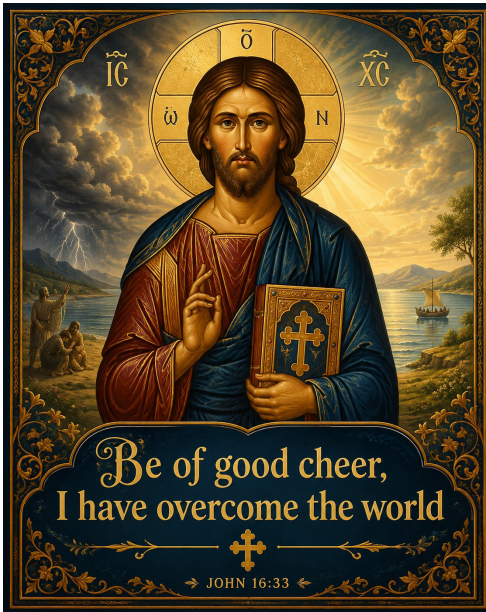


The Apostle

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

The Hope that Overcomes



There is no doubt that humanity in this century is facing problems that it has never faced before and on a scale of threat that dwarfs anything from the past. The disruption to employment that AI will bring in its wake, the ecological

stresses of a world that has been depleted of its resources and progressively eroded of its biodiversity; not to mention, of course, global warming and the possibility of more international pandemics. Humans might rise to these challenges if it were not for the fact that we continually shoot ourselves in the foot with pointless wars.

Dwelling too much on these things, as well as ignoring them, is a recipe for disaster. Faith is not an exercise in escapism or retreat, but neither is it an engagement that submits to the powers of this world. Knowing what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God, (to quote our Lord in Matthew 22:21), are always

questions set before us to resolve, and these are never easy questions.

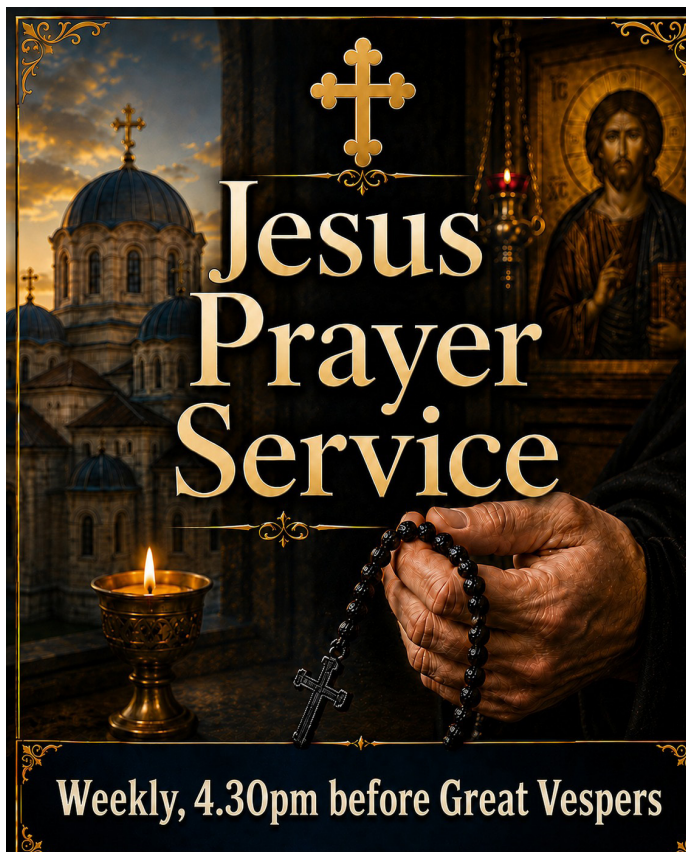
I think that most of us feel powerless in the face of all these issues, and yet, in truth, this is not the whole story of what is possible in and through us. With Christ in our hearts and lives, provided, of course, we are being purified of everything contrary to Him, we can be energised and enlightened, well

beyond our natural capacities. So, we should take heart. We are not as powerless as we think ourselves to be.

This hope that overcomes the world is strengthened even further still by the fact that we all belong to the Church, the body of Christ. Together in the Holy Spirit, we are far more powerful for good than any of us are individually. The faith and

life that rendered the might of the Roman Empire docile to Christ is the same faith and life that we have amongst ourselves. "Be of good cheer", Christ says, "for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b). In Him, so can we.

- Fr Gregory



The Pilot and the Drone

On the dimensions of the human person



Anyone who has watched a drone pilot at work will have noticed something curious. The pilot sits at a console, hands on a small controller, eyes fixed on a screen that shows the world as the drone sees it. After a few minutes something shifts: he no longer says, ‘the drone is turning’, but ‘I am turning’; not ‘the camera is descending’, but ‘I am going lower’. He begins to feel the machine’s movements as his own. Yet the drone is not the pilot. It is a limited instrument — it can fly, hover, look, and little else — while the one who operates it is a whole human being,

with a mind, a history, affections, and a life the drone knows nothing of. The machine transmits only a narrow slice of what its operator is.

It seems to me that this picture, for all its modernity, describes something the Church has always confessed about us. In this life, the body is our drone. Through it the spirit acts in the material world: it sees through these eyes, speaks through this tongue, works through these hands. The actions available to it are real but limited, because the instrument is limited — a body can lift only so much, go only so far, endure only so long. And the

connection is a kind of remote control: an act of will, invisible in itself, becoming a movement of the hand. But the one who wills is far more than the hand that moves. The Apostle Paul says as much when he calls the body 'our earthly house', a tent we inhabit while we groan for a dwelling not made with hands. We are more than the tent we camp in — for God, having formed the tent from the dust, breathed into it the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

The Apostle also gives us the map of what that 'more' contains, when he prays that the Thessalonians be sanctified wholly, 'and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless'. Spirit, soul, and body: three dimensions of one person. No Father of recent memory expounded this more clearly than St Theophan the Recluse, the nineteenth-century Russian bishop who resigned his diocese for a hermitage at Vysha and from it directed thousands of souls by letter. His book *The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned to It* began, fittingly, with a young woman at a ball, struck in the middle of the dancing by the sudden thought of her soul's immortality and the vanity of the swirl around her. Answering her,

Theophan describes the human person as living on three levels. There is the bodily life, concerned with food, rest, health, and comfort. There is the life of the soul — thought, imagination, feeling, the business of family, work, and culture. And above both there is the life of the spirit: that highest dimension of the person, which is the very breath of God in us, which knows God, seeks God, and finds rest in Him alone. It shows itself, Theophan says, in three unmistakable signs — the fear of God, the voice of conscience, and a thirst for God that nothing created can quench.

Here the drone analogy earns its keep. Theophan's constant lament is that most of us live as though we were the drone. We attend to the machine — feeding it, resting it, upgrading it, worrying over its scratches — and forget the pilot entirely. A man may spend decades absorbed in the feed from the camera, managing what the instrument needs and what the instrument sees, while the spirit, the actual person, sits neglected at the console, starved of the one thing it was made for. The tragedy is not that we care for the body; the tragedy is mistaken identity. When the drone becomes the whole

horizon, the pilot forgets he exists. But when a man hears the spirit claiming its rights — in the pang of conscience, in the fear of God — and freely chooses to live from that highest level, then, Theophan promises, God Himself unites with him, and the sanctification of the whole man begins, soul and body together, ‘that God may be all in all’.

The older Fathers say the same in the images of their own age. St Gregory of Nyssa compares the mind to a musician and the body to his instrument: the music is in the musician, not in the lyre, and if the strings are broken the art remains whole though it can no longer sound. This is why illness or injury does not diminish the person — a truth worth remembering at any hospital bedside. St Macarius the Great sees the soul pervading and carrying the whole body, as the divine glory filled the mysterious chariot of Ezekiel’s vision. Nemesis of Emesa states it plainly: the soul uses the body as its instrument. St Gregory the Theologian goes further and tells us why God made such a strange amphibious creature at all: man is a second cosmos, great in his littleness, placed on the earth as a mingled worshipper — priest of the visible creation and initiate of the invisible. The drone

exists so that the unseen realm can act, and give thanks, within the seen. And St Paul, caught up into paradise, confesses that he cannot even say whether he was in the body or out of it — the person, evidently, is not simply identical with the machine through which he ordinarily operates.

But if the body is the drone, where is the console? The hesychast Fathers answer with one voice: the heart. St Gregory Palamas, citing Macarius, teaches that the heart is the first rational organ of the body, the throne of the nous, from which the whole organism is directed; and the whole labour of the Jesus Prayer — ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner’ — is precisely the pilot coming home to his post: the return of the nous, scattered across a thousand screens, into the heart where it belongs. This is why the Fathers call prayer of the heart the science of sciences. A pilot who wanders from the console does not stop the drone; he merely leaves it to fly on habit and wind. Watchfulness, *nepsis*, is simply the sobriety of the one who has taken his seat again and keeps the link — and the link is grace. When prayer stops, the operator flies blind, and the

drone drifts wherever the winds of appetite carry it.

Yet here the analogy must be corrected, and honesty requires that we correct it, because it can mislead in a direction the Church has always resisted. A drone is rented hardware: disposable, replaceable, finally alien to its operator. The body is none of these things. It is not a vehicle we happen to occupy but a dimension of the person we are; God did not make a spirit and issue it equipment — He made man, an embodied spirit, and saw that it was very good. When Barlaam and his party sneered at the monks of Athos for involving the body in prayer, Palamas answered that the body is not evil — it is the carnal mind that is evil — and that the body is the soul's fellow-worker, destined to share with it in grace: spiritual joy, descending from the nous into the body, is not diminished there but transfigures the flesh itself. The proof is the Incarnation: the Son of God did not pilot a body from a distance — He became flesh, and that flesh, crucified and risen, is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

Our funeral service holds both truths together without flinching. St John of Damascus makes us sing over the coffin: 'I weep and I lament

when I think upon death, and behold our beauty, fashioned after the image of God, lying in the tomb disfigured.' No one weeps over a broken drone; we weep because the body is ours, and its ruin is a wound in the person. And yet in the very same service the Church answers herself: 'I am an image of Your ineffable glory, though I bear the wounds of transgressions.'

The pilot outlives the machine — and, wonder of wonders, even the machine will be raised: sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body, a temple of the Holy Spirit made radiant. The Mother of God has gone before us in this: at her Dormition her most pure body was not abandoned to corruption but translated to heaven, the first entirely successful human being, body and soul in glory. Our destiny is not to abandon the drone at last and fly free, as the Platonists hoped, but to receive our body back transfigured. No pilot ever loved his drone; but we shall be reunited with our bodies, because they are not our equipment but our very selves.

What, then, is the use of the picture? Precisely this: it restores proportion. If the body is the instrument and the spirit the operator, then a life spent entirely

on the instrument is a life spent upside down. Theophan's counsel follows naturally. Feed the spirit as deliberately as you feed the body: with prayer, with the word of God, with silence, and above all with the Holy Mysteries — for notice that the Lord, who knows what we are, gives His grace through the drone itself: water on the skin in Baptism, oil in Chrismation, and His own Body and Blood on the tongue in the Eucharist, so that sanctification enters the pilot through the machine. Care for the body honestly, as a good workman cares for a good tool, but do not mourn its slow wearing-out as though the pilot were dying with it: 'though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day'.

And remember, finally, whose image the pilot bears. The glory of God, says St Irenaeus, is a living man — not a living body only, nor a disembodied spirit, but the whole person, spirit, soul, and body, alive with the life of God. The drone will fall silent one day; every machine does. But the one at the console was made for the vision of God, and even the machine will be raised.

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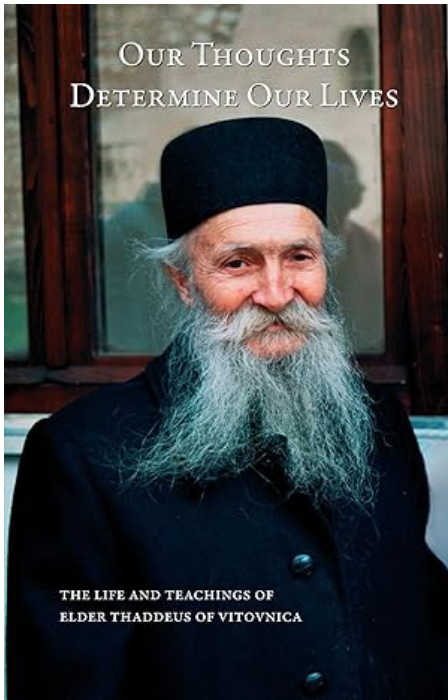
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Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives

by Elder Thaddeus (published by St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood)



This book by a Serbian Orthodox monk puts out a bold thesis, as set out in its title: “Our thoughts determine our lives.” The elder points out that “our starting point is always wrong. Instead of beginning with ourselves, we always want to change others first and ourselves last. If everyone were to begin first with themselves, then there would be peace all round.” [p.64].

“We may think that we are good,

but evil is in us. We do not have the strength to resist it. And we know that as Christians we must not even think evil, let alone do it. We, however, have Divine power, Divine life and Divine energy. On the day of the final judgment we shall have to give an answer for the way we have used this Divine power, life and energy which have been given to us: whether we have contributed to the harmony in the universe or have sown disharmony” [p.64].

The Lord has taken all of our sufferings and cares upon Himself, and He has said that He will provide for all of our needs, yet we hold on to our cares so tightly that we create unrest in our hearts and minds, in our families and all around us” Whenever I am burdened by problems and when I try to bear all the cares of the monastery ... by myself, then there is trouble in store for me.... Even the easiest job is carried out with great difficulty. But when I commit myself... and everything else unto the Lord, even the hardest of jobs gets done with ease. There is no pressure, and peace reigns... [p.65].

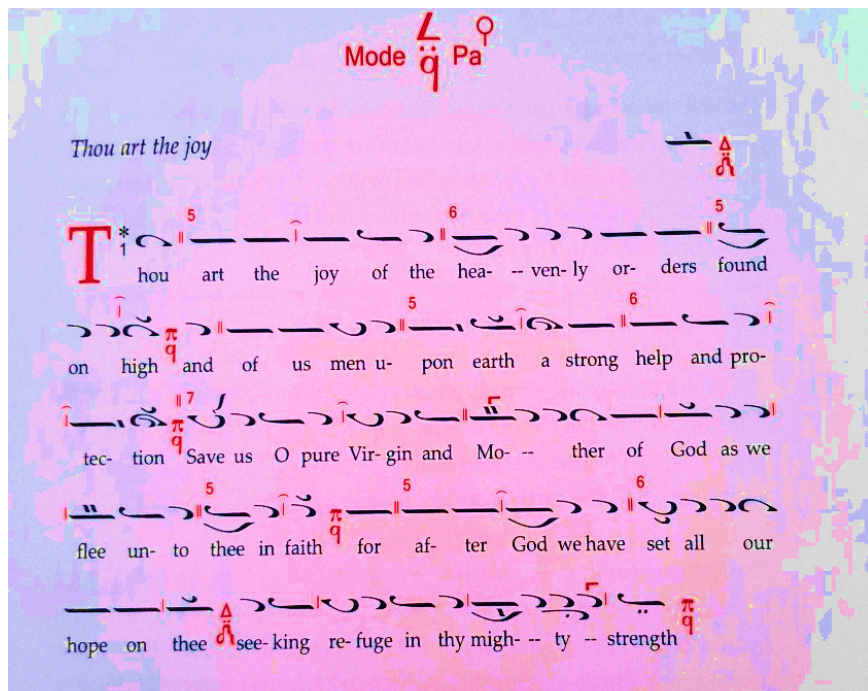
The Lord is present everywhere, and nothing happens without His will or His permission.... When we accept this idea everything is made easier. If God would allow us to do everything the way we desire and when we desire this would certainly result in catastrophe [but] God reminds us in different ways of His presence. We however quickly forget about it especially when things are going well for us. We forget that we are here [on earth] for a short time only, and we think that we will be around forever. But when misfortune strikes we cry, 'Lord have mercy!' This is why we should try hard to change our character for the better" [p. 65].

"The role of a Christian in this world is to filter the atmosphere on earth and expand the Kingdom of God.... Those who have the Kingdom of God in themselves will imperceptibly pass it on to others. People will be attracted by the peace and warmth of us; and they will want to be near us, and the atmosphere of heaven will gradually pass on to them...The atmosphere of heaven will radiate from us even when we keep silent or talk about ordinary things. It will radiate from us even though we may not be aware of it" [p. 66].

"The Holy Fathers tell us to let our attention be on the Lord immediately upon waking, to let our thoughts be united with Him during the entire day and to remember Him at every moment. The Holy Fathers prayed to be delivered from forgetfulness, for we often get carried away by the things of this world and forget the Lord. We forget that he is everywhere and that any job we do and any task we perform is His. We think that the job we are doing is for someone else, and we often perform our tasks unwillingly. When we perform a task unwillingly, soon resistance and a feeling of disgust are born in us, and then our life becomes filled with resistance and disgust for everything, and we grow old in this manner. Your thoughts are burdened because you are influenced by the thoughts of your fellow human beings. Pray to the Lord that He might take this burden from you. These are the thoughts of others which differ yours

This book review has focused solely on Chapter 1, "On Thoughts." This is not an easy book to read but it can contribute a great deal to our lives.

- Father Emmanuel



Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All East Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland

St Aidan's Parish, Manchester Meet your Byzantine Music Teacher

Following an interest by several members of our parish in learning to sing in the Byzantine Ecclesiastical Music (BEM) way,
September 18th, 6.30pm, St Aidan's Church

Mr Nectarios Soteriades, MATheol, BAMusic (Fr Stavros's nephew)
a teacher of BEM in various parishes across UK,
will be at St Aidan's to meet, discuss and form a learning plan with all
interested.

Please confirm attendance texting or emailing Fr Stavros
(073 654 15519; prieststavros@stet1909.onmicrosoft.com)



1. Don't arrive late for any service but especially for the Divine Liturgy. Do not appear at the end and expect to receive Holy Communion!
2. Don't talk in the services unless it is vitally important to do so, or if you have the care of children and you are guiding them.
3. If you have children, don't leave them uninvolvement in the services, whatever their age might be.
4. Don't sit during the priests' Communion or after your own Communion. Stand as usual, unless you are sick, elderly or infirm.
5. Don't stand at the back when there are a number of vacant seats and spaces down the sides and in the middle of church. When seated don't put your belongings on the seat next to you.



1. Do be present for the readings at the beginning of the Liturgy *at the latest*. This is the requirement of our bishop across all parishes and missions.
2. Do try and maintain a prayerful attentiveness to every word in the services: the prayers, the hymns, the psalms, the readings and the sermons.
3. Do involve your children in listening, prayer and action throughout the service.
4. Do stand for as much of the service as possible. In this way the body disposes the mind and heart to be more attentive in prayer.
5. Do fill up seats and spaces further forward. Make it easy for others to do the same.

When you confess ...



If you are frequently spending more than five to ten minutes in Confession, then take care that you are not elaborating on problems in your life, because the Confessional is not the place to do that. If you need spiritual counselling, fine, make an appointment for that, but do not please confuse it with Confession.

- Sacramental Confession is for those sins that weigh heavily on your heart, and

which have a persistent character in your life. Be ruthlessly honest with yourself when you confess and realise that we are all tempted to deceive ourselves as to the gravity of the ways in which we fall short of what the Lord requires of us.

- In Confession, do not reel off the seven deadly sins or just work your way through a list in a very general way. Confession must specify particular words, deeds, persons, events, and not be overgeneralised.

Some things to remember please:

Confession is when you have done something wrong or failed to do something right, in thought, word, or deed. True Confession, therefore, is simple and direct and specific to a named sin. Do not justify your behaviour or implicate others in what you yourself are bringing to the Lord.

- Confession is not spiritual counselling!

- A Confessional is a hospital, not a courtroom. Do not be afraid or make Confession a great burden to your soul. It is a place where you can finally find liberation in Christ. If Confession doesn't set you free, it's not Confession!

- Please do not chop and change between different priests for your Confession or indeed spiritual counselling. It is a very unhealthy practice, and unfortunately quite common. It only encourages a comparing of notes between clergy responses and choosing the one that we like the best (may not be the best one for us at all!) All the clergy have differing perspectives on the same issues, and consistency is the true route to healing. There are many different ways to care for the soul, but stick to the advice you have already been given.

- Be practical about Confession in the following ways:

- If you are making an appointment for a Saturday afternoon, do not leave this to the last minute and expect a space to be available for you. Contact the priest in good time. The last time for a Confession on a Saturday afternoon is 4:15, on the basis that

you will not be spending more than 10 minutes. The earliest time is negotiable after 2:30 pm.

- If you are confessing on a Sunday before the Liturgy. This is done on a first-come, first-served basis, no appointments. Please be considerate of others who may be waiting in a queue behind you. Stick to the 5 to 10 minute maximum guideline. Preferably 5 minutes on a Sunday morning.

- Unless there is an unforeseen emergency, please do not ask the clergy to hear your Confession after the Liturgy or after Great Vespers on a Saturday. For spiritual counselling, contact the clergy well in advance. We may be able to accommodate you at times other than at the weekend or, if necessary and convenient, remotely by Teams. Due to the size of our community, time is not available for in-depth spiritual counselling on a Sunday morning - other than short conversations with the clergy at their desks during lunch. As always, please be considerate of other people waiting their turn.

-Fr Gregory

Weekly Bible Study

St John's Gospel



Online on Teams



Starting Tuesday 15 September



7.30pm–8.30pm



All welcome