

# 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: Great Vespers 5:00 PM**

**Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM**

**Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM**

**\*Please note that attendance is currently limited by restrictions dictated by local response to the COVID-19 pandemic; if you are currently not assigned to an attendance group, please contact [outreach@apostlethomas.org](mailto:outreach@apostlethomas.org) for**

**information on when you may attend.**



## July 5, 2020 | 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost | Venerable Athanasius of the Holy Mountain St. Athanasius as a Model for Our Lives

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

The venerable Athanasios the Athonite lived in the tenth century, during the reign of Nikephoros Phokas. He was born in Trebizond from pious parents who had come from Antioch. Having learned his first letters in his homeland he then improved his studies in Constantinople. Because he desired the ascetic life he departed for the interior parts of Asia Minor, to Mount Kymina, where he was subservient under the renowned Elder Michael Maleinos. In rapid time he surpassed in virtue his fellow ascetics and was admired by all.

So as not to be praised by others, he took the blessing of his Elder and departed for Mount Athos, where he became subservient to another Elder. He lived in perfect obedience and reached extreme humility. Following a divine revelation, he went to the interior parts of Mount Athos and built the Sacred Monastery of Great Lavra with the help of Emperor Nikephoros Phokas. There gathered around him many disciples, whom he molded in the Orthodox Tradition and life, and they continued his work, which has bloomed and bore fruit until today.

His end was martyric, like a seal, one would say, of his life and state of being, because the way in which he lived and the state of his being was truly like a martyr and confessor of Jesus Christ. Together with six disciples he climbed to the dome of the sacred Sanctuary of the church in order to complete it, but the dome collapsed and crushed both him and his disciples. The sacred hymnographer does not fail to mention this fact and to honor not only the Saint but also his six disciples: "Athanasios with his six disciples, release the temple of their bodies with the release of the temple." And especially for Athanasios he writes: "Anthony the Great was the first of the Fathers, divine Athanasios was the last. Though Athanasios lived in recent years, he surpassed the ancients in labor." In other words, Anthony the Great was the first of the ascetic Fathers and Saint Athanasios the Athonite was the seal and last of them. Though he lived in recent times, he surpassed all the older venerable ones in asceticism and labor.

The life of the venerable Athanasios, which we have briefly written, gives us the opportunity to emphasize the following:

First, inside the Church all must be done "seemly and according to order" (1 Cor. 14:40), as the Apostle Paul says, in order to bear spiritual fruit. That is, in the Church there is a logical order and sequence that the faithful must follow, in order to reach their expected purpose which is communion with God. This order was followed by the venerable Athanasios the Athonite, as did all the saints. He was subject to a spiritual father, a bearer of Orthodox Tradition, learned obedience and humility, whose mother and daughter are pure prayer, and then became a Teacher of the spiritual life himself. A true theologian and a genuine teacher of the life in Christ is that person who suffered and learned divine things, under the guidance of an inspired Elder. Those who overstep this order and sequence and rush to become teachers without first becoming disciples, to become Elders without first undergoing subservience, these are "blind guides" and it is known that if the "blind lead the blind, they will both fall into the ditch". And unfortunately today we are witnesses of many sad situations. We see people who ascend to positions and offices in the Church in unorthodox ways, without the appropriate conditions and for alternative purposes. They are likened to what Gregory the Theologian describes: "Before becoming worthy to approach the temples, they lay claim to the

sanctuary, and they push and thrust around the holy table, as if they thought this order to be a means of livelihood instead of a pattern of virtue, or an absolute authority instead of a ministry of which we must give account." As a result they darken instead of illumine the people of God, they become deluded and they delude, they create scandals, and become disruptors and creators of schisms and divisions, those who should be the center of the unity of believers.

Second, the way one departs this world reveals the way in which they established themselves throughout their earthly life. The natural way for fallen man to depart is through martyrdom. This is why the saints tasted martyrdom throughout the course of their lives, as well as at the time of their departure. Even those who were "perfected in peace" and endured martyrically throughout their lives with the labor and pain of various temptations, and who until the end endured various illnesses without murmurings, but with a joyful disposition and glorifying God, because they knew by this experience they would be purified of subtle stains and thus appear clean before the impartial Judge. Most people during the course of temptations and sorrows complain and murmur against God and consider blessed those who leave this world without suffering and difficulties because, having not tasted, they fail to understand the love of God and what spiritual joy means, inner rejoicing and eternal life "in the light". Illness can demonstrate to be a great blessing, because throughout its course it is possible for man to recover and sincerely repent.

The spiritual life is difficult because one has to wrestle against the passions, sins and the devil. But it is grand, because it is the natural life of man, offering him internal fulfillment, honoring him as a man and making him different from dumb animals. This is why "blessed are those who die in the Lord" because "they will live forever". (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 6:18-23**

Brethren, having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading* to *more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves *of* righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 8:5-13

At that time, when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.” And Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.” The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this *one*, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does *it*.” When Jesus heard *it*, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Amen, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go your way; and as you have believed, *so* let it be done for you.” And his servant was healed that same hour.

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

The Gospel is the coming of God, when He was seen by us: He is no longer speaking to us as through a cloud and indistinctly, as He did to Moses through thunder and lightning and trumpets, by a voice, by darkness and fire on the mountain. Nor does He appear through dreams as to the prophets, but He appeared visibly as a true man. He was seen by us as a gentle and peaceful king who descended quietly like rain upon the fleece, and we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14). Through Him, the God and Father spoke to us face to face, and not through riddles. From heaven the Father bears witness to Him, saying “This is my beloved Son” (Mt. 3:17), wisdom, word, and power, who is foretold to us by the prophets. He is revealed in the gospels, so that all who receive Him and believe in His name might receive the power to become children of God (Jn. 1:12). We have heard and seen with our eyes that He is the wisdom and word of God, and we all cry “Glory to You, O Lord.” And the Holy Spirit, who was concealed in a bright cloud, now exclaims through a man: “Attend, listen to Him.”

There are four gospels because there are four universal winds, corresponding to the four-formed creatures on which the God of all sits. Holding them all together, and having been revealed, He gave us the four-formed gospel, which is joined together by one Spirit. And they have four faces, and their faces represent the activity of the Son of God. For the first resembles a lion, characterizing His activity, authority, and royalty. The second resembles a calf, manifesting His holy work and priesthood. The third has the face of a man, which clearly delineates His coming

as a man. And the fourth resembles a flying eagle, explaining the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the gospels correspond to these four animals, on which Christ sits. For the Gospel of John recounts His sovereign, paternal, and glorious birth from His Father. The Gospel of Luke, being of priestly character, begins with the priest Zechariah burning incense in the temple. Matthew tells about His birth according to His humanity - "the book of the genealogy." Therefore this gospel is in the form of a man. And Mark begins from the prophetic spirit, which comes to men from on high, making the beginning say: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is written in the prophets: 'Behold, I send my messenger'". It thus points to the winged image of the gospel.

The proskomede, which takes place on [the table of oblation], signifies the place of Calvary, where Jesus was crucified. There, it is said, lies the skull of our forefather Adam, and it is pointed out that "there was a tomb near to where He was crucified" (cf. Jn. 19:41-42). This Calvary was prefigured by Abraham when he, commanded by God, made an altar of stone on one of those mountains, collected wood, and placed his son on it, and then offered a ram instead as a burnt-offering. Thus the God and Father, Who is without beginning and ancient of days, was pleased for His eternal Son to be incarnate in the last times from the undefiled virgin Theotokos from the loins of Adam, according to a vowed promise which He made him. And as a man He suffered in the flesh, but in His divinity He remained impassible. For Christ, going forth to His crucifixion, took up His cross and offered His own blameless body instead of a ram, as a lamb pierced in the side with a spear. And He became a high priest, offering Himself and offered in order to bear the sins of many. He died as a man and rose as God, and thereby He obtained that glory which He had before the world together with His God and Begetter (cf. Heb. 7:26-28).

By means of the processing of the deacons and the representation of the fans, which are in the likeness of the seraphim, the Cherubic Hymn signifies the entrance of all the saints and righteous ahead of the cherubic powers and the angelic hosts, who run invisibly in advance of the great king, Christ, who is proceeding to the mystical sacrifice, borne aloft by material hands. Together with them comes the Holy Spirit in the unbloody and reasonable sacrifice. The Spirit is seen spiritually in the fire, incense, smoke and fragrant air: for the fire points to His divinity, and the fragrant smoke to His coming invisibly and filling us with good fragrance through the mystical, living, and unbloody service and sacrifice of burnt-offering. In addition, the spiritual powers and the choirs of angels, who have seen His dispensation fulfilled through the cross and death of Christ, the victory over death which has taken place, the descent into hell and the resurrection on the third day, with us exclaim the alleluia.

It is also in imitation of the burial of Christ, when Joseph took down the body from the cross, wrapped it in clean linen, anointed it with spices and ointment, carried it with Nicodemus, and placed it in a new tomb hewn out of a rock. The altar is an image of the holy tomb, and the divine table is the sepulchre in which, of course, the undefiled and all-holy body was placed.

– St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*

### **Also Commemorated Today: St. Elizabeth the New Martyr**

St Elizabeth the New Martyr (1864-1918) was the Princess Diana of her day: fabulously wealthy, a royal princess, highly educated, intelligent and stunningly attractive. And yet unlike Princess Diana, her life of privilege and wealth, parties and the high society of Europe underwent a dramatic change in February, 1905.

The Grand Duchess Elizabeth was born in 1864 into the German Royal Family and was one of the favorite granddaughters of the famed Queen Victoria of England. She led a typical life of 19<sup>th</sup> century European royalty, a life of money and privilege with the best of education and every opportunity in life. She was raised in a pious, Christian home, in the Lutheran faith of her father, Grand Duke Louis IV of Hesse-Darmstadt. Known as “*Ella*” within her family, she grew into a beautiful young princess and was considered one of the most desirable brides in all of Europe. Despite many suitors it was Grand Duke Serge of Russia who won Elizabeth’s hand and they married in 1884. Her new life in Russia was much like her life in Germany: a whirl of parties and formal balls in the royal palaces of Russia. The Grand Duchess was known as a good dancer and had a fine taste and gift for choosing the right fashions.

From the beginning of her married life, Elizabeth felt attracted to the Orthodox Faith of her husband. She continued to attend Protestant services on occasion but she felt that this faith could no longer satisfy her spiritual quest. She saw the joy that Serge felt after receiving Holy Communion and she herself wanted to share this joy with her husband. After years of study and contemplation, with no pressure from Serge, and despite the disapproval of her German and English family, she converted to the Orthodox Faith in 1891. In that same year, Czar Alexander III named his brother Serge as the Governor-General of the city of Moscow. As the first lady of Moscow, Elizabeth was touched by the poverty of many of its residents and involved herself in work as the head of various charitable organizations.

#### 1. Assassination

Elizabeth’s life was forever changed on February 18, 1905 when her husband Serge was assassinated with a bomb as he rode in a carriage to his office in the

Governor's Palace. Hearing the sound of the explosion, Elizabeth rushed to the spot only to find pieces of her husband scattered in the snow. Three days after Serge's death, Elizabeth visited his murderer in prison, forgave him and encouraged him to repent and ask God's forgiveness, leaving behind an icon and copy of the Holy Bible.

With the sudden death of her husband, Elizabeth's old life of parties, balls, dances, clothes, and royal politics seemed more and more empty. She began to see the futility of all the temporary things of this world and increasingly turned her attention to the spiritual life. She slowly began to discover a new purpose to her life. She decided to become a nun in order to devote her life to serving God. Elizabeth sold her extensive collection of clothes and jewels in order to found a new monastery in Moscow: the Monastery of Sts. Martha and Mary. Taken from the Gospel story of Sts. Martha and Mary – the sisters of Lazarus – and the Lord's teaching on the need for contemplation along with a life of service, the monastery would be a new type of monastery. Along with hours spent in prayer each day, along with a life of self-denial and fasting, she and the nuns would devote themselves to helping the poor and the sick of the city. The convent established a hospital with 22 beds and gave free care to any needy person who came to their doors. The poor were fed in the monastery kitchens with more than 300 meals served daily. On the day of her tonsure as a nun, Elizabeth said to her fellow nuns:

*I am leaving the brilliant world where I have occupied a high position, and now, together with all of you, I am about to ascend into a much greater world, the world of the poor and afflicted.*

In the monastery, the Grand Duchess led the life of a true ascetic. She slept on a wooden bed without a mattress, often sleeping no more than three hours a night, rising at midnight to pray in her chapel. When a seriously ill patient tossed in pain and called for help, she would stay at his bedside until dawn.

## 2. Ascending Golgotha

With the overthrow of her brother-in-law, Czar Nicholas II in 1917 and the Communist ascent to power, Elizabeth's life was in danger as a member of the hated royal family. Despite pleas from her English and German families to flee there to safety, Elizabeth refused to leave the needy people of Moscow and her monastic sisters. At first the Bolsheviks did not interfere with the monastery as one by one the members of the Czar's Romanov family were arrested. Lenin's policy was to liquidate every person who bore that name or who was connected to the Czarist dynasty in any way. The Grand Duchess was finally arrested during Bright Week of 1918 and was taken in exile to the town of Alapaevsk along with her assistant, Sister Barbara. On the night of July 17-18, 1918, the Grand Duchess

Elizabeth, Sister Barbara and several other members of the Royal Family were martyred by being thrown alive into a deep mine shaft. The fall did not immediately kill Elizabeth and her companions. It was reported by local people that they heard the sound of singing coming from the bottom of the pit including the hymn “*O Lord, save they people...*” The Sts. Martha & Mary convent was eventually closed, the remaining nuns sent into exile and the church converted into a movie theater. The relics of St. Elizabeth and St. Barbara were recovered from the mine shaft and today are enshrined in the monastery of St. Mary Magdalene on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Today her old monastery in Moscow has been restored once again as a convent and house of worship. A statue of St. Elizabeth has been erected in the garden outside the monastery church with the words: *To the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna, with repentance*”. The old mine shaft outside of Alapaevsk has become a place of pilgrimage and there a shrine to her memory has been erected.

### 3. Her Significance

As read in the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 10 the story of Jesus in the home of Martha and Mary, Jesus said that “Mary has chosen the best part” or other translations say she has “found the one thing needful”. So much of the lives of people are spent on what they consider to be important, but often those things are not “the best part” or “the one thing needful”. It has been my privilege to work for over 20 years as a pastoral counselor with terminally ill patients under the care of a hospice program. I have yet to hear one patient say to me: “I wish I had been more successful in my career....I wish I had spent more time at work....I wish I had nicer clothes or car....” But patients have said to me: I should not have neglected my faith for all these years....I’m sorry I didn’t give my kids a better foundation in their faith....I should have spent more time with my family”. Unfortunately, it is often only through difficult situations and tragedies that everything in life becomes clearer. St. Elizabeth made a drastic change in her life because of a terrible tragedy. Her life of clothes, palaces, and parties lost their appeal. Like St. Maria Skobstova of Paris who underwent such a conversion when her young daughter died, it literally took an explosion for St. Elizabeth to reconsider what is “the best part” or “the one thing needful”. There is a PBS television station in New York that has as its motto “Keeping what matters in sight”. It is often difficult for us, living in this world with all its distractions and attractions to keep what is truly important in sight. Sometimes the Lord will use bad experiences, problems and even tragedies in order to awaken us to what really matters, to lead us to repentance and to a change of life. It is a mistake to believe that the Lord is the source or cause of our problems and tragedies but it is true that the Lord can and will use these evil things to lead us to salvation. The Epistle of St. Paul teaches:

“In all things, God works for the good of those that love Him...” (Romans 8:28)  
In fact, some of the great saints of the Church, such as St. Theophan the Recluse, taught that if a person’s life is peaceful and without problems and difficulties it is a sign that God is neglecting that person. They teach that it is only through these bad experiences that God is working with us to wake us up and place us on the right path. This was the experience of St. Maria of Paris and of St. Elizabeth the New Martyr.

Fr. Ed Pehanich (*from acrod.org*)

## **June Treasurer’s Report**

Glory to Jesus Christ! This month we received \$10,958 in weekly collections. We paid out \$7408.05 in expenses. Thanks you all for your continued support! To God be the glory!

Herman, 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, Howl Family, 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, Robinson Family, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, 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.)