

Go therefore and make disciples of
all nations
Mt 28:19



Allez, faites de toutes les nations
des disciples
Mt 28:19

CANADIAN ORTHODOX MESSENGER

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Preparing for Great Lent and Pascha

Fasting in Great Lent

The three pillars of Great Lent are fasting, good works and prayer. In these things we find both discipline and reward, and those who really try to enter into the spirit of Great Lent and seriously attend to them find many blessings, a saving self-knowledge and profound spiritual renewal. Fasting is discussed below. Good works are always just at hand, whether at home, at work or school, or in reaching out to those in need in our community. Prayer in Lent calls for both more serious attention to prayer and one's rule of prayer, and the use of such Lenten prayers as that of St Ephraim, of attending Lenten services, and includes spiritual reading. Spiritual reading involves following the lectionary readings of the Church calendar, perhaps taking note of the Old Testament readings in particular, as well as reading from the lives of the saints and other "spiritual" literature—theology, history, hymnography, biography.

This year let Lent make a difference in your life! Take up the challenge! A journey is about to begin

Great Lent, together with Holy Week, is a strict fast of seven weeks. The Church enjoins us to take up a personal discipline of fasting, good works, and prayer. Although good works and prayer appear to be self-evident concepts for most people, fasting seems to be rather more difficult. Here are some points to consider as we approach the season of the feast.

To fast means "not to eat." In Great Lent there are several traditional practices concerning fasting.

Not eating at all. For those who can bear it, the first three days of Great Lent are days of not eating. This is also true of the first three days of Holy Week, Holy Friday and Holy Saturday. More typically, Orthodox Christians will *cut back on the number of meals and the quantity of food*. Thus many people will not eat until "after

Vespers" (the late afternoon), or until after the noon hour. This fasting until late in the day is, of course, the normal practice when we celebrate the Presanctified Liturgy in the evening. Again, many people will take only one small meal late in the day. Others will take two small meals. The object of fasting is to limit our consumption of food.

To abstain means "not to eat certain foods." During the fasting seasons, and Great Lent in particular, Orthodox Christians are encouraged to observe a strict abstinence from a number of foods. Throughout the fast we are directed to abstain from animal products (meat and meat byproducts, poultry, fish, dairy, eggs). On week-days we are also directed to abstain from wine and oil. Although invertebrate seafood (squid, octopus, shrimp, lobster, shell fish) are not actually proscribed, the fact that these are, in our times, more or less luxury foods suggests that avoiding them is in the spirit of the Orthodox Lenten discipline.

Thus weekdays in Great Lent have a rather strict discipline in terms of abstinence. Saturdays and Sundays have a lighter discipline, for with the exception of Holy Saturday on which oil is forbidden, on these days wine and oil, and the seafoods noted above, may be eaten. Fish is permitted on the feast of the Annunciation and on Palm Sunday, and, happily, caviar is permitted on Lazarus Saturday. There are a number of weekdays on which the strict discipline is relaxed to allow wine and oil. These are noted on the Church calendar.

Thus the basic rule for Orthodox Christians is: abstain from animal products and cut back on the amount you eat.

We are submitting to a discipline, a *regime* if you will. And while this discipline is a good opportunity for learning about and experimenting with various vegetarian and vegan foods, and especially ethnic cuisines, it is important to remember that the spirit of luxury and

continued, next page . . .

self-indulgence can be quite heady in this sort of cooking. The best thing is to eat simply and frugally, and at the same time to pay attention to what is permitted as a relaxation or consolation on the Church calendar.

It is also important that what and how we eat are just one form or expression of the far broader themes of fasting and abstinence in our lives. For we are called to fast and abstain with all our senses and all our appetites, that is, to turn away from all wickedness and vice, from consumerism and indulgence, from materialism and self-centredness, from busy-ness and noise, from muddle and insensitivity, from making pleasure the motive of our life.

To keep the fast requires will-power and imagination. The will to say no to temptations, cravings and desires, and the will not to listen to the thousand and one justifications for not keeping the fast that suddenly come to us whenever we try to do so. The imagination to pre-empt cravings, devise strategies for resisting temptation, organising our lives in such a way as to make keeping the fast possible. Confession and spiritual counsel are important tools supporting our ascetic effort.

Certain thoughts will surely come to us during the course of Great Lent, such as: I can't fast—it is too difficult; I do not need to fast—God doesn't care; others are not fasting—why should I?; I'll get sick if I don't eat *this or that*; others will be offended if I fast; being hospitable and getting along with co-workers and friends is more important than fasting These thoughts are all demonstrably false. Fasting is not all that difficult, it just requires some effort. We *do* need to fast—our Lord himself in His life and teaching directs us to do so, the Spirit-filled Church spells this out for us, the witness of countless saints and faithful people down through the ages testifies to it. What other people do or do not do is of no concern to us. No one ever became ill through eating a vegetarian or vegan diet for a modest seven weeks: quite the opposite in fact. Not only is such a diet in itself healthy, but also it conveys numerous graces and blessings to those who keep it in faith. No healthy-minded person will be offended if you fast, just as no right-thinking person will take offence if for health reasons—allergies or cholesterol, for examples—you modify your diet. If relatives, family, co-workers, classmates, friends respect you, then when you tell them—if the opportunity presents itself—that as an Orthodox Christian you are in a fasting period, and that you think that this personal discipline is important and good for you, they will respect the fact that this is something valuable for you. Fasting is *not* a big deal. If someone makes your keeping of the fast into a big deal or an occasion for conflict, this is a very good indicator that there are some other, deeper problems in your relationship! There is ample scope for hospitality within the fast, and even without drawing unnecessary attention to the fast.

In Great Lent the Church offers us a tried and true discipline, which is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. It is an end most fully realised when the means are embraced and employed with good will and serious intent.

(Those who are pregnant or nursing, or who suffer from diabetes or some other illness with dietary impact, those who are elderly, and those who are just beginning to try to keep the fast, ought to speak to their parish priest for direction in dealing with the fast.) —*Archpriest Andrew Morbey, Dean of the Cathedral of the Annunciation and St Nicholas, Ottawa*

Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women

On Holy Saturday we accompany Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus and the Myrrhbearing Women as they mourn for their beloved Lord who has died and tenderly prepare His body for burial. They remained with Him and cared for Him in grief and love even when all hope seemed to be lost. On the third Sunday of the Paschal season we come back to them and see the same events from a very different perspective. At Pascha the Church has suddenly turned a corner into a whole new world. The words of the troparia may be the same as on Holy Saturday, but the music is entirely different. On this Paschal Sunday we share with Joseph, Nicodemus and the Holy Myrrbearers in the radiant joy of Christ's Resurrection.

As Orthodox Christians we put a lot of time and effort into preparing for Pascha—first several weeks of preparation for Lent, then the Great Fast itself, then Holy Week, and Pascha finally comes. During Lent we do lots of extra things to build the edifice of our spiritual life. There is great emphasis on religious education, fasting, prayer, almsgiving, extra services, repentance, confession and frequent communion. We need to remember that if all this is preparing us for Pascha, then Pascha is more important than what prepares for it. Our spiritual participation in Pascha is even more important than our participation in Great Lent. Unfortunately sometimes it is also more difficult.

During Lent we are constructing a great building in our souls, and in Holy Week our Lord comes to us as the Master Builder who completes the job that we have failed to accomplish. Then what happens? All the extra things we did during Lent to build it, all that special prayer, fasting, spiritual reading, church attendance, and so on, may suddenly be gone. It is as if the scaffolding that held the building up while it was under construction is taken down, and it is left to stand by itself. The supports we are used to relying on are suddenly no longer present. The abundant life and light and joy of the Risen

Christ are more than enough to uphold and adorn our spiritual lives, but sometimes we lose touch with Him, the problems and temptations of this world rush back in, and the whole structure comes crashing down. Perhaps we forget that we still need some spiritual discipline after Lent is over.

When we read in the Gospels about what happened after Christ's Resurrection, we find that His own disciples and apostles had similar problems. They did not just spend forty days singing, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death." They had trouble understanding and accepting the Resurrection, even though they had lived with the Lord for three years and were taught by Him personally. The Resurrection reveals something entirely new and unexpected, the light without evening of God's kingdom in which there is no darkness at all, the triumphant and incorruptible life that has swallowed up death and made it powerless, the beginning of the eternal Kingdom.

In the Gospel we hear that when an angel revealed these things to the Myrrhbearing Women, they ran away in trembling and astonishment. Although the angel asked them to tell the disciples, at first they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid [Mark 16:6-8]. Meanwhile, the disciples still mourned and wept for the Master they had lost, and when Mary Magdalen told them she had seen the Risen Lord, they did not believe it [Mark 16:9-11]. Maybe they were so overwhelmed by grief that they were not ready to receive such unexpected joy. Maybe the joy itself was so great that they disbelieved because it was more than they could bear. Like Thomas they probably had trouble with

the concept of a body risen from the dead and immortal. Christ showed His wounded hands and side, he ate and drank before them, to show them it was really true. Luke tells us that he presented himself to them alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing repeatedly for forty days and speaking of the Kingdom of God [Acts 1:31]. He was present among them again and again granting them reassurance, joy, peace and life. When some of the apostles went back to their old jobs as fishermen, He did not leave them to return to a supposedly normal life. He appeared to them again on the seashore [John 21]. Finally, when He appeared to the eleven apostles in glory on a mountain in Galilee and declared that all authority in heaven and on earth was given to Him, and then ascended into heaven, the apostles worshipped Him, but even then some doubted. Nevertheless, they did what He commanded them to do. They proclaimed the Good News to all nations, so that it has come even to us. As the Lord promised them, He is with them and with us always, even until the end of the world when He will come again [Matt. 28:16-20].

During the Paschal season our task is to do as the disciples did. Even though they were doubtful, distraught, confused and frightened following Christ's Resurrection, they continued to do what He commanded them to do. Like them we must continue to serve Him, pray, and meet together for worship. We have to keep reminding ourselves and each other with joy that Christ is risen and is with us always. We still live in a fallen world, we still struggle with the same old weaknesses, problems and temptations as before, but Christ is still risen and He is here to forgive us, help us and grant us joy and peace.

The devil hates it when we celebrate Pascha, because we are proclaiming that Christ has defeated him once and for all through his Cross and Resurrection. So sometimes there are extra temptations at this time of year. Sometimes the enemy does really nasty things in an attempt to disrupt our celebration and rob us of our joy. But whatever happens, Christ has already overcome all the powers of darkness through the Cross. They did everything they could to destroy Him, but He could not be destroyed. So now no matter what happens there is nothing that can stop Him from being risen from the dead. Even if we do not believe it, He is still risen. He shares with us His abundant life and joy freely again and again during these forty days and throughout our lives. All we have to do is remember His presence, be willing to work with Him, and receive His gifts with love and thanksgiving. **CHRIST IS RISEN!** —*Sr Nonna Harrison, guest lecturer in Patristics at St Paul's, University of Ottawa, Spring 2002.*

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A Christian's missionary calling Begins 'at home'

Recently I stepped into the dormitory shower stall, turned on the water and with shocked amazement realized that someone had changed the showerhead. The previous showerhead had provided a luscious cascade of water. But suddenly there was only a weak spray of mist; the old showerhead was gone! I stood in the light mist of the new showerhead, weeping. Sobbing. My whole childhood appeared in the shower stall—all the deprivation and abuse, all the pain. At the same time, I couldn't believe that I was crying over a showerhead. Later, I watched as I pawed through the trash to see if I could find the showerhead. Me—pulling trash all over the floor, weeping as I sorted through used tissue paper, empty shampoo bottles, discarded plastic bags, half-eaten pizza crusts. This certainly was not consistent with my image of myself!

I saw that the showerhead had become some kind of god for me, dispensing this little morning pleasure, this comfort in the harshness of seminary life. I wept and wept. Weeping over a showerhead! How could I substitute a stream of water for the living water and peace God offers? I saw that I needed to leave something behind—my old sense of deprivation and my attempt to be one step ahead of God in comforting myself. Somehow, by confronting my personal history and my relationship to it, I was brought into God's peace. The next morning in the shower stall, I found myself free of the showerhead, free to turn to God for his peace and comfort and care.

I had been working on a homily I had to give in the seminary chapel on Luke 10: 1-15. It struck me that Jesus' teaching on missionary work included me, the me that had stood in the shower weeping. It included all of us who are struggling to turn to God, who are hoping to be useful in his work. In Luke, Jesus sends out seventy disciples in pairs. He tells them how their needs will be met, where they are to stay, and when they should leave a place. He reassures them, telling them how they will find food and lodging and how they will know when the message of the Gospel will be accepted. Jesus is also speaking to us about missionary work.

What seems most interesting about this passage is what Jesus tells us not to take and what He never mentions at all. First, He tells us what we must leave behind—our purse, bag, and sandals. We are to take nothing extra with us, no money food, clothing or shoes. Unarmed, empty-handed, and guileless, we are "lambs in the midst of wolves." And this is how we are to step into the world—with this simplicity, this lack of pretension, this willingness to take nothing with us except what God provides.

The second part of what interests me in this passage of Luke is what Jesus never mentions at all. He never says what the disciples are to say. He gives them no instruction on how to share the Gospel. He tells them only how to greet people: "Peace be to this house. And if a son of peace is

there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you." (Lk 10:5-6)

What does this word "peace" mean? According to Fr Paul Tarazi, peace is a characteristic of God. It is neither an absence of conflict nor the status quo. We can think of peace as similar to God's energy, His attention that maintains and sustains all creation. Peace is not something we humans can create; we can merely be sensitive and available to its presence and workings. Peace belongs only to God.* So, what we are told to look for in missionary work is this peace, this presence of God already working.

How can we recognize God's peace? The first part of the text gives the answer: by our leaving certain other things behind, so that we can be receptive to it. This leaving things behind provides the space for God's peace in us; when we know this peace in ourselves, then we can recognize it in others. We are called to look for and cling to this peace. Not to some showerhead that can unexpectedly disappear. God showed me that I had wanted the comfort of that cascading water more than I wanted His peace. I was horrified that part of me could be so blind. Clearly that part of me had never heard of Jesus Christ.

My homily became clearer to me. I saw that our missionary work begins as an inner journey. We are called to be missionaries to ourselves the moment we step out of bed each morning. We need to begin to ask the right questions of ourselves, to confront ourselves. Is God's peace in me or is it just bouncing off me and returning to Him? Am I sensitive and available to God's presence this moment? There are parts of me that have never heard of Jesus Christ; am I willing to recognize where God's peace does not exist in me? Am I willing to be a missionary to those parts? What am I carrying that gets in the way?

As I presented my homily on inner missionary work, I felt my hands tremble with nervousness and fear. We have so many ideas of ourselves. We label ourselves as intelligent or stupid, as victim, as honest, as "spiritual," etc. We have self-images we try to maintain—both negative and positive ones—and we feel naked without these. I looked out at the faces and saw that my need to appear a certain way was something else I had to leave behind.

How do we become available to God's peace in order to be his missionaries? We first need to be missionaries to ourselves. We need to do some personal housecleaning, some re-ordering, peeling away the "me" that gets in the way in order to reveal the unique "me" that is made in God's image. This unique "me" is the one I need to uncover and carry with me on my journeys; this one recognizes and flourishes in God's peace and is able to recognize and share in that same peace that flourishes in others. This is the missionary "me."

*Tarazi, Paul, "Biblical Understanding of Justice and Peace," from Limouris, Gennadios, ed., *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights from Orthodoxy* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), 116-124.

Our inner preparation includes practicing receptivity through daily meditation, by practicing a stillness to find our connection with God's presence all around us. By seeing what gets in the way and learning to leave behind what is not useful in God's work. Honesty is our most important tool.

We can also read the Gospel and contemplate God to know more truly who we are in His image, and to discern what is non-essential. And as we disentangle ourselves from unnecessary baggage, we can discover our authentic selves in Christ, to be freed from what gets in the way and weighs us down. Jesus assures us that he will take care of us and of the encounters with others throughout our journey this day. He will free us from the tyranny of showerheads and show us his peace. It is this peace we take on the missionary journey. However, we can only be missionaries to others if we are first willing to be missionaries to ourselves.—*Jean Wason Knapp, student at St Vladimir's Seminary*

How often should we receive The Holy Communion?

To receive Communion the usual two or three times a year is good and helpful, but to receive Communion more frequently is far better. Remember, the nearer a person comes to the light, the more light he gets. The nearer he approaches sanctity, the more saintly he becomes.

In the same way, the more often one draws near to God in Communion, the more one receives light and warmth and holiness. My friend, if you are worthy to make your Communion two or three times a year, you are worthy of making it more often, as St John Chrysostom tells us, by maintaining your own earlier preparation and worthiness.

But what does stop us from taking Communion? The answer is our carelessness and laziness, and we give way to these faults so much that we are not sufficiently prepared to be able to receive Communion.

There is another way of looking at this problem, too. People like this do not, in fact, obey God's commandment as they imagine they do. Where did God, or any one of the saints for that matter, bid us communicate two or three times a year? Nowhere is this found. Therefore we must be very sure that, when we obey a command, it is our duty to see that we are obeying it exactly as it says. That is, we must pay attention to the place, the time, the purpose, the method and all the conditions in which it should take place. Thus the good action that we wanted to perform will be perfect in every detail and well pleasing to God.

You can see that the same thing applies to the case of Holy Communion. It is both necessary and very beneficial to the soul for a person to receive Communion frequently. It is also in obedience to the commandment of God. It is a good deed well done and well-pleasing to God. On the other hand,

to communicate only three times a year is neither in obedience to a command, nor a perfect good deed. Because it is not good in itself, its results are not good.

Therefore, like all the rest of God's commandments, everyone requires the right time, as it says in Ecclesiastes, "For everything there is a season."

This is true also with regard to the command about Holy Communion. We must receive at the proper time; and that means the proper time is the moment when the priest exclaims, "In the fear of God and with faith and love draw near."

Is this heard only three times a year? Oh, no. Yet, although everyone must eat two or even three times a day in order that the material body may live, must the unfortunate soul only eat three times a year—or perhaps even once—the food that gives it life in order to live the spiritual life? And, isn't this completely absurd? Even if this is not the case, I am very much afraid that we may be deriving no benefit from complying with the commandments, because we water them down and spoil them. So we are not keepers of the law, but breakers of the law.—*Macarius Notaras, 18th-century Archbishop of Corinth*

Repression of passions, Or their healing? Saints show the way

"According to the spirituality of the holy elders, the subconscious must never remain in the dark. We must never *repress* our weaknesses and passions. The aim of the Church as a method of healing is to sanctify the human individual, the whole person . . . [If the spiritual work we do led only to repression of desires instead of their healing] we would all be psychopaths, neurotics, and schizophrenics. For how long can you repress your passions? Lunacy, that's what is going to be the inevitable outcome, and that's why the saints are truly liberated in their very being. They are the freest people on earth. Once they reach that state they can never be affected by the sins of the world. They are not terrified by them. They are not human beings fortified behind their prejudices and repressions. You may meet saints and tell them the most horrendous sins. They will not be touched in their innermost core. Persons who have repressed their passions will get angry, will get into a punishing mood. If you tell them that you committed some sinful act, they will become very upset and judgmental. They will become intolerant without a trace of compassion. Do you know why? Because they themselves are suffering. They have a lot of repressed emotions and anger inside them, a lot of repressed temptations. Such persons are moralistic and pious, but they are no saints. Their hallmark is not utter humility." —*Fr Maximos in conversation with Kyriacos Markides, recorded in The Mountain of Silence*

Our mother among the saints

Holy Xenia of St Petersburg

January 24 / February 6

St Xenia belongs to that special category of saints known as fools for Christ: *yirodivii* in Russian, and *thia Christon saloi* in Greek. These are saintly people who oppose the world by asserting the truth of the Kingdom through their very different lifestyle, usually quite opposite to that of those around them. Their unique mission is often expressed in homeless wandering. Their nonsensical words are full of clear spiritual meaning, sometimes evident right away, sometimes after a while. Their humble raggedness is a wordless exposé of the vanities of the world revolving around fame, fortune and outward finery. By their lowly lifestyle, manners and bearing, fools for Christ juxtapose the higher ways of God to the ways of the world, appearing unsanitized and repugnant in a “nice world.” They are the opposite of the whitewashed sepulchres of which the Lord spoke, as they are not at all busy making clean the outside. And what they are busy with is for the eyes of God, not for men; they have no desire to show and tell at a horizontal level.

In parodying normal existence through their exterior non-conformity, they often invite judgment and abuse from those round them. Those who treat them kindly often experience tremendous blessings. And in the middle of it all, showing up where they are not expected and blurting out the unconventional, these holy bag-ladies and bag-men respond to insults with a smile, speak the truth when others would quake, pray and the prayers get answered, or take on odd feats that have deep, ascetical meaning. The holy fools go so much beyond the bounds of precedent and tradition that they come a full circle—their freedom and uniqueness form its own tradition. Fools for Christ are rare and beautiful. In Russian, there are called *cheloveki Bozhii*, literally *God’s men*, or in a sense, *God’s own*.

Such was Xenia Gregorovna Petrova. Little is known about her early life, except that she was widowed at twenty-six when her husband, whom she dearly loved, dropped dead one night after a drinking party. Because of his occupation, that of imperial chorister, it is likely that the Petrovs belonged to the lesser Russian nobility. She was probably used to a relatively comfortable life with considerable social connections. The death of Andrei Theodorovich shattered the world she knew, and the vanities around her began to crumble. Haunted by the fact that Andrei was snatched from life and had no time for spiritual preparation, Xenia began to push away from the life she knew, giving away money and personal effects. When it grew to giving away her house and estate, relatives tried to prove her insane. But a full examination showed her in possession of her faculties. Her motivation was clearly to leave all and follow Christ.

Then, mysteriously, Xenia disappeared for eight years. Many believe she entered a women’s monastery where she engaged in deep prayer under the direction of a spiritual elder. After that, she showed up again in St Petersburg, wearing her husband’s old uniforms and answering to his name. The general opinion is that she had been blessed by an elder somewhere to become a holy fool. The unique manifestation of her foolishness, identification with her husband, reflected her sorrow and compassion for him, her caring for him truly as “one flesh.” Bearing the burden of his unrepented sin, she so identified with him that Xenia became Andrei.

She would spend her time as a beggar wandering in the poorest districts of the city, carrying a walking stick and distributing the small copper coins given her known as *kings on horseback*. She would never take more from those offering her money, just the smallest of coins. She also dropped in quite frequently at her own house which she had given to her friend, Paraskevia Antonovna. She was known for her loving gaze and her stern directions, and it was found that if she held or touched sick children, they recovered their health.

That the Lord raised up gifts of foreknowledge and prophesy in St Xenia is confirmed by many accounts. Many of them have a rather merry flavour, such as asking for the duck she knew was in the oven when the mistress of the house told her there was nothing else to eat, or sending a young, unmarried girl to the cemetery because “your husband is burying his wife in Okhta. Run quickly!” Yes, there was a duck in the oven. And yes, a grief-stricken widower was at the graveside of his wife at Okhta, and in time, the girl would marry him. In a similar way, by Xenia’s word to hurry to a certain street, a childless woman received a son. Going to that place, she found that a woman who was about to deliver a child, had been fatally struck by a carriage. The child had been born before she died and Xenia’s friend rescued him, then raised him as her own. The boy grew up with a strong love for St Xenia.

It is impossible to know anything of the interior life of this dear woman of God, except as her tropar says, “she did not fear privation or grief.” It is one thing to face privation when the soul is unburdened. But when the soul is filled with grief (as hers was for her husband) and with pain (for the sins of those around her and probably of all mankind) the consolation of sleep, food or even warmth can be important. And who knows even what unknown abuses she must have suffered over the years. But she refused to take a regular, human way out, choosing instead to suffer deprivation and mockery. Lest we should somehow see her testing as romantic, idealistic or unreal, we must underline that it was a stretch of forty-five years filled with roughness, rudeness, hardness and cold. There was no reward on this side of the grave, no respite until death. In some respects St Xenia is a female counterpart to St Alexis, the Man of God, really a day-by-day martyr.

It was quite a puzzle to find out where St Xenia spent her nights. After careful observation, she was found in an

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Memory Eternal

Alexander Ivanovitch Chomicz

14 September 1909 – 11 December 2001

On December 11, 2001, the parish of Sts Peter and Paul Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Montreal suffered a great loss. Mr Alexander Chomicz, who for several decades carried out the duties of reader and assisted choir duties for the parish, reposed in the Lord. He was ninety-two.

Alexander Ivanovitch Chomicz was one of those parishioners whom you could easily not know anything about. He was an unnoticeable, discrete and humble person, and his duties and responsibilities in the parish did not draw any attention (nor did he require any). But, throughout more than four decades, he served the parish, and served it well, as reader—*psalomshtchik* as it is known in Russian—as singer, and as teacher. He did his work with unflinching dedication and attention.

Already in the Ukraine and in Germany, where he lived during the 1950s, Mr Chomicz was busy on the kliros, putting his wonderful talents to work and teaching choir music and reading in the old church slavonic. When he arrived in Montreal in the early 1960s, he became psalomshtchik at Sts Peter and Paul Cathedral, assisting then choir director Alexander Kaminski, and substituting for him in his absence.

Here, as in Europe, Alexander Ivanovitch continued teaching singing and reading. It is impossible to say exactly how many candidates studied with him. I remember how once, sitting in his kitchen and talking over a cup of tea, he showed me his notebook where he wrote the name and date of birth of each of his students. I did not begin counting, so exhaustive was the list. He continuously looked for, and found, new students. He was very attentive to each one of them, putting a lot of effort into teaching them to sing and read. He knew and understood that there can never be too many singers and readers—the Church always needs them. This was the purpose for his life-long efforts: to serve the Church.

Those who attended church services on Sundays saw what I saw during the 1970s and 1980s, when I would come to Montreal to church from Quebec with my parents three or four times a year. The choir singers gathered on the choir loft, with Mr Kaminski at his post; and there, on the side, stood an elderly gentleman in dark glasses, sometimes leaning on his cane. Upon the exclamation “Blessed is our God,” Mr Chomicz would read the third hour, and that is pretty much all that was heard from him for the rest of the service, the choir taking over.

On Pascha, when in the first years I would serve in the altar, or in the later years when I would join the choir with my brother to try and sing, Mr Chomicz would give me a chocolate egg as a present. I thanked him, although I did not know nor understand who he was.

Fifteen to twenty years later, after finishing my Masters studies in Quebec, I moved to Montreal for work and began attending church services on a regular basis. There, I saw an entirely different picture, a more complete picture, one which was contemplated by those who attended church on weekdays and Saturday evenings. Archbishop Sylvester, our long-time rector who also headed our diocese for nearly thirty years, was serving in the altar, joined by the priests. On the kliros stood Alexander Ivanovitch Chomicz, supervising the entire reading and choir singing duties. Sometimes there were six of us but, more often than not, a quartet gathered to sing under his direction. He handed out his music books (they were difficult to read, as they were written in his



Alexander Ivanovitch Chomicz

later years, when he was already tiring), and we sang and read in turns. He often had to use a magnifying glass as his sight faded, but he always managed to find the right page in the books.

Alexander Ivanovitch was a very gentle and pleasant person. He loved to joke, to tell stories, to
continued, next page . . .

Alexander Chomicz, *continued from p.7:*

philosophize, and he was very attentive to his conversant. You simply liked being around him, somewhat like around your grandfather, and it was impossible to turn him down when, on occasion, he would ask a favour. He loved to invite you over to his place, always offering you something—a cup of tea with cake, or fried cabbage, or something else. It was pleasant to sit down with him, and it was difficult to get away.

Of course, Mr Chomicz had a very special character, and each person would look at him in his or her own way. Although he walked bent over and leaning on his cane, he would occasionally stop, stand straight and, waving his hand, energetically voice his opinion on an issue which stirred him inside. He was a simple man, yet he had his flashes of wisdom. Some students would consistently arrive late at the service; he would tell them: “I have a good trick for you so you arrive on time: leave home earlier!” To those who arrived late in Spring because they “forgot to change their watches” he answered: “Why don’t you arrive an hour early in Fall when the clocks go back one hour?”

Mr Chomicz was also stubborn; but, who amongst us is not? He was a real Christian, open and sincere. He would never say something while thinking the opposite. If we had a run-in during the service, all was forgotten by the time we sang the last “Aminj.”

It happened on occasion that I sang an entire service alone with him. In a certain way, these are the services I cherish the most. Sometimes he would lead; at other times I would; and, without a word or direction, we sang the service, with no interruption or hiccup, in a relaxing and prayerful way.

No matter what day or what service, no matter what weather or transportation conditions were (strong winds, scorching heat, freezing rain, snow drifts, no bus service), Alexander Ivanovitch was always on time. When I arrived to church straight from work, my first glance was to the kliros, and there he always stood, ready.

Vladyka Sylvester had great respect for Mr Chomicz, and was grateful for his efforts. It was obvious to see, and, clearly, the feeling was mutual. Although one was a bishop and the other a layman, both understood very well each other’s role and duty and, together, they carried out their duties and prayed together with and for the parish. During the course of five years when I observed this relationship, I recall only a single instance where Vladyka pointed out a mistake; and yet it was well known how Vladyka strictly followed the *oustav*. At the

annual parish meetings, when Vladyka Sylvester recalled the multitude of services held during the past year (the number exceeded two hundred), he always pointed out how Alexander Ivanovitch Chomicz had not missed a single service.

Mr Chomicz lived a frugal life, but he knew how to take care of himself. He knew even better how to take care of others, especially those who worked on the kliros or who served in the altar. A week before Great Lent, he would buy boxes of chocolate and wine, and he would especially look for herring. He would prepare it *à la russe* and, when Lent started, he would offer some to the clergy, to choir members and to other parishioners. I will never forget the time when I visited him in the hospital last year, where he was recovering from pneumonia, and it moved me to tears. As I entered his room and saw him lying in bed, weak and with the oxygen tube in his nose, I asked him how he was, and his first words were: “Misha, I prepared some chocolate boxes. Please hand them out.” This is how he was, not a single complaint about his health, about his solitude, only concern for others. On his 90th birthday, he had served dinner to the entire parish in the church hall. He was already making plans for his 95th birthday.

In his last years, his health continued to decline, and it became increasingly difficult for him to move around, his back and knees ailing. He was hoping so much that his relatives could immigrate to Canada and take care of him, and he steadfastly refused to move to a senior citizens’ home. Sadly, he did not outlast the immigration process. He reposed on December 11, 2001. The *otpevanie* was held Monday, December 17, following Divine Liturgy for the departed. He is interred in the Rawdon cemetery.

It was sad to see how few people were able to gather and pay their last respects to a person who gave his entire life to the Church and who served the parish so well and with such dedication for such a long period of time. There is some consolation, however, in that the Church prescribes panikhidas on the ninth and fortieth days of repose. By God’s grace, these days, in Alexander Ivanovitch Chomicz’s case, coincided with two well-celebrated Church feasts where many faithful gathered: St Nicholas (December 19, OS), and the Great Feast of Theophany. Let us all be particularly fervent in our prayers to God that He give rest to the soul of His newly departed servant Alexander and make his memory to be eternal!—
Michael Woinowsky-Krieger, Montréal



Retiring after 35 years in parish of first assignment

Many Years to Father Svetislav and Matushka!

“God grant them many years” resounded gloriously through the Church of the Holy Trinity in Moose Jaw on the First Sunday after the Nativity, as nearly 130 parishioners and guests prayed for peaceful life, health, salvation and all good things for the servants of God, Father Svetislav and Matushka Eva Balevich, about to enter retirement after nearly thirty-five years of continuous service there. Amidst many tears and best wishes, with the bright winter sun pouring through the altar windows, Father Svetislav celebrated his retirement liturgy and Matushka Eva assisted the choir. As His Grace, Bishop SERAPHIM noted in his letter of commendation on this occasion to this couple, they have followed the ancient Orthodox practice of remaining and serving in the parish of first assignment, rare in this age. He also recollected that there was a long period of time when “Father Svet held the fort” as the only OCA priest serving all of Saskatchewan, including Kayville, Stenen, Maple Creek and even Sandy Lake, Manitoba, across the province’s eastern border.

Young Svetislav’s route to theological seminary took him from his birthplace in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, where his Russian parents settled after the rise of communism forced them to leave their homeland. They fled to Austria when the Nazis blitzed across Eastern Europe, and then to Venezuela and to Toronto, from where this dedicated church supporter was encouraged to attend St Tikhon’s Seminary in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. There he met and married Eva Lazarak, whose family were active parishioners of the monastery church and lived one mile up East Hill and down the dirt road from St Tikhon’s.

Ordained a deacon in Montreal during Expo ’67 and a priest in Toronto by Archbishop Sylvester, Fr Svetislav and his bride arrived in Moose Jaw in late August 1967. Serving the parish community and raising their sons Nick and Igor in Moose Jaw, their roots would go very deep, and it appears, might well remain even after retirement.



Shown from l to r: Reader Jordan Eriksson, altar-server Michael Luciuk, Matushka Eva Balevich, Father Rodion Luciuk, Matushka Denise Luciuk, Father Svetislav Balevich, Father Phillip Ericksson, Father Orest Olekshy, Matushka Barbara Ericksson, Deacon Taras Papish, and Monk Innocent (Green).

Sister communities in Saskatchewan were fully represented at the retirement festivity, including Saskatoon, Yorkton, Kayville, Assiniboia, Avonlea and Regina. Concelebrating the Divine Liturgy were Father Rodion Luciuk, Assistant Dean of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Father Orest Olekshy, Father Phillip Ericksson, Deacon Taras Papish, Reader Jordan Eriksson, and altar-server Michael Luciuk. Father Svetislav’s homily was on the Gospel reading, St Luke 18:18-27, on leaving all and following the Lord. In a sober look at loving the Lord and loving our neighbour, he contrasted human nature, and its emphasis on self-preservation, with the Divine nature, expressed so fully in Christ’s words “forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Fr. Svetislav raised the question of just how do we go about “breaking out of our bag” in order to do God’s will and not our

continued, next page . . .

Fr Svetislav, *continued from p.9:*

own. How do we turn from—even discard—our own will to follow Christ?

A most delicious parish feast was followed by greetings, fond remembrances, and presentation of tokens of appreciation from the parish itself, the Deanery, Kayville and Saskatoon, and again, there was the blessing of “Many Years.” Reminiscences by many gave a heartfelt sketch of the Baleviches’ dedication and work of humble love over all these years toward young and old alike. It was a uniquely vibrant picture, as anyone who knows the Baleviches are aware that they care not only for the souls of parishioners, but also for their physical conditions with their deep interest in herbs, health and massage.

Tears joined chuckles as the years of working together to keep the parish running smoothly and the work of the parish Sisterhood were remembered, ending with the animated comment, “Somehow we all got old at the same time!” John Bistretzan of Kayville told of a time of prayer in the emergency wing of the hospital in Regina, and its successful answer. Sophie (Hasapis) Yannitzos brought greetings from the Greek community of then-Moose Jaw/now-Regina—fondly recalling the parish picnics, the Baleviches’ van transporting them to Sunday School, and drama debuts on the parish stage. “We counted on the Baleviches in whatever problem we had. And when we had problems with algebra, we’d run to Presvytera Eva!” In conclusion, Father Svetislav lightly and poignantly touched on the joys and riches of parish life. Matushka Eva reminisced about her earliest days there, grateful especially for all the help and assurance that parish members gave her, concluding with an expression of her confidence “in the God Whom we trust with our eternal salvation to guide us into and through retirement.”

Moose Jaw attracts many these days with its mineral water spa and its historic tourist attractions. But for many of us, Moose Jaw will always be first and foremost the location of organic, from-the-roots-up Christian caring as exemplified by the servants of Christ, Father Svetislav and Matushka Balevich. And as they assured us all, Saskatchewan is in their blood. They will very likely be found at Moose Jaw (or in their huge vegetable garden at Riverhurst down the road) for some time to come. And at Holy Trinity Church as well, as fervent invitations were extended to (PLEASE!) celebrate whenever possible, joining the clergy of Assiniboia-Kayville who take up serving the Moose Jaw church on two Sundays a month in the interim.

May God grant these two faithful servants of the Lord Many Years! —*Kathy Szalasznyj, Saskatoon*

Pastoral Notes

Effective 1 Dec 01, **Priest Larry Reinheimer** is appointed Missions Director for the Archdiocese of Canada.

Effective 1 December 01, **Priest Anastasy Richter** is appointed Youth Director for the Archdiocese of Canada.

Effective 31 Dec 01, **Archpriest Svetislav Balevich** is granted retirement from active service. He remains attached to Holy Trinity Church, Moose Jaw SK.

On 26 Jan 02, **Deacon John Hainsworth** was ordained to the Holy Priesthood in Three Hierarchs’ Chapel (SVS), Crestwood NY, to which he is attached.

On 2 Feb 02, **Ignatius Rigden-Briscall** was ordained to the Holy Diaconate in St Herman of Alaska’s Church, Surrey BC, to which he is attached.

St Xenia, *continued from p.6:*

open field at the edge of the city, where she would do prostrations to the Lord in all four directions of the wind. In the late 1790s, a church was under construction, and seemed to grow at night. As people kept an eye on it, a little lady was observed carrying bricks up the scaffolding, building and repeatedly going down for more: St Xenia!

Truly by her prayers and unusual example, Holy Xenia has worked for the building of the Church, the uplifting of the faith. Modern accounts prevail of her help in time of need even in North and South America—prayerful visitations from an unknown little woman shuffling to the bedside of a sick person and speaking a word, or dropping in looking for directions to a certain place, and then disappearing as soon as she closes the gate. In each case, those visited are inspired by the love of the Lord and his saint to have hope, to have courage in their unique situation. The power of her prayers has been sought even in the most atheistic times. The cracks in the wood of the chapelette over her grave in Leningrad were always aflutter with papers as anonymous intercessory requests would be written down and left at her graveside.

She wandered for nearly half a century and reposed in the Lord at seventy-one. As her gravestone says, “May whoever knew me pray for my soul that his own may be saved.” Perhaps in this lies the mystery of the person known as St Xenia / Andrei Theodorovich, the symbiotic relationship of love, the *becoming the life* of the other, of all men.

“Thou didst know the love of Christ,” her tropar says. It was a sweep of divine love that transformed an ordinary noblewoman into a humble, unusual, transparent vessel of eternal grace. St Xenia is an unique persona in Him, reminding us how much the Lord appreciates our uniqueness and gives us special tasks to perform for Him. She stands out as a believer who truly “let go and let God”

Holy St Xenia, pray to the Lord for us!

A pilgrimage to Kiev (Kyiv)

—by John Harwood, Edmonton UK

Many years ago, this writer's spiritual father described to him the terrible events which followed the German occupation of Kiev during the Second World War. In 1941 the ancient Kiev-Caves Lavra, the most sacred Russian monastery, was handed back to the Church. The monks had been expelled in 1925 and the buildings were in an appalling condition. The main cathedral of the monastery, the Dormition Sobor, was lovingly prepared for worship again. As the lighting was switched on, the whole church was blown up. The retreating Bolsheviks had connected the electrical switches to mines which were activated immediately. The most venerated church in Russia, dating from the 11th century, was completely destroyed. Its main icon, that of the Dormition, was lost.

Twenty years later, during the Khrushchev persecution, the last vestiges of monastic life at the Caves Lavra were extinguished. There seemed no hope of a second revival.

My short pilgrimage took place during the Dormition feast and the celebrations of the 950 years from the first monastic foundation associated with the names of Saints Antony, Theodosius and Hilarion. I will attempt to describe Church life at the Lavra and other holy places of Kiev as it is today.

Pilgrimages to Kiev are first and foremost pilgrimages to the Caves themselves. These comprise two separate complexes of narrow underground passages—the Near and the Far Caves. Both are found in the lower half of the Lavra (this is entirely monastic property; the Upper Lavra is a state museum with only the churches in it owned by the monastery).

The Near Caves are the more extensive and contain the incorrupt relics of the better-known Kiev fathers: Antony of Kiev, Alipy the iconographer, and Nestor the Chronicler (the first historian of Ancient Rus') are here. Seventy-three bodies are here altogether. The passages are unlit and the pilgrim proceeds with a small candle. The saints are displayed in glass-topped coffins—before the revolution they were exposed—and above each is a lamp from which a little oil drips. This can be taken after each saint has been venerated. The experience, needless to say, is very moving. Several underground chapels can be found in each of the Caves.

The Far Caves contain the cell (but not the relics) of Saint Theodosius (Feodosy) of Kiev, who reposed in 1074, and the bodies of about 40 saints. These are less celebrated than the Near Caves Fathers and often we know only their names. The ancient collection known as the Kiev-Caves Patericon deals almost entirely with the Near Caves Saints.

Contrary to popular belief the Caves relics are not only those of the ancient monks of the Lavra. Part of Saint Evphrosinia's relics are there (though most were transferred to Polotsk before the revolution) and the newly discovered body of the martyr-Metropolitan Vladimir (d. 1918) has recently been laid to rest nearby.

At the entrance to both the Near and Far Caves, icons of many of these saints can be bought.

On the morning when I visited the Caves, I received a second blessing, as part of the relics of the Apostle Andrew had just been brought from Greece, for a journey through Ukraine and Russia, and they were solemnly met at the Lavra by the monastic community. Immediately large crowds began to gather and for the next few days the relics were venerated by the Orthodox people of Kiev. Many had to queue for hours, and scenes were reminiscent of pre-revolutionary days. Groups from different parishes gathered with their priests to wait, some reading prayers, others singing akathists. Terrible howls came from the possessed who had been brought to the relics to beg for relief.

Here it should be said that, from what this pilgrim observed, Church life in Kiev is healthier than it is in some other parts of the Orthodox world, if the large numbers of men and women, and indeed whole families, are any indication.

It would be tedious for the reader, who has no mental picture of the places, to be given a list of the monasteries, churches and icons I visited in these five short days. Two places, however, cannot be passed over in silence.

First there was the Kitayev Pustyn. This small skete (about 40 monks reside there) is on the edge of the city in a typically wooded and pleasant spot. The main church, with its characteristic green and gold double cupolas, is the parish of the local inhabitants and is served by married clergy. Inside is the shrine with the relics of the recently glorified Feofil the Fool-for-Christ, where akathists are chanted early every morning. Nearby was buried the equally famous Eldress Dorothea, who blessed Saint Seraphim to go to Sarov. She lived her whole monastic life as a recluse, and was believed until her death to be a man. The spiritual atmosphere of Kitayev is very tangible and the church singing beautiful even by the impossibly high standards of Kiev.

The second place was the wonderfully peaceful Pokrovsky (Protection) Convent, together with its large new foundation of Saint Panteleimon. The convent, where I had the privilege of eating and resting several times, was founded by Mother Anastasia (formerly Grand Duchess Alexandra Petrovna) at the end of the nineteenth century. It is the largest convent in Russia and Ukraine and one of only four which were not closed during the Khrushchev period.

The main church of Saint Nicolas is huge. I attended Saturday evening Vigil there and can never remember

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Review of *In Peace Let Us Pray to the Lord*



My mother (and yours too, probably) used to advise, “If you can’t find something nice to say about something, don’t say anything!” Alas, I am unable to take her advice in this book review, since if I did, I would not be able to write anything at all! Usually one can manage to find at least something good to focus upon, no matter what the book, but of this present volume, I can find nothing good to say whatsoever.

The volume is entitled *In Peace Let us Pray to the Lord*. It is written by Fr Alexis Trader and published by Regina Press. The book purports to be “An Orthodox Interpretation of the Gifts of the Spirit.” Its author was a Protestant who converted to Orthodoxy in 1989 at the age of 24 at StTikhon’s Monastery in Pennsylvania. He received his Master of Divinity degree from St Tikhon’s in 1994, was tonsured a monk there and began to teach courses on patristics and spirituality at the seminary that same year. To further his education, he was sent to Greece in 1995. He entered an Athonite monastery the next year and continues there still as a monk.

His book bills itself as the fruit of Athonite spirituality since, to quote from a review by fellow Regina Press author Clark Carlton, it “draws on the 1000 year history of the Holy Mountain.” Actually, it seems to be the well-digested fruit of reading a few books by John Romanides (whom he quotes 48 times), a couple of books on the cults in Greek (*Handbook of Heresies and ParaChristian Groups* by Anthony Alevizopoulos and *Pentecostalism: Heresy and Deception* by Dimitrios Kokoris) and the always-interesting Seraphim Rose (*Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*). The “Athonite part” of the work comes from his relentless focus on the Philokalia, quoted at least 27 times.

For all the abundance of foot-noted citations from the Fathers, the work is not really a presentation of authentic Patristic thought, but rather a *tour-de-force*, attempting to view the Scriptures through the peculiar lenses of his own preoccupation with the monastic practice of the “prayer of the heart.”

His central thesis appears to be this: the Scriptural phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” was not, in fact, a supernatural ability to speak other languages but rather the silent prayer of the heart, so that when the Corinthians were all speaking in tongues (a practice addressed by St Paul in 1Corinthians 12-14), they were in fact all praying silently together. This practice—silently praying in the heart—is, he says, what the Scriptures mean by “speaking in tongues” and the modern Pentecostal practice of glossolalia is, at best, a self-deluded fraud and, at worst, demonic.

The nature of glossolalia in modern Pentecostalism will not be dealt with here. But what must be stated is that Trader’s Scriptural exegesis is simply nonsense (for all his reference to the Greek original).

But as well as “wresting the Scriptures” (to coin a phrase), he distorts the Patristic exegesis of them as well. He admits that St John Chrysostom thought that the apostolic speaking in tongues mentioned in Acts 2 consisted in speaking other languages—that, after all, is what “speaking in a tongue” means. But, he says, Chrysostom had some “misgivings” about this interpretation, and, he says, “Chrysostom readily admits” that his own interpretation “does not make a great deal of sense.” Trader admits that Chrysostom’s interpretation was “the Antiochian” one, but he might as well admit that it was not just the interpretation of Antioch but also the universal Patristic one as well. None of the early Fathers interpreted “speaking in tongues” as silent prayer. Trader’s view is idiosyncratic, unpatristic, perverse and simply wrong.

But if the Fathers were wrong, where then could one go for truth? Mount Athos, of course. “To find a deeper interpretation of Scripture,” Trader writes, “it is often necessary to turn to those Fathers whose words were directed to those in a state of illumination . . . whose writings are contained in the *Philokalia*.” Here at last we have the heart of it—the practices of Mount Athos as the touchstone, even at the cost of correcting the Fathers. Athonite spirituality is indeed very precious, but we cannot all live on the Holy Mountain. And there are other things in the Christian life besides the prayer of the heart.

The other major defect of the book is its triumphalism. A sense of arrogant superiority is found throughout the book, which makes it an impossible read for its professed target audience. I was offended by the book’s lack of humility, and can only imagine what a modern Pentecostal would think.—*Archpriest Lawrence Farley, Surrey BC*

New books in Alexander’s ‘Mount Athos’ series



In these days when we are surrounded with endless talk of security, terrorism and warfare, it is good for us, as Christian people, to be reminded of who we are and what we are called upon to become. Five book recently published by Alexander Press in Montreal as a continuation of its “Mount Athos” series offer us a rich variety of words and images which set before us the sanctity which we are to strive for, and the Kingdom which we are to pursue. Four volumes of the work of Archimandrite Vasileios, the abbot of Iveron on Mount Athos, as well as a volume by Hieromonk Agathangelos of Mount Athos, are welcome additions to the Press’s series and urge us to pursue genuine Christian life, which really is the only true response to the troubled times in which we live.

Many will have read previous Alexander Press publications of Fr Vasileios’ work or the *Hymn of Entry* published by SVS Press. The four new volumes by the

archimandrite are a delightful addition to the material from him which is currently available in English. *The Fayyum Portraits, What is Unique about Orthodox Culture?, The Light of Christ Shines upon All through the Saints*, and *Institution and Charism in the Orthodox Church* all serve to refresh and enlighten those struggling to live the Christian life.

The essay dealing with the Fayyum portraits is sub-titled "from the humanity of ancient Greece to the Divine-Humanity of the Divine Liturgy." Essentially, Fr Vasileios is presenting "the view that the Fayyum portraits are a forerunner of the icon . . ." While he does not claim that this is a new and unprecedented view, he fills his examination with a freshness and beauty which bring us face to face, as it were, with a key element of our faith: the expectation of the Kingdom. He writes: "In the faces of Fayyum, as in the chorus of an ancient tragedy, you can see all the agony of the human soul and of human history. At the same time you see a tremor of emotion cross their faces, as if they see the Good Shepherd approaching." As we finish reading such a brief and simple essay, do we see in our own faces the same look of expectation as we are led to see in the faces of these ancient peoples?

What Is Unique about Orthodox Culture? is an essay which, as the editor notes, grew out of a discussion on a national level in Greece regarding language, contemporary society, and ancestral values. While this may seem to limit the appeal of the essay, the same editor correctly points out that while "western culture has achieved admirable scientific achievements and has undoubted technological predominance and enormous economical and military power . . . it lacks divine inspiration, the divine-human face. For this reason, its imposition encounters resistance . . ." The real value of this work is that it "shows the way towards a beginning in spiritual life. And it can become a guide for each person . . . and for every society . . . to give it the possibility of being grafted into . . . the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church . . ." Fr Vasileios may be using the Greek historical context for his discussion but his central point bears on us all. Our culture must exist in such a way as "to convey the message of the Resurrection of the God-man, the resurrection of each man." We may be caught up in talk of "culture, revolutionary movements, intellectual life and being progressive." What, asks Fr Vasileios, "do we have to say to this? Is it that the young should not be intellectuals, progressive or people of culture? That is not quite it. Through the prism of Orthodox hesychasm and the ferment of the new wine which bursts the old wineskins, all this seems, not fearsome because it is so daring, but inadequate because it is insignificant." His discussion of what is significant is a challenge to us to entirely re-focus our lives in every aspect and to allow ourselves to personally and corporately bear witness to the truth of the Holy Gospel.

The centre of Fr Vasileios' discussion in *Institution and Charism in the Orthodox Church* is the truth that "The institution of the Church is not a human but a divine-human foundation. And the way in which she functions is a confirmation, a manifestation of the Lord's constant presence with us." While the essay is sub-titled "a view from the Holy Mountain," the point is directed toward the whole Church. We are confronted with a vision of the Church which exists, in all its facets, "as a constant theophany." The challenge is to evaluate our efforts to exist this way and to be prepared to order our own lives in such a way as to show forth the fullness of the Church which Fr Vasileios so beautifully articulates.

Finally, one might look at the two remaining volumes as touching on the same theme: the saint. *The Light of Christ Shines upon All through the Saints* speaks of the lives of holy people, whether great saints or holy ones known only to God, as embodying the "gospel of the new creation, the message of life which the Fathers proclaim by their existence. And they teach you how to live, to write, to organize . . . they allow everything to move freely . . . they pour out grace . . . All they want is for others to live." In the same way that the body of the Church is Theanthropic, showing forth the presence of the risen Christ, so each person's life is called to do the same thing. It is only the saints who can properly teach, heal, comfort or fulfill the lives and expectations of those who encounter them. It is certainly not a new idea, but the beauty of Fr Vasileios' text sparks a desire to push a little harder toward the Kingdom, toward becoming truly alive in the holiness for which we were created.

As a complement to Fr Vasileios' treatment of the saint, Fr Agathangelos' *My Recollections of Papa Tykhon* sets out, in concrete terms, one person's efforts to live deeply the life in Christ. Papa Tykhon reposed on the Holy Mountain in 1968 and so is one of many holy men and women whose lives touch our own times and circumstances. The account nourishes and encourages us in our own efforts and teaches us that great struggling for sanctity is not confined to by-gone eras. We read the lives of the saints so that we may evaluate our own efforts to live out our Baptism. The narrative of Papa Tykhon's life pushes us that bit more to respond to our responsibility to be holy as the Lord is holy.

Each of these five small volumes is a delight. In these times (as has perhaps been said in each preceding generation) we must be cautious as we respond to the events in the world around us. The only alternative for the Christian is to be holy, to struggle to "put on Christ," to be the leaven, the salt, the light and the savour which Christ commanded us to be. These essays help to frame our efforts, to encourage us, to teach us and above all, to remind us of the beauty of the Kingdom which is within us, which is inaugurated and moves toward its fulfillment when the Lord will make all things new.—*Priest James Griggs, Kingston ON*

Questions about refugees And refugee policies, Post – September 11

Printed below is a position paper of the Canadian Council for Refugees, Montréal, which Bishop Seraphim wants to share with readers of the Canadian Orthodox Messenger. He thinks that its approach to these questions is informed, thoughtful, compassionate, in keeping with Christian values, and can help us respond better to refugee crises in a Christian way—including asking enough questions.

* Does immigration make Canada vulnerable to terrorism?

There is no connection between immigration and violence. Many immigrants and refugees in fact come to Canada to escape from violence and to find freedom and peace. There are of course some violent immigrants, just as there are some violent non-immigrants: consider the Oklahoma City bombing or the FLQ, responsible for bombs and kidnappings in Québec.

Canada, the US and Australia, three countries of immigration, have historically experienced relatively little terrorism. In contrast, various European countries that do not identify themselves as countries of immigration have experienced much more. It is arguable that a positive immigration program actually discourages violence by promoting an open, diverse, dynamic and tolerant society, with opportunities for all.

* Are Canada's immigration laws too lax?

Canada's *Immigration Act* contains a whole series of provisions making people inadmissible on criminality and security grounds. They cover every conceivable security threat. The problem is not that these provisions are too narrow, but rather that they are too wide and therefore penalize many innocent people (for example, all past and current members of the African National Congress [ANC] are inadmissible to Canada on security grounds).

The challenge with criminality and security provisions is to know who the bad guys are. They don't have "terrorist" stamped on their forehead. The authorities need to be smart and informed. Refugee communities are important sources of information and they have in the past drawn attention to the presence in Canada of torturers and other human rights violators (for example, it was the Somali community which denounced the presence of the wife of the ex-dictator of Somalia).

* Are Canada's immigration controls weaker than those in the US?

Canadian and US immigration programs are in many ways similar, although there are also significant differences. Many people actually find it easier to get into the US than Canada. Often people refused a visa to Canada will then be granted one to the US. A significant proportion of refugee claimants who come to Canada arrive via the US (64% of claims made at a border in 2000). This is a clear demonstration of the fact that it is often easier for refugees to enter the US than Canada.

* Should we be worried about refugee claimants entering the country without identity documents?

Why focus our worries on refugee claimants? They make up only one-tenth of one percent of the visitors and immigrants entering Canada each year. More sophisticated wrong-doers are unlikely to choose to go through the refugee claim system, which involves fingerprinting, photographing and interviews. Those involved in the September 11 attacks all seem to have entered the US on visitor or business visas. They didn't make refugee claims.

Most of the prominent cases of undesirables who have entered Canada did so under their own names: the problem is lack of information on the part of officials. Consider, for example, Léon Mugesera, a Rwandan whom the government is trying to remove on the basis that he incited genocide against Rwandan Tutsis. He entered under his own name after having been approved by an ill-informed Canadian immigration officer in Spain.

Many refugees arrive without identity documents because it would be dangerous for them to carry identification while they are fleeing persecution. Others, such as Somalis and Afghans, come from countries where there is no government left to issue documents. Since 1993 the Canadian government has required Convention refugees to produce identity documents in order to obtain permanent residence. The effect has been to put thousands of refugees in long-term legal limbo, without permanent residence status and all its accompanying rights. On the other hand, years later no evidence has emerged that criminals or security threats have been hiding in this group of refugees.

* Would it be safer to detain refugee claimants on arrival?

Liberty is a fundamental human right. One of the forms of persecution refugees flee is arbitrary imprisonment. Detaining refugee claimants en masse would be fundamentally unjust and a disgrace to Canada. It would

be equivalent to arresting everyone found near the scene of a crime on the off-chance that one of them might be guilty of the crime.

In 1996 the US adopted laws which resulted in massive increases in immigration detention, including detention of asylum seekers. These measures did nothing to protect the country from the September 11 attacks. On the other hand, many genuine refugees have had to spend months and even years in detention, often in appalling conditions.

*** Is it too easy to be accepted in Canada as a refugee, including for people with terrorist designs?**

It is not easy to be accepted as a refugee in Canada. Each claim is individually scrutinized and each claimant interviewed, often at great length. The Immigration and Refugee Board's documentation centre is highly regarded internationally and is probably the best in the world. In recent years somewhat less than half of claimants have been granted refugee status (49% in 2000).

The refugee determination system is designed to find out who is a refugee, not who might be a terrorist: that is the job of our police and security services. However, the Refugee Convention explicitly excludes from the refugee definition people who have committed serious crimes: where there is evidence of this, claimants will be denied refugee status.

*** Should we be concerned about the large numbers of refused claimants that are not deported?**

Refused refugee claimants do not in themselves represent a security threat, any more than a group of Canadian citizens does. Many of the refused claimants are children. Where an individual case raises security concerns, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) will deal with it in a special way (including detaining the person if the concerns are serious). Many refused claimants come from countries at war or where there is acute public disorder (such as Afghanistan or the Democratic Republic of Congo). Because sending people to these countries would cause significant hardship, CIC does not immediately remove their nationals, unless there are criminality or security concerns.

It is impossible to know how many refused claimants are in Canada because we do not keep exit controls. Many refused claimants have likely left Canada on their own without CIC knowing. This situation is not particular to refugee claimants. Every year there are millions of visitors that enter Canada: we do not know how many of them overstay their visas.

*** Do we need to tighten immigration controls in order to promote our security?**

Tightening immigration controls may seem the answer if you believe that security can be achieved by building stronger walls. But unless Canada is prepared to take a radical step in cutting itself off from the rest of world, it is misguided to focus efforts at the border. International threats to security must be addressed inside and outside our borders: what happens at the border itself can only be a very small part of any solution.

*** Should we harmonize our immigration policies with those of the US?**

There is a lot in US immigration policies of which Canadians should be very wary, including a wide range of draconian and unfair measures. Given the power relationship between the two countries, harmonization would inevitably mean Canada's adopting US policies, without Canadians' elected representatives being able to influence decisions.

In any case, after September 11 when US policies so clearly failed to protect people's security, why would we want to harmonize with them?

*** Are refugees being scapegoated in the aftermath of September 11?**

The attacks of September 11 had absolutely nothing to do with refugees, and yet since that date our refugee policies and refugees themselves have come under attack. We have to ask ourselves why. Is it because refugees are easy targets and because people's fears are informed by racism and xenophobia? Refugees are amongst the most vulnerable people in our society: their own government was unable or unwilling to protect them and on arrival in Canada as claimants they have no status here. They depend on Canadians' sense of justice and hospitality to ensure that their basic rights are respected.

During the Second World War, Japanese Canadians were made the victims of Canadians' desire for security. Their mistreatment was clearly fed by racist prejudice. This chapter in our history is now recognized as one of the most shameful. How do we ensure that we don't make the same mistakes today in our treatment of refugees?

The aftermath to September 11 represents a dramatic challenge to Canadians in terms of the responses that our country will make. Where do you stand?

Further information: Canadian Council for Refugees, 6829 Drolet #302, Montréal QC, H2S 2T1. Tel. 514-277-7223, Fax 514-277-1447. E-mail: ccr@web.ca Web site: www.web.ca/~ccr/

Pilgrimage, *continued from p.11:*

hearing such singing. And not only from the nuns; it is the custom of the whole church to join in the singing of “Let us who have beheld the Resurrection of Christ . . .” after the Gospel at Mattins. The effect was indescribable—the kindness of the nuns unforgettable.

The last two days of the pilgrimage were even more crowded. Monday 27th August was the feast of the Lavra’s own Saint Theodosius of the Caves and was celebrated at the large trapeza church. Next to this is the tomb of the great Christian statesman Peter Stolypin, which has been properly restored. He was assassinated in Kiev in 1911, in the presence of the Tsar. Fresh flowers covered the grave.

In the evening of the same day, the Vigil of the Great Feast began in the newly rebuilt Dormition Cathedral—now once again the heart of the Lavra. The church was only reopened recently so this must have been the first celebration of its feastday since the 1920s.

The restored interior is very beautiful. It is as though the events of 1941 had never taken place and that the church had only been cleaned and repainted. Only the ancient Dormition icon is missing.

The Vigil was extremely solemn and at the Polyelos the Burial Shroud (Plashchanitsa) of the Mother of God was brought into the middle of the church by the Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine, accompanied by 50 bishops from various lands.

The following morning, the feastday itself, even more hierarchs served (over 60!) and the new Cathedral was quite inadequate to hold the vast numbers of believers who had arrived at the Lavra. The Liturgy was served in the open air

in front of the church doors. Two choirs sang, Cossacks guarded the Altar, small children watched from the branches of the chestnut trees, swallows dived through the air and the largest bells of the monastery rang out. It was a celebration which seemed to bring to an end the long night which began for the “Mother of Russian Cities” in 1918, with the slaying of their beloved Metropolitan Vladimir at the Lavra gates.

I at first did not know how to conclude this little account, until I read the ancient forward to the Kiev-Pechersky Patericon which contains words which I make bold to associate myself with:

“I have never gone to the Holy Places, I have not seen Jerusalem or Mount Sinai and thus I cannot add anything to my narrations with which skillful narrators decorate their speech. I shall only constantly praise the Holy Caves Monastery and the holy monks who had been in it . . . for I too, a sinner, desire and ask for the prayers of these holy fathers.”

**Bishop Seraphim’s Visitation Itinerary
March – April 2002**

3 — 6 Mar	Alaska: enthronement of bishop
8–10 Mar	Archdiocesan Council, The Sign, Montréal
24 Mar	Chicago, Sunday of Orthodoxy
29 Mar – 1 Apr	St Vladimir’s Seminary, Crestwood NY
1 – 4 Apr	Holy Synod, Syosset NY
6 – 8 Apr	Christ the Saviour Sobor, Toronto

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