

# THE NARTHEX

January-February 2021

'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

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland. Archbishop: Metropolitan Silouan

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Patriarch: His Beatitude, John X

Parish Priest: Fr. Chrysostom Tel. 01202-602628 email: fr.chrysostom@gmx.com

Asst Priest: Fr Filip Tel. 01308-868543 email: frfiliplommaert@gmx.com

Subdeacon David Tel. 01209-217499

Parish web site: [www.saint-dunstan.org](http://www.saint-dunstan.org) Archdiocesan web site: [www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk](http://www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk)



## DEMONOLOGY

During the North Africa Campaign in the Second World War, Field Marshall Montgomery used to keep on his desk a photograph of his opponent, Rommel. He used to study the face of his enemy in order to try to understand his character, and to help him imagine what he might be planning. This may or may not be a good technique in earthly warfare. We, however, are engaged in a spiritual warfare where the tactics and strategy usually require a very different approach. As St Paul writes, *'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.'* [Eph.6:2]

Let me say from the outset that the topic of this edition of the Narthex is, indeed, a difficult one for all sorts of reasons. For most of us, when it comes to a knowledge of the workings of the demonic, it is not advisable to stare into the face of the enemy. It is interesting, by the way, that in the holy icons any demons that are depicted are properly painted in profile, so that the worshipper does not look directly into their faces.

Although we know much about the Bodiless Powers (angels) from Holy Tradition, including the scriptures, and indeed, teach about them in detail to the catechumens, we do not do the same with the demons, apart from a basic knowledge of their existence and of their role in trying to draw us away from God and His kingdom. This is because there is always a danger for the innocent mind, or a mind not fixed on Christ, to be beguiled by evil, just as in the primal story, Eve is beguiled by the serpent. Perhaps the most we need know of the workings of the demons can be found in C.S. Lewis'

often entertaining treatment of the subject, *The Screwtape Letters*. The social milieu of the Britain of which Lewis writes has, of course, changed now, but the lessons remain the same. A classic of satire, the book, first published in 1942, is based around the correspondence between a senior devil and his nephew who is charged with trying to tempt a young man away from a godly life. The power of the book lies in the skilful way that Lewis portrays the workings of the demonic mind, examining temptation, not so much from our normal and limited perspective, but from that of the demons, whose prime objective is our destruction.

In the prayer that Our Lord taught His disciples, we pray that we be not led into temptation. God, of course, does not tempt us; the phrase is an Aramaic circumlocution, a round-about way of asking to be guided away *from* temptation. We undergo temptation for various reasons: our fallen nature as human beings, the proclivities and weaknesses of our own personalities and, of course, the suggestive, spiritual influence of the demons. Perhaps, we might properly say, that all these are really combined. Sin is not the state of being tempted in any particular situation: we only start to be accountable for sin once we let the mind dwell upon the temptation. Once the thought enters the heart, we then begin to fall for the trick. There are also sins that we repeat so often that they become habitual and here, temptation becomes very easy, where our response is somewhat like that of the proverbial Pavlov's dog, with the mind racing into action without us even pausing to check ourselves.

The good news for Christians baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, is that the demons are outside us, not within any longer. At

our Rite of Baptism we prepare the candidate with four prayers of exorcism, and also anoint them with the Oil of Catechumens before they descend into the waters. In the early Church these prayers and anointings were usually done during a period of fasting before the service (which is, in fact, the origin of Great Lent). From then on we are, in the words of the service, enlisted as warriors of Christ, blessed to wage the spiritual warfare against all evil.

If the matter rested there, temptation would be straightforward; the demons, though, are nothing if not subtle. It is one thing to be sober and watchful over the state of our own souls, but we also need to be aware how human institutions themselves, even churches, can be 'infested.' That is, the people operating within institutions, can be unaware of how they have, collectively, been beguiled and duped to follow erroneous and ultimately, sinful paths.

Following the teaching of the first epistle of St John, [1Jn.4:1-3] we are wise to test the spirits. The Catholic-Orthodox Church of Jesus Christ is assured - by Christ Himself - that the gates of Hell will never prevail against her [Matt.16:18]. But patriarchates, local churches and individual parishes are required to be vigilant, testing the spirits of this age. It is not good, perhaps, to pry into private grief, but a close examination of what has happened to the western heterodox churches can serve as a salutary warning to us. In short, a very grave temptation that institutions (including religious ones) can be led into, is that of distraction from their primary

purpose; it is a terrible strength of the demons that they are rarely distracted from theirs! A perfect example of this is the recent controversy surrounding The National Trust, a charitable institution that aims to preserve significant buildings and landscapes as part of our national heritage. That is its primary purpose. It has, however, of late, taken upon itself to promote the causes of certain invidious political campaigns which have seeped into and have influenced, over time, other national institutions. The destructive effects of inculcating false guilt for historic situations, for which we cannot have been responsible, can only result in the breakdown of human relationships. The National Trust has a definite, educative function; it cannot just grandstand its politically correct credentials, focusing on a limited view of the past, for whatever reason. We can certainly discern the demonic, at work here.

To say in addition that the indigenous population really has no right to what it has inherited, *by privilege*, from the past because of connections with a despicable trade in human lives, is to ignore the realities of factual history and the actual interconnectedness of historic societies. Am I, for example, to hand back in shame my Theological degree to Bristol University, because that institution had been greatly endowed by the Wills family, who happened to have made their money in the tobacco industry? Wherever we come from in the world, we are, all of us, the inheritors of the legacies of our ancestors, for good or ill, whether just or unjust. It is always a precarious and usually futile, ethical game to attempt judgment on the past according to one's own standards – judge not that you be not judged – lest a later generation justifiably despise those same values and mores.

It is not hard to see how, what appear on the surface, to be 'good causes,' can gradually pervert our purpose. As it says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians [11:14] the devil himself can appear as an angel (messenger) of light. It seems that many of the western heterodox churches have been taken in by what amounts to Antichrist masquerading as a pacifist, an anti-racist, an environmentalist, a pan-sexualist, an ecumenist, a pan-inclusivist, in order to take over the agenda and push Our Lord and faith

in His resurrection into the background. This is not to say that the Orthodox Church does not take a view on any of these subjects or teach about them, but that her teaching is not drawn from the world, nor is her agenda: we have but one teacher, the mind of Christ. The demonic lies in the temptation of letting these fragmented causes take over as the main purpose of our religion and eventually, come to regard them as the most important. Sadly, we do see this happening in certain other Christian groups, where the Faith becomes merely a means of achieving the world's aims: how the demons must laugh with glee!

Such then, is our own battle against the demonic, whether individual or institutional. As for the ministry of casting out demons, the exorcism of houses etcetera, that belongs properly to the ordained clergy (Lk.10:19-20). It is an area of pastoral care with which I have had quite some experience over the years. It is a ministry that should be engaged in quietly and we must studiously avoid the more cinematographic sensationalism that can be so readily attached to it. However, it is there as a ministry, nevertheless.

Meanwhile, for all of us, generally, our Orthodox prayer books contain forms of words readily available for use in our own journey through life and its temptations, and prayers for God's mighty protection in all demonic attacks. This does, nonetheless, call for great discernment on the part of the people that God has made His own. We do well to call to mind the words of St Peter regarding watchfulness, *'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.'* [1Pet.5:8]

*Fr Chrysostom*



**From the Prayer of St Sophronius for the Great Blessing of Waters**

*... Today the Prophet and Forerunner approaches the Master, but stands before Him with trembling, seeing the condescension of God towards us. Today the waters of the Jordan are transformed into healing by the coming of the Lord. Today the whole creation is watered by mystical streams. Today the transgressions of men are washed away by the waters of the Jordan. Today Paradise has been opened to men and the Sun of Righteousness shines down upon us ...*



**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*

**JANUARY**

- Sun 3<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Theophany  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
- Tues 5<sup>th</sup> Vespers Divine Liturgy of St Basil & Great Blessing of the Waters  
6.00pm



- Wed 6<sup>th</sup> Theophany of our Lord Jesus Christ

- Sun 10 Sunday after Theophany  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

- Sun 17<sup>th</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Luke  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

- Sun 24<sup>th</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Luke  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

- Sun 31<sup>st</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Luke  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

**FEBRUARY**

- Tues 2<sup>nd</sup> The Meeting of Our Lord (Presentation in the Temple)



- Sun 7<sup>th</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Matthew  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

- Sun 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of The Cannaanite Woman  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

- Sun 21<sup>st</sup> Beginning of the Triodion  
The Publican and the Pharisee  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

- Sun 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Prodigal Son  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am