

THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch

ACTS. 9:26

MAY - JUNE 2013

What Do We Do Now?

There is a terrible story, terrible in its bleakness, told about a group of rabbis held prisoner in a concentration camp during the Second World War. Having considered the appalling events that had befallen their communities, they decided that they should put God on trial. An audacious idea but they felt that, if God loved Israel, how could He permit such horrors to happen. The trial went ahead and, as a result, God was found, according to their deliberations, not to exist. Once the verdict had been announced and accepted, there followed a long and profound silence. Then, finally, an elderly rabbi suddenly asked, 'What do we do now?' They had realised that their bold question had left them staring into the abyss; if there be no God then they truly were abandoned. Clearly, with no hope left, they could only give themselves up to utter despair.

On Great Friday we shall be recalling a curiously similar event that occurred two thousand years ago: putting God on trial. At that time, however, the leaders of Israel did not know what they were doing; their own motives were purely political expediency and the protection of their position and perhaps their vested interests in the Temple finances. As Caiaphas says in St. John's gospel, "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people." [Jn.11:47-51] They do not believe and certainly, cannot know that the one they condemn to crucifixion is none other than the incarnate Son of God the Father. But

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on that first Holy Friday, God was on trial, nonetheless. Within the jurisdiction of the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, yet another 'pretender' to the title Messiah would be disposed of, just before the Pesach (Passover) festival began. Within forty years other terrible events would befall the inhabitants of Jerusalem, now in rebellion and the son of the Emperor, Vespasian, Titus, would raze the Temple itself to the ground, as Christ had prophesied.

We shall recall these events and enter spiritually into them, attending the services of Great and Holy Week. We will mark, for example, the deep sadness of the apostles and the women who followed Christ: at the Lamentations service, the Orthos of Great Saturday served on the Friday evening, we shall stand before the tomb of Christ and mourn - a most common human experience but here with a difference. Unlike the experience of unbelievers who can only gaze into the dark abyss and ultimately, despair, our mourning has been transformed. As St. Paul tells us, we are not to mourn like those with no belief. [1 Thess. 4:13] No doubt, the apostles and the others stared at one another on that Friday, as the sun went down and the sky suddenly darkened and, like the rabbis in the concentration camp, asked themselves, what do we do now?

No doubt, those rabbis caught up in the Shoah (the Holocaust) of the mid-20th Century expected God to act, to save as he had saved the Jews in

the time of Moses, of the Exile, of Esther, of the Maccabees. Much theological energy and ink have been used up in the pursuit of *theodicy*, that is, to justify the ways of God to Man. Theodicy (justifying God) is the use of human reason to explain why, according to that age-old puzzle, God allows bad things to happen to good people. There are many sound theological answers to that problem, not least that a world where God had constantly and consistently 'to interfere' in events to assure the wellbeing, success and safety of the good, would not be the world we know. We would quickly learn that doing the right thing was the only way to survive. Confined by the imperative to survive we would actually lose our freedom; goodness would be conditional, pursued only out of fear and our hearts would never be converted to do the good because we loved God. Every parent with any common sense knows this in respect of their own children: that a child-rearing regime exclusively based on reward and punishment cannot truly engender love.

Though, in their grief Christ's first followers did not know it at the time, they were to experience a total transformation of the way in which men had always lamented. Ever since the Third Sunday of Lent, glimpses of the resurrection have been evident, liturgically. If the Apostles had indeed asked themselves, *what do we do now*, then the answer came on the third day. The angel who met the grieving myrrhbearers at the tomb early on that morning told them

and by implication, us, what to do now: 'Go tell ...' [Mk. 16:7] No wonder that our Paschal greeting is, *Christ is risen!* And believing this we reply, *He is risen indeed!* What do we do now? We remind each other that, *Death is overthrown, Christ God is risen* [Resurrectional Troparion tone 4]. But we are not just reminding ourselves; we are commanded by the risen Christ to go tell those who do not yet believe, who still can only ask themselves in despair *what do we do now?* This, the Great Commission from Christ himself, comes at the very end of St. Matthew's Gospel. Liturgically, it is used as the first in the eleven-fold cycle of resurrectional (eothinon) gospels at Matins. And not surprisingly, it is also heard at Baptisms.

Two thousand years ago the God-Man was put on trial but His death was not to be oblivion. For just over sixty generations, people have been baptized into that death in order to have a part in that resurrection. Those with such a faith cannot live in despair and, in fact, the most terrible aspect of that story of the rabbis putting God to the test was not their confinement in such a ghastly prison but their self-concentration into the cul-de-sac of atheism.

As for us, let us turn instead to the Acts of the Apostles, read during Holy Saturday up to the Vigil and through the days of Pascha. In the second chapter, St Luke records that those first Christian, together with the Apostles, Our Lady and the relatives of Christ, gathered together faithfully and gave themselves to the teaching of the Apostles, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. In other words, everything we know that is still to be found in the Orthodox Church: the holy apostolic Tradition, Communion with God and one another, through the mystery of the Body of Christ and

the daily cycle of liturgical prayer - This is what we do now.

When the women disciples of the Lord, learned from the angel the joyous message of the resurrection, they cast away the ancestral curse and proudly told the apostles, saying death is overthrown, Christ God is risen, granting the world great mercy. [Resurrectional Troparion in the fourth tone]

Fr. Chrysostom

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Lenten Giving

Giving money in alms and charity is one of the prime actions that we undertake more intensely during Great Lent. One of the charitable causes you might wish to consider helping is the Deanery Fund supporting the victims of the present Syrian crisis. The monies are distributed via our Patriarchate on the ground. Cheques may be sent directly to the Dean, Archpriest Gregory Hallam, 29 Willis Rd., Cale Green, Stockport SK3 8HQ. Please state that the donation is for the Syrian Appeal. Cheques should be made payable to: The Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of the UK & Ireland.

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A Request

Would parents of small children please make sure that their little ones do run along the side aisles during the Liturgy as this disturbs the concentration of the choir.

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**Annual General Meeting
of
The Bournemouth-Poole
Orthodox Christian Foundation**

**Friday 24th May
At the Church 7.00pm**

SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturday's at 5.00pm in the Saints of Britain chapel. Fr. Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards. The Proskomedie is served at 9.0am and Orthros before the Liturgy at 9.30am.

MAY

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Great & Holy Week

1st **Gt & Holy Wednesday** Anointing Service 7.00pm

2nd **Gt & Holy Thursday** Celebration of the Mystical Supper Vespers Liturgy of St. Basil 11.00am Orthros - Twelve Gospels 6.00pm

3rd **Gt & Holy Friday** Vespers of the Shroud 4.30pm Orthros (Lamentations Service) 6.30pm

4th **Gt & Holy Saturday** HOLY PASCHA

Midnight Office, Rush Procession, Orthros and Divine Liturgy of Pascha 11.00pm

5th **SUNDAY OF PASCHA** Vespers of Love 2.30pm

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Sun 12th Second of Pascha Thomas Sunday. Orthros 9.30pm Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 19th Third of Pascha The Holy Myrrhbearers Patronal feast of St. Dunstan Orthros 9.30pm Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 26th Fourth of Pascha The Paralysed Man Orthros 9.30pm Divine Liturgy 10.30am

JUNE

Sun 2nd Fifth of Pascha The Samaritan Woman Orthros 9.30pm Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 9th Sixth of Pascha The Blind Man Orthros 9.30pm Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Thurs 13th Ascension of Our Lord

Sun 16th Afterfeast of Ascension Orthros 9.30pm Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Sun 23rd **Holy Pentecost** Orthros 9.30pm Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 30th First after Pentecost Feast of All Saints Orthros 9.30pm Divine Liturgy 10.30am