Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.

Sophia

A Devotional Newsletter of St. Sophia Parish

St. Sophia Orthodox Church
195 Joseph St.
Victoria, BC
V8S 3H6
Canada

St. Sophia Orthodox Church

a Parish of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

195 Joseph Street,
Victoria, British Columbia
Canada V8S 3H6

email: info@saintsophia.ca
website: www.saintsophia.ca

Services are in English

Saturday

Vigil – 6 p.m. – Всенощное бдение

Sunday

Hours – 10 a.m. – Часы

Divine Liturgy – 10:30 a.m. – Божественная Литургия

Vespers – 5 p.m. – Вечерня

Archpriest John Adams
Priest Philosoph Uhlman
Protodeacon Gordian Bruce

May 2018 Services

Tuesday May 1- Vigil 6pm
Wednesday May 2 - Liturgy 10:30am; - Mid-Pentecost
Saturday May 5 - Vigil 6pm
Sunday May 6 - Liturgy 10:30am

- *Sunday Evening Vespers- 5pm*

Saturday May 12 - Vigil 6pm
Sunday May 13 - Liturgy 10:30am

- *Sunday Evening Vespers- 5pm*

Wednesday May 16 - Vigil 6pm
Thursday May 17 - Liturgy 10:30am –The Ascension

Saturday May 19 - Vigil 6pm
Sunday May 20 - Liturgy 10:30am

- *Sunday Evening Vespers- 5pm*

Saturday May 26 - Vigil 6pm
Sunday May 27- Liturgy 10:30am – Pentecost *(bring your floral bouquets to hold!)*

Thank you! April Church Cleaners, Florists, Gardeners, Trapeza Decorators and Sisterhood

With the extra services during Holy Week and Pascha, Blessings abounded! Your love of God and for each other was reflected in all your devoted labours.

Paschal Lunch - Youth Choir Performance

Before the amazing Paschal lunch – setup, arranged, and served grandly by the Sisterhood; the parish senior and junior youth choirs sang two new pieces which they had worked on diligently over the past two months. They sang to the glory of God… "Two Angels "in English, and "Christ is Risen" – in French!

ST. SOPHIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

Special Invitation to the Fundraiser

Sunday Samovar

Russian Cuisine

Sunday May 6th

1:00 - 3:00pm

Come…sit by the samovar and enjoy delicious Russian cuisine.

Borsch • Pirog with Meat • Pirog with Mushrooms
Pirog with Salmon • Piroshky with Potatoes • Sauerkraut • Korean Carrot
• Green Salad • Honey Cake • Napoleon Cake • Apple Pie
Cranberry Pie with Meringue • Fruit Salad • Hvorost

Beverages are complimentary.

By cash, cheque or credit card donation.

Second Annual Parish Family Picnic at Goldstream Park

On April 29th the *Sunday of the Paralytic*, 40 Members and Friends of the Parish joined together for the afternoon at the "Prospector" Group Site at Goldstream Park, for a 'Church as our Family' Campfire, Hike and Fun Day. Upon arrival, some of the youngest girls decorated the newly found Icon corner….

This was an Everybody Helps Event… and thank you Everyone!

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” - Psalm 133

Soaking in a healthy dose of Vitamin N (nature), picnickers from ages “under 2 to over 82” helped set up camp and enjoy a campfire hot dog roast, field games, family hike, skits, songs & S’mores.

(*Sitting on an Invisible Bench* – A Summer Camp ’17 Skit: Instant Replay)

The youth re-enacted four of their favourites, also including ‘Gum’, ‘Egg Salad Sandwiches’ and ‘Is it Time Yet’; that they had learned at Camp with Genevieve.

“Praise the Lord from the earth….mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars.” - Psalm 148: 7, 9

“Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.” - Psalm 150: 6

We threw balls, frisbees and bowled the bocce. Grandparents and Godparents escorted youth up the rocky cliff, balanced tots on mossy logs…

and found new ways to roast food on sticks! *Thank you* John for supplying ALL campfire wood and bamboo skewers!

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” Romans 12:5

This Parish event was open to all families and parish members, with a minimal pre-registration fee to cover the cost of the campsite, food and beverages.

These community building events extend beyond individual families, into our Spiritual Family, for an opportunity for fellowship and fun.

This picnic and hike was inspired by the Very Reverend Vladika Gabriel, Archbishop of Montreal and All Canada, who spoke of fond memories as a child at additional Church outings, and the importance of building Christian Friendships within the Parish.

God willing, we will have another Parish Hike and Campfire in a year’s time.

Events are announced at church, publicized in *The Sophia*, *The Ark*, on the *Church Bulletin Board* and via email, *well* in advance.

Homily for Mid-Pentecost

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Christ Is Risen!

If we come to the daily services and pay close attention to the hymnography in this Paschal period, or if we read through the Pentecostarion (which is a great thing to do at home even outside of Church) we will hear and read about the theme of "water" all throughout this period between Pascha and Pentecost in which the Church uses this liturgical book known as the Pentecostarion. On Pascha we hear "come let us taste a new drink, not miraculous water drawn forth from a barren rock, but the Fount of Immortality, springing from the tomb of Christ, in Him we are established," and in the succeeding weeks we hear of the Sheep's Pool, the Well of Jacob, the Pool of Siloam, and the Living Waters of Christ which cause us to never thirst again. We receive this living water in baptism, and in the Cup of Life which is the side of Christ from which flowed blood and water as He hung, triumphantly, on the Cross. He is truly the Fount of Immortality. Thus, in the Dismissal Hymn of Mid-Pentecost we ask Christ for the "waters of piety" to be imparted to our souls.

This feast looks back to Pascha and ahead to Pentecost, originating from both, offering to us, in a sense, a torrent of overflowing grace. The grace of these two amazing feasts is united on this day, and perhaps it is for this reason that this feast was held in especially high esteem by the holy elder Joseph the Hesychast, who was instrumental in renewing the spiritual life on Mt. Athos, and reposed in 1959. He delighted in this feast with the faith of a simple child and awaited with great expectancy and preparation in order to receive these "waters of piety." It is said that the ascent of his soul and the divine visions he received were especially great on this present feast. Such is the love, mercy and grace of God towards man that are poured out in this Paschal period.

Pentecost pours out such abundant grace that it reaches all the way down to Hades—and so on Pentecost we pray on bended knee for those who have reposed. Christ is the Living Water for both the living and the dead. And the Pentecostarion period concludes with the Sunday of All Saints on which we

read from Isaiah 55, that as rain and snow pour out of Heaven and saturate the earth, causing the plants to bud and bringing bread to man, so shall be the Word of God. Whatever proceeds from the mouth of God shall not turn back until all things He wills shall be accomplished. His ways and commandments will prosper, and all peoples, mountains, hills, and trees—indeed, all of creation—shall exalt with joy, and the Lord's name shall be an everlasting sign for Israel. Of course we know that as the Church we are the New Israel, so we are seeing in Isaiah a promise of God's everlasting fidelity to us and the promise of His well-spring which can never be quenched.

Even beginning from the Old Testament we see innumerable important references and events involving water. Genesis shows all life beginning and being sustained by water—and again, Christ is the well-spring of life—He invites all who are thirsty to come and drink from Him and to have their thirst quenched from His unquenchable fount. There are also the events of the Red Sea, the Jordan River, etc. These are all prefigurements of the spiritual realities that are revealed in full in the Incarnation of Christ and are available to us without limit within Christ's Holy Church, which is His very water and life-giving Body.

From the life of Christ, this feast celebrates the time He was found in the Temple at twelve years old in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles. He spoke concerning His origin from God and the living water that He offers, and He astonished all those who heard Him. Here Christ is celebrated not only as the Spring of Living Water but also as Holy Wisdom, which is of course intimately connected to His living water.

We sang tonight: "**Thou, the Wisdom of God, didst come to the temple at Mid-feast," and many other hymns referring to Christ as the Wisdom of God. Some scholars even believe that the Church of the Holy Wisdom, Agia Sophia, in Constantinople celebrated its feast day on this feast of Mid-Pentecost.**

In meeting Christ in the Church in worship and in the sacraments we come to know His Wisdom experientially. This wisdom of course, is not that of man, but it is the Divine Wisdom of God—it is the very life of Christ. It is the life-giving water that He pours out into our souls and with which He saturates our entire being. This Wisdom, which is the life of Christ, is humility. The preaching of Christ is foolishness to the world, but all the wisdom of the world is foolishness in the face of the humble Christ Who gives endlessly of Himself to us who are undeserving of His life. But here, in the Church, on this feast, and at all times, we receive His life through our humility and our repentance—our recognition that we absolutely need His energy to bring us again to Paradise. This is Wisdom and this is Life. Come let us taste this new drink.

Christ spoke in the Temple of His divine origin, and Mid-Pentecost continues the glorious celebration of His defeat of death, which emphasizes His divinity for only God Himself can defeat death. Only God IS Life. Today we remember Pascha, but today we also look ahead to the feast of Pentecost. We are reminded of the coming of the Spirit and are emboldened in preparation for receiving the Spirit. This is the summation of the Christian life according to St. Seraphim of Sarov—the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

And not only do we receive the Spirit—today we prepare moreover to GIVE the Spirit. Christ says “He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly show flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). After Pentecost the Apostles did not stay in Jerusalem and keep this gift of Life to themselves. They went out into all the world and imparted that which they had received, as they had been commanded by Christ. If Christ has given to us, surely we must give to others. Otherwise, where is Christ in our life? Christ is love and humility. Deal with everyone in love and humility, no matter how it works against our egos, and burns us. This burning is cleansing and is cooled by the water we are receiving from Christ. Elder Joseph loved this feast and the grace it imparts, but his life and legacy demonstrates that he also loved to give the Spirit. His influence is keenly felt on Mt. Athos, in Greece, and even here in America, and throughout the

world. This is the mark of the true Christian—he who transmits that which he has received and changes those around him for the sake of Christ.

In his homily on Mid-Pentecost, Fr. Seraphim Rose says if there is anything we learn from this feast it is this: to THIRST. Even in the midst of our rejoicing and feasting on the good things of the earth in these days of Pascha we look ahead to the outpouring of the Spirit—to the good things from above the earth. Indeed, let us seek this Wisdom, and let us thirst for this living water. Thus we sing:

"Having come to the middle of the feast, refresh my thirsty soul with the streams of piety; for Thou, O Saviour, didst say to all: Let Him who thirsts come to Me and drink. O Christ our God, Source of Life, glory to Thee."
- *Jesse Dominick*

Pearls of Wisdom

On Sundays and feast days come to church, and falling down with reverence before God, be mindful of all the mercies you may ever have received from Him. Thank Him for them with all your heart, and as a sign of your thankfulness, promise to live as He has commanded you. This is a sacrifice most pleasing to God. - *St. Theophan the Recluse*

Why do temptations often occur on feast days? On holy feast days, Jesus Christ, the Theotokos and the saints are most joyful, treating us with blessings and other spiritual gifts. ... Knowing this, the devil creates temptations in order to deprive people of these divine gifts and prevent them from rejoicing and benefitting from these feasts days. - *St. Paisios of Mount Athos*

The virtues are linked one to the other, and follow as it were a sacred sequence, one depending on the other. For instance, prayer is linked to love, love to joy, joy to gentleness, gentleness to humility, humility to service, service to hope, hope to faith, faith to obedience, and obedience to simplicity. - *St. Makarios of Egypt*

When you are praying alone, and your spirit is dejected, and you are wearied and oppressed by your loneliness, remember then, as always, that God the Trinity looks upon you with eyes brighter than the sun; also all the angels, your own Guardian Angel, and all the Saints of God. Truly they do; for they are all one in God, and where God is, there are they also. Where the sun is, thither also are directed all its rays. Try to understand what this means.
- *St. John of Kronstadt*

What Significance does the Ascension of Christ have for the Life of the Christian?

Christ ascended to Heaven as man and as God. Once he became a man, being at the same time, as always, perfect God, he never put off His manhood, but deified it, and made it and us capable of apprehending heavenly things.

The Ascension is a prophecy of things to come for those who love God and believe in Him in an Orthodox manner. Those who believe and live according to this belief will be in the heavens, in the flesh, with Him, just as He now abides in the Heavens in the flesh. Our flesh and souls will be saved, because Christ made human flesh capable of deification.

We also call to mind the promise of the Holy Spirit, since Christ mentions this promise He had made before to them, and its advent is tied to His ascension thusly:

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:7-11).

What Christ has done for human flesh and our souls is impossible to understand, but the church, with sweet melody, meditates with fervor and thanksgiving and precise theology in her services.

"O Christ, having taken upon thy shoulders our nature, which had gone astray, thou didst ascend and bring it unto God the Father" (Matins canon for the Ascension, Ode 7).

"Having raised our nature, which was deadened by sin, Thou didst bring it unto Thine own Father, O Saviour" (ibid).

"Unto Him Who by His descent destroyed the adversary, and Who by His ascent raised up man, give praise O ye priests, and supremely exalt Him, O ye people, unto all the ages" (Matins canon for the Ascension, Ode 8).

Since the disciples were "filled with great joy", we who are Orthodox in belief and way of life should naturally be this way also, and should hasten to the temple. There we can meditate upon the magnificent truths and promises in the Ascension by listening carefully to the divinely inspired theology, sung in sweet melody. If we pray with care, and expectation, having valued divine worship above our worldly cares, surely God will enlighten us and noetically teach us the true meaning of Christ's Ascension.

- *St Nicholas Orthodox Church, McKinney Texas*

Pentecost: The Descent of the Holy Spirit

In the Old Testament Pentecost was the feast which occurred fifty days after Passover. As the Passover feast celebrated the exodus of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt, so Pentecost celebrated God's gift of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

In the new covenant of the Messiah, the Passover event takes on its new meaning as the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection, the "exodus" of men from this sinful world to the Kingdom of God. And in the New Testament as well, the Pentecostal feast is fulfilled and made new by the coming of the "new law," the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Christ.

When the day of Pentecost had come they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind,

and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed as resting upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . . (Acts 2.1–4).

The Holy Spirit that Christ had promised to his disciples came on the day of Pentecost (Jn 14.26, 15.26; Lk 24.49; Acts 1.5). The apostles received "the power from on high," and they began to preach and bear witness to Jesus as the risen Christ, the King and the Lord. **This moment has traditionally been called the birthday of the Church.**

In the liturgical services of the feast of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit is celebrated together with the full revelation of the divine Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The fullness of the Godhead is manifested with the Spirit's coming to man, and the Church hymns celebrate this manifestation as the final act of God's self-disclosure and self-donation to the world of His creation. For this reason Pentecost Sunday is also called Trinity Day in the Orthodox tradition.

Often on this day the icon of the Holy Trinity—particularly that of the three angelic figures who appeared to Abraham, the forefather of the Christian faith—is placed in the center of the church. This icon is used with the traditional Pentecostal icon which shows the tongues of fire hovering over the Virgin Mary and the Twelve Apostles, the original

prototype of the Church, who are themselves sitting in unity surrounding a symbolic image of "cosmos," the world.

On Pentecost we have the final fulfillment of the mission of Jesus Christ and the first beginning of the messianic age of the Kingdom of God mystically present in this world in the Church of the Messiah. For this reason the fiftieth day stands as the beginning of the era which is beyond the limitations of this world, fifty being that number which stands for eternal and heavenly fulfillment in Jewish and Christian mystical piety: seven times seven, plus one.

Thus, Pentecost is called an apocalyptic day, which means the day of final revelation. It is also called an eschatological day, which means the day of the final and perfect end (in Greek eschaton means the end). For when the Messiah comes and the Lord's Day is at hand, the "last days" are inaugurated in which "God declares: . . . I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." This is the ancient prophecy to which the Apostle Peter refers in the first sermon of the Christian Church which was preached on the first Sunday of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1 7; Joel 2: 28–32).

Once again it must be noted that the feast of Pentecost is not simply the celebration of an event which took place centuries ago. It is the celebration of what must happen and does happen to us in the Church today.

We all have died and risen with the Messiah-King, and we all have received his Most Holy Spirit. We are the "temples of the Holy Spirit." God's Spirit dwells in us (Rom 8; 1 Cor 2–3, 12; 2 Cor 3; Gal 5; Eph 2–3). We, by our own membership in the Church, have received "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" in the sacrament of Chrismation. Pentecost has happened to us.

The Divine Liturgy of Pentecost recalls our baptism into Christ with the verse from Galatians again replacing the Thrice-Holy Hymn. Special verses from the psalms also replace the usual antiphonal psalms of the liturgy. The epistle and gospel readings tell of the Spirit's coming to men. The kontakion sings of the reversal of Babel as God unites the nations into the unity of his

Spirit. The troparion proclaims the gathering of the whole universe into God's net through the work of the inspired apostles. The hymns "O Heavenly King" and "We have seen the True Light" are sung for the first time since Pascha (Easter), calling the Holy Spirit to "come and abide in us," and proclaiming that "we have received the heavenly Spirit."

The church building is decorated with flowers and the green leaves of the summer to show that God's divine Breath comes to renew all creation as the "Life-creating Spirit." In Hebrew the word for Spirit, breath and wind is the same word, ruah.

The Great Vespers of Pentecost (after Liturgy) features three long prayers at which the faithful kneel for the first time since Pascha.

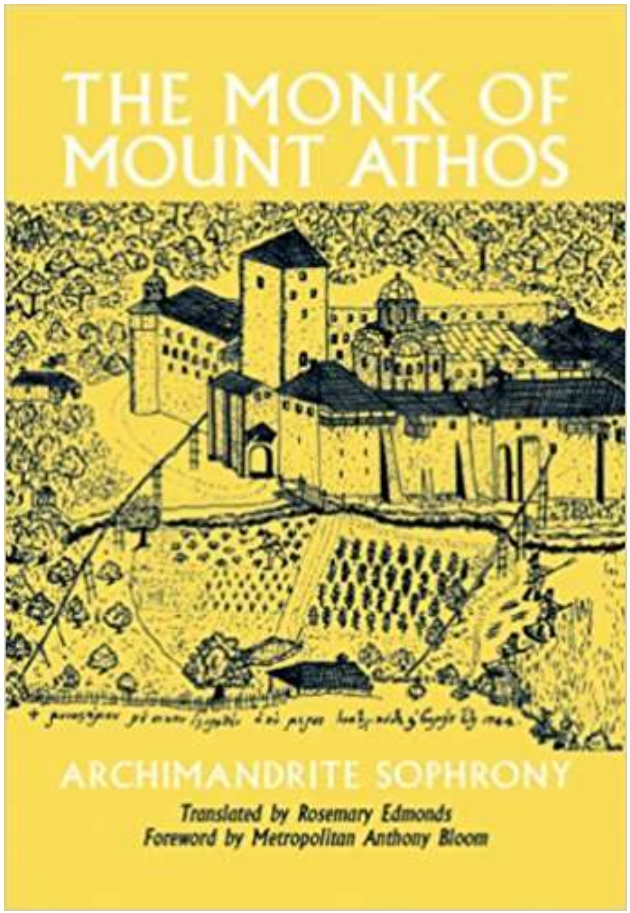
The Monday after Pentecost is the feast of the Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Church, and the Sunday after Pentecost is the feast of All Saints. This is the logical liturgical sequence since the coming of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled in men by their becoming saints, and this is the very purpose of the creation and salvation of the world. "Thus says the Lord: Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I your God am holy" (Lev 11.44–45, 1 Pet 1.15–16).

May Library Features

«Жив Бог. Православный катехизис», London, 1988, 486 стр.

Эта книга написана группой православных членов парижского «Православного братства» в 1979 году. Книга имела значительный успех у инославных христиан, справедливо увидевших в ней истинное свидетельство о православной духовной традиции. Это издание — русскоязычный перевод оригинального труда с дополнениями и исправлениями. Предназначаетсявсем,

ктохочетлучшепонятьправославнуюхристианскуюверу. This catechism (discussion of Bible subjects in Q&A form) was published by the Parisian Orthodox Christians in 1979. It was warmly met by contemporaries who found in it a trustworthy account of the true Christian tradition. This is the second edition of the original book with additions and corrections.



The Monk of Mount Athos: Staretz Selouan by Archimandrite Sophrony

Silouan, an unlettered young peasant from the heart of European Russia, set off for the Russian Monastery of St Panteleimon on Mount Athos in 1892. There, rooted in a tradition reaching back to the very beginnings of Christian monasticism, he came to a personal experience of Christianity akin to that of the Desert Fathers. This account of Silouan's life, written by his disciple Archimandrite Sophrony, reveals not only Silouan's personality and teaching, but also the spiritual struggles which truly made him a staretz (a monk whose God-given wisdom and insight enable him to serve as a spiritual guide for others).

May Parish Saint's Days

Congratulations to matushka Alexandra, Shura, Irena, Iouri, Isidora, Marcos D, Marcus S, Rodney-Mark, James B, James P, Christopher and Kiff. May God grant you all many, many, years!

The 100th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Russian Royal Family … A series of articles from various Russian Orthodox Language sources

The Nicholas II and Alexandra Romanov daughters – Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia (†1918) – so little had been written about them, aside from passing comments in a handful of contemporary memoirs and things said about them in family letters and diaries. They led very protected lives, attendance at Russian court functions and the occasional ball was a rare treat, as too were trips to opera and ballet in St. Petersburg with their Father, Emperor of Russia Nicholas II. In their childhood the four sisters lived a quiet family life at home at the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo, where the family had close ranks to protect Prince Alexei from harm. Their summers were spent sailing on the imperial yacht, the Shtandart, round the Finnish skerries, or at the Lower Dacha at Peterhof by the Gulf of Finland, or at their beloved white palace in Livadia, Crimea.

They signed some of their letters as OTMA, short for their names. Yet behind the scenes these were four very different personalities. Their letters and diaries reveal their lovely voices full of hope, of love, and of undying optimism – a belief in the basic goodness of people no matter how difficult and frightening their circumstances.

As the girls grew older speculation inevitably mounted about whom they might eventually marry, and all kinds of dynastic pairings were suggested. But all talk of marriage evaporated when the Great War broke out in 1914. Their personal lives aside forever, the war years revealed a different, sober, and suddenly grown-up side to the girls.

Next day the Great War broke out Tsarina Alexandra signed up the three elder daughters to be nurses in a military hospital. There the Romanov daughters were not spared any of the shock of their first confrontation with the suffering of the wounded and the terrible damage done to their bodies by bombs, sabres and bullets. They were thrown in at the deep end, dealing with men who arrived “dirty, bloodstained and suffering… Our hands scrubbed in antiseptic solutions, we began the work of washing, cleaning and bandaging maimed bodies, mangled faces, blinded eyes, all the indescribable mutilations of what is called civilized warfare” – they wrote in their diaries. Family tutor Pierre Gilliard observed that the Grand Duchesses “with their usual natural simplicity and good humour… accepted the increasing austerity of life at Court during the War… They were not playing at being nurses – which I observed in other aristocratic ladies – but were true sisters of mercy”.

The brisk and efficient Tatiana (b. 1897) was the absolute linchpin of the royal family: “She had inherited her mother's nature: strength of character, a tendency to keeping life in order, and an awareness of her duty. She took charge of organizing things in the house. She watched over Alexei. She always walked with the Emperor in the yard. She was the closest person to the Empress. They were two friends… If the family had lost Alexandra Feodorovna, then its protector would have been Tatiana Nikolaevna”.

Olga (b. 1895) was gentle and soft-hearted. In many ways she was Tatiana's opposite, so much easier to love, for she had inherited her father's warm, disarming charm. Unlike Tatiana, Olga hated being organized and loathed housework. With her love of books and preference for solitude, it seemed in their exile in 1918 she understood the situation considerably more than the rest of the family and was aware of how dangerous it was. Olga's finely tuned nature clearly predisposed her to a sense of impending tragedy,

accentuated by her love of poetry and her increasing concentration, in her reading, on religious texts. She wrote to her friends: “Father asks me to tell all who have remained loyal to him and those over whom they might have an influence, that they should not avenge him, for he has forgiven everyone and prays for them all; that they should not themselves seek revenge; that they should remember that the evil there now is in the world and it will become yet more powerful, and that it is not evil that will conquer evil – only love”.

Of all the Romanov sisters, sweet, accommodating Maria (b. 1899) remained the most self-effacing, her consistently loving and stoical personality inviting the least amount of comment or criticism. Everyone, including the red guards and even the commissar, adored her. She was the archetypal, wholesome Russian girl “kind-hearted, cheerful, with an even temper, and friendly”.

Anastasia (b.1901) had an irrepressible personality; she was “the family's cheer-leader who kept everyone's spirits up with her high energy and mimicry”. She certainly could be juvenile at times, challenging authority in the classroom. But all in all, [in their exile], her “gay and boisterous temperament proved of immeasurable value to the rest of the family”, for when she chose to, “Anastasia could dispel anybody's gloom”.

Everyone who spent the last months in 1918 with the family noticed their quiet fortitude in the face of so much desperate uncertainty. “My respect for the Grand Duchesses only grew the longer our exile lasted” - recalled family doctor Botkin, “Every time the Emperor enters the dining room with a sad expression on his face the Grand Duchesses push each other with their elbows and whisper: “Papa is sad today. We must cheer him up”. And so they proceeded to do so. They would begin to laugh, to tell funny stories, and, in a few minutes, His Majesty begins to smile”.

When the daughters were leaving for Ekaterinburg, the place of their martyrdom (where the rest of the family was already under arrest), a local engineer who was at the station suddenly caught sight of three young women dressed in pretty dark suits with large fabric buttons whom he recognized as the Grand Duchesses: “They walked unsteadily, or rather

unevenly. I decided that this was because each one was carrying a very heavy suitcase and also because the surface of the road had become squelchy from the incessant spring rain… They passed by very close and very slowly. I stared at their lively, young, expressive faces somewhat indiscreetly – and during those two or three minutes I learned something that I will not forget till my dying day. It felt that my eyes met those of the three unfortunate young women just for a moment and that when they did I reached into the depths of their martyred souls, as it were, and I was overwhelmed by the pity for them – me, a confirmed revolutionary. Without expecting it, I sensed that we Russian intellectuals, we who claim to be the precursors and the voice of conscience, were responsible for the undignified ridicule to which the Grand Duchesses were subjected… We do not have the right to forget, nor to forgive ourselves for our passivity and failure to do something for them".

As the young women passed him, the engineer was struck by how "everything was painted on those young, nervous faces: the joy of seeing their parents again, the pride of oppressed young women forced to hide their mental anguish from hostile strangers, and, finally, perhaps, a premonition of imminent death… Olga, with the eyes of a gazelle, reminded me of a sad young girl from a Turgenev novel. Tatiana gave the impression of a haughty patrician with an air of pride in the way she looked at you. Anastasia seemed like a frightened, terrified child, who could, in different circumstances, be charming, light-hearted and affectionate…"

That engineer was, forever after, haunted by those faces. He felt – indeed he hoped - "that the three young girls, momentarily at least, sensed that what was imprinted on my face wasn't simply a cold curiosity and indifference towards them". His natural human instincts had made him want to reach out and acknowledge them, but – "to my great shame, I held back out of weakness of character, thinking of my position, of my family". This was the last account of meeting the royal daughters alive and free.

Practical Tips

Over the years I have met people who have chosen not to join a church, choosing, rather, to "worship" at home. Some have convinced themselves church is a waste of time, and feel they can be close to God while staying home on a Sunday morning. Others believe none of the churches teach the bible according to their own interpretation, and choosing to worship in the privacy of their own home, assure themselves they won't have to hear any false teachings.

Some people have chosen to stay away from church because of past conflict with a clergyman, or perhaps got tired of hearing pleas for money, and have convinced themselves that giving to a charity is money better spent (in reality, church goers tend to outspend non-church goers in charitable giving).

In truth, God has given us the Church as the very place wherein we can grow spiritually, while enjoying the protection, and the blessings, of being in weekly contact with other believers. Just like an earthly family, we don't always enjoy the presence of other members, but it is often those difficult and uncomfortable moments that help us grow the most. As well, there are blessings that would never be experienced, should we remain apart from fellow Christians.

In Luke 4:16, we read that Our Lord Jesus Christ was regularly in the temple, for "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom." It was Christ's regular practice to go to church, "As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place." If Our Lord Jesus made it a priority to meet together with other believers, how can we excuse ourselves from doing the same.

Perhaps the most important reason for weekly church attendance lies in the fact that it is only in the church where we can receive Holy Communion, for Our Lord went so far as to say that unless we eat of His flesh, and drink of His blood, we will have no life in us (John 6:53). It is in the reception of Holy Communion where we receive the grace needed to grow spiritually, and where we are empowered to live in all holiness and truth.

"...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25)".

Finally, the neglect of corporate worship grieves the Holy Spirit who lives within the individual believer and the Church as a whole, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30)". With love in Christ, Abbot Tryphon

Links

St. Sophia Orthodox Church, Victoria BC
http://saintsophia.ca/

St. Sophia Parish's FREE Lenten Cookbook Recipes "Come and Dine"
http://comeanddinerecipe.blogspot.ca/

Official site of the Montreal and Canadian Diocese
http://mcdiocese.com/en/

Official site of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia
http://www.russianorthodoxchurch.ws/synod/indexeng.htm

The Rudder: Streaming Orthodox Christian sacred music 24/7
http://www.myocn.com/rudder/

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Vancouver BC
http://russianorthodoxchurch.ca/en/

Morning Offering by Abbot Tryphon
http://blogs.ancientfaith.com/morningoffering/

"We knew not whether we were in heaven or earth… We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations."

The Orthodox Church

With these words, envoys sent from Russia by Prince Vladimir in the year 987 recorded their impression of Constantinople's awesome Orthodox Cathedral, Hagia Sophia. They had been sent to search for the true religion. Within a year of their report, Prince Vladimir and the Russian people were baptized in Christ by Orthodox missionaries. Today, as in Prince Vladimir's time, the Orthodox Church – fully aware that man is a union of body and soul – uses all the beauty of creation to move her faithful children to prayer and worship: icons, beautiful singing, sweet-smelling incense, and majestic services.

The Greek word 'Orthodoxia' means 'correct praise' or 'correct teaching' and in the Orthodox worship the praise and teaching are closely interwoven.

Jesus Christ founded His Church through the Apostles. By the grace received from God at Pentecost, the Apostles established the Church throughout the world. In Greece, Russia, and elsewhere, the True Apostolic Church continues to flourish, preserving the Faith of Christ pure and unchanged.

"Christ the Power of God,
and the Wisdom of God"

– First Corinthians

Troparion in the Second Tone

We bow down before Thine all pure image, O Good One, asking forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ God; for Thou wast well pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh of Thine own will, that Thou mightest save what Thou hadst created from slavery to the enemy. Wherefore, we cry out to Thee in thanksgiving: Thou hast filled all things with joy, O our Saviour, Who hast come to save the world.

Kontakion in the Second Tone

O uncircumscribable Word of the Father, knowing the victorious image, uninscribed and divinely wrought, of Thine ineffable and divine dispensation towards man, of Thy true incarnation, we honour it with veneration.