

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

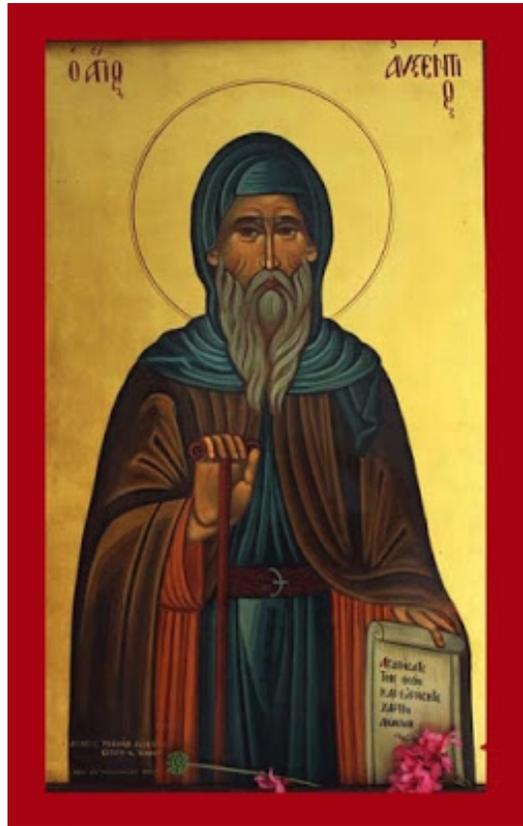
***Please note that attendance is currently limited by restrictions dictated by local response to the COVID-19 pandemic; if you are currently not assigned to an**

attendance group, please contact outreach@apostlethomas.org for information on when you may attend.

February 14, 2021 | 36th Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday of Zacchaeus | Venerable Auxentius of Bithynia

Saint Auxentios was of Persian parentage but born in Syria, where his father had emigrated during the persecution of Shapur II. He came to Constantinople in the reign of Theodosius II (408-50) and obtained a commission in the imperial guard. Held in high-regard by the Emperor and by all his contemporaries on account of his piety and integrity, he enjoyed the friendship of men illustrious for their virtues and asceticism including Saint Marcian -- the future Steward of the Great Church (10 Jan.) -- Anthimos and Sittas, with whom he spent his days in fasting and prayer and nights in vigils, their faces wet with tears. They participated as often as they could in vigils at the Church of Saint Irene, which had been built by Saint Marcian, and they frequently went to the Hebdomon district to receive the counsels of John, a well-known stylite.



As his holy life and early miracles brought him fame, Saint Auxentios withdrew from the clamor of the world and even from his friends. Resigning his commission in the guards, he enlisted in the ranks of the angelic army and made his way to Mount Oxeia, where he lived in complete obscurity, clad like Saint John the Baptist in a garment of animal hair. He was eventually discovered by some children whose sheep had strayed. Their flock was found by a miracle and, in gratitude, the parents of the young shepherds built a cell for the ascetic near the mountain top. However, Saint Auxentios fixed up a small shed outside in which he enclosed himself, and attended to spiritual prayer granting no comfort to his body.

Visitors flocked in ever larger numbers to the Saint to seek direction from him or to obtain healing through his prayer. Saint Auxentios would communicate with them at set times through a small window, and he always began conversations by inviting them to give glory to God. The rest of the time they were free to listen outside to the prayers or readings with which he was occupied within. Tried and tested as he was by a ruthless daily struggle against the devil, he had acquired the power of driving him out from the possessed people who came to ask for the help of his prayers. Thus, after three days of incessant combat, he freed a girl who had been possessed as a result of her father's unbelief. On another occasion, he healed a blind lady from Nicomedia by touching her eyes while saying, 'May Christ the True Light heal you!' Many similar miracles were wrought by God at the prayer of His servant.

He was accused of heresy but was exonerated at the Synod of Chalcedon in 451, to which he had been invited by the emperor. Familiar with Holy Scripture and learned in theology, Saint Auxentios easily bested those opponents who disputed with him. Afterward he established a new hermitage atop Mount Skopas, in Bithynia, about 12km from Chalcedon. (This mountain is today called Kayışdağ in the Kadiköy subprovince of Constantinople/Istanbul, and following the repose of the Saint it became known as Mount Saint Auxentios. The hill was thickly wooded and later became a place of many hermitages and monasteries. The Monastery of Saint Auxentios was destroyed in 760 by Iconoclasts. No remains from the late Roman period have been identified today on Mount Auxentios.)

He wrote some concise hymns which united beauty of expression with usefulness to the soul, and he instructed visitors from Roufianes or from farther afield to chant them. (These are the first troparia and the earliest elements of the hymnography of the Church). He would often exhort pilgrims until evening on the practice of the virtues and on renunciation of the vain pleasures of the body.

One Saturday, he opened the window of his shed to inform the company outside that the great pillar of the Church, Saint Symeon the Stylite (1 Sept.), had just died.

When news of the Stylite's decease finally arrived from Antioch, the announcement of Saint Auxentios was confirmed to the very day and hour.

Among those who came to see the Saint was one of the Empress Pulcheria's ladies-in-waiting. She had often begged him to clothe her in the monastic schema; and finally he submitted to the will of God and directed her to a place at the foot of the mountain where she would be able to practice the ascetic life. She was soon joined by other women of all classes to the number of seventy, so that Saint Auxentios had to build a church and establish a Monastery for them. It was called Trichinaria (from trikhinos, 'or hair') probably because of the rough tunics that Saint Auxentios made them wear. Every Friday and Sunday, the nuns would come up the mountain to the saint, who would exhort them persevere in the contest of virginity, not only of the body but above all of the soul.

Sometimes he would go down to them, negotiating the steep path to the Monastery with a youthful agility which belied his old age and infirmities. He had been down to the convent one day to look over some new buildings and had sent up fervent prayers for God's blessing on the community. On returning to his little shed, he fell ill and few days later (14 February 470) he was carried off to heaven. A great crowd from the deserts and the cities gathered for his funeral. The monks of Saint Hypatios sought possession of his honorable, grace-bearing holy relics but they were finally committed to the care of his spiritual daughters.

Sozomen commended Saint Auxentios as follows: "Auxentius was noted for his very faithful piety, his zeal for his friends, the moderation of his life, his love of letters, and the greatness of his attainments in pagan and ecclesiastical literature. He was modest and retiring in deportment, although admitted to familiarity with the emperor and the courtiers, and possessed of a very illustrious appointment. His memory is still revered by the monks and zealous men, who were all acquainted with him" (*Eccl. Hist.* 7.21). (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy 4:9-15

My son Timothy, this *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this *end* we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. These things command and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 19:1-10

At that time, *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, *there was* a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that *way*. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw *it*, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.” Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Men and women who choose, after being honorably widowed, to draw near to a life of virginity or to live [in a monastic community], should be like Anna, Phaniel's widow, [who] was both a widow and a prophetess. How was this possible? Because she renounced the worldly cares of everyday life and did not leave the Temple. She spent her days and nights in fasts, vigils, prayers and psalmody, and her life was blameless.... Hold fast to your purpose and follow in the footsteps of those who stayed unmarried all their lives. At one time Peter had a mother-in-law (cf. Mark 1:29-31, Luke 4:38-39), but he did not lag behind the virgin John when they both ran to the tomb where life began (cf. John 20:3-6). In some ways he even surpassed John, for he was appointed leader of the leaders by their Lord (cf. Matt. 16:18-19, John 21:15-17). When desire is redirected from the flesh to the spirit it raises us to such heights.

Be careful not to stand aloof from marriage as from something vulgar whilst at the same time failing to remain chaste because it is too difficult. In that case, you will drift away and fall unawares, for you are following neither what is according to the law nor what is superior to the law; but what is against the law. We regard widowed people who do not live chastely as worthy of condemnation...for Paul says that they have cast off their first faith (cf. I Tim. 5:11-12, I Cor. 7:27, 39-40). So how much more to be condemned are those who prefer illicit pleasure to lawful marriage, and who live with their wives but do not abstain from fornication. It was fornication which brought the universal flood upon those originally called God's sons (Gen. 6:1-7), which caused fire to rain down from heaven on the men of Sodom (Gen. 13:13; 18:20; 19:5-25), and brought defeat and terrible slaughter to

the Israelites at the hands of the Moabites (Num. 25:1-9). And at the present time, in my opinion, it brings upon us defeats at our enemies' hands and all sorts of misfortunes and disasters from within and without.

The first to be called sons of God in the Scriptures are the descendants of Enos, who was the first to hope to be called by the Name of the Lord (cf. Gen. 4:26 Lxx). Enos was the son of Seth, whose family was separate from the accursed family of Cain, and lived chastely. For their sake the world continued until, according to the Scripture, they saw the daughters of men, that is, the women of Cain's stock, that they were fair (Gen. 6:2). Overcome by their corrupt beauty, they took wives of all whom they chose, and learned their ways. Then evil increased on earth and the flood came and swept them all away (Gen. 6:17). If on earth in those days Noah and his sons had not been found to be chaste - as shown by the fact that each man had one wife with whom he went into the ark (Gen. 7:13) - there would have been no root or source from which a second world could begin.

Notice that the world would have been destroyed in those days on account of the promiscuous, had it not been preserved for the sake of the chaste. How will people who are unworthy even of this present life, seeing that they pervert its order into disorder, not be banished from the age to come? They will be handed over to the fire of hell because they did not withstand the fire of fleshly pleasures, unless they make haste now to quench it with repentance and wash away with tears the stains it has already caused. They should also be aware that if they do not quickly make a stand against this passion, in time they will be delivered up to worse, shameful, unnatural passions. These are the product of impure desires and attract here and now the fire of hell, which seizes the licentious and carries them away to eternal punishment.

Everyone has heard of the men of Sodom, of their fervor for completely unlawful depravity; the unprecedented rain of fire that fell on them and their destruction. Often a whole town had to bear the consequences of one man's lechery, as in the case of the inhabitants of the town of Shechem who were completely wiped out by Jacob's sons because Shechem defiled Jacob's daughter Dinah (Gen. 34:2-31). If we leave aside now those who lived before the law, the law itself commands that if a bride is found not to be a virgin she is to be stoned (Deut. 22:13-21), and if a priest's daughter plays the harlot she is to be burnt with fire (Lev. 21:9). It is also forbidden to offer the wages of prostitution in the Lord's Temple (Deut. 23:18). When the Israelites defiled themselves with Moabite women, twenty-three thousand men perished by the sword in one day (1 Cor, 10:8, cf. Num. 25:1-9, Exod. 32:28). The great Paul tells us, "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand" (1 Cor. 10:8).

Such are the penalties for fornication before the law and under the law, once the law was given.

But what about ourselves who have been enjoined to crucify the flesh with the passions and lusts (Gal. 5:24), but fall again into those sins on account of which God's wrath comes upon the children of disobedience (Col. 3:6)? We have been exhorted to mortify our members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection & lust, and have not heeded the advice (Col. 3:5). At the end of the day, if nothing else, we should at least fear natural disasters: from below, from above, those which have happened already, those eternal ones which threaten us. We should stand in awe of the appearance of Christ, the Sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2), in the flesh, and walk honestly as in the day (Rom. 13:13). We should be afraid of the apostle's warnings, declarations and counsels when he says, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Also, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19, 21). Also, "For this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5). Also, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication. For God has not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness. He therefore who despises, despises not man, but God, who has given us his Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 4:3, 7-8).

Who could recount all the sayings of the apostles and prophets on this subject? Those who are chaste, and therefore belong among Christ's members, are commanded by the apostle as follows: "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators" (1 Cor. 5:9). Because they themselves feel no shame, he advises the others to avoid them and awaken shame in them saying, "If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, with such an one do not eat" (1 Cor. 5:11). Notice that anyone who wallows in fornication is a stain on the whole Church (1 Cor. 5:6), so everyone should turn away from him and drive him out (1 Cor. 5:7). Paul himself delivered to Satan the fornicator in Corinth and neither allowed love to be shown towards him, nor accepted him, until he exhibited fitting repentance (1 Cor. 5:5).

Save your soul, O man, from such present and future evils, and from those twofold evils which are both in the present and the future. Esau's descendants were outcasts because he was immoral and sacrilegious (Gen. 25:25; 26:34-35, Heb. 12:16). Rehoboam was deprived of most of his kingdom (1 Kgs. 11:43) because his father Solomon, who was exceptionally obsessed with women (1 Kgs. 11:1-4, cf. Neh.

13:26), died without suffering this loss. Solomon was spared on account of David (I Kgs. 11:34), who with streams of tears and other works of repentance, continuously eroded the curse that at one time was inflicted on him.

You will observe that the passion of fornication pushes a person toward ungodliness. Susanna's beauty would not have beguiled the senior judges in Babylon, triumphed over them and resulted in their being stoned, if from the beginning they had fled from defilement and had not watched her every day lasciviously beforehand (Sus. 5-62). The wretched Holofernes would not have died with his neck severed if Judith's sandal had not previously, according to the Scripture, caught his eye and her beauty ensnared his soul (Judith 16:9). Job says, "I made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I think upon a maid" Job 31:1), how much less upon a corrupt woman either divorced or married?

Practice the single life as dear to God, or the married life as God's gift. Drink water from your own wells or rather, chastely from your one well. Keep away completely from the adulterated draught, which is the water of the Styx, the stream of the river Acheron. It is full of murderous venom and has poisonous powers, and invariably drags those who drink it down through the trapdoor of hell into its innermost recesses. Flee from the honeyed lips of prostitutes which are skilled in spreading shameful death, namely, separation from God. David said on this subject, "Those who wantonly desert you shall perish" (Ps. 72:27 Lxx).

We, whose bodies have become the temple of God through the Spirit, and in whom the Spirit dwells, must be clean, or at least be in the process of being cleansed, and remain always undefiled, contenting ourselves with permissible pleasures. We must make haste to attain purity and chastity and avoid fornication and every uncleanness, in order to rejoice throughout all ages with the pure bridegroom in the unsullied bridal-chambers. By the prayers of the ever-virgin, most pure, all-glorious Mother who bore Him in virginity for our salvation, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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

Also Commemorated Today: Hieromartyr Valentine

The Hieromartyr Bishop Valentine (In the West, St. Valentine is celebrated on February 14th, according to the Roman Martyrology. In the East, specifically the Slavic Churches, St. Valentine the Presbyter of Rome is celebrated on July 6th, while St. Valentine the Bishop of Terni is celebrated on July 30th. Often the two are assumed to be one man, though the details of their lives come from later sources. Notwithstanding, because of the relative obscurity of these two Saints in the East and since there is no commemoration of St. Valentine in the Greek

Orthodox Church, members of the Greek Orthodox Church named Valentinus (male) or Valentina (female) may observe their name day on the Western ecclesiastical calendar date of February 14th.) and his three disciples, Proculus, Ephebus and Apollonius, and the righteous Abundius, lived during the third century. Saint Valentine was a bishop in Umbria (Italy), in the city of Interamna (Terni). He received from God the gift of healing various maladies. He cured the brother of the Roman tribune, Frontanus, of an illness.

At this time three pagan youths, Proculus, Ephebus and Apollonius, came from Athens to Rome to study. They found a tutor named Craton, and lived in his home. Craton's son Cherimon fell grievously ill, and his spine was so contorted that his head was bent down to his knees. Craton asked Bishop Valentine to help his sick son. The holy bishop went into the sick child's room and prayed fervently all night. When day came, the happy parents saw their son had been healed. They believed in Christ and were baptized with all their household.

Craton's students, Proculus, Ephebus and Apollonius were also baptized and became devoted disciples of Saint Valentine. The bishop's fame quickly spread, and many were converted to Christ. Among them was the city prefect's son, Abundius, who openly confessed himself a Christian. This was a bold thing to do, since paganism prevailed in the world, and Christianity was persecuted.

The wrath of the prefect and other city leaders fell upon Bishop Valentine, the teacher of the youths. They demanded that he renounce Christ and worship the idols. After much torture they threw him into prison, where his followers visited him. Learning of this, the prefect gave orders to take Valentine out of the prison and behead him. Saint Valentine's students Proculus, Ephebus, and Apollonius took the body of their teacher and carried it outside the city walls of Interamnum, wherethey buried it along the Via Flaminia. Both believers and pagans were drawn to them, and they converted many idolaters to the true faith. When the authorities heard about this, they arrested the youths and threw them in prison. Fearing that people might break the sufferers out of prison, the executioners beheaded them by night. Abundius, learning that his friends had been locked in prison, hastened to see them, but found that they had already been executed. He buried their bodies near the grave of holy Bishop Valentine. Many years later the Basilica San Valentino of Terni was built on top of this cemetery. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

A Prayer for Those Who Have Fallen Into Melancholy

Master Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, Slow to Anger, Very Compassionate, and Almighty, whose philanthropy is as an incomprehensible sea, whose goodness is as an inexhaustible well, the mighty aid and help of the hopeless, send down Your rich compassion on Your servant (N...), who has fallen into melancholy, and

deliver them from all afflictions and depression, stress and anxiety, frustration, bitterness and sorrow. Give them healing of this continuous sickness and weakness, dizziness and turmoil. Grant them deliverance from all grief and state of listlessness. Plant in their heart joy and gladness, meekness and serenity, for You are easy to reconcile with and very merciful. Send them an angel from Your holy heavenly dwelling, a vigilant guardian, to strengthen them and protect them from all the wickedness and influence of the evil one. Raise a gladsome light on their face, a light of relaxation, rejoicing and peace, by the grace of Your Father Who is without begin-ning and Your life-giving Spirit, and the prayers and intercessions of Your all-immaculate Mother and all the Saints. Amen. (+Met. Chrysostomos of Mani, *adapted from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Sunday of Zacchaeus: The Lenten Journey Begins

The Paschal season of the Church is preceded by the season of Great Lent, which is also preceded by its own liturgical preparation. The first sign of the approach of Great Lent comes five Sundays before its beginning. On this Sunday (according to the Slavic Lectionary and sometimes according to the Greek Lectionary for which it is the Thirtieth Sunday After Pentecost), the Gospel reading is about Zacchaeus the tax-collector. It tells how Christ brought salvation to the sinful man, and how his life was changed simply because he "sought to see who Jesus was" (Luke 19:3). The desire and effort to see Jesus begins the entire movement through Lent towards Pascha. It is the first movement of salvation. Our lenten journey begins with a recognition of our own sinfulness, just as Zacchaeus recognized his. He promised to make restitution by giving half of his wealth to the poor, and by paying to those he had falsely accused four times as much as they had lost. In this, he went beyond the requirements of the Law (Ex. 22:3-12). The example of Zacchaeus teaches us that we should turn away from our sins, and atone for them. The real proof of our sorrow and repentance is not just a verbal apology, but when we correct ourselves and try to make amends for the consequences of our evil actions. We are also assured of God's mercy and compassion by Christ's words to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation is come to this house" (Luke 19:9). After the Great Doxology at Sunday Matins (when the Tone of the week is Tone 1, 3, 5, 7) we sing the Dismissal Hymn of the Resurrection "Today salvation has come to the world," which echoes the Lord's words to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was short, so he climbed a tree in order to see the Lord. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We are also short in our spiritual stature, therefore we must climb the ladder of the virtues. In other words, we must prepare for spiritual effort and growth. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

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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. 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.)