

# St John of the Ladder / The Forth Sunday of Great Lent

1 / 14 March

**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 7:** By Thy Cross, Thou didst destroy death / to the Thief, Thou didst open Paradise / for the myrrh-bearers, Thou didst change weeping into joy! / and Thou didst command Thy disciples, O Christ God / to proclaim that Thou art risen / granting the world great mercy.

**Tropar of St. John Climacus, Tone 3:** Having raised up a sacred ladder by thy words/ thou wast shown forth to all as a teacher of monastics/ and thou dost lead us, O John/ from the purification that cometh through godly discipline/ unto the light of Divine vision/ O righteous father/ do thou entreat Christ God// that we be granted great mercy.

**Resurrection Kondak, Tone 7:** The dominion of death can no longer hold men captive, / for Christ descended, shattering and destroying its powers. / Hell is bound, while the prophets rejoice and cry: / The Saviour has come to those in faith, / enter, you faithful to the Resurrection.

**Kondak of St. John Climacus, Tone 1:** Offering teachings from thy book as ever-blossoming fruits, O wise one, thou dost sweeten the heart of them that attend to them with vigilance, O blessed one; for it is a ladder that, from earth unto the heavenly and abiding glory, doth lead the souls of those who with faith do honour thee.

**Our Holy Father John Climacus (of the Ladder)** - The author of the famous 'Ladder', he came from an unknown place to Mount Sinai as a sixteen-year-old boy and remained there, first as a novice, then as a hermit and finally as abbot of Sinai, until he died at the age of eighty, in about 649. His biographer, the monk Daniel, says of him: 'He brought his body up to Mount Sinai, but his spirit he brought to the Mount of Heaven'. He spent nineteen years in obedience to his spiritual father, Martyrios. Anastasius of Mount Sinai, who saw John once as a young man, foretold that he would be abbot of Mount Sinai. After the death of his spiritual father, John took himself off to a cave, where he lived for twenty years in strict asceticism. His disciple, Moses, fell asleep one day in the cool shade of a huge rock. John was at prayer in his cell, and, perceiving that his disciple was in danger, began to pray for him. Moses came up to him later, fell to his knees and began to thank him for saving him from certain death. And he related how he had heard John calling him in his sleep and had jumped up at the very moment that a rock fell. Had he not jumped out of the way, the rock would certainly have killed him. At the importunate urging of the brethren, John accepted the abbacy, and guided their souls to salvation with loving zeal. He once heard a monk reproach him for being too verbose. He was not in the least angered, but was silent for an entire year, not uttering a single word until the brethren begged him to speak. He then began to instruct them with the wisdom with which God had endowed him. Once 600 pilgrims came to Mount Sinai. At supper they all noticed an agile young man dressed as a Jew who was serving at table and giving orders to the other servants, taking charge of everything. Suddenly, he disappeared. While everyone was pondering this and asking questions among themselves, John said: 'Do not bother to look for him; that was the prophet Moses serving you in his own home.' During the time that he was silent in his cave, John wrote many instructive books, of which the most famous, 'The Ladder', is much read to this day. It describes the way to raise the soul to God as if on a ladder. Before his death, John appointed his own brother, George, to the abbacy, but George began to grieve greatly at the approaching parting with John. Then John said that, if he were found worthy to stand close to God in the next world, he would pray that George be taken up to heaven in the same year. And so it came to pass. After ten months, George also fell asleep and departed to take his place among heaven's citizens alongside his brother John.

## Epistle: Hebrews 6:13-20

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, Saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, Where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

## AFTER ABRAHAM HAD PATIENTLY ENDURED, HE OBTAINED THE PROMISE

Do you see that the promise alone did not effect the whole, but the patient waiting as well? ...This shows that oftentimes a promise is thwarted through faintheartedness ...What is 'the hope set before us?' From these past events we conjecture the future. For if these came to pass after so long a time, certainly the other will. So that the things which happened



in regard to Abraham also give us confidence concerning the things to come ...He shows that while we are still in the world, and not yet departed from this life, we are already among the promises. For through hope we are already in heaven ...And you see how very suitable an image he has discovered: for he did not say 'foundation,' but 'anchor.' For that which is in the tossing sea, and seems not to be very firmly fixed, stands on the water as upon land, and is shaken and yet is not shaken.

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily XI on Hebrews VI 1, 2, 3. B#58, pp. 418, 419.*

Second Reading: Ephesians 5: 8b-19

### **Gospel - Mark 9:17-31**

Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."

### **HEALING THROUGH PRAYER AND FASTING**

Do you see how He now proceeds to lay beforehand in them the foundation of His doctrine about fasting? ...You see, at any rate, how many blessings spring from them both. For he who is praying as he ought, and fasting, has not many wants, and he who has not many wants cannot be covetous; he who is not covetous, will be also more disposed for almsgiving. He who fasts is light, and winged, and prays with wakefulness, and quenches his wicked lusts, and propitiates God, and humbles his soul when lifted up. Therefore even the apostles were almost always fasting. He who prays with fasting has his wings double, and lighter than the very winds ...nothing is mightier than the man who prays sincerely ...But if your body is too weak to fast continually ...although you cannot fast, yet you can avoid luxurious living.

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily LVII on Matthew XVII, 4, 5. B#54, pp. 355, 356.*

Second Reading - Matthew 4:25 to 5:12

### **WILL WE GO TO HEAVEN OR HELL?**

We learn even as small children about going "to heaven" or "to hell." There is a great difference between them in our minds. This distinction comes from the Scriptures. St. John and the other Evangelists speak in glowing terms of eternal life, and St. Paul tells us 'But it is written, eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him' (1 Cor. 2:9). So we know heaven is indescribably beautiful. St. Paul also speaks of having experienced a vision of paradise or heaven (Cf II Cor. 12). The other is a place of hopelessness and desolation. St. Basil the Great says (On the Holy Spirit, 40): "Those who have grieved the Holy Spirit...will according to one of the Evangelists, be completely 'cut asunder.' (Cf. Matt.24:51) which means utter separation from the Spirit.. the eternal alienation of the soul from the Spirit... Thus 'in hell there is no one who confesses, no one in death who remembers God', because the help of the Spirit is no longer available." We know this also from the story of Lazarus and the Rich man (Luke 16:19-31). Lazarus begged crumbs from the rich man's table and was refused. Both the poor and the rich man died, Lazarus went to heaven, to the arms of Abraham; the rich man to hell, pleading with Abraham to send Lazarus to the rescue. The holy fathers tell us: "But what do we learn from this? That no man can protect us there, if we are betrayed by our works, not because he will not, but because he cannot. For these too take refuge in the impossibility, this the blessed Abraham also indicated, saying 'between us and you there is a great gulf,' so that not even when willing is it permitted them to pass it... The end of each one is at the doors, whether he be old or young: and it is not possible for men after they have gone hence, either to buy oil any more, or to obtain pardon by prayers, though he who entertains be Abraham, or Noah, or Job, or Daniel." (St. John Chrysostom. Homilies LXXVIII on Matthew XXV and XX on Matthew VI).

The parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, recorded by St. Matthew (Mt. 25:1-13) covers the same subject: "What are we to understand by that petition for oil which they make to the prudent virgins if not that, in the hour of judgment, discovering their interior want, they seek testimony from without?...In that day...the testimony of each one will scarcely suffice for himself...They will not find pardon then who waste the time now in which they might repent...The prophet says, (Isa. 55:6) 'Seek the Lord while He may be found: call upon Him while He is near.' (St. Gregory the Great. Parables of the Gospel).

## Saints of the Week

**1 / 14 March — Our Holy Mother, the Martyr Eudocia** - Living in Heliopolis, a city of Phoenicia, during the reign of Trajan, she was at first a great harlot, then a penitent, a nun and finally a martyr. She gained great wealth from her harlotry. The reversal of her life was brought about, through the providence of God, by an elderly monk, Germanus, and that unintentionally. Coming to Heliopolis in the course of his work, he stayed at the house of a Christian woman whose home abutted onto Eudocia's. When at night he began, as was his monastic custom, to read the Psalter and a book on the Dreadful Judgement, Eudocia heard him and stood listening attentively to his every word until the end. Fear and dread took such hold on her that she remained awake until daybreak. As soon as it was dawn, she sent a servant to beg that monk to come to her. Germanus came, and they began a long conversation on that which the old monk had been reading the previous night, and especially on faith and salvation. The result of these discussions was that Eudocia asked the local bishop to baptise her. After her baptism, she gave all her goods to the church, to be distributed to the poor, dismissed her servants and slaves and retired to a women's monastery. She so devoted herself to the monastic life—to obedience, patience, vigils, prayer and fasting—that after thirteen months she was chosen as abbess. She lived fifty-six years in the monastery and was worthy in the eyes of God to be given the gift of raising the dead. When a persecution of Christians arose under the governor, Vincent, holy Eudocia was beheaded. Here is a wonderful example of how a vessel of uncleanness can be purified, sanctified and filled with a precious, heavenly fragrance by the grace of the Holy Spirit; Our Holy Father Agapius; The Holy Martyr Antonina;

**St. David of Wales, bishop (542 - 601)** - of Welsh royalty. Son of King Sant of South Wales and Saint Non. Grandson of Ceredig, Prince of Cardigan. Uncle of King Arthur. Priest. Studied under Saint Paulinus. Collaborated with Saint Columba, Saint Gildas, and Saint Finnigan. Missionary and founder of monasteries. Following his contribution to the synod of Brevi in Cardiganshire, he was chosen primate of the Cambrian Church. Archbishop of Caerleon on Usk; moved the see to Menevia. Presided at the Synod of Brefi which condemned the Pelagian heresy. Encouraged and founded monasteries. First to build a chancel to Saint Joseph of Arimathea's wattle church at Glastonbury. After a vision in his monastery in the Rhos Valley, he set out next day with two monks to Jerusalem to aid the Patriarch. While there his preaching converted anti-Christians. It is said that once while he was preaching, a dove descended to his shoulder to show he had the blessings of the Spirit, and that the earth rose to lift him high above the people so that he could be heard by them all. Born at Menevia (now Saint David's), Wales. Died 601 at Mynyw, Wales. Name means beloved one.

**2 / 15 March — The Hieromartyr Theodotus, Bishop of Cyrenia** - He was chosen for his wisdom and virtue as bishop, and governed the Church of God with love and zeal. When a persecution of Christians arose in the time of the wicked Emperor Licinius, this man of God was taken before the judge and put to various tortures. When the torturer, Sabinus, urged him to deny Christ and worship pagan idols, Theodotus replied: 'If you knew the goodness of my God, who, it is my hope, will by these brief tortures make me worthy of eternal life, you would wish to suffer for Him as I do!' They hammered nails into his body, and he thanked God; then, believing that the end was near, he counselled and instructed the Christians that were around him. But, by the providence of God, there came at that moment an order from the Emperor Constantine to free all Christians who had been brought to trial for the sake of Christ. Then this saint also was freed, returned thus tortured to his see in Cyrenia and lived for a further two years. He then entered into rest in the Lord whom he had served faithfully and for whom he had suffered greatly. He finished his earthly course in 302, and went to the courts of the Lord; The Holy Martyr Troadius; The Four Hundred and Forty Martyrs of Lombardy; Our Holy Father Agathon; The Holy Martyr Euthalia.

**St. Chad of Mercia (672)** - Our holy father Chad was tonsured in Ireland while still in his teens. When he came to Great Britain, we do not know, but in about 655, he became abbot of a monastery in Yorkshire where he was known as a great struggler. St Aiden had been his elder, and St Chad followed his example in everything. St Chad became well known throughout Britain for his holiness, meekness and patient love. In 664, the Bishop of York reposed in the Lord, and Saint Chad was chosen as the new bishop. The saint was filled with love for his flock, and he wanted to teach them all about Christ. The holy bishop began to walk through the whole diocese, teaching the Gospel everywhere. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy in every village and town, and preached from the town squares, where he set up crosses. Moreover, St Chad stopped to teach at every cottage, farm, castle and cross-road, and his diocese became one of the most enlightened in Britain. When blessed Theodore of Tarsus, a Greek bishop, was made Archbishop of Britain in 669, he soon heard of St Chad. When the blessed Theodore visited York, he commanded the holy bishop to travel by horse, rather than on foot, for he saw that St Chad was already old and frail. The saint did not want to fulfil this, for he wanted to come to his people as a minister and servant, as Christ had done, and not like a lord on horseback. Nevertheless, the meek saint obeyed. In this same year, 669, St Chad was appointed as bishop of the Kingdom of Mercia. At that time, Mercia was ruled by King Wulfer. Wulfer had been baptised many years before, but later, he supported the worship of demons in his land, and his chief adviser was a cruel pagan. The king's wife, Erminhilda, was a fervent Christian, however, and tried to teach her children about Christ and His Holy church. St Chad began his long, hard work of teaching the people of Mercia the way of salvation. Again, the holy bishop travelled from town to town, preaching, baptising and celebrating the Divine Liturgy. The saint often preached standing near one of the great stone crosses left behind by the Celtic Christians who had long before been driven out of the country by the invading Angles and Saxons. More than anything else, St Chad liked to go alone into the forest, and pray to God for his flock, and for his own soul. He built a small cell and chapel in the woods, and went there to pray and struggle as often as he could. Once, while St Chad was in his cell praying, he heard a loud crashing sound outside. He went out and saw a large stag, collapsed from exhaustion, by the side of the pool, drinking. Making the sign of the Cross, the saint went to the poor animal and stroked it. He knew that hunters must be chasing the stag to kill it, so the saint hid the animal. Soon, the sound of a hunter's horn was heard, and a richly dressed young man on horseback came galloping into the clearing. He reverently greeted the bishop, and asked if he had seen the deer. "I do not tend the deers, nor the beasts of the forest, nor the birds of the air, but this deer, perhaps, has led you to salvation," the bishop replied. The young man was Prince Wulfade, the eldest son of the King. The saint's words opened the heart of the young prince, and he asked the holy bishop to explain the path of salvation to him. St Chad began to tell the prince about how the world was created by Christ our God and how Christ died on the Cross and rose again to save us. He explained about the Church and how everyone who wants to be saved must be born again in Holy Baptism and be united to Christ's Holy Church. The young prince heard all this, and then begged St Chad to baptise him. The saint took Prince Wulfade to the pond, and entering the deep water, baptised him in the name the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He then taught the prince many more things. Later, Prince Wulfade brought his younger brother Rufine to the saint to be taught and baptised. After this time, the young princes came often to the holy bishop to be taught how to struggle and

pray. The evil pagan counsellor of the king found out about the new, holy life of the two young princes, and he feared that he might lose his power because of them. For this reason, and because he hated the two princes, he began to slander them to the king. "Your two sons have disobeyed you. They have become Christians, even though you forbade it. They no longer obey your law, and they are now plotting against you to take over your throne." The evil counsellor convinced the king that he had to kill the two princes before they killed him. One day, the king and the counsellor followed the two princes into the forest, to the cell of St Chad. The holy bishop was away, and the two young men stood alone in prayer. Suddenly, the king burst through the door and cried out: "Why do you disobey my commands and follow this religion of Christ. You know my law, that the old gods must be worshipped by my sons and nobles. I command you to renounce Christ and give honour to the old gods." "We belong to Christ's Holy Church, and we will never turn from Him. But you yourself were once a Christian. We beg you, father, to return to the Holy Church and save your soul." At these words, the king became enraged, and, drawing his sword, furiously cut the two princes to pieces. Thus, the two holy princes received the crown of martyrdom. When the queen learned of this evil deed, she and her daughter immediately went and buried the relics of the two martyrs, and then went to live in the women's monastery at Sheppey. Soon after this, the king's evil counsellor fell ill and died. Suddenly, the king was left all alone: he had killed his two sons; his wife and daughter had fled from him and become nuns, and his counsellor was dead. Now, the king began to feel sorrow for his evil deed. He realised that his sons were innocent, and he remembered his own baptism, and the last words of his sons, begging him to return to Christ's Holy Church. Finally, overcome by sorrow and repentance, the king set out at dawn to the cell of Saint Chad, to ask his help and prayers. As King Wulfer entered the chapel, the holy bishop was celebrating the Divine Liturgy. The king, feeling his guilt, stood at the door and watched. When the bishop reached that part of the Liturgy in which the great mystery takes place, the sanctuary was suddenly filled with a great light. The king was amazed, and fell to the floor in prostration, looking up with fear. He saw that the great light stayed around the Holy Table and filled the sanctuary until the saint had finished communion. The king remained on the floor until the Liturgy ended, and the saint came to him. After this, the king listened to everything Saint Chad taught him, and then he confessed his faith in Christ, and returned to His Holy Orthodox Church. King Wulfer struggled to completely change his life. He helped Saint Chad and his presbyters to lead the people of the kingdom to Christ's Church, and he became merciful and gentle. St Chad chose the town of Lichfield for his cathedral, as in earlier days, St Arnphibale and nearly a thousand other Christians had been martyred there. King Wulfer helped to build the new Church. St Chad continued his life of holy struggle, teaching the Gospel of Christ's Church everywhere in the Kingdom of Mercia. At length, God called the holy bishop to Himself, and Saint Chad gave up his holy soul to the Saviour on 2 March, 672. Through the prayers of our God-bearing father, St Chad, may we find repentance, and save our souls, glorifying the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen!

**3 / 16 March — The Holy Martyrs Eutropius, Cleonicus and Basiliscus** - They were comrades of St Theodore the Tyro. When glorious Theodore gloriously laid down his life, they remained behind in prison, and were not condemned for a long time because of the courage of the imperial governor of the town of Amasea. When a new governor arrived, more inhuman than his predecessor, he ordered these three to be brought before him. All three were young men; Eutropius and Cleonicus were brothers and Basiliscus a kinsman of Theodore's. But all three were, through their brotherly love, as blood-brothers. And they therefore said to the governor: 'As the Holy Trinity is indivisible, so are we indivisible in faith and inseparable in love.' All flattery on the governor's part was in vain, as were all his efforts to bribe Eutropius. He first invited him to dine with him, which Eutropius refused with a quotation from the Psalms: 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsels of the ungodly', after which he offered him vast wealth—150 litres of silver—which Eutropius likewise refused, reminding the governor that Judas lost his soul for silver. After all these attempts, followed by interrogation and torture, the first two were condemned to be crucified, for which they gave thanks to Christ that He had counted them worthy to die the death He had died; and the third, Basiliscus, was beheaded. They all entered into the Kingdom of joy, where their commander, Theodore, was waiting for them, glorified before Christ the Lord and Victor. They suffered with honour in 308. St Piama of Egypt; An Unknown Girl in Alexandria; St. Non - also known as Nonna; Nonnita - Nobility, possibly of a royal house. A widow, it is said she was the unwed mother of Saint David of Wales. Lived in convents in Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany.

**4 / 17 March — St James the Faster** - lived in the sixth century. He was so perfected in godliness that he was able to heal the gravest illnesses by his prayers. But the enemy of the human race brought a heavy temptation on him. There was once sent to him a woman who had been corrupted by some mockers. She pretended to weep before him, but enticed him to sin. Seeing that he would fall into sin, James put his left hand into the fire and held it there until it was completely burned. Seeing this, the woman was filled with fear and horror, repented and reformed her life. But on a second occasion he did not resist and fell with a young girl whom her parents had brought to him to be healed of her madness. He indeed healed her, but then sinned with her and, in order to conceal the sin, killed her and threw her into a river. As always, the path from lust to murder was not very long. James spent ten years after that as a penitent, living in a grave. He learned after that that God had forgiven him, because, when he at one time prayed for rain in a time of great drought from which both men and cattle were suffering, it fell. Here is an example, similar to that of David, of how wicked the evil demon is; how, by the permission of God, the greatest spiritual giants can topple, and how again, by sincere repentance, God in His compassion will forgive the greatest sins and does not punish those who punish themselves.; Our Holy Father Gerasim.

**5 / 18 March — Saint Nikolai, (Velimirovic) of Ochrid** - Saint Nikolai was internationally known in the religious literary world. He was born to very religious parents in 1880 in Lelic, Yugoslavia. After finishing high school, he applied to a military academy and was rejected because he did not possess the physical requirements. Small in body but high in spirit, he decided to be a soldier for the Kingdom of Heaven. He applied to a theological seminary in Belgrade, where he was accepted. He graduated from theology in 1902. For a while he was teaching, but as he was an outstanding student, he was sent to enrich his education in France, Switzerland, Germany, England, and sometime later in Russia. He was fascinated by the firm beliefs of the Russian Orthodox people. In 1908, he received his doctorate of theology in Bern. The school year of 1908-09, he spent at Oxford University and earned his doctorate in philosophy. After a serious illness, he decided to serve the Lord who had spared his life. On December 20, 1909, he became a hieromonk in the Rakovica Monastery and put to work his knowledge and ability to serve God and the Serbian people. He lived and worked for God and the Serbian people as well as working in and for the Church, but it was not without serious criticism. From 1915-1919, he lived in America and England where he worked for his church and his government. In 1919, he returned to Serbia and was ordained Bishop of Zica. He worked very hard teaching religion, helping the poor, and opening orphanages. He earned the nickname "Grandpa". He was a zealous reader of the Holy Fathers. In 1941, the Germans arrested him. He was in confinement with Serbian Patriarch Gavrilo in the Ljuboslir Vojlovica Monastery for the greater part of the second world war where he wrote his "Prayer

Canon" and a prayer to the Holy Mother of God of Vojlovica. In January 1945, he wrote three prayers which are on the cover of the Gospel in the Serbian Church in Vienna. In September of 1944, Saint Nikolai and Patriarch Gavriilo were taken from Vojlovica to the concentration camp Daxay, where they were subjected to abuse and torture until May 8, 1945, when they were rescued by Americans. Some time later Patriarch Gavriilo returned to Serbia but Nikolai decided to emigrate with one wish: to be buried in his fatherland. He came to America in 1946. Poor in health, he still had a lot of strength for his missionary and church work. He travelled extensively through America and Canada. He was a zealous writer and good teacher, often being referred to as the "New Chrysostom" because of his eloquence. He left a legacy of work both in English and in Serbian. One of these works is Missionary Letters. He died on the eighteenth of May in 1956 in the Monastery of Saint Tikhon in Pennsylvania and was buried in the Monastery of Saint Sava in Libertyville, Illinois. However his relics has since been translated to his homeland.

**Tropar of Saint Nikolai (Tone 4):** Thy righteous acts have revealed thee to thy flock as a model of faith, a reflection of humility and a teacher of abstinence, O Holy Father Nikolai; therefore, through humility thou hast obtained exaltation and through poverty, riches; pray to Christ God to save our souls; The Holy Martyr Conon of Isauria; The Holy Martyr Conon the Gardener; Our Holy Father Hesychius the Faster; Our Holy Father Mark the Ascetic; St. Kieran of Saigher, Munster, Ireland (5th-6th c.)

**6 / 19 March — The Forty Two Holy Martyrs of Ammorio** - these were all generals under the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus. When the Emperor lost the struggle against the Saracens around the town of Ammorio, the Saracens took the town and enslaved many Christians, with these generals among them. The remaining Christians they either killed or sold into slavery, but threw these generals into prison, where they remained for seven years. Moslem leaders came many times, urging them to accept the Mohammedan faith, but the generals refused to do so. When the Saracens told the generals that Mahomet was a true prophet and Christ was not, the generals asked them: 'If two men were to quarrel about a field, with one saying: "It's mine!", and the other saying: "No; it's mine!", and one had many witnesses that it was his field and the other had not a single witness but himself, what would you say—whose field was it?' The Saracens replied: 'His, of course, who had the many witnesses.' 'You have judged right', the generals answered them. 'So it is with Christ and Mahomet. Christ has many witnesses: the ancient prophets, whom you also recognise, from Moses to John the Baptist, witnessed to Him, But Mahomet only witnesses to himself that he is a prophet, and has no other witness.' The Saracens were confounded, but attempted then to defend their faith thus: 'That our faith is better than Christianity is seen in this: that God has given us victory over you, that He gives us the best lands on earth and an empire much greater than the Christian.' To this the generals replied: 'If that were so, then the idol-worship of Egypt and Babylon, and of Greece and Rome, and the fire-worship of Persia, would have been true faiths, for at some time each of these peoples has conquered others and governed them. It is obvious that your victory and power and wealth do not prove the truth of your faith. We know that God sometimes gives victory to Christians, and sometimes leaves them in torture and suffering to correct them and bring them to repentance and cleansing from sin.' After seven years they were beheaded, in 845. Their bodies were cast into the Euphrates, but they floated to the other bank where Christians collected them and gave them burial. Blessed Job; The Holy Martyrs Conon, Father and Son;

**St. Fridolin, enlightener of the Upper Rhine** - c 540. Born in Ireland, he became a monk at Luxeuil in France. Later he founded the monastery of Sackingen and is venerated as the Apostle of the Upper Rhine in Germany.

**Translation of the relics of Saints Cyneswitha and Cyneburga, abbesses of Caistor** (Daughter of Pendra of Mercia, a fierce opponent of Christianity. Sister of Saint Cyneburga. Relative of Saint Tibba. Benedictine nun. Abbess at Dormancaster (now Castor) abbey in Northamptonshire, England) and Saint Tibba (Benedictine nun at Dormancaster abbey, Northamptonshire, England), nun of Rynall.

**7 / 20 March — The Seven Hieromartyrs of Cherson** - Basil, Ephraim, Eugene, Elpidius, Agathodorus, Aetherius and Capito. They were all bishops in Cherson at different times, and all suffered from unbelievers (only Aetherius died peacefully), either Jews or Greeks from Scythia. They had all gone to that savage land as missionaries, sent by the Patriarch of Jerusalem to bring the light of the Gospel there. They were all tortured and suffered for the sake of their Lord. Basil raised the son of a prince of Cherson to life, which embittered the Jews and they brought charges against him. He was bound by the feet and dragged through the streets of the town until he gave up the ghost. Ephraim was beheaded. Eugene, Elpidius and Agathodorus were beaten with rods and stones until they gave their souls into God's hands. Aetherius lived in the time of Constantine the Great, and so he governed the Church in freedom and peace, built a great church in Cherson and died peacefully. When the last of them, Capito, was sent as bishop, the savage Scythians sought a sign of him, that they might believe. And they suggested to him that he go into a burning furnace, and, if he were not burned up, they would believe. With fervent prayer and hope in God, Capito put on his episcopal pallium and, crossing himself, entered the burning furnace, holding his heart and thoughts directed towards God. He stood in the flames for about an hour, and came out untouched, with no scorch-mark either on his body or his clothing. Then all cried out: 'There is one God, the great and powerful God of the Christians, who keeps His servant safe in the burning furnace!', and the whole town and surroundings were baptised. Many spoke of this wonder at the Council of Nicaea (325), and all glorified God and praised the firm faith of St Capito. But Scythian unbelievers caught Capito by the River Dnieper and drowned him. They all suffered around the beginning of the fourth century; Our Holy Father Emilianus;

**Saint Eosterwine** - 688. A Northumbrian noble, he entered the monastery of Wearmouth with his relative St Benedict. He succeeded St Benedict as abbot. He was celebrated for his gentleness.