

## PSALM 138 (139)

**For the End. David's. A Psalm of Zacharias in the Dispersion.**

(from [http://www.orthodox.net/services/pro-life-psalms.html#\\_Toc318706526](http://www.orthodox.net/services/pro-life-psalms.html#_Toc318706526))

1 O Lord, Thou hast proved me and Thou knowest me; Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising. 2 Thou hast discerned my thoughts from afar; my path and my lot hast Thou traced out, 3 And hast foreseen all my ways, for there is no guile in my tongue. 4 Behold, Lord, Thou knowest all things, the last and the first; Thou hast fashioned me and hast laid Thy hand upon me. 5 Thy knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is mighty, I cannot attain unto it. 6 Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? And from Thy presence whither shall I flee? 7 If I go up into heaven, Thou art there; if I go down into hades, Thou art present there. 8 If I take up my wings toward the dawn, and make mine abode in the uttermost parts of the sea, 9 Even there shall Thy hand guide me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. 10 And I said: Surely darkness shall tread me down, and the night shall be turned into light in my delight. 11 For darkness will not be darkness with Thee, and night shall be bright as the day; as is the darkness thereof, even so shall the light thereof be. 12 For Thou hast possessed my reins; O Lord, Thou hast holpen me from my mother's womb. 13 I will confess Thee, for awesomely art Thou wondrous, marvelous are Thy works, and my soul knoweth it right well. 14 My bone is not hid from Thee, which Thou madest in secret; nor my substance in the nethermost parts of the earth. 15 My being while it was still unformed Thine eyes did see, and in Thy book shall all men be written; day by day they are formed, when as yet there be none of them. 16 But to me, exceedingly honourable are Thy friends, O Lord; their principalities are made exceeding strong. 17 I will count them, and they shall be multiplied more than the sand; I awoke and I am still with Thee. 18 Surely Thou wilt slay the sinners, O God. Ye men of blood, depart from me. 19 For Thou wilt say concerning their thoughts that in vain shall they take Thy cities. 20 As for them that hate Thee, O Lord, have I not hated them? And because of Thine enemies have I not pined away? 21 With perfect hatred have I hated them; they are reckoned enemies with me. 22 Prove me, O God, and know my heart; examine me and know my paths. 23 And see if the way of iniquity be in me, and guide me in the way everlasting.

## Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 6

"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. 5 "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. 9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. 14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. 16 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you,

they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

### **Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 15**

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 2 “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” 3 He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ 5 But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”— 6 then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. 7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8 ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ” 10 When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, “Hear and understand: 11 Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.” 12 Then His disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” 13 But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14 Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” 15 Then Peter answered and said to Him, “Explain this parable to us.” 16 So Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding? 17 Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? 18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20 These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” 21 Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried

out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." 23 But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." 24 But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." 27 And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. 29 Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there. 30 Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. 31 So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel. 32 Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." 33 Then His disciples said to Him, "Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?" 34 Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few little fish." 35 So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. 36 And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. 37 So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. 38 Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat, and came to the region of Magdala.

### **Epistle of St. Jude**

1 Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: 2 Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. 3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. 5 But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; 7 as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. 8 Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. 9 Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" 10 But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. 11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. 12 These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; 13 raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. 14 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, 15 to execute judgment on all,

to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”  
16 These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. 17 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: 18 how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. 19 These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.  
22 And on some have compassion, making a distinction; 23 but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. 24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,  
25 To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.

### **Apostle and Evangelist Luke Commemorated on October 18**

(From <https://oca.org/saints/lives/2016/10/18/102993-apostle-and-evangelist-luke>)

The Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke, was a native of Syrian Antioch, a companion of the holy Apostle Paul (Phil.1:24, 2 Tim. 4:10-11), and a physician enlightened in the Greek medical arts. Hearing about Christ, Luke arrived in Palestine and fervently accepted the preaching of salvation from the Lord Himself. As one of the Seventy Apostles, St Luke was sent by the Lord with the others to preach the Kingdom of Heaven during the Savior's earthly life (Luke 10:1-3). After the Resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Sts Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus.

Luke accompanied St Paul on his second missionary journey, and from that time they were inseparable. When Paul's coworkers had forsaken him, only Luke remained to assist him in his ministry (2 Tim. 4:10-11). After the martyric death of the First-Ranked Apostles Peter and Paul, St Luke left Rome to preach in Achaia, Libya, Egypt and the Thebaid. He ended his life by suffering martyrdom in the city of Thebes.

Tradition credits St Luke with painting the first icons of the Mother of God. "Let the grace of Him Who was born of Me and My mercy be with these Icons," said the All-Pure Virgin after seeing the icons. St Luke also painted icons of the First-Ranked Apostles Peter and Paul. St Luke's Gospel was written in the years 62-63 at Rome, under the guidance of the Apostle Paul. In the preliminary verses (1:1-3), St Luke precisely sets forth the purpose of his work. He proposes to record, in chronological order, everything known by Christians about Jesus Christ and His teachings. By doing this, he provided a firmer historical basis for Christian teaching (1:4). He carefully investigated the facts, and made generous use of the oral tradition of the Church and of what the All-Pure Virgin Mary Herself had told him (2:19, 51).

In St Luke's Gospel, the message of the salvation made possible by the Lord Jesus Christ, and the preaching of the Gospel, are of primary importance.

St Luke also wrote the Acts of the Holy Apostles at Rome around 62-63 A.D. The Book of Acts, which is a continuation of the four Gospels, speaks about the works and the fruits of the holy Apostles after the Ascension of the Savior. At the center of the narrative is the Council of the holy Apostles at Jerusalem in the year 51, a Church event of great significance, which resulted in the separation of Christianity from Judaism and its independent dissemination into the world (Acts 15:6-29). The theological focus of the Book of Acts is the coming of the Holy Spirit, Who will guide the Church "into all truth" John 16:13) until the Second Coming of Christ.

The holy relics of St Luke were taken from Constantinople and brought to Padua, Italy at some point in history. Perhaps this was during the infamous Crusade of 1204. In 1992, Metropolitan Hieronymus (Jerome) of Thebes requested the Roman Catholic bishop in Thebes to obtain a portion of St Luke's relics for the saint's empty sepulchre in the Orthodox cathedral in Thebes.

The Roman Catholic bishop Antonio Mattiazzo of Padua, noting that Orthodox pilgrims came to Padua to venerate the relics while many Catholics did not even know that the relics were there, appointed a committee to investigate the relics in Padua, and the skull of St Luke in the Catholic Cathedral of St Vico in Prague.

The skeleton was determined to be that of an elderly man of strong build. In 2001, a tooth found in the coffin was judged to be consistent with the DNA of Syrians living near the area of Antioch dating from 72-416 A.D. The skull in Prague perfectly fit the neck bone of the skeleton. The tooth found in the coffin in Padua was also found to fit the jawbone of the skull.

Bishop Mattiazzo sent a rib from the relics to Metropolitan Hieronymus to be venerated in St Luke's original tomb in the Orthodox cathedral at Thebes.

### **St. Paul the Apostle**

**Commemorated on June 29**

**(from "The Prologue from Ochrid" of St. Nikolai Velimirovich at)**

**<http://98.131.104.126/prolog/my.html?month=June&day=29&Go.x=13&Go.y=12>**)

Paul was born in Tarsus of the tribe of Benjamin. At first, he was called Saul, studied under Gamaliel, was a Pharisee and a persecutor of Christianity. He was miraculously converted to the Christian Faith by the Lord Himself Who appeared to him on the road to Damascus. He was baptized by the Apostle Ananias, was called Paul and numbered in the service of the great apostles. With a fiery zeal, Paul preached the Gospel everywhere from the borders of Arabia to Spain, among the Jews and among the Gentiles. He received the title "Apostle to the Gentiles." As horrible as his sufferings were, so much more was his super human patience. Throughout all the years of his preaching Paul, from day to day, hung as one on a weak thread between life and death. Since he fulfilled all days and nights with labor and suffering for Christ, since he organized the Church in many places and since he attained such a degree of perfection he was able to say: "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Paul was beheaded in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero at the same time as the Apostle Peter.

### **Righteous Juliana of Lazarevo, Murom**

**Commemorated on January 2**

**(from <https://oca.org/saints/lives/2016/01/02/100010-righteous-juliana-of-lazarevo-murom>)**

Righteous Juliana of Lazarevo and Murom presents an astonishing example of a self-denying Russian Christian woman. She was the daughter of the nobleman Justin Nediurev. From her early years she lived devoutly, kept the fasts strictly and set aside much time for prayer. Early on having become orphaned, she was given over into the care of relatives, who did not take to her and laughed at her. Juliana bore everything with patience and without complaint. Her love for people was expressed by nursing the sick and sewing clothing for the poor.

The pious and virtuous life of the maiden attracted the attention of the Lazarevo village owner, Yurii Osoryin, who soon married her. The husband's parents loved their gentle daughter-in-law and left the running of the household in her hands. Domestic concerns did not disrupt the spiritual efforts of Juliana. She always found time for prayer and she was always prepared to feed the orphaned and clothe the poor. During a harsh famine, she herself remained without food, having given away her last morsel to someone begging. When an epidemic started after the famine, Juliana devoted herself completely to the nursing of the sick.

Righteous Juliana had six sons and a daughter. After the death of two of her sons she decided to withdraw to a monastery, but her husband persuaded her to remain in the world, and to continue to raise their children. On the testimony of Juliana's son, Kallistrat Osoryin, who wrote her Life, at this time she became all the more demanding towards herself: she intensified her fasting and prayer, slept not more than two hours at night, and then laying her head upon a board.

Upon the death of her husband, Juliana distributed to the poor her portion of the inheritance. Living in extreme poverty, she was none the less vivacious, cordial, and in everything she thanked the Lord. The saint was vouchsafed a visitation by St Nicholas the Wonderworker and guidance by the Mother of God in church. When Righteous Juliana fell asleep in the Lord, she was then buried beside her husband at the church of St Lazarus. Here also her daughter, the schemanun Theodosia was buried. In 1614 the relics of Righteous Juliana were uncovered, exuding a fragrant myrrh, from which many received healing.

**Excerpts from "The Ladder of Divine Ascent" by St. John Climacus**  
(from <https://orthodoxchristianparenting.wordpress.com/2015/03/18/lenten-learning-st-john-climacus/>)

“The memory of insults is the residue of anger. It keeps sins alive, hates justice, ruins virtue, poisons the heart, rots the mind, defeats concentration, paralyzes prayer, puts love at a distance, and is a nail driven into the soul. If anyone has appeased his anger, he has already suppressed the memory of insults, while as long as the mother is alive the son persists. In order to appease the anger, love is necessary.” \*\*\* “Let your prayer be completely simple. For both the publican and the prodigal son were reconciled to God by a single phrase.” \*\*\* “It is impossible, someone says, impossible to spend the present day devoutly unless we regard it as the last of our whole life. And it is truly astonishing how even the pagans have said something of the sort, since they define philosophy as meditation on death. This is the sixth step. He who has mounted it will never sin again. Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin [Ecclesiasticus/Wisdom of Sirach 7:36].” \*\*\* “If you want to overcome the spirit of slander, blame not the person who falls, but the demon that prompted them to sin.” \*\*\* “Do not say, after spending a long time in prayer, that nothing has been gained; for you have already gained something. And what higher good is there than to cling to the Lord and persevere in unceasing union with Him?” \*\*\* “The first stage of this tranquility consists in silencing the lips when the heart is excited. The second, in silencing the mind when the soul is still excited. The goal is a perfect peacefulness even in the middle of the raging storm.” \*\*\* “Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly, the angel who guards you will honour your patience.” \*\*\* “When our praisers, or rather our seducers, begin to praise us, let us briefly call to mind the multitude of our sins, and we shall find ourselves unworthy of what is said or done in our honor.”

**Venerating Icons: What are Icons, and Why are They Important?**  
(edited from [https://bethebee.goarch.org/home/-/asset\\_publisher/gAnk4cdUihei/content/venerating-icons?inheritRedirect=false](https://bethebee.goarch.org/home/-/asset_publisher/gAnk4cdUihei/content/venerating-icons?inheritRedirect=false))

. . . . What exactly is an icon? And what are they for? Icons are a very important part of the prayer life of Orthodox Christians. We can see them in church buildings and homes around the world. According to tradition, St. Luke the Evangelist painted the very first icon. And as we'll see in a bit, we even see images being used in the context of worship, as far back as the Old Testament. Just like the Bible expresses the faith in words, icons express the faith in colors and images. Icons are visible reminders of the reality of God and His saints, and are a great way to focus our minds and our hearts on the Lord as we pray.

Though icons have been used in the Church since the very beginning, . . . [people] have still disagreed about them. For instance in the 8th century, the Roman emperor started a period of Iconoclasm, which means fighting against images. Countless icons were taken down and destroyed by Iconoclasts, those who opposed the use of icons. A few, like Panagia Portaitissa, survived because they were taken to places of safety, like Mount Athos. If you ever got to the city of Thessaloniki in Greece, you can visit the church of Haghia Sophia, which was built around the time of Iconoclasm. To this day, the building is unique, because there aren't any icons on the walls.

Even to this day, some . . . reject the use of icons. Just like the iconoclasts did. Just like in the past, people usually oppose the use of icons because they fear that icons are an example of idolatry. Which is the worship of things rather than God. And idolatry is very clearly prohibited in the Bible. Yet as St. John of Damascus points out in his excellent "Treatise on the Divine Images," God gave us this instruction not to prohibit images, but to prohibit idolatry. To keep us from worshipping something false, instead of the one true God. That's why when God told Moses to build a Tabernacle, to contain the Ten Commandments, He told Moses to adorn the Ark of the Covenant with carved Cherubim. Solomon later included carved Cherubim when he built the first temple. And that's why God told Moses to build a bronze serpent when the Jews were wandering in the wilderness after the exodus. So the people could look upon it, and be healed. Because images aren't the problem, the problem is worshipping something false.

There's an important difference between worship, on the one hand, and veneration, on the other. We worship God, and God alone, because God is the creator of all, the Lord of all, Our Father. Yet we can venerate or honor people and things, because of their closeness to God. For instance, we venerate the cross and the Bible, we treat them with honor and even kiss them. We venerate the saints, men and women who are alive in Christ, connected to Christ, a part of Christ, as members of His Body. And we venerate icons of Christ and of His saints.

In 787 AD the Church assembled in the city of Nicaea for the 7th Ecumenical Council, where the Church declared that icons are a very important part of our prayer life and our worship. And that we should venerate icons, because the honor we pass to icons passes back to the saints they depict, and ultimately, back to Christ. Because images aren't the problem, in fact images are a reminder that Christ, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity took on flesh and became human. Before Christ we couldn't depict God in an icon because . . . God is invisible. The Son of God, like we celebrate every Christmas, was born of the Virgin Mary and became human. He walked with us, ate with us, cried with us. We could see Him, hear Him, touch Him. The Son of God took on flesh so He could save us, body and soul. And that's why we're able to depict Him in an icon. As Saint John of Damascus wrote, "I do not worship matter, I worship the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing matter, through which my salvation was worked."

The opponents of icons were right to oppose idolatry, just as Orthodox Christians continue to oppose it to this day. Idolatry is false worship, but true worship focuses on God. And icons are an important part of that. We worship God who created the heavens and the earth, both things visible and invisible. We worship God, who became human for our salvation, who became physical for so He could save all creation. We worship God, and literally we receive Him physically every time we receive Holy Communion in the Divine Liturgy. We worship God, not just with our minds and our souls, but with our bodies as well. And we're reminded of that every time we venerate an icon. So let's be the bee and venerate icons, so we can worship God. Be the bee and live Orthodoxy.

**From Fr. Thomas Hopko, "The Orthodox Faith: An Elementary Handbook on the Orthodox Church--Volume 3: Church History--Fifth Century"**

## Inner Struggles

In the first decades of the fifth century, when Alexandria and Constantinople were continuing their feud over their respective positions in the Church and in the Empire, Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople (r. 428–431), made known his refusal to honor Mary, Christ's mother, with the traditional title of Theotokos. He claimed that the one born from Mary is not the Logos Himself, but merely the "man" in whom the eternal Logos of God came to dwell. Thus, Mary could not properly be called "Theotokos," which means "the one who gave birth to God," but only either "Christotokos," meaning "the one who gave birth to Christ," or "anthropotokos," meaning "the one who gave birth to a man"—i.e., the man Jesus, to whom the Logos was joined.

Saint Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria (r. 412–444), with the active support of Pope Celestine of Rome, forcefully rejected the teaching of Nestorius, claiming that it is indeed proper to call Mary Theotokos since the one born from her "according to the flesh" is none other than the divine Logos of God. The only-begotten Son of God was "begotten of the Father before all ages"; and He it was "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man" (The Nicene Creed). Thus, the Son of God and the Son of Mary is one and the same Son.

## Third Ecumenical Council

Nestorius and his followers refused to yield to Saint Cyril's appeals for repentance. Thus, in 431, in the city of Ephesus, a Church council was summoned by Emperor Theodosius II (r. 408–450) to resolve the issue. On the first day, Nestorius, supported by only ten bishops, still refused to change his mind, so he was condemned by Saint Cyril and his group of 57 bishops, and by Bishop Memnon of Ephesus and his group of 52 bishops. This decision, however, was not accepted by Bishop John of Antioch and his group of 30 bishops, who arrived at the council four days after it started—having been delayed in their travels. They maintained their support for Nestorius, who had previously been an outstanding preacher in Antioch.

The controversy was not resolved until two years later, when Bishop John and Saint Cyril signed the Formulary of Peace of 433, in which the condemnation of Nestorius was reaffirmed, but with language that more clearly honored the typically Antiochian emphasis on the full reality of Christ's humanity. The Council of 431 (along with the Formulary of Peace of 433) subsequently became known as the Third Ecumenical Council.

**"The Most Beautiful Service of My Life" from "Everyday Saints and Other Stories" by Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov). Translation by Julian Henry Lowenfeld. Pokrov Publications, 2012. (from <http://everyday-saints.com/diveevo.htm>)**

During soviet times there perhaps was no more horrific symbol of the devastation of the Russian Orthodox Church by Communist rule than Diveyevo Monastery.

The monastery had been founded by St. Seraphim of Sarov, yet it had been turned into a frightful ruin. The gutted remains of what was left towered over the pathetic Soviet "regional center" into which the once glorious and flourishing town of Diveyevo had been transformed. The authorities didn't bother destroying the monastery completely. Instead they deliberately left the ruin standing there as a memorial of their triumph, as a trophy of their perpetual enslavement of the Church. By the Holy Gates of the monastery, they put up a monument to the leader of the Revolution—Lenin—whose arm was raised to the sky in mocking greeting of anyone who came to the devastated monastery.

Everything about the scene said convincingly that there would never be any return to the past. The prophecies of St. Seraphim about the grand destiny of Diveyevo Monastery, which had been so beloved in all of Russian Orthodoxy, seemed to have been forever profaned and destroyed.

Nowhere in Diveyevo, neither within the town, nor in its surroundings, was there a single working church, not even the memory of a church—all had been utterly destroyed. And in the once renowned Monastery of Sarov, and in the towns around it, instead of a holy site, now one of the most top-secret and heavily guarded constructions of the Soviet Union was housed instead—a project known as Arzamas-16. Here nuclear weapons were made.

If any priests ever made a secret pilgrimage to Diveyevo, they hid their intentions, dressing in secular clothes. It was to no avail. The secret police would find them out anyway. In the year when I first visited the devastated monastery, two monks who came to pray and express their reverence for the holy relics of Diveyevo were arrested, cruelly beaten by the police, and then kept imprisoned for fifteen days in a jail cell, sleeping on a frozen floor.

That winter, Archimandrite Boniface, a wonderful and extremely kind monk from the famous Holy Trinity Monastery, asked me to accompany him on a trip to Diveyevo. According to our ecclesiastical rules, a priest who sets out on a journey with the Sacred Gifts of the Eucharist—the Body and Blood of Christ—must always be accompanied by someone, so as to help defend and protect the great Holy Gifts in the event of any emergency that might arise. And Father Boniface was on his way to Diveyevo in order to give Communion to a few old nuns still living in the area around the monastery—some of the last few still living in our time of the thousand who once inhabited the pre-Revolutionary convent.

To get there we had to take a train through Nizhny Novgorod, then called Gorky, and next drive by car to Diveyevo. In the train all night long Archimandrite Boniface could not sleep. Hung around his neck by a silken cord was a small sacred receptacle for the Holy Gifts. I was sleeping on a neighboring bunk, but from time to time would wake up at the sound of the wheels and see Father Boniface seated at table reading the New Testament in the dim night light of our train wagon.

We made it to Nizhny Novgorod, which was his home town, and stayed in his parents' house. Father Boniface gave me a seriously transformative book to read—the first volume of the works of Holy Hierarch Ignatius Brianchaninov—and all night long I couldn't sleep a wink, as I first discovered for myself that amazing Christian writer.

Next morning we set off for Diveyevo. We faced a drive of about eighty kilometers. Father Boniface tried to dress in a way so that no one would ever suspect him to be a priest: carefully tucking away the pleats and folds of his cassock beneath his coat, and hiding away his very long beard into his thick scarf and upturned collar.

It was already getting dark by the time we reached our destination. Looking out of our car window through the snowflakes whirling in a February storm, I was distressed to see the tall watchtower, wrecked dome, and ruined shells of the desecrated churches. Despite this mournful scene, I was still struck by the unusual power and secret energy of this great monastery. What's more, I had a sense that the Monastery of Diveyevo was not yet dead, but still alive with some ineffable spiritual life, well past the comprehension of this uncaring material world.

And so it turned out to be! In a ramshackle little hut on the outskirts of Diveyevo I saw something that I could have never imagined even in my most radiant dreams. I saw alive the Church Radiant, invincible and indefatigable, youthful and joyful in the consciousness of its God, our Shepherd and Savior. It was then that I was struck by a great verse of the apostle Paul: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth" (Philippians 4:13)!

And what's more, the most beautiful and unforgettable church service in my life took place then—not in some magnificent grand cathedral, not in some glorious ancient church hallowed with age, but in a nondescript building in the community center of Diveyevo, on Number 16, Lesnaya Street. It was not even a church at all, but an old bathhouse somehow vaguely converted into communal housing.

When I first arrived with Father Boniface, I saw a dingy little room crowded by about a dozen elderly women, the youngest of whom could not have been younger than eighty, while the oldest

were definitely more than 100 years old. All of them were dressed in simple old country maids' clothes and wearing peasant kerchiefs. None of them was wearing a habit or any kind of monastic or ecclesiastical clothing. Of course, these weren't nuns—just simple old ladies; that's what anyone would have thought, including me, if I had not known that these old women were in fact some of the most courageous modern-day confessors of our faith, true heroines who had suffered tortures and decades in prisons and concentration camps for their beliefs. And yet despite all their ordeals, their spiritual loyalty and unshakable faith in God had only grown.

I was amazed to see how before my very eyes the venerable Father Boniface, an archimandrite and rector of the churches in the Patriarchal quarters of the Holy Trinity Monastery, a respected and well-known father confessor in Moscow, got down on his knees before blessing these old women, and bowed low to the floor! To be honest, I could not believe my eyes. But after lifting himself up from the floor, this priest fervently began to bless those old women who were hobbling up awkwardly to him, each in their turn. It was clear how truly delighted they were by his visit.

As Father Boniface and the old women were exchanging greetings, I looked around. Icons in ancient ceremonial frames, dimly lit by flickering lamps, were hung on the walls. One of them particularly attracted my attention. It was a large and beautiful icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov. The elder's face exuded such kindness and warmth that I could not tear my eyes away from him. As I found out later, that image had been painted right before the Revolution for the new Cathedral of Diveyevo, which they had never even had time to consecrate, and which only by miracle had been spared from complete desecration.

Meanwhile I started to prepare myself for the Vigil service. It took my breath away as the nuns started to take out of their secret hiding places and set down on the crudely put together wooden table genuine artifacts belonging to St. Seraphim himself. Here was the stole of his ecclesiastical vestment; there was his heavy iron cross on thick chains, worn for the mortification of the flesh, a leather glove, and the old-fashioned cast iron pot in which the saint had cooked his food. After the Revolution when the monastery was pillaged and destroyed, these holy relics had been passed down from sister to sister by the nuns of the Monastery of Diveyevo.

Having put on his vestments, Father Boniface gave the priest's pronouncement that begins the Vigil service. The nuns immediately perked up and began to sing. What a divine and utterly amazing choir they were!

"In the sixth tone! Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me!" sang out one of the voices quavering with age; it was the canonarch nun, who was now 102 years old. She had been imprisoned and exiled for over twenty years. And all those wonderful sisters sang out together with her: "Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me! Harken unto me, O Lord!"

There is no way to capture the sublimity of this service in words. Candles flickered, and the limitlessly kind and wise face of St. Seraphim looked down from his icon upon us . . . These incredible nuns sang the entire service virtually by heart. Only very rarely did one of them glance at the thick old books, for which they needed to use not just eyeglasses but gigantic magnifying glasses with wooden handles. They had risked death or punishment saying this service in concentration camps and prisons and places of exile. They said it even now after all their sufferings, here in Diveyevo, settling into their wretched hovels on the outskirts of the town. For them it was nothing unusual, and yet for me I could scarcely understand whether I was in Heaven or on Earth.

These aged nuns were possessed of such incredible spiritual strength, such prayer, such courage, such modesty, goodness, and love, and they were full of such faith, that it was then at that wonderful service that I understood that they with their faith would triumph over everything—over our godless government despite all its power, over the faithlessness of this world, and over death itself, of which they had absolutely no fear.