



## FROM THE FATHERS

“THE ELDER [Abba Moses] was asked, ‘What is the good of the fasts and watchings which a man imposes upon himself?’ And he replied, ‘They make the soul humble. For it is written, *Behold my lowliness and my toil, and forgive all my sins* (Ps. 24:18). So if the soul gives itself all this hardship, God will have mercy upon it.”

VEN. MOSES THE BLACK, + 405 A.D.

“JUST as the most bitter medicine drives out poisonous creatures, so prayer joined to fasting drives evil thoughts away.”

AMMA SYNCLETICA OF ALEXANDRIA, FOURTH CENTURY

“GOD does not accept prayers, fasting, or mortification without reverence, good order and humble-mindedness.”

VEN. JOSEPH OF VOLOKALAMSK, + 1515 A.D.

“THE HOLY CHURCH cries out: fasting is not just avoiding food, but putting away all evil, controlling the tongue from idle-talking and gossip, forbearing from anger, and abstaining from lust, falsehood and flattery. Whoever fasts in this way, his fast is pleasing to God.”

VEN. ANTONY OF OPTINA, + 1865 A.D.

*IN his First Epistle to Timothy, the Holy Apostle Paul gives us an instruction which is reiterated time and again in the commemorations that we have throughout the lenten period: **Take heed unto thyself, and unto doctrine** (1 Tim. 4:16). Bearing this in mind, we have, this month, included two articles one on taking heed to doctrine by **Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi**, and one on starting a life in the world attending to oneself by **Saint Philaret of Moscow**.*

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# “The Ultimate Guaranty of Truth”: God and His Word<sup>1</sup>

*by His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi,  
Acting President of the Holy Synod in Resistance*

IT HAS BEEN very aptly observed that the passage from the Acts of the Apostles<sup>2</sup> which is read at the commemoration of the three hundred eighteen Holy and God-bearing Fathers of the First Œcumenical Synod in Nicæa *has a theological density and a perduring timeliness that render it a cornerstone of the whole of the teaching of the Apostles and, by extension, of the teaching of the Church throughout the ages.*<sup>3</sup>

In his celebrated oration to the Shepherds of the Church in Ephesus, the Holy Apostle Paul prophesies (“for I know”) that the local Church will be assailed by heretics (“men speaking perverse things”), who will provoke schisms (“to draw away disciples after them”).

These heretics and schismatics will come forth, the Holy Apostle stresses, from among yourselves, from you, the Bishops appointed by God (“of your own selves shall [they] arise”), and the fall of these Shepherds will be not only most tragic, but also most perilous for the Church, for her inner identity, and for her soteriological mission.

Since, therefore, not even Bishops are exempt from a “fall from within [the Body of the Church],” St. Paul’s firm exhortation, “Therefore watch,”<sup>4</sup> assumes pan-ecclesiastical dimensions; that is, it is directed both to the Shepherds and to the flock.

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THE FAITHFUL bear an equal responsibility before the Truth and ought likewise not relax their vigilance or have blind confidence in their Shepherds; indolence and spiritual drowsiness have no place in the Living Body of Christ.

For this reason, “the Orthodox Christian should always seek with perspicacity the dividing line that separates Orthodoxy from heterodoxy; and one’s concern in this instance should be all the more deep and intense, since he is dealing with a matter of eternal life and salvation.”<sup>5</sup>

The spiritual content of the injunction “Watch!” pertains not just to the safeguarding of our personal integrity from the machinations of unclean spirits through our passions, but also to the safeguarding of Apostolic and ecclesiastical Tradition, since right Faith and Truth are identical with salvation.

Prayer, as a personal and collective exercise in the Church, as a fountain of—and pathway to—purification, illumination, and deification, cannot be permitted to function at the cost of attentiveness to the integrity of the Faith and the integrity of those who transmit that Faith.

The charismatic life in Orthodoxy has always been indissolubly bound up with charismatic zeal for the preservation of the sacred legacy of Orthodoxy, and it is because of this connection that the Confessors of our Faith have always been par excellence monastics.

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CONSEQUENTLY, a crucial question arises: If even Shepherds are subject to “falls,” to heresy and apostasy, does this entail some “sense of general insecurity” within the Church? If such is the case, what, for the faithful, should be “the ultimate guaranty of Truth”?<sup>6</sup>

The Holy Apostle Paul is crystal-clear in his response: “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His Grace.”<sup>7</sup> I commend you to God and to the word which His Grace has revealed to us. This word of His will safeguard you from every error and deviation.

The word that derives from revelation is for the Church a foundation and a yardstick: God, through the word of His Grace as it is revealed to us in the sacred texts of the Church (Biblical, Synodal, and Patristic), constitutes for the faithful the ultimate guaranty of Truth, grounds us unshakeably in the Body of Christ, and guides us unerringly to the “inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, for the God-Bearing Paul, the highest and sole hope and, at the same time, our totally infallible criterion of Truth is God Himself and His word, which authoritatively judges, assays, and appraises the theologies, the theories, and the actions of the fallen ecumenists, who in our age speak and do perverse things.

Absolute fidelity, in deed and word, to this ultimate guaranty of Truth demonstrates who is truly keeping watch in the Holy Spirit....

*May 26, 2008 (Old Style)  
Sunday of the 318 God-bearing Fathers*

1 Translated from “«Τὸ ὕστατο ἐγγύγιο τῆς ληθείας» Ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ὁ λόγος Του” in Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐνοστιασις καὶ Μαρτυρία, Series 3, No. 2, April-June 2008, pp. 3-4.

2 Acts 20:16-18, 28-36.

3 Archbishop Stylianos of Australia, Στὸ Περιθώριο τοῦ Διαλόγου (1980-1990) [On the Peripheries of Dialogue (1980-1990)] (Athens: Ekdoseis “Domos,” 1991), p. 79.

4 Acts 20:31. 5 Archbishop Stylianos, Στὸ Περιθώριο τοῦ Διαλόγου, p. 85.

6 Ibid., p. 83. 7 Acts 20:32. 8 Ibid.



“FASTING ought to be fulfilled not in abstinence of food only, but much more in the cutting off of vices.”

**SAINT LEO THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, + 461 A.D.**

# HOW TO LIVE ACCORDING TO THE FAITH

LESSONS OF THE GREAT ARCHPASTOR, SAINT PHILARET,  
METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW  
1783 A.D. - 1867 A.D.

FAITH in Christ has existed on earth for almost 2,000 years now, and is in no way overcome. Hundreds of thousands of people have joyously borne terrible torments out of love for Christ, for faith in Him. And if in present times there have appeared *men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the Faith* (2 Tim. 3:8) and stood against the Faith and the Church of Christ, all their efforts are in vain: the Lord said that *the gates of Hades shall not prevail against His Church* (see Matt. 16:18). Let us look at ourselves. Is there among us firm faith and love for Christ? Do we not stifle it with our passions, laziness, doubts? Ah, friends, without faith in the Lord Christ there is no salvation! We must by all means kindle in ourselves the spirit of faith, that is, stimulate it, feed it with prayer, the Word of God, patience, sincere remembrance of the Saviour, Who suffered for us. All of this can be done every day.

## WHAT TO DO IN THE MORNING

When you wake up, first of all let your soul and heart say “Glory to Thee, O Lord, Who has preserved us this night! Glory to Thee, Who has shown us the light! Lord, bless this day for us!” In doing this, think about how God gives you the day which you could not give to yourself, and devote the first hour, or perhaps even the first quarter hour of the day given you and offer it as a sacrifice to God, in grateful, supplicatory prayer. The more zealously you do this, the more you will sanctify your day, the more strongly you will protect yourself from the temptations that we meet every day.

## THE DWELLING AND CLOTHING OF THE CHRISTIAN

From the start of the morning and throughout the day, make thought about Christ the soul of your life, the moving force of your actions. So, for example, if you glance over your dwelling, remember Christ in the manger, in swaddling clothes, lying on straw, all through this life not having where to lay His head, finally imprisoned, nailed to the Cross, and thank God for your house, your shelter, however humble and poor it may be. Do not envy magnificently decorated mansions: the mansion of Christ is a pure heart!

As you dress in your simple clothing, remember Christ stripped naked and then robed in the clothing of mockery. Do not dwell on apparel, do not follow slavishly the whims of fashion, but try to garb yourself in goodness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, gazing mentally on the meek and humble heart of Jesus.

If you are eating a meal, remember the vinegar and gall that Christ tasted, and do not demand plentiful, luxurious food and drink: the heavenly Guest does not love to enter the house of feasting, but always loves to enter the one that opens the door of his heart to Him. Place in your heart Christ suffering and dying on the Cross, and in His unseen presence mortify your passions and lusts.

## CONTACT WITH PEOPLE

Later, when you deal with people, both relatives and others, before saying a word, think about what its effect will be, and think even more seriously before you do something in their presence, for actions speak louder than words.

## WORLDLY AFFAIRS

If you are undertaking anything, before asking any other adviser, ask the advice of faith. Appeal in the words of the Apostle: *Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?* (Acts 9:6). Is what I would undertake pleasing to Thee, Lord? If it is pleasing, bless it; if not, do not let me do what is

displeasing to Thee. And then listen to what the Lord tells you in your conscience, in your reason, in the counsels of pious and wise people and, having begun the course that you select, pray in your heart, *O Lord, make haste to help me* (Ps. 69:1).

## ABSENCES

If you are going anywhere, go with God, as our pious forebear said as a farewell; *walk before me* (Gen. 17:1) as the Lord Himself demanded; always see Him before you, for He is at thy right hand (see Ps. 15:8). As much as possible keep in your thoughts and in your heart that God sees you, so that you may be both ashamed and afraid to attempt anything unworthy before the eyes of God.

## WORD AND FEELINGS

If you enter the company of people, behave with extreme caution. If you hear a word of praise for yourself there, be careful: praises frequently conceal flattery and can arouse in you self-satisfaction and neglect of your further improvement. If you hear an insulting or humiliating word, take care not to become inflamed with anger which *worketh not the righteousness of God* (James 1:20). Answer the one who insults you either with silence or a meek word of truth. If you hear a word that accuses a neighbour, be careful that you not take part in the sin of someone else's tongue. Do not join in words that are more harmful to the one who judges than to the one being judged. If you hear a word that saddens one with bad news, be careful lest your sorrow become stronger than your common sense; dissolve it with hope in God's mercy and with the warm prayer: *O my Rejoicing, deliver me from them which have encircled me* (Ps. 31:7). Endure without complaint sorrows and misfortunes. Sorrows are inescapable on the path leading to the Kingdom of God! Many are the sorrows of the righteous! Christ Himself endured them; the Mother of God endured them as well. Without sorrows we will not be saved, but even in the depth of sorrow believe that the Lord loves you truly, and is only testing you. Remember: you sometimes return home from afar by a bad road, in a storm, in frost, or in terrible heat, but you go patiently,

willingly; likewise patiently go by the difficult and sorrowful path to the heavenly home, the Kingdom of God.

## CAUTION REGARDING HARMFUL BOOKS

If you see in a letter or a book a word of unbelief, irreverence, or indecency, turn your eyes away from it quickly, do not entice yourself with the thought of reading it out of curiosity or for amusement. Do not touch filth. Do not play with fire. Do not desire to experience the taste of poison.

In general, in your relations with people be peaceable, just, compassionate, do good even to your enemies, imitating Him Who shines His sun on both the evil and the good.

If you live and act in this manner, then, when you pray, nothing will obstruct your prayer's path to heaven.

## ATTENDING CHURCH

When the time comes, and especially the time put aside for God and His house, a feast day or the hour of Divine Services, hurry to tear yourself away from business and worldly cares, and voluntarily and zealously offer yourself to God in His church. When you enter the church bring to mind the promise of the Lord to those that gather in His name: *there am I in the midst of them* (Matt. 18:20), and stand reverently in church, as before the very face of Christ, and pray to Him that he sanctify you by His holiness, to animate you by His prayer, and enlighten you with the word of the Gospel and the Grace of the Mysteries.

Take note of this, too: in the church, angels serve with us and guard the holiness dwelling there. Once, in the Lavra of Saint Theodosius near Jerusalem, Abba Leontius, coming one Sunday to church to receive the Holy Mysteries, saw an angel standing on the right side of the Holy Table, and when the elder, being afraid, turned to run to his cell, the voice of the angel called to him: "From the time this Holy Table was consecrated, I have been charged to stay by it." Remember this, beloved, and stand reverently.

And, if you feel that only your body is standing in church, while your mind thinks of home, or the market, or a place of merriment, collect yourself. Hasten to bring back your mind that has strayed, join it to God in your heart, force it to strive towards God, Who looks upon you. When you hear the word of God, open up not only your bodily ears, but your spiritual ones as well, open your heart, receive this heavenly Bread and with it nourish not only your memory, but also your life and work.

## ON COMMUNION

When you are preparing to be a communicant of the Body and Blood of Christ, or are simply present at this Mystery, cleave in mind and heart to the Cross and the Tomb of the Lord, to the Body of Christ, suffering, dying, buried, risen, glorified and believe that your faith's touching Him will be more substantial than the touching of His garment by the woman with an issue of blood, and Christ's power [will] go out (Luke 8:46) to purify and elevate your powers of soul and body.

## HOW TO CELEBRATE FEAST DAYS

Having left church and returned home, do not rush to worldly business on days dedicated to God: business that you illicitly conduct in festal times will bring you no benefit. Realize most of all that if you do not come to thank and glorify God in His church, then you can be sure that He will not send down His blessing on your business outside the church (Haggai 1:9). And if sometimes you decide to excuse yourself from attending the church, be in fear lest you suddenly be overtaken by death, and lest it be said of you: *Remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things... but now (in eternity) thou art tormented* (Luke 16:25). God preserve you from this fate.

Never forget that your soul is also God's temple, and if at any time an impure thought and evil desire draws near to your soul, and will draw your body as well towards sin, hasten to protect yourself with the words said to the first Christians, and consequently to you: *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?* (1 Cor. 3:16). Then say to yourself: How can I dare to ruin the temple of

God, by sin and iniquity? How can I be so bold as to insult and alienate the Holy Spirit!

## WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENING

Now the day has ended - you are going off to sleep. Ponder the thought that God gives you rest from labours, and take the first fruits of the time of your rest and dedicate it to God with pure and humble prayer. Its fragrance will draw an angel close to preserve your rest. While preparing for sleep, remember death, of which sleep is an image and threshold, and with a prayer of faith surrender yourself to Him that is *the Resurrection and the Life* (Jn 11:25). But when you can conquer sleep, or when it does not conquer you, remember the Lord's *name in the night* (Ps. 118:55).

Such should be the constant disposition and activity of the believer that he may gradually draw near to that state of soul in which the holy Apostle Paul says of himself: *I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me... Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me* (Gal: 2:20)!

TRANSLATED BY SERAPHIM F. ENGLEHARDT  
FROM "ORTHODOX LIFE" [IN RUSSIAN], NO.10, 1952



## **FROM THE SACRED CANONS**

IF ANY BISHOP, or presbyter, or deacon, or reader, or chanter does not fast the holy forty-day fast for Pascha, or the fourth day [Wednesday], or the day of Preparation [Friday], let him be deposed, unless he be hindered by some bodily infirmity. If he be a layman, let him be refused communion.

CANON 69 OF THE 85 APOSTOLIC CANONS

# The Coming Month

THIS YEAR, except for the first four days, the whole of March falls within Great Lent. Perhaps the best description of the lenten observances and their significance is given in the introduction to the English translation of *The Lenten Triodion*, an essay entitled, *The Meaning of the Great Fast*, written by **Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia** in 1977, when he was yet an Archimandrite. We would advise all those of you whose first language is English to obtain a copy of this book for use during Lent, and to read this excellent study.

Among the saints we commemorate during the month, we have:-

The **Venerable Benedict of Nursia, the Cænobiarchof the West** (14th / 27th March) was born in 480 A.D. in Nursia, a small town some sixty miles northeast of Rome. In his youth, his parents sent him to Rome to study. Unsettled by the immorality around him, he decided to devote himself to a different sort of life. At first he settled near a village church dedicated to the holy Apostle Peter, but notice of his ascetic life compelled him to go farther into the mountains. There he encountered the hermit Romanus, who tonsured him as a monk and directed him to live in a remote cave at Subiaco. From time to time, the hermit would bring him food and give him spiritual guidance. For three years the Saint waged a harsh struggle with temptations and conquered them with the grace of God. People soon began to gather to him for guidance. The number of disciples grew so much, that the Saint divided them into twelve communities. Each community was comprised of twelve monks and was under the direction of an elder monk chosen from among the Saint's experienced disciples. Only the novice monks remained with St Benedict for instruction. The strict monastic rule that St Benedict established for the monks was not approved of by all, and more than once he was criticized and abused by dissenters. Finally he settled in Campania, where he founded the Monte Cassino monastery, which for a long time was a centre of spiritual enlightenment for the Western part of the Church. St Benedict wrote his Rule, based on the experience of life of the Eastern desert-dwellers and the precepts of St John Cassian the Roman.

This rule guided Western monasticism for centuries. It prescribed the renunciation of personal possessions, as well as unconditional obedience, and constant work. It was considered the duty of older monks to teach the younger and to copy ancient manuscripts. This helped to preserve many memorable teachings from the first centuries of Christianity. St Benedict was granted by the Lord the gift of foresight and wonderworking. He healed many by his prayers, and he foretold the day of his death in A.D. 547. The main source for his Life is the second Dialogue of St. Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, whose feast day is also in March. St Benedict's sister, St Scholastica is commemorated as a saint (10th / 23rd February) and also became renowned for her strict ascetic life. It is recorded that she used to come once a year to see him, and the Saint would go to a house not far from the gate to see her. She came one day, according to her custom, and her venerable brother likewise came, with his disciples. After they had spent the whole day in the praise of God and pious conversation, the night drawing on they took their meal together. As they were yet sitting at table, his sister entreated him saying, "I beseech you, leave me not this night, that we may talk until morning of the joys of the heavenly life." To this he answered, "What is this you say, sister? By no means can I stay out of my monastery." At that time the sky was calm, and not a cloud was to be seen. The holy woman, therefore, hearing her brother's refusal, clasped her hands together upon the table and, bowing her head upon them, she prayed to Almighty God. As she raised up her head from the table there began such a violent lightning and thunder, with such abundant rain, that neither venerable Benedict nor his brethren could put foot out of doors. Then the man of God was sad and began to say, "God Almighty forgive you, sister; what is this you have done?" She answered, "I prayed you to stay and you would not hear me; I prayed to Almighty God and He heard me. Now, therefore, if you can, go forth to the monastery and leave me." But he, not able to go forth, was forced to stay. Thus it happened that they spent the night in vigil and were content with spiritual conversation about heavenly matters. The next day the venerable woman returned to her cell and the man of God to his monastery. Three days later, while standing in his cell, he saw the soul of his sister depart out of her body and, in the form of a dove, ascend

and enter into the celestial mansions. Rejoicing to see her great glory, he gave thanks to God in hymns and praises and announced her death to the brethren. He sent them to bring her body to the monastery and caused it to be buried in the same tomb that he had prepared for himself. By means of this it happened that, as their minds were always one in God, so also their bodies were not separated in their burial.



## ON CHURCH MINISTERS

IT IS HOPED that when he visits England for the Great Feast of the Annunciation, **His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methoni** will ordain Subdeacon Borislav Popov to the diaconate (on Saturday 6th April n.s., at Saint Edward's), and so it seems appropriate in this issue to give some teaching regarding this ministry, following on from that which we gave last September on readers and subdeacons.

The diaconate is the first degree of what are called in Western terms the major or higher orders: deacon, priest, Bishop. In the Russian nomenclature they are more happily called priestly orders. Deacons and priests are therefore ordained within the sanctuary, and Bishops are consecrated there; whereas readers and subdeacons are set aside for their ministry by the Bishop in the centre of the church. Furthermore, whereas readers and subdeacons are made during the reading of the Hours, those in priestly orders are ordained during the Divine Liturgy itself.

Because they do not read the prayers at the consecration of the Holy Gifts (*anaphora*), but only serve at that point, deacons are ordained after the consecration, immediately after the exclamation, *And the mercies of our great God and Saviour....* Priests read the prayers of the *anaphora* and so are ordained prior to it, after the chanting of the Cherubic Hymn. Bishops, who have the fullness of the Apostolic ministry, are consecrated even earlier during the Divine Liturgy, after the Trisagion and before the

Apostolic readings. In any one Liturgy, only one Bishop may be consecrated, only one priest ordained, and only one deacon ordained.

When we reach the point where the deacon is to be ordained, the Bishop is seated at the north-west corner of the Holy Table. The subdeacons then take the candidate from the middle of the church, laying one hand on his neck and with the other holding his hand, and they bow him down to the ground before the altar. The deacon exclaims, *Command*; and they lead him forward again, and the bowing and exclamation are repeated. As they come to the Holy Doors of the sanctuary, they do this again, and this time the deacon exclaims, *Command, Most Reverend Master*. That they take the candidate “forcibly” and bow him down, reminds us that no one should seek ordination or preferment, and the three exclamations are addressed first to the people, then to the clergy and lastly to the Bishop, so each might have the opportunity, if need be, to object to the ordination.

At the Holy Doors, the deacon takes the candidate into the altar, and he bows down before the Bishop, who signs his head with the sign of the Cross. The deacons then take him around the Holy Table, and as he processes he kisses the four corners of the Table, and coming to the Bishop again kisses his hand and knee. This is repeated twice more. By his kissing the Holy Table the candidate dedicates himself always to serve there, and by kissing the Bishop’s hand and knee he signifies both his gratitude to him and his godly obedience to him. As these three processions are made the choir chants first a hymn to the Martyrs, then one to Christ (‘The Apostles’ boast and Martyrs’ joy’), and lastly one based on the prophecy of Esaias concerning the Virgin being with child and bearing a Son. The first of these reminds the candidate that his commitment must be like that of the Martyrs, unto death; the second that his ministry, like that of the Apostles and Martyrs must be to our Saviour; and the third that the foundation of the priestly ministry itself is the incarnation of the Word of God.

The Bishop then stands and the candidate kneels on his right knee. A man being ordained priest kneels on both knees, signifying the fuller ministry. He places his palms crossways on the edge of the Holy

Table and lays his forehead upon his hands. The Bishop then blesses him three times, signifying the strength he will need to fulfil his ministry, for he is strengthened by the power of the Cross. The Bishop then lays his hand on the candidate's head and prays that that which is infirm or wanting Grace Divine might heal, and he calls upon us to pray for him. The clergy and then the people chant a threefold *Lord have mercy* slowly while the Bishop reads the prayer of ordination quietly over him. The Protodeacon then intones a litany praying for the Bishop and the new deacon, and during this the Bishop, keeping his hand on the candidate's head again prays for him, calling to mind the Holy Proto-Martyr and Archdeacon Stephen. After the ending of this prayer and the litany, the newly-ordained deacon is raised to his feet and the Bishop takes from him his *orarion* (stole), which he has been wearing crossed over his chest, and hangs it from his left shoulder, crying out three times: *Axios!* (Worthy). The clergy repeat this acclamation, and then so do the choir. Then the Bishop gives him the cuffs, and again the thrice threefold *Axios* is chanted. The Bishop then gives the new deacon one of the liturgical fans, and he in turn kisses the Bishop's shoulder and then takes his place by the side of the Holy Table and fans the Holy Gifts thereon, until it is time for the clergy to partake of Them. This is the first task of his ministry, signifying the paramount function of his ministry, serving the Holy Gifts. At this Liturgy, for the first time, the newly ordained Deacon will partake of the Holy Mysteries within the sanctuary, and will do so, on this occasion, before the other deacons. It is also customary for him to intone the final litany in the Liturgy on this day.

After his ordination, a deacon is called *Father* or *Father Deacon* (with or without his Christian name), and is not referred to by the Orthodox faithful by his Christian name alone. His wife, if he is married, is also addressed with similar respect, either as *diaconissa* or *matushka* (Russian practice), but not with her Christian name alone. This recognizes her valued ministry of support for the deacon. From his ordination, a deacon always wears his cassock (except perhaps when his secular employment precludes this), and when out and about he wears the cassock and *ra-son* and a clerical hat. In this way, he confesses that he is a minister of the

Church at all times, as was promised by his kissing the four corners of the Holy Table three times during his ordination, and he does not simply wear his clerical habit when he goes to church or is about specifically church business. From this time also he wears his hair and beard uncut, or, if his secular employment precludes this, only trims them slightly to be tidy.

During the divine services, the deacon intones the litanies, and leads the two entrances during the Liturgy (the first, Little Entrance with the Gospel Book, and the second, Great Entrance, with the diskos and prepared Lamb). During the Divine Liturgy, he also reads the Gospel, and carries on a dialogue of prayer with the priest at the most important points in the service. He assists at the communion of the faithful, and indeed may be blessed to impart Communion to them if the priest is unable to do so for some reason. He may also take the Holy Mysteries to the sick in their homes or in hospital, and often participates in instructing the young. On occasions, he may be blessed to preach, but all these things, even to the putting on of his sacred vestments, he does with the blessing of the Bishop or a priest.

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## POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

*“I asked XXX [a non-Orthodox] to come last Sunday?! We couldn’t stay after Liturgy for a cup of coffee and a talk, we have been lectured on our way back!!! Why do you kiss the icons, it’s dirty everybody does it, it’s full of germs, etc... kids don’t kiss the icons, do not touch it with your lips!! understood?!? even priests don’t kiss icons with their lips, I have been watching everybody closely.” Anon, by email*

WELL, your guest is both seriously wrong and very unobservant. It is a time-honoured practice among Orthodox Christians to kiss the icons. One might simply leave the reply at that, because as Saint John Chrysostom says in his homily on the Second Epistle to the Thesalonians: “It is tradition, seek no more.” From time immemorial the

Orthodox Christians have venerated the icons by kissing them. There is a story that the Emperor Leo III, an iconoclast, began his campaign against the icons by ordering that they be moved high up on the walls of churches so that they could not be reached and kissed. In fact, it seems, this story is apocryphal, but the fact that the story is current is a witness to the fact that Christians kiss the icons, and to the importance of this manner of veneration. The Empress Theodora, who later became Regent and was instrumental in restoring the icons after the reign of her iconoclast husband Theophilus, was apprehended for kissing the icons which she kept secretly in her apartments during the period of her husband's persecution of the Orthodox. With the Patriarch, Saint Methodius, after becoming Regent she restored the veneration of the icons on the first Sunday in Lent in A.D. 843 and thus inaugurated, by kissing an icon, the feast that we keep to this day, the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. And in the last century, as is recorded in the life of St Nicolas Planas of Athens (1851-1932), there is witness to the fact that kissing icons is God-pleasing. The saint was extremely short and could not reach the frescoed icons on the walls to kiss them, but the saints in the icons would stretch out their feet so that he could kiss them. There are innumerable other incidents which testify that this is tradition. Kissing the icons sanctifies our lips. As for saying that the priests do not kiss them, your guest may not have been there at the start of the service or may indeed be very unobservant, but one of the things that the clergy are required to do as they approach to celebrate the Divine Liturgy is to kiss the holy icons. As for being afraid that kissing icons spreads germs - what a deplorable lack of faith! Your guest may be excused, perhaps, in that he is not Orthodox. But should an Orthodox Christian come up with such a reason for not kissing the icons it would be inexcusable. God does not permit those practices which are pious, God-fearing and traditional to bring us harm. As we have said, kissing the icons sanctifies our lips. And even if there were such a danger, should it hinder us? The Empress Saint Theodora, by kissing the icons, while her husband still reigned and presided over a persecution of the icon-venerators, risked being ousted, persecuted and perhaps even executed. What timid creatures, and lacking in faith, we have become if we are frightened of catching a cold!

# NEWS SECTION

## *NEW PATRIARCH OF BULGARIA ELECTED*

METROPOLITAN NEOFIT was elected Patriarch of Bulgaria and enthroned at the Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia on Sunday 24th February. He was born on 15th October, 1945 in Sofia, and is a graduate of the Theology Academy there, and has “specialized” in Moscow. Patriarch Neofit is a former lecturer and conductor of the Theology Academy choir, coadjutor of the Sofia Bishopric, President of the Theology Academy, first Dean of the restored Faculty of Theology at Sofia University, and was Chief Secretary of the Holy Synod. He is said to have been very close to the previous Patriarch, Maxim. The Bulgarian Patriarchate follows the New Calendar.

## *COMMUNION BETWEEN TWO PATRIARCHATES RESTORED*

THE PRESS OFFICE of the Patriarchate of Romania reports that from 20th to 21st February 2013, a delegation of the Romanian Patriarchate met in Jerusalem with a delegation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, in order to solve the problem of the Romanian Settlement in Jericho, and that an agreement was reached. The two delegations drafted a document that has received the blessing of **His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem** and **His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of Romania**, whereby brotherly eucharistic communion between the two Churches was restored. The Press Office report notes: “This blessed work constitutes a contribution to the strengthening of pan-Orthodox unity.” The Romanian Patriarchate follows the New Calendar and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem the Old, but, as extraordinary as it might seem, the earlier rift appears not to have any doctrinal or ecclesial basis, but only concerned a dispute about property.

## ***THE FEAST OF SAINT SAVA OF SERBIA IN CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA***

ON Wednesday, January 10/23, 2013, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methone visited Australia once again, as Locum Tenens of our Diocese there, in order to preside at the Feast Day of the Holy Monastery of St. Sava of Serbia in Canberra. His Grace, Bishop Auxentios of Photike, from Etna, California, U.S.A., also travelled to Australia for this important event. The Monastery of St. Sava and its Church were built by Serbian Orthodox émigrés belonging to the “Free Serbian Orthodox Church,” which was separated from the Serbian Patriarchate during the Communist era in Yugoslavia, primarily for political reasons. The monastery covers an area of more than fifty acres, within which there are to be found: a magnificent church, an episcopal residence, quarters for monks, a cemetery, summer camping facilities for children, apartments, a meeting hall, a trapeza with seating for six hundred people, outbuildings, and outdoor areas, etc. At the monastery, on Saturday, January 13/26, Bishop Auxentios celebrated a special Liturgy at the conclusion of the camping season (in Australia they are at the height of summer!), in which twenty-five children took part, under the direction of Hegumen Father John (Smelic) of our sister Church, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA), under the jurisdiction of His Eminence, Metropolitan Agafangel. On Sunday, January 14/27, the Festal Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the Katholikon of St. Sava of Serbia by Bishop Ambrose, with the participation of Bishop Auxentios, our own clergy, Archpriest Dragan Saracević, Father Zvonimir Jović, Father Bojan Vlajić, and Father Stylianos Papadopoulos, who came with a group of faithful from Melbourne, and also clergy from the ROCA, Hegumen Father John, Protodeacon Father Basil Yakimov, and Deacon Father Nebojsa Mirković. The small choir was directed by Sister Elizabeth (from the ROCA). A large crowd of faithful, mainly Serbs, but also Greeks, was present. Bishop Ambrose preached a homily in English and Bishop Auxentios offered greetings on the occasion of the Feast. At the end of the Divine Liturgy there was a procession with the Icon of St. Sava around the imposing Church, followed by the celebration of the Slava (the blessing of the Slavski Kolač, a

special loaf of bread), in accordance with the Serbian tradition, inside the Church, and finally by the installation of Bishop Ambrose as the legally recognized Bishop of the “Free Serbian Orthodox Church of Australia and New Zealand.” A large number of guests attended the ensuing festal banquet, and it is estimated that several thousand pilgrims were present during the course of the day. During his five-day sojourn in Australia, Bishop Ambrose also visited the parishes of St. George, in Canberra, and of the Holy Unmercenaries, in Sydney; presided over a meeting of the Episcopal Council; resolved various matters, and met with many faithful, primarily Serbs and Greeks. He departed from Australia by air on Tuesday, January 16/29, arriving safely in Greece the following day, after completing this important pastoral journey.

*Taken from the Synod in Resistance website.*



# SIR-UK NEWS

## *REPOSE OF MOTHER VASILIA*

ON THE FEAST of St Photius the Great, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Tuesday 6th /19th February, at about 1 p.m, **Mother Vasilia** of the London **Convent of the Annunciation**, reposed in the Lord. She had suffered a long illness, but, through the love of the sisters and various helpers, she died in the Convent rather than in hospital. On the Sunday, before the Divine Liturgy, she received the Holy Mysteries. Early on Monday morning, it seemed that her end was near, and the priest was called and again she partook of Holy Communion, and the Canon for the Departure of the Soul was read for her. On the Tuesday, the Canon to Release from Sufferings those who have Suffered Long was read, and she quietly reposed just as the final phrases of the prayer at the end were being read over her. Almost immediately the service at the Departure of the Soul was chanted for her. On the third day, services were chanted for her repose at the Convent and at Brookwood, and on that same day,

**Protopresbyter-Stavrophore Milun Kostic of the Serbian Orthodox Church** visited the Convent to pay his respects and chanted a *pannikhida* at her coffin.

**His Grace, Bishop Ambrose** arrived from Greece on Monday 25th February and stayed at the Brotherhood overnight. On the following day he celebrated a memorial Liturgy at the Convent with the Brotherhood clergy. Mother Vasilias brother, **Musa Janho**, had come from Germany, as had people who loved her from all over the country and from France. At the end of the Liturgy, the Bishop preached on the heavenly mansions, pointing out that in the original Greek of the Gospels, the word translated as mansions, *moni*, is the same as is used for monasteries. Almost immediately after the Liturgy, the funeral service according to the monastic order was chanted, and by this time the Convent was crowded with mourners. The services were chanted in Slavonic, English, Greek and Arabic, with some Romanian, French and Georgian, so that everyone there could have something in their own language. Again at the funeral, the Bishop paid tribute to Mother Vasilias and assured **Mother Vikentia and her sisters** that, as the Convent had been founded by Saint John of Shanghai and was under his protection, it should remain as a monastic house. He also thanked all those who had helped care for Mother Vasilias during her illness and had supported the sisters. When the faithful had given the departed the last kiss and the service had ended, the Sisters offered those present coffee and some light refreshments. Mother Vasilias was laid to rest in Gunnersbury Cemetery next to the two former abbesses, **Mother Elisabeth and Mother Seraphima**, who was Mother Vasilias sister according to the flesh. We then returned to the Convent, where everyone was invited to a Mercy Meal in the Sisters' *trapeza*.

Mother Vasilias, Vera Janho in the world, was 83 at the time of her repose. She had been born in the Holy Land, one of six siblings, of whom Musa is now the last remaining in this life. Her mother was widowed in her mid-twenties, and Vera's grandmother helped to raise the children, and so it was that she was brought up in the immediate vicinity of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. As a young girl she entered the Bethany School, run by the Russian Church Abroad, where

she came to know Mother Elisabeth, and under her guidance she and the other sisters took up the monastic life at the **Gorny Convent at Ein Karim**. When church properties in Israel were ceded to the Moscow Patriarchate, Abbess Elisabeth and her closest disciples left, rather than place themselves under that administration. Years later, in 2006, the Sisters resolved to place themselves under the omophorion of **Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili**, when the majority of the ROCA hierarchs and people submitted to the Moscow Patriarchate. So twice, in very different circumstances, they made confession against that spiritually hazardous threat, and remained faithful to the course of their earlier and faithful spiritual fathers. On leaving the Holy Land, they lived for a period as refugees in Jordan, and were then offered hospitality at the **Lesna Icon Convent** in France. With the blessing of **St John of Shanghai**, then bishop in Western Europe, the community was brought to England and eventually established in their present home in Brondesbury Park. At first they supported themselves, as so many poor immigrants do by stitching clothes together, but later they took up book-binding, something which Sister Vera had been introduced to by the future **Archbishop Antony of Los Angeles**, who as Archimandrite and Head of the Russian Mission in Jerusalem had been their spiritual guide. Later, in 1970, Archbishop Antony came to England for the Great Feast of Pentecost, and tonsured the sisters to the Little Schema, and it was then that Mother Vasilia was renamed for St Basil the Great, the Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. Besides her book-binding, Mother Vasilia became the “handyman” of the community, and cared for the church, making, as Bishop Ambrose remarked, everything ready for every service. She was also quite an expert on liturgical practice; she used to guide their first chaplain, **Fr John Sawicz**, who had lost his memory through war injuries, through the Divine services, and had been known to correct even an Archbishop, when she noticed that he had neglected something in the services. Her loss to the Convent will be immense, but we pray that now she will receive the reward of her labours and struggles, and be granted rest with the Saints, and with her beloved mentors Abbesses Elisabeth and Seraphima, alongside whom her relics now lie. *Eternal Memory!*

## ***BURIAL AT BROOKWOOD***

ROBERT EADES, the father of the **Reverend Hierodeacon Sabbas** of our Brotherhood, died at his home in Pirbright on 24th January, after a long illness. He and his wife, **Hazel**, have long supported our community, and when they were younger used to come and help with the garden, and so, in thanksgiving, we gave them a grave space in the section we reserve for our non-Orthodox supporters. The funeral was held at the grave side on Friday 8th February, led by the **Rev. Alison Toplas**, minister of the **United Reformed Church at Worplesdon**. Immediately afterwards the numerous mourners went into St Edward's Church to light candles and then repaired to their chapel at Worplesdon where a memorial service was held, again led by Rev. Toplas. Family members, siblings of Fr Sabbas, from Somerset, Shropshire and London were joined by many members of the United Reformed congregation.

## ***AID FROM THE AFIDNAI CONVENT***

THE SACRED CONVENT of the Holy Angels, Afidnai, Attica, Greece, offered invaluable help to our Convent in London recently, by blessing one of their novices, **Sister Sophia** ("Spriggett"), to spend a month in London, helping to care for the ailing Mother Vasilias. This was arranged through the good offices of **Bishop Ambrose** and we owe him and **Abbess Taxiarchia and her synodia at Afidnai** an immense debt of gratitude for this exemplary act of Christian love.

## ***CATECHUMEN CLASSES***

FOR MANY YEARS now we have been holding Catechumen Classes on Saturday evenings at 5 p.m. - to make it easier for those who attend also to attend Vespers. Recently a couple of people who are not catechumens, but have had no instruction in the Faith have asked if they may attend also. Naturally we welcome this. If you are simply interested and not yet a catechumen, are a catechumen, or are already Orthodox, but would like to come, you will be welcome.

## ***VOLUNTEER***

OVER THE WEEKEND of 16th & 17th February (n.s), **Andre Henderson-Stewart** stayed with us so that he might undertake some more “back-breaking work” in the garden. His effort was much appreciated.

## ***FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION***

FOR the Great Feast of the Annunciation, both **His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methoni** and **His Grace, Bishop Sofronie of Suceava** will be here in England to celebrate the dedication festival of the Convent in London. We will announce fuller details as and when we know them.



## **PRACTICAL TIP**

IN MARCH this year we begin Great Lent. Unfortunately, in the circumstances in which we live in the Orthodox diaspora, the observance of the fast can often simply be reduced to a question of diet. Many live far from their church; many are unable to attend church on any other day than Sunday. But try in every way in which you can to remedy this. If you never attend weekday services, you will never see how the lenten services are conducted, because at weekends we do not have the full lenten typicon. Liturgically, you will to all intents and purposes miss Lent. Try to come to some of the weekdays services. If this is simply impossible, then read them at home. Also spend more time in spiritual reading, so that your fasting will not simply be a matter of changing diet. At the very least, try to read with quiet attention the Scriptural readings for every day, which we list in the calendar insert. Remember there are probably millions of people in the world who, for various reasons, keep a vegan diet all the year round, and many millions more who eat extremely little simply because of their utter poverty and need. It will not profit us greatly if our fast is restricted in a similar fashion. It must be augmented by increased prayer, by spiritual reading, and perhaps most of all by almsgiving.