



Prophet Elias News

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

September 4th - 18th 2021



Finding One's Vocation in Life

by Fr. Thomas Hopko

Part 2

Everyone has His or Her Unique Calling

All are called to be saints, but each person is called to do so in his or her own unique way. No two persons are the same. Each one is different. All are called to partake of God's being and life. All are called to love as He loves, know as He knows, serve as He serves, live as He lives. But each will do it in his or her own specific manner, according to the concrete conditions and means that God provides.

Some will sanctify their lives being married; others will be single. Some will do it in clerical orders; others as lay people. Some will be monastic; most will live in the everyday secular world. Some will work primarily in a physical way, others will work intellectually. Some will be artists, scientists, business people, professionals. Others may have no particular job or profession. And some may be called simply to suffer, while others, in terms of this world, will hardly suffer at all. Some will have many temptations, and will bear heavy burdens because of the sins of the world and their particular inheritance of a fallen, broken, distorted humanity. And some may have to fight destructive memories, imaginations, and passions that seem at times impossible to bear.

Others will be greatly blessed by receiving a highly purified humanity, for which they will especially have to answer before God. For, as Jesus taught, "to whom much is given, of him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). But each person will have his or her own life to sanctify. And each will answer for what he or she has done. In the eyes of God none is better than the other. None is higher or more praiseworthy. But each must find his or her own way, and glorify God through it. This is all, ultimately, that matters. The rest is details.

The Will to Find God's Will is Essential

All that is needed to discover the will of God and to do it is the pure desire to see, to hear, to understand and to obey. God does the rest. When people saw Jesus on earth, and yet did not accept and obey Him in love, the Lord Himself gave the reason, quoting the Prophet Isaiah. He said that the people had eyes but did not see; had ears but did not want to hear; had minds, but refused to understand and be saved. (Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:13-14, Mark 8:18; John 12:36-41)

To find one's vocation demands that one really wants to do so. It sounds simple. And it is. But, to quote the Lord once more, "Few there be who find it" (Matthew 7:14). The reason is that it takes courage to allow the Lord to speak, or rather, to hear the Lord when He speaks, and to follow Him. It is also quite painful. Our own will has to go. Our egocentric desires have to be denied. Our ideas about ourselves have to be abandoned. Our personal plans and projects have to be discarded. Our agendas of action have to be thrown away. We have to say to God: Speak Lord, your servant is ready! We have to respond to God: Let it be to me according to Your word! And we have to mean it. If we do, we will find our way. But if we fight it, and keep craving the things that we want, we will be miserable and unhappy. We will realize, as the song says, that we "can't get no satisfaction." For the heart of the human person is made for God - for truth, for love, for life itself, and not for mere "existence" - and is inevitably unsatisfied, frustrated, confused, distressed, angered, bored...until it comes to rest in Him.

From *Finding One's Vocation in Life* by Fr. Thomas Hopko.

<https://www.oca.org/parish-ministry/theology/finding-ones-vocation-in-life>

In the next issue Fr Thomas explores where we can look for help to recognise our vocations.

On Being True to Oneself by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

Time and again I am asked by people on a concrete occasion 'What is the Will of God for me now, in the nearest future?' And I always refuse to speak in God's own Name, because I believe that all I, or any priest, can do is to stand before God in awe, and say, 'Lord, Thou art the Truth, Thou art Life, Thou art also the Way — teach this person; be to this person the Way, enlighten this person with the truth, and bring him to such plenitude of life as no one can either convey or give'.

And yet there are things which can be done. Each of us is a freeman of God, as St. Paul said clearly. He says there was a time when we all were slaves of Satan, slaves of our passions, of our fears, slaves of all the things that press on all sides and do not allow us to be true people. In Christ freedom is granted; not licence, but the freedom to be ourselves, the freedom to grow into the fullness of the stature which God has dreamt for us, to grow into fullness that will make us truly living members of the Body of Christ, partakers of the Divine Nature.

On whatever step of our spiritual development we are, the first thing which is required of us is that we should be true to ourselves: not to try to be anyone except the person we are; not to try to ape any behaviour, to force ourselves into any mould in heart, in mind, in will which could be a lie before God, a lie to ourselves, a deception for others. The first rule is to be true to ourselves; and to be true with all the integrity, all the passion, all the joy of which we are capable. And what does this mean? Apart from what I said a moment ago, it means that we must find who we are not only socially, but at another level. And to do this, we can read the Gospel, which is an image of what a true human being is; not a book of commandments, of orders, as it were, given by God, 'Do this, and you will be right in My sight' — no: it is a picture of what a real human being thinks, feels, does and is. Let us look into the Gospel as one looks into a mirror, and we will discover that in so many ways we are a distorted image but that in a few ways perhaps, we are a true human being already, at least potentially. Let us mark those passages of which we can say, like Luke and Cleophas on the way to Emmaus: Does not my heart burn within me when I hear, when I read these words? How beautiful they are! How true! That is life!.. And if you find one passage or another to which you respond this way, rejoice; because at that point God has reached you at the deepest level of your being, revealed to you who you truly are; but at the same time revealed to you Who He truly is, shown you that you and He are in harmony; that if you only become what you already, potentially, truly are, you will become His like, the like of God; a true undistorted image — at least in one or two things.

Then there is another move; if we want to be truly ourselves, we must remember that God does not expect us to be what we are not, but what we are. And that we can stand before God, and say to Him, 'Lord! I have read this and that in the Gospel; I understand it with my mind; I believe in my heart that it must be true; but it does not set my mind aglow, my heart on fire; it does not stir my will, it does not transform me yet. Accept me as I am! I will change — but for the moment I cannot respond to such a commandment, to such an example. There is a passage so beautiful, to me, in the writings of St. Mark the Ascetic in which he says, 'If God stood before you, and said, Do this, and do that — and your heart could not answer 'Amen' — don't do it; because God does not need your action: He needs your consent, and harmony between Him and you'.

Let us therefore try when we ask ourselves in an attempt to find out what the Will of God is for us, not in the absolute, but now: where do I already stand? What can I already now be and do, and do it wholeheartedly with God? — because in the end, the aim of our spiritual life, of our life and our faith in Christ does not consist in being drilled into doing one thing rather than the other; it is to establish between God and us a relationship of true friendship, of a joy of mutual freedom, and within this freedom, within this friendship, in response to God's love, to God's respect for us, to the faith He has in us, to the hope He has vested in us, and say This person has understood that he is not a slave, that he is My friend. And He is our friend. What a joy! And it is a gift of God, which we can give Him as we received it from Him!

The Birth of the Mother of God

As we celebrate this first of the Twelve Great Feasts we print the opening part of a long poem by Thomas Ken (1637-1711), Bishop of Bath & Wells and one of the last of a generation of divines who kept much traditional Orthodox Catholic teaching alive in the 17th century Church of England.

Hugh Allen

GOD, Who is pleased bright Angels down to send,
On purpose little children to attend;
When blessed Mary first drew vital air,
Entrusted her to a bright seraph's care;
The aged Saints, who for a child had prayed,
Sang hymns to God when joyful parents made;
Devoted God's free gift to God alone,
And more God's child esteemed her than their own;
Her seraph kept her in his sweet embrace,
No one foul spirit durst approach the place;
The Holy Ghost His temple in her built,
Cleansed from congenial, kept from mortal guilt;
And from the moment that her blood was fired,
Into her heart Celestial Love inspired.

Some later verses have been adapted to be sung as a hymn, including the final quatrain which looks forward to her Dormition:

Heaven with transcendent joys her entrance graced,
Next to his throne her Son His Mother placed;
And here below, now she's of Heaven possessed,
All generations are to call her blessed.

God Speaks to Each of Us

God speaks to each of us as he makes us,
then walks with us silently out of the night.

These are the words we dimly hear:

You, sent out beyond your recall,
go to the limits of your longing.
Embody me.

Flare up like flame
and make big shadows I can move in.

Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final.
Don't let yourself lose me.

Nearby is the country they call life.
You will know it by its seriousness.

Give me your hand.

*Rainer Maria Rilke: The Book of Hours: I, 59
Translation by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy
Riverhead Books 1996 Reprinted with permission*

The Three Teachers

Before I decided to embrace the Orthodox Faith, which was after being very moved when I attended the Holy Week services in the parish church of Saint Nicolas in the port of Gavrio on Andros, I found that three of the teachers from the school where I was a pupil in Ilfracombe had done so already.

During the chastisement of lockdown (*cf Hebrews 12:5-11*) it was a comfort to tend Daphne's (a Biology teacher's) garden, to behold Betty's (a French teacher's) icon of the Transfiguration, and recently to venerate the icon of the Dormition in Father John's (a Drama teacher's) and Dawn's household chapel of St. Simeon and St. Anna.

I hope, if God and the administering priest allow, to partake of the Holy Mysteries at least one more time before I die*. I hope not to have to wear one of those garments that one might wear in a sandstorm, but I suppose I had better do what the presiding priest thinks is best!

Personally I think 'pandemic' is something of a misnomer for what we have experienced. There are those who feel the micro-chip era is the era of the Anti-Christ. If it is indeed so, may God grant us wisdom and repentance!

John Thomas

* We are glad to say John has assured us that this is not a coded message that he is terminally ill! God grant that he may partake of the Holy Mysteries many, many times before he dies. Ed.

This Fortnight We Celebrate

Again we have an issue which spans two of the Great Feasts of the Church. The Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God is the first great feast of the Church year, just as the feast of her Dormition is the last, thus cradling in her arms the entire history of our salvation told in the other great feasts. The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, roughly half a year from the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross in Great Lent, reminds us of the centrality of the Cross as the symbol of our faith, and of its dual significance as the instrument both of Christ's passion and of His triumph. Ed.

On Sunday September 5th: The **Prophet Zachariah** and the **Righteous Elizabeth**,
parents of Saint John the Baptist.

We wish **Alice S**, Presbytera **Elizabeth C**, **Elizabeth T** and **Lily S**
a **Happy Feast and Many Years!**

On Monday 6th: **Saint Bega (Bee)**, Abbess of Copeland (7thC)

We wish Matushka **Jenny Bega M** and all those in the Parish of **Saint Bega, Saint Mungo**
and **Saint Herbert** in Keswick a **Happy Feast and Many Years!**

On Tuesday 7th: **Saint Kassiani the Melodist** (9thC)

On Wednesday 8th: **THE NATIVITY OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY THE MOTHER OF GOD**

On Monday 13th: **Saint Cornelius** the Centurion, first gentile convert to Christianity

On Tuesday 14th: **THE EXALTATION OF THE PRECIOUS AND LIFE GIVING CROSS**

On Thursday 16th: **Saint Edith** of Wilton (984)

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

On Friday 17th: **Saint Sophia** and her daughters **Faith (Vera)**, **Hope (Nadezhda)** and **Love (Lubov)** (2ndC)

We wish **Sophia R** and **Nadya K** a **Happy Feast and Many Years!**

Noticeboard

Services:

On Sunday September 5th: Typika* Saint Anne's 10.30am

On Tuesday 7th: Vespers for the Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God Saint Anne's 6.30pm

On Wednesday 8th: Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth 8.30am

On Saturday 11th: Divine Liturgy Saint James' Church (not Hall) 10.30
followed by Panikhida on the first anniversary of Father Peter's death.

On Monday 13th: Vespers for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross Saint Anne's 6.30pm

On Saturday 18th: Vespers Saint Anne's 6pm

On Sunday 19th: Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth 9.30am Torquay 9.30am

Advance notice: On Saturday 25th: Divine Liturgy Saint James' Hall 10.30am

*The Typica service is a specific form of service which mirrors the Divine Liturgy. It may be used as a 'dry Liturgy'[Obednitsa] when it is not possible to serve the Liturgy, for instance when a priest is not available, when it could be led by a deacon, reader or experienced lay person.

Reminder: In view of the increasing rate of Covid infection across the Southwest, we ask that people continue for the time being to wear face coverings in the very confined space of Saint Anne's.

Fence me about, O Lord, with the power of Thy most precious
and Life-giving Cross, and preserve me from every evil.

Toward an Orthodox Social Ethos

The statement from the French Vicariate quoted in the last issue mentioned the report ‘For the Life of the World: Toward an Orthodox Social Ethos’. I have to admit that up to that point I had been unaware of this document which, now I have read it, I believe to be extremely important. Some will welcome it as a long overdue sign of a commitment to face some of the issues of the modern world, some will find it challenging as possibly indicating a willingness to compromise with the world’s values. Either way, I think everyone concerned with the future direction of the Church should read it. Commissioned by Patriarch Bartholomew in 2017 “to prepare a formal document on the social doctrine of the Orthodox Church, as this has been reflected and expressed in the tradition through the centuries and by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in contemporary practice, particularly as recently adopted in the documents and decisions of the Holy and Great Council held in Crete in June 2016”, the mandate of the special commission was “to submit a text in timely manner for consideration and approval by the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Church of Constantinople. The fruit of this deliberation and composition will subsequently be published for the benefit of our faithful throughout the world in order to serve as a solid foundation for reference and conversation on vital issues and challenges facing the world today.” (Quotations from [Preface to "For the Life of the World" - Social Ethos Document - Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical, and Interfaith Relations - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America \(goarch.org\)](#)) The full text of the document can be found at <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos> Anyone who does not have internet access and would like to see the document in hard copy, please ask us.

One of the theologians entrusted with this huge task is well known to us, in the person of the Revd. Dr. Brandon Gallaher, who has this to say in his preface to a paper shortly to be published as ‘Christ as the Watermark of Divine Love: Expanding the Boundaries of Eastern Orthodox Ecumenism and Inter-religious Encounter’:

‘For the Life of the World: Toward an Orthodox Social Ethos’ is in many ways a bold and innovative text in the history of Orthodox social teaching. It engages with a multitude of social issues that Orthodox normally are silent on from sexuality to human rights. It celebrates the modern world’s cultural and social pluralism as a vehicle for the peaceful co-existence of the world’s many cultures and the context in which a just society in which the person’s infinite and inherent dignity can flourish. This is a remarkable turn in intellectual history given that so much of Orthodoxy has tended to emphasize—perhaps because of its Eucharistic cast—social, political and religious unity and has tended to be suspicious of pluralism as a Western innovation not seeing it as a providential opportunity for the free encounter with Christian orthodoxy. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in publishing this text has opened up Orthodoxy to consider a new proactive approach to the modern pluralistic world we now face.’

Saint Alexis of Uguine and Archbishop Gabriel

In response to our piece on Saint Alexis of Uguine in the last issue, Father Patrick sent us this reminiscence:

‘I had the opportunity some years ago of taking part in a Liturgy with Archbishop Job at Bussy Monastery, followed by a Molieben to St Alexis in front of his relics, [which had been brought there in 2014]. The grave which he had previously occupied at St Genevieve cemetery chapel had become that of Archbishop Gabriel, where we also sang a panikhida.’

The Ormylia Synaxarion

*Also following our mention of Saint Alexis in the last issue, Christa Antonina sent us a much fuller account of his life from the **Ormylia Synaxarion**, together with a resounding recommendation of that publication as a source of information on the lives of the saints. (Published in 6 volumes by Holy Convent of the Annunciation, Ormylia). I was particularly taken with the quality of the English translation, which on investigation I found to be by none other than the late Christopher Hookway, one of the founder members of our parish.*

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A Prayer for the Beginning of the School Year

O Lord, our God and Creator, You have honoured us with Your own image, and taught Your chosen disciples that the fear of You is the beginning of true wisdom; You have revealed Your wisdom to children and taught Your law to Solomon and to all those who have sought You in purity of heart. Open the hearts, the minds, and the lips of those who are students, that they may perceive the power of Your law, and successfully comprehend the useful things which will be taught them, so that they will understand Your perfect will and contribute to the building up of Your Holy Church. Deliver them from every snare of the enemy, preserve them in the true faith and in righteousness and purity all the days of their lives, that they may grow in wisdom and in the observance of Your commandments, and may be revealed as worshippers of Your Name and heirs of Your Kingdom. Bless also their teachers, O Lord; grant that their words may be free from every worldly deceit and vanity, and may always clearly proclaim the word of Your truth. For You are God, the Author of truth and the Fountain of wisdom, and to You we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen

<https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/timeeternal/a-prayer-for-a-new-school-year>