

# SOBORNOST

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## **SERVICES**

***Wednesdays in Great Lent: Liturgy  
of Presanctified Gifts 6 PM***

***Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM***

***Great Vespers 5:00 PM***

***Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM***

***Sunday School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM***

**April 21, 2024 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Great Lent (St. Mary of Egypt)**

By St. Luke the Surgeon, Bishop of Simferopol

We know from the book of Genesis that God created man in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). We also know that the Lord God created him “from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). Thus, the spirit and soul of man have their origin in the Spirit of God and are therefore capable of communion with Him. Remember this.

Recently, on the day of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos, you heard from us that after the entrance of the Most Holy Spirit within her, the Most Holy Virgin Mary burned with Divine fire and yet was not consumed, like the burning bush that the great Moses saw in the desert. It was the greatest example of man receiving the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit sanctified her human nature above Angels and Archangels, Seraphim and Cherubim.

No other person has ever been in such close communion with the Spirit of God as the Blessed Virgin Mary.



But not only in this exceptional form of the entering of the Divine fire is it possible for the human spirit to communicate with the Spirit of God; it, as a rule, takes place differently, in the form of a tremendous impact of the Spirit of God on the human spirit, as we see it in the lives of the saints and, above all, in the amazing life of Saint Mary of Egypt, to whose blessed memory the fifth Sunday of Great Lent is dedicated. About her life, similar to the life of an angel, you have already heard many times from us, your shepherds. I won't bore you with repetition.

In bliss and luxury, a life full of sin and depravity, this brilliant young beauty lived in Egypt, not thinking about her deep impurity. But the Omniscient God knew how bottomless was the depth of her heart and what feats of communion with the Spirit of God she was capable of. And He, not wanting the death of a sinner, stopped Mary on her perilous path with a sudden powerful shock to her soul.

She, along with a crowd of people, wanted to enter the Jerusalem temple on the day of the Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord, but she could not step further than the porch, for some unknown force pushed her away from the door of the temple when she tried to enter. Before the spiritual eyes of Mary suddenly appeared the disgusting impurity of her life in Egypt; she trembled with her whole being and with fervent prayer turned to the Most Holy Theotokos, whose icon hung over the door of the church.

The Most Holy Theotokos honored her with the answer: "Go beyond the Jordan, and there you will find rest for your soul." After that, Mary freely entered the temple and with fiery love kissed the cross of her Savior - the Lord Jesus Christ.

The subsequent 47-year life of Mary in the desert beyond the Jordan was a continuous series of amazing influences of the Holy Spirit on her soul and body. But it is impossible in one sermon to grasp the whole depth of her unceasing communion with the Spirit of God, which she had already achieved in the flesh, in this earthly life, a great closeness, if not even equality with the incorporeal powers of heaven.

I will only say that direct influences of the Holy Spirit on the human soul were experienced to a greater or lesser extent not only by great saints, but we, ordinary and even weak Christians, often experience them too. And we, like Mary of Egypt, are stopped by the Lord God on the crooked and sinful paths of our life by very different upheavals of our soul.

How often, how unexpectedly, the buildings of our life that we arbitrarily erect according to our own plans and desires collapse, if we build them guided by our passions and lusts, and not according to the commandments of our Savior Jesus Christ!

How often a serious illness sent by God makes us stop in an effort to achieve a high social position, wealth or earthly glory. Let us remember what invaluable spiritual benefits Saint Mary of Egypt received after Christ God stopped her on her perilous path. We will, therefore, treat everything difficult and unexpected that we have to endure with deep obedience to the will of God, and not with sinful grumbling against God who saves us. Amen. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 9:11-14 EOB**

Brethren, when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, he entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation. It was not through the blood of goats and calves but through his own blood that he entered into the Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. Indeed, if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer (sprinkling those who have been defiled) could sanctify to restore the purity of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to offer divine service to the living God?

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 10:32-45 EOB**

At that time, Jesus took the Twelve [aside] and began to tell them about the things that were going to happen to him. "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes. They will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles. They will mock him, spit on him, scourge him, and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again." James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we will ask!" He replied, "What do you want me to do for you?" They answered, "Grant to us that we may sit, one at your right hand, and one at your left hand, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking! Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able!" Jesus said to them, "You shall indeed drink the cup that I drink, and you shall be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with! However, to sit at my right hand and at my left hand is not mine to give, but it is for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they became upset with James and John. Jesus called them, and told them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you! Whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever of you wants to become first among you shall be slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

Prooimion – Through hatred of Esau the glutton, and love of Jacob the just, You have transferred Your blessing from the former to the latter; but just as grace was given to the meek one through the advice of his mother, Just so, O Christ God, through the prayers of Your Immaculate Mother, grant us Your blessing from on high.

Let us sing to the one who through His obedience saved the human race, who trampled on the serpent and illumined the world, who was born without seed from the Virgin, the One who delivered all creation from the curse, who shattered the angels who had transgressed, who raised the fallen Adam with His own hand; let us praise Him. Let us know what the Fall did, as far as we are concerned, in the blind disobedience of the transgression, as the Scriptural story reports the faithlessness of the first man. Then let us hasten and all cry to our God, “Grant us Your blessing from on high.”

The two brothers were, then, the prototypes of the future: sons born to Isaac by Rebecca. One day the old man called Esau and said to him, “My son, go quickly in the country and hunt with diligence. Take your bow and your quiver, hunt some game for me, and hasten to please your father, and bring me the food so that I may recognize your zeal and give you my blessing before I die. Rise up, show your disposition, and fulfill my desire. As I see your complete acceptance of my purpose, I cry out to God, 'Grant us Your blessing from on high.'”

The old man encouraged his beloved son, and Esau hastened to go from there to the hunt. His mother said to Jacob, “Hasten to go to the flock of sheep and contend in the hunt. I heard your father saying to his son, 'Hunt some game for me, my son, and bring me the food; and, as I eat it, in my pleasure, I shall bless you before I die.' Obey me at once and exactly, and proceed just as I tell you; take two young kids from the flock, and I shall make for your father a dish of food, in order that, blessing you, he will pray, 'Grant us Your blessing from on high.'”

As he heard this, Jacob replied to his mother, “How am I to go to the flock and bring back young kids? Esau, mother, is a man hairy in appearance, and I am ashamed of my smooth skin. Perhaps my father would recognize me, and I shall be covered with shame before him because I have treated him with scorn. More than likely I shall draw some curse on myself; he will not praise me but destroy me. Mother, I am afraid of this overly audacious boldness, and I fear the anger of my brother. Rather, I shall keep silent, and I shall pray to the Creator, crying, 'Merciful One, grant us Your blessing from on high.'”

“hear my words, my child, and do not be afraid,” said his mother as she flattered her son. “Now, obey me and show me how much you love me. The curse will be on me, my child; just grant me this favor in accordance with my wish, as I have commanded, and bring me two young kids, fine and tender ones.” The child left and brought to her two kids, and the mother, well pleased with his zeal, quickly prepared the dish of food, just as the father liked it; and the child prayed, “O Lover of man, grant us Your blessing from on high.”

Then the young man folded around him the cloak of his older brother, as the Scriptures tell us; he took the rough skin of the goats, and he covered up his neck and his arms, clear up to the shoulders, and also his fingers; he took the bread and the meat and at once quickly ran to his father; and when he came in the presence of the old man, at once he cried out, “O father, here is your son, as you ordered, your first-born, Esau. I speak to you; hear me. I have brought you the dish of food, as you told me, and I beg you, grant to me the blessing from on high.”

Isaac then said to his son, “My child, how quickly you obeyed me and secured the meat.” But his son spoke again to his father, “This happened because God sent it for you; he armed me for the hunt and appeared to me on the plain and gave me the strength, as though against a lamb. And after that it was as though I were in a sheepfold; I secured it and brought in the sacrifice. Father, I have accomplished what you ordered in order that I might secure the blessing, the favor that you promised me earlier; now, fulfilling your promise, grant to me the blessing from on high.”

Isaac, aware that his son had returned quickly from the chase, was troubled in mind, and he said, “What kind of race is this? Why this great haste? My thinking leads me to some reflection: could this not be some trick? Could it not be that Jacob has come to take from me the gift intended for my older son? No, rather the Lord, wishing to fulfill my wish, has Himself assisted in achieving it. And my son has found what he sought for, and so came here directly and hastily to receive the reward of a blessing of the One who sent him, to whom I pray, 'Grant us Your blessing from on high.'”

“Now draw near, my child, and I shall quickly run my hands over you. Show me whether or not you are Esau, my first-born.” As he felt him, Isaac considered carefully, “The voice that strikes my ears is that of Jacob, but the hands are those of my son Esau.” “Come, then, dear child, and embrace me, and bring me the meat.” Isaac ate, then embraced his son, and as he smelled his robe, he said, “Here is the scent of my son and of the fertile field, a field that the Lord has blessed as He heard my prayer; He will grant us His blessing from on high.”

Ten the old man clearly blessed his son Jacob, and with his prayers he instructed his child, saying, “My God will bless you in the world with bread and with wine, and all nations will serve you; all rulers will bow down before you. In turn, be master of your brother; the one who invokes a curse on you will receive a curse; and the one who praises you will be blessed by divine grace.” When he heard this, the son went away, praising the Creator and singing out, “The Lord is just and He is merciful; in His pity He granted me a blessing from on high.”

The old man, out of love for his son, blessed him; in his blessing he prefigured Christ, the Creator of all. Then Jacob ran to his mother, saying, “Lo, I have received a blessing; I have found grace in the eyes of my father.” Then his mother embraced the young man and began to weep, saying, “He is One, Who gives the saints intelligence; He will come in the flesh into the world from your root and stock, without leaving the bosom of the Father. Let us pray to Him, the Merciful One, the Lover of Men, 'Grant us Your blessing from on high.'”

Isaac did not clearly understand the import of the blessing until his soul was filled with a great joy, and he said to Rebecca, “Now God has visited us, and from the heavens above He looks upon us, so that as Lord He may bestow the blessing on the saints. He has given us children for our honor, and He gives the grace of the Holy Spirit, bestowing it in abundance when He consents to save the human race in His incarnate form; for now in His grace He has given us a prototype of what is to come. He has granted us a blessing from on high.”

As Isaac was saying these things to his wife, their son Esau came back from the hunt, and he also prepared the dish of meat for his father. He took it in to his father for him to partake of it, saying, “Father, hear me, and rejoice in your son, returned from the hunt; you bless me for it.” But the old man, Isaac, then said to his son, “Who are you? Show me.” Esau answered, saying, “I am Esau, your son, I am the first-born of your loins, and I beg you grant me your blessing from on high.”

After these words of his son and his prayers, the old man was struck with an exceedingly great amazement, and he said, “Who then is the one who brought me meat and I took pleasure in all of it and blessed him? Indeed, being blessed, he is in possession of all my benedictions; for before you arrived from the fields into the tent, he brought me a platter of meat.” When Esau heard these words, he cried out in a voice of lamentation, exclaiming and saying, “Hasten and bless me also, father, just as you did him; and bestow on me your blessing deservedly, and may the Most High grant me your blessing from on high.”

When he heard this, Isaac cried out, “Your brother Jacob, coming before you, by a trick deprived you of the blessing. What am I to do? How shall I answer your request? Esau said to his father, “Truly and justly has he been called Jacob; he is Jacob in word and deed. Even now, a second time he has supplanted me; he took from me my birthright, and now, as I just learn, he has received the blessing of my father. For a second time since my birth he has supplanted me; but I beg of you, grant me your blessing from on high.”

Isaac, overcome, and giving in to his inmost desire, cried out to Esau, saying, “Listen, my son, if I have given power to your brother, and if I have filled his home with food and drink, what shall I do for you, my child? Tell me.” Esau again answered his father and, weeping, said to him, “Do you have, then, only one blessing? From what you leave as heritage, bless me, too.” then Isaac, the father, was pricked at heart, and he cried out through his tears, “The Merciful One will bless you with the blessing that you wish. May He grant you a blessing from on high.”

When he ceased weeping, the old man stretched out his hand and blessed Esau as he said this: “Lo, from the dew that falls from on high and from the richness of the earth you will have your dwelling. You will obtain your living by the sword, and you will serve your brother zealously always, and you will be happy. For if you do not remove the yoke of service to him from your neck, you will go through the world in all peace, since your anger will have left you. The Lord will grant your requests, as He wishes; He will grant you your blessings from on high.”

Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of jealousy, and after the death of his father he intended to kill him, and said in his heart, “Now let the [final] illness of my father draw near, and straightway after his death, taking advantage of a good opportunity, I shall kill him who has cheated me of my birthright. But God, who knows all thoughts in advance, at once made the plan of Esau to the mother of the two boys and gave her the wisdom to separate them. Let us then pray to the Merciful One, “O Lover of man, grant us Your blessing from on high.”

As for you, my friends, consider this story carefully, for all the accounts in the Scriptures predict through prototypes. Esau prefigured the Jews. Jacob presents us in advance with the image of the Christians, since he received in advance of his brother the blessing that he had merited on the advice of his mother; he tells me in advance of the grace to come. And Rebecca is clearly revealed in advance to me as the type of the church of Christ, for she and the church lead their sons to the Father of all things. Let us assemble in the church and cry out to our God, “Grant us Your blessing from on high.”

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion 42 “Jacob and Esau”*

[*This kontakion was traditionally recited on the fifth Sunday of Great Lent. - Ed.*]

## **Selections from the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete**

Where shall I begin to lament the deeds of my wretched life? What first-fruit shall I offer, O Christ, for my present lamentation? But in Your compassion grant me release from my falls.

I have not resembled Abel's righteousness, O Jesus. I have never offered Your acceptable gifts, nor divine actions, nor a pure sacrifice, nor an unblemished life. (Genesis 4:4)

It is time for repentance. I draw near to You, my Creator. Take from me the heavy yoke of sin, and in Your compassion grant me tears of compunction.

I have sinned above all men, I alone have sinned against You. But as God have compassion, O Savior, on Your creature. (I Timothy 1:15)

I have darkened the beauty of my soul with passionate pleasures, and my whole mind I have reduced wholly to mud.

I am wrapped in a garment of shame as with fig leaves, in reproof of my selfish passions.

Like the publican I cry to You: Be merciful, O Savior, be merciful to me; for no child of Adam has sinned as I against You. (Luke 18:13. )

I have no tears, no repentance, no compunction. But as God, O Savior, grant me these.

Running through all who lived before the Law, my soul, you have not been like Seth, nor imitated Enos, nor Enoch by translation, nor Noah. But you are seen to be bereft of the life of the righteous. (Genesis 5)

You would have contrived to build a tower, my soul, and erect a stronghold for your lusts, had not the Creator confounded your plans and brought your schemes crashing to earth. (Genesis 11:3-4)

You know, my soul, of the Ladder shown to Jacob reaching from earth to Heaven. Why have you not clung to the sure step of piety? (Genesis 28:12)

Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on me, I implore You, when You come with Your Angels to requite us all as our actions deserve.

Do not reject the prayer of those who praise You, O Lord; but have compassion on us, O Lover of men, and grant forgiveness to those who ask with faith.

The end is drawing near, my soul, is drawing near! But you neither care nor prepare. The time is growing short. Rise! The Judge is near – at the very doors.



Like a dream, like a flower, the time of this life passes. Why do we bustle about in vain? (Matthew 24:33; Psalm 38:7)

Come to your senses, my soul! Consider the deeds you have done, and bring them before your eyes, and pour out the drops of your tears. Boldly tell your thoughts and deeds to Christ, and be acquitted.

You have emulated the hated Esau, my soul, and have given up your birthright of pristine beauty to your supplanter, and you have lost your father's blessing, and have been tripped up twice in action and knowledge. Therefore, O wretch, repent now. (Genesis 25:31; 27:37)

Have you heard of Job who was made holy on a dunghill, O my soul? You have not emulated his courage, nor had his firmness of purpose in all you have learned or known, or in your temptations, but you have proved to lack perseverance. (Job 1)

My body is defiled, my spirit is sullied, and I am all covered with sores. But as the Physician, O Christ, heal, wash and cleanse both body and spirit with repentance, and make me, my Savior, purer than snow.

You laid down Your body and blood for all, O crucified Word: Your body in order to renew me, Your blood in order to wash me, and You surrendered Your spirit, O Christ, in order to bring me to the Father.

I, wretch that I am, have rolled my mind in mud. But wash me, O Lord, in the bath of my tears, I pray, and make the robe of my flesh as white as snow.

Spare, spare, O Lord, Your works. I have sinned; forgive me, for You alone are pure by nature, and apart from You there is none without defilement. (I Peter 3:21)

Being God, for my sake You took my form, and worked miracles, healing lepers and bracing paralytics; and You stopped the flow of blood of the woman with hemorrhage, O Savior, through the touch of Your hem. (Philippians 2:6; Matthew 4:24; Luke 8:43-48)

Hannah's child, the great Samuel, was reckoned among the Judges, and he was brought up in Arimathea and in the House of the Lord. Imitate him, my soul, and before judging others, judge your own actions. (I Kings 16:13. )

David was chosen to be king, and he was royally anointed with the horn of divine oil. So if you, my soul, desire the Kingdom on high, be anointed with the oil of tears.

Have mercy on Your creation, O merciful Lord; have compassion on the work of Your hands, and spare all who have sinned, and even me who above all have ignored Your commands. (*from The Lenten Triodion*)

## **Hieromartyr Januarius, Bishop of Benevento**

*Januarius was a noble man; in the month of April he was beheaded. \* Proculus together with Sosius and Festus bent forward for beheading while the sword was in its sheath. \* The neck of Desiderius was bound to the sword; he submitted to beheading and stands before the Lord. \* The voice of Acutius was heard, saying "Euty chius my fellow in beheading." \* On the twenty-first Januarius was beheaded.*

In the time of Diocletian, emperor, and in the fifth consulate of Constantine [Constantius], and seventh [probably "fifth"] of Maximian, there was a great persecution of the Christians. At that time Diocletian appointed Timothy, a pagan, governor in the province of Campania and ordered him to offer sacrifices to idols and to compel all who believed in Christ to do the same. It happened as he was making the customary round of cities, he came to the city of Nola. There he ordered the officials to present themselves before him and when they were present he began to inquire from them concerning the judgments of his predecessors.

To him the officials related their deeds and among them, when they reached the affairs of the blessed martyrs Sosius, deacon of the church at Miseno and Proculus, deacon of the church at Pozzuoli, and Euty chius and Acutius, and how they had been tormented by various tortures and had been recast into prison by the order of the judge, he asked the officials what had been done with them. They replied saying that they for a long time were detained in chains and they uttered in addition evil remarks concerning the Blessed Januarius, bishop of Benevento.

This most unjust Timothy having heard these remarks regarding Januarius, ordered him to be brought before him and when he was presented before his tribunal at Nola, Timothy the judge said to him: "Januarius, having heard of the reputation of your family I exhort you to sacrifice to the gods in obedience to the decrees of the invincible rulers. But if you are unwilling I shall subject you to horrible torments which the God whom you worship when he shall see them he himself shall fear."

St. Januarius however replied: "Be silent, O unhappy man, and do not insult in my hearing Him who created heaven and earth, lest the Lord God may hear such a blasphemy as that which proceeds from you mouth and he may destroy you and you shall be mute and deaf, not hearing and like a blind man not seeing."

Having heard these things the tyrant Timothy says to the saint: "Is it in your power that by any enchantments whatever you or your god can prevail against me?"

St. Januarius replies: "My power is nothing but there is a God in heaven who can resist you and all who obey and abet you." And when he had said this the tyrant ordered him back to prison.

Being very angry he ordered a furnace to be heated for three days and the saint to be cast into it. The holy man made the sign of the cross on his forehead, looked up to heaven sighing and extending his hands, and having entered the fiery furnace he was praising God, saying: "O Lord Jesus Christ for the sake of thy holy name I embrace willingly this suffering and I expect every promise which thou hast promised to those who love Thee. Hear me praying to Thee and deliver me from this flame, thou who wert present with the three children, Ananias, Azarias, Misael in the fiery furnace, and be with me in this my trial to deliver me from the hands of the enemy." Saying these things, Blessed Januarius began to walk with holy angels in the midst of the fire praising the Father and Son and Holy Ghost.

When the soldiers who were around the furnace heard St. Januarius in its depth praising God they feared with a great fear and ran in great haste and told the judge saying, "We beseech thee, sir, not to be angry with us but we have heard the voice of Januarius in the furnace invoking his Lord, and being greatly terrified we fled." Timothy hearing this ordered the furnace to be opened and when it was opened the flames shot out and devoured some incredulous pagans who were around about it. But St. Januarius appeared in the midst glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ so that the fire could not touch either his clothes or his hair.

Timothy however when he had heard this ordered him before him and said to him: "Of what avail is it that the magic you exercise is powerful? By various torments I will make you perish." Bl. Januarius replied: "It will not be well for thee, thou cruel tyrant, to alienate the servant of Christ from the truth of Christ or to cause me to obey through fear. I will hope in the Lord. I will not fear no matter what men may do to me," and thus replying the judge ordered him led back to prison.

On another day early in the morning Timothy had Januarius before him: "How long, unhappy man, will you refuse to sacrifice to the immortal gods? Approach now and offer incense. If not I shall order you to be beheaded and if he can, let your God free you from my hands." The saint replied: "You do not know that the power of God is great. Would that you would repent so that my God might pardon you whom you say to be unable to free me from your hands! When you speak thus you are heaping up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath."

The judge not liking this speech ordered his shackles [-nervi-] to be removed. Januarius prayed God saying: "O Lord Jesus Christ who hast not abandoned me from my mother's womb now hear thy servant crying to thee and command me to depart this world and obtain thy mercy." The judge thinking how he would kill him sent him back to prison.

While guarded by soldiers in hard captivity, two of his clergy, the deacon Festus and the reader Desiderius, learned of their bishop's captivity and being moved by

the Holy Ghost they immediately set out from Beneventum and came to Nola, and there weeping they cried: "Why is such a man in custody? What crimes did he commit? When did he fail to aid those in trouble? What sick man was visited by him without regaining health? Who approached him weeping and went away not rejoicing?"

Their words were reported to Timothy who ordered them at once to be detained and along with Januarius to be brought before him, whereupon he asked Januarius who were these two and the saint replied: "One is my deacon and the other is my reader." "Do they proclaim themselves Christians?" "Certainly, for if you ask them, I hope in my Lord Jesus Christ that they will not deny themselves to be Christians," and being asked, they said: "We are Christians and we are prepared to die for the love of God."

Then Timothy filled with anger ordered Januarius the bishop, along with Festus the deacon and Desiderius the reader, to be bound in chains and to be dragged before his chariot to the city of Pozzuoli, determining that there along with Sosius, Proculus, Eutychius and Acutius, they should be delivered up to wild beasts. When they were come to Pozzuoli, they were kept in prison until the arena was prepared. On the day appointed they were led into the amphitheatre and Timothy coming ordered the wild beasts to be let loose; and when this was done, St. Januarius cried: "O brethren, seize the shield of faith and let us pray to the Lord our Helper in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth." And the mercy of God was so present that to the feet of Januarius like sheep with heads down ran the wild beasts.

The unbelieving judge had the beasts removed and the saints of God taken from the arena and brought before his tribunal, where sitting in state he dictated their sentence: "We order to be beheaded, Januarius bishop, Sosius, Proculus and Festus deacons, Desiderius reader, Eutychius and Acutius, citizens of Pozzuoli, who have professed themselves Christians and have despised the sacrifices of the gods and the commands of the emperor." But Bl. Januarius looking up to heaven said: "Lord Jesus Christ who descended from on high for the redemption of the human race, deliver me and free me from the hand of this enemy and I beg thee my God that you punish Timothy for the things he did against me thy servant and that thou blind his eyes so that he may not see the light of heaven."

When he had finished his prayer darkness fell on his [Timothy's] eyes and suddenly he was made blind. Then prayed Januarius to the Lord, and said: "I give thanks to thee, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hast heard thy servant and destroyed the eyes of the impious Timothy because many souls on account of him have been perverted to the evil spirits."

Then Timothy was suffering with his stricken eyes and the pain was increasing. Repentant he began to cry out and say to the officials: "Go, bring Januarius to me." And they going found him lead along by the executioners on the incline that leads to the Solfatara and bringing him back they set him before the judge and a great multitude of people was attracted by the sight. But Timothy began to cry out with a great cry and to say to Bl. Januarius: "Januarius, servant of the most high God, pray the Lord, thy God, for me blind that I may recover the sight which I have lost."

Then Januarius raising his eyes to heaven prayed: "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, hear my prayer and restore to Timothy though unworthy his eyes that all the people present may know that thou art God and there is no other but thee; for we may not return evil for evil." And when St. Januarius had finished his prayer his were opened.

The multitude seeing the wonderful things which the Lord wrought by Januarius his martyr, many of the bystanders believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, almost five thousand, and they cried out raising their voices: "Will not the God of such and so great a man be feared? Will he not perhaps take revenge for their sufferings and death and will we not all likewise perish?" Januarius was very beautiful both in body and disposition. Then the impious judge Timothy seeing such a crowd turned toward the Lord was troubled and (lest the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ might be deprived of his crown) fearing the commands of the emperor the judge ordered the soldiers to take him away quickly and to behead him with the holy martyrs.

When they were on their way to martyrdom a certain old and very poor man, hoping favor from Januarius placed himself in his way and fell at his feet and besought him that he might receive some of his clothes. But Januarius said to that old man: "When my body has been buried thou wilt see that I myself will give thee my orarium with which I will have bound my eyes." The mother also of St. Januarius residing at Benevento, three days before her son suffered, saw in a dream that Januarius was flying in the air to heaven and when she was puzzled by the dream and would inquire what it meant, suddenly it was announced to her that her son was imprisoned for the love of God. She however greatly terrified, prostrating herself in prayer before the Lord, gave up her spirit.

In the meantime when the saints had arrived at the place where they were to be beheaded, that is at the Solfatara, St. Januarius kneeling prayed: "O Lord, omnipotent God, into thy hands I commend my spirit" and then rising he took his orarium and bound his eyes and kneeling again he placed his hand on his neck and asked the executioner to strike. The executioner struck with great force and cut off at the same time a finger of the saint's hand and his head. The other saints received likewise their crown.

St. Januarius after his execution appeared to the old man and offered him as he had promised the orarium which had bound his eyes and said: "Behold what I promised you, take it as I promised it," and he took it and hid it in his bosom with great reverence.

The executioners and two other officials seeing the old man, laughingly asked him: "Have you got what he who was beheaded promised?" But he said, "Yes," and showed them the orarium which they recognized and wondered greatly.

On the very same hour at which St. Januarius and the holy martyrs were beheaded the cruel Timothy began to suffer very much and he was exclaiming aloud: "I suffer these pains for having treated Januarius the servant of God so impiously. The angels of God torment [me]." And when he had been long tormented he gave up the ghost.

The Christians of various cities were guarding the bodies of the saints that they might carry them off at night to their own cities and they kept a careful though secret watch; and when night was come and all were sleeping, St. Januarius in the silence of the night appeared to one of those who were prepared to take away his body and said to him: "Brother, when you take away my body know that the finger of my hand is missing. Seek it and place it with my body." And so it was done as the saint himself had admonished. The bodies of the saints lay at the Solfatara where later was founded a church worthy of St. Januarius the martyr.

Here ends the passion of Januarius Martyr. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

### **Martyr Alexandra, Empress of Rome, Wife of Diocletian**

Christ's holy Martyr, Alexandra or Alexandria, was the wife of Emperor Diocletian (r. 284-305). Diocletian hailed from Dalmatia of the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia. Like many low born Roman boys from the backward provinces, Diocletian pursued a career in the Roman army. When he came to power in 284, he made it his main purpose to stabilize and reform the empire. To this end, he created an absolute monarchy, with all power centering in himself as the semi-divine ruler. He made his palace a divine haven and his own person sacred. The Senate was permanently in a subordinate position.

He attempted to appear august when he donned gold and purple robes and a pearl diadem. All had to address him as "our Lord" (*dominus noster*). Those in his audience were required to prostrate themselves on the ground before him. In fact, he claimed divine honors, as the vicar of Jupiter Capitolinus. He guarded his "sacred majesty" with many circles of soldiers and eunuchs, and allowed no one to approach him except on bended knees, and with the forehead touching the ground, while he was seated on the throne in rich vestments from the far east.

As Augustus and Decius before him, Diocletian attempted to use the state religion as a unifying element in society. It happened that Diocletian consulted about some issue with the oracle at Apollo's temple. The demon that spoke through the idol complained that he could no longer accurately prophesy the future, since the just ones frustrated him. Diocletian, wishing to learn the identity of the "just", conferred with the pagan priests, who found them to be the Christians.

Thus, in 303, Diocletian issued a series of four increasingly cruel decrees designed to compel the Christians to participate in the imperial cult. He ordered the leveling of church buildings. Manuscripts of the Scriptures were burned and Christians were removed from high government offices. Bishops were imprisoned, and could only be released if they sacrificed before the idols. Indeed, everyone was required to offer sacrifice. Thus began the Great Persecution.

At that time, the brave and accomplished Saint George, the trophy-bearer from Cappadocia, was serving in the Roman army. The holy George would not comply with the emperor's mindless orders to destroy the Christians and their holy places, since he, too, was reared in Christian piety by his parents from childhood. The Saint, after he distributed his possessions among the needy, appeared before Diocletian. He charged the emperor with the unreasonable murders of the pious. The emperor, taken unawares that George was a Christian, sentenced him for insubordination.

His empress, Alexandra, was present when her husband ordered barbaric punishments upon the person of the holy George. She beheld when they placed a heavy stone upon his chest, and how the martyr bore all with quiet endurance. She saw the monstrous wheel, designed with iron spikes and hooks, to which the martyr's naked body was bound. The holy George underwent all silently. Afterwards when Saint George was released from that wicked contraption by an angel, his wounds were miraculously cured. Though Diocletian could scarce believe his eyes, Alexandra and the others knew that this was surely George renewed.

Now divine grace was able to enter Alexandra's heart when she realized the truth about the God of the Christians. As she advanced to profess Jesus before all, the emperor took her arm and detained her at the palace.

In the meantime, Diocletian commanded that his soldiers intern George in a stone pit used for quicklime. However, when the martyr survived the lime-pit unscathed and perfectly healthy, all were taken aback. Diocletian, unmoved, then ordered that the martyr be shod with iron shoes that were perforated with heated nails. After this inhuman torture, the Saint was confined to prison.

The following morning, when George appeared before the emperor, no trace of any wounds were found on his feet, leaving all dumbfounded at his wondrous recovery. The emperor then bid his executioners to thrash George with whips. Later, George was made to drink poison which roused the martyr to laugh. When George drank the fatal potion, he suffered no injury. Enraged and confounded, the emperor ascribed all of George's vulnerability to punishment as magic and sorcery.

The court magician then suggested that George's power be tested upon a dead man; that is, whether George could resurrect the deceased. By God's grace, when Saint George prayed, the dead man stood up alive in his grave. All were filled with terror and disbelief. Needing time to collect himself and consider the matter, Diocletian remanded George to prison.

Not much time passed, however, when Diocletian made George appear before him again. This time, however, he offered worldly power to Christ's athlete, saying, "I shall have you as my administrator, second in the realm, if you will turn to the gods." George answered by offering to enter into the temple of Apollo. The emperor, interpreting this answer as a victory, joyfully entered the temple with George. George then stood before the idol and made the sign of the honorable Cross. The wicked demon inhabiting the idol was then enjoined to confess that he was not a god. Moreover, the demon was made to acknowledge the God Whom George worshiped. George then rebuked the devil. Demons fled the idols, causing them to fall and smash upon the ground. The people then rained blows upon George and cried to the emperor to execute him.

The tremendous tumult that took place in the city was made known to the augusta. Now Alexandra had already confessed Christ in her heart and soul. She could no longer refrain from keeping her new faith a secret. She desired to make an open avowal.

Whereupon, she hastened to the temple of Apollo, seeking George. Unable to reach him from the press of the mob, she cried aloud, "O God of George, help me, for You only are the true God!" At length, the crowd calmed, and Diocletian ordered that George appear before him. The emperor, incensed, bellowed, "This is a token of your gratitude, O evil head? In this manner have you learned to sacrifice to the gods?" The Saint answered, "No, O mindless emperor, I learned to disdain the gods who are unable to save themselves from extinction." As the holy George spoke, Alexandra arrived and fell before the martyr's feet. She then thanked the Saint for ridiculing the idols. Sore astonished at his wife's words and actions, the emperor, unable to compose himself, said to his wife, "What has happened to you, Alexandra, that you follow this magician and renounced piety to the great gods?" The augusta answered, "O dull-witted, impious and lawless emperor, you are blind,



benighted, in error and do not believe the truth; neither can you recognize that Christ is the true God."

When the emperor heard his wife's rebuke and insult, he was at a loss how to proceed. However, from his rage or from his sorrow, he ordered that both George and Alexandra be imprisoned together. Diocletian then wrote this decision regarding the Saint and the augusta: "George, the Christian, who has despised my authority, insulted the gods, and destroyed the idols, I command to be beheaded together with Augusta Alexandra." Thus, their sentence was officially decreed.

While the augusta was in prison, she noetically glorified God. Then it happened that Alexandra began to grow quite weary, so that she had to sit upon a stone. In this manner then, she surrendered her holy soul unto God. This was witnessed by the great George, who glorified God.

Together with the augusta, in the prison, were three of her servants, whose names were Apollo, Isaakios and Kodratos. Their augusta's contempt and scorn for temporal rule and a mortal kingdom helped bring about their belief in Jesus Christ. Indeed, they, too, also were martyred for His love. They went before Diocletian and censured him as a law breaker and a beast. They criticized him for not even taking compassion on his spouse with whom he begat children. Incensed at their reproof, he had them cast into prison. That night, Diocletian pondered upon what manner of death to mete out upon those martyrs.

In the morning, he had them taken from prison. He ordered that Kodratos' head be struck off; but Apollo and Isaakios were returned to their cells. In prison, those faithful men neither ate or drank for many days. Thus, from hunger and thirst they surrendered their holy souls into the hands of God and received the crowns of the contest. These three Saints are commemorated with Saint Alexandra by the Holy Church on April 21st.

However, shortly after the repose of Saint Alexandra, the soldiers then took the Great Martyr George and escorted him outside the city. He eagerly went with them, hastening that he might soon enjoy the Desired One.

Arriving at the execution site, Saint George prayed aloud. He then bowed his head under the sword and received the reward of his labors. It was the 23rd of April, A.D. 304.

Diocletian, after twenty years in office, abdicated in 305, at the age of sixty. He retired to his palace on the Yugoslavian coast where his chief concern became the cultivation of cabbage. In 316, he died and went on to receive the eternal retribution he richly deserved. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

## Also Commemorated Today

Hieromartyr Theodore of Perge in Pamphylia, his mother Philippa, and Martyrs Dioscorus, Socrates, and Dionysius (2nd c.).

Uncovering of the relics (1999) of St. Theodore of Sanaxar (1791).

St. [Alexis](#), priest of Bortsumany, Nizhni-Novgorod (1848).

New Hieromartyr John priest (1918).

St. Nicholas confessor, priest (1933).

New Hieromartyr Alexis priest (1938).

New HM Protopresbyter Basil Martysz of Teratyn (Chelm & Podlasie, Poland) (1945).

St. Maximus (Maximian), patriarch of Constantinople (434).

The Mozdok Icon of the Mother of God.

Venerable Jakov (James) of Stromynsk.

St. Niphon, bishop of Novgorod (Kiev Caves).

+Venerable Beuno, abbot, priest of Clynnog Fawr, England (ca. 640) (British).

St. Maelruba, monk, of Apur Crossan (722) (Celtic & British).

St. Ethilwald, hermit of Farne. (Celtic & British).

St. Anastasius of Sinai (beg. of 8th c.).

New Martyr [Noultos](#) of Kastoria and those with him (1696)

## Social Team for April 28

Team 4 is up next week – Carol V., Katie Matthews, Joseph Frey. Thank you!

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

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

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***In Your Prayers – Please Remember...*** His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Tina Crull, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Johnson family, 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. Nectaros & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine & the Holy Land, the newly reposed handmaiden of God Mary Diane David, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)