

The Sunday of Orthodoxy / The First Sunday of Great Lent

11 / 24 March



The First Sunday of Great Lent, Troparion, Tone II — We worship Thy immaculate Image, O Good One, and ask forgiveness of our sins, O Christ God; for of Thy own will Thou wast pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh, to deliver from slavery to the enemy those whom Thou hadst created. Therefore we thankfully cry to Thee: Thou hast filled all things with joy, O our Saviour, by coming to save the world.

Kontakion, Tone VIII — The illimitable Word of the Father accepted limitations by incarnation from thee, O Mother of God; and He transformed our defiled image to its original state and transfused it with the divine beauty. But we confess and give thanks for our salvation, and we proclaim it by deed and word.

Troparion of the Sunday, Tone I — When the stone had been sealed by the Jews; / while the soldiers were guarding Thy most pure Body; / Thou didst rise on the third day, O Savior, / granting life to the world. / The powers of heaven therefore cried to Thee, O Giver of Life: / Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ! / Glory to Thy Kingdom! / Glory to Thy dispensation, O Thou Who lovest mankind.

Hymn to the Theotokos, Tone I — When Gabriel announced to Thee, O Virgin, "Rejoice!" / with that word the Master of all was incarnate in Thee, O Holy Ark. / As the righteous David said, / Thy womb became more spacious than the heavens, bearing Thy Creator. / Glory to Him Who took abode in Thee! / Glory to Him Who came from Thee! / Glory to Him Who freed us by being born of Thee!

Kontakion of the Sunday, Tone I — As God, Thou didst rise from the tomb in glory, / raising the world with Thyself. / Human nature praises Thee as God, for death has vanished! / Adam exults, O Master! / Eve rejoices, for she is freed from bondage, and cries to Thee: / Thou art the Giver of Resurrection to all, O Christ!

Kontakion, Tone VIII "To thee, the Champion Leader" — O Sophronius of Jerusalem, most wise among patriarchs, who struggled with divine zeal, / spread the commandments of truth with thy lips, set the foundations of the Church in good order, / and there transmitted them to those in the monastic ranks: / thou didst bring most wise discourses to light; and, instructed thereby, we cry out to thee: // Rejoice, O splendid boast of the Orthodox!

Matins Gospel IX

Epistle: St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews 11: 24-26, 32 - 12:2

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. ... 32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins

and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

At all times, indeed, but specially then, when I reflect upon the achievements of the saints, it comes over me to feel despondency concerning my own condition, because we have not even in dreams experienced the things among which those men spent their whole lives, not paying the penalty of sins, but always doing rightly and yet always afflicted .. And having spoken of what befell the apostles (Cf. I Cor. 4:11, II Cor. 11:23-28,12:7, Phil. 1:12, II Tim. 3:11) ...Elijah suffered the same thing with them (II Kings 1:8) and the Son of Man (Matt. 8:20) ...For God 'has provided some better thing for us.' In order that they might not seem to have the advantage of us from being crowned before us, He appointed one time for crowning for all ...Do you see His tender carefulness?

St. John Chrysostom. Homily XXVIII on Hebrews XI, 1, 2. B#58, pp. 491, 492.

We preach not one coming of Christ but a second as well, far more glorious than the first. The first gave us a spectacle of his patience; the second will bring with it the crown of the kingdom of God. In general all things are twofold in our Lord Jesus Christ. His birth is twofold, one of God before the ages and of one of a virgin in the consummation of the ages. His descent is twofold, one lowly "like the rain upon the fleece," and a second, his manifest coming, which is yet to be. In his first coming he was wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger; in his second he will be "robed in light as with a cloak." In his first coming he "endured the cross, despising the shame"; in his second he will come in glory, attended by a host of angels. We do not rest, therefore, in his first coming, but we look for his second. Just as we said of his first coming, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," so we shall repeat the same at his second.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem. Catechetical Lectures 15.1

The Gospel According To St. John 1: 43-51

43 At that time, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. 46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. 49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, 'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel. 50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. 51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

"The day following, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me" (Jn. 1:43). So the Holy Gospel begins this Sunday, recounting the calling of the Holy Apostles. Centuries have passed, and the same call is audible today, but now refers directly to us, "Follow Me." And we ask the Lord, "Where?" And the Church answers us by the very name of this Sunday, "into Orthodoxy!"

Just be attentive. Tonight, when this week comes to a close and a new week of Great Lent begins, the Holy Church will say for our edification: "Lord, Thou hast given abundant gifts to those who fear Thee!" And we cannot say that we did not receive these gifts. We received the Sacrament of Confession, the

Sacrament of the Eucharist —the Body and Blood of Christ, the Tree of Life. Yes, we undoubtedly received them. But do we have the state of mind which is expressed in the second part of the prayer: "Lord, Thou hast given abundant gifts to those who fear Thee." The gifts have been given, but are we those who fear God? Yet the fear of God is not an ordinary fear as before someone or something. No. This is the fear of losing what the Lord has given to our heart.

And at the same time, the Holy Church, while telling us that we have received the Grace and Gifts of God, reveals to us through the Apostle reading the states of mind we should possess. These are the states which should be possessed by those who have achieved everything which Christ gives. We know what these achievers have gone through: sufferings, beatings, bonds, prison; they were stoned, sawn asunder, exiled, died by the sword, wandered in the mountains. Those of whom the whole world was not worthy hid in ravines, in caves—they all bore witness to their faith, but they did not receive what had been promised. And this is because God provided for them something better, something worthy of them (Heb. 11:37-40).

Yes, as we see, God calls: "Follow Me! I will give you everything." But at the same time, such sufferings, such experiences, such horrible things! Look around you, at our walls which are painted with the pictures of saints. All of them are now in the heavenly dwellings, and yet all of them experienced, as every one of us experiences, the way of our earthly existence. Look, among them were archbishops, bishops, priests, monks; there were farmers, nobles and princes, workers of all kinds; there were labourers, people of simple background; there were great scholars, there were illiterate people. And all of them experienced on earth every kind of suffering, grief, and horror. But they kept that which the Church requires. When the Church says through the words of Christ, "Follow Me," she is showing us where to go: into Orthodoxy. In the Russian language, Orthodoxy means the Right Word, that word which is true, which we should not betray; the word which we too have given and are again giving every year.

After the Nativity of Christ (on the day of Circumcision), when the circumcision of our heart is accomplished, then we say, "We belong to Christ, we are Christian. Our will is His Will. Christ is our Life; Christ is our Goal; Christ is our Way." And this way leads us into the Church. Bishop Theophan the Recluse shows us what to do in order to go the way of the Church. He addressed his flock (this was in the 1870's) with the following words: "We know what technology teaches us, what mechanics teaches us, law, economics. But the Church teaches us about the movement of our heart. Learn and keep in your heart everything the Holy Church teaches, and receiving Godly forces through the sacraments, and quickening them through the holy services and prayers of the Church, go unswervingly the Way of Christ's commandments under the guidance of lawful shepherds, and you will undoubtedly reach the Kingdom of Heaven and will be saved."

And so, being zealous for salvation, all our attention should be directed to our heart, to inscribe on it Christian feelings and dispositions. Bishop Theophan reveals to us that the most important thing is in our heart, dispositions, those feelings which appear in the heart. External things are needed, but only in so far as they bear the spirit which spiritualises them. And social life will become true life only if into social relationships you bring spirit, which means heart, the heart of a true Christian. And family life will be true family life only if into all traditions of the external temporal family life we bring those relationships of the heart which God gives us in His Beatitudes: poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, peaceableness—out of this will come real family life. And this way, and only this way, into all phases of our life will come the Triumph of Orthodoxy.

The One Thing Needful - Archbishop Andrei

On this day the Church commemorates the final ending of the Iconoclast controversy and the definitive restoration of the holy icons to the churches by the Empress Theodora, acting as Regent for her young son Michael III. This took place on the first Sunday in Lent, 11 March 843. There is, however, not only an historical link between the first Sunday and the restoration of the icons but also a spiritual affinity. If Orthodoxy triumphed in the epoch of the Iconoclast controversy, this was because so many of the faithful were prepared to undergo exile, torture, and even death, for the sake of the truth. The Feast of Orthodoxy is above all a celebration in honour of the martyrs and confessors who struggled and suffered for the faith: hence its appropriateness for the season of Lent, when we are striving to imitate the martyrs by means of our ascetic self-denial. The fixing of the Triumph of Orthodoxy on the first Sunday is therefore much more than the result of some chance historical conjunction.

The Triodion gives the text of a special 'Office of the Triumph of Orthodoxy', which is held at the end of Matins or, more commonly, at the end of the Divine Liturgy on this Sunday. The Office celebrates not only the restoration of the holy icons but, more generally, the victory of the true faith over all heresies and errors. A procession is made with the holy icons, and after this extracts are read from the synodical decree of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787). Then sixty anathemas are pronounced against various heretics dating from the third to the fourteenth century; 'Eternal Memory' is sung in honour of the emperors, patriarchs and fathers who defended the Orthodox faith; and 'Many Years' is proclaimed in honour of our present rulers and bishops. Unfortunately in many parts of the Orthodox Church today this impressive service has fallen into disuse; elsewhere it is performed in a greatly abbreviated form. Before the Triumph of Orthodoxy came to be celebrated on the first Sunday, there was on this day a commemoration of Moses, Aaron, Samuel, and the prophets. Traces of this more ancient observance can still be seen in the choice of Epistle reading at the Liturgy (Hebrews 11: 24-6, 32-40), and in the Alleluia verse appointed before the Gospel: 'Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His Name'.

Saints of the Week

11 / 24 March — St Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem - born in Damascus of eminent parents. Having acquired worldly wisdom, he was not content with this, and began also to acquire pure, spiritual wisdom. In the monastery of St Theodosius he found himself with the monk John Moschus, whom he took as his teacher; then, together with him, set out to visit the monasteries and ascetics of Egypt. Their motto was to glean more spiritual wisdom each day. They wrote down all that they discovered, and later published it in two books entitled 'The Spiritual Meadow'. They later went to Rome, where Moschus died, leaving Sophronius with the pledge to take him either to Sinai or to the Monastery of St Theodosius. Sophronius fulfilled the desire of his teacher and took his body to the monastery, after which he was delayed in Jerusalem, which by that time had been freed from the Persians. He witnessed the return of the Precious Cross from Persia, which the Emperor Heraclius carried into the Holy City on his back. The old Patriarch, Zacharias, who also returned from slavery, did not live long and, when he went to the other world, was followed first by Modestus, who died in 634, and then by blessed Sophronius. He governed the Church with outstanding wisdom and zeal for four years, standing in defence of Orthodoxy against the Monothelite heresy, which he condemned at his Council in Jerusalem before it was condemned at the 6th Ecumenical Council. He wrote the life of St Mary of Egypt, compiled the rite of the Great Blessing of Water and introduced various new hymns and songs into different services. When the Arabian Caliph Omar captured Jerusalem, Sophronius begged him to spare the Christians, which Omar hypocritically promised. When Omar quickly began to plunder and ill-treat the Christians in Jerusalem, Sophronius, with many lamentations, begged God to take him from among the living upon earth, that he should not see the desecration of the holy places. And God heard his prayer, and took him to Himself in His heavenly courts in 644.

St. Angus (Oengus) of Culdees, compiler of first Irish martyrology - Born in Ireland; died c. 830. The appellation "Culdee," Ceile De, or Kele-De means "worship of God," which became the name of a monastic movement otherwise known as the "Companions of God." Oengus was of the race of the Dalaradians, kings of Ulster. In his youth, renouncing all earthly pretensions, he chose Christ for his inheritance by embracing the religious life in the monastery of Cluain-Edneach (Clonenagh) in East Meath (County Laois). Here he became so great a proficient both in learning and sanctity, that no one in his time could be found in Ireland that equalled him in reputation for every kind of virtue, and for sacred knowledge. To shun the esteem of the world, he disguised himself and entered the monastery of Tamlacht (Tallaght Hill), three miles from Dublin, where he lived for seven years as an anonymous lay brother. There he performed all the drudgery of the house, appearing fit for nothing but the vilest tasks, while interiorly he was being perfected in love and contemplation absorbed in God. After his identity was discovered when he tried to coach an unsuccessful student, he returned to Cluain-Edneach, where the continual austerity of his life, and his constant application to God in prayer, may be more easily admired than imitated. For example, he would daily recite one-third of the psalter (50 Psalms) while immersed in cold water. He was chosen abbot, and at length raised to the episcopal dignity: for it was usual then in Ireland for eminent abbots in the chief monasteries to be bishops. He was known for his devotion to the

saints. He left both a longer and a shorter Irish Martyrology, and five other books concerning the saints of his country, contained in what the Irish call *Saltair-na-Rann*. The short martyrology was a celebrated metrical hymn called *Felire* or *Festilogium*. The longer, *Martyrology of Tallaght* was composed in collaboration with Saint Maelruain of Tallaght. He died at Disertbeagh (now Desert Aenguis or Dysert Enos), which became also a famous monastery, and took its name from him.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Euthymius, Bishop of Novgorod, wonderworker (1458). Venerable Alexis of Goloseyevsky Skete, Kiev Caves (1917). Venerable Patrikius confessor (1933). New Hieromartyr Basil, priest (1937). Venerable Sophronius, recluse of the Kiev Caves (13th c.). Hieromartyr Pionius of Smyrna and those with him: Asclepiades, Macedonia, Linus and Sabina(250). Translation of the relics of Martyr Epimachus of Pelusium to Constantinople (250). St. Sophronius of Vratsa (1815) (Bulgaria). Venerable George, abbot of Sinai, brother of St. John Climacus (7th c.). Venerable John Moskhos (622). Venerable George the New, wonderworker of Constantinople (970) (Greek). St. Theodora, queen of Arta, wife of Despot Michael II of Epirus (1275) (Greek). Hieromartyr Eulogius, metropolitan of Cordova (859). Martyrs Trophimus and Thalys of Laodicea (300) (Greek). Hieromartyr Constantine, in Kintyre.

12 / 25 March - St Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome - son of the senator Gordianus, he himself became a senator and governor of the city of Rome, but, as soon as his father died, he gave himself to the spiritual life. He built six monasteries in Sicily and a seventh in Rome itself, out of his great wealth, being tonsured in this last, which he dedicated to the Apostle Andrew. His mother, Sylvia, also received the monastic habit in a women's monastery. After the death of Pope Pelagius, Gregory was chosen as Pope. He fled from this honour and power and hid himself in the mountains and ravines, but God showed people where to find him by making a fiery column, reaching from earth to heaven, appear at the place where Gregory was hiding. He had a rare compassion, using all his income for the housing of the poor and on hospitality. He frequently brought the poor in and fed them from his own table. He occupied himself with the writing of instructive books. 'The Dialogist', or 'the one who converses' was the name he was known by, having written a book entitled 'The Dialogues' in which he brought to light the virtues and miracles of the Italian saints. He also compiled the service of the Presanctified Gifts that is used on Wednesdays and Fridays in the Great Fast. His archdeacon, Peter, often saw a dove hovering over his head when he was writing. He went to the Lord in 604.

Venerable Theophanes the Confessor - Theophanes is called the Sygrian [Sigrian] because of Sygriana [Sigriana], the place of his birth. He was a kinsman of the Emperor Leo Isaurian and his son Copronymos. He possessed great wealth and splendor. But all of this lost its worth for Theophanes when the Lord Christ began to reign in his soul. He resisted his own marriage and, when he was compelled to marry, succeeded in counseling his bride to live together in chastity, as brother and sister. As soon as his parents died, his wife entered a convent and he, a monastery. His monastery was located in the Sygrian Mountains in the Province of Cyzicus. The one-time glorious and wealthy Theophanes lived in this monastery as the least of the poor. All were amazed at the change in him. Having become renown because of his strong faith, abstinence, and wisdom, he was summoned to the Seventh Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 783 A.D.]where the veneration of icons was confirmed. Because of his purity and chastity, God bestowed upon him the gift of performing miracles, by which he cured all diseases, especially maniacal disorders and insanity. He prayed to God for all the sick and the unfortunate and, through his prayers, helped them. Only when he became ill and his illness lingered for a while, did he refuse to pray to God for the restoration of his own health but endured his illness with gratitude. When the Iconoclastic persecution resumed again under the wicked Leo the Armenian, Theophanes was brought to Constantinople and cast into prison, where he languished for two years in hardships, pain and humiliation. Then the emperor banished him into exile to the island of Samothrace, which he had earlier foreseen in his spirit and had mentioned it to his jailers. After he arrived at Samothrace, he lived for twenty-three days and appeared before His Lord and Creator to receive his merited wreath of glory.

Venerable Symeon the New Theologian - This God-bearing and great Father of the Church was born in Galatia, Paphlagonia. Simeon was educated in Constantinople and was assigned as a courtier in attendance to the Emperors Basil and Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Simeon left all for the sake of Christ and retreated to a monastery. He lived a life of asceticism under the direction of the Elder Simeon, after which he became the abbot of the Monastery of St. Mamas and in the end became a recluse. He is the greatest theologian after St. Gregory the Theologian. Simeon felt God's Grace in his heart. His words are true spiritual and theological revelations. He died in 1032 A.D. His relics are miracle-performing.

St. Alphege the Bald, bishop of Winchester, England (951) - (also known as Elphege the Elder or Elphege the Bald) Before he was raised to the dignity of bishop of Winchester in 935, Alphege was a monk or hermit. He persuaded many others to enter monastic life, including his kinsman Saint Dunstan and Saint Ethelwold, both of whom he ordained to the priesthood on the same day. His feast is still kept at Winchester and Saint Albans

Also commemorated on this day: St. Alexander confessor priest (1933). New Hieromartyrs John, Constantine priests, New Hieromartyr Vladimir (1938). New Hieromartyr Sergius priest (1943). Righteous Phineas, grandson of Aaron (1500 B.C.).

0St. Gregory the Dialogist, pope of Rome (604). Symeon the Reverent of the Studium (987). The Lydda Icon of the Mother of God Not-Made-by-Hands (1st c.). Righteous Aaron the High Priest, brother of Prophet Moses the God-Seer. Venerable Cyrus, monk of Alexandria (6th c.). St. Paul, bishop of Leon in Brittany (572). St. Nicodemus of Mammola in Calabria (990). Restoration of the Autocephaly of the Georgian Apostolic Church (1917) (Georgia). St. Demetre the Devoted, King of Georgia (1289) (Georgia). St. Theoctistus Dragutin of Serbia (1316).

13 / 26 March — St Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople. (c. 758-829) - he governed the holy Church with wisdom and zeal as the greatest arch-pastor of Constantinople. When Leo the Armenian made his stand against icons, he opposed the Emperor; first counselling him and then denouncing him. For this the accursed Emperor exiled him to the island of Prochonis. There was a monastery on that island, which Nicephorus himself had built in honour of St Theodore. And this confessor of the Orthodox faith spent thirteen years there, then died and went to the Lord in 827. Then all the iconoclast Emperors perished, and Michael, with his mother Theodora, came to the imperial throne in 842, and Methodius became Patriarch. Then, in 846, the relics of St Nicephorus were translated from Prochonnesus to Constantinople and placed first in the Church of St Sophia, from which he had been driven in his lifetime, and then in the Church of the Holy Apostles. The main commemoration of this great hierarch is on June 2nd, but on March 13th is commemorated the finding and translation of his uncorrupt relics. St Nicephorus was driven from Constantinople on March 13th, and on March 13th, nineteen years later, his relics were brought back to his patriarchal seat.

Martyr Christina of Persia - For her unwavering confession of faith in Christ, she was cruelly tortured in Persia in the fourth century. So much did they torture her, flogging her with a whip, that she became weak and died. Her soul then departed from her tortured body and entered into the joy of Christ, the King and Lord.;

Hieromartyr Publius - This priestly-martyr was successor to the episcopal throne of the glorious Dionysius the Areopagite in Athens. As a bishop, he was tortured by the pagans and beheaded in the second century. After a brief period of torture, he inherited life eternal.

Also commemorated on this day: New Hieromartyr Nicholas priest (1919). New Hieromartyr Gregory priest (1921). New Hieromartyr Michael priest (1938). Martyr Sabinus (Abibus) of Egypt (303). Martyrs Africanus, Publius, and Terence of Carthage (3rd c.). Martyr Alexander of Macedonia (305). Venerable Aninas the Presbyter of the Euphrates. St. Leander, bishop of Seville (596). New Hieromartyr Stephen (Bekh), bishop of Izhevsk (1933).

14 / 27 March — St. Benedict - born in Nursia in Italy in 480, of rich and eminent parents, he did not persevere long with his schooling, for he realised himself that he could, through book-learning, lose 'the great understanding of my soul'. And he left school 'an untaught sage and an understanding ignoramus'. He fled to a monastery where a monk, Romanus, gave him the habit, after which he withdrew to a craggy mountain, where he lived for more than three years in a cave in great struggles with his soul. Romanus brought him bread and dropped it over the wall of the crag on a rope to the mouth of the cave. When he became known in the neighbourhood, he, to flee the praise of men, moved away from that cave. He was very brutal with himself. Once, when an impure rage of fleshly lust fell on him, he stripped bare and rolled among nettles and thorns until he had driven out of himself every thought of a woman. God endowed him with many spiritual gifts: insight, healing and the driving out of evil spirits, the raising of the dead and the ability to appear to others from a distance in a dream or vision. He once discerned that he had been given a glass of poisoned wine. He made the sign of the Cross over the glass and it broke into pieces. He founded twelve monasteries, each having twelve monks at first. He later compiled the specifically 'Benedictine' rule, which is today followed in the Roman Church. On the sixth day before his death he commanded that his grave, already prepared as the saint had foreseen that his end was near, should be opened. He gathered all the monks together, gave them counsel and gave his soul to the Lord whom he had faithfully served in poverty and purity. His sister, Scholastica, lived in a women's monastery, where, guided by her brother and herself practising great asceticism, she came to great spiritual perfection. When St Benedict set his soul free, two monks, one on the road and one at prayer in a distant cell, had at the same moment the same vision: a path from earth to heaven, curtained with precious cloth and illuminated at the sides by ranks of people. At the top of that path stood a man of indescribable beauty and light, who told them that the path was prepared for Benedict, the beloved of God. After that vision, the two brethren discovered that their beloved abbot had gone from this world. He died peacefully in about 550 and went to the eternal Kingdom of Christ the King.

St. Theognostus, Metropolitan of Kiev - he was a Greek by origin and a successor to St. Peter of Kiev. He suffered much from the Mongol hordes, especially at the hands of Janibeg Khan. Theognostus was

slandered by his own Russian people before the Mongolian emperor because he did not render the emperor any tribute for his episcopal rank. When the emperor summoned and questioned him concerning this, Theognostus replied: "Christ our God has redeemed this Church from paganism by His Precious Blood. For what and on what should I pay tribute to the pagans?" In the end he was released and returned home. He governed the Church for twenty-five years. He died to the Lord in the year 1353 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Rostislav-Michael, prince of Kiev (1167). St. Euschemon, bishop of Lampsacus (9th c.). Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of St. Theodore ("Feodorovskaya") (1613). Martyr Eustathius and his company at Carrhae, Mesopotamia (741).

15 / 28 March — The Holy Martyr Agapius and the seven with him: Publius, Timolaus, Romulus, Alexander, Alexander, Dionysius and Dionysius - They all suffered in Palestinian Caesarea at the hand of Urban, the governor, in the time of the Emperor Diocletian. All of them, apart from Agapius, were very young men and were not yet Christians. They had never been baptised with water, but their baptism was of blood. One day these seven were watching how the Christians were being tortured: one in fire, another on the gallows, a third before wild beasts, and when they saw with what patience the Christians endured all these tortures, they were inflamed with zeal for Christ, bound their own hands behind their backs and, thus bound, came before Urban saying: 'We too are Christians!' Urban's flattery and threats were in vain. Agapius, a prominent inhabitant of that city, who had previously suffered somewhat for Christ, joined them, and they were inspired with an even greater faith in and love for the Lord. They were all beheaded in 303, and went to the courts of the King of heaven.

Hieromartyr Alexander of Side, in Pamphylia - a deputy of the Emperor Aurelius asked Alexander, "Who are you and what are you?" To that, Alexander replied that, he is a shepherd of the flock of Christ." "And where is this flock of Christ?," further inquired the wicked and suspicious governor. Alexander replied, "Throughout the entire world where men live whom Christ the God created, and among those who believe in Him, they are His sheep. But all who are fallen away from their Creator and are slaves to creation, to man-made things and to dead idols, such as you, are estranged from His flock. At the dreadful judgment of God, they will be placed on the left with the goats." The wicked judge then ordered that Alexander, first of all, be beaten with oxen straps and then thrown into a fiery furnace. But the fire did not harm him in any way. After that, he was skinned and was thrown to the wild beasts, but the beasts would not touch him. Finally, the deputy ordered that Alexander be beheaded. Just as soon as the judge pronounced the sentence, he became possessed by an evil spirit and went insane. Howling, the judge was led before his god-idol and on the way, his evil soul was wrenched from him. St. Alexander suffered between the years 270 - 275 AD.

Martyr Nicander of Egypt - Nicander was skinned and then beheaded for his faith in Christ. As a physician, his crime was that he ministered to Christian martyrs and honourably buried their martyred bodies. He suffered honourable in the year 302 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: New Hieromartyr Alexis priest (1938). New Hieromartyr Michael priest (1940). Venerable Nicander, monk, of Gorodets (Novgorod) (1603). New Martyr Manuel of Crete (1792) (Greek). St. Hebarestes. St. Zachariah, pope of Rome (752)

16 / 29 March — The Holy Apostle Aristobulus, one of the Seventy - He was the brother of the Apostle Barnabas and was born in Cyprus. He was a follower of the Apostle Paul, who mentions him in his Epistle to the Romans (16:10). When the great Apostle Paul created many bishops for different parts of the world, he made this Aristobulus bishop of Britain (i. e. England). In Britain there was a wild people, pagan and wicked, and Aristobulus endured among them unmentionable torments, misfortunes and malice. They smote him without mercy, dragged him through the streets, mocked him and jeered at him. But in the end this holy man came to success by the power of the grace of God. He enlightened the people, baptised them in the name of Christ the Lord, built churches, ordained priests and deacons and finally died there in peace and went to the Kingdom of the Lord whom he had served so faithfully.

The Holy Martyr Sabinas - An Egyptian from the city of Hermopolis, he was the administrator of that city. In the time of a persecution of Christians he went off into a mountain with many other Christians and shut himself in a hut, where he spent the time in fasting and prayer. But a poor man who had brought him food and for whom Sabinas had done much betrayed him; as Judas did Christ, so this poor man for money (for two pieces of gold) betrayed his benefactor. Sabinas, with six others, was taken by soldiers, bound and brought to judgement. After harsh torture, he was thrown into the River Nile, where he gave his spirit to God in 287.

The Holy Martyrs Trophimus and Thallus - They were born in Syria and were brothers by birth. They openly and freely preached Christ and denounced the folly of the Hellenes [Greeks] and Romans. The enraged pagans decided to have them stoned to death, but when they began hurling stones upon

these two holy brothers, the stones reverted and struck the assailants and the brothers remained unharmed. Afterward they were both crucified. From their crosses the brothers taught and encouraged those Christians who stood sorrowfully around. After much agony they presented their souls to the Lord to Whom they remained faithful to the end. They suffered honourably in the year 300 A.D., in the city of Bofor.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Papas of Lycaonia (305). St. Serapion, archbishop of Novgorod (1516). Hieromartyr Alexander, pope of Rome (119). Martyr Julian of Anazarbus (305). Venerable Christodulus, wonderworker of Patmos (1093). Martyr Romanus at Parium on the Hellespont. 10 Martyrs in Phoenicia (Greek). St. Pimen, Fool-for-Christ and Enlightener of Dagestan, and his companion Anton Meskhi, the Censurer of Kings (13th c.) (Georgia). St. Ambrosi (Khelaia) the Confessor, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia (1927) (Georgia). New Martyr Malachi of Rhodes, who suffered at Jerusalem (1500). St. Abban of Kilabban (650) (Celtic & British

17/ 30 March — St. Alexis, the Man of God - Varied are the paths along which God leads those who desire to be pleasing to Him and fulfil His Law. In the time of the Emperor Honorius (393-423), there lived in Rome a high imperial dignitary, Euphemianus, very eminent and very rich. Both he and his wife, Agalais, lived lives pleasing to God. Although he was rich, Euphemianus sat down to table only once a day, at sunset. They had an only son, this Alexis, who, when he was grown up, was compelled to marry. But, on the night of the wedding, he left not only his wife but also his father, took ship and went to the town of Edessa in Mesopotamia, where the wonderful Face of the Lord Himself, sent to King Abgar, was kept. Having venerated this Face, Alexis dressed himself in simple clothing and lived for seventeen years as a poor man in that town, constantly praying to God in the porch of the church of the Mother of God. When he became known as a holy man, he shunned the praise of men and so went off and took a ship that was going to Laodicea. By the providence of God, the ship went off course and took him right to Rome. Regarding this as a cross from God, Alexis decided to go to his father's house and there, unknown, continue his life of self-denial. His father did not recognise him, but from charity allowed him to live in his courtyard in a little shack. There Alexis spent seventeen further years, living only on bread and water. Molested by the servants in many ways, he persevered to the end. And when the end drew near, he wrote a few words on a single sheet of paper, held it in his hand, lay down and breathed his last, on March 17th, 411. Then a voice was heard in the Church of the Holy Apostles, saying to the Emperor, who was present, and the Patriarch: 'Look for the Man of God.' Shortly afterwards it was revealed that this Man of God was in Euphemianus's house. The Emperor, the Pope and their whole escort came to Euphemianus's house and, after lengthy questioning, discovered that the poor man was the Man of God. When they went into his shack, they found him dead with his face shining like the sun. His parents discovered from the paper that he was their son Alexis; and his bride, who had lived for thirty-four years without him, that this was her husband, and they were overcome by immeasurable sorrow and grief. But then they were comforted, seeing how God had glorified His chosen one. For, on touching his body, many of the sick were healed, and a sweet myrrh came forth from it. He was buried in a coffin of marble and emerald. His head is preserved in the Church of St Laurus in the Peloponnese.

St. Patrick, enlightener of Ireland - was born in Britain, of Roman stock, probably with the name Patricius Magonus Sucatus. When he was about fourteen, in the year 403, Irish raiders carried him to their own country as a slave, and there, near Ballymena in Antrim, he first learned to pray while looking after his master's herds. The saint escaped in a ship taking dogs to Gaul and there he became a disciple of Saint Germanus of Auxerre, studying also at the monastery of Lerins. For fifteen years or so he lived abroad, but then he dreamed of Ireland and determined to return to the land of his slavery as a missionary. Saint Germanus consecrated him bishop, and he returned to Ireland in the year 432. At Tara in Meath he confronted King Laoghaire with the Christian Gospel and confounded the druids. He converted the king's daughters. He threw down the idol of Crom Cruach in Leitrim. The saint wrote that he daily expected to be violently killed or enslaved again. But in 444 he established his bishopric at Armagh, and with this city as his base placed the organisation of the Irish church on a sure foundation. 'I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through belief in the Threeness, through confession of the Oneness, towards the Creator of Creation. I arise today through the strength of Christ with His Baptism, through the strength of His Crucifixion with His Burial, through the strength of His Resurrection with His Ascension, through the strength of His descent for the Judgment of Doom. I arise today through the strength of the love of Cherubim, in obedience of Angels, in the service of the Archangels, in hope of resurrection to meet with reward, in prayers of Patriarchs, in predictions of Prophets, in preachings of Apostles, in faiths of Confessors, in innocence of Holy Virgins, in deeds of righteous men. I arise today through the strength of Heaven: light of Sun, brilliance of Moon, splendour of Fire, speed of Lightning, swiftness of Wind, depth of Sea, stability of Earth, firmness of Rock. I arise today through God's strength to pilot me: God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's host to secure me: against snares of devils, against temptations of vices, against inclinations of nature, against everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and anear, alone and in a crowd. I summon today all these powers between me (and these evils): against

every cruel and merciless power that may oppose my body and my soul, against incantations of false prophets, against black laws of heathenry, against false laws of heretics, against craft of idolatry, against spells of witches and smiths and wizards, against every knowledge that endangers man's body and soul. Christ to protect me today against poison, against burning, against drowning, against wounding, so that there may come abundance of reward. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through belief in the Threeness, through confession of the Oneness towards the Creator of creation. Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of Christ. May Thy Salvation, O Lord, be ever with us.' wrote Patrick in the hymn we call 'Saint Patrick's Breastplate'. The saint died in the year 461 at Saul on Strangford Lough, Downpatrick;

The Holy Martyr Marinus - a soldier. Not only did he not want to offer sacrifices to the idols, but if others made sacrifices, he scattered and trampled them under his feet. As a result of this, Marinus was tortured and beheaded in the third century. A certain Senator, Astyrius, clothed in a priceless white garment witnessed the suffering of St. Marinus. Astyrius was so overcome with enthusiasm for the Faith of Christ, Who gives to His followers so much courage, that he placed the martyred body on his shoulders, removed it and buried it with honor. Upon seeing this, the pagans murdered him also as a Christian; St. Withburga, solitary at Holkham and East Dereham (c.743)

Also commemorated on this day: Parents' Saturday. Remembrance of the dead. Venerable Macarius, abbot of Kalyazin (1483). New Hieromartyr Alexander priest (1919). New Hieromartyr Victor priest (1942). Venerable Parthenius of Kiev (1855). Monk-martyr Paul of Crete (767). St. Withburga, solitary at Holkham and East Dereham (ca. 743) (Celtic & British). St. Ambrose, deacon of Alexandria (400). St. Gertrude, abbess of Nivelles (659) (Belgium). St. Theosterictus the Confessor, abbot of Pelecete Monastery near Prusa (826). Venerable Hieromartyr Gabriel the Lesser of Garesja (1802) (Georgia). St. Beccan of Rhum (677) (Celtic & British).

‡ Daily Scripture Readings ‡

Monday - Isaiah 4: 2-5:7; Genesis 3: 21-4:7; Proverbs 3: 34-4:22

Tuesday - Isaiah 5: 7-16; Genesis 4: 8-15; Proverbs 5: 1-15

Wednesday - Isaiah 5: 16-25; Genesis 4: 16-26; Proverbs 5: 15-6:4

Thursday - Isaiah 6: 1-12; Genesis 5: 1-24; Proverbs 6: 3-20

Friday - Isaiah 7: 1-15; Genesis 5: 32-6:8; Proverbs 6: 20-7:1

Saturday - Hebrews 3: 12-16; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-17; Mark 1: 35-44; John 5: 24-30

On Icons

Since there are certain people who find great fault with us for adoring and honoring both the image of the Savior and that of our Lady, as well as those of the rest of the saints and servants of Christ, let them hear how from the beginning God made man in His own image. For what reason, then, do we adore one another, except because we have been made in the image of God? As the divinely inspired Basil, who is deeply learned in theology, says: "The honor paid to the image redounds to the original, and the original is the thing imaged from which the copy is made. For what reason did the people of Moses adore from round about the tabernacle which bore an image and pattern of heavenly things, or rather, of all creation?

Indeed, God had said to Moses: "See that thou make all things according to the pattern which was shewn thee on the mount" And the Cherubim, too, that overshadowed the propitiatory, were they not the handiwork of men? And what was the celebrated temple in Jerusalem? Was it not built and furnished by human hands and skill?

Now, Holy Scripture condemns those who adore graven things, and also those who sacrifice to the demons. The Greeks used to sacrifice and the Jews also used to sacrifice; but the Greeks sacrificed to the demons, whereas the Jews sacrificed to God.

And the sacrifice of the Greeks was rejected and condemned, while the sacrifice of the righteous was acceptable to God. Thus, Noah sacrificed "and the Lord smelled a sweet savor" of the good intention and accepted the fragrance of the gift offered to Him. And thus the statues of the Greeks, happen to be rejected and condemned, because they were representations of demons.

But, furthermore, who can make a copy of the invisible, incorporeal, uncircumscribed, and unportrayable God? It is, then, highly insane and impious to give a form to the Godhead. For this reason it was not the practice in the Old Testament to use icons. However, through the bowels of His mercy God for our salvation was made man in truth, not in the appearance of man, as He was seen by Abraham or the Prophets, but really made man in essence. Then He abode on earth, conversed with men, worked miracles, suffered, was crucified, rose again, and was taken up; and all these things really happened and were seen by men and, indeed, written down to remind and instruct us, who were not present then, so that, although we have not seen, yet hearing and believing we may attain to the blessedness of the Lord.

Since, however, not all know letters nor do all have leisure to read, the Fathers deemed it fit that these events should be depicted as a sort of memorial and terse reminder. It certainly happens frequently that at times when we do not have the Lord's Passion in mind we may see the image of His crucifixion and being thus reminded of His saving Passion, fall down and adore. But it is not the material which we adore, but that which is represented; just as we do not adore the material of the Gospel or that of the Cross, but that which they typify. For what is the difference between a cross which does not typify the Lord and one which does? It is the same way with the Theotokos, too, for the honor paid her is referred to Him Who was incarnate of her.

And similarly, also, we are stirred up by the exploits of the holy men to manliness, zeal, imitation of their virtues, and the glory of God. For, as we have said, the honor shown the more sensible of one's fellow servants gives proof of one's love for the common Master, and the honor paid to the image redounds to the original. This is the written tradition, just as is worshiping toward the east, adoring the Cross, and so many other similar things.

Furthermore, there is a story told about how, when Abgar was lord of the city of Edessenes, he sent an artist to make a portrait of the Lord, and how, when the artist was unable to do this because of the radiance of His face, the Lord Himself pressed a bit of cloth to His own sacred and life-giving face and left His own image on the cloth and so sent this to Abgar who had so earnestly desired it. And Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, writes that the Apostles handed down a great many things unwritten: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast: and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word or by our epistle; and to the Corinthians: "Now I praise you, brethren, that in all things you are mindful of me and keep my ordinances as I have delivered them to you."

St. John of Damascus



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