

Sunday of the Prodigal Son / Holy Apostles Archippus and Philemon.

19 February / 3 March

The Prodigal Son, Kontakion, Tone III —

Having foolishly abandoned Thy paternal glory, I have squandered on vices the wealth Thou gavest me. Therefore I cry to Thee, O compassionate Father, receive me who repent, and treat me as one of Thy hired servants.

Troparion of the Sunday, Tone VI —

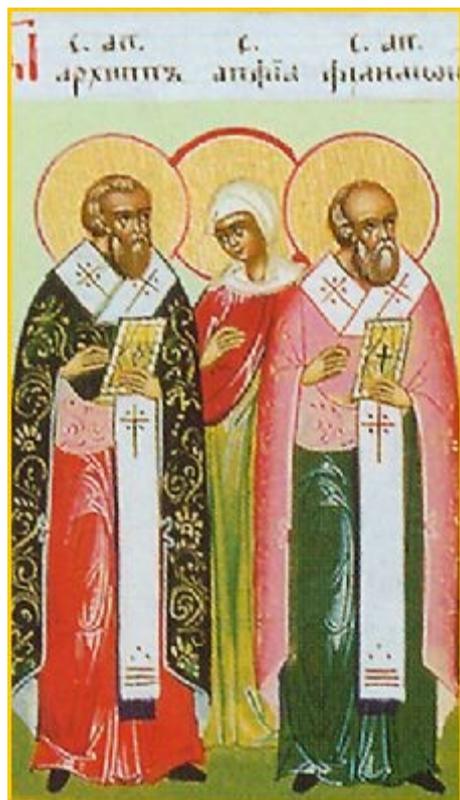
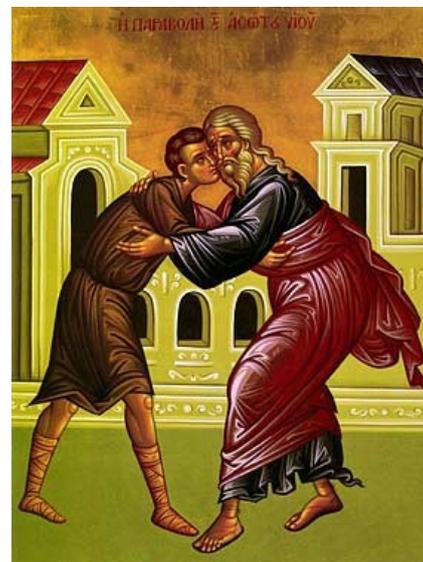
The angelic powers were at Thy tomb; / the guards became as dead men. / Mary stood by Thy grave, / seeking Thy most pure Body. / Thou didst capture hell, / not being tempted by it. / Thou didst come to the Virgin, granting life. / O Lord, Who didst rise from the dead: glory to Thee!

Hymn to the Theotokos, Tone VI —

Thou Who didst call Thy mother blessed / came of Thine own will to the passion. / Shining on the cross, desiring to recall Adam, Thou didst say to the angels: / "Rejoice with Me, for the lost coin has been found." / Thou Who hast ordered all things in wisdom, / O our God, glory to Thee! (1x) Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth and forever more.

Kontakion of the Sunday, Tone VI —

When Christ God, the Giver of Life, / raised all of the dead from the valleys of misery with His mighty hand, / He bestowed resurrection on the human race. / He is the Savior of all, the Resurrection, the Life, and the God of all.



Holy Apostle Archippus, Troparion, Tone III —

O holy apostle Archippus/ entreat the merciful God// that He grant to our souls remission of transgressions.

Kontakion, Tone IV "Thou hast appeared today" —

The Church, possessing thee as a great star,/ O Archippus,/ and illumined by the rays of thy miracles,/ crieth out to thee:// Save those who honor thy memory with faith!

Matins Gospel VI

Sunday Epistle: I Corinthians 6: 12-20

12 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. 13 Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the

members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "The two," He says, "shall become one flesh." 17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 18 Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

YOUR BODY IS THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Lord overlooks nothing. Even secrets are open to Him. Let us then do everything as if He were dwelling in us. Thus we shall be His temples, and He will be within us as our God - as He actually is. This will be clear to us just to the extent that we love Him rightly.

St. Ignatius of Antioch. Letter to the Ephesians. B#10, p. 92.

What is Paul trying to prove when he says that we are not our own? He wants to secure us against sin and against following the improper desires of the mind. We have many improper desires, but we must constrain them, and we can do so. If we could not, there would be no point in exhorting us like this. Paul does not say that we are under compulsion but that we have been bought- and bought with a great price, reminding us of the way in which our salvation was obtained.

St. John Chrysostom. Homilies on the epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 18.3.

Sunday Gospel: St. Luke 15: 11-32

THE LORD SAID THIS PARABLE: A certain man had two sons: 12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. 13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. 14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. 15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. 17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. 20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. 21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. 22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. 25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. 28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. 29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: 30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. 31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. 32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.

The Sunday of the Prodigal Son says so much to us! It speaks about our peace and abundance in the house of the Heavenly Father, about our mad departure from the Father's guardianship to unbridled freedom, about the richness of the heritage given us despite our disobedience, about its reckless waste on all sorts of indecencies, and about our utter impoverishment as a result. But then it talks also about how one recovers his senses and, coming to himself, decides to return to his greatly merciful Father. It talks about how he returns, how he is received lovingly and is restored to his first state. Who will not find this lesson profitable?

If you abide in your Father's house, do not strive for freedom.

You see how a similar experience ended! If you have run away and are squandering all, stop this quickly. If you have already squandered everything and are living in poverty, resolve quickly to return-- and then, return. There every lenience and the former love and prosperity await you. This last step is the most necessary one. But there is no point in enlarging upon this. All has been said concisely and clearly. Come to your senses, resolve to return, arise and hasten to the Father. His embrace is open and ready to receive you.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a most instructive lesson for youth. We see in the prodigal son the true character of flighty youth: lightminded, thoughtless, thirsting for independence; in short, everything that usually distinguishes the majority of youths. The younger son grew up in his parents' house. On reaching adolescence, he already began to imagine that life at home was too restrictive. It seemed unpleasant to him to live under his father's rule and his mother's watchful eye. He wanted to imitate his comrades, who had given themselves up to the pleasures of the world. "I am the heir of a rich estate. Would it not be better," he reasoned, "if I received my inheritance now? I could manage my wealth differently than my father does." Thus the lightminded youth was carried away by the deceitful glitter of the world's pleasures and decided to throw off the yoke of obedience and to depart from his parents' home.

Are not many inspired by similar impulses today, and, while they may not leave their parents' home, do they not depart from the home of their Heavenly Father, that is, from obedience to the Holy Church?

The yoke of Christ seems difficult for immature minds, and His commandments burdensome. They think that it is not really necessary to keep that which God and His Holy Church command us. To them it seems possible to serve God and the world at the same time. They say, "We are already strong enough to withstand destructive temptations and seductions. We can hold onto the truth and sound teachings by ourselves. Allow us to perfect our minds through acquiring many kinds of knowledge. Let us strengthen our wills ourselves amid temptations and seductions. Through experience our senses will become convinced of the vileness of vice!" Are such desires any better than the illconsidered request of the younger son to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me?"

And so, a lightminded youth ceases to heed the commandments and admonitions of the Holy Church. He ceases to study the Word of God and the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and listens intently to the sophistries of those who are falsely-called teachers, and in these pursuits he kills the best hours of his life. He goes to church less frequently or stands there inattentively, distracted. He does not find the opportunity to devote himself to piety and to exercise himself in the virtues, because he spends so much time attending shows, public entertainments, etc. In a word, with each day he gives himself up more and more to the world, and, finally, he goes off to "a far country."

What is the result of such an estrangement from the Holy Church? It is the same as the result of the prodigal son's leaving his parents' house. Lightminded youths very quickly waste their excellent energies and talents of soul and body, ruining for time and eternity all the good they have done. Meanwhile, there appears "a mighty famine in that land": emptiness and dissatisfaction — the inevitable result of wild pleasures. A thirst for enjoyments appears, which intensifies with the gratifying of wanton passions, and finally becomes insatiable. It often happens that the unfortunate lover of the world, in order to gratify his passions, resorts to base and shameful pursuits, which do not bring him to his senses like the prodigal son and do not return him to the path of salvation, but complete his ruin, both temporal and eternal!

St. John Maximovitch

Saints of the Week

Meatfare week

19 February / 3 March - Apostles Archippus and Philemon of the Seventy, and Martyr Apphia - Archippus was one of the Seventy Apostles. The Apostle Paul mentions him in his Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. "And tell Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you received in the Lord' " (Colossians 4:17) as well as in his letter to Philemon calling him his fellow soldier in the battle: "To Archippus our fellow soldier" (Philemon 1:2). In the town of Colossae, the center of Christianity was in the home of Philemon. Here Christians gathered for prayer. In writing to Philemon, the Apostle Paul called this "the church at your house" (Philemon 1:2). At that time, the apostles ordained their disciples as bishops; some of them in permanent places and others as missionaries traveling to various places. Philemon was one of the latter. Apphia, Philemon's wife, hosted and served in the domestic church! At the time of a pagan feast to the goddess Artemis, according to their custom, all the faithful in Colossae, gathered in the home of Philemon for prayer. The pagans, learning of this gathering, rushed and apprehended all the Christians; Philemon, Apphia and Archippus, as leaders. At first, they were whipped and afterwards they were buried up to their waists and they began to stone them. Thus, they killed Philemon and Apphia and, Archippus they removed from the pit barely alive and left him to the amusement of the children. The children pierced him throughout with knives. Thus, this "fellow soldier" in battle ended well in the course of his earthly path.

The Venerable Dositheus - Dositheus was a disciple of the glorious Abba Dorotheus who lived in the cenobitic monastic community of the Venerables Serdus, John and Barsanuphius the Great. Dositheus was a kinsman of a general and came to Jerusalem to visit the Holy Shrines. Once while he was gazing upon the icon of the Dreadful Judgment in a church, a woman clothed in purple attire approached him and began explaining the icon to him. Finally, before parting, she said that if you desire to be saved, you should fast, abstain from meat, and pray to God often. That was the All-Holy Virgin Birthgiver of God [The Theotokos]. The heart of the young Dositheus became inflamed, and he desired the life of a monk. Dorotheus received him as his novice [Iskusenik] and ordered him to completely abandon his will and to obey his spiritual father. For a few days, he gave him as much as he wanted to eat. After a period of time, Dorotheus cut down his rations by one-fourth and after a period of time again, by one-fourth, until Dositheus became accustomed to get by with the least amount of food, always saying to Dositheus: "eating is a habit, and as much as a person is accustomed to eat, that much he will eat." He was saved and glorified by total obedience. He remained forever an example of monastic obedience and dedication to his spiritual father. This young saint lived in the sixth century.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Theodore of Sanaxar Monastery (1791). New Martyr Demetrius (1942). Martyrs Maximus, Theodotus, Hesychius, and Asclepiodotus of Adrianopolis (305-311). Venerables Eugene and Macarius, presbyters, confessors at Antioch (363). Venerable Rabulas of Samosata (530). Venerable Conon, abbot in Palestine (555). New Hieromartyr Nicetas of Epirus (1809). Venerable Philothea, nun-martyr, of Athens (1589) (Greek). St. Mesrop the Translator of Armenia (439).

20 February / 4 March — St Leo, Bishop of Catania - beneath Mount Etna the volcano, in the town of Catania, St Leo was a good shepherd and compassionate teacher of the people. He had great care for the sick and poor, and both his zeal for the Faith and his compassion for the needy were great. There appeared one day in that town a magician called Heliodorus, who deluded the people with many illusions and greatly seduced the young. He once entered a church during divine service and began his tricks. St Leo came up to him, bound him with one end of his pallium and led him out to the market place. There he ordered that a great fire be kindled. When it was burning fiercely he stood among the flames and pulled Heliodorus to him. Heliodorus was completely burned up, but Leo remained alive and unharmed. All who had been taken in by Heliodorus, and who had regarded him as in some way divine, were put to shame by this. The compassionate and zealous Leo became known throughout the whole kingdom as a wonder-worker, helping people by his miracles. When he had finished his course, some time in the 8th century, his soul went to the Lord and healing myrrh flowed from his relics.

The Hieromartyr Sadok, bishop Persia and the 128 martyrs with him - Sadok was a bishop in Persia, following St. Simeon. At one time, St. Simeon appeared to him in a dream and said: "Yesterday, I - today, you!" Sadok interpreted these words to his flock as meaning: Last year I [St. Simeon] suffered, this year you [Sadok] will suffer. Indeed that year the Emperor Sapor arrested him with many of the clergy and people and brought them to trial. Sapor first ordered them to worship fire and sun as divinity. Sadok replied: "We are eagerly prepared to die for our God, but we cannot worship the sun nor fire." After that, they were tortured and sentenced to death by beheading. Before being beheaded, Sadok uplifted a prayer to God: "Wash us, O Lord, from our sins in our blood!" Sadok, with his priests and faithful gloriously gave up their bodies to death and their souls to the immortal God. They suffered in the year 342 A.D. or 344 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: Abbot Macarius and 34 monks and novices of Valaam Monastery martyred by the Lutherans: hieromonk Titus, schemamonk Tikhon, monks Gelasius, Sergius, Varlaam, Sabbas, Conon, Silvester, Cyprian, Pimen, John, Simonas, Jonah, David, Cornelius, Niphon, Athanasius, and Serapion, and novices Varlaam, Athanasius, Anthony, Luke, Leontius, Thomas, Dionysius, Philip, Ignatius, Basil, Pachomius, Basil, Theophilus, John, Theodore, and John (1578). New Hieromartyr Nicholas priest (1938). St. Yaroslav the Wise (1054). Venerable Agatho, wonderworker of the Kiev Caves (13th-14th c.). Beheading of Venerable Cornelius, abbot of the Pskov Caves (1570), and his disciple St. Bassian of Murom. Venerable Agatho, pope of Rome (682). Venerable Bessarion the Great, wonderworker of Egypt (466) (Greek). St. Cindeus, bishop of Pisidia (Greek). Hieromartyr Eleutherius, bishop in Byzantium (2nd c.). St. Eleutherius, bishop of Tournai (531). St. Eucherius, bishop of Orleans (740).

February 21 / 5 March — St Zacharias, Patriarch of Jerusalem - the Persian King Chozroes attacked Jerusalem, ransacking the city, in the time of the Greek Emperor Heraclius, in 614. He took the Precious Cross off to Persia and enslaved an enormous number of Christians, including Patriarch Zacharias. The Jews supported him in his wickedness towards the Christians. It is recorded, among further malice on the part of the Jews, that they bought 90,000 Christian slaves from Chozroes and killed them all. The aged Patriarch spent fourteen years in slavery. Many marvels were wrought in Persia by the Precious Cross, and the Persians exclaimed: "The Christian God has come to Persia!" The Emperor Heraclius later compelled King Chozroes to return the Precious Cross to Jerusalem, together with the Patriarch and the remaining slaves. The Emperor himself carried the Cross into the Holy City on his back. St Zacharias

spent his remaining days in peace, and went to the Lord in 632. Patriarch Modestus deputised for him on the patriarchal throne, and after him came St Sophronius.

Our Holy Father Timothy - Timothy was a recluse in a place called Symbola on the Asiatic side of Mount Olympus. In his youth, Timothy entered a monastery, was tonsured a monk and until old age spent his earthly time in fasting, prayer, vigils and ceaseless labour. He remained pure and chaste throughout his entire life. To the pure and chaste God gives authority over evil spirits and He gave this to Timothy. Though his labours for the salvation of his soul, St. Timothy succeeded to build in himself a beautiful home for the Holy Spirit. This holy man died in the year 795 A.D.

St Eustathius (Eustace), Archbishop of Antioch - a great zealot and protector of Orthodoxy. As such, he was especially prominent at the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea 325 A.D.], where he intellectually and systematically refuted the teaching of Arius. With the other Holy Fathers, Eustathius confessed correctly that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit according to divine Hypostasis [natures]. Following the death of Emperor Constantine, the Arians somehow again gained prevalence and began to bitterly persecute Orthodoxy. St. Eustathius was ousted from his throne and exiled, at first to Thrace and after that to Macedonia. Eustathius suffered much and long until, in the end, he gave up his holy soul to God in the year 345 A.D.

St John III Scholasticus, Patriarch of Constantinople - As an advocate, John was ordained a priest and after that became patriarch in the year 565 A.D. He compiled canons, which were included in the Nomo-Canon.

Also commemorated on this day: New Hieromartyrs Alexander, Daniel and Gregory priests (1930). New Hieromartyr Constantine priest, Paul deacon (1938). Virgin-Martyr Olga (1938). St. George, bishop of Amastris on the Black Sea (805). "Kozelshchanskaya" (1881) Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. St. Zachariah, patriarch of Jerusalem (633). Hieromartyr Severian, bishop of Scythopolis (452)

22 February / 6 March Fast. Fish Allowed. — Blessed Theoktista the Fool for Christ - When Archbishop Peter (Zverev) & Bishop Alexis (Bui) were in Voronezh, a remarkable holy woman lived there, a fool for Christ, the blessed Theoktista Michaelovna. Who she was or where she came from - no one knew. It was said that she had been the wife of a high-ranking naval officer who had died during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), and that after this tragedy, becoming disillusioned with the solidity of earthly life, she directed the gaze of her heart on high and took upon herself the exploit of foolishness for the sake of Christ. God rewarded her with a gift of clairvoyance with which she helped her suffering neighbours. She was small of stature, skinny, worn out, with noble features in her face. She lived in the Voronezh Monastery until it closed in 1931 and then took shelter with various people. She had literally "nowhere to lay her head". She did not sleep at nights, but would spend them in prayer and vigil. She had a remarkable mind and a refined way of expressing her thoughts and feelings. It was apparent that she was well bred. The righteous Theoktista saw the rapid liquidation of the Orthodox Churches and monuments of Voronezh in the 1930's, which was only a part of the satanic program that was conducted all over the much suffering Russian land, to the appalled outrage of almost the whole Russian people.. By the mid-1930's all the churches were closed, levelled by dynamite, or turned in to factory storehouses. The heart of the blessed one, which inspired so many good deeds for her neighbours, could not endure any longer. One day blood rushed to her throat, and on February 22, 1936 (OS), she died. It was said that before her death she dressed all in white to meet her bridegroom, Christ. She was buried in the cemetery outside the city and her memory was erased from Voronezh. But the Christian conscience bears her image in loving hearts throughout the world, wherever there is knowledge and understanding of Russia's Catacomb Saints.

The Holy Martyr Maurice and the Seventy Soldiers with him - During the reign of Emperor Maximian there was a great persecution of Christians. In the Syrian town of Apamsea, Maurice was superior of the local army. The pagans reported him to the emperor as being a Christian and a sower of the Christian Faith among the soldiers. The emperor himself came and conducted an investigation. Along with Maurice seventy Christian soldiers were also brought before the emperor among whom was Photinus, the son of Maurice. Neither the emperor's flattery nor threats could sway these heroes. To the threats of the emperor, they replied: "O Emperor, there is no fear in the sound and powerful souls of those who love the Lord!" When the emperor ordered and removed their military belts and garments, they said to him: "Our God will clothe us with incorruptible garments and belts and eternal glory!" When the emperor rebuked them because they despised the military honor given to them by him, they replied: "Your honor is without honor, for you have forgotten God Who gave you imperial authority!" Then the emperor commanded and the executioner beheaded Maurice's son Photinus before his eyes to instil fear in the father and in the others. But, Maurice said: "You have fulfilled our wish O torturer and have sent Photinus, the soldier of Christ before us." Then the emperor sentenced them to a most inhuman death: they were brought to a muddy place, stripped, bound to trees and rubbed them with honey, in order to be bitten by mosquitoes, wasps and hornets. After ten days under the most painful sufferings, they gave up their souls to God and departed to rejoice eternally with the holy angels in heaven. Christians secretly

removed their bodies and honourably buried them. These courageous soldiers of Christ suffered about the year 305 A.D.

The Many Martyrs of Eugenius - During the reign of Emperor Arcadius, the relics of many martyrs of Christ were unearthed, among whom was the Apostle Andronicus and his female assistant Junia. "Great Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are prominent among the apostles and they were in Christ before me." (Romans 16:7). These relics were discovered according to a revelation from God to a cleric Nicholas Calligraphus. "Their names are known only to God Who has written their names in the Book of Life in the heavens." In the twelfth century, Emperor Andronicus II built a beautiful church over the relics of the Apostle Andronicus

Our Holy Fathers Thalassius and Limnaeus - Both Thalassius and Limnaeus were Syrian ascetics. One of their unique forms of asceticism was "silence." Following the death of St. Thalassius in 440 A.D., Limnaeus joined St. Maron (February 14) and with him lived a life of mortification on top of a mountain under the open sky.

St Papias of Hierapolis - a disciple of the holy apostles and a patristic author. From Papius we have testimony of the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, the four Marys and the brothers of our Lord as well as an incomplete but preserved manuscript: "An Interpretation of the Words of our Lord."

Also commemorated on this day: New Hieromartyr Priest Michael Lisitsyn of Ust-Labinskaya, Russia (1918). New Martyrs Joseph Smirnov protoierey, John Kastorsky deacon, Vladimir Ilinsky priest and John Perebaskin (1918). New Hieromartyrs Michael, John, Victor, John, Sergius, Andrew priests, New Hieromartyr Sergius and Antipa, Virgin-martyr Parasceva, Martyr Stephen, Virgin-martyrs Elizabeth, Irina and Barbara (1938). Martyr Andrew (1941). New Hieromartyr Philaret (1942). Venerable Athanasius the Confessor of Constantinople (826). St. Telesphorus, pope of Rome (127). Venerable Peter the Stylite of Mt. Athos (Greek). St. Abilius, patriarch of Alexandria (98). St. Titus, bishop of Bostra in Arabia (378). Holy Nine Children of Kola: Guarami, Adarnasi, Bakari, Vache, Bardzini, Dachi, Djuansheri, Ramazi, and Parsmani (6th c.) (Georgia). St. Leontius of Lycia (6th c.). Sts. Babylus and his wife Comnita of Nicosia (7th c.). Martyr Anthusa and her 12 servants (Greek). St. Blaise, bishop (Greek).

23 February / 7 March — The Hieromartyr Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna - born a pagan. St John the Theologian brought him to the Christian faith and baptised him. Polycarp was left an orphan in early childhood and a noble widow, Callista, after a vision in a dream, took him in, rearing and educating him as her own son. Polycarp was God-fearing and compassionate from his early years. He made great efforts to emulate the life of St Bucolus, the then Bishop of Smyrna, and of the Holy Apostles John and Paul, whom he had met and heard. St Bucolus ordained him priest and, at the time of his death, proclaimed him his heir in Smyrna. The apostolic bishops, who had gathered for Bucolus's funeral, consecrated Polycarp bishop. From the very beginning he was endowed with the power of wonder-working. He cast out the evil spirit from a servant of some prince and put out a great conflagration in Smyrna by his prayers. Seeing these things, many pagans regarded him as one of the gods. He brought rain in a drought, healed sickness, had the gifts of insight and prophecy, and so forth. He suffered in the time of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Three days before his death, he prophesied: 'In three days I shall be consumed by fire for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ!' When, on the third day, the soldiers arrested him and took him for trial, he cried out: 'May this be the will of the Lord my God!' When the judge urged him to deny Christ and recognise the Roman gods, Polycarp said: 'I cannot exchange the better for the worse.' The Jews especially hated Polycarp and endeavoured to have him burned. When they placed him, bound, on the pyre, he prayed long to God. He was very old and grey, and he shone like an angel of God. All the people saw how the flames licked around him but did not touch him. Frightened by such a phenomenon, the pagan judge ordered the executioner to stab him with a lance through the flames. When this was done, a vast flow of blood gushed out and extinguished the whole fire, and his body remained whole and unburned. At the Jews' persuasion, the judge ordered that Polycarp's dead body be burned according to the Greek custom, and so they dishonourably burned dead him whom they had failed to burn alive, St. Polycarp suffered in the year 167, on Holy Saturday

Our Holy Father Damian - a monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenou on Mt. Athos, was a contemporary and companion of the great Cosmos of Zographou. He lived a life of asceticism on Mount Samareia between Esphigmenou and Hilendar. He died peacefully in the year 1280 A.D. When he died, a pleasant and sweet-smelling aroma emitted from his body for forty days

Also commemorated on this day: New Hieromartyrs Alexis, Nicholas priests and Martyr Sergius (1938). Uncovering of the relics (1998) St Matrona the Blind of Moscow (1952). Venerable Polycarp, monk, of Briansk (1620-21). Venerables John, Antioch, Antoninus, Moses, Zebinas, Polychronius, Moses, and Damian, ascetics of the Syrian desert (5th c.). Venerable Alexander, founder of the order of the Unsleeping Ones (430). Venerable Moses, monk, of White Lake (1480). Venerable Gorgonia, sister of St. Gregory the Theologian (372) (Greek). New Monk-martyr Damian the New of Philotheou, who suffered at Larissa (1568) (Greek). St. John the Harvester of Stylos in Calabria (11th c.). Venerable Cosmos of

Zographou, Mt. Athos (1281). New Hieromartyr Lazarus of the Peloponnese (1618). St. Nazarius, abbot of Valaam (1809). St. Mildburga, abbess of Much Wenlock.. Martyr Clement (Greek). Martyr Thea (Greek).

24 February / 8 March Fast. Fish Allowed. — The Finding of the Head of St John the Forerunner

- The great and glorious Forerunner was beheaded at the wish and request of the wicked Herodias, wife of Herod. When John had been beheaded, Herodias ordered that his head should not be buried with his body, for she feared that the terrible prophet would somehow rise from the dead. So she took his head and buried it in some hidden and unworthy place, deep in the earth. Her lady-in-waiting was Joanna the wife of Chuza, a courtier of Herod's. This good and God-fearing Joanna could not bear that the head of the godly man should remain in an unworthy place, so she disinterred it secretly, took it to Jerusalem and buried it on the Mount of Olives. Not knowing about all this, King Herod, when he heard about Christ and His great miracles, was afraid and said: 'It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead ! ' (Mk . 6:16) . After a considerable time, an eminent government official came to believe in Christ, left his position in the world and became a monk. Under the name Innocent, he settled on the Mount of Olives, in precisely the place where the Baptist's head had been buried. Deciding to build himself a cell, he dug deep and found an earthen pot containing a head which, it was revealed to him secretly, was that of the Baptist. He venerated it and re-buried it in the same place. By God's providence, that wonder-working head went from hand to hand, disappearing into the darkness of forgetfulness and then being once more revealed, until it was finally taken to Constantinople in the middle of the 9th century, in the time of Patriarch Ignatius and the God-fearing Empress Theodora, mother of Michael and wife of Theophilus. Many miracles were performed by the head of the Forerunner. It is important and interesting to note that, while he was alive, John did not work a single miracle (Jn. 10:41), but to his relics was given the blessed power of working miracles.

Our Holy Father Erasmus - a monk in the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev. He inherited great wealth from his parents and spent all on adorning churches, especially on silver-plating and gilding icons. When he had become impoverished and remained without anything, he was despised by all. The devil whispered to him that he squandered his estate in vain; instead of distributing his wealth among the poor, he gave it for the adornment of churches. Erasmus succumbed to this temptation and believed it for which he despised himself and fell into a state of despair and began to live aimlessly and lawlessly. When the hour of his death approached the brethren assembled around him and discussed his sins which he himself was not conscious of. All at once, he straightened up in bed and said: "Fathers and brothers, it is as you say; I am sinful and unrepentant, but behold St. Anthony and St. Theodosius appeared to me and after that, the All-Holy Mother of God told me that the Lord gave me more time for repentance." The Mother of God also spoke these encouraging words to him: "The poor you have with you in every place and my churches you do not." Erasmus lived for three more days, repented and fell asleep in the Lord. This teaches us that zeal for the Church and adornment of the churches is a task pleasing to God. St. Erasmus died in the year 1160 A.D.; St. Ethelbert, king of Kent (616).

Also commemorated on this day: Uncovering of the relics (1486) of St. Romanus, prince of Uglich. Martyrs Montanus, Lucias, Julian, Victorius, Flavian and their companions at Carthage (259). St. Cummain Ailbe, abbot of Iona (669) (Celtic & British).

25 February / 9 March — St Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople - His predecessor, Patriarch Paul, secretly left the patriarchal throne, retired to a monastery and received the Great Habit. This was during the reign of Irene and Constantine. By Paul's advice, Tarasius, a senator and advisor to the Emperor, was chosen as Patriarch in 784. He quickly passed through all the stages of ordination and became Patriarch. A man of great physical stature and great zeal for Orthodoxy, Tarasius accepted this undesired state in order to help in the struggle of Orthodoxy against heresy, especially that of Iconoclasm. He was responsible for the summoning of the 7th Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787, where the iconoclasts were condemned and the veneration of the holy icons was restored and confirmed. Tarasius was very compassionate to the poor and indigent, building them shelters and feeding them, but he was decisive with those in power in the defence of faith and morals. When the Emperor Constantine divorced his lawful wife, Maria, and took a kinswoman to live with him, seeking the Patriarch's blessing to remarry, Tarasius not only withheld his blessing, but first counselled and then reproached him, and finally excommunicated him. As death approached, those round him saw him answering the demons: 'I am not guilty of that sin, nor of that one', until he was incapable of speech. He then began defending himself with his arms, driving them away from him. As he breathed his last, his face shone as with the light of the sun. This truly great hierarch entered into rest in 806. He had governed the Church for 22 years and four months.

Also commemorated on this day: New Hieromartyr Alexander, priest, Virgin-Martyr Mstislava (1938). New Hieromartyr Priest Leo Korobczuk of Laskov (Chelm and Podlasie, Poland) (1944). New Hieromartyr Nicholas priest (1945). Hieromartyr Reginus, bishop of the isle of Skopelos (355). Venerable Polycarp.

Martyr Anthony. Venerables Erasmus and Paphnutius of Kephala, monks, contemporaries of St. Anthony the Great (4th c.). Martyrs Alexander at Marcionopolis (305) and Hypatius. St. Ethelbert, king of Kent (616) (Celtic & British). Venerable Walburga, abbess of Heidenheim (779) (Celtic & British). St. Maecellus, bishop of Apamea in Syria (Greek). St. Theodore, fool-for-Christ (Greek).

‡ Daily Scripture Readings ‡

Monday - 1 John 2:18-3:10; Mark 11:1-11

Tuesday - 1 John 3:10-20; Mark 14:10-42

Wednesday - 1 John 3:21-4:6; Mark 14:43-15:1

Thursday - 1 John 4:20-5:21; Mark 15:1-15

Friday - Luke 7:17-30 (Matins Gospel); 2 John 1:1-13; Mark 15:22-25, 33-41; 2 Corinthians 4:6-15; Matthew 11:2-15

Saturday - 1 Corinthians 10:23-28; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Luke 21:8-9, 25-27, 33-36; John 5:24-30

HYMN OF PRAISE

OBEDIENCE

Obedience without murmuring, salvation complete,
Among the spiritual, the first pearl; stone most precious.
This pearl, from Eve's necklace, unraveled,
And after it, all the goods, by God, bestowed.
The devil speaks both then and now: To God, do not listen,
Rather, according to the thoughts of your mind, live only!
Thus speaks the devil from time immemorial who detested the light,
Thus speaking, the disobedient with his nose he fitted.
Christ came, to the people cried out: the obedient He summoned,
To every call, the disobedient did not respond.
The scene of Paradise from Christ until now, repeats itself,
The obedient to Paradise is raised; the disobedient falls.
To his spiritual father, the true monk is obedient,
The father to the Church, the Church to Christ, her Lord.
Obedience, the reliable path toward salvation is,
Of the spiritual necklace; the first light, the first pearl.

Words of Wisdom

Jacob led out his sheep
And brought them to his father's home;
A symbol for those with discernment,
A parable for those with perception
Is to be found in this homecoming:
Let us too return to our Father's house,
My brothers, and do not become
captivated with desire
For this transient earth

- for your true city is in Eden.
Blessed indeed is that person
Who has seen his dear ones in its midst.

St. Ephrem The Syrian. Hymns on Paradise 14.7.

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