



# Prophet Elias News

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



## **A Seed Fallen into Good Ground**

Father Peter touched the lives of countless people in many different contexts. It will take some time for his grieving family to put together a formal obituary, drawing on all the memories and tributes which have flooded in from across the world. What follows is simply a brief snapshot of one encounter and its lasting harvest.

I was fortunate enough to have the joy of Peter's company when we visited Uganda in 2012. Our main purpose was to celebrate the patronal feast of our sister parish of Saint Cyprian with Father Daniel Kaddu and his parishioners in rural Luweero province on October 2nd. But on the Sunday before the feast we attended Divine Liturgy at St Nicholas Cathedral in Kampala, where we met a group of remarkable young people with whom we subsequently kept in touch, and have happily been able to arrange sponsorship for some of them to attend university.



Last Sunday Dimitrios – about to complete his final year at Medical School – and Athanasios, who has just graduated with a B.Sc. in Computer Science, arranged a panikhida for Peter at St Nicholas', having found online a picture of Peter at his ordination which they downloaded and framed for the occasion. Both young men had been in almost daily contact with me over the time of Peter's illness, anxiously asking for updates and assuring him, his family and all of us of their prayers and those of their community.

Peter's face to face encounter with these young people amounted to only a few hours, but in that short time he had found his way into their hearts. And this is how he was: any number of people here in Britain, in Russia, across Europe, in America will, like these young people in Uganda, have Peter firmly rooted in their hearts - hearts which, like ours, will be aching now.

Dimitrios' characteristic response on hearing of his death was one we can all share in:

**Good Paradise, dear Father Peter.**

**May Christ give you rest in the land of the living, and open for you the gates of Paradise; may He receive you as a citizen of the Kingdom, and grant you forgiveness of your sins, for you were His friend.**

**From the Funeral Service**

## The Decisive Hour

*We make no apology for focussing on death in this issue. In Western society the tendency in both secular and religious circles is to minimize the significance of death, to the point where a favourite reading at funerals is often the poem 'Death is nothing at all.' In contrast, Orthodoxy insists that life has meaning only in the light of a sober awareness of death. Both of Father Peter's great spiritual mentors, Metropolitan Anthony and Fr Alexander Schmemmann, wrote urgently on the subject. Indeed, shortly after his admission to hospital, Fr Peter drew our attention to Fr Alexander's views when he posted on Facebook:*

'One of Alexander Schmemmann's lesser known titles is "The Liturgy of Death." Schmemmann writes that the Church, modern medicine, and the funeral industry have been "co-conspirators" in removing the dead from the living and in "sanitizing" death from being a "meaningful" event, the critical and opportune "decisive hour" of human destiny.'

*We have not yet had the opportunity to consult 'The Liturgy of Death': the following paragraphs on the same theme are taken from 'For the Light of the World':*

'Secularism is an "explanation" of death in terms of life. The only world we know is this world, the only life given to us is this life - so thinks a secularist - and it is up to us to make it as meaningful, as rich, as happy as possible. Life ends with death. This is unpleasant, but since it is natural, since death is a universal phenomenon, the best thing man can do about it is simply to accept it as something natural. As long as he lives, however, he need not think about it, but should live as though death did not exist. The best way to forget about death is to be busy, to be useful, to be dedicated to great and noble things, to build an always better world. ... The American "funeral home" is indeed the very symbol of secularist religion, for it expresses both the quiet acceptance of death as something natural (a house among other houses with nothing typical about it) and the denial of death's presence in life.

Christianity is not about reconciliation with death. It is the revelation of death, and it reveals death because it is the revelation of Life. Christ is this Life. And only if Christ is Life is death what Christianity proclaims it to be, namely the enemy to be destroyed, and not a "mystery" to be explained. Religion and secularism, by explaining death, give it a "status," a rationale, make it "normal." Only Christianity proclaims it to be *abnormal* and, therefore, truly horrible... The horror of death is, therefore, not in its being the "end" and not in physical destruction. By being separation from the world and life, it is separation from God. The dead cannot glorify God. It is, in other words, when Christ reveals Life to us that we can hear the Christian message about death as the enemy of God. It is when Life weeps at the grave of the friend, when it contemplates the horror of death, that the victory over death begins.'

Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Rev. Edition  
(Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2010)

What earthly sweetness remains unmixed with grief? What glory stands immutable on earth? All things are but feeble shadows, all things are deluding dreams: yet one moment only, and death shall supplant them all. But in the light of Thy countenance, O Christ, and in the sweetness of Thy beauty, give rest unto him whom Thou hast chosen, for as much as Thou lovest mankind.

Alas! What manner of ordeal does the soul endure when it is parted from the body? Alas! How many then are its tears and there is none to show compassion. Turning its eyes to the angels, it supplicates in vain: stretching out its hands to men, it finds none to offer succour. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, meditating on the brevity of our life, let us beseech of Christ rest for him who has departed hence; and for our souls great mercy.

Idiomela from the Funeral Service, by St John of Damascus

## Metropolitan Anthony: On Death

Death is the touchstone of our attitude to life. People who are afraid of death are afraid of life. It is impossible not to be afraid of life with all its complexity and dangers if one is afraid of death. This means that to solve the problem of death is not a luxury. If we are afraid of death we will never be prepared to take ultimate risks; we will spend our life in a cowardly, careful and timid manner. It is only if we can face death, make sense of it, determine its place and our place in regard to it that we will be able to live in a fearless way and to the fullness of our ability. Too often we wait until the end of our life to face death, whereas we would have lived quite differently if only we had faced death at the outset.

There is a patristic injunction, constantly repeated over the centuries, that we should be mindful of death throughout our life. But if such a thing is repeated to modern man, who suffers from timidity, and from the loss of faith and experience which prevails in our time, he will think he is called upon to live under the shadow of death, in a condition of gloom, haunted always by the fear that death is on its way and that then there will be no point in having lived. And death, if remembered constantly and deeply, would act as a sword of Damocles for him, suspended over his head by a hair, preventing the enjoyment of life and the fulfilment of it. Such an approach to the saying must be rejected. We need to understand mindfulness of death in its full significance: as an enhancement of life, not a diminution of it.

Most of the time we live as though we were writing a draft for the life which we will live later. We live not in a definitive way, but provisionally, as though preparing for the day when we really will begin to live. We are like people who write a rough draft with the intention of making a fair copy later. But the trouble is that the final version never gets written. Death comes before we have had the time or even generated the desire to make a definitive formulation. We always think that it can be done tomorrow. 'I will live approximately today. Tomorrow is when I shall act in a definitive way. It is true that things are wrong, but give me time. I will sort them out somehow, or else they will come right of themselves'. Yet we all know that the time never actually comes.

The injunction 'be mindful of death' is not a call to live with a sense of terror in the constant awareness that death is to overtake us and that we are to perish utterly with all that we have stood for. It means rather: 'be aware of the fact that what you are saying now, doing now, hearing, enduring or receiving now may be the *last* event or experience of your present life'. In which case it must be a crowning, not a defeat; a summit, not a trough. If only we realized whenever confronted with a person that this might be the last moment either of his life or ours, we would be much more intense, more much attentive to the words we speak and the things we do.

Only awareness of death will give life this immediacy and depth, will bring life to life, will make it so intense that its totality is summed up in the present moment. Such precisely is the way in which the ascetics fought against mindlessness, lack of attention and carelessness, against all the attitudes which allow us to miss the moment of opportunity, to pass the other person by, not to notice the need. One of the chief things that we are called upon to learn is awareness - awareness of our own self and of the other person's situation, an awareness that will stand the test of life and death. All life is at every moment an ultimate act.

From the edited version of an address given in 1978. Published in *Sobornost* vol.1, №2, 1979 and available at:

[http://www.mitras.ru/eng/eng\\_archive.htm](http://www.mitras.ru/eng/eng_archive.htm)

Copyright: The Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh Foundation

## This Week We Celebrate

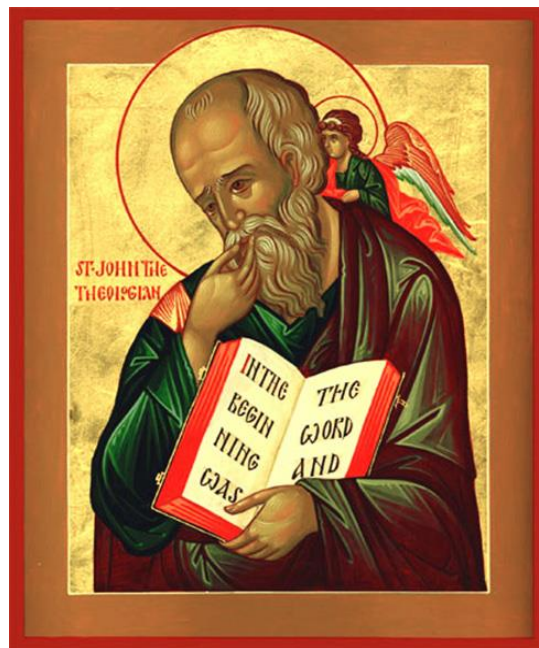
On Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup>: The Conception of the **Holy Forerunner and Baptist John**

On Thursday 24<sup>th</sup>: **Saint Silouan** of Mount Athos (1938)  
Staretz to Saint Sophrony of Essex

On Friday 25<sup>th</sup>: **Saint Sergius**, Abbot and Wonderworker of Radonezh (1392)

On Saturday 26<sup>th</sup>: The **Holy Apostle and Theologian John**

We wish **Father John** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**



## News Please!

The aim of bringing out a newsletter weekly has been to help us to feel in touch with one another during a difficult time when we weren't able to meet up in person to celebrate the Liturgy together. Now our situation is even more difficult: Father Peter, the lynch-pin of our community, is no longer here to guide us and to inspire us. We therefore have to make every effort to hold together in whatever way we can. We know that people are keeping in touch with one another individually by all sorts of means – by phone, email, social media, by post (even). It would be really good if the newsletter too could be part of this network, but that can only happen if your contributions come flooding in. News, views, reviews, quotes you particularly like, anecdotes – anything that in easier circumstances you might talk about in the hall after church - all will be gratefully received.