



## FROM THE FATHERS

“A BROTHER questioned an Elder, saying: ‘If some scandalous night-time fantasy should befall me, and in the morning I am to commune of the Immaculate Mysteries, what should I do?’ The Elder replied: ‘You may approach Holy Communion not in contempt of the sacredness of the Mysteries, but with the sense that you have been wounded and are in need of a physician; then the Lord, Who cured the woman with the flow of blood, will cure you. Let us greatly love the Lord, that He might also say to us: “Your sins, which are many, are forgiven, for you loved much” (Luke 7:47)”

VEN. BARSANOUPHIUS THE GREAT, SIXTH CENTURY

“CONSIDER, my brothers and sisters, what a difference there is between the Church of Christ and that ancient Ark of Noah. That Ark took in animals and again sent animals forth. In other words, the raven that entered the Ark emerged from it still a raven; the wolf entered a wolf and emerged a wolf; the horse entered a horse and emerged a horse, and so on with all of the other animals. However, the Church of Christ, if it has accepted a raven, that is, a man blacked and impure from sins, transforms his outlook and sends him forth a white and pure dove. If it has accepted a wolf, that is, one who is violent, rapacious, greedy, and a malefactor, it transforms him by its teaching, and in particular by holy Confession and Communion of the Divine Mysteries, and makes him a tame sheep, charitable, and a benefactor of men. If it has accepted a fox, that is, a crafty and wicked man, it turns him into a simple and guileless lamb.”

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

# *A Homily on the Holy Eucharist and on Not Judging Others or Remembering Wrongs*

HOLY HIEROMARTYR ANASTASIOS II,  
Patriarch of Antioch

THE GRACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT always urges us, throughout Holy Writ, to fulfil the Divine commandments. This is especially true of the admonitions of the Prophet David that are chanted daily in our psalmody. For the Book of Psalms instructs us in piety, sets forth ordinances concerning faith, teaches temperance, leads us to the fear of God, and speaks about punishment, compunction, continence, repentance, compassion, the love of God, the patience of God, chastity, long-suffering, fasting, and beneficence. Now, assiduity and attentiveness in prayer and in reading the Divine Scriptures are the mother of all the virtues. It is by prayer that we obtain every request and gift from God; as Scripture says: *In congregations bless ye God* (Ps. 67:26), and *in the midst of the Church will I hymn Thee* (Ps. 21:22). Hence, the Prophet, in the person of God, quite naturally suggests that we practice unceasing assiduity and attentiveness towards God, saying: *Be still, and know that I am God* (Ps. 45:11). Thus, without great attentiveness and diligence in prayer and the reading of Divine Scripture it is impossible either to receive what one requests from God or truly to know God.

For, if it often happens that one who spends a sufficient number of years in secular schools is scarcely able to learn this or that skill, how much more must one who wishes to attain to knowledge of God and to please Him devote his time to God and

fervently and ardently elevate his soul to Him as it were on wings until the end of his life? Do you not see how those who assume temporal and transitory power, whenever they grasp some opportunity, are driven and impelled by their own thoughts as if by fire, and every one of them says: As long as I find the opportunity, as long as I am in power, as long as I am able to give orders and demand obedience, as long as life's affairs turn out well for me, I will acquire riches, build, plant, plunder, prosper, and seize the initiative before there is a change in circumstances! I will not wait, I will not be negligent, for I do not know what the next day will bring! The majority of men are urged on by these and similar thoughts, as if driven and impelled by demons; they are suffocated by the temptations and cares of this life, and without any profit. None of them gives any thought to the soul, death, punishment, or judgment. We practically ignore ourselves and deceive ourselves. And if this were all, it would not be so bad; but we hate and slander one another, we plot against each other, and we envy, calumniate, and mock one another. None of us pays any attention to his own sins, no one is concerned about his own load; but we examine the sins of our neighbours with precision and are filled with mud up to our necks, and yet, we are not at all bothered about this. We worry about other people's affairs until old age, and not even in old age do we examine our own vices. We see the small faults of our brothers, but we do not see the beam in our own eye. We are weighed down by the burden of our sins, and yet, we busy ourselves with the flaws of others. Not even then do we feel shame; we spare no one and respect no one, but bite everyone. We devour everyone, the small, the great, the guilty, the innocent, priests, our teachers, those who lead us, those who admonish us, and those who correct us. And for this reason, the wrath of God is coming upon us. It is because of the blindness that grips us that we are being chastised and delivered up to many afflictions and calamities.

Great is our blindness, great is our indolence, great is our negligence. We have no compunction, no fear of God, no amendment, no repentance; our mind is directed entirely towards wick-

edness, wantonness, and drunkenness. It often happens that, throughout the day, when we occupy ourselves in theatres, shameful conversations, and the other works of the devil, we do not become bored, and we even despise food, our homes, and life's other necessities on account of these pursuits. But in the church of God, we do not want to stand for even one hour before God in prayer and reading; rather, we hasten to depart from His church as if from a fire. As for the Holy Gospel, if a longer passage is read, we get angry and stand there listlessly; if the priest who is reciting the prayers prolongs them just a little, we become sullen and inattentive. If the one who offers the bloodless Sacrifice proceeds too slowly, we become bored and morose, we yawn, and we hasten to withdraw from prayer as swiftly as we would from a court of law. And yet, we are incited by the devil to go and engage in idle and prodigal activities. Great is our wretchedness, my beloved. Although we ought to be ardent and zealous in all prayer and supplication, and especially in the Divine Liturgy of the Immaculate Mysteries, and although we are obligated to attend with fear and trembling before the Master at such a gathering, yet we do not make even this offering to Him with a sincere conscience in a spirit of contrition and humility; rather, we carry out our legal transactions and deal with our many vain concerns at the Holy Eucharist.

There are some who are not concerned about the cleansing and repentance with which they should approach the Holy Table, but about the kind of clothing with which they are to adorn themselves. Others come, but do not see fit to remain in attendance until the service is over; they ask other people what is going on at the Eucharist and whether it is time for communion. Then they burst in hurriedly, like dogs, snatch the Mystical Bread, and depart. Others who are present in the church of God do not keep silent even for one hour, chattering with one another, intent on babble rather than on prayer. Others relinquish the Mystagogy of the Divine Liturgy and give themselves over to carnal pleasures. Others pay no heed or attention to their consciences, for they do not cleanse themselves of the filth of sin through self-examination, but add to

the burden of their sins by contemplating the beautiful figures of women, making the church of God into a brothel through their irrational concupiscence. Others make business and property deals, turning the church, at that most awesome hour, into a stock exchange and a marketplace. Others engage in mutual backbiting, and even against the very priests who are offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Certain women are not exempt from these criticisms, and, in particular, all those who are slaves to the devil and do not attend the church of God so much for the sake of prayer as to be seen and to lead many of the more naïve men astray. Therefore, since my exhortation concerns the two sexes, both men and women, I shall return to the original purpose of my discourse, expressing and deploring the kinds of woes that our own indolence and contempt have wrought for us who suppose ourselves to be Christians. What could be more dreadful than such behaviour, when, being replete with rapine, wickedness, and multitudes of sins, washing our hands with a little water, and being thus unclean and defiled, we take into ourselves that Holy Body and the Divine Blood which was shed for the salvation of the world?

Do you not see how Judas, after partaking of the Body of the Master unworthily and treacherously, was immediately condemned and gave more room to the evil one? For, Scripture says: *And when he had taken the sop, Satan at once entered into him* (John 13:27); not because the devil disdained that Bread, but so as to convict the partaker of communing to his own condemnation. For with what conscience, tell me, do you approach the Mysteries? In what state of soul, with what thoughts, having your conscience within you as your accuser? Tell me, if you were carrying dung in your hands, would you dare to touch the king's robes? And why am I saying this? You would not touch even your own clothes with dirty hands, but you would first wash them and dry them, and then you would touch your clothing. Why, therefore, do you not render to God the honour that you accord to mere clothing? And tell me,

what forgiveness will you enjoy? For, it is not entering into the church of God and venerating the sacred figures on the holy icons and the precious Cross that is pleasing to God; nor is it washing one's hands in water that constitutes cleansing, but, rather, avoiding and washing away the filth of sins both by confession and by tears, and purging away the stains of sins by means of a humbled soul. Only thus may we approach the Immaculate Mysteries.

But perhaps someone will say: It is not pleasant for me to weep and lament over myself. And why is this? It is because you do not toil, you lack understanding, and you do not take into account the fearful Day of Judgment. However, if you cannot weep, at least groan heavily, look sad, and restrain laughter; at least cast away elation and stand before the Master with fear, inclining your eyes to the ground and confessing to Him with a downcast spirit. Do you not see how those who stand before an earthly king—and oftentimes even an ungodly one—stand before him with all reverence, gazing at him with trembling, not saying anything or moving, and without agitation, but stand before him in silence and awe? But we stand in the church of God as if we were in a theatre or a bathhouse, laughing, babbling, and chattering. Thus, we deceive ourselves, failing to keep in mind that we are standing in church.

Do you not know that the Church of God is a surgery and a harbour? Now, if you remain in a surgery ailing and unhealed, when, henceforth, will you be cured? And if you are tempest-tossed in a harbour, where, hereafter, will you find rest? Stand with reverence, I implore you. Stand with awe at the fearful hour of the *Anaphora*; for with whatever attitude and thoughts each of you attends at that hour, such also is the frame of mind in which he offers worship to the Master. The oblation is called the *Anaphora* because it is offered up to God. Therefore, stand before God in silence and compunction. Confess your sins to God through the priests. Condemn your actions and do not be ashamed; for, *there is a shame that bringeth sin, and there is a shame which is glory and grace* (Eccles. 4:2 1). Condemn yourself before men, so

that the Judge may justify you before Angels and the whole world. Seek mercy, seek forgiveness, seek remission of past sins and deliverance from future sins, so that you may approach the Mysteries worthily, so that you may partake of the Body and Blood with a pure conscience, and so that it may be for you unto purification and not unto condemnation. Hear what the Divine Paul says: *Let each man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep* (1 Cor. 11:27-30). Do you notice that illness and death result, for the most part, from approaching the Divine Mysteries unworthily?

But perhaps you will say: And who is worthy? I, too, am aware of this. However, you will become worthy, if only you desire it. Recognize that you are a sinner. Cut yourself off from sin. Desist from sin, wickedness, and anger. Display the works of repentance; endue yourself with prudence, meekness, and forbearance. Show compassion from the fruits of righteousness for those in need, and you will have become worthy. Beseech God with a contrite heart, and He will fulfil your petitions; for, if you do not do this, you will be wasting the time that you spend in church. These are not my words, but the voice of the Master: *And why say ye, Lord, Lord, and do not My will?* (cf Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46); for, *faith without works is dead* (James 2:20). And why, someone will object, because I have evil deeds, should I not pray? Why should I not spend time in the church of God? This is not what I am saying, nor do I even countenance it. But I beseech you to pray as you ought, so that when we draw near to God in our prayers, we may stand before Him in a way that befits Him, lest Christ say to us as He did to the Jews: *My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves* (Matt. 21:13). For, if those who sold and bought in the Judaic temple were beaten by the Lord and expelled, what kind of punishment and Gehenna is in store for those who slander each other and remember wrongs? What suf-

fering will be inflicted on us who swear allegiance to God, but are subject to the devil?

For, since the priest is a mediator between God and man and propitiates God for the remission of the sins of the multitude, consider how he fortifies everyone in advance and bears witness, as if saying words such as these to the people: Since you have established me, O my people, as a mediator before God on your behalf at this mystical Table, I implore you, be as zealous as I am. Refrain from all worldly thoughts. Forsake every bodily care. It is time for fervent prayer, not for idle pursuits. Hear what the deacon exclaims to you, when he says: *Let us stand well, let us stand with fear*. Let us be attentive to the holy Oblation, let us incline our necks, let us restrain our minds, let us hold our tongues, let us give wings to our minds, and let us ascend to Heaven. Let us lift up our minds and hearts, let us raise the eye of our soul up to God, let us traverse Heaven, let us go past the Angels, let us go past the Cherubim, and let us run to the very Throne of the Master, let us grasp Christ's immaculate feet themselves, let us weep, let us, as it were, compel Him to be compassionate, and let us give thanks in the holy, heavenly, and ethereal Sanctuary.

The priest affirms these things to us when he says: *Let us lift up our hearts*. What do we then say in response to these words? *We lift them up unto the Lord*. What are you saying? What are you doing? Our minds are distracted by corruptible and transient things, and they devote themselves to vanities, possessions, pleasures, and court cases. And you say: I lift it [my heart] up unto the Lord? Make sure, I beseech you, that you have your heart elevated to the Lord, and not lowered to the devil. What are you doing, O man? The priest is offering the bloodless Sacrifice to the Master for your sake, and you view it with disdain? The priest is struggling for your sake. Standing before the altar as if before a dread tribunal, he implores and urges that the Grace of the Holy Spirit might come down to you from on high, and you take no thought for your own salvation? Do not carry on like this, I beg you. Abandon



this evil and vain habit. Cry out with the priest who is struggling for you, toil with him who prays for you. Offer yourself for your salvation: *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much* (James 5:16). It will be effectual if you struggle together with the priest and manifest the fruits of repentance; for, *when one buildeth and another pulleth down, what profit have they except labours?* (Eccles. 31:23). What is not terrible about this destruction, when you not only lie to Christ at that dread hour of the Divine Eucharist, but also feel rancour towards your own brothers, although you say in the Lord's Prayer, *and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors* (Matt. 6:12)?

What are you saying, O man? Why do you display such audacious insolence towards God? You remember wrongs which your brother has done to you, while you sharpen a knife to use against him, devise mischief against him, and bear malicious poison in your heart, and yet you cry out to God: Forgive me my debts, even as I, too, have forgiven my debtor? Have you come to pray in God's church or to lie? To receive Grace, or to draw down His wrath upon yourself? To gain forgiveness of sins, or to add to your sins? To obtain salvation or punishment? Do you not see that we give each other the kiss of peace at that fearful hour precisely in order that, having rejected every *bond of iniquity* (Es. 58:6) and hard-heartedness, we might draw near to the Master with a pure heart?

What are you doing, O man? While the six-winged Angels are ministering and covering the mystical Table, the Cherubim are standing around and exclaiming the Thrice-Holy Hymn with clear voices, the Seraphim are bowing their heads with reverence, the Hierarch is propitiating God on your behalf—all of them concentrating on the proceedings with fear and trembling—, the Lamb of God is being sacrificed, the Holy Spirit is descending from on high, the Angels are running about all the people unseen as they note down and register the souls of the faithful, do you not shudder at the disdain that you show and at the kiss of Judas that you give to your brother, concealing in your heart the recollection of

wrongs committed many years ago and the pernicious venom of the serpent against your brother? How can you not shudder and fall down when you say to Him Who knows the secrets of the heart: Forgive me, even as I, too, have forgiven my brother? In what way does such a prayer differ from a curse? Why, in saying this, you contradict yourself: If I pardon, pardon me; if I forgive, forgive me; if I show sympathy, show sympathy to me; if I harbour a grudge against my fellow-servant, harbour one against me; if I am angry, be angry with me; with what measure I measure, let it be measured to me; if I forgive with hypocrisy, may I be shown mercy with hypocrisy. I shall pronounce the verdict against myself, O Master. For I have heard Thy fearful voice, which says: *For with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again* (Matt. 7:2); and: *If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you* (Matt. 6:15). Convinced by the assertion of these unerring words of Thine, I have pardoned and forgiven those who have sinned against me. Therefore, O Master, pardon me, just as I, too, have pardoned my fellow-servants.

Let us say these things. Let us pray them every day when we are present at the time of the awesome and dread Eucharist. In recognition of this, the priest, after the consecration of that bloodless Sacrifice, elevates the Bread of Life and shows it to everyone. The deacon then exclaims, *Let us attend*, that is, Be attentive to yourselves, brethren. Behold, shortly before this you agreed when you said: *We lift our hearts up unto the Lord*. And again, confessing your purity of heart and freedom from rancour, you said: *Forgive us, as we forgive our debtors*. For this reason, you gave one another the kiss of peace. But since I, too, am a man and do not know your thoughts, I refrain from passing judgment on them; for I do not know who is worthy or unworthy to partake of these Mysteries, and this is why I tell you to be attentive to yourselves and to be aware of the One before Whom you stand.

The priest then immediately adds: *The Holy Things are for the Holy*. Now, what is he saying? Be careful, brothers, how you

draw near to partake of the Divine Mysteries, lest any of you, when approaching to commune, should hear: Do not touch Me, depart from Me, you who remember wrongs and work iniquity. Go far away from Me, you who do not forgive your brother. And then come and offer your gift, and you will be counted worthy to commune (cf Matt. 5:23-24). Cast off from yourself all the filth of evil, and then come and receive the Coal that purifies. Say to Him: I know, O Master, that I am a debtor with many sins and offenses, but because of Thy commandment, I have forgiven my brothers, so that I, too, may be vouchsafed forgiveness from Thee, O Master. These things and the like are suggested to us by the priest through that small exclamation.

So, let us who desire to *walk worthily of the vocation wherewith we have been called* (Eph. 4:1) forgive our brothers and cast off all evil and wickedness from ourselves. Do not say, I have forgiven my brother many times and he has sinned against me again, because you, too, will hear the same words from the Master. Do not say, So-and-so has greatly offended me, he has designs on my house, he has appropriated my land, he has killed my son, he has caused me many woes, he has thrown me into prison, he has handed me over to death, and this I cannot forgive. No, my beloved, do not talk this way, I beg you. As much as you pardon your brother, so much and much more will the Master pardon you. Imitate Stephen, the first among the Martyrs. Now, what did he say while he was being pelted with stones? *O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge* (Acts 7:59).

Imitate James, the Brother of God, of whom ancient historians [see Eusebius, Church History, Book II, ch. 23 (*Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XX, col. 201A)—Trans.] relate that he prayed for those who were about to kill him and said: O Lord, forgive them; for they know not what they do (cf Luke 23:34). Imitate the Master Himself, Who accepted death for the sake of your salvation, and, if your brother wants to hang you on a tree, cry out with the Master and say: *Father, forgive them this sin* (cf Luke 23:34). Consider

the man who owed ten thousand talents to his master. When you hear ten thousand talents, understand by this the burden of sins. After this man had fallen down before his master, pleaded with him, and implored him, he was forgiven the entire amount. But because he harboured a grudge and did not forgive his fellow-servant, he forfeited the pardon that he had obtained and was delivered to eternal Hell. His rancour alone was sufficient to destroy him, over and above all of those grave sins that amounted to ten thousand talents (Matt. 18:23-35).

So, I beseech you, let us flee from this wicked and unforgivable sin. And, if you want to learn that the darkness of rancour is worse than any other sin, listen to me. Every other sin is committed for a short time and is quickly accomplished. For example, one fornicates, and after this he realizes the magnitude of the sin, and recognizes his guilt. But remembrance of wrongs is an unceasing and festering passion. For, whether he stands up, lies down, prays, or travels, one who is gripped by this passion retains the poison of it in his heart unceasingly and unremittingly, with the result that, being thus enslaved, he neither enjoys the Grace of God nor obtains the forgiveness of his sins. Where rancour puts down its roots, nothing is of any avail: neither fasting, nor prayer, nor tears, nor confession, nor supplication, nor virginity, nor almsgiving, nor any other good deed. Rancour towards one's brother destroys everything.

Let us also take careful note of the following point. Christ did not say, If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thou hast ought against thy brother, but if thou rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Matt. 5:23-24). If, therefore, we ought to heal the evil and wickedness of a brother, what forgiveness do we have, not only if we fail to do this, but also if we remember wrongs that our brothers have done to us and conceal within ourselves the pernicious venom of the serpent? I often hear many people saying: Alas, how can I be saved? I do not

have the strength to fast, I do not know how to keep vigil, I cannot practice virginity, I cannot bear to withdraw from the world—how, then, can I be saved? How? I will tell you. Forgive, and you will be forgiven (cf. Luke 6:37). Behold, a single short path to salvation. I will show you a second way, too. And what is this? *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged* (Luke 6:37). Behold, another way, one that does not involve fasting, vigil, or effort.

Therefore, do not judge your brother, even if you see him sinning with your own eyes. For, there is one Judge and Master, Who will render to each man according to his deeds on the Day of Judgment, on which we shall stand, laid bare according to our actions and receiving the mercy of God. For *the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son* (John 5:22). He, therefore, who judges before the Second Coming of Christ is an Antichrist, for he usurps the office of Christ. Let us not judge our brothers, I implore you, so that we might be vouchsafed forgiveness. Well, perhaps you see him sinning; but you do not know what kind of ending his life will have. That thief who was crucified with Jesus had committed homicide, whereas Judas was an Apostle and Disciple of Jesus and one of His genuine Disciples. And yet, within a short span of time an exchange took place: the thief entered the Kingdom, while the Disciple went to perdition. Now, granted your brother is a sinner, how do you know about his other deeds? For, many who have sinned frequently and openly have secretly brought forth great repentance. We see them sinning, but we have no knowledge of their repentance and conversion. By us they are judged to be sinners, but they are justified by God.

Hence, I beseech you, let us not remember wrongs or judge any man until the coming of the just Judge, *Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts* (1 Cor. 4:5). Above all, do not judge any priest of God regarding secret and uncertain things that you have heard about him. Do not say: He who offers the Eucharist is a sinner, he is condemned, he is unworthy, and the Grace of the All-Holy Spirit

does not descend. Do not think anything of the kind. There is Another Who knows and examines what lies hidden. Know this about yourself, that everyone is superior to you, and leave the judgment to the just Judge. As long as a priest is not in error about the dogmas that pertain to God, it is not for you to judge the rest—if, indeed, you have not taken leave of your senses, but are aware of your limitations and know your place. Well then, someone will say, is a priest not subject to spiritual court and ecclesiastical canons? Yes, of course. However, he will not be judged by you, but by God, or in many cases by a Hierarchy. Why do you, being a sheep, judge the shepherd? Why do you pharisaically usurp the judgment of God and a sacred office which has not even been entrusted to you by God?

For this reason, I implore you, do not judge anyone, and especially not a priest of God, but approach the Divine Mysteries with faith, efficacious repentance, and a pure heart, and you will attain to complete sanctification. For, even if an Angel of God offers the bloodless Sacrifice, and you approach unworthily, in no way will the Angel cleanse you of your sins. That what I am saying is true is attested by Judas himself. In his case, after receiving the Divine Bread from the immaculate hands of the very Master, because he received It unworthily, Satan immediately entered into him.

And if you would like to hear a story to the effect that not judging frees one from sins, and conversely, that judging places a seal on one's sins, then listen. As Christ the Master is my witness, those who beheld this event are still alive and in the flesh. A certain monk, who had passed his life in complete negligence and sloth, became sick unto death. When he had reached his last breath, he was not at all afraid of death, but began to depart from his body with the utmost gratitude and eagerness. One of the God-loving Fathers sitting beside him asked him: Brother, believe me, looking at you, we used to reckon that you had spent your life in total idleness and negligence, and so we do not know how you can

be so free from anxiety at this time. To this, the brother replied: Truly, reverend Fathers, truly I have passed my life in complete slothfulness, and now the Angels of God have brought the record of my sins to me at this very hour. After reading aloud the sins which I had committed since the time I renounced the world, they said to me: Do you recognize these sins? And I responded: Yes, I certainly do; nevertheless, ever since I renounced the world and became a monk, I have neither judged any man nor remembered any wrongs. And I beg you to observe in my case what Christ said: *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged, and: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven* (Luke 6:37). When I had said this to the Angels, they immediately tore up the record of my sins, and behold, I am going to Christ full of joy and free from anxiety. After relating this story to the Fathers, the brother surrendered his spirit to the Lord in peace, giving a very beneficial and edifying example to those present. May we be deemed worthy of this benefit and edification, and of the portion of those who preserve themselves invulnerable to all condemnation and rancour, by the Grace and love for mankind of our All-Holy and merciful God, for to Him is due all glory, honour, and worship, together with His Only Begotten Son and His All-Holy and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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“HE WHO BELIEVES in the Saviour, and feeds upon His Body and Blood, has life eternal in himself; and this is why every sin causes him painful suffering and disturbance of heart. But those who have not life eternal in them drink wickedness like water, and do not suffer, because life eternal is not in their hearts.”

RIGHTEOUS JOHN OF CRONSTADT, + 1908 A.D.

“Concerning Frequent Partaking  
of the Immaculate Mysteries of Christ”

# Which Sins Do Not Obstruct Us From Divine Communion

“But let a man examine himself, and  
so let him eat of that bread and drink  
of that cup.” (1 Cor. 11:28)

*THOSE well-known advocates of frequent communion of the Immaculate Mysteries of Christ, Saints Macarius of Corinth and Nicodemus the Hagiorite, in their famous book on the subject deal with the objection and doubts of those Christians who are well-intentioned in other respects, but who remonstrate and say, regarding all those who partake frequently: “Perhaps they, as human beings, are not bothered by the passions of gluttony, vainglory, laughter, idle talk, and the like? How, then, can they desire to commune frequently?”*

*The Saints respond to this objection by citing a marvellous text of St. Anastasius of Antioch, which they first quote verbatim and then in simplified language.*

*Let us pay special attention to this position of St. Anastasius, which concisely expresses a profound aspect of Orthodox spirituality: the distinction between “pardonable” and “serious” sins, the existence of “various sacrifices” which purify us in order to approach the Holy Mysteries, and the experience in our lives of continual repentance as the indispensable preconditions for frequent communion.*

*Thus let us take delight in the blessed text by Saint Anastasius.*



MANY are they who, communing rarely, collapse into sins; but others again, partaking more frequently, guard themselves often from much evil, since they fear Holy Communion (“the condemnation of the Eucharist”).

Thus, if, being human, we should err by certain small and forgivable sins—for instance, should we be carried away by our tongue, our hearing, or our eyes; or, being deceived, should we fall into vainglory, sorrow, or anger, or other such things—, let us reproach ourselves and let us confess our sinfulness before God, and so let us partake, believing that Holy Communion is for the remission of our sins and our purification.

If, on the other hand, we should commit heavy sins that are evil, carnal, and impure, and we are resentful of our brother, let us not dare approach the Divine Mysteries until we have repented of those sins.

Thus, because we are carnal and weak people, infected by many sins, God has given us various sacrifices for the remission of our sins, the which, if we offer them to Him, cleanse us and make us fit to partake.

For this reason, almsgiving is a “sacrifice” which purifies man from sins. There is another salvific “sacrifice” for the remission of sins, about which the Prophet David says: “A pleasing sacrifice unto God is a man’s humble disposition and spirit; a heart that is humble and broken by compunction, God never despises.”

If we offer those “sacrifices” unto God, even should we have small failings as humans, we will be made capable of approaching Holy Communion with fear and trembling, compunction, and the confession of our sinfulness, just as the woman with an issue of blood approached Christ with weeping and trembling.

For there are sins unto death (“deadly” sins), and there are sins unto repentance (“pardonable” sins). And there are sins unto healing. But genuine repentance is able to heal all things.

For one is the forgiveness which he receives who approaches the Mysteries with fear and trembling, confessing his sinfulness, and, with contrition, partakes; and another is the punishment which he receives who partakes without fear and with contempt.

Unto those who partake unworthily and disdainfully, not only is the remission of sins not given, but the Devil pounces on them even more.

And all those who partake with fear not only are sanctified and receive the remission of sins, but the Devil is expelled from them.

Source: Agios Kiprianos, No. 258 (January-February 1994), pp. 202-203.



## POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

*IS THE Sunday 9:45 service appropriate for the children?*  
*- A.T., by e-mail*

RE: the suitability of the services for children. The Orthodoxy I “grew up in” was with Russian emigrés, and their view was that all services are suitable for children and they should be brought to as many services as possible. The bigger problem nowadays, - when parents and Godparents seem to have adopted the “modern” idea that you should not guide or direct your children, much less correct them, - is the children, and so the question is: Are the children suitable for the services? Have they been brought up to pray, to be reverent, to attend, to care, as much as their age permits, for their spiritual life?



# THE COMING MONTH

OTHER than July, October is the only month in the Church Year, as we have said in previous issues, when there are no Great Feasts and no special fasting periods or days. However, we do have a number of spiritually important festivals. The first and most prominent of these is the **Protection of the All-holy Mother of God** on the first of the month.

A second is the **Synaxis of the Fourteen Venerable Elders of Optina**, which this year falls on a Sunday, 10th/23rd. In the last days of Imperial Russia, for almost a century until the Monastery's forced closure by the Communists in 1923, the Optina Skete of Saint John the Forerunner was at the centre of spiritual revival in Russia. As a result of Westernizing policies adopted during the reigns of Peter I and Catherine II, a general decline in monastic life had taken place across Russia. Those desiring to follow monastic life in its fulness often chose to leave Russia in search of a monastery in one of the neighbouring Orthodox lands, or to follow this course in the depths of forests, hidden from view. The greatest example of those who chose the first path was St. Paisius Velichkovsky, who laboured ascetically on Mount Athos and ended his days spearheading a monastic revival in Moldavia, Romania. A number of his disciples later returned to Russia from Romania, bringing with them priceless patristic writings on the spiritual life which had been translated by St. Paisius, and which became instrumental in bringing about a new blossoming of sanctity in Russia. When, in the first quarter of the 19th century, a more propitious time for monasticism arrived in Russia itself, the run-down Optina Monastery was restored and from among the forest-dwellers there came the Elders Moses and Anthony, who took the reins of the Optina Monastery and established the Optina Skete nearby. They, in turn, brought in Elder Leonid, a disciple of Elders Theodore of Svir and Cleopas of Valaam, both of whom were direct disciples

of Saint Paisius. With the arrival of Elder Leonid, the practice of eldership was introduced in Optina. This is a prophetic ministry of the Church, which has existed since Apostolic times, and through which God's will is directly revealed to those seeking guidance. An elder is one who, through inward purification, has become a vessel and conduit of the action of the Holy Spirit. This ministry was passed on in Optina from one Elder to the next, in a remarkable chain of holiness that lasted a century. The succession of Optina Elders had a profound effect on all levels of Russian society. Guidance by eldership—marked by a life of simplicity, unquestioning obedience to the Elder, and frequent revelation of one's thoughts—was a source of spiritual rebirth, not only for Optina's monks and monastics of other monasteries, but also for the thousands of lay people who came to Optina in a steady stream for spiritual direction. Famous Russian authors, such as Gogol, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, were deeply affected by their contact with the Elders. The Elders also had a profound effect on the spirituality of Russia by fostering the publication of a significant body of patristic literature concerning the ascetic, spiritual life. The books that Optina Monastery published were sent out free to all monasteries in Russia, and were read by great numbers of lay people as well. They are still being read, in various translations, by Orthodox throughout the world today. In 1990, the **Fourteen Optina Elders** were glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

(The above is mostly a shortened version of an extract from the introduction to *Elder Leonid of Optina*, published by the St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood.)

### ***The Prayer of the Optina Elders***

O Lord, grant me to meet everything that this coming day may bring me with spiritual peace. Grant me to surrender myself gladly to Thy holy will. In every hour of this day, support me in all my undertakings. Teach me to accept whatever news I may receive in the course of the day with peace of soul and with the firm conviction that Thy holy will is in all things. In all my words and actions, direct my thoughts, feelings and senses. In all unfore-

seen events, grant me not to forget that everything is sent by Thee. Teach me to act frankly and reasonably with everyone I meet, that none may be disturbed or embittered. O Lord, give me strength to bear the fatigue of the coming day and all that may happen in the course of the day. Guide my will, and teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to suffer, to forgive and to love. Amen.

Translation by the Sisters of the Convent of the Annunciation, Willesden



# NEWS from the Richmond Diocese of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece

## *BISHOP SOFRONIE'S VISIT*

HIS GRACE, **Bishop Sofronie of Suceava** visited his flock in England at the beginning of the month. On Saturday, 3rd September, n.s., he baptized **Alexia**, the infant daughter of **Ioan and Daniela Tamasanu**, and **Marina**, the baby daughter of **Constantin and Adriana Munteanu**. Alexia is named after St Alexis the Man of God and her Godparents are **Paul and Ionela Chiriac**, and Marina was named after the Holy Great Martyr Marina and her Godparents are **Ioan and Niculina Vasile**.

On the following day, the Sunday, His Grace celebrated the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy at Saint Edward's, assisted by the Brotherhood clergy and **Fr Borislav Popov**. After the Liturgy, Bishop Sofronie read prayers of blessing for the children in our parish about to start the new school year, and while the other clergy served *litis* at the graves in the cemetery and blessed cars, Bishop Sofronie read prayers over his spiritual children in church.

Before leaving for London, Bishop Sofronie looked over the work being done on the Mortuary and met **Ioan Turcu** and the Romanian team who are going to complete the work there.

## ***BISHOP AMBROSE'S VISIT AND ST EDWARD'S DAY***

IN COMING to England for St Edward's Day, **His Grace, Bishop Ambrose**, started this time from the North, arriving in Manchester and celebrating the Church New Year with **Fr Gabriel Lawani, Presbyter Helena** and their parishioners at the **Joy of All Who Sorrow Mission in Droylsden**. On the eve of our feast, the Lawanis brought the Bishop to Brookwood, where His Grace celebrated the Vigil Service with Fr Gabriel, Fr Borislav and the Brotherhood clergy. At the end of the service, he gave an address on the significance for us of the saints and their sacred relics. On the occasion we were joined by a number of parishioners from the **Russian Orthodox Cathedral in London at Ennismore Gardens**. In the night that followed we had one of the most tremendous thunder storms one could imagine and torrential rains. Nonetheless, despite there being flash floods in the area and the local station being flooded, we had a good congregation for the Divine Liturgy. For the Liturgy we were joined by **Mother Vikentia**, the superior of the **Convent of the Annunciation in London**. During the Little Entrance, Bishop Ambrose bestowed the *epigonation* on Fr Borislav and blessed him to hear confessions, explaining carefully to him and to us the significance of this ministry. At the end of the Liturgy, His Grace preached on the life of St Edward and his defence of the monastic life. Everything being so sodden outside we had to cram everyone into the monastic house kitchen and library for the breakfast, which was provided by **Vasileos Kalkanteras** and volunteers, to whom we are extremely grateful.

On the Saturday morning, we took Bishop Ambrose to Heathrow to catch his flight to Moscow, and later in the day returned there to collect **Archimandrite Daniel**, who served the Sunday services with us and preached at the Divine Liturgy.

During their visit from Droylsden, Fr Gabriel and Presbytera brought a large and beautiful icon of the **Mother of God, the Joy of All Who Sorrow**, the patroness of their church. And Fr Daniel brought us an icon of **Saint Filofteia of Romania**, given him by parishioners for us. Our thanks to them both.

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

ON SATURDAY, 11th/24th September, the feast of the Venerable Theodora of Alexandria and Blessed Xenia of Petersburg, **Antonia**, the infant daughter of **Mihai and Maria Florea, of Wembley**, was baptized at Saint Edward's Church. Her godparents are **Ioan and Niculina Vasile**, and Antonia is named after **Saint Antony the Great**. The forty-day churching prayers were also read on this occasion and Antonia partook of the Holy Mysteries for the first time. After the service, members of the Brotherhood and those who participated in the Baptism were offered refreshments under the gazebo, which currently serves as our refectory. Please remember your new sister in Christ, Antonia, her godparents and her parents, in your prayers.

### ***VISITORS***

ON the Heritage Open Days, **Margaret Hobbs** of the **Brookwood Cemetery Society** brought a group of about fifteen people to see the church during their tour of the Cemetery.

## ***MORTUARY RESTORATION***

AT the time of preparing this issue for the proofreader, the main contractors, **Marshels of Farnham**, are bringing their work to a close, and our Romanian parishioners/contractors are beginning work on remodelling the interior of the building so that we have more space, and restoring and redecorating. We have also discovered in the past week (end of September) that the turret finial, which we had thought was complete in itself, once had something attached to its top, and so we are in the process of ordering a cross to top the turret, so that there will be crosses on each of the ridges and on the turret.

## ***PRACTICAL TIP***

THIS ONE is primarily for Godparents and parents. The rest of you may sigh a sigh of relief! Be aware that as children grow older, they need to be instructed about the Church, her Faith and the implications faithfulness to her will necessarily have in their lives and conduct, and in ways that are appropriate to their age. No teacher worth their salt would be teaching fifteen-year-olds ABC and two-plus-two-equals-four. But the equivalent often seems to happen with regard to Church upbringing. Often one finds people who have come from Orthodox homes but whose grasp on the things pertaining to the Church is limited to knowing a few customs: that you kiss the priest's hand when he blesses you; you hold flowers at the Pentecost service; eat little pastries that look like birds on Forty Martyrs' day; have a special bread with a six-pence hidden in it on St Basil's day, etc. All these customs have their own significance and beauty, but if you have reached your teens and do not know what our Faith teaches or how, as an Orthodox Christian, to cope with the moral dilemmas of modern life, you are going to be an easy prey to the powers of evil. So Godparents and parents, **respect the intelligence of the children and guide them in accordance with their maturity**. Do not leave them, as so many seem to have been, as "Kindergarten Orthodox," easy prey to the powers of evil whose skills are not at all underdeveloped.