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Saint Nestor

CENTRAL YOUTH COMMITTEE MAGAZINE

"I am the Resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." (John 11: 25)

O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from



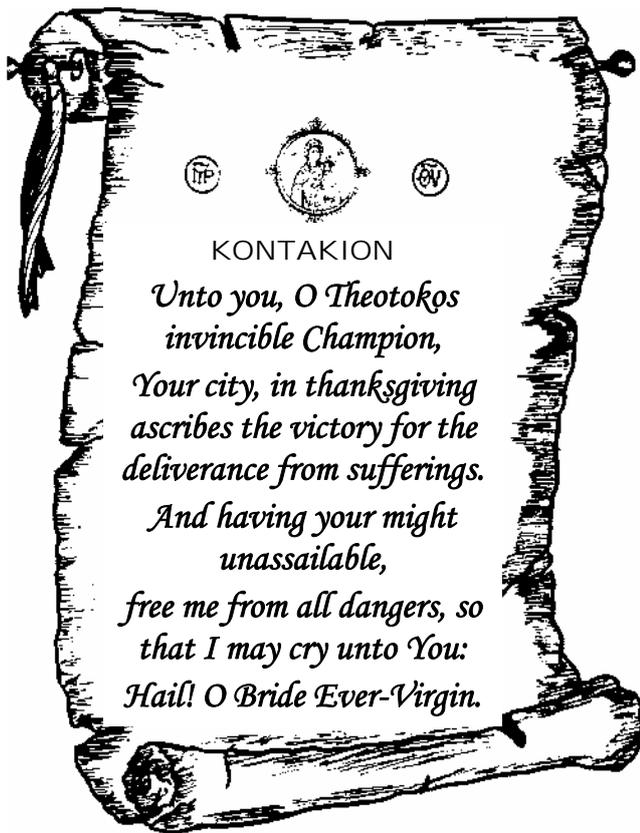
From Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.

Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.

O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away

"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8: 12)

The Akathist Hymn



The «Akathist Hymn» (also known as the Laudations or Salutations to the Theotokos) is a profound, devotional poem, which sings the praises of the Holy Mother and Ever-Virgin Mary. While it is a composite work by more than one of our Ecclesiastical Hymnographers as we know it today, it was formally recited, or rather prayed in the year 626 A.D., in the Church of the Theotokos of Vlachernae in Constantinople, on the occasion of the deliverance of the «Queen City» from the siege of the Barbarians.

The «Akathist Hymn» is a very important and indeed an integral part of our religious and ecclesiastical life. It is chanted in all the Orthodox Churches throughout the world, during the first 5 Fridays in Lent, and constitutes a very concrete spiritual preparation for the Holy Week and Easter Services. When we are present during the first Friday Service, we firmly realize that we commence to ascend the spiritual steps of the lengthy Lenten period, to finally reach the peak with our Lord's Glorious Resurrection.

The «Akathist Hymn» was not strange to the Latin

West even though apart from the Eastern Church. There is a reference that Pope Benedict XIV on May 4, 1746 granted an indulgence of fifty days to the Latin and Eastern Rite Catholics for each recitation of the Akathist Hymn.

Fr. Vincent McNabb, a Roman Catholic Priest in London translated the Hymn into English in 1934. In his foreward remarks he states: «No apology is needed for introducing the *Akathistos* to the Christian West. Indeed the West might well be apologetic about its neglect, or ignorance of such a liturgical and literary masterpiece».

In any of our Service Books we can readily see that our glorious and Ever-Virgin Theotokos is at the centre of many of our Orthodox Services in which prayers abound for Her interceding to Her Son and our God, for our Salvation. The Virgin Mary is the most exalted and most honoured person by God. She is the most revered and most loved by humans. She is a binding force for all Christians. She is the Unique Personality of the world, because of the unique fact of the Lord's Incarnation. She is the daughter of Grace and the Crystal Vessel of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. To Her we pray as our protecting Mother.

Brief Historical Notes

The devotional Hymns to the Virgin Mary are as ancient as the first Christian Church. The Byzantine Empire from its very inception, closely allied itself to the Virgin Mary and always sought Her protection. This we see from the Prayer Services to the Theotokos in the 5th, through the 8th Centuries. The «Akathist Hymn», which has more than one Author, existed for the most part even before the established year of 626 A.D. The Kontakion «*To the invincible Champion... we ascribe the victory*» was added then, and came to be recognised as the «Akathist Hymn», because of the following miracle attributed to the Theotokos.

While the Emperor of Byzantium Heracleios was on an expedition to fight the aggression of the Persians on their own grounds, there appeared outside the walls of Constantinople barbaric hordes, mostly Avars. The siege lasted for a few months, and it was apparent that the outnumbered troops of the Queen

City were reaching desperation.

However, as history records, the faith of the people worked the impossible. The Venerable Patriarch Sergius with the Clergy and the high Official of Byzantium Vonos, endlessly marched along the great walls of Constantinople with the Holy Icon of the Theotokos in hand, and bolstered the faith of the defenders of freedom. The miracle came very soon. Unexpectedly, as the chronicler narrates, a great storm with huge tidal waves destroyed most of the fleet of the enemy, and full retreat ensued.

The faithful of Constantinople spontaneously filled the Church of the Theotokos at Vlachernae on the Golden Horn, and with Patriarch Sergius officiating, they prayed all night singing the praises of the Virgin Mary without sitting. Hence the title of the Hymn «Akathistos», the Greek word for «not seated».

This is the great Glory of our Holy Orthodox Church! Faith in the Almighty was primary and all-important. Our dependence on God was always beyond question, and from this faith we should strive not to stray. Therefore, Services like the «Akathist Hymn», should be a must, and attended by all. Moreover, this particular Service links us so beautifully with a great and glorious period of the Christian History; it is also a very live tradition, which has never ceased in the Orthodox Church since the official year of the Hymn, 626 A.D.

Living in these trying times, when we are besieged by many forces of evil, it is our hope that the «Akathist Hymn» as well as our other Services may become the bulwark to withstand, and indeed to overcome these forces.



The Annunciation of the Virgin Mary

**Archangel Gabriel
announces to the Vir-
gin Mary that she has
been
chosen to be the
Mother of God.**

Brief Outline

The «Akathist Hymn» is composed of 24 Stanzas known as «Oikoi». The starting letter of each of the 24 Stanzas in sequence is a letter of the Greek Alphabet, Alpha to Omega. Twelve of the Stanzas are lengthy, and end with «Hail! O Bride Ever-Virgin», and the other twelve are rather short and conclude with «Alleluia», a Hebrew word meaning «Praise the Lord».

The Hymn is divided into 4 main parts, and briefly the content is as follows:

1. The first 6 Stanzas recount:

- a) The Annunciation of the Virgin Mary.
- b) The Virgin Mary's purity.
- c) The Virgin Mary's visit to Elizabeth.
- d) The doubts of Joseph the protector, and his joy upon learning of the supernatural Conception.

2. Stanzas 7 - 12 tell us of:

- a) The Shepherds hearing the Angels praising the Birth of the Lord and their visit to the Manger.
- b) The adoration of the Magi.
- c) The flight of the Holy Family to Egypt and the falling of the Idols.
- d) The receiving of the infant Jesus by the Prophet Symeon in the Temple on the 40th day.

3. Stanzas 13 - 18 relate:

- a) The new «Creation» which was wrought by the Incarnate Lord through the Theotokos.
- b) The call for the uplifting of our minds to Heaven from where God descended.
- c) The Lord's Omnipotence, that while He came to Earth, He was no less in Heaven.
- d) The confounding of the philosophers and orators who were at a loss to explain God's condescension.

4. The last Stanzas 19 - 24 speak of:

- a) The Theotokos as a protectress of all devout, and those who choose to flee unto Her.
- b) God coming as one of us, amongst us, to draw us near to Him.
- c) Our inability to adequately sing the praises of God, whose mercies are countless.
- d) The Lord canceling all ancient spiritual debts, and the granting of His Grace to all.
- e) Our prayers and petitions to the Holy Mother to protect us from misfortunes and save us from the future condemnation.

All through the points outlined above, there is a plethora of beautiful portrayals of the Holy Mother Mary, alluding to Her role in the incarnation of the Lord, for the Salvation of Mankind.

*(From the Akathist Hymn by Fr George Papadeas,
published by Patmos Press, Daytona Beach, FLA 1994)*

The Sacraments of the Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church has a tremendous role to play, not only in our personal lives and in the lives of our families, but in the life and society as well. There are multitudes of people in Australia groping and searching for a more stable, secure and fruitful religious tradition. By giving them the right kind of exposure, the Church can provide them, as well as us, with religious fulfillment. However, before this can be accomplished, we who are Orthodox by baptism and confirmation must show others through our manner of living that our Church furnishes us with spiritual nourishment and equips us with the tools of knowledge and understanding to live a purposeful, devout and spiritual life in Christ. Therefore, it is important for us to learn about Christ and His Holy Orthodox Church on the one hand, and to grow in spiritual stature and Grace on the other.

The first is accomplished by studying the Holy Bible, the Creed and other inspirational or devotional books about Christ, the Theotokos, the Martyrs and the Saints. The second, growing in spiritual stature and Grace, is accomplished by studying the Sacraments and participating in them.

We will examine the Seven Sacraments as the means by which our Holy Church sanctifies us and gives us the tools to live a Christ-like life. Through **Baptism** we are reconciled and united with God; through **Chrismation** we are equipped with the Grace of the Holy Spirit to enter our Christian life; through **Confession** we are spiritually re-baptised each time we fall away from God because of sin and return through repentance; through **Holy Communion** we are united with Jesus Christ and are fortified with the Grace of the Holy Spirit to continue our progress along life's path; through **Marriage** love and fellowship are cemented together and we become co-creators of new life with God; through the **Priesthood** Jesus calls His leaders to carry on His redemptive work; and through **Holy Unction** we are healed of the wounds of both body and soul.

Before beginning the study of the Sacraments and their significance for us, we shall briefly review the history of man as recorded in the Old Testament, and how he fell away from God, and how Jesus Christ came into the world for our salvation. In order for the Church to sanctify us, we must first understand the need for being sanctified.

Man's relationship with God in the Old Testament THE ORAL COVENANT

Many years after Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, and after their children's children had begun to spread throughout the lands of the earth,

God found a good man named Abraham with whom He made a covenant. (A "covenant" is an agreement between two people in which both parties make promises to each other). This covenant was called the *Oral Covenant* because it was spoken, not written. God instructed Abraham to leave his home in Ur near the Tigris River and go to Canaan where he would become the sole owner of all the land that he could see. He also promised Abraham that in this new country his descendants would become as numerous as the stars in heaven. Abraham followed God's instructions and migrated to Canaan. There he and his wife Sarah had a son they called Isaac. Through Isaac's son, Jacob, the Oral Covenant was fulfilled.

The Bible tells us that Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. In the course of events Jacob, instead of Esau the first-born, received the birth-right and the father's blessing. Esau wanted to kill his brother;

therefore Jacob fled from his father's house. Along the way, however, he repented and asked God's forgiveness.

In a dream Jacob saw the Angels of God ascending and descending a ladder from Heaven. He heard the voice of God saying:

"I am the Lord, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac your father. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken to you".
(Genesis 28:13-16)

God forgave Jacob and renamed him "Israel", which means "the chosen one of God". All of Israel's descendants were to be called Israelites. If they would fulfil the requirements of the Oral Covenant spoken to Abraham and fulfilled in Jacob – that is, live and walk according to God's teaching and love Him - they and all the generations to follow would enjoy the fruits of God's promise of eternal fellowship and abiding love.

The Israelites were generally influenced by their neighbours who were idolators and worshipped many

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The Sacraments of the Orthodox Church

gods. Instead of bringing their neighbours to God, as God had charged them, they were lead astray by them. As a result, the Israelites fell further and further away from God. God's Oral Covenant became more remote from their thoughts and more obscure in meaning with each passing generation. One reason was that they found their neighbour's religion and worship more colourful and exciting than their own. But the Lord God had given His word that all nations on earth would be blessed through the "Chosen People". Therefore, He continued to remind the Israelites of His promise and their obligations by way of special ambassadors: prophets and teachers. One such prophet and teacher was Moses.

THE WRITTEN COVENANT The Ten Commandments

Jacob had twelve sons, one of whom was Joseph. Joseph was greatly envied and disliked by his brothers, and one day they sold him as a slave to some nomads who took him to Egypt. There he was sold again as a slave and later thrown into prison. One day he was summoned from prison to interpret dreams for the Pharaoh, as the King of Egypt was called. As a reward for these interpretations and for his prudent advice, Pharaoh made Joseph a princely ruler over all Egypt. As a result of famine in their country, Joseph's family and hundreds of other Israelites settled in Egypt.

Generations later the Israelites no longer enjoyed the special favour of the Pharaohs. They had become slaves. God then instructed Moses, one of the descendants of the Israelites in Egypt, to return with his people to Canaan, the land once given to Abraham. Moses obeyed. Along the way he stopped and ascended Mount Sinai to receive further instructions from God. Here God reaffirmed the Covenant He had first made with Adam, later affirmed with Abraham, and fulfilled in Jacob. But this time the Covenant was set forth as Ten Laws, which were inscribed on two stone tablets. This was the *Written Covenant* and was called the *Ten Commandments*.

The Ten Commandments were placed in an elaborately decorated cabinet, which came to be known as the Ark of the Covenant. The Israelites always took the Ark of the Covenant with them wherever they went. When they encamped before a battle, one tent always housed the Ark of the Covenant. It was their constant and ever-present reminder that God would fulfill His promise if they kept theirs.

After the Israelites returned to the Promised Land of Canaan, God instructed them to form a nation and

to govern themselves through leaders called "Judges". Shortly thereafter, Saul was anointed as the first King of the Kingdom of Judah. David succeeded Saul and Solomon succeeded David. But the Israelites still did not keep their Covenant with God. Instead they fell deeper and deeper into sin and drifted further and further away from God's Countenance.

Before long, rivalry caused the nation to be divided into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar captured both Kingdoms and carried off the Israelites as captives to Babylon. Later the Persian Emperor Cyrus conquered Palestine and permitted the Israelites to return to Jerusalem. During this period of trial and suffering God's prophets encouraged, advised and comforted the Israelites. They also rebuked them when it was necessary.

One of the prophets, Isaiah, assured them during the exile that God would not abandon them, but would fulfill His Covenant by sending the Messiah. Jeremiah, another prophet, revealed to them that in spite of all attempts to annihilate the Israelites, there would still survive a "remnant" of their nation from which the Messiah would come to save the world. Ezekiel, another prophet, said that the Lord God would take the dead bones of the Israelites and reassemble them, breathe life into them, and make them live again. They were promised that in due time the Messiah, the "Anointed One", would come to fulfill the Covenant once and for all time.

THE BLOOD COVENANT: Jesus Christ

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God their relationship with Him, as well as that of all generations to follow, became weakened and insecure. People lost their moral and ethical values. They could no longer distinguish right from wrong, good from bad. They became subject to afflictions both physical and mental: sickness and disease, guilt and misery. All of these resulted from the Original Sin. But the most disastrous consequence of Original Sin was man's alienation from God, which inevitably brought death.

Although in civilization, culture and technical accomplishments man had advanced greatly since the Creation, his spiritual development continued to deteriorate. He had been brought to the brink of eternal spiritual death. It was to this state of the world that Jesus Christ, the "Anointed One", came. Jesus Christ, the Messiah was a descendant of the House of David and part of the "remnant" of the Israelites. God made the first Covenant with Adam; He made the Oral Covenant with Abraham, and He gave the Written Covenant to Moses; but in each instance the "Chosen



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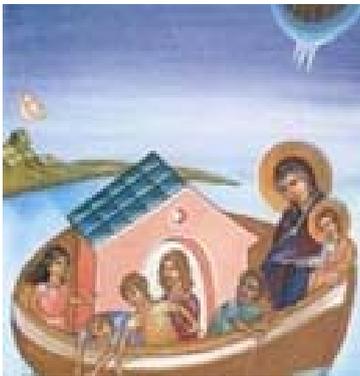
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People" did not keep their part of the promise. This time God offered to help His people once and for all; He sent His Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who was born as a human being, to come into the world and live among His people to redeem them.

THE THREE OFFICES OF CHRIST

When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost three great gifts they had received from God: **divine knowledge, communion with God,** and the **privilege of living with God forever in His Heavenly Kingdom.** As a result of Original Sin, they forfeited their rights to citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ came in the role of the Second Adam with the mission to restore to man all three gifts, thereby reconciling and uniting him with God once again. These three things Jesus Christ accomplished in his three fold role of



*Prophet and Teacher,
High Priest and King.*

Prophet and Teacher

The Prophets of the Old Testament were inspired by God and prophesied about the Messiah. Jesus proclaimed and lived what they taught in prophecy. He told the people about their destiny and the need for rebirth and

regeneration. Jesus gave them first-hand knowledge about the Kingdom of God and salvation. Therefore, Jesus restored the first of the three great gifts lost: **divine knowledge.**

High Priest

As High Priest, Christ became both the Offerer of the Sacrifice and the Sacrifice Offered, when He performed the Supreme Sacrifice by offering Himself on the Cross for the sins of the whole world. The shedding of His Blood on the Cross at Golgotha is the fulfillment of God's promise once and for all. Therefore, the second lost gift was restored too: **communion with God.**

King

As Prophet, Jesus Christ enlightened mankind. As High Priest He sacrificed Himself on behalf of mankind and offered salvation. After His Resurrection, the Lord returned and reunited His band of followers. He charged them "to go forth, make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world." (Matthew 28:19-20). Thus, as King, Jesus Christ restored the third great gift lost: **the Kingdom of God for mankind.**

SACRAMENTS

Although their sins were forgiven, the people still had the capacity to sin again; to reject God and fall away from Him again. Therefore, Jesus founded the Church

as a channel through which a continuous flow of grace could enlighten, forgive, strengthen and save us. Since man has a body and lives in a material world, it was necessary to provide a very special way to express this restoration of divine fellowship and reconciliation with God. Jesus Christ instituted the **Sacraments** as a **visible** means of imparting God's **invisible grace.**

In the next issue of our magazine we will look at the Seven Sacraments of our Church in general.

*(From the Sacraments of the Church
by Fr George Papadeas, published by Patmos Press,
Daytona Beach, FLA 1994)*



Occasional Prayers

FOR FORGIVENESS

Lord my God,

I confess to you all the ways in which I have grieved you,

Both in soul and body, in word, deed or thought.

For I know my transgression,
and my sin is ever before me.

But now, merciful Lord, with repentance and compunction

I approach your boundless love.

I ask you, therefore, do not turn your face from me,
but forgive all my offences, both voluntary and involuntary,

and wipe out all my sins.

Create a pure heart in me,
and renew an upright spirit within me.

Show me the way in which I am to walk,
for to you have I lifted up my soul.

Teach me to do your will,

for you are my God.

Cleanse the defilement of my soul, Lord,
and save me in you loving kindness.



*(From the Book of Prayers: A Selection for Orthodox Christians,
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, Sydney 1993)*

The Donation of Organs

Rapid advances in modern medicine have opened up vast new vistas in an effort to prolong human life and eradicate disease. Most dramatic of these breakthroughs is the transplantation of vital organs from one person to another. Organ transplants are such a new phenomenon that they raise unique and never before encountered theological and ethical questions for our Orthodox faithful: Can we violate the bodily integrity of one person, in order to help another? Can we allow the deliberate "dismemberment" of a lifeless body or the "mutilation" of one living person for the sake of another? Or shall we permit an otherwise healthy person to die when an organ transplant can restore him to a fairly normal and reasonably extended life? In seeking answers to these very complex questions, we turn, as the Church has always done in every dilemma, to that rich and timeless store of Orthodox tradition which continues to serve as a guide in our fast-changing world.

Sanctity of the Body

Before delving further into the question of organ transplants, it is important to stress that special sanctity accorded our limited bodily existence in the Orthodox Christian faith. The Church affirms that every man and woman is a psychosomatic unity, a union of body and soul, and cannot exist as a human person in permanent separation from his or her physical manifestation in the flesh. As Christians, we recognise as well that our bodies have been sanctified by God's own assumption of human flesh in the incarnation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And in the glorious light of His Resurrection, we await the resurrection of our own transfigured bodies to new, eternal life. Furthermore, we are reminded that our bodies have become "temples of the Holy Spirit" through our baptism.

From all this, it is apparent that we ought to treat our bodies with reverence as an inseparable part of our very being. We manifest ourselves through our bodies, and therefore ought not to abuse them or violate their integrity and wholeness without good cause.

A Moral Conflict?

At the same time, we proclaim the free and unselfish love of God Himself called *agape* to be the highest good of the Christian life. We accept the call to follow our Lord's example of free self-giving to the fullest—even to the point of giving up our life for the life of another.

Now the fundamental moral conflict involved in the question of organ transplantation is that between the reverence we hold for our own bodies as "temples of the living God" and our Lord's commandment to love one another even as He loved us—between the duty to preserve the wholeness and integrity of our bodies and the call to sacrifice a part of ourselves for the good of another. There are no absolute answers, but we can offer the following guidelines for Orthodox Christians faced with the decision to donate or not to donate their bodily organs after death.

Suggested Guidelines

We should probably regard the donation of a duplicated organ, such as a kidney, by a living person to save the life of another person as a loving act of mercy. The donor is to be commended if he perceives his sacrifice not as a violation of his bodily integrity, but as a gracious and loving unselfish gift of himself.

The Church does, however, place a limit on the generosity of its members. Orthodox are not enjoined and even prohibited from giving to the point of suicide. The donation of such vital, unduplicated organs as the heart or liver by living persons is out of the question, nor is the donation of duplicated organs condoned when there is reasonable doubt that the health of the donor can be maintained by the sole remaining organ of the pair.

In addition, the Church recognises the highly personal nature of the decision to donate. For this reason, it does not condemn the potential donor who shies away because of a particularly strong aversion to the mutilation of his own flesh; that decision too is a natural and healthy one and may be guided by Divine Providence to some future need. Further-

more we are aware that every individual possesses his own unique calling and gifts and will respond to the gospel message accordingly. In making any decision, the potential donor must be careful to weigh all the factors entering into his decision, and examine both his motives and the resulting consequences. Does he choose not to donate out of selfishness or dislike for the dying person, or out of a genuine and healthy regard for self? Or does he give not out of love and compassion for his brother, but out of an externally-imposed shame and guilt? No one should feel compelled to donate, and no person should donate if there is no reasonable chance that such a sacrifice will restore the patient to health.

Organ Donation After Death

The donation of cadaver organs present additional and overlapping questions. The Orthodox Church maintains that such a donation must remain a free and unconstrained gift of self. It would in all likelihood oppose any legislation which would make the routine salvaging of usable organs standard procedure in hospitals, unless prior objection has been registered. Even in death, the human body retains its sanctity. It is horrifying to think that our bodies might become part of a giant "rummage sale", a collection of

"exchangeable parts", that one goes to the hospital to obtain, just as one goes to an automobile "graveyard" to find spare parts for his car. And it is essential that the wishes of a person who explicitly expresses the desire that his body be buried fully intact be respected. Neither should vital organs be taken from the corpse of any person who has expressed no opinion on the matter if his surviving relatives find the trauma of partial dismemberment too much to bear in their grief.

On the other hand, if a person believes his organs ought to be donated for the benefit of others and expresses his desire either in his will or through provision of the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act (in the U.S.A), or lacking explicit direction, his surviving loved ones find such a donation consonant with the major thrust of his life, then the Orthodox Church in all likelihood would offer no objection to the act.

Other Issues

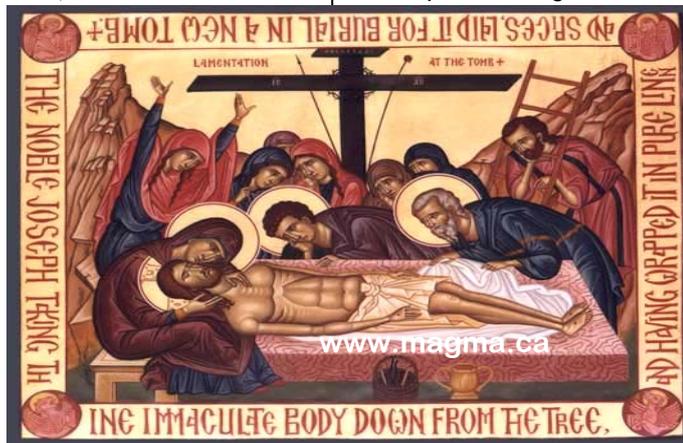
But it is never considered moral to hasten the death of a potential donor for the sake of salvaging vital organs. Here we encounter such technical medical questions as to what constitutes death: whether death occurs with the disappearance of a heart beat or the halting of brain wave patterns.

It is also imperative to enquire whether the candidate for an organ transplant is obligated to accept the donation. His/her decision should be based on a consideration of other alternatives, the existence of a reasonable chance of success, and the threat to health of a living donor. In some cases, the recipient may sense a threat to his own bodily integrity by the intrusion of another's organ; we ought not condemn any person who refuses a transplant for this reason.

Special caution must be exercised in regard to heart transplants. As yet, a high degree of success has not been demonstrated in this area, and the risks most often outweigh the benefits of this procedure. Here the Church also wishes to guard the special place given the heart in Orthodox tradition as the seat of the emotions of the soul. Yet, it is not relevant for these ethical questions to locate the soul in any specific place, such as the heart.

In conclusion, the donation or reception of organs is a personal decision which must be made on an individual basis in light of the teachings of the Church. Such decisions should be made in an attitude of prayerful faith and in consultation with physician and spiritual advisor.

(From *Contemporary Moral Issues facing the Orthodox Christian* Stanley S. Harakas, Light & Life Publishing Co, Minneapolis, 1982)



Tuesday of Bright Week

Holy Hieromartyrs Raphael, Nicholas & Irene

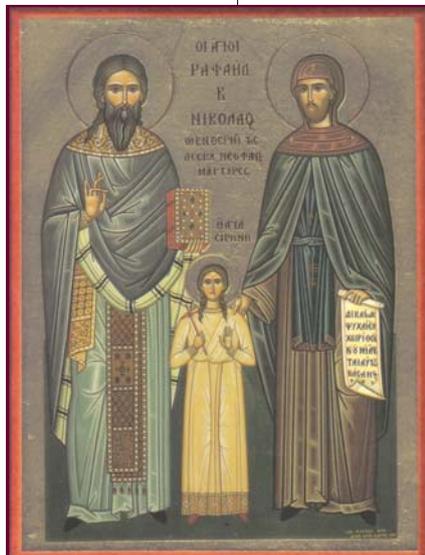
The narrative we shall relate begins at a little hill, just outside the village of Thermi, some 14km north of the town of Mytilene, the capital of the island of the same name (called Lesbos in ancient times). On this hill were to be found the ruined remnants of a small chapel, and the Christians of the area had the curious custom of ascending the hill on Tuesday of Bright Week, and serving the liturgy or simply praying in the ruins. No one knew why that day especially was celebrated, and there existed only a vague recollection that there had once been a monastery at that place, and that the last monks had been killed by the Turks. The whole site was covered by an olive grove that belonged to the local Turks until the exchange of the populations in 1922, when it passed into the hands of the Greek refugees from Asia Minor. In 1959, it was the property of a pious Christian by the name of Angelos Ralles. That year encouraged by his wife, he decided to build a small chapel on the hill at the site of the old ruins.

On the first day of July the work began, and on the third, exactly in the centre of the ruined church, the workman who was digging the foundations found a grave containing a human skeleton; the head was separate from the body, and the lower jaw was missing. The workman gave little significance to the discovery, and having placed the bones in a sack, continued his work. The new chapel was soon finished and on September 8, the first liturgy was served there. During the liturgy, the workman that had found the bones and was much given to the sin of blasphemy, was joking about the skeleton; suddenly he jumped up and ran headlong down the hill, finally falling flat on the ground. When he came to himself, he explained with tears that he had seen a strange priest who had chased after him and beaten him, saying that he would remain paralysed for three days. After these days had elapsed, he recovered and, for the first time in 27 years, went to confession and Holy Communion and began to live an exemplary Christian life. The signs had already begun.

Many people in the neighbourhood, quite independently, began to see dreams concerning the former monastery and the monks who had been martyred there. The main personage who appeared was St Raphael, who had been archimandrite of the monastery, and whose life we will relate in detail below as he dictated it to many people. With him appeared the deacon, St Nicholas, who repeatedly showed the place of his burial; his grave and relics were found on 13 June 1960, exactly at the spot he indicated. The Saints started to appear not only in dreams, but in

daylight and at night in and around the old monastery, and were seen by many pilgrims. Other persons were seen accompanying them, and they also, little by little, revealed their identities.

Beneath the floor of the new chapel terrible groaning sounds were often heard, and it was finally decided to demolish the newly-built chapel in order to excavate beneath. Thus, on 12 May 1961 the graves of the mayor of the village of Thermi, Basil, and the charred remains of his daughter Irene, who, though only twelve years old, had been burned to death by the Turks in an attempt to force her parents to reveal the whereabouts of the hidden Christians, were found. Through the directions of the Saints, the spring of the monastery was found, into which the dead body of St Raphael had been hurled by the Turks. Similarly, with precise instructions from the Saints, a wonderful bas-



relief icon of the Saviour, which had been hidden by St Raphael beneath a flagstone in the church, in order to save it from desecration by the Turks had been found. Many miraculous cures began to be recorded and have continued unceasingly to the present time.

The other persons who appeared with the Saints were: the village teacher, Theodore, who indicated the site of his grave where his martyred remains were subsequently found; the monks Stavros and Akindynos, who had buried the bodies of the Martyrs, the monk Reuben, who had received the Saints when they arrived at the monastery and died before them; Ignatius, a former abbot, and several others. Finally, in February 1962 a nun called Olympia began to

appear. She revealed that, in earlier times, the monastery had been a convent, of which she was abbess; in 1235 the convent was sacked by Turkish pirates, who slaughtered the nuns and tortured her to death by driving nails into her body and head. She showed the place of her burial, and the relics were found there, together with a mass of nails, two of them driven into the head. After her martyrdom, the monastery remained in ruins for some two hundred years, until shortly before the arrival of Sts Raphael and Nicholas.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to the celebrated icon-painter Photios Kontoglou, who, with the greatest patience and reverence, collected all the materials relating to the Saints, and published them as the book "A Great Sign", first published in 1962. The Saints themselves appeared to several persons, telling them to note their features well and describe them to Kontoglou, so that he could paint their icon, as indeed he did; to others they appeared with information, which they told them to write to Kontoglou. They even appeared to the Metropolitan of Mytilene, Iakovos, in

(Continued on page 9)

Tuesday of Bright Week: Holy Hieromartyrs Raphael, Nicholas & Irene

(Continued from page 8)

order to dispel his doubts about the miraculous events. But now we must set out in detail what the Saints related of their lives and struggles. St Raphael was born on the island of Ithaca around 1410; in the world his name was George Laskaridis. At the age of sixteen, he left home for Athens, where he became a monk, and having reached the canonical age, was ordained deacon and priest. From there he was sent on ecclesiastical business to France, and there, in the town of Morlaix in Brittany, he met a young Greek layman from Thessalonica. This young man, the future St Nicholas, St Raphael rescued from the wiles of the world (as St Nicholas himself recorded with gratitude) and, in due course, made him a monk. After some while in France, they returned to Athens, where Nicholas was ordained deacon. Together, they served in the church of St Demetrius Lubadiaris, at the foot of the Acropolis.

The Saints were sent to Constantinople in 1453, but hearing before they arrived that the city had fallen to the Turks, they took a boat from the Thracian coast to the island of Lesbos, which was still free from the Islamic hordes, under the domination of the Genoese. As soon as they reached the island, they sought a monastery where they could live, and were soon invited to the monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos at Thermi, where there was living only one old monk, Father Reuben.

As we mentioned earlier, the monastery, after its destruction in 1235, had been left in ruins for many years, until a pious lady named Melpomene, in gratitude for the miraculous cure of her son Akindynos, restored the monastery and dedicated her son to its service; he lived there with the Saints as a layman and buried them after their sufferings. The Saints passed about nine years at the monastery in peace, prayer and fasting, and soon became beloved of the local people. Meanwhile, the aged monk Reuben reposed in the Lord.

In the spring of 1463, it seems that some local uprising occurred in Lesbos against the Turks, who by then dominated the island. They took immediate reprisals. The mayor of the village of Thermi, Basil, together with his wife and daughter, and also the teacher Theodore, ran up to the monastery to warn the fathers of the danger, but were instantly arrested there by a company of Turks. It was Holy Thursday and St Raphael had just served the last Liturgy of his life. The torments of the Martyrs lasted for several days. Firstly, in order to force the mayor to betray those responsible for the uprising, the Turks, together with a German mercenary named Schweitzer, tortured his twelve year old daughter, Irene, before her parents; finally she was burned alive in a large earthenware jar. Following this, they slaughtered her parents and beheaded the teacher. Finally, in the evening of

Bright Tuesday, they took St Raphael and, tying him to a tree by his hair, severed his head from his body by cutting through his jaws with a saw. St Nicholas, who was tied to a tree and forced to watch, died of a heart attack, seeing the fearful death of his beloved elder. The Turks threw the bodies of the Saints into the spring, set fire to the monastery and left.

Some days later, the two remaining monks, Akindynos and Stavros, who had managed to hide from the Turks, brought the old and blind village priest to bury the bodies of the slain. St Raphael's body was lying in the spring, but they could not find the lower jaw, which had been severed (this was discovered in 1960 by a revelation of the Saints). With tears, they buried St Raphael's body in the centre of the ruined church, the remaining bodies outside. So it became the custom of the local Christians to go up to the site of the monastery every year on Bright Tuesday, the anniversary of the martyrdom. The custom remained, though in the course of the 500 years that elapsed until the rediscovery of the Saints, the reason had been completely forgotten.

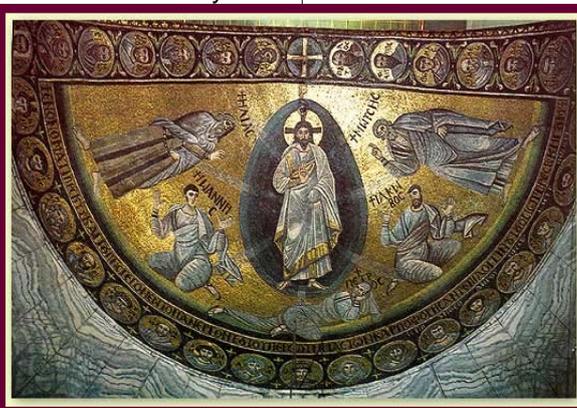
A curious feature of the discovery is the following: In Thermi there stood a house of "Arif Agha" which that *agha* had built many years before with materials from the ruined monastery. It was commonly regarded as "haunted" because a priest, or a priest and deacon were frequently seen censing around the house, who disappeared as soon as they were approached. The house was abandoned and fell into ruins; but the same phenomenon occurred, indeed very regularly, in the house built on the same site. The Saints revealed the mystery in this way: "*When the Turks burned the monastery, they took many pieces of marble, and with them Arif Agha built his house. His house has been demolished, but they put some pieces in the new one, and we are commanded by the Lord to go and cense the marble from the church*".

St Raphael is tall, well-built, around fifty years old, with a long grey beard, large dark eyes and a hooked nose. He appears dressed in a black *ra-son* and veil, or else bare-headed in priest's vestments, usually blue. Sometimes, he

appears also in bishop's vestments. St Nicholas is shorter, thin, younger, with a pallid face and short beard. He is usually dressed in deacon's vestments, and stands before St Raphael with the utmost respect. Most of the adults have seen them during sleep; the children have seen them while awake. It is remarkable that most of those to whom the Saints appeared and revealed their history, were themselves victims of the Turkish barbarity who had been expelled from their homes in Asia Minor in 1922 and had lost many of their closest relatives at that terrible time.

Following the discovery of the Saints, a convent

(Continued on page 10)



Tuesday of Bright Week
 Holy Hieromartyrs Raphael, Nicholas & Irene

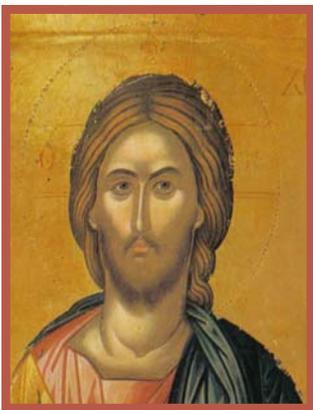
(Continued from page 9)

was built on the site of the monastery, which is today a great centre of pilgrimage, where the relics of the Saints are guarded and many have been miraculously healed. Here we will include just one miracle from the many recounted in the book, "The Miracles of St Raphael", by Eugenia, abbess of the Convent of St Raphael:

"My son Constantine, a pupil at high school, had a terrible accident. Together with two other boys, he was burned when a cauldron of boiling fat exploded. There was no part of his body, which was not burned, from head to foot. We rushed him to hospital, but the doctors said he could not live, or if by any chance he did so, he would remain paralysed.

As soon as I heard this, I uttered from the depths of my heart: 'St Raphael, have pity on me and save my child. Let him live with no trace of the accident, or else let God take him tonight, so that he should suffer no more'.

That evening as I dozed, I dreamed that I was at the harbour of Mytilene and St Raphael came up to me dressed in a white rason and said, 'Magdalene, our Costas will get well, soon he will be home without any mark'. That same night, my son saw St Raphael come and peel off a black skin from him, from the crown of his head to his toes. The Saint said, 'You are completely well'.



From that moment, he recovered rapidly and in fifteen days he was home without any mark on him. The doctors confessed that it was a great miracle. This happened in 1969".

(Magdalene Patrele, Ellwood, Australia)

To the unbeliever, the discovery of the New Martyrs Raphael, Nicholas and Irene would seem an impossible fantasy, but to the Orthodox Christians, it gives reassurance in our faith. The Saints appeared to simple, often unlettered people (like the fishermen of the Gospel), and through them, they revealed their history and the history of their monastery. They reassure us in our Orthodox piety when they wish their icon painted, they offer incense and are seen conducting the services of the church, they tell us to venerate their relics, and work such great miracles. They reassure us that the Church Triumphant is so close to us, that we can see and hear and pray together. In our sinful times, God has given us this sign to believe and repent.

(From *New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke*, translated by L. J. Papadopoulos G. Lizardos & others, St Nectarios Press Seattle, Washington 1985)

From the Old Testament - The Psalms

PSALM 50

Have mercy on me, O God according to your great mercy, and according to the abundance of your compassion wipe out my transgression.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my iniquity, and my sin is ever before me. Against you only have I sinned, and done evil before you, that you might be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.

For behold I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother bear me.

For behold you have loved truth, the hidden and secret things of your wisdom have you made manifest to me.

You will sprinkle me with hyssop, and I will be made clean; you will wash me, and I will be made whiter than snow.

You will cause me to hear joy and gladness; the bones that are humbled with rejoice.

Turn your face away from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create a pure heart in me, O God, and renew an upright spirit within me.

Cast me not from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and with a guiding spirit strengthen me.

I will teach my transgressors your ways, and the ungodly will return to you.

Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; my tongue will rejoice in your righteousness.

Lord, you will open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

For if you had desired sacrifice I would have given it; with whole burnt offerings you will not be pleased.

A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit, a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise.

Do good to Sion in your good pleasure, Lord, and let the walls of Jerusalem be built.

Then will you be pleased with a sacrifice of righteousness, with oblation and whole burnt offerings.

Then will they offer calves upon your altar.



[This is a psalm of repentance and God's mercy, and a prophecy about salvation through baptism. It is also a teaching about worship in spirit. Of all the 150 psalms, this is the one most used in the Orthodox Church. Historically, this psalm is David's prayer of confession after his sin with Bathsheba(2 Sam.12:1-15)]

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Abba Daniel and his disciple had been walking for many days in the desert. Wearing from the long journey, the youth, with a certain dissatisfaction, said to the Elder, "When will we be able to stay put in our poor little hut?"

"Who hinders us, my child, from seeing God even here" Both in our hut and outside of it, He surrounds us", replied the Elder, who never let the remembrance of God leave his mind.

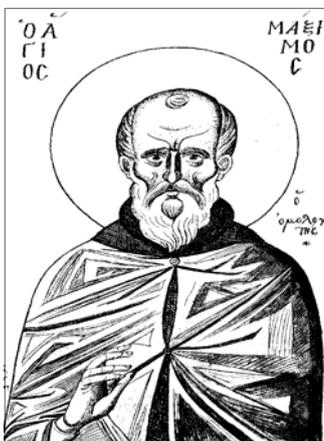


A hermit once fasted for seventy weeks, entreating God to reveal to him the meaning of a certain passage he could not comprehend. Since God did not reveal the meaning to him, he said to himself, "Why should I put forth such efforts and remain without gain? Why do I not go to ask this of my neighbouring Elder? Maybe he will know". But just as he turned to go, God sent him an Angel, who revealed to him what he wanted to know.

"Why did you not come until such time had passed?" "So that you might be humbled and seek the advice of another", the Angel answered.



St Maximos the Confessor writes the following words about charity: the disposition to love is made manifest not only by charity wrought with money, but much more by what is imparted to others for the sake of God - indeed, by every kind of service to others. They who have truly become strangers to the world, and serve their neighbour with sincere love,

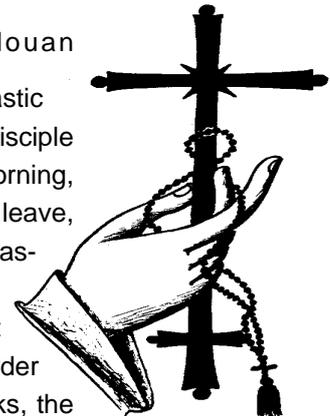


will quickly be released from their passions and will become partakers of divine love and knowledge. They who love God, of necessity love their neighbour. They can keep nothing for themselves. They dispense all as it pleases God and willingly give charity to all who have need.

Saint Nestor

Abba Silouan

once visited a monastic brotherhood with his disciple Zachariah. In the morning, when they got up to leave, the monks of the monastery compelled them to eat, even though it was a fast day. In order not to grieve the monks, the Abba accepted.



Afterwards, as soon as they were on their way, they found a small well. Zachariah, who was thirsty, asked permission from his Elder to drink.

"It is a fast day", he reminded the disciple.

"But just a while ago we were eating, Abba".

"That was food of hospitality", the holy Elder explained. "Now, however, nothing keeps us from pursuing our fast"



Abba Isidoros, the Presbyter of a skete in Egypt, had such forbearance that he would take all of the bad novices in and correct them. When it so happened that one of the Elders would have a contrary or disobedient novice and decide to dismiss him, Abba Isidoros would intervene and say, "Bring him to me, brother".

He would keep him in his cell and with kindness and patience, correct him and send him back to his Elder a sober disciple.

In Church as well, his most beneficial message was always:

"For if you forgive your neighbour's trespasses..."

"Brother's forgive - forgive your brothers, that your sins will be forgiven", the holy Father would proclaim from the pulpit with all the strength of his soul.



"I believe, Lord, and confess that you are truly the Son of the living God, who came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first..."

(Prayer of St John Chrysostom)

Orthodox Christian Calendar 2006

This monthly (x2) calendar is provided for your information. It aims to give you an insight into the Orthodox Christian Church year of 2005 and hopes to prove useful and beneficial with its indications. The calendar provides you with a day-by-day outlook of the following pieces of information: **1.** The Greater Feastdays (†) celebrated in the Orthodox Christian Church. **2.** The main fasting and non-fasting periods in the Church and the strictness of each of these fasts. **3.** The schedule of English Divine Liturgies, where these are held and at what time. **4.** Main Vespers Services held at each of our Melbourne, VIC Parishes (commence 7p.m.) **5.** Public Holidays and other events held.

Month of May

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	
	ENGLISH LITURGY AT ST EUSTATHIOS, STH MELBOURNE, 7.30-8.45pm			† ST IRENE THE GREAT MARTYR		
7 † SUNDAY OF THE MYRRH- BEARING WOMEN	9	10	11 † STS CYRIL & METHODIOS	12	13	ENGLISH LITURGY AT GEELONG MONASTERY, 9.00 - 10.00am
		VESPERS: STS CYRIL & METHODIOS, PRESTON				
14 † SUNDAY OF THE PARALYZED MAN	16	17 † MID-PENTECOST	18	19	20	VESPERS: STS CONSTANTINE & HELEN, SOUTH YARRA
	CYC MONTHLY LECTURE: "IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE UNITY WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS" by Rev. Fr Emmanuel Lykopandis					
21 † SUNDAY OF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN (sts Constantine & Helen Equal to the Apostles)	22	23	24	25	26	27 † ST. JOHN THE RUSSIAN
28 † SUNDAY OF THE BLINDMAN	29	30	31 † THANKSGIVING & LEAVE TAKING OF THE FEAST OF PASCHA			

Month of June

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
4 † SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS OF 1ST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL	5	6	7	8	9	10 † SATURDAY OF ALL SOULS VESPERS: HOLY TRINITY RICHMOND & AXION ESTI NORTHCOTE
11 † PENTECOST SUNDAY (AXION ESTI)	12 † FEAST OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (FAST FREE WEEK) QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY (PUBLIC HOLIDAY)	13	14	15	16	17 ENGLISH LITURGY AT GEELONG MONASTERY, 9.00 - 10.00am
18 † ALL SAINTS DAY	19 (FAST BEGINS FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY APOSTLES) CYC MONTHLY LECTURE: "ICONOGRAPHY AS TAUGHT ON MOUNT ATHOS" by Iconographer Mr Petar Stefanovic	20 ENGLISH LITURGY AT ST. EUSTATHIOS, SOUTH MELBOURNE, 7.30—8.45pm	21	22	23 VESPERS: ST. JOHN CARLTON	24 † BIRTH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST & FORERUNNER
25 †	26	27	28	29 † STS PETER & PAUL LEADERS OF THE APOSTLES (FAST ENDS)	30 † SYNAXIS OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES (FISH PERMITTED) VESPERS: STS ANARGYRI OAKLEIGH	

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

SECOND ARCHDIOCESAN DISTRICT OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Central Youth Monthly Lectures

“Iconography As Taught on Mount Athos”

presented by

Mr Petar Stefanovic

(Iconographer)



Monday, 19th June 2006

at the

Greek Orthodox Church of St. Eustathios

221 Dorcas Street, South Melbourne

Commencing at 7.30pm

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION TELEPHONE: 9696 2488

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

SECOND ARCHDIOCESAN DISTRICT OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Central Youth Monthly Lectures

“The Orthodox Christian Belief and the Da Vinci Code”

presented by

Very Reverend Elias Kentrotis



Monday, 31st July 2006

at the

***Greek Orthodox Church of St. Eustathios
221 Dorcas Street, South Melbourne***

Commencing at 7.30pm

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION TELEPHONE: 9696 2488

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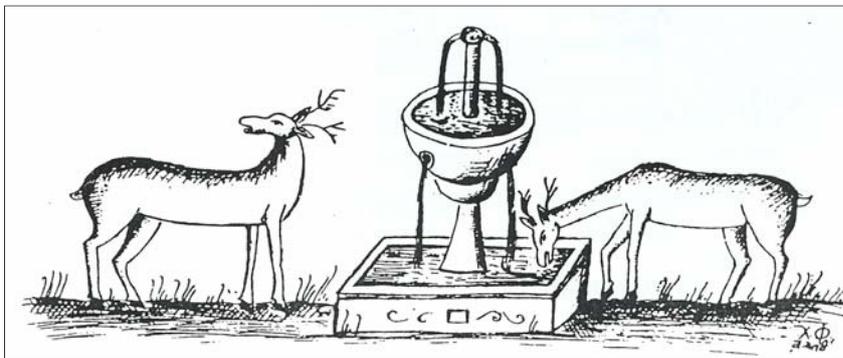
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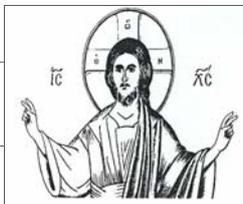
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Saint Nestor

CENTRAL YOUTH COMMITTEE MAGAZINE



Youth Group Meetings in Victoria

<p>Ascot Vale: St.Dimitrios Tuesday 7.30 p.m.</p>	<p>East Keilor: Dormition of the Theotokos Sunday 2.00 p.m.</p>	<p>South Melbourne: St.Eustathios Tuesday 7.30 p.m.</p>
<p>Bentleigh: Sts.Raphael, Nicholas and Irene Call church</p>	<p>East Malvern: St.Catherine Tuesday 7.30 p.m.</p>	<p>Templestowe: St.Haralambos Tuesday 8.30 p.m.</p>
<p>Box Hill: Holy Cross Thursday 7 - 8.00 p.m.</p>	<p>Fawkner: St.Nektarios Wednesday 7.00 p.m.</p>	<p>Thomastown: Tranfiguration of the Lord, Thursday 7.30 p.m.</p>
<p>Brunswick: St.Basil Wednesday 6.30 - 7.30 p.m.</p>	<p>Northcote: Axion Estin Monastery Monday 7.30 p.m.</p>	<p>Yarraville: St.Nicholas Tuesday 7.30 p.m.</p>
<p>Dandenong: St.Panteleimon Thursday 7.00 p.m.</p>	<p>Oakleigh: Sts.Anargyri, Cosmas & Damianos , Tuesday 7.30 p.m.</p>	

Icon of Saint Nestor from the Monastery of Stavronikita (Mount Athos) by Theophan the Cretan