



The Apostle

St. Aidan's Orthodox Church
Issue 120 August 2008



Just an Ordinary Connection



by Fr. Gregory

To hear some Christians talk you would think they had a "hot-line to God." They are so convinced that God is in daily, direct communication with them, to suggest otherwise would be to compromise on the glorious intimacy that faith and grace bestow. So overweening is this confidence that rarely do they stop to ask:- "Am I hearing right? Is this God or Satan? Is this perhaps me talking to myself? There is no room for such doubts on the hotline. Moreover, if God is speaking so clearly to me should I not like the prophets open my mouth and tell others, "thus saith the Lord"? And if my hearers reject my word are they not rejecting the very Word of God Himself? And aren't there terrible consequences for such rejection?

The logic is inexorable isn't it? If I am the Lord's anointed, you should take heed to what I say in his Name. If you do not you place your soul in peril. It is but

a short step here from this pride, this hubris, this prelest to the Jonestown massacre and every other craziness that emerges from the cults and sects who assume an infallibility that even the Pope never claims. It even infiltrates Orthodoxy in the rush of young and inexperienced monastics to become "elders" for sycophantic devotees, (usually of the opposite sex).

Against this we must set the standards of the Church for true prophecy which are:-

1. Counsel must be in accordance with the Scriptures in Holy Tradition as interpreted by the Church not the alleged prophet.
2. In respect of foretelling the only test is retrospective in terms of previous utterances. Did these things come to pass? Even then, there is no guarantee that future pronouncements will be unalloyed by sin and pride.
3. Is the speaker living what he or she prophesies? In other words is he or she a servant or a manipulator, subtle or overt?
4. Is the prophecy received, tested and authenticated in the church? If not then flee from such a voice as from hell itself.

With this in mind we should not say that we have a "hotline to God" that rather that we have "an ordinary connection." True, God speaks to us. He does answer our prayers, although not always in ways we would like. However, in this life our sin and laziness always generate "noise on the line." Repentance deals with this interference progressively. We should therefore have a more measured sense of what we and others are able to hear. Sometimes it is the "Word of the Lord." Sometimes it is not. Discernment is called for.

Children's Christian Education One Year On

by Dwynwen East

Teaching groups, meeting after the Liturgy, began a year ago on July 15th 07. These have continued each week without a break throughout the year giving our young people a continuity of instruction which, in my opinion, and according to the reports from the leaders of each group, have proved to be very successful and worthwhile.

At a recent meeting with Fr. Gregory in which the leaders reported on progress it would

seem that, as a result of the bonding of each group and the interest shown by the children and young people, a confidence to question and discuss our Orthodox faith has emerged which can only lead to an increase in the level of understanding about what our church means to us. Meaningful debate at the level of individual learning appropriate to age and experience within the group results from the advantage of having three groups according to age.

The response of our young people has been encouraging to the leaders and for my part, with the very young children, their enthusiasm to be together and talk about our faith has been a joy to me personally. We talk, laugh, sing, and pray together as well as listen to Bible stories. Our children are certainly not of the group which UNICEF report as belonging to the unhappy state of the majority of children living in this country. I like to think that this is because, 'With God on our side who could be against us.' We find love, joy, welcome, security and friendship in our church and in our groups. We come together with trust and respect in Christian truth and peace which is reflected in the fun learning situations we aim to create which will help children to enjoy life in all its fullness in a Christ centred environment of church while giving the young people confidence to take this out into the wider world of school and friendship groups.

The experience of the worship in the Liturgy is made

more meaningful through discussion and questioning. This opportunity is there for them in the group situation as the group leader will promote a greater awareness of God's loving care for all of us which is, of course, why faith is so important to us in our lives. Liturgical vocabulary is learned and also the value of praying together in a group.

Time in the groups is, of necessity, limited which means that the leaders have to be more focussed in their teaching yet without pressure or any obvious evidence of time restrictions. I find that our group breaks up when the children are eager for more which is a good thing because, with continuity in mind, the children look forward to the next session. Their uninhibited, spontaneous response to prayer and worship is a joy and privilege to witness and I thank God every week for the children and young people in our church family.

Transfiguration in the Snow



One of Seraphim's of Sarov close devotees and disciples, Motovilov, described a wonderful event of transfiguration of the great saint. It happened on a cloudy winter

evening. Motovilov was sitting on a stump in the forest. Saint Seraphim was squatting in front of his disciple explaining to him the meaning of a Christian life and the aim of us, Christians, living on earth.

Seraphim was saying, "We must let the Holy Spirit into our hearts. Everything good that we are doing for Christ's sake renders us the Holy Spirit, but most of all it is achieved through a prayer, which is always in our hands."

"Father," - Motovilov asked - "how can I witness the grace of the Holy Spirit? How can I know if the Holy Spirit is with me or not?" Saint Seraphim provided examples from lives of Saints and Apostles, but Motovilov still could not grasp the idea. Then the venerable old man took him firmly by the shoulder and said, "We are both in the Holy Spirit now."

Motovilov felt as if his eyes were opened and he saw that the face of the old man was brighter than the sun. His heart was filled with joy and peace, and his body felt warm like summer; there was a sweet scent in the air around them too.

Motovilov was overwhelmed by this sudden change and particularly by the glowing that was coming from the elder's face. But Saint Seraphim said to him, "Have no fear, father. You could not have seen me, unless you yourself were now possessed by the Holy Spirit completely. Be grateful to the Lord for His mercy to us." Then Motovilov understood what it meant when the Holy Spirit descends upon a person and transforms him.





