

# SOBORNOST

## St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

## SERVICES

**Saturdays:** Confession 5:00 PM,

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

**Sundays:** Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

### May 15, 2016 – Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearing Women

Today we celebrate the Myrrhbearing women. One of those women named in the gospel accounts is St. Salome. Saint Salome was the wife of Zebedee and mother of the Apostles James and John, as well as a first cousin of the Panagia. Together with other women she followed Christ and was present at His martyrdom by crucifixion at Golgotha. Also, together with other Myrrhbearing women she went to the tomb of Christ to anoint His Body with spices and myrrh, and she was made worthy to hear from the Angel the joyful news of the Resurrection of the Lord. Saint Salome, as Matthew the Evangelist says, at one point was motivated by motherly love, so she went to Christ with her sons and pleaded with Him to honor them with positions. "Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of Him. 'What is it you want?' He asked. She said, 'Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at Your right and the other at Your left in Your kingdom'" (Matt. 20:20-21). And then Christ, having told them that they did not understand what they were asking for, spoke about His "cup." That is, while they asked Him for positions Christ spoke to them about His martyric death. "'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said to them. 'Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?' 'We can,' they answered" (Matt. 20:22).

Later, Saint Salome, like her two sons, drank the cup of Christ, because at Golgotha they became partakers of His death by crucifixion, but also because she



experienced the deep pain of a mother who saw the lifeless body of her child and accompanied it to the grave, when the "frivolous" Herod beheaded her firstborn son, the Apostle James. However, her hope in Christ, and her expectation of the good things to come, strengthened her and instilled in her heart heavenly sweetness and consolation and thus she was prevented from being led into despair. And the end of her life was peaceful.

Her life and disposition gives us the opportunity to highlight the following: All God's creations have a beginning and end, including the life of man on earth. Human life, however, has no end, because this is how God wanted it. This means that at some point the human body is dissolved into the elements, while the soul is immortal by Grace and will once again unite with the body, when it will rise again at the Second Coming of Christ. Of course, it is desirable for the parents to first depart from this present life, when they have advanced in age, and then the children. But when the opposite takes place according to the delegation of God, then the pain of the parents is very great and without the strength of God it is truly unbearable. It is like a two-edged sword piercing the heart of a man, as Saint Symeon the God-Receiver said to the Panagia, when he foresaw the death by crucifixion of her Son: "And a sword will pierce through your own soul also." It is essentially a martyrdom, which is impossible for a person to endure without the Grace of God.

Folk wisdom stresses that "for the wounds of death, the earth has no herbs." And this is absolutely true, because human words, as merciful and compassionate as they are, fail to provide essential consolation, and more so it doesn't have the power to heal wounds and ease pain, which is caused by the loss of a loved one. Rather, the herbs of heaven - the uncreated Grace of the Triune God and the words of Christ and the saints - transfuse strength and hope and have the ability to sweeten the pain, to heal wounds, and to truly console a person. This truth is stressed by Basil the Great in a letter he sent to the wife of Nektarios, together with a letter he sent to him, in order to console her for the loss of her son. Nektarios is probably the person who was to later become Archbishop of Constantinople, who succeeded Saint Gregory the Theologian. He writes, therefore, among other things, the following:

"You have lost a son whom, while he was alive, all mothers called blessed, with prayers that their own might be like him... But our lives are not without Providence. So we have learned in the Gospel, for not a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of our Father. Whatever has come to pass has come to pass by the will of our Creator. And who can resist God's will? Let us accept what has befallen us; for if we take it ill we do not mend the past and we work our own ruin. Do not let us arraign the just judgment of God. We

are all too untaught to assail His ineffable sentences. The Lord is now making trial of your love for Him. Now there is an opportunity for you, through your patience, to take the martyr's lot... When first you were made a mother, and saw your boy, and thanked God, you knew all the while that, a mortal yourself, you had given birth to a mortal. What is there astonishing in the death of a mortal?... Above all, one thing I would strongly urge; spare your husband. Be a comfort to others. Do not make his trouble harder to bear by wearing yourself away with sorrow. Mere words I know cannot give comfort. Just now what is wanted is prayer; and I do pray the Lord Himself to touch your heart by His unspeakable power, and through good thoughts to cause light to shine upon your soul, that you may have a source of consolation in yourself" (Letter 6).

Let us struggle to live in accordance with the will of God, so that uncreated divine Grace will touch our hearts and then, during the sorrowful events that will take place in our lives, we will not need external consolation, because genuine and true consolation will flow from within us.

– Protopresbyter George Papavarnavas

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – The Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7**

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

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John Mark 15:43-16:8**

At that time, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid

Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene and Mary *the mother* of Joses observed where He was laid.

Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary *the mother* of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first *day* of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?” But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

## On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Parts 68-70: Acceptable Offering?



*“In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.” (Genesis 4:3-4 RSV)*

Many of our Orthodox parishes and missions encourage the use of festivals, food sales, and lottery-type drawings for the purpose of raising funds for the needs of the parish or mission. These types of events are, of course, inventions of human minds (taken from the experience of the world) in order to secure means without sacrifice.

What might the influence of such fundraising actions be on the youth of the Church? Seeing that such events (particularly the lottery or raffle-type events) are given approval and usage in the church, young minds might think this an interesting way to get money without work. Our young people are surrounded in temptations. Betting on bowling or football games (including the now very popular “fantasy football” that offers a million dollars a week to its winners) is surely enticing to a young mind. It seems an easier way to get money than by work. “Games like this (*including lotteries or fundraising 50/50s or raffles*) are used in the church. If it’s o.k. for the church, it’s got to be o.k. with me! I’m

going to help myself to this easy money.” So goes the thinking of an uncritical young mind. So he or she “invests” what little money he or she has thinking it could bring in quite a sum. It will not take long for the truth to rise to the surface. But then, it might be too late.

Why do the churches put a stamp of approval over these types of fundraising? The most common answer is: “Well, the funds are being raised *for the church*.” Must the churches resort to the ways of the world that cultivate the worst of human greed to support itself? One is reminded of the offering of Cain in Genesis 4. Cain’s offering was not acceptable to God and his brother Abel’s sacrifice was. Why? St. Ephrem the Syrian calls Cain’s offering an “*offering of negligence*.” That means Cain’s offering was not the best he had. Our offerings to God must be the best we have: offerings that come from the heart, from a willingness to sacrifice, from a desire to receive no gain through that offering. When churches approve of raising funds promising a return of any kind (that includes buy/sell as well as lottery/raffle or any kind of monetary or other reward for giving), such means must be carefully judged.

*Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, “This is the thing which the LORD has commanded. Take from among you an offering to the LORD; whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the Lord's offering...” (Exodus 35: 4-5)*

God had commanded Moses to build a tabernacle (tent-church) in the wilderness for Him. God had laid out all the plans: the size, the contents, everything the tabernacle would need. He laid out the plan and called on Moses to simply get it done. The plan of Moses in the wilderness to raise what was needed to build the tabernacle was highly successful.

There was no pressure put on the people of Israel. Moses made no grand banquet. He did not invite to people to a dance or a festival or any other kind of pleasurable event. Nor did Moses use a lottery or raffle to obtain the means he needed to accomplish God’s plan. Very simply, God commanded Moses to tell the people to bring offerings. Moses was to accept every gift brought to him willingly from the heart. These freewill offerings came in such an abundance, Moses had to put a stop to it: “*They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, so that all the able men who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, and said to Moses, ‘The people bring much more than enough for doing the work which the Lord has commanded us to do.’ So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, ‘Let neither man nor woman do anything more for the offering for the sanctuary.’ So the people were restrained from bringing; for the stuff they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more” (Exodus 36:4-7 RSV).*

In fact, the amount of offering that came in far exceeded the need. Here are people who have fled from their homes in Egypt. They own only what they can carry or have carried for them by their animals. They are years wandering in the desert. But when the call came to make their offering to God and His place of worship, the offerings came in far in abundance. We find no mention in Scripture or the traditions of Holy Church that anything other than freewill offerings made from the heart and for the direct need of the church and with no promise of return are acceptable to God. Our personal culture today is a culture of self-centeredness and pleasure. Our society's culture is one of entertainment, monetary gain, and "*what's in it for me?*" Devising all sorts of means to fund our churches that are not based on the love for God and for all God has done for us push the limits of acceptability. *Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer, and put fire in it, and laid incense on it, and offered unholy fire before the Lord, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came forth from the presence of the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord has said, 'I will show myself holy among those who are near me, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.* (Leviticus 10: 1-3 RSV)

The Old Testament of our Scriptures is full of meaningful but sometimes not understandable stories. The brief story of Nadab and Abihu is one of them. The sons of Aaron (second in command of the Israelites in the wilderness under Moses) are serving as God's priests in the tabernacle (tent-church). Of their own accord, they place fire in the censers for worship. It is clear that this offering was not acceptable to God. God had not given the command to light this fire. God's laws and commands in the Old Testament are strict and to be followed without question. The punishment for this seemingly minor offense is death. Nadab and Abihu are dead because they did not follow the command of God in making their offering.

Why is this story in our Scriptures, and what does it mean for us? It relates directly to our stewardship topic of "Acceptable Offering?" Church Father and Bishop St. Cyprian was bishop of Carthage, born around the beginning of the 3rd century in North Africa.

In his work "The Unity of the Church," St. Cyprian says of this story of Nadab and Abihu: "*These examples are being followed wherever the tradition which comes from God is despised by lovers of strange doctrines and replaced by teaching of merely human authority.*" These stories are examples for us of how we are to determine the appropriateness of any action we take on behalf of the Church.

For example, there has been little or any change in the Divine Liturgy served in the Orthodox Church for centuries. There has been no change in the teachings of the Church enshrined in the canons of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. New beliefs

and practices that are based on what St. Cyprian calls “*merely human authority*” are not acceptable. The sons of Aaron did something on their own personal authority, and without the command of God. In Old Testament times the outcome of such outright disobedience is startling. Church practices, including how we support our parishes and missions, must not be done under “*merely human authority*” or what we think will work. “*Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back*” (Luke 6:38 RSV). (from [acrod.org](http://acrod.org))

## Pascha & Bright Week at St. Thomas



Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen! Pascha was rainy, but that could not dampen the spirits of those celebrating the Feast of Feasts. On the left, Fr. Joseph blesses one of several tables laden with Pascha baskets full of the meat and dairy products abstained from during Lent. We also had a good turnout Bright Monday (*below*). Because of the weather, we processed with the artos indoors. If you missed the distribution of the artos last week, there is still some available.



## *A Word From the Holy Fathers*

Let us in the first place flee from sin. Yet, even if we are wounded by sin's dart, let us not delay, allured by the sweet taste of its poison as by honey, nor let us, like a wounded bear, make the wound worse through our fingering it, but let us run immediately to our spiritual physician and vomit out the poison of sin by means of confession. Having spat out its venom, let us be eager to receive, as an antidote, the penances he prescribes following our repentance, and let us also strive with ardent faith to perform them in full, and in the fear of God.

– St. Symeon the New Theologian

### **Also Commemorated Today: Venerable Pachomius the Great**



St Pachomius the Great was both a model of desert dwelling, and with Sts Anthony the Great (January 17), Macarius the Great (January 19), and Euthymius the Great (January 20), a founder of the cenobitic monastic life in Egypt. St Pachomius was born in the third century in the Thebaid (Upper Egypt). His parents were pagans who gave him an excellent secular education. From his youth he had a good character, and he was prudent and sensible. When Pachomius reached the age of twenty, he was called up to serve in the army of the emperor Constantine (apparently, in the year 315). They put the new conscripts in a city prison guarded by soldiers. The local Christians fed the soldiers and took care of them.

When the young man learned that these people acted this way because of their love for God, fulfilling His commandment to love their neighbor, this made a deep impression upon his pure soul. Pachomius vowed to become a Christian. Pachomius returned from the army after the victory, received holy Baptism, moved to the lonely settlement of Shenesit, and began to lead a strict ascetic life. Realizing the need for spiritual guidance, he turned to the desert-dweller Palamon. He was accepted by the Elder, and he began to follow the example of his instructor in monastic struggles. Once, after ten years of asceticism, St Pachomius made his way through the desert, and halted at the ruins of the former village of Tabennisi. Here he heard a Voice ordering him to start a monastery at this place. Pachomius told the Elder Palamon of this, and they both regarded the words as a command



from God. They went to Tabennisi and built a small monastic cell. The holy Elder Palamon blessed the foundations of the monastery and predicted its future glory. But soon Palamon departed to the Lord. An angel of God then appeared to St Pachomius in the form of a schemamonk and gave him a Rule of monastic life. Soon his older brother John came and settled there with him.

St Pachomius endured many temptations and assaults from the Enemy of the race of man, but he resisted all temptations by his prayer and endurance. Gradually, followers began to gather around St Pachomius. Their teacher impressed everyone by his love for work, which enabled him to accomplish all kinds of monastic tasks. He cultivated a garden, he conversed with those seeking guidance, and he tended to the sick. St Pachomius introduced a monastic Rule of cenobitic life, giving everyone the same food and attire. The monks of the monastery fulfilled the obediences assigned them for the common good of the monastery. Among the various obediences was copying books. The monks were not allowed to possess their own money nor to accept anything from their relatives. St Pachomius considered that an obedience fulfilled with zeal was greater than fasting or prayer. He also demanded from the monks an exact observance of the monastic Rule, and he chastized slackers.

His sister Maria came to see St Pachomius, but the strict ascetic refused to see her. Through the gate keeper, he blessed her to enter upon the path of monastic life, promising his help with this. Maria wept, but did as her brother had ordered. The Tabennisi monks built her a hut on the opposite side of the River Nile. Nuns also began to gather around Maria. Soon a women's monastery was formed with a strict monastic Rule provided by St Pachomius.

The number of monks at the monastery grew quickly, and it became necessary to build seven more monasteries in the vicinity. The number of monks reached 7,000, all under the guidance of St Pachomius, who visited all the monasteries and administered them. At the same time St Pachomius remained a deeply humble monk, who was always ready to comply with and accept the words of each brother.

Severe and strict towards himself, St Pachomius had great kindness and condescension toward the deficiencies of spiritually immature monks. One of the monks was eager for martyrdom, but St Pachomius turned him from this desire and instructed him to fulfill his monastic obedience, taming his pride, and training him in humility. Once, a monk did not heed his advice and left the monastery. He was set upon by brigands, who threatened him with death and forced him to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. Filled with despair, the monk returned to the monastery. St Pachomius ordered him to pray intensely night and day, keep a strict fast and live in complete solitude. The monk followed his advice, and this

saved his soul from despair. The saint taught his spiritual children to avoid judging others, and he himself feared to judge anyone even in thought.

St Pachomius cared for the sick monks with special love. He visited them, he cheered the disheartened, he urged them to be thankful to God, and put their hope in His holy will. He relaxed the fasting rule for the sick, if this would help them recover their health. Once, in the saint's absence, the cook did not prepare any cooked food for the monks, assuming that the brethren loved to fast. Instead of fulfilling his obedience, the cook plaited 500 mats, something which St Pachomius had not told him to do. In punishment for his disobedience, all the mats prepared by the cook were burned. St Pachomius always taught the monks to rely only upon God's help and mercy. It happened that there was a shortage of grain at the monastery. The saint spent the whole night in prayer, and in the morning a large quantity of bread was sent to the monastery from the city, at no charge. The Lord granted St Pachomius the gift of wonderworking and healing the sick.

The Lord revealed to him the future of monasticism. The saint learned that future monks would not have such zeal in their struggles as the first generation had, and they would not have experienced guides. Prostrating himself upon the ground, St Pachomius wept bitterly, calling out to the Lord and imploring mercy for them. He heard a Voice answer, "Pachomius, be mindful of the mercy of God. The monks of the future shall receive a reward, since they too shall have occasion to suffer the life burdensome for the monk."

Toward the end of his life St Pachomius fell ill from a pestilence that afflicted the region. His closest disciple, St Theodore (May 17), tended to him with filial love. St Pachomius died around the year 348 at the age of fifty-three, and was buried on a hill near the monastery. (*from oca.org*)

## Young Women's Encounter

Registration is now open for the Third Annual Diocesan Young Women's Encounter which will take place from Sunday, June 26th to Wednesday, June 29, 2016 at Sts Peter and Paul Church in Windber, PA which is open to young women in our Diocese ages 12-18. This engaging experience will highlight how young women can live our Orthodox Faith and serve the Church with their own unique gifts. This year we are really looking forward to having Katrina Bitar with us. She is the YES North America Program Director (Youth Equipped to Serve) for FOCUS North America (Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve.)

Space is limited to the first thirty respondents, so participants are urged to register as soon as possible. **Registration Deadline is June 1, 2016.** For more information, please visit <http://www.acrod.org/news/7283/ywe2016>

## Diocesan Altar Boy Retreat

Plans are underway for the Annual Altar Boy Retreat which will take place from Sunday evening, June 26th (Registration is from 6pm till 8 p.m.) until Wednesday, June 29th. The Retreat will once again take place at Christ the Savior Seminary, Cathedral and Education Center in Johnstown. This year's outing will be to Teen Quest Ranch in Somerset, PA where they will enjoy a wide variety of outdoor activities. This is the time and place for our faithful Altar Servers to join other Altar Boys from all over our Diocese. For more information, please visit <http://www.acrod.org/news/7283/abr-2016>. **All Altar Boys must be registered by June 13, 2016.**

## Parish News

Yard sales will be held at St. Thomas on the following Saturdays this year: May 21, June 18, July 9, Sept. 3, Sept. 24, and Oct. 15. Please sign up on the sheet in the fellowship hall if you are able to help. Contact Dennis or Phyllis at thomidg@comcast.net or 410-535-3005 if you have items that you would like to donate to arrange for item pickup.

Papers for the 2016 Summer camping session at Camp Nazareth are now available at [http://www.campnetwork.com/Register/Register.php?camp\\_id=396857](http://www.campnetwork.com/Register/Register.php?camp_id=396857). Start your planning now; your kids won't want to miss this. Get 'em while they're hot!

## Pani Stacey Retires:

Pani Stacey retired from her job at NASA just before Pascha. We surprised her with a cake and a card full of well-wishes after liturgy last week.

Pani says:

*"Dear St. Thomas Family, heartfelt thanks for remembering my retirement from NASA! How can I ever properly express my appreciation for my gifts and for my Guardians of the Universe cake!? So funny and so touching. I love you all. Pani Stacey"*



## Follow Our Diocese On-Line

Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

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

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddioecese>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

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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, Millie Borys, Jeffrey Carey, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Dominiecki, 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, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Daria Virvan, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, for the newly departed servant of God Timothy Loya, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)