

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

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

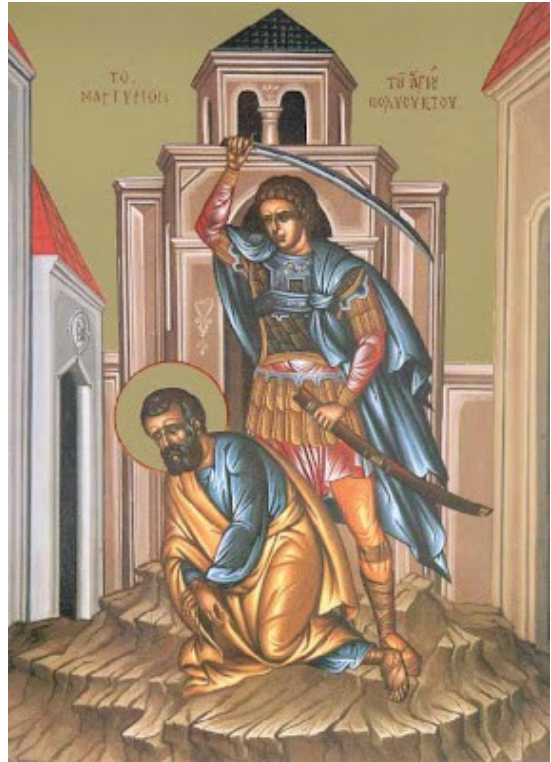
Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6 AM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



January 9, 2022 – Afterfeast & Sunday After Theophany Martyr Polyeuktos of Melitene in Armenia

In the Gospel reading today, on this Sunday after Theophany, we hear the very first sermon that Christ ever gave in his public ministry: “Repent! For the Kingdom of God is at hand!”

With just these few short words, Christ begins His earthly ministry, and he summarizes all of the Gospel that is to come. Yet the first word He says is “repent.” “Repent” in the original Greek literally means to “change one’s mind – to change one’s heart” and to “turn God-ward.” In order to see Christ and to believe in Him, we must repent. In order to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, we must repent. In order to take even the first step, we must repent.

Repentance is not a one-time thing, or some grand, romantic gesture. We who sin almost continually – if not in our actions, then in our thoughts – must constantly turn back to God and repent. To repent, we must die to ourselves and live to God. And we must die daily. And many times daily. Maybe thousands of little deaths each and every day – but death to sin and death to death. Repentance is a death that brings life! This sense of paradox is captured quite wonderfully in a quote written

on a wall in St. Paul's Monastery on Mt. Athos which says: "If you die before you die, then when you die, you will not die."

This is a constant battle from the moment we are born until our very last breath.

Repentance is not simply an emotional state. It isn't simply feeling sorry, although this is part of it. Repentance is a turning from darkness to the light of Christ. It is about moving away from selfishness to selflessness, moving away from death to life. It is not some protracted, morose state of being. Instead, repentance brings true joy. When we truly repent and truly turn to God, then we receive the grace of God and we are joyful! When we turn to Christ in repentance, this turning brings life, light, joy and peace – the very fruits of the Holy Spirit. Our lives are new and different – full of joy. Full of life and vigor. This is what it means to repent. This is what Christ is saying when He says, "the Kingdom of God is at hand." This Kingdom can be experienced here and now, if we repent and turn to God.

Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life – the Living Kingdom. Christ sets for us a banquet table, and He calls us together with Him and to dine with Him. He feeds us with His own self – His own sacrifice – the Body and Blood of our Lord.

And why are these two statements linked together: "Repent" and "the Kingdom of God is at hand"? It is this way because Christ is "the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He has accomplished everything for us and for our salvation. He has reconciled us to God and has prepared and acquired for us the Heavenly Kingdom. All God requires of us is that we accept it. Our salvation is given to us by God free and complete, but we must accept it.

Fr. Thomas Hopko told a story about how he was once riding in a taxi when the taxi driver looked at him and asked, "So... are you a priest?" Fr. Hopko said, "Yes, I'm an Orthodox Christian priest." The cabbie then asked him, "Well... Are you saved?" And Fr. Hopko thought about it and said, "Yes! I am saved! Christ became Incarnate for us. He suffered, died on the Cross, was buried and rose again, all for my salvation. He did it all for us and there's nothing more that God could possibly do to save us. The only problem," Fr. Hopko said, "Is that I *reject* it, everyday, by my own sins and actions."

Indeed, Christ offers us salvation, if only we will turn to Him. The Kingdom of Heaven and Christ the King are ineffably close to us – much closer than we can imagine. Closer to us than the beating of our own heart. Closer to us than our next breath. "Behold I stand at the door" of your heart, and knock, says Christ. "If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in with him, and will dine with him, and he with Me." (Rev. 3:20) It is only through repentance that we can open wide the doors of our heart to our Savior, the Heavenly King. On this first Sunday after Theophany, let us recall our own baptism, and our own baptismal promises.

Let us turn from our sins and fix our gaze on Christ. Through a true repentance let us open wide the doors of our heart to Christ and to the Kingdom of Heaven as we look ahead towards Lent – that great season of repentance. “Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” Amen. (*from holycross.org*)

Saint Polyeuktos was the first to be martyred for Christ in the Armenian city of Melitēnē. He was a soldier during the reign of Emperor Decius (249-251), and he later suffered martyrdom in the reign of Valerian (253-259). He was a friend of Néarkhos (Νέαρχος) a fellow-soldier and a firm Christian. Polyeuktos, however, although he led a virtuous life, remained a pagan.

When the persecution against Christians began, Néarkhos said to Polyeuktos, “Friend, soon we shall be separated, for they will take me to torture, and you, alas, will renounce your friendship with me.” Polyeuktos told him that he had seen Christ in a dream. The Savior took his soiled military cloak from him and dressed him in a radiant garment. “Now,” he said, “I am prepared to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Enflamed with zeal, Saint Polyeuktos went to the city square, and tore up the edict of Decius which required everyone to worship the idols. A few moments later, he met a procession carrying twelve idols through the streets of the city. Dashing the idols to the ground, he trampled them underfoot.

His father-in-law, the magistrate Felix, who was responsible for enforcing the imperial edict, was horrified at what Saint Polyeuktos had done and advised him to obey the imperial edict. Polyeuktos told him that we must obey God rather than men. Felix declared that Polyeuktos must die for this. “Go then, bid farewell to your wife and children,” he said. Paulina wept and urged her husband to renounce Christ. Felix also wept, but Saint Polyeuktos remained steadfast in his resolve to suffer for Christ.

Bowing his head beneath the executioner's sword, he was baptized in his own blood. In the reign of Saint Constantine the Great, when the Church of Christ had triumphed throughout the Roman Empire, a church was built at Melitēnē in honor of Saint Polyeuktos. Many miracles were worked through his intercession. In that same church, the parents of Saint Euthymios the Great (January 20) prayed fervently for a son. The birth of this great luminary of Orthodoxy occurred in the year 376, through the prayers of the Holy Martyr Polyeuktos.

Saint Polyeuktos was also venerated by Saint Akakios, the Bishop of Melitēnē (March 31), who participated in the Third Ecumenical Council, and was a great proponent of Orthodoxy. In the East, as well as in the West, the Holy Martyr Polyeuktos is venerated as the patron Saint of vows and treaties. (*from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 4:7-13

Brethren, to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 4:12-17

At that time, when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Eternal King without beginning, Who are before all worlds, my Maker, Who have summoned all things from non-being into this life: bless this day that You, in Your inscrutable goodness, give to me. By the power of Your blessing enable me at all times in this coming day to speak and act for You, to Your glory, in Your fear, according to Your will, with a pure spirit, with humility, patience, love, gentleness, peace, courage, wisdom and prayer, aware everywhere of Your presence.

Yes, Lord, in Your immense mercy, lead me by Your Holy Spirit into every good work and word, and grant me to walk all my life long in Your sight without stumbling, according to Your righteousness that You have revealed to us, that I may not add to my transgressions.

O Lord, great in mercy, spare me who am perishing in wickedness; do not hide Your face from me. And when my perverted will would lead me down other paths, do not forsake me, my Savior, but force me back to Your holy path.

O good One, to Whom all hearts are open, You know my poverty and my foolishness, my blindness and my uselessness, but the sufferings of my soul are

also before You. Wherefore I beseech You: hear me in my affliction and fill me with Your strength from above. Raise me up who am paralyzed with sin, and deliver me who am enslaved to the passions. Heal me from every hidden wound. Purify me from all taint of flesh and spirit. Preserve me from every inward and outward impulse that is unpleasing in Your sight and hurtful to my brother.

I beseech You: establish me in the path of Your commandments and to my last breath do not let me stray from the light of Your ordinances, so that Your commandments may become the sole law of my being in this life and in all eternity.

O God, my God, I plead with You for many and great things: do not disregard me. Do not cast me away from Your presence because of my presumption and boldness, but by the power of Your love lead me in the path of Your will. Grant me to love You as You have commanded, with all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my mind, and with all my strength: with my whole being.

For You alone are the holy protection and all-powerful defender of my life, and to You I ascribe glory and offer my prayer.

Grant me to know Your truth before I depart this life. Maintain my life in this world until I may offer You true repentance. Do not take me away in the midst of my days, and when You are pleased to bring my life to an end, forewarn me of my death, so that I may prepare my soul to come before You. Be with me then, O Lord, on my great and sacred day, and grant me the joy of Your salvation. Cleanse me from manifest and secret sins, from all iniquity hidden in me; and give me a right answer before Your dread judgment-seat. – St. Sophrony of Essex

Also Commemorated Today: St. Peter, Bishop of Sebaste

Saint Peter was the brother of Saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, making him a member of a very illustrious family, and the youngest of ten children who were born to Saints Basil and Emmelia. He was born in 340 in Caesarea of Cappadocia. Saint Macrina, his eldest sister, exercised a great influence over his religious training, acting as his instructor and directing him toward the spiritual and ascetic life.

Renouncing the study of the profane sciences, he devoted himself to the study of Holy Scripture and the cultivation of the spiritual life. Shortly after Basil's elevation as Bishop of Caesarea in 370, Peter received from him priestly ordination. Basil appears to have employed his brother as his confidential agent in some matters. Subsequently, he withdrew from active affairs, and resumed the life of a solitary ascetic. He assisted his sister and his mother in establishing their monastic community after his father's death. Peter became involved in the gradual

transformation of his mother's household from a community of virgins to a cenobitic community of both women and men. He headed the male monastery while Macrina was responsible for the female community. When the provinces of Pontus and Cappadocia were visited by a severe famine, he gave a remarkable proof of his charity, liberally disposing of all that belonged to his monastery, and whatever he could raise, to supply with necessaries the numerous crowds that daily resorted to him, in that time of distress.

About 380 he was elevated to Bishop of Sebaste in Armenia after the death of the violent Arian and furious persecutor of his brother Basil, Bishop Eustathius of Sebaste, to root out the Arian heresy in that diocese, where it had taken deep root. Without displaying any literary activity, he took his stand beside his brothers Basil and Gregory in their fight against the Arian heresy. In his life and episcopal administration he displayed the same characteristics as Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa writes of Peter: "In his later life he seemed to be no less than Basil the Great in virtue." Linked together in the closest manner with his brothers, he followed their writings with the greatest interest. At his advice Gregory of Nyssa wrote his great work, *Against Eunomius*, in defense of Basil's similarly named book answering the polemical work of Eunomius. It was also at his desire that Gregory wrote the *Treatise on the Work of the Six Days*, to defend Basil's similar treatise against false interpretations of the Book of Genesis and to complete it. Another work of Gregory's, *On the Endowment of Man*, was also written at Peter's suggestion and sent to the latter with an appropriate preface as an Easter gift in 387. We have no detailed information concerning his activity as a bishop, except that he was present at the Second Ecumenical Synod of Constantinople in 381.

Saint Peter reposed in peace in 391. Theodoret of Cyrus wrote of him: "Among the conspicuous bishops of Asia were the two Gregoryses, the one of Nazianzus and the other of Nyssa, the latter the brother and the former the friend and fellow worker of the great Basil. These were foremost champions of piety in Cappadocia; and in front rank with them was Peter, born of the same parents with Basil and Gregory, who though not having received like them a foreign education, like them lived a life of brilliant distinction." (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Virgin-Martyr Parthena of Edessa

On the first Sunday after Theophany, in the Metropolis of Edessa and Pella, there is commemorated the Holy Virgin Martyrs Neollina, Domnina and Parthena of Edessa. We do not have details concerning the lives of these Saints, except for that of Saint Parthena of Edessa. Saint Parthena came from Edessa in Macedonia and was born in the fourteenth century. As was her name so was her life, for she was a virgin, living in asceticism and modesty.

Around the year 1375 Edessa was besieged by the Turks and residents opposed them with a strong defense, strengthened and encouraged by Hieromonk Seraphim, parish priest of the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Theotokos. The enemy was well organized and numerous, and it appeared they were ready to raise a siege.

But at the last moment, one of the elders of the town, named Peter, who was the father of Saint Parthena, was paid a large amount of money by the conquering Pasha of the Turks to betray the city. The Turks invaded Edessa on 26 December 1375 from the southeastern part, which he guarded, where also one of the main bastions of the city was. Immediately they engaged in the slaughter and enslavement of its inhabitants, with plunderings and dishonors. They arrested Hieromonk Seraphim, and after cruel tortures they drowned him in a great waterfall, which bears the name "Waters of Pasha".

The traitor Peter, after his horrible act and the fall of the city, denied Christ and became a Muslim. But this was not enough. He handed over his daughter Parthena to be the concubine of the Pasha, after having tried to convince her to renounce Christ. When Saint Parthena heard these words of her father, like another Saint Barbara, she shuddered and rebuked with spiritual bravery her miserable father and confessed that she would never betray the sweet name of her heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. He, instead of being remorseful and repentant, was enraged and became like a wild beast. He began to beat the Saint until blood was spilled and she couldn't feel anymore. He then unclothed her and gave her over to the Turks. The soldiers tortured her for three days. In the end, she was led naked to a hill, where they buried her alive. This hill is still called "Hill of the Virgin".
(from johnsanidopoulos.com)



January Anniversaries and Birthdays

Anniversaries:

George & Voula Chrisovergis 16th
Mark & Karen Blaydoe 18th Norman & Tina Harris 20th



Birthdays:

Amira Madison 3 rd	Luke Connour 3 rd	Addison Robinson 3 rd
Anne Rosario 13 th	Andrew McNeil 17 th	Dana Dewey 22 nd
Katerina Dewey 29 th	Anastasia Kopan 29 th	

Social Team for January 16

Team 1 is up next week – Hanbury, P. Blaydoe, Chumak. 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, Dcn. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the newly reposed handmaiden of God Sandy Tucker, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)