

# Sunday of the Myrrbearing Women

## Third Sunday of Pascha

21 April / 4 May



**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 2:** When Thou didst descend to death, O Life Immortal, Thou didst slay hell with the splendour of Thy Godhead! And when from the depths Thou didst raise the dead, all the powers of Heaven cried out: O Giver of Life, Christ our God, Glory to Thee.

**Tropar of the Sunday Of The Myrrh-bearing Women, Tone 2:** The noble Joseph took Thine immaculate Body down from the Tree, / having wrapped It in pure linen and spices, laid in a new tomb. / But on the third day Thou didst rise, O Lord, // granting to the world great mercy.

**Kondak of the Sunday Of The Myrrh-bearing Women, Tone 2:** When Thou didst cry, Rejoice, unto the myrrh-bearers, / Thou didst make the lamentation of Eve the first mother to cease / by Thy Resurrection, O Christ God. / And Thou didst bid Thine apostles to preach: // The Saviour is risen from the grave.

**Kondak of Pascha, Tone 8:** Though Thou didst descend into the grave, O Immortal One, yet didst Thou destroy the power of Hades, and didst arise as victor, O Christ God, calling to the myrrh-bearing women, Rejoice, and giving peace unto Thine Apostles, O Thou Who dost grant resurrection to the fallen.

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**Vespers: Lord I have Cried, Tone 2, on 10: Resurrection 7; Myrrh-bearers 3 (At deep dawn, the myrrh-bearing women); G: Myrrh-bearers (The myrrh-bearing women came to Thy tomb); N: Sunday Dogmatic (The shadow of the law). Aposticha: The sticheron of the Resurrection 1 (Thy resurrection, O Christ our Savior); The Paschal Stichera, with their verses; G: Pentecostarion (O Thou Who putttest on light like a garment); N: Pascha (It is the day of resurrection) and Christ is risen from the dead x1.**

### Matins Gospel III

#### Epistle: St. Acts of the Apostles 6: 1-7

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

#### THE FIRST SEVEN DEACONS

He performs the office of a deacon, who anoints the mind for holy endeavours and drives out passionate thoughts; he performs the office of a priest, who enlightens the mind by knowledge of what is, and destroys false knowledge; he performs the office of a bishop, who completes the mind's perfection by the sacred unction of knowledge of the worshipful Holy Trinity.

*St. Maximos the Confessor. Second Century on Love. Text 21. B#9. p. 302.*

## **The Gospel According To St. Mark 15: 43 - 16: 8**

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marvelled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James observed where He was laid. Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away--for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples--and Peter--that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you." So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

### **THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN**

Mark how great the women's assiduity. They had followed Him, ministering to Him, and were present even to the time of the dangers. This is why they also saw all; how He cried, how He gave up the ghost; how the rocks were rent and all the rest. These women were the first to see Jesus; and the sex that was most condemned first enjoys the sight of the blessings; this sex shows its courage the most. And when the disciples had fled, these were present. Joseph, who had been concealing his discipleship of late, now became very bold after the death of Christ. He was by no means an obscure person ...but one of the council ...He exposed himself to death, taking great enmity upon him from all by his affection for Jesus ...Do you see the women's courage? Do you see their affection? Do you see their noble spirit in matters of money? their noble spirit even unto death? Let the men imitate the women; let us not forsake Jesus in temptation ...But we neither feed Him when hungry, nor clothe Him when naked (Cf. Matt.25), but seeing Him go begging, we pass Him by. And yet if we saw Him in fact, everyone would strip himself of all his goods.

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily LXXXVIII on Matthew XXVII, 1. B#54, p. 522.*

"And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" (Mk. 16:1-3).

Brothers and sisters! Can you imagine the state of mind these Myrrh-bearing women were in? For those who lived through Soviet times in Russia and through the persecution of the Church, it is so understandable. In some churches, as in the outskirts of Kiev, this service (the Burial of the Saviour) was performed at night. People made their way to such a church through dark streets. Anything could happen, you had to be careful of everything. Neighbours might hear that you went somewhere at night; and you could be stopped on the street. And the service itself in church and the carrying of the Shroud around the church could be interrupted by the authorities. One did not know if tomorrow, on Holy Saturday, this already semi-Easter Liturgy would be performed, because the priest might be arrested.

The Myrrh-bearers were in such a state of mind. They themselves were in danger of being arrested at any moment. Even in their homes they locked the doors from inside; they were afraid of any knock, any little sound. Two days before, Peter had denied that he too was with Jesus, meaning that he was one of His disciples. And before whom? Before a servant girl, and only because she might report him.

Such was the situation. Their Teacher had been condemned and sentenced to the most terrible death, had been executed. And now it was their turn: as the disciples of the executed Teacher they were outside the law. More than that—they were probably being sought already. The most sensible thing would have been to flee somewhere, to hide. But instead of that, they decided to go while it was still night to the sepulchre which was not far from the place of execution. They knew well that the entrance to the sepulchre was blocked by a stone, which as the Gospel says, was "very great" (Mk. 16:4), that it bore a seal, that Roman guards were guarding the tomb, and that these guards were armed and especially vigilant because they had been warned that the disciples might steal His body.

Actually, in terms of reason, what these weak women wanted to do was not only impossible, but was just a mad risk. And yet they went anyway. How? Why? What powerful force was drawing them? This force was the Word of God expressed in the Law of Moses. And fulfilling what was for them a holy law, they bought perfumes and went to anoint Him. This required their conscience. And this strength of faith in the Word of God, strength of love toward their tortured Teacher, and strength of hope that God would help—proved to be stronger than fear, stronger than reason, stronger than everything else.

And what happened? When they arrived, the guards had run away in fear. And when they entered the tomb, they saw a youth sitting on the right side, clad in white clothes; and they were terrified. But he said: "Be not afraid: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified; He is risen; He is not here: behold the place where they laid Him" (Mk. 16:6).

Doesn't the same thing happen in our life? The Myrrh-bearers, fulfilling the Old Testament Law, the Law of Moses, bought perfumes and went to anoint His body, the body of Christ. And we, fulfilling the Law of the New Testament, the Law of Christ, must also acquire spiritual perfumes—His commandments: humility, meekness, peaceloving—and we must anoint His body with spiritual oil (that is, with love and mercy). And His Body is the Church of Christ. This is all our brothers and sisters in Christ; and more—this is even our enemies. How often in doing this, we subject ourselves to discomfort, losses, mockery, and sometimes even dangers. And what insurmountable obstacles are raised by our cold mind, our egotism! Not infrequently we yield, we retreat, we are afraid to express ourselves loudly and openly as His disciples.

But if we throw off this shameful fear and only begin to fulfil His teaching, only begin to follow in His footsteps, the same will happen to us that happened to the Myrrh-bearers: the obstacles will disperse of themselves, will fall away, like the stone from the door of the tomb. All those who would disturb us will run away; we will not even find them. Before us will be one thing—the illuminated sepulchre of Christ. And there will be such a clearness that all doubts will vanish. We will know what to do, how to act; and that which seemed impossible will become possible.

Let us from this day imitate the Myrrh-bearers and not fear to fulfil the will of Christ, not fear to be His disciples. Christ always conquered, always conquers, and always will conquer.

*The One Thing Needful - Archbishop Andrei*

### **Saints of the Week**

**April 21 / May 4 — The Hieromartyr Januarius and those with him** - This saint was Bishop of Benevento in Italy. In the time of a persecution under Maximian, he was brought before the judge and tormented with various tortures, which he endured patiently. When they threw him into the flames, they were cooled by an invisible dew and the martyr stood uninjured in it and sang the praises of God. Then they flayed his body with iron flails until the bones showed white, but the martyr patiently endured all. His deacon, Faustus, and his reader, Desiderius, were watching the torture and wept for their spiritual father. Then they too were bound and taken with their bishop to the town of Pozzuoli, and cast into prison. There were in the same prison for the sake of Christ the Puetolian deacons Proclus and Sossus and two simple, Christian men, Euty chius and Acutius. All seven were thrown next day to the wild beasts, but the beasts would not touch them. They were all then beheaded, and the Christians of the city of Naples secretly took the body of St Januarius to their city and buried it in the church. To this present day innumerable wonders are worked at this saint's grave. One among many remembered is this: a poor widow, whose only son had died, took the icon of St Januarius out of the church and laid it on her dead son, weeping and imploring the saint's aid, and her son was restored to life. St Januarius suffered with honour in 305.

**The Holy Martyr Theodore and Company** - Theodore suffered for the Faith of Christ in Perga of Pamphylia during the reign of Antonius. Theodore was young and of handsome countenance. When the governor of that province chose him, along with other young men, who were to be sent to the imperial court for service, Theodore objected and declared that he is a Christian. Because of that, he underwent many kinds of tortures and was then tossed into the fire. But, water bubbled out of the ground and quenched the fire. The governor attributed this to some magic of Theodore. But, the martyr said: "This is not the work of my power but Christ my God. If you want to know the power of your gods, light another fire and toss in one of your soldiers and then I hope you will see their power and the Almighty power of my God." Indeed, the governor wanted to cast one of his soldiers into the fire but they, out of fear, implored him to throw in their place Dioscorus, the pagan priest. The pagan priest Dioscorus then begged the governor to throw in the idol of Zeus and the other idols and, if they are gods, they will easily save themselves. Dioscorus said this because he had turned to Christ in his heart since he saw the miracle that took place with St. Theodore. Learning of this, the governor sentenced Dioscorus to death by burning; also delivered over to death by the governor were Theodore and the two soldiers, Socrates and Dionysius and Theodore's mother, Philippa. Theodore was crucified on a cross on which he expired on the third day. Socrates and Dionysius were pierced with a spear and Philippa was beheaded. All were crowned with the wreaths of glory in the Kingdom of Christ.

**St. Beuno, abbot of Clynnog Fawr, England (c.640)** - born and educated in Herefordshire before founding his main monastery. When he died a stone oratory was built over his tomb; later his relics were

translated to a new church (Eglwys y Bedd) where miracles were reported. He is considered to be the most important local saint of North Wales. Remains of the primitive oratory were excavated in 1914.

**St. Maelrubba (642-722) Apostle of the Picts** - born in Ireland he became a monk at Bangor; later founded a monastery at Applecross on the west coast of Scotland. From there he evangelised Skye and penetrated as far north as Loch Broom. He also build a church on an island in Loch Maree, where his spring was famous for its healing properties.

**St. Ethilwald, hermit of Farne (d. 699)** - he was a monk and a priest of Ripon, who succeeded Cuthbert in the Inner Farne hermitage in 687. Almost nothing is known of him. Once Guthrid, the future abbot, with two monks of Lindisfarne, visited him by boat; on the return journey they were saved from shipwreck in a sudden storm by his prayers. Many miracles have been reported due to his intercession.

**Right-believing Tamara, queen of Georgia** - St. Tamara is commemorated on the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women in addition to her regular commemoration on May 1. In 1166 a daughter, Tamar, was born to King George III (1155-1184) and Queen Burdukhan of Georgia. The king proclaimed that he would share the throne with his daughter from the day she turned twelve years of age. The royal court unanimously vowed its allegiance and service to Tamar, and father and daughter ruled the country together for five years. After King George's death in 1184, the nobility recognized the young Tamar as the sole ruler of all Georgia. Queen Tamar was enthroned as ruler of all Georgia at the age of eighteen. She is called "King" in the Georgian language because her father had no male heir and so she ruled as a monarch and not as a consort.

At the beginning of her reign, Tamar convened a Church council and addressed the clergy with wisdom and humility: "Judge according to righteousness, affirming good and condemning evil," she advised. "Begin with me—if I sin I should be censured, for the royal crown is sent down from above as a sign of divine service. Allow neither the wealth of the nobles nor the poverty of the masses to hinder your work. You by word and I by deed, you by preaching and I by the law, you by upbringing and I by education will care for those souls whom God has entrusted to us, and together we will abide by the law of God, in order to escape eternal condemnation.... You as priests and I as ruler, you as stewards of good and I as the watchman of that good."

The Church and the royal court chose a suitor for Tamar: Yuri, the son of Prince Andrei Bogoliubsky of Vladimir-Suzdal (in Georgia Yuri was known as "George the Russian"). The handsome George Rusi was a valiant soldier, and under his command the Georgians returned victorious from many battles. His marriage to Tamar, however, exposed many of the coarser sides of his character. He was often drunk and inclined toward immoral deeds. In the end, Tamar's court sent him away from Georgia to Constantinople, armed with a generous recompense. Many Middle Eastern rulers were drawn to Queen Tamar's beauty and desired to marry her, but she rejected them all. Finally at the insistence of her court, she agreed to wed a second time to ensure the preservation of the dynasty. This time, however, she asked her aunt and nurse Rusudan (the sister of King George III) to find her a suitor. The man she chose, Davit-Soslan Bagrationi, was the son of the Ossetian ruler and a descendant of King George I (1014-1027).

In 1195 a joint Muslim military campaign against Georgia was planned under the leadership of Atabeg (a military commander) Abu Bakr of Persian Azerbaijan. At Queen Tamar's command, a call to arms was issued. The faithful were instructed by Metropolitan Anton of Chqondidi to celebrate All-night Vigils and Liturgies and to generously distribute alms so that the poor could rest from their labors in order to pray. In ten days the army was prepared, and Queen Tamar addressed the Georgian soldiers for the last time before the battle began. "My brothers! Do not allow your hearts to tremble before the multitude of enemies, for God is with us.... Trust God alone, turn your hearts to Him in righteousness, and place your every hope in the Cross of Christ and in the Most Holy Theotokos!" she exhorted them.

Having taken off her shoes, Queen Tamar climbed the hill to the Metekhi Church of the Theotokos (in Tbilisi) and knelt before the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. She prayed without ceasing until the good news arrived: the battle near Shamkori had ended in the unquestionable victory of the Orthodox Georgian army.

After this initial victory the Georgian army launched into a series of triumphs over the Turks, and neighboring countries began to regard Georgia as the protector of the entire Transcaucasus. By the beginning the 13th century, Georgia was commanding a political authority recognized by both the Christian West and the Muslim East.

Georgia's military successes alarmed the Islamic world. Sultan Rukn al-Din was certain that a united Muslim force could definitively decide the issue of power in the region, and he marched on Georgia around the year 1203, commanding an enormous army.

Having encamped near Basiani, Rukn al-Din sent a messenger to Queen Tamar with an audacious demand: to surrender without a fight. In reward for her obedience, the sultan promised to marry her on the condition that she embrace Islam; if Tamar were to cleave to Christianity, he would number her among the other unfortunate concubines in his harem. When the messenger relayed the sultan's demand, a certain nobleman, Zakaria Mkhargrdzelidze, was so outraged that he slapped him on the face, knocking him unconscious.

At Queen Tamar's command, the court generously bestowed gifts upon the ambassador and sent him away with a Georgian envoy and a letter of reply. "Your proposal takes into consideration your wealth and the vastness of your armies, but fails to account for divine judgment," Tamar wrote, "while I place my trust not in any army or worldly thing but in the right hand of the Almighty God and the infinite aid of the Cross, which you curse. The will of God—and not your own—shall be fulfilled, and the judgment of God—and not your judgment—shall reign!"

The Georgian soldiers were summoned without delay. Queen Tamar prayed for victory before the Vardzia Icon of the Theotokos, then, barefoot, led her army to the gates of the city.

Hoping in the Lord and the fervent prayers of Queen Tamar, the Georgian army marched toward Basiani. The enemy was routed. The victory at Basiani was an enormous event not only for Georgia, but for the entire Christian world.

The military victories increased Queen Tamar's faith. In the daytime she shone in all her royal finery and wisely administered the affairs of the government; during the night, on bended knees, she beseeched the Lord tearfully to strengthen the Georgian Church. She busied herself with needlework and distributed her embroidery to the poor.

Once, exhausted from her prayers and needlework, Tamar dozed off and saw a vision. Entering a luxuriously furnished home, she saw a gold throne studded with jewels, and she turned to approach it, but was suddenly stopped by an old man crowned with a halo. "Who is more worthy than I to receive such a glorious throne?" Queen Tamar asked him.

He answered her, saying, "This throne is intended for your maidservant, who sewed vestments for twelve priests with her own hands. You are already the possessor of great treasure in this world." And he pointed her in a different direction.

Having awakened, Holy Queen Tamar immediately took to her work and with her own hands sewed vestments for twelve priests.

History has preserved another poignant episode from Queen Tamar's life: Once she was preparing to attend a festal Liturgy in Gelati, and she fastened precious rubies to the belt around her waist. Soon after she was told that a beggar outside the monastery tower was asking for alms, and she ordered her entourage to wait. Having finished dressing, she went out to the tower but found no one there. Terribly distressed, she reproached herself for having denied the poor and thus denying Christ Himself. Immediately she removed her belt, the cause of her temptation, and presented it as an offering to the Gelati Icon of the Theotokos.

During Queen Tamar's reign a veritable monastic city was carved in the rocks of Vardzia, and the God-fearing Georgian ruler would labor there during the Great Fast. The churches of Pitareti, Kvabtakhevi, Betania, and many others were also built at that time. Holy Queen Tamar generously endowed the churches and monasteries not only on Georgian territory but also outside her borders: in Palestine, Cyprus, Mt. Sinai, the Black Mountains, Greece, Mt. Athos, Petritsoni (Bulgaria), Macedonia, Thrace, Romania, Isauria and Constantinople. The divinely guided Queen Tamar abolished the death penalty and all forms of bodily torture.

A regular, secret observance of a strict ascetic regime—fasting, a stone bed, and litanies chanted in bare feet—finally took its toll on Queen Tamar's health. For a long time she refrained from speaking to anyone about her condition, but when the pain became unbearable she finally sought help. The best physicians of the time were unable to diagnose her illness, and all of Georgia was seized with fear of disaster. Everyone from the small to the great prayed fervently for Georgia's ruler and defender. The people were prepared to offer not only their own lives, but even the lives of their children, for the sake of their beloved ruler.

God sent Tamar a sign when He was ready to receive her into His Kingdom. Then the pious ruler bade farewell to her court and turned in prayer to an icon of Christ and the Life-giving Cross: "Lord Jesus Christ! Omnipotent Master of heaven and earth! To Thee I deliver the nation and people that were entrusted to my care and purchased by Thy Precious Blood, the children whom Thou didst bestow upon me, and to Thee I surrender my soul, O Lord!"



The burial place of Queen Tamar has remained a mystery to this day. Some sources claim that her tomb is in Gelati, in a branch of burial vaults belonging to the Bagrationi dynasty, while others argue that her holy relics are preserved in a vault at the Holy Cross Monastery in Jerusalem.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Martyrs Isaacius, Apollo, and Codratus; St. Maximian, patriarch of Constantinople; Venerable James of Stromynsk Monastery, Radonezh; Righteous Alexius of Bortsumani; New Hieromartyr John Prigorovsky, priest; Righteous confessor Nicholas Pisarevsky, priest; New Hieromartyr Alexis Protopopov, priest; Finding of the relics of Venerable Theodore, abbot of Sanaxar Monastery. Movable feasts on the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women: The Myrrh-bearing Women: Mary Magdalene; Mary, the wife of Cleopas; Joanna; Salome, mother of the sons of Zebedee; Susanna; Mary and Martha, sisters of St. Lazarus; and Mary, mother of the Apostle James; Righteous Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

**April 22 / May 5 — Our Holy Father Theodore the Sykeote** - His birthplace was the village of Sykeon in Galatia, because of which he was named 'the Sykeote'. While still a ten-year-old boy, Theodore gave himself to strict fasting and night-long vigils under the eye of an elder, Stephen, who lived in his house. His mother, Maria, was a rich widow and intended her son to devote himself to a soldier's calling. But St. George appeared to her in her sleep and told her that Theodore was destined for the service, not of an earthly king, but of the King of heaven. St. George also appeared to Theodore many times, either to instruct him or to save him from some danger in which the evil demons had placed him. He also had several visions of the most holy Mother of God. Theodore's asceticism exceeded in its severity the asceticism of all the other ascetics of his time. He tormented his body in hunger and thirst and iron girdles and standing all night in prayer. All this—only to link his soul in love to God and to achieve total mastery over his body. The merciful Lord's love responded to Theodore's love. He gave him great power over evil spirits and over all the ills and pains of men. He became known on all sides as a miraculous healer. For his great purity and devotion, he was chosen against his wishes as Bishop of Anastasioupolis. He spent eleven years in episcopal service, and then begged God to release him from this service in order to devote himself again to his beloved asceticism. After that, he returned to his monastery, where, in old age, he gave his soul to the Lord for whose sake he had undergone so much voluntary suffering. He died at the beginning of the reign of the Emperor Heraclius, in about 613.

**Our Holy Father, the Monk Vitalis** - During the time of the Alexandrian Patriarch John the Merciful, a young monk appeared who, as soon as he arrived, compiled a list of all the prostitutes in Alexandria. The mortification (asceticism) of this young monk was exceptional and unique. During the day he would offer himself for hire to do the most difficult jobs and at night, he would enter the houses of ill repute, gave the earned amount of money to some prostitute and close himself in the room with her the entire night. As soon as they were locked up, Vitalis would beg the woman to lie down and sleep and he would spend the entire night in a corner of the room in prayer to God for that sinner. Thus, he would save the woman from sinning at least one night. The second night, he would go to a second, the third night to a third and so on until he had visited them all, and then, he again returned to the one with whom he started. By his counselling, many of the sinners abandoned their sullied trade. Some of them married, others entered convents and still others turned to a respectable work and income. Vitalis forbid all of these women to reveal the reason why he was visiting them. Because of this, Vitalis became a scandal for all of Alexandria. The men began to scold him, spit upon him and to openly beat him on the streets. He bore all patiently, making known his good works to God and concealing them from men. When he died, everything about him became known. Many miracles of healing occurred over his grave. People from different places began to bring their sick to his grave. Spat upon by men, he was and remained glorified by the Omniscient God.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Holy Apostles Nathaniel, Luke (not the Evangelist), and Clement; Martyr Epipodius of Lyon; Martyrs Leonidas, Orator, Cyriacus, and Basil of Alexandria; Martyr Nearchus, soldier; Translation of the relics of the Right-believing prince Vsevolod (Gabriel in baptism) of Pskov; New Hieromartyr Eustathius Malahovsky, priest; Hieromartyr Platon, bishop of Banja Luka; New Martyr Demetrius Vlasenkov.

**April 23 / May 6 — The Holy and Great Martyr George** - This renowned and glorious martyr was born in Cappadocia, the son of rich and God-fearing parents. His father suffered for Christ, after which his mother moved to Palestine. When George grew up, he went into the army, in which he rose, by the age of twenty, to the rank of tribune, and as such was in service under the Emperor Diocletian. When this Emperor began a terrible persecution of Christians, George came before him and boldly confessed that he was a Christian. The Emperor threw him into prison, and commanded that his feet be put in the stocks and a heavy weight placed on his chest. After that, he commanded that he be bound on a wheel, under which was a board with great nails protruding, and thus be turned. He then had him buried in a pit with only his head above the ground, and left there for three days and nights. Then, through some magician, he gave him deadly poison, but in the face of all these tortures, George prayed unceasingly to God, and God healed him instantly and saved him from death, to the great amazement of the people. When he also

raised a dead man to life by his prayers, many embraced the Christian faith. Among these was the Emperor's wife, Alexandra, and the chief pagan priest, Athanasius, the governor Glycerius and Valerius, Donatus and Therinus. Finally, the Emperor commanded that George and the Empress Alexandra be beheaded. Blessed Alexandra died on the scaffold before being killed, and St George was beheaded. This happened in the year 303. The miracles that have been performed at his grave are without number. Also are his appearances in dreams to those who, thinking on him, have sought his help, from that time up to the present day. Consumed by love for Christ, it was not difficult for holy George to leave all for this love—his status, wealth and imperial favour, his friends and the whole world. For this love, the Lord rewarded him with a wreath of unfading glory in heaven and on earth, and with eternal life in His Kingdom. The Lord further endowed him with the power to help in need and distress all who honour him and call on his name.

**St. Ethelbert, king of East Angles** - he was venerated as a martyr because of his violent death for political reasons at the hand of Offa, king of Mercia, whose daughter Aelfthryth he visited with a view to marriage. The body was buried by the river Lugg at Marden and later translated to Hereford where it remained until the Danes burnt it in 1050. Fragments of the original shrine at Hereford still remain - it was the second most popular pilgrimage centre of the times.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Martyr Alexandra the Empress, wife of Diocletian; Martyrs Anatolius and Protleon, soldiers; Martyr Glycerius the farmer, Athanasius the magician, Valerius, Donatus, and Therinus; Blessed George of Shenkursk, fool-for-Christ; New Martyr George of Ptolemais; Martyr Lazarus of Bulgaria; New Hieromartyr John Anserov, priest; Venerable Sophia (Khotokuridu).

**April 24 / May 7 The Holy Martyr Sabbas Stratelates** - This famous Sabbas lived in Rome in the time of the Emperor Aurelian, and held a general's rank. He was of a noble Gothic family. He often visited Christians in prison, helping them from his abundance. Through his great purity and fasting, God gave him power over unclean spirits. When he was charged with being a Christian, he stood courageously before the Emperor, cast his officer's belt before him and publicly confessed Christ the Lord. He was tortured in various ways: flogged, flailed with iron rods, burned with torches. But he did not succumb to these deadly tortures, and was seen to be alive and well. His comrades, the soldiers, seeing clearly that God was helping Sabbas, accepted the Christian faith, and seventy of them were immediately beheaded at the Emperor's command. Christ the Lord Himself appeared to Sabbas in the prison in great light, and strengthened His martyr. Then Sabbas was condemned to death by drowning. He was thrown into a deep river, where he gave his soul to God in the year 272. And his soul went to the Lord to whom he had remained faithful under many tortures.

**St. Egbert of Lindisfarne (729)** - a Northumbrian monk, born of noble parentage c. 639; d. 729. In his youth he went for the sake of study to Ireland, to a monastery, says the Venerable Bede, "called Rathmelsigi", identified by some with Mellifont in what is now County Louth. There, when in danger of death from pestilence, he prayed for time to do penance, vowing amongst other things to live always in exile from his own country. In consequence he never returned to England, though he lived to the age of ninety, and always fasted rigorously. Having become a priest, he was filled with zeal for the conversion of the still pagan German tribes related to the angles, and would himself have become their apostle, if God had not shown him that his real calling was to other work. It was he, however, who dispatched to Friesland St. Wigbert, St. Willibrord, and other saintly missionaries. St. Egbert's own mission was made known to him by a monk, who, at Melrose, had been a disciple of St. Boisil. Appearing to this monk, St. Boisil sent him to tell Egbert that the Lord willed him instead of preaching to the heathen to go to the monasteries of St. Columba, "because their ploughs were not going straight", in consequence of their schismatic practice in the celebration of Easter. Leaving Ireland therefore in 716, Egbert crossed over to Iona, where the last thirteen years of his life were spent. By his sweetness and humility he induced the Iona monks to relinquish their erroneous mode of computation; in 729 they celebrated Easter with the rest of the Church upon 24 April, although their old rule placed it that year upon an earlier day.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Martyr Alexander of Lyon; Martyrs Pasocrates and Valentine at Dorostolum in Moesia; Martyrs Eusebius, Neon, Leontius, Longinus, and others at Nicomedia; Venerable Elizabeth, wonderworker of Constantinople; Venerable Innocent, priest on the Mount of Olives; Venerable Thomas, fool-for-Christ of Syria; St. Wilfrid, archbishop of York; St. Egbert, bishop, of Iona; Venerable Xenophon, of Mt. Athos; Venerable Sabbas and Alexius the Hermit of the Kiev Caves; Martyr Doukas of Byzantium; St. Symeon (Stefan), metropolitan of Transylvania; Sts. Elias (Iorest) and Sabbas (Sava), metropolitans of Ardeal (Transylvania); St. Joseph the Confessor, bishop of Maramures (Romania); Martyr Nicholas of Magnesia; Martyr George of Anatolia; Righteous Alexis Toth, priest, of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania; New Martyr Sergius Archangelsky; Hieromartyr Branko of Veljusa, Serbia; 'Molchensk' Icon of the Mother of God.

**April 25 / May 8 — The Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark** - Mark was a companion and helper of the Apostle Peter in his journeys. Peter, in his first Epistle, calls him his son, not after the flesh but after

the spirit (I Pet. 5:13). When Mark was with Peter in Rome, the faithful begged him to write down for them the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus, His miracles and His life. So Mark wrote his Gospel, which the Apostle Peter himself saw and testified to as true. Mark was chosen by the Apostle Peter to be bishop, and sent to Egypt to preach. And so Mark was the first preacher of the Gospel and the first bishop in Egypt. Egypt was oppressed by a thick darkness of paganism, idolatry, divination and malice. But, with the help of God, St Mark succeeded in sowing the seed of the knowledge of God in Libya, Ammonia and Pentapolis. From Pentapolis, he went to Alexandria, whither the Spirit of God led him. In Alexandria, he succeeded in establishing the Church of God, in giving her bishops, priests and deacons and in rooting everything firmly in faithfulness and devotion. Mark confirmed his preaching with many great miracles. When the pagans brought accusations against Mark as a destroyer of their idolatrous faith, and when the governor of the city began to search for Mark, he fled again to Pentapolis, where he continued his earlier work. After two years, Mark again returned to Alexandria, to the great joy of his faithful, whose number had already increased very greatly. The pagans took the opportunity to seize Mark, and they bound him firmly and began to drag him over the cobblestones, crying: 'We're taking the ox to the stall!' They threw him into prison all injured and bloodstained, where there appeared to him first an angel from heaven, who encouraged and strengthened him, and then the Lord Himself. Jesus said to him: 'Peace to thee, Mark My Evangelist!', to which Mark replied: 'And peace to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ!' On the next day, the wicked people hauled Mark from prison and again dragged him through the streets with the same cry: 'We're taking the ox to the stall!' Utterly spent and enfeebled, Mark said: 'Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit', and thus breathed his last and went to the better world. His holy relics were given burial by Christians, and through the ages they give healing to people from every pain and ill.

**St Anianus, Second Bishop of Alexandria** - When Mark stepped out of the boat on dry land in Alexandria, the sandal on one foot became torn. Then, he saw a cobbler to whom he gave his sandal for repairs. In mending the sandal, the cobbler pierced himself with the needle in his left hand and blood began to flow and the cobbler screamed in pain. Then the apostle of God mixed some dust with his spittle and anointed the wounded hand and suddenly the hand became whole again. Astonished at this miracle, the cobbler invited Mark to his home. Hearing Mark's homily, Anianus [for that was the cobbler's name] was baptized; he and his entire household. Anianus displayed so much virtue and so much zeal for the work of God that St. Mark consecrated him bishop. This holy man was the second bishop of the Church in Alexandria.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Hieromartyr Stephen, bishop of Antioch; St. Macedonius, patriarch of Constantinople; Venerable Sylvester, abbot of Obnora; Venerable Basil of Poiana Mărului, Romania; New Hieromartyr Sergius Rokhletsov, priest; 'Constantinople' Icon of the Mother of God.

**April 26 / May 9 —The Hieromartyr Basil, Bishop of Amasea** - Licinius, the brother-in-law of the Emperor Constantine, whose sister he had married, dissembled before the great Emperor, saying that he was a Christian. When he received authority over the whole of the East, he began, at first secretly but then publicly, to persecute the Christians and to uphold idolatry. His wife grieved greatly over this, but could not turn her husband back from this dishonour. Giving himself over to idolatry, Licinius gave himself over to all the passions, and especially to brutality towards women. Through this fall into such an impure passion, he desired to deflower the maiden Glaphyra, who was in waiting at the imperial court. She complained to the Empress, who sent her away from the court at Nicomedia secretly to the coast of Pontus. The maiden got as far as the town of Amasea, and was there warmly received by the bishop, Basil, and the other Christians. Glaphyra was very joyful that God had preserved her virginity, and wrote of this to the Empress. And the Empress rejoiced and sent her money for the Church in Amasea. But one letter of Glaphyra's, on its way to the Empress, fell into the hands of an imperial eunuch, who showed it to Emperor Licinius. Discovering where Glaphyra was to be found, he immediately sent orders that she and the bishop be brought to Nicomedia. In the meantime, Glaphyra died, and the soldiers brought only Basil, in bonds. After torture and imprisonment, this blessed man was beheaded and thrown into the sea, in the year 322. His priests, with the help of an angel of God, found his body near the town of Synope, took it out of the water with the aid of fishing nets and carried it to Amasea, where they gave it burial in the church which he had built by his labours. The Emperor Constantine raised an army against Licinius, overcame him, arrested him and sent him into exile in Gaul, where he ended his God-hating days.

**St Stephen, Bishop of Perm** - a Russian by birth. From an early age he was devoted to prayer and pious thoughts. As a young man, Stephen went to Rostov where he was tonsured a monk in the monastery of St. Gregory the Theologian. Learning about the Land of Perm, completely overrun with the weeds of heathenism, Stephen desired to become a missionary in this land. He immediately dedicated himself to the studying of the language of the Perms and when he mastered the language, he composed an alphabet and translated the ecclesiastical books into that language. With the blessing of the Metropolitan of Moscow, Stephen, as a presbyter, started out on his apostolic mission and with apostolic zeal began to preach the Gospel in this dense darkness of the heathenism of Perm. Having baptized a few souls, he endeavoured to build a church in Perm dedicated to the Holy Annunciation. When the Church of



God flourished in Perm, he was consecrated as its bishop. Undergoing every hardship, affliction, maliciousness and humiliation, he succeeded to dispel the darkness among the heathens of Perm and to illuminate them with the Light of Christ. In his old age he returned to Moscow once more but, there ended his earthly life and took up habitation with the Lord in the year 1396 AD.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Righteous Virgin Glaphyra ; Venerable Richarius of Picardy; Venerable Kalandion of Cyprus; Venerable George of Cyprus; Venerable Ioannicius of Serbia; New Hieromartyr John Pankov, priest, and his children Martyrs Nicholas and Peter Pankov; Venerable Justa. Commemoration of Orthodox soldiers slain on the field of battle.

**April 27 / May 10 — The Holy Apostle Simeon** - One of the Seventy, he was the son of Cleopas, and Cleopas was the brother of Joseph, the betrothed of the most holy Mother of God. Seeing the miracles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Simeon was converted and included among the Seventy apostles. With great zeal and courage, he preached the Gospel everywhere in Judea. And when the wicked Jews killed James, the Lord's brother and first bishop of the Church in Jerusalem, throwing him down from the top of the Temple and belabouring him round the head with a stick, then this Simeon, Joseph's nephew, was installed as bishop in Jerusalem. He, as the second Bishop of the Holy City, governed the Church of God with wisdom and strength to a great age. He was more than a hundred years old when he suffered, and his sufferings came about as follows: in the time of the Emperor Trajan there was a double persecution begun in Palestine, against the descendants of David and against the Christians. The wicked people condemned Simeon on both counts. St Simeon endured harsh torture and was finally crucified, as had been the Lord whom he had faithfully served on earth.

**The Burning of the Relics of St. Sava by the Turks** - Sava was the Archbishop of the Serbs. The body of St. Sava was buried in Mileshevo Monastery. During the time of the Turkish tyranny, the Serbian people gathered around the relics of their saint to seek comfort and healing. Fearing that an insurrection might arise from that place against the Turks, Sinan Pasha of Belgrade ordered that the relics of St. Sava be translated to Belgrade and there to be burned on Vracar, April 27, 1594 A.D. With the burning of the relics of this saint, the rabid Pasha did not burn the saint who remained alive before the Throne of God in the heavens and in the hearts of his people on earth.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Righteous Eulogius the Hospitable; St. Floribert, bishop of Liège; Venerable John, abbot of Cathares Monastery; St. Stephen, abbot of the Kiev Caves, bishop of Vladimir in Volhynia; New Hieromartyrs Paul Svetozarov and John Rozhdestvensky, priests, and those with them: Martyrs Peter Yazykov, Nicholas Malkov, Auxentius Kalashnikov, Sergius Mefodiev and Anastasia; New Nun-martyr Mary (Nosova); New Hieromartyr John Spassky, priest; Translation of the relics of New Hieromartyr Hilarion (Troitsky), bishop of Verey; Martyrs Publius (Poplion) and Lollion; 'Kazan' Icon of the Mother of God in Alexandrov.

### ‡ Daily Scripture Readings ‡

**Monday** - Acts 6:8-7:5, 47-60; John 4:46-54

**Tuesday** - Luke 12:2-12 (Matins, Gospel); Acts 8:5-17; John 6:27-33; Acts 12:1-11 St. George; John 15:17-16:2 St. George

**Wednesday** - Acts 8:18-25; John 6:35-39

**Thursday** - Acts 8:26-39 ; John 6:40-44

**Friday** - Acts 8:40-9:19; John 6:48-54

**Saturday** - Acts 9:19-31; John 15:17-16:2

## HOMILY

### -About seeking the living among the dead-

**"Why do you seek the living One among the dead?" (St. Luke 24:5).**

The angel of God asks the Myrrh-bearing women as though in astonishment: **"Why do you seek the living One among the dead?"** As though the perceiver of the mystery of God and God's power wanted to say: "How could you have thought for a moment that He is the hostage of death? Do you not know that He is the principal source of life? Do you not know that all life is through Him and that not one living thing can borrow not even a drop of life from any other source? Did He not fully reveal to you His authority over life and death on earth? Who gave life to the lifeless Lazarus? Who took away the life of the barren fig tree?"

O my brethren, let us also cease to look for the living among the dead. If there are some of us who are still seeking Christ among the dead, let them desist from this soul-destroying effort. This is the vain effort of the Jews, pagans and non-Christians. We know that the Lord and Giver of life is not in the tomb but on the Throne of Glory in the heavens. The spirit, not darkened by sin, looks up into heaven and does not see the tomb; and the spirit, darkened by sin, looks into the tomb and does not see heaven. Sin and virtue govern the spiritual vision of man and reveals to each man its own world at cross purposes with one another. Sin overthrows the vision of the spirit to the earth and reveals to it the corruption of the world. Virtue uplifts the spirit to heaven and reveals to it the eternal world and the resurrected Christ as the King in that world.

O my brethren, let us not seek life among creation, but from the Creator. Let us not commit an even graver sin i.e., let us not seek the Creator in the tomb of creation nor the Illuminating, Immortal One in the darkness of death.

O Lord Jesus, Victor over death, we cry out to You: resurrect us also into life eternal from the corruption and darkness of death.

**To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.**