

THE NARTHEX

The disciples were first called Christian in Antioch (Acts.11:26)

The Newsletter of St Dunstan's Antiochian Orthodox Church, Poole BH14 9JG. The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of Great Britain and Ireland. Metropolitan Silouan. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Patriarch John X.

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CONTINUITY

In spiritual matters there is an interesting tension between stability and exploration. Spiritual searching and investigation are real features of human experience; an inner drive that, with an open mind, asks questions and tests propositions. Indeed, we regard people who just accept everything that they are told as gullible, even foolish. However, there comes a point where the searching has to end, when restlessness is satisfied and the soul is able to abide in peace.

St Benedict of Nursia who, in the sixth century, wrote down his Rule for the monastic life in the West, highlighted three aspects of that life: stability, obedience and conversion of life. Stability was particularly important in his day, when there were those who claimed to be monks, wandering from monastery to monastery, seeking what suited them best. Itinerant monks, Benedict discovered, were no good to themselves, nor for the monastic life.

Considering those monastic virtues, it might be imagined that somehow there is a contradiction in maintaining stability on the one hand, and conversion of life on the other, inasmuch as conversion implies change. This, though, is not true: conversion here, akin to repentance (metanoia) is in fact a continuous turning back to what is stable, fixed and abiding; a tactical retreat from spiritual wandering.

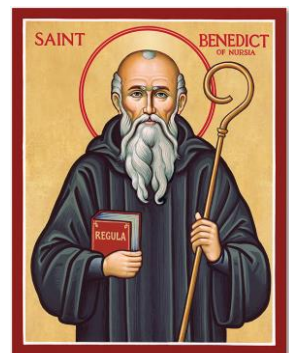
In referring to all this, I have in mind that our experience of the Orthodox Faith is one of establishment upon a firm foundation and built upon the rock of the true confession (cf Matt 7:24; 16:18). We have no spiritual need to search anywhere else for the truth of our salvation. The Orthodox Christ is the same one discovered by Blessed Augustine of Hippo: *'For Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.'* (The Confessions)

Since Pentecost, fifty days after Our Lord's resurrection, the Orthodox-Catholic Church has become the custodian, proclaimer and celebrant of Holy Tradition, symbolised in the Pearl of Great Price (Matt 13:45-46). This is not some deadening set of customs, tediously passed on, merely because it always has been there. Holy Tradition is the voice of the Holy Spirit in the Church, giving authority, authenticity, power and illumination to all who share in its grace.

In other words, the point being made is that Orthodox Christianity is marked not by instability but by continuity. Although individuals may wander and become lost, the faith of the Church stands firm (cf Matt 16:17-19). It is indeed continuity along its own path that authenticates the Orthodox Church in a passing world, standing in marked contrast to what has happened, historically, to that same faith in the West from about the eighth century onwards.

The original deposit of the faith was preserved within the bounds of the old Eastern Roman Empire. It spread, of course, also into the West very early as well, and initially flourished even, here, in the British Isles. After the collapse and fragmentation of the Empire in the West, contact with the eastern half of Christendom became gradually weaker. But with the revival of learning in the West, especially in the monasteries, together with the development of the first universities, intellectual inquiry came to prominence in learned circles. This, however, led to the separation of spiritual experience (especially in the Liturgy) from the original deposit of faith. Western theology came under the influence of ancient philosophical thought; what is called 'Scholasticism' diverted the western churches away from the pursuit of theosis and illumination in Christ. They moved towards philosophical definitions, governed by human reason and logic, instead of being led into all truth by the Holy Spirit. (cf Jn 16:13)

Naturally, from the western theological perspective, our Church of the East (from where the light arises!) could only appear stultified, fixed, irrelevant, perhaps exotic to an engaging extent, but basically *old*. Although this academic approach to Christianity took a very long time to affect the lives of ordinary believers in the West, the restlessness of the occidental collective mind changed for ever the nature and content of western Christianity. It is sometimes suggested that the only matters that separate Rome from Orthodoxy is the Filioque clause added to



the Creed, together with the Papal claims to universal Primacy. This, however, is merely to read the headlines. The restless theological 'creativity' of the Roman magisterium has also spawned the idea of doctrinal development, purgatory, presbyteral celibacy, created grace, eucharistic transubstantiation in Aristotelian terms, papal infallibility, the immaculate conception of the Theotokos, and so on.

Whilst the Christian Eastern Empire had to survive in the hostile incursions of the Mohammedan hordes of Arabs, Avars, and Turks, the western kingdoms developed their own traditions, until the social changes that came in the wake of the Black Death during the fourteenth century. Gradually, from the emergence of the Lollards, for example in England, to the challenge of Martin Luther, the primacy of the Papacy over western Europe became fragmented. The emergence of Protestantism, whether Lutheran, Zwinglian or Calvinist in origin, epitomised the instability and innovative energy of the western Christian denominations. This is illustrated by the thousands of different groups, marked by various heretical departures from the Tradition of the Apostles, that have grown out of the Reformation.

To summarise, on the one hand, Orthodoxy (the content, ethos and soul of the Eastern Orthodox-Catholic Church,) is marked by *continuity* whereas, on the other, the denominations are driven by the vicissitudes of *creativity and innovation*.

From this there has appeared among western Christians and, indeed, among those affected by the social disenchantments of secularism, a growing interest in 'looking back' to where they have come from. As with commercial world of antiques, in ecclesiology, provenance is everything. For some, this has meant leaving the novelties of a way of religion that first appeared in the sixteenth century and rediscovering the clear doctrines and disciplines of Roman Catholicism, rooted in Medieval Scholasticism. For others, however, the restless searching has ended by returning to the fountainhead and source of the True Faith in the Orthodox Church.

We have only to ponder for a while the mystery of the Divine Providence in the events of human history, to uncover how this has been possible. In this country in particular, we may consider that any effective Orthodox spirituality ended with the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century. The reintroduction of the ancient faith, however, began slowly. From the first tentative links between Orthodoxy and Anglicanism in the seventeenth century, through to the Russian Revolution, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, and the free movement of workers in the EU, Orthodox Christianity has now been established (in not inconsiderable numbers) within the British Isles once again, as it had been first among the Romano-British, possibly from the first century.

It is, therefore, in this context that we have noticed the growth of enquirers within our own congregation at St Dunstan's. The same has occurred, as I am frequently told by my clerical colleagues, in our archdiocese as a whole, as among other Orthodox jurisdictions. Sociologists will no doubt have a field day in analysing why there has been, supposedly, a growth in the numbers of young men in particular, discovering the ancient faith, as well as other forms of Christianity.

With this in mind, it is worth considering how we receive and, indeed, assess enquirers into the Orthodox Church. Here, essentially, we have to combine the great commission from Christ to proclaim the gospel (Matt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-16) with a real and transformative catechesis that truly changes the orientation of people's inner lives. (1 Tim 5:22; 6:3-5; Tit 3:9-10)

There are, of course, clear aspects of Orthodox Christianity that need to be understood by enquirers from the start. The first 'test' is whether they realise the implications of Christ's own words: *'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'* [Matt 16:24] And furthermore, *'No one, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'* [Lk 9:62] The early Christians were also very wary over whom they admitted, especially during times of persecution, as well as holding it necessary to guard the holy mysteries from profane eyes. (We hear a liturgical echo of that before the recitation of the Nicene Creed: 'The doors! The doors! In wisdom, let us attend.')

There is also our clear understanding, as we say plainly in the Creed, that there is only one Church of Jesus Christ, and that the Orthodox-Catholic Church of Jesus Christ (us!) is it. Further to this, anyone coming to the Orthodox Church has to develop and acquire the *phronema*, the mindset of Orthodoxy. This can take time; it is a spiritual illumination and requires the letting go of much theological, religious or philosophical baggage. My fellow presbyter, Fr Gregory Hallam (Manchester) has noticed how, for many people, a fundamental attitude of Calvinism often proves very 'sticky.' (Disturbingly, I have occasionally noticed such an attitude even among some cradle-Orthodox!)

At heart, therefore, becoming Orthodox involves serious engagement, not just learning through book-reading (be wary of the Internet influencers...) but also with *Orthopraxy*, that is, the practical involvement in a life of prayer, fasting and charity. St Nikolai Velimirovitch summarised this, saying, *'Our religion is founded on spiritual experience, seen and heard as surely as any physical fact in this world, not theory, not philosophy, not human emotions, but experience.'*

We need to be aware, therefore, that when we engage with enquirers, that they be encouraged to face up to several matters. These might be listed as follows:

a) Negativity has a role, but do not come merely rejecting your past. It was through that past that Providence has led you to Orthodoxy. Furthermore, there are plenty of problems, scandals and faults among the Orthodox.



- b) Yes indeed, there is beauty to be found in Orthodox worship, but the attraction of beauty is there to draw us upward to the Divine Mystery; it is not an end in itself.
- c) Orthodox life, indeed, involves an image of an earthly paradise at times: incense, chanting and ceremony. But most of it is concerned with the spiritual, moral and personal struggle of ordinary daily life. In practice, Orthodoxy is not ritualistic and mystical, as it appears to many ~ it is liturgical and ascetic.
- d) Learning how to comport oneself in liturgical services is important, and we can learn the accepted ways of worship from those around us. But in following ritual actions in prayer, we are not 'performing' in front of others or making a display of our piety (cf Matt 6:5-7; Lk 20:46-47).
- e) Orthodoxy, as a religion, links us and indeed, keeps us 'in touch' with God. Of itself, however, practicing a religion does not save us: we are saved by Jesus Christ.
- f) To enter into the Orthodox Church, one needs to come with an open mind, in humility (not with opinions) and learn continual repentance. The gospels, especially, should be read. Faith is a quality of the soul, not founded primarily on proofs, but predicated on trust in Christ.

The experience of Orthodox Christian life shows itself as a spiritual paradox. Our knowledge of the divine comes through our faith, yet at the same time, we have this faith because we are endowed with the knowledge of God (in as far as He has been revealed to us). It is in this faith and knowledge that we live within the providence of God; that our life has a meaning and sense beyond what is apparent. In short, our stability and continuation in Christ requires, that in all the changes of this life, its sufferings and joys, its difficulties and challenges, we remain watchful over our souls, crucifying the passions and abiding in love. *'Whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.'* [1Jn 2:5-6]

Fr Chrysostom

Keeping Great Lent in the Orthodox Church

- ♣ Keep the fasting rules (except for clear medical reasons) as far as you are able
- ♣ If you do not have one, try to keep a daily prayer rule at home
- ♣ Read the scriptures daily, using the lectionary
- ♣ Try your best to take part in any extra Lenten services offered at church
- ♣ Read Orthodox books, especially the Fathers
- ♣ Give as you can to charity and to the relief of suffering
- ♣ Try to avoid distraction from popular entertainments and social media
- ♣ Go to Confession before Pascha
- ♣ Say the Lenten prayer of St Ephraim at least once a day

55 Maxims by Fr Thomas Hopko of blessed memory on the Christian Life

Be always with Christ.
 Pray as you can, not as you want.
 Have a keepable rule of prayer that you do by discipline.
 Say the Lord's Prayer several times a day.
 Have a short prayer that you constantly repeat when your mind is not occupied with other things.
 Make some prostrations when you pray.
 Eat good foods in moderation.
 Keep the Church's fasting rules.

Spend some time in silence every day.
 Do acts of mercy in secret.
 Go to liturgical services regularly.
 Go to confession and communion regularly.
 Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings. Cut them off at the start.
 Reveal all your thoughts and feelings regularly to a trusted person.
 Read the scriptures regularly.
 Read good books a little at a time.
 Cultivate communion with the saints.
 Be an ordinary person.
 Be polite with everyone.
 Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
 Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
 Exercise regularly.
 Live a day, and a part of a day, at a time.
 Be totally honest, first of all, with yourself.
 Be faithful in little things.
 Do your work, and then forget it.
 Do the most difficult and painful things first.
 Face reality.
 Be grateful in all things.
 Be cheerful.
 Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
 Never bring attention to yourself.
 Listen when people talk to you.
 Be awake and be attentive.
 Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
 Speak simply, clearly, firmly and directly.
 Flee imagination, analysis, figuring things out.
 Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
 Don't complain, mumble, murmur or whine.
 Don't **compare** yourself with anyone.
 Don't seek or expect praise or pity from anyone.
 We don't judge anyone for anything.
 Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
 Don't defend or justify yourself.
 Be defined and bound by God alone.
 Accept criticism gratefully but test it critically.
 Give advice to others only when asked or obligated to do so.
 Do nothing for anyone that they can and should do for themselves.
 Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
 Be merciful with yourself and with others.
 Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
 Focus exclusively on God and light, not on sin and darkness.
 Endure the trial of yourself and your own faults and sins peacefully, serenely,
 because you know that God's mercy is greater than your wretchedness.
 When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
 Get help when you need it, without fear and without shame.

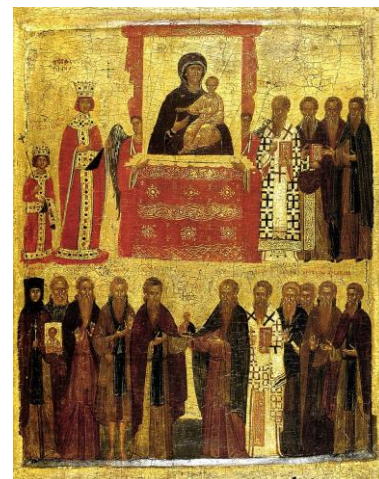


SERVICES

PLEASE NOTE **Memorials for the Dead** are served after the Divine Liturgy only by prior arrangement with the clergy. We remember the departed in Church during the forty days, traditionally, the first, third, ninth and fortieth day of death. Then, after six months and on the anniversary. Memorials are then offered each year on the date of death. We do not accept random lists of the departed whose memorial dates do not occur before or after the Sunday concerned. General lists of names for the departed are commemorated at the Proskomedia (preparation) before the Liturgy. Name lists for the Living and the Dead should be handed in on Sunday morning before 10.15am. **Vespers** is normally served on Saturday evenings at 5.00pm in the Saints of Britain Chapel. Please enter the church by the side door from the car park. **Confessions** are heard after Vespers or by appointment. For **Baptisms** and **Weddings**, please come to the Divine Liturgy on Sunday and arrangements can be made after the service.

MARCH

Sun 1st	First Sunday of Lent	Orthros	8.45am
	Divine Liturgy & Procession of Icons		10.30am
Sun 8th	Second Sunday of Lent	Orthros	8.45am
	Divine Liturgy		10.30am
Sun 15th	Third Sunday of Lent	Orthros	8.45am
	Divine Liturgy & Veneration of the Cross		10.30am
Sun 22nd	Fourth Sunday of Lent	Divine Liturgy	10.30am
	[Divine Liturgy at Athelhampton 10.30am]		
Wed 25th	The Annunciation		
Sun 29th	Fifth Sunday of Lent	Orthros	8.45am
	Divine Liturgy		10.30am



APRIL

Sun 5th	Entry of Our Lord (Palm Sunday)	Orthros & Blessing of Palms	8.45am
	Divine Liturgy		10.30am

PASSION WEEK

8th Great & Holy Wednesday	Anointing Service		7.00pm
9th Great & Holy Thursday	Vespers	Divine Liturgy of the Mystical Supper	11.00am
	Service of the Twelve Gospels		6.00pm
10th Great & Holy Friday	Vespers of the Shroud		4.00pm
	Lamentations Service		6.30pm
11th Great & Holy Saturday	Midnight Office, Rush Procession and Paschal Orthros		9.00pm
Sun 12th	HOLY PASCHA	Divine Liturgy & Parish Breakfast	11.00am
	Agape Vespers		2.30pm
Sun 19th	Second Sunday of Pascha	Divine Liturgy	10.30am
Sun 26th	Third Sunday of Pascha	Divine Liturgy	10.30am

