

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wednesday: Lay Vespers 6:30 PM

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

November 13, 2022 – 22nd Sunday After Pentecost

St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

The divine Chrysostom is one of the most known Saints of the Orthodox Church. He was born in Antioch in 354 from pious parents. His father was the commander Sekoundos and his mother was Anthousa. Very early he was left fatherless and his mother took care to raise him with the sacred laws of the Gospel. In Antioch he studied rhetoric and philosophy. At the age of eighteen he was baptized and studied three years at the Theological School of Antioch. After the death of his mother he retired to the desert, where he remained six years. The first four years of his ascetic life were spent near an elder ascetic and the next two he stayed alone in a cave. His biographer, Palladius of Helenopolis, writes: "Most of the time he spent without sleep, learning Holy Scripture. He did not lay down to sleep for a period of two years, neither night nor day." His breakdown in health from excessive asceticism caused him to return to Antioch, where in 381 he was ordained Deacon then Presbyter. As a Presbyter he served in Antioch until 397, the year in which he was elected and consecrated Archbishop of Constantinople. From this "bastion" he held great battles against the pagans, as well as heretics who were breaking the



unity of the Church. He organized missions and philanthropy for Gothia, Scythia, Persia and Phoenicia. Steady and unwavering as he was in the faith and in the struggle against sin and every form of injustice, he was exiled three times and finally reposed in exile in the Caucasus of Armenia on 14 September 407. His memory, due to the Feast of the Cross, which is equivalent to Good Friday, was transferred to November 13th, that he may be celebrated brilliantly and joyfully.

His works are timeless, because they are divinely inspired. When one studies them, they think they have before them a contemporary and timely author. He is an excellent interpreter of Holy Scripture, which is to be interpreted not by anyone, but by the divinely-inspired Holy Fathers of the Church, who as purified and "filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit" are infallible interpreters of Holy Scripture. The sacred hymnographer characterizes him as a "golden trumpet and divinely-inspired organ, a heavenly nous and depth of wisdom".

One could speak for many hours or write whole volumes about the Saint of golden speech. In this short article I will highlight just three points that are related to this explosive and majestic personality:

First, he was a great theologian, but also a true shepherd. As His Eminence Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos stresses: "He shepherded theologians and theologized shepherds". He is characterized by many as social because he dealt with people and social problems. He was indeed social, precisely because he was a neptic and ascetic. He was constantly praying. His discourses and sermons had a vibrancy and immediacy about them and are very popular because he truly loved people and cared for them; for their spiritual progress, as well their material needs, since people are psychosomatic beings. He sought, however, to heal them of their physical and psychic passions. For example, when he spoke about avarice he urged the rich not to detain the goods of God only for themselves, but to also help the poor. He does not remain only there, though, but he goes deeper trying to heal the one and the other from this terrible passion, because there are poor people who are also avaricious, just like there are rich people who are not.

Second, the center of his life was was a life of worship and from this perspective he struggled to integrate the "reason of his flock". He attached great importance to worship because he believed that when we participate in the Divine Liturgy and commune of the Immaculate Mysteries, we participate in a Paschal Dinner with the disciples of Christ, eating of the same bread and drinking of the same cup, together with all those whose hearts, from all time and all places, burn with love for Christ, and know Him as His disciples knew Him from the "breaking of bread". The Divine Liturgy he wrote is the most known since it is celebrated almost all year long. Of course, over the centuries it has gone through certain changes and some

additions, but the prayers are the same as they were recited by the Archbishop of Constantinople himself. He sought to man the Sacred Altar with worthy Priests, and his discourse "On the Priesthood" is unique and deserves to be studied by all the faithful, Clergy and Laity.

Third, that which occupied him especially was the spiritual progress of his flock, as well as the glorification of the Triune God and His Holy Church. He did not receive glory for himself, because he did not deem himself worthy of honor. Besides, he considered it an apostasy and a sin. And things could not have been differently, since he was most humble and by his behavior he taught and showed to all of us the heights of humility. "Grace shining forth from your lips like a beacon has enlightened the universe. It has shown to the world the riches of poverty; it has revealed to us the heights of humility" (Apolytikion).

The "tongue and heart of gold" Saint John, by his life and words urges us to love prayer and the life of worship, in order that our hearts also "burn" with love for Christ, that we may be made worthy to know Him in the "breaking of bread".
(from *johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 6:11-18 EOB

Brethren, see with what large letters I write to you with my own hand! It is those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh who are trying to compel you to be circumcised; and it only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. As for me, I shall find glory in nothing, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. In Christ Jesus, circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; only a new creation is significant. To those who live by this rule, may there be peace and mercy upon them, and on the Israel of God. From now on, let no one cause me any trouble, for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus branded on my body. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 10:25-37 EOB

At that time, behold, an expert in the law stood up and put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" The man answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live." But the lawyer, desiring to justify himself, asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered, "A certain man

was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes and beat him. Then they went away, leaving him half-dead. By chance, a certain priest was going down that way. But when the priest saw him, he passed by on the other side. In the same way, a Levite also came to the place, but when he saw the beaten man, he [also] passed by on the other side. Now, a certain Samaritan was traveling and arrived at the spot where the man was. When the Samaritan saw the wounded man, a he was moved with compassion, came to him, and wrapped his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. He placed the man on his own animal and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he was leaving, he took out two denarii and gave them to the host, saying to him, 'Take care of him. Whatever you spend beyond that, I will pay you back when I return.' Now, which one of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" The lawyer replied, "The one who showed mercy on him!" Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

A feast is approaching which is the most solemn and awe-inspiring of all feasts. If one were to call it the metropolis of all feasts, one wouldn't be wrong. What is it? The birth of Christ according to the flesh.

In this feast the Epiphany, holy Pascha, the Ascension and Pentecost have their beginning and their purpose. For if Christ hadn't been born according to the flesh, he wouldn't have been baptized, which is Epiphany. He wouldn't have been crucified, which is Pascha. He wouldn't have sent the Spirit, which is Pentecost. So from this event, as from some spring, different rivers flow - these feasts of ours are born. But not only on this account would it be right to give precedence to this day, but also because what happened on it is much more awe-inspiring than all other days. I say this because the fact that Christ died after becoming human was the consequence of that: even if he didn't commit sin, still he assumed a mortal body. And that too was an amazing fact: that, although God, he was willing to become human and to condescend to take so much on himself that not even the imagination can embrace. It's this that is most awe-inspiring, and completely perplexing. Even Paul said in amazement: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our piety" (1 Tim. 3:16). How great? "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). And again he says elsewhere: "For surely it's not with angels that God is concerned, but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect" (Heb. 2:16-17).

On this account especially I embrace and love this day, and put my ardent love on show to make you share in my affection for it. On this account I beg and entreat all

of you to be present with much zeal and enthusiasm, each having vacated your own house, so that we may see our Master lying in the manger, dressed in swaddling-clothes - that awe-inspiring and miraculous sight. What kind of defense could we have, what kind of excuse, when he came down from heaven for our sake while we can't even leave the house to go to him? Or when the Magi, who were barbarians and foreigners, hurried from Persia to see him lying in the manger? But you, a Christian, can't be bothered to travel even a short distance in order to enjoy this blessed sight? For if we're present in faith we'll certainly see him lying in the manger: this table fulfills the role of the manger.

Indeed, here lies the body of the Lord, not wrapped in swaddling-clothes as formerly, but attired completely with the Holy Spirit. Those who are initiated know what I'm saying. The Magi merely worshiped him, whereas you, if you approach to communicate with a clear conscience, we permit to consume him and go back home. Approach, then, bringing gifts - not gifts like the Magi brought but ones that are much more solemn. They brought gold; you must bring temperance and virtue. They brought incense; you must bring pure prayers which are spiritual incense. They brought myrrh; you must bring humility and a humble heart and love. If you approach with these gifts, with great confidence you'll enjoy this holy table. For my part, I'm saying this now because I know quite well that on that day many of you will come forward and fall on this spiritual sacrifice. So that we don't do this to the detriment or condemnation of our soul but for our salvation, I'm calling you to witness beforehand, and I'm begging you to approach the holy mysteries after you've cleansed yourselves in every respect.

Please don't let anybody say to me: "I'm full of shame, I have a conscience crammed with sins, I'm carrying a very heavy burden." If you're sober, and pray and keep vigil, the appointed period of five days is sufficient to trim away your many sins. Don't look at how short the time is, but consider the point that the Master is loving. The Ninevites were able to beat off God's considerable anger in three days, and the time-constraint was no hindrance, but their readiness of spirit captured the Master's generosity and was able to effect everything (cf. Jon. 3). The prostitute, too, coming to Christ in a brief critical moment washed away all her offenses (cf. Lk. 7). When the Jews made the accusation that Christ had admitted her and had given her so much confidence, he silenced them, and freed her from all evils, and, having approved her enthusiasm, he sent her away. What's the message? That she came with an ardent mind and a burning soul and a fervent faith, and she touched those holy and sacred feet, when she had let down her hair, let tears flood from her eyes, and poured out the perfume.

The objects by which she bewitched people, she used to prepare the drugs of repentance. The objects by which she excited the gaze of the licentious, she used to

weep tears. The locks of hair by which she tripped up many people so they fell into sin, she used to wipe Christ's feet. The perfume by which she enticed, she used to anoint his feet. And you too therefore must placate God in turn by using the objects by which you provoked him. Did you provoke him by stealing money? Win him over by giving away what you stole to those who've been unjustly treated, and give other things in addition; say in the words of Zacchaeus: "I give back four times everything I've stolen" (cf. Lk. 19:8). Have you provoked him with your tongue and your abuse, by insulting many people? Propitiate him in turn with your tongue, by sending up pure prayers, by blessing those who abuse you, by praising those who speak badly of you, by thanking those who wrong you. These actions don't require days or the passing of many years, but only right purpose, and they can be accomplished in one day. Keep aloof from wickedness, embrace virtue, desist from evil; promise to commit these sins no longer, and this will be sufficient for your defense. I testify and guarantee that, if each of us that has sinned keeps aloof from their former evil ways and promises God truthfully that they won't touch them any more, God will require nothing else for a substantial defense. I say this because he is generous and merciful, and just as a woman in labor longs to give birth, so he too longs to dispense his mercy - it's our sins that interfere with this.

Let's pull down the wall, then, and right from that time begin the feast, renouncing all activities for these five days. "Farewell to the law courts, farewell to the council chambers - a plague on daily business, with its contracts and transactions. I want to save my soul." "What does it profit a person if they gain the whole world and lose their own soul?" (Matt. 16:26). The Magi came away from Persia; you must come away from daily business and travel towards Jesus. The distance isn't great, if we're willing. The point is that you don't have to cross the sea, or traverse mountain peaks, but if you sit at home, exhibiting piety and much compunction, you can see the wall being completely broken down, you can remove the obstacle, you can cut the length of the journey. "For I am a God at hand," it says, "and not a God far off" (Jer. 23:23), and "The Lord is near to all who call on him in truth" (Ps. 145:18).

But as it is, many of the faithful have arrived at such a degree of silliness and neglect that, although they are full of countless evils, and because they take no thought whatsoever for themselves, they approach this table on feast days in a random and frivolous fashion. They don't know that the time of communion doesn't consist of a feast and a celebration, but of a clear conscience and a life full of reproach. Just as the ordinary person who has nothing on their conscience ought to approach communion every day, so it's unsafe for the person who is overpowered by sin and does not repent to approach even on a feast day. For approaching once a year isn't going to free us from reproach, if we approach unworthily; but it's precisely this that damns us all the more, namely that when we

approach on that one occasion we're not even then approaching with a clear conscience.

That's why I beg all of you not to touch the divine mysteries in a negligent manner because you have to celebrate the feast. If, however, you're ever going to partake of this holy offering, you must purify yourselves for many days beforehand through repentance and prayer and almsgiving and devotion to spiritual matters, and not "return like a dog to its own vomit" (Prov. 26:11). Isn't it absurd to take so much care over bodily concerns, so that many days before the feast approaches you get your best clothes out of their chests and get them ready, and you buy shoes, and enjoy a more lavish table, and over and above that you take thought for many provisions from all quarters, and in every respect you clean yourself up and make yourself look good? On the other hand, you take no account of your soul, which is neglected, dirty, squalid, wasted from hunger and still unclean. Isn't it absurd that while you take your clean body to church, you overlook your soul, which is naked and disgraced? Yet whereas your fellow servant sees your body and no harm results no matter how it's dressed, the Master sees your soul and will put in place a most serious punishment for its neglect.

Don't you know that this table is full of spiritual fire, and just as springs gush forth the force of water, so too does the table contain a certain mysterious flame? So don't approach it if you're carrying stubble, wood or dry grass, in case you cause a bigger blaze and you burn your soul as it takes communion. But bring precious stones, gold, silver, in order to make the material more pure, in order to go back home having derived a great deal of profit. If you've got something wicked in you, get rid of it, banish it from your soul. Is it the case that someone has an enemy, and is suffering grievous wrongs at their hands? Let them bring the enmity to an end, let them restrain their inflamed and swollen attitude, so that internally they experience no tumult or disturbance. I say this because in communicating you are going to welcome a king. But if it's a king coming into your soul there must be abundant tranquility, abundant silence and a deep peace for your thoughts. But your suffering grievous wrongs, and you can't stop being angry? Why, then, do you visit much greater wrongs and difficulties on yourself? Whatever the person does, your enemy won't inflict on you the kind of harm you inflict on yourself by not being reconciled with them but rather trampling God's laws under your feet. Did your enemy insult you? Is it on this account, tell me, that you then insult God? Refusing to be reconciled with the one who hurt you isn't so much a sign of taking revenge on them as of insulting God, who laid down these laws.

So don't look at your fellow servant, nor at the magnitude of the wrongs they have done, but when you have put God and the fear of God into your mind, consider the following point. The excessive wrenching that you feel internally when, after

countless evil acts, you force yourself to be reconciled with the one who hurt you, will be commensurate with the increased esteem which you will enjoy in the eyes of God, who ordered this course of action. And just as here on earth you will welcome God with great honor, so too will he receive you in heaven with great glory, as he pays you back ten-thousandfold for your obedience. May all of us attain this through the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, honor, power and worship, for ever and ever. Amen.

– St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Approach of Christ's Nativity*

St. Irene Myrtidiotissa

Irene Demetra Pateras was born March 30, 1939, the third child of an affluent Greek shipping family from the island of Oinoussi. True to her name ("Irene" in Greek means "peace"), the girl had a serene and meek temperament, although in matters of faith she did not hesitate to stand up for her convictions. The family lived in Alexandria, where six-year-old Irene attended a Roman Catholic school. One day she was taken, against her parents' express instructions, to church to receive Communion. When she refused, the priest tried to reassure her by saying, "It's all right. We're all the same." "In that case," Irene said, "you should come to St. Sophia's [the Greek Orthodox Church] to commune. Then I'll receive Communion from you."

In 1952, after the family had moved to Athens, Irene's father, a former sea-captain and prominent member of the community, became seriously ill. It was not until a year later that the doctors diagnosed Hodgkin's disease. Irene loved her father, and she could not bear to see him suffer. She begged God that the illness pass to her and that her father be relieved. She reasoned that the family needed her father more than they needed her, and that he could still do good for others through his deeds.

Two weeks later, Irene developed a fever. She asked her mother, "Perhaps, I have the same illness as Papa?" Her mother assured her daughter that was not possible. Irene had always been healthy, and the family assumed she had the flu. However, after days passed and the fever grew stronger, Irene was taken to a hospital. Among Irene's visitors was her high school principal. When her mother thanked him for the honor of his visit, he said that the honor belonged to Irene, as the school was proud to have a student of such fine character.

Irene's illness was first diagnosed as rheumatism. She did not respond to treatment and her condition worsened. A biopsy of fluid from a gland in her neck ultimately revealed Hodgkin's disease. Her parents were told, but decided to keep the truth from Irene. When Irene again asked if she had her father's disease, her mother said no. The doctor at the clinic was bewildered as he had never encountered two cases

of Hodgkin's disease in the same family. Her parents ultimately decided to consult another blood specialist, but before being examined, Irene saw the diagnosis in her medical file. When her mother asked why she looked so sad, Irene replied, "It's nothing, Mama. I am only human. It will pass." Later, however, she confided to her sister that she was upset that she had not been told of her disease, so that she could focus her life accordingly. Irene told her that she had prayed to God to take on her father's illness, and was surprised at how quickly God had answered her prayers. Meanwhile, her father's pains ceased, as did the radiation treatments, and the disease miraculously remained in remission. He was profoundly affected by his daughter's sacrifice, and grieved for her sufferings, but he accepted this development together with the rest of the family, as being for the greater glory of God.

Irene's was a devout family, and now she became more consciously focused on her spiritual life. She read the cycle of services daily and concentrated reading the lives of the saints. Her sufferings made her even more tender-hearted towards others in their misfortune, and she consoled many through her letters and prayers. Unaware of this herself, she told her spiritual father, "I have a stone in my heart. Pray that that stone will soften, so I might acquire love."

In 1960, Irene spent forty days at the convent of St. Menas on Aegina. The Elder Ieronymous lived in a nearby hermitage, and she had many occasions to visit him and receive his instruction and counsel. He gave her the Ascetic Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian. When she had finished it, he asked if she had understood what she had read, and she admitted with characteristic humility and simplicity, "No." The Elder had her re-read the book, and the next time she came to him with notes.

Returning home to a suburb of Athens, Irene moved into a basement room, which had been remodeled as a monastic cell. Although she considered the high calling of the monastic life to be beyond her capabilities, she was increasingly withdrawing from the world into a life of prayer. She asked that all her worldly clothes and accessories be given away, and wore a simple grey dress. Later, she wore only black. Eldress Matrona of Chios came to live with Irene, and her presence contributed to the monastic atmosphere that now defined Irene's life. Her intense physical sufferings, which she bore with rare fortitude, scoured her soul, making it shine with an otherworldly tranquility and joy apparent to all who had contact with her.

Irene desired to embrace monasticism in its fullness. In late 1960, Fr. Panteleimon, now Abbot of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Brookline, came to visit, being already well acquainted with the family and its devotion to the Church. Encouraged by her mother, Irene asked him if it would be possible for her to

become a nun, in view of her inability to perform the monastic rule. Fr. Panteleimon assured her that in such cases the uncomplaining acceptance of suffering replaced prostrations and fasting. Overjoyed, Irene requested that the tonsure take place in three weeks, on October 26, the feast of St. Demetrios the Myrrhusher, her patron saint. Her illness had progressed to such an extent that the doctors thought she might die within a matter of days. Others suggested the tonsure be performed earlier, but Irene was confident that God would grant her more time.

On the eve of the feast, Fr. Philotheos Zervakos and Fr. Panteleimon, her sponsor, came to serve the vigil in the family chapel. Irene experienced severe pains and a cough, so Fr. Philotheos told her to stay in bed and, when the time came in the service for the tonsure, they would come downstairs and perform it in her room. When, however, the vigil began, Irene quietly got out of bed and took the small elevator upstairs to a room next to the chapel, where she followed the service. Just before it came time for the tonsure, she entered the chapel and, disregarding her pain and extreme exhaustion, went around the chapel, making a full prostration before each icon. During the service, Irene's cough subsided and, in spite of her exertions, she began to feel better. She was clothed in the angelic schema with the name Irene Myrtidiotissa.

For two weeks after her tonsure, Mother Irene felt better, and a blood test confirmed the marked improvement in her condition to the amazement of her doctors. However, on November 12, her pains began again, and she was taken to the hospital. Relatives and spiritual acquaintances kept vigil at her bedside as it became clear that her departure was imminent. Early on the morning of November 13, 1960, her mother called those in the house to come to the hospital, along with Fr. Philotheos. Everyone stood around Mother Irene's bed in prayerful silence. The previous day she had told a friend, "If you want to see your neighbor again, come tomorrow very early, before sunrise." Just as the sun was brightening the sky, Mother Irene went peacefully from this world to meet her Heavenly Bridegroom.

Her body was taken home where it was prepared for burial. The funeral was held that same day at the Holy Convent of St. John the Theologian in Holargos, a suburb of Athens. There was such a feeling of joy among those present that one priest wondered aloud if it wouldn't be appropriate to chant a Resurrection service. Irene was buried in the convent cemetery, her body being placed directly into the earth without a coffin, according to the Greek monastic custom.

In 1963, three years later, in the same tradition, Mother Irene's remains were exhumed. After Liturgy on the Feast of the Mother of God "Myrtidiotissa," Fr. Panetleimon and other monks and clergy went with Irene's mother to the cemetery, taking with them a box into which to transfer the bones. In digging down, however,

they found her remains to be completely intact and fragrant. They were carried in a sheet to the convent, where the overjoyed nuns sang Resurrectional hymns, and then took her remains to Mother Irene's cell. There, nuns from the convent washed and dressed them. They were appropriately laid to rest in a reliquary in a chapel of the Annunciation Convent that her family had founded on Oinoussai, the island where they had been born.

When Mother Irene had been prepared for burial, her father looked upon her serene countenance and said softly, "You closed your eyes, my child; now my pains will begin again." He died on the Feast of St. Nicholas, December 6, 1966, three years after receiving the monastic tonsure, for which he was well prepared after living for fourteen years with the constant thought of death. After his repose, his wife, at the urging of Elder Ieronymous of Aegina, also entered the monastic life. Following the instructions of the Elder, she assumed the duties of abbess at the Convent of the Annunciation.

The idea for the establishment of a convent came in 1959 when Irene's parents were with her at the clinic. It was constructed with astonishing rapidity. The portable icons were written by the eminent iconographer, Fotios Kontoglou, who encouraged Irene's parents in their holy undertaking. The convent follows the Old Calendar and the ancient Typicon of St. Sava.

Just recently, the area around the blessed remains of Nun Irene Myrtydiotissa at the Annunciation Convent was found bathed in myrrh, the sweet fragrance of a life sacrificed for another. (*from antiochian.org*)

Guidelines for the Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast is one of the four Canonical Fasting Seasons in the Church year. This is a *joyous* fast in anticipation of the Nativity of Christ. Because it begins the day after the commemoration of the Apostle Philip (Nov. 14th), it is often referred to as the Apostle Philip fast. Although it is as long as Great Lent, it is not as severe. Throughout the entire duration of these forty days there is no accommodation for meat, dairy products and eggs. However, fish is allowed to be consumed every day except Wednesdays and Fridays, from November 15th until December 17th. Fish is also allowed on the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos, which falls on November 21st, no matter what day of the week it falls on. From the 18th to the 24th of December, which is Christmas Eve, oil and wine are the only relief from a strict fast, except Wednesdays and Fridays on which we adhere to a strict fast. We should keep a fast of dry foods (xerophagy) also on the first day of the fast on November 15th, as well as on Christmas Eve, unless of course they fall on a Saturday or Sunday. Strictly interpreted, xerophagy signifies that we may eat only vegetables cooked with water and salt, and also such things as fruit, nuts,

bread and honey. In practice, octopus and shellfish are also allowed on days of xerophagy; likewise vegetable margarine and corn or other vegetable oil, not made from olives. But the following categories of food are definitely excluded: *Meat; animal products (cheese, milk, butter, eggs, lard, drippings); fish (i.e., fish with backbones); oil (i.e., olive oil) and wine (i.e., all alcoholic drinks).*

Do Not Fast

- if you are pregnant or nursing a newborn;
- during serious illness;
- without prayer;
- without alms-giving;
- according to your own will without guidance from your spiritual father.

Fasting from Foods and Passions

We must always keep in mind that in our Church true fasting is not only about abstaining from certain foods, but also abstaining from the passions and sins. Saint Photios the Great says: "Fasting that is acceptable to God is that which combines the abstention of food with the aversion of chatter, envy, hatred and other sins. The one who fasts from food, but does not temper the passions, is like one who puts a splendid foundation to a house he has built, but allows snakes, scorpions and every poisonous reptile to live within." We thus aim for a spiritual fast during this period, to avoid sin and keep the will of God, being an embodiment of love and forgiveness and mercy, as well as striving to attain even greater virtue. In this way we will better understand and realize the words of Saint Basil the Great: "True fasting is to alienate ourselves from all evil, all sin, all impassioned thoughts, all unclean desires."

Repentance & Worship

Together with our fasting and our preparation for Christmas we also include repentance. An honest examination of ourselves, admitting our wrongs and participating in the sacred Mystery of Confession are prerequisites for a truly worthy participation in the Christmas Divine Liturgy. Indeed, it is good to take care and approach Divine Communion in a timely manner and not at the last minute. The preparatory period before Christmas gives us a great opportunity to understand well the misery that we hide deep within our being, in order to acquire a humble spirit and self-control, that we may be mentally transformed, to sincerely repent, and to dare undertake the great meeting with the Newborn Lord of Bethlehem.

During a time of spiritual preparation and anticipation, such as the forty days prior to Christmas, the prayers of the faithful and our participation in the worship of the

Church play an essential role.... It is beneficial to participate in [as many services as possible] and prepare to receive Divine Communion. Here, therefore, before us is the path towards Bethlehem. "Come, believers, let us see where Christ is born," we chant in church. Let us follow the advice of our Mother the Church, and prepare ourselves properly throughout these days, that we may be found worthy to worship "the Ancient of Days Who becomes an Infant for us, for He Who sits on a Heavenly Throne on high is placed in a manger, He Who broke the shackles of sin is now wrapped in swaddling clothes, because this was His will" (St. John Chrysostom). (*adapted from Antiochian.org and johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

Martyrs Antoninus, Nicephorus, and Germanus of Caesarea in Palestine (308).

Martyr Manetha of Caesarea in Palestine (308).

New Martyr Damascene of Mt. Athos (1681).

St. Bricius, bishop of Tours (444)

St. Quintianus, bishop of Clermont (525) (Gaul).

St. Euphrasius, bishop of Clermont (515) (Gaul).

St. Leonien of Vienne (518) (Gaul).

St. Caillin of Ferns, Bishop (7th c)

St. Columba of Cornwall, Virgin Martyr (unk)

+St. Denick of Caithness, Bishop (6th c)

St. Gredifael of Wales, abbot of Whitland in Pembrokeshire (7th c)

St. Kilian of Aubigny (Chillianus, Chillien, Chillen), bishop (7th c)

Martyr Abbo of La Réole (Gascony)(1004)

Martyrs Arcadius, Paschasius, Probus, Eutychian and Paulillus of Spain (437)

Hieroconfessor Dalmatius, Bishop of Rodez (580)

Pope Damasus (384)

St. Eugenel, Bishop of Toledo (657)

Martyr Maxillendis of Caudry (670)

Martyr Mitrius of Aix (314)

Martyrs Valentine, Solutor and Victor of Ravenna (305)

New Church App!

St. Thomas Parish now has a smartphone app! Our parish family is encouraged to download the "Church Center" app on either the Apple App Store or Google Play. Once you've downloaded the App, search for our parish. From the app you can see the Church calendar, donate, participate in church groups, and be notified about important information from St. Thomas Church.



Social Team for November 20

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

Study on the Divine Liturgy Wednesday Evening

As a reminder, we are holding the Study Series: *Exploration of the Divine Liturgy* on Wednesdays in the parish hall (house behind the church) at 7:00 pm following Lay Vespers (6:30 - 7:00). In the series, will work through the Liturgy to understand why each part is there, its significance in our Corporate Worship and our personal Christian development with a goal of bringing us closer to Christ. We will look at historical writings and explanations to gain a better understanding of our Liturgy.

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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 & Marlena 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, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)