

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

**Wednesdays in Great Lent:
Liturgy of Presanctified
Gifts 6 PM**

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

Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10 AM

**March 9, 2025 – 1st Sunday in Great Lent (Sunday of
Orthodoxy) | Holy 40 Martyrs of Sebaste**

By Igumen Gabriel

We are gathered here together on the first Sunday of Great Lent to celebrate the Triumph of Orthodoxy. This feast was originally established to commemorate the victory of the venerators of icons over the iconoclasts, but more generally we also commemorate on this day the victory of the true Orthodox faith over all the heresies that have challenged it throughout history.

There is an interesting fact which we easily overlook about this feast: the original Triumph of Orthodoxy, the triumph of the veneration of icons, was not only a victory in a battle waged within the Church, but also within society and the entire Byzantine Empire at large. Because when the final victory of the holy icons occurred, the Seventh Ecumenical Council was long over; the bishops had already decreed that the icons are a holy and necessary part of our faith. It was rather the iconoclast emperors who had continued to resist; therefore the Triumph of Orthodoxy was not only a theological triumph, but also a political triumph.



I mention this fact because it stands in such sharp contrast to our own world today: we have come to assume that our Christianity is, by and large, a strictly private affair. We do not generally think of our faith as something appropriate to bring openly into public life. And we especially become nervous at any mention of theology or dogma around those who do not share our faith: this subject seems just too contentious, too divisive, too unnecessary, and perhaps even a bit embarrassing. We have come to believe that society is better off without such things, that we will all get along much better if we simply leave those things in the privacy of our own homes and churches.

Such a view of religion and society, the “separation of church and state,” is a quite recent phenomenon and totally unique in human history. It would take too much time to get into the political, philosophical and historical causes behind this idea, but suffice it to say that it is almost universally believed today by everyone, Christians and atheists alike.

But is it true? Despite the great syncretist goal on which America was founded — E Pluribus Unum, “Out of the Many, One” — we now watch as our country daily grows ever more divided by class, race, culture, and ideology. Our national discourse is plummeting — indeed, has plummeted — into an abyss of vitriol, hostility, bitterness and resentment. Meanwhile, our schools are no longer safe places to send our children; divorce and abortion have become ever-present facts of life; depression and anxiety are the norm; and modern life has become so meaningless, so unbearably empty, that [[drug overdose is now the leading cause of death in Americans under fifty](#)]. Religion in general and Christ in particular have all but vanished from public life all across the world; yet the dream and promise of a peaceful and enlightened secular society, grounded in shared ideals of humanism, is nowhere to be found. Certainly this has not been for lack of effort; indeed, the history of the past several centuries reads like a catalog of failed attempts to create such a society.

But the reality is that this society does not and cannot possibly exist. Christ said: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” How can we think to create a good and healthy society that does not follow the Way, is not founded on the Truth, and does not seek to bring Life to all its people? For as St. Paul writes: “other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 3:11).

So what am I saying, that we ought to unify society by forcibly creating a theocracy, at the edge of the sword? Of course not. But what I am saying is that we must, above all else, unify our own hearts. We cannot continue to divide our lives into career, family, politics, entertainment, and over there in one small corner our Christianity. Our faith is not something to take out and look at for an hour on Sunday mornings, and then put back away again safely for another week. Such a

faith is no faith. It is only a lifeless idol; it cannot save us, and it cannot save those around us.

And the world today desperately needs our Holy Orthodox Faith. It is the pearl of great price, worth far more than all the treasures in all the world put together. It is only Christ and His Holy Church that can heal the spiritual sickness and existential pain that we see all around us every day. But the plain fact is that the people around us, in all likelihood, have precisely one chance of ever finding the Church: through us. Through the witness of our daily lives. As someone once said: Christians should live in such a way that, if Christ had not been raised from the dead, their lives would be absurd.

Of course, we must use discernment. We cannot force our faith on others, we cannot bring healing to those around us by relying upon arguments and contentions and debates. There will probably be times when we are called upon to preach the faith directly, but most of our lives are actually a preparation for such times. Most of the time, we are called simply to be Christians in every place and at every moment of our lives, without exception. And that means to begin and end every day with prayer. It means to pray as much as possible throughout the day, and to pray openly with the sign of the Cross before and after meals, whether at home or in public. It means not to watch anything that you would be ashamed to watch with your children or your priest. It means to seriously keep each one of the fasts. It means to attend church as often as you can. It means to go regularly to confession, repenting sincerely of all the things in your life that keep you from God. It means to never, ever say an unkind word about anyone, whether openly or behind their back. It means to always put everyone before yourself. It means to make real, meaningful sacrifices for those in need, especially strangers and the poor. It means to forgive everyone for everything, all the time and no matter what. It means to never judge another human being for anything whatsoever. It means to thank God sincerely for every single thing in your life, even the things that are the most unpleasant, confusing and painful. It means to trust God totally, and to obey Him completely. In short, it means to die to everything in this world, to take up whatever crosses God may send you, and to follow Him.

Perhaps you might think that this sounds a bit unrealistic, suitable maybe for monks but beyond what God expects of people living ordinary lives in the world. If so, then I suggest a very simple and purely scientific experiment: just try it. Try this Lent to remember Christ all the time, to really love Christ with every thought and word and action. Try really keeping the fast. Try going without impure and frivolous entertainment. Try praying like it really, really matters. Try giving up things that you want for the sake of those around you. Try being the kindest to the people that you like the least. Try to really live as though all the pleasure and honor

and possessions and prestige that this life can offer mean absolutely nothing in comparison with eternity. Try living like you could die tonight. And then see—even if you don't do a very good job of it—whether your life doesn't become better. See whether your life doesn't become fuller and not emptier, richer and not poorer, more joyful and not more dull. I'm not saying that it will be easy. But I promise you that it will be worth it.

Because God, Who is our loving Father, never gives a single commandment that is not solely for the sake of our own eternal joy and happiness. He really does know better than we do what is good for us; but we must discover this fact for ourselves, in actual experience in our own lives. We must be willing to take the risk of believing God. But despite our fears, every sacrifice we make to God is never, ever something that we lose. He always gives back the gift a thousandfold, and we always find ourselves infinitely richer and not at all poorer for having made the sacrifice. After all, God does not need Lent. We do. And so do all the people around us, because as St. Seraphim of Sarov said: "Acquire the Spirit of Peace, and a thousand souls around you will be saved."

And once we begin to live in this way, once the Holy Spirit begins His work of transformation and deification in our hearts, then and only then we will be able to speak to others of the holy truth of our faith. Because then and only then will anyone have a reason to listen. The world will never know Christ if we never speak openly of Him; but if the world does not see Christ in us, if it does not meet Christ in us, then in all our talk they will know us for what we truly are: Pharisees and hypocrites. But though they will know us, they will not know Christ. How sad it is, how shameful it is, that so many living in the world today have known only these two types of Christians: those who are silent about their faith, and those who are hypocrites.

Let us then sincerely repent of these two great sins. Let us learn with the help of God to become true Orthodox Christians. Let us pray fervently to the Lord, and let us all strive to acquire the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our lives during this Lenten fast, so that not only we but a thousand souls around us will be able to experience together the supreme and incomparable joy of the Lord's Pascha, both now and in the eternal kingdom which is to come. May God grant us this, through the intercessions of the Most Holy Theotokos and of all the saints. Amen. (*From rememberingion.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 11:24-26, 30-12:2 EOB

Brethren, by faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing to share ill-treatment with God's people rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time. He considered the disgrace of the Anointed a

greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt because he had his eyes fixed on the reward.

By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down, after the people [of the city] had been encircled for seven days. By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had received the spies in peace. What more shall I say? Time would fail me if I mentioned Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Through faith, they overpowered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, became strong in weakness, grew mighty in war and caused foreign armies to flee. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Others were tried by mocking and scourging, yes, by chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn apart, they were tempted and they were slain with the sword. They went around in sheep and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted and ill-treated. And yet the world was not worthy of them! They wandered in deserts, mountains, caves, and the holes of the earth.

All of them received a testimony through their faith but they did not receive the promise because God had made provision for us to have something better, and they were not to reach perfection apart from us. And so, seeing that we are surrounded by such a great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising its shame, and he has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 1:43-51 EOB

At that time, being determined to go out into Galilee, Jesus met Philip and said to him, "Follow me!" Now, Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, "We have found the one of whom Moses in the law and the prophets, have written: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph!" Nathanael asked him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip replied, "Come and see!" As Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him, he said about him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked Jesus, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are King of Israel!" Jesus said to him, "Because I told you, 'I saw you underneath the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these!" He said to Philip, "Amen, amen, I tell you; hereafter, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

“Hereafter you will see the heavens open” (John 1:51). I congratulate myself and many of you, beloved brothers and sisters, on the ineffable mercy of God, on the spiritual renewal received through the feat of abstinence, prayer, fasting and repentance, and especially through communion of the most pure and life-giving Mysteries of the body and blood of the Lord. In this short time we could experience for ourselves the benefits of fasting and prayer, not to mention the benefits of abstinence, confession and communion; if, of course, we sincerely took advantage of this time to our salvation and sincerely fulfilled the condition of fasting and abstinence; if you abstained from excess in food and drink, sincerely prayed, humbled yourself before God and your neighbors, showed mercy, recognized many of your sins and iniquities and deeply regretted them, having accepted the firm intention not to do them again, and, finally, sincerely confessed them and received their remission and absolution, and were honored to taste the life-giving bread.

But did we all really benefit from the past week? Have our hearts become closer to God, to the Most Pure Mother of Life, to the Church, to the Holy Guardian Angel and to the Saints of God? Have we sincerely loved righteousness and virtue, and hated all unrighteousness and lawlessness? Do we sincerely love God and our neighbors? Do we feel a greater spiritual affinity with each other, as members of the one body of Christ, as the bread of Christ, for “we, though many, are one bread” of the mystery, “and one body, for we all partake of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17)? Do we feel in our hearts that the streams of iniquity do not flow with such insolence and violence to our souls as they did before the Fast and Communion, and have they significantly dried up in us, and have we become purer, freer, calmer, more dispassionate, kinder, softer-hearted, more inclined to all that is good and useful? Has our greed for the pleasures of the flesh and for covetousness diminished? Have you become more patient, more lenient, more forgiving to your neighbors? Have we begun to look more often to heaven, to the true and eternal fatherland, and with less partiality do we turn our gaze to all earthly things as temporary, momentary, transitory? For see how many in our midst are caught up in death in a short time, and death is constantly taking away its victims. If so, if we have become the best and most prudent, then I again congratulate myself and you on the great mercy of God, and together I pray that the Lord will confirm this good disposition and sentiment of the heart in me and in you; but let not the evil thought deceive any of us that now, thank God, we have thrown off the burden of sins and can again live as we lived, and sin as we sinned, for who would be without sin?

It is true, brothers and sisters, that no one is without sin, but to live as one lived and to sin in the same way as before, after renewal through repentance and communion, should not, must not, is not befitting a Christian. The Holy Church, through her spiritual father, gives the following admonition to everyone who repents: "From now on you shall guard against all these sins, since you have been baptized a second baptism, according to the Christian mystery, and may you lay a good beginning, with the help of God, and rather not sneer at the same thing, that you shall not make a man laugh, for this is not befitting a Christian: but live honorably, and rightly, and reverently, that God may help you by His grace" (Rite of Confession). This is what the Church inspires in the repentant. And common sense also inspires us; for who, then, having washed himself, would want to be deliberately soiled again? Only "a pig, having washed himself, goes back to wallowing in the mud; only a dog returns to his vomit" (2 Peter 2:22). "Behold, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you" (John 5:14), says the Lord to the healed paralytic. And something very bad can also happen to us if we neglect virtue after repentance; then the grace of God will leave us for inattention and carelessness about ourselves. Repentance and communion opens heaven and the heavenly kingdom to us, for, says the Lord, "He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood, will have eternal life – and He abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:54, 56).

How can we not value the gift we have received – eternal life and Christ's abiding in us, and our abiding in Him! Heaven has been opened to us through repentance and communion according to Scripture: "From now on you will see heaven opened" (John 1:51), what a wonderful mercy! It was closed by our sins, with the strongest gates and locks, but by repentance it was opened. Let us take advantage of this mercy of God before it is closed again for us: for God knows whether it will open again for us when we again close it with arbitrary sins. For many it was locked forever. Foolish virgins knocked on closed doors, saying: "Lord! Lord! Open to us," and it was said to them: "Amen, I say to you: I do not know you;" and we are all told: "Watch therefore, for you do not know the hour of the day that the Son of man will come" (Matthew 25:11-13). Amen. (*translated by John Sanidopoulos*).
– St. John of Kronstadt

Kontakion on the 40 Martyrs of Sebaste

by St. Romanos the Melodist

Proemion I: When you had forsaken every worldly battalion, then you joined yourselves unto the Master in heaven, as the Lord's forty-numbered contenders who won the prize. Inasmuch as you have gone through fire and through water, O blessed ones, you worthily received heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

Proemion II: May you rejoice, army of the glory of the King; Rejoice, illustrious stars of piety; rejoice, steadfast guardians of the church; rejoice, renown of kings; rejoice bulwark of citizenship, you forty athletes. Take pity on us, as we are in remembrance of you.

O Christ the Ruler over all, our Creator and God, the One who is mounted on a throne and cannot be contained, Who stretched out the heavens like a curtain, established the earth, and gathered the water into its places, Who brought all things from nothingness into being, And who gives breath and life to all, Who receives praise from the Archangels, and is glorified by Angels and worshiped by all: I the unworthy come before You and bring my prayer, asking for the grace of speech, so that I may piously extol the holy Martyrs, whom You showed to be victorious, and to whom You have given heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

The champions were arrayed with all wisdom, in a manner surpassing encomiums, as they fought Satan, and trampled upon the band of the idols. They deposed irreverence in favor of reverence. These steadfast ones were preachers of piety. They, without a doubt, were teachers of precision. They ever heal the sick, and deliver from evil spirits. They make the blind see and cleanse lepers. They raise up from the dung hill and lift up the fallen. They are the harbor for those who sail, They are the good fellow-traveling guides. They especially protect from tyrants, as the band that received heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

Surpassing the light of the sun shines this glory of the Saints, for though the sun can be covered by clouds, the Saints are never occluded by night. The sun makes jewels to shine, and after it sinks at dusk, again it comes back to all. This all-joyous and radiant lamp of the Saints proclaims the day, while the night again is greatly amazed how they were able to traverse the storm of deeds, for they stand full of glory beside Him Who glorifies the faithful, and they hear from Him: "You glorified Me upon those on the earth. Now I will confess you in the highest, granting you good things, heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

O wise beloved ones of the all-wise Master, and legitimate children of Him whom we know to be begotten [of the Father], the famous army of Jesus our God Who enlisted you, the wondrous flock of the wondrous Shepherd, and the sowing of the Sower, for He pours forth the waters of an ineffable spring upon them. O divine branches of the divine Vine, and holy shoots from the holy Root, as the beloved creations of the Creator of all, and the all-joyous gathering of the Pure Lord, the disciples of Christ, the Savior of all, Who gathered them together, and ordained that they dwell in the living pastures, granting to them heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

Greatly they were exalted by the Fashioner, and with the Angels they celebrate, the unconquerable phalanx of forty athletes; for as ones bearing victory, they rejoice together with the Saints of all ages in the highest, being arrayed with holy and spotless garments from their struggles, and through faith received the crown, that is praised by all of the noetic powers as a worthy bride standing beside the Lord, the Good Bridegroom, which He adorned through His gifts, ever shining with divine jewels, for they were made worthy to receive heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

What mouth is sufficient to praise, what tongue is strong enough to hymn the holy martyrs, who left behind transitory glory for that which is to come, who separated themselves from the devil and joined themselves to our Savior with faith, who broke apart every sin and were united to righteousness, who are inapproachable in commendations, who fled from the whole land of error and preached Orthodox dogma everywhere, the soldiers of Christ, who ever fight on behalf of the faithful, and fervently make war against the enemies of God? For to them was granted heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

They were shown strong in war, and again, they were shown very strong in struggles, these all-joyous ones, who were from various and sundry places. One was their desire in one harmony to worship the God of all with their whole soul. They were one of mind and one of knowledge in truth, as they fled delusion, as they stood against distortion, as they partook of good things, as they received crowns as ones worthy through their steadfastness. Forty, they appeared, the athletes of Christ, who glorified Christ, the only Redeemer, Who granted them heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

My soul is unable to recount of the divine multitude with one heart, though divided in forty bodies and known as one. Therefore, they fled from the tortures of the north and bravely resisted the devil. I would need forty tongues to be able to hymn those who with one tongue clung to and hastened to the noetic powers which, together with them, sing a holy song that cannot be silenced to God in the highest, Who separated them from the fleeting dangers and united them to His servants, for He granted them heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

The mighty soldiers of God on high unhesitatingly and bravely waged war against the enemy, the lord of the godless; and so, if it seems good, most faithful, exert your minds and hearts in my behalf, for I wish to make use of an analogy. Just as though we were on a headland, let us behold on the heights the Judge of the games, Christ, as he looks down on the stadium and beholds the warlike array and the all-evil, all-wily Satan with all his servants drawn up against the reverent group; and Christ sees the reverent man striving against the impious to overcome him, so that he may obtain all at once heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

Satan the deceiver, who exalted evil, waged war against the saints. The most blessed ones drew up their lines against him as they put their hope in God, for they had a mixture of hope and faith. Their Leader and their Guide were their shields against the opposition, for there came into view a host of angels, along with the Most High. With Belial, there was a body of demons; the unjust were equipped to fight with spears. So, too, the just took up shields to receive the blows. The arms of the mighty were unceasing torture. What was the armor of the humble? Zealous prayer. By it, the faithful found heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns. The mighty soldiers of God on high unhesitatingly and bravely waged war against the enemy as when Moses warred against Amalek, lifting his eyes towards the Lord, His *nous* and heart soaring to the heights together with his hands and all his senses, and therefore truly, with many entreaties and lifting his hands with his heart he reached Him Who is in the highest. He was upheld by Aaron and Or, as it is written, and he upheld them with faith and hope, as we know. Moses was therefore shown a victor, teaching all to turn to God, and that the way of the faithful is victory through prayer, showing as they received heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

The terrible champion of irreverence, Agrikolaos, eagerly struck out with words like weapons and, thinking that compulsion under the guise of persuasion would conquer the martyrs, said to them, "O friends, it is fitting for you to be generals and chiefs of the Romans. Do not rob yourselves of a position in the senate; do not keep company with the condemned who rejoice in tortures. Your life is worthy of honor, but theirs is laid under a curse. Glory follows for you, but punishment for them. As you snatch yourselves away from bitter death, do not get mixed up with them, for Christ will not free you from this death, nor will you through Him enjoy heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns."

"I am experienced in the utterly wicked and very wily arts to use against the godless. By means of these arts those who oppose us were unable to oppose the group. But I have confidence in you, who are seen as chiefs of the Romans, since you are in all respects subjects, and the king will honor you with wealth and glory as men illustrious and revered and possessed of prudent wisdom, for you now understand the decrees of the Romans. Come, then, my very good friends, and along with all sensible men, let us bow down before the gods, that they may redeem us from bitter death, to which the disciples of Christ always run, as they think they will find heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns."

Fearlessly they received his weapons, and they overthrew his wickedness while they remained unwounded; for the just men answered the unjust in this way: "O enemy of truth, son of destruction, well are you called by the name of Agrikolaos, for you are a savage flatterer, just like that father of yours, Satan, who advised Eve,

they say, 'If you taste of the tree, then you will become divine.' You told us to choose temporal glory, but you will not laugh at us; for we do not deny Christ, the God of all, the One who is always Master of life and death, the One who gives the faithful heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.”

The deceiver, with sinews strained in his insufferable spirit, when he heard this from the humble me gnashed his teeth like a wild lion and hissed like a snake; and full of fighting spirit, the ruler said to his captain, “Let their group be crushed on the rocks.” Immediately, Belial, sword in hand, took his stand so that in the battle line with the godless he might make war on the lovers of God; and with great eagerness they hastened to make war and struck them down with stones, but the wicked seemed to be crushed themselves; their wickedness reacted against them, and their injustice came on their own heads, for the wicked did not find heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

And so, the enemies of the saints were utterly shameless in crushing them by stones; but they wished to find another torture against the soldiers of Christ, and advised by the devil, they found a terrible punishment for them. Knowing well the great chill of the lake, excelling the cold of the north wind, when the biting cold of night came, they ordered the martyrs to stand naked in the water; and they took off their clothes, and naked, as in a stadium, they entered the water, and in the night sent up their prayers to Christ. But the enemy separated one of their number from them, for he did not hope to find heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

From on high the Creator, as though it were in the summer, brought out the sun for the martyrs, and sent thirty-nine crowns for those who endured the cold. As he beheld this, one of those on guard came into the lake and declared his faith in Christ. Judas went away, and Matthias was substituted; he who was formerly stubborn and just yesterday a pursuer was counted among the martyrs. When the irreverent saw him in the morning, he angrily gave orders to break the ice with sticks, and touching fire to it, they burned their bodies. They scattered their remains in the river, and the faithful found heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

When his mother saw one of the saints left behind by the lawless, she lifted the one whom she had borne on her shoulders and cast him among the bodies of the saints. Since she conquered her sufferings, by this addition she shared eternal glory along with them; but just as it was then, O Savior, Christ, my King, grant victory to Your saints, victory against demons and tyrants. Now, too, as one easily placable, grant victories and trophies against the barbarians to the most faithful ruler, and grant peace to Your people through the suppliant prayers of the one who bore You in the

flesh, and of the saints, who are steadfast and always Your prizewinners who receive from You heavenly glory from on high, and manifold crowns.

Holy 40 Martyrs of Sebaste

Satisfying the deficiency of your passion Savior, the legs of the forty are crushed.

On the ninth the legs of the forty men were broken.

These Holy Forty Martyrs [Cyrion (or Quirio), Candidus, Domnus, Hesychius, Heraclius, Smaragdus, Eunoicus, Valens, Vivianus, Claudius, Priscus, Theodulus, Eutychius, John, Xanthias, Helianus, Sisinius, Angus, Aetius, Flavius, Acacius, Ecdicius, Lysimachus, Alexander, Elias, Gorgonius, Theophilus, Dometian, Gaius, Leontius, Athanasius, Cyril, Sacerdon, Nicholas, Valerius, Philoctimon, Severian, Chudion, Aglaius, and Meliton – Ed.] came from various lands. All were soldiers under a general, during the reign of Emperor Licinius (308-324). Having been captured then examined on behalf of their Christian faith, first they were bound in chains and fetters and thrown in prison, then they were struck with stones in their faces and mouths. However, when the stones were hurled, they did not come into contact with the Martyrs, but they turned back and struck the ones who threw them. Then on a day when it was cold and very icy, especially in Sebaste where it is distinctly cold, these blessed Martyrs were condemned to be placed naked in the lake of the city. Because one of the forty, due to the weakness of his soul, went to the nearby bath that was lit, and as soon as the heat of the bath hit him he died, one of the guards who was keeping watch outside, seeing this, entered of his own accord into the lake, and by replacing the deserter, he established himself among the Holy Martyrs. He did this for the following reason: When the man who was weak in soul went to the bath, the guard saw a heavenly light that encircled the Holy Martyrs. He simultaneously saw bright crowns over the heads of each one. Only one of them was without a crown. (Basil the Great says that the guard saw these crowns before the one who was weak in soul left the lake. The name of the guard was Aglaios.) At dawn, because the Saints were faint yet alive, their legs were crushed, therefore they delivered their souls into the hands of God, and received the unfading crowns of martyrdom.

There was much desire among the Christians at that time to die for Christ, and they made this manifest. One of the Martyrs among the forty, who was young in age and named Meliton, had not yet died. Therefore the tyrant ordered that his legs not be crushed, but to leave him be, thinking that because he was young and physically strong, he could yet live, and turn from his faith in Christ. Wherefore when his mother saw that he was still alive, she feared that due to his youth and love for life he may give in to fear, and thus be found unworthy of the honor and rank of his fellow soldiers. Standing beside her son, she stretched out her hands, and with signs, glances, and every possible word and way she tried to impart courage and

bravery in his heart, saying: "My sweet child, child of the Heavenly Father, endure yet a little more, that you may become a perfect Martyr of Christ. Do not fear the torments, for behold Christ stands by as an invisible helper. Yet a little more my child, and you will receive no more sorrow and no more pain. All the torments have passed, all the terrible things you conquered with your bravery. After these things you will receive joy, pleasure, relaxation, gladness, and good things that you will enjoy, reigning together with Christ, and you will become an intercessor to Him on my behalf, your mother."

When the God-loving mother saw the soldiers placing the relics of the Saints on the wagon, and her son was left behind in the hopes that he may live, for this reason the good and brave mother, thinking that for her son to live would be more of a death, decided despite the weakness of her womanhood, and forgetting the affections of motherhood, lifted her son on her shoulders, and followed behind the wagon with strength of soul. The blessed one made it known that she did not want to see her son alive, but to see him die for Christ. When she saw that her son delivered his soul as he was being carried on the shoulders of his mother, then she felt liberated of her concerns, and danced and leaped for the joyous end of her son. Thus she brought his relic to the place where the other relics of the Saints were, and she placed her beloved child there among the other soldiers, that his body may not be separated from the bodies of the Saints, whose soul she numbered with their souls.

When the soldiers lit a large fire, they burned the bodies of the Saints. Whatever remained, they threw maliciously into the lake, that they may not be taken by the Christians. But by divine economy, the holy relics came to a bank of the river, therefore they were taken up by the Christians, giving to the Orthodox an inviolate treasure. The Synaxis of these forty is celebrated in their most-holy and martyric Temple near the four bronze pillars. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Holy Family of Martyrs

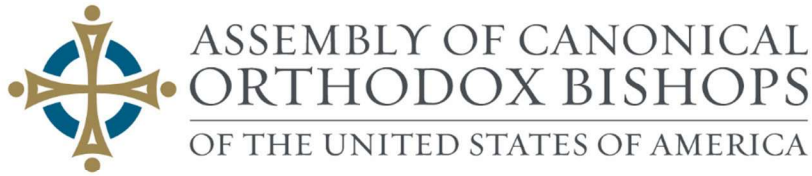
Generations of a family contested by the sword, grandfather-grandmother-father-mother-children.

The Holy Grandfather, Grandmother, Father, Mother and two Children Martyrs met their end by the sword. [The names and circumstances of many martyrs have not been passed down to us. May our families aspire to such courage in the face of death as this family did. - Ed.] *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Also Commemorated Today

New Hieromartyr Archpriest Mitrophan Buchnoff of Voronezh (1931).

New Hieromartyrs Michael, Alexis, Demetrius, Sergius, Sergius priests & Nicholas deacon, New Hieromartyr Iosaph and Virgin-martyrs Natalia and Alexandra (1938).



Sunday of Orthodoxy 2025

Encyclical


Dearly beloved faithful in Christ,


Each year on the first Sunday of Great Lent, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we lift our voices and our hearts in joyful remembrance of the restoration of the holy icons to their rightful place in the life of the Church. Today, we celebrate triumphally and with humility the resulting Unity of the Orthodox Church manifested through this decision of the 7th Ecumenical Council that met in Nicaea in 787, under the aegis of Byzantine Empress Irene and, subsequently, the definitive Restoration of Holy Icons in Constantinople on the First Sunday of Great and Holy Lent in 843, henceforth known as Orthodoxy Sunday, under the patronage of the Byzantine Regent, Saint Theodora, and, the Ecumenical Patriarch, Saint Methodios the Confessor. Now, here in the United States of America, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops is tasked with preserving, manifesting, and promoting this same mystery of Unity exemplified and confessed with courage by the Saints so long ago. Thus, inspired by the same sense of joy, witness and responsibility “Assembly of Bishops Sunday” is now recognized throughout the country in conjunction with the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul cries out across the ages with a message that still speaks to our hearts today: “I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). This powerful pericope crossed with the example of restoration celebrated on the Sunday of Orthodoxy inspires us to always rise above division and to stand together in the unshakable love of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. Indeed, the restoration of the holy icons is the restoration of unity through the victory of faith over fear, of salvation over condemnation, of a God incarnate over an unknown deity. Unity prevails when we all open up our hearts and minds in selfless love, transformed by grace in the mystery of Christ. Just as we venerate icons, we too become icons to one another, united in one body, that is the Church, just as the Saints of the 8th and 9th Centuries chose to stand firm, witnessing God’s glory. Thus, let us be challenged by Saint Paul’s words by being “united in the same mind and the same judgement.” Let us not harden our differences but rather embrace what unites us in Christ.

As we celebrate Assembly of Bishops Sunday – along with the Sunday of Orthodoxy – we encourage you all to learn about the Ministries of the Assembly as well as to support our sincere efforts for Orthodox Christian Unity through the steadfast and generous gifts of your time, talent, and treasure.


With Paternal love in Christ and prayers for a blessed Lenten journey, on the 9th of March, 2025.



Archbishop Elpidophoros, Chair
Ecumenical Patriarchate


Metropolitan Saba, Vice-Chair
Antiochian Orthodox Church

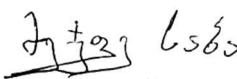

Archbishop Michael
Treasurer



Metropolitan Gregory
Secretary


Bishop Irinej
Serbian Orthodox Church


Metropolitan Nicolae
Romanian Orthodox Church


Metropolitan Joseph
Bulgarian Orthodox Church


Bishop Saba
Georgian Orthodox Church


Metropolitan Tikhon
Orthodox Church in America

[Urpasianus](#) of Nicomedia (295).

Righteous [Caesarius](#), brother of St. Gregory the Theologian, w/w (369).

St. Tarasius of Liconium.

St. Philoromus the Confessor of Galatia (4th c.).

St. Pacianus (Pacian), bishop of Barcelona (390).

St. Jonah, archbishop of Novgorod (1470).

[42 Martyrs](#) of Momisici

St. [Vitalius](#) of Castronovo (994).

St. Constantine, King of Dumnonia, hieromonk & Protomartyr of Scotland (576)

St. Bosa, Bishop of York, England (686)

St. Melle (female) (Brittany)

St. Telio

St. Laouen

St. Glannon (female)

St. Felix (Felis?) of Quimper (10th c.)

St. Ilan

St. Antony (Antoine), hermit of Froidemont (10th c.)(France)

Martyr Alvère of Limueil in Périgord (3rd-4th c.)

St. Boltulphe (Botolf) of Masstricht (655)

New Martyrs [Christos](#) the priest and Panagos (1716)

Social Team for March 16

Team 7 is up next week – Samouris family. Thank you!

Follow Our Diocese On-Line

Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

Camp Nazareth: <http://www.campnazareth.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

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. 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.)