

The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem / The Sixth Sunday of Great Lent

15 / 28 March

Extracts from the Vigil Service:

Today the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together, and we all take up Thy Cross and say: Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

Today the Word and co-eternal Son of God the Father, whose throne is the heaven and whose footstool is the earth, humbles Himself and comes to Bethany, seated on a dumb beast, on a foal. Then the children of the Hebrews, holding branches in their hands, praise Him saying: 'Hosanna in the highest: blessed is He that comes, the King of Israel'.

Let us also come today, all the new Israel, the Church of the Gentiles, and let us cry with the Prophet Zechariah: Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem; for behold, thy King comes unto thee: He is meek and brings salvation, and He rides upon the colt of an ass, the foal of a beast of burden. Keep the feast with the children, and holding branches in your hands sing His praises: Hosanna to the highest; blessed is He that comes, the King of Israel.

1st, 2nd 3rd Stichera of 'Lord, I have cried'



Tropar of The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, Tone 1: In confirming the common Resurrection, O Christ God, Thou didst raise up Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion. Wherefore, we also, like the children bearing the symbols of victory, cry to Thee, O Vanquisher of death: Hosanna in the highest, blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,

Another Tropar of The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, Tone 4: As by baptism we were buried with Thee, O Christ our God, so by Thy Resurrection we were deemed worthy of immortal life; and praising Thee, we cry: Hosanna in the highest; blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Kondak of The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, Tone 6: Being borne upon a throne in heaven, and upon a colt on the earth, O Christ God. Thou didst accept the praise of the angels and the laudation of the children as they cry to Thee: Blessed is he that cometh to recall Adam.

Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND ... ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY—MEDITATE ON THESE THINGS

It is possible to grieve for our own sins and yet to rejoice in Christ. Or when your communion with God is not hindered, rejoice ...Is it best to envy, or to rejoice with one another? Let us search out all these things, and we will find that virtue, like a truly kind mother, places us in safety, while vice is a treacherous thing and full of danger ...That which is 'honourable' belongs to external virtue and that which is 'pure' to the soul ...If we will be at peace with each other, God will be with us ...Therefore we must make a beginning on our part, and then we will draw God towards us ...For he 'who digs a pit for his neighbour, falls into it' (Prov. 26:27) ...As we injure ourselves when we injure our neighbours, so by benefiting them, we benefit ourselves.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily XIV on Philippians IV. B#57, pp. 246, 248, 249.

Gospel - John 12: 1-18

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus. The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!" Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt." His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him. Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign.

THE ENTRY OF CHRIST INTO JERUSALEM

Brothers and sisters! So the Holy Church indicates for us spiritual spring. Winter is over. Ended is the state in which our heart was like ice, as if dead in languor, thirsting for Grace. And now, during the past six weeks the sun has been warming us more and more, and nature has gradually started to come back to life. And so our heart too should have come back to life.

Last night during the evening service, we sang, "Children were bearing the sign of Victory . . ." "What sign? Pussy willows, branches which had already budded, indicating that spring was coming, as if saying to us: Look here, joy is already beginning, happiness. So through the pussy willows, the Church has been saying to us: This is the beginning for you too; just be Christians, and think it over, and you will begin to see a sign. A sign of what? —that Christ is Risen.

And we, brothers and sisters, we close our eyes like an ostrich who puts his head under his wing. We don't want to think that a limit will come, just as it comes to old people: hands stop working, eyes stop seeing, ears stop hearing—a limit. The end will come. And it seems that in these moments, when we begin to recognize the approach of old age, we involuntarily compare it with winter, with snow. Yes, but after winter comes spring. And in a spiritual understanding: after our eyes close, then comes Eternal Life, the joy of Life with Christ. This is what last night's pussy willows were telling us about, "bearing the sign." Abide not in grief; turn to joy. And now comes the moment when the Lord, by a special mystery, through Passion Week which we are approaching, will give us the feeling of this joy of Eternal Life.

Now we worry about a piece of bread, about a roof over our heads, about our social conditions. And it seems to us that the meaning of life consists of this. But the Church says, Look at the pussy willows: leaves will sprout and later flowers and fruit. So it is even in a Christian soul. Everything we are busying ourselves with, all this will remain here. But with us there will go another stream of life—spiritual life. You should think about this. But is it so? Maybe it's not. Brothers, it is so! Today the Holy Church speaks to us through the Apostle. What does the Church say? She says: "Rejoice in the Lord always, (Phil. 4:4). Today, at the conclusion of Great Lent, she says to us, rejoice! Do you have this joy? If this is joy about Eternal Life, then yes, you will have this joy, because Christ is Risen. And all our sicknesses, our old age, our expectancy of death—all of this will dissolve. In what? In Christ. And when the moment of our departure comes (this is how we believe and what the Church says), God Almighty, the Giver of Life, will come to us and will perform for us the mystery of releasing our bonds, and we will enter eternal existence.

"Rejoice," says the Apostle, "and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). See how the Apostle is exhorting us. But what is this? There is a condition: "Let all men know your meekness," (trans. forbearance or moderation in English versions) continues the Apostle. Look here, spring has come to nature. But it will not stop here, it will go further; it will change into summer. And so it is with us—life goes on. "Let all men know your meekness." This means that our life should move in such a way that pride will depart. It should dissolve in Christ's patience, in Christ's meekness. The Apostle says: May your meekness be of the Lord. And further, "Have no anxiety about anything," but be always in prayer. Hear what promises the Lord gives. "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your wishes (trans. requests in English version) be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). What daring is given to us!

But what kind of wishes should our prayers express? If they are the wishes which people experience in sitting rooms, theatres, worldly amusements—then of course, brothers, the Lord desires something else for us, because all of this will remain here. This senselessness, this commotion, this quarrelling, this adversity, this rage, all this will remain here. And only joy will depart with us. This is joy: if you wish for meekness, humility, prosperity, brotherly love, Christian living, quiet—then pray! The Lord will be with you. Rejoice! The Holy Day is approaching. Tomorrow there will come great moments when the Sacrament is being performed. And so in our hearts will be revealed this joy: Christ is Risen! May this joy abide with us in a joyous feeling of Eternal Life.

Let us hasten, O believers, moving from one divine festival to another; from palms and branches to the fulfilment of the august and saving sufferings of Christ. Let us watch Him, bearing His sufferings voluntarily for our sake; and let us sing unto Him with worthy praise, crying, O Fountain of mercy, O Haven of Salvation, O Lord, glory to You.

Palm Sunday Evening Vespers.

Saints of the Week

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.

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.

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)

18 / 31 March — St. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem - Born in Jerusalem in the time of Constantine the Great, he died in 386, in the time of Theodosius the Great. He was ordained priest in 346, and in 350 succeeded the blessed Patriarch Maximus on the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem. He was three times deposed from his throne and sent into exile; until in the end, in the time of Theodosius, he did not return but lived a further eight years in peace and gave his soul to the Lord. He had two great struggles: one against the Arians, who became strong under Constans, Constantine's son, and the other in the time of Julian the Apostate, with this renegade and with the Jews. In a time of Arian domination, at Pentecost, the sign of the Cross, brighter than the sun, appeared stretching over Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives and remaining several hours from nine o'clock in the morning. A letter was sent to the Emperor Constans about this happening, which was seen by all living in Jerusalem, and this served for the strengthening of Orthodoxy against the heretics. In the time of the Apostate, another sign took place. In order to humiliate the Christians, Julian arranged with the Jews for them to rebuild the Temple of Solomon. Cyril prayed to God that this should not happen. And there was a terrible earthquake which destroyed all that had been newly-built. The Jews began again, but again there was an earthquake, that destroyed not only the new building but also the old stones that were still in place beneath the earth. And so the words of the Lord came true: 'Not one stone shall remain on another.' Of this saint's many writings there has been kept his 'Catecheses', a first-class work, which sets out the faith and practice of Orthodoxy to the present day. A rare arch-pastor and a great ascetic, he was meek, humble, worn out by fasting and pale of face. After a life of great labour and knightly battle for the Orthodox faith, he entered peacefully into rest and went to the eternal courts of the Lord.

Aninus the Wonderworker - born in Chalcedon. He was of short stature as was Zacchaeus of old but great in spirit and faith. He withdrew from the world in his fifteenth year and settled in a hut near the Euphrates river where he prayed to God and atoned for his sins, at first with his teacher Mayum and, after his death, alone. Through the power of his prayers, he replenished a dry well with water, healed the sick of various maladies and tamed wild beasts. A trained lion accompanied him

and was at his service at all times. He discerned the future. When Pionius, a stylite, was attacked and badly beaten by robbers some distance away from Aninus, Pionius decided to descend from the pillar and proceed to complain to the judges. St. Aninus "discerned the soul" of this stylite and his intention. He sent a letter to Pionius, by his lion, counselling him to abandon his intention, to forgive his assailants and to continue in his asceticism. His charity was inexpressible. The bishop of Neo-Caesarea presented him with a donkey in order to ease the burden of carrying water from the river, but he gave the donkey to a needy man who had complained to him about his poverty. The bishop presented him with another donkey and he gave that one away. Finally, the bishop gave him a third donkey, not only to serve as a water-carrier but one that Aninus was to care for and to return. Before his death Aninus saw Moses, Aaron and Or [Egyptian Ascetic] approaching him, and they called out to him, "Aninus, the Lord is calling you, arise and come with us." He revealed this to his disciples and gave up his soul to the Lord, Whom he faithfully served. He was one-hundred ten years old when his earthly life was ended.

St. Edward the Martyr, king of England (978) - the eldest son of the first-crowned king of England, Edgar the Peaceable, and the only King of England formally recognised as a saint by the Orthodox Church. He was slain in 978 at the instigation of his step-mother and a party within the realm who wished to secularise the monastic properties and lands. The abundant miracles which took place at his tomb bore witness to the favour he had found with our Saviour, and he has been glorified by the Church for his righteous life and his defence of the monastics. His relics were uncovered in 1931 during an archaeological dig at the ruins of Shaftesbury Abbey in Dorset, which are privately owned. Mr John Wilson Claridge, the man who found the relics and whose family 'owned' them decided in the 1980's to hand them over to the care of a group of Russian Orthodox monks in England under the jurisdiction of the Russian Church Abroad. He made this decision as he wanted the relics to be kept in a place where they would be properly venerated. A small monastic brotherhood was formed and a church building was purchased to house the relics (now the Shrine Church of St. Edward). In 1982, the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad verified the correctness of the veneration of St. Edward. The significance for England of the martyred King Edward is akin to that of the martyred Tsar for the Russian people. Holy King-martyr Edward, pray for us!

19 March / 1 April — The Holy Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria - Chrysanthus was the only son of a great noble, Polemon, who moved from Alexandria to Rome. As the son of rich parents, Chrysanthus studied all the secular disciplines, having the most learned men as his teachers. But worldly wisdom confused him, and he was left ignorant of the truth. And he grieved over this. But God, who provides for each and all, assuaged the grief of the young Chrysanthus by putting copies of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles into his hands. The truth was revealed to him in the reading of these. But he wanted a teacher, and found one in the person of Carpophorus, a priest, who instructed and baptised him. But this did not please his father, who did all in his power to turn him back from the Christian faith. Then, in no way succeeding, the wicked father tried to corrupt him by shutting him up alone with shameless girls, but Chrysanthus gained the victory over himself in that, and preserved his virginity. Then his father compelled him to marry the pagan Daria, but Chrysanthus persuaded Daria to receive the Christian faith and to live with him as his sister although appearing to be married. When his father died, Chrysanthus began openly to confess Christ and to live as a Christian, both he and his whole house. In the time of the Emperor Numerian, both he and Daria were terribly tortured for their faith. The torturer Claudius himself, though, seeing the endurance of these martyrs and the wonders that were revealed at their martyrdom, embraced the Christian faith with all his house. For this, Claudius was drowned, both his sons were beheaded and his wife died on the gallows with prayer on her lips. Daria showed such endurance under martyrdom that the pagans cried out: 'Daria is a goddess!' Finally it was decreed that Chrysanthus and Daria be buried in a deep pit and covered with stones. A church was later built on the site. Near this pit was a cave, in which some Christians at one time met together for prayer and communion in memory of the holy martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria. Discovering this, the pagans rolled a stone across the entrance to the cave, and thus by death drove those Christians from this world into that better world where Christ the Lord reigns in eternity. These glorious martyrs, Chrysanthus and Daria and the others with them, among whom are Diodorus the priest and Marianus the deacon, suffered for Christ in Rome in 283 and 284;

The Holy Martyr Pancharius.- born in Villach, Germany [present day Austria]. He was a high-ranking officer at the court of Diocletian and Maximian. At first, he denied Christ but, being counselled by his mother and sister, he returned to the Faith of Christ and died for it in the year 302 A.D.

20 March / 2 April — Our Holy Father John and those martyred with him - This glorious monastery, which still exists today, was visited by our own Serbian St. Sava and endowed by several Serbian rulers. Many times it was attacked by brutal Arabs, pillaged and laid waste. But, by the Divine Providence of God, it was always restored and is preserved until today. During the reign of Constantine and Irene, it was attacked and pillaged by the Arabs. The monks did not want to flee but, counselling with their abbot Thomas, they said, "We have fled from the world into this wilderness for the sake of our love for Christ and it would be shameful if we fled from the wilderness out of fear of men. If we are slain here, we will be slain because of our love for Christ for Whose cause we came to live here." Having decided, they awaited the armed Arabs, unarmed as lambs before wolves. Some of the monks the Arabs killed with arrows and some they sealed off in the cave of St. Sabbas. They lighted a fire at the entrance of the cave and all were suffocated by the smoke. Thus many of them died as martyrs for the sake of Christ and were translated into the Kingdom of Him Whom they loved and for Whose love they perished. They suffered honourably prior to the Feast of the Resurrection in 796 A.D., during the reign of Constantine and Irene and Elijah, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. A just punishment quickly befell these savage attackers. Returning to their tents, they began to quarrel among themselves and in mutual combat all were slain. This occurred in the year 796 A.D.;

The Holy Martyr Photina - This was the Samaritan woman who had the rare fortune to converse with the Lord Christ Himself at the Well of Jacob, near Sychar (St. John 4:4-31). Believing in the Lord, Photina afterwards went to preach His Gospel with Victor and Josiah her two sons, and with her five sisters, Anatolia, Phota, Photida, Parasceve and Cyriaca. They had gone to Carthage in Africa. There they were arrested and taken to Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero and were thrown into prison. By God's Divine Providence, Domnina, the daughter of Nero, came into contact with St. Photina and was converted to

the Faith of Christ by her. After imprisonment they all suffered for the sake of Christ. Photina, who for the first time was enlightened with the light of truth at the well of Sychar, was now thrown into a well where she died and entered into the eternal kingdom of Christ;

St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, bishop (687) - one of the greatest English saints and missionaries, became a monk of Melrose abbey on the River Tweed 'then ruled by Abbot Eata, the gentlest and simplest of men,' as the Venerable Bede observed. The prior of Melrose, named Boisil, taught Cuthbert the Bible and the pattern of a devout life, and when Boisil died, Cuthbert became prior in his place. He would preach throughout the surrounding countryside, riding many miles on horseback to win the erring for Christ. 'Cuthbert was so great a speaker and had such a light in his angelic face,' wrote Bede, 'he had also such a love for proclaiming his good news, that none hid their innermost secrets from him.' But the saint preferred the life of a hermit and secured Eata's permission to live as one for eight years on the island of Farne. In the year 684 he was appointed, unwillingly, Bishop of Hexham. Cuthbert preferred Lindisfarne, where Eata was bishop, to Hexham and the two men exchanged bishoprics. He had two more years to live.

21 March / 3 April — St James, Bishop and Confessor - Neither his birthplace nor the place of his episcopate are known. It is known only that he fulfilled the Law of Christ, living in strict asceticism, in fasting and prayer and that, in the time of Copronymos, he endured much hardship and suffering at the hands of the iconoclasts: hunger, imprisonment and ridicule of every sort. He finally gave his soul to God, whom he had faithfully served in this life. He lived and suffered in the eighth century. Our Holy Father Cyril (Beryllus), Bishop of Catania; St Thomas, Patriarch of Constantinople; Our Holy Father Serapion; St. Enda, earliest leader of Irish monasticism.

Great and Holy Friday: Why the wise thief was pardoned.

And one of the malefactors which were hanging railed on Him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou contest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise. (Luke 23:39-13)

This Is How the holy Evangelist Luke relates the edifying and moving incident concerning the conversion and the Lord's pardoning of the thief who hung on the cross next to Him on Golgotha.

How did the thief deserve such mercy? What prompted such a quick and definitive response from the Lord? All the righteous figures of the Old Testament, including Saint John the

Baptist, were still shut up in hades. The Lord Himself was preparing to descend into hades, not, of course, to suffer there, but to bring out the prisoners.

The Lord had not yet promised anyone to lead them into the Kingdom of Heaven; even the Apostles were promised to be taken into His mansions only after He had prepared them.

How is it that a thief was granted such mercy before anyone else? Why were the gates of Heaven opened so quickly for him? Let us examine the soul of the thief and the attendant circumstances.

His whole life had been one of theft and crime. But evidently his conscience had not died, and in the depths of his heart something good remained. Tradition even holds that he was that very thief who, during Christ's flight into Egypt, took pity on the beautiful Baby and forbade his accomplices to kill Him, when they attacked the holy family. Did he perhaps recall the face of that Child when he looked upon the face of the One hanging next to him on the Cross?

Whether or not this actually occurred, when the thief looked upon Christ his conscience was awakened. There he was hanging next to the Righteous One, next to Him Who was *comely in beauty more than the sons of men* (Ps. 44:2), Whose form at that time was ignoble, and inferior to that of the children of men... , *having neither form nor comeliness* (Is. 53:2-3).

Gazing upon Him, the thief awoke as it were from a deep sleep. He saw clearly the difference between Him and himself. That One was without doubt a Righteous One, Who forgave even His tormentors and prayed for them to God, Whom He called His Father; while he was the killer of many victims, one who had shed the blood of people who had done him no harm.

Gazing upon the One hanging on the Cross, he saw as in a mirror his moral downfall. All the good concealed within him was awakened and surfaced. He came to a realization of his sins, he understood that it was his own fault that had brought him to this bitter end; he had no one to blame. Like the thief crucified on Christ's left, he too had been gripped by hatred for the executioners, but this gave way to a feeling of humility and compunction. He felt fear at God's coming judgment.

Sin became loathsome, dreadful. In his soul he was no longer a thief. There awakened in him feelings of love for mankind, merciful kindness. With his fear over the fate of his soul there was united a revulsion to the outrage being heaped upon the innocent Sufferer.

He had undoubtedly heard about the great Teacher and Wonderworker from Nazareth. What had occurred in Judea and in Galilee was the subject of many conversations and debates throughout the country. Previously, he had paid scant attention to any of this. Now, finding himself together with Him and in the same situation, he began to understand His moral greatness.

Christ's lack of malice, His all-embracing forgiveness. His prayer, astonished the thief. He understood in his heart that beside him was no ordinary man. To turn to God as to One's own father, in the hour of death, was possible only for Someone who truly knew Himself to be the Son of God. Not to waver in One's teaching about love and unconditional forgiveness, to bear the humiliation of men's slander and malice on the part of those to whom one has done good, was possible only for One who had the most intimate relationship with the source of Love, or Who was that Love.

The thief recalled all the remarkable things he had heard about the One now crucified with him, and a warm feeling of faith was kindled in his heart. Yes, He was without doubt the Son of God, incarnate on earth while existing in uninterrupted communion with His Father; the Son of God, Whom the earth did not receive and Who was returning to Heaven; the Son of God, Who was able and powerful to forgive men their sins! That gave hope that the thief would escape condemnation at the Dread Judgment. If Jesus prayed to His Father for His hangmen,

He would not refuse to do the same for the one crucified with Him. The thief need only turn to Him, Who now shared with him the same bitter suffering, and He would receive him into His blessedness.

True, his turning to Christ with words of love and sympathy would be met with jeers on the part of the angry crowd. To acknowledge Him as a holy man and the Son of God would mean drawing upon himself the attention and anger of the Hebrew elders. Although they could not cause him greater physical agony than he already endured, it would be painful to be surrounded by malice; how much more grievous his sufferings would be when they began to revile him likewise.

But what did he care now about the anger of earthly authorities, about men's taunts. As painful as it was to be abandoned by men at the threshold of death, it would be still more painful to be abandoned by God. He was nearing God's judgment, and it was God alone he need fear! In the final moments of life, he had to do whatever was still in his power to gain God's good will.

Perhaps he could say something to ease His suffering even just a little, perhaps even just one of the blasphemers would be ashamed and stop slandering Him. Christ had promised to give a reward for a cup of water offered in His name; surely He would not leave him without recompense. Let those reviling Christ revile him also! This would tighten his bond with Christ! He was going to share Christ's lot here; Christ would surely remember him when He came into His glory!

There, amidst the clamor of slander, blasphemy and derision, he began exhorting his companion hanging to the left of Christ to stop slandering Him. *Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.* And then from his lips came a humble voice: *Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom* (Luke 23:40-42).

This was the cry of a former thief — now Christ's new disciple — who came to believe in Christ at a time when His other disciples had abandoned Him.

"A thief blessed Him, while I denied Him" (*Sedalion*, Tone 5), Saint Peter lamented afterwards. At that time all the other Apostles likewise doubted the Lord. Even Saint John the Theologian, who had followed inseparably after his Teacher and was standing at the Cross on Golgotha, although he continued to be faithful to his beloved Jesus, even he did not then have complete faith in the Divinity of his Teacher. It was only after the Resurrection, after entering the empty tomb where lay the napkin and grave clothes which had wrapped Christ's dead Body, only then did he "see and believe" that Christ had truly risen and was indeed the Son of God.

The Apostles wavered in their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, because they anticipated and desired to see in Him an earthly king, in whose kingdom they could sit at the right and the left hand of the Lord.

The thief understood that the Kingdom of Jesus of Nazareth, despised and given over to a shameful death, was not of this world. And it was precisely this Kingdom that the thief now sought: the gates of earthly life were closing after him; opening before him was eternity. He had settled his accounts with life on earth, and now he thought of life eternal. And here, at the threshold of eternity, he began to understand the vanity of earthly glory and earthly kingdoms. He recognized that greatness consists in righteousness, and in the righteous, blamelessly tortured Jesus he saw the King of Righteousness. The thief did not ask Him for glory in an earthly kingdom but for the salvation of his soul.

The faith of the thief, born of his esteem for Christ's moral greatness, proved stronger than the faith of the Apostles, who, although captivated by the loftiness of Christ's teaching, based their faith to a still greater extent on the signs and wonders He wrought.

Now there was no miraculous deliverance of Christ from His enemies — and the Apostles' faith was shaken.

But the patience He exhibited, His absolute forgiveness, and the faith that His Heavenly Father heard Him so clearly, indicated Jesus' righteousness, His moral superiority, that one seeking spiritual and moral rebirth could not be shaken.

And this is precisely what the thief, aware of the depth of his fall, craved. He did not ask to sit at the right or the left hand of Christ in His Kingdom, but, conscious of his unworthiness, he asked in humility simply that he be remembered in His Kingdom, that he be given even the lowest place.

Before everyone he openly confessed the Crucified Christ as Lord, and asked of Him the mercy of forgiveness.

His humble faith in Christ made him a confessor. By his own volition he was even a martyr, for he did not fear to recognize as his Lord the rejected “King of the Jews” — on Whom was concentrated the hatred of the multitude who had gathered in Jerusalem from all corners of the world for the Passover, and who, together with their elders and priests, were blaspheming Christ. The thief would not have feared even to suffer for Him.

Thus, the earnest repentance of the thief gave birth to humility, and together with this turned out to be a solid foundation for a strength of faith which at that time not even Christ's closest disciples possessed. The converted thief performed a spiritual feat which not one of them was then capable of doing.

Whoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven (Matt. 10:32).

The thief confessed Christ; he confessed Him before a whole multitude who were railing at Him; he confessed Him then when no one else dared, and when even those few disciples and women who remained faithful to Him manifested their love for Him only with their bitter tears.

The thief did what once the three youths in Babylon did, refusing to bow down before the golden idol which Nebuchadnezzar had set up on the plain of Dura and before which “all nations, tribes and tongues” bowed down (Dan. 3:7).

The thief came to belief in the suffering Lord; confessing Him as “the hidden God,” he came to know Him before anyone else, and the power of His resurrection, and participation in His sufferings, *being made conformable unto His death* (Phil. 3:10); he understood before anyone else what constitutes the Kingdom *not of this world*; he came to know *what is truth* (John 18:36-38).

He was the first to comprehend the nature of Christ's Kingdom, and therefore he was the first to enter it.

He was the first to see *Jesus Christ and Him crucified* (I Cor. 2:2), the first to preach *Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumblingblock, to the Greeks foolishness, But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (I Cor. 1:23-24).

For this reason he was also first to personally experience the power and wisdom of God, the power of Christ's co-suffering and regenerating love; he was first to hear “the sound of the power of the Cross, for through it Paradise was opened.” (Fourth Ode, Ascension Canon)

His thorough repentance of his sins and transgressions, his profound humility, his firm faith in the Crucified Lord Jesus Christ Who gave Himself over to suffering, and his confession, made at a time when the whole world was against Christ — these are the strands which wove the crown that adorned the head of the former thief, this is the substance of which the key was forged that opened to him the gates of Paradise!

Many people sin, trusting to repent just before death; they point to the example of the wise thief. But is anyone capable of what he did? “The Lord pardoned the thief at the final hour so that no one would despair. But it was a single instance, that no one should have immoderate hope in His mercy” (Blessed Augustine).

“Such was his end! What ours will be we do not know — neither do we know by what death we will die: whether it will come suddenly or with some sort of forewarning” (Saint Theodore Studite, “Lesson on the occasion of a monk's sudden death”).

Will we then be capable of a moral transformation and rise up spiritually like Christ's “fellow traveler/” “who let out a small voice and gained great faith? Will a sudden death not carry us away, deceiving our hope of repentance at the last minute?” (Saint Cyril of Alexandria, “On the Dread Judgment,” printed in *The Great Horologion*).

For this reason, “sinner, do not postpone repentance, that your sins not accompany you into the other life and weigh you down with an intolerable burden” (Blessed Augustine, in *The Sunflower* of Saint John of Tobolsk, Book 4, chap. 5).

May the example of the wise thief prompt us not to postpone repentance but to crucify ourselves with Christ (Gal. 2:19) and more earnestly repent, that we too might experience upon ourselves the mercy of co-suffering. (*Prayer of Saint Symeon the New Theologian*) *They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts* (Gal. 5:24). Let us be zealous for our speedy and complete inner amendment, wholly giving ourselves over to the will of God and asking of Christ mercy and grace.

“Do Thou, Who alone lovest mankind, grant us the repentance of the thief as we serve Thee with faith, O Christ our God, and cry to Thee: Remember us also in Thy kingdom” (verse on the Beatitudes, Tone 4).

“O Lord, this very day hast Thou vouchsafed the Good Thief Paradise. By the Wood of the Cross do Thou enlighten me also and save me” (Exapostilarion, Matins of Holy Friday).

St John of Shanghai and San Francisco