



**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

OUR MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS AND THE HAND OF ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS

“Now the Mother of God shuts her material eyes, and opens her spiritual eyes towards us like great shining stars that will never set, to watch over us and to intercede before the face of God for the world’s protection. Now those lips, moved by God’s grace to articulate sounds, grow silent, but she opens her (spiritual) mouth to intercede eternally for all of her race. Now she lowers those bodily hands that once bore God, only to raise them, in incorruptible form, in prayer to the Lord on behalf of all creation.” (St John Damascus, Third Dormition Homily)

All the Saints have venerated the Theotokos and felt in awe how to sing her praises. Neither human tongue nor angelic mind is able worthily to praise her through whom it is given to us to look clearly upon the Lord’s glory. Yet, St. John of Damascus stands out in this love:

“Lovers are wont to speak of what they love, and to let their fancy run on it by day and night... Wine is truly pleasant to drink, and bread to eat. The one rejoices, the other strengthens the heart of man. But what is sweeter than the Mother of my God? She has taken my mind captive and held my tongue in bondage. I think of her by day and night.” (St John Damascus, Third Dormition homily)

Ioannis, i.e. John, felt like this because the Theotokos was a catalyst in his life, probably more so than in most other saints’ lives. Let us then, at the Feast of Her Dormition, when She who is broader than the Heavens is translated to Heavens, commemorate Her amazing miracle of Saint John’s of Damascus hand.

Ioannis was born in Damascus about the year 675, the son of wealthy and pious parents, of the family of Mansur. He was reared together with St Cosmas, who had been adopted by John’s father Sergius, a man of high rank in the service of the Caliph of Damascus. Both of these young men were instructed by a certain monk, also named Cosmas, who had been taken captive in Italy by the Arabs and later ransomed by John’s Father. Saint John became a great philosopher and enlightener of the age in which he lived, and was

honoured by the Caliph with the dignity of the counsellor.

When Emperor Leo the Isaurian (reigned 717-741) began his war on the holy icons, John’s irrefutable epistles defending their veneration inundated the world. Since the Saint, being under the Caliph of Damascus, was beyond Leo’s power, the Iconoclast Emperor had a letter forged in John’s handwriting which invited Leo to attack Damascus, saying the city guard was then weak and openly promising his support and help. Leo then sent this letter to the Caliph, who in his fury immediately ordered that Saint John be removed from his post, be led through the city in chains and his right hand be cut off.

That same evening, the Caliph’s servants returned the severed hand to Saint John. The saint pressed it to his wrist and prayed fervently to the most holy Theotokos before her icon*:

“Most Holy Theotokos, All Pure Mother, Who gave birth to my God, my right hand got severed for the holy icons. You are aware of the cause of Leo’s fury. Hasten speedily and heal my hand. The Right Hand of the Highest, Who received flesh from you, can do Mighty Wonders with your intercessions. May He Heal my right hand with your supplications, so that this hand may compose hymns with orderly harmonies for Thee, Theotokos and for Him who was incarnated through Thee. So that this hand may henceforth toil unceasingly for Orthodox Worship. Because you can achieve anything you want as the Mother of God.”

After a time, he fell asleep before the icon of the Mother of God. Then, he saw in his dream, the Theotokos brought to life in Her icon, looking at him with eyes full of compassion: *“See, your hand has been healed”*, he heard Her voice telling him: *“Do not tarry, make your hand the pen of a skilful writer, «κάλαμος γραμμα-τέως οζυγράφου». Compose hymns for my Son and me, as you have just promised.”*

Upon awakening, Ioannis found that indeed his hand had been attached back to his arm. Only a small red mark around his wrist remained as a sign of the miracle.

When he learned of the miracle, which demonstrated Ioannis’ innocence, the Caliph asked his forgiveness and wanted to restore him to his former office, but the Saint refused. He gave



The Three-Handed icon of the Theotokos (Tricherousa), now kept in the Monastery of Hilandar, Mt Athos, Greece. The third hand represents St John's miraculously healed hand.

away his riches to the poor and went to Jerusalem with his stepbrother and fellow-student, Cosmas. There he entered the monastery of St Savas the Sanctified as a simple novice.

It was not easy for him to find a spiritual guide, because all the monks were daunted by his great learning and by his former rank. Only one very experienced Elder, who had the skill to foster the spirit of obedience and humility in a student, would consent to do this. The Elder forbade Ioannis to do anything at all according to his own will. Even, especially, any theological writing or composition of hymns!

One of the monks happened to die, and his brother begged Saint John to compose something consoling for the burial service. Saint John refused for a long time, but out of pity he yielded to the petition of the grief-stricken monk and wrote his renowned funeral troparia, "What earthly delight", "All human vanity", and others. For this disobedience, the Elder banished him from his cell. Ioannis fell at his feet and asked to be forgiven, but the Elder remained unyielding. All the monks began to plead for him to allow Ioannis to return, but he refused. Then one of the monks asked the

Elder to impose a penance on Ioannis and to forgive him if he fulfilled it. The Elder said: "If Ioannis wishes to be forgiven, let him wash out all the chamber pots in the lavra and clean the monastery latrines with his bare hands." Even with that hand which was miraculously restored by the Theotokos!

All the monastery was shocked and disgusted at this order, but Ioannis rejoiced and eagerly ran to accomplish his shameful task. And that, not just for one day or two, but for about two months. He humbly collected all sewage from all cesspits, carried them on his shoulders and disposed of them away from the monastery. That was his new obedience! All the time, silently reciting the Jesus prayer: "*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner*". His Elder eventually relented and took him back. But Ioannis was still under very strict orders not to undertake any writing. Until, after a certain while, the All-Pure and Most Holy Theotokos intervened and commanded the Elder in a vision to allow Saint John to write again:

"Why are you doing this?" She scolded the Elder in anger. Why are you hindering Ioannis from his writings and composition of hymns? Why have you obstructed the spring which outpoured exquisite spiritual nectar? Let it overflow the whole world and quench the thirst of my children, Lest you be harmed, Elder!"

At which stern charge, Ioannis' Elder woke up in fright and awe, and fell on his knees before Ioannis. At the Queen's order, he gave the blessing to Ioannis to deliver on his promise to the Mother of God and dedicate the rest of his life to the Confession of the Orthodox Faith and adorn the Church of Christ with his sacred hymns:

"Most Holy Theotokos, no one stands between Son and Mother... Intercede for us, heal our passions, cure our diseases, help us out of our difficulties, make our lives peaceful, send us the illumination of the Spirit. In-flame us with the desire of thy Son. Render us pleasing to Him, so that we may enjoy happiness with Him, seeing thee resplendent with thy Son's glory".

Aikaterini Podia

Translated and adapted from Sister Olympia Ditora, *The Prince of the Desert and St Theodore*

the Studite and St John of Damascus' Dormition Homilies

* According to some scholars, this miraculous icon was originally written by Luke the Evangelist himself and eventually became the famous icon of the Mother of God the Three-Handed Theotokos, a famous wonderworking icon now kept in the Serbian Orthodox monastery of Hilandar on Mt Athos, Greece. Her Third Hand represents St John of Damascus' restored hand since, after Her miraculous healing of his severed hand, St John had a silver model of his hand attached to the icon.

ON FREEDOM AND CHOICE

St Thomas Moore: *"I trust I make myself obscure"*

Christianity is a journey of paradoxes: it is in giving that we receive, in thirsting and being hungry that we are satisfied, in suffering that we find joy, in laying down our life that we gain eternal life, in surrender that we discover freedom.

Our Lord wants us to be free and have choices. Our life in Christ starts with an invitation and our response to this invitation. The Theotokos has brought salvation and freedom to the whole world by her choice to say yes to the Lord. Mary, betrothed of Joseph the carpenter, was chosen, but she utters the words which enable us all to be free *"Let it be done to me according to your word."* (Luke 1:38)

I have often wondered how God can bear with us, why He doesn't force us to be righteous, since He is all powerful, why He invites and waits for us, thus opening the door for us to err in our ways and get lost. Because He loves us and wants us to love Him. Love cannot exist outside of freedom. It is through the Love, Death and Resurrection of Christ that we become free. It is our love for Him, our choice of following and surrendering ourselves to Him that renders us free.

In truth, there is only one freedom -- the holy freedom of Christ, whereby He freed us from sin, from evil, from the devil. It binds us to God. All other freedoms are illusory, false, that is to say they are all, in fact, slavery." (St Justin Popovich)

We live in a society which is very concerned with individual rights and freedoms. But this freedom is an illusion, an outward circumstance. So many Christian martyrs have found freedom in persecutions and prisons all around the world.

The freedom to come and go as you please, to do whatever you want can be a form of slavery and so often is. In this freest of all worlds, we are chained by our sins, bound by our comforts, burdened by our worries and ambitions. When we place all these at the foot of the Cross, we become lighter, joyous. Our problems do not cease to exist, our sufferings are still gnawing at us and yet they do not oppress us, they are carried by Christ alongside and our burden becomes light. *"The opposite of sin is not virtue, the opposite of sin is freedom."* (Kierkegaard)

"Some people by the word freedom understand the ability to do whatever one wants... people who have the more allowed themselves to come into the slavery of sins, passions and defilements more often than others appear as zealots of external freedom, wanting to broaden the laws as much as possible. But such a man uses external freedom only to burden himself with inner slavery. True freedom is the active ability of a man who is not enslaved to sin, who is not pricked by a condemning conscience, to choose the better in the light of God's truth and to bring it into actuality with the help of the gracious power of God." (St Philaret of Moscow)

The peculiar and paradoxical freedom experienced by prisoners and people who find themselves in coercive situations is not one of this world, but an internal lightness which comes from living in the Lord. The worst prison, with the strongest metal bars, with no other hope of being freed but by Christ is the prison of our own self. It is an oppressive and dark cave and we are often unaware of being incarcerated. It is the prison of our ego, of our selfishness, of the old Man. When we are touched by the Holy Spirit and use our freedom of choice to say Yes, we begin to see light and to break down the metal bars of our cell. *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."* (2 Corinthians 3:17) There is nothing that others can do to deprive us of our inner freedom. The only real prison is the one we build for ourselves.

When St Paul is in prison in Rome, he

describes himself as a “prisoner of the Lord”. The outward circumstances of his incarceration are an irrelevance since he has acquired the freedom of Christ. His assumed invisible chains bind him to Christ for ever.

Thus we reach one of the most mysterious moments of our Christian life: in choosing freely and willingly to lay down ourselves (all that we have and all that we are, which is in fact very little) for Christ and for our brothers and sisters, we become free and rich beyond measure, light and joyous.

Martha and Mary

SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Dear brothers and sisters, the wearing of masks is encouraged in Church but is not compulsory.

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

Aug. 14: *Paulina*
Aug. 26: *Evangelos*
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

6th Aug: The Holy Transfiguration of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

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

15th Aug: The Dormition of our Most-Holy Theotokos

16th Aug: St. Gerasimus, Wonderworker of Cephalonia

20th Aug: St. Oswin, King and Martyr (☩ 651)

22nd Aug: St. Sigfrid, Abbot of Wearmouth (☩ 688)

24th Aug: St. Cosmas of Aetolia, equal-to-the-Apostles

27th Aug: Martyr Phanourius

29th Aug: Beheading of the Holy, Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John

31st 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



Services at St Martin's in August

Mon. 1 st	09:45	Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Procession of the Holy Cross. Beginning of the Dormition Fast.
Sat. 6 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy for the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus
Sun. 7 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy
Sat. 13 th	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 14 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy
Mon. 15 th	09:45	Holy liturgy for the Dormition of the Mother of God
Sat. 20 th	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 21 st	09:45	Holy Liturgy
Sat. 27 th	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 28 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy

“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*.

