

*Go therefore and make disciples of
all nations
Mt 28:19*



*Allez, faites de toutes les nations
des disciples
Mt 28:19*

CANADIAN ORTHODOX MESSENGER

*Founded by the blessed Archbishop Arseny (Chahovtsov), 1866 – 1945
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Protodeacon ordained to priesthood in Montréal

On 9 January 2004, at The Sign of the Theotokos Church in Montréal, Bishop Seraphim ordained Protodeacon Cyprian (Dr Robert) Hutcheon to the Holy Priesthood. Immediately after the liturgy, His Grace announced that because Fr Cyprian had long been a protodeacon, his status is now that of Archpriest. The joy in the church upon this occasion was palpable, so beloved is Fr Cyprian in the parish he has long faithfully served.

The Very Reverend Cyprian (Robert) Hutcheon is a paediatrician with many years' experience in hospital palliative care administration, a holder of a PhD in Orthodox theology, and a deacon at The Sign since 1984. He is Bishop Seraphim's chosen nominee for consideration by the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America for the position of Auxilliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of Canada.



From l to r, row 1: Vasili Cremanzidis, Brent Mansour, Romanos Hadjinicolaou, Jonah Nimijean. Row 2, l to r: Priest Daniel Giubega, Archpriest Cyprian Hutcheon, Higoumène Irénée (Rochon), Bishop Seraphim, Archpriest John Tkachuk, Priest Gregory Nimijean, H-moine Basile (Paradis), Priest Mark Korban. Row 3, l to r: Justin Solak, Jason Settles, Subdeacon Leo Martin, H-diacre Amvrosi (Mlodzik), Deacon Pau Ruiz-Gomar, Subdeacon Philippe Martin, and Subdeacon Karl Joachim Mansour.

Letter of thanks to His Grace for nomination process

6 November 2004

To : The Right Reverend Seraphim, Bishop of Ottawa and Canada

cc to : The Most Blessed Herman, Archbishop of Washington and Metropolitan of All America and Canada
Protopresbyter Robert Kondratick, Chancellor of the OCA

Beloved Vladyka,

Now that you have announced the final conclusion of the Canadian phase of discovering an appropriate candidate for Auxiliary Bishop for our vast Archdiocese, we on your Archdiocesan Council write to express our appreciation—our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude—for the dignity of the process you mandated. From this experience, we have all of us together emerged with confidence that the Holy Spirit has been operating in our midst, and thanks to your guidance, all parties have felt their worth respected, and we are free from any possible doubt.

In the first place, while we understood clearly from the outset that the choice of candidate was yours and yours alone to make, we thank you for the respect you have shown to us—and indeed, to the voice and hearts of many others of your faithful—by beginning with a wide process of consultation. In this way, you could be certain that as you proceeded to make your decision, you knew “the mind of the Archdiocese” and you also knew that whoever was chosen would command the full confidence of all. This was encouraging for us, but far more than encouraging, it was respectful—respectful of whatever wisdom God’s grace has granted to His faithful and also respectful of the yearning of our souls to share with you the heavy burden of this choice. The result of this action was that we discovered within ourselves a corresponding respect, for the validity of the process and for the awesomeness of such a choice. This was leadership at its very finest.

But even more—far more—we wish to thank you for the greater leadership of allowing the final choice of name to be left in the hands of God, through the divinely inspired means of casting lots. Since the thinking and judging phase had produced equally excellent names, each of whom would function equally as an outstanding Auxiliary Bishop and each of whom was equally admired and beloved by the people, the only appropriate—the only possible—methodology was to recognize that the final choice would have to represent the untrammelled intention of God. You knew, and by this process you taught us, that the roots of casting lots are both Scriptural and traditional in Orthodoxy ; in proceeding this way, you gave us a clear sign that the greatest strength is found in the humility of the surrender of our will to God’s will. All of us together learned from this experience the beauty of divine risk, the joy of free openness to the Holy Spirit. Thus, you did show yet greater leadership, by acknowledging that the only true leader is God Himself.

Finally, we cannot end this letter of thanks without extending the thanks to all the candidates. Because incorporating a consultative stage in your decision-making resulted in a very long process, they had to endure a long time of personal uncertainty, not knowing what the future held in store for them, not free to make any decisions they might wish for themselves, and subject to open scrutiny by many in a way that most of us never experience. Words cannot say how edifying this endurance of all of them has been for us under these circumstances, since all of them bore the time with great responsibility, with willingness to be the servant of all, with perfect grace and humility. And now that your choice is announced, they edify yet again ; by the love and respect with which they are supporting your chosen candidate while returning to their own appropriate duties, they give a role model to us all, and they show clearly that all of them share fully in the leadership to which you call all of us on your Archdiocesan Council.

Eis polla eti, despota!

With love and obedience,

The Archdiocesan Council, Archdiocese of Canada, OCA

An encouragement to everyone in the Archdiocese:

A wonderful gift !

We in the Archdiocese of Canada are being given a wonderful gift from God : the gift of an auxiliary bishop. As you will already know, Protodeacon Cyprian Hutcheon has been chosen as the episcopal nominee, and as part of the process of offering his name to the Holy Synod for their consideration of him for the position of auxiliary bishop for Canada, the Archdiocese is raising funds. We love him and need to support him!

The parish of St Herman of Alaska in Langley BC is immensely thankful to God for this gift, and cannot but respond with gifts of our own. Like the rest of the diocese, we are asking our individual members to donate. But even before the parish appeal was made, our Parish Council decided to give \$1000.

So much, we guess, for not letting the right hand know what the left hand is doing when it gives! We mention this

not to blow a trumpet before us as we give (see Mt 6:2), but rather to encourage our sister parishes in the Archdiocese. In particular, we would like to issue a loving challenge to the other parishes: can you match this gift with one from your own budget? (Remember, this does not replace soliciting individual donations.)

In sending out this challenge, we are aware that it is not ultimately about money. It is about unity in the diocesan family. We are all being given the opportunity to unite around this gift of another bishop that God is giving us, and to realize once again that, whether we live in the east or the west, we are one family in Christ. The gift of an auxiliary bishop reminds us of this. That is the real reason for sending out this challenge—to make a connection with our sister parishes, and to manifest our unity in this tangible way.—*the Parish Council of St Herman of Alaska Church, Langley BC*

Historic day for iconography in Canada

On the afternoon of October 2, 2004, the voices of children playing rang out amidst the tranquil hills and trees of the Monastery of All Saints of North America in Dewdney BC. Upwards of fifty guests from several parishes—as well as pilgrims from three countries—were on hand to welcome the distinguished Canadian iconographer, Heiko Schlieper, and to celebrate the opening of an icon museum and centre for iconography that will bear his name.

After officially opening the museum, His Eminence Archbishop Lazar, Retired Bishop of Ottawa, welcomed the curator of the new centre, David J. Goa, who in turn introduced Mr Schlieper. Having begun studying iconography in the early 1950s, Mr Schlieper left his academic career at McGill University in 1978 to dedicate himself to iconography full-time. He took a few moments to describe what he called the “three levels” of the iconographer’s task : striving for mastery of the technical skills, continual study of the tradition, and a spiritual pilgrimage. It is hoped that the Heiko Schlieper Icon Museum will become a resource and inspiration to the iconographers throughout North America.

As visitors toured the light-filled conference room, which was filled also with over fifty holy icons written by Mr Schlieper, conversations could be heard in English, Romanian, Russian, Arabic, and Greek. The afternoon was rounded out by an informative lecture by Archbishop Lazar entitled, “The Icon as Scripture,” and, as the sun began to set, many of the faithful were present for Great Vespers in the monastery’s chapel. The whole day was a powerful witness to the universal language of the Orthodox Christian faith . . . the great tradition of iconography. —*Matthew Francis, St Herman of Alaska Sobor, Edmonton*



Shown from l to r are Archbishop Lazar, Iconographer Heiko Schlieper, and Curator David J. Goa.

Georgia, Finland, Russia

21 November – 13 December 2004

Once again, the Lord gave the blessing that I visit the Church in Georgia (the name of the country is *Sakartvelo* in Georgian). Along with the Metropolitan's secretary, Archpriest David Brum of the OCA chancery, I was representing Metropolitan Herman, the Holy Synod, and the Orthodox Church in America at the consecration of the new Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tblisi on 23 November. This was on a day celebrating the memory of the Great Martyr George (cousin of St Nino), and of the first anniversary of the so-called Rose Revolution. Represented with delegations of various sizes were twelve of the fifteen Autocephalous Orthodox Churches. Only Jerusalem, Bulgaria and Czechia-Slovakia were unable to be present.

The event of the consecration itself was momentous for Georgia, and for the Orthodox Church in general. This very poor country, suffering for a long time from various political divisions and trouble with neighbours, and also from great unemployment and poverty, has perceived this great event as a sign of the unity of the people of Georgia—past, present and future. It was related at a later event that the beginning of each millennium for Georgia has been marked by great and significant events, followed by a significant period for the people.

In the first, there was the arrival of the Robe of Christ at Mtskheta, the mission of the Apostle Andrew in the west, and the mission, later, of St Nino, which brought about the christianising of the nation. The second millennium was marked by a great building of temples, adding to the many from the fifth and sixth centuries, by the Holy King David the Builder. The third is marked by the renewed independence of Georgia, and the erecting of this new cathedral. This cathedral, and its coming adjacent buildings, as described by Patriarch Ilya II, will serve as a focus for the renewal of the Orthodox Church in Georgia, along with the natural attendant promotion of study of theology, history,

and the arts, which will refresh the traditional cultural support of the Christian way of life.

This building, four years in construction, and still to be completely finished, stands on a prominent hill overlooking the city, the new presidential palace, and as well the patriarchate, the famous Sioni Cathedral, and the nearby sixth-century basilica named for the Icon of Christ Not-Made-By-Hands. Construction was and is being enabled not only by support from the government and private businessmen, but significantly also by free-will offerings of the faithful in general throughout Georgia. As a result, there is one place in the country where a large number may gather.

The interior can hold fifteen thousand, and on this occasion the cathedral was surrounded also on the outside by throngs of believers. Even after the seventy years of communist destruction, Georgians are still among

the earth's most hospitable people, so very much according to the Gospel. During the Divine Liturgy, there arrived in the cathedral a white dove, an unusual creature, and an unusual event. The dove, sitting on the arm of a student at first, was taken by an archbishop to the altar, to the Patriarch. It went passively. Patriarch Ilya received it, and placed it on the top back of his chair.



Patriarch Ilya (l) with Bishop Seraphim. Note the white dove perched on the Patriarch's throne, at his right shoulder.

There it remained for the whole of the liturgy, standing still and watching everything. It did not flinch at the passing by of many servers and clergy. When the Patriarch was at the chair, it sat with the Patriarch, and stood with him. It was, of course, taken as a divine sign.

Because this visit was to be followed soon by the celebrations in Moscow and the official visit of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, to Finland, and because Archbishop Nikoloz of Akhalkalaki and Kumurdo had invited me to prolong my stay, I was given the blessing to do so, and as a result was able to visit more of the country, and to meet more of the faithful.

First, with Archbishop Nikoloz, there was a visit again in the Kakheti region to the monastery at Bodbe, the veneration of the relics of St Nino there, a visit to the healing

spring of St Nino nearby, and also a visit to the faithful of the nearby village of Tibani. The next day, we travelled to central Georgia, to Archbishop Nikoloz's diocese, high on a mountain plateau, near the Turkish and Armenian borders; and as a result of a resettlement of peoples in recent decades, it now has a significant population of Armenians. This plateau is mostly treeless (because of a huge fire set by conquerors a thousand years ago), and reminds one of southern Alberta. Its climate is similar, and there was heavy snow.

The cathedral in Kumurdo is presently a ruin, but services have already been held. People pray there regularly, without a priest, and hope for future restoration—but 10th-century buildings are not cheap to restore, and it means a long wait. There are various small monastic communities in the villages, a characteristic in all Georgia. These are serving as seeds for rebuilding the normal Christian life of the people, and are already bearing some fruit. The many dioceses of Georgia are small in area, generally poor, very mission-minded, and family-spirited. It was explained to me by an interpreter that the priests are very close to their people, as a family, and the bishops are likewise close. The people press near to take a blessing either as we do, or simply by touching or being touched on the head.

In the course of visiting this diocese, which included the village of Ninotsminda, I was taken along almost the whole route of the "Way of St Nino," the route she followed from the lake nearby the village, following the river rising from the lake, all the way to Mtskheta. We could not approach the spring-fed lake because of snow drifts that inhibited even four-by-fours. Only some tractors could manage.

On the Friday evening, again in Tblisi, Patriarch Ilya organised a reflective gathering of the remaining representatives, and many lay persons. There was a prolonged consideration by His Holiness and the other speakers of the historical significance of this event. It was punctuated by singing, poetry, and instrumental numbers. It reminded me of various similar and ancient reflective gatherings, including some represented in Viking sagas. I met also in Tblisi three young American persons who are students of a St Vladimir's professor, who have lived for some months in Georgia, and studied Georgian singing. They sang as Georgians, and when they spoke with me, I thought by their deportment that they were fair-skinned Georgians. There is also an American monk living in Georgia, hoping in due time to build a bridge in North America to Georgian monastic life.

Second, I was taken to west Georgia, to the Samagreló region, to Bishop Gerasim's diocese, Zugdidi, a mere thirty kilometres from the Black Sea, a few kilometres from Avkhazia, and within easy sight of the western Caucasus. It was chilly and rainy, but this is where palms and other subtropical plants grow, including oranges, lemons, grapefruit, and tea. Georgia, the size of South Carolina, with all its mountains and plateaus, has all but the most extreme

of the earth's climates. We served together at the Kortsheli monastery, and visited the reconstruction of the Zugdidi Cathedral. Next to the cathedral is a museum in which are one of the robes of the Theotokos, a bone of the Forerunner, and part of an arm of St Marina. That these holy relics are in a museum tells of the last eighty years, but it also speaks of the antiquity of the Church itself. It is hoped that the Church may soon enough reclaim these holy relics. We also visited the Tsaishi Cathedral, which was the seat of the first Georgian Patriarchs. It will have been not far from here, it must be remembered, that St John Chrysostom died on his way into exile, and it was in this area that the Apostle Andrew made the first missionary ventures.

Archbishop Nikoloz, head of the Missions Department, has extended an offer to us, and to the Church in the USA. If at least one priest and some young people can manage to get themselves to Georgia, and are prepared to stay up to a month with sleeping bags and the like, he is prepared to take them around and help them to experience this ancient Christian culture, and, by using multimedia also, to see how mission is being undertaken there. In addition is the possibility of visiting ancient Georgian churches in nearby Turkey. Such an experience could be of great value in helping us here in Canada with our own missionary labours by adding a different perspective.

I left for Russia to join a group of OCA pilgrims already there. St Petersburg, Russia is not the same city I visited exactly twenty-four years ago, on just the same days (a sign of God's Providence, I am sure). There is a similar renewal of daily life as seen in Moscow, but most significant is the openness of the people. In 1980, everyone was afraid of everyone else, no one trusted anyone. Now, there is ready and joyful conversation, and open expression of opinions.

After visiting three historic and important churches, I was taken separately by the mother of our Toronto subdeacon Alexei Vassiouchkine to the St Seraphim Cemetery Church in a northern suburb. Here is the burial place and official monument of the multitudes that perished during the siege in WW II. I visited this Church in 1980, and visiting it now, still active, was moving. Moreso was that fact that it was on exactly the same day as 24 years ago, and I met the same pastor, Archpriest Vasili Ermakov, who had served then. A classmate of Patriarch Alexei II, he spent time in both German prison camps and soviet gulags, never bowing the neck, never abandoning Christ, and is, like others, a living confessor of the faith. He is full of life and joy, and surrounded with a staff of several young priests who are similarly joyful and energetic.

Very heavy traffic and some communication problems kept me from visiting Kronstadt this time, but I did visit the shrine and venerate the tomb of St Xenia of St

continued, next page . . .

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Petersburg in the Smolensk Cemetery. We saw there the church which she helped to build. We visited also the St John of Rila Monastery, and venerated the tomb of St John of Kronstadt there. Our Church has helped this monastery in particular in many practical ways since its reopening. After a quick tour of the Hermitage Museum, the group of pilgrims left for Moscow.

The visit to Moscow included a tour of the Kremlin, and a visit to the Trinity-St Sergius Monastery for the pilgrims, including venerating the relics of St Sergius, of St Metropolitan Innocent, and of others.

Then Divine Liturgy was served at the Dormition Cathedral in the Kremlin with His Holiness, Patriarch Alexei II and His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, and we venerated the relics of St Patriarch Peter. Afterwards, there was a moleben at the Donskoy Monastery, and veneration of the Don Ikon of the Theotokos, and the relics of our St Patriarch Tikhon. Vigil was at the Novospassky Monastery, the former guardian of the Romanov dynasty's more precious goods. There was liturgy also at the Epiphany Cathedral, where we venerated St Patriarch Alexei, and the bishops afterwards took tea with Patriarch Alexei at his rural home. We venerated St Patriarch Philaret at Christ the Saviour Cathedral, and also St Daniel of Moscow and St Panteleimon at St Daniel's Monastery. It was underscored time and again that there are still alive many confessors for Christ, both clergy and lay, who suffered not just a little in the course of their lives under official atheism. One encounters them often, and it gives one a humbling perspective. Of course, secularism in the wake of communism is a big challenge in all post-soviet places, as it is for us in the midst of a capitalist society, for communism and capitalism are both different faces of the same coin. We have very similar home-mission challenges.

The main purpose, of course, for our time in Russia was the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the OCA's representation church, St Catherine-in-the-Fields on Bolshaya Ordinka Street. Vigil was served on 6 December by His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, Archbishop Nathaniel, Bishop Seraphim, Bishop Nikon, and eight priests, including Protopresbyter Robert Kondratich, Archimandrite Zacchæus, Archpriest Leonid Kishkovsky, Archpriest Constantine White, and Archpriest Oleg Kirillov. On the Feast of St Catherine, 7 December, Patriarch Alexei II concelebrated with Metropolitan Herman and the previously-mentioned bishops, and as well Archbishop Arseny, Bishop Niphon of the Antiochian Patriarchate, and Bishop Sergei. After the dinner, there was a visit to the Danilovsky Monastery, and veneration of the relics of Sts Panteleimon, Daniel of Moscow, and Alexander Nevsky.

The second purpose of the voyage was to make Metropolitan Herman's official visit to the Church of

Finland. This began with a stop on 8 December in Helsinki. We were met by Archbishop Leo, and my classmate Archpriest Rauno Pietarinen, now the rector of the seminary. There we visited the Lutheran Archbishop and the American Ambassador before going on to Joensuu, and to New Valamo Monastery in Heinavesi County. Our Father Vladimir (Lysak) is still there, working in the brotherhood, and painting many icons. He has introduced the Finns to cheesecake, very successfully! The next day, there was a visit to the seminary and the theological faculty in Joensuu, and Metropolitan Herman gave an official address. Then we visited the local parish of St Nicholas. Others returned to Valamo while I visited the Finnish Youth Association, and some old friends.

The next day began with visiting around in Valamo Holy Transfiguration Monastery, and then we left to visit Lintula's Holy Trinity Monastery, where Abbess Marina and other sisters remember the visit of our Mother Magdalen and Anna Belzile; and their priest of 22 years, Archimandrite Herman, remembered our days together in Valamo 24 years ago. The next day began with liturgy in the monastery, at which I once again sang in the choir. This was followed by a visit to Kuopio, to the Cathedral of St Nicholas and Archbishop Leo's residence and offices. In the evening, we left for Helsinki. On Sunday, we served with the Archbishop at the famous and picturesque Dormition Cathedral on the waterfront, and I visited old friends. On Monday, we attended Divine Liturgy in Espoo, visited the speaker of the Finnish parliament, and departed for New York, and then I returned to Ottawa.

These over three weeks were very, very full for me, with many emotional experiences, and at the same time many important responsibilities to fulfil on behalf of our Church. Our international relationships are crucially important, and I, and/or the others who go, must be careful to strengthen the bonds of love and fraternity among the various Churches visited. This can only be done on the basis of person-to-person contacts. Letters will not suffice. This has been demonstrated to me repeatedly in these travels. It is a hard thing economically and personally to travel, but the face-to-face contact between believers, members of this giant family of the Orthodox Church, is absolutely needed. As it is in any family or association, so it is in the Church at large: if we do not see each other regularly, interpersonal problems arise, because as humans we easily fall prey to temptations of fear. It is the renewal of our mutual love in personal contact that keeps all inter-Church relationships as stable as possible. And so, pray for me as long as I have this work to do. And I pray also for you as I travel, and venerate the holy things, and encounter holy people. May we continue to strengthen each other in Christ's love through our mutual service. May the Saviour protect us all !

+Seraphim

How can I help the Church, And why should I?

If we really are Christians, if we truly love God, and if we accept what the Holy Scriptures teach us, then we have to understand that everything we have, no matter how we acquired it, is from God, and it is an expression of His blessing. We are care-takers with Him of His creatures, of His creation. Therefore, in fact, we owe Him everything, not just a token. And if we are able to remember this fundamental lesson, we will be able to understand the first and most important answer to the question : How do we use what He has given us? When the Saviour talked about the various persons who were given their various talents (amounts of money in the parable), some invested the talents and increased them, but one hid the talent until it had to be repaid. The Saviour was speaking about us. How do we use what He has given us? He will be asking us this question at our end. Are we generous like Him, or are we selfish misers ?

It is important for us Orthodox Christians to understand that the Church is not some human-made institution apart from us. The Church is us. As the Apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 12, the Church is the Body of Christ, with many members. Christ Himself is the Head, and we all, clergy and lay persons, constitute the rest. We each have our God-given talents and abilities, but we are all members, together, of this Body, the Church. When we were baptised, we sang: “As many as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ.” We became members of Him. It is true that, because of human weaknesses, the Church sometimes can seem to be some kind of institution, but the Lord, the Head, does not allow it to become one—or if it should sometimes happen, He does not let it stay so. The Lord gives us each our particular talents and gifts, so that we can help the other members of the Body, so that the Body can be strong and healthy. This is how it is, similar to a human body. If one part is unwell, or uncooperative, or paralysed, or infected, or even cancerous, it affects the whole body badly. Sometimes the rest of the body can help, heal or repair the unwell parts, sometimes not. Sometimes, and especially with human beings, the unwell part does not accept help or healing. This has its effect on the whole body. So, because we love Christ, we grow to love each other in Him, and we mutually support each other.

Again, from the earliest times, the Lord has shown us that if we have anything at all, it is because of His blessing. He is the creator of all, and He placed us here to work together with Him in His creation, to look after it, and even improve it in some ways. Everything comes from Him. To acknowledge this, with His direction, it has been customary from the time of Adam and Eve to return to Him the *first fruits*, the first and best portion of what we have brought from the earth. We see this still, for instance, on

the feasts of Transfiguration and Dormition, as we offer fruits and herbs. If we are not raising living things, but have some other material, or money, we can offer the first portion of that. And it has always been understood, in the same love of God, that another portion must be given to the poor and needy. This is the Christian way. How big these portions are is not specific. Some say it should be 1/10th, but it can be more, or less.

If we could each of us give this, or even only 5% of our income monthly, every parish would be in good condition, able not only to pay its bills, but also to do a lot of good for those in need. And caring for the poor has always been a Christian activity. Muslims make much of giving alms, especially in Ramadan, and as break-offs from Christianity, they seem to do this well. But Christians have been expected always to make this giving to the needy a part of our recognition that God has blessed us richly, and this must be shared with those in need. The Lord’s Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man applies to each of us, too. One of the prayers at marriages asks God to supply the couple with plenty, so that they will have enough to share with those in need. God has given freely, so we must do likewise. Orthodox Christian hospitality of the table is a clear demonstration of this.

The point of all this is that God gives to us liberally. If we give freely, if we support the Church as suggested here, if we give freely to the needy, then God blesses us with more to give. He pours out His blessings abundantly, and enables us to give more—not just money, but also time, work, materials, and talents and abilities. If we do not give, but hold back, we are like Ananias and Sapphira in the Acts of the Apostles. We begin to wither and die inside. We dry up. We resist God’s blessing and we become unproductive, because without Him we can do nothing.

There is nothing wrong with contributing and getting a tax credit for it, because this has the effect of enabling us to give even more. It is always best, however, that we give in secret—that is, that we do not tell others that we have given, or what we have given, so that we don’t run the risk of falling into the temptation of pride.—*Mike Andruff, Holy Resurrection Sobor, Vancouver*

Changed your address? Or does it need correcting in some way? Please inform our OCA publication, *The Orthodox Church*, by writing to: Lydia Ludermann, PO Box 675, Syosset, NY 11791-0675 or phone her at 516.922.0550. Returned mail from wrong addresses can cost the OCA hundreds of dollars per month — money easily directed to other good causes! Your information can make a difference, cutting superfluous costs. And while you’re doing that, please send the same to our Bishop Seraphim’s office: P.O. Box 179, Spencerville ON K0E-1X0. We need to be diligent to keep information up to date and avoid unnecessary costs for our Archdiocese, too.

Mudpuddles

Having just come from the Mystery of Confession, and feeling cleansed, renewed, and strengthened, I am wishing that Great Lent could begin today. Today, by the grace of God, I am ready for the battle to begin, having put on His armour of light.

Confession doesn't always have this same effect on me. Mostly, the thought of this Holy Mystery of our Faith strikes terror in my heart. Where to begin? How specific do I need to get? How can I possibly *say those* things out loud? This is sooooo embarrassing!

Intellectually, I know that the Lord knows it all anyway. Therefore, one would think that it shouldn't be such a big deal, making one's confession. Recounting my misdeeds out loud in time and space, on the other hand, makes it all glaringly obvious that I have fallen short of the glory of God. Sin is ever so much easier to live with if I:

- refuse to acknowledge it;
- ignore it;
- pretend it did not happen;
- justify it;
- tell myself that I'm a good person, so it's ok : I'm trying my best and that's all that matters;
- luxuriate in it (oops! I'm not ever supposed to do that, so to admit that it's possible to enjoy sin is a huge confession in itself);
- am not even aware of it.

Confessing one's sins out loud, while heeding the injunction given at the beginning of confession ("Beware, lest you depart unhealed"), doesn't allow sin to remain hidden. This is a very good thing too, because it's the hidden splinter that festers and becomes a full-blown systemic infection. Expressing our choice to turn away from sin, and affirming our desire to "become the best possible person that God wants me to be" is what the Mystery of Confession is all about.

There is an oft-told allegory of monks, on their way to salvation. The secret of their journey is in their persistence: they fall down, pick themselves up, and continue on their way, over and over again.

Well, I don't know about those monks, but I have a habit of falling (with quite a splash, mind you) into the mudpuddle of sin. It's not that I'm not aware of this proclivity, and therefore am not on my guard. On the contrary, I do keep watch and pray, especially about this one particular temptation. My hipwaders are on, my mackintosh buttoned to the neck, my sou'wester tied

under my chin. I'm not going to be sullied by this mudpuddle again, nosiree!

However, from time to time the Enemy of Our Salvation sends the mother of all mudpuddles my way, cloaked deceptively in innocuous, innocent, everyday life. Or, perhaps I've undone the mackintosh a little (complacency : "gee, it's really dry on this stretch of the road") ; dared to bare my toes in sandals (pride : "I've made it this far unscathed, so I must have conquered *that* sin") ; left my sou'wester at home (laziness : "can't be bothered, because it's such a nice day anyway").

When I was preparing to be received into the Orthodox Church, the priest warned me about sins repeating themselves. I, in my pride and arrogance, thought that the whole point of repentance and confession was that they wouldn't repeat. How could they, if true repentance, true *metanoia*, the 180-degree turn away from the sin, had taken place?

Today, some twenty-odd years later, I confessed the same old, same old thing. The struggle, the battle to be lifted from the quicksand hidden in my particular mudpuddle, is not accomplished without divine intervention, witnessed and prayed for by the confessor. In this, as in all things, we are saved through community. The priest hearing the confession is the witness for the whole community. Our sins, committed in isolation, affect the whole world—and our repentance likewise. We cannot be isolated in our confession ("I'll just go for a walk and tell God all by myself") because we are healed through communion, in all senses of the word. The act of confession in particular has special power to bring us farther along the road to salvation.

Today I asked the priest if I could exchange this particular mudpuddle for another. I am so very weary of dealing with this one over and over again. I feel that because this temptation is ever with me, that I am somehow lacking; that I am either doing something I ought not to do, or am not doing something that I should do, in order to be rid of it.

Unfortunately, there is no magic formula for me to follow. Just as some people have an affinity for country music and others for Mozart and Bach, so too do we each have our own particular type of mudpuddle to fall into. No doubt there are other sins that we commit, "willingly or unwillingly, in knowledge or in ignorance," but there will always be our own particular stumbling block. Our fathers and mothers of the Church became saints through their persistent efforts, often with major struggles against one temptation in particular. We are certainly not alone, nor unique, in this.

continued on p. 10 . . .

‘Humble yourselves In the sight of the Lord And He will lift you up’ (Jas 4:10)

I’m sitting at my computer—an urban Aboriginal, an academic, and a monk in the world—in the midst of the Little Lent of Advent, writing on the merits of Holy Confession for Great Lent. The *Messenger* editor asked me for a few words after a mutual discussion in which I inadvertently disclosed that Confession is one of my favorite sacraments. She asked me to explain why, so I will offer just the beginning of an explanation.

Because I am an Aboriginal, I have always been aware that confession is an integral part of the spirituality of my ancestral community. Confession finds its way into sweat lodges, healing circles, talking circles, visits with elders and healers, among other contexts. It is a practice that predates our contact with the Jesuit missionaries. The practice is not laden with notions of asceticism (as being an ascetical exercise), nor of legalism (as appeasement or legal restitution for breaking an external taboo or law). The purpose of the practice is two-fold: (1) a reality check regarding one’s condition of spirit and one’s primary relationships (with the Creator, with one’s family, with one’s friends); and (2) as a humble reminder that we do not become sick alone, and that our spiritual sickness affects our ability to function in right/healthy relationships.

Because I am also an academic, I am very aware of the reality that since the advent of Freudianism and all the other isms which have followed in its wake, most of the West has rejected the Judeo-Catholic notions of sin as disobedience, prideful rebellion, transgression of law and inherited guilt, for a kinder (albeit often mundane) notion of *sickness*.

Because I am both an Aboriginal and an Orthodox monk, I find such contemporary notions highly unsatisfactory. I say mundane, because such notions of sickness often do not involve two important concepts. The first is the concept of accepting responsibility for one’s sickly condition, that is, the owning up to the *sick* contribution I make in causing me to be *ill*, which needs to be addressed. The second involves the concept of the responsibility I have for failing to make my relationships holy, that is, the realization that my sickness involves the toxic contamination of my peers, and that my sickness prevents an influx of Divine Energies through lack of reverence for them. Pop-psychology is ego-focused, concerning itself with easing notions of guilt, yet in the process diminishing the sense of responsibility — to God, and to others. As a result, no authentic conversion — no real change of being — transpires.

I find that familiarity with the mystical traditions of Orthodoxy heightens my appreciation for the sacrament of Confession, and re-sets it more in accordance with the Gospels. True Psychology fosters True Faith. Jesus the Christ is primarily the Divine Physician (*cf* Lk 6:31). He comes to save, to radically heal, not to condemn (Jn 3:17). How could Jesus do otherwise? As the newly canonized St Maria (Skobtsova) wrote,

It is impossible even to say that God punishes humans by suffering, but rather evil itself punishes through some irreversible law of its inner logic. In an epistle of the Apostle Paul this is thus expressed: ‘Just as God Himself is not tempted by evil, so also He tempts no one.’ [In actuality, Jas 1:13.]

Jesus comes to transform and then deify the personality; as well as to set right and sanctify relationships (*cf* Lk 4:18-19). Confession is one of those avenues through which the Holy Spirit brings about the healing will of God as *Father* (*cf* Mt 6:9), and achieved by Jesus as *Divine Friend* (*cf* Jn 15:14-15) and *Prince of Peace* (Is 9:5). Hence the Russian introduction to Confession begins with the phrase, “Take care, therefore, lest having come to a physician, you depart unhealed.”

Confession is a means of unburdening (*cf* Mt 11:28), which cannot be sufficiently done alone. Why? (1) Because all of us are spiritually blind. There are aspects of our personalities, our hidden motives, which remain elusive even to the more spiritually advanced. St Silouan said that “If a man does not open his heart to his confessor, his will shall be a crooked path that leads not to salvation.” (2) Because spiritual growth requires humility. As the eldress Mother Gavrilia (Papayanni) taught, “The spiritually advanced person is the one who arrives at a place of no identity . . .” Spiritual growth requires a deflation of ego (I-ness), a moving away from ego-focus (self-attentiveness), and a willingness to learn and to listen. (3) Because whatever we become and do, because of what we are, is never achieved in isolation. That is, the Body of Christ is always involved, whether we are conscious of such involvement or not. As Archimandrite Sophrony maintained, “We all of us bear in ourselves the fate of all [hu]mankind . . .”

Unlike the Western Churches, the Eastern Churches historically have sanctioned the practice of Confession to any competent confessor (whether priest, monk, nun, or even lay-person), wishing this to be a widely received and enjoyed sacrament. In her collective wisdom, the Eastern Church has reserved the sins of adultery, murder and public apostasy specifically to priests (as the absolution, deemed one of the priestly functions, involves reinstatement to one’s rightful place in the church). The

continued, next page . . .

'Humble yourselves,' continued from page 9:

commentary of the English translation of *The Philokalia* is quite clear:

St Symeon the Studite, who soon became spiritual father to the young Symeon [the New Theologian], was a lay monk, never ordained priest; for the Christian East the ministry of spiritual direction has often been exercised by monks not in holy orders, and also, although less frequently, by nuns and even by non-monastics. St Symeon the New Theologian himself wrote a treatise specifically defending the right of monks who are not priests to 'bind' and 'loose,' that is, to receive confessions and to confer absolution.

This is confirmed, as well, in the scholarly work of Fr John Meyendorff, a past Dean of St Vladimir's Seminary :

Except in cases of 'mortal' sins—murder, apostasy, adultery—followed by formal excommunication, it is nowhere evident that a priest's absolution is necessary to seal the act of repentance. On the contrary, numerous sources describe absolutions given by non-ordained monks, a practice which has survived in Eastern monasteries until our own day.

St James says only, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another that you might be healed." (Jas 5:13) We are reminded, as well, that the Holy Spirit breathes where He wills (*cf* Jn 3:8).

Because of our historic situation now in the west as Orthodox Christians, most of us today normally confess to the parish priest, who stands not as a judge but as a *witness*, for the whole Church community, to our repentance and confession before God. Suffice it to say, the Holy Mystery of Confession demands compassion from any confessor, as the Church wishes that we live now, and forever, in the presence of God in all honesty and spiritual freedom (*cf* Jas 1:25). The guidance and counsel of the one witnessing the confession, sometimes called "spiritual direction," requires that the confessor be not only theologically sound, but also discerning of spirits (*cf* 1 Jn 4:1), and truthful in uncovering the ill-motivations buried beneath the layers of "talk;" and to do so gently when possible, and bluntly when no other recourse is possible. But always, with honesty and charity. "Love covers a multitude of sins" (I Pt 4:8) like a healing balm.

Why would I not find this healing balm one of the greatest of blessings, and thus this Holy Mystery one of my favourite sacraments? In this one sacrament, the life of Christ it brought to bear within me, it re-establishes my relationship with creation, it brings about health and order to the Church, and it honours the wisdom of my ancestors.—*Monk Pierre (Blais), Th.D., Toronto*

Mudpuddles, continued from page 8:

As we make our Lenten beginning, it is important to realize that the journey of Great Lent is not the same as making New Year's resolutions. Nor is it about making a contract with oneself, as Dr Phil would have it. It isn't so much about what we are going to do for the Lord (fast, read edifying books, attend more church services, etc), but rather *what we are going to allow the Saviour to do with us*.

Our calling during Lent is to strive to be as open to the Lord as the Theotokos was at the Annunciation : "Be it done to me according to Your will." This begins with our *wanting* to want do His will, as Fr Thomas Hopko has noted. Let the Potter take His vessel and clean it, smash it, refashion it during the Great Fast. We begin to allow that to happen when we come before the Lord in Confession and allow His grace to work within us.

"Courage, courage, O people of God : for Christ will destroy our enemies, since He is all-powerful." Courage—the willingness to do something even when you are afraid, and which comes when you stop putting yourself first) is needed for honest, complete, no-holds-barred Confession. Don't let yourself, through embarrassment, nerves, or indifference, prevent this Holy Mystery which will bring healing. Abandon yourself to the Lord, and be held securely in the palm of His hand.

Grant that we may all persevere during the Fast, and be granted, by God's grace, to see the Holy Pascha of the Risen Lord!—*Larissa Rodger, Annunciation/St Nicholas Cathedral, Ottawa ON*

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and other missionary labourers
of the Orthodox Church in America.*

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**“Je n’ai pas encore commencé
à faire pénitence”:**

**Le repentir
Chez les pères du désert**

Abbé Chamé disait : Mon père abba Anter m’a dit : “Si grands que soient les péchés que j’ai commis, si je fais pénitence, le Seigneur me pardonnera ; mais si mon frère me demande le pardon et que je ne lui pardonne pas, le Seigneur non plus ne me pardonnera pas.” (Abba 319)

Quand abba Agathon le Grand voyait un frère commettre une faute et que l’envie lui venait de réprimander le frère, il se reprenait lui-même et disait : “Agathon, prends garde de ne pas commettre ce péché.” Et après s’être dit cela, il ne réprimandait pas le frère. (Abba 318)

Une frère qui avait commis un péché fut chassé de l’église par le prêtre. Alors abba Bessarion se leva et sortit avec lui en disant : “Moi aussi, je suis un pécheur.” (Abba 326)

Un jour un frère commit une faute à Scété. Il y eut un conseil et on envoya chercher abba Moïse. Mais il ne voulait pas venir. Le prêtre lui envoya donc dire : “Viens, car tout le monde t’attend.” Alors, s’étant levé, il s’en alla prendre une corbeille percée, la remplit de sable et l’emporta sur son dos. Les autres, sortis à sa rencontre, lui dirent : “Qu’est-ce que ceci, Père?” L’ancien leur dit : “Mes péchés coulent à flot derrière moi et je ne les vois pas, et je viens aujourd’hui pour juger des fautes d’autrui.” Ayant entendu cette parole, ils ne dirent rien au frère mais lui pardonnèrent. (Abba 327)

On disait d’abba Sisoès que, lorsqu’il fut près de mourir, les Pères étant assis auprès de lui, son visage brilla comme le soleil. Et il leur dit : “Voici qu’abba Antoine vient.” Et après un petit moment il dit : “Voici que le coeur des prophètes vient.” Et de nouveau son visage brilla avec plus d’éclat et il dit : “Voici que le choeur des apôtres vient.” Et son visage redoubla encore d’éclat et voici qu’il paraissait parler avec quelques interlocuteurs. Et les anciens lui demandèrent : “Avec qui parles-tu, Père?” Il dit : “Voici que les anges viennent me prendre, et je supplie qu’on me laisse faire un peu pénitence.” Les anciens lui dirent : “Tu n’a pas besoin de faire pénitence, Père.” Mais il leur dit : “En vérité, je

n’ai pas conscience d’avoir commencé.” Et tous reconnurent qu’il était parfait. Et à nouveau son visage redevint subitement comme le soleil, et tous furent saisis de crainte. (Abba 375)

Un frère dit à abba Poemen : “Si je tombe dans une faute lamentable, ma pensée me ronge et me reproche: Pourquoi es-tu tombé?” L’ancien lui dit : “À l’heure même où l’homme succombe à l’égarement, s’il dit : J’ai péché, aussitôt c’est fini.” (Abba 201)

Abba Poemen a dit encore : Il y a une voix qui crie à l’homme jusqu’à son dernier souffle : “Aujourd’hui, convertie-toi.” (Abba 202)

Abba Poemen a dit que le bienheureux abba Antoine disait : Le grand exploit de l’homme, c’est de prendre sur lui sa faute devant le Seigneur et de s’attendre à la tentation jusqu’au dernier souffle. (Abba 207)

On demanda à un ancien : “Comment l’âme acquiert-elle l’humilité?” Il répondit : “En n’étant attentive qu’à ses propres fautes.” (Abba 209)

Un frère demanda à abba Poemen : “Que dois-je faire pour mes péchés?” L’ancien lui dit : “Qui veut racheter ses péchés, les rachète par les pleurs, et qui veut acquérir les vertus, les acquiert par les pleurs.” (Abba 212)

Un frère demanda à abba Poemen : “Si l’homme tombe dans quelque péché et se convertit, obtiendra-t-il le pardon de Dieu?” L’ancien lui dit : “Assurément Dieu, qui a commandé aux hommes de pardonner, ne le fera-t-il pas lui-même davantage? Il a commandé en effet à Pierre de pardonner jusqu’à soixante-dix-sept fois sept fois” (Abba 215)

On demanda à un ancien : “Que faut-il faire pour être sauvé?” Il tressait des palmes ; sans lever les yeux de son ouvrage, il répondit : “Ce que tu vois là.”(Abba 52)

Un jour abba Dioscore pleurait sur lui-même dans sa cellule, tandis que son disciple se tenait dans une autre cellule. Quand celui-ci vint chez l’ancien, il le trouva donc pleurant et il lui dit : “Père, pourquoi pleures-tu?” L’ancien répondit : “Je pleure mes péchés.” Alors son disciple lui dit : “Mais, Père, tu n’as pas de péchés.” Et l’ancien répondit : “Vraiment, mon enfant, si j’obtenais à voir mes péchés, trois ou quatre autres ne suffiraient pas à les pleurer.” (Abba 311)

à suivre p. 12 . . .

... de p. 11:

Abba Antoine a dit : Quiconque n'a pas été tenté ne pourra entrer dans le royaume des cieux. Il est dit en effet: "Supprime les tentations, et pas un n'est sauvé." (Abba 227)

Abba Jacques a dit : De même qu'une lampe éclaire une chambre obscure, ainsi la crainte de Dieu, quand elle vient dans un coeur d'homme, l'éclaire et lui enseigne toutes les vertus et les commandements de Dieu. (Abba 246)

Abba Poemen a dit : Se jeter en présence de Dieu, ne pas s'estimer soi-même et rejeter derrière soi la volonté propre, sont les instruments de l'âme. (Abba 138)

Un frère dit à abba Théodore : "Dis-moi une sentence, car je suis perdu." Avec effort l'ancien lui dit : "Je suis moi-même en péril, que pourrais-je te dire?" (Abba 185)

Abba Antoine dit : Je vis tous les filets de l'ennemi déployés sur la terre, et je dis en gémissant : Qui donc passe outre ces pièges? Et j'entendis une voix me répondre : l'humilité. (Paroles 16,6)

Un frère dit à abba Antoine : "Prie pour moi. " Le vieillard lui répondit : "Je ne te prendrai pas en pitié, ni Dieu non plus, su toi-même n'y mets pas du tien et ne supplies pas Dieu. " (Paroles 18,15)

On disait d'abba Macaire l'Égyptien que, remontant un jour de Scété avec un chargement de paniers, il s'assit accablé de fatigue et se mit à prier en ces termes : "Mon Dieu, tu sais bien que je n'en puis plus!" Aussitôt il se trouva au fleuve. (Paroles 99, 12)

Abba Matoès dit : "Autant l'homme s'approche de Dieu, autant il se voit pécheur. En effet, Isaïe le prophète, voyant Dieu, se déclare misérable et impur." (Paroles 108, 2)

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Our father among the saints

St Polycarp of Smyrna

February 23 / March 7 (OS)

There is a peculiar beauty in old champions, strength in their grizzled and worn lines that differs from the beauty of vivacious youth. It is "endurance beauty" that years of testing and trying alone raise up, as we see in St Polycarp of Smyrna. A man of eighty-six years is thrown off the transport carrying him to his martyrdom. He pushes away the pain, and steps boldly forward with the best gait he can muster, eyes on the final goal. Then he declares to his torturers that there is no need to be tied to the soon-to-be-ignited pyre: "Let me be as I am; for He who makes it possible for me to endure the fire will also make it possible for me to remain on the pyre unmoved without the security of nails." *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* is the greatest testament to a life fully lived for God, documented to the last breath.

Polycarp is also important because he is a bridge from the years of the Apostles to the Holy Fathers. History records that he was baptised by the Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian. Ignatius, the second bishop of Antioch, was his friend. While on his way to Rome to be martyred, Ignatius rested along his journey, visiting Polycarp. Later he wrote him a personal letter from Troas that depicts their mutual love, in salutation writing "welcoming your godly mind which is fixed on an immovable rock, I glory exceedingly that I was judged worthy of your blameless face." This letter is in itself very special, as it is the only personal letter of St Ignatius that has come down to us through the ages.

An orphan raised by a believing widow named Callista, Polycarp in his youth once gave away all the provisions of the household to the poor while his mother was away. Thinking that she might not be pleased to find everything gone, by his prayers the goods were replenished just as she returned. He was raised within the secret community of Christians, and ordained by the saintly Bishop Bucolus, who had been appointed to the See of Smyrna by St John the Theologian on one of his missionary voyages. Polycarp was consecrated bishop by those gathered for Bucolus' funeral.

Smyrna (modern Turkish Izmir), where he served, was the second city of the seven churches of the Apocalypse, an active Roman commercial centre and major port on the Aegean Sea, the ancient home of the Greek poet, Homer. The beauty of Smyrna was renowned

with its paved streets, library and stadium that seated twenty thousand.

A gifted leader, Polycarp was responsible for gathering various epistles, including an epistle of St Ignatius. He personally wrote an epistle to the church at Philippi in Macedonia, which has survived. In it he urges them strongly to mutual love and to hatred of heresy. Every line he writes finds its place in corresponding Scripture, as we know it today.

The Asia Minor Churches recognized Polycarp's leadership by choosing him as a representative to settle the date of the Paschal celebration in Rome, no small controversy then. He is also remembered for his battles with the heretic Marcion (who basically preached two Gods, the Good God of the New Testament and the God of the Law), from whom a sect would develop that would last for three hundred years. Bishop Polycarp was unwavering in his struggle against the Marcionite movement. As a supporter of sound doctrine and careful follower of those before him, Polycarp did much to preserve the spirit of the Holy Scriptures, echoing them to an astonishing extent and faithfully transmitting Apostolic doctrine.

It is not surprising that such a one would meet martyrdom. In 167, the persecution of Christians under Marcus Aurelius broke out in Smyrna with full force. Bishop Polycarp was pursued and captured in a farmstead outside of Smyrna. When he heard that his captors had arrived, he descended from the room where he was resting and talked with them. "And they who were present wondered at the vigour of his age and his soundness of body, and that they had had to use so much trouble to capture so old a man." Then he asked that food and drink be given them, and asked if he could go to pray undisturbed, which he did for two hours.

He was taken to Smyrna and pushed off the transport, and his ordeal began in front of the crowd, which was seeking entertainment as well as blood. He was ordered to denounce Christ. He responded: "I have served Him eighty-six years and in no way has He dealt unjustly with me; so how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" When threatened with fire, Polycarp showed no fear whatever, and instead paralleled the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment reserved for the wicked. He was burned on the pyre, after a solemn prayer, proving faithful to the end.

Signs and wonders accompanied his martyrdom. The faithful "later took up his bones, more precious than costly stones and finer than gold," and deposited them in a suitable place. It was also decided to celebrate the "birthday of his martyrdom" (the tradition of the saint's

day) "both in memory of those who have contended in former times and for the exercise and training of those who will do so in the future."

The trail of holy archives relating to St. Polycarp is very interesting :

So then Gaius...transcribed this from these writings of Irenaeus and Isocrates transcribed it in Corinth from the copies of Gaius. I, Pionius, in turn wrote it out from the copies of Isocrates, after a search was made because of a revelation of the holy Polycarp. I gathered it together, now almost worn out with age, that the Lord Jesus Christ might also gather me together with his elect into his heavenly kingdom. To whom be glory with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

St Polycarp's icon depicts a scroll in his hand that reads: "I praise Thee. I bless Thee. I glorify Thee"—words which come to us today in the holy liturgy. "With patience he overcame the unjust magistrate and thus carried off the crown of incorruption," ending his earthly life as a champion-martyr, wise and full of years.

O holy Hieromartyr Polycarp, pray to the Lord for us!

Pastoral Notes

On 1 Dec 2004, **Priest Daniel Guenther**, instead of attached, is assigned Associate Priest (2nd Priest) at Holy Resurrection Sobor in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

On 25 Dec 2004, **Hieromonk Philip (Speranza)** was made Igumen of the Protection Hermitage in Edmonton, Alberta, and blessed to wear the Palitsa.

On 9 Jan 2005, at the Sign of the Theotokos Church in Montréal, QC, **Protodeacon Robert Cyprian Hutcheon** was ordained to the Holy Priesthood. He is assigned as Associate Priest (2nd Priest) at the Church of the Sign. In view of his long service in the diaconate, his protodiaconate, and his being the nominee for Auxiliary Bishop, he was immediately declared an Archpriest.

On 2 Feb 2005, at St Vladimir's Seminary in Crestwood NY, with the Blessing of Metropolitan Herman, **Barnabas Powell** was ordained to the Holy Diaconate, and **Deacon Christopher Ignatius Rigden-Briscall** to the Holy Priesthood. They are both attached to Three Hierarchs' Chapel in Crestwood NY, and have the hope of serving in Canada.

From a letter to the editor :

Our children and the occult

With great interest I read the article “An Accord with Satan” by His Eminence, Archbishop Lazar in the last issue [of the *Canadian Orthodox Messenger*] and want to thank you for publishing it. Each generation seems to have its own temptations in regard to the occult; in our day it is the ubiquitous 1- 900 Psychic ads and e-mail chain letters, promising evil if you do not send the required number of copies to others.

In our schools, here are some examples of how the occult creeps in : French class presents the opportunity to do a horoscope poster for students (to learn French presumably!), a two-day Nature Camp ends with an introductory lesson in Druid shape-shifting, an invitation to stare at a stick for ten minutes and “draw the student trapped inside,” and finally, a session that can only be called rudimentary hypnosis. Scholastic Book Fairs offer a gamut of body-possession books for our youth right in our schools; current movies do the same. God protect the children! May He grant strength for them to say “I will not take part in this” and allow them to keep communication lines open with their parents so that they can protest to the powers that be.

The occult comes to us in so many forms, both white magic and black. What feeds this interest? Kevin Saunders, Wicca specialist at the mystical Isle of Avalon Foundation in Glastonbury, England, a centre specializing in courses on the Goddess, Shamanism, Wicca & Witchcraft, Tarot Cards and Crystals, himself a practising Witch since 1995, and a High Priest since 1999, credits our film and book media for their role in contributing to growing Wicca numbers, at least. He writes, “Young people throughout the world are being attracted to the Craft having gained an interest from Sabrina, Harry Potter, etc.” He adds that courses at their Centre have increased since the Potter books appeared. That is the negative spinoff to these books and movies that appear to be only fantastic and symbolic. And if the books possess higher symbolism as John Granger [see the last issue of *COM*, p. 19, “Finding God in Harry Potter?”] and others say, there is a reason why the symbolism may well be lost on children. Symbolic reasoning, according to one Orthodox psychologist, is not developed in persons often until they are well into adulthood. In the meantime the effects of these books will be felt—the growth of fear in children’s personal lives or the license to dabble in some form of the occult.

Our Orthodox Church has made such good provision for us, through the powerful sign of the cross, the use of Holy Water to keep ourselves free, and intercessory prayers such as the Akathist “Nurturer of Children.” In the light of Witch Saunder’s comment, we might do well to consider the warnings from others in our faith concerning certain

works for children, e.g., the Russian Orthodox Church in regard to the Potter books and movies.

Thank you, Vladyka Lazar, for reminding us that the occult is not a game to play with, or be entertained by, that we must strive to be wise as serpents and not naive in discerning the various faces of evil as we lead our children in loving and serving our Lord.—*Katya Szalasznyj, Holy Resurrection Sobor, Saskatoon SK*

Is 2005 the year That feelings shall rule?

“Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child...” (Eccles. 10:16)

The last two years have seen a head-spinning series of events regarding the legal definition of marriage in Canada, culminating in a proposed redefinition of marriage by the national government—a result unimaginable two or three years ago. Mainline Protestant groups have moved to recognize these unions as well, deeming them “sanctified”—a euphemism for “holy.” While the federal government has assured Canadians that no religious group will be forced to solemnize such unions, the realities of legal appeals to the Supreme Court make this protection a temporary one, the eventual outcome of which is undoubtedly the surrender of licences to perform marriage by clergy (including Orthodox clergy) who refuse such an innovation.*

What does such news mean for Orthodox Christians? Certainly, no civilization in the history of mankind would have envisioned such a change, and no major religious group would have supported such a move until the last two decades. By all measures, the move is a radical one, even for a secularized civil society. What is perhaps most dangerous about these developments is the abrogation of any definition of sin—or at least a common definition, shared by society as a whole. Boundaries of sexual morality have been essentially understood by societies and religions at all times and in all places; the new legal developments in Canada suggest a basis for civil law based no longer on religious values, or even secular legal precedent, but rather on the fuzzy rule of feelings.

The use of feelings as a reference point for moral behaviour have been gaining popular acclaim since the Enlightenment, and 2005 will no doubt be a watershed year

* *Bishop Seraphim’s comment: “Should any civil authority ever try to force any ecclesiastical institution to bless any kind of marriage contrary to its tradition and conscience, or to do anything contrary to its own tradition, it would be unconstitutional and unenforceable. Since most Canadians are sensitive about this relationship, the government could also fall. But our Church will only live by its authentic Orthodox Christian tradition, regardless.”*

for their triumph in Canada. In addition to the redefinition of gender limits for marriage, pending Supreme Court cases will likely see the extension of marital rights to polygamous couples (of course, couples would not be the correct term: perhaps spouses, or more colloquially, spice, as in, “one mouse, three mice; one spouse, three spice”). Laws governing age of sexual consent are another possible candidate for revision; child pornography laws have already paved the way for liberalization based on the preferences of the individual. Ontario will likely adopt a law allowing for Islamic Sharia Law to be an option for those seeking alternate dispute resolution, thereby forcing Muslim women to choose between the freedoms currently offered by Western society, and continued acceptance by their community. All in all, the future of civil laws and religiously sanctioned practices in Canada based on personal feelings appears very promising indeed.

When considering the spiritual life, the Church Fathers expressed extreme skepticism toward feelings, as either an indicator of what is right, good, or personally helpful, or as a means of knowing God. In both cases, feelings were considered by the Fathers as the worst possible indicator of Truth, inherently deficient and subjective, completely controlled by the passions of life in the fallen flesh, against which the faithful man or woman struggles throughout his or her life. Indeed, emotional feelings are indicative of an immature spiritual life, one in which even the process of maturity is put at risk, since the immature passions consciously avoid the struggles and self-denial required to mature. For the soul ruled by the feelings, spiritual immaturity is a guaranteed sentence, short of a jolt of Divine Providence to shake the self-indulgent soul out of its stupor.

Western spiritual life offers little in the way of resistance. Mainstream Protestantism long ago gave up the idea of revealed Truth as an objective measure for conduct. (A recent article on beliefnet.com highlighted the increased demand for values-based discussion groups among liberal Protestant congregations in the United States; meetings would undoubtedly be short; one can bet there would be lots of “sharing”). Charismatic groups, centred on feelings as the prime measure for “real” spiritual experiences, are poorly equipped to address the question, although many charismatics feel very strongly about it, and will share those feelings quite vividly every Sunday morning. While Rome has provided a quite consistent voice on moral questions, the gigantic gulf between faith and personal belief among average Roman Catholics in North America (and especially in Canada), suggests that feelings have won the day in Catholic pews, not to mention in Catholic seminaries.

Evangelical Protestants will no doubt take great comfort that they provide a safe refuge from the storm of feelings raging across our social and legal landscape. Unfortunately, they are wrong. Evangelicalism is founded very much upon viewing the Bible as revealed Truth—the interpretation of that Truth being left up to the individual, ostensibly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With a

credit to Frank Schaeffer for the musical analogy, this quickly sees the evangelical measure of scripture move from sola scriptura (the scriptures alone) to “o solo mio,” in which each believer becomes his own arbiter of the meaning of scripture, his own “holy” tradition, including moral tradition.

A vivid illustration of this occurred about a decade ago in a class I took at a well-respected Canadian evangelical seminary. Discussing a complex and controversial scripture with a class of thirty adult students, the professor proceeded to ask what each student thought the passage meant. Each student proceeded to give his or her own interpretation, a diverse mix of views. In the end, the professor admitted, in keeping with the evangelical worldview, that one “can never tell how the Holy Spirit is working in peoples’ hearts,” and that it was certainly not up to us to determine what is true. One student asked, “So, who exactly is it up to?” A stony silence greeted the student who asked the unthinkable question. The student never did get a satisfactory answer—or any answer, for that matter (of course, all agreed that it was “a really good question”).

Undoubtedly, Canada will march ahead to crown feelings as king in 2005, and feelings shall rule unchallenged for many years to come, short of a return to a patristic, Orthodox Christian interior life, or (perhaps more likely) the imposed moral system of a supra-national police state, or (less likely) widespread Islamic rule (in which one can only guess that there will be little room for alternate dispute resolution). Hopefully, the experience presented to us will teach the lesson the Church Fathers knew well: the false freedom of feelings is slavery, and like any slave master, it enslaves its challengers as well, unless its challengers master it first.—*Fr Geoffrey Korz, All Saints of North America Mission, Hamilton ON*

The Gospel of John: The motion picture

The Gospel of John is a three-hour motion picture that premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2003 and was released in VHF format and a three-DVD set in April 2004. Although I had seen the usual newspaper listings when the film first came to the theatres around the time of the release of “The Passion of the Christ,” the whole idea of such movies did not have any personal appeal for me. It was not until I came across a brief but positive comment on the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America website about the movie and its word-for-word adaptation of the actual Gospel of John that it made me rethink making the effort to see this production, since it might come in handy with the teenage discussion group of our parish that I lead, and to my surprise I was indeed taken by the experience.

The film truly lives up to the way that it has been promoted as being “both intimate and reflective and

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provides audiences an unparalleled opportunity to understand the tumultuous period in history at the time of Jesus Christ. This ambitious motion picture follows the Gospel precisely, neither adding to the story from other Gospels, nor omitting complex passages.” After watching the movie several times with others, I realized that some found it difficult to take it all in at one three-hour sitting (two DVDs), and even though there were mostly favorable comments, I had the feeling that it was too “serious” for a movie. As a result I was reluctant initially to show it to the teenage church school group that I meet with twice a month. After using it to show a short sequence that illustrates the teaching of the Church on how to read the Old Testament, based on Jesus’ very own instructions, the group made it quite obvious to me that my reservations were unfounded, and over the next two classes they were drawn into this unique way of experiencing word-for-word the Gospel according to Saint John the Theologian.

The portrayal of Jesus the man in this movie is probably one of the most accomplished aspects of this production, in that there is none of the detached pious godliness that has been part of some previous releases concerning the life of Jesus. The limited conversations of the actual text of the Gospel somehow seem to go on to completion just out of the ear’s reach. The personal tension between Jesus and the chief priests is truly a human struggle between established order and tradition and the new way to interpret the Scriptures in view of the arrival of the Messiah. Above all, the movie somehow has succeeded in capturing the feeling of “enlightenment” that overcomes the persons who opened their hearts to the few words that we hear Jesus speaking to them. It is this personal reality, which we also see between Jesus and his disciples, that the movie has truly succeeded in portraying.

We can also understand the difficulty that the established priesthood of Judea was experiencing when openly confronted, by a fringe character from Galilee who had no formal credentials, about their apparent misguided interpretation and application of the teachings of the Scriptures. The word-for-word re-enactment of the Gospel of John comes across in the movie as close to a true expression of the intended message of the Evangelist as we can expect in a motion picture, and avoids any invention of

images that are inconsistent, overly theatrical, or blasphemous to any viewer. Also it appears that much attention was given to the careful recreation of the sights and sounds of the period so that the buildings, the music, and even the interior of the synagogue, authentically conform to historical reality.

I must admit, though, that initially it took me a little while to become comfortable with this modern translation, and especially with the use of the phrase “I’m telling you the truth” instead of the biblical “amen.” After having seen the movie, I realized that it was because of this very same modern phraseology that I was more directly drawn into the dialogue on a personal level; and I even felt challenged to come to terms with how I would have reacted to someone’s saying these things had I been there as part of the Judean establishment. Could it be that even today, when listening to Jesus’ very own words, I am more comfortable being like the chief priests or Pilate when confronted with someone’s being so categorical about the “truth” that I somehow would prefer hearing the less threatening “amen,” which comes across as expressing the final word of a personal opinion or of some idealistic spiritual guidelines?

For any one who has not yet had a chance to see this motion picture, it is available in video stores and, if like me, finding time to keep up with daily readings is an ongoing struggle with all those demands on our time, this movie certainly could be a more accommodating way to experience a “great read” that you can share with family, friends or a church group. The ability to access any part of the movie by the “chapter and verse” option makes it particularly useful for church school and Bible study groups. The third DVD in the package contains special features on the making of the movie, historical details and interviews with biblical scholars, as well as interactive maps, making this set not only a wonderful way to experience the Gospel according to Saint John, but also a useful reference for church school and discussion groups.

His disciples did not understand these things at first but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about him and that they had done these things to Him. John 12:16

—Dr Emanuel Kolyvas,

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