



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

The Stavronian

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*Ἐσθρονος 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

APPROACHING PASCHA

Nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus of Nazareth defeated Death and the devil. We are reminded of this fact every Spring – in times when we celebrate Pascha, the glorious Resurrection of Our Lord. It is the most joyous occasion, which is nevertheless difficult to communicate to those who are not (and even to some who are) Christian believers. Why? Because sin and the suffering are still present everywhere around us. The Risen Lord is indeed 'Christus Victor', but this world is still 'the valley of tears', and even the subtlest theology finds it hard to take the painful sting out of this basic metaphysical paradox.

Our Lord anticipated this problem when He established the Eucharist and sent His Holy Spirit to the Apostles on the first Pentecost. These two moments mark the birth of His Church. It is not a secret that the Church was established to offer us spiritual comfort, and to sustain/nourish our sin-weakened bodies and souls, through the various tests and tribulations of the Last Days, which lasted for the two millennia – and no one knows, in all truth, for how much longer they will continue.

When unassuming and curious visitors enter an Orthodox temple he/she will be straight away faced with the 'enhanced' reality of the Church life; one that is marked by slightly different focus from the environment that was left behind. Here, the imaginary guest will encounter (hopefully intensely so): the Scripture, Sacraments (and by this I mean - holy Mysteries), Saints and an attitude of selfless Service. These four pillars of the ecclesial life are deeply connected and constantly renewed by the Holy Spirit – who truly is the One who offers divine hospitality to those that enter this place with an open heart.

The 'connectivity' of the religious life among the Orthodox is also known as Sobornost. This word is notoriously hard to translate to English, but the best approximation would be something like: 'wholesome togetherness' or 'unity-in-diversity'. It distinguishes itself from the similar other ways of describing various groups, communities or fellowships, by insisting on the: freedom, solidarity, mutuality and reciprocity among its members – who are not perceived as mere atomised individuals, but rather as 'true persons in relation'. The theologians like Alexey Khomiakov and John Zizoulas are good starting

point for further academic exploration of this elusive concept. Or, you can just let yourself experience it in your local parish (doing both then is probably the best way).

Although I tried to explain what is 'happening' in the Church – we must accept that Liturgical life is always greater than the sum of its 'components'. This unpredictable element of spiritual life is what gives special zest to each moment spent in communal worship. Accumulated Wisdom that is present and fully accessible in our Orthodox Tradition, is a finely woven interplay of Scriptural and Sacramental in the context of the saintly action of all past and present members of the Christ's Body. But this is not limited only to human interpretations. A reality of the angelic witness and a constant invocation and presence of the Holy Spirit defines Church as wholly a cosmic, all embracing Event.

However, Church does not resolve the tragic realities that were mentioned in the first paragraph. The burden of our fallen state, hardly ever lets go – and in testing times (such as is the one that we are inhabiting now) paradoxes of Christian teaching come to an even sharper focus of the believers and to disdainful scrutiny of its enemies. Instead of immediately tasting the fruits of His glorious victory – which is Eternal, Blessed and Blameless life for All...Our Lord wishes us to taste the fruit of His Spirit in the temporal and still afflicted world first. His Church is then, an intersection point – where both: great Victory is celebrated and the struggle still remains. This apparent antinomy is not to be fully resolved now, but it will be only in the 'age to come'. The paradox of Resurrection defies our everyday logic, which itself bears the marks of our fallen state – we need to accept somehow this painful fact with deep humility and repentant hearts. This attitude could, if God wills so, turn our minds into a 'breeding ground' for the Christian virtue par excellence: Hope. The ascetic struggles of life in the Church, will then be fully 'exported' into the wider world. As we, as a Church, are now becoming more and more aware that our Culture, Arts, Sciences and Politics are groaning in great pains – waiting to be re-aligned to its Edenic origin; it has never been a more acute Kairos to again rekindle this process, with Ascended and Triumphant Lord at our helm.

Alex Miljkovic

ON FORGIVENESS

Oh, how many times have I heard about forgiveness, how many times have I read about it and have agreed with the homilies and sermons preached about it! Yet, I am a beginner when it comes to experiencing real, full and heartfelt forgiveness. When I find myself in circumstances where forgiveness is necessary to move forwards, I groan and sigh at the thought. How many excuses I find for my own sins and behaviour and unable to see or to remove the plank from my eye, I judge my brother! (*Matthew 7:3*)

But the Lord is clear on the matter, you and I are to forgive. To forgive for everything, the smallest and most awful, bitter offences equally. Forgiveness does not mean that everything will be as it was, although sometimes the circumstances become better that they were before. Forgiveness does not make the consequences our actions and sins disappear. These are very often still present and it can be compared to a spiritual scar, reminding us of the sin. The consequences of the Fall are still present, although the sin is forgiven and we are reunited to our Saviour Jesus Christ. We repeat daily "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". In order to experience the Lord's mercy, we have to show mercy unto others, as many of the Gospel parables remind us. In Matthew (18:25-35), we hear of a servant whose master forgives him a huge debt of ten thousand talents, but he is unable to forgive his fellow servant a debt of one hundred denarii. Thus the master holds the unforgiving servant to account.

If our heart is slow to forgive, we must pray that the Lord will teach us how. Otherwise we cannot go on as Christians. How could we pray peacefully with a bitter and resentful heart? How could we approach the Holy Mysteries with grudges in our mind, harbouring bad thoughts against our neighbour? Instead, we should follow the example of our Saviour - He has forgiven us so much, and keeps forgiving at every hour that pass by. He is teaching us that we should not only forgive, but love those who have caused us pain or offence. "*But I say to you love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven; for He makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just*

and the unjust." (*Matthew 5:43*) When Peter asks the Lord if he should forgive his brother up to 7 times, the answer is "*I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.*", which in fact means unlimited forgiveness, just as love is unlimited. (*Matthew 18:22*)

Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk count not be any more clear when he said: "*Do we refuse to forgive? God, too, will refuse to forgive us. The forgiveness or unforgiveness of your sins, then, and hence also your salvation or destruction, depend on you yourself. For without forgiveness of sins there is no salvation. You can see for yourself how serious it is.*"

We often imagine that forgiveness is one grandiose act of letting go of our bitterness and resentment, but it rarely is. It is more often a slow process, sometimes a daily process, an effort of will, where we daily have to repeat *I forgive* about the same offence. Ultimately it is only through the grace of God that we can forgive. After days and days of blessing those who have harmed or offended us, of repeating *I forgive*, we can feel the wave of grace which enables us to forgive truly once and for all to the point that the offence is no longer remembered. As with every spiritual movement only God can grant the absolute gift, we can only persevere with our poor and limited faith and good will.

Moses, a precursor of the spiritual father, prays to God for the forgiveness of the people of Israel who trespass against the Lord again and again and turn against Moses himself. He identifies with his people to the point of taking unto himself their sins, as Jesus does on the Cross. He asks, as many saintly spiritual fathers have asked since, to be counted with the sinners: "*If Thou wilt forgive their sins, forgive; but if not, blot me as well out of the book of life which Thou hast written.*" (*Exodus 32:32*)

Forgiving is not easy, can even seem impossible at times, but all we need to do is want to forgive, persevere and offer our hurt to the Lord in prayer and He, the healer of all things, will do the rest. Forgiveness of our brothers and sisters is in fact a process of healing and a way to freedom for them and for ourselves.

Martha and Mary

ON THE MEANING AND PRACTICE OF THE SACRAMENTS OF EUCHARIST AND CONFESSION

Sacraments of Eucharist and Confession are essential components of a truly Christian life. But when and how should we take part in them, and what is the relationship between these two sacraments?

The Holy Tradition asserts that Eucharist is the central Sacrament of the Church and its very essence: *"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"* (John 6:54). In this Sacrament the faithful through partaking the actual Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ are drawn into the mystical union with God and each other, making one Body of Christ, which is the true Church (1 Cor. 12:12-14). Lord himself instituted the Eucharist before his saving Passion (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20) and commanded that it is necessary for our salvation (John 6:54). The Eucharist is given to us for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28). It has a healing power to restore the original relationship between God and humanity, broken because of the sin – the relationship of communion with God.

Emphasizing the power of the Eucharist, saint Paul warns people against the unworthy approach to the Holy Mysteries: *"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."* (1 Cor. 11:27). Nevertheless, taking the Eucharist regularly is a documented practice of the Early Church (e.g. Acts 2:46; Acts 20:7). The way worthiness is understood in the Holy Tradition does not allow the concern with a worthy approach to contradict or prevent regular partaking of the Holy Communion:

But it is much better to receive them every Sunday for the healing of our infirmities, with that humility of heart <...> than to be puffed up by a foolish persuasion of heart, and believe that at the year's end we are worthy to receive them. (St. John Cassian, 1984, p. 653)

People cannot achieve worthiness on their own before the Holy Mysteries. Worthiness is a humble

recognition of one's own inescapable unworthiness and the hope for God's mercy that He can purify us through the divine Gifts. In the Sacrament of Eucharist God mystically makes those who approach in humility and faith genuinely worthy of the unity with Him. That is why we dare to sing in the thanksgiving hymn after the Holy Communion: *"For Thou hast made us worthy to partake of Thy holy, divine, immortal, and life-giving Mysteries."*

Repentance is the recognition of our unworthiness and a hopeful appeal to God for forgiveness. The repentance requires constant self-examination, on which St. Paul insists in his letter: *"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup"* (1 Cor. 11:28). The personal self-examination and repentance are reinforced at the Divine Liturgy by the communal prayers before the offering of the Eucharist. The repentance does not end until the very moment of partaking the Holy Mysteries. The exclamation of the general criterion *"The Holy things are for the holy"* invites everyone to determine his worthiness or unworthiness before approaching the Chalice. If one finds himself being seized by any passion, should first clean himself through repentance, and only after cleaning his conscience approach the Lord in the Eucharist.

Does the repentance require a sacramental validation before a person is allowed to approach the Holy Communion? The holy fathers found it unnecessary, not daring to liken themselves with the omniscient God. No one can grant absolution from sins apart from God. However, being aware of the dreadful consequences of the unworthy Communion (1 Cor. 11:30), the fathers of the Church instituted the practice of excommunication. Excommunication is the temporary exclusion of a person from the Eucharist for committing sins, which according to Church Canons are irreconcilable with partaking the Holy Mysteries without a period of intensive penance supervised by a priest or bishop. The Sacrament of Confession provided the reconciliation of penitent at the end of the excommunication period, so that this person can again receive the Holy Communion. Yet Reconciliation is not the absolution of the committed sins. The confessor does not absolve the sins, but appeals to God to forgive the penitent.

The original meaning of the Sacrament of Confession changed when the monastic practice of non-sacramental confession got spread among the laity. That practice implied self-examination and repentance through opening one's sins to an experienced monk (or abess in the women's monastery) who then provided spiritual guidance and made a decision on whether to allow the monk or nun to receive the Holy Mysteries. In the parishes, the role of the spiritual guide was necessarily vested with the priest, and eventually, the spiritual counseling was absorbed into the sacramental confession.

Despite this change, the Holy Tradition preserved theological and liturgical separation of the two Sacraments. People are encouraged to commune every Sunday, while confession takes place at a separate time from the Liturgy and is not connected with the Eucharist. Nevertheless, as well as with the Eucharist, people are encouraged to confess regularly, because this is essential for their spiritual growth. The only case when Sacrament of Confession becomes a necessary condition for the partaking of the Holy Mysteries is when the person has been excommunicated from the Eucharist and requires a sacramental reconciliation.

Dmitry Ismagilov

VIGIL PRAYERS

During the pandemic, we continue the standard prayer practice at home, including the reading of the Lord's prayer at 12:00 every day. In addition, many parishioners have already signed for the Vigil Prayer [online](#), so that the non-stopping prayer is maintained by the faithful all over the world continuously for 24 hours, until the pandemic surrenders.

NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Apr. 8: *Evangelos*
Apr. 14: *Jeanne*
Apr. 16: *Aristides*

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

5th Apr: **Monk-Martyrs Claudius, Diodore, Victor, Victorinus, and those with them**

6th Apr: **Eutychius, Patriarch of Constantinople**

7th Apr: **Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and Enlightener of North America**

8th Apr: **Rufus the Obedient of the Kiev Caves**

9th Apr: **The Holy Martyr Eupychius of Caesarea**

10th Apr: **Holy Father Theonas, Archbishop of Thessalonica**

11th Apr: **Sunday of St. John Climacus**

14th Apr: **Aristarchus, Pudens, Trophimus the Apostles of the 70**

15th Apr: **5th Thursday of Lent: The Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete**

17th Apr: **5th Saturday of Lent: The Akathist Hymn**

18th Apr: **Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt**

23rd Apr: **St. George the Great Martyr and Triumphphant**

24th Apr: **Lazarus Saturday**

25th Apr: **Palm Sunday. Mark the Apostle & Evangelist**

26th Apr: **Holy Monday. Basil the Holy Martyr Bishop of Amasea**

27th Apr: **Holy Tuesday. The Holy Hieromartyr Symeon, Kinsman of the Lord**

28th Apr: **Holy Wednesday. The Holy Nine Martyrs of Cyzicus**

29th Apr: **Holy Thursday. Jason and Sosipater the Apostles of the 70 and their Companions**

30th Apr: **Holy Friday. James the Apostle & brother of St. John the Theologian**

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 May (*online**)

Fri. 2nd	18:30	Third Akathist to the Theotokos
Sat. 3rd	10:00	Souls Saturday. Memorial
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 4th	09:45	Third Sunday of Great Lent: Veneration of the Cross**
Wed. 7th	18:30	Great Compline
Fri. 9th	18:30	Fourth Akathist to the Theotokos
Sat. 10th	10:00	Souls Saturday
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 11th	09:45	Fourth Sunday of Great Lent: St John Climacus**
Wed. 14th	18:30	Great Compline
Fri. 16th	18:30	Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos
Sat. 17th	10:00	Memorial
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 18th	09:45	Fifth Sunday of Great Lent: St Mary of Egypt**
Wed. 21st	18:30	Great Compline
Thru. 22nd	18:30	Great Vespers for Holy Glorious Great Martyr, Victory bearer and Wonderworker St George
Sat. 24th	09:45	Lazarus Saturday. Holy Liturgy**
Sun. 25th	09:45	Entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem. Holy Liturgy**

* 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/>. All services are subject to change or non-transmission because of internet connection.

**Services in Church

Services for the Great and Holy Week to follow and will be notified by e-mail to the faithful. Location and times of services may be changed at short notice.

“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.

