

# Pentecost: The Birth of the Church?

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

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# ΛΥΧΝΟΣ

A GREEK ORTHODOX PERIODICAL







## Η Ανάληψις του Κυρίου: Η Συνανύψωσις του ανθρώπου

με τον Πατέρα μαζί Σου πάνω στον ουράνιο Θρόνο Του, σαν ελεήμων και φιλάνθρωπος που είσαι).

Ο Ευαγγελιστής Λουκάς, στις «Πράξεις των Αποστόλων», με λίγες και απλές φράσεις περιγράφει το γεγονός.

Ο Κύριος παίρνει τους μαθητές Του προς το Όρος των Ελαιών, λίγο έξω απ'τα Ιεροσόλυμα. Τους δίνει τις τελευταίες συμβουλές Του. Η πιό σπουδαία: Να μη φύγουν απο τα Ιεροσόλυμα, αλλά να περιμένουν πότε θα πραγματοποιηθεί η υπόσχεση που τους έδωσε. Δηλ. τον ερχομό του Αγίου Πνεύματος που θα τους έστειλε ο Πατέρας Του. Και ενώ τους ευλογούσε «διέστη απ'αυτών» δηλ. εχωρίσθη και απεμακρύνθη απ'αυτούς και ανέβαινε προς τον ουρανό και ένα φωτεινό σύννεφο Τον πήρε απ'αυτούς. Έκθαμβοι αυτοί, παρακολουθούσαν την άνοδο του Κυρίου τους, την απερίγραπτη δόξα και λαμπρότητα του γεγονότος. Και, ακολουθώντας, με χαρά μεγάλη, επέστρεψαν στα Ιεροσόλυμα.

**Η** Ανάληψις του Κυρίου μας είναι το τελευταίο γεγονός της παρουσίας Του στη γή. Το τελευταίο μα το πιό ένδοξο. Με την Ανάληψη η ανθρώπινη φύση Του ανυψώνεται και θεώνεται. Λαμβάνει τις τιμές και την εξουσία της Θείας φύσεως. Το θαυμαστό, για μας, είναι πως η Θεία Του Ανάληψις συνανυψώνει και όλους ημάς στον ουρανό, αφού Αυτός ο μονογενής Υιός και Λόγος του Θεού έλαβε ανθρώπινη σάρκα και ενώ είναι ο Θεός, γίνεται και τέλειος άνθρωπος.

Ο Απόστολος Παύλος λέγει: «συνήγειρε και συνεκάθισε εν τοις επουρανίοις» (Εφ. 2:6) (μας ανέστησε και μας έβαλε να καθίσουμε μαζί Του στα επουράνια).

Το κάθισμα της γιορτής (Της Αναλήψεως) συνοψίζει όλη τη συγκατάβαση, το έργο της Σωτηρίας μας και το θαυμαστό αποτέλεσμα, «κατελθών ουρανόν εν εις τα επίγεια και την κάτω κειμένην εν τη του Άδου φρουρά, συναναστήσας ως Θεός, Αδαμιαίαν μορφήν, τη Αναλήψει Σου Χριστέ, εις ουρανούς αναγαγών τω θρόνω τω πατρικώ Σου συγκάθεδρον απειργάσω ως Ελεήμων και Φιλάνθρωπος».

(Δηλ, κατέβηκες απ'τον ουρανό στη γή Χριστέ μου, και τη φύση του Αδάμ που ήταν πεσμένη και αιχμάλωτη στον Άδη, τη συνανέστησες σαν Θεός και με την ένδοξη Ανάληψή Σου την ανέβασες στον ουρανό και κάθεται

Η υμνολογία της γιορτής παίρνει απο τον 23<sup>ο</sup> ψαλμό του Δαβίδ και παρουσιάζει τους αγγέλους που φωνάζουν «...άρατε πύλας άρατε... και εισελεύσεται ο Βασιλεύς της δόξης» (εξαποστειλάριον) (Δηλ. Σηκώστε τις πόρτες, ανοίξετέ τις γιατί θα μπει ο Βασιλιάς της δόξης στους ουρανούς). Και αυτό γίνεται στον ουρανό στην Ανάληψη του Κυρίου μας.

Όμως, πόσες φορές ο Κύριος, ο Βασιλεύς της δόξης, στέκεται και έξω απο τη πόρτα της καρδιάς μας και κρούει τη θύρα της ψυχής μας και φωνάζει: «Ιδού έστηκα επι την θύραν και κρούω» (Αποκ. 3:20) (Στέκομαι έξω απο την πόρτα της ψυχής σου και κτυπώ δυνατά)

Σαν να μας λέει: «Χριστιανέ, που με το θάνατο, την Ανάσταση και την Ανάληψή μου σε ζωοποίησα και σ'ανέβασα στους ουρανούς, άνοιξε να εισέλθω μέσα σου, να σε αγιάσω, να γεμίσω με χαρά το είναι σου. Να γεμίσει με δόξα και ευφροσύνη η ζωή σου. Η παρουσία μου στη ζωή σου είναι η δική σου σωτηρία. Εγώ, πανένδοξος Βασιλιάς στους ουρανούς, αν μου το επιτρέψεις, εισέρχομαι ο ίδιος και στη ψυχή σου, για να σε υψώσω και εσένα στον ουρανό και να συνδοξασθής μαζί μου».

Άραγε, θα του ανοίξουμε;

# Pentecost: The Birth of the Church?

In triumphant splendour the Church invites us in this period of the cycle to "celebrate with joy this final post-festal feast".

We hear that "on this day the fire of the Paraclete descended to the earth immediately, as in the form of tongues, and illumined the Disciples and made them initiates of heaven" (Kathisma I). Of course, the great feast of Pentecost is upon us. Celebrated fifty days after Holy Pascha, it is the feast of the fulfillment of Christ's earthly mission. It is the completion of our Lord's promise that the disciples would receive "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name [and] He will teach you all things" (John 14:26).

The feast of Pentecost is a crucial part of our understanding of salvation. All Orthodox Christians, upon receiving their baptism and Chrismation, are confirmed with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, as we celebrate on Pentecost.

Pentecost, however, is also commonly called the "birthday" of the Church. This is no doubt because it was the day on which the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles and St Peter preached the saving message of Christ to the crowd. Each member of the crowd miraculously heard St Peter's sermon in their own language, leading to the conversion and baptism of over 3,000 souls. These events led to the establishment of church communities in all parts of the Roman empire and beyond.

The Holy Fathers, however, teach that the Church existed "both before Christ and after Christ" (St Gregory the Theologian) and was "created before the sun and moon... and has been from the beginning" (St Clement, Bishop of Rome). The Church, in the Orthodox Church understanding, has always existed and, even before humanity was created, the Church had the Angels as its members. The Church was not born on the day of Pentecost but it certainly received more members and took a form which is more recognisable to us today.

It is from the day of Pentecost that the Apostles received the grace of the Holy Spirit which has been passed on, in an unbroken chain, to every canonical Orthodox priest



since those apostolic times. And it is from Pentecost that the body of the Christians came together regularly "with one accord in the temple... praising God" (Acts 2:46-47). The same Church we attend regularly in the parishes of Australia is that same Church (members of Christ's body) that is spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles.

Given that we are all members of the Church, that is, members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), it is important that we each pray and discern, with the assistance of our spiritual guides, how it is we can best serve the Church so as to be active members of His body. Each has a different calling - some to minister, some to preach, some to chant, some to teach - but all should work with the same goal: to become lights of the world so that others can see those good works and give glory to God (Matthew 5:14-16).

It is fitting to conclude by invoking the prayer contained in the Exapostelation of the feast:

**"O all-holy Spirit who from the Father issues forth, and through the Son was indwelling in the unlettered Disciples, sanctify all who acknowledge You to be God, and save us".**





# *Christian (Orthodox) & Secular Ethics*

## *A Comparison*

*“Popular secular ideals, divorced from the context of a loving relationship with God, create a radical and unbridgeable chasm between the two ethical systems.”*

**I**t would be no exaggeration to say that young people tend to be more accepting of new ideas than those of older generations. It is equally true that the present generations exhibit a higher level of conformity to that of their predecessors.

There are several reasons for this: the education system, the media, political activism, peak industry representatives, parents who are unwilling or unable to express traditional Christian ethics, and the presence of few role models who embody and defend Christian ethics. Young people are surrounded by influences which promote popular secular ethics.

Generally, the young and not-so-young popular secularists wonder why the Christians, and particularly the Orthodox, do not share and support their values as well. After all, both ethical systems value equality, freedom of choice, fellowship, fairness, and justice. Yes, that might well be right - but:

- i. Secular ethics reach very different conclusions from Christian ones, because they only borrow aspects of Christian teaching, leaving their ethical system wanting and defective.
- ii. Popular secular ideals, divorced from the context of a loving relationship with God, create a radical and unbridgeable chasm between the two ethical systems.

The problem becomes easier to understand if we examine the three major ideas promoted by popular secularists.

**Equality:** The idea that people are created equal is not something that can be demonstrated by evidence.

Some of us are stronger, some are larger, some are athletically gifted, and others are academically inclined. So, where does this idea come from? *It is derived from the Christian teaching that God loves everyone equally.*

**Justice:** Commonly, justice means a fair, and correct decision concerning a dispute. It also involves the concept that people are treated fairly, equally, and in a lawful manner. In our daily lives, we frequently meet with people who are treated unjustly – in a work or social situation – where legal proceedings are not on foot. In such cases, the philosophical and moral aspect of justice are practised. But this form of justice requires a person, a mediator, who themselves practises morality, which means Christian morality.

**Liberty:** Freedom of choice is a basic teaching of Christianity. It is rooted in the story of creation and in the gospels. Humans are free to make moral choices, as in the story of Adam and Eve. They were given a commandment to keep them happy and under the care of God. They chose otherwise, as God did not rescind His gift, i.e. their freedom of choice and moral liberty.

The three ethical values mentioned above are shared by both Christian and secular ethical systems. And yet, their differences are vast, stemming from a distortion of Christian principles borrowed by the secularists to create a different ethical system altogether. For secular ethicists, liberty means that the individual is a recipient of human rights. They then argue that the absolute claim of liberty for an individual allows them the absolute right to even end human life (e.g. abortion, euthanasia).

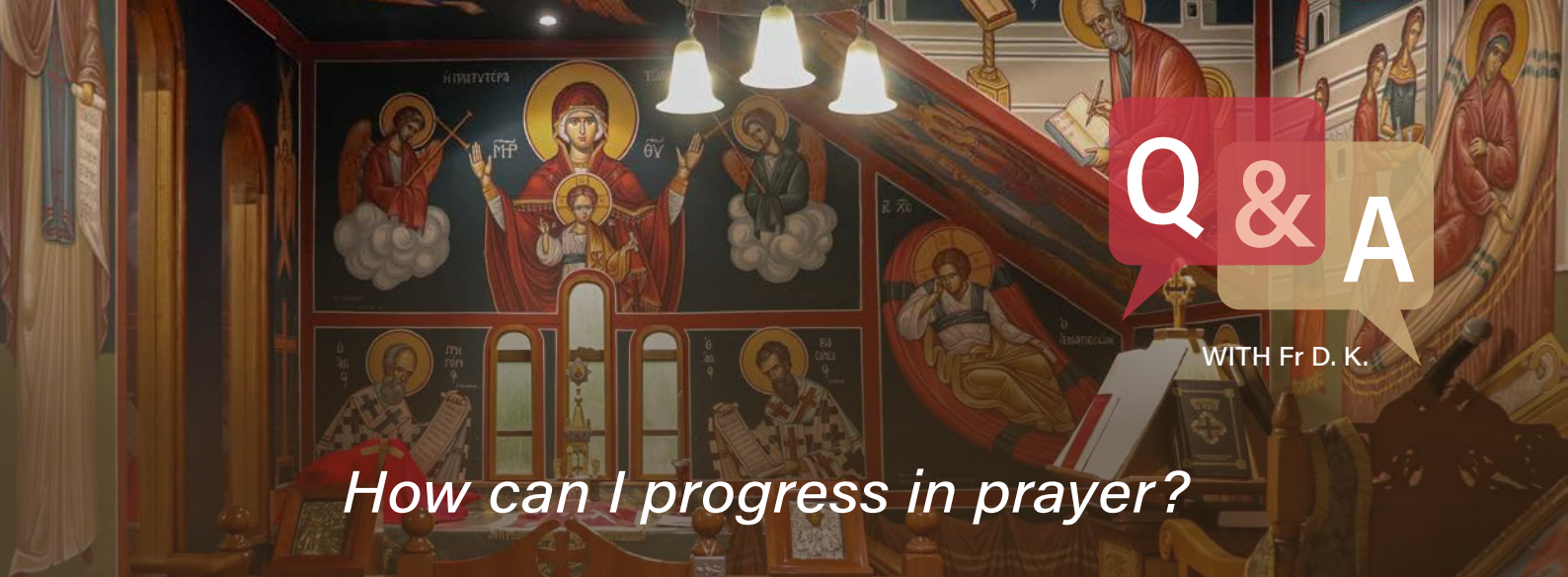
Christianity does not define the unit of humanity as an “individual”, but as a person. The person is the individual with all his social relationships, privileges, and duties towards God, his parents, spouse, children, friends, and colleagues. People are equal simply because God loves all equally, and calls humans to love in the same manner as He loves.

Christians never ask, “what are the rights of a person?” Instead, they ask, “what are the duties of a person?” This is so, because Christian ethics (love, compassion, charity) are sacrificial and self-giving, not selfish, and are far more consistent than demanding one’s own human rights. After all, it is easier for a person to change themselves, than to change the world around them.

Also, for Christians “good” is what is consistent with God’s will, whereas “bad” is what is inconsistent with His will. In contrast, secular ethics allege that actions are not inherently “good” or “bad” but derive their quality purely from their consequences.

One cannot help but feel uncomfortable when perceiving the great divide between the two ethical systems. For the Christian person who values spiritual principles and tries to live a gospel-inspired life, the spread of secular ethics, based on materialistic and strictly rational ideas, foretell a stormy period for our world, where disorder and upheavals may become even more prevalent. All Christians should join together to reverse the steep descent towards a godless society, remembering that such reversals are not uncommon in history.





## How can I progress in prayer?

Prayer is the most difficult work we have on this earth. Archbishop Stylianos of blessed memory expressed it as follows, "The greatest privilege, but also the greatest problem for the faithful, is prayer". Through prayer, one can come into communion with God, our Creator. St John, the author of "The Ladder", said that how well we pray is an indicator on how progressed we are spiritually. St John of Kronstadt put it as follows: "The best moments on earth are those in which we meditate upon heavenly things... Only then do we truly live. It is therefore vital to the soul that we should more often rise above the earth, and mount to heaven, where alone is our true life, our true country which shall have no end".

There are three elements to the human person: body, mind, and spirit. Similarly, there are three degrees of prayer: oral or bodily prayer, prayer of the mind, and prayer of the heart. The first, praying the words to get it over with, but with the mind scattered, is not prayer. The second, praying attentively, focused on the words of the prayer, is sort of prayer. The third is true prayer: feeling the words and mentally to gaze unswervingly at God and to converse with Him in reverent fear and hope, to stand with the mind in the heart before God. True prayer can be with words, or soundless - simply remaining in God's presence, saying nothing but being conscious of His love, our sinfulness, and that He is near us.

To be practical, it helps a lot to get into certain habits. To read the morning and evening prayers from an Orthodox prayer book every morning and every night, the prayers before and after Holy Communion, etc. In

Church it can aid our attention to follow the Liturgy using a Liturgy Book; useful also is the "Digital Chant Stand" app of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. At other times during the day, especially when tempted, it is very important to attentively repeat the 'Jesus Prayer' - "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me". Certain people asked St John of Kronstadt if it is best not to pray if one is not feeling inclined to prayer, and he replied that this attitude is crafty carnal sophistry. He quoted the words of Jesus, that the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force (Matthew 11:12), and said, "You will not be able to work out your salvation without forcing yourself". The same Saint pointed out that if we spend 30 minutes in evening prayer we will get 30 minutes less sleep, however if we do pray fervently we "will gain three whole hours of the soundest sleep".

What very much hinders prayer is the passions, when we have given in to lust and carnal passions, and when we have in our heart irritability, anger, hatred, resentment, and pride.

We could write a lot more about prayer. For now, it is worth emphasizing that what is important in the beginning of this sacred journey is attentiveness. When we are praying, the mind can be distracted. This needs to become our "asceticism" - we need to force our mind back to our prayer. When we are praying alone it may be necessary to say the words slowly, for example "Lord...Jesus...Christ..., have mercy...on me!" As St Ignatius Brianchaninov put it, "Prayer has quality, i.e. is genuine, when the mind is attentive during prayer, and when the heart with its feelings follows the mind".





# Changing of the Vestments of St John the Russian

on 18 April 2024

St John the Russian (1690 - 1730) is a much loved Saint of our Church, whose miracle-working body remains incorrupt in his church at New Prokopi in Evia, Greece.

As a young soldier, St John was captured and sold to a Turkish commander where he became a slave. His master would often torture him in the hope that he would accept Islam, but the Saint resolutely refused, saying that he would rather surrender his head than change his faith. St John, with humility and meekness, continued to fulfil all his master's commands and would perform his duties despite the difficult conditions. Eventually, St John's actions and character softened his master's fierce heart, and he was left in peace. When St John passed away, his master summoned the priests and allowed him to receive a Christian burial. A few years later, the priest was informed that St John's relics had

remained incorrupt and these relics were eventually placed in New Prokopi in 1924.

Countless miracles have been attributed to the Saint making his church one of Greece's most popular pilgrimages. One miracle concerns the changing of his vestments. Father John Vernezous describes the miracle as follows:

**"The Saint himself asks us to change his vestments...How does he notify us about the changing of his vestments? Well, he comes, for example, to a good soul and says to them in their sleep (in different places, in New York, in Australia, in Thessaloniki),**

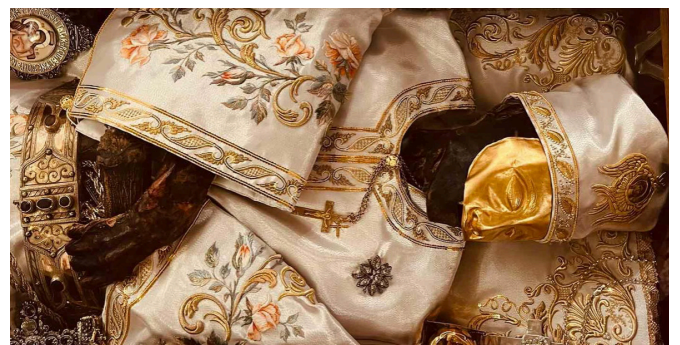
**'Come and greet me, I am John from Russia. Come to my church and tell the priest the time has come to change my robes.'**

**This is how it happened in 1937, in 1955, and in 1977 when I became a recipient. I got the information from the faithful. In 2005 the Saint again asked for a change of vestments after 28 years that had passed since 1977."**

This amazing miracle again took place just two months ago, on 18 April 2024, when the Saint's vestments were changed from blue to white. The priest of the church in New Prokopi, Father John Markos, describes how St John the Russian had recently appeared to 35 different people around the world, telling each of them that the time had come for his robes to be changed. The Saint specifically requested that his new robes be white and decorated with roses.

Following these appearances, in an overnight service accompanied by much prayer and fasting, the local bishop and the priests gathered to fulfil St John's wishes and change his vestments from blue to white.

May St John intercede for us to become worthy of such miracles!







# ELDER AIMILIANOS ON MID-PENTECOST

**E**lder Aimilianos of Simonopetra served as Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra on Mt Athos from 1974 until 2000 when he stepped down due to failing health.

Over this period, he gave many spontaneous and prepared talks, or catechisms, to the community of monks for which he was responsible at Simonopetra or to the affiliated sisterhood of nuns at the Monastery of the Annunciation of the Theotokos at Ormylia. He also gave sermons at churches in various cities and towns of Greece upon invitation by the local Bishop of that district. The following translation is an excerpt from his Catechism on the Ascension of Our Lord given to the Monastic Brotherhood of Simonopetra. It is from the Book, «ΛΟΓΟΙ ΕΟΡΤΙΟΙ ΜΥΣΤΑΓΩΓΙΚΟΙ» (Festive and Mystagogical Discourses).

...

The Feast which we call Mid-Pentecost, which occurs in the middle of the period of the Pentecostarion (the period between Pascha and Pentecost), possesses a particular sweetness and most profound spirituality. It is like a well which our Church opens in the field of the Pentecostarion, so that we can look upon our own reflections and see who we are, what is missing from us, and how we should proceed.

Mid-Pentecost is “the mid-point of days” as the first hymn of vespers of Mid-Pentecost tells us, which begins with the saving resurrection of Christ and reaches until

the feast of Pentecost, which seals this great and unique period of the Church Year. The crowning then of Great Lent and of Pentecost is the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

To show us the road towards the Holy Spirit, this same hymn says that the mid-point of feast-days, “is honoured for it reveals in advance,” it reveals before the event, that the glory of the Master’s Ascension into the Heavens draws near. In this manner, the hymnographer wants to indicate the great significance which the Feast Day of the Ascension of our Lord has in the cycle of Feasts of the Pentecostarion, so that of all the Feast-Days it mentions this one both first and last.

**...we can look upon our own reflections and see who we are, what is missing from us, and how we should proceed...**





The first reading of the feast of Mid-Pentecost, the Prophecy of Micah, says that "the Lord will be magnified in strength," that the day in which the Lord will be magnified, clothed in might, is finally revealed and foreshadowed. If we remember the promise of God the Father, "until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49), when the Holy Spirit descends, if we remember the phrases of the New Testament, "but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:5) and "in the spirit and power" (Luke 1:17), we are able to understand that the might and arm of the Father within the history of the Old Testament is the Son.

In the New Testament, the Son is the historical person who reveals the Father, as much as is possible for human nature to bear, which is why He says, "and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Luke 10:22).

Now the Son, the arm, raises the Father before the world, enabling the world to welcome and receive the Heavenly Father.

However, the time is coming when the Son must hand over His revealing power to the third person of the Holy Trinity; from now on, the Spirit will reveal the Son, and the Father simultaneously.

Consequently, the arm, the power of Christ in the life of the Church is the Holy Spirit. In this way, we have the continuation of the presence of the Personal God in the Person of the Holy Spirit, which works the revelation of the Son "upon all flesh" meaning, upon all humans. The prophecies of the Old Testament which refer to this event are most beautiful. Let us recall that amazing scene where the Spirit is poured out "upon all flesh" (Joel 3:1), and whoever receives it is called a son and daughter of God, becoming in other words a perpetual tabernacle of God, which can never be destroyed. The permanent enthronement of the Lord in the hearts of men happens through the Holy Spirit. In this manner, Christ is magnified in His strength.

And when the Lord is magnified, the Prophecy of Micah continues to tell us that, "he will shepherd his flock in peace," indeed into perfect communion along with the Father. Clearly, that which brings about the communion of man with the Father, is the Holy Spirit; it brings the work that Christ began in history to perfection. Christ broke down the middle-wall of separation, uniting the hands of God and man, but the preservation of this bond is achieved through the Holy Spirit.

**Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra (+2019)**







# The Daily Office

*"I praise You seven times a day for the judgements  
of Your righteousness" + Ps 118:164*

One of the most distinguishing features of Orthodox Christianity is the splendour, majesty and beauty of her daily liturgical and worship services. When Prince Vladimir of Russia in 987 AD sent emissaries to several countries in Europe to see which religion his country should adopt, they came back and reported to him:

*"...Then we went on to Greece, and the Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendour or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We know only that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty!"*

The services of the Orthodox Church, especially that of the Divine Liturgy, are truly reflections of Heaven, where the angels ceaselessly praise and worship God, as described for example in the vision of Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8). In the Book of Exodus, immediately after the giving of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17), God gives instructions to the people of Israel for building His altar: "An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your whole burnt offerings, your peace offerings, your sheep and your calves." (Ex. 20:24). Then comes instruction concerning keeping the Sabbath (Ex. 23:10-13), the annual feasts (Ex. 23:14-19) and the various offerings and furnishings in the sanctuary (Ex. 25:1-40). Following this, chapters 26-30 deal with such matters as the design of the tabernacle, the altar, and the outer court, the priests' vestments and their consecration, and instructions for daily offerings. We see from this that God is very particular about the way in which He is to be worshipped.

The first Christians of the Apostolic era, in keeping with

these Jewish practices of worship and sacrifice in the Temple, as well as prayer services in the synagogues, gathered daily in the Temple and in their homes for the breaking of bread in Holy Communion (Acts 2:46). From these beginnings emerged the daily cycle of prayer services of the Orthodox Church known as the Daily Office. From the times of the Apostles, these services were gradually transformed into the pattern of services we have today, influenced largely by monastic communities, particularly that of the monastery of St Sabbas the Sanctified in Palestine. The services of the Daily Office may be found in the Book of Hours (Ωρολόγιον), and consist of Vespers, Compline (Απόδειπνο), Midnight Office (Μεσονυκτικόν), Matins (Ορθρος), the First Hour, the Third Hour, the Sixth Hour, and the Ninth Hour. The Divine Liturgy is counted as a separate service, above prayer itself, in which the faithful officiate and partake in the bloodless sacrifice of our Lord in the Sacrament of Holy Communion – described by the Fathers of the Church as "the summary of God's entire economy"!

Today the full set of services of the Daily Office is performed mainly in monasteries. Nonetheless, a daily program of prayer is important for all Christians to maintain, particularly by having a morning and evening prayer rule. And throughout each day, Apostle Paul encourages Christians to continually turn their thoughts and attention to the Lord in gratitude and prayer: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess 5:16-18).

With our fervent daily prayers, we indeed make God's sanctifying presence a powerful reality in our life: "Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven... For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen"!



# THE LIFE OF ST SAVA

by St Nikolai Velimirovich

In the writings of the Church, it is not uncommon to find gems of hagiography written by saints themselves. Following in the traditions of such fathers as St Sophronius, the biographer of the life of St Mary of Egypt, and St Gregory of Nyssa, the author of the subliminal Life of Moses, St Nikolai Velimirovich, a contemporary, 20th Century champion of the Serbian Church, left for the Orthodox faithful of all traditions this book, The Life of St Sava.

Upon taking up this outstanding book, one is thrown into a world of medieval intrigue filled with warriors, Zupans, battles, heroes, foreign villains, internal foes and the pressures of patriotic duty. Within this dark world of war, poverty and ever-present threats, the author portrays the life of a young boy called by God from an early age to monasticism – to flee from his princely life of wealth and comfort in order to cultivate a spiritual kingdom.

The life of St Sava is the life of a prince filled with a sense of duty to his beloved Serbian people, a humble and deeply sensitive monastic hermit, a builder of magnificent churches, monasteries and lasting monastic communities, an archbishop, a founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church, an ecumenical traveller moving freely within the melting pot of Byzantine cultures, a champion of Serbia, a miracle worker and a civil peacemaker.

First published in 1951 by an important bishop of the Serbian Church, the book is unusual in that, though it starts with the birth of the Saint and ends in his falling asleep, it does not read like a typical biography. It reads like the observations of a grateful heir of the inheritance of Serbian spirituality and nationhood. St Nikolai keeps his chapters very short - no more than 3 pages each.

He starts each chapter with a philosophical observation (e.g. “No beauty can be compared with the beauty of holiness”) before narrating a chapter in the life of Saint Sava that flows from the opening observation. Not one dull moment can be found in the pages of this extraordinary biography.

The Life of Saint Sava is a deeply inspiring narration of Serbia’s greatest saint. It throws the reader deep into an unfamiliar world within which the Orthodox reader can nonetheless somehow navigate (it is by no means a historical treatise). Within that world, St Nikolai paints the picture of a man with the same desires and struggles so familiar to the contemporary Orthodox Christian. In the Life of Saint Sava, one is forced to encounter one’s own shortcomings and inspired to act on God’s ceaseless calls to sainthood.



THE LIFE OF ST SAVA  
St Nikolai Velimirovich

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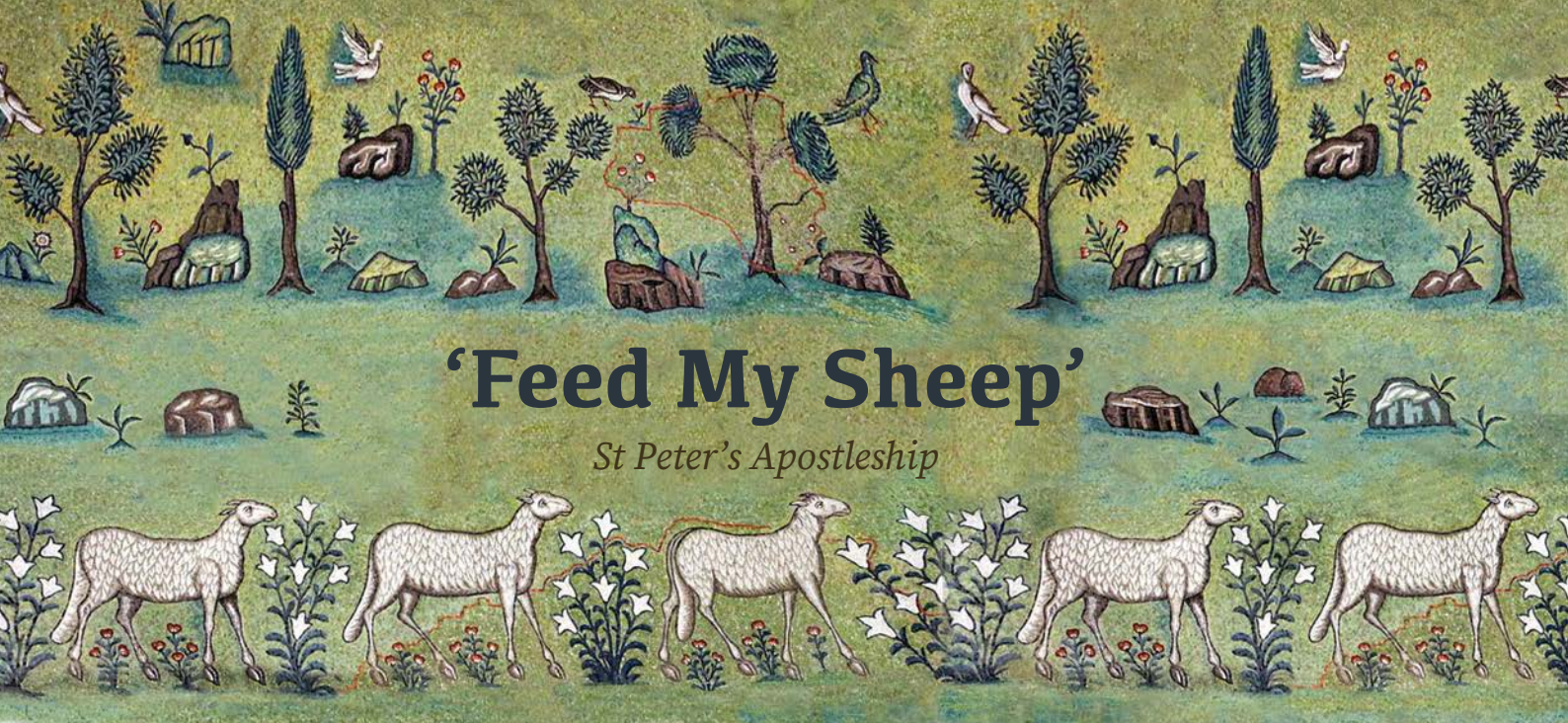
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# 'Feed My Sheep'

*St Peter's Apostleship*

## *From the Gospel of John, chapter 21*

One night at the sea of Tiberius, seven of the disciples, led by Peter, have returned to their former trade as fishermen. Being unable to catch a single fish, their failed efforts have brought to mind a similarly fruitless night three years ago, when the Lord had blessed their labours with an abundant haul, calling them to follow Him and become 'fishers of men' (Luke 5:1-11).

Just as day is breaking, they hear a voice calling out to them from the shore,

*"Young men, do you have any fish?  
Cast your net on the right side of  
the boat, and you will find some."*

The disciples show humble obedience to this stranger's command. To their amazement, the catch is so enormous that they struggle to draw it in.

John turns to Peter, *"It is the Lord!"*

As soon as he hears this, Peter puts on his outer garment and leaps off the boat, around ninety meters from the shore, while the others quickly bring the boat in with its hefty load.

Arriving at the shore, they are met with a warm charcoal fire and food.

The Lord requests they bring some of the fish they have caught, and invites them to have breakfast with him, serving them Himself.

They eat their breakfast in silence, with no one daring to ask who this man was. They knew it was the resurrected Lord, writes the Evangelist.

When they had eaten, Jesus says to Peter,

*"Simon, son of Jonah, do you love  
Me more than these?"*

He is called by his birth name, rather than 'Peter' (rock), in order to remind him of the prior state of sin and ignorance from which he had been saved.

*"Do you love me...?"*

The question deeply wounds Peter. He recalls his betrayal of Christ, when he denied knowing Him three times, out of cowardice. He had done much to repent of his sin: shedding bitter tears, overcoming his shame to rejoin the other disciples, and running eagerly with John to the empty tomb. Now remained for him the opportunity to reaffirm his love to the Lord face to face, and to abolish the stigma of his three-fold denial.

*"...more than these?"*



Peter has learned from his mistake. He no longer exhibits the self-confidence he had displayed shortly before his denial, proclaiming that he would follow the Lord both to prison and to death (Luke 22:33). In his humility, he does not answer that he loves the Lord more than the others, but replies *"You know that I love You."*

### *"Feed My lambs"*

The Lord's response. The question is repeated a second time, with the same answer.

A similar command is then given,

### *"Tend My sheep"*

Upon hearing the question a third time, however, Peter is grieved and filled with worry.

His thoughts race, 'Is the Lord predicting that I will again betray Him? Is my love for Him still in doubt?'

*"Lord, you know all things, (for you are the Son of God). You know that I love you."*

### *"Feed My sheep"*

If you love Me, says Christ, then you must show it. Love My lambs as a shepherd of the Church, tending to them with your ministry and feeding them with the Word of God and the sacred sacraments, and by doing so you will show that you love Me.

The Lord's words teach us that the shepherding of the Church by its clergy is not a position or career path that has as its aim the acquisition of glory or earthly comforts, but it is a calling from Christ Himself and solely motivated by love for Him. The same can be said for all those who serve or undertake missionary work within the Church.

*"When you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish."*

The Lord's chosen labourers would not have an easy life, but would suffer persecution and martyrdom, as he foretold when he warned them *"In the world you will have*

*tribulation"* (John 16:33). The sufferings of the Apostle Peter were present from the beginning of his ministry, when he was beaten and jailed, and continued until his death by crucifixion in the city of Rome - *'you will stretch out your hands'*.

Having foretold that Peter would glorify Him by martyrdom, the Lord then utters a familiar command,

### *"Follow Me"*

Just like that night three years earlier, Peter obeys the call and becomes an Apostle of Christ. This time, however, with unshakeable faith in the resurrected Lord.

The Apostle Peter's ministry and death is summarised by the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (†339 AD), as follows:

*"Peter appears to have preached in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia to the Jews of the dispersion. And at last, having come to Rome, he was crucified head-downwards; for he had requested that he might suffer in this way."*

(Church History Book III)



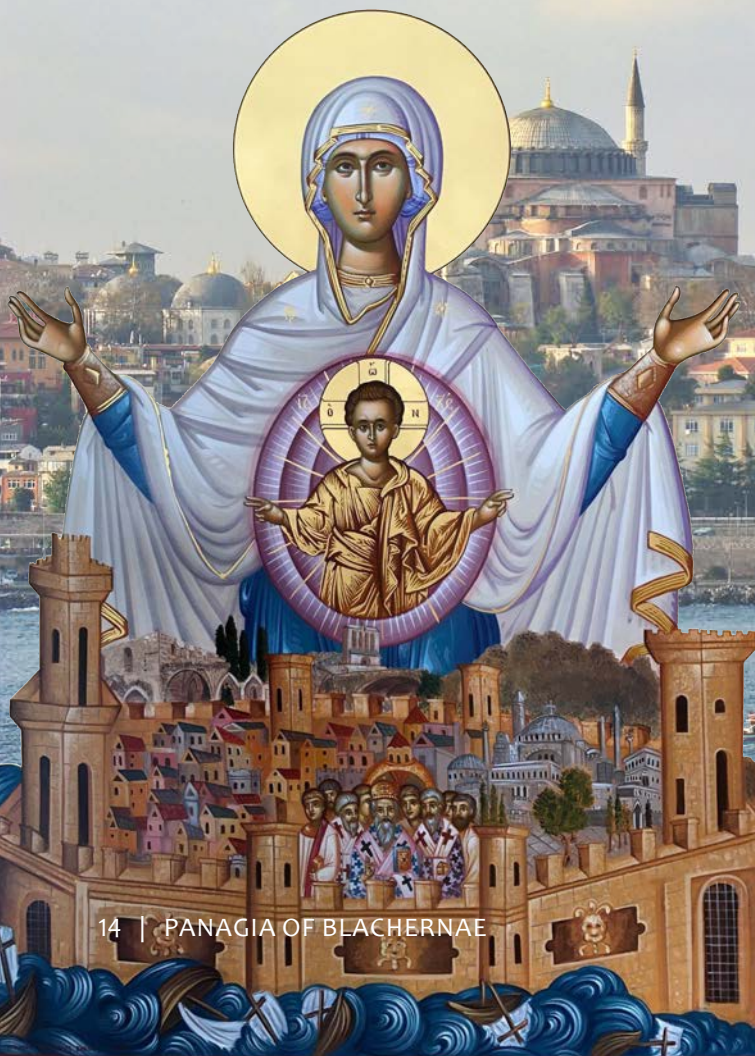




# PANAGIA OF BLACHERNAE

One of the most important historic churches of Constantinople is that of Panagia of Blachernae, well known for the events and miracles that took place there over the centuries. It is located just within the Theodosian walls of the City in the Ayvansaray region, and operates to this day as a church.

This church was built as a large basilica around the year 450 by the Byzantine Empress, St Pulcheria, and Emperor Marcian. It was also home to a chapel



which housed the mantle and belt of the Theotokos. It sits over an agiasma, a spring of holy water.

One of the most notable miracles that occurred at the church was in 626 AD, when Constantinople was besieged by the Avars and the Persians. Seeking divine help in their hour of need, the faithful in the City, led by Patriarch Sergius, held a prayerful liturgical procession with the icon of Panagia of Blachernitissa along the walls.

Through a miraculous appearance of the Theotokos and the consequent destruction of the Avar fleet, the siege was lifted and the City was saved. In gratitude, the Akathist service was held for the first time at the church of Panagia of Blachernae.

Just over two centuries later, the Triumph of Orthodoxy was celebrated for the first time at Blachernae. This saw the restoration of icons throughout the Byzantine Empire and the defeat of iconoclasm, which sought to end the veneration of icons in Orthodoxy.

Over the centuries, the church at Blachernae was burned and rebuilt, and later destroyed after the fall of Constantinople with nothing remaining except the agiasma spring. The land where the ruined church was situated was granted to Ottomans and remained in their hands until 1867, when Greek Orthodox furriers purchased the land and built the modern church of Panagia of Blachernae, dedicated to the Dormition of the Theotokos, which sits above the agiasma.

The history of Panagia of Blacherna shares the history of the Christian population in Constantinople. When there were attacks against the Christians of Istanbul in September 1955, and especially the Greeks, Panagia of Blachernae was not spared. Dimitrios Kaloumenos, a photographer who chronicled the pogrom, captured a photo of the brutal vandalism of the agiasma.

The destruction was described by an eyewitness: "The sight that greeted us can hardly be described. The narthex no longer existed. The interior of the church was levelled to the ground. There was neither *iconostasis* nor pulpit, nor episcopal throne, nor pews, nor lecterns nor icons nor holy altar. Everything was in smithereens. It was impossible to walk there. Father Anthimos and the good sexton, Kyr Stratos, told us what happened, still terrified."

The church was restored afterwards, and ordinarily holds a service on Friday mornings, Sunday mornings and feast days, and is open to pilgrims.





Εἶδομεν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ἐλάβομεν Πνεῦμα  
ἐπουράνιον, εὗρομεν πίστιν ἀληθῆ, ἀδιαίρετον  
Τριάδα προσκυνοῦντες· αὕτη γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἔσωσεν.

*We have seen the true light, we have received  
the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true  
faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity,  
which has saved us.*

Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom

This hymn is chanted in most of the Holy Liturgies performed during the Church year and serves as a post-communion hymn. It is taken from the Vespers service of the Sunday of Pentecost. It is a hymn of thanksgiving, an outpouring of praise and a triumphant declaration of theological precept.

We sing this as an affirmation of the dogma; the truth revealed to the Church by God, acknowledging that every Divine Liturgy is a gift of the eternal grace of the Holy Trinity to each Orthodox Christian who truly takes part in it. It is the experience par excellence of the Orthodox Christian.

The Holy Liturgy does not end when we leave this earthly dimension of our existence. It is ongoing, both earthly and heavenly. This is confirmed in numerous prayers and hymns of the service. In participating in the Holy Liturgy, we are in fact participating in the uncreated energies of the Holy Trinity.

We realise this participation by communing of Christ's body and blood. St Nicholas Cabasilas explains: *"that of which we partake is not something of His, but Himself. It is not some ray and light which we receive in our souls, but the very orb of the sun. So, we dwell in Him and are indwelt and become one spirit with Him"* (The Life in Christ, Book 4).

As St Gregory the Theologian explains, *"we receive the Son's light from the Father's light in the light of the Spirit: that is what we ourselves have seen and now proclaim – it is the plain and simple explanation of the Trinity"* (Oration 31 'On the Holy Spirit').

St Symeon the Theologian, in one of his own hymns on divine Love, gives us a sense of the outpouring of praise encapsulated in this liturgical hymn:

*"Again, the light shines for me, again it is seen clearly, again, it opens the heavens, again it divides the night, (Mt 3:16) again, it creates all things, again the light alone is seen, again, it transports me outside all visible things, and likewise, it separates me from perceptible things -- oh surprise!"* (Hymn 40)

In every Holy Liturgy, after we have partaken of the Divine Gifts, we cannot but praise the Holy Trinity for once more, again, bestowing on us the true Light of God.

And finally, this hymn is a hymn of thanks. St Dionysius the Areopagite eloquently illuminates this for us:

*"So, then, after the entire sacred rank has come together in hierarchic fashion and after they have all joined in communing with the most divine things, they end the ceremony with a sacred thanksgiving. They declare openly and praise appropriately the gifts of the divine activity. Those who do not participate in and know the divine things do not join in the thanksgiving, even though the infinite gifts of God are worthy in themselves of appropriate thanksgiving... Through their reception of these gifts, they will behold how sublimely splendid they are. Only when they have received them will they see how lofty, how infinitely broad their magnificence is. Then they will be able to praise and give thanks for those divine gifts of the Deity as they come down from beyond the heavens"* (from The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy).

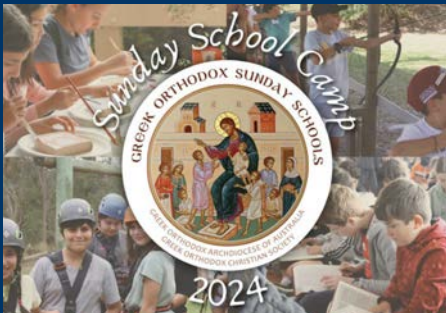
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## Annual Sunday School Picnic 2024



With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, the Annual Sunday School Picnic for 2024 was held at Gough Whitlam Park in Earlwood, on Monday 10th of June. Over 350 children and their families from Sunday Schools across Sydney and Wollongong gathered together for a day filled with activities, games and enjoyment.

The day was further blessed by the presence of numerous members of the clergy who attended. Very Rev Fr Irenaeus Triantis, parish priest of St Sophia & Three Daughters, along with Very Rev Fr Dimitri Kokkinos, parish priest of St Ioannis, addressed the children, emphasising the importance of Christ-centred environments such as Sunday School. They also conveyed the blessings of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios and provided a small icon for each child to take home.

Throughout the day, the children participated in numerous games and activities, culminating in running races and tightly contested tug-of-war. Ultimately, the alliance of the parishes of All Saints Belmore, St Nicholas Marrickville, the Annunciation of Our Lady Redfern and St Andrew Gladesville triumphed and took home the 2024 Sunday School picnic trophy. Glory to God for such a blessed day and for all those who attended!

**June 10, 2024**