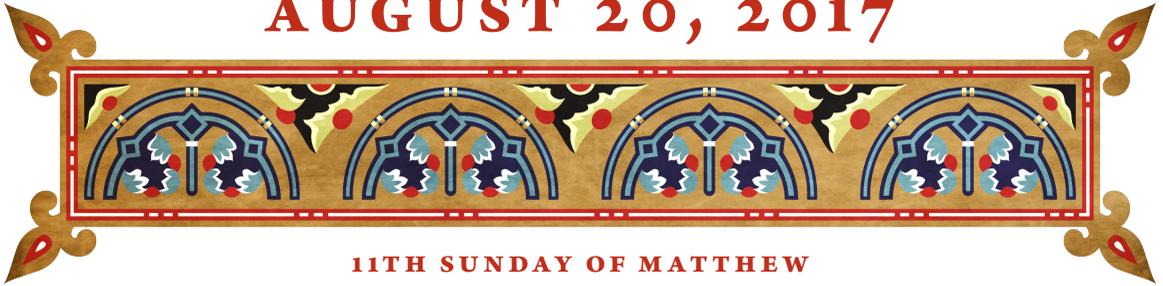


SAINT LUKE THE EVANGELIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

AUGUST 20, 2017



11TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW

The Prophet Samuel was the fifteenth and last of the Judges of Israel, living more than 1146 years before the Birth of Christ. He was descended from the Tribe of Levi, and was the son of Elkanah from Ramathaim-Zophim of Mount Ephraim. He was born, having been besought from the Lord through the prayers of his mother Hannah (therefore he received the name Samuel, which means “besought from God”). Even before birth, he was dedicated to God. Her song, “My heart exults in the Lord,” is the Third Ode of the Old Testament (1 Sam/1 Kings 2:1-10).

When the boy reached the age of three, his mother went with him to Shiloh and in accord with her vow dedicated him to the worship of God. She gave him into the care of the High Priest Eli, who at this time was a judge over Israel. The prophet grew in the fear of God, and at twelve years of age he had a revelation that God would punish the house of the High Priest Eli, because he did not restrain the impiety of his sons. Eli’s whole family was wiped out in a single day.

The prophecy was fulfilled when the Philistines, having slain in battle 30,000 Israelites (among them were also the sons of the High Priest, Hophni and Phinees), gaining victory and capturing the Ark of the Covenant. Hearing this, the High Priest Eli fell backwards from his seat at the gate, and breaking his back, he died. The wife of Phinees, upon hearing what had happened in this very hour, gave birth to a son (Ichabod) and died with the words: “The glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God is taken away” (1 Sam/1 Kgs 4: 22).

Upon the death of Eli, Samuel became the judge of the nation of Israel. The Ark of God was returned by the Philistines on their own initiative. After returning to God, the Israelites returned to all the cities that the Philistines had taken. In his old age, the Prophet Samuel made his sons Joel and Abiah judges over Israel, but they did not follow the integrity and righteous judgment of their father, since they were motivated by greed.

Then the elders of Israel, wanting the nation of God to be “like other nations” (1 Sam/1 Kgs 8: 20), demanded of the Prophet Samuel that they have a king. The Prophet Samuel anointed Saul as king, but saw in this a downfall of the people, whom God Himself had governed until this time, announcing His will through His chosen saints. Resigning the position of judge, the Prophet Samuel asked the people if they consented to his continued governance, but no one stepped forward for him.

After denouncing the first king, Saul, for his disobedience to God, the Prophet Samuel anointed David as king. He had offered David asylum, saving him from the pursuit of King Saul. The Prophet Samuel died in extreme old age. His life is recorded in the Bible (1 Sam/1 Kgs; Sirach 46:13-20).

In the year 406 A.D. the relics of the Prophet Samuel were transferred from Judea to Constantinople. *The martyrs Severus, Memnon, Philip, and thirty-seven others* suffered in Philippopolis, Thrace under the emperor Diocletian (284-305).

When the governor learned that the Saint Severus had converted the centurion Memnon to Christ, he ordered that Memnon be tortured. They cut three strips of skin from Saint Memnon’s back.

Saint Severus was raked with iron hooks. Then they put red-hot rings on his fingers and girded him with a red-hot iron belt. After these tortures, he was blinded. The others had their hands and feet cut off and were thrown into a fiery oven.

AT THE SMALL ENTRANCE WE CHANT



ΑΠΟΛΥΤ. ΤΗΣ ΕΟΡΤΗΣ. ΗΧΟΣ Α.

Εν τῇ Γεννήσει τὴν παρθενίαν ἐφύλαξας, ἐν τῇ Κοιμήσει τὸν κόσμον οὐ κατέλιπες Θεοτόκε. Μετέστης πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν, μήτηρ ὑπάρχουσα τῆς ζωῆς, καὶ ταῖς πρεσβείαις ταῖς σαῖς λυτρουμένη, ἐκ θανάτου τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν.

ΑΝΑΣΤ. ΑΠΟΛΥΤ. ΗΧΟΣ Β.

Οτε κατήλθες πρὸς τὸν θάνατον, ἡ Ζωὴ ἡ ἀθάνατος, τότε τὸν Ἄϊδην ἐνέκρωσας τῇ ἀστραπῇ τῆς Θεότητος, ὅτε δὲ καὶ τοὺς τεθνεῶτας ἐκ τῶν καταχθονίων ἀνέστησας, πᾶσαι αἱ Δυνάμεις τῶν ἐπουρανίων ἐκραύγαζον. Ζωοδότα Χριστέ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν δόξα σοι.

ΑΠΟΛΥΤ. ΤΗΣ ΕΟΡΤΗΣ. ΗΧΟΣ Α.

Εν τῇ Γεννήσει τὴν παρθενίαν ἐφύλαξας, ἐν τῇ Κοιμήσει τὸν κόσμον οὐ κατέλιπες Θεοτόκε. Μετέστης πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν, μήτηρ ὑπάρχουσα τῆς ζωῆς, καὶ ταῖς πρεσβείαις ταῖς σαῖς λυτρουμένη, ἐκ θανάτου τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν.

ΑΠΟΛΥΤΙΚΙΟΝ ΤΟΥ ΝΑΟΥ. ΠΛ. Α΄.

Λουκάν τον πανύμνητον καὶ ἅγιον ἀπόστολον, τὸν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας γνωστὸν συνθέτην τῶν Πράξεων τῶν Ἀποστόλων, τὸν τε σεμνὸν τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου Χριστοῦ ὑπομνηματιστήν, ἀξίως τιμήσωμεν ὕμνοις ὁσίοις, ὡς νοσημάτων ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ φυσικῶν ἀσθενειῶν θεραπευτήν, τὸν καθαίροντα πληγὰς τοῦ πνεύματος, καὶ ἀδιαλείπτως πρεσβεύοντα ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν.

ΚΟΝΤΑΚΙΟΝ. ΗΧΟΣ Β.

Τὴν ἐν πρεσβείαις ἀκοίμητον Θεοτόκον, καὶ προστασίαις ἀμετάθετον ἐλπίδα, τάφος καὶ νέκρωσις οὐκ ἐκράτησεν. ὡς γὰρ ζωῆς Μητέρα, πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν μετέστησεν, ὁ μήτραν οικήσας ἀειπάρθενον.

ΑΠΟΛΥΤ. ΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΕΟΡΤΗΣ. ΜΟΔΕ 1.

In giving birth you retained your virginity, and in dormition you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos. You were translated unto life, being the Mother of Life. And thus by virtue of your intercessions you deliver our souls from death.

RESURRECTIONAL ΑΠΟΛΥΤ. ΜΟΔΕ 2.

When You descended unto death, O Lord who yourself are immortal Life, then did You mortify Hades by the lightning flash of Your Divinity. Also when You raised the dead from the netherworld, all the Powers of the heavens were crying out: O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to You.

ΑΠΟΛΥΤ. ΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΕΟΡΤΗΣ. ΜΟΔΕ 1.

In giving birth you retained your virginity, and in dormition you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos. You were translated unto life, being the Mother of Life. And thus by virtue of your intercessions you deliver our souls from death.

ΑΠΟΛΥΤΙΚΙΟΝ ΓΙΑ ΤΟΝ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣΤΙΚΟΝ. ΜΟΔΕ 5.

The holy Apostle, the All-hymned Luke, * who is acknowledged by the Church of Christ * as the recorder of the Acts of the Apostles, * and the splendid author of the Gospel of Christ. * Let us praise with sacred hymns as a physician, * who heals the infirmities of man, * and the ailments of nature, * who cleanses spiritual wounds, and prays unceasingly for our souls.

ΚΟΝΤΑΚΙΟΝ. ΜΟΔΕ 2.

The Theotokos, unsleeping in intercession * and the immovable hope of protection, * could not be retained by any tomb or death. * For being Life's own Mother, she was transferred to life by Him * who dwelt in the ever-virgin womb.

THE READINGS OF THE DAY



EPISTLE READING

THE FIRST LETTER OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS 9:2–12

Brethren, You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. My defense to those who question me is this: Have we no right to eat and to drink? Do we not have the right to take along a sister—a wife—even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Kephias? Or is it only Barnabas and I who are obliged to work? What soldier ever serves at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who feeds a flock and does not drink from the flock's milk? Do I speak these things according to human ways? Does not the law say the same thing as well? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it for the oxen that God shows care, or does he say these things for our benefit? Yes, it was written for us, because whoever plows should plow in hope, and whoever threshes in hope should have a share in his hope. If we sowed to you spiritual things, is it [such] a great thing if we reap your material things? If others partake of this right over you, should we not even more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we bear all things, so that we may cause no hindrance to the Good News of Christ.

GOSPEL READING

MATTHEW 18: 23–35

The Lord said this parable: "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who wanted to settle his accounts with his slaves. When he began the settlement, someone was brought in who owed him ten thousand talents. But because the slave could not pay, his lord gave orders that he be sold, with his wife, children, and all that he had, so that payment may be made. At this, the slave fell down on his knees before him, saying: 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will repay you all!' The lord of that slave, moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. However, that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him one hundred denarii. He grabbed him and took him by the throat, saying: 'Pay me what you owe!' And so, his fellow slave fell down at his feet and begged him, saying: 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you!' But the first man would not [have compassion] but went off and had him cast into prison, until he should pay back what was due. When his [other] fellow slaves saw what had been done, they were extremely distressed and came to their lord to report all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned the [first] slave and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' His lord was angry and delivered him to the jailers until he would pay all that was due. This is how my heavenly Father will also treat you if you do not each forgive each other their trespasses from your hearts."

ANNOUNCEMENTS



UPCOMING CHURCH SERVICES:

Monday, August 14, Vigil for the Most Holy Theotokos, 8pm

Saturday, August 19 Great Vespers, 5pm

FLOWER DONATIONS - ARTOCLASIA

Thank you to all who donated towards the decorating of the icon for the Feast of the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God and for the artoclasia.

#SOAKUPHESON

It's Week 13 in this summer series. See info in Narthex for details. SPF!

COMMUNITY POTLUCK

There will be a Community Pot Luck on August 27 after Divine Services. Please plan to join us for food and fellowship.

ALTAR SERVER ROBES

Thank you to all who donated towards the altar boy robes. Donations are still needed for additional sizes. Please see Father if you would like to help.

PURPLE BARREL

Don't forget the the purple barrel next time you are at the grocery store. Donations are picked up by the local food bank. Thank you!

WOMEN'S SUPPLY DRIVE

Philoptochos is sponsoring a Supply Drive for True North, the local women's shelter for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Items for donation include toiletries for women and babies as well as other items. Please see the list of needed supplies in the Narthex. Let's give of our abundance to comfort and support to these women and children in need.

CHURCH ATTIRE

There is no allowance for Church "summer-wear." An Orthodox Christian should always dress for Church in modest attire (in every season), so as not to draw attention to him/herself, becoming a distraction to others. Traditionally women wear dresses or skirts of at least knee length; dresses, blouses / tops should, at minimum, include short sleeves and cover the shoulder. **Women should not wear lipstick or lip gloss to Church** - it leaves a residue on the icons and on the Communion spoon. Men should dress in pants and polo or button-down shirts. Shorts should never be worn in Church. **Additionally, tight-fitting clothing is not appropriate for women or men.**

In the year 1740 Sultan Ahmed and Ibrahim Pasha, the governor of Asia Minor, a decree was issued that Christian boys should be placed in concentration camps. The orphan Theocharis was among them. On a certain day, however, the judge of Neapolis (Nevsehir) in Cappadocia, saw Theocharis in the camp, he liked him, and brought him home to care for his animals.

Theocharis's piety and comeliness prompted the judge to suggest that he become his son-in-law, after first becoming a Moslem. Theocharis answered courageously, "My master, I was born a Christian, and I cannot deny the faith of my Savior and of my fathers." The Ottoman judge, considered the answer to be offensive and threatened him with torture, and then he sentenced him to death by starvation. Theocharis went to church to confess and to partake of the spotless Mysteries, and then returned to his master. When he repeated his refusal and confessed his faith, they threw him into prison without food for many days. He was nourished by prayer, however and did not feel hunger; he was satisfied with a little water once in a while. When the judge repeated his offer to let marry his daughter, Theocharis firmly refused. Then, after frightful torture, they took him an hour's journey from the city of Neapolis, where he was stoned and then hanged at noon on a white poplar tree on August 20, 1740.

In 1923, the right hand of St. Theocharis was brought to Thessaloniki and was placed in the Church of St. Katharine, where it remains today.

"IT IS OUR FAULT THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO DO NOT KNOW CHRIST"

Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol talks about end times, trust in God and the mission of Church

How unique are our times? How to overcome spiritual weakness? What to do if you don't have an experienced spiritual father? How to pray and support the mission of Church? What is contemporary monasticism? Why must married people read paterikons? Well-known Greek preacher, Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, answers these and other questions.

Q: Your Eminence, do you have a feeling that we live in abnormal times? I understand that I sound grumpy, as people always complain that in the past the sun was brighter, the grass was greener and the people were kinder. However, today many people, not only Christians, have a general feeling of anxiety and uneasiness.

M.A.: I think that we have grown older and that is why we idealize the past and think that it was better than the present. Ob-

viously, the world is heading toward the end times. However, there is no "yesterday" or "tomorrow" for Christians. There is only "today", which is lived in the presence of God through the sacraments of Church and Divine Liturgy. When we celebrate Church holidays, we say "Christ is born today," "Today is the Baptism of Christ," or "Today Christ is crucified." This way we live by today and the Kingdom of Heaven that will come in the end. I think, my dear, that we must be thankful to God for the Kingdom of Heaven. As Elder Paisios used to say, the more tribulations we go through, the more God blesses us.

Q: So there is no "yesterday" or "today" in Church; but strange things are happening in the world outside of Church's fence: same-sex marriages are being legalized and in some places killing old people has become legal, if they, or possibly, those who got tired of looking after them, requested it. We see unprecedented propaganda of debauchery; we see iniquities happening right before our eyes. Aren't we right when we say that our world is different from what it was only 50 years ago?

M.A.: It is a pity that our brothers do not know the Holy Gospel and do the things you described. We pray for them and for the entire world. The conditions were always difficult for our Church. Think about this: The conditions were always difficult for our Church. It was founded at the time of idolatry. For centuries, it was persecuted. Remember what happened in Russia only several decades ago? Regardless, our Church continues to persevere. We do not despair; instead we thank God for leading us to Church and pray to Him, asking to let us stay in the Church. We pray for the people who are outside of Church, so that these brothers of ours would experience God, because this is also our responsibility. We know that the devil is the prince of this world outside of Church. But Christ will triumph over the devil and those who seek Christ's truth will always be with Him. It is the greatest responsibility of the people of the Church to preach the truth of the Gospel to those who want to hear it.

Q: In the 1990-ies, Russia experienced a colossal surge of spiritual enthusiasm, but today we clearly see that people's interest in faith is on the decline. This means that the people who should be the "children of the kingdom" have chosen a totally different kingdom and a different master, rather than Christ. How should Christians maintain their zeal?

M.A.: People's backsliding from Christ is always the reason for sorrow for Christians, but it also becomes a motivation for showing love and praying for those who have strayed from Christianity. We need to treat those who don't believe in Christ with great love and great sorrow. In the Gospel, Christ tells us that we should "let our light so shine before men", that they may know God. (Mt. 5:16).

It is our fault that there are people who do not know Christ. We must feel a tremendous responsibility for the souls of such people. If we become saints, we will attract people to Christ. Our problem, however, is the lack of holiness within us. Therefore, we are unfair toward our brothers who don't see the holiness within us and as a result are not drawn closer to the Gospel. So, what we really need is holiness and saints in the Church.

Q: My question was a bit different: What can be used to maintain the Christian faith and aspirations of holiness, if our belief is on the decline after the first passionate years of embracing Christianity? We see that tragedies occur even in the families of priests. A wife of a priest I knew left him, some seminary students I was acquainted with got divorced. Unfortunate things happen where we thought they simply couldn't happen. What must contemporary Christians focus on to keep this from happening?

M.A.: Surely, our life will always be full of temptations. And of course all these temptations will try to eradicate our love of God. In addition to being vigilant and active in our lives, it is very important for people who want to preserve the warmth in their hearts to have a righteous and pious spiritual father that they can turn to in difficult times of temptation. Guided by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, our spiritual fathers help us keep the love of God in our hearts. We must also nourish our souls by praying and reading spiritual books. That is how, with the help of our spiritual fathers, we will be able to overcome the tribulations in our lives and in the world around us.

Q: You said that it is good to have a spiritual father, but currently in Russia there are many young priests who simply don't have enough spiritual experience or special spiritual gifts. What should the majority of Christians, who cannot communicate with saintly people, do?

M.A.: Elder Paisios used to say that when there is no help from man, there is abundant help from God. What you say is, of course, very logical. However, it is not so according to God's logic. God doesn't need me or anybody else, even Elders Porphyrios and Paisios. God can implement His will in the souls of people Himself, and that is why we should never despair.

Church is a sacrament of God's presence and manifestation in this world. If you approached Elder Paisios without faith, you would not benefit from this at all. And the other way around: If you approach your spiritual father with faith and humbleness in the name of Christ, you will receive the answer that would reflect God's will.

On Mt. Athos, I heard a story about a monk whose spiritual father passed away. This monk put the elder's clothes on a log and said, "Since I don't have a spiritual father, I will be ask-

ing this log." And that is what he started doing. Once, when he asked the log a question, he heard the voice saying, "No, don't do that!"

God acts in accordance with our faith. I understand you very well, but we are in trouble if we expect support from people and not from God. Even in Greece, many people didn't know Elders Paisios and Porphyrios, even though they were extraordinary saints. What is important is that the Church of Christ continues its mission.

Q: If your faith is alive and you love God, you do not need anything but God and His Church. But how do you save yourself if your faith and zealotness are on the decline and you feel that you need this world that according to the apostle "lieth in wickedness"?

M.A.: Such Christians should do what Apostle Peter did when he started drowning. He cried, "Lord, save me!" And God stretched out his hand and saved him.

Christ is alive! He is always near. And anybody who asks Him for help will receive it.

Q: What if you pray, but don't get any tangible responses to your prayers? What if it seems that God doesn't answer?

M.A.: If you wait for the results of your prayers, you will never see them, because the starting point of such a prayer is wrong. I don't pray to get any results. I pray so that God forgives my sins and has mercy on me.

God gives us His Body and Blood, forgives us our sins and through Church bestows the grace of the Holy Spirit upon us. So all we need to do is pray to God for His Mercy in a humble and simple manner. A humble person trusts God and doesn't doubt that God hears him. If you want to see the results of your prayer, this means that you doubt it. Since God doesn't want our own pride to harm us, He conceals the fruits of our prayer. Quite likely, He will show them to us when we become humble, and we will be able to enjoy the fruits of the prayer without even understanding it.

One elder told the monk who always wanted to see the fruits of his prayers, "You are like that person who after putting a seed in the ground digs it out every day to see if it took roots. Leave that seed in the ground, water it and take care of it, and then it will grow on its own."

Q: How can we explain this truth to people outside of Church? Many people think that life is a supermarket where you can quickly buy something. They light a candle and expect God to cure cancer, help them find an apartment or a job, etc.

M.A.: We are not God's lawyers. We don't always have to explain what God does for each person. We must teach people to love God as children love Him, not as supermarket buyers.

We need to trust God and God's Will. God will find a way to the heart of every person and we shouldn't worry about what happens with the world and the people in it. Christ is the Savior of the world. He was crucified for the sake of the people and He won't be unjust toward anybody. God will address the heart of every person, when He is needed. If God is silent, so are we.

Everybody must yield their souls to God's Will. Sometimes, in order to feel God in your heart, you have to live through many sorrows, trials and misunderstandings. Do you remember what happened with Job the Long-Suffering? God let him experience a great number of trials and addressed him only at the very end. God knows when it is time to talk to a person's heart. We must trust God and His love of the entire world. When we see somebody who needs God, we must pray for this person, and God will surely touch his heart.

Q: How should the Church implement its mission then? You say that we shouldn't worry about what happens with the world and that God will talk to the hearts of people in due time. This could mean that we shouldn't worry about if and when people go to Church. However, we do need to do something to bring people to Church. What should be the true mission of Church?

M.A.: A farmer sows a seed in the field, then prays to God to make this seed grow and doesn't worry about it. Likewise, we must sow seeds and water them but not worry about their growth.

Q: To what extent then can we approach the world to try to influence it? The Russian Church has been discussing appropriate methods of missionary work for a long time. For example, can priests go to rock concerts, play soccer and so forth? Can these methods be used to bring people to Church?

M.A.: I think the world doesn't need us at the rock concert or a soccer match. I believe that the world needs us to be where people can find us—that is we need to be at the analogion in the church, taking confessions and being available for spiritual conversation. People need to hear the Word of God from us. They need us to accept them with love and kindness. They don't need us to attend a soccer match or drink alcohol at a disco. They need our love, kindness and holiness of life.

Q: For two years in a row, you have been coming to Russia to attend the conference on monasticism. How would you describe the current situation with monasticism?

M.A.: I am very touched that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, archpriests and priests show concern about the matters of contemporary monasticism. Obviously, there are many issues to discuss, focus on and improve, but this can be said not only

about Russia, but even about Mt. Athos. Every country has its own traditions, rules and people. Monastics emerge in various countries and live among the local people. I think that everything is going well. This doesn't mean that I don't see the reality. I see that everything is developing in a natural way, and abbots and abbesses are committed to correcting some shortcomings and learning to do things in a better way.

Q: Is there any connection between good Christian families and good monastics?

M.A.: I always say that a good monk would be a good family man and a bad monk, if he got married, would be a bad family man. Christians' goal in monasticism and marriage is the same—it is the eternal union with Christ. This is what we need to aspire to both in monasticism and married life. You can ask me whether it is better to achieve this goal in monasticism, but I can't say so. Everybody has to do what is fitting for them in order to find Christ.

Q: We often hear people say, "What can monastics know about family life?"

M.A.: One needs to look below the surface here, and the bottom line remains the same. The writings of ascetic monks teach us to overcome egoism and passions and put off "the old self" so we can start communicating with ourselves, other people and, most importantly, God. Married people must read paterikons to learn how to build a good family, because paterikons contain answers to many of the problems that we encounter in our lives.

Q: Your eminence, as a ruling bishop of a large diocese, spiritual father and abbot of many monasteries, do you have time to take confessions and provide spiritual guidance to laypeople?

M.A.: Everywhere in the Greek-speaking world—not only on Cyprus—bishops dedicate a lot of time to hearing the confessions of their laity. Our confessions are different from confessions in Russia. As far as I know, you have a fairly short confession limited to listing of the sins. Our people are used to confessing differently: confession may take several hours because confessants tell about their sins and problems, ask questions, and basically speak about everything that bothers them.

Several days ago, a young teacher came to me for confession. He came at 5 pm and left at 6 am. Thank God, he was the only one on that day (laughs).

Q: If you hear the confessions of so many people, you know the general state of the souls of your parishioners. What sins are most typical in our times?

M.A.: One of the reasons that I personally take confessions is that I don't want to lose my contact with people, I don't want

to sit in the office and be some kind of manager. Confession is the simplest way to learn what people think about and to understand their problems or concerns. I am very happy when people view their bishop as their father. I am happy when I know that people can come to my church and find me there to tell me about their problems.

I go to my diocesan office once or twice a month. I feel like a mayor there, so I prefer being in the church and meeting people there. Church is the natural place for the bishop to be.

Q: Still, what in your opinion is the biggest spiritual problem of our times?

M.A.: You see, the name of the sin (murder, abortion, lust...) is not important; it is the core of the sin that is important. And the core of any sin is forsaking God.

In Greek the word "sin" (ἁμαρτία) means "missing the target". When ancient Greeks shot arrows and missed they exclaimed "Imarton!" (ἤμαρτον), which meant "I have sinned," that is, "I have missed the target". When people do not have Christ in their hearts, they make the wrong choices.

I became a spiritual father and started taking confessions when I lived on Athos and was very young. Once I asked Elder Paisios what I should ask the people who come to confession. Some of them asked me to ask them questions so they would answer. Elder Paisios told me, "Try to avoid asking questions, but if people insist, your first question should be 'Do you love God? What is your relationship with God?' Then ask them if they love people around them, if they love themselves and their situation, and only after that ask them about the rest." That is why God says that the first and the greatest commandment is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart" (Mt. 22:37-38). The rest will follow.

Q: You mentioned Elder Paisios. You probably often remember the teachings of Elders Paisios, Porphyrios and Joseph.

M.A.: It is true. God arranged so that when I was a student, a very young man, I met many contemporary saints. I knew Elder Athanasios from the monastery. In another monastery on Cyprus, I talked to another Elder Athanasios, also a very pious man. Later, when I came to Greece, I got acquainted with Elder Ephraim, Elder Charalampus from Dionysiou monastery, Elder Ephraim who now lives in Arizona, USA, Elder Joseph who was my spiritual father and tonsured me. God graced me to meet Elder Porphyrios, Elder Jakob from Euboea, Elder Philotheos, Elder Sophronius from Essex, Elder Emilian from Monastery of Simonos Petra and many other lesser-known elders. I heard many recommendations and homilies from all of them.

The general feeling that I got from communicating with all these people was that due to God's grace they were spiritually and psychologically healthy. They did not have any shortcomings. They were not excessively strict. The elders were even-tempered, reasonable and tactful people. They were full of love of God and love of people. They were very happy people too.

When you looked at any of them, you thought that this was the kind of man that God created, because they kept the image of God in their hearts and looked like their Heavenly Father. They were all children of the Church. They all taught that we should always be in touch with Church, have peace in our souls despite the circumstances in our lives and look at everything through the eyes of Christ. I could talk about them for hours, but I don't want to take too much of your time.

Q: Surely, there are some specific teachings that stand out in your mind. Which ones do you recall more often in conversations?

M.A.: Elder Paisios always called on people to work hard lest God be disappointed. In particular, he used to say, "I know that I deserve to go to Hell, but I don't want to go there lest I disappoint Jesus."

Elder Ephraim of Katounakia kept on saying that fulfilling their obedience is everything for monks.

Elder Porphyrios used to say that God is everything—"We are always happy to be with Christ and we will go wherever he goes. Even if we have to go to hell, we would happily go there if Christ is with us".

The lives of these saints had one thing in common—they all lived by Christ. I remember that when our Elder Joseph came to dine with us and we read some spiritual instructions or a book, as soon as he heard the word "Christ" he would start to cry and wouldn't be able to eat.

Q: Your eminence, thank you very much for this insightful conversation. As an epilogue, could you say something for our readers?

M.A.: I can't say anything on my own behalf. All those speeches and sermons published by our brothers in Russia, for which I am very thankful, are also not the words said on their own behalf.

I can only say that we all need to love Christ, and if we have Him in our hearts, everything will be all right. If not, everything will fall apart.