

# 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.**

## **May 28, 2017 – Sunday of the Holy God-bearing Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council**

Halfway on the uphill road that connects deserted Alexandro with the seaside and bustling Nikiana, the driver or hiker will come across the Hermitage of the Holy Fathers. Crowds of pilgrims visit this location, which is on the northeastern outskirts of Skaros Mountain, the "Holy Mountain" of Lefkada, on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers, which is the Seventh Sunday of Pascha, between Ascension and Pentecost. It is on this Sunday that the Church honors the 318 God-bearing Fathers that comprised the First Ecumenical Synod.

Tradition gives us much information about the Holy Fathers and their relationship with the island of Lefkada.

Among the 318 Holy Fathers who attended the First Ecumenical Synod was Bishop Agatharchos of Lefkada. He came from Achaia and was a representative of the Church of Epirus Vetus ("Old Epirus"). It seems that due to the holiness of his life and the grace of the Holy Spirit within him, he attracted five other Holy Fathers who participated in the Synod of Nicaea, whose names are not known. Upon his return, therefore, to his diocese in Lefkada, these five Holy Fathers followed him.



When the Holy Fathers arrived, their ship landed in the cove where the village Episkopos ("Bishop") is today, while the adjacent area known as Nikiana probably derives from the name "New Nicaea".

Three of the Fathers chose a cave on Mount Skaros and decided to live there the rest of their lives. There they passed their time with fasting, vigils and prayers, and they reposed in peace. They were buried in the place where there stands today a small chapel of the Hermitage of the Holy Fathers. From the grave one of the Fathers gushes forth holy water. Indeed, the water level does not decrease at any point of the year, regardless of weather conditions. More so, it doesn't even dry up on the feast day, when numerous people partake of the holy water. The Holy Altar of this small chapel is over the grave of the second Holy Father, while the third is buried on the spot where today three oil lamps burn.

Many miracles constantly take place for those who drink this holy water with faith, invoking the intercessions of the Holy Fathers.

The other two Holy Fathers who followed Bishop Agatharchos, lived as monk in the place where today stands the Monastery of Phaneromeni. At the time there was a small house of prayer where - before the Apostles Aquila and Herodian came to the island - there was a temple dedicated to Artemis. These two Holy Fathers lived there in asceticism and reposed in peace. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:12-16**

Brethren, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 18:18-27**

At that time, a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when he heard this, he became very

sorrowful, for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For 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." And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

## *A Word From the Holy Fathers*

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

My presence, He says, is without compulsion. I knock at the door of the heart, and to those who open I rejoice with them at their salvation. For I regard this as food and supper, that as I am nourished even so they are nourished; they banish the famine of hearing the word of God (Amos 8:11) and the darkness of deceit.

*He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

The throne indicates the kingdom and the rest of the coming age. Therefore, he says that those who have conquered the enemy "will be glorified with me and rule with me." Rom. 8:17. When He says, "as I myself as conquered," he is speaking in a human manner on account of the assumption of the flesh. For God the Word did not acquire the kingdom as a prize for virtue, for He has this essentially as an eternal possession. For if this were not so, He would not be able to share it with others. But according to the Theologian and the "son of thunder," He shared from His fullness with all the saints. For this reason also He promised to His holy apostles that they would sit on twelve thrones and judge the future twelve tribes of Israel. (Mt. 19:28). For when He who is God and the eternal King became man for us, He shared everything that is ours, except only sin (Heb. 4:15), and shared everything of His with those who had conquered the devil as it was possible for human nature to receive. Therefore, having made a cloud the chariot of His ascension into heaven, He said through the apostle that the saints would be snatched up to meet Him on the clouds (1 Thes. 4:17). And when He, who is the Creator and Lord of creation, shall come as judge, He will allow the saints to judge those who had rebelled against the truly divine and blessed service. As the apostle says, "Do you not know that we are to judge angels?" (1 Cor. 6:3) that is, the principalities of darkness. Since, therefore, we have such a benefactor of mankind as judge, let us be zealous to receive His favor, fulfilling at all times the word of Solomon, "Let your garments always be white" (Ecc. 9:8), not making them filthy

through evil deeds. For in this way, having decorated our souls in a way fit for marriage (Mt. 22:1-12), we shall present ourselves lovely for union with the King, and we shall receive the eternal blessings in Christ, our God, the supplier of these things, with whom glory, honor and worship be to the Father, together with the all-holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

– Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on Revelation 3:20-22*

## On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – 131:

### Spiritual Cowardice



*“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.”*  
(Philippians 1:22 RSV)

Can we really say this as Paul did? “Do we believe what he said above?” Or, do we make excuses: ‘I am not an Apostle so it doesn’t work that way for me’ or ‘Paul had a vision of Christ but I never have, so how do you expect me to live that way?’ **What is your excuse?**

The reality is most of us are **spiritual cowards** and find some excuse not to live by those words that Paul uttered in Philippians. We like and crave the elf-centered life we live here on earth. Paul is torn between being with God in His heavenly kingdom or continuing the fruitful labor he was given here on earth. God endowed Paul with special skills and gifts, as He has all of us, to do His work here on earth. These skills and abilities are to prepare **US** and to show others the way! By fruitful labor here on earth, we are fulfilling Christ commandments to love him and to love our neighbor.

Paul was facing physical death like all of us will eventually experience. But Paul knew that only his physical body would die but he would live in his spiritual body until the second coming. He states in the later part of Philippians Chapter 1, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” But, he admonishes the Philippians to, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.....and not be frightened in anything.”

**Is your life being lived in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ?** Are you using the time, talents and treasures that God has given you to benefit the less fortunate? Only you can answer that question. Only you and God know the answer. If you honestly answer “NO!”, then start today. Give your time, talent and treasure to God through the church that others may be saved. If your answer is “YES!”, God bless you for doing God’s work!

As you ponder the passage above, pray that God will give you the grace of the mindfulness of death. Archimandrite Zaccharias in his book, *Man, the Target of God*, states that through this grace “suddenly, man awakes out of his age-old stupor. He perceives that God’s eternity summons him from every side.” Use what God has given you to **awaken you** and open your heart and to touch the heart of others.

## **On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – 132:**

### **Do You Have Enough Chips?**

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is a gift from God—not because of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9 RSV)

There are some people in the Orthodox Church, as well as other Christian denominations, that believe you can buy your way to salvation, by saving up “chips.” In other words, by making considerable contributions to the church or charities, working fundraisers, teaching classes, taking classes, going on pilgrimages, etc., so that we are “members in good standing” in the parish. It is as if people believe that they are storing up “**religious chips**” that they can cash in at the end of life. The truth is as Paul states above; there is nothing we can do.

We cannot buy our way into the Kingdom of God. There is no ticket that we can purchase by human effort. We need to understand what salvation is and what is expected of us. The Lord asks us not to be **pretty good** or even **very good** but to be, “**perfect as God the Father is perfect.**” We do those things stated above not to build chips to cash in but to show gratitude for what God has done for us. We don’t just offer a little, what is left over after we take what we want, but to offer Him everything! We don’t do this because we feel we are obligated to pay Him back, we can never repay Him for what He has done for us. We do it because once we experience God. He becomes our whole life and we want to do anything and everything for Him. We give back to Him our time, talents and treasure saying, “thank you for the wonderful gift of salvation.”

At the same time, as Fr. Andrew Damick states in his blog *Roads from Emmaus*, “When we come to pray; when we fall on our faces before God; when we sacrifice our time, our abilities, and our resources...when we change our whole lives, bit by bit, so that it is defined by the rhythms of Church life and not secular pursuits, than what we are doing is cooperating with divine grace.” When we don’t do those things stated above and for the right reason, we are not cooperating with divine grace. Divine grace is what heals us and is critical for our salvation.

Give your time, talents and treasure and for the right reasons; to show gratitude to God for all that we have and to cooperate with His divine grace. Being a member in good standing in a parish does not necessarily mean you are a member in good standing in the Kingdom of Heaven. There is a price to pay. As Fr. Damick points out, “Being here and being engaged costs something. It will cost time. It will cost you your money. It will cost you your talents. It will cost you your prestige. It will cost you your comfort. It will cost you your convenience. It will cost you your life. **But it will gain you not only life in eternity but an earthly life marked by eternity.**”

### **On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – 133: Desire**

*“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would.”* (Philippians 1:22 RSV)

The Holy Fathers teach us that there are two types of desire, divine and carnal/sensual. When God created man, He placed within man a seed of **divine desire**. The desire to be with God, to commune with Him. Man’s joy came from being with God, and there was that desire always to be with Him. God made us in His image, to be like Him, but we have to work at being in His likeness. Adam did not develop fully into the likeness of God.

Adam was deceived by Satan to believe that joy could come from the desire of sensual things, of material things. Thus the distortion of desire began. Some theologians believed that there are two separate desires but most believe that there is only one desire, that which God implanted in us – the desire to be with Him. All other desires are distortions, sensual in nature. St. Maximus the Confessor states in Questions to Thalassius Prologue, “The more that man went after sensible things through his senses alone, the more the ignorance of God overcame him; the more he was enslaved by the ignorance of God, the more he gave himself over to the delight in material things known empirically; the more he was imbued with pleasure, the more he aroused the self-love which was the consequence of it; the more he cultivated self-love, the more he invented various means for obtaining pleasure, the fruit and goal of self-love.”

What St. Maximus is telling us is that as we move further from God, ignorance of God, the more we desire sensual things to find joy! The joy we find in the material world is **ephemeral**, so we continue to seek other joy, other desire, to fill the void left by the ignorance of God. Our desire must be to be in communion with God at all times! Material pursuits must not be our primary goal. Use the gifts that God has given you to help others. God has gifted each of us in many ways, to use to provide us with a complete life and to help those that are not so gifted. When was

the last time that you felt real joy, a joy that lasted? Was it when you offered your time, your talents or your treasure to help somebody less fortunate?

Why continue down the road that provides you joy from material things; joy that is ephemeral? God wants us to be like Him in His image and **LIKENESS**. We have to work at the likeness. We are to be like **HIM**, loving, kind, generous, compassionate, and thoughtful. Can you honestly say that “I am like Christ?” We can only say that if we **ARE** like Christ! He wants us to desire to be with God, receive our joy from being with God and for experiencing eternity with God. Being a good Steward of your time, talents and treasures will lead you back to the path of desiring God more than anything else in this world! *(from acrod.org)*

## **COMMEMORATED TODAY: ST. NICETAS THE BISHOP OF CHALCEDON**



Saint Nicetas, Bishop of Chalcedon, lived during the second half of the eighth century. For his God-pleasing life he was consecrated as Bishop of Chalcedon.

Saint Nicetas distinguished himself by his charity, he always helped the poor, he lodged travelers in his home, he cared for orphans and widows, and he interceded for those who had been wronged.

During the reign of the iconoclast Leo the Armenian (813-820), Saint Nicetas bravely denounced the Iconoclast heresy and urged his flock to venerate the holy icons of Christ, the Theotokos, and the saints. Saint Nicetas endured much suffering from the impious emperor and his like-minded cohorts. He was subjected to tortures and sent off to exile.

The holy confessor Nicetas died at the beginning of the ninth century. From his relics occurred many miracles of healing. The Canon of the service, written by the priest Joseph of Constantinople, also includes Saint Nicetas's brother, Saint Ignatius, among the saints. *(from oca.org)*

## **HOLY NEW MARTYR MITROS OF PELOPONNESOS**

Saint Mitros (or Demetrios) of Peloponnesos, originated from Theisoa and was raised in a devout and virtuous family. However, at about eleven years of age he was converted to Islam, very likely as part of the suppression of rebellion in the Peloponnese in 1769 by the Turks. His Christian name was Demetrios, but when he became a Muslim he was named Mustafa.



Gifted with intelligence and wisdom, he quickly became well known amongst the most eminent Turks of the Peloponnese and rose in office to the position of sub-prefect. His many contacts and productivity also resulted in his acquisition of many riches and servants. Despite these riches and glory he was deeply dissatisfied with his situation and his young gullibility into being deceived into Islam and he wished to return to the faith of his parents. He went to the town of Tripolis, sold all his possessions, returned to his relatives and was brought back to the Christian Church through confession, repentance and spiritual guidance.

He also shaved off his beard, since at that time in Tripoli the Muslims wore beards, and it was forbidden for Christians. Dimitrios lived for another ten years as a devout Christian.

His Christian life became known to the Turks, and while he was at Mystra he was recognised, captured and taken to the pasha of Tripolis on charges of converting back to Christianity. The pasha pointed out the many benefits of office and wealth that he owed to the Turks and made many attempts to make him denounce his faith, however Demetrios remained steadfast, declaring that he would rather die for his faith. He was imprisoned and after a few days, following further futile attempts to convert him, he was charged as an offender against Islam and executed by beheading on 28 May 1794, which was Pentecost Sunday. His last words to his fellow Christians at his execution were the following: "I am one of you. Demetrios is my name. Therefore entreat the Lord on my behalf." He was buried with honor and respect by the Christian community at the Church of St Demetrios the Great-Martyr in Tripolis, now named after Saint Mitros. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*



## June Anniversaries and Birthdays

### Anniversaries:

Steve & Nancy Hall 4<sup>th</sup>

Larry & Gail Hartenstein 6<sup>th</sup>

Bernie & Carol Vallandingham 8<sup>th</sup>

Michael & Phyllis Kopan 9<sup>th</sup>



### Birthdays:

Rebecca Vallandingham 6<sup>th</sup>

Aurora Rodzianko 23<sup>rd</sup>

Chris Nicolaus 25<sup>th</sup>

Ron Wright 30<sup>th</sup>

## **Thank You from Christina Harris & Valentina Makowelski**

*Dear Father Joseph,*

*Thank you very much and all parishioners who donated for the beautiful flowers in memory of Alex. I truly appreciate the kindness some have shown him when we came to church.*

*God bless you.*

*Valentina*

*Dear Father Joseph, & our St. Thomas Church family,*

*Thank you so much for the beautiful flowers that were sent for Dad. We appreciate those of you that came out to see him off. We miss seeing you at church weekly & I'm sure Dad will be missed by all. His memory will always be eternal!*

*Love,*

*Christina & family*

### **Follow Our Diocese On-Line**

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***In Your Prayers – Please Remember...*** His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, 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, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, Josh Moore, 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, 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, the newly departed servants of God Protopresbyter Ronald Hazuda and Father William George, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)