



# Prophet Elias News

News and Views for the Orthodox Church  
of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon  
October 2023



**For service times see Noticeboard on P5**

## **Prosphora: An Offering to God** by Phyllis Meshel Onest

*(On October 31<sup>st</sup> we celebrate Sts Spyridon and Nikodim, Prosphora Bakers of the Kyiv Caves)*

Every Orthodox parish must have one or more persons to make *prosphora*, the bread used in the Liturgy. It could be the priest or a layperson. For those who live a devout Orthodox Christian life, making *prosphora* is a very special way to serve God and His Holy Church. It is a great privilege and requires a blessing from the priest.

### **What do the Scriptures Tell Us about Bread?**

“He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man’s heart.” (Psalm 103:14-15, LXX.) This psalm gives us much information: God created from nothing; He is the “Cause” of everything. He provides for the animals and for man. God has given the earth to man, and by working the earth, man can grow his food. When used appropriately, wine can lift our spirits. Oil has many uses. It adds flavour to our food. It is medicinal when used topically. In Jesus’ time people would apply oil to their faces after washing. Bread is a staple in our diet, giving us the strength we need.

In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus told us pray “give us this day our daily bread.” It is the only thing we are told to ask for, since it represents all the food that we need to sustain our life. And Jesus said, “I am the living Bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51). At the Last Supper, Jesus used bread as a way to continue to share in the lives of His Disciples. He took a loaf of bread and broke it. Just as the loaf is broken and consumed to give us life, so His body, broken on the cross, would give us everlasting life. He asked us to do this in remembrance of Him. When we participate in the Eucharist, we do just that!

### **A Little History about Bread**

For us in the twentieth century, bread is just bread. We can live without it. At the time when Jesus walked among us, bread was an important staple in the diet of ordinary people. By virtue of paying taxes, each Roman citizen was entitled to a daily ration of bread. As a result it was regulated. The Romans had stringent laws about the size and weight of loaves of bread that were sold. The consequences for shortchanging the purchaser were dire. *Sealing* each loaf with the imprint of the baker kept the bakers honest, and guaranteed that the Roman government got exactly the amount of bread paid for to feed the Roman troops. Bread was not the only item *sealed*. Dealers of olive oil and wine used clay seals to identify their products.

### **Bread and the Liturgy**

*Prosphora* is a Greek word meaning “offering.” In one sense, all that we offer for the use of the Church is *prosphora*: wine, incense, charcoal, oil (for oil lamps), candles, flowers, and bread. Our offerings are never raw materials. In all these cases we take something and make it into something else. Grapes to wine, olives to olive oil, wheat to bread, etc. Generally speaking, *prosphora* refers to the bread offering. In addition, the bread was not only a gift for use in the Liturgy, but it was also a gift to the Church to feed the priest and the poor.

While its use has remained the same as in the early Church, its form and markings have evolved. Bread with markings and in various shapes was common in ancient times among pagans as well as Christians. People decorated or impressed symbols on bread that was baked, bought, and eaten every day, as well as on bread

offered in religious rites. Once again the Church “Christianized” a pagan or common practice. During the time of Christian persecution, Christian symbols became cryptic, hiding, for example, the cross in simple decorative motifs. Although the symbol used on the bread may have varied during the early years, St. John Chrysostom (4th century) refers to the bread being “sealed,” probably with the IC-XC NIKA.

### Two Prosfophora Traditions

The Slav tradition uses a small seal, stamped on five loaves, in honour of the “feeding of the 5000.” These small loaves are made with two layers to represent both the two-fold nature of Christ and the uniting of heaven and earth. The Greek style, which uses one large loaf marked with IC-XC NIKA in the centre, surrounded by several other seals, signifies the one Body of Christ.

### Preparing the Bread at Church

The priest prepares the offering in the part of the Liturgy called the *proskomidia* or *prothesis*, offered just prior to the Divine Liturgy. The centre of the seal, in both the Greek and Slav traditions, reads IC-XC NIKA, which means “Jesus Christ Conquers /The Victor.” The priest cuts one seal in the shape of a cube to be offered as the “Lamb,” which becomes Christ’s Body. He also removes pieces and places them next to the Lamb on the *diskos* (*paten*). To the left is placed a large triangular piece for the Theotokos, Christ’s Mother. Nine smaller triangular pieces are placed to the right, in three rows of three, “in memory of John the Baptist, the prophets, apostles, hierarchs, martyrs, monastic saints, healers, and the whole company of the righteous, with special mention of the saints commemorated on that particular day. Finally a piece of bread is placed on the *diskos* in memory of the saint whose liturgy is being celebrated. In addition, two rows of bread pieces are placed on the *diskos* for the bishop of the given church, for the civil authorities of the country and for all of the faithful both living and dead, once more with particular mention by name of those particularly remembered by the local community.” (Fr. Thomas Hopko, *The Orthodox Faith*, Vol. 2, 1975, p.160-1). In this way the whole Church, the entire Body of Christ – saints, loved ones in heaven together with the local congregation – participates in the offering to God. In the Slav tradition a separate loaf is used for each set of particles cut during the *proskomidia*: the Lamb, the Theotokos, the “Nine Ranks,” the living, and the dead.

January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011. Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div., former Director of Religious Education for the Metropolis of Pittsburgh / Retired. Akron, Ohio USA..

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### Saints Cyprian and Justina – October 2<sup>nd</sup>

(Saint Cyprian is Patron Saint of Father Daniel’s Parish in Uganda)

Cyprian, known as "the Magician" to distinguish him from Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, was a magician in Antioch and dealt in sorcery. Justina was a young Christian woman who took private vows of chastity. A pagan lawyer sought the aid of Cyprian's magic to induce Justina into marrying him. Cyprian sent a demon to torment Justina, hoping to arouse carnal passions within her. The spells had no effect on Justina, who spent her time in prayer and fasting. Cyprian again employed sorcery, sending "the chief of the demons" to Justina, who likewise was conquered by a certain "Sign of Christ". Brought to despair, Cyprian made the Sign himself and in this way was freed from the toils of Satan. Cyprian summarily burned all his books of spells and sorcery in front of a bishop of the Church, sealing his commitment to a new life as a Christian. He was baptized and received into the Church and was made preeminent by miraculous gifts. Cyprian became in succession a deacon, priest, and finally, bishop of Antioch, while Justina became abbess of a convent.



During the Diocletian Persecution, both were seized and taken to Damascus, where they were tortured. As their faith never wavered, they were brought before Diocletian at Nicomedia, where at his command they were beheaded. The same fate befell a man named Theoctistus, who upon observing Cyprian's faith, declared himself a Christian. After the bodies of the saints had lain unburied for six days, they were taken by Christian sailors to Rome, where they were interred on the estate of a noble lady named Rufina and later entombed in Constantine's basilica.

Source: OrthodoxWiki

## The Elders of Optina

### *Synaxis of the Elders of Optina – October 11<sup>th</sup>*

Over the course of one century—from Elder Leonid's arrival in 1829 until the Monastery's forced closure by the Communists in 1923—Optina, with its Skete of St. John the Forerunner, was at the centre of a tremendous spiritual revival in Russia.

With the arrival of Elder Leonid, the practice of eldership was introduced in Optina. This is the prophetic ministry of the Church, which has existed since apostolic times, and through which God's will is directly revealed to those seeking guidance. An elder ( *Russian 'staretz'* ) is one who, through inward purification, has become a vessel and conduit of the action of the Holy Spirit. This ministry was passed on in Optina from one Elder to the next, in a remarkable chain of sanctity that lasted a full century.

The succession of Optina Elders had a profound effect on all levels of Russian society. Guidance by eldership — marked by a life of simplicity, unquestioning obedience to the Elder, and frequent revelation of one's thoughts—was a source of spiritual rebirth, not only for Optina's monks and monastics of other monasteries, but also for the thousands of lay folk who came to Optina in a steady stream day after day for spiritual direction. Famous Russian authors, such as Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy, were deeply affected by their contact with the Elders.

The Optina Elders also had a profound effect on the spirituality of Russia by fostering the publication of a significant body of patristic literature concerning the ascetic, spiritual life. The books that Optina Monastery published were sent out free to all monasteries in Russia, and were read by great numbers of laypeople, as well. This labour of love began under the leadership of Elder Macarius (Elder Leonid's disciple) and continued until the forced closure of Optina Monastery.

Since the 1988 reopening of Optina, numerous men have found shelter within the walls of this great monastic citadel. The Monastery and Skete, after years of neglect and destruction under the Communist regime, have gradually been restored by loving hands, and are already beginning to regain their former magnificence. *[Two young members of our parish, William O and David P, spent two weeks at Optina working on the restoration in 1990. Ed.]*

The Elders of Optina Monastery are the holy fathers Moses, Antony, Leonid (Lev), Macarius, Hilarion, Ambrose, Anatolius I, Isaac I, Joseph, Barsanuphius, Anatolius the Younger, Nectarius, Nikon the Confessor, and Hieromartyr Isaac the Younger. Hieromartyr Isaac was shot by the Bolsheviks on December 26, 1937.

*From the introduction to Elder Leonid of Optina, by Kliment Hieromonk - St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2002)*



### **Prayer at the Beginning of the Day (Prayer of the Elders of Optina)**

O Lord, grant me to greet the coming day in peace. Help me in all things to rely upon your holy will.  
In every hour of the day reveal your will to me. Bless my dealings with all who surround me.  
Teach me to treat all that comes to me throughout the day with peace of soul,  
and with firm conviction that your will governs all.  
In all my deeds and words guide my thoughts and feelings.  
In unforeseen events let me not forget that all are sent by you.  
Teach me to act firmly and wisely, without embittering and embarrassing others.  
Give me strength to endure the fatigue of the coming day with all that it shall bring.  
Direct my will, teach me to pray, pray in me yourself. Amen



## **This Month We Celebrate**

- On Sunday October 1<sup>st</sup>: **The Protecting Veil of Our Most Holy Lady the Mother of God**
- On Monday 2<sup>nd</sup>: Hieromartyr **Cyprian** and Virgin Martyr **Justini** of Nicomedia (c250)  
We wish **Father Daniel** and all in the **Parish of Saint Cyprian** in Uganda  
a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**
- On Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup>: Hieromartyr **Dionysios the Areopagite, Bishop of Athens** (96)  
We wish **Dionisius A** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**
- On Friday 6<sup>th</sup>: **Holy Apostle Thomas**  
We wish **Thomas S** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years !**
- On Monday 9<sup>th</sup>: **Holy Apostle James**, the son of Alphaeus  
The Righteous **Abraham** and his nephew **Lot**  
Saint **Dionysios (Denys)** of Paris (c250)
- On Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup>: **Saint Ambrose of Optina** (1891)
- On Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup>: **Apostle Philip of the Seventy**, one of the Seven Deacons  
Synaxis of the **Elders of Optina**
- On Thursday 12<sup>th</sup>: **Saint Symeon the New Theologian** (1022)
- On Saturday 14<sup>th</sup>: **Saint Paraskevi (Petka)** of the Balkans, whose relics lie at Iasi in Romania (11<sup>th</sup> C)
- On Sunday 15<sup>th</sup>: Commemoration of the **Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council** (787)
- On Monday 16<sup>th</sup>: The Centurion **Longinus**, who stood by the Cross of the Lord.
- On Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup>: **Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke**  
We wish **Luke D** and **Luke K** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**
- On Thursday 19<sup>th</sup>: Translation of the relics of **Saint John of Rila (Rilski)** Patron Saint of Bulgaria (1238)  
We wish **Father Trayan** and **all our Bulgarian friends** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**  
**Saint John of Kronstadt** (1908) (also December 20<sup>th</sup>)  
**Saint Frideswide** of Oxford (735)  
We wish **Father Seraphim** and **all members of the Parish of the Annunciation in Oxford**  
a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**
- On Monday 23<sup>rd</sup>: **Holy Apostle James the Lord's Brother**  
We wish **James T** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**
- On Thursday 26<sup>th</sup>: **Glorious Great Martyr Dimitrios** of Thessaloniki (c306)  
We wish **Father Gregory Palamas, Presbyter Elizabeth** and **all members of the Parish of Saint Dimitrios and Saint Nikitas** in Plymouth a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**
- On Sunday 29<sup>th</sup>: Martyr **Anastasia** of Rome (3<sup>rd</sup> C)  
We wish **Anastasia T** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**
- On Monday 30<sup>th</sup>: **Saint Issui** of Patricio (6thC) Patron Saint of the Children's Camp in South Wales.
- On Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup>: **Saint Aristobulus** of the Seventy, First Bishop of Britain (1<sup>st</sup> C)  
**Saints Spyridon and Nikodim** the Prosphora-bakers of the Kyiv Caves (12<sup>th</sup> C)

## **In All, Yet Beyond All**

When men search for God with their bodily eyes they find Him nowhere, for He is invisible. But for those who ponder in the Spirit, He is present everywhere. He is in all, yet beyond all.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian (October 12<sup>th</sup>)

## Noticeboard – Services in October

Sunday October 1<sup>st</sup>: 17<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup>: Vespers 6pm

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup>: 18<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

**followed by Parish Annual General Meeting**

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup>: Vespers 6pm

***Orthros and Divine Liturgy to celebrate Saint Paraskeva of the Balkans Torquay 9am***

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup>: 19<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup>: Vespers 6pm

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup>: 20<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Saturday 28<sup>th</sup>: Divine Liturgy 10.30am Combe Martin (to be confirmed)

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup>: 21<sup>st</sup> after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

*All services in Saint Anne's unless stated otherwise*

*For services in the Romanian parish (Exeter and Newton Abbot) consult*

*<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064673836911> or telephone Fr Julian on 07469 262827.*

*Similarly for the Torquay parish either visit [https://www.facebook.com/standrewtorquay/?locale=en\\_GB](https://www.facebook.com/standrewtorquay/?locale=en_GB) or telephone*

*Robert Skrivanos on 07971 316416. For services in Plymouth visit [plymchurch.com](http://plymchurch.com)*

## Baptisms

Douglas (Alexander) Axon and Elizabeth Axon were baptised before the Liturgy at Saint Anne's on Saturday Sept 23<sup>rd</sup>. We wish them Many Years, and aim to give a fuller report in our next issue.

**For as many as have been baptised into Christ  
have put on Christ.  
Alleluia!**

## Memory Eternal

It is with sadness that we report the deaths in September of Michel Sollogoub (aged 78, in Paris on 8<sup>th</sup>) and Sylvia Bachelor (75, in Walsingham on 11<sup>th</sup>).

**Michel Sollogoub** was Secretary of the Diocesan Council of the Archdiocese of Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe [*the Ecumenical Vicariate*] when our Deanery joined the Vicariate and remained a member of the Council until the Vicariate was dissolved by the Phanar in 2018. "In a particularly complicated period in the life of this ecclesial entity, Micha, faithful to the spirit of the founders of the Archdiocese, embodied the vision of an Orthodoxy in Western Europe rooted in the ecclesial Tradition, conciliar, open and creative, free and independent of all political power, transcending nationalisms." (Orthodoxie.com) Father Alexander represented the Deanery at Michel's funeral on September 13<sup>th</sup>

**Sylvia Bachelor** was custodian of the Orthodox pilgrim chapel of Saint Seraphim and icon gallery in the Old Station at Walsingham, as well as the moving spirit behind the development of the adjoining Quiet Garden as 'a natural space to complement the spirituality of the Chapel and provide a calming and natural reflective space for use by pilgrims and the whole community locally.' Sylvia was a long-time friend of our parish, visiting Combe Martin whenever she could.

An informal celebration will take place in the Quiet Garden on September 30<sup>th</sup> between 1 and 4pm.

**May Their Memories Be Eternal!**

*Contributions for the November issue should reach the Editors at [martinolsson827@btinternet.com](mailto:martinolsson827@btinternet.com) or by post at Little Linhay, Bondleigh, EX20 2AJ by **Monday 23rd October**, please.*

*Any opinions expressed in this newsletter are entirely those of the named authors or identified sources and should not be taken as representing the views of the parish as a whole.*