



# “Joy of All Who Sorrow”

No 49 December 2012



## BEGINNING THE NATIVITY FAST

*Dear brothers and sisters!*

**W**e have entered the days of the Nativity Fast, that period of preparation for one of the greatest feasts of the Orthodox Church: the radiant and joyful day of the Nativity of Christ. In his daily life, modern man is immersed in his usual earthly deeds, cares, and concerns. It can be difficult for him to put aside all earthly things and turn to the heavenly, eternal, and Divine. The law of the Gospel is known and accessible to all, but man in his weakness often stumbles and commits sin. The more his soul is burdened, clinging to the earth, the more difficult it becomes for him to perceive the spiritual.

The Church, therefore, has wisely established a time of fasting for Christians: a time of penitential introspection, of work on oneself, and of conforming oneself to the traditions, foundations, and rules of the Church, including the ecclesiastical canons. In this regard, modern society's attitude towards the fast is no exception: one hears questions about whether it is necessary, about whether one can forego, mitigate, or shorten it. But it is characteristic of the true Christian to be completely obedient to the Mother Church, accepting that which She has established and which has been observed by its faithful children for centuries.

People with an inadequate conception of church life often perceive the fasts as being concerned exclusively with limitation in food, in both quantity and quality. But fasting is primarily a spiritual matter. Today the spirit of sacrifice and the capacity for self-denial are dying out. Fasting is the best means of reviving this spirit, through restraining the flesh and resisting its insistent demands.

Yet it should go without saying that bodily fasting alone, such as abstaining from foods of animal origin, is incomplete and incorrect. Spiritual fasting is essential: the rejection of entertainments, amusements, and of everything that in ordinary, non-fasting, times might sting a Christian's conscience. In order to understand the fast's essence, its true content, one should spend as much time as possible in church throughout the duration of the fast and be more diligent in fulfilling one's personal rule of prayer. During this time it is especially important to live to the fullest possible extent within the mysteriological, grace-filled life of the Church by approaching the Mysteries of Confession

and Communion more frequently.

I know well how difficult fasting can be for Christians living amidst the world. They often meet with incomprehension from friends and colleagues – and not only incomprehension, but rejection and even ridicule. This sometimes causes the cowardly desire to abandon the fast, so as not to appear strange in people's eyes or to stand out from their surroundings. But it should be firmly understood that the steadfast observance of church rules by Christians, although it might seem unusual to non-churchgoers, will command their involuntary respect. Our fasting itself can become a wordless sermon for many, reminding them of our faith and of that great and majestic event for which we are preparing by means of this fast.

I sincerely wish you to complete the course of this fast with spiritual profit, peering attentively into your souls and hearts during these days in order to cleanse them of everything that could hinder God – Who became Man for our sake and our salvation by descending from heaven to earth – from entering and making His abode in them. We will render to the Lord only the small labour of abstinence that is within our powers, and He will grant us His great and incomparable spiritual joy – the joy of the living knowledge that God has appeared unto us in order to be with us always, never leaving those who have put their trust in Him, through the joy of Christ's radiant Nativity.

The humble LONGIN,

By the mercy of God, Bishop of Saratov and Volsk,

2003

## **PASTORAL ISSUES: Part 1 ~ *The Question of Frequent Communion***

Guidance on this subject can be found in the writing of many great saints. In this instance, we have taken some paragraphs from the works of St Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain.

### **WHO WAS THIS SAINT NIKODEMOS?**

Our venerable and God-bearing Father Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, also known as Nikodemos the Hagiorite and Nicodemos the Athonite, was a great theologian and teacher of the Orthodox Church, reviver of hesychasm, canonist, hagiographer and writer of liturgical poetry. His life and works helped provide (among other things) an Orthodox response to contemporary Western Enlightenment culture.

St. Nikodemos was born Nicholas Kallivourtzis in about 1749 in Naxos, Greece. According to his biographer, he was possessed of "great acuteness of mind, accurate perception, intellectual brightness, and vast memory", qualities which were readily apparent to those who tutored him. He passed from the tutelage of his parish priest to that of Archimandrite Chrysanthos, who was the brother of St. Cosmas Aitolos. From there he made his way to Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey), where he continued his studies in theology, as well as ancient Greek, Latin, French, and Italian. Persecution from the Turks, who ruled the Greek world at the time, cut his schooling short, and he returned to Naxos in 1770.

In 1775 he became a monk of Dionysiou Monastery on Mount Athos. Upon being tonsured, Nicholas' name was changed, as is the custom for those who



abandon the world, to Nikodemos. He was initiated into the practice of hesychia, a method of prayer involving inner stillness, controlled breathing, and repetition of the "Jesus Prayer" (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner). Nikodemos aligned himself with the monks known as Kollyvades, who sought a revival of traditional Orthodox practices and patristic literature, and he spent the remainder of his life at work translating and publishing those works.

In 1777, Saint Makarius of Corinth visited him and gave him three texts to edit and revise: the *Philokalia*, a defining work on monastic spirituality, *On Frequent Holy Communion* and the *Evergetinos*, a collection drawing on the lives of the desert fathers. He wrote original works such as *Lives of the Saints*. He also later compiled the writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian and the writings of St. Gregory Palamas, although the latter collection was sadly and mistakenly destroyed amid political controversy over Greek revolts.

St. Nikodemos reposed in the Lord in 1809 and his feast day is celebrated on July 14.

### **"WITH FEAR OF GOD AND FAITH DRAW NEAR"**

With these words, in the Divine Liturgy, the deacon calls the people to receive Holy Communion. Saint Nikodemos tells us:

*"The commentary on the eighth and ninth Apostolic Canons emphasizes: The commands of these canons are very strict and severe, for they excommunicate those who come to the Liturgy but do not remain until the end and take Communion. And other canons of the Councils command the same: namely, that it is wholly proper and appropriate to receive Communion.*

When the Christian communes, what mind could understand the gifts and graces he enjoys after the Divine Communion? How can our feeble tongue express it? Anyone who does not commune frequently is following the opposite way, for he is not sealed with the precious Blood of the Lord, as St. Gregory the Theologian states.

And so, my brethren, if we do as our Holy Fathers direct and receive frequently, we have not only the cooperation and help of divine grace during this temporal life, we also have the assistance of the



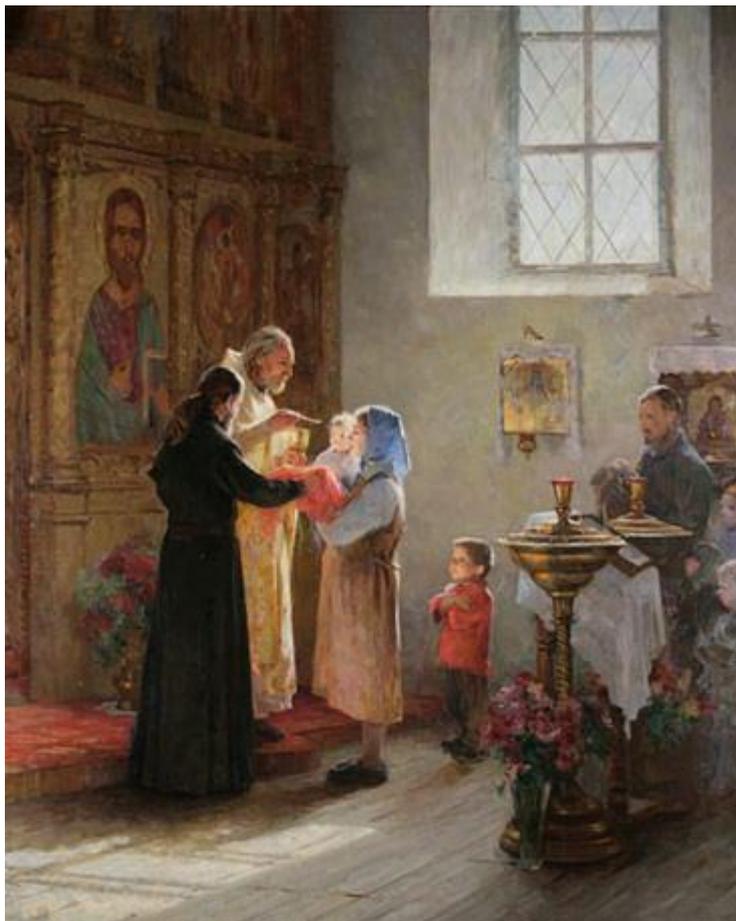
angels of God and of Him who is the Lord of the angels. This Blood of the Lord is salvation for our souls; with it the soul rejoices, with it, it is beautified, it is warmed; this Blood makes the mind shine more brightly than the light; it makes the soul more beautiful than gold. Those who partake of this Body stand with the angels and archangels and the powers above; with it they are adorned with royal robes and the weapons of the Spirit. Those who receive Communion receive the very King Himself.

Do you see what graces you receive if you commune frequently? Do you see how the mind becomes radiant, thoughts shine, and all the powers of the soul are purified with frequent Communion? If you love mortifying the fleshly passions, commune frequently and you will delight. Without frequent Communion we will not be able to free ourselves from the passions nor raise ourselves to the heights of sobriety. And if we do not partake frequently (if possible, even daily) of the precious Body and Blood of our Lord, then we will not be able to escape the devil.

Many invent all kinds of virtues and think that just by doing these without frequent Communion, they will be saved which is utterly impossible, since they do not wish to obey God's will and commune frequently and to follow the Church's standard for every festal Liturgy. To be loved by Christ through frequent Communion of the holy Body and Blood, makes it impossible [for us] not to love everyone. How can you love other good things, O Christian, and not frequently receive Communion? Would you like to enjoy each day? Would you like to have Pascha and rejoice with ineffable joy at the end of life? Then run frequently to the Mystery and receive it with proper preparation, so that you may rejoice....."

Further, St Nikodemos continues:

"I am astonished and amazed how contemporary Christians can celebrate Sundays and other feasts of the year with true spiritual joy, and yet not partake frequently of the Holy Communion, which is the rationale and purpose of each of the feasts and festivals. It is most certain that those who do not commune frequently, fall short, alas, of all the celestial and divine good things; and beside this, they violate the commandments of the Lord and the authoritative decisions of the apostles and the Councils and of all the saints. They are under the penalty of excommunication according to the holy apostles and the Council of Antioch. Such people give aid and opportunity to the devil through avoiding Communion, casting themselves into various sins and many other temptations."



He concludes: "And if we have shown great negligence towards the Holy Communion until now, then let us from now on - I beg you with brotherly- love let us awake from the deep sleep of indolence, and let us put forth eagerness and diligence."

These holy words set out for us the principle of frequent communion. Questions arising concerning the preparation for receiving the Sacrament will be addressed in a subsequent issue of the bulletin.

## THE PRAYER ROPE

The prayer rope originated with the great father of monasticism, St Anthony. He tied knots in a leather cord, one for each *Kyrie Eleison* he would pray. However, the devil tried to spoil this system by constantly untying the knots. The Virgin Mary then appeared to him, showing him a way of tying the knots using an intricate pattern of interconnected crosses. This protected them from the devil, who is rendered powerless by the Cross. Prayer ropes are still constructed according to this method today. The shorter ropes have 33 knots, one for each year of Our Lord's life. Attached to the knots there is always a cross, and then usually a tassel, which can be used to wipe away tears of repentance, and also represents eternity, which can only be reached through the Cross. The ropes are always constructed with prayer. In his letter to the Thessalonians, St Paul exhorts Christians to pray unceasingly. The prayer which Christians pray as they go about their daily business is the afore-mentioned *Kyrie Eleison* or 'Lord have mercy'. This keeps them in a constant attitude of prayerful repentance and humility before the Creator. It is often lengthened to include the Holy Name of Jesus, which is beneficial when pronounced as often as possible. Thus we pray 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy...' We can pray for mercy on ourselves, when we usually refer to ourselves as '[N], a sinner', on someone else, or simply 'on us'-people collectively. Alternatively we can pray 'Most Holy Mother of God, save us' or a short prayer to our Guardian Angel or a particular saint. When we come to a bead, we can pray the 'Our Father', or a chosen Psalm. The rope is useful in reminding us to pray, as it can be easily carried around with us wherever we go, and then in helping us to count, particularly if we have a rule of praying a set number of prayers.



## CHURCH NOTES AND JOTTINGS

### PATRONAL FEAST AND FOUNDERS DAY

November is always a big month for us in Mettingham, with our patronal feast on 6 November and Founder's Day, the annual commemoration of the repose of our foundress Mary Bond, on 15 November. Both services went well and we were blessed with bright Autumn weather. Thank you to all who helped in supplying food, flowers, kolliva, voices and, most importantly, prayers.

### FOUR YEARS OF THIS BULLETIN COMPLETED

The November issue completed the first four years of "*Joy of All Who Sorrow*". Thus we are now beginning our fifth year of publishing. Besides keeping readers informed about our church life, we plan next year to develop a series of articles on aspects of the Orthodox Church, starting with a glossary of words and terms which are frequently used. It often happens that words taken from Greek or Russian have no English equivalent and therefore some explanation is necessary.

### SHARE YOUR FAVOURITE SGOIS BLOG POSTS ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER



In the last issue of the bulletin we made reference to the new SGOIS Blog, where information about new stock and College events can be found as well as features from *Orthodox News*. Since then, Justin Reynolds, our webdesigner, has embedded facebook and twitter sharing buttons on the blog to make it easier for you to share your favourite posts with friends and family.

## FATHER LAZARUS (MOORE)

On Monday 26 November a panikhida was served for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the repose of the soul of Archimandrite Lazarus (Moore) of pious memory. The College has been assisting *The Father Lazarus Moore Foundation* in sourcing archival correspondence from the Lambeth Palace and Canterbury Cathedral. Just last night, we were sent further material from Lambeth Palace that shed a great deal of light on Fr Lazarus' time in Jerusalem and India as well as containing his bold and remarkable confession of Orthodoxy to the Archbishop of Canterbury following his reception and ordination in December 1935. We hope to make some of these letters available soon which are also helping in making final corrections to the Life of Fr Lazarus that will be sent to the printers shortly.

## CHRISTMAS SERVICES

It's good to have the feast in sight at the start of the Advent fast so please take note of the Nativity Services at the College to which all our welcome:

**Friday 4 January 2013**  
*Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ*  
9.30am The Royal Hours

**Saturday 5 January 2013**  
*Saturday before the Nativity*  
7.30pm Vigil

**Sunday 6 January 2013**  
*Eve of the Nativity/Sunday of the Holy Fathers*  
10.30am Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom & 7.30pm Vigil

**❖Monday 7 January 2013❖**  
*Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ*  
10.30am Divine Liturgy of St Basil, followed by a Christmas Party in the House

## NAMEDAYS



We send greetings and congratulations to all whose namedays occur this month and wish you:

**MANY YEARS!**

- 7 December – **Great Martyr Catherine of Alexandria** - Catherine Meyer
- 17 December – **Great Martyr Barbara** – Matushka Barbara Jones
- 19 December – **St Nicholas the Wonderworker** – Nicholas Meade
- 28 December – **Hieromartyr Eleutherios, & Martyr Anthea** (his mother) – Anthea Barry

Church of the Mother of God *Joy of All Who Sorrow*  
The White House, Low Road, Mettingham, Suffolk NR35 1TP  
01986 895176

E-mail: [churchmettingham@aol.com](mailto:churchmettingham@aol.com) Website: [www.mettingham.org.uk](http://www.mettingham.org.uk)

Cheques should be made payable to "Joy of All Who Sorrow" Church  
The account is in HSBC Bank, 3 New Market, Beccles, Suffolk, NR34 9HQ  
Account No 71395912 Sort Code 40 – 09 – 24