

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM,

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

July 7, 2019 – 3rd Sunday After Pentecost | Venerable Thomas of Mt. Maleon | Venerable Acacius of Sinai

Saint Thomas of Mt. Maleon was a military commander before he became a monk. Strong and brave, he had participated in many battles, and brought victory to his countrymen, for which he gained glory and esteem. But, striving with all his heart towards God, Thomas abandoned the world and its honors, and he took monastic vows.

With great humility he visited monastic Elders, asking for guidance in the spiritual life. After several years Thomas received the blessing for solitary wilderness life and, led by a pillar of fire at night by the holy Prophet Elias, he settled on Mount Maleon (on the eastern part of Athos). Dwelling in complete seclusion, Saint Thomas fought with invisible enemies with as much courage as he had displayed against the visible enemies of his country.

The life and deeds of Saint Thomas could not be concealed from the surrounding area. People began to flock to him seeking spiritual guidance, and even those suffering from sickness, since he received from God the blessing to heal infirmities.



Many believers received help through the prayers of the holy monk. Even after his death, he does not cease to heal those who seek his aid, from every passion and sickness. (*from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 5:1-10

Brethren, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 6:22-33

The Lord said, "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great *is* that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Human arrogance is nothing, nor is the self-conceit of our hearts. For arrogance anchors itself in the wind and our self-conceit drifts in the air like fleeting smoke. What, really, is arrogance except the counterfeit image of puffed-up thought, the momentary crashing of a wave? It is a bubble, ready to burst, floating for a little while on the surface of the water; suddenly it breaks, and comes to nothing. Tell me, what profit, really, do we gain from it? It cannot add an inch to our height, and yet it makes us fly above the heavens. It cannot add a penny to our possessions, and yet it makes us conceited like rulers and kings. It doesn't provide us with extravagant foods or luxurious clothing, and yet it inflates our thoughts the way luxury bloats the bodies of the self-indulgent. It doesn't add one day to our lives, and yet like the immortals we keep our brows raised sky-high!

Earth and dust, we forget the stench of the tomb and fly away on the air. Arrogance is like the swelling of the sea which sometimes is calm and smooth, while at other times its every drop rises and crests; yet one wave after another crashes onto the shore and vanishes. In the same way arrogance also brings down the mind it holds captive through self-important thoughts and then dashes it against the gates of Hell.

And let us reflect on this in our hearts: neither the virtuous and holy person - even if he is like Peter and Paul, even if he is more highly esteemed than any person - neither saints nor those who are impious can fly in the air a single inch above the earth, but all of us, whether righteous or sinners, measure off the same steps, equally, in the flesh, upon the selfsame earth. But who can judge whether the righteous person lives soaring in his principles and deeds? 'For our citizenship,' he says, 'is in heaven.' (Phil. 3:20) But he says to the arrogant person: 'You will now be dragged down to Hades, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.' (Mt. 11:23, Mt. 23:12) Wherefore, humility has a height: the only Son of God, 'who humbled himself even unto death, death on the cross.' (Phil. 2:8)

Know then, beloved, how great is the indescribable humility by which God descended even unto death. Piety is the foundation for the whole society of the saints. Indeed, I say to you, brothers, that it is neither the Greek nor the Jew nor the Samaritan who has true piety and gentleness, and who is beloved and cherished before both God and humanity. For among every race, the person who fears and honors God is acceptable to him. In order that we might demonstrate for ourselves how beneficial piety is, let us learn from the four-footed animals and wild beasts and birds: we associate with those that are the most holy and most gentle, while we go after those that are wild and savage.

Let us, then, acquire these virtues, beloved, I mean humility and piety, through which we will be beloved by both God and humankind. Let us take the yoke of Christ upon ourselves, and let us learn from it that He is gentle and humble in heart, and we will find rest and peace for our souls and He will receive us as joint partakers in His eternal kingdom.

– St. George the Chozebite

Venerable Acacius of Sinai

Saint Acacius of Sinai lived during the sixth century and was a novice at a certain monastery in Asia. The humble monk distinguished himself by his patient and unquestioning obedience to his Elder, a harsh and dissolute man. He forced his disciple to toil excessively, starved him with hunger, and beat him without mercy. Despite such treatment, Saint Acacius meekly endured the affliction and thanked God for everything. Saint Acacius died after suffering these torments for nine years.

Five days after Acacius was buried, his Elder told another Elder about the death of his disciple. The second Elder did not believe that the young monk was dead. They went to the grave of Acacius and the second Elder called out: “Brother Acacius, are you dead?” From the grave a voice replied, “No, Father, how is it possible for an obedient man to die?” The startled Elder of Saint Acacius fell down with tears before the grave, asking forgiveness of his disciple.

After this he repented, constantly saying to the Fathers, “I have committed murder.” He lived in a cell near the grave of Saint Acacius, and he ended his life in prayer and in meekness. Saint John Climacus (March 30) mentions Saint Acacius in THE LADDER (Step 4:110) as an example of endurance and obedience, and of the rewards for these virtues. (*from oca.org*)

New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke

On the third Sunday after Pentecost, the Orthodox Church commemorates those who were martyred by the Turks after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Among them is Holy New Martyr Anastasios the Gounaras of Agiou Vlasiou (+ 1743) (feast day July 8).

Anastasios was from the village of Agiou Vlasiou near the city of Ioannina, Greece. From his name "Gounaras," it seems to indicate he was trained as a furrier, but at some point became a priest. One day while serving as a priest in the suburbs of Constantinople, he witnessed the martyr-dom of Saint Constantine the Russian (May 21), and this ignited in his heart the desire for martyr-dom, prompting him to daily pray to God to be made worthy to spill his blood for his

faith in Christ. At that time in Constantinople there was a certain hieromonk from Cyprus, and due to his sinful way of life he abandoned Orthodoxy at the age of 70, after becoming blind, and accepted Islam. For this he was richly rewarded by the Turks, and he would make money while standing on the steps of the Yeni Cami mosque teaching his fellow Muslims about their myths and fables.

Fr. Anastasios happened to be passing by Yeni Cami one day and saw this former Orthodox priest teaching his fellow Muslims, and he felt sorrow in heart, wondering how he could allow himself to descend into such darkness from such a great height. As Fr. Anastasios stood there deep in thought, one of the listeners called out to him: "Hey priest, do you see that teacher? He too was once a priest but saw the light and became a Muslim. Come, become a Muslim too and gain Para-dise." In reply Fr. Anastasios said to him in Turkish: "O you who are blind and deceived, why are you listening? He is telling you all lies. You whose ancestors were Muslims, you are listening to this rotten old man to teach you your faith? He who was abandoned by God because of his wicked-ness and denied his faith in his old age? How does he know your faith? How pitiful your know-ledge is, and you say you have faith?" Having said these things, among other things, the Muslim bystanders became furious and took hold of him, bringing him before the judge, and then before the vizier who decided to exile him to the island of Chios. But on the way to his exile, just before they were to board the ship, Fr. Anastasios somehow tricked his escort to return him to the vizier.

Standing before the vizier once again, Fr. Anastasios said to him: "Most glorious master, why do you send me into exile? Because I told you the truth? On the contrary you should reward me and not exile me. But you don't want the truth and this is why you have the unscrupulous and the blind to teach you, but why should I go on?"

Fr. Anastasios proceeded to boldly teach about the Christian faith and testified that Jesus Christ is true God together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and he expounded on the significance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Such things left those present speechless. Unable to listen to the rebuke of the truth, the vizier sent Anastasios to the mufti, who ordered that he be beheaded at the Yeni Cami. In this way the thrice-blessed Anastasios received the crown of martyrdom, which his holy soul longed for, on the 8th of July in 1743. After his beheading, a heavenly light appeared over the Martyr's holy relics at night, which was noticed by the guards protecting his body, and left both Turks and Christians in awe over the spectacle. His body was given to Christians for burial, but unfortunately we have no information as to the location of his burial. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Also Commemorated Today: Hieromartyr Vlasios of Akarnania

One of the gifts from God to men is the revelation of Saint Vlasios of Akarnania and those martyred with him in the year 1006. This revelation took place in the year 1923 in the town of Palairos Sklavaina of Akarnania. The small and unassuming town of Sklavaina is found at the base of the Mountains of Akarnanos a short distance from Palairos, and beginning in 1915 until 1923 it was experiencing wondrous events.

Beginning in 1915, the inhabitants of Sklavaina would see a priest in their sleep, who told them to dig to uncover his relics, indicating a certain place. None, however, knew where to dig, and fearing ridicule from others they kept it to themselves. The only thing they did was to build an icon stand in the place where the Saint showed them he was buried, in the name of Saint Vlasios, Bishop of Sebaste (Feb. 11). The dreams, however, continued much more, and Saint Vlasios became more austere. Still, however, there was hesitation. The Saint especially appeared to Ms. Euphrosyne Katsara, a simple and pious woman who had dedicated her life to the worship of the Trinitarian God.

One night on the 23rd of August in 1923, Euphrosyne was staying at her daughter Sophia's house, who was suffering from typhoid fever and was on her death bed. During the night, while Euphrosyne was up praying, the room was illumined by an indescribable light and the doors and windows opened automatically. Amidst the light could be discerned the form of a venerable priest, dressed in a priestly stole, and holding a shepherd's rod in his hand. His form and appearance Euphrosyne discerned in detail, though her daughter could only see the light. Then this priest turned towards Euphrosyne and told her: "Euphrosyne, I am Saint Vlasios. Follow me that I may show you the place to dig to uncover my relics. I can't bear the sheep trampling on me." It should be noted that the tomb of the Saint had become a sheep pen.

Euphrosyne, astonished by what she experienced, took courage, and approached the Saint in all her simplicity: "My Saint, it is dark, and I would be eaten by wild dogs. And also, my child is very sick." The Saint replied: "Follow me, Euphrosyne, and don't be afraid." And taking out a Cross from around his neck, he made the sign of the Cross on her sick daughter. Then, Euphrosyne took courage and followed the Saint into the night. The darkness, however, dissolved by the light of the Saint. Reaching a place about 100 meters from the Saint's house, he told her: "Dig here," and began to mark the dirt with his rod in a circle. Having returned Euphrosyne to her house, he disappeared. There, her daughter had greatly improved, and in a few days she was totally healed. From that time on, Saint Vlasios would appear to her and guide her. Euphrosyne faced disbelief and skepticism from her neighbors. The Saint, however, continued his appearances to

others, so that Euphrosyne would be believed. And at one point they began to dig in the place where they were shown. Euphrosyne told them that she had been informed by the Saint that his relics would be found on the third day of their work. On the second day, however, the worker despaired of their lack of progress, and dropped his tools and left. He eventually returned at Euphrosyne's insistence, and thus they reached the third day of their work. At noon, as they were ready to abandon their efforts, they hit something hard. Waves of emotion and hope hit all those around, and banished their disbelief. When they removed the covering, a heavenly fragrance filled the air. The holy relics of the Saint were found! Their joy was indescribable.

Among the relics were found a Cross and five nails that looked as if they had been made that instant, and a stone plaque which wrote the date of 1006. Euphrosyne, having gathered the relics with reverence, cleaned them and placed them back in the tomb. And though it was raining, the rain and winds did not affect them. Then St. Vlasios appeared again to her and said: "I am happy that you found my relics, but you did not uncover my skull. As a result, you should keep digging to uncover it from the earth." And indeed, they began their work again, and found the skull of the Saint. The Saint directed that they build the Holy Altar of a church, by the blessing of the then Metropolitan of Aitolia and Akarnania, who had gone himself to the tomb of the Saint to dig. St. Vlasios appeared and guided the founding of his church, appearing to people by day and by night. He was among them and strengthened them.

After the founding of the church, the Saint told Euphrosyne to go to Lefkada to a certain man who would paint the icon of the Saint. The iconographer, however, depicted Saint Vlasios, Bishop of Sebaste. At the Saint's wishes, he made a new icon as the Saint was described by Euphrosyne. Details from the life and martyrdom of Saint Vlasios were revealed to Euphrosyne, Fr. Arsenios Tsatalios (to whom the Saint appeared on December 6, 1978), and Elder Paisios the Athonite. Saint Vlasios was an abbot or retired bishop in the Holy Monastery of the Entrance of the Theotokos, which was in the region of Sklavaina-Zaverda, now Palairos. He endured death by martyrdom from Muslim pirates together with his fellow five monastics, and a multitude of Christian men, women and children in his flock, for their faith in Christ. He was beheaded, having previously been slowly nailed with five nails in his body, as was revealed at the uncovering of his relics. The executioners tried to burn the Saint's body, but it did not burn. The Christians who were saved returned and buried Saint Vlasios, together with his five fellow martyrs, in a common tomb. The rest of the Christians were buried in a large mass grave. Their martyrdom occurred on the 19th of December, a Sunday, in the year 1006, as was revealed from the stone plaque.

The revelations surrounding the life of Saint Vlasios did not stop when God was well-pleased to reveal his holy relics. Many other new facts came to light in recent years. The continuous appearance of the Saint, and his continuous wonderworking power at the appeal to his holy name placed him as a bright star in the firmament. Much more could be written about it.

Archimandrite Augoustinos Katsabires had entreated Elder Paisios to pray that the newly-revealed Saint Vlasios of Akarnania would appear to him. He hoped to learn his appearance so he could paint his icon. It was the 21st of January 1980, the evening of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. The Elder, having prayed at night in his cell with the prayer rope, saw appear before him amidst uncreated light an unknown Saint wearing a monastic mandya (of an abbot). Next to him on the wall of his cell, above the stove appeared the ruins of a Monastery. He felt indescribable joy and exultation, and wondered: "Which Saint is this?" Then he heard a voice from the church: "It is Saint Vlasios from Sklavaina."

Out of gratitude, and to thank the Saint for the honor which he showed him, he traveled to Sklavaina to venerate his grace-flowing relics. Mr. Apostolos Papachristou mentions: "May 20, 1980, the Elder came to my house in Agrinio with the desire to travel to Sklavaina of Xeromeros to venerate the holy relics of Saint Vlasios of Sklavaina, after the Saint appeared to him in his cell. He stayed in our house one night and though we laid out clean linens for him, the Elder left them totally unused. When he went to Sklavaina, he venerated the Saint with prostrations, and taught all those around him. Following this, the Elder ordered the icon of Saint Vlasios from the Holy Monastery of the Holy Trinity, in Koropi of Attica, having described the Saint's characteristics to the iconographer nun. When he received the icon, he was relieved, for she had exactly captured the Saint's image. He said: "It appears that the sister had piety and painted this icon with prayer and fasting." Every year he honored Saint Vlasios' memory with a vigil alone in his cell. He, however, did not celebrate it on February 11th (the feast of Saint Vlasios of Sebaste) when his memory is celebrated, but on December 19th, the day when he was martyred. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Commemorated Yesterday: St. Melo of Kos

On the island of Kos, in the area southwest of Asklepios and 150 meters west of Kokkinonero (therapeutic waters), is the very old church (or small monastery) of Saint Melo. This Saint is the only canonized local female figure, although we do not know her origins. It is very important that despite the lack of historical data, the memory of the Saint is kept in the consciousness of the people, and her veneration has been uninterrupted through the centuries. Despite this the uncertainty of the etymological origin of her name has led to questioning the

historical existence of the Saint, which was ultimately confirmed in 1972/73 in the publication of a manuscript from the 15th century with verses written in her honor.

Iakovos Zarraftis cites evidence that in the year 1018 a hermit built a monastery next to the Church of Saint Melo, and he lived there and healed many of the faithful by pointing them to the therapeutic waters. Indeed, the ruins of the cell of this ascetic are about 50 meters above the chapel, to the south. Foreign archaeologists who visited the church in the year 1933, expressed the opinion that it dates to early Christian times.

The little information we have about the life of the Saint comes from hymns composed by Metropolitan Metrophanis. According to a study by Professor Zacharias Tsirpanlis, their author possessed the hierarchical throne of the Metropolis of Rhodes, in the period of the occupation of the Knights in the Dodecanese, and had under his pastoral responsibility Kos, as the knights did not allow the ordination of prelates on the other islands. The recent thesis of Metropolitan Nathaniel of Kos and Nisyros, which published the inscription of this church, confirms these findings, and gives the date "1483 of the month of July." From the verses of Metropolitan Metrophanis we see that before her departure from the world, in order to engage in the life of asceticism, the Saint distributed her belongings to all those in need. Immediately after she went to a mountainous place where, lacking even life's necessities, she dedicated herself to asceticism. Within cold conditions because of the altitude, she managed to subdue her body and the passions. In choosing to isolate herself in the rough mountains of Vourrina, Metropolitan Metrophanis likens her to a solitary pelican, which isolate themselves from others, in order that she may communicate with God.

Interesting is his observation that since, by her great humility, she slept among the rocks, the place became a pilgrimage site for pilgrims which led to them building a church ("sanctuary") to the Saint. This comment suits the terrain of the area where the chapel was built. On the south side is a rock, on which is mounted the south wall of the church. This rock is identified with her dwelling, as well as the place where she passed away and was buried. Frescoes are preserved in the chapel.

The Saint often appears to the people of Kos, near her church, among roses, which indicates her sensitivity and purity. The presence of Saint Melo is a special blessing for the island and her name is more often now given to children and her veneration is becoming more known. The Holy Metropolis of Kos and Nisyros appointed the memory of the Saint to be celebrated every year on the first Saturday of July. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Social Team for July 14

Team 3 is up next week – Hebert, Howl, Karbowsky, Kopan. Thank you!

June Treasurer's Report

Glory to Jesus Christ! The month of June, having five Sundays, allowed the Church an extra opportunity for tithing. We had expenses totaling \$9,585 and income of \$13,870. We met all our financial obligations and also gave \$1066 to charitable and other worthy causes. Thank you for your continued support and efforts for the Parish!

In Christ,

Josh Moore, Treasurer.

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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, Dn. Steve Hall, 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 Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl and family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Alexander Shostko, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectaros and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)