

THE NARTHEX

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

March-April 2022

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

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Communion

'Look, I entreat you, a royal table is set before you, angels minister at the table, the King Himself is there, and do you stand gaping? ...Then partake.... For everyone that does not partake of the Mysteries is standing here in shameless effrontery. It is for this reason that they which are in sins are first of all sent out....You [who are not partaking] are no more allowed to be here than the catechumen is.'

This quotation comes from St John Chrysostom's third Homily on the epistle to the Ephesians. It seems that by the fourth century the regular and frequent receiving of Holy Communion by the congregation had gone into decline. The reasons for this are obscure, but perhaps, many and varied. Clearly, there was the growing sense of holy fear and awe that pervaded the Liturgy itself, coming in gradually from time of St Constantine the Great. There was, of course, the demands of proper spiritual preparation and fasting involved in receiving each Sunday, but this was long before most people might be able to recite formal prayers of preparation, easily available in relatively cheap printed books. There was also the fact that large numbers of formerly pagan people were being brought into the Church. Many put off baptism until the end of their lives, reluctant to take up the moral and ascetic demands of following in the way of Christ.

During the first two centuries of Christianity, the faithful took part in the holy mysteries of Christ, knowing that the whole purpose was to commune with the Holy Gifts. Indeed, before the influx of large numbers of pagan and barbarian peoples, it was common for people to take the sacrament away with them after the service to communicate themselves during the week, in much the same way that people take away the Antidoron nowadays. St Basil writes of how his practice was to receive four times a week.

The same decline in communion happened in the West as well, so that from the early Middle Ages the norm was for most people to receive only at Pascha (Easter Sunday), once a year, although some might receive on certain occasions, such as before going on pilgrimage or other important life events.

Previously, as was done in the

ancient rite of Jerusalem, the Liturgy of St James, the faithful received the Body of Christ into their hands and drank the precious blood from the chalice, exactly as the clergy still do now. In the East, it seems, with only children being frequent communicants, the use of the liturgical spoon must have become more convenient. Whereas, in the West, the chalice itself was denied the people and they received in one kind only. Added to this was a growing clericalism, so that receiving communion became something that priests did, and the people often became not much more than passive bystanders. In fact, in the Mediaeval West, better off people could occupy their minds whilst attending Mass by reading books of devotions. But the clergy are not there to receive communion on behalf of the people, they are there to minister to them. The point is, Holy Communion sustains within us the new life in Christ that we entered at our baptism. Without it we cannot grow in grace. (There are exceptions, like the extreme ascetic, St Mary of Egypt, but most of us are still battling our sins.)

To some extent, frequent communion as the norm among the Orthodox has been recovered, particularly in this country. But this, naturally, raises the question of the opposite danger of unworthy reception (see 1 Cor.11:27). Some Orthodox jurisdictions also expect confession before every communion which is, for many, another hurdle in the way.



How then do we balance these two: the proper fear of unworthy reception on the one hand, and cutting ourselves off from communion altogether? Many may suggest that they are uneasy, not being worthy of communion. Well, none of us is worthy of it; that's the point! If we were worthy (full of grace) we would not need communion. What we need to be is open to our need for grace. When I am preparing catechumens for entry into the Orthodox Church, I teach that weekly

reception on the Lord's Day should be the norm; that it involves repentance, examining our souls, fasting from midnight and devout reading of the prayers of preparation. From time to time also, they should go to confession, especially before the great feasts. Should they fall into serious sin, however, then they must abstain until they have been to confession.

St John Chrysostom pleads in his homily, *'I entreat you not to forbear coming to church, but to render yourselves worthy of being present and of approaching [for Communion].'* Some also need to be aware that the Holy Canons of the Church are quite clear, that those who never prepare and receive communion have excommunicated themselves. Let's be blunt: if you have not received communion for a whole year you are *not* a member of the Orthodox Church. *'And those persons who enter the church and listen to the sacred Scriptures, but shun the participation in the Eucharist,...we decree that these people be outcasts from the Church until they confess and exhibit the fruits of repentance.'* (Canon 2 of the Council of Antioch, 330AD). Those who are in such a state will certainly need to go to confession before presuming to approach the chalice. Incidentally, the same applies to those who wilfully fail to come to the Liturgy on three consecutive Sundays without due cause.

Children, of course, are brought frequently to communion, but what about many of their parents? Some small children display reluctance to receive when they are brought to the chalice. But why shouldn't they? Their parents often do not receive. Why? If you wish your children to grow up in Christ then you have to lead by example.

There is indeed a creative tension between the fear of unworthy reception and our need to receive grace in communion. In the end it can only be pride, sloth or a lamentable lack of zeal that keeps us unready when the Lord comes. As it says in the Liturgy, *'With fear of God, and faith and love, draw near.'*

Fr Chrysostom

Your Church and Parish needs your help!

The Holy Apostle James teaches: *What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith, and have not works, can faith save him?... Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also (James 2:14,17,26). For our salvation one needs not simply faith alone but works also.*

Your Church needs your works. From next week, the maintenance plan for the next 4 weeks will be displayed at the back of the Church. Clearly, there are many talented people in our Parish, so we hope that those who are able to undertake some of this work will volunteer their services. Please speak to Father Filip if you are able to do some of the tasks that need doing. No tasks that need specialist knowledge or qualifications will be on the list. We already have some committed volunteers who provide sterling work, but we need more!

Faith is the foundation of all good deeds, and without faith it is impossible to please the Lord (Heb. 11:6). Faith is the gift of God, but we still have to accompany it by good work (Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:19-20).

The next point is that the finances of the Parish are in a parlous state. It costs over £3,000 per month just to open the doors every Saturday and Sunday. This includes the Parish contribution for the maintenance of our Metropolitan (Fr Chrysostom and Fr Filip do not receive a stipend). And this does not take into account the volunteer work done by for instance our webmaster, who donates a free hosting service, and others who donate their services for free. During the last 2 years, what reserves the Parish had have dwindled and now are almost nothing.

Shutdowns and lower attendance played a role, certainly. But the average donation per parishioner also has gone down, and although the number of regular attendants has increase, the donations have not increased accordingly. Of course, we realise that not everybody earns large sums, and some have really struggled during the pandemic. The Parish team therefore hoped and prayed that the contributions from the parishioners would rise again. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

Matthew 6:2 When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the

synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get.

In the next twelve months we will face many more financial challenges: only half the roofs have so far been repaired, at a cost of nearly £250.000, of which some £167.000 came from a Heritage Fund grant. The remainder of the costs were born by the Parish and the Bournemouth-Poole Orthodox Christian Foundation, which owns the buildings and land. The roof over the connection between the Church and the Hall needs repairing too. We need to strive to raise more funds to repair the other half of the roofs.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8: Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Now the Antiochian Woman group has been established, more fundraising efforts will be organised. These women will engage in the works which are required for their salvation and support of their faith. It is hoped that this will improve the finances somewhat. However, it will not be sufficient to organise regular fundraisers, which costs time and effort. The entire Parish will have to pull together and support the functioning of the Church and Parish. We therefore invite you to set up a standing order at your bank, making a fixed monthly donation **within your means**. You can find the Parish bank account information on our website, www.saint-dunstan.org. (A standard form for this, with bank account details, can be obtained from Kh. Annemieke.) If you are a taxpayer, please also sign a Gift Aid form. This will enable us to claim £0.25 from the Government for each pound you donate.

Acts 20:35 And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Presbytera Annemieke



PRACTICAL TIPS

When receiving holy communion, make sure that you hold your head upright, do not look down, so that the priest can administer the Holy Gifts from the spoon directly into your mouth. Also, gentlemen with moustaches should be sure to trim them from over their upper lip before they come to church.

SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturdays at 5.00pm and on Wednesdays at 6.00pm. (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

March

Sun 6th Cheesefare Sunday
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 7th **Beginning of Great Lent**

Sun 13th First of Great Lent
Sunday of Orthodoxy
Divine Liturgy & Procession 10.30am

Sun 20th Second of Great Lent
St Gregory Palamas
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Fri 25th Annunciation of Our Lady

Sun 27th Third of Great Lent
Veneration of the Cross
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

April

Sun 3rd Fourth of Great Lent
St John of the Ladder
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 10th Fifth of Great Lent
St Mary of Egypt
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 17th Entry of Our Lord
(Palm Sunday)
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Passion Week

18th Great & Holy Monday
19th Great & Holy Tuesday
20th Great & Holy Wednesday
Anointing Service 7.00pm
21st Great & Holy Thursday
Vespers Divine Liturgy of the Mystical Supper 11.00am
Service of the Twelve Gospels 6.30pm
22nd Great & Holy Friday
Vespers of the Shroud 4.00pm
Orthos (Lamentations Service) 6.30pm
23rd Great & Holy Saturday
Midnight Office, Rush Procession & Orthros & Divine Liturgy 10.00pm



24 **Sunday of Holy Pascha**
Vespers of Love 2.30pm