

THE NARTHEX

November-December 2017
'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

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Practical Guidance

Since the days of the Apostles the pastors of the Church have always offered spiritual, moral and practical guidance to the faithful. The earliest instance of this is found in the New Testament itself, especially in the epistles of St Paul. In the Acts of the Apostles, for example, we have in chapter 15 the story of the council of Jerusalem which settled the matter of initiation into the Church of Christ: Circumcision, the sign of the covenant with Abraham, had now been surpassed for Christian Baptism was not about the outward man but the inner; not the separation of one chosen people but the remaking and restoration of humanity itself in Christ.

How precisely the life in Christ is to be lived, of course, is not imparted as if by magic. Although not being *of* the world yet being still *in* this world, we have the task of acquiring the mind of Christ and have the great work of conforming our inner and outward lives to Christ. This is the ascetic struggle of each one of us where we stand or fall in our temptations and sins. This is why, for those who realise this and take it seriously, we have the joyful mystery of Confession, the means of grace by which we conquer, again and again.

At the council of Jerusalem (Acts:15:6-29) the Apostles directed the followers of Christ not to eat meat that had been used in pagan sacrifices or any meat from strangled animals, which would contain the life-blood and therefore was not to be consumed (one the commandments in the Jewish Laws of Kashrut (food laws). They were also to guard themselves from sexual morality (fornication).

This approach to the direction of the faithful continued through various Church councils and especially in the seven Ecumenical Councils which laid down the Holy Canons for the regulating of Church life.

The whole purpose of any canon or directive is that it act as a standard, an expected way of behaviour, drawn logically, by implication, from the teaching and commandments of Christ, Himself. They serve, basically, for the *bene esse*, that

is, the well-being of the Church, whether local or world-wide, enabling it to work cohesively, according to accepted norms of behaviour.

The Holy Canons, of course, emerged over time, as they were needed. Many have fallen into irrelevance, such as those touching on the treatment of slaves; others need to be understood in context and might no longer be directly applicable. Many of the canons are, naturally, concerned only with the clergy: such matters as the rights and duties of bishops, relations between bishops, of the limits of authority and ideas of precedence.

When we remember that, for the most part, the Apostles, whether the twelve or the seventy, were Jewish, we can see the idea of the Holy Canons coming from the tradition in Judaism of the *Midrash*, the teaching on a particular matter of religion. Over the years these were gathered together into the *Talmud*, a collection in many volumes of reflection and practical interpretation of the 613 commandments of the Torah in the Old Testament. We might call to mind our Lord in St Matthew's gospel giving His midrash: *'Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.'* [Matt.13:52]

It is possible, I think, that this reflective process passed naturally into the early Church of the Apostles and beyond as the way of conducting their communal life in Christ: a unique approach, quite without real parallel in the ancient world. True, there had been laws and directives in other ancient systems of belief, such as the Laws of Manu in Hinduism, the Five and the Ten precepts of Buddhism. There was ancient piety, custom, taboo and ritual procedure in all forms of pagan religion but nothing quite like this. And it is interesting that what came from the great councils of the Church are called in Orthodoxy, the Holy Canons; *Canon Law* is a term more common in western Christianity and, in the way it operates, perhaps owes more to Roman Law.

Such direction is also exercised at a more personal, one-to one level in the Orthodox Church. One can think of the

ministry of a parish priest in confession, the guidance of a spiritual father or mother or even of laypeople, one to another. Here we might also call to mind the important role of sponsors and godparents which, in reality, is a serious responsibility.

This rather long preamble is intended to help us understand the life and working of our own church community. From our beginnings as a parish in 2006 and our purchase of the building in 2011, we have developed a local approach to life together, as is only natural. I should like now to establish some very general guiding principles that I believe will help in the development of our mission, our life together and our spiritual growth. Some of these points are clearly very obvious but they need to be restated from time to time.

1] Conduct at the Liturgy.

I remember years ago when I was an Anglican clergyman, one of my colleagues pointing out, quite honestly, that the reason most of his congregation came to church was because their friends were there. We cannot deny the social importance of a church community and I am sure many of you a very happy to meet with friends at church. There is nothing wrong with that. It is especially important for those who have come to Britain from abroad and are glad to have contact with their fellow countrymen. Sadly, a great deal of that conviviality can take place, from time to time, during the Liturgy itself. Our hearts cannot be on high with the Lord when the mind is drawn downwards. The deacons who have a real oversight of the congregation during the service, issue their own directives: *Let us attend!* We come together *firstly* to worship Almighty God, so attentiveness is essential as far as we are able. There have been occasions when idle chatter has broken out among the congregation which is disturbing, not only to fellow worshippers but also to the Choir and to the clergy within the altar.

It is especially important that we keep silence going to and returning from receiving the Holy Gifts, the most sacred moments of our entire week. Incidentally, it is not correct to buy items (apart from votive candles) from the little shop in the church during the Liturgy. Those who have the care of young children are responsible for their behaviour in church and, as far as they are able, should teach by word and example how they can best take part without causing a disturbance.

Another problem is late arrival for the service. It is understood that large families with young children take a lot of organisation in the morning. Here, though, it must be stated, that if you are going to receive the Holy Gifts you *should* be present from the beginning. For those who value a quiet start to their Sunday morning and have the time, I highly recommend attendance at Orthros before the Liturgy at 9.00am: a service whereby the Church greets and worships the risen Christ and is therefore a wonderful part of our preparation for communion.

2] After the Liturgy.

Following the Liturgy many like to prolong their devotions. The clergy have to consume what remains of the Holy gifts and then remove their holy vestments. It is also good practice to have the post-communion thanksgiving prayers recited audibly, if possible at this time. The time after the Liturgy is precisely the time for meeting and talking together over refreshments. It is, therefore, important that as many as possible should come down to the hall after the service, not least to welcome and get to know any strangers and visitors to the church. What does it mean to come to the service merely to talk and then go away after the dismissal?

It has become common practice for people to queue in order to see me after the service to arrange various matters, such as special blessings. Given the numbers in the congregation now, this is becoming increasingly difficult. It will be relieved once we have a second priest but nevertheless, it is important that I and the deacons appear in the hall as soon as possible after the service to meet everyone. The clergy have been standing for over three hours at the end of the service and do need some coffee at least. It is perfectly possible to see me in the hall to arrange baptisms or sign papers for school applications etc. and I am very happy to do that. As for 40-day Churchings and Memorial Trisagion prayers, these can be done on a Sunday later on, after coffee I am often at church till about 1.30 – 2.00pm) but it is best that they are done on the actual day and it is perfectly possible to have these services on a weekday, as appropriate. What I should stress is that it is far easier if I know what is coming before Sunday, so a simple telephone message or an email

beforehand would be very helpful.

3] Weekdays.

As far as possible we like to have the church open on weekdays both for worshippers but also for those who wish to visit the building or general enquirers. To this end it is good to have regular and occasional services during the week. Saturday evening after Vespers is the set time for Confessions but I am available at other times by appointment. We have recently started a Vespers service on Wednesday at 6.00pm (Choir practice currently takes place after the service). Where they can happen on a weekday it would be better if special services of blessing, Moliens, memorials, eighth-Day Namings or Churchings etc. be served then, rather than on Sunday. They can be done on a Sunday but it is better that they are not rushed, so a little pre-planning and arrangement would be greatly appreciated. I have toyed with the idea of having a dedicated 'surgery' time for arranging events such as baptism and weddings. However, I think it best at present to encourage people to come, first, to the Liturgy and discuss these things in the context of our own gathered church community.

4] Security and Safety

Among the early Christians there was a minor order of Doorkeepers who, during the days of persecutions, regulated who came into the service and guarded the doors to protect the congregation. You will recall the declaration by the deacon: *'The doors, the doors!'* during the Liturgy, just before the Creed: anciently, a direction to see that all catechumens had left before the Anaphora, (Eucharistic Prayer). When we remember we had over 600 people at the vigil at Pascha this year, the implications for their safety call for some action on our part. To this end it would be good if we could appoint some recognised 'doorkeepers,' working under the direction of the deacons, to be in charge of the congregation's safety. They would, for example, be properly trained to take charge of evacuating the people in the event of an emergency, such as a fire, directing worshippers to the nearest escape route. There is a tendency for many to gather at the Narthex, the back of the church, rather than spread forward into the rest of the building. You might imagine a possible outcome, should there be a need to leave the building, without blocking the exits! Here the directions from any such doorkeepers (possibly wearing some sign of their official capacity) would need to be respected and followed. These arrangements need to be in place by next Pascha. So, for the good-ordering of our church life:

- Come and worship, then meet others and talk
- Make proper arrangements beforehand for special services
- Remember, the building is not just for use on Sundays

Fr Chrysostom

SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Wednesdays at 6.00pm. It is also served on Saturdays at 5.00pm in the Saints of Britain chapel when, afterwards, Fr. Chrysostom is available to hear Confessions. Orthros is served before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at 9.00am

November

Sun 5th 22nd after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 12th 23rd after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Wed 15th Beginning of the
Nativity Fast

Sun 19th 24th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Tues 21st Entry of the Theotokos
Orthros 10.00am



Sun 26th 25th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

December

Sun 3rd 26th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 10th 27th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 17th 28th after Pentecost
Sunday of the Holy Forefathers
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 24th Eve of the Nativity
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 25th The Nativity of Our
Lord Divine Liturgy 9.30am

Sun 31st Leavetaking of the
Nativity Divine Liturgy 10.30am

