

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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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

Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

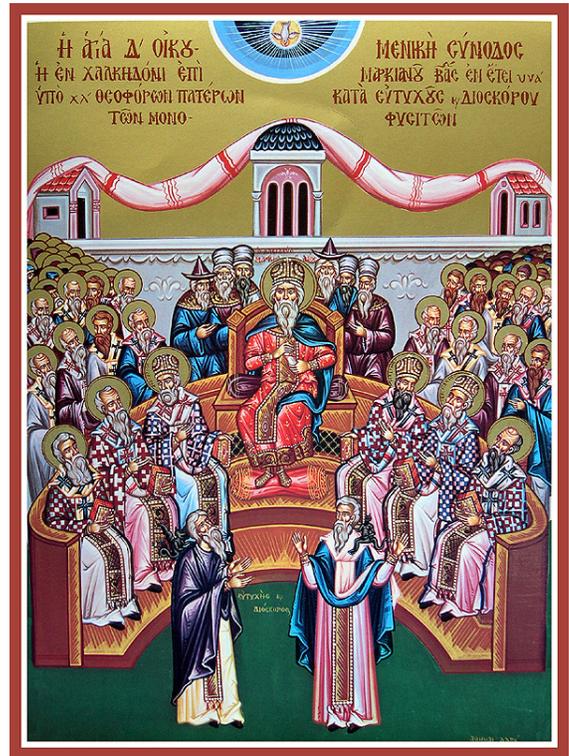
July 15, 2018 – 7th Sunday After Pentecost

Holy Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today our church commemorates the Holy Fathers of the first six Ecumenical Councils, so it would be beneficial to consider why they are considered so important. On the great day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fell upon the timid apostles, who then went forth throughout the whole known world preaching the Gospel boldly. Although uneducated, being mostly fishermen, it was the Holy Spirit who overshadowed and prompted them and gave them the eloquence to spread salvation across many lands. St. Paul warned us though that there will be wolves in sheep's clothing, who will pervert and twist Christ's true teaching. In every generation there have arisen both false pastors and people with ears itching for different and novel doctrines.

So that Christians everywhere would always be taught the same thing and believe the whole truth without picking and choosing what they like or adding faddist interpretations the councils were called as a protection and confirmation of what the Church had always held and believed. Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches and a host of



others taught new and different things, much of which was a reflection of their own egotistical reasonings. The councils were called to clarify in succinct terminology what we have always held and to point out contemporary deviations and having done that to condemn false doctrine and anathematize their perpetrators. As an example, Nestorius taught that Mary was the mother of Christ and rejected that she was the mother of God. Out of this council the term Theotokos, birthgiver of God, was [used] to describe the exact role of Mary. It may sound like a subtle distinction, but if Nestorius' teaching would be accepted then some might question is Jesus truly God and man at the same time. Who is Christ and who is the Holy Spirit are some of the things that the church had to delineate and define so that there would be no confusion. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed which we solemnly chant in church is a short catalogue of what we hold which was devised so that all Christians would affirm the selfsame list of beliefs.

Do not think that the holy fathers, gathered from throughout the world's churches for such a council, were going to vote solely considering their own whims and reasonings. True they had different thoughts and approaches, but in voting they depended on the Holy Spirit to so influence and overshadow them that the true teaching would become manifest. ...Over the early centuries when heresies and challenges arose seeking to divide the church and its faithful members, the councils were called to address the issues and protect the church from grievous assault. The result of these actions is that the Orthodox Church teaches the selfsame doctrine everywhere and is not going to change from generation to generation....

Led by the Holy Spirit, the fathers at the six ecumenical councils sought not their own human reasoning when considering clarification of teaching. Prayerfully, seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance, they considered first what had always been taught and in every place using the scripture and the tradition coming down from the apostles as a guide. They did not seek their own will or to devise anything totally new. Being Orthodox, you have the assurance that what you are being taught is what the apostles taught down through all the ages and that what you believe here is the same as taught and held in Ukraine, Japan, Greece, Bosnia, Brazil or anywhere where the Orthodox Church exists.

As an adjunct to this, out of these ecumenical councils also arose the basis of our Orthodox Canon law. Do not think that these fell from heaven and are a monument to the positive outreach of the Gospel. In truth, regulatory canons and laws arose because the holy fathers had to deal with nasty practices and misdemeanors of bishops, priests, monks and laymen who should already know better. In New Testament times the 600 some Old Testament regulations and even the enumeration of the ten commandments should not be on our mind. Why? If we are truly ruled by the law of love then we never will sin or break

commandments. If I truly love you, I will not cheat or harm you, or steal from you and so forth.

The holy fathers had to attack and advise upon ingrown problems that were out of control in the church. The church had to identify and rectify problems and deal strongly with perpetrators. For example, abortion was revealed simply as murder and those guilty were those not only who had it done on them, but those who did it or gave herbs or whatever to perform it. A grave social problem had to be identified and its seriousness underlined. Bishops encroaching on others' territory, ordaining clergy wrongfully and every sort of ecclesiastical corruption had to be dealt with decisively. Again canon law arose because many hierarchs and lay people alike chose to go against the New Testament law of love and do their own sinful thing. Canon law then is a monument to the failure of many in the church to live up to its high calling.

In summation this celebrating of the holy fathers at the six ecumenical councils is a tribute that the Holy Spirit continues to overshadow and dwell in our church. The fathers gathered together did not seek or serve their own will, but it is the Holy Spirit that guides and protects our church. Amen. (*adapted from uocofusa.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 15:1-7

Brethren, we who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received you, to the glory of God.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 9:27-35

At that time, two blind men followed Jesus, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, "See *that* no one knows *it*." But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country. As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed. And when the demon was cast out, the

mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never seen like this in Israel!" But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons." Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

ALSO COMMEMORATED TODAY: ISAPOSTLE GREAT PRINCE VLADIMIR OF RUS

Few names in the annals of history can compare in significance with the name of Saint Vladimir, the Baptizer of Rus, who stands at the beginning of the spiritual destiny of the Russian Church and the Russian Orthodox people. Vladimir was the grandson of Saint Olga, and he was the son of Svyatoslav (+ 972). His mother, Malusha (+ 1001) was the daughter of Malk Liubechanin, whom historians identify with Mal, prince of the Drevlyani. Having subdued an uprising of the Drevlyani and conquered their cities, Princess Olga gave orders to execute Prince Mal for his attempt to marry her after he murdered her husband Igor, and she took to herself Mal's children, Dobrynya and Malusha. Dobrynya grew up to be a valiant brave warrior, endowed with a mind for state affairs, and he was later on an excellent help to his nephew Vladimir in matters of military and state administration.

The "capable girl" Malusha became a Christian (together with Great Princess Olga at Constantinople), but she preserved in herself a bit of the mysterious darkness of the pagan Drevlyani forests. Thus she fell in love with the austere warrior Svyatoslav, who against the will of his mother Olga made her his wife. The enraged Olga, regarding as unseemly the marriage of her "housekeeper" and captive servant to her son Svyatoslav, heir to the Great Kiev principality, sent Malusha away to her own native region not far from Vybut. And there in about the year 960 was born the boy with the Russian pagan name Volodimir, meaning peaceful ruler, ruling with a special talent for peace.

In the year 970 Svyatoslav set out on a campaign from which he was fated not to return. He had divided the Russian Land among his three sons. At Kiev Yaropolk was prince; at Ovrucha, the center of the Drevlyani lands, was Oleg; at Novgorod was Vladimir. In his first years as prince, we see Vladimir as a fierce pagan. He headed a campaign, in which the whole of pagan Rus is sympathetic to him, against Yaropolk the Christian, or in any case, according to the chronicles, "having given great freedom to the Christians", on July 11, 978 he entered into Kiev, having become the "sole ruler" of the Kiev realm, "having subdued the surrounding lands, some by peaceful means, and the unsubmitive ones by the sword."

Though Vladimir indulged himself in a wild, sensuous life, he was far from the libertine that they sometimes portray him as being. He “shepherded his land with truth, valor and reason,” as a good and diligent master, of necessity he extended and defended its boundaries by force of arms, and in returning from military campaigns, he made for his companions and for all Kiev liberal and merry feasts.

But the Lord prepared him for another task. Where sin increases, there, in the words of the Apostle, grace abounds (Rom. 5: 20). “And upon him came visitation of the Most High, and the All-Merciful eye of the Good God gazed upon him, and shone forth the thought in his heart, of understanding the vanity of idolous delusion, and of appealing to the One God, Creator of all things both visible and invisible.” The matter of accepting Baptism was facilitated through external circumstances. The Byzantine Empire was in upheaval under the blows of the mutinous regiments of Bardas Skliros and Bardas Phocas, each of whom sought to gain the imperial throne. In these difficult circumstances the emperors, the coregent brothers Basil the Bulgar-Slayer and Constantine, turned for help to Vladimir.

Events unfolded quickly. In August 987 Bardas Phocas proclaimed himself Emperor and moved against Constantinople, and in autumn of that same year the emissaries of Emperor Basil were at Kiev. “And having exhausted his (Basil’s) wealth, it compelled him to enter into an alliance with the Emperor of the Russians. They were his enemies, but he besought their help,” writes one of the Arab chronicles of events in the 980s. “And the Emperor of the Russians consented to this, and made common cause with him.”

As a reward for his military help, Vladimir asked for the hand of the emperors’ sister Anna, which for the Byzantines was an unheard of audacity. Princesses of the imperial lineage did not marry “barbarian” rulers, even if they were Christians. At the same time the emperor Otto the Great was seeking the hand of Anna for his son, and he was refused. However, in Vladimir’s case Constantinople was obliged to consent.

An agreement was concluded, according to which Vladimir had to send the emperors six thousand Varangians, and to accept holy Baptism. Under these conditions he would receive the hand of the imperial daughter Anna. Thus in the strife of human events the will of God directed the entering of Rus into the grace-filled bosom of the Ecumenical Church. Great Prince Vladimir accepted Baptism and sent the military assistance to Byzantium. With the aid of the Russians, the mutineers were destroyed and Bardas Phocas killed. But the Greeks, gladdened by their unexpected deliverance, were in no hurry to fulfill their part of the bargain.

Vexed at the Greek duplicity, Prince Vladimir “hastened to collect his forces” and he moved “against Korsun, the Greek city,” the ancient Chersonessos. The “impenetrable” rampart of the Byzantine realm on the Black Sea fell. It was one of the vitally important hubs of the economic and mercantile links of the empire. This blow was so much felt, that its echo resounded throughout all the regions of Byzantium.

Vladimir again had the upper hand. His emissaries, the commanders Oleg and Sjbern soon arrived in Constantinople for the imperial daughter. Eight days passed in Anna’s preparation, during which time her brothers consoled her, stressing the significance of the opportunity before her: to enable the enlightening of the Russian realm and its lands, and to make them forever friends of the Byzantine realm. At Taurida Saint Vladimir awaited her, and to his titles there was added a new one: Caesar (Tsar). The haughty rulers of Constantinople had to accede also in this, to bestow upon their new brother-in-law the imperial insignia. In certain of the Greek historians, Saint Vladimir is termed from these times as a “mighty basileios-king,” he coins money in the Byzantine style and is depicted on it with the symbols of imperial might: in imperial attire, and on his head the imperial crown, and in his right hand the scepter with cross.

Together with the empress Anna, there arrived for the Russian See Metropolitan Michael ordained by holy Patriarch Nicholas II Chrysoberges. He came with his retinue and clergy, and many holy relics and other holy things. In ancient Chersonessos, where each stone brings to mind Saint Andrew the First-Called, there took place the marriage-crowning of Saint Vladimir and Blessed Anna, both reminiscent and likewise affirming the oneness of the Gospel of Christ in Rus and in Byzantium. Korsun, the “empress’s dowry,” was returned to Byzantium. In the spring of 988 the Great Prince and his wife set out through the Crimea, Taman and the Azov lands, which had come into the complexion of his vast realm on the return trip to Kiev. Leading the princely cortege with frequent Services of Thanksgiving and incessant priestly singing they carried crosses, icons and holy relics. It seemed, that the Ecumenical Holy Church was moving into the spacious Russian land, and renewed in the font of Baptism, Holy Rus came forth to meet Christ and His Church.

Then followed an unforgettable and quite singular event in Russian history: the morning of the Baptism of the Kievans in the waters of the River Dneipr. On the evening before, Saint Vladimir declared throughout the city: “If anyone does not go into the river tomorrow, be they rich or poor, beggar or slave, that one shall be my enemy.” The sacred wish of the holy Prince was fulfilled without a murmur: “all our land glorified Christ with the Father and the Holy Spirit at the same time.”

It is difficult to overestimate the deep spiritual transformation of the Russian people effected by the prayers of Saint Vladimir, in every aspect of its life and world-view. In the pure Kievan waters, as in a “bath of regeneration,” there was realized a sacramental transfiguration of the Russian spiritual element, the spiritual birth of the nation, called by God to unforeseen deeds of Christian service to mankind.

“Then did the darkness of the idols begin to lift from us, and the dawn of Orthodoxy appear, and the Sun of the Gospel illumined our land.” In memory of this sacred event, the regeneration of Rus by water and the Spirit, the Russian Church established the custom of an annual church procession “to the water” on August 1. Later, the Feast of the Procession of the Honorable Wood of the Life-Creating Cross of the Lord, which Russia celebrated with the Greek Church, was combined with the Feast of the All-Merciful Savior and the Most Holy Theotokos (established by Saint Andrew Bogoliubsky in the year 1164). In this combination of feasts there is found a precise expression of the Russian theological consciousness, for which both Baptism and the Cross are inseparable.

Everywhere throughout Holy Rus, from the ancient cities to the far outposts, Saint Vladimir gave orders to destroy the pagan sanctuaries, to flog the idols, and in their place to clear land in the hilly woods for churches, in which altars would be consecrated for the Bloodless Sacrifice. Churches of God grew up along the face of the earth, at high elevated places, and at the bends of the rivers, along the ancient trail “from the Variangians to the Greeks” figuratively as road signs and lamps of national holiness. Concerning the famed church-building activity of Saint Vladimir, the Metropolitan of Kiev Saint Hilarion (author of the “Word on Law and Grace”) exclaimed: “They demolished the pagan temples, and built up churches, they destroyed the idols and produced holy icons, the demons have fled, and the Cross has sanctified the cities.”

From the early centuries of Christianity it was the custom to raise up churches upon the ruins of pagan sanctuaries or upon the blood of the holy martyrs. Following this practice, Saint Vladimir built the church of Saint Basil the Great upon a hill, where a sanctuary of Perun had been located, and he built the stone church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos (Desyatinnaya) on the place of the martyrdom of the holy Varangian Martyrs (July 12). The magnificent temple was intended to become the cathedral for the Metropolitan of Kiev and All Rus, and thus the primal altar of the Russian Church. It was built in five years, and was richly adorned with frescoes, crosses, icons and sacred vessels, brought from Korsun. The day of the consecration of the church of the Most Holy Theotokos, May 12 (in some manuscripts May 11), was ordered by Saint Vladimir to be inserted into the Church calendar as an annual celebration. This event was linked

with other events celebrated on May 11, and it provided the new Church a twofold sense of continuity. Under this day in the calendar is noted the churchly Founding of Constantinople “dedicated by the holy emperor Saint Constantine as the new capital of the Roman Empire, the city of Constantine is dedicated to the Most Holy Theotokos (330). On this same day of May 11, the church of Sophia, the Wisdom of God was consecrated at Kiev (in the year 960 under Saint Olga). Saint Vladimir, having had the cathedral church consecrated to the Most Holy Theotokos, followed the example of Saint Constantine in dedicating the capital city of the Russian Land (Kiev) to the Queen of Heaven.

Then a tithe or tenth was bestowed on the Church; and since this church had become the center of the All-Russian collection of churchly tithes, they called it the Tithe church. The most ancient text of the grant, or church rule by holy Prince Vladimir spoke thus: “For I do bestow on this church of the Holy Mother of God a tenth of all my principality, and also throughout all the Russian Land from all the princely jurisdiction a tithe of squirrel-pelts, and from the merchant, a tithe of the week, and from households each year, a tenth of every herd and every livelihood, to the wondrous Mother of God and the wondrous Savior.” The grant also specified “church people” as being free from the jurisdictional power of the prince and his “tiuni” (officials) and placed them under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan.

The chronicle has preserved a prayer of Saint Vladimir, with which he turned to the Almighty at the consecration of the Dormition Tithe church: “O Lord God, look down from Heaven and behold, and visit Your vineyard, which Your right hand has planted. And make this new people, whom You have converted in heart and mind to know You, the True God. And look down upon this Your church, which Your unworthy servant has built in the name of the Mother Who gave birth to Thee, the Ever-Virgin Theotokos. And whoever prays in this church, let his prayer be heard, through the prayers of the All-Pure Mother of God.”

With the Tithe church and Bishop Anastasius, certain historians have made a connection with the beginnings of Russian chronicle writing. At it were compiled the Life of Saint Olga and the account of the Varangian Martyrs in their original form, and likewise the “Account, How in the Taking of Korsun, Vladimir came to be Baptized.” Here also originated the early Greek redaction of the Lives of the Holy Martyrs Boris and Gleb.

During the time of Saint Vladimir, the Kiev Metropolitan See was occupied successively by the Metropolitan Saint Michael (September 30), Metropolitan Theophylactus, who transferred to Kiev from the See of Armenian Sebaste (991-997), Metropolitan Leontius (997-1008), and Metropolitan John I (1008-1037). Through their efforts the first dioceses of the Russian Church were opened: at

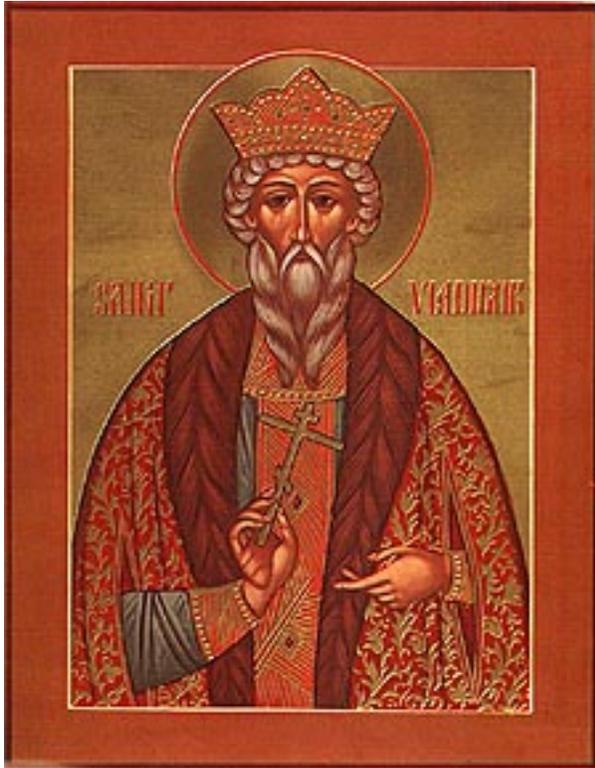
Novgorod (its first representative was Saint Joachim of Korsun (+ 1030), compiler of the Joachimov Chronicle), Vladimir-Volyn (opened May 11, 992), Chernigov, Pereslavl, Belgorod, and Rostov. “And thus throughout all the cities and villages there were set up churches and monasteries, and the clergy increased, and the Orthodox Faith blossomed forth and shone like the sun.”

To advance the Faith among the newly enlightened people, learned people and schools were needed to help prepare them. Therefore, Saint Vladimir and the holy Metropolitan Michael “commanded fathers and mothers to take their young children and send them to schools to learn reading and writing.” Saint Joachim of Korsun set up such a school at Novgorod, and they did the same in other cities. “And there were a multitude of schools of scholars, and of these were there a multitude of philosophers.”

With a firm hand Saint Vladimir held in check enemies at the frontiers, and he built fortified cities. He was the first in Russian history to set up a “notched boundary,” a line of defensive points against nomadic peoples. “Volodimir began to set up cities along the Desna, along the Vystra, along the Trubezha, along the Sula and along the Stugna. And he settled them with the Novgorodians, the Smolyani, the Chuds and the Vyatichi. He made war against the Pechenegs and defeated them.” But the real reason for his success was the peaceful Christian preaching among the pagans of the steppes.

In the Nikol’sk Chronicles under the year 990 was written: “And in that same year there came to Volodimir at Kiev four princes from the Bulgars and they were illumined with Divine Baptism.” In the following year “the Pecheneg prince Kuchug came and accepted the Greek faith, and he was baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and served Vladimir with a pure heart.” Under the influence of the holy prince several apparent foreigners were also baptized. For example, the Norwegian “koenig” (king) Olaf Trueggvason (+ 1000) who lived several years at Kiev, and also the renowned Torvald the Wanderer, founder of a monastery of Saint John the Forerunner along the Dneipr near Polotsk, among others. In faraway Iceland the poet-skalds called God the “Protector of the Greeks and Russians.”

In addition to the Christian preaching, there were the renowned feasts of Saint Vladimir. After Liturgy on Sundays and Church Feasts there were put out abundant feasting tables for the Kievans, they rang the bells, choirs sang praise, the “transported infirm” sang bylini-ballads and spiritual verses. On May 12, 996, for example, on the occasion of the consecration of the Tithe church, the prince “made a bright feast.” He distributed goods “to many of the poor, and destitute and wanderers, and through the churches and the monasteries. To the sick and the



needy he delivered through the streets casks and barrels of mead, and bread, and meat, and fish, and cheese, desiring that all might come and eat, glorifying God". Feasts were likewise celebrated in honor of the victories of Kievan warriors, and the regiments of Vladimir's retinue: of Dobrynya, Alexander Popovich, Rogda the Bold.

In the year 1007 Saint Vladimir transferred the relics of Saint Olga to the Tithe church. Four years later, in 1011, his spouse and companion in many of his undertakings, the Blessed Empress Anna, was also buried there. After her death the prince entered into a new marriage with the young daughter of the German Graf Kuno von Enningen, granddaughter

of the emperor Otto the Great.

The era of Saint Vladimir was a crucial period for the formation of Orthodox Rus. The unification of the Slavic lands and the formation of state boundaries under the domain of the Rurikovichi resulted from a strenuous spiritual and political struggle with neighboring tribes and states. The Baptism of Rus by Orthodox Byzantium was a most important step in its self-definition as a state. The chief enemy of Vladimir became Boleslav the Brave, whose plans included the extensive unification of the West Slavic and East Slavic tribes under the aegis of Catholic Poland. This rivalry arose back when Vladimir was still a pagan: "In the year 6489 (981). Volodimir went against the Lakhs and took their cities, Peremyshl, Cherven, and other cities, which be under Rus." The final years of the tenth century are likewise filled with the wars of Vladimir and Boleslav.

After a brief lull (the first decade of the eleventh century), the "great stand-off" entered into a new phase: in the year 1013 a conspiracy against Saint Vladimir was discovered at Kiev. Svyatopolk the Accursed, who was married to a daughter of Boleslav, yearned for power. The instigator of the conspiracy was Boleslav's cleric, the Kolobzheg Catholic bishop Reibern.

The conspiracy of Svyatopolk and Reibern was an all-out threat to the historical existence of the Russian state and the Russian Church. Saint Vladimir took

decisive measures. All the three involved were arrested, and Reibern soon died in prison.

Saint Vladimir did not take revenge on those that “opposed and hated” him. Under the pretense of feigned repentance, Svyatopolk was set free.

A new misfortune erupted in the North, at Novgorod. Yaroslav, not yet “the Wise,” as he was later to be known, in the year 1010 having become ruler of Novgorod, decided to defect from his father the Great Prince of Kiev. He formed his own separate army, moving on Kiev to demand the customary tribute and tithe. The unity of the Russian land, for which Saint Vladimir had struggled all his life, was threatened with ruin. In both anger and in sorrow Saint Vladimir gave orders to “secure the dams and set the bridges,” and to prepare for a campaign against Novgorod. His powers were on the decline. In the preparations for his final campaign, happily not undertaken, the Baptizer of Rus fell grievously ill and surrendered his soul to the Lord in the village of Spas-Berestov on July 15, 1015. He had ruled the Russian realm for thirty-seven years (978-1015), twenty-eight of these years after his Baptism.

Preparing for a new struggle for power and hoping for Polish assistance, and to play for time, Svyatopolk attempted to conceal the death of his father. But patriotically inclined Kievan nobles, by night, secretly removed the body of the deceased sovereign from the Berestov court, where Svyatopolk’s people were guarding it, and they conveyed the body to Kiev. At the Tithe church the coffin with the relics of Saint Vladimir was met by Kievan clergy with Metropolitan John at the head of the procession. The holy relics were placed in a marble crypt, set within the Saint Clement chapel of the Dormition church beside the marble crypt of Empress Anna.

The name and deeds of the holy Equal of the Apostles Saint Vladimir, whom the people called the Splendid Sun, is interwoven with all the successive history of the Russian Church. “Through him we too have come to worship and to know Christ, the True Life,” testified Saint Hilarion. His deeds were continued by his sons, and grandsons and descendants, rulers of the Russian land for almost six centuries, from Yaroslav the Wise, who took the first steps towards the independent existence of the Russian Church, down to the last of the Rurikovichi, Tsar Theodore Ioannovich, under whom (in 1589) the Russian Orthodox Church became the fifth independent Patriarchate in the dyptichs of Orthodox Autocephalous Churches.

The festal celebration of the holy Equal of the Apostles Vladimir was established under Saint Alexander Nevsky, in memory of the intercession of Saint Vladimir on May 15, 1240, for his help in gaining the renowned victory by Nevsky over Swedish crusaders.

But the first veneration of the holy prince began in Rus rather earlier. The Metropolitan of Kiev Saint Hilarion (+ 1053), in his "Word on Law and Grace," spoken on the day of memory of Saint Vladimir at the saint's crypt in the Tithe church, calls him "an apostolic sovereign", like Saint Constantine, and he compares his apostolic evangelisation of the Russian Land to the evangelisation by the holy Apostles. (*from oca.org*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The very incarnation of the Son of God and His coming into the world strongly encourages sinners to repentance. For whose sake did Christ come into the world? For the sake of sinners. To what end? For the sake of their salvation. O how dear to God was our salvation! He Himself came into the world, O sinners, for the sake of our salvation.

Listen, sinners, and understand! God Himself came into the world for the sake of our salvation, and He came in our image. O truly great is the mystery of piety! God appeared in the flesh. "Lord, what is man, that You are made known unto him? Or the son of man, that You take account of him?" (LXX-Ps. 143:3 [KJV-Ps. 144:3]).

Truly wonderful is the grace of God toward man, wonderful also is this work of His. Foreseeing this the prophet cried out to Him with fear and terror, "Lord, I have heard Your report, and I was afraid; O Lord, I considered Your works, and I was amazed" (Hab. 3:1-2). Sinners, let us call to mind this great work of God, which He wrought for our sake, and let us repent. Let us remember how for our sake He was born of a Virgin and became a child, and was nourished on His mother's milk. The Invisible became manifest, and He who was without beginning had a beginning, and He who was intangible became tangible and was wrapped as an infant in swaddling bands: "And the Word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14).

Let us recall how while yet a child He fled from the murderers of Herod the King. Let us recall how He lived on earth and was a stranger, how He went from place to place, and labored for the sake of our salvation. Let us recall how He Who is unapproachable to the Cherubim and Seraphim kept company with sinners; how He who has Heaven as His throne and the earth as the footstool of His feet and Who abides in light unapproachable, had nowhere to lay His head; how He who was rich became poor, that by His poverty we may become rich. Let us recall how He who clothes Himself with light as with a garment, put on the garment of corruption; how He Who gives food to all flesh ate earthly bread; how the Almighty became weak, and He who gives strength to all did labor. Let us recall how He Who is above all honor and glory, was blasphemed, cursed, and mocked

by the lips of transgressors. Let us recall how He ailed, suffered, sorrowed, wept, and was filled with horror. Let us recall how He was sold and betrayed by an ungrateful disciple and was forsaken by the rest of the disciples; how He was bound and brought to trial; how He was judged by transgressors.

He was reviled. He was scourged. He was clad in the robe of mockery, He was mockingly hailed as King, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Jn. 19:3). He was crowned with a crown of thorns, beaten on the head with a reed, He heard from His lawless people, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him" (Jn. 19:15). He was led to crucifixion between two evildoers and died on the Cross.

All these things the Son of God did for the sake of our salvation. O sinners, in Adam we lost our salvation and all our blessedness, but Christ, the Son of God, by the good will of His Heavenly Father, has brought it all back to us. Let us, then, consider, O sinners, whether the very Blood of Christ, shed for the sake of our salvation, and all His Suffering do not cry out to us. Let us repent and so let us not be deprived of eternal salvation, for without repentance there is no salvation for anyone, but nevertheless the wretched sinner still does not understand. God loves man so much that He revealed His wonderful providence for him that he should repent and so be saved, but the sinner still does not understand.

Christ the Son of God shows him His coming into the world for his sake, in the Gospel. He presents to him His willing self-emptying, His willing poverty, His willing and deep humility, His labors, pains, tribulations, sorrows, sufferings and death, and even a death on the Cross. And He says to him, "Man, I took all this on Myself and endured it for your sake and for your salvation...."

Set your salvation on nothing else but on Christ Jesus alone, the Savior of the world. If you truly believe that He suffered and died for you and is your Savior, then love him with all your heart, obey Him and please Him, as your Savior, and lay and confirm all your hope of salvation on Him alone. We must unfailingly do good works as Christians, but we must ask and await salvation from Christ alone.

– St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

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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, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Santiago Alzugaray, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl and family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Alexander Shostko, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectaros 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.)