



# Prophet Elias News

News in the time of self –isolation for the Orthodox Church of  
the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon  
5<sup>th</sup> July 2020



## Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh: Reading the Signs of the Times

Sermon given in May 1974

*He also said to the multitudes, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"*

*Luke 12: 54 - 57*

In today's Gospel, Christ advises His disciples to learn to read the signs of the times. Can we read the signs of the times? Have we received this message, this calling compelling us to look at what the times say to us?

Our times say something which is very worrying: while centuries back the Christian Church proclaimed its message in a credible, acceptable way, while people who heard the message did receive it and believed it, it seems that our message reaches only the few. It is not because the truth has changed, or because we must preach another Gospel than the integrity of the Gospel of Christ. Saint John of the Ladder says that the word of God is like a straight and pointed arrow, it can fly straight to its goal, it can hit the target, it can pierce any thickness and any resistance. But Saint John tells us also that the arrow will remain useless and dormant unless there is an arm, a bow, a string, an eye, unless there is an eye to aim the shaft, unless there is a vigorous arm to send it flying.

The arrow straight and pointed is God's message which we are to deliver to the whole world that it may be saved, as straight as the integrity of the Gospel - but have we got all God needs from us for this arrow to fly and hit the target? Is it not that the word of God remains unconvincing because looking at us people see no evidence that it has any power to transform life?

And here, we must read the signs of the times. The times, the people around us, the world is standing in judgement over us. Why is it that words of truth do not sound true? Why is it that words of life do not convey and impart life? Because we have not been hit in such a way as to possess life, as to be able to proclaim truth.

I would like to leave this thought with you, and each of us can ask himself what is the message he received from the Gospel, what is the life he had derived from it? What is the truth that has become the truth of his life? And only then can our message convey to men what God had imparted to us and commanded us to carry.

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## Are We Nearly There Yet?

The government has set out its plan "to return life to as near normal as we can, for as many people as we can, as quickly as we can, as fairly and safely as possible." This means updated guidance for the safe use of places of worship. New government anti-Covid regulations permit the opening of churches for public worship from 4<sup>th</sup> July.

The Church of England has also provided detailed information on Holy Communion, which is permitted, subject to very stringent sanitary rules. Subject to approval by our Archbishop, it is hoped that we may before too long be able to celebrate the Liturgy and you will be able to receive communion.

However, the infection control measures outlined in the regulations, including social distancing, are so rigorous that it will be quite impracticable for us to celebrate the Liturgy together in the very small space of Saint Anne's in the immediate future.

We are exploring the possibility of negotiating the use of a bigger building for communal services in the meantime, hoping that we might be able to celebrate our Patronal Feast together, or failing that, the Feast of the Transfiguration. Please rest assured that Hugh will send out an announcement as soon as there is something to announce.

## This Week we Celebrate

On **July 7<sup>th</sup>**, Saint **Kyriaki (Nedelja)** Great Martyr

Kyriaki was born in Nicomedia to devout Christian parents who had for many years been childless. After much prayer they conceived a child and, since she was born on the Lord's Day, she was given the name Kyriaki, the Greek word for Sunday. (In Bulgaria she is known as Nedelja – Sunday in Bulgarian.) From her childhood, Kyriaki consecrated herself to God, refusing all suitors as she had dedicated her life to Jesus Christ. A magistrate of Nicomedia wished to betroth Kyriaki to his son, but when she rejected his proposal, he denounced Kyriaki and her parents as Christians to the Emperor Diocletian. After savage tortures, as a result of which several pagan onlookers were converted by her courage and were themselves martyred, Kyriaki was sentenced to be beheaded. As she was given a little time to pray, she asked God to receive her soul and to remember those who honoured her martyrdom. At the time of her death, (c 303) she was 21 years old.



We wish our Kyriaki Happy Feast and Many Years!

On **July 8<sup>th</sup>**, Saint **Morwenna** of Morwenstowe in North Cornwall (6<sup>th</sup> C) – daughter of King Brychan of South Wales and sister of Saint Nectan of Hartland.

## WHY ARE WE SITTING HERE?

Extracts from an article by Metropolitan Alexander of Nigeria in the Series 'Faith in a Time of Pandemic' posted on Orthodoxy in Dialogue on 24<sup>th</sup> June. The full text can be found at: <http://orthodoxyindialogue.com/2020/06/24/faith-in-a-time-of-pandemic-why-are-we-sitting-here-by-metropolitan-alexander-of-nigeria/>

*Metropolitan Alexander has written this important article prompted by the current heated and often uncharitable arguments in some Orthodox quarters about the administration of the Holy Gifts during Covid-19 precautions. He sees these destructive conflicts as symptomatic of a general tendency of the Church to turn inwards rather than out towards the world.*

It grieves me that the Orthodox Church often shows itself to be naïve, inward-looking, incapable of grasping the messages of the times, or, to put it better, to live in the present time. Instead, it seems detached from life and reality, it creates its own fantasy world, its own language, its own self-evident certainties, incommunicable uncertainties. It does not realize how dangerous it is for someone to speak and to express themselves in their closed space, 'in a world of their own.'

*He likens the present situation of the Church to that of the Israelites starving in the city of Samaria under siege by the Assyrians. (4th Book of Kings: AV 2 Kings 6:24 – 7:10)*

Outside the walls, rather than attacking, the enemy waited patiently for those inside the walls to die, because Israel had lost all its inner riches and strength, it had lost its energy and, above all, because it had lost its will to deal with the real problems with which it was threatened. Instead of this, they were going about their daily life waiting for God's salvific intervention.

*His comparison continues with an account of the behaviour of four lepers, trapped outside the gates of Samaria. Their choices were very limited – to try to get into the city where they would die of starvation, to sit where they were and die anyway, or to go over to the Assyrians. They decided on this last option, but as they approached the enemy camp, God made the Assyrians hear loud noises as if a huge army was descending on them. They not only fled, but left behind all their provisions, so that the lepers and the whole city were saved.*

Throughout its historical course, the Church has often found itself besieged, as it continues to do so today. It is surrounded by the new needs of society, of which it forms a part. The Church finds itself at the "gates" once again! Just as with the lepers in the story, we are faced by three possibilities. We can go back to the city, to stay within the walls. We can stay where we are, at the gates, which is very convenient, acting as mere observers of present and future events. Or, finally, we can venture something new, provided that we have the will and resilience to go forward in the dark and uncertainty. To go forward as the nomads do, the first to go forth to places where others cannot and do not dare to go. As the late Professor Nikos Matsoukas said, "The Orthodox Church is the Church of exodus. The Church's teaching, life, sufferings, faith in the Resurrection, and its patient struggles show that the nature of the Church is to find itself in a continual state of exodus throughout the dramatic course of history."

Those who dare to come out of the walls are the real leaders of the ecclesiastical community. It is they who do not try to make the present viable but who struggle to make the future possible and real. Let us realize that, as spiritual leaders of a certain community, a diocese or parish, we owe no debt to yesterday or today, but to tomorrow, to the vision of a dynamic, living, inclusive Church, that is sensitive to the human condition, that also learns to live in the margins, so that it can embrace also those weakest in faith and those who are most vulnerable.

It is time to dare to come out of the walls of the city, turning away from the inwardness of the community, going forth to untrodden places, and carving out new paths, without fear of the Laestrygonians and the Cyclops [*man-eating giants*] of the moment. This is the challenge and invitation of the Most-Holy Spirit.

*Commentary in italics by Martin Olsson*

## CURIOSITY CORNER: THE WESTERN RITE

From time to time the subject of “western rite” Orthodoxy crops up. In France there was at one time a fairly vocal movement in favour of restoring the so-called Gallican rite, the form of liturgy current in that country before the eastern and western churches went their separate ways in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, but a major snag is that no complete text of this rite (or rites – there were probably several) survives. The various 20<sup>th</sup> century reconstructions (today mostly used by non-canonical groups) rely to a large extent on guesswork and “borrowing” from post-schism local rites such as those of Lyon and Milan, as well as bits and pieces from authentic Orthodox sources. There is anyway a world of difference between continuous use of an ancient tradition (as in mainstream Orthodoxy) and the revival of a long-disused one, which can’t help seeming rather artificial.

In this country there are so far as I am aware two Orthodox priests authorised to celebrate a rite based on the traditional Roman Mass, both belonging to ROCOR and with very few lay followers. Long before either of them came on the scene there was another, the founder of our parish Fr Barnabas. He had been ordained as a member of an Orthodox western rite brotherhood in Paris, and although licensed to officiate according to both western and eastern traditions quickly abandoned the former, commenting that the difference between them was like that between black and white and “Glorious Technicolor”!

Fr Barnabas came to Orthodoxy after many years as an Anglican priest, and doubtless found the services at the little monastery in the rue d’Alleray an easy “way in”. In America the Antiochian jurisdiction has received evangelical groups and others from the Episcopal (Anglican) Church and allowed them to use a suitably amended version of the Anglican liturgy: time will tell whether this phenomenon turns out to be a permanent feature of that country’s religious landscape, or whether it will eventually die out (or be killed off).

In 1947 an Anglican friend of the Orthodox Church, Fr Derwas Chitty, delivered at a conference of the Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius a lecture entitled *Orthodoxy and the Conversion of England*. In those optimistic days there were still some who hoped that the Church of England might draw sufficiently close to Orthodoxy for it to be received as a body (a hope which, sadly, has become less and less realistic as the years have passed). To the objection that Orthodox liturgy is “foreign” or “oriental” he made the significant observation that it is used by peoples as diverse as Greeks, Russians and Syrians, each of which is just as “foreign” to the others as any of them to those of western Europe.

This is not to say that there aren’t great riches in the western tradition. To me it seems tragic that the western churches have in the past fifty years let so much of their liturgical heritage fall out of use. Like many another convert I have fond memories of the texts and music on which I was nurtured in pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism and mainstream Anglicanism, but have since grown to appreciate an altogether richer and more satisfying spiritual diet. I still read the Psalter from the Anglican prayer book; apart from that, the only “western” feature I want to claim for Orthodoxy is one hymn, to be sung at my funeral.

Hugh Allen

### **Library Corner - The Madonnas of Leningrad by Debra Dean**

It is set both in the time of the Blockade of Leningrad in 1941, telling the story of Marina a guide in the Hermitage museum as the masterpieces are packed up and sent for safekeeping further east, and of the present time as she slides into dementia of America. As Isabel Allende’s quote on the back says ‘An unforgettable story of love, survival and the power of imagination. The rare kind of book that you want to keep but you have to share’. I cannot disagree. It is a story which stays with me. Celia Olsson