

**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

LITTLE CHILDREN'S REFLECTIONS

Children have a beautiful and simple relationship with God. It is a level that the grown-ups often lack in their approach, usually by fussing too much or too little, we complicate what is meant to be a simple, beautiful, and straightforward relationship. Looking at the little children, I wonder about the words of our Lord, when He says that we need to become like them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, *Matthew 18:2-4*.

There are times when the Lord sends us great wonder, and for me the moments described below count as such. The most recent was one of the most moving situations that have lately occurred. During the Holy Liturgy on a Sunday morning, standing in the middle of the Church, Evangelia looks up, seeing a beautiful icon of Christ painted on the ceiling and, she says to the Lord "I see you!". The purity of the two-year-old has left a big spiritual imprint on my heart (despite her ability to bite, shout and hit at other times!). When she enters the Church, one might get a completely wrong impression of her, she has no sense of embarrassment, she demands to kiss icons, she pushes past people, she makes metanias, she walks as if she owns the Church (she has overturned a candle stand, played hopscotch seeing the fancy floor and even shouted to hear the echo). From a stranger's point of view, one might see her as an unruly and perhaps even a disrespectful child but as her mum, I see that her love of God puts mine to shame.

Another day, I have found myself bombarded with questions by her older siblings, Joshua wondering about God, asks me "Mummy, are you a Saint?", so I reply "No, Joshua, it takes a long time and hard work to become a Saint", he persists "when will you be a Saint??" – "When I stop shouting!" was my reply. I often notice, that when children start asking questions, they are very simple, yet only the complicated answers come to my mind, none of which would help them understand our faith, so stopping myself I try to appease them with short replies.

One evening when Emiliana finished reading to Joshua from her Synaxarion (although it is for April but is often read all year round!), questions followed "Mummy, why do we say St Catherine of Sinai? Is Sinai the Surname?" I tried to explain

that the second part of the name often refers to the place where the Saint lived. Well, they replied by asking if Saint Anthony lives in The Great! This time round, my wisdom ended, and I just giggled. I can never guess what their next question will be, as children's thinking is so far from my own grown-up way of processing and reflecting. I pray that I may taste of some of this holiness and simplicity.

Here is another conversation which, stuck in my mind, I found it more difficult to answer in the beginning and it required a minute's worth of reflection. "Mummy, can I still be a child in heaven or do you have to be a grown-up?" All I could think for my answer was child martyrs or dying young, neither of which I was prepared to explain, who knows what more they would ask? Cutting conversation short, I decided to say that Heaven is full of children. That seemed to work, knowing Joshua – he wants a friend to play with! The same car trip vouched for another chat – "Is heaven as far away as space?" "No.. But it is bigger than space and can contain everyone and everything". The answer did seem to satisfy my logical son.

I have noticed that the children are often inspired by something, the questions usually start after we read something, or after their orthodox lesson at school, or if we do a craft, sometimes they even start by lying in bed (they sleep in a bunk bed at the moment). One time I was surprised when one of the children just simply asked "is my halo visible?" Erm.. "Saints don't usually know they're Saints.. but they love God very much!" – was my answer. More often than not, I cannot bear to take their innocence away by giving them my in-depth knowledge. I much prefer to, well, just let them simply be who they are, children who love God in a very beautiful way.

My most favourite moments are those, when children make something, a picture, a craft, or when they pick flowers and by themselves take it as an offering to the icon corner. Most recent gift to the Lord was a clay pot?! One day, the children come from school saying, "I have made a clay pot today, but my teacher said I can't put water inside – so I'm going to give it to God." I'm sure that the Lord knows better than me what it will be useful for. The most precious are the simple, spontaneous, and pure words spoken by the children and most rewarding is to hear them pray.

There are times when I have no more energy in the evening to pray, and so it often happens that I am encouraged by Emiliana when I hear her read from the prayer book. On another occasion, before her first trip with school here in Poland, her prayer brought me to tears when she asked the Lord to make mummy happy while she was away.

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these". (Matthew 19:14)

Marta Radford

THE SHADOW OF THE WIND

*(Matthew 21:16) And Jesus said to them,
'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants,
You have perfected praise'?"*

The little boy held his Grandad's hand tightly in the driving rain.

He suddenly stopped and looked down and stared at the puddle before him.

His Grandfather anticipated some mischievous action from his little grandson.

Was he going to jump into the puddle and make a splash?

But no, the infant just stood there, looking intently into the puddle.

Then he looked up at his beloved elder, and with enquiring eyes asked:

"Grandad, are those ripples the shadow of the wind?"

His Grandfather was reduced to silence before such an observation and search for truth.

*Lord, you breathed the breath of life into my body,
Let my heartstrings be tuned to your Holy Spirit,
my song of praise be the shadow of my soul,
and may I learn silence
before your Word of Wisdom. Amen*

To the Glory of God

*"It depends on us whether we wish to be saved."
(Apophthegmata Patrum)*

Fr Jonathan

ON DEATH

"There is an unknown presence that is with you every step on the road of your life, from the very moment you were born. That presence is your death."

This quote by wonderful Irish philosopher John O'Donohue reminds us of how truly difficult is to talk about death. It is immeasurably far and distant from us and (as O'Donohue suggests) - it is the longest-standing and intimate companion of our lives. Who amongst us has any authority to speak on the topic of death? At this moment we are all equally away from death, simply because we are alive. But also, in one hour we'll be closer to death just because we'll all be that much older.

Still, we are on the same 'ontological plane' now - regardless of circumstances or any previous experiences... close encounters with death included. I thought I had one of them myself during the COVID crisis, but I'm none the wiser in relation to 'death-talk' than I was before it. Indeed, we could claim that death had become, together with the religion, ultimate taboo of postmodernity; similar to what sex was for the generation of our grandparents. A great existentialist psychotherapist, Karl Jaspers, noticed that fear of death is not the same as a fear of dying. Fear of death is the fear of the unknown, of nothingness, of non-being and of total oblivion of Ego. This is why death is a great oppressor and enslaver of human beings - we never cease to be anxiously aware of the concept of death, regardless of the fact that we don't really know what death really is phenomenologically speaking, 'from the inside' (so to say).

Pagan philosopher Epictetus thought that he solved this conundrum by offering us famous piece of 'atheists' eschatology: *"When we are - death is not. When death is - we are not. So, there is nothing to fear."* Comforting enough for peaceful sleep? Perhaps. For a devout Christian, certainly not, not even remotely enough. Apostle Paul and early Fathers (St. John Chrysostom in particular) made a lot about deep connection

between death and sin (both individual and collective) as well as (which is easier to grasp) an interrelation between fear of death and our bad conscience. Ancestral sin lead Adam, our forefather, to death - and death itself creates generates more sin in the ultimate vicious circle. Fear of death or (in more sublimated language) a survival instinct is often presented as major justification for the vice of self-centredness or, as Saint Maximus would say, self-love – the mother of all passions. In our struggle to survive (in the widest possible meaning of that word) we corrupt our conscience and diminish our stature; of beings that were once made in the image of God. And when we somehow manage to survive we are far cry from what St. Ireneus meant when he exhorted that *'...glory of God is a man fully alive...'*

Existentialist thinker and protestant theologian Paul Tillich was not the first who noticed that for the humans, limitation to lifespan constitutes major ethical concern. However, all of this still doesn't solve the puzzle of the rightful claim on authoritative speech about death. Does anyone truly possess it, and, more importantly, if one does - can it be communicated? In Martin Scorsese's movie *"Last Temptation of Christ"*, Lazarus was approached by two zealots: *"Hey, we understand you were raised from the dead, what was like to be there?"* to which Lazarus laconically replays: *"To tell you the truth, it's not that much different from being alive here"*. *"Good, because we are sending you back!"* as one of zealots kills Lazarus; making him the only person in history who tasted death twice. This exchange would probably not be sufficient to relieve anyone from the fear of death, even if it comes from the mouth of the one who knows what he's talking about (as Lazarus indeed does).

Artists are great death escapist, and apparently, they are doing better than the rest of us through the (relative) immortality of their artworks. This was probably a way to 'play with death' in the same manner in which medieval knight played chess with forbidding hooded figure, in Ingmar Bergman masterpiece -- *'The Seventh Seal'*. He played the game betting for his dear life, but we knew that he was actually playing just for more precious time – like all of us often do. Death oppresses us and strikes terror in our souls with its' mixture of inevitability and arbitrariness, but our sinful existence also bears marks of **living death** as St Maximus reminds us. We are living half-

lives, like those shadowy figures from Eliot's *Wasteland*. Unfulfilled lives, devoid of true love and freedom that our Saviour gifted us (and obliged us) with. It is nearly impossible not to feel great 'fear and trembling' in front of the death's finality and mystery. But as it was suggested in a quote at the very beginning, death is already somehow with us all of the time. It is not only that insularity of our own sins that are preventing us to the joys of full living. Structural fallibleness of the whole universe constantly forces to make difficult choices – not simply between good and evil, but also between our different future selves. In making those choices (often enough others make them for us) we always must lose some of our God-given potential. That is another bitter pill that mortals have to swallow, even those with most diverse talents and genuinely fruitful and fulfilled lives.

In his recently published book *"Sacraments of Healing"* (which is based on the series of talks from 1999), Metropolitan Kalistos of Blessed Memory, connects thoughts of death with a liturgical sense of peace and eagerness, devoid of any anxiety. He talks about preparation for death, memento mori (mindfulness of death) and seeking out for reconciliation with others through forgiveness. He gently reminds us that we should never think of a death alone, but rather of death and Resurrection. Such is the Orthodox way. In opposition to this view, determinism, scientific positivism and relativism were recognizable markers of the modern outlook on the world – all of them very alien to Christianity. Being devoid of its own metaphysical 'grand narrative', in which death has its place and meaning – contemporary psychology lacks the confidence and directness that our Faith has when uses its own symbolical language related to it. Renowned Orthodox psychotherapist, Vasileios Thermos noticed: *"Psychological truth leads to theological truth if, of course, it is in accordance with one's intentions; the personal psychological truth of the subject is an ally of the theological truth of the Church."*

Still, we need to respectfully acknowledge very dense 'apophatic fog' that necessarily surrounds any language that dares to describe death. Scene from *'Last Temptation'* was completely fictional and we never had a chance to hear absolutely anything from the Lazarus's experience – of his point of view.

Of course there were attempts (officially unrecognised) to go further in this type of speculation, but I often remember Metropolitan Kalistos' metaphor about approaching the end of a railway platform and the sign that says 'Stop!' - you can't go any further.

In Orthodox theology (and Christian in general) we tend to think in an antinomian/paradoxical way: just think of these pairings – Virgin/Mother, God/Man, Trinity/Divinity and perhaps we can extend this to death-talk when we say *oppressor/liberator*. It is not either/or any longer but rather and/both.

Russian theologian and martyr Pavel Florensky championed this approach in his masterpiece “*The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*” (although it was already present dogmatically since the time of the early Councils).

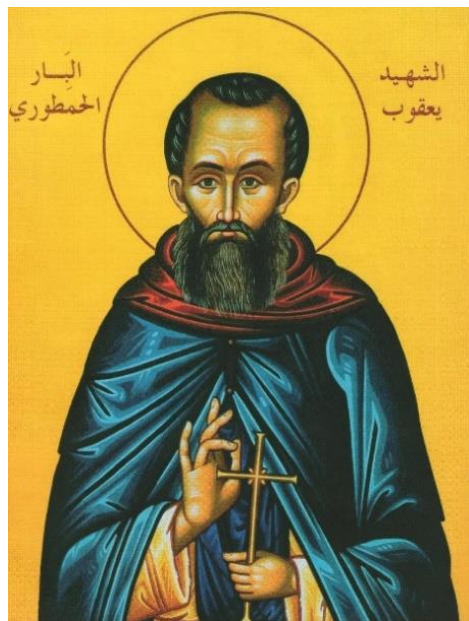
St. Maximus, who said that *self-love* is the 'mother' of all sins, implies that destructive ego-defence, developed to maintain the false sense of worthiness; kind of self-love (*philautia* in Greek)... only; it is not love at all, but rather defensive pseudo-love. Death in this case, comes as an ultimate threat to the ego, one which is impossible to defend ourselves from through the thickness of neurotic armour and therefore it has absolute and exclusive power to oppress us. It messes up our ambitions, plans and vain projects. Luckily, there are some amongst us who managed to overcome this malady - they are called Saints of the Church. But only one Person fully (and eternally) broke 'this mortal coil' – Jesus of Nazareth. Death without anxiety has emancipatory (and therefore liberating) potential and no amount of riches, status or power can change anything once we pass this threshold.

But, are we all going to be equal, since we are carrying the burden of our sins and neglects? This is one area I am not willing to speculate about. However, certain kind of earthly suffering will cease to be - and we will not look at things through the glass, darkly any longer. I also hope that we will all lose the ability to hurt others... it is very hard to imagine such a state of existence now. In the garden of Gethsemane, Christ's human will was struggling with fear of death – but He was finally able to let go and surrender to the will of the Father. May God help all of us to learn His holy example well, before our time to leave to that other shore eventually arrive.

Aleksandar Miljkovic

ST JACOB OF HAMATOURA

Saint Jacob of Hamatoura was an ascetic in the Monastery of the Dormition of Our Lady - Hamatoura in northern Lebanon in the late fifteenth century (1450 AD). He became prominent spiritually through his activity in which he stabilized monastic life in the monastery area after the Mamluks destroyed it. When he rebuilt, renewed,



and revitalized the monastic life, the Mamluks turned to him and decided to change his resolve, dissuade him from his activity, and convert him from his faith into a Muslim, but he did not accept it despite the hardships. In keeping with the Mamluks' custom of torturing and abusing their opponents, they took him from Saint George's Monastery at the top of the mountain at Hamatoura, where he was ascetic, and dragged him to the city of Tripoli before the governor.

When his trial began, at times they flattered him and at other times they accused him, pressuring him with severe torture and intimidation. He did not accept or bend. Finally, they brutally beheaded him on October 13th. Prayer accompanied him during his torture. He believed and was certain that with it he would endure all pain, he would endure all torment, and he would even endure beheading to provide a valid testimony to the Lord Jesus. In extreme arbitrariness, they burned

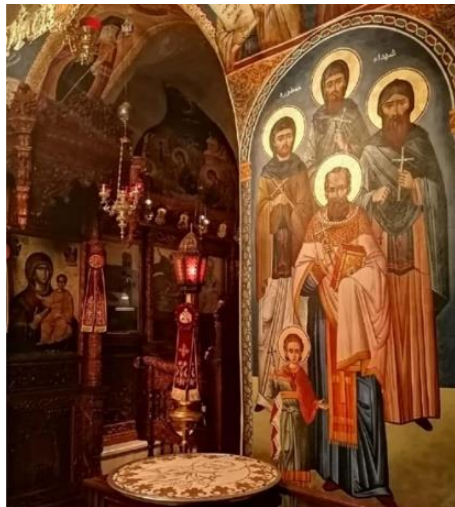
his body so that they would not hand him over to the church, so he would be honored and buried as a martyr. But God crowned him with wreaths that do not fade and blessed him with bliss after humiliation in a short time. The Church declared him a saint, honoring him and interceding for him.

Because of spiritual weakness and lack of reading and knowledge during the time of the Ottomans, the saint was forgotten. However, the visitors and pilgrims of the monastery felt his presence and he appeared to many and performed miracles and healings, glorifying God while he was hidden. He would often recite in the church so that the monks and visitors would hear him and



strengthen their prayers and faith. He recommended to one of the believers to tell the monks that his grave would be revealed to them. The monks did not care about this matter, but on July 3, 2008, while renovation work was underway, human bones were found under the soil of the church floor, and a small grave contained three skeletons and blood, showing signs of torture and beatings. It was revealed after laboratory tests conducted, that two skeletons date back to 650 years ago. One of them showed signs of a fire, and its head was cut off and the second vertebra of its neck was missing. This indicates, according to the specifications mentioned in the Balamandian Synaxarion manuscript, that it belongs to Saint Jacob of Hamatoura, who was

fifty years old. Also, some bones of a child's skull were found under the Holy Table as well. The ancients considered these remains sacred, so they



did not bury them in ordinary cemeteries, but rather in the middle of the church.

The monastery celebrated his memorial for the first time on 13 October 2002 in a vigil in which many priests, deacons, and fellow believers participated, praying the holiday service organized by Archimandrite Panteleimon (Farah) of blessed memory, the head of the monastery back then.



NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Nov. 8: *Fr Tosko*
 Nov. 11: *Eleonora*
 Nov. 12: *Sir John Tavener*
 Nov. 19: *Geronda Gregorios*
 Nov. 29: *Ioanna*

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 Nov: Sts Cosmas and Damian, the Holy Unmercenarys and Wonderworkers
8th Nov: Synaxis of Archangel Michael and Gabriel and the other Bodiless Powers
9th Nov: St. Nectarios the Wonderworker, Metropolitan of Pentapolis
10th Nov: St. Arsenius of Cappadocia
11th Nov: St. Martin of Tours (☩ 397)
13th Nov: St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople
14th Nov: St. Gregory Palamas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Thessalonica
15th Nov: Beginning of the Nativity fast
16th Nov: Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew
17th Nov: St. Hilda, Abbess of Whitby (☩ 680)
21st Nov: The Entry of our Most-Holy Lady the Theotokos into the Temple
23rd Nov: St. Alexander Nevsky
25th Nov: Great Martyr Catherine of Alexandria
30th Nov: Holy Apostle Andrew the First-called

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 November

Sat. 4 th	16:00	Great Vespers*
Sun. 5 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy
Sat. 11 th	12:00	St Martin's day
	12:00	Anglican Order for Midday Prayer & Homily Archdeacon of Lancaster
	13:00	Bring and Share Lunch
	14:30	Orthodox Great Vespers*. Homily: Fr Jonathan
Sun. 12 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy
Sat. 18 th	16:00	Great Vespers*
Sun. 19 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy
Sat. 25 th	16:00	Great Vespers*
Sun. 26 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy

Other possible services as announced.

*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

