

Ecumenical Patriarchate

Archdiocese of Thyateira & Great Britain

Edinburgh Orthodox Community of St Andrew

Newsletter

Issue 3

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The third issue of our Parish Bulletin is dedicated to our children, this great blessing from God to our Community.

How encouraging and moving it is to see so many children coming to our Church, venerating the Holy Icons, singing and praising God with us, receiving Holy Communion, serving in the Altar, coming to Sunday School and the Religious Education classes. Glory to God for this!

In many ways children are an example to us. The Lord said that we ought to become like them in order to enter His Kingdom. Children, say the Holy Fathers, can have pure prayer, forgive more easily, are not corrupted by passions.

Yet children need our help to be rooted in the faith and grow. Spiritually, they are like Adam and Eve: innocent and pure but also vulnerable and naïve. They can grow in holiness but also can be led astray and hurt by the deceit of the Devil and the Christ-less world.

We adults have the sacred responsibility to protect them but also to teach them and inspire them to love and live the Christian way of life. We should bring them to Church, teach them to pray and pray with them, impart on them the Christian beliefs and values, encourage them to act lovingly and respectfully towards others, help them to choose what is good and abstain from sin. All these are sacred, indispensable duties of the Christian educator.

Yet, we pastors, parents, teachers, will not be successful in our mission unless we make a serious and continuous effort to become holy ourselves. St Porphyrios of Kaysokalyvia encourages us to teach our children first by our own example and then by words. He advises us to pray and become holy day by day so that children may see the Light of Christ in our own lives and be inspired to be good Christians. "Do not so much speak to the children about God as speak to God about them...pray to God about them and God will speak in their hearts" says the Saint. Teaching our children without entrusting ourselves and them to God may become a dry and tiresome process with negative effects on them.

Sr Magdalene in her book *Thoughts about our Children in the Orthodox Church Today* tells us about a father who knelt every night next to his sleeping son's bed and prayed to God to grant His grace to his child (p. 27 of the Greek edition). Let this father's example be a guide to us.

Fr Raphael Pavouris

News

Since the publication of the last issue of our Bulletin two very important events for our local Church took place:



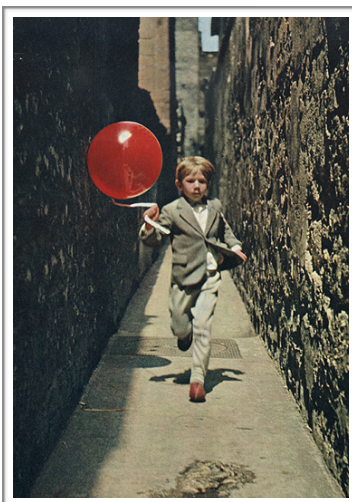
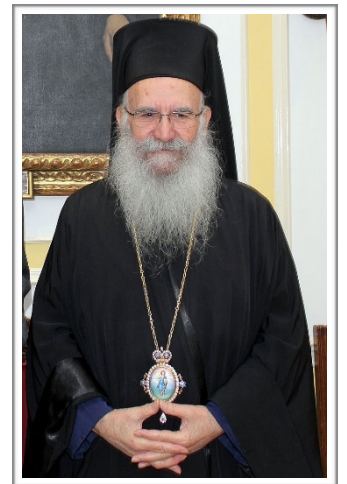
On 12 June Metropolitan Nikitas of Dardanelles was elected Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain.

His Eminence was born in the USA (Tampa, Florida) to second generation Greek American parents. He studied Theology in Boston and Thessaloniki and Russian language in St Petersburg and has taught in numerous Universities. He served as a priest in several parishes in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North America before being elected Metropolitan of Hong Kong and later of the Dardanelles.

His Eminence Nikitas was enthroned in the Cathedral Church of the Divine Wisdom in London on 28th June. 2019. The godly zeal, love for the Church, pastoral care, and vision which he has already exhibited has inspired a great sense of joyous expectation among the clergy and the faithful who have already embraced him with love as their spiritual leader. Let us all keep him in our prayers. Axios!

On 20th November Archbishop Gregorios, the beloved Archpastor of this Archdiocese for the last thirty-one years, passed away. In his long tenure Archbishop Gregorios worked tirelessly for our Church: he served the Liturgy for as long as he could stand, founded many communities, ordained a great number of clergy and established schools. But perhaps he will be mainly remembered for his total trust in God's providence, his warm and unpretentious character and his indiscriminate love for all. He held a very demanding position, being the shepherd of a large Diocese, and yet he made time for every person who needed him, giving him his undivided attention. From royalty to students, all were treated with love, respect and Cypriot hospitality in his modest premises. It was not uncommon for Archbishop Gregorios to answer the phone of the Archdiocesan office late at night to console, to guide, to offer practical help.

May the Memory of our departed Chief Hierarch and Archpastor Gregorios be Eternal!



Film Review: The Red Balloon

By Mina Radovic

The Red Balloon is a French film about a young boy who befriends a red balloon, and sets off with him on a series of adventures through the cobble streets of Paris. A tale of unconditional love through friendship to the point of complete self-denial in death and a new life in the resurrection, the film is a gem to be cherished by the whole family as it authentically captures the perspective of a child, and reminds us, even as adults, of the goodness that comes to our aid at the times we least expect.

What the Church Means to Me

By Evdokia Tsolakis

For me, the Church means everything. Having lived in it, I could not live without it - I think the sudden burden of a life without God, without love, would emotionally crush me.

First of all, the Church has opened my eyes and my mind to things I would otherwise struggle with. Through the Church, I see why sometimes bad things happen in life and why sometimes good things happen; I also sometimes see why people behave the way they do. So the Church has been, and still is, the answer to my problems. When I feel as though I am emotionally breaking down and I can't cope anymore, I turn to God and find comfort. In the Church services, I calm down after being stressed and upset and get strength for life. I remember that at one point I was very insecure, and I was struggling a lot. When I walked into the classroom, I felt as though I was being suffocated by 20 eyes that all seemed to turn on me. I could barely breathe, and I sat on edge through the lessons which my friends weren't in. Eventually, I summoned the courage to ask, fumbling over my words in embarrassment: what should I do when I worry about what others think about me?

Raising Saints by Example

While adults may be convinced by words, children learn by example. Children develop through actions, through real life experiences.

Do we expect our children to follow the example of The Lord? Do we expect them to act lovingly? To put away their egos and place their neighbour first? To act with self sacrifice? To defend the weak and care for those in need? To speak the truth openly and as young apostles bring more people to The Lord, who is the Way and the Light and the Truth? Let us influence them positively with our example, our way of life. Do we ourselves read the Holy Bible? Do we

Just think, I was then told, you are not alone when you walk into that classroom. Around you are all the saints who pray for you, the Mother of God, Christ himself, your guardian angel, your saint; they all walk with you into the classroom, full of strength. You are surrounded by an army. Imagine if your classmates could see that shining army by your side - they would be truly awed!

So then I thought: I am very weak and scared, but I am surrounded by the most powerful army in the universe. I may seem a fool and completely weird, but I am actually (trying) to represent the most beautiful and amazing faith, which is definitely not weird and foolish to those who understand it. And that was it for me. Not that I overcame my insecurity at once, but I had a thought which would squish my worries.

Essentially, that is what the Church is for me. My rock in difficulties and a source of love, even when I think I don't need it.



pray in front of the holy icons a heartfelt prayer, undisturbed by our thoughts? Do we act with love and wisdom or in anger and haste?

Parents usually have great expectations from their children. They aspire to see in them a better self. They want them to grow into being successful, strong and independent persons. They neglect at times the most important thing; that is to introduce the Word to them. Take them to church, pray with them at home, read the holy scriptures to them, act as a true Christian would.

If we, as parents, expect that the school will take care of this, I am afraid to say the chances are really slim. There are some teachers nowadays, as always, that do follow the Lord's path, but the official government policy is that of secularism, not of the Christian way of life. Do parents put their hopes on mere luck then? In a world drowned in consumerism, power struggles and gender politics, do we hope that the children will

follow "the narrow path" out of sheer luck? When the Bank of Scotland places on their front window a sign saying "celebrating the LGBT community" and when the Greek prime minister wishes to include in the country's constitution the phrase "the country is religiously neutral", are we aware of the social circumstances our children grow up in today? Nevertheless, if The Lord wills and if He finds fruitful soil, He could turn an energetic opponent of God to a true apostle, as we can see in Saint Paul.

And one more thing. If our children ever actually do a good act, let us remember this is the Lord's doing, an act of the Holy Spirit through the children. We can be joyful about this. However it is not for us to take pride in it. The whole arm is the Lord's and we are but the small finger. Our aim is to act in our own parental lives in synergy with The Lord, in good cooperation as one hand. Gently, patiently, judging ourselves and loving others.

Supporting the School Life of our Boys

By Zoe Assimakos

I am a mother of three; two sons aged 11 and 10 and a daughter who is nearly 4. Since I have had my sons longer than my daughter, I feel better placed to talk about my experiences with raising my boys. I am sure in time, I will be more experienced in raising girls too. Although I am focusing more on boys in this article, what I write could easily apply to girls as well.

I would like to share my thoughts on something that is very close to my heart. It is about boys in school. Almost every authority on child development recognises that schools are not set up to accommodate the unique needs of boys. I believe this bias is largely unintentional but rather quite simply due to the way schools have always functioned. The things that they largely excel in (gross motor skills, spatial and visual skills etc.) do not find a good reputation in school. Boys often find it difficult to sit quietly and work with pencils and pens, a prohibition of noise and long periods of inactivity when all they want to do is play and build things. Because of this, teachers find it difficult to deal with

them and often argue that girls in their classrooms are easier to deal with. Boys can sometimes go through the education system feeling that teachers like girls better. I would like to believe that schools cater for the needs of all boys irrespective of their needs but we all know that due to severe underfunding in our educational system, there is only so much schools can do.

Through my experience, I have found that there are two kinds of children commonly seen in every school classroom. There are those who by nature are organised and love to learn. They take their work very seriously and not doing well is not an option for them. In the second category, are children who tend not to adapt well to the structure of classrooms. They may be disorganised, have an aversion to work and just love to play. They are impervious to adult pressure and seem not to be embarrassed when they fail to complete assignments or fail tests. God made us all differently and we have to understand that these children are not intrinsically inferior to their

hardworking siblings or classmates but that every child is unique and may not fit the same mould as everybody else. We all know many (academic) under-achievers who outperformed the classroom superstars in the long run. So, what can we as parents, do to help?

As parents and guardians, we must stay as close as possible to our boys' school life. It is unlikely they will tell us what is going on in the classroom so we have to find out ourselves through engaging with their teachers and maintaining an active dialogue with the school. Encourage boys to learn the basics of reading and motivate them to practice it. Pick books that entice them such as books on sports, non-fiction and adventure. Give books as presents. Consider the reading level of the child; too easy and they will get bored, too difficult and they will not finish them. Make them part of the decision-making process of picking novels or any reading material by taking them to the bookshop or library.

Seek tutorial assistance if possible. Try to provide educational resources at home and continue "home schooling" after the school day is over if and when it is needed. Education doesn't end in

the classroom but should be a 'round-the-clock' thing, even if it's not in the strict academic sense. Helping and checking homework will help the parent identify weak spots and gaps in their knowledge. Explore outings such as museums, parks, days with Dad or another male figure to their place of work and special interest clubs. Even going to the supermarket can bring up a multitude of lessons such as pricing, budgeting, reading labels. God has given us all talents and our children are no different; we just have to help them discover what they are and nurture them along the way.

Most importantly, we must ceaselessly pray for our children and accept what God's will may be for them. Our job as guardians is to bring them up as God's vessels so they can be presented back as pure and beautiful as they were given to us.



The Holy Family of St Emilia

By Stephen Griffith

St. Emelia (Emmelia, Amelia, or Emily) is known as 'the mother of saints.' Among her ten children were some of Orthodoxy most significant theologians: Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa. Indeed, she was part of a family of saints who were themselves disciples or friends of still other recognized saints. She was born to wealthy Christian parents in Cappadocia in Asia Minor who suffered and died during the last Roman persecutions against Christians. It was her intention never to marry but this plan was thwarted by her circumstances. So sought-after was she for her beauty and wealth that some of her potential suitors threatened to kidnap her if she held-off marriage any longer. Fearing for her safety Emelia decided to marry. She was thus married to a Christian professor or rhetoric named Basil, a virtuous man who came to be recognized as a saint (known as St. Basil the Elder). His mother was been St. Macrina the Elder who together with her husband had like Emelia's parents suffered for the faith. This holy couple were disciples of the inspired bishop and teacher St. Gregory the Wonderworker. St. Basil the Great wrote about his grandmother:

'What clearer evidence can there be of my faith, than that I was brought up by my grandmother, blessed woman...? I mean the celebrated Macrina who taught me the words of the blessed Gregory; which, as far as memory had preserved down to her day, she cherished herself, while she fashioned and formed me, while yet a child, upon the doctrines of piety.'

Emelia's first child was a daughter named Macrina in honour of her holy grandmother. Somewhat contrary to the practice of the time Emelia took the chief role in caring for her children - it was the common practice of wealthy Roman households for children to be nursed by servants. For all of her children she took special care over the children's education. This started with her first daughter Macrina. Emelia preferred not to teach her children in the standard way of the time from the Greek classics but from the Holy Scriptures. St. Gregory of Nyssa writes about his sister:



'Whatever of inspired Scripture was adaptable to the early years, this was the child's subject matter, especially the Wisdom of Solomon and beyond this whatever leads us to a moral life. She was especially well versed in the Psalms, going through each part of the Psalter at the proper time; when she got up or did her daily tasks or rested, when she sat down to eat or rose from the table, when she went to bed or rose from it for prayer, she had the Psalter with her at all times, like a good and faithful traveling companion.'

Emelia and her husband arranged for Macrina to marry at a young age a devout young man. However, the young man died before their marriage was formalized. This confirmed Macrina in her choice to pursue a life of consecrated virginity. She chose to live this life close to her mother. St. Gregory writes:

'Her mother often used to say to her that the rest of her children she had carried in her womb for a fixed time, but this daughter she always bore, encompassing her in her womb at all times and under all circumstances... The older woman cared for the young woman's soul and the daughter for her mother's body, fulfilling in all things every desirable service, often even making bread for her mother with her own hands.'

It must be remembered that monasticism as we know it was only emerging during this period.

St. Basil was trained in rhetoric by his father and went on to study further in Palestine, Constantinople and finally in Athens together with his close friend St. Gregory the Theologian. Here he mastered various branches of learning including: grammar, mathematics, logic, philosophy and medicine.

St. Gregory also learned rhetoric and philosophy from his father. Unlike his other brothers he married a devout woman named Theosebeia and practiced as a professor of rhetoric.

The same educational path was taken by St. Naucratus. However early on he decided to renounce a successful career as a jurist to live as a hermit. Tragically Naucratus was killed in an accident while hunting in order to care for a group of poor and elderly people who lived close to his hermitage. Emelia was devastated by the news of her son's death. St. Gregory writes:

'At this point, the great Macrina's excellence was evident. By setting reason against passion, she kept herself in hand, and, becoming a bulwark of her mother's weakness, she lifted her out of by abyss of grief, and, by her own firmness and unyielding spirit, she trained her mother's soul to be courageous.'

Together Macrina and Emelia divided the family property between its members and decided to keep only a minimum to support themselves. They freed their household servants most of whom stayed to form with them a monastic community. Despite their differing social status' all held everything in common and regarded one another as equals. Macrina thus succeeded her mother as director of the family. Through her influence she led her brother Basil to follow the monastic life. Basil together with his brother Gregory and friend Gregory used their expert knowledge to teach the Orthodox Christian faith and to defend it against the popular false teachings of the heretics particularly defending the divinity of the Lord and of the Holy Spirit as equal persons of the Holy Trinity. St. Basil later became bishop of Ceasarea in Cappadocia and made his brother Gregory, bishop of Nyssa.

As well as an important liturgist St. Basil also strove to regulate the very disordered early monastic movement in Cappadocia. According to his rules for monks, monasteries should make it their special concern to show hospitality, help the poor and suffering, and serve as centres of education. St. Basil's

ultimate realization of this ideal was his Basiliad - a community serving a complex of buildings outside Ceasarea which included a hospital, hospice and alms houses for the poor. No doubt St. Basil learned this idea of Christian community life from the life of his own family.

St. Macrina also oversaw the education of the youngest child in the family Peter, born just before his father's death. He helped his mother and sister establishing their monastic community and would later serve as a bishop (of Sebaste) together with his brothers Basil and Gregory.

When St. Emelia died it was her eldest child Macrina and her youngest Peter who were by her side:

'As they were sitting beside her bed, she touched each of them with her hand and said to God in her last words: "To you, O Lord, I offer the first and tenth fruit of my pains. The first fruit, my eldest daughter here, and this my tenth, my last-born son. Both have been dedicated to you by law and are your votive offerings. May sanctification, therefore, come to this first and tenth.'

St. Gregory the Theologian wrote of St. Emelia:

'Who has not known Emelia, whose name was a forecast of what she became, or else whose life was an exemplification of her name? For she had a right to the name which implies gracefulness, and occupied, to speak concisely, the same place among women, as her husband among men.'

The holy family that St. Emelia nurtured remain for us an example, just as the teachings of her God-inspired children remain sources of wisdom and inspiration for us. St. Gregory of Nyssa knew from personal experience when he taught that 'grace begins at home.'

St. Emilia and the members of her family are commemorated on the following dates. St. Emelia and her husband St. Basil the Elder - 30th May (St. Emelia also on the 1st January and 8th May). St. Macrina the Elder - 14th January. St. Macrina the Younger - 19th July. St. Basil the Great - 1st January and 30th January (the Three Holy Hierarchs). St. Gregory of Nyssa - 10th January. St. Peter of Sebaste - 9th January. St. Emelia has an additional feast on the Sunday following the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord (2nd February) together with the two others

mothers of the Three Great Hierarchs: St. Nonna, mother of St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Anthousa, mother of St. John Chrysostom.

O saints Emelia, Basil the Elder, Macrina the Elder, Macrina the Younger, Basil the Great, Naucratius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Peter of Sabaste pray to God for us!

St John Chrysostom to Christian Parents

'Let the man, as soon as he has risen from his bed, seek after nothing else, but how he may do and say something whereby he may render his whole house more reverent. The woman again, let her be indeed a good housekeeper; but before attending to this, let her have another more needful care, that the whole household work the works of Heaven.'

'To each of you fathers and mothers I say, just as we see artists fashioning their paintings and statues with great precision, so we must care for these wondrous statues of ours. Painters when they have set the canvas on the easel paint on it day by day to accomplish their purpose. Sculptors, too, working in marble, proceed in a similar manner; they remove what is superfluous and add what is lacking. Even so must you proceed. Like the creators of statues do you give all your leisure to fashioning these wondrous statues for God. And, as you remove what is superfluous and add what is lacking, inspect them day by day, to see what good qualities nature has supplied so that you will increase them, and what faults so that you will eradicate them.'

'In this matter the tutor and attendant must exercise the greatest care. Show the boy other fair sights, and you will steer his eyes away from those others. Show him the sky, the sun, the flowers of the earth, meadows, and fair books. Let these give pleasure to his eyes; and there are many others that are harmless.'

'from earliest life encompass them [your children] with spiritual armour and instruct them to seal the forehead [with the sign of the Cross] with the hand: and before they are able to do this with their own hand, do you imprint upon them the Cross.'

When the boy takes relaxation from his studies - for the soul delights to dwell on stories of old - speak to him, drawing him away from all childish folly; for you are raising a philosopher and athlete and citizen of Heaven. Speak to him and tell him this story; "Once upon a time..." [St. John tells a Bible story in simple terms] ...Make your stories agreeable that they may give the child pleasure and his soul may not grow weary. ...Is it not a far better thing to relate this than fairy tales about sheep with golden fleeces? Then stimulate his mind - for not a little depends on the telling of the story - introducing nothing that is untrue but only what is related in the Scriptures [explain what lessons may be learnt from the story]... So far is enough for the child. Tell him this story one evening at supper. Let his mother repeat the same tale; then, when he has heard it often, ask him too, saying: "Tell me the story," so that he may be eager to imitate you. And when he has memorized it you will also tell him how it benefits him. ...This is not all. Go, leading him by the hand in church and pay heed particularly when this tale is read aloud. You will see him rejoice and leap with pleasure because he knows what the other children do not know, as he anticipates the story, recognizes it, and derives great gain from it. And hereafter the story is fixed in his memory.'

'When you go home, therefore, discourse of all these things [the subjects of the readings and the priest's sermon] with those who are in your house; and as many persons often do, when they come back from a meadow, having plucked there a rose, or a violet, or some flower of that kind, they return twisting ¹³²⁷ it about with their fingers; and as some, again, when they leave the gardens to go home, take with them branches of trees, with their fruit upon them; and as others, moreover, from sumptuous feasts, carry away leavings of the entertainment for their dependents; so indeed do you, departing from here, take an instruction home to your wife, your children, and all your household. For this lesson is more profitable than the meadow, the garden, or the banqueting table. These roses never wither; these fruits never drop off; these dainties never corrupt.'