

THE NARTHEX

Sept-Oct 2018

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

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

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Something Understood

*Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
The milkie way, the bird of paradise,
Church-bels beyond the starres heard,
The souls blood,
The land of spices; something understood.*
GEORGE HERBERT (1593-1633)

At certain times during the Divine Liturgy, the deacon exclaims, *Stand upright!* Indeed, it has been the tradition within Orthodox liturgical practice to stand for prayer since the days of the Apostles. This was inherited from Old Testament practice but takes on a dynamic character in the New Covenant in Christ.

There are, of course, exceptions to this posture: one thinks of the Kneeling Prayers at Pentecost or the natural inclination to go down on ones knees as an expression of repentance. (However, we might recall the repentant publican in the gospel 'who stood a long way off...' [Lk.18:13]) But under normal circumstances, we stand.

The prime reason for this tradition of standing for prayer is symbolic. I do not mean by that, mere symbolism and that is all, as if it were of no real importance. The word, *symbolic*, refers here to the physical manifestation of something spiritual. There is no mere symbolism in the Orthodox faith and practice; the whole point of our religion, in terms of praxis, is that everything becomes sacramental for us; an expression of *something understood* among us.

Apart from those who, for obvious reasons, are unable to stand for long periods, or cannot stand at all, in standing for prayer, whether during the liturgical services or in our own prayers at home, we are doing so for two clear reasons.

The primary reason is that, having been baptised into Christ's death we now stand with Him in His resurrection. In other words, standing is a mark of our dignity in the New Adam; not the arrogance of human pride, rooted in the old Adam, but a mark of the grace with which we have been blessed and in which we stand before God.

Standing is certainly the normal posture for worship on all Sundays of the year, in commemoration of the Resurrection. And indeed, the Holy canons actually forbid kneeling for worship during the whole of the season of Pascha. (They also forbid fasting at that time as well, which is still Antiochian practice.)

The second reason is really ascetic. Standing for long periods does, of course, take effort. Having been raised up with Christ to this dignity, we stand in Him not just for our own sakes but as servants, waiting on God. In a paradox, our service is the discovery of the perfect freedom. All our ascetic practice, as part of our life in the Church, takes real effort. Our fasting takes effort; our time given to prayer takes effort; so does our charity, our turning of the other cheek, our forgiveness of others, our fostering of a humble spirit: all of it is a synergy, a co-operation with Grace, forming within us the lineaments of the New Adam. The very word, *Liturgy*, means a public service. We talk of priests *servicing* the Liturgy; of those who approach the holy chalice as the *servants* and *handmaidens* of the Lord. Truly, in standing for the liturgical services we are the servants of God, as Christ Himself was among us as one who serves (Mk.10:43-45).

Bearing this in mind, it is normal to think of the temple, the Orthodox Church building, as having few seats. It strikes me as a shame that so many newer church buildings, especially those in the Greek tradition, seem to be filled with seating, whether chairs or pews. Is this because the people have become, suddenly, ascetically weak? Is it because the seats are required now by congregations that have grown old and are not renewing themselves with younger members?

In the past, in both the churches of the west, as well as the east, there was little by way of seating until the Protestant Reformation. Monastic churches would have misericords for monks to rest upon and, as the expression says in English, 'the weak go to the wall,' where there would be seats for those who needed them. Pews were a Protestant addition to the naves of the Reformed churches, suited to their new services. Having removed most of the

symbolic beauty and ritual employed in the old Catholic rites and ceremonies, what was once liturgical, they replaced with long sermons and the exhortations of a more verbose and didactic form of worship. Worshippers became sedentary listeners.

I remember once, when I was teaching in Nottinghamshire, I had the opportunity to visit Lincoln Cathedral. I was delighted to discover that in that great mediaeval building, there were no pews in the nave; the vast floor space was empty, save for the great columns. (There were, of course, stacking-chairs at the sides which were put out for the Anglican services.) Two lessons were confirmed for me during this visit. Firstly, that if you wish to improve the internal appearance of any building, then take things out! Great architecture can stand for itself when not cluttered. Secondly, there is an artistic rule that I have always found to be true: you can put old items into a new building (they look curious and interesting) but you cannot put new items into an old building; they become an eyesore. Sadly, they had made this mistake at Lincoln Cathedral, with a hideously modern metal construction, erected over the tomb of Hugh of Lincoln at the east end of the building.

In short, then, there is no reason for ranks of seats in our Orthodox Churches. One of the great blessings of our own building is that there were no pews from its original Anglican days. The two long wooden benches that are there were originally used by the choir. We do indeed have stacking-chairs, stored along the north wall, and these may be used if you need to sit during the homily, for example. They are also used when there are musical concerts in the nave. (One practical point: if you do use a chair, it would be much appreciated if they were replaced afterwards and in stacks of no more than six chairs.) But whether you stand or have to sit at certain times, there are points in the service when we should stand, if *physically able*.

These times are:

- Whenever the priest comes out of the altar and into the nave.
- At the opening blessing
- During any processions
- During the chanting of the gospel (kneeling at this point is a curious and unusual custom, followed by some, not to be encouraged).
- During the Creed
- During the Anaphora (Eucharistic Prayer). At weekday liturgies one may make a full prostration following the epiclesis, which invites the Holy Spirit to complete the consecration ('*Changing them by Thy Holy Spirit...*').
- Whenever the command, 'stand upright!' is given.
- The final blessing.

Orthodox liturgical and spiritual life is, in fact, also very physical; it involves the body, for the body, alongside the spirit, has been sanctified in Baptism and we shall be raised up at the last with spiritual bodies, or rather, bodies that have been spiritualised, just as, currently, we have spirits that have been manifestly made physical. Therefore we use the body in worship, training it (hence ascetic practice) in the ways and the service of the kingdom of heaven. This is why we make the sign of the cross frequently; we perform metanoias and full prostrations; we bow the head when the command is given during the service; when receiving a blessing, we cup our hands together and bow the head; we kiss icons and similarly, reverence the hands of our priests and bishops; we greet each other with a holy kiss. All our major senses are employed and engaged in our worship. Certainly our cerebral and intellectual powers are, likewise, engaged but not on their own, as if we come to church only to think about our salvation. We do that, but not that alone. Our churches are not lecture halls. It is true that the great St Benedict of Nursia thought of his monastery as 'a school of the Lord's service' and there is much, quite rightly, that we learn at church. But in the first place, we must consider the sacred temple as the place on earth where we encounter, even now before the time, life in the kingdom of God. We know, morally, that if we are not to be judged hypocrites, our life should be no different, whether we are in or outside the church building, integrating the kingdom and its service (liturgy) with our daily lives. In church we should be humble, knowing we are servants of God and one another; we should be joyful, living in hope of the coming of the Lord; we should allow nothing to disturb our peace; we should be repentant and made ready to perform our service in whatever office we find ourselves within the body of Christ. In part, the building itself and all it contains, should help us in this holy

endeavour. It is a mark of our commitment to the ascetic life – the spiritual training of the body – that we can carry all this across once we have left the sacred courts and portals of the Lord.

Fr Chrysostom



Developments in the Church Building

It was in great joy that, on Sunday 19th August, we received into the temple the original, handwritten icon of our Patron, St Dunstan. We have had a lithographic copy for some years, of course, but I have long known of the existence of the original at Glastonbury Abbey House, written in 1991 by the Monk Alypi at the Kiev Caves Monastery, Ukraine. I remember the very first time that I saw it, when I was overawed by its numinous quality. From the sacred images of the Holy Trinity, to the saints of God, icons manifest the persons (hypostases) depicted and I was particularly struck by the sense of 'presence' in this icon we have been given.

When the Abbey House closed as a retreat centre I contacted my friend, the icon painter, John Coleman, regarding the possibility of obtaining the icon of St Dunstan, as he had contacts in Glastonbury. In fact, it was put into the care of the local Anglican parish church, so that through the generosity and understanding of the vicar, the Rev'd David MacGeoch and the good offices of John Coleman, we have now become the custodians of the icon: a real answer to prayers.

Further to what was written in the Jul-Aug edition of the Narthex, we have now estimated the cost, as suggested, of moving the high altar that stands under the canopy. Unfortunately, this has proved far too expensive, so it will stay where it is. Before too long, however, we hope to be able to reorganise the church furnishings in order to use the area of the high altar for the liturgy. The main icon stands for the front of the altar are being prepared. You will see two already in situ with temporary icons, if you venture up towards the high altar. Using the high altar will entail putting the current iconostasis into storage and moving various items in the nave forward by one bay.

Before this can happen, though, we need to acquire suitable music stands for the choir that would not be out of place behind the balustrades, either side of the steps. The altar party, clergy and servers, will also have to work out the liturgical 'choreography' to make sure that the various processions and movements during the service are possible and dignified.

The principal icons for the people to venerate, with their votive candle stands, will be moved from the west end to just below the steps. The new icon of St Dunstan will have its own shrine on the north side against the pier abutting onto the steps.



SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturdays at 5.00pm and on Wednesdays at 6.00pm. *Fr. Chrysostom* is available for Confession afterwards or by appointment. *Orthros* is served before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at 9.00am

September

Sat 1st Beginning of the Church Year

Sun 2nd 14th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sat 8th Nativity of the Theotokos



Sun 9th 15th after Pentecost Sunday before the Exaltation Divine Liturgy 10.30am



Friday 14th Exaltation of the Holy Cross Baptism & Divine Liturgy 11.00am

Sun 16th 16th after Pentecost Sunday after the Exaltation Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 23rd 17th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 30th 18th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

October

Sun 7th 19th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 14th 20th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 21st 21st after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 28th 22nd after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am [NB Clocks go forward one hour]