

# SOBORNOST

## St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

(301) 638-5035 Church  
4419 Leonardtown Road  
Waldorf, MD 20601

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor  
(703) 532-8017

[fredgington@gmail.com](mailto:fredgington@gmail.com)

[www.apostlethomas.org](http://www.apostlethomas.org)

*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**

**December 17, 2023 –**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Before Nativity**

## **Sunday of the Forefathers | Prophet Daniel & 3 Holy Youths**

On the Sunday that occurs on or immediately after the eleventh of this month, we commemorate Christ's forefathers according to the flesh, both those that came before the Law, and those that lived after the giving of the Law.

Special commemoration is made of the Patriarch Abraham, to whom the promise was first given, when God said to him, "By your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). This promise was given some two thousand years before Christ, when Abraham was seventy-five years of age. God called him and commanded him to forsake his country, parents, and kinsmen, and to depart to the land of the Canaanites. When he arrived there, God told him, "I will give this land to your seed" (Gen. 12:7); for this cause, that land was called the "Promised Land," which later became the country of the Hebrew people, and which is also called Palestine by the historians. There, after the passage of twenty-four years, Abraham received God's law concerning circumcision. In the one hundredth year of his life, when Sarah was in her ninetieth year, they became the parents of Isaac. Having lived 175 years altogether, he reposed in peace, a venerable elder full of days.

*Daniel, being beheaded, now you see God in reality on His throne, and not in a vision as of old. \*\* The Three Children shed their blood in a foreign place, like the*



*fire beforehand, now they are led to the sword. \*\* On the seventeenth Daniel was beheaded, who sees the future.*

The blessed Daniel the Prophet was from the royal tribe of Judah, of the family of those prominent in the royal service. He was born in Upper Beth-horon. While he was still an infant, he was brought as a slave from Judah to Babylon, and there he prophesied for seventy years. The Birth of Christ he foretold four hundred and sixty years beforehand. He was a man of such chastity, that the Jews thought he was a eunuch. And he lamented much over the slavery of his fellow Jews. It was also his desire to fast from all foods. Though his bodily appearance was lean, he was very good looking by the grace of God above.

The Holy Three Children were from the Holy City of Jerusalem, the sons of Hezekiah the king, and their mother was Kalliniki. Their father Hezekiah became ill and said to God with tears, to guard them and have them be pleasing before Him, which is why he was given an additional fifteen years to his life. When the city of Jerusalem was enslaved under Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon and Assyria, these Three Children were taken as slaves to Babylon, together with Daniel the Prophet. There they were positioned over the affairs of the king because of their virtue and prudence, as well as through the mediation of Daniel. Because they turned away from the golden image of the king which he ordered everyone to worship, and which was in the plain of Dura, they were cast into a furnace, which burned sevenfold. There they were cooled off by the descent of the divine Angel, and chanted the universal hymn, inviting all of creation to glorify God. When the king saw this strange miracle, he confessed that God was great and he worshiped Him.

Meanwhile the divine Daniel, although he lived and ate with the above Three Children, and was the cause for their honorable position through his mediation, as we mentioned, he was not placed with them in the furnace. Holy Scripture does not mention this. The reason he was not cast into the furnace, as it appears to me and to be the truth, is that King Nebuchadnezzar gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar (Dan. 5:12), because this name was a recognition of prominent honor and the name of God (Dan. 4:8). Because the name of Daniel was the name of God, for this reason, so as not to appear to the Persians, who thought God was fire, that the flame of the furnace was cooled by a Babylonian god, that was called Belteshazzar, therefore Divine Providence economized that the Prophet Daniel not be cast into the furnace with the Three Children, since he bore this name. Neither in the history of the narration of the furnace is Daniel referred to. The other Three Children, who were redeemed in a strange and supernatural manner from the fire of the furnace, were restored once again to their former glory. And having passed their life honorably, they were perfected in peace together with the Prophet Daniel.

It is also said, that after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, and the other kings who honored the Three Children, another king arose named Atticus. After examining these three Saints for their impiety, he ordered that Saint Misael be beheaded, but Saint Azarias put out his robe and caught his head. Saint Azarias was also condemned to be beheaded, but his head was caught by the divine Ananias. Then Ananias was also beheaded. It is also said that after the heads of the three were struck off, they once again became connected with their bodies. An Angel of the Lord then took their relics and brought them to Mount Gebal, and placed them there beneath a rock. After four hundred years, they arose with other forefathers, when the Lord arose from His tomb. Then they died again.

Their Synaxis is celebrated in the most holy Great Church. We received from the God-bearing Fathers to celebrate their memory seven days before the birth according to the flesh of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. This is because, I think, they were from the royal tribe of Judah, from which our Lord came from as a man. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:4-11 EOB**

Brethren, when Christ who is our life is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory. Therefore, put to death what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, depraved passions, lust and greed (which is idolatry). Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming on the children of disobedience. You also used to live in those things when you lived among these people; but now, put them all away: anger, rage, evil, slander, and shameful language. Do not lie to one another. You have put off the old self with his doings and you have put on the new self who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator. Here, there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free; but Christ is all, and in all!

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 14:16-24 EOB**

At that time, Jesus said, "A certain man gave a great banquet and invited many people. At supper time, he sent out his servant to tell those who were invited, 'Come, for everything is ready now!' But they all began to make excuses. The first told him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please have me excused!' Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen and I must go try them out. Please have me excused!' Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come!' That servant came back and reported these things to his lord. At this, the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and bring in the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame.' The servant said, 'Lord, it is done as you commanded, and there is still room!' The lord then told the servant, 'Go out into the highways

and hedges, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled! For I tell you that none of those who were invited will taste of my supper.'”

## **Homily on the Beatitudes 8**

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

*"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:8).*

In the fourth beatitude Christ blessed those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Here in the eighth beatitude Christ blesses those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Everything in life has value and people depending on their options collect the positives and negatives of each action.

The term "righteousness" is very important in Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. Righteousness is the prevalence of the authority of justice, as well as the prevalence of love, therefore it is "beyond all virtue".

Christ affirms that those who work towards righteousness will be persecuted by people, because societies rely on injustices, they adopt injustices and, despite the apparent legitimacy, injustice prevails. Whoever, therefore, wants righteousness to exist, who will speak of righteousness, and who desire to live according to the will of God, will be persecuted.

Persecution usually takes place in human societies. If someone does not go along with the common standards that exist in society, they are automatically ejected from society and live on the margins. Society itself which is organized with special authorities will persecute people who refuse to comply. Of course, with this we do not mean those cases where people do not want to abide by the laws of a certain nation and are sentenced by the courts, but rather those where people cannot keep certain unwritten laws that have prevailed in societies. In other words, if someone wants to live honorably, without committing illegalities, they are marginalized by the system and isolated.

Such persecutions were endured by the Christians since the first day the Church began to operate as the Body of Christ, that is, from the day of Pentecost. The Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of the Apostles, the Apocalypse of John the Evangelist describe these early persecutions of Christians.

Persecution is the basis of the Orthodox Christian preaching. Just as a shadow follows the sun, so does persecution follow the sun of righteousness, Christ. Christ warned His Disciples about this: "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (Jn. 15:20). Ecclesiastical history from the day of Pentecost until today is full of persecutions, martyrdoms, tortures and deaths, showing the authenticity of the ecclesiastical life.

It is natural for Christians to be persecuted for righteousness. Every society is organized either by a religious side or a side of atheism and indifference, or even a side of other deities besides that of Christianity. Many times people do not tolerate diversity, so they turn against Christians. There is also a deeper reason. When people deny false gods or deny the passions that are deified, then they are considered dangers and damaging for those living in atheism, deism, mysticism and idolatry.

The Martyrs accepted the hate of people and suffered persecution. They confessed Christ and suffered martyrdom for Christ. They refused to deny Him and gladly accepted martyrdom. Not only were Martyrs persecuted, however, for confessing their faith, but those who defended the aggrieved and wanted to live a life of virtue were also persecuted. Persecution "for the sake of righteousness" determines when persecution has value and when it doesn't. Because even criminals, thieves and murderers are persecuted, but they are persecuted for unrighteousness and illegality, which are not included in this beatitude.

Those who are persecuted "for the sake of righteousness" are children of God, because God loves the aggrieved, for He Himself was persecuted, defamed and martyred, which is why He rewards them. This is why the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them. The first beatitude that speaks of humility and the eighth beatitude that speaks of persecution for the sake of righteousness both speak of the Kingdom of God as the prize and reward. But all the intermediate beatitudes also speak of the Kingdom of Heaven, just with different expressions. Essentially the Kingdom of Heaven is one, but is received in a variety of ways.

The point is that every action we do has an analogous value, and it is a special blessing from God for one to be persecuted for God and not for their passions, for their Christian life and not their impassioned life, because then the fee is raised. The Martyrs of blood and the Martyrs of choice have great honor and glory in the Church. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

*When one of those who reclined at table with Him heard these things, he said unto Him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. But He said unto him, A certain man made a great supper....* [here follows the remainder of today's gospel reading – Ed.]

The purport of the lessons laid before us obliges me to say that the fruit of good works is praiseworthy. For not unrewarded is the toil of the saints, as they strenuously labor to lead that life which is truly worthy of admiration both with God and men. For the wise Paul writes, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your

labor and your love, which you have showed unto His Name." And again in another place he uses similar words, "For the lightness, he says, of our present affliction works for us abundantly and in a higher degree an eternal greatness of glory, when we look not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen; for the things which are seen are those of time, but the things which are not seen are for eternity." For the things of time are those of earth; and these we say are what are here called "the things which are seen:" but those which are to come, and which at present are not seen, but consist in those hopes which, are with God, are stored up for us in mansions that cannot be shaken.

And who they are for whom these things are prepared, and unto whom they will be given, the Savior has here shown, portraying as in a picture by the parable set before us, the nature and efficacy of the dispensation. It is necessary however for me first to say what was the occasion which led to this discourse.

Our Lord then was feasting at a certain Pharisee's, in company with many others assembled there, the friends of him who had bidden them to the entertainment, and the sharers of his sentiments. There again the Savior of all, to benefit those who were gathered there, - for He loves mercy rather, and not honor and vainglory; - perfected him that invited them, by not permitting him to make lavish expense, or aim at what was beyond his means, to gain the praise of men. For He said, "When you make a dinner or a supper, call not your friends, nor your brethren, nor further, any others who are rich and your neighbors: but rather the poor, and the maimed, and the blind. For those, He said, who so act shall be blessed at the resurrection of the just." Upon which one of those who were reclining with them at meat, on hearing words thus excellent, said, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Probably however this man was not as yet spiritual, but rather animal, nor fitted to understand correctly what was spoken by Christ: for he was not one of those who believed, nor had he as yet been baptized. For he supposed that the rewards of the saints, for their mutual labors of love, would be in things pertaining to the body. Because then they were too dull in heart to comprehend a precise idea, Christ frames for them a parable which with sufficient appositeness sets forth the nature of the dispensation about to be instituted for their sakes: and says, "A certain man made a great supper, and bade many. And he sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for lo! all things are ready."

And here let us first of all inquire, what was the reason why it is rather to a supper than a dinner that the guests were invited; or rather, even before this, who is to be understood by the man who sent one to invite to the supper; and who also is the inviter, and who in fine they are who were invited, but despised the summons.

By the man therefore is to be understood God the Father. For similitudes are formed to represent the truth, and are by no means the truth themselves. He therefore, the Creator of the universe, and the Father of glory, made a great supper, that is, a festival for the whole world, in honor of Christ. In the last times then of the world, and so to speak, at this our world's setting, the Son arose for us: at which time also He suffered death for our sakes, and gave us His flesh to eat, as being the bread from heaven, Which gives life to the world. Towards evening also, and by the light of torches, the lamb was sacrificed, according to the law of Moses. And therefore with good reason the invitation that is by Christ is called a supper.

And next, who is he that was sent, and who it also says was a slave? Perchance Christ Himself: for though God the Word is by nature God, and the very Son of God the Father, from Whom He was manifested, yet He emptied Himself, to take the form of a slave. As being therefore God of God He is Lord of all; but one may justly apply the appellation of a slave to the limits of His humanity. Yet though He had taken, as I said, the form of a slave, He was even so Lord as being God.

And when was He sent? At supper time, it says. For it was not at the commencement of this world that the only-begotten Word of the Father descended from heaven, and was in form like unto us; but rather when the Omnipotent Himself willed it, even in these latter times, as also we have already said.

And what was the nature of the invitation? "Come: for lo! all things are ready." For God the Father has prepared in Christ for the inhabitants of earth those gifts which are bestowed upon the world through Him, even the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing away of all defilement, the communion of the Holy Spirit, the glorious adoption as sons, and the kingdom of heaven. Unto these blessings Christ invited by the commandments of the gospel Israel before all others. For somewhere He has even said by the voice of the Psalmist; "But I have been set as a king by Him; that is, by God the Father; upon Zion His holy mount, to preach the commandment of the Lord." And again, "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

And their determination then, was it for their own good? Did they regard with admiration the gentleness of Him Who bade them, and the office of Him Who ministered the call? Not so: for "they began, it says, all of them at once to make excuse:" that is, as with one purpose, without any delay, they made excuse. "For the first said, I have bought a field, and I must needs go to see it: I pray you, permit me to be excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them: I pray you, permit me to be excused. And another said, I have taken a wife, and therefore I cannot come." You perceive that by senselessly giving themselves up to these earthly matters, they cannot see things spiritual; for being

overcome by the love of the flesh, they are far from holiness, and are covetous and greedy after wealth. They seek those things which are below, but make no account, no not in the slightest degree, of those hopes which are stored up with God. Far better would it have been instead of earthly fields to gain the joys of paradise: and instead of transitory tillage, for this was the object of the yokes of oxen, to gather the fruits of righteousness. For it is written, "Sow for yourselves righteousness; gather as vintage the fruit of life." Was it not their duty rather, instead of the carnal procreation of children, to have chosen spiritual fruitfulness? For the one is subject unto death and corruption: the other is an eternal and abiding; affluence for the saints.

When then the householder heard their refusal, he was angry, it says; and commanded that from the streets and marketplaces of the city there should be gathered the poor, and the maimed, and the blind, and the lame. And who then are to be understood by those who for the sake, as I said, of lands, and tillage, and the carnal procreation of children, refused to come? Certainly it must be those, who stood at the head of the Jewish synagogue; men with wealthy purses, the slaves of covetousness, with their mind set on lucre, on which they lavished all their earnestness. For so to speak throughout the whole of inspired Scripture, one may see them blamed for this very thing.

Those then who were superior in station to the mass of the common people did not submit themselves to Christ, when, saying unto them, "Take My yoke upon you:" they rejected the invitation: they did not accept the faith; they remained away from the feast; and scorned the great supper by their hardened disobedience. For that the scribes and Pharisees did not believe in Christ, is manifest by what He says unto them, "You have taken away the key of knowledge: you enter not in yourselves: and those that are entering you have hindered." In their stead therefore those were called who were in the streets and market-places, who belonged, that is, to the Jewish common people, whose mind was sickly, and infirm, and dark, and halting: for such one may consider to be blind and lame. But they became strong and whole in Christ: they learnt to walk uprightly, and received the divine light into their mind. And that a multitude of the Jews not easy to number believed, one may learn from the Acts of the Apostles.

When then those, it says, who were in the streets had been called, he whose office it was to bid them to the supper said to the householder, "Still there is room. And the lord said to his servant. Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that no one of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper."



Here observe, I pray, the calling of the Gentiles after that the Israelites had entered by faith. For in old time the Gentiles were boorish in mind, and uncultivated in understanding, and so to say, outside the city, as living in lawlessness, and more like cattle than men, and with little use of reason. And on this account he who invites to the supper is sent unto the highways, outside the city, and to the hedges in the fields: moreover he is commanded by him who seat him not merely to invite, and offer them exhortation only, but even to compel them. And yet in all men faith is a voluntary act, and by attaining unto it of their own free will, men are acceptable unto God, and largely endowed with His gifts. How then are men compelled? Yes, this also was said advisedly. For it was necessary, absolutely necessary for the Gentiles, as being fettered by an intolerable tyranny, and fallen under the yoke of the devil, and caught, so to speak, in the indissoluble meshes of their sins, and utterly ignorant of Him Who by nature and verily is God, that their calling should be very urgent, resembling the use of force, that they might be able to look up unto God, and taste the sacred doctrines, and leave off their former error, and spring away as it were from the hand of Satan. For Christ also said, "No man can come unto Me except My Father Who sent Me drag him." But dragging implies that the calling is an act of power such as God only can exercise. And the blessed David is also found addressing God in similar terms respecting them, "With bridle and bit shall You restrain the jaws of those that draw not near unto You." You see how the God of all as with a bridle turns unto Himself those who fiercely have departed from Him: for He is good and loving unto mankind, and wills that all men should be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth.

The chiefs therefore of the Israelitish populace remained aloof from the supper, as being obdurate and proud and disobedient, and scorned so surpassing an invitation, because they had turned aside to earthly things, and fixed their mind upon the vain distractions of this world. But the vulgar multitude was called in, and after them immediately and without delay the Gentiles. For when our Lord Jesus Christ arose from the dead, He cried out unto the holy apostles saying, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth: go make disciples of all nations, baptizing you them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: and teaching you them to observe all those things that I have commanded you: and lo! I am with you every day even unto the end of the world."

— St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Homily 104 on Luke*

### **St. Begga, Abbess at Andenne**

St. Begga was born in 615, and was the daughter of Pepin of Landen. He was the Mayor of the Palace of Austrasia. Pepin of Landen, mayor of the palace to three Frankish kings, and himself commonly called Blessed, was married to a saint,

Blessedd Itta or Ida, and two of their three children figure in the Roman Martyrology: St. Gertrude of Nivelles and her elder sister, St. Begga. Gertrude refused to marry and was an abbess soon after she was twenty, but Begga married Ansegisilus, son of St. Arnulf of Metz, and spent practically the whole of her long life as a nobleman's wife "in the world". Of this union was born Pepin of Herstal, the founder of the Carolingian dynasty in France. After the death of her husband, St. Begga in 691 built at Andenne on the Meuse seven chapels representing the Seven Churches of Rome, around a central church, and in connection therewith she established a convent and colonized it with nuns from her long-dead sister's abbey at Nivelles. It afterwards became a house of canonesses and the Lateran canons regular commemorate St. Begga as belonging to their order. She is also venerated by the Beguines of Belgium as their patroness, but the common statement that she founded them is a mistake due to the similarity of the names. St. Begga died abbess of Andenne and was buried there.

### **Practical Take Away**

Very little is known of St. Begga, other than she was the daughter of Pepin of Landen. Her father was a high political figure, and St. Begga was very spiritual child that became a Nun. She went on to found seven Churches, and a Convent at Andenne, on the Meuse River. It is the faith of our early church founders that worked so, that brought us the many traditions we hold dear today. Her work in founding a Convent and seven Churches was a major accomplishment in her day, especially as a woman. *(from www-newmartyros-ru)*

### **Also Commemorated Today**

New Hieromartyrs [Alexander, Nicholas](#) (of Perm) & [Sergius](#) (of Estonia) priests (1918).

New Hieromartyrs [Peter](#) and John priests (1937).

Venerable [Daniel](#) the [Confessor](#), martyr (in schema Stephen) of Spain & Egypt (10th c.).

[St. Dionysius](#) of [Zakynthos](#), archbishop of Aegina (1622).

New Hieromartyr [Paisius](#), abbot of Turnovo & Martyr Abbacum the Deacon at Belgrade (1814).

Martyr [Iakchos](#)

Martyrs [Patermuthius](#), Coprius and Alexander the Soldier of Egypt (361).

St. [Sturm](#), abbot and founder of [Fulda](#) monastery (779) (*Germany*).

Sts. Athanasius, Nicholas, and Anthony, founders of Vatopedi Monastery (10th c.).

New Martyr [Nicetas](#) of Nyssa (1300).

St. Misael of Abalatsk, hieromonk (1797).

St. [Tydecho](#) of [Merionethshire](#) (6<sup>th</sup> c.)

St. [Briach](#) (Brioch) priest of Brittany (614)

St. [Judicael](#) King of [Domnonia](#) (Brittany) (698)

St. [Tetta](#) of Wimborne, Abbess (8<sup>th</sup> c.)

St. [Egill](#) (Aeigilus), abbot of Fulda (Germany)(822)

St. [Maxentius](#) (Mezenceul), Abbot of Notre-Dame de Cunault (France)(5<sup>th</sup> c.)

## Social Team for December 24

\*\*\*There will be no social after liturgy next Sunday\*\*\*

### Nativity Vigil on Christmas Eve

On Sunday evening at **5:00**, a Nativity Vigil followed by the Liturgy of St. Basil will be held at St. Thomas. Please observe at least a 3 hour fast if you plan to receive the Eucharist.

Also note that the service of the Royal Hours of Nativity will be held on Friday morning (Dec. 22) at 8:00 AM.

#### 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, 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.)