



# Prophet Elias News

**News for the Orthodox Church of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon**

**12<sup>th</sup> June – 26<sup>th</sup> June 2021**



## **The Strength of God Made Perfect in Human Weakness**

We are at present in the period between the feast of the Ascension of the Lord and the feast of the Holy Trinity; and I should like to say something that is relevant to both feasts. The prophet Isaiah says in the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of his book that He - the Christ to come - was wounded for our sins, that He took our frailties upon His shoulders and that by His wounds we are healed. When we think of the risen Christ appearing to His disciples and giving them His hands to touch, inviting Thomas the Apostle to test the reality and the depth of the wounds on His hands and feet and side, we tend to forget that in His Ascension also Christ bore in His flesh the wounds inflicted by our sins; that in some incomprehensible way Christ, not only risen, but having ascended into heaven and sitting in glory on the right hand of God the Father, bears in His human flesh the wounds that the human sin has inflicted. He still carries our human frailty on His shoulders, and both Christ's Resurrection and the terrible days of His Passion are now, so to speak, enshrined in the mystery of the Triune God, the Trinity Holy, Incomprehensible, Great. All the sorrow of the world, all the sin, all the pain, all the horror were laid on Christ, and neither by His Resurrection nor by His Ascension in glory did He throw them off. Christ remains the Lamb of God slain before the creation of the world for the salvation of the world.

When on the day of Pentecost, the day we celebrate as the day of the Holy Trinity, He sends down His Holy Spirit on His disciples, on His Apostles, on the Church, and into the whole world, He sends it as it were in a double way. On the one hand we are the Body of Christ, living, tremulous, tortured and wounded throughout the ages, bearing on ourselves, as St Paul says, the wounds of the Saviour, fulfilling in ourselves that which was lacking in the earthly sorrows and physical suffering of Christ; for from century to century the Church is called upon to be the Body of Christ which is broken for the sins of men, broken for the salvation of mankind. And because we are that Body, however unworthy we may be, just because we are Christ's, because we are the Church, we participate in this gift of the Holy Spirit. But on the other hand the Holy Spirit descends on us not just because in an incomprehensible way we are already joined to Christ, but because we are frail, we are weak, we are sinful, and only the strength of God which is made perfect in human weakness is able to save us. It is not only as the Body of Christ that we receive the Holy Spirit, but collectively as a sinful society, and individually as sinners desperately in need of the strength of God for our salvation.

For this reason we must prepare ourselves in a very special way for the feast that will be upon us next Sunday, we must come to it in our frailty, but with absolute openness, with all our longing for God, with hunger and thirst for the coming of the Lord in order that our souls should come alive, that our life should change, that the chasm should be closed which divides what is Godly in each one of us from what still belongs to corruption, sin and death. Let us spend this week recollected; let us spend this week in expectation and in prayer, so that when together we sing the prayer of invocation to the Holy Spirit, "Come, and abide in us", it should not be just a routine prayer, but the culmination of our longing for God, our love of God, so that our weakness should be laid open before Him as the soul can open itself to love and joy. And then however sinful and weak we may be, we shall be able to receive once again, in a new way a new measure of that grace which makes us nearer and dearer to God, that God Who entered into glory in the flesh that bears unhealed the wounds inflicted by our sin, because our sin still persists. How wonderful is our God! With what gratitude can we contemplate Him for we who are but half-believers, we who live so badly are loved by Him, He believes in us, He hopes all things, and by His strength He can give us everything if only we give Him the right, the power over us, the opportunity to act freely. Let us then prepare reverently for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us.

## News from St Gregory's Foundation

I've just received the Summer 2021 newsletter from St Gregory's Foundation, whose various projects support vulnerable children and families in Russia and Georgia. This year St Gregory's is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, having been founded by Irina von Schlippe with the blessing of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh. Because of his links with the Church in Russia it was possible to get help directly to those in need, bypassing often slow and inefficient official channels, and although organised on a proper legal basis the Foundation still operates in the same informal way.

A few extracts from reports in the newsletter:

*\* We backed up our huge programme of obstetrics and gynaecology by the publication of a Russian adaptation of "The Pregnancy Book", that essential aid which the UK issues to each new mother in Britain. Help to orphanages resulted in the 3-volume "School for Life", a guide to life skills for orphanage leavers.*

*\* 19-year-old Vadim is a cashier and provides a great example of how supporting him at the initial stage and during the covid quarantine period helped him to find a job in the post-quarantine period. "When I left the orphanage, it was very difficult. I did not understand how to carry on or what to do. I left in March and then the quarantine began, but I was hugely helped by 'Sunflower' giving me food parcels and money for travel."*

*\* The pandemic noticeably worsened the working conditions in Georgia, as it did in the whole world. Regular work remained only for those who worked at grocery stores and supermarkets and perhaps as street cleaners. Young people at the Mkurnali shelter decided to grow a small vegetable garden rather than sit still and do nothing. It is inspiring that they took the decision and organised this all by themselves. Remarkably one of the inspirers of this idea and work was Achiko, our new resident recently released from prison. Together with Jemal and others he worked hard in the garden – it was a particular joy to me to see that he treats Mkurnali as his home.*

Also included is the announcement that St Gregory's **online shop** will be opening this month, with orders for **Christmas cards** being taken from 20 June, and china mugs, books, paintings and other items available later in the summer. As in past years we hope to have their cards on sale in the autumn, but meanwhile you might like to visit [www.shop.stgregorysfoundation.org.uk](http://www.shop.stgregorysfoundation.org.uk) if only for a browse!

Individual membership is recommended: annual subscription £30, or £20 for students. I have full details.

Hugh Allen

### Members One of Another

'And when one member suffers, all the members suffer with it' (1 Cor. 12:26): this is said of the Church. If we do not feel this, we are not within the Church.

Holiness and knowledge are given by the spirit of *sobornost*. \* Ignorance and sin are the characteristics of isolated individuals. Only in the unity of the Church do we find these defects overcome. Man finds his true self in the Church alone: not in the helplessness of spiritual isolation but in the strength of his communion with his brethren and with his Saviour. The Church is a living organism, integrated by common love, forming an absolute unity in Christ of the living and the dead.

\**Sobornost* - the Russian term for 'catholicity', signifying above all the unity of many persons in the one Body of Christ, harmony without loss of individual freedom, the attainment of a 'common mind'.

Father Alexander Elchaninov: *The Diary of a Russian Priest*.  
Quoted in Every, Harries and Ware: *Seasons of the Spirit* SPCK 1984.  
Footnote by Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware)

## The Heart of the Parish Community Must be Love

In 2011 the website pravmir.com asked clergy from different countries and different jurisdictions to share their experience of church attendance in the west. The response of Father Anthony Hughes of Saint Mary Orthodox Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, struck us as describing a community very much like our own. The following extracts from Fr Anthony's article are printed with his permission. The full text can be found at

[www.pramvir.com/the-heart-of-the-parish-community-must-be-love](http://www.pramvir.com/the-heart-of-the-parish-community-must-be-love).

Ed.

In the environment of Cambridge, Massachusetts, people tend to think deeply about issues of faith and life. Fundamentalism doesn't play well here. Openness, tolerance, diversity, and inclusiveness are hallmarks of our parish. Everyone is welcome. No one is turned away. We embrace people as they are, not as we think they should be, knowing that the transformation of human life demands a safe, welcoming community where the believer can encounter Christ, the Lord and Giver of Life, without fear or condemnation. Christ stretched out His arms on the Cross to embrace the whole panoply of humanity. We are called to do nothing less. The Church exists as the Ark of Salvation for all.

If I were asked to put into one word the reason for the growth and success of St. Mary's, Cambridge, I would say "love." The heart of the parish community must be love, for God and for one another, if it is to thrive as a living expression of the God Who is Love. Where there is love there is no place for narrow-minded dogmatism or extremism. The Church of Christ is a hospital, not a cult or an exclusive club for the self-righteous. There are no disputes here over language or ethnicity, clothing, or any other external expression of faith. Our diversity demands it. A recent count called to our attention that there are 17 different nationalities represented in our community, but English is the unifying language. Thus, the Liturgy is in English. This is becoming increasingly true for a growing number of American parishes as the walls of ethnicity give way to the realities of life in a multicultural society, not to mention the ever-increasing number of inter-faith and inter-ethnic marriages. Where these facts of life are embraced rather than resisted, parishes are able to navigate well the changes that are necessary for parish survival and growth.

One issue at the heart of Church growth overall is the loss of young people to the life of the Church. I think much of it is due to a poor and narrow-minded transmission of the Faith. The temptation to present an ossified view of the faith that ignores life in the modern world does not attract the young, mostly well-educated young person. Such an Orthodoxy is not relevant, nor is it true to the Faith which must be transmitted to every age as it is, not as we wish it were. It is not the faith that is irrelevant, it is our presentation of it that is. It is not the Gospel that is irrelevant, it is us.

I do not believe Orthodoxy has any reason to fear the modern world. Far from being a threat, it is an opportunity and a challenge. How do we preach the Gospel today, taking into consideration all the advances in human knowledge? Do we retrench behind barricades and barriers for fear that maybe, just maybe we might have to change our perspective, or do we meet the challenge by having the courage to look carefully and critically at ourselves and responding with wisdom and compassion to the world we actually live in in the context of the teachings of Jesus Christ Whom we profess to follow? For me, the answer is simple. The latter must be our path.

### Saint Raphael of Optina

Our father among the saints, the New Hiero-Confessor **Raphael (Sheichenko) of Optina** (1891 - 1957) was a Russian monk, priest, and confessor. He suffered twenty years of unjust imprisonment under Communist rule. He was a spiritual son of some of the last of the Optina Elders, such as St. Nectarius.

His relics are located in the narthex of the Church of the Feast of the Transfiguration in Optina.

The scroll reads: 'Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you.'

Source: Orthodox Wiki



## This Fortnight We Celebrate

On Sunday June 13<sup>th</sup>: **7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha.**

**The Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council (325)**

For the Epistle - Acts 20:16-18, 28-36 Gospel – John 17: 1-13

On Thursday 17<sup>th</sup>: **Saint Nectan** of Hartland (6thC)  
**Saint Botolph** of East Anglia (7thC)

On Saturday 19<sup>th</sup>: **Saturday of Souls**  
**Holy Apostle Jude**, Brother of the Lord  
New **Hiero-confessor Raphael** of Optina (1957)

On Sunday 20<sup>th</sup>: **8<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha. HOLY PENTECOST**  
For the epistle - Acts 2: 1-11 Gospel – John 7:37-52; 8:12  
**Saint Nicholas Kavalas** (1391)  
Author of *The Life in Christ* and *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*

On Monday 21<sup>st</sup>: **Day of the Holy Spirit**

On Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup>: **Saint Alban**, First Martyr of Britain (209)

On Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup>: **Saint Mark of Ephesus** (1445)

Saint Mark was the sole Orthodox bishop to refuse to sign the declaration of the Council of Florence in 1439. For his defence against the addition of the Filioque, the primacy of the Pope, and the doctrine of purgatorial fire, the Church subsequently honoured him with the title 'Pillar of Orthodoxy'.

On Thursday 24<sup>th</sup>: **Nativity of the Holy, Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John**

## Noticeboard

### Services:

**Saturday June 12<sup>th</sup>: Divine Liturgy at Saint James' Hall 10.30am**

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup>: Matins and Divine Liturgy at Saint Stephen's, Exeter High Street (in Romanian)  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth\* Torquay 9.30am

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup>:** Saturday of Souls  
**Divine Liturgy at Saint James' Hall 10.30am** – Celebration of Pentecost

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup>: **PENTECOST**  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth\* Torquay\*

**The week following Pentecost – 21<sup>st</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> – is Fast Free.**

Monday 21<sup>st</sup>: Day of the Holy Spirit  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth\* Torquay 9.30am

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup>: Vespers – Saint Anne's 6pm

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup>: Matins and Divine Liturgy at Saint Stephen's, Exeter High Street (in Romanian)  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth\* Torquay 9.30am

\*Go to: <https://plymchurch.com/> for times of services

### Online Lecture by Deacon Brandon

The last online event in the series "Time for Action" organized by Volos Academy for Theological Studies will take place on **Monday, June 14, at 8 pm Greek time [6pm BST]**. The speaker will be Rev. Dr. Brandon Gallaher, Senior Lecturer of Systematic and Comparative Theology at the University of Exeter (Devon, UK) and the topic of the lecture will be "*Sergius Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky: Two Complementary Voices for Contemporary Orthodox Theology.*"

The lecture will be in English. It will be delivered through Zoom and the link for attending is <https://zoom.us/j/94709675464>. Admission is free.

**Refugee Week** Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> June - with Refugee Support Devon, Exeter

Refugee Week is a nationwide recognition of the value not only of offering a place of safety but also of the benefits that newcomers bring to the lives and livelihoods of their hosts.

A series of historic re-enactments and commemorations are planned over the weekend of 26<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> June. If you can help, please contact Refugee Support Devon on <https://refugeesupportdevon.org.uk/>

**Parish AGM** The Parish **Annual General Meeting** will be held after the Liturgy on **Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> July**, at Saint James' Hall. Please make every effort to attend.