



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

***The Stavronian***

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*Έπιθρονος 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*

# CAN ANY BIOGRAPHY BECOME A HAGIOGRAPHY?

## Part II

In the first part of the article<sup>1</sup>, I outlined the ingredients of a holy life as seen by the Orthodox Church: **repentance, confession of faith, love, humility, patience, courage, and perseverance**. I also spoke of monasticism as a fully authentic path of holy life, in which the experience and manifestation of the above ingredients is the most apparent. Finally, I illustrated this point with the life story of our great local saint, St. Herbert of Derwentwater, who lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

The glorification of hermits such as Herbert of Derwentwater, desert fathers like Anthony the Great, or modern days ascetics such as Paisios the Athonite, usually does not spur significant controversies. But the Church has also glorified many saints who at first sight did not have the necessary ingredients of a holy life. In particular, considerable opposition arose in the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) against the glorification of the last Russian Tsar Nicholas II (Romanov) and his family. The Bolsheviks assassinated the Royal family on the night of July 16-17, 1918. The Tsar, his wife Empress Alexandra, and their five children, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, Alexei, were glorified as **passion bearers**<sup>2</sup> on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2000<sup>3</sup>. The dispute regarding the correctness of the glorification still has not been resolved within the ROC. The opponents of glorification focus their critique on the figure of the Tsar, providing the following arguments: the Tsar was not known as a truly pious person; he was responsible for prosecuting members of political opposition and national minorities; finally, he was a mediocre political leader, who has drawn Russia into the disastrous Russian-Japanese War, the First World War, and failed to prevent Revolution of 1917. But is it true that there are no examples of the seven ingredients of a holy life in the biography of Nicholas II? No, it is not true. The story of the last year of the Tsar

and his family demonstrates the facts of a holy life.

The life of the Royal family after their arrest in March 1917 and until assassination provides such examples. The book *The Romanov Royal Martyrs* (Saint John the Forerunner Monastery of Mesa Potamos [SJFMMP], 2019) describes the life and inner world of the Royal captives. After their arrest they lived in a constant state of uncertainty about their future, awaiting the prosecution or assassination. They were isolated from their loved ones, betrayed by the friends and former servants, hated by many in their own country, routinely bullied and insulted by the guards. Yet, the Tsar and family faced this challenge with courage and patience, living their life in the spirit of **love**, caring for one another, and forgiving their prosecutors and enemies. Letter from the Empress Alexandra to her friend Anna Vyubova illustrates this well:

He [Nicholas] is simply marvelous. Such meekness while all the time suffering intensely for the country. A real marvel. The others are good and brave and uncomplaining, and Alexei is an angel (SJFMMP, 2019, p. 287).

Towards the end of the letter, where Alexandra tells her friend about challenges of life in captivity, she adds a **humble** summary: "But God is in all" (SJFMMP, 2019, p. 292).

The structure of their day resembled that of a monastery, and, the Palace where they were initially held captive, became for them like a hermit cave. Commanded and constrained by the guards, they spent days in work. Some of the routine duties included tasks not heard for the Royal persons, such as wood chopping or repairing the house roof. When not at work, they prayed. Priests who were allowed by the authorities to celebrate divine services at the places of the captivity of the Royal family, were amazed and moved by their thirst for prayer, worship and **repentance**. Father Athanasius Belyaev, describes hearing the confession of the

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<sup>1</sup> See June 2021 edition of the Stavronian

<sup>2</sup> In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the customary title for saints, who faced death in a Christ-like manner, holding to the faith with piety and true love of God. The principal difference between

passion bearers and martyrs is in the fact that the former are not killed explicitly for their faith.

<sup>3</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) glorified Royal Family as royal martyrs in 1981.

Tsar as follows:

The humble servant of God Nicholas, as a meek lamb, wishing good for all of his enemies, not harboring any offense, praying fervently for Russia's prosperity, deeply believing in her glorious future, on bended knees, gazes upon the cross and the Gospel, and in the presence of my unworthiness, relates to his Heavenly Father the hidden secrets of his long-suffering life, and reduced to dust before the greatness of the Heavenly King, tearfully asks forgiveness for his transgressions, voluntary and involuntary (SJFMMP, 2019, p. 254).

When the Royal Family was moved to Ekaterinburg, the last place of their captivity, the conditions deteriorated significantly. Physical and moral insults by the guards became the norm, while the family's freedom of movement even within the house was severely limited. But they **persevered** until the very end, showing no anger or despair. On the night of the assassination, facing the firing squad and covering with his own body his beloved son Alexei, the Tsar's last words were: "Lord, my God! What?! What?!". Others at the moment were making the sign of the Cross (SJFMMP, p. 358). Such a life and end serve as the obvious, albeit silent, **confession of faith** in Loving, Merciful, and Life-Giving God. (*To be continued*)<sup>4</sup>

*Dmitry Ismagilov*

## **TREES IN THE BIBLE – ANSWERING THE CALL OF THE LORD**

*"Now the next day, when they had come out of Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When he came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In*

*response, Jesus said to it: "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again" (Mark 11:12-15)*

The parable of the little fig tree cursed by Jesus never to yield fruit again has always puzzled me slightly. It seems such a harsh reaction on the part Jesus who is so gentle and compassionate! The fig tree is interpreted in the context of the entrance into Jerusalem as a metaphor for the Pharisees or the people of Israel who had stopped yielding fruit. Recently I read a homily by N. Steinhardt, which shed more light on this particular parable. The most striking element of the parable in the Mark's Gospel, stressed by father Steinhardt, is that we are told "*it was not the season for figs*". If it was not the season for figs, why then does Jesus curse and wither the tree? It seems a reasonable enough excuse that there cannot be any figs on this poor tree if it is not the right time of the year! But what is reasonable in human terms, becomes a mere excuse when the grace of God is involved. Jesus calls on the fig tree to offer him fruit because, He, Lord of all nature, is hungry. But the fig tree does not respond to the call of its Lord but puts forward an excuse "Sorry, not in season!". This tree is not in harmony with the Creator and therefore life ceases to flow through it "*Immediately the fig tree withered away.*" (Matthew 21:22) The Lord calls us to repentance, to holiness each and every day, He calls us to yield fruit, to feed the hungry. The apostles answer Him instantly, dropping their nets, leaving everything behind and following Him; the rich young man does not answer the call, neither do the Pharisees. How about us? How do we answer God's call? Do we say: "Sorry not in season. Not ready yet. Need to do a few more things first." or "Here I am Lord! If it is Your Will, I can bear fruit in any season."

Jesus tells the apostles, stunned at the speed with which the tree withers "*Assuredly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain: "Be removed and be cast into the sea, it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.*" (Matthew 21: 23-25) In other words, all we need to do is be

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<sup>4</sup> Reference list available [here](#)

willing, say Yes to God's grace, believe and thus we allow God to work miracles.

The opposite of the fig tree parable is the story of Aaron's rod. As a proof to all the disobedient children of Israel that God has chosen Aaron of the tribe of Levi to be His high priest, in one night God performs a miracle and Moses discovers in the morning that Aaron's rod "*had sprouted and put forth buds, and had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.*" (Numbers 17:23) An inanimate object comes to life here because Aaron is in obedience to the Lord and in harmony with his Creator, therefore the symbol of his authority, the rod, becomes alive and bears fruit miraculously.

Trees in the Bible are mysteriously linked with the idea of obedience. Sin came into the world through Adam and Eve's act of disobedience – desiring and eating the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve break the unity and harmony with their Creator by having their own will, opposed to that of God and acting on it.

But humanity is redeemed from this act of disobedience by Christ's total submission to the Will of the Father. Christ's suffering and death on the tree of obedience, the Cross, turns the initial interdiction in *Genesis*: "*You shall not eat from it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die*" upside down. We are now, through Christ's death and resurrection called to the foot of the tree, we are called to pick up our own cross and follow Jesus. He exhorts us to come to Him, to touch Him as he did call Thomas and to eat of Him, who is Life itself. "*Take, eat, This is My Body, which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sins.*"

Let us therefore answer the call of our Lord and Saviour, run to Him, leaving all excuses behind, partake of His Holy Mysteries and bear fruit in Him and for Him.

*Martha and Mary*

## 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.

## ATTENDING THE SERVICES AT CHURCH

To attend the in-Church services during June you have to sing-up using this [form](#). We want to ensure that as many people as possible can attend at least one service over the weekend. So please rank them based on which of the available dates you prefer more. Allocation of the places depends on the volume of requests, and we cannot guarantee that you will be able to attend all services. The places are allocated on the "first come, first served" basis. At present, only 20 people are allowed to attend the worship, including the priest, the server, the chanter and the COVID officer.

Please note that if you are planning on attending the service as a family, you need to register each family member separately using the form. This is because each person, even from a single family, counts towards the maximum allowed number. You will be notified about attendance in due time, and the full protocols concerning attendance will be issued. Please check your email regularly to get the confirmation emails, as well as to be aware of any changes and updates regarding the online and in-Church services.

## NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Jul. 9: *Metropolitan Methodios Fougias*

**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

1<sup>st</sup> July: Cosmas and Damian the Holy Unmercenaries

2<sup>nd</sup> July: St. John Maximovitch, Bishop of Shanghai & Archbishop of San Francisco († 1966); St. Juvenal, Protomartyr of America and Alaska († 1796)

3<sup>rd</sup> July: St Germanus Bishop of the Isle of Man († 474)

4<sup>th</sup> July: St. Andrew of Crete, author of the Great Canon

7<sup>th</sup> July: Great-martyr Kyriake

11<sup>th</sup> July: Great Martyr Euphemia the All-Praised; St. Olga, equal to the Apostles, Princess of Kiev

13<sup>th</sup> July: Synaxis of Archangel Gabriel

15<sup>th</sup> July: Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Great Prince Vladimir, in Baptism Basil, Enlightener of the Russian Land

17<sup>th</sup> July: Great-Martyr Marina of Antioch and Child-Martyr Prince Kenelm

20<sup>th</sup> July: Holy Glorious Prophet Elijah

25<sup>th</sup> July: Dormition of righteous Anna, mother of the Most Holy Theotokos

26<sup>th</sup> July: Holy Martyr Paraskeve

27<sup>th</sup> July: Great Martyr and Healer Panteleimon

31<sup>st</sup> July: St Joseph of Arimathea

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 July (online\*)

Sat. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 4 <sup>th</sup>	09:45	Divine Liturgy preceded by Hours**
Tue. 6 <sup>th</sup>	18:30	Vespers for St Kyriake
Sat. 10 <sup>th</sup>	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 11 <sup>th</sup>	09:45	Divine Liturgy**
Sat. 17 <sup>th</sup>	08:30	Orthros for St Marina
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 18 <sup>th</sup>	09:45	Divine Liturgy (Fathers of the 4th Ecumenical Council)**
Wed. 21 <sup>st</sup>	18:30	Great Vespers for St Mary Magdalene
Sat. 24 <sup>th</sup>	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 25 <sup>th</sup>	09:45	Divine Liturgy**
Mon. 26 <sup>th</sup>	18:30	Vespers for St. Panteleimon
Sat. 31 <sup>st</sup>	10:00	Memorial
	18:30	Great Vespers

\* 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 or availability.

\*\* Services in the Church.

*“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.