The Tower

Saint Barbara the Great Martyr Orthodox Church

Sunday 15th November 2026

8th Sunday of St Luke

Issue 042

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We've arrived at the Sunday marking the beginning of the Nativity Fast of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. This is the best time of year, as many of the pop songs will say! This is very true because it is the time when Our God was born and became incarnate and saved the world. For this reason the Holy Orthodox Church established this very special time for all Orthodox Christians.

I wish everyone good and spiritually profitable fast.

This week, at 5.30pm on the 20th of November, we will hold a Vigil service for the Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos into the temple. Please come and celebrate. This is an amazing feast and a liturgical preparation for Christmas. Celebrating it during the Nativity Fast marks the Liturgical prelude to the birth of Christ, and signals the very first day on which Christmas hymns are sung in church. Do not miss this great time.

As you can see from the announcement in The Tower, the applications for the 2027 summer camp are now open. If you would like your child to attend, please complete the application form. All the children who have attended in previous years have plenty of good stories to share and made many new friends. Bursaries are available, so please let me know if you need any help. No child will be left behind for any reason. This camp will be spiritually beneficial to your children. Bishop Raphael is usually present, along with a few other priests and many volunteers who help care for the children.

Our Parish feast is fast approaching. On the 6th of December we plan to have a parish lunch. The location will be confirmed shortly. It will be a 'bring and share' style lunch and will be open to everybody. It will also raise funds for the church. The suggested donation is £10 per adult. Children attend free of charge. Of course, no person will be left behind.

Since it is also the feast of St. Nicolas on this day, I heard from Father Christmas that our amazing children have been very good throughout the year and will receive presents! If you wish to help with the organisation of the parish feast and its activities, please let me know.

Last but not least I would like to draw your attention to the Christmas Giving event organised by Matthew Hunter at our church. The event will take place on the 12th of December after Vespers. The first event will be at St. Aidan's church in Manchester. I received a message from Matthew saying that the event has become very popular and that more than 15 people will be helping there. Please come and help make this event great. The fasting period is a great time to show mercy and help people in need.

Fr. John



Announcements

- We collect food at the church for the Chester Food Bank. The boxes are by the refectory door. Please bring non-perishable food items.
  Thank you very much for your generosity!

Upcoming Services

18 Nov Wednesday	6.30pm 7.15pm	Vespers Catechesis	Prophet Obadiah
20 Nov Friday	5.30pm	Vigil	Entry of the Theotokos in the Temple
21 Nov Saturday	5.30pm	Great Vespers	
15 Nov Sunday	**09.00am** **10.00am**	**Matins** **Divine Liturgy**	**9th Sunday of St Luke**

Saint Bega Youth Camp

From Orthodox teaching, to adventure activities, campers will meet new friends, have lots of fun, and learn about the Orthodox Christian Faith.

The next camp will run between Saturday 24 and Friday 30 July 2027 at the usual place, God willing. Fr Symeon has created a new website with information about the camp, which will be shared soon; in the meantime though, please, note that the applications forms are live, so you could start registering your child/ren, should they wish to join the St Bega camp this summer.

Please, also note that due to the increase of the stay from 4 to 6 nights, as well as the fees needed to pay to the campsite, this year's cost will be £330 per child, which can be paid in instalments, with the deposit of £100 due soon after confirmation of the registration. The usual bursaries should be able to help out, and we will do our best to distribute whatever donations we receive to those families, who may need it. It is important that no child misses camp on financial grounds, so please do get in touch, if you have any financial concerns or for any other matter.

Here is the link to this year's registrations for your convenience:
https://saintsophronyscamp.churchsuite.com/-/forms/5uu5qmtk

Please, also remember to update your details in churchsuite, if appropriate. This is the link to it: https://saintsophronyscamp.churchsuite.com/embed/addressbook/form

We will look forward to welcoming as many old campers as possible as well as new children, so please, spread the news to any other interested families. As always, thank you for your continuous prayers for the camp, your trust, and good wishes!

May the prayers of St Bega and all the Saints guide and guard us all!

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
Archdiocese of Thyateira & Great Britain Camping Ministries

Applications now open!



Monday 3rd – Friday 7th August 2026

For young people from
8 to 18 years old*

Where?

ROCK UK Whithaugh Park,
Newcastleton,
Scottish Borders, TD9 0TY

* Entering school years 5 to 13 (England), P6 to S6 (Scotland) in September 2026



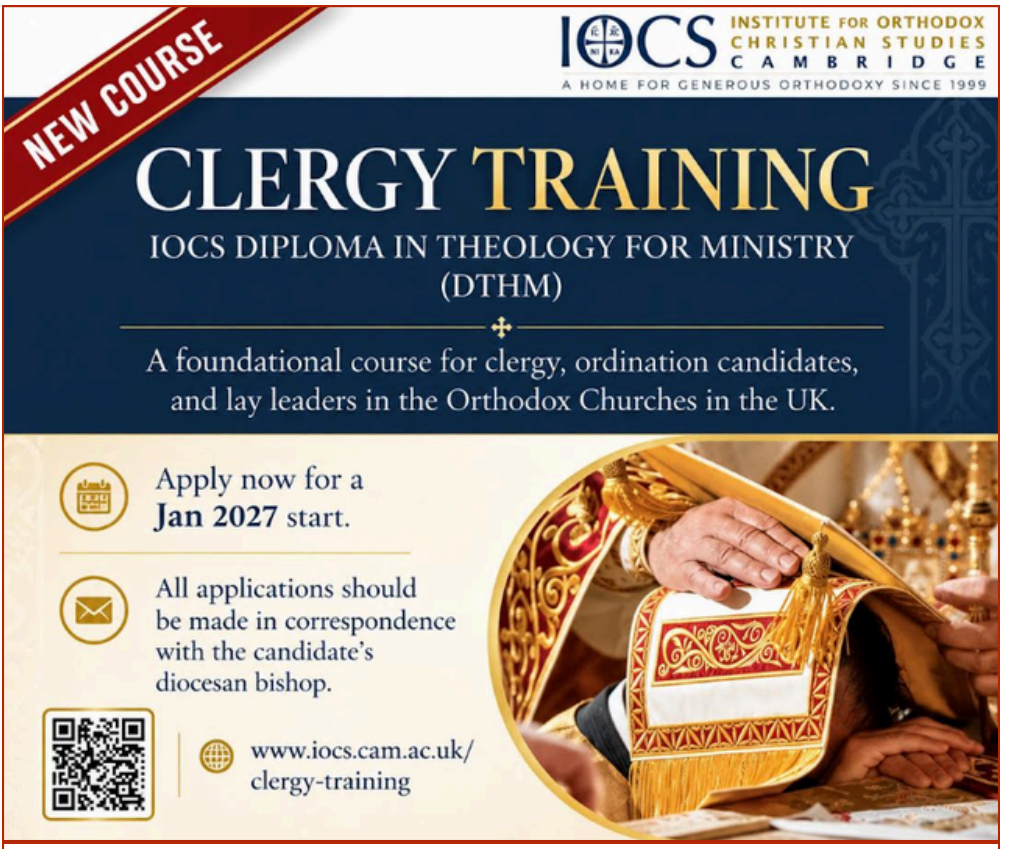
For information and pre-registration please visit the following link:
https://thyateirayouthcamps.org.uk/youth-camps/

Please refer any queries to: Presvytera Konstantina Menne
Niki-Marie Jansson
stbegayouthcamp@gmail.com



Chester Christmas Giving - Saturday 12th December 2026

A message from Matthew: We're currently suffering from success with too many people wanting to volunteer. We already have 14+ people and I think it could get quite overwhelming for a homeless person. I'd say that potentially it's for the best if we just stick to our own parish. I'm planning Chester's giving for the 12th of December on Saturday. Obviously it's still cross parish so we can share resources but I think it might be for the best if no one from Chester comes on the 28th. Thank you for understanding.



With the blessing and support of His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain, the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies (IOCS), Cambridge, is inviting applications for its new two-year Diploma in Theology for Ministry, beginning in January 2027.

The diploma is designed for Orthodox clergy, candidates for ordination and lay leaders in the United Kingdom and Ireland. It combines Orthodox theological study with practical training and parish mentorship.

Please consider whether the programme could support your own continuing formation, and share the course details with your parish. It may be of interest to parishioners, including young adults who would like to deepen their understanding of the Orthodox faith and explore ways to serve the Church.

If someone in your parish is interested in applying, and parish funds allow, you may wish to consider contributing towards their course fees.

Prospective applicants should speak with their diocesan bishop before applying.

Course details and application information: www.iocs.cam.ac.uk/clergy-training

Entrance of the Theotokos to the Temple

Today is the prelude of God's pleasure and the proclamation of man's salvation.
The Virgin is clearly made manifest in the temple of God and foretells Christ to all.
Let us also cry out to her with mighty voice, "Hail, fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation."

The Feast of the Entrance into the Temple of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is celebrated on November 21 each year. The Feast commemorates when as a young child, the Virgin Mary entered the Temple in Jerusalem.

Protevangelion Story
The birth and early life of the Virgin Mary is not recorded in the Gospels or other books of the New Testament, however this information can be found in a work dating from the second century known as the Book of James or Protevangelion.

When Mary was three years old, Joachim and Anna decided that the time had come to fulfill their promise and to offer her to the Lord. Joachim gathered the young girls of the neighborhood to form an escort, and he made them go in front of Mary, carrying torches. Captivated by the torches, the young child followed joyfully to the Temple, not once looking back at her parents nor weeping as she was parted from them.

The holy Virgin ran toward the Temple, overtaking her attendant maidens and threw herself into the arms of the High Priest Zacharias, who was waiting for her at the gate of the Temple with the elders. Zacharias blessed her saying, "It is in you that He has glorified your name in every generation. It is in you that He will reveal the Redemption that He has prepared for His people in the last days."

Then, Zacharias brought the child into the Holy of Holies—a place where only the High Priest was permitted to enter once a year on the Day of Atonement. He placed her on the steps of the altar, and the grace of the Lord descended upon her. She arose and expressed her joy in a dance as wonder seized all who saw this happen.

The Virgin Mary dwelt in the Temple for nine years until, reaching an age for marriage, she was taken from the Temple by the priests and elders and entrusted to Joseph as the guardian of her virginity.

The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple signifies her total dedication to God and her readiness for her future vocation as the Mother of the Incarnate Lord. This is a feast of anticipation. As honor is shown to Mary, the faithful are called to look forward to the Incarnation of Christ, celebrated in a little more than a month by the Feast of the Nativity on December 25.

Icon of the Feast



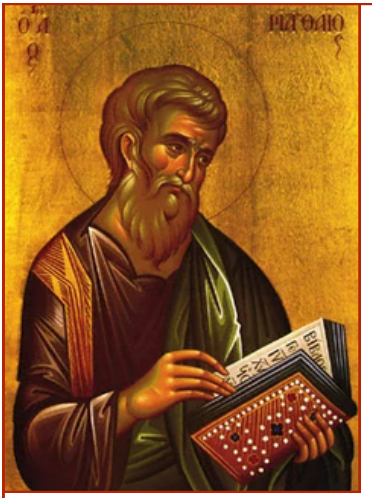
The icon of the feast tells the story of Mary's entry into the Temple. The High Priest, Zacharias, is in his priestly robes standing on the step of the Temple. His arms are outstretched, ready to greet and receive the Virgin. Mary is shown as a small child, standing before Zacharias with her arms reaching up to him.

In some icons the young maidens who served as her escort are depicted standing behind her. Also, we see her parents, Joachim and Anna, offering their child to God and His divine service.

In the upper center portion of the icon, the Virgin is seated on the steps of the Holy of Holies. An angel is there, attending to the one chosen by God to bring the Savior into the world.

Orthodox Christian Celebration of the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos
The Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom which is conducted on the morning of the Feast and preceded by a Matins (Orthros) service. A Great Vespers is conducted on the evening before the day of the Feast. Scripture readings for the Feast are the following: At Vespers: Exodus 40:1-5,_9-10, 16, 34-35; I Kings 7:51, 8:1, 3-4, 6-7, 9-11; Ezekiel 43:27—44:4. At the Matins: Luke 1:39-49, 56. At the Divine Liturgy: Hebrews 9:1-7; Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28.

source: *https://www.goarch.org/entrance-theotokos*



Synaxarion

St Matthew the Apostle & Evangelist

This Apostle, who was also called Levi, was the son of Alphaeus and had Galilee as his homeland. A publican before being called by Christ, he became one of the Twelve Apostles, and an Evangelist. While still in Palestine, he wrote his Gospel first in Hebrew, being also the first of all to write the Gospel. When he is depicted in icons, there is portrayed next to him the likeness of a man, one of the symbolic living creatures mentioned by Ezekiel (1.10), which, as Saint Irenaeus writes, is a symbol of our Saviour's Incarnation.

Apolytikion of Apostle and Evangelist Matthew
Third Tone
O Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, intercede to our merciful God, that He may grant our souls forgiveness of sins.

Kontakion of Apostle and Evangelist Matthew
Fourth Tone
When thou didst cast away the publican's balance and wast united to the yoke of uprightness, then didst thou prove a merchant of great excellence, one that gathered in the wealth of the wisdom of Heaven; for this cause, the word of truth thou didst herald, O Matthew, and didst arouse the souls of sluggish men by signifying the dread day of reckoning.

Nativity Fast Begins

The Nativity Fast is one of four main fast periods throughout the ecclesiastical year. Beginning on November 15 and concluding on December 24, the Nativity Fast gives individuals the opportunity to prepare for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior in the Flesh on December 25. By abstaining from certain food and drink, particularly from meat, fish, dairy products, olive oil, and wine, as well as focusing more deeply on prayer and almsgiving, we can find that the primary aim of fasting is to make us conscious of our dependence upon God.



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

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

ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΌΝ ΑΝΆΓΝΩΣΜΑ

Ἔφεσ. β΄, 14-22

Ἀδελφοί, Χριστός ἐστιν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἕν, καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν τῇ σαρκί αὐτοῦ, τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν, καταργήσας· ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν ἑαὐτῷ εἰς ἕνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον, ποιῶν εἰρήνην, καὶ ἀποκαταλλάξῃ τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους ἐν ἑνὶ σώματι τῷ Θεῷ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἀποκτείνας τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν αὐτῷ· καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσατο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ τοῖς ἐγγύς· ὅτι δι' αὐτοῦ ἔχομεν τὴν προσ- αγωγὴν οἱ ἀμφότεροι ἐν ἑνὶ Πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα. Ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι, ἀλλὰ συμπολῖται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὔξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν Κυρίῳ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν Πνεύματι.

EPISTLE READING

Eph. 2: 14-22

Brethren, Christ is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΜΟΝ ΑΠΟΛΥΤΊΚΙΟΝ

Ἦχος βαρὺς

Κατέλυσας τῷ Σταυρῷ σου τὸν θάνατον· ἠνέῳξας τῷ ληστῇ τὸν παράδεισον· τῶν μυροφόρων τὸν θρῆνον μετέβαλες, καὶ τοῖς σοῖς ἀποστόλοις κηρύττειν ἐπέταξας, ὅτι ἀνέστης, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεός, παρέχων τῷ κόσμῳ τὸ μέγα ἔλεος.

RESURRECTION APOLYTIKION

Plagal of the 3nd Mode

You abolished death by your Cross, you opened Paradise to the Thief, you transformed the Myrrhbearers' lament, and ordered your Apostles to proclaim that you had risen, O Christ God, granting the world your great mercy.

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

Λουκ. ι΄, 25-37

Τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ, νομικός τις ἀνέστη ἐκπειράζων αὐτὸν καὶ λέγων· διδάσκαλε, τί ποιήσας ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω; ὁ δὲ εἶπε πρὸς αὐτόν· ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τί γέγραπται; πῶς ἀναγινώσκεις; ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· ἀγαπήσεις Κύριον τὸν Θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας σου, καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν· εἶπε δὲ αὐτῷ· ὀρθῶς ἀπεκρίθης· τοῦτο ποίει καὶ ζήσῃ. ὁ δὲ θέλων δικαιοῦν ἑαυτὸν εἶπε πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν· καὶ τίς ἐστί μου πλησίον; ὑπολαβὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ἄνθρωπός τις κατέβαινεν ἀπὸ Ἰερουσαλὴμ εἰς Ἰεριχώ, καὶ λῃσταῖς περιέπεσεν· οἳ καὶ ἐκδύσαντες αὐτὸν καὶ πληγὰς ἐπιθέντες ἀπῆλθον ἀφέντες ἡμιθανῆ τυγχάνοντα. κατὰ συγκυρίαν δὲ ἱερεύς τις κατέβαινεν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ἀντιπαρῆλθεν. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Λευΐτης γενόμενος κατὰ τὸν τόπον, ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ἀντιπαρῆλθε. Σαμαρείτης δέ τις ὁδεύων ἦλθε κατ᾽ αὐτόν, καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, καὶ προσελθὼν κατέδησε τὰ τραύματα αὐτοῦ ἐπιχέων ἔλαιον καὶ οἶνον, ἐπιβιβάσας δὲ αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ ἴδιον κτῆνος ἤγαγεν αὐτὸν εἰς πανδοχεῖον καὶ ἐπεμελήθη αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν αὔριον ἐξελθών, ἐκβαλὼν δύο δηνάρια ἔδωκε τῷ πανδοχεῖ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἐπιμελήθητι αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὅ τι ἂν προσδαπανήσῃς, ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ ἐπανέρχεσθαί με ἀποδώσω σοι. τίς οὖν τούτων τῶν τριῶν πλησίον δοκεῖ σοι γεγονέναι τοῦ ἐμπεσόντος εἰς τοὺς λῃστάς; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὁ ποιήσας τὸ ἔλεος μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ. εἶπεν οὖν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· πορεύου καὶ σὺ ποίει ὁμοίως.

GOSPEL READING

Luke 10: 25-37

At that time, a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, What is written in the law? How do you read? And he answered, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. And he said to him, You have answered right; do this, and you will live. But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor? Jesus replied, A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, The one who showed mercy on him. And Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise.



ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑ ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΚΟΥ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΜΑΤΟΣ

Παραστατικότατη η σημερινή ευαγγελική περικοπή, και συνάμα συγκινητική και διδακτική. Είναι η περικοπή του καλού Σαμαρείτη. Είναι η περικοπή, με την οποία ο Κύριος Ιησούς Χριστός μας δείχνει πόσο ελεήμονες και φιλάνθρωποι πρέπει να είμαστε όλοι μας και πόση αγάπη πρέπει να νοι- ώθουμε προς τον πλησίον. Κάποιος νομικός ρώτησε τον Χριστό, τι πρέπει να κάνει για να κληρονο- μήσει την αιώνια Βασιλεία και ο Χριστός διηγείται την ιστο- ρία ενός ανθρώπου που ληστεύθηκε, κακοποιήθηκε και κατέληξε στον δρόμο ημιθανής. Τον προσπέρασε ένας ιερέας και ένας λευΐτης, αλλά έσπευσε να τον βοηθήσει κάποιος Σαμαρείτης, ο οποίος θέτοντας τον εαυτό του σε μεγάλους κινδύ- νους, ξόδεψε, περπάτησε, καθυστέρησε και έδειξε όχι τόσο ποιός είναι, αλλά ποιός γίνεται πλησίον.

Πλησίον για τον χριστιανό δεν είναι μόνον ο στενός συγγενής, ο γείτονας, ο συνάδελφος, ο συνερ- γάτης, αλλά, δυνάμει, πλησίον μπορεί να είναι και ο ξένος, ο αλλοεθνής, ο εχθρός. Κάθε άνθρωπος μπορεί να γίνει πλησίον γι' αυτόν που βρίσκεται σε δύσκολη θέση. Είναι ενδεικτική η ερώτηση του Χριστού προς τον νομικό: «Ποιός από τους τρείς (ιερέα, λευΐτη, Σαμαρείτη) αποδείχθηκε πλησίον εκείνου που έπεσε στους ληστές;» Και ο νομικός απάντησε: «Αυτός που τον σπλαχνίστηκε», επιβεβαιώνοντας συγχρόνως ότι όποιος πιστεύει στον Θεό της αγάπης και της θυσίας, σέβεται και τον κατ' εικόνα Θεού πλασμένο άνθρωπο και όχι μόνον δεν αδιαφορεί γι' αυτόν, αλλά τον αγαπά, όπως τον εαυτό του. Και είναι αυτή του η αγάπη εκχύλισμα αγαπώσης καρδίας, έκφραση πνευματικής καλλιέργειας, έκφραση ανιδιοτελούς αγάπης προς τον πλησίον που αφετηρία έχει την αγάπη προς τον Θεόν, αφε- νός, και την υγιή αγάπη προς τον εαυτό μας, αφετέρου.

Ο νομικός του σημερινού Ευαγγελίου, που νόμιζε ότι τηρούσε «εκ νεότητός του» τις εντολές, αδυνατεί να κατανοήσει, γιατί η αγάπη του Χριστού ξεπερνά την εξωτερική συμπεριφορά και αγγίζει το βαθύτατο είναι και την καρδιά του ανθρώπου. Μόνον, όταν κάποιος διαθέτει καθαρή καρδιά και πεφωτισμένο νου, μπορεί να προσφέρει ανιδιοτελώς στον πλησίον. Στην άσκηση βέβαια της φιλανθρωπίας χρειάζεται μεγάλη προσοχή. Πρέπει να γίνεται χωρίς εγωισμούς και τυμπανοκρουσίες με σεβασμό στο πρόσωπο του έχοντος την ανάγκη. Και είναι αυτή η ανιδιοτελής και διακριτική αγάπη που μας εισάγει διάπλατα στην βασιλεία του Θεού, στην βασιλεία των Ουρανών.

Κάποτε, διαβάζουμε στον Συναξαριστή, ήταν κάποιος πλούσιος που δεν φημιζόταν για την ελεημοσύνη τους προς τους ανθρώπους. Σε ένα όνειρό του είδε ότι στην επίμονη παράκληση να βοηθήσει τους φτωχούς, πέταξε με θυμό ένα καρβέλι ψωμί. Και όταν πέθανε, είδε, ότι αυτή του η ενέργεια, έστω και με θυμό, ήταν αρκετή για να γείρει η πλάστιγγα προς την μεριά των αγγέλων και να κερδίσει τον Παράδεισο. Ήταν τόσο αληθινό και συνταρακτικό το όνειρό του αυτό που όταν ξύπνησε, άλλαξε τρόπο ζωής. Μοίρασε ό,τι είχε στους φτωχούς και αναχώρησε στην έρημο. Αφιέρωσε την ζωή του στον Θεό και έζησε το υπόλοιπο της ζωής του με νηστεία και προσευχή. Όταν δε ήρθε η ώρα να παραδώσει την ψυχή του, άγγελοι Κυρίου την παρέλαβαν και την παρουσίασαν ενώπιον του θρόνου του Θεού.

Ας προσπαθήσουμε λοιπόν και εμείς να είναι η ζωή μας γεμάτη από έργα ανιδιοτελούς αγάπης, εμπνεόμενοι πάντοτε από την αγάπη του Θεού προς τον άνθρωπο και το έλεος του Κυρίου στον καθένα από εμάς.

Αρχιμ. του Οικουμενικού Θρόνου Θεωνάς Μπακάλης

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Today is the beginning of the Christmas fast, a time of spiritual renewal for the building up of our hearts into the temple of God, for we were created to become the dwelling place of inexhaustible Divine life. Abstaining from certain foods helps bridle the passions and curb self-will, in order to devote ourselves to works of love of God and neighbour. In the keeping the two-fold commandment of love (cf. Luke 10:27) is found eternal life, as Christ confirms to the lawyer in today's Gospel saying, 'do this and you will live' (Luke 10:28).

Christ is our example in all things and shows the way to life. He showed Himself to be humble, self-emptying love. He did not come down to us to 'please Himself' (Rom.15:3) and to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him (cf. John 6:38). The more attached we are to our own will, the less we are able to love. Pride and self-will yield the fruit of division destroying life with others and with God, whereas self-denial, the key precondition of love, binds people together and yields peace: 'Everyone who renounces his own will before God and other people will always be at peace in his soul; but the man who likes to have his own way will never know peace' (Archim. Sophrony: St Silouan, the Athonite p. 312).

Formerly we were divided against one another and separated from God by sin, but now Christ is become our peace, healing our divisions through His kenotic love, dying for us on the Cross, for 'the chastisement for our peace was upon Him' (Isa. 53:5). Healed by His rich mercy and great love - inasmuch that even as his enemies dead in trespasses, has He made us alive together with Him (cf. Eph. 2:4-5) - He is our peace, for He has restored us. He has reconciled not only gentiles and Jews, but all people with each other and with God. Christ has made us, in Him, 'one new man' with 'access by one Spirit to the Father' (Eph. 2:15,18).

For this renewal we strive, 'day by day' (2 Cor. 4:16), co-operating with God's grace for the "new man" to be born in us and to know Christ as 'all and in all' (Col. 3:11). We struggle to live 'in Christ' to become 'a new creation' (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17) and to know His peace. The content of the struggle is the keeping of the commandment of love which is only possible through daily repentance. Christ's death has abolished hostility and division and His resurrection has built us up into one family of God, knitting us together into the structure of His household for each person to become 'a holy temple', 'for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit' (Eph. 2:21,22).

To appropriate the gift of God, to know 'the peace from on high' and 'the salvation of our souls' for which we petition in the Divine Liturgy's Litany of Peace, we must like the Samaritan of today's gospel, extend selfless love to others, without prejudice or condition for, "He who does not love his enemies does not know God" (Archim. Sophrony: St Silouan the Athonite p.105). Throughout the 40-day fast may we keep at the forefront of our minds what the Samaritan did and 'do likewise' (Luke 10:37); that is, for the love of God, take care of those whom Christ's peace has made fellow citizens with us of the household of God and, as Christ's brethren and members of one another, be neighbour to all and forgive all.

With repentance by which we love God and with forgiveness by which we love our fellow, we can build up the temple of God in us and others, by His good will and grace, and become His abode and truly know, with glory to God, that Christ, the peace from on high, is become the peace on the earth of our hearts.

Protopresbyter John Hookway

For your prayers

11 Nov	Darius Theodor Pedra George Kakouri Anthony & Irina	Baptised this day in 2017 Laid to rest this time in 2010 Wedded this day in 2007
12 Nov	Boris Tony Dimitrov	Baptised this day in 2022
14 Nov	Timofej Kaliakin Stephanie Johnson	Baptised this day in 2021 Laid to rest this time 2002
16 Nov	Kevin Stefan Cicu	Baptised this time in 2019
20 Nov	Jessica Maria Cicu Eleanor Ioannou Gregorios of T&GB *(AB)*	Baptised this day in 2021 Laid to rest this time in 2017 Laid to rest this time in 2019

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Thank you for your continous support !

Author: Fr John
Editor: Magdalena-Melangell Andic
Saint Barbara the Great Martyr Orthodox Church
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