



FROM THE FATHERS

“THE TONGUE of the dragon is less evil than that of the whisperer, which in turn comes from a most evil demon; for it provokes quarrels and bitter strife between brethren, sows evil and discord among the peaceful, scatters communities. If you permit a whisperer to approach you, he will strip you of every virtue you possess. Whoever becomes involved with him has already become a confederate in his bloodshed, in his murders, and in his slayings. For a whisperer and a murderer spawn the same whelp; if they do not slay you with the sword, they will bring the same disaster on you with the tongue. The tongue of the whisperer differs little from the serpent’s bite; rather better to live with serpents and scorpions than dwell with a whisperer. A blasphemer or a tyrant is better than a whisperer. All sins are less grievous than those of a whisperer. The whisperer and those who give ear to him receive the same condemnation.”

VEN. ANTONY THE GREAT, + 356 A.D.

“A DETRACTOR makes known something to you, and you give ear to him, and the harm he is eager to inflict with his tongue, you receive in secret into your ears. You mingle his bitter leaven with your own soul. From whence did death arise if not from the ears of Eve, who when the serpent began to speak gave ready ear to him? For the evil demon is able, by the mouth of someone speak-

ing, to slay even the one who keeps silent; and he whom he cannot destroy through his own words, he slays through hearing.”

VEN. EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN, + 373 A.D.

“SOME YOUNG WOMEN do wrong without shame, and there are others who, secretly and with apparent great modesty, behave still worse than the former; and it is the same with the passions of dishonour. There are many insincere maidens, such as: hypocrisy, vice, melancholy, the remembrance of injuries, disparagement of others in one’s heart. They appear to propose one thing, but they have something else in view.”

VEN. JOHN OF THE LADDER, + C. 563 A.D.

“NOTHING so weakens the fire kindled in the heart ... by the Holy Spirit for the sanctification of his soul as communication and talk and chatter, excepting conversations with those who are sons of the divine mysteries, conversations for the restoration of the mind and for spiritual fellowship.”

VEN. SERAPHIM OF SAROV, + 1833 A.D.

“HE [God] always abhors idle talk, even if it seems spiritual. According to the Fathers, idle talk is mainly passing one’s time with words, without applying them.”

BLESSED ELDER JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST, + 1959 A.D.



Homily on the Theophany

St Philaret the New Confessor of New York

ON THE DAY of the feast of Theophany, the Baptism of the Lord, it is not inappropriate to remember another Baptism: that Baptism which was performed over each of us, Orthodox Christians, that Baptism at which each of us, by the mouth of our godparents, gave a promise to God that we would always renounce Satan and his works and would always unite ourselves, “join ourselves” with Christ.

This, I repeat, is especially fitting for this present day. The solemn rite of the Great Blessing of Water will be performed shortly. Its centre, its main part, one could say, is the majestic prayer wherein the Lord is glorified and the grace of the Holy Spirit is called down upon the water being sanctified. This prayer begins with the beautiful words: “Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvellous are Thy works, and no word sufficeth to hymn Thy wonders.” Whoever has been at a performance of the mysterion of Baptism and was present attentively, knows that the prayer at the sanctification of the water in which the person will be baptized begins with these same words, and the first part of this prayer is completely the same, both at the Great Blessing of Water and at the performance of the mysterion of Baptism. And only later, in the last part, does the prayer at the performance of the mysterion of Baptism change, as applicable to this mystery, when a new human soul will be baptized.

And so, it would not do us any harm to remember those vows given at Baptism on behalf of each of us. When a man is baptized as an adult, as even now sometimes happens, and happened especially often in antiquity, he himself makes the vows on his own behalf; but if he is baptized in infancy, his godfather or godmother - his “sponsors,” as the Church calls them - pronounce these vows

for him. And so these vows, in which a Christian has promised God to renounce Satan and all his works and to join himself, to unite himself, with Christ, these vows are not only forgotten by people, but many in general know nothing about them or about the fact that these vows were pronounced for them and that they ought to think a little about how they must fulfil these vows.

And what if at the last day of the history of the human race on earth, on the day of the Dread Judgment, it turns out that a man (or his sponsors for him) made vows, and he does not even know what the vows were and what was promised? What will happen to such a man? Think, brethren, about what it means to renounce Satan and all his works and to join oneself to Christ.

The times are such now that a God-opposing bustle, in which the enemy of the human race reigns, has taken possession of mankind and, as was said in olden times, forces almost all people “to dance to his tune.” All this bustle, of which our present life is composed, is a God-opposing bustle, in which there is no God, in which God’s enemy holds sway and rules. If we made a vow to renounce Satan and all his works, then, in fulfilling it, we ought to strive not to stifle our soul with this bustle, but to reject it and to remember how the Church says, *One thing is needful* (Lk. 10:41) - only one thing is necessary - and to remember that we must join ourselves with Christ, that is, not only fulfil His commandments, but also endeavour to unite ourselves with Him.

Think, then, about this, O Christian soul, on this day of the radiant and great feast; think and pray that the Lord send thee firm faith and the resolve to fulfil these vows, and not to be swallowed up by the bustle of the world and lose the tie with the Lord, with Whom thou didst promise to join thyself for ever.

Today’s feast is called the feast of the Lord’s Baptism or the feast of Theophany; but those who know the church Typicon well, know also that sometimes in this Typicon it is also called “the feast of the holy Theophanies” - in the plural number.

Why? Here is why: Of course, what the singers chanted about today, “God the Word appeared in the flesh to the race of man,” is the centre of the commemorations of the present feast day. The incarnate Son of God, of Whose birth, when He was born, only a very few knew, “appeared to the race of man”; for His Baptism is, as it were, His solemn inauguration of His ministry, which He then performed after that until His death and Resurrection.

But at the very same time, the fact that precisely on this feast “the worship of the Trinity was made manifest,” as is sung in its troparion, is characteristic of today’s feast. All three Persons of the Holy Trinity appeared for the first time in their separateness, which is also why this feast, I repeat, is called “the feast of the holy Theophanies.” Men heard the voice of God the Father: *This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased* (on Whom My favour rests); the Son of God accepted Baptism from John (moreover, we know from the Gospel that John the Baptist was, as it were, at a loss when the Saviour of the world came to him, and he attempted to restrain Him); and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended from the Father upon the Son. In this way, “the worship of the Trinity was made manifest” for the first time, which is why the Church sings thus in the troparion, and why she also calls this feast “the feast of the holy Theophanies.” Christ the Saviour appeared to begin His saving ministry.

Here, not so long ago, when there was another Great Feast, the Nativity of Christ, we said that the Lord, by His birth in a poor cave, when He deigned to be laid in a cattle manger, thereby emphatically rejected, as it were, all earthly glory, all earthly splendour and magnificence, for He did not deign to appear in royal chambers or rich palaces, but precisely in those poor and modest conditions. And thereby straightway He showed that He had brought to the earth a new principle, the principle of humility.

Look, then, how He Himself, so to say, is true to Himself, how even now on today’s Great Feast He institutes the very same principle of humility manifestly and undoubtedly for us. For

whither did He come? To the Jordan. Why? To be baptized by John. But sinners came to John; they confessed their sins to him and were baptized. But He was without sin, “could not be touched by sin,” was absolutely free of it and pure; yet nonetheless, He humbly stands in line with other sinners, as if He were in need of this cleansing washing with water. But we know that the water did not cleanse Him, the most holy and sinless One; but it was He who sanctified the water by deigning to be washed by it, as was sung today during the blessing of the water: “Today the nature of the waters is sanctified.” And so, Jesus Christ brought the principle of humility to the earth and was true to it throughout the course of His whole life. But that is not all. He has also left us this testament: *Come and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls* (Matt. 11:29).

Remember one more radiant, joyful, Spring feast - the feast of the Annunciation. There the most blessed Virgin Mary hears the good tidings from the Archangel, how the incarnation of God will be accomplished through her. What does her most holy, most pure and blameless soul say when she came to her kinswoman, Elizabeth, in order to share her joy with her? She only says: *My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour, for He hath regarded the lowliness [humility] of his handmaiden*. This humility was also the beauty of her spirit. From the very account of the Annunciation, we know that the Archangel appeared to her at that moment when she, having read the prophecy of Esaias concerning the incarnation of God from a virgin, was not even thinking to apply this to herself, but only thought in the depth of her humility: “How joyful I would be if I were the least handmaid of that blessed virgin.” ... And here the Archangel Gabriel stands before her with his good tidings. The Lord, meek and humble Himself, regarded her humility.

He also enjoined humility on us, contrary to the principles of pride and self-love by which humanity breathes today. Look, why are there so many disagreements among us, both within the enclosure of the Church and in parishes? Because everywhere men made

red-hot by self-love are clashing; but if that humility to which the Lord calls us were found in us, none of this would happen.

Let us, then, brethren, learn from our Saviour, Who as if He were the least sinner came to John in order to be baptized by him; let us learn from Him this God-beloved and fragrant virtue, without which, as the holy Fathers have said, no other virtue whatsoever can be perfect. Amen.



Teaching on the Divine Services of the Orthodox Church

BY ARCHPRIEST ALEXANDER RUDAKOV

PUBLISHED IN 1890 IN SAINT PETERSBURG

12) **The Pectoral Cross** is worn by Bishops over their vestments as a sign that they must have Christ crucified in their hearts and confess Him with their lips. Pectoral crosses, variously adorned, are also given to archimandrites and, as a sign of their distinction, to archpriests and priests.

13) **The Panagia** or **Encolpion** is a smallish circular pendent depicting the Saviour or the Mother of God, worn by Hierarchs on the breast.

14) **The staff** is used in hierarchal services, and indicates the pastoral duty of the Bishop to direct his flock on the path of salvation, not permitting it to stray and guarding it from the depredations of spiritual wolves.

15) **The Eagle Mats** are round mats with a depiction of an eagle (not double-headed) hovering over a city. During the Di-

vine services, they are placed under the feet of the Bishop and they are to remind him that in thought and deed he must strive to soar to the heavens.

As well as the above, among the vestments we can include various coverings of sacred things, which are used in our services:

16) The **hangings and covers of the Holy Table** are: a) the **Under-Covering**, which is made of white linen and represents the winding sheet, in which the body of Jesus Christ was laid in the tomb; b) the **Outer Covering** is usually made of a richer material to indicate the glory of God's Throne; c) the **Iliton** is a silken or linen cloth in which the antimimension is folded, and represents the cloth which was placed around the head of Jesus Christ at His burial; d) the **Antimimension** is a silken cloth with a depiction of the entombment of the Saviour, and it contains a portion of sacred relics sewn into it. It is kept folded into nine, but is unfolded during the Divine Liturgy so that the sacred vessels may be placed upon it, and upon it the gifts are consecrated. The antimimension is itself blessed by the Bishop, whose signature is found upon it.

The reason for the appearance of the antimimension and its widespread use was as follows: 1) according to the Early Church custom, the Church and the Holy Table must needs be consecrated by the Bishop. When the Bishop was unable personally to attend for the consecration of churches, he delegated this to the priests, but would send to the newly built church a cloth consecrated by himself upon which the consecration of the Holy Gifts was to be performed thereafter; 2) In the East, the Christian churches were often subject to the depredations of the unbelievers and of the heretics. Therefore to protect the holy things from desecration, they often did not erect other altars but simply kept those silken cloths, blessed by the Bishop (that is the antimensia). [These, of course, they were better able to hide or to keep in safety.] Subsequently, the antimensia began to be placed even on consecrated Holy Tables, as a sign that the liturgical celebrations there had the blessing of the Hierarch.

17) The **Covers or Veils for the Holy Gifts**: there are two smaller ones, used to cover the diskos (paten) and the chalice, and a larger one, which covers the diskos and chalice together. The larger one is called the **Aer**, because it is laid over the Asterisk or Star, and so represents the air in which the star appeared, which led the Wise Men to the Saviour's manger. Mystically these coverings represent the swaddling clothes in which the Lord was bound at His birth or the linens in which He was wrapped for burial.

18) the **Coverings of the Prothesis or Proskomidi Table**, the coverings for the icon stands, the veil for the Royal Doors and the rest of the hangings are not ascribed any particular significance, but they serve for the adornment of the Church and the services.

.... to be continued with "The Holy Vessels"



“IT WAS THROUGH whispering that the serpent drove Eve out of Paradise, so he who speaks against his neighbour will be like the serpent, for he corrupts the soul of him who listens to him and he does not save his own soul.”

ST. HYPERECHIUS OF EGYPT, FOURTH CENTURY

“DO NOT LISTEN gleefully to gossip at your neighbour's expense or chatter to a person who likes finding fault. Otherwise you will fall away from Divine love and find yourself cut off from eternal life.”

VEN. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, + 662 A.D.

“THE TONGUE of a back-biting soul is three pronged: it injures the speaker, the listener and sometimes the person being maligned.”

VEN. THALASSIUS THE LIBYAN, SEVENTH CENTURY.

Counsels on Prayer

BY THE HOLY ELDER HIERONYMOS OF ÆGINA
(†1966)

WHETHER you have zeal or not, do not cease praying and do not become negligent in your prayer. For whatever reasons, do not cease praying and do not become negligent in it. And try to shed one teardrop every night.

- Do not let a day pass without prayer; and your prayer should not be without tears.
- Persevere in and increase your prayer. Say the prayers that our Church has prescribed: the Six Psalms, Small Compline, the Paraklesis, etc. Read them from prayer books, but now and then leave the books aside for a while. That is, without the book, apart from the words of prayer written there, speak to Christ on your own. Simply, and from the heart, speak to Him as though you were seeing Him before you: “My Father, I have sinned; I did not spend my day in a spiritual way, but with worldly things. I judged, spoke a lot, laughed, ate a lot, did not pray. I had so many weaknesses and falls. Forgive me, Lord,” and so on. Speak that way and Christ will take pity on you and send you tears. And tears have to come, because such prayerful tears will give you strength and joy. They will take away your sorrows.
- Just as when you do not work, you do not get paid, so without toil, effort, diligence, prayer, etc., neither spiritual gifts nor a taste for holy and spiritual things come.
- Humility, tears, prayer, and a pure soul. Tears do not come when one has not spent his day well, in a spiritual manner.
- If a day has passed during which you do not sense Christ in your heart by means of prayer, reading of the Psalter and the Gospel, etc., consider such a day to be a waste!

Beg with tears, like Mary Magdalene, saying: “Do not abandon me, O my Christ! Do not leave me alone, O my Christ! My sweetest Christ, do not take my soul before I become all Thine!”

With each prayer, you must shed one teardrop. And when you are filled with compunction, do not tell it to anyone, because it is a Divine gift and you might lose it!

Taken from the website of the Synod in Resistance



A Miracle of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco

BY MARIA TSALLA

SIX YEARS AGO, when I was fifteen years old and had lost my father, my prayers each night hid a certain complaint, because God had taken my father so early, and even though I asked to see him at least in a dream, this desire of mine was not fulfilled.

God’s answer to my complaint was not long in coming; it came by way of a dream. In my dream, I was in a strange Church and was waiting in a line with other pilgrims. In front of me were children of various nationalities. As I waited at the end of this line, some people from the upper gallery motioned for me to go forward, and at these instructions the children obediently made way for me.

I found myself in front of an Icon depicting a Saint that I had never seen before. He was elderly and had a grey beard. As I gazed upon the Icon, the Saint stepped out of it like an apparition and told me to go to the right. Heading in the direction he had indicated to me, I saw a reliquary, out of which arose the same elderly man I had seen in the Icon. This time, however, he was not an apparition, painted in the colours used by Iconographers, but was flesh and blood.

I approached him, and we both sat down on the reliquary. He did not frighten me; I felt as if I were sitting with a friend on a bench and not with a Saint on a reliquary. He looked in my eyes with love and tenderness. His eyes emitted love and affection, and beautified his aged and bent body. Embracing me paternally, he spoke to me in a different language - not Greek or other languages that people speak. It was as if our souls were communicating. He told me that thenceforth he would be my father. His embrace filled my soul with calm and his fragrance made the dream real.

I woke up thinking about him, and with many questions as to who the elderly man was. Alongside the questions, however, I also had an answer to my question: "Do I have a father?" Of course I did; I just did not know his name. I asked for help from my mother, who is a catechist and knows a great deal about Saints and their lives. None of those she mentioned, however, corresponded to the description I gave her. I only knew that he had a grey beard, was elderly, short, and bent, and, in any event, a foreigner, since the Church did not look Greek Orthodox, nor were the other pilgrims Greek, and he had not spoken to me in Greek.

My mother advised me to pray to him to reveal to me who he was. The answer to my prayer did not come through a dream this time, but rather through a birthday gift given to me by my spiritual Father (to whom I had never told the dream). I opened the gift and saw that it was a book. When I opened it, I saw the "strange" Church ("strange" to me, that is, because it was Russian) that I had seen in my dream, the Icon of the Saint, his reliquary,

and the man himself! That is how I learned his name: St. John Maximovitch, the protector of orphans. Thus it was that I learned the name of my father - the father of all orphans, the afflicted, the weak, the poor, and the wronged. The Saint never leaves me, but is always near me and often appears in my dreams to give me support, consolation, and advice in difficult moments.

God took my [biological] father, but He also took care to send me an incorrupt one (the incorrupt Relics of the Saint are located in San Francisco), who is also on earth and who reminds us that whoever follows Christ has no reason to fear death.

I feel myself fortunate; but, at the same time, since God permitted such a thing to happen to me, the most sinful one, I have a responsibility to help as many people as possible learn about St. John Maximovitch, so that, just as I have been changed, he might also bring about a change for many other people who are reading these words now and who are searching for a place of refuge and a paternal embrace. The only thing I could do as a fifteen year old was to make a Facebook page called SAINT JOHN MAXIMOVITCH (ΑΓΙΟΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ ΜΑΞΙΜΟΒΙΤΣ), which today numbers more than 3,000 members. In the embrace he offered me, we all fit!

*THE ACCOUNT ABOVE is a translation from the Greek made by the sisters of the Synod in Resistance's **Convent of Saint Philothei in Sweden**, with whose kind permission we are publishing it here. The original Greek version may be found on <<http://stavroulasblog.blogspot.gr/2013/12/6-15.html>>*

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“IF EACH of you reflects upon the wonderful gift of the acquired liberty which our Christ has granted to His faithful people through the regeneration of the life-giving bath [Baptism], and through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, he understands that God should not be served languidly.”

ST VALERIAN, BISHOP OF CIMIEZ, + C. 460 A.D.

THE COMING MONTH

JANUARY is graced with the **Great Feast of the Theophany** (6th / 19th), during which we celebrate the **Saviour's Baptism by John in the River Jordan**. It was during this event, as the *troparion* of the feast tells us, that *the worship of the Trinity was made manifest; for the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee [Christ], calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the certainty of the word.* Thus in differing ways the Three Persons of the All-holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, were made manifest to our kind. It was at this feast also that the Mysterion of our own Baptism into Christ was inaugurated, whereby being totally immersed in the waters of Baptism we die with Christ, and rising out of those waters we rise again to new life in Him. The Fathers are emphatic that whereas when we are baptized we are cleansed of sin, in His Baptism Christ had no need of cleansing, but was baptized to cleanse the waters, that therein we might be cleansed.

In remembrance of these salvific events, on the feast we have the **Great Blessing of the Waters**. Properly this is done twice: once on the eve of the feast day itself in church, and once on the day of the feast at a well, spring, stream, lake, or in the sea. The first blessing provides a supply of Holy Water for the faithful, who may take it to their homes for use there throughout the year. The clergy also use it to bless the homes of the faithful when invited to do so at this festival. The Theophany Water should always be taken fasting, and it should be kept in the icon corner with the other holy things in one's house. In fact here, having blessed the waters at the Convent on the eve of the feast, we repeat the in-church blessing at Brookwood at the Vigil, so that the people who attend church here also have a supply of Theophany Water. The out-door blessing we are fortunate to be able to hold at Chertsey on the Abbey River, the site of the seventh century monastery

founded by St Erkenwald, and the place where many monastic fathers subsequently suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Danes. For this we are grateful to **Robin and Mary Haigh** for welcoming us to their home at Abbey Bridge Farmhouse year after year.

Although it falls within the festal period which stretches from Christmas to Theophany, the eve of the Theophany is kept as a **fast day**. The day after the feast day itself is kept as a festival of **Saint John the Baptist**. The feast itself continues until 14th/27th January, and on all those days the service of the Theophany is chanted, along with services to the saints of the particular days.

This year the day of Theophany falls on a Sunday, and this means that the more usual order of services is somewhat modified. We have the **Royal Hours on the Friday** (not on the eve). On the Saturday we celebrate the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, and on the feast itself that of St Basil (a reversal of the more normal order). Among the Russians Vespers follows the Saturday Liturgy and they start the Vigil with Great Compline, but, as it is a weekend service, others start the Vigil with Vespers. Although the feast falls on a Sunday, the day of the Resurrection, the service usually appointed for the Sunday is omitted altogether, and only that for the Great Feast is chanted, because of its paramount importance.

Among the Saints celebrated in January, we have the **Holy Martyr Tatiana** (12th/25th), the daughter of a wealthy and renowned Roman family, who brought her up in the Christian faith. When Tatiana came of age, she grew indifferent to her wealth, position and other material benefits, and with all her heart came to love the spiritual life. She renounced forever entering into married life, and in view of her virtuous way of life, was appointed a deaconess in the Roman church. In that capacity, she cared for the sick, visited those in prison, cared for the poor, and strove to ever please God with prayer and good works. In about 225, during the reign of Emperor Alexander Severus (A.D. 222-235), and at the orders of the city ruler Ulpian, St. Tatiana was martyred for her confession of Jesus Christ. According to tradition, she was subjected

to various tortures and then cast into the arena of the Colosseum, to be torn apart by a fierce lion for the amusement of the audience. However, instead of doing so, the lion meekly lay down before her. Then, as a wild beast would not despatch her, the bestial torturer did so and Tatiana was beheaded by the sword. Eight of the city governor's servants who had taken part in persecuting and torturing the Saint bore witness to the fact that God's power rested upon her, and came to believe in Jesus Christ. They themselves were put to torture, and they also were beheaded, thus gaining crowns of martyrdom with the Saint.



POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

*“I have a question. There is a Greek Orthodox church in XXX bearing the name of St. XXXX, which I was looking forward to going to, but when we entered there, I thought I was in a [Roman] Catholic church. The people were all seated, and the ladies were not wearing scarves on their heads. There was almost no room for standing, but we did for a while, then decided to leave, the more so [as] we did not understand Greek. Apparently some Georgians still attend the service (last part of it), and take Holy Communion without having confessed, or read any preparation prayers. Do you think that's acceptable? We will need your blessing to go there. - **From a correspondent (not a member of our Synod) who lives in Georgia, but had this experience while visiting the United Kingdom recently.** (We have removed the name of the church and the town she visited).*

Many thanks for your letter and your observations about the Greek parish in XXX. In part this is why we are in “resistance.” It is not simply a matter of the policies of the hierarchs,

although those are of paramount importance. It is also that, perhaps through the negligence of those hierarchs, there is at all levels a slipping away from Orthodox faith and practice. Many churches now seem to run simply on the maxim of ethnic identity, and matters of Faith and practice play a very inferior rôle. Thus Orthodoxy dies. But it is not only the Greeks who are travelling down this road, so be careful not to blame them particularly.

In fact, be extremely careful not to judge the people in that church. The poor things have not been instructed and perhaps not pastorally cared for. I remember years ago, at Pascha, urging our, then largely convert, congregation, to show a little more enthusiasm and explaining that the Greeks call coming up to receive the paschal light “the rush,” whereas our English people were, of course, more reticent! I had to change my plea after visiting my mother once and seeing on the television much the same as you saw. Women (mostly), heads uncovered, sitting in pews watching the priest and a couple of helpers standing by the *epitaphios*, as if they were simply spectators and not participants in the liturgy. A rather depressing let down.

Regarding receiving Holy Communion: of course, no one should do so without proper preparation, without being present and praying at the whole Liturgy, without fasting and prayer, without frequent confession. To do so is inviting spiritual danger.

Regarding your particular situation: I cannot direct you, because you must ask your own spiritual father. However, in the Liturgy we are exhorted several times that we confess “with one mind,” that we glorify “with one mouth and one heart,” etc. How then can you partake of the Holy Mysteries if you do not find yourself of one mind and heart with the “participants” there? I would think it impossible. I hope this helps you a little.



News Section

HISTORIC CHURCH DESECRATED

THE ***IN SERBIA*** website (*The “IN” also means Independent News*) carries an horrific report on the desecration of the **Orthodox church of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist in the village of Samodreza** near Vucitrn, which has been turned into a rubbish dump. Albanian children have turned the altar of this holy place, built where **Prince Saint Lazar received Communion with his men before the Battle of Kosovo** (1389 A.D.), into a public toilet. Shockingly not only children are to blame: a picture shows an adult man urinating there. The church was burned, vandalized and desecrated for the first time in 1999 after international forces arrived in Kosovo, writes the daily newspaper, *Kurir*. The roof of the church was destroyed, windows and the metal door broken, and over the apse a large hole was breached. The interior of the church has been turned into a public rubbish dump and a toilet in which people and the animals relieve themselves. The wall around the church has been destroyed. The **Bishop of Raska and Prizren, Teodosije**, told the *Telegraf*: “We tried several times to stop the further desecration through the international community and proposed [the] placement of brass doors and windows, but the Albanian community opposes renewal.”

EXTRAORDINARY STATEMENT MADE BY METROPOLITAN HILARION (MP)

A RUSSIAN LANGUAGE SITE, *Orthodox News*, reported (26/12/13) the following extraordinary statement of **His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk**, one of the senior hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate and the head of their **Department for External Church Relations**: “And if it had

not been that we had the holy hierarch Tikhon, the holy hierarch Peter, the holy hierarch Cyril, the holy hierarch Agathangel, their fellow ministers and co-workers, the many others who suffered for the Faith, and finally the Most Holy Patriarch Sergii (Stragorodsky), I am not sure that now there would have been any such country as Russia.” [А вот если бы у нас не было святителя Тихона, святителя Петра, святителя Кирилла, святителя Агафангела, их сослуживцев и сотрудников, многих других страдальцев за веру, наконец - Святейшего патриарха Сергия (Страгородского), я не уверен, что вообще сейчас существовала бы такая страна, как Россия”]. This statement comes in an otherwise sober and sensible piece, but is extraordinary in that he places Patriarch Sergii, who betrayed the Russian Church to its persecutors, alongside great hierarchs and confessors, the last three of whom endured martyrlic sufferings rather than accede to Sergii’s destructive policies. It is also extraordinary in that it implies that somehow the rôle of Church hierarchs is to uphold a state. Surely this is yet another manifestation of the survival among the church leaders of the post-Soviet Russian Federation of a Sergianist mind-set. Soviet communism, they say, is dead, but it is quite apparent that Sergianism is still very much alive.

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SIR-UK NEWS

THREE BAPTISMS AT BROOKWOOD

ON SATURDAY, 24th November / 7th December, the feast day of Sts Clement of Rome and Peter of Alexandria, **His Grace, Bishop Sofronie of Suceava** visited us and celebrated two Baptisms together. **Rafael**, the infant son of **Ioan and Simona Biosa**, and **Maria**, the daughter of **Mihai and Adriana Catrina**, were baptized. Rafael’s godfather was **Alexandru Petrea**, and Maria’s godmother **Teodora Castel**. After the baptismal service, His Grace imparted the Holy Mysteries to the newly illumined ba-

bies, and then returned to London to attend to the pastoral needs of the Romanian Traditionalist Orthodox peoples living there. On the Sunday, which was also the feast of the Great Martyr Catherine of Alexandria, Bishop Sofronie celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the **Convent of the Annunciation**. It had been intended that this service would be completely in Romanian for the many Romanians in that area, but, because of his infirmity, the Bishop requested that one of the Brotherhood clergy assist him and so unfortunately much of the Liturgy itself was in English. However, the Romanian faithful chanted the choir parts and read the appointed readings.

On Saturday 1st / 14th December, the feast day of the Righteous Philaret the Merciful, **Emmanuel**, the infant son of **Matias and Liggy Fagerlund of Bungay**, was baptized at Saint Edward's, with **Andrew Henderson-Stewart** and **Elena Golitsyn** standing as his godparents. After the service, the family offered light refreshments to those who had attended in the Old Mortuary building. On the following day, Emmanuel partook of the Holy Mysteries for the first time at the Divine Liturgy celebrated at the Convent in London.

SECOND EPISCOPAL VISIT

ON TUESDAY, 27th November / 10th December, **His Grace, Bishop Antonie of Ploiesti** paid a completely unannounced visit to Saint Edward Brotherhood. His Grace is a member of the episcopate of the Orthodox Church of the Patristic Calendar in Romania, under the presidency of **His Eminence Metropolitan Vlasie**. He was accompanied by **Archdeacon Glycherie** and two laymen, one of whom was a visitor from Italy and the other an old friend of our community. His Grace was in England for the first time, and while at Brookwood visited the church and venerated the holy relics, before visiting the work rooms of the Brotherhood to see something of our life and work here.

THREE DEACONS TOGETHER

FOR THE FEAST of St Spiridon of Trimythus and St Herman of Alaska, 12th / 25th December, we were joined at the Divine Liturgy by **Father Deacon Nikolaj Petrov**, his **diaconissa Kalina** and their children, from Sofia, Bulgaria. Fr Nikolaj serves in the **Dormition Cathedral** there, with other clergy assisting **His Eminence, Bishop Photii of Triaditsa**. He brought from Bulgaria an icon of Saint Seraphim of Sarov and some beeswax candles as **gifts from Bishop Photii**, some of their year-books for 2014 and a number of copies of two recent publications of the Church in Bulgaria: one on the witness and spiritual teachings of **Abbess Seraphima** (+ 2004) of the **Convent of the Protection of the Mother of God at Knyazhevo**, near Sofia; and one titled ***The Twenty Years of the Open Ministry of the Bulgarian Old Calendar Church***. Both are in Bulgarian, but beautifully produced and with many photographs. For the first time since his ordination last March, our **Father Deacon Borislav Popov** served with his brother-in-law, Father Nikolaj, at the Liturgy. The third deacon, our Fr Sabbas, retreated to the choir to be on hand if Fr Thomas' chanting failed (he is suffering from glandular fever). Fr Borislav served in English and Fr Nikolaj in Slavonic and Greek. We should perhaps note that Abbess Seraphima, like **St Seraphim of Sofia**, were Russians living in exile in Bulgaria. Their steadfastness was fundamental in establishing the traditionalist presence in the country of their adoption. We in turn are edified by the love and prayerful support which our brothers in the faith in Bulgaria and in Romania now show our tiny presence in this country.

AND TWO NAMED JOHN

SOME WEEKS ago, one of the security lights on the church failed, and we asked **Ioan Turcu**, an electrician, to fix it for us. We did not know what we had let ourselves in for! He decided that

the whole system needed a complete overhaul, and was joined in his work by **Ivan Nenov**. The two of them replaced the whole system around the church and augmented it. They then attacked the old Mortuary Building and replaced the lights there, and then the house. The system that they have installed on all three buildings will be considerably cheaper to run, and is much more effective. They refused to take any payment for their work, though they came at weekends and in the evenings (one working up the ladder while the other held a torch!). **Ioan** paid for the new lights around the church and **Ivan** for those around the mortuary. Under immense pressure, they did allow us to pay for those on the monastic house. We are immensely grateful for this labour of love and for all they have done for us. In the world, *Hate Mail* (i.e. the cheap dailies and magazines) is spreading fear of the influx of Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants now expected. If they are such as these workers, we would welcome even more of them. Perhaps we should encourage hard working people like this to come to our country, and suggest that those who prefer to live parasitically, from the “highest” to the “lowest” find a sunnier home abroad!

ORTHODOX AID FUND

WITH the return of this year’s “Shepherd” re-subscription forms, we received donations for our **Orthodox Aid Fund** totalling **£801**. With other donations given during the civil year of 2013, we have made gifts from this fund to various church, humanitarian and environmental charities totalling **£8,580.95**. (When donations were made in dollars or euros, we calculated the sterling equivalent on the day the donation was made). In addition to this, we have in hand about **£1,800** to give to **His Grace, Bishop Ambrose**, when he next visits, for the **missions in Africa** and for the **soup kitchens run by our Church in Greece**. May God bless all of you who have contributed to this effort, and reward you in due time with things heavenly for things earthly.

Donations, included with the “Shepherd” re-subscription forms, earmarked for the **King Edward Orthodox Trust Co. Ltd**, which administers the property here at Brookwood, totalled **£1,192.16**. This is in addition to the support we receive by regular bankers’ orders and other donations. This money will, of course, help with the support and work of the community here at Brookwood. **Note:** all those monies given to the **Orthodox Aid Fund** have been distributed to charities and good causes, which do not financially support our community here and are independent of us.

PICTURE FRAMING BY “EASELS”

Two picture framers in this area have gone out of business, and so recently we found “**Easels**” at **Chobham**, run by **the most gracious and excellent lady, Shanni**, who has the added advantage of being a lover of dogs. Recently when we asked her to frame the two new icons received from the **Convent of St Elizabeth in Etna** (Sts Pelagia and Nonnus, and the Venerable Martyrs of Prevlak), she insisted on doing it for free, because she liked the icons and because it was Christmas time. For this kindness and generosity we owe her much gratitude.



PRACTICAL TIP

EVEN in the best run communities and parishes, indeed even in our own (!), things happen which people feel they should complain about. This is fine and healthy, but be sure that you complain in the right way so as not to cause more temptation. The first step is to address your complaint to the person responsible (Matt. 18:15), and not to a third party. Recently here two parishioners complained about something in church to one of the lay members of our choir, even though their complaint had nothing to do with the choir. This left her with the responsibility of passing on the

complaint, which is unfair and perhaps even cowardly. Furthermore it may spread a temptation. The matter they brought up may never have crossed her mind, but once the thought is seeded there it could grow. In that way temptations are spread, and the devil is helped in his work. Another person did complain to the person responsible directly, and thus did well, but then spoiled it by boasting that she had given them a piece of her mind, thus uncovering the sin (or at least the perceived sin) of someone else (Gen. 9:20-23*). In both these ways the horrific sin of gossiping takes root (see quotes from the Fathers throughout this issue). It is totally destructive of brotherly love.

* We should point out that, in the case of Ham, the sin was doubtless much more serious in that he exposed the sin of the leader of the people.

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A CAUTIONARY NOTE

BECAUSE of its importance, in this issue we included quotations from the Fathers concerning the destructive sin of gossiping, spreading rumours, slandering, grumbling - in short, what St Antony refers to as *whispering*. Bear in mind these things were said long before telephones were known, much less mobiles, emails, internet forums, texting, twittering and the whole host of modern aids to this form of spiritual destruction. It seems that today many people cannot exist (and it is only existing, not living) without communicating with someone every minute of their waking lives. How many ways have been devised helping the evil one to spread this spiritual contagion. How timely then this years' **Christmas Message from The Queen**, reminding us to make time to reflect. God bless Her Majesty for her wise counsels. One supposes that few will heed them for more than a day or two, but at the very least we who are blessed to be Orthodox Christians and, in the Fathers, have such a plentiful fund of spiritual wisdom to draw upon, should strive to follow that good advice throughout our lives.