No. 230

January 2026

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

The Stavronian

Monthly magazine and newsletter publicised by the Holy Cross Synodia

Ἐνθρονος 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)

HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN SILOUAN'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Christ is born! Glorify Him!
Beloved fathers, brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we approach the radiant Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, our hearts are filled with thanksgiving and holy joy. The birth of Christ is not only the revelation of our salvation, but also the profound mystery of God dwelling with us. In the humility of the cave, heaven and earth are united, and humanity is once again embraced by the loving presence of God Emmanuel.

In a world wounded by war and violence, and in times when malicious forces seek to inflame hatred and division, the message of the Nativity shines with undiminished light. The words of the Prophet Isaiah resound with hope and promise, offering a firm foundation for our faith and our prayer:

> *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)*

Christ is born as the Prince of Peace, not as one who imposes power, but as One who heals hearts, restores broken relationships, and calls us to become peacemakers in a troubled world. His Nativity reminds us that true peace begins within the human heart, transformed by love, humility, and self-giving.

As we celebrate this holy feast with our families and loved ones, I ask you not to forget those who do not celebrate Christmas, and especially those who are alone, abandoned, or suffering. Remember them in your prayers, extend to them compassion and kindness, and allow them to feel the warmth and consolation of this blessed feast. In doing so, we make room for Christ Himself, who was born among the poor and the rejected.

May the light of the newborn Christ illumine your homes, fill your hearts with joy, and grant peace to the whole world.

With my heartfelt prayers and blessings for a peaceful and grace-filled Nativity,

Your Father in Christ,
+Silouan

WELCOME TO 2026 A.D.

God Knows

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."
And he replied:
"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."
So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.
And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

"The Gate of the Year" by Minnie Louise Haskins.

As we enter into another year of Grace, we pray that the Holy Spirit who is the Comforter and Guide will lead us to do the will of God. The term *anno Domini* is Medieval Latin, which means "in the year of the Lord" but is often translated as in the year of our Lord. It is not our year but this year, as all time, belongs to God; we just live in it.

It has been 10 years since we moved to St Martin's Church Westgate. Thinking back, it is remarkable that our Orthodox Community survived for more than 20 years without a Temple. It is even more remarkable that our Community, thanks to the ministry which God gave us, is not restricted or limited to Lancaster and Morecambe but through the Stavronian network our extended family is worldwide.

Looking forward, we pray that as we enter into a new civil year, we may continue to witness to the Love of God and to bring others into His Kingdom.

We go forward with faith, in hope and ,above all, in love, putting our hand into the Hand of God, who meets us, greets us and welcomes us into His New Year of Grace 2026.

Colossians 3:14
14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

Fr Jonathan

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

When God comes to us
May the joy of the archangels be yours,
May the wisdom of the wise men be yours,
May the watchfulness of the shepherds be yours,
May the contemplation of Joseph be yours,
May the humility of the oxen and donkey be yours,
May the brightness of the stars be yours,
May the love of the Holy Virgin be yours,
May the peace of the Christ Child be yours.

Today the earth gives a cave
Today the heavens give a sign
Today the Magi offer gifts
Today the angels glorify in praise
Today the shepherds hear the proclamation
Today we offer our hearts in worship

"We worship thy Nativity O Christ
Show us also Thy Divine Theophany"

DIRT AND GRIME

> *Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)*

Piles of greasy pots and pans, dirty socks, dusty shelves, muddy footprints in the corridor; selfishness, frustration, impatience, anger, petty jealousies… general chaos. That's what my home looks like. A very puzzling fact is that in a most mysterious and unexpected way, saints started moving in. They snuck in uninvited. First, one at a time, quietly, discreetly, but not taking *No* for an answer, then in twos and threes. All around this grimy home of mine, I see and feel the presence of saints. I cannot understand why they would choose to enter under my roof, so dirty and unholy.

I have been treasuring and pondering this in my heart, yet all along I knew that even more wondrous things happen inside me week after week. *"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." (John 6:56).* It is unthinkable, yet true that my God condescends to enter this carcass of bone and flesh which is my body and even more so that He ventures into my dark soul, to bring His light, week after week in the holy mystery of Communion. No matter how hard I try, what ascetic feats I attempt, what works I do, my being is still polluted by decay and sin. The Creator of Heaven and Earth chooses to enter therein… but only if I invite Him. He, the Lord of Lords, awaits my invitation!

So often I find myself repelled by human deformity, poor personal hygiene or sin. It is very difficult to choose to sit on the bus next to someone who is smelly. Even harder to associate with the unfaithful and the sinners of this world. In fact, we make a virtue out of avoiding sinners because they might pollute us and our families. We like the idea of keeping pure, unsoiled by contact with sin. Sometimes, we just can't physically bear to live with smell and dirt and so we just keep away from the "smelly and repulsive" of this world. Yet the Gospels clearly show that this should not be so. The Parable of the good Samaritan teaches us that mercy and compassion should overrule all other considerations of purity. We watch our Lord Jesus Christ dine with sinners, speak to prostitutes and thieves. We see Him spit on the ground and dip His finger in dirt to heal the blind man. *"He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay." (John 9:6)*. We see Him touch the lepers, the blind, the beggars, the lame, the dead, the impure. There is no ailment, no sin repulsive enough to make God shrink away. *"Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him saying: "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately, his leprosy was cleansed." (Matthew 8:3)*

As we are in the midst of celebrating the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, it is even more humbling to reflect on the place God chose to be born. Not a luxurious, clean or orderly place, but a dark, smelly, cold and dirty place. A cave of dumb animals. He chose to be worshipped by shepherds and kings alike in a manger.

We tend to romanticise every scene of the Gospel. Yet, the physical reality would have been quite different. Our God almighty likes to get His hands dirty; He likes to enter dark caves, touch the unclean, the contagious; He steps inside ill lit hovels with His blinding light. If we wish to follow in the footsteps of Christ, we must bind up festering wounds, embrace lepers, touch the untouchable, get our hands dirty with the work our Lord has set for us.

"He has come, He who by a single word

called all things visible and invisible from non-existence into existence, Who by a word called into being birds, fishes, quadrupeds, insects and all creatures existing under His almighty providence and care; He has come, He whom the innumerable hosts of Angels continually and joyfully praise. And in what humility He has come! He is born of a poor Virgin, in a cave, wrapped in poor swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. Riches, honours, glory of this world! Fall down, fall down in humility, tearful devotion, and deep gratitude before the Saviour of men, and share your riches with the poor and needy.[…] Glory of this world! Learn here, before this manger, your vanity. Thus, let us all humble ourselves; let us all fall down in the dust before the boundless humility and exhaustion of the Sovereign of all, of God, Who has come to heal our infirmities, to save us from pride, vanity, corruption and every sinful impurity." (Saint John of Kronstadt, My Life in Christ)

Martha and Mary

PARISH NEWS

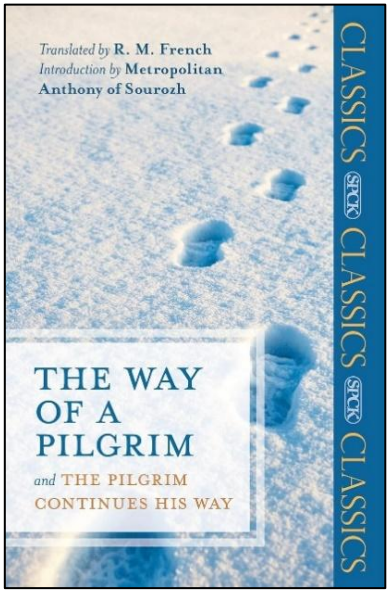
St Bede and St Cuthbert. Icon given to us by Fr Justin from Durham.

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)

Spotlight on Our Latest Addition

The Way of a Pilgrim: And the Pilgrim Continues his Way.

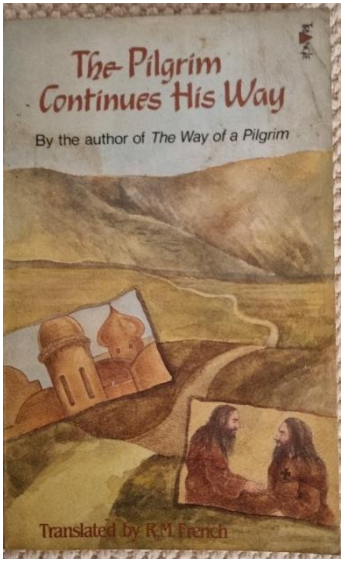


This humble and beautiful work of Orthodox literature offers a firsthand narrative of a pilgrim's quest to fulfil Saint Paul's call to "pray without ceasing." The story follows an anonymous 19th-century peasant who begins his journey through Russia and Siberia carrying only a Bible, a prayer rope, and some dried bread. As he travels, he continually repeats the Jesus Prayer — "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner". Through this constant prayer, the pilgrim experiences a deep and transformative spiritual awakening that stills his mind and awakens love for all creation in his heart. This version has an introduction by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (a.k.a. Anthony Bloom) who was bishop, then archbishop, then metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Diocese of Sourozh, the Patriarchate of Moscow's diocese for Great Britain and Ireland.

We sincerely appreciate the generous book donations received from parish members over the past month – thank you for your support.

If there is a book you would like us to add to the library collection—whether for your own use or for others—please drop a suggestion slip into the box on the table.

You can search the library catalogue online: www.librarycat.org/lib/Holy.Cross.Orthodox



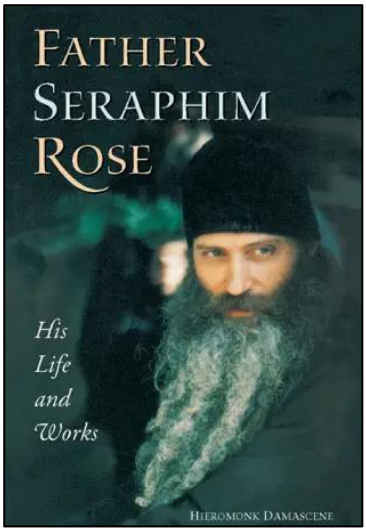
Book Reviews from Holy Cross Readers

We warmly invite you to share reviews of books that have inspired or supported you for inclusion in this Library Table feature. Your story could spark inspiration for others! To get you started, here are two reviews from a reader at Holy Cross, highlighting books that made a deep impression on them.

Fr. Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works by Hieromonk Damascene

It is difficult to put into words how much this one man has impacted my life. The entire movement of Orthodoxy in the West is heavily indebted to his efforts. He stands as a beacon of light for us who seek to recover our roots, cutting through the layers of lies and deception which seem to characterise our times, and leading the way back to original, life-giving Truth.

At its core, the message of the Gospel is simple. So simple, in fact, that there are those who say it is fully surmised by the words of the Jesus Prayer. The intellect, however, so over-fed and bloated in our times, has a tendency to deny this simplicity and over-complicate matters for its own gratification. Fr. Seraphim understood this entirely and realised that mere intellectual arguments are worth nothing if they are not firmly rooted in simple Faith, exemplified by the lives of the Saints. As such, his teachings are down-to-earth, and emphasise the need for a pure, loving heart, which bleeds for the suffering of others and earnestly lifts itself towards Christ with faith, love, and humility.

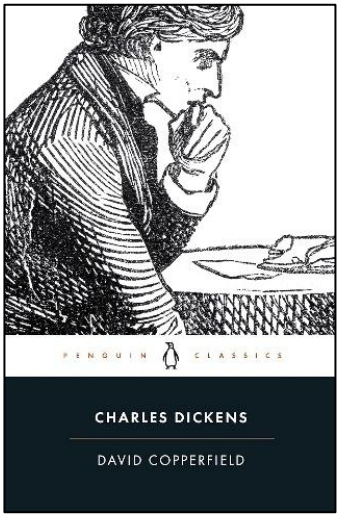


There is a good reason why Seraphim Rose is so widely beloved today, especially among converts and quote-unquote "OrthoBros". A child of modern America, he witnessed firsthand the nihilistic currents which are all the more salient in our times. His life, therefore, is a testament to the fact that all of us are called to be Saints, regardless of our circumstances. There has never been an easy time to be Christian. As Fr. Seraphim said himself, we should "expect nothing other than to be crucified". It is only by facing the world as it is, with both feet firmly rooted in Christ, that we may work out our salvation.

"Christ is the only exit from this world; all other exits — sexual rapture, political utopia, economic independence — are but blind alleys in which rot the corpses of the many who have tried them" -- Blessed Fr. Seraphim Rose of Platina (†1982).

David Copperfield by Charles Dickens

There was once a young man, eager to become a monk, who visited a monastery on Athos. Talking with the Abbot, he asked for spiritual guidance in



pursuit of unceasing prayer, communion with saints, and cultivation of the virtues. The Abbot gave him a copy of David Copperfield, and instructed him to read it. The young man was confused, and questioned the Abbot as to why he would recommend something so soft and sentimental — why not something more "spiritual", like The Ladder or Philokalia? The Abbot smiled at him, and said, "Unless you first develop normal, human, Christian feelings and learn to view life as little Davey did — with simplicity, kindness, warmth, and forgiveness — then all the Orthodox spiritual writings will be of little benefit to you."

There is a deep streak of love and faith which runs through all of Dickens' works, and David Copperfield is no exception. It is a privilege to be let into the inner world of one who is so sweet, simple, and loving as its young protagonist. He bears each affliction which his life entails — of which there are many — with humour and humility. His love for those around him, even those in his periphery, is almost saint-like. Even to those who do him wrong, who lie or cheat or steal from him, he cannot bring himself to fling accusations or accost them with barbed words. Instead, he loves them all the more and prays for them in secret.

In short, it is a lovely story, full of wit and humour. It is perhaps to be best read periodically, as one might read letters from a dear, old friend. With almost seventy chapters and a phenomenal roster of characters, there is certainly no need to rush.

"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 18:3)

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!

Christmas Fayre

The St Nicholas Fayre was a great success despite the inclement weather. The fellowship was warm, the free fasting food was wholesome, the contributions were so generous and our hopes fulfilled. Thank you to all who gave so freely of their time, talents and money and thanks be to God for his mercies.

We raised £1,400 in total, of which £250 plus some knitted gifts were donated to the Lancaster and District Homeless Action Services.

At the handing over of the money from the St Nicholas Fayre.

Impressions of St Nicholas' Fayre 6th December 2025

This Christmas Fayre was unique, unlike any I have ever attended. The physical appearance resembled similar events. The stalls beautifully arranged, colourful and with a variety of gifts displaying the hardwork, skills and love given prior to the event by the stall holder seemed nothing out of the ordinary.

So what was different?

The ethos of this Fayre was distinctly different. Prior to the event the encouragement was to contribute what you could, however small. Every contribution, however small, was welcomed and blessed by father. (It reminded me of the offering to Christ of the five loaves and two fish.) The offering was to God.

The atmosphere at the Fayre reflected this. Father censed the stalls and stallholders as the Fayre opened. There was a warmth, calm, welcoming atmosphere. There was the sense of unity, contributors and helpers aiding each other. One visitor commented on this that it was like a community, a family and it felt to them like a family celebration. This reminded me of Psalm 132(133). How good it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It did feel grace-filled.

The joyous spontaneous singing (and dancing!) together with the singing of 'Many Years' for those celebrating their name day added to this unique experience.

The free soup lunch was enjoyed by all, many commenting on how delicious the soup was (always tastes so when made with love). There was time for people and for conversations with those visiting.

Another difference was highlighted to me by my neighbouring stallholder. She was reflecting on how purposeful the children had been in going around the stalls and they seemed to really know what they were doing and understand how they were contributing to the aim of the day.

Although the footfall was maybe lower than anticipated maybe due to the inclement weather and competing fayres in the near vicinity, nevertheless the experience was joyful.

St Nicholas truly blessed the event, the generosity of the people and of those contributing their time and skills to God reflected in a small way St Nicholas' spirit of generosity.

The Fayre raised £1,400. Monies and woollen gift donations were given to the homeless shelter in Lancaster.

As the Fayre ended, seamlessly the stalls disappeared and the iconostasis appeared. Vespers began.

It was a taste of heaven.

Thanks be to God for such a grace filled day.

Some stalls from St Nicholas' Fayre:

Iconostasis extension

With the blessing of Metropolitan Silouan, our Iconostasis is now planned to be extended by Christmas 2025. 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.

NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Jan. 6: *Fr. Michael Harper*
Jan. 14: *Nina*
Jan. 16: *Fr. Jacob Myers*
Jan. 25: *Elena*
Jan. 30: *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 Jan: St. Basil the Great, Archbishop of Ceasarea in Cappadocia
6th Jan: The Holy Theophany of Our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ
9th Jan: St. Adrian and St. Brithwald, Archbishops of Canterbury (†710 and †731 A.D.)
17th Jan: St. Anthony the Great
18th Jan: St. Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria
20th Jan: Righteous Euthymius the Great
24th Jan: St. Xenia, the Fool-for-Christ of St. Petersburg (†1803)
25th Jan: St. Gregory the Theologian
28th Jan: St. Ephraim the Syrian
30th Jan: Synaxis of the Three Hierarchs: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom

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 January*		
Thurs. 1st	09:45	Divine Liturgy. Circumcision of Christ and St Basil
Sat. 3rd	15:45	Great Vespers
Sun. 4th	09:45	Divine Liturgy
Mon. 5th	19:00	Blessing of waters Theophany
Wed. 7th	19:30	Online Prayer group of St Seraphim and St Etheldreda**. Rule of St Pachomius*
Sat. 10th	15:45	Great Vespers
Sun. 11th	09:45	Divine Liturgy, followed by church council
Wed. 14th	19:30	Online Prayer group of St Seraphim and St Etheldreda**. Rule of St Pachomius*
Sat. 17th	15:45	Great Vespers
Sun. 18th	09:45	Divine Liturgy
Wed. 21st	19:30	Online Prayer group of St Seraphim and St Etheldreda**. Rule of St Pachomius*
Sat. 24th	15:45	Great Vespers
Sun. 25th	09:45	Divine Liturgy
Wed. 28th	19:30	Online Prayer group of St Seraphim and St Etheldreda**. Rule of St Pachomius*
Sat. 31st	15:45	Great Vespers
Sun. 1st February	09:45	Divine Liturgy

*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

7:30 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.

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

For further information please contact:

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Tel: 07951 722 877
Email: frjah@yahoo.co.uk

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 Dendrinos, Ithaca, Greece.
The sketch of Christ by Photis Kontoglou was scanned from the Orthodox calendar of the *Apostoliki Diakonia* of the Church of Greece.