

# SOBORNOST

## St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## SERVICES

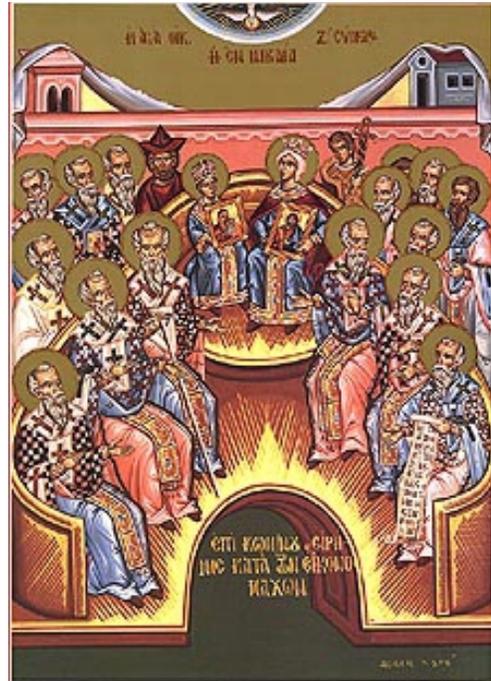
**Wednesday: Lay Vespers 6:30 PM**

**Saturday: Vespers 5 PM**

**Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM**

**Sunday School 9:30 AM**

**Divine Liturgy 10 AM**



## October 8, 2023 – 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost | Commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council

### The Sacred Icons and the Holy Cross by Fr. Anthony Alevizopoulos

God is the unique Being, the absolute existence; nothing can be compared with Him and the honor which is due Him, i.e. worship and adoration, is rendered unto none other; neither to some non-existent god nor to some idol.

But God's grace is transmitted in every way in accordance with His will; even through material objects or even through the shadow of holy men, as was the case with the shadow of the Apostles, which is their imprint, a type of image (Acts 5, 12-16. 19,11-12).

In the Old Testament some of the objects which transmitted the miraculous grace of God were the bronze snake of Moses, the Ark of the Covenant, the sheep-skin coat of the Prophet Elias, *et al.* Every desecration of the sacred objects was severely punished by God (see Num. 10,15-20. I Kings 5, 2-4).

The teaching of the Orthodox Church concerning the holy icons has a Christological foundation. God is by essence unapproachable; He can neither be expressed by words nor depicted. The Son and Word of God, however, became man and we beheld His glory (Jn 1, 14). Thus we can depict the person of Christ which constitutes the visible sign of the invisible presence of God, an "image of

the invisible God" (Col. 1, 15). In the Orthodox Church that which is seen can be depicted; we express the same confession of faith either by written or oral word and even by depiction. The icon of Christ constitutes the confirmation of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, which was a totally real, and not a docetic or imaginary, one.

Through the sacred icons we express our internal desire to grow in the love of Christ and the saints, to attain to the "new creation in Christ" and to become "conformed to His image" (Rom. 8,29). Just as the word sanctifies our lips, in a like way the icon, which transmits the same meaning as does the word, sanctifies our eyes and our mind.

The icons of the saints refer to "the new man" and are a declaration of our belief in our transformation in Christ and in the incorruption of man and the entire world. They do not refer to the "beauty" of this world, but rather symbolize the beauty and the glory of the "future age". This is why the holy icons lack the dimension of "depth" and are two-dimensional. They proclaim a transfigured world which however we observe "as through a mirror" (I Cor. 13, 12). The holy icons give us the feeling that there exists a new world that is being transformed, and they constitute the assurance of our hope, expressed in the words of our Lord: "Behold I make all things new" (Rev. 21,5).

The honor rendered to the holy icons is placed within the framework established by the Seventh Ecumenical Council. According to the Holy Fathers of this council, the honor shown towards the holy icons refers back to the ancient Church and confirms the belief in the real incarnation of God the Word. This council ordains that along with the Holy Cross icons be made for the Churches, to be placed on the sacred vessels and the vestments of the priests, in the homes and in the roads; icons of Christ, the Theotokos and all the saints. It further underlines:

"For the more frequently they [the sacred icons] are seen, all the more those who see them are moved to remembrance and desire of those depicted; to them [the icons] they render greetings and a veneration of honor, but not true worship, which in accordance with our faith, is due only unto the divine nature...for the honor rendered to the icon is transferred to the prototype, and he who venerates the icon venerates the person depicted thereon".

Orthodox Christians believe that the Holy Cross is their only pride (Gal. 6,14). It is the instrument through which sin, the source of death, was set at naught (Rom. 5,12. 8,3). The Cross is thus no longer a symbol of death and of shame (Deut. 21,23), but a source of eternal life. Through the Cross the curse is done away with, conciliation "in Christ" is brought about, and "the new man" is created (Eph. 2, 15-16). These truths are expressed in many of the hymns of the Church:

*"You spread out Your hands on the Cross, O Merciful One, and You gathered together the Nations that were far from You so that they might glorify Your great goodness".*

*"By spreading out Your divine hands upon the Cross, O Jesus, You brought unto Yourself the work of Your hands, and You freed all from the hands of the Evil One and subjected them [unto You], for which cause let us faithful hymn Your majesty, for indeed it is glorified".*

The Cross of Christ is thus characterized by the Lord Himself as glory, as the judgment of this world, as the casting out of the Devil and as exaltation (Jn 12, 24-33). Our Church characterizes the Cross as "a weapon against the Devil", because he trembles and shudders at the sight of the Cross, not being able to bear its power.

*"Lord, You have given us Your Cross as a weapon against the Devil; for he shudders and trembles, not being able to gaze upon its might. For its resurrects the dead, and abrogated death; for which cause we venerate Your entombment and Your Resurrection".*

The Holy Cross of Christ becomes a standard and a measure of either man's triumph or his condemnation, depending upon the position he takes vis-a-vis it. Whoever equates Christ's Cross with that of the thieves, is equated with the unrepentant thief and is condemned. On the contrary, whoever differentiates the Cross of Christ and considers it to be a royal scepter, and invokes the mercy of Christ, is likened unto the good thief, and the road leading to Paradise is opened up before him. In this way the Holy Cross becomes the measure of the judgment of the world, "the scale of justice" as it is called by the hymn of the Church:

*"Your Cross stood between two thieves as a scale of justice. The one is led down to hell by the weight of his blasphemy, the other is lightened from the burden of his sins unto the knowledge of things divine. O Christ-God, glory to You".*

When we speak of the Holy Cross we do not mean only Christ's crucifixion, but also the wood of the Cross. For this, too, is sanctified by its contact with the Body of Christ, and that is why it, too, is venerated: "The wood of Your Cross do we venerate, O Lover of man, for on it was nailed the Life of all things", states one of the Church's hymns. The sign of the Cross is also "divine and venerable", says St. Gregory Palamas, for it is "a venerable seal, sanctifying and perfecting all the marvelous and ineffable good things that come from God". It is an image of the crucified Christ and it draws its power and grace from His passion. This is why the sealing with the sign of the Cross is the external sign of all of the Church's Mysteries through which man's salvation is wrought.

The Cross of Christ expresses the ineffable love of God, but at the same time it also expresses man's infinite value in God's sight. A contemporary theologian says that Christ put sin to death without slaying the sinner; He did away with guilt and yet saved the guilty one. This is the great difference between Christ and human justice which crushes guilt by deriding and disgracing the guilty one. However, Christ did not simply conquer sin but also the consequence of sin which is death, and restored man to his pristine purity. Thus He led man to a surpassing of death, to the life of immortality and incorruption. Thus we do not have here a lifting of some type of Augustinian inherited guilt, nor room for any type of "payment" or "ransom" - save only in the patristic sense - and certainly not an Anselmian satisfaction of Divine justice. Rather the weight rests on Christ's love, Who achieved the most extreme limits of sacrifice in behalf of those whom He loves. And it is in precisely this that we see man's infinite value.

Making the sign of the Cross is an early Christian Tradition testified to by St. Justin the Martyr (+ 150) and by Tertullian (+ 200). The latter writes: "We Christians in all our travels and in all our movements about, at every departure and upon every arrival, when we put on our clothes and shoes, in the bath and at the table, when we light our lamp, when we sit or sleep, in all the acts of our every-day life in general, we make the sign of the Cross".

"This custom," Tertullian concludes, "has its beginnings in the Church's Tradition, it is strengthened through habit and should be preserved in faith".

Orthodox Christians unite the three fingers of their right hand and place them first on their forehead, then on their stomach and finally bring them to their two shoulders from right to left. All of the Church's theology is depicted in the sign of the Cross. By uniting our three fingers we depict and confess our belief in the One Triune God. From the forehead we bring our fingers to the stomach, and by so doing "typify the Son" Who was pre-eternally born of the Father and came down to earth by His birth from the Virgin Mary. When we place our united fingers on our shoulders we do so to "typify the Holy Spirit", Who is characterized as being the "arm" and the "might" of God. By uniting the remaining two fingers we depict Christ's incarnation and the inseparable union of the two natures, through which human nature was cured and exalted to the height of theosis.

We must not make the sign of the Cross in a mechanical way, but conscientiously, with inner participation. We should make the sign of the Cross upon our bodies distinctly and not carelessly, but in accordance with the order of the Church: with our three fingers joined together and as if the Cross itself were touching us. It is understood that the sign of the Cross must be accompanied by analogous faith in that which it depicts and by the unwavering decision to crucify and do away with

our sinful selves and our passions; to put on the new man and ever be orientated towards the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ.

Orthodox Christians therefore render respect and honorary veneration to the Cross just as they do to the holy icons, in relation always to the personage of Christ. This also holds true for the honor rendered to the saints. This honor is not adoration and worship, but an expression of respect and love towards persons and things which God Himself honored by abundantly bestowing upon them His grace. This veneration would be transformed into worship only in such case where one were to render it by identifying in his conscience that which he venerated with God. No Orthodox Christian, however, ever identifies the Holy Cross, the sacred icons or the saints with God, nor does he differentiate the honor accorded them from their relationship to the person of our Lord. *(from impantokratoros.gr)*

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians 9:6-11 EOB**

Brethren, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Let everyone give according to what he has determined in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that by having what is needed in everything, you may overflow in every good work. As it is written: He has scattered abroad, he has given to the poor. His righteousness remains forever. Now, may he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food also supply and multiply your seed for sowing, and increase the fruits of your righteousness. Thus, may you be enriched in everything, so that you may be generous in all things, and through us, this brings thanksgiving to God.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 7:11-16 EOB**

At that time, Jesus went to a city called Nain. Many of his disciples, along with a great multitude, went with him. Now, when Jesus drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a dead person was being carried out, who was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. Many people of the city were with her. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, "Do not cry." He came near and touched the coffin, and the bearers stood still. He then said, "Young man, I tell you, arise!" And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. Jesus then gave him to his mother. They were all filled with awe and glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people."

### **Homily on the Great Litany of the Divine Liturgy – City & Citizens**

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

The Divine Liturgy is held at a certain place and time, but it is held for the inhabited world, for the people who are traveling, who are sick, in general for the

whole world. Thus, the liturgist exhorts the people: "For this City, every City, Country and the faithful who live in them, let us pray to the Lord." In other words, let us pray for this City or County, in which the Divine Liturgy is held, for every City and for every Country, but also for those who live in them with faith - that is to say, with Orthodox Christian faith - that is, the Orthodox Christians.

We were born in a certain place, a special Motherland that we love and care about, but we also pray for its progress. Social justice, peace, love, harmony, respect for the freedom of every person, but also social unity must prevail in this City. But we do not absolutize things, that is why we also pray for every City and Country. The love for our City and Homeland does not exclude every other City and Country of our fellow human beings.

With the Divine Liturgy every place is sanctified where it is celebrated, or at least we pray that God will give His Grace so that the members of the Church will be blessed. In another prayer this request is made concrete, so that God may send His Grace and protect the City and its inhabitants from wrath, earthquake, disease, hunger, civil war and sudden death. Also, in another prayer we pray for the authority that exists in every place, so that the believers also live a calm and peaceful life with all piety and modesty. Christians do not deny history and place, because otherwise their faith would be not based in reality. Christ with His incarnation entered history, took on human nature and deified it, transformed it. Since then we too respect historical place and historical time.

The Bishops take the name of a specific City as their title and thus sign the Minutes of the Ecumenical Synods. The seats of the Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches have special embassies and privileges. Jerusalem is a glorious City, where Christ taught, was crucified and resurrected. And the New Jerusalem, Constantinople, is the City that was the Capital of the Roman Empire and where many Ecumenical Synods were convened and is now the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Those who live in the cities with faith need the help and protection of God, because there are many dangers. Modern urban societies are de-Christianized, secularized, cut off from God. Many citizens do not go to church, even if they are baptized Christians, they do not adapt their lives to God's commandments. This in some way also affects faithful Christians, that is why they need God's help.

Despite the fact that we love our Country, the City or the Village where we live, we nevertheless know that we are going to the City above. The Apostle Paul speaks on the one hand of the "earthly dwelling of the tabernacle", that is, of the body, on the other hand of the "house not made by hands and eternal in the

heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1-2). Our government is in heaven and from there we are directed, as the Apostle Paul says, "for our government is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20).

However, we love the City or County where we live, we are interested in peace and love prevailing in it, and we pray for it, because along with everything else peaceful conditions enable us to celebrate the Divine Liturgy freely and glorify God with all our hearts. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him." (Matthew 21:31-32)

See by how many things is shown the commendation of those, and the charge against these. He came to you, not to them. You did not believe; this did not offend them. They believed; this did not profit you.

But the word, "go before you," is not as though these were following, but as having a hope, if they were willing. For nothing, so much as jealousy, rouses the grosser sort. Therefore He is ever saying, "The first shall be last, and the last first." Therefore He brought in both harlots and publicans, that they might provoke them to jealousy.

For these two indeed are chief sins, engendered of violent lust, the one of sexual desire, the other of the desire of money. And He indicates that this especially was hearing the law of God, to believe John. For it was not of grace only, that harlots entered in, but also of righteousness. For they did not enter in by continuing in harlotry, but they entered in having obeyed and believed, and having been purified and converted.

Do you see how He rendered His discourse less offensive, and more penetrating, by the parable, by His bringing in the harlots? For he did not begin by saying that they did not believe John, but what was much more pricking, He put forward the publicans and the harlots, then He added this, by the order of their actions convicting their unpardonable conduct, and showing that for fear of men they do all things, and for vainglory. For they did not confess Christ for fear, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; and again, of John they dared not speak evil, and not even this from reverence, but for fear. He convicted them of these things by His sayings, and with more severity afterwards He went on to inflict the blow, saying, "But you, when you knew it, did not repent afterwards, that you might believe him."

For it is an evil thing to not at the first choose the good, but it is a heavier charge to continue rejecting it even after it is shown to be good. For this above all makes many wicked, which I see to be the case with some now from extreme insensibility. But let no one be like this; but even if one is sunk down to the extremity of wickedness, let him not despair of the change for the better. For it is a simple thing to rise up out of the very abysses of wickedness.

Have you not heard how that harlot, who went beyond all in lasciviousness, outshone all in godly reverence? Not the harlot in the gospels do I mean, but the one in our generation, who came from Phoenice, that most lawless city. For she was once a harlot among us, having the first honors on the stage, and great was her name everywhere, not only in our city, but even as far as Cilicia and Cappadocia. And she ruined many estates, and overthrew many orphans; and many accused her of sorcery also, as weaving such toils not by her beauty of person only, but also by her drugs. This harlot once won even the brother of the empress, for mighty indeed was her tyranny. [*St. John is probably referring to St. Pelagia the Penitent, commemorated today. See below. - ed.*]

But all at once, I do not know how, or rather I do know well, for it was being so minded, and converting, and bringing down upon herself God's grace, that she despised all those things, and having cast away the arts of the devils, mounted up to heaven.

And indeed nothing was more vile than she was when she was on the stage; nevertheless, afterwards she outdid many in exceeding continence, and having clad herself with sackcloth, all her time she thus disciplined herself. On the account of this woman both the governor was stirred up, and soldiers armed, yet they were not able to carry her off to the stage, nor to lead her away from the virgins who had received her.

This woman was counted worthy of the unutterable mysteries, and exhibited a diligence proportionate to the grace given her, and so ended her life, having washed off all through grace, and after her baptism having shown forth much self-restraint. For she did not even allow to those who were once her lovers a mere sight of herself, when they had come for this, having shut herself up, and having passed many years, as it were, in a prison. Thus "shall the last be first, and the first last;" thus in every case we need a fervent soul, and there is nothing to hinder one from becoming great and admirable. Let no man then of them that live in vice despair; let no man who lives in virtue slumber. Let neither this last be confident, for often the harlot will pass him by; nor let the other despair, for it is possible for him to pass by even the first.

— St. John Chrysostom, *from Homily 57 on Matthew*

## **Venerable Pelagia the Penitent**

Saint Pelagia the Penitent was converted to Christianity by Saint Nonnus, Bishop of Edessa (Saturday of Cheesefare Week). Before her acceptance of Christianity through Baptism, Pelagia was head of a dance troupe in Palestinian Antioch, living a life of frivolity and prostitution.

One day Pelagia, elegantly dressed, was making her way past a church where Saint Nonnus was preaching a sermon. Believers turned their faces away from the sinner, but the bishop glanced after her. Struck by the outer beauty of Pelagia and having foreseen the spiritual greatness within her, the saint prayed in his cell for a long time to the Lord for the sinner. He told his fellow bishops that the prostitute put them all to shame. He explained that she took great care to adorn her body in order to appear beautiful in the eyes of men. “We... take no thought for the adornment of our wretched souls,” he said.

On the following day, when Saint Nonnus was teaching in the church about the dread Last Judgment and its consequences, Pelagia came. The teaching made a tremendous impression upon her. With the fear of God and weeping tears of repentance, she asked the saint for Baptism. Seeing her sincere and full repentance, Bishop Nonnus baptized her.

By night the devil appeared to Pelagia, urging her to return to her former life. The saint prayed, signed herself with the Sign of the Cross, and the devil vanished.

Three days after her baptism, Saint Pelagia gathered up her valuables and took them to Bishop Nonnus. The bishop ordered that they be distributed among the poor saying, “Let this be wisely dispersed, so that these riches gained by sin may become a wealth of righteousness.” After this Saint Pelagia journeyed to Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. She lived there in a cell, disguised as the monk Pelagius, living in ascetic seclusion, and attaining great spiritual gifts. When she died, she was buried in her cell. (*from oca.org*)

## **Also Commemorated Today**

New Hieromartyr [Arcadius](#) Otarsky, priest of Ismentsy (1918)

New Hieromartyr [Leonid](#) Skvortsov, priest of Laishev, and 4 laymen (1918)

New Hieromartyrs [Demetrius](#) archbishop of Mozhaysk and with him John deacon, Hieromartyr Ambrosius and Pakhomius, Virgin-martyr Tatiana, Martyr Nicholas, Virgin-martyrs Mary and Nadezhda (1937).

New Hieromartyr [Jonah](#) bishop of Velizhsk, Hieromartyr Seraphim, New Hieromartyrs Peter, Basil, Paul, Peter, Vladimir priests, Martyrs Victor, John, Nicholas and Virgin-martyr Elizabeth (1937).

New Hieromartyr Barlaam (end of 1930's).

Venerable [Dositheus](#), abbot of [Verkneostrov](#) (Pskov) (1482).  
Venerable [Tryphon](#), abbot, of [Vyatka](#) (1612).  
Synaxis of All Saints of Vyatka.  
Ven. Martyr [Ignatius](#) of Kios (8<sup>th</sup> c.)  
++Venerable [Thais](#) ([Taisia](#)) of Egypt (4th c.).  
Virgin-martyr [Pelagia](#) of [Antioch](#) (303).  
St. [Philip](#), bishop of Gortyna (180)  
New Monk-martyr [Ignatius](#) of Bulgaria and Mt. Athos (1814).  
St. Anthony, bishop of Novgorod (1232).  
+-St. [Keyene](#) (Keyna, Ceinwen), hermitess of Cornwall. (5/6<sup>th</sup> c.)  
St. [Iwi](#) (Ywi), hierodeacon of Lindisfarne. (690)  
St. [Triduana](#) (Triduna), virgin nun of Restalrig.  
St. Alexis (Kabaljuk), confessor and modern apostle to Carpatho-Rus (1949) (also Nov 19)  
St. [Amor](#) of Aquitaine, founder of the convent of Muensterbilsen (Belgium)(9<sup>th</sup> c.)  
St. [Badilo](#), abbot of Leuze in Hainault (Belgium)(c. 870)  
Virgin-Martyr [Benedicta](#) of Laon (France)  
St. [Evodius](#), bishop of Rouen (5<sup>th</sup> c.)  
St. [Gratus](#), bishop of Châlons-sur-Saône (France) (c. 652)  
Martyrs [Palatias](#) and Laurentia in Fermo (Italy)(302)  
Martyr [Peter](#) of Seville

## Social Team for October 15

Team 1 – Hanbury, P. Blaydoe, Chumak. Thank you!

## 2023 Young Adult Fall Retreat

**Iconography: Awed by the Beauty** with Keynote Speaker Michael Kapeluck (who painted the icons in our church – ed.) The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese, the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh Y2AM and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church USA invite Young Adults to come retreat at Camp Nazareth for a weekend with other Orthodox Young Adults from all jurisdictions. The weekend event (**October 27-29**) will be filled with learning, fun, fellowship and worship and time for reflection and rejuvenation! To register, click [here](#)!

Note: Financial-need Scholarships may be available through your home parish or diocese. If you need assistance, please call Camp Nazareth at 725.662.4840 or email [youngadultretreats@gmail.com](mailto:youngadultretreats@gmail.com).

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# FALL YOUTH ENCOUNTER

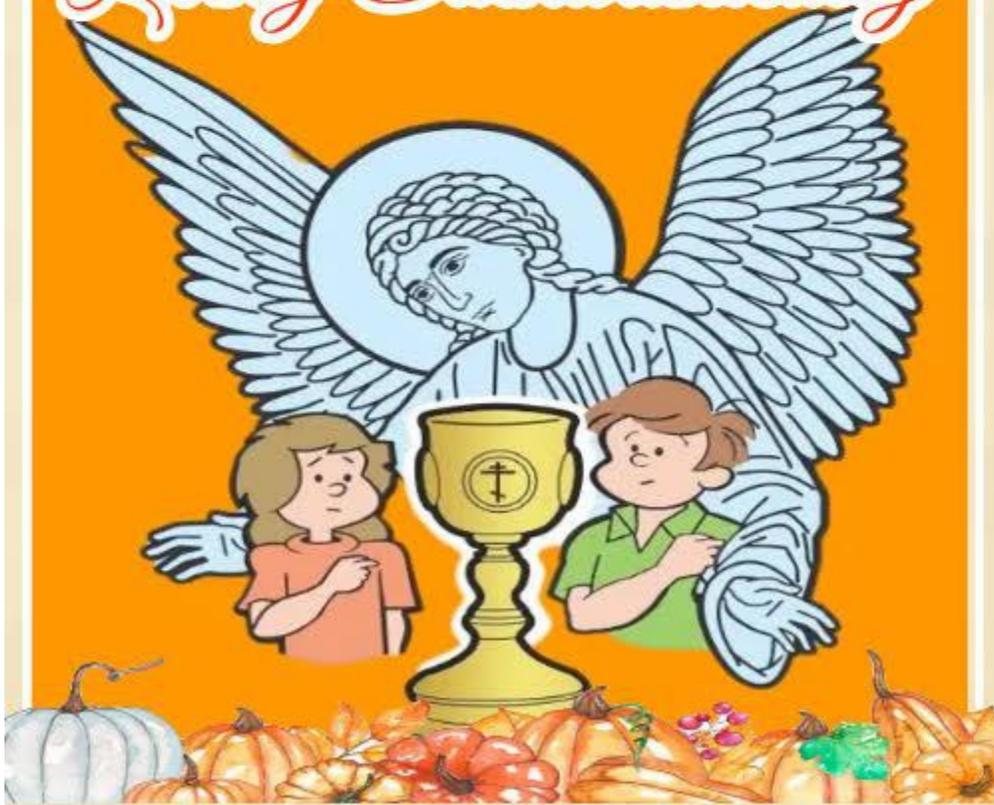
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***In Your Prayers – Please Remember...*** His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & 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, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Jacob, 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.)