



Prophet Elias News

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

4th October 2020



On Tuesday 6th October we celebrate the Holy Apostle Thomas

On more than one occasion Father John told us that we should all regard Saint Thomas – ‘Doubting Thomas’ - as one of our patrons among the Saints.

Father Anthony Hughes: The Importance of Doubt

Thomas was unique in two ways. One: he was honest and open about his doubt. And second: he wanted proof not only by sight, but by touch. Not just to see, but to touch, which is daring because it is so intimate. It reminds me of the great communion hymn sung during the Presanctified Liturgy, “O Taste and See that the Lord is good.” To taste and see. To see and touch. This implies a deeper kind of faith, the desire for a deeper kind of intimacy.

Tasting and seeing also means changing and growing. We must have a faith that grows. We must not have a faith that remains as it was when we first learned about God in Sunday School. We should not be afraid to ask questions, afraid to incorporate new knowledge, afraid to change when evidence mounts that it no longer makes sense not to.

Galileo was tried because he challenged the dogma of Rome that the sun revolved around the earth. In the same way, are there really dragons in the Jordan? Is mental illness really the result of demons? Was there really a six twenty-four-hour day creation? Is there really a three-tiered universe with earth in the middle, heaven above, and hell below? Can a loving God really condemn to hell those who impugn his majesty? Even on my worst days I can restrain myself better than that! Is it really a Christian virtue to deliberately ignore the findings of science, the revelations of psychology, and the creative genius of the accumulated wisdom of the world’s religions? Just because we are Christians doesn’t mean we have to be stupid.

Thomas was not afraid to voice his doubts, to be honest about them no matter what his fellow disciples might say. And he voiced them most passionately. He admitted his doubts and confusion, he did not hide them or deny them. He embraced them. Therefore, he took a major step towards a mature faith and a theophany. Jesus honoured Thomas’ doubt and answered his prayer. He allowed Thomas to touch his wounds, and instead of chastising him the Lord blessed him. The comment, “blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” is not a criticism of Thomas at all, but a moment of truth. Jesus is speaking not only to Thomas, but to the whole gathered congregation, who also did not believe before they had seen. In this singular moment Thomas was key. His confession, "You are my Lord and my God," rings throughout the centuries!

I say we must respect the doubt. Instead of denying it, acknowledge it. Doubt that leads to inquiry is a gift. Instead of pretending the doubt is not there, bring it to light and examine its roots. Doubt in the light of day becomes filled with light. Doubt hidden and buried in the soul festers and poisons the heart.

It is also true that doubt may be a cover for something else. It may be a cover for our own inner confusion, not about God, but about ourselves. Low self-esteem and self-loathing are hallmarks of our civilization. We project our hidden insecurities on to the world around us, our relationships with others and also with God. In other words, it may be that we have grown so afraid of our own inner chaos that we remain forever floating on the surface of faith without ever exploring its depths.

But if we are to grow we must explore all our questions about God, including those things we have come to believe and why we have come to believe them. If they connect to our internal chaos in some way we will see the truth of what Evagrius of Pontus taught, "If you want to know God you must first come to know yourself."

Exerpt from a sermon for Thomas Sunday by Fr Anthony Hughes
St Mary Orthodox Church Cambridge, Massachusetts on April 22 2012
(Used here by kind permission)

Just a Thought

Heard many years ago on *Thought for the Day* on Radio 4:
The opposite of Faith is not Doubt: the opposite of Faith is Certainty.
(The same speaker also said 'There are more important things than being right.')

This Week We Celebrate

On Tuesday 6th October: **Holy Apostle Thomas**

We wish **Thomas** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Friday 9th October: **Holy Apostle James, Son of Alpheus**

On Saturday 10th October: **Saint Ambrose of Optina** (1891)

Keeping In Touch

In the last issue I suggested we might all contact one another more in these trying times when we cannot meet together. I have since realized that there will be many parishioners we don't have contact details for should we want to email, phone or write to them.

Hugh, our parish secretary, has all the information, of course, but he cannot give it out without the permission of the person concerned. He is, however, quite happy to pass messages on, so what I suggest is:

For emails: Send an email with the subject heading MESSAGE FOR (N)

to hpeliasdevon@gmail.com

Hugh will then forward the message without opening it.

To phone: Email Hugh at hpeliasdevon@gmail.com

or ring him on 01884 258031 or 07812 388958

asking him to give the person your phone number with a request to ring you.

By post: Address your envelope to the person, marked Please Forward, to:

(N)

c/o Holy Prophet Elias Parish

9 Park Close

Tiverton EX16 6AX

Martin Olsson

The Optina Elders



In the 19th century, the Optina Pustyn monastery was one of the most important spiritual centres of Russian Orthodoxy, particularly renowned as the centre of Russian staretsdom, or eldership. The startzi (spiritual advisors) attracted crowds of devout Christians, including many intellectuals and writers, among them Dostoevsky, Gogol and Turgenev. Dostoevsky's characterization of Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* may have been based on Staretz Ambrose, who was the principal elder at Optina from 1860 until his death 30 years later.

After the Russian Revolution, the last of the startzi were forcibly deported from the monastery, which was declared a gulag. The last hegumen was executed in Tula in 1938. Later, some of the structures were demolished, while the cathedral was designated a literary museum. In 1987 with the beginning of Perestroika, Optina Pustyn was one of the first abbeys to be returned to the Church. Among many volunteers who worked on the reconstruction, Philip Scorer, William Olsson and Nick Roberson spent two weeks there in 1991.

In 1993 three inhabitants of the monastery were murdered on Easter night - hieromonk Basil, monk Ferapont and monk Trophim, known collectively as the Optina martyrs.

Adapted from OrthodoxWiki



'The love of God is proven by love and mercy towards one's neighbour. Mercy and a kind-hearted attitude towards one's neighbour and forgiveness of his wrongdoings is achieved through humility and self-reproach, when we blame ourselves and not someone else in all distressing and unpleasant occasions; when we find faults with ourselves because we didn't know how to act the right way, which led to the trouble that we have to face now. If we look at things this way, we will be less upset and angry, for anger does not do what is right before God.'

Saint Ambrose of Optina

A Useful Resource

Are you aware of something called **Ages Digital Chant Stand**. It compiles the daily services each day from their various sources, allowing you to read them without having to refer to the several different books and breaking your train of thought. On Sundays it also provides the Typika for those with no access to a priest in these difficult times. It's available on the web at: <https://www.agesinitiatives.com/dcs/public/dcs/servicesindex.html> and there are apps for Android and iPad/iPhone.

Ian Bromelow

Baptism and Reception at Combe Martin

Eleanora Vera, infant daughter of Pavlik and Anna Frank, was baptised in St Symeon's & St Anna's, Combe Martin on 25th September. The Godparents are Nika Frank and Eleanora's sister Maria. Also Anna was received into the Orthodox Church, with Irina Scorer as Sponsor. Fr Trayan and Fr John officiated.

Father Peter

Today marks two weeks since the passing of o. Peter. In one of our recent conversations, I shared with him my anxiety that because of the virus, because temples are closed, this is bad for our spiritual lives, because we do not have the opportunity to regularly attend church and be communed! And he responded well: not to worry because this is a test that will pass and reminded me that it was much worse in Soviet Russia. There were thousands of priests, monks and laity who had no access to an Orthodox church for years and to the holy mysteries, but they were still saved! God looks at the human heart and his pursuit of heaven. Wonderful cleric. He always found the right words to comfort us and inspire us with faith and hope! His absence is tangible. God rest his soul!



Facebook post by Martin Ralchevski – used here by kind permission.

A Last but Eternal Gift from Peter

When Martin and I went to see Fr Peter a few days before he died, he told us how he felt about the great love around him – family in the house chatting to each other, visitors joining them and then coming to see him. ‘It is Divine Love’, he said and I thought then that Peter was giving us a final gift – a real and tangible vision of God’s love. What a wonderful gift to be left with.

Celia

Vouchsafe Him the Sweetness of Paradise

Lord, Thou art merciful to us without measure. Thou art the only Deliverer; what can we add to the great strength of Thy saving love? But as Simon the Cyrenian helped Thee, the All-powerful, to bear Thy Cross, so now it is pleasing to Thy goodness to accomplish the salvation of our dear ones with our participation:

Jesus, Thou didst command that we bear one another's burdens.

Jesus, Thou Who hast mercy on us after death through the intercession of our close ones;

Jesus, union of love placed between those who have fallen asleep and those among the living;

Jesus, may the labours of those who loved him serve for the salvation of Thy servant the priest Peter.

Jesus, hear his heartfelt cry, offered up by our own lips.

Jesus, in our tears accept his repentance.

Jesus, All-merciful Judge, vouchsafe Thy servant the priest Peter the sweetness of Paradise.

Ikos 4 from the **Akathist to Jesus Christ for a Loved One Who Has Fallen Asleep**

Posted on Blogger by Maria on 11-02-2011

<https://akathistcollections.blogspot.com/2011/11/akathist-to-jesus-christ-for-loved-one.html>