

Sunday of the Myrrbearing Women

Third Sunday of Pascha

13 / 26 April



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

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

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

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

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

Matins Gospel III

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

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

THE FIRST SEVEN DEACONS

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

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

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

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

THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN

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

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

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

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

The Myrrh-bearers were in such a state of mind. They themselves were in danger of being arrested at any moment. Even in their homes they locked the doors from inside; they were afraid of any knock, any little sound. Two days before, Peter had denied that he too was with Jesus, meaning that he was one of His disciples. And before whom? Before a servant girl, and only because she might report him. Such was the situation. Their Teacher had been condemned and sentenced to the most terrible death, had been executed. And now it was their turn: as the disciples of the executed Teacher they were outside the law. More than that—they were probably being sought already. The most sensible thing would have been to flee somewhere, to hide. But instead of that, they decided to go while it was still night to the sepulchre which was not far from the place of execution. They knew well that the entrance to the sepulchre was blocked by a stone, which as the Gospel says, was "very great" (Mk. 16:4), that it bore a seal, that Roman guards were guarding the tomb,

and that these guards were armed and especially vigilant because they had been warned that the disciples might steal His body.

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

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

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

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

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

The One Thing Needful - Archbishop Andrei

Saints of the Week

13 / 26 April —The Hieromartyr Artemon - He was a priest in Laodicea in the time of the Emperor Diocletian. He spoke thus of himself before the torturers' tribunal: 'I am called Artemon, a servant of Christ my God. Sixteen years I was a reader, and read the services in the Church of my God; twenty-eight years a deacon, and read the Holy Gospel; and have now completed thirty years as a priest, teaching the people and setting them on the way of salvation with the help of Christ.' The judge took him to the temple of Aesculapius, where the priests kept great snakes, regarding them as gods. They meant the snakes to bite Artemon, but he made the sign of the Cross, and by its power riveted the snakes to the ground so that they could not bite him. He then brought them out to the courtyard and breathed on them, and they died instantly. All who saw this were filled with amazement. But the chief of the pagan priests of that temple, Vitalis, seeing this marvel, fell to his knees before Artemon and cried: 'Great is the Christian God!' The martyr baptised him, along with several of his friends. But the evil judge stood firm in his wickedness and tortured the aged Artemon in various ways. He intended at one time to cast him into burning pitch, but fell off his horse into it himself and was burned. Two eagles were seen to descend on him, lift him from his horse and cast him into the pitch. St Artemon remained free for a certain time and went about teaching the people, accompanied always by two tame deer. But he was arrested afresh and beheaded in the year 303. And his soul went to the Kingdom of Christ our God, whom he had served so faithfully.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Eleutherius of Persia (4th C); Martyr Zoilus of Rome (4th C); Martyr Thomais of Alexandria (†476); St. Martyrius, archbishop of Jerusalem (†486); Venerable Martius of Clermont (†c.530); New Martyr Demetrius of the Peloponnesus (†1803); New Nun-martyr Martha (Testova) (†1941); Martyr Crescens of Myra in Lycia. Movable feasts on the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women: The Myrrh-bearing Women: Mary Magdalene; Mary, the wife of Cleopas; Joanna; Salome, mother of the sons of Zebedee; Susanna; Mary and Martha, sisters of St. Lazarus; and Mary, mother of the Apostle James; Righteous Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

14 / 27 April — St Martin the Confessor, Pope of Rome - He became Pope on July 5th, 649, at the time of a furious quarrel between the Orthodox and the Monothelite heretics. Constantine the Second, Heraclius' grandson, was on the throne at the time, and Paul was Patriarch of Constantinople. To restore peace in the Church, the Emperor himself wrote a dogmatic decree, the Typos, which leaned heavily towards heresy. Pope Martin summoned a Council of 105 bishops, at which the Emperor's statement was condemned. At the same time, the Pope wrote a letter to Patriarch Paul, begging him to uphold the purity of the Orthodox faith and to counsel the Emperor to reject the theories of the heretics. This letter infuriated both the Patriarch and the Emperor. The Emperor sent one of his generals, Olympius, to take the Pope to Constantinople in bonds. The general did not dare to bind the Pope with his own hands, but instructed one of his soldiers to kill him with the sword in church. But, when the soldier entered the church with his sword concealed, he was instantly blinded. So, by the providence of God, Martin escaped death. At that time, the Saracens fell upon Sicily, and Olympius went off there, where he died. Then, by the intrigues of the heretic Patriarch Paul, the Emperor sent a second general, Theodore, to bind and take the Pope on the charge that he, the Pope, was in collusion with the Saracens and that he did not reverence the most holy Mother of God. When the general arrived in Rome and read the accusation against the Pope, he replied that it was libel; that he had no contact of any sort with the Saracens, the opponents of Christianity, 'and whoever does not confess the most holy Mother of God and do her reverence, let him be damned in this age and in that which is to come'. But this did not affect the general's decision. The Pope was bound and taken to Constantinople, where he lay long in prison in great sickness, tortured by both anxiety and hunger, until he was finally sentenced to exile in Cherson, where he lived for two years before his death. He gave his soul into the hands of the Lord, for whom he had suffered so greatly, in 655. The evil Patriarch, Paul, died two years before him and, when the Emperor visited him on his deathbed, he smote his head against the wall, confessing with tears that he had greatly sinned against Pope Martin and asking the Emperor to set Martin free.

Also commemorated on this day: Venerable Fronton of Nitria (2nd C); Martyr Ardalion the Actor (†311); The 1,000 Martyrs of Persia, and with them Azat the Eunuch (†344); St. Tassach, bishop of Raholp, Ireland (†495); Venerable Christopher of St. Sabbas Monastery (†797); Martyrs Anthony, John, and Eustathius of Vilnius (†1347); New Martyr Demetrius at Tripolis (†1803); Righteous confessor Alexander Orlov, priest (†1941); 'Hodigitria of Vilnius' and 'Vilnius-Ostrobramsk' Icons of the Mother of God.

15 / 28 April —The Holy Apostles Aristarchus, Pudens and Trophimus - These were all numbered among the Seventy. Aristarchus was Bishop of Apamea in Syria. The Apostle Paul mentions him several times (Acts 19:29; Col. 4:10; Philem. v.24). He was seized in Ephesus, together with Gaius, by a mob that had risen up against Paul. The Apostle wrote to the Colossians: 'Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you', and, in the Epistle to Philemon, Paul calls Aristarchus 'my fellow-labourer', together with Mark, Demas and Lucas. Pudens was an eminent Roman citizen. The Apostle Paul mentions him once (II Tim. 4:21). Pudens' house was first the refuge of the chief apostles and was then turned into a church dedicated to the Good Shepherd. Trophimus was an Asian (Acts 20:4), and accompanied St Paul on his journeys. In one place, Paul writes: 'Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick (11 Tim. 4:21). During Nero's persecution, when the Apostle Paul was beheaded, these glorious martyrs were also beheaded.

The Holy Martyr Sabas the Goth - In Gothland, there was a brutal persecution against Christians. A certain prince of the Goths [Atharidus] entered the village where this devout Sabas lived and asked the villagers: "Are there any Christians living in your village?" They convinced him by swearing that there are none. Then Sabas stood before the prince and the people and said: " Let no one swear for me; I am a Christian!" Upon seeing Sabas, wretched and poor, the prince let him go in peace saying: " This one can neither harm nor benefit anyone." The following year, around Easter, a certain priest Sansala came to this village and celebrated the glorious Feast of the Pascha [Resurrection] with Sabas. Upon learning of this, the heathens suddenly attacked the home of Sabas and began to beat this holy man of God unmercifully with canes and, besides this, they dragged the naked body of Sabas through thorns and then tied both Sabas and Sansala to a tree and offered them the meat of the idolatrous sacrifices to eat. These men of God called to mind the words of the apostles and refused to eat of the unclean sacrifices of the devil. Finally, Prince Atharidus condemned Sabas to death and handed him over to the soldiers. Full of joy, Sabas arrived at the scaffold praising God. Recognizing him as a good man, the soldiers wanted to release him along the way and, because of that, Sabas became very sorrowful and said to the soldiers that they are duty-bound to carry out the order of the prince. The soldiers then brought him to the Mussovo river [at Targoviste, Romania, near Bucharest] tied a stone around his neck and tossed him into the water. His body was washed up along the shore. Later on, during the reign of Emperor

Valens when the Greek Commander Ioannis Soranos was warring with the Goths, he discovered the body of Sabas and translated it to Cappadocia. Sabas, the saint, suffered at the age of 31 in the year 372 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyrs Basilissa and Anastasia in Rome (†c.68); Martyr Sukia and his companions: Andrew, Anastasius, Thalaleus, Theodoretus, Ivchirion, Jordan, Quadratus, Lucian, Mimnenus, Nerangius, Polyeuctus, James, Phocas, Domentianus, Victor, and Zosimus (†c.100-130); St. Leonidas, bishop of Athens (4th C); Venerable Ruadhan, abbot of Lothra, Ireland (†584); Right-believing Prince Mstislav (Theodore in baptism) of Kiev (†1132); Martyr Basil of Poiana Marului (†1767); Righteous Daniel of Achinsk, Siberia (†1843); New Hieromartyr Alexander Gnevushev, priest (†1930); Martyrs: Proclus, Veronica, Dionysius, Octavius, Potamius, Prudentius, Phocas, Cyra, and Lucian in Antioch of Syria.

16 / 29 April — The Holy Martyrs Agapia, Chionia and Irene - They were sisters from the region of Aquileia. When the Emperor Diocletian was staying in Aquileia, he ordered that the famous spiritual guide, Chrysogonus, be executed. An old priest named Zoilus received a vision in which he was shown where the body of Chrysogonus lay unburied. The old man hurried off, found the body of the martyr, placed it in a coffin and carried it to his home. On the thirtieth day after that, St Chrysogonus appeared to him and told him that the three maidens would be martyred in the next nine days, and that he, Zoilus, would himself enter into rest during that time. Anastasia the Seer also received the same tidings in a vision sent by Chrysogonus, who had been her teacher. The elder Zoilus did indeed find his rest after nine days, and the three sisters were brought to trial before the Emperor. The Emperor urged the holy maidens to worship idols, but they all refused, confessing their firm faith in Christ. Irene told the Emperor that it was ridiculous to bow down to things made of wood and stone, made to order at an agreed price by the hands of a mortal man. The furious Emperor flung them into prison. Now, when the Emperor travelled to Macedonia, he took all his slaves and servants with him, including the three sisters. He gave them to Dulcitus, a general, for torture. Inflamed with a dark passion, he desired to defile the maidens, but, when he tried to go into the prison, he lost his mind and fell upon the pots and cauldrons in front of the gate, embracing and kissing them, and was completely blackened with soot. When the Emperor heard of this happening, he ordered another general to undertake the trial of the sisters. After terrible torture, the judge condemned the first two sisters to death by fire, but kept Irene for a time, hoping to defile her. But, when he sent Irene to the brothel along with some soldiers, an angel of God turned the soldiers back and led her out onto a high hill. The next day the general went out to the hill with his soldiers and, being unable to climb it, ordered that Irene be shot at with arrows. St Anastasia gathered all three bodies together in one place and gave them burial. They suffered for Christ their King and Lord in about 304.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Leonidas and with him Chariessa, Nika, Galina, Callista (Calisa), Nunechia, Basilissa, and Theodora (†258); Martyr Irene of Corinth (†258); Hieromartyrs Felix, bishop of Spoleto, Januarius, priest, and Martyrs Fortunatus and Septemius of Lycaonia (†304); Venerable Theodora (Princess Bassa in the world) of Nizhni-Novgorod (†1378); Blessed John of Verkhoturys, fool-for-Christ (†1701); New Martyr Michael Vurliot (†1772); New Monk-martyr Christopher of Adrianopole (†1818); New Hieromartyr Constantine (Zhdanov), priest (†1919); 'Tambov,' 'Ilyin-Chernigov,' and 'Shuya-Smolensk' Icons of the Mother of God.

17 / 30 April — The Hieromartyr Simeon, Bishop in Persia - In the time of the wicked King Savori, or Sapor, Simeon was tortured for Christ together with two of his priests, Audel and Ananias. The King's eunuch, Ustazan, who had first denied Christ but then, moved by the reprimand of St Simeon, again confessed the true Faith before the King, was executed before they were. A thousand other Christians were also led to execution with St Simeon, who purposely stood a little back so that he should be the last to die, and so be able to encourage the other Christians right to the end and keep them from wavering through fear of death. When the priest Ananias laid his head on the block, he was trembling all over. But the King's clerk, Fusik, who was himself secretly a Christian, began to encourage him, saying: 'Don't be frightened, old man. Shut your eyes and be a man, and you'll see the divine light.' As soon as he had said this, it was seen that he was a Christian and he was denounced to the King. The King wore him down with harsh tortures, and also his daughter, the maiden Askitria. St Simeon was eventually beheaded, after having seen his flock into the other world. The following year, on Great Friday, the King's beloved eunuch, Azat, was slain for Christ, along with another thousand of the faithful. Then the King grieved for his eunuch and gave up killing any more Christians. They all suffered with honour for Christ their King and Lord in about 341.

St Acacius, Bishop of Melitene - lived the ascetical life in the place where he was born, i.e., in Melitene, Armenia. Blessed Otreius, bishop of that city, who participated at the Second Ecumenical Council [Constantinople 381 A.D.], ordained him a presbyter. Following the death of Otreius, Acacius became a bishop. He participated at the Third Ecumenical Council [Ephesus 431 A.D.], which condemned the evil blasphemy of Nestorius against the Mother of God. Here, together with St. Cyril of Alexandria, Acacius zealously fought for the purity of the Orthodox Faith. St. Acacius possessed much Grace from God and worked many miracles. After long and zealous service to God, Acacius died peacefully in the year 435 A.D.

Holy Martyr Donan, an Irish monk of Iona under Columba & 52 monks with him at his monastery on the Isle of Eigg - Inner Hebrides, Scotland - while the monks were celebrating Liturgy on Easter night 618 a gang of robbers, possibly Vikings, arrived on the island and herded the monks into the refectory and set fire to it. Those who tried to escape were killed by the sword. At least eleven Scottish churches bear his name.

Venerable Zosima of Solovetsk - The Monk Zosima, Hegumen of Solovetsk, – a great luminary of the Russian North, was the founder of monastic common-life on Solovetsk Island. He was born in Novgorod diocese, in the village of Tolvui near Lake Onega. From his early years he was raised in piety, and after the death of his parents Gavriil and Varvara he gave away his possessions and accepted monastic tonsure.

In search of a solitary place the monk set off to the shores of the White Sea and at the mouth of the Suma he met the Monk German (Comm. 30 July), who told him about a desolate sea island, where formerly he had spent six years with the Monk Savvatii (Comm. 27 September). In about the year 1436 the hermits, felicitously having made the sea voyage, landed at the Solovetsk islands. God blessed the place of their settlement with a vision to the Monk Zosima of a beautiful church in the sky. The monks with their own hands built cells and an enclosure, and they began to cultivate and sow the land. One time in late Autumn the Monk German set off to the mainland for necessary provisions. Because of the Autumn weather he was not able to return. The Monk Zosima remained all Winter alone on the island. He suffered many a temptation in struggle with the devils. Death by starvation threatened him, but miraculously two strangers having appeared left him a supply of bread, flour and oil. In Spring the Monk German returned to Solovetsk together with the fisherman Mark, and he brought supplies of food and rigging-tackle for fish nets.

When several hermits had gathered on the island, the Monk Zosima constructed for them a small wooden church in honour of the Transfiguration (Preobrazhenie) of the Lord, together with a refectory. At the request of the Monk Zosima, an hegumen was sent from Novgorod to the newly formed monastery with antimins for the church. Thus occurred the start of the reknown Solovetsk monastery. In the severe conditions of the remote island the monks knew how to arrange their economy. But the hegumens, sent from Novgorod to Solovetsk, could not withstand life in the unwontedly harsh conditions, and so the brethren chose as hegumen the Monk Zosima.

The Monk Zosima concerned himself with the building up of the inner life of the monastery, and he introduced a strict life-in-common. In 1465 he transferred to Solovetsk from the River Vyg the relics of the Monk Savvatii. The monastery suffered vexation from the Novgorod boyars (nobles), who confiscated catches of fish from the monks. The monk was obliged to set off for Novgorod and seek the protection of the archbishop. On the advice of the archbishop, he made the rounds of homes of the boyars and requested them not to allow the ruin of the monastery. The influential and rich boyarina Martha Boretskaya impiously gave orders to throw out the Monk Zosima, but then repented her action and invited him to a meal, during the time of which he suddenly beheld, that six of the illustrious boyars sat without their heads. The Monk Zosima told about this vision to his disciple Daniel and predicted for the boyars an immanent death. The prediction was fulfilled in the year 1478, when during the taking of Novgorod by Ivan III (1462-1505) the boyars were executed.

Shortly before death the monk prepared himself a grave, in which he was buried beyond the altar of the Transfiguration church (+ 17 April 1478). Later on, over his relics was built a chapel. His relics together with the relics of the Monk Savvatii were transferred on 8 August 1566 into a chapel consecrated in their memory at the Transfiguration cathedral.

Many a miracle was witnessed to, when the Monk Zosima with the Monk Savvatii appeared to fishermen perishing in the depths of the sea. The Monk Zosima is likewise a patron of bee-keeping and preserver of bee-hives, and to him is even bestowed the title "Bee-keeper" ("Pchel'nik"). To the Monk Zosima often hasten those in

sickness. The many hospital churches dedicated to him testify to the great curative power of his prayer before God.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Adrian of Corinth (†251); Venerable Agapitus, bishop of Rome (†536); Venerable Ephraim, bishop of Atsquri, Georgia (9th C); Finding of the relics of Venerable Alexander, abbot of Svir (1641); Venerable Macarius (Notaras) of Corinth (†1805); Venerable Paisius of Kiev, fool-for-Christ (†1893); Righteous confessor Michael Novitsky, priest (†1935); New Hieromartyr Theodore Nedosekin, priest (†1942).

18 April / 1 May — Our Holy Father John - He was a disciple of St Gregory of Decapolis. In the time of the iconoclast heresy, the Emperor Leo the Armenian put John to torture, together with his teacher, Gregory, and Joseph the Hymnographer. When Gregory finished his earthly course, John became abbot of the Decapolite monastery in Constantinople. Becoming abbot, he intensified his asceticism for the sake of the Kingdom of God. He died peacefully in about 820. After his death, St Joseph buried him near the grave of St Gregory.

The Holy Martyr John the New of Ioannina - born in Ioannina, once the capitol city of the Emperor Pyrrhus. When his impoverished parents died, the young John moved to Constantinople and there continued his occupation, for he was a craftsman. Not long before that, the Turks surrounded Constantinople and many Christians, out of fear, denied Christ and embraced the Islamic faith. St. John had his workshop in the midst of these converts to Islam. The more the young John burned with love for Christ the Lord, the more openly he exposed himself as a Christian before these traitors of Christ. He began to argue with them about faith and, finally, rebuked them for their betrayal of Christ. They dragged him before the judge and falsely accused John, alleging that he had earlier embraced Islam, and that he again reverted to Christianity. After he was tortured and beaten with rods and iron ramrods, they cast him into prison. The next day was the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ and, again, they brought him out for further torture and John emerged singing: "Christ is risen from the dead!" To his torturers, he bravely said: " Do what you want in order to send me as soon as possible from this transient life to eternal life. I am Christ's slave, I follow Christ, for Christ I die that I may live with Him!" After that, John was bound in chains and brought to the place of burning. Upon seeing a large fire prepared for him, John ran and leaped into the flames. His torturers seeing how he loved death in the fire removed him from the fire and sentenced him to be beheaded. After they beheaded him, they threw his head and body into the fire. Later on, Christians leafed through the ashes and gathered some of the remains of his honourable and wonder-working relics and interred them in the Great Church [Agia Sophia - Church of the Holy Wisdom] in Constantinople. Thus, St. John of Ioannina died a martyr's death and received the glorious martyr's wreath on April 18, 1526 A. D.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyrs Victor, Zoticus, Zeno, Acindynus, Severian, and Caesarius (†303); Venerable Basil (Ratishvili) (13th C); St. Cosmas, bishop of Chalcedon, and his companion St. Auxentius (†815-820); Venerable Anthony (†1435), Euthymius, and Felix (†1418) of Karelia; Martyr John Koulikas (†1564); New Hieromartyr Bessarion Selinin, priest (†1918); New Nun-martyr Tamara (Satsi) (†1942); 'Maximov' Icon of the Mother of God.

19 April / 2 May — Our Holy Father John of the Ancient Caves - lived a life of asceticism in the so-called "old caves," the "old Lavra" of Chariton the Great in Palestine. Having loved Christ the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind, John, at an early age, began to travel to the holy places and to listen to the instructions and counsels of the holy men. Finally, he settled in the Caves of Chariton, where he gave himself to rigorous asceticism spending days and years in fasting, prayer, vigils, continuously meditating on death, and teaching himself humility. As a good ripened fruit, he was plucked by death and took up habitation in Paradise. He lived and died in the eighth century.

The Holy Martyrs Christopher, Theonas and Antoninus - young officers serving under Emperor Diocletian. When St. George the Great Martyr was being tortured, they witnessed his sufferings as well as the miracles which occurred at that time. Seeing all of this, they came before the emperor, laid down their arms, removed their military belts and bravely confessed the Name of the Lord Jesus. For that, they were subjected to great torture and finally were tossed into the fire, where their bodies were consumed while their souls went to God into eternal joy. They honourably suffered in Nicomedia in the year 303 A.D.

St Tryphun, Patriarch of Constantinople - The Emperor Romanus, who reigned over Byzantium at the beginning of the tenth century had a son, Theophylact, who was sixteen years old when Patriarch Stephen died. The emperor wanted his son to be elevated as patriarch for he had promised him [his son] this spiritual calling from his youth. Because his son was a minor, the emperor was ashamed to do this. The patriarchal throne was assumed by Tryphun a simple but chaste and pious old man. Tryphun remained on the throne for three years. When the son of the emperor reached his twentieth year, the emperor thought, to remove Tryphun at any price and to install his son as patriarch. The saint of God, Tryphun, did not want to relinquish his throne voluntarily, for no other reason, because he considered it to be a great scandal that such a young man be elevated to such a responsible and burdensome position as that of being patriarch. Through the intrigue of a nefarious bishop, the signature of the innocent Tryphun was extracted on a blank sheet of paper. Later on, in the imperial court, above that signature, the alleged resignation of the patriarch was written which the emperor decreed. As a result of this, there arose a great confusion in the Church, for the laity and the clergy stood by Tryphun, the godly man. The emperor then forcibly removed the aged patriarch and sent him to a monastery and, his son, Theophylact, was elevated as patriarch. St. Tryphun lived as an ascetic in this monastery for two years and five months and presented himself before the Lord in the year 933 A.D.

Hieromartyr Alphege, archbishop of Canterbury (1012) - he became a monk at Deerhurst but after some years retired to be a hermit in Somerset. In 984 he became bishop of Winchester and he became known for his personal austerity and lavish almsgiving. In 994 King Ethelred sent him to parley with the Danes Anlaf and Swein, who had raided both London and Wessex. The Anglo-Saxons paid tribute but Anlaf became a Christian and promised he would never again come to England 'with warlike intent.' This promise was kept. In 1006 he succeeded Aelfric as archbishop of Canterbury. Meanwhile the Danes continued to overrun southern England. They besieged Canterbury and imprisoned Alphege and others and demanded a ransom of 3000 pounds. Alphege refused to pay and forbade his people to do so. The Danes were so infuriated that, after a feast at which they got drunk, and killed him with the bones of oxen: an axeman delivered the final blow. His was originally buried in St. Paul's Cathedral, London however in 1023 his body was translated to Canterbury Cathedral. In 1105 his body was found to be incorrupt.

St. Matrona the Blind of Moscow - She was born in 1881 to a poor family in the village of Sebino-Epifaniskaya (now Kimovski). Though she was born blind — her eyes were without pupils — she showed a gift of spiritual insight from an early age, and by her prayers healed many who came to her. At about the age of fourteen she made a pilgrimage to several Russian holy sites. When she came to Kronstadt to receive the blessing of St John (20 Dec.), the holy priest, who had never met her, cried out "Matrona, come here!" and proclaimed "She will be my heir, the eighth pillar of Russia." At the age of seventeen she was stricken with paralysis and was never able to walk again. For the rest of her life she lived in a room filled with icons, where she would sit cross-legged on her bed and receive visitors. She never bemoaned her blindness or paralysis; once she said "A day came when God opened my eyes, and I saw the light of the sun, the stars and all that exists in the world: the rivers, the forests, the sea and the whole creation." In 1925 she settled in Moscow. After the death of her mother in 1945, she moved frequently, living secretly in the homes of the faithful. Despite this, throngs of believers found their way to her for counsel and healing. The Communist authorities, knowing her holy influence, sought many times to arrest her; but she always knew in advance when they were coming, and would be moved to a different secret location. She fasted much, slept rarely, and it is said that her forehead was dented by the countless signs of the Cross that she made. Of the persecution of the Church by the Communists, she simply said that this was due to the sins and lack of faith of the Christians, and added, "Difficult times are our lot, but we Christians must choose the Cross. Christ has placed us on His sleigh, and He will take us where He will." Having foreseen the day of her death, she said, "Come close, all of you, and tell me of your troubles as though I were alive! I'll see you; I'll hear you, and I'll come to your aid." She reposed in peace on April 19, 1952 (May 2 on the new calendar). Many miracles occurred at her tomb. In 1998 her relics were moved to the women's Monastery of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God, where thousands of Orthodox Christians come to venerate her and, as she asked, to bring her their problems and concerns as though she were alive on earth. She was glorified by the Church of Russia in 1999, for local veneration in the Diocese of Moscow.

Also commemorated on this day: Hieromartyr Paphnutius of Jerusalem (4th C); St. George the Confessor, bishop of Antioch in Pisidia (†820); New Martyr Omir of Jerusalem (†1579); Venerable Symeon the Barefoot (†1594); Uncovering of the relics of St. Joachim, founder of Opochka Monastery in Pskov (†1621); New Monk-martyr Agathangelus of Esphigmenou (†1819); New Hieromartyr Victor (Ostrovidov), bishop of Glazov (†1934); Venerable Nicephorus, abbot of Katabad.

† Daily Scripture Readings †

Monday – Epistle: Acts 6:8-7:5, 7:47-60 (§17); Gospel: John 4:46-54 (§13)

Tuesday – Epistle: Acts 8:5-17 (§18); Gospel: John 6:27-33 (§20)

Wednesday – Epistle: Acts 8:18-25 (§19); Gospel: John 6:35-39 (§21)

Thursday – Epistle: Acts 8:26-39 (§20); Gospel: John 6:40-44 (§22)

Friday - Epistle: Acts 8:40-9:19 (§21); Gospel: John 6:48-54 (§23)

Saturday – Epistle: Acts 9:19-31 (§22); Gospel: John 15:17-16:2 (§52)

HOMILY

-About seeking the living among the dead-

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

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

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

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

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

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.