

THE NARTHEX

May-June 2020

'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 e-mail: fr.chrysostom@gmx.com

Asst Priest: Fr Filip Tel. 01308-868543 e-mail: frfiloplommaert@gmx.com

Asst Priest: Fr Alexander Tel. 07765417610 e-mail: fr.Alexander@gmx.com

Subdeacon David Tel. 01209-217499

Parish web site: www.saint-dunstan.org Archdiocesan web site: www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk



Time and Salvation

Time's Pace is a poem by Henry Twells (1823-1900) and concerns an odd phenomenon, of which most of us become aware; that is, the experience of Time becoming faster as we get older. The words of the poem are these:

*When as a child I laughed and wept,
Time crept.*

*When as a youth I waxed more bold,
Time strolled.*

*When I became a full grown man,
Time ran.*

*When older still I daily grew,
Time flew.*

*Soon I shall find, in passing on,
Time gone.*

*O Christ! wilt Thou have saved me then?
Amen.*

For most of us now, I suspect, Time has become a very concrete idea, one that has become even more concrete since the invention of mechanical clocks. In particular, the ownership of clocks and, of course, the mass-wearing of wristwatches - something that grew after the First World War - means that the passing of time became visibly depicted before our very eyes. During the WWI wristwatches replaced the watch-and-chain for reasons of obvious convenience, when planning synchronised action in battle. Time itself had been 'nationalised' in Britain from the 1840's onwards due to the development of the railways and the need to have nationwide timetables for rail services. The industrialisation of labour, as well, played its part, dividing time into packages, with clocking-on and clocking off permitting the regulated payment by the hour for employers and wage earners alike.

Whereas in the past, right up to the eighteenth century, most people experienced time as sunrise, midday day (the sun overhead) and sunset, the changing seasons of the year, the agricultural and Church calendar, high days and holy days, now time is a commodity and a form of pressure on our activity.

Our ancestors always knew that our time on earth was limited, and to the Christian mind, contemplating the end, there was always the question of whether,

in Twell's words, '*wilt Thou have saved me then?*' But Time now has become very specific for us. It has, I think, taught us all to be impatient.

The odd thing, of course, is that Time is only a concept in our mind; of itself it does not exist as some force in the universe; it is an abstraction. If it is anything at all in terms of Physics, it can only be related to energy itself, and the movement of matter across space as a process, the action of sub-atomic particles, atoms and molecules in all their forms and combinations.

There is an infuriating (or fascinating according to your point of view) problem posed by the ancient Greek philosophers. Imagine an arrow being fired from a bow. It travels in an arc and finally lands in the earth. The flight of the arrow takes a certain amount of time, travelling from point A, where it was fired, to point B, where it landed. We must now ask ourselves the question, where is the arrow half-way through the time of its flight? If it is half-way across the arc, let's call it point x, then does it actually occupy that point in time? (that is, it is static at point x.) If so, it cannot be moving! We might imagine the front parts of the arrow passing through point x before the back parts of the arrow do, but how far across is point x? There must be a point A and a final point B in point x itself!

If you found that problem a little difficult to resolve, consider the conundrum of reverse infinity. An object is crossing two points, from A to B. Each time it moves it covers half the distance of its previous movement. So, if its first step was one meter (or 3 feet for those of us who prefer the old imperial measurements!) the second would be half a meter, then a quarter, then an eighth and so on. The question is, will the object ever reach point B?

We are Time-bound only in as much as Henry Twell pointed out: by getting older what is left to us becomes less and less and we experience it as less and less. Whichever horsemen of the Apocalypse takes us, Death, famine, plague or war, our form is prone to a kind of entropy and we will run down to a stop.

Considering these things, we can

understand why our perception of God is bound to view Him as eternal, outside and beyond the universe known to physics, contingent on nothing, purely being of Himself without beginning or end, *unoriginate*, as many of our liturgical texts put it.

Furthermore, the Church's revelation of God (what we know of Him) says that the Son is eternally begotten from the Father as the source of the divine nature. Without a beginning or an end, the Son, as in a mirror, is the reflected image of the Father, always being begotten, not 'made' in time, as the Arian heretics claimed. And equally part of the Triune Godhead, the Holy Spirit is eternally proceeding from the Father. So we know One Being, God in three persons, consubstantial in divinity.

Times and seasons, therefore, are of no direct relevance to, and certainly have no effect upon, God. Yet for us, it is a different matter, for though the human soul is eternal, we are indeed formed by what goes on within and around us and all our thoughts and actions in this creation of perceived time, space, energy and matter. As human beings we are profoundly affected by the limitations of our life here that make us what we are. We like the Trinity reflect a triune whole; in our case, body, spirit and soul. The corporeal body or the flesh will decay in time but is nevertheless, the manifestation of the image of God on earth, and that is its glory. However, it is often in conflict with our spirit, the life from God, the inner life and awareness that draws us up from mere animal existence. This is the spirit of life that was breathed into creation at the beginning, [Gen.1:2 & 2:7] giving life to all. This is life as an underlying spiritual reality [Greek: Ζωή] manifest, of course, in physical, biological life [Greek: Βίος]. Finally, there is the immortal soul, the individually aware Self which, in a work attributed to St Anthony the Great (*On the Character of Men*) is the breath of God, joined to our body to be tested and deified. The

soul is naturally at home in the body, It is not trapped or imprisoned in the flesh, as the Platonic philosophers and Gnostics thought. This is why biological death (the failure of the bodily systems) is the unnatural separation of body and soul; an estrangement that can only be overcome by the Resurrection. For it is in the destiny of our soul finally to find expression and be manifest once again beyond the spiritual alone, in the actual form of the resurrection body. Such is the teaching of the Orthodox Church.

Within the soul there is, as the fathers teach us, our highest faculty called the Intellect (Greek: *Nous*). This is above even what we call reason (the normal, logical analysing undertaken by the brain) as applied to the human mind, and when purified, can perceive the spiritual realities.

This Orthodox Christian understanding (Anthropology) of man we may consider well beyond our daily concerns, and perhaps even somewhat remote. We might think that it is more appropriate, more suited, to the pursuits of monastics in the ascetic life, endeavouring to have the mind dwell in the heart through practice of the *Prayer of the Heart*. Yet we who are so bound (unlike the ascetic or the true martyr) to the life of the body; the body upon which we cast so much of our concern, anxiety and care, and which is bound up with the busyness of the world and the noise of distractions, have still to consider how we use perceived time. It we cannot be so detached from the world and its concerns, what is served by, what is the purpose of, our time here?

If we are honest, we know only too well that conflict which exists between our physical self, our carnal instincts, fears and attractions, the power exerted over us by what we call the passions, on the one hand, and on the other, what we know to be our higher self, the spirit. It is a consequence of our falling away from the grace of God that the tripartite harmony of the human person has become fragmented and results in the *dis-ease* and discomfort within our body, our psychology and our understanding and, in turn affects our relations with each other. When we consider, furthermore, that at our Chrismation we received, as a guest, God the Holy Spirit, come to dwell within (as the apostles did at Pentecost) we begin to see in sharp relief the potential for a spiritual warfare within. According to St Serafim of Sarov, our task is to acquire the Spirit, more and more; to live as prompted by the Holy Spirit, or as St Paul puts it, to walk according to the Spirit. But then life here intervenes because, for us, the Ladder of Divine Ascent (as delineated for us by St John Climacus) is a time-bound ladder and the weight of spiritual gravity (the passion of sloth) is very great: we are easily distracted and pulled downward by life, temptation, and that

attachment and comfortable familiarity with the world that we know.

I was struck particularly this past Great Lent by the story of the ascetic, St Mary of Egypt. There is a line in the Troparion sung during her commemoration which might seem to some quite extreme, even reckless: *"Thou didst teach us to ignore the body because it is perishable, and attend to the concerns of the undying soul..."*

Hers, however, was a very specific vocation, a way of life far more advanced than the upward call in Christ that we received (1 Cor.7:17-20). Most monks and nuns do not live in the same kind of extreme, solitary mortification; few discerning spiritual fathers would feel able to grant a blessing to live like Mary of Egypt to many. At the very least, though, the Troparion teaches us that in all things, whilst we are still in Time, our soul's requirements take precedence over the body's demands. The battle we have is to teach the body to acknowledge and accept this. And this is a task of healing our demanding bodies and our fragmented psychology (that clouds the vision of the Intellect) and of bringing them into subjection to the Spirit.

Only in Christ is any of this possible and despite the uphill struggle, in Christ we are all called to battle: priest, layman, monastic, catechumen. None who wish to use Time well can exempt themselves from active service, which is why we have the four fasting seasons of the liturgical year. Even out feasting at this joyful season is not an indulgent feast where the appetites of the body are merely given free rein. Rather, the body now participates in a foretaste in symbols of that wedding feast of the Lamb that awaits us; that is, in God's good time, when what we now know as Time has reached its end.

Meanwhile, as Twell says in his poem, Time has crept, strolled, run and even flown by. *Tempus fugit, (time flies)* as they say, and as you have been reading this, a part of our time has indeed flown by, and cannot be recovered, yet Twell's question at the end still stands...

Fr Chrysostom

KNOWING THE GLORY OF GOD

One who stands beside the sea sees the infinite ocean of waters but cannot grasp the extent of them... So it is with one who is judged worthy to fix his gaze in contemplation on the infinite ocean of God's glory and behold Him with the intelligence: he sees only what the spiritual eyes of his soul can grasp... Just as one who enters the waters of the sea up to his knees or his waist sees clearly what is outside the water, but if he plunges into the depths and is wholly covered by the water, can no longer see anything outside the water, and knows nothing else than that he is in the depths of the sea, so it is with those who increase in spiritual progress and come to perfection of knowledge and contemplation.

St Symeon the New Theologian AD949-1022

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.

Orthros is served before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at 8.45am

NB Under current circumstances, at the time of publication, we cannot say whether the church will be open to all. We are therefore asked to be patient, to continue in prayer and await announcements.

May

Sun 3rd Third Sunday of Pascha
The Holy Myrrhbearers Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 10th Fourth Sunday of Pascha
The Paralyse Man Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 17th fifth Sunday of Pascha
The Samaritan Woman Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 24th Sixth Sunday of Pascha
The Blind Man Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Wed 27th Leavetaking of Pascha

Thurs 28th The Ascension of Our Lord

June

Mon 1st Nun-Martyr Wite, Patroness of Dorset

Sun 7th Holy Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Fast-Free Week

Sun 14th First after Pentecost
All Saints Divine Liturgy 1.30am

Mon 15th Beginning of the Apostles' Fast

Sun 21st Second after Pentecost
All Saints of Britain Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 28th Third after Pentecost
All Saints of Antioch Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 29th Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul

