



Prophet Elias News

**News in the time of self – isolation for the Orthodox Church of
the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon
24th January 2021**

This Sunday, the Sunday of Blind Bartimaeus, is the first of the Sundays with Gospel themes which lead us towards Great Lent.

Epistle reading: 1 Timothy 1: 15-17 Gospel: Luke 18: 35-43

Next Sunday is the Sunday of Zaccheus – a lovely time to do your House Blessing if you haven't already, with Christ's declaration in mind: 'Today is salvation come unto this house.' If you are shielding strictly at home and haven't been able to collect blessed water from Saint Anne's, we will do our best to get some delivered to you if you let us know.

We are All Blind, and We Must Learn to See

As in the days of the ministry of Christ on earth Saint John the Baptist had been preaching the Gospel of repentance - the good news that repentance, turning to God, always brings us face to face with Him in reconciliation - so does also the Church now, before Lent, face us with weeks of preparation, weeks during which we look at ourselves as deeply as we can, as honestly as we can, before we are confronted with deeds of God, with His power and with the example of those who had truly turned away from evil, given themselves to God, and have found fulfilment and salvation.

And before these weeks begin to prepare us even to this, we remember, as we do today, Bartimaeus, the blind man of Jericho, a reminder that we all are blind, that we all have forgotten how to see the reality of things. He was blinded by illness; we are blinded by the visible; the invisible becomes invisible to us because all that catches our eye prevents us from looking deep, looking into the depth.

The message which is brought to us today is this: we are all blind, and we must learn to see. To see ourselves as we are, both what is evil, imperfect, distorted to us, and also the beauty of the image of God which nothing can erase, nothing can destroy, which may be covered up as an icon may be covered up by dust, but which remains glorious within us. And we must learn to look at ourselves, and discern both good and evil: not only evil, but also that good which can inspire us to struggle, to fight and to overcome all that is unworthy of God.

But we must also learn in these weeks to look at everyone around us and see God's image in him or in her, forget those imperfections which blind us to the beauty of every person, look deep into each one who is our neighbour, and worshipfully, reverently discover the divine presence, the divine likeness in him or in her.

Only then we will be able to move on to the weeks of preparation which will confront us one after the other with our most common and most destructive imperfections. If we try to look at ourselves, we often feel that we don't have eyes to see, we have no terms of reference: how can we see? There is a mirror in which we can see both good and evil. Let us, in the course of these days, read - with an open mind and open heart, with veneration - the Gospel. We will see in Christ what a true human being is; we will see in His teaching what we are called to be and to become; we will see in His apostles, in those who surrounded Him, the struggle for perfection. Let us look into the Gospel as one looks into a mirror, compare ourselves with what we see, and we will then discover not only evil but glory. And let us, inspired by it, move on, as Paul says, from glory to glory, turning away from past [failure] and rushing towards the fulfilment of our vocation.

What is the Use of Praying?

One day a crowd passed him, a crowd greater than usual, a noisy oriental crowd; the blind man heard it and asked who was there, and when he was told that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to call out.

Every spark of hope that had survived in his soul suddenly became a fire, a burning fire of hope. Jesus, whom he had never been able to meet, was passing his way. He was passing by, and every step was bringing him nearer and nearer, and then every step would take him farther and farther away, hopelessly so; and he began to cry, 'Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy upon me.' Then something happened which happens constantly in our lives: they told him to be quiet.

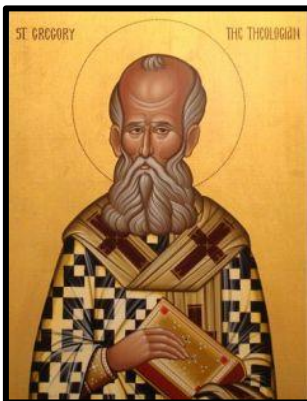
How often does it not happen that after seeking and struggling for years on our own, when on a sudden we begin to cry to God, many voices try to silence our prayers, outward voices as well as inward voices. Is it worth praying? How many years did you struggle and God did not care? Is he to care now? What is the use of praying? Go back into your hopelessness, you are blind, and blind forever. But the greater the opposition, the greater also is the evidence that help is at hand. The devil never attacks us so violently as when we are quite close to the term of our struggle, and we might yet be saved, but often are not, because we give way at the last moment. Give in, says the devil, it is too much, it is more than you can stand, you can put an end to it at once, do not wait, you cannot endure it any more. And then we commit suicide, physically, morally, spiritually; we renounce the struggle and accept death, just a minute before help was at hand and we might have been saved.

We must never listen to these voices; the louder they shout, the stronger should be our purpose; we must be ready to cry out as long as necessary, as loud as Bartimaeus did. Jesus Christ was passing by, his last hope was passing by, but the people who were surrounding Christ were either indifferent or trying to silence him. His grief and suffering were out of place. They, who perhaps needed Christ less, but surrounded him, wanted him to be busy with them. Why should that blind man in distress interrupt them? But Bartimaeus knew that there was no hope for him if this last one vanished. This depth of hopelessness was the well from which sprang a faith, a prayer full of such conviction and such insistence that it broke through all barriers – one of those prayers which beat at the gates of heaven as St John Climacus says. Because his despair was so profound he did not listen to the voices commanding him to be quiet, to hold his peace; and the more they tried to prevent him from reaching out to Christ, the louder he said: 'Thou, son of David, have mercy on me!' Christ stood still, asked for him to be brought forward and worked a miracle.

We can learn from Bartimaeus in our practical approach to prayer that when we turn to God wholeheartedly, God always hears us. Usually when we realise that we can no longer depend upon all that we are accustomed to find reliable around us, we are not yet ready to renounce these things. We can see that there is no hope as far as human, earthly ways are concerned. We are aiming at something, we search for our sight and we are constantly frustrated; it is torment and hopelessness and if we stop there, we are defeated. But if at that moment we turn to God, knowing that only God is left, and say: 'I trust thee and commit into thy hands my soul and body, my whole life,' then despair has led us to faith.

Despair is conducive to a new spiritual life when we have got the courage to go deeper and farther, realizing that what we are despairing about is not the final victory but the means we have employed to reach it. Then we start at rock bottom in quite a new way. God may bring us back to one of the means we have already tried, but which, under him, we may be able to use successfully. There should always be real cooperation between God and man and then God will give intelligence, wisdom, power to do the right thing and achieve the right goal.

Extract from The Prayer of Bartimaeus in Archbishop Anthony Bloom: Living Prayer. Darton, Longman and Todd 1966



Saint Gregory Nazianzus (January 25th) The Theologian

Saint Gregory is most often depicted in icons with Saint Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom, together revered as the Three Holy Hierarchs and Ecumenical Teachers. A classically trained rhetorician and philosopher, he played an important part in the development of doctrine of the Trinity, and is one of only three saints of the church to be honoured with the title "Theologian" - meaning one who speaks from personal experience of God – the others being Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Symeon the New Theologian.

Grace is given not to those who speak their faith, but to those who live their faith.

St. Gregory the Theologian

This Week We Celebrate

On Thursday January 21st: **Saint Agnes** of Rome (c304)

We wish **Agnes O** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Sunday January 24th: **Sunday of the Blind Man Bartimaeus**

Saint Ksenia the Fool for Christ of Saint Petersburg (1803)

Saint Xenia of Rome and her two companions (5th C)

We wish **Ksenia S, Xenia C** and **Oxana**

a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

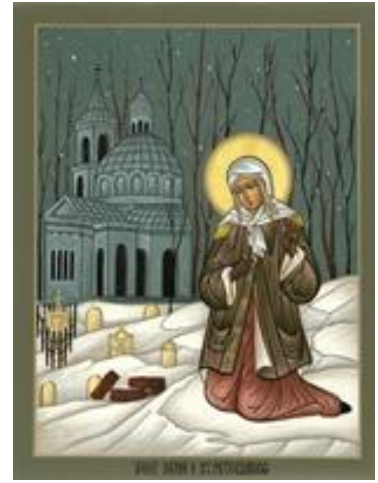
On Monday 25th: **Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, 'the Theologian'**,

Archbishop of Constantinople (389)

On Thursday 28th: **Saint Ephraim (Ephrem) the Syrian** (373)

Saint Isaac the Syrian, Bishop of Nineveh (7th C)

We wish **Isaac O** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**



How We Should Thank Him!

From on high Power came down to us
From a womb Hope shone out for us
From the grave Salvation rose for us
On the right hand the King sits throned for us:
Blessed in His glory!

From God, His godhead
From mortals, His manhood
From Melchizedek, His priesthood
From David, His kingship:
Blessed is His fusion of them!

He joined the guests at the wedding feast
He joined the fasters in temptation
He joined the watchers in toil
He was a teacher in the sanctuary:
Blessed is His instruction!

He did not shrink from the unclean
He did not turn away from sinners
In the sincere He delighted greatly
In the simple He rejoiced greatly:
Blessed is His teaching!

He did not hold back His footsteps from the sick
Or His words from the simple;
He extended His descent to the lowly
And His ascension to the highest:
Blessed is He who sent Him.

His birth gives us purification
His baptism gives us forgiveness
His death is life to us
His ascension is our exaltation:
How we should thank Him!

*From The Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems by Saint Ephrem
Number 3 (Hymns on the Resurrection No. 1)
in Studies Supplementary to Sobornost Number 4, 1983*

What is a merciful heart?

What is a merciful heart? A heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, the animals, the demons, and for all that exists.

At the recollection of them the eyes of a merciful person pour forth tears in abundance. By the strong and vehement mercy that grips such a person's heart, by such great compassion, the heart is humbled, and one cannot bear to hear or see any injury or sorrow in any of creation.

For this reason, such a person offers up tearful prayer continually, even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy.

St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 81



A man who is truly humble is not troubled when he is wronged and he says nothing to justify himself against the injustice, but he accepts slander as truth; he does not attempt to persuade men that he is calumniated, but he begs forgiveness. Saint Isaac the Syrian

Library Corner

'Your piece about being positive in God's creation reminded me of one of my favourite poems, Thomas Hardy's 'The Darkling Thrush', written at the turn of a previous century in 1900. The totally bleak winter landscape is transformed by the ecstatic song of a thrush rejoicing in 'Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew, And I was unaware.'

Having made several visits in recent years to Hardy's Cottage at Bockhampton and his house at Max Gate on the edge of Dorchester, I have become more aware of him as a poet, particularly in his close observation of nature, rather than a (rather gloomy) novelist.'

Joanna T

I quite agree with Joanna about Hardy's close observation of nature. Now, when many of us find ourselves spending more time just looking at the natural world, might be a good time to revisit his poetry, or (for some lucky people) to discover it for the first time.

Literature offers any number of examples of birdsong being invested with spiritual significance. The mediaeval romances are full of Spring birds singing hymns in 'their sweet latin'; Shakespeare mentions in Hamlet that on Christmas night the 'bird of dawning singeth all night long'; Shelley's skylark 'pours out its full heart' 'from Heaven's gate or near it' and TS Eliot finds some hope in Ash-Wednesday as 'the bird sang down Redeem the time, redeem the dream, The token of the word unheard, unspoken'. In George Meredith's The Lark Ascending the bird's continuous song maintains a state of 'self-forgetfulness divine' in its hearers – a state which many people find beautifully recaptured in Ralph Vaughan Williams' 1920 rhapsody for violin and orchestra inspired by Meredith's poem.

For those who like to watch birds as well as listen to them, next weekend (29th -31st) is the time for the RSPB's Big Birdwatch, when people up and down the country list all the birds they see in their garden or local park over a one hour period. Details can be found at

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch>

Don't worry if you don't know one little brown bird from another – they will send you a picture guide to most of the birds you are likely to see.

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Noticeboard

Services: On 9th January His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas announced that in the light of the dangerous surge in Covid 19 cases all the churches of the Archdiocese would close for public worship until further notice, following the same policy as during the first National Lockdown in March 2020. The Archbishop concluded by asking us 'to pray and ask God to send His healing grace upon the world and to be obedient to the Church, the government regulations and medical professionals'. We do not know when this decision might be reviewed. We have provisionally booked Saint Stephen's church for Sundays 14th February and 14th March (Forgiveness Sunday) but can say nothing more definite at this stage.

Several communities offer live-streamed services:

The Vicariat in France live-streams Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings and Feastdays, normally starting at 10.30 (9.30 GMT/UTC.) Services in French

(Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=la%20lettre%20du%20vicariat>)

Father Stephen Platt's parish in Oxford (Diocese of Sourozh – Old Calendar) also livestreams services on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=st%20nicholas%20orthodox%20church%20oxford>

For a taste of African Orthodoxy, (part English, part Swahili), try Fr Eliud Muthiru's orphanage in Kenya - a bit rough and ready at times, but utterly delightful. Times variable, but always available as recordings:

<https://www.stireneorthodoxmission.org/?fbclid=IwAR0wCbQfTKD-15k3XkYx02l0BFWhuFJPJSDzceytB0YgSyO3ONr8Ymu0s8I>

Another possibility is to go to YouTube and type in "Orthodox Liturgy live". This will bring up quite a few, if not all are in fact live.

Father Gregory has resumed his daily streaming of readings and prayers on the Plymouth facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/StsDemetriosNikitasPlymouthEngland> . He aims to begin the streaming at 8 am but it can be viewed at any time.

Parish AGM: Strictly speaking, our Parish Annual General Meeting is due to be held sometime before 10th February (ie within 15 months of our last meeting.) In the circumstances it is extremely unlikely that we will be able to meet face to face before then; we are therefore asking for any matters that parishioners feel need to be discussed to be sent in writing (email or postal) to Hugh, our Parish Secretary, who will circulate them to the PAC for consideration. The PAC will send parishioners a summary of their discussions on these matters together with the usual AGM reports (Finance, Safeguarding, Parish Warden's report in lieu of Parish Priest's). Any matters requiring a vote (appointment of officers etc) are likely to be adjourned until a full AGM can be held.

News from Christians Together Across Exeter (CTAX)

Holocaust Memorial Day: Be the light in the darkness

27th January, Holocaust Memorial Day, reminds us of the unparalleled horrors of the WW2 holocaust, as well as subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. This year's theme, *Be the light in the darkness*, is an affirmation and a call to action for everyone. We are asked to consider different kinds of 'darkness', for example, identity-based persecution, misinformation and denial of justice. We are also asked to think about different ways of 'being the light', for example: resistance, acts of solidarity, rescue and illuminating untruths. There are a number of events and talks taking place free online between 20 January and 10 February. For details visit:

www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk/news-events/latest-news/holocaust-memorial-day-devon-2021/

“Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.”

— Primo Levi

Linking Lives

Linking Lives UK is a national Christian charity equipping local churches to respond to loneliness and isolation. For example, they run 'Two's Company', a telephone befriending service, to offer churches a way of addressing the current vast need. To find out more, see:

Web: <https://linkinglives.uk>

Mail: Devon@linkinglives.uk

Tel: 07958 980035

Messiaen from Exeter Cathedral

Exeter Cathedral's Assistant Director of Music Timothy Parsons will be performing Olivier Messiaen's epic *La Nativité du Seigneur* on the organ of Exeter Cathedral. The performance will be broadcast live on Exeter Cathedral's Facebook page on **Saturday 30 January at 7pm.**

<https://www.facebook.com/exetercathedral>

La Nativité is one of the most important works in the organ's repertoire. The piece consists of nine meditations, ranging from playful depictions of shepherds and angels to profound expressions of the divine mysteries surrounding the birth of Jesus. The last movement, *Dieu parmi nous* ("God among us") finishes with one of Messiaen's most famous passages of music: an exhilarating, thunderous toccata for full organ, in which the descending pedal line encapsulates God's incarnation on Earth. This performance is a final opportunity to reflect on the Christmas message as the season comes to a close.

The editors would like to express their heartfelt thanks to Hugh for his excellent work in producing the last issue of the Newsletter for January 17th and to Alice for her able help with the formatting. Any other offers to edit an issue will be very gratefully received or, if an entire issue feels too much of an undertaking, short articles, reflections, reviews or snippets of news are always most welcome.