

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

(301) 638-5035 Church

4419 Leonardtown Road

Waldorf, MD 20601

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor

(703) 532-8017

fredgington@gmail.com

www.apostlethomas.org

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.**

September 20, 2020 | 15th Sunday After Pentecost Sunday After and Afterfeast of the Elevation of the Cross Great-Martyr Eustathios and His Family

*Eustathios burns with his offspring in a bronze ox,
And you, O Word, save the whole race.*

On the twentieth Eustathios with his wife and his sons were burned.

This Great Martyr of Christ, Eustathios, was a most illustrious general of Rome, during the reign of Emperor Trajan in the year 100. He was famously recognized by others for his virtue, his way of life and thought, and he was merciful and compassionate to the poor. He was first called Plakidas, and his wife was Tatiani.

Hence this infamous man, because he was held under the delusion of idols, and for his great reverence and goodness, was made worthy to be called from above to faith in God, just as the Apostle Paul.

Once, as he was hunting and chasing after a large deer, and was near it and approaching it, O the wonder!, he saw standing between the two antlers of the deer, the honorable Cross of Christ, which shined like the sun. And on it was Christ

crucified, from which he heard a voice saying: "Plakidas, why are you chasing after me? I am Christ."

Thus the blessed one was taught piety by Christ, and was baptized with his entire household. And instead of Plakidas he was renamed Eustathios. His wife, instead of Tatiani, was renamed Theopisti. And of his sons, one was renamed Agapios and the other Theopistos.

Then he was instructed by Christ, who appeared to him by means of trial temptations which he was to suffer, like Job, and so he was surrendered over to the tempting demon. Immediately he lost everything he had, and left his homeland with his wife and children. As for his wife, he lost her on the journey to ship-masters, who were barbarous and wild people. His two children were taken by two wild animals when he was crossing a river. However, his wife and children were kept unharmed by divine Providence. Saint Eustathios, who was formerly rich and a man of office, was left to work for a salary. Under such circumstances this unbreakable man bravely endured, though not for a short period.

Due to the fact that barbarians went up against the land of the Romans, and the emperor was seeking help in this battle against the barbarians, there came to his remembrance the brave Eustathios who of old had manly virtue and was victorious. Therefore there was an investigation and he was sought for throughout the world, and the good Eustathios was soon recognized by the royal men seeking him. They were surprised by the pitiful vision they saw, for he was in an impoverished state when he was found. So he went to the emperor and was magnificently honored by being raised to his former office. He was sent against the barbarians, and altogether conquered them. On his return to Rome after the battle, by the economy and plan of God, he found his wife and children, and they were reunited. Wherefore he magnified God for all things which He paradoxically economized.

Returning to Rome with his wife and children, he went to Emperor Hadrian, in the year 117, and having received great gifts for his victory, he was urged to sacrifice to the gods in thanksgiving for his victory. The Saint told him that he was victorious through the power of Christ, and not the power of the gods. This enraged the tyrant. First, he removed the position of general from him. Then he was brought to be fed to wild lions with his wife and children. Because the four were kept unharmed from the wild beasts, they were all placed into a red-hot copper ox. In this way their sacred souls were delivered into the hands of God, and their holy bodies were kept completely unharmed from the fire, so that the unbelieving people were amazed and came to faith in Christ. And the Christians were compelled to glorify their Holy God. So they reverently took up their bodies and lavishly buried them. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Today's Epistle Lessons – St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 2:16-20

Brethren, you know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified. But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Today's Gospel Lessons – Saint Mark 8:34-38: 9:1

The Lord said, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The sword of flame no longer guards the gate of Eden, For a strange bond came upon it: the wood of the Cross. The sting of Death and the victory of Hades were nailed to it. But you appeared, my Savior, crying to those in Hades: 'Be brought back Again to Paradise'.

Nailed to the form of the Cross As truly a ransom for many You redeemed us, Christ our God, For by your precious blood in love for mankind You snatched our souls from death. You brought us back with you Again to Paradise.

All things in heaven and earth rightly rejoice with Adam, Because he has been called Again to Paradise.

Three crosses Pilate fixed on Golgotha, Two for the thieves and one for the Giver of life, Whom Hades saw and said to those below, 'My ministers and powers, Who has fixed a nail in my heart? A wooden lance has suddenly pierced me and I am being torn apart. My insides are in pain, my belly in agony. My senses make my spirit tremble, And I am compelled to disgorge Adam and Adam's race, given me by a tree, A tree is bringing them back Again to Paradise'.

When he heard this the cunning serpent, Ran crawling and cried, ‘Hades, what is it? Why do you groan for no reason? Why produce these wailings? This tree, at which you tremble, I carpentered up there for Mary’s child. I intimidated it to the Jews for our advantage, For it is a cross, to which I have nailed Christ Wishing by a tree to do away with the second Adam. So do not upset yourself. It will not plunder you. Keep hold of those you have. Of those whom we rule Not one escapes Again to Paradise.’

‘Away with you, come to your senses, Beliar’, cries Hades ‘Run, open your eyes, and see The root of the tree inside my soul. It has gone down to my depths, To draw up Adam like iron. Elisha of old painted its image in prophecy When he drew the axehead from the river. With a light object the prophet dragged a heavy, Warning you, and teaching you That by a tree Adam is to be brought up From wretchedness Again to Paradise.’

‘Who gave you such an idea, Hades? Whence now this cowardly fear, where once there was no fear, Of a worthless tree, dry and barren Made for the removal Of malefactors and those who welcome bloodshed? For Pilate discovered it, persuaded by my counsels. And do you fear it, and reckon it powerful? The universal executioner: will it in your view prove a savior? Who has misled you? Who has persuaded you That he who fell by a tree is being raised by a tree, And, that he may dwell there, is being called Again to Paradise.’

‘You have suddenly lost your senses, you of old the cunning serpent. All your wisdom has been swallowed up through the Cross And you have been caught in your own snare. Lift up your eyes and see That you have fallen into the pit which you created. Behold that tree, which you call dry and barren, Bears fruit, having tasted which a thief Has become heir to the good things of Eden. For it has outdone the rod Which led the people out of Egypt, For it is bringing Adam back Again to Paradise.’

‘Wretched Hades, cease this cowardly talk, For these words of yours reveal your thoughts. Were you afraid of a cross and of the crucified? Not one of your words has shaken me, For these deeds are part of my plan, For I would again both open a grave and entomb Christ. So you may enjoy your cowardice double, From his tomb as well as from his cross. But when I see you, I shall mock you. For when Christ is buried I shall come to you and say, “Who now is bringing Adam back Again to Paradise?”’

Suddenly Hades began to call out to the devil—The eyeless to the sightless, the blind to the blind—‘Look, You are walking in darkness, feel around, lest you fall. Consider what I tell you, hard of heart, Because what you are doing has quenched the sun. For the tree which you boast of has shaken the universe, Has convulsed the

earth, hidden the sky, Rent the rocks together with the Veil, And raised up those in the graves. And the dead are shouting, “Hades, understand. For Adam is running back Again to Paradise.”

‘Has the Nazarene’s tree been strong enough to scare you?’ Said the devil to Hades the destroyer, ‘Have you been slain by a cross, you who slay all? Truly if a tree has scared you, The crucifixion of Haman should have frightened you, And that stake with which Jael did away with Sisera, And the five crosses to which Jesus son of Navi Once fixed the tyrants. More than all let the plant in Eden Scare you, because it led out Adam, yet does not lead him back Again to Paradise.’

‘Now is the moment for you to open your ears, Beliar. Now the hour will show you the power of the cross And the great authority of the crucified. For you the cross is folly, But for all creation it is seen as a throne, Nailed on which Jesus, as though seated, Hears the thief crying to him, “Lord, remember me in your kingdom”, And answers as from a tribunal, “Today, poor beggar, you will reign with me. For with me you will go in Again to Paradise.”

When he heard this, the all-resourceful dragon, He began to wilt, and what he had heard he saw, A thief witnessing to Christ crucified. And so, astounded at this He strikes his breast and argues, ‘He speaks to a thief, yet does not answer his accusers? To Pilate he never deigned so much as a word, Now he addresses a murderer, saying, “Come, live in pleasure”? What is this? Who has seen On the cross words or deeds from the thief By means of which he is taking This man to Paradise?’

A second time the demon raised the same cry Calling out, ‘Hades, receive me. My recourse is to you, For I submit to your views, I who did not believe them. I saw the tree at which you shuddered Crimsoned with blood and water. And I shuddered, not, I tell you, at the blood, but at the water. For the former shows the slaughter of Jesus, But the latter, his life, because life has gushed From his side. For it was not the first But the second Adam who made Eve, The mother of all living, bud Again to Paradise.’

With words like these the wholly wicked one Grudgingly admitted that he had fallen along with Hades. And so, of course, together they bewail their fall, ‘What’, he says, ‘is this to which we have brought ourselves? How have we fallen by this tree? For our destruction its stock was rooted in the earth. We grafted to it bitter shoots. The sweetness in it we did not transform’. ‘Alas, my comrade’. ‘Alas, my companion’. ‘As we have fallen together. So let us grieve, For Adam is going back Again to Paradise.’

O how did we not remember the types of this tree! For of old they were shown forth in many and various ways In the saved and in the lost. By a tree Noah was

saved, But the whole world, unbelieving, was destroyed. Moses was glorified through one when he took a staff as a sceptre, But Egypt, with the plagues that came from it, Was drowned as though fallen into deep wells. What it has now done, the Cross showed forth Of old in image. How then can we not weep? For Adam is going Again to Paradise.’

‘Wait, wretched Hades’, said the demon with a groan, ‘Quiet, be patient, lay hand on mouth, For I hear a voice revealing joy. A sound has reached me bringing good tidings, A rustle of words like the leaves of the Cross. For Christ at the point of death cried out, “Father, forgive them”. But he grieved me when he then said That “the lawless know not what they do”. But we know that it is the Lord Of glory who is suffering and that he wishes To bring Adam back Again to Paradise.’

‘Did not the Master by the tree he showed to Moses, Which once sweetened the water at Mara, Teach what it was and what its root? Then he did not say, for it was not his will. But now he has made it clear to all. For see, all things have been made pleasant, but we have been embittered. A cross which was thrust into the earth Has sprouted from our root, which became sweet. That which formerly bred thorns Now like a vine of Sorec has put out branches Which are transplanted Again to Paradise.’

‘Now therefore, Hades, groan and I will harmonize with your wails. Let us lament as we see the tree which we planted Transformed into a holy trunk, Beneath which have sheltered And will nest in its branches Thieves, murderers, and publicans and harlots³⁸, that they may reap Sweet fruit from the supposedly arid. For as to a plant of life they cling to the Cross. Pressed against it and swimming, Through it they escape and are brought for anchorage As to a fair haven Again to Paradise.’

‘Swear then, tyrant, finally to crucify no one.’ ‘And you, Tartarus, make a firm decision to slay no one.’ ‘We have had our experience, let us draw in our hand. May what we have undergone become for us Knowledge for the future. Let neither of us henceforth tyrannise against the race of Adam, For it has been sealed⁴⁰ by the Cross, like a treasure Containing an unravished pearl in a corruptible vessel, Which a thief, well-suited to his trade, Ravished on the cross. For stealing he was nailed up, And for thieving he was called Again to Paradise.’

Most high and glorious, God of fathers and of youths, Your willing outrage has become our honor. For in your Cross we all boast. To it let us nail our hearts, That on it we may hang our instruments And sing to you, the Lord of all, from the songs of Sion. The ship from Tarshish once upon a time Brought gold to Solomon, as it is written. To us your Tree gives back Every day and moment wealth beyond price, For it brings us all Again to Paradise.

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion 22 “On the Cross”*

Also Commemorated Today: Holy Martyr and Confessor Michael and his councilor, Theodore, Wonderworkers of Chernigov

The Holy Prince Michael of Chernigov, son of Vsevolod Ol'govich the Dark-Red (+ 1212), was noted from childhood for his piety and mildness. His health was very poor, but in 1186, trusting in the mercy of God, the young prince asked for the holy prayers of Saint Nikita the Stylite of Pereyaslavl (May 24), who during these years received renown by his prayerful intercession before the Lord.

In 1225 he was invited to be prince of the Novgorod people. Through his sense of justice, compassion and firmness he gained the love and respect of Old Novgorod. This was particularly important for the Novgorodians, since the accession of Michael as prince signified a reconciliation of Novgorod with the city of Vladimir's holy Great Prince George Vsevolodovich (March 4), whose wife was the holy princess Agatha, sister of Prince Michael. But Saint Michael did not long remain prince at Novgorod. He soon returned to his native Chernigov. To the stipulations and requests of the Novgorodians to remain prince he answered that Chernigov and Novgorod ought to become kindred lands, and their inhabitants like brothers, and he would forge the bonds of friendship of these cities.

The noble prince assiduously concerned himself with the building up of his appenage realm. But it was difficult for him in these troubled times. His activity provoked unease in the Kursk Prince Oleg, and in 1227 internecine strife nearly erupted, but Metropolitan Cyril of Kiev reconciled them. And in this same year Prince Michael peacefully resolved a dispute between the Kiev Great Prince Vladimir Rurikovich and the Galich prince. In 1235 Prince Michael occupied the throne of Kiev.

Troublesome times ensued. In 1238 the Tatars (Mongols) laid waste to Ryazan, Suzdal, and Vladimir. In 1239 they moved against South Russia, and ravaged the left bank of the Dniepr River, and the lands of Chernigov and Pereyaslavl. By the autumn of 1240 the Mongols were coming close to Kiev. The khan's emissaries proposed that Kiev surrender voluntarily, but the prince would not negotiate with them. Prince Michael rode urgently to Hungary, to persuade the Hungarian king Bela to organize allied forces to resist the common enemy. Saint Michael tried to recruit both Poland, and the German emperor into the struggle against the Mongols, but the moment for a combined resistance was lost. Rus was devastated, and later Hungary and Poland. With no foreign support, Prince Michael returned to the ruins of Kiev and for a certain time he lived near the city on an island, and then he resettled in Chernigov.

The prince did not abandon hope in the possibility of an united Christian Europe against the Asiatic nomads. In 1245, at the Council of Lyons in France, his co-worker Metropolitan Peter (Akerovich) was sent as emissary by Saint Michael, calling for a crusade to march against the pagan Horde. Catholic Europe in the persons of its chief spiritual leaders, the Roman Pope and the German emperor, betrayed the interests of Christianity. The Pope was involved in a war with the German emperor, and the Germans took advantage of the Mongol invasion to attack Rus themselves.

In these circumstances affecting Christianity in general, there is a universal significance to the confessor's deed of the martyred Orthodox Prince Saint Michael of Chernigov in the midst of the pagan Horde. In Rus emissaries of the khan soon appeared, in order to conduct a census of the Russian population and to impose taxes upon it.

The prince was ordered to make full submission to the Tatar khan, and for his princely realm, the khan would grant a special charter. The emissaries informed Prince Michael that it was necessary for him to journey to the Horde for an affirmation of rights to rule the principedom under the khan's charter. Seeing the woeful plight of Rus, Prince Michael recognized the need to obey the khan, but as a fervent Christian he knew that he would not deny his faith before the pagans. From his spiritual Father, Bishop John, he received a blessing to journey to the Horde and be a true confessor of the Name of Christ.

With the holy Prince Michael on the journey to the Horde went his faithful friend and companion, the noble Theodore. At the Horde they knew about Prince Michael's attempts to organize an uprising against the Tatars in concert with Hungary and the other European powers. His enemies had long sought the opportunity to destroy him.

In 1246 when Prince Michael and the boyar Theodore arrived at the Horde, they were instructed on how to go to the khan, to proceed through a fire to cleanse them of their evil intents, and to worship the primal elements considered gods by the Mongols: the sun and fire. In answer to the pagan priests commanding them to perform the pagan rituals, the holy Prince replied, "A Christian worships only God, the Creator of the world, and not creatures."

They reported to the khan about the firmness of the Russian Prince. Batu's attendant El'deg delivered the conditions: either fulfill the demands of the pagan priests, or die in torments. But this also was followed by the resolute answer of holy Prince Michael, "I am prepared to submit to the emperor, since that God has entrusted him with the destiny of the earthly kingdoms, but as a Christian, I cannot worship idols." The fate of the brave Christians was sealed.

Taking courage in the words of the Lord: “Whoever would save his life, shall lose it, and whoever will lose his life for My sake shall save it” (Mt.16:25), the holy prince and his devoted boyar prepared for a martyr’s death and received the Holy Mysteries, which their spiritual Father gave them, foreseeing this possibility. The Tatar executioners seized the prince and for a long time they beat him fiercely, until the ground ran crimson with blood. Finally, Domanus, an apostate from the faith in Christ, cut off the head of the holy martyr.

The Tatars deceitfully promised Saint Theodore great honor and his lord’s princely rank if he would fulfill the pagan ritual. But Saint Theodore was not swayed by this, and he followed in the path of his prince. After quite vicious torments they beheaded him. The bodies of the holy passion-bearers were thrown to be eaten by dogs, but the Lord miraculously guarded them for several days, until faithful Christians could secretly bury them with reverence. Later on, the relics of the holy martyrs were transferred to Chernigov.

The confessor’s act of Saint Theodore amazed even his executioners. Persuaded of the Russian people’s steadfast fidelity to the Orthodox Faith , and their readiness to die for Christ with joy, the Tatar khans decided not to try the patience of God as before, and ceased demanding that Russians at the Horde perform any pagan rituals. But the struggle of the Russian nation and the Russian Church against the Mongol Yoke continued for yet a long time. The Orthodox Church was adorned in this struggle by new martyrs and confessors. Great Prince Theodore was poisoned by the Mongols. Also martyred were Saint Roman of Ryazan (+ 1270), Saint Michael of Tver (+ 1318), his sons Demetrius (+ 1325) and Alexander (+ 1339). All of these took courage from the example and holy prayers of the Russian Protomartyr of the Horde, Saint Michael of Chernigov.

“The generation of the upright shall be blessed,” says the holy Psalmist David (Ps. 111/112:2). This occurred in full measure for Saint Michael. He is at the head of many famous families in Russian history. His children and grandchildren continued the holy Christian service of Saint Michael. The Church also numbers his daughter Saint Euphrosyne of Suzdal (September 25), and his grandson Saint Oleg of Briansk (September 20) among the saints. *(from oca.org)*

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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 & Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Presbytera Katie Baker & family, Santiago Alzugaray, Patty Blaydoe, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Howl family, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl & family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, Luke & Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Nicholas Pavlik, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore & Christina Ristas, Robinson Family, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Joe & Darlene Waters, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Dcn. Nectaros & Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)