

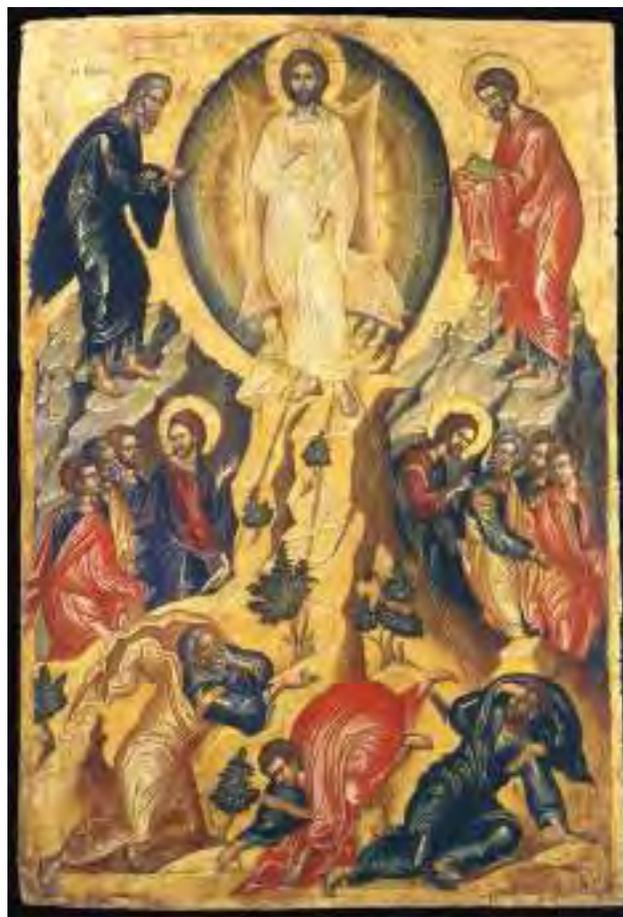


THE VISION OF GOD

In Exodus 33:18 Moses asks God: “Please, show me Your glory”! But the vision of God as presented in the Holy Scriptures may sometimes appear contradictory. Some passages characterise such a vision as impossible whereas others state the opposite. From the Old Testament, we read: “the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend”. At the same time a few verses later God tells Moses: “You cannot see My face, for no man can see My face and live” (Exodus 33:11,20). Likewise, in the New Testament Christ teaches: “blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8), whereas St Paul states that God is He “whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16).

Noting that these visions of God were typically interpreted by the Church Fathers as appearances of the Divine Word, we can conclude that the vision of God supported by the Scriptures is in fact a vision of the Son rather than the Father. This is affirmed by St John the Apostle and Evangelist who wrote: “no one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is at the Father’s side, He has made Him known” (John 1:18).

If therefore the Old Testament theophanies offered small glimpses into the glory of God through Christ, what can we say about the vision of God on Mt Tabor where there is a complete manifestation of the Holy Trinity in which the Son is transfigured, the Father speaks, and the Holy Spirit overshadows the whole mountain by the bright cloud? Furthermore, what did the three Disciples actually see? How can Christ *be* transfigured? Is it not written that



“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8)?

The answers to these questions came decisively in the fourteenth century when St Gregory Palamas explained that it is impossible to see God’s Essence, because it is inconceivable to all created beings, yet it is possible to know God by His Divine Energies through which He makes Himself approachable. Thus, the glory of God which is presented as light, as a cloud, as darkness, as fire, as a storm, and as a gentle breeze in the Old Testament, and which also shone on Mt Tabor as an unapproachable light, is a vision of the Uncreated Energies of God. Thus Christ did not change on Mt Tabor: He is always God (and man) by essence. Rather, His Divine Energies were revealed to His Disciples

so that they could bear witness to His Divinity, to declare that He is the Lord of all and has authority over the living and the dead. The latter is represented by the appearance of Moses who came forth from Hades, having tasted death, and Elijah who was taken up to heaven while still alive. Finally, Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets respectively, therefore as Moses died before entering the Promised Land, it follows that the Law was a shadow of the Grace that would abound with the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. But since Elijah was mysteriously translated into heaven not having tasted death, so too the Law and prophecies were not abolished but fulfilled through Christ, for He truly is the glory of God.



Η Παναγία

Κάθε 15αύγουστο, οι ψυχές των Ορθοδόξων, όπου γης, σκιρτούν από χαρά και συγκίνηση. Γιορτάζουμε την Κοίμηση-Μετάσταση της Παναγίας Μητέρας του Κυρίου μας, μα και μητέρας όλων μας. Σαν τα μικρά παιδιά που γυρεύουν καταφύγιο και μόλις δουν τη μάννα τους, τρέχουν γρήγορα και πέφτουν στην αγκαλιά της, έτσι και μεις οι ορθόδοξοι προστρέχουμε στη χάρη της τέτοιες μέρες. Καταφεύγουμε στη προστασία της, εκλιπαρούμε τις μεσιτείες της.

Στα χείλη όλων των ευλαβών Χριστιανών βρίσκεται το όνομά της, όνομα μητέρας στοργικής και αγίας. Νιώθοντας την για μητέρα μας, γινόμαστε αληθινά αδέρφια με το Χριστό, αφού είναι «Υιός της κατά σάρκα».

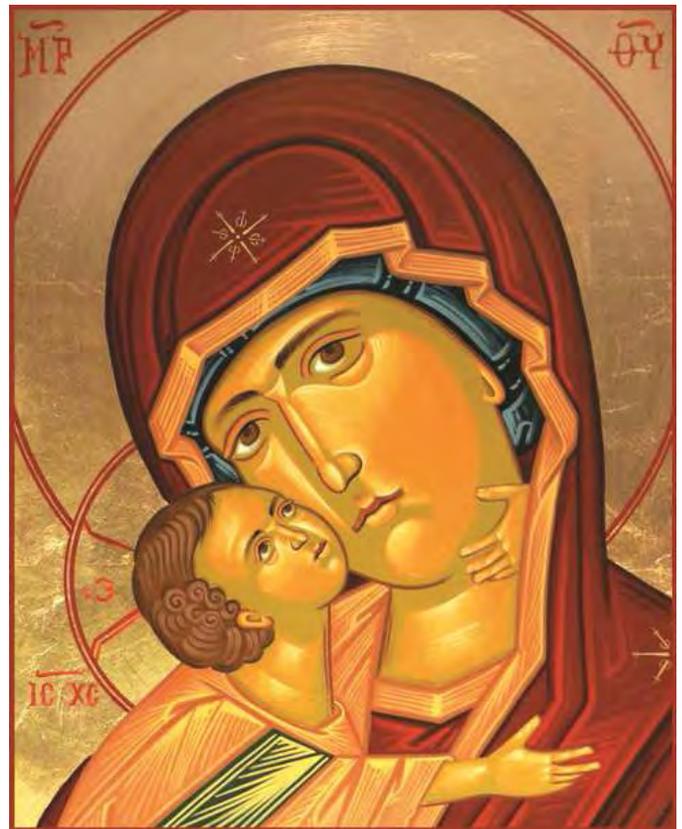
Σε κάθε ακολουθία της Ορθόδοξης Λατρείας μας, αναπέμπουμε ύμνους προς την Αειπάρθενο κόρη. Σ'αυτήν που έγινε «**χαράς δοχείον**» και με το να γεννήση το Χριστό έλυσε την κατάρα της προμήτορος Εύας.

Γι' αυτό η Παναγία μας βρίσκεται στην κορυφή της ουράνιας ιεραρχίας. Πάνω απ' όλους τους αγίους αλλά και από τα αγγελικά τάγματα «**τήν τιμιωτέραν τῶν Χερουβίμ, καὶ ἐνδοξοτέραν ἀσυγκρίτως τῶν Σεραφίμ**».

Στην Ορθοδοξία, τα πάντα μιλούν για την Αειπάρθενο κόρη. Όλα αυτά γιατί η αγνή Παρθένο Μαρία παίζει τόσο κεντρικό ρόλο στο Μυστήριο της Ενανθρωπήσεως του Θεού Λόγου. Με το να πει «**Ἰδοὺ «ἡ δούλη Κυρίου, γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου» (Λουκ. Α' 38)**, στο ἄγγελο Γαβριήλ, σήμανε την ώρα της σωτηρίας για ολόκληρο το γένος των ανθρώπων.

Με την ανυπακοή της Εύας στην εντολή του Θεού χάσαμε τον Παράδεισο. Με την υπακοή της Παρθένου στο θείο θέλημα άνοιξε ο δρόμος στους ανθρώπους να ξαναβρουν τον Παράδεισο. Ο Άγιος Επιφάνιος γράφει: «**Ἡ Εὐὰ εἶχε γίνει αἰτία θανάτου για τους ανθρώπους διότι μέσω αυτής εισήλθε ο θάνατος στο κόσμο ενώ η Μαρία αἰτία ζωής, διὰ της οποίας γεννήθηκε για χάρη μας ἡ ζωή**».

Και ο ιερός Δαμασκηνός λέγει για τη Θεοτόκο τα εξής: «**τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα ἅπαν τὸ μυστήριον τῆς οἰκονομίας συνίστησι**». Δηλ. το όνομα «**Θεοτόκος**» συνθέτει γνωστοποιεί και αποδείχνει περίτρανα όλο το μυστήριο της θείας οικονομίας. Να, γιατί οι Ορθόδοξοι την τιμούμε ιδιαίτερος. Γιατί είναι «**ἡ ἀγίων ἀγιωτέρα καὶ**



ιερών ιερωτέρα, καὶ ὀσίων ὀσιωτέρα» (Αγ Ιωαν. Δαμασκηνός).

Γι'αυτό και οι γιορτές της Παναγίας στην Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία μας μπορούν να συγκριθούν μόνο με τις μεγάλες Δεσποτικές γιορτές των Χριστουγέννων και της Λαμπροφόρου Ανάστασης του Κυρίου μας. Το εορτολόγιο της Εκκλησίας μας είναι γεμάτο από γιορτές αφιερωμένες στην υπερευλογημένη Θεοτόκο. Τα λειτουργικά βιβλία γεμάτα από ευχές, ύμνους και θεοτοκία (τροπάρια αφιερωμένα στη Θεοτόκο).

Τον 15αύγουστο ιδιαίτερα οι Παρακλητικοί Κανόνες «**Μεγάλος**» και «**Μικρός**» αποτελούν μιά έκχυση ευγενικών αισθημάτων της φιλόθεης ψυχής που επίμονα προσεύχεται, παρακαλεί και ζητεί από την Παναγία Μητέρα, παρηγοριά στις θλίψεις, μεσιτεία στις ανάγκες, βοήθεια στους πειρασμούς.

Ας τρέξουμε και μεις κοντά της, ας ενώσουμε τις προσευχές μας για τα δεινά που μαστίζουν σήμερα τον κόσμο μας, την ιδιαίτερη πατρίδα μας, την κοινωνία μας. Η Μητροπάρθενος Γοργοεπήκοος Κόρη, σίγουρα θα πρεσβεύσει και «**ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν**». ❖

Current Issues

The Saints Invade the Present

In the last few years, the Orthodox Church has declared as Saints several men who were known to her devout members, as pious and sincere Christians. They included Russians, Serbians, and in rapid succession three from Greece - Saint Nicholas Planas (March 2012), Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalivia (December 2013), who lived most of his life in Athens, and Saint Paisios of Mount Athos (January 2015).



The announcement by the Ecumenical Patriarchate caused a surge in popular piety, as all three Greek Saints were very close to the people through most of their lives, were well known almost to everyone in Greece, and were revered as Saints even before their elevation to Sainthood.

It is felt that this column should voice its view on the matter of spiritual standing, knowledge and even the state of piety of our people. One cannot help but feel disappointed, as he faces the degree of ignorance of our people regarding their Faith, the lack of understanding of its relevance to their daily lives, and their practice a superficial Christianity, consisting only in keeping the most elementary religious duties. Certainly, on hearing the news about the recent Saints, the majority of the Church people here were very pleased, particularly regarding Saint Paisios, who in 1977 had visited Australia.

But, the above announcement produced no obvious improvement on the spiritual state of our people. In fact, spiritual life remains something strange when you talk to most of them, whilst the question of Sainthood remains a forgotten dream.

And yet the Saints are not meant to be "a blast from the past", as devoted people who lived in previous periods of

history. The most serious problem as Christians is that we consider Saints to be either irrelevant, and worse, unnecessary in our lives. And yet the Saints are the most genuine people that lived. They are free of all passions, do not sin willingly, they are concerned more about others than themselves, God Himself rests in their heart: that is, God has nothing to complain about them. They are

the pinnacle that human nature can reach. That is why the Church urges us to know the story of their life, their teaching, their behaviour - because they are our role-models. Through them we discover the nature of a genuine man, and to a degree what God is like.

Over the years, we have restricted the Saints to the four walls of our Churches. Their icons are hung around in beautiful golden frames, and we admire the art of painting as well as the golden frame! But the Saints are not dead: they are very much alive. They appear to people who honour them, they perform miracles even in our days, and are in constant communion with God Himself, who reveals to them divine truths (St.Basil the Great, St.Gregory the theologian, St.Paisios, visited many times by Panagia, and many others). After all, we have the assurance of God that they are alive, when He confirmed to Moses in the desert, that "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I am not a God of the dead, but of the living" (Exodus 3:6).

The Saints are not only to be revered, they are meant to move about among us, to teach us, to help us and to save us. They have a lot to tell us about their lives, their virtues, their miracles and their teachings. Our relationship with the Saints of God should be the source of our strength in life.





Gospel Reading August 15th The Dormition of the Theotokos (Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28)



Luke 10:38–42 recounts the visit paid by our Lord to the home of two sisters, Mary and Martha. Upon entering the house, Jesus is welcomed by Martha. She then continues to pre-occupy herself with serving while her sister, Mary, sits at the feet of Jesus listening to His teaching. Upon noticing that Mary is no longer helping with the serving, Martha becomes annoyed and says: “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me.” (v. 40).

Our Lord then answers: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (v. 41-42).

Christ makes an example of Martha to show us that by worrying about too many things we distance ourselves from God. We must learn to care about things in the right way.

Saint Paisios clarifies this point further: “when a little child is playing and is all absorbed with his toys, he is not aware that his father may be next to him caressing him. If he interrupts his play a bit, then he will become aware of his father’s caresses. Similarly, when we are preoccupied with too many activities and are anxiously concerned about them, when we worry too much about worldly matters, we cannot become aware of God’s love. God gives but we do not sense it. Be careful not to waste your precious energy on redundant worries and vanities, which will turn to dust one day”¹.

We must not aimlessly waste our spiritual energy on vain anxieties and pursuits, leaving nothing for God. If we notice that we are easily preoccupied and anxious with school, sports, work or other social obligations to the detriment of our spiritual life, then this should alarm us. Like Martha we may have become closer to creation than to the Creator. We have become attracted to that which will turn to dust rather than to that which is eternal. Let us then be vigilant and aim with the grace of God to lift the quality of our spiritual life. ❖

¹ Saint Paisios, “With Pain and Love For Contemporary Man” published by the Athonite Monastery of St. John the Theologian in 2006



The Beheading of St John the Baptist Commemorated on August 29th

St John was the forerunner of Christ, preparing the world for the Saviour. He is sometimes referred to as the Child of the Desert and the one who fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: *Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God* (40: 4).

St John was born to Panagia’s cousin, Elizabeth, and Zachariah six months before Christ. The relationship between St John and Christ began from the womb, when Panagia visited Elizabeth and the unborn John leapt in his mother’s womb on seeing Panagia!

As an adult, St John lived an ascetic life dressed in camel skin and surviving on locusts and wild honey. When he encountered someone, he spoke of the need to repent and began baptising in God’s name in anticipation of the Christ who would baptise with the Holy Spirit. Christ himself, before embarking on his three-year ministry, approached His holy cousin to be baptised and declared John greatest amongst all (Mat 11:11).

Filled with divine courage, St John was unafraid to speak the truth, rebuking King Herod for his sinfulness in taking his brother’s wife as his own. This made Herodias, Herod’s new wife, furious. But Herod was aware of the high regard that many had for John, and did not act on his wife’s vengeful fury.

However, at the time of the King’s birthday, Herodias’ daughter from her first marriage, Salome, danced pleasingly for the guests. Herod wished to lavish her with any reward she requested even up to half of his kingdom. Salome sought her mother’s advice as to what gift to request. Herodias replied that she should request the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

The King was resistant, but knew he had made a promise that would be embarrassing to back out of. A soldier was then ordered to fulfill Herod’s command, and Salome presented her mother with the trophy.

St John is one of the greatest Saints, and is commemorated on four occasions throughout the ecclesiastical year: 7 January, 24 June (his birth), 23 September (his conception) and 25 May (the finding of his head). ❖



Questions & Answers

A clergyman of our Archdiocese answers ...

What Happened to the Departed Souls before Christ?

According to St Epiphanius, who lived in the fourth century, the souls of the departed who lived before Christ were in waiting in Hades, or the underworld. What were they waiting for? They were neither in heaven or hell, but waiting.

St Epiphanius writes that after Christ was crucified and before His Resurrection, He descended into Hades and those who were righteous ran with eagerness to join Him, but others ran and hid from Him, their hearts unable to receive the love He was so freely offering. He brought the righteous souls out of Hades, in a triumphant march. Out of Hades, escorted by angels and led by the Cross on which He was crucified. Everyone was free to join Him, but only the righteous found themselves able to receive His great gift of eternal life with Him.

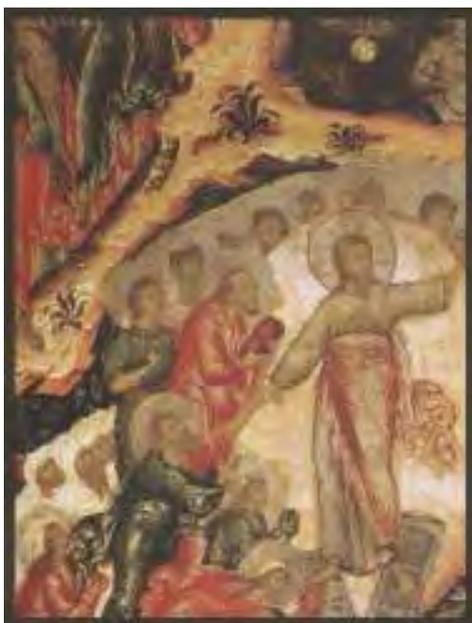
Below are some excerpts of what St Epiphanius writes about Christ's descent into Hades...

Something strange is happening... there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness.

The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear. He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep.

Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, He has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, He who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the Cross, the weapon that had won Him the victory. At the sight of Him Adam, the first man He had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: "My Lord be with you all". Christ answered him: "And with your spirit". He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: "Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (cf Eph 5:14).

I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of My hands, you who were created in My image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in Me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated. For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth. For your



sake, for the sake of man, I became like a man without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden. See on My face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in My image. On My back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back. See My hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree. I slept on the Cross and a sword pierced My side for you who slept in paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side has healed the pain in yours.

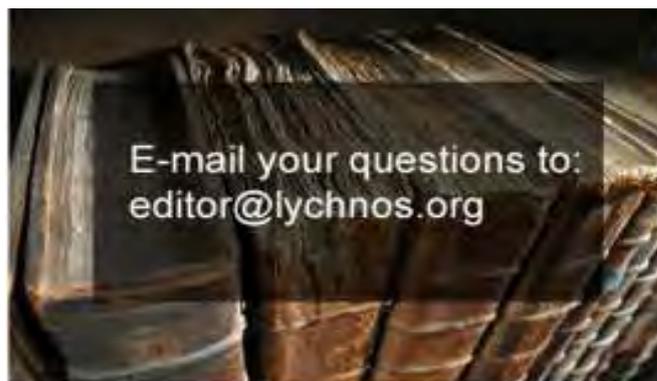
My sleep will rouse you from your sleep in hell. Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven. I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am life itself am now one with you. I appointed Cherubim to guard you as slaves are guarded, but now I make them worship you as God. The throne formed by Cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager.

The bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open.

The Kingdom of Heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.

From an ancient homily for Holy Saturday by Saint Epiphanius (PG 43, 439, 451, 462-463).

† Fr N. S. ✠





“You know where to go!” A miracle of Saint Xenia of St Petersburg in Oakland, California

The sermons of Fr Weldon, an evangelical pastor, attracted many types of people, including a youth who arrived at church riding a Harley Davidson, who was however sincerely interested in his faith.

Having started to transform his life, the young man struggled daily, conquering all passions but one – “biking”. Hearing that he must surrender this, he left the community despondent and intended never to return.

Being involved in a terrible motorcycle accident that cost him his legs, the man landed back into the company of old friends, living in a run-down apartment in a crime-ridden part of the city. Once, abusing drugs and alcohol rather vigorously, he fell unconscious. Fearing contact with authorities, his “friends” dragged his unconscious body down the street and threw him into a dumpster.

Gaining consciousness, the young man lay there, thinking the darkest thoughts: “This is what I have come to – useless trash thrown away like garbage!”

Sunk in pessimistic thoughts, an old lady in tattered clothes – a “bag lady” – approached. Advancing with a fierce expression, she commanded him, “You know where to go. So, go there!” He immediately remembered his former life and church where he had almost reformed.

The man soon after returned to that church to find it completely different – gold domes with crosses on the roof, a completely changed interior and an iconostas at the front depicting Saints. He was astonished when his gaze caught the image on an icon depicting the very “bag lady” that had approached him in his hour of dire depression. It was Holy Blessed St Xenia, the fool-for-Christ of St Petersburg!

He confessed to the now Orthodox Fr Weldon. Receiving holy Baptism, he began to live the life of a dedicated parishioner, this time truly transformed.

Source: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/68219.htm>



With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos of Australia and the Orthodox Christian Society, Sydney, along with some of their families



Members of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society with Fr John Athanasiou and other members of the parish of St Nectarios, Perth, following the Divine Liturgy.



Delivering a sermon during the Divine Liturgy at the Annunciation of our Lady.



Fr Emmanuel Stamatiou and Fr Evan Batalis welcomed the Greek Christian Orthodox Society at the church of Sts Constantine and Helen

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IT TO PERTH

and His Grace Bishop Nikandros of Dorileou, a group from the Greek visited three parishes in Perth on the weekend of 3-5th July.

Some of us had been to Perth before, for work or leisure, but this was the first time that a group of us representing the Greek Orthodox Christian Society was going there. We were therefore looking forward to meet Greek Orthodox Christians from Perth, to exchange views and experiences with them, and to help one another on our spiritual journey.

As we landed into Perth and travelled towards our accommodation, we saw a glimpse of how beautiful Perth is.

Saint Nectarios, in the suburb of Dianella, was the first parish we visited. We were welcomed by Fr John Athanasiou who explained to us the history of the parish and its challenges. A striking feature of the church is its dome, arguably the biggest Orthodox church dome in Australia. The Greek Orthodox School of St Andrews is also located in the same suburb of Dianella.

Greeks settled in Perth from the late 19th and early 20th centuries and built the first Greek Orthodox church in Australia, dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helen in the centre of Perth. A striking feature of the church is its old iconography. We were welcomed to this church by Fr Evan Batalis.

Not far away is the parish of the Annunciation of our Lady. Fr Emmanuel Stamatiou welcomed us and explained the parish's many activities. The church has the blessing to possess a miraculous icon of the Annunciation, brought from Asia Minor, which continues to perform miracles to this day. The parish also boasts an extensive library of Orthodox Christian books.

Despite its relatively small Greek Orthodox population, Perth is also blessed to have a Monastery in the outskirts of the city. The Holy Monastery of St John has as its abbot Heiromonk Evagrius, who is accompanied by two monks. We had the blessing to attend the Divine Liturgy on Saturday at the Monastery, after which we embarked on a tour of the Monastery and its grounds, including its own oil factory. Following the tour and a common lunch provided by the Monastery, we re-entered the church where members of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society presented to the abbot, monks, priests and the various aspects of the Society's work. This will hopefully make it easier for people from Perth to access resources which are available in Perth.

Throughout the visit, we had the opportunity to give sermons at the churches, present talks on various topics related to our Greek Orthodox Faith, to chant during the Divine Liturgies, conduct Sunday school classes and sing songs and perform plays.

We were warmly received in Perth by all the faithful. We hope that this visit will be the beginning of a long lasting relationship that will benefit the Greek Orthodox Church both in Perth and in Sydney.

Other photos of our visit may be found on page 8 of this issue of *Lychnos*. ✠

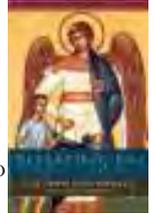
BOOK REVIEW

Defeating Sin: Overcoming our Passions and changing Forever

By Fr. Joseph Huneycutt

Published by Regina Orthodox Press, Salisbury, Massachusetts, 2007.

Defeating sin: *Overcoming our Passions and Changing Forever* is a book that provides a deep exploration of the passions and the virtues, spiritual warfare and the way toward repentance. It skillfully gathers like a honeybee from the writings of many Orthodox Fathers to produce sweet spiritual honey.



Fr Joseph provides a clear and yet deep picture of the Passions, how they affect our lives and how we can practically conquer them:

It is often unnerving to discover just what constitutes our sins. Some of our misdeeds, thoughts, and actions can seem so mundane and natural. Yet upon further inspection we realize that they represent a real hindrance toward reconciliation. We know that, ultimately, the cause of all our sins is disobedience.

With clarity of vision and originality of expression he weaves throughout his book a pastoral understanding of how to use this self-knowledge in the process of spiritual growth:

The passive aspect of the soul is first cleansed and then the intelligent power of the soul. The faithful are initially delivered from the passions of the flesh; then – through harder prayer and more intensive struggle, from the passions of hatred, anger and rancour. When man manages to be freed from anger and rancour, it is obvious that the passive aspect of his soul has almost been purified. Then the entire warfare is carried out in the intelligent aspect, and the athlete wars against pride, vainglory and against all vain thoughts. This warfare will follow him to the end of his life. But all this course of purification takes place with the help and energy of grace so that the faithful becomes a vessel receptive of rich divine grace.

As the book unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident that the unbroken Tradition of the Church is the sole key to understanding God's revelation to man. Because Fr Joseph has so firmly placed his trust in the holiness of this Tradition, his thinking, both creative and inspired, elucidates the way of salvation that leads to the renewal of life.

Not only is a sound theological understanding of the doctrinal themes provided, but practical advice is also offered, as well as inspirational prayers (including an analysis of St Ephraim's prayer recited in Lent) and meditation. Very useful definitions are provided in the Appendix, synthesising common terminologies utilised by the Fathers.

The advice provided serves as a wonderful tool to assist the preparation for, and the undertaking of confession. ✠

A wider range of Orthodox Christian books in Greek and English is available from the Orthodox Bookstore, 217 Bexley Rd, Kingsgrove.

For further enquiries.

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MISSIONARY VISIT TO PERTH

Continued from pages 6-7



The miraculous icon of the Annunciation at church of the Annunciation of our Lady, in Perth.



Walking with the Fathers of the Holy Monastery of St John, Perth, down to the oil factory of the Monastery.



Members of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society at the Holy Monastery of St John, presenting various aspects of the Society's work.



An Orthodox Hymn performance during a Talk session at the church hall of Sts Constantine and Helen.



Members of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society conduct a Sunday School lesson at the church of the Annunciation of our Lady, Perth.



Inside the Orthodox Christian Library, at the grounds of the church of Evangelismos.





How do we pray the Psalms?

Orthodoxy has many standard prayers that can be used by the faithful when we pray at home and Church. Such standard prayers include the Psalms, God's own "Prayer Book". The Psalms teach us how, what and when to pray. When we recite them prayerfully and with faith, God speaks and enlightens us in accordance with our individual needs and circumstances. Further, the Psalms gradually become a part of our own daily lives when committed to memory by constant repetition and studied in their context to the rest of the Bible with the aid of commentaries by Church Fathers.

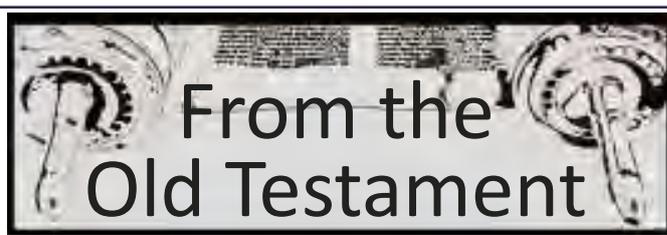


For an Orthodox Christian however, the danger is not to let the daily reading of the Psalms become something impersonal that stops us from establishing a real relationship with God. Rather, the daily reading of the Psalms should act as a launch pad into a life of ceaseless prayer where we are completely immersed in Christ. According to St Athanasios the Great, praying the Psalms engages us in a continuous encounter and conversation with our Lord Jesus Christ. We find ourselves constantly invoking His "great and awesome name" or requesting that the light of His face should shine upon us (Psalm 67:1). We find ourselves regularly joining in with His prayers offered "on behalf of humanity" or making our own calls upon His mercy, His salvation or His deliverance.

The Psalms can also be viewed Christologically, that is, seeing in the Psalms clear references to Jesus Christ. For example, Psalm 22 is a foreshadowing of the Passion and therefore the words, "Protect me, O Lord, for in you did I hope", constitute a prayer of Christ Himself to the Father.



The praying of the Psalms should be done with the realisation that we are standing before God and are in His very presence. Though it may not seem like we are praying or asking the Lord for anything, in fact we are. The act of standing in His presence and reading His Word is prayer itself. ❖



Moses and the Burning Bush - the Representation of Panagia

"..And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.



Then Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.' So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look.... He said, 'Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.' (Exodus 3:2-5)

The miracle of the burning bush, where we awe at all natural law being defied, is a miracle well-known by all Christians. In the Orthodox Church we see this early miracle in Earth's history as a prophecy of the Theotokos' own divine conception of Christ that was to come.

Saint John of Damascus (c676-c750) expresses this beautiful truth in his hymns where it is chanted *'plainly foreshadowed by the burning bush that was not consumed, a hallowed womb has borne the Word.... That which was revealed to Moses in the bush, we see accompanied here in strange manner. The virgin bore Fire within her, yet was not consumed, when she gave birth to the Benefactor Who brings us light.*

His compositions express the parallel between the miracle of the burning bush and the miracle of Panagia becoming the mother of our Lord with her purity unaltered - her womb becoming the Holy ground that was not consumed by the Divine fire of the incarnate Word of God. Whilst not physically altered, the Holy Virgin is transformed in this moment into the new Eve by re-establishing our union with God and allowing God to, as in the time of Adam and Eve, walk amongst us once again. ❖



What we Hear in Church



Hymn of the 9th Ode of the Small Paraklesis to the Theotokos

Απὸ τῶν πολλῶν μου ἀμαρτιῶν, ἀσθενεῖ τὸ σῶμα, ἀσθενεῖ μου καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, πρὸς σέ καταφεύγω τὴν Κεχαριτωμένην, ἐλπίς ἀηλιτισμένων, σύ μοι βοήθησον.

Owing to the multitude of my sins, ailing is my body and diseased also is my soul. O help me, I pray you the hope of the despairing. To you I come for refuge, O Maiden full of grace. (transl. Fr Seraphim Dedes)

Being created in the image and likeness of God, man was not originally made to feel pain, to be sick and to die. The Fathers agree on this: for example, St Maximus the Confessor says that *"When God created human nature, he did not create sensible pleasure and pain along with it."*¹

Sin darkened the minds of the first created, Adam and Eve, and their nature was inexorably changed. Since pain, suffering and ultimately death became part of their nature it was passed down in a hereditary fashion to all their descendants. St Cyril of Alexandria is definitive: *"Human nature became ill and subject to corruption through the transgression of Adam, thus penetrating man's very passions."*²

Instead of our two-fold nature, body and soul, cooperating to orientate us towards God, we now have a tendency deep within us to allow our body, that is, its members and its senses, to enslave our soul to created things and to the pleasures they give to us. This is a perversion of our nature, which in the patristic literature is called "the malady of the senses."³

It is a tendency but not a compulsion. God always helps us if we freely choose to call upon Him in our struggle against sin. Saint Macarius of Egypt explains: *"The effectual working of God depends upon the will of man."*⁴

This is why our Church, during the first 15 days of August, in the Paraklesis Service to the Theotokos, calls on us to pray to the Mother of God, she who is *"more honourable than the Cherubim, incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim"*, so that she may intercede for us to God, to offer us refuge from our own sick nature. We believe she can help us because our tradition tells us her intercessions are especially powerful, full of great boldness and assurance, just like a Mother would have with Her Son. ✠

1. St Maximus the Confessor, "Questions To Thalassios, 61" CCSG 22:85 trans. Blowers, P.M. & Wilken, R.L. from "On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ" SVSP, Crestwood NY 2003 p.131.

2. St Cyril of Alexandria, "Commentary to the Holy Gospel of John" PG 74 788-789

3. St Isaac the Syrian, "The Ascetical Homilies", Homily 1, HTM, Boston, 2011 trans. by pub. p. 114

4. St Macarius of Egypt, "Fifty Spiritual Homilies", Homily 37, 10 from <http://www.ecatholic2000.com/macarius/untitled-55.shtml>

FROM THE HOLY FATHERS...

St John of Damascus On the Holy Cross

Saint John of Damascus is an important father of our Church who lived in Syria in the seventh century. A monk, but also a polymath, he was very knowledgeable in the areas of law, philosophy, music, science and astronomy. Above all, he was gifted in tying all of these disciplines with the field that he is most famous for: Theology.

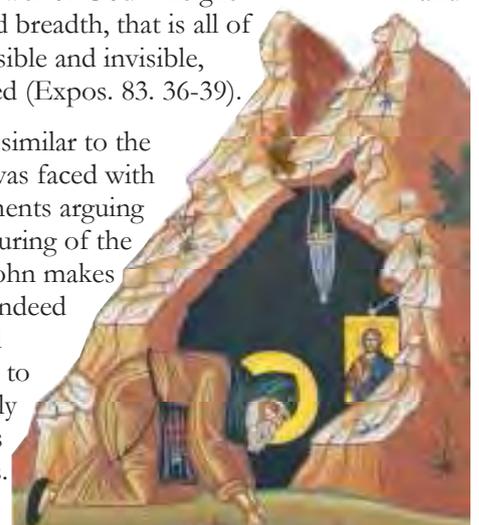


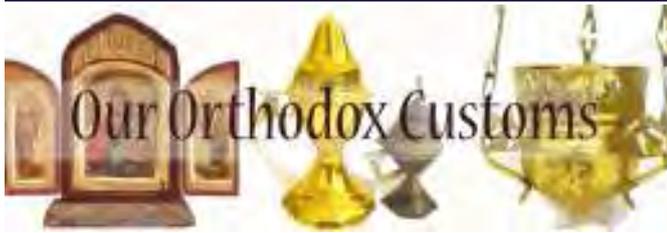
In his premier work, the *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, he writes at length about the importance and significance of the Holy Cross on a number of levels, as it represents the ultimate means by which God transcends all human categories. He states all that has been accomplished through the power of the Holy Cross: Death has been abolished, ancestral sin has been loosed, hell has been despoiled, the Resurrection has been bestowed, the way back to blessedness is made straight and the gates of Paradise are opened (Expos. 83.21-9).

Therefore, the very making of the sign of the Cross has a unique power in itself. This action, so central to our worship, is described as a shield, a weapon, a trophy against the devil, a seal protecting us from the destroyer, the resurrection of the fallen, a staff for the weak and a rod for the shepherded (Expos. 83. 42-8).

The Holy Cross can finally be seen as a symbol for all of creation itself. Just as the four arms of the Cross have been made firm and are bound together in the middle, so – through the power of God – height and depth, length and breadth, that is all of creation, both visible and invisible, have been secured (Expos. 83. 36-39).

In a time where, similar to the present day, he was faced with numerous opponents arguing against the honouring of the Holy Cross, St John makes it clear that it is indeed proper, right and indeed necessary to venerate this Holy Symbol of God's Salvation (Expos. 84.72-3). ✠





Namedays

When a child is born it is given a name that will stay with them (unless changed) for the rest of their life. Traditionally, people choose names to express continuity with their family, i.e, they will 'recycle' the names of parents, grandparents and other relatives. Orthodox Christians have long chosen the names of Saints to proclaim their link with their spiritual family, the Church.

Every day of the year is dedicated to the memory of at least one Saint or Martyr, as well as events in our Church (Resurrection, Transfiguration) and others (Angels, Holy Cross, Memory of Relics). Mostly though, we remember the day the Saint died or martyred as this is the day of their birth into eternal life. The name chosen for the child may be that of a Saint commemorated on the day or near to the day of the child's birth, or for whom the family has a special devotion. The child may also be pledged to a certain Saint in the case of a miraculous birth, for example, after having difficulties conceiving. Likewise an adult who is received into the Orthodox Church chooses a Saint's name to whom they have a strong attachment.

Namedays are more important than birthdays to Orthodox Christians. Often, gifts are given, festive meals are prepared and special preparations are made for an open house or coffee hour at the church.

One's nameday is an occasion to honour the memory of the Saint whose name we bear and to give thanks for their daily intercession on our behalf. We would benefit from attending the Divine Liturgy on this day having prepared to partake Holy Communion. We could also pray and bake a prosforo (bread offering), as well as do an artoclasia. An icon of our Saint usually adorns our houses and it is important that we learn to chant the troparion of our Saint.



Often it is to our patron Saint that we pray to intercede for us. Their life can be a model for us, and our patron Saint can become a true hero for us to emulate. Those who are not named after a Saint usually celebrate on All Saints Day, the Sunday after Pentecost. The usual greeting for someone on their name day is "hronia polla". ✠



Precious Vessels of the Holy Spirit: The Lives & Counsels of Contemporary Elders of Greece

By Herman A. Middleton

Published by Protecting Veil, 3rd edition, 2011.

“Read a lot so that God might enlighten your mind.” – St Porphyrios

Precious Vessels of the Holy Spirit describes the lives and teachings of eight important Spiritual Fathers of modern Greece.



The book gives a biography of each Elder along with a selection of their teachings and counsels in the style of ‘The Sayings of the Desert Fathers’.

The Elders described are: Amphilochios of Patmos, Epiphanius of Athens, Iakovos of Evia, Joseph the Hesychast, Paisios the Athonite, Philotheos of Paros, Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia and St George of Drama. Some of these Fathers have been canonised as Saints: Elders Paisios and Porphyrios (after the book was published), as well as St George of Drama. The other Elders are similarly distinguished by their holiness and teachings. For example, Elder Philotheos (1884 – 1980) undertook many missionary travels to towns and villages to preach to the people and hear confessions, contributing to a restoration of the Orthodox faith amongst the various islands of the Dodecanese. An extraordinary example of the Elder’s virtue is described, taking place during the German occupation of Greece:

“At one point Elder Philotheos interceded with the German commissioner of Paros for 125 innocent young Greeks condemned to death. The commissioner, unwilling to back down, finally gave in when Fr. Philotheos offered to be executed along with them.”

Some of the teachings of the same Elder Philotheos, as recounted in the book, include:

“If a man builds a house and leaves it without a roof, this house can’t be used at all. In the same way, if a man acquires all the virtues but not love, the house remains useless and is of no benefit at all.”

“In order for the nation to be straightened out, evil habits and sin must cease.”

Many more edifying examples and sayings fill the pages of this book.

Precious Vessels of the Holy Spirit is a significant resource for any Orthodox Christian seeking guidance on faith, holiness, and wisdom in our contemporary time; each Elder being a vivid, modern example of the true life in Christ. ✠

NEWS and VIEWS

Missionary Visit to Perth

On the weekend of 3-5th July, with the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos and His Grace Bishop Nikandros, a group of men from the Greek Orthodox Christian Society along with some of their families visited three parishes in Perth. The visit proved to be very fruitful for both the Sydney group as well as the Perth parishes. More details may be found on pages 6, 7 and 8 of this issue of Lychnos.

Mid-Year Retreats

During the months of June-August, the Boys and Girls Fellowships (Ομάδες), as well as the young men of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society held their separate mid-year retreats at Mangrove Mountain, about 90 minutes north of Sydney. The Boys mid-year retreats were spread over three weekends in June-July, with 60 boys attending and 12 leaders overall. The Girls retreat took place on the first weekend of the July winter holidays. Approximately 30 girls and leaders attended, with the theme of their Retreat was: "Give me your heart". The girls discussed the importance of developing a relationship with Christ, learning to love Him with their whole heart and mind and soul. Apart from the usual Retreat activities such as Bible studies, talks, craft, games and Divine Liturgy, the girls also had the opportunity to cook and prepare their every meal! The young men's retreat was held from Friday 31st July till Saturday 1st August at Landmark Camp Centre, Mangrove Mountain, with about 25 men attending. ✠



The Boys Fellowship of Earlwood at their mid-year retreat.



The Boys Fellowships (Ομάδες) of Earlwood, Belmore, Parramatta and Kogarah outside the main church of Pantanassa Monastery following the Divine Liturgy with Abbot Fr Eusebios.



The Girls Fellowships with Fr Eusebios, Abbot of Pantanassa Monastery.



The young men of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society at their mid-year retreat.

**Ακούτε το ραδιοφωνικό πρόγραμμα
«Η ΦΩΝΗ ΤΗΣ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΙΑΣ»**

κάθε Κυριακή:

10:45 π.μ. στο 2MM-AM 1665

11:00 π.μ. στο 2ERA-FM 151.675 (scanner)

5:30 μ.μ. στο Galaxia FM 151.850 (scanner)

κάθε Πέμπτη:

3:30 μ.μ. στο Radio Club AM 1683

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