

Late in July
or The Modest Newsletter with an Obscure and Inept Allusion to Faulkner
but let us move on . . .

Who Was Egeria?
And Why Are Her Writings Important to an Understanding of Early Church Liturgy?
by Dana Burkinshaw

Egeria was a Spanish nun who visited the Holy Land in the 4th century (she was there from 381 to 384). This was within 50 years after the reign of Constantine (306 - 337). Her's is thus the earliest surviving account of the Holy Land. In the words of John Wilkinson, "Her description with a loving attention to detail of the Holy Places and particularly of Jerusalem make her the prime source for early Christian pilgrimage and worship."

[You will hear more about Egeria's observations on liturgy at the next Bash.]

Egeria was a fascinating lady. My favorite quote from her is as follows: "Indeed, whenever we arrived anywhere, I myself always wanted the Bible passage to be read to us." In other words, she didn't want to just hear entertaining stories; she wanted to hear the Word of God. Would that more people today had such an attitude!

I haven't found any indication of Egeria's age at the time, but she must have been young and healthy. Some of her journeys, especially those in the Sinai Peninsula, involved traveling on foot over very rugged terrain under extremely harsh conditions. [When I was at Masada, on the west side of the Dead Sea, I saw a young woman from England succumb to sunstroke. That experience impressed upon me the danger of overexertion in a hot, arid climate.]

I give you the following quote from Egeria, not because it is pertinent to liturgy, but because it illustrates the dramatic changes that had taken place within the Roman Empire: "At this point we dismissed the soldiers who had provided us with an escort on behalf of the Roman authorities when we went through the danger areas. We no longer needed military protection, since we were on the state highway...." Prior to Constantine, Roman soldiers would not have gone out of their way to protect Christians. After Constantine, the Roman authorities had a completely changed attitude toward Christianity.

Another quality that I appreciate in Egeria is that she was not given to exaggeration. If she wasn't too sure about something, she tells us that she wasn't sure. She was told about the pillar of salt that Lot's wife was transformed into. The purpose of her account was to inform her sisters back in Spain. Since it is very unlikely that any of them would ever make the long, arduous trek to the Holy Land, she could have pulled the wool over their eyes and they would have been none the wiser. But she didn't do that: "But what we saw, reverend ladies, was not the actual pillar, but only the place where it had once been. The pillar itself, they say, has been submerged by the Dead Sea - at any rate we did not see it, and I cannot pretend we did."

There are geographical inaccuracies in Egeria's account. These inaccuracies are understandable for two reasons: 1) Egeria was using a Latin translation of the Bible based on the Septuagint. By the time you take a place name from Hebrew to Greek to Latin, it can become very garbled. 2) Egeria was dependent on the accuracy of the information that the local "experts" gave her. Sometimes, this information wasn't so accurate.

Shortly after Egeria was in the Holy Land, Jerome went there (in 386, about the same time that Augustine was converted). He was determined to make a new Latin translation of the

Bible. Despite the advice of prominent men in the church, including Augustine, to use the Septuagint as the basis for his Old Testament (completed around 405), Jerome insisted on going to the Hebrew instead. His identifications of place names are more reliable than those of Egeria. When Egeria traveled to Mt. Nebo, where Moses viewed the Promised Land, the monks on site told her that Sodom and Gomorrah were located near the north end of the Dead Sea. I believe it is much more likely that Sodom and Gomorrah were located at the south end of the Dead Sea. Similarly, Egeria was told that the Land of Uz, where Job lived, was located east of the Sea of Galilee. I believe that the Land of Uz was actually located far to the south, near the border between Edom and Arabia (today northwest Saudi Arabia).

By our standards, Egeria was unnecessarily gullible. She was eager to believe just about anything that was told to her by “holy men” (I do not mean to suggest that they were not honorable men. They, too, were gullible.).

I’m thinking in particular about Egeria’s experiences in Edessa (today Urfa in southern Turkey near the Syrian border). There was a story extant in Egeria’s day about a letter that was sent from Jesus through Ananias (the man from Damascus in the story of Paul’s conversion) to the king of Edessa, King Abgar. The letter purportedly possessed supernatural powers. It was alleged that when Edessa was attacked by the Persians, the letter was read at the gates of the city. The Persians immediately became confused and disoriented and were unable to finish their attack. Egeria, and her hosts, readily accepted the story. A Roman synod convened in 494-5 condemned the letter as spurious.

I have given you this information as background so that you will know who Egeria is and I can concentrate on liturgy at the Bash.

Among Egeria’s comments about the Jerusalem Church are extensive observations about baptism. As Baptists, you will find what she had to say especially significant.

***Cancer Ward* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn**

Book Review by Joel Zartman

Cancer Ward is my favorite book by Solzhenitsyn. I like most every one I’ve read and am even extremely fond of his picture. The books which I can’t say I’m terribly fond of are *August 1914* and *Lenin in Zurich*. Perhaps the pre-soviet stuff just kind of drags. Perhaps I was too young when I read them.

I started reading Solzhenitsyn back when I was newly wed. At the time I had been reading Gabriel García Márquez, since the Minneapolis Public Library obligingly had his books in Spanish. So I was looking around for other things in Spanish they had to read and I came across *The Gulag Archipelago*.¹ I started reading, but it was too tough to do it in Spanish. It is a long work, you know, and the going is slower for me in Spanish than in English. Moreover, the words were close and many on a page and so progress was not as tangible. So I switched to what I later found out was an abridgment of the work in English. I still have not read my way through all three hardcover volumes, but I mean to. However it came about, I was hooked on him, having found the world of the gulag very interesting. But more interesting was the person who wrote

¹I know you are wondering, and it is idle wondering. Here is all it works out to: *El Archipelago Gulag*.

about this world. So I became seriously interested in reading Solzhenitsyn. When I am serious about an author, then I start looking for him in my regular visits to the used bookstores, so that I can start lining up the books on my shelf.² Soon I had *A Day in the Life of Ivan Desinovich* and *Cancer Ward*. I liked them both well, especially the latter. Later on I acquired the two that I am not so fond of as well as my second favorite, *The First Circle*.³

What is most remarkable, in my opinion, about *Cancer Ward*, is the deft way in which Solzhenitsyn shows you the personality of the characters. The hopes and joys and fears and vulnerabilities and all the other things that go in to making people are deftly demonstrated. His ability to portray a person so vividly and so variously will leave you amazed. I would read a chapter in the bathtub and sit there in amazement, not going on. I think that what Solzhenitsyn can show me about people, in itself, is worth it. You should pick a chapter, any chapter, and you will see how interesting his people become in just that one chapter. There are some books, by other authors, in which the characters are elaborated over the span of the book with less subtlety of nuance and excellence of detail.

Another good thing about Solzhenitsyn is that the characters don't drag on you like Dostoyevsky's, or Dickens'.⁴ You know how the women get so frantically hysterical, and the pompous fat men get so pompous, and the hearty good fellows get so overwhelmingly hearty in Dostoyevsky? Solzhenitsyn has none of this overindulgence. His ability to judge the measure of whatever it is one measures when one is describing characters, is unerring. He has characters you can like and dislike really, which sets him far beyond Dostoyevsky.

While I am contrasting Dostoyevsky with the master, let me also mention atmospheres. Now Solzhenitsyn has to describe some pretty bad places and some exceedingly unpleasant conditions. But where he has Dostoyevsky beat is at finding something enjoyable even in the most bleak situations. The human spirit's ability to find hope and encouragement is something that Solzhenitsyn doesn't miss. He describes a happy couple who have been sent into perpetual exile in a place where there are very few of life's comforts. The way he describes their delight in getting a round table, a lampshade, and a radio with the right batteries makes you understand the

²I know a guy who saves the books of his favorite authors, rationing them out for maximum enjoyment. He will not read two or three in a row. Instead he lets himself read one every so often so that he will have the pleasure of a new work by that author at regular intervals. I cannot do such a thing myself. I have to get as much of the author as I can when I discover someone I really like. Then you find which of his works you will re-read and what season of the year is best for it (Charles Williams in October, you see). Although, I'm still missing one of his works and it is pleasant to think it still awaits me.

³Every time I read the quotation by C. S. Lewis about there not being a book long enough or a tea cup big enough to suit him, I think of *The First Circle*. I spent a happy December reading it while drinking many cups of tea.

⁴I should, perhaps, refrain from mentioning Dickens, but his great, sentimental, dragging-around characters I find intolerable. I've only made it through *A Tale of Two Cities* but that main fellow in there was enough to decide me for all time. Besides, who wants to read Dickens when there are good books to read instead?

delight that they have in these things very clearly.⁵ This ability to enjoy a time and a place for the beauty or delight that is there, whatever the conditions, is something like what Hemingway is good at. I think that Hemingway's ability to find the pleasure in any place he found himself, and his ability to describe the enjoyment of it, have something to do with this gratitude that Solzhenitsyn has and Dostoyevsky lacks. Gratitude has a gilding effect on things, it seems to me.⁶ Even in the cancer ward, Solzhenitsyn observes the things that make life interesting and enjoyable. He is able to find them out because, at heart, he is grateful for life and so he looks for these kinds of things. I should like to castigate Dostoyevsky some more, but I should perhaps read him some more. Of course, I would, were I to find him more enjoyable.⁷

Solzhenitsyn is a master craftsman. You will soon see this if you glance at the table of contents. Sometimes, after a chapter, when I have ceased reading in amazement, I look at the table of contents again and marvel at what I see. Are these not interesting in and of themselves? It makes me wish I had read them before I read the book, so I could speculate about them happily. But I am happier knowing the contents of the chapters. What skillfully whole chapters he writes! Each is its own entity. Each hangs like a ripe grape on a cluster. He spends a whole chapter describing an official's dream. This is hard to do, such a long dream, and yet it is a marvel. Of course, you should not get the idea from all this that his work doesn't hang together, because it does.

One may speculate about the more allegorical significance of the comparison between cancer and soviet government. These things are clearly there, but they are not obtruded in a way that threatens the story. Solzhenitsyn is not clumsily didactic. He gets his point across in the best possible way, and is greatly to be admired for that.

The worth of character is the greatest lesson that I learn from Solzhenitsyn. The value of conviction and the ennobling effect of living by principle rather than convenience or capitulation are the greatest lessons that he teaches. He does this not by lecturing one about them as the manner is of some. Rather, he shows enough to make it clear. He doesn't give you a sketch that hides the crucial parts either.⁸ He has characters, some who capitulate and some who do not, and the ones who do not capitulate shine forth brightly. The moral imagination is in good hands with

⁵If I remember correctly, when Solzhenitsyn first got out of the camps he was exiled to a similar place and lived in a chicken coop - perhaps somebody else did, but I think it was him. The gratitude he describes for such a place, where he could at last sleep in the dark, is sincere, and contagious.

⁶ The stern dutifulness (or whatever it is) of Dostoyevsky has a gelding effect on things.

⁷How about some new works, Mr. Dostoyevsky! Ha, ha! Do not protest, sir! You have never been alive anyway, the only change, and it is a good change, is that you can no longer use the pen. Ha, ha, ha! [sub-footnote: I really do not feel this way, I would actually read something by him if I ever came into some empty time. I could not resist doing this though.]

⁸It is a judicious view of his characters that he gives. A properly rounded view. Not sparing and not distorting. There is honesty to his fiction, at least I fancy there is. It is honesty that can be known by the way he gives you what he gives you of his characters.

Solzhenitsyn. He doesn't kill the important lesson by being didactic. Rather, he makes you want it. He makes you see it as it is in all its glory so that you desire and make secret resolves to be that way, even while in the bathtub. You form an admiration for the old doctor who went his own way and wasn't rotted out of life like others were who were part of the system rotting everything in it. And Solzhenitsyn does it with such light, deft strokes too. Everything has its proper place. There is a great, a cosmic order to the way he carries out the book.⁹ The more prim might wonder at times, but I do not. What he is doing, he is doing, and he is doing it well.

You should read Solzhenitsyn if you have not. I do not say 'should' in the sense that you have a moral obligation to read him. One could make the case for that, but one does not really think that sort of motivation would make the reading so profitable. There are great, long books that one saves for oneself, for December and other such months when the reading will be good. Books by Thomas Wolfe or a reputable biography of an interesting person are such books. Such a book is *Cancer Ward*, to read and to re-read. There are many things to savor and to relish found therein, even in a translation.

Some Poetry by George Herbert

JORDAN. (II)

When first my lines of heav'nly joyes made mention,
 Such was their lustre, they did so excell,
 That I sought out quaint words, and trim invention ;
 My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,
 Curling with metaphors a plain intention,
 Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.

Thousands of notions in my brain did runne,
 Offring their service, if I were not sped :
 I often blotted what I had begunne ;
 This was not quick enough, and that was dead.
 Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne,
 Much lesse those joyes which trample on his head.

As flames do work and winde, when they ascend,
 So did I weave my self into the sense.
 But while I bustled, I might heare a friend
 Whisper, *How wide is all this long pretence!*
 There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn'd :
 Copie out only that, and save expense.

⁹Surely this is an exaggeration, you will think. Perhaps it is exaggerated of me to feel this, but I cannot disagree with myself here. There is a cosmic order to the arrangement which is shown by the way he describes this or hints at that. It is the order of the world, the properness of creation, the creator's own delight in the created things, somehow shared, no doubt through gratitude and the corresponding humility.

For the Bash

Bring these, or copies, to discuss at the bash.

JORDAN. (I)

WHO says that fictions onely and false hair
 Become a verse ? Is there in truth no beautie ?
 Is all good structure in a winding stair ?
 May no lines passe, except they do their dutie
 Not to a true, but painted chair ?

Is it not verse, except enchanted groves
 And sudden arbours shadow course-spunne lines ?
 Must purling streams refresh a lover's loves ?
 Must all be veil'd, while he that reades, divines,
 Catching the sense at two removes ?

Shepherds are honest people ; let them sing :
 Riddle who list, for me, and pull for Prime :
 I envie no mans nightingale or spring ;
 Nor let them punish me with losse of ryme,
 Who plainly say, *My God, My King.*

THE WINDOWS.

LORD, how can man preach thy eternall word ?
 He is a brittle crazie glasse :
 Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford
 This glorious and transcendent place,
 To be a window, through thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie,
 Making thy life to shine within
 The holy Preachers, then the light and glorie
 More rev'rend grows, and more doth win ;
 Which else shows wat'rish, bleak, and thin.

Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one
 When they combine and mingle, bring
 A strong regard and awe: but speech alone
 Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
 And in the eare, not conscience ring.