

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

The Stavronian

Monthly magazine and 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)***

NEEDED IN EACH COMMUNITY

Gardeners, cleaners, servers, tea/coffee makers, washing up, visitors to people at home, drivers, teachers, singers, catechists, welcomers, hosts, people to set up the church, painters, organisers, iconographers ... **Do you have a skill?**

We can make use of every gift in our Lord that everyone has!

From Archimandrite Philip's February Newsletter (same applies to us!)

ST. PHOCAS THE GARDENER

Gardens play an important part in our salvation history, from the Garden of Eden in Genesis through the Garden of Gethsemane to the Garden in which Jesus was buried, recorded in the Gospel of John 19:41.

We are stewards of God's creation and as such we look after that which God has given to us for the cultivation of food. Genesis 1:29; *And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.*

Christ himself was mistaken for a gardener by Mary Magdalene. He called Himself the "True Vine." He told the Parable of the Sower. Growing flowers, fruits, seed bearing plants, herbs and vegetables brings us into an intimate relationship with God's creation.

In the Church too, we have a gardener Saint. St Phocas, who received the heavenly reward for his labours, was a hermit, born at Sinope on the shores of the Black Sea. He lived alone cultivating his garden and offering rest, hospitality

and the fruits of his labour to visitors and to the poor. He took the God given opportunities of sharing not only his produce but the spiritual food of the good news of the Gospel.

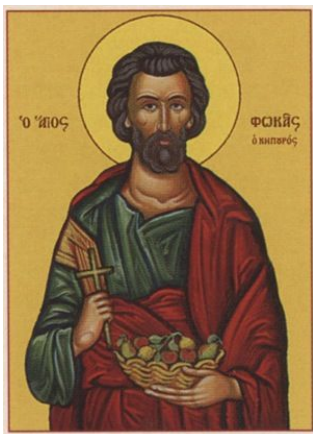
He lived at the time of the Emperor Diocletian who viciously persecuted Christians. The Emperor dispatched soldiers to seek out and execute Christians at Sinope of whom of course St Phocas was one. As was his nature, the holy one offered the soldiers hospitality and food. The soldiers told him the purpose of their visit and asked if they knew where Phocas, the Christian lived. The saint told them that in the morning after they had taken some rest, he would tell them where Phocas was to be found.

As the soldiers slept, Phocas dug his own grave in the garden. In the morning Phocas revealed to the soldiers his identity. The soldiers begged the holy hermit-gardener to recant his Christian faith so they would not have to kill him, but he would not. The soldiers fearing the earthly Emperor more than Creator God carried out their duty and beheaded Phocas. He received the martyr's crown and received his heavenly reward in the year 320.

This humble gardener shows us the spirit of kindness and hospitality and of hard work as well as the virtues of simplicity, great courage and strength of faith.

1 Corinthians 3:5-9; *What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labour. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*

Fr Jonathan



St Phocas the gardener

GOD, LORD OF OUR GARDEN

In every fruitful garden there is a collaboration between the Creator, Maker of all seeds, plants, soils and the gardener who has a specific role. [Genesis 2:15](#); “*Then the Lord God took the man He formed and put him in the garden to tend and keep it*”. Whether the gardener has the wisdom and awareness to understand or not, every little happening in his garden is the fruit of this blessed cooperation, in which all aspects are mystically interconnected giving life and purpose to each other.

Together, we have embarked on various gardening projects and as we have learnt about the life of plants, through reflection on many wonders and failures in nature, a clear parallel emerged between the life of a garden and spiritual life. Below, are just a few fruits born from these conversations.

The soil

The journey of growth begins in winter, with the preparation of the soil, which needs to be “made ready” to receive the

seed, just as our souls need to be made ready to receive the Lord by weeding out, digging and enriching. It is a most sobering reflection that if you weed a patch of land with the greatest care and dig it over making it thus perfect for planting, but delay planting, the land will become overgrown with weeds in the blink of an eye. Similarly, if you ready yourself for the Lord by uprooting all your passions and destroying all evil propensities (if such a thing were possible), but delay in placing Christ therein, in planting the seed of the Holy Spirit, your soil will only become fertile ground for new, overgrown passions. Secondly, as soon as you stop tending and watering your heavenly garden it will begin to wither, giving space to weeds. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully watch over the garden of our hearts and to cultivate the good seed of virtue, letting it multiply on the prepared soil.

It is also a matter of wonder that the soil in enriched by adding into it decayed matter, like rotten leaves, discarded cuttings, manure. All things dead and rejected transform into nourishment for the soil. May we find the wisdom and knowledge to transform all of our rejected, failed plans and endeavours into matter which will enrich the soil of our hearts. This reminds me of the first lesson in Physics and its heading: Matter does not appear nor disappear, it only transforms – as Christians we are called to transform by the Holy Spirit. [Romans 12:3](#); “*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind*”.

The wonder of the seed

Germination is without doubt the most wondrous stage (and my favourite) in gardening. It is similar to the birth of a child. From an infinitesimal seed, life bursts forth. The miracle of Creation is encompassed in the Parable of the mus-

tard seed “*which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs*”; Matthew 13:31-32. We can only marvel at the fact that every tree was once a tiny seed, which you can hold between two fingers. Every germination is a small miracle because life itself is encased in a tiny inconspicuous looking ball or speck, in this sense the Lord has made us part-takers and co-creators of Creation.

If we look at our own lives, we can sometimes pinpoint the moment of germination. The seed of faith was planted in us at different times and in ways specific to each of us: by a friend, a parent, a book or an experience. But often, it lies dormant in the soil of our being, until all elements are right for germination: temperature, light, humidity. And then, suddenly, the tree of faith bursts forth out of the tiny seed. It is sadly too true that some seeds never germinate, but there is always hope. Take the case of the Mathusalem palm tree. During an archaeological excavation of a fortress in Masada, some seeds were found. After spending some years in a researcher’s drawer, one of the 2000 year old seeds of a palm tree was germinated in 2005. This species of palm tree had been extinct in the area for hundreds of years. Life had slept inside the tiny seed for 2000 years! The tree is now over 3 metres tall and produces dates.

Like all new life, germination holds the promise of beauty and perfection. Every time a new plant emerges from the soil, you can picture in your mind’s eye the beauty of its maturity.

The battle for growth

The stage of growth or the journey from new born to maturity is the hardest part of gardening. It requires of the gardener immense energy to combat all threats to the plant (pests, disease, competition from weeds), to water, feed and protect

it. It is a matter of relentless watchfulness. It demands patience (in short supply in our garden) to watch the plant grow and also wisdom and faith in equal measure. The wisdom to accept the loss of plants to disease and pests, but the faith to carry on tending to the few little plants left. We see thus that gardening is a spiritual school. How many seeds of the Spirit have germinated in our souls only to die, prey to our bad habits, laziness or forgetfulness. Accepting the loss, rather than mourning over it, going to confession and starting germination afresh in faith is an essential lesson for spiritual growth.

Some gardening techniques, which strengthen the plants and give them a better chance to survive are startlingly useful in our spiritual life. It all starts with grading, which involves discarding the seedlings which appear weak or diseased and only leaving the strong, healthy ones. We need sometimes to choose the best seedlings in our lives and when they are old enough, we sometimes need to pinch the ends out. This pain inflicted on young plants makes them grow stronger, with healthier roots, so that when the time comes to bring them outside into the cold and the wind, they can survive and reach maturity.

Bearing fruit

Finally, most people’s favourite part is when the crop is ready – the fruit of God’s labour through us. We can feast on the fruit of love and patience, gift it to others and give thanks to the Lord for the completion of our endeavours.

Mary and Martha of gardening





Blessing of Mary and Martha's allotment



Blessing of Mary and Martha's allotment



Blessing of Mary and Martha's allotment

PARISH NEWS

On March 2nd, we had the Baptism of little Loredana Maria Hall. May the our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ keep her under His protection!

On March 3rd, at 7 am, we received the *Cristelnita*, i.e. Baptismal Font, from Ploiești, Romania, which arrived at 7 am in the morning. We would like to thank Fr Bogdan Georgescu and the donors for their generosity of heart. May our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ give the reward!

NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Mar. 4: Nikolaos

Mar. 12: Georgianna

Mar. 18: Fr. Thomas Hopko

Mar. 19: Metropolitan Philip of North America, and Fr. Georgios Myrou

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

1st Mar: St. David of Wales (†589)

2nd Mar: Our Holy fathers St Nicholas Planas & St Joachim of Ithaca and Vatopaedi

10th Mar: Forgiveness Sunday

11th Mar: Clean Monday; Lent starts today

17th Mar: Sunday of Orthodoxy

17th Mar: St Patrick, the Enlightener of Ireland (†492)

20th Mar: St Cuthbert the Wonderworker, Bishop of Lindisfarne (†687)

25th Mar: The Annunciation of our Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

30th Mar: St John Climacus the righteous, author of the Divine Ladder of Ascent

31st Mar: St. Innocent, Enlightener of Siberia & Alaska

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



Services at St Martin's in March*

Sat. 2 nd	10:00	Great Vespers, Memorial, Confessions and Catechism
Sun. 3 rd	09:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy
Sat. 9 th	10:00	Great Vespers, Memorial, Confessions and Catechism
Sun. 10 th	09:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy
Fri. 15 th	18:30	Akathist to the Theotokos
Sat. 16 th	10:00	Great Vespers, Memorial, Confessions and Catechism
Sun. 17 th	09:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy
Fri. 22 nd	18:30	Akathist to the Theotokos
Sat. 23 rd	10:00	Great Vespers, Memorial, Confessions and Catechism
Sun. 24 th	09:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy
Fri. 29 th	18:30	Akathist to the Theotokos
Sat. 30 th	10:00	Great Vespers, Memorial, Confessions and Catechism
Sun. 31 st	09:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy followed by Parish lunch

*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](#).