

The Shepherd

An Orthodox Christian Pastoral Magazine

VOLUME XXI NUMBER 8 APRIL 2001

Christ is Risen ! Truly, He is Risen!

We greet all our readers with the Radiant Resurrection of Christ our Saviour, hoping that the joy and triumph of the feast of feasts will fill your hearts and minds, and sustain you in the months ahead. Pray that we may also receive a like blessing.

FROM THE FATHERS

"FOR, as in the regeneration of the universe, the Apostle tells us, that *the Lord Himself will descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel* (I Thess. 4:16), and by a trumpet sound raise up the dead to incorruption - so now too he who is in the tomb (Lazarus), at the voice of command, shakes off death as if it were a sleep, and ridding himself of the corruption that had come upon his condition as a corpse, leaps forth from the tomb whole and sound, not even hindered in his egress by the bonds of the grave-cloths round his feet and hands. Are these things too small to produce faith in the resurrection of the dead? Or do you seek that your judgment on this point should be confirmed by yet other proofs? In truth the Lord seems to me not to have spoken in vain to them of Capernaum when He said to Himself, as in the person of men, *Ye will surely say unto Me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself* (Luke 4:23). For it behoved Him, when He had accustomed men to the miracle of resurrection in other bodies, to confirm His word in His own humanity. You saw the thing proclaimed working in others - those who were about to die, the child that had just ceased to live, the young man at the edge of the grave, the putrefying corpse - all alike restored to life by one command to life. Do you seek for those who have come to death by wounds and bloodshed? Does any feebleness of life-giving power hinder the grace in them? Then behold Him Whose hands were pierced with nails; behold Him Whose side was transfixed with a spear; pass your fingers through the print of the nails; thrust your hand into the spear-wound; you can surely guess how far within it is likely the point would reach, if you reckon the passage inwards by the breath of the external scar, for the wound that gives admission to a man's hand (John 20:27) shows to what depth within the iron entered. If He then has been raised, well may we cry out with the Apostle's exclamation: *How say some that there is no resurrection of the dead!*"

Saint Gregory of Nyssa, +394A.D: On the Making of Man.

"IN WHAT WAY could men be more truly encouraged to believe in the glory to come, and to strive for eternal life, than by knowing that God Himself had become a Sharer of their humanity and their mortality? In what other way could they be more efficaciously appealed to, to suffer evils of every kind for the sake of salvation, than by

learning that their own Creator had undergone at the hands of impious men infamy of every kind, and even the sentence of death itself? For what reason could they more fittingly accept the hope of resurrection than through remembering that they had been cleansed by His Mysteries, and made one with His Body Who, tasting death on their behalf, speedily offered them an example of rising from the dead?

Venerable Bede of Jarrow, + 735 A.D.

PASCHA, THE LORD'S PASCHA!

*"It is the day of Resurrection,
let us be radiant, O ye peoples;
Pascha, the Lord's Pascha;
for Christ God
hath brought us from death unto life,
and from earth unto Heaven as we sing the triumphant hymn."*

(Heirmos of the First Ode of the Paschal Canon)

BY THE MERCY OF GOD, we have again been deemed worthy to live through to the celebration of the greatest and most joyous of the Christian festivals - to "the feast of feasts and festival of festivals," the radiant resurrection of Christ, Holy Pascha.

With love we send all our readers that paschal greeting which is unchangingly new, full of the power of grace, and forever joy-filled:-

CHRIST IS RISEN!

How fortunate we, Orthodox Christians, are, that we have this marvellous festival, that, every year, forgetting all of life's tribulations and the afflictions of the present insidious earthly life, even to us it is granted to enjoy "this good and radiant festival"! Indeed there is no faith more joyous than our Orthodox faith. And this is because it breathes with the joy of the Lord's Resurrection.

The Resurrection of Christ is the chief corner stone of our holy faith.

For this reason its celebration is replete with special solemnity and rejoicing.

"This festival," says that great father of the Church, Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus, "is more festive than all the festivals. For the whole world it embodies festivity, renewal and salvation. This festival is the chief and the highest of all the feasts."

It is highly significant that at the present time our holy Orthodox Church alone celebrates "this chosen and holy day" as did the first Christians in deep antiquity, and this fact in itself bears the strongest witness of the truthfulness of our holy Orthodox Faith, giving her precedence over all those other confessions, which while calling themselves Christian, are separated from holy Orthodoxy.

But how did they celebrate holy Pascha in the very first ages of Christianity? Saint Gregory of Nyssa, very eloquently and orderly, informs us about this:

"Today," he says, "the whole universe, as though it were one family, assembles together for one purpose, leaving off its usual concerns as it were at a given sign, it turns to prayer. Today on the roads there are no travellers, no voyagers are to be seen upon the seas, the tiller of the soil, leaving his plough and his spade, bedecks himself in his festive clothes; the taverns stand empty, the noise of their gatherings gone, even as Winter has disappeared with the advent of Spring; the disturbance, confusion and

strifes of life are transformed by the stillness of the feast. The poor man is adorned like the rich; the rich man is clothed in even greater magnificence than usual; the old man, like a youth, fastens to participate in the joy, the sick man overcomes his debility; children changing their apparel keep festival with their emotions because as yet they are not able to celebrate spiritually; chastity rejoices the soul because she sees the radiant, festive pledge of her hope; the mother of the family, celebrating today, rejoices with all her household; herself, her husband, and children, the servants and the domestics, they all make glad... And now the righteous one rejoices, and he who has cleansed his conscience hopes for the correction of repentance. The present day diminishes every affliction, and there is no man so miserable that he would not find consolation in the celebration of the feast."

Oh, our wonderful Paschal mattins! Can anything on earth compare with the exceedingly moving and exalting celebration of our paschal Divine Services, which, as we so often observe, draws even people who are separated from us according to faith to our churches on the night of Pascha with, as it were, an irresistible force. On this "sacred and all-festive night," it is as if Heaven itself, or some portion of it, drops down to us on our sinful earth, and we, each according to his measure, are granted to taste something of the sweetness of Paradise, of that blessedness of Paradise which cannot be expressed in human tongues, but which awaits all true Christians in the future life.

In what does the core cause of this luminous, paschal joy consist?

In that of which we chant in the paschal hymns: "*Christ Cod hath brought us from death unto life, and from earth unto Heaven as we sing the triumphal hymn*"

The cause of our radiant joy is this, that by the Resurrection of Christ evil *has been conquered, the consequences of evil have been conquered, as has our most evil enemy - death; and from this sinful earth, which has been filled with evil, we have been raised up to Heaven.*

By the Resurrection of Christ, we have been delivered from the gloomy power of Hades, and there has been granted unto us the possibility of another eternal and blessed life.

Celebrating this victory over death and Hades, the holy Church calls us to participate in her hymn of triumph: "*We celebrate the death of death, the destruction of Hades, the beginning of an everlasting life ...*"

"Now is salvation come to the world," teaches Saint Gregory the Theologian, "to the visible world and to the invisible world. Christ [comes] from the dead, - and you, rise up with Him! Christ in His glory, - and you, enter therein! Christ from the tomb - and you, free yourselves from the fetters of sin! The gates of Hades are broken open, death is annihilated, the old Adam is put away and is made completely new, for *if nay man be in Christ, he is a new creature*" (2 Cor. 5:17).

"Let us then celebrate this most great and luminous festival," Saint John Chrysostom cries out, "in which the Lord is risen! Let us celebrate it radiantly and reverently, for *the Lord is risen and hath raised up the world with Him*"

What does our joyfulness on the day of the Paschal feast signify, what does our experience of radiant exaltation during the paschal mattins mean? Is it not the clear voice, which proceeds from the depths of our inner consciousness, and which says that our usual, day-to-day life, which we live on earth, is not the real life, for which we were fore-ordained; that our soul strives towards another life, namely one of luminous blessedness, the possibility of which the Lord has granted us through His Resurrection,

a life free of the bonds of sin, a pure life, a heavenly one, such is our real joy, our real blessedness; - real happiness is not on earth, but in heaven; not in the earthly but in the heavenly.

And because of this, we must indignantly sweep away from ourselves, and resolutely reject, everything that binds us strongly to the earth, which makes us ourselves "earthly," which makes us unable to raise ourselves to Heaven, which makes us insensitive to the heavenly world and the spiritual. We were not created for this corruptible world, but for the eternal, incorruptible life, which the Lord, having liberated us from the power of sin, grants us anew through His Resurrection.

As we radiantly celebrate the joy of Holy Pascha, while we are yet able to, let us guard ourselves against every pernicious influence of a world, which does not accept the Resurrection of Christ; let us flee from all the numberless allurements, which from all sides now trap dissipated souls; let us be careful that we remain in the closest union with the true Church; let us prepare ourselves for the eternal, incorrupt life, which has been prepared for us through the Lord's Resurrection, joyously chanting together with all the faithful the hymn of victory:

O PASCHA OF INCORRUPTION - SALVATION OF THE WORLD!

The Paschal Message of the Ever-Memorable Archbishop Averky, 1960

NOTE: Most modern teachers call us to spiritual struggle in the fasts, and devote their festival addresses to celebration. Archbishop Averky in this piece shows a more sober attitude, by reminding us, even in the midst of the rejoicing of the greatest feast, that its true celebration is achieved only through spiritual wakefulness and the struggle to overcome all that is worldly within us, and indeed that, contrary to what most of us usually think, our true joy consists in our spiritual struggle and not in its abandonment or flight from it. If we were to take his soul-saving teaching to heart, we would rise from the kind of roller-coaster spiritual life that most of us live - sometimes high in trying to struggle and the next moment right down, seeming to reject all that we have worked for and giving ourselves over to "pleasures!"

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 B. Merritt of Brookwood, Surrey

Continuation from the last issue

3. The Church and Communal Divine Service

*My house shall be called the house of prayer (Matt. 21:13).
These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication (Acts 1:14).*

THE CHURCH is an earthly heaven. Standing therein, we must stand with reverence, in an orderly way, like the holy Angels, having our eyes cast down to the

ground, not leaning against the wall, with our hands hanging free and not clasped together, not unevenly upon our feet, but standing on both evenly -*Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov*.

THE GRACE of God is an inalienable component of the house of God; in the visible world there is always air, and within the house of God the grace of God is always there and we should stand in God's house, relying upon its grace-filled activity, just as surely as we rely upon the activity of the air when we breathe it in. Thus, we can say, that in the house of God it is impossible that we should not be filled with God's grace, unless we alienate it ourselves and hinder its acting upon us. If you wish that the grace of God, which abounds in God's house, should act upon you, then do not hinder its activity upon you, and put away from yourself everything inimical, everything sinful; lay aside all that pertains to the life of this world if it distracts you from the sacred rites; it is better even to restrain within yourself even the most prayerful sighings if they are not in accord with the Church prayers. In church it behooves us to pray as the Church is praying, and to reflect upon only what is happening there. It is through the sacred rites that even the grace of God acts upon us, and in those very prayers there is contained a power which is saving. See how close the grace of God, which abides in God's house, is to us; only we have to regard it with a reverential simplicity; only we have to pay heed to it with peaceful attentiveness; then, it, like the light of the sun in the middle of the day, will shine into our soul, and like the fragrance in a beautiful garden it will grant sweetness to our heart - *Archpriest Putyatin*.

Everything earthly is an image and shadow of the heavenly. Thus the form of the Divine service on earth is an image of that in heaven. The beauty of the church is an image of the unapproachable Divine glory in the Heavens; the fragrance of the incense is an image of the ineffable fragrance of the saints there; the chanting here is an image of the indescribable doxology of the Angels - *Righteous John of Cronstadt*

GOD does not need a church [building], for Heaven is His Throne and the earth His footstool, and the Universe cannot contain Him, but it is man who requires one that he might take refuge in God by estranging himself as much as possible from the worldly vanities in which the feeling of God's presence is lost - *Saint Philaret of Moscow*.

THE CHURCH SERVICES, through their rites and the continuation of the prayers, readings and chanting, inspire a deep thankfulness towards God and a mutual community and love for each other, no matter who the other persons are, as well as a consciousness of our numberless sins, and unremitting repentance for them, combined with the frequent repetition of the prayer of the publican in its short form: Lord, have mercy! - *Righteous John of Cronstadt*.

IN CHURCH God is present in a special way, and that is why our prayer has more access to Him. Here the propitiatory sacrifice is offered to God, and that is why He quickly fulfils our prayer. Here we all pray to God together, and He especially loves it when two or three pray to Him together. Here, even if your prayer does find access to God, others are supplicating Him for you. And so, when you are in church, never forget that there others are also praying for you and with you; and even if you have no trust in your own prayer, then take comfort in the thought that God hears the prayers

of those others who are praying for you. Here if you lack enough diligence in prayer, then it will be born in you, and looking at the others praying you will begin to pray - *Archpriest Putyatin*.

IN GOING from your cell to the church to stand before the face of God, you must maintain reverence in your walk, do not run or look around, have your eyes cast down to the ground, do not gesticulate with your hands, but let them hang down loose - *Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov*.

GENERALLY in church we must maintain as great a reverence and good order as is possible both unto the glory of God and also for one's own spiritual benefit and the spiritual benefit of the people there present, who are thus edified by the reverence of the monastics. On the other hand, their [the people's] reverence is disturbed, tried and dispersed by irreverence. One should not leave the church before the time; one should not permit even the smallest infringement of the rule of good order and reverence. From carelessness in small things, carelessness in the more important things and indeed in everything proceeds. In order to maintain attention to one's primary duties, one must keep a watch over oneself and be attentive to everything, even the slightest of actions - *Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov*.

IT IS GOOD to come to Divine service before everyone else, but it is not good to leave the service before the dismissal without some necessity - *Venerable Ephraim the Syrian*.

HOW DO WE DARE to leave the Divine service before the dismissal when there is no need to do so? If a rich man were to invite you to supper, would you dare to rise up from among those sitting at table with you and go home? Would you rather not wait patiently until everyone else rose from table? - *Ibid*.

... to be continued with "On the Prayer Rule."

From "An Athonite Gerontikon"

AN ASCETIC called Pachomius was illiterate. He knew only to say, "Christ is Risen!" He worked in a hut doing his obedience task, and from time to time someone would bring him food. Many snakes would come to his workplace and make his attempt to work very difficult. He had to take them in his hand and throw them out. One time a very large snake was such a problem that he grabbed it and tied it around his waist, like a belt, and continued working. At that moment the monk who had just brought him some food entered his kelli [cell]. When he saw the snake tied around his waist, he became very frightened and told him to throw it outside so as not to be hurt by it. The elder then repeated Christ's words: "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you," and "They will take up serpents and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them."

THE COMING MONTH

PASCHA, Easter Day, falls on the second day of the Church month, and is of course the festival of the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. This event is the foundation stone of our Faith and for that reason Pascha is the greatest of the Christian festivals. To underline its importance, whereas most of the principal feasts of the Church year are kept for a maximum of eight or nine days, Easter is celebrated for forty days.

Death is destroyed by the Saviour's arising, but people may ask, "How is this the case, when we still die?" It is so, of course, because we have been granted resurrection from the dead unto life eternal. And although we die physically, we have been granted spiritual resurrection -this is something which even in this life we participate in. And at the end of the world we shall participate with all mankind in the resurrection of the body.

The Saviour's contest with death and His victory over it was foretold even from the first days after Creation. When Adam and Eve fell, the Lord in His loving-kindness gave them a promise. In rebuking the serpent, he said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall crush thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15). The Saviour Himself, being born of a virgin, is the only one who is the "seed" of a woman, and His heel was bruised in the crucifixion, but the evil one was crushed by His victory over death.

Later in Exodus, in bringing the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, the Lord inaugurated the feast of the Passover. That festival was kept by the faithful Jews for generations as a celebration of their deliverance. But it is much more than that, it exactly foreshadowed the Christian celebration of Pascha, the deliverance of His chosen people, not simply, as then, from a temporal bondage as an enslaved nation, but from the bondage of sin.

In preparation for the exodus from Egypt, the Jews killed the paschal lamb, which was a figure of Christ Himself, the Lamb of God. Its blood was smeared on the door posts and lintels of the Hebrews that the Angel of death might pass over them and leave them free, just as the blood of the Lamb of God stained the beams of the Cross, signed with which we are freed from spiritual death and granted resurrection from the dead unto life everlasting. The people miraculously crossed over the Red Sea led by Moses; now led by Christ Himself we cross over from death unto life. Pharaoh and his hosts were drowned in the sea, just as the hosts of the demons are destroyed and are unable to touch those who have passed through the waters of Baptism.

The whole history of the travels of the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai is a portrayal of our life, after our spiritual resurrection, in the Church. The coming into the Promised Land is our hope and aim, our entry again into Paradise. And it was at the festival of the first Christian Passover, that the Good Thief, as the first of our kind, entered again into Paradise with Christ.

It is for these reasons that the Orthodox Christians celebrate the festival with such rejoicing. It is for this reason that not only once a year, but every week, on Sundays, we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord, looking forward to our own

resurrection. We end the recital of the Creed every day in our prayers with the words, "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come." The reason that we so often slip back and fall into sin is that, despite what we say, we fail to do this. Instead we simply live our Christian lives, insofar as we do, seeing our Faith as an aid and a crutch for the duration of this life. Indeed, it is such and is invaluable, but without the hope expressed in those last two clauses of the Creed, it would be, and often is, a completely joyless experience. For forty days the Church insistently calls us, from such a miserable drudgery as most of us manage to make of our Christian life, to a promise and foretaste of joy.

"Christ is Risen!" the Church proclaims, and, inviting us to take upon ourselves the role of the Ointment-bearing Women, for forty days, or rather throughout our earthly lives, she calls forth this response from us: "Let us arise in the deep dawn" - (i.e. even when it is yet dark because of our sins), - "and, instead of myrrh (symbolic of defeat and death), offer praise unto the Master; and we shall see Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, Who causeth life to dawn for all."

For the first week of Easter, Bright Week, the services follow the pattern set on Pascha Night. The doors of the icon screen are left wide open, reminding us both of the open tomb and of Paradise again opened to us. On the next Sunday, the services return to their more usual form, but they are still shot through with paschal hymns. This Sunday is particularly devoted to the Holy Apostle Thomas, whose initial doubting and whose proclamation of faith on the eighth day of the resurrection, has been a foundation stone of belief for generations of believers. The third Sunday is dedicated to the Ointment-Bearing Women, those first witnesses of the resurrection. The fourth and fifth Sundays of Pascha, which both this year fall within the month of April, are dedicated to the healing of the Paralytic and our Saviour's meeting with the Samaritan Woman. Both these events happened before His Resurrection, but they show forth its power granted to others, in this case one ostensibly physically sick but also spiritually ailing, and to one (the Samaritan Woman) who was spiritually sick both because of the prodigality of her life and because of erroneousness of her belief. The power of Christ's Resurrection can touch all such and heal them of physical and spiritual ills.

Among the Saints that we celebrate in April, the most beloved is undoubtedly the Holy Great Martyr George the Trophy Bearer, whose feast day, this year, falls on the Sunday of the Paralytic, and so the service for the Saint is combined with that of the Sunday. We should undoubtedly particularly turn to St George now in our prayers, because he is the defender of herds and flocks, and it was a tradition in agricultural societies on his day to bless the cattle.

Holy New Martyr Paul the Russian (3rd/16th April): This martyr was kidnapped by Tartars when he was a young lad and was abducted from his homeland and sold into slavery. By God's providence, he was bought by a Christian master who in time granted him his freedom. Paul met a young Christian woman, who was a Russian like himself and had similarly been abducted as a child and enslaved. They married and settled in Constantinople. Sometime after this, Paul was afflicted with a kind of brain disorder, and became subject to fits and seizures. His Christian friends took him to the Church of the Mother of God, "Mouglounio," because there many cures had been granted to those with mental disorders. However, in some kind of delirium Paul refused to go and struggled against those who were trying to help him. He then saw a

group of Turks and shouted out to them: "I am a Hagarene, and have become a Hagarene." This worried his Christian friends as they suspected that trouble would ensue, and indeed it did. The matter was reported to the authorities. Paul and the priests of the Church were arrested. Paul was asked if indeed he had become a Moslem, but at this point he recovered his wits and answered that he was a Christian and explained the situation. However, the vizier had a written deposition from those who had heard him cry out that he was a Hagarene, and so ordered Paul either to do so or to face a death sentence. Paul's wife had come to witness the interrogation, and in Russian so that she would not be understood, she urged the Martyr to remain steadfast. She was overheard by a Turk who spoke Russian, and as a result was ordered to be taken out and thrashed with rods. Paul, however, heeded her good advice, and although they kept hi in prison for three days hoping he would recant, he remained faithful. On the third day, the vizier ordered that he be beheaded. It was on 3rd April, 1683, which that year was Holy and Great Friday, and so he received the crown of martyrdom. The Christians offered a bribe for the release of the priests who had been arrested with him, and so they were freed.

The holy Martyr Thomais (13th/26th) was born in Alexandria and was brought up in piety. At the age of fifteen she was given in marriage to a devout young Christian. However, her husband had to journey away from home on business, and Thomais' father-in-law, being overcome by a spirit of lust, used this opportunity to attempt to dishonour her. When she struggled against him and tried to bring him to his senses, he took a knife and killed her. Instantly, he was struck blind and was unable to find his way out of the house, and so his crime was discovered. He was tried and executed, whereas his victim was glorified as a Martyr for remaining steadfast in the Christian virtue of marital fidelity and chastity. Abba Daniel of Scetis, one of the great fathers of the Egypt desert, translated her sacred relics to Scetis and laid her in the cemetery with the priests because of the honour that was due her. She suffered in the year 476.

Our holy father, Maccald of the Isle of Man (25th April/8th May) was a native of Ireland and a contemporary of the great St Patrick. However, he lived a profligate life and was the leader of a band of robbers, who harassed the country with their crimes and murders. One day, they came upon St Patrick as he was journeying, and Maccald told his men: "This is the impostor that is leading the people astray, let us see whether his God is strong or not." They had one of their number lie down and pretend to be sick, covering him with a cloak, and then they called the Saint over pretending to ask him to heal him through his prayers. The Saint simply removed the cloak from the man, and he was found to be dead. A fear fell upon the robbers who had tried to mock the saint, and Maccald fell at St Patrick's feet in repentance. He was subsequently baptized, and asked St Patrick to give him a penance because of the horror of his former crimes. The saint instructed to leave his native land never to return, taking with him only a single garment to cover his nakedness. Fulfilling this instruction, he entrusted himself to a coracle, believing that he would be taken by the winds wherever the Lord desired. He came up on the Isle of Man, and there he placed himself in the service of the two Bishops, Conindrus and Romulus, who ministered there. They directed him in the spiritual life, and in time, so much did he grow in virtue, that he was consecrated to be Bishop as their successor. He died c 518 A.D.

Saint Basil of Ostrog was born in a village called Popovo Selo in Herzegovina. His parents were simple folk but devout, and he grew up loving the Church of God. As a youth he entered the monastery of the Mother of God at Trebinje and there received the monastic tonsure. Because of his virtue he was chosen to be the Bishop of Zahum and Skenderia, and he cared for the flock entrusted to him from the monastery at TvrDOS. In those days the people suffered many things because they were oppressed by the Turks, and the Latins continually by means of guile sought to bring the people over to their faith from Holy Orthodoxy. St Basil defended them from both these assaults, praying for them and instructing them. Eventually he was forced to move from TvrDOS, which was destroyed by the Turks, and he settled at Ostrog, where he ended his days in a life of the strictest asceticism. He lived in the sixteenth century and his incorrupt relics are revered at his monastery to this day. They have been a source of unending miracles, and so many and great are the healings that have been worked through his intercessions, that not only the Christians resort to his sacred relics but the Moslems also.

BOOK NOTICE

FREEDOM BELLS

by Protopresbyter Alexander Cherney

Published by Square One Publications, Upton upon Severn, 2000
ISBN 1 899955 46 1; illustrated, hardcover, 330 pages; £15.00

THIS BOOK, the autobiography of the dean of the Latvian Orthodox Church Abroad in this country, Protopresbyter Alexander Cherney, is a witness to the struggle which his homeland and the Orthodox Church in general has experienced in that ugliest of centuries, the twentieth century. Father Alexander was born in 1914, in the early days of the First World War, when his homeland was still part of the Russian Empire. His family migrated to western Siberia. After his father's death, his widowed mother managed to take her family back to Latvia, but here they found themselves as refugees in their own land. He met and was inspired by the holy hieromartyr Archbishop John (Pommers). He witnessed the Soviet invasion of his country and later the Nazi one. During the former he was arrested, tortured, imprisoned and sentenced to death. Under the Nazis he was forced to evacuate to Germany. After the War, he married a German girl, Helen, now his matushka, and they decided to settle in England, where Helen's sister was already living. After the death in 1969, of Archpriest Antonijs Gramatins, who is buried at Brookwood, the Latvian Church community was left without a priest and in time Father Alexander was ordained to spiritually lead his people here in 1972. Since that time he has ministered to his fellow Latvian Orthodox Christians and others who have joined them in this country, travelling the length and breadth of the country to care for them. His autobiography is introduced by a Prologue written by Fr Alexander's ruling hierarch, Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain, which pays tribute to this faithful priest and to the Faith which has sustained him through so many trials and troubles in a life which spanned one of the saddest periods of our history. Our own community here at Brookwood owes an immense debt of gratitude to Father Alexander and his matushka, for the love they have shown us over the years, and for the fact that he freely offered his services as an architect to

help us in the conversion of our Brotherhood house from the original mortuary chapel. He is always commemorated here in our Liturgies as the first of our benefactors. His book is written simply and with great modesty but it tells the life of a faithful pastor of God's Church and a confessor of the Faith. Often we think of the times of trial and persecution as somehow belonging to another time and another place, as being dramatic, even exhilarating. Father Alexander's book shows us how such times affect the lives of ordinary people - in his case an ordinary person who was to manifest extraordinary steadfastness through his faith in Christ. In the midst of a world that was made ugly by the last century, beauty still shines through. In the midst of contemporary London, unknown to the world at large, we have living modestly a priest and his matushka who bear witness to the truth of the Lord's counsel to St Paul: "My strength is made perfect in weakness."

*THOU art risen, O Jesus,
the enemy is fettered,
Hades is despoiled,
the graves are laid bare,
and risen are they below
who worship Thee, O Christ.*

*From the Pentecostarion
Ode Nine of the Canon for
Myrrhbearers' Sunday*

POPE'S VISITS TO THE EAST CHALLENGED

THE PRESS has given quite extensive coverage to the fact that the Pope's proposed visit to Greece has called forth protests from among the faithful there. Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Peristerion says: "Every European citizen, including the Pope, has the right to visit Greece, and our Church has no right to oppose it. So if he chooses to come as Vatican head of state, or as a simple pilgrim, this poses no problem. But if he comes as head of the Roman Catholic Church, we will not be able to receive him, since this would require bilateral discussions." Although the Church administration's response to the plans is thus muted, among the faithful, both clergy and laity, there have been loud protests, and it has been reported that the Pontiff will be met with the tolling of bells as a sign of mourning.

Those protests from the faithful in Greece have now been joined by similar ones from Orthodox Ukrainians. Pope John Paul II has plans to visit the Ukraine in June. The situation there has been complicated by the fact that the Orthodox Christians are divided into three jurisdictions. Bishop Julian Gbur, the Greek Catholic bishop, has described the protests as "Orthodox scare tactics" (ENI bulletin 01-0070). He also commented rather incongruously that the Pope "always unites rather than divides"!

...AND WELCOMED!

THE POPE is scheduled to visit Syria in May, and the leader of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church there, Patriarch Gregory III, stated in Rome that the visit would have a "strong ecumenical dimension." He is the leader of some 300,000 Melkites in Syria,

and he stated that he and his Orthodox counterpart, Patriarch Ignatius IV, who heads the 800,000 Orthodox in the country, were both committed to restoring full unity. The Christians comprise only 13% of the total population in Syria and are overwhelmed by the Moslem majority. Among the Orthodox Churches, the Patriarchate of Antioch is undoubtedly the one most fully committed to Ecumenism, although the motivation for this seems not to be founded on any religious principles - (already they have endorsed inter-communion with the Monophysites) - but on political expediency. The President of Syria, Bachad el-Assad, has also welcomed the papal visit with the truly astounding assertion, that "If Palestine is the land where Christ was born, Syria is the land where Christianity was born"!

MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE REMAINS STEADFAST ON TOLSTOY

VLADIMIR TOLSTOY, a great-great-grandson of the world renowned writer, Leo Tolstoy, has petitioned the Moscow Patriarchate to reconsider the Church's excommunication of his ancestor. He claimed that the excommunication was a hindrance to national reconciliation. According to ENI bulletin 01-0080, Church officials have made it clear that they stand by the Church's decision in 1901 to excommunicate the writer. At a press conference on 4th March, Patriarch Alexei II acknowledged Tolstoy's literary genius, but pointed out that the writer's religious views were another matter. "I do not think we have the right to force a man, who died [almost] 100 years ago, to return to the bosom of the Church that he rejected," he stated. Vladimir Tolstoy seems unmoved by this eminent common sense, and appears to be intent on his campaign buoyed up by the fact that he has received many letters and telephone calls of support.

MIRACULOUS POCHAEV ICON TAKEN TO MOSCOW

THE WONDER-WORKING ICON of the Mother of God of Pochaev, which is kept at the renowned Pochaev Monastery of the Dormition, was taken to Moscow at the end of January this year and will remain in the Russian capital for a month, so that the faithful there may venerate it. It is the first time that this icon has been taken to Moscow, and during its stay there it will be kept in the Holy Trinity Cathedral of the Danilov Monastery.

CONCERN OVER PATRIARCH'S HEALTH

THE SENTINEL (April 2001) carries a report, tagged RFE/RL 2/5/01, which states: "Aleksii II's rapidly deteriorating health has opened the struggle over who will be the next patriarch, *polit.ru* reported on 31 January. Among the most frequently suggested are Archbishop Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, Archbishop Yuvenalii of Kutitssk (*sic*) and Kolomna, Archbishop Filaret of Belarus. But President Vladimir Putin appears likely to support Archbishop Vladimir of Ladoga and St Petersburg, who is a close friend of presidential envoy Viktor Cherkosov, the website suggested."

HOLY TRINITY MISSION, BELFAST

FOR THE SUNDAY of St John of the Ladder, Fr Alexis visited the Holy Trinity Mission in Belfast. He visited the garden chapel at the home of Fr Deacon Geoffrey and Diaconissa Jolan Ready in Bangor before the Saturday evening service at the Mission's Belfast Cathedral. After the service, he was asked to give a talk about the "Ladder of Divine Ascent," and this was followed by a question and answer session,

which, they being Irish, continued so long that we only arrived back at home base again just before eleven o'clock. In the morning, the Hours and Divine Liturgy of St Basil were served in the Belfast chapel, followed by coffee and biscuits in the adjoining charity shop. After lunch at the Ready's home, Father was given a tour of the Bangor area and shown the site of the ancient monastery, which was the place of repentance of so many of the great monastic fathers of the Celtic Church and of missionary fathers who travelled across Europe enlightening the peoples there.

FRIENDS OF SHAFTESBURY ABBEY

THE FRIENDS held their Annual General Meeting for 2001 at Shaftesbury Town Hall on Thursday, 8th March at 7.30 p.m. About sixty people attended. It being the thousandth anniversary year of the glorification of St Edward, the Friends asked Father Alexis to give a talk after the business of the meeting had been completed. He spoke on: Why King Edward is commemorated as a Saint and Martyr. After his talk which was kindly received, refreshments were offered to participants, and people were given an opportunity to ask questions about the Saint and the topics raised in the talk.

BROOKWOOD NEWS

NEW CASKET FOR THE SACRED RELICS: For some time now, we have seen the need to have a portable casket for the Sacred Relics of St Edward, so that they can be stowed more reverently in their safe place and carried to and from the Shrine on the feast days. Aidan Hart has just completed the carving of a casket in limewood, made in a traditional pitch-roof style, with the six principle panels depicting: the birth of the saint and his presentation as a new-born baby to his father, King Edgar the Peaceable; his coronation at Kingston-upon-Thames; his martyrdom at Corfe; his burial without ceremony at Wareham; the translation of his sacred relics to Shaftesbury; and the reception of his relics by Bishop Gregory at Brookwood in 1984. Two angels on the end panels guard the relics. Providentially the reliquary arrived in time for the feast day of the Saint in this the millennial year of his glorification. It also arrived at Brookwood on the day of the commemoration of the slaying of the Emperor Paul I of Russia, Saturday 11th/24th March, when, as usual, we chanted a memorial liti for his repose. This might otherwise have been pure coincidence and unremarkable, except for the fact that a number of things, over the years, which have helped us, have happened on days when royal passion-bearers are commemorated by the Church. The most notable of these was the fact that, after much delay and worry, our purchase of the property here went through on the day of the celebration of Sts Boris and Gleb in 1982.

SACRED RELICS DONATED: Small portions of the sacred relics of the holy Martyr and Deacon Vincent of Spain, the Martyr Menas of the company with St Hippolytus of Rome, St Tikhon of Zadonsk, St Peter Orseolo and St Gerard of Csanad and others have been recently given to the Brotherhood, and placed within the reliquaries in the sanctuary and near the Shrine of St Edward.

ICON DONATED: Sreto Duricic has painted and donated to our church an icon of the Holy Peers of the Apostles Cyril and Methodius, the teachers of the Slavs, which

has been blessed and has replaced the reproduction icon that we had of the saints in the church.

FREEWILL OFFERINGS: The average weekly amount found in the alms box at the back of the church for the last six months of 2000 were as follows: July £227.58; August £260.71; September £212.53; October £165.21; November £167.60; December £238.92. May God bless all of those of you, who, when coming to church, help support us in this way.

OUR THANKS are also offered to the relatives and friends of the late Margo Stevens. Through visiting the cemetery, Margo came to befriend our Brotherhood and left instructions that instead of flowers at her funeral donations should be sent to the Brotherhood. Messrs G. Hall and Sons, funeral directors, of Hemel Hempstead, recently sent us the monies donated in this way, and we offer our thanks to them and all who made donations in memory of Margo. May the Lord, seeing your love for her, grant her His mercies.

COMMUNITY FESTIVAL: This issue of "The Shepherd" is going to press, "Greenprint and Design," just before Saint Edward's Day and so we will include a paragraph on that in the next issue.

PRACTICAL TIP

IF, as is to be hoped, during Great Lent, you have developed a discipline of spiritual reading, do not abandon it now that we have reached Pascha. Supplement your daily prayers with a little spiritual reading, if only a page or two a day. This will nourish you spiritually and enlighten you. It is always hard to survive on a subsistence diet, and yet many Christians try to do exactly that spiritually by limiting themselves just to church attendance or formal reading of prayers at home, but their observance is never informed and illumined because it is not backed up with spiritual reading, if you are in any doubt regarding what to read ask the advise of your pastor or father confessor.