

The Forth Sunday of Great Lent /

St John of the Ladder

16 / 29 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.

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

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



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

Matins Gospel VIII

Epistle: for Sunday: Heb 6:13-20

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

AFTER ABRAHAM HAD PATIENTLY ENDURED, HE OBTAINED THE PROMISE

Do you see that the promise alone did not effect the whole, but the patient waiting as well? ...This shows that oftentimes a promise is thwarted through faintheartedness ...What is 'the hope set before us?' From these past events we conjecture the future. For if these came to pass after so long a time, certainly the other will. So that the things which happened in regard to Abraham also give us confidence concerning the things to come ...He shows that while we are still in the world, and not yet departed from this life, we are already among the promises. For through hope we are already in heaven ...And you see how very suitable an image he has discovered: for he did not say 'foundation,' but 'anchor.' For that which is in the tossing sea, and seems not to be very firmly fixed, stands on the water as upon land, and is shaken and yet is not shaken.

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

for the Saint: Eph 5:9-19

Gospel: for Sunday: Mark 9:17-31

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

HEALING THROUGH PRAYER AND FASTING

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

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

for the Saint: Matt 4:25-5:12

WILL WE GO TO HEAVEN OR HELL?

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

The parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, recorded by St. Matthew (Mt. 25:1-13) covers the same subject: "What are we to understand by that petition for oil which they make to the prudent virgins if not that, in the hour of judgment, discovering their interior want, they seek testimony from without?...In that day...the testimony of each one will scarcely suffice

for himself...They will not find pardon then who waste the time now in which they might repent...The prophet says, (Isa. 55:6) 'Seek the Lord while He may be found: call upon Him while He is near.' (St. Gregory the Great. Parables of the Gospel).

Saints of the Week

16 / 29 March — The Holy Apostle Aristobulus, one of the Seventy - He was the brother of the Apostle Barnabas and was born in Cyprus. He was a follower of the Apostle Paul, who mentions him in his Epistle to the Romans (16:10). When the great Apostle Paul created many bishops for different parts of the world, he made this Aristobulus bishop of Britain (i. e. England). In Britain there was a wild people, pagan and wicked, and Aristobulus endured among them unmentionable torments, misfortunes and malice. They smote him without mercy, dragged him through the streets, mocked him and jeered at him. But in the end this holy man came to success by the power of the grace of God. He enlightened the people, baptised them in the name of Christ the Lord, built churches, ordained priests and deacons and finally died there in peace and went to the Kingdom of the Lord whom he had served so faithfully.

The Holy Martyr Sabinas - An Egyptian from the city of Hermopolis, he was the administrator of that city. In the time of a persecution of Christians he went off into a mountain with many other Christians and shut himself in a hut, where he spent the time in fasting and prayer. But a poor man who had brought him food and for whom Sabinas had done much betrayed him; as Judas did Christ, so this poor man for money (for two pieces of gold) betrayed his benefactor. Sabinas, with six others, was taken by soldiers, bound and brought to judgement. After harsh torture, he was thrown into the River Nile, where he gave his spirit to God in 287.

The Holy Martyrs Trophimus and Thallus - They were born in Syria and were brothers by birth. They openly and freely preached Christ and denounced the folly of the Hellenes [Greeks] and Romans. The enraged pagans decided to have them stoned to death, but when they began hurling stones upon these two holy brothers, the stones reverted and struck the assailants and the brothers remained unharmed. Afterward they were both crucified. From their crosses the brothers taught and encouraged those Christians who stood sorrowfully around. After much agony they presented their souls to the Lord to Whom they remained faithful to the end. They suffered honourably in the year 300 A.D., in the city of Bofor.

17/ 30 March — St. Alexis, the Man of God - Varied are the paths along which God leads those who desire to be pleasing to Him and fulfil His Law. In the time of the Emperor Honorius (393-423), there lived in Rome a high imperial dignitary, Euphemianus, very eminent and very rich. Both he and his wife, Agalais, lived lives pleasing to God. Although he was rich, Euphemianus sat down to table only once a day, at sunset. They had an only son, this Alexis, who, when he was grown up, was compelled to marry. But, on the night of the wedding, he left not only his wife but also his father, took ship and went to the town of Edessa in Mesopotamia, where the wonderful Face of the Lord Himself, sent to King Abgar, was kept. Having venerated this Face, Alexis dressed himself in simple clothing and lived for seventeen years as a poor man in that town, constantly praying to God in the porch of the church of the Mother of God. When he became known as a holy man, he shunned the praise of men and so went off and took a ship that was going to Laodicea. By the providence of God, the ship went off course and took him right to Rome. Regarding this as a cross from God, Alexis decided to go to his father's house and there, unknown, continue his life of self-denial. His father did not recognise him, but from charity allowed him to live in his courtyard in a little shack. There Alexis spent seventeen further years, living only on bread and water. Molested by the servants in many ways, he persevered to the end. And when the end drew near, he wrote a few words on a single sheet of paper, held it in his hand, lay down and breathed his last, on March 17th, 411. Then a voice was heard in the Church of the Holy Apostles, saying to the Emperor, who was present, and the Patriarch: 'Look for the Man of God.' Shortly afterwards it was revealed that this Man of God was in Euphemianus's house. The Emperor, the Pope and their whole escort came to Euphemianus's house and, after lengthy questioning, discovered that the poor man was the Man of God. When they went into his shack, they found him dead with his face shining like the sun. His parents discovered from the paper that he was their son Alexis; and his bride, who had lived for thirty-four years without him, that this was her husband, and they were overcome by immeasurable sorrow and grief. But then they were comforted, seeing how God had glorified His chosen one. For, on touching his body, many of the sick were healed, and a sweet myrrh came forth from it. He was buried in a coffin of marble and emerald. His head is preserved in the Church of St Laurus in the Peloponnese.

St. Patrick, enlightener of Ireland - was born in Britain, of Roman stock, probably with the name Patricius Magonus Sucatus. When he was about fourteen, in the year 403, Irish raiders carried him to their own country as a slave, and there, near Ballymena in Antrim, he first learned to pray while looking after his master's herds. The saint escaped in a ship taking dogs to Gaul and there he became a disciple of Saint Germanus of Auxerre, studying also at the monastery of Lerins. For fifteen years or so he lived abroad, but then he dreamed of Ireland and determined to return to the land of his slavery as a missionary. Saint Germanus consecrated him bishop, and he returned to Ireland in the year 432. At Tara in Meath he confronted King Laoghaire with the Christian Gospel and confounded the druids. He converted the king's daughters. He threw down the idol of Crom Cruach in Leitrim. The saint wrote that he daily expected to be violently killed or enslaved again. But in 444 he established his bishopric at Armagh, and with this city as his base placed the organisation of the Irish church on a sure foundation. 'I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through belief in the Threeness, through confession of the Oneness, towards the Creator of Creation. I arise today through the strength of Christ with His Baptism, through the strength of His Crucifixion with His Burial, through the strength of His Resurrection with His Ascension, through the strength of His descent for the Judgment of Doom. I arise today through the strength of the love of Cherubim, in obedience of Angels, in the service of the Archangels, in hope of resurrection to meet with reward, in prayers of Patriarchs, in predictions of Prophets, in preachings of Apostles, in faiths of Confessors, in innocence of Holy Virgins, in deeds of righteous men. I arise today through the strength of Heaven: light of Sun, brilliance of Moon, splendour of Fire, speed of Lightning, swiftness of Wind, depth of Sea, stability of Earth, firmness of Rock. I arise today through God's strength to pilot me: God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom

to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's host to secure me: against snares of devils, against temptations of vices, against inclinations of nature, against everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and anear, alone and in a crowd. I summon today all these powers between me (and these evils): against every cruel and merciless power that may oppose my body and my soul, against incantations of false prophets, against black laws of heathenry, against false laws of heretics, against craft of idolatry, against spells of witches and smiths and wizards, against every knowledge that endangers man's body and soul. Christ to protect me today against poison, against burning, against drowning, against wounding, so that there may come abundance of reward. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through belief in the Threeness, through confession of the Oneness towards the Creator of creation. Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of Christ. May Thy Salvation, O Lord, be ever with us.' wrote Patrick in the hymn we call 'Saint Patrick's Breastplate'. The saint died in the year 461 at Saul on Strangford Lough, Downpatrick;

The Holy Martyr Marinus - a soldier. Not only did he not want to offer sacrifices to the idols, but if others made sacrifices, he scattered and trampled them under his feet. As a result of this, Marinus was tortured and beheaded in the third century. A certain Senator, Astyrius, clothed in a priceless white garment witnessed the suffering of St. Marinus. Astyrius was so overcome with enthusiasm for the Faith of Christ, Who gives to His followers so much courage, that he placed the martyred body on his shoulders, removed it and buried it with honor. Upon seeing this, the pagans murdered him also as a Christian; St. Withburga, solitary at Holkham and East Dereham (c.743)

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

Aninus the Wonderworker - born in Chalcedon. He was of short stature as was Zacchaeus of old but great in spirit and faith. He withdrew from the world in his fifteenth year and settled in a hut near the Euphrates river where he prayed to God and atoned for his sins, at first with his teacher Mayum and, after his death, alone. Through the power of his prayers, he replenished a dry well with water, healed the sick of various maladies and tamed wild beasts. A trained lion accompanied him and was at his service at all times. He discerned the future. When Pionius, a stylite, was attacked and badly beaten by robbers some distance away from Aninus, Pionius decided to descend from the pillar and proceed to complain to the judges. St. Aninus "discerned the soul" of this stylite and his intention. He sent a letter to Pionius, by his lion, counselling him to abandon his intention, to forgive his assailants and to continue in his asceticism. His charity was inexpressible. The bishop of Neo-Caesarea presented him with a donkey in order to ease the burden of carrying water from the river, but he gave the donkey to a needy man who had complained to him about his poverty. The bishop presented him with another donkey and he gave that one away. Finally, the bishop gave him a third donkey, not only to serve as a water-carrier but one that Aninus was to care for and to return. Before his death Aninus saw Moses, Aaron and Or [Egyptian Ascetic] approaching him, and they called out to him, "Aninus, the Lord is calling you, arise and come with us." He revealed this to his disciples and gave up his soul to the Lord, Whom he faithfully served. He was one-hundred ten years old when his earthly life was ended.

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

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

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

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

The Holy Martyr Photina - This was the Samaritan woman who had the rare fortune to converse with the Lord Christ Himself at the Well of Jacob, near Sychar (St. John 4:4-31). Believing in the Lord, Photina afterwards went to preach His Gospel with Victor and Josiah her two sons, and with her five sisters, Anatolia, Phota, Photida, Parasceve and Cyriaca. They had gone to Carthage in Africa. There they were arrested and taken to Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero and were thrown into prison. By God's Divine Providence, Domnina, the daughter of Nero, came into contact with St. Photina and was converted to the Faith of Christ by her. After imprisonment they all suffered for the sake of Christ. Photina, who for the first time was enlightened with the light of truth at the well of Sychar, was now thrown into a well where she died and entered into the eternal kingdom of Christ;

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

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

22 March / 4 April — The Hieromartyr Basil, Priest of Ancyra - Under the Emperor Constantius there was much suffering at the hands of the Arians. At that time, Basil became known as a staunch defender of Orthodoxy and a true shepherd of his flock in Ancyra. When, after Constantius, Julian the Apostate came to the throne and began to persecute the Christians, Basil openly denounced this new wickedness and encouraged his people in the Faith. For this he was thrown into prison. When the

Emperor Julian came to Ancyra, Basil was brought before him and he began to urge Basil to abandon the Christian faith, promising him honours and wealth. Then Basil answered him: 'I believe in my Christ, whom you have denied and who gave you this earthly kingdom, but He will shortly take this from you. How can you have no shame before the altar under which you were saved from death as an eight-year-old child when they sought to kill you? Therefore He will soon take this earthly kingdom from you, and your body shall not be buried when you have spewed forth your soul in bitter torments.' Julian was furious and ordered that seven strips of skin be torn from his body every day. And his torturers carried this out for seven days. When Basil was brought out again before the Emperor, he tore a strip of his own flesh off and threw it into Julian's face, shouting: 'Take this and eat it, Julian, if such food is sweet to you, but Christ is life for me!' This occurrence was noised in the town, and the Emperor left Ancyra in secret out of shame and went to Antioch. And they continued to torture Basil with red hot irons until he surrendered his soul to his Lord for whom he had suffered so much. This was in the year 363; St Drossida; Our Holy Father Euthymius the Martyr.

Thursday of the Fifth Week

At Matins on this day the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is read in its entirety once a year, which was read in four parts on the first four days of the first week, and the Life of St. Mary of Egypt is read after the Sessional Hymn (Kathisma). According to this feature of the Thursday Matins it is called either the St. Andrew of Crete or the St. Mary of Egypt Thursday. In the Canon are collected and stated, as was stated above (see page 510), all the exhortations to fasting and repentance, and the Holy Church repeats it now in its fullness to inspire us new strength for the successful end to Lent. "Since", it is said in the Synaxarion, "the Holy Forty Day Lent is drawing near the end so that men should not become lazy, or more carelessly disposed to the spiritual efforts, or give up their abstinence altogether," that this Great Canon is offered. It is "so long, and so well-composed, as to be sufficient to soften even the hardest soul, and to rouse it to resumption of the good, if only it is sung with a contrite heart and proper attention". And the church Typikon (Ustav) orders the Great Canon to be read and chanted slowly and "with a contrite heart and voice, making three prostrations at each Troparion". For the same purpose of abstinence and strength, and attention to repentance is the reading of the Life of the Venerable Mary of Egypt. According to an explanation of the same Synaxarion, the Life of the Venerable Mary also "manifests infinite compunction and gives much encouragement to the fallen and sinners", representing itself to us as a paradigm of true repentance, and an example of the unutterable mercy of God. It serves as the continuation of the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete and a transition to the order of the following Sunday. Reading the Canon of St. Andrew and Mary of Egypt on the Thursday of the Fifth Week was established from the time of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

Fifth Saturday of Great Lent

The service on this Saturday is called the Praise of the Most Holy Theotokos, because on this day "we sing the hymns of praise" to the Most Holy Theotokos in memory of the triple deliverance of the imperial city of Constantinople from the attack of enemies through Her intercession (see March 10). In the reign of Heraclius (in 626) the Persians from the East and the Scythians or Avars from the west blockaded Constantinople. Patriarch Sergius took the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos called the Hodigitria (refer to July 28), and her encased robe, in a cross procession to the walls of city and when he dipped the robe of the Mother of God into the water, the sea began to boil, and the ships sank, and the unwelcome enemies were exterminated. The people spent the whole night in prayer in the Blachernae church, which is on the seacoast, singing the thanksgiving hymns to the Mother of God (Akathist). A similar deliverance of Constantinople from the Agarians occurred during the reign of Constantine Pogonatus (in 670), Leo the Isaurian (716-740), or, according to other reports, during the reign of Michael III (864) from the Agarian and the Scythian Ascold and Dir. The Holy Church entered into the universal use of the thanksgiving hymns to the Theotokos, performed on the 5th Sunday of Great Lent as the first deliverance of Constantinople was about this time. With thanksgiving for former deliverance from enemies, the Holy Church connects the prayer to the Most Holy Theotokos with even freeing us from all misfortunes, looking to the Mother of God as the Helper in prayers and repentance. Reminding believers about the heavenly Mediatrix and Intercessor of the Christian race, the Holy Church thus confirms repenting in the hope of greater help in one's spiritual efforts, for She never abandoned the suffering and grieving needing Her help, even in the struggle against external enemies.

S. V. Bulgakov, *Handbook for Church Servers*, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 0523-5
Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © January 9, 2004. All rights reserved.