

THE NARTHEX

*The believers were first called
Christians at Antioch*

ACTS. 9:26

DECEMBER 2007- JANUARY
2008

The Spiritual Life

Public performance in any of the arts, whether it be a classical piece or something improvised, rarely succeeds without a great deal of work beforehand. Inspired improvisation can happen, of course, but most great performances are given following much effort, practice, study and experimentation. Inasmuch as the mastery of any art is the result of much hard work, many mistakes, hours of commitment and utter dedication, we should not be surprised that the spiritual arts, whose end is our salvation, similarly, require the same resolute determination. The spiritual life is not a specialised vocation reserved for a select group of very special individuals. When St. Paul wrote that one should pray without ceasing, for example, he was not writing to hesychast monks but to the butchers, bakers and candlestick makers of Thessalonika, the ordinary Christians who made up the congregation. In other words, the spiritual life in Christ is the Christian life; there is no other. The early Christians to whom the Apostle wrote and those who came after, knew this acutely. Whether finding the completion of the Law (Torah) in Christ as Jews or as abandoning the pagan way of life as gentiles, the radical realignment of their lives found its focus in the kingdom of God: that is the spiritual life, a life centred on God in Trinity rather than in our own ego and will.

The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan Poole-Bournemouth

The Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of The United Kingdom and Ireland
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

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In a fundamentally Christian society, where everything from the monarchy to the design and layout of cities were informed by the spiritual world view, human life itself was, at least, set towards the path of redemption; people were born into a culture that pointed in the right direction.

This, however, has largely gone in Britain and it has gone in just one generation for the indigenous population of Anglo-Saxons and Celts who make up 90% of the people.

It can be no surprise, therefore, that we must be different. We find ourselves in a rearranged situation but one we share with all who follow Christ in this land. Like the writer of the *Epistle to Diognetus* (c. 124 AD), we may appear just like anyone else in our society but our underlying state is something different: "*Though destiny has placed them [the Christians] here in the flesh, they do not live after the flesh; their days are passed on the earth but their citizenship is above in the heavens.*"

Though it might be thought of as perverse, for the Orthodox, the weeks before the so-called festive season - the politically correct term in a secular age - is not spent in a frenzy of commerce, buying things we do not need with money we not have. Nor is it a time for an endless round of parties and conspicuous consumption.

Rather, since the 15th November, we have begun a fast. Not as severe, perhaps, as

the Lenten fast but nonetheless, one that challenges us to be different. Any spiritual endeavour requires, like perfection in art, the same dedication, commitment, stumbling errors, temptations to give up and minor successes but what matters is the striving. The end is not the keeping of the fast itself according to minute rules and regulations but the dedicated heart - the repentant soul that is surrendered to the will of God.

Two ideas strike me about the Christian approach to the spiritual life. One is that the kingdom of God is within us (Luke 17:21) and secondly, that the Lord is at hand (Phil.4:5). In other words, as we might live awaiting what the Creed calls '*the life of the world to come*', in the meantime we can so live as to be there, spiritually, already. This is the whole essence of Christian behaviour, morality and action, in short, the mind of Christ. We have, already, everything we need for this life: we have the Liturgy - a foretaste of the life to come; the scriptures, prayer manuals, spiritual fathers, time for prayer, the rules of the ascetic life, our neighbour in need in whom to serve Christ. What more need we add? The only thing that can possibly hold us back is falling into the dangerous vice of sloth.

Inasmuch as the spiritual life is like the artistic life, it involves much trial and error, much failing and

stumbling. For this reason we need constantly to fall back on God's grace received through the Mysteries (sacraments).

Confession, in particular, as the joyful celebration of each new beginning, is essential for anyone taking the spiritual life in Orthodoxy seriously. To approach the Holy Gifts for example, without being serious about our spiritual endeavour seems, at best, a contradiction in terms and at worst, sacrilegious. Those who approach the chalice having stayed away from the Liturgy for a long time should, of course, make confession first. Those who receive regularly, on a weekly basis, say (which is a practice common in British Antiochian churches) should have a clear rule about confession from time to time, especially before great festivals like the one we approach. Metropolitan Kallistos says that he is in favour of frequent communion; he is not in favour of casual communion. It is all too easy for people to fall into the kind of religious (and not necessarily 'spiritual' practice, therefore,) of mere Sunday religion, where communion is no more than part of a ritualised social gathering, when meeting with like-minded people once a week. The approach to the Holy Gifts is, rather, the start of each week in Christ and yet, the Lord's day is also the eighth day - the foretaste and sign of the age to come in which we are to live the rest of our week till we gather again. It must be part of all our spiritual lives that we live having offered the thanksgiving prayers for our communion just past, then praying in preparation for that which is to come. Adding to this the communion fast, we are working in synergy with God the Creator, forming Christ within us like a sculptor chipping away at the excess stone till our hearts be remade.

Fr. Chrysostom

Keeping in Touch

It has been suggested, by certain members of the congregation, that we should compile a list of names and contact details of those of us who would wish to have them circulated amongst others in the congregation.

Copies of the list would only be given to those who appear on the list. This would be to enable us to keep in touch, especially as we are such a scattered community. It would be useful for the passing of information, for sending messages and greetings cards, being informed in the case of illness or other difficulties and the making of any necessary arrangements.

If you would like your name to appear on such a list, please supply Fr. Chrysostom with as much of the following information as possible:

- Name
- Postal address
- Telephone number
- E. Mail address
- Name Day date

Christ is born



Glorify him!

SERVICES

DECEMBER

2nd Sun 27th after Pentecost. Divine Liturgy 10.45am

9th Sun 28th after Pentecost. Conception of the Theotokos by St. Anna Divine Liturgy 10.45am

16th Sun 29th after Pentecost. Sunday of the Forefathers Divine Liturgy 10.45am

23rd Sun 30th after Pentecost. Sunday before Nativity No service at Castlepoint (Divine liturgy in Cornwall)

The Nativity of Our Lord according to the flesh

24th Mon. Eve of the Nativity Divine Liturgy 9.00pm (Service in the church, not the hall. Fr. Chrysostom will be available to hear confessions from 7.30pm-8.30pm)

30th Sun 31st after Pentecost. Leavetaking of the Nativity Divine Liturgy 10.45am

JANUARY

6th Theophany of Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing of Waters 10.45am (Bring suitable bottles to bring Holy Water home. Fr. Chrysostom will bless homes by appointment)

13th Sun 33rd after Pentecost. Divine Liturgy 10.45am

20th Sun 34th after Pentecost. Divine Liturgy 10.45am