

DIOCESE OF SOUROZH
RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
CATHEDRAL OF THE DORMITION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD
AND ALL SAINTS

67 ENNISMORE GARDENS, LONDON SW7 1NH

CATHEDRAL NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2015



SYNAXIS OF THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL AND THE OTHER BODILESS POWERS (8/21 NOVEMBER)

Troparion of the Feast

O supreme commanders of the heavenly armies, / we, the unworthy, ever entreat you / that by your prayers ye surround us with the protection of your wings of immaterial glory, / preserving us who earnestly fall down before you and cry aloud: // Deliver us from misfortunes, as ye are the leaders of the hosts on high.

Kontakion of the Feast

Supreme leaders of the armies of God, / and ministers of the divine glory, / princes of the bodiless angels and guides of men, / ask what is good for us and great mercy, // as supreme leaders of the Bodiless Hosts.

SYNAXIS OF THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL & THE OTHER BODILESS POWERS: GABRIEL, RAPHAEL, URIEL, SALAPHIEL, JEGUDIEL & BARACHIEL

According to the Holy Scriptures, the angels, human beings, and all nature were created by God. With the words, "*In the beginning God created Heaven and earth*" (Gen. 1:1), we have the first indication that God created the spiritual world. Here, in contrast to earth, a substantial world, this world of spirits is called Heaven. The angels were already present during the creation of the starry skies, which is evidenced by the words of God spoken to Job, "*When the stars were created, all My angels sang praises to Me*" (Job 38:7).



All the Angels, according to the Apostle Paul, are ministering spirits, - sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation - (Heb. 1:14). God set them as overseers of every nation and people, and guides to that which is profitable (Deut. 32:8); and while one Angel is appointed to oversee each nation as a whole, one is also appointed to protect each Christian individually. He commands them to guard them that hope on Him, that nothing should harm them, neither should any evil draw nigh to their dwelling (Ps. 90:10-12). In the Heavens they always behold the face of God, sending up to Him the thrice-holy hymn and interceding with Him in our behalf, seeing they rejoice over one sinner that repents (Esaias 6:2-3; Matt. 18:10; Luke 15:7). In a word, they have served God in so many ways for our benefit, that the pages of Holy Scripture are filled with the histories thereof.

It is for these reasons that the Orthodox Church, wisely honouring these divine ministers, our protectors and guardians, celebrates today the present Synaxis that is, our coming together in assembly for their common feast to chant their praises, especially for the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, who are mentioned in the Scriptures by name. The name Michael means "Who is like God?" and Gabriel means "God is mighty." The number of Angels is not defined in the divine Scriptures, where Daniel says that thousands of thousands ministered before Him, and ten thousands of ten thousands attended upon Him -(Dan. 7:10). But all of them are divided into nine orders which are called Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim, Dominions, Powers, Authorities, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels.

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

THE EUCHARIST

A Sermon by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh
(September 1969)

When the Lord instituted at the Last Supper that mystery of our faith which we call the Holy Liturgy or the Eucharist, He gathered round Himself His disciples, both those who were later on to be faithful unto death and also the one who was already prepared to betray his Master, and He confronted him, together with the others, with the extraordinary love of God, because to be admitted to a man's table means that He, our host, considers us to be His equals, His companions in the old sense of the word, those who are entitled to break the bread with Him, to share with Him the substance of life; equals in the love of God, equals with God through His love for us.



This is one of the aspects of the extraordinary events which we call the Last Supper. But we have given it also another name: we call it the Eucharist from the Greek word which means simultaneously "gift" and "thanksgiving". Indeed, we can see that communion to the Body and Blood of Christ, this incredible relationship which He accepts for us, is the greatest gift which the Lord can grant us: companionship and equality, becoming the co-workers of God, and through the incredible, unfathomable action and power of the Spirit (because this Bread is no longer bread only and this Wine is no longer only wine, they have become the Body and Blood of the Giver) we become incipiently and increasingly partakers of the divine nature; gods by adoption, gods by participation, so that together with the one who is the incarnate Son of God we become the total revelation of God's presence, the total Christ of whom St. Ignatius of Antioch spoke. Beyond this, higher, deeper even than this: in this community of nature and life with the Only-Begotten Son of God, in the words of St. Irenaeus of Lyon, we become truly, with regard to God Himself, the Only-Begotten Son.

This is the gift, but where is the thanksgiving? What can we bring to the Lord? Bread and wine? They belong to Him. Our own selves? Are we not His? He brought us out of nought, He has brought us into being, He has endowed us with all that we are and all we possess. What then can we give which is really ours? St. Maximus the Confessor says that God can do all things save one. He cannot compel the smallest of His creatures to love Him, because love is supreme freedom. This is the only gift we can bring to God, the gift of a trusting heart. But

why is this mysterious supper of the Eucharist called a thanksgiving more than any other service, more than any other action of ours? What can we give to God? This was a question the psalmist was asking himself centuries ago, before Christ appeared and revealed the divine love, and his answer was so unexpected and so true. He says, 'what reward shall I give to the Lord for all His benefits?' And he replies, 'I shall take the cup of salvation, I will give thanks unto the Lord. I will sing praises in the courts of the temple of the Lord.' The supreme act of thanksgiving is not to give back, because one who receives and pays back repays the gift and thus somehow destroys the gift. Both indeed become equal, both have given, both have been at the giving end of the chain, but the reciprocal gift has destroyed both joys up to a point.

If we are capable of receiving wholeheartedly, then we are expressing truly our total trust, our assurance that the love of the giver is perfect and it is in receiving wholeheartedly, in all simplicity, that we bring joy to the one who has given from all his heart. This is true even in human relationships. We wish to repay a gift only to make ourselves free from gratitude and from a certain enslavement in which we are put when we receive from one who does not love us enough to give wholeheartedly and whom we do not love enough to receive wholeheartedly. This is why the Eucharist is the supreme thanksgiving of the Church and the supreme thanksgiving of our earth. People who trust the love of God openheartedly without any thought of repaying the gift, only rejoicing in the love it expresses, receive from God not only what He can grant but also what He is, participation to His life, to His nature, to His eternity, to His love divine. Only if we are capable of receiving with perfect gratitude and perfect joy, can our participation in the Eucharist be true, only then does the Eucharist become the supreme act of gratitude. But gratitude is difficult because it requires hope, a loving heart capable of rejoicing when it receives, and a perfect trust and faith in the love of the one who gives, that this gift is not meant as humiliation or an act of enslavement. This is why we must grow from day to day into the ability to love and to be loved, into the ability to be grateful and rejoice, and only then does the Last Supper of the Lord become the perfect gift of God and the perfect response of the earth. AMEN.

WELCOME A NEW PRIEST OF THE DIOCESE!

Ordination of Fr. Dmitry Nedostupenko to the Priesthood



Axios! A big surprise was in store for those who came to the morning Liturgy on Sunday 8th November. A major event in the Cathedral's life took place in the middle of the service. Fr Dmitry Nedostupenko, a well-known Archdeacon, was ordained a priest after

nine years of service in the diocese of Sourozh. The Rite of Ordination was performed by Archbishop Elisey of Sourozh during the Divine Liturgy. It took place on the Feast of Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessalonica and coincided with the Namesday of Fr Dmitry Karpenko, who recently arrived in London and serves as both Cathedral Sacristan and Secretary of the diocese of Sourozh.

An emotional Vladyka Elisey gave a bouquet of flowers to each of the two Fathers who shared the same name and blessed Fr Dmitry Nedostupenko's pastoral service. The newly ordained priest will serve in London, Manchester and the parishes of Northern England. In his speech, Vladyka Elisey mentioned that as a deacon, Fr Dmitry always accompanied him on his visits across the country and would therefore be well prepared to look after several parishes. Here is to a new beginning, Fr Dmitry, and we send our heartfelt congratulations!



By Tatiana Salmon

'WALK WITH GOD EVERY DAY' - Sister Vassa Larin Visits Our Cathedral

One of the most memorable Cathedral events of this year took place a month ago. On Friday, 16th of October 2015, Sister Vassa (Larina) visited London and gave a highly anticipated talk at the Dormition Cathedral. A trilingual nun with a strong presence and a doctoral degree in Theology, she works as a lecturer in the Institute of Liturgical Studies of the Theological Faculty at the University of Vienna. The host of a popular show 'Coffee with Sr. Vassa' and a regular speaker on the issues of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, Sr. Vassa is arguably one of the most influential people in Orthodoxy today. The talk was given in English but questions in Russian were warmly welcomed.



"The word of God in Liturgy and life" was the official subject of the meeting. In the course of the talk Sister Vassa explained how four words of the Gospel - "took

bread", "and blessed it", "and broke it", "and gave it" (Mt 26:26), form the basis of the Holy Eucharist, which lies at the heart of the Divine Liturgy. These words also become the means of recognition of Christ Himself after His Resurrection for His disciples.

The audience, mesmerised by the powerful speaker, listened attentively. Sr. Vassa emphasised that Christ - 'a person who changed the world' - would spend most of his time with ordinary people, not 'holy' ones. She also shared her thoughts on how to make use of the Holy Scriptures in everyday life. Very often Christian believers lose their "first love" - the zeal of the newly converted. This happens because many of them believe that deep spiritual life is a 'matter for saints' and limit themselves to weekly church attendance. She particularly highlighted that this is not enough and frequently causes spiritual stagnation. The Holy Gospel should be involved in our everyday life one way or another. Sister Vassa herself makes notes every day of her reflections on passages of the Bible. She advised the audience to read at least a little bit of the Holy Scriptures daily so they could "walk with God every day".

Two interesting questions were asked about matushka's views on the relationship between Orthodoxy and Catholicism: 1. How she as an Orthodox worked with a non-Orthodox supervisor (Sr Vassa was the Graduate Assistant of the renowned expert on Byzantine Liturgy, Professor Robert F. Taft, S.J., an American Jesuit priest and archimandrite of the Eastern Catholic Church), and 2. How we can keep our 'Orthodox identity' in a non-Orthodox environment. To the first she answered that he (Taft) never imposed his own convictions on her and that he was a man of prayer; 'I never felt a threat to my faith there'. To the second she said she would prefer us to be concerned about our Christian identity first and foremost and Christ Himself, rather than denominations.

All present warmly welcomed Sister Vassa. The small church was full of both Russian and English-speaking guests. Nadia Yegorova-Johnstone, a parishioner, commented: 'It was the first time I saw her live. She was very interesting and engaging. She made me question the way I worship, the way I pray, which is a good thing. And I was relieved to hear that you can try and connect to God and learn things in different ways on a daily basis. You do need a drive and she said 'make it simple' which I agree with as well.'

At the end of the talk Archbishop Elisey of Sourozh thanked matushka for the most interesting and vibrant talk and expressed his wish to have further such meetings in the future. She accepted the invitation enthusiastically.

By Tatiana Salmon

Sister Vassa was born and brought up in America, in the family of Archpriest George Larin - a well-known priest of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. Orthodox audiences know her from the 'Daily Reflections of Sr. Vassa' and a popular YouTube program - 'Coffee with Sr. Vassa' (both available at www.coffeewithsistervassa.com). She is also

the author of multiple scientific theological publications and a member of the Inter-Council Presence of the Russian Orthodox Church since 2014.

COFFEE INTERVIEW WITH SISTER VASSA

Deacon Andrei Psarev (Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary, Jordanville, New York) was one of the speakers at the Diocesan Conference 2013. He interviewed Sr. Vassa Larin in Vienna on September 25th last year. We are publishing the abridged version of this interview by Andrei's kind permission.



Sister Vassa (Larin) has lived the Orthodox monastic life for twenty-five years. She received her Masters Degree in Orthodox Theology from the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich, where she also received her doctorate degree in 2008 under the direction of Robert Taft, S.J. Since January 2009, she teaches Liturgical Studies at the University of Vienna. In her YouTube show “Coffee with Sister Vassa” she discusses liturgical, ecclesiastical and spiritual topics.

- What does it mean for you as a nun and scholar to communicate with a worldwide audience via your YouTube channel?

- I see this kind of communication as my “obedience” (or “poslushanie”, as we say in Russian) and also my obligation. Because my spiritual father, Archbishop Mark of Berlin, Germany, and Great Britain sent me to receive academic degrees in theology, and later blessed me to take on a teaching position at the University of Vienna. He also blessed me to make these videos, as part of my academic activities. He did not send me to get a doctoral degree just to stimulate my own brain cells or to decorate my CV. I was blessed to receive a theological education to be of service to others; to share this gift with others. Today, in academia it is becoming increasingly popular for professors to offer courses online, as a service to the larger public. However, as an Orthodox Christian in academia, I am not only a member of the academic community, but also a member of the Church. So, just like the rest of us within the one body that is the Church, I try to make myself useful in the way that I can.

As far as the world-wide audience is concerned, I am grateful for it. I never expected to have viewers volunteer to translate the videos into the many languages we now have in the subtitles: Russian, Greek, Serbian, Spanish, Romanian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Slovak – and occasionally Japanese, Portuguese, Georgian, Hungarian, Finnish, and even Arabic. We have received letters of thanks from war-torn Syria, from South Africa, and many more from Russia, Serbia, and Greece – even from Mount Athos. Christ calls us all to “Go and teach all the nations...” Both men and women answered that call in the Early Church

with great enthusiasm. Even the Samaritan woman in the Gospel – a sinful woman – managed to convert her entire village to faith in Christ, by spreading the word about Him. So, if today we are able to spread His word through the internet, as well as the word about His saints – then I think we can be nothing other than grateful for that opportunity to answer Christ's call.

- You are fluent in contemporary theological, academic and social trends. How does your ROCOR (the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia) background help you in your work?

- My ROCOR background helps me in everything, not only my work. Because it is the Church that baptised me, taught me its traditions as well as love for them, accepted me into monasticism, heard my confessions and raised me up again when I fell (and continues to do so), and blessed me to study. I also experienced, together with my Church, the very unique changes we underwent, as ROCOR members, when our Church opened up to communion with other Orthodox Churches. Our Church had the humility and wisdom to change, and to open up to the broader world of Orthodoxy; to open up after many years of a very isolated existence. I find myself still processing this immense transition, and learning from it. I now cross paths with other Orthodox jurisdictions on a regular basis, and am often very impressed by the vibrant church-life that I observe there. This kind of capacity to change, demonstrated by our Church in recent years, is very unique in the history of church divisions, and I am grateful to be part of it.

Interview by Deacon Andrei Psarev

Full version of the interview is available via the website of Historical Studies of the Russian Church Abroad: www.rocorstudies.org.

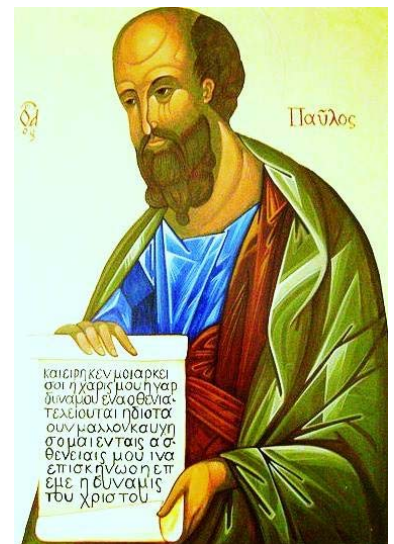
ON THE PATH TO ETERNAL LIFE -

A Bible Study by Fr. Joseph Skinner

On Thursday 27th October Archpriest Joseph Skinner, a priest of the Cathedral, held the first in his series of Bible Study sessions dedicated to St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. The Epistle to the Ephesians is regarded as the finest expression of St Paul's understanding of salvation in Christ. One might call it the Gospel according to Paul. Richard Hill, a parishioner of our Cathedral, attended the session and kindly shared his experience.

St Peter said the letters of St Paul "contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort...to their own destruction"(2 Peter 3:16). And so it was with some trepidation that our discussion group began to tackle St Paul's letter to the *Ephesians*.

Father Joseph led us in a fascinating, free ranging conversation about the meaning of the first chapter of *Ephesians*. St Paul used this letter to explain God's message to the "saints", the early Christian community of Ephesus. He begins by explaining that God has "blessed us...with every spiritual blessing" (Eph. 1:3) and Father Joseph explained that this reveals a major change of emphasis between Old and New Testaments. Early Christians may not have been obviously blessed in a material sense: they did not secure great wealth through their faith. However, they were blessed in a deeper sense because their sins were forgiven and they were set on a path to eternal life.



Our conversation then went on to touch upon some profound theological concepts such as grace, predestination and salvation. Different understandings of these concepts can lead to strikingly different interpretations: the group had an animated discussion about whether Paul's description of God as "having predestined us" meant that God had determined our salvation in advance, leaving no scope for human freedom.

Some felt that this Calvinist interpretation was an example of the destructive readings of St Paul that St Peter warned against. Against it, Father Joseph urged the teachings of St John Chrysostom: he highlights how St Paul's letter combines a perception of divine omnipotence with a vision of how humans can use their freedom to orient themselves towards God. This view focuses on the synergies between God and man rather than the vast distance separating us - a synergy that will be explored in future conversations about *Ephesians* led by Father Joseph that will hopefully be as fruitful as this one.

By Richard Hill

Father Joseph, a priest of the Cathedral, thanks those who attended and grappled with one of the most sublime, but also most challenging passages in the New Testament, Eph. 1:1-14. The next talk in the series will take place on Nov 24th at 19.30.

"THE PRIVILEGE OF SOLITUDE"

A Meeting with Archpriest Fr. George Zavershinsky

Archpriest George Zavershinsky, Dean of Scotland and Northern Ireland, recently visited our Cathedral. A meeting with him took place on Thursday 29th October. It was dedicated to Father George's new book titled *"The Privilege of Solitude"*. In the course of the meeting, Father George told us about this, his latest and fourteenth book and answered questions from the audience.

"The Privilege of Solitude" is intended for a wide circle of readers and is being prepared for publication by the publishing house of the Sretensky monastery (Moscow, Russia). The book touches upon various topics. The author addresses a



number of issues, including problems of unsubdued passions and addictions such as alcoholism, drugs or mental disorders. Fr George reminded the parishioners that before being judgemental towards people suffering from addictions, we should remember that often we ourselves are 'slightly' addicted to substances such as coffee, tea, sugar, or things like "comfort food", from which we seek an 'energy kick' or calming ourselves down.

Many of us often question ourselves: is it really possible to completely get rid of a severe addiction? 'As long as one is capable of exclaiming "Lord!" deliverance is really possible with God's help,' Father George pointed out.

By Elena Kuzina

Rev. George Zavershinsky is the Dean of Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Isle of Man of the Diocese of Sourozh. The next meeting with him will take place at the Cathedral of the Dormition on Thursday 26th of November at 19.30 and will be a further discussion of the above topics. 'The Privilege of Solitude' will be published in Russian.

THE CHRISTIAN UPBRINGING OF A CHILD -

A Discussion with Archpriest Vadim Zakrevsky (Part 1)

- *Father Vadim, once a child is born, he is brought home from the hospital and being cared for and brought up. When does the Christian upbringing of a child start?*

- I think that the Christian upbringing of a child starts from the moment a child is conceived. When the child is still in its mother's womb, her lifestyle is very important. The spiritual lifestyle. Right now I'm talking exclusively about that. I mean her participation in sacraments, confessions, communions and prayer observance. Just so that people don't think that I'm being primeval (laughing), because some will say to me: "Have you ever been



pregnant yourself?", I'll expand on that. A lot of women come to me and say that they get tired, something is hurting, that they feel sick, find it difficult to walk, that they can't do anything and ask what to do. In this case do everything I mentioned earlier, but do it as much as you can. Most importantly, if you can't do the whole thing, do a part of it. If you can't read the whole prayer, read half of it. If you can't read a half, read a quarter. Most important is that a prayer exists in a person's life. I'm absolutely sure that a child and his mother are not only connected through an umbilical cord, but they are also connected spiritually. This is the very beginning. But in a more literal sense... of course child's spiritual life begins with his baptism. It is still not acknowledged by the child himself, but everyone else - his parents and godparents are praying for him, he has his own protector up in the sky, a guardian angel. That is what can be said briefly.

- *There are some people that have only recently discovered their faith or just become a part of a congregation, they bring their kids to communion, but at home their life is not based upon the Orthodox values. In such a family, what should one do? This question has some background to it. A discussion took place on Facebook in one of the groups for Russian speaking parents, when the child was not able to undergo Communion, because he got scared near the chalice and wasn't able to calm down. The parents were not happy. What should they do in such a situation?*

- A child needs to be taught how to undergo Communion. Let's highlight the fact that it doesn't matter where and how the parents live, they brought their child to the Communion! Thank God! Good and very positive, in a **spiritual** sense, deed was done. I don't know how spiritual their life was at home, but they worried about it, they thought about it and it didn't leave their mind, which is good in itself. I always remind parents who baptised their child, that it doesn't matter whether he is three, six months or a year old, they need to undergo Communions with a child as often as possible, and the first Communion after the baptism should be as soon as possible, the following day, the day after or the first day the parents are available. I always emphasise: don't come with a child just for the Communion, don't ask when the service ends, so that you know when the Communion will be. The argument that I hear is that the child is small and won't be able to endure the whole service. Certainly. I'm not saying to come for the beginning of the service, but at least come 15 minutes before the Communion occurs. It's not a favour I'm asking for, it is more like a condition, if you'd like. A child, when he is still a baby can still feel everything, but cannot say it. He cannot feel everything as well as an adult, but he is a living soul, and a soul of course can feel something, hear something, sees, becomes used to something, understands some things in its own way, becomes used to this atmosphere, the smell of candles, the sound of singing. If you are going to spiritually involve your child like that from the beginning, everything will turn out successfully. If, on the other hand, you bring your child to church at the age of three, four or five for the first time, I will not be surprised if the same reaction will take place as the one we discussed earlier. But even in this case, if the child is not ready for Communion,

but the parents or godparents still want him to undergo Communion, which is God bless, they simply need to come to church for 15 minutes, 20 minutes, half an hour, it's all very personal, but give him a chance to **adapt** to a church, show him how to undergo Communion, explain it to him. He will come round, give it time, but he will definitely come. With this approach, the wish of the parents will be fulfilled.

*Interview by Julia Pliauksta
(Translated from Russian by Vasily Druzhinin)*

Archpriest Vadim Zakrevsky is a priest of the Cathedral. The discussion about Christian upbringing of a child will be continued in the next issue of the Cathedral Newsletter.

**"THROUGH THE PARISH'S SUNDAY SCHOOL, OUR CHILDREN LEARNT
TO LIVE NOT BY THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE,
BUT BY THE LAW OF THE GOSPEL"**



We began attending this church in 2002. Back then, the Sunday school, as we know it today, did not exist. There was a youth group, which evolved into the Sunday school. When our children were growing up, they first began attending the children's choir and then the school. This year, all four of our children (aged 4-13) are attending it. The school, like the church, has become very dear to us and we always feel at home there. The children feel that it differs from the English schools in a spiritual sense and their relationships with their classmates often grow into sincere close friendships. When our eldest children were younger, they said that they preferred going to the church school rather than going to a regular English school, because "everyone was kind" at the former. Communicating with families and children who seek to live by faith is especially important because we live in England, a foreign country to us. For the most part, our children not only learnt the Russian language, but also the fact that it is not necessary to live by the law of the jungle ('every man for himself') and that they can live by the statutes of the Gospel, and also that they are not alone in doing so. They've learnt that to be Orthodox is completely normal and natural.

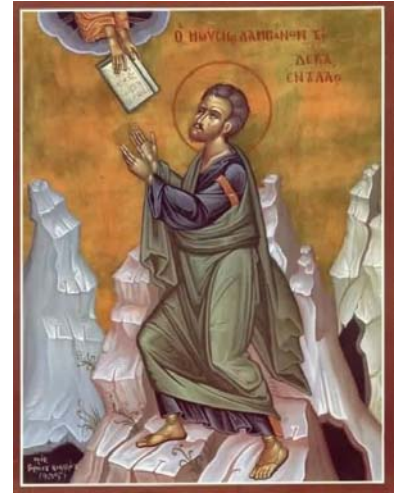
*By the Marine Family
(Translated from Russian by Ilya Tolchenov)*

In the photo above – Alexander Marine and his wife Olga Marina

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF GOD: THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

"I am the Lord thy God ... thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

With this commandment, the Lord draws our attention toward Himself as the ultimate Source of our existence and of all goodness in life, and as the supreme Goal of our existence. He is eternal, almighty, knows everything, and lives in an approachable light. He is the only true God, the Creator of everything visible and invisible; He is the Author of life, the Lawgiver, our most merciful Savior and loving Benefactor. For this reason He deserves all our respect, reverence and sincere love. He deserves that all our thoughts, words and actions be inspired by Him and



be directed toward His glory, as the Lord Jesus Christ has taught us to wish and pray: *"Hallowed be Thy Name; Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."*

Moses receives the Ten
Commandments of God

Thus the first commandment lays the proper foundation for private and social life and for this reason it holds a pre-eminent place among the other commandments. It casts man's spiritual outlook toward God and tells him to make the Lord the object of all his thoughts and endeavors. Consider the knowledge of God as the most precious knowledge, His will - the highest authority, service to Him - your life's calling. Because of this all-encompassing content, the first commandment reveals the superiority of the God-revealed law over all human legislation - ancient as well as contemporary. Experience shows that a healthy morality can be built only when it is founded on religious principles. Without divine authority, all human laws become conditional, unconvincing and subject to change.

In our age, the first commandment is as applicable and important as it was thousands of years ago. Indeed, although many contemporary people are saturated by all sorts of information and knowledge, they have but a dim awareness of God's existence and role in their life. This estrangement from God deprives people's intellects of necessary spiritual guidance and makes their lives wavering and empty. To find the correct direction in life, one should learn about God and His revelation by studying the Holy Scriptures and meditating, which can be augmented by reading the writings of the Holy Fathers and other religious books approved by the Church. This process of spiritual self-education becomes especially fruitful when it is accompanied by prayer and a sincere desire to become a better Christian. This acquired religious knowledge will enlighten not only the mind but will also permeate the heart and become the light of Christ shining in good deeds. Because of this wide scope, the first commandment includes in itself the rest of the commandments, which expand its meaning with specific actions.

Sins against the first commandment result from indifference toward God and His revelation or, what is even worse, from deliberate rejection of His will. These sins include atheism (militant rejection of God's existence), polytheism (belief in many gods), disbelief or agnosticism (unwillingness to learn about Him), superstition, disavowal of faith, heresy (distortion of His revealed truth) and despair (disbelief in His providence and mercy). All of these are, first of all, sins of the mind. Because sins of the mind invariably lead to sinful life and falling away from God, the Fathers of the Church always struggled with great energy and forbearance to preserve the purity of faith in God.

By Bishop Alexander (Mileant)

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Source: <http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/command.htm>. Read about the Second Commandment in the next issue of the Newsletter.

THE BRITISH SAINTS

The Venerable Hilda, Abbess of Whitby (17/30 November)



The Venerable Hilda, Abbess of Whitby (+680, commemorated November 17) was the daughter of Hereric, the nephew of King Edwin of Northumbria, and like her great-uncle became a Christian through the preaching of St. Paulinus of York, about the year 627, when she was thirteen years old. Together with the King and his two sons she was baptized on the holy Feast of Pascha, 627.

While Hilda was still an infant, her mother had a dream that she was searching for her banished husband. Although she failed to find him, she discovered something very precious under her garments: a valuable jewel that cast a light so brilliant that all Britain was illuminated by its rays. This dream was fulfilled in her daughter.

Hilda continued to live at court until she was thirty-three years old, that is, exactly half way through her life. She had, however, always longed for the monastic life, and prepared to join her sister who was already a nun in France. Bishop Aidan, the saintly abbot of Lindesfarne, recognized her innate spiritual wisdom and persuaded Hilda to undertake her monastic labours on her native soil. Under his guidance she spent a year with a few like-minded companions observing the

monastic rule. Soon after her profession she became abbess of a small monastery at Hartlepool, founded by the pious Hieu who is believed to be the first woman in Northumbria to take the monastic vows. There Hilda was often visited by her spiritual mentor, Bishop Aidan, and others who helped prepare her for the increased responsibilities of governing the double monastery which she founded eight years later at Whitby. Five of the monks under her care later became bishops, three of whom were glorified as saints. The fame of her holy life spread, so that not only the laity but also clergy and rulers came from afar seeking her advice.

One day in the monastery a worker called Caedmon, who was a simple, unlearned man, came to the abbess to relate an extraordinary dream. Falling asleep, he dreamed that someone came and asked him to sing. He said sadly that he didn't know how. "But you shall sing to me" was the reply. "Sing about God's creation." Immediately Caedmon began to sing in praise of God verses he had never known before. When Abbess Hilda heard his beautiful, moving poem, she realized that this was a gift of God. From that time on Caedmon composed devotional songs of such great sweetness and power, that many were moved to greater piety. Until then, all religious writings had been in Latin, the language of the educated. Now for the first time people could hear of Christ's Passion, Resurrection and Ascension in verses in their own tongue – English.

Because of a dispute between the Roman and Celtic Churches over the computation of the date of Pascha, a Synod was convened in Abbess Hilda's monastery at Whitby in the year 664. A decision was finally reached to follow the Roman practice, as propounded by St. Wilfrid, one of her former monks, who had visited Rome several times. Inclined to the Celtic tradition of her spiritual mentor, Abbess Hilda nevertheless humbly accepted the change; though not all the Celtic Church felt able to do so at the time.

For six years towards the end of her life, the saintly abbess suffered from a painful illness. But she continued to instruct her flock and until the moment of her death never ceased thanking God for her purifying trial. The very night of her repose, a nun in another monastery founded by Hilda was woken by the bell which was normally tolled at the passing away of a nun, and she saw Hilda's soul being guided to heaven by angels in a cloud of light. She informed her abbess of the vision, and all the nuns were called to prayer and the reading of the Psalter. In the morning news reached them confirming that St. Hilda had died that night. She is commemorated on November 17th.

Prepared by Elena Kuzina

Source: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/75450.htm>

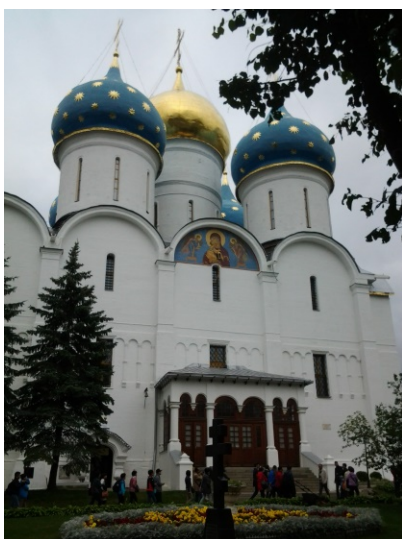
IMPRESSIONS ON A VISIT TO THE HOLY TRINITY LAVRA, SERGIEV POSAD

In the October issue of the Newsletter we published a life of St Sergius of Radonezh, one of the most beloved Russian Orthodox Saints. John and Stella Newbery, from the parish of St. Peter and St. Paul in Portsmouth, recently visited the Holy Trinity Lavra near Moscow – a monastery founded in 1345 by St Sergius and containing his relics. It is the most important monastery in Russia and the spiritual center of Russian Orthodoxy. John and Stella kindly share their impressions on the visit.



It was our privilege and pleasure to visit the Holy Trinity Monastery in Sergiev Posad on a mild September day in the early autumn of this year. Ignoring Trip Advisor we took the more frequent suburban train from Moscow rather than the express service. As soon as we eased out of the Yaroslavskiy station, a succession of people selling drinks, cakes, sweets and even books passed through the carriage. Time elapsed rapidly as sellers were interspersed with musicians. These groups included some army veterans, a boy-girl duo and an accomplished violinist with accordion backing. They even had CDs for sale.

Although the train had further destinations, there was no mistaking our stop as nearly everyone rose to alight at the small station. There was time for a brief tea in a nearby café before making the ten minute walk to the monastery. In front of the monastery there is a huge square that was being used to disembark tourists. There were two main groups of visitors on this day. Chinese were pouring off the buses intent on taking 'selfies' and Russians were heading towards the cathedrals to venerate ikons. The monastery



site is enclosed by 10 metre high walls and has an impressive entrance decorated with images of the Theotokos and St Sergius. Walking under the archway you pass through a passage that has panels depicting the life of St Sergius. Once inside the compound you can only marvel at the range of buildings. As well as the different cathedrals there are excellent souvenir shops and what can only be described as an ecclesiastical emporium with stock to equip parishes with everything that might be needed, such as vestments, chalices, incense burners, candle holders, fabric, and of course large ikons.

The highlight of our visit was entering into the Holy Trinity Cathedral. A continuous cycle of prayer at the tomb of St Sergius was in progress with the words of the priest receiving responses from a small choir. Two routes were indicated by the ushers, to the left to join the line to venerate the tomb and centrally to observe and venerate the ikonostasis. In broken Russian we asked a monk who was manning the votive stall whether he spoke English. He did and we then asked him to comment on the ikonostasis. Instead of the normal form, the figure of Christ was replaced with the familiar Holy Trinity ikon by Andrei Rublev. Indeed close examination showed another two Holy Trinity ikons in the ikonostasis, one next to that of the Theotokos. He explained that the ikons were either by Rublev or by members of his school of ikonographers, and that the wealthy patron at that time had wanted nothing but the best for the decoration of the cathedral. His regret was that the original ikon was now in a Moscow museum. At that moment we proudly and reverently recalled that we had seen that ikon in its protected case at the Tretyakov Gallery just a few days previously.

It was a very moving experience for us and we were able to distribute small blessed ikons from the shop upon our return. In their own unique and individual way they conveyed the all-significant truth of the Most Holy Trinity to our waiting friends and family back in England.

By John and Stella Newbery

THE EXHIBITION 'RUSSO-BYZANTINE ICONS' IN LONDON



Our Lady of Kazan - egg tempera with gold leaf, semi-precious stones and pearls.
Source:
<http://sacredspacegallery.com/>

London's Sacred Space Gallery is holding an exhibition of Russian icon paintings, organised by the Sisters of St. Elisabeth Convent (Minsk, Diocese of Belarus). The exhibition will be held from 16 to 30 November 2015.

We are having a conversation with Sister Anna Vasilyeva, one of the exhibition organizers.

- How did you come up with the idea to demonstrate the works of your artists in London?

- We noticed a keen interest in Russian icons while meeting members of other Christian denominations. Over the course of time, we began to wish to show people the beauty of Orthodox icon and thus give them an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the Orthodox spiritual tradition.

- How many showpieces will be brought to the London exhibition? Tell us a little about these icons please.

- The upcoming exhibition will feature 17 icons. Seven of them are tempera paintings, three are ones decorated with semi-precious stones - sardonyx, malachite, amethyst, jasper and some others. Two of the icons are produced by the icon-making workshop. The faces are painted and the frames are embroidered with beads, pearls and gold threads.

- What were the criteria for selecting the icons for this exhibition?

We tried to select the icons that would be the most representative of Russian iconography. At the same time, we wanted to exhibit icons painted in various techniques that are being revived in our convent.

- What are your expectations of the exhibition in the UK's capital?

- We are hoping that this exhibition will act as our humble contribution to the mission of acquainting more people with the beauty and divinity of the icon. Thank you very much for your interest!

Interview by Julia Pliauksta

(Translated from Russian by Elena Kuzina and Tatiana Salmon)

Saint Elisabeth Convent is an Orthodox Christian community named in honour of the Holy Martyr Grand Duchess Elisabeth. It was founded in Minsk, Belarus, in 1999 by a group of Sisters bearing the same name. The Sisters support their ministries through more than twenty workshops and studios in which the potential of each individual can be realized. These include studios in iconography, needlework, embroidery, ceramics, candle-making, woodwork, stone carving, and metalwork workshops (Sacred Space Gallery website).

The exhibition 'Russo-Byzantine Icons' will be open from 10am-1pm on weekdays from 16 to 30 November 2015. The Sacred Space Gallery's address is St. John's Notting Hill, Lansdowne Crescent W11 2NN. Entrance is through St. John's Gardens. Nearest tube station is Holland Park.

Correction: There was an error in the October issue of the Newsletter in regards to the rector of the parish of St Paulinus in Newark. The rector is Fr. Gregory Butler, not Fr. Gennady Andreev as was incorrectly published. We apologise to Fr. Gregory for this mistake.

NEWSLETTER 30 YEARS AGO...

An Ikon Dedicated for the Choir

(No. 180, November 1985)

An ikon specially painted for our Choir and commissioned by Ellie Sutter who sang in the Choir for two years before returning to America, was blessed by Fr John on Sunday 13th October during a short and beautiful prayer in the middle of our Cathedral. This is what Fr John said to introduce the occasion:

"An Ikon has been sent from America expressly for the Choir. It is an Ikon of St. Roman, the Singer.

Sometimes members of the Choir express a feeling of being separate from the body of the Church. This is not true, of course, - they are not separate, but it is difficult sometimes for us to overcome our physical circumstances like having to sing from a gallery. We

are deeply grateful to them for their singing, especially during the Lent and many other lengthy Services. So let us bless this Ikon and send it up to the Choir loft with our prayers and gratitude, so that when they come to the choir they will venerate the Ikon, and may our prayers be present with them."

Saint Romanos, who was from Syria and who died around 556 A.D., was attached to the Great Church of Saint Sophia in Konstantinople as one of the Sacristans. A modest reader, with no apparent gift, as the legend tells us, he was reading the Kathisma one Christmas Eve, and rather badly at that; he had to be replaced by another reader. Seeing this, his colleagues mocked him. He went away to pour out his sadness in intense prayer. Half asleep in the night before the Ikon of the Mother of God, he had a vision in which Our Lady made him swallow a scroll. This had the effect of making him eventually into an outstanding poet, composer and singer. In the morning he was able to sing his newly composed poem of the Feast, the Kondak of the Nativity of Christ, which starts with the following stanza:

"The Virgin today gives birth to Him who is above all being,
And the earth offers a cave to Him whom no man can approach.
Angels with shepherds give glory,
And Magi journey with a star:
For unto us is born a young child -
The God before all ages".



The Ikon of St. Romanos, the Singer, is still in the Cathedral. It is situated in the small church behind the choir.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

A Bible Study (in English) with Father Joseph Skinner will take place on **Tuesdays 10th and 24th November** after the evening service. The discussion will be held in the Cathedral's library. We shall continue our exploration of St Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.

Fr George Zavershinsky welcomes everyone to his talk (in Russian) on **Thursday 26th November at 7.30 p.m.** in the Cathedral's library. Again, it will be dedicated to his latest, fourteenth book, 'The Privilege of Solitude' and its main topic - 'Mental disorders, alcoholism, drug addictions - disease or unsubdued passions?'

Next Church Slavonic classes taught by Mikhail Sarni will be on **Mondays, 16th and 30th November, at 7.30 p.m.** New students will be given the summary of the previous sessions and are very welcome to join at any time. The classroom language is Russian.

As you will be aware, the restoration and refurbishment of the Cathedral continues. Any donation, however small, is welcome and will help to maintain and beautify the Cathedral, which is our common spiritual home. You can donate by:

- Cash to the church collection boxes
- Online via the diocesan website www.sourozh.org (click «Donate»)
- A cheque or a bank transfer to **Lloyds Bank**

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We welcome your stories of finding faith, conversion, pilgrimages etc. If you would like to leave feedback or contribute content to the Newsletter, please contact us at the above address. We are always happy to hear from our readers.
