

# THE NARTHEX

*The believers were first called  
Christians at Antioch*

ACTS. 9:26

April-May  
2009

## The Journey

In his novel *The Alchemist*, the Brazilian writer, Paulo Coelho, tells the story of a young Spanish shepherd boy called Santiago. He is led by a strange encounter with character (a thinly disguised *Melchizedek* from the book of *Genesis*) to set out and seek his fortune near the Pyramids of Egypt, if only he follows the 'omens'. He sells his flock and crosses over to Tangiers. Here, a local rogue cheats him out of his money but he manages to find a job in a glass shop. He does so well that he makes enough money to go off once more. A series of adventures follow, where he joins himself to a caravan and sets off across the desert towards an oasis. Here, he falls in love with one of the Bedouin girls and meets an alchemist who tells him to leave her for a while and continue his search. Together, they go to Egypt. Once again, on the way he loses his money to thieves but he presses on, the alchemist taking his leave of him. At the pyramids he digs for treasure yet, once again, is deprived of his fortune by others. So, he returns to Spain once again and picks up his old life. In response to an omen, he digs for treasure in a ruined church, where he used to shelter his flock of sheep. Here, of course, he finds his treasure, in the very place where he started out. With his wealth the novel ends with him determinedly setting out to find the Bedouin girl to make her his wife.

A cursory glance at this

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tale might raise the question as to whether it might not have been a colossal waste a time and effort for the young man. We have all had the experienced of losing something everywhere yet finding it again right under our noses, as we say. But this is to miss the point of the tale altogether. It is the process of the search, the learning to read the 'omens' that forms the young man's education in the meaning of his life. The easy finding of his 'treasure' would have given him nothing but wealth and, moreover, wealth without the acquired and necessary wisdom.

For us, the *treasure* has nothing to do with worldly wealth. It is, in fact, the very thing St. Paul writes about in II Corinthians 4: '*For God...made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*'<sup>7</sup> *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*'

The point is, we too have been engaged over the last few weeks in our own journey. We too have trekked across a desert of sorts - not of sand but of the Great Fast. The *treasure* for us is that relationship we have in Christ. The *omens* are the inner knowledge that we have gained about ourselves, the discovery of our own weaknesses and those hidden fault-lines in our own characters that we must carry and lay at the foot of His cross. And as for the journey itself: it will only repay what we have put into it. Truth to tell, here is no way in which we can complete the journey on our own; it is only

God's grace that can make up for the inadequacies of our spiritual efforts. But, yet again, the point is: we have to make the journey. The Lenten journey has not been an end in itself; we do not fast in order to *be* ones who fast, as if there were some merit in it, *per se*. We fasted because it is an ancient religious practice, practised indeed by Christ Himself; commended to us within the Apostolic Tradition. Yet we know - as the Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom will remind, once again at the Orthros of Pascha - all are invited to share the feast, '*those who have fasted and those who have not...*' But we do not believe in salvation through grace *alone*, nor by faith *alone*. We know that we have to work out our salvation '*in fear and trembling*' and by co-operating (a holy synergy) with the grace of God. For this is what God has laid down for us. There are indeed other 'christianties' that will try to convince you that all this is useless. That faith is a simple matter; that salvation is given to you, now, as a free (for which read: *cheap*); that you have only to know the Lord Jesus as your personal saviour and you are saved - with no knowledge of spiritual growth, no cost of discipleship and most delusional of all: no recovery of the Divine image and likeness within. This is not our faith nor is it what the Fathers passed on to us. One of those, who features in Great Lent, is of

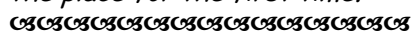
St. Andrew of Crete, composer of the Great Canon. There is a line in the Canon which never fails to shock me and I am sure, reading it, year by year, that St. Andrew meant it to shock. It runs: *'The law has become weak, the Gospel has been abolished and every book has been neglected by thee. The prophets have tired and the speech of everyone that is righteous. But thy wounds have multiplied, O my soul, where there is no physician to heal thee...'*

The message here is blunt and simple - God has supplied all we need for our reformation and salvation; the journey is laid out for us but unless we bother to embark upon it, the Gospel might as well not exist. For these essence of our response to the call from God is repentance, that renewal of our minds that sets before us the vision of what we might be, the recovery of what it is to be truly human, after the image and likeness of Christ.

What more need be added of prayer and almsgiving; these too are part of the journey, chipping away at our inhuman self-centredness, like a sculpture cutting away the marble, till the face of Christ is formed within us. Bit by bit, that old master, the Holy Spirit, is at work upon us but only in as much as we practise work with Him. As the great Canon reminds us, the Gospel, the prophets, the Law, Holy Tradition itself is not magic. Had but God snapped his fingers and repaired the sin of Adam, would we not now be saved. Indeed, so but not as free souls, able to reciprocate the unfathomable love of God.

There is an end to our faith, our endeavour; *end*, that is, in the Greek sense of *τελος* (telos), the goal and destination, the purpose for which we set out in the first place. But any destination may only be attained via the journey itself and the end of our travels is the to arrive at the feast of Pascha,

advanced upon the road of our salvation. We set out from ourselves and, having commended *ourselves and our whole life unto Christ our God whole*, God grants us life in this world a little longer to continue the journey. We discover ourselves once again, like Santiago in *The Alchemist*, back where we began but we know it afresh. With his treasure found, he set off to marry his bride. And we, in our turn, seek out the risen Christ. For the counterbalance of Great Lent is the forty days of Pascha - fast free in the Antiochian tradition, as among the early Christians. As the poet, T.S. Eliot, wrote: *'And the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started/And to know the place for the first time.'*



#### Holy and Great Week

Between Great Wednesday and the Eve of Pascha we are able, once again, to offer most of the liturgical services, marking the passion and resurrection of our Lord. It is most important that each one of us participates in as many as these as possible. Any serious vocation or even claim to follow the Orthodox Christian way of life must involve a dedicated emersion of oneself in the experience of the Paschal Mystery. For us, this is mediated through the divine liturgy of the Church.

As we have only a couple of chanters, we are unable to offer the Service of the Twelve Gospels or the Vespereal Liturgy of Great Saturday. (There is always, as ever, space in the choir for any who can competently sing and sight-read music. If you are interested Please contact Presbytera Olympias for further details.)

Fr. Chrysostom will be available to hear confessions before any of the services.

## SERVICES

### April

5<sup>th</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent  
St. Mary of Egypt Divine  
Liturgy 10.45am  
12<sup>th</sup> Palm Sunday Divine  
Liturgy 10.45am

### Holy and Great Week

15<sup>th</sup> Gt. Wednesday  
Anointing Service 7.00pm [in  
the church hall]  
16<sup>th</sup> Gt. Thursday Vespereal  
Divine Liturgy of the  
Mystical Supper 11.00am  
17<sup>th</sup> Gt. Friday Vespers of  
the Shroud 4.30pm.  
Lamentations Service 7.00pm  
18<sup>th</sup> Gt. Saturday and Pascha  
Midnight Office, Rush  
Procession, Orthros and  
Divine Liturgy of Pascha  
9.00pm

26<sup>th</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Pascha  
Thomas Sunday Divine  
Liturgy 10.45am

### May

3<sup>rd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Pascha  
The Holy Myrrhbearers  
Divine Liturgy 10.45am  
10<sup>th</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha  
The Paralyse Man  
Divine Liturgy 10.45am  
17<sup>th</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha  
The Samaritan Woman  
Divine Liturgy 10.45am  
19<sup>th</sup> Feast of Our Father  
among the Saints, Dunstan of  
Canterbury  
24<sup>th</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha  
The Blind Man  
Divine Liturgy 10.45am  
28<sup>th</sup> Ascension of our Lord  
*Service time to be announced*  
31<sup>st</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha  
Divine Liturgy 10.45am