



Prophet Elias News

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

13th December 2020



The King's Feast (Luke 14: 16-24)

How often have we heard today's parable about those people who were called to the Feast of the King, and who refused to come. The one who had acquired a plot of land, thought he was in possession of it; in reality, he was so attached to it that he could not detach himself from it: he was a prisoner of what he thought he possessed. And so it is with whatever we imagine we possess; it is enough for us to have the smallest thing in our hand and this hand is alienated from us; we cannot use it anymore, we cannot use our arm, our whole body is conditioned by what we possess, or imagine we possess: we are held prisoner by it.

Another refused to come because they had bought five pairs of oxen: they had to try them, they had a task to fulfil, they had work to do, they had perhaps what they believed to be a mission in life, and therefore they had no time for anything except that which was their personal concern.

And the last refused to come because his heart was full of his own joy: having married, how could he be concerned with anyone else's marriage? He was full of his own joy - how could he participate in anyone else's joy? And so, they all turned away from the call.

Doesn't this apply very directly to us? Each of us possesses something that he deems so important that he is prepared to turn away from God - yes, from God, since there is no time for prayer, there is no time for worship - and to turn away from other people who need him because he is busy with his own business? And how often has it happened that we are full of joy or of sorrow - but they are our own, we hug them to our heart, we have no time for anyone else's sorrow or anyone else's joy.

But then, what should we do? We hear every Sunday in the Liturgy words that say, 'Let us lay aside all the cares of this life'. Does this mean that we must turn away from the earth on which we live, from the tasks which are ours, from the joys and true sorrows that come our way? No!

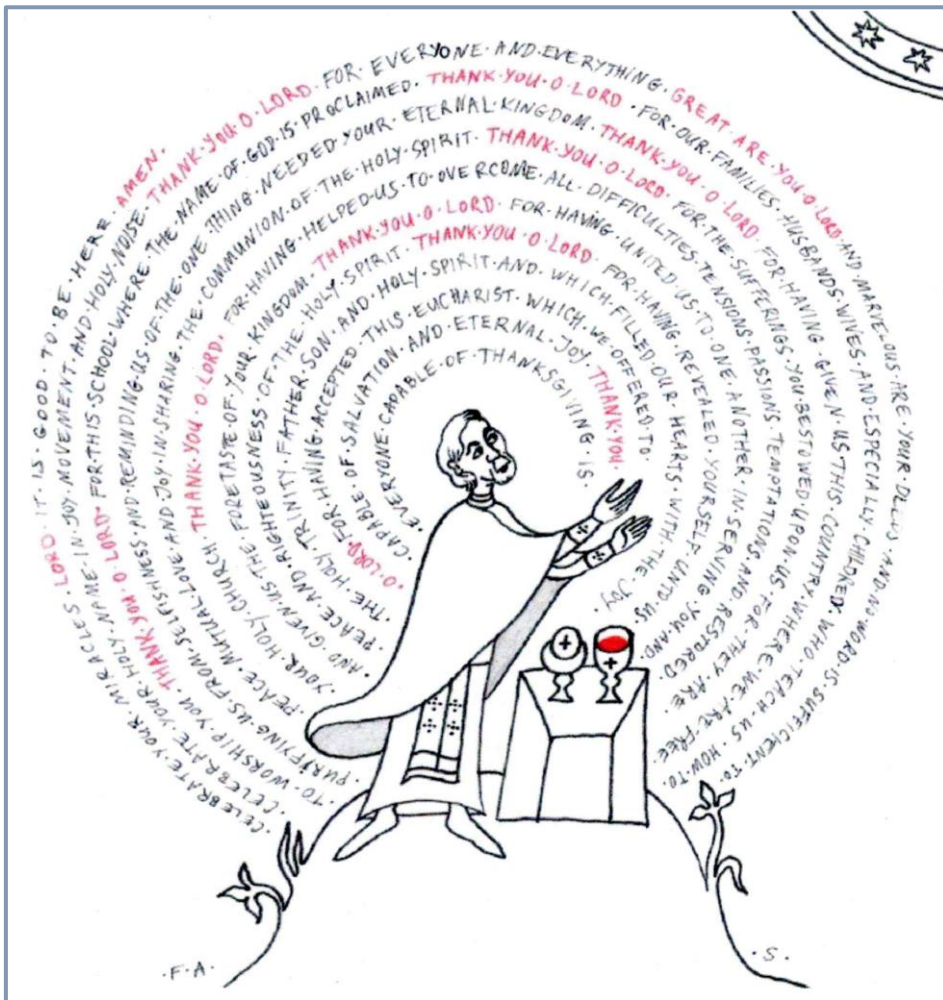
But there is an answer perhaps in the lines that precede the reading from the Epistle which we heard today, where we are asked: Are you risen with Christ? Is your life hid in God with Christ? [*Colossians 3: 1-4*] What does this really mean to us? It means that if we are dead with the death of Christ to everything which is destructive of love, destructive of compassion, everything which is self-centredness, which is self-love, which leaves no space for anyone but ourselves - if we are dead to all this, and if we have accepted life on Christ's terms, ready to live for others, live for God, live for the joy and life of those who surround us - then we are risen with Christ, and our life is indeed hid with Christ in God, it is at the very depth of God, at the very depth of divine love!

And then we can turn to the earth; then, instead of possessing we can serve, instead of overpowering we can try to bring this earth of ours, in an act of love, in an act of reverence, to be God's earth, to be able to bring fruit from the earth, not as now being raped, being violently possessed by us, but giving us its fruit in an act of responsive love. And the same applies to our tasks; we are called to serve, we are called to make of all our life an act of concern, of love, of service - then, all that we do becomes an act of God, then it becomes meaningful and it does not separate us from God.

And if joy has come into our heart, it is a gift of God; if sorrow has come into our heart, we can carry it to God, for it to be integrated in the mystery of salvation!

Let us reflect on this! Let us truly lay aside all the cares of this life in this sense: let us not be prisoners, but free, since Christ has come to set us free. And then the earth, and our labour, and our joys, and our sorrows and everyone on earth will become part of the Kingdom of God. Then indeed, our life will be hid with Christ in God, but a God Who has chosen so to love the world as to be incarnate, to become man among men, to take upon Himself life in a fallen world. And, having accepted it all in an act of saving and redemptive love, He has risen, and anyone can enter into eternal life, the life of the resurrection, by uniting himself or herself to Christ.

Memory Eternal! Father Alexander Schmemmann – 13th December 1983



This lovely image by Andrej Strocua was posted recently on Facebook by Inga Leonova in memory of Father Alexander Schmemmann. She wrote:

Father Alexander celebrated the Divine Liturgy for the last time on Thanksgiving Day 1983. Two weeks later, on December 13, he passed away

As is well known, Father Alexander had devoted his entire life to teaching, writing and preaching about life as love and communion, the Eucharist—the Greek word eucharist means thanksgiving. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, Father Alexander took from his pocket a short written sermon, in the form of a prayer, which he proceeded to read. These were his words, which proved to be the last ever spoken by him from the ambo in church:

Thank You, O Lord! Everyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation and eternal joy.

Thank You, O Lord, for having accepted this Eucharist, which we offered to the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and which filled our hearts with the joy, peace and righteousness of the Holy Spirit.

Thank You, O Lord, for having revealed Yourself unto us and given us the foretaste of Your Kingdom.

Thank You, O Lord, for having united us to one another in serving You and Your Holy Church.

Thank You, O Lord, for having helped us to overcome all difficulties, tensions, passions, temptations and restored peace, mutual love and joy in sharing the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Thank You, O Lord, for the sufferings You bestowed upon us, for they are purifying us from selfishness and reminding us of the “one thing needed;” Your eternal Kingdom.

Thank You, O Lord, for having given us this country where we are free to worship You.

Thank You, O Lord, for this school, where the name of God is proclaimed.

Thank You, O Lord, for our families: husbands, wives and, especially, children who teach us how to celebrate Your holy Name in joy, movement and holy noise.

Thank You, O Lord, for everyone and everything.

Great are You, O Lord, and marvellous are Your deeds, and no word is sufficient to celebrate Your miracles.

Lord, it is good to be here! Amen!

Those of us who have been unable to attend Divine Liturgy in person in recent months might usefully remember that Fr Alexander's key work on the Eucharist, For the Life of the World, was originally entitled The World as Sacrament, reminding us that everything we do can be an act of sacramental Thanksgiving.

M O.

This Week We Celebrate

On Sunday 13th December: Sunday of the **Holy Forefathers** who lived before the Law and under the Law.

We wish **Mother Sarah, Sally L and Naomi** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

Saint Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker of All America (1837) (See Noticeboard)

Holy Martyr Lucia (Lucy) of Syracuse (304)

On Tuesday 15th: **Saint Stephen of Surozoh** (787)

On Wednesday 17th: **Holy Prophet Daniel** and the **Three Holy Children, Ananias, Azarias and Misael**

We wish **Father Daniel Kaddu** in Uganda, **Daniel L** and **Daniel W** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

A special feature of this Sunday is the frequent mention in the chants of the prophet Daniel and also of the three young men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego [Ananias, Azarias and Misael] who, thrown into the furnace for refusing to worship the image of the king, were miraculously saved from death. This is explained by the fact that the feast of Daniel and the three young men falls on December 17th, and will thus fall very close to this Sunday. The liturgical texts themselves bring out the symbolic meaning of this episode. On the one hand, the three young men (like the three angels who appeared to Abraham) represent the Trinity: "The young men of God came and went in the fiery furnace, rejoicing in the dew of the Spirit which refreshed them, and representing the mystery of the Trinity..." They represent the victory of faith over death: "By their faith they quelled the power of the fire". Finally they represent - and here is found the link with Christmas - the new burning bush, the fire of the divine presence which does not consume: "Thy young men, O Christ, when they were in the furnace which was to them like dew, mysteriously figured Thy birth from the Virgin, which has illumined us without burning us". We are reminded that, as the Bible tells us, the three young men were not alone in the furnace: "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God". These last words shed light on the problem of human suffering. The Son of God Himself is always there to be with men in the midst of the furnace.

Fr Lev Gillet, *The Year of Grace of the Lord*

From the Exeter Book's 'Advent Lyrics'

*Ēala ēarendel, engla beorhtast,
ofer middangeard monnum sended,
ond sōðfæsta sunnan lēoma,
torht ofer tunglas, þū tīda gehwane
of sylfum þē symle inlihtes!
Swā þū, god of gode gearo acenned,
sunu sōþan fæder, swegles in wuldre
būtan anginne æfre wære,
swā þec nū for þearfum þīn āgen geweorc
bīdeð þurh byldo, þæt þū þā beorhtan ūs
sunnan onsende, ond þē sylf cyme
þæt ðū inlēohte þā þe longe ær,
þrosme beþeahte ond in þeostrum hēr,
sæton sinneahtes; synnum bifealdne
deorc dēapēs sceadu drēogan sceoldan.
Nū wē hyhtfulle hælo gelyfað
þurh þæt word godes weorodum brungen,
þe on frymðe wæs fæder ælmihtigum
efenece mid god, ond nū eft gewearð
flæsc firena lēas, þæt sēo fæmne gebær
geomrum to gēoce.*

Hail, Thou Daybreak brightest of angels
sent to all of us men here on earth,
bright beyond all stars bringing light to each season.
As Thou, God from God wholly begotten
Son of the True Father without beginning
ever abidest in heaven's glory,
so we, Thine own handiwork ever in need
now boldly beseech Thee send us the bright sun,
come Thyself and enlighten us that long have lingered
enwrapped in sin, ever enduring
in dismal darkness death's dire shadow.
Now we have hope and hail our salvation
proclaimed to people by God's own Word
which was from the first with the Father Almighty
and has since assumed flesh without sin stain
born of the Virgin to bring us to safety.

Adapted by M O from the prose translation by Charles W Kennedy

The Exeter Book, also known as the Codex Exoniensis, is a 10thC anthology of Anglo-Saxon poetry. It was donated to the library of Exeter Cathedral by Leofric, the first bishop of Exeter, in 1072. It is the largest known collection of Old English literature still in existence, and in 2016 UNESCO recognized it as one of the "world's principal cultural artifacts". Some attribute the Advent Lyrics to the 9thC poet Cynewulf, but this attribution is not now widely accepted.

Saint Lucy's Day (13th December) commemorates Lucia of Syracuse, an early 4th-century martyr under Diocletian who according to legend brought food and aid to Christians hiding in the Roman catacombs, wearing a candle-lit wreath on her head to light her way and leave her hands free to carry as much food as possible. Her feast day, which coincided with the shortest day of the year prior to calendar reforms, is widely celebrated as a festival of light, pointing to the arrival of the Light of Christ on Christmas Day.

Saint Lucy's Day is celebrated most widely in Scandinavia and in Italy. In Sweden, the eldest girl in the family, dressed as Sankta Lucia in white with a scarlet sash to represent her martyrdom, and wearing a wreath of candles on her head, processes through the house carrying a plate of special saffron buns for the family breakfast.



Noticeboard

This week's **'Virtual Visit'** from the Orthodox Fellowship of Saint John the Baptist is to **Spruce Island, Alaska** and **Saint Herman** on Monday 14th December at 7pm. To register go to:

<https://forerunner.org.uk/winter-series-2020-21/>

Services in December

Saturday 12th December 6pm: Vespers at Saint Anne's

Saturday 19th December 6pm: Vespers at Saint Anne's

Wednesday 23rd December 6.30 pm: Vigil (Eve of Christmas Eve) at Saint Anne's

Saturday 26th December 6pm: Vespers at Saint Anne's

Sunday 27th December 10.30 am: Divine Liturgy (Parish celebration of the Nativity)
Service to be held at Saint Stephen's Church, Exeter High Street.

Exeter Cathedral

Readers may like to know that the normal fee for entering **Exeter Cathedral** will not be charged during December. The Cathedral is open to visitors from 11am-3pm Monday to Saturday.

The Coming

And God held in his hand
 A small globe. Look, he said.
 The son looked. Far off,
 As through water, he saw
 A scorched land of fierce
 Colour. The light burned
 There; crusted buildings
 Cast their shadows; a bright
 Serpent, a river
 Uncoiled itself, radiant
 With slime.

On a bare
 Hill a bare tree saddened
 The sky. Many people
 held out their thin arms
 To it, as though waiting
 For a vanished April
 To return to its crossed
 Boughs. The son watched
 Them. Let me go there, he said.

R S Thomas

