

The First Sunday of Great Lent, The Sunday of Orthodoxy

16 February / 1 March

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!

The First Sunday of Great Lent, Troparion, Tone II : We worship Thy immaculate Image, O Good One, and ask forgiveness of our sins, O Christ God; for of Thy own will Thou wast pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh, to deliver from slavery to the enemy those whom Thou hadst created. Therefore we thankfully cry to Thee: Thou hast filled all things with joy, O our Saviour, by coming to save the world.

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 First Sunday of Great Lent, Tone 8: The Uncircumscribable Word of the Father was circumscribed when he took flesh of thee, O Theotokos; and when He had restored the defiled image to its ancient state, He suffused it with divine beauty. As for us, confessing our salvation, we record it in deed and word.



Vespers

Lord I have Cried, Tone 5, on 10: Octoechos 6; Triodion 4 (The prophets, inspired by Thy Spirit); G: Triodion (The grace of truth); N: Sunday Dogmatic in the 5th Tone. Aposticha: Octoechos; G: Triodion (Advancing from ungodliness to the truefaith); N: Theotokion, Tone 2: (O new wonder).

Matins Gospel V

Epistle: St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews 11: 24-26, 32 - 12:2

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. ... 32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

At all times, indeed, but specially then, when I reflect upon the achievements of the saints, it comes over me to feel despondency concerning my own condition, because we have not even in dreams experienced the things among which those men spent their whole lives, not paying the penalty of sins, but always doing rightly and yet always afflicted .. And having spoken of what befell the apostles (Cf. I Cor. 4:11, II Cor. 11:23-28,12:7, Phil. 1:12, II Tim. 3:11) ...Elijah suffered the same thing with them (II Kings 1:8) and the Son of Man (Matt. 8:20) ...For God 'has provided some better thing for us.' In order that they might not seem to have the advantage of us from being crowned before us, He appointed one time for crowning for all ...Do you see His tender carefulness?

St. John Chrysostom. Homily XXVIII on Hebrews XI, 1, 2. B#58, pp. 491, 492.

The Gospel According To St. John 1: 43-51

43 At that time, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. 46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. 49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, 'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel. 50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. 51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

“The day following, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me” (Jn. 1:43). So the Holy Gospel begins this Sunday, recounting the calling of the Holy Apostles. Centuries have passed, and the same call is audible today, but now refers directly to us, “Follow Me.” And we ask the Lord, “Where?” And the Church answers us by the very name of this Sunday, “into Orthodoxy!”

Just be attentive. Tonight, when this week comes to a close and a new week of Great Lent begins, the Holy Church will say for our edification: “Lord, Thou hast given abundant gifts to those who fear Thee!” And we cannot say that we did not receive these gifts. We received the Sacrament of Confession, the Sacrament of the Eucharist—the Body and Blood of Christ, the Tree of Life. Yes, we undoubtedly received them. But do we have the state of mind which is expressed in the second part of the prayer: “Lord, Thou hast given abundant gifts to those who fear Thee.” The gifts have been given, but are we those who fear God? Yet the fear of God is not an ordinary fear as before someone or something. No. This is the fear of losing what the Lord has given to our heart.

And at the same time, the Holy Church, while telling us that we have received the Grace and Gifts of God, reveals to us through the Apostle reading the states of mind we should possess. These are the states which should be possessed by those who have achieved everything which Christ gives. We know what these achievers have gone through: sufferings, beatings, bonds, prison; they were stoned, sawn asunder, exiled, died by the sword, wandered in the mountains. Those of whom the whole world was not worthy hid in ravines, in caves—they all bore witness to their faith, but they did not receive what had been promised. And this is because God provided for them something better, something worthy of them (Heb. 11:37-40).

Yes, as we see, God calls: “Follow Me! I will give you everything.” But at the same time, such sufferings, such experiences, such horrible things! Look around you, at our walls which are painted with the pictures of saints. All of them are now in the heavenly dwellings, and yet all of them experienced, as every one of us experiences, the way of our earthly existence. Look, among them were archbishops, bishops, priests, monks; there were farmers, nobles and princes, workers of all kinds; there were labourers, people of simple background; there were great scholars, there were illiterate people. And all of them experienced on earth every kind of suffering,

grief, and horror. But they kept that which the Church requires. When the Church says through the words of Christ, “Follow Me,” she is showing us where to go: into Orthodoxy. In the Russian language, Orthodoxy means the Right Word, that word which is true, which we should not betray; the word which we too have given and are again giving every year.

After the Nativity of Christ (on the day of Circumcision), when the circumcision of our heart is accomplished, then we say, “We belong to Christ, we are Christian. Our will is His Will. Christ is our Life; Christ is our Goal; Christ is our Way.” And this way leads us into the Church. Bishop Theophan the Recluse shows us what to do in order to go the way of the Church. He addressed his flock (this was in the 1870’s) with the following words: “We know what technology teaches us, what mechanics teaches us, law, economics. But the Church teaches us about the movement of our heart. Learn and keep in your heart everything the Holy Church teaches, and receiving Godly forces through the sacraments, and quickening them through the holy services and prayers of the Church, go unswervingly the Way of Christ’s commandments under the guidance of lawful shepherds, and you will undoubtedly reach the Kingdom of Heaven and will be saved.”

And so, being zealous for salvation, all our attention should be directed to our heart, to inscribe on it Christian feelings and dispositions. Bishop Theophan reveals to us that the most important thing is in our heart, dispositions, those feelings which appear in the heart. External things are needed, but only in so far as they bear the spirit which spiritualises them. And social life will become true life only if into social relationships you bring spirit, which means heart, the heart of a true Christian. And family life will be true family life only if into all traditions of the external temporal family life we bring those relationships of the heart which God gives us in His Beatitudes: poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, peaceableness—out of this will come real family life. And this way, and only this way, into all phases of our life will come the Triumph of Orthodoxy.

The One Thing Needful - Archbishop Andrei

On this day the Church commemorates the final ending of the Iconoclast controversy and the definitive restoration of the holy icons to the churches by the Empress Theodora, acting as Regent for her young son Michael III. This took place on the first Sunday in Lent, 11 March 843. There is, however, not only an historical link between the first Sunday and the restoration of the icons but also a spiritual affinity. If Orthodoxy triumphed in the epoch of the Iconoclast controversy, this was because so many of the faithful were prepared to undergo exile, torture, and even death, for the sake of the truth. The Feast of Orthodoxy is above all a celebration in honour of the martyrs and confessors who struggled and suffered for the faith: hence its appropriateness for the season of Lent, when we are striving to imitate the martyrs by means of our ascetic self-denial. The fixing of the Triumph of Orthodoxy on the first Sunday is therefore much more than the result of some chance historical conjunction.

The Triodion gives the text of a special ‘Office of the Triumph of Orthodoxy’, which is held at the end of Matins or, more commonly, at the end of the Divine Liturgy on this Sunday. The Office celebrates not only the restoration of the holy icons but, more generally, the victory of the true faith over all heresies and errors. A procession is made with the holy icons, and after this extracts are read from the synodical decree of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787). Then sixty anathemas are pronounced against various heretics dating from the third to the fourteenth century; ‘Eternal Memory’ is sung in honour of the emperors, patriarchs and fathers who defended the Orthodox faith; and ‘Many Years’ is proclaimed in honour of our present rulers and bishops. Unfortunately in many parts of the Orthodox Church today this impressive service has fallen into disuse; elsewhere it is performed in a greatly abbreviated form. Before the Triumph of Orthodoxy came to be celebrated on the first Sunday, there was on this day a commemoration of Moses, Aaron, Samuel, and the prophets. Traces of this more ancient observance can still be seen in the choice of Epistle reading at the Liturgy (Hebrews 11: 24-6, 32-40), and in the Alleluia verse appointed before the Gospel: ‘Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His Name’.

Saints of the Week

16 February / 1 March — TWELVE HOLY MARTYRS WHO SUFFERED DURING THE REIGN OF EMPEROR DIOCLETIAN - Pamphilus, the first of the martyrs, was a presbyter of the church at Caesarea in Palestine. He was a learned and devout man who corrected the text of the New Testament from the errors of the various

copiers. He alone, recopied this salvific book and gave it to those who desired it. The second was the Deacon Valentine, old in years and grey in wisdom. He was an excellent authority of Holy Scripture and knew them completely by heart. The third was Paul, an honourable and distinguished man who, during a previous persecution, was cast into the fire for Christ. Besides them, there were five brothers, according to the flesh and spirit, who were born in Egypt and were returning to their homeland after being forced to work in the mines of Cilicia. At the gates of Caesarea they declared that they were Christians for which they were brought to court. To the question: "What are your names?" They responded: "The pagan names which our mother gave to us, we discarded and we call ourselves: Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Samuel and Daniel." To the question: "Where are you from?" They responded: "From Jerusalem on High." All of them were beheaded and with them a young man Porphyrius who sought the bodies of the martyrs in order to bury them. Porphyrius they burned alive as well as Seleucus, formerly an officer who had approached and kissed the martyrs before the sword fell on their heads. Also the aged Theodulus, a servant of a Roman judge, who, during the funeral kissed one of the martyrs. Finally Julian, who revered and praised the lifeless bodies of the martyrs. And so they gave little for much, the inexpensive for the precious and mortality for immortality and took up habitation with the Lord in the year 308 A.D.

The Holy Venerable Martyr Roman – a simple and illiterate peasant from Carpenesion. Learning of the heroism and glory of the martyrs of Christ, the young Roman desired martyrdom for himself. He went to Thessalonica where he began to praise the Faith of Christ on the streets and referred Islam as a fable. The Turks tortured him horribly and then sold him to a galley captain. Christians ransomed him from the captain and sent him to the Holy Mountain [Athos] where he was tonsured a monk by the illustrious Elder Acacius. But Roman further desired martyrdom for Christ. With the blessing of the Elder Acacius, Roman traveled to Constantinople pretending insanity and began to lead a dog along the Turkish streets. To the question: "What are you doing?" Roman responded that he is feeding the dog as Christians feed the Turks. The Turks threw him into a dry well, where he remained without bread for forty days. They then removed him from the well and beheaded him. A light emanated from his body for three days. An Englishman removed his body and took it to England. A certain monk dipped a towel in the blood of the martyr. This towel is preserved, even today, in the Dochiariu Monastery [Mt. Athos]. This glorious soldier of Christ suffered in the year 1694 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyrs of Persia at Martyropolis (4th C); Venerable Maruthas, bishop of Martyropolis in Mesopotamia (†422); Righteous Basil of Pavlovo-Posadsky (†1869); St. Macarius (Nevsky), metropolitan of Moscow (†1926); New Hieromartyr Peter Uspensky, priest (†1938); Synaxis of Saints of the Novosibirsk Metropolitanate. Movable Feast on the first Sunday of Lent: 'Cyprus' Icon of the Mother of God in the village of Stromyn, Moscow Region.

17 February / 2 March — St. Theodore the Tyro - 'Tyro' means 'Recruit'. No sooner had St Theodore entered the Marmarite regiment of the army in the town of Amasea than a persecution of Christians broke out under the Emperors Maximian and Maximinus. Theodore did not attempt to conceal that he was a Christian, and was brought to trial and imprisoned in a prison that was then locked and sealed. The wicked judge intended him to die of hunger, but the Lord Christ Himself appeared to Theodore in the prison and encouraged His martyr with these words: 'Fear not, Theodore; I am with thee. Take no more earthly food and drink, for thou shalt be in the other life, eternal and unending, with Me in heaven.' Then a multitude of angels appeared in the prison, and the whole place shone with light. The warders on duty saw the angels in white apparel and were filled with fear. Then St Theodore was taken out, tortured and condemned to death. He was thrown into fire, and gave his soul to the most high God. He suffered in 306.

St. Hermogenes, patriarch of Moscow and all Russia - The PriestMartyr Ermogen, Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus', was descended from the Don Cossacks. In the testimony of the Patriarch himself, he was priest in the city of Kazan at a church, near the Kazan bazaar, in the name of Sainted Nicholas (Comm. 6 December and 9 May). Soon he became a monk and from 1582 was archimandrite of the Saviour-Transfiguration monastery at Kazan. On 13 May 1589 he was ordained bishop and became the first Kazan metropolitan.

During the service of His Holiness the Patriarch at Kazan there occurred the appearance and discovery of the Wonder-Working Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in the year 1579. Being then still only a priest, but with the blessing of the then Kazan archbishop Jeremii, he carried the newly-appeared icon from the place of its discovery to the Church of Saint Nicholas. Having remarkable literary talent, the saint himself in 1594 compiled an account about the appearance of the wonderworking icon and the miracles accomplished through it. In 1591

the saint gathered newly-baptised Tatars into the cathedral church and during the course of several days instructed them in the faith.

In 1592 there was the transfer of relics of Sainted German, the second archbishop of Kazan (Comm. 25 September, 6 November, and 23 June), who had died at Moscow on 6 November 1567 during the time of a pestilential plague, and buried in Saint Nicholas Church. With the blessing of Patriarch Job (1589-1605), Saint Ermogen made the re-burial at the Sviyazhsk Uspenie monastery. On 9 January 1592 Saint Ermogen directed a letter to Patriarch Job, in which he stated that at Kazan there was celebrated no particular remembrance of the Orthodox soldiers, who gave their life for the Faith and Fatherland beneath Kazan, and he petitioned to establish an assigned day of memory. At the same time he reported about three martyrs who had suffered at Kazan for their faith in Christ, – one of which was a Russian by the name of John (Comm. 24 January) born at Nizhny Novgorod and captured by the Tatars, while the other two, – Stephen and Peter (Comm. 24 March) were newly-converted Tatars. The saint expressed regret that these martyrs were not inserted into the synodikon read on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, and that memory eternal was not sung for them. In answer to Saint Ermogen, the Patriarch issued an ukaz (decree) of 25 February, which decreed: – "for all the Orthodox soldiers, killed at Kazan and the Kazan surroundings, to celebrate at Kazan and throughout all the Kazan metropolitanate a panikhida on the Saturday following the (1 October) feastday of Pokrov / Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God, and to inscribe them in the great synodikon read on the Sunday of Orthodoxy", and ordered to inscribe in the synodikon also the three Kazan martyrs, entrusting to Saint Ermogen to set the day of their memory. Saint Ermogen circulated the Patriarchal ukaz throughout his diocese, adding, that in all the churches and monasteries they should celebrate liturgy and panikhida for the three Kazan martyrs and should remember them also at litya and liturgy on 24 January. Saint Ermogen displayed zeal in the faith and firmness in the observance of church traditions, and he concerned himself with the enlightening of Kazan Tatars by the faith of Christ.

In 1595, with the active participation of the saint there occurred the discovery and opening of the relics of the Kazan Wonderworkers: Sainted Gurii, the first archbishop of Kazan (Comm. 4 October, 5 December, 20 June), and Sainted Varsonophii bishop of Tver' (Comm. 4 October, 11 April). Tsar Feodor Ioannovich (1584-1598) had given orders to erect at the Kazan Saviour-Transfiguration monastery a new stone church on the place of the first one, wherein the saints were buried. When the graves of the saints were discovered, Saint Ermogen came with a gathering of clergy, he commanded the graves to be opened and, having beheld the undecayed relics and garb of the saints, he notified the Patriarch and the tsar. With the blessing of Patriarch Job and by order of the tsar, the relics of the newly-appeared wonderworkers were placed in the new church. Saint Ermogen himself compiled the lives of Sainted-hierarchs Gurii and Varsonophii.

Having been deigned the arch-pastoral position – metropolitan Ermogen was chosen to the arch-hierarchical cathedra (chair), and on 3 July 1606 he was elevated to the assemblage / sobor of sainted-hierarchs upon the Patriarchal throne at Moscow Uspensky (Dormition) cathedral. Metropolitan Isidor handed the Patriarch the staff of Sainted-hierarch Peter, Moscow WonderWorker (Comm. 5 October, 21 December, 24 August), and the tsar gave as a gift to the new Patriarch a panagia, embellished with precious stones, a white klobuk and staff. In the ancient manner Patriarch Ermogen made his entrance upon a donkey.

The activity of Patriarch Ermogen co-incided with a difficult period for the Russian state – the incursion of the imposter the False-Dimitrii and the Polish king Sigismund III. The arch-hierarch devoted all his powers to the service of the Church and the Fatherland. Patriarch Ermogen was not alone in this exploit: his self-sacrificing fellow-countrymen copied his example and assisted him. With an especial inspiration His Holiness the Patriarch stood up against the traitors and enemies of the Fatherland, who wanted to install Uniatism and Western Catholicism in Russia and to wipe out Orthodoxy, while enslaving the Russian nation. When the imposter arrived at Moscow and settled himself at Tushino, Patriarch Ermogen dispatched two missives to the Russian traitors. In one of them he wrote: "...You have forgotten the vows of our Orthodox faith, in which we are born, baptised, nourished and raised, ye have violated the oath and the kissing of the cross to stand to the death for the house of the Most Holy Mother of God and for the Moscow realm, but have fallen for your false would-be tsarlet... My soul aches, my heart is sickened, all within me agonises, and all my frame doth shudder; I weep and with sobbing I lament: have mercy, have mercy, brethren and children, on your own souls and your parents departed and living... Consider, how our Fatherland is devastated and plundered by foreigners, who offer insult to the holy icons and churches, and how innocent blood is spilled, crying out to God. Think, against whom do ye take up

arms: is it not against God, Who hath created you? Is it not against your own brothers? Do ye not devastate your own Fatherland?... I adjure you in the Name of God, give up your undertaking, there is yet time, that ye perish not at the end". In the second gramota / document the Arch-hierarch appeals: "For the sake of God, come to your senses and turn round, gladden your parents, your wives and children; and we stand to pray God for you..."

Soon the righteous judgement of God was realised upon the Tushino thief: a sad and inglorious fate befell him just as it did his predecessor [another false-Dimitrii]; – he was killed by his own close associates on 11 December 1610. But Moscow continued to remain in peril, since in it were situated the Poles and traitor-boyars, having made betrayal to Sigismund III. The gramoti / documents, dispatched by Patriarch Ermogen throughout the cities and villages, exhorted the Russian nation to liberate Moscow from the enemies and to choose a lawful Russian tsar. The Muscovites raised up a rebellion, in answer to which the Poles burned the city, and shut themselves up within the Kremlin. Together with Russian traitors they forcefully seized hold of Patriarch Ermogen from the patriarchal throne and imprisoned him in the Chudov monastery under guard. On Bright Monday in 1611 the Russian militia approached Moscow and began the seige of the Kremlin, which continued for several months. Besieged within the Kremlin, the Poles many a time sent messengers to the Patriarch with the demand that he order the Russian militia to leave the city, threatening for refusal a death by execution. The saint firmly replied: "What are your threats to me? Only God do I fear. If all of you, Lithuanian people, go from the Moscow realm, I shall bless the Russian militia to go from Moscow, but if ye remain here, I shall bless all to stand against you and to die for the Orthodox faith". While still in prison, the Priest-martyr Ermogen turned with a final missive to the Russian nation, blessing the liberating army against the invaders. The Russian commanders could not come to an agreement over a way to take the Kremlin and free their Arch-hierarch. He languished more than nine months in dreadful confinement, and on 17 February 1612 he died a martyr's death from starvation.

The liberation of Russia, for which Saint Ermogen stood with such indestructible valour, was successfully concluded by the Russian nation. The body of the Priest-martyr Ermogen was buried in the Chudov monastery, but in 1654 was transferred to the Moscow Uspenie cathedral. The glorification of Patriarch Ermogen into the rank of Sainted-hierarchs occurred on 12 May 1913.

St. Finan, bishop of Lindisfarne - Irish by birth, St. Finan of Lindisfarne became a monk at Iona and upheld the Celtic traditions against the encroachment of Roman usage. Finan baptised Penda, ruler of the Middle Angles, and Sigebert, ruler of Essex. Elected bishop of Lindisfarne in 651, Finan sent missionaries to Mercia and to Essex. He also debated Ronan, an Englishman, about the correct way to calculate the date of Easter. On the Holy Island, he built a wooden cathedral, the roof of which was thatched with seagrass. (A later abbot removed the thatching and covered the building with lead). Finan died in 661, and St. Cuthbert succeeded him as abbot.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Mariamne, sister of the Apostle Philip (1st C); St. Auxibius I, bishop of Cyprus (†102); Right-believing Emperor Marcian (†457) and his wife St. Pulcheria (†453); Finding of the relics of Martyr Menas the Most Eloquent (9thC); Venerable Theodore the Silent of the Kiev Caves (13th C); Venerable Theodosius (†1362) and Romanus (†c.1370) of Bulgaria; Martyr Michael of Adrianopolis (†1490); Martyr Theodore of Mytilene (†1795); Hieromartyr Theodore of Adjara (†1822); Venerable Barnabas of Gethsemane (†1906); Righteous Nicholas Planas of Athens, priest (†1932); New Hieromartyrs Michael Nikologorsky and Paul Kosminkov, priests (†1938); New Martyr Anna Chetverikov (†1940).

18 February / 3 March — The "Holy Night" of Russian Monasticism. The 'Holy Night', so called by the people, was on the night of the 17-18 February, 1932. It is a radiant yet terrible date, the Passion Friday of Russian Monasticism - ignored by all and almost unknown to the whole world - when all of Russian monasticism in a single night disappeared in to the concentration camps. It was all done in the dead of night and with the full knowledge of Metropolitan Alexis (later appointed Patriarch Alexis I of Moscow under the Communists) - about which there is sufficient evidence. In Leningrad there were arrested: 40 monks of the St Alexander Nevsky Lavra; 12 monks of the Kiev metochion (the other monks had all been arrested in 1930); 10 monks from the Valaam metochion; 90 nuns of the Novodevichi Convent; 16 nuns of Abbess Taisia's Leushinsky metochion; 12 monks from St Theodore's Cathedral; 8 monks from the "Kinovia" of the St Alexander Nevsky Lavra's "Big Okhotko"; a hundred or so monastics from various other Leningrad churches. In all - 318 people. That same night all the monks and brethren of the St Macarius the Roman Monastery were arrested and brought to Leningrad as vicious criminals whose very presence was a threat to society; they were treated as deadly insects whose presence must be stamped out. The wave of arrests, like thunder, rolled over the Russian land, striking chiefly the monastic population which so recently had been the glorious guardian of the nation's morals and values. It

also struck many of the white (parish) clergy and laymen who, in one way or another, were close in spirit to monasticism. For example, the flaming sermons of the parish priest Father Alexander Medvedsky were the cause of his arrest. All were sent to the Kazakhstan region from where almost no one ever returned.

Papa-Nicholas Planas - was born on the island of Naxos, the only son of a well-to-do family. He moved to Athens with his mother and sister at the age of 14 following the death of his father. He married at the age of 17, but his wife died giving birth to their first child. Soon afterwards, in 1879, he was ordained a deacon, and five years later, a priest. For fifty years without a break he celebrated liturgy daily from eight in the morning till three in the afternoon. His joy and his life was to celebrate Liturgies, Vigils, Vespers, Canons, Blessings of the Waters, Holy Unction, and Memorial Services. Many times he would say with simplicity, "I will chant unto the Lord for as long as I have my being". He was a great faster, eating only once a day, in the evenings. He would commemorate names for hours on end - sometimes 2000 at a time. First deceased patriarchs, metropolitans, priests, deacons, monastics, and the people of Naxos & Athens. He would tie the lists of names into a big bundle and carry them close to his heart. He was patient & long-suffering, enduring all manner of trials and insults. He quietly observed the Old Calendar and the ways of True Orthodox Christianity. He had no attachment to earthly things, and passed his whole life without acquiring anything. There were many miraculous occurrences during his life, as those close to him have testified, and there are many reports of healings through his prayers and contact with his relics after his repose. He reposed in February 1932 at the age of 81, following a short illness. He shines forth as one of the great saints of the 20th Century. Holy Papa-Nicholas, pray for us!

Tropar of Papa-Nicholas Planas, Tone 5: Let us praise our protector, the godly Nicholas; as one endowed with blest virtue, he shone forth as a true priest of the Most High God, and was his fervent worshipper. For, by his holy life on earth, he hath left us most sublime, divine and unfailing teachings of long suffering, meekness, patience, unfeigned humility and true God-like love.

Kondak of Papa-Nicholas Planas, Tone 3: Humble of spirit and pure of heart, illustrious in life and dispassionate of a truth, wast thou, O wise one. Thou didst illumine all by thy virtues and dost grant grace unto them that draw nigh unto thee; and by thine intercessions, thou dost heal them that call upon thee, O Father Nicholas.

St. Colman, bishop. of Lindisfarne - An Irish bishop of Lindisfarne, England, a disciple of St. Columba. He was born in Connaught, Ireland. At the Synod of Whitby Colman defended the Celtic ecclesiastical practices against St. Wilfrid and St. Agilbert.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome (†461); Martyrs Leo and Parigorius of Patara in Lycia (†c.258); St. Agapitus the Confessor, bishop of Synnada, and the Martyrs Victor, Dorotheus, Theodoulos, and Agrippa (4th C); Hieromartyr Abid, bishop (4th C); St. Flavian the Confessor, patriarch of Constantinople (†449); Venerable Blaise of Mt. Athos (9th C); Venerable Cosmas of Yakhromsk. (†1492); St. Nicholas, catholicos of Georgia (†1591); Venerable Vladimir (Terentiev), confessor (†1933) Finding of the relics of New Martyr Irene of Lesbos (1961).

19 February / 4 March — Commemoration of all the holy and God-bearing Fathers who shone forth in the ascetic life — there is a general commemoration of all the ascetic saints of the Church, both men and women. As we set out on the journey of the Lenten fast, we are reminded that we do not travel alone but as members of a family, supported by the intercessions of many invisible helpers.

The Holy Apostles Archippus, Philemon and Apphia. Archippus was one of the Seventy. The Apostle Paul mentions him in his Epistles to the Colossians (4:17) and to Philemon (2), calling him his fellow-soldier in the battle. The Christians' gathering-place for prayer in the town of Colossae was in the house of Philemon. The Apostle Paul, writing to Philemon, calls this 'the Church in thy house'. This was in the time when the apostles were consecrating their disciples to the episcopate—some to permanent sees and others as missionaries, travelling to various places. Philemon was one of these latter. Apphia, Philemon's wife, remained to serve the house-church with fasting. At the time of a feast of the pagan goddess Artemis, all the faithful in Colossae were, as was their custom, gathered at prayer in the house of Philemon. The pagans came to hear of this gathering, rushed in on them and seized all the Christians. They flogged Archippus, Philemon and Apphia as their leaders, then buried them up to the waist in the ground and stoned them. Philemon and Apphia died of this, but they took Archippus out of the hole barely alive and left him for the children to play with. They took knives and stabbed him all over, and thus this fellow-soldier of Paul's in the battle made a good end of his earthly road.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Auxibius II, bishop of Cyprus (2nd C); Martyrs Maximus, Theodotus, Hesychius and Asclepiodota of Adrianopolis (†305-311); Venerable Macarius and Eugene, confessors of Antioch (†363); Venerable Rabulas of Constantinople (†c.530); Venerable Conon of Palestine (†c.555); Venerable Dositheus of Gaza, a disciple of Venerable Abba Dorotheus (7th C); Venerable Philothea of Athens (†1589); St. Theodore of Sanaxar (†1791); Hieromartyr Nicetas of Epirus, at Serres (†1809); New Martyr Demetrius Volkov (†1942).

20 February / 5 March — St Leo, Bishop of Catania - beneath Mount Etna the volcano, in the town of Catania, St Leo was a good shepherd and compassionate teacher of the people. He had great care for the sick and poor, and both his zeal for the Faith and his compassion for the needy were great. There appeared one day in that town a magician called Heliodorus, who deluded the people with many illusions and greatly seduced the young. He once entered a church during divine service and began his tricks. St Leo came up to him, bound him with one end of his pallium and led him out to the market place. There he ordered that a great fire be kindled. When it was burning fiercely he stood among the flames and pulled Heliodorus to him. Heliodorus was completely burned up, but Leo remained alive and unharmed. All who had been taken in by Heliodorus, and who had regarded him as in some way divine, were put to shame by this. The compassionate and zealous Leo became known throughout the whole kingdom as a wonder-worker, helping people by his miracles. When he had finished his course, some time in the 8th century, his soul went to the Lord and healing myrrh flowed from his relics.

The Hieromartyr Sadok, bishop Persia and the 128 martyrs with him - Sadok was a bishop in Persia, following St. Simeon. At one time, St. Simeon appeared to him in a dream and said: "Yesterday, I - today, you!" Sadok interpreted these words to his flock as meaning: Last year I [St. Simeon] suffered, this year you [Sadok] will suffer. Indeed that year the Emperor Sapor arrested him with many of the clergy and people and brought them to trial. Sapor first ordered them to worship fire and sun as divinity. Sadok replied: "We are eagerly prepared to die for our God, but we cannot worship the sun nor fire." After that, they were tortured and sentenced to death by beheading. Before being beheaded, Sadok uplifted a prayer to God: "Wash us, O Lord, from our sins in our blood!" Sadok, with his priests and faithful gloriously gave up their bodies to death and their souls to the immortal God. They suffered in the year 342 A.D. or 344 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: Hieromartyr Eleutherius, bishop of Byzantium (2nd C); Venerable Agatho, bishop of Rome (†681); St. Eucherius of Orléans, Bishop of Orleans (†743); Right-believing Prince Yaroslav the Wise (†1054); Venerable Agatho of the Kiev Caves (14th C); Monk-martyr Cornelius, abbot of the Pskov Caves and his disciple, Venerable Bassian of Murom (†1570); Monk-martyrs of Valaam, who suffered at the hands of the Lutherans: Titus, Tikhon, Gelasius, Sergius, Varlaam, Sabbas, Conon, Sylvester, Cyprian, Pimen, John, Simonas, Jonah, David, Cornelius, Niphon, Athanasius, Serapion, Varlaam, Athanasius, Anthony, Luke, Leontius, Thomas, Dionysius, Philip, Ignatius, Basil, Pachomius, Basil, Theophilus, John, Theodore, and John (†1578); New Hieromartyr priest Nicholas Rozov (†1938); St. Cindeus, bishop of Pisidia.

21 February / 6 March — St Zacharias, Patriarch of Jerusalem - the Persian King Chozroes attacked Jerusalem, ransacking the city, in the time of the Greek Emperor Heraclius, in 614. He took the Precious Cross off to Persia and enslaved an enormous number of Christians, including Patriarch Zacharias. The Jews supported him in his wickedness towards the Christians. It is recorded, among further malice on the part of the Jews, that they bought 90,000 Christian slaves from Chozroes and killed them all. The aged Patriarch spent fourteen years in slavery. Many marvels were wrought in Persia by the Precious Cross, and the Persians exclaimed: "The Christian God has come to Persia!" The Emperor Heraclius later compelled King Chozroes to return the Precious Cross to Jerusalem, together with the Patriarch and the remaining slaves. The Emperor himself carried the Cross into the Holy City on his back. St Zacharias spent his remaining days in peace, and went to the Lord in 632. Patriarch Modestus deputised for him on the patriarchal throne, and after him came St Sophronius.

Our Holy Father Timothy - Timothy was a recluse in a place called Symbola on the Asiatic side of Mount Olympus. In his youth, Timothy entered a monastery, was tonsured a monk and until old age spent his earthly time in fasting, prayer, vigils and ceaseless labour. He remained pure and chaste throughout his entire life. To the pure and chaste God gives authority over evil spirits and He gave this to Timothy. Though his labours for the salvation of his soul, St. Timothy succeeded to build in himself a beautiful home for the Holy Spirit. This holy man died in the year 795 A.D.

St Eustathius (Eustace), Archbishop of Antioch - a great zealot and protector of Orthodoxy. As such, he was especially prominent at the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea 325 A.D.], where he intellectually and systematically refuted the teaching of Arius. With the other Holy Fathers, Eustathius confessed correctly that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit according to divine Hypostasis [natures]. Following the death of Emperor Constantine, the Arians somehow again gained prevalence and began to bitterly persecute Orthodoxy. St. Eustathius was ousted from his throne and exiled, at first to Thrace and after that to Macedonia. Eustathius suffered much and long until, in the end, he gave up his holy soul to God in the year 345 A.D.

St John III Scholasticus, Patriarch of Constantinople - As an advocate, John was ordained a priest and after that became patriarch in the year 565 A.D. He compiled canons, which were included in the Nomo-Canon.

Also commemorated on this day: Hieromartyr Severian, bishop of Scythopolis (†452); St. George, bishop of Amastris on the Black Sea (†803); New Hieromartyrs Alexander Vislyansky, Gregory Klebanov and Daniel Alferov, priests (†1930); New Hieromartyr Constantine Pyatikrestovsky, priest, and Paul Shirokogorov, deacon (†1938); New Martyr Olga Koshelev (†1939); 'Kozelshchina' Icon of the Mother of God.

22 February / 7 March — Blessed Theoktista the Fool for Christ - when Archbishop Peter (Zverev) & Bishop Alexis (Bui) were in Voronezh, a remarkable holy woman lived there, a fool for Christ, the blessed Theoktista Michaelovna. Who she was or where she came from - no one knew. It was said that she had been the wife of a high-ranking naval officer who had died during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), and that after this tragedy, becoming disillusioned with the solidity of earthly life, she directed the gaze of her heart on high and took upon herself the exploit of foolishness for the sake of Christ. God rewarded her with a gift of clairvoyance with which she helped her suffering neighbours. She was small of stature, skinny, worn out, with noble features in her face. She lived in the Voronezh Monastery until it closed in 1931 and then took shelter with various people. She had literally "nowhere to lay her head". She did not sleep at nights, but would spend them in prayer and vigil. She had a remarkable mind and a refined way of expressing her thoughts and feelings. It was apparent that she was well bred. The righteous Theoktista saw the rapid liquidation of the Orthodox Churches and monuments of Voronezh in the 1930's, which was only a part of the satanic program that was conducted all over the much suffering Russian land, to the appalled outrage of almost the whole Russian people.. By the mid-1930's all the churches were closed, levelled by dynamite, or turned in to factory storehouses. The heart of the blessed one, which inspired so many good deeds for her neighbours, could not endure any longer. One day blood rushed to her throat, and on February 22, 1936 (OS), she died. It was said that before her death she dressed all in white to meet her bridegroom, Christ. She was buried in the cemetery outside the city and her memory was erased from Voronezh. But the Christian conscience bears her image in loving hearts throughout the world, wherever there is knowledge and understanding of Russia's Catacomb Saints.

The Holy Martyr Maurice and the Seventy Soldiers with him - During the reign of Emperor Maximian there was a great persecution of Christians. In the Syrian town of Apamsea, Maurice was superior of the local army. The pagans reported him to the emperor as being a Christian and a sower of the Christian Faith among the soldiers. The emperor himself came and conducted an investigation. Along with Maurice seventy Christian soldiers were also brought before the emperor among whom was Photinus, the son of Maurice. Neither the emperor's flattery nor threats could sway these heroes. To the threats of the emperor, they replied: "O Emperor, there is no fear in the sound and powerful souls of those who love the Lord!" When the emperor ordered and removed their military belts and garments, they said to him: "Our God will clothe us with incorruptible garments and belts and eternal glory!" When the emperor rebuked them because they despised the military honor given to them by him, they replied: "Your honor is without honor, for you have forgotten God Who gave you imperial authority!" Then the emperor commanded and the executioner beheaded Maurice's son Photinus before his eyes to instil fear in the father and in the others. But, Maurice said: "You have fulfilled our wish O torturer and have sent Photinus, the soldier of Christ before us." Then the emperor sentenced them to a most inhuman death: they were brought to a muddy place, stripped, bound to trees and rubbed them with honey, in order to be bitten by mosquitoes, wasps and hornets. After ten days under the most painful sufferings, they gave up their souls to God and departed to rejoice eternally with the holy angels in heaven. Christians secretly removed their bodies and honourably buried them. These courageous soldiers of Christ suffered about the year 305 A.D.

The Many Martyrs of Eugenius - During the reign of Emperor Arcadius, the relics of many martyrs of Christ were unearthed, among whom was the Apostle Andronicus and his female assistant Junia. "Great Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are prominent among the apostles and they were in Christ before me." (Romans 16:7). These relics were discovered according to a revelation from God to a cleric Nicholas Calligraphus. "Their names are known only to God Who has written their names in the Book of Life in the heavens." In the twelfth century, Emperor Andronicus II built a beautiful church over the relics of the Apostle Andronicus.

Our Holy Fathers Thalassius and Limnaeus - Both Thalassius and Limnaeus were Syrian ascetics. One of their unique forms of asceticism was "silence." Following the death of St. Thalassius in 440 A.D., Limnaeus joined St. Maron (February 14) and with him lived a life of mortification on top of a mountain under the open sky.

St Papias of Hierapolis - a disciple of the holy apostles and a patristic author. From Papius we have testimony of the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, the four Marys and the brothers of our Lord as well as an incomplete but preserved manuscript: "An Interpretation of the Words of our Lord."

Also commemorated on this day: St. Abilius, patriarch of Alexandria (†98); St. Telesphorus, bishop of Rome (†127); St. Titus, bishop of Bostra (†378); Martyrs Eutherius, Palatinus, Victorinus, Paula, Emerita, Antoniana, Dativa, Rogatiana, Antiga, Urbana, Maxima, Marina, Matrona, Peregrina, Secundula, Justa, Castula, Florentius, Victor, Marcellinus, Casta, Donatula, Libosa, Flavia, Dota, Furnata, Lucian, Amicus, Regina, Cyriacus, Galatius, Valerius and Gorgianus of Nicomedia (4th C); Venerable Thalassius, Limnaeus and Baradates, hermits of Cyrrhus (5th C); Venerable Babylus the Jester and his wife Comnita, of Nicosia (7th C); Venerable Athanasius the Confessor of Pavlopetrios (†c.821); Venerable Herman of Stolobensk (†1614); New Hieromartyrs Vladimir Ilinsky, Joseph Smirnov, and Michael Lisitsyn, priests, John Kastorsky, deacon, and Martyr John Perebaskin (†1918); New Hieromartyrs, Andrew Iasenev, Victor Morigerovsky, John Orlov, John Parusnikov, Michael (Gorbunov), and Paul Smirnov, priests (†1938); New Hieromartyr Sergius Belokurov, priest, Monk-martyrs Antipas (Kirillov) and Sergius (Bukashkina), Nun-martyr Parasceva (Makarova), Martyrs Nicholas Nekrasov, Stephen Frantov, Barbara Losev, Elizabeth Timokhin, and Irene Smirnov (†1938); New Martyr Andrew Gnevishev (†1941); New Monk-martyr Philaret (Pryakin) (†1942).

† Daily Scripture Readings †

Monday – Sixth Hour: Isa. 4:2-6, 5:1-7; Vespers: Gen. 3:21-4:7; Prov. 3:34-4:22

Tuesday – Sixth Hour: Isa. 5:7-16; Vespers: Gen. 4:8-15; Prov. 5:1-15

Wednesday – Sixth Hour: Isa. 5:16-25; Vespers: Gen. 4:16-26; Prov. 5:15-6:3

Thursday – Sixth Hour: Isa. 6:1-12; Vespers: Gen. 5:1-24; Prov. 6:3-20

Friday - Sixth Hour: Isa. 7:1-14; Vespers: Gen. 5:32-6:8; Prov. 6:20-7:1

Saturday – Epistle: for Saturday: Heb. 3:12-16 (§309); for the Departed: I Thess. 4:13-17 (§270)
Gospel: for Saturday: Mark 1:35-44 (§6); for the Departed: John 5:24-30 (§16).

HOMILY

About repentance and the forgiveness of sins

"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name"(St. Luke 24:47).

This is the final instruction of the Saviour to the holy apostles. In these words as in the shell of a walnut, is contained the gospel of reconciliation between God and men. What does God seek from men and what does God give them? He seeks repentance and He grants forgiveness of sins. He seeks little but He gives all. Let men only repent for committed sins and let men cease to sin and men will receive all from God; all; not only all that their hearts could desire rather even more, much more. In truth, to the righteous everything is promised. The righteous will be the inheritors of the Kingdom of God, they will be the sons of God, and they will be the children of light, the children of immorality, companions to the angels, brothers of Christ. The righteous will have an abundant life, an abundance of peace, an abundance of wisdom, an abundance of power and an abundance of joy. The righteous will have all, for all has been promised to them.

Let men only repent and they will receive all. Let the beggar only cleanse himself, bathe himself and clothe himself in purity before the doors of the royal court and he will be immediately ushered into the royal court and he will be met and embraced by the king and he will have all. He will live with the king, sit at the royal table; he will have all, all, all!

O my brethren, these are not only words rather this is the living and holy truth. For we know that many penitents, both female and male, received all of this, which was promised. Many have appeared from the other world and have proved the truth of these words, witnessing how they now live as royal sons and daughters. But they repented promptly; and there remains time for us to repent if we desire to be together with them as the heirs of the kingdom.

O Merciful Lord, help us that we may repent before death in order that we may live eternally.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.