

SOBORNOST

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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

Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

January 20, 2019 – 34th Sunday After Pentecost

Venerable Euthymius the Great

Saint Euthymius the Great came from the city of Melitene in Armenia, near the River Euphrates. His parents, Paul and Dionysia, were pious Christians of noble birth. After many years of marriage they remained childless, and in their sorrow they entreated God to give them offspring. Finally, they had a vision and heard a voice saying, “Be of good cheer! God will grant you a son, who will bring joy to the churches.” The child was named Euthymius (“good cheer”).

Saint Euthymius’ father died soon after this, and his mother, fulfilling her vow to dedicate her son to God, gave him to her brother, the priest Eudoxius, to be educated. He presented the child to Bishop Eutroius of Melitene, who accepted him with love. Seeing his good conduct, the bishop soon made him a Reader.

Saint Euthymius later became a monk and was ordained to the holy priesthood. At the same time, he was entrusted with the supervision of all the city monasteries. Saint Euthymius often visited the monastery of Saint Polyeuctus, and during Great Lent he withdrew into the wilderness. His responsibility for the monasteries weighed heavily upon the ascetic, and conflicted with his desire for stillness, so he



secretly left the city and headed to Jerusalem. After venerating the holy shrines, he visited the Fathers in the desert.

Since there was a solitary cell in the Tharan lavra, he settled into it, earning his living by weaving baskets. Nearby, his neighbor Saint Theoctistus (September 3) also lived in asceticism. They shared the same zeal for God and for spiritual struggles, and each strove to attain what the other desired. They had such love for one another that they seemed to share one soul and one will.

Every year, after the Feast of Theophany, they withdrew into the desert of Coutila (not far from Jericho). One day, they entered a steep and terrifying gorge with a stream running through it. They saw a cave upon a cliff, and settled there. The Lord, however, soon revealed their solitary place for the benefit of many people. Shepherds driving their flocks came upon the cave and saw the monks. They went back to the village and told people about the ascetics living there.

People seeking spiritual benefit began to visit the hermits and brought them food. Gradually, a monastic community grew up around them. Several monks came from the Tharan monastery, among them Marinus and Luke. Saint Euthymius entrusted the supervision of the growing monastery to his friend Theoctistus.

Saint Euthymius exhorted the brethren to guard their thoughts. “Whoever desires to lead the monastic life should not follow his own will. He should be obedient and humble, and be mindful of the hour of death. He should fear the judgment and eternal fire, and seek the heavenly Kingdom.”

The saint taught young monks to fix their thoughts on God while engaging in physical labor. “If laymen work in order to feed themselves and their families, and to give alms and offer sacrifice to God, then are not we as monks obliged to work to sustain ourselves and to avoid idleness? We should not depend on strangers.” The saint demanded that the monks keep silence in church during services and at meals. When he saw young monks fasting more than others, he told them to cut off their own will, and to follow the appointed rule and times for fasting. He urged them not to attract attention to their fasting, but to eat in moderation.

In these years Saint Euthymius converted and baptized many Arabs. Among them were the Saracen leaders Aspebet and his son Terebon, both of whom Saint Euthymius healed of sickness. Aspebet received the name Peter in Baptism and afterwards he was a bishop among the Arabs. Word of the miracles performed by Saint Euthymius spread quickly. People came from everywhere to be healed of their ailments, and he cured them. Unable to bear human fame and glory, the monk secretly left the monastery, taking only his closest disciple Dometian with him. He withdrew into the Rouba desert and settled on Mt. Marda, near the Dead Sea.

In his quest for solitude, the saint explored the wilderness of Ziph and settled in the cave where David once hid from King Saul. Saint Euthymius founded a monastery beside David's cave, and built a church. During this time Saint Euthymius converted many monks from the Manichean heresy, he also healed the sick and cast out devils.

Visitors disturbed the tranquillity of the wilderness. Since he loved silence, the saint decided to return to the monastery of Saint Theoctistus. Along the way they found a quiet level place on a hill, and he remained there. This would become the site of Saint Euthymius' lavra, and a little cave served as his cell, and then as his grave.

Saint Theoctistus went with his brethren to Saint Euthymius and requested him to return to the monastery, but the monk did not agree to this. However, he did promise to attend Sunday services at the monastery.

Saint Euthymius did not wish to have anyone nearby, nor to organize a cenobium or a lavra. The Lord commanded him in a vision not to drive away those who came to him for the salvation of their souls. After some time brethren again gathered around him, and he organized a lavra, on the pattern of the Tharan Lavra. In the year 429, when Saint Euthymius was fifty-two years old, Patriarch Juvenal of Jerusalem consecrated the lavra church and supplied it with presbyters and deacons.

The lavra was poor at first, but the saint believed that God would provide for His servants. Once, about 400 Armenians on their way to the Jordan came to the lavra. Seeing this, Saint Euthymius called the steward and ordered him to feed the pilgrims. The steward said that there was not enough food in the monastery. Saint Euthymius, however, insisted. Going to the storeroom where the bread was kept, the steward found a large quantity of bread, and the wine casks and oil jars were also filled. The pilgrims ate their fill, and for three months afterwards the door of the storeroom could not be shut because of the abundance of bread. The food remained undiminished, just like the widow of Zarephath's barrel of meal and cruse of oil (1/3 Kings 17:8-16).

Once, the monk Auxentius refused to carry out his assigned obedience. Despite the fact that St. Euthymius summoned him and urged him to comply, he remained obstinate. The saint then shouted loudly, "You will be rewarded for your insubordination." A demon seized Auxentius and threw him to the ground. The brethren asked Abba Euthymius to help him, and then the saint healed the unfortunate one, who came to himself, asked forgiveness and promised to correct himself. "Obedience," said Saint Euthymius, "is a great virtue. The Lord loves obedience more than sacrifice, but disobedience leads to death."

Two of the brethren became overwhelmed by the austere life in the monastery of Saint Euthymius, and they resolved to flee. Saint Euthymius saw in a vision that they would be ensnared by the devil. He summoned them and admonished them to abandon their destructive intention. He said, “We must never admit evil thoughts that fill us with sorrow and hatred for the place in which we live, and suggest that we go somewhere else. If someone tries to do something good in the place where he lives but fails to complete it, he should not think that he will accomplish it elsewhere. It is not the place that produces success, but faith and a firm will. A tree which is often transplanted does not bear fruit.”

In the year 431, the Third Ecumenical Council was convened in Ephesus to combat the Nestorian heresy. Saint Euthymius rejoiced over the affirmation of Orthodoxy, but was grieved about Archbishop John of Antioch who defended Nestorius.

In the year 451 the Fourth Ecumenical Council met in Chalcedon to condemn the heresy of Dioscorus who, in contrast to Nestorius, asserted that in the Lord Jesus Christ there is only one nature, the divine (thus the heresy was called Monophysite). He taught that in the Incarnation, Christ’s human nature is swallowed up by the divine nature.

Saint Euthymius accepted the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon and he acknowledged it as Orthodox. News of this spread quickly among the monks and hermits. Many of them, who had previously believed wrongly, accepted the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon because of the example of Saint Euthymius.

Because of his ascetic life and firm confession of the Orthodox Faith, Saint Euthymius is called “the Great.” Wearied by contact with the world, the holy abba went for a time into the inner desert. After his return to the lavra some of the brethren saw that when he celebrated the Divine Liturgy, fire descended from Heaven and encircled the saint. Saint Euthymius himself revealed to several of the monks that often he saw an angel celebrating the Holy Liturgy with him. The saint had the gift of clairvoyance, and he could discern a person’s thoughts and spiritual state from his outward appearance. When the monks received the Holy Mysteries, the saint knew who approached worthily, and who received unworthily.

When Saint Euthymius was 82 years old, the young Sava (the future Saint Sava the Sanctified, December 5), came to his lavra. The Elder received him with love and sent him to the monastery of Saint Theoctistus. He foretold that Saint Sava would outshine all his other disciples in virtue.

When the saint was ninety years of age, his companion and fellow monk Theoctistus became grievously ill. Saint Euthymius went to visit his friend and remained at the monastery for several days. He took leave of him and was present at his end. After burying his body in a grave, he returned to the lavra. God

revealed to Saint Euthymius the time of his death. On the eve of the Feast of Saint Anthony the Great (January 17) Saint Euthymius gave the blessing to serve the all-night Vigil. When the service ended, he took the priests aside and told them that he would never serve another Vigil with them, because the Lord was calling him from this earthly life.

All were filled with great sadness, but the saint asked the brethren to meet him in church in the morning. He began to instruct them, “If you love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15). Love is the highest virtue, and the bond of perfectness (Col. 3:14). Every virtue is made secure by love and humility. The Lord humbled Himself because of His Love for us and became man. Therefore, we ought to praise Him unceasingly, especially since we monks have escaped worldly distractions and concerns.”

“Look to yourselves, and preserve your souls and bodies in purity. Do not fail to attend the church services, and keep the traditions and rules of our community. If one of the brethren struggles with unclean thoughts, correct, console, and instruct him, so that he does not fall into the devil’s snares. Never refuse hospitality to visitors. Offer a bed to every stranger. Give whatever you can to help the poor in their misfortune.” Afterwards, having given instructions for the guidance of the brethren, the saint promised always to remain in spirit with them and with those who followed them in his monastery.

“Saint Euthymius then dismissed everyone but his disciple Dometian. He remained in the altar for three days, then died on January 20, 473 at the age of ninety-seven. A multitude of monks from all the monasteries and from the desert came to the lavra for the holy abba’s burial, among whom was Saint Gerasimus. The Patriarch Anastasius also came with his clergy, as well as the Nitrian monks Martyrius and Elias, who later became Patriarchs of Jerusalem, as Saint Euthymius had foretold.

Dometian remained by the grave of his Elder for six days. On the seventh day, he saw the holy abba in glory, beckoning to his disciple. “Come, my child, the Lord Jesus Christ wants you to be with me.” After telling the brethren about the vision, Dometian went to church and joyfully surrendered his soul to God. He was buried beside Saint Euthymius. The relics of Saint Euthymius remained at his monastery in Palestine, and the Russian pilgrim Igumen Daniel saw them in the twelfth century. (*from oca.org*)

Today’s Epistle Lesson – St. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians 3:4-11

Brethren, when Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication,

uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 18:35-43

At that time, as Jesus was coming near Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the road begging. And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, “What do you want Me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” Then Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw *it*, gave praise to God.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Listen to an edifying and true story that some Egyptian elders I met told me about a man thought holy by all but who in secret stirrings of his heart angered God because, I think, of assent to impure thoughts. Their story went as follows. A man with second sight, on entering this man's city, found him gravely ill and all the citizens affirming with tears, “If the saint dies, we have no further hope of salvation; for we are all protected through his intercession.” On hearing this, the man with second sight hurried off to get a blessing from the supposed saint. When he drew near, he saw many candles all ready and great crowds of clerics and laymen, including the bishop himself, waiting to conduct the funeral. Going in to him, he found him still breathing, and saw with the eye of his mind the devil of hell with a fiery fork inserting the fork into his heart and with many tortures pulling at his soul; and he heard a voice from heaven saying, “Just as his soul did not give me rest for a single day, so you too are not to stop pulling at his soul and torturing it.” I have recounted this to make us at all times ready for combat and prepared for the departure of the soul from the body, lest, seduced by love of pleasure, we be unbearably tormented at the time of departure...let us entreat God, Who has

applied corrective not capital punishment, to free His creature from the plot of the impure and pleasure loving spirit.

– St. Euthymius the Great

Also Commemorated Today: St. Feodor (Theodore) of Tomsk

In Western Siberia, on the banks of the river Tom, sits the town of Tomsk. It was founded in 1604 by settlers from the European north of Russia. Those were people accustomed to the fierce northern climate and quite capable of working and living in extreme conditions. So the fierce conditions of Siberia did not scare them off. Tomsk was dubbed the gateway into Asia, since from there one could reach the beaten tracks into Peking, Mongolia, the Pacific Ocean. The founding fathers of Tomsk were people of Orthodox faith. Over time, the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church founded an independent Tomsk eparchy there. That is where our road lies today, to make the acquaintance of the legendary local Saint – the Elder Feodor of Tomsk.

“The Elder Feodor of Tomsk is one of the most revered Saints in Tomsk eparchy,” says its head – Archbishop Tomsky and Asinovsky Rostislav. “And widely known outside the boundaries of Tomsk is the legend of how hiding under the name of this Elder was Russian Emperor Alexander I. According to legend, the Emperor staged his own death in the town of Taganrog on November 19th 1825, setting off on pilgrimage across the holy sites of Russia. Eventually, he came to Siberia, and committed himself to Elderhood,” said the Archbishop. While author of the book about Elder Feodor Tomsky, that came out in Moscow in 2007, well-known scientist Marina Gromyko, insists that Saint Feodor Tomsky and Emperor Alexander I are one and the same. To prove her point she quotes documents and numerous convincing testimonies of the Elder’s contemporaries. So it transpires that the legend about the Elder and the Emperor is more than the stuff of legends. Marina Gromyko insists that representatives of the Romanov dynasty were well aware of this truth. After all, it’s known that when in the reign of Emperor Alexander III the grave of Alexander I was opened, the sarcophagus was found to be empty. However, the Romanovs strictly guarded the family secret and avoided talking about this even amongst themselves, fearful of possible problems regarding the succession to the throne.

The emergence of the Elder Feodor in Siberia was preceded by his years of pilgrimage to Russia’s holy places St. John the Ladder defined the term ‘pilgrimage’ as “irreversible renunciation of all that ... obstructs us in our striving for piety.” The Elder Feodor, with the modesty that was his inherent feature, referred to his own pilgrimage as “vagrancy”. He was often mistaken for a

vagabond. It is known that on September 4th 1836 the Elder was riding a horse-drawn cart across Perm region. This is the Urals. The police stopped him to check his papers. However, he had no documents on him. So they promptly took him to the police station and six days later his case was heard in court. The old man was very tall, of pious noble looks, generally pleasing manners and ways. All this couldn't but dispose the judges in his favor. However, all their requests to reveal his identity, inform them of his rank and calling, and say where he was going, fell on deaf ears.

As a result the old man was sentenced to 20 lashings. They deliberated the possibility of a soldier's life for him, but his age ruled that out. So then the decision was made to exile him to Siberia. Curiously, the Elder seemed quite pleased with the sentence. However, using his illiteracy as excuse, he had someone else sign the court ruling. In the meantime, many of those who personally knew the Elder insisted he was not only literate, but boasted an excellent education. However, all of his life he feared lest a sample of his handwriting find its way into the hands of the authorities. The refined manners of the Elder Feodor amazed the convicts that he found himself amongst. Besides, the old man was very kind, compassionate, cared for the sick and weak, and had a word of kindness for every person.

Soon he was the general favorite, loved by officers and soldiers, who accompanied the exiles, as well as by the hundreds of convicts. At stopovers during the night he was accorded a special shelter. The Elder enjoyed such all-round trust that he was the sole one of the convicted not to be shackled. On March 26th 1837 the convicts (with Elder Feodor among them) reached Tomsk. This was a time when the town was in the grips of gold-mining fever. It had started after gold deposits were discovered in one of the regions of Tomsk gubernia. Historian Potanin, describing what took place in Tomsk at the time, remarked: "Lackeys were turning into rich folk, while their one-time masters went broke." Neither sermons nor persuasions could have any effect on the gold diggers. The sole way of impacting the lives of the restless souls was by personal example of piety. The life of Elder Feodor became just such an example to emulate.

Hegumen Siluan Vjurov, superior of the St. Alexi Monastery, where Elder Feodor's holy relics are kept, says that despite his age, and he was over 60, Elder Feodor led a strictly ascetic lifestyle. He slept on a bare plank, with a wood block for a pillow. He wore a long white shirt of thick sack-cloth. He ate very little – once or twice a week. His main staple was rye rusks moistened in water. Besides, he ate baked potatoes complete with the skins and liked black cherry berries. People who visited him brought him various food offerings, but he accepted only bread for himself, giving all else away to the needy.

For his pious life the Elder was granted by God the gift of spiritual vision and ability to cure people. He used his gift to serve people, and was their spiritual mentor. He could discern the spiritual condition of every person, human vices could not be concealed from him, and he tried to warn people from making erroneous steps in life, although, generally, he never aspired to the role of spiritual Father. After all, he was not a clergyman or a monk,” said Hegumen Siluan.

Elder Feodor spent the first five years of his Siberian exile in the village of Zertsaly outside Tomsk. One of the local Cossacks, noticing the Elder’s penchant for seclusion, built him a cottage in the Cossack settlement of Beloyarskaya. There the pious Feodor could pray undisturbed. Nobody saw how or when he prayed. However, after his death it transpired the Elder’s knees were covered in calluses. He observed the fast with conviction, without ever demanding of others that they follow his example. The Elder walked from village to village in the district, teaching the youngsters their letters. However, he never made attempts to sermonize or dictate to either young or old, never offered unwilling advice. So, perhaps, this explains why people flocked to him for advice in thousands.

The Elder Feodor was not only of tremendous height, but remarkable strength, too. He could easily lift a whole hayshock with the pitchfork and moved about logs with ease. In a word, this was a kind and clever giant. Everyone could see that he was of uncommon stock, and even asked him if he was ever oppressed by a life of such privation. However, Elder Feodor would smile in reply and say the following: “Why do you think that my present situation is so much worse than the previous? Right now I am free, independent, tranquil. Before, I had to concern myself with how not to stir up envy, brood over my friends’ betrayal, and many other things. Now I have nothing to lose. All my worldly possessions are constantly with me: they are the words of our Lord, and love for our Savior and for the people around us. You do not understand what joy there is in such freedom of spirit.”

Elder Feodor lived tranquilly in the settlement of Beloyarskaya until one of the local priests recognized him. This was Ioann Alexandrovsky, exiled from St. Petersburg to Beloyarskaya for some misdemeanor. Since Father Ioann had seen the Emperor many times he openly announced that hiding under the guise of Elder Feodor was the Russian Emperor. Elder Feodor made haste in leaving the settlement. Many well-to-do peasants from nearby villages invited him to take up residence at their homes. However, he accepted the invitation of the poorest of them all, a former convict, father of a large family, Ivan Malyh. The Elder spent the winter in his house. Afterwards, the peasants constructed a cell for him, converting an old sheep barn, where he lived ten years.

After that the Elder was invited by peasant Ivan Latyshev from the village Krasnorechenskoye. He built a cell for the pious Feodor right near the apiary. In that period, between 1840 and 1850, as one of Elder Feodor's contemporaries recalled, "...people besieged Elder Feodor in droves with all manner of requests. One would be concerned about his sickening cow, the other – had lost a horse, while someone else was plagued by other disasters. It gave the Elder great pleasure to give advice and instructions to those seeking his counsel, telling them how to live their lives and what to do to seek God's grace. He also made various predictions in the form of parables.

Word of him spread farther and farther, drawing vast crowds of varied folk..." Not unnoticed were visits made to the Elder by high-ranking folk. For example, many recalled how Hierarch Afanasiy Irkutsky came to see the Elder. And what stunned the local people was that the Elder conversed with the hierarch in the French language. Elder Feodor spoke in the same language to other nobles visiting him. Just like other Elders, Feodor alternated receiving "vast crowds of varied folk" with periods of complete or partial seclusion for profound prayer. A contemporary of the Elder testified: "Once, without saying anything to anyone besides Ivan Latyshev, he disappeared into the taiga and after roaming there for some time, chose a spot there for himself ... in its very depths, and asked Latyshev to transport his cell there. He received few people there. Some he spoke to only outside... In that particular period he spent whole days sometimes sitting in his cell and never showing himself to his rare visitors."

Later the Elder confided in Tomsk merchant and gold-trader Semion Hromov regarding that period of his life: "...I wanted to seek seclusion in the depths of the taiga woods, far from the crowds of people, but, apparently, this was not the will of God." Semion Hromov gave an account of his encounters with the Elder: "In November of 1852, passing through the village Krasnorechenskoye, I wanted to see the Elder Feodor, about whom I had heard from the monk Porphyri of Holy Mount Athos. The Elder was living at the time near the apiary belonging to peasant Ivan Latyshev... That was my first encounter with the righteous Elder Feodor. Upon arriving at his cell I quietly said a prayer to Jesus and stepped in, as the door was unlocked. Upon entering the cell, I once again prayed to the Lord, then saw the grey-haired elder and greeted him. His first question was: 'Where do you come from?' I explained. He followed up with: 'And whither are you going?' I responded: 'To Yeniseysk on gold trading business.' He said a lot to me regarding my business but this is what I remember particularly: 'It's a shame you are in this gold trading business,' the Elder said, 'God feeds you without it, you know.' He also said that we do much to incense the Lord and the Holy Mother of God, but their mercy towards us, sinners, is truly boundless.' He gave me counsel

on how a true Christian ought to live. One need not busy oneself so much with the stuff of life, but had better reflect on the future life, in God's Kingdom.

After this I began to see the Elder on every occasion I passed by his residence, and upon each visit of mine he told me not to increase the number of my gold mines. 'You have enough,' he said, 'you shall not want for anything.' And he would always add that I should not work on weekends. 'This work,' he said, 'takes from you all that is beneficial and is a great sin.' He warned me to always deal honestly with the workers employed by me and never cheat them out of a single coin. When once my brother didn't allow me to have a share in his horse trading business, and I told the Elder about this grievance of mine, he said: 'What can you do? Grief comes from thieves and from one's kin, too: you must have patience; the Lord will help to deal with this sorrow, all you must do is pray to Him and the Holy Virgin.'"

Semion Hromov at length tried to persuade Elder Feodor to move in with him in Tomsk. Towards the very last years of his life the Elder accepted the merchant's offer. Elder Feodor, as a devout ascetic, was hardly seeking particular comforts. In taking this decision he relied exclusively on the will of God, which had been revealed to him some 20 years before his encounter with Semion Hromov. In 1837 it was predicted to him that he would be residing in Tomsk at the home of a merchant. The Elder moved to Tomsk on October 31st 1858. To begin with he occupied the attic in Hromov's house, and later – a specially built for him cell in the woods, some 4 kilometers out of town.

Later on, the merchant built a special cell for Elder Feodor in the garden near his house, where the latter lived out the end of his days in solitude, rigid fast and constant prayer. The degree of care shown him was established by the zealot himself. So the lifestyle of the Elder in the town of Tomsk didn't much differ from the life he had led in his village retreat: the same asceticism in his cell, food and clothes. A local bishop Pyotr wrote: "The Elder partook very little of food and always limited himself to a lean diet: rye bread, cabbage soup with mushrooms, at times peas, and on big Orthodox feasts he allowed himself fish and eggs. Before lunch he always prayed at length and always made four prostrations: three to the Holy Trinity, and the fourth – to the Holy Mother of God. He had no bed to speak of – just a bunk near the stove without any mattress, without blanket, with a block of wood for a pillow."

In the last years of his life the Elder only left his cell to go to church. The St. Alexi Monastery was not far from the Elder's residence. Elder Feodor maintained constant contact with the brethren there and the Father Superior Archimandrite Victor Lebedev. The latter was a highly educated and extremely kind man. No

one ever left him without receiving the help or advice they had come seeking from him. Archimandrite Victor displayed tremendous respect towards Elder Feodor and never embarked on a single serious deed without the latter's advice and blessing. This was confirmed by people who knew them both. The Elder also communicated with other clergymen, such as Bishop Parfeniy, who confided in a conversation with merchant Hromov: The Elder "told me that he had visions of a heavenly light, that he'd seen the Holy Trinity, that it was revealed to him when he would die and many other things..." The merchant Hromov was not greatly surprised at hearing this, since Elder Feodor had frequently told him that "...through God's great grace, he was daily bestowed the Lord's meal, in other words, he received the Eucharist through the Lord's Angel."

Representatives of all the classes began to visit Elder Feodor. Such was the latter's reputation that even the Governor deemed it his duty to drop in at the Elder's cell and converse with him at length eye-to-eye. These conversations touched on matters of spiritual life and outstanding public issues. The Elder was just as well-versed in matters of state and public life as he was in the spiritual side of things. The Elder's contemporary who resided in Tomsk, the 'fool for Christ' Domna recalled: "When he lived in the garden, in a cell, once, when I was very ill, I remained in that garden by night in the hopes of going to him for a cure. I began knocking on the door. He opened the door and I only stepped across the threshold when I felt cured! A holy old man, he was!" We would like to add that the 'fool for Christ' Domna herself is a locally honored and venerated Saint.

In the Tomsk period of his life Elder Feodor regarded merchant Semion Hromov in the light of his closest spiritual child. The merchant was totally devoted to the zealot and sincerely did his best to aid him in everything. Elder Feodor responded to this in kind by displaying tremendous trust in the merchant and informing him of many miraculous visions that had been sent to him from above. The merchant's eldest daughter Anna also had a strong spiritual connection to Elder Feodor. Generally, the entire Hromov family honored the Elder in his lifetime and after his demise. The Elder helped members of this family also long after his death. Thus, the merchant himself and the husband of his youngest daughter Zinoviya were cured of grave illnesses after drinking water which had been poured over a likeness of the Elder made when he was still alive.

On January 20th 1864 Elder Feodor sighed thrice deeply and on the fourth, inhaling quietly he passed away without a moan. In those minutes the Hromov neighbors witnessed a veritable miracle: they saw how a huge flame of fire leaped out of the merchant's house three times... But there was no fire.... Residents of Tomsk who gathered various witness accounts of the demise of the Elder noted: "News of the death of Elder Feodor swiftly spread across Tomsk and its environs.

Crowds of people surrounded the Hromov house where the mysterious hermit had spent his last breath. So great was his popularity that everyone, beginning with the local aristocracy and ending with the beggars, which the Elder always gave generously to, rushed to pay their last respects to the wondrous Saint. The Elder was buried near the altar of one of the churches of the St. Alexi Monastery. Miracles that occurred in the Elder's lifetime continued at his funeral dinner. When after the burial service merchant Hromov gave the nun Sarra, who could barely stand due to her debilitating illness, the portrait of Elder Feodor to kiss, she became cured that instant."

Presently residing in Tomsk is the great-granddaughter of merchant Semion Hromov, Yevgenia. She is 90 years old. She has in her possession some of the things that used to belong to the Elder Feodor. Yevgenia's acquaintance Nataliya Zelenova, a Tomsk old-timer, insists that only prayers addressed to Elder Feodor helped her and like-minded to preserve the historical part of the town with its unique wooden houses from destruction. "Here is a house that is 151 years old," Nataliya Zelenova says. "I have lived here all my life. They intended to demolish it, along with a number of similarly unique buildings, to construct on their site some panel housing. We are activists for the protection of historical monuments, so we marched with slogans and banners in protest against the barbarous destruction of unique historical sites. But it was all in vain. The authorities refused to hear us. Only after we prayed to Elder Feodor did we manage to get a response from the powers-that-be. As a result in 2005 a program was adopted for the preservation of ancient wooden architecture in Tomsk. Thus, the Elder is a patron of our town, helps us protect it," said Nataliya Zelenova.

There was a place in Tomsk which the Elder particularly loved visiting. It's the place where a spring falls into the river Ushaika. Today the spot is a pilgrimage site for people from across all of Siberia. And at the end of the 19th century the last Russian Emperor Nicholas II came here. The image of the mysterious Elder always intrigued the minds of representatives of the Romanov dynasty. However, they didn't dare speak publicly about this. Proof of Elder Feodor being none other than Emperor Alexander I could cast doubt over the legality of the succession to the throne. "In 1958 in Canada Prince Trubetskoi, a Russian emigrant residing in Canada, met up with the Great Duchess Olga, daughter of Emperor Alexander III and sister of the last Russian Emperor Nicholas II," the Tomsk local historian Gennady Skvortsov says. "In their conversation Prince Trubetskoi asked the Duchess about her personal attitude to the legend of the Elder Feodor and Emperor Alexander I being one and the same. To this she replied that the Royal family never had doubted that this was true. She also said that her father – Emperor Alexander III said: 'Do you know, children, that the remains of our great ancestor

Alexander Pavlovich are buried in Tomsk?” Once upon coming to Elder Feodor’s cell the merchant Hromov stood before him on his knees and asked: “Word has it that you are none other than Emperor Alexander the Blessed. Is this true?” Upon hearing this, the Elder made the sign of the cross and said: “Wondrous are Your deeds, Lord. There is no secret that shall not be revealed”....

And after the Elder’s demise, on February 2nd 1864 a sign was discovered behind the icon of the Mother of God that hung in his cell – it was the royal monogram, the letter A written in his hand. Hegumen Siluan of the St. Alexi Monastery which houses the holy relics of St. Feodor of Tomsk, told a correspondent of one of Moscow’s TV channels: “We see before us a sacrament of holiness which, in my opinion, cannot be put to any doubt. For certain, St. Feodor of Tomsk was a devout zealot and in this respect I feel him answer my prayers. As to who he was in the past – I believe this is a secondary issue, although, without doubt, it is important. Particularly for our time. For if, indeed, he was the Emperor, truth of which is substantiated by numerous convincing arguments, then it transpires that a man at the summit of power and glory chose to willingly opt for something greater. And this something is the Lord. An example like this is very important for the people of today, often lured by earthly attractions and boons, to the point of growing oblivious of the Heavenly Kingdom. There is something so much greater than success here on earth, something more important and wonderful, spiritually gratifying.” (*adapted from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Upcoming Events

- ❖ The Annual Parish Meeting & Potluck will be held on Jan 20th (today) after Liturgy, from noon until 2 pm. All are welcome and encouraged to come! The more perspectives and voices we can have the better. The primary order of business is to approve the church’s 2019 budget and to elect Parish Council officers. For official votes, only those who are considered voting members of the church can vote, but anyone can come to participate in the meeting.
- ❖ Holy water was blessed on Theophany and is available at the church for people to take some home for personal use. Contact Fr. Joseph to schedule a house blessing.
- ❖ There will be a St. Barbara meeting Feb 3rd after lunch to elect officers. After three years, Phyllis Thomidis is stepping down. There is also new business to address.

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan 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, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Santiago Alzugaray, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Domieniecki, 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. 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.)