



Ecumenical Patriarchate

Archdiocese of Thyateira & Great Britain

**Bulletin of the Orthodox Community of St Andrew**

# The Spiritual Meadow

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**In the Quietness of Joy: Liturgical meetings with Fr John Musther**

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## In the Quietness of Joy: Liturgical meetings with Fr John Musther

Fr Antonios Kakalis

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we<sup>d</sup> have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we<sup>d</sup> boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

[St Paul, Romans, 5:1-5]

It was a great blessing to find myself assisting the late Archpriest John Musther during the last two years of his life at the Parish of St Bega, St Mungo and St Herbert, in Braithwaite (Keswick, Cumbria) that he established around 10 years ago. I met a quiet and powerful man that was committed to serving God. People of the parish and the Deanery of the Ecumenical Patriarchate were telling me stories about the active priest that used to have an open house with his wife, Presvytera Jennifer – Bega, in Brighton, and set up the Parish of Keswick in his “retirement” years.

Liturgical co-existence around the Holy Altar is of major importance, as concelebrating becomes a way of getting to know the other (clergy and congregation) in ineffable ways. Physically tired of age and health, Fr John did not have long conversations with me and pastoral meetings. Though, I have always felt that our moments of co-existence during the Eucharist were lessons of Christian character, pastoral sacrifice, endurance through pains, joy and hope of Resurrection. Living as a Christian body-soul, Fr John's physical problems, were spiritually balanced by the strength of his soul, a soul given to God through serving the others. Fr John never thought of ‘retiring’ as a priest; not only that this concept does not exist in Orthodox Church, but I also never saw him hesitating to grasp the calling

of his clerical responsibility. I still remember our last D. Liturgy, when I was helping with some of the practical aspects during the Anaphora, when he gently pointed with his hand something that I had forgotten to do – me, the one that was asked to help him. Fr John has always been in the ‘here and now’ of liturgical, Eucharistic, reality, and this is how he was able to teach us the way living in the Eucharistic joy is a way of seeking union with God through loving others. As an honest priest, he never left anything ‘behind’ and embraced the younger ones, us, in the unique way that God was allowing him to do it, by doing his best to fully trust Him. In every Divine Liturgy I served with Fr John Musther, I learnt something new, something that cannot be fully described in words, as always involving the mystery of Christ.

A few months before his death we asked him to put together some thoughts on Christian Joy. Working with his wife, he put together the following ‘prayer of life and work’. It is a great blessing for us to publish it for Christmas 2023.

Fr John Musther was born in Halifax during the second world war. He studied law (London University) and Theology (Oxford University). He spent 17 years in a contemplative monastery in Sussex as a monk. Leaving the monastery, he established an ‘open house’ in Brighton, offering comfort to others. In the mid-1990s he met with his wife, Jennifer, and soon after this, the two of them joined the Orthodox Church with Fr John becoming a deacon. They moved to Keswick in 2007, where they established an Orthodox Parish responding to the needs of the area and opening the Orthodox Church to Cumbria. He left this life in February 2023.

May his memory be eternal!

## **Christian Joy: A Prayer of Life and Work**

by Fr. John Musther

Christian Joy

is the presence of Christ,  
whether recognised or not,  
whether known or unknown,  
but frequently found to be  
powerful, motivating, inspiring,  
personal, liturgical, but not confined,

beyond that connecting,  
dynamic, changing, transforming,  
dwelling, in the hearts where Christ touches,  
fulfils and sanctifies.

**St Macarius: ‘The divine wind** of the Spirit

recreates and refreshes

soul and body

with a divine, ineffable tranquility.’

**St Isaac the Syrian:** ‘When the Spirit dwells in a person,  
that person does not stop praying since the Spirit prays in him.’

**St Hesychius:** ‘In stillness the heart breathes  
and invokes without ceasing

**Jesus Christ the Son of God’.**

**St Simeon the New Theologian:** ‘After we have been entirely purified  
from the defilements of the passions, **his holy fire** becomes in us, food  
and drink, light and unceasing **joy**.’

O condescension beyond words, you reveal yourself like a sun.’

The parish needs **joy**,  
the joy of presence,  
the joy of salvation,  
the joy of turn-around.  
the vision of pioneers.  
the need of pilgrims.

**St Silouan:** ‘I want only one thing:  
to pray for all people  
as I do for myself.’

**Prayer sets free.**

God becomes our freedom  
and **our joy.**

**‘God is ineffable,  
God is inconceivable,  
God is invisible,  
God is incomprehensible’**

‘ever existing and eternally the same,

tradition is the past  
tradition is the present.

**tradition belongs  
to the front edge**

**of all our future.**

## A Joyful Troparium to St Silouan

*On the path of humility,*

*by your prayers you received Christ as your Master.*

*In your heart the Holy Spirit witnessed to your salvation.*

*Therefore all people called to live in hope*

*rejoice and celebrate your memory!*

*Holy Father Silouan,*

*pray to Christ God to save our souls.*



*Archpriest John Musther*



## **James Brown: A Short Biography**

by Ian Hooper

James was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> January 1954 to George Brown (born 29/06/1921) and to Jean Brown (Nee Erskine, born 01/09 / 1917).

George's roots were in Forfar, Perthshire and I believe Jean was from Stirling way. They met and married during the Second World War due to the high degree of mobilisation of the population for the war effort. My father met my mother Edith also, who was George's sister whilst on an RAF posting near Edinburgh at one of the many dances that were arranged in those days. It may have been the same dance that George met Jean, when it is said that Jean picked George from the many choices, to dance with her!

George served with the Army and according to my father had an interesting and distinguished war. George was very smart and a hard worker. Also a talented sportsman who played County Cricket. He trained as an accountant, where he spent a lot of time in the financial institutions of George street, Edinburgh and spells in Belfast and Bellshill, near Glasgow. They moved to a Bungalow at 35 Craigmount Park, Corstorphine, and became a member of Charlotte Baptist Chapel in Rose street. I know that he was baptised there and I seem to recall he was a treasurer for them. I had the pleasure of worshipping with him there in the early seventies when I was an undergraduate at Edinburgh University. By then, George was a financial director for Barret Homes in Scotland.

My father, returned to Cardiff with his young bride, Edith and so our family was split by the distance of some 400 miles. Despite this we had many holidays and mutual visits to our respective homes.

My grandfather was a railway worker, which brought them to live in Grangemouth. My grandmother lived a long life and finished up living in Dundas street Grangemouth and finally, 32 Kingseat Avenue so my mother and I made many train journeys there in my early years.

James and I were born in the same year and so our mothers were pregnant together and so as sisters in law had a strong bond and kept quite close over the years, not so easy in those day as we didn't have a telephone in the early years. I do remember joint holidays in Scarborough, Bournemouth and the many visits to Grangemouth and Edinburgh. For whatever reason, James was kept very close by his mother, always with an extra layer of clothing and not allowed to play football and cricket, swimming with myself and George when on holiday together.

James lived with his parents all his life. After George retired they went into business together and ideally wanted a Post Office. They ended up with a Card and Gift shop in Larbert. They sold up in Edinburgh and moved to 14 Robert Bruce court in Larbert and ran the shop for several years. I believe the family were members of Larbert Old Church of Scotland Presbyterian, a local chapel until Jean died in 2006 following which the shop was the subject of a compulsory purchase order. Jean had

chosen to be buried with her parents at the Grand Sable cemetery in Falkirk, whereas George had bought a family plot in Forfar. I flew up to Edinburgh for the funeral, returning the same day. When leaving, on an impulse, I kissed my uncle George on the forehead. I am glad I did, for it was the last time I actually saw him. They moved to Barnton in Edinburgh for their last years.

My mother, Edith, died at the young age of 57 in 1977. I have to say my father and sister did a good job of keeping the family ties going in the following thirty years after her death, keeping in touch regularly. My sister, Susan had holidays in Edinburgh, I recall. One memorable family occasion was my father's eightieth birthday, when George and Jean came to Cardiff for a family celebration. I recently rediscovered this on video, so I have them on camera. James came to my daughter's weddings in 2008 and 2015 and also spent a few Christmas periods here, staying with my sister.

I last saw James in May 2018 when in Edinburgh for my 40 years reunion of the class of 1978, Edinburgh Dental Hospital. My wife and I took James to lunch a couple of times at Crammond and Queensferry I recall.

When George finally passed in 2012, my wife, daughter and sister flew to Edinburgh for the funeral at a church in Scotland in Corstorphine. Strangely, we along with Jim were the only mourners. George was reunited with Jean at the Grand Sable cemetery in Sterling.

The loss of both parents must have created a huge void in the life of James and I can see how the sense of community that the Greek Orthodox Church offered would have greatly helped James to fill a massive void and given him a sense of purpose in life. It must have been very hard when Covid came to cope with the loneliness. My sister phoned him on the 1<sup>st</sup> September, Jean's birthday but could only leave a message unfortunately which was not returned. I phoned in October but again with no success. We didn't learn that he had passed on until Christmas unfortunately.



*James Brown*

## **James Brown: A Life of Christian Joy**

by Isaac Gabr

If there is a league of gentlemen throughout history who have possessed the ability to disarm a band of pirates with the power of their smile, James is certainly numbered among their ranks! All who met James were lifted by his positive nature, his quirky sense of humour and friendly disposition were two of his constant companions. He did not care to slice the world into categories of important and unimportant people- on the contrary, he received all people as one would a brother or sister. On a wintry day, people will naturally gravitate to the warmth of a fire – in much the same way, James’ hearty smile and attendant enthusiasm were a source of warmth and comfort for those who were blessed to share his presence.

In Matthew 18:3, we hear: “Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

James was clearly a man who intuitively understood the beautiful simplicity of the child-like innocence that Christ is referring to; he was not bound by the confines of prim and proper society - he operated on higher ground. James fully understood the importance of correct doctrine ; however, he did not allow himself to become entangled in the subtle intricacies of dogma – he kept his sights on the that which is most critical: love of God and neighbour. In this way, he allowed his faith to grow undeterred in the ever-fertile soil of Christ’s vineyard.

In the presence of James, we were given an opportunity to recognize the artificial walls that we often place between ourselves and the fulfilling of the commandments. We can easily overcomplicate the message of the Holy Gospels, buying into the false notion that to fulfil the commandments we must spend a great deal of time trying to master an exotic craft. James was not hijacked by such ideas, instead he permitted himself to be unified with “The Good News” – he simply decided to put Christ’s teachings into practice. Without an ounce of reservedness, he would extend a helping hand to those in need, and with a zeal born of love, would share the “Good News”. He demonstrated that entrance into the Light of the Holy Gospels, is not question of ironing out our quirks, but simply a question of reorienting our horizon.

As countless souls throughout the centuries have proved, true alchemy occurs when a person plants his sorrow in the vineyard of Christ. Like all who have spent considerable time in the arena of the world, James had experienced his fair share of sorrows- yet critically, he refused to be defined by them; instead, he placed his hope in Christ, and understood that in following Christ, all things invariably work out for best. James often stressed the importance of the choices we make: he said that when tragedy afflicts us, we must avoid the temptation to succumb to bitterness. Despite his own trials, James opted to take the blessed path of thanksgiving; his appreciation for the seemingly small things was visible to all who got to know him. May the Good Lord grant us the wisdom to be a little more like James!

## Snakes and Ladders

by Chad Sutherland-Lockhart

The concept of "Christian Joy" is an oxymoron to the western secular mind. The perception of the Joyless Christian is a strong stereotype in the psyche of secular society especially in Britain. It is no surprise given how many unfortunate heterodox ideas, especially those deriving from John Calvin, have been perpetrated in our recent history. Despite these prevalent modern perceptions I would argue the inverse, **that there is no Joy outside of the Church.**

Firstly, it would be most pertinent to properly define Joy. The dictionary definition of Joy conflates it with pleasure but I would argue that they are quite distinct. The Latin root of Joy is "Gaudere" which means to rejoice, to rejoice is an uplifting feeling of exultation. People rejoice great triumphs and hard fought victories, such as Christ's over death. Conversely, there are no more great victories for the secular mind at best symbolic victories that give short term gratification. Whereas pleasure is just that, short term gratification derived from base and carnal means.

Saint Porphyrios talks about how secular love can often be more damaging than hate as it is either suffocating or egotistical. In a false love of concern and expectations or selfish desiring of a love expecting to be returned, we do not take Joy but pleasure. if a secular person has such a Great affinity for nature entails the danger of idolising physical aspects of the self, ignoring the great significance of the soul. Uncritical seeking for

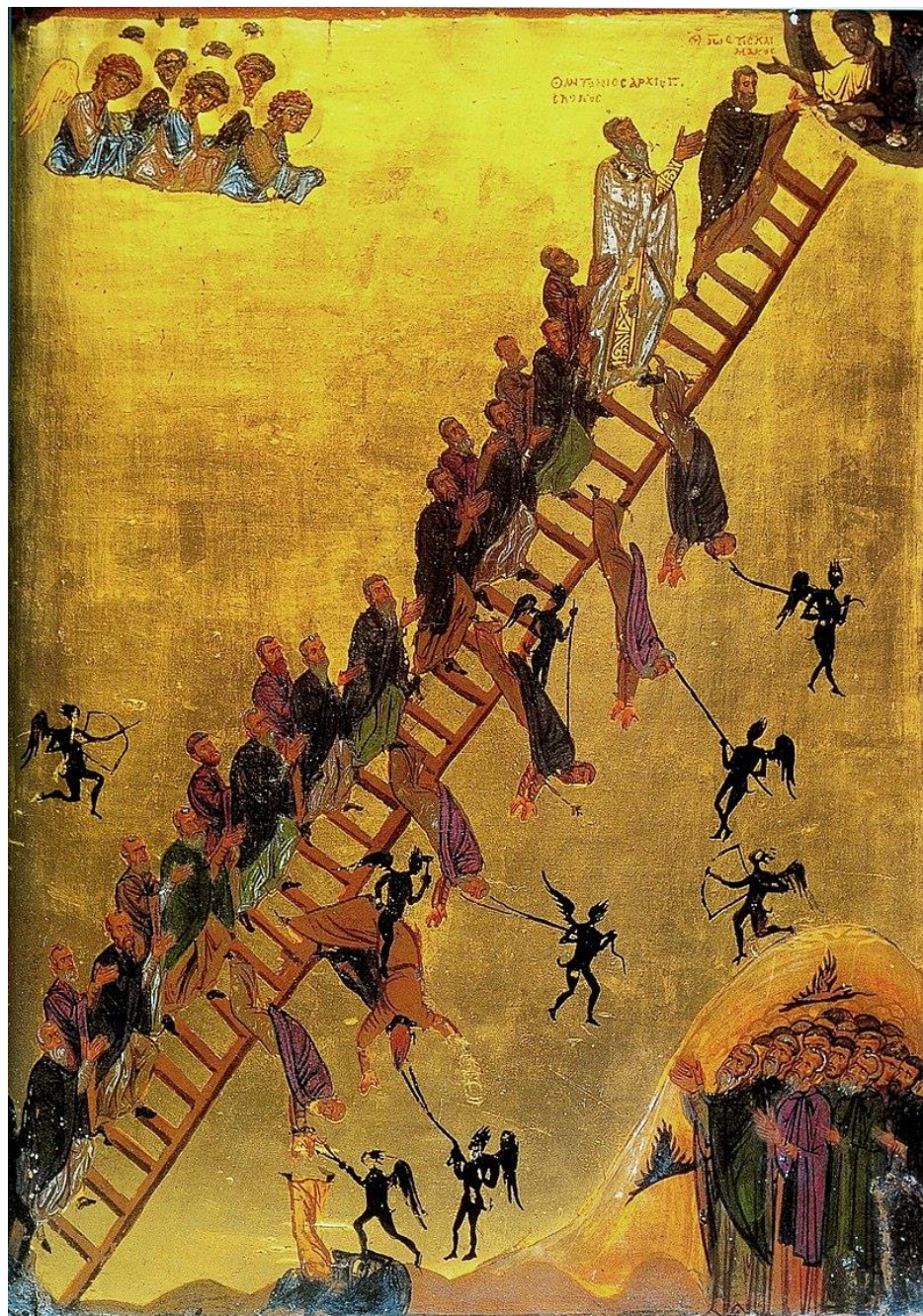
entertainment in sports and social media and politicising everything, become eventually distractions from the true joy, and possible ways to passions. The latter are the ones that always lead to the sadness of shallow and egocentric pleasure, leaving the human empty, as isolated from the others and the Holy Other. Current young generation suffers from the constant fight against constantly new ways of hedonistic temptations, offered to them as routes to joy, but leading to deep unhappiness and pain. One needs only to look at anti-depressant usage and suicide rates to take a step back and think of what joy might truly be and where it can be found and practiced.

Now in stark contrast to these secular “snakes” Orthodox life offers the truth of Divine Ladder. The idea of the ascetic ladder, as introduced by Saint John Climacus, as a metaphor of a developing spiritual life is the core of working towards real, Christian Joy. Even from the moment one discovers the beginning of the ladder, its first step, he or she experiences great Joy; that there is reachable salvation from the low place that he/she finds himself/herself. The life of a Christian is hard fought. We struggle and labour as Saint Paul is oft to remind us, we deny ourselves as Christ calls us to follow Him. We are athletes moaning and groaning our way up a very steep ladder, leading to Love. We will inevitably suffer droughts where we do things simply out of obedience and we are given no Joy in our lives, when we feel God is absent. This is when we clamber sweaty palmed up the ladder struggling with every rung feeling as if our efforts are nought but when our despair is highest is when Christ returns. But in this



suffering we are taken ever higher. As we get closer to God our Joy increases, we feel His Love ever stronger.

It is through this suffering up the ladder we destroy the snakes the same way Christ in his suffering upon the cross destroyed death. When we center our lives around self denial in the pursuit of Theosis all good things are redeemed because we are not enslaved by them. Joy is found in struggle for getting out of ourselves; it is to battle upwards or sometimes just to hang on for dear life. Whether it's in a grand victory or simple survival it is the contrast that defines our rejoicing. To struggle is to suffer a life outside of your ego and towards living with others for the sake of God, and the secular world flees from such suffering like the plague as they have no context for it, they run and slide down, like small snakes to escape it. But as Christians we know Christ redeemed our corrupted nature through his suffering and we are called to do the same, it is in suffering we find our Joy.



*Ladder of Divine Ascent, 12<sup>th</sup> c., Saint Catherine Monastery, Sinai, Egypt*