

# SOBORNOST

**St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church**

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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**

**December 4, 2022 – 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**

**Great-martyr Barbara of Heliopolis in Syria**

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

Saint Barbara is a jewel of the third century. She came from the East and was raised in a pagan family. Her father, named Dioscorus, was rich, and he was a fanatical pagan. His daughter was a virtuous and benevolent person and she was catechized in the faith of Christ by a pious woman. After her baptism she lived in an enclosed tower because she was very beautiful, and she lived in asceticism and prayer. Her difficulties were numerous, but Saint Barbara had learned to entrust to God all her problems and the difficulties she faced. It was not long before Dioscorus learned that his daughter had become a Christian. He had a bath house built and ordered for it to have two windows. The Saint told the craftsmen to open three windows. When her father asked about this she replied that she had three windows opened in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Then, full of anger, he came against her with a sword and she fled into the forest. He chased her, arrested her and led her to the pagan ruler who tried, first with flattery and later with inhuman torture, to persuade her to deny Christ. Because she remained firm and steadfast in her faith, he wanted to humiliate and disgrace her.



For this reason he ordered the removal of her clothing and to parade her this way through the city. His miserable purpose failed to be realized, however, because God protected her in a wondrous way. At the moment when they tried to unclothe her, she would be dressed immediately with new clothes, better and more brilliant than the previous. Then the ruler ordered her decapitation, and her father full of hatred and blind fanaticism decapitated her with his own hands, and in this way she received the blessed crown of martyrdom. [Also commemorated today is the holy martyr Juliana of Heliopolis, who upon seeing the glorious Martyr Barbara during her terrible trial suffering from her many wounds severely reproached the ruler for his cruelty and unfairness; she was seized by the ruler and tortured along with St. Barbara. St. Juliana was also beheaded. - Ed.]

The life and times of Saint Barbara gives us the opportunity to emphasize the following:

First, the offering of one's self to God and to entrust to Him, with unwavering confidence, our various problems that concern us, is a way of life that helps us balance our lives and not despair, not to "feel down" as we often say. For it is not a small thing to be hated by your own father, for him to give you over to tortures and finally for him to bring on your death with his own hands. That is, from the place where you expect to experience love, the essence of life, you encounter hatred and death. The place where you seek to lean on for support and comfort in the difficulties of your life, you face hostility even for having not committed any offense. The only offense was because you have chosen a different faith from what he had, even though he should love you sacrificially.

Do you think such similar events do not happen nowadays? For someone to want to impose one's views on another, when they feel like they have the ability to do so, with flattering and promises of a better life, or even with various extortions when the other is in a disadvantaged position? Many times poverty and misery lead people to the decision to leave their homeland and submit to the trial of searching for better and more humane living conditions. And then, unfortunately, several tragic events occur, many of which the protagonists are certain parents.

Second, the fall of man into sin and apostasy from God, led them to create substitutes of the true God. This led to the establishment of various religions, in which they essentially worship created things and non-existent gods. Christ became man to free humanity from the tyranny of the devil and created things. Orthodoxy is not a human construct, it is not a discovery of man and in this sense it is not a religion, but a Church. In other words, it is a revelation of God Himself and, as it is stressed by the ever-memorable Fr. John Romanides, it is "the treatment of religion, or superstition". Unfortunately, today we are becoming

witnesses of sick events, such as the hatred of blind fanaticism, which is derived from various human constructs.

There are nowadays many who argue, apparently out of ignorance, that God is one and that we all worship the same God. There is certainly no greater error than this. For what relation is there between the Holy Triune God of the Orthodox Church, who is a Person and develops a personal communion of love with humanity and even teaches love towards our enemies, and the gods of the idols or with the dynastic gods of other religions, that are without mercy for "unbelievers" and inspire revenge, intolerance and fanaticism? A person is free to believe whatever they want, but we can't bulldoze over everything. The experience of Orthodox ecclesiastical life humanizes people and elevates them to such a point so as to love, not only our children in the flesh which is self-evident, or friends and those who are like-minded, but even enemies, and they respect their differences and their faiths.

A personal communion with the personal God of the Church generates an unwavering trust in His love, which frees man from all complexities and deadlocks and elevates their humanity. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 4:1-6 EOB**

Brethren, this is why I, being a prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called. Walk with complete lowliness and humility, with patience, bearing with one another in love; being eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 17:12-19 EOB**

At that time, as Jesus entered into a certain village, ten men who were lepers met him, and they stood at a distance. They lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When Jesus saw them, he told them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And it happened that as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice. He fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks; and this man was a Samaritan. Jesus said, "Were not ten cleansed? But where are the nine [others]? Was no one found who came back to glorify God, except for this foreigner?" Then Jesus said to him, "Get up and go your way. Your faith has healed you!"

# A Word From the Holy Fathers

## First Canticle

Of old the Master that works wonders saved His people, \* Making the watery wave of the sea into dry land; \* And now of His own will has He been born from a Maiden, \* And so He establishes a path for us whereby we may mount to heaven. \* We glorify Him Who in essence is equal to the Father and to mortal men.

Plainly foreshadowed by the burning bush that was not consumed, \* A hallowed womb has borne the Word. \* God is mingled with the form of mortal men; \* And so He looses the unhappy womb of Eve from the bitter curse of old. \* We men give Him glory.

A star showed plainly to the Magi \* The Word that was before the sun, who has come to make transgression cease. \* They saw You wrapped in swaddling clothes, within a poor and lowly cave, \* Who shares all our sufferings, \* And in joy they gazed upon You, at once both man and Lord.

## Third Canticle

Graciously accept, O Benefactor, the praises of Your servants \* And bring down the spiteful and haughty looks of the enemy. \* O blessed Lord Who sees all, raise us up far above sin, \* And establish Your singers firm and unshaken \* Upon the foundation of the faith.

The choir of shepherds abiding in the fields was overwhelmed \* By the strange sight they were counted worthy to behold; \* For they looked upon the all-blessed Offspring of an all-pure Bride; \* And they saw also the ranks of bodiless angels, who sang \* In praise of Christ the King, incarnate without seed.

He who rules the heights of heaven, in His compassion, \* Has become such as we are, born of a Maiden who has not known man. \* The Word who before was wholly outside matter, in these last times \* Has assumed the material substance of the flesh \* That so He might draw unto Himself fallen Adam, the first-formed man.

## Fourth Canticle

Of old Habakkuk the Prophet was counted worthy to behold ineffably \* The figure and symbol of Christ's birth, \* And he foretold in song the renewal of mankind. \* For a young babe, even the Word, has now come forth from the Mountain that is the Virgin, \* Unto the renewal of the peoples.

Of Your own will, O Most High, You have come forth equal to mortal men, \* Taking flesh from the Virgin, \* To purge the poison of the serpent's head. \* God by nature, You lead all \* From the gates that know no sun to the life-giving light.

O people who before were sunk in corruption, \* But now have escaped wholly from the perdition of the adversary, \* Lift up your hands and clap them in songs of praise, \* Honoring Christ alone, our Benefactor, \* Who in His compassion is come into our midst.

O Virgin, sprung from the root of Jesse, \* You have passed beyond the boundaries of human nature, \* For you have borne the pre-eternal Word of the Father. \* According to His good pleasure, by a strange self-emptying, \* He passed through your womb, yet kept it sealed.

### **Fifth Canticle**

From the night of deeds of dark error we watch vigilantly, \* And sing to You, O Christ, as to our Benefactor. \* Come to us and grant us cleansing: \* Make the path easy for us, \* Whereby we may ascend and so attain to glory.

The Master, by His coming in the flesh, has cut clean through \* The harsh enmity of the flesh against Him, \* And has destroyed the might of the murderer of our souls, \* Uniting the world to the immaterial essences, \* He has made the Father merciful to the creation.

The people who before walked in the darkness \* This day have seen a light from the beacon on high. \* The Son offers to God the nations as His inheritance, bestowing grace past telling \* Where sin once flourished more abundantly.

### **Sixth Canticle**

Enclosed in the uttermost depths of the sea, \* Jonah entreated You to come and still the storm. \* And I, O Christ, pierced by the dart of the tyrant, \* Call upon You, the Slayer of evil, \* Beseeching You to come quickly and deliver me from my slothfulness.

God the Word, who was in the beginning with God, \* Seeing our nature powerless to guard unharmed \* Its ancient fellowship with Him, now grants it new strength: \* Abasing Himself, in a second act of fellowship \* He makes it once again free from the passions.

For our sakes He has come forth from the loins of Abraham, \* To raise up as His sons those who were sadly fallen \* Into the darkness of sin that bowed them down to the earth; \* And He who dwells in light has now been pleased, despite His high dignity, \* To dwell in a manger for the salvation of mankind.

### **Seventh Canticle**

Caught and held fast by love for the King of all, \* The Children despised the impious threats of the tyrant in his boundless fury; \* And as the terrible fire withdrew before them, \* They said to the Master, 'You are blessed unto all ages.'

The seething and roaring furnace, heated seven-fold, \* In its fury burnt up the servants of the king, \* But spared the Children: \* For as the flame encircled them, the Lord, \* Rewarding their godliness, shed upon them abundant dew.

O Christ our Defender, You have put to shame the adversary of man, \* Using as shield Your ineffable Incarnation! \* Taking man's form, You have now bestowed upon him the joy \* Of becoming godlike: for it was in hope of this \* That of old we fell from on high into the dark depths of the earth.

You have overthrown by Your almighty power \* The fierce sin that raised its head in wanton pride, \* And raged with blasphemy throughout a world gone mad. \* Those whom in times past it dragged down, today You have delivered from its snares, \* O Benefactor, who of Your own will has taken flesh.

### **Eighth Canticle**

The Children of the Old Covenant who walked in the fire, yet were not burned, \* Prefigured the womb of the Maiden that remained sealed, \* When she gave birth in fashion past nature. \* It was the same grace of God that brought both these wonders to pass in a miracle \* And rouses the peoples to sing in praise.

Shunning the guilt of its vain attempt to become as God, \* The whole creation sings, like the three Children, in praise of the eternal Word, who now empties Himself: \* Yet sings with trembling, afraid to bring \* A prayer unacceptable to God, for it is subject to decay, \* Even though the divine wisdom maintains it ever in being.

You have come, O Resurrection of the nations, \* To bring back the nature of man from its wanderings, \* Leading it from the hills of the wilderness to a pasture rich in flowers. \* Destroy the violent strength of the murder of man, \* who in Your providence have appeared as man and God.

### **Ninth Canticle**

Today the Virgin bears the Master within the Cave.

It would be easier for us, because free from all danger, to keep silence in fear: \* While it is hard indeed, O Virgin, in love to devise songs harmoniously put together.

But, O Mother, give us strength so we may fulfill our good intent.

Today the Master is born as a babe of a Virgin Mother.

Today shepherds behold the Savior wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

Today the Master who cannot be touched is wrapped as a babe in swaddling rags.

We have seen, O pure Mother, the dim figures of the Word and the shades that are past; \* And now that He has newly appeared from the closed gate, \* We who are counted worthy to behold the Light of truth, as is meet and right, bless your womb.

Today all creation rejoices greatly and makes glad, for Christ is born of a Virgin Maid.

The Powers of heaven declare to the world that the Savior, Lord, and Master has been born.

Magnify, O my soul, the power of the undivided Godhead in Three Persons!

The people who delight in Christ have attained their desire, \* Being counted worthy of the coming of God, \* And now they humbly pray for the regeneration that gives life. \* O undefiled Virgin, grant them the grace, \* To worship Christ in His glory.

– St. John of Damascus, *Canon for Nativity*

## **New Hieromartyr Seraphim, Bishop of Phanarion & Neochorion**

St. Seraphim hailed from Pezoula (Mpezila), in the Agrapha region of Greece. His parents, Sopronios and Maria, raised him on the spring waters of the Faith from his earliest childhood days. Accordingly, they enrolled him in the [local] “school of sacred letters.” The young Seraphim, even when he was not attending school but staying at his paternal home, spent the greater part of his time in the reading of Scriptures and the lives of the Saints, at the same time never being absent from Divine Services.

When he got older, he ceased showing interest in any of the matters of daily life and, seeking a place to pursue the ascetic life of hesychasm, ended up in the Holy Monastery of the Most Holy Theotokos, or the Holy Monastery of the Cold Spring (subsequently called the Monastery at the Crown or Koroni), where he remained and was tonsured a monk, eagerly imitating the most virtuous of his brothers. Over time, his fellow monastics, having seen all of his own virtues (fasting, watchfulness, humility, and love), proposed that the Saint, who accepted, be ordained, initially as a Reader, thereafter a Deacon, and finally as a Presbyter (Hieromonk).

Such was the esteem in which the faithful and the monastics held his person, that after the passing of the Metropolitan of Phanarion and Neochorion, Seraphim was elected as the new Bishop. The Saint, assuming the care and guidance of so many souls, redoubled his struggles, caring for his flock and, indeed, frequently calling himself a lowly servant, all the while ardently keen to be found worthy of the crown of martyrdom, something that was not long in coming to fruition.

During this period, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Metropolitan of Larissa, Dionysios the Philosopher, was preaching revolution [against the Ottoman Empire] in the regions of Epirus and Thessaly, which met with no success, while the Metropolitan, as the one accountable, was in the end tortured to death by the Ottomans. Coincidentally with this activity, Seraphim travelled to Phanarion, Karditsa in order to give the designated periodic tributes to the Aghas. The Ottomans, believing that Seraphim was also participating in the incitement of revolution, attacked him, at first verbally, suggesting in particular that he renounce his faith, so as to escape punishment and to eliminate their suspicions. After the refusal of the Saint, the Turkish mob carried him off to Hamouz bey, who was the Pasha of Phanarion.

The Pasha began in a calm way to speak with the Saint, saying that even if he had been deceived by the revolutionary Dionysios, he could yet be delivered by becoming a Muslim. The Saint defended the truth of his words, resolutely insisting that he had not involved himself in the revolutionary movement and that he had no intention of ever abandoning “my sweetest Master and God, Jesus Christ,” as his words are preserved verbatim in the *Synaxaristes*. Then the brave Bishop continued: “For even if I were to suffer a myriad of deaths for His Holy Name, I would do so with joy and gladness. Therefore, O Sovereign, strike, cut, do whatever is in your power!”

Thereupon the Agha commanded that he be beaten mercilessly and that his nose be cut off. While the Saint was enduring all of this, he continually gave thanks to God that he had been deemed worthy to be martyred for His name. Afterwards, Seraphim was imprisoned for a day without food and water. In jail, he rejoiced and praised God, thanking Him for the sufferings that he was found worthy to withstand, to the glory of God, asking God for the strength to bear his approaching martyrdom. The next day, the Ottoman ruler ordered that Seraphim be brought to him again. Hamouz, employing new threats, tried to change the Saint's mind.

But St. Seraphim restated ever more definitively his decision not to deny Jesus Christ. So, the Agha ordered that he be beaten more viciously. The torturers continued their inhuman efforts, stretching his hands and feet with ropes, simultaneously placing a large stone on his abdomen, and cutting him continually with knives. Then they gave him water with dirt and bile to drink, yet the face of the Saint was radiant, as though he were taking part in some banquet instead of being tortured. Even his torturers looked on the Saint with admiration.

Near a cypress tree in the vicinity of the market place in Phanarion, the Saint gave up his spirit, mortally wounded in his entrails. (He endured martyrdom by impalement; i.e., they skewered his body with a stake). This was on December 4,



1601. The holy body remained there for some days, affixed to the stake with which he was tortured, but his body did not decompose. On the contrary, it looked like a live body and emitted an ineffable fragrance, producing wonderment and contrition among the faithful and consternation among the Ottomans. The Pasha refused the request of the Christians that his body be released to them. After a number of days, he ordered that the head of the Saint be cut off and sent to Trikala, along with other heads of revolutionary fighters aligned with Metropolitan Dionysios and common criminals, as well.

There, all of the heads were placed on poles, creating a macabre forest, in order to set an example for those of other religions (non-Muslims) in the area. The Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Dousiko, located near Trikala, gave a certain Albanian Christian fifty silver coins to steal the head from the place where it was under guard, with the goal of keeping it as a treasure in his monastery. The attempted seizure of the Relic was detected by the guards, who angrily pursued the Christian, who in turn quickly ran away with the Relic. Nearing a bridge on the River Peneios (Peneus), he saw that his pursuers were dangerously close to him. So he threw the holy Relic into the river and fled with haste from the Turks, who had stopped and were observing the foregoing scene. A short distance from the bridge, two fishermen, who had built a small dam in the bed of the Peneios, miraculously found the holy Relic and, because they knew him, reverently delivered it to the aforementioned Abbot.

Shortly thereafter, the Abbot of the Holy Monastery at the Crown asked for the Relic from the monks at Dousiko, since St. Seraphim had been a monk at their monastery, remunerating them the fifty silver coins that had been paid to the Christian who was sent to steal them. From that time on, the skull of the Saint has been kept there as a treasure, and to this day it is fragrant and frees all of those who seek the intercession of the Saint from every disease and adverse thing. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

### **Also Commemorated Today**

New Hieromartyrs Alexis, John, Alexander and Nicholas priests, Basil deacon and with him 10 Martyrs (1918)

New Hieromartyr Demetrius priest, Virgin-martyrs Ecaterine and Cyra (1937).

New Hieromartyr Damascene, bishop of Glukhov (1935) and his father priest Nicholas (Tsedrik).

New Hieromartyr Alexander Hotovitzky priest (1937)

Venerable John, bishop of Polybotum (716). w/w

St. Gennadius, archbishop of Novgorod (1504).

Martyrs Christodula and Chistodulus (*Greek*).

St. Ada, Abbess at Le Mans (7<sup>th</sup> c.)

St. Bertoara, Abbess of Notre-Dame-de-Sales in Bourges (614)

St. Felix, Bishop of Bologna

## **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 December 11**

Team 1 is up next week - Hanbury, P. Blaydoe, Chumak, Wally Simkin. 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.

### **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 & 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.)