

# THE NARTHEX

*The believers were first called Christians at Antioch*

ACTS. 9:26

**January-February 2015**

**The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan of Canterbury, Poole**  
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## THE SOUL

*'For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?' (Matt.16:26)*

Back in 1995 there was an episode the popular TV cartoon *The Simpsons* where Bart sells His Soul to Millhouse for \$5. After being punished for bad behaviour at church, Bart declares that there is no such thing as a soul and promptly sells his for a small sum of money. He gives Millhouse a piece of paper with "Bart Simpson's soul" written on it. His sister, Lisa, warns Bart that he will regret this and Bart begins to see peculiar changes in his life. He comes to believe that he has truly lost his soul but, with help from his sister, he eventually gets it back.

At one level, in common speech, the term *soul* just refers to our life in this world, as in the SOS message: 'save our souls' meaning equally, save our lives. But in the passage from St Matthew quoted above there is something even more crucial, yes, more urgent than survival in this current life. We are asked here to consider not only the spiritual truth that we each have a soul but that it is possible to lose it whilst still in this life. Furthermore, the idea is presented to us that we actually possess nothing of more value than our soul. This connects with Christ's teaching that, *'He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.'* [John12:25]

We can learn from this that there is something hidden about what we know as our real life, our *soul*, something that is not obvious to the rest of the world or to those

who judge everything from a secular viewpoint. About our real life, St. Paul tells us, *'...you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.'* [Col.3:3] There are many implications of this idea, not least that we have been reborn, remade after the image of the perfect humanity of Christ. It teaches that our souls but not yet our present bodies, have already experienced a death when we were baptized. St. Paul speaks of the 'body of sin' and of doing that which he knows he does not want to do, looking to Christ to deliver him. [Rom.6:6 & 7:21-25] This should make us realise the horror of sinning - whether in body, defiling the soul within, or in the soul, defiling the body without - for we are Christ's own and the price that ransomed us was through Christ himself, passing through our death for us to remake our humanity afresh after his image and likeness.

The spiritual task before us, the very aim and purpose of our earthly existence, is to be what we became at baptism. In his incarnation, Christ's humanity was the true humanity, not the fallen humanity that we were conceived and born in. In that state, he was still subject to this world's temptations though he proved victorious over them and showed in himself an image of what we must become. Before we learn this, before we become enlightened and gain spiritual wisdom, the way of the world has already seduced us. The Orthodox baptismal rite speaks

undefiled; of preserving the seal yet which of us achieved that? No wonder Holy Tradition has blessed us with Confession as a remedy for our stumbling progress in saving our souls. For a soul unrepentant, unhealed, unforgiven and through spiritual sloth, unaware of its state, becomes like the body treated with abuse, diseased and in agony. There are indeed spiritual diseases of which the great mass of mankind are ignorant and will be until their souls stand naked before the Judge, no longer veiled in flesh but openly displayed and worst of all, visible to their own gaze.

We came into existence, not just in this world but for eternity at the moment each of us was conceived; from that point on, the human person has ultimate significance. There is no pre-existence of the soul as the followers of Pythagorians and Plato might have surmised; there is no reincarnation in a great wheel of rebirth. The soul begins and is to grow just as the body grows. Indeed, we have a spiritual duty to feed our souls. And souls can become weak and stunted and can be lost, not in that they cease to exist but can wander astray, consumed by the beguilement, delusions and temptations of this world.

The other noticeable thing is that the soul and body are inseparable. [Here, I do not wish to become embroiled in speculations over whether the mind can leave for a time in so-called 'out-of-body' experiences.] Evidently, the state of our soul will affect the mind and the mind, the body - witness, for example,

what is often called by spiritual writers, *the gift of tears*. It is because body and soul are integrated that we have such meaningful gestures, used both liturgically and in our ascetic and prayer life: signing with the cross, metanoias, prostrations. Fasting itself would be meaningless if the soul and body were somehow separate entities, the outer one merely a prison for the inner. Feasting would be the mere indulgence of our bodily cravings, if it did not point beyond to something sacred.

*'...Thou did teach us to ignore the body and to attend to the concerns of the undying soul...'*

Thus runs the general troparion in the 8<sup>th</sup> tone for a female ascetic saint. It might seem too demanding for most of us, perhaps. In fact, just think how much of our mental and physical energy is taken up each day with the needs of our bodies. For some, their creature comforts become a relentless and insatiable mistress, always complaining, always demanding attention. And yet the troparion reminds us vividly of what must come first if we are serious in this business of the salvation of the soul. If our priority is to seek first the kingdom of God, as Our Lord taught, then everything else - and yes, they are important - will fit into place.

The spiritual fathers who write in the Philokalia advise us to *guard the heart*. The *heart*, here, is the centre of the self of which the carnal heart, the physical organ that pumps blood is the symbol or manifestation in this world. All that comes into the heart and all that goes out, affects the soul, just as a diseased heart affects the body. The soul that looks with contempt on those who have fallen into sin and human degradation, lost in vices and an immoral or abusive way of life and yet, takes its ease in a life of self-assured comfort, easy

living and outward respectability has already fallen into pride worse than all the lusts, addictions and shameful inadequacies of those who might know no better way of surviving. This was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

There are those in our own time who, in Iraq and Syria, have refused, under the IS threat of brutal death, to swap *Yeshua*, the living Saviour for the dead (so-called prophet) Muhammad, children among them. Losing their lives, they have saved their souls for eternal life. In the very face of antichrist this harvest of souls can shame our poor efforts to strive for the kingdom. Bart Simpson's Faustian pact with Millhouse profited him a paltry five dollars. We must not sell our very selves cheap; we must not sell our selves at all. Even if we have gained the whole world, in the end the deal will cost us everything, even our very souls, like Mozart's *Don Juan*, denied salvation and descending to hell.

Our pact is not with the devil, it is not a pact within this world. We have instead a new kind of contract, the New Covenant, established by Christ in his offering of his own life and raising up with him those with the faith that enlightens the heart.

St. Paul tells us that, *'Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.'* [2 Cor. 4:16] For those in Christ, though they grow old in this fallen world, the soul has been redeemed and awaits its re-clothing in the eternal, spiritual body. So guard the heart and let your soul grow. At the end of this life it will be all you have left and what it has become will be judged and will be either set among the righteous or forever lost.

*Fr. Chrysostom*



## SERVICES

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

### January

Sun 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Theophany Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Tues 6<sup>th</sup> The Holy Theophany of Our Lord

Sun 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Theophany Divine Liturgy 10.30am and Great Blessing of Waters

Sun 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Ten Lepers Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Zacchaeus Divine Liturgy 10.30am

### FEBRUARY

Sun 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the Publican & the Pharisee Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 2<sup>nd</sup> The Meeting of Our Lord



Sun 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Prodigal Son Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Last Judgement - Meatfare Sunday Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 22<sup>nd</sup> The Expulsion of Adam Cheesfare Sunday The Divine Liturgy 10.30am

**First Week of Great Lent**