

The Shepherd

An Orthodox Christian Pastoral Magazine

VOLUME XXIII NUMBER 6 MARCH 2003

FROM THE FATHERS

"HE WHO FASTS is light and active, and prays wakefully, and quenches his evil lusts, makes God propitious, and humbles his proud stomach. And he who prays with his fasting has two wings, lighter than the winds themselves. For he is not heavy and wandering in his prayers (as is the case with many), but his zeal is as the warmth of fire, and his constancy as the firmness of the earth."

Saint John Chrysostom, 354 - 407 A.D.

"ON THIS the greatest and most sacred of the fasts, what more fitting opening than to begin with the words of the Apostle, in which Christ spoke, and declare again what has just be read to you: "*Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Cor. 6:2)? For though there is no season that is not filled with Divine gifts, and though at each moment we have, through His grace, access to the Divine Mercy, yet now is the time in which the souls of all men should be stirred with greater fervour towards spiritual perfection, and inspired with greater confidence: now when the return of that day on which we were redeemed invites us once more to the fulfilment of all our sacred duties, so that purified in body and soul we may celebrate the supreme Mystery of the Passion of our Lord."

St Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, + 461 A.D.

"THE SECOND ASCETIC virtue is the Theanthropic virtue of prayer and fasting. This being a virtue which must become the way of life of our Orthodox people, becoming the soul of their souls, because prayer and fasting are the all-powerful, Christ-given means of purging not only the human personhood but also society, the people, and the human race at large, of every defilement. It is prayer and fasting which are able to cleanse our people's souls from our defilements and sinning (Matt. 17:19-21; Luke 9:17-29). The souls of our people must fall in step with the Orthodox life of prayer. Prayer and fasting are not to be performed merely for the individual, or for one people, but for everyone and everything ("*because of all and for all*" [*from the Liturgy*]): for friends and for enemies, for those who persecute us and those who put us to death, because that is how Christians are to be distinguished from the gentiles (Matt. 5:44-45)."

Saint Justin of Serbia, 1894-1979

THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER FOR A BEGINNER

Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) of the Caucasus, 1807-1867

INTRODUCTION

HERE WE OFFER teaching on the quality of prayer proper to one who is beginning to go to God by way of repentance. The main thoughts are each set forth separately so that they may be read with great attention and more easily retained in the memory. The reading of them, by feeding the mind on truth and the heart on humility, may supply the soul with due direction in the labour of prayer, and serve as a preparatory study to it.

1. Prayer is the lifting up of our requests to God.
2. The foundation of prayer is that man is a fallen being. He strives to regain the happiness which he once had but has lost, and therefore he prays.
3. Prayer's haven is God's great mercy towards the human race. For our salvation, the Son of God offered Himself to His Father as a propitiatory sacrifice of reconciliation. For this cause, if you wish to engage in prayer, banish doubt and duplicity (See James 1:6-8). Do not say to yourself, "I am a sinner. Will God really hear me?" If you are a sinner, then those comforting words of our Saviour refer precisely to you: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13).
4. The following things serve as a preparation for prayer: an unfilled stomach, the cutting off of cares with the sword of faith, the forgiveness from the sincerity of one's heart of all offenses, thanksgiving to God for all the adversities and sorrows of life, withdrawal of oneself from all distraction and from mooning, reverent fear (awe) which is so natural for the creature to have when he is permitted to hold converse with his Creator through the Creator's unutterable goodness to the creature.
5. The Saviour's first words to fallen mankind were "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17).
6. True prayer is the voice of true repentance. When prayer is not animated by repentance, then it does not accomplish its purpose, then it does not win God's favour. He will not disregard "a broken spirit, a heart that is broken and humbled" (Ps. 50:17).
7. The Saviour of the world calls the poor in spirit blessed, that is, those who have a humble idea of themselves, who regard themselves as fallen creatures who are here on earth in exile, outside their true home, which is heaven. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," those who pray with a deep realisation of their destitution, "for theirs is the Kingdom of the Heavens." "Blessed are they that mourn" in their prayers, from a sense of their destitution, "for they shall be comforted," with the Holy Spirit's gracious comfort which consists in Christ's peace and in love for all one's neighbours in Christ. Then no neighbour, not even the most malicious enemy, is excluded from the all-embracing love of the one who is praying. Then he who prays becomes reconciled to all the most oppressive circumstances of earthly life.
8. In teaching us how to pray, the Lord compares a praying soul to a widow wronged by a rival who pesters persistently a just and impartial Judge (Luke 18:1-8) [*The widow in the parable pesters an unjust judge of course, but St Ignatius takes us*

quickly on to the end of the parable where we stand before God, the Judge Who loves us - ed.J. Do not let the disposition of your soul differ from this model. Let your prayer be, so to speak, a constant complaint against sin which does violence to you. Look into yourself, reveal yourself by attentive prayer and you will see that you are precisely a widow in regard to Christ on account of the sin that dwells in you, which is hostile to you and which causes inner conflict and suffering, and which estranges you from God.

9. "All the day long I went with downcast face" (Ps. 37:6), says David of himself, meaning of course that he spent the whole day of his earthly life in blessed sorrow over his sins and defects.

10. "Serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice in Him with trembling" (Ps. 2:11), says the Prophet, while another Prophet says in the name of God, "To whom shall I have regard, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word?" (Es. 66:2). The Lord "hath regarded the prayer of the humble, and hath not despised their supplication" (Ps.101:17). He it is "who giveth life," that is salvation," to the contrite heart" (Es.57:15).

11. Even though a person has reached the very summit of the virtues, yet unless he prays as a sinner, his prayer is rejected by God (*See St Isaac the Syrian, ch. 55*).

12. On the day when I do not weep for myself, said a blessed practiser of true prayer, I consider myself in a state of self-delusion. (*These are the words of a certain Fr Athanasius to a visitor in 1829. He lived as a hermit in a tower of the Svensk monastery in the diocese of Orloff - footnote*).

13. Even though we may have endured many exalted struggles or works, said St John Climacus, yet they are stale and spurious unless at the same time we have a painful sense of repentance (*See The Ladder, step 7:64*).

14. Sorrow for sin is a precious gift of God. He who carries it in his heart with due care and reverence carries a holy treasure. It replaces all bodily penances if one has insufficient strength to perform them. On the other hand, from a strong body labour is required as well as prayer; without labour the heart will not be contrite and the prayer will be feeble and false (*See St Isaac the Syrian, chs. 89&11*).

15. A sense of penitence keeps the person who prays from all the snares of the devil. The demon flees from strugglers who radiate the fragrance of humility which is born in the hearts of the penitent.

16. Offer to the Lord in your prayers child-like lisping, the simple thought of a child - not eloquence, not knowledge and reasoning. "Expect ye be converted"- as from paganism or Mohammedanism, from your complexity, duplicity and hypocrisy - "and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3), the Lord has told us.

17. An infant expresses all its desires by weeping. And let your prayer always be accompanied by weeping. Not only in the words of prayer, but also in the silences of prayer, let your desire for repentance and reconciliation with God, your extreme need of the mercy of God, express itself in weeping.

18. The value of prayer consists only in its quality, not in its quantity. Quantity is laudable when it leads to quality. Quality always leads to quantity. Quantity leads to quality when the person praying prays attentively (see *The Ladder, step 28:21*).

19. The quality of true prayer consists in the fact that the mind during prayer is attentive and the heart sympathises with the mind.

20. Enclose your mind in the words of your prayer and keep it attentive. Have your eyes on your lips, or closed. This will assist the union of the mind with the heart. Say the words with extreme unhurriedness and you will more easily enclose the mind in the words of the prayer, do not let a single word of your prayer be said without attention.

21. When the mind is enclosed in the words of the prayer, it draws the heart into sympathy with it. This sympathy of the heart with the mind expresses itself in compunction. Compunction is a pious feeling that consists of sorrow combined with gentle, meek comfort. (See *St Mark the Ascetic: He who thinks he can be justified by works*).

22. An essential property of prayer is perseverance. When you feel aridity, hardness, do not give up praying. For persevering and struggling against insensibility of heart, the mercy of God, which consists in compunction, will descend upon you. Compunction is a gift of God that is given to those who "persevere in prayer" (see Romans 12:12; Col. 4:2), which constantly increases in them and leads them to spiritual perfection.

23. The mind, when engaged in attentive prayer to the invisible God must itself be invisible, as an image of the invisible Deity. That is, the mind should not produce within itself, or out of itself, or before itself, any kind of form. It must be completely formless. In other words, the mind should be completely void of all imagery, however holy and harmless that imagery may appear to be (Sts Callistus and Ignatius, word 73; *The Ladder, step 28:42*).

24. During prayer, do not seek raptures and ecstasies; do not put your nerves into motion; do not heat your blood. On the contrary, keep your heart in profound peace, into which it is brought by a sense of repentance. Material fire, the fire of fallen nature, is rejected by God. Your heart needs purification by penitential weeping and penitential prayer. And when it is purified, then God Himself will send down into it His all-holy spiritual fire (see *The Ladder 28:45*).

25. Attention in prayer brings the nerves and the blood into tranquillity; it also helps the heart to immerse itself in repentance and remain therein. Peace of heart is not disturbed by the Divine fire if it descends into the cenacle of the heart wherein are gathered Christ's disciples - thoughts and feelings borrowed from the Gospels. This fire does not burn or heat; on the contrary it bedews and cools it, and reconciles the person with all people and with all circumstances, and draws the heart into unutterable love for God and one's neighbour (*St Maximus Kapsokalivites: Conversation with St Gregory the Sinaite*).

26. Distraction robs prayer. When you have prayed with distraction, you feel within yourself an inexplicable dryness and emptiness. From this state is born coldness towards God, accidie or despondency, darkening of the mind, weakening of faith, and

thence deadness with regard to the eternal, spiritual life. And all this, taken together, is a clear sign that such prayer is not accepted by God.

27. Reverie in prayer is even more harmful than distraction. Distraction makes prayer fruitless, while reverie serves as a cause for false fruits - self-deception and (thus named by the Holy Fathers) diabolical delusion. By imprinting and holding in the mind representations of objects of the visible world and representations of the invisible world formed by fancy, the mind is made as it were material and transferred from the Divine sphere of Spirit and Truth to the sphere of matter and error. In this sphere the heart begins to sympathise with the mind not with spiritual feelings of repentance and humility, but with carnal feeling, a feeling due to nerves and blood, and an untimely and disorderly feeling of delight such as is improper for sinners, a wrong and false feeling of imaginary love for God. Criminal and abominable love is imagined holy by those unskilled in spiritual experiences, while in actual fact it is only the disorderly feeling of a heart not purified of passions, which takes pleasure in vainglory and sensuality caused by reverie. Such a state is a state of self-deception. If a person lingers in it, the forms that appear to him become extremely vivid and attractive. When they make their appearance, the heart begins to be warmed and delighted unlawfully or, according to Holy Scripture, to commit fornication (Ps.72:25;etc). The mind regards such a state as a state of grace, a Divine favour. Then he is near to passing into obvious diabolical delusion, in which the person loses self-control and becomes a toy and laughing-stock of the evil spirit. From imaginative prayer, which reduces man to such a state, God turns away with anger. And on a person who prays in that way the sentence of Scripture is fulfilled: "Let his prayer become sin" (Ps. 108:6).

28. Reject apparently good thoughts and apparently bright ideas that come to you during prayer, which distract you from prayer (*St Simeon the New Theologian: The First way of Prayer*). They come from the realm of misnamed reason, and they are mounted on vainglory like riders on horses. Their dark faces are muffled so that the mind of the person praying may not recognise them as its enemies. But it is just because they are hostile to prayer, draw the mind away from it, lead it into captivity and hard slavery, strip and devastate the soul, that they can be recognised as enemies from the realm of the prince of this world. Spiritual knowledge, knowledge of God, aids prayer, concentrates the person within himself, immerses him in attention and compunction, brings to mind reverent silence, fear and wonder, which are born of a sense of the presence and greatness of God. This sense or awareness in due time can be increased greatly, so that prayer becomes for the person praying the awful tribunal of God (*The Ladder, step 28:1*).

29. Attentive prayer, void of distraction and imagery, is a seeing of the invisible God which draws to itself the sight of the mind and the desire of the heart. Then the mind sees unseeingly, and is fully satisfied with its unseeing which is above all vision. The reason of the blessed unseeingness is the infinite fineness and incomprehensibility of the object to which one's sight is directed. God, the invisible Sun of Righteousness, sends forth rays invisible yet clearly perceptible to the soul's sense. These invisible rays fill the heart with a wonderful peace, faith, courage, meekness, mercy, and love for one's neighbour and for God. By these effects seen in the inner chamber of the heart, the person knows beyond a doubt that his prayer has been accepted by God. Then he begins to believe with a living faith and to trust firmly the Lover and Beloved. This is the beginning of the soul's revival for God and for a blessed eternity.

30. The fruits of true prayer are a holy peace of soul combined with a calm, silent joy devoid of imagery, self-esteem and passionate impulses and movements; a love for one's neighbours which in the matter of love makes no distinction between good and bad, worthy and unworthy, but intercedes and prays to God for all as for oneself, as for one's own members. From such love for one's neighbour is born the purest love of God.

31. These fruits are God's gift. They are attracted to the soul by its attention and humility; they are kept by its fidelity to God.

32. A soul continues in fidelity to God when it rejects every sinful word, deed and thought, and when it immediately repents of those sins into which it is drawn by its frailty

33. We prove that we desire to acquire the gift of prayer by our patient sitting with prayer at the doors of prayer. For our patience and persistence we receive the gift of prayer. "The Lord," says Scripture, "gives prayer," that is a gift of grace "to him that prayeth" patiently and contributes merely his own effort.

34. For beginners short and frequent prayers are more profitable than long prayers separated from one another by a considerable space of time. (*St Dimitry of Rostov: The Interior Man*).

35. Prayer is the highest exercise of the mind.

36. Prayer is the head, chief, source and mother of all the virtues.

37. Be wise in your prayer. Do not ask in it for anything vain or corruptible, remembering the Saviour's precept: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things," that is, all that you need for this temporal life, "will be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

38. When you intend to do anything, or want anything, and also when you are in difficult circumstances, offer your thought in prayer to God - ask for what you consider you need and would benefit you. But leave the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of your request to the will of God, with faith and hope in the omnipotence, wisdom and goodness of God's will. This excellent way of prayer was given us by Him who prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup assigned to Him might pass. "Yet not My will," He concluded His prayer to the Father, "but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

39. Offer humble prayer to God for the good works and pious labours that you do; purify and perfect them by prayer and repentance. Say of them in your prayer what righteous Job said in his daily prayer for his children: "Lest perhaps my children have sinned and have thought evil in their heart against God" (Job 1:5). Evil is cunning. It mixes with virtue unnoticeably, defiles and poisons it.

40. Renounce everything so as to inherit prayer and, lifted up from the earth on the cross of self-denial, surrender to God your spirit, soul and body, and receive from Him holy prayer which, according to the teaching of the Apostle and the Universal Church, is the action of the Holy Spirit in men, when the Spirit dwells in a man (Rom. 8:26).

CONCLUSION

HE WHO IS NEGLIGENT in the practice of attentive prayer blended with repentance cannot make spiritual progress or expect spiritual fruits. He is in the darkness of the many-headed hydra of self-deception. Humility is the one altar on which men are permitted to offer sacrifices of prayer to God, the one altar from which sacrifices of prayer are accepted by God. Prayer is the mother of all true and divine virtues. Any spiritual progress is utterly impossible for him who rejects humility, or who is not concerned to enter into holy alliance with prayer. Exercise in prayer is the Apostle's will. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17), the Apostle tells us. The practice of prayer is our Lord's own command, a command combined with a promise. "Ask," the Lord invites us, orders us, "and it will be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it will be opened unto you" (Matt. 6:7). Prayer "shall not slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 120:4), until it shows to him who has loved it, and has constantly practiced it, the palace of eternal delights, until it brings him to Heaven. There it will be transformed into an unceasing sacrifice of praise. This unceasing praise will be offered, will be uttered incessantly by God's elect from the constant sense of beatitude in eternity, which sprouts here on earth and in time from the seeds of repentance sown by attentive and fervent prayer. Amen.

*Slightly modified from a translation first published
in "Orthodox Life," November-December issue, 1950*

St Ignatius' concept of a "beginner" is a little more advanced than our own; but perhaps readers, rather than trying to comprehend all that he writes here at a go, would more profitably use it as a reference and continually return to it.

From
**THE HOUSE OF GOD
AND THE CHURCH SERVICES**

By the Priest N. R. Antonov

Continuation

§ 63. The Changeable Parts of the Services. As we have already mentioned (in § 6 above), in church we read and chant selected sections from the Sacred Scriptures and prayers that were composed by pious Christian writers and hymnographers. These and other hymns and prayers, which are found in the order of the church services, are employed to depict and to glorify events in the three liturgical cycles: the daily, the weekly and the annual. Very simply, the readings and chanted portions from the sacred books themselves are named after the books from which they are taken; thus psalms are taken from the Psalter, prophecies from those books penned by the prophets; and gospel readings from the Gospels. The changeable parts of the services are made up of various hymnographical compositions to be found in various church service books, and they are known by a number of designations. The most important of them are the following:-

1)The Troparion is a short hymn which briefly depicts the life of the saint or the events of the feast. As examples we have: "Thy Nativity, O Christ our God....," "Thou was transfigured on the mountain, O Christ our God....," "The truth of things hath revealed

thee to thy flock as a rule of faith, an icon of meekness...." There are various explanations for the derivation of the word troparion: a) it may derive from the Greek word *tropos*, which means way, mode or image, because it depicts the manner of life of the saint or the manner of festal events; b) it may be from *tropaion*, a trophy or emblem of victory, because it serves as such verbally; c) *tropos* may be used to indicate the metaphorical comparison of the subject with the attributes of some other, and in troparions the saints, for instance, might be compared to the sun, the moon or the stars; d) it may even derive from the word *trepo*, indicating changing or turning, because in chanting them often the chant is taken up first by one choir then by the other, changing and turning between the two.

2)The Contakion (from the word *kontos* - short) is a short hymn which sets out the distinguishing mark of the event or saint celebrated. Others suggest that the name derives from the material on which in early days they were inscribed, and indeed scrolls of parchment, inscribed on both sides were known as *kontakia*. The contakions are distinguished from the troparions not only by the form of their composition but also by the place that they are appointed to be chanted in the divine services. As examples of contakions, we have: "Today the Virgin giveth birth...," "To thee, the Champion Leader...."

3)The Magnification is a hymn sung in praise of the saint or festival. In the Russian practice it is sung by the clergy during the All-night Vigil before the icon in the centre of the church, and then repeated by the choirs. In the Greek usage, there is a short hymn which serves a similar purpose, called the Megalynarion, which is sung during the Divine Liturgy almost immediately before the petition, "Calling to remembrance all the saints" (Litany before the Lord's Prayer). Its form is not the same as the Russian magnification.

4) The Stichera or Verses (from the Greek word *stikhos* - verse) are compositions made up of a series of verses, which are composed in a common metrical form and usually interspersed between scriptural verses. In each of these verses there is some principal thought which refers to the event or saint being celebrated. For each day there are several of these series of verses and they are designated by the place in which they are used in the divine services. There are the stichera, for instance, on "Lord, I have cried," and those on the Praises at the end of Mattins. Also there are scriptural verses near the end of Vespers and Mattins to which stichera are appointed, and so these are called the Aposticha (meaning "on the verses) or in the more common Russian form, "the verses on the verses." In certain places in the divine services, - for instance on "Lord, I have cried," - the number of stichera chanted is an indication of the importance of the feast being celebrated, thus, there might be ten verses for a very important commemoration, eight, six or even just four. To help the chanters, in the service books, between the scriptural verses, it is indicated where one would start chanting the sticheras on each of these occasions. If more verses are needed than are available, some are repeated.

6) The Theotokion is a verse whose principal subject is the Theotokos or Mother of God. It is chanted after the Doxastichon in a stichera series, or after troparions. (The Doxastichon is the verse that comes after "Glory to the Father,...." - from the Greek, *doxa*, glory). On "Lord, I have cried," on Saturday evenings for the feast of the Resurrection (and again on Friday evenings - the leavetaking of that week), we chant

the Dogmatic Theotokion. This derives its name from the fact that it clearly expresses the dogma (teaching) of the Incarnation of the Word of God from the All-holy Virgin. There are dogmatic theotokions in each of the eight tones. There are also Stavrotheotokions; these are chanted in the services for Wednesday and Friday and refer to the Mother of God at the Cross of her Son (from the Greek, *stavros*, a cross).

6) The Akathist - a long composition of twelve alternating kontakions and ikoses (in this case, hymns of laudation), the first pair being repeated at the end. The word akathist means "not sitting," because in church one is not permitted to sit while it is being chanted. The only akathist appointed to be read in church is the original one, that to the Mother of God, which is used in Great Lent, but there are akathists to the Saviour and to numbers of the saints and icons. In relatively modern times, while attendance at the daily appointed services in church has dwindled, the chanting of akathists has become immensely popular among the Slavic Orthodox. It has been suggested that this is because the laudatory exclamations within the ikoses are short and much more readily understood by the laity than the more complicated poetic and grammatical forms in other types of hymn.

7) Antiphons are hymns for which two choirs chant verse by verse alternately.

8) The Prokeimenon - this is a word which could be translated prelude, but seems to have gained acceptance as it is or in its Russian form, *prokimen*. It means that which lies before, and it consists of two (or more) scriptural verses which are appointed before the reading of the Epistle and Gospel, or in Vespers before the Old Testament readings (Actually at Vespers, there is a prokeimenon every day, even though on most days no Old Testament readings are appointed). The prokeimenon verses reflect the essential message of the commemoration and act as an introduction to the scriptural readings. There are daily prokeimenons appointed for Vespers and the Liturgy, and festal ones, used in Mattins and again in the Liturgy. To give an idea of the type of thing appointed - on feasts of the Apostles we use the verse, "Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth..." and for the Theotokos, we use, "I shall commemorate thy name in every generation and generation" (see also Luke 1:48).

9) The Communion Hymn is a verse chanted very slowly during the communion of the clergy and before that of the laity.

10) The Canon is a long composition written in honour of a feast or saint, which is chanted and read at the Mattins and sometimes at Compline. The word, from the Greek, means a rule. It is divided into nine odes, although usually the second one is missing because it is only used in Great Lent. Each ode is again divided into several distinct parts. The first of these is the Hiermos or Irmos, which is chanted in church and which properly sets the form for the following hymns within the ode. These other hymns are called troparions, or simply verses. Between these verses, there are short refrains. The first of these address the principal subject of the Canon (e.g. "Glory to Thy holy resurrection, O Lord;" "Most holy Mother of God, save us;" "Holy Hierarch N, pray unto God for us"). The penultimate one is "Glory to the Father, ..." and the last one (which is usually addressed to the Theotokos), "Now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen." The number of troparions on each ode varies, but often canons are combined, and the rank of the feast will indicate how many troparions are to be read on each ode.

11)The nine Biblical Odes of the Old and New Testaments form the basis of the form of the Canon. In olden times, these nine Biblical Odes were used in the church services, but now except the second one in Great Lent, the actual scriptural texts are omitted and only the hymns based on them chanted. The first of the Biblical odes is the song of the God-seer Moses, sung when he had brought his people across the Red Sea (Exodus 15:1-19). The second, used only in Lent, because of its more penitential nature is also the composition of Moses, written after the Law had been written (Deut. 32:1-43). The third is the song of the Prophetess Hannah (1 Kings 2:1-10), the fourth that of Abacum the Prophet (Abb. 3:2-19), the fifth that of Esaias (Es. 26:9-10); and the sixth that of Jonas (Jon. 2:3-10). The seventh ode is the Prayer of the Holy Three Children (Dan. 3:26-56), and the eighth is their Hymn (Dan 3:57-68). The ninth is the only one to come from the New Testament and is the Song of the Theotokos, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) to which is joined Zacharias' Prayer (Luke 1:68-79). Originally, verses from these Biblical songs were read or chanted between the verses of the special compositions for each day. This is done only in Great Lent now, and then not fully, although the Magnificat is usually chanted before the reading of the ninth ode of the canon in Mattins. The refrains, mentioned above, now replace the scriptural verses.

After the recital of all the troparions on each ode of the canon, the irmos is chanted again, to bring that ode to a conclusion and descend to the next ode. These repeated irmoses are called the katabasia, from the Greek, I descend. Often special ones are appointed appropriate to the feast being celebrated or one shortly to be celebrated.

In its form and content, the canon forms one great poetic composition, and might be called a spiritual poem. In the whole sequence of the services for each feast of the Church Year and for each day of the year, it is probably in the canon, read towards the end of Mattins, that we are told most about the day's celebration and in the most concentrated form.

... To be continued with "Understanding the Service Books"

Translator's Note: In the above section, as in previous and subsequent ones, we have adapted Fr Antonov's work to accord with contemporary practice, sometimes abridging what he says, and sometimes adding to his text for greater clarity. To help readers, in this particular section, we have been more liberal than usual in adapting the original.

THE COMING MONTH

THIS YEAR, March falls wholly within Great Lent, and so the lenten commemorations pervade the whole month. The one Great Feast that falls within the month is that of the Annunciation (25th March / 7th April). It is one of the most important festivals in the Church Year, and as its troparion spells out, it, rather than Christmas, is the festival of the Incarnation of the Word of God - "The Son of God becometh the Virgin's Son." This year the Annunciation falls on a Monday, and so the Vigil Service begins Great Vespers, whereas if it falls deeper into the week, the Vigil would normally begin with Compline, as we are in Lent. Two beautiful things particularly mark the Vigil service: the chanting of the magnification to a special melody, and the fact the Canon is written as a dialogue between the All-holy Virgin and the Archangel Gabriel. Because on the Monday morning we are firmly back in lenten mode, the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom is appended to Vespers. Vespers is served more or less as normally, but after the Old Testament readings for the day, two more

are added for the festival. Then follows a Little Litany, which ends with the exclamation which introduces the trisagion in the Liturgy, "For holy art Thou, O our God...." After this, we chant the trisagion and then continue the Liturgy itself. In the evening, instead of Great Compline, we have Little Compline. Because of the importance of this celebration, we are allowed fish, wine and oil. The only other day on which such a dispensation is properly permitted before Pascha is Palm Sunday.

In the same week as the Annunciation we have St Andrew's Standing on the Wednesday evening (27th March / 9th April), when during the Mattins for the Thursday, we read the Life of St Mary of Egypt and the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete. And on the Friday evening (29th March / 11th April) (again actually the Mattins for the next day) we have the Laudation of the Mother of God and the chanting of her Akathist Hymn. Other than these particularly important services, we will not attempt in this issue to run through all the lenten observances. An excellent description of them can be found in the introduction to the English translation of the "Lenten Triodion" published by Faber and Faber.

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

To a reader asking about the upbringing of children in today's world:

Many thanks for your letter. It is true that it is extremely difficult to bring up children in an Orthodox Christian environment these days. There are so many influences upon them over which their parents have little or no control: school, peer pressure, media - most of these will not be Christian and may well be explicitly or implicitly anti-Christian.

But do not panic or lose heart. Remember that the Saviour loves your children more than you do and He thirsts for their salvation. So do not become over-anxious.

Also be wary of comparing your situation with that of other parents and children....

Keep a long-term perspective. It seems that parents are often too careful about what influences their children, and forget God's providence. I have no idea if anyone who liked "Lord of the Rings" has been saved, but know that several serial killers have been! - it is recorded in the lives of the Saints. Just now, in trapeza, we are reading the lives of the New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke, and they bring home very forcibly how the Lord can find us even when we have strayed or have fallen. There are people who were drunkards, who had committed various sexual indiscretions, who were tax-dodgers, cheats, killers, gossips, liars, etc. etc. - and yet they came to repentance and were not only saved but are glorified by the Church as martyrs. You will not be able to prevent your children from sinning, even straying (if that is what they will), but you may still hope for their salvation.

This does not mean that you need not worry about them at all, and be completely laissez-faire. That would be a grave sin on your part. You have to do your utmost to help them, to give them a good foundation -but do not be surprised if, even after that, they err. Adam and Eve were in Paradise and yet they sinned. Judas was of the company of the Twelve and a healer, preacher and wonder-worker, but he fell.

How can you give them a good foundation? First of all I would suggest: be realistic. You cannot put your children in a monastery at age seven! It is practicably

impossible in these days; it would be cruel for children who have grown up in our society (and for the monks!); it would be an abdication of your responsibilities, and it may not be for their salvation - people in monasteries also often go to hell.

So what can you do to give them that good foundation? First of all, show them an example of Christian living. Make your Orthodox Christian confession so much part of family life that it is the starting point for all their presuppositions. If they see you saying your prayers, reading spiritual works, avoiding worldly entertainments, dressing modestly etc., that will form an impression upon them. If they only hear you telling them what they ought to do and not doing it yourself, they will quickly divine that your faith is counterfeit.

Secondly, talk to them a lot - not just *tell* them things, but discuss your faith and its implications with them at every stage in their life. Often it seems that parents think that just bringing their children to church once or twice a week and having them go to Sunday school is enough. It is not!!! - you have to spend time with them and allow them to ask questions, discuss things and even challenge things.

Thirdly, insure that they are not simply passive followers of you. That sounds odd, but I have noticed that very often children in church seem to be allowed by their parents only to exist as "adjuncts" of their parents. Let them get involved in church life in their own right and in their own ways, not simply attend as "your children." Very often, for instance, they only speak to the priest for a few minutes occasionally in confession, and otherwise never have any contact with the clergy. They come and perhaps serve in the altar but then just walk away. They do not form links and relationships with the other people in church. Encourage this. After all, they may come back to the Faith after you are dead and gone - it is easier if they have connections there or at least know how to make them.

I learned a little trick from an elderly Russian priest in America too. He once told me that he always taught children the little particular customs of our Church (keeping name days instead of birthdays, having pastry larks on Forty Martyrs' day, helping make olive and the various festival foods, joining in the Thespian house blessings, etc. etc). He told me he did this because he figured that somewhere along the line they would lapse, but later would probably want to return. "If," he said, "I only teach them the Gospel message or specifically church things, when they want to return they might find a home in a church of another denomination, and think they have come to rest there, but if they have remembrance of these 'folk' customs embedded in their hearts, they will not find rest until they come back home to Orthodoxy."

Lastly, and most importantly: prayer. Both pray with them, and pray for them. Those prayers will not go unheeded. Pray and do not lose hope. And give up any idea of finding an easy way out!

NEWS SECTION

ESPHIGMENOI BLOCKADE

AT THE END of January, as we went to press with our last issue, the Sacred Monastery of Esphigmenou on the Holy Mountain Athos was subject to a blockade, because the fathers there, who do not commemorate the Patriarch of Constantinople, believing that his ecumenical activities compromise his Orthodoxy, resisted an attempt

by the Patriarchate to evict them. Describing this as an unprecedented move, the Abbot of the monastery, Father Methodius, issued a press release on 29th January, headed "Patriarch of Constantinople blockades food, heating oil, to monastery in attempt to forcibly evict monks critical of his policies." The monastery had been blockaded on land by Greek and European Union police, and on sea by the Coast Guard, in an attempt to starve them out. Fr Methodius commented, "The use of force to accept the faith is a concept that is totally alien to the Orthodox Church. It is not just his [the Patriarch's] teachings, but his actions which are unorthodox, and we cannot accept this." Protopresbyter George Metallinos, a Professor of the University of Athens, has rightly backed the monks. "The monks have an obligation under church law," he contends, 'to object to what the Patriarch is doing. This Canon gives the right even to a lay person to question the Patriarch. According to the Sixth Œcumenical Synod's 15th canon, the monks had an obligation to cease commemoration of the Patriarch." At a news conference held on 27th January, Fr Methodius requested a dialogue with the Patriarch to end the dispute, saying, "We want a peaceful solution to this standoff." The Patriarch has not responded to the monks' request in this respect.

It is not only the Esphigmenou monks who are being threatened in this way; eviction orders were also served on monks in sketes dependent on the Pantocrator and Great Lavra monasteries on the Mountain.

The eviction attempts are being challenged in the courts, but Fr Methodius commented, "We will fight with our prayer ropes."

Such was the shock of the sight of a Christian Archpastor seeming to invoke military force against men who have dedicated their lives to the monastic life that reports of the blockade were carried even in the secular press here in the West.

In the Australian magazine, "The Voice," the following good counsel is given:- "As Orthodox Christians we can assist Abbot Methodius and the persecuted monks of Esphigmenou firstly by our prayers -especially asking for the monks to be commemorated at the Divine Liturgy, by asking supplicatory Molebens to be served for them, and in our private prayers. In addition we can made use of the modern methods of communication available to us - e-mail, fax or telephone - and contact Abbot Methodius, assuring him of our prayerful support. We can then make respectfully worded entreaties to Patriarch Bartholomeos in Constantinople, and the appropriate government authorities in Greece....

Express your opposition to the unchristian embargo of food, medicine and fuel supplies for Esphigmenou Monastery, and the Patriarch's demand for the monks' eviction.... Emphasise that basic and fundamental concepts of Human Rights and Religious Freedom for the monks are being violated, the eviction order is illegal under the Charter governing the Holy Mountain, and that such action as denying food, medical supplies and heating fuel brings shame and dishonour, not only to the Orthodox Faith and all Orthodox, but also to the Greek government and the Greek people in whose name they govern."

The following contacts will be useful in this regard:-

His All Holiness the Œcumenical Patriarch, Bartholomeos I,
Rum Aptrikhanesi, 34.220 Fener-Halic, Istanbul, Turkey; Tel: 0090212
531 96 70-76; Fax: 0090212 534 90 37 e-mail: melito@superonline.com

Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs,
the Hon. George A. Papandreou
e-mail: dialogue@mfa.gr; Fax: 0030 210 368 1433

Civil Administration of Mount Athos Fax: 0030 23770 23290

Holy Community Administration, Karyes, Athos Fax: 0030 23770 23315

Sacred Monastery of Esphigmenou Tel: 0030 23770 237796

His Excellency the Ambassador of Greece, Alexandras Sandis, 1 a Holland Park,
London W11 3TP Tel: 020 7229 3850; Fax 020 7229 7221

JERUSALEM PATRIARCHATE AND ECUMENISM

NUMBERS of reports have circulated announcing that for the first time the Patriarchate of Jerusalem had participated in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It was reported that an Archimandrite Alexandros had represented the Patriarchate and "participated in prayer meetings." In the event, no clergy from the Jerusalem Patriarchate took part in prayer services with any of the non-Orthodox, Fr Alexandros simply addressed a meeting at the Cenacle, traditionally the place where the Mystical Supper was celebrated. Archbishop Aristarchos made the rather ambiguous comment, that this small degree of participation was undertaken "with reservation, but perhaps this is already a positive change in our attitude." This minor shift in position is reported to have disappointed both Roman Catholic and Anglican clergymen in the Holy Land, who are anxious that the Orthodox Patriarchate should participate fully in the ecumenical celebration.

SAINT WERBURGH PILGRIMAGE

ST WERBURGH'S DAY falls on the day after the Great Feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple. This year, with the blessing of Archbishop Mark and the kind permission of the Dean of Chester Cathedral, Orthodox parishioners from her mission in Congleton and from St Elizabeth Mission in Birkenhead were able to make a pilgrimage to her shrine within Chester Cathedral. The Vigils for the Great Feast and the Liturgies were served separately at Congleton and Birkenhead, and then both congregations converged on Chester. We had been led to expect that we would not be permitted to use incense in the Cathedral and had therefore changed our plans to celebrate there. In the event, we found that the Cathedral staff had not only found a way to permit us incense, but had kindly prepared a massive censer for us! Fr Paul Elliott welcomed the pilgrims and explained the purpose of our visit and the order of the service, and then we chanted a Supplicatory Canon before the Shrine. At the end, Fr Alexis gave a short address. Then again, the Cathedral staff excelled themselves, by offering us accommodation in the cathedral precincts to have a picnic lunch and by having a coffee urn already heated for us there. The head verger also kindly spent almost an hour showing various features of the Cathedral. After the picnic, a smaller group journeyed on to Plemstall, where, at St Plegmund's Well at the roadside, we chanted a canon to the saint who, before being elevated to be Archbishop of Canterbury, had lived there as a hermit in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Vigils for the Sunday were chanted separately, and on Sunday morning Frs Alexis and Paul concelebrated at the chapel in Eaton, where the Congleton congregation holds its Sunday Liturgies. On Sunday afternoon a brief excursion was made to St Ann's Well at

Buxton. Thanks are due to all those at Chester Cathedral who showed us such extraordinary and exemplary hospitality, to all who contributed and participated, and especially to Mrs Barbara Worth for her hospitality on the home front.

BROOKWOOD NEWS

TALKS: On Wednesday 12th February, Fr Alexis gave a talk on Holy Orthodoxy at the home of Terry and Janet Henshall to the Wednesday Group of the local Anglican parish at Fleet in Hampshire. Arrangements were made for this by Richard Dexter, who also attended our Christmas Liturgy and wrote an article on his impressions in the Fleet parish magazine. On Wednesday, 13th / 26th February, the eve of Saint Valentine's day, he also gave an informal talk on Great Lent to a group of notionally young people who had gathered at the London home of Miss Elizabeth Meade in Chiswick, ending by answering the many questions from the participants.

NEW BABY: On Sunday 9th February, the infant daughter of parishioners Vasileos and Evphemia Calcanteras was born, and the first day prayers were read for mother and daughter at Guildford's Royal Surrey County Hospital. Because of the Chester pilgrimage, the eighth day prayers could only be read on the tenth day, Tuesday 18th February, when the baby was named Zoe-Marie, in honour of the festival of the Life-Giving Spring of the Theotokos.

HISTORY MAGAZINE: In its March issue, the BBC's "History Magazine" carried a four page article by Geri Parlby about Saint Edward and his shrine at Brookwood. Although generally sympathetic, it was in the way of such articles more "Classic fm", than "Third Programme." Peter Langdown took some very beautiful photographs to accompany the piece, in one managing to make it seem that the church was reflected in a nearby lake - it fact it was the January flood.

PRACTICAL TIP

GREAT LENT is upon us, and in church, even if not at home, there are many prostrations. It is best then to learn to do them properly. Many people start by kneeling down and flopping forward. This can be extremely painful, injurious (falling suddenly on the knees), and it prevents one from doing a number of prostrations in a row, as is sometimes necessary. A better way is, after crossing oneself, to lean orward, allowing the knees to start bending only as the hands reach the floor. Then with your hands on the floor you can ease yourself down onto the knees gently, and then bring the head and shoulders down until the forehead touches the floor. You are also then better poised to push up on your hands and start the ascent to an upright position again. Doing prostrations this way, there will be no jerky or uncomfortable movements, and you will be able to keep doing considerably more than by the "drop and flop" method, to the benefit of both soul and body.