

St John of the Ladder / The Forth Sunday of Great Lent 1 / 14 April



The Fourth Sunday of Great Lent: Venerable John Lestvichnik, Troparion, Tone I — Thou didst prove to be a freeman of the desert, an angel in a body, and a wonder-worker, O our God - bearing Father John. By fasting, vigil and prayer thou didst obtain heavenly gifts, and thou healest the sick and the souls of those who have recourse to thee with faith. Glory to Him Who gave thee strength, glory to Him Who crowned thee, glory to Him Who works through thee healings for all.

Kontakion, Tone I — Offering ever-blossoming fruits of learning from thy book, O wise one, thou delightest the hearts of those who study it seriously, O blessed one. For it is a ladder which leads up from the earth to the heavenly and abiding glory souls who with faith honour thee.

Troparion of the Sunday, Tone IV — 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 overthrown! / Christ God is risen, / granting the world great mercy!

Hymn to the Theotokos, Tone IV — The mystery of all eternity, / unknown even by angels, / through you, O Theotokos, is revealed to those on earth: / God incarnate, by union without confusion. / He voluntarily accepted the cross for us, / by which He resurrected the first-created man, / saving our souls from death.

Kontakion of the Sunday, Tone IV — My Savior and Redeemer as God rose from the tomb and delivered the earthborn from their chains. He has shattered the gates of hell, and as Master, He has risen on the third day!

Our Holy Father John Climacus (of the Ladder) - The author of the famous 'Ladder', he came from an unknown place to Mount Sinai as a sixteen-year-old boy and remained there, first as a novice, then as a hermit and finally as abbot of Sinai, until he died at the age of eighty, in about 649. His biographer, the monk Daniel, says of him: 'He brought his body up to Mount Sinai, but his spirit he brought to the Mount of Heaven'. He spent nineteen years in obedience to his spiritual father, Martyrios. Anastasius of Mount Sinai, who saw John once as a young man, foretold that he would be abbot of Mount Sinai. After the death of his spiritual father, John took himself off to a cave, where he lived for twenty years in strict asceticism. His disciple, Moses, fell asleep one day in the cool shade of a huge rock. John was at prayer in his cell, and, perceiving that his disciple was in danger, began to pray for him. Moses came up to him later, fell to his knees and began to thank him for saving him from certain death. And he related how he had heard John calling him in his sleep and had jumped up at the very moment that a rock fell. Had he not jumped out of the way, the rock would certainly have killed him. At the importunate urging of the brethren, John accepted the abbacy, and guided their souls to salvation with loving zeal. He once heard a monk reproach him for being too verbose. He was not in the least angered, but was silent for an entire year, not uttering a single word until the brethren begged him to speak. He then began to instruct them with the wisdom with which God had endowed him. Once 600 pilgrims came to Mount Sinai. At supper they all noticed an agile young man dressed as a Jew who was serving at table and giving orders to the other servants, taking charge of everything. Suddenly, he disappeared. While everyone was pondering this and

asking questions among themselves, John said: 'Do not bother to look for him; that was the prophet Moses serving you in his own home.' During the time that he was silent in his cave, John wrote many instructive books, of which the most famous, 'The Ladder', is much read to this day. It describes the way to raise the soul to God as if on a ladder. Before his death, John appointed his own brother, George, to the abbacy, but George began to grieve greatly at the approaching parting with John. Then John said that, if he were found worthy to stand close to God in the next world, he would pray that George be taken up to heaven in the same year. And so it came to pass. After ten months, George also fell asleep and departed to take his place among heaven's citizens alongside his brother John.

Matins Gospel I

Epistle: Hebrews 6:13-20

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

AFTER ABRAHAM HAD PATIENTLY ENDURED, HE OBTAINED THE PROMISE

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

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

Second Reading: Ephesians 5: 9-19

Gospel - Mark 9:17-31

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

The Significance of Fasting in the Struggle against Fallen Spirits

The Lord said to His Apostles about the evil spirits, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting (Mk. 9:29). Here is a new aspect of fasting! Fasting is acceptable to God when it is preceded by the great virtue of mercy; fasting prepares a reward in heaven when it is foreign to hypocrisy and vainglory; fasting works when it is joined with another great virtue—prayer. How does it work? It not only tames the passions in the human body, but it enters into battle with the spirits of evil, and conquers them.

How can fasting, which is actually a bodily podvig [ascetical labor], work or cooperate with prayer in a war against spirits? Why do the bodiless spirits submit to the power that fasting has over them?

The reason fasting works against the evil spirits lies in its powerful influence upon our own spirits. When the body is tamed by fasting, it brings freedom, strength, sobriety, purity, and refinement to the human soul. Our spirit can withstand its unseen enemies only when it is in such a state. But as for me, said the God-inspired David, When they (the demons) troubled me, I put on sackcloth. And I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer shall return to my bosom (Ps. 34:13). Fasting gives the mind sobriety, while prayer is the weapon the mind uses to drive away the invisible adversary. Fasting humbles the soul, and frees it from the callousness and inflatedness brought on by satiety; while the prayer of one who fasts becomes especially strong. Such prayer is not just external, but comes from the very soul, from the depths of the heart. Fasting directs and carries prayer to God...

Where are the people who are possessed by evil spirits? Where are those people whom he would tear and torment, like he tore and tormented the youth mentioned today in the Gospels? Apparently there aren't any, or they are very rare—thus reasons the person who sees everything superficially, and brings his life as a sacrifice to distractions and sinful pleasures. But the holy fathers saw things differently. They say, "From the moment they caused man to be exiled from paradise and separated from God through disobedience, the devil and the demons received the freedom to mentally stir any person's rational nature, both day and night." Very similar to those torments and tearing of the Gospel youth's body by the evil spirit are the sufferings of the soul that willfully submits itself to the influence of the evil spirit, and who accepts as truth that murderous lie which the devil ceaselessly shows to us in order to make us perish, hiding it behind a façade of truth to more easily deceive us, and to succeed in his wickedness. Be sober, be vigilant, the Apostle Peter warns us, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in

the faith (1 Pet. 5:8-9). What does the fallen angel use against us? Mostly sinful thoughts and fantasies. He runs from those who resist him, but he sways, torments, and destroys those who do not recognize him, who enter into conversation with him, and entrust themselves to him. He himself crawls on his belly and is incapable of spiritual thought. He vividly depicts this transitory world with all its allurements and pleasures; meanwhile he enters into conversation with the soul about how it can make its pipe dreams come true. He offers us earthly glory, he offers us riches, he offers us satiety, and delight in fleshly impurities. As St. Basil the Great expresses it, the devil not only received a feeling for fleshly impurities, but since he was created as a bodiless spirit, he gave birth to them. He presents all this as a fantasy, but he also provides illicit ways to realize these illicit dreams. He casts us into sorrow, depression, and despair. In a word—he tirelessly works to obtain our destruction in seemingly decent as well as indecent ways: by obvious sin, by sin hidden behind a good façade, and by waiving the bait of pleasure in front of us.

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, says St. John the Theologian (1 Jn. 5:4). Faith is our weapon of victory over the world; it is also our weapon of victory over the fallen angels. Who has looked with the eye of faith to the eternity proclaimed by God's Word and not cooled to the world's quickly-passing beauty? What true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ will want to trample upon His all-holy commandments for the sake of sinful pleasure, which seems alluring before it is tasted, but is vile and murderous after tasting? What power over the disciple of Christ has the enchanting picture of earthly benefits and pleasures, or even the horrifying picture of earthly calamities, which the evil spirits draw in order to bring the viewer to depression and despair, when magnificent pictures of eternity are impressed upon his soul through the power of God's Word, before which all earthly scenes are pale and insignificant? When St. John the Theologian proclaims that the victory that overcometh the world is our faith, he salutes the true children of Christ who have overcome the world on their victory over the fallen angel and his minions: I write unto you, young men, he says, because ye have overcome the wicked one (1 Jn. 2:13). Here "young men" is what he calls Christians who are renewed by Divine grace. When a servant of Christ shows courage and constancy in his struggle against the evil spirits as he should, then Divine grace descends into his soul and grants him victory, and his youth shall be renewed as the eagle's (Ps. 102:5)—youth which never ages, with which he was adorned by the Creator when he was created, and which he exchanged for incurable agedness at his voluntary fall...

Beloved brethren! Why shouldn't we also be victors over the world and over its prince? People like us have overcome them, people clothed in flesh and human weakness. Not only valiant men have been victorious over them, but also frail elders, weak women, and little children; they won, and left us no excuse for losing if we give ourselves up to them. The same world with all its allurements was before them, the same invisible serpents crawled around them, applying every effort to taunt out their souls and make them to live in the dust. The hearts and thoughts of the conquerors were raised up! Guarding their bodies with fasting, they tamed them and stopped the impulse for earthly pleasures in them! Through fasting, they gave their spirit the opportunity to abide in ceaseless sobriety and vigilance, and the opportunity to unsleepingly heed and watch out for the multifarious snares of the devil! By lightening their bodies—and even their very spirits—with fasting, they gave the spirit the opportunity to cleave to the Lord with pure and constant prayer, to receive Divine aide, to enliven their faith from hearing (cf. Rom. 10:17), from hearing to make their faith substance (cf. Heb. 11:1) and spiritual strength—and by this strength to obtain decisive victory over the world and the evil spirits. St. John the Theologian calls such faith the confidence that we have in God, and he teaches us from his own holy experience that it is attained through prayer that is heard [by God]... Only the ascetical laborer of Christ is capable of such faith. He has prepared himself for warfare with the evil spirits by forgiving his neighbors' sins—that is, through mercy and humility—and has entered the fight bearing the weapon of fasting and prayer. Amen.

St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov)

Second Reading - Matthew 4:25-5:12

FOURTH SUNDAY: ST. JOHN OF THE LADDER

Two Gospels were read today. The first was about the healing of the one possessed. The disciples of Christ asked Him when they were alone: "Why could we not cast him out?" And the Lord said to them, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting" (Mk. 9:28,29). This is as if a reminder that now is the time for prayer and fasting — Great Lent.

During the three weeks before Great Lent, we were shown the ways of repentance of a Christian who returns to his Father. And when Great Lent approached, with its hymns and prayers which were given to us during the Church readings of these past four weeks, we should have studied and understood ourselves. And when we understood ourselves, then involuntarily we should have come to a feeling of humility: "But Lord, what am I going to do? Lord, Thou seest how feeble and weak my will is. I constantly yield to the will of the prince of this world. Help me!" And I begin to weep.

This is why the second Gospel, about the Beatitudes, was read. These commandments show us what to do: step by step, as if rung by rung. This is why the Church this Sunday commemorates St. John of the Ladder, who wrote his spiritual work called "The Ladder," which shows us what to do, how one virtue leads to another, like rungs on a ladder. In a spiritual sense, these steps are the Beatitudes. He who abides in spiritual poverty will surely weep because of his infirmity, and he who weeps because of his infirmity is already meek. In relation to his brother he will be indulgent and will always strive for mercy, for help in order to create peace which the Lord requires in our hearts. And he will not be afraid of persecution and will not think of how to take vengeance on those who harm him. No, he will always have this feeling: "Lord, I am weak, help me!"

This is why, after the Church gave us at the end of the first week of Lent the direction where we must go (into Orthodoxy), during the second week of Lent, the Sunday following the Sunday of Orthodoxy, she revealed to us the feeling of a man who already enters into spiritual endeavors; and he has before him the new principle of a man such as Gregory Palamas, who was renewed not only spiritually, but also physically.

And after showing us Gregory Palamas, the Church brought us to Golgotha. She showed us the Lord's Cross, which we have venerated for the whole week. Those who were in church, and even those not in church, saw mentally before them Golgotha. We saw the wise thief and the thief who reviled Christ; and we saw Christ Himself Who pronounced His last words: "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit!" (Lk. 23:46).

This mood of Golgotha has remained with us. And we, who saw the reviling thief and the wise thief, should have determined: What are we to do? And seeing the long-suffering thief, we accepted in our hearts: "Lord, I will be long-suffering. But how am I to do this?" Live according to the Beatitudes. There is no other way. And this long-suffering, of whatever kind it may be, will cause us to suffer, but at the same time will give us blessedness not only in eternity, but even here, in the midst of our suffering, while we endure. To be poor in spirit, humble, to weep for our sins, meekly to endure offense, to wish peace to everyone, to wish everything good, to endure persecutions for Christ — all this is difficult. But at the same time it is also joyful. This is the only way to true happiness; and this is the shortest way.

So what is the matter? Let us make this step right now, this very moment. Everyone these days fights for happiness. But we don't even have to fight (unless with ourselves) and we will be blessed. May God bless you to this step.

Archbishop Andrei

Saints of the Week

1 / 14 April — St Mary of Egypt - The recorder of the life of this wonderful saint was St Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem. A hieromonk, the elder Zossima, had gone off at one time during the Great Fast a twenty-days' walk into the wilderness across the Jordan. He suddenly caught sight of a human being with a withered and naked body and with hair as white as snow, who fled in its nakedness from Zossima's sight. The elder ran a long way, until this figure stopped at a stream and called: 'Father Zossima, forgive me for the Lord's sake. I cannot turn round to you, for I am a naked woman.' Then Zossima threw her his outer cloak, and she wrapped herself in it and turned round to him. The elder was amazed at hearing his name from

the lips of this unknown woman. After considerable pressure on his part, she told him her life-story. She had been born in Egypt, and had lived as a prostitute in Alexandria from the age of twelve, spending seventeen years in this way of life. Urged by the lustful fire of the flesh, she one day got into a ship that was sailing for Jerusalem. Arriving at the Holy City, she tried to go into one of the churches to venerate the Precious Cross, but some unseen power prevented her from entering. In great fear, she turned to an icon of the Mother of God that was in the entrance, and begged her to let her go in and venerate the Cross, confessing her sin and impurity and promising that she would then go wherever the Most Pure led her. She was then allowed to enter the church. After venerating the Cross, she went out again to the entrance and, standing in front of the icon, thanked the Mother of God. Then she heard a voice: 'If you cross the Jordan, you will find true peace.' She immediately bought three loaves of bread and set off for the Jordan, arriving there the same evening. She received Communion the following morning in the monastery of St John, and then crossed the river. She spent forty-eight whole years in the wilderness in the greatest torments, in terror, in struggles with passionate thoughts like gigantic beasts. She fed only on plants. After that, when she was standing in prayer, Zossima saw her lifted up in the air. She begged him to bring her Communion the next year on the bank of the Jordan, and she would come to receive it. The following year, Zossima came with the Holy Gifts to the bank of the Jordan in the evening, and stood in amazement as he saw her cross the river. He saw her coming in the moonlight and, arriving on the further bank, make the sign of the Cross over the river. She then walked across it as though it were dry land. When she had received Communion, she begged him to come again the following year to the same stream by which they had first met. Zossima went, and found her dead body there on that spot. Above her head in the sand was written: 'Abba Zossima, bury in this place the body of the humble Mary. Give dust to dust. I passed away on April 1st, on the very night of Christ's Passion, after communion of the divine Mysteries.' Zossima learned her name for the first time, and also the awe-inspiring marvel that she had arrived at that stream the previous year on the night of the same day on which she had received Communion—a place that he had taken twenty days to reach. And thus Zossima buried the body of the wonderful saint, Mary of Egypt. When he returned to the monastery, he recounted the whole story of her life and the wonders to which he had been an eyewitness. Thus the Lord glorifies repentant sinners. St Mary is also commemorated in the Fifth Week of the Great Fast. The Church holds her up before the faithful in these days of the Fast as a model of repentance. She entered into rest in about 530.

St Meliton, Bishop of Sardis - A well-known pastor of the Church in the second century, he was a man of great learning and laboured to codify all the books of Holy Scripture. He laboured also in meekness and devotion to bring peace to the Church in Laodicea, involved in a quarrel about the celebration of Easter. Apart from this, he defended Christianity against the pagans. He travelled to Rome in about 170, bringing a written apologia on the Faith and the Christian Church to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. St Meliton, this learned, devout and zealous man, entered peacefully into rest in the Lord in about 177.

Also commemorated on this day: Venerable Euthymius, monk, of Suzdal (1404). Venerable Barsanuphius of Optina (1913). New Hieromartyr Sergius priest (1938). New Hieromartyr Schema-bishop Macarius of St. Macarius the Roman Monastery near Lezna (1944) and Michael, fool-for-Christ (1931). Martyr Abraham of Bulgaria (1229). Venerable Gerontius, youth, canonarch of the Kiev Caves (14th c.). Venerable Macarius, abbot of Pelecete (840). Martyrs Geroncius and Basilides (3rd c.). Righteous Achaz. St. Procopius, abbot of Sazava (1053). Sts. John of Shavta and Vardzia (12-13th c.) and Eulogius the Prophet and Fool-for-Christ (Georgia). Martyr-hermit Tewdric of Tintem.

2 / 15 April — Our Holy Father Titus the Wonderworker - He conceived a love for Christ from his earliest years, and despised the vanities of the world. For His sake, he left the world, went off to a monastery and received the angelic habit. With not a backward glance, he gave himself to the sober and narrow way of monasticism. Through great patience, he attained the two basic virtues of humility and obedience, and in these virtues he exceeded 'not only the brethren, but all men'. He preserved his purity of soul and body right from his youth. In the time of the iconoclast heresy, he was seen to be a steadfast pillar of the Church of God. For his great humility and purity, he was endowed by God with the gift of wonderworking, both in his lifetime and after his death. And when he went to the Lord, he left a large number of disciples behind him. He entered peacefully into rest in the 9th century;

The Holy Martyrs Amphianus, and Edesius - These two young men were blood brothers from the city of Patara of distinguished but pagan parents. While they were studying the secular sciences in the city of Beirut, they were enlightened by the Spirit of God, and acknowledging the falsehood of paganism, discerned the truth of Christianity. When they returned home they could no longer live with their pagan parents and kinsmen and secretly fled to Caesarea in Palestine to the presbyter Pamphilius, renowned for his sanctity and spiritual learning. With Pamphilius, they studied the Law of God day and night and practiced Christian asceticism. It is said of Pamphilius that he was twenty years old according to the flesh but, in understanding and generosity, he was a hundred years old. When a persecution began during the reign of Maximian, many Christians fled the city and hid themselves. Others, willingly and rejoicingly, gave themselves into the hands of the persecutors in order to suffer for the Name of Him, Who first suffered for them. Amphianus was among the latter. Unafraid, he entered a pagan temple where Prince Urban was offering sacrifices to the idols, grabbed the prince by the hand which was holding the sacrifice and cried to him to refrain from serving and making sacrificial offerings to dead idols and to acknowledge the True God. Some of the pagans who heard these words and witnessing the great courage of Amphianus, repented and embraced the Faith of Christ. The enraged prince subjected Amphianus to torture. Among the other tortures, they wrapped the legs of Amphianus with cotton and set them on fire. When he remained alive, they tossed his body into the sea with a stone around his neck. The sea became turbulent and hurled his martyred body back into the city. At first, Edesius was sent to a copper mine in Palestine and was later taken to Egypt. In Alexandria, Edesius was filled with holy zeal against a certain Prince Hierocles who, in the market place, assembled Christian nuns, maidens and virtuous women and handed them over to the most shameful perverts for derision. Edesius, filled with holy zeal, struck the disgraceful prince. For that, he was tortured and drowned in the sea as was his brother Amphianus. As two innocent lambs, they were sacrificed for Christ about the year 306 A.D. and were translated to the glorious mansions of the Lord.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Polycarp of Alexandria (4th c.). Venerable Gregory, ascetic of Nicomedia (1290). St. George of Matskveri Monastery (9th c.) (Georgia). St. Nicetius of Lyons (573) (Gaul). Virgin-martyr Theodora of Palestine (Greek). St. Sabbas, archbishop of Crimea (11th c.).

3 / 16 April — St Nicetas the Confessor - He was born in Bithynia, in the town of Caesarea. His father, Philaret, losing his wife, became a monk. Nicetas remained with his paternal grandmother. After he had grown up and finished his schooling, he went to a monastery in Midikion, where Nicephorus, the abbot, tonsured him as a monk. After seven years of toil and asceticism, he was ordained hieromonk by Patriarch Tarasius. After the deaths of Nicephorus and Nicetas's great friend, Athanasius, the brethren chose Nicetas as abbot, much against his will. St Nicetas was a holy example of life and asceticism to his brethren for many years. But when Leo V, the Armenian, came to the throne, following the devout Empress Irene and the pious Emperors Nicephorus and Michael, the iconoclast heresy sprang up again. The Emperor deposed Patriarch Nicephorus and sent him into exile, and in his place put a heretic, Theodotus Cassiteras, a man of impure life. Nicetas was imprisoned and tortured, but remained unwavering in his Orthodoxy. He was taken from prison to prison and tortured by hunger and thirst, by cold and heat and malice. But he remained utterly unwavering. A certain Nicolas pestered him particularly with his derision and malice. But one night the dead father of this Nicolas appeared to him in a dream and said: 'Leave that servant of God alone!' From that moment Nicolas repented, and not only refrained from pestering him but prevented others doing likewise. When the Emperor Leo the Armenian had made an evil end, the throne passed to the Orthodox Emperor Michael Balbus, who freed all the Orthodox sufferers. Nicetas retired to a lonely place near Constantinople, where he spent the remaining days of his earthly life in prayer and thanksgiving to God. When he died, his body was taken to his monastery and, during that journey, many of the sick, on touching his body, were healed. His relics were placed close to the graves of his spiritual father, Nicephorus, and his friend Athanasius. This great hierarch entered into rest in 824; St Paul the Wretched;

The Holy Martyr Ulphianus - a young man from the city of Tyre. He suffered for Christ at the hands of Urban, the mayor of the city of Tyre, who also was the torturer of Amphianus [April 2]. Finally, he was tied in a sack along with a dog and a snake and tossed into the sea. He suffered and was glorified in the year 306 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: Virgin-martyr Theodosia of Tyre (307-308). Venerable Illyricus of Mt. Myrsinon in the Peloponnesus. Martyrs Elpidophorus, Dius, Bithonius, and Galycus (3rd c.). Icons of the Most Holy Theotokos "The Unfading Flower", and Iveron. New Martyr Paul the Russian at Constantinople (1683). Venerable Nectarius, abbot, of Bezhetsk (1492). Venerable Joseph the Hymnographer, of Sicily (883) (Greek). Martyrs Cassius, Philip, and Euty chius of Thessalonica (304). Martyrs Evagrius, Benignus, Christus, Arestus, Kinnudius, Rufus, Patricius, and Zosima at Tomis (310). St. Fara (Burgondofara) of Eboriac or Faremoutiers (7th c.).

4 / 17 April — Our Holy Father Joseph the Hymnographer - He was born in Sicily of devout and virtuous parents, Plotinus and Agatha. After the death of his parents, he moved to Salonica, where he became a monk. As a monk, he was an example to all in fasting, restraint, ceaseless supplication, psalmody, vigils and toil. The Bishop of Salonica ordained him hieromonk. The famous Gregory of Decapolis, visiting Salonica, loved Joseph with heart and soul for his rare character, and took him back with him to his monastery in Constantinople. When the flame of iconoclasm sprang up again under Leo the Armenian, Joseph was sent to Rome to call the Pope and the Roman Church to battle for the true Faith. But pirates captured him on the way and took him to Crete, where he was kept in prison for six years by the heretics. Joseph rejoiced that he was made worthy to suffer for Christ, and thanked God constantly, regarding the iron chains with which he was bound as golden ornaments. In the sixth year, around Christmas, the wicked Emperor was murdered at the morning service in church. At the same moment, St. Nicolas appeared to Joseph in the prison and said to him: 'Get up and follow me.' Joseph felt himself lifted up in the air, and found himself all at once in Constantinople. His arrival was a source of rejoicing to all the Orthodox faithful. He composed Canons and hymns for many of the saints. He had the gift of insight, because of which Patriarch Photius made him spiritual father and confessor to his priests, recommending him as 'a man of God, an angel in the flesh, a father of fathers'. In great old age, he gave his soul into the hands of the God he had served so faithfully in work and song. He died peacefully on the eve of Holy Thursday in 883.

The Holy Martyr Pherbutha - During the reign of the Persian Emperor Saborius, St. Simeon, the bishop, was slain. At the wish of the empress, Pherbutha, the sister of Bishop Simeon, was taken to the palace. Pherbutha was exceptionally beautiful and because of that many suitors thronged to her among whom were many pagan priests and soothsayers. Pherbutha rejected them all and provoked much anger against herself. At that time, the empress became ill and all the pagan priests explained to the emperor that the empress was poisoned by Pherbutha and, as a cure for the ailing empress, they recommended the following: that Pherbutha, her sister and their slave, as Christians, be sawn and that three parts of their bodies be placed on one side and three parts on the other side and that the empress should be borne between them. The emperor agreed to the recommendation of these blood-thirsty pagan priests. Pherbutha, together with her sister and their slave, suffered for Christ in the year 343 A.D., thereby earning the incorruptible wreath in the eternal kingdom of their Lord.

Our Holy Father, the Martyr Nicetas - a Slav from Albania. As a monk of the Holy Mountain (Mt. Athos), he went to Serres where he debated with the Mullahs about religion. Being that they could not overcome him with reason, the Turks subjected him to torture under which Nicetas, the holy one, died and gave up his soul to his God in the year 1808 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: Venerable George, monk, of Mt. Maleon in the Peloponnesus (9th c.). New Hieromartyrs Archimandrite Benjamin (Kononov) and Hieromonk Nicephorus (Kuchin) of Solovki (1928). Virgin-martyr Mary (1932). New Hieromartyr Nicholas bishop of Velsk (1933). New Hieromartyr John priest (1933). Martyr John (1943). Venerable Joseph the Muchailing of the Kiev Caves (14th c.). Venerable Zosimas, abbot of Vorbozomsk (1550). Venerable Zosimas, monk, of Palestine (560). Icons of the Mother of God, named "Gerontissa" and "Deliveress". Venerable Theonas, metropolitan of Thessalonica (1541). St. Isidore, bishop of Seville (636). Holy Martyr Kallinikos. Venerable James of Old Torzhok in Galich, Kostroma (15th-16th c.). Martyr Basil of Mangazea in Siberia (1602).

5 / 18 April — The Holy Martyrs Agathopous and Theodulus - The first was a deacon and the second a reader in the Church in Salonica; the first adorned with the white hairs of age and the second with the chastity of youth. In the time of Diocletian's hunting of Christians, these two were summoned for trial. They went there joyfully, and, each holding the other by the hand, went in crying: 'We are Christians!' The whole court's urging them to deny Christ and worship idols was in vain. After long imprisonment and starvation, they were condemned to

death by drowning in the sea. Their hands were bound behind them and a large stone tied to their necks, and they were taken off to be drowned. When they went to throw Agathopous into the depths, he cried out: 'Lo, by a second baptism we are washed from all our sins, and will go cleansed to Christ Jesus!' The sea quickly threw their drowned bodies onto the shore, and Christians gave them burial. St Theodulus appeared to his friends in the form of a shining angel in white raiment and commanded them to distribute all his remaining goods to the poor. These great soldiers of Christ suffered with honour under the Emperor Diocletian and Faustinus, the governor of Salonica, in the year 303.

Our Holy Father Mark of Trache - also called "Mark the Athenian" because Athens was the place of his birth. His parents died after he completed his higher education in Athens. He thought to himself that death, even for himself, was unavoidable and that one should sufficiently prepare beforehand for that honourable departure from this world. Distributing all of his possessions to the poor, he sat on a plank in the sea and with a tenacious faith in God's help, prayed that God direct him wherever He wills. God, in His Providence, protected him and brought him to Lybia (or Ethiopia) to a mountain called Trache. Mark lived an ascetical life on this mountain for ninety-five years, seeing neither man nor beast. For thirty years, he waged a violent combat with evil spirits and suffered from hunger, thirst, frost and heat. He ate dirt and drank sea water. After thirty years of the most vehement suffering, the defeated demons fled from him and an angel of God began to bring him food daily in the form of bread, fish and fruit. St. Serapion visited him before his death and, afterward, made known the miraculous life of Mark. Mark asked St. Serapion: "Are there any Christians in the world now, who, if they were to say to this mountain, 'Arise from here and hurl yourself into the sea,' would it be so?" At that moment, the mountain upon which they stood moved in the direction of the sea. Mark raised his hand and stopped it. Such was the miracle-working power which this man of God possessed. Before his death, he prayed for the salvation of mankind and then gave up his soul to God. St. Serapion saw angels as they bore Mark's soul and he also saw an extended hand from heaven which received it. St. Mark lived to be one-hundred thirty years old and died about the year 400 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: Translation of the relics (1652) of St. Job, patriarch of Moscow (1607). New Hieromartyr Alexis priest (1930). New Hieromartyr Nicholas priest (1931). Venerable Publius of Egypt, monk (4th c.). Venerables Theonas, Symeon, and Phorbinus of Egypt (4th c.). Venerable Plato, abbot of the Studion (813). Venerable Theodora, nun, of Thessalonica (892) (Greek). New Martyr George of New Ephesus (1801). Repose of St. Philip the First, metropolitan of Moscow (1473). Five girls martyred at Neanidor of Lesbos (Greek). Martyrs Theodora and Didymus of Alexandria (305). The Martyr Fermus. New Martyr Argyra at Constantinople (1725). New Martyr Panaghiotis of Jerusalem (1820). St. Derfel of Lianderfel. Venerable Ethelburga, queen and Abbess of Lyminge, Kent. Martyrs Claudius, Diodorus, Victor, Victorinus, Pappia, Serapion, and Nicephorus (Greek).

6 / 19 April — St Eutychius, Patriarch of Constantinople - Born in Phrygia of devout parents, he was the son of an officer. Once, Eutychius was playing with some other children of his own age, their game being to write their names on a wall and put beside them the rank that they reckoned they would have in life. When Eutychius' turn came, he wrote: 'Eutychius— Patriarch!' He became abbot of a monastery in Amasea at the age of thirty, and ten years later the Metropolitan of Amasea sent him to the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 as his representative. At the Council, he shone like a bright star among the Church fathers, both for his learning and his devotion. When a quarrel arose about whether heretics could be anathematised after their deaths or not, he supported his belief that they could by citing III Kings (A.V. I Kings) 13:1-8, and IV Kings (A.V. II Kings) 23:16. He became greatly liked by both Emperor Justinian and Patriarch Menas. The Emperor very frequently turned to him for advice, and Menas (at that time very rich) designated him his heir and asked the Emperor to ensure that this happened. And so it came to pass. Eutychius governed the Church in peace for twelve years. But then the devil raised a storm against him. This storm reached the Emperor Justinian himself. The Emperor was deluded and fell into the Monophysite heresy of Aphthartodocetism, which taught the falsehood that the Lord Jesus, before the Resurrection, had a divine and uncorrupting body, not feeling hunger or thirst or pain. Eutychius stood firmly against this heresy, for which the Emperor sent him into exile to his first monastery. There Eutychius lived for twelve years and eight months, being shown to be a great wonder-worker, healing people of various diseases by his prayers and by anointing with holy oil. Justinian repented and died, and his successor, Justin II, called Eutychius back to the patriarchal throne, on which this saint

remained till his death, governing the Church of God in peace. In 582, at the age of seventy, he went to the Kingdom of Christ the Lord; the Lord whom he had served so faithfully and courageously all his life;

The One Hundred and Twenty Martyrs in Persia - When the Persian Emperor Sapor plundered the lands of Byzantium, he enslaved one-hundred twenty Christians. Since his attempts to persuade them to deny Christ and worship fire proved to be in vain, the emperor tossed them into the fire and burned them alive. Among those martyrs, were nine virgins dedicated to God. They all suffered honourably between the years 344 A.D. and 347 A.D. and took up habitation in the mansions of Christ the King.; St. Govan of Cornwall.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyrs Peter and Prokhor (1918). New Hieromartyr John priest (1934). New Hieromartyr James priest (1943). St. Sebastian, Elder of Optina and Karaganda (1966). St. Methodius, Equal-to-the-Apostles, enlightener of the Slavs (885). Venerable Platonida (Platonis) of Nisibis (308). Martyrs Jeremiah and Archilias the Presbyter. Venerable Gregory of St. Athanasius monastery on Mt. Athos, instructor of St. Gregory Palamas (1308). Venerable Gregory the Sinaite (1346). 2 Martyrs from Ascalon. New Martyr Nicholas of Lesbos (1463). New Monk-martyr Gennadius of Dionysiou, Mt. Athos, who suffered at Constantinople (1818). New Martyrs Manuel, Theodore, George, Michael, and another George, of Samothrace (1835).

7 / 20 April — Laudation of the Mother of God.

St George the Confessor - For his great virtues, which he acquired through long asceticism, George was chosen and installed as Metropolitan of Mitylene. And this saint governed his flock with zeal and wisdom to old age. But when a persecution arose under Leo V, the Armenian, who destroyed the holy icons, this holy elder was summoned by the Emperor to Constantinople, to the Council of bishops which was summoned, at the Emperor's desire, to put a stop to the veneration of icons. But George not only refused to act according to the Emperor's desire; he, together with some other courageous bishops, stood up in defence of the holy icons. For this he was held in derision by the Emperor and exiled to the region of Cherson, where, in physical pain and every sort of need, he spent the remainder of his earthly life. He died and went to immortal life in about 816. He was a wonderworker both during his life and after his death, through his great righteousness and love for the Lord Jesus.

Our Holy Father Nil Sorsky - Nil is one of the great Fathers of the Russian Church. He was the founder of the Scete way of monastic life in Russia. He died peacefully in the year 1508 A.D. His relics repose in the Sorsky Monastery. His "Rule of Life" for the "Scete" way of monastic living represents a first-class work on the spiritual and practical life of a monk;

The Holy Martyr Calliopius - an only son granted by God to a senator from Perga in Pamphylia after the senator had shed many tears in prayer. From his early youth his devout mother, Theoclea, taught him to respect God and to live a chaste life. Calliopius was still a youngster when a terrible persecution began during the reign of Emperor Maximian. To spare him from death, his mother placed him in a boat, gave him an ample amount of money and saw him off to the city of Pompeiopolis. However, God in His Divine Providence, planned it otherwise. Landing in Pompeiopolis he fell into the midst of a tumultuous polytheistic celebration. When Calliopius refused to participate in this ridiculous feast, at the insistence of the crazed mob, he was pushed toward Maximus the commander, before whom Calliopius confessed that he was a Christian. The commander ordered that Calliopius be beaten with lead canes and burned by fire. Wounded throughout, they cast him into prison. Learning about the tortures of her son, Theoclea distributed her entire estate to the poor and needy and with a paltry sum of money hurried to her son in prison. Upon entering the prison, Theoclea bowed down before her son and dressed his wounds. Finally, the commander pronounced the ultimate sentence. Calliopius was to be crucified on a cross. Joy and pain intermingled in the heart of his mother. When they brought her son to the place of execution, she slipped five pieces of gold to the executioners to have her son crucified, not as the Lord was, but rather upside down. Theoclea did this out of humility before the Lord. Calliopius was crucified upside down on Holy Thursday. His mother stood beneath the cross-giving praise to God. One the second day when they removed his lifeless body from the cross, she fell upon her son and she, herself, died. Thus, these two went before the Throne of the King of Glory together. They honourably suffered in the year 304 A.D.;

Our Holy Father Daniel of Pereyaslavl - he had, as a unique form of mortification, that of caring for the dead. Whenever he heard that someone was found frozen to death or that had died in some other manner, Daniel would hasten to bury him decently and to offer prayers to God for him. He died peacefully in the year 1540 A.D. His relics remain intact.

Also commemorated on this day: New Hieromartyr Arcadius priest (1933). Martyr Eudocia (1939). Martyr Calliopius at Pompeiopolis in Cilicia (304). Martyrs Rufinus deacon, Aquilina, and 200 soldiers at Sinope (310). Venerable Serapion of Egypt, monk (5th c.). Venerable Serapion archbishop of Novgorod. The Byzantine Icon of the Mother of God. St. George, patriarch of Jerusalem (807). St. Gerasimus of Byzantium (1739). Venerable Leucius, abbot of Volokolamsk (1492). St. Govan of Cornwall.

‡ Daily Scripture Readings ‡

Monday - Isaiah 37: 33-38:6; Genesis 13: 12-18; Proverbs 14: 27-15:4

Tuesday - Isaiah 40: 18-31; Genesis 15: 1-15; Proverbs 15: 7-19

Wednesday - Isaiah 41: 4-14; Genesis 17: 1-9; Proverbs 15: 20-16:9

Thursday - Isaiah 42: 5-16; Genesis 18: 20-33; Proverbs 16: 17-17:17

Friday - Isaiah 45: 11-17; Genesis 22: 1-18; Proverbs 17: 17-18:5

Saturday - Hebrews 9: 24-28; Hebrews 9: 1-7; Mark 8: 27-31; Luke 10: 38-42; 11: 27-28

Thursday of the Fifth Week

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

S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 0523-5

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Fifth Saturday of Great Lent

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

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