

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SERVICES

**Wednesday: Moleben to the
Theotokos 6 AM**

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6 AM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

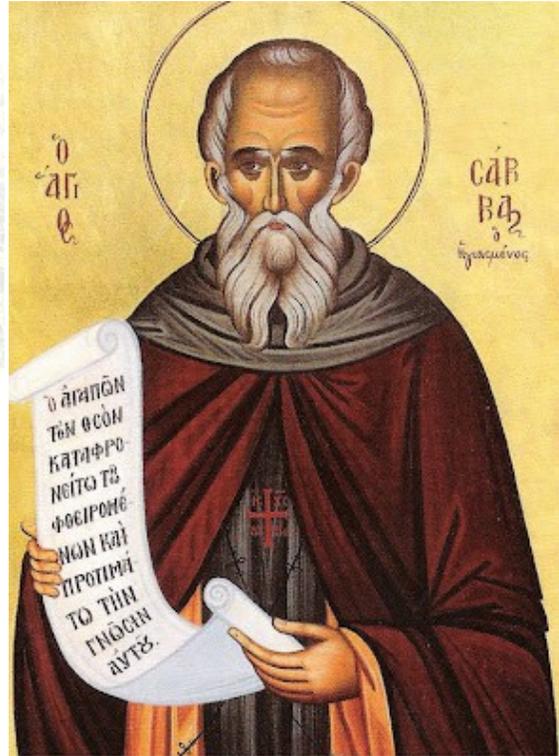
December 5, 2021 – 24th Sunday After Pentecost

Venerable Savva the Sanctified

Saint Savva (or Sabbas) the Sanctified was born in the fifth century at Cappadocia of pious Christian parents, John and Sophia. His father was a military commander. Journeying to Alexandria on military matters, John and Sophia left their five-year-old son Savva in the care of an uncle. When the boy reached eight years of age, he entered the monastery of Saint Flavian located nearby. The gifted child quickly learned to read and became an expert on the Holy Scriptures. In vain did his parents urge Saint Savva to return to the world and enter into marriage.

When he was seventeen years old he received monastic tonsure, and attained such perfection in fasting and prayer that he was given the gift of wonderworking. After spending ten years at the monastery of Saint Flavian, he went to Jerusalem, and from there to the monastery of Saint Euthymius the Great (January 20). But Saint Euthymius sent Saint Savva to Abba Theoctistus, the head of a nearby monastery with a strict cenobitic rule. Saint Savva lived in obedience at this monastery until the age of thirty.

After the death of the Elder Theoctistus, his successor blessed Saint Savva to seclude himself in a cave. On Saturdays, however, he left his hermitage and came



to the monastery, where he participated in divine services and ate with the brethren. After a certain time Saint Savva received permission not to leave his hermitage at all, and he struggled in the cave for five years.

Saint Euthymius attentively directed the life of the young monk, and seeing his spiritual maturity, he began to take him to the Rouba wilderness with him. They set out on January 14, and remained there until Palm Sunday. Saint Euthymius called Saint Savva a child-elder, and encouraged him to grow in the monastic virtues.

When Saint Euthymius fell asleep in the Lord (+ 473), Saint Savva withdrew from the Lavra and moved to a cave near the monastery of Saint Gerasimus of Jordan (March 4). After several years, disciples began to gather around Saint Savva, seeking the monastic life. As the number of monks increased, a lavra sprang up. When a pillar of fire appeared before Saint Savva as he was walking, he found a spacious cave in the form of a church.

Saint Savva founded several more monasteries. Many miracles took place through the prayers of Saint Savva: at the Lavra a spring of water welled up, during a time of drought there was abundant rain, and there were also healings of the sick and the demoniacs. Saint Savva composed the first monastic Rule of church services, the so-called “Jerusalem Typikon”, accepted by all the Palestine monasteries. The saint surrendered his soul to God in the year 532. (*from oca.org*)

Today’s Epistle Lesson – St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians 2:14-22

Brethren, He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Today’s Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 17:12-19

At that time, as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up *their* voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” So when He saw *them*, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of

them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on *his* face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where *are* the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” And He said to him, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

There are three things, my brethren, by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other.

Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them, they cannot be separated. If you have only one of them or not all together, you have nothing. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others you open God's ear to yourself.

When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know that you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive, give. If you ask for yourself what you deny to others, your asking is a mockery.

Let this be the pattern for all men when they practice mercy: show mercy to others in the same way, with the same generosity, with the same promptness, as you want others to show mercy to you. Therefore, let prayer, mercy and fasting be one single plea to God on our behalf, one speech in our defense, a threefold united prayer in our favor.

Let us use fasting to make up for what we have lost by despising others. Let us offer our souls in sacrifice by means of fasting. There is nothing more pleasing that we can offer to God, as the psalmist said in prophecy, “A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; God does not despise a bruised and humbled heart.”

Offer your soul to God, make him an oblation of your fasting, so that your soul may be a pure offering, a holy sacrifice, a living victim, remaining your own and at the same time made over to God. Whoever fails to give this to God will not be excused, for if you are to give him yourself you are never without the means of giving.

To make these acceptable, mercy must be added. Fasting bears no fruit unless it is watered by mercy. Fasting dries up when mercy dries up. Mercy is to fasting as rain is to the earth. However much you may cultivate your heart, clear the soil of

your nature, root out vices, sow virtues, if you do not release the springs of mercy, your fasting will bear no fruit.

When you fast, if your mercy is thin your harvest will be thin; when you fast, what you pour out in mercy overflows into your barn. Therefore, do not lose by saving, but gather in by scattering. Give to the poor, and you give to yourself. You will not be allowed to keep what you have refused to give to others. - St. Peter Chrysologus

The Miraculous Return of the Relics of St. Savvas the Sanctified

St. Savvas the Sanctified during his lifetime told his disciples that his incorrupt body would be removed from his monastery and later would rest in the Lavra, which he founded. He said this return of his relics would come before the end of the world. This prophecy was fulfilled when the holy relics of St. Savvas were stolen by the crusaders of the First Crusade (1096 – 1099) together with many other relics and brought to Venice, Italy where he was enshrined in a church dedicated to St. Anthony. Nearly nine centuries later his relics were returned to Israel.

On 10 October 1965 the relics of St. Savvas were returned by Pope Paul VI to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The reception was made, at the direction of Patriarch Benediktos of Jerusalem, by Bishop Vasilios of Jerusalem, Fr. Theodosios the Abbot of Bethany, Fr. Seraphim the Abbot of St. Savvas Lavra, and the Hierodeacon (and future Metropolitan of Nazareth) Kyriakos.

Though it is commonly recorded that this gesture on behalf of the Pope was made merely as an ecumenical gesture, such as that of the [skull of St. Andrew in Patras](#), with regards to the return of the relics of St. Savvas there is more to the story. In fact, it was St. Savvas himself who was urging Pope Paul VI to have his relics returned, appearing first to his predecessor Pope John XXIII in his dreams and causing a scene in his reliquary.

Fr. Seraphim, the Abbot of St. Savvas Lavra, explains everything as follows:

“The Pope did not give us the holy relic because he loved us, but because he [St. Savvas] would constantly appear to him [Pope John XXIII] and would bother him to have his relics returned to his monastery. When the Pope died he did not take the wishes of the Saint into account, so he appeared again to his successor [Pope Paul VI]. Even in the church where his holy relics were treasured in a glass coffin, he would hit the glass and cause trouble, frightening the guards and the Latin monks.”

Patriarch Benediktos had insisted that Fr. Seraphim attend the reception of the relics. He even told the Abbot: “In your days, Fr. Seraphim, Saint Savvas has returned!” Fr. Seraphim responded: “No, in your days, Your Holiness.”

When the Orthodox representatives arrived at the Church of Saint Anthony in Venice they wondered if indeed these were the relics of Saint Savvas. Fr. Seraphim observed every inch of the incorrupt relic to see if he could see a sign of authenticity. He noticed that one of the eyes of St. Savvas was missing. This proved it for him, since in his biography it is said that the Monophysites removed one of his eyes. Moved by this Fr. Seraphim would not leave the side of the relics till they arrived at his monastery. Even when the holy relics arrived in Athens where they were to be venerated by the faithful prior to the return, Fr. Seraphim stood all night guarding the holy relics while everyone else was sleeping. Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth describes the scene as if Fr. Seraphim and St. Savvas were having a conversation that night.

A problem arose when it came time to dress the holy relics in Orthodox vestments, since the Latins had dressed him in Latin vestments. After nine centuries it would be impossible to maneuver the body so as to put on the rason, the monastic schema and epitachelion among other things. To further complicate matters, the hands of St. Savvas were crossed over his chest. Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth describes what then happened as follows: “We then saw Abbot Seraphim kneel before the holy relics and pray for a good amount of time. At one point he arose and did prostrations and lifted the arms of Saint Savvas as one would a living man before the amazed eyes of us all.” They were able to change the vestments without a problem in Venice before the return to Jerusalem.

When the glass coffin arrived at the Piazza San Marco on the pier, there was a gondola that transported it by escort to an area near the airport. In a strange coincidence it was the same pier the sacred relic had disembarked centuries ago. Countless pigeons were gathered there, as if they were there to honor the event. Even many years later, when Fr. Seraphim and Metropolitan Kyriakos would reminisce about those days, they would always talk about the pigeons.

When the holy relics finally arrived in Jerusalem it was first brought to the Church of the Resurrection for many days. Here the women could venerate the holy relics prior to being brought permanently to the all-male monastic Lavra of St. Savvas. Fr. Seraphim tells of a certain miracle at this time in Jerusalem. An Orthodox nun who was waiting to venerate the holy relics had doubts over whether or not the Latin’s had indeed given the authentic relics to the Orthodox. It was then that she saw the head of St. Savvas lift and turn to her, then it returned again in its place. Her joy removed all doubts. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

St. Sabbas the Sanctified Monastery – A History

The holy and respected Laura of our Holy Father Sabbas the Sanctified in the Judean desert is a unique phenomenon in ecclesiastic history because of its contribution in forming worship and the monastic order and hymnography as well as its multitude of Saints, austere anchorites, divinely inspired theologians and martyrs. Even more significant was the decisive role of the Laura in fighting the heresies which appeared in the Holy Land after its foundation, the defense of Orthodoxy and the rights of the only legitimate Patriarchate of Jerusalem, namely the Greek Orthodox.

The Great Laura of St Sabbas, which celebrates more than 1,500 years of unceasing monasticism, owes its foundation and development to the God-endowed and Spirit-filled monk Saint Sabbas (439-532), who was the lamp shining from on high for those wishing to live the life of an anchorite and fervent intercessor before the Lord for all future “Sabbaites” monks. The first nucleus of the Laura was created by seventy hermits who had gathered around St Sabbas in 483 A.D. Subsequently, the Laura was relocated from the eastern side of the Kidron valley, where the hermitage of St Sabbas was located, to the western side, where the Theotistos Church was built (486, consecration 491 A.D.). The increased number of the brotherhood members made it necessary to build the main church of the Theotokos (502 A.D.) and to organize the Laura buildings and facilities so as to serve the ever increasing needs. St Sabbas’ reputation and holiness, which resulted in his elevation to head and instructor of all the anchorites of the Jerusalem area (493 A.D.), influenced even the Great Laura which became the model of monastic life and liturgical order – *The Typikon* – not only for the other monasteries in Palestine and, during the Middle Ages, the worldwide Church.

Under the leadership of St Sabbas, the Great Laura initially undertook the fight against the heresy of Monophysitism from 512 to 516 A.D., confronting emperor Anastasios and the other three Patriarchates of the East, which were in the hands of the Monophysites. The courageous stand and confession of the anchorites saved the Patriarchate of Jerusalem from heresy. St Sabbas’ successors in the abbacy made the Laura a stronghold against the heresy of Origenism. Under the guidance of Sabbaites St John the Hesychast, former bishop of Colonia (454-558), the Laura abbots Gelasios (537-546), Kassianos (547-548) and Konon (548-568) overwhelmed the wiles of Origenists and their intrigues before the emperor Justinian, yet not without cost. The monks of the Laura, which was the only monastery supporting Orthodoxy, suffered persecution and acts of violence and even the enforced enthronement of the Origenist Abbot Georgios (547 A.D.). Nevertheless, God saved the Laura, and Konon’s actions contributed greatly to the summoning of the Fifth Ecumenical Synod (Council) (553 A.D.), which

condemned the errors of Origen once and for all and favored the entire Church forever. The appearance of the Persians in the Holy Land (614 A.D.) was the prelude of the invasion of the Arabs of Islam (638 A.D.). The first holy martyrs of the Laura were the forty-four Sabbaite Fathers slain by the Persians on May 16, 614 A.D.

The reorganization of the Great Laura under Patriarch Modestos after the Arabian conquest was followed by the glorious period, the “golden age” of the Laura, namely the eighth and part of the ninth century, A.D. The greatest theologian of the eighth century, St John of Damascus, the hymnographer, Kosmas the Hagiopolite, Stephanos the Melodist, Michael the Synkellos, Theodore and Theophanes the *Graptoi* (Branded), Theodore, bishop of Karron (Abu Qurrah), -- distinguished for their holiness and theology, and the Saints Stephanos the miracle-worker, Theodore bishop of Edessa and Michael the holy martyr enriched both the Church of Jerusalem and the Universal Church. Despite the violent and murderous invasions of various barbarians (796, 809, 813 A.D.) and general disorder, the contribution of the Laura to the Church reaches its peak with the stand in favor of the holy icons of St John of Damascus during the first period of Iconoclasm (726-787) and that of Saints Michael Syncellos, Theophanes and Theodore the *Graptoi* (Branded). The significant role of the Laura for theology is evidenced by the fact that the last three above mentioned confessors were summoned to Constantinople by St Theodore the Studite in relation to this subject. Apart from its theological literary production during this period, the Laura increased its copying and translating activities, becoming the center of Georgian literature from the seventh to the tenth century, as well as the center for translation of ecclesiastical writings from Greek into Arabic. A characteristic example of this is the widely known *Ascetic Homilies* by St Isaac the Syrian which were first translated from Syrian into Greek by the monks Avramios and Patrikios at the end of the eighth century. The liturgical *Typikon* of the Laura, along with the hymns of the Sabbaite hymnographers and probably certain monastic practices of the Laura were widely disseminated by distinguished monastery founders from the 9th to the 13th century. The Laura *Typikon* influenced, to a great or lesser degree, the monastic *Typika* written by St Theodore the Studite (ninth century), St Paul the Younger of Mount Latros (11th century), St Lazaros of Mount Galesion (10-11th century), St Luke of Messina (Sicily, 12th century), St Neophytos the Recluse (Cyprus, 12-13th century) and St Nilos of Tamasia (Monastery of Maheras, beginning of 13th century). Already in the ninth century the *Typikon* of the Laura had found its way to far-away Georgia (by Gregory Khandzta in 826 A.D.). Parallel there was also a spreading of the new hymnographic poetic form, the *canon*, developed mainly by St John of Damascus and his subsequent “Sabbaite poetic school.” The

hymnographic production of the Laura was the foundation upon which ecclesiastical worship was shaped in the period after Iconoclasm. The eight tones in the melody, ascribed to St John of Damascus, prevailed in worship, while his *Octaechos* constituted the core of the *Paraklitiki*, the main liturgical book of the church.

During the occupation of the Crusaders, the position of the Laura abbot appears to have been exceptionally high with the Latins, on account of the absence of an Orthodox patriarch in Jerusalem. The Laura was endowed with assets by Queen Melissenda (1131-1162) while the church of the Theotokos and its frescos were renovated by the emperor Manuel Komninos (1143-1186) circa 1169.

The victory of Saladin's Mamluks against the Crusaders in 1187 A.D. was the beginning of still further hardships for Palestinian Monasticism. Despite the renewed slaughter of Sabbaite monks, the Laura continued to function when all others in the desert were destroyed. During this period the Laura shrank to its core, the surrounding walls were erected and the monks adopted the coenobitic way of life abandoning the lavreotic. The Laura then went through the most difficult phase of struggle for survival within a hostile environment. Nevertheless, it became a significant school for the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher which taught the monastic way of life and matters concerning ecclesiastical subjects. A new renovation of the Laura Katholikon and St Sabbas' tomb by the emperor Ioannis Kantakouzinus was carried out in the middle of the 14th century.

Even more decisive for this period and for the future of Orthodox worship was the spread of the so-called "neo-Sabbaitic liturgical *Typikon*" (i.e. the synthesis of the old Sabbaitic *Typikon* with elements of the Studite *Typikon*). Having replaced the *Typika* of the Studite and the Mother of God *Evergetis* monasteries this *Typikon* was established in Constantinople in the 13th-14th century. (Convents of Lips, St Demetrios Kellibara and Mother of God *Bebaia Elpis*.) During this period, the *Typikon* was established as far away as Serbia by St Sabbas the Serbian (1175-1236) and the archbishop of Serbia Nicodemos (1317-1324). The new Sabbaitic *Typikon*, on account of the radiant theology of Hesychasm, spread throughout the Balkans, Bulgaria and Russia. From its definitive prevalence everywhere in the 16th century until today, the Sabbaitic-Athonite liturgical *Typikon* has been established as the *Typikon* of universal Orthodoxy.

The Turkish invasion of Palestine under sultan Selim, accomplished by a new slaughtering of the Sabbaite fathers, did not affect the life of the Laura favorably. Although the sultans had issued more than thirty firmans (between 1533 and 1735) concerning reconstruction of the Laura buildings, tax exemptions and the protection and rights of the Sabbaite Brotherhood, the Sabbaite fathers suffered

greatly for many years and whole Arabic villages moved into the Laura. The significant presence of Serbian monks in the Laura, which had initially been a positive bolstering of the small number of Greek monks, ended at the beginning of the 17th century when the Serbians were unable to pay off the debts accrued by their construction activities. The intervention of Patriarch Theofanes III (1608-1644) barely saved the Laura from the hands of the Armenian and Latin creditors.

Among all the benefactors and donors of the Laura were the patriarchs of Jerusalem Nektarios (1669-1707), the so-called “great benefactor,” since they succeeded in restoring the Laura to the exclusive use and habitation of the Sabbaite fathers. Furthermore, they undertook (chiefly Dositheos) numerous and expensive renovations and expansions of the churches, buildings, reservoirs and the wall of the Laura during the years 1667 and 1686.

The Laura owes the present condition of its buildings to constructive activity carried out after the catastrophic earthquake on May 13, 1834 and the subsequent abbacy of Ioasaf the Cretan (1843-1874), a saintly figure of Palestinian monasticism of recent times. Proof of the spiritual depth of this holy, simple, humble and discerning monk is the fact that, for the first time after many centuries, the number of the Sabbaite fathers rose to around eighty.

The continual political changes in the Near East during the 20th century have, by the Grace of God and the intercessions of the Theotokos and our Father St Sabbas, created fewer problems for the Laura than for other monasteries and shrines of the Orthodox Patriarchate. On the contrary, the return of the incorruptible Holy Relics of St Sabbas in 1965, after their absence (possibly since the 13th century) has proved to be a great blessing for the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher, the Laura monks and all the Orthodox Christians of the Holy Land, but also undoubtedly the cause of sure hope in God and evidence of the unceasing fatherly care of St Sabbas for his Laura. The spiritual life of the Laura and the diversity of its contributions to the confrontation of the problems faced by the fathers of the Holy Sepulcher, the Orthodox flock and the pious pilgrims of the Holy Places, makes it possible even today to confirm the truth of the age-old assertion: *“Just as Jerusalem is the queen of all cities, so too the Laura of St Sabbas is the prince of all deserts, and so far as Jerusalem is the norm of other cities, so too is St Sabbas the exemplar for other monasteries.”*

Taken from an album published by St Sabbas the Sanctified Monastery in Jerusalem in 2002 as part of their celebration of 1,500 unceasing years of monasticism.

Social Team for December 12

Team 4 is up next week – Samouris, Kopan, Connell. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Howl family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, John Reece, Mary Reed, Rose Song, Sandy Tucker, Dcn. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)