

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

YOUR THOUGHTS HAVE A MIND OF THEIR OWN

Men often prefer their own personal ideas and theories rather than sound doctrines and Divine revelations.

Proverbs 3:7

*Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the Lord and depart from evil.*

Isaiah 5:21

*Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,
And prudent in their own sight.*

To a foolish mind, its own thoughts appear the most intelligent and superior to others. All matters are measured relatively against its own ideology or philosophy. So too, people come to enquire about faith, but often carrying their own baggage of theories, preferences, predispositions and agendas; but this brings a distortion of truth; it is a vanity of indulgence and a lack of obedience. When we entertain our own thoughts and reasoning then we construct a wall which separates us from spiritual enlightenment. We must pray for the spirit of discernment and the virtue of watchfulness lest these disturbing thoughts descend to the heart and are captivated by the heat of the passions.

Timothy 6:3-4

³ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴ he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.

The wise man does not regard his own thoughts in this way. It is precisely when he feels convinced that they are true and the sole wisdom that he most distrusts his own judgement and finds recourse to the Holy Fathers, the Holy Tradition of the Church, Holy Scripture and spiritual counsel. He makes elders the judges of his thoughts and arguments – lest he should run, or may have run, in vain (cf. Gal. 2:2).

*Fr Jonathan,
Based on the sayings of
Saint Maximos the Confessor*



THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION TO THE THEOTOKOS

"Christ's conception in the womb of the Panagia took place at the moment of the Angel's salutation: the moment he came and proclaimed the joyous news that she would become the Mother of Christ and would bring to the world the Saviour of humanity. For us, the 'conception' of the Grace of Christ happened at the time of our holy baptism. That's when Christ was conceived in our souls and has been carried within us ever since. He is conceived in the womb of obedience, of the carrying out of the commandments of God. For some people, the 'pregnancy' lasts a long time -- that is, a lot of time has to pass until fruit is borne from this gestation of Christ and for there to be a spiritual birth -- while for others, this goes more quickly, depending on the depth of each soul's response. The humbler one is and the more he imitates the Panagia in humility, the easier will be the gestation and the spiritual birth, the bearing of fruit."

From Blessed Elder Kragiopoulos

SIN, WARFARE AND HEALING

“The Doctor of our soul has placed the remedy in the hidden regions of the soul” (St John Cassian)

It seems strange to speak of our daily apparently little sins when the whole world is in the grips of evil, which has stretched out its tentacles as a giant octopus over us all. As we approach our Lenten journey, how can we worry about eating sweets on a fasting day or being angry with the children or falling out with our sister or brother when not so far brother fights brother, children are dying under bombs and nuclear warfare threatens to destroy the entire creation? Strangely, we can and we must. There has never been a time when repentance was more needed. Repentance for our own personal sins, for collective sins through our acts or through omission. Sin always starts as a seed and grows into a giant tree. *“The devil makes small sins seem smaller in our eyes, for otherwise he cannot lead us to greater evil.” (St Mark the Ascetic)*

I have heard so many people say they do not go to confession because they have next to nothing to confess. They feel that by not committing adultery or murder they have not transgressed. Just like the young rich man who comes to Jesus and asked what he needs to do to be saved. (Matthew 19:16-30) He had kept all the commandments and yet he knew things were not quite right. This is because in effect there is no such thing as a small sin. Sin is whatever separates us from God and from our brothers and sisters, sin is that which offends God. Sinning is idolatry. Sin starts as temptation in the heart and once accepted or welcomed by us, it grows just like the giant octopus of evil that we see unfolding in our days or like an invasive weed. It takes root and multiplies. Other sins grow on its back. Sometimes we are so deceived, we are unaware that this sin exists. It is so much part of our life, we fail to detect it. *“The worst kind of sin is not to acknowledge that you are sinful.” (St Caesarius of Arles)*

Jesus asks the various people in the Gospels *“Do you want to be healed? or “What do you want me to do for you?”*. This is because sin is so much part of our life and we have lived so comfortably with it for so long it has become our comfort zone. Do we really want to be healed? We justify it to ourselves and others as not so bad. Just a little “treat”.

“We must consider all evil things, even the passions which war against us, to be not our own, but of our enemy the devil. It is very important. You can only conquer a passion when you do not consider it as part of yourself” (St Nikon of Optina)

In order to purge sin out of our heart a few steps are necessary. Firstly we must identify sin, recognise it. This takes humility and the Grace of God. Sin is not part of us, it is an enemy infiltrated in our life. Then we must want to eradicate it and turn to God for help. We must see sin for what it is, a barrier to our communion with God and people. We must fight the tendency to idolatry whether this idol is money or the flesh or passions of the heart. They are all rooted in self love and the watered by pride.

It is essential nonetheless that we do not start cultivating Greenhouse virtues as a means of self-improvement, which will eventually get us the winning ticket to Paradise. This is not about focusing on ourselves. Our eyes have to be fixed on God at all times and through the grace of God we must look towards others. The most important thing is to Love God and trust in Him that He only can right everything. Our efforts are null without Him. Secondly, we must wage war on sin and fight it without mercy of fear. Let our Yes to God be a Yes and our No to sin be a No. Let us use warfare only against the sin rooted in our heart. Whatever is self-indulgence, self-praise and not love has to be rejected. We shall lose battles because we are weak, but if the Lord is present in our life, sin cannot prevail.

Sin is forgetting about God’s all-encompassing Love. It is a barrier to our pilgrimage towards absolute communion with God. In practical everyday terms, we all have our weak points which are favoured by our individual nature, wounds of the past, or the way we grew up. Some people get angry every day for trifles, some overindulge in drink, others in food, some people are over-careful with they money and obsess about saving, others about their looks, others are jealous of affection or their friends’ success. All these little trifling things take the form of bad habits, but these bad habits grow and can become prisons for the self without windows through which we can observe others and look to our Saviour.

The poet Michel Quoist describes the way in which sin becomes a prison for man:

*This sin that I have grasped and consumed
with gluttony,
It's mine now, but it possesses me like a spider
web holds captive the fly.
It is mine,
It sticks to me,
It flows in my veins,
It feels my heart.
It has slipped in everywhere, as darkness
slips into the forest at dusk and fills all the
patches of light.
I can't get rid of it [...]
Everyone must notice it.
I am so ashamed that I feel like crawling to
avoid being seen,
I'm ashamed of being seen by my friend,
I am ashamed of being seen by you, Lord,
For You loved me and I forgot You.*

If we want to uproot sin from our heart and be ready for the day of Judgement we must look to the church fathers for advice on spiritual warfare.

When a man is given over to the passions, he does not see them in himself and does not fight against them, because he lives in them and by them. But when the grace of God becomes active in him, he begins to discern the passionate and sinful in himself, acknowledge them and to repent and decide to guard against them. A struggle begins. At first the struggle begins with deeds, then the struggle begins with shameful thoughts and feelings. And here the struggle encounters many steps [...] The struggle continues. The passions increasingly are torn out of the heart. It even happens that they are entirely torn out...The sign that the passions are torn out of the heart is that the soul begins to feel repulsion and hatred for the passion.” (St Theophan the Recluse)

After we have acknowledged our particular sins which we have allowed to grow in our life, armed with prayer, patience and humility, we must start with small deeds. When we feel the demon of gluttony approach us, we must refrain from that slice of most delicious cake and offer it to someone else; when anger mounts up in us, we must through the effort of will offer kind words instead of angry ones, when the thought of money threatens to dominate us, we must quickly give away some money to a brother or sister in need, when selfishness creeps in we must think of

someone else's needs. The healing of habitual sin begins with small gestures of opposed virtues. God has gifted us through the Holy Spirit the weapons against sin. In our heart, maybe weak and unpractised lie all the saving virtues of humility, patience, self-restraint, generosity, all crowned by Love.

At the start of our Lenten journey, let us prepare for battle and arm ourselves with prayer and all the virtues freely gifted to us by our Creator and remember that Christ, the Theotokos, all the saints and angels are at our side and will lift us when our enemy, sin, threatens to overwhelm us.

Martha and Mary

ATTENDING THE SERVICES AT CHURCH

Dear brothers and sisters,

COVID pandemic is in retreat in the UK. Glory to God for His mercy! From the 27th of January 2022, the Government in England scraps almost all mandatory COVID measures, except for self-isolation rules for the infected. In line with these two facts, we relax the COVID rules in our church too. **Most importantly, there is no more cap on the attendance numbers, and you DO NOT have to register for attendance anymore.** Please come to the church whenever there is a service. There is no need to notify us of your attendance in advance or provide your contact details for the NHS Test & Trace.

COVID may be retreating, but there are still many cases across the UK and in the North West of England in particular. **Therefore, the following anti-COVID measures remain in our church:**

1. **We strongly encourage you to take a lateral flow test (LFT)** before attending the church. It is an easy way to ensure you are not ill and to protect the other faithful, some of whom are medically vulnerable. If you test “positive”, do not come to the church and follow the [government guidance](#) instead.

2. We **strongly encourage you to keep on wearing masks while in the church**, unless you are medically exempt. The wearing of masks in confined places is highly recommended by medical experts and in line with government guidance.
3. Windows **are to remain open at all times** during services in the Church to improve airflow in line with the expert and government guidance.

THANKSGIVING OF FAITH AND PRAYER

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

Mar. 4: *Nikolaos*
 Mar. 12: *Georgianna*
 Mar. 18: *Fr. Thomas Hopko*
 Mar. 19: *Metropolitan Philip of North America, and Fr. Georgios Myrou*

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

1st Mar: St. David of Wales (†589)

2nd Mar: Our Holy fathers St Nicholas Planas & St Joachim of Ithaca and Vatopaedi

6th Mar: Forgiveness Sunday

7nd Mar: **Clean Monday. Lent starts today**

13th Mar: Sunday of Orthodoxy

17th Mar: St Patrick, the Enlightener of Ireland (†492)

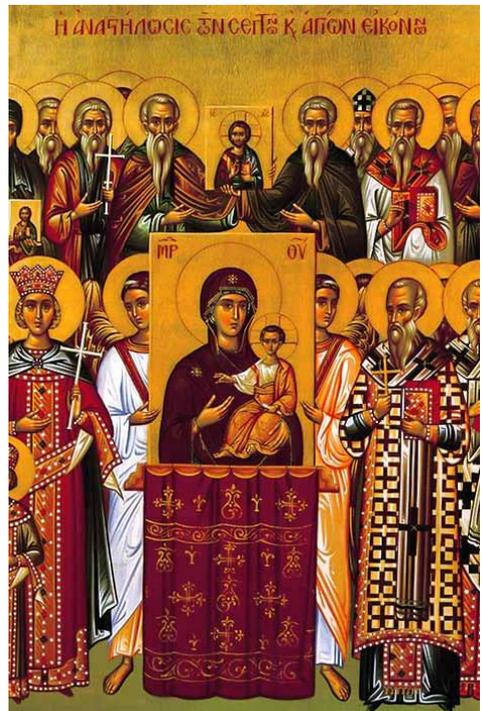
20th Mar: St Cuthbert the Wonderworker, Bishop of Lindisfarne (†687)

25th Mar: The Annunciation of our Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

30th Mar: St John Climacus the Righteous, author of the Divine Ladder of Ascent

31st Mar: St. Innocent, Enlightener of Siberia & Alaska

For the lives of Saints please visit the Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.calendar.goarch.org



Sunday of Orthodoxy (image [source](#))

Services at St Martin's in March

Sat. 5 th	16:00	Great Vespers (Saturday of Cheesefare)
Sun. 6 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy (Sunday of Cheesefare)
Wed. 9 th	18:00	Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete*
Fri. 11 th	18:00	Small Compline and Akathist (1)
Sat. 12 th	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 13 th	09:45	Liturgy of St Basil (Sunday of Orthodoxy)
Sat. 19 th	15:45	Saturday of Souls Memorial
	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 20 th	09:45	Liturgy of St Basil (St Gregory Palamas)
Thurs. 24 th	18:00	Vespers for the Annunciation to the Theotokos*
Fri. 25 th	18:00	Small Compline and Akathist (2)
Sat. 26 th	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 27 th	09:45	Liturgy of St Basil (Veneration of the Cross)

* Services online. Please, join a Skype group <https://join.skype.com/KZt20cnwQw5f> to join 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.

“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](#).

