

# SOBORNOST

## St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## SERVICES

**Wednesday: Reader Vespers 6:30 PM**

**Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM**

**Great Vespers 5:00 PM**

**Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM | Sunday**

**School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10 AM**

**January 25, 2026 – Sunday of  
Zacchaeus | Saint Gregory the**

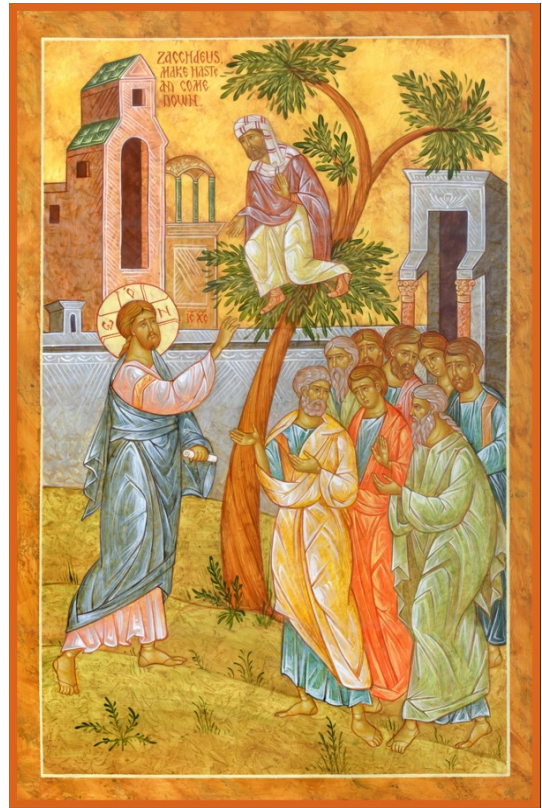
**Theologian | New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia**

## **Saint Gregory the Theologian as a Model for our Lives**

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

Saint Gregory the Theologian was from Nazianzus in Asia Minor. His mother Nonna was a pious Christian, while his father was initially a follower of the system of the Hyspistarians, which merged Jewish and Gentile religious elements, and in which the worship of the Most High God was combined with the worship of fire. His wife through prayer and daily persuasion succeeded in returning him to the Christian faith. He was baptized by bishops of the area and received the name Gregory. Shortly afterwards he was ordained Bishop of Nazianzus. Saint Gregory the Theologian likens his parents to Abraham and Sarah because they had three children at an advanced age - Gorgona, Gregory and Caesarius.

Saint Gregory was ordained Presbyter by his father and Bishop by his friend Basil. He was a great theologian. In hymnography he is mainly praised as "the utmost theological mind". The Church honored him by awarding him the title of "Theologian", which it has reserved for only three Saints. The other two are John the Evangelist and the venerable Symeon the New Theologian.



Saint Gregory was chosen to assume the leadership of the Church of Constantinople at a difficult time, during which the heretical Arians prevailed for forty years and the imperial court favored the heresy. There, despite great difficulties, his theological charisma shined, as well as the greatness of his soul. He delivered his famous homilies on theology and the small church in which he spoke and liturgized was called "Anastasia" ("Resurrection"), because he resurrected the divine word. Eventually, the Emperor Theodosius handed over the cathedral and the Second Ecumenical Synod elected him Archbishop of Constantinople. His enemies, however, raised the issue of canonical irregularity upon his election to the throne of Constantinople, because allegedly he held another office. The complaint, however, was not correct, because he was never settled in the city of Sasima. But to prevent schism within the Church, he departed Constantinople, after delivering a moving speech at the headquarters of the Synod, which revealed the splendor of his spiritual power. He said that if he was the cause of division, then let him be thrown into the sea like Jonah, that the storm may cease. And he retired to find "his friend quietude".

His life and writings give us the opportunity to highlight many and important things, but the narrowness of space allows us to mention the following:

First, Saint Gregory was a Theologian both by name and reality, because he had the personal knowledge and experience of God. His homilies, especially his festive discourses on the great Despotic Feasts, have theological content, because Orthodox preaching is simultaneously a catechism and an initiation into the mystery of theology. Orthodox theology is a way of life and helps man to be purified of his passions, that he may acquire personal communion with God, who is not only a higher power or an abstract idea, but a Person. Saint Gregory the Theologian, like all the Holy Fathers, nourished and nourishes the people of God with the teachings of Orthodox Theology, which offers solutions to the great existential problems.

Orthodox preaching today has been influenced, unfortunately, by foreign standards and secularism. Of course, there are exceptions, but one mostly hears sermons that are societal, moralistic, colorless and tasteless of Orthodox theology, leaving people untouched and untreated. The Holy Fathers, as pastors, certainly grappled with various social issues and problems, but they did so as Theologians. They reflected on the issues and proposed solutions from the perspective of Orthodox theology.

Second, we are in the first month of the year, and as is known, we tend to wish each other "many years". And we do this because we love life and want to live as much as possible. Nobody wants death because we weren't created to die, but to live eternally. Death is something foreign and an intruder in our lives. It is a result

of sin, the misuse of freedom, and disobedience to God's will. Human life has a higher purpose and thus is of great importance and value. It is worth reflecting on the value and purpose of human life through the theology of Saint Gregory. The Saint will tell us that man is "an animal residing here but transferring elsewhere, and the end of this mystery is to move towards God." In other words, man is not made for the herein, but for eternity. In this life, by economy, we live, breathe, eat, drink, work, become a monastic, get married, etc., but the purpose of our life is something else. It is deification, namely communion with the Holy Triune God. Our true citizenship is not here, but elsewhere. It is the Kingdom of the Holy Triune God. We live here, but we are transferring elsewhere, that we may become citizens in heaven.

It is worth rejoicing in Orthodox theology, which offers solutions to our daily problems, and helps us overcome the herein, namely death and the enjoyment of life, not just for "many years", but for eternity. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy 4:9-15 EOB**

My son Timothy, this saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance. For this purpose, we work hard and experience rejection, because we have placed our trust in the living God who is the Savior of all, especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Let no one despise your youth, but be an example for those who believe: in speech, in your way of life, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to public reading, encouragement and teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the council of presbyters. Be attentive in these things. Give yourself to them completely, so that your progress may be manifest to all.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 19:1-10 EOB**

At that time, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, and could not because of the crowd, because he was short. He ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus who was [about] to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up, saw Zacchaeus, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house!" He hurried, came down, and received Jesus with joy. But when the people saw it, they all grumbled, saying, "He has gone in to stay with a man who is a sinner!" Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have wrongfully obtained money from anyone, I restore four times as much!" Then Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

## Homily on the 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Luke

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos

*"Zacchaeus, make haste and come down"* (Lk. 19:5) To satisfy his metaphysical search, Zacchaeus sought to encounter Christ and He, showing the purpose of His incarnation, called him to a personal encounter: "Zacchaeus," He said to him, "make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." We will formulate a few thoughts about the personal encounter with Christ.

The communion of man with Christ and of Christ with man is primarily a personal event. Christ does not meet with [humanity en masse], but with the persons who are worthy to receive His divine teaching and to hear His heavenly call.

Christ is a Person. The same goes for man. Therefore a personal encounter (face to face) creates the proper conditions for salvation. Indeed, the knowledge of God is experienced at the limits of the personal relationship.

An expression of this encounter and communion is the pronunciation of the name. Christ calls man by his name (which is very personal to him) and man calls God by His name: "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me."

Christ Himself, who is "the Good Shepherd," revealed this personal relationship with His flock, when He said: "The sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 1:3). We see this in the case of the Apostle Peter. After His resurrection, the Lord asks him: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs" (John 21:15). We also see the same in the case of Mary Magdalene. When the Lord says, "Woman, why are you crying? What are you asking for?" she thinks He is the gardener. But when He uses her name "Mary" then she immediately recognizes her Lord and her teacher.

Christ's encounter with Zacchaeus also shows the real conditions of a personal encounter. And this condition is ecstasy. The Lord came down from heaven to earth to encounter man and converse with him, for the purpose of his salvation. And Zacchaeus climbed from the ground to the tree to see Christ and hear His divine word. Both of them made a departure and had an encounter. Zacchaeus in particular succeeded in the personal encounter because he was doing something crazy. It was no small thing, a rich man, a publican with a social position, to climb the tree to see a Nazarene. But this departure from having a good idea about himself and his "dignity" had the consequence of his salvation.

This shows that man encounters Christ at the limits of the personal relationship, when he does something crazy. When he destroys the illusion of completeness and self-sufficiency, when he ceases to consider the opinion of the world, and when he innocently and truly seeks Christ, even if everyone mocks him, then he encounters

the Lord. The personal and saving encounter with Christ takes place in the Church which is His blessed and glorious Body and a communion of persons.

At Baptism, the Church gives a person his name and knows him by it from then on. She personally gives him divine Grace and personally offers him the message of salvation. With his name she forgives his sins, crowns him, ordains him a Priest, gives him the divine Gifts, i.e. the Body and Blood of Christ, accompanies him to the next life with the funeral service.

Since the Church is a communion of persons, it means that if we want our salvation, we need to feel it as the place of our personal encounter with Christ and not just with external contact with Him. After all, with His divine Grace we are united with Him.

So we should not live our lives in the Church as individuals, since she herself does not want to speak to a mass of people and consider the believers as a mob, but wants to talk and associate with people personally. This is the greatest offering of the Church especially today when everyone is trying to turn people into individuals, into a mob to lead them where they want.

Many today accuse the Church of not doing a great social work and dealing only with worship, or rather giving priority to it. But this objection shows the terrible weakness they have to access the redemptive space of our Church. The Church does great social work. It has plenty of social work. And only an objective researcher can establish this. He can also find that she is doing it correctly and truly. However, despite the great social work, she avoids doing it only in order to overcome the great temptation to view people as a group. She works more personally, with confession, personal salvation encounters, than "socially", as people mean by it, because many times with social work the person is destroyed, since the person becomes just a number, so he loses hope of salvation. Statistical surveys about the poor, the elderly, etc. or the collective offer of work (a boarding school with so many children who eat, drink, etc.) help us to work socially, but most of the time they do not let us work philanthropically. It is better to give the other inner peace and security than to limit our work to external offerings.

In conclusion, we say that it is necessary in the critical days that we are passing through to consider the Church as an ark of personhood and not as a ministry of social services, as an ark of salvation and not as a hall of lectures and discussions. Then like Zacchaeus we will acquire our salvation. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

I'm learning that you've become resentful of the outrages committed against us by the monks and beggars. And it's unsurprising that you, still unharmed and without

firsthand experience of our calamities, are growing impatient at such events. Given that I've been tested by even greater calamities and taken my share of violence, please let me be thought fairly reliable when advising Your Reverence what gray hair teaches and reason shows us.

What happened was terrible, even beyond terrible—who would argue with that? The altars were violated and sacramental objects demolished; we stood between the initiates (*those on their way to baptism – Ed.*) and the stone throwers; we even offered petitions as a remedy against the stonings; they forgot the modesty of virgins, the decency of monks, the misery of beggars—they did damage to their own pitifulness by their harshness.

However, perhaps it's better to be patient and, from our experience, to give an example of patience to the masses. For a rational argument does not persuade most people in the same way as practice, the silent exhortation.

I think that it's a great thing to exact justice from those who acted unjustly. I say a great thing (for it's even beneficial for the correction of others), but much better than this, and more godlike, is the endurance of sufferings. For while the former curbs vice, the latter persuades people to be kind, which is far better and more wholesome than simply not being vicious.

Let's think that a great act of beneficence lies before us, and let's forgive anything done against us, so that we too may obtain forgiveness and pay kindness in advance for kindness.

Phineas was called a zealot because he ran a spear through the Midianite woman along with the adulterer and removed the reproach from the sons of Israel [Num 25:6– 11], but he was praised even more for praying for an errant people. Well then, let us too stand up and make atonement, and let the plague abate and let it be reckoned to us for righteousness, as it is written [Ps 105(106):30–31].

Moses too was praised for killing the Egyptian who subjected the Israelite to horrible treatment [Exod 2:11– 12], but he was admired more for curing through prayer his sister Mariam, made leprous because of her grumbling [Num 12:1–16].

Consider the following examples too. The Ninevites were threatened with catastrophe, but they paid off their sin with tears [Jonah 3:1–10]. Manasseh was the most transgressive among the kings but the most renowned among the saved because of his lament [2 Chron 33:1–20].

“What shall I do with you, Ephraim?” God says [Hos 6:4]. The story contains terrible wrath, yet protection is supplied too [Hos 11:8–9]. Is anything swifter than beneficence? The disciples begged for Sodomite fire [Gen 19:24; Luke 17:29] against those who led Jesus out, but he disdained vengeance [Luke 9:54–56]. Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, one of the attackers, but Jesus restored it [John 18:10].

What about the person who asked if we should forgive a brother who erred seven times? Isn't he accused of being too stingy? For to the "seven times" is added "seventy-seven times" [Matt 18:21–22]. What about the debtor in the gospels, the one who wouldn't forgive the very things for which he was forgiven [Matt 18:24–34]? Didn't he pay for it bitterly? What about the example set by the [Lord's] Prayer [Matt 6:12; Luke 11:4]? Doesn't it want us to exchange one act of forgiveness for another?

Now that we've got so many examples, let's imitate God's beneficence and not want to learn for ourselves just how wicked retribution for sin is. Do you see the progression of kindness? First it legislates, then it commands, promises, threatens, reproaches, brandishes, restrains, and threatens again. Only when it's constrained does it strike a blow, and this just slightly, leaving open some room for making amends.

Accordingly, let's not suddenly lash out—that wouldn't be safe—but let's chasten them with fear and then conquer them with beneficence, and let's make them debtors of our reverence, tormented more by their conscience than by our wrath. Let's not cause a fig tree that can still produce fruit to wither up; let's not condemn its soil as useless and infertile, soil that the gardener's protection and care might perhaps cure [Luke 13:6–9].

Let's not destroy an important and renowned deed on account of, perhaps, the Wicked One's insult and envy, but rather let's want to come off as beneficent instead of perfect, as lovers of the poor instead of lovers of the court. Let's not put up with those who would secretly enkindle us to this more than with those who would restrain us, if for no other reason than to reflect on the shame of being seen to fight against the poor, who have this great advantage, that, even if they commit injustice, they're still shown mercy on account of their misfortune.

Think now of how they'll all fall before you: the poor and their caretakers as well as all the monks and virgins who supplicate on their behalf. Therefore, grant this favor both to all of them (since they're sufficiently afflicted, as is clear from those who beseech me) and, before everyone else, to me, who makes this request on their behalf.

If the fact that they dishonored me strikes you as a terrible thing, how much more terrible would it appear to ignore those who recommend this course of action to you. May God forgive the noble Paul for the violence he committed against us.

– St. Gregory the Theologian, *Letter 159, To Theodore*

## **Homilies on the Commonwealth of the Church – The Presbyter**

by Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos

In each Metropolis there is a Metropolitan and many Presbyters, who are the Clergy/Priests, who have been ordained and placed in each Parish of the Metropolis by the Metropolitan, to shepherd the Christians, with his command and guidance.  
The term "presbyter" perhaps comes from the presbyters of the Jews, as the leaders of the Jewish people were called and we see it in the sacred Gospels. Christ Himself foretold His death and Resurrection to His Disciples, that He would "go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the presbyters and chief priests and scribes" (Matt. 16:21), and elsewhere it is written that "chief priests and the presbyters of the people came to Him" (Matt. 21:23).

Because Christianity appeared in Palestine, at first among Jews, that is why this name was adopted to denote those Clergy who were ordained by the Apostles to shepherd a smaller flock.

Of course, the word "presbyteros" is Greek, which denotes a person of older biological age, who should be respected, and by extension this word characterizes the Priest, that is, the second degree of the Priesthood, who is ordained by the Bishop, who is the third degree of Priesthood.

In the New Testament, there does not seem to be a clear distinction between Presbyters and Bishops, since the terms are used interchangeably, that is, Bishops are also called Presbyters and Presbyters are characterized as Bishops. This distinction came after the holy Apostles lived, who ordained Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons.

It seems that from the early Church there was a distinction between Bishops and Presbyters, but the confusion was with the terms. However, when the Apostles disappeared, then, especially in the Apostolic Fathers and especially in Saint Ignatius the God-bearer, a clear distinction is made between the three ranks of the Priesthood, that is, the Bishop, the Presbyter and the Deacon.

The Presbyter is also called a Priest. The word "Priest" comes from the sacrifices, he is the one who performs the sacrifice, who sacrifices, and by extension the Bishop is also characterized as Hierarch, because he is the head of the Priest and the Priests. Moreover, the Presbyter is also called Cleric, like all the ranks of the Priesthood, because they are the Lot of God (Κληρο τοῦ Θεοῦ).

Each Metropolis for its good operation and pastoral ministry is divided into several Parishes, in which one or several Priests are placed, according to the number of Christians who make up the Parish. At the same time, the Chancellor and the Preachers are also Presbyters/Priests, to whom the Metropolitan assigns corresponding responsibilities, either administrative or preaching.

In order to become a Presbyter, one must possess the appropriate canonical qualifications, which are evaluated by the Metropolitan. Thus, the Metropolitan, as Saint Epiphanius the Bishop of Cyprus writes, with the Mystery of ordination gives birth to fathers in the Church, while the Presbyters cannot ordain, therefore with the Holy Baptism they perform they give birth to children in the Church and not fathers.

After the election of a Christian by the Metropolitan, his ordination as a Presbyter takes place. This is not an appointment, but a sacramental act. In fact, during the central moment of the Mystery, the Metropolitan says aloud: "The divine grace, which always heals that which is infirm and completes that which is lacking, ordains the most devout Deacon (name) to be a Presbyter. Let us therefore pray for him, that the Grace of the Holy Spirit may come upon him."

Here, we are talking about divine Grace, which ordains a Deacon to be a Presbyter, and which heals the infirm and makes up for what is lacking. No one is perfect to undertake this work, therefore God is asked to send His Grace, to empower him in this multi-responsible work.

Because the Parish is the smallest cell of ecclesiastical life, it is the place where every Christian is baptized and enters ecclesiastical life, that is why we all got to know the Church first in our Parish. We entered it on the fortieth day after our birth, with the sacred Service of the Sarantismos; in it we were baptized and chrismated; in it we were ministered from our young years, and we received communion of the Body and Blood of Christ; we even confess in it when we sin. From there a family begins with the Mystery of Marriage and there also the funeral service of Christians takes place, when the soul is separated from the body.

This means that the Presbyter/Priest has a great spiritual responsibility, he is the spiritual father of the Christians of the specific Parish and consequently he has an important liturgical, spiritual and administrative task to accomplish.

Certainly, no work is autonomous in the Church, no one is autonomous within the synodical and hierarchical commonwealth of the Church. The Presbyter has a spiritual superior, the Metropolitan, whom he calls father, is ordained by him, refers to him and works in the specific Parish based on his orders and the decisions of the Sacred Synod.

This is clearly seen in the way in which he liturgizes and performs the Mysteries of the Church. Always, in all services he mentions his name, and especially in the Divine Liturgy: "First of all, Lord, remember our Archbishop (he mentions the name) who you granted your holy churches, in peace, safety, honor, and health, unto length of days, rightly dividing the word of Your truth." When a Divine

Liturgy is performed without mentioning the name of the Bishop, then the Divine Liturgy suffers in its canonicity.

If a Presbyter has been deposed from the Church and continues to officiate or perform various Mysteries, all these are invalid, even if he mentions the Metropolitan's name uncanonically.

The Presbyter obeys his Metropolitan and the Metropolitan obeys the Sacred Synod and in this way there is unity in the Church and God is glorified.

It is a great honor to be a "Priest of the Most High God", to be a Presbyter and to be a spiritual father of the Christians of the Parish he presides over. Along with honor comes great responsibility, because he will give an account of his actions to God. That is why he must perform this work with faith, purity of life, prayer, selfless love and obedience to his Metropolitan and the tradition of the Church. *(Translated by John Sanidopoulos)*

### **Commemoration of the New Martyrs & Confessors of Russia**

On the Sunday nearest (or after) January 25, we commemorate the New Martyrs of Russia who suffered under the Soviet yoke. Among them are Hieromartyr Basil (Vasily) and Venerable Martyr Margaret, Abbess of St. Elijah Woman's Monastery in Ufa, commemorated January 25.

**Hieromartyr Vasily**, Bishop of Priluki (in the world, Vasily Ivanovich Zelentsov) was born in 1870 in the village of Zamoraevo, Rannenburg District, Ryazan Governorate, to an archpriest's family. He graduated from the University of St. Petersburg Law School and the St. Petersburg Theological Academy. He taught at the Yekaterinoslav Theological Seminary and was then appointed a diocesan missionary for the Yekaterinoslav Diocese. In 1917-1918, he was a member of the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In 1919, Father Vasily received monastic tonsure from Bishop Feofan (Bystrov, commemorated February 6) of Poltava, with whom he was particularly close. In 1920, Father Vasily served in a parish in Poltava.

His ministry and sermons attracted large crowds; even sectarians came to hear him. Father taught his flock to pray without noticing anyone or anything during prayer. He introduced congregational singing during services and held spiritual talks on Sundays.

Father Vasily, who helped the poor, had four orphans in his care. He held open debates with sectarians, bringing them to Orthodoxy. In the early 1920s, Father Vasily organized the Pokrovsk Christian Youth Society, as a counterweight to the Komsomol. After speaking out against church robberies, he was arrested in 1922 and sentenced to death, which was commuted to five years in a labor camp thanks

to the protection of his flock. In 1925, the priest was released under an amnesty. From prison, he took the child of a deceased prisoner with him and raised him along with his other four children.

That same year, on August 25, Archbishop Gregory and Bishop Damaskin consecrated Father Vasily as Bishop of Pryluky, a vicar of the Poltava Diocese. In September 1926, Vladyka was arrested again in Kharkov. In Poltava, the authorities were afraid to do so, fearing an uprising among his loyal people, primarily workers.

After torturous interrogations in the dungeons of the GPU, he was exiled to Solovki. There, the Bishop issued serious criticism (the so-called "necessary canonical amendments") against Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky)'s "Declaration" and his new ecclesiastical course, despite the fact that he had been particularly close to it during the first years of his deputyship. Saint Basil believed that Metropolitan Sergius's attempt to achieve peace with the persecutors of the Church "was not moving forward along canonical lines, and therefore not along the path of Church truth," since peace should be understood as the peace of Christ, "and not earthly well-being and security." The Bishop believed that the referral of the Deputy Patriarchal Locum Tenens to the Council Court was justified.

At the initiative of the Bishop, the Solovetsky bishops in September drafted their response to the "Declaration," calling for an open declaration to the Bolshevik government that "the Church cannot tolerate interference in the area of purely Church relations by a state hostile to religion."

In 1928, Vladyka was transferred from Solovki to continue his exile in the Irkutsk region (the village of Pyanovo in the Bratsk district). There, his stance against Metropolitan Sergius's policies became even more intransigent. He sent his spiritual daughter a large manuscript, demanding that it be handed over to Metropolitan Sergius. This manuscript, among other things, even spoke of the need to fight the Soviet regime by all possible means, including armed uprisings. In 1929, after much hesitation, his spiritual daughter handed the manuscript over to Metropolitan Sergius. Soon after, on December 9, Vladyka was arrested and transported to Moscow's Lubyanka Prison. On January 22 (February 3, new style), 1930, after torture, he was sentenced to death by firing squad, and three days later, on January 25 (February 7, new style), the fearless Saint was executed. The holy remains of the holy martyr were buried at the Vagankovskoye Cemetery.

Canonized by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a locally venerated saint in 1997, he was canonized as a New Martyr and Confessor of Russia at the Jubilee Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in August 2000 for church-wide veneration. (*from tatmitropolia-ru*)

**St. Marguerite** (or Margaret) (Gunaronula Maria Mikhailovna) was born around 1865–1866 in Kyiv. Her spiritual father was Archpriest Alexander Korsakovsky. In his memoirs, Prince N.D. Zhevakhov noted her fervent faith and love for God. After her tonsure, she became a member of the women's monastic community "Consolation and Comfort" in the Moscow province, where she faced severe trials.

By the decree of the Holy Synod on January 18, 1917, she was appointed abbess of the Menzelinsk Prophet Elijah Women's Monastery in the Ufa province. The move to Menzelinsk was difficult, but she successfully managed the monastery, caring for the spiritual life of the nuns and the external well-being of the community. Under her strict and demanding, but at the same time loving guidance, the monastery prospered. It had fruit trees, kitchen-gardens, apiaries, and workshops for the production of icons and gold-weaving. There was even a photographic laboratory - an extreme rarity at that time. In April 1917, revolutionary events affected the monastery, and she managed to protect the monastery school from being transferred to state control.

On April 18, 1918, she was elected to the Diocesan Council. At this time, the Czechoslovak rebellion began, and the territory of the Ufa province frequently changed hands between the Reds and the Whites. In the late summer of 1918 the White armies left Kazan and the neighboring towns, and Mother Margaret decided not to remain in the power of the Bolsheviks. She was at the wharf preparing to leave when St. Nicholas appeared to her and said: "Why are you running from your crown?"

Stunned by the vision, Abbess Margaret returned to the monastery and told the monastery priest about what had happened. And sensing that she would soon have to suffer for the faith, she asked for her coffin to be prepared in advance, and that she should be buried on the very day of her death, after the burial service.

The next day, the Bolsheviks again seized Menzelinsk, and Abbess Margaret was arrested as a "counter-revolutionary". According to witnesses, she boldly spoke out against the Bolsheviks, calling them to repentance. They dragged her out onto the porch of the church during a service, and after refusing her request to commune of the Holy Mysteries, shot her. Her martyr's death occurred on August 9/22, 1918. Immediately after the burial service, the sisters of the monastery buried her behind the altar of the Cathedral of the Ascension, the church where she had been shot.

It was only the next day that the abbess's request to be buried on the very day of her death, which had at first seemed strange to the priest, became comprehensible. For the same chekists who had shot Abbess Margaret brought out a Muslim mullah to be shot, wishing to bury him in one grave with the Orthodox superior of the monastery. However, since she was already buried, they could not do this and took the mullah somewhere else.

A great Russian elder - St. Ambrose of Optina, it seems - prophesied about this monastery that under one superior they would build a church, another would be a martyr, and under a third - the bells would fall. The prophecy was fulfilled. Abbess Margaret became a martyr, and under the last superior they removed the bells from the church and closed the monastery.

In the 1970s, near the main church of the Menzelinsk monastery, which was closed at that time, they decided to dig a hole behind the very altar. Suddenly they came on a coffin. In it were the incorrupt relics of Abbess Margaret with a cross on her breast. They did not disturb the coffin, but filled in the grave and found another place for the hole...

In 1999, Abbess Marguerite was canonized as a locally venerated saint of the Ufa diocese, and in 2000 she was added to the Assembly of New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia with a feast day on the Sunday on or following January 25. *(adapted from orthodox.net and athos.guide)*

## **Martyr Felicity & Her 7 Sons of Rome**

Saint Felicitas (or Felicity) was born into a wealthy Roman family under the emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161). Having given birth to seven sons (Januarius, Felix, Philip, Silvanus, Alexander, Vitalius and Martial) and become a widow, she devoted her life to the proper raising of her children and the service of God. By her public and edifying example, many idolaters were moved to renounce the worship of their false gods. For this Felicitas and her seven sons were turned over to the Prefect Publius to be examined and compelled to sacrifice to the idols.

Publius tried to persuade her to renounce her faith in Christ, with such words as: "Take pity on your children, Felicitas; they are in the bloom of youth, and may aspire to the greatest honors and preferments." The holy mother answered: "Your pity is really impiety, and the compassion to which you exhort me would make me the most cruel of mothers." Then turning herself towards her children, she said to them: "My sons, look up to heaven where Jesus Christ with his saints expects you. Be faithful in his love, and fight courageously for your souls."

Seeing her steadfast in her faith, Publius ordered for Felicitas to be beaten. Then one by one, the children were questioned by the prefect. All likewise, by the good example of their mother, boldly confessed their faith and would not be persuaded to worship the idols, despite being threatened. They were all therefore imprisoned, showing not a fear of death, but rather feared eternal punishment if they should deny their beloved Christ.

Antoninus having read the interrogatory, gave an order that they should be sent to different judges, and be condemned to different deaths. Januarius was scourged to

death with whips loaded with plummets of lead. The two next, Felix and Philip, were beaten with clubs till they expired. Silvanus, the fourth, was thrown headlong down a steep precipice. The three youngest, Alexander, Vitalius, and Martial, were beheaded, and the same sentence was executed upon the mother four months after.

Her body was laid to rest in the catacomb of Maximus on the Via Salaria; in that cemetery all Roman itineraries, or guides to the burial-places of martyrs, locate her burial-place, specifying that her tomb was in a church above this catacomb. The crypt where Saint Felicitas was laid to rest was later enlarged into a subterranean chapel, and was rediscovered in 1885. In the early Middle Ages there was a chapel in honor of Saint Felicitas in an ancient Roman edifice near the ruins of the Baths of Titus. Some of her relics are in the Capuchin church at Montefiascone, Tuscany. Others are in the church of Santa Susanna in Rome. Her sons were buried in four different Roman cemeteries:

- Saints Alexander, Vitalis, & Martial (Cemetery of the Jordani, on the Via Salaria)
- Saint Januarius (Cemetery of Praetextatus, on the Via Appia)
- Saint Silvanus (Cemetery of Maximus, on the Via Salaria)

Saint Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome, delivered his third homily on the Gospel of Saint Matthew (Mt. 12:47), on the festival of Saint Felicitas, in the church built over her tomb on the Salarian road. In this discourse he says, that this Saint “having seven children was as much afraid of leaving them behind her on earth, as other mothers are of surviving theirs. She was more than a martyr, for seeing her seven dear children martyred before her eyes, she was in some sort a martyr in each of them. She was the eighth in the order of time, but was from the first to the last in pain, and began her martyrdom in the eldest, which she only finished in her own death. She received a crown not only for herself, but likewise for all her children. Seeing them in torments she remained constant, feeling their pains by nature as their mother, but rejoicing for them in her heart by hope.”

The same father takes notice how weak faith is in us: in her it was victorious over flesh and blood; but in us is not able to check the sallies of our passions, or wean our hearts from a wicked and deceitful world. “Let us be covered with shame and confusion,” says he, “that we should fall so far short of the virtue of this martyr, and should suffer our passions still to triumph over faith in our hearts. Often one word spoken against us disturbs our minds; at the least blast of contradiction we are discouraged or provoked; but neither torments nor death were able to shake her courageous soul. We weep without ceasing when God requires of us the children he hath lent us; and she bewailed her children when they did not die for Christ, and rejoiced when she saw them die.” (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

## Also Commemorated Today

[Follow the links below for more information. - Ed.]

- Venerable [Anatole](#) I (Zertsalov, the "Elder") of Optina (1894).  
New Hieromartyr [Vladimir](#), [metropolitan](#) of Kiev, proto-martyr of the communist yoke in Russia (1918).  
New Hieromartyr [Peter](#) [archbishop](#) of Voronezh (1929).  
New Martyr Abbess Athanasia (Lepeshkin) of Zosima Hermitage (1931).  
St. Stephen priest, martyr Boris (1938).  
New Hieromartyr [Leo](#), Archimandrite in Leningrad (1942)  
St. [Moses](#), archbishop of Novgorod (1362).  
St. [Gabriel](#), bishop of Imereti (1896)  
Venerable [Publius](#), ascetic in Zeugma of Syria (380).  
Venerable [Mares](#) the Singer of Syria (430).  
[Icon](#) of the Most Holy Theotokos "Assuage My Sorrow"  
New Martyr [Auxentius](#) of Bellas at Constantinople (1720) (Greek).  
Martyr [Medula](#) and her companions (Greek).  
St. [Castinus](#), bishop of Byzantium (240) (Greek).  
Venerable [Demetrius](#) Skevophylax ("Keeper of the Sacred Vessels") of Constantinople (8th c.) (Greek).  
Venerable [Apollo](#) of the Thebaid, monk (4th c.) (Greek).  
St. Bretanion ([Vetranion](#), Bretannion), bishop of Tomis in Little Scythia (380) (Romania).  
St. Gregory, abbot of Staro-Golutvin and bishop of Kolomna (15th c.).  
St. [Dwyn](#) (Donwen, Donwenna, Dunwen, Dwynwen, Dwynen), virgin of Llandwyn (daughter of Brychan). (465)  
St. [Eochod](#), Apostle to the Picts of Galloway, Scotland (597)  
St. [Thordgyth](#) (Thorgith, Thergite), nun of Barking (7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> c.)  
St. Konhouarn (Cynhaearn), monk of Redon (9<sup>th</sup> c.) (Brittany)  
Martyr [Sigebert](#) (Sigeberht), King of the East Angles (635)  
Hieromartyrs [Amarinus](#), abbot of a monastery in the Vosges, and [Praejectus](#) (Priest, Prest, Preils, Prix, Prict), bishop of Clermont, and St. Elis (c. 676) (Gaul)  
Child-Martyr [Artemas](#) of Pozzuoli (unk) (Italy)  
Sts. Maurus and Placid, disciples of St. Benedict (unk)  
St. [Racho](#) (Ragnobert), bishop of Autun (c. 660) (Gaul)  
St. [Poppo](#) (Poppon) of Stavelot, abbot (1048), and his mother St. Adelwise (Belgium)  
Martyrs Juventius and Maximin (363)

## **Pray for our priests and seminarians!**

Prayer is powerful, and we need more priests in our Diocese. Metropolitan Gregory is asking that each one of us pray daily that we have more vocations to the priesthood. He also wants us to pray by name for our clergy and seminarians--they aren't sick! The clergy that we are to pray for are: Fr. Kevin Greenwood, Fr. Andrew Gromm, and Deacon Donald Koch. The seminarians are: Deacon Maximus Cannaverde, Bradley Shaffer, Nicholas Cizin, John Bonnewicz-Coffey, John Fedornock III, Clay Raburn, Spyridon Raburn and Ignatios Leonardo (please also pray for Joshua Horner, who is taking a break from seminary to work full-time). We started this four years ago, and we already see its fruit – Fr. Seamus was on this list the last time I ran it!

### Prayer for vocations

Master of all, You promised us, “I will be with you always, even until the very end of the world,” and You have taught, “I will build My Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Mindful of this pledge, we beseech Your great goodness to inspire men to the Holy Priesthood, the service of Your Holy Orthodox Church, so that she may properly be able to fulfill Your will for Your people in this age. There are children to baptize, the sick to heal, and the dying to care for. There is the Bread of Life to distribute, and the Word of God to teach. There are sins to forgive, and charity to be done in Your Name. Send Your Church in this hour and in every age “vessels of clay” to be instruments of Your presence. Hear us, O Lord, and have mercy.

### Prayer for the priesthood

O Lord Jesus Christ, Good Shepherd of Your sheep, light the fire of ardent love in the hearts of all Your priests, that they may ever and in all things seek only Your glory. Remember especially, Lord, our Metropolitan Gregory, and our spiritual father Seamus, who are laboring in Your vineyard for the salvation of all those whom You have entrusted to them. Remember also, O Lord, our priests Fr. Kevin Greenwood, Fr. Andrew Gromm, and Deacon Donald Koch, and seminarians Deacon Maximus Cannaverde, Bradley Shaffer, Nicholas Cizin, John Bonnewicz-Coffey, John Fedornock III, Clay Raburn, Spyridon Raburn, Ignatios Leonardo and Joshua Horner. Make their lives as holy as the word they preach. Keep them from being discouraged. Hear their prayers for our salvation. Give them wisdom and courage to proclaim Your truth. Make them priests after Your own heart. For You are a merciful God who loves us, and to You we give glory, together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

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***In Your Prayers – Please Remember...*** His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Seamus & Family, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Eldoret and Northern Kenya, Patty Blaydoe, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlana Cooper, Roberta Corson, Tina Crull, Marlene Doukas, Alaina Espinal, Angelo Espinal, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, John M. Janowiak, Johnson family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Dennis Thomidis, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine & the Middle East, the newly reposed handmaiden of God Janette Gaydovchik, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Seamus of changes.)