

THE NARTHEX

*The believers were first called
Christians at Antioch*

ACTS. 9:26

DECEMBER-JANUARY
2009/10

The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan Poole-Bournemouth

The Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of The United Kingdom and Ireland
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

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"There is too much of You, O Lord, my breath, therefore people do not see You. You are too obvious, O Lord, my sighing, therefore the attention of people is diverted from You and directed toward polar bears, toward rarities in the distance."

These words come from the seventh of St. Nicolai Velimirovitch's *Prayers By the Lake*.^{*} St. Nicolai is pointing out that people in general are unaware of God, they do not see God, not because he is hidden but because He is too great to take in. Therefore, people seek out the particular and the small, the novel and the entertaining. In other words: distractions. It is as if, since the Fall, Mankind has become distracted; that his attention is fixed in the here and now. Where true religion would point him towards the eternal verities, to what is beyond, the secular delusion keeps Mankind tied, like an insecure child, to the apron strings of its mother, the earth.

Of course, the proper response to God's greatness and holiness is to bow in worship and humility. But having forgotten God and become distracted, Mankind reverts of *paganism*, worshipping the creature rather than the Creator. Even modern *Scientism*, far from being a reliance on the merely rational and empirical, has become a narcissistic belief in human autonomy, our freedom to do what we like.

Yet God is merciful: knowing our limitations; knowing our tendency to become lost in the particular, *not seeing the wood for the trees*, He has become *particular* for us. The mystery of the incarnation that we celebrate at Christ's Nativity, may

be understood in part as God meeting us where we are, lost in the world. Lost, that is, in both senses of not knowing where we are but also, absorbed and beguiled by the things around us, lost in our distractions.

The truth is, there is both the general and the particular in the mystery of the Godhead; God is both transcendent and immanent at the same time. We know God *particularly* as the persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We also know *generally* that they are divine by nature. Divinity is unknowable to the human mind, save what God has revealed but through the particular, the personal, we can be found by God. In particular, it is in his becoming man through the Theotokos, that God presents us with Himself in our own condition. Thus using our sinful tendency to become distracted in order to distract us away from sin. As St. Paul says, *'For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.'* (2 Cor.5:21)

In order to save us who had become lost in the things of this world, God became one of those things; emptying himself, he became as all men are [Phil.2:6ff]. *'Being in the form of God'*, to use the Pauline language, that is, possessing the fullness of divinity by nature and therefore beyond us, he took our human nature, born in a particular time and place, in the form of *'a slave'*, [Gr. δουλος] St. Paul writes, just as we are slaves to the particular things of this world. Through

obedience he passes even into death in our human nature and then is exalted. In his resurrection and Ascension that same humanity that he took on, is now exalted unto the heavens. From the particular, our nature too has been brought in to the general and, in as much as we are in Christ, we also dwell in the heavenly places, freed from that lost condition (Sin) that bound us. This is what we mean by redemption and it is the whole theme of Christ's life on earth, from his Annunciation to the Theotokos to his Ascension in glory. It is the very gospel we proclaim every time we serve the Divine Liturgy; it is the mystery in which we partake each time we receive the Holy Gifts.

"It is not with angels that he (God) is concerned," [Hebrews 2:16], otherwise, Christ would have to have taken on the angelic nature of the Bodiless Powers, (rather than our humanity,) to save them if they needed it! Rather it is *"with the descendants of Abraham"* that he is concerned; that is, we, who are the children of Abraham, the father of faith, in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed [Gen.12:3].

The appearing of this mystery of redemption on earth is the heart of the meaning of the Nativity feast; there is no other real meaning of Christmas. Everything else is an imposition, an obsession with particularities, a distraction. The family, the gifts, the greetings, the food, the commerce, the entertainments are not in themselves bad. It is only that,

should they distract us from our focus on Christ, we have sought our joys not in God himself but in that which he made. In this fallen world we have to tread circumspectly, making our way with care. The world we know is a 'mixed economy'; God has created all things well - the book of Genesis has God overseeing his creation and seeing all as *good*. It is only that, following Adam's departure from paradise into this world of time, space, matter and free will that our human nature too easily *falls* in love with the things available to us, rather than their Maker. Not only that, our concupiscence, our desire to assimilate as much as we can of pleasure, wealth and power, leads to our corrupting of both the objects of our desire and of our very selves as well.

The remedy to all this starts in our own threefold-vision: our hindsight, foresight and insight. Hindsight: because our lives here need constant repentance; foresight: for we need an eye always on our departure from this world and of the judgement seat of Christ; insight: for if we lack the wisdom and understanding of these things, we will only gaze on things like the rest of humanity and not perceive them as God does.

But none of this is achieved by our own efforts alone. Only the grace of God perfects the mystery of redemption within each of us. This is why we take refuge in the ark of salvation, the Church, the εκκλησια, the body of those who have been 'called away' from their distractions; who have had their eyes opened through enlightening Baptism and Chrismation; who now receive grace upon grace from the Divine Gifts of the Holy Table

Fr. Chrysostom

*Prayer by the Lake by St. Nicolai may be found at www.sv-luka.org/praylake/index.htm

Bp. Thomas of the American Antiochian Orthodox Church, writing in support of the recent *Manhattan Declaration* of Pro-Life Christians in the USA :

With regard to abortion, the Orthodox Church forbids it. We do everything we can to align ourselves with the mind and teachings of the Church. With regard to marriage, we obviously only bless marriages between one man and one woman. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Having said this, it is also important for us to understand that the union between a man and a woman should exist within the Mystery of Holy Matrimony. The Scripture clearly forbids homosexuality. It is not necessary for me to direct you to Scriptural passages that deal with this issue. The Tradition of the Church speaks with one voice concerning the expression of sexuality as proper only between a man and a woman who have been united as husband and wife. Homosexuality is clearly outside of the proper, blessed, and life-nurturing context of Holy Matrimony. With regard to the freedom of religion, we, of course, support the freedom of each person to make a choice concerning religion. Orthodox Christians likewise possess the freedom to reject the teachings and practices of all non-Orthodox religions and secular ideologies. Love and tolerance for others do not imply agreement or consent. We reject such "political correctness." As Orthodox Christians, we must reject and respond to attempts by non-Orthodox groups to inhibit us from speaking, teaching, and living the inalterable Tradition. Since the days that immediately followed Pentecost, Christians have lived up to their responsibility to say "yes" to Christ and "no" to false gods and ideologies that contradict the true Faith. We recognize the authority of the state, endeavor to obey the civil laws established to preserve order in society, pray for our leaders, and prefer to work in cooperation with the state (*symphonia*) for the good of men. Christ taught us to "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17, NKJV). When edicts of the government conflict with the divinely revealed Orthodox Faith, we are obliged to disregard such edicts, insofar as they contradict the Faith, and continue to live according to the Tradition as our sainted Fathers and Mothers have done throughout the generations before us.

[see: www.antiochian.org]

When the temporal state attempts to usurp the divinely-rooted authority of the Church, our obedience to God and loyalty to His Kingdom must prevail. As the Holy Apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29, NKJV).

SERVICES

December

6th Sun 26th after Pentecost
St. Nicholas The Wonderworker
Divine Liturgy 11.30am

13th Sun 27th after Pentecost
Sunday of the Forefathers
Divine Liturgy 11.30am

20th Sun 28th after Pentecost
Sunday before Nativity Divine
Liturgy at 11.30am

24th Thurs Eve of the Nativity
Divine Liturgy of the feast
9.00pm

25th Fri NATIVITY ACCORDING
TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD AND
SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

27th Sun No Service at
Castlepoint
(Fr. Chrysostom on holiday)

January

3rd Sun before Theophany
Divine Liturgy at 11.30am

6th Wed THE HOLY
THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD
AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

10th Sun After Theophany
Divine Liturgy and Great Blessing
of Waters 11.30am

Bring an empty bottle to take the blest water home. If requested, Fr. Chrysostom will be honoured to bless your homes by appointment during the Afterfeast of Theophany.

17th Sun 32nd after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 11.30am

24th Sun 33rd after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 11.30am