

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 18, 2024 – 8th Sunday After Pentecost

Martyrs Florus and Laurus of Illyria

Afterfeast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

Saints Florus and Laurus were twin brothers. They entered life on the same day and they also departed it on the same day, after giving their testimony for Christ and sealing it with the blood of their martyrdom. They lived in the first Christian centuries during a period of persecution, however it is unknown exactly when. They came from Byzantium and were catechized in the faith of Christ by Saints Proclus and Maximus, who were also martyred for Christ. Also, from these Saints they were also taught the art of stonemasonry, which they practiced and made their livelihood with. After the martyrdom of their teachers they left for Illyria and settled in the city of Ulpiana, where they continued practicing their trade. The prefect admired their skills and gave them a blueprint and the required money to build a temple to idols. The Saints distributed the money to the poor and when they built the temple - by the Grace of God and with the help of an angel, who helped and served them - they demolished the idols with the poor, and they consecrated the temple and dedicated it to the worship of the true God.



Merentios, the priest of the idols, when he saw all of the above, asked the Saints to baptize him, just as they previously baptized his son Athanasius, who had been blind in one eye. And since he had not found healing by fleeing to medical science, he resorted to the Saints, who healed him by invoking the name of Christ. The prefect, when he learned everything the Saints did, ordered, full of rage, for the poor who demolished the idols to be thrown into a burning furnace, and for the Saints to be tortured. After harsh and unspeakable torture they were thrown into a dry well and in this way they were perfected and received the crown of martyrdom. Later, the faithful collected their bones, which were fragrant and healed many illnesses.

Their lives and dispositions give us the opportunity to highlight the following:

First, the profession of stonecutter and the way it is practiced has many things to teach the faithful members of the Church, who struggle to transform their passions and acquire communion with God, which is why it is worth imitating the way a stonecutter works. That is, just as a stonecutter takes a stone, and after throwing away all the useless pieces they place them and consider it a piece of art, following persistent and difficult effort, so also does a believer, who desires their regeneration and salvation, must work carefully and skillfully in order to cast away from their nous and heart all the debris - namely all the unclean and wicked thoughts, as well as every type of idol - in order to be able to put in order and change their heart into a temple of the Holy Spirit, in which will be celebrated the eternal worship of the true God. Further, just as a stonecutter, in order to complete his work in such a way that it appears elegant, needs great patience, so also does the believer who works for the regeneration of their life need immense patience. But, because the work of inner regeneration is not possible without the power of God, this is why together with patience the believer must make much prayer; for the regeneration and salvation of man is the work of God. Man is a co-worker with God, by being obedient to His will and showing in this way his choice, his love and his *philotimo* [*difficult to translate: perhaps "zeal" or "earnest endeavor" - Ed.*].

Also, just as a stonemason, if something does not go well during the course of their work, must continue to work and not abandon their effort, leaving the job undone that they began to build, but every time they must seek and find an alternative solution - namely the proper way to continue and reach the completion of their obligated project - so also the same must be done by the faithful. That is, they must not lose hope after every fall, because repentance is possible and it exists. Further, no difficulty, no matter how great it is, must prevent them from caring about their spiritual advancement, but with every difficulty they must turn to God and seek His help, and after being refreshed they can continue with greater zeal along their

spiritual journey. And this should be done continuously until the end, until the time of their departure from this transitory life.

Second, just as Saints Florus and Laurus before they consecrated the Sacred Temple that they built and made ready for the worship of the true God, demolished the idols with the help of the poor, who they previously gave charity too, and then after the consecration of the Sacred Temple they spilled their blood for Christ, so also must every believer desire to build a house of God in their hearts, in order for it to be a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. That is, we need to demolish all the idols of the passions, which lead us to distance ourselves from God, with the help of almsgiving, which is born out of love for God and neighbor. And love, almsgiving and all the virtues, in their authentic form, are fruits of the Holy Spirit, and are obtained with sweat and blood, namely a persistent and arduous struggle to live the divine commandments.

The art of stonemasonry and the art of salvation are alike in that they both chisel; the first with stones and the second the inner man. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 1:10-18 EOB

Brethren, I beg you through the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you. Instead, may you be perfected together in the same mind and opinion. As it is, those who are from Chloe's household have informed me concerning you my brethren, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this: that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," "I follow Apollos," "I follow Kephas," or, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one should say that I baptized you into my own name. (I also baptized the household of Stephanas; besides them, I do not know whether I baptized any other.) Indeed, Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Good News - not in wisdom of words, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 14:14-22 EOB

At that time, Jesus went out and saw that there was a great crowd. He had compassion on them and healed their sick. When evening came, his disciples came to him and said, "This place is deserted, and the hour is already late. Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." They replied, "We only have here five loaves and two fish!" Jesus said,

“Bring them to me.” Having instructed the crowds to sit down on the grass, he took the five loaves and the two fish. Looking up to heaven, a he blessed, broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples distributed it to the multitudes. And so, everyone ate and was satisfied. His disciples gathered up twelve baskets full of what remained left over from the broken pieces. Those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Immediately after this, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and told them to go ahead of him to the other side, while he would send the crowds away.

Homily for the 8th Sunday of Matthew by St. Luke of Simferopol

You have heard in the current Gospel reading about one of the greatest miracles of Christ - about the feeding of five loaves and two fishes to more than five thousand people. Why did the Lord create this miracle? What is its significance for us? Why did the Lord perform His miracles at all?

We find the answer to this question in the Evangelist Matthew, who says this: “Jesus departed from there in a boat to a deserted place alone; and the people, when they heard about it, followed Him out of the city on foot.” And the people, having learned about this, followed Him in crowds, walking along the shore of the lake. “And going out, Jesus saw a multitude of people; and had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Mt. 14:13, 14).

He took pity on them - that's where the answer is. Love for the unfortunate human race, love, which is the essence of the Divine nature of the Savior, guided Him first of all in all His actions, and in the creation of His miracles. But not only love, there were other extremely important, deep reasons for the Lord to work His wondrous miracles: He taught us with miracles.

When, at His command, the apostle Peter threw the net into the sea after working in vain all night, and pulled out a full net of fish, he fell at the feet of the Savior, and the Lord said to him: “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men” (Luke 5:10). You see, in this miracle there was a prototype of what the holy Apostle Peter would become, a prototype of what he would be - a fisher of human souls.

When the Lord raised Lazarus from the dead after four days, who had already been lying in the tomb, there was reflected in this not only His love, love that even tears flowed from His eyes, but this was also done in order to show the whole world that the Lord has power over death and even over decay.

One could say the same about other miracles of Christ, but let us dwell on the miraculous nourishment of the people and delve into the depth of the significance of this miracle. What is this depth? The answer is found in the words of Jesus

Himself. When, after the healing of the demon possessed Gadarene, the Lord Jesus Christ got into the boat and crossed to the other side of the lake, and the people ran along the shore of the lake and met Him with delight. Then he said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."

For them, the most important thing was the saturation of bread. They knew how to appreciate a miracle in itself, and the Lord accustomed their thoughts to the fact that they would know the great goal of this wondrous miracle. He told them: "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him" (John 6:26-33) .

Strive not for perishable food, not only for bread. Remember that "man will not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4) . Take care, therefore, not about temporal, not about earthly food, but about food that endures into eternal life, about spiritual food. For it is not only our body that needs food; our immortal soul longs for truth, longs for eternal life. Our soul also needs food, much more than the body needs bodily food.

It is impossible, it is impossible to live without food for the soul, it is impossible to leave our soul to starve, as happens with many, countless people. Our soul, as Tertullian, one of the Fathers of the second century, said, is by nature a Christian. And if so, if she is a Christian by nature, then how can she live without Christ, without the word of Christ, without communion with God the Father and the Holy Spirit in prayers and mysteries? It cannot, it cannot: it will starve, sometimes it will die of hunger.

You Christians know with your heart, you know this thirst for spiritual food, this hunger of the soul. You know how you need spiritual food, how you suffer, how your soul is starving when you do not hear the word of God, how you long to hear at least a little from the word of God. And those who are far from Christ, who live only the life of the earth, appreciating only the blessings of the earth, are they not starving?

No, they are starving, they are very hungry, but they do not realize it. Their souls do not know how to explicitly demand the food of the word of God, but the hunger of their souls manifests itself in an unaccountable, painful anguish. Among all pleasures, among the satisfaction of lusts and passions, in a whirlwind of joy, wealth and luxury, they are often attacked by a deep, painful longing. Often they all suddenly become unloving, empty. The soul cries, the soul yearns, and they vaguely feel this longing of their Christian soul. The soul demands that its tears be wiped away. The soul asks for food immeasurably higher than those pleasures with

which people who are far from spiritual life try to console it. The soul cries, the soul yearns, finds no place for itself anywhere. This suggests that it is impossible to drown out the voice of the soul, the voice of one's conscience, with impunity.

This is what the Lord Jesus Christ said about spiritual food. They listened to Him and very poorly understood and told Him: "What shall we do to do the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them: "Behold, it is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:28-29). This is the first and most important of all things - to believe in God the Father and in the Son of God, whom the Father sent.

The people listened, and His words seemed strange to them: why should they believe in Him? And they said to Him: "What sign will You give, so that we can see and believe You?" They needed a sign, they needed evidence, their hearts did not yet know the love of Christ. "Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness, as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat, which was a real sign that Moses gave them bread from heaven." Jesus said to them: "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, but My Father gives you true bread from heaven."

The manna was not the true bread of God, it was only a type of the True Bread that God would later give them. "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:30-33). This is the kind of bread the Lord Jesus Christ spoke about, this is the incorruptible food. This is the inner meaning of the great miracle of feeding the five thousand. By this miracle, the Lord prepared human hearts to understand that there is another, Divine, eternal food, food for the soul; prepared for the understanding that He Himself, the Son of God, is this food, He Himself is the Bread that came down from heaven, that He gave His Flesh for the life of the world.

Remember this. Remember more often this great gospel story about the Lord feeding a huge crowd of people. Remember that it signified that heavenly food, without which the soul cannot live. Remember that your souls are hungry, that it needs heavenly food, food of a completely, completely different order than bodily food, and never leave your soul without this food, just as you do not leave your body without food. Remember that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Always remember the word of God, learn from it; listen to it with deep attention; delve into it, penetrate it. And ask for help from Christ Himself our God. Ask Him to help you understand the wondrous meaning of what you are reading, for in the Gospel you read the words of Christ, those words the likes of which the world has never heard and will never hear. And this will be the most necessary food for your souls. Amen. (*trans. John Sanidopoulos*)

Homily on the Dormition of the Theotokos by St. Luke of Simferopol

“Neither the grave nor death could contain the Theotokos, the unshakable hope, ever vigilant in intercession and protection. As Mother of life, He who dwelt in the ever-virginal womb transposed her to life.”

It is necessary to explain this kontakion of the feast.... The Most Holy Mother of God prays vigilantly for the human race, and our hope in Her intercession before Her Divine Son is unshakable. Death and the grave could not keep Her in their power.

We know from legend that when all the apostles were miraculously gathered to Her deathbed, the Apostle Thomas was missing: he arrived a few days later and in great sorrow asked to see at least the grave of the Theotokos. They rolled away the stone from the grave in the Garden of Gethsemane, where, according to the will of the Mother of God, She was buried, but Her body was not found.

The grave and death did not hold Her back, for She was the Mother of the Source of life, who inhabited Her ever-virgin womb, Who also delivered Her to eternal life. Let us dwell on these last, very important words. The death of the Mother of God was a blessed Dormition, in which, according to the unfalse word of Her Divine Son, She passed directly from death into life. For thus said the Lord: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24).

The death of the righteous is a direct transition from life in the body, under earthly conditions, to eternal life in the Kingdom of God. We also know this from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in His Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: “The poor man died and was carried by the angels into the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died, and they buried him. And in hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luke 16:22-23). So, immediately after death, eternal blessed life began for Lazarus, and hellish torments for the rich man.

From the 20th chapter of the Revelation of John we know that there is a first death and a second death. The first death is that natural death with which the life of every person ends, and only this natural death, often a blessed dormition, overcomes the righteous. Serious sinners and blasphemers await a terrible second death, a spiritual death, to which they will be condemned by Christ at His Last Judgment.

You will say, “But will the righteous also be judged?” Yes, they will appear, but this will not be a judgment for them, but a triumph, for, according to the word of Christ, they do not come to judgment. Before pronouncing His Divine judgment, Christ will separate the sheep from the goats, and the sheep, i.e. righteous, He will

set on His right hand and say to them: “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). And the condemnation to a second death will befall only evil goats.

The ancient sage Solomon spoke about this deep secret: “The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and torment will not touch them. In the eyes of the foolish, they seemed to be dead, and their exodus was considered death, and their departure from us was destruction; but they are in peace” (Wisdom 3:1–3).

And the holy apostle Paul said this: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you” (Phil. 1:21–24). Oh, how marvelous are these words of the apostle: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Let us also imitate him, as he did Christ, may our life be all for Christ, and let death be a joy and a great gain, so the word of the Psalmist not overtake us: “The death of sinners is fierce” (Ps. 33:22).

May it also be for us Christians a blessed dormition and transition from death to life. May the expectation of the Last Judgment not frighten us, for it is terrible only for serious lawless people, for unrepentant sinners and blasphemers. And to us, Christians, the Son of God said, finishing His discourse about the signs of His Second Coming: “When this begins to come true, then rise up and lift up your heads, because your deliverance is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). Live so that none of you suffers a second death! (trans. John Sanidopoulos)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Proomion – Deliver from famine and every necessity, O Merciful One, us who are nourished from your flesh, O Christ our God At the intercession of the Mother of God, count us worthy of your eternal good things, for you, O Savior, are *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

All the angels in heaven marvel at things of earth; that humans, born of earth, who inhabit what is below, are lifted up in thought and attain what is on high as partakers in Christ crucified. For together they all eat his body. As they fervently approach the Bread of Life, from it they hope for immortal salvation. though to the senses it appears as bread, spiritually it makes them holy, for it is *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

That the bread we take is the flesh of Emmanuel, the Master himself is first to teach us all. For when he went willingly to his Passion Christ broke the bread of salvation, and said to his apostles, as is written, “Now draw near. Eat from this and

by eating you will gain eternal life. For this food is my flesh, since I whom you now see am *the heavenly bread of incorruption.*”

As many of us as have in Christ obtained the full faith all know that when we approach with fervor the mystical bread, and take as well the cup of salvation, if we have a pure and sincere intent, and all, with faith in him, partake of Christ’s Body together with his Blood, we hope from these to become fellow citizens with the angels. For the most holy Body of Jesus Christ, who suffered, is truly *the heavenly bread of incorruption.*

Everyone has come to hear yet once again how the Gospels cry out, and to marvel at Jesus. For he ineffably once nourished five thousand in the wilderness: Fearsome wonder, full of amazement! For the Savior took five loaves, as it is written, and from them nourished these thousands, and all were completely filled by the ineffable Wisdom. For they did not need a multitude of loaves, since Christ was present, who is *the heavenly bread of incorruption.*

I want now to recall how the multitude was nourished when the Farmer and Doctor was present in the wilderness. The countryside that was sick and grew thorns hurried at once to meet its benefactor. Christ saw them all and had compassion, and first of all the Wise One gives them healing and grants the grace of power to their weakness. But they, having enjoyed this treatment, knew that he was *the heavenly bread of incorruption.*

The God of all things cured those in afflictions one and all, as powerful Lord healing also the passions of their souls, the wealthy heir taking as his co-heirs all the poor, if they only desired it. But, while he was preaching to them the Good News, the measure of the day was moving to its setting and the whole gathering was fasting, but filled full of teachings and knowing that, for mankind, Christ is *the heavenly bread of incorruption.*

We may easily gather what the apostles were saying to Christ and what the Savior immediately replied. For he, as the one who knows beforehand, foresaw the future, while they could know none of these things. For he is God and Creator of the universe, while they were weak, being only creatures. He is powerful; they are without power. But he granted them power by nourishing them divinely, for he is *the heavenly bread of incorruption.*

For when the Redeemer’s apostles saw that the day had hastened to its close, they hurriedly approached him. “Teacher,” they cried, “the day has declined. All these people are faint from hunger. But, as you know, this is a desert place. Send them away before evening comes, that they may go into the villages and buy bread. For they are not capable of fasting like us, to whom you have granted strength, since you are *the heavenly bread of incorruption.*”

You are by nature the great Savior of the world and you have taught knowledge to all. By nourishing the people with words of truth you have guided humans to the path of salvation, giving them knowledge of justice. Spiritually, they have nurtured their souls but now they need to provide for the body, and especially the little children and their mothers. Concerned at this, we beg you to nourish them, Redeemer, because you are *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

“But, Lord, we see now how these people love you, since they cherish your words above every pleasure. But, if evening comes, they will have to go back, for there is no way of finding bread in the desert, and they are likely to collapse, unable to bear the lack of food. Send them away for we are gravely worried. Let them depart, let them buy food before evening. You have taught your disciples and apostles to have compassion on all, for you are *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.”

Now let us hear what the Lord said to the disciples. “Since you are worried, give food and bread to the hungry. They do not need to buy provisions from others. Quickly, then, feed them all here!” They answered him at once and said, “The crowd gathered here is enormous, and if we wanted to buy bread for them, O Compassionate One, two hundred days’ wages would not be enough for them. But you alone are by nature *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.”

“As we have learned, and we do not hide the truth from you, Teacher, you will find we have nothing but five barley loaves. Moreover none of us brought them into the desert. A boy here in the crowd brought them with him. We have no other food, O Lover of mankind. For such a vast crowd, O Most Compassionate, how can these five loaves be sufficient? He has in addition two small fishes. But hasten and feed them, for you are *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.”

But when Christ heard these words from his disciples, he answered them, “You err, not knowing that, as I am Creator of the world, I care for the world. And now I know very well what these people need. I see this desert and the setting sun. It was I who fixed the course of the sun. I am aware of the exhaustion of the multitude here. I know what I am going to do for them. I will cure their hunger myself, as I am *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.”

You sometimes think that I reason like a human being, not knowing that I am aware of all things before they happen. As powerful Lord I know beforehand what is hidden. I knew before that you had no bread, but I adapted myself to your plan when I said to you, ‘Provide nourishment for everyone here.’ With your misplaced worry you think like human beings. Why are you worried, my disciples; do you not know that I offer myself ungrudgingly to all, as *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

Do you not remember how my Virgin Mother asked me at the wedding at Cana, saying, ‘My Son, those who are giving this wedding feast have no wine here’? And how I, persuaded by my Mother, as God changed the nature of the waters, gave them wine without a vine? Therefore I have the power to nourish with bread, at a mere nod, this whole multitude as well; for, by nature, I am the Vine, and I am for the hungry *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

“As humans you cannot, by taking thought, now provide food. Either feed the people, you who are so worried, or, if you are quite incapable of feeding them, keep silent. For I alone take thought for all, as I am the good Creator, the God before time began. And I provide food for all flesh, while you, having seen the multitude, are worried and do not consider the One who gives, that, from in high, I offer myself to all, granting them *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

“What you are thinking, what you are now saying to yourselves, I know beforehand. As you see the people, the place, and the hour, you are thinking, ‘Who will feed the whole multitude in the desert?’ Therefore, friends, know clearly who I am by nature. I nourished Israel in the desert and I gave them bread from heaven. I brought water from a rock in a waterless place. In addition to all this, I provided them ungrudgingly with quail, for I am *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

Together my word and my will can save the universe, but, so that you may know my power now as well, make all the men and little children with the women at once sit down in order, and, as God, I will show the desert bearing fruit. With me as the farmer producing the fruit at a nod, you will be shown as workers and servants, and I shall feed the whole multitude, because I alone, offered to all, am *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.”

Hearing what Christ had said, the apostles hastened, and at his order immediately made the multitude sit down in order, as was fitting. Grass provided them with seats and tables. Christ then has the five loaves brought and, having looked toward the Father, says at once, “It is your works I am working, for I am your son. For at the beginning, with you and the Spirit I created the whole world, as *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.”

See how, like lords at a table, Christ’s slaves waited for Jesus the servant and found him at once. For the Master blessed the five loaves, saying to them with an unseen voice, “Increase perceptibly and multiply and now nourish all those present here.” At once the loaves obeyed the Lord. They gave birth invisibly, as Christ told them to, he who is *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

No human mind can fully reason out this wonder, how the visible loaves flowed on invisibly. Where did their ineffable increase occur – in the hands of the disciples or was it on the tables? Since I do not know the manner of the inexpressible sight, I

keep silence at the wonder, while by faith I correct my mind, for I do not apprehend the depth of the mystery, as I now see the twelve baskets filled with fragments, as he alone knows, *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

So also multiply for us all the multitude of your compassion and just as then, O Savior, you satisfied with wisdom and fed with power the multitude in the desert, satisfy us all with justice. Strengthen us in your faith, O Lord. Nourish us all, as you are merciful, and give us your grace and forgiveness of offenses at the intercessions of the Mother of God, because you alone are good and full of pity as *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

We all owe you a hymn of praise, O Christ, Savior without sin, and we believe that you, being God before the ages, born from the Virgin, remained what you were. You alone know the wonder of your birth. As for us, not knowing how the loaves gave birth, how can we comprehend with human hearts your birth, O Saviour, from her who know not wedlock? Therefore we all glorify you, for you are the God of the universe, and *the heavenly bread of incorruption*.

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion 13 “On the Five Loaves”*

Icon of the Theotokos “Hogedetria Soumela”



At *Trapezunta* (today Trabzon) in Pontus, built on a high rock, is the [Holy Monastery of Panagia Soumela](#). Etymologically, the name of the monastery is derived from the name of the mountain it's built on which is called Mela. In Greek, 'stou mela' means 'at Mela', and in the Pontic dialect it is pronounced 'sou Mela'. Hence, Panagia at Mt. Mela. The existing icon of Panagia Soumela was iconographed by the [Evangelist Luke](#) who was both a physician and an iconographer. According to tradition, whenever Luke drew icons of Panagia, the Holy Mother was very pleased and blessed his works.

Furthermore, she encouraged him to draw more icons. When Luke died, his disciple named Ananias, took the icon and transferred it to the Church in Athens dedicated to Panagia. The icon was venerated as *Panagia Athinotissa*.

Two Athenian monks were called by the Virgin to follow Panagia Athinotissa from the Church in Athens to Mount Mela in Pontus of [Asia Minor](#), a region in current day Turkey. Their names were Barnabas, and his acolyte Sophronios. At Mt. Mela, the icon was found at the end of the fourth century A.D. in a cave, and the monastery was built at this place to the glory of God. The icon was renamed '*Panagia Soumela*'.

The monastery was inaugurated by the Bishop of Trapezunta in 386 A.D. During the decline of the Byzantine Empire, the monastery was a centre of education. The monastery was pillaged many times but was always rebuilt, with the latest construction occurring around 644 A.D. Trapezunta was occupied by the Turks in 1461 and so was the monastery. Despite these difficult times, the monks remained in the monastery unshaken in their faith and tradition. The monks in the monastery were finally forced to flee in 1923 following the barbaric period of the genocide of all Greeks in Asia Minor including Pontus. Before fleeing the monastery, certain items were buried in the front yard of the Church of St. Barbara which was built at a short distance from the monastery by Saint Sophronios. The little church was only one kilometre from the monastery. These items were the icon of [Panagia Soumela](#) painted by the Evangelist Luke, the handwritten Gospel copied on parchment by St. Christopher, and the Holy Cross with the honorable wood donated by Emperor [Manuel Comnenos](#). This event took place in August of 1923.

In 1931, on the feast day of the Dormition of the Theotokos at Mega Spelion (the Great Cave) of Kalavryta, Peloponnesos in Greece, many people gathered for this great feast day. They gathered to pray before another icon of the Evangelist Luke, Panagia Speliotissa. Amidst the crowds were many [Pontic Greeks](#) and the Greek Prime Minister, [Eleftherios Venizelos](#) (1864- 1936). Metropolitan Polycarp of Xanthe mentioned the hidden icon of [Panagia Soumela](#) to the Greek Prime Minister. Upon hearing this account, Venizelos was touched and made a promise that he would do whatever was possible to retrieve the icon. During the same year, Eleftherios Venizelos met the Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Inonu, and asked for his permission to send monks to the Mt. Mela monastery to retrieve the icon and the other sacred treasures. Father Ambrosios, who was one of the monks of Panagia Soumela, was chosen by the [Metropolitan Chrysanthos](#) of Trapezunta to undertake this special journey. Father Ambrosios set out to go to Turkey on October 22, 1931. Upon arriving at the sacred site, Father Ambrosios was moved with tears. The laborious task of excavating began. Turkish soldiers and Greeks helped, including Father Ambrosios. Soon the hidden icon was unearthed along with the other sacred objects. They were all returned to Athens and deposited at the Benaki Museum in Athens for 20 years.

In 1950, [Dr Philon Ktenides](#) encouraged fellow Pontic Greeks in Greece to build a new church for Panagia Soumela. The church was built on a site amid the Macedonian mountains in Greece. This site was Kastania of Vermio. It was chosen because it reminded Dr Ktenides of the wild and natural beauty of the heights of Mt. Mela in Turkey.

In 1951 the icon was transferred from the Benaki Museum to Kastania in Macedonia. The miraculous icon was enthroned at Kastania on the 15th of August 1952. Even though the new home of the icon is called the Monastery of Soumela, there are no monks or nuns who live in this remote mountain site. The Church of the Dormition may be visited by pilgrims and tourists. Every year on the 15th of August which is the feast day of the Dormition of the Theotokos, thousands of pilgrims from around the world travel to this Monastery at Mt. Vermion to venerate the holy icon. (*from pontosworld.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

New Martyrs Archimandrite [Augustine](#) of Orans Monastery, Proto-priest Nicholas of Nizhni-Novgorod, and 15 people with them (1918).

New Hieromartyr Gregory priest and Martyr Eugene and Michael (1937).

Martyrs [Hermes](#), [Serapion](#), and [Polyaenus](#) of Rome (2nd c.).

Hieromartyr [Emilian](#), Martyrs [Hilarion](#), [Dionysius](#), and [Hermippus](#), and others (about 1,000) of Italy (4th c.).

Sts. [John](#) (674) and [George](#) (683), patriarchs of Constantinople.

Venerable [Macarius](#) the Monk of Pelekete (830).

++Repose of Venerable [John](#), abbot of [Rila](#) (946) (*Bulgaria*).

+Venerable [Barnabas](#) and his nephew Venerable [Sophronius](#), monks of Mt. Mela near Trebizond (412) (*Greek*).

+Venerable [Christopher](#), abbot of Mt. Mela Monastery (694) (*Greek*).

Venerable [Sophronius](#) of St. Anne's Skete on Mt. Athos (*Greek*).

Venerable [Arsenius](#) the New of Paros (1877) (*Greek*).

Martyr [Juliana](#) near Strobilus (*Greek*).

Martyr [Leo](#), drowned near Myra in Lycia (*Greek*).

Four [Venerable Ascetics](#)

St. [Christodoulos](#) the Philosopher, called the Ossetian, of Georgia (12th c.) (*Georgia*).

+St. [Daig](#) MacCairill, bishop of Iniscaoine-Deghadh (560)

St [Evan](#) of Ayshire, hermit (9th c.) (Inan)

+New Martyr [Constantine](#) of Kappua (1610)

++New Martyr [Matthew](#) of Crete (1697)

New Hieromartyr [Agapios](#) of Galatista (1752)

New Martyr [George](#) of Kastoria (1809 or 1815)

Kollyvades [Agapios](#) (1844) and Porphyrios (1852) of Santorini
Martyr [Agapitus](#) of Palestrina (Italy) (274)
St. [Firminus](#), bishop of Metz (France)(c. 496)
Martyrs [John](#) and Crispus, priests of Rome (c. 300)
St. [Milo](#), hermit at Fontenelle (France)(c. 735)
[300](#) Martyrs of Utica (N. Africa) (3rd c. under Valerian)

Social Team for August 25

Team 3 - Pani Stacy, Victor Barzykin, Tatiana Chumak. 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 & Ia, 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.)