

Ecumenical Patriarchate

Archdiocese of Thyateira & Great Britain

Edinburgh Orthodox Community of St Andrew

Newsletter

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Dear Friends,

With much joy (and a little trepidation) we publish the first issue of our Parish Newsletter.

For some time now, we have been thinking of issuing such a bulletin but did not have either the time or the resolve to do it. We have now launched it and, if God blesses, will try to continue publishing it regularly.

In the Newsletter you will find Parish news as well as articles on the Orthodox Faith and Life written by the Clergy and members of the Parish as well as contributors from outside our Community.

Our hope and prayer is that the Newsletter will help readers appreciate more the Treasure of our Orthodox Faith and encourage members of our Community to become more involved in its life.

If, through this small endeavour, anyone is inspired to love Christ and His Church more, the editors and contributors of the Newsletter will be very glad and should give thanks to the Triune God, to Whom Only is due Glory, Honour and Worship.

With best wishes for Easter,

Fr Raphael and the editorial team

News

This year marks the 30th anniversary of our Archbishop's appointment as the spiritual leader of the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain. Since his enthronement, Archbishop Gregorios, who is 90 this year, has worked tirelessly for the spiritual edification of his flock and the organisation of the communities under his care. During his pastorate a great number of communities have been founded (there are today 118 communities under his care), many with their own Church building and School. He also ordained many priests and deacons, a considerable number of whom are native of the British Isles.

The senior Orthodox Hierarchy in this country, the Archbishop is well regarded in both Church and society as a voice of prayerful wisdom, pastoral discernment and loving directness. Archbishop Gregorios is an inspiration to us all.

Lord, grant that our Archbishop may serve your Holy Church in peace, safety, honour, health and length of days, rightly proclaiming the Word of Your Truth!





External works in our new Church in Chapel Street have been almost entirely completed. The roof has been repaired and re-slatted, external walls have also been repaired and repointed, stained-glass windows have been masterly restored. Also, our Church building is now, for the first time in its 263 years of history, adorned by two very beautiful Crosses produced by a skilled local stonemason: one on the top of the roof and one over the east elevation.

Thanks be to God and to our generous Benefactor.

On the 15th March our Student Society had its AGM and elected a new Committee. We wish them good strength!

The following Saturday, the Society went on a Pilgrimage to St Fillan's Cave in Pittenweem and St Andrews, Fife. In one of Scotland's ancient Christian holy places, the Cave of St Fillan, we sang a Supplicatory Canon to the Saint who lived there in the 8th c. It was a joyous and moving occasion which connected us, a group of 21st c Orthodox Christians from various countries with an 8th c. Scottish Orthodox Saint and reminded us of this country's Orthodox Christian roots!



Lord and Master of my life

By Fr Raphael Pavouris

Holy and Great Lent is full of most beautiful hymns and prayers. However, there is one prayer which sums up the Lenten ethos more than any other. It is called the Prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian (4th c) and it consists in three verses:

Lord and Master of my life, give me not a spirit of sloth, vain curiosity, lust for power and idle talk. (Prostration)

But grant to me, your servant, a spirit of soberness, humility, patience and love. (Prostration)

Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own faults and not to condemn my brother; for you are blessed to the ages of ages. Amen. (Prostration)

This prayer is said in all weekday Services during Lent and in our private prayer rule. Not only our mind but our body too is involved in saying this prayer: after each of the three verses we make a prostration, then twelve bows saying silently at each one of them O God cleanse me the sinner, and again a fourth prostration after repeating the last verse or the full prayer.

Lord and Master of my life

There is nothing more liberating than to take up the good yoke of Christ. It is in our nature to desire freedom, but this is nowhere to be found except in God. Freedom is not to be able to choose from many choices; freedom is to be with God. Wherever God is there is freedom. The only truly free person is the one who has Christ as His Lord and Master.

When I try to run my life on my own I make many mistakes. Lord, I entrust my life to You, receive it and do what You please with it. You gave it to me, lead it as you know. For only You know what is best for me.

Give me not a spirit of sloth

God does not give us a spirit of sloth; what God gives is always a blessing. What we are asking here is that He may not permit us to invite such a spirit because of our weakness (in the same way as we ask, in the Lord's Prayer, God the Father not to lead us into temptation).

Sloth or idleness was considered by the ancient Greeks the mother of all evil (αργία μήτηρ πάσης κακίας) and the Holy Fathers numbered it amongst the seven deadly sins (ακηδία). Weeds and thorns grow in the field which is not cultivated; evil thoughts and desires grow in the soul which remains idle. We are created to pray and practice the virtues; if we do not, we malfunction, and our soul becomes ill.

If we look back, we will see that many of our sins (if not all) were the result of spiritual laziness.

Vain curiosity

There is good curiosity and bad curiosity; e.g. good curiosity is when one is interested in finding out how a good person has become good so that they may learn to do the same. Also, when one asks to find out how things work so that they may develop their knowledge and skills. This is good curiosity. But there is also bad curiosity: when we are too extrovert and neglect our inner life; when we look into subjects that may be harmful and in any case are not our business. Many people have been spiritually harmed because they did not contain their urge to see or hear things that they ought not to. They let themselves know areas of life it would have been better they did not.

Lust for power

This is a great temptation. Many feel that they will not be fulfilled as human beings unless they dominate others. Humbling themselves, by admitting that the other person is right and not they, is considered by many a defeat. Even some generally docile people, when given a position of authority, can be tempted to exercise dominion over others as a means of self-assurance.

In the Church, however, the words of Christ stand for ever: he who is first among you must be a servant of all. For the Christian, having a position of authority means being called to show more responsibility, greater love and, therefore to carry a greater Cross.

Idle Talk

"I have often regretted the words I have spoken, but I have never regretted my silence" said Abba Arsenios and many of us will share this. They who talk carelessly will never acquire prayer and inner stillness. "He who chatters uselessly will not escape sin" says St Basil the Great.

Instead of the above deadly passions the Saint Ephraim asks the Lord to grant us the following virtues:

Soberness

Soberness (σωφροσύνη) we have when our mind, enlightened by the Grace of God, rules over us and is not ruled by the passions. Then we see what is spiritually beneficial for us and for others and what is harmful. Accordingly, guarding ourselves against any impurity which can defile our soul, we strive to retain our integrity. A person who has sobriety is a treasure for others because his judgment is sound and his word is "salted".

Humility

"God opposes the proud but gives Grace to the humble". The kingdom of God is for the humble. Let us learn from the Lord, Who is meek and humble, how to live so that we may resemble Him. This will grant us peace, freedom and love but also great spiritual strength. There is no stronger person than the humble one!

Patience

"In your patience you will gain your souls" and "he who endures to the end will be saved" says the Lord. We should show patience when our prayers are not answered; when our passions, despite our efforts, do not go away; when those close to us do not behave as we would like them to. 'What do I need to do' asked one an Elder; "pray and be patient." If we all do so we will gain our souls.

Love

Christian love is the purpose and fulfilment of all the virtues mentioned above; without it they are worthless; without them pure love cannot be achieved. Love is a gift that is granted to those who practice the Christian life; those who pray, abstain from sin and act lovingly towards all.

Grant me to see my own faults and not to condemn my brother

St Isaac the Syrian says that to be able to see our sins is greater than being able to raise the dead.

When the gift of repentance is granted, one sees his own faults and yet he is not discouraged. Rather he feels true joy and freedom: Joy because he realizes that God loves him and has given him a new

beginning; freedom because no matter what he has done or been, God has forgiven him. God is He Who justifies, who can condemn?

He who truly repents has no desire to point out the faults of other people. He covers their mistakes and sympathizes with their weakness. Others become brothers to be loved (or at least be treated lovingly) as ourselves because in Christ we become one.

The Spring of the Fast and the flower of repentance have come.

Brethren, let us purify ourselves from all impurity and singing to the Light-Giver let us say:

Glory to You, the only One Who loves Mankind!

St Gregory Palamas

By Stephen Griffith

The First Sunday of Lent is dedicated to celebrating the Triumph of Orthodoxy – the victory of Orthodoxy over the heresy of iconoclasm. The Second Sunday of Lent is likewise dedicated to another triumph of Orthodoxy – the victory achieved by the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas.

In the fourteenth century two men left their homes to become monks. Gregory Palamas, the son of a Byzantine noble family left the possibility of an illustrious career at the imperial court to join a monastic community on Mount Athos. Barlaam of Calabria, a Greek-Italian, left his home in Italy to find monastic life in the East. Barlaam sought out some monks to learn about prayer from them. They taught him their techniques and told him that a particular fruit of deep inner prayer was a vision of God as uncreated light. Barlaam was shocked to hear this. The idea that God could be seen by people seemed to go against the principle that God is transcendent – totally other.

Instead Barlaam taught that we cannot know God directly – the divine light and other divine revelations

are simply created symbols ('created grace') from God that tell us about God but are not God Himself.

From his monastery on Mount Athos St. Gregory heard about Barlaam's teaching. He was shocked and spoke out against it. For St. Gregory, Barlaam's teaching was something like this: Imagine someone you have never met sending you a photograph of himself. You would learn true facts from it about how the person looks and even something of his personality – but you could not say that you truly know the person in the picture. By trying to defend God's transcendence Barlaam had in fact declared true knowledge of God impossible.

Instead St. Gregory taught that God is both totally-transcendent and at the same time totally-immanent. St. Gregory did that by distinguishing between God's 'essence' and God's 'energies'. What does this mean? Imagine a friend you know. You will never ever know that friend in the same way as that friend knows herself. That is – you will never know that person in her 'essence.' But at the same time we truly do know that friend in a real way by her 'energies' – her words,

actions, the way she looks at you and treats you. By participating in our friends energies we truly know that person (the energies really are part of who she is) - though in a different way from the way she knows herself. Further by participating in a friend's energies it is possible that in some way we begin to become like that person in a way not always easy to define.

So it is with God. We can never know God as only God knows Himself - but we can know God in His 'uncreated energies' - the innumerable ways in which God has real contact with us - the uncreated light being one of them. As uncreated they are just as much God as God's essence but unlike the divine essence we can participate in them. By participating in the divine energies we can share in God's divine

Δύο του Δεκέμβρη

Ήτανε δύο του Δεκέμβρη, όταν η μαμά μου, δεν ξέρω γιατί, αν και δεν ήταν Κυριακή, με πήγε στην εκκλησία. "Γιορτάζουμε έναν σύγχρονο άγιο μας," μου εξήγησε, "για πρώτη φορά!"

Καινούργιος Άγιος! Δεν ήξερα πως κάτι τέτοιο γίνεται. Εγώ νόμιζα πως οι Άγιοι είχαν ζήσει πριν από πολλά πολλά χρόνια!

Καθώς δεν ήταν Κυριακή, μες στην εκκλησία βρισκόταν λίγος κόσμος. Στο κέντρο είχε στηθεί μια μικρή εικόνα του Αγίου. Δεν ήταν ξύλινη όπως οι άλλες. Μου φαινόταν χάρτινη, σαν φωτοτυπία που πλαισιώθηκε από ένα απλό ξύλινο καδράκι. Ο Άγιος χαμογελούσε κι εγώ δεν χόρταινα να τον κοιτάζω. Ποιος ήταν αυτός ο Άγιος;

Το μυαλό μου δεν ήταν στη Θεία Λειτουργία. Ταξίδευε. Δεν άκουγα τα λόγια του ιερέα μας ούτε τη χορωδία μας. Μόνο κοιτούσα τον Άγιο. Χαμογελούσε με τα μάτια! Το χαμόγελό του αυτό με είχε μαγνητίσει.

Κοιτάζα τους ανθρώπους που βρίσκονταν μέσα στην εκκλησία. Άλλοι σιγοψέλλοντας, άλλοι συγκινημένοι, άλλοι με ύφος σοβαρό, όλοι με το βλέμμα στο ιερό, σαν να περίμεναν κάτι. Και τότε μου μπήκε στο μυαλό η ιδέα, ότι όλοι εμείς σήμερα

Life and indeed become like God: 'we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.' (1 John 3:2) The defence of this essential Orthodox teaching was truly a triumph of Orthodoxy!

St. Gregory's teaching was defended at three Church councils in Constantinople. St. Gregory went on to be archbishop of Thessaloniki. By some Orthodox he is regarded as the 'Fourth Great Hierarch' alongside the Three Great Hierarchs: Sts. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom. As for Barlaam, after his teaching had been condemned in council he went back to Italy. He left the Orthodox Church and later became a Latin bishop. Among other things he taught Greek to the Renaissance poet Petrarch before dying of the plague.



ήρθαμε εδώ για τον ίδιο λόγο. Είχαμε αφήσει τις ασχολίες μας και μαζευτήκαμε εδώ κι όλοι μαζί, σαν να ήμασταν ένα, προσευχόμεσταν στον Θεό. Σαν να ήμασταν ένα!

Αυτή η ιδέα καρφώθηκε στο κεφάλι μου και στριφογύριζε μέσα μου διαρκώς. Μια κοιτούσα τον χαμογελαστό Άγιο, μια τους ανθρώπους που στέκονταν όρθιοι και περίμεναν, κι όλο πιο πολύ και πιο σίγουρα το ένιωθα μέσα μου, πως όλοι μας είμαστε ένα και στεκόμαστε σαν ένα σώμα μπροστά στον Κύριο. Αυτό το ζεστό συναίσθημα μου γέμισε την καρδιά κι είπα στον Κύριο, αχ, ας γινόταν να μην το χάσω, ας γινόταν να μείνει για πάντα μέσα μου, αλλά έλαβα αμέσως την απάντηση, πως θα το χάσω σύντομα κι ας το χαρώ όσο διαρκέσει.

Προς το τέλος της Λειτουργίας, βγήκε ο ιερέας μας από το ιερό και στάθηκε μπροστά μας. Θα μας μιλήσει για αυτόν τον καινούργιο Άγιο, σκέφτηκα.

“Είχε πει μια φορά ο Άγιος Πορφύριος,” ξεκίνησε, “ότι σκοπός μας είναι να αγαπήσουμε ο ένας τον

άλλον τόσο πολύ, ώστε σαν να είμαστε όλοι ένα να κοιτάμε με την καρδιά μας ανοιχτή προς τον Κύριο και να τον περιμένουμε να έρθει.”

Θα είπε κι άλλα ο ιερέας μας, θα είπε κι άλλα πολλά, αλλά εγώ πια δεν ήξερα αν πίστευα στ' αυτά μου!

Και την επόμενη Κυριακή, δεν κρατιόμουν άλλο και το εκμυστηρεύτηκα στον ιερέα μας, ότι τα πρώτα λόγια που είπε, τα ένιωθα πραγματικά μες στην καρδιά μου κατά τη διάρκεια της Θείας Λειτουργίας, μέχρι που τελικά το συναίσθημα αυτό χάθηκε, όπως ήρθε.

“Θα έβαλε το δαχτυλάκι του ο Άγιος” μου απάντησε. “Κι άλλοι μου είπαν, ότι ένιωσαν κάτι ιδιαίτερο εκείνη τη μέρα στη Λειτουργία. Κι εγώ, να σου πω, αλλά είχα προετοιμαστεί να πω και, μόλις ξεκίνησα, αλλά μου βγήκαν!”

Τελικά, φαίνεται, πως οι Άγιοι δεν έζησαν πριν από πολλά πολλά χρόνια, αλλά είναι ακόμη ζωντανοί.

Recipe: Cypriot olive cake

Serves 15

- 1 cup olive oil
- 1 cup fresh orange juice
- 3 cups plain flour
- 3 tsp baking powder
- 1½ cups black olives without pips, cut in four
- 6 spring onions, only the white part cut thinly
- 1 cup fresh coriander, finely cut
- 1 tbsp dried mint



1. Mix the first four ingredients together and knead.
2. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix well. The consistency will be as runny as a cake, but not as dense as pastry.
3. Evenly spread it in an oiled 27cm baking tray, and place in a preheated oven at 170°C. Bake for an hour.

Life of St Mary of Egypt

St Mary of Egypt was an ascetic in the Judean desert. The Church venerates her especially during great lent because her example of repentance was magnificent. We are blessed to have the story of her life, told in her own words, as it was recorded by the monk Zosimas, who by the grace of God met her in the final year of her life.

My native land, holy father, was Egypt. Already during the lifetime of my parents, when I was twelve years old, I renounced their love and went to Alexandria. I am ashamed to recall how there I at first ruined my maidenhood and then unrestrainedly and insatiably gave myself up to sensuality. It is more becoming to speak of this briefly, so that you may just know my passion and my lechery. For about seventeen years, forgive me, I lived like that. I was like a fire of public debauch. And it was not for the sake of gain -- here I speak the pure truth. Often when they wished to pay me, I refused the money. I acted in this way so as to make as many men as possible to try to obtain me, doing free of charge what gave me pleasure. Do not think that I was rich and that was the reason why I did not take money. I lived by begging, often by spinning flax, but I had an insatiable desire and an irrepressible passion for lying in filth. This was life to me. Every kind of abuse of nature I regarded as life.

That is how I lived. Then one summer I saw a large crowd of Lybians and Egyptians running towards the sea. I asked one of them, "Where are these men hurrying to?" He replied, "They are all going to Jerusalem for the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross, which takes place in a few days." I said to him, "Will they take me with them if I wish to go?" "No one will hinder you if you have money to pay for the journey and for food." And I said to him, "To tell you truth, I have no money, neither have I food. But I shall go with them and shall go aboard. And they shall feed me, whether they want to or not. I have a body -- they shall take it instead of pay for the journey." I was suddenly filled with a desire to go, Abba, to have more lovers who could satisfy my passion. I told you, Abba Zosimas, not to force me to tell you of my disgrace. God is my witness, I am afraid of defiling you and the very air with my words.'

That youth, on hearing my shameless words, laughed and went off. While I, throwing away my spinning wheel, ran off towards the sea in the direction which everyone seemed to be taking and, seeing some young men standing on the shore, about ten or more of them, full of vigour and alert in their movements, I decided that they would do for my purpose (it seemed that some of them were waiting for more travelers whilst others had gone ashore). Shamelessly, as usual, I mixed with the crowd, saying, "Take me with you to the place you are going to; you will not find me superfluous."

I also added a few more words calling forth general laughter. Seeing my readiness to be shameless, they readily took me aboard the boat. Those who were expected came also, and we set sail at once.

How shall I relate to you what happened after this? Whose tongue can tell, whose ears can take in all that took place on the boat during that voyage! And to all this I frequently forced those miserable youths even against their own will. There is no mentionable or unmentionable depravity of which I was not their teacher. I am amazed, Abba, how the sea stood our licentiousness, how the earth did not open its jaws, and how it was that hell did not swallow me alive, when I had entangled in my net so many souls. But I think God was seeking my repentance. For He does not desire the death of a sinner but magnanimously awaits his return to Him. At last we arrived in Jerusalem. I spent the days before the festival in the town, living the same kind of life, perhaps even worse. I was not content with the youths I had seduced at sea and who had helped me to get to Jerusalem; many others - citizens of the town and foreigners - I also seduced.

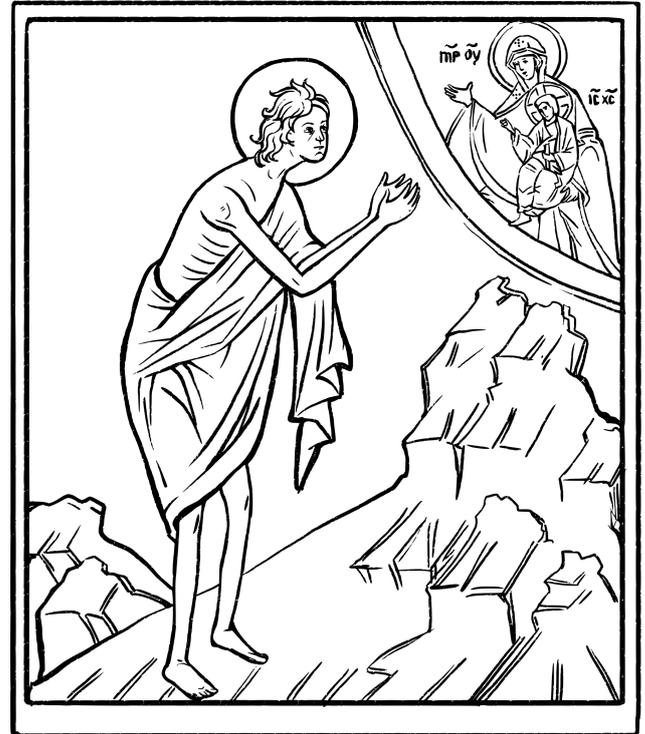
The holy day of the Exaltation of the Cross dawned while I was still flying about hunting for youths. At daybreak I saw that everyone was hurrying to the church, so I ran with the rest. When the hour for the holy elevation approached, I was trying to make my way in with the crowd which was struggling to get through the church doors. I had at last squeezed through with great difficulty almost to the entrance of the temple, from which the life-giving Tree of the

Cross was being shown to the people. But when I trod on the doorstep which everyone passed, I was stopped by some force which prevented my entering. Meanwhile I was brushed aside by the crowd and found myself standing alone in the porch. Thinking that this had happened because of my woman's weakness, I again began to work my way into the crowd, trying to elbow myself forward. But in vain I struggled. Again my feet trod on the doorstep over which others were entering the church without encountering any obstacle. I alone seemed to remain unaccepted by the church. It was as if there was a detachment of soldiers standing there to oppose my entrance. Once again I was excluded by the same mighty force and again I stood in the porch.

'Having repeated my attempt three or four times, at last I felt exhausted and had no more strength to push and to be pushed, so I went aside and stood in a corner of the porch. And only then with great difficulty it began to dawn on me, and I began to understand the reason why I was prevented from being admitted to see the life-giving Cross. The word of salvation gently touched the eyes of my heart and revealed to me that it was my unclean life which barred the entrance to me. I began to weep and lament and beat my breast, and to sigh from the depths of my heart. And so I stood weeping when I saw above me the icon of the most holy Mother of God. And turning to her my bodily and spiritual eyes I said:

"O Lady, Mother of God, who gave birth in the flesh to God the Word, I know, O how well I know, that it is no honour or praise to thee when one so impure and depraved as I look up to thy icon, O ever-virgin, who didst keep thy body and soul in purity. Rightly do I inspire hatred and disgust before thy virginal purity. But I have heard that God Who was born of thee became man on purpose to call sinners to repentance. Then help me, for I have no other help. Order the entrance of the church to be opened to me. Allow me to see the venerable Tree on which He Who was born of thee suffered in the flesh and on which He shed His holy Blood for the redemption of sinners and for me, unworthy as I am. Be my faithful witness before thy son that I will never again defile my body by the impurity of fornication, but as soon as I have seen the Tree of the Cross I will renounce the

world and its temptations and will go wherever thou wilt lead me."



'Thus I spoke and as if acquiring some hope in firm faith and feeling some confidence in the mercy of the Mother of God, I left the place where I stood praying. And I went again and mingled with the crowd that was pushing its way into the temple. And no one seemed to thwart me, no one hindered my entering the church. I was possessed with trembling, and was almost in delirium. Having got as far as the doors which I could not reach before - as if the same force which had hindered me cleared the way for me - I now entered without difficulty and found myself within the holy place. And so it was I saw the life-giving Cross. I saw too the Mysteries of God and how the Lord accepts repentance. Throwing myself on the ground, I worshipped that holy earth and kissed it with trembling. Then I came out of the church and went to her who had promised to be my security, to the place where I had sealed my vow. And bending my knees before the Virgin Mother of God, I addressed to her such words as these: "O loving Lady, thou hast shown me thy great love for all men. Glory to God Who receives the repentance of sinners through thee. What more can I recollect or say, I who am so sinful? It is time for me, O Lady to fulfill my vow,

according to thy witness. Now lead me by the hand along the path of repentance!" And at these words I heard a voice from on high: "If you cross the Jordan you will find glorious rest."

'Hearing this voice and having faith that it was for me, I cried to the Mother of God: "O Lady, Lady, do not forsake me!"

'With these words I left the porch of the church and set off on my journey. As I was leaving the church a stranger glanced at me and gave me three coins, saying: "Sister, take these."

And, taking the money, I bought three loaves and took them with me on my journey, as a blessed gift. I asked the person who sold the bread: "Which is the way to the Jordan?" I was directed to the city gate which led that way. Running on I passed the gates and still weeping went on my journey. Those I met I asked the way, and after walking for the rest of that day (I think it was nine o'clock when I saw the Cross) I at length reached at sunset the Church of St. John the Baptist which stood on the banks of the Jordan. After praying in the temple, I went down to the Jordan and rinsed my face and hands in its holy waters. I partook of the holy and life-giving Mysteries in the Church of the Forerunner and ate half of one of my loaves. Then, after drinking some water from Jordan, I lay down and passed the night on the ground. In the morning I found a small boat and crossed to the opposite bank. I again prayed to Our Lady to lead me whither she wished. Then I found myself in this desert and since then up to this very day I am estranged from all, keeping away from people and running away from everyone. And I live here clinging to my God Who saves all who turn to Him from faintheartedness and storms.'

'Forty-seven years have already gone by, I think, since I left the holy city.... I had two and a half loaves when I crossed the Jordan. Soon they dried up and became hard as rock. Eating a little I gradually finished them after a few years.'

'Believe me, Abba, seventeen years I passed in this desert fighting wild beasts – mad desires and passions. When I was about to partake of food, I used to begin to regret the meat and fish which of which I had so much in Egypt. I regretted also not having wine which I loved so much. For I drank a lot of wine when I lived in the world, while here I had not even

water. I used to burn and succumb with thirst. The mad desire for profligate songs also entered me and confused me greatly, edging me on to sing satanic songs which I had learned once. But when such desires entered me I struck myself on the breast and reminded myself of the vow which I had made, when going into the desert. In my thoughts I returned to the icon of the Mother of God which had received me and to her I cried in prayer. I implored her to chase away the thoughts to which my miserable soul was succumbing. And after weeping for long and beating my breast I used to see light at last which seemed to shine on me from everywhere. And after the violent storm, lasting calm descended.

'And how can I tell you about the thoughts which urged me on to fornication, how can I express them to you, Abba? A fire was kindled in my miserable heart which seemed to burn me up completely and to awake in me a thirst for embraces. As soon as this craving came to me, I flung myself on the earth and watered it with my tears, as if I saw before me my witness, who had appeared to me in my disobedience, and who seemed to threaten punishment for the crime. And I did not rise from the ground (sometimes I lay thus prostrate for a day and a night) until a calm and sweet light descended and enlightened me and chased away the thoughts that possessed me. But always I turned to the eyes of my mind to my Protectress, asking her to extend help to one who was sinking fast in the waves of the desert. And I always had her as my Helper and the Acceptor of my repentance. And thus I lived for seventeen years amid constant dangers. And since then even till now the Mother of God helps me in everything and leads me as it were by the hand.'

'After finishing the loaves I had, of which I spoke, for seventeen years I have fed on herbs and all that can be found in the desert. The clothes I had when I crossed the Jordan became torn and worn out. I suffered greatly from the cold and greatly from the extreme heat. At times the sun burned me up and at other times I shivered from the frost, and frequently falling to the ground I lay without breath and without motion. I struggled with many afflictions and with terrible temptations. But from that time till now the power of God in numerous ways had guarded my sinful soul and my humble body. When I only reflect on the evils from which Our Lord has delivered me I

have imperishable food for hope of salvation. I am fed and clothed by the all-powerful Word of God, the Lord of all. For it is not by bread alone that man lives. And those who have stripped off the rags of sin have no refuge, hiding themselves in the clefts of the rocks.'

'Believe me, I have not seen a human face ever since I crossed the Jordan, except yours today. I have not seen a beast or a living being ever since I came into

the desert. I never learned from books. I have never even heard anyone who sang and read from them. But the word of God which is alive and active, by itself teaches a man knowledge. And so this is the end of my tale. But, as I asked you in the beginning, so even now I implore you for the sake of the Incarnate word of God, to pray to the Lord for me who am such a sinner.'

Profound Innocence

By Rod Angus

Ever since our daughter Judi reposed aged 17, 14 years ago, I have felt an unceasing desire to carry her in my life and in the things I do, to represent her in some way within my own faith and practices. I don't mean the mere 'memory' of her as of someone who is dead, but the conscious reality of a young lady who now reposes, who rests in the arms of a God who says that he is not the God of the dead at all, but of the living only.

Last night I read these words of Saint Paisios: 'Giving alms to people who are suffering...is also very helpful for the repose of the souls of those who have passed away. For when we give alms on behalf of someone who has died, the recipients will say, "May God forgive him; may his relics (physical remains) be sanctified", or, "Take this for the sake of the soul of so and so." They will say a heartfelt prayer, and it is this that helps a lot those who have fallen asleep.' Or, in the case of a woman's husband who died or a child killed in an accident, 'What else can she do to help their souls? When she gives alms this will naturally help her personally, but it will also help her departed...'

How strange this sounds in the ears of any western Protestant Christian. It seems suspiciously close to the attempt of the heretic Simon Magus to purchase the apostolic gift of the Holy Spirit with money, as is recorded in Acts 8: 18 'Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the Apostle's hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also".'

In addition, is it really possible for us who remain in this life to represent those who have departed? Remember that obscure passage in 1 Corinthians 15:29, that everyone tries to re-translate or re-interpret? '...what do people mean by being baptised on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised on their behalf?' Evidently, baptised Christians were allowing themselves to be baptised, to be immersed on behalf of loved ones who had died prior to being baptised. They weren't trying to 'earn their salvation' by fulfilling a mere religious rite, but they had apparently taken it upon themselves to fulfil out of the bond of love what a reposed person was no longer able to fulfil themselves. You see, this entrenched modern autonomy is something of an illusion. We belong to others and they belong to us. So, although it is no longer practised, if it is possible within the organic unity of the Church to be baptised on behalf of deceased loved ones, it is certainly real to be able to perform deeds on behalf of a reposed soul to which we have a special bond.

The spirit exhibited by Simon Magus is the expression of a different spirit than this one. It is a twisting of the spiritual function of a loving heart into a form of legal transaction; an attempt to buy the favour of God. The teaching of the Orthodox Church does not involve any sort of legal 'works' transaction. At the heart of the Church is an innocent, almost child-like spirit. This is not a naive childishness, nor a gullible immaturity, but a deep innocence; the same

innocence that expressed itself in the life and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same innocence that is required if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is a profound innocence. The darkening and twisting of this child-like spirit into the corrupt motives of Simon provides a crucial window into the abiding contrast between it and Orthodoxy and the word given by Saint Paisios.

I expect that I am not alone amongst Christians in struggling to know how to treat the beggars we meet in our cities. Whenever I go into Edinburgh there are always beggars lining the streets. Knowing the teaching of Christ that we should give to anyone who asks, should I merely comply? I served for two years as a drug and alcohol counsellor at a Christian rehab unit. Boy, did I learn the hard way how people are willing to skin their own grandmother to trick people out of money in order to purchase their necessary intoxicants! Thereafter I toughened myself up by reasoning, 'These guys in the street will just spend whatever I give them on a can of super lager, etc., etc., etc.'

I had this discussion years ago with a very wonderful sister in Christ. She disagreed with me. A few days after our disagreement our families were out walking together in an English town. There was a beggar. I walked past him, 'knowing' that he would simply spend any money on booze. I looked over my shoulder and there (as I knew she would be) was my dear sister, stooping down to this poor man, speaking tenderly to him, and giving him some money. In the same book by Saint Paisios that I've just mentioned, he speaks clearly about not judging or assuming that a beggar is anything other than a beggar needing help. Even if he does, probably inevitably, take your alms to the off-licence, if you speak tenderly to him, he will remember you and what you have done. His conscience is his own affair.

And so today I knew that I would be travelling into the city to celebrate the Liturgy. I knew that I would pass some beggars. I felt 'quickened' in my spirit that I wanted to represent my daughter Judi, and do something for her as if she were still present.

After she was killed in the car accident an old man came to our house. Judi used to work part-time on the deli at the Co-op. This old man told me that once he had wanted to buy some cheese at the deli but

couldn't afford to buy it. So Judi had taken the cheese and marked it as a reduced item at a fraction of its price. Yes, I know she shouldn't have done this, but her active compassion for this pensioner was the overriding factor to me. It certainly was to him. He had taken the bother of walking all the way up our steep road to come and tell a grieving father of a kind deed done to him by my deceased elder daughter.

After the Liturgy I was walking back to the train station. I purposefully had reserved a £2 coin to give to a beggar in Judi's name. I was still a little unsure and was wrestling a bit in my conscience. But I was aware of the grace of the Holy Spirit in my heart. Then I saw him: a young beggar man sitting on the pavement. He was in his mid-twenties. He had cuts on his face and arms. I walked past him still unsure whether or not what I wanted to do was right. After about a hundred feet I stopped. I walked back towards the young beggar. I took the meagre two pound coin out of my wallet. I stooped down to him and put my hand on his shoulder. He looked alarmed. I looked into his eyes and said, 'My friend, I would like to give you this from my daughter Judi.' 'From your daughter?' he replied, as we shook hands. 'Yes', I said. 'Have a really good day'. For those brief moments our mutually Christ-loved humanities merged together as one, dissolving those apparent aspects that separated us. A great joy entered my heart. Not a whiff of any attempt to 'purchase' any favour from God by a good work. This was simply an innocent act of pure love for my Judi, on behalf of her and the inspiration that she was and still is to me.

We don't need to work everything out. We can analyse things to death and crush the life out of them by formulating doctrines and prescribed behaviour. I will carry on this practice until I too leave this old world. I will not do it by rote or automatically every time I see a beggar. But I will do it regularly and prayerfully in full communion of the Holy Spirit and with all the saints, including, and especially, my Judi. Since the triumph of the resurrection, death no longer separates us from those reposed in Christ. Is Judi conscious of this act today? I hope and believe she is. The Holy Spirit is the one Spirit who pervades both the living and those who sleep in the Lord.

Let us entrust ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God

Wisdom of the Holy Fathers

'Just as it is a pressing duty of every Christian when he loses his peace of heart to do all he can to restore it, so it is no less obligatory for him to allow no accidental happenings of life to disturb this peace; I mean illness, wounds, death of relatives, wars, fires, sudden joys, fears and sorrows, memories of former sins and errors, in a word, everything which usually troubles and agitates the heart. It is indispensable in such cases not to allow oneself to feel worry and agitation, for, having succumbed to them, a man loses self-possession and the capacity to understand events clearly and see the right way to act, each of which gives the enemy the possibility to agitate a man still more and push him to take some step, that is difficultly or quite impossible to remedy.'

– St. Theophan the Recluse, *Unseen Warfare*, p. 155

'The most perfect way is not to pray for our health - not to pray to become well, but to become good. That is what I pray for myself. Do you hear? I do not mean to be good in the sense of virtuous, but in the sense acquiring divine zeal, of abandoning ourselves in trust to God's love, and of praying rather for our soul. And we mean our soul as it is incorporated in the Church, whose head is Christ, along with all our fellow men and our brothers and sisters in Christ.'

– St Porphyrios, *Wounded by Love, The life and Wisdom of Elder Porphyrios*, p. 229

'God especially loves and provides for large families. A large family provides children with many opportunities to grow up normally, as long as the parents give them the proper nurturing. One child helps the other. The oldest girl helps the mother; the second child takes care of the younger one, and so forth. There is a sense of giving and they live in an atmosphere of sacrifice and love. The younger ones love and respect the older ones; and this is something that comes naturally in a large family.'

– St. Paisios, *Family Life*, p.78

'Life is much easier for the man who is given over to the will of God, since in illness, in poverty, in persecution he reflects thus: 'such is God's pleasure, and I must endure on account of my sins.'

– St. Silouan, *Wisdom from Mount Athos*, p. 68