

27th Sunday After Pentecost

St Alexander Nevsky & Afterfeast of the Entry

23 November / 6 December 2015



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!

Troparion of the Feast: Today is the prelude of God's goodwill/ and the prophecy of the salvation of men./ The Virgin appears openly in the temple of God and foretells Christ to all./ So let us cry to her with loud voices:/ Rejoice, thou who art the fulfilment of the Creator's providence.

Troparion — Tone 4: Christ revealed you, O Blessed Alexander / As a new and glorious worker of wonders; / A man and a prince well pleasing to God / And a divine treasure of the Russian Land. / Today we assemble in faith and love / To glorify the Lord by joyously remembering you. / He granted you the grace of healing, / Therefore entreat Him to strengthen your suffering spiritual children, / And to save all Orthodox Christians.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 2: Hell became afraid, O Almighty Saviour, seeing the miracle of Thy resurrection from the tomb! The dead arose! Creation, with Adam, beheld this and rejoiced with Thee! And the world, O My Saviour, praises Thee forever.

Kontakion — Tone 8: We honor you as a most radiant, spiritual star, / Rising up from the east; going down in the west! / As you enriched the Russian people with good works and miracles, / So now enlighten us who remember you in faith, O Blessed Alexander. / Today as we celebrate your falling asleep, we ask you to beseech the Lord / That He may strengthen his suffering servants and save all Orthodox Christians!

Kontakion of the Feast: The most pure Temple of the Saviour,/ the most precious bridal chamber and Virgin,/ the sacred treasury of the glory of God,/ today enters into the house of the Lord,/ bringing with her the grace that is the Divine Spirit./ And the angels of God sing of her:/ This is the heavenly tabernacle.

Vespers: Wisd. 5:15-6:3; Wisd. 3:1-9; Wisd. 4:7-15

Matins Gospel V

EPISTLE: Ephesians 6: 10-17

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE WILES OF THE DEVIL

He does not speak against the fighting, nor against the hostilities, but against the 'wiles.' For this enemy is at war with us, not simply, nor openly, but by 'wiles.' To use 'wiles' is to deceive and to take by artifice or contrivance ...and stratagems in the case of those who seduce us. I mean something like this. The Devil never proposes to us sins in their proper colours ...Our conflict is with one skilled in the arts of war ...'For you were once darkness' (Eph. 5:8); so naming that wickedness which is in this present life; for beyond it, it will have no place, not in Heaven, nor in the world to come ...By 'evil day' he means the present life, and also calls it 'this present evil world' (Gal. 1:4) ...How then, you may say, are we to wrestle with the darkness? By becoming light. How with the spiritual hosts of wickedness? By becoming good ...No, if we have a mind, neither will we wrestle at all, for it is because we choose it, that there is a struggle, since so great is the power of Him who dwells in us, as He said, 'Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:9). All power He has given us, both of wrestling and of not wrestling. It is because we are slothful, that we have to wrestle with them ...Then let us trample under foot the power of the devil; let us trample under foot our sins, I mean everything that pertains to this life: wrath, lust, vainglory, every passion.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily XXII on Ephesians IV. B#57,pp.159-162.

for St. Alexander: Gal. 5:22-6:2 (§213)

THE GOSPEL - LUKE 12: 16-21

Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.' " But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The Harvest of a Rich Man.

We read a very short parable about the harvest of a rich man and like so much of scripture it has deep theology in very few words. It appears simple on the outside. But, truly it has much more than just the external message that we know of that is obvious from it that we should not only care about ourselves and be stingy and care only and think of life as the acquiring of goods.

Our Lord said this parable because he had just been part of or been brought into a dispute between brothers two about an inheritance. So He was trying to show how silly it is, how foolish it is to be concerned about riches.

So He begins His parable by saying "the ground of a certain rich man" — he doesn't even name the man. If you notice sometimes in parables those who are great sinners don't even have a name: such as the rich man and Lazarus, and the rich man who had this plentiful harvest. They don't even mention his name. His name is blotted out of the book of the Living. It's unimportant. Perhaps, when he dies, there would be great fanfare, and people playing bugles, and paid mourners wailing and gnashing their teeth and tearing at their hair and a huge retinue of people to bury him and maybe even those from the towns people, who say, "What a great man he was..." and everything. And yet God doesn't know his name, the angels don't know his name, the saints don't know who he is.

This is not how we want to be referred to, as a certain person, a certain rich man, a certain sinner, a certain non-entity in the Kingdom of God. Indeed we want to be named. So this nameless, foolish man has many many crops and it is a bountiful year. And he makes a great mistake. Instead of thanking God, he thinks before he's even brought his crop in, "What shall I do?"

This is a question that all of us ask all the time: "What shall I do?" The poor man asks, "What shall I do? I'm destitute. I have no funds. I have no food in the cupboard. Winter is coming and my children do not have shoes. What shall I do?" and the rich man, who is not rich toward God, who has all this bounty, says "What shall I do?" The one who has nothing and the one who has everything in a temporal sense, they both ask the same question. So what good is riches? What good is abundance unless we understand from Whom that abundance comes and what is the significance of that abundance and how we can use it for the Kingdom of God?

So he says, "I have no room in my barns so I'm going to tear down perfectly good barns and I'm going to build greater barns." And then he makes an even bigger error and that's an error that we make often so you should take note of it. He says, "My soul, soul that has much goods laid up for many years take thine ease. Eat, drink, and be merry." He speaks to his soul. What does the soul need of food? What does the soul need of raiment? What does the soul need of great barns? The soul is incorporeal. The soul communicates with God. It doesn't need food. He speaks to his soul and mistakes it for his body. This, indeed, is a great error and this is what happens in our life. People define life in terms of the pleasure that they have, or in terms of the comfort that they have, or the security that they have. It is always about taking care of their bodies. Or more than taking care of their bodies, sometimes giving their body pleasure that is illicit and unclean. But, it's always about their bodies.

This rich man makes the mistake that is very typical of those who do not have their eye on God and don't understand what the purpose of their life is all about. His soul and his body to him, he doesn't understand what his soul is. His soul is the body as far as he is concerned. Everything is the here and now, everything is the next dinner, the next dance, the next bit of entertainment. That is for him what his soul is. And we will see later in only a moment what this really means. The implications of not understanding about your soul and your body and the purpose in your life are tremendous and terrible.

So God says unto him, "Thou fool. This very night thy soul shall be required of thee." A more proper way to put it is: "This very night, they shall require thy soul." "They" are the demons. They will take the soul and cast it where it belongs: in the pit of hell. God doesn't refer to the death of a righteous man in this way. The angels take the soul which is light and ascends to God. It is not "required," that is, against the will of a man. It is natural. In this case, the rich man, his soul is required. It is torn away because everything that he had in this life was temporal, was false, and was fleeting. And when he died, he had nothing. No good works, no good thoughts. Nothing. And so his soul clung to his body. His soul became fleshly in the words of Blessed Theophylact. And so his soul was torn away for him.

I tell you, there will be no greater pain experienced by any man than when a fleshly soul is torn away from a corrupt body at the time of death. Nothing can compare. No torture, no torment. It is a moment of great tragedy that a man who has so much provided to him would have not understood it for all of his years.

There are other things in this parable that are important to understand. Perhaps, more side issues. One is that when he says, "I'm going to pull down my barns and build greater." He had barns that he could've put his foodstuffs into: the bellies of the poor. If a man has more than another, he is obligated to give to one who needs. The bellies of the poor are storehouses, abundant storehouses, infinite storehouses. And the wonder of these storehouses is that when food is put into them, it does not perish. It endures forever and every single cup of water that is given to one of these store houses, the bellies of the poor,

will be remembered according to the words of our Savior, in the last day. So, this food does not perish. Where as normally, we eat food, it goes into the belly, and it goes out, and as the Lord says "into the drop." It becomes waste in a matter of hours. But not food that is given to the poor. Not abundance that God gives to us that we distribute to others.

But you have to understand this is not just a moral teaching saying we should give to others. There is depth here as far as why we give to others. It's all God's anyway. That's another mistake the rich man made when he said, "Thou hast many goods..." Oh, rich man, thou hast no goods! Everything is of God's. And God has given some of it to you. He has given you an abundance in order so that you could give unto others. So we must understand everything is of God's. But much more critical, if we are truly to be benevolent people, is that we must understand "What is the purpose of our life?" The rich man definitely didn't understand. He called his body his soul. He didn't understand at all. In the end of the parable, the Lord said, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God."

The purpose of our life is to become rich towards God. Our Lord wishes us to have everything in abundance. And in the second, there was speaking of, "All of His goods will be given to the good man of the house that watches and waits and will be seen to be so doing when his Lord comes" So there's a perfect tie in with the two gospels. All of the Lord's goods will be given, but they are not silver and gold and food and dancing, and merriment. By the way, Blessed Theophylact, says that when the rich man says "take thine eat, drink, and be merry" this word "merry" is a euphemism. When people are indulged in great excess of drinking and eating, merriment is something that you wouldn't want to see. That would be unclean and immoral. All manner of fornication, and all manner even of murders, and all kinds of infidelities and all that sort of thing. That's the merriment for a person who's glutting himself on pleasure.

The purpose of our life is to know God. God gives us things so that we can know Him. God sometimes gives us abundance so that we can know Him. Everything is of God. Therefore, we are only His stewards. We are His servants. We must have that attitude about ourselves. And then we must understand what is really treasure? God has given us many things of a physical nature and we can enjoy them. We can certainly enjoy the taste of fine and succulent food on the days when it is allowed and it is totally lawful thing to do this. And all of the other things God has given. But, we must understand where our treasure is. Our treasure is in being rich towards God, in having full faith in Him. And then He will bestow His goods to us. We can't even imagine what those goods really are. We can only speak of them in a poor way. Language can't communicate what God wants to give us. He will give it to a man who is open to Him, who is rich toward Him. Who hears of the commandments and says, "I wish to do this."

Even if a man can not do a certain commandment or can not in every way change his life, in his heart, if he is a Christian, he says, "I want to change. I want to direct my life according to that which is true, that which is perfect, that which is holy." Then a man, not matter what state he's in, is rich toward God. This is the purpose of our life: to know God, to become like Him in moral attributes, to become pure and holy. And this rich man, this nameless, wanton sinner, did not understand that. He did not understand anything of what God had given him and what the purpose of his life is.

So here we have before us, brothers and sisters, a bad example. We must learn from bad examples as much as we learn from good examples. This is an example of how not to live, how not to think. We should not live according to the flesh. We should not acquaint the flesh with our life. There are necessities of the flesh and we take care of those. There are pleasures of the flesh and when they are lawful, may it be blessed. But if we ever acquaint any pleasure of the flesh with our life, we have ceased to be a Christian. No longer are we a Christian if we think of the flesh as our life. May God help you. May God enlighten you. There is much depth here. I can't begin to plum the depths of it because I don't have the purity to see it all or the eloquence to express it all. But, there is depth here. There is in this parable a teaching trying to teach you how to live, what kind of attitude to have. That's the depth of it. May God help you and enlighten you to live according to God, to be rich toward God. Amen.

Fr Seraphim Holland

for St. Alexander: Matt. 11:27-30

Saints of the week

23 November / 6 December — Afterfeast of the Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos — **Nativity Fast — St Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium** — A fellow-countryman and friend of St Basil the Great and other great saints of the fourth century, Amphilochius early forsook the bustle of the world and withdrew to a cave where, as the solitary, he lived in asceticism for forty years. The episcopal throne in Iconium then fell empty, and Amphilochius was chosen in a wonderful way and consecrated as Bishop of Iconium. He was a marvellous shepherd and a great defender of the purity of the Orthodox faith, and took part in the Second Ecumenical Council in 381. He fought zealously against Macedonius, and against the Arians and the Eunomians. He personally begged Theodosius the Great to drive the Arians out of every city in the Empire, but the Emperor did not comply with his request. After a few days, Amphilochius came before the Emperor again. When the bishop was taken into the presence-chamber, the Emperor was sitting on his throne with his son Arcadius, whom he had taken as co-Emperor, sitting at his right hand. Entering the room, Amphilochius did reverence to Theodosius, but ignored Arcadius as though he were not there. Infuriated by this, the Emperor Theodosius commanded that Amphilochius be instantly driven from court. The saint then said to the Emperor: 'Do you see, O Emperor, how you do not tolerate a slight paid to your son? In the same way, God the Father does not tolerate dishonour paid to His Son, turning with loathing from those who blaspheme against Him, and being angered at that accursed Arian heresy.' Hearing this, the Emperor understood the reason for

Amphilochius's seeming disrespect towards his son, and marvelled at his wisdom and daring. Among many other works, Amphilochius wrote several books on the Faith. He entered into rest in 395 in great old age, and went to immortal life.

St Alexander of the Neva (Nevsky) - The son of Prince Yaroslav, his heart was drawn to God from his youth. He overcame the Swedes on the river Neva on July 15th, 1240, whence he took the name 'of the Neva'. On that occasion, Ss Boris and Gleb appeared to one of Alexander's generals and promised their aid to the great prince, their kinsman. Among the Golden Horde of the Tartars, he refused to sacrifice to idols or pass through fire. The Tartar Khan valued him for his wisdom, and his physical strength and beauty. He built many churches, and performed innumerable works of mercy. He entered into rest at the age of forty-three, on November 14th, 1263, today being the commemoration of the translation of his relics to the city of Vladimir; St Gregory, Bishop of Agrigentum; St Mitrophan, Bishop of Voronezh' St. Trudo, Abbot.

24 November / 7 December — Afterfeast of the Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos — Nativity Fast — The Holy and Great Martyr Catherine — The daughter of King Constus, she lived with her mother in Alexandria after her father's death. Her mother was secretly a Christian and, through her spiritual father, brought Catherine to the Christian faith. In a vision, St Catherine received a ring from the Lord Jesus Himself as a sign of her betrothal to Him. This ring remains on her finger to this day. Catherine was greatly gifted by God, exceptionally well-educated in Greek philosophy, medicine, rhetoric and logic, and added great physical beauty to this. When the wicked Emperor Maxentius offered sacrifice to idols and ordered everyone to do the same, St Catherine came with daring before him and denounced his idolatrous errors. The Emperor, seeing that she surpassed him in wisdom and learning, summoned fifty of the wisest men, to dispute with her about faith and put her to shame, but Catherine was wiser than they, and put them to shame. The furious Emperor commanded that all fifty wise men be burned. These wise men, at St Catherine's prayers, all confessed the name of Christ at the moment of death, and proclaimed themselves Christians. When the martyr was in prison, she brought Porphyrius the general, with two hundred of his soldiers, to the Faith, and also the Empress, Augusta-Vasilissa. They all suffered for Christ. At St Catherine's martyrdom, an angel of God appeared to her, stopping and breaking the wheel on which she was being tortured, and after that the Lord Christ Himself appeared to her, strengthening her. After many tortures, Catherine was beheaded with the sword at the age of eighteen, on November 24th, 310. Milk flowed from her body in place of blood. Her wonderworking relics are preserved on Sinai. St. Minver, virgin of Cornwall, St. Romanus of Bordeaux (d.382) The Holy and Great Martyr Mercurius; The Holy Maiden Mastridia.

25 November / 8 December — Apodosis of the Entry into the Temple — Nativity Fast - The Hieromartyr Clement Bishop of Rome - Born in Rome and of royal blood, he was a contemporary of the apostles. His mother and two brothers were caught by a storm on a voyage and driven to different places. His father then went off to find his wife and sons, and himself disappeared. Clement, being then twenty-four years old, set off eastwards to look for his parents and brothers. In Alexandria, he made the acquaintance of the Apostle Barnabas, and afterwards became a friend of the Apostle Peter, who was already being followed by his two brothers, Faustinus and Faustinian. By God's providence, the Apostle Peter found Clement's aged mother, who was living as a beggar-woman, and then his father also. Thus the whole family was reunited, and they all returned to Rome as Christians. Clement remained linked with the great apostles, who made him bishop before their death. After Peter's death by martyrdom, Linus was bishop in Rome, then Cletus—both of them only for a short time—and then Clement. He governed the Church of God with burning zeal and, from day to day, brought large numbers of unbelievers to the Faith. He set seven scribes to record the lives of the Christian martyrs who were at that time suffering for their Lord. The Emperor Trajan drove him out to Cherson, where Clement found about two thousand exiled Christians, who were all put to the hard toil of cutting stone in an arid region. The Christians welcomed Clement with great joy, and he was to them a living source of comfort. By his prayers, he brought water from the dry ground and converted so many of the pagan inhabitants to Christianity that there were seventy-five churches built in that place in one year. To prevent the further spreading of the Christian faith, Clement was condemned to death, and drowned in the sea with a stone round his neck in the year 101. His wonderworking relics were taken out of the sea only in the time of Ss Cyril and Methodius; The Hieromartyr Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria; Our Holy Father Paphnutius.

26 November / 9 December — Nativity Fast — St Innocent of Irkutsk - Saint Innocent was born John Veniaminov in 1797 in the village of Anginskoye in Irkutsk province. The son of a church server, he entered the Irkutsk theological seminary at the age of 20. He married, was ordained a deacon of the Church of the Annunciation in Irkutsk, and became a teacher before being ordained at the age of 24. At 26 he volunteered to travel to the distant island of Unalaska in the Aleutians as a mission priest, accompanied by his aging mother, his wife, his son, and his brother. It took them more than a year to travel from Irkutsk to the island of Unalaska. He built churches, learned the local languages, translated the gospels and hymns, and expanded his mission to the surrounding islands. In Unalaska he wrote his famous "Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven." We went on to Sitka Island, to minister to the Tlingits (or Kolushchans), who had not heard the Gospel and served there for fifteen years before returning to St. Petersburg to report on the mission. In St. Petersburg he received news of the death of his wife, and he was tonsured a monk and given the rank of archimandrite, then bishop and then archbishop of Irkutsk. In 1865, the Holy Synod issued a decree appointing Archbishop Innocent a member of the Holy Governing Synod. In 1867, after the repose of Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow, he was appointed Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna and Archimandrite of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra. Both in Moscow and in the Holy Synod, Metropolitan Innocent achieved, under the guidance of Divine Providence, a great deal for the missionary cause. His administration of his diocese brought fruitful results: many members of the Moscow and village clergy were provided with houses by their communities, and their standard of living improved, thanks to funds raised by Metropolitan Innocent; a home for retired clergymen was opened in 1871; a diocesan school of icon painting and other arts was opened for poor children and orphans of the clergy who were not able to attend ordinary schools (1873); a school for daughters of the clergy; and a church dedicated to the Protecting Veil of the Mother of

God was built for the Moscow Theological Academy. He reposed in 1879. One of his contemporaries wrote of St. Innocent, "His Eminence, Innocent stands out magnificently among all our Orthodox hierarchs, ancient and new, for his remarkable and unique qualities. Having grown up and worked up to the age of seventy in the midst of nature, surrounded by simple children of nature, he was himself approachable, kind and welcoming, straightforward and free of partiality, caring not for show or finery, nor prone to flaunt either his knowledge or his accomplishments, and his behavior at all times was simple and humble. His great natural intelligence was enriched with a wealth of knowledge that few possess. His heart had no place for envy and cunning, ambition and vanity, desire for riches or for earthly comforts. Since early childhood he had to wage a constant struggle with severe natural conditions and people, resisting need and privation, and he taught himself patience and industry, courage and perseverance, self-control and resourcefulness, restraint and the ability to be content with little, and implicit submission to the holy will of God in all circumstances." Preaching the Gospel was St. Innocent's main task in life, accomplished at great personal sacrifice and hardship, but with great joy. He wrote to his bishop in Irkutsk about his missionary expedition to the island of Unga in 1828: "Words cannot describe the zeal with which the Aleuts received my teaching, the gratitude with which they honored me for having instructed them, or the spiritual pleasure which teaching them brought me. Thanks be to God the Word, for granting me His Word, and for enlightening and comforting them with the Word."

Our Holy Father Alypius the Stylite - Born in Hadrianopolis, a city in Paphlagonia, he was from his youth dedicated to the service of God. As a deacon, he served in the church in that city with Bishop Theodore. But, desiring a solitary life of prayer and meditation, Alypius withdrew to a Greek cemetery outside the city, from which people fled as from a place of terror, as demonic visions had been seen there. Here he erected a Cross, and built a church in honour of St Euphemia, who had appeared to him in a dream. Near the church, he built a high pillar, climbed up onto it and spent fifty-three years there in fasting and prayer. Neither the mockery of men nor the evil demons could drive him away or shake his purpose. This saint endured endless assaults from the demons. They not only tried to terrify him with demonic apparitions, but also stoned him and gave him no peace day nor night for a long time. But Alypius courageously defended himself against this diabolical power with the sign of the Cross and the name of Jesus. Finally, the vanquished demons left him and fled, and men began to revere him and to come to him for his prayers, comfort, teaching and healing. Two monasteries were built beside his pillar, on one side for men and on the other for women. His mother and sisters lived in the women's monastery. St Alypius guided the monks and nuns from his pillar by word and example, and shone like the sun in the sky for them all, showing them the way of salvation. This man of God had such grace that he was often bathed in heavenly light, and a pillar of this light stretched above him to heaven. Alypius was a great and mighty wonderworker, both in his lifetime and after his death. Living for a hundred years, he entered into rest in the year 640, in the time of Emperor Heraclius. Of his holy relics, the head is preserved in the monastery of Koutloumousiou on the Holy Mountain. Our Holy Father James the Solitary; Our Holy Father Stylianus; Our Holy Father Nikon the Preacher of Repentance; St Innocent of Irkutsk.

27 November / 10 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Martyr James the Persian - Born in the Persian town of Elapa, or Vilat, of Christian parents, he was brought up in the Christian faith and married a Christian wife. The Persian king, Yezdegerd, loved James for his gifts and for his skill, and made him a noble at his court. Flattered by the king, James was deluded and offered sacrifice to idols, which the king also worshipped. His mother and wife, hearing of this, wrote him a reproachful letter in which they grieved over him as an apostate and one spiritually dead, begging him at the end of the letter to repent and return to Christ. Moved by this letter, James repented bitterly, and courageously confessed his faith in Christ the Lord before the king. The furious king condemned him to death, and added that his body was to be cut to pieces, little by little, until he breathed his last. The executioners fulfilled this command of the accursed king to the letter, and first cut off James's fingers, then his toes, his legs and arms, his shoulders and finally his head. During the entire process, the repentant martyr gave thanks to God. A fragrance came from his wounds as of cypress. Thus this wonderful man repented of his sin, and his soul went to Christ his God in the heavenly Kingdom. He suffered in about 400. His head is to be found in Rome, and a part of his relics in Portugal, where he is commemorated on May 22nd. St. Congar, bishop of Somerset; St. Fergus, bishop of Glamis; The Seventeen Holy Fathers Martyred in India; Our Holy Father Romanus the Wonderworker; Our Holy Father Pinuphrius; Our Holy Father Nathanael.

28 November / 11 December — Nativity Fast — Our Holy Father, the Martyr Stephen the New - As aforetime Hannah the mother of Samuel, so Anna the mother of Stephen prayed God to give her a son. Praying thus at one time in the Blachernae church in front of the icon of the most holy Mother of God, a light sleep fell on her, in which she saw the holy Virgin, radiant like the sun, and heard her voice: 'Woman, go in peace; in fulfilment of your prayer, you have a son in your womb.' Anna indeed conceived and bore a son, this holy Stephen. He received the monastic habit at the age of sixteen on Mount St Auxentius near Constantinople, at the hands of the elder John, from whom he learned divine wisdom and asceticism. When John entered into rest in the Lord, Stephen remained on that mountain in strict asceticism, taking on himself labour upon labour. His holiness drew many disciples to him. When the Emperor Constantine Copronymos began to persecute the icons even more ferociously than his foul father, Leo the Isaurian, Stephen showed himself to be a zealous defender of the veneration of the holy icons. The demented Emperor listened to various slanders against Stephen, and himself devised a number of intrigues, solely to break Stephen and get him out of the way. Stephen was exiled to the island of Proconnesus, and then taken to Constantinople, put in chains and cast into prison. There he met three hundred and forty-two captive monks, brought from all sides and thrown into prison for their veneration of icons. In the prison, they followed the whole order of church services as in a monastery. The wicked Emperor condemned Stephen to death. The saint foresaw his death forty days before, and took his leave of the brethren. The Emperor's servants took him from the prison and, beating and buffeting him, dragged him through the streets of Constantinople, calling on all who were on the Emperor's side to stone this 'enemy of the Emperor'. One of the heretics aimed a blow at the saint's head with a piece of wood, and the saint breathed his last. As Stephen the

Protomartyr suffered at the hands of the Jews, so this Stephen suffered at the hands of the iconoclast heretics. This glorious soldier of Christ suffered in the year 767, at the age of fifty- three, and was crowned with unfading glory. The Holy New Martyr Christos; Our Holy Mother Anna; The Holy and Devout Emperor Maurice.

29 November / 12 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Martyr Paramon, and 370 others - In Asian Bithynia, the governor, Aquilinus, was ferociously persecuting Christians. He once seized three hundred and seventy Christians and took them with him in bonds to some place where there was a temple to the god Poseidon. Here, the wicked governor tried to force them to offer sacrifice to idols. Although he threatened with death any who refused to obey his command, not a single one of the Christians submitted to it. At that time, there passed along the road running beside the temple a respected man called Paramon. He stopped beside the group of bound men and learned what was happening, then cried out: 'Oh how many innocent and righteous men does this foul governor desire to slaughter because they will not bow down to his dumb and dead idols? Paramon then continued on his way, and the furious governor sent servants to kill him. They caught up with him and seized him, first piercing his tongue with a thorn and then stripping him and stabbing him all over. Holy Paramon, with prayer in his heart, gave his soul into God's hands. After that, these three hundred and seventy martyrs, great sons of God and innocent lambs, were beheaded with the sword and thus entered into the immortal Kingdom of Christ the Lord. They suffered in the year 250. Our Holy Father Acacius of Sinai; The Holy Martyr Dionysius Bishop of Corinth; St Tiridates King of Armenia; The Holy Martyr Apollonius.

St. Brendan of Birr - Friend and brother monk with Saint Brendan the Navigator at Clonard abbey. Spiritual student of Saint Finian. Founded the monastery at Birr in central Ireland c.540, and served as its abbot. Friend and advisor of Saint Columba. At Brendan's death, Columba had a vision of the abbot's soul being carried away by angels.

Tropar of Saint Brendan of Birr, Tone 8: Most glorious ascetic and chief of Ireland's Prophets, O Father Brendan, thou wast a bright beacon in the western isle guiding many to salvation. At thy heavenly birthday the Angels rejoiced and miraculously announced their joy to our Father Columba. The prayers of the righteous avail much for us sinners. Wherefore O Saint, pray to God for us that He will find us a place in the Mansions of the Blest.

Saint Sadwen of Wales - Brother of Saint Illtyd. Disciple of Saint Cadfan. Sixth century hermit. Several Welsh churches are dedicated to him.

Tropar of St Sadwen, tone 8: The remoteness of the Welsh mountains was thy desert, O Father Sadwen,/ where thou didst serve God in fasting and humility./ May thy continual intercession avail for us sinners that our souls may be saved.

HYMN OF PRAISE - Saint Alexander Nevsky

A knight of Christ, St. Alexander, A prince of the people and servant of the Lord- Ruler on earth and slave of the Almighty- This was the life of Nevsky. On the outside opulence, on the inside weeping; On the outside struggle, on the inside serenity; On the outside illusion, on the inside truth. Christ was the prize of this hero, Both in war and deceptive peace. In torment, Christ was his joy, In suffering, Christ was his assurance, In victory, Christ was the victor, And in death, Christ was his Resurrector! To him, in both worlds, all was Christ! He was the end; He was the living goal. The pious prince was an exemplar to his people, Of how one should serve the Lord. O holy Prince, help us also, By your brilliant power, by your holy prayers!

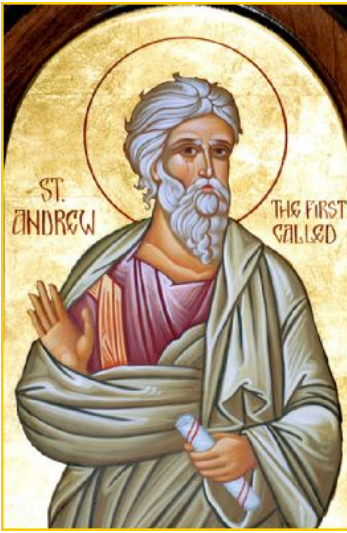
REFLECTION

God permits misfortune to befall the righteous, that He might glorify them more greatly. The overcoming of misfortune reveals both the glory of God and the glory of the righteous. St. Gregory of Agrigentum was, in all things, righteous and pleasing to God. But God permitted misfortune to befall him, similar to that misfortune that once overtook St. Athanasius and St. Macarius. Two priests, Sabinus and Crescens, for whom Gregory had done much good, could not at all tolerate Gregory's virtuousness. For such is the nature of vice, that it cannot tolerate virtue. Consequently, Sabinus and Crescens found a notorious prostitute and bribed her to malign Gregory by saying that he had had immoral relations with her. So it was that when Gregory was in church, the woman crept into his bedroom, and just as Gregory came out of church with the people, she emerged from his room. The two priests began to revile Gregory as a libertine. However, Gregory was composed and prepared for every suffering. They confined him in prison and then transferred him to Rome. The pope believed the slanderers and kept Gregory in prison for two and a half years, without a trial or a verdict. A council was then convened to try Gregory's case, but God judged before man could judge. The woman went insane and was brought mad before the council. She was unable to answer any questions. Gregory, the miracle-worker, prayed to God for her and she was healed, for the evil spirit came out of her. Then, through her tears, she confessed that she had been bribed to malign the man of God, and that immediately after she had committed the slander, the evil spirit had entered her and held her in its power. Sabinus and Crescens, along with the other maligners-more than a hundred in number-found their faces suddenly turned as black as coal, and they were punished with exile. St. Gregory was returned to his diocese and was received with great exultation by his people.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (Genesis 2): 1. How God gave the first people all the plants and all the fruitful trees for food; 2. How He forbade them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, lest they die.

Available on the net at <http://www.saintjonah.org/bltn/> or at www.roq.org.au or, request your own copy from Father John Weir by emailing him at rev.john.weir@rocor.org.au



28th Sunday After Pentecost

The Holy and All-praised apostle Andrew the First-Called

30 November / 13 December 2015

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 3: Let the heavens rejoice / let the earth be glad / for the Lord has shown strength with His arm! / He has trampled down death by death! / He has become the first-born of the dead! He has delivered us from the depths of hell / and has granted the world great mercy.

Troparion of St Andrew tone 4: As the first-called Apostle/ and brother of their leader/ entreat the Master of all/ to grant peace to the world, O Andrew,/ and great mercy to our souls.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 3: On this day thou didst rise from the tomb, O Merciful One, / leading us from the gates of death / On this day Adam exults as Eve rejoices. / With the prophets and the patriarchs they unceasingly praise the divine majesty of Thy power.

Kontakion of St Andrew tone 2: Let us praise the divine leader and namesake of courage,/ first-called disciple and Peter's kinsman./ For as of old Christ called to him so he now calls to us:/ Come, we have found the Desired One.

Vespers: I Pet. 1:1-2:6; I Pet. 2:21-3:9; I Pet. 4:1-11

Matins Gospel VI

EPISTLE: ST. PAUL'S Letter To The Colossians 1: 12-18

Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.

AND HE IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY OF THE CHURCH

He who is thus above, and above all, connected Himself with those below. For everywhere He is first; above first; in the Church first, for He is the Head; in the Resurrection first. That is, Ver. 18. "That He might have the pre-Eminence." So that in generation also He is first. And this is what Paul is chiefly endeavoring to show. For if this be made good, that He was before all the Angels; then there is brought in along with it this also as a consequence, that He did their works by commanding them. And what is indeed wonderful, he makes a point to show that He is first in the later generation. Although elsewhere he calls Adam first (1 Cor. xv. 45), as in truth he is; but here he takes the Church for the whole race of mankind. For He is first of the Church; and first of men after the flesh, like as of the Creation.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily III on Colossians. B#57,pp.271

for the Apostle: I Cor. 4:9-16

GOSPEL: ST. LUKE 13: 10-17

Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, "There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day." The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound--think of it--for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

OUGHT NOT THIS WOMAN ...WHOM SATAN HAS BOUND ...

FOR EIGHTEEN YEARS, BE LOOSED FROM THIS BOND ON THE SABBATH?

Mark, I pray, how variously and suitably in each case, He introduces His pleas for the breaking of the sabbath. So first in the case of the blind man, He does not so much as defend Himself to them when He made the clay: and yet then also they were blaming Him. But the manner of the creation was enough to indicate the Lord and Owner of the law. Next, in the case of the paralytic, when he carried his bed, and they were finding fault, He defends Himself, now as God, and now as man, as man, when He says, "If a man on the Sabbath day receives circumcision, that the law should not be broken' ...'are you angry at Me, because I have made a man completely well on the Sabbath day?' (John 7:23). As God again, when He says, 'My Father works hitherto, and I work' (John 5:17). But when blamed for His disciples, He said, 'Have you not read what David did' (Cf Matt. 12-3,4) ...He also brings forward the priests ...

And the other evangelist (Mark) says that He also looked about on them when asking these questions, so by His very eye He might win them over; but not even so did they become better ...None of these things made them meek, rather while the man was healed, they became worse by his health. For His desire was indeed to cure them before him, and He tried innumerable ways of healing, both by the things He did in their presence, and by His words, but since their malady was incurable after all, He proceeded to the work. They had received no injury, yet they went about to slay Him. So great an evil is envy. For it is ever warring, not only against strangers, but even against our own. And Mark says, they took this counsel with the Herodians.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily XL on Matthew XII, 1,2. B#54, pp. 259-260.

for the Apostle: John 1:35-51

Saints of the week

30 November / 13 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Apostle Andrew, the First-Called - He was the son of Jonah and brother of Peter, born in Bethsaida and a fisherman by profession. He was first a disciple of St John the Baptist, but, when John pointed to the Lord Jesus and said: 'Behold the Lamb of God' (Jn. 1:36), St Andrew left his first teacher and followed Christ. After that, Andrew brought his brother Peter to the Lord. After the descent of the Holy Spirit, it fell to the lot of the first of Christ's apostles, St Andrew, to preach the Gospel in Byzantium and Thrace, then in the lands along the Danube, in Russia and around the Black Sea, and finally in Epirus, Greece and the Peloponnese, where he suffered. In Byzantium, he installed St Stachys as its first bishop; in Kiev he raised the Cross on high and prophesied a Christian future for the Russian people; in Thrace, Epirus, Greece and the Peloponnese, he brought many people to the Faith and gave them bishops and priests. In the city of Patras he performed many wonders in the name of Christ and brought many to the Lord, among whom were the brother and wife of the imperial governor, Aegeatus. Aegeatus, infuriated by this, put Andrew to torture and then crucified him. While he was still alive on the cross, the Apostle of Christ taught the Christians who were gathered round him. The people wanted to take him down from the cross, but he would not let them. Finally, the Apostle prayed to God and a strange radiance surrounded him. This light lasted for half an hour and, when it disappeared, the Apostle gave his holy soul into God's hands. Thus the first-called Apostle, who first of the twelve Great Apostles came to know the Lord and followed Him, finished his earthly course. St Andrew suffered for his Lord in the year 62. His relics were translated to Constantinople, but his head was later taken to Rome and one hand to Moscow. In the 3rd century some of his relics were taken by a monk, Regulus, to Scotland and given to Oengus, King of the Picts on the eve of a mighty battle in 747 and that night the king and his army saw a huge St. Andrew's Cross blazed in fire across the face of the heavens; so they went forth to battle and triumphed. After this St. Andrew became the Patron Saint of Scotland. His remains were taken to the ancient Pictish city of Muckcross and deposited there. That city is the modern St. Andrews. St. Frumentius, Enlightener of Abyssinia;

St Tudwal, bishop in Wales & Brittany - A Welsh monk Saint Tudwal (died c. 564) was one of the seven founder Saints of Brittany. He travelled to Ireland to learn the scriptures, then became a hermit on what is now called Saint Tudwal's Island East. St Tudwal later emigrated to Brittany, settling in Lan Pabu with 72 followers, where he established a large monastery. Tudwal was made Bishop of Tréguier on the insistence of Childebert I, king of the Franks. Tudwal is shown in iconography as a bishop holding a dragon.

Tropar of St Tudwal, tone 1: Having left thy native Wales/ thou didst serve God in Brittany, O Father Tudwal,/ and both by thy zealous preaching and thy piety thou didst win souls for Christ./ Wherefore we hasten to thee, O radiant Hierarch,/ that thou wouldst intercede for us that our souls may be saved.

1 / 14 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Prophet Nahum - Born of the tribe of Simeon in a place called Elkosh, on the further side of the Jordan, he lived seven hundred years before Christ and foretold the fall of Nineveh two hundred years after the Prophet Jonah. The people of Nineveh had repented after hearing Jonah's preaching, and God had protected them and not destroyed them. But, with the passage of time, they came to forget God's mercy and turned again to evil. Nahum foretold their doom, warning them that, if they showed no repentance, they would receive no protection. The entire city was so utterly destroyed by earthquake, flood and fire that its location is no longer known. Holy Nahum lived for forty-five years before going to his rest in the Lord, leaving us a small book of his true and genuine prophecies. St. Philaret the Merciful. **2 / 15 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Prophet Habakkuk** - The son of Sapnat, of the tribe of Simeon, he prophesied six hundred years before Christ, in the time of King Manasseh, and foretold the devastation of Jerusalem. When Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem, Habakkuk went into the land of the Ishmaelites, whence he returned to Jerusalem and made his living working on the land. One day, when he was carrying lunch to the workers in the fields, an angel of the Lord

suddenly appeared to him and said: 'Go, carry the meal that thou hast into Babylon, unto Daniel who is in the lion's den.' Habakkuk replied: 'Lord, I never saw Babylon, neither do I know where the den is' (Daniel 14:33 in the Greek text. It is omitted in the Hebrew Bible, and is to be found in the Apocrypha under Bel and the Dragon). Then the angel seized him by the hair and carried him straight to Babylon, over an immense distance, to the lion's den where Daniel had been cast by King Cyrus because he would not worship idols. 'O Daniel, Daniel,' cried Habakkuk, 'take the dinner which God hath sent thee!' And Daniel took it and ate. Then the angel of God again took hold of Habakkuk and carried him back to his field in Judea. Habakkuk preached and prophesied about the liberation of Jerusalem and the coming of Christ. He entered into rest in great old age and was buried at Keilah. His relics were discovered during the reign of Theodosius the Great. The Holy Martyr Myrope; St Uros, King of Serbia; Our Holy Father Athanasius, Recluse of the Kiev Caves; St Jesse.

3 / 16 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Prophet Zephaniah (Sophonias) - Born on the mountain of Savarat and of the tribe of Simeon, he lived and prophesied in the seventh century before Christ, in the time of Josiah the pious King of Judah, and was a contemporary of the Prophet Jeremiah. With his great humility, pure mind and constant striving after God, he was found worthy of seeing into the future. He foretold the day of the wrath of God and the punishment of Gaza, Ashkalon, Ashdod, Ekron, Nineveh, Jerusalem and Egypt. He looked upon Jerusalem as 'a filthy, polluted and oppressing city ... her princes within her are like roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves ... her prophets are light and treacherous persons; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the Law (Zeph. 3:1-4). Foreseeing the coming of the Messiah, he cried out with rapture: 'Sing, O daughter of Sion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all thy heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!' (3:14). This seer of secrets and mysteries went to his rest in the place where he was born, there to await the general Resurrection and his reward from God. St John the Silent (the Hesychast); The Hieromartyr Theodore, Archbishop of Alexandria; Our Holy Father Theodulus; Our Holy Father Sava of Storozhev;

St. Lucius -in the days of Good King Lucius came a revival. Llewrug Mawr, Llewrug the Great (grandson of Saint Cyllinus and great-grandson of Caractacus), nicknamed Lleiver Mawr or the great luminary (hence his latinised name of Lux or Lucius), was king in Britain in the middle and towards the end of the 2nd century. He increased the Light that the first missionaries, the disciples of Christ, had brought, by sending emissaries to Eleutherius, Bishop of Rome, requesting him to send missionaries to Britain. The Welsh Triads tell us that Eleutherius, in response, sent Dyfan and Fagan, Medwy and Elfan, all of them British names, in AD 167. These missionaries journeyed through Britain and came to Glastonbury. There, God leading them (wrote William of Malmesbury), they found an old church built, as 'twas said, by the hands of Christ's disciples, and prepared by God Himself for the salvation of souls, which Church the Heavenly Builder Himself showed to be consecrated by many miraculous deeds, and many Mysteries of healing... And they afterwards pondered the Heavenly message that the Lord had specially chosen this spot before all the rest of Britain as the place where His Mother's name might be invoked. They also found the whole story in ancient writings, how the Holy Apostles, having been scattered throughout the world, St. Philip coming into France with a host of disciples sent twelve of them into Britain to preach, and that there, taught by revelation they constructed the said chapel which the Son of God afterwards dedicated to the honour of His Mother; and, that to these same twelve, three kings, pagan though they were, gave twelve portions of land for their sustenance. Moreover, they found a written record of their doings, and on that account they loved this spot above all others, and they also, in memory of the first twelve, chose twelve of their own, and made them live on the island with the approval of King Lucius. These twelve thereafter abode there in divers spots as anchorites - in the same spots, indeed, which the first twelve inhabited (traditionally in huts round the wonderful Chalice Well at the foot of St. Michael's Tor). Yet they used to meet together continuously in the Old Church in order to celebrate Divine worship more devoutly; just as the three pagan kings had long ago granted the said island with its surroundings to the twelve former disciples of Christ, so the said Phagan and Deruvian (Dyfan) obtained it from King Lucius for these their twelve companions and for others to follow thereafter. And thus, many succeeding these, but always twelve in number, abode in the said island during many years up to the coming of St. Patrick, the apostle of the Irish.

St. Birinus, (600-50) - Ordained in Rome. Bishop in Genoa, Italy. Sent by Pope Honorius I as a missionary to Britain in 634. Preached with the pagan West Saxons where he had great success, converting King Cynegils and many of his subjects. Bishop of Dorchester, England. Founded many churches in the region. Known for a great devotion to the Eucharist.

4 / 17 December — Nativity Fast -The Holy and Great Martyr Barbara - This famous follower of Christ was betrothed to Him from her early years. Her father, Dioscorus, was a pagan in the city of Heliopolis in Egypt, and was famed for his wealth and standing. Dioscorus shut up his only daughter, who was both intelligent and beautiful, in a high tower, surrounded her with all possible comforts, gave her a host of attendants, set up idols for worship and built her a bathroom with two windows. As she gazed through the windows of the tower upon the earth below and the starry sky above, Barbara's mind was opened by the grace of God, and she came to know Him as the one, true God and Creator, although she had no human teacher to bring her to the knowledge of Him. Once, when her father was away from the city, she came out of the tower and, by God's providence, met some Christians who told her about the true Christian faith. Barbara's heart was set on fire with love for Christ. She had a third window cut in the bathroom as a symbol of the Holy Trinity, and traced a Cross with her finger on one wall of it, which etched itself deep in the stone as if cut by a chisel. A spring of water gushed forth from the bathroom floor from her footprint, and it later gave healing from sickness to many. When Dioscorus found out about his daughter's faith, he beat her harshly and drove her from the tower, chasing after her to kill her, but a cliff opened and hid Barbara from her irate father. When she appeared again, Dioscorus took her to Marcian, the governor of the city, who handed her over for torture. The innocent Barbara was stripped and beaten until her entire body was covered in bloody wounds, but the Lord Himself appeared to her in the prison with many angels, and healed her. A certain woman, Juliana, beheld this and conceived a desire for martyrdom herself. Both of them were fearfully tortured and taken around the city to be mocked, then their breasts were cut off and much blood flowed from them. They were finally led out to the place of execution, and Juliana was slain by soldiers while Barbara was killed by her own father. On the same day, lightning struck Dioscorus's house, killing both him and Marcian. St Barbara suffered in 306, and her wonderworking relics are preserved in Kiev. Greatly glorified in the Kingdom of Christ, she has

appeared many times down to our own days, sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of the most holy Mother of God..

St John Damascene - he was first a minister of Caliph Abdul-Malek, and then became a monk in the monastery of St Sava the Sanctified. For his ardent advocacy of the veneration of icons while still a courtier during the reign of the iconoclast Emperor Leo the Isaurian, he was slandered by the Emperor to the Caliph, who had his right hand cut off. John fell down in prayer before the icon of the most holy Mother of God, and his hand was re-joined to his arm and miraculously healed. When he beheld this wonder, the Caliph repented, but John no longer desired to remain at court as a nobleman, but to withdraw to a monastery. There, he was from the beginning a model of humility and obedience, and of all the works of asceticism prescribed for monks. He wrote the hymns for the Parting of the Soul from the Body, put together the Octoechos, the Irmologion, the Menologion and the Easter Canon, and wrote many theological works of an inspired profundity. A great monk, hymnographer and theologian, and a great warrior for the truth of Christ, Damascene is counted among the great Fathers of the Church. He entered peacefully into rest in about 749, being seventy-five years old; St Gennadius, Archbishop of Novgorod.

5 / 18 December — Nativity Fast - Fish, Wine & Oil allowed — Our Holy Father Sabbas the Sanctified - The unknown village of Mutalaska, in the province of Cappadocia, became famous through this great light of the Orthodox Church, for St Sabbas was born there. He left the home of his parents, John and Sophia, at the age of eight and became a monk in a nearby monastery called 'Flavian's'. After ten years, he moved to the monasteries of Palestine, staying longest in the monastery of St Euthymius the Great (Jan. 20th) and Theoctistus. Euthymius, who had the gift of discernment, foretold that he would be a famous monk and leader of monks, and that he would found a monastery that would be greater than any other of that day. After St Euthymius's death, Sabbas went into the desert, where he lived for five years as a hermit in a cave which an angel of God showed him. After that, when he had become a perfected monk, he began by divine providence to gather round him many desirous of the spiritual life. They very quickly grew in number, so that Sabbas had to build both a church and many cells. Some Armenians also came to him, and he set aside a cave for them, and they celebrated the services there in their own language. When his father died, his aged mother Sophia came to him and he made her a nun and gave her a cell away from the monastery, where she lived in asceticism till her death. This holy father endured many attacks from those close to him, from heretics and from demons. But he overcame them all in these ways: those close to him he won over by his goodness and forbearance, the heretics by an unshakeable confession of the Orthodox faith, and the demons with the sign of the Cross and the invocation of God's aid. He had a particularly severe battle with the demons on the mountain of Castellium, where he founded the second of his seven monasteries. He and his neighbour, Theodosius the Great, are considered to be the greatest lights and pillars of Orthodoxy in the East. Kings and Patriarchs were brought to the right Faith by them, and these holy and wonderful men, strong in the power of God, served each and every man as an example of humility. St Sabbas entered into rest in 532 at the age of ninety-four, after a life of great labour and great reward. Our Holy Fathers, the Martyrs of Karyes; Our Holy Father Nectarius of Bitola; Our Holy Fathers Karion and Zachariah;

St. Justinian, hermit of Wales (560) - Breton noble. Well educated. Priest. Left his country to become a travelling evangelist. Settled on the Isle of Ramsey near southern Wales, living with a pious layman named on Honorius; he moved in on the condition that all the women of the household were sent away. Hermit on the island. Visited Saint David of Wales, who was so impressed with the man's holiness that he gave him hermitages on the mainland and a nearby island. Justinian is listed on very ancient Welsh calendars of saints and martyrs, and the church at Llanstinan is dedicated to him. Once some sailors landed at the island hermitage. They said that Saint David was very ill, and that they had been sent to bring Justinian to the mainland. En route, Justinian discerned that the sailors were actually devils in disguise. The saint recited Psalm 79; the devils changed to blackbirds and flew, leaving the boat to sail itself safely to shore where Justinian found David in excellent health. Justinian died when he advised his servants that they should apply themselves to their jobs. Goaded by devils, the three of them became enraged, assaulted Justinian, and beheaded him. At the place where the body fell, a spring of healing water emerged from the ground. The killers were struck with leprosy, and lived out their days in the caves and rocks near the hermitage. Justinian had already specified a location for his burial; a church was built over the tomb, and became known as a scene of miracles. Saint David later moved the body to his own church.

St. Cawrdaf (Cwdrey in English): Cawrdaf is recorded as one of the sons of King Caradog Freichfras. Though the kingdom of the latter appears of have been Gwent & Ergyng, tradition ascribes that he also held sway over areas to the north, between the Wye and the Severn. When his kingdom was divided, upon his death, this region apparently fell to Cawrdaf. It was called Fferreg, though, in later centuries, it was known by the descriptive name of Rhwng Gwy ag Hafren. He was apparently a wise monarch, one of the 'Three Chief Officers' of Britain and counsellor of King Arthur. Nothing is recorded of his reign, but Cawrdaf was a founder of churches, sometimes described as a saint with his feast day on 5th December. His endowments, at Llangowdra (Ceredigion), Abererch (Llyn) and Llangoed (Mon), were, however, not in Fferreg; and it is possible that, in old age, he abdicated in favour of his son, Caw, in order to follow his religious calling. He was supposedly a disciple of St. Illtud. Cawrdaf had several saintly children and though it is unknown how long his descendants remained Kings of Fferreg, they continued for many centuries as two of the leading patriarchal families of Brycheiniog.

Tropar of St. Cawrdaf, Tone 8: O Father Cawrdaf, spurning the transitory glory of temporal power,/ thou didst flee from the world to serve God in monastic seclusion./ Wherefore, O righteous one, pray that we, following thy example by serving God rather than self,/ may be found worthy of eternal salvation.

6 / 19 December — Nativity Fast — St Nicolas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia -- This saint, famed throughout the entire world today, was the only son of his eminent and wealthy parents, Theophanes and Nona, citizens of Patara in Lycia. They dedicated to God the only son He gave them. St Nicolas was instructed in the spiritual life by his uncle Nicolas, Bishop of Patara, and became a monk at 'New Sion', a monastery founded by his uncle. On the death of his parents, Nicolas distributed all the property he inherited to the poor and kept nothing back for himself. As a priest in Patara, he was

known for his charitable works, fulfilling the Lord's words: 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth' (Matt. 6:3). When he embraced a life of solitude and silence, thinking to live in that way until his death, a voice from on high came to him: 'Nicolas, set about your work among the people if you desire to receive a crown from Me.' Immediately after that, by God's wondrous providence, he was chosen as archbishop of the city of Myra in Lycia. Merciful, wise and fearless, Nicolas was a true shepherd to his flock. He was cast into prison during the persecutions of Diocletian and Maximian, but even there continued to instruct the people in the Law of God. He was present at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325, and, in his zeal, struck Arius with his hand. For this act, he was removed from the Council and from his episcopal duties, until some of the chief hierarchs had a vision of our Lord Christ and His most holy Mother showing their sympathy with Nicolas. This wonderful saint was a defender of the truth of God, and was ever a spirited champion of justice among the people. On two occasions, he saved three men from undeserved sentences of death. Merciful, trustworthy and loving right, he walked among the people like an angel of God. People considered him a saint even during his lifetime, and invoked his aid when in torment or distress. He would appear both in dreams and in reality to those who called upon him for help, responding speedily to them, whether close at hand or far away. His face would shine with light as Moses' did aforesaid, and his mere presence among people would bring solace, peace and goodwill. In old age, he sickened of a slight illness, and went to his rest in the Lord after a life full of labour and fruitful toil. He now enjoys eternal happiness in the Kingdom of heaven, continuing to help the faithful on earth by his miracles, and to spread the glory of God. He entered into rest on December 6th, 343. St Nicolas, Bishop of Patara - The uncle of the great St Nicolas, he set his nephew on the spiritual path and ordained him priest; The Holy Martyr Nicolas of Karamanos; St Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch; On icons of St. Nicolas, our Lord and Saviour will often be seen on one side with the Gospels in his hand, and the most holy Mother of God on the other with an episcopal stole in hers. This has a twofold historical significance: it denotes firstly, Nicolas's calling to episcopal office, and secondly his vindication and re-instatement following the punishment for his clash with Arius. That very night, several of the fathers had the selfsame vision: how the Lord stood on one side of Nicolas with the Gospels and the Mother of God on the other with a pallium, offering to the saint those marks of rank that had been stripped from him. Seeing this, the fathers were amazed, and quickly returned to Nicolas that which they had taken from him. They began from that time to respect him as a great man, and to interpret his action against Arius not as some senseless rage but as the expression of great zeal for God's truth. Name Day Tsar Nicholas II (1918).

REFLECTION

St. John Chrysostom says: "All is given to the Apostles." That is, all gifts, all power, all the fullness of grace which God gives to the faithful. We see this in the life of the great apostle, St. Andrew the First-called: He was an apostle, evangelist, prophet, pastor and teacher (Ephesians 4:11). As an evangelist, he carried the good news of the Gospel to the four corners of the earth; as a prophet, he prophesied the baptism of the Russian people and the greatness of Kiev as a city and a Christian centre; as a pastor, he established and organized many churches; as a teacher, he tirelessly taught people right up to and during his crucifixion, when he taught from the cross until his last breath. In addition to this, he was a martyr, which is also according to the gift of the Holy Spirit, and is not given to everyone. And so we see in this apostle, as in the others, the fullness of the grace of the Spirit of God. And every great work that a follower of Christ performs must be ascribed to that grace. St. Frumentius testifies this to us. When he returned from Alexandria to Abyssinia as a consecrated bishop, he began to perform the greatest miracles, thus converting great masses of people to the Faith. Then the amazed king asked him: "So many years have you lived among us and never have we seen you perform such miracles. How is it that you do so now?" To this, the Blessed Frumentius replied to the emperor: "This is not my work, but the work of the grace of the priesthood." The saint then explained to the king how he had forsaken parents and marriage and the whole world for the sake of Christ, and how he had-by the laying on of hands by St. Athanasius-received the grace of the priesthood: miracle-working grace.

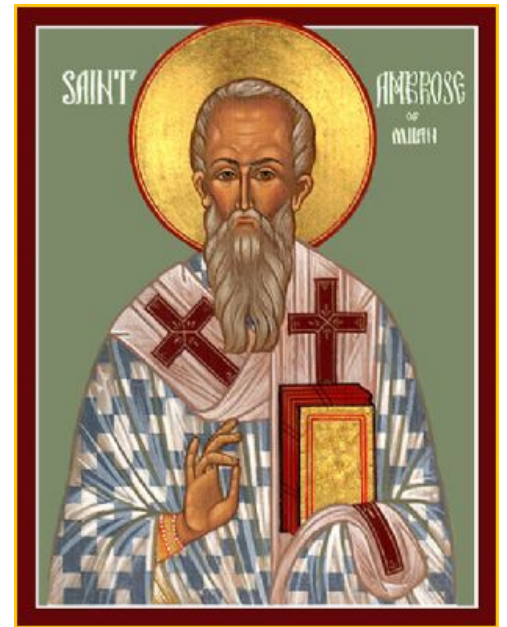
CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the spiritual fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3): 1. How the serpent provoked greed and pride in Eve; 2. How the greedy and proud woman transgressed God's command and ate of the Tree of Knowledge; 3. How Eve sinned, not in the midst of poverty or need, but in an abundance of all things.

29th Sunday After Pentecost

St Ambrose of Milan

7 / 20 December 2015



Resurrection Tropar, Tone 4: When the women disciples of the Lord / learned from the Angel the joyous message of Thy Resurrection / they cast away the ancestral curse / and elatedly told the Apostles / death is overcome / Christ God is risen / granting the world great mercy.

Troparion of St Ambrose tone 1: O Ambrose, wonderworker and champion of the Church, / Godbearing Hierarchy; / thou didst work miracles by thy faith and love for God; / therefore we the earthborn glorify thee and cry out; / Glory to Him Who has glorified thee; glory to Him Who has crowned thee; / glory to Him Who through thee works healings for all.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 4: My Saviour and Redeemer / as God rose from the tomb and delivered the earth-born from their chains / He has shattered the gates of hell, / and as Master, / He has risen on the third day.

Kontakion of St Ambrose tone 3: Thou didst shine with divine doctrine / and blacken the error of Arius; / working miracles in the power of the Spirit / thou didst heal various passions. / O Ambrose, shepherd and teacher, pray to Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.

Matins Gospel VII

EPISTLE: ST. PAUL'S Letter to the Colossians 3: 12-16

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

AS THE ELECT OF GOD... PUT ON TENDER MERCIES, KINDNESS, HUMBLENESS OF MIND, MEEKNESS, LONGSUFFERING... AND ABOVE ALL LOVE

Ever let mercy outweigh all else in you. Let our compassion be a mirror where we may see into ourselves that likeness and that true image which belong to Divine nature and Divine essence. A heart hard and unmerciful will never be pure.

St. Isaac of Syria, Directions on Spiritual Teaching. B#8.

GOSPEL: ST. LUKE 17: 12-19

Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

THE BLIND MAN HEALED NEAR JERICHO

The lepers then having met the Saviour, earnestly besought Him to free them from their misery, and called Him Master, that is, Teacher. No one pitied them when suffering this malady: but He Who had appeared on earth for this very reason, and had become man that He might show pity unto all, He was moved with compassion for them, and had mercy upon them. And why did He not rather say, "I will, be ye cleansed;" as he did in the case of another leper; but commanded them rather to show themselves unto the priests? It was because the law gave directions to this effect to those who were delivered from leprosy: for it commanded them to show themselves to the priests, and to offer a sacrifice for their cleansing. He commanded them therefore to go, as being already healed, and, that they might, so to speak, bear witness to the priests, as the rulers of the Jews, and ever envious of His glory, that wonderfully, and beyond their hope, they had been delivered from their misfortune by Christ's willing that they should be healed. The nine then, as being Jews, falling into a thankless forgetfulness, did not return to give glory to God: by which He shows that Israel was hard of heart, and utterly unthankful: but the stranger, for as being a Samaritan he was of foreign race, having been brought thither from Assyria: for the phrase is not without meaning, in the middle of Samaria and Galilee: "returned with a loud voice to glorify God. It shows therefore that the Samaritans were grateful, but that the Jews, even when benefited, were ungrateful.

Saints of the week

7 / 20 December — Nativity Fast — St Ambrose, Bishop of Mediolanum (Milan) - This great Father of the Orthodox Church was of eminent parentage. His father was the imperial governor of Gaul and Spain, and a pagan, while his mother was a Christian. While he was still in his cradle, a swarm of bees once settled on him, left some honey on his lips and flew off; and, while still a child, he thrust out his hand and said prophetically: 'Kiss it, for I shall be a bishop!' On the death of his father, the Emperor made him governor of Liguria, of which province Milan was the chief city. When the bishop of Milan died, there was great dissention between the Orthodox Christians and the heretical Arians about the choice of a new bishop. Ambrose went into the church to keep order, this being his responsibility. Thereupon, a child at its mother's breast cried out: 'Ambrose for bishop!' All the people took this to be the voice of God, and unanimously elected Ambrose as their bishop, although it was against his will. Ambrose was baptised, and passed through all the necessary ranks in one week, and was consecrated bishop. In this capacity, he strengthened the faith of the Orthodox, restrained heretics, adorned churches, spread the Faith among the pagans, wrote many instructive books and was an example of a true Christian and a true shepherd. He also composed the *Te Deum*, the great hymn of thanksgiving. This renowned hierarch, who was visited by people from distant lands for his wisdom and gracious words, was very austere in his personal life, being no stranger to toil and full of good works. He slept little, worked and prayed constantly and fasted every day except Saturday and Sunday. God therefore permitted him to witness many of His wonders, and to perform many himself. He discovered the relics of Ss Protasius, Gervasius, Nazarius and Celsus. Humble before lesser men, he was fearless before the great. He reproached the Empress Justina for heresy, cursed Maximus for tyranny and murder and forbade the Emperor Theodosius to enter a church until he had repented of his sin. He refused to meet the powerful Eugenius, the self-styled Emperor. God granted this man, who was so pleasing to Him, such grace that he could raise the dead, drive demons from men, heal the sick of every ailment and see into the future. He died peacefully at daybreak on Easter Day in the year 397; Our Holy Father Gregory the Hesychast; Our Holy Father Nilus of Stolobnoye.

8 / 21 December — Nativity Fast — Our Holy Father Patapius - born and brought up in the Faith and in the fear of God by pious parents in the Egyptian city of Thebes he early perceived and rejected the empty vanity of the world and went into the Egyptian desert, where he devoted himself to cleansing his heart from every worldly thought and desire for the sake of divine love. When his virtues became known among the people, they began to come to him and seek relief from their troubles. Afraid of human glory, which darkens a man's mind and separates it from God, Patapius fled from the desert to Constantinople, for this wonderful saint thought that he could more easily hide himself from men in the heart of a city than in the desert. He built himself a hut close to the Blachernae church and there, enclosed and unknown, took up again his interrupted life of asceticism. But the light cannot be hidden. A child, blind from birth, was led by divine Providence to St Patapius and begged him to offer a prayer that he might be given his sight and look upon God's creation, and praise God all the more. Patapius had pity on the suffering child and prayed to God, and the child saw. Through this miracle, Patapius's godly life became known throughout the entire capital, and people began to turn to him for healing, comfort and teaching. Patapius healed one eminent man of dropsy after blessing him with a cross and anointing him with oil. Making the sign of the Cross in the air, he freed a youth from an unclean spirit which had cruelly tormented him, and the evil spirit went out of God's creature like smoke, uttering a great cry. He made the sign of the Cross over a woman who had sores on her breasts all filled with worms, and she was healed. St Patapius worked many other miracles, all through prayer in the name of Christ and by the power of the Cross. He entered into rest in great old age, going to the Kingdom of God in the seventh century; The Holy Apostles Sosthenes, Apollos, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, Onesiphorus, Cephas and Caesar; The Holy Martyrs in Africa;

St. Budoc, bishop of Plourin - from an early age resolved to embrace the religious life, and was in due course made a monk by the Abbot of Youghal. His mother died, and on the death of the Abbot of Youghal he was elected to rule the monastery. Later, upon the death of the King of Ireland, the natives raised Budoc to the temporal and spiritual thrones making him King of Ireland and Bishop of Armagh. After two years he wished to retire from these honours, but the people were "wild with despair" at the tidings, and surrounded the palace lest he should escape. One night, while praying in his metropolitan church, an angel appeared to him, bidding him betake himself to Brittany. Going down to the seashore, it was indicated to him that he must make the voyage in a stone trough. On entering this it began to move, and he was borne across to Brittany, landing at Porspoder, in the diocese of Léon. The people of that district drew the stone coffer out of the water, and built a hermitage and a chapel for the Saint's convenience. Budoc dwelt for one year at Porspoder, but, "disliking the roar of the waves," he had his stone trough mounted on a cart, and yoking two oxen to it he set forth, resolved to follow them wherever they might go and establish himself at whatever place they might halt. The cart broke down at Plourin, and there Budoc settled for a short time; but trouble with disorderly nobles forced him to depart, and this time he went to Dol, where he was well received by St Malglorious, then its bishop, who soon after resigned his see to Budoc. The Saint ruled at Dol for twenty years, and died early in the seventh century.

9 / 22 December — Nativity Fast — The Conception by St Anna of the Most Holy Mother of God - St Joachim was of the tribe of Judah, and a descendant of King David. Anna was the daughter of Matthan the priest, of the tribe of Levi as was Aaron the High Priest. This Matthan had three daughters: Mary, Zoia and Anna. Mary was married in Bethlehem and bore Salome; Zoia was also married in Bethlehem and bore Elisabeth, the mother of St John the Forerunner; and Anna was married in Nazareth to Joachim, and in old age gave birth to Mary, the most holy Mother of God. Joachim and Anna had been married for fifty years, and were barren. They lived devoutly and quietly, using only a third of their income for themselves and giving a third to the poor and a third to the Temple, and they were well provided for. Once, when they were already old and were in Jerusalem to offer sacrifice to God, the High Priest, Issachar, upbraided Joachim: 'You are not worthy to offer sacrifice with those childless hands.' Others who had children jostled Joachim, thrusting him back as unworthy. This caused great grief to

the two aged souls, and they went home with very heavy hearts. Then the two of them gave themselves to prayer to God that He would work in them the wonder that He had worked in Abraham and Sarah, and give them a child to comfort their old age. God sent them His angel, Gabriel, who appeared to each of them separately and told them that God had heard their prayer and that a daughter would be born to them. St. Anna conceived at once, and in the ninth month gave birth to the holy Virgin Mary who was blessed by God and all generations of men.

Tropar of the Conception by St. Anna of the Most Holy Theotokos, Tone 4: Today, the bonds of barrenness are loosed, / for God, hearkening unto Joachim and Anna, / doth manifestly promise them that they will, / beyond all expectation, / give birth to the divine Maiden, / from whom The Infinite One Himself, / becoming man, shall be born. / And He commandeth the angels to cry unto her: / Rejoice thou who art full of grace, // the Lord is with thee! Kondak of the Conception by St. Anna of the Most Holy Theotokos, Tone 4 (Special Melody): Today the whole world doth celebrate / Anna's conceiving, / which was brought about by God; / for she gave birth unto her // who ineffably gave birth unto The Word.

St Hannah, Mother of the Prophet Samuel; Our Holy Father Stephen the New Light; St Sophronius, Archbishop of Cyprus; St. Diuma, bishop of the Mercians and Middle Angles – an Irishman and companion of St. Cedd

10 / 23 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Martyrs Menas, Hermogenes and Eucarpus - Both Menas and Hermogenes were born in Athens. They both lived in Constantinople, where they enjoyed the high favour of the Emperor and the honour of the people. Menas was known for his great learning and gift of speech and, although he acted outwardly as a pagan, he was in his heart a convinced Christian. Hermogenes was Eparch of Constantinople, and was a pagan through and through. He was, however, a merciful man and performed many good deeds. When dissention broke out between the Christians and the pagans in the city of Alexandria, the Emperor Maximian (285- 305) sent Menas to calm the turmoil and drive the Christians from the city. Menas went and restored peace, but he also declared himself to be a Christian and brought many of the pagans to the true Faith by the power of his words and the witness of his many miracles. When the Emperor heard this, he sent Hermogenes to punish Menas and to liquidate the Christians. Hermogenes brought Menas to trial, and he cut off his feet and his tongue, gouged out his eyes and then threw him into prison. The Lord Jesus himself appeared to him there, to heal and console His suffering servant. When he saw Menas miraculously healed, Hermogenes was baptised and began to preach the mighty Faith of Christ, being made Bishop of Alexandria. Then the furious Emperor Maximian came himself to Alexandria and put Menas and Hermogenes to harsh torture, which they endured courageously with the help of God's grace. Beholding the fortitude of these soldiers of Christ and the miracles God wrought upon them, Eucarpus, Menas's secretary, went into the judgement-hall and shouted to the Emperor's face: 'I too am a Christian!' The Emperor flew into a rage, took a sword and beheaded Eucarpus himself, and then he commanded the executioner to behead Menas and Hermogenes. Their holy relics, thrown into the sea, floated in a miraculous way to Constantinople, where the bishop, forewarned in a dream, met them with great ceremony and buried them with honour; Our Holy Mother Angelina and St John the Despot; The Holy Martyr Gemellus; Our Holy Father Thomas of Bithynia.

11 / 24 December — Nativity Fast — Our Holy Father Daniel the Stylite - Born in the village of Maroutha, near the city of Samosata in Mesopotamia, of Christian parents, Elias and Martha, he was a gift of God through the tearful prayers of his mother, who was barren, and was dedicated to God in his youth. He embraced the monastic state at the age of twelve and visited Simeon Stylites, receiving his blessing. Desirous of solitude, Daniel left his monastery and withdrew to an abandoned pagan temple on the shore of the Black Sea. He endured many assaults from demons, but overcame them all by prayer, endurance and the sign of the Cross. After that, he climbed up onto a pillar, where he remained till his death, enduring with equanimity both heat and cold, and attacks from both men and demons. Many disciples gathered around his pillar, and he led them towards eternal life by his example and his words. God rewarded His devoted servant with great grace in this life, and he worked many miracles of help to men, and foretold future events. People came to his pillar from all parts, seeking help and advice from the saint of God. Kings and patriarchs came to him, as well as simple folk. The Emperor Leo the Great used to bring his foreign guests, princes and nobles, and show them Daniel on his pillar: 'Here is the wonder of my empire!' Daniel foretold the day of his own death, taught his disciples as a father would his children, and took leave of them. At the time of his death, his disciples saw angels, prophets, apostles and martyrs around the pillar. Having lived in asceticism for eighty years, this angelic man entered into rest, and into the Kingdom of Christ in 489; Our Holy Father Luke the Stylite; Our Holy Father Nikon the Withered; The Holy Martyr Meirax.

12 / 25 December — Nativity Fast — St Herman, Wonderworker of Alaska - at an early age entered the Holy Trinity Sergius Hermitage near the Gulf of Finland, where he was miraculously healed of a dangerous carbuncle by the Mother of God. He later moved to Valaam Monastery, which he greatly loved all his life. He was one of the ten monks selected by Abbot Nazarius for missionary travel to the far reaches of Russia - that part which is now Alaska. A church and school were founded and many adults and children baptised. Over the years the mission was reduced to St. Herman alone. He then chose Spruce Island as the place for his seclusion and monastic labour, naming it 'New Valaam'. He travelled at times to speak to others of Christ's boundless love for man and how one should love God. Before his repose in 1836, he attained such a degree of holiness that he was granted the gifts of miracle working and prophecy. He is a great benefactor to all those who thirst for their eternal heavenly homeland.

St Spiridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus - The island of Cyprus was both the birthplace of this famous saint, and the place in which he spent his life in the service of the Church. He was of simple farming stock, and remained simple and humble to the end of his days. He married young and had children, but, when his wife died, he devoted himself entirely to the service of God. He was chosen for his devotion as Bishop of Tremithus, and even as a bishop did not change his simple style of life, taking charge of his cattle himself and tilling his own land. He consumed very little of his own produce, giving the greater

part to the poor. He performed great wonders by God's power, making rain fall in a drought, stopping the course of a river, raising several of the dead, healing the Emperor Constans of a grave sickness, seeing and hearing angels, foreseeing future events and penetrating the secrets of the human heart. He turned many to the true Faith, and did much else. He was present at the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325, and, by his simple and clear expositions of the Faith, as well as by convincing miracles, brought back many heretics to Orthodoxy. He dressed so simply that once, when he was invited by the Emperor to the imperial court, a soldier took him for a beggar and struck him a blow. The meek and guileless Spiridon turned him the other cheek. He glorified God with many miracles, and was of great aid both to individuals and to the whole Church of God. He entered into rest in the Lord in 348, and his wonderworking relics now lie on the island of Corfu and continue to glorify God with many wonders; Synaxis of the first martyrs of the American land: Hieromartyr Juvenal, Peter the Aleut, and Russian New Martyrs Anatole (Kamensky) of Irkutsk and Seraphim (Samoilovich) of Uglich and priest John (Kochurov) of Chicago and Alexander (Khotovitsky) of New York;

The Hieromartyr Alexander, Bishop of Jerusalem; The Holy Martyr Synesius;

St. Finnian of Clonard, founder of Skelling Michael, Ireland (549) whose tropar in Tone 8 is: Truly thou art the "Tutor of the Saints of Ireland", / O Founder of Clonard, great Father Finnian. / As thou didst tirelessly teach the faith in thy native land, / so teach us to follow thy example that many may come to know Christ / and be led into the Way of Salvation; Born c.470 at Myshall, County Carlow, Ireland A pious youth, he founded three churches in Ireland while still a layman. Studied in Wales under Saint Cadoc and Saint Gildas. Monk. Great admirer of Saint Patrick. Considered one of the great founders of Irish monasticism. Founded the monastery at Clonard, Meath, Ireland c.520 which lasted a thousand years, and was a training centre for great Irish saints. Spiritual teacher of Saint Columba of Iona, Saint Columba of Terryglass, Saint Ciaran of Clommacnois, Saint Brendan the Voyager, Saint Nathy, Saint Nennius and others. Maintained close relations with the British Church. Often referred to as a bishop, there is no evidence he was ever so consecrated. Many miracles are attributed to him. Birds would gather around him because of his gentle holiness. Reported to have cleared parasitic insects, worms and vermin from the island of Flathlom and the regions of Nantcarfan. One report says that he fended off a party of Saxon raiders by causing an earthquake to swallow their camp. Died c.549-552 at Clonard, Meath, Ireland of plague; relics originally enshrined in Clonard, but were destroyed in the 9th century

St. Colman of Glendalough, Ireland (659) whose Tropar in Tone 8 is: Giving thy life to Christ in monastic poverty, / thou didst teach us a God-pleasing set of values, O Father Colman. / Wherefore intercede with Christ our God that He will instil in us constancy of faith, patience in trials and freedom from worldliness / that we may be found worthy of His great mercy.

St. Columba of Leinster whose Tropar in Tone 8 is: O pious Columba, as a disciple of our Father Finnian and a renowned struggler, / thou didst shine forth in the ascetic life. / O Ireland's treasure, cease not to pray for those who labour, / weeping and repenting, for the salvation of their souls.

13 / 26 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Martyrs Eustratius, Auxentius, Eugene, Mardarius and Orestes - These five courageous men shone like five resplendent stars in the dark days of the anti-Christian Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. St Eustratius was a Roman general in the city of Satalios, Eugene was one of his comrades in arms and Orestes likewise a respected soldier. Auxentius was a priest and Mardarius a simple citizen who came, like Eustratius, from the town of Aravraca. The imperial governors, Lycias and Agricola, tortured Auxentius first as he was a priest. Beholding the innocent suffering of the Christians, Eustratius presented himself before Lycias and declared that he also was a Christian. While Eustratius was being tortured, Eugene stood up before the judge and cried out: 'I am a Christian too, Lycias!' When they were driving Eustratius and the other martyrs through the town, Mardarius saw them from the roof of his house, and he took leave of his wife and two frail daughters and hastened after them, shouting into the faces of their tormentors: 'I am a Christian too, like the Lord Eustratius!' Orestes was a young and handsome soldier, who stood head and shoulders above all the other soldiers. One day, when he was at target practice in Lycias's presence, the Cross he was wearing fell from his breast, and Lycias realised that he was a Christian. Orestes openly confessed his faith, and was martyred with the others. Auxentius was beheaded, Eugene and Mardarius died under torture, Orestes was exposed on a red-hot iron grid and Eustratius died in a flaming furnace. St Blaise gave Communion to St Eustratius in prison before his death. Their relics were later taken to Constantinople, and are preserved in the church dedicated to them—The Holy Five Companions. They were seen alive in that church, and St Orestes appeared to St Dimitri of Rostov. A beautiful prayer by St Eustratius is extant, which is read at the Midnight Service on Saturdays: 'I glorify Thy majesty, O Lord for Thou hast regarded my lowliness and hast not shut me up in the hands of my enemies, but hast saved my soul from want ...'. The Holy Martyr Lucy the Virgin; The Hieromartyr Gavrilo, Patriarch of Serbia; St. Odilia, virgin of Alsace, France (720);

St. Judoc, hermit of Ponthieu - (Died AD 675) (*Welsh: Iudog; Latin: Iudocus; English: Joyce*). Prince Judoc (or Josse, as he was commonly called) was educated at the monastery of San Maelmon. On the abdication of his brother, Prince Judicael of Domnonee, around 636, Judoc immediately ascended the Domnonian throne. He asked for eight days to consider his position, but decided he too preferred the religious life and fled to Ponthieu where he became chaplain to the local Count. Judoc later retired from the World to Ray where he set up a small hermitage. Unfortunately, the locals took to worrying him for miracle cures and he was forced to move to Caer-Runiac (Saint-Josse-sur-Mer) to escape them. He lived there thirteen years, and then in the Valley of Pidrague before travelling on a pilgrimage to Rome. Judoc died some time after his return, on 13th December 675. St. Judoc's bones were enshrined at Saint-Josse, before being taken to Winchester New Minster in 902 by some refugee monks. Hence his popularity in England.



30th Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and Holy Prophet Daniel and the Three Youths

14 / 27 December 2015

"This the second Sunday before Christmas - it calls to remembrance the ancestors of Christ according to the flesh, whether before or under the Law. The Sunday that follows is still broader in scope, commemorating all the righteous men and women who pleased God from the beginning of time, from the days of Adam the first man down to Joseph, the betrothed of the Mother of God. Approaching Christmas in this way, the worshipper is enabled to see the Incarnation, not as an abrupt and irrational intervention of the divine, but as the culmination of a long process extending over thousands of years." - the Festal Menaion.

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 5: Let us, the faithful; praise and worship the Word, / Co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, / born for our salvation from the Virgin; / for He willed to be lifted up on the cross in the flesh, / to endure death, / and to raise the dead / by His glorious Resurrection!

Tropar of the Holy Fathers, Tone 4: Daniel, the man of divine desires, seeing Thee, the Stone uncut by human hands, O Lord, prophetically called Thee a babe born without seed, the Word incarnate of the Virgin, the immaculate God, the Saviour of our souls.

Troparion of the Holy Prophet Daniel and the Three Children tone 2: Great are the achievements of faith: / In the fountain of flame, as in refreshing water, the Three Holy Children rejoiced. / And the Prophet Daniel proved a shepherd of lions as of sheep. / By their prayers, O Christ our God, save our souls.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 5: Thou didst descend into hell, O my Saviour, / shattering its gates as Almighty, / resurrecting the dead as Creator, / and destroying the sting of death. / Thou hadst delivered Adam from the curse, O Lover of Man, / and we cry to Thee, O Lord, save us.

Kondak of the Holy Fathers, Tone 6: O thrice-blessed ones, who did not honour an image wrought by hands, but were defended by the indescribable Essence, ye were glorified in your ordeal by fire; and, standing in the midst of unbearable flame, ye called upon God, saying: Make speed and haste Thou to help us, O Compassionate One, in that Thou art merciful; who what Thou wiltest, Thou canst do!

Kontakion of the Prophet Daniel tone 3: When thy pure heart was purged by the Spirit / thou didst become a vessel of clear prophecy; / for thou seest things afar off as though they were close at hand. / Thou didst tame the lions when thou wast cast into their den. / Therefore we honour thee, O blessed Prophet, glorious Daniel.

Kontakion of the Three Children in Babylon tone 2: An image made with hands you would not worship, O thrice blessed three; / but protected by the ineffable Essence you were glorified in your ordeal by fire. / From the midst of the devouring flames you called upon God, / crying: Hasten, O compassionate One, / in Thy mercy come to our aid, for if Thou wiltest Thou canst.

Matins Gospel VIII

Epistle: Colossians 3: 4-11

When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, In which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

DO NOT LIE TO ONE ANOTHER, SINCE YOU HAVE PUT OFF THE OLD MAN WITH HIS DEEDS

You shall destroy all those who utter a lie (Ps. 5:7). The mouth that speaks a lie will slay the soul (Wis. 1:11). Forasmuch as all sins arise through a love of pleasure or avarice or vainglory, we can say that lying has its roots in these three vices: a man has to avoid blame and humiliation to fulfil his own desires or to gain something ...And in the end no one believes him when he speaks the truth ...A man whose very life is a lie is one who is licentious and pretends to be temperate, or a miser and speaks of almsgiving and compassion, or ostentatious and goes in raptures over poverty, not wanting to acquire the virtue he praises ...'the devil changes himself into an angel of light' (II Cor.11:14) ...the man whose very life is a lie: he is not a simple but a two-faced man; he is one thing on the inside and another on the outside.

GOSPEL: ST. LUKE 14: 16-24

Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, And sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.' "

Sunday of the Forefathers.

'Many are called but few are chosen'. So says Christ in today's Gospel. If we think of the knowledge of God conserved among different peoples in the world before Christ, these words have a special significance.

Some peoples conserved a dim memory of events of the human past. In Australia the Aborigines kept a vague memory of how God created the world perfect, which they call the 'Dreamtime'.

All over the world, from Asia to South America, some 120 different peoples and cultures have kept the memory of a great, universal flood, which is known to us in detail through Noah.

In India the Hindus long ago kept an intuition of a Trinitarian God, but among them their knowledge of God became so twisted that their trinity is a trinity of destructive gods.

Other peoples fell even further and began worshipping stones and trees, rivers and mountains, mistaking creation for the Creator. For instance, in this country, thousands of years before Christ, the 'cleverest' people, not unlike some today, worshipped the stars, as we can see from the great astronomical monument that they built and called Stonehenge. At that time in Egypt too the cleverest people built huge Pyramids to worship the Sun, and through which they believed that their leaders, the Pharaohs, would become stars.

Other peoples altogether gave up on ever knowing God and declared that the way ahead consisted in following the wisest men of their cultures, Buddha in India, or Confucius in China.

In Ancient Greece, the wisest men declared that men could never know God unless God first revealed Himself to man and in Athens they set up an altar to 'the Unknown God'.

Many were called but few were chosen, for among all these peoples and cultures, there were representatives of one people who conserved the true history of mankind. This people were the Jews, the ancient Hebrews, the chosen people, and today we commemorate all the righteous among them, our forefathers and foremothers in the Faith. From Adam and Eve on, there were among that people righteous and holy men and women. In their lives they prefigured the life of Christ and foresaw Christ.

Abel, who was murdered by his brother Cain, is a prefiguration of Christ, who was also murdered by men.

Melchizedek the priest is the prefiguration of Christ the High Priest.

Enoch and Elijah, who were taken up to heaven, prefigure Christ Who was also taken up to heaven.

Noah, whose family alone survived the Flood, is a prefiguration of the baptism of purification given to us by Christ.

Job the long-suffering prefigures the longsuffering of Christ.

Abraham, who was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac, prefigures the sacrifice that God the Father made with His Son.

Jacob prefigures Christ, for he saw the ladder that connects earth to heaven, enabling heaven to come down to earth and earth to rise up to heaven.

Joseph, who was betrayed by his twelve brothers, prefigures Christ who was betrayed by His disciples.

Moses, the leader of his people, who was given the great revelation of the Ten Commandments, unsurpassed until Christ gave us the Beatitudes, prefigures Christ, for Moses saw the burning bush unconsumed, which is the Virgin's womb, which was unconsumed by the fire of Christ.

Joshua, whose name is the same as Christ's, that is Jesus, the Saviour, prefigures Jesus the Deliverer of His people.

David, related by blood to Christ, saw Christ in the Psalms which he wrote down.

Solomon expressed the Wisdom of God in his Books of Wisdom.

The Prophet Daniel saw the Holy Trinity through the Three Holy Youths in the furnace of Babylon.

The Prophet Isaiah saw Christ the suffering Servant.

The Prophet Jonah prefigures the three-day burial of Christ through his three-day stay in the belly of the whale.

All these holy forefathers together with our holy foremothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Ruth, Deborah and many, many more, whose icons are all on the back wall of our church, which is devoted to the righteous of the Old Testament, all these we commemorate today. All these are in fact our spiritual family, for they saw, long before we were born, the One Whom we confess, Christ our true God Who is Risen from the dead.

Let us in these last few days before the celebration of the Birth of the Saviour on earth, read one, or at least one part, of their writings, for example, in the Book of Genesis, the Book of Exodus, the Book of Proverbs, or simply the Psalms, and let us renew our links with our ancestors in the Orthodox Faith.

Holy Forefathers and Foremothers of Christ, pray to God for us!

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From this Sunday of the Holy Forefathers begins a new cycle of preparation for the Birth of Christ. This is the beginning of a new life. From the manger, the light of Christ will shine on us. And in this light will be the warmth of our adoption by God. At the manger we will feel like one family.

Something wonderful happens every year at the manger of Christ. We all begin to feel like brothers and sisters, children of one Father. And these are not just words, but reality. Love becomes manifest. There is a desire to gladden one another, to help, and to love.

And again this year, from the manger of Christ our new ways will begin: family, monastic, social, domestic, business. But all of them will guide us to one goal—to the Kingdom of God, to communion with God, to the Lord's Feast.

So let us not forget our dignity, our calling, that we are invited to the Lord's Feast. And let us spend our temporary life as pilgrims, proceeding on the paths that will bring us to the Heavenly Jerusalem, where there will be "the ceaseless sound of those keeping festival." And then we will become not only those who are called, but those who are chosen. (Mt. 22:14)

Archbishop Alexei - The One Thing Needful,

Saints of the week

14 / 27 December — Nativity Fast - The Holy Martyrs Thyrsus, Leucius and Callinicus - Saints Thyrsus and Leucius were eminent citizens of Bithynian Caesarea; the latter being baptised and the former still a catechumen. Callinicus, however, was a pagan priest who offered sacrifice to idols. When Cumbricius, heir to the Emperor Decius, began to torture and murder the Christians, the intrepid Leucius stood before him and reproached him: 'Why have you begun to make war on your own soul, Cumbricius?' The enraged judge ordered that he be flogged and tortured, and then beheaded with the sword. In terrible torment, Leucius went to his execution as joyfully as if he were going to a wedding. When he beheld Leucius's courageous death, blessed Thyrsus was inflamed with divine zeal and, like Leucius, went before the judge and rebuked him for his crimes and his lack of belief in the one, true God. He was therefore beaten and cast into prison. He was healed of his wounds by the invisible hand of God, which also opened the prison doors and led him forth. Thyrsus went at once to Phileas, the Bishop of Caesarea, to be baptised by him. After his baptism, he was again seized and tortured, but he endured all the torments as if in a dream and not in reality. Many idols fell down through the power of his prayer. When he saw this, Callinicus, a pagan priest, was converted to the Christian faith, so both he and Thyrsus were condemned to death. Callinicus was beheaded with the sword, and Thyrsus was placed in a wooden coffin to be sawn asunder, but God's power prevented this and the saw could not penetrate the wood. Then Thyrsus arose from the coffin, praying and thanking God for his sufferings, and he peacefully gave his soul into the Lord's hands. At the end of the fourth century, the Emperor Flavian built a church to St Thyrsus near Constantinople, and placed his holy relics in it. The saint appeared in a vision to the Empress Pulcheria, and suggested that she bury the relics of the Forty Martyrs beside his own. The Holy Martyrs Philemon, Apollonius, Arrian and others; St. Hybald, Abbot in Lincolnshire, England (7th c.) - Benedictine abbot at Bardney, Lincolnshire, England. Mentioned by the Venerable Bede as an acquaintance of Saint Chad. Hermit in later life. Some churches, the village of Hibaldstowe, and other locations are named in his honour. Died c.690 of natural causes; relics at Hibaldstowe, Lincolnshire, England

15 / 28 December — Nativity Fast — The Hieromartyr Eleutherius - A good fruit of a good tree, this wonderful saint had noble and eminent parents. He was born in Rome, where his father was in imperial service. His mother, Anthea, heard the Gospel from the great Apostle Paul himself, and was baptised by him. Being early left a widow, she entrusted her only son to the education and service of the Bishop of Rome, Anacletus. Seeing how greatly Eleutherius was gifted and illumined by the grace of God, the bishop ordained him deacon at the age of fifteen, priest at eighteen and bishop at twenty. Endowed by God with wisdom, he made up for what he lacked in years. This godly man was made bishop in Illyria, with his seat at Valona in

Albania. He kept his flock like a good shepherd, adding to their number from day to day. The Emperor Hadrian, a persecutor of Christians, sent a commander, Felix, with soldiers, to seize Eleutherius and take him to Rome. When the furious Felix arrived in Valona and went into the church, and heard and saw God's holy hierarch, his heart was suddenly changed and he became a Christian. Eleutherius baptised him and set off with him for Rome, as merrily as though he were going to a feast, not to trial and torture. The Emperor put the gently-born Eleutherius to harsh torture, flogging him, burning him on an iron grid, boiling him in pitch and burning him in a fiery furnace. But, by God's power, Eleutherius was delivered from all these deadly torments. Seeing all this, Choribus the governor proclaimed that he himself was a Christian. Choribus was tortured and then beheaded, and so also blessed Felix. Finally, the imperial executioners cut off the honoured head of St Eleutherius. When his mother, holy Anthea, came and stood over the dead body of her son, she was also beheaded. Their bodies were taken to Valona, where St Eleutherius glorifies the name of Christ to this day by many wonders. He suffered in the time of Hadrian, in the year 120. St Stephen the Confessor of Sourzoh; Our Holy Father Paul of Latros; Our Holy Father Pardus the Solitary.

16 / 29 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Prophet Haggai - Born in Babylon in the time of the captivity of Israel, he was of the tribe of Levi. He prophesied in 520 B.C., and visited Jerusalem as a young man. He urged Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest to restore the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, prophesying for this Temple greater glory than the former Temple of Solomon: 'The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts' (2:9), for the Lord, the Saviour, would appear in the new Temple. He lived to see the first half of the new Temple completed by Zerubbabel. and died in old age, and rested with his fathers. St Nicolas Chrysoverges, Patriarch of Constantinople; St Theophano the Empress.

17 / 30 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Prophet Daniel, and the Three Children: Ananias, Azarias and Misael - All four of them were of the royal tribe of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed and plundered Jerusalem, Daniel, as a boy, was taken off into slavery together with Jehoiachin, King of Judah, and many other Israelites. The account of his life, sufferings and prophecies can be found in detail in his book. Utterly given to God, Daniel from his early youth received from God the gift of great discernment. His fame among the Jews in Babylon began when he denounced two lecherous and unrighteous elders, and saved the chaste Susannah from an unjust death. But his fame among the Babylonians stemmed from the day when he solved and interpreted the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. For this, the king made him a prince at his court. When the king made a golden idol in the Plain of Dura, the Three Children refused to worship it, for which they were cast into the burning fiery furnace. But an angel of God appeared in the furnace and soothed the flames, so that the Children walked in the furnace untouched by the fire, and sang: 'Blessed art Thou, Lord God of our fathers!' The king saw this marvel, and was amazed. He then brought the Children out of the furnace and did them great honour. In the time of King Belshazzar, when the king was eating and drinking with his guests at a feast out of consecrated vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, an invisible hand wrote these three words on the wall: 'Mene, Tekel, Upharsin'. No-one could interpret these words but Daniel. That night, King Belshazzar was killed. Daniel was thrice thrown into a den of lions for his faith in the one, living God, and both times God preserved him alive. Daniel saw God on His throne with the angelic powers, often saw angels, had insight into the future of certain people, of kingdoms and of the whole human race, and prophesied the time of the coming of the Saviour on earth. According to St Cyril of Alexandria, Daniel and the Three Children lived to great old age in Babylon, and were beheaded with the sword for the true Faith. When Ananias was beheaded, Azarias held out his robe and caught his head, then Misael caught Azarias's head and Daniel Misael's. An angel of God carried their bodies to Judea, to Mount Gebal, and placed them under a rock. According to tradition, these four men arose at the time of the death of the Lord Jesus and appeared to many, then fell asleep again. Daniel is counted as one of the four Great Prophets (with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel). He lived and prophesied half-way through the thousand years before Christ. Our Holy Father Daniel; Our Holy Fathers, the New Martyrs Paisius and Habakkuk; In Wales, in Merionethshire,

St. Tydecho, brother of St. Cadfan. Whose tropar in Tone 8 is: By thy labours for Christ, O Father Tydecho,/ thou didst win the crown of eternal glory/ and didst light the way into the Ark of Salvation./ Wherefore, O Saint, intercede for us that in following thee we may be found worthy of Christ's great mercy. Born in Wales. Several Welsh churches are named for him. No other information has survived.

18 / 31 December — Nativity Fast - The Holy Martyr Sebastian and those with him - This glorious martyr of Christ was born in Italy and brought up in the city of Milan. He was destined in his youth to be a soldier, and, as an educated, handsome and courageous man, commended himself to the Emperor Diocletian, who made him captain of the imperial guard. He secretly confessed the Christian faith, and prayed to the living God. An honourable, upright and merciful man, Sebastian was greatly loved by his soldiers. Whenever possible, he saved Christians from torture and death and, when this was not possible, gave them courage to die for Christ the living God without turning back. Two brothers, Marcus and Marcellinus, who were in prison for Christ and already on the verge of denying Him and worshipping idols, were confirmed in their faith and strengthened in their martyrdom by Sebastian. As he spoke with them, exhorting them not to fear death for Christ, his face was illumined like that of an angel of God. Sebastian supported his words by marvels: he healed Zoe, the wife of Nicostratus the gaoler, who had been dumb for six years, and brought Nicostratus and his whole household to baptism; he healed the two sick sons of Claudius the commander, and brought him and his whole household also to baptism; he healed Tranquillianus, the father of Marcus and Marcellinus, of gout and pains in his legs which had troubled him for eleven years, and brought him to baptism together with his whole household; he healed the Roman Eparch, Chromatius, of the same infirmity and brought him and his son Tiburtius to baptism. Of these, Zoe was the first to suffer, being seized while at prayer beside the tomb of the Apostle Peter. After torture, she was thrown into the river Tiber. Then Tiburtius was seized, and the judge placed live coals before him, challenging him to choose life or death: to cast incense on the coals and cense the idols, or to stand himself barefoot on the coals. St Tibertius made the sign of the Cross and stood barefoot on the coals, and remained unharmed. He was then beheaded with the sword. Nicostratus was killed with a stake, Tranquillianus was drowned and Marcus and Marcellinus were run

through by spears. Then Sebastian was taken before the Emperor Diocletian. The Emperor rebuked him for his betrayal, but he said: 'I always pray to my Christ for your health, and for the peace of the Roman Empire.' The Emperor ordered that he be stripped and shot at with arrows. The soldiers then shot at him, until the martyr's whole body was so covered with arrows that it was invisible beneath them. When they thought that he was dead, he showed himself alive and healed of all his wounds. Then the pagans beat him to death with staves. He suffered gloriously for Christ his Lord and entered into the heavenly Kingdom in 287, when Gaius was Bishop of Rome. St Florus, Bishop of Aminsus; St Modestus, Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Martyrdom of Hieromonk Nestor of Zharki (Ivanova), defender of the holy icons (1993) - in the world Nestor Savchuk was born in Crimea in 1960. An artist, he travelled to Odessa in the early 1980's to undertake further studies. There he came in contact with Orthodox Christians, afterwards journeying to the Pochaev monastery where he was tonsured and later ordained a priest. An 'unregistered' monk, he fled the authorities and settled in Zharki, where he served in the church and ministered to the people. He struggled with great courage against the Russian Mafia which was at that time stealing the holy icons from the churches for sale abroad. He was murdered on December 18, 1993, at the age of 33, defending the church from thieves.

19 December / 1 January — Nativity Fast - The Holy Martyr Boniface - Martyrdom for Christ makes sinners into saints. This is shown by the example of St Boniface. He was at first servant to a wealthy and dissolute woman, Aglais, in Rome, and had unclean and unlawful relations with her. They were both pagans. Aglais evinced the desire to have the relics of some martyr in her house as an amulet against evil, so she sent her servant to Asia to find and buy for her what she desired. Boniface took some slaves with him and a fair amount of money and, at the moment of parting, said to Aglais: 'If I can't find any martyrs and if they bring you back my body, martyred for Christ, will you receive it with honour? Aglais laughed, and called him a drunken old sinner, and so they parted. Coming to the city of Tarsus, Boniface saw many Christians undergoing torture: some were having their legs cut off, some their hands, others their eyes put out, yet others were dying on the gallows and so forth. Boniface's heart was changed, and he repented of his sinful life with tears. He called out among the Christian martyrs: 'I too am a Christian!' The judge took him for interrogation and ordered that he be harshly flogged, then that boiling lead be poured into his mouth and, as this did him no harm, that he be beheaded. The slaves then took his body back to Rome. An angel of God appeared to Aglais and said: 'Take him who was at one time your servant, but is now our brother and fellow-servant; he is the guardian of your soul and the protector of your life.' Aglais went in wonder to meet them, took Boniface's body, built a church for his relics and placed them there. She then repented, gave away all her goods to the poor and withdrew from the world, living a further fifteen years in bitter penitence. St Boniface suffered in the year 290. St Gregory, Bishop of Omir; St Boniface the Merciful, Bishop of Ferentino; Our Holy Father Elias of Murom; St. Manirus, b, apostle of Nth. Scotland; St. Winebald the Pilgrim, abbot and missionary of England and Heidenheim, Germany (761).

20 December / 2 January — Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ - Nativity Fast - Repose of St John of Kronstadt. - a great luminary of the Russian Church. A married priest, he served in the Cathedral of St. Andrew's in Kronstadt, a busy port near St. Petersburg. A great man of prayer, he served Divine Liturgy every day and read the entire cycle of daily services. He visited the poor and the sick, generously giving alms, himself often going without. He and his matushka lived as brother and sister. He taught and advised all those who came to him, young and old, rich and poor. Such was the love of the people for him throughout Russia that the Kronstadt post office had a special section just for St. John! Even during his lifetime hundreds were healed through his holy prayers. In 1906, he became very ill and suffered with this sickness until his death. Nevertheless, he continued to serve daily. On December 20, 1908, he quietly reposed in the Lord. A crowd of 60,000 attended his funeral, an unprecedented event in Russia. He was formally glorified as a saint by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad on June 3, 1964. Holy blessed Father John, pray to God for us!

Tropar, 4th Tone: With the apostles thy sound hath gone forth unto the ends of the world; / with the confessors thou didst endure sufferings for Christ; / thou didst liken thyself unto the holy hierarchs in the preaching of the Word; / and with the venerable hast thou shone forth in the grace of God. / Therefore, the Lord hath exalted the depths of the humility higher than the heavens, / and hath given us thy name as a source of most wondrous miracles. / Wherefore, O wonderworker, who livest in Christ forever, / lovingly have mercy upon those amid misfortunes, / and hearken unto thy children that call upon thee with faith, / O Righteous John, // our beloved pastor.

Kontakion, 4th Tone: O thou who from infancy wast chosen by God, / and in childhood didst miraculously receive from Him the gift of learning, / and wast gloriously called to the priesthood in a vision during sleep, / thou didst prove to be a wonderful shepherd of the Church of Christ, / O Father John, namesake of grace. / Pray to Christ our God // that we all be with thee in the kingdom of the heavens.

The Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-Bearer - This holy man was named the 'God-Bearer' because he always carried the name of the living God in his heart and on his lips. Also, by tradition, he was thus named because he was held in the arms of God incarnate, Jesus Christ. On a day when the Lord was teaching His disciples humility, He took a child and set it among them, saying: 'Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:4). This child was Ignatius. He was later a disciple of St John the Theologian, together with Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna. As bishop in Antioch, he governed the Church of God as a good shepherd, and was the first to introduce antiphonal singing into the Church, in which two choirs alternate. This way of singing was revealed to St Ignatius from among the angels in heaven. When the Emperor Trajan passed through Antioch on his way to battle with the Persians, he heard about Ignatius, summoned him and urged him to offer sacrifice to idols, so that he could be made a senator. The Emperor's urgings and threats being in vain, holy Ignatius was put in irons and sent to Rome, escorted by ten bestial soldiers, to be thrown to the wild beasts. Ignatius rejoiced to be suffering for his Lord, and prayed to God that the wild beasts should be the tomb for his body, and that none should hinder his death. After a long and difficult journey from Asia through Thrace, Macedonia and Epirus, Ignatius reached Rome, where he was thrown to the lions in the circus. They tore him to pieces and devoured him, leaving only a few of the

larger bones and his heart. This glorious lover of the Lord Christ suffered in the year 106 in Rome, in the time of the Emperor Trajan. He appeared many times from the other world and worked wonders, helping to this day all who call on him for help. St Danilo, Archbishop of Serbia.

HYMN OF PRAISE **The Holy Prophet Daniel and the Three Children**

Whoever fears the true God Is not afraid of men or demons. The Lord rewards faithful servants And guards them from every evil. Among the lions, Holy Daniel remained unharmed; In the fiery furnace, The Three Children remained alive; In the midst of the fire, they glorified God, With an angel, God's messenger. Like Noah in the evil world, Like holy Lot in wild Sodom, And like Joseph in decadent Egypt, So Daniel in the middle of Babylon Remained faithful and righteous With three of his young friends: Ananias and Azarias And the faithful young Misael. The tortures came and the tortures passed. The martyred were gloriously glorified In the Immortal Kingdom of Christ.

REFLECTION

There are three types of praiseworthy zeal: zeal in cleansing oneself of sinful desires and thoughts, zeal for the truth of the Faith, and zeal for God's justice among men. All three of these filled the soul of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker to perfection. He showed zeal in purifying himself throughout his life, vigilantly guarding over his heart. He especially showed zeal for the truth of the Faith at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea [325] when he entered into a fearful confrontation with Arius. His zeal for God's justice among men was seen particularly in two notable events, when on each occasion he saved three innocent men from the punishment of death. Once, in his absence from the city of Myra, the avaricious commander Eustathius condemned three men to be beheaded, receiving a bribe for this from some of their enemies. Informed of this, St. Nicholas returned to Myra with the greatest haste. The condemned men had already been brought to the place of execution, and the executioner had already raised the sword over the innocent men. At that moment, Nicholas grabbed the sword, pulled it out of the executioner's hand, and freed the condemned men. Afterward, he rebuked the commander Eustathius and brought him to shame and repentance. In a similar way, three imperial commanders-Nepotian, Ursus and Herpylion-were slandered before Eulavius the Eparch of Constantinople and before the emperor himself. The emperor signed their death sentence. On the eve of their execution, the three commanders prayed to God, saying: "O God of Nicholas, deliver us innocent ones from death!" That night, St. Nicholas appeared to both the emperor and the eparch in a dream, rebuked them for this injustice, and ordered them to free the three commanders from prison immediately. The next day, the emperor and eparch each related to the other the same dream and they immediately freed the commanders, both from the death sentence and from prison.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Abraham's obedience: 1. How Abraham obeyed God when He ordered him to go out from his country, his kindred and his father's house (Genesis 12); 2. How He obeyed God when He commanded him to offer his only son as a sacrifice (Genesis 22).

HOMILY on Jacob

For I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved (Genesis 32:30).

The God of Abraham and Isaac is also the God of Jacob the faithful, the obedient, the merciful and the meek. The meek beholder of God, Jacob, can be called the "one who saw God." For in truth he was meek, and he saw God and spoke with God, and he saw the angels of God and the ladder from earth to heaven. By his meekness he defeated Laban his father-in-law, and Esau his brother; by his meekness he made peace between his wives, Leah and Rachel; for his meekness he was even dear to pharaoh. Jacob's meekness is a prefiguration of the meekness of Christ. *Blessed are the meek*, said the Lord, *for they shall inherit the earth* (Matthew 5:5). These words were also realized in Jacob. He inherited the land of his fathers; his descendants were delivered from Egypt and inherited the Promised Land; through Christ the Lord, his descendant according to the flesh, he inherited the whole earth, that is, the Church of God which spread over the entire world. *I have seen God face to face*. Jacob saw God in the form of man but not as true man. And even this vision was only a prefiguring of the true Incarnation of God as man. *And my life is preserved*. His soul was preserved from fear and from every unrighteousness. If Jacob was preserved by only seeing a vision of God, how much easier is it for us to be preserved who know God as true man and as the God-man.

O meek Lord, the strength and glory of the meek, as Thou didst preserve Jacob by Thy vision, preserve us also by Thy true Body and Blood.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.