



# The Tower

Saint Barbara the Great Martyr Orthodox Church

Sunday 17th May 2026

Sunday of the Blind Man

Issue 020



## Dear Brothers and Sisters,

### The Sacrament of Repentance (Confession)

From an Eastern Orthodox perspective, the sacrament of confession (often called Holy Mystery of Repentance) is rooted in a combination of Scripture, apostolic authority, and the Church's understanding of healing and restoration rather than just legal forgiveness.

#### 1. Scriptural foundation

Orthodox grounds confession primarily in Christ's giving authority to His apostles:

- In Gospel of John 20:22–23, after the Resurrection, Christ tells the apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven..." This is understood as Christ entrusting the Church with the ministry of reconciliation.
- Other passages like Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 (binding and loosing) reinforce this authority.

#### 2. Apostolic and Church continuity

The Orthodox Church sees this authority as passed down through apostolic succession. Bishops—and by extension priests—act not on their own power but as witnesses and instruments of Christ's forgiveness. Importantly, the priest is not the source of forgiveness. God forgives; the priest:

- bears witness to repentance
- offers spiritual guidance
- pronounces absolution as a sign of God's action

#### 3. Healing, not just legal pardon

A key difference in emphasis: Orthodoxy views sin less as a legal violation and more as a spiritual illness. So confession is:

- therapeutic (like spiritual medicine)
- part of a process of theosis (growing into union with God)
- aimed at restoring the person to communion with God and the Church

The priest is often described as a spiritual physician, not a judge.

#### 4. Role of repentance (metanoia)

The Greek word metanoia means a change of mind/heart. Confession is not just listing sins but:

- genuine turning toward God
- humility and honesty
- desire for transformation

Without repentance, confession is considered incomplete.

#### 5. Ecclesial (communal) dimension

Sin affects not only the individual but the whole Church. Therefore:

- confession reconciles a person to the Church community, not just privately to God
- the priest represents the Church as well as Christ

Article published in Compass, the Newsletter of Saint Peter and Saint Paul Greek Orthodox Church, Bristol

### Fr. John



## Announcements

Dear all, a few points about Confession connected to the material published above. Fr. Pancratios is available in the church every first Sunday of the month. Please, if possible, arrange it beforehand and come early, during the Matins if possible. As every christian and communicant you should participate in the Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy shouldn't be the time to do your Confession. Please look serious on the Sacraments of the Orthodox church.

- On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, on Bank Holiday Monday, you are invited to take part in a Pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Melangell. We will arrive at midday to visit the actual well for the blessing of the waters. Then, in the afternoon we will serve Vespers in the church of St. Melangell. Don't forget to bring warm clothes, a light lunch and dry shoes. The weather in Wales is unpredictable!

## Upcoming Services

<b>17 May Sun</b>	<b>10.00am</b> <b>11.00am</b>	<b>Matins</b> <b>Divine Liturgy</b>	<b>Sunday of the Blind Man</b>
20 May Wed	06:30pm 7.15pm	Vespers Catechesis	Holy Ascension
21 May Thu	10.00am 11.00am	Matins Divine Liturgy	Holy Ascension
23 May Sat	5.30pm	Great Vespers	St. Symeon the Stylite
<b>24 May Sun</b>	<b>10.00am</b> <b>11.00am</b>	<b>Matins</b> <b>Divine Liturgy</b>	<b>Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council</b>

## Announcement

Pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Melangell



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## Homily from St. John Chrysostom

Those days, therefore, dearly-beloved, which intervened between the Lord's Resurrection and Ascension did not pass by in uneventful leisure, but great mysteries were ratified in them, deep truths revealed. In them the fear of awful death was removed, and the immortality not only of the soul but also of the flesh established. In them, through the Lord's breathing upon them, the Holy Ghost is poured upon all the Apostles, and to the blessed Apostle Peter beyond the rest the care of the Lord's flock is entrusted, in addition to the keys of the kingdom. Then it was that the Lord joined the two disciples as a companion on the way, and, to the sweeping away of all the clouds of our uncertainty, upbraided them with the slowness of their timorous hearts. Their enlightened hearts catch the flame of faith, and lukewarm as they have been, are made to burn while the Lord unfolds the Scriptures. In the breaking of bread also their eyes are opened as they eat with Him: how far more blessed is the opening of their eyes, to whom the glorification of their nature is revealed than that of our first parents, on whom fell the disastrous consequences of their transgression.

- III. The Prove the Resurrection of the Flesh. And in the course of these and other miracles, when the disciples were harassed by bewildering thoughts, and the Lord had appeared in their midst and said, "Peace be unto you",<sup>3</sup> that what was passing through their hearts might not be their fixed opinion (for they thought they saw a spirit not flesh), He refutes their thoughts so discordant with the Truth, offers to the doubters' eyes the marks of the cross that remained in His hands and feet, and invites them to handle Him with careful scrutiny, because the traces of the nails and spear had been retained to heal the wounds of unbelieving hearts, so that not with wavering faith, but with most steadfast knowledge they might comprehend that the Nature which had been lain in the sepulchre was to sit on God the Father's throne.

- IV. Christ's Ascension Has Given Us Greater Privileges and Joys Than the Devil Had Taken from Us.

Accordingly, dearly-beloved, throughout this time which elapsed between the Lord's

Resurrection and Ascension, God's Providence had this in view, to teach and impress upon both the eyes and hearts of His own people that the Lord Jesus Christ might be acknowledged to have as truly risen, as He was truly born, suffered, and died. And hence the most blessed Apostles and all the disciples, who had been both bewildered at His death on the cross and backward in believing His Resurrection, were so strengthened by the clearness of the truth that when the Lord entered the heights of heaven, not only were they affected with no sadness, but were even filled with great joy. And truly great and unspeakable was their cause for joy, when in the sight of the holy multitude, above the dignity of all heavenly creatures, the Nature of mankind went up, to pass above the angels' ranks and to rise beyond the archangels' heights, and to have Its uplifting limited by no elevation until, received to sit with the Eternal Father, It should be associated on the throne with His glory, to Whose Nature It was united in the Son. Since then Christ's Ascension is our uplifting, and the hope of the Body is raised, whither the glory of the Head has gone before, let us exult, dearly-beloved, with worthy joy and delight in the loyal paying of thanks. For to-day not only are we confirmed as possessors of paradise, but have also in Christ penetrated the heights of heaven, and have gained still greater things through Christ's unspeakable grace than we had lost through the devil's malice. For us, whom our virulent enemy had driven out from the bliss of our first abode, the Son of God has made members of Himself and placed at the right hand of the Father, with Whom He lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.



## Synaxarion - St Constantine and Helen



On the twenty-first of this month we commemorate the holy, glorious, God-crowned and great sovereigns Constantine and Helen, the Equals to the Apostles.

As the earthly Sovereigns had the earthly crown in common, So now they have in common the crown celestial. On the twenty-first Constantine died with his mother.

This great and renowned sovereign of the Christians was the son of Constantine Chlorus (the ruler of the westernmost parts of the Roman empire), and of the blessed Helen. He was born in 272, in (according to some authorities) Naissus of Dardania, a city on the Hellespont. In 306, when his father died, he was proclaimed successor to his throne. In 312, on learning that Maxentius and Maximinius had joined forces against him, he marched into Italy, where, while at the head of his

troops, he saw in the sky after midday, beneath the sun, a radiant pillar in the form of a cross with the words: "By this shalt thou conquer". The following night, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him in a dream and declared to him the power of the Cross and its significance. When he arose in the morning, he immediately ordered that a labarum be made (which is a banner or standard of victory over the enemy) in the form of a cross, and he inscribed on it the Name of Jesus Christ. On the 28th of October, he attacked and mightily conquered Maxentius, who drowned in the Tiber River while fleeing. The following day, Constantine entered Rome in triumph and was proclaimed Emperor of the West by the Senate, while Licinius, his brother-in-law, ruled in the East. But out of malice, Licinius later persecuted the Christians. Constantine fought him once and again, and utterly destroyed him in 324, and in this manner he became monarch over the West and the East. Under him and because of him all persecutions against the Church ceased. Christianity triumphed and idolatry was overthrown.

In 325 he gathered the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea, which he himself personally addressed. In 324, in the ancient city of Byzantium, he laid the foundations of the new capital of his realm, and solemnly inaugurated it on May 11, 330, naming it after himself, Constantinople; since the throne of the imperial rule was transferred thither from Rome, it was named New Rome, the inhabitants of its domain were called Romans, and it was considered the continuation of the Roman Empire. Falling ill near Nicomedia, he requested to receive divine Baptism, according to Eusebius (The Life of Constantine, Book IV, 61, 62), and also according to Socrates and Sozomen; and when he had been deemed worthy of the Holy Mysteries, he reposed in 337, on May 21 or 22, the day of Pentecost, having lived sixty-five years, of which he ruled for thirty-one years. His remains were transferred to Constantinople and were deposited in the Church of the Holy Apostles, which has been built by him (see Homily XXVI on Second Corinthians by Saint John Chrysostom).

As for his holy mother, Helen, after her son had made the Faith of Christ triumphant throughout the Roman Empire, she undertook a journey to Jerusalem and found the Holy Cross on which our Lord was crucified (see Sept. 14). After this, Saint Helen, in her zeal to glorify Christ, erected churches in Jerusalem at the site of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, in Bethlehem at the cave where the Saviour was born, and another on the Mount of Olives whence He ascended into Heaven, and many others throughout the Holy Land, Cyprus, and elsewhere. She was proclaimed Augusta, her image was stamped upon golden coins, and two cities were named Helenopolis after her in Bithynia and in Palestine. Having been thus glorified for her piety, she departed to the Lord being about eighty years of age, according to some in the year 330, according to others, in 316.

*The consecration of the Orthodox Church in Shrewsbury in 1997 by Bishop Gregorios.*

*This year the community in Shrewsbury have their 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Just one year younger than us. On this picture we can see Fr. Pancratios, second from the right side, Fr. Stephen Maxfield, priest with white vestments and most interesting person....teenager on the back is the parish priest now in Shrewsbury, Fr Panteleimon. I think this picture is the one with the most beards in the world.*



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](http://www.thyateira.org.uk).

## ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΝ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΜΑ

Πράξ. ιστ´, 16-34

Ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις, ἐγένετο πορευομένων ἡμῶν εἰς προσευχὴν παιδίσκην τινὰ ἔχουσαν πνεῦμα πυθῶνος ἀπαντήσαι ἡμῖν, ἥτις ἐργασίαν πολλὴν παρεῖχε τῷ κυρίῳ αὐτῆς μαντευομένη. αὕτη κατακοιθῆσασα τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Σίλα ἐκράζε λέγουσα· οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δούλοι τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου εἰσίν, οἵτινες καταγγέλλουσιν ἡμῖν ὁδὸν σωτηρίας. τοῦτο δὲ ἐποιεῖ ἐπὶ πολλὰς ἡμέρας, διαπονηθεὶς δὲ ὁ Παῦλος καὶ ἐπιστρέψας τῷ πνεύματι εἶπε· παραγγέλλω σοι ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐξελεῖν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐξῆλθῃν αὐτῆς τῆ ὥρα. Ἴδόντες δὲ οἱ κύριοι αὐτῆς ὅτι ἐξῆλθεν ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς ἐργασίας αὐτῶν, ἐπιλαβόμενοι τὸν Παῦλον καὶ τὸν Σίλαν εἰλκυσαν εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας, καὶ προσαγαγόντες αὐτοὺς τοῖς στρατηγοῖς εἶπον· οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐκταράσσουσιν ἡμῶν τὴν πόλιν, Τουδαῖοι ὑπάρχοντες, καὶ καταγγέλλουσιν ἔθνη ἃ οὐκ ἔξεστιν ἡμῖν παραδέχεσθαι οὐδὲ ποιεῖν Ῥωμαῖοι οὖν, καὶ συνεπέστη ὁ ὄχλος κατ’ αὐτῶν, καὶ οἱ στρατηγοὶ περιρρήξαντες αὐτῶν τὰ ἱμάτια ἐκέλευον ραβδίειν, πολλὰς τε ἐπιθέντες ἀποῖσις πληγὰς ἔβαλον εἰς φυλακὴν, παραγγείλαντες τῷ δεσμοφύλακι ἀσφαλῶς τηρεῖν αὐτούς· ὃς παραγγείλαν τοιαύτην εἰληφῶς ἔβαλεν αὐτούς εἰς τὴν ἑσπερὰν φυλακὴν καὶ τοὺς πόδας αὐτῶν ἠσφαλίσατο εἰς τὸ ξύλον. Κατὰ δὲ τὸ μεσονύκτιον Παῦλος καὶ Σίλας προσευχόμενοι ὕμνου τὸν Θεόν· ἐπηκροῶντο δὲ αὐτῶν οἱ δέσμοι. ἄφνω δὲ σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας, ὥστε σαλευθῆναι τὰ θεμέλια τοῦ δεσμοτηρίου, ἀνεώχθησάν τε παραχρῆμα αἱ θύραι πάσαι καὶ πάντων τὰ δεσμὰ ἀνεθῆ. ἔξυπνος δὲ γενόμενος ὁ δεσμοφύλαξ καὶ ἰδὼν ἀνεωγμένας τὰς θύρας τῆς φυλακῆς, σπασάμενος μάχαιραν ἐμελλεν ἐαυτὸν ἀναιρεῖν, νομίζων ἐκτεφευγῆναι τοὺς δεσμίους. ἐφώνησε δὲ φωνῆ μεγάλη ὁ Παῦλος λέγων· μηδὲν πράξεις σεαυτὸν κακόν· ἅπαντες γὰρ ἔσμεν ἐνθάδε. αἰτήσας δὲ φῶτα εἰσεπήδησε, καὶ ἐντρομος γενόμενος προσέπεσε τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Σίλα, καὶ προαγαγὼν αὐτοὺς ἔξω ἔφη· κύριοι, τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ; οἱ δὲ εἶπον· πιστεύουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, καὶ σωθήσῃ σου καὶ ὁ οἶκός σου, καὶ ἐλάλησαν αὐτῷ τὸν λόγον τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ, καὶ παραλαβὼν αὐτοὺς ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ τῆς νυκτὸς ἔλουσεν ἀπὸ τῶν πληγῶν, καὶ ἔβαπτίσθη αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ αὐτοῦ πάντες παραχρῆμα, ἀναγαγὼν τε αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ παρεθίκε τράπεζαν, καὶ ἡγαλλιάσατο πανοικὴ πεπιστευκῶς τῷ Θεῷ.

## EPISTLE READING

Acts 16: 16-34

In those days, as we apostles were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. She followed Paul and us, crying, These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation. And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice.

The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely.

Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

But Paul cried with a loud voice, Do not harm yourself, for we are all here. And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, Men, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God.

## GOSPEL READING

John 9: 1-38

At that time, as Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.

We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, saying to him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam -which means Sent. So he went and washed and came back seeing.

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, Is not this the man who used to sit and beg? Some said, It is he; others said, No, but he is like him. He said, I am the man. They said to him, Then how were your eyes opened? He answered, The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight. They said to him, Where is he? He said, I do not know. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, He put clay on my eyes and I washed, and I see. Some of the Pharisees said, This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath. But others said, How can a man

who is a sinner do such signs? There was a division among them. So they again said to the blind man, What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes? He said, He is a prophet. The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, and asked them, Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see? His parents answered, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself. His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess him to be Christ he was to be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, He is of age, ask him. So

for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner. He answered, Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see. They said to him, What did he do to you?

How did he open your eyes? He answered them, I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples? And they reviled him, saying, You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from. The man answered, Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. They answered him, You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us? And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, Do you believe in the Son of man? He answered, And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him? Jesus said to him, You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you. He said, Lord, I believe; and he worshiped him.



The following sermon was written by Fr John and was published in the Archdiocese's Sunday Bulletin.

## SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Christ is risen!

Today, on the sixth Sunday after Pascha, the Church commemorates the Sunday of the Blind Man, as recorded Paralytic and the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman. In these three passages, the water acts as a symbol of Baptism, and of spiritual growth from darkness to light.

Although the Gospels describe several instances of Jesus Christ healing the blind, this story is different as the man didn't lose his sight due to an illness or accident, he was born blind. At that time, such a condition carried strong social stigma, and showing mercy or helping others was seen as a sign of weakness. This is unimaginable today but was the reality of that time. Many people wrongly believed that this condition was a punishment for sin. Even today, many people believe similar things. When Christ met the Blind man, his disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Contrary to the popular belief of the time, Christ responds "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (John 9:3-5).

The miracle also teaches us about the spiritual growth that happens to everyone who meets Christ. Christ created the man's eyes from clay and sent him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. Through this act, the man not only received physical sight, but was completely changed from darkness to light. This man changed so drastically that the people who knew him asked "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg? Some said, 'It is he.' While others said, 'No, but it is someone like him.'" (John 9:8-9). St. John Chrysostom likens Christ to the spiritual pool of Siloam where our spiritual eyes are recreated and opened again, allowing us to see the light of Christ. St Irenaeus interprets this passage as demonstration of Christ as the Divine Artificer, mimicking the act of the Creation out of mud.

This passage is important to us as Christians as we see the same spiritual transformation within ourselves. The story reveals the meaning of the Sacramental life of the church and the transition from spiritual darkness to light. We too are washed through Baptism and witness a transformation within the lives of the people around us from darkness to light. Many have witnessed lives transformed and recreated by faith, that even their relatives scarcely recognise them. Such a transformation comes when we meet Christ, and when we recognise Him.

The narrative also teaches us a very important lesson through the dialog between the Blind man and the Pharisees. In our lives we may find ourselves trapped by the spiritual blindness of pride, legalism and judgemental thoughts, and like the pharisees, we may not be able to see the Illumination in our neighbour. Even a beggar, born in darkness, met Christ, and gradually grew in faith, at first calling Him a "man", then a "prophet" and finally proclaiming Him as "the Lord" and worshiped Him. Let us imitate the Blind Man and preserve our Baptismal Illumination spotless and keep the Light of Christ always before our eyes by worshipping our Lord and God and Saviour and partaking in the Divine Gifts, the Sacraments of the Church.

Presbyter John Petkov

## For your prayers

18 May	Marioara Tobosi	Laid to rest this time in 2018
20 May	Iakobos Deakin	Baptised this day in 2001
21 May	Helen Johnson	Baptised this day in 1989
22 May	Helena Silav	Baptised this day in 2011
23 May	Darya Foster Mara Andreea Poteteas	Baptised this day in 2004 Baptised this day in 2021



## Please consider donating!

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 if 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 !



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