



The Orthodox Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross, Lancaster

Meeting at the Chaplaincy Centre of Lancaster University

Newsletter



*Ἐθρονος Χριστός, Ζωοδότης.
(Φ. Κόντογλου, 1962)*

*The Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
belongs to the Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of the United Kingdom and Ireland,
which is part of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Western and Central Europe.*

*Our Metropolitan is His Eminence Archbishop John.
The Patriarchate of Antioch is third senior of the Orthodox Churches.
The Patriarch is His Beatitude Ignatius IV.*

*The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch
(Acts 11:26)*

THE ROLE OF A DEACON

I have the honour and responsibility of the ancient Order of Deacons. It seems that the diaconate emerged before the presbytery (priesthood) and the bishops in fact because deacons were appointed to serve under the Apostles themselves. Hence the first martyr was also a deacon, St Stephen. I am in this position because I submitted myself to the Church for selection. It cannot be an office achieved by merely wanting it. In deed in this process a whole set of people were consulted and several of them had a veto. My spiritual father could have said no, without any rationale being needed. Fr Jonathan as the parish priest had a similar power as did the collective will of the parish. In addition I consulted others who have known me well for years within the Orthodox Church. Canonically they did not have the right of veto but had doubts been expressed I would have backed off. After that I was put through the *Axios* committee which advises the Archbishop, and of course the Archbishop takes such matters seriously as well.

The basic qualifications are set out in 1 Timothy Chapter 3 ⁸Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons”.

When I arrived in Paris for the ordination service (in St. Stephen's Church) it was with a fair degree of trepidation and fear. In due time I was kneeling at the Holy Table, in the presence of the consecrated elements, whilst the Archbishop pronounced those awe-inspiring words: *“O Lord our God, who by thy foreknowledge dost send down the fullness of the Holy Spirit*

upon those who are ordained, by Thine inscrutable power, to be thy servitors and to administer thy spotless mysteries: Do thou, the same Master, preserve also this man, whom thou hast been pleased to ordain, through me, by the laying-on of hands, to the service of the diaconate, in all soberness of life, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. Vouchsafe unto him the grace which thou didst grant unto Stephen, thy first Martyr, whom, also, thou didst call to be the first in the work of thy ministry; and make him worthy to administer after thy pleasure the degree which it both seemeth good to thee to confer upon him. For they who minister well prepare for themselves a good degree. And manifest him as wholly thy servant. For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen”.



I have underlined the words that really hit hard. God himself does the ordaining. That is truly frightening. The great delight though is that in obeying I discover I am more truly myself and free

to do things better. I am living proof that service really is perfect freedom.

So what is this role? We are all quite clear it is as a servant. Without the blessing of a priest or a bishop the deacon cannot cense or put on vestments and if a service is to happen without a priest. He participates essentially as any other member of the congregation.

I have described myself as a "sheep-dog" rather than a shepherd and so it is. Throughout it is the deacon's privilege to assist the priest. But he is also very much the servant of the whole church.

Liturgically; at the Divine Liturgy and at other services; the deacon serves as an assistant to the priest he is serving with, although certain things remain the task of the deacon rather than the priest or bishop. Chief amongst these are leading the prayers of the people, and also drawing their attention to things, hence "Let us attend" reading the gospel (usually) and certain things in the most sacred part of the Liturgy by way of being involved in the consecration of the elements, dividing the bread etc.

It is also appropriate for a deacon to preach as required. Outside the services the Deacon's role includes things of a practical and social work character. Because part of the duty includes taking communion to people unable to attend deacons were often victims of the persecutions. The work outside the services informs and supports the liturgical work. It is also noticeable that the deacon serves both as part of the clergy within the altar, in a priestly role, and outside as part of the people. The two are all part of the ministry and in being made deacon he does not cease to be a Christian like any other.

He leads the prayers and it is important that we all realise the implications of that. It is never just the deacon praying,

and nor is it the deacon/priest/choir. The choir makes responses but they do so as part of the people. In some versions of the service books "Lord have mercy" "Grant this O Lord" and other responses in the litanies are labelled "All". The serving of the Holy Liturgy and all the other services are a corporate act. It depends on the whole Church.

The Church is described in the first letter of Peter, chapter 2 in these terms *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy"*.

A priest is one who mediates for people with the deity involved. Priesthood means the person concerned has a certain role. In the ancient temple worship of course the high priest was allowed access to the Holy Place on certain days, and the offering was the blood (the life) of the victim. Because blood equates to life the Jewish tradition prevented the consumption of blood (see Acts 15 v19).

There are degrees of priesthood. Within mankind the Church is a priesthood to which we all belong, the priesthood of all believers, regardless of age, class, nationality or sex, and within that we have the clergy. Ultimately all priesthood derives from Christ himself, who is the ultimate priest and victim who gives us his body, blood and life in the Holy Liturgy which we experience in time and which reflects the greater liturgical reality of Heaven.

The ultimate aim of the Christian life is *theosis*; becoming God-like; and the aim is the same for all of us. We have our own paths to tread and our unique personalities. As priests to the world all

of us make contact with many many people. Our actions and prayers make a difference to all those around us. The point is that everyone reading this has a unique role and part to play.

My job now is to serve you all and help the expression of your ministry as well as my own in any way within my power.

I ask for your prayers as ever, and offer my own for you.

The unworthy deacon,
Christopher

VISIT TO THE PELOPONNESE

Greece, Peloponnese, Arcadia county. A bit before the traditional village of Vytina, as you turn for the village of Nimfasia, the Holy Monastery of Panagia (Theotokos) of Kernitsa stands magnificently. One could say that the monastery has sprung up within the greenery, since, whenever you turn your head, you see rich vegetation.

The monastery was named after the mediaeval town of Kernitsa, it has around 10 centuries of life and is considered to be the most ancient of Arcadia and among the oldest ones in Greece. From the year 1680 onwards, a secret school was operating in the monastery, where the wise fathers of Kernitsa taught the children not only to read and write, but also the passion of freedom.

Underneath the church there is a cave where the icon of Virgin Mary was found. Later, the monastery chapel was built here. Inside the monastery, relics of Saints and Martyrs are kept, along with the thaumaturgical icon of the Theotokos. The upper part of the monastery is

the chapel of the Archangels, a masterpiece of art with artistic wooden temple, which is used as a confessional. The monastery accepts pilgrims only, nevertheless it maintains two guesthouses and can accommodate 50 to 60 people. It is worth mentioning that the Holy Liturgy is always served at night.

Below the monastery, there is a beautiful stone bridge, the Kernitsa bridge, built from 1901 until 1905. Today the monastery is run by nuns.

info taken from <http://www.levideonline.com>





ICON PAINTING COURSE

Dear Friends,

One of my friends in Manchester is running an iconography course starting shortly and I wish to commend it to you. The idea has Fr Jonathan's blessing.

Ephraim, apart from being a very pleasant individual is well trained and skilled at this art. You can see a selection of his work at

<http://home.clara.net/orthodox/Multimedia/icons-carrasco.htm>

The St. Kentigern icon is the one I commissioned as a gift for Duncan to mark my ordination. I have to say the web reproduction does not actually do it justice; the icon is far more beautiful than it appears on the web.

The course is to run on Saturday afternoons, commencing 20th February, 2:00-4:30pm. If we stay for Vespers, which starts at 5pm, we will still be back

early evening. The cost must be paid on the first Saturday and for 4 weeks in advance:

£10/week; £5 students/concession; non Orthodox £20/£10.

Materials we would be buying jointly to get a bulk discount and sharing out so it will not be a lot. I am hoping to be going so there would be space in the car. We would need to get off briskly after our Liturgy ends to get down in time (but I hope we will all help to get the items packed away before we go! I appreciate that there will be times we could be late when we have a longer service.

If you are interested I would be glad to know as soon as you can. Of course as a side effect it will mean contact with another parish of the Deanery which can only be good for everyone.

In Christ,
Father Deacon Christopher



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