

The Forth Sunday of Great Lent, 40 Martyrs of Sabaste

9 / 22 March

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 8: Thou didst descend from on high, O Merciful One! / Thou didst endure the three-day burial / to free us from our sufferings! / O Lord, our Life and Resurrection, glory to Thee.

Troparion of the Martyrs tone 1: Together let us honour that holy company united by faith,/ those noble warriors of the Master of all;/ they were divinely enlisted for Christ and passed through fire and water./ Then they entered into refreshment and pray for those who cry:/ Glory to Him Who has strengthened you; glory to Him Who has crowned you;/ glory to Him Who has made you wonderful O holy Forty Martyrs.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 8: By rising from the tomb Thou didst raise the dead and resurrect Adam/ Eve exults in Thy Resurrection, / and the world celebrates Thy rising from the dead, O Greatly Merciful One.

Kontakion of the Martyrs tone 6: You left all earthly armies to cleave to the heavenly Master,/ O Forty Prize-winners of the Lord./ You passed through fire and water/ and received glory from heaven and many crowns.

The service to Our Holy Father John Climacus (of the Ladder) is transferred to Compline.

Matins Gospel VIII

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.



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."

HEALING THROUGH PRAYER AND FASTING

All three Synoptics speak of this event, indicating that it happened immediately after the transfiguration. During this time, a large crowd surrounded the disciples of Christ who were waiting for Him at the bottom of Tabor. According to St Mark, they were arguing with the scribes. St Mark also indicates that all the people, when they saw Jesus, "were greatly amazed," probably because His face and entire appearance still retained a shade of His former glory on Tabor during the transfiguration. A certain man approached the Lord with a request to heal his son, who was a lunatic, meaning that the devil in him would go into fits of rage on a full moon, casting him alternatively into the fire or the water. He also added that he had already brought the boy to the disciples, and they could not heal him.

Hearing that the disciples could not heal him, even though He had given them power over the unclean spirits, the Lord exclaimed: "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you?" Some exegetes interpret these words as directed toward the disciples since they did not have enough faith to heal the possessed boy, while others refer them to the whole nation of Israel. St Matthew merely says that after this exclamation, Jesus had the boy brought to Him, and He "rebuked the demon, and it came out of him." Saints Mark and Luke add certain other details. When the boy was brought to Him, he had a demoniac fit. When the Lord asked the father how long the child had been afflicted with this devil, the father said that it was from early childhood, adding: "but if You can do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." The Lord answered him: "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears,

"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." With humility, he admitted that his faith was not sufficient, incomplete. For this humble confession, the Lord rewarded him. His son was healed.

When His disciples asked why they could not cast out the demon, the Lord answered: "Because of your unbelief." It is possible that having heard of the strength, duration, and stubbornness of this possession, they began to doubt their own ability to cast out this particular demon, and so they could not, just as Peter began to sink even after he had begun to walk on the water, when he was faced with the ferocity of the winds and waves and doubted his ability to walk to Jesus.

"I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." Even the smallest amount of faith is capable of performing great miracles, because in this faith is hidden a great power, similar to the power that is hidden in the minuscule mustard seed that later grows into a large tree.

However, it would be wrong to think that faith has power in and of itself; no, faith is merely the necessary precondition for the action of God's power. God can, of course, perform miracles even when faith is insufficient,

as Christ showed with the father of the possessed youth. "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23). This means that the Lord is ready to do anything for a person, contingent on his faith. Faith is like a conductor for the grace of God, which performs miracles. In conclusion, the Lord utters some very important words: "However, this kind" meaning this kind of demon, "does not go out except by prayer and fasting." This is because true faith cannot be had without labors of prayer and fasting. True faith gives birth to prayer and fasting, which themselves help and, even more, strengthen faith. Thus, our hymnography praises both prayer and fasting as a double-edged sword against the demons and the passions. St Theophan the Recluse writes: "The demons sense the fasting and prayerful man from a distance, and they run far from him, in order not to receive a painful blow. Can one say that where there is no prayer and fasting, there are demons? Yes, one can."

During this sojourn in Galilee, the Lord again "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" (Mark 9:31-32). The Lord saw that now more than ever, His disciples needed to know about the nearness of His suffering, death, and resurrection, and so He repeats His prophecy several times, in order for them to better remember it when the time came and to prepare them for it. But they still clung to the Jewish expectations of the Messiah, and these words remained for them something incomprehensible.

Archbishop Averky (Taushev)

Second Reading - Matthew 20:1-16

Saints of the Week

9 / 22 March — The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste - These were all soldiers in the Roman army, but believed firmly in the Lord Jesus. When a persecution arose in the time of Licinius, they were all taken for trial before the commander, who threatened to strip them of their military status. To this one of them, St Candidus, replied: 'Do not take only our military status, but also our bodies; nothing is dearer or of greater honour to us than Christ our God.' Then the commander ordered his servants to stone the holy martyrs to death. But when the servants threw the stones at the Christians, the stones turned back and fell on them themselves, causing them grievous injuries. One stone fell on the commander's face and smashed his teeth. The torturers, in bestial fury, bound the holy martyrs and threw them into a lake, setting a watch all round it to prevent any of them escaping. There was a terrible frost, and the lake froze around the bodies of the martyrs. To make the torture worse, the torturers built and lit baths by the lake, in the sight of the freezing sufferers, with the idea that one of them might deny Christ and acknowledge the idols of Rome. In fact, one of them did abjure, came out of the water and went into the baths. But lo, during the night a strange light appeared from heaven, which heated the water in the lake and the bodies of the martyrs, and with that light there descended from heaven thirty-nine wreaths for their heads. One of the sentries on the shore saw this, confessed the name of Christ and went into the lake to be worthy of the fortieth wreath in place of the traitor. And the fortieth wreath was seen to descend upon him. The next day, the whole town was amazed to see the martyrs still alive. Then the wicked judges commanded that their legs be broken and their bodies thrown into the water, so that the Christians should not be able to find them. On the third day the martyrs appeared to the local bishop, Peter, and told him to search beneath the water and bring out their relics. The bishop went out on a dark night with his clergy, and saw where the martyrs' relics were glowing in the water. Every bone that had been broken off from their bodies rose to the surface and burned there like a candle. They gathered them, and gave them burial, and the souls of these martyrs went to Him who was martyred for us all and rose with glory, the Lord Jesus. They suffered with honour and were crowned with unfading glory in 320. On this day it was a tradition in Russia to make cookies in the shape of swallows which were then arriving with the approaching spring. In our own times Blessed Father Seraphim (Rose), who always baked swallow cookies for the feast, would also make lizard cookies as spring in Platina, where his Monastery of St. Herman of Alaska was situated, brought lizards, and not swallows.

St. Bosa, bishop of York - Died 686. Saint Bosa was a Benedictine monk at Whitby, England, under Saint Hilda. In 678, he was consecrated bishop of Deira (the southern half of Northumbria, now Yorkshire) by Saint Theodore, with his see at York, when Saint Wilfrid was driven out by King Egfrid for refusing to accept the division of his see. Wilfrid returned in 686, but Bosa took over the diocese in 691 when Wilfrid was again exiled following a quarrel with King Aldfrid; Bosa ruled it with great holiness and ability until his death. Saint Bede

praises Bosa as "a man beloved by God . . . of most unusual merit and sanctity." One of his disciples was Saint Acca, who later followed and succeeded Wilfrid at Hexham.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Urpasianus of Nicomedia (†c.295); Righteous Caesarius, brother of St. Gregory the Theologian (†369); Venerable Philoromus the Confessor of Galatia (4th C); Translation of the relics of Martyr Abraham the Bulgar (1230); St. Jonah, bishop of Novgorod (†1470); Righteous Theodosius Levitsky, priest of Balta, Odessa (†1845); New Hieromartyrs Alexius Smirnov, Demetrius Glivenko, Michael Maslov, Sergius Lebedev, Sergius Tsvetkov, priests, Nicholas Goriunov, deacon, Monk-martyr Ioasaph (Shakhov), Nun-martyrs Alexandra (Samoilova) and Natalia (Ul'ianova) (†1938); Righteous Tarasius, wonderworker of Lycaonia; 'Albazin' Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos ('The Word Was Made Flesh').

10 /23 March — The Holy Martyr Codratus of Corinth, and others with him - In a time of persecution of Christians, many of the faithful fled to the mountains and caves. The mother of this Codratus did so. She was pregnant just at that time, and gave birth to Codratus in a forest, dying almost at once. He was kept safe and fed by the providence of God and his guardian angel. Codratus grew up in solitude with nature. He who gave manna from heaven to the Israelites in the wilderness released a sweet dew from a cloud onto the mouth of the child Codratus. When he was twelve years old, he went down to the town, and there some good people took a fancy to him and educated him. He studied medicine and then began to heal the sick, using both natural medicines and, more importantly, the spiritual power and prayer which had been with him from childhood. When a new persecution arose under Decius, Codratus was taken for trial and thrown into prison. Five of his friends stood beside him and confessed the name of Christ. They were: Cyprian, Dionysius, Anectus, Paul and Crescens. They were all dragged through the streets and struck with sticks and stones by the unbelievers, especially by the children, until they arrived at the scaffold. Here the martyrs prayed to God and were beheaded with the sword. A spring of water gushed out onto the earth at the spot, which to this day is called by Codratus's name and commemorates the heroic death for Christ of the holy six. They suffered with honour for the truth in Corinth in the year 250, in the time of the Emperor Decius and his governor Jason. Martyr Codratus of Nicomedia.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Quadratus of Nicomedia and with him Saturninus, Rufinus and others (3rd C); Venerable Anastasia the Patrician of Alexandria (†c.568); Venerable George Arselaites, brother of Venerable John Climacus (6th C); Venerable John of Khakhuli, Georgia (11th C); Martyr Michael of Thessalonica (†1544); Blessed Paul of Taganrog (†1879); New Hieromartyr Demetrius Legeydo, priest (†1938).

11 / 24 March — St Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem - born in Damascus of eminent parents. Having acquired worldly wisdom, he was not content with this, and began also to acquire pure, spiritual wisdom. In the monastery of St Theodosius he found himself with the monk John Moschus, whom he took as his teacher; then, together with him, set out to visit the monasteries and ascetics of Egypt. Their motto was to glean more spiritual wisdom each day. They wrote down all that they discovered, and later published it in two books entitled 'The Spiritual Meadow'. They later went to Rome, where Moschus died, leaving Sophronius with the pledge to take him either to Sinai or to the Monastery of St Theodosius. Sophronius fulfilled the desire of his teacher and took his body to the monastery, after which he was delayed in Jerusalem, which by that time had been freed from the Persians. He witnessed the return of the Precious Cross from Persia, which the Emperor Heraclius carried into the Holy City on his back. The old Patriarch, Zacharias, who also returned from slavery, did not live long and, when he went to the other world, was followed first by Modestus, who died in 634, and then by blessed Sophronius. He governed the Church with outstanding wisdom and zeal for four years, standing in defence of Orthodoxy against the Monothelite heresy, which he condemned at his Council in Jerusalem before it was condemned at the 6th Ecumenical Council. He wrote the life of St Mary of Egypt, compiled the rite of the Great Blessing of Water and introduced various new hymns and songs into different services. When the Arabian Caliph Omar captured Jerusalem, Sophronius begged him to spare the Christians, which Omar hypocritically promised. When Omar quickly began to plunder and ill-treat the Christians in Jerusalem, Sophronius, with many lamentations, begged God to take him from among the living upon earth, that he should not see the desecration of the holy places. And God heard his prayer, and took him to Himself in His heavenly courts in 644.

St. Angus (Oengus) of Culdees, compiler of first Irish martyrology - Born in Ireland; died c. 830. The appellation "Culdee," Ceile De, or Kele-De means "worship of God," which became the name of a monastic movement otherwise known as the "Companions of God." Oengus was of the race of the Dalaradians, kings of Ulster. In his youth, renouncing all earthly pretensions, he chose Christ for his inheritance by embracing the

religious life in the monastery of Cluain-Edneach (Clonenagh) in East Meath (County Laois). Here he became so great a proficient both in learning and sanctity, that no one in his time could be found in Ireland that equalled him in reputation for every kind of virtue, and for sacred knowledge. To shun the esteem of the world, he disguised himself and entered the monastery of Tamlacht (Tallaght Hill), three miles from Dublin, where he lived for seven years as an anonymous lay brother. There he performed all the drudgery of the house, appearing fit for nothing but the vilest tasks, while interiorly he was being perfected in love and contemplation absorbed in God. After his identity was discovered when he tried to coach an unsuccessful student, he returned to Cluain-Edneach, where the continual austerity of his life, and his constant application to God in prayer, may be more easily admired than imitated. For example, he would daily recite one-third of the psalter (50 Psalms) while immersed in cold water. He was chosen abbot, and at length raised to the episcopal dignity: for it was usual then in Ireland for eminent abbots in the chief monasteries to be bishops. He was known for his devotion to the saints. He left both a longer and a shorter Irish Martyrology, and five other books concerning the saints of his country, contained in what the Irish call *Saltair-na-Rann*. The short martyrology was a celebrated metrical hymn called *Felire* or *Festilogium*. The longer, *Martyrology of Tallaght* was composed in collaboration with Saint Maelruain of Tallaght. He died at Disertbeagh (now Desert Aenguis or Dysert Enos), which became also a famous monastery, and took its name from him.

St. Euthymius, Bishop of Novgorod wonderworker - Sainted Evthymii, in Baptism Ioann (John), was born at the fervent prayers of the presbyter Mikhei and his spouse Anna. For long years they had been childless, and they gave a vow: if a son were born, they would dedicate him to God. The reading of priestly books and frequent visits to Divine-services, which the boy served at with his father – a priest at a not-large temple named for Saint Theodore, – all this gave sanctity to the soul of young Ioann. And at the age of fifteen, in the year 1411, he departed his parental home for a monastery.

Twelve versts from Novgorod, in a wilderness spot named Vyazhisch, amidst the forests and the swamps there had settled three monks – Evphrosyn, Ignatii and Galaktion. There soon joined them the priest Pimen, who accepted tonsure with the name Pakhomii. Here they asceticised in complete solitude at a wooden chapel built by them in the name of Christ's Saint Nicholas, living in unceasing prayer and in the harsh struggle with the severe conditions of nature in the Northern regions. The young Ioann in seeking salvation came also to these ascetics. The hegumen Pakhomii accepted him fondly and tonsured him into monasticism with the name Evthymii. Tonsure at so early an age reflects the outstanding spiritual traits of the young ascetic, which were evident to the perspicacious Pakhomii. During this period in time the Novgorod archbishop's cathedral-seat was occupied by archbishop Simeon, a simple monk elevated to archbishop. The virtuous life of the Monk Evthymii became known to the archbishop. Saint Evthymii was summoned to Novgorod and after a long talk with the vладыka he was appointed the archbishop's steward. During these times Novgorod archbishops occupied quite unique a position: independent of princely authority, they were elected directly by the veche-assembly and they assumed a large role in secular matters; moreover, it imposed upon them the administration of vast land-holdings. And an archbishop's steward under these conditions had to combine administrative talent with the utmost non-covetousness and deep Christian humility. Saint Evthymii fervently entreated the archpastor to send him away back again to Vyazhisch, but then he yielded.

In his new duty, Saint Evthymii evoked general astonishment and esteem, in that while occupying so important a position, and being at the centre of business life in a large crowded city, he as a monk asceticised as fervently as he would have in the deep forest. In 1421 archbishop Simeon died. Under the new hierarch, Evthymii I, Saint Evthymii again withdrew to his monastery. Soon however the monks of a monastery on Lisich Hill chose the saint as their hegumen. With the death of the Novgorod archbishop Evthymii I in 1429, the hegumen Saint Evthymii was then chosen archbishop of his native city, and on 29 November he entered into the temple of Saint Sophia. For four years the saint administered the Novgorod diocese, whilst putting off being acclaimed archbishop, and it was only on 24 May 1434 that he was consecrated at Smolensk. The archepiscopal laying on of hands was headed by metropolitan Gerasim.

Saint Evthymii wisely governed his diocese over the course of 29 years, zealous in the fulfilling of his archpastoral duty. Saint Evthymii toiled much at the construction and restoration of churches, especially after the devastating conflagrations of the years 1431 and 1442. The Sophia cathedral was richly embellished by the saint, and in the Novgorod Kremlin there was built several new churches. "If thou dost wish to see, – writes Pakhomii the Logothete, – some few from the number of his great works, go to the temple of Saint Sophia. There

thou wilt catch glimpse the temples of saints built by him, standing like hillocks. Not by the voice, but in the deed do they bespeak their varied charm. This was bestowed me by archbishop Evthymii, – proclaims the one church; while another sayeth – so magnificently hath he adorned me; and yet a third one doth relate – he did build me up from the very foundations. The temple of great John Chrysostom, tall and beautiful, with the hand of a Chrysostomos he blesses and from its face is proclaimed: "In as thou hast erected me a temple-habitation, I in turn shalt beseech the Creator to prepare thee habitation in Heaven". The cathedral temple of the Wisdom of God, Saint Sophia, answering from over the years in its restoration by him, proclaimeth: "He hath returned me to mine original grandeur, he hath adorned me with holy icons, he – is my praise and beauty". Saint Evthymii built also a church in honour of his Guardian Angel [i.e. Russian idiom for "patron saint"], and in 1438 he built at Vyazhitsk monastery a stone church in honour of Saint Nicholas; and in the following year – a stone church in honour of Saint John the Theologian with a refectory and consistory. Zealous for the Glory of God, Saint Evthymii concerned himself over the increase of spiritual books. From this period is found quite many a Divine-service book, transcribed "under authority of archbishop Vladyka Evthymii". Despite his abundant works, the saint always promptly fulfilled the monastic rule: whatever he did not succeed doing by day he accomplished by night. An hour before Matins the saint rose up for cell prayer. Often the whole night he spent without sleep; he wore chains, but no one knew about them until his end. The first week of Great Lent the saint spent at Vyazhitsk monastery in silent prayer, eating nothing.

In 1446 the great-princely throne was usurped by Shemyaka, who entered into relations with Novgorod. The political situation in Novgorod was often quite strained. Sainted Jona (Comm. 31 March) in a special missive in 1451 urged the Novgorod people to cease their rowdiness and to heed their archpastor – "be ye in everything heedful to our son and brother, your father and teacher, the God-beloved archbishop Evthymii". Saint Evthymii, quite up in age, was troubled in soul that the actions of Shemyaka might cast a pall over his relations with the church primate he so deeply revered, and he dispatched a letter to Saint Jona. Sensing the nearness of his death, Saint Evthymii besought for himself prayers and pardon. Saint Jona in the reply letter – a grammota of pardon, wrote: "We call to mind for thee, my son, that thou didst comport thyself too simply: one, who was excommunicated for transgressions by our humility, ye did accept unto yourself and find worthy of your blessing. And do thou, my son, offer repentance in this before God". And with this Saint Jona gave orders: if the grammota of pardon should arrive after the blessed end of the Novgorod archpastor, then it should be read over his grave. Sainted Evthymii reposed on 10 March 1458. The priest Evmenii, dispatched by Saint Jona with the grammota of pardon, arrived in Novgorod 16 days after the death of Saint Evthymii, whose grave at his bequest stood at the church of the Vyazhitsk monastery. When they opened the grave so as to read the grammota of pardon, they then saw that no decay had touched the body of the saint. Saint Evthymii lay there as though asleep, and his fingers were positioned in blessing. "God preserve yet Novgorod, for which Sainted Evthymii doth pray", – loudly exclaimed Evmenii, and reading the grammota of Saint Jona, he placed it into the hand of the deceased hierarch.

Soon after the death of the saint, the Lord glorified him in blessing with grace those, who recoured to his prayerful intercession. Highly revering the saint, the monks of the Vyazhitsk monastery in gratitude erected a church in honour of Saint Evthymii, which was noted in the census of 1500. The celebration of the memory of Saint Evthymii was established at the Moscow Sobor of 1549. The Vita (Life) of Saint Evthymii was written by Pakhomii the Logothete, having been commissioned by Saint Jona, Archbishop of Novgorod (+ 1470, Comm. 5 November).

Also commemorated on this day: Hieromartyr Pionius of Smyrna and those with him: Asclepiades, Macedonia, Linus, and Sabina (†250); Translation of the relics of the Martyr Epimachus of Pelusium (†250); Venerable George of Sinai (6th C); Venerable John Moskhos (†622); Hieromartyr Eulogius, archbishop of Cordoba (†859); Venerable George the New, Wonderworker of Constantinople (†c.970); Venerable Theodora, queen of Arta (†1275); Venerable Sophronius, recluse of the Kiev Caves (13th C); St. Sophronius, bishop of Vraca, Bulgaria (†1813); Venerable Alexius of Goloseevsk Skete, Kiev Caves (†1917); Venerable Patrick (Petrov), confessor (†1933); Righteous priest Basil Malahov, confessor (†1937).

12 / 25 March - St Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome - son of the senator Gordianus, he himself became a senator and governor of the city of Rome, but, as soon as his father died, he gave himself to the spiritual life. He built six monasteries in Sicily and a seventh in Rome itself, out of his great wealth, being tonsured in this last, which he dedicated to the Apostle Andrew. His mother, Sylvia, also received the monastic habit in a women's

monastery. After the death of Pope Pelagius, Gregory was chosen as Pope. He fled from this honour and power and hid himself in the mountains and ravines, but God showed people where to find him by making a fiery column, reaching from earth to heaven, appear at the place where Gregory was hiding. He had a rare compassion, using all his income for the housing of the poor and on hospitality. He frequently brought the poor in and fed them from his own table. He occupied himself with the writing of instructive books. 'The Dialogist', or 'the one who converses' was the name he was known by, having written a book entitled 'The Dialogues' in which he brought to light the virtues and miracles of the Italian saints. He also compiled the service of the Presanctified Gifts that is used on Wednesdays and Fridays in the Great Fast. His archdeacon, Peter, often saw a dove hovering over his head when he was writing. He went to the Lord in 604.

Venerable Simeon The New Theologian - This God-bearing and great Father of the Church was born in Galatia, Paphlagonia. Simeon was educated in Constantinople and was assigned as a courtier in attendance to the Emperors Basil and Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Simeon left all for the sake of Christ and retreated to a monastery. He lived a life of asceticism under the direction of the Elder Simeon, after which he became the abbot of the Monastery of St. Mamas and in the end became a recluse. He is the greatest theologian after St. Gregory the Theologian. Simeon felt God's Grace in his heart. His words are true spiritual and theological revelations. He died in 1032 A.D. His relics are miracle-performing.

St. Alphege the Bald, bishop of Winchester, England (951) - (also known as Elphege the Elder or Elphege the Bald) Before he was raised to the dignity of bishop of Winchester in 935, Alphege was a monk or hermit. He persuaded many others to enter monastic life, including his kinsman Saint Dunstan and Saint Ethelwold, both of whom he ordained to the priesthood on the same day. His feast is still kept at Winchester and Saint Albans.

Also commemorated on this day: Venerable Theophanes the Confessor of Sigriane (†818); Righteous Phineas, chief priest of Israel (c.1500 BC); Venerable Abbacyrus (or Cyrus) of Alexandria (6th C); Venerable Symeon the Reverent (†987); Martyr Demetrius, king of Georgia (†1289); Right-believing Stephen Dragutin (in monasticism, Theoctistus), King of Serbia (†1316); Righteous priest Alexander Derzhavin, confessor (†1933); New Hieromartyrs John Plekhanov, Constantine Sokolov, priests, and Monk-martyr Vladimir (Volkov) (†1938); New Hieromartyr Sergius Skvortsov, priest (†1943); 'Not Made by Hands' Icon of the Mother of God on the pillar at Lydda.

13 / 26 March — Great Canon of St Andrew - St Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople. (c. 758-829) - he governed the holy Church with wisdom and zeal as the greatest arch-pastor of Constantinople. When Leo the Armenian made his stand against icons, he opposed the Emperor; first counselling him and then denouncing him. For this the accursed Emperor exiled him to the island of Prochonis. There was a monastery on that island, which Nicephorus himself had built in honour of St Theodore. And this confessor of the Orthodox faith spent thirteen years there, then died and went to the Lord in 827. Then all the iconoclast Emperors perished, and Michael, with his mother Theodora, came to the imperial throne in 842, and Methodius became Patriarch. Then, in 846, the relics of St Nicephorus were translated from Prochonnesus to Constantinople and placed first in the Church of St Sophia, from which he had been driven in his lifetime, and then in the Church of the Holy Apostles. The main commemoration of this great hierarch is on June 2nd, but on March 13th is commemorated the finding and translation of his uncorrupt relics. St Nicephorus was driven from Constantinople on March 13th, and on March 13th, nineteen years later, his relics were brought back to his patriarchal seat.

Martyr Christina of Persia - For her unwavering confession of faith in Christ, she was cruelly tortured in Persia in the fourth century. So much did they torture her, flogging her with a whip, that she became weak and died. Her soul then departed from her tortured body and entered into the joy of Christ, the King and Lord.

Hieromartyr Publius - This priestly-martyr was successor to the episcopal throne of the glorious Dionysius the Areopagite in Athens. As a bishop, he was tortured by the pagans and beheaded in the second century. After a brief period of torture, he inherited life eternal.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Sabinus of Egypt (†287); Martyrs Africanus, Publius, and Terence (3rd C); Hieromartyr priest Alexander of Macedonia (†c.305); New Hieromartyr Nicholas Popov, priest (†1919); New Hieromartyr Gregory Pospelov, priest (†1921); New Hieromartyr Stephen (Bekh), bishop of Izhevsk (†1933); New

Hieromartyr Michael Okolovich, priest (†1938); Venerable Aninas, the wonderworker; 'Moldovan' Icon of the Mother of God.

14 / 27 March — St. Benedict - born in Nursia in Italy in 480, of rich and eminent parents, he did not persevere long with his schooling, for he realised himself that he could, through book-learning, lose 'the great understanding of my soul'. And he left school 'an untaught sage and an understanding ignoramus'. He fled to a monastery where a monk, Romanus, gave him the habit, after which he withdrew to a craggy mountain, where he lived for more than three years in a cave in great struggles with his soul. Romanus brought him bread and dropped it over the wall of the crag on a rope to the mouth of the cave. When he became known in the neighbourhood, he, to flee the praise of men, moved away from that cave. He was very brutal with himself. Once, when an impure rage of fleshly lust fell on him, he stripped bare and rolled among nettles and thorns until he had driven out of himself every thought of a woman. God endowed him with many spiritual gifts: insight, healing and the driving out of evil spirits, the raising of the dead and the ability to appear to others from a distance in a dream or vision. He once discerned that he had been given a glass of poisoned wine. He made the sign of the Cross over the glass and it broke into pieces. He founded twelve monasteries, each having twelve monks at first. He later compiled the specifically 'Benedictine' rule, which is today followed in the Roman Church. On the sixth day before his death he commanded that his grave, already prepared as the saint had foreseen that his end was near, should be opened. He gathered all the monks together, gave them counsel and gave his soul to the Lord whom he had faithfully served in poverty and purity. His sister, Scholastica, lived in a women's monastery, where, guided by her brother and herself practising great asceticism, she came to great spiritual perfection. When St Benedict set his soul free, two monks, one on the road and one at prayer in a distant cell, had at the same moment the same vision: a path from earth to heaven, curtained with precious cloth and illuminated at the sides by ranks of people. At the top of that path stood a man of indescribable beauty and light, who told them that the path was prepared for Benedict, the beloved of God. After that vision, the two brethren discovered that their beloved abbot had gone from this world. He died peacefully in about 550 and went to the eternal Kingdom of Christ the King.

St. Theognostus, Metropolitan of Kiev - he was a Greek by origin and a successor to St. Peter of Kiev. He suffered much from the Mongol hordes, especially at the hands of Janibeg Khan. Theognostus was slandered by his own Russian people before the Mongolian emperor because he did not render the emperor any tribute for his episcopal rank. When the emperor summoned and questioned him concerning this, Theognostus replied: "Christ our God has redeemed this Church from paganism by His Precious Blood. For what and on what should I pay tribute to the pagans?" In the end he was released and returned home. He governed the Church for twenty-five years. He died to the Lord in the year 1353 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Eustathius and those with him, at Carrhae, Mesopotamia (†741); St. Euschemon, bishop of Lampsacus (9th C); Right-believing Great Prince Rostislav (Michael in baptism) Mstislavich of Kiev (†1167); Venerable Andrew, abbot of Raphael Monastery in Tobolsk (†1820); 'Feodorovskaya' or 'St. Theodore' Icon of the Mother of God of Kostroma.

15 / 28 March — Saturday of the Akathist - The Holy Martyr Agapius and the seven with him: Publius, Timolaus, Romulus, Alexander, Alexander, Dionysius and Dionysius - They all suffered in Palestinian Caesarea at the hand of Urban, the governor, in the time of the Emperor Diocletian. All of them, apart from Agapius, were very young men and were not yet Christians. They had never been baptised with water, but their baptism was of blood. One day these seven were watching how the Christians were being tortured: one in fire, another on the gallows, a third before wild beasts, and when they saw with what patience the Christians endured all these tortures, they were inflamed with zeal for Christ, bound their own hands behind their backs and, thus bound, came before Urban saying: 'We too are Christians!' Urban's flattery and threats were in vain. Agapius, a prominent inhabitant of that city, who had previously suffered somewhat for Christ, joined them, and they were inspired with an even greater faith in and love for the Lord. They were all beheaded in 303, and went to the courts of the King of heaven.

Hieromartyr Alexander of Side, in Pamphylia – a deputy of the Emperor Aurelius asked Alexander, "Who are you and what are you?" To that, Alexander replied that, he is a shepherd of the flock of Christ." "And where is

this flock of Christ?," further inquired the wicked and suspicious governor. Alexander replied, "Throughout the entire world where men live whom Christ the God created, and among those who believe in Him, they are His sheep. But all who are fallen away from their Creator and are slaves to creation, to man-made things and to dead idols, such as you, are estranged from His flock. At the dreadful judgment of God, they will be placed on the left with the goats." The wicked judge then ordered that Alexander, first of all, be beaten with oxen straps and then thrown into a fiery furnace. But the fire did not harm him in any way. After that, he was skinned and was thrown to the wild beasts, but the beasts would not touch him. Finally, the deputy ordered that Alexander be beheaded. Just as soon as the judge pronounced the sentence, he became possessed by an evil spirit and went insane. Howling, the judge was led before his god-idol and on the way, his evil soul was wrenched from him. St. Alexander suffered between the years 270 - 275 AD.

Martyr Nicander of Egypt - Nicander was skinned and then beheaded for his faith in Christ. As a physician, his crime was that he ministered to Christian martyrs and honourably buried their martyred bodies. He suffered honourable in the year 302 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Zachariah, pope of Rome (†752); Venerable Nicander of Gorodets (†1603); Martyr Manuel of Crete (†1792); New Hieromartyr Alexis Vinogradov, priest (†1938); New Hieromartyr Michael Bogoslovsky, priest (†1940); translation of the relics of Venerable Barsanuphius (Yurchenko) of Cherson, Hieroconfessor (2007). Movable feast on the fifth Saturday of Great Lent: The Leushinskaya Icon of the Mother of God ('I am with you, and no one can be against you').

† Daily Scripture Readings †

Monday – Sixth Hour: Isa. 37:33-38:6; Vespers: Gen. 13:12-18; Prov. 14:27-15:4

Tuesday – Sixth Hour: Isa. 40:18-31; Vespers: Gen. 15:1-15; Prov. 15:7-19

Wednesday – Sixth Hour: Isa. 41:4-14; Vespers: Gen. 17:1-9; Prov. 15:20-16:9

Thursday – Sixth Hour: Isa. 42:5-16; Vespers: Gen. 18:20-33; Prov. 16:17-17:17

Friday - Sixth Hour: Isa. 45:11-17; Vespers: Gen. 22:1-18; Prov. 17:17-18:5

Saturday – Epistle: for Saturday: Heb. 9:24-28 (§322); for the Theotokos: Heb. 9:1-7 (§320)

Gospel: for Saturday: Mark 8:27-31 (§35); for the Theotokos: Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28 (§54)

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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