

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

**Wednesdays in Great Lent: Liturgy of
Presanctified Gifts 6:30 PM**

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



April 3, 2022 – 4th Sunday in Great Lent | St. John Climacus

In the icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent, we only see the image of Christ at the very top, upon the last step (of love); but, this does not mean that Christ is not with us at every step. It is true that the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” is only seen in its full, unmediated vision, at the height of the ladder’s summit: divine love and union with God—that is, only after we have struggled long and hard, co-operating with God, and His grace has freed us from sin and passion; and He has made to grow within us the fullness of His love, making us to see Him within us in the fullness of His glory.

Even so, Christ is also the Foundation of our whole life and of our ascent into Him; Christ Himself is the Divine Ladder and every Step thereon; He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; He is every virtue; for, every virtue that may be found in us, is a living and personal quality of Christ which dwells and acts within us; when we acquire virtue, we acquire Christ, we live in Christ, and He lives in us.

King Solomon confesses: “The heart of the upright seeks a perception”, that is, a sensation, a conscious, heart-felt feeling...of what? Of the indwelling eternal life of the Trinity, the Personal God.

However, to awake into this perception and knowledge of God—and in order for us to be resurrected into this true life found in God—we must suffer spiritual crucifixion, pain, dying, death.

Even so, Christ is with us, every step of the way; whether we are consoled, at peace, or exalted above the passions; or whether we are afflicted, or suffering great temptations, agonizing dryness of soul, dark thoughts, and the painful struggle with sin...no matter where we are at, Christ is there, and He is with us; God is with us!

He rejoices with us, He suffers with us; in fact, we can say that He rejoices more in our joy than we do, and He suffers more in our sufferings than we do. How is this? Because He is the perfect man, fully alive, fully sensible, a man full of sympathetic love, a suffering love, a divine love.

Until God revealed Himself in our flesh, human kind could not understand this love of God in its fullness. But now, what do we see? Our God is born from the Virgin as a tiny babe; He comes forth and eats, drinks and sleeps like a man, He suffers and dies like a man—not just in appearance, but in truth and deed.

His divine and all-pure soul descended into that dark abyss of spiritual death, hades, where souls dwell in hopelessness. He came there, and He still comes there: whenever He enters our weary, dark and deadened hearts.

Then, He takes us by the hand and He lifts us up with Himself, and in Himself. Who could have asked for this? This is exactly what we see today in the Gospel: A man brings his son to Christ, saying that he is afflicted with an unclean demon who casts him into fire and water, and has stricken him with muteness and deafness.

What is this? This is exactly an image of our corrupted state. The demons, by our weakness and allowance, have come to dwell in us, not necessarily as full-blown demonic-possession, but in a moral sense: we are possessed by the burning flames of passion and the chilling waters of insensibility; and we are like deaf and mute men who cannot comprehend what is happening to us, what we should do, or how to express our need and ask for help.

Whoever seeks to war against his fallen state cannot but help to confront this. This is a truly overwhelming experience. It is frightening, lonely, dry, hopeless, dark and painful. But the person who does not confront this is worse off than the one who does, because sin is still lurking hidden within while he thinks he is fine.

What happens though? Christ comes, He confronts the demons, the passions, our many sins; He commands them to depart from us—but only after we are allowed to be tried to the extremity of our strength and patience, or even beyond it. His superabundant compassion moves Him to suffer with us, and He cries out: “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you?”

Christ commands the demons to depart; but they do not depart without a fight, nor do they leave quietly; but they rend, tear and torment. This is the same with the one who strives against evil in his own self.

What happens next? The boy falls down as one dead, in so much that many exclaim: "He is dead". When Christ cuts out our sins, we are pained by this, just as a man who has had a large and deadly tumor growing on him for a long time; when it comes time to remove it, it is painful, because it has been so closely knit to him, as if it was always a natural part of him.

We become like dead men when sin departs from us. Why? Because sinful ways of thinking, feeling and acting have grown old with us, and have become the mainstay of our lives, they have become our strength and the foundation of our existence. Therefore, when these evil things depart, we feel dead, as if the end has come. Truly, the end has come, but not for us, but for our sinful selves.

New life is just dawning, just beginning to appear. What happened with the possessed boy after he fell down as one dead? Christ "took him by the hand, and lifted him up" and the boy arose!

This is a symbol of our resurrection in Christ. It is not just a coincidence that after this healing, Christ began to teach His disciples, saying: "The Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him, and after that He is killed, He shall rise the third day." This death and resurrection of Christ is our new life.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich says that it is a greater miracle to cast out demons from a man than to raise the dead. And furthermore, he says that to be possessed by sin and passion is worse than to be possessed by demons. This is a frightful truth!

But, if despite our poor state and our disbelief we yet cry out in desperation: "I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief", then we shall see the greatest miracle take place, not over there, not long ago, but here, now, within our very selves.

What is this miracle, it is the life-giving resurrection of our souls by Christ, a deliverance from sins that have tormented us for a whole lifetime; it is the miracle of God's incomprehensible and boundless power of loving-compassion which descends upon us, within us, casting out all evil, healing us, restoring us, granting us not only forgiveness from our past sins, but complete freedom from them; and not only this, but filling us completely with Himself, His love, grace, peace, joy and life, His eternal life.

St. John of Karpathos points out: "When already well advanced in years, David offered thanks to God for choosing him, and he said this about the final fruits of God's blessing: 'Now Your servant has found his own heart, so as to offer this prayer' (2 Sam. 7:27. LXX). This he said to teach us that a great effort and much

time are needed in prayer, before through struggle we can reach a state in which our mind is no longer troubled, and so attain the inward heaven of the heart where Jesus dwells. As the Apostle says, ‘Do you not know that Jesus Christ dwells within you?’ (cf. 2 Cor. 13:5).”

We do not adhere to a dead moralism. We do not serve a dead god. We do not believe in cheap and quick techniques that will grant us supposed enlightenment and peace. No! We believe in the Living and Personal God: the All-Loving Father, the Most-Humble Son, and the Life-Giving Spirit.

We cannot force God beyond what He judges to be right for us at any given time; we cannot trick Him, or overstep our boundaries, or pry proudly into divine things with our feeble intellect, while casting aside constant dependence upon God through humility and prayer.

Surely, we are called to ascend to Him, even as St. John of the Ladder cries out: “Ascend brothers, ascend eagerly...let us hasten until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of God, unto a perfect man, to the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ”; although this is said to us, it is tempered by the spiritual law that Abba Isaac points out: “Do not try to make your course run more quickly than the divine will wishes; do not be in such a hurry that you try to get ahead of the providence which guides you—not that I am saying that you should not be eager.”

This eagerness of spirit, which both saints speak about, is that good intention within us which desires to live fully in God. This small intention is, according to even the most ascetic saints, the greatest thing we can offer to God for our salvation.

St. John Climacus, within the first step of his Ladder, on heroic renunciation of the world, says this: “Let us who are weak and passionate have the courage to offer our infirmity and natural weakness to Christ with unhesitating faith, and confess it to Him; and we shall be certain to obtain His help, even beyond our worth, if only we continually plunge to the depth of humility.”

Man offers, God purifies! Man seeks, God gives! Man weeps, God saves! Man falls, God lifts up! Man sins, God heals! Man falls again, God swiftly saves again! Man despairs, God gladdens and consoles! Man kills himself by sin, but God raises the dead, casts out demons and completely destroys deadly passions and sins.

“What God is as great as our God? Our God is He Who works wonders!” He alone makes all things out of nothing! He alone makes the Virgin a Mother, God a Man, man a god, earth into heaven! He alone makes most pure angels out of worldly and carnal men! He alone makes life out of death!

He alone makes fornicators into virgins; drunkards into sober, watchful and prayerful contemplatives; cursing mouths into theologizing rivers of most beautiful and gracious hymnody! He alone makes spiteful men into most meek and loving doves!

Come, let us fall down before this very God, in body, mind and all our soul; and let us weep and cry aloud unto Him, constantly calling upon the all-sweet name of the Lord Jesus, Who has created us, and Who has promised to re-create us, unto the eternal glory and praise of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages! Amen. (*from holycross.org*)

The Mystical Journey of the Christian, Through the Desert, Towards the Resurrection and Pentecost (4 of 5)

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

(continued from Part 3) **6. "Uncreated Divine Light and Ways of Contemplation"**

The Uncreated Light is the "is eternal life, the Kingdom of God, the uncreated energy of Divinity." "Uncreated Divine Light by its nature is absolutely different from ordinary physical light. Contemplating it begets, first and foremost, an all-absorbing feeling of the living God - an immaterial feeling of the Immaterial One, a noetic, yet not a rational perception which with irresistible force transports man into another world but so warily that he neither realises when it happens nor knows whether he is in or out of the body. At the time he is more effectively, more deeply conscious of himself than he ever is in everyday life, yet he forgets both himself and the world, carried away by the sweetness of the love of God. In spirit he beholds the invisible, breathes Him, is wholly in Him."

The vision of God "appears neither from without nor even from within but unaccountably encompasses the spirit of man, lifting him into the world of Divine Light." "He then neither sees nor feels his own materiality or the materiality of the world." "Space and time, birth and death, sex and age, social or hierarchical status - all cease to exist for him." "Contemplation of Divine Light is unfettered by circumstance. Dark of night and light of day are alike propitious. Sometimes the Light comes to man in such a fashion that he remains conscious of both of his own body and of the world outside. He can then stay open-eyed and simultaneously behold two light, the physical and the Divine."

The natural light of the sun and of electricity is the "psycho-physiological process of natural vision," but "Divine Light is of a different nature. It is the light of the mind, the light of the spirit, the light of love, the light of life." "Divine Light is constant in itself but man's receptivity varies. Faith is light but in small measure. Hope is light but not yet perfect. The perfect light is love." "The Uncreated Light

bears within it eternal life and the force of Divine Love. Indeed, it is itself both Divine Love and Divine wisdom, indivisibly one in eternity."

There is also the so-called "darkness of divestiture", when "the ascetic's soul is plunged in obscurity," having employed "special ascetic methods, he strips himself of all notions and fancies concerning visible matters - when he 'stays' his mind and his imagination. This is why it can be termed the 'darkness of divestiture', and the prayer labelled 'methodical', since it follows the method specially established to this end." "God is not in the darkness of divestiture. God reveals Himself in light and as light" and then the body also acquires grace.

The distinction between created and uncreated Light is the characteristic feature of empirical theology, which is done by those who have gained experience of the vision of the uncreated Light.

7. "Spiritual Trials"

When the ascetic sees God in the Light, then he experiences his own personal Easter, and his own personal Pentecost. Because, however, he cannot remain permanently in this state, he accepts a "spiritual trial" due to the so-called "abandonment of grace", which is something that brings him particular pain. This abandonment of divine grace "lasts for many years". Then "God may appear to the soul to be merciless."

"Like the most helpless creature he hangs suspended over the frightful abyss, and cries to God for help but all his cries remain unheeded. God seems indifferent to all his sufferings." The soul is "plunged into the shadows of death, and not finding by her side the God Whom she invokes day and night she suffers intolerably."

Having thus been abandoned by God, the soul of the ascetic "descends into hell but not like those who do not know the Divine Spirit, who do not possess the light of true knowledge of God and so are blind. No - she descends into hell capable of discerning the nature of the darkness she beholds." "The seed of Divine love which the soul bears in her depths then engenders repentance so powerful, so total, as to surpass the measure of ordinary religious consciousness. Shedding abundant tears, man turns to God with his whole being, with whole strength, and so learns true prayer, which detaches him from this world, introducing him into another world where he hears words which no human language can express."

These trials are of a different condition from the usual trials one feels in one's struggle against the passions, the thoughts and the imagination. They are trials from the abandonment of divine grace.

"When the soul has gone through this whole gamut of harsh testing she perceives clearly in herself that there is no place in the world, no tribulation, no joy, no force,

no creature that could separate her from the love of God. The shades of night can no longer swallow up the light of this life." God returns and gives man the sense of eternal life. Thus, the first vision of God is followed by the abandonment of grace and then God returns and gives man the undisturbed sense of His presence.

For Saint Silouan in such situations of abandonment of divine grace, it was revealed to him by God: "Keep thy mind in hell and despair not." According to Saint Sophrony, on the night that this truth was revealed to him by God, in fact, "the mystery of the fall and redemption and the whole spiritual course of man" were revealed to him.

Saint Silouan, in the period of the abandonment of divine Grace, encountered hell, its deep darkness, "he really knew the state of the sufferings of hell", but at the same time it was revealed to him not to despair. Thus, he kept his mind in hell, having hope in God and in this way he expelled every tempting situation.

In this way he "with a certain movement of his spirit" was able to bring back within himself "the real experience of the torments of hell", "sometimes to a greater and sometimes to a lesser degree". "At times the torment of feeling abandoned by God is worse than all the torments of hell but it differs in that it has within itself life-giving Divine strength capable of transforming affliction into the sweet blessedness of the love of God." "Only a few can follow this way of asceticism."

The description of the spiritual trials of the God-seeing ascetic after the vision of the Uncreated Light shows a theologian of great stature who finds it difficult to find measures to measure this spiritual experience of the vision of the Light and of this experience of hell.

- Translated by John Sanidopoulos. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 6:13-20

Brethren, when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation *is* for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*. This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the *Presence* behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 9:17-31

At that time, one of the crowd said, “Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.” He answered him and said, “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.” Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!” Then *the spirit* cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.” Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know *it*. For He taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Brethren and fathers, the day of Pascha is drawing near, since with God's help we have passed the mid-point of the fast. But are we pressing forward to reach the Pascha that comes and goes? Have we not achieved this year after year? The present Pascha too will pass, for there is nothing lasting in the present age, but, *All our days pass like a shadow*, and our life travels like a rapid rider, until it has driven us to the final boundary of life. ‘What’, someone says, ‘is Pascha not to be desired?’ Of course, it very much to be desired. How could it not be? But we accomplish Pascha every day. And what is this? Cleansing from sins, contrition of heart, tears of compunction, a clean conscience, the death *of the parts of us that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire*, and any other evil that is at work. One who has been found worthy in all this does not *easter* and celebrate a much longed for feast to the Lord just once a year, but, we may say, does so each

day. Someone, on the other hand, who does not have all the foregoing, but is held fast by the passions, cannot celebrate. For how can someone celebrate whose god is their stomach? Or who is aflame with fleshly lust? Or melted by the heat of jealousy? Or drowned by the love of money? Or enslaved to vainglory? Or caught up by the other passions. No one could possibly say that someone with a high fever was at rest, or that someone shipwrecked was making a good voyage. It simply isn't possible. It is impossible for someone who has become dark to be enlightened, or for someone possessed by sins to celebrate. But for you, brothers, we are confident of better things, ones that promise salvation. For our way of life is nothing other than preparation for a feast. Look at the reality: psalmody succeeds psalmody; reading, reading; study, study; prayer, prayer, like a wheel drawing us and joining us to God. How truly excellent is this way of life, how supremely excellent! How blessed this life and thrice-blessed! So then, since we have been shown the sought for Pascha, my honored brothers, let us make it our aim, and, as far as we can, celebrate it every day, through the death of the passions and the resurrection of the virtues, in imitation of the Lord, *because he too suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps*. And I say this, not so we become judges of the others —*for each has their own load to carry*—but so that, conscious of the grace that has been given us by God, we may give thanks to the giver, glorify the benefactor, repay the master, who has not only granted our present blessings, but also, to those who genuinely serve him to the end, he will also give those that are in his promises, that eternal and heavenly Pascha. May we all attain it, by the grace and love for humankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and always, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Theodore the Studite, Catechesis 67, in the 4th week of Lent

An Interpretation of the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian: On Idleness

By St. Luke the Surgeon, Archbishop of Simferopol and All Crimea

"O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of laziness...."

This is how Saint Ephraim the Syrian begins his great prayer. Why does he begin with a request to be delivered from idleness (or laziness), as if there were no more grievous vices than idleness? Saint Ephraim speaks of idleness because he knows better than us what is more important, what is more disastrous, what vice is stronger, more dangerous, and, if we talk about idleness, he begins his prayer with a prayer not to give the spirit of idleness, which means that idleness is a very dangerous vice.

Observing idleness from an ordinary, worldly point of view, we see that idleness is contemptible, deserving of universal condemnation. See how low idle people are,

who do not want to work, spend their lives in complete idleness and go toward many, many vices. Idleness is the mother of a great many vices. Idle people lie down, doing nothing, sitting and dreaming. About what? About nothing, their thoughts often wander completely aimlessly; they remember the past, that happiness, those joys that they experienced, they dream that all this will happen again. They think only about this, about nothing serious, they do not focus their thoughts on the deep seriousness of life, on the enormous responsibility that lies with everyone not only before people, but also before God Himself.

An idle person is a harmful member of society, a harmful member of the state. Idleness leads to great and grave vices. Idle people are not able to work, they fall into poverty, into hunger. Money does not come by itself, wealth does not come, they do not want to work, nothing comes by itself, and a person needs everything that is necessary for life, and in addition, that which exceeds the limit of what is necessary: he needs pleasures, needs luxury in life. To get money, he invents various, often sinful, means, becomes capable of all baseness, dark deeds, theft, lies, deceit, bribes. So contemptible is idleness from a purely worldly point of view.

And what shall we say if we speak of idleness in our spiritual life? Does it really deserve less condemnation than in the area of our material life? It is even more disastrous in the spiritual life. Any ability of ours that remains without exercise is lost. If a musician who has reached perfection in playing ceases to practice, if he leaves music altogether for many years, he loses his perfection in playing.

Every organ of our body without exercise comes into a state of lethargy, inability to work. A person who always lies down loses the ability to walk. He who does not work with his hands, brings the muscles of the hands to sagging. Without physical inactivity, the powers of the body fade away.

Also the faculties of the soul: any spiritual faculties left untrained are lost. If a person does not pray, then he loses the ability to pray. A person who always rejects fasting will not force himself to pray. Whoever does not follow his spirit, his heart, becomes spiritually dissolute, never follows anything. The soul, left without exercise, becomes like a field that has not been cultivated for several years, which is overgrown with weeds, worthless grass, thorns, which is difficult to make fruitful. Idleness of the spirit, lack of exercise in good deeds lead to the death of the soul, to the overgrowth of the soul with all the weeds of sin. As bad as it is, that's not the whole problem.

It is a much greater misfortune that we lose the days of spiritual work - the short days of our lives. They are given by God in order to achieve a great and holy goal, to prepare for the Last Judgment, for the answer at the Judgment, so that we

become worthy in the eyes of God, so that He won't put us on the left side Himself and say: "Go ... you damned ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

Life is given to us so that we hurry, hurry to do the great work of purifying our hearts, following the Lord Jesus Christ. But this following is strenuous work, often hard work, and not idleness. This is the enduring of suffering for the Lord Jesus Christ, and idleness does not suffer, it avoids suffering.

Do you know that all the saints, who, it would seem, did not need labor, who devoted their entire lives to spiritual exploits, divided the time of day into three parts: one part - prayer, the other part - reading the word of God, another part - work or labor. They lived in the desert, in the wild Libyan desert, lived in the forests of the Far North, in impenetrable wilds, and devoted one part of their time to work. They chose different kinds of work: weaving baskets, matting, planting vegetable gardens, cutting wood, building cells, churches and entire monasteries. What they did with their hands was sold to the nearest city, they ate by what they made for themselves and fed the poor. They considered work an important and necessary thing.

The holy apostle Paul preached God throughout the day, and at night he made tents. By the light of the moon or lamp, he worked diligently, considering work obligatory for himself. His main work, his main aspiration was to run, to hasten as much as he could towards the goal - to flee to the Kingdom of God. Do you know his amazing words: "Brethren, I do not consider myself accomplished; but only, forgetting what is behind and stretching forward, I strive for the goal, for the honor of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

He, not at all considering himself to have achieved it, strove forward, forgetting what had already been achieved, he strove for a higher goal, for receiving the highest calling of the Divine in Christ Jesus. This is an example of a life opposite to the life of idle people. You will not find any trace of idleness in the life of the Apostle Paul, in the life of fasting hermits, in the life of a monastic, in the life of great saints. They all worked from morning to night. Idleness was alienated from them, idleness was considered a great and fatal evil.

It is necessary, hearing the prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian, which is repeated so often, to carefully listen to every word of the prayer, and remember, delve into the meaning of these words and imprint them forever in your heart. I will help you capture them. Today I captured the petition of Saint Ephraim for deliverance from the spirit of idleness. Remember that life is short; you must hasten, as the apostle Paul hastened; you must hasten in the work of the Lord. Amen. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Also Commemorated Today: Venerable Niké́tas the Confessor, Abbot of Medikion

Saint Niké́tas the Confessor was born in Bithynian Caesarea (northwest Asia Minor) of a pious family. His mother died eight days after his birth, and his father Philaretos became a monk. The child remained in the care of his grandmother, who raised him in a true Christian spirit. From his youth Saint Niké́tas attended church and was a disciple of the hermit Stephanos. With his blessing, Saint Niké́tas set off to the Mydicia monastery, where Saint Nikēphóros (March 13) was the igumen.

After seven years of virtuous life at the monastery, famed for its strict monastic rule, Saint Niké́tas was ordained presbyter. Saint Nikēphóros, knowing the holy life of the young monk, entrusted to him the guidance of the monastery when he himself became ill.

Not wanting power, Saint Niké́tas devoted himself to the enlightenment and welfare of the monastery. He guided the brethren by his own example. Soon the fame of the lofty life of its inhabitants of the monastery attracted many seeking salvation. After several years, the number of monks had increased to one hundred.

When Saint Nikēphóros departed to the Lord in his old age, the brethren unanimously chose Saint Niké́tas as igumen.

The Lord granted Saint Niké́tas the gift of wonderworking. Through his prayer a deaf-mute child received the gift of speech; two demon-possessed women were healed; he restored reason to one who had lost his mind, and many of the sick were healed of their infirmities.

During these years under the emperor Leo the Armenian (813-820), the Iconoclast heresy resurfaced and oppression increased. Orthodox bishops were deposed and banished. At Constantinople a council of heretics was convened in 815, at which they deposed the holy Patriarch Nikēphóros (806-815), and in his place they chose the heretical layman Theodotus. They also installed heretics in place of exiled and imprisoned Orthodox bishops.

The emperor summoned all the heads of the monasteries and tried to bring them over to the Iconoclast heresy. Among those summoned was Saint Niké́tas, who stood firmly for the Orthodox confession. Following his example, all the igumens remained faithful to the veneration of holy icons. Therefore, they threw him into prison. Saint Niké́tas bravely underwent all the tribulations and encouraged firmness of spirit in the other prisoners.

Then the emperor and the false patriarch Theodotus attempted to trick those who remained faithful to Orthodox teaching. They promised that the emperor would

give them their freedom and permit the veneration of the icons on one condition: that they take Communion from the pseudo-patriarch Theodotus.

For a long time the saint had doubts about entering into communion with a heretic, but other prisoners begged him to go along with them. Acceding to their entreaties, Saint Niké́tas went into the church, where icons were put out to deceive the confessors, and he accepted Communion.

But when he returned to his monastery and saw that the persecution against icons was continuing, he then repented of his deed, returned to Constantinople and fearlessly denounced the Iconoclast heresy. He ignored all the emperor's threats.

Saint Niké́tas was again locked up in prison for six years until the death of the emperor Leo the Armenian. Enduring hunger and travail, Saint Niké́tas worked miracles by the power of his prayers: through his prayer the Phrygian ruler released two captives without ransom; three shipwrecked men for whom Saint Niké́tas prayed, were thrown up on shore by the waves.

Saint Niké́tas reposed in the Lord in 824. The saint's body was buried at the monastery with reverence. Later, his relics became a source of healing for those coming to venerate the holy confessor. *(from oca.org)*

Social Team for April 3

Team 5 is up next week - Vallandingham, Tony Papadakis, Andrew and Katy. Thank you!

Help People in Need

As things in Ukraine have been changing rapidly, all of us at IOCC have been fervently praying for everyone affected.

The core of IOCC's work has always been responsibly and effectively offering humanitarian aid. As of today, I can share with you that we've been in touch with partners in Ukraine and across the region. Our immediate response will consist of:

- Supporting basic needs, like supplying fuel and generators
- Providing flashlights, batteries, and candles

I invite you to do three things to help today:

- First and foremost, pray for everyone affected.
- Share this update with friends and loved ones so they know how the Orthodox community in the US is responding.
- Support IOCC's efforts with a gift to our [International Emergency Response Fund](#), which

allows us to respond quickly and effectively to help those in need.

Thank you for your prayers and your faithful support of IOCC's mission.

Yours in Christ,



Constantine M. Triantafilou

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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 suffering people of Ukraine, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)