

Thomas Sunday

Second Sunday of Pascha

13 / 26 April



Troparion of Thomas Sunday, Tone 7: While the tomb was sealed, Thou, O Life, didst shine forth from the grave, O Christ God. And while the doors were shut, Thou didst come unto Thy disciples, O Resurrection of all, renewing through them an upright Spirit in us according to Thy great mercy. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Kontakion of Thomas Sunday, Tone 8: With his searching right hand, Thomas did probe Thy life-bestowing side, O Christ God; for when Thou didst enter while the doors were shut, he cried out unto Thee with the rest of the disciples: Thou art my Lord and my God.

The Holy and Glorious Apostle Thomas - He was one of the twelve Great Apostles. Through his doubt of the Resurrection of the Lord Christ, a new confirmation was given of that wonderful and saving event, for the risen Lord appeared again to His disciples, to convince Thomas. The Lord said to Thomas: Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side; and be not faithless, but believing', and Thomas cried: 'My Lord and my God! (John 20). After the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the apostles cast lots to see who would go where to preach the Gospel, it fell to Thomas to go to India. He was somewhat saddened at having to go so far away, but the Lord appeared to him and comforted him. In India, St Thomas converted many, both rich and poor, to the Christian faith, and founded a Church there, making priests and bishops. Among others, St Thomas converted two sisters, Tertiana and Mygdonia, wives of Indian princes. Both sisters were ill-treated for their faith by their husbands, who would not live with them after their baptism, and divorced them. Being freed from their marriages, they lived godly lives till their deaths. Dionysius and Pelagia, a couple at first betrothed to each other, heard the Apostle's teaching and did not live together, but devoted themselves to the ascetic life. Pelagia died a martyr for the Faith and Dionysius was made bishop by the Apostle. Prince Misdaeus, the husband of Tertiana, whose wife and son Iuzanes Thomas baptised, condemned the Apostle to death, and sent five soldiers who ran him through with their lances, and thus the holy Apostle Thomas gave his soul into the hands of his Christ. Before his death, he, with the other apostles, was miraculously borne to Jerusalem for the funeral of the most holy Mother of God. Arriving late, he grieved bitterly and, at his request, the tomb of the Most Pure was opened, but the body was not there; the Lord had taken His Mother to His heavenly home. Thus St Thomas first, by his unbelief, confirmed the faith in the Resurrection of the Lord and then, by his late arrival, revealed to us the wondrous glorification of the Mother of God.

Matins Gospel I

Epistle: St. Acts of the Apostles 5: 12 -20

And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, So that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

MANY SIGNS AND WONDERS WERE DONE AMONG THE PEOPLE

For though the Apostles themselves modestly ascribe it all to this cause, declaring that they did these things in the name of Christ, yet at the same time the life and noble conduct of the men helped to produce this effect ...Observe how he now no longer tells the number of those who believe: at such a rate was the faith making way even to an immense multitude, and also widely was the Resurrection proclaimed. So then 'the people magnified them': but they were now no longer lightly to be despised as once they were: for in a little moment, at a single turn of the scale, such have been the effects produced by the fisherman and the publican! Earth had become a heaven, for manner of life, for boldness of speech, for wonders, for all: like angels they were looked upon with wonder.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily XII on Acts V B#55. p. 78.

The Gospel According To St. John 20: 19-31

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

For great is the dignity of the priests. 'Whosoever sins,' it says, 'you remit, they are remitted unto them' ...And hold them very exceedingly in honour ...The priest, even if he rightly orders his own life, if he does not have an anxious care for yours, yes and that of all those around him, will depart with the wicked into hell; and often when not betrayed by his own conduct, he perishes by yours, if he has not rightly performed his part... 'For they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account' (Heb.13:17)...For this is the Faith, to receive things not seen, since 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen' (Heb. 11:1).

St. John Chrysostom. Homily LXXXVI, 4 and LXXXVII, 1 on John XX. B#58, pp. 326,327

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe (Jn. 20:24-25).

What does this mean, his "I will not believe"? Is it possible he could not believe the other eleven Apostles, his brothers? Is it possible they could lie to him? The whole evangelical life of Christ, all His miracles, Golgotha, the death on the Cross, they had experienced together. And now this joy which they all had experienced they wanted to share with him. No, this was not a lie.

But He, Whom they had seen, was He really the same Christ? Was this not a vision or some other Christ? Was this not a mistake? And Thomas was afraid to lose what he had. And what did he have? This is what: during the years of fellowship with Christ, he had absorbed His teaching, the entire makeup of His life; and by now he was incapable of living any other way. It was painful for him not to have personal fellowship anymore with Christ; but by this time he understood that Christ came to earth in order to teach us the main commandment of God: love for God and neighbour, to perform it Himself, and to give us the strength to fulfill it.

In Paradise the first man fulfilled the commandment of God. The strength to fulfill this commandment of God he drew from eating the fruits of the Tree of Life. But then came the Fall. Paradise was lost, the Tree of Life was lost, and together with it, the strength for a godly life. And Christ came in order to give us the New Testament Tree of Life—His Body and Blood. "This do in remembrance of Me," He said at the Last Supper (Lk. 22:19).

Thomas knew the commandments of Christ, and he knew where to draw the strength to fulfill them. He lived this. Although he lived without the human presence of Christ, he lived in Christ. He was afraid to make a mistake. What if another Christ had appeared to the disciples, not the One in Whom he lived and continued to live? This is what his "I will not believe" meant. And on the eighth day after His Resurrection, the Lord again appeared to His disciples, while Thomas was also in the house, and allowed him to touch His wounds. And here resounded Thomas's triumphant cry, which even now stirs our hearts: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:28). And here are the words of Christ which relate to you and me, opening a new era of faith which will remain until the end of the world: "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed... But these are written," adds the Apostle John the Divine, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (Jn. 20:29, 31).

The One Thing Needful - Archbishop Andrei

Today is the second Sunday of Pascha already. It is the Sunday of St. Thomas. Today we read about, as the church calls it, St. Thomas' "believing unbelief." ¹ There is a theme here that the church is going to be talking about now in the light of the resurrection during the whole Pentecostarion period: the enlightenment of man. The resurrection is being applied now. We see it in the Acts that we're reading for quite some time now. In the light of the resurrection, we see what's happening. We see how many people were healed, how many people were converted, and how lives were changed. Even the shadow of the apostles healed people of their infirmities. ² In the light of the resurrection, there was activity, there was motion, and there was enlightenment.

St Thomas, no different than you or I, had to be enlightened also. Everyone has different levels of understanding on various things, even among the apostles, even among the saints. It is fascinating to look and see how our Lord in the forty days that He spent on the earth enlightened so many using different ways to enlighten them, and also throughout the whole of the gospels how He reached people where they needed to be reached. The final destination is always the same: to follow the

commandments and to become purified, so that we can know Christ in an intimate way. But sometimes Christ teaches certain people a little bit different. In fact, everyone is treated a little bit different.

Thomas wasn't there the first night of Pascha. ³ He had just left probably on some errand, and that is when Christ came, the doors being shut. And Jesus spoke to the eleven, or actually, ten ⁴ at that point, and they were glad. I have always marveled how in the scriptures great, momentous occasions are stated so laconically. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." ⁵ Indeed, they were glad, when they saw the God-man! But Thomas was not there, and the resurrection was such an incredible thing; he cannot really be faulted for not believing.

Peter didn't believe when he saw the grave clothes, only John did, when they went into the grave and saw the clothes lying folded up. ⁶ John saw and believed, but Peter didn't. He went away, wondering in himself what had come to pass. ⁷ Mary Magdalene, who saw the stone rolled away from the tomb together with the Theotokos, didn't immediately believe in the resurrection. She came back to the tomb with myrrh and aloes to anoint the Lord, He Who in her mind was dead. She was weeping because He wasn't in the tomb. ⁸ She was weeping for someone Who was dead. That's why we sing, "Do not weep for one who is dead," it says (in a paraphrase). "He is not dead, He is not here, He is alive and risen." In our exapostilarion we speak of this quite a bit, of how Mary misunderstood. And our Lord came to her and she thought He was the gardener, till He spoke to her and just in the hearing of His voice, when He said, "Mary," then she recognized Him. ⁹

Other disciples spent an entire perhaps half a day with Christ, and didn't understand. They were Luke and Cleopas on the way to Emmaus. ¹⁰ The tomb had already been empty for some time, and they were walking a long distance. It says in the scriptures 60 furlongs, quite a long distance, a day's journey, in the hot sun, and our Lord drew alongside them, and He spoke to them, and they didn't understand Who He was. They thought that He was a misinformed stranger, because He made like He wondered what the events were in the past couple days. But their hearts burned within them. Something about this Man captivated them, when He spoke to them about the scriptures, and opened their understanding. That's why it says: "And then opened He their understanding of the scriptures" And when they sat down, and when He broke bread, (which was of course, the Body and Blood of Christ), then they saw Him, and He vanished. And as they were making their way back in the wee hours of the morning, another day's journey, (they took two days' journey in one day), Christ was appearing to the other apostles, save Thomas.

You see how He enlightened people where they needed to be enlightened. Luke and Cleopas must have needed this conversation with the Lord, and to see Him in the breaking of the bread, to really have the point brought home that yes, the Lord had risen. Mary had to be spoken with by Lord. She had to see Him. John believed just by seeing the empty tomb. Peter was met by the Lord, the church understands. ¹¹ Peter was met individually by the Lord, because after all, he was a bit shaken, wasn't he? Peter was a man of great bravery. He can't be faulted for his denying Christ three times. We would have done it a thousand times. But he was very shaken because of this, and because of his emotional turmoil he was in, it was very difficult for him to believe in the resurrection, because he was all wrapped up with his feeling so completely unworthy of what the Lord had called him to do. So the Lord had to meet with Peter individually, apart from the other apostles. And in fact, Peter was the first of the apostles to see the risen Lord. And I suppose maybe the second to believe after John, who without seeing believed.

And now the last to find out, after eight long days of hearing from the apostles about the Lord being risen, Thomas, is in the room and the Lord comes, through the doors again, which were shut, passing through the doors, because after all, His body is a human body, but it is a transfigured human body. It's not subject to the same kind of laws that we are subject to. It doesn't get tired, it doesn't get sick. And that's the way we will be as well. The way Christ was in His transfigured body is a prophecy for us of how our bodies will be as well.

Jesus comes in and speaks very gently to Thomas. He says, "Alright, I know what you need. You need to touch Me. Feel the prints of the nails in my hands. Feel the slit in my side, and be not faithless, but believing." ¹² And then Thomas has the privilege of being the first of the apostles to proclaim unambiguously, in clear terms, the dual nature of Christ's humanity and His divinity. It is the first confession of faith in the scriptures, where Christ is proclaimed God and man openly. He says, "My Lord and my God!" ¹³ Thomas had to wait awhile, but God gave him that great privilege of almost, shall we say, beginning the symbol of faith ¹⁴. What a great privilege it was.

In the coming week we will be speaking about the myrrh-bearing women ¹⁵, and there is a theme throughout the story of the myrrh-bearing women of their continuing enlightenment, just like for Thomas or for Peter or for Luke and Cleopas or for the other apostles. And then we go onto the blind man and the lame man, the paralytic. We see how the resurrection is applied. Why does the church do this? Why do we speak of things that have to do with enlightenment and healing right after Pascha? Well, because the resurrection applies to us in our life now. It's very important to understand this. That's why I have been speaking of it so often. It's very important to understand, because you must know that God has given you the ability to be able to get rid of your sins, of your passions, of the problems in your life that are making you to be away from God. You have the ability, through the resurrection. And all these examples of people that partially believed, even the great apostles, who were at times disbelievers, at times were cowards, at times were at odds with each other and vied amongst themselves who would be greatest, and all the other things — even them — the Lord purified them, and brought them to a great wholeness.

If He can do it with them and do it with all the others examples in the scriptures, with the paralytic and the blind man and the woman at the well, named Photini ¹⁶, and all the others, then He can do it with us. I tell you, the resurrection is not something that you believe in as an event that occurred in the past. Nor is it something that you believe, and say that it will happen in the future, like Mary and Martha did, saying, "Oh Lord, I believe in the resurrection. In the last day, all will be resurrected." ¹⁷ When their brother Lazarus lay dead, and Christ showed them, "I am the resurrection. If I live in you, then you are resurrected now, not later." It is very important to understand this.

A Christian who understands that Christ's becoming man makes him able to do holy things will not fall prey to despondency. Despondency is really the negation of belief in God, you know. Despondency is a type of atheism. You should fear despondency and confess it every time. It is a terrible sin, because in it, you are rejecting the resurrection. God can save

you, and God will save you if you live the Christian life. Yes, indeed, you must consider yourself unworthy of salvation, but you must also know that Christ has promised it.

So live as a Christian, fast as a Christian, think as a Christian, and when you cannot do things properly, when you do things that are sinful, run to confession with the sure hope the sure knowledge, that God will receive your repentance, because of the resurrection. I tell you if you live in the light of the resurrection, you will not become despondent. As a pastor I believe that the number one sin I see is despondency. Sometimes it is cloaked, so that people can have a sin and may be despondent about it, but not so noticeably despondent, so that it is a sort of semi-excuse.

And sometimes it is because people really desire to change, and they just can't believe that they can really change. Mary and Martha couldn't believe that their brother would be resurrected after four days. The apostles, many of them, could not believe that our Lord, Who spoke of the resurrection over and over and over again, could be resurrected. It took many proofs for some of them, such as Thomas, and the other ones as well. You know, it says "Many things the Lord did, many signs He did, but not everything is written in this book." ¹⁸ By the way, as an aside, you realize that the Lord taught the apostles so much that is not written down, that is part of our holy tradition now. The apostles transmitted it to their disciples, and so on. It wasn't written down, but it was precious, and St. John only in a dark way refers to it.

So today we see an example of a man, Thomas, enlightened. Christ went out of His way to enlighten him. He sort of accorded him special treatment, as it were. And Thomas believed, and he confessed. Christ did and does the same thing for us, to bring us to enlightenment. And now we must believe and confess.

Now He said something else that's very important, important not to pass over. He said, before Thomas didn't see this, but our Lord said it many other times when Thomas heard. He said, "As the Father hath sent me, so send I you." ¹⁹ And by extension, it is the same for us. No, we don't have the role of the apostles. We are not bishops, and we don't have the grace that has been bestowed upon the apostles, but we are sent along basically the same path: the path of obedience to the same gospel, the path of obedience to the commandments of our God, the life in the church, and everything that living as an Orthodox Christian entails. Later on, just after this reading in fact, the disciples, seven of them, are fishing, and the Lord tells them to let down their nets, and they had a catch, and then Peter is told to bring the catch to the shore, a hundred and fifty and three fishes, and yet the net did not break. ²⁰ And later, after they ate, our Lord restored Peter by asking him three times, "Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou me?" and then He showed him how he would die. ²¹ This is tied in with when He was saying, "As my Father hath sent Me, so send I you."

We must use Christ as the example of how to live, whether as an apostle or whether as anyone else. The Christian life is one of difficulty and one of strife. We are in the light of the resurrection, but we can never get far away from knowing that our life is a difficult one. We make it so because of our sins, sometimes, and other times because of the evil of the world surrounding us. Follow the example of the saints. Follow the example of the apostles. Live as they lived, which means you live the life in the church.

And brothers and sisters, always believe that the resurrection applies to you, now. Fear disbelief in it. Every time you fall into despondency, berate yourself for being a fool and gazing into an empty tomb, and wondering where the Lord is. Don't be like this. Believe in the resurrection, and believe that you can be changed, and through struggle, arduous struggle, through many tears, through ups and downs, and even in the midst of your sins, God will perfect you, but you must believe.

Fr Seraphim Holland

Saints of the Week

13 / 26 April —The Hieromartyr Artemon - He was a priest in Laodicea in the time of the Emperor Diocletian. He spoke thus of himself before the torturers' tribunal: 'I am called Artemon, a servant of Christ my God. Sixteen years I was a reader, and read the services in the Church of my God; twenty-eight years a deacon, and read the Holy Gospel; and have now completed thirty years as a priest, teaching the people and setting them on the way of salvation with the help of Christ.' The judge took him to the temple of Aesculapius, where the priests kept great snakes, regarding them as gods. They meant the snakes to bite Artemon, but he made the sign of the Cross, and by its power riveted the snakes to the ground so that they could not bite him. He then brought them out to the courtyard and breathed on them, and they died instantly. All who saw this were filled with amazement. But the chief of the pagan priests of that temple, Vitalis, seeing this marvel, fell to his knees before Artemon and cried: 'Great is the Christian God!' The martyr baptised him, along with several of his friends. But the evil judge stood firm in his wickedness and tortured the aged Artemon in various ways. He intended at one time to cast him into burning pitch, but fell off his horse into it himself and was burned. Two eagles were seen to descend on him, lift him from his horse and cast him into the pitch. St Artemon remained free for a certain time and went about teaching the people, accompanied always by two tame deer. But he was arrested afresh and beheaded in the year 303. And his soul went to the Kingdom of Christ our God, whom he had served so faithfully; The Holy Martyr Crescens; The Holy Martyr Thomais.

14 / 27 April — St Martin the Confessor, Pope of Rome - He became Pope on July 5th, 649, at the time of a furious quarrel between the Orthodox and the Monothelite heretics. Constans the Second, Heraclius' grandson, was on the throne at the time, and Paul was Patriarch of Constantinople. To restore peace in the Church, the Emperor himself wrote a dogmatic decree, the Typos, which leaned heavily towards heresy. Pope Martin summoned a Council of 105 bishops, at which the Emperor's statement was condemned. At the same time, the Pope wrote a letter to Patriarch Paul, begging him to uphold the purity of the Orthodox faith and to counsel the Emperor to reject the theories of the heretics. This letter infuriated both the Patriarch and the Emperor. The Emperor sent one of his generals, Olympius, to take the Pope to Constantinople in bonds. The general did not dare to bind the Pope with his own hands, but instructed one of his soldiers to kill him with the sword in church. But, when the soldier entered the church with his sword concealed, he was instantly blinded. So, by the providence of God, Martin escaped death. At that time, the Saracens fell upon Sicily, and Olympius went off there, where he died. Then, by the intrigues of the heretic Patriarch Paul, the Emperor sent a second general, Theodore, to bind and take the Pope on the charge that he, the

Pope, was in collusion with the Saracens and that he did not reverence the most holy Mother of God. When the general arrived in Rome and read the accusation against the Pope, he replied that it was libel; that he had no contact of any sort with the Saracens, the opponents of Christianity, 'and whoever does not confess the most holy Mother of God and do her reverence, let him be damned in this age and in that which is to come'. But this did not affect the general's decision. The Pope was bound and taken to Constantinople, where he lay long in prison in great sickness, tortured by both anxiety and hunger, until he was finally sentenced to exile in Cherson, where he lived for two years before his death. He gave his soul into the hands of the Lord, for whom he had suffered so greatly, in 655. The evil Patriarch, Paul, died two years before him and, when the Emperor visited him on his deathbed, he smote his head against the wall, confessing with tears that he had greatly sinned against Pope Martin and asking the Emperor to set Martin free. The Holy Martyrs Antony, John and Eustace; The Holy Martyr Ardalion the Actor; New Martyr Sergius (Trofimov) of Nizhni-Novgorod and one with him.

15 / 28 April — The Holy Apostles Aristarchus, Pudens and Trophimus - These were all numbered among the Seventy. Aristarchus was Bishop of Apamea in Syria. The Apostle Paul mentions him several times (Acts 19:29; Col. 4:10; Philem. v.24). He was seized in Ephesus, together with Gaius, by a mob that had risen up against Paul. The Apostle wrote to the Colossians: 'Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you', and, in the Epistle to Philemon, Paul calls Aristarchus 'my fellow-labourer', together with Mark, Demas and Lucas. Pudens was an eminent Roman citizen. The Apostle Paul mentions him once (II Tim. 4:21). Pudens' house was first the refuge of the chief apostles and was then turned into a church dedicated to the Good Shepherd. Trophimus was an Asian (Acts 20:4), and accompanied St Paul on his journeys. In one place, Paul writes: 'Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick (11 Tim. 4:21). During Nero's persecution, when the Apostle Paul was beheaded, these glorious martyrs were also beheaded. The Holy Martyr Sabbas the Goth; The Holy Martyrs Vasilissa and Anastasia; St. Ruadhan, founder and abbot of Lothra, Ireland (c.584).

16 / 29 April — Fast Day - The Holy Martyrs Agapia, Chionia and Irene - They were sisters from the region of Aquileia. When the Emperor Diocletian was staying in Aquileia, he ordered that the famous spiritual guide, Chrysogonus, be executed. An old priest named Zoilus received a vision in which he was shown where the body of Chrysogonus lay unburied. The old man hurried off, found the body of the martyr, placed it in a coffin and carried it to his home. On the thirtieth day after that, St Chrysogonus appeared to him and told him that the three maidens would be martyred in the next nine days, and that he, Zoilus, would himself enter into rest during that time. Anastasia the Seer also received the same tidings in a vision sent by Chrysogonus, who had been her teacher. The elder Zoilus did indeed find his rest after nine days, and the three sisters were brought to trial before the Emperor. The Emperor urged the holy maidens to worship idols, but they all refused, confessing their firm faith in Christ. Irene told the Emperor that it was ridiculous to bow down to things made of wood and stone, made to order at an agreed price by the hands of a mortal man. The furious Emperor flung them into prison. Now, when the Emperor travelled to Macedonia, he took all his slaves and servants with him, including the three sisters. He gave them to Dulcitus, a general, for torture. Inflamed with a dark passion, he desired to defile the maidens, but, when he tried to go into the prison, he lost his mind and fell upon the pots and cauldrons in front of the gate, embracing and kissing them, and was completely blackened with soot. When the Emperor heard of this happening, he ordered another general to undertake the trial of the sisters. After terrible torture, the judge condemned the first two sisters to death by fire, but kept Irene for a time, hoping to defile her. But, when he sent Irene to the brothel along with some soldiers, an angel of God turned the soldiers back and led her out onto a high hill. The next day the general went out to the hill with his soldiers and, being unable to climb it, ordered that Irene be shot at with arrows. St Anastasia gathered all three bodies together in one place and gave them burial. They suffered for Christ their King and Lord in about 304; The Holy Martyr

17 / 30 April — The Hieromartyr Simeon, Bishop in Persia - In the time of the wicked King Savori, or Sapor, Simeon was tortured for Christ together with two of his priests, Audel and Ananias. The King's eunuch, Ustazan, who had first denied Christ but then, moved by the reprimand of St Simeon, again confessed the true Faith before the King, was executed before they were. A thousand other Christians were also led to execution with St Simeon, who purposely stood a little back so that he should be the last to die, and so be able to encourage the other Christians right to the end and keep them from wavering through fear of death. When the priest Ananias laid his head on the block, he was trembling all over. But the King's clerk, Fusik, who was himself secretly a Christian, began to encourage him, saying: 'Don't be frightened, old man. Shut your eyes and be a man, and you'll see the divine light.' As soon as he had said this, it was seen that he was a Christian and he was denounced to the King. The King wore him down with harsh tortures, and also his daughter, the maiden Askitria. St Simeon was eventually beheaded, after having seen his flock into the other world. The following year, on Great Friday, the King's beloved eunuch, Azat, was slain for Christ, along with another thousand of the faithful. Then the King grieved for his eunuch and gave up killing any more Christians. They all suffered with honour for Christ their King and Lord in about 341.

St Acacius, Bishop of Melitene - lived the ascetical life in the place where he was born, i.e., in Melitene, Armenia. Blessed Otreius, bishop of that city, who participated at the Second Ecumenical Council [Constantinople 381 A.D.], ordained him a presbyter. Following the death of Otreius, Acacius became a bishop. He participated at the Third Ecumenical Council [Ephesus 431 A.D.], which condemned the evil blasphemy of Nestorius against the Mother of God. Here, together with St. Cyril of Alexandria, Acacius zealously fought for the purity of the Orthodox Faith. St. Acacius possessed much Grace from God and worked many miracles. After long and zealous service to God, Acacius died peacefully in the year 435 A.D.; St Agapetus, Pope of Rome; Our Holy Fathers Sabbatius and Zossima.

Holy Martyr Donan, an Irish monk of Iona under Columba & 52 monks with him at his monastery on the Isle of Eigg - Inner Hebrides, Scotland - while the monks were celebrating Liturgy on Easter night 618 a gang of robbers, possibly Vikings, arrived on the island and herded the monks into the refectory and set fire to it. Those who tried to escape were killed by the sword. At least eleven Scottish churches bear his name.

18 April / 1 May — Fast Day - Our Holy Father John - He was a disciple of St Gregory of Decapolis. In the time of the iconoclast heresy, the Emperor Leo the Armenian put John to torture, together with his teacher, Gregory, and Joseph the Hymnographer. When Gregory finished his earthly course, John became abbot of the Decapolite monastery in Constantinople. Becoming abbot, he intensified his asceticism for the sake of the Kingdom of God. He died peacefully in about 820. After his death, St Joseph buried him near the grave of St Gregory.

The Holy Martyr John the New of Ioannina - born in Ioannina, once the capitol city of the Emperor Pyrrhus. When his impoverished parents died, the young John moved to Constantinople and there continued his occupation, for he was a craftsman. Not long before that, the Turks surrounded Constantinople and many Christians, out of fear, denied Christ and embraced the Islamic faith. St. John had his workshop in the midst of these converts to Islam. The more the young John burned with love for Christ the Lord, the more openly he exposed himself as a Christian before these traitors of Christ. He began to argue with them about faith and, finally, rebuked them for their betrayal of Christ. They dragged him before the judge and falsely accused John, alleging that he had earlier embraced Islam, and that he again reverted to Christianity. After he was tortured and beaten with rods and iron ramrods, they cast him into prison. The next day was the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ and, again, they brought him out for further torture and John emerged singing: "Christ is risen from the dead!" To his torturers, he bravely said: "Do what you want in order to send me as soon as possible from this transient life to eternal life. I am Christ's slave, I follow Christ, for Christ I die that I may live with Him!" After that, John was bound in chains and brought to the place of burning. Upon seeing a large fire prepared for him, John ran and leaped into the flames. His torturers seeing how he loved death in the fire removed him from the fire and sentenced him to be beheaded. After they beheaded him, they threw his head and body into the fire. Later on, Christians leafed through the ashes and gathered some of the remains of his honourable and wonder-working relics and interred them in the Great Church [Agia Sophia - Church of the Holy Wisdom] in Constantinople. Thus, St. John of Ioannina died a martyr's death and received the glorious martyr's wreath on April 18, 1526 A. D.; The Holy Martyrs Victor, Zoticus, Zeno, Acyndinus and Severian; New Martyr Priests Nicholas (1937) and Basil (Derzhavin) (1930) and lay people of the city of Gorodets, Nizhni-Novgorod.

19 April / 2 May — Our Holy Father John of the Ancient Caves - lived a life of asceticism in the so-called "old caves," the "old Lavra" of Chariton the Great in Palestine. Having loved Christ the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind, John, at an early age, began to travel to the holy places and to listen to the instructions and counsels of the holy men. Finally, he settled in the Caves of Chariton, where he gave himself to rigorous asceticism spending days and years in fasting, prayer, vigils, continuously meditating on death, and teaching himself humility. As a good ripened fruit, he was plucked by death and took up habitation in Paradise. He lived and died in the eighth century;

The Holy Martyrs Christopher, Theonas and Antoninus - young officers serving under Emperor Diocletian. When St. George the Great Martyr was being tortured, they witnessed his sufferings as well as the miracles which occurred at that time. Seeing all of this, they came before the emperor, laid down their arms, removed their military belts and bravely confessed the Name of the Lord Jesus. For that, they were subjected to great torture and finally were tossed into the fire, where their bodies were consumed while their souls went to God into eternal joy. They honourably suffered in Nicomedia in the year 303 A.D.;

St Tryphun, Patriarch of Constantinople - The Emperor Romanus, who reigned over Byzantium at the beginning of the tenth century had a son, Theophylact, who was sixteen years old when Patriarch Stephen died. The emperor wanted his son to be elevated as patriarch for he had promised him [his son] this spiritual calling from his youth. Because his son was a minor, the emperor was ashamed to do this. The patriarchal throne was assumed by Tryphun a simple but chaste and pious old man. Tryphun remained on the throne for three years. When the son of the emperor reached his twentieth year, the emperor thought, to remove Tryphun at any price and to install his son as patriarch. The saint of God, Tryphun, did not want to relinquish his throne voluntarily, for no other reason, because he considered it to be a great scandal that such a young man be elevated to such a responsible and burdensome position as that of being patriarch. Through the intrigue of a nefarious bishop, the signature of the innocent Tryphun was extracted on a blank sheet of paper. Later on, in the imperial court, above that signature, the alleged resignation of the patriarch was written which the emperor decreed. As a result of this, there arose a great confusion in the Church, for the laity and the clergy stood by Tryphun, the godly man. The emperor then forcibly removed the aged patriarch and sent him to a monastery and, his son, Theophylact, was elevated as patriarch. St. Tryphun lived as an ascetic in this monastery for two years and five months and presented himself before the Lord in the year 933 A.D.. Our Holy Father, the Martyr Agathangelos; Our Holy Father Simeon the Barefoot;

Hieromartyr Alphege, archbishop of Canterbury (1012) - he became a monk at Deerhurst but after some years retired to be a hermit in Somersset. In 984 he became bishop of Winchester and he became known for his personal austerity and lavish almsgiving. In 994 King Ethelred sent him to parley with the Danes Anlaf and Swein, who had raided both London and Wessex. The Anglo-Saxons paid tribute but Anlaf became a Christian and promised he would never again come to England 'with warlike intent.' This promise was kept. In 1006 he succeeded Aelfric as archbishop of Canterbury. Meanwhile the Danes continued to overrun southern England. They besieged Canterbury and imprisoned Alphege and others and demanded a ransom of 3000 pounds. Alphege refused to pay and forbade his people to do so. The Danes were so infuriated that, after a feast at which they got drunk, and killed him with the bones of oxen: an axeman delivered the final blow. His was originally buried in St. Paul's Cathedral, London however in 1023 his body was translated to Canterbury Cathedral. In 1105 his body was found to be incorrupt.