

«ΛΥΧΝΟΣ ΤΟΙΣ ΠΟΙΣ ΜΟΥ Ο ΝΟΜΟΣ ΣΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΦΩΣ ΤΑΙΣ ΤΡΙΒΟΙΣ ΜΟΥ» ΨΑΛΜ 118, 105

# PASCHA

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# ΛΥΧΝΟΣ

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**Δ**εν υπάρχει τίποτα πιο βαρύ και οδυνηρό στη ζωή μας από το θάνατο. Δεν θέλουμε ούτε να τον σκεφθούμε. Δεν ταιριάζει στη φύση μας, γιατί ο Θεός μας έπλασε άφθαρτους. Η Αγ. Γραφή μας πληροφορεί «**φθόνω δὲ διαβόλου θάνατος εἰσηλθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον**» (Σοφ. Σολ. β' 24). Δηλαδή ο φθόνος του διαβόλου μας έρριξε στην αμαρτία και στη φθορά.

Μα η αγάπη του Θεού δεν μας άφησε εκεί. Γι'αυτό ήλθε ο Χριστός στο κόσμο. Έγινε άνθρωπος σαν και μας. «**Εγεύσατο θανάτου, ἀλλ' ἦν τοῦτο τοῦ θανάτου θάνατος**» (Κύριλλος Αλεξ.) Ο Κύριός μας εγεύθη το θάνατο, αλλ' ο θάνατός Του, εθανάτωσε τον θάνατο.

Όταν η θεωμένη ψυχή του Σωτήρα μας Χριστού κατέβηκε στον Άδη, ο κόσμος των νεκρών συγκλονίστηκε. Αντίκρυσαν έναν παράδοξο νεκρό. Ένα νεκρό γεμάτο φως και ζωή. Παντοδύναμο, έναν «**νεκρό ζωαρχικότατο**». Στη θέα Του, ο Άδης έβγαλε βαθύ αναστεναγμό και ελευθέρωσε τις φυλακισμένες από αιώνες ψυχές. (Από την υμνολογία της Α' Ανάστασης).

Το Σώμα του Χριστού δεν ήταν σαν οποιοδήποτε άλλο νεκρό. Ήταν νεκρό μεν αφού είχε χωρισθεί από τη ψυχή, αλλά παρέμενε αχώριστα ενωμένο με τη θεότητα. Σώμα «**κατάστικτον τοῖς μῶλωψι καὶ πανσθενουργόν**» (Καν. Μεγ. Σαββάτου). Γεμάτο από πληγές αλλά και παντοδύναμο.

Η Νίκη, το ξεπέραςμα του θανάτου, έγινε με το θάνατο του Αθανάτου Λόγου του Θεού. Ο θάνατος του Χριστού λέγει ο π. Γεώργιος Φλωρόφσκυ «**είναι ο εκούσιος θάνατος Ενός που ο ίδιος είναι Ζωή Αιώνιος, που είναι αληθινά η Ανάσταση και η Ζωή, και για τούτο ένας Αναστάσιμος θάνατος**».

Εμείς οι πιστοί που αποτελούμε το Σώμα του Χριστού, μέσα στην Εκκλησία ζούμε αυτό το ξεπέραςμα του θανάτου, εφόσον βέβαια η ζωή μας είναι συμμετοχή στη ζωή του Χριστού. Για τους πιστούς η Ανάσταση του Κυρίου δεν είναι απλά ένα γεγονός του παρελθόντος. Είναι κυρίως μια πραγματικότητα που βιούται και επιβεβαιώνεται στο παρόν, στη ζωή του καθενός.

Από το Μυστήριο του Αγ. Βαπτίσματος, μέσα στην αγία κολυμβήθρα, εμείς οι βαπτισμένοι στο όνομα της Αγ. Τριάδος, συνθαπτόμαστε με το Χριστό, μετέχουμε στο θάνατό Του. Όστε όπως ακριβώς ο Χριστός ανεστήθη έτσι και μείς να αναστηθούμε στη νέα, ενάρετη και αγία ζωή. Συνεχίζοντας να ζούμε τη ζωή της Εκκλησίας, οι πιστοί θεωρούμε τους εαυτούς μας «**νεκρούς μὲν τῇ ἁμαρτία, ζῶντας δὲ τῷ Θεῷ**» (Ρωμ. στ' 11), πεθαμένους μεν ως προς την αμαρτία, ζωντανούς δε για τον Θεό.

## Το Ξεπέραςμα του Θανάτου



Αυτό είναι το μεγαλείο του Θεού, που με την Ανάσταση του Υιού Του και Θεού ημών, ανασταίνει και μας και τον κόσμο. Αυτό είναι και το μεγαλείο του ανθρώπου του Θεού που ζει τον εσταυρωμένο βίο και ακολουθεί το Χριστό στην Ανάσταση και τη δόξα Του.

Μέσα σ' ένα κόσμο που έχει στερηθεί την ελπίδα της ζωής και η σκιά του θανάτου καλύπτει τη ζωή των ανθρώπων αποπνέοντας κατάθλιψη και φόβο, υπάρχουν και οι άνθρωποι του Θεού που θάνατος δεν μπορεί να τους αγγίξει, «**θάνατος αὐτοῦ οὐκέτι κυριεύει**» (Ρωμ. στ' 9). Ο θάνατος δεν μπορεί να τους καταβάλλει. Δεν είναι οι άνθρωποι του φόβου και της απάτης αλλά του θάρρους και της Αλήθειας.

Είναι οι αναστημένοι άνθρωποι που σκορπίζουν γύρω τους φως και χαρά κι ελπίδα. Αυτοί από τώρα νικούν τη φθορά του χρόνου και βρίσκονται στην αιωνιότητα. Το έχει πει ο Κύριος «**Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί Με ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον, καὶ εἰς κρίσιν οὐκ ἔρχεται, ἀλλὰ μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν**» (Ιω. ε' 24). Η μετάβαση από τον θάνατο στη ζωή έχει συντελεσθεί και η κρίση έχει γίνει για όποιον δέχεται το Λόγο του Θεού και πιστεύει σ' Αυτόν.

Η Ορθόδοξος Εκκλησία μας είναι η Εκκλησία της Αναστάσεως. Κάθε Κυριακή όλο το χρόνο, οι Ορθόδοξοι γιορτάζουμε την Ανάσταση. Τη νέκρωση του Άδου, την «**απαρχή μιας άλλης βιοτής**» της αιωνίου (Καν. Πάσχα).

# CHRIST IS RISEN WITH US!

## PASCHA – Passage to Life Eternal

**O**ur Lord Jesus Christ by His Resurrection achieved a spectacular victory for the human race. We were under the power of death, and He led us to **the true life**. We lived in the dark, and all kinds of sin, deception and despair, and He led us from “the darkness to **His spectacular light**” (1 Pet 2:9). His power is summarised by the last words He said to His Disciples, “**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth**” (Matt 18:28). He asked them to preach the Gospel to the ends of the world. Missionaries are preaching it now in Africa, Asia, even the islands of the Pacific. Who ever had the courage to ask his followers to live and preach exactly what he told them? All who follow Him, keep His commands as He told them. Exactly. Some do more than expected! What great man on earth promised his people, he will be with them forever? No one. Christ alone did promise exactly that, and kept His promise, “**and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age**” (Matt 28:20).

As we worship and kiss the icon of the Resurrection, we shudder at the earthquake which the Victor of death has brought to our own personal existence and to the whole world. We feel His powerful hand gripping our own flabby one, pulling us up from our atrocious state

of slavery to the freedom of the children of God, saying – “**Stand fast therefore, in the liberty in which Christ has made us free and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage**” (Gal 5:1).

If one were to gather all the victories of the world together, they could not possibly equate to the magnificent and glorious victory of the Resurrection of Christ. All human victories divide the people, and most of them result in greater enmities and even wars. Only the victory of Christ brings together and joins people with one another. It leaves no defeated, but only victors!

All battles and wars waged by men on earth result in widespread death of people and despair. Christ waged war against the devil and all the evil powers in the world; His only purpose to save man. Many victorious leaders and generals spread death to their enemies, but they are shivering when facing their own death. In the victory of Christ what happened was something grandiose and unique. He defeated death and converted it to **immortality**. And whilst He Himself was free from sin, and immortal, He delivered Himself to death, “and suffered for us” (1 Pet 2:21), making us the corruptible, **Incorruptible**. But the great threat to humanity was defeated, as “death was swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54). With the Resurrection of Christ, **death** was crushed to smithereens! He no longer has any power or strength. He may still be in existence, but no longer is he eternal. We are still dying, but no longer forever. In any case, its abolition is fixed – at the time of Judgment. What is more important, is that the Resurrected and Living Lord, has abolished **Spiritual death**, the one that is the cause of all sin. Because with His blood, “**He Himself is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world**” (1 John 2:2). And whoever takes this unique medicine, will hear the saving word, “**your sins are forgiven**” (Matt 9:2).

The glorious victory of Jesus Christ attained on the Cross and His Resurrection, is offered to every one of us. Christ does not impose it on anybody, but he leaves people free to make their own choice, to accept it or deny it. Those who accept it, He fills them with unbelievable joy and soul satisfaction. With His Resurrection He did not help us to cross a raging river or a sea crossing. Instead, He helped us **Cross from death into Life!**

The Resurrected Christ becomes our own resurrection, since He joins the souls He raises from the dead. He gives us **Life Eternal**, and raises us to the brilliance and beauty of the Angels, and makes us **heirs of His Heavenly Kingdom!**



There is no greater or more important event in the history of the world, as the **Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ**. It is this pre-eminent event that differentiates Christianity from the other religions. Their leaders are all human, but that of the Christians is the Resurrected Jesus Christ.

# THE DOOR TO ETERNITY!

Jesus Christ died on a Cross on the Hill of Golgotha, on the site where the body of Adam was buried. His death was unbelievably painful and shameful. Such was the death the Jewish people prepared for their Messiah! His death was the **"ransom"** for the world, and therefore **necessary for our salvation**. In a world immersed in sin following the fall of the original man, what was needed was a sacrificial act, one that only a pained and shamed God would be able to offer. The answer to the question is given by the Cross of Christ. His love for us goes beyond all tribulations, afflictions and difficulties, and reaches to the very end of time. It goes as far as death. On the Cross, Christ carries all of our sins – from the time of Adam till the end of the world ("He was wounded because of our lawlessness, and became sick because of our sins... and by His bruise we are healed" – see Isaiah 53:3-5).

## The expiating sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross, gave us blessings:

1. The restoration of a peaceful relationship between God and man, was based on the love of Jesus Christ for His Father and for man.
2. The expiating sacrifice of Jesus Christ was the cause of the forgiveness of our sins. **"He Himself is the expiation (i.e. merciful forgiveness) of our sins"** (1 John 2:2). Apostle Paul says "we were enemies, and we were reconciled to God, through the death of His Son (Rom 5:10).
3. The forgiveness of sins is an exclusive power given to Christ by God the Father, as reward for the salvation of the world, **"the Son of man, has power to forgive sins on earth"** (Matt 9:6).

## The primary task of the Resurrected Jesus Christ was the Moral Restoration of the fallen man

This involved repairing all the damage and deficiencies caused by the separation of man from God, which brought about the loss of the Grace of God from the human person. Man lost many of his divine qualities, lost many of his mental powers and became alienated from himself. Jesus Christ grafted the fallen human nature onto His own. This had the effect of passing the divine elements of the personality of Jesus Christ onto the fallen man, who slowly became transformed into an icon of his lost divinity.

In the Old Testament we read that God promises to transplant into the fallen man **"a new heart of flesh,"** instead of the heart of stone he had, and so make him responsive to His Spirit and His love (Ezek 11:19). Jesus Christ used the same method of transplanting a new heart to man, in His effort to reconstruct the whole person. This led Him to His next task:

## The Correction and Therapy of the Human Will

1. Man had lost the freedom to make his own decisions, since his willpower was weak, as it was controlled

by sin. His tendency was to always select a way of thinking, living and behaviour, contrary to the Will of God. All these defects were eliminated by the great power of Jesus Christ, which He transferred to the willing and accepting humans.

2. The restoration of normal relations between man and God, by means of obedience. The sin of the will of fallen man, was an expression of the disobedience, injected into him by the Devil.
3. Following the separation of man from God, there followed the gradual separation of men from one another (see Eph 2:11-13, 14-17). The love of Jesus removed the wall of hate between them.
1. The abolition of sin. The sin of the original man was the sin of the will, which led to his spiritual death, i.e., permanent separation from God. Jesus Christ with His Resurrection, **"takes away the sin of the world"** (John 1:29). With this act, Jesus accepted willingly the death of His body.

## The Perfection and Deification of Man

1. The victory of Jesus Christ against Sin, Death and the Devil, was a gift to the whole human race. This is an article of our Orthodox Creed: "I expect the Resurrection of the dead". **Everyone will be resurrected, on the day of Judgement.**
2. All humans will become **Immortal**, they will live forever!
3. They will also be **Incarnable**, death will be no more.
4. **Eternal Happiness** (Μακαριότητα) of life, will be given to genuine members of the Church, who have attained a state of union with Christ (theosis). They will be taking part in the Communion Table of the Holy Trinity – the ultimate blessing for the human being.
5. There will also be an Eternal Life of Misfortune and Suffering! Among those who will be resurrected, there will be a number of people (unknown), who with their own free will and selection, did not pursue salvation through Jesus Christ, and never tried to live a Christian life. Their fate is permanent separation from God, and their life will be "an eternal spiritual death"!

The **Sacrifice** and **Resurrection** of our Lord Jesus Christ **was meant to save every person**, in the past, present and future. It consists of the **free and sincere obedience** of the human will to that of Jesus Christ, and the powerful effect of **Divine Grace** of the risen Lord!



# Saint Nikephoros

## *An Angel Among Lepers*

Born in 1890 in the village of Serikari, Crete, Nicholas Tzanakakis was soon orphaned and entered into the care of his grandfather. At just thirteen, he moved to Chania to work in a barbershop. It was there where the first signs of leprosy showed up.

As leprosy was still incurable and highly contagious, to limit the spread of the disease, lepers from Crete were sent to the island of Spinalonga and never returned. This would have seemed like a death sentence to young Nicholas who was full of life, so after three years, as the disease became more evident, he fled to Alexandria where he continued to work as a barber.

However, as it often happens, man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps (Prov 16:9). Soon, his illness manifested on his face and hands, and he came to the realisation that he could no longer hide. Not knowing where to turn he visited the Holy Land to venerate the Holy Sepulchre as well as Golgotha, the place of Christ's suffering, to gain strength for his own suffering and carry his own cross.

In 1914 he went to a home for lepers, the Lovokomeio of Chios. Here, Nicholas found a refuge under the spiritual guidance of Elder Anthimos Vagianos (+1960,

canonised 1992) who taught him how to transform his pain. Within two years he was tonsured a monk with the name Nikephoros.

He made countless prostrations, fasted strictly and never quarrelled with anyone. He honoured the wonder-working icon of Παναγία Υπακοή (Panagia of Obedience) with his perfect obedience. One time, in the chapel where this icon was, he chanted the Axion Estin. Upon hearing his voice, the nuns remarked it was the voice of an angel, however after he finished the hymn and they saw his disfigured face they were petrified.

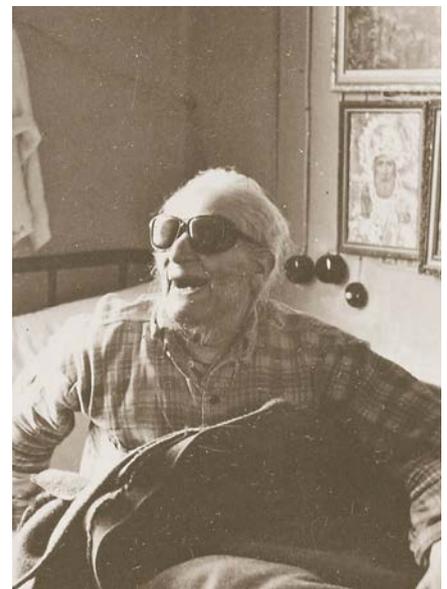
Here, he spent 43 years and eventually lost the use of his hands, feet and eyes due to his illness. For his patience and endurance, God rewarded him with the gifts of discernment and wonderworking. He also had the rare gift to console the suffering of others who drew enormous courage and comfort just by seeing how gracefully he endured his illness.

In 1957 after six centuries of continuous care, the Lovokomeio closed its doors due to the decrease in patients after a cure was found. Elder Anthimos sent the last patients together with Fr Nikephoros to the Hospital of Infectious Diseases in Agia Barbara, Athens, which was under the spiritual direction of Fr Sophronios Saridakis - later known as Fr Evmenios (+1999, canonised 2022) after his priestly ordination. Elder Anthimos characteristically wrote to Fr Sophronios saying: "Take care of the treasure Panagia

is sending you: he may be a novice monk, but he is a perfect monk and you will be perfected through him if you serve him till the end of your life".

Fr Sophronios built him a cell next to his and cared for him, while Fr Nikephoros provided spiritual guidance, introducing Fr Sophronios and other patients to noetic prayer and spiritual books like the Philokalia. One night, after covering him and closing his cell door, Fr Sophronios realised he had forgotten to turn off the heater. Upon returned to close it, he saw Fr Nikephoros levitating in prayer over his bed surrounded by light.

As his body deteriorated, his endless suffering sanctified his soul, teaching us how to turn pain into prayer. As an angel amongst lepers, he reposed in the Lord on January 4th, 1964. Through the countless miracles attributed to him, the Ecumenical Patriarchate canonised him in 2012.





# “How do we know that we have a soul?”

BY Fr D. K.

This author is completely convinced that any honest and non-biased thinker can clearly see that we have a soul. When we meditate on the fact that we are aware of our own existence, on our continuous subjective awareness of reality, on our ability to contemplate the world and ourselves, then we can become convinced that we have a soul. How can my deep sense of my own existence, the simplicity and immediacy of consciousness, be due to complex physical networks within my brain?

This author spent a long time in his earlier years trying to understand how atheists explain consciousness without needing to invoke the existence of a metaphysical entity that we Christians call soul. He found none of their explanations convincing, and can understand and agree with the following conclusion of a well-respected contemporary philosopher, David Bentley Hart:

“Most attempts to provide an answer without straying beyond the boundaries of materialist orthodoxy are ultimately little more than vague appeals to the power of cumulative complexity: somehow, the argument goes, a sufficient number of neurological systems and subsystems operating in connection with one another will at some point naturally produce unified, self-reflective, and intentional consciousness, or at least (as strange as this may sound) the illusion of such consciousness. This is probably just another version of the pleonastic fallacy, another hopeless attempt to overcome a qualitative difference by way of an indeterminately large number of gradual quantitative steps.”

Taking this matter even deeper, for Orthodox Christians, it is our experience of prayer that can lead to an even more profound conviction that we have a soul. There are three elements of man: talking about this can be a little confusing because the words used, (words such as soul, mind, intellect, spirit, nous, heart), can have different meanings in different contexts or when used by different authors.

Broadly, the three elements are:

1. Body, this is physical, it includes the brain with all its complex networks, and can come to know through the senses.
2. Mind, (or intellect, or soul, or *διάνοια*) comes to know through intellectual reasoning.
3. Spirit (or soul, or nous), this is the highest faculty of man, and that which enables him to enter into communion with God. This part of us transcends our ordinary rational processes.

Just as there are three elements in man, so there are three main degrees of prayer:

1. Oral or bodily prayer
2. Prayer of the mind
3. Prayer of the heart (or “of the mind in the heart”), spiritual prayer

If prayer is just oral or bodily, we read words, do prostrations etc, but the mind is not concentrating on the meaning of what we are saying, then this is not prayer at all. If in prayer we are attentive, we confine our mind within the words of prayer, then this is sort-of prayer. If however prayer remains in the head, in the intellect or brain, it is incomplete and imperfect. When we are not only attentive to the words of prayer, but feel in our heart these words, or are in prayer without words and with an awareness of God's presence and love, then prayer is more truly prayer. At an even deeper level, when in prayer we descend from head to heart, to bring down the mind into the heart, then this is “prayer of the heart”. Such experiences, even glimpses of true prayer, lead one to no longer need rational, philosophical or scientific proof that there is a soul or that there is a loving God.

What hinders such experiences? Jesus said, “*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*” (Matt 5:8). In other words, experiences of Grace are hindered by what dirties the heart, which is the passions, such as lust, greed, spiritual laziness, anger, hatred, and above all pride.



## The Icon of the Resurrection

Whilst the gospels recount various scenes surrounding our Lord's resurrection, the descent of Christ into Hades is not one of them. And yet, this scene is what we all picture when we think of the feast of Easter. Of course, that is because it is how the resurrection is most commonly portrayed in our iconography, in accordance with the traditions of the Church.

Saint Paul makes reference to the descent into Hades in his letter to the Ephesians (4:9) where he writes, *"now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?"* In 1 Peter 3:19, we read, *"by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison"*. Similarly, in Acts 2:24, Peter says, *"whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it"*. There are many other scriptural references to the descent into Hades, including many from the Old Testament, but what is clear is that the most common and recognisable icon of the feast of the resurrection is informed by non-gospel sources.

In the centre of the icon, Christ is clad in white robes which symbolise His divine glory and His glorified and resurrected body. He is clothed in light and surrounded by it, or rather, He is the Light from which new life is given to creation on this "feast of feasts".

Christ is standing on the doors of Hades which he

has just smashed down in the course of His descent. Surrounding the broken doors are the chains, keys and hinges which kept the prisoners (the dead) in Hades prior to His descent. These are the spirits to whom Peter refers as imprisoned (1 Pet 3:19). Christ preached the good news to them in His three-day mission in Hades and they followed Him out in His glorious ascent from Hades. Amongst the scattered chains, a new prisoner can be seen, Death himself. Death is depicted as an old man who is cuffed, imprisoned and powerless. The iconographer is of course depicting the message of Easter itself: death no longer has dominion over us – Christ has trampled upon him.

Christ firmly grasps the wrists of Adam and Eve pulling them out from their tombs. They represent mankind which had been subject to death and all those who were waiting for the coming of Christ the redeemer to bring them up into life. With them are depicted various righteous characters from the Old Testament, all those who heard Christ's preaching in Hades and have followed him. Thus, the icon shows the salvation of all mankind throughout history. John the Baptist, recently beheaded, is also portrayed. As the Forerunner, he prepared even those in Hades for the coming of Christ. Thus, with this awesome scene, the Church guides us mystically towards the message of Easter so that we too may be "united with Him in a resurrection like His" (Rom 6:5).

# Pascha with St Porphyrios

The following is an account<sup>1</sup> of a visit to St Porphyrios by his cardiologist, Professor George Papazahos:

On bright Tuesday, two days after Pascha, following his usual cardiac examination, I recall that the Elder's face radiated with joy. He had asked me if I knew the hymn "We celebrate the death of death"

I answered: *Yes, I know it.*

So he asked me to say it. I quickly began to chant: *"We celebrate the death of death, the destruction of Hades, the beginning of an other life which is eternal. And leaping for joy, we hymn the Cause, the only blessed and most glorious God of our fathers."*<sup>2</sup>

*Did you understand it?* asked Elder Porphyrios.

I replied: *Of course I understood it* - thinking he was asking if I understood the meaning of the words.

The Elder made a sudden gesture with his hand saying: *You understood nothing! You said it like a hurried chanter! Listen what fearsome, awe-inspiring things this hymn reveals:*

*Christ, with His Resurrection didn't simply pass us to the opposite side of a river, or over a canyon in the earth, or a canal, or lake, or over the Red Sea. He passed us over to the other side of an abyss, which was impossible for mankind to pass over alone. For centuries mankind waited for this passing - this Pascha. Christ passed us over from death to life!*

*That is why today "we celebrate the death of death, the destruction of Hades". Death is no more. Do you understand? Today we celebrate the beginning of another, new eternal life close to Him.*

I noticed that the Elder spoke with great enthusiasm and certainty, and was deeply moved. Then, he remained silent for a moment before continuing even more forcefully:

*Now there is no chaos, no death, no dying, no Hades. Now there is all joy, due to the Resurrection of our Christ. Human nature was resurrected with Him. Now we can also be resurrected, to live eternally with*

*Him. Oh what happiness the Resurrection is!*

*"And leaping for joy, we celebrate the Cause". Have you ever seen the little goats in Spring jumping about over the grass? Eating a little, then jumping about again? This is how we should be leaping for joy, from the inexpressible joy of the Resurrection of our Lord, and for ours as well.*

He paused speaking again. In the silence, I felt like I was in a euphoric atmosphere.

Elder Porphyrios continued: *Can I give you some advice?*

*In every sorrow you face, at every disappointment, gather yourself for half a minute, and say this hymn slowly. You will see that the greatest event in your life has already happened. The Resurrection of Christ, our salvation. And you will realise that the hitch which happened to you is a very small thing to spoil your attitude.*

He squeezed my hand and said: *I wish that you "leap for joy", looking behind at the chaos over which the Resurrected Christ has passed you. Now chant for me the "Christ is Risen..."*

May we too have this blessing of St Porphyrios, and may our joy be full for we have been called to eternal life with the only blessed and most glorious God of our fathers.

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the website <http://www.isagiastriados.com/index.php/articles/didaktikes-istories-2/2956-thanatou-eortazomen-nekrosin> adapted from the Greek book «Πάσχα το τερπνόν».

<sup>2</sup> From Ode 7 of the Paschal Canon: «Θανάτου ἐορτάζομεν νέκρωσιν, Ἄδου τὴν καθάρεισιν, ἄλλης βιοτῆς, τῆς αἰωνίου ἀπαρχῆν, καὶ σκιρτῶντες ὑμνοῦμεν τὸν αἴτιον, τὸν μόνον εὐλογητὸν τῶν Πατέρων, Θεὸν καὶ ὑπερένδοξον».



# Holy Great Martyr Xenia of Kalamata

Commemorated on May 3

The Holy Great Martyr Xenia was born in Kalamata in 291 to devout parents, Nicholas and Despina, who had come from the Italian peninsula. As Christians were being persecuted at that time, they fled to the city of Kalamata in Peloponnesus, Greece. Her father was a farmer and owned a farm just outside the city.

As a young child, Saint Xenia was dedicated to the Christian faith and practiced all the Christian virtues such as fasting, self-control, silence, unceasing prayer, vigils, and charity.

When the magistrate Domitianos, the ruler of that region and idol worshiper, met the Saint, he was amazed by her beauty and wished for her to be his wife. Saint Xenia

stood out for her beauty with long, golden-blond hair and blue eyes. However, her deep faith and love for Jesus far outshone her physical beauty.

Saint Xenia did not accept the marriage proposal from the idolator and refused to change her faith to accept the idols. Domitianos thought that prison and torture would alter the Saint's mind and entice her to renounce Jesus and bow before the idols. So he had her arrested and cruelly tortured, hence our church in her wisdom bestowed on the Saint the title "Great Martyr". Saint Xenia was eventually beheaded in 318 and entered the never ceasing joy of eternal paradise with her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ  
"...in seeking You, I endure suffering...and I died so that I might live with You. Accept me as a pure sacrifice, for I have offered myself in love" (Apolytikion).

Saint Xenia was only recently discovered as a Saint of our church. Father George Nasis, the parish priest of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in New York from 1942-1967 was praying one day when a beautiful woman appeared to him. She said her name was Xenia, a martyr who had been forgotten for almost 1700 years. She asked him to paint an icon, depicting her holding a cross.

At first Father George did not mention this vision to anyone,

fearing that people may ridicule him. He then decided to inform his superiors and described Saint Xenia with such sincerity that the researchers vigorously attempted to find references to the Saint. Initially, they were unsuccessful but with the grace of God they found the Saint in an ecclesiastical work titled 'O Megas Synaxaristes' comprising twelve volumes of the history of the Orthodox Saints. In it, the Saint is described as a young woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, just as Father George visualised her.

Saint Xenia is greatly adored in her city of Kalamata and a chapel is dedicated to her in the church of the Holy Trinity that was built in 1993.

*"You appeared as a bright star announcing Christ with your radiance, which is repulsive to this world, O Martyr Xenia; extinguishing the allure of false gods, you enlighten the faithful, always interceding for us all" (Kontakion).*



Miraculous icon of St Xenia in Manhattan & the Church of the Holy Trinity in Kalamata

# “Keep thy mind in hell and despair not” Saint Silouan the Athonite

The lives of ascetic fathers are particularly difficult to capture in writing, owing to the reclusive nature of their subjects. Often, these hagiographies only manage to supplement dry biographical detail with stories of extraordinary ascetic feats and miracles performed. This leaves the reader feeling disconnected from the person who is being portrayed, especially as regards their secret inner world, thoughts, and feelings.

*Saint Silouan the Athonite* differs in this respect from other spiritual biographies, due to the attention it devotes to the inner life of the saint. The first part of the book tells his life story from a spiritual perspective, while the second part contains the writings of the saint. Less attention is given to historical facts about Saint Silouan's life than to his spiritual journey, delving into such topics as the experience of spiritual trials in the

life of a Christian, the cultivation of humility, and how to seek advice from one's spiritual father.

If not for the contributions of Saint Silouan's disciple and the author of his biography, Saint Sophrony, it is entirely possible that the ascetic would never have been revealed as a saint, and his life would be kept hidden from the world. Externally, Saint Silouan led an unremarkable life; he was not considered an elder in his own time and had no group of disciples around him. Outwardly, he lived like any other monk, his daily routine consisting of attending church, reading sacred books, observing the fasts, showing obedience to his superiors, and diligently performing his duties as a monastery steward.

It was Saint Silouan's remarkable prayer life which distinguished him from others. His nightly vigils were a real spiritual battlefield, where he wrestled, 'not against flesh and blood, but against... the rulers of the darkness of this world' (Eph 6:12).

Arguably the most well-known and influential account from the life of the saint takes place during one of these nocturnal vigils, when Saint Silouan is already fifteen years into his monastic life.

The Saint, wrestling with constant demonic torments and feeling utterly abandoned, turns to the Lord in his heart and humbly asks for instruction.

In his soul, Saint Silouan hears a reply, "The proud always suffer from the devils."

"Lord," he says, "teach me what I must do that my soul may become humble."

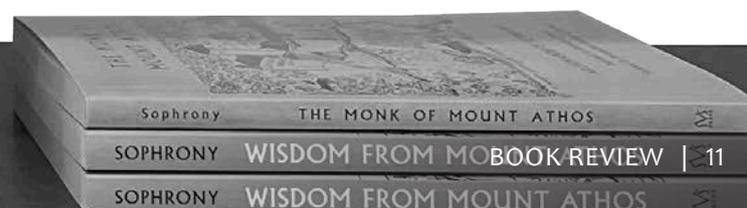
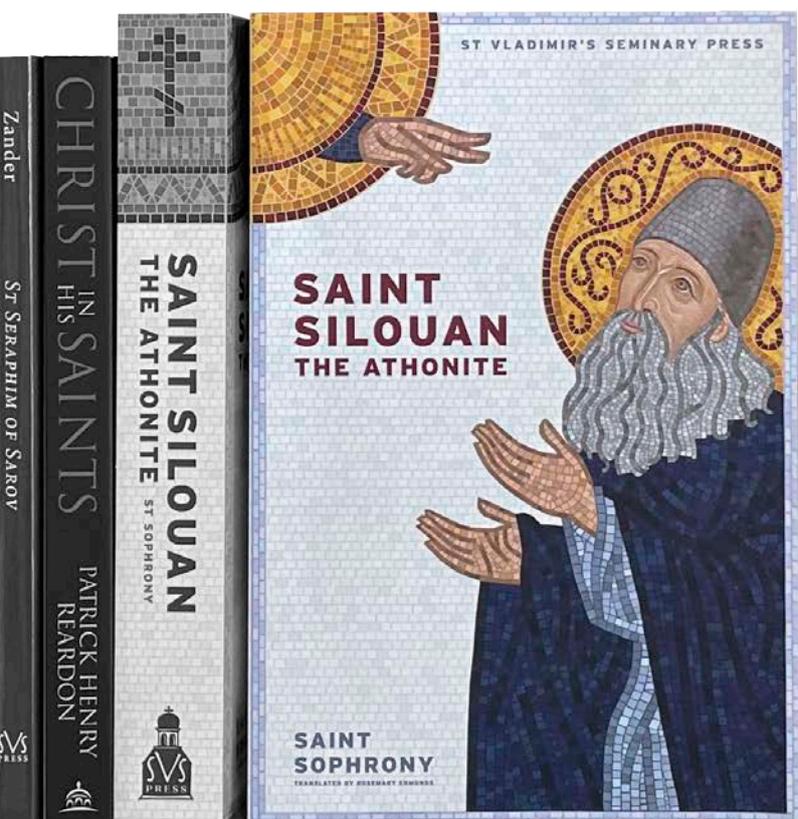
Again, his heart hears God's answer: "*Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.*"

*Saint Silouan the Athonite* is filled with such direct spiritual truths both from the life and writings of the ascetic, as well as from the perceptive theological commentary of its author. This book can be recommended to those who are seeking a deeper examination of the spiritual life and are ready for a challenge.

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# THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:18-20

These verses are the last three verses of the Gospel of Matthew. They form the bulk of the first Morning Gospel reading, the first of eleven, which are read, one each Sunday on a repeating cycle, during the Matins Service of the Ordinary Sundays of the Church Calendar.

Fittingly, they also make up the Gospel reading of each Orthodox Baptism Service.

Christ gathered His disciples 40 days after his Glorious Resurrection, to give them His final commandments and ascend in glory to His Heavenly Father.

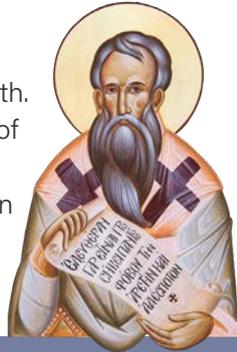
**18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."**

It may seem that Christ is stating something self-evident. Did He previously not have all authority?

The Patristic Tradition elucidates the true significance behind this statement, which sheds light on the following verses, where Christ commands His disciples to

**19 "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."**

Christ had just victoriously conquered death. As St Gregory of Nyssa tells us from his sermon on the Ascension:



"Now the mystery of Christ's death is fulfilled, victory is won, and the Cross, the sign of triumph, is raised on high."

However, as St Theophylact explains in his Commentary on Matthew's gospel:



"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth! This means, 'as God and Creator I have always had authority over all things... but I did not yet have man's voluntary submission. Now I have this as well. For all things shall be subjected unto me, since by means of the cross I have conquered him who had the power of death... Now have I received all authority. Previously My authority was in part, as they served Me only involuntarily in that I was their Creator. But now that men serve Me with knowledge as well, total and complete authority has been given unto Me."

This explains Christ's Earthly authority, but in regard to His Heavenly authority?

St Gregory Palamas tells us in his own Sermon on the Ascension that Christ was:



"ascended in glory and entered into the Holy of the Holies not made by hands and sat on the right side in the heavens, on the same throne of divinity, so that our nature, with which He mixed, should share in it."

Our own human nature, in the Person of Christ now sits on the Heavenly Throne. All human nature has been saved, sanctified, and made divine, so naturally, Christ sends His disciples to all nations.

St Theophylact concludes his commentary explaining the verse,

**20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."**

The Holy Father tells us that by commanding the disciples to baptise all people, Christ handed down theology to us. However, in teaching the keeping of the commandments, Christ guides us to practice active virtue.

In this manner then, may all Orthodox Christians witness to Christ's authority on Earth and Heaven, being baptised in His Church and keeping his commandments with lives of virtue.



## In one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church

Building on the preceding confession of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, Article 9 in our Creed outlines our belief in the Church. In Orthodox theology, Ecclesiology (the attempt to describe the mystery of the Church), is inextricably linked with Triadology (the Holy Trinity) and Christology (the Incarnation). In fact, the mystery of the Church is considered an extension of the Christological mystery, for without Christ, the Church does not exist.

The Church which originates from God's pre-eternal plan for the salvation of the world, exists in history with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The event of Pentecost signifies the activation and spread of the consequences of Christ's economy to the rest of mankind (beyond the Jews) and to the whole of creation, through the construction and organisation of the body of the Church.

From the time of His Ascension, Christ returns to the Church and is present mysteriously through the Holy Spirit. He offers Himself to the Church through the Sacraments, especially in Holy Communion as the *"Lamb of God broken and distributed, broken yet not divided, ever eaten yet never expended, but sanctifying those who partake"* (Divine Liturgy, St John Chrysostom). It is the Holy

Spirit who allows us to personally commune in the deified humanity of Christ. Thus, the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in the actualisation of the Church as the Body of Christ, as He unifies the members of the Body with the Head who is Christ, and with one another. *"He [the Holy Spirit] gathers together the whole institution of the Church"*, we chant at Vespers for Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is the life of the Church.

There is no single accepted definition of the Church in Orthodox theology. The Greek word - «εκκλησία» - means a gathering of people (in a broad sense), and a gathering of those who believe in Christ (regarding faith).

The holy fathers proclaim the Church as heaven on earth, a divine institution, not an earthly or human one. In the words of St Porphyrios, she is *"without beginning, without end and eternal, just as the Triune God, her founder, is without beginning, without end and eternal"*. The purpose of the Church is to receive and transform us and all of the created world. Her work is the work of Christ and His Apostles; perpetually offering the faithful of every generation the sure path of salvation towards God's eternal Kingdom.

*"On entering into the uncreated Church, we come to Christ;*

*we enter into the realms of the uncreated when we live in the Church, we live in Christ"* (St Porphyrios). For the Orthodox Christian, participating in the life of the Church is not a matter of fulfilling a religious duty or maintaining a weekly routine. They feel an existential need for it, to live truly and authentically, to meet their Creator, to be transformed in Him, to be crucified to the world and to be united with Him. The life of the Church is the life of Christ. It is through the Church that Christ offers us His very Self *"for the life of the world"* (John 6:51).

In the Gospel reading of Holy Monday evening, Christ's rather caustic address to the hypocritical Pharisees and scribes of Jerusalem, is followed by a rare lament of sorts - *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"* (Matt 23:37). As the faithful who comprise the Church today, may we the *"New Jerusalem"*, heed these stirring words of our Lord, especially just after our journey with Him through His Holy Passion. May we be willing to be gathered in His loving embrace that we may receive the shelter and nurture we require to survive and be with Him eternally.

In the next issue we will examine the attributes given to the Church in Article 9. OUR CREED | 13

Εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν.

In one holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the



το σημερινό μας άρθρο θα ασχοληθούμε με την Εβραϊκή Βίβλο, γνωστή στους Χριστιανούς ως Παλαιά Διαθήκη (Π.Δ.). Το τμήμα αυτό της Αγίας Γραφής, που μέχρι σήμερα αποτελεί την Ιερά Βίβλο των Ιουδαίων, περιέχει την προ Χριστού Θεία Αποκάλυψη, από τη δημιουργία του κόσμου μέχρι τα μηνύματα των Αγίων Προφητών που κήρυξαν έως και λίγους αιώνες πριν την ενανθρώπιση του Σωτήρος Χριστού. Γνωρίζουμε ίσως πως στις μεν εκδόσεις των προτεσταντικών ομολογιών η Π.Δ. αποτελείται από 39 βιβλία ενώ στις ορθόδοξες εκδόσεις από 49 (συν 1 βιβλίο ως παράρτημα). Θα ήταν χρήσιμο όμως να παρακολουθήσουμε την εξέλιξη της Εβραϊκής Βίβλου από την αρχή.

Η Π.Δ. για τους Ιουδαίους φέρει το ακρωνύμιο TANAX (λατινικά TA.NA.KH → **Τορά** = Νόμος, **Νεβιείμ** = Προφήτες, **Κετουβείμ** = Γραφόμενα ή Αγιόγραφα.

Υπάρχει κάποια «ιεραρχία» σε αυτές τις ομάδες. Ο (Μωσαϊκός) Νόμος αποτελεί το βασικότερο θεμέλιο του Ιουδαϊσμού και την εποχή του Κυρίου ήταν το μοναδικό τμήμα που αναγνωριζόταν ως κανονικό από τους

Σαδδουκαίους (ιερείς και Λευίτες που υπηρετούσαν στο Ναό του Σολομώντος). Θα θυμόμαστε πως όταν ο Κύριος ρωτήθηκε από τους Σαδδουκαίους για το εάν υπάρχει ανάσταση νεκρών, τους παρέπεμψε σε χωρίο της Τορά – Εξ 3,6 (Μτ 22:31-32, Μκ 12:26-27, Λκ 20:37-38). Ακολουθούν σε ιεραρχία οι Προφήτες και ύστερα τα Αγιόγραφα.

Θα πρέπει επίσης να γίνει διάκριση μεταξύ του «βιβλίου» (book) και του «κυλίνδρου» (scroll) όπου τυλιγόταν η περγαμνή για ανάγνωση στις Ιουδαϊκές συναγωγές. Κατά κανόνα ένα βιβλίο ισοδυναμεί με έναν κύλινδρο, όταν όμως το βιβλίο είναι μεγάλο χρειάζεται περισσότερους κυλίνδρους. Αντίστροφα, αριθμός μικρών βιβλίων μπορούν να τυλιχθούν μαζί σε έναν κύλινδρο.

#### ΤΟΡΑ – ΝΟΜΟΣ:

Βασικά είναι ένα ενιαίο βιβλίο το οποίο, λόγω μεγέθους, χωρίστηκε σε πέντε κυλίνδρους. Οι πέντε αυτοί κύλινδροι διακρίνονταν μεταξύ των με τις πρώτες λέξεις του ιερού κειμένου. Οι αντίστοιχες ελληνικές ονομασίες δόθηκαν αργότερα στη μετάφραση των εβδομήκοντα (Ο').

- (1) *Μπερεσίθ* = Στην αρχή → κατά τους Ο' *Γένεσις*
- (2) *Βεέλε σεμόθ* = Αυτά (είναι) τα ονόματα → κατά τους Ο' *Έξοδος*
- (3) *Βαγικρά* = Και κάλεσε → κατά τους Ο' *Λευιτικών*
- (4) *Μπεμιδμπάρ* = Στην έρημο → κατά τους Ο' *Αριθμοί*
- (5) *Έλε χαντεβαρείμ* = Αυτοί (είναι) οι λόγοι → κατά τους Ο' *Δευτερονόμιον*

#### ΝΕΒΙΕΙΜ – ΠΡΟΦΗΤΕΣ:

- (α) Προγενέστεροι Προφήτες:
  - (1) *Ιησούς* (του Ναυή)
  - (2) *Κριταί*
  - (3) *Σαμουήλ* → χωρισμένο σε δύο κυλίνδρους, Α' και Β' → κατά τους Ο' *Βασιλειών Α' και Β'*
  - (4) *Βασιλέων* → χωρισμένο σε δύο κυλίνδρους, Α' και Β' → κατά τους Ο' *Βασιλειών Γ' και Δ'*

- (β) Μεταγενέστεροι Προφήτες:
  - (5) *Ησαΐας*
  - (6) *Ιερεμίας*
  - (7) *Ιεζεκιήλ*

Δωδεκαπρόφητον – 12 βιβλία σε έναν κύλινδρο:

- (8) *Ωσηέ*
- (9) *Ιωήλ*
- (10) *Αμώς*
- (11) *Οβδιού*
- (12) *Ιωνάς*
- (13) *Μιχαίας*
- (14) *Ναούμ*
- (15) *Αβθακούμ*
- (16) *Σοφονίας*
- (17) *Αγγαίος*
- (18) *Ζαχαρίας*
- (19) *Μαλαχίας*

#### ΚΕΤΟΥΒΕΙΜ – ΑΓΙΟΓΡΑΦΑ:

- (1) *Ψαλμοί* → αυτή η συλλογή ποιημάτων υποδιαιρείται σε 5 βιβλία
- (2) *Παροιμίες* (Σολομώντος)
- (3) *Ϊώβ*
- (4) *Άσμα Ασμάτων*
- (5) *Ρουθ*
- (6) *Θρήνοι* (Ιερεμίου)
- (7) *Εκκλησιαστής*
- (8) *Εσθήρ*
- (9) *Δανιήλ* – Αυτό το βιβλίο ανήκε κάποτε στην ομάδα των Προφητών. Επειδή όμως περιέχει ακριβής Μεσσιανικές προφητείες που εκπληρώθηκαν στο πρόσωπο του Ιησού, η ραβινική παράδοση υποβίβασε τον Δανιήλ από «προφήτη» (απεσταλμένο του Θεού που διαμηνύει το θέλημά Του) σε «βλέποντα» (κάποιον που έχει τη δυνατότητα να προβλέπει το μέλλον). Σαν δεύτερο επιχείρημα χρησιμοποιήθηκε το γεγονός πως ο Δανιήλ, φθάνοντας σε ανώτατα αξιώματα στο Βαβυλωνιακό κράτος,

39 *The following day, as was now necessary, Judas and his men left to gather up the bodies of those killed in battle, to bring them back to rest with their kindred in the tombs of their forefathers.*

40 *But under the tunics of each of the dead, they uncovered sacred tokens of the Jamnian idols, which the Jews are forbidden by law to wear. So the reason these men died in battle became clear to everyone.*

41 *Thus they all blessed the ways of the*

*Lord, the righteous judge, who reveals the hidden things.*

42 *They turned to supplication and prayed that the sin they had committed might be completely blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted his people to guard themselves from sin, for with their own eyes they had seen what happened to those who died in battle because of their sin.*

43 *He then took up an offering from his soldiers amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, and sent it to*

*Jerusalem to present as a sin offering. In doing so he acted properly and with honor, taking note of the resurrection.*

44 *For if he were not looking for the resurrection of those fallen, it would have been utterly foolish to pray for the departed.*

45 *But since he was looking to the reward of splendor laid up for those who repose in godliness, it was a holy and godly purpose. Thus he made atonement for the fallen, so as to set them free from their transgression.*



## PRAYING FOR THE DEAD & THE RESURRECTION

2 Maccabees 12:39-45

συνεργάστηκε με τον εχθρό του Ιουδαϊκού έθνους και καταστροφέα της Ιερουσαλήμ και του (πρώτου) Ναού του Σολομώντος, το βασιλιά Ναβουχοδονόσωρ. Μαζί με τον συγγραφέα υποβαθμίστηκε και το βιβλίο του και τώρα κατατάσσεται στα Αγιόγραφα. Ο Χριστιανικός κανόνας της Π.Δ. επανέφερε το βιβλίο του Δανιήλ στην αρμόζουσα αρχική του θέση – στα Προφητικά βιβλία.

(10) Έσδρας

(11) Νεεμίας

Τα δύο παραπάνω βιβλία (10 και

11) αποτελούσαν έναν κύλινδρο

(12) Χρονικών → χωρισμένο σε δύο

κυλίνδρους, Α' και Β' → κατά τους

Ο' Παραλειπομένων Α' και Β'

Ο προτεσταντικός κανόνας της Π.Δ. ταυτίζεται με τον Εβραϊκό κανόνα, αλλά η σειρά των βιβλίων διαφέρει.

Στο επόμενο άρθρο μας θα αναφερθούμε στη Μετάφραση των Εβδομήκοντα.

The book of 2 Maccabees is considered by the Orthodox Church to be a holy and canonical text. The above passage, from 2 Maccabees 12:39-45, follows the remainder of Chapter 12 which describes a series of victorious battles and campaigns by the Maccabees (a group of Jews) against their enemies. Following those battles, as the soldiers awaken on the "following day", they go to "gather up the bodies of [their fellow men who were] killed in battle" (Verse 39). In doing so, however, they discover that "each of the dead" had kept idolatrous "sacred tokens of the Jamnian idols" instead of destroying them as was commanded. This great sin was "the reason these men died in battle" (Verse 40).

After this discovery, however, the Maccabees do not simply do nothing. Instead, "taking note of the resurrection" and "looking for the resurrection of the fallen", they turn to fervent supplication and prayer to the Lord so that "the sin [the men] had committed might be completely blotted out" (Verses 42 to 45). In this way, they show their belief in the power of prayer for the departed and hope that the Lord will forgive their sins.

Unlike the Maccabees, however, we do not simply "hope" for the resurrection but "expect" it (Nicene Creed). We know about the Resurrection of Christ and celebrate it with much joy. Given this truth, it is essential that we pray with zeal for the departed, both during the memorial services at Church and in our personal prayers.

May the power of the Resurrection help us and the departed.

## What is Sunday School?

For the past 67 years, Sunday Schools in NSW have been organised by the Greek Orthodox Christian Society, with the blessing of past and present Archbishops and Metropolitans of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia.

The greatest gift and the most precious inheritance we can give to our children is our Orthodox Christian Faith. Jesus makes it clear that He wants children to come to know Him, and that He considers it a grave offence for an adult to hinder this process.

Sunday School is vital in developing a child's knowledge and love for God. It offers a friendly and nurturing environment in which children can begin to appreciate the beauty of their Orthodox Christian Faith and a life in Christ.



## History of Sunday School

Sunday Schools were established in NSW in 1955 with the blessing of His Eminence, the late Metropolitan Theophylaktos, and continue today with the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia.

The first Sunday School was held at the parish of Agia Triada in Surry Hills and has now spread to 24 parishes in NSW.



## What happens at Sunday School?

Most Sunday School classes begin after Holy Communion every Sunday. Students are separated into three classes: infants, primary, and high school. They play games, learn Christian songs and hymns, and engage in lessons on various aspects of our Orthodox Faith.

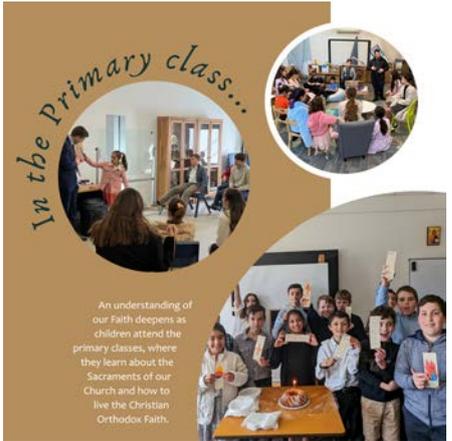
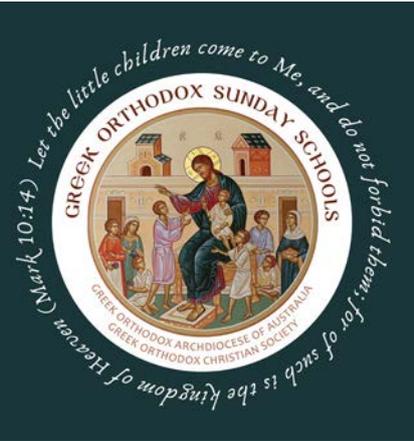
There are over 400 children that attend Sunday School each week and more than 120 teachers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when churches were closed for public worship, Sunday School continued with video lessons being sent to children each week and many Sunday Schools continued to operate remotely via Zoom.



## In the Infants class...

Lessons are focused on instilling the basic truths of our faith and teaching stories from the Holy Bible and the lives of our Saints.



An understanding of our Faith deepens as children attend the primary classes, where they learn about the sacraments of our Church and how to live the Christian Orthodox Faith.



## In the High School classes...

The youth are inspired to develop a love for Christ and the life of the Church, establish a spiritual daily routine of prayer, reading of the scriptures and Christian books, and grow the courage to face the challenges of life with faith and hope in God.



Sunday School life for a student extends well beyond the confines of the classroom every Sunday...



## Other Sunday School events include:

- Sunday School picnics
- School holiday events
- Parenting seminars
- Parish English Divine Liturgies
- Parish-based excursions & activity days
- Annual Science Day for primary students
- Annual Soccer World Cup for High School boys
- Annual Games & Craft Day for High School girls
- Annual Sunday School Camp for primary students



# Sunday Schools Begin Again for 2023

With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios, Sunday School classes have resumed for 2023 in Greek Orthodox parishes across Sydney. Students are separated into three classes: Infants (kindergarten to Year 2), Primary (Years 3-6), and High School students (Years 7-12). As parents, the greatest gift and most precious inheritance we can give to our children is our Orthodox Christian Faith. Sunday School can help by fostering in the children a love for God and His Church. It provides a variety of activities they will enjoy, and is a place where they will find good friends.

Even if your children receive Scripture education at School or attend our Greek Orthodox Colleges, they will still benefit enormously from Sunday School. To register your child, please speak with your parish priest or visit:

<https://sundayschool.lychnos.org/registration/>



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