



Prophet Elias News

**News in the time of self – isolation for the Orthodox Church
of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon
28th March 2021**



Second Sunday of Great Lent – Saint Gregory Palamas

Fr Alexander Schmemmann on the Prayer of Saint Ephrem (2)

[After listing] the four 'negative' objects of repentance..., the prayer moves to the positive aims of repentance which are also four.

Chastity! If one does not reduce this term, as is so often and erroneously done, only to its sexual connotations, it is understood as the positive counterpart of sloth. The exact and full translation of the Greek *sofrosini* and the Russian *tselomudryie* ought to be *whole-mindedness*. Sloth is, first of all, dissipation, the brokenness of our vision and energy, the inability to see the whole. Its opposite then is precisely *wholeness*. If we usually mean by chastity the virtue opposed to sexual depravity, it is because the broken character of our existence is nowhere better manifested than in sexual lust – the alienation of the body from the life and control of the spirit. Christ restores wholeness in us and He does so by restoring in us the true scale of values by leading us back to God.

The first and wonderful fruit of this wholeness or chastity is *humility*. It is above everything else the victory of truth in us, the elimination of all lies in which we usually live. *Humility* alone is capable of truth, of seeing and accepting things as they are and therefore of seeing God's majesty and goodness and love in everything. This is why we are told that God gives grace to the humble and resists the proud.

Chastity and humility are naturally followed by *patience*. The 'natural' or 'fallen' man is impatient, for being blind to himself he is quick to judge and condemn others. Having but a broken, incomplete and distorted knowledge of everything, he measures all things by his tastes and ideas. Being indifferent to everyone except himself, he wants life to be successful right here and now. Patience, however, is a truly divine virtue. God is patient not because He is 'indulgent', but because He sees the depth of all that exists, because the inner reality of things, which in our blindness we do not see, is open to Him. The closer we come to God, the more patient we grow and the more we reflect the infinite respect for all beings which is the proper quality of God.

Finally, the crown and fruit of all virtues, of all growth and effort, is *love* – that love which can be given by God alone – the gift which is the goal of all spiritual preparation and practice.

All this is summarized and brought together in the concluding petition of the lenten prayer in which we ask 'to see my own errors and not to judge my brother'. For ultimately there is but one danger: *pride*. Pride is the source of evil, and all evil is pride. Yet it is not enough for me to see my own errors, for even this apparent virtue can be turned into pride. Spiritual writings are full of warnings against the subtle forms of pseudo-piety which, in reality, under the cover of humility and self-accusation can lead to a truly demonic pride. But when we 'see our own errors' *and* 'do not judge our brothers', when, in other terms, chastity, humility, patience and love are but one in us, then and only then the ultimate enemy – pride – will be destroyed in us.

After each petition of the prayer we make a prostration. Prostrations are not limited to the Prayer of Saint Ephrem but constitute one of the distinctive characteristics of the entire lenten worship. Here, however, their meaning is disclosed best of all. In the long and difficult effort of spiritual recovery, the Church does not separate the soul from the body. The whole man has fallen away from God; the whole man is to be restored, the whole man is to return. The catastrophe of sin lies precisely in the victory of the flesh – the animal, the irrational, the lust in us – over the spiritual and the divine. But the body is glorious, the body is holy, so holy that God himself 'became flesh'. Salvation and repentance then are not contempt for the body or neglect of it, but restoration of the body to its real function as the expression and the life of the spirit, as the temple of

the priceless human soul. Christian asceticism is a fight, not *against* but *for* the body. For this reason, the whole man – soul and body – repents. The body participates in the prayer of the soul just as the soul prays in and through the body. Prostrations, the 'psycho-somatic' sign of repentance and humility, of adoration and obedience, are thus the lenten rite *par excellence*.

From Alexander Schmemmann Great Lent – Journey to Pascha Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press 1969

Saint Maria of Paris on the Second Gospel Commandment

There exists in the Christian world a constant tendency, in moments of various historical catastrophes, to preach with great intensity an immersion in oneself, a standing of the solitary human soul before God.

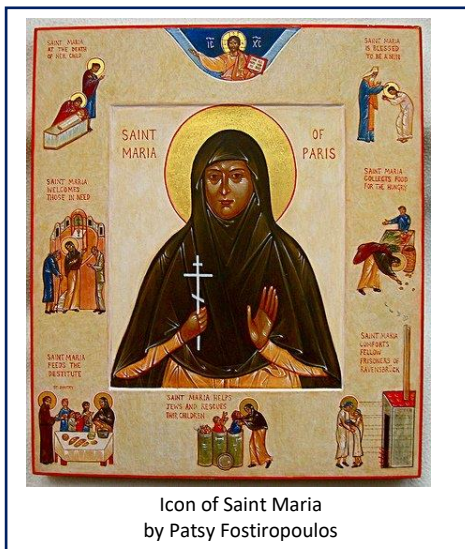
It appears to me that now, too, this tendency is beginning to show itself very strongly, producing a strange picture of the world: on one side all the diverse forces of evil, united and affirming the power of the collective, of the masses, and the worthlessness and insignificance of each separate human soul; and on the other side – dispersed and disunited Christian souls, affirming themselves in this dispersion and disunity, for whom the world becomes a sort of evil phantom, and the only reality is God and my solitary soul trembling before Him.

It seems to me that this state of mind is definitely a temptation, is definitely as terrible for each person as it is for the destiny of the Church of Christ, and I would like to rise against it with all my strength and call people to each other, to stand together before God, to suffer sorrows together, to resist temptations together.

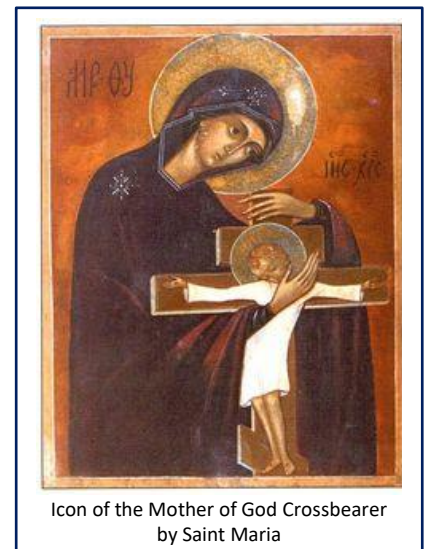
It would be unseemly protestantizing on the part of Orthodox people if they forgot the central and most characteristic particularities of their Orthodox truth. In the Orthodox Church man is not alone and his path to salvation is not solitary; he is a member of the Body of Christ, he shares the fate of his brothers in Christ, he is justified by the righteous and bears responsibility for the sins of the sinners. The Orthodox Church is not a solitary standing before God, but *sobornost'*,* which binds everyone with the bonds of Christ's love and the love for one another. And that is not something invented by theologians and philosophers, but a precise teaching of the Gospel, brought to life through the centuries of existence of the Church's body..... The Orthodox man only fulfills the precepts of his faith when he takes them as a certain bi-une commandment of love for God and love for one's neighbour.

*From 'The Second Gospel Commandment' in Mother Maria Skobtsova – Essential Writings.
Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky N. Y. Orbis Books 2003*

* *'Sobornost'* is a principle derived from the Russian word *sobor*, 'council', which also became the word for 'cathedral'. It means 'conciliarity' or 'catholicity', the coming together of many to form a whole, a communion among free persons.' (Translator's note.) [*Sobornost' came to be one of the main principles underlying the proceedings of the Moscow Council of 1917-18, and so subsequently informed the Statutes of the former Exarchate, of our Deanery and of our Parish Ed.*]



Icon of Saint Maria
by Patsy Fostiropoulos



Icon of the Mother of God Crossbearer
by Saint Maria

How Can I Deal with my Sinful Condition?

So often we ask ourselves and one another a very tormenting question: How can I deal with my sinful condition? What can I do? I cannot avoid committing sins, Christ alone is sinless. I cannot, for lack of determination, or courage, or ability truly repent when I do commit a sin, or in general, of my sinful condition. What is left to me? I am tormented, I fight like one drowning, and I see no solution.

There is a word which was spoken once by a Russian staretz, one of the last elders of Optina. He said to a visitor of his: "No one can live without sin, few know how to repent in such a way that their sins are washed as white as fleece. But there is one thing which we all can do: when we can neither avoid sin, nor repent truly, we can then bear the burden of sin, bear it patiently, bear it with pain, bear it without doing anything to avoid the pain and the agony of it, bear it as one would bear a cross, — not Christ's cross, not the cross of true discipleship, but the cross of the thief who was crucified next to Him. Didn't the thief say to his companion who was blaspheming the Lord: We are enduring because we have committed crimes; He endures sinlessly... And it is to him, because he had accepted the punishment, the pain, the agony, the consequences indeed of evil he had committed, of being the man he was, that Christ said, 'Thou shalt be with Me today in Paradise...'"

This is something which all of us can do: to endure the consequences, to endure the enslavement which is ours patiently, humbly, with a broken heart; not with indifference, not with a sense that as we are abandoned to it by God, then, why not sin? But taking it as a healing perception of what sin is, of what it does to us, of the horror of it. And if we patiently endure, a day will come when our inner rejection of sin will bear fruit, and when freedom will be given us.

From a sermon preached by Metropolitan Anthony on 12th August 1984
Copyright: The Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh Foundation

This Week We Celebrate

On Sunday March 28th: **Second Sunday of Lent – Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas**

Epistle: Hebrews 1:10 – 2:3 Gospel: Mark 2:1-12

We wish **Father Gregory** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!** Also, congratulations on the 30th anniversary of his ordination as a deacon.

On Tuesday 30th: **Saint John Climacus** (c649) Author of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*

On Wednesday 31st: **Saint Innocent** of Alaska (1879) Apostle to the Americas

Saint Maria (Skobtsova) of Paris and Ravensbruck (1945)

We wish **Maria G** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Thursday April 1st: **Saint Mary of Egypt** (1st C)

We wish **Julia M, Bea P** and all at **Saint Mary of Egypt Sub-Parish** in Uganda a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

Can You Help?

Bojidar's faithful Springer Spaniel, Izzy, died recently, and he is looking for another dog to keep him company. Mature (say 6-10 years old), not too big or too energetic, no behaviour problems – another spaniel, perhaps, or something similar.

If anyone knows of a suitable dog looking for a home, or can suggest a suitable organisation Bojidar could ask, please contact him at

bpapasimof@gmail.com

A True Fast

Do not limit the benefit of fasting merely to abstinence from food, for a true fast means refraining from evil. Loose every unjust bond, put away your resentment against your neighbour, forgive him his offences. Do not let your fasting lead only to wrangling and strife. You do not eat meat, but you devour your brother? You abstain from wine, but not from insults? So all the labour of your fast is useless.

Saint Basil the Great

Saint Innocent of Alaska

Saint Innocent worked as a missionary in Eastern Siberia and Alaska for 45 years, before becoming Metropolitan of Moscow towards the end of his life. He preached and wrote in the Aleut language, and made a close study of their customs and beliefs: his writings remain an important primary source for ethnographers. He undertook year-long journeys to the more remote islands, often by native kayak 'with not a single board to save you from death – just skins'. This anecdote illustrates his down-to-earth approach:

'A deacon asked Bishop Innocent, 'Vladikha, if God is infinitely merciful, how can he deprive anyone of his heavenly Kingdom?'

'And why do you keep twisting your head about from side to side?' Innocent countered. 'Why don't you sit still?'

'Because the sun keeps hitting me right in the eye and just won't leave me in peace,' the deacon replied.

'There. You've answered your own question,' the bishop laughed. 'God doesn't deprive of his heavenly Kingdom sinners who won't repent. They themselves simply can't bear its light – any more than you can bear the light of the sun.'

Source: G. Every, R. Harries, K. Ware *Seasons of the Spirit* SPCK 1984
Quotation from P.D. Garrett *St Innocent, Apostle to America* (1979).



Noticeboard

Services

Saturday 27th March: Divine Liturgy - St James' Hall 10.30

Sunday 28th March: Orthros and Divine Liturgy – Plymouth 9.30 Torquay 9.30
Sunday Vespers – Saint Anne's 3pm

Saturday 3rd April: Vespers/Matins for Sunday of the Cross – Saint Anne's 6pm

Next Liturgy at St James' Hall – Saturday 10th April 10.30

News from CTAX (Christians Together Across Exeter)

Volunteer Schools Mentors

Check out this video about volunteering as a mentor in schools in Exeter:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55FuGOuvluo>

Mentor training is online. If you are interested in being a mentor please fill in an application form here:

<https://lighthouse2web.tlg.org.uk/create-early-intervention-mentor-application-invitation>

Article by Edward (Skidelsky)

Edward has published an important article in *The Critic* exploring the increasing intolerance – in our universities particularly - of rational exchange of ideas about 'controversial' issues such as gender identification or decolonialisation. You can find the article at:

<https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/march-2021/the-spectre-of-totalitarianism/>

It is pointless for someone to say that he has faith in God if he does not have the works which go with faith. What benefit were their lamps to the foolish virgins who had no oil, namely, deeds of love and compassion?

Saint Gregory Palamas