



BASILDON ORTHODOX COMMUNITY BULLETIN

All Saints Church North Benfleet

No. 15 ~ January 2017



Basildon Orthodox Community is a registered charity. No. 1168146

GIFT AID

All glory to God, our parish has been awarded charity status by HMRC (charity no. 1168146). We are now able to collect *Gift Aid* on donations and financial contributions. Gift Aid is the Government scheme for enabling churches and charities to reclaim tax paid on donations. If you are a UK taxpayer, we are able to receive an extra 25p for every £1 you donate; the process is simple and straightforward. If you would like to enable us to collect Gift Aid on your donation we humbly ask that you donate by STANDING ORDER, or by using our NUMBERED ENVELOPE. For details, please see our Treasurer, Susannah Anderson.

ANNUAL BLESSING OF HOMES

Now that we have had the Great Blessing of the Waters on Holy Theophany, Fr. Jakob is available to visit and bless your home with holy water. Please contact him to arrange the blessing. The process is a simple one, does not take long, and provides a blessing of your home for the forthcoming year.

SAINT PAUL OF THEBES

[Feast Day: 15th January] Around the year 342, St. Anthony the Great, who thought that he was the first desert-dweller, was informed by an angel in a dream about St. Paul's existence: *"There is a man who lives in the inner wilderness; the world is not worthy of his footsteps."* The saint (*see the Coptic ikon on our front cover*) lived a life of prayer and asceticism in the mountains of the Theban desert, in a cave near a clear spring and a palm tree. The palm leaves he plaited to make his only clothing; whilst for many years the fruit provided his sole source of sustenance, until – like the Prophet Elias - a raven started bringing him half a loaf of bread daily. The saint remained in his cave for the rest of his life, until he was almost one hundred years old. Such was the edenic sanctity of St. Paul that, when he reposed in the Lord, two lions dug his grave with their claws. His holy relics are now at the small and beautiful church of Santa Maria in Porto, in Ravenna.

ON MATTER AND TIME

Each ounce of matter belongs to God and is to find in God its fulfilment. Each instant of time is God's time and is to fulfil itself as God's eternity. Nothing is "neutral." For the Holy Spirit, as a ray of light, as a smile of joy, has "touched" all things, all time—revealing all of them as precious stones of a precious temple.

~ Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *For Life of the World*, 2nd revised and expanded edition (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), p. 76.

ORTHOPRAXIS: A PURE AND HUMBLE HEART

Beloved Christians,

The immediate objective of the Christian life should be the acquisition of purity of heart.

We are warned that a superficial, shallow, faith provides only a hostile environment, one in which the divine cannot germinate or take root; poor (corrupted) soil is unworthy of God. A soil that is not tended, watered and fertile will produce nothing but weeds. The adoption of a reverential and humble attitude is foundational to the process of salvation. Salvation, the attainment of the Kingdom, is the activation of the God-given ability to assimilate the divine and uncreated energies (grace).

The sacramental *mysteria* of the Holy Church are not 'magic'. Grace is not simply sprinkled around like fairy dust. For a *mysterion* to be *effective* the disposition of the soul and personal attitude of the recipient have a crucial part to play: the recipient must have a repentant and contrite heart. Only a pure heart is open to God- only someone who knows that they are sick visits the physician, and only one who trusts the physician takes his medicine.

Grace is never 'forced' upon the person by God, one must desire it with one's whole being. Neither is grace received simply because we *will it*. The operation of Grace is a *synergeia*: a cooperative action of the love shared by God and man. In all things that we do and say we must have remembrance of God and be conscious of our dependence on Him for all things- when we awaken we must praise God; before we begin every task we must ask God's assistance; before a journey we should ask God's protection; in times of distress we should call upon God for help; when things go well or badly we must praise and thank Him for His beneficence. When making our Confession or partaking of the Holy Mysteries we should beseech God for his mercy, praise Him for His Glory, and be conscious of our own utter unworthiness and broken-ness before Him.

When we make our confession our sins are cleansed by our tears – a *second Baptism*; our contrition is necessary for absolution to have validity and be thoroughly effective. A confession without pain of heart does not reconcile us to God or to man. Likewise, at Holy Communion, proper preparations are necessary for us to be granted the fullest physical and spiritual benefits of partaking of the Holy and Precious Body and Blood of Christ God. The virtue of the divine *koinonia* is conditional upon the disposition of him who approaches the economy. Holy Communion, as with all the sacramental *mysteria* of the Holy Church, is something that we should only ever approach with fear of God and in faith and love.

The first objective of the Christian life should be repentance of sin and the humbling of our self before God and before man. On this rests the successful attainment of the ultimate goal of the Christian life: *theosis* – union with God.

In Xp,

the sinner and unworthy priest, Jakob

WORDS OF LIFE

Abstinence from bodily food is useless without charity.

~ St. Gildas the Wise

You were called Catechumen, when the Word echoed round you from without; hearing of hope, and knowing not, hearing of mysteries, and understanding not; hearing of Scriptures, and not knowing their depth. No longer does it echo round you, but within you; for the indwelling Spirit henceforth makes your mind a Divine habitat.

~ St Kyril of Jerusalem

*I do my Cross in the morning,
I do my Cross in the evening;
in the middle I say 'thank you' a lot,
in the middle I say 'help me' a lot.*

~ Fr. Nicholas Samaras, from 'Psalm in the Words of a Simple Man To Emulate'

The Philokalia is an itinerary through the labyrinth of time, a silent way of love and gnosis through the deserts and emptinesses of life, especially of modern life, a vivifying and fadeless presence. It is an active force revealing a spiritual path and inducing man to follow it. [. . .] It must be stressed, however, that this spiritual path known as hesychasm cannot be followed in a vacuum. Although most of the texts in the Philokalia are not specifically doctrinal, they all presuppose doctrine even when they do not state it. Moreover, this doctrine entails an ecclesiology. It entails a particular understanding of the Church and a view of salvation inextricably bound up with its sacramental and liturgical life. This is to say that hesychasm is not something that has developed independently of or alongside the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. It is part and parcel of it. It too is an ecclesial tradition. To attempt to practice it, therefore, apart from active participation in this sacramental and liturgical life is to cut it off from its living roots.

~ from the 'Introduction' to the Eng. tr. of the *Philokalia*, vol. 1, pp. 13,15.

The man who has struggled bravely with the passions of the body, has fought ably against unclean spirits, and has expelled from his soul the conceptual images they provoke, should pray for a pure heart to be given him and for a spirit of integrity to be renewed within him [cf. Ps. 51:10]. In other words, he should pray that by grace he may be completely emptied of evil thoughts and filled with divine thoughts, so that he may become a spiritual world of God, splendid and vast, wrought from moral, natural and theological forms of contemplation.

~ St. Maximos the Confessor

'His majesty is upon Israel' [Ps. 68:34. LXX] — that is, upon the intellect that beholds, so far as this is possible, the beauty of the glory of God Himself. 'And His strength is in the clouds' [ibid.], that is, in radiant souls that gaze towards the dawn. In such souls it reveals the Beloved, He who sits at the right hand of God and floods them with light as the sun's rays flood the white clouds.

~ St. Hesychios the Priest

AN EXTRACT FROM THE LIFE OF 'CRAZY JOHN', A SAINTLY FOOL IN THE HEART OF MODERN ATHENS



“John made it a habit to indiscriminately ring the doorbells, not only in his own building, but also in neighbouring apartment buildings. He would introduce himself to everyone and would ask them if they needed anything that he could help them with:

“ ‘And how did you wake up this morning? Has any problem come up so I can be of assistance to you? How are your children?’

At first, some snubbed him. Others slammed their door in his face, refusing to speak to him - obviously annoyed by his unexpected presence. But there were others who actually waited for Crazy John to come, so that they could hear a kind word from him. Eventually, he came to know all of them; he came to know their peculiarities, but also the elements of their characters.

“In the evenings, Crazy John would retire to his humble home and pray. He liked to recite the book of Psalms, claiming to someone who asked him why, that ‘they were intended to drive away the little *critters* (demons) from the neighbourhood...’ He used to read it out so loud, that a newly-arrived tenant who didn't know him that well called the Police, complaining about him disturbing the peace! Also on a daily basis, the fool would cense all the apartments, beginning from the top floor and working down. He would even go out to the back yards and cense there also. And when someone was sick, he would visit them and - after censing them and making the sign of the Cross over them - he would read haltingly, with his limited education, the words of St. James' Epistle... ‘Pray for each other, so that you may be healed’, he would say to them. He would urge them to go to confession, ‘to get well by the greatest of doctors, our Christ...’”

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+ GLORY TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS +