So, do the right thing, parents, so that your ‘apples’ become sweet.”

NEW HIEROMARTYR COSMAS OF AETOLIA, PEER OF THE APOSTLES, + 1779 A.D.

“CHILDREN look more at their parents’ lives and reflect them in their young souls than they listen to their words.”

SAINT TIKHON OF ZADONSK, 1783 A.D.

“TAKE GREAT CARE of your children. We live at a time when much freedom is given to the expression of thought, but little care is taken that thoughts should be founded on truth. Teach them to love truth.”

VEN. MACARIUS OF OPTINA, + 1860 A.D.



# *The Mystery of the Rapture*

*Continuation & Completion*

## **IV. The “incomparable” glory of the Mother of God**

1. “Heaven,” therefore - to wit, the “House of the Father” - is “spacious” and includes “many mansions,” that is “different degrees of honour.” Perhaps, however, this clarification now gives rise to the perception of three very general “mansions,” that is, three places or levels of different degrees of honour,

when we take into consideration that there is one glory of the Most Blessed Theotokos, another of the Holy Bodiless Powers, and another of the deified faithful.

2. Yet, what mind is capable of apprehending the incomparable glory of the Mother of God? The sanctification that befits her as the Mother of God and her preternatural charisms “transcend every mind and every word, on account of both their magnitude and their multitude,” since “there is nothing else in the entire creation either equal to the Theotokos or superior to her.”

3. “There is, therefore, nothing in life like Mary the Theotokos,” says that most consummate orator Chrysostom; “Go about the whole creation in your mind, O man, and see whether there is anything equal to, or greater than, the Holy Theotokos and Virgin; traverse the earth; look around the sea; pry into the air; scrutinise the heavens in your intellect; call to mind all of the invisible Powers, and see whether there is any other such wonder in the whole of creation.”

4. In what, however, does the incomparable glory of the Mother of God reside? “Thou, O Virgin Mary,” says St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, addressing the All-Holy Theotokos, “didst contain in thine immaculate womb genuinely, without seed [and] without knowing a man, God the Word, Whom thou didst carry without fatigue, didst bring forth without travail, and to Whom thou gavest birth without corruption, without impairing thy Virginity. These four [facts] are the most preternatural, the most extraordinary, the most unprecedented, and the most astounding.”

5. On account of these four [facts], “most fittingly is the Theotokos incomparably higher than all of the Heavenly Powers, for they only receive certain illuminations from God, whereby they are illumined and perfected;” “hence, the Theotokos is incomparably superior even to the very Cherubim, as also to the Seraphim; for the Theotokos is incomparably more glorious than they.”

6. Furthermore, it is a fact that “the Theotokos is the animate throne of God, the King of all, for she contained in her womb Him Who cannot be contained by anything, and carried Him as a throne.” The Seraphim, however, stand around this throne,

which suggests the distance between the Theotokos and the Heavenly Powers: “I saw the Lord sitting on a high and exalted throne, and the house was full of His Glory. And the Seraphim stood round about Him: each one had six wings, and with twain they covered their face, and with twain they covered their feet, and with twain they flew. And one cried to the other, and they said, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His Glory.”

7. There is, therefore, a “difference in station” between the Theotokos and the Heavenly Orders, concerning which the Divine Gregory Palamas makes the following marvellous comments: ‘Concerning the supreme order of Angels Esaias writes: “And the Seraphim stood round about Him;” but concerning her David says: “upon thy right hand stood the queen.” Do you see the difference in their station? From this you can also comprehend the difference in the dignity of their standing; for the Seraphim stand around God, but only the Queen of all stands beside Him;’ ‘not only does she stand beside Him, but at His right hand, as is fitting, for where Christ sits in Heaven, to wit, “on the right hand of the Majesty,” there also she now stands, having ascended from earth to Heaven; not only because she loves and is loved in return more than all others, in accordance with the very laws of nature, but also because she is truly His throne; where the king sits, there also stands his throne. Esaias beheld this throne in the midst of that Cherubic choir and called it “high and exalted,” indicating thereby that the Mother of God far surpasses the Heavenly Powers. For this reason, he also introduces the Angels glorifying God for her and saying: “Blessed be the Glory of the Lord from His place.”’

8. So great is the superiority and the exceeding honour of the Ever-Virgin Mother of God, “beyond all measure and proportion,” in relation to the Heavenly Powers, by virtue of the magnitude and multitude of her “essential” and “inner” charisms, that Saint Cosmas the Melodist, “wishing to hymn the incomparable glory of the Mother of God,” “is compelled to summon from without the Cherubim and the Seraphim, the foremost Orders of Angels, who stand around God, in order that through their comparative incomparability, or incomparable comparison,” he

might chant this extraordinary hymn: *More honourable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, thee who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, the very Theotokos, thee do we magnify.*

9. That remarkable exponent of our Church's teaching concerning the Theotokos, Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite, declares that this hymn should be understood as follows: 'Beyond compare more honourable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim,' since the adverb 'incomparably' is to be ascribed 'not only to the Seraphim, but also to the Cherubim;' that is, the Theotokos is 'more honourable not comparably, but incomparably' than the Cherubim and the Seraphim.

10. It is noteworthy that "in referring to the two highest Orders of the first Angelic Hierarchy - I mean the Cherubim and the Seraphim - and in saying that the Theotokos is incomparably more honourable and more glorious than they, the Divine Cosmas demonstrated that she is more honourable and more glorious than all of the other lower Orders; for if she is superior to the greater, how much more superior is she to the lesser."

11. The Spirit-bearing Athonite expert on the Theotokos concludes succinctly: She surpasses both Angels and Archangels, and all of the choirs of the Heavenly Powers, not commensurably, but incommensurably.

12. However, the incomparability of the preëminence of the Mother of God is extolled with especial emphasis not only when the Saints teach that the All-Pure one "is the sole frontier [μεθόριον] between created and uncreated nature," but also when they proclaim that 'the Virgin is the treasurer and guardian of all the treasures and charisms of God the Heavenly King,' 'so as to impart and distribute them to all creatures, both intelligible and sensible, both Angels and men.'

13. This astounding idea was already expressed by Saint Gregory Palamas: 'She was the first to receive the fullness of Him Who fills all things, and she renders Him accessible to all in distributing to each according to his strength and in proportion to the measure of his purity; hence, she is the treasury and dispenser of the wealth of the Godhead,' 'and none of the gifts of

God can be granted either to Angels or to men save through her.’  
14. This common mind of the Church regarding the incomparable superiority of the Mother of God is summarised as follows by Saint Nicodemus: Since Our Lady, the Theotokos, as Mother of God, comes immediately after God and incomparably surpasses not only men, but also the very foremost and highest Orders of the Angels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, she distributes through herself the wealth of all God’s gifts and Divine illuminations to all, both Angels and men alike; such is the common mind of the entire Church of Christ.

B.

15. Nevertheless, the ninefold choir of the Holy Bodiless Powers, although incomparably inferior, in terms of participation in Divine Glory, to the All-Blessed Theotokos, is still clearly superior to the choir of deified persons, since the Angelic choir constitutes the Heavenly Hierarchy.

16. The Holy Bodiless Powers are differentiated, according to Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, into three triadic ranks: the highest triad is comprised of the Thrones, the Cherubim, and the Seraphim; the middle triad consists of the Dominions, the Powers, and the Authorities; in the lowest triad are found the Principalities, the Archangels, and the Angels.

17. The Divine Damascene, with reference to these three “triadic ranks,” says the following: As that most holy, sacred, and superlative theologian, Dionysius the Areopagite, says, all theology, that is to say, Divine Scripture, assigns nine different names to the heavenly Entities; that Divine Mystagogue divides these Entities into three triadic ranks.

18. In Heaven, however, there prevails an eternal principle, as the Saints assure us: the lesser participate in God through the greater. For, since this is an eternal principle in Heaven, that the lesser participate through the greater in Him Who is beyond being, and since the Virgin Mother is incomparably greater than all, as many as participate in God do so through her.

19. By virtue of this principle, therefore, the three Orders of the Holy Bodiless Powers participate to different degrees in the Divine illuminations, but whereas the higher Orders participate in the glory of the lower, the lower Orders do not participate in

the sacred illumination of the higher, according to the initiate of hidden mysteries, Dionysius: For the superior ranks possess superabundantly the sacred attributes of their inferiors, whereas those lowest in rank do not possess the transcendent fullnesses of their superiors, although the initial illuminations are partially conveyed to them through the first ranks, proportionately to themselves.

20. This difference between the Heavenly Orders is confirmed by Saint John of Damascus: But they differ from each other in luminosity and station, either occupying their station in accordance with their luminosity, or participating in luminosity in accordance with their station, and illumining one another by virtue of the superiority of their rank or nature. It is clear that the superior Orders impart both illumination and knowledge to the inferior ones.

21. This difference in luminosity and station between the Heavenly “triadic ranks” became especially perceptible during the Divine Ascension of Our Lord, as Saint Maximus the Confessor teaches us. Responding to the question, “Why did the Holy Spirit descend nine [ten] days after the Ascension?” he leads us up to the Mystery of the Restoration of those in Heaven: ‘Some who are educated in the things of God say that, since the Angelic Powers consist, according to Dionysius the Areopagite, of nine Orders, when the Lord ascended—according to His humanity (for, according to His Divinity, He fills all things), He assigned a single day to each Order, from the first day to the last; for these, too, were in need of the Lord’s visitation to them; for in Him, according to the Apostle, all things were gathered together, not only things on earth, but also things in Heaven; and after this He appeared to God the Father, and thus did the Spirit descend,’ ‘neither the Thursday on which He ascended nor the Sunday on which the Spirit descended being including in the reckoning.’

22. To each Order of the Heavenly Powers, then, the God-Man, in His Ascension, “assigned a single day” and “on each day” “each Order approached and worshipped that deified Flesh” of the Saviour. And finally, “when the nine days and Orders had been fulfilled, on the tenth [day] the Comforter descended.”



### C.

23. Therefore, as the lower Heavenly Orders do not participate in the same glory as the higher Orders, “for the final ranks have no share in all of the attributes of the highest ranks,” in precisely this way human beings who have been deified, who in some sense collectively form a place or level, do not participate in the sanctifying illumination of the supreme Heavenly Orders.

24. A clear picture of this inferiority of deified human beings by comparison with the Heavenly entities is given by the wondrous event of the purification of the Holy Prophet Esaias by a Seraph: There was sent to me one of the Seraphim, and he had in his hand a coal, which he had taken off the altar with the tongs: and he touched my mouth, and said, ‘Behold, this hath touched thy lips, and shall take away thine iniquities, and shall purge thy sins.’

25. The Holy Bodiless Hosts, as “celestial powers,” according to Saint Basil the Great, “are deemed worthy of standing in closest proximity [to God] by virtue of their exceeding holiness,” and consequently, as “secondary noetic lights,” according to the Divine Damascene, “which derive their luminosity from the First and Unoriginate Light,” “enjoy a primary and manifold participation in the Divine, and provide primary and manifold revelations of the Divine hiddenness.” It is precisely for this reason that they are called by the general name “Angels,” because “Divine illumination is granted to them first, and through them revelations that transcend us are transmitted to us.”

26. To be sure, the Holy Bodiless Powers, that is, “every noetic nature,” as Saint Gregory Palamas says, are “fellow-servants with us and in the image of the Creator;” nevertheless, “we are far inferior [in respect of the Divine likeness], and especially now [after the Fall], to the good Angels,” who are “more honourable than us, as being without bodies and closer to the utterly incorporeal and uncreated Nature,” and “are for this reason called a secondary light and an emanation of the Primal Light.” And, more specifically, the Noetic Powers “though fellow-servants with us, are nonetheless honoured by us and are by virtue of their rank far more honourable than us,” as “maintaining both their proper rank and cherishing that purpose for which they were created.”

27. However, in spite of this vivid awareness of the three most general “mansions,” that is, the three levels of different degrees of honour and glory - of the Theotokos, of the Bodiless Powers, and of deified human beings - the Holy Apostle Paul did not have this distinction in mind, and certainly did not ascend to the third level, that of the Theotokos. Therefore, what, in the end, was the “third heaven” to which the God-bearing Apostle was “caught up”?

28. The Holy Hesychastic Fathers will give us an authoritative answer to this question, since they had similar deificatory experiences, that is, they were “experienced Fathers,” who, after passing through the stages of purification and illumination, attained to deification and became “supracelestial.”

• These three stages of the ladder leading to Heaven, which touches on the Throne of the Lamb, now induct us into the Mystery of the three Heavens.

## **V. The apprehension of “more Divine realities”**

1. According to the holy Fathers, “no one can be saved without first being deified; and again, no one can be deified without first being assimilated to God.” For a man to be made like unto God, he must imitate the Divine perfections and thus be united with Him.

2. Salvation, therefore, means deification, and deification means the resemblance and union of the image (man) with the Prototype (God): Salvation cannot be brought about but through the deification of the saved; deification is assimilation to God and union with Him, as far as this is attainable.

3. Man, in ascending the ladder towards assimilation to God, becomes good by participation and by Grace, and is inflamed by Divine longing, and is purified through this Divine longing; in being purified, he becomes Godlike; in becoming Godlike, he becomes god by Grace forever after.

4. In this state, the mind of the person being deified “is smitten by longing” “and experiences awe beyond comprehension,” because he sees “himself being caught up by God” and enjoying the future blessedness, which is “the vision of God, not [of course] according to His Nature and Essence, but according to

His Divine attributes and perfections.”

5. This vision of God is to be identified with the vision “of the Divine attributes that are beheld naturally and eternally,” that is, with the vision of the uncreated Energies of God; this apprehension of “more Divine realities” is to be identified with the “third heaven.” In that case, he who is deified is caught up “into the regions around the Trinity;” that is, he participates in the uncreated Energies of God and “is led and acted upon” by God, since his bodily and psychic functions are suspended and become quiescent.

6. The Holy Fathers give the name “rapture” to this revelatory experience of the Holy Apostle Paul and speak about the “mystery of the rapture.” This “rapture” was a spiritual experience identical to the deification experienced by the Saints of the Old and New Testaments. However, in view of its ineffability, it has been articulated in a variety of ways, since created language is insufficient to express realities that are, by nature and by Grace, uncreated.

7. As the Patristic theology of prayer draws closer and closer to the Mystery of the three Heavens, we observe that it already lays a secure foundation for the further understanding of this issue: The beginning of prayer consists in expelling thoughts, through single words of prayer, as soon as they assault us; the middle stage of prayer is for the intellect to concentrate on what is being said or thought; the end of prayer is being caught up to the Lord.

8. Corresponding to the three stages of prayer, the journey towards deification passes through three stages: practical philosophy, natural contemplation, and theological mystagogy. According to Saint Maximus the Confessor, it is said that the function of practical philosophy is to purify the mind of every passionate fantasy, that the function of natural contemplation is to afford the mind access to all true knowledge of existing things in accordance with the cause by which they exist, and that the function of theological mystagogy is to make it [the mind], by Grace and according to habit, like God and equal to Him - as far as possible -, so that it no longer has any awareness at all of things sequent to God, on account of its transcendence of them. Saint Theophylact of Bulgaria, summarising the Tradition ante-

cedent to him, in which he participates by experience, gives us an anagogic interpretation of the three Heavens: Since many matters are spoken of anagogically, we will say a few things that are easier to understand. Thus, there is the first heaven, the end and scope of moral philosophy, in which one properly regulates his moral conduct. Then there is the second, physical heaven, in which one acquires knowledge of the nature of the universe, as far as this is possible. Then there is the theological, third heaven, in which, according to the measure of his capacity, one attains, through vision, to the apprehension of more Divine realities that transcend knowledge.

10. To this hermeneutical tradition belongs also the choir of the Hesychastic Fathers of the Philokalia, down to Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite. The greatest among them, Saint Gregory Palamas, assures us that the Holy Apostle Paul was at that time [during the “rapture”] light and spirit, to which he was united and from which he had received the capacity of uniting, having gone out from all things and become light by Grace and non-being by transcendence, that is, by rising above created things.

11. It should be noted that the Neptic Fathers distinguish between two different kinds of illumination and “rapture”: that of the heart and that of the mind, the former preceding and the latter following. Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite calls illumination in the heart “enhypostatic” “because it abides in the heart by habit, not coming and going in the manner of thoughts,” and he also notes that “unless the heart is first illumined, the mind cannot be caught up to God.”

12. When the “illumination” of the heart has increased greatly, then the mind, becoming the “mind of Christ,” is exalted “to the third heaven.” For, being guided by that light which multiplies in the heart and inundates it, the mind ascends or is led up to Divine revelations of God’s power, wisdom, and goodness. It is caught up to the eternal and natural attributes of God prior to the fashioning of creation; and it sees the issues of things to come and beholds whatsoever other secret and ineffable mysteries the Holy Spirit will reveal to him in proportion to his purity.

13. According to the Holy Fathers, the “Mystery of the rapture” is the next stage of “pure prayer,” since, as Saint Isaac the Syrian

elucidates, “prayer is one thing, and Divine vision during prayer is another:” beyond the boundary of pure prayer “there will then be wonderment, and not prayer,” for “what pertains to prayer has ceased, while there is a certain Divine vision, and the mind does not utter any prayer.” This “Mystery” is given very rarely, for “one out of thousands is found worthy to attain to pure prayer with great vigilance, to break through this boundary, and to acquire experience of that Mystery,” “and as to that Mystery which is after pure prayer and lies beyond it, there is scarcely to be found a single man from generation and generation who by the Grace of God has attained to it.”

14. The “Mystery of the rapture,” which, on account of its rarity, is characterised by the Saints as “a thing difficult to grasp, difficult to express, and difficult to acquire,” those who are deified are always vouchsafed it “at the time of prayer.” Abba Isaac, after stating that this “ineffable grace” “is granted to the worthy at the time of prayer,” just as, moreover, the Lives of the Saints present “many of the Saints standing at prayer, their minds caught up therein,” then responds as follows to the question, “why are these great and inexpressible charisms granted only at the time of prayer?” Because at this time, and more than at any other time, a man is prepared and collected, so as to devote his attention to God, both desiring and receiving mercy from Him.

15. With particular regret we must conclude our lengthy disquisition on the mysteries of the “third heaven” and the “progress, ascent, or assumption” of the God-bearing Apostle thereto with the words of Saint Theophylact of Bulgaria, according to the simpler rendition of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite: ‘Paul, therefore, ascended to the vision of the celestial regions around the Holy Trinity, caught up thereto, assuredly, by the ineffable power of the Holy Spirit, having transcended all created things, both sensible and intelligible, and even the very Orders of the Angels. During the time of this rapture, he was neither in the body, since his bodily senses were not functioning, nor outside the body, since even the cognition and energy of his mind had ceased and were not functioning; neither were the other faculties and energies of his soul functioning, and consequently he did not know in what kind of state he was. For before the things of God all

human cognition becomes quiescent, since the mind of man is then caught up by God and is led and acted upon by Him as, where, and into what mysteries He desires and wills,' 'which sights and revelations are all unknown to the mind and inexpressible in language, and one cannot receive or apprehend them unless he departs from man's natural baseness and lowliness and ascends to that which is above nature by the ineffable power of the Holy Spirit.'

*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](https://www.hsir.org/Info_en/New.html)), click on "Theology," then "Studies" and thirdly "Hermeneutics."*



## POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

*"I START to do my prayers in the morning and evening and sometimes my eyes close from exhaustion when I want to pray and I can almost not read (suddenly my sight becomes bad). It is probably temptation but how to solve it?" **T.O., Ghana.***

YOU ASK ME about exhaustion in prayer and I am the one who will find any and every excuse to be "exhausted." It is like asking a drunkard how to overcome drink! I think though there are two ways to help. One is, if you are really exhausted, just to sit and say the Jesus Prayer, rather than trying to get through a prayer rule. Another way, which I was told about at the monastery in America, is to say, particularly in the evening, the prayers early. Don't wait to the end of the day when you just want to drop into bed, but say them earlier (perhaps leaving one or two for just before bed) and then go on with the day, finishing off when you go to bed. That way, at least they are done, and perhaps with greater attention and clarity. If the priest you confess to disagrees with anything I have written, please ignore what I have said and follow his counsel, and forgive me for leading you astray.

# The Icon of the Panagia\*

## Orthodoxy of the Heart: A Moving True Story

THE ELDERLY CHARALAMBOS lived the last years of his life with nostalgic memories of his lost homeland.\*\* He thought continually of his beautiful village near Prousa, and his eye would well up with tears. With this longing, he departed for the everlasting life.

Often, he would take his grandson Bobby (Charalambos) in his arms and talk to him about his village. He would describe the church and the school where he first learned how to read and write, and also the village square where he used to play. In great detail he would describe the house where he was born and lived after he was married and raised a family.

Bobby grew up and was educated in Athens, but he always remembered his grandfather. When he learned that a travel agency had organised an excursion to Prousa, he felt that it was his duty to visit that place in the memory of his grandfather.

Bobby was very moved when he arrived at his grandfather's village. He first saw the church, which had been turned into a mosque. He approached the coffee house that his grandfather used to frequent... it had closed. The village square was completely neglected. He arrived in front of the house. With a trembling hand, he pushed the gate open. An old man was sitting on the steps. He stood up when he saw him. "Come, my child, what do you want?" he asked him in Turkish. With the few Turkish words that Bobby had learned from his grandfather, he tried to make himself understood - that he had come from Greece to see his grandfather's village.

\* *Panagia* - Greek word meaning the All-holy one, the term by which the Greek faithful often refer to the All-holy Mother of God - *ed.*

\*\* In 1922, the Orthodox Christians living in the new state of Turkey left to settle in Greece, and a smaller number of Moslems living in Greece went to Turkey - it is known as the Exchange of Populations - *ed.*

When the old man heard that, he jumped up and embraced him warmly. "Welcome, he said in Greek. "I knew you were coming, and I was waiting for you." Bobby looked at him in bewilderment. The old man took him by the hand and led him to a small room inside the house. He sat him in the only chair in the room. Wiping away a tear that rolled down his face, he continued: "I was born in a beautiful little village in Macedonia. My parents were Moslems. They were farmers. I was the family's youngest child. When the rest of the family would go to work on the farm, I used to stay at my friend Nick's house. Many times I would also sleep there. His parents loved me, and I was like one of their children. They were good people and faithful Christians; they would go to church often. In the evening the whole family would kneel and pray in front of the Panagia's icon, where an oil lamp was always burning. A censer was next to it, which gave forth a fragrance throughout the whole house. All these things filled me with a sense of awe. Many times I would kneel with them and I would talk with the Panagia as if I were talking with my mother. Then my soul would be filled with peace.

One day, Nick's family went to a country chapel which was celebrating its feast day. They took me with them. I attended the Holy Liturgy, and when I saw the faithful walking towards the Beautiful Gate to partake of Holy Communion, I followed them. My friend's father held me back. "Not you, my child, he said in a low voice. "You cannot commune because you are not baptised." I looked at him sadly. "Then I will be baptised," I answered. A little later, my friend's father explained to me that we belonged to different faiths, and my parents would not allow me to be baptised. If I had the same yearning when I came of age, I could be baptised then.

I continued to pray to the Panagia, waiting for that much-desired day. But I was unable to carry out my great desire. Before I came of age, the exchange of populations took place. I was brought to this village by my parents. It was during the night, and I was unable to say goodbye to my friend and his family, which I loved. That grieved me a great deal.



Once or twice I tried to leave home. My parents were forced to lock me in this room, where I have continued to live all these years.

One night, when I was overcome with despair, I knelt down like Nick's family used to do, and with tears in my eyes I besought the Panagia to help me return. Suddenly I sensed a wonderful fragrance filling the room. I felt it to be the Panagia's answer to my prayer. To this day, I still sense that same fragrance when I pray at night.

Later on, I began to hear light tapping coming from underneath the bed in which I slept. For a whole year I could not understand what was happening, nor did I dare tell anyone.

I found an opportunity one day when my family was attending a wedding at a neighbouring village. I searched the spot very carefully and noticed that some floor boards were loose. Lifting them up, I saw a metal box underneath. "Surely it must be some hidden treasure," I thought. Trembling overcame me as I opened it. Inside was a gilded icon of the Panagia, an oil lamp and a censer that was giving off a fragrance. It occurred to me that the people who had left this house had hidden the precious treasure so it would not fall into defiled hands.

I thought of doing the same - to protect the icon until someone from the family was found, to whom I could hand it over. That was my request when I prayed to the Panagia every night.

Years have passed since then. My parents have left this life. My brothers married and have their own homes. I have remained here on my own, protecting the icon of the Panagia. I did not want to get married or have a woman enter my house (because the Panagia was there). My relatives and fellow villagers avoided me since they thought that I was a bit mad. That suited me, because in this way they did not bother me.

Lately I have been feeling weak. I have been praying to the Panagia, "My Panagia, do not let me die before I deliver your icon into safe hands."

Last night I received an answer. The fragrance stopped. A refreshing breeze enveloped my soul. I took the icon out of the box and it seemed that the Panagia smiled at me. I thought, “She will send someone today to take it,” so I sat on the steps since morning waiting. Now I can close my eyes in peace.”

Deeply moved Bobby took the holy icon from the old man’s hands. He kissed his hand and felt as if he were kissing his grandfather’s hand. He thanked him from the bottom of his heart. They said goodbye with tears in their eyes.

Before Bobby left, the old man gave him a small pouch. “Take it, my child,” he said, “it is soil from your grandfather’s garden. Put it on his grave for his soul to find rest.”

An Article from “Spiritual Treasures,”  
Translated and kindly contributed by the sisters of the  
Convent of the Holy Angels, Afidnai, Greece.



## THE COMING MONTH

IN July we celebrate:-

The **Holy New Martyr Michael the Gardener of Athens** (9<sup>th</sup> / 22<sup>nd</sup>) was born to very poor but pious and faithful parents in the city of Athens in A.D. 1753. He did not go to school but learned gardening instead. A devout Orthodox Christian, Michael was a parishioner at the church of Panagia Vlassarou, which today is in ruins in Ancient Agora near This-seio. During the harvest season Michael would load his donkey with products and peddle them in the villages surrounding the city of Athens. One day when he was eighteen years old, as he was returning from such a journey in the villages of Attica with his donkey, he was seized by some Muslims and accused falsely of transporting gunpowder to some rebel Greeks (*klefts*) who had become allies of the Russians, who were at that time at war with the Ottomans. The Muslims beat him up and brought him

before the *kadi* who had him put in gaol. There, he was visited by other Muslims who threatened Michael and attempted to convert him to the Islamic faith. A pious and zealous Christian named George, who found out about Michael, was able to visit him in prison and give him much needed support, for Michael was rather simple and uneducated. George feared that Michael might deny his Orthodox Faith, seeking to spare his life since he was young. After bribing the guards, George saw Michael in his prison cell on his knees praying with tears. For many hours they stayed together and prayed and sang hymns. After giving the young Michael words of encouragement to make firm his faith for martyrdom, they embraced and he departed. After thirty days of incarceration, Michael was returned to the *kadi* who began to flatter Michael and promised not only to spare his life, but to reward him with all kinds of good things if only he would consent and embrace Islam. Michael, however, refused saying: "I will not become a Muslim! I will not become a Turk!" Consequently he was sent to the so-called *kalopasha* (good pasha) from Ioannina to decide on his fate. Then the same thing occurred: the same threats and promises, but also the same refusal from Michael, who, though simple, was mighty in faith: "I will not become a Muslim! I will not become a Turk!" As a result, he was sentenced to death. On the way to his execution, Michael asked forgiveness from all the Orthodox Christians he encountered. The site of his execution was to be the Temple of Olympian Zeus. At the site of his execution Michael knelt and bent his head, being tied to one of the pillars of the Temple. The executioner, to frighten and cause him to weaken at the last minute, hit him with the blunt edge of the sword asking the martyr to reconsider. The martyr responded: "I told you, I am a Christian. I refuse to become a Muslim." It is said that this was done a few times to induce fear in Michael. But Michael, full of the Holy Spirit, shouted with courage: "Strike for the Faith!" This infuriated the executioner who struck off Michael's head with one fatal swing of the sword. Thus Michael the Gardener from Athens gave his life for the love of Jesus Christ on 9<sup>th</sup> July, 1771. Today the following inscription at the Temple of Olympian Zeus (the first southeastern pillar) bears witness to Saint

Michael's martyrdom: "1771 Ιουλίου 9 απεκεφαλίσθη ο Πακνανάς Μιχάλης" (9<sup>th</sup> July 1771 Michael Paknanas was beheaded.) The ever-memorable Photis Kontoglou painted an icon of Saint Michael in the Chapel of Saint Eirene in Kifisia, Attica.

The **Holy Martyr Golinduc the Persian** is celebrated on 13<sup>th</sup> / 26<sup>th</sup> July, the same day as we celebrate the icon of the Mother of God "It is Truly Meet" and the Synaxis of the holy Archangel Gabriel. She lived in Persia during the reign of Chosroes II. She was a pagan woman, but had a good soul and intention. Endowed with a lucid mind, Golinduc perceived the falseness of the pagan wisdom, and she pondered much about what the true Faith might be. She always sought to do good and she praised God in her life. Her husband, however, was a magician and superstitious. Once Golinduc was granted to have a glimpse of heaven, a bright place with many joyous people dressed in shining raiment. She felt enheartened and with longing tried to get into that pleasant place. She was prevented by an Angel telling her: "The witnesses of Christ stay here." And immediately this vision was lost, leaving Golinduc sorrowful. When she brought herself under control, she went and found the Christians in the city. "I want to be a witness of Christ," she told them. They received her, gave her catechism and baptised her giving her the name Maria. And her joy was great! When her husband learned of these things, he reported it to the king, and Chosroes ordered that she be banished to a fortress, which was called "Oblivion." Maria stayed for eighteen years in this fortress living with suffering and deprivation, but having in her heart joy and peace due to her faith in God. Every now and then, people of the king tried to persuade her to deny Christ. During the reign of Chosroes' successor, his son Ormisdas, an ambassador of the Byzantine Emperor Maurice, named Aristobulus, arrived in Persia. Having learned that for many years Mary the Christian had been languishing in prison, Aristobulus repeatedly visited her with the permission of the Emperor and taught her to chant the Psalms of David. But after Aristobulus left, Ormisdas gave orders that Golinduc be brought before him and for a long time he tortured her, subjecting her to all sorts of beatings and torments. But in all the torments through the mercies of God the Saint was preserved unharmed. When they gave her over for defilement, the Lord made her invisible to the impious and preserved her purity. In the end she was thrown into a pit, where there was a large and poisonous snake and other reptiles and vermin. She was left there for four months but none of the

animals ever bothered her. Indeed the snake, which terrified others, became so accustomed to Maria's presence that it liked to sleep by her side. The pagans saw all these things and felt puzzled because, despite the hardships, Maria was in a good state, but they could not believe that it was God who gave her the strength and safeguarded her. They thought that she was a witch. Therefore, after putting her through many hardships, the king ordered that she be beheaded. She was marked at the neck and was led to the executioner. On the way an Angel of the Lord made her invisible for a moment and took her out of the city. When Saint Maria understood what happened she felt sad because she wanted to become a witness for Christ. Then the Angel said to her: "Do not feel sad, after going through so much, you are a martyr." Then, after she glorified God, Maria left for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There, she spent her time praying in the churches, teaching and supporting the faithful, and giving catechism to the pagans. For this reason she was loved by many people who had her as their mother. In Jerusalem she denounced the Severian heresy, which taught that the Divine nature in Christ suffered, which is why they read the Trisagion in the following erroneous form: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, Who was crucified for us, have mercy on us." Indeed, the Patriarch asked her to go to Constantinople to pray for the Christian kings. She replied that she did not have enough time left to do that. True enough, a short time after saying that, while she was in the Church of Saint Sergius in the city of Antioch Migdonia (Nisibis), she knelt, prayed and delivered her soul to the hands of God.

**Our Venerable Father Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain** (14<sup>th</sup> / 27<sup>th</sup>) is one of the greatest theological and instructive figures during the Turkish occupation. His works elevated the morals of monastics and all the faithful by making known the wisdom of the holy fathers, the fragrance of hagiography and the grace of hymnography. Rightly is he the boast of the Holy Mountain and the glory of the Orthodox Church. According to his virtue-loving spiritual brother and excellent biographer Hieromonk Euthymius, he was born in Naxos in 1749 to virtuous parents, Antony and Anastasia, who ended her life as a nun named Agathi at the Monastery of Saint John Chrysostom in Naxos. The excellent gifts that adorned him were made manifest early on. His sharpness, love of learning, strong memory and purity made him an excellent student of the priest-teacher of his parish and a server at the sacred services. Such intelligence and performance also appeared while he attended school in the town of Naxos. As soon as he turned sixteen he entered the

renowned Evangelical School of Smyrna. Returning to his homeland he enriched his knowledge with the famous and very good teacher Chrysanthus, brother of the Hieromartyr Cosmas of Aetolia. The Metropolitan of that place, Anthimus Vardis, who valued him, hired him as his secretary. There he met Athonite fathers, though whom he became attracted to the monastic life and was taught noetic prayer. From there he went to Hydra. There he found Saint Macarius of Corinth, and the Elder Sylvester. These were self-exiled Athonites known as Kollyvades, who were followers of the philokalic movement, that spoke of a return to the proper and genuine ecclesiastical tradition. From these very virtuous elders the young Nicolas Kallivourtzis was initiated further into noetic prayer and he grew to love Athonite monasticism. In 1755 he went to the Holy Mountain, where he was tonsured a monk at Saint Dionysius, and was renamed Nicodemus. He was appointed Reader and Secretary of the Monastery, and departed from the Monastery after seven years, occupying himself in a certain cell, near the Sacred Monastery of Pantocrator, where he was distinguished by his ascetic life and love for hard work, and there for six years he lived in quietude, becoming a tested interpreter of the Divine Scriptures. His desire for exalted spiritual work urged him to go to Romania, to the worker of noetic prayer Saint Paisius Velichkovsky, but it did not come about, so he went to the deserted island of Skyropoula near the Holy Mountain, where for one year he lived near Elder Arsenius Kollyvas, and there he composed the Handbook of Counsel. He wrote yet more hermeneutical, liturgical, hymnographical and apologetical works, with epistles and canonical, ascetical, mystical, moral and saintly writings and these amount all together to about a hundred works. Having lived in different cells in the desert of Kapsala, which belongs to the Monastery of Pantocrator, he endured many temptations with continuous fasting, poverty and great asceticism, and he became a pole of attraction to many. "All those wounded by their sins left the hierarchs and spiritual fathers and all ran to the shabbily dressed Nicodemus, to find healing and comfort in their sorrows, not only from the monasteries, sketes and cells, but many Christians came from different lands to see him and take comfort in their tribulations from Nicodemus." While suffering to help others, as can be seen from his instructive books, the large amount of people tired him, because they removed him from his beloved prayer. He dedicated himself throughout all the hours of the day and night, either explaining Holy Scripture or bending his head

while crying out, 'Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.' He was connected with Vatopedi Monastery, visiting its rich library, and also with the school of the Monastery. When the school was going through difficulties in 1801, the Holy Assembly appointed him as a member of the of the board of three, who were responsible for the smooth operation of the school. He contributed to the economic improvement of the school and zealously worked for the development of the school allowing for it to remain in operation until the brink of the Revolution in 1821. The Saint was a theologian of the Kollyvades movement, a "chief leader" of it. He oversaw the publication of the works of Saints Gregory Palamas and Symeon the New Theologian. Writings of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite have been translated into many languages. Besides all we have mentioned, he helped in publishing the works of Hieromartyr Gregory V. Saint Gregory sent the Neomartyr Constantine of Hydra to him to catechise him and prepare him for martyrdom, and afterward he wrote his life. There would come also to his Cell in Kapsala several heterodox, and he introduced to them Orthodox theology, worship and life. He was a teacher at every level. This truly great teacher was sadly slandered by some of the ignorant. So he was forced to write a Confession of Faith to prove his correct beliefs and his devout and exact faith. The Saint says somewhere: "To universally proclaim all that the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Eastern Church of Christ, our common and spiritual mother, has accepted and confessed, so also we accept and confess, and whatever it abhors and renounces, we similarly abhor and renounce, as her sincere and genuine children." The brave athlete of Christ, the fervent confessor of genuine holy patristic Orthodox tradition, the lover of the Theotokos, the friend of the saints and singer of their praises, who laboured much for the truth fell ill and sensed his death approaching. He was in his beloved, hospitable and ascetic cell of Saint George. He confessed, received unction, communed daily, prayed continuously, constantly having on his sweet lips the name of Jesus. On the night of the 13<sup>th</sup> July in 1809 he communed for the last time, sensing his end was near. When the brothers asked him: "Teacher, how are you? Are you at rest?" He responded: "I put Christ in me, so how can I not be at rest?" His biographer writes: "On the fourteenth, as the sensible sun rose on the earth the noetic sun of the Church of Christ was setting. The guiding pillar of the new Israel to piety was no more, the refreshing cloud of those melting in the furnace of their sins is hidden. Friends and acquaintances and all Christians mourned, among whom was an illiterate Christian, who said the following: 'My fathers, it would have

been better for a thousand Christians to die today and not Nicodemus.' But the radiance of his teachings is with us and illumines us and illumines the Church." The Monk Onouphrius Iveritis states: "His way was simple and forbearing, his morality sweet and graceful, being landless and undisturbed. He had such a memory, that he could repeat all the chapters of Scripture, with verses and sayings and pages and testimonies and opinions of the Fathers, knowing by memory the place of their discourses and volumes."



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

**FR JOHN & MATUSHKA MARINA SOMERS**

FR JOHN SOMERS of the **Saint John of Damascus Orthodox Educational Initiative**, who has recently visited us several times, came again on 10<sup>th</sup> June, this time with his wife, **Matushka Marina**. They had been on a pilgrimage to Durham and Lindisfarne, but before returning to the States, came to Saint Edward's for the weekend services. At the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning, Fr John preached, and they returned to us for Matins on the Monday morning before being taken to London Heathrow to catch their flight. As a gift they gave us an Oxford Miniature Coronation Bible, published in June, 1953, for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

**VISITORS**

ON Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> May, **Kim Lowe** of the **Brookwood Cemetery Society** brought a large group of the members of the **European Cremation Network** to visit Saint Edward's. There were about twenty people in the group, all from various nations, and they showed lively interest in our Church and her faith and worship.

ON Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> May, **David Cooper** of the **Kingston Ramblers** brought a small party of their group to see the line of the old **Necropolis Railway** and they visited the church.



ON Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> June, thirteen members of the **Wednesday Wanderers** called in to see the church.

ON Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> June, ten “**Friends and Associates**” came to see the church.

ON Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> June, **Ian Tomes**, Woking Borough’s Strategic Asset Manager, brought the **Member of Parliament for Woking, Jonathan Lord**, to see the exhibition room and Saint Edward’s Church. They were part of a larger group visiting the cemetery at that time.

ON Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> June, **Reader Valery** from Ascot, from the ROCA-MP church, brought the seminarian, **Aiden Harrington** from the **Holy Trinity Seminary, Jordanville, N.Y.**, and three other people to see the church. They stayed some time and were given refreshments in the exhibition room.

ON Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> June, the **Arts Society of Mayford** visited the church.



## Practical Tip

IN CHURCH, as closely as possible follow the order and meaning of the service. Oftentimes, for instance, during Sunday Matins, when the Gospel Book is brought out and the faithful come and venerate it, some go on to kiss other icons, thus missing the point that they are greeting the Saviour Risen from the dead. Again, at the Little Entrance in the Liturgy, the choir chants “Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ,” and the people stand rigid as guardsmen at the palace, not even crossing themselves. The priest then turns to bless the servers to return to the altar and they bow low, even though he is not blessing them. It is true that some priests do bless them as if they imagined they were Pope Francis blessing *urbi et orbi*, and perhaps this misleads them. There are dozens of such incidents, but always keep in mind exactly what is taking place and its inner significance and worship in accord with the Church.