

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SERVICES

**Wednesdays in Great Lent: Liturgy of
the Presanctified Gifts 7:00 PM**

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.

March 5, 2017 – Sunday of Orthodoxy (1st Sunday in Lent)

During this past week we made a beginning in Great Lent. We call the first week of Lent “Clean Week”, because it is a time when we cleanse ourselves, spiritually, through prayer and fasting – through long church services, through abstaining from food, through silence and by separating ourselves from the every-day noise and distractions that draw us away from the remembrance of God.

Clean Week is a great “break” – a clean separation from the feasts and frivolity that often precede it, and we find our souls stripped away from the stench and baggage of bad habits, and sins. In this space that the Church gives us to aid in our repentance – this first great leap into Lent – many people experience the sense of “metanoia”, or “changing one’s mind” – turning back to God, and they vow to make a new and a good beginning, with God’s help, during this time. This is the *beginning* of repentance.

And it is of no small significance that on the Sunday following Clean Week we celebrate the Triumph of Orthodoxy. After the quiet and ascetical sobriety of Clean Week, the whole Church meets together on the day of Our Lord’s Resurrection to joyfully proclaim with one voice:

This is the true Faith!



This is the Faith of the Apostles!

This is the Orthodox Faith!

The Faith that established the universe!

For on this Sunday we are not simply remembering the *historical* event of the triumph of the Orthodox faith over iconoclasm. Taken in the context of Clean Week and our personal spiritual struggle during this time, we must remember that ***the Triumph of Orthodoxy in the soul of each one of us is the goal of Great Lent.*** Indeed the triumph of Orthodoxy over falsehood, sin, the passions and the machinations of the devil – following the “royal path” towards Christ in the Orthodox Faith – this is the goal of our entire lives.

We are called, as Christians, to be a light to the world, to be the salt of the Earth, to witness to Christ, and not to be ashamed of Him, lest He be ashamed of us on that Day. We are to give account of our faith, to “speak the Truth in Love.” Yes, we must use words, but even more so, our very life must confirm the Gospel. If we confess the truth of the Holy Orthodox faith with our mouth, ***we must live it daily in our lives as well.*** To quote Abba Poemen of the desert, we must teach our heart to say what is in our mouth – when we recite the Creed, when we read the Great Canon of St. Andrew, when we read the prayers of the Church, the liturgical prayers, our morning and evening prayers, our Communion prayers, and so on. We must make the prayers of the Church our prayers, and the truths of the Church our truths. We must make the Church our very life and reason for being – the air we breathe, the food we eat and the blood in our veins. St. Hilarion Troitsky spoke very bluntly and to the point when he asserted: “Only the Church lends purpose and value to one’s existence on earth; Only service to the Church, in my belief and conviction, lends purpose and value to our activity on Earth; ...if you do not serve the Church – there is no sense in any activity whatsoever; and there is no sense in continuing to live on Earth.”

And so here we see that Clean Week and the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy are really two very necessary sides of the same coin. During Clean Week, we make an attempt to separate ourselves not only from all that is harmful to us, but from everything that distracts us from your yearning for Christ. All outside influence, heavy foods and alcohol, music, noise and distraction are banished totally in order to set the right atmosphere and condition for repentance, to “be still and know that I am God.”

On the Sunday of Orthodoxy, when we pronounce, along with the whole Church, the anathemas, are we somehow condemning people in the spirit of wrath and anger? Taking a kind of perverse joy in the damnation of others? God forbid, no! This is not what this Sunday is about. Rather, in the same way that we separate

and set aside all harmful influences during Clean Week, the church very clearly identifies all the heretical and blasphemous teaching that can enter into the soul like a poison and sets them aside once and for all. For God created us all with Free Will, and God wants us to enter into the Communion of Love with Him freely. Yet we also have the free will to go astray. And on this Sunday, the Church identifies those teachings which *can and do* lead people astray, and like a poison, they enter into the soul and have the ability to lead a soul to eternal death.

A skilled doctor, out of love and in order to save his patient, must first identify the disease if he is to provide a cure. These anathemas today are the identification by the Church of the spiritual diseases that lead to death, in the hope of leading people towards spiritual health – towards repentance, towards the Church, and to Christ.

St. Ignati Brianchaninov explains: “There is no Orthodoxy in human teachings and philosophies. False reason reigns in them – the fruit of the fall. Orthodoxy is the teaching of the Holy Spirit given by God to man for his salvation. Where there is no Orthodoxy, there is no salvation.”

Yet we must not be too prideful of our own individual virtues and efforts as Orthodox Christians, for we are all spiritually weak in these last times. It seems these days that the enemies of the Faith and of God’s Church are multiplying rapidly and becoming more hateful and enraged. The minions of the Antichrist have their cannons fixed on the Holy Church and all that is good, true, and decent. To witness to Christ in our time will become increasingly difficult. It is true that right now, 80% of religious persecution around the globe is against Christians – and by persecution, we mean beatings, torture, imprisonment, exile, starvation, enslavement, dismemberment, harassment and death. But really, it has always been this way. This is simply the way of the Cross – the way to follow Christ. Just witness the suffering that Christians had to endure during the years of Iconoclasm, and especially monks who were in the frontlines in the battle for holy icons and Holy Orthodoxy. Monasteries were closed. Churches destroyed. Monks were beaten, their eyes gouged out, their noses cut off, and icons were smashed over their heads. The fingers of iconographers were burnt off. This has been going on since the day that Christ died on the Cross for us, and he told us: *The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.* (John 15:20) Yet we must be accounted worthy in God’s eyes to be granted the honor to suffer for Christ in such a manner, and it is God who grants those who love him the grace, the strength and the courage to endure all this, and we can do nothing apart from God’s grace. *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your Name give glory, for Your mercy and Your truth’s sake.* (Psalm 115:1)

Even more than this, though, the fathers call monasticism a “daily martyrdom.” God gives us everything that we need for our salvation right where we are. And so, in the first week of Great Lent, the Church lifts us up on these two wings: **Orthopraxy** – that is, prayer fasting, psalmody, prostrations, almsgiving, and so on, and **Orthodoxy** – or “right worship” and “right belief”. If we only use one of these two wings, we just go in circles and spiral downward. And if we neglect both of them, we plummet headlong to the ground. Both of these wings – Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy – are necessary in order to be lifted up to the Heavens by the breath of the Holy Spirit.

So today, my brothers and sisters in Christ, let us follow the example of our holy fathers in the faith – of the saints, the apostles, and the martyrs – emulating their lives and confessing the truth of our Faith, not just in word but in deed. Let us follow the Church rubrics and keep the fast not out of empty ritual or dead legalism, but out of love for God and for our neighbor – in prayer and in yearning for Christ. In this way, our very lives, like the lives of each and every saint, can become with God’s help and by God’s grace – a Triumph of Orthodoxy. Amen.
(from holycross-hermitage.com)

Today’s Epistle Lesson – St. Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews 11:24-26, 30-12:2

Brethren, by faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward. 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. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with

endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 1:43-51

At that time, Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The representation of the Virgin's form cheers us, inviting us to draw not from a bowl of wine, but from a fair spectacle, by which the rational part of our soul, being watered through our bodily eyes, and given eyesight in its growth towards the divine love of Orthodoxy, puts forth in the way of fruit the most exact vision of truth. Thus, even in her images the Virgin's grace delights, comforts, and strengthens us! A virgin mother carrying in her pure arms, for the common salvation of our kind, the common Creator reclining as an infant - that great and ineffable mystery of the Dispensation! A virgin mother, with a virgin's and a mother's gaze, dividing in indivisible form her temperament between both capacities, yet belittling neither by its incompleteness. With such exactitude the art of painting, which is a reflection of inspiration from above, set up a lifelike imitation. For, as it were, she fondly turns her eyes on her begotten Child in the affection of her heart, yet assumes the expression of a detached and imperturbable mood at the passionless and wondrous nature of her offspring, and composes her gaze accordingly.... Do you see the beauty of which the face of the Church was bereft without her image? Of what splendor it was deprived? This is a most conspicuous token of a heart seized by God and of the Lord's love, whereby the initiated band of the apostles were led to perfection, through which the martyrs' winged course sped to the crowns of victory, and the prophets, God's tongues, with

knowledge of future things and truthful foretelling, came to men bringing undoubting belief. For truly these things are the prizes and gifts of a most sincere and divine love, from which depends likewise the veneration of holy images, just as their destruction comes from an irrepressible and most foul hatred. Those men, after stripping the Church, Christ's bride, of her own ornaments, and wantonly inflicting bitter wounds on her, wherewith her face was scarred, sought in their insolence to submerge her in deep oblivion, naked as she was, so to speak, and unsightly, and afflicted with those many wounds....

Still bearing on her body the scars of those wounds, in reproof of their Isaurian and godless belief, and wiping them off, and in their stead putting on the splendor of her own glory, she now regains the ancient dignity of her comeliness, and sheds the rude mockery of those who have insulted her, pitying their truly absurd madness. If one called this day the beginning and day of Orthodoxy (lest I say something excessive), one would not be far wrong. For though the time is short since the pride of the iconoclastic heresy has been reduced to ashes, and true religion has spread its light to the ends of the world, fired like a beacon by imperial and divine command, this too is our ornament; for it is the achievement of the same God-loving reign....

We too, with gladness and joy in our souls, join the choir of this festival, and sharing today in the celebration of this restoration, we exclaim those prophetic words, saying, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; cry aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away your injuries; He has delivered you from the hand of your enemies. (Zeph. 3:14-15) Lift up your eyes round about, and see your children gathered. For behold, all your sons have come from afar, and your daughters also, bearing to you not gold and frankincense and stones, all begotten of the earth and by human custom adorning what is precious, but purer than all gold, and more precious than all stones, the ancestral faith unadulterated. Rejoice and delight yourself with all your heart, for behold, the Lord is coming, and He shall fix His tabernacle in your midst.

What could be more agreeable than this day? What could be more explicit than this feast to give expression to gladness and joy? This is another shaft being driven today right through the heart of Death, not as the Savior is engulfed by the tomb of mortality for the common resurrection of our kind, but as the image of the Mother rises up from the very depths of oblivion, and raises along with herself the likenesses of the saints. Christ came to us in the flesh, and was borne in the arms of His Mother. This is seen and confirmed and proclaimed in pictures, the teaching made manifest by means of personal eyewitnesses, and impelling the spectators to unhesitating assent. Does a man hate the teaching by means of pictures? Then how could he not have previously rejected and hated the message

of the gospels? Just as speech is transmitted by hearing, so a form through sight is imprinted upon the tablets of the soul, giving to those whose apprehension is not soiled by wicked doctrines a representation of knowledge concordant with piety.

Martyrs have suffered for their love of God, showing with their blood the ardor of their desire, and their memory is contained in books. These deeds they are also seen performing in pictures, as painting presents the martyrdom of those blessed men more vividly to our knowledge. Others have been burnt alive, a sacrifice sanctified by their prayer, fasting and other labors. These things are conveyed both by stories and by pictures, but it is the spectators rather than the hearers who are drawn to emulation. The Virgin is holding the Creator in her arms as an infant. Who is there who would not marvel, more from the sight of it than from the report, at the magnitude of the mystery, and would not rise up to laud the ineffable condescension that surpasses all words? For even if the one introduces the other, yet the comprehension that comes about through sight is shown in very fact to be far superior to the learning that penetrates through the ears. Has a man lent his ear to a story? Has his intelligence visualized and drawn to itself what he has heard? Then, after judging it with sober attention, he deposits it in his memory. No less - indeed much greater - is the power of sight. For surely, having somehow through the outpouring and effluence of the optical rays touched and encompassed the object, it too sends the essence of the thing seen on to the mind, letting it be conveyed from there to the memory for the concentration of unfailing knowledge.

...The whole offshoot of the iconoclasts has perished, branches, roots and all, even as the wondrous David in his psalms sings of the memorial of the impious being destroyed with a noise (Ps. 9:7), and it is He Whom they have set at naught through His picture Who has passed righteous judgment on them. But before our eyes stands motionless the Virgin carrying the Creator in her arms as an infant, depicted in painting as she is in writings and visions, an interceder for our salvation and a teacher of reverence to God, a grace of the eyes and a grace of the mind, carried by which the divine life in us is uplifted to the intelligible beauty of truth.

– St. Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Homily 17.2,3,5,6*

FEBRUARY TREASURER'S REPORT

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

Operating Income: \$12,438.00 | Operating Expenses: \$12,201.21

Income Over/Under \$236.79

The major expense for this month was the Burch-oil service contract \$ 299.95. Thank you for being good Stewards of God's House.

Kari David, Treasurer

2017 LENTEN DIOCESAN RETREAT



EASTERN REGION INTER-DIOCESAN LENTEN RETREAT



SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

9:00 AM TO 6:30 PM

AT

**ST. FRANCIS CENTER FOR RENEWAL
395 BRIDLE PATH ROAD
BETHLEHEM, PA**

COST TO ATTEND (INCLUDES BREAKFAST, LUNCH & DINNER):

\$30.00 ADULTS / TEENS (Until March 15) \$55.00 after March 15

\$7.00 (AGES 6 TO 12)

REGISTRATION DEADLINE:

March 15, 2017

OLEH OR NATALIE BILYNSKY

nsufler@aol.com

610-892-7315



**SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL A.C.R.Y &
THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX LEAGUE OF THE USA**

New for this year, this is a joint retreat with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA (Oleh and Natalie attended our Eastern Region retreat last year as observers). If you are interested in attending, please let Fr. Joseph know by March 12 so we can get the registration form in by the deadline. Make checks payable to St. Thomas – the parish will send a group payment with the registration form. If you have any questions, please contact Oleh or Natalie (see contact info above). Please note that pictures from the Retreat may be used for publicity; let Fr. Joseph know if you do not want pictures of you and/or your child used.

<u>Age</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Presenters</u>
Adults & Adolescents	“Peace Be Unto All”: Encountering the Divine Liturgy	Fr. Anthony Perkins Fr. Bazyl Zawierucha
Ages 6-11	The Divine Liturgy: The Five Senses	Fr. William George Fr. William Bennett

CAMP NAZARETH

Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Camp Nazareth is eagerly awaiting and preparing for the arrival of the Summer Camping Season. Diocesan priests and parents have already been calling to find out the details of the 2017 Summer Camping Schedule. The 2017 Schedule is posted on the Camp's website.

REGISTRATION FOR CAMP WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO BE DONE ONLINE THROUGH THE CAMP'S WEBSITE – CAMPNAZARETH.ORG.

The Online Registration system will be up and running starting March 1, 2017. Here is what is different from previous years in this information:

1. The Most Important Change is the Clearances now required of all Clergy, Staff, and Volunteers. This is all explained through the Camp website.
2. The Dates for the Diocesan Weeks have been updated!!
3. The Fee for Camp is: \$315/diocesan camper and \$365/non-diocesan camper.
4. Staff applications are due March 15th, 2017.
5. If anyone is interested in being on the Camp's Medical Staff (MD or RN), please contact Fr. Stephen at the Camp (724-662- 4840 or campnazareth@acrod.org). The Nurse or Doctor on staff each week will receive a Stipend (\$400) and a campership for one of their children or for someone whom they designate.

Those who are of age (at least 18 by the beginning of the Summer Season and have completed High School) are encouraged to be part of the Camp's Summer Staff. There are positions available as counselor, head counselor, kitchen staff, maintenance staff, athletic director, program director (and assistant program director), technology director (and assistant technology director), Ropes Course Facilitator and Lifeguard. This is a wonderful opportunity to get involved in this vital and meaningful diocesan apostolate, form lasting friendships, and use your God-given talents for the benefit and up-building of our Church. Fr. Stephen never attended Camp as a Camper or as part of the Staff, but his experience as a clergy volunteer, and now as Administrator, has made him wish he had. Staff Applications can be found on the Camp website campnazareth.org.

Please note the following deanery weeks at Camp:

Week 1, July 16-22, 2017: Johnstown, Pocono, Southern Tier, Youngstown and Chicago Deaneries

Week 2, July 23-29, 2017: Pittsburgh, Mid-Atlantic, Tri-State and **Washington D.C. Deaneries**

Week 3, July 30 - August 5, 2017: New England, NY, NJ, Florida and Canada Deaneries

Remember also the following dates:

1. **March 15** -- Staff Applications due
2. May 15 -- Clergy and Volunteer Applications due
3. May 15 – Last Day for Early Bird Discount (\$20) and Camper Registrations are due

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 116:

Giving



“And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9: 8 RSV)

*Giving is an act of love, especially when done with a cheerful heart expecting nothing in return. After all **God gave first!** He gave us Creation. He gave us life. He continues to give us every blessing in abundance and the most precious gift He had to give us, His Son. God shows us the way through giving of ourselves and our abundance to those less fortunate.*

How would you answer the following question, “Which word appears most often in the bible: believe, pray, love or give?” I believe most would say, “love.” It appears 714 times. “Believe” appears 272 times and “pray” appears 371 times. The word most frequently used is “give” - as in giving to others. It appears 2171 times! Do you think God was trying to tell us something?

Scripture tells us to give joyfully, give selflessly, give willingly, and give thankfully. St. Basil states in *On Social Justice*, “For if we all took only what was necessary to satisfy our own needs, giving the rest to those who lack, no one would be rich, no one would be poor, and no one would be in need.... You are thus guilty of injustice toward as many as you might have aided, and did not.”

We read in Psalms 116: 12, “*What shall I render to the Lord for all of His bounty to me?*” Give back to God from the time, talent, treasure and love He has given to you! (*from acrod.org*)



Office of the Bishop
312 Garfield Street
Johnstown, PA 15906

Protocol No. 3/2017

Dear Diocesan Clergy, Parents and Young Women,

Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Preparations have already begun for the 4th YWE is designed specifically for our young women to provide them an opportunity to spend time in fellowship with each other, have fun, and pray together. We learn about our faith and to

The 4th Annual Young Women's Encounter will take place from Sunday June 25th to Wednesday, June 28th, 2017.

The YWE will be held at the Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Christian Church in Windber, Pennsylvania. Young women in our Diocese ages 12-18 are encouraged to attend.

Please do not miss this opportunity for the young women of our Church and Diocese to gather with one another and grow in their faith. We ask for your prayers and support as we plan for this young women.

Registration details are forthcoming on acrod.org. Space will be limited so please register as soon as possible! You may contact Pani Eleni Stagon, acrodywe@gmail.com for more information.

Looking forward to seeing you this summer at our youth events!

Working in His Vineyard with much love,

+Bishop Gregory of Nyssa

Catechetical Homily on the Occasion of Holy and Great Lent (2017)

CATECHETICAL ENCYCLICAL ON THE OPENING OF GREAT LENT

+ B A R T H O L O M E W

By God's Mercy

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church

May the Grace and Peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Together with our Prayer, Blessing and Forgiveness be with you

* * *

Beloved brothers and children in the Lord,

With the grace and loving kindness of God, tomorrow we enter the arena of Holy and Great Lent, the most suitable period for the soul—our own soul—to turn toward the Lord.

This period is one of constant contrition before the mystery of God that daily unfolds before us, the mystery of our salvation. This is why the opportunity granted to us with the Sacred Fast has a special characteristic: the renewal and vigilance of the soul that is called for during this time filled with divine exhortation and sanctity to become aware of the ephemeral and material, while gradually being transferred to the eternal and spiritual.

Symbolically and summarily, the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete addresses its author as well as every soul troubled and distressed by the temptations and distractions of this life. Conscious of the burden carried by a soul wounded by sin, St. Andrew cries out with anguish: “My soul, my soul, arise; why do you sleep?” This cry leads to the realization of vanity and the inexpressible fear of death: “The end is near and [my soul] will be troubled.” Before the unexpected end of life that comes “like a thief in the night,” the illumined Cretan poet invites himself and every soul suffering and consumed by the fear of insecurity to “awaken in order that Christ our God, who is ever present and fills all things, may take care of us.” The Orthodox patristic teaching calls each of us, during this period of struggle, to recognize “who we are, where we are, and where we are headed.” We are called to realize the vanity of this temporary life and repent for all that we have hitherto done “in knowledge or in ignorance, in word or deed, in action and in all our senses” contrary to the Gospel of Christ and the law of grace. Only then shall we find mercy and grace; and only then will the Lord, who knows hearts and minds as well as the innermost secrets and thoughts of human beings, take care of us and forgive our unjust thoughts that lead us to vain and useless deeds.

The struggle that lies before us culminates in vigilance, renewal and repentance. Through repentance, namely by coming to know our condition, and through

confession, our life is crowned with “forgiveness of sins, communion of the Holy Spirit, and fullness of the heavenly kingdom.” This renewal is identified with the conscience of the repentant soul (see 2 Cor. 1.12 and Rom. 2.15) and is a gift of God.

Brothers and children in the Lord, we Orthodox Christians are called to live the period of Holy and Great Lent as a time of conscientious renewal and vigilance, as an eternal moment of our Orthodox identity. That is to say, we are called to live and experience Christ Himself, to love and experience ecclesiastically and spiritually. For it is only through our life in Christ that we have the possibility to renew our conscience and ascend to the level of true freedom and the infallible criteria for our consolation and salvation.

At the opening of this blessed period, the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Great Church of Christ spiritually visit every Orthodox Christian soul that labors without consolation and is laden by the values and pleasures of the flesh and this world; we travel with and pray to “the King of kings and Lord of lords, who comes to be slaughtered and given as food to the faithful”: O Lord, deem worthy all Orthodox faithful in peace and contrition of heart, that they may journey through this sacred period and the arena that opens up before us, “granting grace and strength to all, that they may reach their goal and courageously walk the way to the festive day of Your Resurrection in order that they may be crowned with joy and ceaselessly give praise.” (Poem of Theodore, Triodion)

We bless all of you paternally, beloved and faithful children of the Mother Church. And united with you in prayer and intercession, we invoke upon all the power of the precious and life-giving Cross, through the intercessions of our Lady Theotokos, the holy angels and all the saints, so that all of us may be worthy of our calling to live as Orthodox Christians and thus enjoy the delight and glory of our Lord’s Resurrection. To Him belong the might, thanksgiving, honor, power and glory, to the ages of ages. Amen.

Holy and Great Lent 2017

+ Bartholomew of Constantinople, your fervent supplicant before God

COMMEMORATED TODAY: MARTYR CONON OF ISAURIA

The Holy Martyr Conon of Isauria was born in Bethany, a village near the Asia Minor city of Isauria, whose inhabitants had accepted Christianity from the Apostle Paul. From his youth, Saint Conon was accorded the special protection of the “Archistrategos” (“Leader of the Heavenly Hosts”) Michael, who appeared to him and assisted him in many difficult circumstances in life.



At the insistence of his parents, Conon was betrothed to a maiden named Anna. He persuaded her to live with him in virginity after the wedding. The young couple lived as brother and sister, devoting themselves entirely to God. Saint Conon brought also his parents to the Christian Faith. His father, Saint Nestor, received a martyr's death for denouncing idol-worshippers.

After burying both his mother and wife, Saint Conon continued his service to God, devoting himself entirely to monastic works, fasting and prayer. In his declining years the holy ascetic was glorified with the gift of wonderworking. By virtue of his preaching and miracles many pagans were converted to Christ. It is said that even the evil spirits were forced to serve him.

When a persecution against Christians broke out in Isauria, one of the first to suffer was Saint Conon. He was subjected to fierce torments for his refusal to offer sacrifice to idols. When the people of Isauria learned of the tortures to which the saint was being subjected, they came forth bearing arms to defend the martyr.

Frightened by the people's wrath, the torturers fled, and the Isaurians found the martyr wounded and bloodied at the place of torture.

Saint Conon wished to endure martyrdom for the Lord, but he lived two more years. Saint Conon died in the second century and was buried beside his parents and wife. *(from oca.org)*

ALSO COMMEMORATED TODAY: MARTYR CONON THE GARDNER



The holy martyr Conon, a gardener from Nazareth of Galilee, lived during the reign of Emperor Decius (249-251). He left Nazareth, bound for the city of Mandron in the province of Pamphylia. Once there, he sojourned in a place called Karmela or Karmena. He resumed his work of cultivating a garden where he would grow a variety of vegetables, and, thereby, he was able to sustain himself.

Conon was a simple and guileless man. When the deputies who were ordered to apprehend Conon because he was a Christian arrived, he greeted them all with his heart and soul. His captors then revealed that he was being summoned to appear before Governor Puplius. Conon innocently

remarked: "What does the governor require of me, for I am a Christian? Let him invite them that are of like-mind and worship the idols." Whereupon, the deputies bound Conon and brought him before the governor, who then proceeded to encourage Conon to sacrifice to the idols. Conon then sighed from the depths of his heart. He rebuked Puplius for his folly and confessed that he was of the Christian Faith. He explained that it was impossible for him to renounce his Faith, though he undergo ten thousand torments.

At this point, Governor Puplius condemned Conon to harsh punishment. His feet were pierced with nails, and he was tied behind the governor's chariot. The martyr was then forced to run quickly behind. After a while, the Saint was dragged on his knees. The path was littered with sharp stones which tore at him, and he became covered with wounds. Though terribly lacerated, he continued to pray to God all the while and then surrendered his soul in the hands of God. (From *The Lives of the Saints of the Holy Land and the Sinai Desert*, pp. 167-168.)

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