



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

***The Stavronian***

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*Ἐπιθρονος 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.  
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)*

*Often, goes the Christ in the stranger's guise*

## ENCOUNTERS WITH SAINTS

### Little great saints

When Saint Paraschiva arrived and took residence in the icon corner, she brought along four friends on the very same icon, smaller and framing her. Saint Filofteia, I have already written about, but the other three were completely unknown to me, so I started to get to know them. Great was my surprise to find that although there are many icons depicting them and they are much loved especially in Romania, two of the three have no feast day in the Romanian orthodox calendar. The more I learnt about them, the more drawn I was to them. They are so little known beyond their homeland and yet so inspiring in their striving for God, that I felt they needed a place in the Stavronian.



*St. Mavra of Ceahlau, St. Teofana Basarab,  
St. Saint Theodora of Sihla*

The first of the three, seen in the middle of the icon is Saint Teofana Basarab. By her baptism name Theodora, she was born around 1310, daughter of Basarab I of Wallachia (southern modern-day Romania). She was given in marriage for political reasons to Ivan Alexander of Bulgaria, heir to the Bulgarian throne and took up residence with her husband in Lovech in Bulgaria. Lovech became under the influence of Theodora

an important cultural centre, where byzantine manuscripts as well as manuscripts from Mt Athos were copied and translated. Theodora had four children, whom she raised in the faith. She was much loved by all for her gentleness, humility and virtue. Her husband became Tsar in 1330 and the new Tsaritzza continued her tireless cultural and spiritual endeavours in Tarnovo, the capital. In 1347, Ivan Alexander tired of his wife and repudiated her. In order to avoid political conflict, she did not return to her father's court, but retired to a monastery near Tarnovo and became a nun, taking the name of Teofana. Here she lived in humility and asceticism, accepting meekly all her misfortunes. The Tsar married his Jewish mistress and baptised her Orthodox, giving her his first wife's name, Theodora. The new wife poisoned one of Teofana's three sons, who passed away. Mother Teofana continued in her life of holiness in the monastery until her eldest son became Tsar of half of Bulgaria and then joined him at Vidin, the new Capital, where together with her daughter in law, she set an example of virtuous life and encouraged monasticism, founded a centre for compiling and popularising lives of saints, copying and translating spiritual works. The date of her death is unsure, but the holiness of her life was so great, that the Bulgarian church canonized her as early as 1371. Her feast day in the Bulgarian Orthodox calendar is the 28<sup>th</sup> October.

On the right of the tsaritzza, mother, wife and nun, we can see Saint Theodora of Sihla carrying a cross, a saint who has found a place in the Romanian Orthodox synaxarion.

Saint Teodora of Sihla, commemorated on the 7<sup>th</sup> August, was born around 1650 in an area of incredible natural beauty of mountains and forests in northern Romania. Her desire to serve the Lord took shape early on in her life, after the death of her only sister, but her parents did not agree that she should enter a monastery and gave her in marriage to a holy young man in the vicinity. Since the marriage was not blessed with children, both husband and wife decided to enter monasteries. They both received monastic tonsure in the same skete in Poiana Marului. In a few short years, Saint Theodora advanced greatly in obedience, prayer and asceticism. When the Turks invaded the Buzau valley, Theodora and her spiritual mother fled to the mountains. They lived for several years in fasting, vigil and prayer,

enduring cold, hunger and many temptations from the evil one. When her spiritual mother passed away, the saint went to venerate the wonder working icon of the Theotokos in Neamt and was guided to seek spiritual advice from Hieromonk Barsanuphios of the Sihastria skete, who advised her to go and live alone in the wilderness for a year. "If, by the grace of Christ, you are able to endure the difficulties and trials of the wilderness, then remain there until you die. If you cannot endure, however, then go to a women's monastery, and struggle there in humility for the salvation of your soul."

Together with her new spiritual father, Paul she went in search of a dwelling and moved in a cave on mount Sihla. Here she lived in complete solitude only seeing her spiritual father, who came to bring her the Holy Mysteries. She grew in asceticism and she would keep vigils all night long with her arms lifted up to Heaven and fed on herbs and drank water from a small channel cut into the cliff, known to this day as St. Theodora's spring.

As the Turks attacked villages and monasteries around Neamt and people started fleeing to the mountains, the saint gave up her cell and retired to an even remoter cave. Discovered by the Turks, the saint was miraculously rescued by the Lord and continued her spiritual struggles completely forgotten by the world into old age. Like Mary of Egypt, her clothes became rags and like the prophet Elijah, she was fed by the birds, often depicted on her icon. The monks of the Sihastria skete saw birds come to pick up bread and fly off with it in their beak in the same direction. Guessing that some ascetic might live in the vicinity and guided by the Holy Spirit, the Hegumen and two monks went in search through the wood. They saw a great light and as they approached, they found Saint Theodora levitating and shining with great light praying. The Saint had been praying for the Lord to send her a confessor and the Holy Mysteries. The next morning, two monks went to find the saint and Father Anthony heard her confession and gave her the Holy mysteries, after which St Theodora passed away saying "Glory to God for all things!" The monks buried her in her cave and her relics remained incorrupt. News of her death spread and people came to venerate her tomb. Her former husband, Hieromonk Eleutherios came to the cave and made a cell for himself in the vicinity, below the

cliffs of Sihla, where he remained for the following 10 years until his repose. Saint Theodora's relics were moved to the Kiev Caves monastery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The inscription on Saint Theodora's scroll reads: "Life is blessed for those in the wilderness as they fly upon the wings of Divine love" (Sunday Matins).



*St Theodora's cave, place of pilgrimage*

The third saint of the icon is Saint Mavra of Ceahlau, who does not have a feast day in the synaxarion but who is much loved. She lived in the same area as St. Theodora on the Ceahlau mountain in northern Romania. Born sometime in the middle of the XVIIIth century, a record of her life is found in the writings of Fr. Ioanichie Balan. Raised by God fearing parents, Mavra (Mary at baptism) ached with love for God. She entered the monastery at 20 years old at the skete Silvestru. In a short time, Mavra became renowned for her humility, obedience, gentleness and unceasing prayer. Lover of silence, she built herself a little hut outside the monastery where she lived in solitude, joining the community only in the daytime and keeping vigil in her hut at night. She slept only for a few hours sitting up on a chair, ate very little dry bread and vegetables once a day and did hundred of metanias every day. As time went by, she withdrew deeper into the mountain in a clearing called to this day The Nuns' clearing (Poiana maicilor). Here, she struggled with temptations and endured the bitter mountain cold, wind and snow. The nuns in the skete followed her to ask for spiritual guidance and built their own small cells around the clearing to be near her and join her in her vigils. Such was her gentleness and holiness, that all animals of the forest loved her and were tamed by her. Wherever she went, a deer followed her. She passed to the Lord

surrounded by her spiritual daughters and was buried in an unknown place in The Nuns' clearing.

The question that sprang to mind was how come these three saints are often depicted together when they are so different: one was an princess and queen, promoter of culture, long suffering wife and mother, the other two simple women, of whom only one had known wedlock, leading austere and ascetic lives. They are united, beyond their Romanian origins, by their great love of God, by willingness to take up His Cross and above all, by humility.

*A. McCafferty*

## **PRIORITY**

Yesterday evening, a strange coincidence happened. I literally stumbled across (pressed the wrong button on the computer) an article by Father Chris Salamy from Phoenix, Arizona and straight after I watched a talk about prayer. Both article and talk mentioned the word priorities. The word jumped out at me and I started to examine my conscience and question my own priorities.

You often hear people talk about getting their priorities right or urging others to do so. So, urged by Father Salamy, I asked myself: what is my priority? For a Christian there can be no other answer than God. Our Lord and our God can be our only priority in the singular. Only to Him are we indispensable, only by Him are we infinitely loved even unto death and resurrection. The Lord waits for us, but should He, the Lord of all Creation, maker of the Universe, have to wait for us to do our chores first, talk to our friends, eat first? I realised with shame that after an initial revival in my prayer routines at the beginning of lockdown when life became de-cluttered of unnecessaries by force, I had slipped back into other priorities: getting things done, answering the phone, checking that last e-mail before prayers. Even if the things which make us busy are all selfless and good, they should come second to our relationship with the Lord. Only after we speak to the Lord and listen to Him, after we are strengthened by the power of His Love and spirit

can we do things right. *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His Righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33).* Search the kingdom of God and everything else will come after.

Father Salamy makes the interesting point that saying No to most things is the right thing to do. He gives examples of how doing certain things with his parishioners or for them, ultimately impinged on his mission as a priest. Because he attended wedding parties in his parish on Saturdays, he was tired and lifeless on Sunday mornings when he celebrated the Liturgy. Therefore, he started saying no to any social engagement after Saturday night vespers. I pondered then on all the things I do, and which seem good and pleasant too, but which impinge on my worship time or simply on my worship.

I came to reflect also on the aspect of time. Having set aside a particular time for prayer, I then keep checking the clock to see if time is up. Time begins to rule my relationship with the Lord. Reality check. My God is Lord of time and is not constrained by it. Our relationship with our maker should be free of time constraints. We should allow the Lord to speak to us for as long as He desires. Looking back at what I have been doing during prayer, I effectively left our Lord in mid sentence because the clock struck 8 and I rudely rushed off to my chores or even worse, pleasures. Or I had an appointment with the Lord but I left Him waiting or never turned up at all because I forgot or because the phone rang and some friend wanted a chat about some trivial matters and I knew the Lord was waiting but I let Him wait.

Everything can wait – the phone, the friend, the e-mail, the chores, dinner, -- but the Lord should never have to wait for our convenience!

*Martha and Mary*

## **SERIOUS TALKS**

For some time now we have been having short conversations with our children about God. They have started to occur during evening time or

in the car whilst travelling – a lot of distractions are taken away when sitting down with a seatbelt on! I thought that our talks at this age (5 & 3) would be easy and simple but they have turned out to be quite tricky instead and they cheer me up to no end!

One of the first questions that our daughter asked about the Lord is: Where is He? And: I want to see Him now! These questions match her personality and make me joyous. She asked this question repeatedly for a period of time until finally she received an answer with which she was happy. It may seem even more funny that I had to ask my spiritual father to help me with this! After explaining to her a well-thought child-friendly version of God is like the sun behind the cloud (short version), she was satisfied yet thoughtful. Once and for all, this was settled when her little brother raised his hands and looked at her saying: “He is invisible” with an obvious-type of face expression, and her answer was “Oh, okay”. At that time, I found myself rather bewildered and amused!

Another time whilst putting children to bed I began to say the Lord’s Prayer in Slavonic, yet seeing not a slightest reaction, I said it again in English. Once I got to the part which says “and give us this day our daily bread...” our daughter interrupted me saying “Mummy, but we can’t say ‘Give us’, that’s not kind, we need to say give us please!” Now I am unsure, if I should add please to the prayer or simply settle that this is how it is meant to be said (never mind the manners!).

Our latest children commentary involved the Ten Commandments. I have decided to read something short before bedtime from the Children’s Bible Reader. I came across the Ten Commandments, thinking this would be a nice way to begin and familiarise the children with them, and it involves Moses (my dearly beloved OT Saint). Our three year old lost his focus very quickly however, once I read out the last commandment: Do not covet anything belonging to your neighbour: his house or his wife or his animals or any of his things – the children looked at me asking: WHERE ARE THE ANIMALS??! Oh dear...

*Marta Radford*

## CHURCH REOPENING

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it gives me great joy to announce the resumption of the Divine Liturgy at St Martin’s Church, God willing, to the faithful in August. Although the protocols are strict, it is a small step forward as we open up public worship whilst complying with the government’s regulations for all the churches and with the regulations which were given out by his Eminence Silouan, our Metropolitan Archbishop. Please refer to the [safety regulations](#) and [risk assessment](#) for further details.

We will be sending a link before each month whereby you can request attendance. Please give your Name, Email and Contact Number (for Track and Trace Protocol), as well as first three dates priorities to simplify the allocation of places. You will be notified by email if and when you have a place to attend worship; those not given a place during the current week will have priority in the following week(s).

*Fr Jonathan*



*This olive tree was planted behind the Church of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross on 31 July 2018. It has thrived significantly since then!*

# 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

6<sup>th</sup> Aug: The Holy Transfiguration of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

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

15<sup>th</sup> Aug: The Dormition of our Most-Holy Theotokos

16<sup>th</sup> Aug: St. Gerasimus, Wonderworker of Cephalonia

20<sup>th</sup> Aug: St. Oswin, King and Martyr († 651)

22<sup>nd</sup> Aug: St. Sigfrid, Abbot of Wearmouth († 688)

24<sup>th</sup> Aug: St. Cosmas of Aetolia, equal-to-the-Apostles

27<sup>th</sup> Aug: Martyr Phanourius

29<sup>th</sup> Aug: Beheading of the Holy, Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John

31<sup>st</sup> Aug: The Placing of the Cincture of the Most Holy Theotokos in the Church of Chalkoprateia / 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](http://www.calendar.goarch.org)

### Services at St Martin's in August\*

<b>Sat. 1<sup>st</sup></b>	9:00	Orthros
	18:30	Great Vespers
<b>Sun. 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	10:00	Holy Liturgy in Church (allocated places only)
<b>Thru. 6<sup>th</sup></b>	9:00	Orthros (The Holy Transfiguration of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ)
<b>Sat. 8<sup>th</sup></b>	10:00	Memorial
	18:30	Great Vespers
<b>Sun. 9<sup>th</sup></b>	10:00	Holy Liturgy (allocated places only)
<b>Sat. 15<sup>th</sup></b>	9:00	Orthros for the Dormition of the Mother of God
	18:30	Great Vespers
<b>Sun. 16<sup>th</sup></b>	10:00	Holy Liturgy (allocated places only)
<b>Sat. 22<sup>nd</sup></b>	10:00	Memorial
	18:30	Great Vespers
<b>Sun. 23<sup>rd</sup></b>	10:00	Holy Liturgy (allocated places only)
<b>Sat. 29<sup>th</sup></b>	9:00	Orthros for the Beheading of St. John the Baptist
	18:30	Great Vespers
<b>Sun. 30<sup>th</sup></b>	10:00	Holy Liturgy (allocated places only)

\* The services are provisional and may be changed at short notice. Services will be in Skype unless otherwise stated. Please, join a Skype group <https://join.skype.com/KZt20cnwQw5f> to obtain the link to a current service. The live services are also available on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/126074338184/>. Before attending the Holy Liturgy on Sundays, please carefully read [safety regulations](#) and [risk assessment](#).

*“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*.

