

# The First Sunday of Great Lent /

## The Sunday of Orthodoxy

8 / 21 March

**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 8:** Thou didst descend from on high, O Merciful One! / Thou didst endure the three-day burial / to free us from our sufferings! / O Lord, our Life and Resurrection, glory to Thee.

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

**Resurrection Kondak, Tone 8:** By rising from the tomb Thou didst raise the dead and resurrect Adam/ Eve exults in Thy Resurrection, / and the world celebrates Thy rising from the dead, O Greatly Merciful One.

**Kondak First Sunday of Great Lent, Tone 8:** The Uncircumscribable Word of the Father was circumscribed when he took flesh of thee, O Theotokos; and when He had restored the defiled image to its ancient state, He suffused it with divine beauty. As for us, confessing our salvation, we record it in deed and word.



### Matins Gospel VIII

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

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. ... 32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

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

#### WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

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

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

## Gospel John 1: 43-51

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

### THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

"This is the Apostolic faith, this is the faith of your fathers, this is the Orthodox faith, this is the faith which has consolidated Christendom"

(from the "Order of Orthodoxy")

All our feast days are directly connected with sacred events and persons glorified by God. The present feast, however, is of a different nature. This first Sunday in Lent, dear brothers and sisters, the Holy Church has designated for the celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. This feast is unlike most others in the Orthodox Church, for it grew out of the very heart of our Mother Church, out of her long struggle to defend the true faith.

The Triumph of Orthodoxy was instituted by the Holy Church as a sign that the saving dogmas, i.e., the truths of Christ's teachings, have been received by the Church from the Son of God Himself and His Holy Apostles. Not only have these teachings been preserved unchanged and in all their purity, they have also received the necessary definition and elucidation during the long drawn-out struggle against various heresies and errors.

The last such heresy, whose defeat brought about the definite triumph of Orthodox dogmas, was that of the iconoclastic controversy. The heretics believed it wrong to depict in artistic images the Invisible and Indescribable God. This false interpretation of the veneration of icons led to the expulsion of icons from churches and the destruction of sacred images.

Orthodox defenders of icon veneration have shown from the Holy Scriptures and writings of the Holy Fathers that with the coming of the Lord of Glory in the flesh to the world, the depiction of God and of the history revealing the mystery of our salvation has become not merely possible but essential. The teaching on the veneration of icons and sacred images expresses the dogmatic unity of all Christian dogmatic truths, and has culminated in the present-day celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Through the decision of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, the Holy Church has enhanced the splendid edifice of Christian dogma, whose firm walls have sheltered the spiritual life of Christians from the winds of heresy.

As understood by the Mother Church herself, the Triumph of Orthodoxy expresses the joyous unity of all Christians in the truths of the holy faith, and the plenitude of communion with Christ through His Church. "Play music and clap your hands," proclaims the feast-day stikheron, "sing aloud with joy: so wondrous and fearful are Your deeds, O Christ! And who can express, O Savior, Your might, which has united the Church through our harmony of mind and concord?" (Apostikha).

What a profound and clear idea lies at the basis of our feast day! Our harmony of mind and common belief in the truths of faith revealed to us by God have united that which has been put asunder, have healed the terrible affliction of division, and have again made whole the Body of Christ, thus ensuring the triumph of the Universal Church.

How is this holy accord and singleness of mind of Christians manifested? In the very holy of holies of the Christian faith: the firm and unwavering faith and conviction in our Lord Jesus Christ as the True and Perfect God and Perfect Man.

Once again our Holy Church is filling the hearts and minds of her children with an awareness of the triumph of ecumenical faith. Each and every heresy is a denial of either the Divine or the Human nature of the Founder of our faith, the God-Man, Jesus Christ. "True faith," says St. Athanasius the Great, "consists in believing and confessing that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the God-Man—God, consubstantial and begotten of the Father in pre-eternity, and Man, born of the substance of the Mother within time. Perfect God and Perfect Man.... This is ecumenical faith. Whosoever will not steadfastly nurture the seed of faith cannot be saved" ("An extensive homily on faith").

Christians, as members of the Church of Christ, must bear witness to the world through their life, deeds and work: "professing salvation by deed, word, and images" (Ikos of the Feastday). Immersing our minds and hearts in the teachings of the Orthodox Church, we must ask ourselves in these days of penance: is our faith firm and well-founded, is our life pleasing to God, and do we have a living communion with the Mother Church through her Sacraments, prayers and teachings?

Thus it is with good reason that the Holy Church in today's Gospel reading has given us the outline of true Christians in the persons of the Holy Apostles Philip and Nathaniel, in whose thoughts there is no cunning, whose words are straightforward, and whose lives and deeds are pure and holy. From the moment they believed in Christ our Savior, they devoted their entire lives to His service.

Thus we too, brothers and sisters, must profess our Orthodox Faith not by acceptance of Christ's teachings alone, but also by leading righteous lives before God. Preserve and embody these few truths of faith revealed to us by God, "imprinting them into your memory like a seal. They will serve you as an invincible wall against slanderers, and will provide a fortress for your soul" (St. Basil the Great, "Homily on Faith"). Thus does the Holy Orthodox Church preach to us in the days of Great Lent, in celebrating the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Amen.

*The Living Word*

A.G.B

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

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

### Saints of the Week

**8 / 21 March — St Theophylactus, Bishop of Nicomedia** - When the emperor's advisor Tarasius, as a layman, was elected Patriarch of Constantinople, then with him and from him, many of his friends, admirers, and others of the laity received the monastic tonsure. Among them was Theophylactus. Tarasius appointed him Bishop of Nicomedia. As a bishop, Theophylactus was a good shepherd to his entrusted flock and proved to be exceptionally filled with compassion toward the less fortunate and indigent. After the death of St. Tarasius, the Patriarchal Throne was occupied by Nicephorus and shortly after that, the Imperial Throne was occupied by Leo the Armenian, who was an Iconoclast and, as such, raised up a absolute storm in the Church of Christ. Even though Iconoclasm had been anathematized by the Seventh Ecumenical Council [Nicæa, 783 A.D.], nevertheless, Emperor Leo re-instated it and by this wanted to supplant Orthodoxy. Saint Theophylactus opposed the emperor to his face and, when the emperor would not yield, Theophylactus said to him, "O emperor, violent injury will unexpectedly befall you, and you will not find anyone who will save you from it." Because of these words and by the order of the emperor, Theophylactus was ousted from his position and banished into exile, where he spent thirty years undergoing many hardships and insults and, where, in the end, he rendered his soul to the Lord about the year 845 A.D.; The Hieromartyr Theodoretus;

**St. Felix of Burgundy, bishop of Dunwich, and enlightener of East Anglia (c.648)** - Monk. Priest, In Burgundy he met befriended, converted and baptised King Sigebert who was in exile from East Anglia. England. When Sigebert returned to East Anglia in 630, he invited Felix to bring Christianity to his people. Felix was ordained bishop by Saint Honoratus of Canterbury, and then sailed up the River Kent, apparently starting his work in the area now known as Felixstowe. Evangelized throughout East Anglia, building a cathedral and school at Dunwich, stone churches throughout the region, and the college that became the University of Cambridge. With Saint Sigebert he founded the Bury Saint Edmunds abbey c.637. Worked with Saint Fursey. Spiritual teacher of Saint Audrey.

**The anniversary of the repose of Archbishop Vitaly (Maximenko) of Jordanville (1960)** - the young Archmandrite Vitaly was assigned by his bishop to the Pochaev Monastery in 1902 as a printer and preacher. He turned the Pochaev print-shop into one of the biggest church printing operations in Russia, having St. Job of Pochaev - a champion of Orthodoxy against the Uniates - as his heavenly patron. His efforts were interrupted by the First World War and the Russian Revolution, however, as the print-shop was plundered by Ukrainian nationalists and the Bolsheviks. In 1924 Vladika Vitaly managed to re-establish the print-shop in Ladomirovo, situated just inside the Czechoslovakian border. In 1944 the brotherhood was forced to move again, this time because of the Second World War. Once again everything was lost, this time to advancing Soviet troops. Archimandrite Vitaly was ordained Bishop and appointed to North America. He asked the monks at the Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville to accept him as one of the brethren which they did. He moved the print-shop of St. Job of Pochaev there in 1947, where it operates to this day. He was Abbot of the monastery from 1948 until his repose in 1960. One of the great figures of the Russian Diaspora, Vladika Vitaly was a great printer-missionary and stalwart of Orthodoxy in these times. May his memory be eternal!;

**New Martyr Archpriest Michael Edlklinsky** - little is known of Father Michael. He was the parish priest of the Church of Sts. Boris & Gleb at Podol in Kiev from at least 1889 until the Revolution. He worked tirelessly for his parishioners. He was especially attentive to the problem of drunkenness, considering it to be the foremost reason for human depravation and spiritual fall. Through his prayers, many were healed from this terrible weakness. He was given much money by others for charitable purposes. He established a parish cafeteria which distributed food for the poor and also an orphanage and a day school for the children of working women. He, his Matushka, and their daughters dressed poorly so as to give everything they could to the poor. Once, when the people began to attack the local Jewish population, he proceeded together with his clergy in full vestments and admonished the rioters, who began to disperse. He had great faith, and prayed fervently with tears. His sermons greatly profited those who heard him, and all who confessed in his presence experienced spiritual joy and peace. He died in a Kiev prison in 1938. There have been many miracles worked through his prayers, both during his life and after his martyrdom. Holy New Hieromartyr Michael, pray for us!

**9 / 22 March — The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste** - These were all soldiers in the Roman army, but believed firmly in the Lord Jesus. When a persecution arose in the time of Licinius, they were all taken for trial before the commander, who threatened to strip them of their military status. To this one of them, St Candidus, replied: 'Do not take only our military status, but also our bodies; nothing is dearer or of greater honour to us than Christ our God.' Then the commander ordered his servants to stone the holy martyrs to death. But when the servants threw the stones at the Christians, the stones turned back and fell on them themselves, causing them grievous injuries. One stone fell on the commander's face and smashed his teeth. The torturers, in bestial fury, bound the holy martyrs and threw them into a lake, setting a watch all round it to prevent any of them escaping. There was a terrible frost, and the lake froze around the bodies of the martyrs. To make the torture worse, the torturers built and lit baths by the lake, in the sight of the freezing sufferers, with the idea that one of them might deny Christ and acknowledge the idols of Rome. In fact, one of them did abjure, came out of the water and went into the baths. But lo, during the night a strange light appeared from heaven, which heated the water in the lake and the bodies of the martyrs, and with that light there descended from heaven thirty-nine wreaths for their heads. One of the sentries on the shore saw this, confessed the name of Christ and went into the lake to be worthy of the fortieth wreath in place of the traitor. And the fortieth wreath was seen to descend upon him. The next day, the whole town was amazed to see the martyrs still alive. Then the wicked judges commanded that their legs be broken and their bodies thrown into the water, so that the Christians should not be able to find them. On the third day the martyrs appeared to the local bishop, Peter, and told him to search beneath the water and bring out their relics. The bishop went out on a dark night with his clergy, and saw where the martyrs' relics were glowing in the water. Every bone that had been broken off from their bodies rose to the surface and burned there like a candle. They gathered them, and gave them burial, and the souls of these martyrs went to Him who was martyred for us all and rose with glory, the Lord Jesus. They suffered with honour and were crowned with unfading glory in 320. On this day it was a tradition in Russia to make cookies in the shape of swallows which were then arriving with the approaching spring. In our own times Blessed Father Seraphim (Rose), who always baked swallow cookies for the feast, would also make lizard cookies as spring in Platina, where his Monastery of St. Herman of Alaska was situated, brought lizards, and not swallows. Our Holy Father Philoromus the Confessor; St. Caesarius;

**St. Bosa, bishop of York** - Died 686. Saint Bosa was a Benedictine monk at Whitby, England, under Saint Hilda. In 678, he was consecrated bishop of Deira (the southern half of Northumbria, now Yorkshire) by Saint Theodore, with his see at York, when Saint Wilfrid was driven out by King Egfrid for refusing to accept the division of his see. Wilfrid returned in 686, but Bosa took over the diocese in 691 when Wilfrid was again exiled following a quarrel with King Aldfrid; Bosa ruled it with great holiness and ability until his death. Saint Bede praises Bosa as "a man beloved by God . . . of most unusual merit and sanctity." One of his disciples was Saint Acca, who later followed and succeeded Wilfrid at Hexham.

**10 /23 March — The Holy Martyr Codratus of Corinth, and others with him** - In a time of persecution of Christians, many of the faithful fled to the mountains and caves. The mother of this Codratus did so. She was pregnant just at that time, and gave birth to Codratus in a forest, dying almost at once. He was kept safe and fed by the providence of God and his guardian angel. Codratus grew up in solitude with nature. He who gave manna from heaven to the Israelites in the wilderness released a sweet dew from a cloud onto the mouth of the child Codratus. When he was twelve years old, he went down to the town, and there some good people took a fancy to him and educated him. He studied medicine and then began to heal the sick, using both natural medicines and, more importantly, the spiritual power and prayer which had been with him from childhood. When a new persecution arose under Decius, Codratus was taken for trial and thrown into prison. Five of his friends stood beside him and confessed the name of Christ. They were: Cyprian, Dionysius, Anectus, Paul and Crescens. They were all dragged through the streets and struck with sticks and stones by the unbelievers, especially by the children, until they arrived at the scaffold. Here the martyrs prayed to God and were beheaded with the sword. A spring of water gushed out onto the earth at the spot, which to this day is called by Codratus's name and commemorates the heroic death for Christ of the holy six. They suffered with honour for the truth in Corinth in the year 250, in the time of the Emperor Decius and his governor Jason. Martyr Codratus of Nicomedia; St. Anastasia, Patrician of Alexandria.

**11 / 24 March — St Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem** - born in Damascus of eminent parents. Having acquired worldly wisdom, he was not content with this, and began also to acquire pure, spiritual wisdom. In the monastery of St Theodosius he found himself with the monk John Moschus, whom he took as his teacher; then, together with him, set out to visit the monasteries and ascetics of Egypt. Their motto was to glean more spiritual wisdom each day. They wrote down all that they discovered, and later published it in two books entitled 'The Spiritual Meadow'. They later went to Rome, where Moschus died, leaving Sophronius with the pledge to take him either to Sinai or to the Monastery of St Theodosius. Sophronius fulfilled the desire of his teacher and took his body to the monastery, after which he was delayed in Jerusalem, which by that time had been freed from the Persians. He witnessed the return of the Precious Cross from Persia, which the Emperor Heraclius carried

into the Holy City on his back. The old Patriarch, Zacharias, who also returned from slavery, did not live long and, when he went to the other world, was followed first by Modestus, who died in 634, and then by blessed Sophronius. He governed the Church with outstanding wisdom and zeal for four years, standing in defence of Orthodoxy against the Monothelite heresy, which he condemned at his Council in Jerusalem before it was condemned at the 6th Ecumenical Council. He wrote the life of St Mary of Egypt, compiled the rite of the Great Blessing of Water and introduced various new hymns and songs into different services. When the Arabian Caliph Omar captured Jerusalem, Sophronius begged him to spare the Christians, which Omar hypocritically promised. When Omar quickly began to plunder and ill-treat the Christians in Jerusalem, Sophronius, with many lamentations, begged God to take him from among the living upon earth, that he should not see the desecration of the holy places. And God heard his prayer, and took him to Himself in His heavenly courts in 644. St. Pionius; St. George the Sinaite; **St. Angus (Oengus) of Culdees, compiler of first Irish martyrology** - Born in Ireland; died c. 830. The appellation "Culdee," Ceile De, or Kele-De means "worship of God," which became the name of a monastic movement otherwise known as the "Companions of God." Oengus was of the race of the Dalaradians, kings of Ulster. In his youth, renouncing all earthly pretensions, he chose Christ for his inheritance by embracing the religious life in the monastery of Cluain-Edneach (Clonenagh) in East Meath (County Laois). Here he became so great a proficient both in learning and sanctity, that no one in his time could be found in Ireland that equalled him in reputation for every kind of virtue, and for sacred knowledge. To shun the esteem of the world, he disguised himself and entered the monastery of Tamlacht (Tallaght Hill), three miles from Dublin, where he lived for seven years as an anonymous lay brother. There he performed all the drudgery of the house, appearing fit for nothing but the vilest tasks, while interiorly he was being perfected in love and contemplation absorbed in God. After his identity was discovered when he tried to coach an unsuccessful student, he returned to Cluain-Edneach, where the continual austerity of his life, and his constant application to God in prayer, may be more easily admired than imitated. For example, he would daily recite one-third of the psalter (50 Psalms) while immersed in cold water. He was chosen abbot, and at length raised to the episcopal dignity: for it was usual then in Ireland for eminent abbots in the chief monasteries to be bishops. He was known for his devotion to the saints. He left both a longer and a shorter Irish Martyrology, and five other books concerning the saints of his country, contained in what the Irish call *Saltair-na-Rann*. The short martyrology was a celebrated metrical hymn called *Felire* or *Festilogium*. The longer, *Martyrology of Tallaght* was composed in collaboration with Saint Maelruain of Tallaght. He died at Disertbeagh (now Desert Aenguis or Dysert Enos), which became also a famous monastery, and took its name from him.

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

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

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

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

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

**14 / 27 March — St. Benedict** - born in Nursia in Italy in 480, of rich and eminent parents, he did not persevere long with his schooling, for he realised himself that he could, through book-learning, lose 'the great understanding of my soul'. And he left school 'an untaught sage and an understanding ignoramus'. He fled to a monastery where a monk, Romanus, gave him the habit, after which he withdrew to a craggy mountain, where he lived for more than three years in a cave in great struggles with his soul. Romanus brought him bread and dropped it over the wall of the crag on a rope to the mouth of the cave. When he became known in the neighbourhood, he, to flee the praise of men, moved away from that cave. He was very brutal with himself. Once, when an impure rage of fleshly lust fell on him, he stripped bare and rolled among nettles and thorns until he had driven out of himself every thought of a woman. God endowed him with many spiritual gifts: insight, healing and the driving out of evil spirits, the raising of the dead and the ability to appear to others from a distance in a dream or vision. He once discerned that he had been given a glass of poisoned wine. He made the sign of the Cross over the glass and it broke into pieces. He founded twelve monasteries, each having twelve monks at first. He later compiled the specifically 'Benedictine' rule, which is today followed in the Roman Church. On the sixth day before his death he commanded that his grave, already prepared as the saint had foreseen that his end was near, should be opened. He gathered all the monks together, gave them counsel and gave his soul to the Lord whom he had faithfully served in poverty and purity. His sister, Scholastica, lived in a women's monastery, where, guided by her brother and herself practising great asceticism, she came to great spiritual perfection. When St Benedict set his soul free, two monks, one on the road and one at prayer in a distant cell, had at the same moment the same vision: a path from earth to heaven, curtained with precious cloth and illuminated at the sides by ranks of people. At the top of that path stood a man of indescribable beauty and light, who told them that the path was prepared for Benedict, the beloved of God. After that vision, the two brethren discovered that their beloved abbot had gone from this world. He died peacefully in about 550 and went to the eternal Kingdom of Christ the King. St. Eusebius, Bishop of Lampsacus;  
**St. Theognostus, Metropolitan of Kiev** - he was a Greek by origin and a successor to St. Peter of Kiev. He suffered much from the Mongol hordes, especially at the hands of Janibeg Khan. Theognostus was slandered by his own Russian people before the Mongolian emperor because he did not render the emperor any tribute for his episcopal rank. When the emperor summoned and questioned him concerning this, Theognostus replied: "Christ our God has redeemed this Church from paganism by His Precious Blood. For what and on what should I pay tribute to the pagans?" In the end he was released and returned home. He governed the Church for twenty-five years. He died to the Lord in the year 1353 A.D.

**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.

# Lenten Synaxarion

## The Triumph of Orthodoxy Sunday

**I rejoice when I see  
the veneration due the icons  
once so ignominiously rejected.**

On this first Sunday of Great Lent, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the Church of Christ celebrates the restoration of the holy and venerable icons by the Emperor Michael, the holy and blessed Empress Theodora and the Holy Methodius, Patriarch of Constantinople.

Through God's indulgence Leo the Isaurian, a swineherd and keeper of donkeys, inherited the scepter of the kingdom. At that time Saint Germanus was at the helm of the Church. Leo sent for him and said, "Since it seems to me that there is no difference between the holy icons and idols, command that they be removed immediately from among us. Although if they are true likenesses of the saints, let them be hung higher on the walls so that we who are wallowing in sins do not defile them by venerating them." But the Patriarch responded thus to the Emperor's abomination, "O King, we have heard of someone who once raised his hand against the holy icons. He was called Conon. Could you be this man?" The emperor said, "I was so called as a child." And since the Patriarch refused to obey the emperor, he deposed him and installed Anastasius, who sympathized with him. And so at that time began the struggle against the holy icons.

After this Leo Constantine Copronymus became heir to the kingdom as well as to the savage attacks against the holy icons. And what can be said about the number and kind of deeds that lawless man committed except that he came to a most shameful end. His son, whose mother was a Khazar, inherited the kingdom after him, and he also came to a bad end. Irene and Constantine then ascended the throne. At the direction of the holy Patriarch Tarasius they assembled the Seventh Council, and the holy icons were once more accepted by Christ's Church. After they relinquished the kingdom, Nicephorus ascended to the throne. After him there were Stauracius and then Michael Rhangabe, who were both iconodules.

The beast-like Leo the Armenian seized the throne from Michael, and, having been misled by an impious hermit, began the second iconoclasm. And once more the Church was bereft of Her beauty. Michael Amorius succeeded him, whose son Theophilus then for the second time directed this madness against the icons. For it was this Theophilus who gave many of the Holy Fathers over to torments and tortures, seeking the truth about the holy icons and believing whatever he would. "If there be anyone in the city intent on uprising, then he will be caught not long after I am told." And after reigning for 12 years, he was stricken with an intestinal disorder so that he desired to relinquish his life. His mouth opened so wide, that his internal organs were visible.

The empress was so upset at what had happened, that she could barely sleep. And in a dream she beheld the most pure Theotokos holding the pre-eternal Child, surrounded by most luminous angels. They were striking Theophilus her husband and humiliating him. Now when her dream had passed and Theophilus had come to his senses, he cried, "Woe is me in my wretchedness, I am struck for the sake of the holy icons." And immediately the empress held an icon of the Theotokos above him and entreated her with tears. And Theophilus, so inclined, saw that one of the clergy surrounding him had an engolpion, which he grabbed and kissed. Now as soon as his lips touched the icon, and he opened wide his mouth, he returned to normal and was relieved of the adversity and affliction and fell asleep, after confessing that it is good to venerate the holy icons. Then the empress, fetching the holy and precious images from her bedchamber, convinced Theophilus to kiss them and venerate them with all his heart. A short while afterwards Theophilus departed this life. Theodora then commanded that all who were in exile and in prison be freed. John was deposed from the patriarchal throne, since he was more a sorcerer and demon worshiper than patriarch. Then Methodius, a confessor of Christ, ascended the throne, having suffered much through having been closed up in a tomb alive.

While he was there, Ioannicius the Great, who was practicing asceticism on Mount Olympus, received a divine visitation. The great faster Arsaacius came to him and said, "God has sent me to you, that we might go to the righteous Isaiah the recluse in Nicomedia and learn from him what God desires and what is fitting for His Church." Now when they came to the venerable Isaiah, he said to them, "Thus saith the Lord: Behold, the end is approaching for the enemies of My image. Go to the empress Theodora and to the Patriarch Methodius and tell them: 'Cease to do what is not holy, and offer sacrifice to Me with the angels by venerating the countenance of My image and of the Cross'." Hearing this they immediately left for Constantinople and announced what had been said to Patriarch Methodius and all God's assembled people. The assembly then went to the empress and found her agreeable in all things, since this was the pious and God-loving tradition of the Fathers. The empress straightway brought out the image of the Theotokos for all to see, and venerating it, she said, "Let all be condemned who do not venerate the images, kissing them in love, not in worship as gods, but as images for the sake of the love of their archetypes. And they rejoiced with great joy. And in response she entreated them to pray for her husband Theophilus. Seeing her faith, they obeyed reluctantly. For Patriarch Methodius among the saints assembled all the people, priests and bishops and proceeded to God's Great Church. Among the assembled were Ioannicius the Great from Olympus, Arsaacius, Pancratius and the disciples of Theodore the Studite, and confessors Theophanes and Theodore

Graptoi, Michael of the Holy City and Singelus and many others. And they prayed to God for Theophilus in tears all night long.

Now this took place throughout the first week of the Great Fast, with the empress Theodora herself, the women and all the people taking part. Having completed the prayers, the empress Theodora retired at dawn on Friday, and dreamed that she was at the foot of the Cross, and there were several people passing noisily by, wearing various instruments of torture. As she recognized the Emperor Theophilus among those being led with his hands bound behind his back, she followed the group and its guards. When they reached the brass gates, she saw a supernatural vision, a man sitting in front of the image of Christ and Theophilus brought before him. Reaching to touch his feet, the empress prayed for the emperor. He opened his mouth and said, "Great is thy faith, O woman. Know that because of thy tears and thy faith, as well as the prayers and petitions of My servants and My priests, I grant forgiveness to thy husband Theophilus." Then He said to the guards, "Loose him and give him to his wife." And taking him, she departed rejoicing in gladness. And immediately the dream left her.

Now Patriarch Methodius, while the prayers and petitions were being offered for him, had taken a new parchment scroll and written the names of all the heretical emperors, including Theophilus, placing it under the holy altar table. But on Friday he saw a great and terrible angel entering the temple, coming to him and saying, "Thy petition has been heard, O Bishop, and the Emperor Theophilus has received forgiveness. Trouble the Godhead about this no longer." And desiring to ascertain the truth of his vision the Patriarch descended from his place, and taking the parchment and unrolling it, he found (O, the judgments of God!) that all reference to the name of Theophilus has been erased by God.

Upon hearing this, the empress rejoiced greatly and requested the Patriarch to assemble all the people with the holy icons and crosses in the great church, so that might be adorned with the holy icons and God's new miracle could be known by all. And soon when all had gathered in the church holding candles, the empress arrived with her son. And a Litiya was served there with the holy icons and the divine and precious wood of the Cross and with the sacred and divine Gospels. And leaving the church, calling out, "Lord, have mercy," they processed the agreed mile. Then they returned to the church, where Divine Liturgy was celebrated.

When the holy and precious icons were returned to their place, the holy men mentioned earlier and the pious Orthodox rulers were glorified, and those impious people who did not accept the honor of the holy icons were anathematized and condemned. And from that time these holy confessors appointed the annual commemoration of this solemnity, so that we might never again fall into a similar ignominy.

**O unchanging Image of the Father,  
through the prayers of Thy holy confessors,  
have mercy on us.  
Amen.**

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