

The Apostle

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

Light Overcoming Darkness

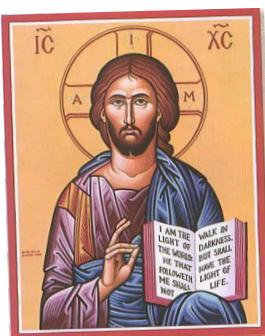
In addition to my existing membership of 'Christian Concern', <https://christianconcern.com/> today I joined today the **'Free Speech Union'**

<https://freespeechunion.org/>
Both organisations work for free speech, defending the legacy of Magna Carta (civil liberties) and in the case of Christian Concern, the legacy of Christ in this country, sustained by the freedom to preach the gospel to all. Both these legacies are currently under threat and in the west more generally.

"Wokery" is the word for this erosion of our freedoms. It used to be called "political correctness" and before that, in

George Orwell's novel "Newspeak" - a language of the State where words are redefined into their opposites, error as truth, darkness as light. However, our faith is that: - "the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it". (John 1:5).

Under no circumstances, therefore, must Christians ever conceal this Light by complicity with the darkness of this world! Some examples come to mind of the advance of this darkness in our post-Christian society: speak the truth from the Bible or Church Tradition in public, online or in person, and you risk being shut down or even imprisoned if someone complains. Even silence is now actionable with the emergence of silent prayer crimes. If, for example, you stand minding your own business in the street, praying without words or actions near an



abortion clinic, a policeman may question you and show you the red card. There have been several cases recently based on a bad law establishing a buffer zone around these death clinics. If you are a street preacher and you transgress the “all religions are equal” mantra, upsetting some passers-by, then watch out, you could be taken to court. Several cases of this sort have happened recently, including this one: Shaun O’Sullivan: <https://christianconcern.com/cccases/shaun-osullivan/>

We must not allow the darkness to win through our “cancelling” – the attempt by the State and activists to gag us. This comes into sharp focus with evangelisation and the attempt to shut that down as well. Recall then from the New Testament St Paul’s words: “woe unto me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16) ... even if like St Paul you get imprisoned and beheaded for doing it! Who, then, do we fear and want to please? Men or God? St Paul reminds us once again that our obedience in preaching the gospel is to be found:

“... not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart with goodwill doing

service, as to the Lord, and not to men”. (Ephesians 6:6-7)

Let us choose wisely then. We will all face the Judgement Seat of Christ. We will recognise us as His friends or will our embarrassment to confess him before others condemn us?

So, If you indeed value your freedoms, hard won over many centuries; if you want to preach Christ without the prospect of censorship or imprisonment, do not under any circumstances become complacent. You may think that by doing nothing you are opting for an easier, safer life – but the very opposite is true. You are opting for cowering and cow-towing in the dark. As the Irishman John Curran once remarked: “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty”.

The final word rests with the Word Himself, our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, especially at the time of writing when we approach the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, a Light to enlighten the Gentiles.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”. (Matthew 5:16)

- Fr Gregory

Harry (Benedict) Broomhead

A Personal Testimony - from Father Gregory, his Parish Priest

Harry (Benedict) Broomhead, Man of God (1938-2025)



I first met Harry when I was appointed Vicar of St Matthew's Edgeley in early 1988. He had little contact with any church since his youth when, as a child, he attended the Methodist Sunday School at the Chapel on Castle Street. For whatever reason, I never really was quite sure, Harry took to his newly found Christian faith like a duck to water. He became a committed and invaluable member of St Matthew's.

One of his many skills, aside from the piano, was as a painter and decorator (although he served his apprenticeship at Simons). St Matthew's then was in rather

a poor shape, so it was Harry who took to that high vaulted ceiling and repainted the entire interior in about 6 weeks. A tireless worker, he would later do the same for St Aidan's, his new home parish, in rendering the ceiling a deep sky blue.

In 1994, both of us felt that we had to leave both the parish of St Matthew and the Church of England. For reasons I won't go into here, both of us, together with some others in the parish, believed that notwithstanding the many blessings we had received in the Church of England, our Christian path lay elsewhere, in the Orthodox Church. In 1995, we were all received into Orthodoxy and a new Orthodox parish of St Aidan was set up, eventually moving from Stockport to Levenshulme.

Once again Harry (now Benedict) worked tirelessly as a founder member to help build up his new Church home. His musical gifts were fully employed as a Church Reader in the fledgling choir. Without his skill our worship would not have been as beautiful as it turned out to be. When eventually his frailty prevented his contribution in the choir his innate friendship and kindness continued to bless so many members of our church. His sense of humour, his meatloaf and trifles will not be forgotten!



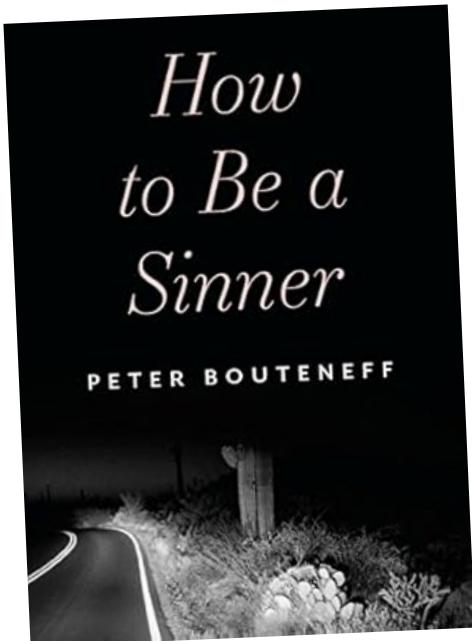
Finally, on a much more personal note and as his friend as well as his priest, I miss him dearly, but in the choir of the saints his voice will be eternal. And so it is that I join my remembrances with those of his family and friends, when I say God bless you dear friend. Pray to God for us as we pray for you!

- Fr Gregory

Book Review - How to Be a Sinner

Finding Yourself in the Language of Repentance

by Peter Bouteneff (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018)



"The thesis of this short book is that there are realistic, useful and healthy ways to understand ourselves within the dynamic of sin just as there are also destructive and unhealthy ways. The goal is to help us find and walk a well-directed path through critical self-reflection [on why and how we sin that can guide us] to freedom, joy,

divine grace and mercy" [p. 14].

The Introduction explains that: "The image of God propels us to cooperate willingly in the process of our salvation and lies at the core of our identity, however broken that might be. A central premise of this book is that we human beings are innately good. But from the very beginning we distort this goodness and must recover it. We are sinners who, even as we are constantly being forgiven, must always be in the process of conversion and the correction of our lives. But God's grace and mercy reaches us precisely through our brokenness, in this we begin to see what lies at the heart of our joy, humility and inner liberty." [pp. 20-21]. In other words, as we become aware of the depth of God's love for us, we begin to understand that God loves us even though at times we are sinners.

The opening chapter is titled "Discovering Myself as 'Sinner.'" [p. 23 f.] The author describes his personal journey into sin in brutally honest fashion [pp. 25-28]. He offers five practical suggestions: (1) "Pray for ...the gift of the awareness of your own sins.... (2) Examine yourself consciously.... Attention, diagnosis and healing are most effective are most effective when they are ongoing practices, not rare events.... So examine yourself as a regular discipline. Know and name the passions that you struggle with. (3) As much as you can, Be involved in the Church's worship life, in its daily, weekly and annual rhythms... (4) Put yourself in situations of purity, goodness, holiness. Read good books of all kinds. Put yourself in the presence of good people, especially ones devoted to the pursuit of purity. Learn from time spent with young children and animals [both of whom] who in their absence of self-consciousness can be profound truth-tellers. Behold beauty and

goodness consciously.... (5) Be alert in times of crisis. They may give you particular insight into your shortcomings. The truism that 'Our problems are actually opportunities' is not an empty one, If you use such challenges as times to reflect on yourself, remembering too that you will die" [pp. 36-39].

"It is a classic Christian paradox: the greatest saints perceive themselves as the worst sinners. We are [each] always somewhere along the path of discovering God's greatness and our lowliness. There is no time like the present: let us covenant with ourselves and each other that we will take the next steps on the journey to our own self-understanding" [39].

I have covered only the Introduction and opening chapter of this insightful book. However, I hope I have said enough that you will pick it up at the parish book table. If it is sold out let me know and I will purchase further copies and reserve one for you.

- Father Emmanuel

Great Lent

*Great Lent begins with Forgiveness Sunday Vespers at 2pm after the Divine Liturgy and Lunch on **Sunday 22nd** of February. In the service of Vespers (anticipating Clean Monday the following day) we ask forgiveness from each other to make a good and holy observance of Great Lent.*

*Our usual pattern of services then continues through Great Lent: the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy on **Wednesdays at 8pm** and the Akathist to the Theotokos on **Fridays at 8pm**.*



*During Great Lent, the Akathist will not be sung before Great Vespers **on Saturday**.*

*Sermons at the end of the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy on **Wednesday evening** will have the theme: "The Cross in the Old Testament."*

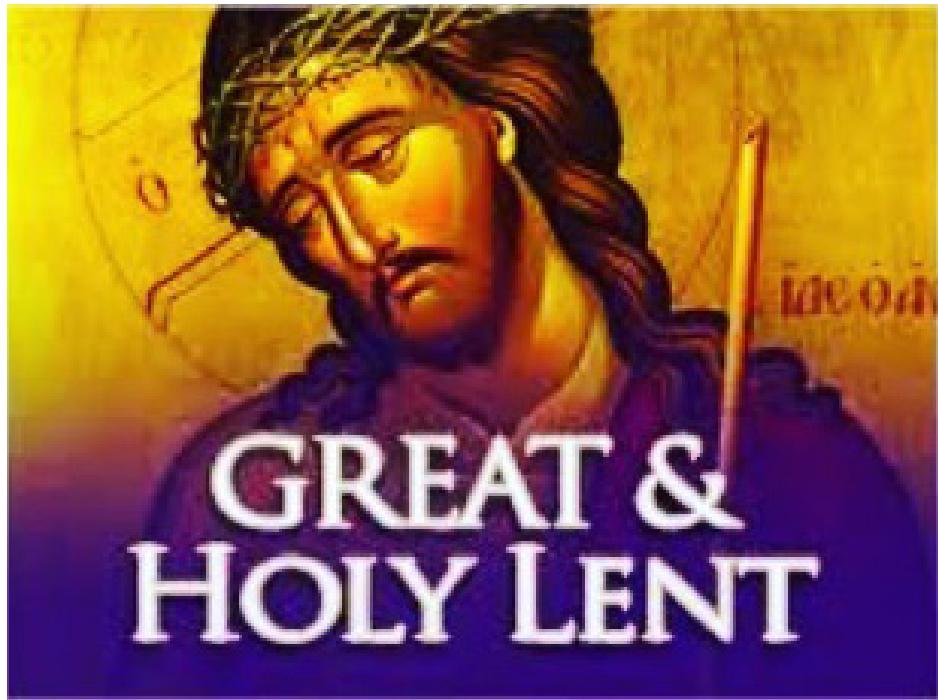
*The first Sunday of Great Lent Divine Liturgy (**1st March**) will conclude with the Synodicon of Orthodoxy and the Procession with the Icons. The Synodicon celebrates our faith and anathematises error. This will take place in both Manchester and Halifax. The faithful bring their home icons for the procession on this Sunday, placing them along the base of the iconostasis.*

Great Lent is a time to take stock of our spiritual lives, to fast, to confess our sins,

to study Scripture and the Lives of the Saints and to perform acts of mercy and love.

The Bishop's Visitations in February and March

*On **Saturday 21st February** the clergy of the Archdiocese (mostly those in the north and the Midlands, about 20 persons) will gather at St Aidan's for our annual meeting to have fellowship, pray and forgive one another. A fasting lunch (Cheesefare Saturday is a Meat Fast only)*



will be at 12.30pm which our parish will be responsible for. A notice will be posted in the Hospitality WhatsApp Group about this. Please help if you can. We will need a serving team and, of course, food ... in addition to our Sunday offering.

On **Saturday 7th March** the bishop will serve a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at 11am in Warrington for the Mission of St Oswald. At this Divine Liturgy we trust that he will ordain Daniel Moran as a Subdeacon. This will be the second Divine Liturgy for the Mission and a great

start for its work. The Mission meets at St Elphin's Church in Warrington by kind courtesy of the Rector, the Church Wardens and the Parish Council. In the evening the bishop will dine with the clergy as usual having driven to St Aidan's for Great Vespers at 5pm.

On **Sunday 8th March** the bishop will serve a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at St Aidan's for the second Sunday of Great Lent.

- Father Gregory

Orthodox Church

St Oswald's Orthodox Mission

First Divine Liturgy in Warrington

Saturday 7th February at 11 am in St Elphin's Church

129 Church St, Warrington WA1 2TL

All Welcome. Services in English

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East



Our Bishop will visit on 7th March!



OUR JOURNEY TO PASCHA! 2026

Created by Fr. Jonathan Bannon (ACROD)

| SUNDAYS | THEMES / GOSPEL READING | HOW TO PARTICIPATE: |
|---|--|--|
| Fast - Free Week FEBRUARY 1st |  TRIODION WEEKS Publican and the Pharisee Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15 Gospel: Luke 18:10-14 | Show compassion on the poor and distressed. Trust in God, not yourself and ask for His help before every task this week. |
| Normal Fast Week FEBRUARY 8th |  The Prodigal Son Returns! Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Gospel: Luke 15:11-32 | Schedule a Confession. Every morning say, "Today I will be humble." Use up/freeze meats this week. |
| Meatfare FEBRUARY 15th FAREWELL TO MEAT TODAY |  The Last Judgement Epistle: 1 Corinthians 8:8-9:2 Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46 | Pray facing East this week. Christ is returning from the East and we wait for Him! Use up/freeze dairy this week. |
| Cheesefare FEBRUARY 22nd FAREWELL TO CHEESE TODAY |  Adam and Eve are cast from Paradise! GIVENESS SUNDAY Epistle: Romans 13:11-14:4 Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21 | Ask each other for forgiveness each evening this week before bed. |
| 1st Sunday of Lent MARCH 1st |  GREAT LENT BEGINS WITH FORGIVENESS VESPERS SUNDAY of ORTHODOXY Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-12:2 Gospel: John 1:43-51 | Bring an icon to church for a procession. |
| 2nd Sunday of Lent MARCH 8th |  ST GREGORY PALAMAS Epistle: Hebrews 1:10-2:3 Gospel: Mark 2:1-12 | Bring a prayer rope to be blessed today! Use it and pray the Jesus Prayer each day this week. |
| 3rd Sunday of Lent MARCH 15th |  VENERATION OF THE HOLY CROSS HALF WAY TO PASCHA! Epistle: Hebrews 4:14-5:6 Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1 | Wear your cross to church and kiss the cross each morning with a bow! |
| 4th Sunday of Lent MARCH 22nd |  ST JOHN of the LADDER Epistle: Hebrews 6:13-20 Gospel: Mark 9:17-31 | Every time you climb stairs this week ask St. John to help you reach Paradise with the sign of the cross! |
| 5th Sunday of Lent MARCH 29th |  ST MARY of EGYPT Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14 Gospel: Mark 10:32-45 | Ask the Theotokos to offer you and the world pure thoughts and ideas this week. |
| FLOWERY (PALM) SUNDAY! APRIL 5th GREAT WEEK BEGINS |  GREAT AND HOLY WEEK ENTRY OF OUR LORD INTO JERUSALEM Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9 Gospel: John 12:1-18 | Place your palm branches and pussywillows behind an icon at home and in your car! |
| GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY APRIL 10th |  GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS CHECK WITH YOUR PARISH FOR ROYAL HOURS AND VESPERS SCHEDULE | Refrain from TV, Internet & Phones to honor Christ's Death. |
| FEAST OF FEASTS! APRIL 12th NO FASTING! |  BRIGHT WEEK HOLY PASCHAI (CHRIST IS RISEN!) Epistle: Acts 1:1-8 Gospel: John 1:1-17 | Greet everyone with "CHRIST IS RISEN!" & say it before good morning and goodnight! |



Seraphim of Sarov the pious (1759-1833), a Russian saint whose fame and spiritual radiance has stretched far beyond his motherland, two years before his repose revealed to one of his students: "The purpose of each and every Christian's life is acquiring the Holy Spirit".

Seraphim, already a hieromonk of the Sarov monastery, from the age of 35, received his elder's blessing and, similarly to St Antonius the Great and other ascetics, reclusive

himself in a hermitage, praying ceaselessly. Even after returning to his monastery 16 years later, he again reclusive himself in his cell for another 15 years. In the age of 66, obeying a Mother of God's order, ended his reclusion to attend the spiritual needs of thousands visiting him and asking for consultation. He reposed his soul to the Creator in 1833 and was proclaimed a saint 80 years later by the Holy Synod of the Russian Church.

Saints do much and say few. What they say to those who "have ears to hear" is the distillation of divine wisdom their perpetual struggle against the Adversary and their bad self has resulted into; otherwise, the Holy Spirit's illumination. In St Seraphim's case, he knew what he was talking about as per all Christians' purpose of life, and that just two years before his repose. For, as we saw, he had already

exercised himself far beyond the “normal” limits of human nature for the best part of his life, and most of it. Or was he simply denouncing earthly “normalcy” by honouring the image of God in him to imitate Him who stretches beyond limits and ceaselessly expands (not by dimensions or time)?

St Seraphim did that not to attract human admiration or get carried away by vainglory but to absorb the Holy Spirit’s gifts and work on them. In doing so, he became “a vessel of the gifts of the Holy Spirit”, as it is put for many a saint in their services’ hymns. Once, he stood praying for 1,000 days and nights upon a rock in the Russian tundra of unbearable cold winters and hot summers, awaiting the Lord’s mercy upon himself, not replacing it by faithless, self-centred anxiety and troubling. And once he had irremovably “acquired” the Holy Spirit or, better, the Holy Spirit chose to abide in him together with the Father and the Son (John, 14, 23), then he was able to tend to the needs of the people of God, to guide them by the Comforter’s illumination – not his opinion, to the Truth and the Life.

St Seraphim matched word with deed; and has showed us one of the innumerable ways to become vessels of the gifts of the Holy Spirit too, to fulfil our life’s purpose that is. Shouldn’t each of us be willing to achieve it too?

The question is “how”? Should we imitate his example and to what extent? Can we, family people, working 24/7 to hardly make ends meet, abandon everything and reclude ourselves to the Siberian tundra or in a cave of the Scottish Highlands? Is that the only secret of success?

No, it is not. Besides, this is the path of few, who have ascended considerable heights from this life. And yet, even someone, who will just about have been saved by God’s mercy and a bit of their effort, will experience these and higher heights in New Jerusalem – only they will not remember their earthly levels to compare. For Paradise is not a static but a dynamic “cosmos” of eternal improvement and expansion. It is not a block of flats where residents keep themselves from each other, simply enjoying the view of God from a bigger or smaller window. It is rather an aula

where they all together commune with God and each other, learning “day after day” new things from the limitless God, and their brothers and sisters, so as themselves to become limitless: imitation of God, correct?

Of course, this is not done in this earthly life at the push of a button; but it has to start somewhere. Why? To show God our free will of being with Him, joining Him and our brotherhood in Him from this earth to eternity – according to His saving commandments. To put it simpler, we need a “ladder” to start ascending spiritual heights like those St Seraphim did.

One “ladder”, and a very famous one, is St John’s, abbot of the Sinai Monastery of St Catherine (579-649AD), with 30 steps, from renunciation (step 1) to love (step 30), which we commemorate along with its author on the 4th Sunday of Lent and March 30th.

However, there is another “ladder” which we make use of on Sundays, in the resurrectional Matins, right before we read the resurrectional gospel: the “anavathmoi” or, in English, steps. Just mark the significance: before

we hear again the good tidings of our Lord’s resurrection and our-in-Him resurrection on the Day of His Second Coming, we are getting spiritually prepared for what is needed.

Anavathmoi are St Theodore’s the Studite (759-826AD) poetic production of 9 verses for each of the eight byzantine music modes, albeit the 8th mode features 12. All in all, 75 steps. Anavathmoi are brief lines/sentences, inspired by verses of the 18th Kathisma of the Psalter (psalms 120th to 134th, which Jews called/still call the “song of ascents” and sang them on their ascent to Jerusalem for Passover, Pentecost and the Tabernacles feasts). In the Orthodox Church 18th Kathisma is read throughout the year either in every autumn and winter vespers (except Monday’s) or on spring and summer Saturday’s vespers; it is also read in the presanctified gifts Divine Liturgy right after the great litany and before the great censing.

I hypothesise that the Orthodox anavathmoi stand as the “selection” (third) psalm of an ordinary Sunday set of “polyeleos” psalms: 1st) 135th (“Praise ye the Lord; Praise ye the name of the Lord; praise him,



O ye servants of the Lord) and 2nd) 136th (O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever). Given that a usual matins service, before the 9th to 11th century introduction, authorisation and pan-Orthodox use of daily canticles, exaposteilaria, praises and "Glory to the Father..." pieces, revolved around the reading/singing of 24 to 28 psalms, it is safe to assume that anavathmoi were used as such (in Lord's and the Mother's of God or great saints' great matins the "selection" psalm of the "polyeleos" set is another, fitting with its meaning to the feast).

God willing and editor permitting, I intend to present/analyse

monthly and for the foreseeable future in this hospitable magazine one by one the 75 anavathmoi, to assist our brotherhood in Christ to "ascend" the spiritual ladder toward New Jerusalem. There

have been two Orthodox patristic cornerstones who have already extensively and comprehensively written about anavathmoi: Nicephorus Kallistos Xanthopoulos (mid-13th century AD) and St Nicodemus of Mt Athos (second half of 18th century AD). Whilst I will be delving into their wisdom for help and inspiration, I will also ask the Comforter's illumination to tailor "my" writings to the 21st century faithful needs and special circumstances.

As a forestate for the next article: 1st STEP of the LADDER to become "vessels of the gifts of the Holy Spirit": HUMILITY

Your prayers brothers and sisters

- **Fr. Stavros**



Icon; The Height Of Humility by Efren Carasco

Puzzle - Lenten Wordsearch

Can you find the hidden words relating to lent? Answers below!

