

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.



December 15, 2019 – 2nd Sunday Before Nativity (Sunday of the Forefathers) | Hieromartyr Eleutherius

The Holy Scriptures teach that, in the beginning, the curse of Adam would be overturned and that Adam's heel would crush the head of the serpent. We have already begun to hear the echoes of this: *the Virgin shall be with child*. This will only become more thunderous as we draw closer to that august day when we celebrate the Nativity of God in the flesh, the second person of the Holy Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But today, today we recall the path which the fulfillment of this promise took and the people through which this miracle came to pass – the Forefathers, that is, the ancestry of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

As exemplified by the lives of the Forefathers of Christ, despite the circumstances and the family environment they were born into, there is nothing outside of ourselves which can stifle the life of virtue, that life wherein we are called to fulfill the commandments of Christ. Our families and our baggage are not an impediment to living the Christian life, whether someone is an INFJ or an ISFJ; whether they were raised by both parents or one parent, two mothers or two

fathers, or neither; whether one's parents were abusive, someone had no friends; whether one is privately educated or enrolled in public schools or has little to no schooling at all; if relationships and jobs have failed; none of this needs to be an obstacle to the Christian life.

Although this thought may be contrary to much public opinion, let us examine the lives of the Forefathers of Christ in order to prove our point. Without enumerating each person, to the detriment of our attention, let's consider Pharez, the son of Judah, Ruth, and King Solomon.

What sort of family was Pharez born into? We read in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew of the genealogy of Jesus Christ wherein "Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah (1.2). We then read that Judah begot Pharez and Zerah by Tamar, and Pharez begot Hezron and the genealogy continues. Stopping at Tamar, we note that Tamar is not an Israelite and yet became Judah's daughter-in-law, the wife of his son Er. She desired not marriage, as St. Ephrem the Syrian says, but the blessing which is hidden in the Israelites." Er died before having any children with Tamar and she, therefore, did not contribute to the lineage of Abraham. Looking to appease her desire to raise up a child from the seed of Abraham, though usually dressed as a widow, Tamar chose to dress in common attire and to cover herself so as not to be recognized. Judah was fooled and had relations with her from which she bore two sons, one of them being named Pharez (Genesis 38.26, cf. Genesis 38.6-30).

Why is such a woman named in the Messiah's genealogy? Because of her righteous desire to be united to the children of Israel by giving birth to one of this lineage. Christ was not ashamed to have her as an ancestor.

What about Ruth's circumstances? Ruth was a Moabite, descended from the children of Lot, Abraham's nephew, and an alien to the promises of Israel. Ruth was the daughter-in-law of Naomi. Naomi was married to Elimelech and had two sons, one whom Ruth married. As it happened, Naomi's husband and two sons died. Naomi encouraged Ruth to go back to the land of her parents. Instead Ruth, being virtuous, whose virtue St. Ambrose of Milan says "exceeded the limits of the law" says to her mother-in-law, "Do not oppose me, to make me abandon you or turn back from after you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. And wherever you die, I will die – there will I be buried. Thus and so may the Lord do to me, and thus and so may he add – for death alone shall part me from you" (Ruth 1:16-17 LXX).

There she met a man of great wealth by the name of Boaz. One night when he slept, she lay by his feet. Startled, he awoke, and she vowed her allegiance to him.

When Boaz learned of her virtue, of her holiness in relation to her mother-in-law, and her respect for the dead and her reverence for God, he took her as his wife, and together they had Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David the King. Though widowed, childless and in a foreign land, outside of the promises to Abraham, and of no small soul, through her virtue, she attained to be in the lineage of Christ's earthly family.

And what about the birth of Solomon? King David seeing from his rooftop a woman bathing, was wounded in his heart. He sent for her, and they had relations from which she bore a son. When he learned of this, David placed her husband, Uriah the Hittite, a citizen of loyalty and faithfulness to the King and the ark of the covenant, who slept at the door of the palace instead of enjoying food, drink and his wife; David sent him into the fiercest part of the battle and there he was killed. Upon his death, David sent for Uriah's widow and took her to himself. Though their first child died, she would give birth to a second child, Solomon, the author of the *Proverbs* and builder of the Temple. Even those born out of adultery are acceptable in the sight of God if only they strive towards virtue.

The reason to enumerate such lives is not to draw attention to the sinfulness of humanity, even as renowned a lineage as Christ's but to show that God was pleased to come into this family *despite* their sinfulness. Where is the boasting of the children of Abraham and where the despondency of those so surrounded by fallen mankind? On the contrary, despite such sins and vices and circumstances, *it was not a hindrance for those who wanted to become the children of God*. Instead, as St. John Chrysostom writes, "For it cannot, nay, it cannot be that a man should be good or bad, obscure or glorious, either by the virtue or the vice of his forefathers; but if one must say somewhat even paradoxical, he shines forth the more, who not being of worthy ancestors, has yet become excellent."

It is not a hopeful or optimistic perspective. Instead, God has revealed to us through the Scriptures, in the lives of Pharez, Ruth, and Solomon, but also through tax collectors (Apostle Matthew), harlots (Martha), and persecutors of the Church of Christ (Saul) that truly the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of Heaven for they believed and repented (Matt. 21.31).

If our genetics or social, psychological, or environmental situation is justification for not obeying God, how is it that Lazarus entered the bosom of Abraham and the Rich Man did not? How is it that the poor, crippled, blind, and lame are received into the banquet when the previous guests all made excuses for themselves? Alternatively, are these the same excuses that we make for ourselves so as not to pray with attention, or to be kind because I woke up late and am grumpy, etc., etc.? "So long as we assign the causes for our weaknesses to others, we cannot attain

perfection in long-suffering,” writes St. John Cassian. Or perhaps we doubt whether we can attain anything in the spiritual life and are given more to despondency? Yet, referring to the attacks of the demon of unchastity, St. John writes, “No one ceases to be attacked by this demon until he truly believes that he will be healed and reach the heights of purity not through his own effort and labor, but through the aid and protection of God. For such a victory is beyond man’s natural powers.” But do we not believe that we can be healed?

We are told in the Synaxarion for today that like Abraham we are in the land of the passions, and when we hear the voice of God we need to decide to leave and with faith, seek the promised land, not turning back. In so doing, Christ will be born in our hearts. As He was planted in us through Baptism, He grows through our keeping of the virtues. These are the children of the promise who have the faith of Abraham and who become the sons of God through the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps, some people still disagree and would say, “But they became amazing saints and I can’t even get out of my own way. My mother this, my father that, when I was young, I can’t help this or I can’t help that...” Yes, but we mustn’t make excuses for our passions and sins. Acknowledging the difficult situation we may be in, do we also acknowledge our own faults. St. Peter Damascene, emphasizing the need to repent despite our circumstances, writes, “We are punished for our lack of repentance, and not because we had to struggle against temptation; otherwise most of us could not receive forgiveness until we had attained total dispassion.” But as St. John Klimakos observes, “It is not possible for all to achieve dispassion, yet all can be saved and reconciled with God.”

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Saint Paul, in describing the God-man Jesus and His coming in the flesh, says, He was made a little lower than the angels (2.9), taking on flesh and blood (2.14), and not the nature of angels (2.16) but the seed of Abraham, being made like us (2.18). Elsewhere, the Apostle, writing to the Philippians, says that, although he is God, He humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant, that is the likeness of mankind (2.5-8). Moreover, He is not ashamed to call us His brethren (Heb. 2.11,17). There is no shame to be had from the ancestry from which we have sprung and these environments in which we find ourselves. “For such a man, though he have an alien for an ancestor, though he has a mother who is a prostitute, or what you will, can take not hurt thereby,” St. John Chrysostom writes. “For if the whoremonger himself, being changed, is nothing disgraced by his former life, much more will the wickedness of his ancestry have no power to bring to shame him that is sprung of an harlot or an adulteress, if he be virtuous.”

Dear fathers, brothers, and sisters, struggle; struggle to obtain the Kingdom which is the Father's good pleasure to give you and Christ will be born in your hearts. Through the prayers of the holy Forefathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen. (from *holycross.org*)

Holy Hieromartyr Eleutherius, the son of a famous Roman citizen, was brought up by his mother, the Martyr Anthia, in Christian piety. "Having fixed his most pure mind to God from youth", he "removed fleshly wisdom from his soul and bountifully enriched himself with the grace of wonders". His good works were so great, that at 20 years of age he was already installed as the Bishop of Illyricum (Albania). During the reign of Hadrian St. Eleutherius after being tortured was beheaded in Rome together with St. Anthia for zealously preaching Christ. The Eparch Choribus, who tortured Eleutherius, himself believed in Christ and also was beheaded. The relics of St. Eleutherius repose in Rome. (adapted from Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., by S. V. Bulgakov (Trans. Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris))

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 14:16-24

The Lord spoke a parable, saying, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in

here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

What is continence? Continence is the restraint of excessive lusts, beyond what is necessary, toward everything, according to the Apostle's word: "Do not make provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Rom. 13:14). Continence is necessary in various circumstances: in relation to the belly, the tongue, the sight, the hearing, and to every mental passion of the flesh or spirit. Continence of the stomach consists in abstaining from excess of delicious foods and from eating at improper times; even if the desire moves one to do so, do not allow it to be carried out and restrain yourself in every way. The tongue is eagerly moved by idle talking, blasphemy and many other unseemly things, but again do not allow this and restrain it in every way possible. The sight stretches its gaze towards various unlawful deeds and to seductive amusements and these also should not be allowed and should be restrained. The hearing desires to listen to idle conversations and jesting or to demonic songs and one should not permit the ears to hear such things and should refrain in every way from listening to them. One should not allow oneself to fulfill any excessive desires, beyond what is necessary, and should refrain from them. This is continence.

– St. Theodore of Sanaxar

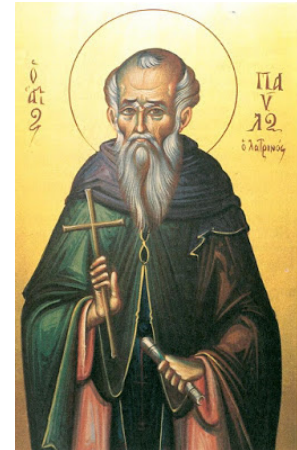
Also Commemorated Today: Venerable Paul of Latros

Our Venerable Father Paul was born at Pergamos, near Smyrna, in Asia Minor, the son of an officer in the Roman imperial army, who was slain in an engagement with the Saracens. His mother then retired from Pergamos to Bithynia, taking her two sons with her. Basil, the elder, took the monastic habit at Mount Olympus in that country, but soon for the sake of greater solitude retired to Mount Latros. When their mother was dead he induced his brother to embrace the same state of life. Though young, Paul had experienced the world sufficiently to understand the emptiness and dangers of what it has to offer.

Basil recommended him to the care and instruction of the abbot of Karia, Peter. Paul desired for the sake of greater solitude and austerity to lead an eremitical life; but his abbot, thinking him too young, refused him leave so long as he lived. After his death Paul's first cell was a cave on the highest part of Mount Latros, where for

some weeks he had no other food than green acorns, which at first made him very sick. After eight months he was called back to Karia.

Paul was indefatigable in the exercise of holy prayer, and having no other desire than to gain heaven, labored seriously to subdue his body by mortification. He never lay down to sleep, but only leaned his head against a stone or tree. His garment was made of goat's hair, and no unprofitable word was ever heard from his mouth. It is said that when he worked in the kitchen the sight of the fire so forcibly reminded him of Hell that he burst into tears every time he looked at it.



Paul chose a new habitation on the rockiest part of the mountain, where for the first three years he suffered grievous temptations. A peasant sometimes brought him a little food, but he mostly lived on what grew wild. The reputation of his holiness spread through the province, and several men chose to live near him and built there a lavra of cells. Paul, who had been careless about all corporal necessities, was much concerned lest anything should be wanting to those that lived under his direction. After twelve years his solitude was so much broken into that he withdrew to another part of the mountains, whence he visited his brethren from time to time to cheer and encourage them; he sometimes took them into the forest to sing the Divine Office together in the open air. When asked why he appeared sometimes so joyful, at other times so sad, he answered, “When nothing diverts my thoughts from God, my heart heart overflows with joy, so much that I often forget my food and everything else; and when there are distractions, I am upset.”

Occasionally he disclosed something of the wonderful revelations, which passed between his soul and God, and of the heavenly graces that he received in contemplation. But Saint Paul wished for yet greater solitude, so he passed over to the island of Samos, and there concealed himself in a cave. But he was soon discovered and so many flocked to him that he reestablished three lavras that had been ruined by the Saracens. The entreaties of the monks at Latros induced him to return to his former cell there. The Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos (912-959) wrote frequently to him asking his advice, and often had reason to repent when he did not follow it. Paul had a great tenderness for the poor and he gave them more of his food and clothes than he could properly spare. Once he would have sold himself for a slave to help some people in distress had he not been stopped.

On December 6 in 956, foreseeing that his death drew near, he came down from his cell to the church, celebrated the Holy Mysteries more early than usual and then

took to his bed. He spent his time in prayer and instructing his monks till his death, which fell on December 15, on which day he is commemorated by the Church. (from johnsanidopoulos.com)

THE DUTY OF ALMSGIVING AND THE HOPE OF A RETURN FROM GOD

By His Eminence Metropolitan Daniel of Kaisariani, Vyronas and Hymettus

In the period preceding the feast of the divine epiphany there is conducted in our Church a Fundraiser of Love. Believers are called to offer their alms for the relief of our needy brethren. This Fundraiser of Love is more necessary now in this prevailing economic, social and humanitarian crisis which affects more and more an increasingly larger portion of our people. We judge the building up and enhancement of this ministry will reflect the way we live philanthropically and give to charity.

1. The Duty of Almsgiving: As it is taught by the word of God, almsgiving is a religious practice, and not merely social and altruistic. This is why almsgiving is linked to the liturgical life. Generosity towards the poor is part of the conduct of divine worship and the eucharistic assembly of the Church.

In the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, almsgiving together with prayer and fasting are the three pillars of the spiritual life. It is certain that in order for the faithful to approach the Bridegroom of the Church, they must help their neighbor (1 John 3:17). The celebration of the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist requires the brotherly distribution of goods (1 Corinthians 11:20). To glorify God, the faithful must freely give and sow generosity, because "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 6:9).

2. The Value of Almsgiving: The Wisdom Writings of the Old Testament present the view that alms given to the poor acquire value, because a) it is considered a loan to God Himself (Proverbs 19:17) and b) it is considered a sacrifice of praise to God (Wisdom of Sirach 35:2). The Lord taught His disciples to give alms without hoping for a return (Matthew 6:1-4), gave meaning to almsgiving that the offering was being made to Himself (Matthew 25:31-46), and established almsgiving as a requirement for someone to be His disciple and to follow Him without regretting the abandonment of their goods (Matthew 19:21).

3. The Duty of Almsgiving Gives the Merciful One a Certain Hope for a Return from God: "Blessed are those who have regard for the weak; the Lord delivers them in times of trouble. The Lord protects and preserves them — they are counted among the blessed in the land — He does not give them over to the desire of their foes. The Lord sustains them on their sickbed and restores them from their bed of illness" (Psalm 40 (41):1-3).

4. The Forms of Almsgiving The Prophets pointed out the ways to practice almsgiving. They expanded the scope to cover many types of behaviors which express compassion, justice, respect and consolation to the helpless people around us (Ezekiel 18:7).

5. The Punishment of the Uncharitable Ignoring the poor combined with luxurious and wasteful living is condemned and subject to severe punishment, like that of Sodom (Ezekiel 16:49; Proverbs 14:21).

6. When A Believer Denies Himself of His Goods, Through Almsgiving He Stores a Treasure in Heaven, According to the Command of the Lord "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:33-34). *(from john sanidopoulos.com)*

Social Team for December 22

Team 5 is up next week – Vallandingham BC, Osborne, Samson, Brady. Thank you!

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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 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, Dcn. 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.)