

GLIMPSES OF ANOTHER WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you are sitting in front of a radio. You can tune in to different wavelengths without moving your position in space. In the same way, I believe, there is another realm which surrounds and interpenetrates with our everyday life and which we can "tune in" to at any time. This little book is a collection of true stories which happened to members of my family, to my friends or to myself. It reveals that we are not living alone in a universe of matter, but that there is another dimension that interpenetrates with ours and with which we can enter into communion.

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This happened to my daughter's mother-in-law, who recounted this event in her life on BBC Woman's Hour.

She had four sons; the youngest, Peter, was five years old. They belonged to the Orthodox Church, and he used to say that when he was grown up he would like to be a priest. So he often put on his mother's dressing-gown and would walk through the house with a wooden cross held high in his hands as in a church procession. Then he fell ill with double pneumonia and had to go to hospital. When he came home, he was of course still not strong after his illness. One morning at breakfast his mother said to him: "The Bishop is coming to see us at eleven o'clock." He said quietly: "He won't see me, but he'll bless me." His mother was just leaving the breakfast table to go into the adjoining kitchen, when the child said this. Her stomach contracted, and the thought raced through her mind: "What does he mean?! 'He won't see me, but he'll bless me.'" Then she heard a gasp, she rushed back and caught the child in her arms as he collapsed. Her little son was dead. She walked to her sitting-room carrying him in her arms and stood still in front of the icon corner looking at the holy faces of Christ, the Mother of God and the Saints. Then, so she told me, the devil whispered into her heart: "Do you still believe that God is good?" And through her tears she answered silently: "Yes, I still believe that God is love and good, although I do not always understand His ways."

She then put the child gently on the settee and phoned her husband at his work, her three other sons, and the doctor. It was the doctor who explained that in some very rare cases the lungs are sticky after double pneumonia and suddenly stick together before opening up again. In the case of Peter it killed him. At eleven a.m. the door-bell rang and there stood the Bishop. She could only utter: "Peter is dead." He got a shock, made the sign of the cross and straightaway went into her sitting-room, where Peter was lying on the settee. The Bishop then made the sign of the cross over the whole body of the little boy and prayed. The mother then remembered what Peter had said: "He won't see me, but he will bless me."

About one year later, it was Peter's birthday and the mother was in his bedroom, feeling very sad and sorrowful. The window was open and in despair she held her hands up in the air and sobbed: "Peter, where are you?" At that moment a little white budgie (an albino) flew into the room. She hurriedly closed the window so that it could not fly out again and thanked God for this sign of Peter. Why? Because she used to take Peter on her lap, cuddle him and say: "You're Mummy's little darling", and he would always firmly answer: "No, I'm your little white bird." When her husband came home from work she told him that a little white bird had flown into Peter's bedroom. He looked startled, knowing it was Peter's birthday, and made the sign of the cross, thanking God, and went out to buy a cage for the albino budgie, which obviously had escaped from someone's home.

God is Spirit, as Christ told us when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well: "God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4.24). And in the previous verse He tells us that "the Father seeketh such to worship Him".

God seeks out those souls who understand that God is Spirit and worship Him in spirit and in truth. It is God Who chooses: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you..."

God has free will, just as He has given to man and the angels to have free will. God decided which offering He is willing to accept and which He rejects. He accepted Abel's offering, but rejected Cain's. God knows the hearts of men, their motives, their volition, whether it is toward and for God or towards and for self.

Peter's parents were comforted in their sorrow and strengthened in their faith because they understood the language of spirit and recognized the message given by God.

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My neighbour Betty had four children, the eldest was about 14 years old, when she became seriously ill with cancer. Of course, her thoughts turned towards God and she wondered whether there is life after death. She never went to Church and I don't know how much she believed in God, but with the onset of her illness she started to search. We had long conversations about the existence of God and how we lost God through doubting His words and believing the words of the devil. It is not possible to be friends with both God and the devil, to be in communion with God as well as with the devil. For Satan opposes the Divine Will of God and was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, as Christ told us. God is a holy and a zealous God, and we can not "share" Him with the devil who opposes Him and wanted to exalt himself above God.

My friend grew daily in faith and in deep spiritual understanding of God, believing that He is Spirit and that one has to seek Him in spirit and in truth. One day, her husband foolishly told her that she had better fight for her life until the bitter end because "there is no life after death and you will never see your children again or anyone whom you love who has died before you". She choked with tears, it was as if a chasm was opening up in front of her - no hope, no meaning to life on earth, to suffering... She struggled to get to the door so as to get to me as I lived next door to her, to talk with me, to be reassured by me about the reality of God and that He is the Truth. When she reached the door and stood outside, terrible pains overcame her, she could go no further. It was a bleak winter day with grey clouds and no sunshine. She held onto the door and her heart cried out to God: "Please, give me a sign that You ARE and that You alone are the Truth, in Whom we can believe and trust." Suddenly a ray of sunshine came from behind a cloud and bathed a small bush in her front garden in light. She looked in amazement, it was like the burning bush of Moses. The bush which before had looked dull and without life now looked radiant and beautiful. She could not believe her eyes. Her eyes and soul drank in the splendour of the transfigured burning bush. Like Moses, she thought that it looked as if it were burning without being consumed. Of course, it was different from Moses' burning bush, which was burning with a Divine Fire, while this little bush was set alight by the rays of the sun falling on it. All round the bush it was dark and grey. The sun's rays did not show up the rest of the garden and then it withdrew its rays and the bush once again looked dull and dreary. But for her the message was received, her heart was singing, she felt a deep peace with his soul and gratitude towards God for answering her immediately.

His answer to her was: "I AM, do not doubt, I can transfigure the world through My Light. What seems dead to you can be brought back to life by ME and be transformed into beauty."

The next day she told me the story and said pensively: "I have learned that God speaks to us through people, through the Scriptures, and in so many different ways, as He is Spirit. He is close at hand, we literally have only to reach out and feel His Presence and He is with us here in time, we do not have to wait for years and years to have a relationship with Him." I have often thought of her words. How true they are now that God has come to man in space and time. He is "at hand", and with the giving of the Holy Spirit "the Kingdom of God is within us". It is so wonderful that in this increasingly confused, sad and often evil world here, we can reach out for God and His household, the angels, saints, prophets, confessors, martyrs, and become aware that they are watching us lovingly, and that we are surrounded by the invisible Host of Heaven. There is no need to feel lonely or deserted - we have God above us and God with us and God withing us until the end of time.

One early morning my lovely friend and neighbour Betty died. Two weeks previously, her mother had travelled down from Bristol to be with her husband and to look after her four children, who were approximately 2, 3, 12 and 14 years old. They phoned me up to tell me. It was around 8 a.m. when the doorbell rang and my neighbour's mother stood there asking me whether she could use my phone to tell her daughter's twin brother that his sister had died. She did not want to tell him in the presence of her grandchildren because she was afraid that she would start crying. She had never been in my house before and I led her to our kitchen where the telephone was. Her face was grief-stricken, although she was very composed, and I put her on a stool near the telephone and looked at the back of her white head and stooped shoulders. Everything expressed deep mourning, and I felt great pity for her as I, too, am a mother and could understand what suffering she was going through. For a mother to lose her child is unnatural and one of the greatest sorrows. I prayed: "Lord, comfort her" - "comfort" is a word I seldom use. The moment I had prayed, our canary burst out into song. His cage was hanging from a hook near the kitchen window. Betty's mother had already started dialling and she burst into tears and could not continue with the telephone call. I replaced the receiver and put my arms around her while she was sobbing. At last she asked through her tears: "Do I hear a canary singing?" Of course I affirmed that this was the case and led her to the cage, while the canary was lustily singing away. She said through her tears: "Thank you for comforting me, little bird, thank you for comforting me." I could not understand how his singing had comforted her, but I noticed at once that she used the word "comforting" as I had used it in my short intense prayer to Christ.

Then when she managed to stop crying, she gave me a tender smile and said how wonderful God was, because when she started dialling Bristol to talk to Betty's twin brother, she was engulfed in sorrow and started to doubt whether her Betty was still alive. So she cried out to God: "Is my Betty still alive?" At that moment the canary burst out into song. "Do you know," she said, "I have not heard a canary sing for forty years! When I gave birth to my twins, I was having a very hard labour and my woman gynaecologist

said to me: 'I'll fetch you someone who will help you.' She came back with a canary in a cage and put it next to my bed. The canary burst out into song, I relaxed and gave birth to Betty while the bird was singing away. My prayer could not have been answered in a better way. Now I know my Betty is still alive and she has been born into a greater life beyond the grave. How thankful I am to God for giving me this sign, this answer, this certainty, words could not have comforted me more than the singing of this canary just now."

For me this is a proof of how angels minister to us, how much they help us without our realizing it. For the old lady decided to phone from our house, which was the one kitchen that there was a canary. God's Divine Providence, His foreknowledge knew how she felt and that she would turn to Him and ask to be comforted. It was meant that I feel compassion towards her and send up a short prayer to prove to me how God answers prayers and to strengthen my faith in His omnipotence and compassion. It was proved to me that her prayer and mine joined together and were answered in a unique way, tailor-made for her. She had to explain to me why it was the answer to her prayer to be comforted, and here we see how that which is a sign for one person means nothing for someone else. So it is with the Scriptures. God does not talk to me directly in each passage; some words are obscure for me, I do not grasp the hidden significance. But at other times, maybe years later, those same words have a great message for me.

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A friend of mine was sitting in the garden feeling low, as her health was declining. She was born with a heart defect, and all her life she struggled with tiredness and lack of energy. Her faith was all-important to her, it comforted her and gave her the strength and courage to battle on. But on this day her faith seemed to have gone and she felt utterly depressed and lonely. Suddenly a sparrow landed close to her feet and dropped a little stone in front of her. Then it flew off again. At once she thought of the Apostle Peter who had said to Christ: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", and the answer of the Lord to him, that on this statement of faith that He is God, He would build His Church. So Christ called him Peter, in Greek "Petros", because on the rock, in Greek "petra", of this statement of faith, which was inspired by God the Father, Christ would build His Church. Her faith welled up within her, and she thanked God for this reminder from the little stone dropped by the sparrow.

After all, wasn't the Prophet Elijah fed by ravens, who dropped food in front of him while he was hiding from the wrath of Jezabel? In the lives of the saints there are many stories of animals helping the saints. Thus concerning the holy Hieromartyr Pyotr, metropolitan of Krutitsa, Fr. Vladimir Rusak writes that one dark night, while he was being taken by train to exile in Siberia, "he was thrown out of the railway carriage while it was still moving (apparently more than one bishop perished in this way). It was winter, and the metropolitan fell into a snow-drift as if into a feather-bed, so that he did not hurt himself. With difficulty he got out of it and looked round. There was a wood, and snow, and no signs of life. For a long time he walked over the virgin snow, and at length, exhausted, he sat down on a stump. Through his torn rasson the frost chilled him to the

bone. Sensing that he was beginning to freeze to death, the metropolitan started to read the prayers for the dying.

"Suddenly he saw a huge bear approaching him.

"The thought flashed through his mind: 'He'll tear me to pieces'. But he did not have the strength to run away. And where could he run?

"But the bear came up to him, sniffed him and peacefully lay down at his feet. Warmth wafted out of his huge bear's hide. Then he turned over with his belly towards the metropolitan, stretched out his whole length and began to snore sweetly. Vladyka wavered for a long time as he looked at the sleeping bear, then he could stand the cold no longer and lay down next to him, pressing himself to his warm belly. He lay down and turned first one and then the other side towards the beast in order to get warm. Meanwhile the bear breathed deeply in his sleep, enveloping him in his warm breath.

"When the dawn began to break, the metropolitan heard the distant crowing of cocks: a dwelling-place. He got to his feet, taking care not to wake up the bear. But the bear also got up, and after shaking himself down plodded off towards the wood.

"Rested now, Vladyka went towards the sound of the cocks and soon reached a small village. After knocking at the end house, he explained who he was and asked for shelter, promising that his sister would pay the owners for all trouble and expenses entailed. They let Vladyka in and for half a year he lived in this village. He wrote to his sister, and she arrived. But soon after her other 'people' in uniform also came..."

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When the Second World War broke out, a Jewish family who were in the diamond business in Antwerp, Belgium, escaped through France and arrived in Java. When they arrived in Batavia (now Djakarta), the father of the family went to the Netherlands Trading Bank and asked for a large loan to start up a diamond trading business. However, since the bank was unable to check his credentials (Belgium had already been overrun by the Germans), his request was refused.

Someone in Djakarta told this man to go to Bandung, where my father was bank manager, and ask him. My father listened and, following his intuition, decided to take the risk and give him a large loan. So the family lived in Bandung, and one of the sons was in my class at school.

Then the Dutch entered into war with Japan. We were occupied, and the Japanese built camps for both men and women and children. My father was immediately put into solitary confinement, but was released temporarily in order to liquidate his banking business. While he was doing this, he entrusted a Chinese clerk who worked for the bank to go and take letters to some rich Chinese clients of his. In the letters my father asked his clients to lend money to the bank so that money could be smuggled into the camps in

order to bribe the guards to buy food and medicine for the bank's employees. Of course, my father signed on behalf of the bank that he would repay the money with interest after the war. The lenders agreed, and they would come to the prisons in Bandung, hand over the money and take with them my father's receipt.

As the Dutch were not allowed to leave the towns in which they were living, my father had to trust a Chinese clerk to do this work. One day, he went to the Japanese and said to them: "How much money will you give me, if I give you the name of the Dutchman who is borrowing money from the Chinese and has it smuggled into the women's camps." The Japanese Kampetai paid him a sum of money, and one day a Kampetai officer unexpectedly drove into the drive of our house in his Kampetai car. We dreaded the look of those cars, which were all of the same model and were khaki-coloured. My father was not at home, and my mother and I wondered why the Kampetai had come to get him. As they had taken out car, my father had to cycle to and from his bank, the Netherlands Trading Company. About half an hour later he came home looking very nervous. The officer in the meantime had been playing the piano, which made him less threatening to us. My mother, being a White Russian who had escaped from Russia during the First World War via Siberia and Vladivostock, spoke in Russian to my father and asked: "What have you done?" My father, who is Dutch but had learned to speak Russian when he met my mother in Shanghai, replied that he thought it had to do with his smuggling money into the camps. And he explained briefly how he had engaged a Chinese clerk to help him in this. The Japanese officer told my father in the Malayan language to pick up his suitcase. So my father hurried to the bedroom and said goodbye there to my mother and me. I was in tears, but my mother stayed calm and blessed him with the sign of the cross in the Orthodox fashion, asking God to give him strength and courage.

When we came back into the living-room, where the officer was playing the piano, he said in perfect Russian: "Kiss your wife and daughter now." Of course, it was a great shock to us that he knew Russian. Apparently he was from Korea, where many can speak Russian. My father told him that we had already said goodbye to each other, but he insisted that we should embrace and kiss each other once more in front of him.

The next day, my father was led handcuffed to the station on the way to Buitenzorg, where the headquarters of the Kampetai was. Our woman cook had gleaned from Malayan servants working at the Kampetai in Bandung that my father was being sent at 6 a.m. the following day to Buitenzorg.

Of course, my mother and I went to the station to see him and to wave to him. But suddenly my mother saw a Kampetai car draw up and my father handcuffed to a Japanese officer. I wanted to scream, but my mother put her hand over my mouth and pulled me behind a thick pillar so that my father could not see us. I sobbed, it was such a humiliating, dreadful sight to see my father, who was by nature a very gentle person, treated in this way. My mother whispered: "He must not see us. That would make it worse for him. And if we survive after the war never tell him that we saw him like this." We peeped around the massive pillar and saw him being taken into the waiting train, which left very soon afterwards.

We both wept on the way home and when we told our cook what we had seen, she also wept. The whole day I thought of my father, wondering what would happen to him in Buitenzorg. At night I could not sleep. I was thinking how unjust and cruel it was to be treated like a criminal for having helped women in the camps buy medicine and food from the guards in order to stay alive. Of course, the guards did not know that the money had been smuggled in, and at first thought that the women had taken it with them into the camps. Suddenly I saw in my mind the still, holy figure of Christ with thorns on His head, a purple robe around His shoulders, and a reed as His sceptre in His hand. I saw the soldiers bending their knees in mockery to Christ and spitting in His holy face, although he was no one less than God our Creator. I saw how they scourged Him, not knowing at that moment that they would do the same to my father's back using whips to which corks were attached. They would beat him until he lost consciousness, his whole back full of wounds.

While I was thinking of Christ, I remembered His words asking the people why they were treating Him like that as He had done only good works among them: healing the sick, resurrecting the dead, casting out demons. Thousands and thousands of people were healed by Him and learned from Him about God and His Kingdom. I felt a deep awe well up in my heart for this marvellous God, Whose solidarity with men proves His infinite Love, Passion and Mercy on us who He created. What had happened to my father was involuntary suffering, and I prayed that he would be brave and survive. But Christ's suffering was a voluntary acceptance of injustice inflicted on Him by man. The Fathers of the Church call it the mad Passion of God for man, and indeed it is a Love which is incomprehensible for the human mind and heart. What struck me, too, was His humility in putting up with such outrageous treatment from us feeble men, who totally depend on God's Grace for our very existence and for the opportunity to share Eternity with Him in His Kingdom or to choose to live in hell without Him. My soul started to tremble, because I sensed a great tragedy in creation. For God to be utterly humiliated for the sake of man, to die for us like a criminal, naked on the Cross, means that something infinitely precious is at stake, the salvation of the souls of men.

After the war we heard from my father that the Japanese had hung him upside down, lowered him into a well, pulled him up again and then put questions to him. Then they whipped him and brought him, unconscious, to hospital. For many days he was critically ill with wound fever. But when he regained consciousness, he was told by the other men in the ward that his life had been saved. They told him that in the bed next to him there lay a Mr. Stolz, the diamond merchant, who used to slip out of bed several times a day, when the nurse was not around, and press a Sibasol pill into his mouth. Sibasol was an American medicine against wound fever, and to get hold of these Sibasol tablets was like finding pure gold. So my father's life was saved by this man whom he had helped some years before with a loan from the bank.

To me this again proves the activity of angels, who watch over us and help us by the Will of God. God created the angels before the material universe and man for the purpose of executing His Divine Will, and some orders of angels minister to man. Sadly there are

also the fallen angels who chose to be with Satan, the adversary of God and man. Although the demons do believe in God, they disobey Him.

Faith in God is not sufficient for salvation unless the works of faith follow, because that show the response to the Will of God. Faith without works is dead, like a stillborn baby. It is like the lamps of the five virgins who had faith in God, but not the oil, which one receives from God the Holy Spirit when one adds works to faith in one's life. The works of faith are often not understood by Christians. Humanists do a lot of good works in the eyes of men, but they are not counted as good in God's eyes because they are not done out of love for Christ or in response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. In some cases, the Holy Spirit tells us to sit still and do nothing except pray and meditate on the Scriptures. This is always needed as a preparation for ourselves as well as others. Besides, praying and reflecting on the word of God are serious works which take energy and time. To be baptized into the Holy Church is the first good work we do when we become believers. To partake of the Holy Mysteries of the Eucharist, communion with the Body and Blood of Christ, is another good work. For Christ said: "Unless you eat of My Body and drink of My Blood, there is no eternal life in you" (John 6).

John 6.66 reveals that at the moment He said these words the multitude left Christ, as they could not accept their gravity. Only the Apostles remained. They moved forwards towards the Mysteries even though they could not at that moment understand how they could eat of His Body and drink of His Blood, they accepted with faith that would become possible somehow. Later on at the Last Supper Christ revealed the Mystery, that just as a pelican feeds her young with blood from her heart, so God adopts us as His children by sharing with us His Divinity. The Body of Christ acts as an anti-body against the poison within us since the fall. It cleanses us from sin, sanctifies and eventually deifies us if we respond and grow nearer and nearer to God in our life on earth.

For this we need the True Church founded by Christ, of which He has said: "The gates of hell [i.e. heresies] shall not prevail against her". Only in the True Church can we receive the sacraments of Baptism, Christmation, Communion, Confession and Unction.

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My husband lost his mother unexpectedly. She was 78 years old and had never been ill. In the evening, at about 7 p.m., when she had gone to her other son's house to babysit for them, she suddenly said that she was not feeling well. They opened the window to let in some air, and while my sister-in-law went to the kitchen to make her a cup of tea, she died. The dog in the kitchen suddenly looked up in the air and uttered a strange sound while bowing its head. While my sister-in-law was looking in surprise at the dog, wondering what it had seen and why it was making this strange, high-pitched sound, her husband burst into the kitchen, saying: "Mummy has died." Apparently, a heart valve had exploded. They phoned my husband, who, dazed and under shock, immediately drove to his brother's house.

The days that followed were very hard for him. He regretted bitterly that he had never thanked his mother for all she had done for him. He regretted that he had never told her how much he loved her, that he had not been present at her death to give her a last kiss.

He became slightly embittered and started to doubt in the goodness of God. He even may have begun to doubt in the existence of God and the life after death. He aired his doubts with me, and his face looked drained. He asked me why God did not send him proof that his mother was alive. I told him that his anger and resentment against God were the fruits of pride and were preventing God from revealing something to him. I reminded him that we had to humble ourselves before the Mystery of God and could not "demand" things from Him. It is always in the face of death that we come to ourselves. There is no way in which we can recall a soul that has gone to God, its rightful Owner. Suddenly we realize that God is the only link between us and the dead loved one. Only by God's Grace can we be reunited again, depending on whether we have found grace with Him.

Almost a year went by, and the birthday of his husband's mother came. He was very quiet that morning. His bitterness and rebellion had changed into a very sad acceptance, but without the joyful hope of ever seeing her again. That evening when he came home, there was a stillness of joy in him. I noticed, but did not ask any questions. Then, late at night, he told me that while he had been driving to work, wondering whether his mother was still alive, a voice within him said that she was alive and that he would have the proof when he entered his office and heard his mother's favourite tune, from Charlie Chaplin's *Limelight*, on the radio.

He got a shock, he had never known an inner voice telling him anything. He did not dare to go to the office out of fear of being disappointed, but by the time it was 11 a.m. he decided he had to go, and that he would turn the radio on. He liked to have music on in the background.

However, when he actually entered the room, his secretary was just switching on the radio. He quickly told her: "Switch it off." She looked in surprise at him, and the voice on the radio announced that *Limelight* would be played. He then quickly told her not to switch it off, and listened to his mother's favourite tune being played. He cried within himself and thanked God.

Ten years later, my father-in-law died. He claimed to be an atheist and ridiculed believers. One day when he was in our house, I told him about an interesting survey I had read. The survey had asked a great number of people whether, among their dead friends or loved ones, any had had a special wish with regard to the manner of their death, and what their hobbies had been. To the surprise of the survey, many people die in circumstances very close to their heart. For example, golfers who are obsessed with golf often have a fatal heart attack on the golf-course. Women devoted to their family are often granted to die with their families around them. Monks and nuns often die in prayer. My father-in-law became very angry and began shouting that it was absolute nonsense, sheer coincidence, etc. He was 87 years old and his life was always centred on cricket. He would

be glued to the radio listening to cricket matches, and of course watched cricket on TV. He never had time to visit the family and was a cricket-bore, going over countless matches in detail to anyone who wanted to listen.

Two weeks after this outburst against the survey, his landlady phoned us up to tell us that he had died from a heart-attack. My husband rushed to his flat and when he came home he told me that they had found him in prostration in front of the TV, which was still on. The doctor thought that he had had a massive heart-attack which had thrown him from the armchair onto the floor. The night before there had been a sports programme about a cricket match being played in Australia!

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This happened to my son, who is a 25-year-old officer with the 10th Gurkha regiment, in September, 1992. He was on leave and had just returned from a holiday on the continent, in Corsica. I had had three phone calls from the Gurkhas in Aldershot asking for him and stressing that he had to catch a plane to Hong Kong on September 5, as a ticket from Hong Kong to Nepal had already been booked for him. If he arrived too late in Hong Kong he would miss the connection to Nepal.

Since he returned from holiday on the morning of September 5, it was cutting things very fine, and he was very worried about catching a plane in time. He phoned the airport and rushed off as there was still a vacant seat on the plane to Hong Kong. He had #180 with him as that is the usual price for officers, the usual price being #600.

When it was his turn to buy a ticket and check in, the girl told him that she could not sell him a ticket at the reduced officers' rate unless he had a special form signed by the authority which issued the form. He was very upset because he had neither #600 nor his cheque book, and he knew he would be punished if he did not arrive on time.

At this point a voice behind him said: "What's the problem? Can I help?" He told my son and the girl that he "happened" to work in the office in which these forms were issued. He also "happened" to have a spare form on him and he also "happened" to have the authority to sign it!

So my son was able to buy the ticket for £180, and caught his plane on time.

If one tries to work out mathematically the chance of all these circumstances coming together, the result is astounding. If the man had been standing at the end of the queue or in front of my son, he would have missed the conversation and would not have offered to help. Three other circumstances also had to fall in place: the man had to be working in that particular office, he had to have a spare copy of the necessary form, and he had to have the authority to sign it. Before setting off on his journey, my son had prayed with our priest for a safe journey and for protection in the months ahead. He wrote me a letter telling me what had happened and asking me to tell the priest that his prayers had certainly helped.

To me, the coincidence of all these events must, again, have been arranged by angels.

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This year I had a student living in our house. He became very interested in the True Christian Faith of the Apostles and therefore in the Early Church. Like so many young people today, he was spiritually starved, and had been searching in many directions - esoteric religions, Madame Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, etc. He suddenly realized that the Kingdom of God is not like a castle on a mountain-top which can be reached by various routes. He had in his room a large icon of Christ the Pantocrator. Suddenly it dawned on him that Christ nobody less than God Who took on flesh in the womb of the Virgin and became man, that he was in fact both God and Man in one Person. He was very moved and excited by this. He was an Anglican who had been to boarding school, where he had been taught a lot about Hinduism and all their gods, as well as other religions, but he had not been taught the Gospel of Christ in any depth. When I used to quote the words of Christ to him, it was all news to him.

He at once understood that the Kingdom of God is not on top of a mountain, but is a going into another dimension and that there is only one Way into it through God Himself, through Christ. He also understood that the Door to the Kingdom is again God, Who having become Man is like a Door with two sides. One side faces the outer world, created being, while the inner side faces the Uncreated Nature of God. Through His Humanity He is one with man, and calls Himself the Son of Man, while through His Divinity He is one with God and is called the Son of God. He is the Word begotten of the Thought, the Father, hidden in the Divine Darkness of the Godhead. The student suddenly understood that the Holy Spirit is also God and is sent out by the Thought, the Father, when the Word, the Son, wants to speak. The Word has to be carried by the Breath ("Ruach", one of the names of the Holy Spirit). The Trinity became for him an exciting discovery, and it was obvious to me that he had received the Holy Spirit in order to be able to understand all this without difficulty. He discovered that God is also likened to Fire: the Flame of the Fire itself (the Father), the Light (the Son) and the Warmth (the Holy Spirit). So there are three Hypostases (Persons) in God, but He is One God, just as one cannot separate the flame, light and warmth from a fire.

The student asked to become a catechumen and be prepared for baptism in the Orthodox Church. (Orthodox Baptism is carried out by three full immersions, and is followed by Holy Chrismation.) I warned him that he would encounter spiritual warfare and that good angels would help him if he remained earnest. One evening he went with his friends to a nightclub in Guildford, and as he was very low in cash at that time he suggested jokingly to his friends that one could make a lot of money by stealing a wheel from a sports car and selling it to a dealer. His friends listened and made various comments. At midnight they all left the nightclub and went to their cars. As his friends' cars were at the front of the car park, he said goodbye to them before setting off for his own car, which was at the back. He got into his car and started it. Immediately he felt a bump. He got out and saw to his astonishment that vandals had not just slashed the rear wheel of his car,

but had even taken the trouble to unscrew the whole wheel. No other car had been touched. The student had to take a taxi home. The next day he spent hours finding a new tyre and bolts. He thought that God had allowed the young vandals to receive this suggestion in order to teach him not to foster thought of theft. He felt ashamed and humiliated.

This same student recently went to work in Germany, from where he wrote the following: "I have again had a few experiences which have served to strengthen my faith and also taught me a few lessons. The first occurred during a Disco two weeks ago. Because of my music taste I am (or was) always partial to a certain type of dancing known as Rekking. It basically involves the dancers stomping around, shoving each other about and occasionally letting loose a few blows. On this occasion I began dancing and was irritated by my cross swinging out of my shirt and in the air around my head. I decided to remove it, and as soon as it was in my pocket I was immediately set upon by 3 Spanish men, dragged to the ground and attacked. It didn't last long but I suffered a cracked bone in my wrist and grazing to my face. Since then I have abstained from this type of dancing. Last week, though, my friend tried it against my advice, and the cross which he was wearing disappeared! Most Christians would be grateful for such evidence of God's work. However, I in a greedy state was not, and the following week I foolishly asked the Mother of God for another sign to strengthen my faith. I duly received it the next morning..."

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A young friend of mine wanted to commit suicide. He was a student at the University of Utrecht in Holland. His parents lived in Aerdenhout. It was in the heart of winter. He decided to travel home and throw himself off a bridge in the evening, when it would be dark. That same evening his father said to his wife: "I'm going for a walk," which was a very unusual thing for him to do. His wife expressed surprise, but he said: "I just feel like it". He walked from his house in the direction of the bridge, and suddenly he saw the figure of a man at the edge of the bridge who looked like his son in build and was about to jump into the ice-cold water. He started to run, shouting his son's name. The man on the bridge hesitated, recognizing his father. Then he fell into his arms sobbing, and told him why he had intended to take his life. He wrote it down for me, and told me how God had been merciful and sent angels to stop him committing suicide.

Some years later he died young from legionnaire's disease. But he had repented and was going to leave the Protestant church and become Orthodox. He found that the Protestant churches were more like synagogues in which one sings hymns, prays and listens to a sermon, but not like the Temple in which through worship one grew into the mysteries of God. He looked first at the Roman Catholic church, but could not agree with various Roman dogmas, such as papal infallibility. Then he studied Orthodoxy, was moved by the Divine Liturgy and came to agree with the Orthodox dogmas.

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When I was in Boston, USA, I heard about a woman who was living in the same Convent of the Holy Nativity where I was staying as a guest. She was a Greek widow with a twelve-year-old son - her only child, to whom she was very devoted. He was a very nice boy, but weak in character and easily influenced by whatever company he happened to be keeping. At the age of 12 he had cancer of the liver, which was so advanced that the doctors, despairing of helping him, sent him home to die.

One day his breathing became slower and slower, and his mother sensed that he was dying. She went up to the window and raised her fist to Heaven, saying: "If You dare to let him die..." She went back to her son's bed expecting to see him die, but to her surprise she noticed that his breathing became gradually easier. As the days passed, to the surprise of everyone, the boy not only survived but his liver showed not a trace of cancer. It was a miracle, and the newspapers carried the story.

The widow was thrilled, but deep in her soul she wondered how God could have been frightened of her and therefore allowed her son to live. But she pushed these thoughts from her mind and rejoiced - at first. Some years later, however, when the boy was 15 years old, she noticed money disappearing from her purse and objects disappearing from her home. When she questioned the boy, he was rude, denied everything and daily became more and more difficult to live with. He was in a group of bad youngsters, and his love for his mother seemed to have gone. Instead, he resented her and even seemed to hate her.

Night after night she lay in bed worrying about him, and one night she said in despair: "I wish you were dead!" As soon as she had said this, she remembered how she had "dared" God with her fist raised, and she started sobbing in despair. Some weeks later, the TV news reported that an old woman had been battered to death in her home by a group of youths. Her heart became heavy with the premonition that her son had been among them. Then there was a knock at the door, and she opened it to a policeman who asked her where her son was. She said that she did not know. He told her that he was suspected of having been a member of the gang. Hours went by in the torture of uncertainty, and finally the police came again, this time to tell her that her son had been one of the gang, that he and the others had been chased by the police, and that he had leapt from a wall and broken his neck. He was dead.

His mother is now living the rest of her life repenting of her blasphemy and shedding tears on behalf of her son. She tells everyone: "God loved my son more than I did, and it was for the sake of the salvation of his soul that He was going to allow him to die at the age of 12 years before corruption would get hold of him. I doubted in the Goodness, Love and Wisdom of God. I dared Him, and for the sake of the salvation of my own soul He granted me my wish to prove that His love is greater than mine. The fate of my son now depends on my tears of contrition. Maybe he repented at the last minute and cried out to God. I shall never know whether he was too hardened. I can only plead with God to have mercy on our souls."

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My mother was a White Russian who fled from the Bolsheviks after the First World War and the Revolution through Siberia to Vladivostok. She was a member of the Russian Orthodox Church, and once she became an emigre she joined the Russian Church in Exile in China. She knew the saintly Bishop John Maximovich in Shanghai. My mother had always been a very difficult person. Already as a child, she was self-willed, and her father decided to send her to the Smolny boarding-school in Saint Petersburg. My mother either loved a person or hated him, nothing in between. When she (rightly or wrongly) suspected a person, she would not alter her opinion. The result was that people either loved her or hated her. Nobody could remain indifferent to her, just as she was a stranger to indifference. The same applied to her political views. She loved politics, and would talk about it passionately, looking at the issues from all angles. She loved playing bridge and was very good at it. While we were living in Java, she took part in many bridge competitions with men. She was good in art, needlework and all sorts of other crafts, and she was a good mechanic. She was prone to say to me: "You can do anything if you want. You simply haven't got the will to master it, and that's why you can't do it." She was a very proud woman who found it impossible to say "sorry", and would hardly ever admit to having been at fault. She would say something like: "Anyone can make a mistake," and in that way gloss over her error. She often infuriated me, but I loved her intensely because of her great love and unselfishness towards me. I admired her courage and her powerful will. Never will I forget the ardour with which she spoke about Christ. She worshipped Him and only when she talked about God would she become humble and childlike. She venerated the Mother of God as the one who made it possible for God to become man. She quoted Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow: "When God in the beginning created by His mighty word: 'Let there be...', whole worlds visible and invisible came into being. But how my heart trembles when I think of the utterance of the divine Miriam: 'So be it', which brought the mighty God into the world." For my mother, Christ, being God as well as Man, conquered death for us by His glorious Death, while the Holy Virgin is like His Body (which is also the Church) through whom He acts. She petitions as the Church does our behalf, and He acts. He is the Head and she is the body. She glorifies Him through her faithful obedience, and He crowns her with beauty and glory. My mother often said to me: "Never let go of Christ, or else you will become a lost soul. In all the pains of life hold on to Christ." Once I dreamt that I was in a ship and a storm broke out. I clung to the mast so as not to be swept overboard, and when the storm was over and I looked up I saw the mast was in the shape of a cross. As my mother always had strong views, black or white, yes or no, never "grey" or "maybe", she detested sects, heretics and all kinds of modern theologians who seem wiser than the apostles and know the mysteries of God better than they. "How dare they try to improve on the teaching of the apostles, who were taught by God Himself?!" she would say.

Once, as she felt that her life drawing to an end, she said thoughtfully to me that she was afraid that the Kingdom of God would not be granted to her, as she had been such a difficult woman. She had lacked gentleness and patience with people she disliked, she had often been rude to people and shown scorn, anger, disgust, etc. She said sadly to me: "My only hope is the Mother of God, that she will plead for me. I do not deserve to find grace with God. I've always been proud and find it very hard to bow my head before God

and accept His Will. I pray always to the Mother of God of Succour (or the Passion) to plead for me, because I love Christ my God with all my soul and I know the Mother of God is exalted above the seraphim and cherubim because she bore God under her heart. Imagine carrying the God of creation in your womb! Such honour, such glory. She is very close to God and He listens to her as at the wedding in Cana..." This was the last serious conversation we had.

I had an icon of the Mother of God of the Passion in the corner of our living-room with a light burning in front of it. Our living-room is L-shaped, and my mother was sleeping in the shorter part of the L. As she had broken her hip, we had put a bed for her downstairs. One evening when I was tucking her up in bed, she suddenly exclaimed: "There is a fire in the other room". Since it was June, there was no open fire burning. I looked over my shoulder and saw that the larger part of the living-room was full of light, an orange light like that of an open fire. I rushed to the room and saw, to my amazement, that the little light in front of the icon of the Mother of God of the Passion was giving out this incredible light. Not only did it light up all the icons in the corner, but the whole room was alight. It was just a simple little oil-lamp which usually lit up only the face of the Mother of God. I turned to my mother and told her that it was the lampada (oil-lamp). The thought went through my mind: "My mother is going to die. This is a message of warning from the Mother of God. I looked at my mother and wondered what she was thinking. I had the feeling she was having the same thought. I asked her whether I should blow out the light as she could see it from her bed and perhaps it kept her awake. But she said quietly: "Leave it, I want to look at it." In the morning when I came to her the light was burning as strongly as the night before. I topped up the lamp with oil; to my surprise I did not have to change the wick. For three days and three nights it burned with this amazing radiance, needing only topping up with oil but no new wick. A friend of ours was working in the garden. I invited him to come and see this strange light coming from a humble little lamp in the icon corner. On the third evening my mother complained of pains in her heart. The doctor came and she was rushed to hospital before midnight. She was given oxygen and I stayed with her until 2 a.m. The danger of a heart attack seemed to have passed, and I went home. The light was out in front of the icon of the Mother of God.

Two weeks later my mother died in hospital. But she asked for a priest to come and give her absolution and commune her in the Divine Body and Blood of Christ. She also decided to leave the Russian Church Abroad, saying that it was no longer the Russian Church that she adored.

My mother was 87, and leaving the Russian Church Abroad was an enormous spiritual step for her. She had always been very proud of being a Russian and belonging to the Russian Church. But when she noticed that it had changed and did not seem to have the Grace it had before, she put Christ first. So she asked to be received into the Greek Church of the Old Calendarists in which she could recognize the voice of her Shepherd, Christ.

So she received her last Communion in the Greek Church, and she said to me: "The Church of God is above all nationalities. As long as she is true and faithful to God, she alone is the Church of God."

When an Anglican deaconess passed her bed and asked her whether she belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church, my mother (as the nurse told me) answered firmly: "No, I belong to the Greek Church, but I am Russian."

To me this light which burned so greatly is a sign that the Mother of God is pleading for my mother's soul, that she find Grace with her Son and God. She also gave my mother a warning to prepare herself to meet the Lord.

*

My mother was very attached to her step-father, who was much older than her mother. He was a surgeon in a hospital in Petrograd, and became rector of the University of Petrograd. When he was dying, the whole family stood around his bed, and my mother was overcome by fear. How would she manage to go through life without the guiding wisdom of her step-father? She suddenly pleaded with the dying man: "Please, whenever I am in danger, warn me. Promise me this." He could not speak anymore, and just closed his eyes and then opened them again. She was not sure whether it was an answer to her request and meant "yes".

He died just before the First World War broke out. After the revolution my mother fled from Russia leaving behind the whole of her family and all her securities. She did not know that all her half-brothers had been killed by the Bolsheviks.

Throughout her life, whenever she or one of us, her husband or her two daughters, were in danger, she would dream of her father the previous night. He would appear in a dream without saying anything; he would just look at her very seriously. The next morning my mother would be on her guard, and something serious would always happen. Then, about fifteen years before her death, she asked an Orthodox priest whether she had been right to ask her father to warn her during her lifetime on earth. The priest said that it had not been right and suggested that they offer up a prayer to God to release her father from this promise. My mother felt as if a burden had been taken from her heart, because secretly she had been worrying about it for many years. She realized that it is sufficient for a believer to pray to God and to ask for the help and guidance of the saints in the Church Triumphant. God chooses the ways and means, which angels and which saints will minister to us.

My mother's step-father never again appeared to her in a dream. Even when her death was approaching, she did not dream about him. Instead the light in front of the icon of the Mother of God gave her the message...

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In 1971 I visited the wonderful monastery of St. George in Deir-el-Harf outside Beirut in the Lebanon. Some Arab Orthodox young people took me there, and I was very impressed by Abbot Elias and the monks. From that time I used to write once or twice a

year to Abbot Elias, and he did the same. Then, twelve years later, I did not hear anything more, and wondered what had happened to Fr. Elias and his monastery. I had the feeling that their lives had been in danger.

Another year passed, and my husband and I went to Thessaloniki in Greece for my husband's work. When we had just arrived, I suggested that we take a bus downtown and visit some of the ancient churches. We looked at the map and as we did not know Thessaloniki at all we searched for the old town and decided to go to a certain section of it. Having arrived there, we walked through narrow little streets and decided to enter the very ancient church of St. David of Thessaloniki. When I stepped over the threshold of the door of the church, I saw two priests talking to a woman warden. Not recognizing them, she asked them (in French): "Are you Orthodox priests?" They replied: "Yes, we are, we come from the Lebanon." I could not believe my ears. I went towards them and asked: "Do you know Fr. Elias from St. George's monastery in Deir-el-Harf?" They smiled and told me that they were his monks. Then they went on to tell me that they had been forced to flee from their monastery because of the Muslims. Now they were living on Mount Athos, where they had been for three months. But they were planning to return to Damascus in a few days' time.

I asked them to tell their abbot that I was in Thessaloniki and gave them my address (we had no telephone). Two days later our bell rang. My husband went down the 64 steps to the entrance and I wondered who on earth could have come to visit us as we did not know anybody yet. Then the door opened and there was Fr. Elias and the two monks! What joy to see each other again after 13 years! We both exclaimed: "The angels have arranged this for us." We shared our thoughts and had to part again, though not spiritually. The monks said that they had suddenly decided to visit the old town. Not knowing where to go, they had decided to visit the same area that we had gone to. If I had entered the church a few minutes later I would not have heard the woman questioning them and would not have met them.

Just work the mathematical odds against all these circumstances coming together: the day, the hour and the exact minute, the same church, the warden putting the question to them (so that I should hear their answer and know that they were with Fr. Elias!). One can see that an angel suggested to my husband that we visit the old town, that we visit precisely that part of the old town and go there at about 6 p.m. And another angel suggested precisely the same to the two monks. Here we can see how the angels work together: "You get them there, and I will get them there - and at the same time." We often think we make decisions on our own. We do not realize that we have responded to suggestions from the invisible realm. We pick and choose the whole time between suggestions coming from the visible and invisible worlds.

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Some years ago, I met a very nice elderly couple. He was a Scot with a degree in mathematics from Cambridge university. His wife was also very clever, and both were members of the Fabian Society. He had held a very responsible post in the Midlands in

education. Both claimed to be atheists. He was very tall and strong, and loved giving parties, being a good host and a witty, interesting conversationalist. He was very proud of his intellect and had no time for fools, but was a loyal friend to those whom he liked. One day he discovered that I believe in Christ as my Lord and God and therefore also in His Resurrection. He was shocked, and did not conceal his disillusionment with my stupidity. Then he threw a party for his birthday and I, as usual, was invited to come. It happened to be around Easter. We were all sitting in a large circle in his drawing-room, having a finger-buffet supper. Suddenly he stood in the middle of the room, pointed his finger at me and said in a loud, mocking voice: "Do you see that young woman sitting over there? You would think she was intelligent - after all, she went to university and read maths. But you know," - a pause, and then he continued like a whiplash: "she is so stupid as to believe in that man on the Cross. To believe in God is already stupid, but to go even further and believe that that man on the Cross is God is the epitome of madness and sheer delusion. She even believes He came back from the dead with a body like ours."

There was a deadly silence in the room. Everyone had stopped talking, his wife looked perplexed. All sorts of thoughts tumbled through my mind. Should I answer him and spoil his party, get everyone mad with me for being so discourteous? But if he had been mocking my earthly father or mother in public, would I have taken it lying down, or would I have spoken up? This decided it for me: God was more important than my parents, for I owed both my being and my salvation to Him. Besides, He is also going to be Judge. This gave me courage. I got up from my chair, stood facing my host and said: "Do you realize how stupid you are?! If a little blood vessel goes in your brain, you are reduced to an imbecile. All your cleverness will have gone. Last week you told me that people who have come of age do not need to believe in a father-figure like God. Well, the opposite is the case: people who have come of age know how helpless they are in life with its illnesses, all sorts of sorrows and death. They admit they need God to survive. It is you who are still infantile at the age of 85 years. I'm going home now. You've mocked the Son of God in public. May God have mercy on your soul!"

He looked dumbfounded, and his wife pleaded with me to stay. No one else said a word. They were looking at their glasses. I think most of them were embarrassed. I decided to stay and sat down for the rest of the evening, while he gave me thunderous looks.

A few weeks later, his wife told me that their only child, a son whom they called Samuel (fancy giving him the name of an Old Testament prophet!) had become a Christian and been baptized while at university. They were deeply shocked, seeing this as treason.

Imagine my horror when a little later she again phoned up to tell me that her husband had had a stroke and was now in hospital. She told me that he did not recognize anybody anymore, and had become as weak as a kitten. When he came home, I went to visit him and could hardly recognize him. He looked frail, stooped swaying over a stick, and did not know who I was. He did not know his wife either, and when she fed him, the food kept dropping out of his mouth. A lump came into my throat and tears rolled down

my cheeks. I said to his wife: "I am so sad to see him like this." She nodded and tenderly nursed him.

Worse was to follow. Some weeks later, Samuel phoned me to say that a terrible thing had happened to his father. He happened to be visiting them when suddenly his father rose to his feet with strength and power, his eyes became wild, and he hurled a heavy object at his wife, shrieking that he was going to kill her and his son. He had gone raving mad. Sam took his mother's hand, rushed to the telephone in the hall and dialled 999. His father chased them, and they locked themselves in the bedroom, pushing the wardrobe against the door. His father, who suddenly had superhuman strength, tried to break the door open. Thank God, the ambulance came just in time and they gave him an injection. He was then put in a strait-jacket and rushed to Holloway.

I was shocked and decided to visit him there. His wife could not drive a car, and I did not think of offering to go to their house (which was in a different town) and give her a lift. I presumed her son would take her. When I arrived at Holloway they told me that he was very ill with double pneumonia. Even so, he was so dangerous that he slept in a padded cell by himself and a nurse had to come with me. He opened first one iron door, and then, to my horror, another. This made me very frightened, and I thought of Sam's dreadful story of his father's superhuman strength and desire to kill him. We stood at his bedside and I thought he was sleeping. Suddenly he opened his eyes. They did not look mad, he seemed to recognize me and a smile flickered over his lips. He whispered: "It's you," and heaved himself up. I thought he was going to attack me and jumped backwards. The nurse was watching carefully. Then I saw an expression of pain come over his face, he closed his eyes and fell back onto the pillow. I can't remember whether I said loudly to him: "I will pray that God may have mercy on you." But I don't think I said it loudly, only inwardly, because I was afraid of his contempt.

Outside the doors, the nurse said to me: "We must warn his wife. He is suddenly lucid and he obviously recognized you. He is dying." I told the nurse that I had backed away out of fear and that he had understood, but that I now believed that that he had wanted to give me a last kiss. He nodded and said: "There was no wild anger in his face, just a gentleness." I was so upset, I was shivering from nerves and did not ask the nurse to take me back again to give him a last kiss. I have often repented of this lack of charity on my part, and have asked God to forgive me. The next day his wife phoned me up in tears to tell me that he had died shortly after I had seen him. She had been too late.

At the cremation I saw all their friends. His best friend with his sister, both believers in Christ, came up to me: "What a drama, worse than a Chekhov play!" We mentioned his last birthday-party, and his friend said solemnly: "We can only hope and pray that he repented at the last hour and asked God for forgiveness." His wife was broken-hearted. She suffered from diabetes, and it was her late husband that always took care that she gave herself insulin injections.

Only a few more months had passed before Samuel was on the phone to tell me that he had found his mother in a coma. She was rushed to hospital where they had to

amputate one of her legs as far as the knee. I visited her there. She was very brave, a totally unselfish woman. She did not talk about herself or her husband, and only asked me about my family.

When I left she said quietly: "I now believe there is a God." I wanted to cry and said: "Yes, and our God is full of love and mercy. Even Judas could have been forgiven if he had turned to Christ and asked for it. Sadly he had lost hope for himself and hanged himself. It takes humility on our part to accept the Humility of God. We can be harder on ourselves than God is. This is disguised pride."

I told her how once as a fifteen-year-old I had had words with my father, whom I loved very much. I was his only daughter. I can't even remember what it was about, but I know I said hard things to him. Afterwards I felt sick with a mixture of shame and hurt at having said these hard words. There was suddenly a rift between us, a great chasm, and we were like strangers politely making conversation. Instead of the closeness and the laughter we shared before, the warmth and the love, it was now all very cold, polite, correct and icy.

Then, a few days later, I noticed my father looking lovingly at me, and there was a pleading warmth in his voice. What I had not realized was that he, too, missed our close relationship, and that he, too, was suffering, although he was the innocent party. He then made it clear to me that he would take the blame and was not expecting me to apologize. All he wanted was that I return to him with my soul and be loving again. I felt deeply moved, then irritation entered my heart and I wrestled with my thoughts and feelings: "Why should you take the blame when it was my fault. I won't accept that!" But he waited patiently, and said nothing more. And I realized that unless I swallowed my pride, there could be no reconciliation. I suddenly knew that he had a greater love for me than I had for him, and that the one who has the greater love makes the move. I came to him from behind, put my arms round him and whispered: "Sorry, I love you."

She smiled and understood. I think she already knew in her heart how compassionate God is and she had a still, peaceful joy in her. This was the last time I saw her as her son took her to the Midlands to live close to him and his wife. A year later Sam phoned to say that they had had to amputate his mother's leg and that she had died during the operation...

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A woman friend of mine became very concerned by the lack of Apostolic Faith in the Anglican Church. She was born with a defect in her heart, and all her life had had to take things easy. She was very intelligent and loved to study the Scriptures and be theologically sound.

When I met her, she was casting her spiritual eyes towards Roman Catholicism, but she could not take some of the Roman dogmas, e.g. the infallibility of the Pope. She had a great veneration for the Holy Virgin, but could not accept the Roman dogma of the

Immaculate Conception of the Virgin by her parents Joachim and Anna. When she met me she also got to know the Orthodox Church and her dogmas for the first time. I told her that the official title of the Orthodox Church, as of the Roman Church, was the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. But after the Great Schism of 1054 the popular titles for these two Churches became: the "Orthodox", i.e. "right believing" or "right worshipping" Church, and the Roman or Papist or Latin Church. The title "Orthodox" does not mean that the Orthodox are self-righteous, but simply that they belong to the Church which has kept the right faith of the Apostles and is Catholic and Holy because God the Holy Spirit dwells in her and gives her the Divine Mysteries of the sacraments. I explained to her that England had been a great apostolic country, one of the earliest to be visited by the Apostles, and that until the Great Schism the Church in the East and the West had been for the most part undivided. Besides the Pope or Patriarch of Rome, there had also been the Pope or Patriarch of Alexandria, and the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem. Moscow became a patriarchate in the sixteenth century. The great saints of Britain before the schism are still commemorated by the Orthodox: St. David of Wales, St. Patrick of Ireland, St. Columba of Scotland, St. Cuthbert of England, etc. England had an especially large number of women saints.

The schism took place in 1054, when the legates of Pope Leo IX went to Constantinople and placed a bull on the altar of Hagia Sophia declaring that the Orthodox were excommunicated because they used leavened bread and not unleavened wafers in the Divine Liturgy (although Christ used leavened bread at the Last Supper). A few years later, Pope Gregory VII convened a council in Rome which declared that the Pope was the universal bishop and above all judgement, and that everyone had to kiss his feet. Shock waves rippled through the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of the East. Nearly five hundred years before, when Rome had been strong in the Apostolic Faith and a bulwark against heresy, the Patriarch of Alexandria had offered Pope Gregory I the title of ecumenical or universal bishop. But he rejected this in horror, saying that any "universal bishop" would be "the forerunner of the Antichrist". So one can imagine the consternation when, nearly five hundred years later, the Pope called himself not only universal bishop but also above all judgement (i.e. infallible).

My friend Pam loved the notorious branch theory, according to which the three branches of the Church are the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, all being rooted in the True Vine and together forming the Holy Church founded by Christ in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Unfortunately, however, the Anglican Church was not founded until the sixteenth century, and is not at all the same as the Great Old Church of England before the schism. The Great Church of England was forced into submission to the heretical papacy after the Norman invasion of 1066. The present Anglican Church is an offshoot of the heretical Roman papacy, and her first bishops received their orders from Rome. In other words, they were not canonical bishops and had no true apostolic succession.

Since she was very intelligent, Pam wanted to read *The Rudder*, which includes the 85 Canons of the Holy Apostles and all the canons of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. Having read these canons, she was forced to agree that the confession of the Anglican Church was

not in harmony with them. Her great problem was that one of the two anathemas hurled by the Roman and Orthodox Churches against each other had to be invalid. She agreed with the Orthodox dogmas, but was still attached to Roman cults, such as those of the Sacred Heart, Fatima, Lourdes, etc. She had difficulty in understanding how a man or woman could become a saint in a heretical church, but still believed that the Roman Church had produced saints after the schism no less than the Orthodox Church.

One Sunday after lunch she phoned me and said: "If only I could be convinced that the Roman Church cannot produce true saints and visions. Then I would be received into the Orthodox Church." That afternoon I went to Sunday Vespers and prayed in front of the icon of the Mother of God "the Quick Hearer". I asked her to give Pam a sign which would convince her that there is but one True Vine. The next day Pam phoned me and told me that she and her husband had gone out the day before. On returning home she had gone into her study. On the wall there were numerous Orthodox icons, but also a picture of the Sacred Heart, of Fatima and of some Roman saints. To her amazement, all the Roman pictures were scattered on the floor. The one of the Sacred Heart, which she had attached to the wall with putty, was under her armchair with the putty on its face! I was stunned and asked her what she thought it meant. She replied: "that the Roman Catholics are not true." Pam then decided that she wanted to join the Orthodox Church.

However, her husband was not ready, so she postponed it, while ceasing to take communion in the Anglican Church. She absolutely believed in the mystery of the sacraments, but having read the Apostolic Canons she was now convinced that the Anglican Church did not have the sacraments. We talked about the parable of the True Vine in which Christ teaches that the branches which produce grapes (saints, sanctified through the sap of the True Vine, which is His Blood) are rooted in Him. But He warned that the branches which do not produce grapes will be cut off, and that a branch which has separated itself from the True Vine withers and dies. If the Roman Church and the Orthodox Church are two branches of the same True Vine, why is it that the grapes on the two branches differ so greatly? The saints of the West before the schism are very similar to the saints of the East. But the saints of the Roman Church since the schism are totally different from those of the Orthodox Church. They have certain psychic abilities, but this is very different from gifts of the Spirit. And often they display a pride which is quite incompatible with true sanctity. Thus Francis of Assisi had a vision of himself "as a sun", next to Christ "the Sun of Righteousness". This vision could not have been from God, for God never leads us to think that we are saints ("suns") on a par with Christ. In the Orthodox Church we call this kind of false vision *plani* (in Greek) or *prelest* (in Russian). It comes from the devil. St. John warns us that we should "test the spirits", i.e. visions or voices, "whether they are from God" or the devil.

Two years later, Pam's heart grew weak, and the doctor advised an operating for the replacement of a heart valve. Since I visited her every day, her husband had given me the key to the bungalow. But that day, which was the day before she went into hospital, I was not intending to visit her because her husband had said that he was going to come early from work. So I decided to go to town and do my shopping for the weekend. I turned the wheel of my car to the right to go towards the shopping-centre, but to my amazement the

wheels of my car turned to the left in the direction of Pam's house. I wondered whether I should again turn the car towards the shopping-centre, but it was as if a little voice said in my heart: "Perhaps there is no mistake, perhaps you are meant to go and see her." So I decided to make the 20 minute journey to see her.

I found her in the sitting-room in a terrible state. Her legs were like tree trunks and she could hardly walk. She couldn't talk, either; but she managed to motion towards the window with her eyes. I opened it quickly. Then she told me how to massage her heart. I thought she was on the verge of death, and while massaging her I said the Jesus Prayer aloud: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." After a few minutes her breathing improved, and she whispered to me: "I must be baptized before the night is over, because otherwise I will certainly die and old Nick (her name for the devil) will get me." I phoned her husband at the office and he hurried home. Then I returned home and phoned for an Orthodox priest to come and baptize her. He lived three hours away in Birmingham, and we could not get hold of him. So an old monk from the Russian Catacomb Church who was staying with us in Guildford, Fr. Anthony Chernov, gave her a clinical baptism that evening. The water was poured over her in the shape of a cross. There was a lovely atmosphere in the room in which the baptism took place. Pam (Mary in Holy Baptism) was smiling and radiant. Afterwards her husband took the dog for a walk. When he returned he smelt a fragrance throughout the bungalow. To his surprise, all the icons in Pam's study had become fragrant as if the Church Triumphant were rejoicing. A few days later, the priest from Birmingham came and gave her the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist.

The day after the Baptism (which was the feast of St. Simon the Zealot), to everyone's surprise, Mary was still alive. She went to St. Thomas' hospital and had the operation. She suffered very much with tubes in her throat, etc. A doctor kept vigil next to her bed. Then one evening I phoned the intensive care unit and they told me that she was very poorly and would probably not survive the night. My husband was in a monastery in Greece at that time, and I phoned to tell him. The priest decided to do an unction service for Mary. When I phoned the hospital in the morning they told me that to their great surprise Mary was still alive and had even had an access of strength during the night. I am sure that it was through the prayers of all those present at the unction service in Greece that she was helped to live a little longer on this earth.

Mary came home from hospital and lived for another two years. Then suddenly she became weak again. By that time we had a Canadian priest, Fr. Gleb Jensen, who took care of her. We went to St. Thomas' hospital, where the doctors had lost hope that she would live. She was lying in a single room, her legs were like trunks again and she could hardly speak. While I was out of the room, the priest took her confession as best he could, and then gave her communion. Then I was allowed into the room. She looked radiant, tears rolled down her cheeks, and she whispered: "I see my mother, I see my mother." I thought she meant her own mother, who had died the year before. Later I realized that she meant me as I was her godmother. There was a radiance and joy in her face that moved Fr. Gleb and myself. We did not talk at all, but looked out on the lights of London. Fr. Gleb sang some beautiful hymns to Christ and the Mother of God. The atmosphere in the little room

was one of utmost peace and beauty. Then we left her. She wanted me to stay the night with her, as she felt that her life on earth was ebbing away. I spoke to the matron, who told me to go home because she felt that Mary was not dying yet, but that it might be necessary for me to stay the following night. So I told this to Mary. And she accepted it by closing and opening her eyes.

The next morning when I went to her room, it was empty. I was shocked, but then I heard a happy voice calling me loudly: "Olga, I'm here. I'm just off for 30 minutes. Please wait for me to come back." She was sitting in a wheelchair and was being taken somewhere for a check-up or X-ray. I was dumb-founded. The matron smiled at me and said: "We are all astonished! The doctors saw her this morning, and she will be allowed home within a week. Everything is alright, her heart-beat, her blood pressure. It's a miracle!"

Half an hour later, Mary was wheeled back. She jumped off the wheel-chair and walked towards her bed. Her legs were normal, not swollen anymore. Her voice was strong and she was laughing. She told me with a radiant face that when she had received the Divine Mysteries the night before, something wonderful had happened to her. She felt Christ entering her bodily and filling her mind, soul and spirit with such joy and peace. She said to me: "Truly it is so, God is in me, and I in Him, it is too wonderful to explain. I never want to lose this again."

We continued talking - or rather, she did all the talking. She was exuberant and radiant. Then I had to go home and left as if in a dream. Her husband was about to visit her. In the early evening I got a phone-call from him. He was as dumbfounded as I. She had not told him of her joy at God's presence in her. Her great sorrow was that he was still an Anglican. In her last conversation with me she said: "I thought I could save the Anglican Church by staying for years and years within her, working from within. Then when I saw it was fruitless, God warned me and gave me a chance to be baptized in time to save myself. I was sure I could convert Ken's soul towards the truth, but I can't even save my own husband." She was worrying about him, but I reminded her that God loved Ken far more than she did, and that God would take care of Ken if he would respond to God. Perhaps he would do so after her death (which is what actually happened). After all, God tells us: "Many are called, few are chosen", because between the calling and the choosing lies the response of man. It is the Divine Will that each man should freely seek God and choose to belong to Him alone. Christ promised: "You shall seek the Truth (i.e. Christ), and the Truth (God) shall set you free." Free from what? Free from death, free from bondage to all the snares of the fallen angels. We are all under sentence of death, we are all criminals in God's eyes. But Christ, being God, can free us from the snares of the evil one. He Himself has paid the price for our deliverance by His own Blood. He has redeemed, He has paid the price for us. This was our last conversation.

The next day, which was a Saturday, Ken phoned me to say that Mary had suddenly become weak and was being rushed into the operating theatre.

The previous night I had had a dream in which I was standing in a flat field and could see the horizon in the distance. Suddenly I saw a bright light shoot down from heaven and hit the horizon. It then became a door of light in the shape of an arch. Then I woke up and understood that it was Christ Who had come down from heaven to earth, and now has Himself become the Door through Whom we enter God's Kingdom. I wondered what the dream meant, and thought of Mary.

As soon as Ken had phoned, Fr. Gleb and I left in his car for London in the hope of seeing Mary before she was wheeled into the operating theatre. When we arrived we were told that we had just missed her, so Fr. Gleb served a moleben to St. Nicholas for her outside the doors of the operating theatre. The Gospel reading was John 10, and when I heard the words: "I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved", I knew that Mary was dying at that moment and was going through the Door. I looked at my watch. When Fr. Gleb had finished the service I told him that I thought Mary had died, and why I thought that. Then my eye fell on the icon which was on the cover of the service book and got a shock. It showed Christ harrowing hell and extending His hand to those who responded to Him. It showed Christ with a mandorla around him which was the same shape as the door of light I had seen in my dream. When I came home Ken phoned me from the hospital to tell me that Mary had died during the operation. The new heart valve had been working perfectly, but the tissues around the heart had stopped functioning. I asked him when she had died. It was almost exactly the moment that Fr. Gleb had read the words: "I am the Door". The amazing thing was that two years earlier, on the day of her Baptism, the reading had also been: "I am the Door". So her entrance into the Church, the Body of Christ, had been signalled by the same reading as her entrance (as we hope and pray) into the mansions of God's Kingdom.

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When I was in Greece I met a man who told me that he had very nearly died when he was young. The doctors had given up hope. Then he had a dream in which he was told that if he went to the Garden of the Mother of God, he would be healed. In the morning he told his family about the dream. But he did not know what the Garden of the Mother of God was. Then someone said: "That is Mount Athos." So his family brought him on a stretcher to Mount Athos. In those days, 60 years ago, transport was bad in Greece. And they thought he was already dying. However, as soon as his stretcher touched Mount Athos, he suddenly recovered. This experience changed his life. He became a devout young man, married and brought up children in the fear of God. And as an old man he loved to tell the story of the miracle in his life with gratitude and joy.

*

When I was in Greece I heard from a Greek woman the following story about her sister. She came from a large family who lived in the South of Greece. One of her sisters contracted infantile paralysis, which resulted in her having a withered leg. As she grew older, this defect became more apparent, which saddened her mother. One day the father of the family suggested that they all go on a pilgrimage to Thessaloniki and visit the holy

shrine and well of St. Paraskeve outside Thessaloniki. St. Paraskeve is a woman martyr-saint who was given the gift of healing. When people would ask her her name, she would reply that her name was of no importance, and that the name they should know was that of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. She would then recite the Creed and carefully explain each article of it.

The family began by fasting for some weeks before the journey. Then they set off on a horse-drawn cart, and several days later arrived at St. Paraskeve's shrine and well. They went into the chapel to pray and ask for St. Parakeve's intercession. While they were praying the mother saw the saint coming through a side door out of the altar. She walked towards the girl and then, without touching the girl's leg, moved her hand from the top of the leg to the bottom. Under the saint's hand the leg suddenly "thickened out" and looked exactly like the other one. The mother wept for joy and as she described what she had seen the whole family rejoiced. They thanked God Who manifests His power through His saints, and then returned home.

It is God alone Who works miracles by His Grace, but He wills that men should be His co-workers. Thus in the miracle of the five loaves and two fishes, it was Christ Who worked the miracle, but the disciples played their part in petitioning and in distributing the miraculously multiplied loaves. The saints glorify God in their lives, and God in turn glorifies them by making them His co-workers in His wonderful works. As one Orthodox bishop explained, the saints are like stained glass windows that have been cleaned to allow the sun of God's Grace to shine through them. We, too, can become like the saints, because we, too, are made in the image of God; only we must cleanse the soot and grime from the windows of our souls.

*

Once, when I was a prisoner-of-war under the Japanese in Java, the Japanese transported us from one camp to another in a cattle truck. The journey lasted 38 hours. The shutters were closed, it was stiflingly hot. When people died from the heat, the train stopped and the corpses were buried along the railway track. I was very young and kept fainting and coming round again. I kept thinking that one does not have to wait for death to know what hell is: "Here on earth one can already experience the horrors of hell".

At last we arrived at our new camp - Kampong Makassar outside Batavia (now Djakarta). Exhausted, we were taken to our barracks, which were made of bamboo and were situated under coconut trees. We had no mattresses and slept on bamboo. During the night I woke up because I had to go to the toilet. I crawled, dead tired, out of my bamboo bed and made my way to the exit in search of the latrines. I remembered vaguely that they were on the right of the barracks in which we were sleeping, but it was a dark night with only a few stars shining in the sky. I had no shoes on and walked carefully on the slippery red clay, peering into the dark. Suddenly I slipped and fell into a slimey pond which stank dreadfully. Big "things" floated around my face, and it suddenly dawned on me that I had fallen into the cesspool next to the latrines. Absolute despair overcame me. This was the last straw; after all I had already gone through, I could take no more and was

going to allow myself to drown. Suddenly I heard the voice of an angel speaking to me. As far as I can remember, I heard his voice with my physical ears, and although I could not see him with my physical eyes, I saw him in my mind somewhere in the air on my right and in front of me. "Do you believe in God?" he asked. In my heart (certainly not with my mouth), I answered: "I do". Then the angel proceeded to warn me in a very stern voice that I was not allowed to take my life, and that if I did so, worse would befall me "on the other side". Whatever I could not solve here on earth in time would not be solved by my suicide, but would rather be aggravated. I certainly would not "get out of it", which had been my motivation for allowing myself to drown.

Fear took hold of me - the fear of God. I waded with my arms through the slime to the edge of the cesspool and tried to clamber out. But to my dismay there was nothing firm like a shrub or a tree to which I could cling and haul myself out. Then I thought of trying to reach the bottom of the cesspool so as to use it as a springboard from which to try and jump onto the dry ground. However, as I sank deeper and deeper I could not find the bottom. Finally in utter despair I cried out with all my soul: "Please God, help me, you can see that I'm trying to get out, but it's impossible."

At that moment I felt two fingers under each of my elbows and I was lifted up and out of the pool like a feather. In my mind I saw two very great angels, much taller than men, each of whom put a finger under each of my elbows and laid me gently on the ground. I think I fainted. When I came round, I wondered what had happened to me. Then I remembered, and wept and wept. God had saved me by sending His angels to my rescue. How wonderful is our great God, Who visits us in the cesspool of this world. Who is so great a God as our God? He is the God that worketh wonders.

*

I was 100 days in a prison under the Japanese, and the Christmas we celebrated there was the most beautiful and unforgettable in my life. 33 people entered the cell, and 13 came out alive. 18 had died and 2 had gone mad during those 3½ months. The prison was a condemned building which should have been demolished. None of the plumbing worked, so every night we slept in one inch of water. Every morning we got up wet, and had to dry ourselves in the sunshine pouring in from outside. That was why so many of us fell ill and died.

One of the prisoners was a young woman about 30 years of age who had three young children with her. She was spitting up blood and dying of tuberculosis, which she had suffered from since her childhood. She was constantly worrying about what would happen to her children after her death. We could offer no comfort; all we could do was tell her to try not to worry.

On the morning of Christmas Eve we woke up to find her lying still and smiling at us. She asked us whether we were not surprised that she was so calm and was not worrying about her children. We admitted that we had noticed a change in her. She told us that during the night, while we were asleep, she had been looking at the millions of stars in the

Milky Way which we could glimpse through the roof. (We had no ceiling above our heads, only a roof of tiles many of which were missing, so there were gaps through which we could see the sky.) While she was looking at these stars and worrying about her children, she heard the voice of an angel asking her whether she believed in God. When she said "yes", the angel told her not to worry about her three children because if God could take care of the galaxies He could certainly look after her three children. A great peace and joy, relief and gratitude entered her heart. She fell into a good, deep sleep which she had not had for many a day. When she woke up, the peace was still in her heart, and she was convinced that God would take care of her children. She died that night, and in the morning her three children were sobbing near her body because "Mummy is not waking up"...

It was Christmas Day, and we felt so sad. Then a Japanese officer came and stood in the doorway. He asked why the children were sobbing. Suddenly one of the women got up and screamed at him: "They are crying because their mother is dead and it is all your fault." The officer took out his whip and was about to beat her. But she was besides herself and shouted: "Whip me! But there is one of whom you ought to be afraid, and that is Allah!" Allah is the Malayan word for God. He dropped his arm, turned and walked away. The woman sat down and cried and cried. Indonesian wardens came to take the body away on a stretcher. Then a warden went up to the woman who had spoken up against the Japanese officer and asked her to follow him together with the three children of the dead woman. When they left we were all terribly depressed. We thought she was going to be beaten as a punishment, and we wondered what they were going to do with the children. About two hours later the woman returned alone. She told us that the Japanese officer whom she had shouted at had asked her whether the children had any relatives living outside the camps. Apparently their maternal grandmother was still living in her house and had not yet been put in camp. The officer then told the woman that he had decided that for the rest of the war the children should live with their grandmother. Then he handed her a big document written in Japanese with his signature and said: "I want you to take the children to their grandmother. You will be accompanied by a warden. Hand this document to the grandmother and tell her about the death of her daughter." So they went off to the address of the grandmother, who broke down on hearing of her daughter's death. However, she hugged the children, took the document, and the warden brought the woman back to the prison.

Our gloom turned to unspeakable awe and joy. God had truly taken care of the three children as the angel had told their mother. Within twelve hours of her death they were outside the prison and living with their grandmother. They survived the war, and were reunited with their father after it.

I had to think of the disciples who thought that all was lost when Christ died on the Cross. Their confusion and sorrow must have been indescribable. They had been with the God-Man for 3½ years, they had witnessed the miracles of healing and resurrection from the dead, they had listened to His holy voice. And then suddenly all seemed lost. In fact, Christ was at that very moment accomplishing His great victory over death.

It is like that so often in ordinary life. When we feel despair, help is at hand, a great surprise of joy is awaiting us. If only we could have more faith in our wonderful God, then all the days and hours of our life would be filled with a wonderful peace and joy.

*

We were going on holiday to Greece. The day before we left, I suddenly felt a pain in my back. I had slipped a disc. I felt awful. The last time it had happened, I had had to sleep on the carpet in our sitting-room, and could barely move or look after our little son. The doctor came, and I had to walk very straight, without bending, going down through my knees, etc. I had to get my back muscles back into shape again, and it took a long time - about two weeks.

My husband was in ill health, and the next day we had to board the plane. I got out of bed with great pain. I could hardly dress myself. Somehow I had to make it to the airport as I did not want to spoil the holiday for my family. My eldest son and his wife and little son were coming, too. I still don't know how I managed to walk and get on the plane. It was agony. By the time we arrived at the hotel where we were booked in, I was bent over and walking very slowly in great pain. My face showed it. The hotel staff were not very happy to see me in such a state because it seemed as if I were suffering from a terminal illness and this was not very pleasant for the other holiday-makers in the hotel. I had a plank put under my mattress, and my food was brought to me.

Near the hotel was the wonderful women's monastery of the Mother of God in Keratea. I had read about the founder of the monastery, Bishop Matthew, a great wonderworker and confessor of the Orthodox Faith who died in 1950, whose relics were reported to be fragrant and working miracles of healing. I was convinced that he could help me, so I asked my husband to take me there so as to venerate his skull. My husband hired a car, and he and my son escorted me very slowly to the door of the car. The hotel waiters looked on sympathetically. When we arrived at the monastery, I gingerly got out of the car with great difficulty and in excruciating pain. Supported by two people, I made my way to the little room where the skull was standing on a table in a bishop's mitre. There was an opening in the mitre on the top of the skull. With great difficulty I stooped to kiss the skull through the opening. Immediately the pain disappeared and I was able to stand up straight! My family was very surprised and delighted. The next day I was playing tennis, which is unheard of for anyone who has just had a slipped disc!

When we returned to the hotel the waiters did not recognize me. I greeted them, but they looked at me as if I were a stranger. "Don't you know who I am?" I asked. "I'm staying here." I felt no pain, and I was walking quickly and upright. They shook their heads in disbelief. I told them what had happened, and as they were all Orthodox believers they had no difficulty in understanding my explanation...

*

One night, towards the end of 1970, I had a dream in which I was in the wilderness somewhere in Israel. On a large round rock was sitting the Prophet Elijah. I just knew it was him. He looked very powerful and stern, with a lot of hair cascading down around him. "The world is full of idols," he said, "just as in my time. Anybody or anything that you love more than God is an idol, whether it is your husband, wife, parents, children, music, sport or travelling. Anything that this world offers becomes an idol if you love it more than God. Today the world is full of idols!" Suddenly he was gone, and on the same rock sat St. John the Baptist. He looked very like Elijah, with hair cascading down. But he was very sad, gentler and less threatening than Elijah. He was looking down, not ahead of him as was the Prophet Elijah, and he said: "I am the voice crying in the wilderness of the souls of men: Prepare ye the way for the Lord. I never said: Prepare ye the way for self." Then he was gone and again I saw the might Prophet Elijah sitting on the rock. He was not looking at me but staring ahead of himself into the future. I summoned up the courage to ask him: "Are we living in the last times?" Without looking at me, he answered: "Can't you recognize the signs of the times? Be as gentle as a dove and as wise as a serpent."

Then I woke up. I could not sleep for the rest of the night. I understood that St. John the Baptist has the same spirit as the Prophet Elijah. He prepares men for the Coming of Christ, leading them to repentance. Our sins cannot be forgiven by Christ unless we repent of them. Repentance is essential if we are to be healed by the Great Physician. We must admit that we are ill before we can receive healing. St. John is still the voice crying in the wilderness of our souls: "Repent! For the Kingdom of God is at hand." The Prophet Elijah has been chosen to come again to earth to warn men that the Great Judgement of God is at hand. In Revelation 11 we read of the two great witnesses - Enoch and Elijah, according to Tradition - who will warn men about the Great Judgement. They are the two people who have not yet tasted of death. Enoch was translated by God, and Elijah was taken up in chariot of fire in the presence of witnesses. They will be killed in Jerusalem during the reign of the Antichrist.

Only a few months later, in 1971, a Lebanese student who was studying in London phoned me up and offered that I go to Lebanon as a guest of his family. He was Orthodox and had heard that I was very interested in Christian meditation. In Lebanon, outside Beirut there is a wonderful monastery of St. George at Deir-el-Harf. The monks there know about Christian meditation, and the writings of their great saints, such as Isaace the Syrian and John of Damascus.

I took up the offer, and within a fortnight I was on a plane to Beirut via Cyprus. I stayed with this wonderful Orthodox Arab family, who took me by car into the mountains to Deir-el-Harf. On the way I told my friends about my dream of the Prophet Elijah and that I was looking for an icon of the Prophet which would show him as he appeared in my dream.

We stopped in a village to buy some bread, and I waited in the car. Near the roadside was a little lamb, obviously lost and terrified. Some people took pity on it, and called to it. But it paid no attention to them. Suddenly a shepherd appeared in the distance. He made a noise on a whistle and the little lamb got up quickly and ran as fast as it could in his

direction. I smiled and thought: what a lesson we can learn from this lamb! If you are lost and do not know where God or His Holy Church is, just sit still and wait on God. Don't listen to any other sounds or voices; wait until you hear the voice of the True Shepherd to Whom you belong. Then get up and towards Him as quickly as possible.

The young men returned to the car, and we set off. We arrived at the monastery and went to the Divine Liturgy. At the end of the Liturgy Abbot Elias announced that a Romanian monk had come to visit them and had presented them with an icon. He then brought out the icon, and to my surprise it was an icon of the Prophet Elijah, looking exactly as he had looked in my dream. The abbot put it on a stand and started to pray in front of it. I whispered to the young men who had brought me to the monastery: "It is just like Elijah as I saw him in my dream! They were as astonished as I was.

After the Liturgy, we left the church and I was introduced to the abbot. I said: "I love the icon of Elijah, it means a lot to me, and I've had a dream about him." To my surprise the abbot replied: "I'm giving you this icon as a present." The Romanian monk who had painted the icon was flabbergasted on seeing his gift immediately given away. The abbot, whose name was Fr. Elias (Elijah), then asked me to tell the monks and himself why the Prophet Elijah meant so much to me. So I told them about my dream and that the prophet had looked exactly as he was portrayed on the icon. We also talked about meditation, and they warned me about spiritual deception (plani or prelest). If we get visions that feed our pride, then we can be certain that they are not of the Holy Spirit but from the evil one. The Romanian monk told me that he had prayed for several days before painting the icon, asking how it should be painted. (Actually, we do not say about icons that they are "painted", but rather that they are "written", because they are not ordinary religious paintings but "messages" from the invisible Kingdom.) And suddenly the Romanian monk saw the face of the Prophet Elijah looking at him sternly with a sword in the shape of a sabre in his hand. I had not seen this sabre in my dream. Of course, it is a reminder of how angry the Prophet Elijah was when he confronted the false prophets of Baal and ordered them to be killed on Mount Carmel.

From that time Abbot Elias and I wrote to each other once or twice a year, exchanging news about our lives.

The Arab family with whom I was staying then took me to a Roman Catholic monastery to meet the abbot. After we had conversed for a while, he asked one of his theological students to take me to a nearby cave in which there was an Orthodox chapel. While we were walking towards this cave I had an uncanny feeling that the Prophet Elijah was walking between the student and me. I asked the student to whom the chapel was dedicated and he said: "To the Prophet Elijah". I was startled and thrilled at the same time. Then he told me that, according to tradition, the Prophet Elijah had lived in this cave when he was in the Lebanon. I said how wonderful it was to walk on the ground which Elijah's feet had trodden. The student then told me hesitantly that people had claimed to have seen Elijah there with their physical eyes. I said: "I can believe that. When do they see him - at night?" "No," he said, "at different times during the day, usually around midday."

By then we had arrived at the cave, and he left me there with the monks who looked after the cave.

When I entered, I saw that the cave was full of icons of the Prophet Elijah representing various scenes from his life. Besides, there were two icons of Christ and the Mother of God on either side of the Royal Doors, a large icon of St. Nicholas, a huge mural icon of the Archangel Michael and an icon of St. John the Baptist. I asked why they had these three icons, and they replied that St. Nicholas had always claimed to work under the guidance of the Prophet Elijah, that the Archangel Michael and the Prophet Elijah will work together during the time of the Antichrist, and that St. John the Baptist had come in the spirit of Elijah and was the forerunner of Christ's First Coming as Elijah will be of His Second. So I learned how certain saints and angels work together in the supernatural world.

*

One day, while I was staying in Beirut, I made a day-trip to Damascus. I will never forget the cedars of Lebanon which I saw on the way. They are gigantic, and some are 4000 years old.

Our courier led us to the "Omayyad", the biggest mosque in the Middle East. He told us that it used to be a Byzantine cathedral dedicated to St. John the Baptist. He led us to the centre of the church and showed us a casket surrounded by a cage of high rails, in which lay the head of St. John the Baptist. He said that after the Third Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist, it was brought from Jerusalem to Damascus. Once a year, on the day of the Beheading of St. John, which is a strict fast day in the Orthodox calendar, the hierarchy of the Orthodox Churches in Syria and Lebanon go to Damascus, the Muslims unlock the door of the cage, and the Orthodox are allowed to open the casket and hold a service there. They told me that since the previous year blood had been coming from the head, which was a warning that blood would soon be shed in the Middle East. Both the Orthodox and the Muslims were very concerned about this. Of course, in the years that followed, a bloody war did break out in the Lebanon.

A week later, I went to Jerusalem, where I stayed for another week before flying home. I was staying in a small hotel on the Mount of Olives and decided to visit the Russian convent of the Ascension which is behind the hotel. One of the nuns beckoned me to follow her, saying that she had something interesting to show me. She led me into a chapel and pointed to hollow in the ground which was covered by a pan of glass. "This is where they found the head of St. John the Baptist for the third time," she said. "It was kept here for years before they decided to take it Damascus to be kept in the great cathedral dedicated to him." I was deeply moved, and told the nun about my visit to the Omayyad mosque and the head of St. John. She was elated and said: "I don't know why, but I suddenly felt like showing you this place where his head lay. It must have been an angel telling me to show it you."

*

I knew a young girl who had been playing with an ooiyah-board with a group of teenagers. One day when they were playing with it, something dreadful happened. The whole group started to scream and roll about - they had been possessed by demons. An ambulance was called; it took them to a mental home in Brookwood. An Anglican vicar was asked to exorcise the demons. It was claimed that most of the young people had one or two demons, but that the young girl had fifteen. Therefore it took longer for her to be "exorcised". She went home, but continued to suffer from deep depressions.

One day she phoned me, but I was away until the evening. Then she told a friend of mine who answered the phone: "I can't wait that long, I'm going to commit suicide." And she put the phone down. My poor friend was desperate; she did not know the name of the girl and she did not know how to contact me. When I arrived home, the mother of the girl phoned and told me that her daughter had been rushed to hospital. She had come home from shopping and found her daughter on the floor with her wrists slashed... The girl's life was saved. But I told her that she had almost committed a terrible sin.

About a year later, she suddenly dropped in on me and said: "I must do confession with you." I told her that since I was not a priest I could not take her confession and that she ought to go to London and see one of the Orthodox priests there. She was not Orthodox at that time. But she answered that if I did not listen to her confession she would again try and commit suicide because she could not face the long journey to London. Remembering what had happened before, I dared not refuse her. So I went upstairs to my bedroom and brought down a beautiful big icon of Christ and put it in front of her. "Now," I said, "it is Christ the Lord Who is listening to you, and only He can forgive sin." She nodded and started her confession. I had decided that, not being a priest, I would not say anything like "your sins are forgiven" at the end. While I listened to her, I was deeply moved by the honesty and depth of her confession. I recognized that I had never made such a true and penetrating confession. It was long - she had obviously been preparing for it with her whole soul, because she never hesitated about what to say next. Then she stopped, and, to my utmost surprise I said: "Christ has forgiven you." She looked up, and a smile like that of a little child broke through the tears on her face. She then went home full of joy.

In the meantime I wondered what my priest would say about my having said these words and I decided to tell the bishop. The next day was a Saturday, and I received in the post an icon-print of Christ sent by Abbot Elias of St. George's monastery in the Lebanon. Christ is holding an open Bible, and something was written in Greek on the opened pages.

The next day I went to church and asked the bishop to tell me the title of the icon and the words written on the opened pages in the Bible. While he was looking at the icon, I told him about the girl and what I had said. The bishop looked up and said with a smile: "The Lord Himself has answered you. This icon is called the Wisdom of God, and the words on the opened pages are: 'The sins that you forgive are forgiven you, and the sins that you retain are retained.' So you were not wrong in telling the girl that Christ had forgiven her sins.

*

I knew a young man called Paul who was a heroin addict. When I met him he was in a terrible mental state, weak and listless. His arms showed the marks of the injections he had given himself. I tried to talk to him, but he was in despair about himself. I phoned the psychiatrist who was treating him. He told me that Paul was a hopeless case. He had destroyed himself, he had no more will power, and would be dead within six months. I sighed and said that I was sure that he was right in his medical diagnosis, but that if Paul would turn to God, with Whom all things are possible, he could be totally cured. The psychiatrist got heated and said that that was impossible. Paul's brains had been damaged, and he advised me not to waste my time and energy on him.

Late one winter evening the phone rang. It was Paul telling me in an incoherent way that he was going to commit suicide, but that he had phoned me from a kiosk first to thank me for having tried to help him. I tried to keep him talking, and asked him where he was. All he would say was: "I'm phoning in Guildford from a public telephone box." Then his money ran out and we were cut off. I told my husband what had happened and he decided to go in his car to Guildford and search for Paul. I could not come with him as our little son was fast asleep. It was a freezing cold night and it was raining. I pointed out to my husband that he had never met Paul in his life. But his faith was very strong, and a voice within him convinced him that he would find Paul before it was too late. He rushed to the car and set off. In the meantime I prayed earnestly to God to prevent Paul from committing suicide and to help my husband find him. I repeated this prayer over and over again, as I stood in front of the icons.

About 20 minutes later, I heard my husband's car, and to my amazement Paul was sitting next to him. He was in a terrible state, and I took him straight upstairs to the spare bedroom to let him sleep. He was sobbing.

When I came downstairs I asked my husband how on earth he had found Paul, and found him so quickly. He shook his head in amazement and told me how he had raced towards Guildford. There were no cars nor people on the road. Having come to the large roundabout in Guildford, he had no idea where to go. Straight ahead would take him to the town centre, which seemed the sensible direction to go in. However, a voice within him urged him to take the left turn, which passes between two huge fields. He then came to a small roundabout and was again not sure where to go. This time he felt that he should turn right. On the right side of the road was the lonely figure of a man walking. For some reason he could not understand my husband knew it was Paul. He opened his window and shouted at him: "Paul, come here!" He did not ask him, he ordered him. The young man stood still, then crossed the road. Only now could my husband see that he was young, because in the winter darkness he had only been able to see that it was a tall man. He opened the door of the car, and Paul stepped in, sobbing. He did not know who my husband was or where he was being driven to until he came to our house.

The next morning, Paul had still not come down and it was almost 12. My daughter was visiting me, and of course she heard the story and got worried that Paul may have committed suicide in our house. But I felt calm, I was sure that he had not committed suicide, he was just exhausted and needed a good sleep. And in the early afternoon he came downstairs, calm and sober.

I put the icon of Christ in front of him, and told him to ask Christ for forgiveness and to ask Him to cure him of his heroin addiction. I told him what the psychiatrist had told me, and reminded him that with God all things are possible. He brought Lazarus back from the dead, although he was already a decomposing and stinking corpse. Paul listened gravely. Suddenly he believed in God and felt hope in his heart. He put his hands on the icon and talked silently to the Lord. He made a promise and felt that he would keep the promise, because God was going to help him.

He then left our house. I have never seen him again, but I have heard from friends that he has been cured, has a job and is mentally normal. His brains do not seem to have been permanently damaged.

It must have been an angel who guided my husband so swiftly to Paul's rescue. It seems that our guardian angel works together with the guardian angels of other people and that they send messages to each other.

*

My husband suffered from many strokes, as he had arteriosclerosis. He had become Orthodox in the Moscow Patriarchate, but had been received by chrismation only, without baptism. Our parish then left the Moscow Patriarchate and came under the omophorion (protection) of the True Orthodox Church of Greece.

Now the True Orthodox do not allow people to receive Holy Communion unless they have had a proper Baptism of three total immersions in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This was the way the Early Church baptized, as also the Anglo-Saxon Church in Orthodox England. Since my husband had only been sprinkled, he had to be baptized. But he began putting it off, which saddened me because he could not receive Holy Communion.

One day the landlord of a pub phoned me to say that my husband had dropped in on his way home from work, but had suddenly been unable to move or feel his legs. So he said that he was bringing him home, and asked me to phone the doctor. I did so, and both my husband and the doctor arrived simultaneously. Having examined him, the doctor said: "Your husband has got a clot, a thrombosis in his neck. There is nothing I can do, there is no time to take him to hospital. He may have only half an hour left." I asked him how my husband felt. "He's frightened, as he feels less and less of his body." "I'm going upstairs in a minute," I said. Then I went into the sitting-room to pray in front of the icon of the Mother of God "The Quick Hearer". I pleaded with her to let him live so as to be baptized. I felt a sudden peace in my heart, I knew everything would be alright. I went

upstairs and met the doctor coming down from the bedroom. "You know," he said, "your husband is a very lucky man. The clot is dissolving." I looked at my husband. He looked very pale and shaken. He said: "I feel life slowly coming back into my body - into my legs as well." Then I told him of my prayer, and that God through the prayers of His Mother had granted him to live so as to be baptized. He nodded. The doctor advised him to take two weeks off and go somewhere to have a complete rest.

We had friends who ran a comfortable hotel-pub near Clovelly in North Devon. So he phoned up and drove himself there the next day. Most of the time he just slept.

Before leaving he had asked me to phone the Greek priest in Birmingham to arrange the Baptism in a fortnight's time. The priest agreed, and on January 25 / February 7, the feast of the Holy New Martyrs of Russia, my husband was baptized. My husband was a keen army officer who loved the army and its traditions. For him it was a great honour that God had chosen to enrol him into His army by Baptism on the day on which the great warriors of God are commemorated for their struggle for the True Faith even to the shedding of their blood.

*

About one year later, my husband woke up one morning and said to me: "My left arm is paralyzed." I shot out of bed and looked at the limp arm hanging down. We phoned the doctor, who told my husband to go and see a heart specialist in Guildford. Since my husband could not drive, we went together. The specialist said that he must have had a stroke during his sleep. He was sombre and doubted whether life would return to the arm. "What happened in your husband's body happens in all our bodies. Let's face it," he said, pointing with his finger at the earth in the garden, "eventually we all end up under the earth." He advised my husband to continue working at his small engineering firm, because routine was essential for him. There was no point staying at home and thinking about his illness. On the way home, my husband said that the man had been very hard. But I thought that he had meant to be truthful, and that hearing the truth about one's situation is often painful. The specialist had asked my husband to come back to see him in a month's time.

Every day someone from the firm came to pick my husband up by car and bring him home again at about 6 p.m. About a week later, I saw Fr. Cassian walking through our garden. He is a German priest-monk who lives in the Pyrenees and used to stay the night with us before boarding the plane for America. I ran towards him, told him about my husband's arm and asked him to serve Holy Unction on him. He agreed. That evening, we all received unction during the long and compunctionate service. It was over by 11 p.m., and on returning home, my exhausted husband immediately rolled into bed.

The next day as I drove Fr. Cassian to Gatwick airport I asked him about my husband's chances of recovery. He said very seriously: "He will recover, but only for a short time." That evening, I was sitting in the kitchen at about 10 p.m. when my husband rushed in with tears rolling down his cheeks. "It's happened" he said, "it's happened!" And to my

astonishment he lifted his arm high in the air and moved his fingers. We embraced each other with joy. This happened on the day of the icon of the Mother of God of Unexpected Joy.

As arranged, about a month later my husband went to see the heart specialist. He drove there alone, as he had been able to do since the day of Unexpected Joy. He walked into the specialist's consulting room, and stood in front of him. The man looked at him in amazement, because he could see that his arm was not hanging down limp and lifeless as before. He examined my husband and shook his head in disbelief. "When did you feel life coming back into it?" he asked. My husband explained that it had happened, not gradually, but suddenly, about a week after his last visit. The specialist was speechless.

I asked my husband why he had not told him about the Holy Unction. He replied that he did not want to tell him because he felt that he would not have believed him. It would have been like throwing a pearl before swine, not because the person was a swine, but because swine do not know the value of pearls and gobble them up. It may have been that my husband had not forgotten the hard words the specialist had spoken to him, and felt resentful.

There are times when we should not talk about miracles, acts of the grace of God. Christ Himself forbade many people to tell others of the healing they had received. At other times he did not forbid it.

*

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*

I have a grandson Joseph who was born with a hole in his spine, on his neck. His parents discovered it when a small lump began growing at the back of his head. The doctors told them that it had to be cut off, but they wanted to postpone the operation until he was a little older; for the operation would have to be repeated every so often when the lump reached a certain size, because they did not as yet know of a way of closing the hole. They warned, however, that it should not be postponed too long in case the lump pressed on some nerves and affected the legs.

The lump had become the size of a small egg, so they decided that the time had come to cut it off. On Monday the parents were going to bring Joseph to Great Ormond Street in London. On Sunday Fr. Cassian arrived unexpectedly at our house on his way to America. I asked him to give Joseph the sacrament of Holy Unction and he readily agreed. So I phoned my daughter-in-law to ask her whether she agreed. Then we drove off to London. Fr. Cassian took the oil of Holy Unction with him together with his prayer stole. Since Joseph was only a small child, the service was somewhat shortened. Fr. Cassian took the oil and made the sign of the cross on the lump.

The next day I drove Fr. Cassian to Gatwick to catch his plane. He suddenly turned towards me and said with a smile: "There is absolutely nothing for you to worry about as regards your grandson. He is perfectly alright." I nodded, and since I was thinking about the impending operation on the top Joseph's spine, I thought Fr. Cassian was saying that the operation would be successful.

When I returned home, the telephone rang and my son told me in a stunned way that they had taken some X rays of the lump to see exactly where the hole was only to discover that the hole had disappeared. The surgeon came out to my son and his wife to tell them that an operation was no longer necessary. They were no longer afraid that the lump would get bigger, and preferred to wait until Joseph was older before taking it away. When you get a surprise of this kind you can't take it in straightaway. You have braced yourself for something serious and suddenly it has been "lifted".

*

One day my six-and-a-half-year-old son Michael was sitting at the bottom of the stairs holding his tummy and evidently in great pain. I phoned the doctor, who examined him. He was afraid that he had appendicitis; he had a very high temperature and was obviously very ill. Michael said to me: "I'm afraid, Mummy. After all - I'm only a little boy." I told him that he might have to have an operation and that I would not always be near him. However, Jesus was always with him, as was the Archangel Michael (his name saint) and the Mother of God. So I reassured him that he would not be on his own.

I brought him to the Nuffield hospital in Woking and warned my husband and three other children, all of whom were at university. They all came quickly to the hospital. Michael was examined and then put on a drip. The surgeon came and explained to my husband and me that he could not operate on the child because of his high temperature. They were giving him antibiotics - which in fact turned out to be useless since Michael had a deadly virus infection.

As we were standing at the foot of Michael's bed, I suddenly heard a throttling sound, which I had heard several dying people give when I was a prisoner of war under the Japanese. Michael gave three convulsions and shot from the head of the bed to the foot. Then he lay motionless. I screamed: "Michael's dead," and ran out of the room into the arms of my eldest son. I kept repeating: "Michael's dead". I could not pray, only say: "God help Michael, God save Michael." Suddenly in my mind I saw Christ lift Michael up in His

arms like a little lamb. I understood that Michael was safe in the arms of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. At the same time I realized that God has done something so great for us that we cannot fathom it. Now that Christ had come my Michael would not have to go to hell. Since God's coming to man and His victory over death, souls can already go straight to one of the mansions of His Kingdom. I felt immense gratitude to God, but I continued to plead with Him: "Please let him live, I will be heartbroken until death if I lose him here on earth."

The door opened and two doctors came out. They said that they had managed to get Michael's heart going again through massage, and that when it started again he had sneezed seven times. They said that he had to be transported by ambulance to the intensive care unit in St. Peter's hospital.

I walked up to Michael's bed. His eyes were closed, his little hands were clasped together. I made the sign of the cross over him. Then I heard the voice of a woman standing behind me on the right: "Just have faith." In my mind I saw her; she was very small, and her name was Paraskeva. I had never heard of her and did not know anything about her. Michael opened his eyes, and I told him that he was going to another hospital. He said in a small trembling voice: "I'm praying all the time." All this happened at about 7 p.m.

In St. Peter's hospital, Michael's heart stood still for the second time. He was lying naked on a mattress with a cold fan blowing on him and six doctors around his bed. His temperature was 104 degrees. They got his heart going again. Then I heard him scream as the doctors made a lumbar-puncture in his spine. Again I heard the voice of the woman behind me: "Just have faith."

Then at about 11.30 p.m. his heart stood still for the third time. A doctor came out to tell us that there nothing they could do now because he had gangrene in his stomach. If he survived his brain and kidneys would be damaged and he would probably be suffering from epilepsy. We were horrified, and my first reaction was: "Let the child die," because to watch him live in a handicapped state would be terrible for him and for us. But I quickly corrected myself and said: "No, no, God's will must be done. Perhaps God wants Michael to live in such a way." And again I heard the voice: "Just have faith."

I turned to our priest who had come from London, and asked: "Father, who is St. Paraskeva?" He was surprised and said: "Why do you ask? Yesterday was her feast. She was a great martyr." And he added slowly: "She was given the gift of healing sick children."

As soon as he had said that, I knew that Michael was going to be healed, and I shouted it out. I told my husband, the doctor and my three children that St. Parasceva was in the room, and that she had three times said to me: "Just have faith." My poor husband, who looked ill from worry and sadness, said half crying: "I hope you are right." I was convinced. The doctor thought that I was under shock and was imagining things. We all

sat there and waited, wondering whether they would manage to get the heart going a third time.

Suddenly the doors opened and the doctors came out, reeling from exhaustion and joy. "Miracles still happen," they said, "miracles still happen." This was at about midnight. They had noticed that Michael's swollen stomach had suddenly gone down to its normal size, and that his temperature had gone. The movements of his arms were controlled, so they thought that his brain was not damaged.

We entered the unit and stood around the bed. Michael was fast asleep. He lay on his back with his arms outstretched above him. The priest said some prayers and then took the oil of Holy Unction and made the sign of the cross on Michael's forehead. To our surprise, the child now turned with tremendous strength onto his stomach with his arms above his head. The priest then made the sign of the cross on each of the shoulder-blades. To me it was a sign from God, saying: "This miracle of healing is entirely an act of MINE. I have sealed him from both sides." The doctors listened to the prayers of the priest and watched him give Michael the oil. Then they asked which church we were from.

My husband and I stayed all night with Michael in the intensive care unit. Michael woke up and said that he wanted to pass water. This meant that his kidneys were working. He talked to us, and it was quite obvious that his brains were not damaged. They decided to move him to a single room in the children's ward, and told us that he would have to be on a diet - milk, custard, etc. - for some weeks as his intestines had to heal from the effects of the viral infection.

We went home and rolled into bed, exhausted. Other members of the family stayed with Michael until he could return home. Two days later, when I visited him in the evening, I saw to my surprise that Michael was eating steak and chips. The nurse came in and told me laughingly that a little boy had wandered into Michael's room, eating a packet of chips. Michael apparently begged for the packet from the boy, who went away to get another one. The nurse walked in when Michael had just finished eating them. She rushed to the doctor to report the incident. He shrugged his shoulders and told her not to worry because Michael's recovery was so sudden and extraordinary that he would not be surprised if Michael suffered no harm at all from eating the chips. And indeed, one hour later, when he examined Michael, he found that his stomach was not swollen and that he was not suffering from pain or indigestion. So he asked Michael: "What would you like to eat tonight?" "Steak and chips" was the reply...

They had told us that Michael would have to stay for several weeks in hospital while he recovered his strength and they kept an eye on him. But six days later, on the evening of November 20th, they phoned up to say that I could take Michael home the next day. The doctors had examined him, and since he was rushing round his little room and eating normally without having to diet, they had decided that he could go home! The next day was the feast of the Archangel Michael. We could hardly believe our ears. He had fallen ill on November 13th and returned home on his namesday, November 21st.

That evening when I brought him to bed and had prayed the Lord's prayer with him, I saw him staring pensively in front of him. "What are you thinking about?" I asked him. "God has three Faces," he said, "but they are one Face." "How do you know?" I asked. The six-and-a-half-year-old boy replied: "I saw it, of course." "You saw it? When did you see it?" "In hospital." I asked him whether this had happened in the intensive unit during the first night or during one of his nights in the children's ward. "Can't remember." I probed him further, asking him what the Faces looked like. "They look very much the same, but are different... I immediately knew Jesus' Face, because it had thickness." I asked him whether the two other Faces had thickness. He said that it was as if one could look through them, but you could not look through them. And sometimes the three Faces became one Face, and then they opened up again and became one Face. Jesus' Face was in the middle, and Michael said: "He looked at me, and I know it was Jesus." So I told him that he had recovered because Jesus had looked at him. I asked him whether he had seen the three Faces one above the other. "No, they were next to each other," he said. "Sometimes they were one Face, and then they became three Faces." He was surprised about it himself.

Years later, when he was twelve years old, we had to go to St. Peter's hospital because of a minor injury. The young doctor looked at Michael's file, and exclaimed: "This is the boy who suffered.... I read all about his case in St. Thomas' medical school. We students were fascinated by his case, and our lecturer asked us to suggest how he had been healed without any harmful effects on his brains or kidneys. "He doesn't suffer from epilepsy, either. I never thought I would meet the child in person!" He turned Michael around, put questions to him, listened to his answers, shook his head and beamed all over his face. I in turn was glad to see that Michael's illness and recovery had been recorded in St. Thomas' medical files in London for students to study.

Had an angel arranged that we go to the hospital on that particular day, to be seen by that particular doctor and learn what we learned?

*

My son Michael is now twenty-five years old, and an officer in the Gurkha regiment of the British army in Hong-Kong.

He decided to apply for a short commission in the Gurkha regiment. This meant that he had to pass four very difficult tests, each lasting about four days, in order to enter Sandhurst Military Academy. The four tests were spread out over a year. He had passed three of them, and he was due to take the last one in Aldershot. We do not live far from Aldershot, so after lunch at home we set off by car. I was frightened, as I felt that he would pass the final exam and be accepted for the army. What would that mean for him? Would he be wounded or killed in a distant country? That morning I prayed earnestly and with a heavy heart in front of the icon corner. I asked God for two specific things: 1) that He guide and protect Michael through the Archangel Michael, and 2) that Michael remain faithful to Christ until death, and that however much he would suffer he would

always remain strong in his faith that Christ is his God and Saviour. Of course, I did not tell Michael about my prayer.

Michael threw his rucksack into the back of the car and sat next to me. I put my handbag under my seat. For some time we did not talk. Then Michael said: "You know, Mum, I'm scared." My thoughts flashed back to the little boy sitting clutching his stomach at the bottom of the stairs. And I heard his little voice again: "I'm afraid, Mummy - after all, I'm only a little boy." I replied: "I understand. I don't know what life will bring you, and I may not be near you or able to help you. But you always have Christ, the Mother of God and the Archangel Michael with you. Always pray, never forget to pray, always hold on to God and remain faithful to Him." He nodded, and we did not talk. We arrived at Aldershot, and I saw tanks and soldiers everywhere. Michael got out of the car, took his rucksack out of the back and slung it over his shoulders. He then walked away, showed his pass to the guard and was allowed through.

I watched him and started to weep. I reached for my handbag under my seat, and put it on the seat where Michael had been sitting. I remember distinctly that there had been nothing on that seat. I drove away crying all the time, thinking of my prayers for him and repeating them in my heart.

I decided to go shopping as I was in no mood to do any housework. As I had not brought a handkerchief I had to drive home first and rush into the kitchen to get some paper tissues which I kept there in a box. I stopped in front of our gate at about 2.30 or 3 p.m. There was no one in our drive. Our neighbours were either at work or in their houses. I wondered whether to take my handbag inside or leave it in the car since I would only be away for two minutes. I hurriedly picked up my handbag and noticed that there was something lying on the seat. I rushed into the house, picked up the paper tissues and rushed back to the car. Through the window I noticed that a small rectangular white paper was lying on the seat. I was startled because I remembered distinctly that there had been nothing on the seat. I said to myself: "Where has the white paper come from?" I opened the door and picked up the paper. When I turned it round I saw that it was a small icon print with a Greek inscription. On the icon was a young man in the uniform of a soldier going up a steep hill. He was stumbling, because he was carrying a large wooden cross on his shoulder. A big angel had a hand under the arm of the cross to help the young soldier to carry it. And with his other hand he was pointing to the heavens above. There stood Christ with a laurel wreath in His hand. At the bottom of the icon print was something written in Greek, which I did not understand.

I felt dazed. It seemed to be the answer to my two petitions, that Michael would be helped by the Archangel Michael or some other angel, and that he would remain faithful to Christ. The picture showed the young man falling - one knee was already on the ground. He was going uphill, an angel was helping him to carry this great cross, and the angel was pointing to Christ as the young man looked up to heaven. I felt dazed and so grateful. It was as if the icon was giving me the message: "Your prayer has been answered in the way you asked. Your two petitions have been granted."

I went to the shops but did not see or buy anything. I was just thinking of this wonderful thing that had happened to me. It was supernatural. When my husband returned home - this was my second husband; my first, Michael's father, had died several years before, - I told him the whole story. Then I put the icon print back exactly where I had found it, because I wanted my husband to experience the surprise, too. I did not tell him that the white paper was an icon print. He slowly walked back from the car, holding the icon print. Then he came inside and said: "It's amazing! Do you know what is written at the bottom? It's from Revelation 2: 'Remain faithful to Me until death, and I will give you the crown of life.'"

Who is so great a God as our God? He is the God of mighty wonders!