



Prophet Elias News

**News in the time of self – isolation for the Orthodox Church
of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon
21st March 2021**



Sunday of Orthodoxy – The First Sunday of Lent

Anniversary Edition

Who would have thought – it is a year since I started these weekly newsletters. Back in March 2020 I wrote that there would be ‘sermons, readings and/or prayers suitable for the stage of Lent we are in, or beyond Pascha if that is what we have to do’. I, probably like many people, thought we’d be in lockdown for a couple of months, but instead we’ve gone through Pascha, the Great Feasts of the summer, on into the Church New Year, through the Christmas season and now into Lent again. What a journey! I feel it is one that we’ve taken together although we’ve been physically apart, and the few occasions when we’ve been able to congregate have been very special.

I started producing this newsletter on my own initiative because I was very aware that some people lived alone and far from others, which might make them feel even more isolated during this pandemic. A few weeks later I learnt that this was the only thing of this type being produced in the Deanery and that Fr Peter was forwarding it to other priests in the Deanery. It saddened me to learn from one person a few weeks ago that they thought the newsletter read like the gospel according to Martin and Celia. No, if anything it is the gospel according to Metropolitan Anthony and Fr Alexander Schmemmann, whose teachings formed the ethos of this parish and all other parishes established in the spirit of the 1917/18 Council of Moscow.

At the start I said I was hoping that parishioners would send in contributions, and I would like to thank those who have, particularly Christa for the little snippets she sends which are so useful for ‘fillers’. Also, thanks go to Elizabeth Theokritoff for her contributions, including links to important online events. My main thanks go to Martin, who from the start did the research for sermons by Metropolitan Anthony and Fr Alexander Schmemmann and also found lots of other bits of interest – he does it so well and now does just about all of the newsletter and I have swapped places with him as proof reader. And, major thanks should go to our secretary Hugh who makes sure you all receive your weekly copy.

Once again, if anyone would like to send something for the newsletter, or even be guest editor for a week, it would be most welcome. Wishing you all a good Lent!

Celia

Fr Alexander Schmemmann On the Prayer of Saint Ephrem (1)

Why does this short and simple prayer occupy such an important position in the entire lenten worship? Because it enumerates in a unique way all the *negative* and *positive* elements of repentance and constitutes, so to speak, a “check list” of our individual lenten effort. This effort is aimed first at our liberation from some fundamental spiritual diseases which shape our life and make it virtually impossible for us even to start turning to God.

The basic disease is *sloth*. It is that strange laziness and passivity of our entire being which always pushes us “down” rather than “up” - which constantly convinces us that no change is possible. It is in fact a deeply rooted cynicism which to every spiritual challenge responds “What for?” and makes our life one tremendous spiritual waste. It is the root of all sin because it poisons the spiritual energy at its very source.

The result of *sloth* is *faint-heartedness*. It is the state of despondency which all spiritual Fathers considered the greatest danger for the soul. Despondency is the impossibility for man to see anything good or positive; it is the reduction of everything to negativism and pessimism. It is a truly demonic power in us because the Devil is fundamentally a *liar*. He lies to man about God and about the world; he fills life with darkness and negation. Despondency is the suicide of the soul because when man is possessed by it he is absolutely unable to see the light and to desire it.

Lust of power! Strange as it may seem, it is precisely sloth and despondency that fill our life with *lust of power*. By making life meaningless and empty, they force us to seek compensation in a radically wrong attitude toward other persons. If my life is not oriented toward God, not aimed at eternal values, it will inevitably become selfish and self-centred and this means that all other beings will become means of my own self-satisfaction. If God is not the Lord and Master of my life, then I become my own lord and master - the absolute centre on *my* own world, and I begin to evaluate everything in terms of *my* needs, *my* ideas, *my* desires, and *my* judgements. The lust of power is thus a fundamental depravity in my relationship to other beings, a search for their subordination to me. It is not necessarily expressed in the actual urge to command and dominate “others”. It may result as well in indifference, contempt, lack of interest, consideration and respect. It is indeed sloth and despondency, directed this time at others; it completes spiritual suicide with spiritual murder.

Finally, idle *talk*. Of all created beings, man alone has been endowed with speech. But being the supreme gift, it is by the same token the supreme danger. Being the very expression of man, the means of his self-fulfilment, it is for this very reason the means of his fall and self-destruction, of betrayal and sin. The word saves and the word kills; the word inspires and the word poisons. The word is the means of Truth and it is the means of demonic Lie. Having an ultimate positive power, it has therefore a tremendous negative power. When deviated from its divine origin and purpose, the word becomes *idle*. It “enforces” sloth, despondency and lust for power, and transforms life into hell. It becomes the very power of sin.

These four are thus the negative “objects” of repentance. They are the obstacles to be removed. But God alone can remove them. Hence the first part of the lenten prayer – this cry from the bottom of human helplessness.

From Alexander Schmemmann: *Great Lent – Journey to Pascha* St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1969

[To be continued]

On the Holy Icons

The name of this Sunday reflects the great significance which icons possess for the Orthodox Church. They are not optional devotional extras, but an integral part of Orthodox faith and devotion. They are held to be a necessary consequence of Christian faith in the incarnation of the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, in Jesus Christ. They have a sacramental character, making present to the believer the person or event depicted on them. So the interior of Orthodox churches is often covered with icons painted on walls and domed roofs, and there is always an icon screen, or iconostasis, separating the sanctuary from the nave, often with several rows of icons. No Orthodox home is complete without an icon corner, where the family prays.

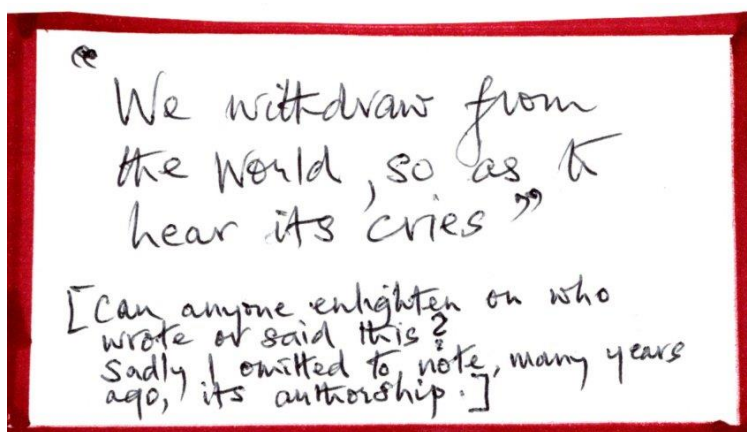
Icons are venerated by burning lamps and candles in front of them, by the use of incense and by kissing. But there is a clear doctrinal distinction between the veneration paid to icons and the worship due to God. The former is not only relative, it is in fact paid to the person represented by the icon. This distinction safeguards the veneration of icons from any charge of idolatry.

Although the theme of the victory of the icons is a secondary one on this Sunday, by its emphasis on the incarnation it points us to the basic Christian truth that the one whose death and resurrection we celebrate at Easter was none other than the Word of God who became human in Jesus Christ.

Source: www.goarch.org

Kontakion (Tone 8)

No one could describe the Word of the Father;
but when He took flesh from you, O Mother of God, He accepted to be described,
and restored the fallen image to its former beauty.
We confess and proclaim our salvation in word and images.



A request from Christa Antonina – Does anyone recognise this quote?

The Church is made for the whole world. Because Saint John's Gospel says of the Word that it has come on earth to illuminate every one who has come into the world. It does not say: every one except those on the Left, every one except prostitutes or whatever, or soap sellers, or lawyers. Christ, just as when he was living in the body in Palestine, that same Christ is among us and concerns himself with every one of us. If we forget that, I think that we are depriving ourselves of all the nourishment that Christ continues to give us every day.

Father Gabriel Henry (+1988) quoted in
La Lettre du Vicariat No. 12 March 2021

This Week We Celebrate

On Saturday March 20th: **Saint Cuthbert of Lindisfarne** (687)

On Sunday 21st: **Sunday of Orthodoxy** – The Restoration of the Holy Icons

On Thursday 25th: **THE ANNUNCIATION TO OUR MOST HOLY LADY, MOTHER OF GOD AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY**

On Friday 26th: Synaxis of the **Archangel Gabriel**



Icon from the Sinai Collection

The Annunciation

Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice: for the Son who is coeternal with the Father, sharing His throne and like Him without beginning, in His compassionate and merciful love for mankind has submitted Himself to emptying, according to the good pleasure and counsel of the Father; and He has gone to dwell in a virgin's womb that was sanctified beforehand by the Spirit. O marvel! God is come among men; He who cannot be contained is contained in a womb; the Timeless enters time; and, strange wonder! His conception is without seed, His emptying is past telling: so great is this mystery! For God empties Himself, takes flesh, and is fashioned as a creature, when the angel tells the pure Virgin of her conception: 'Hail, thou who art full of grace: the Lord who has great mercy is with thee.

By John the Monk, from the Lity at Great Compline

Science and The Christian Faith - a book release by Fr Christopher Knight

Father Christopher Knight, Rector of the Deanery's Walsingham parish, spent the ten years before his retirement from secular employment as the Executive Secretary of the International Society for Science and Religion. In that role he had regular contact with most of the leading participants in the science-theology dialogue around the world, but became concerned that very few Orthodox were involved in that dialogue. This book represents his reflections on the questions about science that he frequently encounters in Orthodox circles. The book is, he says in his Introduction, "aimed, not primarily at academics but at the ordinary, intelligent believer whose formal education may have included neither science nor theology at an advanced level."

In the Foreword to the book, Peter Bouteneff writes "I am grateful for this book, for making me think anew on questions I thought I had resolved, and consider questions that I had not before. I believe it will become an indispensable resource to the Christian apologist, as well as to those interested in how Orthodox Christians frame the science/faith encounter. Finally, the inviting and learned quality of the writing makes this a book both to learn from and enjoy."

The ISBN number is: 978-0881416718. To get the book, click: spckpublishing.co.uk/science-and-the-christian-faith

Big Apology

I woke up this morning (17th) to realize 1) that it is Saint Patrick's Day and 2) that we failed to include Nameday Greetings to Father Patrick in the last issue. So, dear Father, may we belatedly hope that you have had a **Happy Feast**, and wish you **Many Years!**

Ed.

Saint Cuthbert of Lindisfarne – March 20th



This icon of St Cuthbert was commissioned by George Theokritoff (a regular visitor to Exeter for many years, married in St Anne's in 1990 [to Elizabeth – a lovely occasion – Ed]). It was inspired by his visit to the tomb of St Cuthbert, which impressed him profoundly as a holy place. The text that follows, probably written for the iconographer, explains the background to the depiction.

Elizabeth Theokritoff

Durham Cathedral, in the north of England, was built in the 11th century specially to house the incorrupt body of St Cuthbert. Indeed, so great was the holiness of St Cuthbert that no other burials were permitted in the cathedral until the late Middle Ages. Durham was the pre-eminent place of pilgrimage in England until it was surpassed in popularity by Canterbury, where Archbishop Thomas a Becket (canonized in 1173) was martyred in 1170. Nevertheless, Durham continues to be an important place of pilgrimage, for many consider St Cuthbert to be the greatest of the Northumbrian Saints and his tomb attracts large numbers of pilgrims to this day. There is a vivid living memory of St Cuthbert.

St Cuthbert was born about 635 and entered the monastic life at Melrose in 651. He served as Prior of Melrose and later Lindisfarne, and in 685 reluctantly consented to be made a bishop. He was consecrated at York on Easter Sunday, March 26, 685 by St Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury, and four other bishops. St Cuthbert became the third bishop of Lindisfarne. He died on the Inner Farne Island on March 20, 687.

There are two Vitae of St Cuthbert: Bede's, and one by an anonymous monk of Lindisfarne. Additionally, Bede wrote about St Cuthbert in his *History of the English Church and People*.

In the summer of 1986, I visited many of the places associated with St Cuthbert: Holy Island or Lindisfarne, the Inner Farne Island, and Durham. I noted the association in stained glass and in images of three Northumbrian saints: St Aidan (the first Bishop of Lindisfarne); St Oswald King of Northumbria; and St Cuthbert. On the Inner Farne Island, where St Cuthbert died, there is a Benedictine Chapel. It contains stained glass showing St Cuthbert holding the crowned head of St Oswald. Although this glass dates from the 19th Century, I recognized that it may reflect a much older tradition. Indeed, adjacent to the tomb of St Cuthbert in Durham Cathedral, there is a statue (now headless) of a person holding a crowned head in his left hand.* It can only be a statue of St Cuthbert holding the head of St Oswald. Enquiry assured me that the statue is hardly younger than the Cathedral itself. This fact suggests an authentic iconography. But why should they be represented together in this manner? Their lives did not intersect as did the lives of Sts Peter and Paul, Cyril and Methodius, and Boris and Gleb. Sts Cuthbert and Oswald are associated in iconography on account of their relics. The skull of St Oswald is buried with St Cuthbert. The icon is for the Feast of the Translation of the Relics of St Cuthbert (March 20).

* [see <https://citydesert.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/st-cuthberts-shrine.jpg>].

George Theokritoff

Noticeboard Services

Saturday March 20th: **Vespers** at Saint Anne's 6pm

Sunday 21st: **Sunday of Orthodoxy Orthros and Liturgy**: Plymouth 9.30 Torquay 9.30
Vespers at Saint Anne's 3pm

Wednesday 24th: **Vigil for the Feast of the Annunciation** Saint Anne's 6.30

Thursday 25th: **Feast of the Annunciation** Plymouth 8.30 Torquay 9.30

Saturday 27th: Divine Liturgy at Saint James' Hall, Exeter 10.30

News of the Vicariat Sainte Marie de Paris et Saint Alexis d'Ugine

The Vicariat in France – the French equivalent of our Deanery, ie those parishes of our former Exarchate who elected not to follow Archbishop Jean to the Moscow Patriarchate – publish a richly informative monthly newsletter, including details of many online resources, under the title 'La Lettre du Vicariat'. The current issue can be found at <http://www.orthodoxequimper.fr/files/downloads/lettre--n-12-mars-21.pdf> (only available, alas, in French). If anyone would like to receive it online regularly, they should request to be put on the mailing list by contacting vicariatlettre@gmail.com