

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

The Stavronian

Monthly magazine and newsletter publicised by the Holy Cross Synodia



*Ἐσθρονος Χριστός, Ζωοδότης.
(Φ. Κάρτογλου, 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.
Our Metropolitan is His Eminence Bishop Silouan.
Our Patriarch is His Beatitude John X.*

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

PRAYER OF ST AIDAN OF LINDISFARNE

Leave me alone with God as much as may be. As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore, make me an island, set apart, alone with you, God, glory to You.

Then with the turning of the tide prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond, the world that rushes in on me till the waters come again and fold me back to You.

SAINT SPYRIDON

Bishop of Trimythous (c. 270-348), Feast Day 12th December. A Saint who started life as a simple shepherd from Askeia in Cyprus, honoured later as a shepherd of God's people and for his bold defence of the Christian Faith at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325), against the false teaching of Arius and his followers. He was a friend of St Nicholas of Myra. After two removals of his body, his incorrupt relics are to be found today on the Island of Corfu. It is said that he converted a pagan philosopher to Christianity by using a brick or potsherd to illustrate how one piece of pottery is constituted of three entities, namely, fire, water and clay to illustrate the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

He is usually depicted vested as a bishop with omophorion, holding a Gospel Book. Also distinctive in Iconography is him wearing a woven, straw hat on his head - a traditional shepherd's hat symbolic of the fact that he was a simple shepherd of God's people.

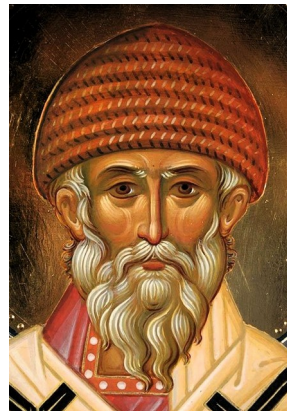
I recall one British convert to Orthodoxy took the name Spyridon at his Baptism because he was impressed not only by the saint's defence of Orthodox Christianity but he was intrigued by the conical shape of the Saint's hat.

The Saint's relics are taken in procession through the streets of Corfu town on Palm Sunday. Before becoming Orthodox, I went to Corfu for a holiday at Orthodox Pascha. I had not venerated the bones of a Saint before, but

since many others were queuing to do so, I decided to venture into the Church of St Spyridon in Corfu Town to kiss his slippers. I went in to the Church rather sceptical of what I considered then, at that time, a rather "primitive" practice; I came out of the Church stunned by a profound religious experience. I truly felt the saint (whose body I realised afterwards was upright in his sarcophagus) blessing my head. Something so unexpected leaves one awe-struck and gasping for an explanation; but God is glorified in His Saints through revelation. I realised then that God's saints are most active in His Church.

Later, I had two icons of the Saint commissioned, the first, a small one in the Russian Tradition from Archimandrite David of Walsingham of blessed memory and a larger one in the Byzantine tradition by Dimitrios Hakim.

Fr Jonathan



OF JUSTICE AND MERCY

A very beautiful story of justice, mercy and redemption can be found in the 2013 hit musical *Les Miserables*. Fear of the Law, who has condemned Jean Valjean to 19 years forced labour and who pursues him relentlessly in the person of officer Javert fails to correct the prisoner and only results in feelings of anger and hatred.

When released, the ex offender finds himself homeless, starving and rejected by all. The

Law cannot reform him through harsh and just punishment, but the love and mercy of Bishop Myriel combats the hatred and resentment, which have taken hold of Valjean's heart. The bishop welcomes the outcast, feeds him and offers him a bed. In return for his kindness, Valjean steals all his silverware and runs away in the night. When apprehended and brought back to the Bishop's house by the officers of the law, the Bishop informs the police officers that the silver had been a gift and offers Valjean also his silver candlesticks to add to his loot. In this act of love and mercy, he redeems the heart of the ex convict and buys back his soul for God.

The law whether it is the Law of God or human law can guide us as to how to live a good and righteous life, but it cannot transform us inwardly.

The Law shows us how to live our lives to be pleasing to God, but our own efforts to be righteous cannot save us. Salvation can only come through the love, mercy and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. He redeems us, we cannot save ourselves. It is through love and self sacrifice that we invite the Holy Spirit to work in us and perfect us, to bring us closer to Christ.

As St Nikolai Velimirovich beautifully writes *"Our soul cannot become white, no matter how often we cleanse it by our own effort and labour even with the help of all legal means of the law until we, at last, bring it beneath the feet of God, spread out and open white so that the light of God illumines it and whitens it."*

In the parable of the good Samaritan we can see how the priest and the Levite observe the letter of the Law - they cannot touch a man, possibly dead or they will be made unclean and thus unfit for God's service, but it is the Samaritan who is showed us as an example - he keeps the spirit of the law, Love thy neighbour as thyself and in his act of mercy, he is pleasing to God.

St Moses of Optina says: *"If at some time you show mercy to someone, mercy will be shown to you. If you show compassion to one who is suffering (and of course this is not a great deed) you will be numbered among the martyrs. If you forgive one who has insulted you, then not only will all your sins be forgiven, but you will be a child of the Heavenly Father."*

How often David speaks of the mercy of God in times of distress and repentance for his

own transgressions and those of Israel? The Lord gifted His people the Law through Moses to guide them, but ultimately it is His Mercy and compassion which saves them. Psalm 102: *"The Lord shows mercies and judgement to all who are wronged. He made known His ways to Moses, the things He willed to the sons of Israel. The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy"*.

No one is entirely righteous, and the only hope and salvation is in the Lord. Psalm 129: *"If You, O Lord should mark transgression, O Lord, who would stand? For there is forgiveness with you. For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption."*

In His infinite mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Father bestows on us many gifts, but the greatest of all is love as St Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians 1 13:1; *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burnt, but have not love it profits me nothing."*

As St Basil the Great teaches us, there are 3 reasons why people follow the Lord: fear, obedience and love. While fearing and obedience are important, we must do all things out of love. Love should be the motive behind all our actions. But love in itself as a feeling or an experience of compassion is nothing, it is wasted gift. Love must be turned into action, into acts of mercy. Going back to the story of Les Misérables, Bishop Myriel did not just experience a pang of compassion, but acted on his inner movement by inviting the poor man into his home and ultimately bestowing on him his most precious earthly possessions. The motive behind his action is not to perfect himself and become more virtuous, but pure mercy for the soul of a man who was lost, but is redeemed for Christ, turned to a new life of light and righteousness.

This is the path of Love that we must follow, the Spirit of the Law. Our Father in Heaven does not only love us endlessly and patiently through all our wanderings and trans-

gressions (“His mercy endureth forever”, Psalm 106 and 117), but sacrifices his only Son and offers Him for us out of Love so that we may learn to offer ourselves to Him and to give of ourselves to others in each and every day, in each and every act of mercy.

Mary and Martha

ST PAISIOS’ REVERENCE FOR ST BARBARA (4 DEC.)

Since I as a young child went to the Church of St Barbara in Konitsa. I have a great reverence for St Barbara. The Saint helped me in the army, when they took me to the radio operators, even though I was uneducated. She also helped me later in the Sanatorium after my lung surgery. The doctors told me then, as soon as my lung was clean, they would take away the tubes and the machine. And though they would remove them in five days, twenty-five days passed and they did not remove them, making me suffer a lot. On Saturday December 3rd, I waited for the doctors, to free me from this martyrdom, but unfortunately they did not appear.

On Sunday morning, being the commemoration of Saint Barbara, I said: ‘If the Saint were to help me, then she would have helped me. The doctors left. Today, being Sunday, there is no way they will come. Now who will remove my tubes?’

I also said a few words of complaint: ‘So many times I lit the oil lamps in the church of the Saint. What oil I brought. I cleaned them, I polished them. They couldn’t remove two tubes?’ I later thought: ‘Perhaps I saddened St Barbara, and this is why she didn’t speedily come to remove them.’

I suddenly heard a noise. ‘What happened?’ I said. ‘Did something happen to someone?’ Someone said: ‘The doctors are coming.’ I don’t know what came over the manager to say to the doctors early in the morning: ‘Go and remove the tubes from the monk.’ They entered the room and said: ‘We have an order to remove the tubes.’ It troubled Saint Barbara that I said a few words of complaint! You have to grumble a

little! It is best not to grumble. It is more noble if you do not grumble.

You see, sometimes a Saint gives immediately what we ask, and sometimes later. Sometimes they hear the prayerful because we are in a good spiritual state, and sometimes because we cry and grumble like little children.”

Source: From Elder Paisios the Athonite: Discourse 6, On Prayer. Thessaloniki, 2012. Translated by John Sanidopoulos.



HOME AND EXILE

Luke 9:58; “And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”

What is home? What does make one think of home? Is it a feeling of comfort and security? Is it our dear and loved ones we live with and who surround us? Perhaps it is our houses, and our families, our warm memories of childhood, a friend we can always turn to, maybe a particular place, town or a country we have left behind and love so dearly? Perhaps we feel at home when we are surrounded by pleasures and goods of this life which bring us this feeling of “happiness”, maybe it is the nature and beloved

creatures that keep us company during the grey, cold winter nights.

What happens when our beloved homes which we so cherish – break, are taken away, or disappear, when we lose our security, comfort, move away from those most precious to us. What happens when we are not satisfied by all that money can buy? We look for that, closest thing which resembles the feeling of “home” deep down in our heart, we try to fill it, and numb the feeling of pain and loss brought by the anxiety, emptiness and suffering of this world.

We are daily reminded in our streets and by the news how many people are homeless, that millions of people have been displaced from their homes because of their ethnicity, colour, faith or by poverty and natural disaster. The refugees, the homeless and dispossessed of this world have no security or safe haven. Our heart is filled with compassion for them and we are reminded that there is no security in this world, whose lot is unfailingly death and decay. The most beautiful homes will eventually turn to dust, our loved ones will die. There is only one safe place to be, in the Lord.

The void in our lives, can only be filled by the One who created us, the feeling of longing can turn to joy and fulfilment only when we reach our final destination. Knowingly or unknowingly, we are searching for Him. We simply need to open our hearts and our spiritual eyes, we need to let the Holy Spirit fill, heal and change the pain that we feel, into wholesomeness, into fruitfulness, into the Temple and home of the Holy Spirit. Let Him be born in the poor, bare and empty manger of our heart. *“The Kingdom of God is within you.”* Luke 17:21 What a wonderful mystery that even when we are sinful, dirty, dispossessed, we can become God’s home through Love. *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”* John 14:23.

Whatever our worldly circumstances, whether rich or alone and completely dispossessed, we are all exiles from our real home. All the comforts of this world, our houses, families, friends and all the things we enjoy are only “tents” in which we dwell as the Israelites did while wondering for 40 years in the Desert in search of the promised land of Canaan. But the

Lord was with them and went ahead of them. Just so, the Holy Spirit has made a home in us to guide us through our wanderings until we reach our ultimate destination, our Home, Heaven. The beautiful English saying *“Home is where the heart is”* reminds us that our heart has to be continually with the Lord, our only fixed abode as we journey through the world, getting ready a little each day for the great Homecoming.

At the beginning of Great Lent, at the Sunday Vigil of the Prodigal son, Psalm 136 is sung *“By the rivers of Babylon. There we sat and wept when we remembered Zion [...]. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”* In the words of Father Seraphim Rose, *“Exiled from Paradise, we must become exiled from the world if we hope to return.”* Just as the chosen people longed to return to Zion, to their home, we Christians long to return to Paradise.

The sisters of St Etheldreda

“For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own ... [but] they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. ... They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. To sum up all in one word - what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world.” ---The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus. For the full text please click [here](#).



SUNDAY SCHOOL PLAN

Dec. 1st, Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker: Today's focus will be on Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia (c.345). This is one of the most well-known and loved Christian Saints. His feast day fall on the 6th of December. We will talk about Saint Nicholas' life, how we can and should imitate him and pray to him for his intercession. We will make a Sail boat with Saint Nicholas which can be used later on for decorating Christmas trees at home!

Dec. 8th, Wreath and Beeswax Candle – Eternity and Light: This Sunday, with the help of parents, the children will make a wreath with a beeswax candle to be put inside. As we approach the Nativity of Christ, this will remind our children what is the Christian meaning of these decorations, wreath is representative of eternity and we use candles in Church to remember the Light born into the world, Our Saviour who brings to us eternal life, light, peace, salvation and Resurrection.

Dec. 15th, The Nativity Scene: Just a little more than a week before Christmas is a good time for children to familiarise with the Orthodox Icon of the Nativity of our Saviour Jesus Christ and to assemble their own scene which will represent it. We will pay attention to all people and animals who are present on this Icon, focusing on the explanation and their symbolical use. They will be able to take their displays home and to use them as standing up centre pieces for their dining tables!

Dec. 22nd, Great Martyr Anastasia and Nativity Lanterns: This week we commemorate the Great Martyr Anastasia, we will learn and discuss her life, as well as construct a scene showing two examples of her life; 1) how she has helped imprisoned Christians in need, 2) her fervent and miraculous intercession. We will also make exciting lanterns with LED lights for the upcoming Nativity.

Dec. 29th, Reflections of blessings: On the last Sunday of the year, we will design our own cal-

endar depicting a Saint celebrated each month. We will discuss all the blessings and gifts bestowed upon us in the past year, remembering that all good things come from God, reminding us that we should be grateful and thankful for all things.

Marta Radford

MAJOR CELEBRATIONS THIS MONTH

4th Dec: Great Martyr Barbara

6th Dec: St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia

9th Dec: The conception of the Most-Holy Theotokos by the Righteous Anna

11th Dec: Hieromartyr Metropolitan Seraphim (Chichagov)

12th Dec: St. Spyridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus

13th Dec: St. Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker of All America

20th Dec: The repose of St. John of Kronstadt

25th Dec: The Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

27th Dec: Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen

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 December

Sun. 1st	09:30 12:00 12:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy "Martha's house" Sunday School Parish lunch
Sat. 7th	10:00	Divine Liturgy
Sun. 8th	09:30 12:00 12:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy "Martha's house" Sunday School Parish lunch
Sat. 14th	15:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 15th	09:30 12:00 12:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy "Martha's house" Sunday School Parish lunch
Sat. 21st	15:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 22nd	09:30 12:00 12:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy "Martha's house" Sunday School Parish lunch
Wed. 24th	20:00	Divine Liturgy; Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Flesh , followed by Parish Feast
Sat. 28th	15:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 29th	09:30 12:00 12:30	Matins and Divine Liturgy "Martha's house" Sunday School Parish lunch

"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](#).

