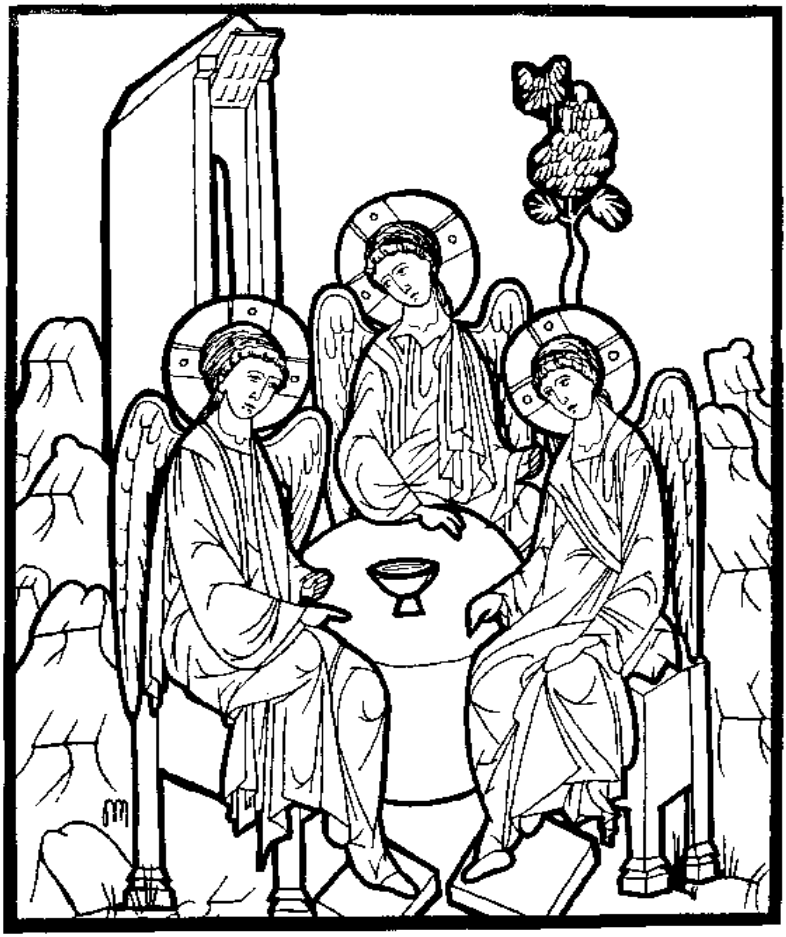
The Dormition of the Mother of God (EP)
Parish Newsletter
June/July 2026



Homily by Father Stéphane – 17 May 2026 - John 9:1–38

Today's Gospel reading is the story of the man born blind. St John tells us that as Jesus passed by, He saw the man. Others had grown used to him, perhaps even ignored him, but Christ sees him with compassion. This is the first message for us: God notices us. He sees us as we are, including our wounds, our fears and our struggles, even when the world does not.

The disciples ask a question: "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" They want a simple explanation, a cause or someone to blame. But Christ refuses this way of thinking. He teaches that this man's blindness is not a punishment. Instead, it becomes a place where "the works of God" will be revealed. Suffering becomes the place where God's mercy and power shine most clearly.

Christ heals the man in a very physical, almost sacramental way. He makes clay from the dust—just as He formed Adam in the beginning—and anoints the man's eyes. The Creator touches His creation again. Then He sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam, and the man returns seeing.

But the miracle is only the beginning of his journey. As he is questioned by neighbours, parents, and Pharisees, something beautiful happens: his faith grows. At first, he calls Jesus simply "a man." Then he recognises Him as "a prophet." Finally, when Christ reveals Himself, the healed man falls before Him and says, "Lord, I believe." His physical eyes are opened in a moment, but the eyes of his heart open step by step.

Meanwhile, the Pharisees—who believe that they see clearly—remain blind. Their pride, their certainty, their fear of losing control prevent them from recognising the One standing before them.

This is the challenge for us: to let Christ open our own eyes. To allow Him to soften our pride and make us revisit our assumptions, to help us

see His presence in the people and situations that surround us, and yet that we overlook.

We too, like the man born blind, should aim to stand before Christ with honesty and gratitude, and say with simplicity but courage: “Lord, I believe.” Fr Stéphane

The Samaritan Woman by Father John (St John 4: 1-25)

We all know this passage in the Gospel where Jesus asks the woman at the well for a drink of water. The mid-day sun is high – all the other women and children have been to the well much earlier in the day. She is alone and she is a Samaritan. The place is a day’s walk from Jericho and from there another two days to Jerusalem… So it is very far from any real centre. The Samaritans, who exist still today in North-Western Israel, can best and most quickly be described as schismatics. They still use older books and religious terminology and were considered as conservative even in the time of Jesus. As we see in the Gospel the animosity between themselves and the Jews was fierce – probably because in truth the Samaritans claim to be the true Jews was in fact quite justifiable – and their land was indeed where the Israelites first rested when they at last entered the Promised Land and it was there that they buried the bones of the Patriarchs which they had borne with them when they left the bondage of Egypt.

The woman at the well is what our youth of today would term “cool” – as she lowered the bucket she asked Jesus why He, a Jew had asked her, a Samaritan for a drink?

I won’t repeat their conversation as you have heard it in the Gospel, but it was amazing – amazing because this lone woman at the well is the first person to whom Jesus reveals that He is the Messiah – He only did so twice, the first occasion was this one by the well in Samaria and the

second was when He was being tried in Jerusalem a few days before His crucifixion.

When it came to the question of the woman's husband or husbands the thing that always strikes me is that she, like us, is telling only a half-truth about herself - and Jesus doesn't hesitate in telling her that she had had five husbands and that her current partner was not her husband! Whether or not she simply wanted to change the subject, understandably, she replied: "Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet." And she brought up the subject that separated the Jews and the Samaritans: "Where is the right place to worship God – here or in Jerusalem?" As I said, their conversation was amazing because Christ unfolded to her His own beliefs and in fact the whole reason for His presence on earth.

The woman, deeply impressed, ran back to the village to tell them to come and see this extraordinary man at the well. Jesus was left alone, awaiting the apostles who had gone to Sichar to buy food. He was grieving as He had had news about the arrest of John the Baptist, whom He loved.

The Gospel is not quite clear whether or not the woman returned immediately nor if anyone was with her. Instead it turns to Jesus sharing both the meal and His beliefs with His disciples. We presume that the people did, however, find Him because we are told that He abode there and many people believed Him – "not because of the woman but rather because of what He had said," and slowly the crowd grew over the two days.

So, what are we left with? Firstly, a fascinating picture of life in that time and place – we all agree. And of course Christ, more than ever before, reveals and shares with His disciples what He is all about… Even though at that particular moment they may not have understood most of it.

Two things come to mind - the first is the half-truth told by the woman. One of my memories concerning telling the truth comes from Primary school. Our teacher, Sister Paschal, was a great favourite – she could sit and chatter with the girls and just as easily play baseball with the boys. Following a religious instruction lesson where the priest had talked about telling lies we carried on after he had gone getting our teacher's view. She made a statement I have never forgotten – she said: "You have no obligation to tell the truth to anyone who has no right to know it." And she gave us an example: "if someone in the playground asks you if your parents are divorced, you could say no, even if it is not true because they have no right to know such a thing." I understand, of course, where many people would have differing views. Her other statement which I have never forgotten is that: "Error has no rights" – you have no right to drive down the wrong side of the road endangering everyone else! I do believe that this second statement is absolutely true.

But both of these things are about: "what is in a man – what makes him cry or worry –what makes him doubt or believe etc." In this Gospel about Jesus and the Samaritan woman both issues are there: what is truth and who was right and who was wrong – the Jews or the Samaritans.

No-one ever knew or knows what is more in the heart of man than our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. With only one or two exceptions He thought only the best of everyone He met. He took the sinful and selfish and led them on to being better. He was truly the "Light shining in the darkness".

At the end of these two days in Samaria word came to Jesus that John the Baptist had been delivered to the tetrarch Antipas and had been beheaded. This was not only a sign of great sorrow for Christ but also a signal that His own ministry should now begin in earnest. John had preached of repentance and of being baptised but the Saviour preached

of the opening of the kingdom of God to all those found worthy. He and His disciples never really returned to Jerusalem until the end of His public life. They spent much of their time in Galilee. There the chosen men came to know Him – to understand His teaching and to live by it and with it. It was in the fertile soil of Galilee that Christianity was born, not in the sophistication of Jerusalem. The woman at the well was blunt, straightforward and had no fear. When she heard the Truth, she recognised it and went to tell the others. It must have been a powerful sign for Jesus to decide what to do next.

In so many examples He shows us the way to go – with Nicodemus, Simon and Nathaniel, in Levi, in the woman they would have stoned, in the rich young man He looked upon and loved – in Judas and Pilate, and finally in the thief upon the cross – yes, Jesus knew what was in man… so He knows what is in us. We must give Him the power to act – through prayer, through sacrifice, through meditation, through study of the Scriptures, a thing often neglected by us orthodox! So that we may with the men of Sichar say that: "this is indeed the Saviour of the world."

Amen

PENTECOST: the FEAST of the CHURCH

by Rev. Alexander Schmemann

In the Church's annual liturgical cycle, Pentecost is "the last and great day". It is the celebration by the Church of the coming of the Holy Spirit as the **end** – the achievement and fulfilment – of the entire history of salvation. For the same reason, however, it is also the celebration of the **beginning**: it is the "birthday" of the Church as the presence among us of the Holy Spirit, of the new life in Christ, of grace, knowledge, adoption to God and holiness.

This double meaning and double joy is revealed to us, first of all, in the very name of the feast. Pentecost in Greek means **fifty**, and in the

sacred biblical symbolism of numbers, the number fifty symbolises both the fullness of time and that which is beyond time; the Kingdom of God itself. It symbolises the fullness of time by its first component: 49 which is the fullness of **seven** (7 x 7): the number of time. And, it symbolises that which is beyond time by its second component: 49 + 1, this **one** being the **new day**, the "day without evening" of God's eternal kingdom. With the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ's disciples, the time of salvation, the Divine work of redemption has been completed, the fullness revealed, all gifts bestowed; it belongs to us now to "appropriate" these gifts, to **be** that which we have become in Christ: participants and citizens of His Kingdom.

The Vigil of Pentecost. The all-night Vigil service begins with a solemn invitation:

> Let us celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit,
> The appointed day of promise, and the fulfilment of hope,
> The mystery which is great as it is precious.
>
> In the coming of the Spirit, the very essence of the Church is revealed:
>
> The Holy Spirit provides all,
> Overflows with prophesy, fulfils the priesthood,
>
> Has taught wisdom to illiterates, has revealed fishermen as theologians.
>
> He brings together the whole council of the Church.

In the three readings of the Old Testament (Numbers 11: 16-17, 24-29; Joel 2: 23-32; Ezekiel 36: 24-28) we hear the prophecies concerning the Holy Spirit. We are taught that the entire history of mankind was directed towards the day on which God "would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh". This day has come! All hopes, all promises, all expectations have been fulfilled. At the end of the Aposticha hymns, for the first time since Easter, we sing the hymn: "O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth … " the one with which we inaugurate all our services, all

prayers, which is, as it were, the life-breath of this festal Vigil, is indeed the very experience of the Holy Spirit "coming and abiding in us".

Having reached its climax, the Vigil continues as an explosion of joy and light for "verily the light of the Comforter has come and has illumined the world". In the Gospel reading (St John 20: 19-23) the feast is interpreted to us as the feast of the Church, of her divine nature, power and authority. The Lord sends His disciples into the world, as He Himself was sent by the Father. Later, in the antiphons of the Liturgy, we proclaim the universality of the apostles' preaching, the cosmic significance of the feast, the sanctification of the whole world, the true manifestation of God's Kingdom.

The Vespers of Pentecost. The liturgical particularity of Pentecost is a very special Vespers of the day itself. Usually this service follows immediately the Divine Liturgy, is "added" to it as its own fulfilment. The service begins as a solemn "summing up" of the entire celebration as its liturgical synthesis. We hold flowers in our hands symbolising the joy of the eternal spring, inaugurated by the coming of the Holy Spirit. After the festal Entrance, this joy reaches its climax in the singing of the Great Prokimenon: "Who is so great a God as our God!" Then, having reached this climax, we are invited to kneel. This is the first kneeling since Easter. It signifies that after these fifty days of Paschal joy and fullness, of experiencing the Kingdom of God, the Church now is about to begin her pilgrimage through time and history. It is evening again, and the night approaches, during which temptations and failures await us, when, more than anything else, we need Divine help, that presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who has already revealed to us the joyful End, who now will help us in our effort towards fulfilment and salvation.

All this is revealed in the **three prayers,** which the celebrant reads now as we all kneel and listen to him. In the first prayer, we bring to God our repentance, our increased appeal for forgiveness of sins, the first condition for entering into the Kingdom of God. In the second prayer,

we ask the Holy Spirit to help us, to teach us to pray and to follow the true path in the dark and difficult night of our earthly existence. Finally, in the third prayer, we remember all those who have departed this life before us, who have achieved their earthly journey, but who are united with us in the eternal God of Love.

The joy of Easter has been completed and we again have to wait for the dawn of the Eternal Day. Yet, knowing our weakness, humbling ourselves by kneeling, we also know the joy and the power of the Holy Spirit who has come. We know that God is with us, that in Him is our victory.

Thus is completed the feast of Pentecost and we enter "the ordinary time" of the year. Yet, every Sunday now will be called "after Pentecost" – and this means that it is from the power and light of these fifty days that we shall receive our own power, the Divine help in our daily struggle. At Pentecost we decorate our churches with flowers and green branches – for the Church "never grows old, but is always young". It is an ever-green, ever-living Tree of grace and life, of joy and comfort. For the Holy Spirit – "the Treasure of Blessings and Giver of Life – comes and abides in us, and cleanses us from all impurity" and fills our life with meaning, love, faith and hope.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

O heavenly King, o Comforter,
the Spirit of Truth,
who art in all places and fillest all things,
the treasure of blessings and giver of life,
come and abide in us,
cleanse us from all impurity
and in Thy goodness, save our souls.

Молитва Святому Духу:

Царю Небесный,

Утешителю, Душе истины,
иже везде сый,
и вся исполняяй,
сокровище благих
и жизни подателю,
прииди и вселися в ны
и очисти ны от всякия скверны
и спаси, блаже, души наша.

Fulfilling Our Christian Vocation, What can we learn from the services?

By Metropolitan Anthony

an address delivered at St Basil's House, London

(continued from the April/May newsletter)

There are two kinds of Services in the Orthodox Church. and one can perceive the difference in emphasis when one takes part in them. Some services, like Matins, or the Hours, are a cry that ascends from the earth Godwards. They are the cry of a community of men, women and children, who turn to God, in praise, in presentation of their petitions, in intercession for their own needs and for the needs of the world, in gratitude to Him. They are Services which are born in the hearts of men and are offered to the Living God. Other Services seem to originate not in us, but in God Himself: all the Services which are of a sacramental content, be it the Liturgy or one of the sacraments of the Church, have their origin, their point of departure not in us but in God. The initiative is His. The sovereign action that fulfils them is His, but it is only in the Eucharistic Liturgy that it is made so explicit in the words which the deacon pronounces just before the priest proclaims the first exclamation. The deacon comes up to the priest and says, "And now it is for God to act". All that was humanly possible has been done. All that will be humanly possible will be done.

And yet neither what has or what will be done has power to achieve what we expect to happen. Nothing rooted in men, no human power or strength, can accomplish the miracle which we expect. In a sacrament like baptism the miracle is that a human being who was a child of the flesh becomes a child of the Kingdom by mysteriously becoming so united with Christ that he shakes His deadness to evil and partakes of His life in God. In a service like that of marriage, human love is blessed by God and the human relationship is lifted up to become not only an image but the incipient realisation of the relationship there is between Christ and the Church. And so it is also in all the sacramental actions that take place in the Church. Because a sacrament is an act of God which happens in the midst of His people and which is mediated by liturgical action and supported by material aids like the bread and wine, like water and oil and eventually by words of power, of grace, of life, of divine blessing, proclaimed by men, but descending from God. This is again made so clear in the ordination of the deacon, when the bishop lays his hands on the head of the ordinand, and in the last of the three prayers which he pronounces, says, "It is not, 0 Lord, in the laying on of my hands, of the hands of a sinner, but in the grace that comes from above that this man is made a deacon of the Holy Church".

This does not mean that human ministrations have no significance, but it does mean that in these services the absolute centre, not only the point towards which, but the point from which everything originates, is the Living God in action. Certain of these Services begin with the words, "Blessed is the kingdom", because when God is there, acting with His sovereignty, glory and mercy in the midst of His people, the kingdom has already come with power, which means with all the creative, transforming intensity of a real presence although it is still incipient, in the making.

To be continued

TIMETABLE OF SERVICES AT ST ANDREW'S, HOLBORN

(all services are celebrated in Church Slavonic and English)

JUNE

Saturday 6th 5:00pm Vigil

Sunday 7th 10:30am Liturgy All Saints

Hebr. 11:33-12:2; Matt. 10:32-33,37-38;19:27-30 Saturday 20th

No Service on the third weekend of June as

Saturday 21st **St Andrew Holborn is not available**

JULY

Saturday 4th 5:00pm Vigil

Sunday 5th 10:30am Liturgy

Romans 10:1-10; Matt. 8:28-9:1

Saturday 18th 5.00pm Vigil

Sunday 19th 10.30am Liturgy

Rom.15:1-7; Matt. 9:27-35

AUGUST

Saturday 15th 5.00pm Vigil

Sunday 16th 10.30am Liturgy Transfiguration

II Peter 1:10-19; Matt.17:1-9

Saturday 29th 5.00pm Vigil

Sunday 30th 10.30am Liturgy Dormition of the Mother of God

Phil.2:5-11; Luke10:38-42;11:27-28

Parish of St Peter and St Paul worshipping at St Peter's Church**,** Clapham Manor Street, London SW4 6BX, http://www.orthodoxclapham.org

Community of Saint Simeon and Saint Anna, St Mary's Church, Redbourn, Herts, AL3 7NL. (Contact James Angus on james@angusfamily.org.uk

There are no services over the Summer due to the unavailability of the church.

Community of all Saints of the British Isles, Bromley at Bromley Quaker Meeting House, 46 Ravensbourne Rd, Bromley BR1 1HP (Contact Father Stefan Strekopytov (st.strekopytov@gmail.com)

Saturday 27th June 9:30am Liturgy

Saturday 25th July 9:30am Liturgy

Saturday 22nd August 9:30am Liturgy

The Parish of the Dormition of the Mother of God worshipping at St Andrew Holborn is under the omophorion of His Eminence Nikitas, Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain, and is part of the Deanery (website: https://thyateira-deanery.uk) within the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain (website: http://www.thyateira.org.uk). Parish Website: www.dormition.org.uk

Parish Clergy:

Archpriest Stéphane Maikovsky

Priest Stefan Strekopytov

Deacon Eugene Gafton

Church Warden Pierre Kovalev