

The Apostle

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

Beginnings

Happy New Year!

No, I have not lost my mind. This really is the proper New Year, the Church's New Year, the first of September. Before the papacy conformed Europe in 1582 to the pre-Christian Roman celebration of the New Year on the first of January in honour of Janus, the god of gateways and beginnings, there were multiple different New Years in western Europe. These included,

in England, Lady Day, 25th March, the feast of the Annunciation. The Christian east continued to observe the New Year on 1st September. Why? Some historians think that it had something to do with ancient Roman fiscal periods. Maybe we could think also that Christians continued to celebrate New Year on the Jewish reckoning, the new year feast of Rosh Hashanah.

That is how Orthodoxy understands the matter. The discrepancy in the exact dates of the Jewish and Christian celebrations is attributable to calendric drift between the two faiths.

Anyway, with more direct relevance to our lives, the Church



has traditionally associated the first of September with a different kind of beginning: the inception of Christ's ministry after his baptism, a sort of manifesto for the Kingdom of God. This was when Our Lord entered the synagogue at Nazareth to announce His mission to mankind (Luke 4:16-22). Quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, the Saviour proclaimed,

"The spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord..."

As we begin this Church New Year, let us put ourselves in Christ's

line of sight so that we might receive afresh and be transformed by the Good News of the prodigious love of God!

Before we leave this topic I must make mention of a new intention for the Orthodox on the first of September, the protection of the environment. Considering how we as a species have so often despoiled this planet, God's gift to us, it is timely to remember that we all need a new beginning for living more sustainably on God's earth, HIS earth. We have the dignity of a vocation to care for this precious gift. Let us make a New Year's beginning for this as well.

- Father Gregory



bishop, includes details about the veneration of his relics. The letter, sent to the Church at Philomelion in the year 156, describes the persecution leading up to Saint Polycarp's martyrdom, being burned at stake and his courageous example. The letter says: "We have taken the bones, which are more precious than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and have placed them in a suitable place, where the Lord will permit us to gather together, as we are able, with joy and to celebrate the day of his martyrdom."

As Orthodox Christians we need to understand that relics are meant to be honoured and venerated, not worshipped. In fact, the saints lead us to fuller worship of God in Spirit and Truth. By honouring their memories, bodies and belongings, we give thanks to God for the saint's holy witness.

If we place the holy relics in a box or medallion or glass case it becomes a "reliquary" and at Saint Aidan's, we have both, primary and secondary relics.

As primary relics we have fragments of bones of Hieromartyr Theodore, Abbot of Crowland, Hieromartyr Jakob of Hamatoura,

of 14,000 Innocents slain by Herod, relics sewn into the antimimension – a rectangular piece of cloth found on the Altar Table on which the priest celebrates the Eucharist, and hair from the beard of Saint Sophrony of Essex.

As secondary relics we have: Holy Oil from the tomb of Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, pieces of cloths blessed on the Holy Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, also blessed on the bodies of Saint Dionysius of Zakynthos, Saint Euphrosyne of Polotsk, Patron Saint of Belarus and Saint John Maximovitch, Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco.

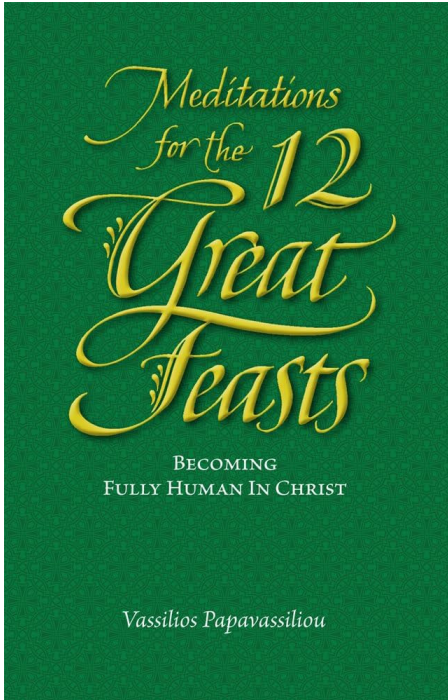
Holy relics are physical, tangible, concrete reminders that Kingdom of Heaven is obtainable for us, so long as we recognize what made the saints holy and work to apply those qualities to our lives. When venerating relics, we express gratitude to God for those members of the Body of Christ who achieved theosis, their bodies becoming communicating vessels of the Holy Spirit of God.

With love in Christ

- Father Daniel.

Meditations for the 12 Great Feasts: Becoming Fully Human in Christ

by Vassilios Papavassiliou (Ancient Faith Publishing, 2015)



As we begin a new church year this month, this timely book by an Orthodox layman and author of Ancient Faith's Meditations series offers short reflections on the great feasts. The introduction explains that: "A central theme which runs throughout all of these great feasts is God taking upon Himself the likeness of man, that man might acquire the likeness of God" (p.12).

Chapter 1, "Completely Human:

The Nativity of the Mother of God," "singles out the Virgin Mary for veneration above every other saint, not on account of her holiness alone, but because it is through her that Christ entered the world" (p. 16). "Christ as God ... chose to subject Himself to everything we go through with the exception of sin. The Virgin Mary ... gave Him the breast, reared Him, taught Him and loved Him..." (p. 17). "Christ was a baby who cried, an infant who, like any other human being, had to 'increase in wisdom and stature' (Luke 2:52)" (p.18). "We can follow Christ because He followed us first; He came to rescue us by becoming one of us and raised us up to the throne of His heavenly Father" (p.20).

Chapter 2, "Strength in Weakness:

The Elevation of the Cross," stresses that "the Cross is not a symbol of earthly power, but of humility and self-denial.... We

Orthodox may think our mission in the world is for Orthodoxy to be established as the official church in every land. But spiritually, the Church is always strongest when it is persecuted.... To be a Christian is to deny oneself, take up one's cross daily and follow Christ (See Luke 9:23). "We become true Christians when we crucify our passions, when we forsake our ego.... The fullness of humanity is given to us through the Cross, which is a denial of the self and the acceptance of death for the sake of everlasting life and union with our heavenly Father and Creator" (pp. 24-26).

Chapter 3, "The Living Temple:

The Entry of the Mother of God," celebrates the entry into the Temple of Holy Mary as a young child. "The human being has become the temple of God. This is the calling of every one of us, male and female, rich and poor, young and old." (p. 33).

Chapter 4, "The Image of God:

The Nativity of Our Lord," reflects that: "We see in the Nativity, the full meaning of humility, and in this humility we see the true nature of God. For all that is truly good, pure, mighty, powerful, majestic, loving

and beautiful has no need to show off, no need to prove itself.... To become like God is to 'become as little children' (Matthew 18:3)."

Chapter 5, "Purification and Enlightenment:

The Theophany," is set out in Matthew 3:13-17. "The first theme of the Theophany is purification and renewal, since our Lord will restore fallen man to the image and likeness of God by taking on a human body and deifying it by His own death and Resurrection, which is prefigured in His immersion in the waters of the Jordan" (p. 42). "The second theme of the Theophany is illumination. For in the Theophany the Triune God is revealed through the Person of the Son, the voice of the Father and the descent of the Holy Spirit... Just as no physical life is possible without water and light, so too spiritual life cannot be sustained if we are not perpetually cleansed and if we do not walk in the light of Christ." (pp. 43-44).

Chapter 6, "What Am I Waiting For?

The Presentation of the Lord," presents how the Virgin Mary and St Joseph brought Jesus Christ to the Temple where "the prophets Simeon and Anna, who have long awaited the Christ, finally meet

their Messiah in the form of a child” (p. 46). “In every aspect of life, we must wait, endure and look forward in hope if we are to experience real joy. The question is: What is the ultimate thing I am waiting for? For Christians, the answer is: Christ and Resurrection. Thus we say every time we recite the Creed, ‘I await the Resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come’ (p. 49).

Chapter 7, “The Servant of the Lord:

The Annunciation of the Mother of God,” reminds us that: “When the Virgin Mary learned from the Archangel Gabriel that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and bear the Son of God. Her response, after questioning the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man’ (Luke 1:34), was one of complete humility, faith and acceptance: ‘Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word’ (Luke 1:38)” (pp. 53-54). “This response of the Virgin Mary should be the response of every Christian to the invitation to do God’s will under any circumstances.... This requires sacrificing our own will, our own self-governance” (pp. 54-55).

Chapter 8, “Not of This World:

Palm Sunday,” reminds us that Christ’s kingdom is bestowed upon us through His self-sacrifice, humility and poverty... The Lord entered Jerusalem not on a chariot, with pride and pomp, rejoicing in the vanquishing of human enemies; He entered on a donkey, in humility, having vanquished death itself” (p. 58). “The celebration of Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday remains with us throughout Holy Week when we remember and relive our Lord’s suffering and death—a celebration that will find fulfillment at Pascha, when we hear and proclaim the joyful news and announcement of true freedom and victory: ‘Christ has risen from the dead. By death He has trampled upon death, and to those in the tombs He has given life!’ (Apolytikon of Pascha)” (pp. 61-62).

Chapter 9, “Children of God:

The Ascension of Our Lord,” explains that Jesus Christ “is the first to ascend to God the Father in the flesh, thus paving the way for all of us (See John 14:2-3)” (p. 64). “In the Ascension the divine destination of humanity is made clear. Our Lord plans not only to restore us to our former dignity and to the earthly paradise that was lost, but to raise us up to heaven” (p. 65).

Chapter 10, “God with Us:

Pentecost,” tells us that: “From the ascent of Christ forty days after Pascha, we are led ten days later to another divine ascent—this time not of the Son of God, but of the third person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. He comes to dwell within us and to establish Christ’s Church as a divine presence on earth to shine ‘in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6)” (pp.67-68)

“Orthodox theology teaches that it is only in and through the body that man can achieve this theosis, this becoming God by grace. We have already seen the significance of the human body in other feasts of the Lord: he was born of the flesh, died and rose in the body and ascended in the body for us. Now we see God choosing to live within our own bodies, divinizing us from within.... through the Incarnation. To be fully human is not to escape the body, but to be with God in body and soul. (pp. 69-70).

Chapter 11: “The Human Body:

The Transfiguration of the Lord,” notes that: “In the Gospel of Matthew 17:1-9 our Lord reveals His divine nature. His divinity and humanity are inseparable....

Having become man, he is not revealed sometimes as man and sometimes as God, but always as the two at once. He is no less human in the Transfiguration and no less divine in the Crucifixion” (p.73).

Chapter 12, “Death Is No More:

The Dormition of the Mother of God,” “is a destiny that awaits all the faithful. For this reason in the Orthodox Church we do not speak of ‘death’ but of ‘sleep’ (the word dormition is derived from the French word sleep; the Greek terminology, koimesis, has the same meaning). When we go to sleep, we expect that we shall wake up; so too, when we die, we expect that we shall rise again” (p. 79).

I conclude with the awareness that these Meditations for the Twelve Great Feasts do indeed offer us guidance as to how to become “fully human in Christ.” I have learned a great deal from preparing this book review; and I hope it has been helpful to many of you.

- Father Emmanuel

Sermon - Ordering Our Lives for Confession



Introduction

Our lives are often very busy with many tasks to do, many people to see or care for. But what should we bring to confession? In the Divine Liturgy at the ending of the Litany of Peace, the deacon (or in his absence, the priest) prays: “Let us commend ourselves and each other and all our life unto Christ our God.” That is exactly what we seek to bring to confession—all our life. Confession can help order our lives by clarifying what sins we have committed and seeking forgiveness from God for those sins. Before coming to confession, it is helpful to consider: What sins have I committed in the context of four approaches to life: (1) my spiritual life; (2) my life with my family and friends; (3) my work life; and (4) my sexual life.

My Spiritual Life

This is perhaps the most

important aspect of our life that we should bring to confession. However, my experience is that few people begin their confessions by reflecting on this aspect of their lives. However, the Lord might well consider this the most important aspect of our life. The Lord knows that all of us—clergy as well as lay people—are sinners, but with confession we become repentant sinners. The Lord knows that we can progress in our Orthodox faith and draw closer to Him. Often, this means identifying our earlier sins and seeking forgiveness in confession for those sins.

My Life with My Family and Friends

As a family grows up, there are many opportunities both for kindness and happiness, as well as for selfishness and naughtiness. Challenges often come to us unexpectedly; and it is necessary to pause and pray before responding. If life is going well, we are often content to sail along steadily without being aware of God's presence and without seeking to grow stronger in our Orthodox faith and our relationships with those with whom we live.

My Life at Work

My experience is that some confessions focus on lives at work. At times, the penitent might confess to either anxiety about earlier wrongdoing or about the awareness of personal failures and sins. Confession offers an opportunity to pause and pray and consider not only past sins, but also future hopes. Work experiences are often linked to personal relationships with colleagues, rather than what work has been achieved. Given how secular are the lives of many of our work colleagues, it is not surprising that they try to draw their Christian colleagues into their secular lifestyle. It requires considerable courage to state openly at work that one is a Christian and to behave with dignity.

My Sexual Life

Although this is the most private aspect of one's life, it is often an area of great personal concern. It is important to distinguish between past sins and ongoing sins. If previous sins have been confessed and forgiven by the Lord with a priest as a witness, then you can leave them behind and accept God's forgiveness. Furthermore, sexual thoughts are not necessarily sins if they have been rejected and not acted upon. If one is seeking to

make a significant change in one's sexual life outside of marriage, there may be a period of asking for forgiveness from God, falling down again and coming back to God in the sacrament of confession to ask for and receive His healing grace as you advance on the path to salvation.

Conclusion

At the beginning of morning prayers, we say to the Lord: "Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who are everywhere and filling all things; Treasury of blessings and Giver of life: Come and abide in us and cleanse us from every impurity and save our souls, O Good One." That is what the Lord does for each of us when we confess our sins. As St. John wrote in his first letter, 1 John1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." St Bede wrote of this Biblical passage: "Since we cannot live in this world without sin, the first hope of salvation that we have is through confession.... The next step is love ... because love covers a multitude of sins. Each of these things encourages us to ... ask [for and receive] God's forgiveness."

- Father Emmanuel

From August to September and back: Holy Cross's cross-roads for the "medieval" ordinary Orthodox

From August to September and back: Holy Cross's cross-roads for the "medieval" ordinary Orthodox

September, by name, means "7th", for it was the seventh month of the Roman calendar starting in March. For us, 21st century people, September is the ninth month of the calendar, with January the first month of the civil year for some centuries now. Long ago, for the (Eastern) Roman Empire (or Byzantium), as well as the Constantinopolitan Church (or Ecumenical Patriarchate) September was the first month of the financial and ecclesiastical year respectively. And, as per the latter institution and all Orthodoxy, it still is.

Empire-wise, since mid-2nd century AD, September 1st marked the renewal of taxation obligations, recycled on a 15th year basis, according to preregistered land and harvest volumes of all imperial landowners-free citizens (not their serfs, who, nonetheless, worked hard to meet their squires' taxation targets). To put it simpler, the amount you had paid in 350AD you were to pay it again in 365AD, unless your circumstances had changed (say, part of your land had

been captured by the enemy or you had already been sold as a slave for your debts). Once education and healthcare were not a budgetary issue, taxation was mainly meant for military expenditure and other "foreign affairs": to fend off external enemies and (re)capture lands belonging to the Empire by force or diplomacy. So, upon autumn's first day, the equivalent to the office of the British Lord of the Exchequer (logothesion tou dromou) settled the accounts of the previous (military) year and prepared for the next (military) one, to start on the month of the pagan god of war Aris or Mars (hence March), given that military activity was seldom taking place in autumn and winter.

Ecclesiastically, and so far as the Ecumenical Patriarchate's efforts to keep pace with and underpin the goals of the Empire-Civitas Dei were concerned, September was (intentionally) thronged with important feasts of

a) our Lord (1st; the beginning of the New Year; 13th; the consecration of the Temple of Resurrection or Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 335AD; and 14th; the Universal Elevation of the Holy Cross),

- b) His Mother (8th; nativity),
- c) His Forerunner (23rd; conception) and
- d) His beloved Disciple (26th; translation).

The first four, along with their pre- and after-feast periods occupied and still occupy the heart of the month. Let us now see why, once for us, 21st century Orthodox, the month's celebrations setting may seem irrelevant to our daily lives or even incomprehensible.

It aimed to underline the basics of the Christian faith: a) physical birth as the outcome of cooperation between God and man = something to cling to when "mother nature" was gradually "dying", and natural darkness and mental gloominess were gaining upon the souls of millions of massively converted 4th century AD Balkans, Asia Minor and East Mediterranean peasants/serfs– Byzantium's productive and military backbone, who had just learnt the new "price tag" for "national" security; b) personal spiritual rebirth, consecration and sanctification by and toward the lifting up of Jesus's Cross and their everyday life's one (with meeting the taxation targets one of them). An example: the Forerunner's September 23rd feast of conception marked the beginning of the sowing of the arable lands, with the sowers/serfs hoping that

until his nativity (June 24th, which coincided with the end of the harvest) and after nine months of patience, incessant prayers/litanies "for favourable weather, abundance of the fruits of the earth and temperate seasons", and obviously very hard work, they would have met the individual taxation targets as set by their squire-otherwise famine or slavery loomed. So, by working "your" land, you were also working on your "inner land", your soul.

Until mid-7th century AD, when the Eastern Roman Empire rule was forcibly replaced by the Muslim, September feasts were celebrated in ecclesiastical and civil grandeur in the Holy Land (Jerusalem, Nazareth, Gethsemane, Jordan river monasteries). So, September was the month of Jerusalem and the Holy Land in general, at the presence of multitudes of pilgrims from all over the Mediterranean. Remember: a) St Mary the Egyptian, still a prostitute, casually embarking on an Alexandrian ship to visit Jerusalem and venerate the Holy Cross at the Temple of the Resurrection and accompanied by a random port "clientele" in 373AD (less than 40 years after the consecration of the Temple); and b) Egeria or Etheria, a Hispano-Roman pilgrim and her diary on her Holy Land pilgrimage ten years later.

Following Jerusalem's and Palestine's Muslim conquest, the focus of annual pilgrimage shifted to Constantinople. A destination boasting (along with masterpieces of secular art) the Holy Cross (Which emperor Heraclius had transferred in the capital after recouping it from the Persians in 629AD and probably kept it there for good), the Mother of God's belt and shawl, and Jesus's Holy Napkin (translated from the frontier city of Edessa to the capital in mid-10th century AD), along, obviously, with the relics of all 12 apostles in their special temple (Apostoleion) and the relics of countless other saints, enshrined in various capital churches.

It is not accidental that August (the medieval "holy days" and currently "holidays" month) ecclesiastically started and still starts with the service of the procession of the Holy Cross from the Constantinopolitan imperial palace (where it was kept) to the Great Church of St Sophia, to be venerated by the multitudes of the faithful, Constantinopolitans and visitors alike for two weeks. 13 days later, as recorded in the Synaxarion of August 14th (one day before the feast of the Dormition started), the Holy Cross was brought back to the Palace.

The aim? That the Crucified

Lord's Mother's major Feast, to last until 23rd, and her veneration, as the patron and protector of the empire and its capital (following the successful repel of its 626AD siege by Persians and Avar), took centre stage, notwithstanding that the very next day (August 16th) Jesus's Holy Napkin's translation from Edessa was celebrated! As August was finishing and still finishes with the commemoration of the mid-6th century AD deposition of the belt of the Mother of God in Her temple, in the Constantinopolitan quarter of bronze-mongers and sellers. Add all these celebrations up, and you end up with an extremely busy month August for every Constantinopolitan, from the emperor to the odd street seller, to serve the multitudes of pilgrims and fill up imperial coffers and individual pockets!

Despite the geopolitical changes and with August a month equally devoted to the Holy Cross and the mother of God, the once exclusively Holy Land-centred September feasts were kept and celebrated as major ecclesiastical calendar events, although Jerusalem was not a part of the empire anymore. And with what a concession! St John the Chrysostom's, the Constantinopolitan patriarch's, memory, celebrated on the day he commended his soul to the

Creator (September 14th, possibly-probably a local Constantinopolitan feast from mid-5th century – not a Jerusalemite) was transferred two months later (November 13th), so that the focus shifted on the Holy Cross and the commemoration of its universal elevation in front of the 326AD Jerusalemite crowds by the local patriarch, after St Helen had miraculously found and identified it in Golgotha (this explanation still to be found and read aloud on September 14th synaxarion!) So, yes, August had to serve Constantinopolitan pilgrims and their craving for venerating the Holy Cross and the Mother of God's shawl and belt. But once everyone was back home to learn and work on the new taxation year's "targets", September feasts, with the universal elevation of the Holy Cross the pinnacle, were there to help: symbolically and in practice.

Because the recouping of Jerusalem from the Muslims and the return of the Holy Cross to its natural cradle had always been the ultimate political goal of the Byzantine emperors, who, entwining faith and politics, sought the populace's support and sacrifices toward it (with taxation topping the list). One of them, the quasi-monk Nicephorus Fokas, in mid-10th century AD, touched the dream, but, Lord knows why,

never fulfilled it (969AD). 130 years later (1099AD) the 1st Crusade crusaders recouped the Holy City from its Islamic rulers. Yet the Holy Cross remained in the imperial Constantinopolitan palace, and its August public veneration and September universal exaltation feasts carried and still carry on in the 21st century within Orthodoxy worldwide.

Further, long before post-1054 schism western European kingdoms started to feature as a force to be reckoned with against the "legitimate" heirs of Rome (aka Byzantium) and contemplate, organise and fund crusades, Holy Cross had exclusively been the Byzantine army's flag and crest. In that sense, all wars, offensive and defensive, were crusades – and not simply by military uniform appearances. Either Heraclius's early 7th century invasion of Persia to recoup the Holy Cross (spoils from the Holy City since 614AD), or Basil 2nd's late 10th-early 11th century wars against the already converted to Christianity Bulgarian kingdom, sought to underline that Byzantium was the only legitimate political force in the world, for it held the "footstool of the King of Glory" (the Holy Cross) and its rulers were anointed by the supreme priest of the same "King of Glory", the patriarch of

Constantinople. So, any barbaric nation or political entity attacking Byzantium was an enemy of the Crucified Himself and a potential usurper of a universal sacred political establishment.

So, non-Roman Christians and pagans would ultimately become the subjects of the one and only political authority of the Christianised (Eastern) Roman Empire/Byzantium, either by force or peacefully. The Holy Cross was the measuring scales for this. Either by featuring as Byzantium's symbol/inspiration of crushing military victory (it all started in 312AD when the still pagan St Constantine the Great had a vision of the Holy Cross as the purpose/reason of his military victory against co-emperor Maxentius). Or as the "plough" to "plough" the soils of hardened hearts of vast geographical European areas (the Empire's "backcourt" of northern Balkans, Hungary, nowadays Ukraine and central Russia) still reigned by the dark powers of the Adversary through idolatry and witchcraft. In that sense, world peace would be achieved when all nations would bow before the Holy Cross and the Crucified Lord as converts or to be converted, also recognising their vassalage to the authority that had subjugated them to It and Him.

Byzantium's political ideology, ripe in contemporary academic works, written and read by the elite, had to find a way to be refracted upon the illiterate or elementarily educated populace. To this, important feasts' services, such as the Universal Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14th, played a central role. Service texts (for vespers and matins) had been open "white papers" for five centuries (mid-5th to mid-10th) before consolidated to what we know and use today. As such, they expanded to accept new pieces, which, together with the older, painted a starker picture of what the populace needed to know and consent to.

Popular pieces of the September 14th service handsomely portray the intersection of a) the doctrine of the Crucified "King of Glory" (the incarnate Son and Word of God who saves the world from sin and death through His voluntary and humiliating sacrifice), and b) the authority of His anointed-on-Earth "lords" to apply it universally. Ecclesiastical poetry was walking on an artistic tightrope in its effort to combine digestible catechism on great truths of the faith for the populace and official ideology. Every poet's challenge, I suppose, in their effort to express themselves and be related with their readership.

Below there are two examples of this poetry. The first, extremely familiar, dates back in early 6th century AD, the second possibly a Leo 6th's masterpiece (late 9th century). The former reflects its time, that is the political elite's conscious efforts to decisively move away from old Rome's civil and secular values toward the New Rome's imperial, spiritual and by-God-anointed ones. The latter is a magnificent piece of poetry, combining doctrine, explanation and mission upon a canvass of discreet political objectives. Enjoy them! And when at Church, celebrating any of September's major feasts (particularly Holy Cross's Universal Elevation), "lose" yourselves in time using them (and other pieces) as "time machines" to "speak" and identify with your brothers and sisters in Christ so early as mid-4th century AD.

KONTAKION (mid-6th century AD;
(mid-6th century or possibly
much earlier)

You, Who were lifted on the cross voluntarily, O Christ our God, grant Your tender compassions upon Your new commonwealth which bears Your name. Make our faithful kings be glad in Your power, granting them victories against the adversaries. And may they [=our kings] have your alliance as a weapon for peace and an invincible

trophy.

MATINS DOXASTIKON
(late-9th century AD or a bit later);

Come, all you nations, let us reverence the blessed tree, through which has come the eternal righteousness.

For he, who deceived our forefather Adam by means of a tree, is himself lured by the Cross.

And he, who formerly held the royal creature in tyranny, falls headlong tumbling down an exquisite corpse.

By the blood of God the venom of the serpent is washed away

And the curse of [mankind's] just sentence [=death and Hades] is untied by the unjust trial and sentence of the condemned Righteous One.

For it was necessary to remedy tree by tree

And to put an end to the passions [of the soul], carved upon the condemned mankind because of the tree [=original sin], by the Passion of the Passionless One.

Therefore, glory, O Christ the King, glory to Your awesome plan for our salvation, by which You saved everyone as You are good and benevolent.

- Father Stavros



The Church as Family – Strengthening Bonds in Christ

Orthodox Christian Retreat

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ..."
— Romans 12:5

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- The role of spiritual fathers, mothers, and godparents in our faith.
- Sharing stories of finding family in the Church

Session 2: Marriage & Parenthood – Icons of God's Love

- Marriage and parenting as a path to holiness
- Parenting as spiritual ministry
- Workshop: real talk for couples and parents


Session 3: Building a Strong Orthodox Community

- Living like the Early Church (Acts 2:42–47)
- Overcoming divisions and fostering unity
- Importance of service, hospitality and bearing one another's burdens

Session 4: Spiritual Brotherhood & Sisterhood

- Making lasting spiritual friendships
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Fr Alexander Haig
(Parish of the Twelve Apostles, Eastleigh)

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"The Orthodox Understanding of Family"



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Kalamari saganaki with mustard and honey - for fasting days

INGREDIENTS

500gr Kalamari frozen
250 gr Shrimps
8 Spring onions
1 onion cut in cubes
2 table spoons olive oil
50gr white wine
1 table spoon mustard
1 table spoon honey
Dill fresh 2 table spoons
Parsley fresh 2 table spoons
1 pinch of salt
1 pinch of pepper
1 pinch of oregano
Juice of 1 lemon



INSTRUCTIONS

Heat the olive oil in a non-stick frying pan and sauté the spring onions and the onion. Add the squid, shrimp, salt and pepper. Add the white wine. After the alcohol has evaporated, add the mustard with honey, lemon juice, dried oregano, dill, parsley, stir and serve.

Pastourma pita-pic - non fasting

Ingredients

- 15 Baklava fylo Sheets
- 20 thin slices of pastourma
- 500 g. kasseri peynir
- 15 sliced tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon of chopped fresh oregano
- 150gr Butter melted and we add also olive oil 3ts we mix and use for greasing the baking tray sheets

Preparation - Steps

We clean the pastourma from the cimeni, which we throw away or use pastourma without cimeni. We oil a 34cm baking pan and spread half the sheets, butter- oiling them one by one. We spread the kaseri, the pastourma, the oregano and then spread the tomatoes. We spread the other half of the sheets, oiled one by one and press the perimeter with our fingers so that the mixture is sealed. We oil the last sheet, score it into cubes and finally wet it. We bake at the oven , at 180°C for 40 minutes on air.

