

**The Living Tradition
of Saints
in the British Isles**

1 Meeting the Saints

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Fr Sophrony

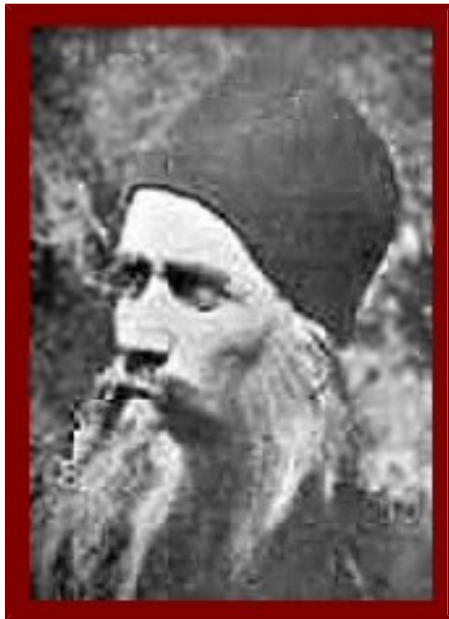
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I get excited by Saints. I don't mean that in a funny way. It is just that they have opened my eyes, well, to everything.

I met Fr Sophrony when I was 20, just after he had arrived in this country. He had an extraordinary effect on me. On my first visit he took me aside, sat me down and told me the whole Gospel in one sentence:

'Christ sends the Holy Spirit into our heart, that he may cleanse it and make us like himself'.

I was utterly dumbfounded. I had never heard anything like it before. I have never forgotten that moment. It was the turning point in my life.



St Silouan

Fr Sophrony told me about Staretz Silouan, his spiritual father. The title of Fr Sophrony's book on the Staretz, 'The Undistorted Image', is a perfect description of a saint whose life has been re-created in the likeness of Christ

When I read it I was bowled over. Here was a man who prayed that all would be saved before he was. He had complete humility.

After meeting this saint, my life could never be the same again.

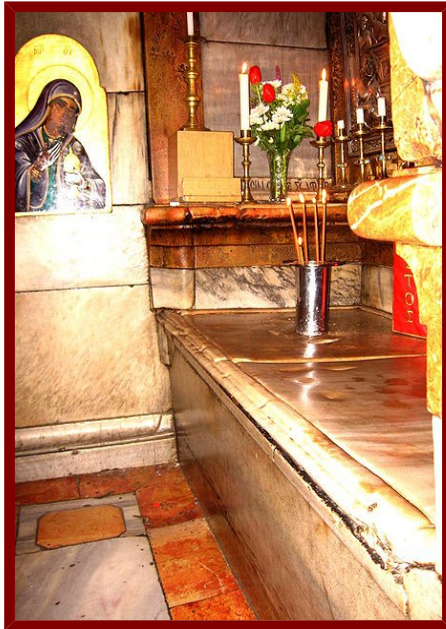


The Cave at Bethlehem.

I needed to fill the historical 'gap' between the Gospel and St Silouan. Brought up as a Protestant, I knew nothing about the Orthodox church and its saints. I read everything I could.

Being young and free I wanted to visit holy places. I went to Mount Athos where both St Silouan and Fr Sophrony had lived. After that I went to the Holy Land. For me the instinct to go to holy places has always been valid.

When we kneel at the cave in Bethlehem, we realise that the Incarnation is the basis of all sanctity. Christ the Son of God has taken our human flesh and united it to himself; through Golgotha, it is changed and sanctified.



Inside the Aedicule

The 'aedicule' ('little house') is built over the place of Christ's Resurrection in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The Resurrection bears witness that our human body has been transformed, - and that this transformation is the hope of us all.

Fifty years on I can still vividly remember my visit to these places.



Fr Sophrony

The Saints are the perfect exemplars of the Gospel.

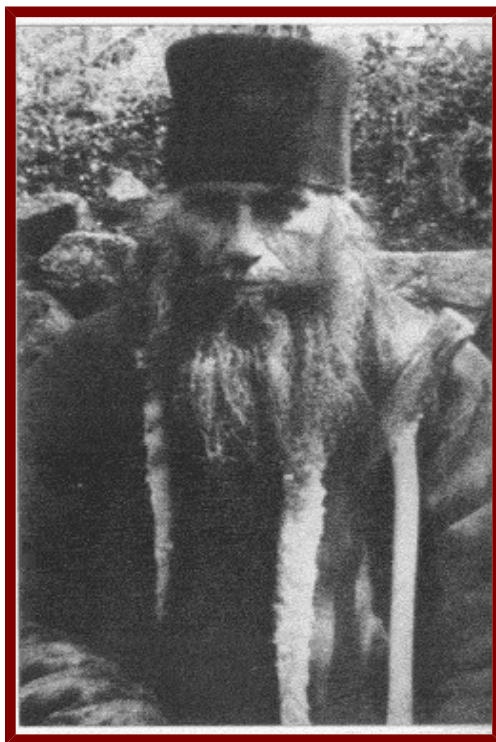
They are living icons of Scripture.

They illuminate all the words and images of Christ .

Over the next 50 years I read so much of the writings and lives of the saints.

We become the friends of the Saints when we drink of their teaching. Through their words we find life and the Spirit. We are joined in communion. Our prayer becomes one with theirs.

St Anthony, St Poemen, St Macarius, St Barsanuphius, St John Climacus, St Isaac the Syrian, St Maximus, St Hesychius, St Simeon the New Theologian, St Gregory of Sinai, and St Gregory Palamas, they truly make me 'sing'.



St Silouan

The saints are interested in us. They intercede for us before the throne of God. Of all the many saints we cannot say we are not able to find a friend.

The saints form a tradition of lived holiness, the 'Living Tradition of the Saints'. It began with Christ, the apostles, martyrs and the Desert Fathers. It continues through every century in every place. Who would not want to 'tag on' at the end, so to speak, of such a tradition?

This is exactly what we, as the church today, are called to do. Tag on - ask for the mercy, learn the obedience, receive the cleansing of heart. This is the very *raison d'être* of the church: nothing else. If the church is not about sanctity, it is not about anything.

Fr Schmemmann said:

'The only tragedy is not to become a saint'.



Fr Sophrony and St Silouan

The Tradition comes to us in England through many lands. We can thank God for the input of many, including Metropolitan Anthony Bloom. The Living Tradition of the Saints is alive in these Isles. It can change the life of this country.

Father Sophrony founded the Monastery at Tolleshunt Knights in Essex. I have revisited the chapel where he taught me to pray and the study where he spoke those simple and powerful words to me. We can go to his tomb and pray. This is a holy place for Britain.

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