

The Shepherd

*An Orthodox Christian
Pastoral Magazine*

VOLUME XLV

NUMBER 9

MAY 2025





FROM THE FATHERS

“THE LORD JESUS does, indeed, say to His disciples, as was read in the Gospel lection, ‘If you loved Me, you would assuredly rejoice, because I go to the Father, because the Father is greater than I;’ but those ears, which have often heard the words, ‘I and the Father are One,’ and, ‘He that sees Me, sees the Father also,’ accept the saying without supposing a difference of Godhead or understanding it of that Essence which they know to be co-eternal and of the same nature with the Father. Man’s uplifting, therefore, in the Incarnation of the Word, is commended to the holy Apostles also, and they, who were distressed at the announcement of the Lord’s departure from them, are incited to eternal joy over the increase in their dignity; ‘If you loved Me,’ He says, ‘you would assuredly rejoice, because I go to the Father;’ that is, if, with complete knowledge you saw what glory is bestowed on you by the fact that, being begotten of God the Father, I have been born of a human mother also, that being invisible I have made Myself visible, that being eternal ‘in the form of God’ I accepted the ‘form of a slave,’ ‘you would rejoice because I go to the Father.’ For to you is offered this ascension, and your humility is in Me raised to a place above all heavens at the Father’s right hand. But I, Who am with the Father that which the Father is, abide undivided with My Father, and in coming from Him to you I do not leave Him, even as in returning to Him from you I do not forsake you. Rejoice, therefore, ‘because I go to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.’ For I have united you with Myself, and have become Son of Man that you might have power to be sons of God. And hence, though I am One in both forms, yet in that whereby I am conformed to you I am less than the Father, whereas in that whereby I am not divided

from the Father I am greater even than Myself. And so let the Nature, which is less than the Father, go to the Father, that the Flesh may be where the Word always is, and that the one Faith of the Catholic Church may believe that He Whom as Man it does not deny to be less, is equal as God with the Father.”

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

“WE HOLD, moreover, that Christ sits in the body at the right hand of God the Father, but we do not hold that the right hand of the Father is an actual place. For how could He that is uncircumscribed have a right hand limited by place? Right hands and left hands belong to what is circumscribed. But we understand the right hand of the Father to be the glory and honour of the Godhead in which the Son of God, Who existed as God before the ages, and is of like essence to the Father, and in the end became flesh, has a seat in the body, His flesh sharing in the glory. For He along with His flesh is adored with one adoration by all creation.”

SAINT JOHN OF DAMASCUS, + 780 A.D.

“THE PIECE of baked fish and the honeycomb (Lk. 24:42) which He ate were also symbols of Christ’s mystery. The Word of God united Himself hypostatically with our human nature, which was like a fish swimming in the waters of pleasure-loving, passionate life. By the unapproachable divine fire of His Godhead He cleansed this nature of every tendency towards passion, and made it equal to God, and, as it were, red hot. The Lord came to send fire upon the earth (*cf.* Lk. 12:49), and through participation in this fire He makes divine not just the human substance which He assumed for our sake, but every person who is found worthy of communion with Him. On the other hand, human nature is like honeycomb because we hold the treasure of reason in our bodies, just as honey is contained in the comb. This is especially true of anyone who believes in Christ, for he has the grace of the divine Spirit stored up in his soul and body like honey in wax. The Lord ate these things because He was pleased to take the salvation of each human being as His food. He did not, however, eat it all,

but just a piece of a honeycomb, that is, a part of it, for not everyone believed. Nor did He take this portion Himself, but it was given Him by His disciples, for the disciples set before Him just the believers, separating them from the faithless.”

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS, + 1360 A.D.



On Holy Pentecost

VEN. THEODORE THE STUDITE, + 826 A.D.

BY THE GRACE of the Most Holy Spirit, we have been vouchsafed to celebrate Holy Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ said of this descent: Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter (that is, the Holy Spirit), will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth (Jn. 16:7, 13). This, His promise and benefit, is so great that we cannot even comprehend it: for the Lord promised to send not an Angel, not a man, but the Holy Spirit Himself.

Thus, having fulfilled the will of His Father, the Only Begotten Son ascends to heaven, and the Holy Spirit descends: not another God (never!), but another Comforter, as it is written. O, the unutterable love for mankind! God Himself has become our Comforter. Thus, He Himself comforts those who are weighed down by misfortune, prevents them from becoming exhausted in spirit, as the Holy Apostle testifies, saying: Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us (2 Cor. 7:5–6). He comforts the heart frightened by demonic fear, raising it up to invincible courage through bold hope, as the Prophet David testifies: For Thou, O Lord, hast holpen me and comforted me (Ps. 85:17). He comforts, encouraging the troubled mind, as it has been given a feast with God

and rest, as the Apostle testifies, saying: as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20); that is, have peace, with God.

Do you see the unsearchable condescension? Do you see the incomparable gift? On high, in the Heavens, the Only Begotten Son intercedes for us before the Father, as it is written: Who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Rom. 8:34). Below, on the earth, the Holy Spirit comforts us in many ways.

What shall I render unto the Lord, for all that He has rendered unto me? (Ps. 115:4). Is it not true, what the psalm says: All my bones shall say, Lord, O Lord, who is like unto Thee? Delivering the beggar from the hand of them that are stronger than he, yea, poor man and pauper from them that despoil him (Ps. 34:11). And again, My help cometh from the Lord, Who hath made heaven and the earth (Ps. 120:2). Unless the Lord had brought me up, my soul had well-nigh sojourned in hades (Ps. 93:17), The Lord is my helper, and I shall not fear what man shall do unto me (Ps. 117:6).

Having such a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Invincible Power, Great Defender, God and Co-fighter, we shall not be afraid of the enemy and shall not be frightened by opposing powers, but shall courageously and steadfastly hasten to the struggle and feat, experiencing them day after day, not being deluded by the deceptions of the snake, and not growing weary from his ceaseless attacks. Sinful desire is not pleasure and joy, and a dangerous and fearsome sickness is not sweetness, but rather delirium and wicked darkening of the mind. They know this, who have tamed the fury of the flesh, cleansed its defilement, and cleaved with all their hearts to the One God. This manner of life is the most pleasant and happy; for in it, although a man be in the flesh in the world, in spirit he abides in the unseen, resting in spirit through the grace-filled breath of the Holy Spirit.

Why do we allow love of pleasure to conquer us, to so debase us, and by such deviations to cause us who, brought low to the earth, to flesh and blood, to be completely alienated from our

Most Good God? Let us flee, brothers, from all the passions. Let us flee love of money, which is the root of all evil; let us flee every other passion that enslaves our soul - anger, envy, hatred, vanity, self-will; so that death may not find us unprepared and distance us from God. Alienation from God is alienation also from the Kingdom of Heaven. Condemnation and punishment will come to those who do not do works pleasing to God. There is no flesh that can endure this condemnation, for the mere thought of it, even before consignment to torments, is already a torment.

In order that we might escape the wrath of God, which comes upon the children of disobedience (Eph. 5:6), let us do good works, that the Lord may rejoice in His works (Ps. 103:33).

Let us begin unfailingly to please God, to purify ourselves, and renew our souls. Take courage: The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon Him, to all that call on Him in truth (Ps. 144:19). Let us repent daily, and God will forgive us our sins, comfort us, and grant us Life Eternal - which may we receive in Christ the Lord Himself; to Him is due glory and sovereignty, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.



“THE CHURCH, standing on her foundation on earth and headed by the Son of God seated at the right hand of the Father, is mysteriously guided by the Holy Spirit. She inwardly links together all of her children and unites them with God. Through the Church, God’s gifts of Grace are poured out on those striving to follow the way of Christ; they sanctify and fortify all good in them, and cleanse them from sin and every defilement, making them able to become receptacles of the radiance of the glory and power of God.”

SAINT JOHN OF SHANGHAI,
THE WONDERWORKER, + 1966 A.D.

THE TRINITY SHINES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

On the Persons of the Holy Trinity

SAINT INNOCENT OF KHERSON, + 1857 A.D.

***“In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit!”***

IT IS with these great and holy words that the pastors of the Church usually begin all of their talks with us, my brethren. On other days, these holy words serve only as the holy heading to the Church's words and conversations; but on this day, they can form the very subject of our teaching. For we now celebrate for the honour and glory of the All Holy, Consubstantial, Life-Creating, and Undivided Trinity: What is more appropriate to talk about now, if not about those Persons in Whose honour this celebration is being held?

True, it is difficult to look at the sun. It is even more difficult to behold the Most Holy and Heavenly Trinity. There, vision is lost, here, the mind goes blind! So blinded were Arius, Macedonius, Sabellius, and Nestorius! And even now, those who dare to look directly at the most luminous face of the creative Being with their own eyes go blind. Let us proceed in such a way, but imitating the example of the Godly-wise and œcumenical teachers, let us arm our weak eyesight with a monocular, which while bringing the spiritual sun closer, at the same time moderates for us the brilliance of its rays. This monocular is the word of God, uttered by the Prophets and Apostles. This is the most reliable means for our purpose, for in the word of God either the Father Himself, or the Son Himself, or the Holy Spirit speaks about Himself. Do not They know Themselves correctly, or are not They able to speak about Themselves as They should?

What does the word of God reveal to us about God? It reveals that God is one in all the power of His word; that, however, this

God Who is one in essence consists of Three Persons. For the One Who appeared as one on Sinai and declared through Moses: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord (Deut. 6:4), the same was revealed in the Jordan in three forms, and through His Evangelist proclaimed: For there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these Three are One (1Jn. 5:7). And the Son of God Himself, Who confessed Him Whom no man hath seen at any time (Jn. 1:18), sending the Apostles to turn the entire world from darkness to light, commanded them to baptise all peoples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. After this, it is by no means an indifferent act for us to confess the One, or the Triune God: No, to confess, worship, and preach the Most Holy Trinity is our immutable duty, because this is the foundation of our faith, the object of our love, and the pledge of our hope. This is eternal life! For who will redeem us with his own blood if not God the Son? Who will sanctify us by his grace if not God the Holy Spirit?

Therefore, in the one God, we confess Three: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God the Father is named such because He, being the beginning of the entire Godhead, pre-eternally begat the Son and pre-eternally produced from Himself the Most Holy Spirit. God the Son is so named because He is begotten from all eternity by the Father, from His own Essence; and in time, He was well pleased to be born of the Most Holy Virgin Mary as man. God the Holy Spirit is so named because He is eternally spirated by the Father and Himself animates all things, especially spirits and rational souls.

How the Persons of the Godhead differ between Themselves is already evident from their very names. God the Father, according to the teaching of Holy Scripture, serves as the source of the Son and the Spirit, Himself unoriginate and self-existent; God the Son is begotten, but does not beget and does not send forth the Spirit; God the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, but is not begotten, nor does He Himself beget or send forth. Fatherhood, sonship, and procession - these are the three distinguishing characteristics of the Divine Persons! Thus differing from one another, these three Persons constitute one and the same God:

The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God - not three Gods, but one Godhead. They are one in power, one in will, one in might, one in glory and authority.

Thus, following the word of God, the holy Church teaches about God without assuming that everything possible was said about God, or that what is said fully and perfectly expresses the image of the Divine Being.

No, despite its dignity as the Bride of Christ, the Church is far from such boldness. It calls the doctrine of the Holy Trinity a mystery; that is, a matter of faith that exceeds our minds; and what exceeds the mind cannot be expounded upon. What is expounded upon is no longer a mystery.

What is most generally understood in this mystery of faith under consideration here is the benefaction with which each Person of the Most Holy Trinity has marked Himself in relation to man. From this point of view, there is nothing unclear, no confusion. God the Father is our greatest Benefactor, inasmuch as He called us out of nothingness, honoured us with His image, did not abandon us when we fell, but sent His Only-Begotten Son to redeem us and the Most Holy Spirit to sanctify us. God the Son is our greatest Benefactor inasmuch as during our ill-fated transgression of the Edenic commandment, He took upon Himself all responsibility for our sin and all the weight of our fall; and then in order to restore us to our primitive perfection, He clothed Himself with our nature, lived among us, died for us, and resurrected for us. God the Holy Spirit is our greatest Benefactor inasmuch as despite His unparalleled holiness, He did not disdain us, sinful and unclean, but overshadows the Church with His grace, so that everything in it might beget, strengthen, and heal by the Sacraments us who are dead in our sins. He enlightens us through the Prophets and Apostles inspired by Him, and even deigns to mystically inhabit every believer's soul, to prepare it for the eternal dwelling of the entirety of the Most Holy Trinity. In short, the whole teaching of the word of God about the actions of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit consists in the narrative about Their benefactions to sinful mankind in various forms.

And how many times has the myopic human mind with its pitiful bewilderments and objections risen up against this most exalted, comforting, and all-enlightening teaching! And this mind, insolent and audacious, would like the fullness of the Godhead to be revealed to it!... Behold, the edge of the veil is lifted up, revealing a hint of the unity of the Tri-Hypostatic God, and the poor mind is unable to bear the radiance! What would have happened had the Triune God appeared to it in all the fullness of Its mysterious perfections? But if it is hard for the mind to raise its eyes to Heaven and behold the Uncreated Light at its very source, then let the poor and weak at least look around themselves. For it was not in vain that another wise pagan noticed and said that a triunity shines throughout the world.

In fact, whether we consider the greatest or the least of the forces of nature, in every one of them we will see a threeness: Their very dimensions are threefold. Thus, all things are primarily enclosed in time and space, and time is threefold: past, present, and future. Space is also threefold: length, width, and height or depth. What keeps the whole world going? Centrifugal, centripetal, and rotational forces. What does a day consist of? The morning, afternoon, and evening. What does every night consist of? Dusk, midnight, and dawn. What do we see in all things? Shape, colour, and weight. With all of these and many others factors, all of visible nature expresses the threeness of the force that drew it out of nothingness.

But apart from all this, each of the Three Persons of the Godhead, we can say, has placed a kind of mark of His Personal existence on all things. For the difference between the Divine Persons, as we have said, is fatherhood, sonship, and the procession of the Spirit. Now look, which of the creatures that we see does not have the ability to give birth and be born? Which, despite its crudeness, does not even have its own spirit? Everywhere there is birth, everywhere there is a spirit, as the traces and signs of the Tri-Hypostatic God.

But if the Divine Trinity shines throughout the entire world, then in man, created according to the image of God, It is reflected with greater fullness. There is a threeness everywhere and in

everything here, beginning with the composition of our nature: our body with the ability to beget, our soul with the ability to feel and suffer, and our spirit with the ability to breathe in the higher, the Divine, and to animate the lower, the sensual, so it becomes not earthly and limited, but like the Heavenly, consubstantial and undivided Trinity, in Which Three are One! (1 Jn. 5:7).

Let us take the human body, with its visible three-part composition: bones, flesh, and fluids. Let us take the soul. It is also in three parts: intellective, incensive, and appetitive. If we take the spirit, again there are three: mind, will, and freedom. Each of these faculties is also threefold in action: The mind receives an impression from an object, judges, and concludes; freedom sees, chooses, and determines; the will is stimulated to desire, strives, and achieves. Amidst such Threeness in all things created, whether material or spiritual, would not contradicting the threeness in the uncreated be like closing your eyes and not seeing the light at midday? Such is the fate of those who reject the guidance of the word of God and give themselves over to the guidance of their poor mind! Passing from delusion to delusion, they often reach the point where they begin to doubt their own existence.

Regretting such folly, and prayerfully seeking enlightenment from above for the deluded, let us turn, my brethren, to the subject of our talk; let us mentally ascend above all things created and draw near to the throne of the Tri-Hypostatic God, having received the boldness to do so through the excellencies of our Divine Redeemer. Let us fall down in awe before the greatness of the inscrutable perfections and, as a testimony of our love and gratitude for the Most Holy Trinity's innumerable benefactions to us, let us offer our entire being to It. Let us offer our body to God the Father, that it might be an instrument for the fulfilment of His most holy will; let us offer our soul to God the Son, that it might be inspired by the power of His Cross; let us offer our spirit to God the Holy Spirit, that aflame from its dew-bearing breath, it might soar aloft over all things terrestrial. Blessings to those who even in this life begin, as our holy Church sings, to be "illuminated by the Holy Trinity in a sacred mystery" (Matins, 1st Antiphon, Tone 4). Translation by Jesse Dominick

Testament of the Venerable Father Theodosius of the Kiev Caves

(+1074)

This is a rather stern but fundamentally true instruction
for Orthodox Christians

Lord, give the blessing! I, Theodosius, the miserable slave of the All-Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, was born in the pure and right-believing faith and brought up in good teaching by an Orthodox father and mother.

Do not commune with the Latin (Roman Catholic) faith, do not attach yourselves to their customs, flee from their communion, avoid all their teachings and abhor their morals.

Beware, my children, of the crooked in faith and their conversations, for our land has been filled to the full with them. If anyone will save his soul, then let him only live in the Orthodox Faith, for there is no other faith better than our pure and holy Orthodox Faith.

Living in this faith, you do not only escape sins and eternal torment, but become partakers of eternal life, and you will rejoice without end with the Saints. As for those who live in another faith: the (Roman) Catholic, or the Muslim, or the Armenian - they shall not see eternal life.

Moreover, it is not right, my child, to praise another faith. He who praises another faith is as if he is blaspheming his own. If someone begins to praise both his own and another faith, then he is two-faithed, and close to heresy. But you, my child, observe such people, and constantly praise your own faith. Do not be friendly with them, but flee from them and struggle in your own faith through good works. Give alms not only to those of your own faith, but also to those of other faiths. If you see someone who is naked or hungry, or who has fallen into misfortune, - whether he be a Jew, or a Turk, or a Latin, - be merciful to every such person, deliver him from his misfortune as far as you are able, and you will not be deprived of a reward from God, for God Himself in the present age pours out His mercies not only on Christians, but also on the unfaithful. God cares in this life for the pagans and those of other faiths, but in the future age they will be alienated from the eternal blessings. But we who live in the Orthodox

Faith will receive all blessings from God both here, and in the future age our Lord Jesus Christ will save us.

My child, if you will even have to die for our holy Faith, go to your death with boldness. Thus did the Saints die for the faith, and now they are living in Christ. But you, my child, if you see people of other faiths quarrelling with the faithful, and trying to draw them away from the right faith by deception, help the Orthodox. In this way you will as it were save a sheep from the mouth of a lion. But if you are silent and leave them without help, then this is as if you took a redeemed soul from Christ and sold him to Satan.

If one who opposes you says: “Your faith and our faith are from God,” then you, my child, must reply as follows: “O crooked in faith! Or do you consider God also to be two-faithed! Have you not heard, you who have been corrupted by an evil faith, how Scripture says: ‘One God, one Faith, one Baptism’ (Eph. 4.5)?

“Have you not heard the Apostle Paul saying: ‘If an angel comes from heaven and preaches to you a gospel that we have not preached to you, let him be anathema’ (Gal. 1.8).

“But you (Latins), who reject the apostolic teaching and the Holy Fathers, have received an incorrect and corrupted faith, full of destruction. Therefore you are rejected by us. Therefore it is not right that you should serve with us and approach the Divine Mysteries with us, neither should you approach our Mysteries, nor we to yours, because you are dead and offer a dead sacrifice, while we offer to the living God a pure and immaculate sacrifice in order to inherit eternal life.

“For thus is it written: ‘Give unto each according to his works’ in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ To Him be the glory. Amen.”



THE COMING MONTH

THE greatest church observances in May this year are, of course, the Great Feasts of the **Saviour's Ascension into Heaven** (16th / 29th May) and that of **Pentecost-Trinity** (26th May / 8th June), but the month also starts with an important celebration, that of **Mid-Pentecost**, the day which marks the midpoint of the fifty days of Pentecost which began at Pascha. The synaxarion for that day makes its importance clear; it says:

“On the Wednesday of Mid-Pentecost, we commemorate the words of our Lord Jesus Christ concerning the provenance of His teaching and His Divine origin, whereby He proved that He was the Messiah, and the Mediator and Reconciler of us and the eternal Father.” Saint Amphilochius of Iconium says: “Today’s feast of Mid-Pentecost is also the Lord’s. The Lord is the Mediator, in the middle also is the feast; the middle is always between two extremes. That is why today’s feast has secured a double grace of the Resurrection. Situated between the feast of the Resurrection and the feast of Pentecost, on the one hand she indicates the Resurrection, on the other she points with her finger to Pentecost which is approaching, and she trumpets the Ascension.”

Lest we give the impression that the church calendar is simply a selection of major feasts, let us now concentrate on at least a few of the multitude of saints we celebrate each day and who aid us and pray for us.

Our Holy Father Athanasius III, Patriarch of Constantinople and Wonderworker of Lubensk (2nd / 15th), in the world known as Alexis, was born in 1560 on the island of Crete, into the pious Greek family Patellarios. Despite his education and position in society, Alexis was attracted by the life of Christian ascetics. After his father’s death, he became a novice in one of the monasteries of Thessalonica with the name Ananias. From there he he later went to the Monastery of Esphigmenou on Mount Athos, where he fulfilled his obedience in the refectory. From Athos he journeyed to the monasteries of the Holy Land, and he was tonsured with the name Athanasius. Upon his return to Thessalonica he was ordained presbyter and spread the gospel of Christ among the Vlachs and the Moldovians, for whom he translated the Psalter from the Greek. At times, the Saint went to Mount Athos for solitude, and to ask God to bless his pastoral work. The holiness of his life attracted many who wished to see a true preacher of the Orthodox Faith. By his remarkable abilities and spiritual gifts he attracted the attention of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril I Loukaris (1621-1623). Summoning the ascetic, the Patriarch appointed him a preacher of the Patriarchal throne. Soon Saint Athanasius was conse-

crated bishop and became Metropolitan of Thessalonica. At this time Patriarch Cyril was slandered before the sultan and imprisoned on the island of Tenedos, and Saint Athanasius assumed the Patriarchal throne on 25th March, 1634, the day of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos. As Patriarch he led an incessant struggle against Jesuit heretics and Muslims. After only forty days on the Patriarchal throne, he was deposed through the intrigues of the enemies of Orthodoxy, and Cyril I was returned. The Saint went to Athos, where for a certain time he pursued asceticism in solitude. Then he became Patriarch again, but was deposed after a year. After this, he returned to Thessalonica. In view of the intolerable persecution of Christians by the Muslims, Saint Athanasius was repeatedly (from 1633 to 1643) obliged to send petitions to the Russian Tsar Michael (1613-1645) seeking alms for his hapless Church. When living at Thessalonica it became impossible for the Saint, so he was forced to journey to Moldavia under the protection of its ruler, Basil Lukulos, and he settled there in the Monastery of Saint Nicolas near Galats, but he longed for Mount Athos. He visited it often and hoped to finish his life there, but God ordained something else for him. In 1652 after the death of Patriarch Cyril I, Saint Athanasius was returned to the patriarchal throne. He remained only fifteen days, since he was not acceptable to the Muslims and Roman Catholics. During his final Patriarchal service he preached a sermon in which he denounced papal pretensions to universal jurisdiction over the whole Church. Persecuted by the Muslims and Jesuits, physically weakened, he transferred the administration of the Church of Constantinople to Metropolitan Paisius of Laureia, and he withdrew to Moldavia, and was made administrator of the Monastery of Saint Nicolas at Galats. Knowing the deep faith and responsiveness of the Russian peoples, Saint Athanasius visited Russia. In April 1653 he was met with great honour in Moscow by Patriarch Nikon and Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich. While in Russia he set forth the procedure for the Divine Liturgy celebrated by a bishop that is still in use in Russia. Having received generous alms for his monastery, Saint Athanasius left for Galats in December 1653. On the way he fell ill and stayed at the Transfiguration Mgarsk Monastery in

the city of Lubno in February 1654. Sensing his impending death, the Saint wrote his last will, and he fell asleep in the Lord on 5th April, 1654, which was the Wednesday of Saint Thomas Week. Abbot Petronius and the brethren of the monastery buried him. According to the Greek custom, being a Bishop, the Saint was buried in a sitting position in full vestments, which is why in Russia they call him “the Sitting.” Eight years after his death they uncovered his relics and found them to be incorrupt (only two fingers were missing from the right hand in which he held his staff), even though his clothes and chair had rotted. He was placed in new vestments and a shrine was built to him. On 1st February, 1662, Saint Athanasius was glorified as a Saint and his feast day was designated as 2nd May, the Feast of Saint Athanasius the Great. After this event the Saint began to appear in many people’s dreams, blessing, teaching and healing the sick, and many healings took place at the tomb of the Saint. News began to spread concerning the miraculous healings through the relics of Saint Athanasius, and eventually reached Moscow. To investigate the matter, Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich immediately sent to the Ukraine the clerk M. Savin. Learning of four cases of miracles, Savin returned to the Tsar and made his report. In 1922 the Bolsheviks were in power and Commissar Sereda came from Kharkov with a letter from Petrovsky to remove the coffin on which Saint Athanasius was seated, which was made of pure silver. In response, people not only in Luben, but also in other regions of Poltava threw themselves into the monastery so as not to allow the atheists to approach the Saint’s relics. Surrounding the church was a ring of tens of thousands of people. The church services went on around the clock, the priests succeeded each other every 3-4 hours, and crowds arrived daily. Then the authorities began military exercises in the monastery with machine-guns and artillery fire and shouting “Hurrah,” sending up to 3,000 soldiers and cadets, but they were unable to disperse the people. The monks put the relics of Saint Athanasius in a wooden coffin, and the silver coffin was taken to Kharkov by the atheists. The relics of holy Patriarch Athanasius, glorified by numerous miracles and signs, rest in the city of Kharkov, in the Annunciation Cathedral church.

Our Venerable Fathers John of Zedazeni and his twelve disciples (7th / 20th May), Abibus of Nekresi, Antony of Martqopi, David of Gareji, Zenon of Iqalto, Thaddeus of Stepantsminda, Jesse of Tsilkani, Joseph of Alaverdi, Isidore of Samtavisi, Michael of Ulumbo, Pyrrhus of Breti, Stephen of Khirsa, and Shio of Mgvime, were Syrian ascetics and the founding fathers of Georgian monastic life. Saint John received his spiritual education in Antioch. Early in his youth he was tonsured a monk and withdrew to the wilderness. The Lord, recognising his humility, diligence in fasting, and devout watchfulness, blessed His faithful servant with the gift of healing the sick and casting out demons. Saint John was celebrated for his holy deeds and miracles. Curious crowds would swarm around him, and after some time he found it necessary to withdraw into even deeper seclusion. Taking with him several of his disciples, he chose a remote area, made a cell for himself, and began to labour as a hermit. Once the Most Holy Theotokos appeared to Saint John and told him, "Take twelve monks and go with them to Georgia, the nation enlightened by the Peer-of-the-Apostles Nina, and strengthen the Christian soul of its people." Saint John related the vision to his disciples, and after much fasting and prayer he chose twelve of them: Abibus, Anthony, David, Zenon, Thaddeus, Isidore, Joseph, Jesse, Michael, Pyrrhus, Stephen, and Shio. He left his remaining disciples in the wilderness in the care of the abbot, the blessed elder Euthymius, and set off for Georgia with the twelve. By divine revelation the Georgian king Parsman and Catholicos Evlavius received the good news that the venerable fathers were in Mesopotamia, on their way to Georgia, and they hurried to greet them with the proper honours. King Parsman and Catholicos Evlavius met the holy fathers as they were approaching Mtskheta. The fathers venerated the myrrh-streaming wood of the Living Pillar and the Robe of Christ at Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. From there Saint John and his disciples travelled throughout Georgia, visiting its many holy sites. With the blessing of Catholicos Evlavius, Saint John and his disciples settled on Zedazeni Mountain, where a pagan temple to the idol Zadeni had previously stood. The monks lived in wretched cells, eating only plants and praying

ceaselessly. Having heard of the spiritual endeavours of Saint John and his disciples, Christian believers began to flock to Zedazeni Mountain. Many burned with longing for the monastic life, and some abandoned the world to join the holy fathers at Zedazeni. In such a way, Zedazeni Mountain was transformed into an abode of hermits. One night the Most Holy Theotokos appeared again to Saint John and instructed him to send his disciples throughout the country to preach the Word of God. In the morning, having related the vision to his disciples, Saint John advised them: "Our Lord Jesus Christ sent us to perform good deeds for this country and its people, for they are newly planted seeds in the Christian Faith. Therefore, let us go forth, each in his own direction, to preach the Word of God!" Saint John remained at Zedazeni and went about his usual labours in the company of the Deacon Ilia. Zedazeni Mountain was without water, but Saint John prayed to God for a spring, and the Lord sent him a healing spring at the mountain's peak. Through Saint John's holy prayers, a bear that often came to the spring to drink was tamed and became a guard and protector of Zedazeni Monastery. To this day, the beasts of Zedazeni forest have never disturbed a single soul. Through Saint John's intercessions, a man mute and paralysed from his childhood began to speak and walk. After earnestly serving God for many years, Saint John received a sign that his death was approaching. He called his disciples, blessed them, bade them farewell, and left them to bury him in the cave where he had dwelt. After receiving Holy Communion, Saint John beheld the heavens open and the incorporeal powers with the armies of saints shining forth. The Lord called Saint John to Himself, saying: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham. Come and I will give you rest from your labours." The holy father prayed and gave up his soul to the Lord. After his repose Saint John's disciples thought that a dismal cave was unfit to serve as their holy father's burial place, and with great reverence they buried his remains in a church at the foot of the mountain. But suddenly a violent earthquake shook the ground where they stood. The earth ceased to quake only after the frightened disciples remembered their shepherd's will and realised that the tremors were a sign from

God. So the disciples, a priest, and a deacon uncovered the holy relics and reburied Saint John according to his will. While they were being translated, Saint John's holy relics healed many sick and demon-possessed people. In the 10th century, during the time of Catholicos Clement, a church in honour of Saint John the Baptist was built on the south side of Saint John's cave. The holy father's grave is located near the altar of this church. The holy **Hieromartyr Abibus of Nekresi** was consecrated bishop of Nekresi at the request of Parsman VI, King of Kartli, and Catholicos Evlavius. Filled with holy zeal, Bishop Abibus converted many pagans to the Christian Faith. In the 6th century the Persians forced many Georgians to deny Christ and worship fire in accordance with their own custom. When Saint Abibus poured water on their altar of sacrifice to extinguish the "holy fire," the enraged Persians beat him cruelly, then stoned him to death. By order of the marzban (Persian viceroy), the holy relics of Martyr Abibus remained for three days under the open sky. But to the marzban's great amazement, neither beast nor bird would touch them. On the fourth night, monks from Rechi Monastery arrived and translated the holy relics to Samtavisi Monastery for proper burial. Later, by order of Stepanoz, the rightful ruler of Kartli, the holy relics of Saint Abibus were translated again, to Samtavro Monastery in Mtskheta, and buried in the sanctuary under the altar table. **Saint Antony of Martqopi** always carried with him an icon of the Saviour "Not-Made-By-Hands" which he had brought from Edessa in Asia Minor. A lover of solitude, Saint Antony settled in Lonoati Gorge, but many Christians, drawn by his prayers and miracles, disturbed his seclusion. So the holy father built a monastery for his faithful followers, withdrew beyond the Alazani River, and later settled on Akriani Mountain. In his new hermitage, he ate mostly plants and the bark of trees, and God sent a bear to bring him food. Later Saint Antony erected a pillar at the top of the mountain and dwelt upon it for eighteen years. The venerable father received a sign from God when his death was imminent, and at the moment of his repose he was kneeling in prayer before the icon of the Saviour. His disciples carried his holy relics down from the pillar and buried them in the monastery he had founded, in

front of the icon of the Mother of God. **Saint David of Gareji** first settled in the outskirts of Tbilisi, the new capital of Georgia. By his wondrous preaching, he converted many fire-worshippers and brought people of many creeds to the Christian Faith. One day the fire-worshippers took revenge - they bribed a pregnant woman to agree to their scheme and accuse Saint David of adultery. But the wonderworker Saint David touched his staff to the woman's womb and said, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command you, infant, tell us who your real father is!" The infant uttered the name of his true father from inside his mother's womb. The crowd of bystanders was outraged and began to stone the pagan slanderers. Deeply disturbed by the rioting and unable to stop the bloodshed, Saint David left with his disciple Lukiane. Saints David and Lukiane settled in the Gareji Wilderness in southeastern Georgia. The Lord provided them with food in abundance: every day, except Wednesdays and Fridays, a herd of deer came to visit them. Lukiane milked the animals, and when David made the sign of the Cross over the milk, it was miraculously transformed into cheese. News of the wonders performed by the fathers spread quickly, and soon the Gareji Wilderness became a refuge for the many Christians who hungered to lead a true ascetic life. After some time a pious monk called Dodo came from Ninotsminda, a village in eastern Georgia, and, having received a blessing from his spiritual father, established the Monastery of the Most Holy Theotokos on the eastern side of the Gareji mountains. Since that time the eastern range has been called "Dodo's Range." Saint David went to Jerusalem on pilgrimage, but when he arrived there, he suddenly judged himself unworthy and dared not enter the gates of the city. He prayed fervently before the city gates, then, in profound humility, chose three stones to take with him as treasures and left. That same night an angel appeared to Patriarch Elias of Jerusalem and told him that a monk named David, who had arrived from Georgia, was taking away all the grace of the Holy Land. The patriarch's messengers found Saint David and seized from him two of the stones. The third stone he carried back to Gareji Monastery. Having served the Lord his whole life, through much suffering and many tribulations, the God-pleasing Saint David

reposed peacefully and was buried at David-Gareji Monastery. **Saint Jesse of Tsilkani** was consecrated bishop of Tsilkani by Catholicos Evlavius, at the suggestion of Saint John of Zedazeni. The holy father preached to many crowds and converted many. Before long, many followers had gathered round him. Saint Jesse, like Saint John's other disciples, was endowed with the ability to work miracles. Once Saint John decided to test the faith of his disciples, and he required each of them to perform a miracle. When it was Saint Jesse's turn, he descended to the Ksani River, crossed over it, then touched his staff to the water and cried out, "In the name of the Lord, I command you to follow me!" Immediately the river began to flow in the opposite direction, and it followed every move of the venerable father's staff. Saint Jesse led the river to Tsilkani Monastery. Having witnessed this miracle, many people were converted to the true Faith. Saint Jesse received a sign from heaven when his repose was near. He partook of the Holy Gifts and prayerfully gave up his soul to God. Saint Jesse is buried in the Tsilkani Church of the All-holy Theotokos. **Saint Joseph of Alaverdi** always carried with him a cross that had been made from the wood of the Life-giving Cross of our Saviour. With his teacher's blessing, Saint Joseph preached the Gospel throughout the region of Kartli in eastern Georgia and later settled in the Alaverdi wilderness. Once he encountered a pagan nobleman and preached the Word of God to him. Deeply inspired by the grace-filled preaching, the nobleman founded a monastery in Alaverdi. Villagers from the surrounding region heard about the holy father's great spiritual feats, and many of them left the world to labour with him. The number of ascetics in the region began to increase steadily from that time. When his long and labour-filled life was drawing to an end, Saint Joseph appointed a new abbot for the monastery and reposed peacefully in the Lord. To this day many miracles have taken place over his grave at Alaverdi Monastery. From his youth **Saint Shio of Mgvime** was a disciple of Saint John of Zedazeni, and he followed him to Georgia. Saint Shio settled in Sarkineti, a region northwest of Mtskheta. The Most Holy Theotokos blessed the monk, and he carried out his labours in accordance with her revelations. A dove would bring food to the

blessed father, and Saint Evagre (at that time the ruler of Tsikhedidi) witnessed this miracle one day while hunting in the area. Deeply inspired by his unceasing labours, the prince left the world to become Saint Shio's disciple. It was not long before Saint Shio's wilderness was filled with people who longed for the ascetic life. Saint Shio founded a monastery in Sarkineti, gathered nearly two thousand monks to labour there with him, and instructed them in a strict ascetic life. Having performed countless miracles, Saint Shio finally vowed to God that he would spend the remainder of his life in a well that he had dug for himself. He appointed Evagre abbot of the monastery and went into reclusion at the bottom of the well. There he spent fifteen years and reposed peacefully in the Lord. Saint Shio's holy relics are buried in that well, and to this day many miracles have taken place over his grave. **Saint Pyrrhus of Breti**, called the "Divine Image of Repentance," founded a monastery in Breti, on the bank of the Jvaristsqali River. His holy relics are buried in the church at that monastery. **Saint Isidore of Samtavisi** preached the Christian Faith in Kartli for many years, in accordance with his teacher's instruction. On the eastern bank of the Rekhula River, he founded the Samtavisi Monastery of the Icon of the Saviour "Not-Made-By-Hands." He reposed and is buried at that monastery. **Saint Thaddeus of Stepantsminda** first preached in Mtskheta, and later he founded a monastery at the foot of the Zedazeni Mountain. After Saint John's repose, Thaddeus continued to preach throughout Kartli and built many new churches. Among them, the Church of the Protomartyr Stephen in Urbnisi is a glorious example. Near the end of his life Saint Thaddeus withdrew to a cave at Tsleva Mountain not far from the city of Kaspi. He reposed peacefully and is buried in that place. **Saint Stephen of Khirsa** and his companions preached in the Kakheti region of eastern Georgia. He founded Khirsa Monastery near Kharnabuji Castle. He is buried in the sanctuary of the Church of the Protomartyr Stephen at Khirsa. **Saint Zenon of Iqalto** preached the Christian Faith in northern Kakheti and founded Iqalto Monastery. He reposed peacefully, after accomplishing many good works on behalf of the Faith. Saint Zenon is buried at Iqalto in the church of the Icon of the Saviour "Not-

Made-By-Hands.” **Saint Michael of Ulumbo** preached the Christian Faith in northern Kartli and Ossetia. He founded a monastery in the Ulumbo area (named after Mt Olympus, a centre of monasticism in Bithynia) area, where his wonderworking relics were later buried. Many Georgian children have been raised at the monasteries founded by the Thirteen Syrian Fathers. For centuries the Divine grace of the holy ascetics has spread among the Georgian people and throughout their land. These holy fathers continue to protect the Georgian people against all manner of sin and unbelief.



POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

IT IS ODD about your question on homosexuality because there was another in the box about it this week, from a different perspective. I think there are two things that can be said. First, we are living in a society which is increasingly becoming aggressively anti-Christian, and this is not the only subject on which the politically correct truth or attitude is seemingly at odds with our Faith, or even with reality. This means that we have to tread carefully - we are sheep amidst wolves, but we must not change our positions. Having said that, we have to make sure that our position is Orthodox! I notice that much which passes for “Orthodox” morality today is cobbled together from right-wing, usually American, moral majority stuff, which is almost as far from an Orthodox position as is a liberal laissez-fair position, and is probably more dangerous spiritually. It leaves you feeling superior, a fall into the worse sin of pride. Notice, you write: “who believe that homosexuality is morally wrong,” whereas this is not exactly right - we believe homosexual actions / desires are sinful, but homosexuality itself is an abstract. Also we have to get it in balance, which many of the moral majority people do not. They condemn homosexuals for their transgressions but not heterosexuals. Fornication (sex outside marriage), adultery (sex with someone other than your spouse), deviant sexual practices even between married couples, and the desire for these things are also sinful, but who speaks out about them? No one! Homosexuals are, it has to be admitted, often used as a kind of scape goat, - we can heap all our opprobrium on them, and feel superior ourselves. This is NOT what the Fathers teach. In Romans, Saint Paul, speaking of this particular sin, then links it with

covetousness, maliciousness, envy, spitefulness, pride, disobedience, lack of mercy and several others. Does anyone rail against these things in the same way as many rail against homosexuals? No! Also we must always, with this sin and others, be careful to condemn the sin, but not the sinner. If we carefully and exactly follow the Church's teachings, and always show love to the people who seem to us to have fallen, then we should be able to navigate our way through the difficult straits of contemporary life.



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

BAPTISM AT SAINT EDWARD'S

ON the feast day of the Forty Holy Martyrs of Sebaste (Saturday 9th / 22nd March), **Ksenia**, the infant daughter of **Pavel and Stephanie Tosev of Chatham, Kent**, was baptised at Saint Edward's Church by her grandfather, the **Priest Ivan Tosev** from Bulgaria. She had been named after the Blessed Xenia of Petersburg, the Fool-for-Christ, and her godmother is Elizabeth Maties. After the Baptism light refreshments were provided for those who had participated in the Mortuary. The next day, the Sunday of the Holy Cross, Fr Ivan concelebrated the Divine Liturgy with our Priestmonk Sabbas, and Fr Borislav Popov, with deacon Ioan assisting. Fr Ivan imparted the Divine Mysteries to his granddaughter then for the first time. He had been accompanied on his journey from Bulgaria by his presbytera **Ariadna**. We ask your prayer for the newly illumined baby and for her godmother, that she fulfil her duties faithfully to the end of her days.

METROPOLITAN AMBROSE'S VISITATION

OUR Bishop, **Metropolitan Ambrose of Methoni** arrived in England on 1st April, and he came to Brookwood, accompanied by **Fr Nicolae Capitanu** two days later. Early on the following morning, he visited the **Worplesdon View Care Home** to impart the Divine Mysteries to **Olena Yermolko**, who was seriously ill there. On the Saturday of the Akathist Hymn, **Fr Sabbas** celebrated the Divine Liturgy assisted by **Deacon Ioan** and the Bishop partook of the Holy Mysteries then. In the afternoon, His Grace attended a meeting of the

trustees of the former Convent in Brondesbury Park with their financial advisors. This was held at the Brotherhood. On the Sunday Metropolitan Ambrose celebrated the Divine Liturgy with **Archimandrite Daniel (Toyne), Priestmonk Sabbas** and **Fr Borislav Popov** concelebrating, the deacon again assisting. The next day was the Great Feast of the Annunciation, and on this occasion, the concelebrating clergy were joined by **Fr Gabriel Lawani**. Just before the Liturgy began, at the end of the Hours, His Grace tonsured **Gregory Ferguson** a reader. After the service and the breakfast, the Bishop returned to London for a couple of days before returning to Greece.

CHRISMATION AT SAINT EDWARD'S

On **Palm Sunday** (31st March / 13th April), **Plamen Monovski of Camberley** was reconciled to the Orthodox Church by the Mysterion of Chrismation which was administered by Priestmonk Sabbas. Pray that he now continues steadfast.

GIFTS TO SAINT EDWARD'S

METROPOLITAN AMBROSE, during his visit, presented us with several gifts including a hand-painted icon of **Saint Aidan of Lindisfarne**, which had been beautifully painted by the sisters of the **Convent of Saint Elizabeth the former Grand Duchess in Etna, California**.

Another beautiful icon of **Saints Cybi and Seiriol**, bearing the inscription, "And walk in love as Christ also hath loved us," has been given to our church by **Benjamin and Elaine Waterhouse**, in memory of Benjamin's mother, **Janet**, who came from Anglesey. The icon was painted by the sisters of the **Holy Angels' Convent in Afidnai, Greece**.

VISITORS

ON Thursday, 10th April, **Kim Lowe** of the **Brookwood Cemetery Society**, brought a group of about sixteen women to see the church; they were on a guided tour of the main cemetery.