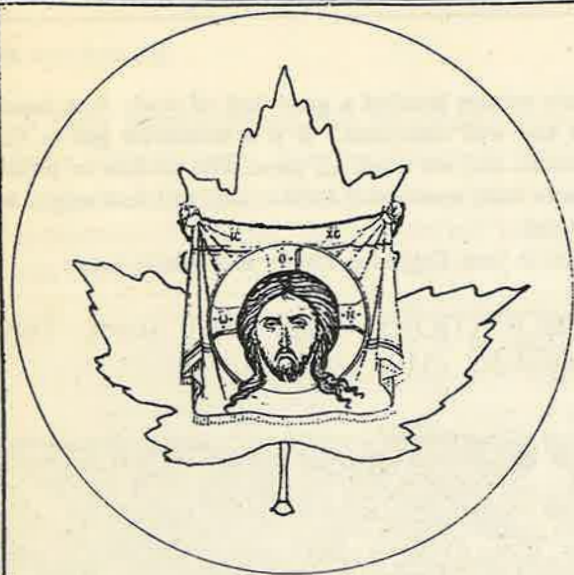




The CANADIAN ORTHODOX MISSIONARY

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THIS evocative photo of Archimandrite Varlaam crossing the grounds with one of the monastery dogs, was taken by Theodore Almas, president of St Nicholas parish.

"JOY OF CANADA" PILGRIMAGE SET FOR AUGUST SECOND

Dedication of Monastery Church to highlight feast.

The annual "Joy of Canada" pilgrimage, the Feast of Canadian Orthodoxy, will be highlighted this year by the dedication of the new monastery church.

This will be the first celebration of the feast at the new monastery. We invite as many of you as possible to come for the pilgrimage and join us in giving thanks to God for the new monastery, which has been obtained through His mercy and blessing.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

SATURDAY, 1 AUGUST:

Divine Liturgy: 10 A.M.

Potluck Picnic: 12-1 P.M.

Spiritual Talk: 1 P.M.

In the afternoon, the clergy will be available for discussions. Pilgrims will be able to explore the monastery grounds and nearby rural area.

Akathist for the Joy of Canada, and Vespers: 5 P.M. Confessions will be heard following vespers.

SUNDAY, 2 AUGUST:

Procession with the "Joy of Canada" ikon: 10 A.M.

Chanting of the Akathist for the "Joy of Canada" will begin as soon as the ikon has entered the church. The Divine Liturgy will follow immediately.

Potluck picnic: 1 P.M.

Spiritual talk: 2 P.M.

Anointing Service: 3 P.M.

Confessions: following the service, time will be allotted for special confession.

The bishop and priests will be available for discussions during the afternoon. Sunday vespers will be served on the monastery typikon at 7 P.M. Pilgrims are welcome to attend.

We ask those planning to attend to remember that the event is a spiritual pilgrimage, and that the monastery rules are set for the purpose of providing an atmosphere of worship and prayer. Appropriate dress and decorum are necessary.

SERMON OF BISHOP LAZAR ON THE SUNDAY OF ALL SAINTS (Hebrews 11:33-12:2)

In the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

Today, the Sunday of All Saints, we celebrate the feast of the power of faith.

The saints, beloved of Christ, are the nobility of God's kingdom. But they obtained this nobility neither by inheritance nor birth, not by wealth or earthly power. Indeed, it was the rejection and renunciation of all these things, not even excepting father and mother, which bestowed upon them this nobility: for true nobility is a condition of the heart, not an accident of birth.

The mark of their nobility was faith; for "by faith they subdued kingdoms." And what kingdoms! By the struggle of faith they have subdued the kingdom of the passions, the kingdom of Satan; they have subdued powers and principalities and the despotism of worldly attachments. They subdued these kingdoms within themselves, first by renouncing them, and then by struggling in faith, with God's help, to set themselves free of them, that the Kingdom of God might reign in their hearts.

"By faith," Paul says, "they worked righteousness." As Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness," so the saints, by faith, have become partakers of the righteousness of Christ, proclaimed that righteousness to the world and led others to seek it.

"By faith, they obtained promises;" and not only the promise of eternal life, but the saints have also received the fulfilment of all those promises of grace — "greater things than these shall they do...", our Saviour declared. And such promises have the saints obtained by faith, "grace of grace" and "glory unto glory."

"By faith," the apostle says,

[Cont. on P.2, Col.1: SERMON]

[SERMON: cont. from P.1]

"they stopped the mouths of lions." He speaks not only of Daniel, but of all the saints, for they have stopped the mouth of a more fearful and terrible beast, as Peter elsewhere says: *"the devil is a raging lion, stalking about seeking whom he might devour,"* and Paul, in another place, glorifies God that he has escaped from the jaws of this same lion. By faith, therefore, the saints have also closed the mouth of Satan, defeating this "lion" and setting him at nought.

And what other wondrous things did they not do through faith! They quenched the violent fire of the passions and, in so doing, escaped the edge of the sword. They grew valiant in spiritual warfare, turned away invading armies of temptations and raised the dead — first their own souls, dead in sin, and then the souls of their neighbours, likewise dead in sin (and not a few of them raised to life those who had fallen asleep).

In the midst of enumerating all these glorious deeds, Paul declares, *"Out of weakness, they were made strong."* And this, too, by faith. For, indeed, the saints became mighty because they confessed from the heart their weakness before God, their powerlessness to fulfil righteousness and obtain salvation without the help of His grace. From their meekness and humility, they were made mighty in faith.

Truly, the saints are the nobility of God's Kingdom. Yet, how did they obtain this noble rank and these wondrous deeds? They were tortured, tried with cruel mockings and scourgings, bound and cast into prison. They were stoned, tempted, slain, tortured and left destitute. They were left without certain homes, but lived in deserts and forests, in caves and the hollows of trees. They renounced father and mother, brother and sister, son and daughter, and daily took up their cross and followed the path of the Great Sufferer, Jesus Christ. The robes and raiment of their nobility were chains, stripes and bonds, the palaces in which they receive the royal purple were prisons, caves, wretched cells, scaffolds and tombs.

But what transformed these wounds, stripes, bonds, mockings and deaths into sceptres and crowns? How did prison cells and caves become royal chambers, and scaffolds the thrones of princes? What made chains, rags and hairshirts into royal purple? What, indeed, transformed sinful and suffering humanity into children of God, into gods by grace?

Faith! By faith, they obtained grace and by faith and grace they struggled to obtain the sure promises of God. By faith they obtained "grace for grace" and ascended "from glory unto glory."

As our Saviour, instructing us to imitate the righteous, commanded, "go ye therefore and do likewise," so we are instructed by the lives of the saints to follow that sure path of faith. Let us, therefore, never cease to pray together with the saints, and ask their help and prayers that we may attain also to such faith, and follow, with God's help, along the path which they have blazed for us, that we, too, may obtain a share in those promises, and become citizens of God's Kingdom. Amen.

BOOKREVIEW:

by Fr Moses Armstrong

ICONOGRAPHER'S PATTERNBOOK

Published by Oakwood Publications

There are many of us, converts and English-speaking Orthodox believers, who constantly pray for the translation of the texts of our traditional Orthodox Christian faith into the English language. When a new service book appears, we rejoice. When a new book appears that teaches us more about our Orthodox history or background, we are more than satisfied.

Recently, a new work appeared which is another step in the preserving and passing on to future generations, of our Orthodox traditions. This work is the "Iconographer's Patternbook: The Stroganov Tradition," which has been translated and edited by Father Christopher Kelley.

The text includes valuable historical information concerning the Stroganov family and the genealogy of the Stroganov patternbook. The original Old Russian text is given, as well as a more modern form, and an English translation. Along with the text, the illustrations provide an excellent guide for models of ikons which are not corrupted by "Western" influences.

Since the book follows the prescriptions given by the "Council of the Hundred Chapters" (Stoglav), it is valuable for those who are interested in the pre-Nikonian forms of Orthodoxy in Russia.

The production of this volume entailed a great deal of work. It is beautifully produced, well organized and well translated. It is a wonderful gift to English-speaking Orthodox Christians, and we thank all those who worked to produce it. We sincerely hope that more such works will follow, and will find ample support among the Orthodox faithful.

This excellent addition to your Orthodox library is available from:

OAKWOOD PUBLICATIONS, 3827 Bluff Street, Torrance, CA. 90505. Telephone Nr. (310) 378-9245.



THE BISHOP'S PAGE
by Bishop Lazar of Vancouver

THE IKON AS SCRIPTURE

{Continued from previous issue}

Haloed are another sometimes misunderstood element of ikonography. They do not have the meaning usually ascribed to them in art. The halo is not an invention of Christian art. It has been used for centuries as a symbolic device in the art of many cultures, usually to amplify or set apart a person depicted in a group of other people, or to signify a special rank or position of a person. In much of pre-Christian art, the light circle or square shown as a backdrop to the head of some person, indicated a special rank, usually of royalty. Kings and the children of kings were often depicted in art with this block of light coloured space placed behind the head.

The device of the halo of light was beautifully adapted for use in ikons, partly to signify that the person depicted has truly become a "member of the royal family," a child of the King and Creator of all. The inner spiritual significance of the halo in Orthodox Christian ikonography is much deeper and more profoundly scriptural than this, however, and it is of considerable theological significance.

In post-Orthodox Western representations, the halo gradually began to be depicted as a brim or disconnected ring above the head. This gradual change developed hand in hand with the corruption of sound doctrine in the schismatic Latin church. In it, we have an expression of the novel doctrines of merits and indulgences which grew out of the legalistic formalism of the separated Roman church. The Western halo is not a radiance of grace, of Christ dwelling in and filling a person, rather it is an evident external award, a sort of "merit badge" hung over the head. It also serves as a label, as if to say, the person pictured here is so utterly carnal in appearance that the little ring is hung over his or her head so that you will be able to know that this is supposed to be a saint.

Theologically, this difference is striking. Firstly, the halo is not necessary in Orthodox ikonography, because a saint is portrayed in the ikon in such a way that the transfigured and spiritual presence is clear from the form and nature of the figure itself, and no label or external sign is necessary to identify the person as a saint of God. There are a number of ikons in which the halo does not appear, as in the ikon of "Thomas Sunday," shown below, where there are no haloes on any of the apostles.



[Continued on P. 3, Col.1: IKONS]

To fully comprehend the scriptural fidelity of this aspect of Orthodox ikonography, it is necessary to understand that the halo is *not* a circle behind the head, but a globe of light which completely encompasses the head. It is rendered "transparent," as it were, so that you can see the face of the saint.



The globe of light, the halo, in the ikon is a radiance from within, the radiance of divine grace which is a gift of God, a testimony of the fact that, as Paul put it, *"It is not I who live, but Christ lives in me"* (Gal.2:20). This radiance is a gift of divine grace to the purified soul, an expression of the indwelling Holy Spirit, a testimony that the holy person represented, has become indeed, a fit temple for the Spirit, and since he *"lives in the Spirit,"* he *"also walks in the Spirit"* (Gal.5:25).

Finally, we must say something about the landscapes in ikonography.

This is another aspect in which the ikon seeks to convey the fullness of the Gospel message, rather than please carnal, sensual ideals. God has become Incarnate and walked upon the earth in a fully human form, and the universe can never again be the same. The incarnation, life, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ have brought the world to its last days, filled it with hope and impelled it onward toward its final destiny of transfiguration and glory.

These facts are often completely overlooked or misunderstood by some would-be ikon painters, who render backgrounds and landscapes in a carnal, naturalistic manner.

The created world fell with man, and now it is again uplifted by the God-man, Jesus Christ. The universe is redeemed together with man, and the process is inevitable, irreversible. As the Church on earth struggles for the salvation of all those who will join themselves to her, she also struggles for, and effectuates, the redemption of the created cosmos.

Moreover, when our Saviour declared, *"You are not of this world,"* and *"My kingdom is not of this world,"* (Jn.15:19; 18:36), He separated His Church from the carnal, sensual world around it, and declared it to be a world unto itself — a fore-image of the transfigured cosmos in the age to come. The world of ikonography is the world of the Holy Church, a world of regeneration, of newness of life, of transfiguration and incorruptibility. Ikons do not seek to debase or lower the created flesh, or to separate it from the spiritual, but rather to clearly unite the two and to transfigure the flesh with the spirit, for the Scripture says, *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit"* (1Cor.6:20); and again, *"The goal is to be holy both in body and in spirit"* (1Cor.7:34), and further, *"May God sanctify you completely and entirely, and your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1Ths.5:23). The same is true of the cosmos.

In Western, post-Orthodox art, the world, like the people in it are either still waiting for the advent of Christ, or they are indifferent to it and unaffected by it. Orthodox Christian ikonography, on the other hand, is profoundly aware of it, and faithful to it.

Here, then, is the principle of the ikonographic representation of landscape: *"God took a material body, thereby proving that matter can be redeemed: 'The Word made flesh has deified the flesh',"* says St. John the Damascene. God has shown that matter can be Spirit-bearing, for He bestowed the Holy Spirit upon flesh, *"I shall pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh"* (Joel 2:28), He said. *"The Orthodox doctrine of ikons is bound up with the Orthodox belief that the whole of God's creation, material as well as spiritual, is to be redeemed and glorified."*¹

And here is the Divine Scripture to which this is profoundly faithful. The Apostle informs us, in Romans, chapter eight, that:

"The whole creation waits expectantly for God's children to be made known. For the creation was made subject to frailty, not by its own fault, but by the Will of Him who so subjected it, but yet with hope. We know that the whole creation has been groaning and toiling together until now. That creation itself will be set free of its bondage to corruption, into the glorious freedom of God's children..." and Paul further says, *"...For in this hope we were saved"* (18-24).



COSMIC GRIEF:

In this ikon of the lamentations, we see a perfect example of the unity of man and the created world in the process of redemption. Note the arms of Mary of Magdala cast up in expression of grief and lament. The mountains behind the scene perfectly mirror the hands of Mary. The mountains are also cast up in a cosmic grief that encompasses the whole universe: the creator of all, the Lord of Life, lies as one dead, for the sake of our failings and sins,

that He might conquer the power which holds our nature prisoner and set us free from the bondage of the tyranny of death and satan (Hb.2:15).

COSMIC JOY:

In the proper ikon of the Resurrection, we see, again, the bond between mankind and the created universe. In this ikon, Christ is bestowing the promise of everlasting life on those of the faithful who fell asleep from the beginning of time, in the hope of His coming, with faith in the promises of prophecy. We see the joy of Sts Adam and Eve as Christ reaches down to take their hands and lift them



up from darkness to light. As the saints of the Old Testament receive the joy of life and resurrection, they stand arrayed on either side of the Redeemer, rejoicing. Mirroring the redeemed saints, the mountains behind them are cast up in a cosmic rejoicing, for, according to Scripture, *"That creation itself will be set free of its bondage to corruption, into the glorious freedom of God's children"* (Rm.9:24).

The Old Testament prophecy which Paul, in the verse above, proclaims to have been fulfilled, is found in the 97th Psalm. The ikon joyously chants this Psalm, glorifying its fulfilment:

"O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvelous things:...The Lord hath made known His Salvation..all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth...rejoice and sing praise...make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King, let the sea be shaken...the world and they that dwell therein. The rivers shall clap their hands together; the mountains shall rejoice together at the presence of the Lord, for He cometh; Yea, He is come to judge the earth" (97th Psalm).

[Cont. from P.3]

This psalm was written in the spirit of prophecy, and the ikon reveals to us that this scripture has been fulfilled in Christ, for in the ikon, the rivers and the mountains are shown uplifted in rejoicing, proclaiming the presence of the Lord. Since the ikon is a form of the Holy Scripture, we must expect to see in them, the proclamation that this prophecy has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ, as indeed we do.



In this ikon we see the fulfilment of the prophetic psalm. In the centre of the ikon, the incarnation of Christ is depicted, showing the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, "A virgin shall conceive and bear a child, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Is.7:14). The mountains are shown uplifted in a transfigured manner, proclaiming, "the mountains shall rejoice together at the presence of the Lord." The Lord of Hosts is received as a babe and the whole of creation recognizes its Creator and rejoices that the day of its redemption is near. In this ikon, the angels offer praise, the shepherds worship; the magi offer gifts and the earth offers a manger cave and a tomb so that the work of the Saviour might be fulfilled. And we, sinful men, offer Him a hymn of praise.

In the ikon, the cosmos reaches upward to receive the Creator, and having received him, twice into its depths, and seen Him ascend again into Heaven, it reaches upward to receive the Holy Spirit, to receive the Righteous Judge and all that He has promised. Being filled with all this hope of transfiguration and the fragrance of incorruptibility, the landscape, the "whole creation" is presented in the ikon as an everlasting hymn of hope and glory, vibrant in the timelessness of eternity.

{Continued in the next issue}



FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

Synaxis Press has announced its fall publication schedule. During late summer and early fall, the following titles will become available.

THE SPIRITUAL MEADOW (The Palestine Paterikon). This classic Orthodox spiritual writing is valuable as a source of moral guidance, spiritual and psychological insights and understanding. Simple and direct wisdom is offered from the experience of great ascetics, both in incidents from their lives and in parables based on their experience.

This work will be offered in a series of four books, in the format of our popular Lives of Saints series. The first volume will be available at the end of summer, and will be announced in *The Canadian Orthodox Missionary*.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN COLOURING BOOK/ALPHABET BOOK. This children's colouring book takes children through the alphabet, with an Orthodox Christian theme and picture to colour for each letter. The book will be used at our own summer Bible camp this year. Watch *The Missionary* for announcement of publication.

THE IKON AS SCRIPTURE. The series on the ikon which is currently appearing in *The Missionary* will be released in book form later this year.

FROM THE DIOCESE

The past two months have been full and productive in the diocese. With the help of parishioners Gilles Parent, John Cioara, Helen Holland, Helen Itcush, Laura Hailes, Aurel Holovaci and Ted Almas, the first half of the monastery's blueberry crop has been planted. About 600 bushes are in the field. Pascha was celebrated, and the agape and lamb roast was held at the new monastery. Gilles Parent has nearly completed the building of the new ikonostas in the monastery church, and the hall has been used many times. A steady flow of pilgrims and guests has kept Fr Moses busy with hospitality and visitors from practically every Orthodox jurisdiction in North America have come to see us.

In June, Milorad (Micky) and Cecelia Jahura's new baby girl was baptised at St Nicholas Parish in Langley. The baby was named Anastasia. Godparents were Edward Merinuk and Leposava Djurdevich (photos in the next issue). Progress is being made in preparing for our first full-fledged summer Bible camp, and the "Joy of Canada" pilgrimage. The diocesan candle factory was expanded to cope with many new orders for our pure beeswax candles. Book sales have increased for the diocesan publishing house, Synaxis Press. Many books have been sent to Russia, and several of them have been translated into Russian, Romanian and Serbian during the past year.

During the past two months, we were saddened by the passing of Fr Varlaam's Mother, Mary Novakshonoff, and Ray Sword, the father of Neil Sword. Olga Jahura's mother, Vasilia, reposed in Serbia. Trees were planted for all three in the monastery's memorial arbor.

The photos below reflect the life of the diocese.



Gilles Parent spent many hours on the tractor at the monastery preparing the field for planting.



Magdaleni Almas passes on the art of making Pascha bread to daughter-in-law Marina Almas.



The Somoila brothers, Ion and Dorel, regularly serve in the sanctuary at St Nicholas Parish and, often, at the monastery for Sunday liturgy. The boys, with their father Vasile, usually spend one day a week at the monastery, helping with grounds work.

THE FALSE TEACHING OF THE "SEVEN SACRAMENTS"

by Hieromonk Taras Kurgansky¹

The efforts of Western theologians to establish rationalized definitions for all the sacred things and acts of Christianity compelled them to examine all these matters illogically, in an attempt to categorize them and separate some from others on the basis of relative importance. Such an approach is unavoidable in an atmosphere where religious life is based on the principle of juridical legalism, where the inner quickening of the Spirit is replaced with a reign of strict discipline, and there is no place for the triumph of the regenerated soul. In harmony with this principle, the tendency of scholastic theology to attempt to define everything by an exact number, led to the Roman Catholic teaching that there are exactly *seven church sacraments*, which are the exclusive sources of divine grace.

Such a teaching excessively exalts the hierarchy above the people of God, since it is the exclusive prerogative of the representatives of the hierarchy to serve these *sacraments*. The entire inner, spiritual life of the Church is thus conveniently reduced to the performing of these *sacraments*, and this placed the whole matter of salvation in the hands of the hierarchy, relegating the people to a passive, subjugated role in the general structure of Church life, denying them any living, active participation. In addition to this practical significance in the life of Western Christianity, the teaching of *seven sacraments* naturally follows the [erroneous] teaching about the "three offices" of the Lord, the "satisfaction of divine justice" and "juridical truth" which is supposedly manifested in the life of the Lord. The Roman Catholics state the matter thus in one of their catechisms:

"Sacraments' is the name given to physical sacred forms established by Jesus Christ for the bestowal of grace. The Old Testament had a multitude of rituals, but not a single sacrament which communicated grace. These sacraments belong only to the New Testament. Jesus Christ Himself established them so that His blood and infinite grace, which are abundant and sufficient to encompass all people, might be assimilated by all his followers."

In the process of importing the Latin system of theology and the scholastic manner of reasoning, into the Ukrainian ecclesiastical school in the 17th century, Kievan theologians first introduced the teaching of *seven sacraments* to Orthodox Christianity. This teaching, a Roman one, both in origin (Peter of Lombardy) and in juridical content, did not encounter resistance on the part of the naive Russian people, who did not realize how completely contrary it is to sacred tradition. It is completely clear, from a survey of the Russian church writers Joseph and Zinoviy, that in the 16th century, the Orthodox Church in Russia had never heard of any sevenfold number relating to the Holy Mysteries. The very definition of the mysteries as sacraments is taken from the Latin catechism: "A sacrament is a visible sign of God's invisible grace, given for our sanctification," says Lavrenty Zizany. "A sacrament is a sacred action which, under the guise of form, communicates God's invisible grace to the soul of a believer," teaches Peter Mohyla.

It is not difficult to grasp the arbitrariness and artificiality of these definitions and concepts. All theologically educated people know that in the language of Holy Scripture and of Orthodox Christian patristic works, the expression 'Mystery' does not have a sacramental sense, which is attributed to it by the scholastics. Not only in the poetical and rhetorical works, but also in the deeply theological expressions of the holy fathers, the term "Mysteries" designates *all the manifestations of divine grace, independent of any formalistic conditions of their accomplishment*. Incidents in the life of our Lord are also referred to as "Mysteries," and the very Christian teaching itself is called a "Mystery." St Gregory the Theologian calls the feast of the Nativity and Theophany "Mysteries." Other phenomena of the sacred life, and also monastic tonsure are called Holy Mysteries in sacred hymns of the Church. The Russian theologians of the 16th century faithfully adhered to the broad, Orthodox Christian sense of this concept, and only in the 17th century did Russian theology begin to assimilate this novel [sacramental] concept of the term "Holy Mysteries" or "Mystery."

Following the Latins, Lavrenty Zizany and Peter Mohyla consider a specific, demonstrable proof of divine establishment to be the distinguishing sign of the "sacraments". If one wished to define this sign exactly and clearly, then one would have to search for a very long time and very carefully in the Holy Bible. If we take them at their word, then we must come to the conclusion that so far as the "sacraments" are concerned, the scholastics gave greater significance to ranking them than to demonstrating a direct and exact proof of establishment by divine will. In most cases, they considered as sufficient proof of "divine establishment," a vague hint in the Gospel or a casual presence of Jesus Christ at the occurrence of some common event of life, although this hint or presence might be remote from its spiritual significance. In other cases, there is not even an example in the life of the Lord which can be mentioned. Moreover, the principle of the provable divine establishment of seven sacraments, degrades other divine services which are no less important and which are certainly divinely established. There is, in fact, a firm testimony of St Basil the Great which establishes the clearly divine origins of rites, acts and manifestations of Church life which are not included in these "seven sacraments":

"Of the teachings and practices preserved in the Church, some we have from written instruction; others we have received 'in silence' by the Apostolic tradition. Both of these have the same authority in relation to true religion. And no one will contradict these — no one, that is, who is even moderately knowledgeable in the institutions of the Church. For if we were to attempt to reject such traditions as have no written authority, on the grounds that they are of little importance, we would inadvertently injure the Gospel in its very vitals; or rather, we would make our public preaching a mere phrase and nothing more" (On The Holy Spirit, 27:66).

Advocates will not tolerate signs of these "seven sacraments" other than the "external form of inner grace" categorization. Nevertheless, in the life of the Church there are other divine services which fully satisfy these conditions, but which, for some reason, the scholastics do not consider worthy of the name "Holy Mysteries," [or "sacraments"]. There is even a divine service which has the greatest importance for the whole life of the one receiving it, and has always been regarded, along with baptism, the Eucharist and ordination to be a great manifestation of divine grace, but which is regarded by the scholastics as lower than simple confession or anointing. This divine service is the rite of monastic tonsure, which is called a *Holy Mystery* in the works of St Dionysios the Areopagite and St Theodore the Studite. Thus we cannot be reconciled with the "internal/external signs" by which we are supposedly obligated to distinguish a "Holy Mystery" from other divine services.

In examining this concept of "sacrament," one is struck by the dichotomy of character and significance which has created a strange division into "sacraments absolutely necessary for salvation and ones only relatively necessary for salvation. Such a division is possible only when salvation is viewed as a formalism. We read in the [heretical] Great Catechism:

"Those which are absolutely necessary for salvation are three: baptism, communion and penance. Those necessary for salvation are two: confirmation and last rite unction. Marriage is necessary for those who use it to help preserve them from fornication, and absolutely necessary in bearing children for the sake of fulfilling the Church. The priesthood is similar. It is necessary for those ordained to direct the Church and perform the holy sacraments of God" (para. 30).

By their very name, all the Holy Mysteries must have equal significance, yet the incomprehensibility and confusion engendered by such a legalistic division of the Holy Mysteries is evident even to the author of the Great Catechism himself. Later, he adds still more Latin scholasticism, writing:

"It is beneficial for you to know of yet another division. All seven sacraments are necessary, but not for every person, nor are they equal. Marriage and priesthood are absolutely necessary for the Church, nevertheless, one who is not married and not ordained can be saved. The other five sacraments are necessary for salvation, but not equally so. Baptism, Communion and penance are absolutely necessary for everyone for salvation, and will save. Without them, not a single person can be saved. Holy unction and last rites are necessary for salvation in this degree: they give us more assurance of our salvation, for holy oil prepares us to suffer with more assurance, while last rites release one from all remains of sins. For this reason, one who is neglectful of them has no certainty of his salvation, unless he desired them but was unable to obtain them" (ibid).

Though he did not attribute varied significance to the Holy Mysteries, Lavrenty Zizany nevertheless asserts the sevenfold number and sacramental nature of them.

Regardless of the convincing tone of these writers, every unbiased reader who is acquainted with the spirit of patristic writings remains convinced that the very idea of a Holy Mystery being understood as a sacramental act special and different in comparison with other divine services and acts, belongs exclusively to Latin [Roman Catholic] theology. He will also understand that the number of such sacred actions is set by the scholastics arbitrarily and artificially, that deliberation about a greater or lesser necessity for salvation of one or another of the Holy Mysteries is foolish. For, salvation is accomplished not by separate sacred actions, but by union with the life of the Church², in which there is *nothing* which has little significance. Such divine services as the great blessing of water, monastic tonsure and the funeral service are no less significant and important than others. We find it onerous to make comparisons of the relative importance of divine services or sacred actions. Upon what does the importance of a divine service or sacred act depend? Could it really be the quantity or degree of grace? But if one is to deliberate on such grounds and not consider the higher spiritual sense of the divine services and sacred acts, then the serving of various services is incomprehensible.

There is neither need nor basis to apply a vain concept of human understandings to Christian divine services, which must be understood purely spiritually. In addition to what we have already said, it is obvious from other sources that the Kievan theologians were attached to the Latin sacramental formula, and the influence of Latin juridicalism is also present in this.

As we saw in our review of the patristic approach, the holy fathers, when discussing divine services and sacred acts, say nothing of a formula of sacred actions, and no such references occur in the dogmatic teaching of the Church. The difficulty in sacramental formulae and definitions of formulae and the attempt to pinpoint a legal "moment of accomplishment," became evident in the teaching about the Eucharist. In exploring this teaching, we see a contradiction in the system of Lavrenty Zizany and Peter Mohyla. Zizany, together with the Roman Catholics, considers the pronouncement of the Lord's words ["Take eat, all of you....All of you drink of it..."] to be the "moment of visible accomplishment" of the Mystery, while Peter Mohyla, coming closer to the sense and meaning of the liturgy, considers the blessing of the bread and wine to be the formula.

One must protest that the lofty, spiritual sense of the divine liturgy, composed by the apostles and transmitted by two of the greatest pillars of the Christian Church, is not open to such coarse, sensual philosophizing. A notable example of such sensual philosophy is Lavrenty Zizany's deliberations on the moment when, after the consecration of the Gifts, the deacon says "Break, master, the Holy Bread."

The *Great Catechism* is especially penetrated with a worldly spirit reminiscent of the medieval scholastic doctrines from which the whole document is borrowed.

[Continued from p. 5]

Also striking is the author's coarse literalism. First of all, one is shocked at the teaching of the Eucharist as a sacrifice satisfying God. We have already spoken of the complete insolvency of the very idea of "satisfaction" or "satisfaction of justice," but even for those who would accept this idea, it seems strange why God, who was once [according to their doctrine] infinitely satisfied, continues to receive satisfaction with each new offering of the blood and body of His Son. As if this was not enough, the author of the *Great Catechism* has the bloody suffering of Christ in the Eucharist exceed the limits of Golgotha. The scholastics did not want to omit even the insignificant easing of His sufferings wherein the Roman soldiers did not break His bones. They assert:

"On the Cross, it is said that 'His bones will not be broken,' but in order that the thing which was not suffered on the Cross be suffered somehow, it is suffered in the prosphora. That is to say, in the breaking of the prosphora, we behold this broken thing that this [the breaking of the bones] may be fulfilled" (*Great Catechism*, para 33).

These words demonstrate clearly what a coarse, sensual character distinguished the view of the Eucharist held by the Kievan theologians.

We have already had occasion to mention the concept of "satisfaction" which was introduced into the realm of the theology of repentance from the general view of Latin theologians. For now, we will limit ourselves to observing that their teaching of "penance" is distinguished by the idea that confession is a juridical cleansing of sins. No doubt the custom of confessing ones sins to a spiritual father is ancient in the Church, but the holy instructors of the faith, in expounding the concept of repentance, turned their attention to the soul of the repentant ones and not to the external circumstances of the repentance. Of course, confession is an important act, and it is undoubtedly a "mystery" in the broadest sense. Nevertheless, if, when setting forth the teaching about repentance, one limits oneself to a discussion of the conditions of confession, and introduces juridical elements into it, this is a departure from the teaching of the holy and God-bearing fathers and an absorption of Latin scholasticism. In the East, the nature of repentance was understood more clearly, and was not limited by the idea of confession. The monk Job even identifies anointing with repentance, and one must agree that the inner spiritual content of both holy mysteries leads to such a conclusion.

The *Great Catechism* and the [Latinized] *Orthodox Confession* introduce marriage as a "sacrament," even though marriage is something which exists outside the realm of religion, even in societies which are not religious. Of course, Christ did not omit to mention such an important phenomenon of human life and, as the Evangelist relates, showed a preference for virginity (Mt.19:12). The apostle expounds the same thing in more detail (1Cor.7). In the dogmatic writings of St Gregory, St John and Blessed Zinovy, nothing at all is said of marriages a Holy Mystery, only as something which is possible in the Church.

Lavrenty Zizany waivers concerning his "absolute necessity" and "relative necessity" of marriage, and is inclined to consider marriage "absolutely necessary" for the Church. Let us merely note that the idea that marriage is indispensable for the Church actually contradicts the Apostle, who desired to see all Christians virgin (1Cor.7:7). It is true that the Apostle referred to marriage as a "mystery" (Eph.5:32), but he is not specifying Christian marriage, rather all marriages. It is this instance, one must understand by the term "mystery," a mystical, transcendent law of life. Indeed, the very content of the words of the Apostle makes it clear that he has in mind not a sacred ritual or divine service (about which nothing is mentioned), but rather a psychological and a physiological act of marital love. What is to be considered as a mystery of marriage — the rite of crowning, or the marital cohabitation? We will not make any further comment since the explanations and interpretations given in the *Great Catechism* is so obviously strained.

Concerning the teaching about "seven sacraments," a teaching which has its source in the works of heretics cannot be authentic or of any vital use. The practice of the Orthodox Christian Church never followed the narrow tendencies of scholastic theology, and it always acknowledges great efficacy and spiritual power in all prayers, sacred acts and rites of the faith.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

Space does not permit the inclusion of Kurgansky's sections on the Patristic concept of the Holy Mysteries (as opposed to the false teaching of "seven sacraments.") It is necessary, however, to offer a summary at this point. The entire work will be included in the booklet, which will be available in August.

The teaching of "sacraments," as opposed to the Holy Mysteries of the Church, presents us with a doctrine of a set of magical formulae, by which we constrain God to fulfil certain desires or intentions of our own. Thus, the sacraments are seen as something accomplished only by the priest, and are considered to be the "visible means for the accomplishment of invisible grace." In sacramental theology, for example, baptism is a formula for the remission of the imaginary "original sin," so popular in Western thought. In the Orthodox concept, as Fr Taras Kurgansky says, "Baptism is regarded as a psychological act, identical to the act of physical birth." In other words, baptism really is a spiritual birth, equal in nature to physical birth. St Gregory of Nyssa comments on this, saying that if even our carnal birth is an incomprehensible matter, how much more is it impossible to fully interpret spiritual birth. Let us see what St Gregory of Nyssa says of the mystery of baptism in this regard:

"One who confesses that the Holy Trinity is uncreated enters into the sure and indestructible life; while another, who through a misconception sees in the Trinity only a created nature and is baptized has only been once born into the changeable and temporary life" (ch.39).

"If, then, by being 'washed', as the prophet says, in that mystic laver we become 'clean' in our wills and 'put away the evil' of our souls, we thus become better people and are changed to a better state. But, if when the washing has been applied to the body the soul has not cleansed itself from the stains of its passions and affections, but the life after initiation continues on a level with the uninitiate life, then, though it may be a bold thing to say, yet I will say it and not shrink: in such cases, the water is only water. for the gift of the Holy Spirit in no way appears in one who is thus baptismally born. Whenever the deformity of anger or the passion of greed or unbridled and unseemly thoughts, with pride, envy and arrogance, disfigures the Divine image, when also the fruits of injustice abide in him...If you continue with the marks of vice in you, then it is in vain that you babble to yourself of your birth from on high" (ch. 40).

Indeed, an adult being baptised needs to approach the font with the same pure, simple, undefiled faith of an infant approaching the font. We see then, that so far from being a magical sacramental act, accomplished only by the formula and ritual, only by an arcane power of the priest, the condition of the act of baptism depends upon the inner disposition of the recipient. We must understand that all the holy mysteries are accomplished by a "synergy" between God and the faithful. If we study carefully the ritual aspect of those specific holy mysteries which are served only in the presence of the congregation of the people of God, then we will find that both the ritual and the prayers serve three purposes: first, they preserve and teach sound doctrine; second, they bring the recipient into a proper spiritual and psychological frame of mind and disposition to cooperate with God's grace in receiving that which is necessary; Third, the rite brings together the people of God in offering up those common prayers of the people of God, led by the priest, which in the unity of faith and love, accomplish all those things which are asked of the Father. St Gregory affirms that the truth of Christianity vouches for the presence of Divine powers in baptism, a fact also indicated in the prayers which are read during baptism:

"How much more will the object be accomplished in that spiritual mode of generation, where God has both promised that He will be present in the process and, as we have believed, has put power from Himself into the work, and, moreover our own will is bent upon that object; supposing that is, that the aid which comes through prayer has been duly called upon?" (Ch.34).

St Gregory further notes that the wisdom of God is demonstrated in that faith in God becomes, in the baptismal water, the weapon of regeneration to a new spiritual life.

This subject is fully explored in the forthcoming book. It is sufficient for now to point out the falsity and spiritual poverty of the teaching of "seven sacraments."

1. This work was translated from the Russian work of V. Rev. Taras Kurgansky. The above article is a chapter from the book, "THE THEOLOGY OF KIEVAN AND NORTH RUSSIAN THEOLOGIANS," written at the beginning of the present century. It was highly praised by the great Russian Church father, Metropolitan Antony Khrapivsky. The present translation is by Archimandrite Varlaam Novakshonoff.



SERMONS ON MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

by Bishop Lazar Puhalo.

MATTHEW 7:12-13

"In all matters, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This is the essence of the Law and the Prophets" (Mt.7:12).

The hinge-pins of the Law and Prophets are love of God above all things, and love of neighbour in a godly manner. If, then, to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is the essence of the Law, then it must stem from the hinge-pins.

The essence of the Law and the Prophets is love — not a worldly love, which seeks a return on the investment or follows after fleshly desires, but a godly love which constrains us to seek our brother's good equally with our own; a love which makes us sincerely desire to avoid hurting any other person, and to weigh the welfare of others equally with our own interests.

Here, Jesus Christ Himself explains the meaning of the Law. Gone is the confusion that led deluded men to teach of "divine justice," of the necessity for Christ to "satisfy God's justice." Swept away is the spirit of vengeance. It is clear that the Law could not have been fulfilled by any of these things. If the hinge-pin of the Law is love, and the essence of the Law is to show the same mercy, compassion and love that you yourself would desire to receive, is it not clear that love is greater than law, that no other deed could fulfil the law except an unconstrained act of pure co-suffering love?

In another place, Christ commands us, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," and more than once He warns us, "Forgive, that ye may be forgiven." In today's reading, He declares to us, "Love, that ye may participate in Love."

Brethren, our salvation does not lie in the blind, cultishly obedient observance of laws. Our salvation lies in godly love: a love of God which leads us freely and joyously to observe the principles of life which He has revealed to us; a godly love of neighbours which leads us to observe those same principles for the sake of each other. In this is true morality: that we struggle to follow godly principles of life, neither by constraint nor fear, but joyfully, from the heart, motivated by sincere love. Every other path, every other teaching leads only to perdition. Broad indeed is the gate of self-interest and self-satisfaction, but narrow and often hard to see is the path of self-sacrifice, of pure love, unrestrained mercy and sincere compassion: narrow and small, so that one must humble oneself to enter in.



30

The Repentance of
THE MONK ISIDORE

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself not discerning the Lord's body. (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

Nigh unto the Bay of Tadios on Cyprus, there stands the monastery called "Hospitality" (Philoksenos). When we arrived thither, we came upon a monk named Isidore, who was from Miletos. We were astonished in him, for he wept and sobbed with groaning, unceasingly. No one was able to comfort him or assuage his sorrow.

"I am a great sinner, such as there has never been from Adam to this day," he lamented to everyone.

We sought to console him: "In truth, father, we are all sinners. Who is without sin except God alone?"

"O brethren," he replied, "I tell thee in truth, that neither in Scripture nor in tradition, nor among living men have I come upon so great a sinner as I, nor a sin such as that which I have committed. If you think that I slander myself, listen to my sin and pray for me. In former times, I was married, and my wife and I belonged to the heresy of Severius.¹ I chanced, one day, to arrive home at an unexpected hour, and discovered that my wife had gone to a neighbour's house to partake of Holy Communion with her. Since the neighbour was an Orthodox Christian, I rushed to the house to prevent my wife from partaking. I entered the house at the very moment when my wife was receiving the Communion. Seizing her by the throat, I forced her to eject the Hories. Then I, wretched one, took up the Holy Mystery in my hand and cast it away. Suddenly, before my eyes, a flash like lightening surrounded the Holy Thing and transported it away. The next night, I beheld in a dream, a dark and fearsome figure clad in rags.

"Thou art condemned to a punishment equal to mine," the figure groaned.

"Who art thou," I asked, trembling with fear.

"I am the one who struck the Creator of all, even our Lord Jesus Christ, on the cheek in the midst of His suffering," replied the figure.

And the monk concluded his story, "Seest thou why I cannot cease my weeping. I beseech thee, brethren, pray for my wretched soul."

31

The Conversion of
MARIA THE HARLOT

"For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Romans 6:20-22).

Two old monks had need to journey from Egius to Tarsus of Cilicia. By God's will, they drew neigh to an inn on the high road in the heat of the day, and they sought shelter therein until midday passed.

A group of young men had earlier stopped in this same inn and they had a harlot with them. The two old monks sat down a little way off from the group, and one of them took his Gospel out of his bag and began to read it to the hearing of the other. When the harlot saw this, she straightway rose up, left her companions and sat down by the monks to hear the reading.

The old monk, perceiving that her heart might be opened, gently said to her, "My dear child, have you no shame? Did you not take thought before approaching us?"

"Turn me not away, father. Though I be filled with vice, nevertheless, the Master of all, our Lord Jesus Christ, did not turn away the harlot who approached Him."

"In truth, my child, but that harlot ceased to do evil from that very moment," the old monk replied with great tenderness.

The woman began to weep, "I hope on the Son of the Living God that from this day forward, I, too, will cease from my vice."

When the two monks departed the inn to take up their journey again, the harlot left the young men and all her belongings and followed after them. The monks instructed her along the way, and after a short distance they came upon the woman's monastery called Nankiba. Here they left her in the care of the abbess, and she remained and became a nun. When I saw her and heard this story from her own lips, she was already an elderly woman, distinguished by great wisdom, compassion and intelligence.

32

THE CONVERSION OF AN ACTOR

"Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt.4:17).

The actor Vavilos dwelt in the city of Tarsus of Cilicia, with two concubines whose names were Komita and Nikosa. Vavilos lived a life of depravity, following the inspiration of the evil-one.

In the fulness of time, the Holy Spirit moved him to step into a church one day, during the Divine Liturgy. He heard the words of the Gospel being read, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

By God's Grace, these words struck his heart, and his conscience convicted him of his sins. He became dismayed, recalling his manner of life and, departing from the church, he hastened home. Calling his concubines to himself, he tearfully said:

"Thou knowest the wantonness of my life, with which I have lived with you. Now, I bestow upon thee all that I have acquired. Divide my possessions between you, for with God's help, I shall depart from this world and enter a monastery."

The two women cried out, "We also have lived with thee in sin, to the ruin of our souls. Now, thou art departing from us for the salvation of thy soul, and dost thou leave us to continue in the destruction of our souls? We will not accept this, for we, too, wish to become partakers of the good."

Vavilos left all that he had and took on the angelic life. Having received a blessing, he closed himself up in a tiny cell in the old fortress walls.

The two women sold all that they had received, gave the money to the poor, and also entered the angelic way. Having been tonsured, they constructed a small cell for themselves and spent their days in prayer and struggle.

By God's mercy, I, though unworthy, managed to see this monk, and received great benefit from him. He was a very compassionate, merciful and humble man, and recounted his story for the edification of all those who read my poor book.

33

ST THEODOTOS PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH

"Whoever exalts himself will be abased; but he who humbles himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11)

Our holy father Theodotos was an example of meekness and humility. While he was still Archbishop of Theopolis, he became known for his tender heartedness. On one feast day, this blessed hierarch invited all the clergy who served with him to his trapeza for dinner. One presbyter who was contentious by nature, refused the invitation. The blessed one serenely went to the presbyter and with great meekness, requested that he come and share his table with him.

The father who told us of this related another such story about the humility of Patriarch Theodotos:

When he was already great in age, he set out on a journey in the company of a younger presbyter. The aged patriarch rode in a sedan-litter, and the presbyter rode on a horse.

After some while, the patriarch turned to the presbyter and said, "Brother, let us evenly share the burden of this journey. We shall exchange places."

The presbyter responded, "My father, it would dishonour your rank if I rode in the sedan-litter whilst the patriarch rode on the horse."

St Theodotos cared nothing for honours, however, and he compelled the presbyter to exchange places with him.

34

ST ALEXANDER THE PATRIARCH

"If someone takes your tunic, give him your cloak also...Love your enemies. Pray for those who abuse you" (Matthew 5:40; 43-44).

Another holy patriarch of the God-protected city of Antioch, was Alexander. This holy father was amazing for his compassion and mercy.

One of his secretaries once stole a considerable amount of money from the diocese and fled to Egypt. The thief was captured by bandits and taken hostage for ransom. When the wondrous Alexander learned of this, he was moved by compassion, and ransomed the captive for a considerable sum. The fugitive thief was returned to him, and the blessed patriarch treated the man with such gentleness and compassion that the people remarked, "There is nothing more profitable than to sin against Alexander."

On another occasion, in the presence of all the clergy, one of the deacons began to reproach St Alexander. The patriarch bowed down before the deacon and asked his pardon, saying, "Forgive me, my brother."

THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

by Fr Moses Armstrong

THE HOLY GOSPELS

The Holy Gospel Book is the last of the holy things from the Holy Table that we will look at. Many times we will see the Gospel Book used in our Orthodox Church. It is used in processions; it is read on all the holy days of the church year and it is also used to bless different services, such as the blessing of water on the feastday of the Baptism of Jesus; it is on a special table with the crowns when a man and woman are married in the church; it is used at the service of anointing with holy oil on Wednesday of Holy Week; it is carried around the church on Holy Saturday when we make the procession before starting the Pascha service.

Why is the Gospel Book so special and why do we treat it with so much respect and love? The holy Gospels are an ikon, in words, of Jesus Christ. What He taught us and how He taught us, is shown in the writing of the Holy Gospels, just the way it is when we see proper Orthodox ikons.

Just what is the Gospel Book? The Gospel Book is Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; this is why we find the ikons of these saints on the cover of the Gospel Book. These four books are put together into one large book which makes the book of the Holy Gospels. In the middle of the ikons of the four saints, we find Jesus Christ, usually as He appeared at the resurrection. On days celebrating the memory of the resurrection, we have the ikon of the resurrection and the four saints facing up.

On the other side of the Gospel Book, we often find the ikon of the crucifixion, along with four Old Testament prophets who told about the coming of Jesus Christ. During the week, this ikon of the crucifixion and the prophets faces up on the Holy Table because we remember the life, suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

During the Liturgy, we have a procession with candles and the Gospel Book. This is called the "little entrance" and it teaches us that God comes to us whenever the Holy Gospel book is read and wherever it is read. This means not only in our church but in our homes where we should keep a copy of the Holy Gospels along with our ikons. We do this in the place that we pray, such as our ikon corners. When we read the Gospels at home, Jesus Christ is there with us and speaks to our hearts, just as He does in church.

The New Testament of our Orthodox Bible begins with the Four Gospels. We can say that the Gospels introduce us to the New Testament and give God's blessing to the rest of the Bible. The Gospels show us Jesus Christ as He was living on the earth. When reading, we see the proper way to treat people who ask for help and how to speak to them and help them to heal their souls. We also see that God loves everyone, good and bad, rich and poor, sinners and those who think they are good. When reading the Holy Gospels, we are carefully taught that it is important to ask for the help and blessing of God to live a life that is good and proper and pleasing to God.

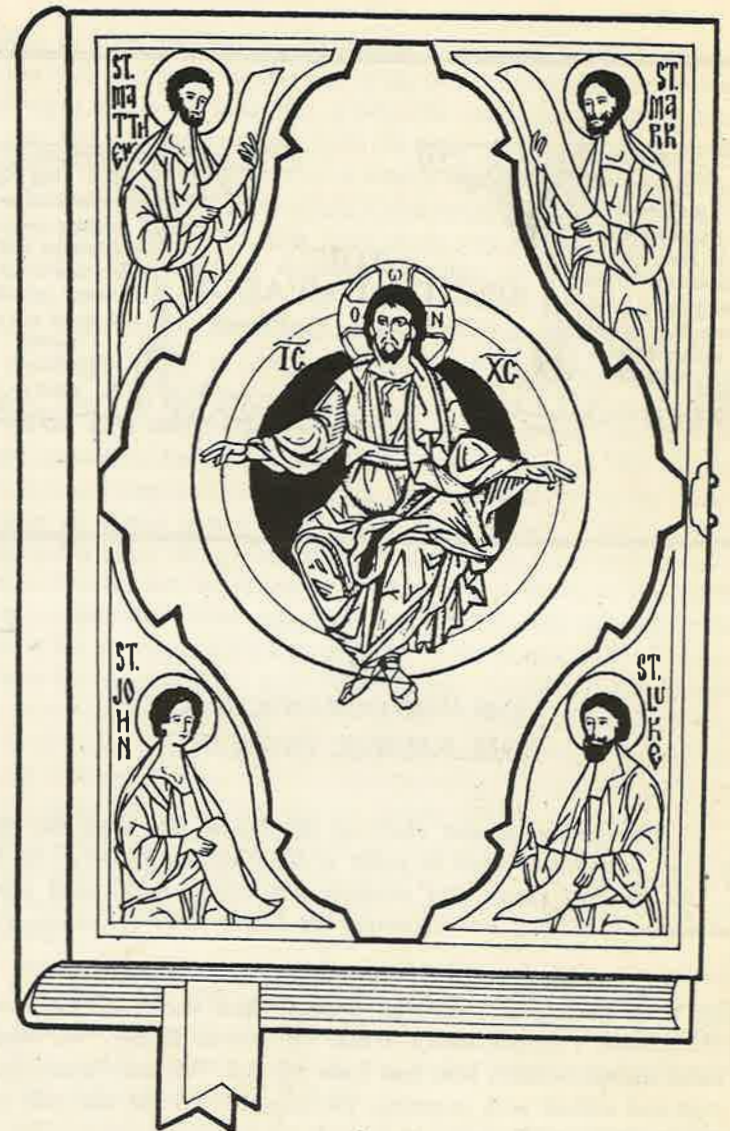
Now, let us look at what is written in the four Gospel books.

First, in the book of Saint Matthew, we find five important lessons. In Chapters 5-7, we find the Sermon on the Mountain. In chapter 13 are many fine and beautiful parables or stories that Jesus told to teach us about God and about how to love God more. Chapter 18 gives us lessons on how to be true followers of Jesus Christ and how to love God.

Saint Mark's Gospel shows the work that Jesus did while He was on the earth. All the works that Jesus Christ did show us the way to God, show us how to love God. Jesus is showing us how to see God with "spiritual eyes".

In this Gospel, we read about Saint John the Baptist preaching and teaching people about Jesus Christ and about how we should make ourselves pure and our hearts open to love Jesus. After the baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness where Satan was allowed to tempt Him (chapter 1, verses 1-13). Next, we read about Jesus preaching and teaching and healing in the land of Galilee and we follow Jesus as He goes into Jerusalem. The last days of the earthly life of Jesus Christ are also here in chapters 11-15. We get to read about Holy Week and the crucifixion of Jesus, then about the burial in the new tomb and the first resurrection or Pascha (chapter 16).

The Gospel of Saint Luke is important because it was written by Saint Luke



who was a convert from the pagan people and became a follower of Jesus Christ. Saint Luke shows us that all the people of the world can become followers of Christ.

We are told in Saint John's Gospel about Jesus Christ and who He was. Saint John carefully tells us that Jesus Christ is human, just as we are but, that Jesus Christ is also divine, just as God is. We read that even though Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He was also always with God in the Heavenly Kingdom. While God was creating the world, Jesus Christ was creating the world. In the Old Testament, God taught us about Jesus Christ, through the holy prophets; in the New Testament, Jesus Christ taught us about God, through the apostles. In the Gospel of Saint John, we are being taught the difference between light and darkness, truth and lies, love and hate, and what Jesus Christ should mean to us. Jesus is the light in a dark world; the truth that makes us free even though we live in a world of lies and falsehood; Jesus Christ is love and sacrifice in a world full of hate and selfishness. Jesus Christ and the apostles taught us to put the will of God first, then the good of other people and, last, comes ourselves.

Many people spend their lives studying the Bible. We see and maybe even know people who have memorized the whole Bible. It is important to not only read and memorize the Holy Gospels, we should also work hard to live as the Gospels teach us. The Gospels teach us to love God more than ourselves; to live a good life in a world that is often bad. If we carry the love and respect for the Holy Gospels in our heart and mind, then we will be blessed. Our lives will not be perfect because we are humans living in the earthly kingdom instead of the heavenly kingdom of God. Even so, we will learn how to love God and help bring the spiritual light of true spiritual love into the sad lives of the people around us.

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