

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 for information on when you may attend.**

August 23, 2020 | 11th Sunday After Pentecost | Leave-taking of the Dormition of the Theotokos | Martyr Lupos

The Holy Martyr Lupos was a faithful servant of the Holy Great Martyr Demetrios of Thessaloniki (Oct. 26). Being present at the death of his master, he soaked his own clothing (said to be his orarion, possibly indicating he was a deacon) with his blood and took the ring from his hand. With this clothing, the ring and the name of the Great Martyr Demetrios, Saint Lupos worked many miracles in Thessaloniki. He destroyed pagan idols, for which he was subjected to persecution by the pagans, but he was preserved unharmed by the power of God.

Saint Lupos voluntarily delivered himself into the hands of the torturers, and presented to the emperor Maximian Galerius, who sentenced him to death. However, the soldiers who took up weapons against Lupos turned against one another and severely wounded themselves. As he was not yet baptized, even though he was a Christian, Lupos prayed to God that He would somehow plan his baptism before his death. At that moment, rain unexpectedly fell from the clouds upon this holy martyr and thus he received baptism from on high. After great

sufferings, Lupos was beheaded and took up habitation in the Kingdom of Heaven.
(from *johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 9:2-12

Brethren, if I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or *is it* only Barnabas and I *who* have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, *is it* a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 18:23-35

The Lord said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

(continued from last week – Ed.) The fifth virtue is vigil.... Vigil with discernment cleanses the mind from the dispersal of thoughts, makes it light, and leads it into prayer. Just as the sensible eyes enlighten the body and illuminate all its members, so also unsleeping attentiveness and vigil enlighten the soul with spiritual sight, or remind a man of the unutterable good things which the Lord has prepared for those who love Him, shows eternal torments prepared for sinners, and a man keeping vigil is astonished at the Creator of all, as to how the day and night succeed one another, how the sun shines, and the moon and stars, how there follow in succession the frost, snow, heat, thunder, rain, which remind a man of the passing life of this age, of the end of death, and draw out of him abundant tears, and, like a guardsman on a high place, illuminate clearly to the spiritual eye the condition of a man as to how he is living, whether on a right or a wrong path. A moderate vigil gives joy to the heart.

The sixth virtue is the Prayer of Jesus. This is a work which is common between angels and men. By this prayer men quickly draw near to the life of angels. Prayer is the source of every good deed and the virtues, and banish from a man the darkness of passions. Acquire it and your soul, before death, will be like an angel's. Prayer is a divine rejoicing. This is the only precious sword. There is no other such implement which, more than it, can cut off the demons. It scorches them as fire scorches thorns. This prayer, like fire, ignites the whole man and brings him unutterable joy and rejoicing, so that from joy and sweetness he forgets about this life and considers everything in this age as dust and ashes.

The seventh virtue is humility and the humility of wisdom. Humility of heart without labor saves the old, sick, humble, poor, uneducated man. For its sake all sins are forgiven. It leads up a man from the very pit of sin. Through humility of wisdom all the nets of the enemy and his plans are dismayed, and it enroots the spiritual life and preserves it from fall.

The eighth virtue is silence, that is, the going away from every worldly care and disturbance, or unanswering silence in the midst of many people. He who has reined and controlled his tongue will hold in check his whole body. He who is continent in his tongue will flee every evil also which comes from it. The tongue is an uncontrollable evil. Many have perished from the sharp sword, but not as many as from their own tongue. For the tongue is a double-edged sword which invisibly slaughters the soul and the body, which utters empty words constantly in idle spectacles. O tongue, the enemy of my righteousness! O tongue, my destroyer and the spirit of satan! For, by much labor a man builds his spiritual

building – salvation; but you, O tongue, by one words, in a single hour, destroy and annihilates it. A wise man attaches himself to silence.

The ninth virtue is non-acquisitiveness of things and extreme poverty.... Let us flee, let us flee from love of silver and other things as from a roaring lion, for it converts meekness and humility in a man into unmerciful anger and remembrance of evil, and makes him a fierce beast.

The tenth virtue is sensible and good discernment in every work, because, without discernment, good may be brought into evil, and therefore not remain good....

Fasting, that is, moderate and constant continence, ceaseless occupation in the instruction from the Divine Scriptures with a moderate vigil, that is, according to conscience, strength, and wakefulness of each, and the prayer of Jesus done sensibly, that is, with heedfulness of the mind to the words of the prayer and inward keeping of the heart are the most fundamental ones and should be fulfilled sensibly before the face of God and for His sake, without any hypocrisy, pleasing of men, or vainglory.... It is better to leave off that virtue through which we voluntarily become highminded. The reward given is not so much for labors as for the sake of humility. It is better to be sinning and repenting than to have corrected oneself and be highminded.

– St. Paisius Velichkovsky

Also Commemorated Today: St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, was born in the year 130 in the city of Smyrna of Asia Minor. He received there the finest education, studying poetics, philosophy, rhetoric, and the rest of the classical sciences considered necessary for a young man of the world.

His guide in the truths of the Christian faith was a disciple of the Apostle John the Theologian, Saint Polycarp of Smyrna (Feb. 23). Saint Polycarp baptized the youth, and afterwards ordained him presbyter and sent him to a city in Gaul then named Lugdunum [the present day Lyons in France] to the dying bishop Pothinus.

Pothinus was sent by Saint Polycarp from Asia Minor to preach in Gaul [France]. He became the first Bishop of Lyons and converted many pagans to Christianity. During the time of the persecution of the Christians in the year 177, Pothinus was brought to trial: more correctly, he was carried in the arms of others for he was ninety years old. The Proconsul asked him: "Who is the Christian God?" The aged Pothinus replied: "You will know if you become worthy of that." The pagans attacked him with canes and stones and beat him without mercy. Thrown into prison, Saint Pothinus died from the beatings two days later and took up habitation

in the Kingdom of Heaven. He is commemorated on the same day as Saint Irenaeus.

A commission was soon entrusted to Irenaeus. He was to deliver a letter from the confessors of Lugdunum to Bishop Eleutherius of Rome (177-190). While he was away, all the known Christians were thrown into prison. After the martyric death of Bishop Pothinus, Saint Irenaeus was chosen a year later (in 178) as Bishop of Lugdunum. "During this time," Saint Gregory of Tours writes concerning him, "by his preaching he transformed all Lugdunum into a Christian city!"

When the persecution against Christians quieted down, the Saint expounded upon the Orthodox teachings of the faith in one of his fundamental works under the title: *Detection and Refutation of the Pretended But False Gnosis*; it is usually called *Five Books Against Heresy (Adversus Haereses)*. At that time there appeared a series of religious-philosophical gnostic teachings. The Gnostics [from the Greek word "gnosis" meaning "knowledge"] taught that God cannot be incarnate [i.e. born in human flesh], since matter is imperfect and manifests itself as the bearer of evil. They taught also that the Son of God is only an outflowing ("emanation") of Divinity. Together with Him from the Divinity issues forth a hierarchical series of powers ("aeons"), the unity of which comprise the "Pleroma", i.e. "Fullness." The world is not made by God Himself, but by the aeons or the "Demiourgos," which is below the "Pleroma."

In refuting the heresy of Valentinus, Saint Irenaeus presents the Orthodox teaching of salvation. "The Word of God, Jesus Christ, through His inexplicable blessedness caused us to be, that we also, should be made that which He is," taught Saint Irenaeus. "Jesus Christ the Son of God, through exceedingly great love for His creation, condescended to be born of a Virgin, having united mankind with God in His own Self." Salvation consists in the "Sonship" and "Theosis" ("Divinization") of mankind.

In the refutation of another heretic, Marcian, who denied the divine origin of the Old Testament, the Saint affirms the same divine inspiration of the Old and the New Testaments: "It is one and the same Spirit of God Who proclaimed through the prophets the precise manner of the Lord's coming," wrote the Saint. "Through the apostles, He preached that the fullness of time of the filiation had arrived, and that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand."

The successors of the Apostles have received from God the certain gift of truth, which Saint Irenaeus links to the succession of the episcopate (*Adv. Haer.* 4, 26, 2). "Anyone who desires to know the truth ought to turn to the Church, since through Her alone did the apostles expound the Divine Truth. She is the door to life."

Saint Irenaeus also exerted a beneficial influence in a dispute about the celebration of Pascha. In the Church of Asia Minor, there was an old tradition of celebrating Holy Pascha on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan, regardless of what day of the week it happened to be. The Roman bishop Victor (190-202) forcefully demanded uniformity, and his harsh demands fomented a schism. In the name of the Christians of Gaul, Saint Irenaeus wrote to Bishop Victor and others, urging them to make peace. After this incident, Saint Irenaeus drops out of sight, and we do not even know the exact year of his death. Saint Gregory of Tours, in his *History of the Franks*, suggests that Saint Irenaeus was beheaded by the sword for his confession of faith in the year 202, during the reign of Severus.

The Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian, Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, and Saint Irenaeus of Lyons are three links in an unbroken chain of the grace of succession, which goes back to the Original Pastor, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

In his old age, Saint Irenaeus wrote to his old friend the priest Florinus: "When I was still a boy, I knew you... in Polycarp's house.... I remember what happened in those days more clearly than what happens now.... I can describe for you the place where blessed Polycarp usually sat and conversed, the character of his life, the appearance of his body, and the discourses which he spoke to the people, how he spoke of the conversations which he had with John and others who had seen the Lord, how he remembered their words, and what he heard from them about the Lord ... I listened eagerly to these things, by the mercy of God, and wrote them, not on paper, but in my heart."

He was buried under the Church of Saint John in Lyons, which was later renamed after Saint Irenaeus. His tomb and his remains were destroyed in 1562 by the Calvinist Huguenots. (The remains of Leonardo da Vinci and Kepler, among others, also were lost in the religious wars of those times.) (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

The History of the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos

The origin of the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos is closely connected with her public veneration in the early fourth century, when Christmas began to be celebrated in Rome, and peaked at the Third Ecumenical Synod of Ephesus in 431, when controversy arose over the title "Theotokos". A few years later, in the *Armenian Lectionary* of 434, which preserves the ancient liturgical practices of the Jerusalem Church between 417 and 439, it says that a feast of Mary the Theotokos was celebrated on August 15th, "at the second mile from Bethlehem," with Scripture readings that focused on the Nativity of Christ and the Mary as the Mother of God. In Egypt, this same feast was celebrated on January 18th under the influence of the Holy Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria (+444), who presided over the

Third Ecumenical Synod. In Constantinople, the veneration of the Theotokos was promoted by Holy Patriarch Anatolios (+458), who also composed the first liturgical hymns to the Theotokos.

At the beginning of the sixth century, a magnificent basilica was erected over the tomb of the Virgin Mary in Gethsemane. With this, the feast of Mary the Theotokos celebrated on August 15th took on a new meaning and became the solemn celebration of Mary's dormition and translocation into heaven under the name of the Feast of the Dormition. In some liturgical calendars of the East, the feast was referred to as the "Journey of the Theotokos into Heaven", or the "Deposition of Mary", i.e. the interment of Mary into her grave.

In Constantinople, the Holy Empress Pulcheria (+453) promoted devotion to the Theotokos and built three churches in her honor. Being present at the sixth session of the Fourth Ecumenical Synod of Chalcedon (451), she asked the Holy Patriarch Juvenal of Jerusalem (+458) for some relics of the Theotokos to be enshrined in the Church of the Theotokos at Blachernae, in Constantinople.

The Holy Patriarch replied: "We have received from ancient and the most reliable tradition that at the time of the glorious dormition (falling asleep) of the Mother of God, the whole company of the Apostles were brought together in Jerusalem. So, amid divine and heavenly praises, they commended her holy soul to the hands of God and, taking her God-conceiving body, they carried it in procession to Gethsemane and there placed it in a little tomb. For three days a choir of Angels continued to sing above Her tomb. After the third day, when finally Saint Thomas arrived, (he had been absent and desired to venerate the body that had borne Christ God), they (the Apostles) opened the tomb and found no trace of her blessed body. Thus, taking the winding sheets, which were filled with fragrance, the Apostles closed the tomb. Wondering at this mystery, they could only think that He, Whom it had pleased to be born of her in the flesh, the Lord of Glory, desired that after her departure from this life, her immaculate and all-pure body would be honored by incorruptibility, being translocated (to heaven) before the universal resurrection of the dead"(cf. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymios*, written about 515).

On July 2, the Orthodox Church commemorates the Deposition of the Venerable Robe of Our Lady the Mother of God at Blachernae. It seems that, instead of the holy relics requested, the imperial city had received Mary's vestments which were found in Nazareth and brought to Constantinople in 474, i.e. after the death of Juvenal and Pulcheria.

The solemn celebration of the Feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos was extended to the entire East during the sixth century. Since the feast was celebrated on different days, it was decreed by Emperor Maurice (582-602) that, in

the entire Roman Empire, the feast will be celebrated on August 15th under the name of Dormition which, literally translated, means "the falling asleep"(1 Thess. 4:14). St. Modestos of Jerusalem (+634), to whom the oldest extant homily of the Feast of the Dormition is ascribed, fully accepted the Jerusalem tradition concerning Mary's wondrous departure and the translocation of her most pure body to heaven .

In the middle of the seventh century, the Feast of the Dormition was introduced in Rome from where it gradually spread to the entire West. However, at the end of the eighth century, the Western Church changed the name of the feast to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven. The Assumption of Mary was celebrated in the West under Pope Sergius I in the eighth century and Pope Leo IV then confirmed the feast as official. The Dogma of the Assumption of Mary was introduced into the Roman Catholic Church in 1950, when Pope Pius XII defined it *ex cathedra* in his Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*.

In the East, the celebration of the feast was enhanced by the famous homilies of St. Andrew of Crete (c. +720), St. Germanos of Constantinople (+733) and especially St. John of Damascus (+749). According to his testimony, the tomb, which harbored the purest body of the Mother of God for only a short time, became an object of public veneration and the source of numerous miracles and special graces. St. John of Damascus, in the homily he delivered at the Basilica of the Dormition in Jerusalem, pointed to Mary's tomb and said: "Her immaculate body was placed here, in this renowned and all-glorious tomb, from whence after three days it was taken up to the heavenly mansion".

The liturgical hymns extolling the wondrous dormition of the Theotokos, for the most part, were composed during the eighth and ninth centuries by such renowned hymnographers as St. Germanos of Constantinople (+733), St. John of Damascus (+749), St. Kosmas of Maiuma (+760), St. Theophanes Graptos (+845) and others.

The Feast of the Dormition is one of the Twelve Major Feasts of the Orthodox Church and is celebrated with uncommon solemnity. In preparation for the feast, a two week period of fasting is prescribed for the faithful, called the Fast of the Dormition, which begins on the first day of August. Since the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Savior falls within this time on August 6th, some refer to the fast up to this time as the Savior's Fast. Historically, the Fast of the Dormition can be traced to the ninth century, which coincided with the two the Holy Cross throughout Constantinople during this same time to sanctify the air and buildings and drive away the diseases of the summer. It was officially introduced into the Orthodox discipline by the Synod of Constantinople in 1166.

Liturgically speaking, the Feast has one day of pre-festivity and eight days (octave) of post-festivity during which time the mysteries of Mary's wondrous death and her glorious trans-location to heaven are celebrated. The leavetaking of the feast on August 23rd is celebrated almost as solemnly and festively as on August 15th.

According to an old custom, flowers and medicinal herbs are blessed after the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Dormition. This custom most probably originated from the traditional belief that after Mary's glorious translocation into heaven, her holy tomb was filled with a "heavenly fragrance" and flowers" (cf. St. Germanos, *Hom. on Dorm.*) The herbs, used by people as natural medicine, are blessed in commemoration of the numerous healings and extraordinary graces bestowed on the pilgrims at Mary's tomb (cf. St. John of Damascus, *Hom. on Dorm.* 1, 13). The blessing of the herbs on the Feast of Dormition may have been introduced as a replacement of the procession of the Holy Cross during this time to banish summer diseases.

Preaching at the tomb of Mary, St. John of Damascus reminded the people: "Divine power is not circumscribed by any place and neither is the inexhaustible goodness of the Mother of God. For if the graces were restricted only to her tomb, only a few people would gain them. Now her graces are poured out in every place throughout the world"(cf. *Hom. on Dorm.* 2, 19).

In his *Homily on the Dormition*, St. John of Damascus makes the Tomb of Mary speak: "Why do you seek in the tomb what has been translocated into heaven? Why do you exact from me an account of her dissolution? I had no power to go against the divine command. Leaving the winding sheet, that holy and sacred body, which filled me with myrrh, sweet fragrance and holiness, has been caught up and has departed with all the powers of heaven accompanying it. Now the Angels keep watch over me. Now the divine grace dwells in me. I have become a well of healing for the sick, a defense against demons, a refuge to those who flee to me. Draw near in faith, you people, and you will receive grace in streams" (cf. *Hom. on Dorm.* 2, 17). (from *johnsanidopoulos.com*)

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