



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

The Stavronian

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*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

THE JOY OF GRATITUDE

At the opposite end of the scale from the misery of ingratitude on which we reflected last month, lies the joy of thanksgiving. Becoming aware of God's gifts to us in our everyday life is a first step towards gratitude. The joy of the gift itself is amplified by the awareness that it is undeserved but that it is given out of Fatherly love, a love generous beyond our wildest dreams. Gratitude itself gladdens our own heart and is a form of prayer. The gift giving becomes a relationship where the Father bestows on His children what is good and needful to see them joyful; they receive it and thank him. A dialogue between the Divine and the human thus ensues.

"We only enter into the full life if our faith gives thanks. Because how else do we accept His free gift of salvation if not with thanksgiving? Thanksgiving is the evidence of our acceptance of whatever He gives. Thanksgiving is the manifestation of our Yes! To His grace."

(Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*)

It is so easy to forget that nothing is our due, but everything a gift. We need to remind ourselves every day that every small thing is from God and that we should take nothing for granted. This exercise in thanksgiving will make us so much more joyful. In doing so, I always remember Polyanna's "glad game" in Eleanor H Porter's homonymous novel: *"There is something about everything that you can be glad about, if you keep hunting long enough to find it."*

From Eleanor H Porter *"... if God took the trouble to tell us eight hundred times to be glad and rejoice, He must want us to do it-SOME."*, to mother Julian of Norwich *"The greatest honour we can give Almighty God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of His love"*, there can be no doubt that all good things come from our Father for our delectation and we should rejoice and give thanks as this is pleasing to Him.

"When you sit down to eat, pray. When you eat bread, do so thanking Him for being so generous to you. When you dress, thank Him for His kindness in providing you with clothes, when you look at the sky and the beauty of the stars, throw yourself at God's feet and adore Him who in his wisdom has arranged things

in this way. Similarly when the sun goes down and when it rises, when you are asleep or awake, give thanks to God, who created and arranged all things for your benefit, to have you know, love and praise their Creator."
(St Basil the Great)

The simplicity with which Michel Quoist expresses this same truth resonates with me deeply:

"We must know how to say Thank You. Our days are filled with the gifts the Lord showers on us. If we were in the habit of taking stock of them, at night we should be like a "queen for a day", dazzled and happy with so many blessings. We should then be grateful to God, secure because He gives us everything, joyful because we know that every day he will renew his gifts. Everything is a gift from God, even the smallest things, and it's the sum of these things that makes life beautiful or sad, depending on how we use them."

He goes on to give thanks for every single detail of his day from morning till night

*"Thank you. Lord, thank you.
Thank you for all the gifts that you have given me today.
Thank you for all I have seen heard, received.
Thank you for the water that woke me up,
The soap that smells good,
The toothpaste that refreshes [...]
Thank you for Mother who welcomes me at home, for her tactful affection, for her silent presence,
Thank you for the roof that shelters me, for the lamp that lights me, for the radio that plays, for the news, for the music and singing.
Thank you for the bunch of flowers so pretty on my table.
Thank you for the tranquil night.
Thank you for the stars.
Thank you for the silence.
Thank you for the time you have given me,
Thank you for life,
Thank you for grace."*
(Michel Quoist, *Prayers of Life*)

As we grow spiritually, we should increase our thanksgiving from the small beautiful ordinary things to the painful, difficult, trying things in our life. We need to begin to give thanks for the gift

of illness, pain, loss and suffering. This is odd to people who are not Christian and often very hard to Christians themselves. Doesn't Saint Paul urge us *"In everything give thanks"* (1 Thessalonians 5:16)? This *everything* is so often painful, almost unbearable. How can we be thankful in the face of so much suffering? This is a complex question, but often complex questions find their best answer in simplicity. I came across this beautiful passage in Wendell Berry's novel, *Hannah Coulter*:

"And so I have to say that another of the golden threads is gratitude.

All through that bad time [...], I was yet grateful. Sometimes I was grateful because I knew I ought to be, sometimes because I wanted to be, and sometimes a sweet thankfulness came to me on its own, like a singing from somewhere out in the dark.

I was grateful because I knew, even in my fear and grief, that my life had been filled with gifts."

I found the three paths which lead to gratitude very enlightening: *"I knew I ought to be"*, *"I wanted to be"* or *"it came on its own"*. It is our duty to be grateful because life itself is gift and salvation its crowning glory, in our worst moments, we must remain aware of our indebtedness to God which can never be repaid. But when we are in grief, the heart refuses itself to gratitude, but wants to dwell on its pain. It is then that will has to take over. Knowing we ought to be grateful, we must will ourselves into gratefulness. And in the midst of our efforts, God sends down His grace and gratitude *"comes on its own"*. Sometimes it comes unexpectedly and delicately to sweep over us at the sight of a baby, as a response to a smile or upon beholding the beauty of a bird in flight.

Suffering brings us closer to God because in our misfortune, we finally come to depend on Him, to entrust ourselves to Him. Suffering unites us to the Cross and we must give greatest thanks for anything which brings us close to our Lord. If we cannot offer our suffering because we are so weak, we can at any rate look outside of it and remember not to become its prisoners. The stars still shine in radiance, the trees blossom, babies arrive safely to this world and there is always so much to be joyous about.

"The fullness of joy is to behold God in everything." (Julian of Norwich)

King David's joy in thanksgiving lifts our heart towards the Lord every time we pray the Thanksgiving Psalms

*I will give thanks to You, o Lord, with my whole heart
In the council of the upright and in the assembly
Great are the works of the Lord"* (Psalm 110)

*Come, let us greatly rejoice in the Lord;
Let us shout aloud to God our Saviour;
Let us come before his face with thanksgiving
And let us shout aloud to Him with psalms."* (Psalm 94)

*I will give thanks to You, O Lord with all my heart,
For you hear the words of my mouth;
And I shall sing to you in the presence of angels.
I shall bow down and worship toward Your holy temple,
And I will give thanks to Your name
For Your mercy and Your truth."* (Psalm 137)

St Ambrose of Optina tells us: *"We must begin with thanksgiving for everything. The beginning of joy is to be content with your situation."*

Giving thanks in the Gospels reveals it to be a great mystery. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us how to give thanks to our Father in Heaven. He significantly gives thanks before feeding the 4000 (Mt 15:36) (Mk 8:6) (*"And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to his disciples."*), before feeding the 5000 (John 6:11), before raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41), before breaking bread and sharing wine at the last supper (Luke 22:19, Matthew 26:27, Mark 14:23). In our British culture, we give thanks for things received, but Jesus gives thanks to His Father at the beginning, before the miracle has occurred. His trust is complete. If we strive to imitate our Lord and Saviour, we must accept the will of the Father, but give thanks to Him with complete trust and faith and joy. If we give thanks daily and hourly before we discover what the hour holds in store for us, miracles will start to happen in our lives.

*"Father, I thank you that You have heard me.
And I know that you always hear Me, but*

because of the people standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me. Now when he had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" and He who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes."

The beautiful sermon given by Father Alexander Schmemmann on Thanksgiving Day 1983 after the Holy Liturgy, a couple of months before his passing from this life, is an effusion of thanksgiving which we should read out every Sunday to remind ourselves how much there is to be grateful for.

"Everyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation and eternal joy.

Thank you, O Lord, for having accepted this Eucharist, which is offered to the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and which filled our hearts with "the joy, peace and righteousness in the Holy Spirit."

Thank you, O Lord, for having revealed Yourself unto us and for giving us the foretaste of Your Kingdom.

Thank you, O Lord, for having united us to one another, in serving You and Your Holy Church.

Thank you, O Lord, for having helped us to overcome all difficulties, tensions, passions, and temptations and for having restored peace, mutual love and joy in sharing the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you, O Lord, for the sufferings you bestowed upon us, for they are purifying us from selfishness and remind us of the "one thing needed: Your eternal Kingdom."

Thank you, O Lord, for having given us this country where we are free to worship You.

Thank you, O Lord, for this holy house, where the name of God is proclaimed.

Thank you, O Lord, for our families: husbands, wives and, especially, children, who teach us how to celebrate Your holy Name, in joy, movement and holy noise.

Thank you, O Lord, for everyone and everything. Great are You, O Lord, and marvellous are Your deeds, and no word is sufficient to celebrate Your miracles.

Lord, it is good to be here!"

Amen.

Martha and Mary

PARISH NEWS

Dear Friends in Christ,

It was great to welcome Panagiotis and Thodoris, our old parishioners and servers in the Altar, back to the Parish on 3 September!



Thank you to those who came to Church for our Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross.



Many thanks to Omar and Maha for making a wonderful knitted Cross!



Look at how the Sun illumines specifically the icons of the Most Holy Theotokos at her Nativity!



Our old parishioner Dmitry Ismagilov has been ordained a Deacon by our Metropolitan, His Eminence Silouan, at the cathedral parish of St George in London on 24 September. May God's grace enlighten and support him on his spiritual path. **Axios!**



This amazing cake has been made to celebrate two feasts – of St Silouan the Athonite and of St Demetrios.



Please follow the link to see more photos in the online album:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Leqwbnf-bEFhsVvRG3XWT5QsDMjniE-OXN?usp=share_link

Thiago's baptism took place at saint Barbara church in Toumba, Thessaloniki on Tuesday September 26th. Father Demitrios was the priest who agreed to do the baptism after speaking with my spiritual father, father John from Nicosia. The godfather is Louise who is a friend from Nicosia. He flew over from Cyprus for the occasion and his cousin came and offered translation for my family during the baptism. We were also blessed with a surprise visit from Vaia and the family of a friend of ours from the UK. It was a beautiful ceremony! We are thankful to God who arranged this baptism and that Thiago can start taking holy communion. Glory to God! May our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ keep him under His protection!



Jacob was made a catechumen on 1st October 2023.



SUNDAY SCHOOL

Dear parents,

Last Sunday school (1 October) focus was on the proverbs and sayings. It was a pleasure being surrounded by our joyful children. With father's blessing, we decided it was important to introduce the children to the wise words, which contain great spiritual advice. We had a look at the Old Testament proverbs and also at the wise sayings. Every verse provides the heart, mind and soul with spiritual food. We have chosen the verses below at the introduction to proverbs and sayings that can lead to further explanation with parents at home. These particularly chosen verses make the children think of happiness, gratefulness, helpfulness and love. God will listen to our prayers if we always look up to him. We have made the most of every single talent, where children not only wrote, but also used their imagination to decorate their work using Holy symbols.

Here are some of the proverbs:

(Philippians 4:4-8) Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things.

Miss Gladys Bland visited our God blessed community on the weekend of 30th September -- 1st October. It was a joy to see her and welcome her again.

(Proverbs 15:13-14 NIV) *A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.*

Smiling faces make you happy, and good news makes you feel better.

(John 15:12) *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

(Proverbs 3:30) *Do not withhold doing good to the needy.*

(Proverbs 8:17) *I love those who love me.*

(Proverbs 27:10) *Do not abandon your friend or the friend of your father.*

(Proverbs 1:9) *Hear my son, the instruction of your father; and do not reject the laws of your mother.*

"Don't treat people as bad as they are, treat them as good as you are."

"No beauty shine brighter than that of a good heart."

"The bee is more honoured than other animals not because she labours, but because she labours for others."

NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Oct. 10: *Barnabas*

Oct. 17: *Garyfalos*

Oct. 20: *Fr. Stephen Hatherly*

Oct. 23: *Fr. Christopher Neill*

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 Oct: **Holy Apostle Thomas**

7th Oct: **Sts Sergius & Bacchus the Great Martyrs of Syria**

10th Oct: **The 14 Holy Elders of Optina Monastery in Russia**

12th Oct: **St. Wilfrid, Bishop of York (✝ 709)**

18th Oct: **Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke**

19th Oct: **St. John of Kronstadt**

26th Oct: **The Glorious Great Martyr Demetrius the Myrrh-Streamer of Thessalonica**

28th Oct: **The Holy Protection of the Theotokos**

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



The Holy Protection of the Theotokos (image [source](#))

Services at St Martin's in October

Sun. 1st	09:30	Making of Catechumen Jacob
	10:00	Divine Liturgy
	12:00	Sunday School and Parish Meal
Sat 6th and Sun 7th: no services		
(Fr Jonathan will be in Jerusalem representing our Patriarch His Beatitude John Xth for the International Conference on 7 th October, God willing)		
Sat. 14th	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 15th	09:45	Holy Liturgy
Sat. 21st	15:45	Commemoration of the Departed followed by Great Vespers. St Demetrius
Sun. 22nd	09:45	Holy Liturgy
Sat. 28th	09:45	Holy Liturgy for the Protection of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary. No Great Vespers
Sun. 29th	09:45	Holy Liturgy followed by Sunday School and Parish Meal

*Note. Memorials are offered at 15.45 on most Saturdays before Great Vespers. If you wish to commemorate your reposed loved ones please contact Fr Jonathan beforehand.

“God cares for everyone. Despair is in effect a lack of faith”
-- St. George Karslides –



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The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of
the British Isles and Ireland: www.antiochian-orthodox.com

Orthodox online liturgical guide: www.antiochian.org/liturgicday

The following blogs of Old Stavronians are available in English at orthodoxcityhermit.com

