

## **Lives of the Saints**

### **Holy Prophet Samuel August 20**

By Archpriest Basil Rhodes

This most holy man, a Prophet of God from childhood, was the last judge of the Israelite people, and anointed the first two Kings of Israel. He was born in the twelfth century before Christ, in the city of Armathaim Sipa, from the tribe of Levi, the son of Elkanah and Hannah (Anna). He was the fruit of prayer, for his mother, being barren, conceived him only after she had supplicated the Lord with many tears; wherefore she called him Samuel, that is, "heard by God." As soon as Hannah had weaned him, she brought him to the city of Silom (Shiloh), where the Ark was kept, and she consecrated him, though yet a babe, to the service of God, giving thanks to Him with the hymn found in the Third Ode of the Psalter: "My heart hath been established in the Lord..." Samuel remained in Silom under the protection of Eli the priest. He served in the Tabernacle of God, and through his most venerable way of life became well-pleasing to God and man (I Kings 2: 26). While yet a child, sleeping in the tabernacle near the Ark of God, he heard the voice of God calling his name, and foretelling the downfall of Eli; for although Eli's two sons, Ophni and Phineas, were most lawless, and despisers of God, Eli did not correct them. Even after Samuel had told Eli of the divine warning, Eli did not properly chastise his sons, and afterwards, through various misfortunes, his whole house was blotted out in one day.

After these things came to pass, Samuel was chosen to be the protector of the people, and he judged them with holiness and righteousness. He became for them an example of all goodness, and their compassionate intercessor before God: "Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; yea, I will serve the Lord, and show you the good and the right way" (ibid. 12:23). When he asked them -- having God as witness -- if he ever wronged anyone, or took anyone's possessions, or any gift, even so much as a sandal, they answered with one voice: "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, nor afflicted us, neither hast thou taken anything from anyone's hand" (ibid. 12:4).

When Samuel was old, the people asked him for a king, but he was displeased with this, knowing that God Himself was their King. But when they persisted, the Lord commanded him to anoint them a king, saying, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me from reigning over them" (ibid. 8:7); so Samuel anointed Saul. But Saul transgressed the command of God repeatedly, so Samuel anointed David. Yet, since Samuel was a man of God, full of tender mercy, when the Lord told him that He had rejected Saul, Samuel wept for him the whole night long (ibid. 15:11); and later, since he continued to grieve, the Lord said to him, "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?" (ibid. 16:1). Having lived blamelessly some ninety-eight years, and become an example to all of a God-pleasing life, he reposed in the eleventh century before Christ.

Many ascribe to him the authorship of the Books of judges, and of Ruth, and of the first twenty-four chapters of the First Book of Kings (I Samuel).

Troparion in the Second Tone

As we celebrate the memory of Thy Prophet Samuel, O Lord, through him we beseech Thee to save our souls.

Kontakion in the 8th Tone

Thy hallowed mother dedicated thee unto the Lord even before she had conceived thee; and when thou wast born thou didst serve Him from thine infancy like an Angel. And, O Prophet of the Most High, for thy fervent faith, thou wast granted to foretell things that should come to pass. Hence, we cry to thee: Rejoice, O ven'erable Samuel.

## **Orthopraxis**

### **Where Can One go in an Orthodox Church**

A Brief Discussion of Holy Space

"I have been told that there are certain no-go areas in Orthodox churches and certain things that people are not allowed to touch. Is this the case?—it seems rather odd to us—and what does it signify? We were also told that it does not apply in churches which have not been consecrated/ blessed. A practical point, where is it we cannot go, and what can we not touch?" — E.S., Nottingham, UK.

Essentially what you have been told is correct, although it seems the whole matter has been presented in a rather negative way. Can we start by looking at the thing from the other end? Orthodox Christians consider their churches to be holy places. As it happens, I have just been trying to translate the latest section from "The Whole Armour of Truth" for the next issue of "The Wolf", and in it St Nicolas Varzhansky explains that the word "holy" means "set apart." In the case of our churches they are set apart for God. The regulations about not entering certain areas, or touching certain objects, are then not so much bans or prohibitions but rather safeguards of that holiness, that "set apartedness."

In our modern society, we tend always to see things subjectively and self-centeredly; we are trained from childhood to do this. We therefore think of our rights, and when we meet something like the Orthodox practice in this instance, we find the matter odd, because our first thought is that our rights have been eroded. This is why I suggested that we look at the thing from the other end. In churches that have been set apart for God, we have no "rights," everything that is allowed us is a mercy from God, even to enter there in the first place. This is why on entering church, even the narthex, Orthodox Christians make three deep reverences, remembering their unworthiness to enter therein, that they are entering upon holy ground.

Thus, when we speak of these traditions as prohibitions, we are simply using a kind of short-hand—essentially, rather than speaking of prohibitions, we would better say that we have no blessing to enter there or to touch that.

You say that you were told this was not so in unconsecrated churches, and this is quite untrue. In fact, here in the Orthodox diaspora in the West, perhaps the majority of the churches are not consecrated. The faithful still treat them with reverence, because the Divine services are chanted there and because the Holy Eucharist and the other Mysteries of the Church are celebrated there; the holy icons are venerated there.

Naturally, in a church which has been consecrated, one would be even more attentive to reverence, but I have not heard of the fact of a church's not being blessed being any excuse not to show the customary reverence. Such an idea borders on impiety, and it will also train us in impiety (see St. Luke 16: 10).

I remember that back in 1967, the day before St Seraphim's chapel was going to be blessed in the old station at Walsingham, we were putting some final touches to the icon screen, and thinking that the church was not yet blessed and it would be alright, I went through the Royal Doors.

I was given to understand,—and though he did not speak English in no uncertain terms,—by Archbishop Nikodem that this was not to be done, and to this day I have not forgotten his reaction! I was certainly not given the impression that this was "alright" because the church had not yet been blessed.

I cannot hope to give you a complete catalogue of the "prohibitions," but will list some, and hopefully in time, as you grow in Orthodoxy, you will be instructed in the others. It seems from the very fact that the matter has arisen this area of instruction is not being completely neglected.

Properly, although this ruling is not often strictly kept today, the catechumens do not go further than the narthex, because the nave itself is symbolic of the Church on earth and the catechumens are not yet members of the Church. In most churches, for pastoral and missionary reasons, they are allowed into the nave, and we follow this practice here at Brookwood, expelling them to the narthex only at the expulsion of the catechumens in the Liturgy.

The laity stand in the nave, and do not enter the sanctuary. Oftentimes one hears that only men are permitted to enter the sanctuary—this is again another "short-hand version," which only approximates to the truth. More properly only those whose ministry requires them to enter the sanctuary, or those who have received a blessing to enter there, are permitted to enter. In general, but not exclusively, this means that women do not enter there.

Even in the nave area, the faithful should be careful not to stand on the Ambon, the raised area immediately in front of the Royal Doors. This is because this area represents the Judgment Seat and we only stand there to receive the Holy Mysteries, remembering both that in doing so we participate in the royal priesthood of all believers, and that we shall have to give an account for our reception of the Mysteries at the Judgment. Thus if one needs to walk across, say in lighting the lamps before the iconostas icons, one comes down from the Soleas (the raised area on either side), rather than walking across the Ambon. Also, the faithful should not walk

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across the church in front of the principal celebrant if the sacred rite requires that he be standing in the nave—always walk round behind him.

Those who are blessed to enter the sanctuary should make three deep reverences when doing so (prostrations if they are appointed on that day). Except for the bishop, all enter through the deacon's (side) doors, unless they are required to enter through the Royal Doors during the sacred rites and when vested. Even then only the priests and deacons (and in some practices the subdeacons too) are permitted to enter through the central doors. In crossing from one side to the other in the sanctuary, we always go behind (to the east) of the Holy Table itself, unless again the rites themselves demand that one of the ministers walk across in front of the Table, such as during a censuring of the Holy Table. Again only those who are at least subdeacons would be permitted to do this, and even they do not walk across that area or stand there unless it is required by the liturgy.

Only subdeacons are permitted to touch the Holy Table or the sacred vessels (excepting only the occasion when, in the Russian practice, the faithful kiss the foot of the chalice immediately after receiving Holy Communion). This applies at all times, both within the Divine Services and at all other times. Only the deacons and priests touch or carry the Antimension or the Holy Gifts themselves. No one, who is not at least a subdeacon, is thus permitted to take anything from, or place anything on, the Holy Table, and the sacred artifacts kept there are only touched by the faithful when they are offered for their veneration by the priest, for instance the Gospel Book during Matins of the Resurrection on Sundays, and the Cross at the end of the Liturgy. This fact should draw our attention to the importance of these blessings, and we should always venerate the Gospel and Cross on these occasions with reverence.

On occasion, either because of the changing festivals or because of the necessity of keeping them clean, the altar hangings have to be changed. On these occasions, it is for the subdeacons or higher clergy to divest the altar and re-vest it with the hangings.

Lastly, you should bear three things in mind. First, this is by no means an exhaustive list. Secondly, although I have tried to give you indications about the general practice of the Church, there may be local variations in practice. And thirdly and most importantly, remember that everything in our Church is done with a blessing, and so on occasion it may be that your

pastor gives you a particular blessing to do something which might not otherwise be generally allowed. In this regard too, remember that even those things which are customary in church are never begun without a blessing. For instance, deacons, subdeacons, readers and servers wear vestments, but they never put these on or take them off (even though it is customary and needful for them to wear them) without first obtaining the priest's blessing. The priest himself, before vesting turns to the High Place and makes three reverences before he puts on his own vestments. If such care is taken in those things which are customary at every service, this should give us to understand that any departures from normal practice are extraordinary and should never be taken for granted. In every situation it is spiritually wise to ask a blessing. In fact this brings us back to one of the first points in this rather rambling letter: that we should regard the seeming prohibitions not as such but as our not having a blessing. And this is the essence of the matter. *From the "Points of Correspondence" section of The Shepherd, Vol. XV, No. 3 (Dec 94), 17-20.*

### **From the Fathers**

Selection from "**The Orthodox Veneration of the Theotokos**"  
Saint John of Shanghai & San Francisco

The Orthodox Church teaches about the Mother of God that which Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture have informed concerning Her, and daily it glorifies Her in its temples, asking Her help and defense. Knowing that She is pleased only by those praises which correspond to Her actual glory, the Holy Fathers and hymn-writers have entreated Her and Her Son to teach them how to hymn Her. Set a rampart about my mind, O my Christ, for I make bold to sing the praise of Thy pure Mother (Ikos of the Dormition). "The Church teaches that Christ was truly born of Mary Ever-Virgin" (St. Epiphanius, "True Word Concerning the Faith").

"It is essential for us to confess that the holy Ever-Virgin Mary is actually Theotokos (Birth-giver of God), so as not to fall into blasphemy. For those who deny that the Holy Virgin is actually Theotokos are no longer believers, but disciples of the Pharisees and Sadducees"

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(St. Ephraim the Syrian, "To John the Monk").

The end of the earthly life of the Most Holy Mother of God was the beginning of Her greatness. "Being adorned with Divine glory" (Irmos of the Canon of the Dormition), She stands and will stand, both in the day of the Last Judgment and in the future age, at the right hand of the throne of Her Son. She reigns with Him and has boldness towards Him as His Mother according to the flesh and as one in spirit with Him, as one who performed the will of God and instructed others (Matt. 5:19). Merciful and full of love, She manifests Her love towards Her Son and God in love for the human race. She intercedes for it before the Merciful One, and going about the earth, She helps men.

Having experienced all the difficulties of earthly life, the Intercessor of the Christian race sees every tear, hears every groan and entreaty directed to Her. Especially near to Her are those who labor in the battle with the passions and are zealous for a God-pleasing life.

But even in worldly cares She is an irreplaceable helper. "Joy of all who sorrow, and intercessors for the offended, and feeder of the hungry, consolation of travelers, harbor of the storm-tossed, visitation of the sick, protection and intercessor for the infirm staff of old age, Thou are the Mother of God on high, O Most Pure One" (Sticheron of the Service to the Hodigitria). "The hope and intercession and refuge of Christians", "The Mother of God unceasing in prayers" (Theotokion of the Third Tone). "She day and night doth pray for us and the sceptres of kingdoms are confirmed by Her prayers" (daily Nocturne).

There is no intellect or words to express the greatness of Her Who was born in the sinful human race but became "more honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim." "Seeing the grace of the secret mysteries of God made manifest and clearly fulfilled in the Virgin, I rejoice; and I know not how to understand the strange and secret manner whereby the Undeified has been revealed as alone chosen above all creation, visible and spiritual. Therefore, wishing to praise Her, I am struck dumb with amazement in both mind and speech. Yet still I dare to proclaim and magnify Her: She is indeed the heavenly Tabernacle" (Ikos of the Entry into the Temple). "Every tongue is at a loss to praise Thee as is due; even a spirit from the world above is filled with dizziness, when it seeks to sing Thy praises, O

Theotokos. But since Thou art good, accept our faith. Thou knowest well our love inspired by God, for Thou art the Protector of Christians and we magnify Thee" (Irmos of the 9th Canticle, Service of the Theophany).

## **Upcoming Events**

### **August 16 – Parish Picnic at Wildwood Park, Saratoga**

Come join the Parish folks at our annual picnic. Please bring a potluck salad, dessert or drinks to share. We will be barbecuing hamburgers and hot dogs. You can bring your favorite thing to barbeque if you wish. Wildwood Park is on Fourth St. in Saratoga. Parking is somewhat limited so if you want to carpool from the Church that would be great. Bring game equipment you think would be fun if you wish.

### **Lunches**

Please sign up to host a lunch. It doesn't have to be complicated, just something to share to give us time to get to know each other.

### **Festival - October 3 and 4**

We still have lots more to cook for the Festival. Matushka Joan has been organizing the cooking while our Cooking Chairperson Olga is away. We have some donated items that didn't sell at the rummage sale that we will use for our St Nicholas Booth. We are looking for higher end items for raffle prizes as well as the booth. If you have a friend who works for a restaurant, winery, hotel, travel agent, see if you can get them to donate a meal, wine, a hotel stay or mini-vacation. We will shortly be having a Parish meeting to discuss the Festival. Please participate. We need help before and during the Festival so please sign up to help with something. Vera Haugh is the Festival Project Manager. Your support is important!

### **Rummage Sale Thanks**

We earned \$735 at the Rummage Sale! Thanks to everyone who helped, donated, worked to price, created and put up signs and cleared up. Both Nika Wynn and Beverly Parker were tireless and very organized.