

# THE NARTHEX

July-August 2016

'And the disciples were first called  
Christians in Antioch' (Acts 11:26)

The Orthodox Church of St Dunstan of Canterbury, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset BH14 9JG

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland. Archbishop: Metropolitan Silouan

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Patriarch: His Beatitude, John X

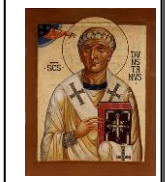
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## Come and See

One of the most significant stages in the development of a new friendship or relationship is when you ask someone to your own home for the first time. Being invited to someone's home implies an unspoken trust and openness towards you by that person; a desire to share, in part and within limits, the intimate sphere in which an individual has a place, a home. Usually, though, we are careful as to how we receive people into our homes. We like to present a clean and tidy house, avoid disputes in any conversation, offer some refreshment and wish to make the guest generally feel at ease and comfortable during the visit.

Imagine, then, being invited to the home of a large family: there might be a smile and a whispered conversation at first but no great demonstration of welcome. Few of the family acknowledge you perhaps and anyway, most of them, apart from some of the little ones, are mostly looking away from you in an entirely different direction. Unless you happen to be very old, infirm or several months pregnant, you are not even invited to sit down. In fact, it's a strange house, with nothing in the way of comfortable furniture of which to speak, only lots of ethnic art work all over the place and a system of lighting that would horrify any health and safety inspector. During the visit the household gets on with what it always does, making no allowances for your presence and when it comes to meal-time, you are not even invited to table, save that, at the end you might be invited to take some of what is left over. At this point, you discover to your surprise and relief that you are invited to partake of another kind of refreshment of a more conventional variety. Then and only then, the family will start to hold a conversation with you.

This is, of course, an analogy of what it must be like to be invited to attend the Divine Liturgy for the first time if you are not an Orthodox Christian. It might appear that such people have stumbled across a very exclusive club but it is the way it must be, notwithstanding that, in the early days of Christianity, enquirers alongside the catechumens and the penitents, were escorted off the premises following the sermon, after a prayer and blessing. Hence the acclamation to guard *The doors! The doors!* which is still heard in the liturgy.

Just as in our homes, a guest does not have free rein to go wherever they wish, so in the Orthodox Church, the house on earth of the Living God, the enquirer can only share partially in the mystery of faith; anything else would be unauthentic until admitted to the communion of the saints. And yet, invite them we must for we exist to call to repentance and salvation all mankind, all those who truly seek their soul's salvation.

At the recent Archdiocesan Conference, the first with our own Metropolitan, Sayedna issued a clear direction for the coming year. In the course of a question-and-answer session a thought came to him: that we should invite anyone to come and see what the life of the Orthodox Church is like; indeed, he suggested that 'Come and See' be a kind of motto for the year. Not only, therefore, should we have this at the forefront of all we do until the next conference, next year [a liturgical conference for clergy, their wives and the choir leaders in the archdiocese] but I would suggest it is the ideal approach in all Orthodox Mission, both for individuals and for parishes.

In St John's gospel, following Nathanael's initial cynicism regarding

'Jesus of Nazareth, Philip tells him to *'come and see'* (Jn.1:46). We shall also meet plenty of cynicism, especially in talking of our faith to British people who, for the most part, imagine that Christianity is a faith they think they have rejected. The trouble is, what most of them have come across is Heterodoxy, not Orthodoxy - a version of Christianity that has either fallen into lost memory over two generations or has compromised its beliefs and moral understanding with the current spirit of the age.

Inasmuch as we are bound to follow the bishop in all things in the gospel, we must be ready to respond to the questions of anyone who enquire about our faith. And we do not have to seem weird, appear different to them or strange in our way of dress to attract their attention.

The early anonymous Christian writer of *the Epistle to Diognetus* (c.124 AD) wrote that:

*'The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality or language or customs. Christians do not... speak any special dialect nor practice an eccentric way of life. They... conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet and other habits. Nevertheless... though destiny has placed them here in the flesh, they do not live after the flesh... They obey the prescribed laws but in their own private lives they transcend the laws.'*

So our difference should be through our moral integrity, by our refusal to give in to modern fears and obsessions and above all, unconfused and clear in what we believe. In this way we shall be able to answer their questions and invite

them to come and see. That is why it is so important that each of us is well-informed and knows the basics of Orthodox Christianity and what it teaches. [Opportunity for improving this is clearly an area of our parish life that we shall have to develop in the near future. Following our recent general parish meeting, we have soon to elect a new parish committee and appoint about three new directors for our foundation. Once this is achieved, the teaching and catechetical work of the parish with all age groups will clearly be one of our priorities.]

Since the eighteenth century the English have always taken pleasure in touring round and seeing inside other people's houses, especially the grand houses and stately homes of the upper classes. We, of course, have a spectacular asset in our own treasured church building, a grand pile, the restoration of which is taking up a great deal of our time, effort and energy - and rightly so. There are many people, for all sorts of reasons, who would value the opportunity to visit the building or who are curious enough to attend the Liturgy itself on a Sunday. St. Dunstan's church itself, like any other Orthodox church building, stands as a symbol of heaven on earth. We can invite people to come to our house: come and see where God dwells among men. You may have come across the well-known story, found in the *Primary Russian Chronicle*, of the envoys of St Vladimir. They had been sent by him to enquire which would be the best religion for the lands he ruled. The envoys, after their journey, reported back to Vladimir that having looked at Judaism, Islam and Roman Christianity - which all failed to impress, they finally arrived at the Church of Agia Sofia in Constantinople and attended the Divine Liturgy. They told Vladimir that they did not know whether they were in heaven or on earth for they had never before seen such beauty. All they knew was that, there, God dwelt among men. It is true, perhaps, that when Agia Sofia was finished, the emperor Justinian was supposed to have said, '*Solomon, I have surpassed thee!*' And although our temple and our Liturgy might not surpass the church of the Holy Wisdom in beauty, yet we can aspire and aim, by the grace of God, to serve Him in the beauty of holiness, to

the end that any who might enquire will know that God dwells among us here.

With this in mind, it is evident that our endeavour to preserve and restore the building is not motivated by vanity nor is it merely the restoration of piece of local the patrimony, though from one point of view it is important. After all, this is where our interests and the interests of the local community meet. But more than this, the church building is our home within which, together, we live our life in Christ here and, as such, this is the house of God to which we invite guests and enquirers; the symbol and very manifestation of where the kingdom of heaven and earth meet.

Furthermore, as far as possible, we should keep an open house in the literal sense. One of the stipulations of receiving any grant from the Heritage Fund is that the building be open to the public at least 40 times a year outside service times. We are more than happy that this should be so. With this in mind, one of my hopes is that I can establish a working office somewhere on the premises so that I can do much of my administrative work there during the week with the doors of the building open for visitors. We might combine this with the regular serving of weekday services, such as the Hours or Vespers at convenient times. Meanwhile, when anyone discovers that we are Orthodox Christians and ask, what is that all about? all we really need reply is: *come and see!*

*Fr Chrysostom*



### Formal Notification

is hereby given of  
elections to the

### Parish Committee

and of

the appointment of three new Directors  
for the

### Bournemouth Poole Orthodox Christian Foundation

Nominees are to be proposed and seconded by the closing date which has yet to be announced. According to law, clergy and their wives may not be elected members of either the Committee or the Foundation.

### SERVICES

*Vespers is normally served on Saturday's at 5.00pm in the Saints of Britain chapel. Fr. Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards.*

### July

Sun 3rd 2nd after Pentecost  
All Saints of Britain Divine  
Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 10th 3rd after Pentecost  
All Saints of Antioch Divine  
Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 17th 4th after Pentecost  
Fathers of 4th Ecumenical Council  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 24th 5th after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 31st 6th after Pentecost  
Forefeast of the Procession of  
the Cross Divine Liturgy 10.30am

### August

Mon 1st Beginning of Dormition  
Fast

Fri 5th Eve of Transfiguration  
Vespereal Liturgy 7.00pm

Sun 7th 7th after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 14th 8th after Pentecost  
Forefeast of Dormition  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am



Mon 15th The Dormition of our  
Lady Divine Liturgy 11.00am

\*Sun 21st 9th after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

\*Sun 28th 10th after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

*\*Subject to possible change, depending on holiday arrangements.*