

# SOBORNOST

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## **SERVICES**

**Today: Divine Liturgy 9:30 AM**

**Monday: Divine Liturgy 8 AM**

**Wednesday: Lay Vespers 6:30 PM**

**Saturday: Vespers 5 PM**

**Next Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM**

**Sunday School 9:30 AM**

**Divine Liturgy 10 AM**

**April 16, 2023 – Holy**

## **Pascha | Christ is Risen!**

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

The Despotie Feasts were established by the Church to be celebrated within the year for us to remember the great events that took place with the Incarnation, the Passion and the Resurrection of Christ, but especially, and above all, to experience the mystery of Christ and the mystery of our regeneration. This is the reason why the celebration of these events are preceded by a period repentance, fasting and prayer, and all are linked with the Divine Liturgy and the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, which means our own existential participation in these great and wonderful events.

In regards to the feasts of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, the central points of the celebration are horrible Golgotha and the life-giving Tomb of Christ, which are located in Jerusalem, and are the center of our love and worship towards the suffering and risen Christ. Golgotha is associated with the Cross of Christ and His Tomb with His holy Resurrection.



Christ's sacrifice on the Cross at Golgotha, which is closely linked to the Resurrection of Christ, is the central point in the teaching and life of the Church. And we also speak of the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ in regards to the victory of Christ over sin, the devil and death.

The resurrectional atmosphere of this day invites all of us to joy, because we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, Who is the Head of the Church, and from Whom we get the certainty of our own resurrection. It is a feast dedicated to Christ, but is also our own.

Christ was resurrected and gave us the hope of the resurrection, first from our passions, which is an experience of death, and then from our physical death. Man was not created by God to live with the passions of sensuality, ambition and avarice, nor was he created to die. In Paradise, before the Fall, man lived differently from the way he lives today, having real communion with God and with all creation, and had the ability to remain immortal. However, after the Fall there developed in man pleasure and suffering, and death came into our existence. So, now with the Resurrection of Christ a new life begins, and man experiences his own resurrection from the passions, freed from the tyranny of pleasure and pain, and acquires the certainty of his own resurrection of his body.

We see this in a wondrous manner in a prophecy of the Prophet Ezekiel, which is read in the Sacred Temples on Great Friday night, following our return from the procession with the Epitaphios. On this day we chant the Matins for Great Saturday, when Christ triumphed over Hades and defeated death. In reading this prophecy the Church wants to transfuse the certainty of Christ's victory over death and assure us of our own resurrection.

In this text it appears that the Prophet Ezekiel was brought by the Spirit of God to a valley of dry human bones which had no life, that is, it was a valley of death, desolation and despair. God asked the Prophet to speak to these dead bones and send them the word of the Lord. As soon as the Prophet preached the word of God, which has energy, there was an earthquake, the bones came together and assembled to form the bodies, then nerves and flesh grew over the bones covering it in skin, but they were without a spirit, that is, a soul. Then God gave a command to the Prophet Ezekiel to speak in the name of the Spirit so that He may come and breath into the dead bodies that they may receive life. The Prophet spoke and then "a spirit entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army." (Ez. 37:1-10)

This prophetic event of the Old Testament depicts the future resurrection of dead bodies. A time will come, as Christians believe, in which, by the power of God, there will be a resurrection of bodies, souls will enter into them by God's

command, and they will be spiritual bodies, so that the entire man, soul and body, will live in the Kingdom of God and have communion with Him. This is what God then said to the Prophet Ezekiel: "My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, My people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put My Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord."

When the human soul leaves the body, then the body dies and becomes dry bones. At the Second Coming of Christ the souls, by the command of God, will return to the bodies and resurrect man, and those who have also the Holy Spirit will enter into the Kingdom of God.

This spiritual resurrection from the dead happens in this life, since we get to experience the spiritual resurrection. Man without the Holy Spirit is spiritually dead and when he hears the word of the Lord he is resurrected spiritually, the Grace of the Risen Christ comes into his existence, and he lives spiritually. He is no longer disappointed by sin, no longer fears death, but lives the life of the resurrection in this life.

So also today, every Clergyman, as another prophet, feels as if they are in a valley of death, in which the pain of humanity and all creation can be heard, since people live in this tragedy. Their bones are dry with hopelessness, disbelief, loneliness and tragedy. They are people without the spirit of life, without a meaningful existence in their life, without the Holy Spirit. And as long as man is in this state, in which he has no spirit of life, this is why society and all of creation suffers and is in need. Society is unsociable, relations between people have dissolved, the environment suffers, the earth is contaminated. Man is spiritually sick and all of creation suffers and is tormented. In this valley of death and pain the Cleric, as another prophet, must address the word of the Lord, which gives life and resurrects all. He must speak of the Resurrection of Christ, which gives life to every dead thing. He must preach the Resurrected Christ, who is the true light that expels the darkness and the fog.

The prophecy of the Prophet Ezekiel is relevant today more than ever, since today human suffering has reached an excess. Our society is a valley with lots of dried bones and everywhere there are divisions, wars, hunger, despair, illnesses and death. So, in imitation of another prophet, Habakkuk, as we chant in the Resurrection Canon, let us stand on the high place, on "divine watch", and show "the brilliant Angel who proclaims: "Today, salvation comes to the world; for Christ, being Almighty, is risen."

Rejoice, brethren, in the Resurrection of Christ, who from dry bones brings together bodies, and in these soulless bodies gives life and spirit. Let us participate in the spiritual resurrection in this life, in anticipation of the future resurrection. *(adapted from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – The Acts of the Apostles 1:1-8**

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” *He said*, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 1:1-17**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore

witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

The pre-eternal, uncircumscribed and almighty Logos and omnipotent Son of God could clearly have saved man from mortality and servitude to the devil without Himself becoming man. He upholds all things by the word of His power and everything is subject to His divine authority (compare Hebrews 1.3). According to Job, He can do everything and nothing is impossible for Him (compare Job 42.2 LXX). The strength of a created being cannot withstand the power of the Creator, and nothing is more powerful than the Almighty. But the incarnation of the Logos of God was the method of deliverance most in keeping with our nature and weakness, and most appropriate for Him who carried it out, for this method had justice on its side, and God does not act without justice. As the Psalmist and Prophet says, “God is righteous and loves righteousness” (compare Psalm 11.7), “and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (Psalm 92.15). Man was justly abandoned by God in the beginning as he had first abandoned God. He had voluntarily approached the originator of evil, obeyed him when he treacherously advised the opposite of what God had commanded, and was justly given over to him. In this way, through the evil one’s envy and the good Lord’s just consent, death became twofold, for he brought about not just physical but also eternal death.

It was necessary for the conqueror [of man] to be conquered by that nature which he had conquered, and for the cheat to be outwitted. To this end it was necessary and indispensable that a man be made who would be sinless (see Job 14:4 LXX)....

God was not only born among men but, according to the prophets, born of a holy Virgin far above all defiled thoughts of the flesh. It was the Holy Spirit's coming upon her, not fleshly desire, that caused the Virgin to conceive, and the conception was preceded by good tidings and faith in God's indwelling, not acceptance and experience of passionate longing. In the complete absence of such desire, the pure Virgin said with prayer and spiritual joy to the angel bringing the good tidings, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Having conceived she gave birth, and it was as if the Victor over the devil, being both man and God, had drawn to Himself the root of the human race but not its sin. For He was the only one neither shaped in iniquity nor conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5), that is to say, in the fleshly pleasure, passion and unclean thoughts that belong to our nature defiled by transgression. The point of this was that the nature He assumed should be wholly pure and unsullied, so that He Himself would not

need to be purified, but would in His wisdom accept everything for our sake. He was rightly called the new Adam, and remained youthful and strong, never growing old. In and through Himself He was to create the old Adam anew and keep him new forever, since He is able completely to dispel the process of growing old. Originally God created the first Adam undefiled, and he was new until he voluntarily obeyed the devil. He turned aside after the pleasures of the flesh, underwent the defilement of sin, grew old and fell into what is contrary to nature.

Christ clearly had to make immortal not only the human nature which existed in Him, but the human race, and to guide it towards participating in that true life which in due course procures eternal life for the body as well, just as the soul's state of death in due course brought about the death of the body too. That this plan for salvation should be made manifest, and that Christ's way of life should be put before us to emulate, was highly necessary and beneficial. At one time God appeared visibly before man and the good angels that they might imitate Him. Later, when we had cast ourselves down and fallen away from this vision, God came down to us from on high in His surpassing love for mankind, without in any way giving up His divinity, and by living among us set Himself before us as the pattern of the way back to life.

God took human nature upon Himself to show that it was so far removed from sin and so cleansed that it could be united with His person and remain eternally undivided from Him. By this act He proclaimed to all that God is both good and just, the Maker of good things who upholds fair judgment. When Satan and the apostate angels with him fell from heaven, those angels who kept their place understood that evil was not in angels by nature. Rather, good was natural for them, and their Creator was the essence of goodness. By the Creator's just judgment Satan had been condemned to eternal darkness, because he had created evil for himself by turning away from Good. But when Adam fell by turning aside from good to evil, no one remained who was not inclined to evil, and no one was appointed in his place. So Christ was declared the new Adam....

Christ was baptized by John.... The grace of the Son, of His Father and the Holy Spirit came to dwell in the baptismal water, such that when it touched those baptized later following His example, they would be divinely regenerated, and mystically renewed and re-created in such a way that they would no longer be from the old Adam and so attract the curse. Instead they would be born of the new Adam and so have God's blessing, not being children of the fleshly, but God's children, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God through Jesus Christ.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and love of God (compare Romans 11.33)! In His wisdom, power and love for mankind God knew how to transform incomparably for the better the falls resulting from our self-willed waywardness. If the Son of God had not come down from heaven we should have had no hope of going up to heaven. If He had not become incarnate, suffered in the flesh, risen and ascended for our sake, we should not have known God's surpassing love for us. If He had not taken flesh and endured the passion while we were still ungodly, we should not have desisted from the pride which so often lifts us up and drags us down. Now that we have been exalted without contributing anything, we stay humble, and as we regard with understanding the greatness of God's promise and benevolence we grow in humility, from which comes salvation.

The Lord manifested Himself and His plan for our salvation so far as was possible. He revealed the Father as being truly His Father on high. To each as were willing of His contemporaries and those who came after them He indicated the way back to the Father. He urged them on, summoned them and guided them through His way of life, His teaching, His miracles and His prophecies, and even more by His truly divine and supernatural wisdom from which nothing is hidden, either things to come or the obscure movements deep in our hearts. However, those who obeyed Him had to be free of servitude to the devil. Man was led into his captivity when he experienced God's wrath, this wrath being the good God's just abandonment of man. God had to be reconciled with the human race, for otherwise mankind could not be set free from the servitude.

A sacrifice was needed to reconcile the Father on high with us and to sanctify us, since we had been soiled by fellowship with the evil one. There had to be a sacrifice which both cleansed and was clean, and a purified, sinless priest. We needed a resurrection not just of our souls but of our bodies, and a resurrection for those to come after us. This liberation and resurrection, and also the ascension and the everlasting heavenly order, not only had to be bestowed upon us but also confirmed. And all this was necessary not just for those alive at the time and those to come, but also for people born since the beginning of time. In Hades there were far more of such people than there were people to be born later, and far more were to believe and be saved at once. I think that is why Christ came at the end of the ages. He had to preach the gospel to those in Hades (compare 1 Peter 3.19), to reveal His great plan for salvation to them and to give them complete freedom from the demons who held them captive, as well as sanctification and promises for the future. It was clearly necessary for Christ to descend into Hades, but all these things were done with justice, without which God does not act.

In addition to what we have mentioned, the deceiver had to be justly deceived and to lose the riches he had seized and deceitfully acquired. For evil had taken control

through cunning, and the originator of evil continually boasted of this fact. The devil would not have ceased from boasting if he had been subdued by God's sovereign power and not pulled down from his authority by justice and wisdom. Since everybody turns aside to evil in deed or word or thought, or in two or all of these, we defile the purity given by God to human nature, and need to be sanctified. Sanctification is accomplished by each person's offering and sacrifice of first-fruits, but as the first-fruits have to be pure, we are not able to offer such a sacrifice to God. This is why Christ was revealed, who alone is undefiled and presented Himself as an offering and a sacrifice of first-fruits to the Father for our sake, that all we who look towards Him, believe in Him and attach ourselves to Him through obedience will appear through Him before the face of God, obtain forgiveness and be sanctified. The Lord referred to this in the Gospels, saying, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17.19). Not only did the offering have to be pure and sinless but so did the high priest who offered it. As the apostle says, "Such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7.26).

For such reasons as these the Logos of God was made flesh and dwelt among us, appearing on earth and living with men. He took upon Himself our human flesh, which was subject to suffering and death, even though it was completely pure, and He used it in His divine wisdom as a bait to hook the serpent, the originator of evil, through the Cross, and set free the whole human race which he had enslaved. When a tyrant falls, all those he tyrannized are liberated. This is what the Lord Himself said in the Gospels, that the strong man was bound and his goods spoiled (compare Matthew 12.29). His possessions were taken as spoil by Christ, and were set free, justified, filled with light and endowed with divine gifts. As David sings, "You have ascended on high," up on to the Cross, or, if you wish, up to heaven, "you have led captivity captive: you have given gifts to men" (Ephesians 4.8; compare Psalm 68.18).

Christ overturned the devil through suffering and His flesh which He offered as a sacrifice to God the Father, as a pure and altogether holy victim—how great is His gift!—and reconciled God to our human race. He underwent the passion according to the Father's will and became for us, who were destroyed through disobedience and saved through obedience, an example of how obedient we should be. He showed that death was far more precious than the devil's immortality, because it procured life that was truly immortal, life that will not be subject to the second and eternal death, but stays with Christ in the heavenly dwellings. When Christ had risen from the dead on the third day and had shown Himself alive to His disciples, He ascended into heaven. He remained immortal and bestowed on us, with



complete assurance, resurrection, immortality and truly blessed, eternal, incorruptible life in heaven. By means of the one death and resurrection of His flesh, He healed our twofold death and freed us from our double captivity of soul and body.

The evil one clothed himself in the serpent to deceive man, but the Word of God put on man's nature to trick the trickster. He received this nature in its undeceived and pure state, and kept it so to the end, offering it as first-fruits to the Father for sanctification from ourselves for ourselves. If the Word of God had not assumed a mortal and passible body, how else could the devil have been deceived; how else would he, who is envy itself, have even dared to attack Him?

The evil one did not attack the Word until he knew that He had a passible body. While He was fasting in the wilderness for forty days He was hungry – for although He was clothed in a body that could suffer, it only acted and suffered those things proper to a body when permitted to by the almighty power united to it. However, when He had fasted for forty days, according to the Gospel, afterwards He was hungry. It was exactly then that the originator of evil dared for the first time to attack and set temptation before Him, striving to find a way in to attack His spirit. He was powerfully driven off, and when he made another general assault by means of sensual pleasures, he was mightily defeated and fled away unnerved, shattered and put to shame. Why was he beaten off when, emboldened by the suffering of Christ's body, he attacked? Because he had attempted to introduce sin into the sinless man. He fled away shamefully beaten and Christ ceaselessly pursued him, chasing him out of demoniacs, healing diseased people in his power and raising the dead, not just the newly dead, but those already decomposing, and all this by His command alone. He also expelled him from people's souls by preaching repentance and showing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He led souls towards faith and a way of life opposed to the enemy, transforming sinners and receiving them. Moreover, He gave His disciples power against demons. Obviously this was completely unendurable for Satan and the angels who fell with him.

If Satan imagined he could drive off the great strength brought to bear against him, would he neglect to do so? Would he tolerate Christ, who cast him out of men and brought down his longstanding tyranny over them, living among men? He rages furiously against Christ, since he knew from experience that His theandric soul was far above all the passions of which He, Satan, was the author, and completely immune from death, which he had created for men by himself. Although Christ's body was both passible and mortal, Satan was not himself able to impose such a death, so he moved the minds of the disobedient Jews towards murdering Him. He provoked them to unrestrained jealousy and fury against Him, because they too

had been censured and rejected by Christ as evil. Satan stirred them up and persuaded them to murder Him in a dishonorable way suitable only for criminals and the ungodly, believing that he would thus cast Him out of the world and make His name meaningless on earth. He was confident that when Christ died he would hold His soul imprisoned in hell, just as he had held the souls of all mankind since the beginning of time.

This is how the deceiver was deceived. He attacked Christ's passible and mortal flesh, and unwittingly brought the light into his dark and terrible caverns and set the gift of life over the souls he had tyrannized through spiritual death. Not only that, but he brought those who had died into contact with Christ's body which offered resurrection and immortality, while he was hastening to deliver it to death and the grave.... To those who believed in the resurrection He proclaimed the power of immortality – not just that they would go on for ever, but that they would continue without eternal destruction, the terrifying eternal damnation prepared for the devil, and live forever with the holy angels, sharing their enjoyment of the incorruptible and never-ending kingdom.

For this reason the Lord patiently endured for our sake a death He was not obliged to undergo, to redeem us, who were obliged to suffer death, from servitude to the devil and death, by which I mean death both of the soul and of the body, temporary and eternal. Since He gave His blood, which was sinless and therefore guiltless, as a ransom for us who were liable to punishment because of our sins, He redeemed us from our guilt. He forgave us our sins, tore up the record of them on the Cross and delivered us from the devil's tyranny. The devil was caught by the bait. It was as if he opened his mouth and hastened to pour out for himself our ransom, the Master's blood, which was not only guiltless but full of divine power. Then instead of being enriched by it he was strongly bound and made an example in the Cross of Christ. So we were rescued from his slavery and transformed into the kingdom of the Son of God. Before we had been vessels of wrath, but we were made vessels of mercy by Him who bound the one who was strong compared to us, and seized his goods. Then Christ rightly became our King, after being wrongfully murdered at the devil's suggestion, and having mysteriously conquered the originator of evil by righteousness. He clearly demonstrated His almighty power by overcoming bodily death, rising from the dead on the third day, ascending into heaven and sitting on the right hand of the Father together with the flesh which He wore for our sake and in which He died. He proved to us that we would rise from the dead, be restored to heaven and inherit the kingdom of, imitating Him as far as we could, we overthrew the author of sin through righteousness, beating off his attacks and his incitement to evil passions, and courageously bearing his treachery.

The Lord has given us rebirth through divine baptism and sealed us with the grace of the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption (compare Ephesians 4.30), but He has allowed us still to have a body which is mortal and passible. Although He has cast out the teacher of evil from the treasure houses of our soul, yet He allows him to attack from without. This is so that anybody who has been renewed in accordance with the new covenant, that is to say, the gospel of Christ, who lives in good works and repentance, despises the delights of this life, endures suffering and is trained in the enemy's assaults, can be made ready to receive immortality and the incorruptible good things to come in the new age.

May we too attain to this through the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sake was made man, suffered, was buried, rose from the dead, took our fallen human nature up to heaven and honored it by sitting on the Father's right hand. To our Lord Jesus Christ belong glory, honor, and worship, together with His Father without beginning and the all-holy and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 16, delivered on Holy Saturday*

### **Newly-Revealed Martyr Leonides and Companions**

*You were given over to the bosom of the sea Leonides; by a plunge you arrived at the uttermost bosom of Abraham.*

*I do not shudder from the sea, said Charissa, for the sea gives me grace.*

*Galina and Nike are cast into the depths, finding victory and calmness being tossed.*

*Kallida received the depth of the sea, in love with the beauty of her beloved Bridegroom.*

*Finding the reward of salvation in the depths, you showed your sensibility Nunekhia.*

*In the belly of the sea the two maidens Vasilissa and Theodora are received, fleeing the licking of the belly of impiety.*

The Holy Martyr Leonides and the Holy Martyrs Charissa, Nike, Galina, Kalisa (Kalida), Nunekhia, Vasilissa, and Theodora suffered at Corinth in the days of Emperor Decius (249-251 AD). The Holy Martyr Leonides with the already mentioned holy women were from Greece, namely the Morea. Divine Leonides was arrested in Troezen, which is in Peloponnesos in the Saronic Gulf opposite Athens, which is commonly called Fanari, or according to others Pediada, which is in the Diocese of Corinth. Being the leader of a spiritual chorus, he was arrested during the festive days of the holy Resurrection of Christ. The holy women were also arrested, and they were brought before the governor of Corinth, whose name was Venousto. Seeing Saint Leonides was unshakeable in his faith in Christ, he ordered for him to be suspended and lacerated. When all tortures failed, Venousto condemned them all to be drowned in the Gulf of Corinth.

Before being thrown into the sea, Leonides looked up to heaven and said: "Behold! And with this second baptism today have I been baptized, which makes the man within us more clean." They were thrown into the sea but the sea received them not. They walked upon the sea as upon dry land and it is said that Saint Charissa sang to God with the words of the Prophetess Mariam: "On the field of battle, I ran O Lord, and the army pursued me; O Lord I did not deny You; O Lord, save my soul!" Seeing them, the heathens at first were amazed, but after they overtook them on a ship as the Saints continued chanting the hymn. They tied stones around their necks and again threw them into the depths of the sea and they drowned. Their martyrdom occurred on Holy Saturday.

Their martyrology, dating from the 13th century, offers the following note after the bodies of the martyrs were washed ashore: "Pious men, dragging the bodies of the Saints lying on the beach, having attended to them, with honor they buried them, having built a church on the spot where the bodies were both augustly venerated and extolled everlastingly, and to those who approach faithfully they make to gush out healings each time."

### **The Miraculous Discovery of Their Relics**

Sixteen centuries later, in 1916, their relics were discovered when they appeared in the visions of pious residents of New Epidaurus and encouraged them to dig for their relics in the ruins of an old church "to find a hidden treasure". At the spot which they were told to dig they found at first an icon of the Panagia. Thinking this was the treasure they returned to their houses but continued having dreams. They thus returned to dig deeper and at a 70 cm depth they found a sarcophagus in which were the relics of the seven female martyrs and another sarcophagus in which were the relics of Saint Leonides which were fragrant. Immediately the residents built a church in their honor and displayed the holy relics of the martyrs for veneration.

The Church of Saint Leonides is located in New Epidaurus. Every year on his feast day the relics of Saint Leonides and his companions are processed from the Annunciation Church (which houses the larnax with the martyr's relics) to the Church of Saint Leonides for the festivities.

The relationship between Saint Leonides and Epidaurus is not exactly known. We do know that in 1833 a priest by the name of Fr. Nikolaos Natsoulis built a church in honor of the holy martyr Leonides and in his apolytikion he is called "the great defender of Epidaurus".

In 1916, during the time when the Saints were revealing the location of their relics, a woman in black appeared to a resident of Epidaurus who said to him: "Go and dig there and you will find a treasure". He went and found an icon of the Panagia.

On that spot a church was built which is located beside the road of Epidaurus-Dyropes down from New Epidaurus.

A little while later the same woman in black told the man to go elsewhere and dig to find another yet greater treasure. He and others went and found a limestone coffin with fragrant bones which belonged to Saint Leonides. They were placed in the Church of the Annunciation in New Epidaurus and only on the feast day of the Saint do his bones go to the Church of Saint Leonides of Troezen. A portion of his relics are in the Church of Saint Leonides and another portion are in the Cathedral of Saint George in Poros.

It should be noted that when the relics were first discovered it was believed Saint Leonides was the Bishop of Athens commemorated in the *Synaxarion* the day prior on April 15th. But serious inquiry was made by Metropolitan Chrysostomos II of Argolidas, and he discovered that the relics of Saint Leonides were not those of the Athenian but of the Martyr with his seven companions commemorated on April 16<sup>th</sup>. (from [johnsanidopoulos.com](http://johnsanidopoulos.com))

### **Also Commemorated Today**

Virgin-martyrs Agape, Irene, and Chionia in Illyria (304).

The Weeping Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos "Ilyin Chernigov" (1658) and "Tambov" Icon (1692).

Venerable Theodora-Bassa, princess of Novgorod (1378).

Martyr Irene of Greece.

Martyrs Felix the bishop, Januarius the priest, Fortunatus and Septimus of Lycaonia (304).

St. John, blessed fool-for-Christ's sake of Verkhoturye (1701).

St. Fructuosus of Braga (Brada) in Iberia (665).

Monk-martyr Christopher of Dionysiou, Mt. Athos, who suffered at Adrianople (1818).

St. [Padarn](#) (Paternus), bishop of Llandbadarn Fawr. (5<sup>th</sup> c.)

St. [Withburga](#) of Dereham (743) (translation on July 8, 974)

St. [Elias](#) of Cologne (1042)

Virgin-martyr [Engratia](#) of Spain (303)

Ven. Herveus (Hervé) of Tours (1021)

Martyr Lambert of Saragossa (c. 900)

18 Martyrs of Saragossa (Optatus, Lupercus, Successus, Martial, Urban, Julia, Quintillian, Publius, Fronto, Felix, Caecilian, Eventius, Primitivus, Apodemius & 4 named Saturninus)(304)

St. Turibius, bishop of Astorga (c. 460)

St. Turibius of Palencia, founder of the monastery of Liébana (Spain) (c. 528)

Martyr Vasius of Saintes (France)(c. 500)

++St. Aphilochos of Patmos (1970)



*Office of the Metropolitan*  
312 Garfield Street  
Johnstown, PA 15906

April 16, 2023

Protocol No. 6/2023

### **PASCHA ARCHPASTORAL LETTER**

To the Very Reverend Protopresbyters, Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers, and Faithful (young and old) of our God-Protected Diocese:

**CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED, HE IS RISEN!**

**CHRISTOS VOSKRESE! VOISTINNU VOSKRESE!**

**CHRISTOS ANESTI! ALITHOS ANESTI!**

On this great and glorious Feast of Pascha — the Resurrection of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, our hearts are filled with tremendous joy, our souls are transformed and we bask in the Light of Truth. This year I want to share with you an excerpt from an inspiring, uplifting and brilliant homily of our Father among the Saints, Gregory of Nyssa.

“The reign of life has begun, the tyranny of death is ended. A new birth has taken place, a new life has come, a new order of existence has appeared, our very nature has been transformed! This birth is not brought about by human generation, by the will of man, or by the desire of the flesh, but by God.

If you wonder how, I will explain in clear language. Faith is the womb that conceives this new life, baptism the rebirth by which it is brought forth into the light of day. The Church is its nurse; her teachings are its milk, the bread from heaven is its food. It is brought to maturity by the practice of virtue; it is wedded to wisdom; it gives birth to hope. Its home is the kingdom; its rich inheritance the joys of Paradise; its end, not death, but the blessed and everlasting life prepared for those who are worthy.

This is the day the Lord has made — a day far different from those made when the world was first created and which are measured by the passage of time. This is the beginning of a new creation. On this day, as the prophet says, God made a new heaven and a new earth. What is this new heaven? you may ask. It is the firmament of our faith in Christ. What is this new earth? A good heart, a heart like the earth, which drinks up the rain that falls on it and yields a rich harvest.

*The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America*  
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In this new creation, purity of life is the sun, the virtues are the stars, transparent goodness is in the air, and the depths of the riches of wisdom and knowledge, the sea. Sound doctrine, the divine teachings are the grass and plants that feed God's flock, the people whom He shepherds; the keeping of the commandments is the fruit borne by the trees.

On this day is created the true man, the man made in the image and likeness of God. For this day that the Lord has made is the beginning of this new world. Of this day the prophet says that it is not like other days, nor is this night like other nights. But still we have not spoken of the greatest gift it has brought us. This day destroyed the pangs of death and brought forth birth of the firstborn of the dead.

I ascend to my Father and to Your Father, to my God and to your God. O what wonderful news! He who for our sake became like us in order to make us His brothers, now presents to His true Father His own humanity in order to draw all His kindred up after Him.”

### PERSONAL GREETINGS

May all the Clergy and Laity, Friends and Supporters of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America experience the love, joy and excitement of the early followers of Christ when they first saw Him following His Resurrection. Christ is Risen!

Greetings from Johnstown with much love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+Metropolitan Gregory".

+Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

*To be read as the sermon in all churches of the Diocese at Resurrection Matins and the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

*The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America*  
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE



**Social Team for April 23**

Team 6 – Howl, Dee Jubb, Johnsons, Charlotte H., Andrew, Jameson Barker. Thank you!

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

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

**Camp Nazareth:** <http://www.campnazareth.org>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

**You Tube:** <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

***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, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine, the newly reposed handmaiden of God Anna Meinhold, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)