



## FROM THE FATHERS

*“WHICH ONE of you, He says, if [his son] asks his father for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent in place of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will hand him a scorpion? (See Luke 11:11-12).... Bread signifies love. Just as the former is the chief kind of food, so that a table seems to be empty without it, so the latter is the chief of the virtues, so that the rest of the virtues are unable to appear as spiritual virtues without it. Whatever good thing is done is made perfect only by love. Hence the Apostle says that if he were to speak with the tongues of men and angels, and if he were to have prophesy and were to know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if he were to have all faith so that he might move mountains, and if he were to distribute all his possessions as food for the poor, and if he were to hand over his body to be burnt, but if he had not charity, it would profit him nothing. True charity is that by which we are commanded to love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. Any perfect person ought to impart the kindness of love not only to his neighbours and friends, but also to his enemies, as the Lord says: *Love ye your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute and slander you, that ye may be the children of your Father, Which is in heaven.* By the fish, faith that is not insincere is represented. Just as a fish is born, lives, and is nourished beneath a covering of water, so also faith which is in God, and which seeks the joys of the other life through the weeping and tears of the present one, is begotten invisibly in the heart, is consecrated by the invisible grace of the Spirit through the water of Baptism, is nourished by the invisible help of Divine protection so that it may not fail. It works all the good things it is capable of for invisible rewards, mindful of that saying of the Apostle that *the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* We can also say that a fish is a type of faith, inasmuch as it is struck repeatedly by the waves of the sea but is not de-*

stroyed, so in the same way firm faith can be assailed by much distress from the world which opposes it yet remain unshaken; moreover, it even emerges from the contest more glorious, with the help of the One who told His disciples, when they were being sent to preach about the gifts of faith, *In the world ye will have distress; but be confident, I have overcome the world.* The certainty of our hope is prefigured by the egg. No offspring is yet discernible in the egg, but the birth of the bird to come is hoped for. The faithful do not yet look upon the glory of the fatherland on high, in which they believe at the present time, but they await its coming in hope. Hence the Apostle says, *But if we hope for what we do not see, we await it through patience.* These, dearly beloved brothers, are the good things which we ought particularly to ask for from God.”

VENERABLE BEDE OF JARROW, + 735 A.D.



## A Homily on the Dormition of Our Supremely Pure Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

By St. Gregory Palamas

BOTH LOVE and duty today fashion my homily for your charity. It is not only that I wish, because of my love for you, and because I am obliged by the sacred canons, to bring to your God-loving ears a saving word and thus to nourish your souls, but if there be any among those things that bind by obligation and love and can be narrated with praise for the Church, it is the great deed of the Ever-Virgin Mother of God. The desire is double, not single, since it induces me, entreats and persuades me, whereas the inexorable duty constrains me, though speech cannot attain to what surpasses it, just as the eye is unable to look fixedly upon the sun. One cannot utter things which surpass speech, yet it is within our power by the love for mankind of those hymned, to compose a song of praise and all at once both to leave untouched intangible things, to satisfy the debt with words and to offer up the first fruits of our love for

the Mother of God in hymns composed according to our abilities.

If, then, “death of the righteous man is honorable” (cf. Ps. 115:6) and the “memory of the just man is celebrated with songs of praise” (Prov. 10:7), how much more ought we to honour with great praises the memory of the holiest of the saints, she by whom all holiness is afforded to the saints, I mean the Ever-Virgin, Mother of God! Even so we celebrate today her holy Dormition or translation to another life, whereby, while being “a little lower than angels” (Ps. 8:6), by her proximity to the God of all, and in the wondrous deeds which from the beginning of time were written down and accomplished with respect to her, she has ascended incomparably higher than the angels and the archangels and all the super-celestial hosts that are found beyond them. For her sake the God-possessed prophets pronounce prophecies, miracles are wrought to foreshow that future Marvel of the whole world, the Ever-Virgin Mother of God. The flow of generations and circumstances journeys to the destination of that new mystery wrought in her; the statutes of the Spirit provide beforehand types of the future truth. The end, or rather the beginning and root, of those divine wonders and deeds is the annunciation to the supremely virtuous Joachim and Anna of what was to be accomplished: namely, that they who were barren from youth would beget in deep old age her that would bring forth without seed Him that was timelessly begotten of God the Father before the ages. A vow was given by those who marvelously begot her to return her that was given to the Giver; so accordingly the Mother of God strangely changed her dwelling from the house of her father to the house of God while still an infant. She passed not a few years in the Holy of Holies itself, wherein under the care of an angel she enjoyed ineffable nourishment such as even Adam did not succeed in tasting; for indeed if he had, like this immaculate one, he would not have fallen away from life, even though it was because of Adam and so that she might prove to be his daughter, that she yielded a little to nature, as did her Son, Who has now ascended from earth into heaven.

But after that unutterable nourishment, a most mystical economy of courtship came to pass as regards the Virgin, a strange greeting surpassing speech which the Archangel, descended from above, addressed to her, and disclosures and salutations from God which overturn the con-

demnation of Eve and Adam and remedied the curse laid on them, transforming it into a blessing. The King of all “hath desired a mystic beauty” of the Ever-Virgin, as David foretold (Ps. 44:11) and, “He bowed the heavens and came down” (Ps. 17:9) and overshadowed her, or rather, the enhypostatic Power of the Most High dwelt in her. Not through darkness and fire, as with Moses the God-seer, nor through tempest and cloud, as with Elias the prophet, did He manifest His presence, but without mediation, without a veil, the Power of the Most High overshadowed the sublimely chaste and virginal womb, separated by nothing, neither air nor aether nor anything sensible, nor anything supra-sensible: this was not an overshadowing but a complete union. Since what overshadows is always wont to produce its own form and figure in whatever is overshadowed, there came to pass in the womb not a union only, but further, a formation, and that Thing formed from the Power of the Most High and the all-holy virginal womb was the incarnate Word of God. Thus the Word of God took up His dwelling in the Theotokos in an inexpressible manner and proceeded from her, bearing flesh. He appeared upon the earth and lived among men, deifying our nature and granting us, after the words of the divine Apostle, “things which angels desire to look into” (1 Pet. 1:12). This is the encomium which transcends nature and the surpassingly glorious glory of the Ever-Virgin, glory for which all mind and word suffice not, though they be angelic. But who can relate those things which came to pass after His ineffable birth? For, as she cooperated and suffered with that exalting condescension (*kenosis*) of the Word of God, she was also rightly glorified and exalted together with Him, ever adding thereto the supernatural increase of mighty deeds. And after the ascent into the heavens of Him that was incarnate of her, she rivalled, as it were, those great works, surpassing mind and speech, which through Him were her own, with a most valiant and diverse asceticism, and with her prayers and care for the entire world, her precepts and encouragements which she gave to God’s heralds sent throughout the whole world; thus she was herself both a support and a comfort while she was both heard and seen, and while she laboured with the rest in every way for the preaching of the Gospel. In such wise she led a most strenuous manner of life proclaimed in mind and speech.

Therefore, the death of the Theotokos was also life-bearing, translating her into a celestial and immortal life and its commemoration is a joyful event and festivity for the entire world. It not merely renews the memory of the wondrous deeds of the Mother of God, but also adds thereto the strange gathering at her all-sacred burial of all the sacred apostles conveyed from every nation, the God-revealing hymns of these God-possessed ones, and the solicitous presence of the angels, and their choir, and liturgy round about her, going on before, following after, assisting, opposing, defending, being defended. They laboured and chanted together to their uttermost with those who venerated that life-originating and God-receiving body, the saving balsam for our race and the boast of all creation; but they strove against and opposed with a secret hand the Jews who rose up against and attacked that body with hand and will set upon theomachy. All the while the Lord Sabaoth Himself, the Son of the Ever-Virgin, was present, into Whose hands she rendered her divinely-minded spirit, through which and with which its companion, her body, was translated into the domain of celestial and endless life, even as was and is fitting. In truth, many have been allotted divine favour and glory and power, as David says, "But to me exceedingly honorable are Thy friends, O Lord, their principalities are made exceeding strong. I will count them and they shall be multiplied more than the sand" (Ps. 138:17). And according to Solomon, "many daughters have attained wealth, many have wrought valiantly; but she doth exceed, she hath surpassed all, both men and women" (cf. Prov. 31:29). For while she alone stood between God and the whole human race, God became the Son of Man and made men sons of God; she made earth heavenly, she deified the human race, and she alone of all women was shown forth to be a mother by nature and the Mother of God transcending every law of nature, and by her ineffable childbirth, the Queen of all creation, both terrestrial and celestial. Thus she exalted those under her through herself, and, showing while on earth an obedience to things heavenly rather than things earthly, she partook of more excellent deserts and of superior power, and from the ordination which she received from heaven by the Divine Spirit, she became the most sublime of the sublime and the supremely blest Queen of a blessed race.

But now the Mother of God has her dwelling in Heaven whither

she was today translated, for this is meet, Heaven being a suitable place for her. She “stands at the right of the King of all clothed in a vesture wrought with gold and arrayed with divers colours” (cf. Ps. 44:9), as the psalmic prophecy says concerning her. By “vesture wrought with gold” understand her divinely radiant body arrayed with divers colours of every virtue. She alone in her body, glorified by God, now enjoys the celestial realm together with her Son. For, earth and grave and death did not hold forever her life-originating and God-receiving body - the dwelling more favoured than Heaven and the Heaven of heavens. If, therefore, her soul, which was an abode of God’s grace, ascended into Heaven when bereaved of things here below, a thing which is abundantly evident, how could it be that the body which not only received in itself the pre-eternal and only-begotten Son of God, the ever-flowing Wellspring of grace, but also manifested His Body by way of birth, should not have also been taken up into Heaven? Or, if while yet three years of age and not yet possessing that super-celestial in-dwelling, she seemed not to bear our flesh as she abode in the Holy of Holies, and after she became supremely perfect even as regards her body by such great marvels, how indeed could that body suffer corruption and turn to earth? How could such a thing be conceivable for anyone who thinks reasonably? Hence, the body which gave birth is glorified together with what was born of it with God-befitting glory, and the “ark of holiness” (Ps. 131:8) is resurrected, after the prophetic ode, together with Christ Who formerly arose from the dead on the third day. The strips of linen and the burial clothes afford the apostles a demonstration of the Theotokos’ resurrection from the dead, since they remained alone in the tomb and at the apostles’ scrutiny they were found there, even as it had been with the Master. There was no necessity for her body to delay yet a little while in the earth, as was the case with her Son and God, and so it was taken up straightway from the tomb to a super-celestial realm, from whence she flashes forth most brilliant and divine illuminations and graces, irradiating earth’s region; thus she is worshipped and marvelled at and hymned by all the faithful. Willing to set up an image of all goodness and beauty and to make clearly manifest His own therein to both angels and men, God fashioned a being supremely good and beautiful, uniting in her all good, seen and unseen, which when He made the world He distributed to each thing and thereby adorned all; or

rather one might say, He showed her forth as a universal mixing bowl of all divine, angelic and human things good and beautiful and the supreme beauty which embellished both worlds. By her ascension now from the tomb, she is taken from the earth and attains to Heaven and this also she surpasses, uniting those on high with those below, and encompassing all with the wondrous deed wrought in her. In this manner she was in the beginning “a little lower than the angels” (Ps. 8:6), as it is said, referring to her mortality, yet this only served to magnify her pre-eminence as regards all creatures. Thus all things today fittingly gather and commune for the festival.

It was meet that she who contained Him that fills all things and who surpasses all should outstrip all and become by her virtue superior to them in the eminence of her dignity. Those things which sufficed the most excellent among men that have lived throughout the ages in order to reach such excellency, and that which all those graced of God have separately, both angels and men, she combines, and these she alone brings to fulfilment and surpasses. And this she now has beyond all: That she has become immortal after death and alone dwells together with her Son and God in her body. For this reason she pours forth from thence abundant grace upon those who honour her - for she is a receptacle of great graces - and she grants us even our ability to look towards her. Because of her goodness she lavishes sublime gifts upon us and never ceases to provide a profitable and abundant tribute in our behalf. If a man looks towards this concurrence and dispensing of every good, he will say that the Virgin is for virtue and those who live virtuously, what the sun is for perceptible light and those who live in it. But if he raises the eye of his mind to the Sun which rose for men from this Virgin in a wondrous manner, the Sun which by nature possesses all those qualities which were added to her nature by grace, he shall straightaway call the Virgin a heaven. The excellent inheritance of every good which she has been allotted so much exceeds in holiness the portion of those who are divinely graced both under and above heaven as the heaven is greater than the sun and the sun is more radiant than heaven.

Who can describe in words thy divinely resplendent beauty, O Virgin Mother of God? Thoughts and words are inadequate to define

thine attributes, since they surpass mind and speech. Yet it is meet to chant hymns of praise to thee, for thou art a vessel containing every grace, the fulness of all things good and beautiful, the tablet and living icon of every good and all uprightness, since thou alone hast been deemed worthy to receive the fulness of every gift of the Spirit. Thou alone didst bear in thy womb Him in Whom are found the treasures of all these gifts and didst become a wondrous tabernacle for Him; hence thou didst depart by way of death to immortality and art translated from earth to Heaven, as is proper, so that thou mightest dwell with Him eternally in a super-celestial abode. From thence thou ever carest diligently for thine inheritance and by thine unsleeping intercessions with Him, thou showest mercy to all.

To the degree that she is closer to God than all those who have drawn nigh unto Him, by so much has the Theotokos been deemed worthy of greater audience. I do not speak of men alone, but also of the angelic hierarchies themselves. Isaiah writes with regard to the supreme commanders of the heavenly hosts: “And the seraphim stood round about Him” (Isaiah 6:2); but David says concerning her, “at Thy right hand stood the queen” (Ps. 44:8). Do you see the difference in position? From this comprehend also the difference in the dignity of their station. The seraphim are round about God, but the only Queen of all is near beside Him. She is both wondered at and praised by God Himself, proclaiming her, as it were, by the mighty deeds enacted with respect to Him, and saying, as it is recorded in the Song of Songs, “How fair is my companion” (cf. Song of Songs 6:4), she is more radiant than light, more arrayed with flowers than the divine gardens, more adorned than the whole world, visible and invisible. She is not merely a companion but she also stands at God’s right hand, for where Christ sat in the heavens, that is, at the “right hand of majesty” (Heb. 1:3), there too she also takes her stand, having ascended now from earth into the heavens. Not merely does she love and is loved in return more than every other, according to the very laws of nature, but she is truly His Throne, and wherever the King sits, there His Throne is set also. And Isaiah beheld this throne amidst the choir of cherubim and called it “high” and “exalted” (Isaiah 6:1), wishing to make explicit how the station of the Mother of God far transcends that of the celestial hosts.

For this reason the Prophet introduces the angels themselves as glorifying the God come from her, saying, “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His Place” (Ezek. 3:12). Jacob the Patriarch, beholding this throne by way of types (*enigmata*), said, “How dreadful is this Place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven” (Gen. 28:17). But David, joining himself to the multitude of the saved, who are like the strings of a musical instrument or like differing voices from different generations made harmonious in one faith through the Ever-Virgin, sounds a most melodic strain in praise of her, saying: “I shall commemorate thy name in every generation and generation. Therefore shall peoples give praise unto thee for ever, and unto the ages of ages.” Do you see how the entire creation praises the Virgin Mother, and not only in times past, but “for ever, and unto the ages of ages”? Thus it is evident that throughout the whole course of the ages, she shall never cease from benefacting all creation, and I mean not only created nature seen round about us, but also the very supreme commanders of the heavenly hosts, whose nature is immaterial and transcendent. Isaiah shows us clearly that it is only through her that they together with us both partake of and touch God, that Nature which defies touch, for he did not see the seraphim take the coal from the altar without mediation, but with tongs, by means of which the coal touched the prophetic lips and purified them (cf. Isaiah 6:6-7). Moses beheld the tongs of that great vision of Isaiah when he saw the bush aflame with fire, yet unconsumed. And who does not know that the Virgin Mother is that very bush and those very tongs, she who herself (though an archangel also assisted at the conception) conceived the Divine Fire without being consumed, Him that taketh away the sins of the world, Who through her touched mankind and by that ineffable touch and union cleansed us entirely. Therefore, she only is the frontier between created and uncreated nature, and there is no man that shall come to God except he be truly illumined through her, that Lamp truly radiant with divinity, even as the Prophet says, “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be shaken” (Ps. 45:5).

If recompense is bestowed according to the measure of love for God, and if the man who loves the Son is loved of Him and of His Father and becomes the dwelling place of Both, and They mystically abide and

walk in him, as it is recorded in the Master's Gospel, who, then, will love Him more than His Mother? For, He was her only-begotten Son, and moreover she alone among women gave birth knowing no spouse, so that the love of Him that had partaken of her flesh might be shared with her twofold. And who will the only-begotten Son love more than His Mother, He that came forth from Her ineffably without a father in this last age even as He came forth from the Father without a mother before the ages? How indeed could He that descended to fulfill the Law not multiply that honour due to His Mother over and above the ordinances of the Law?

Hence, as it was through the Theotokos alone that the Lord came to us, appeared upon earth and lived among men, being invisible to all before this time, so likewise in the endless age to come, without her mediation, every emanation of illuminating divine light, every revelation of the mysteries of the Godhead, every form of spiritual gift, will exceed the capacity of every created being. She alone has received the all-pervading fulness of Him that filleth all things, and through her all may now contain it, for she dispenses it according to the power of each, in proportion and to the degree of the purity of each. Hence she is the treasury and overseer of the riches of the Godhead. For it is an everlasting ordinance in the heavens that the inferior partake of what lies beyond being by the mediation of the superior, and the Virgin Mother is incomparably superior to all. It is through her that as many as partake of God do partake, and as many as know God understand her to be the enclosure of the Uncontainable One, and as many as hymn God praise her together with Him. She is the cause of what came before her, the champion of what came after her and the agent of things eternal. She is the substance of the prophets, the principle of the apostles, the firm foundation of the martyrs and the premise of the teachers of the Church. She is the glory of those upon earth, the joy of celestial beings, the adornment of all creation. She is the beginning and the source and root of unutterable good things; she is the summit and consummation of everything holy.

O divine, and now heavenly, Virgin, how can I express all things which pertain to thee? How can I glorify the treasury of all glory?

Merely thy memory sanctifies whoever keeps it, and a mere movement towards thee makes the mind more translucent, and thou dost exalt it straightway to the Divine. The eye of the intellect is through thee made limpid, and through thee the spirit of a man is illumined by the sojourning of the Spirit of God, since thou hast become the steward of the treasury of divine gifts and their vault, and this, not in order to keep them for thyself, but so that thou mightest make created nature replete with grace. Indeed, the steward of those inexhaustible treasuries watches over them so that the riches may be dispensed; and what could confine that wealth which wanes not? Richly, therefore, bestow thy mercy and thy graces upon all thy people, this thine inheritance, O Lady! Dispel the perils which menace us. See how greatly we are expended by our own and by aliens, by those without and by those within. Uplift all by thy might: mollify our fellow citizens one with another and scatter those who assault us from without - like savage beasts. Measure out thy succour and healing in proportion to our passions, apportioning abundant grace to our souls and bodies, sufficient for every necessity. And although we may prove incapable of containing thy bounties, augment our capacity and in this manner bestow them upon us, so that being both saved and fortified by thy grace, we may glorify the pre-eternal Word Who was incarnate of thee for our sakes, together with His unoriginate Father and the life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto the endless ages. Amen.

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“WHENEVER THE ENEMY with his army stalks us, the fugitives, the sea is forced to yield us a passage (see Exodus 14:5-31). For this crossing, the Guide was the cloud; and men before us have applied this name (that was given to the Guide) to the Grace of the Spirit, for it is He Who guides the just towards salvation. Whoever follows Him will cross the water; He will clear a passage for him and bring him secure redemption, burying in the sea the one who pursues to enslave us.”

SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA, + C. 394 A.D.

# TEACHING

## OF THE VENERABLE SERAPHIM OF SAROV

# ON THE PRAYER OF JESUS

A BOAT cannot make much headway without water, and the wandering of the mind cannot continue long without discarding humility and the unremitting prayer of Jesus Christ. The foundation of a temple consists of stones, and the foundation and the building upon this of the virtuous is the holy and worshipful name of our Lord Jesus Christ. An unskilled helmsman will soon suffer shipwreck, if during a tempest he takes off the sailors and casts the oars and the helm into the abyss, and himself sleeps. But the soul will perish from the demons even sooner, if it neglects sobriety and calling upon the name of Jesus Christ, at the very outset on their onslaught. What I know is what I write, and what I have observed in travelling along this way is what I bear witness to you, if you wish to accept what I say. The Lord Himself said: *If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing* (John 15:6, 5). Just as it is impossible for the sun to shine without light, so it is impossible to cleanse the heart of defiled, destructive thoughts without the prayer of Jesus' name. If this is true, as I hold, then we must unite the name of Jesus with our breathing. Just as it is light, they (the thoughts) are darkness. It is God and Master, and they are slaves of the demons. The guarding of the mind characteristically and deservedly is called born of light, born of lightning, light-emitting and fire-bearing. For, truth to tell, it endlessly surpasses many of the physical virtues. It is for this reason that we must call this virtue by such honorific appellations, because from it a brilliant light is engendered. In coming to love it, sinners from amongst the indecent and the defiled, from among the foolish, the thoughtless and the unrighteous, can be made righteous, profitable, chaste, holy and understanding in Jesus Christ, and moreover they may be granted to see mysteries and to theologize, and, being granted recovery of vision may be carried to that immaculate and limitless

light, experiencing it by an inexplicable encountering, living and abiding with it, so that they might taste that *the Lord is good*, so that the word of the divine David might clearly be fulfilled as with the first angels: *Surely the righteous shall confess Thy name, and the upright shall dwell in Thy presence* (Ps. 139:13). For, indeed, they truly called upon God and confessed Him.

... to be continued.



# The Coming Month

AUGUST is the last month of the Church Year, and in it we have two Great Feasts, which tell forth the glory of our God: first that of the **Transfiguration of our Saviour** (6th / 19th) and then that of the **Dormition of His All-holy Mother** (15th / 28th). So, at the end of the struggles of the whole year, we are granted to glimpse God's glory and see one of our kind, not Divine by nature, sharing in that Divine glory. We also have a third important feast during the month, although it does not rank with the Twelve Great Feasts, that of the **Beheading of the Honourable Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John** (29th August / 11th September), which gives us an example from the one who "proved truly even more venerable than the Prophets, since" he was "granted to baptize in the running waters Him Whom they proclaimed." Not only does the Baptist set before us the example of his ascetic way of life and of his obedience to Christ, but he also instructs us, particularly on this festival, concerning the necessity of standing firm for the truth and or righteous suffering.

There are **two special fasts** in this month. First the **fourteen-day fast** in preparation for the Dormition, and secondly, in addition to the usual Wednesday and Friday fasting that we have almost every week of the year, we have an additional **one-day fast** on the day of the Beheading of the Baptist, even though this year it falls on a Tuesday. Thus we align

ourselves with the spiritual struggler, St John, rather than with those who delight themselves, to their own perdition, in partying and wantonness.

Among the Saints we celebrate in August, we have:-

The **Holy Hieromartyr Alexander, Bishop of Comana** (12th / 25th), who lived during the third century not far from Neocaesarea in Cappadocia. He studied the Holy Scriptures and knew many of the disciplines of the science of his day. Taking upon himself the exploit of holy fool, the saint lived in poverty, occupied with the preparing of charcoal and selling it in the city square. Many, seeing his face always black from the grime of the coal flames, treated him with contempt. When the bishop of Comana happened to die, various candidates were put forth for election as new bishop: one was an illustrious man, others were learned or eloquent, while yet others were rich. Then Saint Gregory the Wonderworker, Bishop of Neocaesarea (feast day: 17th November), having been invited to preside over the election of the new Bishop and to consecrate him, pointed out that a bishop ought to have not only outward worthiness and distinction, but foremost of all, a pure heart and holy life. These words caused some to laugh saying: "If outward appearance and nobility of origin be for naught, then even Alexander the charcoal burner might be made bishop!" Saint Gregory perceived that it was not without the Providence of God that this man came to be mentioned, and he asked that they call him. The appearance of the saint at the gathering evoked laughter. Having respectfully bowed to Saint Gregory, Saint Alexander stood there in deep quiet and ignored the sneering. Saint Gregory put him to the test, and the collier was obliged to reveal, that he was formerly a philosopher, and had studied Holy Scripture, but that for the sake of God he had assumed upon himself voluntary poverty and humility. Saint Gregory then took him to his own lodging, where he washed off the grime, and gave him clean clothes. Returning then to the assembled people, Saint Gregory in front of everyone began to put to him questions from Holy Scripture, to which Saint Alexander answered like a knowledgeable and wise pastor. Seeing this, all were astonished at his humility and with one accord they elected him their bishop. Saint Gregory ordained him priest, and later consecrated him bishop. After the laying-on of hands

the new bishop delivered a sermon to the people, full of power and the grace of God. And everyone rejoiced that the Lord had sent them such a wise pastor. Under the Emperor Diocletian (284-305) the saint bravely confessed Christ, and refused to worship idols; after tortures they threw him into a fire, and there he reposed to God. According to other sources, Saint Alexander suffered instead under the Emperor Decius (249-251) or even under the Emperor Aurelian (270-275). That the exact time of his contest is not now known to us is of little importance; the witness of his humility and the love for Christ and His flock, which compelled him to lay down his life in martyrdom, and his intercession for us, is what gives us cause to celebrate his memory with love.

The **Venerable Macarius the Roman of Novgorod** (15th /28th August) was born at the end of the fifteenth century into a wealthy family of Rome. His parents raised him in piety and gave him an excellent education. He might have expected a successful career in public service, but he did not desire honours or earthly glory. Instead, he focused on how to save his soul. He lived in an age when the Christian West was shaken by the growth of humanism and by the Protestant Reformation. St Macarius was grieved to see so many darkened by sin and worldly vanity, and was disturbed by the rebellions and conflicts within the Western Church. With tears, he asked God to show him the path of salvation, and his prayer did not go unanswered. He came to realize that the safe harbour of salvation was the Orthodox Church. He left Rome secretly, and set out for Russia without money, and wearing an old garment. After many sufferings on his journey, he arrived in Novgorod, where he rejoiced to see so many churches and monasteries. One of these monasteries had been founded three centuries before by his fellow countryman, St Anthony the Roman (feast day: 3rd August). St Macarius came to the banks of the River Svir, where St Alexander of Svir (feast days: 17th April and 30th August) had founded the monastery of the Holy Trinity. St Alexander received Macarius into the Church and tonsured him as a monk. Macarius, however longed for the solitary life and moved to an island on the River Lezna, forty-five miles from Novgorod, where he engaged in ascetic struggles and unceasing prayer. The winters were very cold, and the summers were hot and humid. The marshy area was also a breeding ground for

mosquitoes, which tormented the saint. St Macarius survived on berries, roots, and herbs. Sometimes bears would come to him for food, and they allowed him to pet them. Such a great lamp of the spiritual life could not remain hidden for long. One rainy night someone knocked on his door and asked him to open it. Several people, who seemed to be hunters, entered his cell. Astonished by his appearance, and the divine light shining from his face, the men asked for his blessing. They told him they had come to the forest to hunt, and only by the prayers of the saint did God permit them to find him. “It is not my sinful prayers,” he told them, “but the grace of God which led you here.” After feeding them, he spoke and prayed with them, then showed them the way out of the marsh. St Macarius was concerned that his peace would be disturbed, now that his dwelling place was known. His fears were justified, because many people sought him out to ask for his advice and prayers. The holy ascetic decided to move even farther into the wilderness, choosing an elevated place on the left bank of the Lezna. Even here, however, he was not able to conceal himself for very long. Sometimes a pillar of fire would rise up into the sky at night above his place of refuge. During the day, the grace of God was made manifest by a fragrant cloud of smoke. Drawn by these signs, the local inhabitants of the region were able to find him once more. Some begged St Macarius to permit them to live near him and to be guided by his counsels. Seeing that this was the Lord’s will, he did not refuse them. He blessed them to build cells, and this was the foundation of his monastery. In 1540, they built a wooden church dedicated to the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos. St Macarius was ordained to the holy priesthood by Bishop Macarius of Novgorod, who later became Metropolitan of All Russia. The hierarch also appointed St Macarius as abbot of the monastery. St Macarius was an example to the others, and was given the gifts of clairvoyance and wonderworking from God. He wore himself out with his labours and vigils, encouraging others not to become faint-hearted in their own struggles. After several years, he entrusted the monastery to one of his disciples, and returned to the island where he had first lived. There he fell asleep in the Lord on 15th August, 1550. His disciples buried him outside on the left side of the Dormition church which he had founded. The Hermitage of St Macarius was never

a prosperous monastery with many monks, but it was distinguished by the high level of spiritual life. In the seventeenth century, many of the monasteries near Novgorod were plundered by Swedish invaders. His Hermitage was burned in 1615, and some of the monks were put to the sword. By the eighteenth century, the monastery had become a dependency of the St Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St Petersburg. The Empress Catherine closed it in 1764, just as she had closed so many other monasteries, and it was designated as a parish church. Although pilgrims still came to venerate the saint's relics and to celebrate his feast day, the buildings soon fell into ruin. In the mid-nineteenth century, some benefactors restored the two churches and the miraculous healing spring which the saint himself had dug. About this time an old priest was living there, and he celebrated the church services until his death. In 1894, the monastery began to function once more under the noted missionary Hieromonk Arsenius, who introduced the Athonite typikon. The monastery was destroyed by the Soviets in 1932. The Venerable Macarius the Roman is commemorated on 15th August, the day of his repose, but as this is also the Great Feast of the Dormition, he is also celebrated also on 19th January, his nameday.



## POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

*“HAVING READ in The Shepherd the question of the correspondent who wrote to you for advice on the kissing of clergymen’s hands, etc., your response triggered a memory of my early days as a student at Holy Trinity Seminary, In Jordanville, NY. His Grace, Archbishop Averky (Taushev) of blessed memory, who was rector at the time, took great pains to impress on the seminarians the proper attitude a priest should have toward the giving of blessings. He emphasized that the blessing should never be considered their own, but that the priest should always hold in mind that it is Christ’s blessing he is dispensing. He would conclude, saying: “Why, to imagine that the people are approaching you for your*

*own sake, is like the donkey on which the Saviour rode into Jerusalem imagining that the adulation of the crowds—the palm branches and garments spread on the road, the shouts of Hosanna—were directed at him, rather than the One Who was riding on his back!” - Brother Isaac Lambertsen, N.Y.C.*

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*“IT WAS IMPORTANT [in travelling to Europe - ed.] to meet many of the Orthodox places and I was sad to see the situation of secularization and almost agnosticism and anarchy in Greece. The situation in Greece is not far more different from the situation in the rest of Europe and only small pockets of faith keep the Orthodox tradition alive. I met so many Greeks opposed to Church and religion, especially the young and was praying only with a handful of old islanders! I strongly believe the Russian Church is in a unique position of dynamism and discovery of the real Christian roots. We have to fight to keep our faith alive against secularization of the society. This danger is so much bigger than communism or political oppression in my point of view. I was reading a letter from the Russian Church in Ennismore Gardens that I hereby copy and which gives (me) hope... I would like to know what you think of this letter. Thanks in advance.” - J.P.O., Ghana, by email, dated 25/10/11*

OF COURSE, you are right about the inroads of secularism, but I think you may be falling into a temptation of wanting to see Orthodoxy again as a world power or influence. I may well be wrong, but I suspect those days are gone for good - remember the times we live in. We draw close to those times about which our Saviour Himself said, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”

I also think you are wrong to trust in the unique position of the Russian Church to combat secularism. I say this not from any form of anti-Russianism. Had you said the same about the Greek Church or the Serbian Church, I would also have taken issue with you. My objection to your hope in this regard is twofold.

A) It is true that the Russian Church is the most powerful, the

most numerous, and in many ways the most traditionalist of all the national Orthodox Churches. This gives it great potential, and one can only hope and pray that it will go at least some way to fulfil that potential, for the salvation of souls. However, I think you are wrong to pit one national Church against others. The fight back against secularism will be spearheaded not by national Churches, whether they be Russian, Greek, Finnish, Estonian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Japanese, or any other nationality - it will be spearheaded by faithfulness, perhaps only in a few individuals. Perhaps on the wide screen of global events, this struggle will not even register, but nonetheless that is where it will be. I may have got my reference wrong, but believe it was Sts Barsanuphius and John who said that in their time (6th century) that the world then was being supported by the prayers of only four righteous men. Perhaps the battle you envision against secularism is led by a similar number of hidden people.

B) My second objection is more pragmatic, and is that the evidence is that, just as you observed in Greece, secularism is winning, so it is in Russia. Sure, this is presently masked to a large extent by the pomp and circumstance that the Moscow Patriarchate is able to muster, but we hear from Russia, and observe from the Russians coming to us, that the work of forming Orthodoxy of the heart there has as yet hardly begun. One of the people who attend church here, who returned to Russia recently after a twenty year absence, was deeply saddened by what he saw as the moral decay of the country. We do not rejoice over this; it is a great sadness, but it is sadly a reality. The rate of decay may be slower there than elsewhere, but ignorance of the Faith, non-observance of church-life except on a most superficial level, and perhaps, above all, non-adherence to Christian morality is rife there too. There is, as might reasonably be expected after decades of Sovietism, an immense work of conversion to be worked in Russia itself.

Regarding the letter that you copied, it was written by a ROCAMP priest, and, like much of his output, contains much that is helpful. But his work is always spoiled by exaggeration and a lack of sobriety. For those of us who know him and have known his work for years, the fact that he periodically changes positions markedly, seems first to back one

horse and then another, also undermines any trust we can put in what he says. Like another convert writer in this country, one on the other extreme of the ecclesiastical spectrum, he rarely allows facts or scholarly integrity to spoil a good yarn or upset a pet theory. In correspondence with a priest of the MP, I once referenced this priest's work, and his immediate reply was: "I never visit his website: I have too much respect for my sanity"!

In the letter you sent, we see for instance that his prophecy (he is given to prophesying things) of the return of those who followed the former Bishop Basil is largely unfounded. Six years down the line, albeit restructured, the people and parishes who placed themselves under the Paris Exarchate are still there. I could unpick much more, but it does not seem to be profitable.

I hope you will not be offended in what I have written, and that, through God's mercy, some of it may be helpful for you.



## NEWS SECTION

### *ATTACK ON A CHURCH IN KOSOVO*

THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE of the Moscow Patriarchate posted a report (24/7/12) on "a new extremists's attack against the Orthodox Church of Serbia in the Province of Kosovo," **the Church of St. Michael in Štimlje**. "The church building was looted and desecrated. Unidentified vandals damaged fragments of the murals and knocked off paint from the countenances of the saints. Garbage, sewage and dead birds were put within the church building.... In August 1999, the anti-Christian minded extremists set fire to the church, and the iconostasis was destroyed. During 2004, and in the course of the anti-Serbian pogroms in March in particular, it was not once that the foes of the Church set the church building on fire, desecrated it and disfigured the countenances of the saints depicted on church walls. In 2009, the restoration work began with UNESCO assistance. However, the recent incident compels us to state with regret that the attitude of certain residents of the Province of Kosovo remains

as intolerant as it used to be in the past. Testifying to this attitude is an assault against the Orthodox monk Mitrofan (Bulajić) by some residents of Kosovska Mitrovica on 13 June 2012. He was admitted to a surgery with injuries to his head and arm. Police of the self-proclaimed republic were not able to prevent either the beating up of the monk, or the act of vandalism in Štimlje. Repeated attacks of the extremists against churches, priests, monks and laymen of the Serbian Orthodox Churches in Kosovo and Metohija cause grave concern in the Russian Orthodox Church as they show the lack of effective measures aimed at their protection by the forces of international presence in the province.” The grave concern of the Moscow Patriarchate in this regard is to be welcomed, though one would wish that they showed a like concern for attacks on churches within their own “canonical territory.” On 1st July, the ROCA website carried this report: “On July 1, representatives of the MP seized our Holy Protection Church in Malin in the Zhitomir oblast. The parish rector, Archpriest Vasiliy Demchenko, was assaulted during the incident. The parishioners have fought for ten years for rights to the church, and all court rulings, including one from the upper court, were in their favour. Despite this, the Zhitomir oblast authorities refuse to amend the parish bye-laws. The seizure of the church (the eighth occurrence) took place after the faithful sued the local administration. At the moment, the church is occupied by 15 representatives of the MP and surrounded by militiamen. A bus full of “supporters” is on its way from Kiev to help the occupiers. We ask for the prayers of everyone who is not indifferent to true Orthodoxy.” Since then there have been other attempts on this church. The Moscow Patriarchate has expressed not one iota of “grave concern” over this violence, and indeed it appears to be directed by their local hierarch.

## SIR-UK NEWS

### *EXPANDED ADVANCE NOTICE*

HIS GRACE, **Bishop Ambrose of Methoni**, is planning to be with us for the **Autumn Feast of Saint Edward the Martyr**, the anniversary of the enshrinement of the holy Martyr’s sacred relics in our church at Brookwood in 1984. This year, the feast falls on **Sunday, 16th September (n.s.)**, so we will have the **Vigil Service for the Resurrection and the Saint combined on Saturday, 15th September at 6 p.m.**, and the **Hierarchal Divine Liturgy on the Sunday morning at ten o’clock**. Please keep your diaries free of all other com-

mitments at these times, and join us for the celebration. On the Saturday morning, it is hoped that His Grace will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at the Convent.

### ***BAPTISM AT SAINT EDWARD'S***

ON THE FEAST of the **Nativity of St John the Baptist**, Saturday, 24th June / 7th July, **Sophia**, the infant daughter of **Nicolas and Nektaria Papanicolaou of St Albans**, was baptized at Saint Edward's, the Brotherhood clergy celebrating the Mysterion. **Maria von Sabler** was the godmother. After the Baptism and Chrismation of Sophia, the family invited friends and parishioners to a festive meal in the Old Mortuary. The following day, Sophia was brought to the Divine Liturgy to receive the Holy Mysteries for the first time, and on the following Sunday, the prayer for the removal of her Chrism Robe was read at the end of the Liturgy. May Sophia be kept in the confession of the Orthodox Faith all the days of her life. *Many Years* to our newly-illuminated sister, her sponsor and parents.

### ***CHURCHING AT THE CONVENT***

ADRIAN, the infant son of **Alphonse and Natalia Sofenianos** was presented in the Church and the prayers for his mother's churching were read, before he received the communion of the Holy Mysteries at the Convent of the Annunciation on Sunday, 18th June / 1st July.

### ***INTERMENT AT SAINT EDWARD'S***

ON FRIDAY, 30th June / 13th July, the Synaxis of the Twelve Holy Apostles, **John Clarke** of Charterhouse, London, was laid to rest in our cemetery. For eighteen years, John, a convert to Holy Orthodoxy, had been a parishioner of the **Russian Orthodox Cathedral parish at Ennismore Gardens in London**, and the funeral itself was held in the Cathedral Church. **Fr Joseph Skinner** of the Cathedral clergy and his matushka, with a company of mourners, accompanied John's body to Brookwood and chanted the hymns of the committal. After the interment, Fr Joseph and the other mourners were provided with light refreshments by the Brotherhood. May His servant, John, find rest with the saints and be granted *Memory Eternal*.

## ***FILMING AT BROOKWOOD***

DAN SNOW, the T.V. historian and presenter, brought a film crew to **Brookwood Cemetery** on Monday 16th June, preparing for a future programme about the history of the site. They were filming on the Brotherhood property for about 45 minutes, working near the Old Mortuary Chapel and the former railway station platform, but were extremely attentive not to intrude too much upon our daily work.

### ***KEOTCoLtd A.G.M.***

THE A.G.M. of the **King Edward Orthodox Trust Company Limited**, the charity which administers the Brotherhood property at Brookwood, was held in the Exhibition Room immediately after the Divine Liturgy on Sunday 22nd July. The charity is a limited company (a requirement of our running a cemetery) and accounts have to be deposited with Companies House, and it is naturally also registered with the Charity Commissioners (number 284929/0), and the accounts approved at the AGM should shortly be published on their website: <<http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/>>.

## ***VISITORS***

ANYA STONELAKE, of Shepherd's Bush, London, an old friend and benefactress of our community, brought the **Nun Catherine** from the **Russian Orthodox Convent of Saint Mary Magdalene in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jerusalem**, to visit us on 16th June. Travelling by train to visit a friend in Farnham who was ill, Mother Catherine had noticed the Brookwood stop from the train window, and on their return journey insisted on coming to see us. Their visit was short, as they had to return to London, but they were shown the church and the exhibition room and given light refreshments.

MARGARET HOBBS led a walk around Brookwood Cemetery on Friday, 29th June, and brought about two dozen people to visit the church. The group was from the **Therapy Garden in Normandy, Surrey**.

## ***RENOVATIONS AT SAINT EDWARD'S***

IN the next few weeks, further renovation work will begin on the exterior of **Saint Edward's Church** at the Brotherhood. We are hoping to have the west doors re-hung and restored, and the exterior rendering of the church replaced. When we arrived in 1982, this rendering was in a deplorable state, and we had it treated, and were told by the contractors that it would last thirty years. Well, it nearly did! Now, however, it requires a more thorough renewal and we have contracted with **Marshels of Farnham Ltd** for the work to be undertaken. We hope that it will not cause too much disruption to parish life and that we can have it all completed for the feast of Saint Edward on 3rd / 16th September, when the Bishop will be with us again.



## **PRACTICAL TIP**

WHEN the Thanksgiving Prayers are read in church after the Divine Liturgy, everyone should stand attentively and listen to them. Of course, if you have **not** received the Holy Mysteries at the particular Liturgy you may quietly leave the church, although it is better to stand with your fellow Orthodox and pray with them. Because these prayers are read after the kissing of the Cross, when necessarily there is some movement in church, it seems that many people feel everything in over and they may leave. The one thing worse than this is to stay in church and engage in conversation, in doing so you are distracting those who wish to listen to the prayers from doing so, and dishonouring the house of God.



“A WISE MAN recognizes the gleam of truth whoever utters it.”

VENERABLE GILDAS THE WISE, + C. 570 A.D.