To Our Readers

Food for every season, blessings and curses, and exorcising evil spirits are only some of the many folk traditions associated with Orthodoxy; they make up for what they lack in formal status with a more immediate presence in the lives of the faithful. Alongside other aspects of church life (theology, history, politics, liturgy, art, and music), they are part of the rich fabric of Orthodoxy in the world. We are excited to offer to our readers the current issue as we examine several folk traditions deeply embedded in our church culture.

More often than not, folk traditions within Orthodox cultures reflect how people understand and interpret their religious beliefs, even when these are in tension with formal church teaching. In fact, one can even identify a "secondary" theological system at work among the flocks of rational sheep within the worldwide Church, which at times supplements and enhances received ecclesiastical tradition, and at other times supplants it altogether. Nevertheless, these folk traditions have inestimable value because they each tell a story and give expression and depth to religio-cultural experiences that define who we are. For this reason, we at *The Wheel* want to share a sample of these traditions with you. From food as a tool of political resistance to cross-faith venerations to various forms of paraecclesial art, these traditions provide valuable insights into everyday Orthodox life outside the lofty walls of academia and the strict liturgical rubrics.

A special comment should be made regarding our inclusion of Constantin Sigov's article. It is certainly not meant to be a comment on "folk religion." Rather, Mr. Sigov's report from the frontline of spiritual and military warfare reminds us that one of the most important conflicts of this century for Orthodox Christians is ongoing and cannot be ignored. Mr. Sigov speaks to us not just of war and peace, but also of truth and lies, of hope and justice, and finally, of the irreplaceable role that books and music must play if we want to continue to be human.

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