

# THE NARTHEX

'And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch' (Acts 11:26)

JULY – AUGUST 2022

The Orthodox Church of St Dunstan of Canterbury, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset BH14 9JG

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## BISHOPS AT LARGE

It has yet to be confirmed, but we are very much hoping that we shall have another visit from our bishop, Metropolitan Silouan, on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July. At the time of writing Sayedna is abroad, but confirmation of his visit should be given by the end of June. As on previous visits, we hope to serve a buffet lunch where many of you will want to meet his Eminence, especially if you have not met him before.

With this in mind, it is worth considering the importance of episcopacy, the ministry of bishops, as it is understood in the Orthodox Church. The first of the three sacred orders (Bishops, presbyters and deacons) comes to us from the apostles themselves, where they appointed bishops and elders to watch over and care for the local churches and congregations that they had established, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles (14:23) *'So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.'*

By the end of the first century AD these orders had been established among Christian communities, alongside prophetic ministries which eventually faded away. This was certainly the case by the time of St Ignatius of Antioch (died c. 108) who testifies, in his epistles sent to various churches, to the importance of the role of bishops in the Church. He is very clear that the bishop is the centre of unity and all should be done in harmony with him. We even have in Ignatius the earliest known reference to marriage among Christians, in the Lord, requiring the bishop's blessing.

With the expansion of Christianity it was obvious that a bishop could not be everywhere in his area (diocese) and bishops had always to watch over their people with a council of 'elders', in Greek, Presbyteroi, from which we get the English term, presbyters or priests. This is reflected in the book of the Apocalypse (4:4-5) with its vision of the heavenly liturgy: *'Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.'*

From these early days a valid liturgy was one presided over by the local bishop or by his presbyters who deputised for him. This is, of course, still the case today. Although most people's experience of the clergy is through their parish priest and those who assist him, when the bishop comes to the parish or mission, it is he who takes precedence, especially at the Liturgy. St Ignatius in his letter to the Smyrneans, writes: *'All of you are to follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as the Apostles. Respect the Deacons as the command of God. Apart from the bishop no one is to do anything pertaining to the church. A valid Eucharist is to be defined as one celebrated by the bishop or by a representative of his. Whenever the bishop appears, the whole congregation is to be present, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the whole Church.'*

So without a bishop to preside, whether present or absent, there can be no parish church. He is the local centre of unity and source of teaching authority, appointing ordained presbyters and deacons to minister under him. It is for this reason that he gives each priest the personally signed Antimension (*upon the table*) that lies on the Holy Table. This is a cloth, depicting the burial of Christ and containing the relics of martyrs, that serves as the priest's licence to celebrate the Liturgy on his bishop's behalf.

One very important idea is the concept of the Apostolic Succession, that is, the ability to trace an authentic line of bishops back to the original apostles of Jesus Christ. This is of the utmost importance and is in fact, of the very essence of the Orthodox-Catholic Church herself.

No one can just set up their own church community and expect it to be accepted as such by the Orthodox Church. New churches can only be established under the authority of the existing apostolic community. It is the same with the selection of a new bishop: the synod of bishops in any local Orthodox Church (such as our own Church of Antioch) being in the Apostolic Succession, is the authentic body that can appoint a man for ordination as a new bishop. Any schismatic group establishing

itself without such permission, cannot be accepted as an authentic Orthodox ecclesial community, and its purported holy orders would therefore, be regarded as invalid.

Unfortunately, in Western Christianity there grew up the idea that valid ordination came through the appropriate ritual and liturgical action, regardless of synodical authorisation. This has meant that schismatic bishops could break from their original loyalty and set up a line of their own bishops and priests. Their orders, under this more legalistic understanding of ordination, would be seen as valid though irregular. This has given rise to some strange, if somewhat picturesque, lines of succession claiming Apostolic authority, none of which are accepted, of course, by the Orthodox Church. An example of this would be the case of the Old Catholics who broke with the Roman Church in the nineteenth century, after the First Vatican Council. There are many others from more dubious lines of succession, originating in East Syrian and other Monophysite bodies, giving rise to the phenomenon called, *Episcopi Vagantes*, or wandering bishops. These ecclesial bodies, often with quite exotic titles and outrageous claims to antiquity, are usually very small, appearing and disappearing is due course. I have, in my time, occasionally met men claiming to be priests, who have belonged to such groups, using a variety of cobbled together rites, some western, others eastern.

Many years ago, Peter F. Anson published a very amusing and entertaining account of the goings-on within this ecclesial underworld in a book called, *Bishops At Large*: well worth reading if you can obtain a copy.

The Protestant churches of the Reformation reveal a great variety of approaches to the question of Apostolic Succession. The ecclesiology of the Church of England claims for its bishops the succession inherited from the Roman Church, although the latter, officially, rejects Anglican

orders, citing a lack of correct intention and faulty ordination ritual, beginning with the consecration of Matthew Parker as Elizabeth I's Archbishop of Canterbury. The Church of Scotland rejected episcopacy altogether with a Presbyterian form of church organisation. The various national Lutheran churches often broke with the old Mediaeval lines of Roman Catholic succession, although retaining the office of bishop appointed under royal authority.

All this has led to interesting times for The Orthodox Church in its relations with the denominations of Christians throughout the world. It may be noticed, however, whenever a Roman Catholic priest seeks entry into the Orthodox Church, the general practice is that he is not ordained but is accepted by concelebration with the bishop. Anglican clergy, on the other hand, if they are to be received into the presbyterate, are received by Chrismation and Ordination, as happened to us in the original foundation of our archdiocese back in 1995.

The bishop is charged with watching over his flock, having a duty to superintend the congregations committed to his care. This is inherent in the name of the office itself. The English word, *bishop* comes from the Greek, *Episkopos* and the Latin, *Episcopus*, meaning, an overseer. It is an interesting choice as a term, as it was also used for an official in ancient Rome: an inspector or overseer of the public drainage system! But there again, the term Pontiff, as applied to the Bishop of Rome, has its origins in the pagan priestly colleges of the imperial city. The Pontifex Maximus was the city's highest priest who happened also to be responsible for the care of all the bridges in Rome: *Pontifex* meaning a kind of chief bridge builder. This was a function and title taken over by the Pope when Christianity replaced paganism. Sadly, since from about the year 1054, the bridge between the Orthodox Church and Rome has been down and awaits repair.

*Fr Chrysostom*

### The Orthodox Youth Festival

From Friday 3rd to Sunday 5th of June the Orthodox Youth Festival took place at the Orthona Community near Bradwell-on-sea, Essex. I, John (Cameron), attended with our friend Robert. The Festival was organised by 'The Orthodox Christian Youth of Great Britain' for Orthodox Christians, catechumens and enquirers between their late teens and early thirties. The theme of the Festival was 'Life as Communion', and the weekend centred around talks and Q&A sessions centred on this subject, exploring such questions as what it means for us to be Eucharistic beings, and what that should and does do to our relationships with God, other people and the wider world around us. Upon arriving at the venue, I was struck by the beauty of the location. The complex of buildings was interspersed with flowerbeds, vegetable gardens and busy bird-feeders. Orthona is situated among woods nearby the sea, within the Dengie National Nature Reserve, besides the ruins of the ancient Roman 'Orthona' fortress. Significantly, this was the place where Saint Cedd of Lindisfarne established a thriving monastic centre which became the central hub for the conversion of the East Saxons to Orthodox Christianity during the 7th Century. Just on the other side of the Blackwater Estuary from the Orthona Community is the Monastery of St. John the Baptist, founded by St. Sophrony of Essex. The first people we spoke to were a number of

fellow young attendees from numerous Orthodox parishes of different jurisdictions from around the country. From the very start, all the way through the weekend, our conversations were fun and thought-provoking, as we related and compared our experiences and thoughts as young Orthodox Christians from various cultural backgrounds (British-born or immigrant; 'cradle Orthodox' or convert; etc.) Since attending the Festival I now have Orthodox friends in cities all around the U.K. who would be glad to make us welcome in their parishes if we visited. We might be a small portion of the entire British population, demographically speaking, but through networking at this event, I know I have Orthodox Christian contacts wherever I go in the country.

Shortly after arriving at the Festival, we were fed an delicious Friday fast-friendly lunch. It should be known that the Orthona Community keeps a well-stocked, well-equipped and well-staffed kitchen which did an excellent job at catering for us all. Meals always commenced with a blessing led by one of the attending Orthodox clergymen, and during each meal I sat with different people and enjoyed an array of interesting conversations whilst eating.

Every day of the Festival we were able to listen to engaging and edifying lectures given by a range of attending speakers, and we also participated in several fiery and thoughtful Question-and-Answer sessions. The first speaker on Friday was Fr. Stephen Platt, of the Russian parish of St. Nicholas in Oxford, who in a gentle and steady manner-of-speech exposed and explored the enigmatic 'Road to Emmaus' episode as the first recorded post-Resurrectional Divine Liturgy. Later that evening we heard a lecture given by Fr. Alexander Tefft, from our Antiochian Archdiocese, who serves as the parish priest at St. Botolph's Orthodox Church in central London. In the notebook which I was given, I underlined the word '*epéktaſis*' (ἐπέκτασις) which I jotted down during this talk, and which in passages of Holy Scripture such as Philippians 3:13 means something like a 'straining-forth-towards'. Fr. Alexander spoke (among many other subjects) of how our repentant life of '*theosis*' as communing Christians can and should be characterised by this sense of '*epéktaſis*'.

The lively Marina Robb (a theologian, religious education teacher and leader of catechetical classes within the Greek Archdiocese of Thyateira) picked up on this theme of '*epéktaſis*' during her talk the next day, which was informed by her youthful experiences living with nuns in Greece. Later, on Saturday, we were graced with the company of His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateria, who quite casually spoke with us in the common room area of the Orthona complex. All of the lectures can be found recently uploaded on the UK Orthodox Youth YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/c/OFSJBYouthUK/vid eos>).

Naturally, the high point of the weekend was the Divine Liturgy, of the 7th Sunday of Pascha. Before the Liturgy, Fr. Alexander Tefft gave us a fascinating lesson on priestly vesting and the division of the prosphora. The Divine Liturgy was served in the tall but simple ancient Anglo-Saxon church built by St. Cedd's monks called St. Peter-on-the-Wall: we had already used this church for our morning and evening prayers through the weekend. It was humbling participating in one of the first canonically Orthodox Divine Liturgies to be served in that church since before the Great Schism. Fr. Alexander's homily was unforgettably unique and impassioned. I could go on (I didn't mention the campfire or walk!), but to summarise, the festival was a

thoroughly enriching intellectual, social and spiritual experience. If you have any questions, please speak to me at Agape after the Divine Liturgy. The Festival was organised by the youth wing of the Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist, a society which will be hosting a conference at Walsingham during late August, covering the subject of Angelic Beings, involving guest speakers Fr. Stephen de Young and iconographer Tamara Penwell. There is much to get involved with around the UK as an Orthodox Christian, if you are interested!

*John Wemyss*

### SERVICES

*Vespers is normally served on Saturdays at 5.00pm (Please enter by the side door)*

*Fr Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards or by appointment. Fr Filip is available for Confession by appointment*  
**Orthros is served before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at 8.45am**

### July

Sun 3rd 3rd after Pentecost  
All the Saints of Antioch  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 10th 4th after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 17th 5th after Pentecost  
**Visit of His Eminence Metropolitan Silouan**  
Episcopal Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 24th 6th after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 31st 7th After Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

### August

Sat 1st Beginning of the Dormition  
Fast

Sat 6 Transfiguration (service to be announced)

Sun 7th 8th after Pentecost  
Afterfeast of Transfiguration  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am



Sun 14th 9th after Pentecost  
Forefeast of the Dormition  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 15th Dormition (service to be announced)

Sun 21st 10th after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 28th 11th after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am