

That women too may become apostles is important for Hippolytus, because in this way they represent a counter-concept to the first Eve. For these witnesses to the resurrection are "good witnesses" who present a "good testimony".

The new Eve as *typos* of the church has been made new by Christ. The new Eve becomes the helper, the partner of the new Adam, because she does not lead him into wrongdoing as the old Eve did, but rather announces the good news and the truth of the resurrection.

The encounter of the Risen One with the women is the moment in which the new Eve, the church, takes the place of the old Eve, the synagogue. The women's proclamation of the resurrection brings about the end of the synagogue and the beginning of the church. The synagogue falls silent, the church declares itself.

In this commentary we do not find the comparison of Eve with Mary which is so often drawn in the patristic literature. Rather, the comparison is of Eve with the women of the Easter narrative. Since it was not Mary's task to make a proclamation, the comparison with the women in the Easter narrative is possible precisely because they became the ones who announced the news of the resurrection.

Conclusions

The mission given to women to proclaim the word of God at the very beginning of the church puts the service of women in this same church in a new light. In the new Eve, the church, women are called to proclaim "the resurrection as gospel". This is true even though the task of these "apostles of the apostles" was not to preach to the public, but rather to the disciples. The women in the Easter narrative are the first ones who not only heard the good news, but also brought it to the men, the disciples. These means that men have not only proclaimed the message to women, but also – and even, first of all – heard it from them. So the term "apostles of the apostles" is a correction of any image of the church in which women are only supposed to listen and preaching is to be done exclusively by men.

Saints and Spirit-Bearers

Models for Orthodox Women

MOTHER MARIA (RULE)

Saints

The word "saints" was a term applied at an early date to all Christians. For example, it is used in the salutations at the beginning of Paul's letters to the Ephesians and the Philippians.

According to Luke, the name "Christians" was first used in Antioch (Acts 11:26). The next recorded use of it is in the account of Paul's trial in Jerusalem before Agrippa, who asks in response to Paul's proclamation of Christ in his defence: "Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?" (Acts 26:28). Paul had spoken of his own upbringing, his persecution of Christ's followers, his conversion and his mission to preach repentance, forgiveness and Christ's rising from the dead to the Gentiles. St Peter writes of suffering as one of the fundamental marks of a Christian: "If any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace" (1 Pet. 4:16). Christians are named for their Leader; the signs are witness and suffering, obedience, repentance and conversion.

I remember listening to an elderly archimandrite reminisce about events in western Serbia during the second world war, when he was in charge of a small monastery at Rača on the River Drina, just across from Bosnia. In the village marketplace one day he was complaining to an old peasant about the terrible burden of taxes imposed by the Nazis. The quota of cattle and grain was so crippling that he did not know how the monks could survive. The old man interrupted him: "But Father, what are you moaning about? We are Orthodox Christians and we must expect to suffer."

We have a calendar of saints, but only God knows the names of all the saints. This is wonderfully exemplified in C.S. Lewis's novel *The Great Divorce*. A young man – the writer in a dream – takes a bus trip from hell to heaven. His guide is a man he had always venerated, the 19th-century Scottish novelist and poet George Macdonald. The account of their journey, which develops the theme of transforming and redeeming love, includes this passage:

This is a translation from German of a portion of the author's dissertation (Bern, 1994) entitled *Die Töchter der Kirche Christi und die frohe Botschaft des Sohnes Gottes* ("The Daughters of Christ's Church and the Good News of the Son of God").

All down one long aisle of the forest the undersides of the leafy branches had begun to tremble with dancing light. Some kind of procession was approaching us, and the light came from the persons who composed it.

First came bright spirits, not the spirits of men, who danced and scattered flowers – soundlessly falling, lightly drifting flowers. Then, on the left and right, at each side of the forest avenue, came youthful shapes, boys upon one side and girls upon the other. If I could remember their singing and write down the notes, no man who read that score would ever grow sick or old. Between them went musicians; and after that a lady in whose honour all this was being done.

I cannot now remember whether she was naked or clothed. If she was naked, then it must have been the almost invisible penumbra of her courtesy and joy that produced in my memory the illusion of a great and shining train that followed her across the happy grass. If she was clothed, then the illusion of nakedness is doubtless due to the clarity with which her inmost spirit shone through the clothes. For clothes in that country are not a disguise: the spiritual body lives along each thread and turns them into living organs. A robe or crown is, there, as much one of the wearer's features as a lip or an eye.

But I have forgotten. And only partly do I remember the unbearable beauty of her face.

"Is it... is it?", I whispered to my guide.

"Not at all," said he, "It's someone you'll never have heard of. Her name on earth was Sarah Smith, and she lived in Golders Green."

"She seems to be... well, a person of particular importance."

"Aye, she is one of the great ones. You have heard that fame in this country and fame on earth are two quite different things."

"Who are all these young men and women on each side?"

"They are her sons and daughters."

"She must have had a very large family."

"Every young man or boy that met her became her son – even if it was only the boy who brought the meat to her back door. Every girl that met her was her daughter."

"Isn't that a bit hard on their own parents?"

"No. There are those who steal other people's children, but her motherhood was of a different kind. Those on whom it fell went back to their parents loving them more... Everything that came near her had a place in her love. In her they became themselves. And now the abundance of life that she has in Christ from the Father flows over into them. It is like when you throw a stone into a pool, and the concentric waves spread out further and further. Redeemed humanity is still young; it has hardly come to its full strength. But already there is joy enough in the little finger of a great saint such as yonder lady to waken all the dead things of the universe into life."

I have quoted this at some length, not only because it expresses the point that God alone knows in the end who is a saint, but also because it is a wonderful exposition of the compassion and sacrificial love which are the hallmarks of sanctity.

Spirit-bearers

The "Spirit" here is the Holy Spirit, promised by Christ. As he came nearer to the culmination of his earthly life – his suffering, death and resurrection – he spoke more and more of this. The fourth gospel spells out what he promised:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth (John 14:16f.).

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything (14:26).

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf (15:26).

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears (16:12f.).

These passages are then followed by Jesus' high priestly prayer (ch. 17), in which his relationship to the Father is expressed more clearly than anywhere else.

Surely the sending of the Spirit of truth is emphasized and reiterated because the disciples will soon be without the external physical presence of Christ, to whom they have become accustomed to turn at every moment for advice and help. Now they are to be the church, his body on earth, and to bring the good news to all creation. They will still need this support, this constant outpouring of wisdom; and Jesus reassures them that the wisdom of the triune Godhead will still be with them in the person of the Holy Spirit, sent by him from the Father.

All who have received chrismation have had their every orifice and member sealed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are all therefore Spirit-bearers. The saints are those who have lived out – and who live out today – this anointing with their whole hearts.

Models

Chapters 11 and 12 of the letter to the Hebrews give examples of the faith, trust in God and obedience of our forefathers in the faith. Whenever I read this, I add to the comments about Abraham's faith (vv.17-19) his trust and obedience when God told him to sacrifice his only son, through whom he had been promised so much. We know that God himself did this, and that the succession and inheritance were assured by it, but back in Abraham's day this seemed a total contradiction, as though God were playing with him. Yet Abraham was ready to obey God, even though it seemed that all his hopes would be dashed by this act.

I have recently lived with close friends through the tragedy of having their only child and her husband murdered in East Africa by persons who

wanted only to steal their Land Rover. The parents are devout Christians, but this surpassed their understanding and almost overthrew their faith. Only some time after the burial was the mother able to say to me, "The greatest sacrifice was demanded of us and we have made it. God knows what is happening even if we do not. He has been through it."

The author of the letter to the Hebrews invites us to join this "cloud of witnesses" by "looking to Jesus" (12:2). Love is the source of this obedience, and its consequence. Recall Jesus' words: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34). "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Jesus said these words shortly before his passion, when the cost of the love and obedience would be spelled out: the giving of his life. Each year we experience something new as we live through Holy Week. This year, perhaps because of the tragedy my friends were living through – and the way it deepened day by day as more information became available – I was intensely aware of the cumulative horror that Jesus' suffering must have caused those who were there at the time. We cannot go through the days of Holy Week as they did, and we know that it ended in resurrection; but we can catch a glimpse of the naked trust that was needed to live through the breathtakingly incredible horror of the situation as it developed hour by hour.

When I was a novice in an Anglican community in my early twenties, I was greatly confused by Jesus' image of the man planning to build a tower and sitting down to count the cost (Luke 14:28-30). Jesus' advice seemed so calculating. But as I wrestled with this story, I realized that for us as Christians there really is only one cost: everything, all that we have and are. As I said about the "Spirit-bearers", the saints are those who live this to the full, and those who live it to the full are saints.

All this is not of course confined to Orthodox women, as the title assigned to this article might suggest. The saints are models for all who are baptized in the name of the holy Trinity, women and men, Orthodox Christians and those of other Christian traditions.

Obedience, love and freedom

I have already touched on obedience, love and freedom as marks or attributes of sanctity. Here I shall look much more closely at the third of these.

The world often uses the word "freedom" to mean licence or choice. I am *free* to do this or that, good or evil. For Christians the meaning of the word is both more limited and infinitely wider. Freedom is not doing what we like but saying "yes" to God, keeping his commandments and

doing his will. If we do this we are free; if we do not we are the slaves of sin and the devil. But why do we obey God and keep his commandments? It is because, however haltingly, we love him. This love transforms freedom, taking it from the seeming limitation of obedience to "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

For several years I worked on an English translation of the lives of the saints by the Serbian bishop Nikolai Velimirovič, in his *Prologue from Ochrid*. Thinking about saints as models, I find that I turn most often to those saints who have demonstrated the love and true obedience to live this risky freedom and to recognize that superficial patterns of "correctness" are our servants, not our masters. Just as "the sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27), so rules, even canons, are subject to the royal law of love. Let me cite a few examples.

The first is *St Vitalis* (22 April). As Bishop Nikolai tells the story:

In the time of Patriarch John the Merciful, a young monk appeared who, as soon as he arrived, compiled a list of all the prostitutes in Alexandria. His way of asceticism was exceptional and singular. During the day he hired himself out for the heaviest work, and at night he went into the brothels, gave the money he had earned to some prostitute and shut himself in her room with her for the whole night. As soon as he had shut the door, Vitalis begged the woman to lie down and sleep, while he spent the entire night in a corner of the room in prayer to God for that sinner.

So he kept the sinner from sinning even for one night. The second night he would go to another, the third to another, and so on in order, till he had gone through them all; then he went back to the one with whom he had started. By his counsel, many of these sinners left their foul calling. Some married, some went into monasteries and others began some honest work for payment.

All these women were forbidden by Vitalis to say why he came to them. As a result, he became a scandal to the whole of Alexandria. People reviled him in the streets, spat on him and buffeted him. But he bore it all patiently, revealing his good works to the Lord, but concealing them from men. When he died, all became known about him. There began to be many miraculous healings over his grave; people came from far and wide, bringing their sick to it. Spat upon by men, he was and is glorified by the all-seeing God (*Prologue*, II, p.87).

Saint Abraham (29 October; *Prologue*, IV, pp.125f.) would not rest until he had found his niece Maria. After growing up with a desire for virginity, she had fallen into fornication with a monk and, believing herself to be lost, became a prostitute. He found her and, pretending to be a customer, went to her room and revealed himself as her uncle, finally bringing her to repentance and the knowledge of forgiveness.

Another prostitute whose repentance we commemorate by giving her a special Sunday in Lent as well as a date in the calendar (1 April) is *St Mary of Egypt*, my own patron. I remember first hearing her life read 25 years ago in a tiny church in Walsingham, an ancient pilgrimage centre in England which for many years has had a strong Orthodox presence. The first hearing of the vivid account of her life by St Sophronius of Jerusalem is unforgettable: the completeness of her sudden *metanoia*, her turning round and looking to God; the drastic acuteness of her external asceticism, strengthening her to wrestle with the temptations that assailed her; the profound humility of her relationship with Abba Zosima, culminating in the moment when they were both lying on the ground asking the other's blessing – and in the end it was she who obeyed and blessed him.

In this century, *Mother Maria Skobtsova* is not formally in the calendar of saints, but bears the marks of sainthood. A Russian aristocrat and intellectual, she married twice and had three children. Then, in Paris in the early 1930s, she was called by her bishop, Metropolitan Evlogiy, to be a nun “in the world”, to live for the succour and salvation of others. She worked with Russian women students, with the poor and needy who found a refuge in her house and then, during the war, with Jews in danger of arrest by the Nazis. For this last activity, she was denounced, arrested and sent to Ravensbrück, where she died. There is a strong probability that she took the place of another prisoner who had been condemned to the gas chamber; in any case, this would be consistent with – and the culmination of – a life spent in the loving, sacrificial service of others.

These are examples of saints who have dared to put the law of love above all others, to be unconventional for the love of God. Only God knows how far they were upheld by the prayers of those who, in withdrawal and silence, prayed for them and for those with whom they were engaged, and wrestled with the devil for the souls of those who had fallen away.

There is a lovely story about St Bridget of Kildare and one of her nuns. St Bridget was abbess of a large monastery in Ireland and one of her nuns was blind. St Bridget had the gift of healing, and she restored the sight of this nun. However, after a few days, the nun went to her and said, “Close my eyes again, dear Mother. When the world is clear to the eyes, God is less clear to the soul.”

All of them – those who were in the world and those who withdrew from it – were free with the freedom of obedience to God. I believe that this is a message which we today dare not ignore. In a quarter of a century in the Orthodox church, I have lived both within an atmosphere of

freedom in the Spirit, within the discipline of loving obedience, which Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh has tried to teach me, and within an atmosphere of rigid canonical observance, in which a disciplined freedom in love has had to struggle not to be stifled and the holy Tradition has become more a set of rules to be adhered to than life with the Spirit in the discipline of the church. Let me offer just a few examples.

In Bishop Nikolai's *Prologue* there is a wonderful incident about fasting involving Jeladin Bey, who ruled Ochrid in the first half of the previous century, and Metropolitan Kalinik, who was head of the church at that time.

Jeladin and Kalinik, although of different faiths, were very good friends and often visited each other. It happened that Jeladin Bey condemned 25 Christians to death by hanging, and the execution was to take place on Great Friday. The Metropolitan, deeply distressed by this event, went to Jeladin and besought him to mitigate the sentence. While they were talking the hour of the midday meal arrived, and the Bey invited the metropolitan to eat with him. A dish of lamb had been prepared for the meal. The metropolitan excused himself, as the fast prevented him from remaining to eat, and prepared to leave. The Bey was angry and said to him: “Choose: either you eat with me and free 25 people from hanging, or you refrain and they hang.” The metropolitan crossed himself and sat down to lunch, and Jeladin freed the people from the death sentence.

Bishop Nikolai introduces this account with the words: “Fasting is a great thing, but love is greater.”

As against this, I remember a friend Ljubinka coming to help us prepare for the Feast of the Holy Cross. Ljubinka's leukaemia, which had been in remission, had flared up again, and she knew she did not have much time left in this world. The Feast of the Holy Cross was a very special feast for the monastery and the village below it, and we asked blessing to fast and receive communion on the Feast. The rest of us were given the blessing, but Ljubinka was told that, as she had fasted and received communion the previous week, she was too ill to fast again, and so she could not receive communion.

Christ's teaching about fasting is unmistakably clear:

And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting... But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret (Matt. 6:16f.).

We must not inflict our fasting on others. I have often heard the comment, “I am sorry, I cannot eat this; I am fasting.” In those circumstances, we have already had a choice. If it is during the fasts, should we

be there, in company, at all? If the call of love sends us there, surely it sends us to find some other way of fasting at that moment, and not to fly in the face of Christ's teaching, proclaiming our fasting to all around us. One of the monasteries in which I lived served as the parish church for a small hamlet, and we all knew each other. One small boy was a terror to his parents and his sisters. When he came to communion, I heard the priest ask him if he had fasted from this or that food, but I never heard him ask whether he had stopped hitting his sisters.

Many women suffer from a rigid interpretation of the rules about blood and participation in the life of the church. What woman knows herself able to approach rules about not receiving communion, not entering the sanctuary, not venerating icons when she is menstruating with the same inner freedom and joy with which we embrace the rule about fasting before communion? Whatever insights the church may have into this question, I hope with all my heart that it will be far from the mindless assumption of "uncleanness" which I have so often met both among the clergy and among other nuns. Christ's healing of the deformed woman in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17) gives us the priorities here: liberating from bondage and letting the woman walk tall!

On this matter of living in freedom within a framework and at times interpreting the rules with great flexibility in the name of love, I believe that women have a special contribution to make. It is an insensitive generalization to say that men make the rules and women bend them, but there is a great deal of truth in it. Women tend more easily to react with their hearts first and their heads afterwards, and to see the personal implications of a situation in which compassion and understanding are needed. We need to question the arbitrary decisions that are sometimes made by men in authority in the church, and I have learned by experience that the only way of being listened to is to be prepared to obey as wholeheartedly as possible, and in this way to have the inner authority to ask a hearing.

The Myrrh-Bearing Women, of all human creation, were the first to whom the Lord's resurrection was proclaimed. It is within the mystery of God's dispensation why this was so, but we are given the same joy and task of this proclamation as they were.

I believe that we in Orthodoxy are at a watershed on this issue of disciplined freedom in love on one side and narrow, rigorous observance on the other. We need great wisdom, but that is what we have been promised in the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are called to be saints and Spirit-Bearers.

In the Blachernae Church, across the Golden Horn, the Mother of God appeared to St Andrew the Fool for Christ in the year 911, as a sign

of her protection of the city of Constantinople. The Feast of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God is celebrated every year, in the knowledge of her protection and intercession. Chief among the saints, she is a creature as we are. She was for a short time physically the Christ-Bearer, the God-Bearer, and she was a Spirit-Bearer throughout her life. She will help us, if we ask her, to live in that glorious liberty that Christ has promised us: to know what it means to be a child of God our Father and a fellow-citizen with the saints in the heavenly kingdom.