



Prophet Elias News

**News in the time of self – isolation for the Orthodox Church of
the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon
11th April 2021**



Fourth Sunday in Lent – Sunday of Saint John of the Ladder

Metropolitan Anthony on the Lenten Weeks

One by one the weeks of Lent pass, and having started this journey with enthusiasm, feeling in ourselves the strength to complete it, when we approach the end, and often long before the end, we begin to feel that we have achieved nothing of what we hoped to achieve. We hoped to fast strictly and honestly, we hoped to pray, we hoped to tear ourselves away from those things that have enslaved all our lives - our interests, our concerns - and then a moment comes when the end of the journey is in sight, and suddenly we realise that practically nothing has been achieved of what we had hoped.

This is the moment when we may be attacked by the destructive spirit of despondency which undermines our last ounce of strength: how can I enter the days of the Passion? How can I encounter the glory and triumph of Christ's Resurrection? This is where we must evince both Christian wisdom and our trust in God. It is not by the fact that we strive and achieve some sort of result that we are saved; we are saved by our soul's longing which draws us towards the living God, by the love which draws us to Christ. And even when we fail (as, incidentally, in human relationships) we must not forget that just as the apostle Peter, after thrice denying Christ was able to answer Christ's threefold question, we can say "Lord, you know everything. You know my weakness, my lapses, my doubt, my inconstancy, but you also know that I love you, that that is the final deepest thing in me."

Then we can go farther, as Peter followed Christ, knowing that God believes in this love, that God believes us and believes in us. And we can go on with faltering steps, with uncertain tread, with ups and downs, if only our hearts do not break away from God; if only we carry on, so that one day, in a week or two, we may find ourselves face to face with the Lord's passion, with the manifestation of the love with which He loves us. To endure what He endured for our sakes can be done only through inexhaustible, bottomless love. And so if we cannot unite ourselves to Christ in a more mysterious way by communing to the way of the Cross through prayer, contemplation and ascetic effort, let us at least stand at the roadside, beside this way of the Cross and with the awe and tenderness of a shaken soul - or perhaps one incapable of awe and tenderness - look upon what it means to love as God is capable of loving us. And let us say to Him, if we cannot say anything else, "Thank you, Lord, that you love me, dead, stony, devoid of feeling, lifeless - love me so much that the day will come when for me also will sound the words spoken to Lazarus, then four days dead, "Lazarus, come forth."

One day each one of us will hear this, not at the end of time, not at the general resurrection, as Martha thought, but now, at some unexpected moment when the voice of God shall sound, and at once we shall come alive again, alive both in time and in eternity. And we can even approach Easter conscious that we have done nothing worthy of this meeting with the triumph of the Resurrection, have achieved nothing that would give us a right to this joy. As St. John Chrysostom says in his Easter sermon: "Those who have fasted and those who have not, those who have worked and those who have been lazy, all of you come, for the Lord receives everyone equally; to some He repays a debt, to others He makes a gift of His love." It is not likely that He will be repaying a debt to us, because we have not worked, but the gift of love is offered to each of us. Therefore whatever mood we are in, however lazy we are, however little we have striven, let us go step by step during these last weeks towards that light, as a butterfly is drawn to it: yet not to be burned by it - but rather for ourselves to burn with the glow of the Resurrection, to shine with its light, to become like the Burning Bush which burned and was not consumed in the flame of God's being.

Sermon preached by Metropolitan Anthony on 16th March 1980
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The Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete

At the beginning of Great Lent, the Church offers us the reading of the Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete. Read in four parts during the Great Compline services of the first week of Lent, the Canon is later repeated in its entirety at Matins on Thursday of the fifth week.

The meaning and purpose of the Great Canon is to show us sin, and in doing so to lead us to repentance. But Saint Andrew does not present sin through definitions or lists, but through a profound meditation on biblical history, which is in reality a history of the Fall, of Repentance and of Forgiveness. The saint offers us a series of frescoes from Adam to the Ascension of our Lord.

The Canon of Saint Andrew is great not only on account of its many troparia (more than 250) but above all because of its spiritual power. In bringing us the example of those who have fallen and have subsequently repented, he puts us on our guard against despair and makes us hasten towards God with tears of repentance.

There is no-one, no sinner, who cannot recognise themselves in the Great Canon. Because of this, the Great Canon is in fact the personal confession of every orthodox Christian. That is why the famous Athonite staretz Paissios (+1994) used to recite it even outside Great Lent. As it says in the synaxarion, the Great Canon, if it is read with attention and a heart filled with compunction, is enough to soften the hardest heart. Each troparion of the Great Canon is an echo of the recommendation of the Apostle Paul: 'Awake, you who are sleeping, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.' (Ephesians 5:14)

Original text published in *La Lettre du Vicariat n°12* (March 2021) under the title *Grand Canon de Saint André de Crète*.
Translated with permission by Martin Olsson.

This Week We Celebrate

On Sunday April 11th: **Fourth Sunday of Great Lent – Sunday of Saint John Climacus**

On Tuesday 13th: **Saint Martin the Confessor**, Pope of Rome (655)
We wish **Martin R a Happy Feast and Many Years!**

On Thursday 15th: Martyrs **Vasilissa** and **Anastasia** of Rome,
disciples of the Apostles Peter and Paul (1st C)

Noticeboard

Services:

Saturday April 10th: **Divine Liturgy at St James' Hall – 10.30am** (Followed by Panikhida)

Sunday 11th: **Orthros and Divine Liturgy** – Plymouth and Torquay*

Wednesday 14th: **Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete** – Saint Anne's 6.30pm

Friday 16th: **Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God** – Saint Anne's 6.30pm

Saturday 17th: **Vespers** - Saint Anne's 6pm

* For service times go to <https://plymchurch.com/services/>

Advance notice – Services in Exeter in Holy Week (Covid permitting)

Saturday April 24th – **Lazarus Saturday:**

Divine Liturgy and Blessing of Palms – Saint James' Hall 10.30

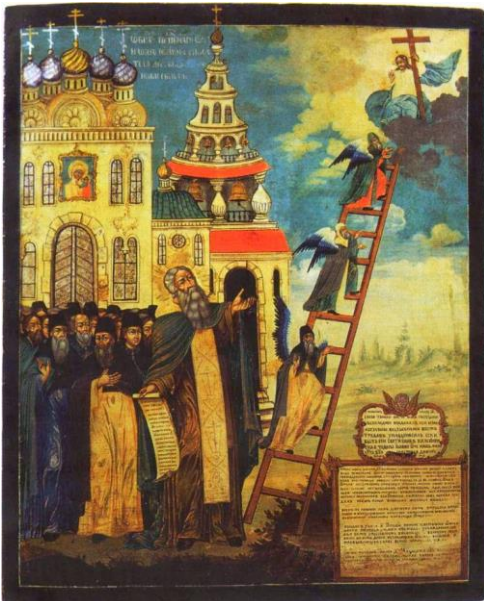
Thursday April 29th – **Holy Thursday** Service of 12 Gospels – Saint James' Hall 6pm

Friday April 30th – **Holy Friday**

Vespers 3.30pm Matins (Burial Service) 6.30pm – Both at Saint James' Hall

Saturday May 1st – **Holy Saturday** Vespers and Liturgy – Saint James' Hall 9.30

May 1st/2nd **Easter Night** – Paschal Vigil and Liturgy 10pm – venue to be announced.



In all your undertakings and in every way of life, whether you are living in obedience, or are not submitting your work to anyone, whether in outward or in spiritual matters, let it be your rule and practice to ask yourself: Am I really doing this in accordance with God's will?

* * *

An angel fell from Heaven without any other passion except pride, and so we may ask whether it is possible to ascend to Heaven by humility alone, without any other of the virtues.

Saint John Climacus

Rembrandt's Late Self Portraits

You are confronted with yourself. Each year
The pouches fill, the skin is uglier.
You give it all unflinchingly. You stare
Into yourself, beyond. Your brush's care
Runs with self-knowledge. Here

Is a humility at one with craft.
There is no arrogance. Pride is apart
From this self-scrutiny. You make light drift
The way you want. Your face is bruised and hurt
But there is still love left.

Love of the art and others. To the last
Experiment went on. You stared beyond
Your age, the times. You also plucked the past
And tempered it. Self-portraits understand,
And old age can divest,

With truthful changes, us of fear of death.
Look, a new anguish. There, the bloated nose,
The sadness and the joy. To paint's to breathe,
And all the darkneses are dared. You chose
What each must reckon with.

Elizabeth Jennings

In Janet Morley, Ed: *The Heart's Time – Poems for Lent and Easter*

'Genuine humility means to see reality as it actually is in God. It means to know oneself and others as known by God—a power, according to Saint Isaac, greater than that of raising the dead.'

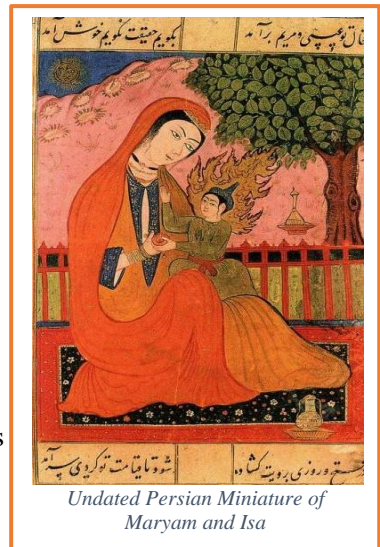
<https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/the-virtues/humility>

'The Place of the Virgin Mary in Islam'

An interesting article posted on Orthodoxy in Dialogue explores the significant place the Mother of God has always held in Islamic tradition.

'In 630, the Prophet Muhammad and his followers conquered the sacred Arabian city of Mecca. Muhammad ordered that the Ka'ba, a shrine believed by Muslims to have been built by Abraham and his son Ishmael for the worship of God, be cleansed of all signs of pagan corruption. According to Islamic tradition, he instructed his followers to remove all the idols and to wash away the images on the walls of the Ka'ba with one exception, an icon of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child. The Prophet is said to have placed his hands upon the holy image and commanded that it remain untouched.

While the above may come as a surprise to some Orthodox Christians, especially given the Islamophobic rhetoric spewed by some church leaders, the Virgin Mary has always held a special place in Islam. The divine directive to "cherish" Mary has remained with Muslims since the time of Muhammad. Maryam (the Arabic form of Mary) is one of the most popular names for girls in the Muslim world. Muslims, especially in the Middle East, are known to visit Christian churches, monasteries, and shrines dedicated to Mary in order to seek her intercession.'



Undated Persian Miniature of Maryam and Isa

The full text of the article by **Andrew James Matthews** can be found at:

<http://orthodoxyindialogue.com/2021/04/02/an-orthodox-look-at-the-place-of-the-virgin-mary-in-islam-by-andrew-james-matthews/>

Library Corner

Becoming Orthodox, for those of us who come to it as adults from a Western perspective, is rarely straightforward. Like it or not, our roots draw sustenance from Mediaeval scholasticism, Renaissance humanism, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Enlightenment, the emergence of liberal democracy and the gospel of individual human rights. One way to make it easier is to reject all of these, to see them simply as wrong turnings in the development of humanity, and to retreat into a rigid, inward-looking form of Orthodoxy which has minimal dealings with the modern world. But for those of us who feel that this would do unforgivable violence to our intellectual and spiritual integrity, there will always be problems. Many of these problems are unflinchingly explored in *Trying to be Orthodox... And Not Quite Succeeding** by Michael Lomax, a Deacon in the Moscow Patriarchate in Belgium. As someone who has toyed for years with the idea of trying to write about my own struggles with rigid vertical hierarchies, inter-patriarchate power games, ethnic exclusivism (sometimes revealing itself as thinly veiled racism), lay passivity, etc etc etc, this book has turned out to be (for me) an ideal lenten mirror in which to explore my own relationship with the Church.

In a *Church Times* review (31 December 2020) Hugh Wybrew comments: ‘Orthodox readers might be unpleasantly surprised by the vehemence of his criticisms of clerical authority, of the strong ethnic character of Orthodox church life in a non-Orthodox country, of the prevalence of worship in a language foreign to the general population, and the failure of Russian Orthodoxy in Belgium to relate to the surrounding culture..... That should not put potential readers off Lomax’s book. He is convinced, too, that the purpose of the Christian life, and so of the life of any given Church, is to enable people to progress “to fullness in Christ”, and that any “approaches and practices which . . . impede that progress” must be changed.’

Lomax himself is well aware of the dangers of his exploration: “My fear is being thrown out of the church for liberalism: for saying that Orthodoxy is perhaps not the only one true Christianity. For saying that you need proper pastoral care for homosexuals, rather than hounding them, or using anti-gay as a definition base of Orthodoxy. For saying that episcopal autocracy as practised in any church has more to do with feudalism than Christianity. For expressing doubts as to whether our practice enables people to grow into mature, discerning adult Christians (Ephesians 4:13), or represses them as servants of a power-holding oligarchy..... This is my personal struggle with Orthodoxy right now: I want it, and my own Christian life, to be relevant to the country I live in.” (p 59)

*Michael Lomax *Trying to be Orthodox... And Not Quite Succeeding: Musings of an Uneasy Orthodox Christian Blogger* Darton, Longman and Todd 2020 ISBN 978-0-232-53452-8

Another example of the obstacles many Westerners encounter on their way to Orthodoxy is Peter France’s illuminating account of his long and winding path to faith in *Journey – A Spiritual Odyssey***, which many of us have been revisiting since learning of Peter’s death last month. Peter’s problem was a not uncommon one – of allowing his formidable intellect to accept that rationalism cannot lead us to Truth. Such was his intellectual integrity that it took him more than half a century to ‘reach the stage of accepting the existence of realities which my rational mind could not understand.’ He sums up his arrival point at the end of the journey: “I now *know* far fewer things than I did before I became a Christian. As a materialist, I knew that all life had emerged from a primeval sludge; that after death there was nothing; that the universe was heading nowhere in particular and that humanity had no destiny to fulfil but would quietly one day cease to exist as the sun cooled. Now I don’t know these things any more. The extent of my ignorance has widened. I live with far more uncertainties than I did before I had faith. So Christianity is not a comforting illusion which provides answers but is the validation of mystery. And now I can acknowledge that the most important things in my life are those I don’t now, and never will, understand.” (p192)

** Peter France *Journey – A Spiritual Odyssey* Chatto and Windus 1998 ISBN 0 7011 6696 7 (Currently out of print but readily available second-hand)

