



The Tower

Saint Barbara the Great Martyr Orthodox Church

Sunday 19th April 2026

Thomas Sunday

Issue 016



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

CHRIST IS RISEN!

HE IS RISEN INDEED!

We are now in the Renewal Week. It's the most amazing time of the year. We had such a nice and full Holy Week and now it is time to rejoice the Lords Pascha. Last week was the busiest in the liturgical year of the Orthodox Church. I would like to start by firstly saying a huge thank you to all the people who came to celebrate and participate during the week, and also say a huge thank you to all who helped organise the Feast. Last but not least, I would like to mention that the people have been very generous and we were able to raise enough money for the flowers in no time.

The Epitaphios was very nicely decorated this year, and many people attended the services during Holy Week.

On Lazarus Saturday four people were baptised. This is the traditional day within the church to do baptisms.

On Palm Sunday we started our Holy week with a full church and a nice procession and blessing of palm crosses and willow branches. It is worth mentioning that the flow of people who came to pray and light a candle continued after the services until about 5pm. It is good base to work with people as well, and to invite them to be part of the Sacramental and Liturgical life of the church. In the afternoon we started with the first Matins of the Bridegroom. It was beautifully sang by the chanters and we heard the famous chant: "Behold the Bridegroom is coming through the night..." in various languages including English, Greek, Romanian and Slavonic. We served the same Matins on Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday and finished with the amazing chant of the "Hymn of Kassiani".

On the evening of Holy Wednesday we gathered together for the Sacrament of Holy Unction. It was very well attended service; about forty people came to participate.

Holy Thursday started with a Vespertal Liturgy of St. Basil that commemorates the

Mystical (Last) Supper of our Lord and Saviour. In the evening we gathered again in great numbers to participate in the service of the Twelve Gospels.

On Holy Friday, the saddest day for the Christians, we served the Royal Hours at 8am and after the service we joined to do the flowers for the Epitaphios. This moment is always special time. The women and children came at 10am and made the Epitaphios look beautiful. It is important to mention that the children were very helpful and fully participated in this important moment. All was prepared and finished on time and we served the Vespers of the Descent from the Cross and started the Matins of the Lamentations. Again, a great number of people came for the Matins and the Procession of the Epitaphios. During the Lamentations some people joined in and we all chanted the hymns, as it needs to be. I'm sure by our example, next year even more people will participate. Late in the evening we did the procession of the Epitaphios.

Holy Saturday started with the Vespertal Divine Liturgy that commemorates the Descent into Hades. This moment is perfectly reflected in the Icon of Resurrection, the Hymns and the tradition to spread bay leaves and the interesting tradition of the faithful making a banging noise during this service.

At the Midnight Vigil a great multitude of people came traditionally to take part in the procession at midnight despite the strong wind and very heavy rain. It was a Great and Holy Pascha and I pray that in the Years to come it will be even better. I wish you all a Holy and Peaceful Renewal Week.

Fr. John

Announcements

- If you have nice pictures from Holy Week or any other pictures from our services, please send them to me. I'm trying to collect as much material as possible from our Liturgical life to be used as an archive of our work and to be used in the Tower.

Upcoming Services

19 April Sun	10.00am 11.00am	Matins Divine Liturgy	Thomas Sunday
22 April Wed	6.30pm 7.15pm	Vigil Catechesis	Great Martyr George
25 April Sat	5.30pm	Great Vespers	
26 April Sun	10.00am 11.00am	Matins Divine Liturgy	Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearing Women
29 April Wed	6.30pm 7.15pm	Vespers Catechesis	Apostle James the brother of St. John
2 May Sat	5.30pm	Great Vespers	Martyr Thimoty and Maura
3 May Sun	10.00am 11.00am	Matins Divine Liturgy	Sunday of the Paralytic

A story by Protopresbyter Antonios Christou

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ! CHRIST IS RISEN!

~Protopresbyter Antonios Christou

My dear readers, CHRIST HAS RISEN! After Great Lent, we entered Holy Week, and after Easter Sunday (the evening of Great Saturday) we're now into the 'Rose' Triodion, that is the period of the Pentikostario (the book of Pentecost). This is the preeminent time of the resurrection in the Church and lasts until the Sunday of All Souls.

The first week of the Pentikostario, that is the week from the Sunday of Easter until the following one, Thomas Sunday, is known as Renewal* Week, obviously because it indicates the new reality in our lives, brought about by Christ's abolition of death and his resurrection. Apart from that, in the years of the Early Church there was also the order of the catechumens, that is those who

came from the ranks of the pagans or Jews and had been taught the truths of the Christian faith in order to become members of the Church through the sacrament of baptism. In those days, holy baptism, like the other sacraments, wasn't a private affair, nor even a family event, as it has unfortunately become today. It was an event which concerned the whole congregation and body of the Church. The catechumens, particularly those who were at an advanced stage of their novitiate and instruction for holy baptism, were baptized all together on the night of Great Saturday, before Easter Sunday, and were then called 'newly-illuminated'. At baptism, at the triple immersion in the blessed water in the name of the Holy Trinity, the former person, the person of sin 'dies' and the new one 'is born', renewed, fresh, someone who experiences rebirth and renewal.

This is why, from the practice of the Church, the week after Easter is known as 'renewal week', or 'white week', because the newly baptized and illumined members wore white clothing for the whole week and attended church in this raiment of body and soul, since, as we all know, baptism expunges all the sins people have committed before that point in time.

Apart from their common characteristics, the seven days of Renewal Week are considered to be 'one day', Easter Sunday. Or, to be more accurate, like the 8th day of the week and of creation, which the holy Fathers of the Church understand as that state which will begin with Christ's second coming and which will be timeless and endless.

According to canon 66 of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod, the faithful should celebrate with spiritual joy, singing psalms and hymns, not engaging in dances and entertainments. They should participate in the services of the Church, taking communion every day, even though they've eaten well the previous day, given that that there's a general dispensation and that they've risen with Christ. The mournful nature of the Lenten offices, the genuflections and prostrations, have no place in the event of the resurrection; they are simply part of our preparation for it. 'During renewal week we may eat meat freely on Wednesday and Friday; for this seven-day period is considered one Lord's day'.

Throughout Renewal Week the Easter service is sung, without the Midnight Office and the 'Come, take the light', which is a later custom and one not mentioned in the printed Pentikostario. It derives from the service of the Holy Light in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Similarly, Saint John Chrysostom's Easter sermon is omitted, being read only on Easter Sunday itself.

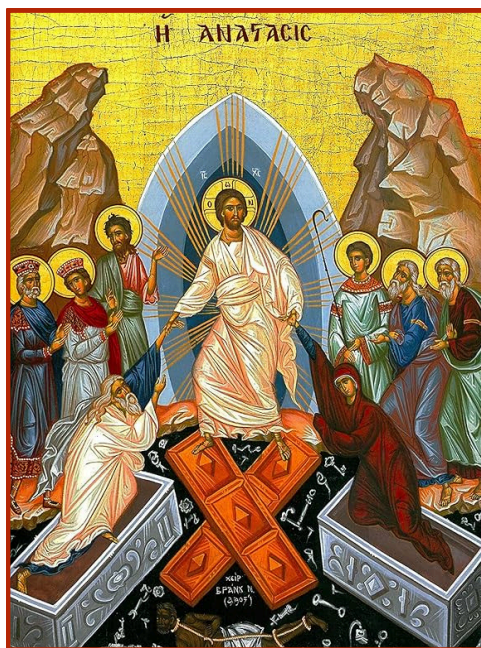
Of course, an obvious question is: 'That's all very well, but given that the institution of the Catechumens has virtually ceased to exist, why do we still celebrate Renewal Week every year?'. A lot of people would say: 'For historical reasons'. The Church has a memory, but it doesn't live with the past in the past; its dynamic and perspective come from the

future... Christ's second coming. So the reason for the celebration of Renewal Week is purely spiritual. How and why? Because of our sins, we've stained the white garment of our baptism within us and so we need repentance if we're to become temples of the Holy Spirit.

As Saint Paul says: 'Let us walk in newness of life' (Rom. 6, 4). So we need renewal, rebirth, renovation. One of the hymns says: 'Become new, brethren, and when you have left behind the old person, live the new life'. As the hymnographer says elsewhere: 'Return to yourself. Instead of old, become new and celebrate the inauguration of your soul. While there is still time, may your life be reborn'. So, for the faithful, Renewal Week is an occasion for spiritual fruitfulness and a change for the good. It means the denial of the old person, that is the one related to sin, decay, the passions and death itself. Let's experience this life, my brothers and sisters, when we thunder with all the power of our soul:

**CHRIST HAS RISEN – HE HAS RISEN,
INDEED, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS.**

First published in the newspaper Κιβωτός της Ορθοδοξίας (Ark of Orthodoxy)



Holy Week and Pascha Celebrations

Palm Sunday

Divine Liturgy

This year a lot of people gathered in the church for Palm Sunday. The service is very popular even with people who don't regularly attend church, mainly with the blessing of the palm crosses and the willow branches, and the procession with the branches around the church. The picture is from the actual blessing of the branches.

Bridgroom Matins

The first bridgroom service was served in the early afternoon and some people stay to be part of it. It was very nice to see that many of them were newly baptised and catechumens.



Holy Monday

Bridgroom Matins

The deep meaning of this service is present of the beautiful hymnography. This is the main motive:

"Behold the Bridgroom cometh in the midst of the night, and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching; and again unworthy is he whom He shall find heedless. Beware, therefore, O my soul, lest thou be borne down with sleep, lest thou be given up to death, and lest thou be shut out from the Kingdom. Wherefore rouse thyself and cry: Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou, our God, through the procession of the Heavenly Hosts save us."

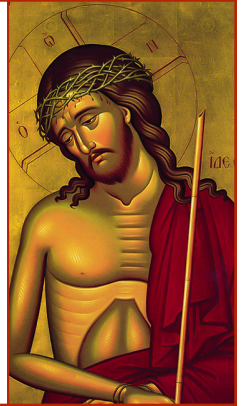


Holy Tuesday

Bridgroom Matins

The Matins of the Bridgroom on Holy Tuesday is the last of the week and finishes with chanting the hymn of the Kassiani.

"The woman who had fallen into many sins recognizes Thy Godhead, O Lord. She takes upon herself the duty of a myrrh-bearer and makes ready the myrrh of mourning, before Thy entombment. Woe to me! saith she, for my night is an ecstasy of excess, gloomy and moonless, and full of sinful desire. Receive the sources of my tears, O Thou Who dost gather into clouds the water of the sea; in Thine ineffable condescension, deign to bend down Thyself to me and to the lamentations of my heart, O Thou Who didst spread out the Heavens. I will fervently embrace Thy sacred feet, and wipe them again with the tresses of the hair of my head, Thy feet at whose sound Eve hid herself for fear when she heard Thee walking in Paradise in the cool of the day. O my Saviour and soul-Saver who can trace out the multitude of my sins, and the abysses of Thy judgement? Do not disregard me Thy servant, O Thou Whose mercy is boundless."



Holy Wednesday

Holy Unction

We had over forty people in the church for this Sacrament. This is quick explanation by Fr. Hopko about the Holy Unction:

"The express purpose of the Sacrament of Holy Unction is healing and forgiveness. Since it is not always the will of God that there should be physical healing, the prayer of Christ that God's will be done always remains as the proper context of the Sacrament. In addition, it is the clear intention of the Sacrament that through the anointing of the sick body the sufferings of the person should be sanctified and united to the sufferings of Christ. In this way, the wounds of the flesh are consecrated, and strength is given that the suffering of the diseased person may not be unto the death of his soul, but for eternal salvation in the resurrection and life of the Kingdom of God."



Holy Thursday

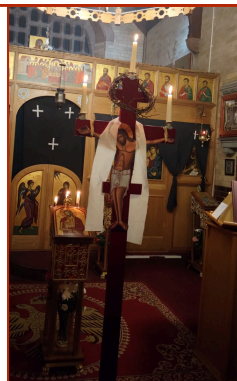
Divine Liturgy of the Last Supper

The people who came to this Divine Liturgy will have experienced light and darkness and joy and sorrow, strangely mixed.

On Thursday of Holy Week four events are commemorated: the washing of the disciples' feet, the institution of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper, the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, and the betrayal of Christ by Judas.

Service of the Twelve Gospels

People who came to the Twelve Gospels took part in the Passions of Christ. We had many people in the church and it is important to mention that most of the people who were baptised this year and the catechumens were all present at the service



Holy Friday

Vespers and Descent from the Cross & Lamentations, Epitaphios Procession

This was the busiest day in the church. We started with the Royal Hours at 8am then the women did the Epitaphios flowers; really good work from them. Even the older children helped with the flowers. At 4pm we served the Vespers of the Descent from the Cross and then we did the service of the Lamentations. Every year more and more people come to participate in this service and more people also chant the beautiful words of this service. Then we did the Procession with the Epitaphios. This is again a service that combines joy and sorrow in a specific way that are only felt in the Orthodox Services.



Holy Saturday

Vesperal Liturgy

This service is usually neglected in the busy Holy Week and is not very well attended but is one that turns sorrow to joy. In the understanding of the Church, sorrow is not replaced by joy; it is transformed into joy. This distinction indicates that it is precisely within death that Christ continues to effect triumph.

It is a very interesting service and my advice is: if you come to this service next year, bring an wooden spoon...you will need it!

Service of Holy Light

I'm not sure how many people came to this service, inside the church and outside, but I would say about 300. Next year with better organisation, we will ensure that all people will participate in the procession and we all will enter the transformed church.

Great and Holy Pascha

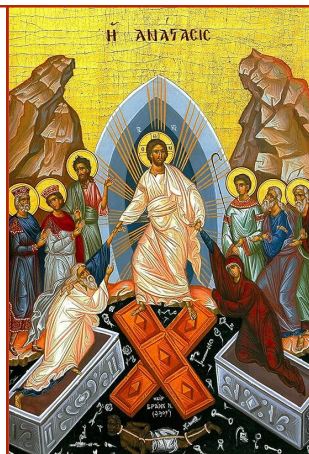
Midnight Matins and Liturgy of the Resurrection

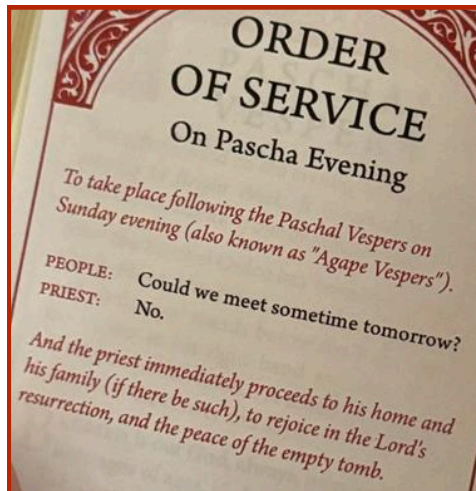
Christ is Risen! It was very nice to see so many people to be part of the midnight Paschal Matins and Paschal Divine Liturgy and to see a long line of Communicants at 2am in the morning.

Agape Vespers

This service is one that I love a lot. It is very interesting to see that usually many people don't come to church (or rarely).

We had about 30 people in the church and we read the Gospel reading in eight languages. Glory to God!





Services for the Week following Holy Pascha

And of course, we cannot forget about the services for Renewal Week...

Here is a picture from the Priest's Service Book showing the order of service following the Agape Vespers on Sunday evening:

People: Could we meet sometime tomorrow?
Priest: No.

And the priest immediately proceeds to his home and his family (if there be such), to rejoice on the Lord's resurrection, and the peace of the empty tomb.

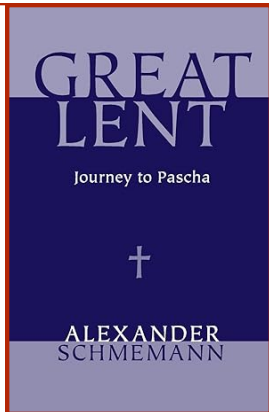
Typical priestly humour!



Book recommendation from the Parish Library

This revised edition of Fr Alexander Schmemmann's Lenten classic examines the meaning of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, the Prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian, the Canon of St Andrew of Crete, and other neglected or misunderstood treasures of Lenten worship. Schmemmann draws on the Church's sacramental and liturgical tradition to suggest the meaning of "Lent in our life."

The Lenten season is meant to kindle a "bright sadness" within our hearts. Its aim is precisely the remembrance of Christ, a longing for a relationship with God that has been lost. Lent offers the time and place for recovery of this relationship. The darkness of Lent allows the flame of the Holy Spirit to burn within our hearts until we are led to the brilliance of the Resurrection. The book is available in our library.



Christian Orthodox Thyateira Youth (COTY) Family & Faith Event



On Sunday 3rd May 2026 the Greek Orthodox Church of Saints Panteleimon and Paraskevi in Harrow (HA3 9QN) will graciously host our event titled 'Family and Faith,' commencing at 3pm.

Sister Magdalene of the monastic community of St John the Baptist in Essex will lead discussions on the theme of 'The Home as a little Church,' encouraging young families in the faith.



Holy Week and Pascha Photo Gallery



Thank you very much to all who helped organise this Feast and thank you to all who participated, chanted and donated. You all have been amazing!

CHRIST IS RISEN!

Thank you very much to Presbytera Anna and to Ina for sharing such beautiful photographs.



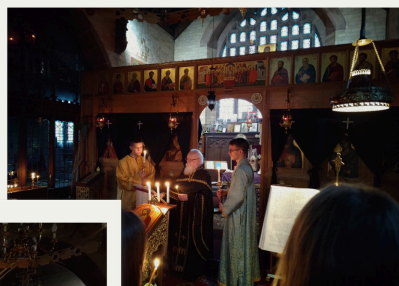
Procession around the church on Palm Sunday



The choir and congregation singing the lamentations on Holy Friday



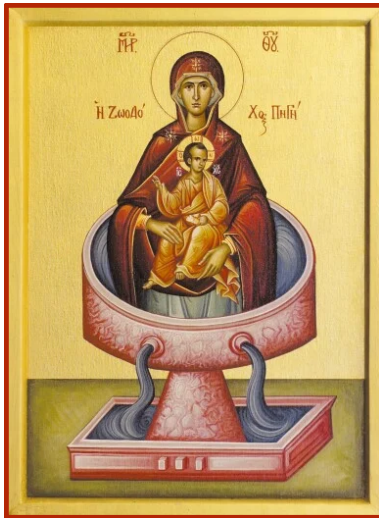
Photograph of the week!
Blessing of the branches



Twelve Gospel Readings on Holy Thursday



Please send any photographs taken during Holy Week to Fr John, or any other pictures taken throughout the years which relate to our parish and liturgical life. We are building a central archive of photographs which will be used in the Tower and to promote our church. Thank you!



Synaxarion

Theotokos of the Life Giving Spring

Outside of Constantinople, towards the district of the Seven Towers, there was in ancient times a very large and most beautiful church named in honour of the Theotokos; it had been built about the middle of the fifth century by the Emperor Leo the Great (also called "Leo of Thrace," he is commemorated on Jan. 20).

Before he became Emperor, he had encountered there a blind man, who being tormented with thirst asked him to help him find water. Leo felt compassion for him and went in search of a source of water but found none. As he became downcast, he heard a voice telling him there was water nearby. He looked again, and found none. Then he heard the voice again, this time calling him "Emperor" and telling him that he would find muddy water in the densely wooded place nearby; he was to take some water and anoint the blind

man's eyes with it. When he had done this, the blind man received his sight. After Leo became Emperor as the most holy Theotokos had prophesied, he raised up a church over the spring, whose waters worked many healings and cured maladies by the grace of the Theotokos; from this, it came to be called the "Life-giving Spring." The Church of Christ celebrates the consecration of this church on this day.

After the fall of the imperial city, this church was razed to the ground and the materials from it were used for building the mosque of Sultan Bayezid. Nothing remained of that church's ancient beauty, except for a small and paltry chapel, almost completely buried in the ruins. This chapel had twenty-five steps going down into it, and a transom window on the roof, wherefrom it received a little light. Toward the western side of the chapel was the aforementioned holy Spring, fenced about with a railing, and with fish swimming in it. Such was the condition of the Spring until 1821. Then even that little remnant was destroyed, occasioned by the uprising of the Greek nation against the Ottoman Empire; the sacred Spring was buried with it and disappeared altogether.

But in the days of Sultan Mahmud, when those subject to him were rejoicing in their freedom to practice their religion, permission was sought by the Orthodox Christian community to rebuild at least part of the chapel. Thus the work was begun on July 26, 1833. When the excavation had been made, and the foundations of the ancient church were found, there was rebuilt -- by a later writ of permission from the Sultan -- not merely a chapel of the holy Spring, but another new church, constructed upon the foundations of the ancient one. The building of this spacious, beautiful, and most majestic temple began on September 14, 1833, and the work was completed on December 30, 1834. On February 2, 1835, the Ecumenical Patriarch Constantine II, serving the Liturgy together with twelve hierarchs and a great company of clergy, as well as a boundless multitude of Christians, performed the consecration of this sacred church and dedicated it to the glory of the Mother of God. On September 6, 1955, however, it was desecrated and destroyed again by the Moslem Turks; it has been restored again, but not to the former magnificence.

The following readings and sermon have been extracted from the Archdiocese of Thyateira & Great Britain news bulletin.

To access the full bulleting, please visit: www.thyateira.org.uk.

ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΝ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΜΑ

Πράξ. ε´, 12-20

Ἐν ταῖς ἡμεραῖς ἐκεῖναις, διὰ δὲ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐγίνετο σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἐν τῷ λαῷ πολλά· καὶ ἦσαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἅπαντες ἐν τῇ στοᾷ Σολομῶντος. Τῶν δὲ λοιπῶν οὐδεὶς ἐτόλμα κολλᾶσθαι αὐτοῖς, ἀλλ´ ἐμεγάλυνεν αὐτοὺς ὁ λαός· μᾶλλον δὲ προσετίθεντο πιστεύοντες τῷ Κυρίῳ, πλήθη ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν· ὥστε κατὰ τὰς πλατείας ἐκφέρειν τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς, καὶ τιθέναι ἐπὶ κλινῶν καὶ κραβάτων, ἵνα ἐρχομένου Πέτρου κἂν ἡ σκιά ἐπισκιάσῃ τινὶ αὐτῶν. Συνήρχετο δὲ καὶ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν πέριξ πόλεων εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ, φέροντες ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ὀχλουμένους ὑπὸ πνευμάτων ἀκαθάρτων, οἵτινες ἐθεραπεύοντο ἅπαντες. Ἀναστάς δὲ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς καὶ πάντες οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ, ἢ οὕσα αἵρεσις τῶν Σαδδουκαίων, ἐπλήσθησαν ζήλου, καὶ ἐπέβαλον τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀποστόλους, καὶ ἔθεντο αὐτοὺς ἐν τηρήσει δημοσίᾳ. Ἄγγελος δὲ Κυρίου διὰ τῆς νυκτὸς ἤνοιξεν τὰς θύρας τῆς φυλακῆς, ἐξαγαγὼν τε αὐτοὺς εἶπεν, Πορευέσθε, καὶ σταθέντες λαλεῖτε ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τῷ λαῷ πάντα τὰ ῥήματα τῆς ζωῆς ταύτης.

EPISTLE READING

Acts 5: 12-20

In those days, many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ἈΝΕΣΤΗ

Χριστὸς ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν, θανάτῳ θάνατον πατήσας, καὶ τοῖς ἐν τοῖς μνήμασι, ζῶν ἡμῶν χαρισάμενος!

PASCHAL TROPARION

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life.



Christian Orthodox Thyateira Youth (COTY)
COTY is the official youth ministry of the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain, for ages 16-35.
To learn more visit: www.coty.org.uk.
Instagram: COTY_org



ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΚΟΝ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΜΑ

Ἰωάν. κ´, 19-31

Οὔσης ὀφίας τῆ ἡμέρα ἐκεῖνη τῆ μιᾶ τῶν σαββάτων, καὶ τῶν θυρῶν κεκλεισμένων ὅπου ἦσαν οἱ μαθηταὶ συνηγμένοι διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον, καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν. Καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἔδειξεν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν πλευρὰν αὐτοῦ· ἐχάρησαν οὖν οἱ μαθηταὶ ἰδόντες τὸν Κύριον. Εἶπεν οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν· Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέ με ὁ Πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς. Καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐνεφύσησε καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· Λάβετε Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον. Ἄν τινων ἀφήτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας, ἀφιένται αὐτοῖς, ἂν τινων κρατῆτε, κεκράτηνται. Θωμᾶς δέ, εἷς ἐκ τῶν δώδεκα, ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος, οὐκ ἦν μετ' αὐτῶν ὅτε ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς· ἔλεγον οὖν αὐτῶν οἱ ἄλλοι μαθηταί· Ἐωράκαμεν τὸν Κύριον. Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Ἐὰν μὴ ἴδω ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτοῦ τὸν τύπον τῶν ἥλων, καὶ βάλω τὸν δάκτυλόν μου εἰς τὸν τύπον τῶν ἥλων, καὶ βάλω τὴν χεῖρά μου εἰς τὴν πλευρὰν αὐτοῦ, οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω. Καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας ὀκτὼ πάλιν ἦσαν ἔσω οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ, καὶ Θωμᾶς μετ' αὐτῶν. Ἔρχεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῶν θυρῶν κεκλεισμένων, καὶ ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον καὶ εἶπεν· Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν. Εἶτα λέγει τῷ Θωμᾶ· φέρε τὸν δάκτυλόν σου ὧδε, καὶ ἴδε τὰς χεῖράς μου. καὶ φέρε τὴν χεῖρά σου καὶ βάλε εἰς τὴν πλευρὰν μου, καὶ μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός. Καὶ ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Θωμᾶς, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Ὁ Κύριός μου καὶ ὁ Θεός μου. Λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ὅτι ἐώρακάς με πεπίστευκας, μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες, καὶ πιστεύσαντες. Πολλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλα σημεῖα ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐνὸς πινον τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ, ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ· ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύσητε ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἔστιν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες, ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Αὐτοῦ.

GOSPEL READING

John 20: 19-31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in His side, I will not believe. Eight days later, His disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. Then He said to Thomas, Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side; do not be faithless, but believing. Thomas answered Him, My Lord and My God! Jesus said to him, Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Forgiveness of sins is one of the great gifts that our Lord, Jesus Christ has given to us through His Suffering and Resurrection. In the evening of the first Sunday, when He appeared to His disciples, He breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' This gift the Lord gave to the apostles for the salvation of the world. However, the Lord didn't give the apostles simply the power to forgive sins; He gave them a directive as well: 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' The gifts the Lord gave to the apostles then, and continues to give to His servants in the Church today, go together with a responsibility, a duty, or a task. He gives us gifts, so that we with serious commitment may use them for the salvation of the world.

The joy of the resurrection cannot take root in our hearts unless we, too, become partakers of this gift, that is, unless we, too, receive forgiveness of our sins through the Church, through our confessors. Of course, it is the Holy Spirit who ultimately forgives sins; but the Lord gave His Church the power to administer this gift through priesthood in the sacrament of confession. Forgiveness of sins doesn't happen in the abstract; it happens when we bring our repentance concretely to the Church, to the confessor.

The time between Easter and Pentecost isn't, of course, a time of lamentation; it is rather a time of joy and of expectation. If we leave behind worldly cares for a while and immerse ourselves in the atmosphere of the Resurrection of Christ, we can draw spiritual joy, strength and inspiration to continue our struggle in the midst of our daily difficulties. The world wants us to forget this joy and to draw us away from the spiritual power of the Holy Church, which in the end is the only real source of life and spiritual joy. The world wants us to stay in the state of unbelief and spiritual blindness; not to see the signs in Jesus' hands and side, and say, like St Thomas, when he finally saw Jesus risen from the dead: 'My Lord and my God!'

In the Church we live in this period also with a sense of expectation in view of Pentecost. We live like the apostles in Jerusalem, 'waiting for the promise of the Father' (Acts 1:4). The Lord said to them after His Resurrection: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. ... You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1: 5, 8). May this time of joyful expectation increase in all of us profound faith in the power of the Resurrection of Christ, in His Gospel and in the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and within us.



For your prayers

19	Meletios of France (Bp)	Laid to rest this time in 1993
20	Polycarp Bickerstaff	Chrismated this day in 1997
22	Anastasia Raneev	Baptised this day in 2018
23	David Vasile Mazalu	Baptised this day in 2017
24	Daria Maria Danda Ryan Valentin Markus Todorov	Baptised this day in 2021 Baptised this day in 2022
25	Gabriela Kate Chirac Nicholas Seaman	Baptised this day in 2012 Chrismated this day in 2004



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Our parish is a self-supporting charitable community, relying solely on the generosity of our faithful, with no supplementary funding from external bodies. We rely on your donations for everything you see in the church including small salary for the priest, and don't forget all charitable work of the church and all the fundraisings organised from the Archdiocese. All our finances are in your hands. You are the owners of everything in the church including the building and all the bills.

Please consider supporting your Parish by donating monthly via standing order:
<https://www.stbarbara.org.uk/church-membership>

If you are a UK taxpayer, please complete the Gift Aid Form alongside each donation as this allows the church to receive an additional 25p for every £1 you donate, at no extra cost to you. Please use yellow envelopes located at the entrance of the church. If you use card payment for your donations, and you like to Gift aid your payment, please put your receipt in the yellow envelope and sign it.

Thank you for your support !



Saint Barbara the Great Martyr Orthodox Church
Overleigh Cemetary, Overleigh Road, Chester, CH4 7HW
<https://www.stbarbara.org.uk/>

