



FROM THE FATHERS

“ESTEEM not lightly this Child, because He is a child. He Who is a child is co-eternal with the Father. His age is measured within a month, yet there were none that went before Him. This is but a babbling infant, but the Mouth whence wisdom is imparted to others; the one because of birth from the Virgin, the other because of the incomprehensible nature of His substance. This too is He of whom Esaias has told us, saying: *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given* (9:5). He says one is born, the Other is given. What is born is seen with the eyes; What is given is known by the mind and thought alone.”

SAINT AMPHILOCHIUS OF ICONIUM, + 400 A.D.
HOMILY ON THE MEETING OF THE LORD



In February this year, on the day before the **Sunday of the Dread Judgment**, we have the first of the **Soul Sabbaths**, days on which we pray for the faithful departed. We have noticed that many Orthodox Christians today who, perhaps through no fault of their own, have not been properly catechized in the Faith, and entertain views about the life after death which are far from Orthodox. Some accept views derived from heterodox teachings (soul sleep, purgatory, etc); others accept purely pagan concepts (re-incarnation, transmigration of souls); yet others, like the majority of people around us naively believe (if such a lack of belief can be called belief!) that "we go to a better place." Even those who have some grasp of the Orthodox teaching often support true teaching with apocryphal stories or concretize the concepts enshrined therein in such a way as to invalidate them. We have taken the following sober and instructive article from the **Orthodox Christian Reporter** website, in an attempt to give some well-founded teaching on the particular judgment that follows our death.

THE TAXING OF SOULS

BY METROPOLITAN HIEROTHEOS (VLACHOS)

WHAT FOLLOWS is written not in order to arouse anxiety, but to prompt repentance, which has joy as its result. For he who has the gift of the Holy Spirit and is united with Christ avoids the terrible presence and activity of the customs demons.

According to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, the soul at its departure from the body, as well as when it is preparing to leave, senses the presence of the demons who are called customs demons, and is possessed with fear because of having to pass through customs.

Of course we must say from the start that the customs demons have no sovereignty over the righteous, those who have united with Christ. The righteous not only will not go through “customs-houses,” but they will also not be in fear of that. We shall see all this better when we compare the teaching of the Fathers. The characterisation of the soul’s passage through the demons as customs is taken from the tax collectors of that time. We may look briefly at this subject in order to understand why the Fathers characterise the soul’s passage through the demons as customs.

In ancient times the name of tax gatherer was given to those who purchased the public taxes from the State and then collected them from the people. The tax gatherers were divided into two classes. The first class comprised the so-called “publicans (‘confiscators’) or tithe collectors”, who were the wealthiest class and the force of authority, and the second comprised the “tax collectors.” The publicans were the general public collectors, who had bought the taxes from the State, while the tax collectors were their salaried servants, who collected the taxes from the people and gave them to the publicans.

The tax collectors were unjust because they collected larger taxes than had to be paid to their masters. That is why they had a very bad reputation in ancient communities. Plato said that the tax collectors were

oppressive, not so much when they collected duties from the visible imports, “but when in looking for what was hidden they meddled in other people’s equipment and freight.” Therefore when Theocritus was asked what were the fiercest beasts, he answered: “in the mountains, bears and lions, and in the cities, tax collectors and sycophants.”

The tax collectors, in their effort to collect as many taxes as they could—and especially in order not to let some people escape who could not accept the very heavy and unjust tax—contrived various means: they would lie in wait in narrow roads and seize passers-by, forcing them to give what they owed. It was very unpleasant and odious to the people of that time.

It is just this familiar and odious image which the Fathers used in order to give the people of that time an understanding of the terrible mystery of death and of the terrible things that unfold when the soul is being prepared for departure, especially when it is leaving the body. St. Macarius of Egypt would say expressively: “Like the tax collectors who sit in the narrow roads and seize the passers-by and the oppressed, so also the demons watch carefully and grab hold of souls. And when they pass out of the body, if they are not completely purified, they are not permitted to go up into the mansions of Heaven there to meet their Master. For they are driven down by the demons of the air.”

The image of the tax collectors certainly belongs to the reality of that time. But the teaching that the demons try to seize a man’s soul at its departure is mentioned in many texts of Holy Scripture and of the Fathers of the Church. We have already seen that after death the souls of the righteous are received by the angels and the souls of sinners and the unrepentant are received by the demons. With the malice which all the demons have against men, they would like to dominate everyone and have them in their power for ever. But they cannot have authority over the righteous.

A basic passage which the Fathers of the Church interpret as referring to the customs demons is what Christ said shortly before His Pas-

sion: “for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in me” (Jn 14:30). The ruler of this world is the devil. He is called the ruler of the world not because he is really the ruler and final authority in the whole world, but because he dominates the world of the unjust. Christ declares that the devil has no authority over Him. He is surely referring here to the devil and death.

St. Paul, referring to the spiritually dead who were deprived of the grace of God, writes: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the ways of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:1-2). This passage indicates that men are deadened by sins and the work of the devil.

Likewise the devil is characterized as the prince of the power of the air because he is in the atmosphere and is constantly waging war on men. It is precisely this image which the Fathers have in view, saying that when the soul leaves the body and passes through the air towards heaven, it meets the ruler of the air. The passage also mentions that this ruler is working now too in the sons of disobedience.

There are many passages in the Old Testament which the Fathers use to indicate what is called the souls’ payment of customs duties. I should like to mention two of them. One comes from a psalm of David in which the Prophet King speaks to God and says: “O Lord my God, in Thee have I put my hope; save me from all them that persecute me; and do Thou deliver me, lest [at any time] like a lion he seize my soul, when there is none to redeem me” (Psalm 7:1-2). The other passage is in the book of the Prophet Jeremias, where it says: “there seemed to be a fire burning in my bones; I was wearied and could not endure, for I heard many mocking me on every side” (Jer. 20:9-10).

Now that we have quoted the most basic passages interpreted by the Fathers, we shall go on to their teaching about the “taxing” of souls. We should say that we will first compare their teaching about the taxing and then speak of the mystical interpretation of this condition. As will be seen more clearly in what follows, the souls of the righteous are not

in fear, since they have the grace of God, and the demons have no power over them. The souls of the unrepentant are in anguish, being subject to the influence of the demons and to the action of the passions as well. There are demons, but the customs payment also means the action of the passions. We should never forget this point, because to be unaware of it creates false conceptions. The reader of this chapter must be particularly careful in studying the patristic teaching.

St. Basil the Great, interpreting the passage from the Psalms: “save me from all those who persecute me; and deliver me, lest they seize my soul like a lion,” says that the brave men who have struggled throughout their lives against the invisible enemy, towards the end of their lives “will be searched by the ruler of the age” in order to hold them captive if they are found to have wounds or stigmata or imprints of sins. But if they are found uninjured and unstained, then “as they are invincible and free, Christ will give them rest.” Therefore he who is under the power of death, since he knows that “One is He who saves, One is He who redeems”, cries out to Christ the Saviour: “deliver me in that time of searching, lest they seize my soul like a lion.” And Christ, since He was free of sin, said: “now the ruler of this world is coming and he will have nothing in Me;” for man, however, it is enough to say that the ruler of the world is coming and he will have “few and small things” in me.

The hour of death is terrible because then the person recalls his sins, but also because he sees frightening things. St. John Chrysostom bears witness that there are many men who recount terrible visions, which the departing one cannot repel. They are so terrible that “his very bed shakes violently, and he gazes in fear at the bystanders.” That is to say, his very body is shaken by his soul’s fear, and he makes many disturbed movements. St. John Chrysostom adds that if we are frightened by the sight of terrible men, how much more frightened we will be when at the departure of our soul from the body we see “angels threatening us and stern powers.” The soul which is parted from the body wails uselessly, in vain.

St. Symeon the New Theologian speaks about this, emphasizing especially that he who has God’s Light conquers the demons that come

near him, for the demons are burnt by the divine Light. This is the case even now, as far as the person is in the vision of God and is clothed in God's Light. It will be much more the case when a person's soul is leaving his body. St. Symeon says that the Christian has no benefit from the spiritual struggle which he is going through if the devil is not set ablaze by the Light of God. And this means that the essence and aim of the spiritual life is to be united with the Light. St. Symeon writes: "If the prince of darkness, when he comes, does not see Thy glory accompanying me and is not utterly confounded—he, the darkness, consumed by Thy inaccessible Light—and if all the hostile powers with him do not flee on seeing the mark of Thy seal, while I pass through, trusting in Thy grace perfectly intrepid, and approach Thee and bow down, what is the use of that which is going on in me now?"

The demons that want to seize a person's soul even at the last moment are characterized by St. Diadochos of Photike as Tartar rulers, that is to say, rulers of Hades. A person who loves God will not be in fear, for love casts out fear, and he will freely outdistance "the tartar rulers". The soul of a man who rejoices in the love of God, at the hour of death, "is lifted with the angels of peace above all the hosts of darkness."

Thus the holy Fathers are not satisfied just to emphasise the existence of the demons and their aggressive rage against men, but they also emphasise the way in which we can escape their threats. By confessing his sins completely a person is released from cowardice and fear, is filled with the love of Christ, and so he is freed from the evils of the demons. The devil has no power over him.

Abba Isaiah calls the demons which approach the soul when it is leaving the body "rulers of darkness" and "rulers of evil." He teaches that when a man's soul leaves his body, the angels travel with it. But then the powers of darkness also go out to meet it and to dominate it. At that moment the angels do not fight with the demons but wall the person round with the good deeds that he has done. When the person has conquered the demons because of the good deeds which he has done in his life, then "the Angels will rejoice with him when they see him, freed

from the powers of darkness.” That is why Abba Isaiah exhorts us to love peace, to have love towards men, to think of God and His righteousness, to ignore need for the world and its honour, and so forth.

The Sayings of the Desert Fathers contain the teaching of Theophilos the Archbishop on the subject we are dealing with. He says that at the time of departure a court case takes place between the angels and the demons. The demons present “all the sins committed either deliberately or through ignorance from birth to this last hour,” and they make accusation against the person. Likewise the angels bring up the good deeds which the soul of the particular person has done. Then the soul under judgement is in great fear. If the demons win, it hears the words: “Take away the ungodly soul, that it may not see the glory of God.” But if it comes out the victor and is given freedom, the demons are put to shame and the angels receive the soul and guide it “into that unspeakable joy and glory.”

We find these views in many patristic texts. Hesychios the Priest prays that when the ruler of darkness comes, he may find our misdeeds few and petty. He teaches that when the soul has Christ with it, “He will speedily avenge it.”

Likewise St. Theognostos says that the righteous soul rises to heaven, going in peace “to meet the radiant and joyful angel that comes down for it and travelling with him unimpeded through the air, totally unharmed by the evil spirits.”

The holy Fathers teach all these things not from their imagination, but from enlightening experiences. Sometimes other holy men have revealed these things to them, and at other times they themselves, illumined by God, have had such frightening experiences.

Antony the Great once reached the point of personally seeing such dreadful things. In his cell he went into rapture and then saw himself go out of his body and walk in the air, obviously led by angels. Some bitter and terrible demons prevented them from ascending to heaven and sought a reason for several deeds. Then those leading Antony the Great fought with the terrible demons, saying that God had forgiven him all

his deeds from his birth and that they should accuse him only of what he had done from the moment when he became a monk. “Then when they had accused him and not proven him wrong, his way became free and unhindered.”

In a dreadful story of Antony the Great, the following is told: During the night a voice wakened him and urged him to go out of his cell and look. Then in fact he saw someone “tall, without bodily form and dreadful”, who was the devil, standing straight with his hands raised, preventing some from ascending by keeping hold of them, and gnashing his teeth at others because they had escaped and were ascending to heaven. It was revealed to Antony the Great that this dreadful spectacle was “the passage of souls.”

St. John of the Ladder describes a terrible spectacle seen by the hermit Stephen, who was an ascetic on Mt. Sinai, near the cave of the Prophet Elias. On the day before his death, while his eyes were open, he went into ecstasy and began to look to the right and left of his bed. Those present heard him answering as if he were being interrogated. Sometimes he said: “Of course it is true. That was why I fasted for so many years”. Or again: “Yes, that is correct, but I wept and served my brothers”. Or again: “No. You are accusing me falsely.” Or sometimes: “Quite right. No, I have no excuse. But God is merciful.” And St. John of the Ladder adds that “this unseen and relentless interrogation was a truly awful and frightening spectacle. Worst of all was the fact that they accused him of things which he had not done.”

From what we have cited it seems that the whole tradition of the Church speaks of the existence of the customs demons, the spirits in the air, which fight a man with hatred and evils not only throughout his life, but especially before and after his soul’s departure from the body.

In the tradition of the Church, however, it is seen clearly, that the demons have no mastery over the men of God, because those who have put on God do not go through such a martyrdom. If the ruler of the world has no power over Christ, this is also true of those men who are united with Him. This is why the Fathers advise us to live within the Church,

with repentance, confession and spiritual works, that we live and die in the Church with the Orthodox faith and the prayers of our Fathers, so that the ruler of darkness and the spirits of evil may not have power over us.

In any case it is a fact that during the soul's departure from the body a great battle goes on, chiefly in people who have insufficient purification. The terrible thing is that many people in our time die without being aware of the shocking hour of death. That is to say, the illnesses of our time, as well as the powerful pharmaceutical culture, distort man's psychosomatic constitution and make it difficult for him to go through these crucial hours with fitting attention, fear of God and prayer. Of course medicines do help us not to feel the pain of our illnesses, but they also alter our whole psychosomatic constitution; they do not allow us to realize what is going on and to seek God's mercy.

These hours are very crucial. This is why all who fear God and have spiritual knowledge of the crucial moments pray to be made aware of the events of that time. It is a real opportunity for the person to repent of all that he has committed, to seek God's mercy. To be watchful at this frightful hour is the most important work. That is why the Church prays for God to deliver us from "sudden death."

But we must look at the existence of the customs houses from two sides. One side is the demons' malice and the other is the existence of passions. In the patristic teaching we find that there is also another interpretation of the customs houses. Without, of course, overlooking the teaching about the existence of the rulers of darkness and the spirits of evil, I would also like us at this point to turn our attention to the mystical teaching of the Fathers of the Church about the customs-houses.

We also said before that when a person's soul is about to leave the body, the memory of the sins which he has committed in his life comes back to him. It is a truly intolerable state. St. John Chrysostom speaks of it. He says that on the last day of a person's biological life "sins contort his soul," they stir up his soul. This refers to passions which "move up from below the heart." The passions seek satisfaction, but the person cannot respond. It is a terrible state.

This insatiable desire of the soul is intensified even further when the soul is separated from the body. St. Gregory of Nyssa attributes this kind of interpretation to his sister Macrina. He says that as it happens with people who have remained in filthy places for a long period of time, that they are not released from the odiousness of the dirt even if they live in clean air afterwards, the same happens to the soul when it parts from the body. Lovers of the flesh, even if they have turned to the incorporeal and refined life, are unable to free themselves from the carnal odour. Precisely then the soul becomes more materialized and in that way “they are in great distress.” St. Gregory adds that if what some people say is true, that the shadowy shapes of the departed are seen in the vicinity of the graves, this is an indication that the soul does not want to be parted from the life of the flesh even after it has left the body. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, in which the Rich Man, finding himself in Hades, seems to be thinking about his relatives, indicates that the souls of lovers of the flesh really cannot part from the passions which constitute the carnal life.

We know from the Orthodox Tradition that there are passions of the body and passions of the soul. Since there is unity between soul and body, there is also a relationship between the passions of soul and body. The passions of the soul work through the bodily senses. When the soul is released from the body, it cannot satisfy its passions. Ungratified passions produce intolerable pain and a suffocating condition. They stifle the soul. This is the real hell and a frightful affliction. For this reason the holy Fathers advise us to cleanse our souls from the passions while we are in the present life, so that the soul may be released and freed after its departure. It should be satisfied and attracted to God Himself.

There is also another problem for the soul after its departure from the body. St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches that all nature is attracted to what is like it, to its relatives. So too the soul is drawn towards the divine and is related to it, since man is related to God and contains within himself copies of the archetype. After leaving the body, the soul is light, without any bodily pain, and therefore it is easy and pleasant to proceed towards what attracts it, towards God. But if the soul is held down by material

habits and by the nails of the passions, then it undergoes suffering in the way in which the body suffers during earthquakes, when it is not only crushed by the weight of the earth but can also be pierced by various pointed objects which are in the earth.

It is just this which constitutes the torment of the soul. It experiences a dreadful bifurcation, we could say. On the one hand, it wants to ascend towards God and unite with Him, since it is His image. On the other hand it is impeded by the passions which riddle, press and torment it. And this view is one part of the interpretation of the holy Fathers concerning the customs houses.

The torment of a soul which is parted from the body is described in a wonderful and realistic way by Abba Dorotheos. He says that during this life the soul is comforted through being distracted by the passions. It can feel great sorrow and dreadful pain, but by means of the body and the passions it can take comfort and ease its pain. In such a melancholic and frightful state the person “is fed, drinks, sleeps, meets and associates with friends,” that is to say he is entertained by persons dear to him. Thus he is comforted in part and can more easily forget the deepest problem which worries him. But when the soul leaves the body, “it is alone with its own passions and, in short, is always tormented by them.” At this time the soul is burning with the annoyance of the passions, it is distracted by them and cannot be mindful of God. This is a real tragedy, for at this time, because there is no body either, it cannot feel even the slightest comfort. In what follows Abba Dorotheos takes an astonishing example. Suppose someone was shut up in a dark cell with no food or drink for three days without sleeping or meeting anyone, or psalmodising, or praying, or thinking of God at all. Then he would know “what the passions do to him.” Actually in such a situation the soul and the whole man is infuriated. We are assured of this by various people who experience the agony of places of torture and frightful imprisonment. If this is the case even while the soul is linked with the body, how much more so when it has left the body and is isolated with its passions.

Abba Dorotheos also makes use of the image of the sick person with a burning fever. This of course creates many other problems as

well, especially if the person has a melancholic and ill-tempered body. The same thing happens with the impassioned soul. “The conflict arising from its own bad habits punishes it all the time, the memory being always embittered, the mutterings of its passions constantly emerging, always burning it and enraging it.” If one adds to this torment and suffering of the soul the terrible places of Hell and the demons and the fire and the darkness, and so forth, then one can understand the suffering and torment of the soul after its departure and its sojourn in Hades and Hell.”

The things that we have said so far show just what those customs houses are that are spoken of in the patristic texts. On the one hand, they are the passions of the soul which, because of the non-existence of the body, cannot be satisfied, and therefore stifle the soul. On the other hand, they are the evil demons which have gained mastery over passionate people, and it is natural that after the soul’s departure they have greater mastery over them. The righteous people, who during their lives have purified their souls and bodies from passions of the soul and body and have been clothed in the pledge of the Spirit and united with God, escape the power of the customs houses, since the demons have no power over them. The souls of the righteous are led, free and undistracted, towards God, with whom they are united.

So the whole problem is not to be afraid of the customs demons, but as long as we live, to cure our soul and our whole being of passions, to partake of the uncreated grace of God, so that the departure of our soul from our body may be a matter of joy and delight.

Of course there are some who maintain that such notions as customs houses and aerial spirits have come into Christianity from Gnostic theories and pagan myths which prevailed during that period.

There is no doubt that such views can be found in many Gnostic texts, in pagan ideas which are found in Egyptian and Chaldean myths. However it must be emphasized that many Fathers adopted the teaching about customs houses, but they cleared it of idolatrous and Gnostic frames of reference and placed it in the ecclesiastical atmosphere. The holy Fathers were not afraid to do such creative work.

It is a fact that the Fathers were working creatively and productively when they took many views and theories from the pagan world, but gave them an ecclesiastical content. It is well known that the Fathers took the teaching about the immortality of the soul, about the ecstasy of man and the dispassion of the soul and body, the teaching about the tripartite soul and many other things from the ancient philosophies, as well as from ancient traditions, but clearly they gave them another content and a different perspective. We cannot discard the teaching about the immortality of the soul just because the ancient philosophers spoke of it. We must look at the content which the holy Fathers gave to it.

Therefore what happened to other topics happened also to the subject of the customs houses. It is true that ancient traditions and heretical views spoke of “rulers of the astral sphere,” about “gates of an astral journey,” about “aerial spirits”, and so forth. We find several of these phrases in the Bible and in patristic texts. As we have mentioned in this chapter, many Fathers of the Church speak of customs houses and aerial spirits, but they have given them different content and different meanings. The patristic teaching about customs houses must be interpreted within the following four points.

First. The symbolic language of the Bible requires the necessary interpretation. Anyone who only keeps to the images used distorts the Gospel message. For instance, we must say that words in the Bible can be misinterpreted if we only look at their theological meaning. The same thing is true in the case of the customs houses. We should not be thinking only of today’s customs houses, through which everyone has to pass at the national borders. The symbolic image is intended to present something, but it must be interpreted in an Orthodox way.

Second. There are demons, which are dark angels. They are persons and therefore have freedom, and with God’s permission, but also through the wrong use of freedom by man, they have been able to dominate him. That is to say, after the soul’s departure from the body, the demons demand to possess a soul which they have mastered because of its unrepentance. In Christ’s well-known parable about the foolish rich man

there is the sentence: “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” According to the patristic interpretation it is the demons who demand possession of the soul of the foolish rich man after its departure from the body.

Third. The demons have no authority over the men of God. All who are united with God and have within their soul and heart the uncreated energy of God are outside the control of the demons. So the deified will not go through the so-called customs houses.

Fourth. According to the teaching of the Fathers, as we have seen before, the demons, which are real spirits, act by means of the passions. The fact that the passions cannot be gratified after the soul’s departure from the body is a suffocation of the soul.

When we examine the customs houses in these theological frames, the use of this teaching is not inappropriate. But if we have other conceptions, we are on the wrong path.

From the book “Life After Death” by Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, (Levadia: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1995), translated by Esther Williams and here very slightly amended.



The Coming Month

IN February, each year we have the **Great Feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple** (2nd / 15th), which falls forty days after the Nativity, and usually in this month we begin our lenten course, with the start of **Great Lent**. However, this year Pascha falls very late, on Sunday 22nd April (it can never fall after 25th April), and so **Great Lent** does not start until 5th / 18th March. We do, however, have three of the four Sundays preparatory for Lent in February: that of the **Publican and Pharisee**, that of the **Prodigal Son**, and that of the **Dread Judgment**, the day on which, as a preparation for the lenten fast, Orthodox Christians also give up eating all meat products.

The **Great Feast of the Meeting** celebrates the event described in Saint Luke's Gospel, chapter two, when our Saviour, as a forty-day-old baby, was presented in the Temple at Jerusalem in fulfilment of the Law of Moses. There He was received by the Elder Simeon, who had been awaiting the coming of the Messiah and recognized this young baby as that Messiah, and indeed as the Ancient of Days Himself. The hymns of the feast emphasise that Simeon the God-receiver was ancient and was holding a young Baby, and yet in reality that Baby was God before the ages and was holding him. In his joy, the Elder exclaimed, "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, O Master..." thus giving us that beautiful prayer which we hear every day at Vespers and which we say after receiving the Holy Gifts after the Liturgy. The Elder also prophesied the grief that the Virgin Theotokos would experience at the Passion of her Son, and thus this festival, falling about mid-point between the Nativity and the Passion services, links both the infancy events in the Christ's earthly dispensation with those of His Passion. In the East it became widely celebrated during the reign of the Emperor Justinian, and appears to have achieved equal prominence in the West a generation or two later. In the West, it became known as the Purification of the Virgin, but the early Orthodox Fathers there, as well as in the East, were careful to point out that the Virgin needed no purification, as she had given birth "without corruption." In this regard she fulfilled the Law of Moses, not because she was in any way impure or corrupted, but that it might be completed and brought to an end. We should also point out that when, in this instance, we speak of "corruption," we do not mean anything filthy or defiled, but simply that her giving birth was a virginal birth-giving without the participation or involvement of any other. This year the feast day itself falls on a Friday, and so it is kept as a fast day but we are permitted fish, wine and oil. The feast is kept for eight days this year, although, when Pascha is earlier and the lenten commemorations therefore also begin earlier, it is sometimes curtailed so as not to conflict with those.

Among the Saints' days in February we have the rather curiously named celebration of the **First and Second Findings of the Precious Head of the Honourable, Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John**

(24th February / 9th March). This commemoration usually falls within Great Lent, but is nonetheless celebrated with a mitigation of the strictness of the fast to allow wine and oil. This year it falls on the **Soul Sabbath**, the day before Judgment Sunday, and for that reason, the service is chanted on the previous day, on the Friday. After Saint John was beheaded (Mark 6;14-29), his body was buried by his disciples in the Samaritan city of Sebaste, and his venerable head was thrown by Herodias in an unclean place. The holy Myrrh-bearer Joanna (27th June), the wife of King Herod's steward Chuza (Luke 8:3), secretly retrieved the holy head and placed it into a vessel and buried it in one of Herod's properties on the Mount of Olives. After many years, this property passed into the possession of a government official who took up the ascetic life with the name of Innocent. He built a church and a cell there. When they started to dig the foundation, the vessel with the venerable head of John the Baptist was uncovered. Innocent recognized its great holiness from the signs of grace emanating from it. This is the First Finding. Innocent preserved it with great piety, but fearful that the holy relic might be abused by unbelievers, before his own death he again hid it in that same place, where it was found. Upon his death the church fell into ruin and was destroyed. During the days of St Constantine the Great, when Christianity began to flourish, the holy Forerunner appeared twice to two monks journeying to Jerusalem on pilgrimage to the holy places, and he revealed the location of his venerable head. The monks uncovered the holy relic and, placing it into a sack of camel-hair, they made their way home. Along the way they encountered an unnamed potter and prevailed upon him to carry the precious burden. Not knowing what he was carrying, the potter continued on his way. But the holy Forerunner appeared to him and ordered him to flee from the careless and lazy monks, with what he held in his hands. The potter concealed himself from the monks and at home he preserved the venerable head with reverence. Before his death he placed it in a vessel and entrusted it to his sister. From that time the venerable head was successively preserved by devout Christians, until the priest Eustathius (infected with the Arian heresy) came into possession of it. He beguiled a multitude of the in-

firm who had been healed by the holy head, ascribing their cures to the fact that it was in the possession of an Arian. When his blasphemy was uncovered, he was compelled to flee. After he buried the holy relic in a cave, near Emesa, the heretic intended to return later and use it for disseminating falsehood. God, however, did not permit this. Pious monks settled in the cave, and then a monastery arose at this place. On 24th February, A.D. 452 St John the Baptist appeared to Archimandrite Marcellus of this monastery, and indicated where his head was hidden. This became celebrated as the Second Finding. The holy relic was transferred to Emesa, and later to Constantinople. The place where the Precious Head was first found on the Mount of Olives, was discovered during the erection of the Convent Church there in the nineteenth century and can be seen to this day in the Russian Convent of the Ascension on that same site. There is a feast also of the **Third Finding of the Head**, celebrated on 25th May / 7th June. The Forerunner's head stayed in Constantinople up to the time of the iconoclasts. Pious Christians left Constantinople secretly and took the head of St. John the Baptist with them, and then hid it in Comana (near Sukhumi, Abkhazia), the city where St. John Chrysostom had died in exile centuries earlier. After the Seventh Œcumenical Council, which reestablished the veneration of icons, the head of St. John the Baptist was returned to the Imperial capital, c. 850, which the Church commemorates as the Third Finding. When in 1204 A.D, the Imperial City was sacked by the Crusaders, the Head was taken to France, where to this day at least a portion of the precious relic is preserved at Amiens.



“WHEN WE WANT to bring a proposal before men of influence, we do not presume to do so except with lowliness and respect. How much more then should supplication be made to the Lord God of all the universe with utter humility and the purest devotion.”

VEN. BENEDICT OF NURSIA, + C. 550 A.D.

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

“THANK YOU for sending on this item (the article, ‘The Decree (Όροϛ) of the Holy Orthodox Church of Christ Concerning Latin Pseudo-Baptism, Issued in 1755,’ posted on the Synod in Resistance website) - I know you have sent other things on this subject in the past. But it is not clear what is the position of those, like me (and others), who were received into the Orthodox Church by chrismation (or even by profession of faith) in another jurisdiction... This appears to have been the approved practice in the Russian Church, even before the Revolution (Hapgood, with the imprimatur of St Tikhon, gives chrismation as the approved procedure for reception of converts from the main Western denominations). I am not challenging the position set out in your attachment - indeed, I would agree with it. I would just like clarification!” - K.G., by email

THOSE who were received by Chrismation were received by *œconomia*, and no one denies that that is possible; however the teaching of the Church is that on being chrismated you receive the Grace of Baptism. The same would apply to those received only by profession of Faith, but *œconomia* in this instance would only be permitted in some dire emergency. The teaching of the Church is clear: there are no Mysteries outside her, but the empty vessel of a non-Orthodox ceremony can be Grace-filled when the person joins the Church, wherein Grace abides.

If you look at the history of the various practices in the Church, - and the New Hieromartyr Hilarion wrote an excellent work on this, - you will see that practices have varied from time to time and place to place, but that the essential teaching has remained the same. However, do not get papal, and assume that because St Tikhon or anyone else gave an “imprimatur” it is necessarily right. Our Faith does not depend on the individual decisions of hierarchs, nor even of saints and martyrs, but on the “pious mind of the Church.” And all the Saints made mistakes... in Orthodoxy only One is infallible.

The variety of practices might cause some confusion, but they are in fact manifestations of the pastoral condescension of the Church.

In the 1970s ROCA reverted to a stricter practice of receiving all converts by Baptism, unless there was a real reason for using *œconomia*, when the Bishop's specific blessing was to be asked for reception by Chrismation. This they did because there was widespread misunderstanding about receiving people by Chrismation, and people were told that "We accept the Baptism of Roman Catholics, Anglicans, or whatever." Of course we do not.



NEWS SECTION

REPOSE OF H.R.H. PRINCESS MARGARITA Von BADEN-KARADJORDJEVIC

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS **Princess Margarita von Baden-Karadjordjevic** passed away on 2nd / 15th January at Farnham, Surrey, where she spent her last days. Princess Margarita was married to H.R.H. **Prince Tomislav of Yugoslavia**, the second son of **H.M. King Alexander I of Yugoslavia** and the brother of the last reigning **King of Yugoslavia, Peter II**, and they had two children Prince Nicholas and Princess Katarina. The marriage ended in 1981. The Princess was born on 14th July 1932 in Schloss Salem (Baden) in Germany. She was the daughter of Berthold, Margrave of Baden and Princess Theodora of Greece and Denmark, a sister of H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh.

The funeral was chanted at **St Sava Serbian Orthodox Church in London**, on Thursday 11th / 24th January. **His Eminence Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain** (Ec. Patr.), **His Eminence Archbishop Elissey of Sourozh** (M.P), **Their Graces Bishop Andrej**, who represented **His Holiness Patriarch Irenej of Serbia**,

and **Dositej of Great Britain and Scandinavia** (both Serbian Orthodox Church), led the ceremonies assisted by about a dozen priests and several deacons. The service was conducted in English, Serbian, Slavonic and Greek. **H.R.H. Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh**, travelled down from Sandringham to attend the funeral. T.R.H. Crown Prince Aleksander and Crown Princess Katherine led the list of mourners, which also included the Crown Prince's son, Prince Philip; Princess Katarina and Prince Nikola (Princess Margarita's children), and Victoria de Silva (Princess Margarita's granddaughter). Members of the von Baden family were also present, including the Margrave and Margravine of Baden (brother and sister-in-law), Hereditary Prince Bernhard (nephew) and Hereditary Princess Stephanie, and their three sons, Prince Leopold & Prince Michael of Baden (nephews); Prince Ludwig and Princess Marianne of Baden (brother and sister-in-law) and their three children. Queen Anne Marie of the Hellenes and Princess Sibilla of Luxembourg attended, as did Princess Sarvath of Jordan and her two daughters. Other Royal personages were also represented. At the end of the service Crown Prince Aleksander gave a heartfelt eulogy. He was followed by the Rt. Hon. Sir Desmond de Silva, QC. Bishop Andrej then gave a spirited tribute, speaking in English, then German, then Greek, and, showing exemplary courtesy, only then in Serbian. The Princess's body was to be taken and laid to rest in her birth family's cemetery, Stefansfeld, near Baden, on 28th January. We were moved by a reference Crown Prince Aleksander made about his aunt being able and willing to help in any situation, to help clean a floor or lay tables in a parish hall, - something which we experienced ourselves. She was known to the sisters at the Convent in London for many years, but first visited us at Brookwood in our early days there when we still lived in the old caravan. A friend, **Vera Stanojlovic**, wife of one our founders, **Bosko Stanojlovic**, brought her to the Brotherhood, came to the caravan and announced, "I have Princess Margarita in the car." When asked who that was, she replied, "The Duke of Edinburgh's niece!" We were horrified and expected to find her robed in ermine. In fact, she was dressed in an anorak and had a huge dog with her. At that time our land was overrun with bracken, a thing which she abhorred, and she told us she knew something that would kill it. A few

weeks later, she was back armed with bracken poison and sprays. At that time we had a young offender on parole from gaol staying with us under police supervision, and the two of them, the Princess and the criminal, spent the day dealing with the bracken. It has never come back! She also brought us homemade jams, and later with the late **Protopresbyter-Stavrophore Miloje Nicolic**, who is laid to rest in the Serbian section of the cemetery at Brookwood, helped us during the contention about the sacred relics of St Edward the Martyr. May the handmaid of God, Princess Margarita, now find rest with the saints and *Memory Eternal*.



SIR-UK NEWS

ADULT BAPTISM AT BROOKWOOD

NATALIA HAY of Woking was baptized and chrismated on Saturday, 23rd December / 5th January at St Edward's Church, and received the Holy Mysteries for the first time at the Divine Liturgy which followed. **Valentina Merritt** stood as her sponsor, and Natalia had prepared traditional Russian foods for the breakfast after the Liturgy. She attended the Liturgies celebrated here and at the Convent during the eight days in which she wore her chiasm robe. God grant that she remain steadfast in the Faith, and grant her *Many Years!*

WEDDING AT BROOKWOOD

HIS GRACE, **Bishop Sofronie of Suceava** briefly visited England over the last weekend of January (n.s.) and, while here, officiated at the wedding of **Catalin-Ion Tamasanu** and **Daniela Mustata** at Saint Edward's Church. The sponsors were **Paul and Adina Chiriac**. The Bishop also kindly took the opportunity to address some pastoral questions, speaking with Fr Alexis at **Bishop Ambrose's** request.

INTERMENT AT BROOKWOOD

VALENTINA CHILENKO was laid to rest in Saint Edward's Cemetery on Wednesday 3rd / 16th January. Her funeral had been held at the **Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Mother of God and All Saints, Ennismore Gardens, London**, and the **Very Reverend Arch-priest Maxim Nikolsky** officiated. After the interment, Fr Maxim and the mourners were offered tea in the Old Mortuary hall. May the handmaid of God Valentina find rest with the Saints. *Memory Eternal!*

FUNERAL SERVICE AT BROOKWOOD

A FUNERAL SERVICE was chanted for **Yordanka Kalnakova's uncle, Nichola**, on Saturday, 13th / 26th January. Nichola had died in Bulgaria, but relatives there did not have a funeral for him and, against Orthodox teaching, had his body cremated, and so for his spiritual comfort a service was chanted at Saint Edward's Church.

FESTAL CELEBRATIONS

OUR CHRISTMAS VIGIL, was attended not only by our own people, but also by a number of non-Orthodox friends and visitors; and although the feast fell on a Monday this year, and there was also a Liturgy at the Convent, the church was full for the service. After the Divine Services, we went to the Lord Pirbright Hall for the Festal Parish Breakfast, as our own hall in the Old Mortuary can no longer contain the numbers who come. Every year we have a list inviting people to subscribe what foods they will bring for the occasion, and each time it looks depressingly inadequate, but then, as if by a miracle, on the day itself the tables are full and there is plenty for everyone. Our thanks are due to **Elena Holden**, who organizes this, and all those who help us in this way, and to **Nick Kalnakov** for arranging to meet the key-holder of the Hall and opening up, and to those who put out the tables and cleared up after-

wards. *God bless you all.* The Liturgy on this day at the Convent had been in Romanian, celebrated by **Fr Justin** who had come over specially to provide the faithful from his country with a Liturgy, and so on the second day of the feast, the Synaxis of the Mother of God, we had a second Liturgy there celebrated in several languages and this was followed by the Sisters' usual breakfast and the Concert.

On Theophany, we celebrated the Royal Hours, Vespers and Liturgy on the eve of the festival at the Convent, and the Vigil and Liturgy on the day of the festival at Brookwood. This year, because the road conditions were hazardous and the way to Chertsey is via minor roads, we did not venture there, even though **Robin and Mary Haigh** offered us their usual hospitality. Instead we blessed the Waters at Saint Edward's. We had expected only a few people to attend because of the snows, but in fact about fifty people came, even though it was a weekday celebration. Oddly enough, or perhaps not so, people who lived locally did not seem to manage to come, but we had a family fly in from Ireland for the feast, three cars made it from Kent, and one family drove down from Norfolk!

CONVENT AGM

THE AGM of the Trustees of the **Convent of the Annunciation** was held on Wednesday 12th December, with all the trustees present, with the exception of Mother Vasilia (who was in hospital at that time). For technical reasons the accounts for the Trust had already been approved by all the trustees, and these and those for Brookwood's KEOT-CoLtd will now be available on the Charity Commissioners website.

VOLUNTEER WORKERS

Michael Visanu, Dorin Dumitru Visanu and Paul Chiriac came on St Basil's Day, and spent the day preparing the ground for a potato patch at the Brotherhood. This involved some heavy work removing

gravel and debris from the area just beyond our present kitchen garden, and their work was much appreciated. **Yordanka Kalnakova** has kindly come twice to help with cleaning in the church and the Old Mortuary.

VISITORS

A SMALL GROUP of pilgrims from the **Russian Orthodox Church of the Dormition on Harvard Road, Gunnersbury**, led by **Alexey Koloydenko**, visited on Saturday, 12th January (n.s). They chanted an Akathist to **St John of Shanghai** before the reliquary in our church which contains a portion of his relics and a set of his vestments. They also kindly donated a set of porcelain cups for the after-Communion wine, which they had brought from the Diveyevo Convent in Russia.

FREEWILL OFFERINGS

THE FREEWILL OFFERINGS left in the alms box by the candle stand for the **last six months of 2012 (n.s.)** are as follows: weekly average for **July £864.43**; for **August £272.68**; for **September £394.06**; for **October £262.15**; for **November £340. 06**; & for **December £320.47**. As we do not take collections at Saint Edward's, these figures represent the monies donated freely by people attending as they enter or leave the church.

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PRACTICAL TIP

WHEN approaching to receive the Holy Mysteries, try as far as you are able to position your mouth just a little, a couple of inches, above the rim of the Chalice. For reasons, beyond our ken, tall people seem to stand bolt upright, and so the spoon has to be raised to meet them with the consequent danger of spilling the Gifts, and short people seem to bend low - a practice which is often confounded (can this be deliberate?) - by their bowing their heads so that the celebrant cannot even see their mouth! This does not help.