



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

The Stavronian

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*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)*

HOLY DAYS AND HOLIDAYS

We often hear people say “*I need a holiday!*”. Our frail minds and bodies need rest, time out from our daily chores, our burdens, our routines. We need time for recreation or better still re-creation. In His infinite wisdom, love and care our Lord gifts us a holiday or a holy day every seven days. From the beginning of Creation, the seventh day is a day of rest. God Himself rested on the seventh day, not because He needed to, but because He looked at His work and rejoiced in it. “*And on the seventh day God finished the works He made, and He rested on the seventh day from all the works He made. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because in it He rested from all his works God began to make*”; Genesis 2:2-4.

Similarly, we are called to stop from our frantic activities and look, reflect on all that has been done in our life, give thanks to God for it and enjoy it. We have six days to be Martha, busying herself with service for others, but one day set aside to be Mary, resting at our Lord's feet, enjoying the peace of His company and drinking in His Word.

Throughout the Old Testament, the children of Israel are exhorted to keep the Sabbath day as a day of rest, a holy day on pain of death. Again and again Moses sets out as an essential part of the Law the Sabbath regulations. “*These are the words the Lord said for you to do. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord. Whoever does work on it shall be put to death*”; Exodus 35: 1-2.

How important it is to rest and keep the Lord's day holy since this is the 4th commandment! Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ takes the Jewish law concerning Sabbath to a different level when He heals on the Sabbath day to the outrage of the Jews. He teaches that “*The Sabbath*

was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath”; Mark 2:27. In other words, we have to change our perception of the Lord's day as a legalistic requirement, which prevents us from doing what is necessary, but begin to see it as a gift. In a Christian's life, Sunday is the gift of rest, but not just of sleep and self-indulgence, but the day which we offer to the Lord. Jesus bids us “*Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*”; Matthew 11:28.

Sunday is therefore the day on which we are renewed by coming together to the Lord in the Holy Liturgy. In the Cherubic Hymn we sing: “*Let us who mystically represent the cherubim and sing the Thrice-holy Hymn to the life-creating Trinity, now lay aside all earthly cares*”. As we offer the Lord this day, He sanctifies our offering and returns it as a most precious gift of holy rest. Sunday is the day we are renewed by prayer, the Word, the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of our Saviour.

Sunday is also a day of reflection when we look back at the work of the Spirit in our life and the work of our own hands with the Lord's grace. We also prepare for the week ahead by laying all cares and worries aside so we may become suspended in the rest of the Lord. We follow in the apostles' footsteps when we listen to the Lord's call. “*Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while'*”; Mark 6:30.

Martha and Mary



KENOSIS, KINETICS AND KATHARSIS IN KEFALONIA

On the first day of my holidays, 1st July, I learned of the repose of my dear friend and priest Fr David Sennitt. A pioneer of the faith and co-founder of the Pilgrimage to Orthodoxy, we were at Oxford together in the early 1980's and shared such great spiritual moments there. Such holy memories - may they be sanctified and perfected as he receives his due reward from Christ. May his memory be eternal!

Arriving at Sami in Kefalonia the heat hits you when you step down onto the runway! Intellectually, you may know it is going to be hot but it is the experience of the heat under the sun that really opens us to the reality of another climate. As the beads of sweat begin to fall, the toxins are expelled. Making our way to Agrillia Monastery in the hills above Sami, the view is stunning, the silence is intense, the beauty truly amazing. The experience of faith has equal warmth, under the intense radiance of the Son, the Light of the world, all our sins (toxins) are exculpated. The first kenosis!

Meetings, connections and movement marked the next day. We visit the Monastery of *Estavromenos* to meet Sister Gerasimina. We reach the Monastery just in time to greet the Icon of the Mother of God which had been to a little island previously. It is a kairos moment when God's plan and our drive across Kefalonia intersect. Seated at table for a meal we exchange our histories and stories. In the afternoon we meet with Koula the niece of Fr Chrysostom, of blessed memory, who had given his blue vestments to our Parish. She also gave a book about his life and another book on the Icons painted in the Church of St Nicholas by the famous iconographer Photis Kontoglou. It had been written by her nephew Fr George, who we found out had been a priest in

the Church of St Nicholas and who knew my friend Fr. Nicholas Doulegeris at the same Church in Athens and who also knew my spiritual daughter Gianna. Later I met Kiki and Maria whom I knew from previous visits to the island; so it was a day of kinetics-especially the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting is good for the spirit and the body, yet fasting food when blessed becomes delicious especially when it is shared with others in the household of faith. This *oikoumene* "household of faith", traditionally has been seen symbolised in the Church as a boat. Sami is a port and amidst the myriad of ships, expensive yachts and small fishing boats in the harbour, there are two large ferries – the one on my left goes to Italy the one on my right goes to Patras. Those embarking on a journey are moved by the large turbine engines, we too are impelled by the Holy Generator of faith Who is the Holy Spirit. As Christians following the Apostolic mission we go, or rather are sent from one place to another, being carried and buoyed up by faith. This is a form of *κάθαρσις* (katharsis - purification and cleansing.) The movement becomes a clarification of who we are and to Whom we belong, since we are moved from the raw state of emotions, fear, uncertainty, apprehension to a state of being renewed, restored and equipped in Christ. Galatians 5: "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*".

There are too many stories I could relate about my "holy days" in Kefalonia; but these are just three little vignettes and short reflections. Other days were spent visiting friends, Monasteries and Churches and in each and every person and place I encountered the quality of warm hospitality, Christian love and faith. Hearing stories of some of the monks and priests, one begins to realise

their struggle but also of their empowerment to perfect in themselves and in others the image of Christ.

I thank my hosts from my heart for their love and hospitality. Ephesians 4:11-16; “*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love*”.

Fr Jonathan



St Gerasimos of Kefalonia

OUR MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS AND THE HAND OF ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS

“Now the Mother of God shuts her material eyes, and opens her spiritual eyes towards us like great shining stars that will never set, to watch over us and to intercede before the face of God for the world’s protection. Now those lips, moved by God’s grace to articulate sounds, grow silent, but she opens her (spiritual) mouth to intercede eternally for all of her race. Now she lowers those bodily hands that once bore God, only to raise them, in incorruptible form, in prayer to the Lord on behalf of all creation.” — St John Damascus, Third Dormition Homily.

All the Saints have venerated the Theotokos and felt in awe how to sing her praises. Neither human tongue nor angelic mind is able worthily to praise her through whom it is given to us to look clearly upon the Lord’s glory. Yet, St. John of Damascus stands out in this love: *“Lovers are wont to speak of what they love, and to let their fancy run on it by day and night... Wine is truly pleasant to drink, and bread to eat. The one rejoices, the other strengthens the heart of man. But what is sweeter than the Mother of my God? She has taken my mind captive and held my tongue in bondage. I think of her by day and night.” — St John Damascus, Third Dormition homily.*

Ioannis, i.e. John, felt like this because the Theotokos was a catalyst in his life, probably more so than in most other saints’ lives. Let us then, at the Feast of Her Dormition, when She who is broader than the Heavens is translated to Heavens, commemorate Her amazing miracle of Saint John’s of Damascus hand.

Ioannis was born in Damascus about the year 675, the son of wealthy and pi-

ous parents, of the family of Mansur. He was reared together with St Cosmas, who had been adopted by John's father Sergius, a man of high rank in the service of the Caliph of Damascus. Both of these young men were instructed by a certain monk, also named Cosmas, who had been taken captive in Italy by the Arabs and later ransomed by John's Father. Saint John became a great philosopher and enlightener of the age in which he lived, and was honoured by the Caliph with the dignity of the counsellor.

When Emperor Leo the Isaurian (reigned 717-741) began his war on the holy icons, John's irrefutable epistles defending their veneration inundated the world. Since the Saint, being under the Caliph of Damascus, was beyond Leo's power, the Iconoclast Emperor had a letter forged in John's handwriting which invited Leo to attack Damascus, saying the city guard was then weak and openly promising his support and help. Leo then sent this letter to the Caliph, who in his fury immediately ordered that Saint John be removed from his post, be led through the city in chains and his right hand be cut off.

That same evening, the Caliph's servants returned the severed hand to Saint John. The saint pressed it to his wrist and prayed fervently to the most holy Theotokos before her icon*: *"Most Holy Theotokos, All Pure Mother, Who gave birth to my God, my right hand got severed for the holy icons. You are aware of the cause of Leo's fury. Hasten speedily and heal my hand. The Right Hand of the Highest, Who received flesh from you, can do Mighty Wonders with your intercessions. May He Heal my right hand with your supplications, so that this hand may compose hymns with orderly harmonies for Thee, Theotokos and for Him who was incarnated through Thee. So that this hand may henceforth toil unceasingly for Orthodox*

Worship. Because you can achieve anything you want as the Mother of God."

After a time, he fell asleep before the icon of the Mother of God. Then, he saw in his dream, the Theotokos brought to life in Her icon, looking at him with eyes full of compassion: *"See, your hand has been healed"*, he heard Her voice telling him: *"Do not tarry, make your hand the pen of a skilful writer, «κάλαμος γραμματέως οξυγράφου». Compose hymns for my Son and me, as you have just promised."*

Upon awakening, Ioannis found that indeed his hand had been attached back to his arm. Only a small red mark around his wrist remained as a sign of the miracle.

When he learned of the miracle, which demonstrated Ioannis' innocence, the Caliph asked his forgiveness and wanted to restore him to his former office, but the Saint refused. He gave away his riches to the poor and went to Jerusalem with his stepbrother and fellow-student, Cosmas. There he entered the monastery of St Savas the Sanctified as a simple novice.

It was not easy for him to find a spiritual guide, because all the monks were daunted by his great learning and by his former rank. Only one very experienced Elder, who had the skill to foster the spirit of obedience and humility in a student, would consent to do this. The Elder forbade Ioannis to do anything at all according to his own will. Even, especially, any theological writing or composition of hymns!

One of the monks happened to die, and his brother begged Saint John to compose something consoling for the burial service. Saint John refused for a long time, but out of pity he yielded to the petition of the grief-stricken monk and wrote his renowned funeral troparia, "What earthly delight", "All human vanity", and others. For this disobedience,

the Elder banished him from his cell. Ioannis fell at his feet and asked to be forgiven, but the Elder remained unyielding. All the monks began to plead for him to allow Ioannis to return, but he refused. Then one of the monks asked the Elder to impose a penance on Ioannis and to forgive him if he fulfilled it. The Elder said, "If Ioannis wishes to be forgiven, let him wash out all the chamber pots in the lavra and clean the monastery latrines with his bare hands." Even with that hand which was miraculously restored by the Theotokos!



The Three-Handed icon of the Theotokos (Tricherousa), now kept in the Monastery of Hilandar, Mt Athos, Greece. The third hand represents St John's miraculously healed hand.

All the monastery was shocked and disgusted at this order, but Ioannis rejoiced and eagerly ran to accomplish his shameful task. And that, not just for one day or two, but for about two months. He humbly collected all sewage from all cesspits, carried them on his shoulders

and disposed of them away from the monastery. That was his new obedience! All the time, silently reciting the Jesus prayer: "*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner*". His Elder eventually relented and took him back. But Ioannis was still under very strict orders not to undertake any writing. Until, after a certain while, the All-Pure and Most Holy Theotokos intervened and commanded the Elder in a vision to allow Saint John to write again: "*Why are you doing this?*" *She scolded the Elder in anger. Why are you hindering Ioannis from his writings and composition of hymns? Why have you obstructed the spring which outpoured exquisite spiritual nectar? Let it overflow the whole world and quench the thirst of my children, Lest you be harmed, Elder!*"

At which stern charge, Ioannis' Elder woke up in fright and awe, and fell on his knees before Ioannis. At the Queen's order, he gave the blessing to Ioannis to deliver on his promise to the Mother of God and dedicate the rest of his life to the Confession of the Orthodox Faith and adorn the Church of Christ with his sacred hymns: "*Most Holy Theotokos, no one stands between Son and Mother... Intercede for us, heal our passions, cure our diseases, help us out of our difficulties, make our lives peaceful, send us the illumination of the Spirit. Inflame us with the desire of thy Son. Render us pleasing to Him, so that we may enjoy happiness with Him, seeing thee resplendent with thy Son's glory*".

Aikaterini Podia

Translated and adapted from Sister Olympia Ditora, *The Prince of the Desert* and *St Theodore the Studite and St John of Damascus' Dormition Homilies*

* According to some scholars, this miraculous icon was originally written by Luke the Evangelist himself and eventu-

ally became the famous icon of the Mother of God the Three-Handed Theotokos, a famous wonderworking icon now kept in the Serbian Orthodox monastery of Hilandar on Mt Athos, Greece. Her Third Hand represents St John of Damascus' restored hand since, after Her miraculous healing of his severed hand, St John had a silver model of his hand attached to the icon.

PARISH NEWS

We are so very grateful to those who remember us in their prayers and show their love as generous benefactors of our Parish. We would like to thank Thomas Tziortziotis for charcoal and incense that he sent for the church. May our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ give the reward!

NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Aug. 14: *Paulina*

Aug. 29: *Angelos*

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

6th Aug: The Holy Transfiguration of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

13th Aug: St. Tikhon, Bishop of Voronezh, Wonderworker of Zadonsk and All Russia

15th Aug: The Dormition of our Most-Holy Theotokos

16th Aug: St. Gerasimus, Wonderworker of Cephalonia

20th Aug: St. Oswin, King and Martyr (†651)

24th Aug: St. Cosmas of Aetolia, equal-to-the-Apostles

27th Aug: Martyr Phanourius

29th Aug: Beheading of the Holy, Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John

31st Aug: St. Aidan, Bishop of Lindisfarne (†651).

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 August*

Sat 3 rd	15:00	Vespers for the Transfiguration of Our Lord
Sun 4 th	09:30	Matins and Liturgy for the Transfiguration of Our Lord
Sat 10 th	15:00	Great Vespers, Memorial, and Confessions
Sun 11 th	09:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy
Wed 14 th	18:30	Divine Liturgy and Lamentations for the Dormition of our Holy Lady the Theotokos
Sat 17 th	15:00	Great Vespers, Memorial, and Confessions
Sun 18 th	09:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy
Sat 24 th	15:00	Great Vespers, Memorial, and Confessions
Sun 25 th	09:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy followed by Parish Lunch
Sat 31 st	15:00	Great Vespers, Memorial, and Confessions

*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 Kontoglou was scanned from the Orthodox calendar of the Apostoliki Diakonia of the Church of Greece.