



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

The Stavronian

a monthly magazine & newsletter publicised by the 'Holy Cross Synodia'



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

*The Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
belongs to the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland.
The Patriarchate of Antioch is third senior of the Orthodox Churches.
The Patriarch is His Beatitude John X.*

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

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

Χριστός Ανέστη! Αληθώς Ανέστη!

Христос Воскресе! Воистину Воскресе!

Hristos a înviat! Adevărat a înviat!

Cristo è risorto! È veramente risorto!

Le Christ est ressuscité! Vraiment Il est
ressuscité!

Cristo ressuscitou! Verdaderamente
ressuscitou!

Cristo ha resucitado! Verdaderamente, ha
resucitado!

Christus ist auferstanden! Er ist wahrhaftig
auferstanden!

Al-Masih-Qam! Hakkan Qam!

基督復活了 他確實復活了

ハリストス復活! 実に復活!

people. Emotion is never far from the Greek character. The masks of tragedy and comedy worn by the early Greek theatre actors were to distinguish the different emotions of the characters. Their exaggerated look was so that people who were sitting afar off were still able to see the character's emotions. Such masks were to amplify and exaggerate rather than hide and dissemble the character. This lends quite a different meaning to hypocrite (Greek word for actor). Greek time is of quite a different order - it does not revolve around efficient punctuality. But then if you have been around as long as Greek Civilisation and Culture from the 8th century B.C. then time is relative; no wonder the Greeks have two words for time! However, if you want to make arrangements, then patience is certainly a virtue. It may take a three way telephone conversation and a committee of four to make a short journey - one to drive and three to decide on the best route.

“Wrap up warm tomorrow Fr Jonathan, its going to be cold” my spiritual daughter said. The forecast was for 21°C! I smiled with amusement. This is the zenith (same word in Greek I think) of summer for a Brit!

PARADISE AND PARADOX

Musings from a visit to Athens

My visit to Athens was full of wonderful Paradoxes (Greek word). The first irony (another Greek word) was that the only two Orthodox priests dressed in cassocks on the Aegean flight from Manchester to Athens were both English “converts.” God has a sense of humour. The contrast to the cold grey of Manchester was immediate. I arrived at *Eleftherios Venezelos* airport to a warm welcome from my friends and Stavronians as well as 27°C of heat; warm even by Greek standards for October. There are many things that are clearer in Greece, the sky, the sea, the

Wednesday

Acropolis museum. Amazing architecture so different to when I was here last time it didn't exist! Greek Technology 5th c. B.C. and 21st c. A.D. Opened in 2012 it is a manifest edifice to the beauty and history of Athens. Light and space pervades the whole stunning, shining, shimmering spectacle of this place of culture and art. Whilst the British Museum is also impressive, the illicit appropriation of the so called Elgin marbles blights its history. The Parthenon Marbles (artist Phidias c. 447-438 B.C.) were originally part of the Parthenon on the Acropolis. In 1801, Lord Elgin's agents removed about half of the surviving sculptures of the Parthenon,

as well as sculptures from the Propylaea and Erechtheum. The Marbles were transported by sea to Britain. Lord Byron the great friend of Greece, likened Elgin's actions to vandalism and looting - he was correct. Another irony came to mind - two contemporary British Lords, one who helped build Greece, one who plundered her. The heart of Lord Byron belonged to Greece and that is why it is to be found in Mesolonghi. If you want to view his reflections about the removal of the Marbles from Athens then it is reflected in his great poem "*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*." Well worth a visit. I will refrain from making a distinction between a poet and a politician!

*Dull is the eye that will not weep to see
Thy walls defaced, thy mouldering shrines removed
By British hands, which it had best behoved
To guard those relics ne'er to be restored.
Curs'd be the hour when from their isle they roved,
And once again thy hapless bosom gored,
And snatch'd thy shrinking gods to northern climes abhorred!*

May they be returned!

Maria and I spent several hours in this place of ancient and modern splendour. The fact that she spoke little English and I spoke little Greek did not seem to matter, we understood one another. The sun bleached white statues of long dead heroes were alive and spoke to us in silent testimony to art and culture and indeed had much to say to us! One has to be dull of eye indeed and hard of heart not to appreciate such beauty. Lunch or afternoon tea, as we would call it by this time, was in the roof terrace restaurant. A harpist accompanied the delicious fasting food delights as our eyes feasted on the Acropolis outside.

I needed a new black cassock and so after searching through the narrow lanes of the Plaka (the old historical neighbourhood of Athens) we came across a clerical tailor shop. My experience of being meas-

ured for cassocks in my Anglican days was a very different experience, but equally quirky. There was a wonderful clerical tailor in my home city who by coincidence had been part of the British forces in Crete during the war. He was an amazing man, his name Noel Vasey. He had designed a style of cassock for St Stephen's House Oxford, the Theological College which I attended. He kept the measurements of all his clients (including I may add some Archbishops) on the back of Breakfast Cereal packets and it took two fittings and a considerable time, usually six months, from initial measurements to the finished article being delivered. He made them all by hand on a very old machine and his wife sowed on the buttons. Alexandra (the lady in the shop at Plaka) the clerical tailor did not even use a measuring tape. Her eyes measured my shoulders and she took from the rail a size 1 cassock and placed me on a rotating pedestal. Carefully pinning the hem and encircling the length with a line of bellow blown chalk. I asked how long it would be before I could collect it "I'm only here for a few days," I pointed out.

"Παρακαλώ καθίστε" Ah at last, a phrase with which I am familiar! So I sat down and taking the cassock to the sewing machine, she cut the cloth and hemmed the garment there and then. Five minutes later it was all wrapped up! Some things it seems happen very quickly in Greece!

Taking a taxi back to the flat, the driver had a slight misunderstanding or miscalculation with a bus; it seemed both drivers believed they had the right of way and did not wish to give way to the other. Since the grinding noise was only mild, the flow of traffic relentless and the damage minimal, nothing was said as we proceeded in an easterly direction. Dinner at 22:☺☺ hours!

Thursday

The springs on the bed settee upon which I spent the night made a noise whenever I moved. It was decided to investigate the problem whilst I spent the day with Maria and Spiros. I hoped and prayed that my family would find a solution. On returning after a full day I learned that a very simple but effective solution had been found by a former pupil of Kyria Maria - olive oil! Indeed, I can vouch for the amazing benefits of olive oil for the skin, for the hair, for cooking and preparation of food but repairing the springs of a bed is a new one for me!

So the day was spent at Sounio visiting the Temple of Poseidon. I had been there once before in 1998. At that time, twenty years ago, you could stand in the middle of the temple which I did and someone holding a camera, in the days before the ubiquitous smart phone, with a refined but hesitant English accent, thinking I was a local Greek priest made a request in that slow pigeon English which assumes the hearer is rather stupid: "Could... I... take... picture... you?" I responded with a rather more affected, smooth cultured English tone "Of course my dear!" She nearly fell backwards with surprise. Today people hardly bother to ask permission to take a photo!

Another word from Byron!

The Isles of Greece, by Lord Byron

*Place me on Sunium's marbled steep,
Where nothing, save the waves and I,
May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
There, swan-like, let me sing and die:
A land of slaves shall ne'er be mine—
Dash down yon cup of Samian wine!*

History has a way of repeating itself! Byron who invested much of his own private resources in the War for Greek Independence (1821-30) here bemoans the

plight of fallen Greece - the cradle of western civilisation.

I seem to remember standing on Sunium's marbled steep at the Temple of Poseidon and seeing Byron's name etched into the footings! The island of Samos is famous for its quality of wine and here Byron is urging the Hellenes to arise out of their erstwhile torpor and fight! Greek Drama bears two masks - humour and tragedy. Here tragedy is portrayed not as a mask but in the reality of oppression under the Ottoman Empire. The poem echoes the sentiments of Rigas Feraios' nationalist poem, the *Thourios* (war-song), which served as a rallying cry for Greeks against Ottoman rule.

Today Greece suffers under another corporate yoke - that of global financial hegemony that has the power to destroy culture and enslave nations. The language may be archaic but the application is still relevant. The hallmark of great poetry is that it speaks anew and afresh to each and every generation.

After the nostalgia, a beautiful fish meal by the sea - wonderful. I won't indulge you in the finer detail of the courses but sufficient to say it was delicious. Back home to meet the children from school and a long session playing with a balloon. In the game that we invented I lost 50 points to 48! The great thing about such visits is that you enjoy old friendships and make new ones! Glory to God!!

Back to Athens for another late meal and some sleep on that now restored and renewed very comfortable bed. Is there an ode to olive oil? I feel a possible poem emerging.

Friday

Nikolaos arrived to take me to the Byzantine Museum. As we entered the newly opened Russian exhibition there in front of us was Andrei Rublev's Icon of the Ascension. Behind us a man appeared and

attached himself to us throughout the tour. He was obviously drawn by hearing me speaking in English and give a commentary on the Icons, either that or he thought I was an official guide!

We had acquired Drew, an American and Southern Baptist from North Carolina who was fascinated by the symbolism of the icons. It is an amazingly beautiful museum and well worth a visit. Its underground vaults remind one of a Cathedral of Catacombs; from beauty to beauty! It gave a physical reality to depth of culture. After nearly three hours, a drive to Chalandri for a meal with Nikos and Irene. Viewing their recent trip to Patmos brought back fond memories of my pilgrimage there in 1999. I will never forget the morning sun lighting the tiny island with fiery red mist as the overnight ferry drew near to Skala.

It was a lovely relaxing day with Nikos and Irene of shared memories and again naturally of good fasting food. One is struck by how Greek people really care about the preparation of food, they enjoy it - but it is more than preparation; it is an act of love for the people who are to share that meal. It is certainly an expression of hospitality and almost Eucharistic in the universal sense of the word, in order to give joy and thanks to the guest and friends in their lives. Such love and preparation demands a blessing from God (and thanksgiving!) which I duly gave.

Saturday

My entry for Saturday is non-existent - except for the words "Book presentation at Ev Πλω." So my recollections are only of this event. I think I spent the morning quietly reading, praying and rehearsing my speech which I was to deliver in Greek. Although the Book launch was the main purpose of my visit, events when you hand them over to God become blessed and extraordinary. Kleio had made the detailed arrangements with the

publishers, as well of course as translating the book itself! On arrival in the centre of Athens we were taken to a small, modern stylish upper room, within the book shop. Actually it was more of a mezzanine or balcony with about 20 seats and a front desk. My first thoughts were - they are not expecting many people! Gradually people arrived - I'm not sure what the start time was but I would be surprised if we did actually start on time. Hieromonk Chrysostom of Koutloumoussi Monastery and Pr Bogdan my spiritual brother from Romania arrived and were placed either side of me behind the front desk - so there was no escape! My friend Pater Nikolaos also arrived and I drew comfort from brother clergy who were there to support me. More people arrived and more chairs were drafted in. Rather like the Liturgy when people arrive at different times - the noise from below grew louder as more people arrived and were unable to find space. After the speeches the book signing and people who I had not seen for many years started to appear. One of our early Psaltis Evangelos from 1997-98 arrived with his wife - he had not changed at all and asked me if I remembered him "Of course" I said, "dear Evangelos, it is so good to see you!" Then Marina arrived with her new born baby, then Panos who knelt at my feet and a succession of familiar faces and some new ones. "I'm Kostas' (one of our Stavro-nians) brother from Marathon." "Good to meet you!"

After the book signing there was quite a long interview with Pemptousia downstairs in the bookshop, unexpected and unscripted! After the emotional wave of excitement at meeting old friends in Christ my thoughts turned to my Parish at home - I hope they will open the Church in time for Fr Michael tomorrow morning. I need not have worried. God

and my parishioners had everything in control!

Sunday

We attended the Holy Liturgy in Plaka at St Nikolaos and St Parakevi church. This was followed by a quite intense theological discourse of one and a half hours over several cups of coffee in a very chic café. How refreshing it is to be able to speak about spiritual and theological matters in Greece without being seen as odd. That does not indicate agreement, however. Indeed, there was division of opinion on several matters but this made the discussion even more interesting. Some of our party decided to take the ferry to Aegina. I am always surprised and in awe at intrepid priests and laity who believe that God has created an individual holy timetable for them that runs contrary to the usual scheduled departure and arrival times. Perhaps, He does. They just made the ferry there and back!

For me, a siesta at my erstwhile home, a visit to see Pater Nikolaos and then back in the evening to Plaka for yet another meal! As they say "It doesn't get better than this;" fellowship and feasting, fervour and fasting are intricately woven patterns into the fabric of Orthodox life.

Monday

A visit on the impressive underground train to Aghios Ioannis to see the holy relics of St Nikolaos Planas. We met there Kostas who was looking after the Church. His father-in-law had been a priest in the Church there for fifty years. As a boy he, later to become priest, had a dream in which he saw St Nikolaos Planas who said "Come and serve with me!". Whether or not the Saint was alive on earth or in heaven when the young priest began to serve with him in St John "the Hunter" I do not know, since the holy one fell asleep in the Lord in 1932.

In the afternoon I went to Vouglia-meni to see Spiros and then returned back to central Athens to pack for the flight the next day. The evening was spent at a local restaurant of course. Gina met her former driving instructor who was parked outside the supermarket. He had a new learner driver who nervously got in to the driving seat. By the state of the car he had obviously possessed lots of patience with some very difficult pupils! I had never seen a car so battered and bruised by a profession but as I looked at the very narrow street I noticed that practically all the cars were suffering from the same malady. Scrapes, dents and scratches it seems is a badge of honour on the streets of Athens.

Tuesday

An early start 4.30 a.m. Arrived at the airport and had time for a coffee with Nikos, Giorgos and Matina who had come to wish me Kalo taxidi! I was wearing an-teri (cassock) and a British couple, who studiously avoided my smiles on the transfer bus had the misfortune to sit next to me on the aeroplane (yep another Greek word and another paradox!).

As I sank into the aircraft seat, I reflected on the past week which had been both wonderful and enigmatic (must they use all our words?). Indeed I suppose the ultimate paradox and original meaning of the word, was that I had found myself on at least two occasions defending Orthodox doctrine and practice in the cradle of Orthodoxy. Athens is both ancient and new, is deeply cultural and yet chaotic (sorry). Like the faces on the drama masks happy and tragic. Smoking may be forbidden in the restaurants, but business is business!

Fr Jonathan



NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

May 26: *Paraskeui*

MEMORY ETERNAL!

Please send us the names of your departed loved ones and date of their departure in order for them to be remembered.



MAJOR CELEBRATIONS THIS MONTH

7th May: Commemoration of the Precious Cross that appeared in the sky over Jerusalem in 351 A.D.

8th May: St. John the Theologian and St. Arsenius the Great

11th May: Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Equal-to-the Apostles

17th May: Holy Ascension

21st May: St. Constantine and Helen Equal-to-the Apostles

23rd May: The retrieval of the relics of St. Joachim of Ithaca

25th May: The 3rd Finding of the Precious Head of the Forerunner and Baptist John

27th May: Holy Pentecost

For the lives of Saints please visit the Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.calendar.goarch.org



The Ascension of Christ, hand-painted by Andrei Rublev, 1408 A.D.

Services at St Martin's in May*

Sat. 5 th	15:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 6 th	10:00	Hours and Holy Liturgy
Sat. 12 th	15:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 13 th	10:00	Hours and Holy Liturgy
Thur. 17 th	09:30	Holy Ascension - Holy Liturgy
Sat. 19 th	15:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 20 th	10:00	Hours and Holy Liturgy
Sat. 26 th	15:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 27 th	10:00	Holy Pentecost - Hours and Holy Liturgy

*Help setting up the church is greatly appreciated and starts half an hour before the service.

“God cares for everyone. Despair is in effect a lack of faith”
- St. George Karslides -



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The following blogs of Old Stavronians are available in Romanian, [Constiinta Ortodoxa](#), in English, [Orthodox city hermit](#), and in Greek, [Orthodoxy rainbow](#).



Top and bottom sketches are created at the Holy Monastery of "The Annunciation of the Theotokos" Chios, Greece, courtesy of Fr Theodosios Dendrinos, Ithaca, Greece.
The sketch of Christ by Photis Kostoglou was scanned from the Orthodox calendar of the Apostoliki Diakonia of the Church of Greece.