

SOBORNOST

**St. Thomas the Apostle
Orthodox Church**

**(301) 638-5035 Church
4419 Leonardtown Road
Waldorf, MD 20601**

**Very Rev. Father Joseph Edgington,
Pastor**

(703) 532-8017

fredgington@gmail.com

www.apostlethomas.org

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Reader Vespers 6:30 PM

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

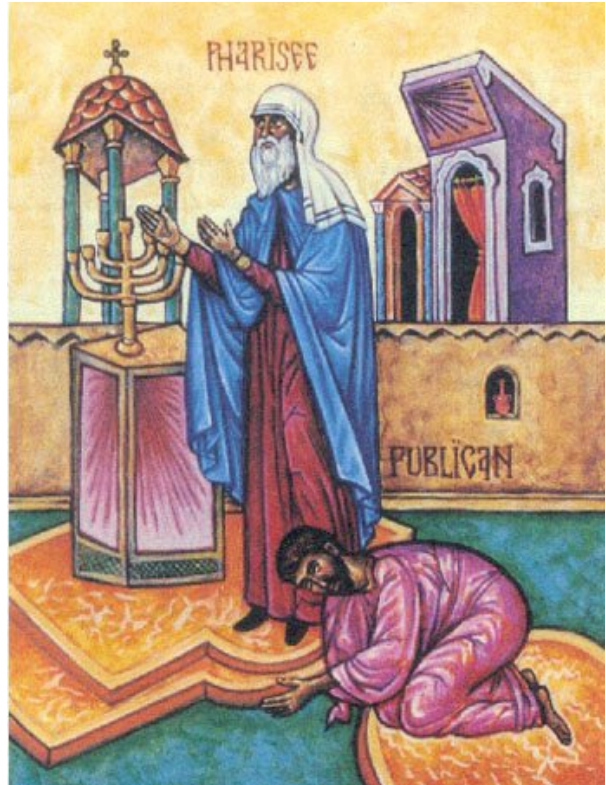
**Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM | Sunday School 9:30 AM
~ Divine Liturgy 10 AM ~**

**February 9, 2025 – Sunday of the Publican & Pharisee
Leave-taking of the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord
in the Temple with Symeon**

By Monk Agapios Landos of Crete

The Holy Fathers of the Church have commanded us to sing and read today about the case and parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, in order that we might prepare for the spiritual struggles and warfare of Holy Lent, which is approaching. This is why they called this week a 'warning order', because it forewarns and reminds us of the time of fasting and repentance which is almost upon us, so that we may prepare accordingly, to fight bravely and fairly, and not be defeated by any passion and lose the kingdom of heaven. Let each of us then examine which sin defeats us, so that we conquer it boldly in these holy days; so that we may shame the wicked devil, who fights day and night to defeat us, because he hates the human race.

When a general attacks a city which is powerful and undefeated, he hurls all his strength at the weakest point of the defenses, where the battlements are at their



lowest, and applies the greatest pressure there. Likewise, the wicked devil attacks most fiercely against the sin which he finds each of us to be most susceptible to. He tempts the pleasure-seekers with fornication and gluttony; the irascible and irritable with hatred and envy; the callous with avarice; and so on. Now if he finds that we're attentive to the commandments of God, that we're virtuous and he can't overcome us in any way, he cunningly contrives to bring us low through pride and arrogance which are more disgusting than any other transgression, which eradicate all good works and virtues and cast them to the wind. Humility, on the other hand, together with a change of heart, is the easier path to salvation and forgiveness. No matter how badly you've sinned, if you humble yourself and weep before God with all your heart, you'll find forgiveness. On the other hand, the thrice-cursed people who keep all the commandments and achieve the utmost in terms of virtues but then fall into vanity have thrown away all their labors.

This is why our Lord, Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God's wisdom and power, Who examines the hearts of each of us and provides for our salvation, as a careful and wise physician spoke to us in parables, one of which is the inspired and wonderful one of the humble Publican and the conceited Pharisee. Through this, He castigates those who think highly of their good works and who, in the belief that they're righteous, look down on sinners. Through this example, our wise Lord humbles the arrogance of those who are conceited and teaches us how to offer our prayer and supplication to God, that is with tears and humility, not with bombast and boasting. In this way we'll avoid greater chastisement from our tolerant and patient Lord. There's no wrongdoing more profound or harmful than pride and arrogance, which brought about the fall from heaven of the first among the angels, Lucifer [the Bearer of Light], and made him Tenebrafer [the Bearer of Darkness], the devil. It was pride which exiled our first ancestor, Adam, from Paradise; which has worked so many other wicked and terrible things, and which is the root of all evil and the impediment to all spiritual progress and virtuous action.

This is why so many people have been lost through it, because they have rightly been deprived of God's Grace, and have fallen into passions of license and other similarly mortal transgressions.... Even if proud people fast, give alms in abundance, live prudently and pray, they're laboring in vain and inopportunistly, they're suffering for no good reason and they're objects of ridicule. Those who have pride in their heart are hated by the Lord and are unclean before Him. So many cities, homes, and innumerable people have been lost to pride and arrogance and have vanished in the end. Many famous hermits and anchorites, too, who renounced the world, scorned the pleasures of the flesh, riches, glory, and hated all other enjoyments then fell into pride, because they didn't know how to humble themselves. They then suffered along with the sinners. They have thus been

deprived of divine bliss and have - alas! - wasted all the labors of their asceticism through their proud thoughts. And as wicked as vanity and pride are, so a change of heart and humility are beneficial. Just as vanity and pride scatter abroad, so humility easily gathers together. Pride casts us down into the depths of hell; humility raises us to the heights of heaven and makes us equal to the angels.
(From the Kyriakodromion)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 3:10-15 EOB

My son Timothy, you have paid close attention to my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, steadfastness, persecutions, and sufferings. You know what happened to me at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. I endured those persecutions and the Lord delivered me out of them all! Yes, all those who desire to lead godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But wicked impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others, being themselves deceived. As for you, remain in what you have learned which is what you firmly believe, knowing from whom you have learned them. From infancy, you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 18:10-14 EOB

The Lord said this parable, "Two men went up into the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee, and the other was a Publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed by himself, like this: 'God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of men, dishonest, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I earn.' But the tax collector, standing far aside, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven. Instead, he would beat his breast, saying: 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man, rather than the other, went down to his house justified. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Homily on the Feast

By Igumen Gabriel

[This feast] has many meanings, many aspects, and even many names. It is sometimes called the Meeting of the Lord, sometimes the Purification of the Virgin, sometimes the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, and finally, especially in the West, it is known as Candlemas – the Feast of the Light that shown upon St. Symeon and which we remember by blessing candles on this day. This multiplicity of names and meanings is an indication that [this] feast is situated at a crossroads: between the Law and the Prophets, between the infancy and the adulthood of Christ, between the Old and the New Covenant. For the first time in history, God Himself enters bodily into the Temple which was made for Him, carried in the arms of Her who is Herself the true Holy of Holies, the Tabernacle more spacious

than the heavens. He enters not in a cloud of glory, but in humble poverty, in meekness fulfilling the Law which He Himself gave. And She enters to be purified, She who alone is spotless and undefiled. Here the Righteous Symeon prophecies over Him who is the fulfillment of all the Prophets.

It is no accident that the Holy Church has ordained that this feast be celebrated very near to the beginning of Great Lent, because this feast is also the first feast of the Resurrection. In this feast we are given a foretaste of the Lord's Pascha, seeing for the very first time death, no longer as an enemy to be feared, but rather as a doorway which opens unto the salvation of God, which was "prepared before the face of all people." In this feast, the death of St. Symeon the God-Receiver has begun to be touched by the life of Christ. He lived on this earth for 360 years, preserved by the grace of God in order to behold the coming of the Anointed One; and though he yet descended into Sheol, the hymns of the Holy Church tell us that he preceded St. John the Forerunner in preaching the coming of eternal life to the souls imprisoned there....

The remembrance of death, though it may seem dour, morbid and joyless to those who love only the fleeting pleasures of this dying life, is [by this feast] shown to be the only source of true joy, life, and happiness. The life of St. Symeon reveals with remarkable clarity and power the truth that is so cleverly hidden from those who try to hide and cover over by every possible means the looming reality of death. Such unfortunate ones imagine that long life is the highest possible good. Our world today is absolutely obsessed with this delusion, very often seeking to prolong life at any cost, employing various grotesque and humiliating medical techniques to add even a few days or weeks to a person's life, days and weeks which are usually filled only with suffering and pain, numbed into oblivion by powerful narcotics.

St. Symeon lived on this earth for 360 years. By the reasoning of our contemporaries, such a lifespan is to be greatly envied. Yet what must it have actually been like for him? One by one, to see his family, his friends and his relatives grow old and die? To see his nation enslaved, his people humiliated; to see the slow decay of all those places which he had known and loved as a young boy? To endure while his body grew ever more weak and feeble with each passing year? Truly, this vain and corruptible world holds no lasting happiness or pleasure. Man was indeed made for eternal life, but clearly he was not made for eternal life in this world.

Yet to recognize the vanity of this world and its pleasures is not enough. This knowledge is shared by the Hindus and Buddhists, even by our modern existentialists and nihilists. St. Symeon's remembrance of and desire for death

went far beyond the desire of Eastern mysticism and modern philosophy to escape into oblivion, into a nothingness beyond the reach of the suffering of life. Far from it. The essence of St. Symeon's remembrance of death was nothing other than an eager and joyful anticipation of the apocalypse, that is to say the unveiling of Christ in His gladsome and glorious light.

For St. Symeon, for monastics, and for every Christian, the miracle of Christ's Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection lies precisely in that Christ filled all things, even and especially death, with Himself. In the words of the Psalmist: "If I go up into heaven, You are there: if I descend into Hades, You are present there, if I take up my wings toward the dawn and make my abode in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Your hand guide me and Your right hand shall hold me." The prophecy that St. Symeon should not taste death until he had seen the Lord's Christ was in fact a double prophecy. It was a prophecy also for the life of every Christian and for every human being: to taste death and to behold Christ are now one and the same.

But though this prophecy caused St. Symeon to depart this life in peace and gladsome joy, this was so only because he had lived all his life in the remembrance of this prophecy, and had shaped his entire life around it. He had died already to everything transient, to everything sinful, and it was this that allowed his death to become an entrance into life. As it is written above the gates of one holy monastery: "If you die before you die, when you die, you shall not die."

For although to taste death and to behold Christ have now become one, this truth is joyful only to those who love Christ; it is exceedingly bitter to those who do not. Resurrection will come at the last day to all men, but the Scriptures warn that only for some will it be a resurrection unto life while for others, a resurrection unto damnation. And so we see once more why the Holy Church has placed this feast near to the beginning of the Great Fast. It is a feast of joy, life, light and resurrection... but it is a feast that can only be entered into through the gates of suffering, repentance, bright sorrow, and ultimately, death.

We all have a choice before us: will we willingly accept suffering and death for the sake of the love of God, and behold these very things being transformed into the source of our joy and eternal life and blessedness? Or will we run and hide from suffering and death, only to find at the end of all things that we cannot run and hide any longer, and that having refused to meet Christ in them, we are left with suffering and death only, stripped of Christ and of all meaning forever? To suffer and to die are inevitable. Our only choice is for whom we will suffer, and to what we will die. Through the prayers of the Holy Righteous Symeon the God-Receiver and the Holy Prophetess Anna, through the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and through the grace and mercy of the only Lover of

Mankind, may we enlightened by the Gladsome Light of this holy feast-day, so that we may make our choice wisely. Amen. (*adapted from rememberingion.com*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Even if you are not what you should be, you should not despair. It is bad enough that you have sinned; why in addition do you wrong God by regarding Him in your ignorance as powerless? Is He, who for your sake created the great universe that you behold, incapable of saving your soul? And if you say that this fact, as well as His incarnation, only makes your condemnation worse, then repent; and He will receive your repentance, as He accepted that of the prodigal son (cf. Luke 15:20) and the prostitute (cf. Luke 7:37-50). But if repentance is too much for you, and you sin out of habit even when you do not want to, show humility like the publican (cf. Luke 18:13): this is enough to ensure your salvation. For he who sins without repenting, yet does not despair, must of necessity regard himself as the lowest of creatures, and will not dare to judge or censure anyone. Rather, he will marvel at God's compassion, and will be full of gratitude towards his Benefactor, and so receive many other blessings as well. Even if he is subject to the devil in that he sins, yet from fear of God he disobeys the enemy when the latter tries to make him despair. Because of this he has his portion with God; for he is grateful, gives thanks, is patient, fears God, does not judge so that he may not be judged. All these are crucial qualities. It is as St. John Chrysostom says about Gehenna: it is almost of greater benefit to us than the kingdom of heaven, since because of it many enter into the kingdom of heaven, while few enter for the sake of the kingdom itself; and if they do enter it, it is by virtue of God's compassion. Gehenna pursues us with fear, the kingdom embraces us with love, and through them both we are saved by God's grace (*Homily On 1 Timothy 15:3*).

If those attacked by many passions of soul and body endure patiently, do not out of negligence surrender their free will, and do not despair, they are saved. Similarly, he who has attained the state of dispassion, freedom from fear and lightness of heart, quickly falls if he does not confess God's grace continually by not judging anyone. Indeed, should he dare to judge someone, he makes it evident that in acquiring his wealth he has relied on his own strength, as St. Maximus states. St. John of Damascus says that if someone still subject to the passions, and still bereft of the light of spiritual knowledge, is put in charge of anyone, he is in great danger; and so is the person who has received dispassion and spiritual knowledge from God but does not help other people.

Nothing so benefits the weak as withdrawal into stillness, or the man subject to the passions and without spiritual knowledge as obedience combined with stillness. Nor is there anything better than to know one's own weakness and ignorance, nor

anything worse than not to recognize them. No passion is so hateful as pride, or as ridiculous as avarice, "the root of all evils" (1 Tim. 6:10): for those who with great labor mine silver, and then hide it in the earth again, remain without any profit. That is why the Lord says, "Do not store up treasures on earth" (Matt. 6:19); and again: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). For the intellect of man is drawn by longing towards those things with which it habitually occupies itself, whether these be earthly things, or the passions, or heavenly and eternal blessings. As St. Basil the Great says, a persistent habit acquires all the strength of nature (*Long Rules* 6).

A weak person especially ought to pay attention to the promptings of his conscience, so that he may free his soul from all condemnation. Otherwise at the end of his life he may repent in vain and mourn eternally. The person who cannot endure for Christ's sake a physical death as Christ did, should at least be willing to endure death spiritually. Then he will be a martyr with respect to his conscience, in that he does not submit to the demons that assail him, or to their purposes, but conquers them, as did the holy martyrs and the holy fathers. The first were bodily martyrs, the latter spiritual martyrs. By forcing oneself slightly, one defeats the enemy; through slight negligence one is filled with darkness and destroyed. (From *A Treasure of Divine Knowledge* in *The Philokalia* (vol. 3).

– St. Peter of Damascus

Holy Martyr Nikephoros of Antioch

*Nikephoros was called from of old to know beheading, practically Nikephoros. **

On the ninth Nikephoros was beheaded by the sword.

Regarding Saint Nikephoros of Antioch, Saint Nikolai Velimirovich writes: "The biography of this martyr Nikephoros clearly demonstrates how God rejects pride and crowns humility and love with glory."

The Holy Martyr Nikephoros lived in the city of Syrian Antioch. In this city lived also the presbyter Saprikios, with whom Nikephoros was very friendly, so that they were considered as brothers. They quarreled because of some disagreement, and their former love changed into enmity and hate.

After a certain time Nikephoros came to his senses, repented of his sin and more than once asked Saprikios, through mutual friends, to forgive him. Saprikios, however, did not wish to forgive him. Nikephoros then went to his former friend and fervently asked forgiveness, but Saprikios was adamant.

At this time the emperors Valerian (253-259) and Gallius (260-268) began to persecute Christians, and one of the first brought before the court was the priest Saprikios. He firmly confessed himself a Christian, underwent tortures for his faith

and was condemned to death by beheading with a sword. As they led Saprikios to execution, Nikephoros tearfully implored his forgiveness saying, "O Martyr of Christ, forgive me if I have sinned against you in any way."

The priest Saprikios remained stubborn, and even as he approached death he refused to forgive his fellow Christian. Seeing the hardness of his heart, the Lord withdrew His blessing from Saprikios, and would not let him receive the crown of martyrdom. At the last moment, he suddenly became afraid of death and agreed to offer sacrifice to idols. In vain did Nikephoros urge Saprikios not to lose his reward through apostasy, since he already stood on the threshold of the heavenly Kingdom.

Nikephoros then said to the executioner, "I am a Christian, and I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. Execute me in place of Saprikios." The executioners reported this to the governor. He decided to free Saprikios, and to behead Nikephoros in his place. Thus did Saint Nikephoros inherit the Kingdom and receive a martyr's crown.

This occurred in the year 260 A.D. during the reign of Gallius. Nikephoros, whose name bespeaks a "victory bearer", won a double triumph over the passions and impiety.

Profuse are the passages of the Old and New Testaments urging us to love one another according to God, even as He who is mercifully most compassionate oftentimes enjoins upon us. The history of Saint Nikephoros teaches us that even if we should give away all our wealth as alms and surrender up all our bodily members to fire and wild beasts, even for the sake of piety, and endure ten thousand other torments, the sacrifice of one who remembers wrongs would not be accepted by Christ. By remembrance of wrongs, we mean those who bear resentment or harbor rancor. Saint John of the Ladder speaks of this vice, saying:

"Remembrance of wrongs is the consummation of anger, the keeper of sins, hatred of righteousness, ruin of virtues, poison of the soul, worm of the mind, shame of prayer, cessation of supplication, estrangement of love, a nail stuck in the soul, pleasureless feeling cherished in the sweetness of bitterness, continuous sin, unsleeping transgression, hourly malice" (*Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 9:2).

For those who have difficulty with forgetting past injuries and offenses, hearken to St. John's further advice: "Let it be put to shame by the Prayer of Jesus which cannot be said with it" (Step 9:10). But, "When, after much struggling, you are still unable to extract this thorn, you should apologize to your enemy, even if only in word. Then perhaps you may be ashamed of your long-standing insincerity toward him, and, as your conscience stings you like fire, you may feel perfect love toward him" (Step 9:11). And, "You will know that you have completely freed yourself of

this rot, not when you pray for the person who has offended you, nor when you exchange presents with him, nor when you invite him to your table, but only when, on hearing that he has fallen into spiritual or bodily misfortune, you suffer and weep for him as yourself" (Step 9:12). (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Virgin-Martyr Apollonia of Alexandria

Ecclesiastical historians have claimed that in the last years of Emperor Philip the Arabian (reigned 244-249), during festivities to commemorate the millennium of the founding of Rome (traditionally in 753 BC, putting the date about 248 AD), the fury of the Alexandrian mob rose to a great height, and when one of their poets prophesied a calamity, they committed bloody outrages on the Christians, whom the authorities made no effort to protect.

Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (247–265), relates the sufferings of his people in a letter addressed to Fabius, Bishop of Antioch, of which long extracts have been preserved in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. After describing how a Christian man and woman, Metras and Quinta, were seized and killed by the mob, and how the houses of several other Christians were pillaged, Dionysius continues:

"But they also seized that most admirable virgin Apollonia, then in advanced life, and knocked out all her teeth, and crushed her jaws; and then kindling a fire before the city, they threatened to burn her alive unless she would repeat along with them their expressions of impiety. And although she seemed to deprecate her fate for a little, on being let go, she leaped eagerly into the fire and was consumed."

Thus, Saint Apollonia asked the pagans to let go of her for a moment so that she could pray. As soon as they did, she leaped into the flames of her own free will and was consumed, receiving a double crown of martyrdom and virginity. Because of the nature of her torments, she is sometimes depicted with a golden tooth hanging from a necklace, or holding a tooth in a pair of pincers. She is invoked by those suffering from toothache.

Though Saint Apollonia is commemorated on February 9th in the West, where she is more popular than in the East, where she is not officially recognized on that date, in the year 2000 the Church of Greece decided to officially recognize her sainthood and honors her memory on October 30th. Furthermore, in Greece she was considered the patron saint of dentists until 1967, but in 1967 they officially recognized Saint Antipas of Pergamum as their patron saint. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

Uncovering of the relics (1805) of St. [Innocent](#) of Irkutsk (1731).
New Hieromartyr [Basil](#) priest (1930).
New Hieromartyr [Seraphim](#), Archbishop of Uglich (1937)
New Hieromartyr [John](#) priest (1938).
Venerable [Pancratius](#), hieromonk of the Kiev Caves (13th c.).
Ven. [Gennadius](#) (1516) and Nicephorus (1557), monks, of Vazhe Lake (Vologda).
Ven. [Maria](#) of Olonets (1860)
Translation of the relics of Ven. [George](#) Karslides (2006)
Hieromartyrs [Marcellus](#), bishop of Sicily; Philagrius, bishop of Cyprus; and [Pancratius](#), bishop of Taormina; disciples of Apostle Peter (1st c.).
Venerables Aemilianus and Bracchio of Tours (6th c.) (Gaul).
St. [Teilo](#) (Telio), bishop (Llandaff in Wales) (6th c.) (Celtic & British).
St. [Romanus](#) the Wonderworker of Cilicia (5th c.).
Hieromartyr [Peter Damascene](#), bishop of Damascus (743).
Ven. [Shio](#) Mgvime (6th c.)(Georgia)
St. [Marianus](#) Scotus, Abbot of St. Peter in Regensberg (Muirdach MacRobartaigh or Muiredach MacGroarty) (1088) (Germany)
St. [Alto](#) (Alton) of Altomuenster, Abbot (bishop?) (c. 760) (Germany)
St. [Cronan](#) (Ronan) the Wise, Bishop and Canonist (8th c. ?)
St. [Cuaran](#) the Wise, Bishop of Iona (Curvinus, Cronan) (after 700) (Ireland)
St. [Eingan](#) of Llanengan, Hermit (Einganor, Einion, Eneon, Anianus) (c. 590)
St. Taraghta, virgin in Ireland (unk)
Martyr [Alexander](#) of Rome with 38 others (unk)
Martyrs [Ammon](#), Emilian, Lassa, & 41 companions of Membressa (unk) (N. Africa)
Martyrs [Alexander](#), Ammon and 20 companions in Soloi of Cyprus (3rd c.)
St. [Ansbert](#), Bishop of Rouen (c. 700)
St. [Nebridius](#), bishop of Egara (c. 527) (Spain)
Hieromartyrs [Primus](#) and Donatus, deacons (N. Africa) (362)
St. [Sabinus](#), bishop of Canosa (c. 566) (Italy)
St. Caireach of Ireland, woman
St. Branwalather of Cornwall
St. Braque, hermit of Auvergne (576) (France)
St. Chamassy, hermit of Perigueux (6th c.) (France)

Memory Eternal!

Dear Faithful of St. Thomas: Helen Pavlik Janowiak fell asleep in the Lord on January 19th. She was almost 98 years old. Helen and her family will be remembered at St. Thomas for donating the altar, two major icons (St.

Nicholas/Divine Humility) as well as the icon of St. Gorazd (a relative). Her son John greatly appreciates your prayers, but please don't call for the time being. You may however email him at janow1234@yahoo.com. May God make Helen's memory eternal.

Social Team for February 16

Team 6 is up next week – Gabriella Howl, Shannon Johnson, Jameson Barker, Angelo Espinal. Thank you!

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You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

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, 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, the newly reposed handmaiden of God Helen P. Janowiak, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)