

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 15, 2024 – 2nd Sunday Before Nativity
(Sunday of the Fore-fathers) | Hieromartyr
Eleutherius, Bishop of Illyria**

Today, beloved, the Church remembers the Forefathers of Christ. On this Sunday and next we remember all the Old Testament righteous. Just as we are preparing in this fast period to receive Christ born in a manger, so it is appropriate for us to remember the Old Testament righteous who were preparing their whole lives for Him as well. And yet, it was not for them to behold the promises fulfilled. What they longed for, they did not see. Living in the year of our Lord 2023, it is important to remember their expectation and hope and to know what they were deprived of in their lifetimes so that we can see and better understand the rich treasures we have inherited.

The righteous who died before Christ lived the same life the righteous after Christ lived. There is one path to holiness—obedience to God and following His commandments. What can be surprising for us is that in many ways the Old Testament righteous even followed the New Testament commandments that had not yet been revealed. Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery and not only that, but embraced them, fed them and supported them in famine. Job,

who was not even a Jew, performed sacrifices for the unintentional sins of *thought* his children might have committed. There was no sacrifice needed for sins of thought in the Old Testament. And yet even someone outside of the Law was exacting in following after God.

Those who followed the commandments and purified themselves were filled with the Holy Spirit in the same way the Apostles later were to be, in the same way the saints always were, up to the God-bearing elders of our times. This can be seen especially in the Prophets, whom the church commemorates during this Fast, and rightfully so, because they pointed to the coming Messiah. By purifying themselves, they were deified in the same way all those who came after Christ were deified. Like the apostles, they rebuked sinners. Many of these rebukes are still timely in our day. Isaiah says, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (5:20). They comforted sinners. They performed miracles, raised the dead, were granted heavenly revelations, beheld the first and even second comings of Christ. And yet for all of that, for all their struggle, for all of the gifts they were given, for all the hope they had in God and in His promises, it was not for them to see them fulfilled. Every single righteous man and woman who died before Christ lost the gift of deification they had received once they died. Why? Because Christ’s victory over sin, death, and the devil had not yet been accomplished. Human nature was still fallen and under bondage to death. It was still separated from God. For all the Old Testament righteous—Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, Ruth, Hannah the Prophets Moses, David, Isaiah, and so forth, when their bodies died, their souls died as well. Not that their souls ceased to exist but that their souls were separated from God when they died. Every last one of them went to Hades on departing this life. Granted, they were not punished there for their sins, but they were cut off from God nonetheless. They had to continue waiting.

They waited in their lifetimes, and they waited after their life as well. We, however, have always lived in the light of Christ’s victory. While we are preparing for the Birth of our Savior, we also have already received Him, being clothed with Him in Baptism and united to Him in communion. If the Prophets are those who have worked since the first hour and bore the burden of the heat of the day and still weren’t not paid at the end of their life, we on the other hand are workers of the 11th hour who are paid as we work.

As much as we rightfully lament living in a post-Christian society, we still live in a world where the devil has been defeated by Christ and he knows it. Again, even though we live in a non-Orthodox country, with few saints and not many roots, we have still been given the incomparably rich inheritance of the Prophets and the

Apostles and all the saints. As St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Eph. 2:19-22). Unlike the Holy Forefathers, in a real sense, we have *everything* handed to us.

This brings us to today’s Gospel of the Great Supper. Here we see the Master preparing a supper and sending his servant to invite others to come. Notice how the servant was sent to people engaging in lawful activity—buying and selling, getting married. The servant was not sent to a dark alley to invite robbers and murderers to the banquet. He was not sent to a pagan temple to invite the heathen. He was sent to those engaged in normal, every-day life. Yet each person declined the invitation. They were too preoccupied in what they were doing to realize that what they were invited to was far better.

For us at this monastery, this banquet is offered all the time. Christ invites us to the Mystical Supper of His flesh and blood every single day. We have been given the greatest gift that none of the righteous before Christ had access to in their lifetime. St. John Chrysostom tells us that there is nothing greater that God can give us than what He gives us in communion. We are given Christ’s flesh and blood and soul and divine energies. Is this not the Kingdom of Heaven? We have infinite wealth pouring out from this Altar table.

And yet, this is a difficult obedience to have. We are hard-pressed to keep up with services and all our obediences, especially this time of the year. Work doesn’t go away for the sake of daily liturgies. Temptations, illnesses, traveling doesn’t go away. Perhaps it can feel like most of the burden is being shouldered by a handful of the Fathers. Or for some, they can’t partake more often anyway no matter how much they want to. But the Mystical Sacrifice is still offered for all of us, and not only do we benefit, but so do the thousands that we commemorate. We are blessed to have the services set up the way we do, and we don’t know how much longer we might have them. Not because we might decide to discontinue daily liturgies, but it might be taken away from us. We’re a car accident away from a father or two being permanently disabled or killed. We never know how international affairs will affect the economy. Not only could the church construction come to a halt, but even our day-to-day activity as well. Disease and death don’t discriminate between their victims.

I say all this not instill fear in the unexpected, but that we might appreciate what has been given to us for this time, and God-willing, permanently. All of us, even the laity present, have already chosen to follow after God and to put Him before all else. I'm not challenging you to check your goals to make sure receiving communion is placed above finishing your obediences or placed above getting the sleep you need. I'm not chastising anyone for putting off doing the communion rule and choosing not to receive on a weekday or lesser holiday because they want to rest and find some consolation in spending time with the brethren. Rather, I want to remind everyone that what we have is incredibly unique and miraculous. We have what people for thousands of years desired but could not receive. In one of the secret prayers for the liturgy, the priest says, "When we had fallen away, Thou didst raise us up again and didst not cease to do all things until Thou hadst brought us up to heaven and bestowed upon us Thy Kingdom which is to come." God has already bestowed upon us His Kingdom. This is the Kingdom the Jews were seeking for hundreds of years. This is the Kingdom the prophets foresaw. This is the Kingdom that is greater than the Paradise from which Adam and Eve were expelled. God has already bestowed upon us His Kingdom and in a few minutes, He will invite participate once more.

As we prepare our hearts for the Nativity of Christ, let us remember the countless righteous who earnestly waited for the Redeemer. Let us remember their virtues and their patience. But most importantly, let us also partake of the inheritance they labored for and longed for so much—Christ our Lord. *(from holycross.org)*

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*Eleutherios as a liberated nature beholds the blade and is not enslaved to error. *
On the fifteenth divine Eleutherios was struck by the sword.*

*Mother [Anthia] gave her child to the world of the dead, and she went there cut up
by the sword.*

Coremun did not contest to satiety until the sword cut at his neck.

*The two executioners perceived you as God O Savior; other executioners
slaughtered them with a sword.*

He was from the city of Rome, in the year 117, very young in age, orphaned of a father, having only a mother, whose name was Anthia. She had been taught by the Apostle Paul the faith in Christ. When he was a child he was offered by his mother to Bishop Anacletus of Rome. From him he learned sacred letters, and was numbered among those in the clerical order, becoming a Reader. When he was fifteen years old he was ordained a Deacon. At the age of eighteen he was ordained a Priest, and at the age of twenty he was ordained Bishop of Illyricum, having worked many miracles beforehand due to his exceeding virtue. It should be noted

that the canons which required a minimum age for the clerical orders were not written until the Synod of Neocaesarea in c. 315, which required a minimum age of 30 for a presbyter. The Sixth Ecumenical Synod in 681 affirmed this. Typically a bishop should not be less than fifty years old, unless it is difficult to find someone at such an advanced age to serve.

Having converted many Greek pagans to the faith of Christ through his teachings, for this reason he was brought before Emperor Hadrian. There he proclaimed Christ as the true God, and at the order of the emperor he was placed on a fiery brazen gridiron, underneath which was lit coals. Then he was laid out over a very fiery altar. After this he was placed in a fiery cauldron full of oil, pitch and resin. By the grace of God however he was kept unharmed from all these.

At the order of the prefect Coremun a furnace was built, which had sharp spits on either side. Coremun was the first to enter this, full of the Holy Spirit, for he had confessed Christ as God. Emerging unharmed from this, he was beheaded, and received the crown of martyrdom.

When Saint Eleutherios was placed in the furnace, the fire was immediately extinguished, and he emerged whole and unharmed. Then he was thrown in prison. After this he was bound to a chariot and pulled by wild horses, but he was unbound by a divine Angel.

He then went up to a high mountain, where he dwelt with wild animals. They were calm when the Saint meditated on the words of God. Because soldiers were sent to capture him, the Saint admonished them, and they returned to faith in Christ and were baptized. Not only them, but many other Greek pagans, up to five hundred of them, believed in Christ.

He was brought to the emperor and given over to the beasts to be devoured, but he was kept whole and unharmed. Finally he was killed by two soldiers at the order of the emperor. His mother Anthia embraced the dead relic of her son, and as she kissed it, she was killed by the sword. This happened after her son received the crown of the contest. His Synaxis is celebrated in his martyric Temple which is next to Xerolofou. (*adapted from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

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

Brethren, when Christ who is our life is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory. Therefore, put to death what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, depraved passions, lust and greed (which is idolatry). Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming on the children of disobedience. You also used to live in those things when you lived among these people; but now, put them all away: anger, rage, evil, slander, and shameful

language. Do not lie to one another. You have put off the old self with his doings and you have put on the new self who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator. Here, there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free; but Christ is all, and in all!

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

At that time, Jesus said, “A certain man gave a great banquet and invited many people. At supper time, he sent out his servant to tell those who were invited, ‘Come, for everything is ready now!’ But they all began to make excuses. The first told him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please have me excused!’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen and I must go try them out. Please have me excused!’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come!’ That servant came back and reported these things to his lord. At this, the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and bring in the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame.’ The servant said, ‘Lord, it is done as you commanded, and there is still room!’ The lord then told the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled! For I tell you that none of those who were invited will taste of my supper.’”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Prooimion – Joseph rent his garment; the brothers revealed their lack of humanity, for, enslaving Joseph, they sold him to lawless men; but he placed all his faith in God, and he carried off the royal crown as he cried out, “The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.”

Men, let us drain the streams of salvation that bring joy to the heart; let us who are drunk with temperance hasten to the cistern of Joseph. Whoever drinks of its waters will never thirst; there, immortal water springs forth. Tell me how, when the cistern is entirely dry, immortal water gushes forth. Christ, whose type is prefigured in Joseph, causes the water to flow as He did for the woman of Samaria. Then let us draw those waters with faith, for He is the Lord, our Savior, who alone is mighty.

Royal crowns, which adorn men of self-control, shine in advance in their dreams, but why through dreams is there a prophecy of their destiny? Learn, O men of faith. When God wishes to direct the daily life of good men to the best, he paints virtues for you, just as he describes virtues for you, revealing to you in sleep the images of temptation – urging you on, warning you, He strengthens you in every way, for the Creator is wakeful and fortifies you as you sleep, giving you knowledge of what is to come, for He is the Lord, our Savior, who alone is mighty.

The Scripture has spread out in advance the arena of the prudent man; let us learn, O men of self-control how the young man put out the fire of fornication in the grass of the flesh, for in truth the Scripture is not dead, but it remains alive always. This young man, like a bronze monument of purity, teaches those who wish to learn to love purity. The Scripture sounds the signal of war against the flesh in order that it may give you virginity as an armor. Then, let those of us who love it cry out: "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

Joseph saw eleven sheaves bowing down before the one that he had bound, and guilelessly he told his father the dream, and the brothers, as though struck with amazement, formed an opinion contrary to the hope of their brother. What sort of a brother, my friends, if he becomes ruler, does not hasten to exalt his brothers above all men? But Satan roused them to envy and put jealousy into their united group, as he did to one of the apostles, and divided them as they cried: "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

Seeing a second dream-vision, he told his father: "The sun, the moon, and the stars, to the number of eleven, in due order do obeisance to me." The father answered Joseph: "You have visions, my child, as though you were trying to be king. Learn how to sleep as a shepherd watching his flock. It would be hard for a son to be worshiped by his father. I shall give you a coat of many colors instead of bright purple, and as a crown I give you the group of your brothers whom the Lord graciously grants me; for He is the Lord, our Savior, who alone is mighty."

"Go away and hunt your flock, my lamb, before the wolves devour them, said the old man to the boy, and Joseph rushed off in a hurry to his flock. As they saw him running, his brothers said, "Welcome, the king has come! Let us dye his purple with blood. He will consecrate his charge of kingdom in the palace of the dead." But Reuben, in sympathy for him, persuaded them all to cast him in the pit, and Joseph cried: "Alas for the kingdom! Is this, then, the palace?" And he cried out: "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

The sacramental lamb symbolically slaughtered the human lamb, and they served the meal. After the brothers had chewed the fragments, they even sought for the nourishment of gain. The Scripture says that Judah advised his brothers, "Let the perfume of the brothers be sold." O, Judas shines forth after so many generations! O, ancient type of treason! And for twenty pieces of gold his brother was sold, and without his coat he was given to the Ishmaelites. If you sell him, at least give his coat to the one who cries out: "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

Finally, the brothers in selling him seemed crueler than wild beasts, sine lions do not allow their whelps to be snatched from their clasp. Dyeing the coat with the blood of a young kid, they took it to Jacob. On beholding this disaster, the heart of

the old man burned more fiercely than the heat of a furnace fire as he mourned his child, crying, "Woe is me, my son, have you been destroyed by a wild beast? Your robe is whole; how have you alone been devoured? Where are your visions of a sceptre? How do you cry: 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty?'"

The younger man, seeing a master, suddenly showed himself as an elder as he said: "I am absorbed in dreams; now it is necessary to persevere for days and nights. The obeisance of the sheaves, and the sun, and moon, And of the eleven stars – they have now set. I shall show obedience to my brothers and not break the revered laws of my ancestors. For if Isaac yielded to sacrifice by his father – just one person commanding one – how shall I not then endure brothers who enslave me; yet I cry out: 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.'"

The human son, hidden in shadows, reached Egypt. By a second sale, he arose like the sun in the dwelling of Potiphar. The grace that adorned him everywhere caused him to shine out with his virtues. And so Potiphar, seeing his prudence, chose him to have charge of his possessions. But a woman came to throw down the man just elevated. When did Eve abandon the scheme of the serpent? On beholding her again, people, let us cry out, The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

When the woman beheld the glory of his splendor, she was loose as a woman would be, and she pestered the young man, inviting him to lie upon the bed of her husband. But he anointed himself with the strength of manly courage and in flight was victorious over his fall – by clever stratagem. As victor he departed from the first struggle, but again the mad woman got after him, And finding him alone in the house, she grasped his tunic by way of the clasp, but he, looking on high, cried out: "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

"I cannot endure to waste my flower, the flower of my grace. Even if you have the strength to rob me of my robe, you cannot rob me of my chastity," said Joseph. "Do not think, woman, that your trespass is unobserved. God looks down upon us from on high. The race of Abraham has not learned relations with prostitutes. Do not try to completely burn up Potiphar. You are indeed my master through a sale, I confess, but I am your master through my actions. I trust In God; keep my robe. He is the Lord, our Savior, who alone is mighty."

Having conquered the arena of the harlot without being broken, he leaped from the sanded pit. graceful and well crowned, he adored, in his thought, God, the One who presides over struggles. But instead of a prize, he was cast in prison. For the Egyptian woman, through a cruel trick, excited Potiphar with false accusations, pushing all the blame on the noble-minded youth. Showing him the robe of Joseph, drowned in a sea of tears, because of her desire, she persuaded him to send Joseph to prison as he cried: "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

Potiphar was roused to anger in a strange way, and raved in an unusual manner; the man was truly a butcher. From what source could he have wisdom, or could the ignorant man be taught about chastity? If he had had wisdom, he would not have allowed the trick to deceive him. You are a foolish judge! As evidence you have Joseph's robe; ask where it is, and consider if she is to be trusted. If she fled from him, then how does she possess his robe? You think that the free slave is at fault, but you will see him shine like light as he cried: "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

The honored blood inhabits prison in return for deeds that were not impious, and in the prison, following the likeness of his ancestor Abraham, he became a host to guests. He was admired for being able to interpret dreams, as he elevated one man in a position of honor and had another descend among the dead with his interpretation. He was revealed to the two men as prophet with his interpretations. In his endurance of the prison he was patient, for the root of the purple grew dim - the root that, in an opportune time, shone as light to the one crying, "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

Pharaoh had a sinister dream; he had wise men called in, and he said to them: "In a dream I saw seven sleek and fine cattle and others thin and lean; the latter fed upon the cattle that were fatter; and with them I saw seven ears of corn that were quite filled out and seven others blasted by the wind. And here again the large ones seemed to be nourishment for the small. Then, when the others were at a loss to interpret the dream, Joseph made it clear and won the crown and cried out, "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

The younger man, who was seen as superior to the professors, ruled in Egypt, and it was possible to see a king governing his people as a father would his sons. Treasuring food in greater quantity than the sands of the sea, a storehouse for all human beings was seen. Then a famine struck the land of Canaan, and Jacob sent off his ten sons. He said: "Depart for Egypt, my sons, I hear rumors of a distributor of food, one who nourishes the hungry. If you find him to be your own brother, cry out to him, "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

They went bounding along, full of hope of living, and they arrived in Egypt. They bowed down before the one whom they had sold, and then the dream of the sheaves was awakened in him. Joseph recognized them, but the ten did not know who he was. And so, the king, bearing in mind the future recognition, said: "These men are spies." And with this pronouncement, he made clear that they were to be guarded, and they saw him, the king and nourisher, the one whom they had sold through jealousy, and they cried: "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

"Tell me your business; do not deceive the purple," the king said. "Knowing your hearts, no one of you can deceive me; I know you." They said, "We have a father who is your slave; we are twelve brothers; one of us is dead. To you, the master, we shall tell the truth in what we say to you. The youngest of us all is Benjamin; he is the consolation of our house, and we have come for grain and we cry: 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.'"

"If you wish to persuade me of what you say, then do what I say. I do not speak as a lord who commands, but as to my brothers. Then, all of you take the grain, but leave one of you behind. Let the others set forth with joy, but bring the little one to me, and then I shall know that you are not cheats." And so he took Simeon from them, and in their presence had him bound; and when the others saw it, they remembered what they themselves had done and cried out, "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

When they saw the terrible pronouncement of the ruler, they wept because of their brother; and going to their father, they greeted him with gloomy countenances: "Hail, father." The devout old man, seeing nine instead of ten, became half-dead with anxiety, and said, "Where is Simeon?" the sons replied to him, "Do not lament, but patiently bear up as you hear our words." "I do not need your speech nor the food," he said. "I want my child. This time, Reuben, you do not bring me a coat? Hear me cry out, 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.'"

"Do not be undone by these difficulties, nor conquered by tears. You should, rather, rejoice, since we have brought you back grain, father," they said. "And we shall recover Simeon. Do not tremble; do not weep; Simeon is not dead. Why are you without courage before you listen? The king of Egypt, when he saw us, thought that we were spies to observe his country, and he sent us to prison for three whole days, and kept us locked up; then he brought us out and cared for us; and for this change of tactics, we cry out, 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.'"

"We have not told you of the falsehood we told in avoiding suspicion of being spies. We said that we had a father and a small brother, Benjamin. The king at once found an answer to his doubt when he made this declaration: 'One of you will remain until Benjamin comes, so that I may believe you.'" At these words, Jacob cried through his tears, "Joseph and Simeon! Now Benjamin is to go. You take him away. Do you not know the affliction of the children of Rachel? O Most High, guard closely the rest of my children, for You are the Lord, our Savior, who alone are mighty."

"As my children, spare me; for I am going down to Hades through tribulation, for I cannot endure that my vine be entirely harvested, bit by bit. There I shall find my beloved Joseph." But they said, "Father, why do you lament? Just see what joy

we found in our sacks: the price of the grain. Now cease to mourn.” “A double misfortune,” cried Jacob, saying, “Because of this, Simeon will suffer still more; but the Merciful One will save him by His hand, for He is the the Lord, our Savior, who alone is mighty.”

“It is unavoidable that I send him; but it is to be avoided that they do not send him back to me,” he said. “Anxiety about my children tortures me like a whip; I mourn both at the birth and death of my sons. Now with grief I descend to Hades; and in sending you forth, Benjamin, I give over the key that guards my children, for clearly they are to become food for wild beasts. Now I despair of you. I shall not weep for you as for Joseph. I had two eyes: the pair of Rachel's children. Indeed, I give this child over to the Merciful One; You are the Lord, our Savior, who alone are mighty.”

“And now, go, my green branch; go with your brothers,” said the old man, weeping. “To guide you on your way will be the God of Abraham and Isaac, and of me, Jacob, your father, my child.” And for the sake of food, they returned to those lands, to Egypt, and they fell down to the ground in fear before the king. When Joseph saw them and Benjamin along with them, he counted in their number the interpretation of the dream of the stars, and, deeply stirred within, he prayed, “O Lord, our Savior, You alone are mighty.”

His face flushed with the blood of wisdom. He felt pity for them, and he argued with himself, arousing his spirit as a court of justice, saying in his mind, “they are not at fault; it was the work of God. They were the real cause of my excellence. What sort of boast is there for the man who struggles hard unless, after he has won the victory, he is legally crowned? Who would not respect such a fine group of brothers? Tears, be silent. I do not wish to be known in this way. Eyes, do not overcome the tongue; pray silently, 'Lord, our Savior, You alone are mighty.'”

“How can I contrive to see with these same eyes the paternal sun? I recognize that the moon, my mother, is majestic; the stars, like a cloud, hide my home. I shall give food to the brothers, and with food I shall now capture Benjamin as I put my cup in his sack. In stealing from myself I shall capture the one whom I love. For me this love which does ill will be good. The people of Canaan will eat, drink, and cry out, 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.'”

After reflecting for a short time, he translated his plans into deeds, and those whom he had called spies he seated as friends in his own household. In the middle of the meal, he prepared the materials for catching his prey. Secretly he spoke to his servant, “Fill up the sacks with grain for those who are dining with me, and in the sack of the small one whose name is Benjamin – into his sack place the cup from which I drink; conceal this from the rest.” And while giving his orders, he cried out, “The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.”

What was done was like a web and net for the youth; it was not the case of merchandise in grain. One could see Joseph placing, as in a bird cage, snares of love and accusing them all of being thieves. Joseph really stole them all in clever fashion. Then what? As the young people walked along the road, a servant ran up to them crying, “Criminals, knaves, thieves, cheats, shameless people! Who has stolen the cup from my master? Terrible things are now facing you, even if you cry, 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.'”

They stopped, trembling, like people found accused without foundation, and they said to the one who sought them out, “Search us as you wish. We are all here. If you find the cup, shed the blood of the thief, and take us all as slaves.” Then, taking the bags, the servant searched them to settle the dispute, but they laughed at the man, since they thought it was a mistake. Then he came to the sack of Benjamin, and there he found the cup. Loudly they lamented, “Jacob, weep for all of us and cry out, 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.'”

Sadly, beating their breasts, they all turned back to Egypt with their loads – like thieves, these men who had stolen nothing; and the wise ruler, on seeing them downcast, suffered in his spirit. Cutting short their fear, he drew near into the very midst of the brothers, but they in terror saw him as a flash of lightning, and they knelt down, accepting servitude to him, even before his accusation. But the king, on seeing his brothers taken into custody, made secure the locks, but opened up the floodgates. With his eyes flowing like rivers, he cried out, “The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.”

He said, “Now, what am I to say to them? Shall I take courage in who I am? Shall I reproach them for what they are? Tempests rage within my heart; my soul cannot find room for joy in waiting for the outcome. I am conquered; I am not sober; I am drunk with my love; my slowness makes them suffer.” No longer concealing his joy, he suddenly disclosed it, and it was seen as a pearl as he cried, “I am Joseph himself, my brothers. Do away with your shame, and assume your strength. Let us send up our praise to God as we cry, 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.'”

“I shall plant my firmly-rooted love; I shall kiss your eyes; I shall kiss your mouths; I shall exult; I shall dance because you are my kingdom, brothers, from now on. Feel no shame before me; feel no fear. I am Joseph, living, a second Abel. Cast aside the fear that comes from Cain; proceed to our father. Bring him to me so that he may bow down, not to me, but to the purple and to the One who gives it. And as he sees me with his own eyes, he will cry out, 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.'”

When they had embraced one another, they set out in haste to return to their own home. When he saw them, the old man became young; as he saw his sons, he cried

out, "I shall glorify You always, my god, who protects me and my sons. Simeon said to him, "Father, I announce a joy to you: hasten, depart to see Joseph, the king, and do not cause yourself distress." The old man said to him, "You mock me, my child; conceal your sins before God, and cry out, 'The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty.'"

"Do not doubt; have faith," the young men cried as they embraced the knees of their father and told him all the things that have been related; and Jacob, on hearing, leaped up and bounded like a boy, with no regard for his age. On hearing news of his son, he hastened, like Abraham. Leaving behind his mourning, he said, "Let us depart; let no one fear the night of discouragement, since the Lord has banished it from my eyes; for He is the Lord, our Savior, who alone is mighty."

"Now a day has dawned for me, having twelve hours; the light of my children is quite reasonably the same in number and brilliance. The infallible works of God, I shall not cease to proclaim. Let all ill will flee from my children, for at a chosen time, for the whole day, God has appeared and restored my son to me. Where is Rachel, that she may see her son Joseph raised up from among the dead – Joseph, whom the Creator has granted the gift of life? For He is the Lord, our Savior, who alone is mighty."

Now the old man, vying with the young people, set out on the road; and as they advanced toward Egypt on their journey, one could see how they rivaled one another in bounding along; they whipped their beasts, urging them on. One could see Jacob with his loins girded, and laying hold of a staff, swiftly rushing on as he asked his fellow companions about the length of the rod, bearing himself proudly, always looking on high and crying out, "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

When they reached Egypt, the king, radiant as the sun, embraced his father around the neck and kissed him. As he melted into tears, he said, "Father, you have loaned me to our God, and I, through your prayers, have borne fruit. You have found the capital doubled with interest." The old man answered him, speaking through his tears, "From what source have you come shining? From earth or heaven? From the dead or the living? What sort of beast has produced you? These things are portents of the Creator, for He exists. The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

Let us hymn in our songs the Creator of the universe, who affords such lessons. For He diligently offers His mercy always to those of us who pray to Him. Let all of us men love self-control, in every way imitating Joseph; let us ask what temperance produces and what licentiousness brings forth. The former calls to eternal life, the other to Gehenna. But let us avoid it; let us devote our time always to prayer, crying out, "The Lord, our Savior, alone is mighty."

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion O.43 On Joseph*

Holy Martyr Susanna the Deaconess of Palestine

Susanna, just as the one of old so also the new, is slandered but does not flee the ambush.

The venerable martyr Susanna flourished during the reign of Emperor Maximian (286-305). She was a native of Palestine, the daughter of a Greek father named Artemios who was a pagan priest and a Hebrew mother named Martha. She however came to know the Christian faith, and was baptized by Bishop Silouan. Upon the repose of her parents, the blessed maiden distributed her entire inheritance among the poor and freed all her servants. Then she donned men's clothing, cut her hair and went to a men's monastery in Jerusalem, assuming the name John. On account of her many virtues, she was made an Archimandrite of this monastery.

When twenty years passed, she became the victim of serious slander. A certain ascetic woman came to the monastery, and believing Susanna to be a man, she was instigated by the evil one to draw "Archimandrite John" into sin. Because Susanna did not consent, the spurned woman resolved to accuse Susanna of taking her by force. Susanna gladly accepted the slanderous accusation and asked forgiveness from the woman.

However, the Bishop of Eleutheropolis learned of this and went to the monastery, to find out why the Abbot allowed such disorderly things to take place. The Abbot therefore decided to remove the monastic schema from the accused "Archimandrite John". Out of necessity the blessed Susanna came, and asked for two virgins and two female deaconesses, to whom she informed that she was a woman. When the Bishop found out about this, he was astonished, and ordained her a Deaconess. From then on the blessed one worked many miracles in the name of the Lord.

When Alexander, the governor, went to Eleutheropolis and offered sacrifice to the idols there, the Saint voluntarily approached him, and with prayer alone toppled down the idols. Then standing before the governor, she confessed Christ. For this he had her breasts cut off, but they were restored and made well by the power of God. When those who cut off her breasts saw this miraculous restoration, they also believed in Christ. Hence they were beheaded and received the crown of martyrdom. Then molten lead was poured through a funnel into Susanna's mouth and filled up her intestines. Nevertheless, the Saint remained unharmed by divine grace. Wherefore she was beaten, then cast into a fire, where she surrendered her soul to God. Thus she went to the Lord her desired Bridegroom. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Social Team for December 22

Team 7 is up next week – Annette Samouris, Hillary Maher. Thank you!

Also Commemorated Today

Venerable [Paul](#) of Mt. Latros (956).

[St. Stephen](#) the Confessor, archbishop of Surozh in the Crimea (790).

New Russian Hieromartyrs Joseph, metropolitan of Petrograd (1938), [Hilarion \(Troitsky\)](#), bishop of Verey (1929); Virgin-martyr Victorina (Diobronravova).

New Hieromartyrs Alexander, Basil, [Victorinus](#) priests (1937).

Venerable [Tryphon](#), of Pechenga or Kola (1583), apostle to the Lopars, and his martyred disciple Venerable [Jonah](#).

Martyr [Eleutherius](#) at Constantinople (4th c.).

Venerable [Pardus](#), hermit of Palestine (6th c.).

Monk-martyr [Bacchus](#) of Mar Saba (8th c.).

Venerable [Nektarius](#) of Bitel'sk (1500).

St. [Flann](#), abbot of Bangor (7th c.) (Ireland)

St. [Offa](#), king of Essex, then monk (c. 709)(England)

St. [Adalbero](#), bishop of Metz (1005)(France)

Martyrs [Faustinus](#), Lucius, Candidus, Caelian, Mark, Januarius, & Fortunatus (unk)(N. Africa)

St. [Maximus](#) (Mesmin), abbot of Saint-Mesmin, Micy near Orléans (520)(France)

St. [Urbinius](#) (Urbez), hermit-monk in the Pyrenees (c. 805)

Hieromartyr [Valerian](#), bishop of Abbenza (457)(N. Africa)

Commemoration of the [Ordination](#) of St. John Chrysostom

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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. Nectarios & 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.)