

# THE NARTHEX

*The believers were first called  
Christians at Antioch*  
ACTS. 9:26

November-December 2014

## PREPARING

The seventieth anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem in 1944 has recently been marked. My own father took part in the battle as one of the *Red Berets*. He was wounded on the last day of the battle and taken prisoner until liberated in 1945. He had signed up early for the war, mainly, I believe, with a high sense of adventure and to get away from home. Having had only a basic education, the Second World War very much made my father and he ended up during the occupation as a captain in charge of a German town. His own father had died soon after the First World War and then, in the 1930's, he was adopted by a brother and sister. They happened to have been related to the MacDonnells, the Earls of Antrim in Northern Ireland. He took their name and, of course, the coat of arms which is shown here:



I mention this as the coat of arms, quite traditionally, bears a motto in mediaeval French: *Tout Jours Pret*, that is, *Always Ready*. It is a worthy motto to live by and has a particular resonance for people who put their entire hope in Christ and the faith that bears his name. At the end of the eschatological passages in St. Mark's gospel - those where

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Christ teaches about the end to which this creation is heading - he says emphatically, *"Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"* [Mark 13:35-37]. In other words, Christ teaches us to be always ready. This is the secret of a vibrant Orthodox spiritual life: to live in this world as knowing that its form, as St. Paul tells us, [I Cor.7:31] is passing away.

This idea is re-enforced by the feast of Our Lord's Nativity that we are approaching. The Christ, of course, had already been incarnate in our human nature for nine months before his birth; secretly hidden away in the womb that was consecrated to God since the Virgin's own birth and self-offering and presentation, not only in the house of God at Jerusalem but also as being herself the real temple of the living God.

In due time, Christ's own kinsman, John the Forerunner, was sent to prepare and make ready the people of God for the coming of the Christ. Some, like Simeon, Anna and Zacharias could depart in peace, knowing that the promises made by God to their forefathers had been fulfilled. Others among the Jewish people, like Peter at Caesarea Philippi [Mark 8:29], were ready to recognise him for who he was and after his resurrection formed the nucleus of the Apostolic Church.

The rest were not ready and rejected him. Two millennia later, there must be more than two billion nominal Christians in the world but how many are ready to enter the kingdom of God? Suffice it to say, the practice of Orthodox Christianity provides us with all we need to be ready. Whether we are preparing to celebrate a great feast or to partake of the Holy Gifts themselves, there are clearly things that must be done if we are to be ready to receive grace worthily. But, as we know, when we come together to celebrate any liturgical service, we are standing symbolically already in the kingdom of God, sharing in the worship and service of the heavenly Jerusalem. It must be obvious from all this that coming to the church is so utterly different from anything else that we do. And yet, it has to be a part of all that we are, or better still, all that we are and all that we do must be consonant with our sharing in the divine service, lest we be shown up as hypocrites, appearing as one thing outwardly but rotten within.

To this end, our preparedness involves a great deal but we really do need to strive seriously towards attaining it. And where we fall short, God's grace provides what we still lack through our own best efforts.

Intending to receive Holy Communion, we should prepare not only through the fast from midnight but also by reading the prayers of preparation. (These can, quite properly, be spread out over a few days, if preferred.) From time to time, also, we should

go to Confession. Obviously, after a serious sin one should not receive the Holy Gifts without confessing first. One other part of this preparation, which is very important, is maintaining an inner silence. Sadly, I have noticed a fair amount of needless chatter among the congregation, before, during and after the congregation receives communion. This is very disturbing to worshippers and suggests an inattentiveness and unawareness of the sanctity of the moment. Save in a clear emergency, no words need be spoken at this time. Even if not receiving yourself, you should respect where you stand and moreover, before whom you stand. This should be gently taught and expected even to the young children if they are in your care.

Meanwhile, from 15th November we prepare to celebrate the feast of the Nativity with a fast of six weeks. Whilst the rest of the world observes, albeit subliminally, the pagan Yuletide well before the 25th December in the usual worldly fashion, we must restrain ourselves in order to be ready once again to enter into the mystery of the incarnation.

Finally, whether outwardly conforming to the commandments of Christ or inwardly purifying our souls, we must watch, ever ready to depart this life or expecting his return in glory to bring all things to their consummation. As St. Paul tells us: knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh. [Rom.13:11-14]

*Fr. Chrysostom*

‡ The world is a system of symbols a *realibus ad realiora* (from reality to the more real). The spiritual world is reflected in the corporeal forms of this world - 'the example and shadow of heavenly things.' [Heb.8:5] The value of symbols lies in the joy springing from the knowledge that the world is a likeness of that other world. Hence the significance of icons, candles, smoke of incense.

‡ Preparation for confession does not consist in recalling your sins as fully as possible and even writing them down. It means striving to attain such a state of concentration, seriousness and prayer that your sins will become as clear as if they had been exposed to the light. In other world, you should bring to your confessor not a lit of sins but a feeling of repentance, not a minutely studied dissertation but a contrite heart.



Extracts from *The Diary of a Russian Priest* by Fr. Alexander Elchaninov



- What if we always carried it around with us?
- What if we went through it several times a day?
- What if we turned back to go get it if we forgot it?
- What if we used it to receive messages more clearly and reliably?
- What if we treated it like we couldn't live without it?
- What if we gave it to our children as a gift, and taught them how to use it?
- What if we used it when we travelled?
- What if we used it in case of emergency?

And one more thing: unlike our mobile phone, we don't have to worry about our Prayer Rope being disconnected - the bill has already been settled. So where are our priorities?



From the pravmir.com web cite

**SERVICES**

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

**November**

Sun 2<sup>nd</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 9<sup>th</sup> 22<sup>nd</sup> after Pentecost  
St. Nektarios Kephalas Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sat 15<sup>th</sup> **Beginning of the Nativity Fast**

Sun 16<sup>th</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> after Pentecost  
St. Matthew Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Fri 21<sup>st</sup> Entry of the Theotokos

Sun 23<sup>rd</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 30<sup>th</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost  
St. Andrew Divine Liturgy 10.30am

**December**

Sun 7<sup>th</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 14<sup>th</sup> 27<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost  
The Forefathers Divine Liturgy 10.30am



Sun 21<sup>st</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost  
Sunday before the Nativity  
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Thurs 25<sup>th</sup> The Nativity of Our Lord  
Divine Liturgy 9.30am

Sun 28<sup>th</sup> 29<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost  
Sunday after the Nativity