

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.**

**February 7, 2021 | 35th Sunday After Pentecost
Afterfeast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple
St. Parthenios, Bishop of Lampsakos**

Saint Parthenios was the son of the deacon Christodoulos from Melitopolis on the Hellespont. Although illiterate, he listened attentively to the reading of Holy Scripture in church, and he did his best to put what he heard into practice. Working as a fisherman, he would give whatever he earned from the sale of his catch to the poor, keeping nothing for himself. His charity became well-known in the area, and Philetos, the Bishop of Melitopolis, obliged him to accept ordination to the priesthood, with a commission to traverse the diocese visiting the Christians in their homes. The grace of God brought forth abundant fruit in him through many miracles and healings. One day, he met a man on the road whose eye had been dislodged by the horn of a bull. He restored the eye to its socket and healed the wound. On another occasion, he cured a woman of a fatal cancer solely by the sign



of the Cross. Then again, when a mad dog attacked him, he brought the creature down stone dead with a simple puff of his breath.

Confronted by so many indications of divine favor, Ascholios, the Metropolitan of Cyzicus, consecrated him Bishop of the city of Lampsakos, which was still in the depths of idolatry. By means of fasting, prayers and inspired words, and through the example of his evangelic way of life, the Saint succeeded in converting the city.

When he visited the court of Saint Constantine the Great he was authorized to destroy the pagan temples of Lampsakos and given funds for constructing a church. On the completion of the building, a large stone was being brought to cover the altar when the envious devil caused the oxen to go out of control, resulting in the death the driver who was crushed beneath the wheels of the cart. The Saint immediately addressed a fervent prayer to the Lord, and the dead man was restored to life.

Saint Parthenios was the loving father and the very providence of his city. He unflinchingly healed every illness, making the doctors superfluous, to their great vexation. As light scatters darkness, at his coming the demons took flight. One day he commanded a devil to depart from a poor man, but the evil spirit entreated him, 'Give me a place where I can live until the time of the dread Judgement or, at least, let me inhabit swine' (cf. Matt. 8:32). "By no means," the Saint replied, "but when you come out of this unfortunate there is someone else waiting for you." "Who is that?" "It is I! Come and dwell in me!" The evil spirit fled at these words, crying out as though scorched, "How could I enter God's house? Great is the power of Christians!"

One day Parthenios went to Heraclea, the chief city of Thrace, whose Bishop Hypatian was very ill. God revealed to the Saint that avarice was the true cause of his disease. "Get up," he told the prelate. "You're not suffering from a bodily illness but from a spiritual one. Let the poor have the goods that you're withholding from them and you'll get better."

Conscious of his sin, Hypatian offered all his goods for Parthenios to distribute to the needy. "But no," said the man of God, 'since God grants you strength, it is up to you to give the poor what they have a right to.' The Metropolitan then had himself carried to the Church of Saint Glykeria, the patroness of the city, and he distributed all his possessions to the needy assembled there. Three days later he was restored to health.

While staying at Heraclea, Saint Parthenios healed other sick people, and blessed fields and crops, predicting exactly what their yield would be. On taking leave of the Metropolitan, the Saint indicated that his own death was near at hand and he

named his successor. Soon after returning to Lampsakos, he gave back his soul to God, bequeathing to his flock the sweet savor of his miracles and the example of his holy life. As soon as they heard the news, all the bishops of the region hastened to pay their respects at his funeral and to send up to God fervent prayers of thanksgiving. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy 1:15-17

My son Timothy, this *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 15:21-28

At that time, Jesus departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great *is* your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Before Christ we all shared the same ancestral curse and condemnation poured out on all of us from our single forefather, as if it had sprung from the root of the human race and was the common lot of our nature. Each person's individual action attracted either reproof or praise from God, but no one could do anything about the shared curse and condemnation, or the evil inheritance that had been passed down to him and through him would pass to his descendants.

But Christ came, setting human nature free and changing the common curse into a shared blessing. He took upon Himself our guilty nature from the most pure Virgin and united it, new and unmixed with the old seed, to His divine person. He rendered it guiltless and righteous, so that all His spiritual descendants would remain outside the ancestral curse and condemnation. How so? He shares His grace

with each one of us as a person, and each receives forgiveness of his sins from Him. For He did not receive from us a human person, but assumed our human nature and renewed it by uniting it with His own person. His wish was to save us all completely and for our sake He bowed the heavens and came down. When by His deeds, words and sufferings He had pointed out all the ways of salvation, He went up to heaven again, drawing after Him those who trusted in Him. His aim was to grant perfect redemption not just to the nature which He had assumed from us in inseparable union, but to each one of those who believed in Him. This He has done and continues to do, reconciling each of us through Himself to the Father, bringing each one back to obedience and thoroughly healing our disobedience.

To this end, He established holy baptism and gave us saving laws. He preached repentance and shared His own body and blood with us. For it is not only human nature in general, but each believer as a person who receives baptism, governs his life by the holy commandments and becomes a partaker of the Bread that makes divine and of the Cup. By these means Christ justified each one of us personally and restored us to obedience to the heavenly Father. He renewed the human nature He took from us and by what He did and suffered in His person united with our nature, He revealed it as sanctified, justified and completely obedient to the Father. Among the things He did and suffered are the events we celebrate today, when He went up, or was taken up, to the ancient Temple for purification, was met by the God-bearing Simeon, and was proclaimed by Anna, who spent her whole life attending to the Temple.

After the Savior was born of the Virgin and circumcised on the eighth day according to the law, then, as Luke the evangelist says, “when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord” (Luke 2:22). He is circumcised according to the law, brought to Jerusalem according to the law, presented to the Lord as it is written in the law and a sacrifice is offered as the law demands.

Notice that the Creator and Lord of the law is completely obedient to the law. What does He achieve by this? He makes our nature obedient in all things to the Father, He completely heals us of its disobedience and transforms the curse on it into a blessing. As all human nature was in Adam, so it is in Christ. All who received their being from the earthly Adam have returned to the earth and been brought down, alas, to Hades. But, according to the apostle, through the heavenly Adam we have all been called up to heaven and made worthy of its glory and grace. Secretly for the present, for it says, “your life is hid with Christ in God.” But, “when Christ shall appear,” at His second manifestation and coming, “then you shall all appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:3). What does it mean by “all”?

All those who have received the adoption of sons in Christ by the Spirit, and have proved by their deeds that they are His spiritual children.

“And when the days of their purification were accomplished they brought him to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22). Whose purification? The law says that the parents and the children born from their coming together need to be purified. Also the psalmist says, “I was born in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). Where there were no parents, only one Virgin Mother, and the child born was conceived without seed, there was of course no need for purification. But this too was an act of obedience which restored disobedient human nature and took away the guilt of its disobedience. So “when the days of their purification were accomplished, they brought him to present him to the Lord”, to dedicate Him, to declare openly that He was a firstborn son, as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord” (Exod. 13:2, 12, 15; 34:19, Luke 2:23).

The pair of turtledoves, reflecting the parents' chastity; referred in some way to those yoked together in lawful marriage. The two young pigeons, knowing nothing of marriage, clearly foretold the Virgin and Him who was born of her and was a virgin to the end. Notice how precise the law is. It stipulated a pair of turtledoves which symbolize those yoked in marriage, but was careful not to refer to the young pigeons as a pair, for neither the Mother nor her Son knew anything of the married state. The law prophesied these things and through them foreshadowed the virgin birth, which it declared long before. When the child born in so marvelous a way was brought up to the Temple, the Holy Spirit prepared other, more fitting turtledoves and young pigeons. Who might these be? Simeon and Anna, who could be said to be young pigeons, because of their babe-like innocence of evil, or rightly called turtledoves on account of their utter chastity.

If we run quickly through the Gospel verses, we see that Simeon, a just and devout man, had been warned beforehand by the Holy Spirit and was moved by Him to come unto the Temple at this time. He met the heavenly and earthly infant and took Him in his arms. As God, he offered Him a hymn and a supplication, asking Him to let him depart from the body, declaring Him to all as the light of salvation (cf. Luke 2:29-32), and asserting that He was set for the fall of unbelievers and the resurrection of those who believed in Him (cf. Luke 2:34).

Then he conversed with the infant's Virgin Mother. He showed that her grief on account of the child's Cross revealed her as the mother according to nature of the now theandric Babe, and that by disclosing the doubtful thoughts surrounding the child she would dispel them from people's hearts. Simeon gave the true Mother of the paradoxical child clear evidence of her pain at the child's suffering and her intense sorrow and compassion for Him (cf. Luke 2:35).

The prophetess Anna, widow of Phanuel, was about eighty four years old. Devoted to fasts and prayers, she never left the Temple. At that moment, more than ever in the power of the Holy Spirit, she gave thanks to God and announced the good tidings, that redemption which she declared to be this infant, had come to those who were waiting for it (cf. Luke 2:38).

The Holy Spirit sent this dovelike Pair into the Temple beforehand to meet Christ when He came, teaching us what sort of people those who receive Christ should be....

– St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 5 On the Meeting of the Lord*

Also Commemorated Today: St. Luke of Steirion

The venerable Luke was born in 896 A.D. in Aegina, but raised in Phocis where he moved to with his family. He was generous and industrious and helped his parents in agricultural work. After his studies at school he helped his father in agricultural work. While grazing the animals of his father he studied various spiritual books, especially Holy Scripture, and would pray. After his father exited this temporary life, he was the comfort and support of his mother, caring for her in an exemplary way until the end of her earthly life. After her repose, he actualized the desire of his soul, which was to live in imitation of the angels. After first distributing his riches to the poor, he then erected a hut in a deserted place near the sea and lived in asceticism and prayer.

When the Bulgarians invaded Central Greece, the Venerable One fled to the Peloponnese. However, he returned to Central Greece in 927, and finally settled on Mount Steirion in Boeotia. The reputation of the venerable Luke caused many to come near him and become monastics under his inspired guidance, and this forced him to establish a Monastery.

He reposed in the Lord on February 7, 953.

His life and deeds give us the opportunity to emphasize the following:

When one studies carefully the lives of the saints it is discovered, among other things, that they were people with great sensitivity and compassion for their fellow human beings, and they stood by them and comforted them in every way. And this is, one might say, very natural, because whoever loves God, loves his fellow men, who are icons of Christ. And because the saints love everyone, even their enemies, it is impossible for them not to love and be concerned for their household and especially their parents. Indeed, they nourish for them a deep respect and great love, which is manifested on every occasion and especially in difficult moments of their lives, such as illnesses and old age. Saint John Chrysostom cared for his mother, Saint Anthusa, and after her repose he actualized his desire and retired to

the desert to devote himself to the worship of the Holy Triune God. And Saint Gregory the Theologian stood by his mother and looked after her personally when she was ill. He wrote the following in a letter to Basil the Great: "For I am sitting by my lady, my mother, who has for a long time been suffering from illness."

Many examples could be mentioned, but we believe that the above is enough to reveal that the behavior of saints to their parents is admirable and reveals the greatness of their sensitivity and that true love filled their hearts.

This behavior of the saints to their parents, should be a model and example for our behavior towards our parents. After all, the love of children towards their parents, as well as parents towards their children, and generally to all relatives of the flesh, is not particularly important, since it is natural love and even unreasonable animals display the same, which indeed often shows their remarkable and exemplary manner. That is, this love is in the nature of man, and it doesn't require a struggle or effort for its acquisition, and for this reason it is neither reprehensible nor worthy of praise.

Reprehensible is the love that is based on the passions, especially the passion of self-love, which is the source of all the other passions, namely sensuality, avarice, vanity, etc. This love is false, selfish, and it has an expiration date, since it only lasts as long as the passions are satisfied. That is, when the beloved person, for various reasons, stops satisfying the passion or passions, then, at best, love ceases. There is the possibility, and there are many examples, that passionate love turns into hatred and vindictiveness.

Worthy of praise is selfless love, which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and is given to those who struggle with pain and effort to acquire it. He who lives in the Church and struggles by the Grace of God to heal their passions and dominate over them, will acquire selfless love, which according to Saint Maximus the Confessor, is "the grandchild of dispassion" and thus is true and without expiration. The bearer of unconditional love, since they love all, even their enemies, it is impossible not also to love their parents, as well as everyone in their household.

We must be aware, and bear in mind, that the spiritual law is in operation, according to which what one does, sooner or later, will stand before them. This means that the behavior of our children to us will be commensurate with our behavior towards our parents, since, after all, children generally imitate the example of their parents. Of course, one cannot ignore the conditions of life, the difficulties and problems of contemporary man, and especially those who live in a big city, but nevertheless there are solutions to all problems, provided that there is a will and benevolent disposition. Anyone who truly loves, will always find ways to express their love, kindness and humanity. – by Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnas (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

DIOCESAN “HOMEROOM” MINISTRY

Calling all youth ages 5-18... If you signed up for the new Diocesan “Homeroom” Ministry, don't forget to PARTICIPATE online each week by posting comments, pictures and videos. Parents, if you signed your child up for the “Homerooms”, help them to participate. We have 65 youth from 27 parishes across the Diocese signed up for the “Homerooms”, but not all are participating yet. If you need any help logging on, downloading the app, or posting, or have any questions, please email fr.stephen.loposky@gmail.com. Thank you!

“When it's Safe” Means Never by Fr. Geoffrey Korz

At every liturgy in the Orthodox Church, just before the singing of the Nicene Creed, the priest or deacon intones the words, “The doors! The doors!” This call dates back to the earliest times, when the doors of the church had to be barred shut, to prevent outsiders (in those days, Roman soldiers) from entering the church, witnessing those who confessed the faith, seizing them, and killing them.

Being a Christian was not safe.

Centuries later, under the Muslim Turks, Crypto-Christians – those who lived publicly as Muslims, but secretly as Orthodox Christians – attended liturgy in secret churches, often hidden beneath secret doors in the floors of their own homes, or in unknown caves. In rural villages, Orthodox priests sometimes posed as Muslim imams just to maintain their cover. If such a village of Crypto-Christians was discovered, everyone – from the old people down to the infants – was put to the sword.

Being a Christian was not safe.

Centuries later, under Communist regimes, faithful Christians would meet secretly in grey concrete apartment blocks, where priests would baptized for little ones who had been brought by their grandmothers, without the knowledge of the parents – a legitimate excuse for the parents to give to the atheist authorities if the family was ever caught. In the most severe Communist regimes, a handful of faithful would gather outside a city or town for a clandestine nighttime liturgy, served by a priest brought in from far away to avoid the prying eyes of local authorities. In all these cases, the faithful knew, if they were found out, the punishment would be a swift execution, or worse – a slow and painful death in a concentration camp.

Being a Christian was not safe.

In the last few months, faithful around the world have experienced the closure of our churches, the prohibition of the public celebration of Holy Week, and the effective ban by bishops and civil authorities in different places on the reception of Holy Communion. In most places, churches are now reopened (at least in part).

Yet formal studies and informal observations show that about one-third of those who regularly attended holy services at the start of the year have now become accustomed to staying home on Sundays and feast days, and have not returned to church.

Perhaps good habits have been broken. Perhaps laziness has set in. Perhaps the allure of Sunday breakfast in bed has proven seductive.

Yet what has covered all the human laziness and brokenness behind the spiritual falling away is a single self-deception. These are the words, “I will return to church when it is safe again.”

Curiously, one does not hear the same phrase repeated in relation to the liquor store – i.e. I will return to the liquor store when it is safe again. Nor does one hear it applied to the purchase of groceries: grocery stores seem somehow protected from all sicknesses, and remained so throughout the recent worldwide crisis.

Neither does one hear this phrase when it comes to the workplace – i.e. I will refrain from making an income, because the risk to my health is too high. I will return to work when it is safe again.

No, it seems only churches suffer from the unique level of danger – just as they did throughout the earlier part of this year, making them more risky than public transport and dollar stores combined.

The truth is, in the current climate of madness, many Orthodox Christians have not only shifted from realistic medical precaution to social hysteria, they have also found social hysteria to be a most convenient cloak for avoiding anything inconvenient or difficult. Have to visit a relative? Not until it's safe again. Have to finish some difficult job? Not until it's safe again. And how about going back to church every Sunday morning...?

Brethren, attending the holy services of the Orthodox Church – Sundays or feast days – has never been safer than it is today. The truth is, however, it has never been safe to be a Christian. In the catacombs around Rome rest the remains of more martyrs for Christ than live in my home city – over half a million martyrs. Being a Christian and going to church was always a risk for them – and so it will be for every generation of Christian, unto ages of ages.

So please, kindly set aside the idea that you will return to the holy services “when it's safe.” That day will never come. You will either make up your mind to live as a Christian and return to church, or you won't. (*reprinted from the Church Messenger*)

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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, Presbyteria Katie Baker & family, Santiago Alzugaray, Patty Blaydoe, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Luke & Marlana 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, Jo, Marshall, Nathaniel, Dcn. Nectarios & 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.)