

Orthodox Contact

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Prayer and its importance in the life of the Faithful

DO YOU WANT TO CONVERSE WITH THE LORD? SIMPLY PRAY

Prayer above all is hunger for holiness. The heart that does not converse with the Lord in prayer withers away. It becomes like a cut-off branch: dry and good for nothing save fire. That is exactly what Jesus said to His disciples: “If anyone does not abide in Me he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6). Our spiritual journey is a long one; in fact our whole life is not enough to achieve what we are set to do. We must know exactly what is required of us. We must ask ourselves, Are we on the right track? Are we progressing everyday towards the goal? Or perhaps we have not started yet; maybe we have taken a few steps and stopped. In reality what is required from us is not only to be faithful believers in Christ, but more importantly to be holy in Him. **“But as He who called you is Holy, you also be holy in all your conduct”**(1 Pet 1: 15). Yes, we are called to this life of holiness without which we cannot see God. **“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which you will not see the Lord”** (Heb 12:14). The holiness that St Paul talks about is not the end of the journey either; we must continue to grow in it in order to become perfect. **“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”** (Matt 5: 48). So in order to be perfect we must start by being holy.

Now in order to understand holiness we must discern that holiness has two poles: God and the world. Its source, its pivot and its content is **God**; but its point of contact, the place into which it is born, where it develops and also where it is expressed in terms of Christ’s salvation is the world. Christ died for this world in order to save it from the **tyranny of Satan** because it has fallen into slavery to him. Seeing this world as a pole of holiness has two aspects: vision of the world as God willed it, as He loves it; and at the same time an

asceticism that requires us to disengage ourselves from the world and free the world from the grip of **Satan**.

Now in order to free the world, which we are part of, from Satan we have to be holy and to be holy we have to be prayerful. To pray is to converse with our heavenly Father who is hidden, but reveals Himself in the love that He has for each one of us. God’s love makes it possible for us to approach Him and to be in communion with Him in spite of our sinfulness. As members of His body the Church, we are called to participate in His glory, to escape from the corruption that is in the world and “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).

We all know what happens in our inmost selves, how evil gets a foothold and develops in our minds and hearts. We also feel our powerlessness, yet in order to be powerful we must be prayerful. Prayer gives expression to our striving towards communion with God, it is a form of worship and a means available to us for overcoming the evil that lodges in us. In this sense prayer is like a special line that carries man’s cry for help to God, we can cry from the heart “Lord have mercy” the moment we notice evil stealing into our consciousness. However, two questions confront us:

ARE WE ABLE TO DO IT? ARE WE WILLING TO DO IT?

Jesus gave us the answer for the first question: “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 5:15). So first of all we have to turn to Christ. We have to arm ourselves with the sword of the Spirit—with the strengthening Word of God. Only then we are able to defend ourselves against evil and achieve victory.

Are we willing to pray? Do we want to ask in order to receive? Do we want to seek in order to find? Do we want to knock in order that the door might be opened for us? All of the above can be achieved if we are serious about our faith and salvation, and therefore serious about prayer. The Lord’s exhortation to prayer is very clear: “Watch and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man”(Lk 21:36). Prayer requires purposeful effort to the very end; and we have a real reason for speaking of it as a struggle. Yet we must always remember that we are not alone in our struggle. The Spirit of Truth—the Comforter—is with us, guiding us and strengthening us. Countless numbers of Christians have already walked the same path as the apostles did. The Church has preserved their experiences and offers them to us as an aid, as a guide, so we can set out praying with confidence. As we set on such a blessed task we must explore the form, the way the place and the time that we should be praying. Firstly, if we look at the tradition of the Church we know that there are two types of prayers: liturgical and private (individual). There is also the intercessory prayer and unceasing prayer using what is known as the Jesus Prayer.

Liturgical prayers represent the work of the Lord being done by the faithful, the people of God. They are also called collective prayers since, when we say them we have come together to pray and participate in the sacraments of the Church. Amongst the sacraments the Divine Liturgy is the most frequently attended. In it the people of God gather every

Sunday to pray, to give thanks and to receive Holy Communion through which they become brothers and sisters in Christ, the people of God and His heirs. That is why the priest says after communion: “O God save your people and bless your inheritance.”

PRIVATE or INDIVIDUAL PRAYERS

First of all, regularity is the prime condition for private prayer. A specific time of the day should be set aside. Morning and evening are natural times to pray. What words do we use? Every member of the Church should have a copy of the Church’s prayer book. But in addition to using the prayer book we can of course always pray in our own words as well. As members of the one Body of Christ, though we pray by ourselves at home we are never in isolation from the other members of the Body. We should have a specific icon corner where our prayers take place. In our Orthodox tradition, when we move to a new home we call the priest to bless it and sprinkle it with holy water as a sign of consecration. The icons in all the rooms are permanent tokens of this consecration. They are reminders that God is with man in his everyday life. The icons in our prayer corner are windows into the Kingdom of God and a bond with its members. They remind us also that our homes are small churches in the suburbs where prayers and devotions are offered to God. Our Children should be exposed to regular prayer. The very early years are immensely important for a child’s spiritual development within the home. It would be a very good practice for the whole family to gather in the front of the icon corner to start the day and to end it with prayer.

Reference to prayers in the Old and New Testaments are innumerable. The Lord’s Prayer in the New Testament is the most important of all and the most used. It is at the core of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus taught and called everyone to be part of the Kingdom. The Lord’s Prayer is the acknowledgement of God’s Fatherhood, and our being His children. It is His saving providence for us that we must accept.

In prayer we encounter Christ when we pray in His name. I said earlier that we must immediately try to destroy with prayer all evil thoughts and fantasies that attempt to enter our consciousness. Related to this teaching is the tradition of the Jesus Prayer. This prayer is a treasure of early Christianity, which has been preserved by the Orthodox Church and which in recent years has drawn the attention of the whole of Christendom.

WHAT IS THE JESUS PRAYER?

The Jesus Prayer is basically the continuous invocation of Jesus’s name, if one takes it seriously it benefits the soul and the heart. It is also called the Prayer of the Heart. Jesus Himself stressed on praying in His name when He comforted His disciples: “Whatever you ask in my name I will do it that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.... Truly, truly I say to you if you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in My name. Until now you have not asked anything in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (Jn 14: 13- 14; 16:23-24).

Praying in the name of Jesus Christ has been a source of joy to all generations; it is the privilege of every Christian. The Jesus Prayer is a great gift that come to us from the Holy Fathers throughout the centuries, but like any gift it must be opened and used to be really appreciated. This gift is given not only to the Church as a whole but to each faithful under

the guidance of a spiritual father, to be used and to become a part of our life in order that our joy may be full. Just as God became man. Just as His holiness was present in the flesh in our midst—living, acting and saving—so too now through the mystery of the Incarnation the Church participate in eternity, in the holiness of God, and at the same time also in the salvation of the world. The holiness of the Church must find its place in the world in an act of crucified love, in an active and living presence. But essentially it is the holiness, the presence of God that we should manifest in the world. This is our vocation, this is what we are. If we are not this, we are outside the mystery that we pretend to express and in which we pretend to be a part.

May the word of God strengthen us in order to be part of the mystery. May the Holy Spirit find His dwelling in our hearts giving us the everlasting joy in Him “who created us for Himself and our hearts will find no rest until they rest in Him” (St Augustine) AMEN.

By Fr Nabil

The Way the Truth and the Life

Homily on the chrismation of ANTONIO PAULINO CAGNONI and CLAIR REDHEAD (Sunday, 05/09/2004).

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

Dear Antonio Paulino, my spiritual son, and Clair, my spiritual daughter.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

When you were babies or young children you were baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity (the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit). This baptism is accepted by our Church, and it will not be repeated again. For you have been buried with Christ in baptism and raised to Life as He was, in the understanding of our Church. His death was once and for all and He will never die again. Therefore someone who is baptized in Him (in the Name of the Holy Trinity) may not be baptized again.

Today you have come for new reasons: you are seeking Holy Chrismation and then Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church. For you know that Holy Communion only be given to true Orthodox Christians.

You have achieved high theological education, and you know what you are

doing. We met many times—hours and hours, day after day—and we are now sure that your only aim is the Orthodox life in the Orthodox Church. You have both finally and completely left your former church in order to join the Orthodox Church, in which you found the truth. The truth incarnate is Christ Himself. In Him only can you know the truth, and in Him only you can be saved. He is the source of truth, and He is the Eternal Truth, which men have been called to follow in their own lives.

The Salvation that Christ granted to us through His Crucifixion and Resurrection is continued in the Church. The Church is Christ's Body extended into the ages, to continue saving the world in the Holy Spirit. There is no Church without Christ, and no Christ outside the Church, because the Church is His Body, and He is the head of the Church. Saint Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, said, "Outside the Church there is no salvation." And so, outside the Church you cannot understand the Holy Scriptures correctly and well. No one is allowed to add or omit anything from the truth, which is Christ Himself. The heretics did not reject the whole truth; they did not refuse Christ, but they did not accept Him entirely. The Church rejected them as heretics, not because she lacked love for men, but, on the contrary, because of excessive love for them and for their salvation. She must remain honest and loyal to the Truth and a sincere keeper of the truth; for the foundation of our faith is one, not more than one, and because outside the Church there is no salvation. The Church cannot compromise or sacrifice the truth. She cannot compromise or sacrifice the Orthodox faith for pleasing heretics, because she will lose the truth as her identity.

Therefore, we must proclaim the Truth of God in our lives. Orthodoxy is more than a theory of truth about the Holy Trinity in our life. Orthodoxy is more than a theory of truth about the universe. It is more than teachings written down on paper, but it is a path along which you journey in this life, in the deepest and richest sense. It is scarcely possible to begin the journey in this western society without guidance from others. Yet what you have learned about Orthodoxy in your theological studies will not be yours unless you live it. Then you will verify for yourselves what you have been taught.

On behalf of the Orthodox Church, His Eminence Metropolitan Paul Saliba, your spiritual Father Fr Dimitri Baroudi and myself the unworthy priest, I wish you both a most holy, successful, and fruitful journey through the grace of God and His blessing. Amen.

Father John Abdel-Karim

Saint Paul's Church, Brisbane

My Mission in Australia

(by Jeremy Davis)

Two years ago I had no inkling that today I would be in Melbourne, Australia. I was then a student at St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York. Through the generosity of Metropolitan PHILIP (Saliba) I had come to the seminary to study in preparation for ordination in the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America.

In December 2002, however, God changed my plans. James Jabbour, a young Antiochian man from Sydney, visited the seminary for several weeks. He had come to New York for an internship related to his medical studies, but he lived on the seminary campus: worshipping, eating meals and socializing with us. He and I became acquainted; and during one conversation he suggested (quite out of the blue): "You should come to Australia to help us for a year." He asked me if he could contact Metropolitan PAUL (Antiochian Archdiocese of Australia and New Zealand) regarding the idea, and I said, "Sure." Met. PAUL gave his blessing and suggested that the North American Archdiocese might assist with funding. James wrote to Met. PHILIP requesting funds and delivered the letter personally. Providentially, Charles Ajalat (an American Antiochian philanthropist) was meeting with the Metropolitan that day. Mr. Ajalat enthusiastically supported James's proposal and challenged Met. PHILIP to match pledges. The two agreed. In less than one month we had come from initial concept to approved and funded mission. I am always mystified by the workings of the hand of God!

Metropolitan PAUL has asked me to work with the youth of his Australian parishes. This broad category of young people (spanning ages 0-30+) are united in their being more integrated into Australian culture than their elders. Most have been in Australia from birth or since a young age, and English is more familiar to them than Arabic. Religiously they struggle with new challenges that were virtually unknown to their parents. Along with Western culture's many attractions it also has many hidden snares.

New philosophies and ideas challenge beliefs simply taken for granted by generations of Orthodox Christians. A moral quagmire of “free-love” and

Along with challenges, however, the situation of the Orthodox youth in Australia offers a great opportunity: to transfigure their families’ migration into a Christian mission. Orthodox Christianity is a gift of God to all mankind. If the youth continue to grow in the fullness of Orthodox Christianity as they engage Australian culture, Orthodoxy’s saving power to bring life and knowledge will become available to a whole new continent. Today’s Orthodox youth in Australia have the opportunity to inaugurate Australian Orthodoxy, which in coming decades will, by God’s grace, stand beside Antiochian Orthodoxy, Greek Orthodoxy, Russian Orthodoxy, etc., as a bona fide indigenous incarnation of the one Church.

My conversion to Orthodoxy while at university initiated my search for what it means to be an Orthodox Christian in the New World. Must I as an American becoming Orthodox exchange my Jazz albums for Russian folk music? Should I buy a Greek national flag and hang it on my wall? Should I exchange my Anglophonic name for “Porphyrios” or “Ivan”? Since cultural forms always overlay and give expression to the heart of Orthodox Christianity, one must carefully discern between the faith’s essence and the secondary and provisional expressions of that faith. To be authentically Orthodox in the New World we must strive for ever greater union with Christ as he is known to us through Orthodox tradition—a union which will inform every aspect of our lives. Now, the union of an American or Australian with Christ may be expressed differently from that of a Romanian or Syrian, insofar as cultures differ, but the nearer we come to Him the more clearly we will recognize one another as brothers and sisters despite our cultural differences.

I have been blessed to have had a home parish (St. George Cathedral/Wichita, Kansas) that is at the forefront of developing an authentic American Orthodoxy in an Archdiocese that has been pioneering this effort for decades. In America we really have come a long way in a short time. For starters, conversion to Orthodoxy is becoming more and more common. Individuals, families and even entire parishes are becoming convinced of Orthodoxy’s authenticity. People from nonreligious, Protestant and Catholic backgrounds are fleeing to the Church for shelter. Secondly, the Orthodox jurisdictions in America are growing closer to one another as

“just do it” surrounds us, and the youth are lured from the narrow road by the sirens’ song of pleasure.

they become more committed to the heart of Orthodoxy and simultaneously more open to American society. Jurisdictional unity is slowly evolving; and (God willing) we will eventually have a single American Orthodox Church, strengthened by unity in its witness to American society.

Orthodoxy in Australia is just beginning a similar journey. The immigration of Orthodox peoples here is much more recent than in America. Their youth are now voicing the same hopes and concerns that American Orthodox youth voiced in the 1960’s. How will they hold onto their faith in a pluralistic society? Might the Orthodox Church one day shine as a beacon of salvation for all Australians? I hope to fan these sparks which God has kindled, and to share what we have learned through similar struggles in America. Please remember me and the Australian Orthodox youth in your prayers.

Playing with Fire

I am an IT systems analyst, accustomed to surfing the Net, in the process of which I have recently discovered that the so-called “New Age” is really the Old Age, in touch with old pagan and occult practices.

Recently I was living in Atlanta, Georgia for work reasons. During this time I had an unsought, and unexplained, spiritual experience. I later learned that around the same time, a close member of my family also had a similarly strange experience. This led me to investigate their nature.

So I started to look at the Internet and found some very innocent-looking websites, which upon investigation proved to contain a real ‘can of worms’—links into demonic spirituality. The family member who had a similar experience also lent me books on the occult, though I initially did not realise what they were.

I have found in this process that what one may start looking at in innocence

can open a door to evil leading to spiritual oppression. And I found to my dismay that it is far easier to get into the occult than it is to get out of it again. My investigation had rendered me vulnerable. I was disturbed by things I had read on the Web and had a troubling sense of being accessed by other forces. I could no longer go to my bed with the expectation of a sound night's sleep and I began to feel fearful and confused.

It was in this state that I prayed to God to show me the way to a 'true church,' and discovered (again on the Internet) St Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church in East Melbourne. I started to attend, beginning my return from the darkness into the light.

I had been baptised into the Anglican Church in infancy but had not attended for years. My father had taught me to love the Bible as a child and now that I was back in Church I obtained a copy of the Orthodox Study Bible and began to read it avidly.

The clergy of the Orthodox Church heard me out patiently. I also sought help from an Orthodox psychological counselor. I then prepared my first Confession and the prayers of exorcism from the Baptism service were read. The spiritual assault from the demonic realm that had been troubling me lessened, but continued sporadically. It seemed good to all involved for me to be received into the Orthodox Church so that I could receive the sustenance of Holy Communion regularly. I was received through Chrismation, preceded by the prayers for deliverance. I received Holy Communion and was greatly comforted: I realised that what had been troubling me did not like sanctification! I knew the real power and presence of Christ in the sacrament. Praise God!

I am now continuing in the practice of the Faith through active participation in the Church sacraments and services. I also enjoy singing with the Church Choir and studying with MIOCS (The Melbourne Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies) in order to consolidate my knowledge of the Church of which I am now a member. Furthermore, I have found peace and solace living at St Anna's Convent, where I can join in regular prayer sessions. Through these sessions I have learned to practice the Jesus Prayer. The powerful presence of Jesus Christ through His Name proves to be effective in spiritual warfare, against all the 'fiery darts' of the wicked one.

As I do all this, I am so very aware of the challenge facing all of us Christians at this time. My experience has left me vividly awake to the reality of the existence of evil – particularly online. Unfortunately, considerable engine power is now in place to develop and increase the scope and effect of Satan's forces via the Internet.

As Church people we cannot afford to be complacent. We need to be able to live within the Lord's life, to avail ourselves of His protection through the practice of spiritual warfare. We need to be alert to the needs of any who may be guileless and readily led astray through the use of the Internet. Due to the Internet, what is developed in one corner of the globe now has universal availability.

In other words we live with the continual threat of a spiritual terrorism attack and we cannot afford to be asleep in our deck chairs on the beach.

Our church is not just a comfortable club where we assemble to meet our mates - it is a spiritual powerhouse within which our needs can and should be met, and through her ministry we grow in God. Are we standing in Christ's strength, with all the armour He offers, ready for service and in place?

Ephesians 6: 10-18.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for

all the saints.

From Naomi Chapman

Faithful member of St Nicholas
Antiochian Orthodox Parish East Melbourne

Coordinating Contact: Issue for Summer, 2004: deadline for written contributions Dec. 1st. Please send them to Riasaphor Virginia, 14, Mihil Street, Preston, Vic. 3072. Tel. & Fax. 03 9484 2238.e-mail: virginiahutchinson@bigpond.com

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