



Parish Information Bulletin

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Fr Athanasios and
Fr Ephraim are available
at the Church every
Monday to Friday
between 4.00 and 6.00pm
for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

It is better
to pray
with good will
for our neighbour,
rather than to
denounce him
for every sin.

St. Mark
the Ascetic

SUNDAY 23 AUGUST
*Apodosis of the Dormition
of the Theotokos*

11th SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, Matthew 18: 23-35

- **8.00am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

MONDAY 24 AUGUST
St Kosmas of Aitola

- **8.00am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

THURSDAY 27 AUGUST
St Phanourios, Great-Martyr

- **8.00am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

SATURDAY 29 AUGUST
Beheading of St John the Forerunner
STRICT FAST

- **8.00am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

SUNDAY 30 AUGUST

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11
Gospel Reading: Matthew 19: 16-26

Apodosis of The Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokios commemorating Panagia tou Harou whose icon is enthroned at our Parish

Panagia of Harou is the name of the unique icon which depicts the Virgin Mary cradling the crucified Christ, rather than the Christ child, hence its name (*haros* in Greek means "death"). This icon is found in the Church of St. John the Theologian in Leipsi, Greece. The annual commemoration of the icon takes place on August 23 when the island of Leipsi fills with pilgrims from all over the Do-decanese, to witness the procession of the icon around the entire island and see the annual blossoming of the dead bouquet of lilies on the icon.

In 1943, during the Nazi Occupation, a family whose home was adjacent to the church tried faithfully and respectfully to save some of its meagre supply of oil in order to light the Virgin's vigil light. On the 25th of March 1943, the feast day of the Annunciation, the family's youngest daughter left six white lilies in front of the Panagia's icon, together with a prayer for a speedy liberation of the country. The lilies wilted, then in August the flowers started to revive and on the 23rd of August they had sprouted 12 new buds and gave off a beautiful fragrance.

Ever since then, this miracle is repeated every year, except the year of the death of that devout young woman who first brought the flowers to the church. In spring, the devotees put lilies on the icon and the flowers are left there to wither. In an inexplicable way, the withered branches start giving buds and on the day of the celebration, they blossom and become fragrant.

THE BEHEADING OF THE HOLY PROPHET AND FORERUNNER JOHN THE BAPTIST

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Why does the Church give such veneration to St John the Baptist, even fixing a strict fast day in his honour? Here are ten reasons:

1. Our Lord Himself said that St John was the greatest prophet 'among those born of women' (Luke 7, 28). Some hearing these words are surprised. They ask: Surely, Christ Himself is the greatest man born of women? However, Christ was not born of a woman (i.e. a married female), he was born of a Virgin. Therefore, in obedience to our Lord's words, that St John is the greatest born of women, the Church duly honours him. In fact, there are no fewer than six feasts of St John in the Church Year. The first is his Conception on 23 September. Then comes his commemoration on 7 January, the day after the Feast of the Baptism of Christ. The third is the Second Finding of his head on 24 February. His next feast is the Third Finding of his head on 25 May. The fifth is his Birth, or Nativity, on 24 June, and finally today's feast, the last in the Church Year, his Beheading on 29 August.

2. The parents of St John were great and holy people in their own right and their child was a gift in answer to prayer made to them in their pious old age. His father was St Zachariah, Prophet, Priest

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and Martyr. His mother, St Elizabeth, was the sister of St Anna, that is the sister of the mother of the Mother of God. This relationship between the Mother of God and her kinsman, St John, is expressed in the icon which hangs over the holy doors in every Orthodox church. This shows Christ in the centre, the Mother of God on His right and St John the Baptist on His left. This icon is called the Deisis, and signifies how our salvation is related not only to Our Saviour, but also to His Holy Mother and St John.

3. For this reason St John has the special title of the 'Forerunner', in Greek 'Prodromos', which is a common Greek Christian name. St John alone can claim to be the Forerunner of Christ, therefore the pioneer of our Faith. How can we fail therefore to give him special honour?

4. The Holy Forerunner is also given the title of 'Prophet'. In fact it can be said that he was the last Prophet of the Old Testament. As you may recall, the last seventeen books of the Old Testament are the Prophetic Books, from St Isaiah to St Malachi. In this way, we can also say that St John is the first Prophet of the New Testament. Thus, St John can be considered as a hinge, joining the Old Testament and the New Testament. We also note that not only was St John the Baptist the first Prophet of the New Testament, but that the last Prophet of the Old Testament was also called John. This was St John the Theologian, who wrote the last book of the New Testament and its only prophetic book, the Book of Revelation.

5. St John the Baptist, the first Prophet of the New Testament, was also the first Martyr during Christ's public preaching, some three years before the holy Archdeacon Stephen, who was the First Martyr after Christ's Ascension.

6. It can also be said that St John the Baptist was the first Monk, indeed this is why he is the patron-saint of monks and the monastic life. This is the meaning of the first Gospel today, in which our Lord tells the young man who wishes to follow him, first of all to obey the commandments and then to give up all his riches. That is how St Antony the Great decided to go into the desert, on hearing this very Gospel, so imitating St John the Baptist.

We recall the importance of monastic life for the Orthodox Church. Monasticism is the barometer of the Church. When monastic life flourishes, so the whole Church flourishes. When monastic life is weak, then the whole Church is weak. And St John stands at the head of this.

7. The first step towards monastic life, and indeed towards Christian life in general, is repentance. And this is the first word of St John. Therefore he is great, because he preaches repentance. Repentance is the letter A of the Orthodox Christian alphabet, it is the mark of truth, the mark of sobriety, the absence of exaltation, the sense of reality. Thus, St John's first disciples, Andrew and Peter, were also the first disciples of Christ. And we should not forget that St John preached repentance not only on earth, but also in hades. After his beheading, St John went down to hades, where all departed mankind was held captive, and there preached to all generations, from Adam and Eve on, of Christ's imminent coming, in less than three years from then.

8. The first step in monastic life is obedience. This obedience can be seen in St John's prayer and fasting. He prayed in the desert and ate honey and locusts, dressed in camel-hair. He was ministered to by angels. Thus, in the Church he is called 'a heavenly man and an earthly angel'. His obedience can be seen in his accepting to baptise the Son of God, Whose shoelaces he, in his own words, was unworthy even to undo.

9. The second step in monastic life is poverty, not only in terms of having no money, but also in having no power. St John fearlessly denounced power that was abused, that was used to do evil. This is the meaning of today's second Gospel, the Gospel for St John. This Gospel tells us how St John had denounced Herod Antipas, the son of the Herod who had slaughtered the Holy Innocents nearly thirty years before in Bethlehem, who at the time of St John's preaching was the ruler in Galilee.

10. Finally, St John was great, because he heralded the third step in monastic life, that of chastity. St John denounced the sins of sensuality of Herod Antipas, he denounced the primacy of the body over the spirit. The latter had first married the daughter of an Arab prince, called Aretas, then he had taken for his mistress his own sister-in-law, Herodias. .

As a result of St John's denunciation of Herod's iniquity and that of Herodias, he was beheaded, his head brought before Herodias on a platter. That is why Orthodox always ask for the prayers of the Baptist John in cases of brain-tumours, migraines and headaches.

As we have heard, it was at Herod's birthday-party, that Herod, excited by Salome's dancing, gave way to his wife's demand to behead St John. This is a reason why we Orthodox do not make a great fuss of our birthdays, but rather of our saints' days. For this episode with Herod is the only time in the New Testament that we hear of a birthday, and it caused a great crime to be committed.

The punishment of Herod was terrible. Firstly, his kingdom was invaded by the Arab Prince Aretas, who was all too keen to avenge his daughter's honour. Then Herod was exiled with all his family by the angry Romans. Exiled by them to Lerida in Spain, it was here one terrible winter that his daughter Salome fell through a hole in the ice while crossing a frozen river. As she sank into the river, the ice froze around her neck. Struggling to free herself, she moved her legs, as though dancing. At that moment, however, jagged edges of ice cut through her neck and she was beheaded. Her sinful and unrepentant body disappeared forever beneath the ice. Eyewitnesses saw her decapitated head on the ice, picked it up and took it to Herod – on a platter. As regards Herod and Herodias, they too disappeared, for they fell into a crevasse which opened up during an earthquake in Lerida. Thus, they disappeared from history, without obeying St John's call to repentance, swallowed by the fires beneath the earth. But as regards St John who called and still calls to repentance – his name lives on forever.

Holy Forerunner, Prophet and Baptist John, pray to God for us!

Source: Excerpt from Sermon *The Beheading of the Holy Prophet and Forerunner John the Baptist*—Orthodox England

Seeking the Mercy of God

The parable challenges purely rationalistic logic by saying love is of extreme importance, far more important to Jesus than justice.

Note, the Master does not call the servant wicked for accruing a 10,000 talent debt (the amount of money is phenomenal, 10,000 years worth of wages), but calls him evil when he refuses to forgive his fellow servant. Think about that – what was really the great problem, the important problem, the insurmountable problem of the parable? The debt is far beyond anyone's ability to repay, the servant had indebted himself beyond all reason, and just that foolishness deserved punishment, but the Master forgives. Why? Because he is of that up-side-down Kingdom of heaven, where love reigns supreme to such an extent that it is almost absurd.

The fellow servant uses exactly the same words the servant used in begging for mercy from the master, but the servant does not recognize himself or his own words! What about us? We hope for God's mercy daily, yet do we show mercy to others in our daily transactions? How many times do we ask for God's mercy in the Liturgy? *Lord, have mercy!* How many times do we have opportunity to show mercy to others each week?

Christ demands more from us, His disciples. Even forgiving isn't enough – we must *forgive from our hearts*. We are to drop all claims to those indebted to us. This isn't saying, "Forget about it." Rather, it is acknowledging the debt, the loss and the pain but then still forgiving with that trespass.

We know how people can get under our skin and just irritate us. Christ though says forget about them just getting under your skin – instead allow them to get into your heart, where despite their foibles and failures you forgive them. You turn your heart into the Kingdom of God.

If we cannot behave in a manner befitting the Kingdom of God right now in this life by practicing love and forgiveness, we will find no entrance into that Kingdom. We will not find the Kingdom either welcoming nor a place we want to be. We will find instead only that bitterness of exact justice that we demand in this world being given to us for all eternity. That is unlike the Kingdom in which complete and undeserved and unearned love and forgiveness is how God runs His Kingdom.

Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers.*" He didn't say blessed are the peace lovers. We have to take the action that brings about peace, not evade or avoid the problems of community.

St Kosmas Aitolos

St. Kosmos: Hatred is the Devil's Poison

Even if we perform upon thousands of good works, my brethren: fasts, prayers, almsgiving; even if we shed our blood for our Christ and we don't have these two loves [love of God and love of brethren], but on the contrary have hatred and malice toward our brethren, all the good we have done is of the devil and we go to hell. But, you say, we go to hell despite all the good we do because of that little hatred?

Yes, my brethren, because that hatred is the devil's poison, and just as when we put a little yeast in a hundred pounds of flour it has such power that it causes all the dough to rise, so it is with hatred. It transforms all the good we have done into the devil's poison.

+St. Kosmas Aitolos, *The Life of St. Kosmas Aitolos Together with an English Translation of His Teaching and Letters*, Translated by Nomikos Michael Vaporis

Saint Phanourius

We know nothing for certain about the background of Saint Phanourius, nor exactly when he lived. Tradition says that when the island of Rhodes had been conquered by Moslems, the new ruler of the island wished to rebuild the walls of the city, which had been damaged in previous wars. Several ruined buildings were near the fortress, and stone from these buildings was used to repair the walls at the end of the fifteenth century, or the beginning of the sixteenth.

While working on the fortress, the Moslems uncovered the ruins of a beautiful church. Several icons, most of them badly damaged, were found on the floor. One icon, of Saint Phanourius, looked as if it had been painted that very day. The local bishop, whose name was Nilus, was called to see the icon. It said, "Saint Phanourius."

The saint is depicted as a young soldier holding a cross in his right hand. On the upper part of the cross is a lighted taper. Twelve scenes from his life are shown around the border of the icon. These scenes show him being questioned by an official, being beaten with stones by soldiers, stretched out on the ground while soldiers whip him, then having his sides raked with iron hooks. He is also shown locked up in prison, standing before the official again, being burned with candles, tied to a rack, thrown to the wild animals, and being crushed by a large rock. The remaining scenes depict him standing before idols holding burning coals in his hands, while a demon stands by lamenting his defeat by the saint, and finally, the saint stands in the midst of a fire with his arms raised in prayer.

These scenes clearly revealed that the saint was a martyr. Bishop Nilus sent representatives to the Moslem ruler, asking that he be permitted to restore the church. Permission was denied, so the bishop went to Constantinople and there he obtained a decree allowing him to rebuild the church.