

# 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**

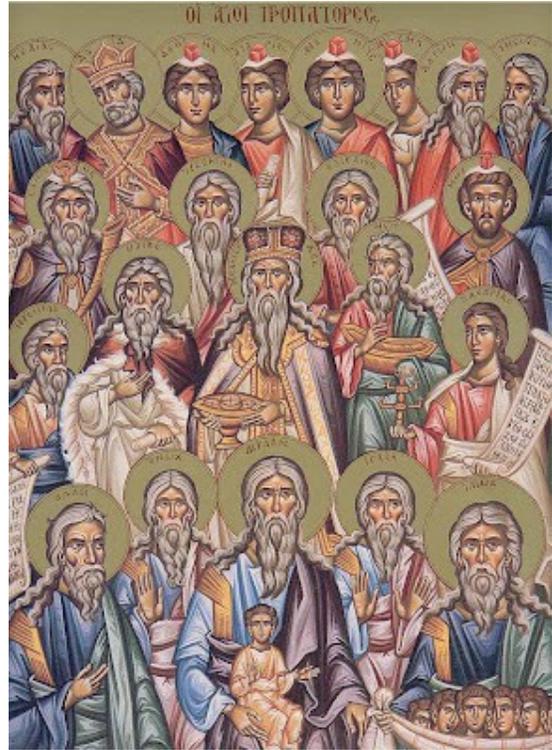
**Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6 AM**

**Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM**

**Great Vespers 5:00 PM**

**Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM**

**Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM**



**December 12, 2021 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Before Nativity**

## **Saint Spyridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus**

The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers occurs between the 11th and the 17th of December. This Sunday commemorates all the ancestors of the people of God, the holy patriarchs living up to the law, given on Sinai, and under the law, - from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed; together with them are commemorated those who preached Christ; the holy prophets - from Samuel to Zechariah and to John the Baptist, and all the Old Testament righteous men, who were righteous in the faith in the coming of the Messiah. Especially in the service for this day are praised the pious youths Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, who in faith were thrown into the fiery furnace and «who in the middle of the flames were cooled by the dew of the Spirit and who walked about rejoicing, are mystically a prototype of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ» from the Virgin, who after giving birth remained a virgin. With these holy youths are commemorated also “the righteous Daniel and the wonderful prophets”, who, clearly revealing the divine second coming, saw Christ, “coming to all nations as Judge”, and who, “your mind

illuminated by divine radiance”, “that clearly the Virgin would give birth represented in mystical images”.

“Today as we celebrate the Forefathers’ memory”, the holy Church exclaims: “let us offer praise to the fathers, who shone forth before and during the law, with righteous minds they served the Lord and Master who shone forth from the Virgin, now they delight in the unending light.” “Let us offer songs of praise to the prophets of God”. “Let us honor the holy youths, for they quenched the flaming furnace, together with the prophet Daniel, and all the righteous ones who shone forth before the law, together with those who served the Master under the law.” By accomplishing “now the honor of the memory of the forefathers”, the holy Church edifies us, that we, in the expectation of the great and light-bearing day of the Nativity of Christ, is reflected by the faith and life of the holy Forefathers and, through them, has prepared ourselves, by their example, to the worthy meeting of the Lord Who came from Heaven, who has adorned their soul with virtues beforehand to be ready for the great and light-bearing day of the Nativity of our Savior worthily to meet Him with the lamp of faith and with the oil of charitable deeds, with the firm hope of life everlasting, with the light of both the joyful face of cleanliness and purity.

Singing in the service for this day “the god-pleasing life” of the Old Testament righteous men, the Holy Church thus represents our intellectual look at the whole universe of great virtues, such as: the God-loving gentleness and meekness of the first martyr in the world, Abel, the holy zeal for the glorification of the name of God, Enos, the high divine thinking and the fear of God, Enoch, the firmness in faith and piety, Noah among the general depravity of his contemporary world, the wonderful faith and obedience to the word of God, Abraham, filial obedience, Isaac up to the preparation to be offered as a burnt offering according to the command of God, the kind domestic bravery, Sarah, the penetrating maternal love, Rebecca, the mild humility, Jacob who earned the rage of Laban and Esau, the holy chastity, Joseph who was more than ready to suffer and die, rather than to sin before God, the unhampered invincible patience in the sufferings and misfortunes, Job, the meek, wise leadership, Moses and Samuel, the inspiring courage through faith, Joshua son of Nun, Barak, and Gideon, the high self-sacrificing love for their country and people, Judith and Esther, the plaintive and contrite repentance, David and Manasseh, the ascetic and divinely intellectual life, Elijah and Elisha, the zeal for the glory of God of the holy prophets, the unhampered invincible dedication to the law of God and usual patriotism of the three youths in Babylon and the rest of the good

deeds of all the other Old Testament men we celebrate, «of whom the world was not worthy» (Hebrews 11:38). According to the teaching of St. Gregory the Theologian, each of these virtues stand by themselves «as a special way to salvation, and undoubtedly results in any one of the everlasting and blessed abodes; for as the generations of life are various, so are the abodes of God are many (John 14:2), and in them are divided and are assigned to everyone according to his worthiness. Therefore let one fulfill his virtue, one to another, the other of the many, and whoever, if it is possible, and in everything; only let everyone go without stopping, let everyone strive forward and follow steadily in the steps of the good leaders, who directly leads a path for him, and makes his way through the narrow gate (Matthew 7:14) to lead to the heights of the blessed heaven».

Together with them the holy Church on the present day, that its appeal be not in vain, places in the Gospel reading by the clergy about those called in Vespers, inspiring us, that we can be distracted from worthily meeting the Lord by the predominance of flesh over spirit, the attachment to the terrestrial, the blinding by gleam of worldly goods, the predilection for vanity, the unwillingness to deny one's self-love and pride everyday, the enslavement to passions and covetousness, and in the Epistle reading directly commands us to destroy our earthly members: fornication, impurity, passion, evil lust and cupidity, to lay aside anger, evil, blaspheming, slander, lies, and in general to take off the old man and put on the new in the image of the Creator (Col. 3:4-11). (*from Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., by S. V. Bulgakov (Trans. Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris)*)

**Saint Spyridon** of Tremithus was born towards the end of the third century on the island of Cyprus. He was a shepherd, and had a wife and children. He used all his substance for the needs of his neighbors and the homeless, for which the Lord rewarded him with a gift of wonderworking. He healed those who were incurably sick, and cast out demons.

After the death of his wife, during the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337), he was made Bishop of Tremithus, Cyprus. As a bishop, the saint did not alter his manner of life, but combined pastoral service with deeds of charity.

According to the witness of Church historians, Saint Spyridon participated in the sessions of the First Ecumenical Council in the year 325. At the Council, the saint entered into a dispute with a Greek philosopher who was defending the Arian heresy. The power of Saint Spyridon's plain, direct speech showed everyone the importance of God's wisdom before human wisdom: "Listen, philosopher, to what I tell you. There is one God Who created man from dust. He has ordered all things,

both visible and invisible, by His Word and His Spirit. The Word is the Son of God, Who came down upon the earth on account of our sins. He was born of a Virgin, He lived among men, and suffered and died for our salvation, and then He arose from the dead, and He has resurrected the human race with Him. We believe that He is one in essence (consubstantial) with the Father, and equal to Him in authority and honor. We believe this without any sly rationalizations, for it is impossible to grasp this mystery by human reason.”

As a result of their discussion, the opponent of Christianity became the saint’s zealous defender and later received holy Baptism. After his conversation with Saint Spyridon, the philosopher turned to his companions and said, “Listen! Until now my rivals have presented their arguments, and I was able to refute their proofs with other proofs. But instead of proofs from reason, the words of this Elder are filled with some sort of special power, and no one can refute them, since it is impossible for man to oppose God. If any of you thinks as I do now, let him believe in Christ and join me in following this man, for God Himself speaks through his lips.”

At this Council, Saint Spyridon displayed the unity of the Holy Trinity in a remarkable way. He took a brick in his hand and squeezed it. At that instant fire shot up from it, water dripped on the ground, and only dust remained in the hands of the wonderworker. “There was only one brick,” Saint Spyridon said, “but it was composed of three elements. In the Holy Trinity there are three Persons, but only one God.”

The saint cared for his flock with great love. Through his prayers, drought was replaced by abundant rains, and incessant rains were replaced by fair weather. Through his prayers the sick were healed and demons cast out.

A woman once came up to him with a dead child in her arms, imploring the intercession of the saint. He prayed, and the infant was restored to life. The mother, overcome with joy, collapsed lifeless. Through the prayers of the saint of God, the mother was restored to life.

Another time, hastening to save his friend, who had been falsely accused and sentenced to death, the saint was hindered on his way by the unanticipated flooding of a stream. The saint commanded the water: “Halt! For the Lord of all the world commands that you permit me to cross so that a man may be saved.” The will of the saint was fulfilled, and he crossed over happily to the other shore. The judge, apprised of the miracle that had occurred, received Saint Spyridon with esteem and set his friend free.

Similar instances are known from the life of the saint. Once, he went into an empty church, and ordered that the lampadas and candles be lit, and then he began the

service. When he said, "Peace be unto all," both he and the deacon heard from above the resounding of a great multitude of voices saying, "And with thy spirit." This choir was majestic and more sweetly melodious than any human choir. To each petition of the litanies, the invisible choir sang, "Lord, have mercy." Attracted by the church singing, the people who lived nearby hastened towards it. As they got closer and closer to the church, the wondrous singing filled their ears and gladdened their hearts. But when they entered into the church, they saw no one but the bishop and several church servers, and they no longer heard the singing which had greatly astonished them.

Saint Simeon Metaphrastes (November 9), the author of his *Life*, likened Saint Spyridon to the Patriarch Abraham in his hospitality. Sozomen, in his *Church History*, offers an amazing example from the life of the saint of how he received strangers. One time, at the start of the Forty-day Fast, a stranger knocked at his door. Seeing that the traveller was very exhausted, Saint Spyridon said to his daughter, "Wash the feet of this man, so he may recline to dine." But since it was Lent there were none of the necessary provisions, for the saint "partook of food only on certain days, and on other days he went without food." His daughter replied that there was no bread or flour in the house. Then Saint Spyridon, apologizing to his guest, ordered his daughter to cook a salted ham from their larder. After seating the stranger at table, he began to eat, urging that man to do the same. When the latter refused, calling himself a Christian, the saint rejoined, "It is not proper to refuse this, for the Word of God proclaims, 'Unto the pure all things are pure'" (Titus 1:15).

Another historical detail reported by Sozomen, was characteristic of the saint. It was his custom to distribute one part of the gathered harvest to the destitute, and another portion to those having need while in debt. He did not take a portion for himself, but simply showed them the entrance to his storeroom, where each could take as much as was needed, and could later pay it back in the same way, without records or accountings.

There is also the tale by Socrates Scholasticus about how robbers planned to steal the sheep of Saint Spyridon. They broke into the sheepfold at night, but here they found themselves all tied up by some invisible power. When morning came the saint went to his flock, and seeing the tied-up robbers, he prayed and released them. For a long while he advised them to leave their path of iniquity and earn their livelihood by respectable work. Then he made them a gift of a sheep and sending them off, the saint said kindly, "Take this for your trouble, so that you did not spend a sleepless night in vain."

All the Lives of the saint speak of the amazing simplicity and the gift of wonderworking granted him by God. Through a word of the saint the dead were awakened, the elements of nature tamed, the idols smashed. At one point, a Council had been convened at Alexandria by the Patriarch to discuss what to do about the idols and pagan temples there. Through the prayers of the Fathers of the Council all the idols fell down except one, which was very much revered. It was revealed to the Patriarch in a vision that this idol had to be shattered by Saint Spyridon of Tremithus. Invited by the Council, the saint set sail on a ship, and at the moment the ship touched shore and the saint stepped out on land, the idol in Alexandria with all its offerings turned to dust, which then was reported to the Patriarch and all the bishops.

Saint Spyridon lived his earthly life in righteousness and sanctity, and prayerfully surrendered his soul to the Lord. His relics repose on the island of Corfu (Kerkyra), in a church named after him (His right hand, however, is located in Rome). (*from oca.org*)

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:4-11**

BRETHREN, when Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 14:16-24**

The Lord spoke a parable, saying, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.' And the servant said,

‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’”

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

When the only-begotten Son of God took flesh for us of the Virgin and, through His way of life in the flesh, fulfilled the law given by Moses, perfected the law of grace and transformed that old law for our Church, the Hebrew race was expelled from the sacred congregation and we were brought in instead, the elect from among the Gentiles, whom the Lord unites with Himself and the Father. He adopts us as true sons and brothers, and - O ineffable love for mankind! - even as His parents. “For whosoever,” he says, “shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Matt. 12:50).

In church today, however, we celebrate the forefathers, most of whom were Hebrews by race. For what reason? So that all of us may learn that the Hebrews were not disinherited nor the Gentiles adopted as sons in a way that was unjust, unreasonable or unworthy of God who did these things and made these changes. Rather, just as among those Gentiles who were called, only the obedient were chosen for kinship with God, so the race of Israel, and Adam's descendants down to Israel's time, were a great multitude, but only those among them who lived according to God's will were true Israelites. To them the prophecies belonged, through them future events were prefigured, and to them the promises were given. Only these men were the true fathers and forefathers, firstly of her who in virginity bore Christ, who is God over all, according to the flesh, and then, through Him, of ourselves. These fathers and forefathers were certainly not cast out of Christ's Church, for they are publicly commemorated by us today as partakers of the fullness of the saints. For in Christ Jesus there is neither old nor new, nor Greek, nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all. In Him there is no Jew, which is one merely outwardly, neither is there any circumcision, which is outward, but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter of the law. All, old and new, who have been well-pleasing to God, and all who have led lives acceptable to God, either before the law, under the law or after the law in the gospel of grace, have this circumcision and are united by it.

If you look at God's dispensation for the human race with understanding, you will see that from beginning to end it is inwardly consistent and follows a logical order. It is now the case that the elect from every nation receive a new name as Christians, but those who are fruitless are rejected, “For many are called, but few

chosen,” as the Lord Himself says (Matt. 20:16). And it was the same with those who lived in ancient times and those of the Jewish nation who came after them. Of those people who received new names, only the elect were accepted, whereas the mass of unprofitable people among them were cast out. Of Seth's descendants, who were called the sons of God, those who were seized with mad desire for the daughters of men were, according to the Scripture, disinherited. The unprofitable majority among the Jews were not the proselytes, but those who were born Jewish, and were even legitimate sons, after the flesh, of Jacob, the first to bear the name of Israel, yet were disobedient like Esau. Even Absalom, the son of the prophet and king David, their first ruler after Saul, was a stranger to the sacred race because he sought to kill his father.

In the same way, not all of us who are called after Christ, as they were after Israel, will be reckoned as belonging to the Christian race, but only those who live according to His will, keep His commandments, and make up for their shortcomings with repentance. Judas Iscariot was not just one of those called, but one of the apostles, and not merely one of the apostles, but one of the company of the twelve chief apostles. But he was estranged from kinship with Christ and became of all men the most alienated from the name of Christ. Why? Because he did not hasten towards the kingdom of heaven that was being proclaimed, nor did he regard the extraordinary deeds and teaching of the Savior. For when God's signs and works are understood, they lead those with the desire for knowledge of them to faith, and listening to holy instruction inspired by the truth that is in God reveals the way of life pleasing to God. With the help of both the miracles and the teaching, we can learn to despise bodily and earthly concerns, and lift up our minds to the hope laid up in heaven.

Judas, however, had no desire for these things, but looked towards the earth and theft, to earthly and detestable gains, and to the advantages he anticipated receiving from them for his flesh. He was a lover of what had been forbidden on many occasions and in many ways by the Father, Lord and Teacher of all. His kinship was not with Christ, nor with his fellow apostles at the time, but with those to whom the Lord had said, “You seek me, not because you saw the miracles, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled” (John 6:26). Having seen the miracles, eaten the bread, and heard the words of the enhypostatic Word made man for our sake, those people shouted to Pilate, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him” (John 19:15). In exactly the same way Judas, too, after seeing the Lord's majesty and divinity with his own eyes, and having more experience of it than others, handed Him over to those who sought to murder Him. But Christ was patient “unto death, even the death of the cross” - O inexpressible forbearance! - and in addition to triumphing over the prince of evil, He guides us towards

patience and shows us that temptations and afflictions are for our good. “In afflictions we have remembered you,” says the Scripture (Is. 26:16 LXX), and “I will bear the correction of the Lord” (Mic. 7:9), and “Your correction has lifted me up” (Ps. 18:35 LXX), that is to say, “When I was bending down towards my body and its concerns, Your chastening raised me up and persuaded me to look towards You alone.”

If, however, you do not run to God in times of trouble, and are not raised up by His correction, what other occasion, what else in existence or among creatures will serve to restore you? You may say that our bodies must have physical nourishment and other necessities. But of course; who can deny that? If you have these things in abundance, you obviously received them from God - “For what do you have,” asks the Scripture, “that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7) – so give thanks to the giver, express your gratitude through your actions. As He took your will into account and fulfilled your desire, so you too should draw near, heed His will, learn it thoroughly, obey it and put it into practice, that you may be praised for your wisdom. “Whosoever hears,” says the Lord, “these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man” (Matt. 7:24). From then on you will have Him as your generous benefactor, not only in respect of earthly, perishable goods, but also with regard to future heavenly gifts that endure. “Well done,” He says, “good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things; enter into the joy of your lord” (Matt. 25:21). If, on the other hand, you do not have an abundance now of what your body needs, or fear that poverty lies ahead, again you should approach Him, again you should entreat Him, again you should obey Him; because it says, “Obey the Lord and beseech him” (Ps. 37:7 LXX). Again therefore show yourself a good servant of His through your deeds. For He it is, according to the Psalms, “Who gives them their food in due season, Who opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing” (Ps. 145:15-16). He says, “I shall not fail you nor forsake you” (Deut. 31:6), and “Behold, my servants shall eat,” but He tells those who do not serve Him, “You shall be hungry” (Is. 65:13).

Why do you imitate irrational animals in what is harmful to you, by stooping down towards your stomach and not looking up from earthly concerns, even though you were created upright, so that you might set your mind on heavenly things and seek what is above? Why do you want to be bound like that woman who was bent over because Satan had bound her for eighteen years, even though the Word of life who released her can easily set you free and wishes to do so? Provided only that you run to Him, listen to Him and obey Him, and do not stop your ears, turn away or rebel.

Why do you copy brute beasts in this characteristic of theirs which is damaging to you, but not in what is to your advantage? Listen to the prophet saying that even lion cubs howl when they need food, and ask God for it and receive prey? “The young lions,” he says, “roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God” (Ps. 104:21). By referring to lion cubs, he leaves those with understanding to deduce that this applies even more to other animals. For if lions, the most voracious, predatory and powerful of beasts, only have an abundance of prey when God gives it, what shall we say of other creatures? Christ, too, makes this same point in the gospel with regard to birds, saying, “Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them” (Matt. 6:26). But why confine myself to animals on dry land, in the air, the sea, or even amphibians? If God, it says, so cares for and so decoratively and magnificently clothes “the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, and which neither toils nor spins, shall he not much more clothe and feed you, of little faith?” (Matt. 6:28-30).

Brethren, “Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” and not only will you be justified by His grace and become heirs of this perpetual kingdom of God for ever, but also, “all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). If, however, you do not seek God's kingdom and righteousness as a priority, but only those things which sustain this unstable body, you will not receive even what you seek, unless it be for the increase of your body's suffering and the eternal condemnation and loss of your soul.

This is demonstrated by the rich man who heard Abraham telling him, “In your lifetime you received your good things” (Luke 16:25). Also, there was a time when the Jewish people wanted to eat meat in the wilderness, and God gave them quails in countless numbers (Num. 11:4, 31-33). “And they ate, and were well filled, and he gave them their own desire. But while,” it says, “their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew them in their masses, and bound the chosen men of Israel hand and foot.” Why did God's wrath strike them down in their masses, that is, kill large numbers of the multitude? On account of the fact that they complained against God and Moses, their leader appointed by God, and spoke against them. But why did he bind the chosen men of Israel? Because they did not restrain the multitude as they sank from bad to worse. Such men are driven out of the sacred congregation and God's kingdom, whether they belong to the Old or New people of Israel. The Lord, too, points this out, saying in the gospels, “Many shall come from the east and the west and the north, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness” (Matt. 8:11-12).

Who are those children of the kingdom expelled into darkness? Those who confess the faith, but deny God with their works, “being abominable, and disobedient, and reprobate unto every good work (Tit. 1:16). Who are those who sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the heavenly kingdom? Those who, with sincere faith, order their lives according to the law and the teaching of the Spirit, and demonstrate their faith through their works.

If anyone wishes to be classed with the latter, delivered from outer darkness, deemed worthy of the unfading light of God's kingdom and to live for ever at rest with the saints in heaven, let him put off the old man, who is corrupt with deceitful lusts, these being drunkenness, fornication, adultery, impurity, covetousness, love of money, hatred, anger, slander and every evil passion. And through his deeds let him put on the new man renewed in the image of his Creator, in which is charity, brotherly love, purity, self-control, and every type of virtue. Through these Christ dwells within us, reconciling us with Himself and one another, to His glory and the glory of His Father without beginning, and of the co-eternal, life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen. - St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 55*

## Social Team for December 19

Team 5 is up next week – Vallandingham, Karbowsky, Magnelli, Papdakis. 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. Nectaros & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)