



Prophet Elias News

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



Sermon by Metropolitan Anthony on the Rich Young Man (Luke 18: 18-27)

To-day's Gospel challenges us all so sharply. It begins with words that may be interpreted in more than one way: "Good Lord - what shall I do to have eternal life?" And the Lord answers, "Why do you call Me 'good'? God only is good". He does not say, "You are wrong". He does not deny His right to be called good as God is good; and thereby, to those who have ears to hear, it is a testimony: Yes, you are speaking to your God, and it is your God that is to answer your question.

And then Christ gives us two indications. The one is: if you wish to have eternal life, keep the Commandments. The Commandments of God are not only rules of behaviour (although, of course they are such), but as one of the Psalms puts it, should be in our inmost hearts. It should be from the depths of our heart that we accomplish the Commandments: not because we are commanded from outside, but because they have reached us with the ring of truth; not because God has spoken, but because with all our being we have answered "Amen! This is true, this is life, this is the way into eternal life."

When we hear Christ mentioning these Commandments - where are we? Who of us can say that he was faithful to every word of this short list that indicates that without which we cannot live? How often do we think, as this young man did - and with how much less reason - that we want perfection. We want perfection without having first trodden the road of the Commandments.

But Christ says to us quite clearly: "If you want perfection - give all you possess." It is not only material things which we can give: every one of us has treasures hoarded in his mind and heart, in his soul, things which are more important to him than anything material: that is his wealth. Each of us should turn inward and ask himself, "What is there which is my peculiar treasure? What are those things which I will not give away even for life eternal, for God?"

We do not put things in such a crude manner, but we hug those things which are so precious to us, and still we hope that we will enter the Kingdom of God, we will reach perfection, we will become in all fullness what we are called to be, the kind of persons of whom God dreamed when He created us. And we do not follow the Commandments, because we think that we can achieve it in a simpler manner; and we do not give away all we have, that is: the only thing we are not prepared to give away, in a hope that God will accept us, and our burden.

Let us reflect on this story. This is not even a parable, it is something that has happened to a young man. It happens to all of us when God says, "Have you been faithful to the way of life which I have described to you in terms of commandments, outlined in these terms as one can outline a road by milestones? Do you want to attain fullness? Start at that point." And if you are aware of having been faithful in these things, then ask yourself the further question: what is the treasure which I will not give away, even for eternal life?

The young man heard the words of Christ, and went away sad. He had earthly possessions, but we have so many possessions which are not material and which are our burden, our fetters. And yet, there is in this story one thing that can give us so much hope. Christ did not condemn this young man; Christ let him go without a word of reproach, because what He had said was like seed sown into the mind and heart of this young man. He let him go wounded at the heart, puzzled in his mind, called to be himself by an act of heroic will and surrender, let go of himself, as Christ said, give everything away and follow Him. Where to? Along the road of human life on one hand, on the other hand - into the fullness of life eternal.

When Christ says to us "Follow Me", He does not call us to walk a frightening, dark road; He says, "I have trodden all this road, I know every meander of it - you can safely follow! I am like the good shepherd that walks in front of his sheep, meeting all dangers himself, so that the sheep may be safe."

We all will go home like the young man, perhaps saddened, that neither are we keeping the Commandments, nor are we able to give away our most precious treasure: but remember - we will not go condemned, we will have been faced with an ultimate choice, and as long as we can struggle on earth - there is time.

But let us not be beguiled by the length of time: time flies, time goes - let it not be too late, let us turn to life, let us become all we are capable of being. The answer to to-day's Gospel is so clear - "Who then can be saved?" – "To man it is not possible by our own strength; but to God, all things are possible." That is our hope: God is with us, and nothing is too much for us.

Sermon preached on 30th August 1987. Copyright: The Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh Foundation

Not a Law, but our Saviour

So let this Advent be marked for each of us by humility, repentance, and spiritual discipline, not as punishment because we have broken a law, but because we all have room to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Our hearts and souls are not worthy of Him. We do not serve Him in every poor and suffering person. We do not seek first His kingdom and righteousness. We are not perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect. But unlike the rich young ruler, we must not give up and walk away in despair. Instead, we should say, "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" as we press forward in the Christian life as best we can. For what is impossible with men is possible with the Incarnation of the God-Man Jesus Christ. He is not a law, but our Saviour.

Fr Philip LeMasters: *Holiness Instead of Legalism* Blog: Eastern Christian Insights, 23rd November 2013

Footnote to Last Week's 'We Celebrate'

Last week we mentioned the Feastday of St Kliment of Ohrid. The same date (25th November) is also the Feastday of the much earlier Saint Clement of Rome. Ed.

The "original" St Kliment/Clement was Bishop of Rome towards the end of the first century. Traditionally he is believed to have followed Linus and Cletus in succession to St Peter.

The church of San Clemente stands about 500 yards west of the Colosseum, where so many early Christians died as martyrs. The present building dates to c1100, but excavations have revealed older structures on two lower levels. The upper one of these is an earlier church of the 4th century, but underneath it is the surviving ground floor of two adjacent houses. At the time Christians gathered for the Liturgy in private houses (see Romans 16.5/Philemon 2), and one of these two may have been Clement's own house; what happened here was that when the congregation outgrew its meeting place they demolished the upper parts and built a new one on top – twice.

The main church is a noteworthy example of liturgical architecture and layout just at the time when East and West were going their separate ways. Visitors with Slav connections will be happy to find a side chapel dedicated to Ss Cyril & Methodius; the church contains relics of St Clement brought back by St Cyril from the Crimea, where he was martyred while in exile.

I would recommend San Clemente with its excavations (currently but let's hope temporarily closed due to covid) as a "must see" on any visit to Rome – more so than some of the bigger and better-known attractions. For pictures and more information see <http://www.basilicasanclemente.com/eng/>, including linked Facebook page.

Hugh A.

Get involved!

The pandemic and the prolonged closure of churches just at a time when so many people are grappling with questions of life and death raises important questions about the place of the Church in society. This has not gone wholly unnoticed, and there is currently a government consultation, open until 11 December, on the government's engagement with faith organisations. Views are invited from the public as well as experts in the field: see <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/independent-faith-engagement-review-call-for-evidence/independent-faith-engagement-review-call-for-evidence>

An interview with the chairman of the consultation, Colin Bloom, was aired on Radio 4 Sunday programme on Sunday 22 November: see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000plvs>

This Week We Celebrate

On Sunday 29th November: The **New Martyr Philoumenos**, (Palestine, 1979)

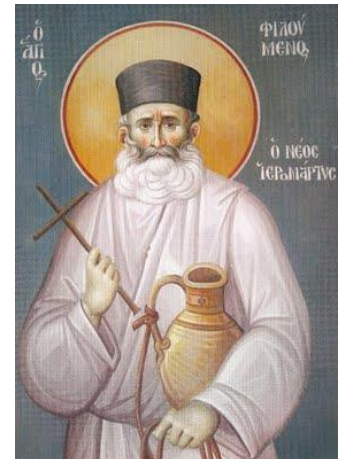
On Monday 30th: The **Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called**

We wish **Andreas A** and **Andrew S** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Friday 4th December: The **Great Martyr Barbara** and the **Martyr Juliana (c306)**
Saint John of Damascus (749)

The **New Martyr the Archimandrite Philoumenos** (Hasapis), a native of Cyprus, was Hegumen of the Monastery of Jacob's Well near Nablus in Palestine. (Nablus was in biblical times the city of Samaria, and it was at Jacob's Well that Jesus met and conversed with the Samaritan Woman.)

His disciple, the monk Yeghia, recalled that 'because of his zeal for the neglected souls of the Palestinian faithful, Father Philoumenos studied to become fluent in Arabic, both literary and conversational, chanting the Holy Gospel more easily than many Arabs, and preaching the Orthodox faith not only in their language but in his Orthodox manner of life. What a good shepherd he was, more worthy than some of the episcopate! Whenever the Palestinian faithful were scandalized by some unworthy priest, whenever Orthodox neglect or European money drove the faithful to wonder whether they would not receive better pastoral care from elsewhere, it was Father Philoumenos that the Patriarch of Jerusalem sent to them as a true defender of the Faith, a man of more than blameless life, a man from whom no one could even imagine any immodest or improper word, a man whose faith and integrity were a model for all.

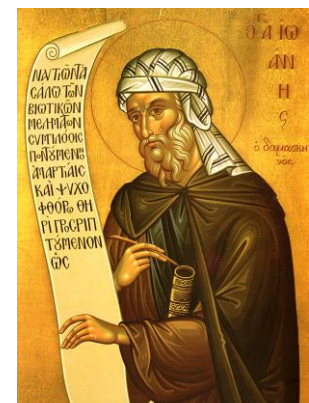


St. Philoumenos was murdered on 29 November 1979, his nameday (He was named for Saint Philoumenos of Ancyra.) His assailant, Asher Raby, a mentally ill 37-year-old resident of Tel Aviv, had entered the monastery and thrown a hand grenade inside. As Philoumenos was escaping from the fire caused by the grenade he was pursued by Raby and hit multiple times with an axe. Raby was subsequently found to have acted alone, "without any connection to a religious or political entity." At a court hearing after his arrest, an Israeli prosecutor told the court that Raby was convinced that the monastery was the site of the ancient Jewish Temple, and that he had acted "in response to a divine command."

A worrying development following Saint Philoumenos' death was the rapid spread of conspiracy theories surrounding his murder. It was widely reported that the murder was planned by an active group of Zionist fanatics, complete with lurid details of a supposed 'ritual killing' involving the saint's disfigurement post mortem. Although no evidence has ever been produced of this conspiracy, such accounts are still to be found on many Orthodox websites.

Source: Orthodox Wiki

Saint John of Damascus (675-749). His writings in defence of the use of icons have had a profound effect on Orthodox practice, in that they laid the foundations for the decision of the 7th Ecumenical Council a generation later that icons were not only permissible but necessary in Christian worship. He was also a prolific writer of hymns, including the Easter Canon and the Idiomela of the Funeral Service. "The liturgical poetry of St. John of Damascus can lead us from grief to compunction, repentance, and even to joy when we place our own death into the context of Christ's Death and Resurrection. When we listen to these hymns attentively and meditate upon them, we find in them the assurance that this perishable nature will one day put on the imperishable, the mortal will put on immortality, and that Death is swallowed up in victory (I Cor. 15:54)."



Fr Joseph Frawley: *The Mystery of Death in the Hymns of St John of Damascus* Jacob's Well Blog Winter 1997

Readers' Corner

For me, one of the compensations of being stuck at home has been the opportunity to reread some of the key Orthodox books on the Liturgy I first read many years ago and thought I had fully absorbed at the time, only to discover all sorts of insights I had missed on first reading. One such book is Archbishop Paul of Finland's commentary on the Divine Liturgy, *Feast of Faith: An Invitation to the Love Feast of the Kingdom of God*. Archbishop Paul explores in detail every prayer and every action in the Liturgy, reflecting on its history as well as its essential significance to us as we take our part in the holy mystery of the eucharistic sacrifice.

One passage particularly spoke to me in our present circumstances, when many of us have not been able to receive communion for several months, and have no idea when we may next be able to. Archbishop Paul reflects on the Church's understanding of time:

'The words referring to time, "now and ever and unto ages of ages," so often repeated in Orthodox worship, have their own message. Only the present moment is available for our use at any given time, but this moment contains the past and the future. In the Eucharist, the past is lived as present and the future is already present. The same happens in the soul of the Christian. "The narrow way has no end: its quality is eternity. There every moment is a moment of beginning – the present includes the future: the day of judgement; for Christ is timelessly present everywhere, both in hell and in heaven. With the coming of the One, plurality disappears, even in time and space. Everything happens simultaneously, now and here and everywhere, in the depth of your heart." (Tito Colliander, *The Way of the Ascetics*) ' *Feast of Faith* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1988) is still in print and widely available.

Martin Olsson

Noticeboard

The Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex, is now streaming weekly talks by Fr Zacharias and the Hegumen, Fr Petros, at 5.30 p.m. on Sundays. To participate, you will need to sign up in order to receive a link each week. To join the mailing list for information about future talks please fill in the form on <https://rebrand.ly/1opx0>

The Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist winter series of 'virtual pilgrimages' begins **30 November**, with Bari and St Nicholas. To register, please go to: <https://forerunner.org.uk/winter-series-2020-21>

From the **Akathist Hymn to the Holy Apostles: Oikos IV -To Andrew the First-Called**

Seeing the God thou didst love walking in the flesh on the earth, O first called of His eyewitnesses, thou didst cry out to thy brother, full of joy: 'Simon, we have found the Messiah, the One whom the prophets announced in the Spirit.' Wherefore, we honour thee, as the first-called of the disciples, the brother of Peter, crying out to thee with these words:

Rejoice, first-called of Christ's disciples;

Rejoice, thou who didst first call others to follow Him!

Rejoice, thou who wast instructed by the Forerunner;

Rejoice, thou who didst heed his call to follow Christ!

Rejoice, thou who didst take up thy cross and deny thyself daily;

Rejoice, who through the Cross wast joined completely to Christ!

Rejoice, all ye holy Apostles, who through hope have been furnished with wings like unto eagles;

Rejoice, for where Christ was in the body, there were ye gathered together!

Rejoice, Peter and Paul with all the holy Apostles.