

# *The Shepherd*

*An Orthodox Christian  
Pastoral Magazine*

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VOLUME XLV

NUMBER 6

FEBRUARY 2025

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## FROM THE FATHERS

“I ENTREAT YOU (though not I, but the love of Jesus Christ) not to nourish yourselves on anything but Christian fare, and have no truck with the alien herbs of heresy. There are men who in the very act of assuring you of their good faith will mingle poison with Jesus Christ; which is like offering a lethal drug in a cup of honeyed wine, so that the unwitting victim blissfully accepts his own destruction with a fatal relish.”

HOLY HIEROMARTYR IGNATIUS THE GOD-BEARER  
OF ANTIOCH, + 107 A.D.

“ONE SHOULD not seek among others the truth that can be easily received from the Church. For in her, as in a rich treasury, the Apostles have placed all that pertains to truth, so that everyone can drink this beverage of life. She is the door of life.”

HOLY HIEROMARTYR IRENAEUS OF LYONS, + 202 A.D.

“OF THE DOGMAS and proclamations preserved in the Church, some we possess from written teaching and others we receive from the tradition of the Apostles, handed on to us in mystery. In respect to piety both are of the same force. No one will contradict any of these, no one, at any rate, who is even moderately versed in matters ecclesiastical. Indeed, were we to try to reject unwritten customs as having no great authority, we would unwittingly injure the Gospel in its vitals; or rather, we would reduce proclamation to a mere term.”

SAINT BASIL THE GREAT, + 379 A.D.

“PUTTING all of your hope in God, I first pray that we, above all, hold to His True Faith. For, as the Apostle says, ‘for no other foundation can a man lay than what is laid,’ by the Holy Spirit through the Holy Apostles and God-bearing Fathers, and that is the True Faith, confirmed and preached at the holy Seven Œcumenical Councils. And for this reason upon this foundation of the True Faith we need to build with gold and silver and precious stones, that is good deeds. For neither is there any use in a correctness of life without the true and enlightened faith in God, nor can true confession without good deeds bring us before the Lord, but we must have them both, that ‘the man of God be perfect,’ that our life not falter because of the lack of one.”

SAINT SAVA OF SERBIA, + 1237 A.D.

“WE KNOW and are convinced that falling away from the Church, whether into schism, heresy, or sectarianism, is complete perdition and spiritual death. For us there is no Christianity outside of the Church. If Christ established the Church, and the Church is His Body, then to be cut off from His Body is to die.”

NEW HIERORMARTYR HILARION OF VEREY, + 1929 A.D.

“CHRIST spoke of Christians as those given Him from the world (Jn 17:6). He did not pray for the whole world but for those men given Him from the world. And the Apostle Saint John teaches that the Church and the world are in opposition to each other, and he exhorts the Christians, saying, ‘Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him’ (1Jn 1:16). Concerning the sons of the Church, the Saviour said, ‘They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world’ (Jn 17:16). In the persons of the Apostles the Saviour warned the Church that in the world She would have tribulation (Jn 16:33), explaining to His disciples: ‘If ye were from the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you’ (Jn 15:19). In Holy

Scripture, so, we see that a clear distinction is made between the sons of the Church and the rest of mankind. Addressing himself to the faithful in Christ and distinguishing them from unbelievers, Saint Peter writes, ‘But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people’ (1 Ptr 2:9). We are in no manner assured in Scripture of the triumph of truth on earth before the end of the world. There is no promise that the world will be transfigured into a Church uniting all of mankind as fervent ecumenists believe, but rather there is the warning that religion will be lacking in the last days and Christians will suffer great sorrow and hatred on the part of all nations for the sake of our Saviour’s name (Matt. 24:9-12)... Therefore the efforts of Orthodox Christians should not be directed to the building of organisations, but toward becoming inhabitants of the new Creation after the Final Judgment through living a pious life in the one true Church.”

SAINT PHILARET THE NEW CONFESSOR  
OF NEW YORK, + 1985 A.D.



## A Rare Virtue

### On Why Many of Us Show No Gratitude

*“Everybody receives abundant blessings from God,  
but only a few give thanks to Him.”*

ABOUT two centuries ago, Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) spoke of a very deplorable moral constant which was revealed to him by his spiritual experience, “Gratitude is a rare virtue among people.” It is enough to look closely at the state of morals in the society we live in to understand that it is a constant and not a variable quantity. We can’t look into someone’s inner world and measure with a ruler his ability to thank, and we don’t need to. Some indirect indicators are sufficient to conclude that a considerable part (if not the best part) of our society has been infected with pathological ingratitude. I am first of all speaking

of banal callousness in its ever more terrifying manifestations, people's ever-increasing dissatisfaction with their lives and an ever more intensive desire to "roll themselves up into balls" like prickly hedgehogs. "What has this to do with ingratitude?" you may ask. The fact is that the soul's ability to be grateful is an effective antidote for such diseases. Someone with a grateful heart, receiving never-ceasing favours from God and his neighbours, naturally shows favour to others; such people are more than happy with their lives and won't be preoccupied with their own problems. In contrast with this, the ungrateful heart will make someone view everything from a very different perspective.

The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to Timothy warns us: This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be proud..., unthankful... (2 Tim. 3:1-2). Pathological ingratitude, which can be found everywhere and in some cases (careerism) is becoming a norm, is a clear sign of the end times. Perhaps the most hideous manifestation of ingratitude, when someone cruelly pays for a benefaction he has received with evil, was widespread even 200 years ago, as Saint Ignatius wrote: "Those who receive great favours often begin to feel something, frenzied hatred for their benefactors. This unnatural oddity occurs so often that a popular proverb appeared: 'You will not make an enemy before feeding him and giving him to drink.'" What can we say about our time? What about children who send their parents to old age homes or simply turn them out into the street like lumber? Take frequent cases when others make use of your gullibility and unselfishness to get you into trouble "as a token of their gratitude." And take the numerous cases when someone who has got used to your benefaction begins to demand favours from you frantically, and if you can't show him favours anymore, you become an "offender" in his eyes.

Why do such things happen and how can we interpret extreme ingratitude? Ingratitude is a defect of self-understanding, and by the virtue of this defect someone has a distorted view of the world around him. An ungrateful person is like someone who sits in a room that has windows smeared with dirt. This person can't see or feel the sunshine; he only feels that it's dark and

cold. What can he be grateful for? The reason for this spiritual state when someone's heart is not even warmed up by the generous "sunshine" is explained by his view of himself. Pride, the root of all spiritual diseases, smears the human heart with the dirt of an exaggerated high opinion of themselves. Pride tells him that not only is he worthy of everything he receives from God and other people, he is also worthy of many other and better things; so he feels disappointed and thinks that it is unjust that he hasn't yet received these "best things." Hence his inability to give thanks, for he is "worthy" of everything he enjoys; hence his discontent with all he has, for he is "worthy of better"! Indeed, "the share of a madman is small in his eyes." Meanwhile, life shows that by thinking in this way he deceives himself. Thus, entrapped by self-delusion, the one who is incapable of thanking hides himself from the "sunshine" of Divine grace and loses what is really best. As opposed to this, a grateful person always receives beyond expectation, for a thankful heart is a receptacle of Divine gifts. This is what the Gospel story of the healing of ten lepers by the Lord is about (*cf.* Lk. 17:12–19).

This episode is one of the few places in the Holy Scriptures which speaks about the need for the ability to be grateful. More than that, the Lord shows here that gratitude to God is a demonstration of someone's true faith in God, the faith that saves and attracts God's mercy to him.

One day, as Christ was entering a village, ten lepers were near His way. They were standing at a distance and dared not approach Him, since lepers were not allowed to be in contact with other people and were treated as social pariahs. Having heard about Christ's arrival, they shouted loudly from a distance, "Jesus, Teacher, have mercy on us!" But the Lord didn't heal the lepers in public: He sent them to their priests so that they could confirm their cure as true. Indeed they were cleansed on their way, but only one of them returned to Christ and, falling at His feet, gave praise to God. This man turned out to be a Samaritan, a member of the "unfaithful" and "alien" ethnic group whom the Jews shunned and weren't on speaking terms with. The Lord said in reply: Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the

nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God... Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole (Lk. 17:17-19).

There are no coincidences in this episode, every detail is filled with deep meaning. Let us examine at least some of them.

### **On the importance of gratitude**

Let us start with the action related to our subject. Soon after Christ had sent the ten lepers away, all of them saw they were healed. Did they go to the priests as Jesus had told them? They probably did because they couldn't re-enter society unless they first went to the priest to be checked. But did they return to Christ to thank Him for this great miracle? Alas, only one of them came. According to the Holy Fathers, thus the Lord showed us the proportion of the grateful to the ungrateful among people. This is what Saint Theophan the Recluse wrote about this: "Ten lepers were healed, but only one came to thank the Lord. Isn't there generally a similar proportion of people who are grateful after gaining benefactions from the Lord? Who has not received good things; or, rather, what do we have in us, or whatever happens to us that is not good for us? Even so, is everyone grateful to God, and does everyone give thanks for everything?" Agreeing with Saint Theophan that not many of us show gratitude and not for everything, let us ask another question: Why is the ability to show gratitude so important? Who needs our gratitude? God? He certainly doesn't need it because He is all-good and all-sufficient. People? But people who strive for goodness and sincerely do charitable acts without mercenary motives don't need gratitude either. Who needs it then? Of course, it is we who need it; for only a grateful heart can respond to the good it receives properly, which guarantees future blessings. Only a grateful heart is the receptacle of multifarious gifts from God, and the Creator awaits our gratitude only in order to give us more blessings. Saint Ignatius writes: "The gratitude of the receiver of gifts encourages the giver to give more gifts which are greater than the previous ones. The gifts are not multiplied only when there is no gratitude for them." There is a famous saying of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiomite, "God does not need your gratitude, but you



desperately need His blessings. Your grateful heart receives and preserves these benefactions.” Only a grateful heart can pray for future blessings with boldness, “for how should he ask for future things, who is not thankful for the past?” (St John Chrysostom).

In other words, the ability to show gratitude is a generator of God’s blessings in our lives. Apart from this, this ability can serve as a strong weapon in our spiritual warfare. Specifically, against the sin of envy, as Saint John Chrysostom wrote: “Let us be thankful for the benefactions that have been granted not only to us but also to others; thus we will be able to both destroy envy and strengthen love, making it most sincere. You will no longer be able to envy those for whom you thank the Lord... Such gratitude releases us from earth, resettles us in heaven and makes us angels.”

### **How should we show gratitude?**

True, the overwhelming majority of us understand that we should show gratitude to God and people for the benefactions we receive. But how are we supposed to express gratitude? Are simple words of appreciation and a smile on our faces sufficient? Perhaps a grateful heart won’t be satisfied with this and will try to repay good with good. A believer will at least pray for his benefactor. But any benefactor is just an instrument in the hands of God; so the following question inevitably arises: How can we show gratitude to God Who is Himself the source of all good things and doesn’t need anything?

Sacrifices were the original form of gratitude to God. Beginning from the first human beings and later throughout the history of the Chosen People we see the faithful offer blood sacrifices. Thus, Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock (Gen. 4:4). Noah offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour... (Gen. 8:20-21). Sacrifices were performed in the Temple of Solomon and continued in the time of the Saviour. However, the Old Testament sacrifices had a prefigurative meaning. In addition to the expression of gratitude they reflected the faith in the coming of the Saviour, the True Sacrifice for the world. After the coming of the Messiah, blood sacrificial offerings lost their



purpose, including that of gratitude. Long before the incarnation of Christ, King David prophetically pointed to the form of gratitude which can replace all blood sacrifices and would always be pleasing to God: A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit: a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise (Ps. 50:19). Repentance for our sins and a remorseful heart are the required form of gratitude, along with praise of God for the benefactions we receive. As Saint John Chrysostom wrote: “Do you want to know how you should show gratitude? To confess your sins means to give thanks to God; he who confesses his sins shows that he is guilty of innumerable sins but has not yet received the punishment he deserves. He thanks God more than everybody else.” Do you want to understand how it works in life? Look how the Patriarch Jacob pours out his gratitude to God in prayer: God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands (Gen. 32:9-10). Consequently, when we happen to taste and see that the Lord is good (*cf.* Ps. 33:8), then, having glorified the Creator for His countless blessings to us, it wouldn't be bad to proclaim together with the Patriarch Jacob: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant.

### **Why should I be thankful for sorrows?**

Everybody understands why we must be grateful to God for joys, but the fact that we must give thanks for sorrows and diseases is not clear to everyone. We read in one of Saint Paul's epistles, In everything give thanks (1 Thess. 5:18). But we are seething inside when something happens and we are harmed. At such times, especially if we suffer serious losses, we ask perplexedly: “Why should I be grateful for this if I feel so terrible?”

But even in unenviable situations we shouldn't forget popular wisdom based on the Holy Scriptures and experience:

“Whatever God wills is for the best.” This truth is confirmed by the New Testament teaching concerning God, which is our most authoritative source. God is love (1Jn. 4:16), we read in the Holy Scriptures. God treats us with love. However, while some need joy or consolation, others need sorrows or illnesses for their salvation. This can be compared to a situation when a doctor sends one patient to a health resort and sends another patient to the operating room, “to go under the knife.” This surgeon’s knife is often the only possible way of saving someone’s life. God does the same by sending people sorrows and infirmities for the restoration of their spiritual health. Though people often doubt this in moments of trouble, later the good outcomes of trials give them important experience. There is an interesting parable on how this can work in our lives.

One eminent and wealthy dignitary invited a tutor who was famous for his wisdom to educate his child. When his son grew up enough and acquired riding skills, they went horseback riding together. But during the ride the boy fell and the horse accidentally crushed his arm. The tutor hurried to support the adolescent morally with the words: “Don’t worry! Take heart! Glory be to God!” Writhing in pain, the latter replied angrily: “What have you given thanks to God for?! I am now an invalid!” And soon by his father’s orders the tutor was sent to prison.

Some time passed. One day the same young man, accompanied by a new tutor, undertook a faraway voyage during which they were captured by a native tribe that practiced human sacrifice. They quickly lit fires, and the tutor was the first to fall victim to the barbarous rite. Now it was the young man’s turn. Dozens of hands lifted him over their heads and carried him to the fire. But an unforeseen thing happened: at the moment they were about to sacrifice him, the high priest noticed that his arm was injured. Since their pagan gods demanded sacrifices without defects, the tribe with disgust rejected the young man and drove him away. So he trudged back to his native shores.

This parable reflects an important spiritual truth: Divine providence often allows adversity in our lives, foreseeing the greatest good that will result from it, just as a pure baby is born

through severe pain.

God doesn't want us to live in clover our entire lives; He wants to prevent us from ruining our souls for eternity. We should make efforts and realise that it is not possible to reach Paradise by flying there business class, that affliction and maladies are often needed to reach it. Our failure to understand this truth not only removes gratitude from our hearts but also gives rise to the opposite, namely grumbling and indignation. When Saint Theophan the Recluse encountered this attitude towards sorrows, he would exhort: "There are even those who permit themselves to ask, 'Why did God give us existence? It would be better for us not to exist.' God gave you existence so that you would be in eternal bliss; He gave you existence as a gift, as a gift He has furnished you with every means for attaining eternal bliss. The job depends on you: you need only to labour a while for this. You say, 'But I have only sorrows, poverty, diseases, misfortunes.' Well, these are also some of the ways to attain eternal bliss. Be patient. Your entire life is less than a moment compared with eternity. Even if you had to suffer unceasingly your entire life, compared to eternity it is nothing; and you still have moments of consolation. Do not look at the present, but at what is prepared for you in the future, and concern yourself with making yourself worthy of that; then you will not notice the sorrows. They will all be swallowed up by unquestioning hope in eternal consolations, and your lips will never cease to utter thanks."

Thus, beyond all doubt, our sorrows and diseases are gifts from God intended to help us attain the heavenly abodes. As with all gifts, they should be followed by thanksgiving. And the Holy Fathers see the proof of our true Christian disposition in gratitude. "If sorrows for Christ are gifts from God made by God to genuine Christians, then they must show their Christianity in practice by gratitude for sorrows, confess and accept the gift of God by showing gratitude for the gift."

So gratitude to God for sorrows is a duty of Christians and an indicator of their progress in spiritual life. But not only that. The words of thanksgiving and glorification of God contain an effective remedy for sorrow. This is what Saint Ignatius writes

about the power of the influence on us of such simple and familiar words as, “Glory to God!” “Glory to God!” These are powerful words! In sorrowful circumstances, when your heart is beset with thoughts of doubt, faint-heartedness, discontent, and murmuring, force yourself to repeat the words ‘Glory to God!’ frequently, unhurriedly and attentively. Those who take this advice with simple hearts and put it into practice when the need arises will experience the wonderful power of glorifying God; they will rejoice at gaining this useful new knowledge and acquiring a weapon against the enemies of souls, such a strong and handy one.”

But that is not all. The Lord said to the thankful Samaritan, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole (Lk. 17:19). Why does the Saviour equate thankfulness with faith? Because there is a direct link between these two virtues, and Saint Ignatius points to it: “Thanksgiving to God has its particular attribute: it gives rise to and strengthens faith and brings us closer to God.” In contrast to this, “ingratitude and disregard of God destroy faith and move us away from God.” The faith of the Samaritan appeared and became stronger in living gratitude to Christ. He saw and felt the things that we so often forget. He learned that this perfect gift, the deliverance from an incurable disease, can come from God alone, and he bowed before God in the person of Christ.

“If something good happens, glorify God, and the good will remain; if something bad happens, glorify God, and the bad will disappear,” Saint John Chrysostom used to say. And for him it was not just a beautiful phrase. He would begin every speech by hitting his index finger to his palm and saying: “Glory to God for all things.” He did it all his life, and before his last sigh he uttered the same words, pointing out the undying value of gratitude to God: “On account of the substantial benefit the soul receives through thanking God, He commanded us to practice showing gratitude to Him diligently and cultivating a sense of gratitude to God.”

We must thank God both for joys and sorrows, for such is the will of God for us, and His will is holy to us. Divine providence

and God's care of human beings boil down to us reaching the haven of the Heavenly Kingdom. It is not bad if we have to face storms and hidden rocks on the way sometimes: the main goal is to reach the haven. However, not many can understand this; alas, the ungrateful are a majority, and they won't hear these most important words from Christ: Thy faith hath made thee whole.

PRIEST DIMITRY VYDUMKIN  
TRANSLATED BY DIMITRY LAPA  
(SLIGHTLY AMENDED BY US)



# THE COMING MONTH

THE two principal events in February are the **Great Feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple** (Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> / 15<sup>th</sup>), which in some local Orthodox Traditions is kept as a Mother's Day, and the **start of the Holy and Great Lent** (Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> February / 3<sup>rd</sup> March). As we begin Great Lent, we should undoubtedly be wary of one grave error. We often think that by giving up meat, fish, dairy products, etc., we have kept the fast, or that by spending a little more time in church or at prayer and spiritual reading we have kept the fast; we often forget the acts of mercy and kindness that are also required, and we need even then to pay heed to this wise teaching of Saint Seraphim of Sarov: "Fasting, prayer, alms, and every other good Christian deed is good in itself, but the purpose of the Christian life consists not only in the fulfilment of one or another of them. The true purpose of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. But fasting, prayer, alms and every good deed done for the sake of Christ is a means to the attainment of the Holy Spirit. Note that only good deeds done for the sake of Christ bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Everything else that is not done for the sake of Christ, even if it is good, does not bring us a re-

ward in the life to come, not does it bring the grace of God in this life. This is why our Lord Jesus Christ said, 'Whoever gathereth not with me scattereth' (Matt. 12:30)."

Among the Saints we commemorate, we have:-

The **Holy Martyr Blaise the Herdsman** (3<sup>rd</sup> / 16<sup>th</sup>) was from Caesarea of Cappadocia, the son of wealthy parents, who had gained their wealth due to the large number of animals they had, wealth which they gave away plentifully along with charity to the poor. When there was an anti-Christian persecution by the Greek pagans, blessed Blaise was sought for but could not be found. They therefore inquired of his whereabouts in the wilderness. When the brave contestant of Christ learned of this, he gave himself up to his persecutors with such joy, it was as if he had been invited to a royal dinner. Being a benefactor and a man of good will, he gave his persecutors and murderers hospitality and served them. Standing before the tribunal, he revealed his name and his faith and his occupation. Immediately after this the four limbs of his body were stretched out, and he was flogged with raw hides. God meanwhile eased his pain, and healed his wounds. When the governor saw this miracle, he called it magic. Therefore he placed the Saint in a cauldron of boiling water, where it was ordered that he remain for five days. Angels of God descended, and urged the Martyr to not be afraid, but to have courage, and with this they scattered the flames and brought harm to those outside them. After five days, soldiers came to remove the Saint from the cauldron, but they saw that he was alive, and that he was chanting with the Angels. For this reason they immediately proclaimed themselves Christians. When the governor learned of this, he sent other soldiers to have him removed. They went, and they also called themselves Christians. After this the governor himself went, and seeing the Saint in the boiling water, he thought that the water had cooled down, so he ordered for some of that water to be brought to him so that he may wash his face. When he did this, the wretched one blinded himself, and with his blindness his stained soul also departed. The Martyr of Christ, however, baptised with that water all the soldiers who believed in the name of the Holy Trinity. After this

he went to his animals' stable, and he delivered to his mother and kinsfolk all that was needed for their salvation, and in this way he delivered his soul into the hands of God. Those who happened to be present when the blessed one died, beheld his holy soul emerge from his body, like a white and luminous dove, and he flew off into heaven. His sacred body was buried at that same place. His staff sprouted near the altar there, and became a large tree, which overshadowed the altar.

**Holy Martyr Nicephorus of Antioch** (9<sup>th</sup> / 22<sup>nd</sup>), whose life, as Saint Nicolas Velimirovich writes “clearly demonstrates how God rejects pride and crowns humility and love with glory.” He lived in the city of Antioch. The presbyter Sapricius also lived there, with whom Nicephorus was very friendly, so that they were considered brothers. Then they quarrelled, and their former love changed into enmity and hate. After some time Nicephorus came to his senses, repented of his sin and more than once asked Sapricius to forgive him. Sapricius, however, did not. Nicephorus then went and fervently asked forgiveness, but Sapricius was adamant. At this time the Emperors Valerian and Gallus began to persecute Christians, and one of the first brought before the court was the priest Sapricius. He firmly confessed himself a Christian, underwent tortures for his faith and was condemned to death by beheading with a sword. As they led him to execution, Nicephorus tearfully implored his forgiveness saying, “O Martyr of Christ, forgive me if I have sinned against you in any way.” Sapricius remained stubborn, and even as he approached death he refused to forgive his fellow Christian. Seeing the hardness of his heart, the Lord withdrew His blessing from him, and would not let him receive the crown of martyrdom. At the last moment, he suddenly became afraid of death and agreed to offer sacrifice to idols. In vain did Nicephorus urge him not to lose his reward through apostasy, since he already stood on the threshold of the heavenly Kingdom. Nicephorus then said to the executioner, “I am a Christian, and I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. Execute me in place of Sapricius.” The executioners reported this to the governor. He decided to free Sapricius, and to behead Nicephorus in his



place. Thus did Saint Nicephorus inherit the Kingdom and receive a martyr's crown. This occurred in 260 A.D. Nicephorus, whose name bespeaks a "victory bearer," won a double triumph over the passions and impiety.

**The Holy Martyrs Ennatha, Valentina and Paul of Caesarea** (10<sup>th</sup> / 23<sup>rd</sup>). During a particularly fierce persecution of the Christians, the prosecutor came to judge one who, although a woman in body, was a hero in the bravery of mind, which she possessed: she was also a virgin in her mode of life, and could not bear the threat of pollution which she heard, but at once gave utterance to harsh words against the tyrannical Emperor, for having given authority to a vile and wicked judge. On this account, therefore, he in the first place bruised her body all over with stripes; then she was hung up and her sides were lacerated; and this not once only, but two and three times in one hour, and for a great while and also repeatedly, until those who inflicted the punishment became wearied and tired; then others took over against her, and, at the commands of the enraged governor, tortured her most severely. Moreover, it happened that while this judge was abusing this girl with his tortures, another young woman, small indeed in person, but courageous in soul - for she was possessed of a great mind, which supplied strength to the smallness of her person - being no longer able to tolerate the wickedness and cruelty of those things which were inflicted upon her sister, called out from the midst of the crowd of persons who were standing before the governor, and cried out complaining, and said: "How long do you intend to tear my sister to pieces in so cruel and merciless a manner?" And when the wicked Firmillianus heard this saying, he was bitterly incensed, and gave orders for the young woman who had complained to be brought before him. Her name was Valentina. Having therefore caught her up they brought her into the midst of the place of judgment. But she placed her trust in Jesus. Then the murderous governor in his fury commanded her to offer sacrifice. But the maiden Valentina despised the word even of the threatener. Then he gave orders for those who were ministering to his will to lay hold upon the girl by force, and to take

her up to the side of the altar, so that she might be polluted by the sacrifices. Then at that time of terror the noble maiden shewed the courage of her mind, and gave the altar a kick with her foot, and it was overturned, and the fire that had been kindled upon it was scattered about; and because she did all these things without showing any fear, the rage of the governor was roused like a wild beast, and he gave command for her to be tortured with the combs, without any mercy, so that no one man was ever torn to such a degree; and I think that, had it been possible, he would even have devoured the girl's flesh. And when at length his fury was satisfied with the sight of her blood, and he had learned, both by deeds and words, how divine is that invincible power which arms and strengthens even little girls with courage and valour, he caused both the young women, Ennatha and Valentina, to be bound together, and gave sentence against them of death by fire. And after these things, Paul the confessor was called to the conflict. And he also endured it bravely, and in the same hour was condemned to be put to death, and his sentence was to be beheaded by the sword. When, then, this blessed man came to the place of execution where he was to be put to death, he besought the officer who was to behead him to have patience with him for a little while; and when the officer had granted him this desire, in the first place, with a mild and cheerful voice, he offered up thanksgiving, and worship, and glory, and supplication to God for having accounted him worthy of this victory. Then he prayed for tranquillity and peace for our people, and entreated God speedily to grant them deliverance. After this he offered up prayer for our enemies, and he prayed even for that judge who had condemned him to death, and for all rulers in every place; and not only for them, but also for that officer who was then going to cut off his head. And as he was offering his supplications to God, the officers heard him with their own ears praying for them, and beseeching God not to lay to their charge that which they did to him. And as he prayed for all with a suppliant voice, he turned to the whole multitude that was standing by and looking on in sorrow and tears; and then, of his own accord, he bent down his body, and put out his neck to be cut off by the sword.

**Saint Leo the Great, Pope of Rome** (18<sup>th</sup> February / 3<sup>rd</sup> March) occupied the see of Rome during one of the most critical periods of history, which saw the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West and the Church threatened on all sides by heretics. He proclaimed the wholesome doctrine of the Truth and did his utmost to preserve the unity of the holy Church, for which he is justly venerated in both East and West as Saint Leo the Great. He was born in Rome into a noble family of Tuscan origin. He entered the clergy in his youth and rose to become archdeacon of the Roman Church, which led him to take a close interest in all Church matters, as well as in the doctrinal controversies of the time. He was on a mission to Gaul when he received word of the death of Pope Celestine, and of the people's unanimous choice of himself to succeed him. At his enthronement in September 440, and on every anniversary of it, he would bear witness in his sermons to his fear at the responsibility he bore, and to his reliance at the helm of the Church on divine grace alone. He was indeed faced with a heavy task. The Empire, threatened by barbarians, was undermined by moral corruption and torn apart by heresies, leaving the people of God straying and in ignorance. Skilfully joining strictness to compassion, Saint Leo began by reforming the clergy, and reestablishing good order in the Churches of Africa and Sicily in the aftermath of the Vandal invasions. He confirmed the authority of the Metropolitan of Thessalonica over the Church of Illyricum, which depended on Rome at that time, and he restored respect for bishops in the Church of Gaul. He penetrated and revealed the designs of the Manichean heretics. By his blameless life, his care for the order of divine service and the sober eloquence of his homilies, he gave an example of a good shepherd to the bishops and priests. At the great feasts, he would expound the mysteries of the Faith for the edification of the people, and exhort them to live in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel. Above and beyond his pastoral labours, Saint Leo is rightly honoured by the Church for his contribution in the domain of dogma. Upon the condemnation of Saint Flavian at the false Synod of Ephesus, the "Robber Synod" as Saint Leo himself named it, he lost no time in condemning its proceedings and in summoning a synod of

Western bishops to annul its decrees and to reaffirm the true faith concerning the Person of Christ. Even before the Robber Synod, Saint Leo addressed a wonderful letter to Saint Flavian in which, having set forth the faith of the Church in the divinity of Christ with great clarity, he went on to say: "Without detriment therefore to the properties of either nature and substance which then came together in one person, majesty took on humility, strength weakness, eternity mortality: and for the paying off of the debt belonging to our condition inviolable nature was united with possible nature, so that, as suited the needs of our case, one and the same Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, could both die with the one and not die with the other. Thus in the whole and perfect nature of true man was true God born, complete in what was His own, complete in what was ours. And by 'ours' we mean what the Creator formed in us from the beginning and what He undertook to repair. For what the Deceiver brought in and man deceived committed, had no trace in the Saviour. Nor, because He partook of man's weaknesses, did He therefore share our faults. He took the form of a slave without stain of sin, increasing the human and not diminishing the divine: because that emptying of Himself whereby the Invisible made Himself visible and, Creator and Lord of all things though He be, wished to be a mortal, was the bending down of pity, not the failing of power... There enters then these lower parts of the world the Son of God, descending from His heavenly home and yet not quitting His Father's glory, begotten in a new order by a new nativity... The same Person is thus at once true God and true man; and this unity is genuine, for it comprises the humanity of man and the majesty of God... The Catholic Church lives and progresses by this faith, so that in Christ Jesus neither the manhood without the true Godhead nor the Godhead without the true manhood is believed in." It is said that Saint Leo composed this letter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit after many days of fasting, vigil and prayer and that he then placed it on the tomb of Saint Peter, entreating the Prince of the Apostles to amend any error that might have crept in through human weakness. After forty days, the holy Apostle appeared to him at prayer and said: "I have read and I have

corrected.” On opening the letter, Saint Leo did indeed find Saint Peter’s handwritten corrections. This letter, which his legates brought to the Synod of Ephesus, was put aside unread by the heretics. However, when the pious Emperor Marcian and Saint Pulcheria convoked the Œcumenical Synod of Chalcedon, it was solemnly read in the presence of all the Fathers, who welcomed it, exclaiming with one voice: “This is the faith of the Apostles; this is the faith of the Fathers. Peter has spoken by the mouth of Leo!” While these great events were taking place in the East, the West was being ravaged by Attila the Hun and his hordes. After sowing death and destruction through Germany and Gaul, they crossed the Alps, ravaged the region of Milan and went on to threaten Rome. The Emperor, Senate and distraught people implored the Pope to entreat for peace with the barbarian tyrant, before whom the world trembled. Wearing his episcopal vestments, the holy bishop, at the head of a great procession of priests and deacons chanting canticles, presented himself before Attila. To everyone’s amazement, the “Scourge of God” showed a timid respect, and agreed to depart in return for an annual tribute. When his soldiers asked him to explain his unusual clemency, Attila replied that at the Pope’s side he had seen the Apostle Peter holding a sword and looking at him threateningly. Rome was thus spared by a miracle, but not for long, since the unthankful people immediately forgot the divine blessing and, led by the Emperor, returned to their usual debauchery. And so the Lord, no longer restraining his anger against the proud city, allowed the Vandals under Genseric to seize and pillage Rome in 455. The Pope once again accosted the invader, who undertook to spare the lives of the people of the city and its buildings. They were satisfied with carrying off vast spoils and a large proportion of the population, both of the nobility and of the common people. As soon as there was calm, Saint Leo was occupied in consoling the survivors, restoring the devastated churches and establishing anew, as far as he was able, Christian life in the once-glorious city. He succeeded in sending priests and alms for the support of those deported to Africa. The remainder of his life was occupied by pastoral labours and the maintenance of the Chalcedonian faith, threatened by the Monophysites espec-

ally in the Church of Alexandria. He gave up his soul to God in 461 after an episcopate of twenty-one years.



## POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

THIS is a point that derives from correspondence rather than being a specific point from a correspondent. Nearly every email we receive now begins with the “pious” platitude, “I hope you are well.” This even to me (Grouch) from people who attend church regularly here and know that I have been unable to serve now since April 1919, but perhaps they don’t bother even to notice that or are just relieved by the fact. Their hopes have been fulfilled: ***I am extraordinarily well*** - I am short-sighted, have gout, very high blood pressure, cirrhosis of the liver, a dicky heart, the curse of Earsham (vertigo), healing cracked ribs, worries about cholesterol, irregular sleeping habits, sudden attacks of montezumas, urinary tract disorders, flu and added to this in the last two weeks loss of appetite and innumerable bloody scratches inflicted upon me by our latest inmate, Smudge. All this has made me rather grumpy (I do sin!), but I have to say I am well because it is undoubtedly what the good Lord knows is necessary for me. Glory and thanks be unto Him. What is the point of being strong, healthy and fit, if it indicates we have abandoned the Lord to achieve these “benefits:” and perhaps even more worryingly that He, seeing this, has let us go our own way? Also, He is undoubtedly trying to waken me up [see immediately below], saying in effect, “If this looks depressing, maybe you should take a look at the disorders in your spiritual life as well.”



“WHEN our good and all-gracious Lord and Master sees people too lazy in their exercises, He lays their flesh low with sickness, an asceticism with less toil; and sometimes it also cleanses the soul from evil thoughts or passions.”

VEN. JOHN OF THE LADDER, + 649 A.D.

# The Prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian

This beautiful Prayer is read at every weekday service (Monday to Friday) in church during Holy and Great Lent, and should also be added to our daily morning and evening prayers at home.

O Lord and Master of my life, a spirit of idleness, curiosity, ambition, and idle talk give me not.

*Make the sign of the Cross and a full prostration.*

But rather a spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love bestow upon me Thy servant.

*Make the sign of the Cross and a full prostration.*

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see mine own failings and not condemn my brother; for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen.

*Make the sign of the Cross and a full prostration.*

*Then make the sign of the Cross twelve times bowing from the waist after each, and saying:*

O God, cleanse me a sinner.

*And then the entire prayer:*

O Lord and Master of my life, a spirit of idleness, curiosity, ambition, and idle talk give me not. But rather a spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love bestow upon me Thy servant. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see mine own failings and not condemn my brother; for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen.

*Make the sign of the Cross and a full prostration.*



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

**CHRISMATION AT BROOKWOOD**

ON the Sunday of the Genealogy, 23<sup>rd</sup> December / 5<sup>th</sup> January, **Nicolas Socaciu of Knaphill, Woking**, was received into our Church by the Mysterion of Chrismation. This was done at the end of Matins and before the Divine Liturgy began, so that he could receive the Holy Mysteries with us for the first time at that service. **Priestmonk Sabbas** celebrated the Mysterion and **Deacon Ioan Turcu** served as his sponsor. Previously Nicolas had been a member of the New Calendarist Church in Romania. Pray that he now remain steadfast in the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians.

**THE ORTHODOX AID FUND**

DURING 2024 (secular calendar), our Brotherhood's Orthodox Aid Fund distributed a total of **£27,872.29 in alms**. This was a large increase on previous years, and that is largely due to the fact that special appeals were made for our Church's missions in Africa, which are under the care of **Metropolitan Ambrose of Methoni**. In fact, £21,116.43 was donated to those African missions and other charitable purposes within the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece and the Sister Churches of Bulgaria and of Russia. £2,764.38 was sent to charities in Ukraine, and the residue was spent on humanitarian, and environmental causes. May our Saviour bless each and every one of you who made this possible by supporting us in this work.

**BEREAVEMENT**

OVER the Western Christmas period we received sad news from **Dame Sarah Goad** that her husband, **Timothy**, had died

on 7<sup>th</sup> December. On 2<sup>nd</sup> / 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2006, Dame Sarah, then the **Lord Lieutenant of Surrey**, laid the foundation stone for our new monastic house here at Brookwood. She subsequently invited brotherhood members to her home and she also arranged for two of us to attend the **Royal Garden Party** then hosted by **Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II**. Timothy attended services here several times, and even helped us when he recognised an irregular Orthodox Bishop who suddenly appeared. We are indebted to them for their love and care. May Timothy be granted mercies in the life to come, and may Dame Sarah and his other loved ones be comforted in their bereavement. Pray for them.

## ***FESTAL CELEBRATIONS***

BOTH the Vigil Service and the Divine Liturgy for Christmas were celebrated with full congregations, with **Archimandrite Daniel, Priestmonk Sabbas, Priest Borislav Popov** and **Deacon Ioan** serving. After the festal Liturgy people made their way to the Lord Pirbright Hall, which **Christopher Hunter**, who grew up in Pirbright, had generously hired for the occasion and paid for. The Festal Breakfast was attended this year by the “Sweet Voice of Woking,” **Ann Harrington**, who writes a column in the local paper each week. During the celebration, parishioner **Teodora Sion**, who is studying music at Cambridge now, gave a flute recital, *Gute Nacht* by Schubert. This was followed by a short play performed by the **Sunday School** class and arranged by **Alex and Ekaterina Spiroglou**. The play was entitled, “I’m bored.” The younger children then sang traditional Christmas carols. Apparently there were rather fewer people at the breakfast than in church, but presumably the carnivores rushed home for their meat. We are extremely grateful to all who contributed to this celebration and especially to all those who cleared up afterwards so that we left the hall as we found it, clean and tidy.

Immediately after Christmas day, brotherhood members were stricken with various types of flu, and so had to cancel some

Liturgies and often have readers' services replace the fuller ones. However the non-resident clergy returned for **Theophany** and celebrated the festal services with an ailing Fr Sabbas. After the Divine Liturgy, all who were able went by car convoy to Chertsey for our now traditional **Great Blessing of the Waters at the Abbey River**, where again we enjoyed the kind and warm hospitality of **Robin and Mary Haigh**, who opened up their medieval barn for refreshments to be served. May they receive many blessings for this great kindness to our people.

### **VISITOR**

PRIEST VASILY RASHEV visited from Bulgaria on the feast day of Saint Spiridon of Trimython (12<sup>th</sup> / 25<sup>th</sup> December) and concelebrated with Priestmonk Sabbas, Father Borislav and Deacon Ioan. He served in Church Slavonic and after the service joined us with some relatives of his at breakfast, before having to return to London. Fr Vasily is a priest of the Old Calendarist Church in Bulgaria, which is headed by **Metropolitan Photiy**, and his parish is in the south of the country.

### **NEW BROTHERHOOD MEMBER**

ON Christmas Day, the **Papanicolaou family** from the Danelaw brought us as a gift a young black and white kitten, which we have called Smudge. It seems to have settled in happily, but Bruna, our dog, is not at all so sure of that!



## **Practical Tip**

NEVER EVER be piously platitudinous; always show real care and concern. Introducing any kind of insincerity into our conversations can lead to temptations.