

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 22, 2023 – 20th Sunday After Pentecost
Isapostle Abercius, Bishop & Wonderworker of
Hieropolis | The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus**

*Throwing to the ground mortal law Abercius, you gave the place to God, belonging to God by nature. ** On the twenty-second Abercius departed the earth.*
Saint Abercius (also spelled Averkios) succeeded Papias as Bishop of Hieropolis (now Pamoukkale) in Phrygia Salutaris and flourished during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180) who, although a reputed philosopher, was a fierce persecutor of Christians. To discover the Christians of his empire, he would order all his subjects to join in celebrations that honored pagan deities, and to offer sacrifices to their idols.

During one such festival, Abercius went into his house alone and prayed with tears that God would have mercy on the ignorant people. Thereupon an Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and ordered him to throw down the altars of Apollo and the other pagan gods. So he did this in the middle of the night, casting down the idols with his staff. When morning came those who were deluded to worship the idols rushed to his house to put him to death. Instead of fleeing, Bishop Abercius went to the public marketplace and confessed his faith in Christ and rebuked the foolishness of submitting to dumb idols. Then seeing three men possessed by evil



spirits, he touched them with his staff and they were restored to their right minds. This calmed down the frenzied crowd, and they listened to him, so that five hundred of them came to faith in Christ that day, and were baptized. The Saint became known throughout the region, and many flocked to him seeking his blessing and to be cured of their various ailments. News of him even reached Rome, prompting Marcus Aurelius to invite him to his palace in order to cure his betrothed daughter who was tormented by evil spirits.

When he arrived in Rome, Abercius was immediately taken to the imperial palace, where Empress Faustina awaited him. She brought him to her daughter, who convulsed violently when she saw the Saint. The demon begged the Saint to torment it no longer and allow it to return to Hierapolis from whence it came. Abercius allowed this, but only as long as it took with it a massive stone used for idolatrous rites in Rome. And indeed it did as commanded, while the crowd was amazed to see the stone rise to the sky away from Rome, clearly showing to all the power that Christians can have over demons. Later, this stone was placed over the tomb of Abercius in Hierapolis, as a trophy of victory. For these things, the Empress wanted to reward Abercius with gold, but he would not have it. Rather, he remained in Rome for a short time to strengthen the Christians by his preaching and miracles, until God ordered him to leave for Syria.

Abercius first went to Antioch and then to Apamea, where he was victorious against the heresy of Marcion. He even crossed the Euphrates, reaching Nisibis, and passed through the whole of Mesopotamia, pursuing the same heresy in order to pluck it out of the regions it most infected. From Mesopotamia he went to Cilicia, Lycaonia and Pisidia. Several years later he returned to Phrygia, where his spiritual flock received him with great rejoicing. Having covered such a great distance in his proclamation of the gospel, like no other bishop of his time since the Apostles, for this reason he has come to be known as an Equal to the Apostles.

In Phrygia during some years of peace, Abercius continued teaching, baptizing, healing the sick and casting out demons. He is said to have authored a letter to Marcus Aurelius and a book of spiritual direction for his clergy to guide them after his departure, but both of these are now lost. Having therefore illumined many with his words and deeds and miracles, one day Saint Abercius went up a high mountain to pray. There he made a spring of water miraculously gush forth, and after received a divine revelation that his end was coming near. Therefore he came down from the mountain and prepared his tomb in Hierapolis. And on his tomb he made the following inscription on the stone brought to Hierapolis by the demon from Rome, which can still be read today at the Vatican Museum:

The citizen of a chosen city, this [monument] I made [while] living, that there I might have in time a resting-place of my body, [I] being by name Abercius, the disciple of a holy Shepherd who feeds flocks of sheep [both] on mountains and on plains, who has great eyes that see everywhere. For this [Shepherd] taught me [that the] book [of life] is worthy of belief. And to Rome he sent me to see majesty, and to see a queen golden-robed and golden-sandaled; there also I saw a people bearing a shining seal [baptism]. And I saw the land of Syria and all [its] cities; Nisibis [I saw] when I passed over Euphrates. But everywhere I had brethren. With Paul as my companion [namely the writings of the Apostle Paul] ..., while faith everywhere led me forward, and everywhere provided as my food a Fish of exceeding great size, and perfect, which a holy Virgin drew with her hands from a fountain and this it [faith] ever gives to its friends to eat, it having wine of great virtue, and giving it mingled with bread [the Eucharist]. These things I, Abercius, having been a witness [of them] told to be written here. Verily I was passing through my seventy-second year. He who discerns these things, every fellow-believer [namely], let him pray for Abercius. And no one shall put another grave over my grave; but if he do, then shall he pay to the treasury of [the] Romans two thousand pieces of gold and to my good native city of Hieropolis one thousand pieces of gold.

Having thus made these preparations, Saint Abercius gathered those near him, bade them farewell, and raising his hands and eyes heavenward, he fell asleep to join the choir of Angels. He was seventy-two years old and reposed in 167 A.D. (*adapted from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

The Seven Holy Youths of Ephesus As Models for Our Lives

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

The mystery of death always occupied and puzzled people, who tried to explain its origin and to find, if possible, the way to abolish it. Various religions and philosophies at times gave various explanations, and most often they were contradictory. However, death remained a harsh reality that caused great pain and deep sadness, even without the hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

When the Word of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, became incarnate and consorted with people, among the miracles He performed, He brought three people back from the dead. He raised the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain and his friend Lazarus. By this He showed He is Lord and the master over life and death. Then with His own resurrection He abolished death and gave people the ability to conquer it and overcome it within the limits of their personal life.

Of course, we also encounter the resurrection of the dead in the Old Testament. But there we don't have the abolishment of death, which is why the righteous of the Old Testament went to Hades. Hades is not a place in the bowels of the earth, "but a particular way of life, different from Hell. It is a foretaste of eternal torments, or we could say a vestibule where souls as prisoners await trial. According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, by Hades we shouldn't understand a place, but a certain state of the soul that is formless and bodiless" (*Metr. Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, Life After Death*). According to Orthodox Theology, death was not created by God, but it is the result of sin. Man was formed by God with the ability to live for eternity. This is why he can't cooperate with the idea of death, nor can he extend his biological life to his satisfaction. What he wants is to defeat death and live for eternity.

The shocking story of the Seven Youths of Ephesus reveals the truth that death is a great sleep, like sleep is a small death. Christ abolished death, but He allowed the temporary separation of the soul from the body to exist, out of great love and philanthropy, so that evil may not be immortal. And just like the Seven Youths who awoke from their sleep, which was given to them by God's concession for 372 years,* so all people will be resurrected at the Second Coming of Christ.

They lived in the third century during the reign of Decius, who persecuted Christians. Having distributed all their possessions to the poor, they entered a cave and pleaded with God to take them near Him and not allow them to be surrendered to the pagan emperor. When Decius came to Ephesus, he asked for them to appear before him and sacrifice to idols. When he was informed that they "died" in a cave, he ordered that the mouth of the cave be blocked. So they were left to sleep for many years and when they woke up they thought they had fallen asleep the previous night. However, they awoke during the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Younger, at a time when a heresy argued that there was no resurrection of the dead. Thus, God showed with this miracle that in the same way all will be resurrected on the day of Judgment.

Here it should be noted that their features did not alter at all over time, nor did their clothes suffer the slightest damage from the humidity of the cave. In the *Small Euchologion* of the Orthodox Church, there is a prayer called "[The Prayer of the Holy Seven Youths For One Who Is Ill And Cannot Sleep](#)", which is read by a Priest for all those who have problems with sleep. Among other things it says the following: "...as You made manifest Your holy glorious Seven Youths, confessors and witnesses of Your Appearance in the days of the Emperor Decius and the Apostate, having sustained them in the cave for 372 years, as infants kept warm in their own mother's womb, none having endured corruption, to the praise and glory of Your love for mankind, and for a testimony and confession of our regeneration and the resurrection of all."

When they woke up from their deep sleep, they felt hungry and one of them went down to Ephesus to shop for food, since by that time the mouth of the cave was unclogged. Then something unusual happened. He was encircled by the inhabitants of the city and was asked where he found that treasure. Because of the money he had on him from the time of Decius, they thought he had found some ancient treasure of coins, and they dragged him to the authorities for questioning. Eventually, after being questioned and investigated, the shocking event became known and everyone went to the cave, full of awe and admiration, to see them all up close. After a short time, the Seven Youths said they were tired and wanted to sleep. And indeed they put their head down and slept until the day of the common resurrection.

Living the way of life as taught by the Church leads to personal communion with the Triune God, and the overcoming of the limits of death in our personal life. Then a person will not only not fear death, but like the Apostle Paul they will "desire to depart and be with Christ". (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 1:11-19 EOB

Brethren, as regards the Good News which I preached, I proclaimed this to you, brethren, that it is not of human origin. I did not receive it from man and I was not taught [this Good News] by man, but it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ. You have heard about how I used to live in Judaism, how I persecuted the Church of God beyond measure, and how I ravaged it. I advanced in the Jewish religion beyond many of my own age among my countrymen, as I was more extremely zealous for the traditions of my forefathers. But when it was the good pleasure of God, (who had set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles), I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood: I did not go up to Jerusalem to visit those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia. Later on, I returned to Damascus. Then, after three years, I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Peter and I stayed with him for fifteen days. However, I did not see any of the other apostles, except James, 'the Lord's brother.'

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 16:19-31 EOB

The Lord said, "there was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, feasting in luxury every day. A certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores, who desired to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even dogs came and licked his sores. It happened that the beggar died and that he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried. In hades, he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus in his bosom. He cried and said,

‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue! For I am in agony in this flame!’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime, you received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But now, he is comforted here and you are in anguish. Besides all this, between us and you a great gulf is fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot [do so], and that no one may cross over from there to us.’ He said, ‘I ask you therefore, father, that you would send Lazarus to my father’s house; for I have five brothers, that he might bear witness to them, so that they would not also come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham replied to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets! Let them listen to them!’ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ Then Abraham said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead.’”

Homily on the Great Litany of the Divine Liturgy – Mary the Theotokos

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

Every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy and every Sacred Service, and we pray to God, either to the Triune God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - or to the God-man Christ, we also ask for the intercessions of Mary the Theotokos, our Panagia. This is because the Panagia played an important role in the incarnation of the Son and Word of God and our salvation. The "homeless" God acquired a "home," that is, he entered the world through our Panagia. Thus the known prayer: "Commemorating our most holy, pure, most blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, with all the saints, let us commend ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God."

In this supplication we can see two points: The first is the cosmetic epithets we attribute to our Panagia, which are not superficial, devoid of substance and content, but perfectly correspond to her person and work.

We call the Mother of Christ the "Panagia" ("Most Holy"), because she is superior to all the Saints, she is "the pinnacle and perfection of all saints." She did not commit any sin in her life, since from the age of three until she conceived Christ "by the Holy Spirit", she lived in the Holy of Holies and reached theosis. She is "Achrantos", that is, "Pure", clean from all sin and impurity, in body and soul. The Panagia is "most blessed", because she received great Grace from the fullness of God's Grace. She is "Glorious", because she is full of the glory of God, and her Dormition is also glorious. She is the "Despina" ("Lady"), because she gave birth to Christ, the Despot (Master) of all. In this sense, she is also characterized as "Lady", in that her intercessions and her prayers have a strong power and she is the

"Unashamed Protection of Christians". She is "Theotokos", because she did not give birth to a simple man, but to the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who is God. And she is "Ever-Virgin Mary", since she is a Virgin before giving birth, during birth and after giving birth, as the iconographer presents her in the holy icons, with the three stars on the forehead and the two shoulders.

The second point is that we ask the Panagia, with so many cosmetic epithets and glory, to be an intercessor for us. This is what "commemorating" means. We commemorate her to glorify her and to beg her to speak to God for our salvation, because Christ promised her before her dormition, that is, those for whom she prays will be saved. That is why all the Saints have a great affinity with the Panagia and feel her close to them, they love her very much, they are Theotokophiles.

We love her right after God. Christ is the mediator between us and God the Father, but the Panagia is the mediator between us and Christ. How this is done is a mystery understood by those who walk the path of salvation.

This is the reason why we ask for the intercessions of the Theotokos, but we also offer our entire life and that of our fellow human beings to Christ. We don't just pray, but we completely entrust ourselves to God. When one prays, but does not leave themselves to God's Providence, they are not really helped. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

A brother asked Abba Rufus, 'What is interior quietude, and what use is it?' The old man said, 'Interior quietude means to remain sitting in one's cell with fear and knowledge of God, holding far off the remembrance of wrongs suffered and pride of spirit. Such interior quietude brings forth all the virtues, preserves the monk from the burning darts of the enemy, and does not allow him to be wounded by them. Yes, brother, acquire it. Keep in mind your future death, remembering that you do not know at what hour the thief will come. Likewise be watchful over your soul.'

Abba Rufus said, 'He who remains sitting at the feet of his spiritual father receives a greater reward than he who lives alone in the desert.' He added that one of the Fathers said, 'I have seen four orders in heaven: in the first order is the sick man who gives thanks to God; in the second, the man who observes hospitality and for that reason, gets up to serve; in the third, the man who crosses the desert without seeing anyone; in the fourth, the man who obeys his Father and remains in submission to him for the Lord's sake. The one who was living in submission was wearing a chain of gold and a shield and had greater glory than the others. I said to

him who was guiding me, "Why does the one who is least have more glory than the others?" He answered me, "He who practices hospitality acts according to his own will; but the last one possesses obedience. Having abandoned all his desires, he depends on God and his own Father; it is because of this that he has received more glory than the others."

See, my child, how good obedience is when it is undertaken for the Lord. You have partly understood the elements of this virtue, my children. O obedience, salvation of the faithful! O obedience, mother of all the virtues! O obedience, discloser of the kingdom! O obedience, opening the heavens, and making men to ascend there from earth! O obedience, food of all the saints, whose milk they have sucked, through you they have become perfect! O obedience, companion of the angels!

— Abba Rufus, *Apothegms of the Desert Fathers*

Virgin-Martyrs Nunilo and Alodia of Huesca

Saints Nunilo and Alodia, daughters of a Muslim father and Christian mother, who were raised as Christians in Huesca, Emirate of Córdoba (southern Spain). After being widowed, their mother married again, also to a Muslim. Their stepfather treated them with great brutality, and ultimately turned them over to the authorities, who imprisoned them. SS. Nunilo and Aldodia were beheaded in 851 in the persecution of Christians during the reign of Emir Abd ar-Rahman II (r. 822–852). (*from drjohnhutchisonhall.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

The [Kazan](#) Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos, (deliverance from the Poles in [1612](#))

New Hieromartyrs [Philaret](#) Velikanov and Daniel Dymov, priests in Kazan (1918)

New Hieromartyrs Seraphim archbishop of Uglich, Archimandrite Herman, Vladimir, Alexander, Basil, Alexander priests & Martyrs Herman & Menas (1937).

New Hieromartyrs Nicholas, Nicholas priests and Martyr Gregory (1937).

Martyrs [Alexander](#) the bishop, Heraclius, Anna, Elizabeth, Theodota and Glyceria, at Adrianopolis (2nd-3rd c.).

Venerable Lot of [Egypt](#) (5th c.).

Venerables [Theodore](#) and Paul, abbots, of Rostov (1409).

Venerable James of Luga and Omutch, disciple of Theophilus of Omutch.

St. [Mellon](#), first bishop of Rouen. (314)

Martyr [Zachariah](#) (Greek).

Venerable Rufus of the [Paradise](#) (Greek).

St. [Donatus](#) of Fiesole, Bishop (874-876)

St. [Eulalios](#) of Lambousa

Holy Ethomartyr [Gregory](#), Bishop of Methoni (1825)

St. [Kuksha](#) of Odessa (1964)
St. [Benedict](#) of Macerai (France)(845)
Martyr [Bertharius](#), abbot of Monecassino (884)
St. [Maroveus](#), founder of the Monastery of Precipiano (Italy)(c. 650)
St. [Moderan](#) (Moran), bishop of Rennes (Brittany)(c. 730)
St. [Nepotian](#), Bishop of Clermont (c. 388)
Martyr [Nunctus](#) (Noint), abbot near Mérida (Spain)(668)
Hieromartyr [Philip](#), bishop of Fermo (c. 270)
St. [Simplicius](#), Abbot of Monetcassino (c. 570)
Martyr [Valerius](#) (Valier) of Langres (411)
St. [Verecundus](#), Bishop of Verona (522)
St. [Leothadius](#) (Léothade), bishop of Auch (France)(718)

Social Team for October 29

Team 3 – Edgington, Victor Barzykin, R&C Wright. Thank you!

Hawaiian Iveron Icon of the Theotokos

St. Mark Parish (Bethesda) will host a visitation of the Miraculous Myrrh-Streaming "Hawaiian" Iveron Icon of the Holy Theotokos on Wednesday evening, October 25th. The icon will arrive and be greeted at 6:45 PM and an Akathist Service will begin at 7:00 PM. All are encouraged to arrive prior to the greeting of the icon.

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

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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, 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.)