

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

(301) 638-5035 Church
4419 Leonardtown Road
Waldorf, MD 20601

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor
(703) 532-8017

fredgington@gmail.com
www.apostlethomas.org

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

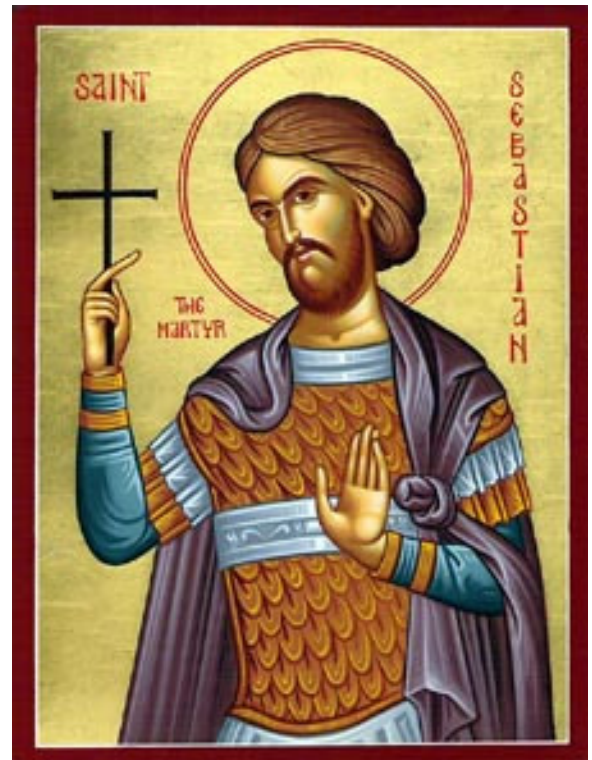
SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

**Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM,
Great Vespers 5:30 PM**

**Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM
Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.**



December 18, 2016 – Martyr Sebastian of Rome

Sunday of the Holy Fathers (Sunday Before Nativity)

The Holy Martyr Sebastian was born in the city of Narbonum in Gaul (modern France), and he received his education at Mediolanum (now Milan). Under the co-reigning emperors Diocletian and Maximian (284-305) he occupied the position of head of the imperial guards. Saint Sebastian was respected for his authority, and was loved by the soldiers and those at court. He was a brave man filled with wisdom, his word was honest, his judgment just, insightful in advice, faithful in his service and in everything entrusted to him. He was a secret Christian, not out of fear, but so that he could provide help to the brethren in a time of persecution.

The noble Christian brothers Marcellinus and Mark had been locked up in prison, and at first they firmly confessed the true Faith. But under the influence of the tearful entreaties of their pagan parents (Tranquillinus and Marcia), and also their own wives and children, they began to waver in their intent to suffer for Christ. Saint Sebastian went to the imperial treasurer, at whose house Marcellinus and Mark were held in confinement, and addressed the brothers who were on the verge of yielding to the entreaties of their family.

“O valiant warriors of Christ! Do not cast away your everlasting crowns of victory because of the tears of your relatives. Do not remove your feet from the necks of your enemies who lie prostrate before you, lest they regain their strength and attack you more fiercely than before. Raise your banner high over every earthly attachment. If those whom you see weeping knew that there is another life where there is neither sickness nor death, where there is unceasing gladness and everything is beautiful, then assuredly they would wish to enter it with you. Anyone who fears to exchange this brief earthly life for the unending joys of the heavenly Kingdom is foolish indeed. For he who rejects eternity wastes the brief time of his existence, and will be delivered to everlasting torment in Hades.”

Then Saint Sebastian said that if necessary, he would be willing to endure torment and death in order to show them how to give their lives for Christ. So Saint Sebastian persuaded the brothers to go through with their act of martyrdom, and his speech stirred everyone present. They saw how his face shone like that of an angel, and they saw how seven angels clothed him in a radiant garment, and heard a fair Youth say, “You shall be with Me always.”

Zoe, the wife of the jailer Nicostratus, had lost her ability to speak six years previously, and she fell down at the feet of Saint Sebastian, by her gestures imploring him to heal her. The saint made the Sign of the Cross over the woman, and she immediately began to speak and she glorified the Lord Jesus Christ. She said that she had seen an angel holding an open book in which everything Saint Sebastian said was written. Then all who saw the miracle also came to believe in the Savior of the world. Nicostratus removed the chains from Marcellinus and Mark and offered to hide them, but the brothers refused.

Mark said, “Let them tear the flesh from our bodies with cruel torments. They can kill the body, but they cannot conquer the soul which contends for the Faith.” Nicostratus and his wife asked for Baptism, and Saint Sebastian advised Nicostratus to serve Christ rather than the Eparch. He also told him to assemble the prisoners so that those who believed in Christ could be baptized. Nicostratus then requested his clerk Claudius to send all the prisoners to his house. Sebastian spoke to them of Christ, and became convinced that they were all inclined to be baptized. He summoned the priest Polycarp, who prepared them for the Mystery, instructing them to fast in preparation for Baptism that evening.

Then Claudius informed Nicostratus that the Roman eparch Arestius Chromatus wanted to know why the prisoners were gathered at his house. Nicostratus told Claudius about the healing of his wife, and Claudius brought his own sick sons, Symphorian and Felix to Saint Sebastian. In the evening the priest Polycarp baptized Tranquillinus with his relatives and friends, and Nicostratus and all his

family, Claudius and his sons, and also sixteen condemned prisoners. The newly-baptized numbered 64 in all.

Appearing before the eparch Chromatus, Nicostratus told him how Saint Sebastian had converted them to Christianity and healed many from sickness. The words of Nicostratus persuaded the eparch. He summoned Saint Sebastian and the presbyter Polycarp, and was enlightened by them, and became a believer in Christ. Nicostratus and Chromatus, his son Tiburtius and all his household accepted holy Baptism. The number of the newly-enlightened increased to 1400. Upon becoming a Christian, Chromatus resigned his office of eparch.

During this time the Bishop of Rome was Saint Gaius (August 11). He blessed Chromatus to go to his estates in southern Italy with the priest Polycarp. Christians unable to endure martyrdom also went with them. Father Polycarp went to strengthen the newly-converted in the Faith.

Tiburtius, the son of Chromatus, desired to accept martyrdom and he remained in Rome with Saint Sebastian. Of those remaining, Saint Gaius ordained Tranquillinus as a presbyter, and his sons Marcellinus and Mark were ordained deacons. Nicostratus, his wife Zoe and brother Castorius, and Claudius, his son Symphorian and brother Victorinus also remained in Rome. They gathered for divine services at the court of the emperor together with a secret Christian named Castulus, but soon the time came for them to suffer for the Faith.

The pagans arrested Saint Zoe first, praying at the grave of the Apostle Peter. At the trial she bravely confessed her faith in Christ. She died, hung by her hair over the foul smoke from a great fire of dung. Her body then was thrown into the River Tiber. Appearing in a vision to Saint Sebastian, she told him about her death. The priest Tranquillinus was the next to suffer: pagans pelted him with stones at the grave of the holy Apostle Peter, and his body was also thrown into the Tiber.

Sts Nicostratus, Castorius, Claudius, Victorinus, and Symphorian were seized at the riverbank, when they were searching for the bodies of the martyrs. They were led to the eparch, and the saints refused his command to offer sacrifice to idols. They tied stones to the necks of the martyrs and then drowned them in the sea.

The false Christian Torquatus betrayed Saint Tiburtius. When the saint refused to sacrifice to the idols, the judge ordered Tiburtius to walk barefoot on red-hot coals, but the Lord preserved him. Tiburtius walked through the burning coals without feeling the heat. The torturers then beheaded Saint Tiburtius, and his body was buried by unknown Christians.

Torquatus also betrayed the holy Deacons Marcellinus and Mark, and Saint Castulus (March 26). After torture, they threw Castulus into a pit and buried him

alive, but Marcellinus and Mark had their feet nailed to the same tree stump. They stood all night in prayer, and in the morning they were stabbed with spears.

Saint Sebastian was the last one to be tortured. The emperor Diocletian personally interrogated him, and seeing the determination of the holy martyr, he ordered him taken out of the city, tied to a tree and shot with arrows. Irene, the wife of Saint Castulus, went at night in order to bury Saint Sebastian, but found him alive and took him to her home.

Saint Sebastian soon recovered from his wounds. Christians urged him to leave Rome, but he refused. Coming near a pagan temple, the saint saw the emperors approaching and he publicly denounced them for their impiety. Diocletian ordered the holy martyr to be taken to the Circus Maximus to be executed. They clubbed Saint Sebastian to death, and cast his body into the sewer. The holy martyr appeared to a pious woman named Lucina in a vision, and told her to take his body and bury it in the catacombs. This she did with the help of her slaves. Today his basilica stands on the site of his tomb. (*from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 11:9-10,17-23,32-40

Brethren, by faith Abraham dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also *of* David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains

and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth*. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 1:1-25

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife* of Uriah. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon *are* fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ *are* fourteen generations.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and

they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 105:

DO YOU BELIEVE?



“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”
(Matthew 16: 26 RSV)

It seems a simple question that Jesus asked of Martha. So I ask you the same question, "Do you believe?" I ask this same question at the beginning of all my Bible study classes. It sounds like a trivial question to ask of Christians, but it is critical. Why ask the question? Because it stimulates the thinking process of most people who hear it; some become indignant that I would ask such a question of them. I then ask if they believe that God created all things, that Mary - the Theotokos - is a virgin, Christ is God, and finally that the bread and wine used in communion are the body and blood of Christ. When they respond in the affirmative to these questions, I then ask, “Why do you then not do what Christ has asked you to do?” Well, as you can imagine, the room is silent, and people begin to squirm when I look at them. How can you believe if you do not do? Is that not what the Pharisees did?

Well, in truth, many of the disciples did not believe! Think about it; they saw Christ raise Lazarus from the dead, heal lepers, and made the blind see. And yet when given the news of Christ's resurrection by Mary Magdalene we learn, *“When they had heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.”* (Mark 16: 11).

But, they came to believe and devoted the remainder of their lives to Christ, spreading the good news, giving of their time and talents by helping others. Christ said to Thomas, *“You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”* (John 20: 29) Are we like Thomas? Or do you show your belief by fulfilling God's commandments, by honoring Him with the first fruits of what HE has given you?

Make a promise to yourself that you will give back to God at *a minimum ten percent of your free time* to the church doing work in one of the ministries instead

of sitting numbly in front of a television. Use the talents He gave you to help others find Orthodoxy, helping others to save their souls.

So you say, we have no ministries in the church; why not? I am sure they are there; you may not have been interested in knowing about them. Ask your priest; I am sure he can use your time and talent in the church and its ministries. Be generous with your time and talents, God gave them to you; they are not yours to keep but on loan from God. *“He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows abundantly will also reap abundantly. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”* (2 Corinthians 9: 6-7 RSV). (from acrod.org)

SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS

The Sunday of the Holy Fathers falls on a date between December 18 and 24. The services are not identical on all these dates: It is different when this Sunday falls on December 18 and 19; and different when it falls on December 20, 21, 22, and 23, that is, the days of the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ; and it is different when it falls on a day when it is the Forefeast and a major Saint is celebrated (e.g., Virginmartyr Juliana of Nicomedia on December 21); and finally, it is different when it falls on the last day of the Forefeast, on December 24. In the services of this week are glorified the Old Testament saints, from whose human family came our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore in the Gospel appointed for this Sunday is read the "genealogy" of Jesus Christ. Together with these on this Sunday, as well as on the Sunday of the Forefathers, are commemorated all those living in faith and all the Old Testament saints who have come to the Savior, who are listed in the Epistle reading for this Sunday. In the church hymns for this day the Holy Church primarily sings of the beginning fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, together with the Three Youths, who quench the fiery flames with the dew of the Spirit and the physical images of the hidden mysteries of God revealed to the world, and the prophet Daniel, who, foretold the birth of the Christ from a virgin and foresaw that the cruel world would be counted among those with deep spiritual peace by the coming of Christ, having sometimes stopped the mouths of lions in the pit. Together with this the Holy Church in the hymns for the present day as well as for the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ, exclaims: Come let us all faithfully celebrate the Nativity of Christ, Skip, O hills and mountains; Dance, O prophets who spoke of God! Clap your hands, O peoples and nations! The salvation and the enlightenment of all draw near. He comes to be born in the city of Bethlehem; The never setting Sun arises from the bedding of the Virgin to enlighten all those under the sun. Let us hasten with chaste eyes and pure deeds to meet Him. These spiritual relay racers are presented before us today by our Mother the Church, these athletes of our faith, the porters of the divine promise, the foremessengers of the

incarnation of the Son and Word of God. It is they whom we contemporary Christians are called to imitate: their benevolent intent, their virtuous life, and their zeal to pass on to those who will come after us the faith, the hope and love for the one and only true Triune God. Amen. (*from Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., by S. V. Bulgakov (Trans. Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris)*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The gospel records that Christ commanded his disciples to do what is permitted and to refrain from what is forbidden, to do what is good, to refrain from what is bad, and to be perfectly good, and this is a manner that accords with what our own nature has taught us about refraining from evil and doing good. To this end, he said, "Behold, what you do not like other people to do to you, do not do it to them, and what you like other people to do to you, do it to them." (Matt 7:12)

He also taught how one might acquire the ability to refrain from evil and be perfectly good. This takes place in four different ways: first, abandon and reject the things of the world; secondly, love God and put him above the world; thirdly, love other people and put them above the world; and fourthly, forego retaliation, cling to forgiveness, reward evil with good, and imitate God.

This is what Christ said about renunciation: "Sell all you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Take up your cross and follow me." (Matt 19:21; 16:24) Again, "In the world, do not take bread for two days nor two sets of clothing nor a bag nor copper in your belt." (Matt 10:9-10) Concerning the love of God and putting him above the world, Christ said, "In the world, whoever loves father or mother wife or child, relative or money, more than me, is not worthy of me." (Matt 10:37)

Concerning our love for one another, Christ said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. By this people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35) This is the type of love where we prefer the one loved to ourselves: "Even as I have loved you, I sacrificed myself for you." (John 15:12-13) Concerning forgiveness, rewarding with good, and the imitation of God, he said, "It was said to the ancients, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' I say to you, however: Do not requite evil with evil. Rather, if someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the left. If someone takes your clothes, give him your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go two. If someone asks you, give, and if someone asks you for a loan, do not refuse. Do not hate your enemies, but love them. Bless those who curse you and do good to those who drive you away. Pray for those who conquer and oppress you, that you might be the child of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on the good and the bad, on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matt

5:38-45) The gospel thus commands us to do the same perfect good that our nature teaches - and in this is health. After all, those who please others with what pleases themselves, those who cast aside and renounce love for the world, those who place love for God above the world and their brethren above both it and themselves, those who renounce retaliation, those who forgive, those who requite evil with good, those who love their enemies, those who imitate God, the summit of every good and virtue, and become his children - they are the most exalted of human beings, and it is they who have banished sickness from their nature and caused it to be in perfect health.

– Theodore Abu Qurrah

November Treasurer's Report

Glory to Jesus Christ! For the month of November our income/expenses were:

Operating Income \$9,725.00 | Operating Expenses \$10,899.55 | Net: \$(1174.55)

The major expense for this month was the property insurance of \$2,481.00. Thank you for being good Stewards of God's House.

Kari David, Treasurer

Parish News

We will celebrate the Nativity of Christ beginning with Royal Hours on Friday, December 23 at 6:00 AM. On the Eve of the Nativity, December 24th, we will hold a vigil at 5:00 PM, and we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy the next morning at 8:00 AM. Please note that there will be no meal after either the Saturday or Sunday service.

Giving Good Gifts

In this Nativity season, we have an opportunity to help establish a young family in their first apartment. So, if you have beds, couches, chairs, tables, TVs, microwaves, and other working furniture and household items, please let us know who you are and what you have on the sign-up sheet in the social hall. The need is imminent so don't delay!



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Camp Nazareth: <http://www.campnazareth.org>

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Cary Cooper, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Domieniecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, Alex Holthus, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Deanna Jarrett, Tucker Karl and family, Robert Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Alex & Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, John Sparks, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectarios and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)