



Prophet Elias News

**News in the time of self –isolation for the Orthodox Church of
the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon
29th March 2020**



It is hoped to produce a more frequent newsletter to counteract our being not be able to meet at church as we usually do. Some of us live alone and far from others, which may make them feel even more isolated. There will be Metropolitan Anthony sermons, readings and/or prayers suitable for the stage of Lent we are in, or beyond Pascha if that is what we have to do, **plus other snippets of information that anyone would like to share.** I am happy to collate all the information and **would appreciate contributions** (email: celia.olsson.art@gmail.com) as I am working so don't have a lot of time. If anyone would like to take over an edition, please let me know.

From a Sermon by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh for the Fourth Sunday in Lent, 9th April 1989

Lent is a time of repentance, a time when our heart of stone must be made by the power of God into a heart of flesh, from insensitive to become perceptive, from cold and hard to become warm and open to others, and indeed, to God Himself.

Lent is a time of renewal when everything becomes new again; when our life that had gone into a twilight becomes alive with all the intensity which God can communicate to us humans, by making us partakers of His Holy Spirit, by making us partakers, through the Holy Sacraments and the direct gift of God, of the Divine nature. It is a time of reconciliation, and reconciliation is a joy: it is God's joy, and it is our joy; it is a new beginning.

Today is the day of Saint John of the Ladder, and I want to read to you a few phrases of his which are relevant to the particular time of the year in which we live:

“Repentance, that is our return to God, is renewal of our baptism; it is our effort to renew our covenant with God, our promise to change our life. It is a time when we can acquire humility, that is peace; peace with God, peace with ourselves, peace with all the created world. Repentance is born of hope and rejection of despair. And one who repents is one who deserves condemnation - and yet, goes away from the tribunal without shame, because repentance is our peace with God. And this is achieved through a worthy life, alien to the sins we committed in the past. Repentance is cleansing of our conscience. Repentance implies carrying off all sadness and pain.

And here is a short word about prayer :

“The use of the multiplicity of words when we pray disperses our mind and fill it with imaginations. One word spoken to God collects the mind in His presence. And if a word, in thy prayer, reaches you deeply, if you perceive it profoundly - dwell in it, dwell in it, because at such moments our Angel guardian prays with us because we are true to ourselves and to God”.

Let us remember what Saint John of the Ladder says, even if you forget the short comments (which I introduced) to make his text more readily understandable. Let us remember his words because he was a man who knew what it means to turn to God, to *stay* with God, to be God's joy and to rejoice in Him. He is offered us in this time, when we are ascending towards the days of the Passion, he is offered us as an example of what grace Divine can do to transform an ordinary, simple human being into a light to the world.

Let us learn from him, let us follow his example, let us *rejoice* in what God can do by His power in a human being, and let us confidently, with faith, with an exulting and yet serene joy follow the advice, listen to God *begging* us to find a way of life and telling us that with Him, in Him we *will* be alive, because He *is* the Truth, but also the Way and also Life eternal. Amen.

Texts for the Sunday of Saint John of the Ladder

You washed your soul in a fountain of tears, O most glorious Father John. You kept vigil for God and gained His mercy. Borne up on the wings of prayer, you flew to divine love and beauty. Now, with your fellow soldiers, O holy one, you dwell in His spiritual light and unending joy.

O holy Father, hearing the Lord's voice in the Gospel, you spurned the riches and glory of the world. You cry out to all: "Love God and find eternal grace! Set nothing higher than His love; thus you will find rest with all the saints when He comes in glory!" Through His prayers guard and save our souls, O Christ!

We honour you as guide and teacher, O John, our father, for through you we have learned to walk by the straight path. Blessed are you, who laboured for Christ, and triumphed over the Enemy. O converser with Angels and companion of the righteous and the venerable, with them intercede with the Lord that He may grant mercy to our souls!

Let us honour John! He is an earthly angel and a heavenly man, the adornment of the world, the joy of the virtuous, the glory of ascetics. He was planted in the house of God, and blossomed with the flower of sanctity. He flourished in the desert like a cedar of Lebanon. Through him the sheep of Christ's flock grow in holiness and righteousness.

Epistles: Hebrews 6: 13-20, Ephesians 5: 9-19 *Gospels:* Mark 9: 17-31, Matthew 4: 25 – 5: 12

*Thursday will be the day of the reading of the Great Canon of Saint Andrew.
In preparation, at Vespers on Wednesday evening we sing:*

In my wretchedness, I have fallen among the thieves of my own thoughts. My mind has been despoiled, and I have been cruelly beaten. All my soul is wounded, and stripped of virtues I lie naked upon the highway of life. Seeing me in bitter pain and thinking that my wounds could not be healed, the priest neglected me and would not look at me. Unable to endure my soul-destroying agony, the Levite when he saw me passed by on the other side. But You, O Christ my God, were pleased to come, not from Samaria but incarnate from Mary: in Your love for mankind, grant me healing and pour upon me Your great mercy.

Is There an Upside to Covid-19?

The coronavirus pandemic we are living through is unprecedented in our lifetime. It is hugely disruptive for everyone, extremely worrying for many, and threatens death for a small proportion of us. For those in the front line - medical and care workers, the emergency services, everyone involved in the distribution of food and other essential supplies – it is going to be totally exhausting. The patience of children and their parents stuck at home will be sorely tested.

But I am convinced that a great deal of good can also come out of this. In the coming months we are all going to have to reassess what our real priorities are – which after all is what Lent is really about. Individually, many of us will have extra time on our hands – time for less distracted prayer, for communicating with people we have lost touch with (by letter, even?), for some serious reading, for learning new skills, for tidying our sheds, garages, attics – for all those things we really have meant to get round to 'one day.' As a nation, a nation which has had life very easy for a long time, we can take a good look at ourselves and decide how we are going to challenge those who continue to insist on their right to behave selfishly. And we can rediscover our problem-solving ingenuity as we work out new (and sometimes even fun) ways of dealing with our new situation. If we don't come through this as better people and a better nation, we will have missed a God-sent opportunity.

Saint Maria of Paris – Feastday 31st March

On Tuesday we celebrate Saint Maria of Paris, one of the most extraordinary of the New Martyrs of the last century. A theologian, poet, and icon embroiderer among other accomplishments, she was above all a shining example of love in action. Born in Latvia in 1891, she was deeply involved in radical politics in Saint Petersburg before the revolution of 1918, an activism which eventually made it necessary for her to emigrate to Paris in 1923. She quickly identified a need for basic practical support among the many Russian refugees who had lost everything, and in due course rented a large house in Rue de Lourmel which provided food, shelter and comfort for many while also becoming a centre for intellectual and theological discussion. When the Nazis took Paris in 1940 many Jews sought shelter there, and many were helped to escape. Eventually the house was closed down and Mother Maria and her companions were taken by the Gestapo. Mother Maria died in the gas chamber at Ravensbruck on Holy Saturday, 1945, possibly having taken the place of another who had been selected for that death.

Mother Maria's path in life was dictated by her total commitment to following Christ no matter what the consequences – in her own words, 'to Christify life': 'If I am faced with two paths and I am in doubt, then even if all human wisdom, experience, and tradition point to one of these, but I feel that Christ would have followed the other -- then all my doubts should immediately disappear and I should choose to follow Christ in spite of all the experience, tradition and wisdom that are opposed to it.'

'The world is so exhausted from its scabs and its sores. It so cries out to Christianity in the secret depths of its soul. But at the same time it is so far removed from Christianity that Christianity cannot, should not even dare to show a distorted, diminished, darkened image of itself. Christianity should sing the world with the fire of Christian love. Christianity should ascend the Cross on behalf of the world. It should incarnate Christ himself in the world.'

Mother Maria Skobtsova: Types of Religious Lives
(www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0113/INDEX.HTM)

There is a beautiful account of Saint Maria's life in Fr Sergei Hackel's *A Pearl of Great Price*



'Love to the end, and without exception'
