

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church
4419 Leonardtown Road, Waldorf, MD 20601
(301) 638-5035 Church | (703) 532-8017

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor (fredgington@gmail.com)

www.apostlethomas.org

SERVICES

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Wed: 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



February 19, 2023 – Sunday of the Last Judgment (Meatfare)

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

The Second Coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead are closely connected with the coming judgment, the so-called future tribunal. All men will stand before the dread judgment seat of Christ.

In the Creed we confess that Christ will come with glory "to judge the living and the dead". This conviction constitutes the central teaching of the Church, as we shall verify in what follows. In all the assemblies for worship and in the Divine Liturgy there are words about presence before the throne of God. The priest prays: "For a Christian end of our life, painless, peaceful and unashamed, and for a good answer before the dread judgment seat of Christ, we beseech You."

In what follows we shall have an opportunity to emphasize the fact that although we use images of a tribunal, the judgment will have more the character of a revelation and manifestation of the spiritual state of the person. Moreover, all the images used have a symbolic character. Christ and the saints, as we shall see, use such images to make people understand pictorially that dreadful day when they will see the reality. Consequently, unless we do away with the images, we must enter into their essence and inner content.

According to St. Symeon the New Theologian, "What we have to say about the judgment is difficult to explain because it is not about present and visible things but about future and invisible ones". The present things are seen, the future is invisible, and that is why purity of nous, much prayer and much zeal are required.

In Holy Scripture a great deal is said about the coming judgment, which is a starting-point for eternal life and eternal Hell. Christ's parables about the Ten Virgins, the tares and the weddings are well known. It is not easy or possible for us to analyze all these elements. However, we shall set down the most significant ones.

Christ assured the people that He Himself would judge the people in the age to come. "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (Jn. 5:22). And this is not independent of the fact that Christ is the prototype of man, since man is an image of Christ, but also the rebirth of man comes through Christ. He became man, suffered, was crucified, rose again and was taken up. He, then, will be the judge of men.

"And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). Also the Apostle Paul preached the same teaching on Mars Hill, when he said: "He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

In these apostolic passages it appears that Christ will be the judge of men. A parallel passage from the Apostle Paul is his exhortation to his disciple Timothy: "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His epiphany and His kingdom..." (2 Tim. 4:1). The Second Coming of Christ is called *epiphany* and *kingdom*, which is connected with the judgment of dead and living, that is to say, those who have died previously and those who will be living at that time.

The connection of the Second Coming of Christ with the throne shows both the majesty of God and Christ's authority to judge men, but also men's fear in the face

of the judgment and the judge. Christ used this image when he said that when he comes with the angels, "He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Matt. 25:31).

The throne, which is a symbol of His glory, but also of the authority which He has over men, has its origin in the worship of the divinities of ancient times and of the god - emperor of the Romans, but also in the Old Testament, as well as in the Revelation of John. The Prophet-king David already writes in one of his psalms: "He has prepared His throne for judgment. He shall judge the world in righteousness" (Psalm 9:7-8). And there is a portrayal saying "preparation of the throne", which has been connected with Golgotha. Since the eleventh century the depiction of the "preparation of the throne" has been connected with the Second Coming of Christ and the coming tribunal.

The meaning of the throne, which suggests the imperial throne and the tribunal, has been closely linked with Christ's judgment of the living and the dead, and we find it in many passages in the epistles of the Apostle Paul. Referring to the fact that we are all suppliants, servants of Christ, and we should not judge others, he affirms: "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10). The Christians of Rome, to whom this is said, had knowledge and experience of what the emperor's and the judge's throne meant. He also says the same thing to the Christians of Corinth: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

Since the final judgment of men will take place, and since the real Judge is Christ, Christians should avoid judging their fellow men, their brothers. The Apostle Paul writes: "He who judges me is the Lord... who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the heart" (1 Cor. 4:5). In this passage, apart from the fact that it says that Christ is the true judge of men, at the same time the way in which He will judge is also presented. He who is the true light, by His appearing will reveal all the hidden things of darkness and will manifest all the wishes and desires which there are in the heart. In another place the Apostle Paul refers to the judgment which will come from the saints. He writes: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2). This passage shows again the way in which the judgment will take place. It is not a matter of a worldly tribunal where the accusation will be pronounced, and there will be witnesses for the accusation and for the defense, and then the decision will be heard. The image of the future tribunal is taken from the judiciary, but its content is different. The appearing of the Sun of Righteousness will reveal everything, all will be stripped of their outward distinctions and there will be a comparison of saints with sinners. This is the meaning of the saying that the saints will judge the

world. We shall look at all these things in what follows when we speak of how the Fathers interpret the scriptural passages which refer to the future judgment.

Christ's parable of the wedding is well known. When the king came to the place where those invited to his son's wedding were gathered, he saw one person who was not wearing a wedding garment. Then he reprimanded him, saying, "Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?" He commanded that he be bound hand and foot and cast into the outer fire, where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:1-14).

According to the interpretation of this parable by St. Gregory Palamas, the wedding refers to the Second Coming of Christ and to the Kingdom of Heaven. The entry of the King, who is God, is "the manifestation at the time of the future judgment". The garment of the spiritual wedding, which was indispensable for those invited, was virtue. And naturally when the Holy Fathers speak of virtue, they mean the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and not a superficial human virtue. He who lacks the garment of virtues will not only be unworthy of the Kingdom of God, but also will be punished. Not only the soul but also the body will prove to be unworthy of that bridal chamber, if it has not lived in self-control, purity and sobriety. The punishment for not having a wedding garment is connected with his removal from the dwelling-place of those rejoicing and from close association with them. It is basically a question of separation from God and not sharing in His grace.

The fact that his hands and feet are bound, by order of the King, refers to a person's constriction by successions of sins which occur in this life. The unbearable pain and great suffering which the person feels when he commits them in this life will continue in the next life as well. The fact that he is cast into the outer fire indicates "his having become far from God because he did not do deeds of light here". Inasmuch as he did not practice deeds of light in this life, in that day he cannot participate in the light. Saying that he is separated from God means this. The darkness into which he will be taken is synonymous with the inextinguishable fire, the unsleeping worms, the weeping and gnashing of teeth. All these things point to "the impending unbearable sufferings touching both soul and body" and the mournful cries of useless and perpetual regret. That is to say, they will repent of the deeds they have done, but it will never be possible to be comforted, for the repentance to be brought to an end.

The passage about the coming judgment is matchless and most expressive, and since it is a teaching of Christ, it is authentic through and through. No one can doubt it and wish to be called Christian. And this because what is said about the judgment comes from the indisputable mouth of Christ (Matt. 25:31-46). We shall

not quote the text of the Gospel which describes the coming judgment, but we shall refer to the interpretation given by St. Gregory Palamas, and within the interpretation we shall also look at the related events.

When Christ has come in glory and with His angels, He will separate the people, as the shepherd does, and the righteous will be placed at His right, and the unrepentant sinners at His left. The judgment will be based on the love or hate which they have shown towards their brethren who found themselves in difficult circumstances. The question is, why is charity the only criterion? And is it altogether right that people should be saved by charitableness, while some people are condemned to everlasting death simply because they did not show sympathy to their fellow men?

St. Gregory Palamas makes a wonderful analysis of the passage, out of the whole experience of the Church. He says that the righteous will enjoy the Kingdom of God, not simply because of a small deed of charity which they have done, but because of their whole reborn existence. This is shown by three things.

First, by the fact that they are called sheep. By this term he shows that they are righteous, gentle, forbearing, and walk the level and trodden path of the virtues, that is to say, they have followed Christ, who is the real Shepherd of men. And not only have they followed him but they have become like Him, who is the lamb of God. This means that throughout their lives they kept the commandments of God, but also that they were always ready "for the death beyond the good". Some of them are sons of God because they are guardians "of the mystical rebirth from God" and others are paid workers, for they have acquired grace once more by the sweat of repentance and humility.

Secondly, the righteous have in their lives lived the love which is completion of the law, it is the virtue which towers above all the other virtues and is their head. Love towards humanity is an expression of the reborn man, especially when that love is within a love for God.

Thirdly, the righteous are also characterized by humility. For although Christ reminds them of what they have done, they do not feel it. Humility is connected with love. The righteous feel unworthy of praise. Therefore, by all these characteristics the righteous show that they are united with God, spiritually reborn.

The opposite happens with the sinners, who will stand at Christ's left. They are not condemned simply for the omission of a few small acts of love and charity, but for the opposite reasons for which the righteous were praised.

First, he calls the sinners children, "as being impudent and undisciplined and going down the precipices of sin". Just as goats go up to high places, the same is observed in sinners. The unrepentant sinners have not acquired the prudence of

Christ, they have not become sheep that are led by the true shepherd, but they preferred the disordered and impudent life, they have not made themselves like the lamb of God, which means that they did not possess the character of sacrifice for their brothers.

Secondly, they did not show charity and love, which means that they had not been reborn of the Holy Spirit. At the same time they showed hate. Just as love is the fullness of all the virtues, so also hate and deeds of hate, the unsympathetic manner, and the uncommunicated opinion is "the fullness of sin". The sinners are judged by their misanthropy, because all evils follow from this.

Thirdly, sinners are distinguished by their arrogance, which is connected with an unsympathetic manner. And then, when they are reproached for their lack of sympathy, instead of humbly drawing near, they contradict and justify themselves. It shows that misanthropy has become their nature.

Just for this reason the righteous enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the sinners are sent to Hell. Analyzing this point, St. Gregory Palamas says that the righteous enjoy eternal life: "They have life and they have it abundantly". "Life" refers to coexistence with God, and "abundantly" means that they are sons and inheritors of the Kingdom of God, that is to say they share the same glory and kingdom. Sinners have no share of God. At the same time they will coexist with the demons and will be consigned to hell fire.

St. Symeon the New Theologian, interpreting this passage, says that Christ is referring to something deeper and more essential. The fact that He reproaches the sinners, since He was hungry and they did not feed Him or He was thirsty and they did not give Him water to drink, means that He was hungry for their salvation and they did not measure up to it.

Through his creation by God, man is in His image and likeness, and through his coming into the Church, which is the Body of Christ, he is closely connected with God. Likewise through the sacraments he becomes a member of the Body of Christ. So when he does not live in accordance with God's commandments, it is as if he was letting Christ be hungry and thirsty.

Analyzing this idea, St. Symeon says that Christ was hungry for man's conversion and repentance and man did not satisfy His hunger. He thirsted for man's salvation, and man did not give Him a chance to taste it. He was bare of virtuous deeds, and man did not clothe Him with them, for when the Christian as a member of Christ lacks these virtues, He is as if left naked with His limbs exposed. He was shut into the narrow, filthy, dark prison of man's heart, and man did not wish to visit Him or bring Him out into the light. The Christian knew that it was because of his

indolence and inactivity that Christ was ill, and he did not help Him by good works and acts.

Christ really desires the salvation of man, whom He created, and through love He has endured many sufferings for his salvation. At the same time, through holy Baptism the Christian is a member of His body. And when he does not measure up to this desire of Christ and remains in the darkness of sin, then he condemns himself.

It is impressive when he says that he was in the narrow, dark and filthy prison of the heart. Actually through holy Baptism the grace of God remains in the depth of the heart of man. But divine grace is hidden by the sins which we commit after our entry into the Church. Thus Christ is as if imprisoned in the heart. Man's Hell will be precisely this.

Connected with this is St. Gregory Palamas' interpretation of Christ's Parable of the Ten Virgins. According to the parable, the five wise virgins who had oil with them along with their lamps, went in to the wedding, while the five foolish virgins, who had no oil, were not found worthy of this great joy (Matt. 25:1-13).

According to St. Gregory Palamas, entrance into the Kingdom of God is connected with virginity, not simply of the body, but properly of the soul. Everyone can experience this virginity. Virginity is practiced by asceticism, self-control and the various struggles of the virtues. But hands too are needed to hold the lighted lamps, as well as oil. The hands are the active life of the soul, that is to say repentance, the effort to purify the soul. Lighted lamps are the right nous in which there will be that diligent spiritual knowledge which rests on the active life of the soul, is consecrated through a life in God and is kindled by the illuminations which come from Him. It seems here that it is a question of purity of heart and illumination of the nous. Noetic prayer, unceasing communion with God, is linked with the illuminations which come from God. But there is need for plenty of oil, which is love, the summit of all the virtues.

Judging from our analysis of patristic passages referring to the future tribunal, it seems that the coming judgment is not a typical legal process but is Christ's expression and revelation of man's inner spiritual condition. He who is reborn of the Holy Spirit will then appear clearly to all men; his kinship with Christ, who will shine radiantly, will be revealed. And he who is not reborn, and especially he who has a dark and unenlightened nous, will be revealed to all men, because he will have no share in God. Just as the appearing of the sun throws light on all things, so also the coming of the true Sun of Righteousness will be a real revelation of the inner dispositions and desires of men. We shall see this put more expressively, especially in the teaching of St. Symeon the New Theologian.

First it must be underlined once more that Christ is the Kingdom of Heaven. He is the true light which will shine at His coming to judge men. St. Symeon the New Theologian, referring to Him, says: "Kingdom of heaven, Christ, earth of the meek, Paradise of verdure, divine nuptial chamber, ineffable banquet hall, table open to all, bread of life, unprecedented beverage...." He adds that Christ, who is the unapproachable sun, will shine in the midst of the saints, and then all will be illuminated according to their faith, practice, hope, love, purity and illumination, which comes from His Spirit. The different mansions which will exist in Paradise will be reckoned as "the measures of their love and their vision of You".

Therefore according to his spiritual purity a man will radiate the brightness of God. The coming of the Sun of Righteousness among men will reveal everything. This is also how the Apostle Paul's saying is understood: "...your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:3-4). Another saying of the Apostle Paul is parallel: "Anything shown up by the light will be illuminated; and anything illuminated is itself a light" (Eph. 5:13). All who have accomplished divine things in their lives will be in the light, and those who have done depraved things, as St. Symeon the New Theologian teaches, "will be in the darkness of punishments" and there will be a great gulf between them.

Thus at His appearance Christ will reveal men's way of life, their whole being, what is at the depth of their heart. This revelation is eternal life and eternal hell, because the first is participation in God, and the second is connected with non-participation and non-communion with God.

What will happen in the next life, at the coming judgment, is also going on already. St. Gregory Palamas says that Christ is the Sun of Righteousness, the never setting, true and eternal light. The souls of the saints are in it now, and in the future life their bodies will be in it as well. Those who do not repent now, although they enjoy the physical, sensible sun and are comforted by the other creatures of God, are living outside the light. Then in the future life they will find themselves very far from God and will be delivered over to eternal Hell.

Therefore what will be in the next life is experienced already now. So St. Symeon the New Theologian asks God to give him His grace already now, as a pledge, that he may enjoy it in the coming life: "Grant me henceforth to serve You, my Savior, and to receive Your Divine Spirit, pledge of Your kingdom and hence to enjoy Your banquet, Your glory, that I may see You, O my God, unto the ages of ages".

This is a concern of all the saints. They do not fear death, but they fear what will happen after that, especially at the Second Coming of Christ. They are not so much concerned about the time of their death as about the way in which they will depart,

that is to say what will be their condition at that hour, for that will have eternal consequences.

St. Symeon says that he has a fear and horror of dying with a blind nous. Even if a person receives sensible light, the light of the eyes after his resurrection, it is of no use if he has no spiritual eyes to see God. In such a case a man who has come out of the dark dwells in darkness again and will be separated from God unto the ages.

Thus the appearance of God as sun will reveal the spiritual nakedness of a man. Now we have the possibility of concealing our spiritual nakedness by various means, but then all will be revealed. In one of his *Catechetical Discourses* St. Symeon the New Theologian presents the truth that it is not a matter of a man's profiting from all the material, sensory and mental gifts which he happens to have in his life.

He puts many questions, such as where will be the sumptuous dinners, the various costly costumes, the arrogance of those in authority, and so forth? I would like to focus attention on his saying that then the nakedness of man's soul will be revealed. He asks: "Where will be the great names? Where the holiness that others attribute to us or we attribute to ourselves? Where will those be who now flatter and deceive us, who call us holy and wipe off the chaffing of our feet?"

Many of us have the illusion that we are holy, that we are full of virtues, since there are also many flatterers who cultivate this self-esteem. But then all will be revealed, and all men will see our nakedness.

There are many things in this life which conceal the blindness of our hearts and the nakedness of our souls. Many times this happens through the wisdom and knowledge of the world. We think that we are something, while essentially we are dead to God, we have nothing good. Then all will be revealed. St. Symeon the New Theologian asks: "Where will be the pretended prudence of those who are honored for their knowledge and wisdom of the world? Where our presumption and illusion that we are something, though we are nothing?" This is precisely why great fear and trembling will then seize those who are slack, careless and slothful.

So, blessed is the man who lives in repentance and sees himself "lower than every creature", because "then he will stand at His right hand in glorious apparel". Only those adorned with the grace of God will stand at the right hand of the throne of God.

When St. Symeon speaks of clothes and nakedness, he does not mean only the existence or lack of virtues, but the Holy Spirit, the very light of God. Then the night will become as light as the day; every house and cave, even heaven and earth will be removed, and thus all who have not put on Christ, that is to say "those who

have not received the light... and previously been in it and become light", then will appear naked and will be filled with much shame. Every act, bad or good, every thought, every memory that has arisen in us from our very birth till our last breath will appear. All will be revealed before men.

It is impressive here that those who appear naked will be chiefly those who have not seen the light in this life and have not become light. In that case the problem is not moral, but spiritual, ontological. The nakedness is related to not having participated in the light in this life. Therefore St. Symeon recommends that they enter the narrow gate through penitence "and see the light that is within it" already in this life. The vision of the uncreated light is not a luxury of the spiritual life, but the essence and purpose of it.

In the teaching of St. Symeon the New Theologian something else appears as well which is connected with what has been said. When we keep the commandments of God, we are brought to the light. Therefore not to keep the commandments takes us away from the light and commits us to darkness. So in reality the commandments of God will condemn man. The word of God is living and abides for ever. The neglected word of God "will stand in the presence of each one of us then and condemn whoever has not observed it". The judgment will be by the commandments of God, which will test the faithful and unfaithful. In reality the unfaithful will be self-condemning for the deeds which they have done. Then a man will not get help from human wisdom and knowledge nor from eloquence of words nor from money and earthly possessions.

In the Biblico-patristic tradition we also see another way in which men will be judged in the future judgment. It is said that men will be judged by the saints. We find this already in Christ's words to His disciples: "Amen I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). The Apostle Paul maintains the same thing. Reproaching the Christians for turning to worldly tribunals to solve their various affairs, he says: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2). But how is this judgment known by the saints?

St. Symeon answers this point as well. He says that every man, finding himself faced with eternal life and that unutterable light, will see "one who is like him and will be judged by him". All men who have lived on earth in different ways of life will be judged by other men who have lived with them in the same conditions of life. And the ones lived in accord with the will of God, the others rejected His commandments. This means that there can be no excuse that the conditions of life were difficult and that therefore they could not live according to God's ordinances.

Thus fathers will be judged by fathers, relatives and friends by relatives and friends, brothers by brothers, the rich by those who were rich, the poor by those who were poor, the married by those who have excelled in the married state, etc. When sinners look at sinners who have repented, whoremongers who have not repented see penitent whoremongers, when the kings see holy kings, etc, and in general, when each person sees that someone like himself, who had the same nature, the same hands and eyes, the same conditions of life has been saved, this will be a self-condemnation, he will have no arguments and no excuses.

St. Symeon's words which I shall quote exactly are very characteristic: "Thus each of us sinners will be condemned by each of the saints, and likewise unbelievers by those who believe, and sinners who have failed to repent by those who perhaps have sinned more but have fervently repented".

It is terrible at that hour for someone to see in the glory of God "him who received the tonsure with him standing on the right hand, the one who ate and drank with him, his contemporary, his colleague" being completely surrounded by great glory like Christ, while he himself is the opposite. Then he will be unable to speak at all. This is just what it means that we shall be judged by the saints. We will be censured by their penitence and by the fact that they lived under the same conditions and yet they have been shown to be recipients of the Holy Spirit, imitators of Christ in every respect. We shall not be able to justify ourselves at all.

Another point which we see in the teaching of St. Symeon the New Theologian is that in the future judgment those who have not received the Holy Spirit will be deprived of eternal life. Not only those who have sinned will be deprived of Paradise. Someone may not have sinned but if he has no virtues, which are the fruit of the Holy Spirit, he will be deprived of eternal life, he will be expelled from Paradise and will go to Hell. What St. Symeon said is characteristic: "Even if he has no sin but if he is without virtues, he stands naked". So even if we have not committed sins, we shall prove unworthy of the glory of God if we have no virtues.

He goes on still further to emphasize that virtues are not enough, but the glory of God, the grace of God is also needed. This means that the virtues are not simply achievements of man's individual effort, but fruits of the Holy Spirit. Just as Adam, because he did not keep the commandments of God, was stripped of divine glory and deprived of Paradise, so also he who will be found "truly stripped of divine glory" will be deprived of the paradise of the kingdom of God and the heavenly bridal chamber.

What one needs in order to enter the Kingdom of God at the Second Coming of Christ is the participation of the Holy Spirit. The judgment Day is terrible because, apart from other things, one will learn "that those who do not have the Holy Spirit

shining like a torch in their spirit and dwelling inexpressibly in their heart are committed to eternal darkness".

Therefore the repeated exhortations of St. Symeon the New Theologian, who is rightly regarded as the "theologian of Light", are to keep away from evils and passions, to free the heart from every impurity, to acquire a pure nous, participate in divine grace, enjoy the divine Light. When a man lives in this way, then when Christ comes, there will be revealed and expressed an ineffable joy. He will participate in God, while the sinner will see God, but that will be self-condemnation and self-punishment, and he will experience the caustic energy of light.

In conclusion let me say that Christ will come into the world again, and this will be His Second Coming. The whole creation will be renewed, the dead will rise again, all who are alive then will be changed, and the judgment of men will follow. All these things are truths which will happen in any case, but we do not know the day and hour when they will happen. Therefore Christ exhorts us always to be ready. Just as happened with Noah's flood, where men were "eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" until Noah entered the ark and then all understood that the flood had come, the same will happen at the appearing of the Son of Man. So Christ says: "Watch, therefore, for you do not know at what hour your Lord is coming" (Matt. 24:37-42). And at the end of the Parable of the Ten Virgins Christ said: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming". *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 8:8-9:2 EOB

food will not commend us to God. If we do not eat, we are not worse; and if we do eat, we are not better! However, be careful that your freedom may never become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you who have knowledge sitting in an idol's temple, will not this person's conscience, if weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols? And thus, through your knowledge, the weak one perishes, even the brethren for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ! Therefore, if food causes my brethren to stumble, I will never ever eat meat, so that I may not cause my brethren to stumble. Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others, I am not an apostle, yet at least for you I am one! You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 25:31-46 EOB

The Lord said, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, just as a

shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then, the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, you blessed of my Father! Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world! For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in. I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?' The King will answer them, 'Amen, I tell you: as much as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then, he will also say to those on his left hand, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not receive me; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.' Then, they will answer: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not help you?' Then he will answer them, saying: 'Amen, I tell you: as much as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' These ones on the left will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Brethren and fathers, it is a universal law on this day for those who live in the world to stop eating meat and one may see among them great competition in meat-eating and wine-bibbing, and even spectacles of outrageous pastimes which it is shameful to speak about. It is necessary to participate with moderation and to give thanks to the Lord for what we have and to make worthy preparation for the banquet before us; while they possessed by the wiles of the devil do the opposite, demonstrating that they have accepted one rather than the other. Why have I mentioned these things? So that we humble monks may not direct our thoughts in that direction, nor desire their desire, which is not worthy of desire, but rather of misery; let us rather turn to consider the Gospel we are going to listen to, thinking, while the canon is being chanted, about the *great and manifest day* of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the judge *will stand the sheep on his right but the goats on his left*. And to those on the right he will utter that blessed and most longed for invitation, *Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*; while to those on the left he will utter that most unwelcome and piteous sentence, *Depart from me, accursed, into the everlasting fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels*. These words are full

of dread, fear and alarm; they should make us, and them, as we reflect fall down and weep and make God merciful to us, before he has come to test those who listen. But although they are thus, let us, I beg, hear and heed the message of the Gospel, striving keenly to serve the Lord with fear and trembling, removing all wickedness from the soul, introducing instead all knowledge of good works, compassionate pity, goodness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, and whatever else is good and estimable, that when we have led lives worthy of the Gospel of Christ we may become heirs of the kingdom of heaven, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom belong glory and might with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Theodore the Studite, *Catechesis 50*

.Holy Apostle Archippus of the Seventy

Archippus longed for the extreme angle of stones; he was crushed with stones for his longing. On the nineteenth Archippus was killed by large stones.

Archippus was one of the Seventy Apostles. The Apostle Paul mentions him in his Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: "And tell Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you received in the Lord'" (Colossians 4:17); "To Archippus our fellow soldier" (Philemon 1:2). In the town of Colossae, the center of Christianity was in the home of Philemon. Here Christians gathered for prayer. In writing to Philemon, the Apostle Paul called this "the church at your house" (Philemon 1:2). At that time, the apostles ordained their disciples as bishops; some of them in permanent places and others as missionaries traveling to various places. Philemon was one of the latter. Apphia, Philemon's wife, hosted and served in the domestic church.

At the time of a pagan feast to the goddess Artemis, according to their custom, all the faithful in Colossae gathered in the home of Philemon for prayer. The pagans, learning of this gathering, rushed and apprehended all the Christians; Philemon, Apphia and Archippus, as leaders. After Governor Androcles failed to persuade them to sacrifice to the idols, at first they flogged Archippus and then they buried him up to his waist. Children were then set upon him who began piercing him with needles. Afterwards he was stoned to death and received the crown of martyrdom. Saint Archippus is celebrated again on November 22nd with Saints Philemon, Apphia and Onesimus. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Pray for our priests!

Prayer is powerful, and we need more priests in our Diocese. So, this year, Metropolitan Gregory is asking that each one of us pray daily that we have more vocations to the priesthood. He also wants us to pray by name for our clergy and

seminarians--they aren't sick! The clergy that we are to pray for are: Fr. Peter Paproski, Fr. Photios Parks, and Deacon Robert Conjelko. The seminarians are: Thomas Kovalak, Nicholas Woroby, Aydin Zill, Seamus Murray, Thomas Slosky, Samuel Loposky, Timothy Paproski, Nicholas Fong, and Nicolas Laliberte. We started this two years ago, and we already have more seminarians! I can't wait to see what happens next!

Prayer for vocations

Master of all, You promised us, "I will be with you always, even until the very end of the world," and You have taught, "I will build My Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Mindful of this pledge, we beseech Your great goodness to inspire men to the Holy Priesthood, the service of Your Holy Orthodox Church, so that she may properly be able to fulfill Your will for Your people in this age. There are children to baptize, the sick to heal, and the dying to care for. There is the Bread of Life to distribute, and the Word of God to teach. There are sins to forgive, and charity to be done in Your Name. Send Your Church in this hour and in every age "vessels of clay" to be instruments of Your presence. Hear us, O Lord, and have mercy.

Prayer for the priesthood

O Lord Jesus Christ, Good Shepherd of Your sheep, light the fire of ardent love in the hearts of all Your priests, that they may ever and in all things seek only Your glory. Remember especially, Lord, our Metropolitan Gregory, and our spiritual father Joseph, who are laboring in Your vineyard for the salvation of all those whom You have entrusted to them. Remember also, O Lord, our priests Fr. Peter Paproski, Fr. Photios Parks, and Deacon Robert Conjelko, and seminarians Thomas Kovalak, Nicholas Woroby, Seamus Murray, Thomas Slosky, Samuel Loposky, Timothy Paproski, Nicholas Fong, and Nicolas Laliberte. Make their lives as holy as the word they preach. Keep them from being discouraged. Hear their prayers for our salvation. Give them wisdom and courage to proclaim Your truth. Make them priests after Your own heart. For You are a merciful God who loves us, and to You we give glory, together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

Holy Martyr Philothei of Athens

A scion of Athens is Philothei, who put on the cross as armor against the enemy.

When Philothei from things earthly was translated, she ascended with joy to heavenly mansions.

This bright star of compassion arose in the dark days of the Turkish occupation to shed God's mercy upon the oppressed people of Athens and to guide many endangered souls onto the path of righteousness.

Her birth in 1528 into the aristocratic Venizelou family was seen as a miraculous answer to her mother's prayers of many years. Even as a child, she showed a remarkable inclination for the life of asceticism and contemplation. However, as a sought-after heiress, she was married against her inclination at the age of twelve to a harsh, violent man whose moods and ill-treatment of her she bore with patience, while praying for his change of heart. After three years, the death of her tyrannical husband freed her from the bonds of matrimony and, despite the urging of her kinsfolk, she would not consider a second marriage, but entirely devoted herself to pleasing the Lord by prayer and fasting, while remaining under her parents' roof. On their death ten years later, she used the whole of her great fortune to found a convent according to directions given to her in a vision by the holy Apostle Andrew, to whom the house was dedicated. [This monastery was situated on the site of the present Cathedral (Metropolis) of Athens.] Not only did she see to the construction of cells and of all the other buildings that a monastery needs, but she also founded a whole range of charitable institutions alongside it: a hospital, hospices for the poor and the aged, various workshops and, above all, schools where the girls and boys of Athens could receive a Christian education. To support the monastery and its associated institutions, she provided an endowment of landed estates and dependencies (*metochia*), which also enabled alms to be distributed on a generous scale. Philothei's monastery thus soon became for Athens a source of heavenly blessings, a haven for the afflicted and a focus for the revival of the tradition of the Greek people.

As soon as the first monastic buildings were ready, she took the veil under the name of Philothei, together with her maidservants, and a large number of other young women of different ranks in society, who had turned from the allurements of worldliness to set out, under Philothei's direction, on the narrow way which leads to the Kingdom of Heaven. They were all of one mind in seeking to imitate the virtues of their spiritual mother. She had no equal in charity and compassion for the poor and the infirm, whom she visited and tended. Since she gave alms without calculation the convent was, on one occasion, reduced to the last extremity, and some sisters began to complain about her. However, a few days later two gentlemen made a large donation, which saved the community from going hungry.

Her faith and compassion led Saint Philothei to offer asylum in the convent to Christian bondwomen who fled from their masters' houses in order to preserve their faith and chastity. As a consequence, the Turks surrounded the convent, pounced on Philothei like wild beasts and, regardless of the fact that she was ill, haled her before the judge, who had her confined in a dark prison cell. When she was called on to deny Christ or to suffer death, she acknowledged with great joy

that her dearest wish was to fulfill her martyrdom for the love of Christ. However, such was not the will of God and, through the good offices of some Greek notables in the city, she was released. Strengthened by this trial, she resumed her apostolic activity and ascetic labors with redoubled zeal. Having attained to perfection, she acquired the grace of working miracles and healings. So many were the disciples who wanted to join her that she had to establish a second monastery. There was a small cave in its grounds, to which she loved to withdraw for the sake of contemplation.

Her influence among the people aroused the hatred of the Turks. One night, they broke into the new monastery during a vigil, and cudgelled the Saint so violently that she was left half-dead on the ground. She bore the effects of her injuries with wonderful patience, and gave back her martyred soul to the Lord on 19 February 1589.

Scarcely twenty days had passed before a lovely scent began to issue from her tomb. Not many years later she was officially recognized as a Saint of the Church. Her honorable relic, which is venerated to this day in the Cathedral of Athens, has remained incorrupt for the glory of God and the consolation of the Christian people. Together with Saint Dionysius the Areopagite and Saint Hierotheos, she is considered the Patron Saint of Athens. Sometimes she is also called Saint Philothea. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Great Lent: Top Ten

1. Regardless of how you fast, fast every single day. This type of fasting helps wear down the passions and build spiritual endurance.
2. Know exactly what the fasting regulations are and try to approximate them as best you can. Each Lent, try to be more strict yet humble.
3. Particular concerns about fasting? Age, health issues, never fasted before, mixed-marriages? Speak with your priest.
4. Be sure to recite the Lenten prayer of [Saint Ephraim](#). If you cannot make prostrations just make bows or cross yourself.
5. On weekends, we do not make prostrations and our fasting is slightly relaxed since Saturday and Sunday are holy days.
6. The Lenten services and tones are offered only during the week – strive to participate as much as possible in these services and the spirit of Lent will rub off on you.
7. Sports and outdoor activities are not contrary to the Lenten spirit.

8. Strive to avoid going to movies, parties, vacations, and other entertainments. This we do so we can have more time to devote to spiritual things.
9. Confession and Holy Communion are central to securing the benefits of Lent. Without fail, we should receive the Sacraments during the period of Great Lent.
10. Be mindful of what we look at and how much time we spend on the TV, computer and smartphone. Some give these up for all of Lent, while others strictly limit their time. Try less Face-book and more “face in book”; reading the Holy Scriptures and other spiritual texts. Ask your priest for suggestions.

(from orthodoxdelmarva.org)

Also Commemorated Today

Apostle Philemon of the Seventy and his wife and companion in martyrdom Apphia (1st c.).

St. Theodore of Sanaxar Monastery (1791).

New Martyr Demetrius(1942).

Martyrs Maximus, Theodotus, Hesychius, and Asclepiodotus of Adrianopolis (305-311).

Venerables Eugene and Macarius, presbyters, confessors at Antioch (363).

Venerable Dositheus of Palestine (6th c.), disciple of St. Abba Dorotheus.

Venerable Rabulas of Samosata (530).

Venerable Conon, abbot in Palestine (555).

New Hieromartyr Nicetas of Epirus (1809).

St. Mesrop the Translator of Armenia (439).

Martyr Odran, chariot-driver of St. Patrick (c. 452)

St. Barbatius (Barbas), bishop of Benevento (682) (Italy)

St. Beatus, monk at Liebana (789) (Spain)

Martyr Gabinus of Rome (c. 295)

St. George, Bishop of Lodève (c. 884)

St. Mansuetus, Bishop of Milan (c. 690)

Martyrs Publius, Julian, Marcellus and companions (unk) (N. Africa)

St. Quodvultdeus, Bishop of Carthage (450)

St. Valerius, Bishop of Antibes (c. 450) (Gaul)

St. Tiernvael, bishop of Dol (6th c.) (Brittany)

St. Gedouin (Gédouin) of Brittany

Social Team for Febuary 26

Team 5 is up next week - Cooper, M. Blaydoe, Roberta Corson, Mary V., Steven Watts. Thank you!

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Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

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