



FROM THE FATHERS

“THE BATTLE is unending, and so also the toil. And why do I speak of the whole of life? Because even a part neglected leads on to great evils. For example, failing to give alms casts into Gehenna those who are neglectful regarding it, though it is not the whole of virtue, but only a part of it. Yet the virgins that were not adorned with this virtue are punished; for this the rich man was tormented; and they that gave no food to the hungry are themselves given over to the company of demons.”

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, + 407 A.D.

“*THEY ARE MULTIPLIED beyond number* (Ps. 39:8). At the call of the Lord the faithful are multiplied beyond number, because not a few come also to faith who do not belong to the elect. Here below they are mingled with the faithful through confession, but because of their reprobate way of life they shall not be vouchsafed to be partakers of the lot of the faithful. This sheepfold of the Church receives young goats with the lambs; but as the Gospel bears witness, when the Judge shall come, He shall separate the good from the bad, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25:32). Nor can they who are here slaves to the pleasures of their bodies be there numbered in the flock of His sheep. There the Judge shall separate from the lot of the humble those that now exalt themselves upon the horns of pride. Neither shall they receive a kingdom who, though formed in heavenly faith, with all their hearts seek the things of earth. And within the Church,

dearest brethren, you will see many such persons, but you must neither imitate them nor despair of them. What a man is today you can see, but what each one will be tomorrow no man knows.”

SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, + 603 A.D.

“IF HE [a person] THINKS he is repentant and nevertheless attempts to refute the person who, rightly or wrongly, is judging him, he is not worthy of forgiveness, since he acts as if he seeks a hearing in court and the opportunity to justify himself, hoping to achieve what he wants through a due process of law. Such behaviour is entirely at odds with the Lord’s commandments. And naturally so; for if one attempts to justify oneself, then one is appealing to lawful rights, not to love for one’s fellow men. In such a case grace is no longer our guiding principle, the grace that justifies the ungodly without the works of righteousness (see Rom. 4:5), but only on condition that we are grateful for rebukes and endure them with forbearance, giving thanks to those who rebuke us and remaining patient and unresentful before our accusers. For the more we pray for those who slander or accuse us, the more God pacifies those who bear enmity towards us and also gives us peace through our pure and persistent prayer.

VEN. PETER OF DAMASCUS,

ELEVENTH OR TWELFTH CENTURY

“DO not be scandalized immediately you hear some word that does not please you, and do not be disquieted when you see some action that appears, at least outwardly, unseemly. No, be patient and consider carefully whether the word is beneficial and good or whether he who said it has the intention and purpose of benefitting and correcting you, whereas you are scandalized on account of the passion that you have, believing in your suspicions.”

VEN. NICODEMUS OF THE HOLY MOUNTAIN, + 1809 A.D.

HOMILY ON THE MEETING OF THE LORD

(2nd / 15th February)

ST. THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE, + 1894 A.D.

WHAT A TENDER scene the Meeting of the Lord shows us! The venerable elder Simeon, holding the infant God in his hands, on either side of him the righteous Joseph and the Most Holy Mother of God. Not far away is the Prophetess Anna, an eighty-year-old ascetic and woman of prayer. Their eyes are all directed toward the Saviour. Their attention is absorbed by Him and they drink in spiritual sweetness from Him, which feeds their souls. You can judge for yourself how blessed was the state of these souls! However, brethren, we are called not only to think about this blessedness, but also to taste it in reality, for all are called to have and carry the Lord in themselves, and to disappear in Him with all the powers of their spirit. When we have reached that state, then our blessedness will be no lower than that of those who participated in the Meeting of the Lord. They were blessed who saw it; we shall be blessed who have not seen, but believed. Pay attention. I will show you briefly how to achieve this. Here is what you should do.

1. First of all, repent. Remember that nothing must be done in the spiritual life without repentance. No matter what anyone endeavours to seek, let the beginning of it be repentance. Just as a house cannot be built without a foundation, nor a field be sown or planted without first being cleared, so also without repentance we cannot begin our spiritual search; anything begun without repen-

tance was begun in vain. Thus, first of all, repent — that is, weep over everything bad that you have done, and resolve to do only what is pleasing to God. This will be like turning your gaze and your whole body towards the path of meeting the Lord, and taking the initial step upon that path.

2. Next, keep this state of repentance constant; establish for yourself a manner of life and conduct that would make every step or movement something directing your attention to our Lord and Saviour. Such an order of life will establish itself naturally, if:

a) you do everything that you do for the glory of the Lord and Saviour, for Christ's sake. Here we mean not only great deeds, but all deeds. For, seeing and hearing, silence and speaking, food and drink, sitting and walking, work and rest can all be dedicated to the Lord and sanctified by His All-Holy Name. There is no minute when we are not doing something; so, by thus dedicating your activity, you will be meeting the Lord minute by minute, directing all of your activities to His glory. You can even more conveniently do this and reap fruits from it if you also:

b) introduce into the order of your daily activities the practice of prayer, both in church and at home, and in general make it your rule to be a strict fulfiller of all the rules and order of the Holy Church to the last iota, without vain elaboration and distorted commentary, but with simplicity of heart. As the content of all prayer is the Lord and our turning to Him, by doing it and participating in it you will be meeting the Lord through your heart's sympathy and delight. If after this:

c) you fill all your interim time with reading the Scriptures about the Lord, listening to talks about Him, or with your own contemplation of Him and the great work of salvation that He wrought on earth, then you will see for yourself that nothing will remain within us or outside of us that does not bring remembrance of the Lord, bring Him to your attention, or carry your spirit to meet Him.

3. Just the same, you should not forget that all of these labours and occupations are only preparation. You should not stop at them, but rather strive onward. Just as food taken in rough form later imbues refined elements needed for life, so must these occupations performed visibly and tangibly turn into a spirit of a very refined inclination or striving toward the Lord. Namely, the labour of consecrating all our activities to the Lord should have the quality of reaching with our whole soul's desire only for the Lord; when we do all our prayers or attend the Divine services, a feeling should form in our hearts of accord only with the Lord and what is His. Underlying our reading and hearing the Holy Scripture about the Lord should only be the eager directing of our mind's attention toward the Lord alone. These labours are that very working of the field, and these strivings are the growth of what has been sown. The first are the stem and branches, the latter are the flower and fruit. When these inclinations come up in us, it will mean that our spirit has gone out with all its consciousness and disposition to meet the Lord. Since the Lord is everywhere, and He Himself seeks to meet with our spirit, their mutual meeting will then come about by itself. From that moment on, our spirit will begin to taste the blessedness of Righteous Simeon; that is, it will begin to bear in the embrace of its powers a striving for the Lord, Who is for it complete satiety and satisfaction. This is what is called tasting the Lord; rest in Him; mentally standing before the Lord; walking in the presence of the Lord, and ceaseless prayer, the object of all God's saints' labour, desire, and seeking.

I wish that all of you who celebrate the Meeting of the Lord be vouchsafed this blessing. If anyone complains that he would like the fruit but the labour it takes to get it is too hard, the answer is: Good. There is an easier method, a method simpler than the one laid out. Here it is! Repent; then, with zeal for keeping all of God's commandments, walk unflinchingly in the Lord's presence, striving for Him with all your mind's attention, all your heart's feelings, and all your will's desires. If you thus dispose yourself, you will soon meet the Lord. He will come down to you and abide in

you, as in the embrace of Righteous Simeon. There is no other way to lighten the labour needed to seek a meeting with the Lord. The Jesus Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*, is powerful and strong to help in this work. Again, however, not by itself; but under the condition that all the strength of our spirit be directed toward the Lord! *Be sober, be vigilant* (1 Ptr 5:8). *Seek those things which are above ... and your life is hid with Christ in God* (Col. 3:1, 3). Then, having become *one in spirit* with the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 6:17), you will behold and embrace the Lord, and *your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you* (Jn 16:22), neither in this age, nor in the age to come. Amen.



Sermon on Meatfare Sunday

PROTOPRESBYTER MICHAEL POMAZANSKY

+ 1988 A.D.

And from Thy presence wither shall I flee?

(Ps. 138:7)

THE QUESTION of the eternal suffering of sinners in the afterlife became one of the liveliest points of discussion in the Protestant world, and the rejection of the concept found fervent defenders in some preachers, as reported in the previous issue of *Pravoslavnaya Rus* [Orthodox Russia - a church periodical].

Human nature would rather answer this question in the negative; in the history of Christianity, there have long been attempts to see in the words about eternal Gehenna in the word of God only an allegory or with conditional meaning. This viewpoint sometimes even creeps in among us.

Meanwhile, Meatfare Week is upon us. The Gospel message about the Day of Judgment, *and these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal* (Matt. 25:46), is a terrible reminder in Orthodox churches not only on that Sunday, but for the entire week that follows.

The Saviour and the Apostles spoke unambiguously many times of the eternal condemnation of sinners, which is a fate which could befall each and every one of us. The Fifth Œcumenical Council rejected the teaching of the so-called Origenists about the ultimate salvation of all people and even of evil spirits. One must subject our thoughts to the voice of the Word of God with humility and with the knowledge that Divine determination is higher than our reasoning. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts*, says the Lord through Prophet Esaias. *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts* (Es. 55:8-9).

But man is generous towards himself. He is not inclined to doubt the promised eternal bliss of the righteous, but he doubts the eternal condemnation of sinners, carelessly ignoring the notion that in denying the latter, one must then deny the former. If we see the words about eternal suffering as conditional, then we must view the promise of eternal blessedness as conditional as well.

Are we to boldly delude ourselves that the Saviour is only frightening us with *everlasting fire* (Matt. 25:41)? That it is only a pedagogical tool coming from His lips? Shall we not lead ourselves under His wrath for such a thought, for such self-consolation? The Psalms say, *Why hath the ungodly one provoked God? For he hath said in his heart: He will not make enquiry* (Ps. 9:33).

Let us then not doubt the truth of God's word. If we are not able to discover God's thoughts for ourselves, let us be satisfied that we can ease our approach by wisely accepting God's determinations.

Human thought makes two main errors on the teaching of eternal sufferings. The first: how can temporary, even singular, actions lead to eternal damnation? The other: even if the condemnation is just, is not the law of fairness annulled by Divine love?

The first, as we see, touches upon the relationship between the temporal and the eternal. Yes, our actions can be singular, and one might say fleeting. Time rushes by, our actions, our words and thoughts are forgotten. But in some deeper sense, nothing in the world disappears forever: everything moves into eternity. The impetus created by one thought, one word, one action, leads to further impetuses and movements; it is simply that we do not notice them or take them into account. The planted seed gives root and prepares for a future harvest. Time is like a vessel in the ocean which is eternity.

Death will come, and we will be immersed in eternity, where the life of the soul continues, though there is no longer the cycle of day and night, there is no onset of fatigue followed by time of rest, there are no clocks, no time; and this life of the soul continues with open and widened eyes directed at ourselves and at all that surrounds us, and also at all the fruits that we cultivated in the earthly life, and as the consequences of our actions. *A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit* (Matt. 7:18).

Our future life is a direct consequence of what we do. Planted within time, it is harvested in eternity. Good deeds will not be lost. *For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward* (Mark 9:41), said the Saviour as He sent His disciples to preach. For this cup of water is the participation in the Good News of faith in Christ, even if the giver doesn't recognize it as such. Evil that is done will likewise not be lost in eternity. *Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment* (Matt. 12:36). An idle word can serve as a temptation, and could spur another person to sin and even to an offence.

Here we clearly see the logic of reward and punishment in future life: a person gathers for himself wealth for the Kingdom of God, and prepares for himself reward or punishment. *For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned* (Matt. 12:37). *Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant* (Luke 19:22), said the Lord in His parable on the talents. Such is the conclusion of pure fairness, this is the logic of justice. This is how the eternal fate of man is determined after temporary life on earth.

This fate, determined by justice, would be sorrowful for all of us without exception, since we are all impure and sinful, for *there shall in no wise enter into it [the Kingdom of God] any thing that defileth* (Rev. 21:27); in the Kingdom there is only holiness, there is not a spot of sin; meanwhile, the common state of man is a mix of good and evil. But meeting us halfway there is Divine mercy, the love of God.

Herein lies the answer to the second question: on the meeting and concord of the justice of God with the mercy of God. God's love came to us with the sacrifice of the Cross of the Son of God, prepared to remove impurity from our soul and to compensate for our lack of personal holiness. The Resurrection of Christ opened for us the Kingdom of the Son of God. But in order for the forgiving and all-embracing love of Christ to lead us into this Kingdom, we must respond to it, we must come to love our Saviour, come to love His brethren, to enter in the spirit and body into His Church, which is His Body, to joyfully commune with Him, to weave ourselves into that prayerful bond, which spreads like threads in all directions and bonds the body of the Church, centrally concentrated in God. Here we find cleansing, purification, justification, sanctification. Here *mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other* (Ps. 84:20). Truth, Christ, appears on earth, and the truth of justice bows down before it: *Truth is sprung up out of the earth; and righteousness hath looked down from heaven* (Ps. 84:21).

This is the foundation for our only hope for future life in the Kingdom of God: the mercy of God. We dare not declare our “rights.” We must not claim the “justice” of reward, only the love of Christ. But what if this love is rejected by mankind? What if the hand offered to us from above is not taken? What if the offer of forgiveness is unheeded? What if the response to this offer is antagonism and proud refusal?

Is the refusal of the Divine call possible? Yes, it is possible, reality demonstrates this. Voltaire expressed this attitude, declaring his hatred for Christianity. Nietzsche likewise, at least until his emotional illness overcame him, sharply despised the teaching of Christianity on humility, patience, mercy, and he created the prideful cult of the superman who rose above the concepts of good and evil. Similar is today’s militant atheism which declares war against all religion, especially the Christian faith. How are we to consider the afterlife of Nero alongside that of the Apostles Peter and Paul? Stalin together with the martyrs of our time? Those killed for the Faith, the truth of God and Church, and their executioners?

On a smaller scale we see how sin distances us from God. The first sin of Adam led to humanity seeking to hide from God. *Adam... Where art thou? I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself* (Gen. 3:9-10). The desire to hide from God and the impossibility of doing so is the beginning of suffering for the sinner. *From thy presence whither shall I flee?* (Ps. 138:6).

What are the sufferings of Gehenna, the fire, the worms, the sheer darkness in the future age? The Fathers of the Church point out that it is not a place, but a condition of existence. “Sinners,” writes St John the Damascene, “will be given to eternal flame, not the physical fire of earth, but of a kind known only to God.”

Mankind, to the extent that sin grows in him, departs from God and the Divine Kingdom; it becomes alien to him. In the words

of Dostoevsky, the sinner “returns the ticket” offered to him. Therefore the sinner scrapes together upon his own head the burning coals, committing himself to life without the rays of Divine light, to sheer darkness, where there is the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Is this the torment of the conscience? Not at all. A conscience that gnaws is the conscience that has not yet been extinguished; it is the light of truth that has not yet gone out in the soul. The sufferings of the conscience have a cleansing effect.

Those other sufferings are probably not the same. There, the loss of life in God is combined with an impossibility—as horrifying as it is imagine—an unwillingness to repent. The fall of the devil shows that the love of God does not disarm evil. How are pride, envy, jealousy, wrath, hatred to be replaced with gratitude, meekness, humility and love? What power is able to extinguish spitefulness against one’s condemnation, when the state of enmity might even comprise an excruciating passion of sorts?

“Many foolish people,” writes St John Chrysostom, “wish only to elude Gehenna: but I deem far more torturous than Gehenna to be outside of the glory of the Kingdom of God; and whosoever is deprived of it, I think, should weep not so much from the sufferings of Gehenna, as much as from the deprivation of heavenly blessings; for that one thing is the most cruel of all sufferings.” On the eve of Great Lent, the Holy Church reminds us of the Dread Judgment and of the punishment of sinners. But much more often, on a daily basis, she reminds us of the joy of the Kingdom of God, imparting within us the hope for it with the words of the Creed which we read every day: “I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come, Amen.” Let us embrace this reminder of Judgment Day with all our hearts, to bring earnest repentance during Lent and to strengthen us in the hope that the Lord does not deprive us, too, of His Heavenly Kingdom.



Teaching on the Divine Services of the Orthodox Church

BY ARCHPRIEST ALEXANDER RUDAKOV

PUBLISHED IN 1890 IN SAINT PETERSBURG

§ 69. The Communion of the Priestly Ministers. In preparing the Holy Gifts for partaking of Communion, the principal celebrant divides one quarter of the Lamb (the one with the XC seal at the top) into pieces for each of the priestly ministers present. The proto-celebrant bows slightly to the others asking their forgiveness, and they in turn bow to him. He then bows to the people on behalf of all the priestly celebrants, similarly asking the forgiveness for them all of their fellow-worshippers in the church. Each of the priests approaches to receive, and takes a portion for himself. The proto-celebrant greets each of the others with *Christ is in our midst*. To which they reply, *He is and shall be*. The deacons receive their portions from the proto-celebrant, and the same exchange of greetings is made in each case. Then holding their portion of the Lamb cupped in their right hands, each quietly says the prayer, *I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ...*, which is the latter part of our preparation for reception of the Holy Mysteries. After the senior minister there has received, the others also consume their portions. Then each of the ministers approaches the Chalice and takes three sips of the Holy Blood, and again the deacons receive from one of the priests. Having received, they wipe their lips with the communion cloth and kiss the lip of the chalice, as if they were kissing the pierced side of our Saviour, saying quietly, *Lo, this hath touched my lips, and mine iniquity is taken away* (see Esaias 6:7). When all the clergy have received, the two remaining quarters of the Lamb are divided into small portions for the communion of the lay people.

While this is being done, as if receiving the Holy Mysteries were meeting the newly Risen Christ Himself, hymns of the Resurrection are quietly read. When the Lamb has been divided into portions, these are placed in the Chalice. While these things are being done in the sanctuary, the chanters sing the appointed communion hymn. When this is ended, the pre-communion prayers may be read, or, sometimes, a short instruction is given.

§ 70. The Holy Gifts are brought out, and the Communion of the People. When the communion of the priestly ministers and the preparation of the Gifts is completed, the Royal Gates are opened, and taking the Chalice from the priest, the deacon brings it through the Royal Gates to the people, exclaiming as he does so: *With fear of God, with faith and love, draw nigh.* This means that those who approach should do so conscious of their own unworthiness, and with faith that within the Chalice there is the true Body and Blood of Christ, and that they should approach with love for Him. The faithful in the body of the church bow down, or on weekdays prostrate to the ground, as before the Risen Christ Himself, and on their behalf the chanters greet Him with the hymn, *Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us.* Thereupon, usually, the priest reads the prayer on behalf of the people, *I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, Who came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief. And I believe that This is indeed Thine immaculate Body, and This is indeed Thy precious Blood. Wherefore, I pray Thee: have mercy on me and forgive my transgressions, voluntary and involuntary, in word and deed, in knowledge and in ignorance. And vouchsafe that, uncondemned, I may partake of Thine immaculate Mysteries unto remission of sins and unto life everlasting. Amen. Of Thy Mystic Supper, O Son of God, receive me today as a communicant; for I will not tell of the Mystery to Thine enemies, nor will I give Thee a kiss as did Judas; but like the thief do I confess Thee: Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom. Remember me, O Master, in Thy Kingdom. Remember me,*

O Holy One, in Thy Kingdom. Then the faithful who have kept the fast and prepared themselves to receive the Holy Mysteries, approach to receive. At the bottom of the steps to the ambon, they make the sign of the Cross, and then cross their hands over their chests reverently, and hold their hands thus until then have received and have descended from the ambon again. The steps of the ambon are usually semi-circular, and this recalls the practice in classical times of judges being seated on a raised place approached by semi-circular steps. On approaching to receive the Holy Mysteries we are craving mercy, but we are also at the Judgment Seat of our Saviour Himself. The Gifts are imparted to each one of the faithful on a spoon, and so when they approach the Chalice, they open their mouths to receive. And each of the communicants is given Holy Communion by name. As soon as they have received, their lips are wiped by the attendant ministers, and then, in many churches though not in all, they kiss the foot of the Chalice. Having descended from the ambon, they go to the side where they are given three sips of warmed wine, and a piece of the antidoron (blessed bread), thus breaking their fast for the first time that day. While the faithful are receiving the Holy Mysteries, the chanters sing: *Partake ye of the Body of Christ; taste ye of the fountain of immortality.*

When all have received, the priest returns to the sanctuary and places the Chalice on the Holy Table. He then tips the particles on the diskos, which commemorated the living and departed Orthodox Christians for whom prayers had been asked, into the Blood of Christ, saying as he does so: *Wash away O Lord, the sins of all those here commemorated in Thy precious Blood, through the prayer of Thy Saints.* In this way it is manifest that all the members of the Church are united with Christ.

Then the priest turns to the people and makes the sign of the Cross over them, saying: *Save, O God, Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.* For by partaking of the Holy Mysteries, the faithful have become such, His inheritance. Affirming this, in

turn they respond: *We have seen the true Light. We have received the Heavenly Spirit. We have found the true Faith, in worshipping the indivisible Trinity, for He hath saved us.*

.... to be continued with “The Last Appearance of the Holy Gifts”



THE COMING MONTH

IN February we have the **Great Feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple** (2nd / 15th), which naturally falls forty days after the Nativity, and through the prophecy of St Simeon points to our lenten struggle leading to the Passion of the Saviour.

Because on this festival the Virgin Mother of God is seen bringing her infant Son into the Temple, the day is kept among many Orthodox peoples as a kind of **Mother’s Day**, in this reminding mothers that their first responsibility is to bring their children to God.

In February too, this year we have the four Sundays on which Gospel readings are appointed which serve as the subject of the service for that day and as a preparation for Great Lent: those of the Publican and Pharisee, of the Prodigal Son, of the Dread Judgment, and of Forgiveness. **Great Lent** will begin in 2016 on Monday 1st / 14th March, and **Pascha** (Easter) will fall on Sunday, 18th April / 1st May. According to the Church Calendar, Pascha always falls on a Sunday between 22nd March and 25th April, never earlier than the former and never later than the latter.

Among the Saints celebrated this month, we have:

The holy **Hieromartyr Charalampus of Magnesia**, the Martyrs Porphyrius and Baptus and Three Women Martyrs, who suffered in the year 202 (feast day 10th / 23rd). St Charalampus

spread faith in Christ through his preaching and example, guiding people on the way to salvation. News of this reached Lucian, the governor of the district, and the Saint was arrested and brought to trial, where he confessed his faith in Christ and refused to offer sacrifice to idols. Despite his extreme old age (he was 113 years old), he was subjected to heinous tortures. They lacerated his body with metal claws and scraped all the skin from his body. During this he turned to his tormentors and said, "I thank you, brethren, that you have restored my spirit, which longs to pass over to a new and everlasting life!" Seeing the Elder's endurance and his complete lack of malice, two soldiers, Porphyrius and Baptus, openly confessed Christ, for which they were immediately beheaded with a sword. Three women who were watching the sufferings of the Saint also began to glorify Christ, and were martyred. The military commander Lucius seized the instruments of torture and began to torture the holy martyr, but he was punished by being incapacitated. Then he entreated the saint to show mercy on him, and was healed, and he besought the Saint to baptize him. Through the Saint's endurance a multitude of witnesses came to believe in Christ. The governor reported these events to the Emperor Septimus Severus, who ordered St Charalampus to be brought to him in Antioch of Pisidia. Soldiers tormented the saint on their journey, and Severus ordered them to torture him yet more severely, but God protected him and he remained unharmed. Many miracles were worked through his prayers: he raised a dead youth, and healed a man tormented by demons. Thus many people came to believe in Christ. Even Galina, the Emperor's daughter, began to believe in Christ, and twice smashed the idols in a pagan temple. They beat the martyr about the mouth with stones and attempted to set his beard on fire, but the flames burned the torturer. Finally, St Charalampus was sentenced to beheading with a sword. During his last prayer, the heavens opened and the Saint saw the Saviour and a multitude of Angels. The holy martyr asked Him to grant that the place where his relics would repose would never suffer famine or disease. He also begged that there would be

peace, prosperity, and an abundance of fruit, grain, and wine in that place, and that the souls of these people would be saved. The Lord promised to fulfil his request and ascended to heaven, the soul of the Hieromartyr Charalampus following after Him. By the mercy of God, the Saint died before he could be executed.

This year, too, because it is a leap year, we have a full day to celebrate our **Venerable Father John Cassian the Roman**, and his fellow ascetic **Germanus of Dacia Pontica** (29th February / 13th March). Through his ascetic struggles and through his prolific writings, St John Cassian played an important rôle in bringing the learning and wisdom of the monastic Fathers of the deserts of Egypt and Palestine to the West.



POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

“I’VE NEVER dabbled in homeopathy but X and I have been talking about consulting a herbalist to perhaps help him with his diabetes/blood pressure/cholesterol. I hope that is ok. I’ve been reading about certain herbal teas that can be very beneficial.

What about ‘earthing’ / grounding? Do you know anything about this? - the belief that walking barefoot on the ground actually allows us to receive positive electrons from the earth which help to boost our body’s healing powers and allows it to fight disease more effectively - plus helps you sleep better. They do this by negating the negative electrons that our body produces naturally and because of modern day living (wifi etc). There are now ‘earthing’ blankets, sheets, pads that help you receive these positive electrons via your electric plug - without it being turned on - just by being connected to the ‘earth wire’ (I think). I’ve read that it can really help normalize blood sugar and blood pressure.

I am on a bit of a mission to get X off his medication - he has been taking it for 3 years now with no improvement, just negative side effects. We've switched to an almost completely organic diet, we drink kefir and fermented vegetables, raw milk, raw yoghurt and butter and we make brown sourdough spelt bread - X has seen an improvement in his readings these last 2 months but they are still not within the 'normal' rates.

What with this diet and school and the children I am finding fasting myself really difficult! Though I was reading about some new research that 'intermittent fasting' can do wonders for your health. One of the models they suggested is eating normally 5 days of the week and on day 3 and 5 fasting (about 500 calories of healthy food only). It looks suspiciously like the church's teaching to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.... I must start fasting properly! - N. P., by email

HERBAL MEDICINE is fine and natural - after all "modern medicine" is simply a streamlined updating of what we learned from herbal remedies. We use herbal teas here; Fr Y relies on nettle teas because of his sinus problems.

Grounding sounds like witchcraft again. I'm sure walking barefoot can be beneficial as it is what we were designed to do, but I would not, for one moment, put any more weight on it than that. Anything more is hocus-pocus.

Your bit about fasting is indicative too, because this should come FIRST, and the other dietary customs you keep should always be secondary to it, because these are matters which you have chosen to take up, and you are free to do so, but the fasts of the Church come from a Far Higher Authority. So if a conflict comes between your chosen diet and the fasts, without hesitation follow the fast.

And, of course, the Church fasts are not just concerned with our spiritual life, but also with our physical well-being, so if a modern theory happens to come up with an idea which seems akin to

Orthodox fasting regulations, that is because in this instance human wisdom has approached something the Church has known for centuries.

One other thought - much time, effort and money is often wasted by people searching out these disciplines and learning about them and trying to put them into practice [as seems to be the case here]. Would the time and effort not be better spent in learning what the Church teaches, in trying to pray and to fast? And the money be more beneficial if given in almsgiving?



NEWS from the communities in England of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

HIS GRACE, **Bishop Ambrose** kindly arranged to come to England over the Orthodox Christmas celebration, so that we could have full services both at the Convent and at Brookwood. On the eve of the Nativity and on the feast day itself, he celebrated the festal services with **Mother Vikentia** and her sisters at the Convent. Here at Saint Edward's our Liturgy on the day of the Nativity was attended by the **Mayor and Mayoress of Woking, Cllr Derek McCrum** and **Rosemary McCrum**. They were met at the church entrance by members of the Brotherhood immediately before the beginning of the Hours, and afterwards joined us at the Lord Pirbright Hall, where we held our Parish Breakfast because of the numbers that attend on that day. During the meal, **Teodora Sion**, one of our young parishioners, gave a short recital

on the flute, and a group of our Russian and Ukrainian women accompanied **Anna Rotherham** on the guitar in singing folk songs from their home countries. As usual, under the expert direction of **Elena Holden**, our parishioners provided a rich table of dishes for the buffet meal. The celebration was also attended by **Ann Harrington**, who writes a column in the ***Woking News & Mail***, and both she and the Mayor mentioned the celebration in their columns the following Thursday. It was particularly apparent from the piece by the Mayor that he had paid intelligent attention to the service in church.

THEOPHANY CELEBRATIONS

ON THE EVE of the Theophany, the Brotherhood clergy served at the **Convent of the Annunciation** for the Royal Hours, the Vespereal Liturgy of St Basil and the Great Blessing of Waters, returning for the evening Vigil at Brookwood. During this, waters were again blessed so that we should have a supply for the year at Saint Edward's. On the day of the Great Feast, after the Divine Liturgy at Brookwood, we made our way in car convoy to **Chertsey**, where, yet again, we enjoyed the hospitality of **Robin and Mary Haigh**, who allowed us to use the quay side adjoining their home to bless the waters of the Abbey River, this being near the site of the monastery founded there by St Erkenwald in the seventh century and the site of the martyrdom of the Abbot Beocca and his monks during the later Viking incursions. As usual, numbers of the townspeople attended this service, and as has become their custom brought their dogs to be sprinkled with the blessed waters. Besides the dogs, swans, herons and ducks came to observe what was going on. The Haighs then kindly provided those who had participated with refreshments in the medieval barn on their property. This year, because they were slightly short-staffed, **Presbytera Marina Popova** and **Boryana Gagova** from our congregation helped serve the teas.

BAPTISMS AT BROOKWOOD

CRISTIAN, the infant son of **John and Elena Chapman** was baptized at St Edward's on Friday, 19th December / 1st January, the feast of **Sts Boniface and Aglais**. The celebrant was **Priestmonk Justin** from Romania and the Godparents **Daniel and Daniela Vraciu**. After the Mysterion the participants enjoyed a celebratory meal together. The following Sunday, Fr Justin celebrated the Divine Liturgy in Romanian at the Convent in Brondesbury Park.

SAVA, the infant son of **Petru and Gabriella Grigoras** was baptized on Saturday, 27th December / 9th January, the feast of the **Holy Protomartyr Stephen**. The celebrant was **His Grace, Bishop Ambrose**, and the Godparents **Florin and Elena Cotoc**, and again the participants enjoyed refreshments afterwards in the Mortuary. The forty day prayers for Sava and his mother, Gabriella, were read at the Convent before the Divine Liturgy on Sunday 11th / 24th January.

Pray that our Saviour keep Cristian and Sava in the confession of a godly faith all the days of their lives.

HIERARCHAL LITURGY OF ST JAMES

ON THE SUNDAY immediately after the Nativity, Bishop Ambrose celebrated the **Divine Liturgy of St James the Brother of God** at Saint Edward's. We have celebrated this Liturgy here in previous years on this Sunday and on the feast of St James, but this is the first time in our 33 years at Brookwood that the celebration has been headed by a Bishop. His Grace was assisted by **Fr Œconomos Stephen Fretwell, Fr Gabriel Lwani, Fr Borislav Popov** as well as the two Brotherhood clergymen. Usually on this Sunday, immediately following the feast, congregations are low, but this year again the church was packed.

Bishop Ambrose preached during the Liturgy and explained the history and derivation of this service. **Catalin Mustata** kindly provided a speaker system so that the Bishop's words could be clearly heard by all. After the service and our usual Parish Breakfast, during which His Grace took the opportunity to meet and speak to as many parishioners as possible, **Ecaterina Rogojina** took the Bishop back to London.

BURIAL AT BROOKWOOD

VALENTINA BOEKE, a parishioner of the **Russian Orthodox Church of the Dormition on Harvard Road, West London**, was laid to rest in St Edward's Cemetery on Thursday, 14th January n.s. The funeral was chanted by **Archpriest Vladimir Vilgerts** and **Archpriest Peter Baulk**. About eighty mourners accompanied Valentina to her grave, and afterwards they attended a mercy meal at a venue in nearby Goldsworth Park. Fr Peter, however, stayed for the rest of the afternoon at the Brotherhood to enjoy afternoon tea and a chat with us. May God's handmaiden, Valentina, find rest with the Saints and Eternal Memory.

ORTHODOX AID FUND 2015

IN 2015, the **Orthodox Aid Fund**, run by our Brotherhood, distributed a **total of £12,509.13** to various church, humanitarian and environmental charities. None of this was allotted to the King Edward Orthodox Trust Company Limited, which administers our property here at Brookwood, or to anything from which the Brotherhood would have benefitted financially. Everything was given out. However, of the total, **£3,180.14** was given to the **Missions in Africa run by Bishop Ambrose**, and **£3,924.30** to the **soup kitchens run by our Church in Greece**

to aid the many displaced and needy persons there. We started the Orthodox Aid Fund in 1999, and for many years distributed between three and four thousand pounds per annum. In 2009, the total was £12,016.92, our previous highest, and then for several years we levelled off to between eight and nine thousand, until this year, when we exceeded our previous record total. Our thanks to our parishioners, friends, and the readers of this magazine who, through their generosity and almsgiving, provided us with the means of achieving this. ***God's blessings be upon you all.***

CONVENT TRUSTEES A.G.M.

THE Annual General Meeting of the trustees of the **Convent of the Annunciation** was held on Friday, 8th January, with their accountant, **Darren Harding**, present. The accounts should soon be posted on the website of the Charity Commissioners, under registered charity number 1120545.

RADIO INTERVIEW

SHARON GALLIFORD of ***Radio Woking*** visited us on Thursday, 31st December, to record an interview about the then forthcoming Orthodox Christian celebration of Christmas.

VOLUNTEERS

IN TIME for our Christmas celebration, **Ioan Turcu** replaced the lights over the Shrine of St Edward, within the relic case on the north side of the church, and over the notice board in the narthex. He was helped in this by **Daniel Ciupercovici**, who not only assisted him, but cleaned the roof beams of the church which

we had not been able to reach since the church had been re-roofed. Their day's work began immediately after breakfast and was completed just before Vespers in the evening.

ON the Synaxis of St John the Baptist, two other Romanian parishioners, **Florin Ungurianu** and his companion **Daniel the Tall**, came for Mattins, joined us for breakfast, and then spent a large part of the rest of the day spring-cleaning the main hall and the kitchen in the mortuary.

Our thanks are due to these and to all the many others who in so many ways helped us with the various feasts and celebrations over the period. Many of these we have tried to thank by sending round an email, but if there are any we have missed or overlooked we ask your forgiveness. May God's blessings be your thanks.



PRACTICAL TIP

PLEASE SPARE a loving thought for “bad” people! Often we notice that we are asked to pray for people, and the request is accompanied by a catalogue of their perceived virtues. This, I suppose, follows the example of the Jewish elders who besought our Saviour to come and heal the servant of the centurion (Luke 7:2-5), and is entirely natural. But remember that people whom we might consider bad also need prayers. So ask prayers for those who have hurt you, cheated you, lied to you, abused you, been angry with you, slighted you, or even gossiped about you, etc., and pray earnestly for them yourself. If your perception of them is anywhere near the truth, and it may well not be so, then they are undoubtedly in even more need of prayers. This tip is close to the heart of the compiler of this magazine as he evidently falls into the category of the bad, and needs your prayers.