



## **THE EASTERN ORTHODOX No 141: November 2021**

His Holiness Kyrill, Patriarch of Moscow and All the Russias  
Most Rev John, Metropolitan of Dubna and the Russian Archdiocese of Western Europe

**ST JOHN'S RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**  
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The Church of St John of Shanghai, built in 1855, is the largest Russian Orthodox church building in the British Isles, and is attended by 4,000 Orthodox of 24 nationalities, with over 150 baptisms per year. It is a parish of the East of England Orthodox Church Trust (Charity No. 1081707), part of the Western European Archdiocese of the Russian Orthodox Church and cares for grassroots Orthodox of all nationalities all over Eastern England.

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**Gardener:** Joy Morris

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**Youtube:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rE2T2sYTy8s>

**Website:** [www.orthodoxengland.org.uk](http://www.orthodoxengland.org.uk)

## **Расписание Богослужений / Timetable of Services**

### **Saturday 6 November**

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

### **Sunday 7 November**

9.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

### **Saturday 13 November**

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

### **Sunday 14 November**

9.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия.

### **Saturday 20 November**

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

### **Sunday 21 November**

9.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия.

### **Saturday 27 November**

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Beginning of the Advent Fast/ Начало Рождественского Поста

### **Sunday 28 November**

9.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия.

## **Baptisms in October**

2/10: Timothy Iana

3/10: David Pantea

3/10: Stefania Burnete

9/10: Ludmila Humenyuk

9/10: Alexandra Hines

10/10: Andrea Craciun

15/10: Sofia Bajenaru

17/10: Sofia Ticus

17/10: Natalie Baiceanu

17/10: Elena Baiceanu

24/10: Oliver Tataru

31/10: Andrei Herghelegiu

31/10: Alessio Anitei

31/10: David Sorescu

## **Church News**

### **Metropolitan's John Visit - 4<sup>th</sup> December**

We announce with joy that Metropolitan John will be visiting us on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December for the feast of the Presentation and we will all concelebrate with him. Afterwards there will be a common meal in St John's Hall. Please do not overlook this very important event! The day before he will be with Bishop Matthew of Sourozh in Knightsbridge.

### **Repainting and Cupola**

We had a number of jobs done at church in October. Firstly, we had the front church porch, the side corridor and the children's room repainted. After this the right-hand church front door was raised up, rehinged and repainted. Then we had our cupola placed behind the sign on an oak post.

### **Hopes for Next Year**

Next year we will have all the other blue doors repainted and the front wall of the church repainted. We are also thinking of redoing the play area behind St John's Hall, with an awning, picnic tables, swings and a slide.

## **PATRIARCH KYRILL CONDEMNS COMMUNISM AND CAPITALISM**

*Moscow, October 27, 2021*



*Photo: interfax.ru*

The reality of the “communist paradise on earth” is brutal persecution and social ghettos, says the head of the Russian Orthodox Church.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill addressed the issue in his new interview with [Forbes France](#). Asked about altruism as “a third way between hyper-materialistic capitalism and revolutionary Marxism,” the Patriarch state firmly: “The desire for self-enrichment as the

highest goal of life, as well as self-satisfied social egoism, are repugnant to the Christian worldview.”

Moreover, the quasi-religiosity ascribed to both capitalism and Marxism is equally unacceptable. For all its talk of creating a paradise on earth, communism and aggressive social justice led to something quite different, His Holiness continued:

We, who have passed the era of communism, know well that the idea of social justice, turned into an aggressive ideology, destroys everything around itself. Hundreds of thousands lawlessly executed for their faith, the creation of a social ghetto for hostile classes—this is the reality of the “communist paradise on earth.”

However, the “capitalist Gospel” of accumulation of wealth and goods at any cost is “no less dangerous,” the Patriarch says.

Any activity, including economic, must be organized on a solid moral basis, which for Christians has always been Holy Scripture and the teachings of the Church, he emphasized, though “this is resisted by powerful forces that are ready to use any means to prevent the domination of Divine ideas in the minds of our contemporaries.”

And commenting on the trend over the past half-century of consumerism being increasingly oriented towards individual, rather than familial desires and needs, His Holiness noted that in Russia and various western countries, the people are recovering the understanding that “the future of humanity is impossible without a traditional family.”

10/27/2021

**AGIA SOPHIA REPLICA IN RUSSIAN VILLAGE**  
**WILL ACCOMMODATE THOUSANDS WHO**  
**COME TO VENERATE MIRACULOUS CROSS**

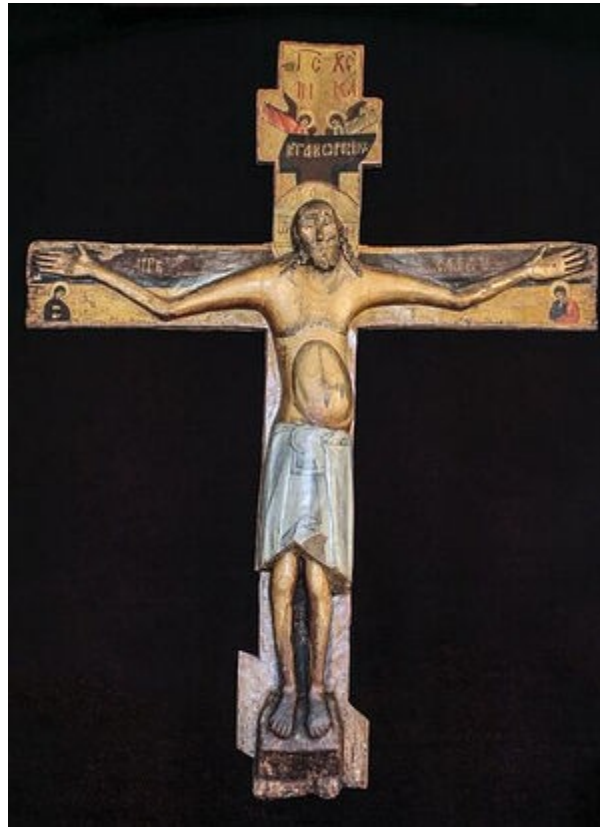
*Godenovo, Yaroslavl Province, Russia, October 27, 2021*



Over the past 25 years, the Church of St. John Chrysostom in the tiny village of Godenovo in the Russian Yaroslavl Province has become a major pilgrimage center.

The church is home to the famous Godenovo Cross, known to work innumerable wonders both in antiquity and today. On feast days, more than a thousand pilgrims can easily descend upon the church, which can only accommodate about 300 people.

Thus, a new Byzantine-style cathedral, modeled after Agia Sophia in Istanbul, is under construction, designed to accommodate as many as 2,000 people.



*The miraculous Godenovo Cross. Photo: pravoslavie.ru* In an interview about the project [in June](#), Abbess Evstolia of the Pereslavl-St. Nicholas Monastery (the Church of St. John Chrysostom became a representation of the monastery in 1997) noted that the project became a necessity as the veneration of the Cross continued to grow and attract pilgrims from throughout Russia.

“Godenovo is a missionary center, and we’re building this church not for ourselves, but for those who come to the holy Cross, to receive healing and consolation from God,” Mother Evstolia explained.

Historical sources have preserved that the Cross first appeared in Russia on May 29, 1423, thirty years to the day before the fall of the Byzantine Empire. Moreover, it is believed that the Cross came “from the Greeks.” Thus, it was decided to model the new cathedral after the world-famous Hagia Sophia.

While the exterior of the new church will not exactly replicate the Istanbul cathedral, as there are a number of later additions to the building, the interior will be an exact replica, at 2/3 the size of the original.

The upper church will be dedicated to the Wisdom of God, and the lower to the Holy Royal Martyrs.



Construction is scheduled to compete in 2023, timed to the 600th anniversary of the appearance of the Cross.

Read more about the miraculous Cross in our articles, “[Miraculous Cross of Godenovo](#)” and “[The Miracles Never Cease.](#)”

10/27/2021

## “IN PEACE LET US PRAY TO THE LORD...” A Second Talk On the Divine Liturgy

*[Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol](#)*

### **Talk 1.**



Our last talk was dedicated to the words that begin the Divine Liturgy: the blessing, the glorification of the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Divine Liturgy takes a man out of the reality of the surrounding world and leads him into another reality, which, however, exists in our life and which man experiences as a state of eternity. Only those who have experienced this personally can fully understand what I’m talking about. The Divine Liturgy is truly the Kingdom of God in time and space, that is in church, in the assembly of the faithful.

The blessing of the Kingdom is followed by a series of petitions, usually pronounced by the deacon, if there is one. If there's no deacon, then these petitions are read by the priest. The first petition is, "**In peace let us pray to the Lord**," which means: "With peace of mind, with peace in our souls, let us entreat the Lord."

Inasmuch as the entire Liturgy is a chain of petitions and prayers to Christ, at the very beginning, the Church points us to the necessary condition for prayer—spiritual peace. Only he whose soul is filled with peace can entreat the Lord. Some may ask: "Is it really possible for us to always have peace in our souls in this life? If we were in, for example, Libya, Egypt, or Japan, then how, in the midst of military conflicts, earthquakes, and floods could we have spiritual peace, in order to pray to the Lord? Maybe this petition is about something else?" Undoubtedly, the external world is important for man, and the Church also prays for the outside world, which we'll see in the petition beginning with, "For the peace of the whole world..." It's important that we have peace in our lives, and in our homes, and in our families. However, this external peace is not always achievable. As you know from your own experience, we very often have to go through various troubles—global, national, social, familial, personal.

I remember [St. Paisios the Athonite](#), who would say in the last years of his life:

"I'm already an old man, but I've taken care of my soul to some degree. Therefore, I pray to God not for myself, but for the world, and I tell God about the sufferings that people endure."

It's impossible for a Christian to remain indifferent to human suffering; it's impossible to watch everything happening around us on TV yawning. Unfortunately, so-called virtual reality has taught us to laugh at troubles. We think it's funny that someone's killing someone on the screen. But what's funny about that?

The day the war began in Iraq, I was in England, in London with our [Elder Joseph of Vatopedi](#), and the next morning we were supposed to return to the Holy Mountain. When we heard about the war, we decided to see what they were saying about it on TV that evening. We were staying at some friends' house. They were showing military operations, combat aircraft, soldiers, and the like on TV. I very clearly remember the children in this family—very good kids. They sat down in front of the screen, soda bottles and sandwiches in hand. They sat in front of the TV, eating and drinking and watching the war just like watching a soccer match. For them as kids it was excusable, but we adults should have a different attitude towards the disasters that the world suffers. A man who is mature both in age and in his spiritual life won't allow himself to remain aloof from the whole world's pain and suffering. And I think the more a man succeeds spiritually, the more he shares the sufferings of mankind.

Thus, when the Church commands us to pray with spiritual peace, we naturally have the question: "Where can I find this peace? How can I find it when people are dying nearby, when everything is losing its equilibrium?" Every day you hear: This one got sick, some misfortune happened to that one, a third one died, a fourth has nothing to eat, a fifth has no money to take of his child... What kind of peace can be found in such a world? That peace that Christ brought to earth when He was born, about which the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace." Yes, but what were they singing about? After all, as soon as Christ came into the world, enmity immediately rose up against Him: There was the massacre



of infants and many other evils. And Christ Himself said: *I came not to send peace, but a sword* (Mt. 10:34)—that is, war. So what kind of peace are we talking about?

As we've already said, it's very important for us that peace reigns in the environment around us as much as possible. But in the petition we're examining today, we're talking about that genuine peace that only God can give a man. Peace is not a psychological state, when everything is going well, and we say, full of optimism: "How wonderful everything is with me!"

The word of God clearly says that Christ is our peace. Christ is peace. If we have Christ in our souls, then we will find peace. If we don't have Christ, then we don't have peace, even if external conditions are extremely favorable for us. This is why the Byzantines built churches dedicated to Holy Peace (in Greek *Agia Irini*)—to Christ. In Istanbul (Constantinople), next to Agia Sophia is a beautiful wooden church that once belonged to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, known as Agia Irini. The faithful think it's dedicated to the Martyr Irene. But it's not dedicated to the martyr, but to Christ, Who is the Peace of the whole world, just as the Church of Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) is dedicated not to the Martyr Sophia, but to Christ, Who is the Wisdom of the world. God the Father created everything by His Wisdom; He created everything by Christ.

Thus, when the Church calls us to pray "in peace," it calls us to pray "in Christ," in communion with Christ, for it is only in Christ that we find genuine spiritual peace. External peace is easily lost when the conditions of our lives, our families, society, the country, or the entire planet change for the worse; our periods of this external peace are broken by various shocks and are not long-lasting or permanent. It's natural that diseases, sorrows, and various misfortunes deprive us of external peace. Christ said: *My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you* (Jn. 14:27). Christ gives peace "not as the world gives," because the peace of this world depends on external circumstances. If everything around me, in my family, at work is good, if I have enough money and no health problems, then everything is in order for me, and I'm at peace. This is a worldly peace. But any misfortune destroys it. With a change in circumstances, its chimera quickly disappears. How can we pray in true peace, in Christ?

For this, brothers and sisters, it's very important to reconcile with your conscience, as Christ says. There's an accuser within us, whom God placed in our soul and who condemns us at every moment. This accuser is called the conscience. The conscience is designed to tell us how we can fulfill the will of God. The more attentively we listen to our conscience, the more sensitive it becomes and the clearer it tells us those things we didn't understand until yesterday. When we don't heed its voice and brush it aside, saying: "I don't care about that," then the same thing happens as when the tip of a needle is hit with a hammer. The tip becomes blunt from the blows of the hammer and the needle becomes unusable. Thus, the conscience becomes useless when we neglect it. The conscience is a gift of God, left with us after the Fall. Therefore, the Holy Fathers say that man, guided only by the dictates of the conscience, can draw near to God (at least to some degree)—it's enough just to listen to its voice and have peace with it.

*Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him* (Mt. 5:25), Christ teaches in the Gospel. Let your conscience speak. You can deceive others, the whole world, but you'll never deceive your conscience. Never anger it, never dull it. Allow it to talk to you. And be sure to make peace with it, to make friends with it. Do what it tells you in order to find peace in your soul. Whoever avoids listening to the voice of their conscience

finds excuses for themselves, contradicts its appeals with various “but, after all...,” and he shouldn’t expect anything good. The time of this life will soon come to an end, and the path along which we must, in the words of Christ, “agree with our adversary,” will soon end.

Who can have an absolutely pure, peaceful conscience if there is no man who doesn’t make mistakes, commit sins, and suffer falls? All of us here, and I am the first among them, make many mistakes, have many sins, and fall every day, and not just once. Only Christ as man absolutely fulfilled the will of God according to His will, and the Mother of God by grace. But the rest of us bear human imperfection. How can we have peace with our consciences? After all, we often make mistakes and commit sins that can’t be corrected. Let’s say I kill a man. How do I fix it? Can I resurrect him? No. How can I calm my conscience and find the peace of God, which is a condition for prayer and standing before God? By repentance. Since there is no way not to sin—no matter what we do, we remain unhappy captives to our passions. What then is our path to salvation, through those saving gates? Sinlessness? No. Infallibility? No. Then what? Repentance. God has given us the chance to learn the great art of repentance. Repentance is the sole path to salvation. Of course, repentance causes the soul pain, especially at the beginning of our conversion to God. It burns us; we feel like we’re in a furnace, and our whole being seems to melt away. (At least that’s how a man who has genuine, fiery repentance feels.) However, after that comes the breath of the Holy Spirit, Who comforts a man who has shed torrents of repentant tears.

The main “instrument” of repentance that purifies the soul from passions and sin is tears, weeping. No matter how strange it may seem, we have to learn the art of tears. We have to learn to cry—and not for show, not just however we want, but we must weep before God. A praying man must learn to weep. Our hardened and calloused heart won’t soften, won’t open up if we don’t weep. Weeping is not just external tears flowing from the eyes. There are people who don’t need much to burst into tears. They can start crying just like that, for no reason. However, there’s nothing wrong with external tears. Let someone have at least external tears. But the weeping I want to talk about is mainly an internal work. St. John Climacus says:

I have seen people who easily shed copious tears. And I have seen people who had weeping in their souls, but their eyes shed no tears. And I honor the second more than the first. I have also seen those who have wept about having no tears.

Thus, weeping and tears are the main “instrument” for leading a spiritual life. Weeping gives birth to peace in our souls. We must learn to weep.

St. Paisios the Athonite said that in his hometown in Cappadocia, the Turks were perplexed when they would walk around the village at night: “What is this? These Romei mourn their dead all night long.” The Turks heard weeping and sobbing and thought that the Greek Christians were crying at night over their dead relatives. They couldn’t understand that people were praying. The Cappadocian Greeks were very simple and sincere people. In accord with Church Tradition, they prayed with tears and truly mourned the dead—their dead souls. We should also weep for our souls this way.

For a man to have peace and the sweet presence of God in his soul, he must have the sweet pain of repentance; he must to learn to open his heart at least once a day that repentant prayer might flow from him, as the Psalm says: *I will pour out before Him my supplication* (Ps. 141:2). It’s as if you uncork some full vessel, and all contents of your heart, your pain, and your spiritual labor come pouring out.

Christ is our peace and His presence fills our souls with peace. Christ visits the penitent man. Christ doesn't visit he who doesn't repent, even if he's a good man. He comes to hearts that are experiencing suffering and pain (mainly from their repentance) and that seek the mercy of God.

Speaking of repentance—I remember an incident from my life associated with a modern ascetic, Elder Philotheos (Zervakos) from the island of Paros. When I went to visit him, I was eighteen or nineteen, I was a student at the Theological Faculty. To be honest, I didn't have any particular desire to go see the Elder. I agreed to it only because a really good friend urged me to visit him, and so persistently, that I was almost forced to go. It was uncomfortable to refuse, because this man even bought me a ticket to Paros. There was nowhere I could hide. I went with one other student. We got on the bus in Thessaloniki and rode to Piraeus, where we boarded the ship and sailed to Paros. We met with Elder Philotheos there, who truly was a great saint.

At that time, I was quite determined to immediately go to Mt. Athos right after finishing college. During Confession with the Elder, I told him about my decision to go to the Holy Mountain.

“Go,” he said. “And where will you go there?”

“To Fr. Joseph.”

“The Cypriot? I've known him for a long time.”

Elder Philotheos gave me a lot of good instruction, spiritually strengthened me, and read the prayer of absolution. As I was leaving, he added:

“I want to give you something...”

Several of my classmates had gone to see the Elder shortly before this and they asked for something to remember him by, so the Elder gave each of them something. The Elder gave one of my classmates, a deacon, a handkerchief.

“Take this handkerchief, you'll need it.”

The guys returned with their gifts. The deacon wanted to hear something prophetic from the Elder about his life, about his future, and he just gave him an old handkerchief. He was visibly disappointed. But what would you think this handkerchief meant? Tears! Indeed, the poor man had to face many woes and temptations in his life, and he shed a river of tears.

So when the Elder said he wanted to give me something, I thanked him and thought: “I wonder what it'll be.” He had trouble getting up (this was in the last years of his life), and he started pulling out drawers, looking for something fitting for me. I remembered my classmate the deacon and said:

“Geronda, you don't have to look around. You can give me anything—a handkerchief, for example.”

“No! I'm not going to give you a handkerchief.”

“Well, then some kind of photo...”

“Photography is a good thing, but I’m going to give you a Panagia.”

I was a little shocked that he wanted to give me something only bishops wear. But I didn’t think much about it at the time.<sup>[1]</sup>

The Elder kept looking and finally pulled a Panagia out of a drawer—a simple plastic icon he got one time in memory of the consecration of the Church of St. Nikon Metanoieite.<sup>[2]</sup>

“I want to give you this. Take it and preach repentance.”

“Geronda, where am I going to preach repentance,” I asked, surprised again. “On the Holy Mountain?”

Again, I didn’t think a lot about why he specifically gave me a Panagia.

“After thirty...” he said.

“Apparently, I’ll become a priest after I’m thirty, according to the canons. That’s why the Elder said this,” I decided.

I came to Cyprus from Mt. Athos at the age of thirty-four, and I’ve been talking ever since. I’ve only now realized the meaning of Elder Philotheos’ words. Over time, I recall his words more and more, and I see that the entire Gospel and the entire spiritual life has repentance as its foundation. Therefore, when Christ came to earth, He taught us to repent; He taught this great Mystery. Repentance isn’t simply regret for what we’ve done. It implies true repentance, contrition, and sorrow for the mistakes made and the sins committed.

Weeping and grieving over your departure from God, you gradually find peace, rest of soul, and you calm down. What happens at this time? Your mind, your being acquires a different perception of reality. Yesterday, money or health was important for you, but today these things no longer interest you; they stop being the goal of your life. Your way of thinking changes. This is the essence of repentance. If you don’t change your way of thinking and remain the same, it means you’re just doing good deeds outwardly. Sometimes we do a little good just to stifle the voice of our conscience within ourselves. For example, I have many opportunities to help people or devote my time to prayer, but I do hardly anything, just enough so I have the right to declare: “I did something too.” We don’t want to go all the way and don’t allow Christ to change our being. That’s why when some people wanted to follow Him while He was preaching, wanting to show that meeting Him means a radical change in our whole existence, our whole being, Christ would say things that would make them freeze in bewilderment.

“Lord, what can I do to follow Thee?”

“Do you want to follow Me? Good. Go sell your possessions and follow Me.”

The man simply froze. “Go and sell everything?!...” Just as surgeons make an incision to see what’s inside the body, so the Lord, by His word, cut into this man, so to speak, to show that His presence in our life and our relationship with Him consists not in performing some kind of external good works, but in the complete change of our entire being. This is the only way peace comes to the soul of man—by cultivating repentance in our souls.

Repentance begins with regret, when we begin to condemn ourselves. Then we move on to weeping over ourselves. We behold the abyss that separates us from God—where God is and where I am. What a wealth of gifts and opportunities God has given me, and how I have squandered all the riches I received from Him in the debauchery of my life. And so we begin to cultivate tears, to weep, and with their help—find repentance. Let us learn to cry, so as to acquire spiritual balance. Weeping—especially in solitude before God—is a whole art. If we learn it, then we will begin to succeed spiritually. Weeping attracts Christ to our hearts. Christ comes to our humble, penitent hearts, and a great change begins. We become different, and then we can truly pray to the Lord in peace.

With this begins the Divine Liturgy. This is the condition for our dialogue with God in prayer. If we have no peace, we can communicate neither with God nor man.

*[Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol](#)*

*[Pravoslavie.ru](#)*

*10/13/2021*

[1] A Panagia is the round icon of the Theotokos that bishops wear.—Trans.

[2] St. Nikon Metanoieite (November 26/December 9) was endowed by the Lord with the gift of preaching repentance, thanks to which his listeners were filled with heartfelt repentance and love for God. He preached throughout Greece, tirelessly appealing to Christians: “Repent!” (“Metanoieite” in Greek—which became the name he was known by). He worked many miracles and healings. He reposed in 998.

## **FOR THE GOOD ESTATE OF THE HOLY CHURCHES OF GOD, LET US PRAY TO THE LORD**

### **Third Talk on the Divine Liturgy**

*[Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol](#)*





*Photo: Dmitry Kiryukhin*

We continue to analyze the text of the Divine Liturgy. Last time, we examined the first petition: “In peace, let us pray to the Lord,” and spoke about how Christ is the peace of our souls. The presence of Christ in our lives is the only thing that is truly necessary for us, inasmuch as we can only pray, labor, and generally live with the help of the grace of Christ.

In response to the deacon’s petition, the people (or the choir) respond: “**Lord, have mercy**” (Κύριε ἐλέησον). When we say, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” or “Lord, have mercy,” we mean: “Lord, give me that which I need,” that is, “help me,” “save me,” “take pity upon me,” “be merciful to me,” “enlighten me,” “guide me,” “heal me.” All of our needs and requirements are contained in one phrase: “Lord, have mercy.” These three words encompass everything. Remember, the Old Testament tells how the Jewish people, wandering through the desert, fed upon manna—which became for each what his body needed. Similarly, the prayer, “Lord, have mercy,” becomes for every person an expression of what he needs.

It’s much more beneficial for us to say: “Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” than to tell God: “Listen, give me this, give me that.” We have to fully commit ourselves to God both in daily life and in our relationship with Him. Of course, we can ask God for something specific (such a desire is quite understandable in human terms), but it’s much better to have confidence in God’s providence and invoke His mercy. God knows what we need, what we lack, and when and how to give it to us.

Further, the deacon proclaims: “**For the peace from above, and the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord.**” In other words, “Let’s ask the Lord to give us Heavenly peace and salvation for our souls.” As you can see, the second petition of the lityny continues the first, and they both speak to us about how the Lord Himself is the peace for the human soul.

Partaking of [Divine grace](#), this energy of Divinity coming directly from God, a man immediately finds [peace](#). After all, the first thing grace brings to our soul is peace. Therefore, when the fathers of the Church want to determine whether a man is under the influence of

Divine grace or the influence of Satan, they look first of all at whether he has peace in his soul or whether he's in turmoil. Peace of soul is one of the first signs that what is happening to a man is from grace. If the soul is full of turmoil and anxiety, you can immediately understand that the evil one is acting there.

It's impossible for God to dwell in a man who is full of turmoil and a troubling uneasiness. God will never find rest for Himself in the heart of such a man. When a man is in turmoil, when everything is upside down in his soul, grace leaves him. God has nothing to do with turmoil, anxiety, and commotion.

"The peace from above" comes down from God the Father Himself and isn't dependent upon circumstances and events of this world. The peace of God doesn't depend on what's happening around us, in our family, in society, in the entire world—wherever. Of course, "the peace from above" has nothing in common with the nirvana of the Hindus who seek to achieve a loss of consciousness and an indifference to everything around them. No, the man of God shares in human pain, empathizes, and sympathizes with all of creation. The Christian is by no means insentient. It's impossible to abide supposedly in peace and tranquility when there's so much pain around you. This is not a Christian state.

What, however, happens with the man of God? Despite the fact that he empathizes with someone else's grief and shares someone else's pain, despite the fact that he's in the same state of suffering as the whole world, nevertheless, the peace of God reigns in the depths of his heart and soul. He's full of trust in God and he has no doubt that in the end, God will do what's necessary and won't leave anyone. The peace of God's presence flows from the certainty that God is with us and that He will not leave us until the last moment of our lives.

In the second petition, besides the peace descending from God the Father, the deacon calls us to pray to the Lord for the salvation of our souls. To this, the people again respond: "Lord, have mercy." Then come petitions that are, let's say, more earthly in their content, concerning our daily life.

The third petition of the litany reads: "**For the peace of the whole world, the good estate of the holy Churches of God, and the union of all, let us pray to the Lord.**" In other words, "Let's entreat the Lord for peace throughout the whole world, for the firm standing of holy Churches of God, and for the unity of all.

We pray, first of all, for peace to reign on earth, by which we, together with the Church, mean both the external and the internal world—the world of human souls. Praying for the external world, we ask that there be no wars, catastrophes, sorrowful circumstances, difficulties—a state that will of course never fully come to pass. No matter what we undertake, there will still be some evil in some corner of the world—we can't avoid it. And yet we pray for the peace of the entire world, we ask God that people might find peace, that everything might be good for them, that they might be happy, healthy, and calm—but mainly that they might have the grace of God.

The peace of the whole world is the presence of Christ in the hearts of men—this is the peace of the world. Christ brought this peace to the world, for He Himself is the Peace of the world. The angels sang of this on the night of the Nativity of Christ: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace." Peace came into the world, and of course, this isn't external peace, because there never was external peace on earth; and as events show, there never will be:

There will always be wars somewhere, unfortunately. The genuine, true Peace—Christ—came to earth and revealed Himself to the world.

Thus, the Church prays for peace in every sense of the word. And notice that it prays for the whole world. We don't pray just for any one group of people, not even for the Orthodox alone, or Christians alone—we pray for the entire world. All people are our brethren, all people are children of God, all are called to the Kingdom of God, and we must pray for all people, that they might have the peace of God, the presence of God in their hearts.

Secondly, we pray for “**the good estate of the holy Churches of God,**” that the holy Church of God, scattered across the face of the entire earth, might stand firm, and be strong and unshakable.

The Church constantly suffers attack from without, experiencing abuse and enmity from various temptations, scandals, seductions—what have you. Christians also have enmity with the Church from within when they make schisms and introduce heresies. Satan is also at enmity with the Church. Therefore, we pray that the Church might have stability and fortitude, that it might stand strong. Fortunately, there's no danger that the Church itself will fall and be crushed: God protects it, and it will never be crushed. But in human terms, we, people, members of the Church, need to stand firmly on our feet and support our brethren.

Do you know what great responsibility we all bear in this regard, although we often have no understanding of it? As members of the Church of Christ, we bear responsibility for the entire world, for our brethren, for our children, for our neighbors, for all people—for those who are far from the Church, and for those who are near to it. And firstly, for those who are far from the Church. After all, by the example of our life—if we truly become, with God's help, how God wants to see us—we can help these people to a much greater degree. Unfortunately, our infirmity often causes the spiritual death of others.

We have to realize that we all make up one body. If everything is in order here and now, it doesn't mean what's happening in the Church as a whole has nothing to do with us. The Church of God is scattered across the entire world, and there are countries where the Church is still persecuted to this day. And even until today, the Church ceaselessly brings forth martyrs. Yesterday, for example, the Synod of the Bulgarian Church canonized several martyrs who suffered in the years of persecution against the Church.<sup>[1]</sup> In Russia, Albania, Romania, Serbia, Georgia, there are thousands of New Martyrs. There are New Martyrs in China and in other countries. There are still countries where the Church is persecuted, where Christ is persecuted, where it's impossible to preach Christ and talk about Him. Some Christians have paid for their Baptisms with their lives; the lives of others are in constant danger and they face many problems. And the churches themselves in these countries face unbelievable difficulties. At one point there existed an Orthodox Church in India, although there're almost no Orthodox there now. The Orthodox priests and missionaries were expelled from India, with only a few Orthodox priests who were Indian remaining, who are secretly trying to preserve their parishes and churches. Satan fights against the Church throughout the world. Therefore, we pray in Liturgy for “the good estate of the holy Churches of God.”

Some people ask me if I feel any difference between my life on the Holy Mountain and my present life in Cyprus. This is how I usually answer: When I lived in the desert on the Holy Mountain and was a novice with Elder Joseph, I knew from experience how the devil battles with man. I knew what was happening with me in this battle. When I became a spiritual father, and then an abbot, I learned through Confession what kind of battle the devil wages

against other people. When I became a bishop in Cyprus, then I saw how the devil battles against the Church. And I testify before you that the devil's most ruthless warfare is against the Church.

Through satan's machinations, everything we plan to do for the Church goes topsy-turvy. Even the simplest thing—like printing a small brochure, for example—is impossible to do just “once and done.” All kinds of obstacles and difficulties will certainly arise; the brochure will be printed all crooked and backwards. Everything will work against this labor. To accomplish something, you have to overcome the strongest resistance. Or maybe we want to build a church. You can't even imagine how many difficulties and temptations we'll have to face! When the church is finally built, it'll be seen as a miracle, but while it's still being built, the problems and temptations will wrench your soul right out of you.

How many things work out so easily in the world—new houses grow up like mushrooms! How many magnificent secular publications come off the printing press without the slightest problem! But in the Church, whatever you undertake, your plans are fulfilled with the shedding of much sweat and blood, overcoming many difficulties; a great struggle, great resistance—from the devil himself, and from people with weak souls. It requires a great feat and great prayer for the Church of God for it to have strength, fortitude, well-being, for it to fulfill its mission and proclaim the word of God throughout the world.

Then the deacon prays for unity, or “**the union of all.**” In modern society, the word “unity” has been used quite a lot recently. But society means one thing by unity, and the Church another. “The union of all” is not some kind of potato salad where all the ingredients are mixed up in the same bowl. “The union of all” means the conversion of all people to Christ and union with Him in the true faith. This is true unity. This is the unity we beseech in the Liturgy: the conversion of all people to Christ. But in society, unity is often understood as, let's say, boiling everything down in the same pot. However, that's not unity but a mixture, where people and entire nations lose their individuality. Take, for example, the notorious multiculturalism. Those who admired multiculturalism eventually realized that that there's something wrong with this policy, that everyone should care for their cultural individuality a little bit.

Nowadays, there's a lot of talk about the ecumenical character of the [unity of the Church](#). But what does the unity of the Churches mean? First of all, it must be said that there is no unity of churches, because the Church of Christ is one, and that is the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. There is no other church. So how should we understand unity then?—the return to the bosom of the Church of those who have fallen away from it, whether Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses—whoever. They must all return to the Church and unite with it—this is the unity of all that the Church prays for—certainly not that we be thrown together into one “salad.”

There's a beautiful prayer in the text of the Liturgy of [St. Basil the Great](#): “Lead back those who are in error and join them to Thy Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.” The Church prays for its children who have fallen away, who have separated from it, who have strayed from the straight path, that the Lord might return them and that they might be reunited with the holy Church of God. This is what St. Basil is talking about—not that the Church would lose its identity and become part of some impersonal gathering, coming to a state that's disastrous for its children and the Church itself. Fortunately, the Lord has assured us that the gates of hades won't overcome the Church.

Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol  
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