

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
Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.**



September 11, 2016 – Afterfeast of the Nativity of the Mother of God | Sunday Before the Elevation of the Cross Venerable Theodora of Alexandria

Saint Theodora of Alexandria and her husband lived in Alexandria. Love and harmony ruled in their family, and this was hateful to the Enemy of salvation. Goaded on by the devil, a certain rich man was captivated by the youthful beauty of Theodora and began with all his abilities to lead her into adultery, but for a long time he was unsuccessful. Then he bribed a woman of loose morals, who led the unassuming Theodora astray by saying that a secret sin, which the sun does not see, is also unknown to God.

Theodora betrayed her husband, but soon came to her senses and realizing the seriousness of her fall, she became furious with herself, slapping herself on the face and tearing at her hair. Her conscience gave her no peace, and Theodora went to a renowned abbess and told her about her transgression. The abbess, seeing the repentance of the young woman, spoke to her of God's forgiveness and reminded her of the sinful woman in the Gospel, who washed the feet of Christ with her tears and received from Him forgiveness of her sins.

In hope of the mercy of God, Theodora said: "I believe my God, and from now on, I shall not commit such a sin, and I will strive to atone for my deed." At that moment St Theodora resolved to go off to a monastery to purify herself by labor and by prayer. She left her home secretly, and dressing herself in men's clothes, she went to a men's monastery, since she feared that her husband would find her in a women's monastery.

The igumen of the monastery, in order to test the resolve of the newcomer, would not even bless her to enter the courtyard. St Theodora spent the night at the gates. In the morning, she fell down at the knees of the igumen, and said her name was Theodore from Alexandria, and entreated him to let her remain at the monastery for repentance and monastic labors. Seeing the sincere intent of the newcomer, the igumen consented.

Even the experienced monks were amazed at Theodora's all-night prayers on bended knee, her humility, endurance and self-denial. The saint labored at the monastery for eight years. Her body, once defiled by adultery, now became a vessel of the grace of God and a receptacle of the Holy Spirit.

Once, the saint was sent to Alexandria to buy provisions. After blessing her for the journey, the igumen indicated that in case of a delay, she should stay over at the Enata monastery, which was on the way. Also staying at the guest house of the Enata monastery was the daughter of its igumen. She had come to visit with her father. Attracted by the comeliness of the young monk, she tried to seduce the monk Theodore into the sin of fornication, not knowing that it was a woman standing before her. Meeting with refusal, she committed sin with another guest and became pregnant. Meanwhile, the saint bought the food and returned to her own monastery.

After a certain while the father of the shameless girl, realizing that a transgression had occurred, began to question his daughter about the father of the child. The girl indicated that it was the monk Theodore. The father at once reported it to the Superior of the monastery where St Theodora labored in asceticism. The igumen summoned the saint and repeated the accusation. The saint firmly replied: "As God is my witness, I did not do this." The igumen, knowing of Theodore's purity and holiness of life, did not believe the accusation.

When the girl gave birth, the Enata monks brought the infant to the monastery where the ascetic lived, and began to reproach its monks for an unchaste life. But this time even the igumen believed the slanderous accusation and became angry at the innocent Theodore. They entrusted the infant into the care of the saint and threw her out of the monastery in disgrace. The saint humbly submitted to this new trial, seeing in it the expiation of her former sin. She settled with the child not

far from the monastery in a hut. Shepherds, out of pity, gave her milk for the infant, and the saint herself ate only wild vegetables.

Bearing her misfortune, the holy ascetic spent seven years in banishment. Finally, at the request of the monks, the igumen allowed her to return to the monastery with the child, in seclusion she spent two years instructing the child. The igumen of the monastery received a revelation from God that the sin of the monk Theodore was forgiven. The grace of God dwelt upon the monk Theodore, and soon all the monks began to witness to the signs worked through the prayers of the saint.

Once, during a drought, all the wells dried up. The igumen said to the brethren that only Theodore would be able to reverse the misfortune. Having summoned the saint, the igumen bade her to bring forth water, and the water in the well did not dry up afterwards. The humble Theodore said that the miracle was worked through the prayer and faith of the igumen.

Before her death, St Theodora shut herself in her cell with the child and instructed him to love God above all things. She told him to obey the igumen and the brethren, to preserve tranquility, to be meek and without malice, to avoid obscenity and silliness, to love non-covetousness, and not to neglect their communal prayer. After this, she prayed and, for the last time, she asked the Lord to forgive her sins. The child also prayed together with her. Soon the words of prayer faded from the lips of the ascetic, and she peacefully departed to a better world.

The Lord revealed to the igumen the spiritual accomplishments of the saint, and also her secret. The igumen, in order to remove any dishonor from the deceased, in the presence of the igumen and brethren of the Enata monastery, told of his vision and uncovered the bosom of the saint as proof.

The Enata igumen and brethren shrank back in terror at their great transgression. Falling down before the body of the saint, with tears they asked forgiveness of St Theodora. News of St Theodora reached her former husband. He received monastic tonsure at this same monastery where his wife had been. And the child, raised by the nun, also followed in the footsteps of his foster-mother. Afterwards, he became igumen of this very monastery. (*from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 15:1-11

Brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that

He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me. Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 19:16-26

At that time, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He said to Him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and *your* mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Amen, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” When His disciples heard *it*, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at *them* and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The birth of her, whose Child was marvelous, was above nature and understanding, and it was salvation to the world; her death was glorious, and truly a sacred feast. The Father predestined her, the prophets foretold her through the Holy Spirit. His sanctifying power overshadowed her, cleansed and made her holy, and, as it were, predestined her. Then You, Word of the Father, not dwelling in place, invited the lowliness of our nature to be united to the immeasurable greatness of Your inscrutable Godhead. You, who took flesh of the Blessed Virgin, vivified by a reasoning soul, having first abided in her undefiled and immaculate womb, creating Yourself, and causing her to exist in You, became perfect man, not ceasing to be perfect god, equal to Your Father, but taking upon Yourself our

weakness through ineffable goodness. Through it You are one Christ, one Lord, one Son of God, and man at the same time, perfect God and perfect man, wholly God and wholly man, one hypostasis from two perfect natures, the Godhead and the manhood. And in two perfect natures, the divine and the human, God is not pure God, nor the man only man, but the Son of God and the Incarnate God are one and the same God and man without confusion or division, uniting in Himself substantially the attributes of both natures. Thus, He is at once uncreated and created, mortal and immortal, visible and invisible, in place and not in place. He has a divine will and a human will, a divine action and a human also, two powers of choosing 0 divine and human. He shows forth divine wonders and human affections – natural, I mean, and pure. You have taken upon Yourself, Lord, of Your great mercy, the state of Adam as he was before the fall, body, soul, and mind, and all that they involve physically, so as to give me a perfect salvation. It is true indeed that what was not assumed was not healed. Having thus become the mediator between God and man, You destroyed enmity, and led back to Your Father those who had deserted Him, wanderers to their home, and those in darkness to the light. You brought pardon to the contrite, and changed mortality into immortality. You delivered the world from the aberration of many gods, and made men the children of god, partakers of Your divine glory. You raised the human race, which was condemned to hell, above all power and majesty, and in Your person it is seated on the King’s eternal throne. Who was the instrument of these infinite benefits exceeding all mind and comprehension, if not the Mother ever-Virgin who bore You?

– St. John of Damascus

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life –

Parts 86-88: Debt

“Owe no one anything, except to love one another.” (Romans 13:8 RSV)

How many have never learned the lesson of keeping expenditures within the limit of their income? So many do not learn to adapt themselves to their circumstances. They borrow and borrow again and again. They become overwhelmed with debt. And the result? So often they become discouraged and disheartened. Sometimes such discouragement leads to “get-rich-quick” schemes like lottery or gambling, all of which



cost even more money with the debt circle then widening and widening. Some even resort to illegal or criminal ways to “get rich.” Here’s a few garnered from the internet: *Advanced Fee Scams, Inheritance Scam, Lottery Scam, money laundering, money mule, Mystery Shopper, Red Cell, Romance Scam, Secret Shopper* and the list goes on and on.

This world makes it even easier to be in debt. Credit card debt is at the top of the list of ways to accumulate debt. Use of a credit card is simply borrowing money at a (usually) outrageous interest rate. One might get an auto loan of a few percentage points; but a credit card “loan” is usually 9% to upwards of 20%. Such “loans” can build up very quickly. Today there are actual companies whose mission is to help people get out of debt – and of course you have to pay them to help you. Now, let’s see. You can pay them through installments – or you can put it on your credit card... And here we go again.

Paying off personal debt usually gets to be a priority when it comes to budgeting income. The cause of God is usually not remembered. Paying off that debt is vitally important these days because we are also duped into thinking that our “credit score” is a description of who we are: the better the score, the better the person. And when it comes to spending, despite the debt we still must have our amusements, entertainments and good food. What does God’s cause get in the end? Leftovers – that is if there is anything left.

In the thirteenth chapter of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul talks about the relationship a Christian has with government. Government is a tool that God uses to keep order in the world. Thus taxes are imposed to pay the costs of keeping such order. In the 7th verse of that chapter, he writes: *Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due...* But the key comes in the next verse: ***“Owe no one anything, except to love one another.”*** Personal debt seems to be a greater problem for the present generation than for the previous one. The whole credit card industry has exploded on us and now even children are provided credit cards for much more than just “emergency” expenses at college or when away from home. St. Paul tells us, *“Owe no one anything.”* Nowadays, someone who doesn’t owe anything to anyone is a rare bird indeed. We are all in debt: mortgage, auto loan, credit card balance, even a few dollars borrowed from a friend.

Some point to how children are raised as the source of the problem of personal debt. Parenting may be one cause for the problem as, often, the lifestyle of the parents is followed by their children, and on into the generations to follow. Consider this example from Roald Dahl’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Mr. and Mrs. Salt have a daughter who is an obnoxious little girl. She has been spoiled

rotten by her rich parents. She gains entry to Willy Wonka's fabulous factory by winning one of the coveted golden tickets - but only thanks to her doting father, who has bought half a million Wonka chocolate bars inside of which one could find that golden ticket.

Some parenting experts call this **indulgent parenting**. **Indulgent parents** are responsive to their children but undemanding and permissive. They are warm and loving but lax, setting few clear boundaries. They often respond to their children's wishes, even when these are unreasonable or inappropriate.

Authoritative parents, on the other hand, love their children unconditionally and accept them for who they are. They keep a close eye on their children, provide them with plenty of support, set firm boundaries, and grant considerable freedom within those boundaries. And this includes understanding financial responsibilities. Children are taught that what they want they must earn, and that self-denial is a true Christian virtue. Most importantly, authoritative parents teach their children to love God and His Holy Church as a primary virtue and responsibility. Further, they teach the children, by clear example, that others, especially those in need of the basic things of life, are more important than they are.

The first lesson is self-denial: *“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”* (Mark 8:34 RSV).

The Old Testament book of Haggai is a prophecy written by Haggai the prophet of whom very little is known. His is a short book, consisting of only two chapters. The historical setting dates around 520 BC before the Temple has been rebuilt. Haggai's message is filled with an urgency for the people to proceed with the rebuilding of the second Jerusalem temple.

The first chapter of Haggai contains a harsh criticism of the people of God: *“Thus says the Lord of hosts: this people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord... then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, ‘is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes’* (Haggai 1:2-6 RSV).

While the Prophet is clearly talking about the people's lack of support for rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, he is just as clearly talking about how the people of God even today fail to support their parish churches. On the one hand, the

Temple of God lay in ruins while, on the other hand, the people ate, drank, bought clothes and lived in their paneled homes.

Are we in line for Haggai's criticism as well? Do our churches "*lie in ruins*"? Perhaps not in ruins, but many are run-down, in need of repair, or in need of total replacement. But perhaps more importantly, so many of our churches are in severe debt to mortgage companies, banks, and builders. Do we eat, drink, buy clothes and live in paneled homes while the churches are left to fend for themselves?

Some might claim bad management by the previous administration. Some might claim too much was agreed upon originally to create such a debt. And some (many?) might say that their own needs are more important than God's House. *More important than God's House?* Where Christ's Body and Blood are provided to His people? Where the Word of God is proclaimed and lived? Where babies are baptized and chrismated?

Parish debt is an affront to God. It sends Him a message. What message do we want to send to God? (*from acrod.org*)

Also commemorated today: St. Euphrosynus the Cook

Saint Euphrosynus the Cook was from one of the Palestinian monasteries, and his obedience was to work in the kitchen as a cook. Toiling away for the brethren, St Euphrosynus did not absent himself from thought about God, but rather dwelt in prayer and fasting. He remembered always that obedience is the first duty of a monk, and therefore he was obedient to the elder brethren.

The patience of the saint was amazing: they often reproached him, but he made no complaint and endured every unpleasantness. St Euphrosynus pleased the Lord by his inner virtue which he concealed from people, and the Lord Himself revealed to the monastic brethren the spiritual heights of their unassuming fellow-monk.



One of the priests of the monastery prayed and asked the Lord to show him the blessings prepared for the righteous in the age to come. The priest saw in a dream what Paradise is like, and he contemplated its inexplicable beauty with fear and with joy.

He also saw there a monk of his monastery, the cook Euphrosynus. Amazed at this encounter, the presbyter asked Euphrosynus, how he came to be there. The saint answered that he was in Paradise through the great mercy of God. The priest again asked whether Euphrosynus would be able to give him something from the surrounding beauty. St Euphrosynus suggested to the priest to take whatever he wished, and so the priest pointed to three luscious apples growing in the garden of Paradise. The monk picked the three apples, wrapped them in a cloth, and gave them to his companion.

When he awoke in the early morning, the priest thought the vision a dream, but suddenly he noticed next to him the cloth with the fruit of Paradise wrapped in it, and emitting a wondrous fragrance. The priest, found St Euphrosynus in church and asked him under oath where he was the night before. The saint answered that he was where the priest also was. Then the monk said that the Lord, in fulfilling the prayer of the priest, had shown him Paradise and had bestowed the fruit of Paradise through him, “the lowly and unworthy servant of God, Euphrosynus.”

The priest related everything to the monastery brethren, pointing out the spiritual loftiness of Euphrosynus in pleasing God, and he pointed to the fragrant paradisaical fruit. Deeply affected by what they heard, the monks went to the kitchen, in order to pay respect to St Euphrosynus, but they did not find him there. Fleeing human glory, the monk had left the monastery. The place where he concealed himself remained unknown, but the monks always remembered that their monastic brother St Euphrosynus had come upon Paradise, and that they in being saved, through the mercy of God would meet him there. They reverently kept and distributed pieces of the apples from Paradise for blessing and for healing.
(from oca.org)

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, Alicia Barosio and family, Millie Borys, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Cary Cooper, 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, John Sparks, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Daria Virvan, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Rdr. Nectarios and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)