

FROM THE FATHERS

“THE VERY indolence of the mind, when it is not kindled with befitting fervour, gets cut off, by a torpor that stealthily grows upon it, from all desires for good things.”

SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, + 604 A.D.

“HE WHO has lost sensibility is a witless philosopher, a self-condemned commentator, a self-contradictory windbag, a blind man who teaches others to see. He talks about healing a wound, and does not stop irritating it. He complains of sickness, and does not stop eating what is harmful. He prays against it, and immediately goes and does it. And when he has done it, he is angry with himself; and the wretched man is not ashamed of his own words. ‘I am doing wrong,’ he cries, and eagerly continues to do so. His mouth prays against his passion, and his body struggles for it. He philosophizes about death, but he behaves as if he were immortal. He groans over the separation of soul and body, but drowns along as if he were eternal. He talks of temperance and self-control, but lives for gluttony. He reads about the judgment and begins to smile. He reads about vainglory, and is vainglorious while actually reading. He repeats what he has learnt about vigil, and drops asleep on the spot. He praises prayer, but runs from it as if from the plague. He blesses obedience, but is the first to disobey. He praises detachment, but he is not ashamed to be spiteful and to fight for a rag. When angered he becomes bitter, and he is angered again at his bitterness; and he does not feel that, after one defeat, he is suffering another. Having overeaten

he repents, and a little later again gives way. He blesses silence, and praises it with a spate of words. He teaches meekness, and during the actual teaching frequently gets angry. Having woken from passion he sighs, and shaking his head, he again yields to passion. He condemns laughter, and lectures on mourning with a smile on his face. Before others he blames himself for being vainglorious, and in blaming himself is only angling for glory for himself. He looks people in the face with passion, and talks about chastity. While frequenting the world, he praises those who live in stillness without realizing that he shames himself. He extols almsgivers, and reviles beggars. All the time he is his own accuser, and he does not want to come to his senses - I will not say cannot."

VEN. JOHN OF THE LADDER, SEVENTH CENTURY



ABBESS MARY OF THE GETHSEMANE CONVENT (1896-1969)

HER YEAR'S MIND FALLS ON 25TH OCTOBER / 7TH NOVEMBER

IT ALWAYS comes as a surprise to learn that the founding Abbess of one of the most revered convents of the Russian diaspora and of the Holy Land was a convert, a Scotswoman who began life as Barbara Robinson. Her life and spiritual character bear evident resemblance to that of another convert, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, who became her guiding star.

Abbess Mary was born in Glasgow, Scotland, on 21st July, 1896. She was christened as an infant in the Presbyterian church, where her father was a minister. After graduating from the Independent Girls' School, she completed a course in pediatric nursing in Liverpool and went on to further her medical studies in London, receiving a diploma with honours in 1923. Three years later she received a degree in sociology from London's Bedford University. Meanwhile, she had been confirmed as a High Church Anglican, and after working for several years for the government as a social worker, she made the decision to enter the monastic com-

munity of Christ the Healer in London. As a novice she was sent with a group of missionaries to India where, with the help of the Archbishop of Bombay, she founded a clinic, attached to a prayer and missionary centre. She returned to London in 1931 to make her vows, and was professed with the name Stella. A year later she was in London again, on business, and she was preparing to return to India when she had a dream prompting her to go to the Holy Land to venerate the Tomb of the Lord. “Yes,” she would later say, “the ways of the Lord are inscrutable. I planned to spend thirty days in Jerusalem - and I stayed for thirty years.”

Sister Stella arrived in Jerusalem accompanied by another Anglican nun, Sister Alexandra (“Alix”) Isabella. They rented rooms in property in Gethsemane owned by the Russian Palestine Society. There a rasophore nun in charge of receiving pilgrims, Sister Valentina, showed them around and they found themselves absorbed in discussions about Orthodoxy, which was virtually unknown to them. They began attending services at the church of St Mary Magdalene, an inspiring edifice there in the Garden of Gethsemane, and there became acquainted with Metropolitan Anastassy. He also spoke to them at length, and the combined influence of these conversations and the nuns’ contact with Orthodoxy at the many holy sites stirred their hearts with a desire for this fullness of Truth. But the thought of converting did not seriously occur to them until they had been at Gethsemane a few weeks, still with the intention of continuing on to India.

Then one night Sister Stella had a dream. A woman dressed in a beautiful habit, with strikingly beautiful eyes, came to her and said, “You cannot leave. Your place is here in Jerusalem.” When the next day Sister Stella related this dream to Sister Valentina, the latter fetched a photograph of Grand Duchess Elizabeth, whom Sister Stella at once recognized to be the woman in her dream. It was, she later noted, the inspiration of Grand Duchess Elizabeth, herself a convert of part English ancestry, that sealed her decision to become Orthodox. Sister Alix followed her example. Metropolitan Anastassy himself guided their catechesis, and on 5th September, 1933, they were received into the saving fold of Holy Orthodoxy. Sister Stella received the name Mary, in honour of St Mary Magdalene, and Sister Alix became Martha.

It was evident to Metropolitan Anastassy that this aristocratic-looking Scotswoman was a very capable individual. With his blessing, a sisterhood was founded and a temporary chapel was set up on the Russian mission property in Bethany. Mary, assisted by her companion Martha, worked tirelessly to rescue the property and its buildings from their dilapidated state. She had a gift for attracting benefactors and, through the influence of her family, was able to enlist the aid of the British Bible Society. Martha came from a very well-endowed family, and they, too, contributed significantly. Buildings were restored, the cistern was repaired, the garden was cleared and cultivated, a clinic was opened. Meanwhile, with the blessing of Metropolitan Anastassy, Mary began gathering sisters for a future monastic community at Gethsemane. In 1933 she was placed in charge of the Russian Garden of Gethsemane and its church of St Mary Magdalene. Martha was appointed to be her assistant and given charge of the Bethany property.

On the Feast of Transfiguration, 6th / 19th August, 1934, Metropolitan Anastassy tonsured the two former Anglican nuns in the church of St Mary Magdalene. His eloquent word addressed to Mother Mary on this occasion is excerpted here:

“You came to us from a different people and from a different religious community; in every nation, however, there are those who fear the Lord. In every Christian country there are people on whom He places His seal at birth and leads them to Himself by means of paths unknown to man. Everywhere there are the chosen ones who have heard God’s call from childhood just as Samuel did. You were one of these. The voice calling from heaven touched your heart very early, and afterwards not all the noise of life’s bustle nor all the songs of the earth could silence it.

“At times, according to your own testimony, an element of gloom rushed upon you, ready to swallow you, but you had a lamp which shone brightly in your soul and darkness did not envelope it. You had already come to love the Heavenly Bridegroom with all your heart. Because of Him, you refused all the delights of youth and entered one of the monastic communities in order to dedicate yourself later to self-denying missionary service in India.

“Nevertheless, an inner voice told you that the first and basic aim of a Christian must be to know the truth, that is, to learn the pure, undefiled Christian teaching and to join yourself to the fulness of an abundant Church life.

“Not finding either of these in the community to which you then belonged, you hoped to fill the deficiency in Anglo-Catholicism, that is, in that branch of the Anglican Confession which most nearly approaches the Orthodox Church. In fact, the motivating force that brought forth the great Oxford Movement a hundred years ago, the continuation of which is today’s Anglo-Catholicism, was the desire on the part of the most fervent Anglicans to re-establish the lost bond with the ancient, One, Universal Church, the living memory of which never died in the bosom of Anglicanism. The Eastern Orthodox Church possesses the advantage over the other Christian confessions in that it never broke this organic unity with the ancient Apostolic Church, remaining faithful to its spirit in all things. This has given it the strength to preserve in itself the complete fulness of Truth and Grace which was given to His Church by its Divine Founder, Christ. You saw this with your own penetrating gaze immediately upon coming closer to Orthodoxy, and your heart automatically [involuntarily] reached out for it.

“Even before coming into contact with Orthodoxy, you already clearly felt monasticism to be the highest embodiment of the Christian ideal. You had already entered the path of monastic struggle. Orthodox teachings deepened for you the thought of monasticism itself, and the Orthodox Church now gives you a special grace for the worthy fulfillment of this genuinely super-human way of life, a way of life that is more heavenly than earthly.

“In the brilliance of Mount Tabor, which will always illuminate for you the day of your complete betrothal to Christ, the lofty significance of monasticism is revealed with special clarity. What is the essence of monasticism if not a constant ascent to the mountain of the Lord and entry into the glory of the sons of God. From the crucible of prayer to which the God-man gave Himself on Tabor, the wondrous mystery of His Transfiguration emerged and shone forth.

“Truly, it is good for a person to be on spiritual heights -- on the mountain of the Lord. He then attains such plenitude and saturation of life that he is ready to exclaim together with Symeon the Theologian: ‘I take delight in His Love and His beauty, I become a participant of light and glory: My face shines like the Beloved’s I am more beautiful than the beautiful, richer than the rich, stronger than the strong.’

“Now obtain for yourself also this unfading beauty, this imperishable wealth, this all-conquering power of Christ.”

Sister Valentina was also professed at that time and became Mother Barbara. In 1935, Mother Mary was appointed superior of the women’s convent of the Resurrection of Christ in Bethany. The following year she visited Belgrade, where she was raised to the rank of abbess by His Eminence Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), and given a jewelled pectoral cross belonging to Metropolitan Anastassy.

At the time of their tonsure, Metropolitan Anastassy said to the nuns, “I entrust Bethany to you; we need to start a school there.” With God’s help the nuns organized an elementary school for girls, which officially opened with a special service of blessing on Lazarus Saturday, 1937. That same year, the house-chapel was frescoed by a new sister, an iconographer, whose talents inspired the opening of an icon studio there in Bethany. The next year the school expanded and received British accreditation as an academy. It soon acquired a superior reputation, and its enrollment increased to more than a hundred Orthodox Arab girl boarders. In addition to the usual curriculum, the girls learned Arabic, Russian and English. They were also schooled in Orthodox piety, and some of the pupils later became monastics. Mother Mary took an active part in the school administration, and visited it almost daily, frequently making the two-mile trip from Jerusalem and back on a donkey.

With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, communication with Metropolitan Anastassy was suspended; it was later restored thanks to Mother Mary’s persistent inquiries at the Red Cross. Meanwhile, hundreds of Russian soldiers, held up in Palestine on their way to Italy, joined the nuns for prayer in the church of St Mary Magdalene.

In Palestine, however, the horrific realities of war came later, with the departure of the British in 1948. Simmering tensions between Arabs and Israelis exploded in bitter fighting in and around Jerusalem. As a British subject, Abbess Mary could have returned to the safety of her homeland, but she declined to abandon her sisters and her children of the Bethany School. Her energies and her talents were dedicated, as always, to helping those in need. She turned the school into a hospital, the classrooms became wards. A courageous young doctor offered his services, and he was joined by a number of professional nurses, who in turn were assisted by the nuns and the older girls at the school. Every day brought more wounded, soldiers and civilians. Bread and other provisions were often obtained under artillery fire. Death and destruction were all around. Fortunately, Mother Mary managed to secure for the hospital the protection of the Red Cross, its flag flying over the walls of the community made Bethany a relatively safe haven. During the worst shelling, local Palestinians sought shelter there, spending the night in the cave on the property, together with their domesticated animals. Somehow the school continued to function, with pupils coming even from other schools. There was no disruption in the order of services, and the intensified prayer of the nuns drew upon them the evident power of God's mercy.

There was a particularly tense period in the winter of 1949, when the military High Command declared its plans to requisition all the buildings of the Bethany School, due to its strategic location, and to evict the entire community. The nuns began removing furnishings and other items to Gethsemane, some things they stored in the cave. A place in the country was rented to house some of the children and elderly. The sisters prayed fervently, and - a miracle - at someone's chance suggestion, a letter was sent by courier to Amman, to General Glubb Pasha, and on the very Feast of Nativity, at trapeza after Liturgy, a reply was received: the order for the requisition had been given in error. Glory to God!

Throughout these years of difficulty and uncertainty, Abbess Mary was a model of evangelical self sacrifice, inspiring those around her with her courage and energy, consoling the grieving and fainthearted. She was, in a word, a noble example of unfailing and selfless charity, which lies at the heart of true Christianity.

With the end of the war, the Bethany community began functioning more normally, and dozens of schoolgirls once again ran about in the courtyard. The war, however, had left its mark, and among its casualties were a number of blind girls. The community decided to help them by teaching them to weave. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of war there were few tourists and little market for such handiwork, and the project was abandoned.

In the summer of 1952, the Bethany School began receiving groups of Russian pilgrims from Western Europe. These annual pilgrimages, organized and led by Bishop Methodius, had a very positive influence, both on the pilgrims themselves and upon the Orthodox living in the Holy Land. They likewise helped inform the broader Orthodox community of the existence of the Jerusalem convents, eliciting needed financial support.

Upon meeting Mother Mary, pilgrims were consistently impressed by her exceptional spirituality and her noble, luminous soul. She was genuinely concerned for the well-being of each individual who approached her, and she showed extraordinary sensitivity in being able to resolve complex and burdensome problems. Warm, gracious and unfailingly tactful, she was loved and respected by a wide spectrum of people. Abbess Mary's high monastic standards reflected upon the community as a whole. Several of her nuns later became Abbesses at other convents. Abbess Elisabeth of the Annunciation Convent in London (six of her nuns there are former pupils of the Bethany School), the late Abbess Tamara, and Abbess Juliana, for many years in Chile.

Not only Russian pilgrims but foreigners and non-Orthodox were drawn by the genuinely spiritual atmosphere there at the Gethsemane Convent. A Roman Catholic visitor from Germany in 1965, wrote:

“This is to express my hearty compliments to your esteemed Convent where the smell of piety comes over the pilgrim attending the Divine Liturgy and the Canonical Hours in your Church. I have finished my pilgrimage to the Holy Land on 14th August, by attending the beautiful sung Vespers in your Church, and I suppose that this was an act of worthy finishing these privileged days one may stay at Jerusalem. Please let

all your Sisters know that I was deeply moved by their chant in the pure monastic Russian style. It is very seldom that one is finding the sacred music performed like by your Sisters. Here, in Europe, in most of the Orthodox churches, the hymns are performed like in an orchestra hall...”

In 1967, as a result of the Arab-Israeli war, the Bethany community found itself on the territory of Israel. Mother Mary and the sisters staunchly endured the trials that fell to them without retreating from their arena of struggle. But from this time Mother Mary’s physical strength began to decline, her heart weakened. She contemplated retirement, but impelled by the command of love, she remained at her post.

Abbess Mary was called to the Lord on 25th October (7th November), 1969. She died peacefully in her sleep, her fingers folded for making the sign of the Cross. News of her repose spread rapidly. That afternoon, hierarchs and clergy of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate came to the convent and held a memorial service. Then began the Vigil for the departed. Through the night, the nuns by turns read the Psalter. The next day, a Saturday, the funeral service was held in a packed church: Abbess Tamara came with nuns from the Mount of Olives convent, as did almost all the Bethany School students; also present were representatives of different church denominations and a large number of other mourners. Afterwards the burial procession filed solemnly up the hill beside the church where, between two pine trees, Abbess Mary’s body was lovingly committed to the earth to await the General Resurrection.

Sister Barbara, Mother Mary’s co-worker for many years, who succeeded her as Abbess of Gethsemane, sketched this spiritual portrait of her *amma*:

“She was a remarkable person, deeply religious, totally dedicated to God in everything, and serving Him through prayer and through her service of love for her neighbour. She was humble, lenient in her judgment, exceedingly condescending and kind even to the ungrateful, attentive to the needs of others. She was a gentle and loving mother, she was our joy, and we thank the Most High for her.”

Blessed are they whom Thou hast chosen and taken to Thyself, O Lord. Their remembrance shall be from generation to generation.

*Translated and compiled from materials in the Gethsemane Convent archives. Taken, with slight amendments from **Orthodox America**, issue 143-144, Vol XVI, No. 3-4 Sept.-Dec., 1996.*



PILGRIMAGE

TO THE HOLY LAND

MY NAME is Lucie Coussmaker and I'm a member of the Brookwood parish. Together with Emma, a friend I met whilst at GOYGB (the Greek Orthodox Youth Camp of Great Britain), I travelled to the Holy Land for six weeks over the Easter holiday. We were both keen to visit a place which we has such Christian significance and planned our trip independently, deciding to visit both biblical places and ones we had heard about in the news. Over the course of our visit, we managed to see many of the sites we knew from church, as well as discovering beautiful scenery we had not really anticipated. Among many other places, we managed to visit Jerusalem, the beautiful Sea of Galilee, Cana, Bethlehem and Jericho.

We travelled across a lot of the Holy Land and fortunately most of the area has a good network of public transport. It was rather difficult at times, ensuring we got on the right bus as neither of us can read either Hebrew or Arabic! However, people were always very willing to help, and we never got too lost. Being on public transport gave us a chance to see a lot of the astonishingly varied scenery; from the snow capped mountains of the north to the Negev Desert in the south.

In the six weeks I was in the Holy Land I saw and experienced a huge amount, as there are so many extraordinary sights in an area smaller than England, so I'll just describe some of my personal highlights.

One of the things that struck me most about my visit was the people. Everywhere we went we met friendly, welcoming people who were really keen to go out of their way to help us. We met a park ranger who invited us into her home as she thought we'd be uncomfortable camping on rocky ground, a family in Jericho who asked us over to experience a traditional lunch, and a church warder at Cana who gave us very bitter Arabic coffee, to name but a few. During our time away, we managed to visit a number of Arab Orthodox churches, both in Israel and the West Bank. They were all very different, but despite many of the parishioners looking poor, the churches were well cared for and obviously very important to the community.

We visited Jerusalem several times during our stay, as we wanted to experience the city both before it became too crowded at Pascha and during Holy Week. The principle sites were still very busy however, and thus we decided to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre early in the morning before it was too full with noisy tour groups. Waking up very early we tiptoed out of the dormitory we had been staying in and made our way outside. It was very surreal and slightly eerie, as at half-past four in the morning the usually bustling streets were empty except for a few cleaners. We made our way into the dim stillness of the Church and went upstairs to the Greek chapel. Although I was exhausted later in the day, I was glad we had managed to visit so early as it was a very different (and more peaceful) experience than later in the day.

Another wonderful place we visited was Taybeh, a completely Christian village in the West Bank. I had read about the village and Maria Khoury, a Greek-American author and the wife of Taybeh's mayor, in an article Fr Alexis had emailed out, and so was keen to visit. Also Emma's parish, which is in Bath, had a link to Maria. Along with being the only all-Christian village in the area, Taybeh is also known for its brewery. This is co-run by Maria's husband, David, and his brother, and each year they host an Oktoberfest which attracts visitors from across the globe and brings together many nationalities and religions (the latter courtesy of a non-alcoholic brew). This spirit of tolerance and positivity, despite hardship including frequent roadblocks and the fact Taybeh only receives running water four days a week, really shone through in the village. People

were immediately hospitable and welcoming - the Priest in their Orthodox church even did some of the service in English as he knew Emma and I didn't speak Arabic. Maria was wonderfully welcoming, inviting us over for dinner many times and feeding us huge amounts of food! She was very keen to have visitors, as it is sometimes hard for members of the community to leave, and she really emphasised the importance of a continuing Orthodox presence in the area which was the birthplace of Christianity. If you are ever fortunate enough to be in that part of the world I would really encourage you to visit these people who are a stunning example of peaceful resistance to the erosion of their heritage.

We returned to Jerusalem for Holy Week to find a city transformed by thousands of visitors. The streets were crowded with pilgrims from across the globe, and moving around was quite difficult. On Holy Saturday in Jerusalem each year the miracle of the Holy Fire occurs. This is when, miraculously, a candle lights, unaided by humans, in the Holy Sepulchre. As one may imagine, thousands of people want to get to see it and we did not realise that you needed tickets to get inside the church. Awaking early we decided to go and wander around the Old City to see how near we could get to the church. There were lots of road blocks up and some fairly fierce looking policemen and soldiers with guns, so we couldn't get to the Greek Patriarchate (where we had been advised to go). We then saw a large group of women in headscarves and discovered we were outside the Armenian Patriarchate. Fortunately the first person we talked to try and establish what was going on was an English vicar! He explained that his parish has a link to the Armenian Patriarchate and that people were congregating before taking part in a procession to the Holy Sepulchre. Also, people had badges (where they had got them from we weren't quite sure) to be able to get into the church. This was presumably some way of controlling the number of people entering the church. Neither Emma nor I had a badge, and within a few seconds we both decided our best course of action was to stay with the Armenians, and pray we would be able to get in. Once our headscarves were on we were virtually indistinguishable from the other women!

We waited around for a few hours, and eventually the group started to move. There were a few nervous moments for us, but we eventually

managed to get inside the church. What we didn't know beforehand was that the Armenians are the first group to enter the church (the Copts and Greeks come in later), and this meant that we were standing only about 10 metres from the Holy Sepulchre itself. The crowd within the church swelled and then the Patriarch of Jerusalem entered the church. He processed three times around the Sepulchre and then entered it. The entire church was still and a sunbeam came through the window and landed on the Sepulchre. Suddenly the Patriarch came out with a lit bunch of candles and a huge cheer went up. Many people were moved to tears and within seconds the flame had been passed to candles in the furthest corner of the church. I know I was incredibly fortunate to experience this, and it was an event which will stay with me forever.

Despite seven weeks seeming like a long time, I still feel that there are more parts of the Holy Land I would like to experience. I left with very mixed opinions; it is such a beautiful land but it has inspired such conflict which unfortunately some people seem determined to exacerbate. I think one of the main things I have taken from my visit is a sense of the Bible coming alive; now when a reading mentions Jericho or Jerusalem I have a real sense of a place. I feel very blessed to have been able to walk exactly where Christ must have walked, and hope this experience will stay with me.



“IT IS CERTAINLY an evil thing to overhear or spy on one's neighbour's conversations or actions, if done with the intention of criticizing or denigrating him, slandering him, or spreading abroad, when the occasion serves, what one has seen or heard. However, it is not wicked if it is done in order to set one's neighbour on the right way with compassion, wisdom, and prudence, and to pray for him with tears from one's very soul.”

VEN. SIMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN, + 1022 A.D.



TEACHING

OF THE VENERABLE SERAPHIM OF SAROV

ON THE PRAYER OF JESUS

YOU, who desire to behold the glorious manifestation of the Divine Light of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who desire to experience in the heart the Fire from above the Heavens, who endeavour to be deemed worthy of experiencing and feeling reconciliation with God, who, in order to find and take possession of the treasure hidden in the field of your heart, have left all worldly things, who conceive the idea of brightly lighting your spiritual lamp from now on, and have rejected all things present, who have apprehended the heavenly kingdom, found within you, through understanding and experience, and seek to obtain it, draw near, and I will teach you the science of eternity, the heavenly life, or, better to say, the means by which, working, without labouring or wearying, you may enter into the refuge of passionlessness, and the means which will not subject you to any sort of deception or disturbance from the demons, without which we are far outside the life into which I shall lead you, we are straying through disobedience, just like once Adam did, who knew God's commandment, but befriended the serpent and imagined that he was trustworthy, until he had imbibed unto satiety of the fruit of deception from him, and in this way threw himself and all his descendents down into the depth of death, darkness and corruption. And so let us allow ourselves to arise, or more truly to say, to turn back, brethren, to our ourselves, loathing the counsel of the serpent and the wreckage caused by those things which drag us to the earth. For reconciliation and union with God cannot be achieved other than, as before, using all our powers, we return to ourselves, or to put it better, we enter in on ourselves, separating ourselves from the turmoil of the world and its vain concerns, and unremittingly holding the kingdom which exists within us. It is an extraordinary work! For which reason the monastic life is called the art of arts and the science of sciences.*

** Footnote in the original:* In the work of the practice of the art of the Prayer of Jesus, some do not make progress, and therefore they reject it, both in name and in its teaching. The biggest stumbling-block in the struggle for mental activity [in prayer] is that some, either not having an experienced guide, or simply through arbitrariness, undertake it not in accordance with the mind of the blessed teachers who taught the method of this mental art. In the community life, it is impossible to keep the same rule as those who live as hermits or in solitude, and those who set out on this struggle cannot complete the course equally with those who have made substantial progress therein. The rule for the Prayer of Jesus is various, depending on the place where one lives, on one's abilities, on the state of one's progress and even on the times. The only thing that is common to everyone is that everyone, everywhere, and at all times, must apply themselves to this work. For Jesus Christ is *the way, the truth and the life* (John 14:6). Many of the instructions laid down here concerning the mental Prayer of Jesus, through written by the Fathers, are not for everyone in general, but for specific communities and for particular people, especially not for those who are engaged in outward activities. This, the prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, - is an indispensable requirement for eternal life and blessedness; but how it should be undertaken so that the prayer will be continuous and last till our dying breath, this the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers teach us in various ways. The instruction of the Fathers set forth here should not be accepted as an unalterable rule. This is the counsel of the Fathers, on how one may most readily make progress in this work. One must enter upon this with discretion. And therein may our Lord Jesus Christ grant help even unto us!

...To be continued in the next issue.

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POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

“Please enlighten me father about the Western Rite Orthodoxy. A relative of mine from southern Philippines who I am catechizing asked me about the Western Rite. He told me about the presence of the Western Rite monastery missions of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in southern Philippines. (If I understand it correctly, the ROCOR have Western Rite parishes and missions even before it unites with the Moscow Patriarchate. That is even during the time that our Synod has a canonical communion with ROCOR.) Please counsel me father about who are the Western Rite and what are their significance to our Holy Church. Is their a particular canon of the Ecumenical Councils that mandates exclusive use of the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom? Are the Orthodox faithful of the Western Rite parish allowed to receive communion with us and vice-versa? Indeed, I need much learning from you.” (copied as sent) - *A.Q., Philippines, by email.*

Regarding the Western Rite, I must start by saying that what I am going to say is only my opinion, and I may well be wrong. I only offer it, because you asked for my opinion.

It is true that the ROCOR which has united with Moscow, ROCA-MP, has in the last couple of years taken in a number of Western Rite clergymen and parishes, and appears to be promoting them. Although, rather strangely, on their official website, little or no mention has been made of this fact. There the emphasis seems to be on Russianness. Perhaps they fear that the two things do not quite marry and are keeping them in separate compartments. His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion appears to have taken all the Western Rite groups under his own omophorion, whatever geographical diocese they happen to fall in. He is assisted by His Grace Bishop Jerome of Manhattan. The ROCA, under His Eminence Metropolitan Agafangel, which is our sister Traditional Synod, does not have any Western Rite clergy or parishes to the best of my knowledge.

Regarding the Rite itself, I believe that there should be great concerns about its implementation, and I believe the fact that it is being sponsored is something that should be of great concern to Orthodox Traditionalists. I will try and explain why I feel this.

First of all, there seem to be two types of Western Rite. There are those who use a modified form of relatively modern Roman Catholic or Anglican rites, from which things, which are ostensibly not Orthodox, have been excised, and into which some Orthodox features have been added. Let us call these TYPE A. And there are those who have tried to return to rites which were current in the West, before the Schism of Rome from Orthodoxy. Let us call them TYPE B. I believe that there are dangers in adopting either of these approaches.

TYPE A: In this instance, they are using rites, which although they might be able to trace a history back to something authentic, have essentially been shaped and formed by people outside the Church. The modifications, excisions and additions, do not seem to have been long and hard thought over. It seems to me as if they have taken a Ford Es-

cort, added in a couple of features, improved the upholstery and taken off the Escort insignia, and pretend it is a Lexus. Just recently, I saw a clip of one of these Western Rite services, and they had statues in their church. If such a “conversion” of these rites was to be undertaken, then I would think that it should be done not by one or two hierarchs and not in a short space of time, but by the whole Church acting together - a thing which, given the situation that Orthodoxy finds itself in today, is completely impossible.

TYPE B: Here we have the problem of trying to revive something which has been unused in the Church for a thousand years. If I am not mistaken, none of the rites used in the pre-schism West still exist in their entirety, and so those who have adopted this approach, of necessity, have to feed in certain elements from Byzantine usage. I once, many years ago, attended such a Mass, celebrated by Bishop Germain de Saint-Denis, who struck me as a very affable man (I gave him a lift in my car), but, although I am no expert in liturgics, it was obvious that the rite he performed could not have been that of the pre-schism West. If my memory serves me right, he even used the *dikiri* and *trikiri* candles, which I am sure were not used in pre-schism France!

Furthermore, with TYPE B, we have the problem of providing for those feasts which are celebrated by the Orthodox today, but were not observed in the pre-schism West. Do services, fitting the Western usage, have to be composed for them, or are these feasts simply to be ignored?

I think, too, that there is a “chicken and egg,” problem. The West fell away from Orthodoxy, and since that time has added heresy to heresy. One has to ask: were the Rites that they were using in some sense deficient, and unable to contain the fullness of Orthodox teaching? If such is the case, there is extreme folly in returning to those Rites, especially as we do not possess them in their fulness. But maybe the West fell away from Orthodoxy despite the adequacy of their Rites at that time; then there is folly in the TYPE A approach. We are in a twilight zone here, and we need fathers of clear spiritual insight, or, better still, the consensus of the whole Church to guide us before we venture on a path which may be perilous.

I am bold enough, and stupid enough, to believe that the adoption of the Western Rite is a path which is extremely perilous, and I will try to explain, in addition to the above, why.

First of all, in the Byzantine Rite, we have an immense wealth of liturgical materials, which have been used by the whole Church for centuries. We have a banquet spread before us. Why turn away from it and pick at crumbs which are stale and may be contaminated?

Second, the vast majority of people involved in the Western Rite movement, if one can call it that, are quite understandably converts to Orthodoxy. They are, perhaps, the people who most need to drink from the living sources, to be nurtured on Orthodox teaching and understanding through the services of the Church.

Thirdly, those in the TYPE A situation, who are excising and amending to bring their rites into an Orthodox frame, are often the very people who should not be doing this! They are not, by and large, people who have been formed by Orthodoxy, who have reached spiritual heights, but are the converts themselves, very often converts who, because of their adherence to these rites, have lived, as it were, on the very outskirts of the Orthodox world, have not integrated with it. How different their approach to that of that beautiful example of a convert, our foremother Ruth - see her confession (chapter 1:15-18) and see her extraordinary obedience (chapter 3:2-5). Can you think for a moment how difficult that obedience must have been for a modest, Eastern woman of that period? And yet her answer was: "All that thou sayest unto me, I will do." Maybe I judge them, and if I do may I be forgiven, but it seems to me that these people are instead making that most horrible of professions, "I will do it my way."

Lastly, at least for now, from the clip that I saw the other day, my attending Bishop Germain's Mass, and other things I have seen, it seems to me that the Rite itself fosters an un-Orthodox spirit. There appears to be a strong element of posing (for want of a better word), of striking "pious" poses, which is alien to Orthodoxy. It appears also that the order somehow takes precedence over the spirit. The thing appears to be an elaborate ritual. In a sense, we do not have ritual in Orthodoxy. I

remember years ago seeing Fr Vladimir serve at Jordanville. One could not say he was performing a ritual (although of course there is an outward ritual form to our services), rather it was clear that he was entering into a dialogue with our Saviour. Perhaps I exaggerate - I was young and impressionable at the time, but it does seem to me that the Western Rite (what I have seen of it) promotes a contrary spirit, - to put it very crudely, a “look at me, see how well I am doing this” ethos. Again, forgive me if I am wrong. This may in any case be a defect of the celebrants I have seen, and not of the rite itself, but it is these same celebrants who are furthering its use.

I believe that before ROCA-MP went under Moscow, there was only one Western Rite community, and that was countenanced more as a pastoral condescension to its priest, with whom I had a brief correspondence, than anything else. There was an earlier venture into Western Ritism with the consecration of Bishop Jean-Nectaire of Saint-Denis, but that did not last long.

As far as I know there is no canon of the Œcumenical Councils regarding the Western Rite - what rites were being used in the West at that time would have been Orthodox, and the question of assessing them would not have arisen.

Regarding whether Western Rites can receive the Holy Mysteries in Eastern Rite churches: I presume, and only that, that in the present ROCA-MP they can, because surely as they are under the same Bishops they are of one mind and one heart with each other, and with their Bishops.

I have probably said more than enough. As you are in correspondence with Archbishop Chrysostomos and the fathers at Etna, I will copy this screed to them, in case I have said anything outrageously wrong, and I hope they will correct me. But, in short, my advice would be, if you want to become Orthodox, or grow in Orthodoxy, avoid the Western Rite.

God grant that some of this be profitable for you, and please forgive its shortcomings.



SIR-UK NEWS

WEEK LONG VISIT OF BISHOP AMBROSE

HIS GRACE, **Bishop Ambrose of Methoni**, came to England in mid-September to celebrate the feast of **Saint Edward the Martyr** with our people. He arrived in England on Wednesday 14th September, and came by train to Brookwood the next day, being met at the station, before being given some time to look around the Brotherhood. In the evening, he presided at the Vigil service for the Saint, and the next morning celebrated the Divine Liturgy. At the Little Entrance, he raised **Fr Stephen Fretwell** to the rank of *Æconomos*, giving him the right to wear the *epigonation* (the lozenge shaped vestment that hangs at the knee, and is said to represent a spiritual sword). In doing this, Bishop Ambrose kindly explained the significance of the ceremony, and paid well deserved tribute to the zeal which Fr Stephen and **his presbytera, Joanna**, have shown in their ministry. In his sermon, the Bishop dwelt upon St Edward's support of the monastic life, and spoke very beautifully of the importance of monasticism in the Orthodox missionary witness. After the Liturgy, we had the Lesser Blessing of Waters, and the Bishop blessed all the people who had gathered, - a goodly number for a weekday Liturgy. A buffet meal was then provided for all by the women of the parish, during which the Bishop took the opportunity to speak with our parishioners and circulate among them.

On the Saturday (17th), we took His Grace to the dedication ceremony of a plaque to his old house master at his *alma mater*, **Winchester College**. While in the town, we briefly visited the museum, the Cathedral and St Swithun's Chapel. After the short ceremonies at the College, we were kindly invited to lunch at the home of **Dr Nicholas Fennell and his wife, Vasiliki**. Dr Fennell is the author of the book, "*The Russians on Athos*," and has been collaborating with one of the fathers at Fili, **Fr John**, on research. The delicious meal proved too tempting, and we were forty-five minutes late in returning His Grace to Brookwood. There **Professor Andrea Britton** was patiently waiting to ferry him to the Convent in Willesden for the Saturday evening Vigil. Through her excellent driv-

ing and navigational skills, despite the late start, she managed to get him there only three minutes late. The weekend services His Grace celebrated with **Mother Vikentia and her Sisterhood** and their parishioners.

For the Vigil and Liturgy of the **Great Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos**, our Brotherhood clergy and monastics, and some of our parishioners, joined the sisters at the Convent, for the services led by His Grace. After the Vigil the Sisters laid on a supper for the clergy and monastics, and on the day of the feast a festal meal was provided for all the participants. At the Liturgy, Bishop Ambrose preached about the significance of the Mother of God's purity and virginity, and remarking that the struggle for virginity is almost universally denigrated in our society, he reiterated its importance for the Orthodox Christian, and taught us, when assailed by lusts, to call upon the assistance of the All-holy Theotokos. On the day after the feast, after spiritually nourishing us with his example and with his teaching, the Bishop left to return to Greece and other duties.

BAPTISM AT SAINT EDWARD'S & PRAYERS FOR INFANTS

ISABELLA-ELIZABETH, the infant daughter of **Robert and Nelea (Nelly) Snelling**, was baptised at Saint Edward's Church on Saturday, 28th August / 10th September, the day of St Moses the Black. Our newly-illuminated sister in the Faith is named after **Saint Elizabeth the Wonderworker** (feast day: 24th April / 7th May), and her sponsors were **Elena Stepavoi** and **Olga Moore**. After the Baptism, the family provided a meal for all who had attended in the Old Mortuary, and Isabella-Elizabeth was brought next day to the Divine Liturgy to partake of the Holy Mysteries for the first time. On the following Sunday at the Liturgy the prayer was read for the removal of her chrim robe. *Many Years* to Isabella-Elizabeth, her god-parents and her parents.

Elizabeth Fagerlund was churchd at Saint Edward's Church on Tuesday 10th / 23rd August, before Vespers, it being the fortieth day after the birth of her second daughter, **Xenia**. On the day of the birth of her son (22nd September), the prayers were read at the **Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading** for **Elena Matthews**, and on the eighth day, in the presence of his father, **Stuart**, and his mother, the baby was named at their home in Newbury, being called **Thomas**, for the **Holy Apostle Thomas the Twin**.

FUNERAL OF VERA MOCQUARD

THE FUNERAL and interment of **Vera Mocquard** took place at Saint Edward's on Wednesday 15th / 28th September. Vera, born in 1920, was the daughter of **Fr Vasiliy Timofeyeff**, and his matushka, **Elizaveta Petrovna**. Vasiliy Timofeyeff first came to London in 1902, in response to the comments made by the Heir to the Imperial Throne (later **Tsar Martyr, St Nicholas**), after his visit to London in early 1894, that the London church should have a better choir, "rather than relying on a wheezy old *psalomshchik*;" he suggested a male quartet as a minimum. Timofeyeff was one of them, and he stayed on after the Revolution, eventually being ordained to the priesthood by Metropolitan Evlogy in 1923, before the latter's schism from the Church Abroad. He initially sided with Metropolitan Evlogy in the 1926 schism, but later changed his mind and sided with the Church Abroad. However, he then moved to Paris to assist Archbishop Seraphim, the former rector of the London parish who had moved there as leader of the Church Abroad diocese in Western Europe. For many years, Vera Vasilievna, always called Timi (from her maiden name), attended the ROCA Parish of St Nicholas in Nottingham, and, when that was closed, she went to the Chapel of St Seraphim in Birmingham, both considerable journeys from her home in Chesterfield. In her last years, she lived in a nursing home in Polebrook, Northamptonshire, near the home of her daughter. In the last weeks of her life, our Brotherhood was called upon to minister to her, and we were able to visit her twice, first taking the Holy Unction, and then Holy Communion. She fell asleep in the Lord on Saint Edward's Day, 3rd / 16th September, and has now been laid to rest in the grave she had reserved for herself here many years ago. She even had made and brought her oaken grave cross. May her rest be with the Saints and her ***Memory Eternal!*** Vera's daughter, Jane, kindly suggested that her floral tributes should be placed in Saint Edward's Church.

OUR REGULAR PARISHIONERS will also know of the recent departures from this life of our **Foundress and Benefactress, the Nun Pelagia of the Lesna Icon Convent in Normandy, France**, and of **Peter Stacey**, one of the founder members of the now closed **ROCA Mission of St Werburgh in Congleton**. At the time of going to press, the Lesna Icon Convent has published a tribute to Mother Pelagia (which we hope to print in our November issue) and we are anticipating their funerals, and so will report on their obsequies in the next issue, but we ask the faithful to remember them both in their prayers and have them commemorated in the Divine Liturgy.

NAMING AT ST BONIFACE MISSION

SOMEWHAT LATE, because of the feasts and the Bishop's visit, Fathers Alexis and Sabbas went to the Isle of Wight on Saturday 11th / 24th September, to read the eighth-day naming prayers for **Malachi**, the infant son of **Martin & Christine Smith of East Cowes**. Taking advantage of the opportunity, after the naming prayer, we chanted a moleben to the Holy Hieromartyr Boniface with members of the Mission there. Malachi is named for the **Holy Prophet Malachias**, whose feast day falls on 3rd / 16th January, during the "holy days" between Christmas and Theophany.

NEW VESTMENTS

THE SISTERS of the **Convent of St Elizabeth the Grand Duchess of Russia, Etna, California**, prepared for us a set of new hangings for the Holy Table, proskomidi, and the analoys, and sets of priestly, deaconal and servers' vestments in crimson with gold and silver embroideries, as well as a veil for the Holy Gates. We expressed the hope that they should be ready for the feast of St Edward, and naturally there were delays and temptations, the last being that the package was held by Customs and VAT charged. However, through the prayers of Saint Edward, and, we are sure, the Etna Sisters, the package arrived at 1.30 p.m. on the day before his feast. We were able to unpack and prepare them, bless them, and have them ready for the celebration.

"THE SPIRIT OF SURREY"

A LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHER, **Mike Cope**, has produced a small book of 60 photographs of events and places in Surrey, under this title. It is published by PiXZ Books. One of the photographs is of the interior of Saint Edward's Church at Christmas time, with our "friendly face," **Father Niphon**, included. On 23rd September, Mr Cope came to visit us, to present Fr Niphon with a gift copy of this book.

VISITORS

Saturday 11th / 24th September: **Protopresbyter Stavrophore Milun Kostic** and **Protopresbyter Stavrophore Radomir Acimovic**, from **St Sava Serbian Orthodox Church in London**, visited the Brotherhood, bringing with them a huge bag of delicacies from Serbia and a bottle of “Serbian Tea,” brewed in Fr Milun’s native village. They stayed and talked about church matters for an hour and a half, before continuing to the Serbian Cemetery alongside our own for a memorial service which they had come to chant there.



PRACTICAL TIP

BEWARE of carers! That was simply to grab your attention (often-times quite a feat in itself!). However, there is a very real and serious problem. In our relatively small circle of parishioners and followers, I have recently found two incidents of extremist “Evangelicals” trying to use their closeness to the people in their professional care to proselytise them and draw them away from Orthodoxy, and this at a time when they are particularly vulnerable. Many years ago, I knew of an elderly Russian lady, who was in a Roman Catholic nursing home, and as she approached her end they refused to call anyone but a RC priest, and so she died without receiving the Mysteries but as a confessor, having refused to accept ministrations from anyone but an Orthodox priest. But this “Evangelical” offensive seems to be a new phenomenon. If you have loved ones in care, or carers coming to look after them when they are infirm, elderly or near to death, take special care to protect them from such “missionary zeal.” And, if you are Orthodox, and know of any one in this situation, then show a contrary and Godly zeal, by visiting them, keeping in touch with them, and trying to support them in remaining true to their Faith. Many seem to think that they only need visit their own family, and that the priests do all the rest. This is not so, and not Orthodox - we are all brothers in Christ. We all share a ministry of love towards each other. All Orthodox Christians are family, and now, with our people scattered widely and priests so few and far between, it is imperative that each and every Orthodox Christian share in this ministry as best they can.