



## **St John's Church News No 30:** **November 2011**

**ЦЕРКОВЬ СВТ. ИОАННА ШАНХАЙСКОГО**  
**ST JOHN'S RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**  
**Military Road, Colchester, Essex CO1 2AN**

His Holiness Kyrill, Patriarch of Moscow and All the Russias  
Most Rev. Metropolitan Hilarion, First Hierarch of ROCOR  
Very Rev. Mark, Archbp of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain

**For this newsletter in electronic form: [www.orthodoxengland.org.uk/zchurchnews.htm](http://www.orthodoxengland.org.uk/zchurchnews.htm)**

### **Confession and Contact / Исповедь**

We follow the universal practice of the Orthodox Church, whereby members of the Orthodox Church may take communion after confession. For confessions, baptisms, weddings, house and car blessings etc: о. Андрей / Fr Andrew:

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### **Расписание богослужений / Services in November**

#### **Saturday 5 November**

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

#### **Sunday 6 November**

10.00 am: Hours and Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

#### **Saturday 12 November**

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

### **Sunday 13 November**

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

### **Saturday 19 November**

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

### **Sunday 20 November**

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

### **Saturday 26 November**

5.30 pm: No Vigil / Всенощного бдения не будет. Diocesan Clergy Conference in London. Епархиальный съезд клира в Лондоне.

### **Sunday 27 November**

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

### **Monday 28 November**

Beginning of the Advent Fast/ Начало Рождественского поста.

### **Weddings in October**

7 October: Roman Stepan and Maria Maksimova

### **New Baby**

Congratulations to Angelina and Paul Welsh on the birth of their baby daughter, Sophia, born on Sunday 2 October.

## **NEWS**

### **Meetings of the Theological Committee of the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops**

As representative of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, on Monday 6 June Fr Andrew had to go to London for a meeting of the Theological Committee of the Local Assembly of Orthodox Bishops in Great Britain and Ireland. Another trip was made for the same reason on Thursday 20 October. Various administrative matters were discussed in order to enhance co-operation between the different Orthodox dioceses in these islands. These Dioceses include the Russian (2 representatives), the Greek, the Serbian, the Romanian and the Arab (Antiochian) Churches. The Bulgarian and Georgian representatives have not so far appeared.

## **BBC TV**

A BBC team came to the church on 13 October to film the inside for a Songs of Praise programme to be screened on BBC1 on the evening of Sunday 22 January.

In the course of conversation with Pam Rhodes, the presenter of the programme, the question was asked: 'Theologically, how do Orthodox stand with regard to Protestant and Catholic disagreements?' The answer was: 'Orthodox cannot see much difference between Catholics and Protestants. To us they seem to be the same, they both come from recent times. We think they should join together. Then Orthodox could talk to them, because we hold to the ancient tradition of the Church, from the first millennium, from apostolic times. Everything that we Orthodox do comes from that period, before either Catholicism or Protestantism was invented. For example we confess the Apostolic Creed, which no-one else uses, we use the Apostolic calendar, we have no pope, a married priesthood, baptism by immersion followed by confirmation at once, communion in both kinds from baptism on, and we do not have organs or pews, both of which are relatively recent innovations'.

## **Trees**

For over a year we have been thinking about what to do with the overgrown conifer trees behind St John's Hall. Thanks to the efforts of our parishioner, Chris, who works with tree surgeons, we received planning permission and had them cut down and removed in mid-October. This has been welcomed by several local people and indeed one of the neighbours at the back of the Church, Jim Maltby, even made a donation to help, as did Chris himself. Thank you very much!

## **A Sermon on Little Good Deeds**

**Russian:** <http://www.pravmir.ru/tolko-silnye-lyudi-lyubyat-slyshat-o-sebe-pravdu/>

[Archimandrite John Krestiankin](#)

Many people think it is very hard to live the faith and do God's will. In fact it is very easy. All we have to do is pay attention to the details, to the little things, and try not to sin in the smallest and easiest things.

This is the simplest and easiest way to enter into the spiritual world and draw near to God.

Usually people think that the Maker demands very great works, the most extreme self-sacrifice, the annihilation of their own personalities. People are so frightened by these thoughts that they even start to fear being near to God, they hide, like Adam who sinned, and they do not even read the word of God. They think: 'I'll never be able to do anything for God and for my soul in any case, so it's better if I keep away from anything spiritual, I won't think about eternal life, about God, and I'll take life as it comes'.

On the very threshold of religious life there exists a sort of 'hypnosis of the important things', 'we must do some great deed – or else nothing'. And people do not do anything for God or for



their souls. It is amazing: the more people give themselves up to the little things in life, the less they want to be honest, pure and faithful to God, precisely in those little things. And yet anyone who wants to draw near to the Kingdom of God must have the right approach to the little things.

- ‘He who wants to draw near’ – this is precisely where the whole difficulty of human approaches to religion is concealed. Usually people want to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven in ways which are quite unexpected for them, magically and miraculously, or, more exactly, through some sort of spiritual exploit. But neither the former nor the latter is the right way to find the spiritual world.

We do not draw near to God in a magical and miraculous way, remaining here on earth, strangers to the interests of the Kingdom of God, we do not buy the values of the Kingdom of God with some sort of outward deeds. Deeds are necessary for spiritual life, a heavenly psychology, an enlightened will, a desire for good, a just and pure heart and unfeigned love must be grafted onto us. It is precisely through the little things of everyday life that all this can be grafted onto us and take root in us.

Little [good deeds](#) are water for the flower of the human personality. There is absolutely no need to pour an ocean of water onto a thirsty flower. You can give it half a cupful, that is enough for life and it will play a very important role in its life.

A hungry person, even someone who has not eaten for a very long time does not need to eat a truckload of bread, half a loaf is enough for his body to recover. Life itself provides us with amazing parallels and examples of the importance of little things. In the medical field, which deals with small and strictly limited doses of medicine, there is a whole field of homeopathy which advocates only tiny amounts of medication. This is on the basis that our bodies themselves produce extraordinarily small amounts of substances which are precious for them and these are quite enough to support them and give them good health.

I would like to draw everyone’s close attention to the very little things, which are easy to do and yet extraordinarily necessary.

‘Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward’. These words of our Lord express the supreme importance of good in little things. ‘A cup of water’ is not much. In the time of the Saviour, Palestine was not a desert, as it is today; it was a flourishing, well-watered land and a cup of water, though small, was of course more or less precious at a time when people mainly went everywhere on foot. But in saying this, the Lord does not restrict Himself to just a small cup of water. He even adds that it may be given only ‘in the name of a disciple’. This is a remarkable detail. And we should examine it carefully. The best things in life are always things in the Name of Christ, in the Name of the Lord.

‘Blessed is he that comes – in any sense – in the name of the Lord’. The Spirit, the Name of Christ bestows on all things and deeds an eternal value, however little those deeds may be.

Simple, human [sacrificial love](#), which always reflects the love of Christ, makes every human word, every human gesture, every human tear, every human smile, every human look significant and precious. And here the Lord says clearly that a little good deed done not even in His Name, but only in the name of a disciple, already has great value in eternity. ‘In the name of a disciple’ – this is the boundary of the link with His Spirit, His deed, His life...

It is after all clear that our deeds can be and often are [selfish](#), inherently self-interested. The Lord indicates this to us, He advises us to invite into our homes not those who can then extend the same invitation to us, but to invite those who need our help, support and consolation. Sometimes our guests spread vain talk, evil gossip and all sorts of futile nonsense. But there can be nice, friendly conversations, a communion of souls, this is blessed, this strengthens the soul, fortifying in it goodness and truth. However, the worship of insincere worldly contacts is a disease which infects other people and ourselves and which is today destroying civilization.

Any human contact must inevitably be touched by the good Spirit of Christ, by His appearance, either overtly or else covertly. The covert presence of the Spirit of God in kind and simple human communion of souls is that atmosphere of ‘discipleship’, of which our Lord speaks. ‘In the name of a disciple’ is the very first stage in our communion with others in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself...

Many who do not yet know the Lord and the wonderful communion with Him already have among themselves this disinterested and pure communion of souls, which draws them towards the Spirit of Christ. And many may be at this first stage of good, of which the Lord spoke as of giving a cupful of water ‘only in the name of a disciple’. More exactly everyone is there. So it is also correct to understand these words of Christ literally and try and help everyone. Not a single instant of such communion is forgotten before God, just as ‘not one sparrow is forgotten before your Heavenly Father’ (Lk 12, 6).

If people were wise, they would all strive to do little but very easy deeds, through which they could receive eternal treasures for themselves. The great salvation for people is that they can graft themselves onto the trunk of the eternal tree of life through even the smallest cutting – a good deed. There is no need to graft the whole trunk of a good apple-tree onto a wild one. All you need to do is to take a small cutting and graft it on to one of the twigs of a wild apple-tree. Similarly there is no need to mix a huge amount of leavened dough with a similar amount of unleavened dough to make it rise. All you need do is add a very small amount of yeast to the unleavened and the whole lot will rise. It is the same thing with little things. The tiniest thing can have a huge effect. This is why we must not neglect the little things in doing good and say to ourselves: ‘I can’t do anything big, so I won’t bother to do any good at all’.

How useful even the smallest good deed is for us is proved beyond doubt by the fact that even the smallest evil is extraordinarily harmful to us. Let us say that a speck of dust has fallen into our eye –our eye can no longer see anything and at the same time it even becomes hard to see anything with the other eye. A small evil which has fallen like a speck of dust into the soul's eye puts us completely out of action. It is a tiny matter to remove a speck of dust from our bodily eye or our soul's eye, or from someone else's, but it is a good deed without which we cannot live.

Indeed, a little good deed is more vital, more essential in this world than a great one. We can live without a great good deed, but not without a little one. Humanity will perish not from a lack of little good deeds, but precisely from a lack of little good deeds. A great good deed is only the roof which is placed on the walls and they are made up of little bricks.

So the Maker left us on earth to do little, very easy, good deeds, having taken on Himself all the great good deeds. And here, through those who do the little deeds, the Lord does the great deeds. The Maker Himself makes our 'little deeds' into His great deeds, for our Lord is the Maker, Who made everything from nothing, all the more therefore He can make little into great. But the air and the earth resist even the slightest upward movement. Human inertia resists even the smallest and easiest good deed. The Savior exposed this inertia in his short parable: 'No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, the old is better (Lk 5, 39). Anyone who lives in the world is attached to the ordinary and routine. If someone is attached to evil, he thinks it is a normal and natural state and he considers good to be unnatural, oppressive, too much of a burden for him. If someone is attached to good, then he does not do it because he needs to, but because he cannot help doing it, just as he cannot help breathing and a bird cannot help flying.

A person who has a kind nature first of all strengthens and consoles himself. This is not at all selfishness, as some unjustly assert, no, this is the true expression of disinterested good, when it brings higher spiritual joy to him who has done it. True good is always a profound and pure consolation for those who unite their souls with it. It is impossible not to be happy when you come out of a dark underground prison into the light and see the pure green of nature and smell the flowers. We must not shout out to people: 'You're selfish, you take pleasure in the good you do'. This is the only selfless joy, [the joy of good](#), the joy of the Kingdom of God. And people will be saved from evil through this joy, they will live with God for ever.

For those who have not experienced real good, this sometimes seems to be a futile torment which no-one needs... There is a state of false peace which it is difficult to get out of. Just as it is hard for a baby to get out of its mother's womb into the world, so it is hard for 'baby-people' to get out of their petty feelings and thoughts, which are directed only at obtaining selfish advantages and who are unable to feel concerned for anyone who is not linked to them.

Here is the conviction that the old, the familiar and the routine are always better than the new and the unfamiliar, a conviction inherent to every unenlightened person. Only those who have begun to grow, to tread the path of thirsting for the Righteousness of Christ and spiritual humility, only they stop regretting their inertia, the immobility of the dreams which they have acquired in life and which they cherish in life...It is hard for people to break out of the routine. In this way, perhaps in part they preserve themselves from unbridled insolence and evil. The stability of our legs in a marsh sometimes prevents us from falling headlong into an abyss. But more often it is the marsh that prevents us from going up to the mountain where we may see God, or at least getting out onto firm ground where we can obey the word of God...

However, through doing the little things, the easy things, those which are done with the greatest of ease, we can most of all get used to good and start to serve it, reluctantly, but from the heart, sincerely, and in this way enter ever more into the atmosphere of good, putting down the roots of



our life into the new earth of good. The roots of human life adapt easily to this earth of good and soon cannot live without it...So we are saved: from little comes great. He who is 'faithful in that which is least' turns out to be faithful in that which is much.

This is why I now sing the praises not of good, but of its insignificance, its smallness. And not only do I not reproach you for being engaged in doing good only in the little things and for not making some great self-sacrifice but, on the contrary, I ask you not to think about some great self-sacrifice and that you in no way neglect to do good in the little things.

If you want, by all means, fall into a rage with regard to some special case, but do not be angry because of some little detail, do not be angry 'with your brother without a cause' (Matt. 5, 22).

Invent some lie in some exceptional case, but do not tell your neighbour untruths in your everyday life. This is a detail, it is petty, insignificant, but try to carry this out and you will see what will come of it.

Leave aside all your musings; are we or are we not allowed to kill millions of people – women, children and old men – try to show your moral feeling in the little things: never kill your neighbour's personality, neither in word, nor hint, nor gesture. After all it is good to restrain yourself from evil...and here, in the details, you will achieve a great deal, easily, unnoticeably and in a practical way for yourself.

It is hard to get up to [pray](#) at night. But enter into prayer in the morning, if you cannot do this at home, then as you go to work, when your thought is free, enter into 'Our Father' and let your heart respond to every word of that short prayer. And at night, making the sign of the cross, give yourself up into the hands of the Heavenly Father with your whole heart...That is very easy...

And give water, give water to all those who need it, give a cup, filled with the simplest sympathy towards anyone who needs it. There are whole rivers of this water everywhere, do not be afraid, it will not be short, each of you draw a cup of it.

I sing your praises, amazing path of 'little things!' Surround yourselves, people, gird yourselves, with little good deeds - a chain of little, simple, easy good feelings, thoughts, words and deeds – they cost you nothing. Let us leave what is great and hard, that is for those who love that, but for us who have not yet come to love the great things, the Lord in His mercy has prepared, pouring it out everywhere like the water and the air, the little love.

St Petersburg Diocesan News (1990, No 1, Pp 27-29)

### **Can we pray in front of a stern-looking icon? Errors and pitfalls of icon painting.**

*Have you ever wondered why the faces of saints on some icons are so stern and threatening that they are frightening to look at? Why was St Christopher portrayed with a dog's head which made him look more like the Egyptian god Anubis than a Christian saint? Is it right to portray God the Father as a gray-haired old man? Can we consider Vrubel's and Vasnetsov's images of angels and saints to be icons?*

*Although icons and the Church are virtually as old as one another and icons have been painted for centuries according to strict rules, yet in this field too there are errors, disagreements and arguments. What should our attitude be? Ekaterina Dmitrievna Sheko, Head of the Department of Iconography at St Tikhon's Orthodox University, explains. Anubis or St Christopher?*

- Ekaterina Dmitrievna, we can find controversial subjects in icons, subjects that are troubling. One of the clearest examples is the image of St Christopher with a dog's head. (According to his life, he was very handsome and suffered greatly from the attentions of women. So he beseeched God to make him ugly to avoid temptation. God granted this wish - Author). What should we make of this?

- The portrayal of St Christopher with a dog's head was prohibited by Synodal order in 1722. But popularly he continued to be portrayed in this way even after the prohibition, in order to make him stand out from all the other saints. However, in Serbia or in Western Europe, for example, St Christopher is portrayed in a different way, carrying a boy across a river on his shoulders. This is a tradition.



St Christopher. Icon of the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



**- What is the difference between a tradition of painting and a rule?**

- Rules for Church services clearly define certain rules and acts, but it is difficult to do this in the field of icon painting, since – generally speaking – a rule here is above all a tradition. Nowhere does it say that you have to paint this way and no other way. But the tradition itself was formed by generations of believers, many of whom ascended to higher levels of the knowledge of God than we do today through their ascetic life and prayer. This is why when the artist and icon-painter studies traditional iconographic techniques, he draws closer to the knowledge of the truth.

**- What is the difference between a tradition of painting and a rule?**

**Is Blessed Matrona not blind then?**

**- So it turns out that every painter adds some details at his or her discretion. For example, we are used to seeing icons of Blessed Matrona with her eyes closed, and the most popular icon (the Sofrino one) depicts her blind. Yet there are some icons where she can see. After all, there will be no disabilities after the Resurrection...Where is the truth here?**

- Opinions diverge on this point. My spiritual father believes that it is incorrect to depict her blind on the icon and I agree with him. Since Blessed Matrona has been canonized, she cannot be blind, because in heaven there is nothing physical, including infirmities, disabilities or wounds.



St Matrona of Moscow

**- Then, please explain why it is normal to depict wounds on the hands and feet of the Savior?**

- We know from the Gospel that Christ rose from the dead and bodily ascended into heaven and that there were nail marks on His hands and feet as well as the spear wound on the ribs. And after His Resurrection He showed them to Thomas the Apostle and let him touch them.

**- Are there any canons on whether we should portray injuries to the bodies of the saints or not?**

- No, there aren't, that's just the point. Anyway blindness was not depicted anywhere else. Matronushka's icon is the exception, though of course there were blind saints in Church history. It is a great pity that there are no Synodal decisions about the iconography of St Matrona which would be binding for the whole Church...

But I think that in the case of this icon it is not even a question of open or closed eyes, but something else. In my opinion, the most popular icon of Blessed Matrona is not only controversial from the standpoint of iconography. The image is very ugly, poorly done, and the face does not have anything in common even with the photo of Matronushka which was taken when she was alive. The photo shows a rather well-rounded face of the saint, a large nose, soft, rounded cheeks and a pleasant look. And here everything is so dried up, she has the thinnest of noses, a huge, frightening mouth, a tense face, the eyes are shut tight and do not express calm. The work is clumsy and ugly. Of course, we can break away from the portrait resemblance, but the icon must express the spiritual aspect of the person and not distort it.

**A saint's face in an icon comes from their tormented face in life.**

**- Should the painter strive to obtain a perfect similarity between the face in the icon and that in life?**

- Some believe that the portrait resemblance is secondary, as it is an element of the fleshly nature of man. For example, Patriarch Tikhon had a very large nose and some icon painters think that there is no need to reflect this in the icon and that his face should be painted in a more generalized manner close to traditional iconography. Such matters are discussed behind the scenes, but the clergy have no common answer, there are no Synodal statements on such issues.

**- Do you think it should be done?**

- I do. Everything that happens in the Church, especially anything that is connected with prayer, should be discussed in all seriousness at Councils. After all an icon is designated to help us pray, since people turn to God and His saints through icons.

The style of the icons that were painted at the beginning of perestroika was discussed very carefully by both icon painters and clergy. For example, the process of creating icons of Patriarch Tikhon, Ambrose of Optina, Elizaveta Feodorovna was lengthy and thought through very carefully. I remember how it all happened and I think that at that time it was quite right. Firstly, we all prayed about it and secondly, we discussed the artistic aspect as well. Later, after the canonizations of huge numbers of saints, we lost the possibility to study the iconography of each one with such great care.

**- Who are the saints whose iconography creates most problems?**

- It is complicated to paint the New Martyrs. They are more or less our contemporaries and we know their faces and this forces us to refer to their portraits. But sometimes all we have is a concentration camp photo taken by the NKVD. Once I had to paint a priest from such a photo. He had been shaved, he had been starved, tortured, interrogated, driven to the extreme of physical exhaustion and sentenced to death – it was all written on his face. And it is extremely difficult to make an iconographical image, shot through with light, out of such a tormented face.

Pre-revolutionary photos are wonderful, they are already icons. For example, the faces of Patriarch Tikhon or John of Kronstadt who did so much for the good of the Church are already transfigured in themselves. Also the tradition of photography was still alive at that time – the photographer caught the mood, the state of mind. But of course the NKVD photos are awful...

Or, for instance, the iconography of Archbishop Luke Voino-Yasenetsky is very complicated. As a result of many terrible incidents in his life his face was slightly irregular, he saw poorly in one eye, so his face was somewhat indistinct. So you must have certain talents to create a new icon and not just copy a traditional one.

#### On 'Corporate' Caution.

##### **- Are there many non-canonical icons in the Russian Church at present?**

- The number has been growing more and more in recent years, precisely because our bishops are silent. There has been no decision on what must not be done. I believe that an official decision on this would be enough to stop artists falling into extremes.

We have some internal controls, a certain caution – people who are serious about iconography look at each other's work, seek advice and discuss what each other does. For example, in the West there are no limits at all, everybody does whatever they want. We are more careful, but this is a sort of internal, 'corporate' principle. There are no strict rules.

##### **- And what is the advantage of keeping to rules? Where does it help?**

- I think the knowledge of certain iconographical rules and traditions gives you the opportunity within those boundaries to express spiritual truth through pictorial art. We have some common elements which have been worked out down the centuries and verified by many generations. We can use them to show spiritual things and it is unwise to ignore them. Apart from this, it is also a link between different periods, a link with many generations of believers, with righteous Orthodox and ascetics.

#### A Synodal decision?! So what?...

**- We can also feel this link between different periods in the opposite sense. When you enter a 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century church, you look up and see the image of 'the New Testament Trinity' beneath the dome. And yet the Local Council of Russian Orthodox Church in the 17<sup>th</sup> century forbade representations of God the Father as a gray-haired old man. Why are such images still in churches?**

- This image is the result of Western influence. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a huge muddle in Russia, the Church was beheaded - during the reign of Peter I the Synod came into being as the State body to govern the Church. The authority of the Orthodox Church was undermined by the authority of the State. Though the Council prohibition had been issued, it was still totally disregarded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

##### **- But surely the decision of a Council was binding?**

- It does not seem to have been. Although there was no official permission for such images, we do not have any to the present day either. I suppose that the Church hierarchy is for some reason afraid to limit artistic freedom. I don't know why. Art experts are given complete control to discuss iconography and the clergy often take a back seat because they consider that they are not

competent. Though sometimes we see the other extreme, when priests do as they think fit without any consideration. Unfortunately, no general opinion of the Church has been formulated.

And why Rublev? We can do better!

**- Does the Church recognize the paintings of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century artists like Vasnetsov, Vrubel etc. as icons?**

- Again, there is no one opinion in the Church. Some recognize these paintings as icons, others do not. No bishop has said anything regarding the images of Vasnetsov, Nesterov or Vrubel, no one has said anything at a conference or at a Council on what is right and what is wrong, on where the limit of what can be permitted is.

**- Is it possible in principle to consider that a secular style drawing is an icon?**

- Yes, sometimes. But that does not mean that we must aim to have a secular style.

I remember one example, when I was working on the fresco restoration project in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior and there was an argument. Many said that there was no need to restore the original secular style of painting, instead something brand new had to be done as a matter of principle – for example, a modern mosaic. At that moment some artist came forward and said: “Of course, it won’t do, we need to do a real fresco ...” He was asked: “And what examples do you suggest we take?” And he answered: “Well, for example, Rublev...And why Rublev? It’s possible to do *better!*” And when he said this, everybody understood that there was no need for better! Since when someone says that he can do better than Rublev, that raises all sorts of doubts.

**- But probably no-one will ever paint like Rublev. The icons of the 14-15<sup>th</sup> centuries are of one style, Renaissance icons are another and modern icons are another again. And you can’t confuse them. Why is that?**

- Iconography reflects our surroundings in life, all human events, images and thoughts. In Rublev’s time, when there was no television, no film industry and not such a huge amount of printed images as nowadays, iconography rose to great heights.

There were still fine examples in the 17<sup>th</sup> century since certain standards were maintained, but you could already find some confusion in iconography, an over-indulgence in the decorative. The depth of content of the icon was lost. And the 18<sup>th</sup> century is decline because what was done to the Church at that time could not help being reflected in iconography. Many bishops were killed and tortured, any Orthodox tradition and legacy was considered to be retrograde and brutally uprooted. There was fear of doing something which would displease the authorities. This had an impact on everything, it was always at the back of people’s minds.



**- And how do you explain the fact that medieval dissymmetry, disproportionately large heads, for example, have disappeared in icons?**

- They disappeared because painters know how to give the right proportions to the human body. Disproportion and deformity are not the goal of icon painting.

**- But some Cypriot icons still have such disproportion, for example... Have they not learnt anything at all then?**

- It depends on the school. The Greeks also strive to keep the old traditions; they do not go in for a secular style. Rublev and Dionysius did not change the proportions because they could not draw in a secular style but because they were men of great gifts and free of blinkered convention. And now it is considered that if a painter has mastered the secular style, it means that he will be good at icon painting. In fact, he will be painting the way the later 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century painters did – with correct proportions, correct perspective and a correct reproduction of dimensions. These are two extremes: either an iconographer can do nothing and just “daubs” or else he studies secular painting seriously, at the Surikov Art School in Moscow, for example, and then he tries to break himself into the techniques of icon painting. But that is very difficult.

Why pray in front of the icon, if it does not speak to us?

**- Has modern icon painting not become more realistic?**

- No, not at all. It depends on the extent to which the practices of the painter who has been trained in secular art influence his icon painting, often unconsciously.

**- Is it a mistake when a face on the icon looks too stern and strict? Or should we see something through this sternness?**

- That is just a lack of skill.

**- Why should we use models? Classic iconography shows that a face in an icon can be beautiful.**

- They set us an example and if we manage to get close to it, that would be very good. But if we work in own individualistic way, the chances are that nothing good will come out of it because nowadays we have a very distorted way of life.

**- What is happening in icon painting today?**

- Nowadays there are a lot of people who are completely ignorant of the classics and simply do not know how to paint. Icon painting has become a very profitable business, so now icons are painted by anyone who feels like it. Even people who have painted two or three icons have already started calling themselves icon painters. Today it is much easier, quicker and more profitable to sell an icon than a landscape. So now any icon sells like hot cakes. You look in the small shops and you can find dreadful-looking icons and they all find a buyer. The market is like a sponge, it is not saturated yet. There are a huge number of errors.

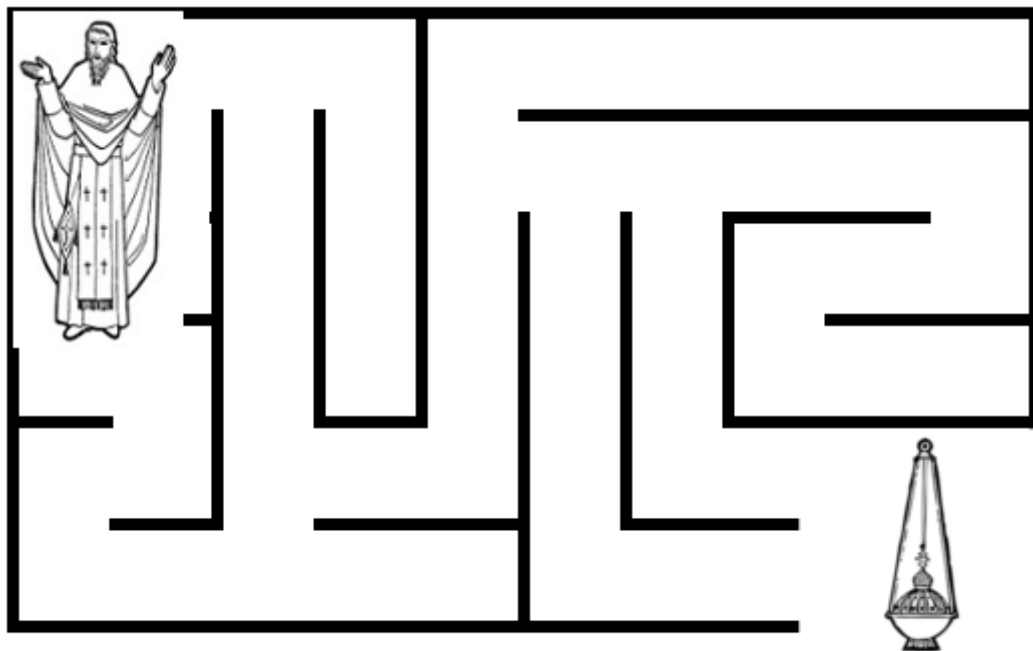
**- What, in your view, is the criterion of a good or a bad icon?**

- I think the main content of any image – even it is a secular painting - is the state of mind of the person depicted. There are secular style icons which are very spiritual – these are the icons of St Dimitry of Rostov, St Joasaph of Belgorod, the Valaam Icon of the Mother of God. They convey the state of divinisation: dispassion and firmness as well as benevolence and peace. And why pray in front of an icon that does not speak to us? For example, as in Vrubel – there are some frightening, insane looks. The form might be very good, but the main thing is the content.





Colour in the image....



Help the priest find his censer !

