

The Shepherd

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FROM THE FATHERS

“ALL IMAGES reveal and make perceptible those things which are hidden. For example, a man does not have immediate knowledge of invisible things, since the soul is veiled by the body. Nor can man have immediate knowledge of things which are distant from each other or separated by place, because he himself is limited by place and time. Therefore the icon was devised that he might advance in knowledge, and that secret things might be revealed and made perceptible. Therefore, icons are a source of profit, help, and salvation for all, since they make things so obviously manifest, enabling us to perceive hidden things. Thus, we are encouraged to desire and imitate what is good and to shun and hate what is evil.”

VEN. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, + 780 A.D.

“FASTING gradually disperses and drives away spiritual darkness and the veil of sin that lies on the soul, just as the sun dispels the mist. Fasting enables us spiritually to see that spiritual air in which Christ, the Sun Who knows no setting, does not rise, but shines without ceasing. Fasting, aided by vigil, penetrates and softens hardness of heart. Where once were the vapours of drunkenness it causes fountains of compunction to spring forth.”

VEN. SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN, + 1021 A.D.

“HE who forbids his lips to gossip (to speak much) preserves his heart from passions. He who preserves his heart from passions, sees God every hour.”

VEN. CALLISTUS AND IGNATIUS, 14TH CENTURY

“A DISCIPLE once asked Saint Leonid of Optina why after years of struggle he found himself worse instead of better, i.e., more inconsiderate, colder of heart, etc. Saint Leonid’s response is very enlightening: ‘Very few have flown up in a short time on the wings of faith and virtue into the spiritual heaven or have sensed in themselves the undying pledge of hope and the betrothal of future glory... There are others who will never sense this during their whole life on earth; they will not sense it according to the dispensation of our heavenly Protector, God, Who always provides what is best for us. For we, infants in our understanding of the judgments of Him that directs the world, often ask of Him such tools which in their own right and power are for our salvation, but we would put them to entirely detrimental use because of our inexperience. Therefore, the loving Father of lights hides from certain pious people the gifts which are for the salvation of some, but to others bring perdition. What would happen if God, Who knows all things, completely fulfilled our every wish? I think, but I’m not saying for certain, that everyone in the world would perish. Even though He does not reject the prayers of His chosen ones, God still does not at all times fulfil their desires. And this only in order to arrange everything in a better way, in keeping with His divine intent... Just because you see yourself making no progress does not mean that you are not making any progress at all. Such feelings can plant sincere humility in your heart. And when you have the genuine awareness that you are deprived of spiritual fruit, then make an unflinching effort to force your striving for God... When we have had no success in the virtues, there is no closer means for salvation than humbleness of mind. Haughtiness even when joined to the virtues is offensive to God; but a meek thought will not be forgotten before God.’”

COUNSELS OF VEN. LEONID OF OPTINA, +1841 A.D.

Homily on the Feast of the All the Bodiless Powers of Heaven

HIS GRACE, BISHOP SERAPHIM OF SOZOPOL

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Brothers and sisters dear-in-the-Lord!

The angels were made by God bodiless, rational beings. We call them relatively bodiless. They are bodiless compared to people and the material world, which we know through our senses. But, according to the Tradition of the Church, they are clothed in bodies of thin substance which we can neither see nor feel. The angels are subordinate to the categories of time and space, unlike God, Who is bodiless in essence and is omnipresent - He encompasses everything.

According to Holy Church Tradition, the angel foremost in glory, Lucifer, became puffed up, fell away from God's love, and in his fall dragged down a great multitude of the bodiless angels who were transformed into demons. But the holy chief commander Michael summoned all the bodiless powers who had not surrendered themselves to demonic pride to stand firmly on God's side. The angels and demons made their own free choice to remain faithful towards Him or, conversely, to resist Him, and this choice of theirs is binding. Because of their nature, the Bodiless Powers are not in the same condition as we are after the Fall. Still, the angels abide in perfect love for God and towards us men, created in God's image, while the demons abide in horrifying hatred.

The angels were made to ceaselessly serve God. They stand before the face of God; they serve Him unceasingly through their constant offering of praise and glory, as well as through participating in the fulfilment of God's Providence for the world and for man. According to Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, the

angels are ordered in a strict hierarchy under the leadership of the supreme commander Michael. They fortify every man in his striving to live according to God's ordinances, in proving our faithfulness to God, and they guard people from demonic influence; the fallen angels strive to turn men away from God by directing them towards sin.

Angels are a light for men, but having them as our fervent protectors we are also called to follow their example of fiery love for God as we are able, and to follow their ceaseless standing in the presence of the face of God, their faithfulness and obedience to the will of God.

How can we do this? The angels are spirits and their life is spiritual. Therefore we too need to lead a concentrated spiritual life. The teaching for the spiritual life is passed down to us by God, in the Sacred Scripture, and by the Fathers of the Church in their plethora of writings. But for us to follow the teaching of the Church on the spiritual life, first of all we have to become familiar with the Word of God, especially the Holy Gospels, so that we can develop a taste for the 'preaching' of the Church Fathers, which is the pulse of Sacred Tradition.

The angels are bodiless. Subsequently, it follows that we also, through diligent self-control, in a wholesome understanding of this concept, should get the upper hand over bodily inclinations. Thus from being in slavery to our bodies we become lords over them.

The angels ceaselessly stand before the face of God. Their mind, their gaze, their attention are directed towards God and His command. But neither are we deprived of this potential. We can also have our gaze, our mind and our attention directed towards God through attentive and frequent prayer. It is expected from those who have dedicated themselves to the monastic life to acquire unceasing prayer. Of course, for those living in the world this is much more difficult, since life in the world is full of cares, with hustle 'n bustle, with pursuit for entertainment, with more and more impressions (stamped on our minds). For those who live in the world the labour of prayer is much harder. Nevertheless, it often does happen that courageous and resolute

laypeople manage, amidst the trials and chaos in the world, to cultivate a fervent prayer life, even attaining to inner stillness. A person may halt his interior prayer while remaining in a prayerful disposition, still keeping God in remembrance and carrying out his everyday work for the sake of the glory of God.

What gets in our way from remembering God and praying to Him? Our daringness to meet head-on the sensual perceptions of the world, which are all too often void of modesty and chastity - this gets in our way. Likewise all the soul-harming experiences that are offered to us via various means - these all get in our way. They divert our attention from God, they dry up our longing for a connection with Him through prayer, they poison our soul by nourishing and stimulating our passions. There is no way for a man to be submerged in the whirlpool of sensual perceptions and mind-impacting commotion and remain untouched by the stirring-up of his own sinful inclinations and passions, which lie in hiding and often suddenly manifest themselves in the dynamics of this whirlpool.

What does our heart bend towards in the moments when we are alone, just by ourselves? Towards the banquet of sensuality or to the quiet union with God? Towards the dance of the servants of the deceiver or to the service of the light-bearing angels? Our eternal lot will be determined by the disposition of our heart.

Today we are gathered to liturgically glorify the heavenly bodiless powers, our benefactors and protectors. But when we depart from the church we can continue glorifying them in our own life. How do we do this? By turning away in repulsion from the allurements of the tempter, by calling upon the holy angels for help, by feeding our hearts and souls with attentive and frequent prayer, by doing that which the Holy Gospel teaches us to do, that which our conscience bids us to.

Should we act this way, should we become friends with the holy angels, they will lead us to the gates of the Heavenly Kingdom of the Most-holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to Whom is due glory, honour and worship now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

THE MORNING STAR WHO HERALDS THE SUN

A Homily for the Feast of the Entrance of the
Theotokos into the Temple

SAINT THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

WE are now celebrating the Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple, which the Church calls the good favour of God by the transfiguration and preaching of human salvation. As the appearance of the morning star indicates the imminent appearance of the sun, so the Most Holy Virgin, the God-chosen Maiden, by her entrance into the Temple, heralds Christ to all, thereby loudly crying out to all: Behold, the promised and awaited Deliverer of all, the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God is nigh!

Night preceded this benevolent dispensation of God, and the people sat in darkness and shadow. Only in the nation of Israel did prophetic promises scatter this darkness a little, appearing at times on their spiritual horizon, like stars illuminating the nighttime darkness. These promises began already in Paradise, immediately after the fall, and they've been repeated with greater frequency ever since, identifying more and more the power of the expected deliverance of God and more clearly identifying the coming of the King, Prophet, and Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, with all the circumstances of His appearance, His miracle working, His teaching, His death, His Resurrection, and His Ascension into Heaven and session at the right hand of God the Father. It was like the Milky Way in the night of the Old Testament canopy. Before the appearance of the Lord, the prophecies ceased, as the stars disappear before the dawn. And as only the morning star remains here in the end, shining and foreshadowing and portending the imminent appearance of the sun, so there shone the Most Pure Maiden, born, and borne into the Temple, who foretold of Christ.

Then the Sun of Righteousness Itself appeared, dispersing

the darkness and enlightening all. Now Christ the Lord Himself shines a full light on the Christian world and enlightens every man who comes into the world. Glory to Thee, Who hast shown us the light! The holy Prophet Esaias foresaw this blessedness of ours and, comforting Israel, foretold: And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Sion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Es. 2:2-3). This mountain is the Church of Christ. All nations have gathered and are still gathering in it. They were and are drawn by their thirst for spiritual light. Entering the Church, they satisfy this thirst, finding in the Christian law everything the soul can seek and desire. Among others, we Russians came and accepted the law of Christ and have followed it. Now we walk in the light of the face of God and rejoice in His name!

Glory to Thee, O Lord! As you know, the faith of Christ, which is the light of Christ, now reigns over us. Everywhere there are churches of God, everywhere the services are held freely and the preaching of the word of God is heard. The light shines. But has each of us in particular received this light and been enlightened by it? As at midday, a man sees nothing if he closes his eyes or goes into a dark place, so amidst the broad daylight of Christ shining above us, it may happen that some abide in darkness and walk in darkness. Let us be careful, brethren, that we not fall into their ranks!

The holy Apostle Peter wrote to the Jews: We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts (2 Ptr 1:19). This is what he says about the prophetic light, assuring the Jews that it existed, now as a light in the darkness, now as the dawn, now as fullness of day. But what the prophetic light was for the Jews, so the light of Christ, or the teachings of Christ, is for us. It is also a lamp in

the darkness for us, the sunrise, the full light of day. These are the inevitable indications when entering into the light of Christ! And he who has yet to experience them on his way has yet to see the light of Christ.

For the Apostle Peter, the starting point for movement towards the light is the vision of light. Take ye heed. Those who are surrounded by darkness will notice the light, will follow its indications and come first to such a light that can be compared with the dawn, or a sunrise, and then to a light that is likened to broad daylight. Let us clarify this comparison.

The sinner who labours according to his passions and neglects his salvation is in darkness, in a dark place. But if he hears a word, or reads something, or sees something, or the circumstances of his life arrange themselves so that he comes to himself, comes to his senses, and begins to concern himself with the danger of his situation and the need to amend himself, then this thought is, like a lamp in a dark place, lit in his soul. The more he hearkens to it, the more the light shines and the more forcefully the need, the demand, and the desire to amend himself flares up within him. Unless some form of distraction comes, this work of attention to the light of grace shining in his heart, calling him to correction, ends with a firm determination to leave the sin of passion, negligence, and all evil deeds, and begin to live properly according to the law of Christ. This time from the first thought of correction to the final determination to correct oneself is a period of repentance, the first step into the realm of the light of Christ, quite like how someone walks towards a light seen somewhere in the darkness.

Then the penitent begins to live properly, as he wanted, as he resolved to do, making a vow in spirit. He wants to do good, but the old habits, inclinations, and passions rise up and attempt to divert him from the good. Not wanting to submit to them, he fights with them, and it is only through this struggle that he manages to do good. It is so inevitable that no matter what good deed a man has conceived, he immediately meets resistance either within himself or from without, and he must by all means fight to stand firm in the good. It is difficult, of course, but it is

comforting that the more a man stands in this struggle and fights more resolutely, the easier this struggle becomes. The passions weaken, and the good dispositions take precedence. Finally, the latter are so intensified that the former are nearly imperceptible. Holy feelings and dispositions are so deeply embedded in the heart that it is as if they become his natural state, and then man exercises the virtues as freely as he breathes.

This period from repentance to the purification of the heart, the period of battling with the passions and lusts is that which the Apostle calls the dawn, or sunrise: Until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. The passions are like a fog. As in nature, the longer the sun stands on the horizon, the less fog there is, until finally the sun appears in all its beauty, so with us: the more we hold on through the battle with the passions before the Sun, Christ, arises the more the fog of the passions thins out, until finally it completely disappears and Christ the Lord, the full and pure Sun, shines in the soul.

From this time begins a blessed state of purity, in which God is contemplated, as the Lord says: Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God (Mt. 5:8). God shines in the pure heart, as the sun in pure water or a clean mirror; as the heart is rational, it contemplates the God shining in it, and as God is blessedness, then it is blessed in Him. "He who has been granted such a state while still in the flesh," says Saint John Climacus, "always has God dwelling within him as his Guide in all his words, deeds and thoughts" (Ladder 29:11); for he no longer lives for himself, but Christ lives in him (*cf.* Gal. 2:20).

Thus, repentance, the battle with the passions and the acquisition of purity of heart - these are the three turns in the movement towards the light of Christ! Everyone look at yourself now and determine where you are. If you're on this path, glory to God; and if not, you must think about yourself and be afraid for yourself. You have not yet seen the light of Christ; you are still walking in darkness; you are wandering on the paths of destruction and hastening to the bottom of hell. May the Lord deliver you all from this! And if any are truly entangled in the passions and overcome by carelessness, force yourself to arise

from the snares in which devil has caught you alive and in which he firmly holds your mind and your heart, preventing the light of the glory of Christ from shining there (*cf.* 2 Cor. 4:4).

God, Who commanded the light to shine out of the darkness, brings us all out of the darkness of sin into His wonderful light (1 Ptr 2:9). And may there shine in our hearts the light of the comprehension of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! And the morning star of the Sun is the Most Immaculate Virgin, who heralded Christ by bringing her morning light into the Temple. May she enlighten us who faithfully confess her to be the Theotokos! Amen.

This homily was delivered on November 21, 1863.

Translation by Jesse Dominick



THE COMING MONTH

IN November we celebrate one of the **Twelve Great Feasts of the Church Year**, that of the **Entry of the All-Holy Theotokos into the Temple** (21st November / 4th December). This feast is greatly beloved of the monastics as Saint Philaret of Moscow proclaims: “Long did this Divine voice call in the Church as in the desert, and apparently did not find a hearkening ear. Mankind did not have the boldness to triumphantly go forth to meet the Divinity. What would have happened to us had the heart of the blessed Virgin Mary not opened to the incomprehensible word of the incarnation, had her boundless dedication to God’s will not responded to the heavenly messenger, *Behold the handmaiden of the Lord: be it unto me according to Thy will* (Lk. 1:38)? She entrusted herself to the King’s desire without holding anything back - and the betrothal of the Divinity with the human race was fulfilled forever.”

Another very important event in November is the start of the **Nativity Fast**. This fast lasts forty days and so begins annually

always on 15th / 28th December. We should take care always to remember that it is not simply a matter of restricting our diets but also a period when we should try to strengthen our prayer-life, devote more time to spiritual reading, seek to root out the passions and to apply ourselves more strenuously to all the virtues, and battle against the vices: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like (Gal. 5:19-21). If we are observant we shall find many of these within us. And there is something, which even in the Old Testament was censured but which in the last generation seems to have become a way of social intercourse for the young and for those who like to portray themselves as young - Ecclesiastes 7:4-6: *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.*” How often even in our church assemblies we hear that “crackling of the thorns under a pot!”

Among the Saints we celebrate in November we have:-

Saint Willibrord, Archbishop of Utrecht and Apostle of Frisia (7th / 20th) who was born in the kingdom of Northumberland around the year 658, and placed by his virtuous parents, before he was seven years old, in the monastery of Ripon, which was at that time governed by Saint Wilfrid, its founder. Wilgris, our saint's father, also retired to a monastery, afterwards became a hermit, and in his old age founded and governed a small monastery between the ocean and the Humber. Willibrord, by carrying the yoke of our Lord with fervour from his infancy, found it always easy and sweet, and the better to preserve the first fruits which he had gathered, made his monastic profession when he was very young. He had made great progress in virtue and sacred learning when, out of a desire for further improvement, in the twentieth year of his age he went over into Ireland, with the consent of his abbot and brethren, where he joined Saint Egbert and the blessed Wigbert, who were gone there before for the

same reason. In their company our saint spent twelve years in the study of the sacred sciences and in the most fervent exercise of all virtues. Though his constitution was weak, in fervour and exactness he outdid the most advanced: he was humble, modest, and of an easy obliging temper; and his whole conduct was regular and uniform. Saint Egbert had long entertained an ardent desire of going to preach the Gospel to the people of those unhappy countries in which barbarism and idolatry still reigned, and he had chiefly Friesland in mind. But he was diverted from that apostolical design by persons of piety and authority, who engaged him to employ his zealous labours in the islands between Ireland and Scotland, in all of which he settled the true manner of celebrating Easter, where he eventually died. His companion, the holy priest Wigbert, went in the meantime to Friesland; but after staying there two years came back without having met with any prospect of success. This disappointment did not discourage Egbert and other zealous promoters of this mission, but excited them the more earnestly to solicit the divine mercy with prayers and tears in favour of so many souls who were perishing eternally. Willibrord, who was then about thirty-one years of age and had been ordained priest a year before, expressed a great desire to be allowed by his superiors to undertake this laborious and dangerous charge. Saint Egbert did not doubt that God had reserved to him the conversion of that nation, and encouraged him. Willibrord was joined by Saint Swibert and ten other English monks in this mission. The twelve missionaries landed at Catwic upon the sea, which was then at the mouth of the Rhine, and where the English were accustomed to export corn. The British tower, as it was called, was built by the Romans at Catwic to defend this harbour. Pepin of Herstal, or the Big, who was at that time Duke of the French, received Saint Willibrord and his companions courteously. But Willibrord set out for Rome and cast himself at the feet of Pope Sergius, begging his blessing and authority to preach there. The pope gave him a great quantity of relics for the consecration of churches. With this treasure the saint returned with all possible expedition to his province, considering the pressing necessities and dangers of so many souls which called for his compassion

and relief. Saint Swidbert was taken from him and consecrated Bishop of the Borroctuarians, who seem to have inhabited the territory of Berg and the neighbouring country towards Cologne. Willibrord, with his ten other companions, under the protection of Pepin, preached with wonderful success in the part of Friesland that had been conquered by the French; so that after six years Pepin, by the advice of his bishops, sent the saint to Rome with strong letters of recommendation that he might be made bishop. His humility made him try to have some other given that ministry, but he was not heard. Pope Sergius received him honourably, changed his name to Clement, and consecrated him Archbishop of the Frisians and gave him the pallium, with authority to fix his see in what part of the country he should think most convenient. The holy man stayed only fourteen days in Rome, being impatient to return to his flock. He came back to Utrecht in A.D. 696, and chose that city for his residence, Pepin having bestowed on him the royal castle of Viltaburg. Saint Willibrord built at Utrecht the Church of our Saviour and that of Saint Martin, though this latter he only restored, for it had been a church, but destroyed by the pagans. The archbishop's indefatigable application to the conversion of souls seemed to prove that, with the new obligation he had received at his consecration of labouring to enlarge the kingdom of his Divine Master, he had acquired fresh strength and a considerable augmentation of his zeal. In the second year after his episcopal consecration, assisted by the liberality of Pepin and the abbess Irmina, he founded, in 698, the abbey of Epternac, now in the duchy of Luxemburg, which he governed to his death. The nunnery of Horrea, of which Irmina was abbess, was delivered from a pestilence by water blessed by St. Willibrord, and by his celebrating the Holy Mysteries there. Pepin of Herstal before his death put away his concubine Alpais, by whom he had Charles Martel, and was reconciled to his wife Plectrudis, and in his last will he recommended to Saint Willibrord his nephews (without any mention of his natural son Charles), and bestowed on our saint the village of Susteren, near the Meuse, with which the holy man endowed a convent which he built there. Pepin died in December, 714. A little before his death, Charles Martel's

son, Pepin the Short, afterwards King of France, was born, and baptised by Saint Willibrord, who then prophesied that the child would surpass in glory all his ancestors. Charles Martel in a short time became mayor of the palace, and proved himself equally the first general and statesman of his age. In 723 he settled upon Willibrord's monastery all the royal revenues belonging to his castle. Not content to have planted the faith in the country which the French had conquered, he extended his labours into West Friesland, which obeyed Radbod, Prince or King of the Frisians, who continued an obstinate idolater, yet did not hinder the saint's preaching to his subjects, and himself sometimes listened to him. The new apostle penetrated also into Denmark; but Ongend, who then reigned there, a monster of cruelty rather than a man, was hardened in his malice, and his example had a great influence over his subjects. The man of God, however, for the first fruits of this country, purchased thirty young Danish boys, whom he instructed, baptised, and brought back with him. On his return he was driven by bad weather onto the famous pagan island called Fositeland, now Amelandt, on the coast of Friesland, a place then esteemed by the Danes and Frisians as most sacred in honour of the idol Fosite. It was looked upon as an unpardonable sacrilege for anyone to kill any living creature in that island, to eat of anything that grew in it, or to draw water out of a spring there without observing the strictest silence. Saint Willibrord, to undeceive the inhabitants, killed some of the animals for his companions to eat, and baptised three persons in the fountain, pronouncing the words aloud. The idolaters expected to see them run mad or drop down dead; and seeing no such judgment befall them, could not determine whether this was to be attributed to the patience of their god or to his want of power. They informed Radbod who, transported with rage, ordered lots to be cast three times a day for three days together, and the fate of the delinquents to be determined by them. God so directed it that the lot never fell upon Willibrord; but one of his company was sacrificed to the superstition of the people, and died a martyr for Jesus Christ. The saint, upon leaving Amelandt, directed his course to Warckeren, one of the chief islands belonging to Zea-

land. His love and patience brought considerable gains to the flock of Christians there, and he founded several churches. After the death of Radbod in 719, he was at full liberty to preach in every part of the country. He was joined in his apostolic labours in 720 by Saint Boniface of Crediton, who spent three years in Friesland, then went to Germany. Saint Bede says: "Willibrord, surnamed Clement, is still living, venerable for his old age, having been bishop thirty-six years, and sighing for the rewards of the heavenly life, after many conflicts in the heavenly warfare." "He was," says Alcuin, "of a becoming stature, venerable in his aspect, comely in his person, graceful, and always cheerful in his speech and countenance, wise in his counsel, unwearied in preaching and all apostolic functions, amidst which he was careful to nourish the interior life of his soul by assiduous prayer, singing of psalms, watching, and fasting." He assures us that this saint was endowed with the gift of miracles, and relates that whilst he preached in the isle of Warckeren, where the towns of Flessingue and Middleburg have been built, going from village to village, he found in one of them a famous idol to which the people were offering their vows and sacrifices, and, full of holy zeal, threw it down and broke it in pieces. In the meantime an idolater, who was the priest and guardian of the idol, gave him a blow on the head with his backsword, with which, nevertheless, the saint was not hurt; and he would not suffer the assassin to be touched or prosecuted. But the unhappy man was soon after possessed with a devil and lost his senses. By the tears, prayers, and zealous labours of this apostle and his colleagues, the faith was planted in most parts of Holland, Zealand, and all the remaining part of the Netherlands, whither Saints Amand and Leobwin had never penetrated; and the Frisians, till then a rough and most barbarous people, were civilised, and became eminent for virtue and the culture of arts and sciences. Saint Wulfran, Archbishop of Sens, and others, encouraged by the success of our saint's missions, were keen to share in so great a work under his direction. Saint Willibrord was exceedingly cautious in admitting persons to priestly ministry, fearing lest one unworthy or slothful minister should defeat by scandal all the good which the divine mercy had begun for

the salvation of many souls. It is also mentioned of him that he was very strict and diligent in examining and preparing thoroughly those whom he admitted to Baptism, dreading the condemnation which those incur who, by sloth or facility, open a door to the profanation of our most holy mysteries. The schools which Willibrord left at Utrecht were renowned. Being at length quite broken with old age, he resigned the administration of his diocese to an auxiliary whom he consecrated bishop, and in retirement prepared himself for eternity. He died sometime between 739 and 741. He was buried, as he had desired, at his monastery of Epternac, and his relics are there enshrined at this day. The portable altar which he made use of for the celebration of the divine mysteries, in travelling through Friesland, Zealand, and Holland, is kept in the Benedictine abbey of our Lady ad Martyres, at Triers.

The **Holy Martyrs Menas, Victor and Vincent** (11th / 24th): The **Great Martyr Menas**, an Egyptian by birth, was a military officer and served in Phrygia under the centurion Firmilian during the reign of the Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. He was praised and admired for his bravery in battle, his patience, and his self-discipline. In A.D. 298, the Emperors published an edict ordering everyone to worship the idols. Those serving in the Legions were ordered to capture and persecute Christians. As soon as Saint Menas heard this impious decree he threw down his soldier's belt and withdrew to a mountain above Kotyaeion, where he lived an ascetic life of fasting and prayer. He spent a long time in the wilderness, suffering great privation and struggling in feats of prayer, fasting, and nocturnal vigils. Thus, the Saint purified himself of every passion of soul and body. When his heart was strengthened with godly zeal, and his soul aflame with love for God, divine grace came upon him and he had a vision. He regarded this as a sign that he was to follow the path of martyrdom. Therefore, he left the mountain and went into the city, where the people were celebrating a pagan festival. At that time, Saint Menas was about fifty years old. Standing in the midst of the crowd, he shouted: "There is only one true God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Your 'gods' are demons, and your idols have been fashioned by craftsmen.

These inanimate objects are nothing but metal, wood, and stone.” The people left their dancing and their games and went to investigate, marvelling at his boldness. They seized and beat him, then brought him before Pyrrhus, the City Prefect. When he saw Menas he asked him who he was, and why he was creating a disturbance. The Saint replied, “I am an Egyptian, a servant of Jesus Christ, the Ruler of all things. I was a soldier and I served in the Imperial Army for most of my life. But since the Emperor has chosen to follow the path of idolatry, and to persecute Christians, I chose to dwell with the wild animals in the wilderness rather than obey the impious commands of those who do not know God.” The Prefect was enraged and had the Saint thrown into prison. The next morning, Pyrrhus urged Saint Menas to return to the army, offering to restore his former rank if he would offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. Menas refused, and so he was subjected to many cruel tortures. The Prefect urged him to submit to the edict and offer sacrifice to the idols, but the Martyr remained firm in his Faith, saying that he would never deny Christ. Pyrrhus ordered further torments, but seeing that he could not persuade Saint Menas, he ordered that he be taken outside the city and beheaded. As he was being led to the place of execution, he asked his friends, who were secret Christians, to take his body back to Egypt for burial when the persecution had ceased. These friends gathered the Martyr’s relics at night and hid them until the persecution was over. Then, they were brought to Egypt and placed in a church dedicated to Saint Menas southwest of Alexandria. Saint Menas received the crown of martyrdom in A.D. 304. By God’s grace he continues to work miracles for those who entreat him in faith. He is known for healing various illnesses, delivering people from demonic possession, and is a protector, especially during times of war. In 1942, General Erwin Rommel had conquered almost all of North Africa, and was heading toward Alexandria. The Nazis had reached El Alamein (so named for the saint), where they camped for the night, intending to attack Alexandria in the morning. Saint Menas, however, did not allow this to happen. At midnight (23rd-24th October), people noticed Saint Menas emerging from his church, leading camels towards the German camp. Overcome by

panic, weakness, and confusion, Rommel's troops fled. The battle ended on 4th November with the enemy in full retreat. It is regarded as a turning point in the whole war. Later, Winston Churchill said: "Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat."

The **Holy Martyr Victor at Damascus** was a soldier during the reign of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius the Philosopher (161-180). When the Emperor began a persecution of the Christians, Victor refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. The saint was given over to torture, but he came through all the torments unharmed. By the power of prayer he was victorious over a sorcerer, who from that point gave up sorcery and became a Christian. By Saint Victor's prayers, blind soldiers suddenly received their sight. Witnessing the miracles worked by the Lord through Saint Victor, **Stephanie**, the young Christian wife of one of the torturers, openly glorified Christ, for which she was condemned to a cruel death. She was tied to two palm trees bent to the ground, which when released, sprung back and tore her apart. She was fifteen years old. The torturer ordered that the holy Martyr Victor be beheaded. Hearing the commander's order, Saint Victor told his executioners that they would all die in twelve days, and that the commander would be captured by the enemy in twenty-four days. As he foretold, so it came to pass. The martyrs suffered in the second century at Damascus, where their venerable relics were buried.

The **Holy Martyr Vincent of Spain** from his childhood was the disciple of a wise pastor, Valerian, the bishop of the city of Augustopolis (Saragossa, Spain). When he reached maturity, the virtuous, educated and eloquent Vincent was ordained deacon by Bishop Valerian. Since the bishop himself was not adept in speech, he gave a blessing to his deacon, an eloquent orator, to preach. Diocletian sent the governor Dacian to the city of Valencia, with full authority to find and execute Christians. People denounced the wise bishop and his deacon to the governor, who arrested them. The soldiers, mounted on horses, dragged the Elder and his disciple behind them in chains from Augustopolis to Valencia, and there they cast them into prison beaten and tortured, giving them neither food nor water. They subjected

the bishop to the first interrogation. The Elder spoke quietly, and seemed tongue-tied and uncertain. Then Saint Vincent came forward and made the most eloquent speech of his life before the judges and assembled people. The bishop was sent back to prison; the persecutor gave orders to torture the holy deacon. The martyr underwent many torments: while nailed to a cross, he was whipped and burned with red-hot rods. When he was removed from the cross, he then himself joyfully climbed back upon it, saying that the executioners were lazy and had not fulfilled their master's orders. They became angry and tortured him again, until they were all exhausted. After the tortures they threw the martyr back into prison. That night the astonished guard heard him singing Psalms, and saw an unearthly radiant light in the prison. The next morning the holy martyr was condemned to be burned on a gridiron in A.D. 304. Christians took the saint's body and buried it with reverence. Although the three Saints bore witness in different part of the world, they and the **Holy Martyr Stephanie** are celebrated every year together.

Our **Holy Father Mitrophan, Bishop of Voronezh** (23rd November / 6th December), in the world Michael, was born on 8th November, 1623. Since the Saint's book of commemorations begins with persons of priestly rank, it is assumed that he was born into a priestly family. We know from Saint Mitrophan's will that he "was born of pious parents and was raised by them in the incorrupt piety of the Eastern Church, in the Orthodox faith." Until he was forty, the Saint lived in the world. He was married, had a son John, and served as a parish priest. The place of Father Michael's pastoral activity was the village of Sidorovo, situated at the River Molokhta, a tributary of the Teza flowing to the Klyazma, not far from the city of Shui. After his wife died, Father Michael received monastic tonsure with the name Mitrophan in the Zolotnikovskaya Dormition Monastery in 1663. After three years of monastic life the hieromonk Mitrophan was chosen abbot of the Saint Cosmas of Yakrom Monastery. He guided the monastery for ten years, showing himself zealous as its head. By his efforts a church was built here in honour of the Icon of the Saviour Not-Made-by-Hands. Patriarch Joachim (1674-1690), learning about the deep piety of Saint Mitrophan,

raised him in 1675 to the rank of archimandrite of the Makariev-Unzha Monastery. Under the supervision of the Saint, a stone church was built there in honour of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos, together with a refectory and bell-tower. At the Moscow Council, 1681-1682, among a number of measures taken for the struggle against the old ritualist schism, and with the goal of improving Christian enlightenment among the Orthodox peoples, it was resolved to increase the number of dioceses, and to open up new cathedrals at Voronezh, Tambov, Kholmogor and Great Ustiug. Saint Mitrophan was summoned to the capital and on 2nd April, 1682, was consecrated Bishop of Voronezh by Patriarch Joachim and sixteen archpastors. The beginning of Saint Mitrophan's tenure as bishop coincided with a dispute over the imperial succession and a Church schism. Upon his arrival at Voronezh the Saint first of all sent an encyclical to the pastors of his diocese, in which he urged his pastors to moral improvement. "Venerable priests of God Most High," he wrote, "leaders of the flock of Christ! You ought to possess clear eyes of the mind, illumined by the light of reason, in order to lead others on the correct path. In the words of the Lord, you must be the light yourselves: 'you are the light of the world' (Mt. 5:14). When Christ the Saviour entrusted His flock to the Apostle Peter, He said to him three times: 'feed my sheep.' This is because pastors care for their flock in three ways: by the words of teaching, by prayer and the power of the Holy Mysteries, and by their way of life. You must also act by all three methods: teach the people, set an example of a righteous life, and pray for them. Strengthen them by the Holy Mysteries; above all enlighten the unbelievers by holy Baptism, and try to lead sinners to repentance. Take care of the sick, so that they do not depart from this life without receiving Holy Communion and Holy Unction." Saint Mitrophan began his archpastoral activity with the building of a new cathedral church dedicated to the Annunciation of the All-Holy Theotokos, replacing an old wooden church. In 1692 the cathedral with chapels in honour of Saints Michael and Nicholas was consecrated. In the twenty years that Saint Mitrophan was bishop, the number of churches increased from 182 to 239, and two monasteries were founded: the Korotoyaksk Ascension and

the Bitiugsk Trinity monasteries. And in the existing monasteries, he concerned himself with eradicating unseemly behaviour and disorder, emphasising a strict life according to the monastic rule. The first Bishop of Voronezh eagerly concerned himself with the needs of his flock. He consoled both the poor and the wealthy, was a defender of widows and orphans, and an advocate of the wronged. His home served as a hostel for strangers and a hospice for the sick. The Saint prayed not only for the living, but also for dead Christians, and particularly for soldiers fallen for the Fatherland, inscribing their names in the cathedral's memorial list. Remembering them at proskomedia, Saint Mitrophan said: "If this is a righteous soul, then there is a greater portion of worthiness. If he is a sinner, however, then there is a connection with God's mercy." There was a great friendship between him and Saint Pitirim, Bishop of Tambov. They not only kept up a correspondence, but also met for spiritual talks. The founding of the Tregulyaev Monastery of Saint John the Forerunner was connected with the friendship of the bishops. On 15th September, 1688, Saint Mitrophan visited Saint Pitirim. Three of them (the priest Basil was with them) took a stroll together to the Tambov archpastor's place of solitary prayer, and there they chose the place for the future monastery. Saint Mitrophan, an intensely patriotic man, by his own moral authority, kindheartedness and prayers, contributed to the reforms of Peter I, the necessity and purpose of which he well understood. With the building of a fleet at Voronezh for a campaign against Azov, the Saint urged the nation to fully support Peter. This was particularly important, since many regarded the construction of a fleet as useless. The Saint did not limit himself only to advice to the Tsar, but rendered also material support to the state treasury, which needed money for the construction of the fleet, and he provided all the means, aware that they would go for the benefit of the nation. The Saint's patriotic feelings were combined in his soul with unflinching faith and strict Orthodox conviction, on account of which he did not fear incurring the Tsar's wrath. The Saint refused to go to court to see Peter, since there were statues of pagan gods there, and although disgrace threatened the Saint for disobeying the imperial will,

he remained uncompromising. Peter gave orders to remove the statues and from that time was filled with greater respect for the bishop. Saint Mitrophan died in 1703 in extreme old age, taking the schema with the name Macarius before his death. The funeral took place on 4th December, conducted according to the Saint's monastic, not priestly, rank. This became the established practice for the burial of a bishop. Tsar Peter himself carried the coffin from the cathedral to the tomb. Taking leave, he said: "I no longer have a holy Elder such as he. Memory eternal to him." One of the remarkable memorials of the life and activity of Saint Mitrophan is his Spiritual Testament. In it he says: "By divine destiny I have arrived at old age and now I have exhausted my natural strength. Therefore I declare this my final writing ... When my sinful soul is released from its union with the flesh, I entrust it to God Who created it, that it might find favour as the work of His hands. My sinful bones I grant to the mother of all (the earth), in expectation of the resurrection of the dead." Further on, addressing pastors and their flocks, the Saint says: "The simple sinner gives answer to God for his soul alone, but priests can come to torment for many, in neglecting the sheep, from which they gather milk and wool... For everyone the rule of wise men is: do work, preserve a balance, and you will be rich. Drink temperately, eat little, and you will be healthy. Do good, shun evil, and you will be saved." The commemoration of Saint Mitrophan was established in 1832. On 7th August, we celebrate the translation of his holy relics.



Practical Tip

BE horribly aware of where the heat for “the crackling of the thorns under the pot” derives from - see page 11 above.

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

NEW CATECHUMEN

ON Sunday, 30th September / 13th October at the end of the Divine Liturgy, **Harry Wiles** made his vows and was received as a catechumen, being given the new name, **Antony**, after **Saint Antony the Great** (feast day: 17th / 30th January). Please pray for him that he continues to struggle and is in time granted the grace of Holy Baptism.

Straight after this **Alexandra Galbeaza** (aka Oliver) was presented with an icon of **Saint Evphrosynus the Cook** as an award for her dissociation from the company of cranks and cliquists.

BURIAL AT SAINT EDWARD'S

ON Friday, 4th October, **Eleni Haji-Christodolou** was laid to rest in Saint Edward's Orthodox Cemetery, the funeral having been served earlier at **Saint Andrew's Church, Englefield Green**. Both the funeral and the interment were served by **Archimandrite Grigorios** (Ec. Patr.), Eleni's pastor. May she find mercy and rest with the saints.

GIFTS FOR SAINT EDWARD'S CHURCH

OUR catechumen, **Joshua Bailey of Ditchingham**, has kindly donated a silver Communion for the sick set to the church.

Alla Sion from Aldershot has given a very beautiful hand-painted icon of the **Holy Martyrs Victor, Menas and Vincent**, painted at the **Convent of the Holy Angels, Afidnai**. Alla's father's name is Victor.

Presbytera Marina Popova brought us from Bulgaria two icons of the newly glorified Confessor **Saint Evstathius** (Evstati in Bulgarian) with several laminated smaller icon prints of him.

Michael and Angela Pieri of Harrow have donated a large icon of **Saint Lazarus the Four-Days Dead**, the beloved friend of our Saviour, with scenes of his life around the main icon.

Svetlana Bentley of Hassocks, Sussex, has donated two woven and framed icons, both beautifully made at the **Holy Trinity-Saint Sergius Lavra, Russia**, one of the **Saviour** and the other of the **Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God**.

VISITORS

ON Saturday, 28th September, ten pilgrims affiliated with the **Saint Edward the Martyr Parish in Poole** (MP), where **Archpriest Maxim Nikolsky** is rector, visited our Brotherhood. They were given a talk in the church and read an acathist before the shrine of the Saint, and then provided with refreshments in the old mortuary building. Most of the pilgrims were apparently from the New Forest area and North Dorset.

On Monday, 14th October, the **Rev'd Alexander Day**, curate of the **Saint Michael and all Angels Anglican parish** in nearby **Pirbright**, visited the church and the exhibition room.

On Friday, 18th October, **Fr Trayan Gorbanov** (Ec. Patr.) and **Professor Ivan Dimitrov** of the **Sofia University in Bulgaria** visited us. Fr Trayan is the pastor of the **Greek Orthodox Community of Saint Andrew in Torquay**.

On Wednesday, 23rd October, **David Cooper** brought a fourteen member group of the **Kingston Ramblers** to see the church, and they arrived just as our Liturgy for the Optina Elders ended, and stayed for about twenty minutes.

