

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

The Stavronian

Monthly magazine and newsletter published by the Holy Cross Synodia



*Ἐθρονος 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)*

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION MONASTERY MIRACLES



Holy Monastery of the Dormition of the Theotokos, Mikrokastro: a beacon of faith and tradition, offering spiritual guidance, hospitality, and hope to the faithful from all over the world. It remains a living centre of Orthodox Christianity, linking past and present through devotion and heritage.

In the past, I have written several blog posts about this monastery and its blessed synodeia. This time I would like to focus on the miraculous icon of the Theotokos **Panagia Eleousa**, the Merciful Virgin, which possibly dates back to as early as 1200 (!), and is located in the iconostasis of the Katholikon. I would like to share with you three recent miracles of the Theotokos, shared with me during my recent monastery pilgrimage.

During a very serious operation, a man died and began to watch outside his body, the agonising efforts of the doctors in the operating room, but also the ascent of his soul, accompanied by angels. He climbed the stairs with difficulty, but the angels always helped him on each step, until he reached the last one, and there, no matter how hard he tried, he could not climb it. He saw a brightly lit space in front of him, but he could not climb it. He begged the angels, but they told him that even they could not help him and that he should ask for

the intercession of his patron saint. Indeed, he prayed to Saint Nektarios, who, however, also told him that he could not help him and that he had to implore the Virgin Mary. She then appeared and told him that he could not actually climb this last step, because he lacked the virtue of charity. However, through her intercession, she would give him a second chance to prepare himself properly. And the Virgin Mary performed her miracle, and he returned to life in front of the astonished eyes of his doctors. His wife had made a vow to the Virgin Mary with many tears to give her husband a second chance, so that he would not leave unprepared for the terrible test.

The miracle that follows is very similar to the previous one. It was again a case of a patient's death during a very serious operation, and it was again a wife praying on her knees to the Virgin Mary, who heard her *tama*, her spiritual vow. However, it also has some differences. This husband arrived in front of a brightly lit plain, but he could not enter; a "wall" separated him. Also, he was not alone, but "outside" this plain, there were a multitude of people who were moaning, lamenting... This torment lasted for this particular man "many hours" and in the end he too was exhausted from waiting, fatigue, thirst! And he, too, began to cry. No matter how many prayers he said, they were not heard. At some point, the Virgin Mary appeared before him. He begged her to help him enter the bright plain, to give him a glass of water. And the Virgin Mary replied that he is not worthy not to enter this place of rest, but he is not worthy even for a glass of water! But because your wife begs me, I will give you a second chance to correct your life so that you can escape this place of torment. And indeed, the husband came back to life, shocked! The sister who told me about this miracle described to me that he himself came to the monastery with his wife to fulfil the vow to the Virgin Mary, and he still seemed shocked. The sister added to me that perhaps the most terrible thing in this story, but also in the previous one, was that these two men had spiritual fathers, they lived with the mysteries of the Church, yet they were not yet ready! Lord have mercy!

The third miracle is a little different. Here we have a husband praying, making a *tama*, and his wife being saved from death. She had been hospitalised for months without any hope, and while the doctors had given up, her husband

begged the Virgin Mary to perform a miracle. One evening, exhausted from the hospital, he drove late at night all the way from Thessaloniki to Mikrocastro, over two hours, and found the door of the monastery open, because a vigil was being held. He entered the church and began to pray with tears to the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary, and at some point, from exhaustion, he fell asleep inside the church. Then he saw what a dream he had. In the centre of the church, he saw the Virgin Mary sitting on a radiant throne with Her Son enthroned in Her arms and standing reverently on one side was the Archangel Gabriel and the



Archangel Michael on the other side. The Virgin Mary then spoke to him, addressing him by his baptismal name, and told him not to worry about his wife; she would be fine. But the Theotokos asked him to fulfil his spiritual vow in the following way: to offer an icon of her to the monastery exactly as she had appeared to him. Then he woke up, and after thanking the Virgin Mary, he hurried back to the hospital to share the wonderful news with his wife. He found her indeed healed, healthy, and the morning medical tests also clinically proved to the astonished doctors that her health was now excellent! A miracle had occurred, and she had been healed! Then, they rushed to the monastery to tell the story of the miracle and to describe to a sister who paints icons the specific representation of the Virgin Mary. Since then, this icon has adorned the narthex of the Katholicon. The miracle and the

Theotokos' request are signed at the bottom of the icon, together with the names and the date of the miracle, October 28, 2017.

LONELINESS AND COMPASSION

I have often suffered from loneliness in my childhood and youth. To this day, lonely people, or those whom I perceive to be lonely, immediately strike a chord in my heart. I was an only child and I always hankered for the company of other children, people in general and animals. Later on, in my youth, I found myself painfully enshrouded in loneliness, sometimes in the middle of a party, surrounded by crowds on the underground, in my lecture theatre as a student. The loneliness of a big city is the most poignant. This feeling was most keenly felt when I lived in Paris, always wandering the streets by myself, reasoning with myself, debating ideas and longing for human interaction.

The great mystery and beauty of Christianity is that from the moment we enter into a real relationship with Christ, we are never ever alone. We may feel lonely sometimes at our workplace, in our own family or marriage, even with our friends, because there is a lack of full communion of thought, feeling and spirit, but this is just an impression. The reality is that loneliness is a thing of the past for those who love Christ. Once we commit to Christ, we enter a union which cannot be dissolved. This is not only a togetherness with our Lord and all his saints, but a fellowship with all creation and every single person in it.

Then God said: "Let Us make mankind in our own image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (Genesis 1:26)

"The Lord God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name." (Genesis 2:18-19)

Just as Adam was created to become a collaborator in the act of Creation, our kind and gracious Lord allowed mankind contribute to the work of its own salvation through the virgin Mary. Our Mother in Heaven was called (and responded) to become the bearer of God, to carry in her womb and give birth to our Salvation, to have her heart pierced at the foot of the Cross. So are Christians, every single one of us, called to bear Christ and enter into his passion on the Cross.

"He endures voluntary suffering on the cross-she involuntarily co-suffers with Him. He bears the sins of the world -she collaborates with Him. She co-participates, she co-feels, she co-experiences. His flesh is crucified -- she is co-crucified." (St Mary of Paris)

Are hermits lonely in their caves? Certainly not. Were our holy mother Mary of Egypt, St Simon the stylite, St Theodore of the Jordan, St Anthony the great, St John of Egypt, St John the Solitary alone in the desert and the caves? No. Are the poor and downtrodden, the seemingly forgotten people alone? They may experience a sense of isolation and loneliness, but alone they are not. They are in communion with Christ, who chooses to dwell in each and every one of us, who welcomes Him. They are present in the prayers and hearts of all those who love Christ.

"The way to God lies through love of people. At the last judgement I shall not be asked whether I was successful in my ascetic exercises, nor how many bows and prostrations I made. Instead, I shall be asked: Did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners? That is all I shall be asked. About every poor, hungry and imprisoned person, the Saviour says: "I was hungry and thirsty, I was sick and in prison". To think that He puts an equal sign between Himself and anyone in need...I always knew it, but now it has somehow penetrated to my sinews. It fills me with awe." (St Mary of Paris)

Compassion is not only an antidote to other people's loneliness but our own, it is our Christian duty and the most effective form of dialogue with our merciful God and his children.

"We crossed the desert by bus night and day... There was a great deal of dust, a

shortage of water, and many sick people. Well, nothing troubled me. I was happy in my Faith. I had plenty of opportunities to care for the ailing during the few hours the bus stopped at the various inns. I was beginning to realise that language is not the only means of communication between people. Compassion was of greater importance than language and, therefore, a better way of communication." (Gerontissa Gavrilia)

A friend lent me a book about the life of a saint. It is a book in two parts: the biography and the writings of the saint. It always gives me joy to see how different we are and how complementary. Where my friend was inspired by the words of the saint, I found myself completely aflame when reading about the works. Com-passion elicits in me a response which involves action. We can feel for another, we can share in their suffering and therefore have compassion, but unless we try to alleviate the suffering, unless we bring discomfort on ourselves in order to bring comfort to the other, it all seems fruitless.

"If you do not find Christ in the beggar at the church door, neither will you find Him in the chalice." (St John Chrisostom)

I am definitely a Martha of this world, and just like her, my actions are usually very menial: coffee and cake or a phone call might be the manifestation of my love and care, since I lack the skills or the courage for greater actions. I am slowly learning that although action is essential, is not limited to the physical movement of reaching out to people, since monks in their cells do more good than all the busybodies of this world. I have come to learn that one of the greatest acts of love is praying for people, especially when we cannot help them in practical ways. The more we pray for others in love, the more our sense of fellowship grows in spirit. As gift and encouragement from God, we can sometimes physically feel when someone is praying for us, especially in a time of need. We also sometimes can feel when others need our prayers. They come to mind again and again and our heart experiences some of their own distress as we become attuned to com-passion.

Martha and Mary

HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?

Working with children for many years has taught me that they are governed by their emotions. They easily burst into tears, have tantrums or get very excited for small reasons which sometimes puzzle us adults. In my early days, I used to reason with them and explain that their reaction or behaviour was not reasonable and explain why. Now I have reached the “wisdom of the hug”. No matter what the upset is, how great or how small, whether they have fallen out with their friend or didn’t get the toy they wanted or would not want to share their toy, all they want to know is that they are loved and be reassured that everything will be ok. The sadness will pass, the relationship will be mended. As adults we like to think that have grown, learnt, matured, but the truth is that we are still essentially and mostly emotional rather than rational beings. How much of our behaviour is ruled by our emotional responses! We may learn to show our emotions less and to control our behaviour (hopefully), but ultimately, we are swayed by our emotional responses to our circumstances. What a small thing can “ruin my day”! How irritable I can be with my family because something overset me at work. How emotionally demanding we can be of our husband or wife because we were deprived of love as children!

We also project this emotional baggage on our idea of who God is. Depending on how we feel, we may assume that “God is angry” or that He has abandoned us or that “He doesn’t care”. Our relationship with Christ is governed by how we feel today. I once heard someone say referring to prayer “I’m not feeling it today” or even “I don’t feel like it”. Our relationship with Christ is influenced by the way we feel today, by the misfortunes which befell us or just by the people who surround us, by what happened at work. I came across a very useful homily by Protosyngel Arsenie Irimiea. I shall translate some highlights which I found very enlightening:

“Man is hurt deep down by the belief that God doesn’t love him fully because of his sins and his hurts. This is a heretical thought [...] This thought is not born from man’s mind or experience, but only from the evil one.

The real Presence runs much deeper and

depends on my absolute faith that God loves me and that His love does not vanish when I don’t feel it or when I sin.

There is a great difference between experiencing God’s love and remaining assured of His love. Our feelings are changeable. They depend on the fluctuations of our own inner life, while assurance is an absolute faith which cannot be swayed by emotion.

How can I move on from emotion to the absolute faith in Your love, Lord?

Firstly, I must stop confusing my inner state with the truth about God. My current feeling is real, but not the ultimate criteria of God’s love. Even if I can’t stand myself, God bears with me and loves me as I am.

Secondly, I must cleanse the image I hold of God, I must return daily to the real image of Christ by reading the Scriptures. You can start with a small prayer: Lord, I have misconceived You. Now I shall read the Scriptures.

And lastly, I shall say the filial prayers. Beloved faithful, after you have had enough crying, feeling sorry for yourself and self-flagellating, start praying to God as a son or daughter.

If you do these three things, you shall experience the great joy that the disciples felt as they returned to Jerusalem after our Lord ascended into Heaven under their eyes.”

Swayed as we are on a daily basis by the winds our surroundings, our temptations, our impressions, our entourage, the news, grief, through all the highs and lows, we must ground ourselves in Christ and His love, which is made manifest and clear for all to see in His Cross, Resurrection and Ascension.

Martha and Mary

PARISH NEWS

BBQ for St Peter and St Paul

Dear Friends in Christ

Christ is Risen !



We plan to hold a Barbecue on Sunday 28th June in anticipation of the Feast of St Peter and St. Paul Founders and Patrons of our Church of Antioch. (June 29th.)

God willing, it will be held in our car park at 1.00p.m.(13.00) adjacent to our Church in Westgate.

Nicolai and Omar will be our chefs for the Festive meal. If you wish to attend please contact Nicolai Bejenaru giving numbers from your family by the end of May. (Please don't contact me!)

There is no charge, but please contribute by bringing meats, salad, drinks. Consult with Nicolai.

My prayers
Ev Χριστώ
Fr. Jonathan

Iconostasis extension

With the blessing of Metropolitan Silouan, our Iconostasis is now planned to be extended by Christmas 2026. A preliminary sketch is shown above. If you would like to donate, please use the credentials above and specify "Iconostasis" in the description of payment.

Baptisms and chrismations

We had the Holy Chrismation of Gill Elizabeth Watts on 30 May. May our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ keep her under His protection!





The Library Table

"When you immerse your mind and heart in spiritual books, you will always be filled, for spiritual reading gives you a foundation in God."
St. John Chrysostom

You can now browse the Holy Cross Library catalogue anytime by visiting: <https://www.librarycat.org/lib/Holy.Cross.Orthodox>

We warmly invite you to contribute to this Library Table feature by sharing short reviews of books that have inspired, encouraged, or supported you in your spiritual life. Your reflections may be just the encouragement someone else needs.

Our library also welcomes donations of books on Orthodox topics. If there are titles you would love to see on our shelves, please speak with **James**. (Please note that any books outside the Orthodox tradition will need a blessing from Father Jonathan before being added.)

Spotlight on Our Latest Addition

Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891–1945)

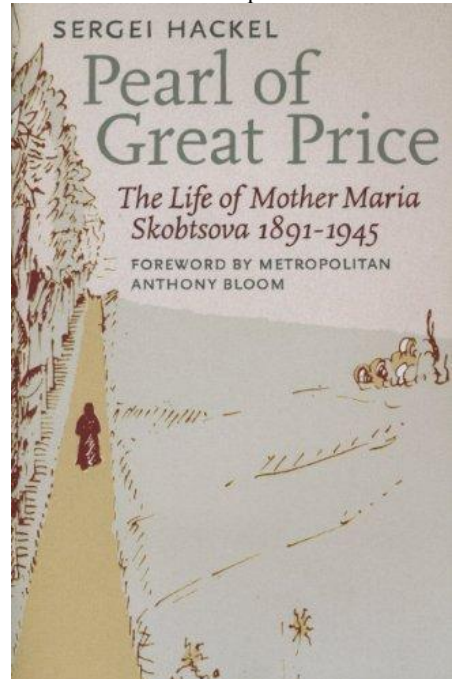
by *Sergei Hackel*

This deeply moving biography tells the remarkable story of Mother Maria Skobtsova, an Orthodox nun whose life journey was as complex as it was inspiring. Born into a Russian aristocratic family, she experienced the upheavals of the twentieth century firsthand. Her life encompassed marriage, motherhood, and exile from her homeland before she embraced a distinctive monastic calling, dedicating herself

wholeheartedly to serving the poor, the displaced, and the despairing in Nazi-occupied France during the Second World War.

Mother Maria's courageous work in aiding Jewish people in Paris ultimately led to her arrest and deportation to Ravensbrück concentration camp. Even in the harshest conditions, she continued to care for others, offering compassion and practical help to fellow prisoners. Her life culminated in an act of profound self-giving, and she is now honoured as St Maria by the Orthodox Church - a powerful witness to seeing and loving the image of God in every person, even amid cruelty and suffering.

Mother Maria was also the spiritual mother of Mother Thekla, co-founder of the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Assumption in North Yorkshire, who later became known for her collaboration with the composer Sir John Tavener.



The author, Fr Sergei Hackel, was a priest of the Moscow Patriarchate in the United Kingdom. He was widely respected as the long-serving editor of the ecumenical journal *Sobornost* and as a familiar voice on BBC Russian religious broadcasts during the Soviet period.

This book offers both a compelling historical portrait and a deeply challenging example of Christian witness in action.

Online donations

Our Orthodox Community of the Holy and Life Giving Cross has been blessed to have a building for a Temple that serves the needs of the Orthodox Christians in the Lancaster area. To this end, we are making **an appeal to help raise funds to cover the rent and other needs of the Church** on a permanent basis. Our monthly expenditure also includes purchasing food, drinks, disposable cutlery and dishware, paying insurance, and other costs. Hence, regular on-line giving to the Church, instead of cash donations on the plate, would help the parish to budget better and plan for the future.

If you would like to give regularly, the details are provided below:

Name: The Orthodox Church of Holy Cross

Bank: Lloyds Bank Plc

Sort Code: 30-96-26

Account Number: 80662168

IBAN: GB23LOYD30962680662168

BIC/SWIFT: LOYDGB21446

Post code: LA1 4XJ

City: Lancaster

Country: United Kingdom

We give thanks for the special ministry that God has given to us over two decades serving particularly the Liturgical and Pastoral needs of Orthodox students from Lancaster University and the citizens of the nearby towns. We aim to continue this ministry but to broaden it to serve the families who now attend our Community.

We are indeed blessed in having support from so many former parishioners “Stavronians” and having our extended family who offer prayers and donations to us from Cyprus, Greece, Romania, USA and elsewhere.

We ask your prayers in this holy task which is now before us and ask a blessing upon you in the name of the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-Giving and Undivided Trinity.

May God prosper this little plant in His Vineyard!



NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Jun. 5: *Vasileios*

Jun. 20: *Sylvia*

Jun. 22: *Ioannis*

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 June: Monday of the Holy Spirit

5th June: Hieromartyr Boniface of Crediton, Archbishop of Mainz (†754)

7th June: Sunday of All Saints

9th June: St. Columba of Iona, Enlightener of Scotland (†597)

14th June: The Holy Prophet Elisseus (Elisha)

16th June: St Tikhon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Amathus (†425)

17th June: St. Botolph, Abbot of the Monastery of Ikanhoe (†680)

19th June: Thaddeus (Jude) the Apostle and Brother of Our Lord (†80)

22nd June: St. Alban, Protomartyr of Britain (†304)

24th June: Nativity of the Forerunner and Baptist John

26th June: Appearance of the Icon of our Most Holy Lady Theotokos of Tikhvin

29th June: Peter and Paul, the Holy Apostles

30th June: Synaxis of the Twelve Holy Apostles

For the lives of Saints please visit the Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.calendar.goarch.org. The Orthodox Calendar and Scriptural Readings Lectionary, including the British and Irish Saints, is available online at www.antiochian-orthodox.com/calendar

Services at St Martin's in June*

Wed. 3 rd	18:30	Online Prayer group of St Seraphim and St Etheldreda**. Rule of St Pachomius*
Sat. 6 th	15.45	Great Vespers. Memorials and confessions – by arrangement
Sun. 7 th	09:20	Shortened Matins
	09.45	Divine Liturgy. All Saints
Mon. 8 th		<i>Beginning of the Apostles fast</i>
Wed. 10 th		<i>No services</i>
Sat. 13 th		<i>No services</i>
Sun. 14 th	09:20	Shortened Matins
	09.45	Divine Liturgy. All Saints of Britain
	12:15	Church Council
Wed. 17 th	18:30	Online Prayer group of St Seraphim and St Etheldreda**. Rule of St Pachomius*
Sat. 20 th	15.45	Great Vespers. Memorials and confessions – by arrangement
Sun. 21 st	09:20	Shortened Matins
	09.45	Divine Liturgy
	12:00	Sunday school
Wed. 24 th	18:30	Online Prayer group of St Seraphim and St Etheldreda**. Rule of St Pachomius*
Sat. 27 th	15.45	Great Vespers. Memorials and confessions – by arrangement
Sun. 28 th	09:20	Shortened Matins
	09.45	Divine Liturgy
	13:00	Barbecue in anticipation of the Holy Glorious and All Praised leaders of the Apostles Peter and Paul

*May be subject to change. Please monitor the email updates and the parish's [Facebook page](#).

**Via WhatsApp: <https://call.whatsapp.com/video/1WnKsoP45eHcAukXpIYXrl>

Online

Prayer
Meeting

Weekly

on Wednesday

6:30 pm

via

WhatsApp



Click here to join the meeting
(no account needed):

<https://call.whatsapp.com/video/1WnKsoP45eHcAukXpIYXrl>

The Orthodox Christian Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross – Lancaster invites you to join our Online Prayer Group “Saint Seraphim & Saint Etheldreda”.

With the blessing of Fr Jonathan Hemmings the prayer meetings of our parish group are back.

Included: Rule of St Pachomius with discussion.

2026 Fasting Calendar

LEGEND:

Abstain from meat, dairy, eggs, fish, olive oil, wine

Abstain from meat, dairy, eggs, fish, olive oil

Abstain from meat, dairy, eggs, fish

Abstain from meat, dairy, eggs

Abstain from meat

Note: On the day of a parish's patronal feast, fish, wine and oil are allowed if it falls on a fasting day.

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27	28	29	30	31						

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



For further information please contact:

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Orthodox Church of the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross:
www.orthodox-lancaster.org.uk

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

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

Online Orthodox Calendar and Scriptural Readings Lectionary:
<https://www.antiochian-orthodox.com/calendar>

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



Top and bottom sketches are created at the Holy Monastery of “The Annunciation of the Theotokos” Chios, Greece, courtesy of Fr Theodosios Dendrinios, Ithaca, Greece.
The sketch of Christ by Photis Kontoglou was scanned from the Orthodox calendar of the *Apostoliki Diakonia* of the Church of Greece.