

THE NARTHEX

*The believers were first called
Christians at Antioch*

ACTS. 9:26

SEPTEMBER- NOVEMBER
2007

The House of God

There are many terms used to describe the Church. The biblical imagery is very rich and it is remarkable but perhaps not surprising, how influential the sacred scriptures have been in forming the mind of the Church. We might think, for example, of the *Body of Christ*, [Col.1:18]; *The Holy City, The Bride of Christ and The New Jerusalem* [Apoc. 21:2; 22:17]. It is *The City of the Living God* [Heb.12:22] and *The Assembly of the First-born* [Heb.12:23].

We might also think of the Church as *the temple* but this we tend to do in respect of the building in which we worship. This of course links back to the biblical temple of Solomon but can no longer be identified with a ruins left on Mount Zion: in Orthodox Christianity, the temporary and physical Old Testament archetypes are spiritualised and made open to all who would be part of the New Israel, the Church. Indeed, St. Paul himself could posit the assembly of the baptized themselves as forming the temple of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor.3:16] and he applies the same idea later to everyone who is baptized [1 Cor. 6:19].

The image, though, that I wish to concentrate on is that of the Church as the House of God. I think this is a salutary exercise for us, given our present circumstances. I do not wish to dwell upon the circumstances of our departure from Parkstone for they are known well enough. We might justifiably see ourselves as reflecting in our own experience pictures familiar to anyone who knows the Bible. We might well mention Abraham called to leave Haran to make a journey in faith; of the children of Israel lead out in the Exodus; or even a departure from *the camp...for we have no continuing city* [Heb.13:13-14

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The point is, of course, that there is real temptation to think of the Church of God as a building or merely an institution. This has been, historically, a problem for the Orthodox just as it has for Western Christianity but not, perhaps, so seriously for us, rooted as we are in the Theology of the Fathers.

In saying, however, that the Church is not a building is, in no way, to deny the sanctity of the church building and all that belongs to it: whatever the Holy Spirit touches is sanctified. The building where the Divine Liturgy is served is itself sacramental, a mystery of God proclaiming in this world the Kingdom of God - as do the scriptures, the vestments, the services, the icons and the mysteries (sacraments) themselves. All these things are holy and in fact, so awesome that it is probably a good thing that so often we take them for granted because of our human weakness: if we were aware all the time of their awful purity, would we dare ever approach? There is a strange paradox here, I think.

The point I wish to stress therefore is that, though we cannot at present conceive of or even imaging fully the mystery of the Church as the House of God, yet we in this locality do constitute that house - we, as a group of people gathered for the Divine Liturgy, are the manifestation, here and now, of the House of God. For *this* place and for *this* time, just by coming together, we make up, as if we were stones, the house of God [cf. 1 Pet.2:5]. This is why it is so sad if we cannot be present at the Liturgy and a sign of spiritual danger if we wish not to be present.

What is interesting and heartening, however, is how this house, this body of believers, has bonded and stayed together. Clearly,

the building we left was, architecturally, very beautiful indeed. What brought to life, however - what turned it into a church rather than a disused church building, were the *living stone, we*, the people of God, serving the Divine Liturgy in faith.

The fact that we have held together as a congregation is proof enough that we understand these mysteries. Over the last couple of years we have bound ourselves together in mutual bonds of love in Christ and thus, as a real community, have moved on. Protopresbytera Jeaane (Harper) recently confided to me that she thought that, in the end, great good will come of all this and that although we do face certain difficulties, the situation in which we find ourselves will, eventually, bear fruit.

We are, of course, immensely grateful to Fr. Marcus for the use of his premises for he and his people have shown us great Christian hospitality. In time, however, we shall need to find our own building, not least, for the sake of our mission to promote the Orthodox Faith.

In the early days of the Faith, in the Church of the Apostles and Fathers, Christians usually gathered for worship in the houses of well-off members, those who could provide the accommodation necessary for the Liturgy. Fairly early, though, dedicated church buildings were obtained where possible. It is true that we need such a building of our own, just as we use the liturgical books, the vestments, the holy vessels, the icons - all the holy things that pertain to the celebration of the mystery of faith, so we need a house for the Lord's people in which to 'show the Lord's death until he come'

[1 Cor. 11:26] To this end our parish committee has resolved to begin the search for such a building. At this stage we must, realistically speaking, think in terms of renting rather than buying. Our finances are in good order but we do not, given our present size as a community, receive a large enough income to purchase our own place or even take out a mortgage on a suitable property. This will, of course, concentrate our minds and we must all begin to examine our own level of giving. If we are serious about this it will take commitment. Each household should therefore think of regular, proportional giving. It might not work out as the biblical 'tithe' but it does need to be proportional and regular. To this end the committee should be able to open a building fund account with our bankers alongside the normal current account used to pay our expenses. Meanwhile, I should be grateful to be informed of any suitable properties of which you might hear.

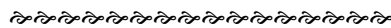
No Christian body on earth quite conceives of itself as the Orthodox Church does - a spiritual communion between the saints in heaven and the saints on earth. We are reminded of this every time we enter a church building and appear before the holy icons as they gaze down upon us. The church building itself is a sacrament of the incarnation; that the dwelling of God is with men. [cf. Apoc.21:3] There is no doubt that we do need our own building if what we have planted is to grow. Be assured that it is my firm conviction that we are here not just to minister to our own spiritual needs; we are not merely a Byzantine cultural association pursuing a mutual interest. We are the Church of the living God and we have a part, with all the Orthodox in this land, in the re-hallowing of Britain. To this end we need our own building; we need to be visible.

An ancient king of Sparta once boasted that no Greek city state had walls like his city. When a visitor came to Sparta he was shocked to find that the city had no walls at all to defend it. He asked the king where were the walls of his city. And the king pointed to a group of Spartan soldiers and said: "These are the walls of Sparta".

We are also, as the Church, *soldiers of Christ* to use another image

of St. Paul's for the Church but in the tangible realities of this world we cannot just be an idea or a concept: we must be made manifest to the world as Christ was made manifest and incarnate. 'After the Ascension of Christ,' said St. Leo the Great. 'The visible presence of Christ passed over into the sacraments.' It is for this reason that the house of God must be both the holy people and the holy place where they are gathered together. For this reason we must resolve to find our own building.

Fr. Chrysostom



THE FREEING OF THE SOUL

'It is in vain that man should try to ascend toward God while he is bound with the cords of this earth. Even if he manages to release himself from all of them except one (however little or trivial that one is) he cannot live for God...He will try to take off while weighed down heavily by this thing to which he is still bound...and having the illusion that he is heading for God, he is surprised to find that this thing still weighs him down as before. He thus falls from is spiritual height and his soul is broken with despair...

...Many are those who, while trying to grow in the life of prayer and worship, suddenly find their progress arrested and apathy overtaking them...The reason behind this...may be a hidden cord. It may be a sin or some addiction to a drug or a certain habit. It may be lusting after worldly pleasure; it may be a hidden quest for fame, honour and vainglory or a sensual love for someone or something in this world. Only one of these impediments is enough to shackle the soul and fetter its movement. It thus cannot enjoy perpetual release in the heaven of prayer or the life of contemplation.'

From: *Orthodox Prayer Life*
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SERVICES

SEPTEMBER

23rd Sun 17th after Pentecost. Conception of John the Forerunner
Divine Liturgy 10.45am

30th Sun 18th after Pentecost.
Divine Liturgy 10.45am

OCTOBER

7th Sun 19th after Pentecost.
Divine Liturgy 10.45am

14th Sun 20th after Pentecost.
Divine Liturgy 10.45am

21st Sun 21st after Pentecost.
Divine Liturgy 10.45am

28th Sun 22nd after Pentecost.
Divine Liturgy 10.45am

NOVEMBER

4th Sun 23rd after Pentecost.
Divine Liturgy 10.45am

11th Sun 24th after Pentecost.
Divine Liturgy 10.45am

15th Thurs Beginning of the Nativity Fast

18th Sun 25th after Pentecost.
Divine Liturgy 10.45am

25th Sun 26th after Pentecost.
Divine Liturgy 10.45am



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