

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Reader Vespers 6:30 PM

Saturday: Vespers 5 PM

Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10 AM

August 4, 2024 – 6th Sunday After Pentecost

Holy Seven Sleepers of Ephesus

On the fourth of August, we commemorate the Holy Seven Youths of Ephesus, Maximilian, Exacustodianus, Iamblicus, Martinian, Dionysius, Antoninus and Constantine.

*The septet choir of Martyrs I honor,
Who showed the world the rising of the dead.*

On the fourth the seven who rose from the dead together died.

These Saints flourished during the reign of Emperor Decius, who in the year 252 distributed all their belongings to the poor, and they entered a cave in which they hid. After supplicating God to be released from the bond of the body, so as not to be handed over to Emperor Decius, they delivered their souls to God. When Emperor Decius returned to Ephesus, he had requested of them to come and sacrifice to the idols, but he learned that they died in the cave, so he ordered that the door of the cave be obstructed. From that time one hundred and ninety-four years passed, until the thirty-eighth year of the reign of Theodosius the Younger, in the year 446.

At that time there began to spread a heresy, which said there was no resurrection of the dead. When Emperor Theodosius saw the Church of God troubled, and many



Bishops had fallen into error due to this heresy, he wondered what to do. Wherefore he dressed in a garment made of goat's hair, spread himself on the ground and mourned, supplicating God to reveal to him the solution to this heresy. The Lord did not overlook his tears, but hearkened to him in the following manner. The landholder of that mountain, where the cave of the Holy Seven Youths was located, at that time wanted to build a stable for his sheep. As he was rolling stones from the cave in order to build his stable, the door of the cave opened, and by God's command the seven Youths who had died in the cave were resurrected, and they conversed between each other, as if they had reposed the previous day, without changing at all, so that not even their clothing was ruined at all from the natural moisture and humidity of the cave. Having therefore risen, they remembered that Emperor Decius sought for them in order to torture them, about which they spoke among themselves. Maximilian said to the rest: "If perhaps, brethren, we are captured by Decius, let us stand with courage, and not betray our noble faith. You brother Iamblicus, go to purchase some bread, and purchase even more, since last night you purchased little bread, which is why we went to sleep hungry. Learn also what Decius is deliberating about us."

Iamblicus therefore went to the city of Ephesus, where he saw the sign of the honorable Cross on the door and he was amazed. Seeing the same in other places, and observing the buildings and houses to have been changed, and the people were different, he thought he was having a vision, or had come into a state of ecstasy. However, as he went to the bread-sellers, he purchased breads, and having given the coins, he set out to return back to the cave. Yet he saw how the bread-sellers were showing the coins to each other, so they turned towards him and said that he had found a treasure, for the money he gave clearly testified that he had found a treasure, for it had engraved on it the image of the emperor Decius from long ago. When Iamblicus heard this, he became terrified, and because of his fear was unable to speak, thinking that he had been recognized by them, and would in turn be handed over to Emperor Decius. He therefore begged them, saying: "I beg you, my lords, you have my coins, take also your breads, and allow me to withdraw." The bread-sellers said to him: "Show us the treasure you found, and make us also partners of the find, otherwise we will hand you over to be killed." Seeing the Saint standing there in his thoughts, they put a chain around his neck, and dragged him to the open market. Taking him to the proconsul of Ephesus, they presented him for examination. When the proconsul saw this, he said: "Tell us, O young man, how you found this treasure, and how much is there, and where." Iamblicus responded that he never found a treasure, but the money he had received from his parents. "What then has come together," he said, "and has followed me, I do not know."

The proconsul again asked him: "From what city are you from?" The Saint responded: "I am from this one, if this is Ephesus." "And who are your parents?" asked the proconsul; "let them come to us, and when they reveal the truth, then we will believe you." Iamblicus replied: "So and so is my father, so and so is my grandfather, and so and so are my relatives." The proconsul responded: "The names you said are strange and unsubstantial, and not of the present custom. Thus with these we cannot believe you." Iamblicus said: "If you do not believe me who speaks the truth, then I do not know what else to say." The proconsul replied: "Irreverent one, your money testifies by its inscription that it was produced almost two hundred years ago, during the reign of Decius the emperor, and you as a young man are attempting to deceive us?" Then Iamblicus fell at the feet of those who were there, and begged them, saying: "I beg you my lords, tell me, where is the emperor Decius, who was in this city?" They told him that currently it is not Decius, for he deliberated many years prior. And Iamblicus said: "This is why my lords you are in astonishment; but follow me to a cave, and from these signs you will come to believe my words. For I am sure, that we fled because of Decius, and yesterday when I came to buy breads, I saw that Decius had entered the city."

These things were spoken by the Saint. The Bishop of Ephesus, whose name was Marinos, heard these things, so he said to the proconsul: "I think a wonderful thing will follow from this proposal, therefore let us follow him." Hence the Bishop and the proconsul and many people followed him, and when they arrived at the cave, Iamblicus first entered it, followed by the Bishop, who when he turned to the right side of the door of the cave, saw a chest sealed with two seals, which was put there by the [secret] Christians Rufinus and Theodore, who were sent there with others by Decius, in order to obstruct the door of the cave. It was they who wrote the synaxaria of the Saints, and wrote their names on plaques of lead. Reading these words, all were astonished. Entering the deeper part of the cave, they found the Saints, and fell at their feet. Sitting down, they questioned them. The Saints narrated, first, their own purpose, then their brave deeds before the emperor Decius. Wherefore all were astonished and glorified the God of wonders. Then the proconsul with the Bishop wrote an account to the emperor Theodosius, and reported to him all of the above. The emperor received the letter, and was filled with joy over the news, and with much speed went to Ephesus. Entering the cave, he fell to the ground and washed the feet of the Saints with his tears. And he rejoiced and was glad in his soul, for the Lord did not overlook his request, but showed him with his own eyes the resurrection of the dead. While the emperor was conversing with the Saints, together with Bishops and other authorities, the Saints began to get a little tired, and before everyone, they delivered their souls into the hands of God.

Then the emperor gave precious garments of gold and silver, and ordered that seven chests be made of the same, to have the relics of the Saints placed in. But that night, the Saints appeared to the emperor and said: "Leave us, O Emperor, in this cave, in which we arose." After many Bishops and authorities gathered, the emperor had the relics of the Saints placed in the ground of the cave, as they revealed to him in the vision. And making a joyous feast, he gave hospitality to the poor of Ephesus, and brought joy to all the people, lovingly honoring them in very expensive and royal ways. He redeemed also from his prisons the imprisoned Bishops, for they proclaimed the resurrection of the dead. This was followed by a common feast, glorifying and blessing our Lord Jesus Christ. *(adapted from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 12:6-14 EOB

Brethren, we have different gifts according to the grace given to us: if it is prophecy, let us prophesy according to the measure of our faith. If it is service, let us dedicate ourselves to service! He who teaches should do his teaching; or he who exhorts his exhorting. As for the one who gives, let the giving be done with generosity. He who rules should rule with diligence and the one who shows mercy should do so with joy.

Let your love be without hypocrisy. Reject with horror what is evil. Cling to what is good. In love for the brethren, be tenderly affectionate with one another; place the honor of others above your own. Do not fall back in zeal; be fervent in the spirit, serving the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in troubles, persevere in prayer; contribute to the needs of the saints; look for opportunities to be hospitable. Bless those who persecute you; bless, and do not curse!

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 9:1-8 EOB

At that time, Jesus entered into a boat, crossed over [the lake] and came into his own town. Behold, some people brought him a man who was paralyzed, lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer! Your sins are forgiven!" At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man blasphemes!" Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil [thoughts] in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or, 'Get up, and walk?' But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (then he said to the paralytic), "Get up, take up your mat, and go up to your house." The man got up and departed to his house. But when the crowds saw this, they were astonished and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Homily for the Sixth Sunday of Matthew – St. Gregory Palamas

For many reasons the Gospels can be seen as resembling a honeycomb. According to the Song of Songs, the "taste" of our souls' spiritual bridegroom, who is fairer in beauty than the sons of men, is "sweet" and "altogether desirable" (S. of S. 5:16). To the soul betrothed to Him, on the other hand, the Songwriter says through the immortal Spirit of wisdom, "Your lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under your tongue" (S. of S. 4:11). Clearly all the evangelists are like this: their words convey a story which can be compared to the wax of the honeycomb, and their deeper moral meaning, contained within or openly set forth by them, can be likened to honey and milk, since it is appropriate not just to the perfect, but also to the imperfect as spiritual milk. The Song refers to the lips of the spiritual bride shedding drops, rather than pouring forth abundantly, when she regards the boundless depth of the bridegroom's wisdom and power, and all they have accomplished, because, "The things which Jesus did, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written", as the greatest theologian among the evangelists tells us (*cf* John 21:25).

For us, however, even these drops are fathomless ocean depths. Having heard the miracle of the paralyzed man recounted by Matthew, we shall examine it and find a great abundance of spiritual food, or rather, we shall discover a little of the hidden treasure. This small portion will be enough and more than enough for everyone, and, like those loaves with which the Lord fed the multitudes in the wilderness, will increase as it is shared. I shall squeeze out as much honey as time allows, and serve it to all of you gathered here for the spiritual feast.

"At that time, Jesus entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed" (Matt. 9:1-2). The city of Jesus which He entered was this world, for, as the evangelist says, "He came unto his own" (John 1:11). The paralyzed man is any soul that thinks of turning back to the Lord and is brought to Him by these four things: self-condemnation, confession of sins, the promise to renounce evil, and prayer to God.

We can, even though the outward sense is different, interpret the account to mean that the Savior of all assumed our nature, crossed the sea of human life, and came into His own city, that throne and dwelling-place which lies above the heavens, far above all principality, and power, and every name and honor that is known, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. That is His true place, where none but He can enter. The psalmist indicates this by saying, "The heavens are the Lord's" (Ps. 115:16 Lxx), for there really is a heavenly place which is God's own home. When the Lord reached His dwelling-place He did not lay

aside our human nature. That is why the evangelist, after telling us that Jesus went into a ship and crossed over, does not go on to say that He disembarked from the boat before entering the city, but simply states that He went into the boat, crossed over and came to His own city, entered heaven, in that same boat, meaning in a body like ours.

He came to the heavenly city, entered the true Holy of Holies, and sat on the right hand of the Father in our human clay, "having obtained eternal redemption for us", to quote St. Paul (Heb. 9:12). Then the apostles chose from the Gentiles those who would accept the preaching of the Truth, who were afraid and humbled by what they understood of the message they heard, but were still lying prostrate on the bed of self-indulgence, feeble and paralyzed, not yet having received the healing of their soul's diseases, that is to say, the forgiveness of their sins, and so incapable of using their body to do anything good. Separating these people from the others, who would not receive the preaching of repentance and godliness, the apostles, especially chose four who were to write the Gospels, picked them up and brought them to Christ.

When Jesus, it says, saw the faith of the apostles who brought them – for they are our teachers and mediators before God – for the sake of this perfect faith of theirs He graciously bestowed the adoption of sons on those who were imperfect, saying to each one carried to Him, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven" (Matt. 9:2). "Set aside", He says, "your anxiety over your sins, for they are forgiven. Forget your horror at the sufferings which threaten you, for you will inherit the promises, seeing you have become My child and heir." In practice this happens through holy baptism, when we are born again through the Spirit of adoption, receiving forgiveness of our former sins, and becoming heirs of God according to the promise, and joint-heirs with Christ.

The scribes and Pharisees, Greeks and Jews, are doubtful about the power and grace of Holy Baptism in which we believe, and ask, "Who can forgive sins?" But we whose souls and bodies used to be paralyzed through sensual pleasures and passions, and incapable of doing anything good, hear the Lord saying to each of us, as to that paralyzed man, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house" (Matt. 9:6). Strengthened by the grace and power of Holy Baptism within us, we become vigorous and active in virtue, and bring into subjection our mental and physical capabilities and those material things which ought to be subservient to them, but which formerly overpowered us. We then go wherever pleases God and ourselves and, as far as we can, move to our real home, the eternal heavenly mansions. Those who see us ordering our lives in this godly way, marvel and glorify God, Who has given such power and authority to those who believe in Him, that they have their citizenship in heaven while still living on earth. But when we sin after being

baptized, although the grace and power of Baptism remain because of the Giver's love for mankind, the soul's health and purity depart.

That is why we who are sinners need to be sorrowful and downcast again over our former sins, and to prostrate ourselves anew in repentance, that we may hear once more in a mysterious fashion those words to the paralyzed man, "Son, be of good cheer", receive forgiveness and have joy in exchange for our grief. For this kind of sorrow is that spiritual honey which we suck from the barren rock, according to the Scriptural allusion, "They sucked honey out of the rock" (Deut. 32:13 LXX). As Paul says, "That Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). Do not be surprised that I refer to sorrow as honey. This is what Paul meant when he said, "Godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2 Cor. 7:10). When someone with an injured tongue is offered honey, it seems to sting, but when his wounds are healed he realizes that honey is sweet. Similarly, when the fear of God touches perceptive souls through the preaching of the Gospel, it brings sorrow, as they are still covered in sin's wounds. But once they have rid themselves of these through repentance, they receive the Gospel's joy instead. As the Savior says, "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John 16:20). Which sorrow? The sorrow the Lord's disciples felt at being deprived of their Master and Teacher; the suffering Peter experienced when he denied Christ; the grief of every godly person who repents of his transgressions and his slothful lack of virtue. On falling into sins we should accuse only ourselves and no one else. When Adam broke the commandment, putting the blame on Eve did not help him, nor was it any use for her to accuse the serpent. God put us in charge of ourselves, and our souls have been granted absolute authority over the passions, so nothing can prevail over us and force us.

This, then, is godly sorrow that brings salvation: to blame only ourselves, nobody else, for what we do wrong, to grieve over ourselves, and to be reconciled with God through confession of our sins and painful remorse over them. Mourning over your guilt, you can escape God's condemnation through your own agonizing remorse. As the prophet said, "Declare your sins first, that you may be justified" (Isa. 43:26 Lxx). And the apostle tells us, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31).

The Ninevites, whole cities and vast numbers of people, escaped judgment from above through repentance and sorrow for their sins. They had not only sinned, but had received God's sentence of condemnation, yet they had confidence that they could overturn it through repentance and painful sorrow for their sins. When Jonah proclaimed God's decision, "Yet three days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah J:4 Lxx) they listened and believed. They did not, however, throw themselves down into the evil pit of despair, nor did they harden their hearts. Instead,

they said among themselves, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" (Jonah 3:9ff). And each one of them turned aside from his evil course and the injustice he had committed. They proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least. Even their king sat with them repenting in sackcloth and ashes, and the babies did not suckle, since mothers apparently forgot their unweaned children in their deep mourning. As the psalmist says, "I forget to eat my bread by reason of my groaning" (Ps. 102:4-5). The animals did not graze, for it seems that herdsmen and shepherds left them shut in their folds and stalls, constrained by their profound remorse. By all joining together in the mourning that brings salvation, they changed God's decision against them, put an end to His wrath, and transformed it into favor.

As we spend almost all our lives in sin, we too, brethren, need to choose this saving sorrow and a life of penitence. Otherwise, as the Lord says, the men of Nineveh shall condemn us at the resurrection, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, whereas we did not repent at the preaching of Christ, the God of Jonah. Moreover, Jonah did not preach repentance but, as we have said, a sentence of condemnation, loss of life, catastrophe, death and utter destruction. Christ, by contrast, came that we might have life and have it more abundantly, together with adoption as God's sons and the heavenly kingdom. When Jonah proclaimed destruction he neither advised repentance nor promised the kingdom of heaven, whereas Christ preached repentance, promised the kingdom, and also foretold the inevitable destruction of everything. As in the days of Noah, He said, they were well fed and comfortable, then suddenly the flood came and took them all away, so shall the end of this world be. For the form of this world is passing away.

In those days Jonah warned the Ninevites only of the destruction of the visible things of this world, but not of the terrifying tribunal, the unbearable Judgment following the catastrophe, the unquenchable fire, the unsleeping worms, the outer darkness, the gnashing of teeth, and inconsolable grief. The Lord, on the other hand, forewarned of all these things to come after the end of the world, and also revealed that they were in store for those who live pain-free lives here. They would not, however, happen after the space of three days, as Jonah preached, but long afterwards, because of the Master's forbearance. God's long-suffering leads you to repentance, but be careful, lest according to the hardness, insensitivity, lack of contrition, and impenitence of your heart, you treasure up for yourself wrath against the Day of the righteous Judgment and revelation of God. He will render to every man according to his deeds; for those who patiently and with a contrite heart seek the remission of sins through works of repentance, there will be comfort and

joy, eternal life, and an indescribable kingdom; but for those who continue ruthlessly in their sins without repenting, there will be suffering, anguish, and unbearable, unending punishment.

After the Ninevites, David appeared as a living monument to godly sorrow, telling of the way of salvation and painful contrition according to God's will. He put down in writing the sin he committed, the grief and repentance he showed to God, and the compassion God granted him. "I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord; and you forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:5), he wrote, using "iniquity" to mean the root of evil, the passion resident in *his* soul, and "transgression" to refer to the sinful deed he had committed, which he proclaimed to all, repented of and grieved for, and then received not just forgiveness, but inner healing.

O come, brethren, let us, too, worship and fall down and weep, as David himself urges us, before the Lord who made us, who has called us to repentance and to this saving sorrow, mourning and contrition. Anyone devoid of this sadness has not obeyed the Lord who calls us. He is not numbered among God's saints, and will not obtain the blessedness in the gospel, nor the promised divine consolation. "Blessed are those who mourn," it says, "for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

What if someone says he is without sin and does not need to mourn? This is difficult, highly unlikely, and all but impossible. But even if we do accept that someone has his passions under control, the Scriptures show us another basic reason for this sorrow that saves us. The disciples grieved when they lost Christ, their good Teacher and Savior, and we too are deprived of Him now, and not just of Him, but of the joy of paradise. We have fallen away from its delights, and exchanged somewhere free of passions for this painful place full of them. We have forfeited direct conversation with God, the company of his angels, and eternal life. Who, aware of this deprivation, would not mourn? And anyone oblivious of it does not belong among the faithful. So we, brethren, who have found out about our loss through divinely inspired teaching, should mourn over ourselves and wash away the stains of sin through godly grief, that we may discover God's compassion, return to paradise, and be the blessed possessors of eternal life and consolation.

May we all attain to this by the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belong all glory, might, honor and worship, together with His Father who is without beginning and the all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen. (*abridged from Saint Gregory Palamas – The Homilies, Mount Tabor Publishing*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Proomion – When Nineveh was desperate, you rushed there and set aside the doom which Jonah had proclaimed. Mercy conquered your anger, O Lord. Have pity even now on your people and our city. With your mighty fist repel those who threaten us, and through the intercession of your Virgin Mother, accept our repentance.

The infirmary of repentance lies open to those who are sick by choice. Come, let us rush there and receive strength for our souls. There the sinful woman found health; there Peter cast aside his denial. There David broke his heart-wrenching pain; there the Ninevites were cured. No delays – let us rise up, let us show our wounds to the Savior, let us receive his divine salve. For, beyond all expectations, he accepts our repentance.

The Lord never demands a fee from those who come to his infirmary – never, because no gift can possibly equal his gift of health. And so all were cured without fee. In return they gave the only gift they could: tears as recompense. Tears of repentance are cherished and desired by the Savior. Witnesses to this are the sinful woman and Peter, David and the Ninevites, because all they did was lament and fall before the Savior – and he accepted their repentance.

This paradox is true: Almighty God can be overcome; sobs conquer him, for the Lord of Mercy gladly surrenders to tears. Yet tears of contrition flow from the soul; they are not caused by bodily pain. We weep over the dead and wail over wounds. Our flesh is clay: it seeps tears unceasingly. But now let us lament from our hearts, just as the Ninevites once forced Heaven open by their contrition and were revealed to the Savior. He accepted their repentance.

My brethren, let us pay heed to these Ninevites: they are the topic of this hymn. Let us strive to hear what happened to them. After that fearsome proclamation of doom which Jonah long ago delivered to those profligate people, after that unbearable and irresistible threat which the prophet pronounced, the Ninevites, like master craftsmen, rushed to shore up their city quaking with corruption. Their new foundations were not of stone, but based on the unshakable rock of their repentance.

Streams of tears cleansed the filth from the city; then prayers adorned the metropolis. The Lord of Mercy was pleased with their re-dedication. For the spiritual glory of Nineveh was immediately evident to the Lord who examines our hearts. The city covered its foul flesh with sackcloth and ashes; it anointed itself with good deeds, as with oil, and gleamed with the sheen of fasting. The city returned to its primeval Spouse, clung to the Lord. And so the Bridegroom gathered in his arms their repentance.

Nineveh's wise king transformed himself into an escort of the bride and ordered the entire city to wreath itself in virtue. He then added new glory to the bride and prepared the city's herds and animals as her dowry. "Lord," he said, "I offer all this to you. Be reconciled. My Savior, Nineveh's divine Groom, take back a city which was a harlot and which had turned away from the immaculate embrace of your pure love. See how the city that loves you freely offers you her repentance."

"The beasts bellow for their green pastures, since I have ordered all my subjects, all our herds, to fast, until you are reconciled to us. If I, the king, have broken the law, condemn me alone and pity all the others. If we all have sinned, then hear all our cries – the bleating of the flocks and herds, the prayers of the people. Let the beam on your scale of mercy fall, and our doom is averted. We will not tremble in terror, if you accept our repentance."

"Merciful Savior, this city had ripped your yoke from its neck. Now it falls before you, eager to submit again. Nineveh, the fugitive slave, bows before you. And I, its wretched king, am your servant; unworthy of the throne, I grovel in the ashes; after defiling my crown, I clutch the dust. Since I am not fit to wear royal purple, I have donned sackcloth. Do not reject me in my misery. Look on me with favor, my Savior, and accept the city's repentance."

:What would you gain by demolishing Nineveh, O Most Perfect Lord? Can a heap of dust in Hell surge in praise of you? This is why we living Ninevites search for you. Reveal the mercy you have fostered to your servants here. Merciful Lord, God of Pity, show pity and mercy. Do not leave us as prey for our foes. Do not let your city be despised like Sodom. Save us – in a flash we could become a toy for our enemies. Show your mercy and accept our repentance."

"City of Nineveh, our ship of state founders, beyond hope of any life-saver! Shout, beg the Redeemer of all to reach his hand out to us. He has not listened to me, your helmsman. All your sins are on my shoulders. Cry out! Perhaps he will hear your prayers and bend his anger to your tears. Weep, O bride! Weep, O groomsmen! Weep, youth and maiden, elder and infant! Weep before the face of the Lord, as we offer him our repentance."

The royal proclamation of the wise king was something like this, for he was a ruler of absolute good will. Then he saw the entire city bowing to his wishes. Suckling infants left their mothers' breasts; prodigal children left their nasty games; wives restored the honor of their vows and kept their marriage beds unstained. Young men and old men bent their backs in prayer, supplication, fasting, works of mercy. And when they did this, the Lord accepted their repentance.

Now a greater marvel occurred: the Bible does not merely report the city's acts of penance, the days of fasting, the robes of sackcloth. The Ninevites did something

more. Each cried out unceasingly to the Lord and rushed back to him whom they had fled, and discovered he was the God of Pity. All those who show contrition for their sins, he gladly saves; he loves to redeem and protect. He offers pity eagerly, and he accepts our repentance.

When all of this happened, the Prophet Jonah was racked with pain: “Lord, I did not mention pity – that you would not slay them. Why do you think I tried to avoid this mission? I was not afraid. I suspected my message of doom would be false. Now I am a broken man, but not because you spared Nineveh. Look, just as I was a prophet of their destruction, so too I would have announced their salvation. But I was sent here as a prophet of wrath, not of forgiveness. I am a stiff-necked servant; you are gentle and cherish their repentance.”

“Give me merely one drop of your pity now, Lord; I am your faithful servant. Take my soul! It is better for me to die than live.” With some such words Jonah fell into exhausted sleep. Sleep always follows grief and pain. The ever-vigilant Lord then cradled him in the shadow of a gourd plant. It protected the despondent prophet, and came to teach him to despise his bitter isolation, to have compassion for all mankind – and to cherish our repentance.

Now, that gourd plant is certainly meant to be a symbol of the Old Law. It grew during the night and overshadowed Jonah: just so the Old Law is a shadow of things to come, it shot up from under a cloud for Moses during the night. But Christ's charity has now risen like the sun and cast its shadow over the law as if it were a weed. This is why the world, like Jonah, woke and saw that charity had reaped the entire harvest of the Old Law – and blossomed forth with our repentance.

Long ago Jonah rejoiced when he saw the gourd plant flourishing. Then, in a flash, it withered and he lost heart. The Creator addressed his holy servant: “If you grieve so bitterly for what you did not produce, if you agonize over a plant, how much more so for men? When the leaves withered, your mean, narrow heart was struck. How much more so should I have pity on a metropolis teeming with tens of thousands of humans! Open up your heart. Cherish with me their repentance.”

Son of the one God, our only God, you grant the wishes of those who love you. In your mercy, rescue us from impending doom, O Perfect One. Just as you once pitied the Ninevites and instructed Jonah in the secrets of your wisdom, so too now deliver from judgment those who sing your praise. Grant your Melodist forgiveness as the reward for my hymn. I know how to sing; I don't know how to act. Since my deeds, my Savior, are not worthy of your glory, accept my songs. Deliver me, for you cherish my repentance.

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion 52 “On Repentance: Jonah & Nineveh”*

Translation of the Relics of St. Ia (Eudokia) of Persia

The Martyr Ia sent forth a fragrance of violets, with her outpoured blood dyed red. Saint Ia (Violet) was an elderly Christian woman who lived in the fortress of Bet-Zabde (or Phenak) on the right bank of the Tigris at the frontier of the Roman and Persian Empires. King Shapur II of Persia (309-379), after several attempts to capture this fortress, took it in 362. He razed its walls, put to death many of the garrison and made captive about 9,000 Christians, including the holy Bishop Heliodoros as well as priests, deacons, ascetics and pious Christians (Apr. 9).

Saint Ia was among the Christian prisoners who were deported to Bet-Houzae in Persia. She was well-instructed in the faith, and love moved her to make the word of God known to the women of the place. But the husbands, suspecting that she was trying to persuade their wives to flee matrimony, denounced her. King Shapur ordered two of his magi to seize the Saint and torture her until she would worship fire and water. As Ia valiantly confessed Christ, she was stripped, her limbs were torn asunder with ropes, and she was flogged mercilessly by five tormentors. Covered in wounds, she was thrown into prison. Two months later, when she was again questioned, she said, "I shall remain steadfast in the grace that has been given to me; nothing in the world will make me give up the true God in exchange for your vain idols." For this answer, she was beaten with forty rose-bush stems full of thorns until the shreds of her flesh covered the ground.

After keeping Saint Ia in prison for six months more, the magi, unable to overcome her resolution that was as strong as brass, tightly bound nine reeds to her body with fine cords. They pulled the reeds out one by one, tearing her flesh so deeply that her entrails appeared. Ten days after this torture, they crushed her in a press and then beheaded her, thus obtaining the crown of martyrdom at last. It is said that where her blood spilled on the ground, the earth began to swell and raise up in a supernatural manner, and the light of the sun was hidden. This, along with the beautiful fragrance that emanated from her relic, struck her executioners with awe. Her body was to be left for vultures and carrion-crows to devour, but the Christians succeeded in ransoming it and they gave her a proper burial. Later on, her holy relics were translated to Constantinople, where several churches were dedicated to Saint Ia. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Also Commemorated Today

Martyr [Eleutherius](#) (reign of Maximinian)

New Hieromartyr Nicholas (Prozrov) (1930)

New Hieromartyr [Michael](#) (1937) (OC)

New Martyrs [Simeon and Demetrius](#) Vorobyov (1937) (OC)

Martyr [Thathuil](#) (Thathuel)

St. [Lugid](#), Abbot of Clonfert, Ireland (622) ([Molua, Lua](#), Luanus, Luggaidh)
St. [Sithney](#) (Sezni)
St. [Agabius](#), bishop of Verona (3rd c.)
Martyr [Crescentio](#) of Rome (unk)
Sts. [Epiphanes and Isidore](#) of Besancon
St. [Euphronius](#), bishop of Tours (573)
Martyr [Hyacinth](#) of Rome (unk)
Martyr [Justin](#) of Rome (unk)
Ven. [Peregrinus](#), Maceratus, and Viventius (France)(6th c.)
St. [Perpetua](#) of Rome (c. 80)
Martyr [Protasius](#) of Cologne (Germany)(unk)
Priest-martyr [Tertullinus](#) of Rome (257)

Why Do We Suffer, and How Should We Respond?

Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick: The main thing we should be asking – as we look at the Scriptures, as we read the teachings of the Fathers, as we listen to, experience, or participate in the divine services and so on – is, what is the purpose of this within the Christian life? The Scriptures are not written for our intellectual curiosity. Even though I’m a big believer in intellectual curiosity, they’re not written for that purpose. Tradition in general is not given to us for that purpose. It’s given to us – all these things are given to us – so “that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing in him we might have life in his name,” to use the words of the Apostle and Evangelist John.

So then, what do all these bad guys of the apocalypse – the Four Horsemen, Gog and Magog, and of course the accompanying swarms of locusts – what does that mean for us in particular? It’s not just about being right or wrong about these things or having a colorful depiction of the end, it’s about what do we do with them? I think there’s a number of things that we could say about that. One of the things is a theme of what we call the “left hand of God”, to use some of the language you see in the books of Kings – where there’s the elect, or the obedient angels, at the right hand of God, and then the disobedient at the left hand, meaning the demons, and while they do their own will, they end up doing God's will. The Four Horsemen and these other demonic figures are kind of on a leash, and sometimes they are unleashed, let go, having been restrained, but under limits. And it is quite simply so that we might repent.

Fr. Stephen and I were asked during the Covid pandemic, “Is the pandemic judgment from God?” Of course, we both said yes it is, meaning that judgment is God establishing his justice and so the pandemic was an opportunity for us to repent. Of course, Resheph, this pestilence god, is one of the Four Horsemen

involved in any kind of mass outbreak of disease, and so there is, on that level, suffering and so forth, an opportunity for us to repent. Both in our personal lives, like my participation in the divine services, in prayer and almsgiving, in acts of love, in self-sacrifice, all that kind of stuff – and on the larger scale of, OK, how am I helping to make the world a more beautiful, more just, better, kinder place? What am I doing to help address the ills of the world? What am I doing to make things right? It doesn't matter if I was the one who made them wrong or not. If I see someone near me suffering, it doesn't matter if I'm the one who caused the suffering – I might well have been, maybe deliberately, maybe through neglect, who knows? Maybe just the fact that I'm a sinner has a spiritual effect. But we can repent on our own behalf, in terms of putting our own souls right, but also repent on behalf of the world in which we live, putting the world right. And I'm not talking about "I am out there to change the world" kind of stuff, but you can make things better where you are. You can serve the people near you, whether it's your family, or friends, or your coworkers, or your fellow parishioners. Parishes really should be doing this for the parish and for anyone who comes to the parish.

You might ask, well, OK, God's unleashing demons again. God is not doing evil things, but he's removing his protection from these evil spirits, allowing them to do their evil things. What about people who seem to be suffering unjustly? Is God saying "you're bad and so you need to shape up"? We've all, I'm sure, seen or at least heard of some unjust suffering, whether it's mass disease, invasion, individual people suffering from serious health problems or other kinds of suffering in their life. Whatever it might be, why do these things happen? Is God telling them, "you're bad, so get better"? Not necessarily.

We all remember, Saint Paul talks about having been sent an angel of Satan, messenger of Satan is often how it's translated, a demon that tormented him. We don't know exactly what experience he was having that he described in that way. There's various ideas about that. But he's the one who said that it was this evil spirit. And he asked God three times take it away, and God says, "No, my grace is sufficient for you." Why would God do that? Was Saint Paul an unrighteous, evil man that needed this in order to shape up? No, he was a righteous man. Certainly by this point. He's one of the holiest people that ever lived. But the experience that he had was so that he might gain even more of the grace of God. As God said, "My grace sufficient for you," so that he might advance even more in holiness. Because repentance is not only to undo some bad things that you did or even that someone else did – that certainly is included in repentance – but it is also to undo any imperfection. It is also to advance towards being more like Christ, to become more worthy of being adopted as sons of God. So there is an advancement. Repentance is not just to set things back to zero; it's actually positively above that,

to grow past that, and the experiences of suffering, demonic suffering, that we have are an opportunity for that. Often we are tempted, and understandably so, to say, “Why God? Why?” Even Job said, “Why God? Why?” He was able to do that without sinning, which is super hard for me. I don’t think I could manage it. But one of the answers to “Why God? Why?” – I’m not saying it’s the only one, I’m speaking in general, not in particular, but in general one of the answers is, so that I might have an opportunity to become holier. You know, it’s not only to deal with some sin; it is also to advance in holiness. And so, when we consider this rogue’s gallery of demonic bad guys at the end, this is how we should receive this. These things are put in front of me so that I might learn repentance even more, or maybe start or maybe restart – whatever’s applicable for me.

Fr. Stephen De Young: So I want to build on what Fr. Andrew was just talking about. He was talking about sort of wrapping our intellect around the shape of life in the world as we live in it and finding meaning and growing in holiness. I want to focus on the fact that you can choose to be invincible. You can choose to live your life a way where no one will ever be able to hurt you, let alone do any harm to you, let alone damage you. This isn’t a one time choice that you make, like, “OK, yeah that sounds good. I’ll choose that.” This is something that we have to practice choosing over and over and over again.

The way it works is revealed in some of the stories in scripture. For example, we read about deliberations among Joseph’s brothers when they were trying to decide whether to kill him or just throw him down a well and ultimately sell him into slavery in Egypt. At the end of that story, of course, when they realize that their brother is alive, that their brother now has the power of life and death over them in Egypt, they’re terrified (and rightfully so), and Joseph says to them, “You meant it to me for evil, but God meant it for good,” and by that he means they were trying to do evil to their brother Joseph, but God had brought good out of it. God had put Joseph into position to be able to save the lives of his whole family.

And that dynamic is at the core, of course, of we’ve been talking about - these demonic, spiritual powers who mean only evil for us. Don’t make that mistake. They only want to destroy humanity. They only want to do us harm. But God allows them, sometimes, in some places, to try do some of that harm in order that He can bring good out of it. And one of the chief ways is, as Father Andrew said, is through inspiring repentance. But choosing how we’re gonna receive things and what we’re gonna do with them is a freedom that we have in Christ.

When we are slaves to sin, and in the orthodox church, we call the sins passions because they make us passive. They take control of us. So greed takes control of you. Anger takes control of you. Lust takes control of you. Laziness takes control

of you. Pride takes control of you. All of these things, once they get control of you, will cause you to do things that in another moment on another day at another time you would've thought were unthinkable. But when you're in the grip of sin, you start doing them. And so when we're bound by sin, we're not free.

But when Christ has set us free from sin, we now have freedom not to just react. We have freedom not to just be passive. We're free to always, and at every moment, to be active in the world. That means when someone just outright insults me, not remotely trying to offer a morsel of constructive criticism, says things designed to hurt me, I have a choice to make a choice to make. I could choose to give into anger. I could choose to retaliate. I could choose to receive that insult, and have it foster humility. When someone offers me something that maybe sideways could be could be taken as constructive criticism, I can make the choice to receive it as constructive criticism, regardless of how it was intended. I could use it to improve. I can use it to repent or to change or to work harder, or to see something I didn't see before about myself or about the people around me, or to make something right that I've done wrong.

These things can bring me to repentance. These things can increase my patience and my resolve. When I get sick, I can use that too. It's funny how often I pray when I'm sick to be healthy again and how little I pray to thank God that I'm healthy when I'm healthy. I can use it to help me understand my own weakness and dependence on others. I can use it to develop empathy for other people who are suffering the same things. That's true even for the most horrible thing that could possibly happen to me. Whatever that would be, it's happened to other people, and is happening to other people – other people who need compassion and who need empathy and need someone to help them through those difficulties.

If we become consistent in making those choices, we become invincible. No one can harm us. No one can hurt us. Whatever anyone does to us, no matter how evil, no matter how motivated by evil, ends up working to our good, up to and including if we're ready to die, if we're ready to die because we've been living our life following Christ. They can't even do us harm by murdering us. You can become invulnerable to harm, if we start to practice this. But this isn't how we've been taught to live our lives and it isn't how we've been taught to see ourselves. We haven't been taught by the world to eat curses and spit blessings back out toward the people who threw them at us. We've been taught to lament how unjust it is that we were cursed. We've been taught that the problem in the world is that I'm a righteous person who is suffering. I'm not a righteous person and that's not why I'm suffering, but we've been taught to look at ourselves that way. The problem is the bad things happening to me, not the way I'm living my life and the choices I'm making and how to receive the things of life. We've been taught

essentially to see ourselves and to act and behave as victims continuously. And a victim, being a victim perpetually, is the opposite of being invincible. It's the opposite of being unable to be harmed. And so, to me, this is the really important practice that we can derive from these things that we've been talking about. There's too much of our lives that's consumed by fear – fear of being hurt, fear of struggle, fear of criticism, fear of the opinions of other people. There's too much of our life that's spent nursing old wounds. There's too much of our life that's spent wanting people to treat us – other people, or life itself, or even, dare I say, God to treat us – the way we think we deserve to be treated, and nowhere near enough time spent turning the way life does treat us to good and getting ourselves into a position where, in and with Christ, we are victorious over all of the troubles that come to us in this life. *(from Lord of Spirits podcast "Bad Boys of the Apocalypse")*

Social Team for August 11

Team 1 - Amelia Hanbury, Patty Blaydoe, Mickey Norfolk. Thank you!

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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 & la, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine & the Holy Land, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)