

# SOBORNOST

**St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church**

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## SERVICES

**Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM**

**Great Vespers 5:00 PM**

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

**Sunday School 9:30**

**Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM**

**September 11, 2022 – Afterfeast of the Nativity of the  
Mother of God | Sunday Before the Elevation of the Cross  
Venerable Theodora of Alexandria**

She was born in Alexandria. After marriage, St. Theodora fell into the sin of adultery, but later when the Lord "opened her eyes with the light of repentance", she, deeply repentant, revealed her sin to a well known abbess, asking her advice and instruction. Encouraged by the instruction of the abbess on the unspeakable mercy of God, Theodora dressed in men's clothing and left for ascetical efforts in the men's Oktokaidekaton Monastery in Egypt and here remained always "among men" "in a man's image". "Through exhausting fasts" and "having endured many assaults from demonic powers", she "through continual prayer" bridled "the inclination for carnal desires" and became known in the monastery as the monk Theodore with strictness of life, severe ascetical efforts and deep humility. On suspicion of an impious communication with one criminal maiden, the hegumen and brothers of the monastery expelled Theodora from the monastery and she settled not far away in a tent, suffering hunger and cold, raising the child of the maiden as if it were her own. "Enduring human disgrace through pious thoughts", "evil slander", "rejection by the monks and expulsion", the holy saint was again accepted into the monastery two years before her death. She died in the year 490.



Only after her death the monks found out who the monk Theodore was. (*adapted from S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed. 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp 326-8 Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris*)

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 16:13-24 EOB**

Brethren, watch! Stand firm in the faith! Be courageous! Be strong! Let all that you do be done in love. Now I beg you, brethren (you know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to serve the saints), that you also be in service to people like this to everyone who helps in the work and labors. I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus; for what was lacking on your part, they supplied. They refreshed my spirit and yours; show therefore your appreciation to such people. The Churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you much in the Lord, together with the Church that is in their house. All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss! This greeting is by me, Paul, with my own hand. If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. Maranatha! May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love is with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 21:33-42 EOB**

The Lord said, "Hear another parable: There was a man who was the owner of a household. He planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, built a tower and leased it out to farmers. He then left for another country. When the season for the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the farmers, to receive his fruit. But the farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned yet another. Again, the owner sent other servants, even more than the first time; and they treated them in the same way. Then, he sent his son to them, saying: 'They will respect my son!' But the farmers, when they saw the son, said to each other, 'This is the heir! Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance. And so, they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the lord of the vineyard returns, what will he do with those farmers?'" They answered him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and he will lease out the vineyard to other farmers who will give him the fruit in its season." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The [very] stone which the builders rejected was made the head of the corner. This was from the Lord and it is marvelous in our eyes?'"

## **A Word From the Holy Fathers**

1969 years ago, a young maiden, Mary, was born to the elderly and hitherto childless Joachim and Anna. This became known only to the neighbors, because

the birth of a child is the most ordinary phenomenon. In silence and obscurity, this great event in the history of the world took place, for she was born who became blessed of all women, the More Honorable Than The Cherubim and the Beyond Compare More Glorious Than The Seraphim, the Mother of Christ the Messiah, our Savior.

In silence, without any widespread glory, the life and preaching of Her Divine Son began. The holy life of the great hermits of the African and Palestinian deserts and the impenetrable forests of the far north of Russia prospered in silence and complete safety. Unknown to the world, in deep silence, these great people approached God, purifying with fiery prayers, not only themselves, but the whole world, their hearts dedicated to God.

Everything great and holy in the history of mankind took place in this way, in deep silence, in the unknown from the restless world. Why so? Why does everything truly great bear the stamp of silence and obscurity? We will find the answer to this in what was revealed by God to the great prophet Elijah, when he fled from the wrath of the evil Jezebel, walked for forty days and came to Mount Horeb, and the Lord said to him: "Go out and stand on the mountain before the face of the Lord, and behold, the Lord will pass, and a great and strong wind will tear apart the mountains and crush the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord is not in the wind; after the wind there is an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake; after the earthquake there is fire, but the Lord is not in the fire; after the fire, a breath of still wind, and the Lord is there" (1 Kings 19:11-12).

You see, God Himself revealed to the great prophet that His deeds are done without noise and menacing manifestations, but in silence, like a cool breeze. Remember this, remember that grace-filled silence and peace is the seal of the deeds of God.

And the works of Satan are not like that. They are carried out in the history of mankind with great noise and roar, bringing confusion and horror to human hearts, as we see it now in the terrible Korean War, the horrors of which freeze the blood in the veins of millions of good people.

But it is not only in the great events of history that the seal of God and the seal of the works of Satan are evident. The same thing happens in human hearts. When we live according to the commandments of Christ, we do not offend anyone, we do good deeds, shed tears of repentance in prayers to God, then the fruits of the Holy Spirit grow in our hearts, about which the apostle Paul spoke in his letter to the Galatians: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, mercy, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Quiet joy and peace fill our hearts after a truly good deed and deep prayer, after communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, and our lips fold into a quiet smile of their own accord. If you experience this by the grace of God, then know that the grace of the Holy Spirit guides you, and the Holy Spirit lives in you. This is the seal of the works of God.

It is not at all what happens in our hearts when the spirit of malice, the enemy of the human race, takes possession of them. Then the heart burns with an impure, painful fire, filled with hatred and malice, and there is no peace in it. Know that this is the seal of Satan.

Live in such a way that on all your deeds there is the seal of the Spirit of God. Fear that impure and tormenting fire that scorches the heart, in which is the seal of Satan. Live quietly and peacefully, working with your hands, keeping peace with all people, and in these charitable deeds, earnestly ask for the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, now born to save the sinful world. Amen.

– St. Luke of Simferopol, *Homily One on the Nativity of the Theotokos*

## **Also Commemorated Today: Translation of the Relics of Venerable Sergius and Herman, Wonderworkers of Valaam**

Saints Sergius and Herman settled on the island of Valaam in 1329. The brethren gathered by them spread the light of Orthodoxy in this frontier land. The Karelian people began to regard Christianity with renewed suspicion, with its authority in the fourteenth century being undermined by the Swedes, who sought to spread Catholicism by means of the sword.

Saints Sergius and Herman died about the year 1353. They are also commemorated on June 28 (Their holy repose). (*from oca.org*)

## **The Holy Martyr Theodora of Vasta**

According to local tradition, in a village on the borders of Messinia and Arcadia, in Ancient Melpēia, lived a poor Christian family. The family consisted of the two parents and three daughters. Their village was situated close to the largest and wealthiest monastery of that region near the border of Arcadia, the well-known Monastery of the Panagitsa.

The birthplace of Theodora was somewhere in the Ancient Melpēia area between today's Vasta of Isari and Likouresi-Dasohorias. Well known to all today is this: This was a Christian family, yet very poor. They had to comply with the law of the day, and send money to the State in order to recruit to the army someone to protect the monastery. Unfortunately, this family was poor and they had no males. The anguish of this family with three daughters is obvious.

Theodora wanted to help her family in this difficult situation. Theodora was the middle daughter; a beautiful daughter who possessed many of the virtues which others envied. She presented a proposition to her father suggesting that under the male pseudonym Theodoris (or Theodore) she would fulfill the family's obligation to the State and enter the army. On hearing this, Theodora's mother was terrified to death. Her father hesitated before responding to the suggestion: "This cannot happen, my child. It is difficult to fool an entire army. It is not just one day. Further, the life of a soldier is hard. This is why they do not allow women in the army."

But Theodora was adamant, saying: "Don't be afraid father. I will succeed. I may not be a man, but the need to defend my position and my true identity will assist me. God gives strength to those in need. He gives strength to the widow with many children allowing her to become a man and rule the house."

Theodora's mother and sisters also objected, but her conviction, commitment and reasoning won them over. They realized they didn't have the money to pay for a soldier, and as time was running short, Theodora's suggestion solved the need. Eventually the parents gave their blessing and the sisters transformed Theodora into Theodoris. This was not a large task, as they could see that the idea that Theodora was going to serve in the army as a man had grown in her heart. She began her preparations at home, exercising so that she would not arouse suspicions. When the day of Theodora's departure came, the family kept her true destination secret from the neighbors. They instead spread the rumor that Theodora had emigrated.

It is easy to comprehend the situation in Theodora's house; there was their daughter, disguised as a man, joining the army, and above all this was the very real fear that this deceit would be revealed. After their daughter left, there must have been a period of prayer and anxiety. We can only speculate what it must have been like for her parents; the heartache at having to send their own flesh and blood into the army as a replacement for the son they never had and the money they could not provide for a replacement.

Theodora's separation from her home and her family was very emotional and almost indescribable. The fear that she might be recognized was nestled in



everyone's heart. In order to hide their true emotions, they tried to find something else to say. Theodora's decision was neither simple nor ordinary. Was it possible for a woman to pass herself off as a man?

However, there was someone strangely calm in the house; the daughter who was leaving to join the army which was based at the nearby monastery. Soldiers were trained there and their headquarters were in the monastery itself.

The daughter was not anxious at all. From the moment she made her decision she lived as if she had taken on a mission from the Panagia's hand. Her heart began to beat with faith in Christ, and she believed whole-heartedly in the protection of the Panagia.

The day she arrived at the monastery and the army camp was, for her, a glorious day. She dedicated herself to the monastery of the Panagia. She gave no thought about how to behave, as if she was being divinely guided. Her only thoughts were of how she could earn the esteem of the monastery and the army. She knew that the only way she could do this was by her virtue, good character, and her ability as a soldier. First and foremost, however, was by her love. She would be able to find success in all these aims through her prayers, if her heart continuously clung to heaven.

With these thoughts, with this mindset and with great faith, Theodora arrived at the army camp. Nobody noticed anything strange about her bearing. Everyone accepted her as Theodoris from Melpeia. She gave her father's name as she was the 'boy' of the family of the appropriate age to fulfill the obligation of joining the army. After showing her papers she was issued her combat gear. Though she had to be careful dressing, she managed easily and nobody suspected anything. She was transformed into an upstanding young soldier.

'He' was distinguished for 'his' beauty and many said that 'his' skin was as soft as a woman's. Theodoris earned everyone's admiration. Though widely respected, some were envious of his beauty and good character. Although women were attracted to him, he paid no attention. He was more afraid of the men, but they had no reason to be suspicious.

Many would ask Theodoris if he wanted to become a monk in the monastery, since he very much loved the church and was distinguished for his virtue above every soldier. He would go as often as possible to the monastery and attend Vespers. He became infamous not only for his dedication to the Church but also for his character and obedience to those in high positions and to his fellow soldiers. He wanted to please everyone, and he achieved it. In this way, time passed.

'Theodoris' managed to evade danger. Nobody suspected him and he was never afraid. In time, he adapted to life in the army and even started to believe he was a soldier. He hid his true identity very well, for it would have been very difficult for someone to discover it. Of course, she was a pure woman and in this was her strength. When a man keeps his purity and does not waste his manliness, he becomes very strong. The same is true for a woman. The only danger a woman faces when she lives with men is herself. When she succeeds in keeping her purity, she need never be afraid because she is very strong.

While Theodora was strong through being pure, there was another woman in the camp who was not pure and had relationships with many soldiers. 'Theodoris' would see her walking around carelessly and he wanted to help her see the error of her ways and to advise her to be more cautious. However, he did not dare. As a woman she would have nothing to fear in approaching this other woman, but everyone knew her as 'Theodoris' – a man. How would he be able to explain his actions when the others saw him associating with this woman? So Theodora contented herself with fervent prayer for her, knowing that this woman was weak.

Theodoris, being wise, did not go near the woman, however the woman noticed him and was attracted to him. Yet he wanted to help her understand that there was no possibility for a relationship, but this rejection caused the woman to be further attracted to him. Other soldiers began to notice her interest in Theodoris and they began to tease him.

It is unclear who this temptress was. It seems likely this woman was a local who came to wash the clothes of the soldiers, and she was probably having an affair with one of them or an officer at the time Theodoris was giving her no attention, as she was allowed to move around the camp freely.

Evil did not take long to emerge, for a great scandal emerged among the soldiers and the monks. The local woman's mother arrived at the army camp one day and went directly to the General accusing a soldier of having defiled her daughter and made her pregnant. The mother demanded that the person responsible should marry her daughter or be court-martialed to set an example to the other soldiers. She was also to bring her daughter to identify the soldier who had deflowered her.

This incident with the woman coincided exactly with the monastery's nomination of 'Theodoris' as Colonel. That May the army Colonel who maintained the monastery had died from an epidemic which also claimed the lives of many other soldiers. The mother's accusation occurred while the Colonel was seriously ill, and he was expected to give a decision upon his recovery. The Abbot's attention turned to the seriously ill Colonel and away from the accusation.

Upon the Colonel's death, the Abbot assembled the officer's to ask for an opinion as to who would be an appropriate replacement for the deceased Colonel. The monastery, which had the final word, inclined towards Theodoris because of his virtue and because he stood out from the rest of the soldiers in the camp. He was summoned to the monastery where he was proclaimed Colonel. His first duty was to attend to the accusation that a woman had been deflowered by a soldier and had consequently conceived a child.

Colonel Theodoris did not hesitate to invite the woman and her father to the monastery. When they arrived, in front of an audience of monks, Theodoris announced his intention: "We will go to the camp together so that you do not feel alone and I will assemble the soldiers in front of you so you can show me the one who wronged you. If you know his name, I will order him to come here, sign the necessary papers, and your marriage will take place with me as best man." The woman however had her own pre-conceived plan, because without shame and without hanging her head down she proudly looked at the Colonel, and turning to the Abbot she said: "We don't need to go to the camp, Colonel, or bring any soldier here. The man guilty of this act is here in this monastery." She insolently looked at the Colonel and said: "Didn't you deceive me? Didn't you promise to marry me one day?"

Colonel Theodoris was struck dumb. He could not believe what he was hearing. When he came to he found his voice and turned to the Abbot, and looking him straight in the eyes he stated loudly and clearly: "Venerable Abbot, look at me. This is a terrible accusation. I rejected this woman's advances. I never accepted her invitation. This is a terrible accusation."

The Abbot looked at Theodoris knowing that those eyes could not lie. Then the woman was suddenly afraid that they would believe Theodoris, so she shouted: "I, Abbot, can prove his crime. Order the soldiers to come here. There are soldiers who can testify that what I am saying is the truth. There are many soldiers who suspected our relationship because they teased me about it." What the woman said was logical, so the Abbot agreed to assemble all the soldiers at the monastery.

The news spread like wild fire and opinions were divided. The good and honorable soldiers who knew Theodoris believed it was a defamation of his character. They supported this belief as they had noticed the woman had approached him and he had paid no attention to her. However, there were misguided soldiers of low character who believed the charge. They were soldiers who were jealous of the upright Theodoris, as he was pure, loyal, strict and handsome. One man who tended to be influenced by words, and who may have been the true guilty one, said: "I believe this man, whom others consider important and holy, is guilty. I saw her



approaching the Colonel and he always noticed her and talked to her. We saw nothing else, as some things do not take place in front of other people." With this, he laughed. In fact, it was this man who would approach the woman when she would come to the monastery, which is why he was jealous.

In the meantime, this woman, it was said, had affairs with other soldiers. It seems clear she had an agreement with them, for when they arrived at the monastery at the invitation of the Abbot, they whole-heartedly supported the woman's statement: "We firmly believe in Colonel Theodoris' guilt, because not only did we see them in each others company, but because the woman herself confessed her love for Theodoris to other soldiers who were attracted to her. She clearly told them, 'I love Colonel Theodoris, and he loves me too. We are going to marry.'" These accusations prevailed, although Theodoris refused to accept them.

Due to the jealousy of the officers, they aimed to destroy Theodoris and managed to do so. With the officers and soldiers assembled at the monastery, the Abbot reached a decision: "Colonel Theodoris, it is with grief that I have accepted this accusation as true. All the facts are against you. You cannot remain a Colonel or an officer in the army. The regulations state that you must marry this woman or face court-martial."

Colonel Theodoris was faced with a dilemma. What could he do? Should he reveal his true identity and embarrass them? He could restore peace by doing this. The real guilty person could then be exposed. As he could not accept marriage, he would have to accept court-martial. He preferred that. If he revealed his true identity, what would people say about this deceit? What would happen to his father? He made his decision: he would accept the sacrifice.

Theodora walked towards her martyrdom. She went calmly as she made her decision. Her honor was no longer in danger. All that she was preoccupied with was being at ease with her conscience. She knew that a refusal by a soldier to reestablish a girl's honor meant being sentenced to death by the court. With this knowledge, she proceeded towards her sacrifice. For martyrs, their suffering takes place after they have made a decision. Theodora received the strength to make her decision from Jesus Christ, whose icon she could see from where she was standing in the Holy Altar, where He was depicted crucified like a criminal for His enemies though He was not guilty. Why could she not be sacrificed without guilt, to save her father, her home and her honor? Who knew what would happen after the revelation? She knew that she was pure and a Christian and that a Christian's gift was to sacrifice.

In this state of mind she appeared before the court-martial, and as she had denied this accusation, she refused to marry this woman who was a liar and slanderer.

Besides, she could not make such a sacrifice. She could only have done it if she was a man and wanted to save herself. The court sentenced her to death, as the regulations dictated for soldiers who disgraced a woman and subsequently did not marry her. She listened to the sentencing calmly and requested she be left alone in the monastery to pray.

In the monastery there was an atmosphere of sadness, but the oil lamps which lit the icons comforted her. She prayed: "My Lord, I leave it to You to strengthen my resolve. I leave life without having lived its joys. I thank you, because you always gave me the strength to appear strong. You glorified me with Your grace and power. My modesty will be kept for a little while longer. Do comfort my father and my sisters. Forgive this woman also, as she will face a difficult situation when my identity is revealed. I want this to happen, not to show my virtue, but that Your Name be glorified. Help me, Lord, to receive the honor of my martyrdom, and accept this small sacrifice of mine as payment for my gratitude. Lord, make trees to grow at my tomb to bear witness Your protection of my purity, and under my grave may my blood become water to water those trees. Amen."

Upon Theodora's conviction, the camp and the monastery were shaken, while the evil and envious were pleased. However, this was nothing compared to the scandal which erupted after the revelation that Colonel Theodoris was, in reality, a woman.

The convicted Theodoris was taken to a huge ravine ten kilometers from the monastery. There 'he' was executed. After the execution, perhaps because Theodora's prayers had been heard and she should be exonerated in front of all the soldiers and monks, it was decided to remove the executed Theodoris' uniform before returning his body to the camp.

Can anyone imagine what those soldiers must have felt upon witnessing such a terrible sight? Inside the uniform of this upright young man lay the body of a woman; a well disguised young lady whose body was fragrant with purity and holiness. It must have hit them like a bolt of lightning, blinding them for a few seconds upon witnessing this event. At first, they could not get over their initial surprise, but it soon turned to distress. Now they understood why he never bathed with the other soldiers. Now they realized why there was a strange light in his eyes; a reflection of the purity of her soul.

They fell to their knees, covered her holy body and bowed to venerate her. Returning to the monastery, they struggled to find the words to tell the Abbot about their discovery. Upon hearing the terrible news, it was like a revelation. The pain he had felt at convicting Theodoris was nothing compared to what he felt now. He had studied the accusations objectively and did not allow his heart to speak when it told him that it was not possible for Theodoris to commit such a sin.

The Abbot felt such a terrible burden on his conscience that he thought he would die. That a great 'man' such as Theodoris, who was devoted to the Church and given his heart to God, should die in such disgrace! He felt joy at the triumph of virtue, but great grief for this Saint who had been convicted, suffered and died. But is this not true for all saints? Are they not envied and ultimately judged on account of their purity? The Abbot reflected on his actions. "Why me? Why did the evil words deceive me? Why did I not listen to the voice of the holy Colonel, in whose eyes purity reflected? How will I answer for my actions?"

While the Abbot reflected on this, a martyr's venerable soul was carried by angels towards the heavens for her virtue and crowned.

Within a few hours, the news spread throughout the countryside. The whole region was in shock. The Abbot was very sad and called for a gathering of the Brotherhood to make an announcement: "My brothers, today the sun is brighter. However, a short time ago, if we had our eyes open, we would have seen that it had lost its glow. Tonight, there will be another star in the sky; the star of Saint Theodora. Do not look at me strangely. I am not insane. Today, a woman accepted martyrdom. An officer was brought to court on the charge of dishonoring a woman. He was considered immoral. For witnesses, they brought a loose woman and five other officers who were motivated by jealousy. The court did not listen to the voice of the innocent, the pure Saint. We all listened to the voice of the loose woman and the officers. The soldiers took Theodoris and led him to a ravine where he was executed. Upon undressing him they discovered he was in fact a woman. Why are you looking at me aghast? Is it not true that a bright star of a martyr will shine in the heavens tonight?"

When the monks overcame their shock, they decided to honor the Saint as a martyr. She had already been nominated a Saint in the hearts of those who knew the story and who had witnessed the virtue of her character – the monks, the officers, the judges, the guilty, and the martyr.

There was a procession to the monastery. The monks carried the Cross and a Bible, while many people gathered around the Abbot and kneeled weeping. The procession took two hours to arrive at the site where Saint Theodora's body had been covered by an officer's cloak. The Abbot sobbed and continued the procession. He knelt before Saint Theodora's body and fearfully uncovered it, so there could be no doubt. His voice cracked as he prayed:

"Lord Jesus Christ, everyone agrees that we stand before Your martyr. You gave us a sign to repent. We who were deceived by a woman and those who out of envy and hatred accused her, we, all the repentant, ask forgiveness before her holy body. You who forgave those who crucified You, forgive everyone and myself. We did

not understand what we were deciding on, what we did. Lord, at the feet of this body we unburden our repentance and plead for her intercessions, the new martyr Theodora. Amen."

On the evening of the day of martyrdom and the revelation, Theodora's relics were carried to the monastery. She arrived during the night. People came in hordes and the monastery church was full of deeply moved people. Young and old, ordinary citizens, soldiers, clerics, women and children, all followed the Vigil that took place in the monastery. Priests from nearby had gathered on hearing the news of the martyr Theodora. At the end of the Divine Liturgy, dawn broke and the Funeral Service began which in ancient times was chanted for the monks.

The Abbot had contacted a convent, and devout nuns came to wash the Saint's holy body with wine and then dressed her in the monastic Angelic Schema, the burial robes which all women who retain their purity till death and who accept the baptism of blood with their martyrdom deserve. This is why she is considered a Venerable Virgin Martyr, like Saint Kyriake and other venerable virgin martyrs.

At the end of the Funeral Service, the monastery offered everyone kolyva and food. The Abbot called on the brotherhood and the priests from the area to gather and decide on the burial of the Saint. It was decided that a simple tomb would be built in the place of her martyrdom, near her birthplace.

It is generally accepted that the Saint's birthplace was a large settlement with many houses where the church stands today. Regarding the traditional idea concerning Ancient Melpeia, many people disagree. From an old man I heard that in the place where the church stands there was a building which Theodora's family built, and the people who lived there were the ancestors of the inhabitants of today's Vasta. What is certain is that before the present day's church there was a tomb which, for many years, was the area's shrine, which caused demand for a church to be built there. It is also certain that still under the Saint's grave and after her burial, a lot of water runs. It's as if an angel listened to Theodora's prayer and took it to heaven, while down on earth her blood became pure and holy water and huge trees grew around the church to protect it from wear.

Tracing details of the church's construction without having written records would be in vain, as so many centuries have passed. It appears that for many years, maybe centuries, the grave was the first shrine. For many years hundreds of pilgrims arrived at the shrine to venerate Saint Theodora everyday. Finally a devout Christian, maybe even a monk, committed himself to build the church which stands today. It is believed the church was built in the twelfth century and possibly the monastery paid for the expenses. It must have been constructed by a local

craftsman, as the techniques of that period were not utilized. Nonetheless, it is undeniably beautiful.

At the church we can observe a miracle of nature that is related to the martyrdom of Saint Theodora. The church is embraced by trees, their branches are fed by the surrounding water from an unknown source and enriches the River Harados. There are seventeen trees growing from the roof. We do not know exactly where their roots are, but they can be found around and under the church.

If the trees, which have protected the church from the ravages of time, were to be separated from the church, it would collapse. It is obvious to the true believer that a divine hand cradles the church, holding it together. It is said that it was the Saint's dying and fervent prayer that her blood run like water and that trees would grow at her grave to protect it from evil.

Every year on September 11th, at the place of martyrdom, people arrive to venerate and pay homage to the Saint. They admire the cluster of trees which surround the church, they attend the Divine Liturgy and discuss the story and martyrdom of Saint Theodora. (*abridged from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

### **Social Team for September 18**

Team 3 is up next week - Edgington, Kish, Barzykin, R&C Wright. Thank you!

#### **Follow Our Diocese On-Line**

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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, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlana Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine, the newly reposed servants of God Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, Sarah Comfort and BJ Weber, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)