

22nd Sunday After Pentecost

Apostles Stachys, Amplius and company & The Holy Martyr Epimachus

31 October / 13 November



Resurrection Tropar, Tone 5: Let us, the faithful; praise and worship the Word, / Co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, / born for our salvation from the Virgin; / for He willed to be lifted up on the cross in the flesh, / to endure death, / and to raise the dead / by His glorious Resurrection!

Troparion of the Apostles tone 5: Let us acclaim Stachys, / Apelles, Amplias, Urban, Narcissus and Aristobulus / as a six-stringed harp of the Spirit / that sings of God's marvellous gifts to mankind. / As divine apostles they pray for us.

Troparion of St Epimachus tone 1: O Epimachus, thou didst wrestle as Christ's warrior / and, put the enemy to flight. / Thou didst suffer many torments, and we honour thee as a companion of God the Word. / Therefore we cry to thee: / Glory to Him Who has strengthened thee; glory to Him Who has crowned thee; / glory to Him Who through thee works healings for all.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 5: Thou didst descend into hell, O my Saviour, / shattering its gates as Almighty, / resurrecting the dead as Creator, / and destroying the sting of death. / Thou hadst delivered Adam from the curse, O Lover of Man, / and we cry to Thee, O Lord, save us.

Kontakion of the Apostles tone 8: Let us thankfully praise the wise Apostles / Stachys, Apelles, Amplias, Urban, Narcissus and Aristobulus, / those treasures of the Holy Spirit and rays of the Sun of glory, / who were brought together by the grace of our God.

Kontakion of St Epimachus tone 3: O Epimachus, of thine own accord / thou didst take up the martyr's struggle. / Thou didst cry to the lawless: / I have come to fight for truth and to revile the graven images. / Thou hast received a crown of righteousness.

Matins Gospel XI

EPISTLE: Galatians 6:11-18

See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

I HAVE WRITTEN TO YOU WITH MY OWN HAND!

He has written the whole letter himself, which was proof of great sincerity. In his other Epistles he himself only dictated, another wrote, as is plain from the Epistle to the Romans, for at its close it is said, 'I Tertius, who write the Epistle, salute you' (Rom. 16:22) ...And this he did by necessity, not merely from affectation, but in order to remove injurious suspicion ...What is the meaning of 'to make a fair show in the flesh?' It means to be esteemed by men. As they are reviled by the Jews for deserting the customs of their fathers, they desire, he says, to injure you, so they may not have this charged against them, but vindicate themselves by means of your flesh. His object here is to show that they did not act this way from respect to God.

St. John Chrysostom. Chapter VI Commentary on Galatians. B#57, pp. 45-46.

THE GOSPEL: LUKE 8: 26-39

Then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!" For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness. Jesus asked him, saying, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," because many demons had entered him. And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss. Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them. And He

permitted them. Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned. When those who fed them saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. They also who had seen it told them by what means he who had been demon-possessed was healed. Then the whole multitude of the surrounding region of the Gadarenes asked Him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. And He got into the boat and returned. Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged Him that he might be with Him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you." And he went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.

JESUS ASKED..."WHAT IS YOUR NAME?"AND HE SAID,"LEGION," BECAUSE MANY DEMONS HAD ENTERED HIM

So, brothers and sisters, ends today's Gospel reading where, as you heard, the Lord tells the healed man to reveal the mystery of his healing before all the Gadarene people. And this is what he did. The Gospel does not tell us how he related what had happened to him; but according to the meaning of the Gospel narrative, we can fully imagine what he must have said and what he most likely did say. Here is what he must have said:

"You Gadarenes have known me from my childhood. I was born among you and grew up among you, in your Gadarene land, a land of transgression. You have seen what happened. You lived not according to the Law which God revealed to you, but according to your lawlessness. In your desire for riches and comfort you engaged in a sinful trade, a trade which was not blessed by God. You raised pigs. You had whole herds of them, and yet according to the Law, they are unclean animals. God punished you and gave you over to the power of the devil.

And by the incomprehensible Providence of God, all this demonic power lodged in me alone—I bore your punishment. I was changed from a human being into a beast. I couldn't live in houses—I lived in a desert place, in a cave where the dead were buried. You bound me with chains, and I broke them. There wasn't just one devil within me but a whole legion of devils; as you saw in reality when He Who healed me permitted the demons to enter your herd of pigs, which threw itself from the precipice into the lake and drowned. Yes, now you can truly imagine why I caused so much evil and trouble. There was a terrible power in me. The devils took possession of all my human passions and brought them to a monstrous state. That is why I hated you so savagely, why I wanted to torment you, destroy you.

And now this force has left me. I am asking you to forgive me. I love you now as a brother—I want to become your fellow citizen. And how grateful I am to Him Who freed me - He is my Saviour—He is my God! And I am calling all of you to Him. Everything you are looking for: peace, happiness, joy—everything you will find in Him. All of you who weep, go to Him. He will wipe away your tears. He will give you what no earthly riches can give."

This is what the formerly possessed man told the Gadarenes. He could also say the same to us. And we would not be surprised, because the very same thing is going on right now. All our newspapers tell us about such horrors which cannot be explained without the participation of the power of evil. And against the background of this nightmare we seem to hear the voice of this man healed by Christ: "I have peace and quiet in my soul. This was given to me by Christ. He will give it to you, too. Hasten to Him. My heart is filled with sweet compunction." But our sceptical mind will ask: Is this so? And even if it is so, how long will this sweet compunction last? Here we are given an answer in today's reading from the Apostle: "But God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the GIFT OF GOD" (Eph. 2:4-5, 8). In these words of the Apostle we have a whole revelation. We have heard about the sufferings of the possessed one and how the Grace of God delivered him from them. This same Grace can do the very same for us. But Grace is given through faith. What is faith? In answer to this question I will tell you one incident from my student life.

I studied at the Polytechnic Institute. At the same time I was a member of a Christian student society. Once, we students decided to invite to our meeting our teacher, Father John Egorov, a famous professor of theology. He would have to travel to Lesnoye, a suburb of St. Petersburg, where our polytechnic institute was located. We asked him to come visit us, but he answered: "I have never been there, and I don't know how to go."

Our friend who had come to invite him said: "Father, it is very simple. First, go to the railroad station, and there you will find the street car. Wait until number 20 comes and take it. Without asking anyone, go to the very end. The conductor will say: 'Polytechnic Institute—last stop.' Walk out, stand with your back to the street car and before you will be a lane. Here, look for number 6 and before you will be a courtyard, and in the courtyard a house. Go up to the second floor, and you will find us there."

Father John said: "A week passed and Sunday came. I took my notebook, looked at what I had written, and knew at once what I had to do. I remembered everything that your friend told me, and accepted it within myself as if I had already done it. I did all this in reality, and here I am with you." This is what faith means: to accept within oneself what was said, and put what was said into action.

Here in the Holy Gospel promises are given to us, and also instructions of what we must do to receive these promises. Let us accept them with faith. Let us perform everything that we are instructed to do in our lives, and we will receive the same Grace, the same peace, the same joy. We will receive everything that was received by the possessed man healed by Christ. Then the words of Christ will also refer to us. "Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee."

Saints of the week

31 October / 13 November - The Holy Apostles Stachys, Amplias, Urban, Narcissus, Apelles and Aristobulus - They were of the Seventy. St Stachys was a helper of St Andrew the First-Called, who made him bishop of Byzantium. He built a church in Argyropolis, and governed his flock with faithfulness and zeal. After sixteen years as bishop, he entered peacefully into rest in the Lord. Amplias and Urban were also fellow-workers with St Andrew, and were made bishop by him, Amplias in Lydda and Urban in Macedonia. They both died as martyrs for Christ the Lord. Narcissus was made Bishop of Athens by the Apostle Philip, and holy Apelles was Bishop of Heraklion in Trachis.

Aristobulus - Born in Cyprus, Aristobulus was the brother of the Apostle Barnabas. He followed the Apostle Paul, who mentions him in his Epistle to the Romans saying, "Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus" (**Romans 16:10**). When the great apostle appointed many bishops throughout the various parts of the world, he appointed Aristobulus as bishop for the British, that is, England. In Britain the people were savages, heathen and wicked. Aristobulus endured many indescribable tortures, misfortunes and evil among them. They struck and beat him mercilessly, dragged him about the streets, ridiculed and mocked him. Finally this holy man succeeded by the power of the Grace of God. He enlightened the people, baptized them in the name of Christ the Lord, built churches, ordained priests and deacons and, in the end, died there peacefully and entered into the Kingdom of the Lord, Whom he faithfully served.

The Holy Martyr Epimachus – born in Egypt, he lived there in ascetism, and there finished his earthly course a martyr. In imitation of St John the Baptist, he went off as a young man into the desert. In response to his great love for God, the Spirit of God instructed him in all truth and, with no other teacher, taught him how to live the ascetic life. Epimachus discovered how the pagans were torturing and slaughtering the Christians in Alexandria, so, all afire with zeal for the Faith, he went to the city and knocked down the idol. When the pagans began to torture him for this, he cried out: 'Smite me, spit on me, put a crown of thorns on my head and a reed in my hand; give me gall to drink, crucify me and pierce me with a spear. The Lord endured all that, and I want to endure it!' In the vast crowd that was watching the martyrdom of holy Epimachus, there was one woman with a blind eye. She wept bitterly on witnessing the soul-less torture of the man of God, and, when the torturers flayed his holy body, blood spurted from it and a drop fell on her eye. Suddenly she could see, and her blind eye became as whole as the other. Then the woman cried out: 'Great is the God in whom this sufferer believes!' After that, St Epimachus was beheaded and his soul entered into eternal joy, in about 250. ; The Holy Martyr Nicolas of Chios; Our Holy Fathers Spiridon and Nicodemus;

St. Begu, nun of Harkness - reputed by St. Bede to have seen in a vision the death of St. Hilda, the foundress of both Whitby and Harkness.

1 / 14 November - Ss Cosmas and Damian - Unmercenaries and wonderworkers, they were brothers in the flesh and in the spirit, born somewhere in Asia of a pagan father and a Christian mother. After their father's death, their mother Theodota devoted all her time and energy to the bringing-up of her sons as true Christians. God helped her, and her sons grew as two choice fruits and as two holy lamps. They were skilled in medicine and ministered to the sick without payment, and so fulfilled Christ's command: 'Freely have ye received; freely give' (Matt. 10:8). They were so strict in their unpaid ministry to men that Cosmas became greatly enraged with his brother Damian when he took three eggs from a woman, Palladia, and gave orders that, after his death, he should not be buried with his brother. In fact, holy Damian had not taken those eggs as a reward for healing Palladia's sickness, but because she had sworn by the Most Holy Trinity that he should have them. However, after their death in Fereman, they were buried together in obedience to a revelation from God. These two holy brothers were great wonderworkers both during their lifetime and after their death. A farm labourer, on lying down to sleep at one time, was attacked by a snake, which entwined itself around his mouth and stomach. This poor man would have breathed his last in the greatest torment had he not at the last moment invoked the help of Saints Cosmas and Damian. Thus the Lord glorified forever by miracles those who glorified Him here on earth by their faith, purity and mercy. The Holy Martyr Hermenegild the Heir; Our Holy Father, the Martyr James with his disciples James and Dionysius; St Ethelnoth of Canterbury, Holy First Hierarch of the English Church.

2 / 15 November - The Holy Martyrs Acyndinus, Pegasus, Anempodistus, Aphthonius, Elpidophorus and others with them - They were Persian Christians, and suffered in the time of King Sapor, in 355. The first three were servants at the court of this king, but secretly served Christ their Lord. When they were arrested and brought to trial before the king, he asked them whence they came. To this they replied: 'Our paternity and life is the most holy Trinity, consubstantial and undivided, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God.' The king gave them over to harsh torture, and they endured it all courageously, singing psalms and with prayer on their lips. At the time of their torture and imprisonment, angels of God appeared to them several times, and once the Lord Christ Himself, as a man 'with a face radiant as the sun'. When one of the torturers, Aphthonius, saw with wonder that boiling lead did no harm to the martyrs, he believed in Christ and cried out: 'Great is the Christian God!' He was then immediately beheaded, and many others saw and believed. Then the King commanded that Acyndinus, Pegasus and Anempodistus be sewn into goat-skins and thrown into the sea. Then St Aphthonius appeared from the other world with three shining angels, and they bore the martyrs to dry land and set them free. Elpidophorus was a courtier. When he revealed that he was a Christian, and denounced the king for his slaughter of innocent Christians, the king condemned him to death, and Elpidophorus was beheaded along with about seven thousand other Christians. Then the three first-named martyrs were finally thrown into a burning furnace, along with twenty-eight soldiers and the king's mother, who

had also come to faith in Christ. And so, in the flames, they gave their righteous souls into the hands of the Lord. Our Holy Father Marcian of Cyrus; The Hieromartyr Victorinus, Bishop of Patav.

St. Cadfan, abbot of Bardsey Island - Breton in origin he migrated to Wales, gathered numerous disciples and founded the church of Towyn (Gwynedd) and the large famous monastery of Bardsey Island, both of which claimed to be the place of his death.

3 / 16 November - Fast Day - The Hieromartyr Acepimas, Bishop of Naeson - The eighty-year-old Acepimas, filled with every Christian virtue, was sitting one day in his house with his guests when a child, filled with the Spirit of God, ran up to the aged bishop, kissed him on the head, and said: 'Blessed is this head, for it will be martyred for Christ!' This prophecy was soon fulfilled. King Sapor raised a fierce persecution of Christians throughout Persia, and St Acepimas was seized and taken before a prince who was also a pagan priest. When the bishop had been arrested and bound, he was approached by one of his household, who asked him what he wanted done about his house. The saint replied: 'It's no longer my house; I'm going to a higher home, and shall not return.' After long interrogation, he was thrown into prison, whence, the next day, were brought a seventy-year-old priest called Joseph and a deacon, Aeithalas. After three years' imprisonment and many sufferings, Acepimas was beheaded, and Joseph and Aeithalas were buried up to the waist in the ground, being stoned by a group of men who were without mercy towards Christians. Joseph's body, by God's providence, disappeared that night, and above Aeithalas's body there grew a tree, which healed all manner of disease and pain. Five years passed, then the wicked and jealous pagans cut down this tree. These soldiers of Christ suffered in Persia in the fourth century, in the time of the pagan King Sapor. The Holy and Great Martyr George; Our Holy Father Elias of Egypt; Elevation of the relics of St. Edith, abbess of Wilton, by St. Dunstan;

St. Winifred of Holywell, abbess of Denbighshire in England, m (630) - Daughter to Trevith, a member of the Welsh landed class and advisor to the king. Spiritual student of her maternal uncle Saint Beuno. Physically beautiful, she made a private vow of chastity, becoming a bride of Christ. Murdered when she rejected the amorous advances of a chieftain named Caradog of Hawarden; she had escaped from him, and was seeking shelter in a church when he caught and killed her. Legend says that where her head fell, a well sprang up which became a place of pilgrimage, and whose waters were reported to heal leprosy, skin diseases, and other ailments. Saint Beuno raised her back to life; he cursed Caradog who was promptly swallowed by the earth. Winifred became a nun, and later abbess at Cwytherin, Denbighshire. Name Meaning - friend of peace (Celtic / Gaelic) . Patronage: incest victims, martyrs.

4 / 17 November - Our Holy Father Joannicius the Great - This great spiritual light was born in the village of Marykata in the province of Bithynia, of his father Myrtrices and his mother Anastasia. He was a shepherd as a youth. Whilst tending his sheep at pasture, he would often retreat into solitude and remain in prayer the whole day, having encircled his flock with the sign of the Cross so that it should not wander off and get lost. After that, he was called into the army, and caused men to marvel at his courage, particularly in the wars against the Bulgarians. After his military service, Joannicius withdrew to Olympus in Asia Minor, where he became a monk and gave himself entirely over to asceticism, persevering in it till his death in great old age. He laboured in the ascetic life for over fifty years in various places, and had from God most abundant gifts of wonderworking: he healed all sicknesses and pains, drove out demons, tamed wild beasts, possessing a particular power over snakes; he walked dryfoot through water, became invisible to men when he so desired and foretold future events. He was distinguished by an outstanding humility and meekness. In outward appearance, he was like a giant, huge and strong. He took an active part in the destiny of God's Church, for, during the iconoclast period he was at first deluded, but then tore himself away and became an ardent defender of reverence towards the icons. He had a great friendship with Patriarch Methodius of Constantinople. Joannicius lived for ninety-four years, and entered peacefully into rest in the Lord in 846. He was a great wonderworker both during his lifetime and after his death. The Hieromartyrs Nicander, Bishop of Myra, and Hermas the Priest.

St. Clether, hermit of Cornwall - probably of Welsh origin and of the family of St. Brychan. After living in Wales by the river Never, he settled in North Cornwall in later life in the remote and beautiful Inny valley at the place which still bears his name.

St. Birstan, bishop of Winchester (931-4) - known for his personal service to the poor; his devotion to the dead evidenced by his frequent prayers for them in the cemetery (to which the departed souls once answered "Amen").

5 / 18 November - Fast Day - Our Holy Father Galacteon and our Mother Epistemis, Martyrs - They were born in the city of Edessa in Phoenicia, both of pagan parents. Galacteon's mother was barren until she was baptised. After her baptism, she brought her husband also to the true Faith and baptised her son Galacteon, bringing him up a Christian. When the time came for Galacteon to marry, his devout mother Leucippe died, and his father betrothed him to a maiden called Epistemis. Galacteon did not wish to enter into marriage at all, and he quickly urged Epistemis to be baptised and then to become a nun at the same time as he became a monk. Both went away to the mountain of Publion, Galacteon to a men's monastery and Epistemis to a women's, and each of them became a true light in the monastery. They were first in labours, in prayer, in humility and obedience, and first in love. They did not leave their monasteries, and neither saw the other until the time of their death. A fierce persecution arose, and they were both brought to trial. While they were mercilessly whipping Galacteon, Epistemis was weeping, and they then whipped her also. They cut off their hands and feet, and finally their heads. One Eutolius, a man who had been a servant of Epistemis's parents and then a monk together with Galacteon, took their bodies and buried them. He also wrote the Lives of these two wonderful martyrs for Christ, who suffered and received their heavenly crowns in 253. The Holy Apostles Patrobus, Hermes, Linus, Gaius and Philologus; St. Jonah, Archbishop of Novgorod;

St. Cybi, abbot in Cornwall and Wales (550) - a Cornish saint who travelled by sea and river, living as a hermit and/or evangelist in various places which bear his name before settling on Anglesey, where his most important work was achieved. This was his founding of a monastery at Holyhead (called in Welsh Caer Gybi, 'Cybi's Fort') in Anglesey, the small island on which it stands being called Holy Island or Ynys Gybi.

6 / 19 November - St Paul the Confessor, Patriarch of Constantinople - When the blessed Patriarch Alexander was lying on his deathbed, the lamenting faithful asked him whom he would leave to follow him as chief pastor of the flock of Christ. Then the sick Patriarch said to them: 'If you want to have a shepherd who will teach you and whose virtues will illumine you, choose Paul; but, if you want a suitable man as a figurehead, choose Macedonius.' The people chose Paul. This was not acceptable to the Arian heretics, nor to the Emperor Constantius, who was at that time in Antioch, and so Paul was quickly deposed and fled to Rome together with St Athanasius the Great. There, both Pope Julian and the Emperor Constans gave them a warm welcome and upheld them in their Orthodoxy. The Emperor and the Pope sent letters which restored Paul to his episcopal throne, but, after the death of Constans, the Arians raised their heads again and drove the Orthodox Patriarch off to Cucusus in Armenia. While Paul was celebrating the Liturgy one day in exile, he was set on by the Arians and strangled with his pallium. This was in the year 351. In the time of the Emperor Theodosius, in 381, his relics were translated to Constantinople, and, in 1236, to Venice, where they still lie. (A small piece of their relics is kept at the Russian Cathedral in London). Our Holy Father Varlaam of Chutinsk, the Wonderworker; Commemoration of the falling of ash from the air;

All Saints of Ireland - This day's feast is not only a celebration of the great multitude of Irish and Celtic Saints, many of whom were missionaries throughout Europe, but is also a celebration of the many contributions of Celtic culture to the world. A number of centuries ago, a family from a Central European tribe met with a tribe from the Carpathian mountains. The result was the beginning of Celtic civilization, especially with respect to the La Tene and Hallstadt cultures. The "Keltoi" as the Greeks called them were described vividly by Julius Caesar in Gaul. The Iberian Peninsula was once called "Celtiberia." Macbeth, High King of Scots, on his way to Rome by ship, visited these people and could carry on a conversation with them, no problem! The Celtic language of these people, "Galiz" from Galizia, has survived and they are one of the seven nations of the Celts (the others being: Irish, Highland Scots, Manx, Cornish, Breton and Welsh). Paris was named for the Celtic tribe that settled there, the "Parisii." Notre Dame Cathedral with its hanging heads calls to mind the way in which Celtic warriors would celebrate a military victory. . . . Everything that had the prefix "Wal" in front of it was of Celtic origin. "Wales" and "Cornwall" and even "Wallachia" in Roumania. Sevastopol in Crimea was originally built by the Celts who settled there very early. "Walnuts" are also named for the Celts who developed them. St Peter Mohyla, Metropolitan of Kyiv, is also of Wallachian and therefore Celtic, descent. The Celtic Christian missionaries were intrepid travelers. They would cross vast areas in their little boats known as "birinns." Even Christopher Columbus visited Ireland to read the log books of St Brendan the Navigator who was said to have crossed over to the Eastern Coast of what is now Canada. There is evidence of early Christian settlements in Newfoundland and also in Baffin Island! Celtic missionaries came down through the Baltic Sea into Kyivan Rus'Ukraine and St Olha the Great greeted Celtic men of God at her court. The Celtic Rite is actually one of the most "Eastern" of those in the West. The Celts had strong ties with Coptic Egypt and its tradition of the Thebaid through the Ukrainian Saint, John Cassian. There are still mentioned in Celtic liturgical sources a veneration for "Seven Coptic Monks" buried in Ireland. The Irish Rite has many connections to the Egyptian liturgy. For example, following the Rule of St Pachomios, the Irish Celtic Office has groups of 12 Psalms. So, depending on the Feast, the Morning Office will have 12, 24, 36, 60 or 72 Psalms. In many cases, the entire Psalter is read in a single day. Prostrations to the ground, familiar in the East, were also practiced by the Celts. It was the Celts who invented the tradition of saying 150 Our Fathers and Hail Mary's for the Psalms. They devised strands of beads and knotted cords as prayer counters, the Celtic Rosary. The great asceticism of the Celtic saints is patterned after that of the Eastern Church Fathers. Saying the Psalter while standing in cold running water, among other things, required a hardy sort of person. . . . The Celts had their own tonsure, the tonsure of Simon Magus, which was in front of the head, rather than on top in the Roman fashion. The Abbot, rather than the Bishop, was the administrator of the Celtic communities, built around the monasteries or "cashels" as they were. Their calculation of Easter was their own and varied from that of the rest of the Church at the time. The Celts inherited much from their druidic ancestors. Like the Eastern Slavs, they worshipped the Sun. After becoming Christian, the Sun symbol still figured prominently in their Christian faith. St Ninian of Galloway in Scotland and St Colum mac Felim O'Neill of Isle of Hy (Iona) and their missionary companions worshipped within stone circles and adapted other Sun imagery in their Christianised traditions. The haloed Celtic Cross is also popular in Ukraine. There is one marking the grave of Taras Shevchenko, the national poet and bard. It refers to the fact that Christ is our "Sun." It is also said to be a Celtic form of the "Chi Rho" or "XP" Greek symbol for the first two letters of Christ's Name, also called the "Cross of St Constantine." The term "Celtic," as some have argued, may be connected to "Chaldea." It is also a play on the monastic notion of "cell." Another explanation is that it refers to the monastic Order of the Celi De or the "Friends of God." Celtic spirituality is very popular these days. Those who should probably know better are presenting it within a type of "New Age" context. Closeness to animals and nature are also stimulants to interest in this version of "Celtic spirituality." In fact, while Celtic monks and nuns lived very simply, their asceticism runs in the face of modern, easy-going spiritual orientations. Their lives were rather exhausting. In addition to daily Divine Liturgy and their Horologion, they recited the full 150 Psalms of David. One could always rest in the after-life, the old Irish spiritual teachers said. . . . During the Irish Penal Times when it was against the law to be Catholic and a priest, Irish priests would roam the countryside incognito, just like during the Roman times of persecution. Irish families would light candles in their windows as a sign that this was where the priests could receive a meal and shelter for the night. When Cromwell's Puritan soldiers asked the people what the candles signified, the people said they were "lighting the way of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem." This interpretation has remained and is why, today, so many homes are decorated with Christmas lights! The Celtic Thebaid was a school for Saints and it is this great Choir that we celebrate today. We are heirs to the rich Celtic Christian culture they produced. The Celtic missionaries were experts at spreading the Gospel and inculturating it with local traditions which they "baptized" as they said. This is why Celtic Christianity became so deeply rooted among the Celtic peoples. Presbyterianism, although Protestant, sees itself as an heir to this tradition as well. Certainly, the Celtic nations had long harboured resentment towards Rome for imposing its Rite on their ancient ways. There is renewed interest in the Celtic Rite today among Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Anglicans. What characterizes the Celtic Rite is its focus on the worship of the Holy Trinity, its spirit of simplicity and asceticism, devotion to the Psalms, the Horologion and the reading of the Gospel, a positive relationship to God's creation in nature, and community in monastic life. The ancient Celtic Rite exemplifies the spiritual richness of the undivided Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ. A missionary Church, the Celtic Rite was practiced throughout Western Europe at one time, reaching out to the shores of North America itself. The Saints of Eire and all Celtic Saints remind us of our calling to preach Christ to all nations, while inculturating the Gospel in every national tradition. All ye Holy Saints of Eire and the Celtic nations, pray unto God for us!