



Prophet Elias News

News in a time of pandemic for the Orthodox Church of the
Holy Prophet Elias in Devon
6th – 19th March 2022



On Forgiveness

by Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann

As once more we are about to enter the Great Lent, I would like to remind us of the verse that we just sang, one of the stichera, and that verse says: "Let us begin Lent, the Fast, with joy."

Only yesterday we were commemorating Adam crying, lamenting at the gates of Paradise, and now every second line of the Triodion and the liturgical books of Great Lent will speak of *repentance*, acknowledging what dark and helpless lives we live, in which we sometimes are immersed. And yet, no one will prove to me that the general tonality of Great Lent is not that of a tremendous joy! Not what we call "joy" in this world – not just something entertaining, interesting, or amusing – but the deepest definition of joy, that joy which Christ says: "no one will take away from you" (Jn. 16:22). Why joy? What is that joy?

So many people have come to think of Lent as a kind of self-inflicted inconvenience. There is the idea that if we suffer enough, if we feel the hunger enough, if we try by all kinds of strong or light ascetical tools mainly to "suffer" and be "tortured," so to speak, it would help us to "pay" for our absolution. But this is not our Orthodox faith. Lent is *not a punishment*. Lent is not a kind of painful medicine that helps only inasmuch as it is painful.

LENT IS A GIFT! Lent is a gift from God to us, a gift which is admirable, marvellous, one that we desire. Now a gift of what? I would say that it is a gift of *the essential* – that which is essential and yet which suffers most in our life because we are living lives of confusion and fragmentation, lives which constantly conceal from us the eternal, the glorious, the divine meaning of life and take away from us that which should correct and fill our life with joy. And this essential is *thanksgiving*: the acceptance from God of that wonderful life, as St. Peter says, "...created out of nothing...", created exclusively by the love of God, for there is no other reason for us to exist; loved by Him even before we were born, we were taken into His marvellous light. Now we live and we forget. When was the last time I thought about it? But I do not forget so many little things and affairs that transform my whole life into empty noise, into a kind of travelling without knowing where.

Lent gives back to me, this *essential* – the essential layer of life. Essential because it is coming from God; essential because it is revealing God. The essential time, because time again is a great, great area of sin. Because time is the time of what? Of *priorities*. And how often our priorities are not at all as they should be. Yet in Lent, waiting, listening, singing ... you will see, little by little that *time* – broken, deviated, taking us to death and nowhere else, without any meaning - that time again becomes *expectation*, becomes something *precious*. You wouldn't take one minute of it away from its purpose of pleasing God, of accepting from Him His life and returning that life to Him together with our gratitude, our wisdom, our joy, our fulfilment.

After this essential time comes the essential relationship that we have with everything in the world, a relationship which is expressed so well in our liturgical texts by the word *reverence*. So often, everything becomes for us an object of "utilizing," something which is "for grabs," something which "belongs" to me and to which I have a "right." Everything should be as *Communion* in my hands. This is the reverence of which I speak. It is the discovery that God, as Pasternak once said, was "...a great God of details," and that nothing in this world is outside of that divine reverence. God is reverent, but we so often are not.

So, we have the essential time, the essential relationship with matter filled with reverence, and last, but not least, the rediscovery of the essential *link among ourselves*: the rediscovery that we belong to each other, the rediscovery that no one has entered my life or your life without the will of God. And with that rediscovery, there is everywhere an appeal, an offering to do something for God: to help, to

comfort, to transform, to take with you, with each one of you, that brother and sister of Christ. This is that *essential relationship*.

Essential time, essential matter, essential thought: all that is so different from what the world offers us. In the world everything is accidental. If you don't know how to "kill" time, our society is absolutely ingenious in helping you to do that. We kill time, we kill reverence, we transform communications, relationships, words, divine words into jokes and blasphemies, and sometimes just pure nonsense. There is this thirst and hunger for nothing but external success.

Don't we understand, brothers and sisters, what power is given to us in the form of Lent? Lenten Spring! Lenten beginning! Lenten resurrection! And all this is given to us *free*. Come, listen to that prayer. Make it *yours*! Don't even try to think on your own; just join, just enter and rejoice! And that joy will start killing those old and painful and boring sins... And with that you will have that great joy which the angels heard, which the disciples experienced when they returned to Jerusalem after Christ's Ascension. It is that joy which was left with them that we nobly adopted. It is first of all the joy of knowing, the joy of having something in me which, whether I want it or not, will start transforming life in me and around me.

This last essential is the *essential return to each other*: this is where we begin tonight. This is what we are doing right now. For if we would think of the real sins we have committed, we would say that one of the most important is exactly the style and tonality which we maintain with each other: our complaining and criticizing. I don't think that there are cases of great and destructive hatred or assassination, or something similar. It is just that we exist as if we are completely out of each other's life, out of each other's interests, out of each other's love. Without having repaired this relationship, there is no possibility of entering into Lent. Sin – whether we call it "original" sin or "primordial" sin – has broken the unity of life in this world, it has broken *time*, and time has become that fragmented current which takes us into old age and death. It has broken our social relations, it has broken families. Everything is *diabolos* – divided and destroyed. But Christ has come into the world and said: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (Jn. 12:32).

It is impossible to go to Christ without taking with me the *essential*. It is not the abandonment of everything as we go to Christ; it is finding in Him the power of that resurrection: of unity, of love, of trust, of joy, of all that which, even if it occupies some place in our life, is at the same time so minuscule. It is tragic to think that from churches, from seminaries, what comes to heaven are complaints ... being tired, always something not going right.

But we are Christ's and Christ is God's. And if we had just a little bit of that which would bring us together, we would replace all our little offences with even a little amount of that joy. That is the forgiveness we want and ask God to give us. Because if there is a strict commandment in the Gospel, it is that commandment: "If you forgive ... your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive ... neither will your Father forgive ..." (Mt. 6:14-15). So, of course it is a necessity. But the NOW of that, I repeat it once more, is to be horrified by the fragmentation of our own existence, by the pettiness in our relationships, by the destruction of words, and by the abandoning of this *reverence*.

Now we have to forgive each other whether or not we have any explicit sins or crimes against each other. That reconciliation is another *epiphany* of the Church as the Kingdom of God. We are saved because we are in the Body of Christ. We are saved because we accept from Christ the world and the essential order. And finally, we accept Christ when we accept each other. Everything else is a *lie* and *hypocrisy*.

So, fathers, brothers, sisters: let us forgive one another. Let us not think about why. There is enough to think about. Let us do it. Right now, in a kind of deep breath, say: "Lord, help us to forgive. Lord, renew all these relationships." What a chance is given here for *love to triumph!* – for unity to reflect the Divine unity, and for everything essential to return as life itself. What a chance! Is the answer we give today *yes* or *no*? Are we going to ask for that forgiveness? Are we gladly accepting it? Or is it something which we do just because it is on the calendar? *No!* this is the *crucial* moment. This is the beginning of Lent. This is our spring "repair" because reconciliation is the powerful renewal of the ruin.

So, please, for the sake of Christ: let us forgive each other.

A Homily delivered on Forgiveness Sunday, March 20, 1983, at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary Chapel, before the Rite of Forgiveness. Transcribed from tape recording and edited. Published with the approval of Juliana Schmemmann in the St. Vladimir's Theological Foundation Newsletter.

Some Reflections on Forgiveness

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thine infirmities; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

Psalm 103 (102)

On no account let anyone suppose that he is far from God because of his infirmities or faults or for any other reason. If at any times your great shortcomings make an outcast of you and you cannot take yourself as being near God, take it then at any rate that He is near to you, for it is most mischievous to set God at a distance. Man goes far or near but God never goes far off; He is always standing close at hand; and even if He cannot come in, He is never further than the door.

Meister Eckhart in *Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing*
Ed Ursula Fleming Collins, Fount Paperbacks 1988

In 1979 the son of Bishop Dehkani-Tafti, of the Anglican Church in Iran, was assassinated. This is part of his father's prayer at his funeral:

O God, we remember not only Bahram but also his murderers. Bahram's blood has multiplied the fruit of the Spirit in the soil of our souls, so when his murderers stand before You on the day of judgement, remember the fruit of the Spirit by which they have enriched our lives, and forgive.

Quoted in *Seasons of the Spirit*
Ed. G. Every, R. Harries and K. Ware SPCK 1984

Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones is not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing. Superficial reconciliation can bring only superficial healing

Archbishop Desmond Tutu *The Book of Forgiving*

Guard me, O Lord, from brooding over the sin I have committed: let not my thoughts sink into the mire of my wrong-doing, but free me to offer Thee the pearl of good deeds. If I have done much evil, grant that I may balance it by doing much good.

Hasidic – Tradition of Rabbi Ytzak Meir of Ger.
Quoted in *God of a Hundred Names* Ed Greene and Gollancz, Gollancz 1962

& Throughout all Eternity
I forgive you, you forgive me:
As our Dear Redeemer said
This the Wine & This the Bread
Wm Blake *My Spectre*

Forgiveness is the demand that evil in the other shall be borne without vindictiveness because the evil in self is known.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.

We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Loving Your Enemies

Forgiving is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.

Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*

Forgiveness is part of the treasure you need
to craft your falcon wings
and return to your true realm
of Divine freedom.

Hafiz trans. Daniel Ladinsky

We make it too easy for ourselves with other people. We completely blunt our sensibility, and then believe that not thinking ill of someone is the same as forgiving that person—yet in so doing we utterly fail to see that, as a matter of fact, we have no positive thoughts about the person—and to forgive would mean having nothing but good thoughts about the person and supporting that person whenever we can. But precisely that is what we avoid—we do not support such persons. Instead, we continue alongside them and grow accustomed to their silence; and yet the whole point is to support such persons—to support them in all situations, with all their difficult and unpleasant sides, including any injustice and sin they may commit even against me—to be silent, to support, and to love without ceasing—that would come close to forgiveness!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

[Forgiveness Sermon by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Matthew 18:21-35 - SermonCentral.com](http://SermonCentral.com)

This Fortnight We Celebrate

On Sunday March 6th **The Expulsion of Adam from Paradise** - Sunday of Cheesefare

Forgiveness Sunday

Discovery of the Precious Cross by the **Empress Saint Helena** in Jerusalem (326)

On Tuesday 8th **Saint Felix**, Enlightener of East Anglia (c648)

On Wednesday 9th: **The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste** (c320)

Saint Constantine of Cornwall (6thC)

On Saturday 12th: First Saturday of Lent:

Commemoration of **Saint Theodore the Recruit**

We wish **Bojidar** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Sunday 13th: **First Sunday of Great Lent** - **Sunday of Orthodoxy**

On Monday 14th: **Saint Benedict** of Nursia (543) Patron Saint of Europe.

Established the Benedictine Rule of monasticism at the Monastery of Monte Cassino in Italy



Saint Felix

On Tuesday 15th: **Apostle Aristoboulos** of the Seventy, First Bishop of Britain (1stC)

On Thursday 17th: **Saint Patrick** of Armagh, Apostle to the Irish (461)

On Friday 18th: **Saint Cyril** of Jerusalem (386)

Saint Edward the Passionbearer, King of England (c978)

Saint Nicholas (Velimirovich), Bishop of Zhica (1956)

Prolific writer, most famously of the *Prologue from Ohrid* and *Prayers by the Lake*

Update from the Deanery Conference Organisers

Plans for our annual Conference & Festival (27th-30th May) are still progressing, and we hope to be able to circulate a provisional timetable soon, showing - among other details - who our speakers will be, and what they will be speaking about: however, **our most pressing concern at present is our awareness of a developing cost of living crisis** which threatens to challenge many - if not all - of us to think that we will not be able to afford to attend this year's renewal.

We want to emphasize that **bursaries are available (from Deanery funds)** for those who need financial help towards the cost of accommodation. Everyone is asked to pay a minimum deposit of £50, and then whatever extra finance may be needed (as a bursary) should be stated on the application - please inform your parish/community priest of your request for help.

News from CTaX (Christians Together Across Exeter)

Saturday 5th March 12 noon City of Sanctuary Protest at Bedford Square

Join with community groups and churches to show support for those seeking to challenge the unnecessary non-humanitarian treatment of those in exile. To do nothing, is effectively to allow proposals to enshrine this behaviour in our laws. This is an opportunity to come and hear more from Exeter City of Sanctuary and allies about the adverse impact on people's lives and what practical steps can be taken to make improvements in the creation of any policy and laws.

For more info go to:

https://refugeesupportdevon.org.uk/images/uploads/Rally_Flyer_5_x7.jpg

Exeter Philharmonic Choir Spring Concert

Join Exeter Philharmonic Choir at Exeter Cathedral on **12 March** to celebrate its 175th anniversary with a performance of **Brahms'** great work *Ein deutsches Requiem*. The programme also includes Gerald Finzi's *Lo, The Full, Final Sacrifice* a rare opportunity to hear this piece accompanied by full orchestra.

Book your tickets



The Prayer of Saint Ephraim, which we use daily throughout Lent

<p>O Lord and Master of my life; take away from me the spirit of idleness, despondency, lust of power, and vain talking.</p> <p>But rather the spirit of purity, humility, patience and love do Thou grant to me, Thy servant.</p> <p>Yea, Lord and King, grant me to see mine own faults, and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen.</p>	<p>Κύριε και Δέσποτα της ζωής μου, πνεύμα αργίας, περιεργείας, φιλαρχίας και αργολογίας, μή μοι δως.</p> <p>Πνεύμα δε σωφροσύνης, ταπεινοφροσύνης, υπομονής και αγάπης, χάρισάι μοι τω σω δούλω.</p> <p>Ναι, Κύριε Βασιλεύ, δώρησαί μοι του οράν τα εμά πταισματα, και μη κατακρίνειν τον αδελφόν μου, ότι ευλογητός ει εις τους αιώνας των αιώνων. Αμήν</p>	<p>Господи и владыко живота моего, дух праздности, уныния, любоначалия и празднословия не даждь ми.</p> <p>Дух же целомудрия, смиреномудрия, терпения и любви даруй рабу твоему.</p> <p>Ей, Господи царю, даждь ми зрети моя согрешения и не осуждати брата моего, яко свят еси во веки веков. Аминь.</p>	<p>Doamne și Stăpânul vieții mele, duhul trândăviei, al grijii de multe, al iubirii de stăpânire și al grăirii în deșert nu mi-l da mie.</p> <p>Iar duhul curăției, al gândului smerit, al răbdării și al dragostei, dăruiește-l mie, robului Tău.</p> <p>Așa Doamne, Împărate, dăruiește-mi ca să-mi văd greșalele mele și să nu osândesc pe fratele meu, că binecuvântat ești în vecii vecilor. Amin.</p>
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Noticeboard

Services:

- Saturday March 5th: Vespers Saint Anne's 6.00pm
- Sunday 6th: Sunday of Adam's Expulsion From Paradise** – Sunday of Cheesefare.
Forgiveness Sunday
Divine Liturgy and Vespers of Forgiveness Saint Anne's 10.30am
(A very welcome visit from Father Alexander Fostiropoulos)
- Monday 7th: **First Week of Great Lent**
- Great Canon of Saint Anthony of Crete Saint Anne's 6.30pm
- Tuesday 8th: Great Canon Saint Anne's 6.30pm
- Wednesday 9th: Great Canon Saint Anne's 6.30pm
- Thursday 10th: Great Canon Saint Anne's 6.30pm
- Friday 11th: Akathist Hymn (Praises) Plymouth 7pm
- Saturday 12th: **No Liturgy – Fr Trayan in Bulgaria** Vespers St Anne's 6pm
- Sunday 13th: **First Sunday of Great Lent – Sunday of Orthodoxy**
 Typika followed by Sunday Vespers Saint Anne's 10.30am
Orthros and Divine Liturgy Torquay 9.30am
Matins and Divine Liturgy (in Romanian) Saint Stephen's, Exeter High St 9am
- Friday 18th: Akathist Hymn (Praises) Plymouth 7pm
- Saturday 19th: Vespers Saint Anne's 6pm
- Sunday 20th: **Second Sunday of Great Lent – Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas**
 Typika and Sunday Vespers Saint Anne's 10.30am
Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth 9.30am Torquay 9.30am
- Thursday 24th: Vespers of the Feast of the Annunciation Saint Anne's 6.30pm
- Friday 25th: FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth 9.30am Torquay 9.30am
- Saturday 26th: Divine Liturgy (Celebration of the Annunciation) Saint Anne's 10.30am**
 Vespers/Veneration of the Cross Saint Anne's 6pm
- Sunday 27th: **Third Sunday of Great Lent – Veneration of the Cross**
 Vespers Saint Anne's 3pm
Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth 9.30am Torquay 9.30am
Matins and Divine Liturgy (in Romanian) Saint Stephen's, Exeter High St 9am

Lent

Lent is a tree without blossom, without leaf,
barer than blackthorn in its winter sleep
all unadorned. Unlike Christmas which decrees
the setting-up, the dressing-up of trees
Lent is a taking down, a stripping bare,
A starkness after all has been withdrawn
of surplus, and superfluous
leaving no hiding-place, only an emptiness
between black branches, a most precious space
before the leaf, before the time of flowers;
Lest we should see only the leaf, the flower,
Lest we should miss the stars.

Jean M Watt

Anthologised in *A Touch of Flame*
An Anthology of Contemporary Christian Poetry
Compiled by Jenny Robertson Lion Publishing 1989

Adam

It wasn't me
it was that woman
she doesn't know what's good for her
she did it

and then
it was that snake
slimy horrible snake
I wouldn't have believed a word
I wouldn't have been taken in
imagine a talking snake
well I ask you

and then
and then
it was *you*
you gave me Eve
you made the serpent
it's your rotten apple
you knew all about it -
I was miles away
doing the garden like I was told
you're the one
you did it
it wasn't me
it *wasn't* me

and anyway I only took a little bite

Godfrey Rust

In *A Touch of Flame; An anthology of contemporary Christian poetry*
Compiled by Jenny Robertson Lion Publishing 1989

Why Do We Call the Great Fast 'Lent'?

'Lent' derives from Middle English *lenten* < Old English *lengten*, the spring: from the lengthening of the days in the spring; akin to Ger *lenz*, spring

Collins Dictionary

We Need to Know What You Think

The fortnight covered by the next issue of the newsletter will include March 22nd, marking two years since we started sending out weekly issues of *Prophet Elias News* in response to the first Covid 19 lockdown. Introducing the first issue, Celia said: '*It is hoped to produce a more frequent newsletter to counteract our being not able to meet at church as we usually do. Some of us live alone and far from others, which may make them feel even more isolated. There will be Metropolitan Anthony sermons, readings and/or prayers for the stage of Lent we are in, or beyond Pascha if that is what we have to do, plus other snippets of information that anyone would like to share.*'

We little thought then that we would still be producing weekly issues a year later. By then we were holding occasional services in Saint James' Hall, but we were still reeling from the awful shock of Father Peter's death, as well as being very aware that several people still felt they needed to keep themselves away from public gatherings, so we decided to continue with *Prophet Elias News* on a fortnightly basis until our situation became more settled.

Now – indeed since the beginning of the Year – we have been able to return to Saint Anne's with a pretty full schedule of services where we can meet and catch up with one another. However, we know there are still parishioners who for various reasons cannot come to Saint Anne's, plus we have found that since we began our distribution list has grown hugely, including to many people who live nowhere near Exeter. So, the question we need your help with is, What do we do now?

We plan in any event to carry on with fortnightly issues until Pascha. After that there are several possibilities. We could drop back to monthly newsletters with roughly the same format. We could continue fortnightly with just a sermon and schedule of services, which we could either continue to distribute as now or simply post on the parish website and Facebook page, continuing to send hard copies by post to those who don't have internet access. We could do something quite different, or we could just say 'Job done' and call it a day. It's really up to you.

Please let us know what you think. You can email us at martinolsson827@btinternet.com, write to The Editors, Prophet Elias News, Little Linhay, Bondleigh EX20 2AJ, or ring us on 01837 82796. *Celia and Martin*