

# SOBORNOST

**St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church**

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*American Carpatho-Russian  
Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## SERVICES



**Wed: Reader Vespers 6:30 PM**

**Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM | Vespers 5 PM**

**Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM | Sunday School 9:30 AM**

**~ Divine Liturgy 10 AM ~**

**December 1, 2024 – 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost (11<sup>th</sup>  
Sunday of Luke) | Holy Prophet Nahum**

*Nahum the Elkoshite breathed forth words \* of wounded longing sprinkled with myrrh. \* On the first of December the living lament Nahum.*

Nahum was from Elkosh beyond Bapareim, and was of the tribe of Symeon. Scholars have attempted to identify Elkosh with several cities, including the modern Alqosh of Assyria in northern Iraq and Capernaum of northern Galilee (the latter is thought to be named after him). The ancient synagogue in Alqosh reportedly contains the tomb of the Prophet Nahum, although Nahum's bones have been relocated to a nearby church. He flourished about 600 years before Christ. After the death of the Prophet Jonah he prophesied and gave signs concerning the Ninevites, saying, "Nineveh shall perish by sweet waters, and ascending fire;" and this actually took place. For the river, which circles Nineveh, flooded it after an earthquake, and drowned it. And fire that came from the wilderness, consumed the highest point of the city. Alexander Maurokordatos (1636-1709), in his *History of the Jews*, says that Nahum lived during the reign of King Zedekiah of Jerusalem and was from Galilee, where he settled after the destruction of Samaria. Although the Ninevites repented during the time of Jonah, they again fell away to their

former sins. Therefore the punishment that God did not send them due to their repentance, the same they received due to their wickedness. For this reason, forty years after the repentance of the Ninevites, they became enslaved by the Babylonians. Since the Ninevites were taken as slaves by the Babylonians, the city of Nineveh was consumed by fire, and drowned by the sea. Having prophesied these things against Nineveh, and after writing his prophetic book, which consists of three chapters, he reposed in peace and was buried in his homeland. It should be noted that with the prophecies the Prophet makes in regards to the destruction of Nineveh and Assyria, he comforts the Israelites, showing that God punishes those who formerly punished them. A portion of a relic of the Prophet Nahum is said to be at the Athonite Monastery of Simonopetra. The name Nahum means "comforter." (*adapted from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 2:4-10 EOB**

Brethren, God who is rich in mercy, on account of his great love by which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved! God raised us up with him, and granted us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come, he might show the overflowing treasure of his grace in kindness toward us, in Christ Jesus. Yes, by grace you have been saved through faith, not by yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one would boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to walk in them.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 18:18-27 EOB**

At that time, certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asked him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good, except one - God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" The ruler replied, "I have observed all these things from my youth." When Jesus heard this, he said, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have, distribute it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when the man heard these things, he became very distressed because he was very rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become very distressed, said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter into the Kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone who is wealthy to enter into the Kingdom of God!" Those who heard this exclaimed, "Then, who can be saved?" But Jesus replied, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

## **Homily on the Gospel for the Tenth Sunday of Luke**

By St. Luke, Metropolitan of Simferopol

Listen again to the Gospel reading that was read today, let us delve into it, for I want to explain it to you....

I think that many of you were surprised by the answer of our Lord Jesus Christ to a young man who questioned Him and called Him a Good Teacher: "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God."

These words sound as if the Lord was instructing people that He is not God, that there is no need to give Him Divine honors. But if we think like this, then we will talk about another passage in the Gospel, in which the Lord Jesus Christ did not forbid His apostles to call Him the Son of God, i.e. God?

When He called His future apostle Nathanael and in a conversation with him showed Divine omniscience, Nathanael, shocked by this, exclaimed: "Rabbi! You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel!" and Christ did not forbid him to call Him the Son of God.

When the Lord Jesus Christ asked His disciples who they considered Him to be, Peter answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And Christ not only did not forbid him to call Himself that way, but said: "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonas, because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you, but by My Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).

But even more than that, we read in the Gospel that the Lord, in the presence of all the people in the synagogue, more than once called Himself directly God. There, when one day the scribes and Pharisees surrounded Him and demanded that He reveal who He was, He answered: "The same that spoke unto you from the beginning."

Who, then, exists from the beginning, if not only God? With this answer, He called Himself God. And another time he said even more definitely to those who asked Him: "I and the Father are One." Is this not declaring Himself to be God? I am one with My Heavenly Father. This answer so angered those who listened that they seized stones to throw at Him for blasphemy. But Jesus said to them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"'? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" (John 10:34-36), and the hands that held the stones dropped.

How can one explain that the Lord Jesus Christ allowed His disciples to call Him the Son of God, that He Himself openly called Himself God, One with the Father,

from the beginning Existing, and this young man who questioned Him and turned to Him with the words "Good Teacher", He stopped, saying: "No one is good but One, that is, God," as if directly denying His Divinity, forbidding to call oneself God, even to call oneself good.

How do we explain this? From my poor mind I will try to explain it to you. This means that it is one thing to allow His disciples, His apostles, and moreover in private, to call Him the Son of God; another thing is to call Himself one God with the Father, from the beginning Existing; and another thing is to allow everyone to call Him by the Divine name.

What would happen if the Lord Jesus Christ unhindered allowed every person from the crowd, like this young man who turned to the Lord, to call Him by that name that belongs only to God?

What would be? It would be very stupid. His numerous enemies and all those who did not believe in Him would immediately accuse Him, from the very beginning, of allowing Himself to be called God. This would stir up the hatred and bitterness of His enemies; this would have prevented many from following Him, being enlightened by His miracles, and believing in Him. This would be a heavy, essential handicap in the great work of Christ. What was permissible and might have borne good fruit at one time might be harmful at another time and under other circumstances.

At the beginning of His ministry, the Lord Himself did not call Himself God, and if He did not object when the apostles called Him the Son of God, it was only among the apostles, only between Him and the twelve apostles, not among the people; this was unknown to the people and could not tempt anyone.

The Lord Jesus openly called Himself from the beginning Eternal, and at the end of His ministry One with the Heavenly Father, when the time for this came.

Here is how to understand the answer of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God."

You have just heard the conversation with the young man. In response to his question, the Lord reminded him of the commandments given through Moses on Mount Sinai. The young man replied that he kept all these commandments from a very early age, fulfilled everything. What else am I missing? When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." The young man bowed his head low and left, for he was very rich, and did not want and could not fulfill this command of Christ.

Then the Lord, addressing the disciples and the people, said: "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

This answer startled and surprised all those who listened, even the apostles, and they asked: "Who then can be saved? But He said: "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

How to explain the question of the apostles? Only by the fact that the ancient Jews considered wealth to be God's blessing, and people who were worthy of wealth, this blessing of God, were considered pleasing to God and righteous - and suddenly the Lord says that the rich cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Lord replied that "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

How can we explain these words of Christ: why did He say that the rich cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven, just as a camel cannot pass through an eye of a needle?

I think that the only explanation can be found in the fact that a rich man who does not part with his wealth amid the poverty and disasters surrounding him, who does not squander his wealth to help the perishing, is disgusted by God for his mercilessness and therefore access to the Kingdom of God is closed to him. And if, Christ added, that what is impossible for people is possible with God, then this means that God can correct even an unmerciful heart with one word of His, for we know many examples of how the word of God shook the hearts of people and radically changed their whole life. There are many vivid examples of this in the lives of the saints. I will cite only the legend of Saint Anthony the Great.

Once in the temple he heard the current Gospel reading, and hearing the demand to sell and give away his estate to the poor - and he was the son of very rich parents who gave him an extremely high education and left their huge estate as a legacy - and yet, without reasoning at all and not hesitating, he carried out the order of Christ and, having distributed everything to the poor, he himself went into the wild African desert, where he labored for many decades. He fought with demons, with the devil himself, achieved the greatest spiritual perfection and became one of those who should be called an angel in the flesh.

This will serve as an example for us. Although there are no rich among us, we have only a small income, but this cannot be an excuse. We must remember about Anthony the Great and, as far as we can, fulfill the requirement of Christ, distributing what we have to the poor. In this, may our Lord and God Jesus Christ help you all. Amen. (*trans. John Sanidopoulos*)

## **Homily on the Monastic and Married Way of Life**

by Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

We divide people into monks and married people, and life into monastic and married, with the result that we praise the monastic life, which we regard as better and more suited to keeping God's commandments, while we disparage married life as not suitable for the practice of God's will.

Indeed we know very well that the Church praises both ways of life, both the monastic life and the married life. But this does not mean that one is praised at the expense of the other. And at this point we must say that the interpretation of the Parable of the Talents applies.

It can be maintained that in the Church the people are not divided simply into unmarried and married, but into people who live in Christ and people who do not live in Christ. Thus on the one hand we have people who have the Holy Spirit and on the other hand people who do not have the Holy Spirit. Moreover, in the early Church, as it seems in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, all the Christians, unmarried and married, lived like monks, because even marriage has its asceticism. Therefore, if some monk criticizes marriage in Christ, he shows that he has a problem with the monastic life, and if a married person criticizes and looks askance at the monastic life, it means that he has a problem with the way in which he is living his life. A good monk never criticizes what God praises and a good married person never criticizes anything that God praises, such as the monastic life. It is characteristic that the best homily about Virginité is said to have been composed by St. Gregory of Nyssa, who was married: and a man who was unmarried, St. Amphilochios of Ikonium, wrote excellent things about the married life. Moreover let us not forget that St. Paphnoutios defended marriage for the Clergy in the First Ecumenical Council.

In his homily St. Amphilochios of Ikonium shows that the Christian is a catholic man, in other words, whole. He praises virginity and marriage. In speaking about virginity he says of marriage: "The worthy marriage towers above every earthly gift, such as a tree in fruit. . . as a root of virginity, as a cultivator of the rational and living branches". Then he says: "Remove the worthy marriage and you do not find the flower of virginity". Moreover, the comparison is between two worthy things, because St. Amphilochios says: "Saying these things, we are not introducing a fight between virginity and marriage; we admire both as mutually indebted". To conclude, he says characteristically: "For without devout knowledge of divine things neither is virginity modest nor marriage worthy".

And the holy Chrysostom teaches many things about this subject. He says: "For our married people have everything in common with the monks except marriage".

All people should adapt themselves to Christ's commandments. Therefore the holy Father says characteristically: "If we are temperate neither marriage nor nourishment nor anything else will prevent us from being able to be well-pleasing to God". If marriage and raising children was going to hinder us on the path of virtue, the creator of all things would not have brought marriage into our life".

What Basil the Great says is also characteristic: "We people, monks and married, are all required to obey the Gospel."

Therefore we cannot justify our indolence by the particular way of life which we have chosen, nor can we criticize and dismiss another way of life which is not like our own. To be sure, there are degrees and spiritual ages. (*Translated by John Sanidopoulos*)

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

Prooimion I – Christ our Lord, you once called a harlot “daughter.” Now name me a son of repentance, since I beg you to rescue me from the squalor of my sins.

Prooimion II – The harlot clasped your feet in contrition and cried out in repentance to you, Christ our Lord, who knew her secret sins: “I once led many men astray with a glance, but now how can I lift my eyes to you? I once enraged you, my Creator, with my sins, but now how can I beg you for compassion? Lord, receive this perfume as my contrite plea and grant me deliverance from the shame for the squalor of my sins.”

The harlot once saw the words of Christ wafting everywhere like aromatic spice, giving a new breath of life to all who believed. Then she despised the stench of her sins. She acknowledged her shameful deeds and felt the pain rising from them. All those who lust are doomed to writhe in agony. Lord, I am one of them, worthy of the lash. Terrified of the rack, the harlot abandoned a harlot's ways; yet I, though terrified, remain mired in the squalor of my sins.

I never have the desire to walk away from evil. I do not remind myself of the terrors I am destined to see. I do not think about the compassion of Christ: how he searches for me even when I deliberately stray. For my sake he scourges every spot. For my sake the one who feeds us all ate with a Pharisee. He made that table an altar of sacrifice. Christ sat there and forgave the debts of all who owed him, so that every debtor would gain the courage to approach him and say, “Lord, rescue me from the squalor of my sins.”

The aroma that arose from Christ's table wafted over the harlot. She had been wildly dissolute, now firmly controlled. At first, a hateful bitch; at last, a loving lamb; slave, then daughter; lustful, then pure. For this reason she hurried to the

table with bounding step. She left the crumbs untouched, but took the Lord's bread. The harlot hungered more than the Canaanite woman, because she had to nourish a soul starving for faith. Yet she was not redeemed by a cry for help; she was saved by silence. For the harlot spoke with her tears, "Lord, raise me from the squalor of my sins."

My brothers, I wish to examine the heart of that wise woman and understand how the light of the Lord shone in it. Jesus is the epitome of beauty, the Creator of all that is beautiful. Thus, the harlot desired him even before she saw his face. This is what the Gospel says: When Christ, was dining at the Pharisee's home, a certain woman heard of his visit and rushed to him. Her thoughts pushed her toward repentance: "Come, my soul, the moment you seek is at hand. The one who will cleanse you is near. Why do you remain mired in the squalor of your sins?"

"I am going to meet him. He has come to help me. I reject my former lovers; he is the one I totally desire now. I shall anoint my new Lord with perfumes and caress him. I shall weep, wail, and convince him to live me purely. I shall respond to the passion of my Lover, and, just as he wishes to be loved, so shall I cherish him. I shall grieve and bend in sorrow; this is what my Lover wants. I shall be silent and shroud my face; he is pleased by this. I scorn my old ways, so that I can bring joy to my new Lord. No hesitation! I draw new breath as I renounce the squalor of my sins."

I am going to meet him, to be bathed in light, as the Bible says. I shall draw near my God, and I shall not be put to shame. He will not berate me by saying: 'Until this moment you have lived in darkness; now you come to see me, your Sun.' And so I shall take perfume and hurry to him. I shall make the Pharisee's home a hall of lights. There I shall wash away my transgressions. There I shall be cleansed of my sins. With tears and oil and perfume I shall mix my bath. I shall wash and scour myself clean – and escape the squalor of my sins."

"Long ago the harlot Rahab sheltered Hebrew spies. This loyal woman received life as the reward for her daring, because Joshua, their commander, was a figure of true life – his glorious name was just like that of my beloved Jesus. Then a harlot welcomed spies who were pure and loyal; now, another harlot seeks to anoint the Virgin Son of a Virgin. Once Rahab set free those whom she had hidden; now I shall keep forever the one whom I have desired. My Lord is not a spy in a strange land; he watches over all creation. I shall grasp him and rise from the slime and squalor of my sins."

"Now the moment which I longed to see has come. This day shines on me in the fullness of time. My Lord God is dining in the house of Simon the Pharisee. I shall cry there as Hannah wept for her barrenness. And even if Simon imagines



that I am drunk – as Eli once accused Hannah – I shall stand firm and pray. I shall cry out in silence: 'Lord, I do not beg for a child; I seek my own soul, which I have lost.' Just as Samuel, son of a childless woman, took away her shame, so Emmanuel, son of a Virgin Mother, rescue this harlot from the squalor of my sins."

The faithful harlot steeled herself with such words, then hurried off to purchase some perfume. She stood before the merchant and cried, "Give me the best you have – perfume worthy of my new Lord, whom I live honestly and purely. He has inflamed my limbs, my mind, my heart. Do not quibble with me about the price. I would cut through my skin and bones to have a gift worthy to give to the one who is anxious to cleanse me from the debris of the squalor of my sins."

When he saw the ardor and passion of the blessed woman, the merchant spoke, "Tell me, who is your new lover? Who has enthralled you to such a pitch? What does he have to merit my precious perfume?" The holy harlot immediately lifted her voice and cried out to the perfume merchant: "You fool! How can you say, 'What does he have?' Nothing can possibly match what he is worth. Neither heaven nor earth nor the entire universe can be compared with the Lord who rushed to rescue me from the squalor of my sins."

"He is the Son of David – and so supremely beautiful. He is the Son of God, God himself – and so totally desirable. I have not seen him, but I have heard of him and am stunned by my vision of him whose nature is incomprehensible. Once Michal saw David and desired him; now, even before I see the Son of David, I love and desire him. Michal abandoned all her royal wealth to go to David, who was then a pauper. Now I scorn my sinful riches and seek to buy perfume for the Lord who cleanses my soul from the squalor of my sins."

The harlot then cut short her surge of explanation, and joyfully took her marvelous perfume. She entered the dining hall of Simon the Pharisee – rushing as if invited to anoint this guests. When Simon saw what was happening, he began to berate the Lord, the harlot, and himself: the Lord, who did not recoil from the woman approaching him; the harlot, who showed no shame in falling before his guest; himself, who never dreamed he would entertain such guests – most especially the harlot, who cried out, "Save me, Lord, from the squalor of my sins."

What folly! Simon thought: "This is all my fault. I invited Jesus as if he were one of the prophets, yet he does not recognize a woman whom we all know well. He does not know her. Were he a prophet, he would know her." The Lord who sees our deepest hearts saw his host's bounding thoughts and immediately raised himself as the rod of correction: "Simon, listen to the words of blessing coming to you and to the woman who is crying out in tears, 'Lord, raise me from the squalor of my sins.'"

“You blame me because I did not rebuff a woman eager to flee her transgressions. But you are wrong, Simon. Your anger is not just. Now pay attention to what I say; ponder my words: A money-lender had two debtors; one owed fifty shekels, the other only five. Since neither had money to repay his debt, the money-lender remitted whatever each owed. Now, tell me, which of the two should love the money-lender more? Who ought to have cried out, 'You have saved me from the squalor of my sins'?”

The wise Pharisee listened, then replied, “Teacher of Truth, it is obvious to anyone that one debtor ought to love his master more – the one whose far greater debt was forgiven.” Then the Lord spoke to Simon: “Your answer is correct. It is just as you have said. The guest to whom you did not offer the oil of hospitality anoints me with perfume. The guest whose feet you did not wash bathes mine in tears. The guest whom you did not clasp in welcome kisses me and shouts, 'As I embrace your feet, my Lord, do not let me sink into the squalor of my sins.'”

“Now that I have shown you, my fine host, that she loves me more, I shall interpret my parable. Who is the money-lender, and who are those two debtors? One of them is you, Simon; the other is the weeping woman here. I have loaned to each of you – not only to you two, but to all the human race. For I have given every person whatever he possesses: soul, breath, intellect, body and life. I am the Master of the Universe which you inhabit, Simon, so plead and cry, 'Deliver me from the squalor of my sins.'”

“You cannot repay me what you owe. So, be silent, and your debts will be forgiven. Do not condemn the harlot who has condemned herself; do not debase a woman who has debased herself. Enough! I require no payment from either you or her, for I have come to remit your debts and those of all men. You have lived a life of law, Simon, but you are in my debt. Now come into the presence of my charity so you can repay me. Look upon the harlot here as if she were all my people crying out, 'I draw new breath as I renounce the squalor of my sins.'”

Now go in peace, my brothers. May you always be free of any debt. Go forward. You have no obligations. You have been set free. Never take on the yoke of slavery again. Your debt-contract has been torn in two. Never sign another one. Lord Jesus, let me, your Melodist, also hear these words, since I cannot repay the debt I owe to you. I have squandered both the principal and the interest. Do not demand back what you have given me: the principal is my soul, the interest is my body. Come, redeem me in your mercy. Raise me, deliver me from the squalor of my sins.

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion O.10 On the Sinful Woman* (Lk. 7:36-50)

## **Blessed Varenka of Sergach**

Blessed Varenka, Barbara Pavlovna Shulayeva, was born in 1914 in the village of Maidany, Pilninsky uyezd, Nizhni-Novgorod province, into a peasant family. The family worked on weekdays and went to church on Sundays. Varenka, who was no different from other peasant children, also went to church with her parents.

But once, when she was thirteen years old, she saw in her sleep a church and a woman in monastic vesture, and many people around her. The eyes of all were directed upon her; they went up to her reverently and received her blessing. And Varenka very much wanted to receive her blessing. She got up after the others - there were nuns there, as well as priests - and went closer and closer to her. Finally she came up to her and asked: "Give the blessing." "No, I only bless the weekdays, who go to church on weekdays."

And such sorrow gripped the heart of the girl, she so wanted to receive her blessing, that from that day she began to go to church every day. And so that people should not laugh at her for going to church every day like a nun, Varenka wrapped her face in a scarf and went to the church through the kitchen gardens.

Some time later, she for the first time fell asleep in a special way and slept for several days. In her sleep she saw the habitations of Paradise and hell and what awaits a man after his death. "Do you remember," she said to her mother on awakening, "when I threw up my hands? That was when I saw a woman who was being flayed with iron combs. Then she was thrown into a boiling cauldron, and I was frightened."

Sometimes she told people what the Lord had been pleased to show her. Matthew Leontiev died in Maidany, and since it was a time of famine his relatives did not want to have a funeral repast on the fortieth day. When Varenka fell asleep she saw him standing up to the knees in a fiery river. "Tell our people to help me," he said. Varenka told this to his relatives, and they had a funeral repast. After this she saw him again in her sleep, but he was now standing on the bank.

The news of her unusual gift spread among the Orthodox, and they began to come to her so as to learn the lot of their dead relatives. An old woman called Olga lived in the village. She was extremely poor and weak. She had a wattle fence which was rickety; she cut wood with a mattock, and her courtyard was always covered with snow - she didn't have the strength or time to clear it because she still had a horse and cow, without which not one peasant household could survive. She had worked all her life and her life had been hard. And when she died Varenka saw her soul in Paradise.

Sometimes when they asked her about something, she did not reply immediately, but only the next time she woke up.

A few days before she would go to sleep, an Angel would appear to her and warn her not to leave the house in case she fell down somewhere with nobody to look after her. When she fell asleep she became as if dead, so that the limbs of her body grew numb and became immobile.

Once in the church after the end of the Liturgy, Varenka said to Anastasia Astafyeva, with whom she was friendly: "Let's go home, I'm going to fall asleep now." "I haven't yet gone up to the cross," she replied. "Quick," said Varenka hurriedly. And indeed they hadn't reached the square before Varenka began to fall asleep. They had to go for a sledge to bring her to her house.

Sometimes while she was asleep she would describe in detail what she was seeing at that moment. These stories were written down and filled a thick notebook. But during the persecutions, for fear of the atheists, those close to her threw the notebook into the stove.

These revelations took place regularly in the course of almost ten years. She said that she had seen the Mother of God, that she had been led by St. Nicholas, that there is a fiery river which every soul must pass over after death, and she showed a place on her hand which had been burned to the bone when a drop from the river fell on her.

The authorities heard about Varenka. Members of the Komsomol used to come to her house while she was sleeping, they even beat her in the hope of awaking her and 'uncovering the deception'. Then doctors began to come from Gorky (Nizhni-Novgorod); they gave her fast-acting injections with the same aim as the komsomolites. They injected her with such strong doses and so often that when she woke up she couldn't raise her hands.

But, whatever they did, the atheists were unable to break her sleep. Then they decided to take her to a hospital so as to continue their experiments there. Once they had already come to the girl and were trying to lift her, but they found her so heavy that they couldn't tear her away from the bed. "It doesn't matter," they said. "Tomorrow we'll come with the car and take her together with her bed."

After their departure Varenka woke up, and her mother, bitterly complaining that she could do nothing, told her what the doctors were intending to do. On the same day Varenka got her things together and left the house. And for the next several years she wandered round the holy places of the Volga region, sometimes alone, sometimes with some friends.

Varenka was a member of the Catacomb Church. She refused to have a passport or to take the pension which they imposed on her. When Metropolitan Sergius' declaration was published in 1927, she went round the churches reproaching the

priests who accepted the declaration. Once she even rebuked a bishop, although he became very angry.

A certain sergianist priest Ioann from Nizhni-Novogorod greatly venerated her and used to visit her. He always wanted to give her communion, but she said: "I've already corrected myself" (that is received communion, for she did not receive communion in the sergianist churches). When he died she wept very much, because she knew what happened to him after death. Once the Lord showed her all the renovationists and Metropolitan Sergius. They were in a dark place and their hands were bound.

Once the priest Peter sent her the Holy Gifts. He put them in a specially adapted icon. When they came to arrest Fr. Peter in the house where he was hiding he suddenly had a heart attack and died.

In 1936, when she was only just twenty-two, she went with some friends to the elder Ioann Ardatovsky, who was famed throughout the region for his righteous life and gift of clairvoyance. He said to her: "Go to Sarov - it's not far from here." But her friends did not want to accompany her; they were in a hurry to go home. And so she, fearing that her mother would worry about her, did not go to Sarov. "I'd better go home first, to warn Mama."

She left the house to go to Pilna, where she lived, fleeing persecution, with the Opariny sisters. She left them with the girl Damasha, and went to the station to go to Sarov. Six policemen were lying in wait for them in a remote place. One of them had been her persecutor for a long time; his name was Gavrilov. Varenka understood that they wouldn't let her go. And she prayed to the Mother of God.

The policemen beat her mercilessly, kicking her and hitting her with iron rods; they beat her in such a way that her face was turned into a purple mask, and blood poured from her ears and mouth. When they were preparing to dishonour her, the Mother of God defended her - an invisible force stopped them from approaching her.

They retreated, and took the girls to the police-station, but they did not abandon the thought of punishing her. When Varenka asked for a drink, they gave her instead, in the guise of medicine, some arsenic powder in the water. But Domasha, who was being kept in the police-station together with Varenka, stealthily poured away the arsenic, and gave her water. The policemen were waiting for the poison to work, but when they saw no signs of her being poisoned, they said: "Well, you're a tenacious one. Probably a saint." From that time Varenka was deprived of the use of her legs, and spent the next 40 years until her death lying down. She had control only over the upper half of her body. "There's my Sarov, my disobedience," she would say.

Her falling asleep also stopped. But now she was persecuted by the authorities, so she couldn't stay long in one place, and had to go from place to place, whatever the weather. In the winter they transported her in a basket attached to the sledge. One night when the weather was bad Varenka fell out of the basket into a snowdrift, and they didn't discover it immediately. They returned, but wandered round the whole night, having lost the way.

Varenka had to suffer not only from the atheists, but also from those close to her. At first she was looked after by Annushka, who was nicknamed Handless, and by Nyura. When Annushka didn't like something she beat the sick Varenka cruelly, while Nyura soon married, taking all Varenka's things except her icons and the bed on which she lay. Soon the house in which she lived with her husband burned down. Then they built another one - and it also burned down. Only then did the mother of Nyura understand that the Lord was punishing her because of the sick Varenka, and she came to ask forgiveness for her daughter.

Finally, Varenka managed to buy a small, but well-built house on the money collected by the Orthodox. Many people visited her, some sought her prayers, others - her spiritual advice. The authorities noticed that many people were visiting her, and when they found out why they decided to evict her. They began to demand from the former owner of the house that he return the money and take back the house. Frightened, the former owner agreed. But God is not mocked. The next day the former owner died, and the house remained Varenka's.

Once Darya Zaikina came to Varenka, sat with her for a while and then got ready to leave. But Varenka asked her: "Don't go. There are so many evil spirits in the house..." And she covered her head with the blanket. "Varenka, look at me," said Darya. "I can't open my eyes, they're so terrible."

At this point a woman arrived, began to pray and said: "Go where you came from." But the demon replied in a coarse masculine voice: "None of us are there now, we're all here, on earth. Whoever has no straps we do whatever we like with." Then he said, turning to Varenka: "Drop it, take it off." And Varenka replied: "I won't drop it, I won't take it off" (They were talking about her prayer-rope and cross.) Twice the demon repeated this, and twice Varenka replied. Suddenly he said with hatred: "Ach, what a hunk of bread you are! You've hung up an internal lock, otherwise I'd wear you out completely!" Then he lifted her up and shook her strongly.

The demon tormented her for days, trying to frighten her. "Mother of God," she cried, "help me!" At that time many demons came to the house, trying to frighten her. And they retreated only when the Queen of Heaven herself appeared and placed an epitrachelion on her head. At the appearance of the All-Holy one the demons disappeared in a puff of smoke.

All of Varenka's spiritual fathers died in prison. One of them was the Catacomb priest Fr. Vyacheslav Leontiev, who was shot in 1937. All the nearby churches were closed, and she began to beseech God to send her a spiritual father. And in a subtle sleep after prayer she heard a voice saying: "A priest will come to you on the day of the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God in the guise of a stove-repairer. His name is Philip - don't let him go until the end of your days."

She came to. What was that? she thought. Probably a demonic illusion - and she made the sign of the cross all around her. Again she lost consciousness, and again she heard the same voice, repeating the same words. On coming to, she again made the sign of the cross all around her. And she lost consciousness a third time, and the same thing happened again. It was the 21st - the day of the Vladimir icon. A peasant workman knocked, called himself a stove-repairer and asked: "Don't you have anything to repair?" She remembered her dream and asked: "And what is your name?" It turned out to be Philip. "Well, come in then, and stay."

It was the priest Fr. Philip Anikin. He had served in Kulatky (Ulyanovsk region), and had been in exile on Solovki. He recounted how, on the first day of Pascha, they were being escorted from work. They stopped in the middle of a wood and immediately began the Paschal all-night vigil service. There were many bishops, priests and deacons. At first, when the priests stopped, the guards shouted at them, but then they fell silent and the service went off without incident. At the end they began to exchange the paschal kiss. And even the guards, who usually abused the prisoners, began to exchange kisses with everyone.

Before being released, Fr. Philip asked one of the Solovki bishops to bless him. And to his question: what should he do now? the bishop replied: "Wherever you find one of the Lord's sheep, feed him." Fr. Philip began to go to the cemetery to pray. The authorities heard about it, and they wanted to arrest him. His spiritual children sent him to Ashkhabad, but he had to escape from there, too. He lived secretly with his matushka.

Fr. Philip's son, Ivan, was imprisoned for eight years in Archangelsk. He wrote: "Papa, there are people like you here, and they give us what you give us (i.e. communion)." Soon he died from hunger. Then Fr. Philip went to Shumerlyu, in Chuvashia, a place where dekulakized peasants were settled. Under the guise of a stove-repairer he would go from house to house serving. And very many people came to him. When the war began and they began to open the churches, many went into the Soviet churches, but he did not go, and many left him. In his last years Fr. Philip used to sit most of the time on his bed - he could no longer use his legs.

In Sergach the church had been destroyed, and many believers from the town and nearby went for church services to Varenka. On great feasts and at Pascha up to 70

people came to her. When there was no priest there would be services at Varenka's according to a "catacomb typicon" which took place quite openly. The authorities knew about them but did not touch her. Varenka was too well-known, and she knew everything in heaven and on earth (in all she had spent 101 days in heaven at various times).

In spite of her weak health, she was a great faster. During Holy Week she ate nothing. Once at the beginning of the Great Fast her novices brought her some soft white bread and began to persuade her to eat it. She obeyed and ate a little piece, after which her ulcer became worse and she ate nothing during the whole of the Great Fast. Her head was constantly aching, and her liver was also painful. So as to relieve her sufferings somehow, she artificially made herself vomit, but she never complained, and was always joyful.

She knew the day of her death in advance. A week before her death the Mari Protopriest Gurias gave her communion, and it was he who buried her. The day before her death she ordered the bath to be stoked up, and when they took her across the courtyard she asked them to stop so that she could look at the starry sky and the snowy earth for the last time. She died on December 1/14, 1980, and was buried in the cemetery at Sergach. When they took her past the church, everyone sensed that the space around became many-colored. Obvious miracles took place during the burial.

Twice a year, on her anniversary and at six months, up to 100 people gather to serve a pannikhida. Many believe that earth from her grave heals illnesses. In her house there live the two women who assisted her during her life, strictly keeping the testament Varenka gave them, serving the whole cycle of services daily. They do not think about food or material needs. Once when they had run out of peat for the stove, a lorry full of peat with some driver whom they did not know came up and unloaded some briquettes. God does not abandon His people! (*from orthodox.net*)

### **Also Commemorated Today**

Righteous [Philaret](#) the [Merciful](#) of Amnia in Asia Minor (792).

Blessed [Varenka](#) of Sergach (1980)

Martyr [Ananias](#) of Persia.

[St. Eligius](#), bishop of Noyon (660) (*Neth.*).

St. [Onesimus](#), archbishop of Ephesus (*Greek*).

Sts. [Ananias](#) and Solochonus, archbishops of Ephesus (*Greek*).

Venerable [Anthony](#) the New, monk of Kios in Bithynia (865) (*Greek*).

St. [Theoclitus](#) (Theoklitos), bishop of Sparta (Lacedaemon) (870).

St. [Botolph](#), of [Boston](#) (England), abbot & confessor (680) (translation of his relics).



St. [Tudwal](#) (Tugdual, Tutuual, bishop of Lan Pabu (Brittany))(6<sup>th</sup> c.)  
St. [Leontius](#), bishop of Fréjus (448) (France)  
St. [Agericus](#) (Aguy, Airy), bishop of Verdun (c. 590)  
Martyr [Anansus](#) of Rome (304)  
St. [Candres](#), bishop of Maastricht (5<sup>th</sup> c.)  
St. [Castritian](#), bishop of Milan (137)  
St. [Constantian](#), abbot and founder of Javron Abbey (France)(570)  
Martyrs [Diodorus](#), Marianus and companions of Rome (283)  
Martyr [Evasius](#), bishop of Asti (Piedmont)(c. 362)  
St. [Grwst](#), founder of Llanrwst, Conwy County Borough (Wales)(7<sup>th</sup> c.)  
Martyrs [Lucius](#), Rogatus, Cassian and Candida of Rome (unk)  
Martyr [Olympiades](#) of Almeria (Andalusia) (c. 303-313)  
Martyr [Proculus](#), bishop of Narni (Umbria) (c. 542)  
St. [Ursicinus](#), bishop of Brescia (Lombardy)(c. 347)

### Social Team for December 8

Team 5 is up next week – Marlena Cooper, Mary Watts, Andrew Joseph, Deborah Koory. 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.)