

The Apostle

The Monthly Magazine of St Aidan's Orthodox Church,
Henderson Street, Levenshulme, Manchester M19 2JX

Recovering a Christian Culture

Dear friends,

"The Church in the British Isles will only begin to grow when Orthodox there begin to venerate their own saints." [variously attributed but mainly to St Arsenios of Paros] Helen and I spent a week in September on pilgrimage to Lindisfarne, Bamburgh, Hexham, following in the footsteps of St Aidan, St Cuthbert and St Bede. Although Holy Island, Lindisfarne, is now overrun with tourists and tourist shops , making pilgrimage there is still a blessing. So many centuries have passed since England was Orthodox but the memory of these saints and their fervent intercessions still shine brightly in our hearts.

Post Christian western societies, however, are suffering from a sort of collective amnesia, wilful or

otherwise. Attention to the past, to our roots, to the history of the struggle for the supremacy of the gospel is now considered to be either an embarrassment, best indeed forgotten, or an irrelevance. We have exchanged the living Christ for other gods. Our culture and history has been progressively de-christianised.

Why would we forsake Christ so? Our Lord has always had his enemies, but since when, ever, in the history of the Church, has collusion with these godless forces and ideas been considered a price worth paying for acceptance? Never! But this is precisely what some "Christians" (notice the inverted commas) have done for a long, long time. And so a forgetfulness and then a resistance



has set in and our culture, as well of our values, have ceased to be Christian; that is, Christ-centred. So, how to recover a Christian culture? How to recover the powerfully transformative memory of the past, its giftedness to the present? Here is where the Orthodox saints of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland deliver

a powerful legacy, with the potential of winning our nations again for Christ. Harnessing the saints spiritually speaking means rebuilding their shrines, visiting their holy places, seeking their prayers and the speaking of their names and deeds in public. It is then a matter for us to emulate those deeds, to become, once again, fearless evangelists by word and deed. This vocation may take decades, even centuries,

to fulfil but we are the pioneers, the ground builders, the visionaries ... and we cannot afford to be inert or silent in this great task of recovering a Christian culture for our Isles.

- Fr Gregory

Testimony - Mary

My Journey Into Holy Orthodoxy

I grew up in a home without faith. Religion felt distant and, for much of my life, I carried an almost stubborn

the world felt both very small and staggeringly vast.



certainty that it wasn't for me.

But in God's timing, everything changed. A few years ago I took a solo trip to Rome. I wandered into St Peter's Basilica, expecting little more than a tourist snapshot, and was stopped still by the place. The hush of prayer, the way the light fell through the high windows, the dome looming like a breath above the people below. In that moment

Then something happened that I could not explain. Deep within me, clear and unmistakable, a voice said, "Accept Christ as your Lord and Saviour." It was not a sound from another person but a call from within. At the time I did not have the language to name it. Only later, as I

walked further into the life of the Church, did I realise that it was the Holy Spirit speaking to me, a gentle, insistent invitation into new life.

Not long after that I was getting to know an Orthodox man. He was patient and tender with my questions, gently showing me the beauty of the faith. And then, abruptly, after what felt like a small quarrel, he left. One day we were

happy; the next I was shattered. The suddenness of it broke something in me. I spent nights crying out without knowing how to pray properly, begging Jesus to heal what felt irreparably wounded. Two days after the breakup I found myself in St Aidan's for the first time. I stayed for the Divine Liturgy and afterwards spoke with Father. He received me with a kindness that felt like a balm. He listened, he prayed with me, and he gave me books and gentle direction. He helped me take the first real steps into Orthodoxy.

At first I told myself I was coming to the Church to be better, perhaps to be worthy enough for that earlier love to return. But God, in His mercy, rewired my heart. As months of catechumenate passed, my prayers changed. I still prayed for him, but no longer with a desperate longing for reconciliation. Instead my prayers became, "Heal me, make me ready, bring the right person in your time." I began to be healed.

In July 2024, a couple of months before my baptism, I met my current partner. He comes from a Catholic family but is himself on a journey into Orthodoxy. We both sense how

God wove our paths together, not merely to comfort one another, but to draw each of us deeper into His life. Watching his faith grow has been one of the truest joys of my new life in Christ.

Looking back, I can see a path carved by grace: from bewilderment to longing, from brokenness to healing, and from solitude to companionship rooted in Christ. I went from asking God to fix my broken heart to discovering a love that reflects His own, a partner who loves sacrificially, puts me before himself, and walks beside me toward the altar we hope to stand before one day.

Most of all, I am grateful. Grateful for the unexpected voice in Rome that turned out to be the Holy Spirit. Grateful for the people, the Fathers and the community at St Aidan's who welcomed me. Grateful for the painful season that brought me to my knees and, through that humility, closer to God. And grateful for the gift of being received into Holy Orthodoxy.

Glory to God for all things.

- Mary

Poetry from St Aidan's community

O you saints of this Holy Church,



How I long to feel Christ as you did,
Rather, how I long to love Christ as
you did,

For it is love alone that can be
measured against our passions,
For in love, one finds humility and
repentance.

Let not my temptations be cast
away from me,
For then I would not struggle, thus
how would I be sanctified?

Did Christ not suffer?
In the desert, atop the mountain,
on the cross
Was Christ not brought to his
knees, whipped, beaten and
mocked?

Wherefore then surely I must be greater than Christ,
To seek a life without struggle or suffering,
To curse the Father unfair for my carnal falls led relentlessly by my
passions.

Little do I know,
yet one thing I say as sure for my yes to be yes and my no mean no,
Not only am I not greater than Christ,
Beyond life I wish to be his servant,
That it be wholly true when I call him master,
Not only is the Father fair,
but long-suffering in his mercy for mankind,

No, let me not be without struggle.
Let me feel the lashes of the passions,
Yet I pray protection and strength bestowed upon me,
That mercy overtake me, for I am but dust, and the Lord my God is my
refuge and healer.

Now, do I wish to love Christ as the Saints?
For as I realise, what they knew or know, and carried heavy,
As Champions of the Church, did they not then beat the best?
Suffering with insatiable temptations, in which only through resisting and
struggling that they be sanctified,
Falling as you and I, feeling as you and I, yet climbing higher every time.
Isn't this the way of our love?

Isn't the only strength we possess rendered useful, humility?
So let us not think of the venerable to be without sin or temptation,
For this is to diminish their victories,
For their victories did not occur through the praises of mankind,
Rather in the depths of the pit in which they fought to escape.

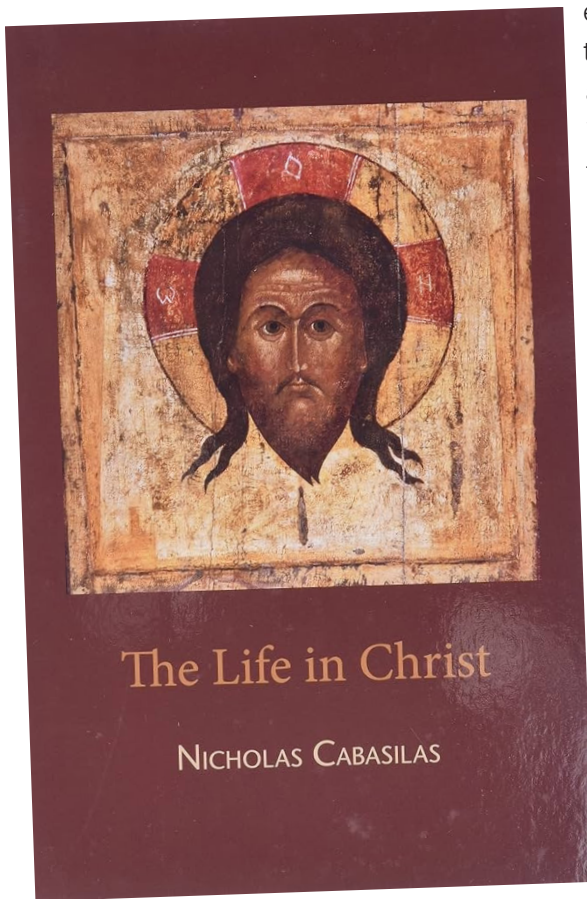
So let us ask, O Holy Trinity
To love as your saints,
but let us not lightly pray this burden upon ourselves,
For from the same mouth, let us not pray our temptations be cast away.
Now, let us rejoice when we think ourselves as sinners, much like the Saints
For through that Holy battle; less swaddled, less puffed up, less
distracted, did they win.
So, O venerable ones pray for me,
That my mouth knows the words it speaks,
That my tongue not become loose,
To covet, that at it does not seek,
Let us pray, Christ have mercy now and ever, upon me.

- Callum Paisios

Book Review

The Life in Christ by Nicholas Cabasilas (SVSP)

Nicholas Cabasilas (1322-1392) was glorified as a saint by the Orthodox Church of America on the 15th of July 1983.



The First Book considers “how the life in Christ is constituted by means of the divine mysteries

of baptism, chrismation [that is, confirmation] and holy communion. The life in Christ originates in this life and arises from it. It is perfected, however, in the life to come (p. 43). “Baptism confers... existence according to Christ” (p. 49). “The anointing with chrisim [that is, confirmation] perfects those who have received new birth by infusing into them the energy that befits such a life. The Holy Eucharist preserves and continues this life....” (p. 50).

The Second Book

considers further “what contribution holy baptism makes to the life in Christ.... We are baptized in order that we may die that death and rise again in [His] resurrection” (p. 66).

The Third Book

considers “what the holy chrisim” contributes to our life in Christ. “The effect of this sacred rite is the imparting of the energies of the Holy Spirit” (p.

106). “However, some are unable to grasp the gifts because of their immature age; others are not eager because they have not prepared or

members and thus of being like Him” (p. 126). Receiving “the Eucharist requires effort on our part” (p. 130). “We must prepare



ourselves to receive the sacred gift [of the Eucharist]” (p. 132).

The Fifth Book considers “what the consecration of the holy altar accomplishes” (p. 149). The bishop anoints the altar, places sacred relics in it and then

have failed to give effect to their preparation.... There is a need of effort and vigilance on the part of those who wish to have these things active in their souls” (p. 109).

blessees the entire church with incense (pp. 150-158).

The Fourth Book considers “how Holy Communion contributes to our salvation” (p. 113). “It is clear then that Christ infuses Himself into us and mingles Himself with us” (p. 123). From this mystery [of receiving the Eucharist] ... we obtain the gift of being Christ’s

The Sixth Book considers “how when we have received grace from the Holy Mysteries, we are to preserve it” (p.159). “We must above all try to divert the eye of the soul from vain things by having the heart always filled with good thoughts, so that [neither the soul nor the heart] at any time may give place to evil thoughts by being empty” (p. 162).

“On the Beatitudes of Christ” from

the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5 to 7 (pp. 176-189) has been covered in Jim Forest's book, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes*, reviewed in the August issue of *The Apostle* and available on St Aidan's bookstall. St Nicholas Cabasilas concludes Book 6 with the firm advice that the words from St Paul in First Timothy 6:20 to "guard what has been entrusted to you" apply to each Christian believer, in the context that: "It is Christ alone who enables us to abide in that which we have received, for as He says in the Gospel of John 15:5, 'apart from Me you can do nothing.'" (p.194)

The Seventh and Final Book considers what happens to the person who "becomes one [with God] once initiated and [who] has zealously preserved the grace which comes from the Mysteries" (p. 195). The stress here is not on seeking or obtaining miraculous powers, but rather to "rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20) (p. 196). "The effect of the mysteries and of mediation is that a [person's] will should belong to Christ alone Who is truly good.... He favoured us with countless blessings and deterred

us with many penalties, in order that He might turn us to Himself and persuade us to desire Him and to love Him alone...." (p. 197). "What is the one thing by which we are prepared? It is by the keeping of the commandments of Him Who is able to reward and to punish hereafter, for it is this which makes God dwell in us. "Those who love Me," Christ says in the Gospel of John 14:23, "will keep My commandments, and My Father will love them, and We [that is, the Father and the Son] will come and make our abode with them" (p.198). "There are three things which preserve our reverence for God: fear of the calamities that await the ungodly, the good hope of those who practice godliness, and love for God Himself and for goodness" (p. 203). "The Christian's joy [is grounded in how] we have joy in ourselves to the extent that we love.... The good [person] rejoices in the good of others, for this too is the object of [their] prayers and desires, that another should enjoy good fortune" (p. 210).

- Father Emmanuel

Poetry from St Aidan's community

The world groans with sorrow,
its nights heavy with grief.
Wars rage, hearts harden,
hope flickers like a candle in the
wind.

And yet we bake the pies.
We set the table with trembling
hands, fold napkins, light a little
flame, and call the children in.

We say our prayers
whispered, weary, steadfast
trusting that the Lord bends low
to gather every word.



We drink our tea in the quiet,
an act of goodwill and peace,
a reminder that gentleness
can still find its place.

We read to our children,
turning pages as if turning soil,
planting seeds of truth and beauty
in their tender hearts.

We sweep the floors,
clearing away dust and despair,
making room for grace to dwell
beneath our roof.

For in the humble work of families
the foundations of a strong world
are laid.
Here, love takes root.
Here, light is passed from one soul
to the next.

And when the night feels long,
we remember:
Our hope is not in the trembling
earth,
but in the Lord who made it
the Lord who promised,
“Take heart, I have overcome the
world.”

- Julie Helena Foley

Recipe

OAT BISCUITS

- 75g wholemeal flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 75g porridge oats
- 50g caster sugar
- 75g butter
- 1 tbsp golden syrup
- 2 tbsp milk



Method

- step 1** - Heat the oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. Line a baking tray with baking parchment.
- step 2** - Sift the flour into a bowl. Mix in the baking powder, porridge oats and sugar.
- step 3** - Melt the butter, syrup and milk in a small saucepan or in the microwave and stir.
- step 4** - Add to the dry ingredients. Mix until the liquid covers all the oat mixture and until well combined.
- step 5** - Spoon onto a baking tray and shape into rounds, leaving space between each biscuit as they will spread whilst cooking.
- step 6** - Bake for 10-15 mins, or until golden brown. Leave to cool for 5 mins before removing from tray

Our Family's Journey to Orthodoxy

By Daniel Moran

When our family was received into the Orthodox Church during Great Lent—Olga, our little son John,



Olga's grandmother Anna, and myself— it was fitting and pleased the Lord we entered together. We needed to be together in this and the Lord arranged it that way. Our journey wasn't overnight or without difficulty, it took a good few years to reach our destination. We are very thankful and grateful we are here now and looking back can see the experiences we have had along the way as forming our journey.

Four generations under one roof: Anna is, in fact, John's great grandmother. United in one faith, one Church. I count it as a great blessing for our domestic church. We have a strong sense that the Holy Spirit led us forward, drawing us into the Church. This occurred in many quiet ways over the years, but was unmistakable all the same.

For Olga and I, a seed for our eventual move was planted back in 2016 during a trip to Ukraine for the ordination of her brother as a Roman Catholic priest. We were married a year before and now looked forward to celebrating another joyous occasion with our brother. Obviously, the main purpose of our trip was to be there for her brother and celebrate with





him on this occasion but, outside of that, we got a chance to visit some Orthodox temples, notably the monastery and caves of Kiev Pechersk Lavra. We very much hope to return to visit one day during more peaceful times.

Anyone familiar with the caves will know it's a very special place of prayer and intercession. In short, the experience there and the other temples we visited made an impression on us over time. Something had stirred. Orthodoxy wasn't really on my radar before that, it was after. We knew the very basic outline of things, that Orthodoxy existed and some of the history, but this was, at least for me, the first real contact with

Orthodox life and worship. The memory of the caves, the worship in the other temples we visited, would come back again visiting Orthodox parishes from time to time back home in the UK. Overall, wherever we went, it was the same experience, a sense of depth and continuity, a sense of sacredness and the presence of God. Thinking back, it was feeling or realisation that this is authentic, real, true.

I remember turning to Olga in one of the temples we entered there in Kiev and saying "this is true worship", something akin to St Vladimirs envoys in Constantinople, a story I hadn't heard at the time. An account I would read about later





and was able to appreciate.

As time moved along, we continued attending divine services when we could, made some friends, continued reading, asking questions, and speaking to people who had experience. We would incorporate prayers from the Orthodox prayer books into our personal prayers every day. We loved the icons, so we setup an icon corner. I was awarded with a bursary and embarked upon post graduate work with The Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies. Olga began painting some works in

an iconographic style and later had a chance to go on a retreat. This was us reaching out and exploring, looking in closely though from a distance. As time moved along, we had the humbling experience of visiting and venerating a couple of miracle-working icons and on two particular occasions, through the intercession of the Mother of God, we experienced a pouring forth of grace that left no doubt in our hearts that God was at work. One of those miracles was the gift of our son, John,

after many years of prayer

and waiting on God's blessing.

The other came in the form of a simultaneous, unmistakable and determined desire of both of us to seek reception into the Orthodox Church. There was no division there between us, we were of one mind and heart and very much shared the conviction that the time had come to move forward.

Olga had her own individual and powerful experiences on our journey. As I mentioned just there, we had a couple of encounters with miracle-working icons. The

first visit was a pilgrimage to the miraculous icon of the Most Holy Mother of God “Three Hands” in the Serbian church of St. Prince Lazar in Birmingham.



We had both long prayed for the Lord’s blessing of a child for our marriage, we both wanted to be parents and Olga’s prayer was particularly intense at this time. She greatly desired to be a mother and wanted a child to love and raise. When we heard about the icon from Paul, who would later be the sponsor at our Chrismation, we decided to drive up to Birmingham with this intention in mind. In the temple, she felt moved to push on through the crowd (it was

absolutely full), not seeing anyone, just focused entirely on reaching the icon. She always describes the great faith she approached the icon with that day, and trust in the Mother of God. She venerated the icon and offered her prayer.

Only a few months before that, she had received a diagnosis from the doctor suggesting she would not be able to conceive. To our surprise and great joy, a few months after venerating the icon, John was on his way, a miracle! Around that time, she also attended an iconography retreat. She was praying, reading about Orthodoxy, and reflecting on her own spiritual journey up to that point.

She felt restless where we were but wasn’t actively considering a move to the Orthodox Church. It was more something we had resolved to appreciate at a distance and draw from in certain ways. Most of our ties, on both sides of our family, are in Roman Catholicism. To break communion with family is not a small thing. Even so, in the midst of this, we were reading Orthodox spiritual works, particularly St Theophan the Recluse on the spiritual life, grace filled awakening and both felt, even if implicitly, something was missing



in our current setting. For Olga, this was a feeling of being drawn back to further explore the tradition she had been moved away from as a child.

In conversation with Father Deacon Nikita who led the course, she mentioned she had been baptised in the Orthodox Church but later her family moved to Catholicism after an encounter with Latin missionaries in Turkmenistan, her place of birth. Christianity

does not have much of a presence in Turkmenistan, it's heavily restricted and controlled and this active mission work moved her family, some of whom were Orthodox, to conversion. Hearing all this, he looked at her with quiet seriousness and asked, "But why?" He challenged her in a good way suggesting perhaps she had never truly experienced the Orthodox faith, at least not fully, as a lived reality. This was true, obviously it cannot be experienced fully from the outside, and

her very short time as an Orthodox Christian as a child was not within the context of lived Orthodox faith which was then supplanted by her family's reception into Catholicism when she was small. She had not fully received what was given to her, no chance to make personal decision to follow it, before it was taken away. Father Deacon's words helped her to reflect on this and that stayed with her.

As Olga's pregnancy progressed and John's birth approached, we began to think about where and how we wanted him to be baptised. This may seem odd, but we were between places at the time so to speak, attending both the Traditional Latin Mass, the traditional form of Roman Catholic worship, and an Eastern Catholic parish, drawn there by our increasing appreciation of Orthodoxy. My family background is Irish Catholic, very much of the Latin tradition. Olga was in fact considered Eastern Catholic canonically as she had moved from Orthodoxy into communion with Rome which under current law means you retain the practice of your own rite and are enrolled in a corresponding eastern catholic church. We found ourselves moving between these two settings within Catholicism, searching for something that felt both true and whole. For those unfamiliar with it, there has been significant liturgical reform within Catholicism over the last half-century not always with the most positive result. A kind of disorientation in the form and meaning of worship has ensued, and sadly, the heavenly spirit of the liturgy has been lost in some

parishes. In this context, faithful who desire more traditional forms of worship seek out parishes that preserve that, and this is where we found ourselves. I say this not looking back in a polemical way, it's a point well acknowledged by those in the pockets of Catholicism that exercise the most intellectual energy and clarity on this issue. I have great sympathy for the many traditionally minded Roman Catholics who love our Lord and who sorrow over what has been lost in their liturgical worship.

Against this backdrop, the more time we spent in the Eastern Catholic parish, the more we were able to delve deeper into Orthodoxy, its ethos and way of approaching things. The rituals are largely the same between the two. The continuity in spirituality and practice across time was impressive, especially sacramental practice which we discovered has been subject to less change and alteration than in the Latin church. We discovered the pattern of tradition has been better preserved by the Orthodox in this regard, and in our setting at the time within Eastern Catholic practice. The Orthodox very much seemed to walk the road of tradition. One

aspect of this that began to be important for us was the practice of infant communion, which we learnt was the traditional practice of the Church both East and West. We felt strongly that John should receive Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist from the beginning, and for him to go on receiving Holy Communion through his childhood and not have to wait until a set 'age of reason' that, while theologically motivated, seemed to have come about through particular historical circumstances. Why Should our son be kept from the Precious and Life-giving Mysteries based on a later discipline which was localised and not reflective of the universal tradition of the Orthodox Catholic Church. Chrismation also, the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, why should he wait until his teenage years to receive a gift he can benefit from now.

Still at that point, we were not yet ready to seek reception into the Orthodox Church, so the natural path seemed to be through Eastern Catholicism so John could receive all the sacraments of initiation while we maintained communion within Catholicism and with most of our family and friends. We are grateful for what we received

in that setting, yet we became increasingly aware that our journey was not yet complete. Within all this I think we were trying to rediscover something, we found it to an extent within a corner of Catholicism. We tried to live it in that setting, with some practical challenges, as we were still between both worlds Eastern and Latin within the umbrella of Catholicism due to my work and our moving up north to Warrington. Shortly before our move and during Olga's pregnancy, we also made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which was an incredible experience. One we will never forget. It was moving and indeed a great blessing to visit all the holy places in and around the old city. Again, we encountered Orthodoxy over there alongside all the other Christian traditions which share the space. Much was happening for us around this time and we had plenty to think about. There's a lot to unpack here but I think with God's grace we arrived at a point where we could no longer just look on from a distance, to draw from it but not be really part of it. We eventually desired a real full sacramental communion.

This was resolved for us very quickly in the end by the grace of

God through another encounter with a miracle-working icon. We travelled to venerate the Hawaiian myrrh-streaming Iveron Icon of the Theotokos at St Elisabeth the New-Martyr parish in Wallasey. I believe we arrived with the intention to grow in our faith, for a true repentance, for all our needs and loved ones. A shared moment of grace came forth from that and within the follow days and weeks a united desire emerged in both of us to seek reception into the Orthodox Church. This was very organic, there was no difference of opinion, we were completely of one mind and heart, both deeply convinced that the time had come to take the next step. Things went smoothly from there, whereas before there were always reasons to stay where we were. I believe in many little ways God calls everybody to where he wants them to be. Sometimes our own thoughts and opinions get in the way.

As we look back, we are deeply grateful for all that we received along the way and now in the Church. The Holy Spirit truly prepared our souls for what lay ahead. Over the years, I spent time looking into the similarities and differences between Orthodoxy and

Catholicism, the faith which I was brought up in. Over time, I became convinced that the Orthodox Church has preserved the faith of our Fathers in its wholeness, in a way that remains most faithful to all we have received through Tradition. We thank everyone at St Aidan's, clergy and laity, who have guided us since we arrived through the doors last year. By God's grace, In thanksgiving and quiet confidence, we have stepped into the fullness of the Orthodox Catholic Church. Glory to God for all things!

- Daniel Moran





St John The Forerunner - icon by Efrem Carrasco