

The Shepherd

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FROM THE FATHERS

"CERTAIN BRETHREN went to visit Abba Pœmen, and while they were sitting with him, they praised a certain brother, saying, 'He hates evil things?' Abba Pœmen said to the one who spoke with him, 'What is hatred of evil things?' Now the brother was astonished, and he found nothing to say; and he rose up and threw himself down before the Elder, saying, 'Tell me what the hatred of evil things is.' And the Elder said unto him; 'The hatred of evil things is for a man to hate his own sins, and to justify those of his neighbour.'"

*From the Paradise of the Fathers
Abba Pœmen, fifth century desert father.*

"ALTHOUGH the commandment of love for God is as far superior to the commandment of love for God's image (man) as God is superior to His image, yet the commandment of love for our neighbour serves as a foundation for the commandment of love of God. He who has not laid the foundation labours in vain to construct a building; it cannot possibly stand without the foundation. By love for our neighbour we enter into love for God. A Christian's love for God is love for Christ, and love for our neighbour is love for Christ in our neighbour. By loving our neighbour - by loving him in the Lord, that is, as the Lord commands us - we acquire love for Christ, and love for Christ is love for God."

Blessed Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, 1807- 1867

"WHO IS HE that abases himself? Not the man who tries to appear smaller than he is, but the one who sees his smallness because of his sin."

Saint Nicolas Velimirovic, 1880-1956

GODPARENTS

ONE OF THE AREAS of our church life which is sadly neglected is the role of Godparents or sponsors at Baptism. Often, it seems, the Godparents, even at infant Baptisms, do little more than have a ceremonial role in the Baptism service itself, and then do little more than send their charges name-day cards in the years that follow. Godparents are often chosen simply for familial or social reasons, and many who take on the duty seem to think that it is simply a honour for the day, like being a bridesmaid. It is little wonder that so many of our young people grow up with so little and so inadequate instruction in the Faith. The religious education of our children is the responsibility, in the first instance, of parents and of Godparents. Recognising the need for some guidance for Godparents, we have been unable to find one article adequately covering the subject, but present here extracts from various sources, which we hope will be of some help.

A) The Holy Orthodox Church, in showing Godparents the importance of their duties, sets the following before them:

"Pious and Christ-loving Godparent! By the grace and compassions of the Man-befriending God, Who desires that all men should be saved, today a spiritual birth through water and the Spirit has been perfected. In the Name of the Holy Trinity, the newly illumined servant of God has been baptized and spiritually reborn. From among the children of darkness, he has been made a child of light; from being a child of wrath, he has become a child of God's grace; from being in the land of the shadow of death, he has re-settled in the land wherein is the lot of the saints in radiance, and he is inscribed in the book of life. For this reason the holy Angels keep festival in the Church triumphant, having great joy over one repentant sinner, seeing a man, numbered among their choirs, making up for those who had fallen from them.

And we, in the Church militant, also rejoice, that a new branch has been grafted on to the true Vine, Which is Christ the Lord, that it might be granted life through the sustenance of His grace, and bring forth fruits of virtue.

And it is particularly appropriate for Your Piety [*a stylized reference to the godparent*] to rejoice, because through the Divine font, you have been made a spiritual father/mother to this spiritual branch, this son/daughter of grace, for whom the Lord, Who lives in the Heavens, now becomes a father through grace. You, as a spiritual father, must know that throughout all of your life you are bound to maintain a paternal love for your spiritual son/daughter, whom God has given you. And when the Lord shall grant him the good use of his mental capacities, you are bound to instruct him in the Orthodox Catholic Faith, and in a life worthy of the Christian vocation. Just as he is now given into your hands through the spiritual rebirth as one illumined with the dawning of grace, so also undarkened you must present him in the future life to the Heavenly Father; and just as today he has come forth from the bath of regeneration pure and whiter than snow, so unpolluted and without cause for reproach from the evil spirits, you must present him after death before the impartial Judge, Who will render to each according to their deeds.

It was through your lips that he joyously renounced Satan and all his works, and through the grace of spiritual rebirth was adopted by the Creator and God of all and made a member of the Church of Christ; so may he abide all the days of his life in the unity of the Faith, not severed from the Church, and may he abide without wavering in the grace of his adoption by God; may he never turn back to the deeds of the guileful Satan. As a soldier of Christ, sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit that he might be confirmed for his spiritual warfare, may he be manifest as strong, through the Lord's beneficence, that he might destroy all the machinations of Satan. After struggles pleasing to God, may he receive from the Contest-Setter his reward in the Kingdom of the Heavens.

And for the love that you show your spiritual son/daughter, you will be beloved of the Heavenly Father, Who is Himself Love.

The above was translated from a typescript given us by the late Archimandrite Nicanor (Troitsky) and headed "Publication of the British Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad."

B) At the Baptism, either of adults or of infants, there must be sponsors. When adults are baptized, the sponsors fulfil the following purposes: 1) to be witnesses and guarantors of the faith and of the answers given by the one baptized, and in this manner to ensure that in their Baptism there is no fraud, deception or hypocrisy or such like; 2) to make replies at the Baptism for such as cannot themselves give the responses because of illness. When infants are baptized, the sponsors recite the Symbol of Faith [*the Creed*] in their behalf and make the necessary responses for them, and consequently they are responsible for the instruction in the Faith and the moral upbringing of those whom they sponsor. According to the Book of Needs, it is only necessary to have one sponsor, a man for a baptizand of the male sex, and a woman for one of the female sex. Customarily though there are two: a man and a woman. But to have two men or two women be sponsors to one child is not permitted. In the most extreme necessity (such as danger of imminent death), a Baptism can be celebrated even without a sponsor. In this instance, one can consider the priest himself who celebrates the Baptism, or the chanter as the sponsor, or, in accordance with the child's sex, their wives. In accordance with their assignment, the sponsors must be Orthodox persons and informed regarding the Faith - (a footnote here indicates that they should at least know the Creed) - that is they should know, at the very least, the principal tenets of the Faith. No schismatic may stand as a godparent. Nor may any heterodox person. No one not in his right mind can be a godparent, nor can any who are completely ignorant of the Faith, furthermore nor can criminals or manifest sinners, and in general all such persons who have fallen low in the general esteem on account of their moral conduct, (a footnote, here adds that those who have not been to confession or Communion for five or ten years do not qualify, as being incapable of leading the one baptized and directing his life, as should a Godparent). Minors cannot be Godparents - this means no boy under 15 and no girl under 13 can be godparent. Monks and nuns cannot be Godparents. Parents cannot be Godparents of their own children. The priest must, as is appropriate, instruct his parishioners that in choosing Godparents for their children they should pay greater attention to the moral character of those they choose and not so much to their position in society and their status, and that it is not consonant with the teachings of the Church to invite people to be Godparents hoping for protection, gifts or the like. Furthermore the priest must instruct the Godparents that they should fulfil their duty in the fear of God lest they should be negligent or fulfil it unworthily, and furthermore he must explain the duties of Godparents do not primarily consist in material provision, but in the spiritual guidance of the one that they have received from the font, so that in their subsequent life these latter may receive from them the appropriate support, guidance and edification. Before celebrating a Baptism, the priest should: 1) ask the sponsors if they know that at the Baptism of the infant, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they are cleansed of the defilement of sin, and that through the Passion and Death of the Saviour Christ, the infant is numbered with the choir of the Saints; 2) tell them that they must strive to teach the infant they are sponsoring faith in Christ, and by their admonitions they should direct them to be lovers of labour, meek, restrained, and loving towards all, and that they should flee sin, as being a work of the devil which will deprive them of the sanctity granted them in Baptism; 3) tell them that they are standing as guarantors in this regard before God for the infant, and that if they are negligent in this regard they will be party to the sin.

*Extracted from the Nastol'naya Kniga (Clergy Manual)
of S. V. Bulgakov, published Kharkov, 1900*

C) Sponsors must receive the sacrament of Penance and Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy before they stand at a Baptism - *From the Priest's Guide of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.*

D) It is essential that the function of the sponsors should clearly be understood both by them and the parents of the child. The sponsor makes a public profession of the Nicene Creed during the Baptism, in the name of the infant or child who is unable to speak for himself. His renunciation of the devil is made on behalf of the candidate for Baptism. He assumes weighty responsibilities of providing for a sound Orthodox religious education in the event that the parents of the child die or fail to fulfil their own duty in this respect. The Godparent implicitly pledges himself to aid his Godchild in whatever necessities that may arise, but most especially in the giving of a good Orthodox Christian example to the Godchild.... The duty of being a sponsor at Baptism does not cease when the sacrament has been administered; it simply begins there. As long as a Godparent lives, he or she must take most seriously the obligations they have assumed. The Church teaches that between the Godparent and the baptized a close spiritual relationship arises. This relationship is so important and so close that the Church considers it an impediment to marriage between Godparent and Godchild [and certain close relatives - ed.].

*From Holy Sacraments for Orthodox Christians by the
Romanian Orthodox hierarch, the late Bishop Valerian D. Trifa.*

E) The person acting as Godparent should be a member of the Orthodox Church in good standing, and must be conscious of the Godparent's obligations and responsibilities - *Yearbook of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain, 1999.*

CONCLUSIONS: We have extracted teaching from the five sources, trying not to repeat points needlessly. Perhaps it might also help to add a few practical points. Bishop Valerian touches on one of the most important of these, when he says that the Godparent must religiously educate the child when the parents fail to do so. Living as we do nowadays in our isolated "nuclear" families, this is of course not an easy prospect, but both the Godparents and the parents of an infant, or if the candidate is an adult the candidate himself, should be fully aware that the Godparent has this duty and therefore he has the right to do so, and this means that you permit him somewhat to "interfere" in your life. Such a thought is, of course, anathema to moderns. The clergy, the Godparents, etc, are there for us when we need them, and to mop up after us when we make messes in our lives, but we do not expect them or allow them otherwise to make demands on us, and so we are left to our own devices and often come to grief. Godparents should be ready and able to help, guide and correct, and their Godchildren and their families should give them leave to do this and help them and encourage them in it.

Godparents should make sure that their Godchildren are instructed in the Faith, that they attend church regularly and are brought to Holy Communion, that at a suitable age (usually this is at seven) they are brought to Confession, that they are trained to keep the fasts, that they are guided to make moral decisions regarding their

lives in accordance with Christ's precepts. And, of course, if they observe that in any of these respects, their charge is failing or going astray, they should try to advise them and correct them.

Godparents should also always remember that the best teaching method is good example. It is no good telling your Godchildren to go frequently to Holy Communion if you do not, to advise them to honour Christian marriage if you are sinfully cohabiting with someone who is not your spouse, to trust in God if you do not even say your prayers.

One aspect of Godparenting that has not been given special mention in the above, and one that is of paramount importance, is prayer. It is necessary for Godparents to pray for their Godchildren. They should remember them daily in their private prayers, have them commemorated at the Divine Liturgy, have *molebens* served for them on their name-days and at times of need, stress or celebration. And should they die, they should have memorial services served for them, give alms in their memory, and continue to pray for them. Even should they be prevented from carrying out the other duties mentioned above, they can continue their ministry of love towards their charges through prayer.

The Godparents should also pray for themselves that they may conscientiously carry out their obligations, that they should be given opportunities to say a word when it is necessary, and that in trying to direct their Godchildren they be given tact and discretion so that they do not hurt them or turn them away from God's Church.

THE GREAT FEAST of the *Meeting of the Lord in the Temple*, which falls in February (2nd/15th) is observed by many Orthodox Christians as "*Mother Day*," and therefore it seems appropriate this month to include the following prayer. It is a translation of a prayer which is being circulated in Russia today, and following on from the piece on Godparents above, it is one which, with a few adaptations, could be used each day by Godparents when praying for their Godchildren.

A MOTHER'S PRAYER FOR HER CHILDREN

O GOD! Creator of all living things, adding mercy upon mercy, Thou hast made me worthy to be the mother of a family; Thy goodness hath granted me children, and I dare to say: they are Thy children, because Thou hast given them being, Thou hast given them immortal souls, Thou hast regenerated them for life through Baptism, in accordance with Thy will made them Thy children and accepted them into the bosom of Thy Church. O Lord, preserve them in a state of grace to the end of their life; vouchsafe them to be partakers of the Mysteries of Thy covenant; sanctify them with Thy truth, that through them Thy holy name may be hallowed. Send down upon me the help of Thy grace in their upbringing for the glory of Thy name and the benefit of their neighbours. To this end give me the means, the patience, and the strength. Teach me to implant in their hearts the root of true wisdom - Thy fear. Illumine them with the light of Thy wisdom by which the universe is governed. May they love Thee with all their soul and mind; may they cleave unto Thee with their whole heart and throughout their life may they tremble at Thy words. Grant me the wisdom to convince them that

true life consisteth in keeping Thy commandments; that labour, strengthened by piety, provideth untroubled contentment in this life and, in eternity, unspeakable blessedness. Unfold to them the wisdom of Thy law. May they act to the end of their days with a sense of Thine omnipresence; implant in their hearts a honour and a loathing of every transgression; may they be blameless in their ways; may they always remember that Thou, O All-good God, art a defender of Thy law and Thy truth. Keep them in chastity and devotion to Thy name, may they not shame Thy Church by their behaviour, but live according to her injunctions. Inspire in them a desire for useful learning and make them capable of every good deed. May they acquire a true understanding of those matters, a knowledge of which is necessary for their position in life. May they be enlightened with knowledge beneficial for mankind. O Lord, teach me to engrave in the minds and hearts of my children lasting traits of fear of friendship with those who know not Thy fear; to instil the utmost estrangement from any union with transgressors; that they might not pay heed to corrupt conversations, that they might not listen to light-minded people; let not bad examples turn them from Thy ways; let them not be tempted by the fact that sometimes the way of transgression is successful in this world.

O Heavenly Father! Give me the grace to beware in every way of causing temptation for my children by my behaviour, but, constantly bearing in mind their conduct, to divert them from error, to correct their mistakes, control their stubbornness and obstinacy, to restrain them from striving towards vanity and light-mindedness; that they may not be enticed by foolish notions, that they may not walk according to their hearts desire, that they may not become proud in their thoughts, that they may not forget Thee and Thy law. Let not iniquity ruin their mind and health. Let not sin weaken their strength of soul and body. O Righteous Judge, Who doth allow children to suffer for the sins of their parents, do not allow them to suffer for my sins, but sprinkle them with the dew of Thy grace, that they may prosper in virtue and holiness, that they may grow in Thy benevolence and in the love of pious people. O Father of compassion and mercy, from maternal feeling I would wish them the blessing of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, but may Thy holy will be done in them. Order their lot according to Thy benevolence, deprive them not of daily bread, send them all that is necessary in this life for the attainment of a blessed eternity, be merciful unto them when they sin before Thee, impute not unto them their sins of youth and ignorance, lead their hearts to contrition when they resist the guidance of Thy goodness; chastise them and be merciful, guiding them on the path pleasing unto Thee, but turn them not away from Thy countenance. Accept their prayers with benevolence, grant them success in every good endeavour; turn not Thy countenance away from them in the days of their affliction; let not temptations beyond their strength befall them. Overshadow them with Thy mercy, let Thine angel go with them and preserve them from every misfortune and evil path, O All-good God. Make me to be a mother who rejoiced in her children, that they may be a joy to me throughout the days of my life and a staff to me in mine old age. Count me worthy, with hope in Thy mercy, to stand with them at Thy dread judgment and with unworthy boldness to say, "Behold, I and my children whom Thou has given me, O Lord!" That together with them, glorifying Thine ineffable goodness and eternal love, I may supremely exalt Thy most holy name, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Distributed at the Kazan-Ambrose Women's' Hermitage in Shamordino.

Note: Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this prayer is that it shows us how far we often fall short of our Christian vocation even when we are praying for others. Here there is no petition that the children may be successful in worldly concerns, pass exams, get promotions, even recover from illnesses, - but only and continuously a prayer that they may be granted those things necessary to salvation.

CONCERNING PRAYER

Its Inner Qualities and Outer Effects

Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1)

*According to the Teaching of the Sacred Scriptures,
the Holy Fathers, and the Teachers and Writers of the Church*

*A Translation from a Booklet Published by the
Russian Skete of the Prophet Elias on Mount Athos.*

Translation by Mrs Valentina Merritt of Brookwood, Surrey

Continuation

3. The Importance and Use of Prayer

*Call upon Me in the day of thine affliction,
and I will deliver thee (Ps. 49:16)*

IT IS NATURAL for the poor to beg, and for a man who has been impoverished by his sins to pray - *Blessed Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov.*

The Lord does not need our prayers! Before we ask, He already knows what we need. He is exceedingly merciful, even upon those who do not ask of Him He pours out abundant mercies. But we need prayer; it draws a man closer to God - *Ibid.*

Prayer or the calling upon the name of the Lord is a threefold duty: a duty towards God, a duty towards oneself, and a duty with regard to our neighbour. Our duty to the Lord obliges us to show our faith in Him through prayer and calling upon Him, - to show that we truly believe in Him, that we know no other, that we confess Him to be the source of all that is good, that we hope on Him, as a true Father, Who loves His children and gives them what they ask. We turn to Him, just as children of the body approach with their petitions not someone else's father, but the one who begat them. The Apostle says: *How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed?* (Romans 10:14). And the Lord Himself said: "I am the Lord thy God. That is: "You must know Me Alone, confess Me, and place your hope in Me Alone, and seek every good thing from Me." *Call upon Me in the day of thine affliction, and I will deliver thee* (Ps. 49:16). Our duty with regard to ourselves obliges us to search with faith for all that is good from the Giver of all goodness, the Heavenly Father, because in spiritual good things, just as we are in things physical, we are barren, poor and destitute. Our duty with regard to our neighbour obliges us to pray for them as we do for ourselves, begging good from God, as the Apostle says: *Pray one for another, that ye may be healed* (James 5:16). Christian love demands this.

God knows what we need before we ask for it, as Christ says: *Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things* (Matt. 6:32), that is: food, drink, clothing and everything necessary for life; and He gives His good things both to the righteous and to sinners, because He is merciful and generous - *He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust* (Matt. 5:45). He also knows about the spiritual things that we need for our salvation, that is: faith, grace, peace of conscience, and the rest. But we should know that every good gift comes from God, - *Every good portion and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights* (James 1:17); and for this reason we should ask these things of God with faith, and we must learn and recognize that we receive everything from God, and in receiving it we should thank Him, Who as our Benefactor, freely has mercy upon us....

God Himself tells us to pray and to call upon Him: *Call upon Me in the day of thine affliction, and I will deliver thee* (Ps. 49:16). Ask, seek, knock - says Christ (Matt. 7:7). And in other places in the Sacred Scriptures, we find the same injunction. Our needs, both bodily and spiritual, urge us to pray. Our bodily needs make us ask for what is temporally necessary for our fleeting life, and our spiritual needs bring us to ask for what relates to the salvation of our soul. We have many sorrows, tribulations, oppressions, afflictions and temptations, which we are unable to overcome ourselves, without God's help, which is given to those who pray. The profit that comes from prayer is beyond expression, for humble prayer asks all things of the Merciful and Good God; of this we can find many examples in various places in the Sacred Scriptures. God's great blessing is that man is granted to converse with the Unapproachable God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to bring his needs before Him and make supplication regarding them, to praise, to hymn and to thank Him, that all this comes about through true, faithful and humble prayer, as says Saint Chrysostom: "When thou prayest, dost thou not converse with God? Tell me, when thou readest, dost thou hearken unto the One, Who converseth with thee?" A man regards himself as fortunate then he talks with earthly sovereigns; so the Christian counts it the greatest blessing that he is permitted to converse with the King of the Heavens, with the most good and merciful God; and yet he is not only permitted this but he is encouraged to do so both by the commandments and by the promise that his petition will be heard! -*Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk*.

What is obtained by frequent and prolonged prayer is firm and lasting -*The Ladder*.

He who keeps constant hold of the staff of prayer will not stumble. And even if he does, his fall will not be fatal. For prayer is a devout coercion of God (see Luke 18:5) - *Ibid*

If you constantly converse with the Heavenly King concerning your enemies, take courage when they attack you. You will not labour long, for they will soon retire of their own accord. These unholy spirits do not want to see you receive a crown for your struggle against them through prayer. And moreover, they will flee as from fire when scourged by prayer - *Ibid*.

I think that it is clear to everyone that without prayer it is impossible to have virtue as one's companion, and to journey along the path of life with her. For how can

anyone begin to struggle in virtue, without supplicating and often falling down before the One, Who is the Giver and Bestower of virtue? - *Chrysostom*.

to be continued.

FROM THE SACRED CANONS

"AS FOR those clergymen who hold a Liturgy in oratories or prayerhouses or in private residences, or who carry out a Baptism therein, without having obtained the consent of the local Bishop to do this, we decree that if any clergyman fail to guard against doing this, let him be deposed from office."

Canon 31 of the Holy and Œcumenical Sixth Council

THE COMING MONTH

THE GREAT FEAST of the *Meeting of the Lord in the Temple*, sometimes called the Presentation, falls forty days after Christmas on 2nd/15th February. It links the two focal points of the Church Calendar: the festal period that surrounds Christmas and the Theophany, and that which culminates in Passion Week and Pascha, because the feast celebrates an event in the infant life of the Saviour, when as a new-born Babe He was presented in the Temple, and during this event the Righteous Simeon the God-receiver foretold to the Holy Virgin the Passion of her Son, and the pain that she would experience then. Appropriately it usually falls about mid-way between the Nativity and Pascha. Sometimes because of the approach of Great Lent, the feast is shortened, but this year, as Pascha is relatively late (17th/30th April), the festival is kept for eight days.

This year, the *four Preparatory Sundays* which lead up to Great Lent all fall within the month of February and Great Lent itself begins on the last day of the month. Being a Leap Year, that is the 29th. The four Sundays and the twenty-two days which they embrace form the first part of the Church Year which falls within the *Lenten Triodion* period. The Lenten Triodion is the service book used in our churches during this preparatory period, throughout the six week period of Great Lent itself, and through Passion Week. It is used for the first time on the Saturday evening before the *Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee* at Vespers, and for the last time for the Midnight Service immediately before the Midnight Procession around the church at Pascha. The Gospel readings used at the Divine Liturgy on each of the Sundays form the basis for the services which are chanted on those days. In fact every year there is a fifth Sunday, that of *Zacchæus* which precedes the other four, but is intimately connected with them. In this lection, read this year on Sunday 31st January/13th February, we see Zacchæus, physically short of stature as we are spiritually, seeking a way to see our Saviour, and when he has climbed his tree, the Saviour grants him his blessing but addresses him with the words, "Come down." Typically, before we can begin our spiritual journey fruitfully, we also have to "come down" from some place, where we have exalted ourselves. The reading for the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee shows us the consequence of our thus humbling ourselves and the sad effect of our not doing so. The parable of *the Prodigal Son* assures us of God's readiness to receive us and forgive us, thus the pattern for Great Lent is set. Then follow two Sundays which tell us

of the *Judgment* and of *Forgiveness* so that the purpose of our Lenten course might be ever before our eyes. Forgiveness Sunday also commemorates the casting of Adam of Eve out of Paradise. Our Lenten course takes us through the period of exile, until at its very end, through the Good Thief we hear the Saviour's words, "this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise," and our kind is led again into Paradise.

The last two Preparatory Sundays are also called *Meatfare* and *Cheesefare Sundays*. The "fare" in these words is nothing to do with fare in the sense of what we eat, but relates to the same syllable in farewell. It is a leavetaking from first meat, and then cheese. Thus Meatfare can be rendered exactly by the word carnival (which unfortunately has a derived meaning in English which all but obscures its primary meaning). Meatfare Sunday (21st February/5th March) is the last day on which the Orthodox faithful eat meat and meat products until Pascha. Cheesefare Sunday is similarly the last day on which they eat dairy products. Of course at Pascha, we begin eating these things, and thus even in our dietary disciplines we have the story told: of Paradise, the Fall, exile, repentance and then restoration through the Resurrection.

Particularly among the Russians, the last week before Lent is kept as a kind of *Pancake Week*, just as in the West Shrove Tuesday was an opportunity to cook pancakes and use up the dairy products that would not be eaten in Lent. Now of course this is just a folk memory, because no one in the Western denominations keeps a fast such as the Orthodox do. But among the Orthodox too disorders arise; one aspect of having a week of pancake eating (the Russian ones are rather different than the English version, and are often eaten with sour cream and roll-mop herrings) is that one seems to be urged to eat as many as possible. There are sometimes competitions for the one who can eat most. One is told by people, who have little intention of keeping the fast properly, to stock up for Lent. In fact the purpose of the week is not to stock up on food for the coming seven weeks - an impossible task in any case, but to help us by gradually preparing us for the fast.

February Saints:-

The *Venerable Isaacius of Kiev* (14th/27th) was a rich merchant before placing himself in obedience to St Antony of the Kievan Caves and becoming a monk under his direction. Desiring a life of stricter asceticism he began to take on extreme fasts and he became a recluse. However, some element of pride must have been there because the Lord permitted him to fall into delusion, and on one occasion he was deceived into accepting an unclean spirit as though it were Christ, and he fell down and worshipped the demon. He was then stricken with the severest debility and had to be nursed back to health, both physical and spiritual, by St Theodosius. When through the prayers of Sts Antony and Theodosius, he was restored, he did not immediately take up his life of reclusion again, but rather that of a fool-for-Christ-sake. Before his repose he was granted to discern the evil spirits, and was granted the gift of working miracles. He died on 14th February in 1090, and his relics are preserved in the Caves of St Antony at Kiev. His life is a warning against self-direction in our spiritual lives.

The *Venerable Baldomer the Subdeacon* (27th Feb./ 11 March) lived in the seventh century in France. He was a blacksmith by trade in the city of Lyons and lived an exemplary pious life. One day, the Abbot, St Viventius, noticed Baldomer at prayer and, seeing his devotion, entered into conversation with him. He was struck by the

saint's knowledge of the Scriptures and was moved to invite him to join his monastic house. Here the saint edified all the brethren by the modesty of his conduct and his diligence in obedience. Despite the fact that he had been a blacksmith, he was an extremely gentle man and apparently would take his bread from the table and crumble it for the birds, who would come and perch on his fingers. Against his will he was made a subdeacon by the Bishop Caudrick of Lyons, and he died in about the year 660. In French his name is rendered Garmier.

The *Venerable Mothers Kyra and Marana* celebrate on 28th February (12th March). They lived at the end of the fourth century and in the first part of the fifth. Both were women of patrician background and of great wealth, but in the year 398 they decided to take up the ascetical life. Their form of asceticism was a particularly severe one. Near Aleppo, they built a walled enclosure in which they settled without having any other shelter. Here they lived and prayed in the open air, but entirely cut off from the world. Their former maid servants were moved to emulate their mistresses and came and begged to be allowed to live with them. The saints instructed them to build a cell for themselves outside their enclosure against the retaining wall, and they permitted that there should be a small window between them. Through this window they instructed and encouraged their disciples and as was necessary received small portions of food to sustain them. Three times during the lives, they emulated the holy prophets Moses and Elias, by fasting completely for forty days. They were visited by Bishop Theodoretus, and out of reverence for his episcopal rank, they permitted him to break through the former doorway into their enclosure and enter it. He was amazed to see that they were both wearing heavy chains, such that he thought that not even a fit man could bear, and he persuaded them to lay these aside. However, when the Bishop had departed they took them up again, and restored their wall. It is reported that they twice left their enclosure: once to make a pilgrimage to the Holy City of Jerusalem, and once to visit the shrine of the Protomartyr Thekla. The two ascetics lived in this manner for forty-two years and gave up their souls to the Lord.

On the last day of February, the 29th, we have one of the greatest saints of the Orthodox West, *Saint John Cassian the Roman*. His witness and his writings were of paramount importance in establishing the monastic life in the West, and were beloved by St Benedict. He travelled throughout the East and met the fathers of the desert, recording their teachings for posterity. He went to Constantinople where he was ordained deacon by Saint John Chrysostom. On returning to the West, he was ordained priest in Rome. His monastery in the South of France was for centuries a renowned monastic centre, and besides his ascetical writings we have benefitted from his defence of Orthodoxy against the heresies and Nestorius and those teachings of his which mitigated some of the extremes into which the Blessed Augustine had fallen. Because his day falls only every fourth year, his service is usually chanted at Compline on 28th February. This year, being a leap year, he will have his own festival and very appropriately for such a great teacher of asceticism, his day falls on *Clean Monday*, the first day of Great Lent.

For Orthodox Christians in Britain, particularly those in the Russian Church, 14th February is a day of special commemoration, because it was on that day in 1865, that the first purpose built Russian Orthodox Church in this country was consecrated.

That church, on Welbeck Street, was used by all the Orthodox in the capital at that time.

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

"Having drifted for years, without totally renouncing Christianity, how should I now go about trying to determine which is the right denomination to follow? Should I just trust my feelings? This seems right, but then I notice that my feelings start changing, and I am not so sure." - R.D.H, Dumfries, Scotland.

ACTUALLY you have already noticed the futility of just trusting your own feelings. Our feelings can be very deceptive, and as you have found they seem to play * tricks on us. Unfortunately, nowadays, we are led to believe that the "feel-good-factor" is the measure of all things. Even in the social and political sphere it often isn't, and in matters spiritual it certainly is not. Perhaps it would work if our hearts and minds were pure, but of course they are not, and that is the reason why it is imperative that we find the right path.

We are in a situation like a sick man who walks into the dispensary and is expected to select his own drugs. He might have a little medical understanding and so choose something based on that; or he might choose something because he likes the colour of the pills, or a third because it is promoted as being natural/organic. In reality he is lost and needs a physician.

As you are not in the position to trust any particular priest, clergyman or minister (after all aren't they all likely to be promoting their own brands?), you cannot yet entrust yourself to one of these as a physician. But there is one lead that you have, and that is to study as far as you are capable the teachings of the various denominations.

You will find several indicators to which is true. In some denominations, especially now, you will find that they almost completely ignore doctrine, despite the Apostolic injunction (1 Tim. 4:13). For others doctrine will have only the shakiest importance and you will be told that you must find what suits you. You have already found that this fails, and furthermore it puts you and not Christ at the centre of things and so can hardly be called Christian. Others will argue that there are distinctions between matters of primary concern and secondary - then you will have more problems because there will be another area of dispute. Who draws the line between primary and secondary, and where does it run? What is this theory based on? And you will find groups who believe that doctrine is of fundamental importance. In this regard these people at least are following the teaching of the Saviour and His Apostles as we have it in the Scriptures, which (I suppose) at this stage is your only measuring stick.

Then you will have to study, as far as you are capable, which of these last groups, has consistently throughout the generations, held fast to doctrine, as expressed in the New Testament and which strives to live according to that doctrine.

This process is not an easy one, but I have twice put in the phrase "as far as you are capable" - remember that you are not alone in this search if your searching is genuine. The Lord Himself is also willing that you come to a knowledge of the truth. He will not expect you to have a PhD in dogmatics before you can know the truth,

although He will expect you to use what powers you do have. Furthermore, knowing that He is seeking to set you free through His truth, pray to Him to guide you and enlighten you at every stage of your search. He assuredly will do so, if He sees that you searching is genuine.

Many people of course do search and do not find, but that is often because they rather enjoy the angst of the search and are not really striving to find; others fail because they are prepared at some point in the search to simply make do with what they think they have got, and so persuade themselves that their search is ended when all they are doing is playing with their own thoughts. If we desire to be Christian, we should be concerned to ascertain not our own wavering and unsubstantial thoughts on things, but those of Christ. That is why the question of doctrine is of such fundamental importance.

BETHLEHEM CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

THE HEADS of fifteen of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches met in Bethlehem for the celebration of the Saviour's Nativity this year, concelebrating at the Midnight Liturgy. A correspondent informs us that the host, *Patriarch Diodoros I of Jerusalem* was serving in a wheel-chair because of his infirmity. Ex-President Boris Yeltsin of Russia and six other "Orthodox Presidents" were present at the ceremony and were named "Knights of the Holy Sepulchre" on the second day of their Holy Land visit. President Milosevic of Yugoslavia was naturally unable to attend, but his country was better represented by the Head of its Royal House, *H.R.H. Prince Alexander*, who attended with his wife, *Princess Catherine*. During the Patriarchs' Holy Land stay, a Synod was held at the Jerusalem Patriarchate in which 14 of the 15 primates there participated. Patriarch Pavle of Serbia was unable to attend the meeting due to ill health. Patriarch Diodoros is reported as calling upon his colleagues to "work for the stability of their churches." "The Cyprus Weekly" (7-13 Jan. 2000) reports that no resolutions were passed at the Synod, but it adds: "The biggest dispute is over the role of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomeos, whose efforts to consolidate power have been denounced as 'neo-papism.' Bartholomeos, called the 'first among equals,' of the Orthodox patriarchs, has been accused of attempting to centralise the Church and getting too close to Orthodoxy's oldest foe, Catholicism." This rather populist presentation of the facts undoubtedly does express a real concern of many Orthodox throughout the world.

GREEK HIERARCH PARTICIPATES IN PAPAL SERVICE

"THE TIMES" on 19th January carried a picture of *Pope John Paul II* kneeling during the ceremonies for opening a "Holy Door" to inaugurate a "Holy Year." His Holiness was flanked by the Archbishop of Canterbury and Metropolitan Athanasios who was acting as a representative of the (Ecumenical Patriarch. Apparently Dr Carey and the Greek Metropolitan fell to their knees in a "spontaneous and unscheduled gesture of support" for the Pope. This occurred at the Church of St Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. "The Times" captioned the picture "Pope opens ecumenical door."

JERICHO COMMUNITY FORCIBLY SEIZED

ARCHBISHOP MARK, the overseer of the Church properties of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in the Holy Land, issued a news release on 15th January, reporting the seizure earlier that day of the Jericho community of ROCA. The monks there had been arrested and detained by the Palestinian authorities and when they were permitted to return to their community, they found that the buildings had been occupied by representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate. Two ROCA nuns were later able to enter the compound to protest against the illegal seizure of the property. Their action brought the attention of the world media to events in Jericho, largely because one of the nuns, *Sister Maria*, is the sister of President Clinton's former advisor, *George Stephanopoulos*, and the nuns are both American citizens. It has been reported in the press that the Palestinian officials said that they were acting on a request made by the *Moscow Patriarch Alexey II*, who had met *Yasser Arafat*, when he was making his Christmas pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Archbishop Mark has gone to the Holy Land to press for the return of the property to its legal owners, and monastics of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem have been keeping Vigil at the gates of the compound. On 23rd January, Archbishop Mark had a meeting with *Patriarch Diodoros of Jerusalem*, who expressed his dismay at the illegal interference of the government in the life of the Church. Twice he repeated: "We will testify that your Church has always held these properties," and he promised to contact Arafat on the issue, as he had done with regard to the similar seizure of the *Holy Trinity Monastery in Hebron* in 1997.

Almost, it seemed, as a prelude to the scandalous seizure of the Jericho property, on Thursday 6th January, "*The Times*," published a piece by their correspondent in Jerusalem, *Sam Kiley*, about Yeltsin visiting the Holy Land. He spoke of hopes for the "reunification with the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad." Speaking of these hopes (whose "hopes" he does not make clear), he adds: "In 1997, the church abroad handed the Trinity Monastery over to the Patriarch Alexei II as part of a rapprochement." When informed of this article, *Archbishop Mark* faxed us to write and explain that "there was no rapprochement at all, rather any chance of such was torpedoed for years to come by the violent and barbarous act of our expulsion" from the Hebron Monastery. Our letter to "The Times" pointed out that their own paper had, on 10th July, 1997, printed a report on the incident in Hebron citing the fact that "several dozen members of Mr Arafat's security forces" were involved, that the assault provoked international outcry, that "two nuns needed hospital treatment," that "one monk was handcuffed, thrown to the ground and stamped on before being evicted." None of these facts seem to support the interpretation that the "hand-over" was part of a rapprochement. Of course, our letter was not published.

It does seem rather baffling though to the present writer that *Patriarch Alexey II* and his agents resort to such tactics to gain possession of small and surely, on the world scale of things, rather insignificant church properties - the Jericho property was described in one national paper here as a "tatty orchard.". One would have thought that, in the post-Soviet period, the administration of the Moscow Patriarchate would perhaps have considered their best tactic with regard to the Church Abroad would be to try and conciliate her, and call her back to what they doubtless would claim is "the Mother Church." Instead, they further alienate her and provoke her people by these

brutal attempts to snatch portions of her property, and by their manifestly unChristian treatment of her personnel. If they are so concerned to gain a few acres and a few buildings, would due legal process not at least be a more civilised way of going about things? Should we conclude that the leopard is indeed unable to change his spots? It is a sad thing indeed if we have to do so, because it runs contrary to our Christian hope, but what we can observe is that, a decade after the fall of the Soviet oppression, the leopard that has charge of the administration of the Moscow Patriarchate has not yet done so.

An internet posting from the *ROCA Synod in New York*, dated 28th January, informs us that a high-ranking Israeli official, who wished to remain anonymous, has told a member of the Synod that "once the monastery in Jericho is in Moscow Patriarchate hands, it will then be sold to the Moscow government, which will turn it into a consulate."

KOSOVO AFTERMATH

IN HIS CHRISTMAS MESSAGE, the *Serbian Patriarch Pavle* and the other hierarchs of his Church spoke of the crisis which faces us. They did not narrowly confine themselves to the evident crisis that faces their homeland after Nato's assault on her, as might have been understandable, but spoke of the crisis which faces all mankind. "Wrong has become right for us, falsehood has become truth, and we can only cry out with the Psalmist David, 'Save me, O Lord, for a righteous man there is no more; for truths have diminished from the sons of men. Vain things hath each man spoken to his neighbour; deceitful lips are in his heart, and in his heart hath he spoken evils' (Ps. 11:1-2). The twentieth century constantly preached with the lips of its demonic 'wisdom' that human lives are the cheapest of all merchandise. In the number of its victims it far surpassed all other centuries of human history." In the light of this, the bishops say: "It is hard to be a human being. To be a human being who spreads warmth is even harder, but it is a task to which we are suited and which the Lord Himself has entrusted us - to be human even in inhuman times. See how many families are governed by coldness, where there is no more love and which are disintegrating. There are more and more such families. See how many ties of kinship, neighbourliness, friendship and kumstvo [the relationship between baptismal and marriage sponsors and their charges] have been broken and enveloped in coldness. We will be completely immobilized by the ice of discord and intolerance, of disunity and envy, if we do not bring Christ into our hearts and especially into the hearts of our children. He is the only One able to bring together the disunited and reconcile the alienated, to warm our hearts and give peace to our lives."

Speaking of the difficulties that now face his people, *Bishop Artemije of Raska-Prizren* boldly ended an interview on 13th January with the words: "There are three things which we must do. First: we need to replace the current regime in Belgrade and Serbia. Second, we need to replace the current regime in Belgrade and Serbia. And third: we need to replace the current regime in Belgrade and Serbia." The bishop said that in speaking thus he was not engaging in politics but simply that the Church was "only demonstrating, as it has always done, its maternal concern for the people who have been entrusted to it by God and by history." "The Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija," he said, "have been completely abandoned, not a single institution of the Serbian state

is functioning here, and those who claim to have been elected by the people have left the people without any means of defence. It is the Church which has remained here to protect the people from attacks of various gangs, to feed it and to distribute humanitarian aid."

Father Sava of Dechani Monastery reports that the *Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania* under the leadership of *His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana*, has been responding to the needs of the Kosovo refugees who have settled in Albania. The Albanian government estimates that the country has taken in 473,429 refugees, and the Orthodox Church in Albania has been helping to feed and care for these people. It has also sent 1,532 tons of humanitarian aid into Kosovo itself.

MACEDONIAN MOVE

"THE TABLET," a Roman Catholic journal, reports that the hierarchy of the Church in Macedonia is going to apply to the Œcumenical Patriarchate to receive status as an autocephalous Church. The Tablet's correspondent seemed sure that the request would be granted. Sadly, as part of the attempt of the throne of Constantinople to present itself as a kind of Orthodox papacy (see disquiet expressed by hierarchs at the Jerusalem Synod above), this might be the case, although properly, the Macedonian Church which broke away from the Serbian Patriarchate illegally, should surely first have recourse to the Patriarch of Serbia and the Synod of his bishops.

MEMORIAL FOR ABBESS ELISABETH

ABBESS SERAPHIMA and the sisters of the Convent of the Annunciation published an appeal on the feast of the Theophany this year. It reads: "The first anniversary of the repose of our beloved Mother Abbess Elisabeth, on 3rd February this year, is approaching. We have ordered a memorial Cross to be erected over her grave in Gunnersbury Cemetery. The inscription on the base of the Russian Cross will be in Russian and in English. We hope the memorial will be completed and erected towards the end of March in time for the feast of the Annunciation, the Convent's feast, which falls on Friday 25th March/7th April, 2000. The blessing of the memorial at the cemetery will take place after the Divine Liturgy and lunch at the Convent on that day. All are cordially invited. We hope that all who knew and loved Mother Elisabeth will contribute towards the erection of her memorial, and we will be grateful to all who do so. Through the loving prayers of Mother Elisabeth may God bless you and all your dear ones." Contributions towards the memorial Cross should be made out to "Convent of the Annunciation" and sent to the sisters at 26 Brondesbury Park, Willesden, London NW6 7DL, England.

BLESSING FOR IOW MISSION

ARCHBISHOP MARK has blessed us to serve Liturgies at *Ryde on the Isle of Wight*, and it is hoped that the five catechumens there will be received into Orthodoxy at St Edward's Church on Saturday, 6th/19th February, the feast day of Saint Photius the Great. In accordance with the Archbishop' blessing, D.V. three will be baptized and

two received through the œconomia of chrismation. We ask the prayers of the faithful for this little group: David, Mary, Joseph, Barbara and Martin.

BROOKWOOD NEWS

THEOPHANY: Our very special thanks are due *Dr George and Mrs Elisabeth Hobbs* for their kind hospitality on the day of Theophany. A group of people from *St Peter's Shared Church in Chertsey* and *St Anne's Roman Catholic Church*, far outnumbering our own small congregation, joined us for the Great Blessing of the Waters at the riverside there. After the ceremony the Hobbsses invited everyone to their nearby home for refreshments, where to Father Niphon's utter delight, they had a massive cheese board. The local council has also laid a path along the route that we usually take to the waterside, which made the whole progress much less muddy. After the blessing, we jokingly suggested to a small group of the locals, that they should also provide a small pier for the blessing ceremony, only to find that they were already discussing that prospect!

VISITORS to the Brotherhood will perhaps have noticed that we have had new direction signs erected. One is attached to the main cemetery sign at the junction of Cemetery Pales and the A322 Guildford to Bagshot road, and the other is a double sided sign at the entrance to the Cemetery at Saint Cyprian's Avenue. These were made and erected by a very helpful local firm, *Focus Signs* of St John's, Woking.

ON FRIDAY 21st January, one of the most senior members of the Russian Orthodox community in London, *Natalia Sowell*s, was laid to rest in the St Edward Orthodox Cemetery in Brookwood. Mrs Sowell's was a close relative of the *New Martyr Eugene*, the Dr Botkin who was slain with the Russian Imperial Family in 1918. Her funeral service was conducted by *Fr Vadim Zakrevsky* at the Dormition Church on Harvard Road, London W.4. Her son-in-law, *Nikolai Yellachich*, was one of the principle architects of the new church. *Abbess Seraphima* and sisters from the Convent of the Annunciation chanted at the funeral. May the Lord grant His departed handmaiden Natalia rest with His saints, and may He comfort her widower, John, and the other members of her family.

OUR DAILY CHOIR recently received a much needed boost. *Leonides Kotsiris*, an Australian Greek now living in the United States, visited our parishioner, Haralampos Sofianopoulos, for a week in January. He turned out to be an experienced chanter, who attends a church where they use both Greek and English, and was able to give us much needed instruction, and spent some time making tapes of things that we would need.

PRACTICAL TIP

IN EVERY SPHERE of life (family, career, housing, social life), before embarking on any change, always reflect carefully on whether the proposed change will help to bring you closer to Christ and His Church, or will put you back further from Him.