

# Selected Lives of Saints

## of May and June

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## Monastic asceticism

There are some people who dedicate themselves wholly to science, art or politics or some other form of favorite activities. Why? Because such is their calling. They promote those branches of science and culture to which they have dedicated themselves. On the other hand, there are people who are not drawn so much by intellectual or visible progress, as much as by the acquisition of inner perfection. They strive for righteousness and with this aim they become monks or nuns.

Terrestrial life does little to promote spiritual perfection and rather hinders it. As the Evangelist St. John the Theologian explains; social life is poisoned by a triple evil: *“For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world”* Therefore he teaches further *“Do not love the world or the things in the world”* (1 John 2:15-16). Monastic life sets for itself the aim to help mankind rid itself from evil which is predominant on earth: from lasciviousness — through chastity and abstinence from “lust of the eyes” i.e. (from passion for riches and earthly goods) through the refusal of personal possessions and from pride, through obedience to the spiritual teacher. In striking down evil at its very root, monasticism sets man on a straight path toward spiritual perfection.

The word “*monk*” is derived from the Greek word “alone.” Monk, means one pursuing a solitary life. Monasteries arose as dwellings that were isolated and remote from the world. Monasticism is distinguished from the usual life of worldly people; hence the word “*monk*” — i.e. “different” person.

The Kingdom of God may be reached by many paths, and the Gospels give man a great scope of choice in his way of life: as long as he avoids evil and does good deeds. However, to

those who are drawn to a more perfect way of life, the Lord says: *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me....there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake ....if you want to be perfect go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, come follow Me ...whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple... (Matt. 16:24; 19:12-21; Luke 14:26-33).* Here above are exemplified those main conditions from which solemn vows are formed (a promise to God upon entry into a Monastery).

Aspirations toward achieving a specific type of life arose simultaneously with Christianity. According to Archimandrite Johannes Cassianus (4<sup>th</sup> cent.), the first monks were the disciples of the Evangelist Mark, who was the first bishop of Alexandria (Egypt). They removed themselves into the farthest areas from the town, where they carried on a special heightened type of life according to the rules established by St. Mark. The Jewish historian Philo Judaeus, a contemporary resident of Alexandria at the time of the Apostles, describes the life of certain *“Therapeutae”* who departed into the environs of Alexandria living exactly as described by the Archimandrite Cassian to be the life of the first Alexandrian monks and refers to their domicile as a Monastery.

There exists information that monasticism existed in Syria during the time of the Apostles. The Venerable Eudoxia who lived in 96 A.D. in the Syrian town of Iliopolis, during the reign of Trajan, was converted to the Christian faith by the Venerable Herman, the prior of the male monastery in which resided seventy monks. After becoming a Christian, she herself entered a monastery which housed thirty nuns.

In spite of the meagerness of documented information, there is no doubt that monasticism arose during the time of the Apostles. It is difficult not to accept the fact that during the times of great spiritual zeal, there were no Christians who would not follow the teachings of Apostle Paul regarding celibacy as stated in the Epistle to the Corinthians: *“It is good for a man not to touch a woman...”* (1Cor. Ch. 7). A living example for such celibacy always was and will be the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Most Holy Virgin Mary, the Prophet John the Baptist, the beloved disciple and celibate Apostle John the Theologian, Apostle Paul, Apostle Jacob, the brother of the Lord, the first Bishop of Jerusalem and many others. Monasticism followed these high examples, from whence it evolved and found its source.

Thus the Venerable Abba Dorotheus explains the evolvement of monasticism as he writes: *“They (Christians) understood, that finding themselves on earth, they could not comfortably perfect themselves through good deeds and therefore chose a specific way of life, a certain order in passing time and a certain manner in which to function — that is to say, a monastic way of life; they therefore began to separate themselves from people and live in deserts, devoting themselves to fast, poverty, sleeping on bare ground while enduring voluntary suffering, totally denying parents and family, possessions and acquisitions. In other words, they crucified themselves from the world.”*

In ancient monasteries attention was directed mainly to spiritual occupation: prayer, fasting and a contemplative meditation of God and the spiritual world. However physical work was also considered necessary as a diversion of studies, which also gave sustenance and a means to help the poor.

At the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century there arose in Egypt a rudimentary aspiration toward monasticism. The weakening of strict rules of Christian life and accession to the church by such pagans, who, even as Christians were only concerned about earthly living, impelled the more zealous Christians to withdraw from cities and towns into the desert, so that there, far from earth-

ly worries they could pass their life in actions of self-denial, prayer and contemplation of God. In the ranks of such achievers, the foremost was the Venerable St. Anthony the Great.

St. Anthony was born in Egypt during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Aspiring toward total isolation, he settled in the ruins of an old fort on the eastern bank of the Nile. He lived there for twenty years in total isolation, devoting himself to fasting and prayer and subjecting himself to various deprivations. In time many heard of him and began to seek him out and some even settled near him so that under his direction they could achieve the same type of life. Thus around St. Anthony there formed a circle of motivated disciples.

St. Anthony did not set specific rules for monastic life, however, in general, he explained the path by which moral perfection can be reached. Thus, using as an example his personal life, he taught them the denial of earthly goods, total submission to God's will, perpetual prayer, solitary meditation of God, and of physical toil. St. Anthony founded the hermitage monasteries. Through his established order, those motivated were under the direction of an elder (Abba father), living apart from each other in huts or caves and devoted themselves to solitary ascetic accomplishments. Such eremitic communities were called *lauras*.

Even during St. Anthony's lifetime, there emanated a new aspect to monastic life — communal living. The ascetics gathering into a community under the direction of the Abba, spent their life together in one or several lodgings following one set of rules. Such lodgings were referred to as (cenobitic) monasteries. The founder of monastic communal living was the Venerable St. Pachomius the Great (348).

St. Pachomius was also born in Egypt. Being in the army, he had the opportunity during a campaign to become acquainted with Christian beneficence, and wished to become one; and truly, upon finishing his term in the army he was baptized. Becoming acquainted with the ascetic type of life in the Theban desert, Pachomius chose, for his future deeds a secluded area near the river Nile known by the name of Tabennisi. Here St. Pachomius had an idea to found a communal monastery. On one of the islands on the Nile he founded a monastery in which those wishing could devote themselves to communal life.

News of Pachomius's deeds quickly drew to him so many disciples that the original monastery could not house them all and he was forced to build other monasteries within reach of each other on the banks of the Nile. He founded a women's monastery on the opposite bank where his own sister resided.

In the monasteries founded by him, Pachomius introduced specific rules for monastic communal life. These were the first modified monastic by-laws. The whole community of monks was divided by Pachomius into 24 categories, depending on the development of their spiritual life and was under the direction of one main Abba. Each monastery had its own administrators who were called priors and abbots. They came under the jurisdiction of the main Abba and reported to him the state of their monastery. In the monasteries themselves there were stewards with helpers who were in charge of housekeeping duties. Those in supervisory capacity had to be examples of monastic life for their brothers. Under the direction of their superiors, the monks had to spend their time in prayer, religious reading especially the Holy Scripture and labor. Communal liturgy was performed twice each day — morning and night. The monks gathered into the church by a prescribed sign, unassumingly and in silence; they read the Holy Scripture and prayers and sang psalms. On Sundays they received communion. In addition, the monks had to pray by themselves before sleep and upon awakening. After prayers or the Liturgy the prior discussed with the brothers Christian life. The monks pursued their reading in their cells during free time from

prayers or work. They received their books from the monastery library distributed by the house-keeper.

The monks tilled the soil, planted gardens, worked in the forge, mills, or tanneries, were carpenters, wove cloth and plaited baskets. Going to work, they followed their prior in an orderly fashion and silence. Silence was prescribed at all times. The monks had to complete all these duties with unquestionable obedience. Without the prior's permission the brothers could not only not leave the monastery but could not begin a new type of work. All the monks wore the same simple habits. The undergarment was of linen — a chiton without sleeves, the outer garment of leather, on the head was a hat of hair and on the feet — sandals. This habit was never removed, even during sleep. There were no beds for Pachomius's monks, instead there were seats between two walls; they could only place under it a mat. They arose way before dawn. They received the simplest food once a day usually at noon. The monks ate bread, butter, cheese, vegetables and fruit. Saturday and Sunday an evening meal was offered. All ate communally in silence.

In Pachomius's by-laws the main vow of the monks was the non-acquisition of personal property. In entering into the community of monks it was not allowed to bring any property, even earthly garments of the newly arrived were given to the needy. Work done by any brother belonged to the whole community. Everything necessary for their livelihood the monks was received from a common monastic fund. The stewards were in charge of furnishing the brothers with food and clothing from stock available at the monastery or bought by them with funds received from sale of monks' output. In order to have these rules followed, Pachomius established that new entrants into the order should be accepted no sooner than after a year's trial time.

During his lifetime, the communities established by Pachomius grew to seven thousand. Eremitic and cenobitic monasticism quickly spread throughout Egypt spilling into other countries. Thus Ammon established the society of desert dwellers on the Nitrian mountain and its surrounding desert. Macarius the Egyptian — in the Skete desert where lived many wonderful ascetics. Illarion, the beloved disciple of Anthony, brought monasticism to Palestine, his fatherland, where near Gaza, he established a monastery. From here monasticism spread throughout Palestine and Syria.

St. Basil the Great, having traveled throughout Egypt and Palestine and having become familiar with monastic life, spread both male and female monasticism to Cappadocia (in Asia Minor, presently Turkey). The by-laws which he gave to his monks quickly spread throughout the east and became universal. During the 5<sup>th</sup> century all of the orient was broadcast with monasteries. From the ascetics of the 5<sup>th</sup> century come the remarkable Isidore Pelusiot, Simeon Stylites, Euthymius, Sabba the Sanctified and many others.

St. Simeon Stylites, born in Syria, for many years devoted himself to prayer without descending from the pillar, enduring hunger and inclement weather. He founded a new order of ascetics, the "stylites"

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, besides the stylites there appeared another type of zeal in the form of the indefatigables. The monk Alexander, established a monastery where the liturgy continued non-stop daily. Studios, a rich inhabitant of Constantinople, who was drawn by this order, erected in Constantinople a similar monastery and invited into it a community of the indefatigables. This monastery was thereafter called the Studion.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century there lived some remarkable ascetics: Simeon, born a fool, who accepted this plight for the sake of Christ reaching total apathy was henceforth known as the Fool of God and John Lestvichnik, who for many years spent his life on Mount Sinai and composed a poem known by the name "Lestvitzy," in which he described the degrees of spiritual ascent toward

moral perfection; in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Alipius Stylites devoted himself to sit on a pillar for more than 50 years. At the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century the representative of the strict monastic life was the famous protagonist of veneration of icons — Theodore the Studite. From his monastery, known for its strict monastic life, emanated many zealots of piety, as for example in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Nicholas, who submitted to torture for the veneration of icons and followers of John who were glorified with the gift of foresight and many others.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century there appeared desert dwellers on Mt. Athos. Such as St. Peter (11<sup>th</sup> Cen), who devoted himself to staying there in solitude for more than 50 years and St. Athanasius (10<sup>th</sup> cent.), who founded on Athos a monastery in which there soon appeared many ascetics. Russian monasticism reached vast dimensions and had a huge spiritual success, beginning with the Venerable Anthony and Theodosius of Kiev-Pechersk and ending with the great Optina monks. Unfortunately there is no possibility to describe the history of the development and spiritual experience of Russian monasticism.

No previous way of life can inhibit entry into monkhood, since monkhood consists of repentance and the monastery — a healing place. One enters a monastery on a trial basis in order to determine how sincere and serious is the entrant's intention to dedicate himself to monastic life. In the case where the director of the monastery is convinced of the sincere objectives of the new entrant, he blesses him with the wearing of the under cassok with a belt and a skull cap (the under cassok is a long black garment with narrow sleeves and the skull cap is of conical form). Thus the future monk who is on trial bears the name of "lay brother" since his main duty is to learn obedience to his spiritual father.

In conscientiously carrying out obedience which was imposed upon him, the "lay brother" must manifest all of his **patience and humility** — which are the rudiments of a monk's virtue. A monastic saying is as follows: "Obedience is above fasting and prayer." That is because obedience based on patience and humility serves as an eradication of the main infirmity of mankind's soul — pride as well as egotism, from which emanate all passions.

After a while, when the lay brother proves by his good behavior the sincerity of his intent for a monastic life, he can then be invested as a "cassock wearer." At this time he does not make any vows, however he does receive a new name and can wear over the under cassock and skull cap a cassock and biretta (the cassock is a long black garment with wide sleeves which is worn over the under cassock; a biretta is a type of head gear which is wider at the top). For investiture into this first preparation in the ascent to monastic life, there is a special liturgical assignation which is called: "The assignation for the wearing of the cassock and biretta."

*"He who is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord — how he may please the Lord...but he who is married cares about the things of the world..."* (1 Cor. 7:32-34). The Lord said to the youth who was seeking eternal life: *"If you wish to be perfect, sell whatever you have and give to the poor"* (Matt. 19:21). Basing on these principles, the monks in general totally renounce all possessions so that nothing would serve as an obstacle toward the acquisition of spiritual perfection.

St. Gregory the Theologian asks: "What could concern a monk besides his own abduction? because the only possession he has are some useless rags covering his body. Let others who are rich find measures for safeguarding. My only possession is God: no one can steal this treasure! As far as the previous is concerned, let them take it all; my property is secure; since what I possess will forever stay with me. The Lord is my lot. I do not wish to have anything besides the Lord; when I serve at the altar, then specifically am I nourished and clothed, herein I shall rejoice

and as an indigent follow the lowly cross, in order to aspire to reach the high plateau with the least obstacles, soaring, as the Apostle said, on clouds in the wake of the Lord in the air.

From monastic ranks there emanated the greatest number of saints; which is only natural; since monkhood places as its aim spiritual perfection. Saints from the ranks of monks are referred to as “godly,” as a sign that they more than others were Christ-like. One becomes a monk who felt that all in life is vanity and who wanted to break away from its bondage and attain God. Monasticism teaches that the straight path is the shortest path between two points — man and God.

Within the monastic milieu there developed the richest spiritual literature. For the majority of secular people it is “high mathematics.” The spiritual states described therein are unattainable to mere mortals. Nevertheless, a potion in this zealous literature is available to all who seek God. The Russian populace loved to read books such as “Love of the Beautiful Good” (Philokalia) a collection of five volumes in which are found the instructions of the ancient ascetics: “Lestvitza” of John, the Abbot of Mount Sinai; “The Unseen Warfare” of the Venerable Nicodemus the of the Holy Mountain; “Useful instructions for Spirituality” of Abba Dorotheus; the instructions of the monks Barsonotheus and John; Tales of the ancient ascetics in “Lausaika” by Bishop Palladius of Hellenopolis and in “Spiritual Meadow” by the Blessed John Moschus. The letters of Bishop Theophanus the Recluse are more accessible to the contemporary reader, the treatise of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, the instructions of the Optina monks, the discourses of the Venerable Seraphim of Sarov with Motovilov.

Pre-revolutionary Russia was covered with monasteries. They had a vast influence on the customs and existence of the people, on Russian culture and history. Within the walls of the holy cloisters, the Russian pilgrims received a moral renewal, tranquility and strength to fight against sin. Here they drew on an ideal life. The monasteries were the healing centers of the whole country.

## **Saint Tamara, Queen of Georgia**

May 14<sup>th</sup> (May 1<sup>st</sup> old calendar).

**S**t. Tamara (Thamar, 1184-1213), a queen of Georgia, was the daughter of the beautiful Bourduhan and George III. During her mother’s time Christianity had already spread into various parts of Georgia. Tamara left a good impression of herself on the people. Many Georgians venerate Tamara as the healer of infirmities. Georgian narratives extol her meekness, love of peace, wisdom, piety and beauty.

It is also known that St. Tamara was solicitous to the poor, widows, orphans and assisted in the spiritual development of Georgia. Besides this, she was the patroness of poets and writers, she built many churches as well as the sumptuous Vardziskiy palace. For her cares and generous gifts, the church added Tamara to the roster of saints.

St. Tamara called for a Church assembly, which put aside the confusion and replaced the unworthy hierarchs. Due to her successful activity within the government the Georgian kingdom spread and became stronger.

# Saint Athanasius the Great, Archbishop of Alexandria

May 15<sup>th</sup> (May 2<sup>nd</sup> old calendar).

**F**rom the time of the Apostles there proceeds a line of Church Holy Fathers and teachers. It is customary to refer to the Church Fathers as Church scribes (preeminently in the ranks of Bishops), especially those who distinguished themselves by their holy way of life. Those church scribes who are not acknowledged as saints are referred to as Church Teachers.

The Fathers and Teachers of the Church through their works saved for us the Apostolic tradition and clarified the true teaching of faith and piety. During the difficult times of the fight with heretics and false prophets, they stepped forth as protectors of Orthodoxy; and their life and activity came as a high (worthy) example of spiritual life.

The 4<sup>th</sup> century in particular was famous for the appearance of great Teachers, who banded for the protection of the holy faith at a time when the peace of the Church was deeply and for a long time shaken by the Arian heresy (the Arians denied the Divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ).

The first great fighter against Arianism was St. Athanasius the Great (293-373). Having been given by nature unusual gifts, Athanasius received his education under the guidance of the Alexandrian Bishops Peter and Alexander. Athanasius was greatly influenced by the founder of Egyptian monasticism, Anthony the Great, whose life he described. Having judiciously studied the Holy Scripture, the works of early Church scribes and ancient classicists, he held what was considered at that time an important and influential function of archdeacon during the time of archbishop Alexander and was his enviable assistant in the preliminary fight against Arian heresy.

As Bishop Alexander's closest colleague and confidant, Athanasius accompanied him to the First Council of Nicaea where he drew a lot of attention to himself: no one expressed himself so strongly against Arianism and no one surpassed his strength of eloquence. Hardly a year passed when the young archdeacon was elevated to the cathedra of Alexandrian Archbishop. In spite of his young age (28 years), archbishop Athanasius took a firm hand in ruling the surrounding community under his jurisdiction: he visited churches in his vicinity, became close with bishops, ordained Thrumentius as bishop in order to strengthen the church in Abyssinia, visited monasteries scattered throughout Thebes and other regions of Egypt and visited Anthony the Great who had been his tutor during his youthful years.

He was energetic and courteous, unbending in truth, and indulgent toward those who went astray, being endowed with great tact in his dealings with people with a shrewd presence of mind, being diversely educated, Archbishop Athanasius immediately gained public respect and love. However the peaceful time of his patriarchal activity lasted no more than two years; this was followed by a series of trials and misfortunes. Followers of Arianism, at whose head was the Nicodemian Bishop Eusebius, a friend of Arius, from the school at Antioch, tried by all means to return Arius to the Church and were able to dispose in his favor the sister of Emperor Constantine and with her help the Emperor himself. It was determined to reinstate Arius from exile, who supposedly was repentant of his straying — and have the Archbishop of Alexandria accept him into the Church community. Athanasius having understood the slyness and pretense of the false prophets, refused to accept the heretic who rejected the Divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ.

From then on, began the persecution of the witness of Christ, with the blackest of calumny being contrived against him. He was accused of embezzlement from the church, and collusion with the enemies of the empire; it was rumored that he had killed a bishop called Arsenius whose cut off hand he used in the practice of magic. St. Athanasius was obliged to defend himself in court since there were some who actually believed this absurd fabrication. Here the enemies of Athanasius displayed the same hand which was supposedly found in his possession. However, to their great embarrassment Arsenius himself showed up. Legend has it that Arsenius was brought in and showed both his hands which had been given him by God. This brought the enemies of Athanasius into an undescrivable rage; they beset upon him and almost strangled him. All this happened during the time of Constantine, the protector of the Church. The ensuing rulers, Constantius the Arian and Julian the apostate openly persecuted St. Athanasius but could not destroy his unwavering steadfastness.

There was a time when some of the more fervent accomplices of Athanasius such as Osee, bishop of Cordoba, Liberius, the Pope of Rome who fought against Arianism and who were also exiled from their cathedras and were incarcerated, wavered in their steadfastness and agreed to concede to the Arians, although St. Athanasius remained the solitary leader of the Christians in the fight with them. During his almost half century of service, he was exiled from Alexandria five times and remained in either exile or incarceration for almost 20 years. Until the last minutes of his life he fervently fought for the establishment of peace and unanimity of thought in the Church.

During difficulties and tumults of his ascetic life, St. Athanasius wrote many apologias in defence of Christianity and edification of believers. His works are published in Russian in 4 volumes. The thoughts and attestations of St. Athanasius to this day have a great meaning and power, — the language is rich and exemplary. The valiant archpriest died at about 75 years of age.

### **Troparion Tone 3**

O Hierarch Athanasius, thou wast a pillar of Orthodoxy/ supporting the Church with divine doctrines;/ for thou didst proclaim the Son to be of one essence with the Father,/ and didst put Arius to shame./ O righteous Father, entreat Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.

### **Kontakion Tone 2**

Thou didst plant the dogmas of Orthodoxy/ and cut out the thorns of false doctrine;/ thou didst water the seeds of Faith with the rain of the Spirit, O righteous Father./ Therefore we call thee blessed.

## **Saint Pelagia of Tarsus**

May 17<sup>th</sup> (May 4<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

**B**orn in the town of Tarsus of pagan but noble and wealthy parents, she heard about Christ and the salvation of the soul from Christians, became inflamed with love for the Savior and was a Christian in her soul. There was at that time a terrible persecution of Christians. It happened that the Emperor Diocletian himself stopped in Tarsus and that, during the time of his stay in the town, his son, the heir, fell deeply in love with Pelagia and wanted to make her his wife. Pelagia replied through her mother — a wicked woman — that she was already promised to her betrothed husband, Christ the Lord.



Fleeing from the foul heir and her wicked mother, Pelagia sought and found Bishop Linus, a man renowned for his holiness. He instructed her in the Faith and baptized her. Then Pelagia gave away her luxurious clothing and great wealth, returned home and confessed to her mother that she was already baptized. Hearing of this, the Emperor's son, losing all hope of getting this holy maiden as his wife, ran himself through with a sword and died. Then the wicked mother denounced her daughter to the Emperor and she was taken for trial. The Emperor marveled at the girl's beauty and, forgetting his son, burned with an impure passion for her. But when Pelagia remained unfaltering in her faith, the Emperor condemned her to be burned in a metal ox heated by fire. When they stripped the martyr, she signed herself with the sign of the Cross and, with prayers of thanksgiving to God on her lips, went into the ox, where, in the twinkling of an eye, she melted like wax. She suffered with honor in 287.

Bishop Linus hunted for the remains of her bones and buried them on a hill under a stone. In the time of the Emperor Constantine Copronymos (741-775), a beautiful church was built on that site in honor of this holy virgin and martyr Pelagia, who was sacrificed for Christ to reign eternally with Him.

### **Troparion Tone 3**

Thou didst abandon dark ignorance through knowledge of the Faith,/ O Pelagia, fair virgin of Christ./ Thou wast refreshed by His dew and didst finish thy contest by fire./ O glorious Martyr,/ entreat Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.

### **Kontakion Tone 2**

Abandoning thy mortal betrothed/ to be wedded to the Immortal,/ thou didst offer thy dowry of chastity and contest./ Wherefore, O Pelagia, we acclaim thee.

## **Saint Monica**

### **Model of Wifely Forbearance**

May 17 (May 4 old calendar).

*“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife”* (I Cor. 7:14).

**S**aint Monica was born in 332 in or near the North African town of Tagaste, some forty miles from the port city of Hippo. Her parents were native Africans, related ethnically to present day Berbers, and were devout Christians.

In addition to the careful nurturing of her parents, Monica benefited as a child from the vigilant attention of an elderly nurse. An excellent Christian and respected by her heads, she disciplined her charges wisely if sometimes inclined towards “holy severity.” The entire household was imbued with a rare atmosphere of Christian piety, and it is not surprising that Monica grew to be a sober and virtuous maiden with a well-developed habit of prayer. One would have expected her to consecrate herself wholly to God in the monastic life, or to become united to a like God-fearing and virtuous husband. Instead, as soon as she reached marriageable age, she was betrothed to a pagan, a man of choleric temperament and dissolute morals. One wonders how Monica's parents could have consented to such a marriage for their daughter, after having taken such pains for her Christian upbringing. Surely they were mindful of the Apostle's injunction:

*“Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers”* (2 Cor. 6:14). Unfortunately, many parents are never so blind as when arranging, or approving, the marriages of their children.

Patricius was a native of Tagaste, and twice Monica's twenty-two years. While there is no precise information about his background, it is probable that he came from an old, noble family, more prominent than Monica's. At any rate, this is the supposition of Blessed Augustine's ancient biographers, who could find no other explanation for such an unequal union. In fact, Patricius was not wealthy. It is true, he was a city administrator, but at that time anyone who owned more than seventy acres of land was obliged to hold such a position. Patricius was not without generous qualities, but these were largely dormant and became animate only later, in response to Monica's unflagging prayers and exemplary Christian behavior.

Whatever Monica felt towards her betrothed, she was obedient to her parents' will, consoling herself with the thought that here was a lost soul that was being entrusted to her, and she determined to sacrifice herself to the task of guiding this soul onto the path to salvation. Nevertheless, she could not have anticipated just what this sacrifice was to entail. In the days and weeks after the marriage, she became increasingly and painfully aware of the abyss that lay between her and her husband. He was annoyed by her prayers; he found her charity excessive; he could not understand her desire to visit the sick; he could not fathom her love for slaves. At every step in her Christian walk, Monica met with countless hindrances. Her case was far from unique and is well described by Tertullian in his treatise, *“To His Wife,”* wherein he speaks of the difficulties a Christian wife endures at the hands of an unbelieving husband:

“When it is time to go to church, the husband takes his wife to the baths; if there are fasts to be observed, the husband arranges for a banquet; if she wishes to visit the poor, no servants are available to accompany her. And will such a husband allow her to be absent all night long for the paschal solemnities? Or permit her to attend the Lord's Supper, which they disavow?”

As a young bride who had spent her life in a Christian atmosphere, where the very purpose of existence centered upon the love of God and neighbor, Monica suddenly found herself in an alien environment. Her husband, although he loved her in his own way, was a stranger not a soul-mate; and her cantankerous mother-in-law, who lived with them, only reinforced his fits of anger with her own. These were prompted by the slanders of the maidservants, whose animosity towards their young mistress intensified an already painful loneliness. Even more grievous was Patricius' infidelity, for what wife, especially one raised, as Monica was, with high standards of chastity and marital devotion, can countenance the defilement of her marriage bed?

Prayer was Monica's strength, and the joys of motherhood further served to mitigate the bitterness of her circumstances. She bore two sons and a daughter, whom she nurtured in the faith with great diligence — and ultimate success. As a boy, writes Blessed Augustine, “I already believed, and my mother and the whole household, except for my father. Yet he did not prevail over the power of my mother's piety in me, that as he did not believe, so neither should I. For it was her earnest care that Thou my God, rather than he, shouldst be my father” (I:11). To Monica's great sorrow, Patricius would not have the children baptized. And when Augustine began to show promise of intellectual brilliance, Patricius sent him for higher education to Carthage, where the youth gradually fell prey to youthful passions.

As young as she was, Monica bore her cross with remarkable fortitude and spiritual maturity. She realized that her husband's weaknesses and moral failings stemmed from the fact that he had not yet been enlightened by the Gospel, that he lacked the grace of God. She shed bitter tears in his absence, but she knew that a man who did not love God could not be expected to be constant in his affection towards one of His creatures. With firm hope, she prayed that God Himself

would grant her husband faith and love for Him, which alone are able to inspire a man with the desire to lead a chaste life.

Monica knew that reproaches were counter-productive, and she tamed her husband's violent temper by her meekness and devotion. Other women, who endured blows from their husbands, asked Monica how it was that Patricius, whom they knew to be irascible, did not once strike her. Monica replied that instead of blaming their husbands they should blame their tongues, for “she had learnt not to resist an angry husband, not in deed only, but not even in word” (IX:9).

Regardless of Patricius' religious indifference and often unchristian behavior, Monica was very attentive towards him, “whom she, the better obeyed, therein also obeying [God] Who hast so commanded” (I:11). Compelled at times to contradict him and to go against his will in what concerned the Faith, she was all the more meek and submissive to him in other matters. And although superior to her husband in education and moral qualities, she made every effort not to reveal her advantage. She firmly believed that if the light of the Gospel was reflected in all her actions, then Patricius would eventually be persuaded of its power and its truth, and would submit to it more readily than if she attempted to persuade him with rational arguments. Indeed, her Christian conduct acted like a soothing balm on Patricius' soul, and, without his realizing it, drew him gradually closer to the Faith. As Saint John Chrysostom wrote half a century later in his homily, On Virginity, the believing wife “will be able to save her husband by putting the Gospel into practice.” This is precisely what Saint Monica did, winning over not only her husband but also her mother-in-law.

This fruit of her prayers, of her long-suffering, and of her steadfast application of the Gospel precepts took a long time to mature. It was only after sixteen years that Patricius was baptized. Nor did Monica enjoy for long her husband's company at the Lord's Supper, for he died only a year later, in 371. Nevertheless, her aim had been to sanctify her husband for eternal life, and, by the Grace of God, this she had achieved. It remained for her to extricate her wayward son from the delusion of the passions and from the Manichean heresy. This required another fourteen years of persistent prayer. When at last his heart, too, was converted, her joy was complete.

Monica was present at Augustine's baptism at the hands of Saint Ambrose in Milan at Pascha, 387, and they were returning to Africa when they stopped to rest in the port city of Ostia. One evening they had a long conversation in which she said to him, “Son, for mine own part I have no further delight in anything in this life. What I do here any longer, and to what end I am here, I know not, now that my hopes in this world are accomplished” (IX:10). Indeed, she had excellently fulfilled her purpose in life, and, after a brief illness, God took her that she might receive her due reward with the saints in His eternal kingdom. She was buried in Ostia, a fact verified by the inscription on a stone tablet discovered there by archaeologists in 1946.

For centuries, Saint Monica was revered in the Roman Catholic Church as a patroness of married women. It is time that Orthodox women became more closely acquainted with this exemplar of womanly virtues, whose prayers are especially to be invoked by those with wayward children and by wives desirous of sanctifying their unbelieving husbands.

## **Saint Irina**

May 18<sup>th</sup> (May 5<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

**S**he lived in the Balkans in apostolic times, in the town of Magedon where her father Licinius was governor of a small region. Some think that she was a Slav. She was born a pagan of pagan

parents. Penelope — for that was her pagan name — learned the Christian faith from her teacher, Appelianus. St. Timothy, the disciple of the Apostle Paul, baptized her and her lady-in-waiting, and brought her a letter from the Apostle Paul to read.

She infuriated her father by her refusal to marry, and he intended to torture her, but she brought him to Christianity in a miraculous way. She was tortured in different ways by four kings, other than her father, but God saved her through His angels. King Sedechias buried her up to the neck in a pit full of snakes and scorpions, but an angel of God neutralized the poison of the reptiles and preserved the holy maiden untouched. Then the same king attempted to saw her in two, but the sword broke against her body as against stone. This same king once again bound her to the wheel of a water-mill, then let the water in to drown her, but the water would not flow, but stood still, and the maiden remained whole and alive. King Sapor, Sedechias's son, shod her with nails, loaded a sack of sand onto her, put a bridle on her and commanded that she be led like an animal far outside the city.

'Truly I am as a beast before Thee, O Lord!' said the holy martyr as she ran bridled behind her torturers. But an angel of God caused an earthquake, and the earth opened and swallowed up her tormentors. Surviving all these tortures, by which an enormous number of pagans were brought to Christianity, Irene went to the city of Kallinikos, where she preached the Christian faith. The local king, Numerian, tried to kill her, throwing her into three burning metal oxen one after the other. But the maiden was preserved and remained alive, and many saw and believed. The Eparch, Vaudon, took her to the city of Constantina, where he thought to kill her by putting her onto a burning grid. But this did not harm St. Irene, and many were brought to the true Faith.

Finally, Irene came to the city of Mesembria, where the king killed her but God restored her to life. And the king, seeing this, together with many of the people, believed in Christ and was baptized. And thus St. Irene, by her sufferings and miracles, brought over 100,000 pagans to faith in Christ. At last she laid herself in a grave and commanded Appelianus to close it. After four days, when the grave was opened, her body was not in it. Thus God glorified forever the maiden and martyr Irene, who had sacrificed all and endured all, that God should be the more greatly glorified among men.

## **Saint John the Theologian, Apostle and Evangelist**

May 21<sup>st</sup> (May 8<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

**T**he Apostle and Evangelist St. John, called the Theologian, was the son of Salome and Zebedee, a fisherman of Galilee. Zebedee possessed rather vast holdings, workers and was a member of some importance in the Jewish community, having access to the high priest. John's mother Salome is mentioned in the ranks of women who served God with their possessions.

John was at first the pupil of St. John the Baptist. Listening to his witness of Christ as the Lamb of God, taking upon himself the sins of the world, he, together with Andrew the First Called followed the Saviour. Being a constant pupil of the Lord, he and his brother James were called by the Lord Himself at a later time after a successful catch of fish in the sea of Galilee. Together with Peter and his brother James, John was deigned worthy to become close to the Lord, being with Him during the most important and triumphant times of His earthly life. Thus, he was worthy to be in attendance at the resurrection of the daughter of Nair, to see Christ's

transfiguration on the mount, to hear the discourse on the signs of His second coming and was a witness to His prayer at Gethsemane. At the Last Supper he was so close to the Lord that in his own words, he lay his head at Christ's bosom, whence emanated his name "bosom-friend," which has become a nick-name for someone who is especially close.

Through humility, not calling himself by name, nevertheless speaking of himself in the Gospel, refers to himself as the disciple "*whom Jesus loved.*" This love of him by the Lord, showed itself when the Lord was on the cross he entrusted His Most Holy Mother to him saying: "*Behold your mother.*"

Zealously loving the Lord, John was filled with indignation at those who were hostile to the Lord or who estranged themselves from Him. While traveling through Sumeria he prohibited those who did not walk with Christ to be exorcised in the name of Jesus Christ and asked the Lord's permission to consume with fire certain residents of a Sumerian town for not accepting Him. For this he and his brother James were called by the Lord "sons of thunder" (Boanerges). Feeling the love of Christ toward himself, but as yet not enlightened with grace by the Holy Ghost, he decided to ask for himself and his brother James a place close to the Lord in His coming Kingdom and learned of the impending sufferings for both of them.

After the Lord's Resurrection, we often perceive Apostle John together with Apostle Peter, similarly with whom he is considered a pillar of the Church and often sojourning to Jerusalem. True to the Lord's directive he cared for the Holy Virgin Mary as a most devoted son and only after her Blessed Dormition did he begin to preach in other lands.

During Apostle John's ministry, one notices the singularity that he chose for himself a specific province and directed all the energy of his soul to eradicate paganism therein and strengthen the holy faith. As example of his specific cares were the seven Churches of Asia Minor — in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicia. Preeminently he lived in Ephesus.

During the time of Emperor Domitian (81-96), Apostle John, as the sole surviving Apostle, was summoned to Rome and by the decree of this persecutor of the Church was thrown into boiling oil, but the power of God saved him unscathed just as it saved the three lads from the fiery oven. Then Domitian sent him to the desert island of Patmos. Here John wrote the Apocalypse or Revelations of the fate of the Church and the world.

After the death of Domitian, Apostle John returned to Ephesus from exile. The Bishops and presbyters of the Ephesian Church showed him three Gospels written by the Apostles Matthew, Mark and Luke. Having approved these Gospels, Apostle John deemed it necessary to supplement that which was lacking and which he knew well, being the last of the living eyewitnesses. This was of great importance, since toward the end of the first century there appeared in the Christian world several active gnostic sects which abased and even denied the Divine merit of the Lord Saviour. It was imperative to protect the faithful from that pedagogy.

In his Gospel, Apostle John explains the sermons of the Saviour narrated in Judea. These sermons directed toward the learned scribes were more difficult to understand and most likely due to this fact were not contained in the first three Gospels which were designated for the newly converted pagans. In beginning to formulate the Gospel, Apostle John designated a fasting period for the Church of Ephesus and withdrew with his disciple Prochorus onto the mountain where he wrote the Gospels bearing his name.

From ancient times the Gospel according to John were called enspirited, for in comparison with the other three preeminently it contains the sermons of the Lord regarding the deepest truths on faith — on the embodiment of the Son of God, on the Maker, on the redemption of mankind,

on spiritual rebirth, on the grace of the Holy Ghost and on Communion. From the first words of the Gospel, John elevates the thoughts of the faithful on the height of the godly emanation of the Son of God from the Father: *“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). The apostle John expresses the aim of his Gospel thus: *“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”* (John 20:31).

Besides the Gospel and the Apocalypse, the apostle John wrote three epistles which were incorporated into the make-up of the New Testament books as Ecumenical (i.e. universal epistles). The main thought in his epistles was that Christians must learn to love: *“Let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is of God and knows God... He who does not love does not know God, for God is love”* (1 John 4:7-8).

*“...love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says I love God but hates his brother, he is a liar; for he does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him; that he who loves God must love his brother also”* (1 John 4:17-21).

Regarding the subsequent ministry of Apostle John, tradition has preserved some wonderful information showing to what extent his heart was filled with love. While visiting one of the Asia Minor Churches, John noticed among his listeners a youth distinguishing himself with unusual gifts and entrusted him to a Bishop as a special ward. Later on this youth became close with unsavory friends, became debauched and the leader of a gang of bandits. John, hearing of this from the bishop went into the mountains where the bandits were ravaging; he was seized and brought before the chief.

On seeing the Apostle, the youth became embarrassed and began to run away. John pursued him and with touching words of love encouraged him and himself brought him to Church, shared with him the labors of repentance and did not rest until he totally reconciled him with the Church. During the last years of his life the Apostle preached only one precept: *“children, love one another”* His disciples asked, *“Why do you repeat yourself?”* Apostle John answered, *“This is the most important commandment. If you will fulfill it, then you will fulfill all of Christ’s commandments.”*

This love would turn into a fiery fervor when the Apostle met false-prophets who corrupted the faithful and deprived them of eternal salvation. In one of the public houses he met the false prophet Cerinthus who disclaimed the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. *“Let us depart quickly,”* said the Apostle to his disciple *“I fear this building might collapse around us.”*

St. John the Theologian died a natural death (the only one of the Apostles to do so), being around 105 years of age, during the time of Emperor Trajan. The circumstances of the Apostle's death appeared to be unusual and even puzzling. Upon the insistence of the apostle John, he was buried alive. On the following day, when the tomb was unearthed it turned out to be empty. This event somewhat affirmed the belief in the conjecture of some Christians that the apostle John will not die but will live until the Second coming of Christ and that he will unmask the Antichrist. The reason for such a surmise was served by the words said by the Savior not long before his Ascension. To the question of Apostle Peter as to what will become of Apostle John, the Lord answered, *“If I will that he remain until I come (the second time) what is that to you? You*

*follow Me* “ The apostle John makes a notation regarding this in his Gospel: “*This saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die*” (John 21:22-23).

### **Troparion Tone 2**

Apostle beloved of Christ our God,/ hasten to deliver a defenseless people./ He Who allowed thee to recline on His breast/ receives thee bowing in prayer, O John the Theologian./ Implore Him to dispel heathen persistence/ and to grant us peace and mercy.

### **Kontakion Tone 2**

Who can tell of thy mighty works, O beloved Saint?/ Thou didst pour forth miracles./ Thou art a source of healing and dost intercede for our souls/ as Theologian and friend of Christ.

## **Saint Christopher**

May 22 (May 9 old calendar)

**A** great wonderworker, he is especially venerated in Spain. His help is invoked particularly against infectious illnesses and great pestilence. He was martyred for Christ and glorified in 249. Although St. Christopher is one of the most popular saints in the East and in the West, very little is known about his life or death. A heathen king (in Canaan or Arabia), through the prayers of his wife to the Blessed Virgin, had a son, whom he called Offerus (Offro, Adokimus, or Reprebus) and dedicated to the gods Machmet and Apollo. Acquiring in time extraordinary size and strength, Offerus resolved to serve only the strongest and the bravest. He bound himself successively to a mighty king and to Satan, but he found both lacking in courage, the former dreading even the name of the devil, and the latter frightened by the sight of a cross at the roadside. For a time his search for a new master was in vain, but at last he found a hermit (Babylas?) who told him to offer his allegiance to Christ, instructed him in the Faith, and baptized him. Christopher, as he was now called, would not promise to do any fasting or praying, but willingly accepted the task of carrying people, for God's sake, across a raging stream. One day he was carrying a child who continually grew heavier, so that it seemed to him as if he had the whole world on his shoulders. The child, on inquiry, made himself known as the Creator and Redeemer of the world. To prove his statement the child ordered Christopher to fix his staff in the ground. The next morning it had grown into a palm-tree bearing fruit. The miracle converted many. This excited the rage of the king (prefect) of that region (Dagnus of Samos in Lycia?). Christopher was put into prison and, after many cruel torments, beheaded.

The oldest picture of the saint, in the monastery on the Mount Sinai dates from the time of Justinian (527-65). Coins with his image were cast at Würzburg, in Würtemberg, and in Bohemia. His statues were placed at the entrances of churches and dwellings, and frequently at bridges; these statues and his pictures often bore the inscription: “Whoever shall behold the image of St. Christopher shall not faint or fall on that day.” The saint, who is one of the fourteen holy helpers, has been chosen as patron by Baden, by Brunswick, and by Mecklenburg, and several other cities, as well as by bookbinders, gardeners, mariners, etc. He is invoked against lightning, storms, epilepsy, pestilence, etc. His feast is kept on 25 July; among the Greeks, on 9 March; and his emblems are the tree, the Christ Child, and a staff. St. Christopher's Island (commonly called St. Kitts), lies 46 miles west of Antigua in the Lesser Antilles.



## **Saint Taisia**

May 23<sup>rd</sup> (May 10<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

**T**haisia was a rich maiden, a Christian in Egypt. She decided not to marry, but to give her possessions to the hermit monks. But, when she had given away all her goods, she gave herself to a life of debauchery. Hearing of this, the hermits begged Abba John the Dwarf to do something, and he went to Alexandria and began to weep in Thaisia's hearing. When she heard the old man weeping for her sins, she repented at once, left her house and everything she had and went into the desert after the saint. One night when she was sleeping and John was standing in prayer, he saw an angel in a nimbus of light coming down to take Thaisia's soul. And John saw that her sudden but deep repentance was more pleasing to God than the years-long but shallow repentance of many of the hermits.

## **Saints Cyril and Methodius, Equal to the Apostles**

May 24<sup>th</sup> (May 11<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

**A**t the beginning of the schism of the occidental Church from the Christian ecumenical Church, one can observe a particular endeavor of the Slavs to accept the Christian Faith. Obviously the Lord called them to complete His Church and raised up for them great prophets of the Faith in the persons of the brothers Cyril and Methodius considered to be “equal to the Apostles.”

Cyril (born Constantine) and Methodius were born in Macedonia in the town of Salonica. Methodius, upon finishing his education joined the armed forces and became administrator of a Slav province. Soon he decided to leave the worldly way of life and became a monk in a monastery on Mount Olympus. From childhood Constantine exhibited amazing talents and received a superb education at the palace with the young Emperor Michael III, where they were taught by the famous Photius, who later became patriarch of Constantinople. Upon finishing his education, Constantine could have had great success in the world, but his heart blazed with love of God and worldly goods did not entice him. For a while he taught in the main academy in Constantinople his favorite subject — philosophy. However he soon left and joined his brother Methodius in the monastery. Here they both devoted themselves to fasting and prayer until such time when God's Thought called on them to preach to the Slav tribes.

For us Russians, it is enough to note that before this calling, the Lord brought the great brothers to the boundaries of our country. In the year 858, the Khazars of the Caucasus tribe who had their nomadic camps on the South Eastern part of the present Russia, begged the Emperor Michael to send to them preachers of the Faith. On the instruction from Photius the holy brothers arrived at Kherson. Here they lived for about two years learning the Khazar language and uncovered the relics of the Holy Martyr Clement, bishop of Rome who had been exiled there at the end of the first century.



The first Slavic people accepting Christianity were the Bulgarians. In Constantinople the sister of prince Boris who was being kept as a hostage, took the name Theodora at her baptism and was educated in the spirit of the Holy Faith. Around the year 860, she returned to Bulgaria and began to influence her brother to accept Christianity. Boris was baptized and took the name of Michael. Saint Cyril and Methodius happened to be in that country and through their preaching furthered the affirmation of Christianity therein. From Bulgaria Christian Faith spread to the neighboring Serbia.

After Bulgaria and Serbia were enlightened, there came to Constantinople emissaries from the Moravian prince Rostislav with the following plea: "Our people profess the Christian Faith, but we have no teachers who could explain to us the Faith in our native language. Send such teachers to us." Both the Emperor and the patriarch were gladdened and calling the holy brothers of Salonica asked to them to go to the Moravian people. In order to have great success with their preaching, they found it necessary to translate both the Holy and Liturgical books into the Slavonic language, since according to the words of Saint Cyril "to preach orally is the same as writing in the sand." Before translating, it was necessary to devise Slavonic letters and compile a Slavonic alphabet. Toward such a difficult undertaking, Saint Cyril prepared himself using the example set by the Apostles, by prayer and fasting for forty days. As soon as the alphabet was ready, Saint Cyril translated into Slavonic selections from the Gospel and Epistles. Some chroniclers state that the first words written in Slavonic were the words of the Evangelist John: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

In the year 863, the Holy brothers dispatched themselves to Moravia with their disciples Gorazdius, Clement, Sabba, Hymonius and others. Contemporary liturgical services and reading of the Gospel in Slavonic quickly drew the hearts of the Moravians to them and gave them sway over German preachers. Their success was envied by German and Latin preachers who tried to hinder the holy brothers in every way. They spread the idea to the people that the Word of God can only be read in three languages, which constituted the epitaph on the Lord's cross, namely: Hebrew, Greek and Latin; they called Cyril and Methodius heretics because the holy brothers preached in Slavonic and finally voiced complaints against them to Pope Nicholas.

The Pope requested to meet the Slavonian godly messengers. Respecting the Pope as one of the patriarchs and hoping to find in him help for their holy work, the holy brothers went to Rome. They carried with them the relics of the "equal to the Apostles" Clement, Pope of Rome and books translated by them. Pope Nicholas the 1<sup>st</sup> died before their arrival. His successor, Pope Adrian, wishing conciliation of the Churches, received the holy preachers with great respect. He met them outside of the town in the accompaniment of clergy and many people. He accepted from them the holy relics and placed them with veneration in the Church of Saint Clement, and blessed at the altar of the ancient Roman Basilica of Mary the Great the translated books. Soon after arriving in Rome Cyril became gravely ill. He willed the continuation of his work to his brother and died peacefully (Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>, 869).

Saint Methodius fulfilled his brother's wish: returning to Moravia with the rank of archbishop, he toiled there for 15 years. During the lifetime of Methodius, Christianity penetrated into Bohemia. Prince Borivoi of Bohemia was baptized by Methodius. His wife Ludmila (who later became a martyr) and many others followed suit. In the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Polish prince Miechislav married the Bohemian princess Dombrowska after which he and his subjects accepted the Christian Faith.

Consequently, these same Slavonic people with great effort cut off the Latin preachers and the German emperors from the Greek Church which was under the jurisdiction of the Roman

Pope for excluding Serbs and Bulgarians. However in all the Slavs, notwithstanding the passage of hundreds of years remains a living memory of the great “equal to Apostles” enlighteners and that Orthodox Faith which they tried to sow among them. The Liturgical memory of Saint Cyril and Methodius serves as a link for all Slavonic people.

#### **Troparion Tone 4**

O Cyril and Methodius, Equals-to-the-Apostles/ and teachers of the Slavonic lands,/ pray to Christ our God to strengthen all nations in Orthodoxy in one spirit,/ to convert and reconcile the world to God,/ and to save our souls.

#### **Kontakion Tone 3**

Let us honor our two holy enlighteners,/ who by translating the divine writings/ have poured forth a well-spring of knowledge from which we still draw today./ We call you blessed, O Cyril and Methodius:/ as you stand before God intercede fervently for our souls.

## **Saint Pachomius the Great**

May 28<sup>th</sup> (May 15<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

**S**aint Pachomius was an Egyptian by birth and was a pagan in his youth. As a soldier, he took part in the Emperor Constantine's war against Maxentius. After that, learning from Christians about the one God and seeing their devout life, Pachomius was baptized and went to the Tabennisiot desert, to the famous ascetic Palamon, with whom he lived in asceticism for ten years. Then an angel appeared to him in the robes of a monk of the Great Habit at the place called Tabennisi and gave him a tablet on which was written the rule of a cenobitic monastery, commanding him to found such a monastery in that place and prophesying to him that many monks would come to it seeking the salvation of their souls. Obeying the angel of God, Pachomius began building many cells, although there was no-one in that place but himself and his brother John. When his brother grumbled at him for doing this unnecessary building, St. Pachomius simply told him that he was following God's command, without explaining who would live there, or when. But many men soon assembled in that place, moved by the Spirit of God, and began to live in asceticism under the rule that Pachomius had received from the angel.

When the number of monks had increased greatly, Pachomius, step by step, founded six further monasteries. The number of his disciples grew to seven thousand. St. Antony is regarded as the founder of the eremitic life, and St. Pachomius of the monastic, communal life. The humility, love of toil and abstinence of this holy father were and remain a rare example for the imitation of monks. St. Pachomius performed innumerable miracles, and also endured innumerable temptations from demons and men. And he served men as both father and brother. He roused many to set out on the way of salvation, and brought many into the way of truth. He was and remains a great light in the Church and a great witness to the truth and righteousness of Christ. He entered peacefully into rest in 346, at the age of sixty. The Church has raised many of his followers to the ranks of the saints: Theodore, Job, Paphnutius, Pecusius, Athenodorus, Eponichus, Soutus, Psois, Dionysius, Petronius and others.

### **Troparion Tone 5**

As a pastor of the Chief Shepherd/ thou didst guide flocks of monks into the heavenly sheepfold / thyself illumined, thou didst instruct others concerning the Habit and Rule./ And now thou dost rejoice with them in the heavenly mansions.

### **Kontakion Tone 2**

O Godbearing Pachomius, after living the life of Angels in thy body/ thou wast granted their glory./ Now thou art standing with them before God's throne/ and praying that we all may be forgiven.

## **Saints Constantine and Helen**

June 3<sup>rd</sup> (May 21<sup>st</sup> old calendar).

Constantine's parents were the Emperor Constantius Chlorus and the Empress Helena. Chlorus had further children by another wife, but by Helena he had only the one, Constantine. Constantine fought two great battles when he came to the throne: one against Maxentius, a tyrant in Rome, and the other against Licinius not far from Byzantium. At the battle against Maxentius, when Constantine was in great anxiety and uncertainty about his chances of success, a shining cross, surrounded by stars, appeared to him in the sky in full daylight. On the cross were written the words: 'In this sign, conquer!' The wondering Emperor ordered that a great cross be put together, like the one that had appeared, and be carried before the army. By the power of the Cross, he gained a glorious victory over enemies greatly superior in number. Maxentius drowned himself in the Tiber. Immediately after this, Constantine issued the famous Edict of Milan, in 313, to put an end to the persecution of Christians. Conquering Byzantium, he built a beautiful capital city on the Bosphorus, which from that time was named Constantinople.

At this time, Constantine fell ill with leprosy. The pagan priests and doctors advised him to bathe in the blood of slaughtered children, which he refused to do. Then the Apostles Peter and Paul appeared to him and told him to seek out a bishop, Sylvester, who would heal him of the disease. The bishop instructed him in the Christian faith and baptized him, and the leprosy vanished from the Emperor's body.

When there was discord in the Church about the troublesome heretic Arius, the Emperor summoned the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, in 325, where the heresy was condemned and Orthodoxy confirmed.

St. Helena, the Emperor's devout mother, was very zealous for the Christian faith. She visited Jerusalem and found the Precious Cross of the Lord, and built the Church of the Resurrection over Golgotha and many other churches in the Holy Land. This holy woman went to the Lord in 327, at the age of eighty. The Emperor Constantine outlived his mother by ten years and entered into rest at the age of about sixty in 337, in the city of Nicomedia. His body was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.

### **Troparion Tone 8**

O Lord, thy disciple Emperor Constantine, who saw in the sky the Sign of Thy Cross,/ Accepted the call that came straight from Thee, as it happened to Paul, and not from any man./ He

built his capital and entrusted it to Thy care./ Preserve our country in everlasting peace, through the intercession of the Mother of God,/ for Thou art the Lover of mankind.

### **Kontakion Tone 3**

Today Constantine and Helena his mother expose to our veneration the Cross,/ the awesome Cross of Christ,/ a sign of salvation to the Jews/ and a standard of victory:/ a great symbol of conquest and triumph.

## **Finding of the Lord's Cross By Empress Helen**

*September 27<sup>th</sup> (September 14<sup>th</sup> old calendar).*

**T**he first meritorious act of Empress Helen was that she inclined her son Constantine (see above) toward the Christian Faith at a time when other youths of noble birth were being educated in pagan ways and abhorred Christianity. The second was the acquisition of the Lord's Cross.

In the 326, with the intent of finding the Lord's Cross Empress Helen traveled to Jerusalem. There she was told that the Lord's Cross was buried at a place where the pagans had erected a temple in memory of Venus. When, at her command the edifice was destroyed and excavation begun, they found three crosses and near them a small board on which was written: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

In order to find out on which of the crosses the Savior was crucified, they began in sequence to lay the crosses on a deceased person. From two of the crosses there occurred no miracle. When the third cross was placed upon the deceased he was resurrected; thus they found the Cross of the Savior.


When the people heard of the miracle, then all wanted to see the Holy Cross. Then Macarius, patriarch of Jerusalem and the Empress Helen stood on a hill and elevated the Cross. The people on seeing the Cross of the Savior, prayed with the words: "Lord have mercy."

In memory of this event the Church established the feast of the Elevation of the Lord's Cross. This feast day is considered in the ranks of other great feast days and is celebrated on September 27<sup>th</sup>. On this day, the Cross is triumphantly brought to the center of the Church for veneration. During the rein of Constantine, the name Jerusalem was reinstated instead of Colonia aelia Capitolina which had been changed by Emperor Hadrian (117-138).

The Empress Helen built several Churches in the Holy Land: on Golgotha the Church of the Resurrection (and tomb) of the Lord, where annually on Easter eve descends a benevolent fire: on the Mount of Olives (where the Lord ascended into heaven); in Bethlehem (where the Lord was born in the flesh) and in Hebron by the Mamre oak (where God revealed Himself to Abraham).

## Saint Efrosinia, Princess of Polotsk

June 5 (May 23 old calendar)



Saint Efrosinia (whose birth name was Predislava) was the daughter of Prince Vseslav of Polotsk. When her parents wished her to be married, she ran away to a monastery and became a nun. An angel of the Lord appeared to her three times to show her the place where she was to build a new monastery for virgins. She brought her own sister, Evdokia, into monasticism and many other young girls from the ranks of the aristocracy. One kinswoman of hers, Zvenislava, a princess of Borisov, brought all her wealth, clothing and precious jewels, and said: 'I count all the beauty of this world as naught, and wish to give these fine things, prepared for my marriage, to the Church of the Savior. And I desire to espouse myself to Him in a spiritual marriage, and to bow my head beneath His easy, and light yoke.' St. Efrosinia professed her too, and gave her the name Evpraxia.

In old age, St. Efrosinia evinced a desire to die in Jerusalem, and prayed for this boon. God heard her prayer, and she did indeed die in the monastery of St. Theodosius in Jerusalem on May 23rd, 1173, during a visit there.

### Troparion Tone 4

Thou didst give thy wealth to the poor,/ and despise the rank of princess and temporal betrothal./ Thou didst betroth thyself to Christ thy Bridegroom,/ and thy wreath was spiritual and bodily purity./ Now thou dost stand before Him:/ Remember us who venerate thee,/ O Euphrosyne.

### Kontakion Tone 8

Thou hast adorned thy virginity with almsgiving, as a lamp with oil;/ thou hast entered Christ's bright bridal chamber with the wise virgins./ We bless thee, O Euphrosyne as we honor thy fragrant relics/ and we cry out with compunction: thou hast boldness before Christ;/ pray that we may be delivered from the stench of our passions, and that our souls may be saved.

## St. Vincent of Lerins

June 6 (May 24 old calendar)

A leading theologian of the Church of Gaul in the 5th century, St. Vincent settled in the island monastery of Lerins off the southern coast of France in order that "avoiding the concourse and crowds of cities... I can follow without distraction the Psalmist's admonition, *"Be still, and know that I am God."* Here he wrote his celebrated *Commonitorium*, a "Reminder," where he wrote down "those things which I have truthfully received from the holy Fathers," which they "have handed down to us and committed to our keeping." Among these things is the celebrated definition of orthodoxy as *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*: that which has been believed in the Church "everywhere, always, by everyone." St. Vincent lived in an age of great historical uncertainty; barbarian tribes were a constant menace and although four hundred years of Chris-

tian tradition had already passed, the foundations of the faith had been only recently clarified by decisions made in the Ecumenical Councils — the Council of Nicea (325), the Council of Constantinople (381) and the Council of Ephesus (431). It is, therefore, not surprising that St. Vincent was so concerned to preserve the authority of Christian tradition. This is not to say that he was opposed to progress or doctrinal development; each age must face its own particular problems and develop a Christian response in answer to them. “But it must be progress in the proper sense of the word, and not a change in faith. Progress means that each thing grows within itself, whereas change implies that one thing is transformed into another.... The growth of religion in the soul should be like the growth of the body, which in the course of year develops and unfolds, yet remains the same as it was.”

“In ancient times, our forefathers sowed the seeds of the wheat of faith in that field which is the Church. It would be quite unjust and improper if we, their descendents, gathered, instead of the genuine truth of wheat, the false tares of error. On the contrary, it is logically correct that the beginning and the end be in agreement, that we reap from the planting of the wheat of doctrine the harvest of the wheat of dogma. In this way, none of the characteristics of the seed is changed, although something evolved in the course of time from those first seeds and has now expanded under careful cultivation. What may be added is merely appearance, beauty, and distinction, but the proper nature of each kind remains.”

His defense of the traditions of the Fathers and his condemnation of innovation and novelty in the Church are as appropriate today as they were in his time:

“The Church of Christ, zealous and cautious guardian of the dogmas deposited with it, never changes any phase of them. It does not diminish them or add to them; it neither trims what seems necessary, nor grafts things superfluous; it neither gives up its own nor usurps what does not belong to it. But it devotes all its diligence to one aim: to treat tradition faithfully and wisely; to nurse and polish what from old times may have remained unshaped and unfinished; to consolidate and to strengthen what already was clear and plain; and to guard what already was confirmed and defined. After all, what have the councils brought forth in their decrees but that what before was believed plainly and simply might from now on be believed more diligently; that what before was preached rather unconcernedly might be preached from now on more eagerly.”

*O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust (1 Tim. 6:20).*

## The Venerable Bede,

Saint and Church Historian  
June 9 (May 27 old calendar)

**S**t. Bede the Venerable did for British Christianity what Eusebius did for Constantinople and what St. Nestor did for Kievan Rus, namely, he recorded the history of Christianity in his own region up to his own time. Indeed, his *History of the English Church and People* has run into numerous editions and is a best-selling religious paperback throughout the English-speaking world.

St. Bede was born probably in 673, in the ancient kingdom of Northumbria. The exact site of his birth is unknown, but it was in the region of the modern city of Yarrow in northern England. At the age of seven he was sent to school at the newly-founded monastery of Wearmouth, the ruins of which may still be visited, only the church surviving intact. He was, however, soon moved to the monastery's twin house at Jarrow where he remained until his death. It was perhaps



this early training that caused him to be ordained to the diaconate when only 19. Eleven years later he was made a priest. That he retained a love for the services may be seen from a letter which he wrote: “I know that the angels are present at the canonical Hours, and what if they do not find me among the brethren when they assemble? Will they not say, “Where is Bede? Why does he not attend the appointed devotions with his brethren?”

Our saint was a pupil of St. Benedict Biscop (commemorated Jan. 12), who had founded both monasteries and who had previously been a monk at Lerins, the most ancient monastery in Europe. From Lerins, monasticism spread throughout the European continent. It was the large library of books which St. Benedict Biscop brought with him from Lerins, as well as from other libraries in Europe, which enabled St. Bede to write many of his scholarly works.

On the eve of his death, St. Bede said that “from the time of my receiving the priesthood until my fifty-ninth year, I have worked, both for my own profit and that of my brethren, to compile extracts from the words of the venerable fathers on Holy Scripture, and to make commentaries on their meaning and interpretation.” St. Bede is known for his biblical commentaries, but he is even better known for his work as a Church historian. He certainly must have known personally several of the Anglo-Saxon saints. His histories were written for edification, however, rather than as scholarly exercises, and topics outside this scope tend to be omitted by him.

No historian is completely objective, and St. Bede is no exception. It should be borne in mind when reading his books that he was a patriotic Northumbrian and his work was intended for royal use. Secondly, he is better informed about events in his own part of Britain than elsewhere. Thus, Wales features hardly at all in his work, for it was not then linked with England, and its population was ethnically different.

Christians seeking the history of Britain’s many Orthodox saints, including St. Cuthbert and the Proto-martyr St. Alban, are often totally dependent upon St. Bede’s accounts. The Saint has been criticized for his account of the Synod of Whitby (664), at which virtually all the English — except for the ancient monastery of Iona — accepted the Roman dating method for Pascha. Modern scholarship suggests that this rather emotional topic was not the reason this local council was summoned, although the question of the Paschal calendar was put on its agenda. There were men of undoubted sanctity on both sides of the dispute. The king’s own bishop, St. Colman of Lindesfarne (commemorated Feb. 18) resigned his see rather than accept the Synod’s decision. But he was allowed to nominate St. Eata (Oct. 26), a man who accepted the decision, as his successor.

Through his writings, St. Bede brings to life for us today the monastic and secular life of seventh and eighth-century Britain. Most importantly, he has preserved for us the lives of many early saints of England — and that is a very precious legacy.

St. Bede and all you holy Saints of Northumbria, pray to God for us!

## **Saint Igor, Prince of Chernigov and Kiev**

June 18<sup>th</sup> (June 5<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

**T**he Right-believing Igor prince of Chernigov ascended the throne in 1146. The citizens of Kiev, not loving the dynasty of Olgovitch, proved false to him and delivered him to Izyaslav prince of Pereyaslav who was originally proclaimed Grand Duke. Saint Igor renounced the earthly way

of life and became a monk in the Theodore Monastery and received the ascetic name of Ignatius. On September 19<sup>th</sup>, when a mob rebels removed him from the monastery while he was praying before the icon of The Mother of God, killed him brutally and dragged his body through the streets of Kiev. For this evil-doing, much misfortune fell on the inhabitants of Kiev, but candles were several times seen to light of themselves on the grave of this blessed monk, and a fiery column appeared over the church where he was buried. This was in 1147.

Following June 5<sup>th</sup> 1150, when the relics of the Saint prince Igor, lauded for their wonders, were transported from Kiev to Chernigov and placed in the Church of the Transfiguration, “From that time on — according to notations of chroniclers — they began to celebrate the memory of the Right-believing prince Igor.” In the “original draught on icon paintings” it is said that prince Igor was of medium height, cold, swarthy, sported long hair and his beard was short and sparce. The Saint prince Igor is revered on the same level with Boris and Gleb as a bearer of sufferings.

## **Holy Martyr Leonidas** **June 18<sup>th</sup> (June 5<sup>th</sup> old calendar).**

## **Holy Martyrs** **Alexander and Antonina**

June 23<sup>rd</sup> (June 10<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

**A**ntonina was a virgin and Alexander an imperial soldier, both from Alexandria and both Christians. Antonina was first taken before the judge and tortured. When they threw her into prison, Alexander went to it at the command of an angel of God (being up to that time a stranger to Antonina), draped her in his military cloak and told her to keep her head lowered and go out through the guardhouse in front of the gates. In this way, she escaped and he remained in the prison. They brought Alexander before the judge, and began to interrogate him for the name of Christ. When Antonina heard of this, she came before the judge herself, and he put them both to various tortures. He cut off their hands and then flayed their naked bodies, scorching their wounds with torches, and finally cast them into a fire set in a hole in the ground, covering them with earth. They suffered with honor for the name of Christ and entered into the courts of the heavenly King on May 3rd, 313. The wicked judge, Festus, became dumb at the time of the martyrs' deaths, and an evil spirit fell on him, torturing him for seven days before killing him.

### **Troparion Tone 1**

Let us praise the two holy Martyrs,/ renowned Alexander and noble Antonina;/ in their holy contests they shone with love, faith and healing/ for those who cry together:/ Glory to Him Who has strengthened you; glory to Him Who has crowned you;/ glory to Him Who through you works healings for all.





### Kontakion Tone 2

Let us bless godly Alexander and Antonina,/ spiritual kinsmen in Christ  
and of one mind in holiness;/ receiving their struggles and wounds as fragrant  
myrrh/ He has glorified them.

## Blessed Augustine

June 28 (June 15 old calendar)

*Thou, Lord abidest forever, and Thou art not angry with us forever because Thou hast pity on our dust and ashes, and it was pleasing in Thy sight of reform my deformity. Inside me Thy good was working on me to make me restless until Thou shouldst become clear and certain to my inward sight. (Confessions).*

**T**his fourth century Father was born in Numidia in northern Africa in 354. His mother, St. Monica, tried to instill in him a love of virtue, but he was insensible to all but his own selfish desires. Following schooling and years of youthful folly, he went to Carthage, where he became a teacher.

As an adult he fell into the error of Manicheism (founded in the first century by the Persian prophet, Mani). However, as one priest told his mother, who was grieving over his waywardness, “the fount of so many tears cannot be lost.” In 387 St. Ambrose of Milan was able to inspire Augustine to fully commit himself to Christ and the True Church. Ordained a priest, he was consecrated Bishop of Hippo in northern Africa in 395. For 35 years he ruled his diocese wisely, participating widely in the controversies of his time, and attending the councils of African bishops.

Blessed Augustine wrote about 1000 books, of which the *Confessions* and the *City of God* are justly renowned and still read today (see “Spiritual Life,” of this issue). In other works this Father sometimes taught in an exaggerated or erroneous manner on one or two points of doctrine, but near the end of his life he reviewed his works and made some corrections, “with judicial severity,” where necessary, submitting them also to the judgment of the Church and humbly adding: “Let all those who will read this work imitate me not in my errors.”

Cited as a patristic authority by many other Holy fathers of the East (and pre-schism West), he was called “holy” by St. Photios the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople.

From the experience of his passionate youth, Blessed Augustine recognized the need for the soul to free itself from the enticements of the world before it could hope to grasp the things of the spirit. Much of his writing is devoted to exhorting his readers not to be conformed to the ways of the world: “We are thus admonished that we ought to turn our love from bodily pleasures to the eternal essence of truth.... With God's guidance a man of good will can turn the troubles of this present life to the advantage of courage. Among abounding pleasures and temporal prosperity, he may prove and strengthen temperance. In temptations he may sharpen his prudence, that he may not only be led into them, but may also become more vigilant and more eager in his love of truth which alone never deceives.”

## Holy Martyr Leontius

July 1 (June 18 old calendar).

**A** Roman military commander in Tripoli in Phoenicia in the reign of the Emperor Vespasian, St. Leontius was born in Yelada, ‘of great physical stature, powerful, strong and bold in battle’. The imperial governor, Hadrian, sent a military detachment to seize Leontius, Hadrian being a fierce adversary and persecutor of Christians. The commander of the detachment, Hypatius, fell ill on the way with a grave fever and the unit had therefore to slow its pace. One night an angel of the Lord appeared to Hypatius and said to him: ‘If you desire to be healed, you and your soldiers must cry to heaven three times: “O God of Leontius, help me!”’

Hypatius told his companions about this vision, and they all shouted together as the angel had instructed him, and Hypatius was immediately healed. This miracle amazed them all, and especially a certain Theodulus. Then Hypatius and Theodulus went on ahead of the other soldiers to find Leontius. Leontius received them courteously and offered them refreshment. When he had expounded his faith in Christ, their hearts began to burn with love towards the Lord, and a bright cloud descended upon Hypatius and Theodulus, shedding dew over them.

In this way the Holy Spirit of God Himself baptized these two converted souls while St. Leontius spoke the words: ‘In the name of the All-holy Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’ The evil Harden discovered that Hypatius and Theodulus had become Christians and ordered that they be beaten without mercy and then beheaded with an ax. In this manner Leontius’ spiritual children died. Then Hadrian ordered a most cruel torture for Leontius, but Leontius remained unwavering in his faith. His entire body was covered with wounds, but he prayed to God unceasingly to remain with him. In the midst of these most vicious torments, an angel of the Lord appeared to comfort and encourage him. At last they threw the martyr onto the ground and flogged him until he gave his soul to God. Leontius’ sufferings were witnessed by a certain Notarius, who recorded all that he saw on tablets and placed them in the martyr’s grave. St. Leontius suffered with honor in the year 73.



*Fragment from the Life of St. Alban, c. 1250*

### **Troparion Tone 3**

Girded with divine strength thou didst triumph in thy contest,/ O Leontius the Savior’s trophy-bearer./ Thou didst spring into the contest like a lion,/ and destroy the enemy’s might;/ O glorious Martyr, entreat Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.

### **Kontakion Tone 3**

Thou didst confound the tyrant’s wicked plans/ and expose the pagans’ empty worship./ Thou didst illumine all men with the knowledge of God/ by thy teachings, O holy Martyr./ We lovingly venerate thy memory, O wise Leontius.

## **St. Alban the Martyr**

July 5 (June 22 old calendar)

**A**ccording to recent findings, St. Alban is shown to be not only the protomartyr of Britain, but the earliest martyr of Latin Europe whom we know. It is thus fitting that he should be first in our series on Western saints.

Based on the 8th-century account of the Venerable Bede, hagiographers have placed St. Alban's martyrdom in the early 4th century, during the fierce Diocletian persecutions. In a guide to St. Alban's Cathedral, built over the site of his martyrdom, we find, however, the following interesting information which, according to the work of Dr. John Morris of London, places the date of execution nearly a century earlier to June 22, 209.

“The search for the source on which Gildas, about 540, and thence Bede, about 700, drew for their accounts of the martyrdom was rewarded by the discovery in 1901 of a copy in Turin of Constantius' life of St. Germaine, originally written in about 480.... Constantius gives the day of St. Alban's execution as June 22nd, but not the year. He does, however, state that the Roman Emperor involved was Septimus Severus, and says 'Then the emperor Severus went to Britain... When it became clear that there were very many Christians there, with his customary fury he ordered them all to be put to the sword.' Gildas, copying from this, apparently read 'Severus' as an adjective, and, in a gloss, supposed the emperor was the notorious anti-Christian, Dioclelius. Bede omitted the 'supposed' and incorporated the gloss in the text and so the Diocletian dating became established.

“In any case,” Dr. Morris points out, “it couldn't have been in that emperor's time, because he ruled only in the East. Maximian ruled the West of the empire and under him Constantius was responsible for Spain, Gaul and Britain. His wife, Helene, was a Christian. A contemporary account emphatically states that while this Caesar 'showed willing' by knocking down a few meeting places of the Christians, he killed none.

“Returning now to Severus: he was in England from the summer of 208 till his death in 211. He had his wife and two sons with him. In 209 he went north with the elder son to deal with the Caledonians, leaving his youngest son Geta Caesar in charge of Britain for three or four months till his return. The Turin MS says that after St. Alban's death, 'Then the evil Caesar, aghast at such wonders, ordered the persecutions to end, without the orders of the emperors, setting down in his report that the religion actually prospered from the slaughter of the saints...'” To this baffling passage Morris offers the solution that the evil Caesar was in fact the acting one Geta, and so confidently places the martyrdom on June 22, 209.”

This same “Guide” also states that St. Alban “was almost certainly a high-born native of Verulamium who had probably held military rank, privileged with Roman citizenship in the same way as was the Jew, St. Paul of Tarsus...”

Enlightened by this piece of brilliant research, we shall continue with the life of the saint, quoting from *Saints of the British Isles* by A. Bond and N. Mabin:

“Whilst this persecution was raging, St. Alban, a resident of Verulam (now known as Saint Albans), was still a pagan. Nevertheless, when the priest Amphibalus sought his help he freely gave it. The holy priest was being pursued by the persecutors and Alban gave him a hiding place. Such was his faith that even at this time of stress Amphibalus never ceased to praise his God. Alban was converted by this example of a holy life and began to imitate it by the Grace of God. Thus it happened that, on seeing this, the priest instructed Alban in the Faith.

“After a few days it came to the ears of the civil government that Saint Alban was sheltering a fugitive in his home. Soldiers were sent to search the house. On their arrival they were met by Saint Alban who was wearing the robes of the priest and thus the soldiers conveyed Saint Alban to the judge. It so happened that the judge was offering a sacrifice to the idols when the saint was brought before him. When he saw Saint Alban in the priestly attire, he was enraged, for he recognized the captive and realized that the priest had been permitted to escape. Even so, because of Saint Alban's position and his former loyalty to the Empire and the Roman deities, the judge

tried to be lenient. He offered Saint Alban freedom if he would offer the sacrifice. This the Saint steadfastly refused to do. Saint Alban declared himself to be a Christian, and feared not the threats of the civil authorities. He so incensed the judge by his boldness and zeal, that Saint Alban was ordered immediately to be taken and scourged. By the beating, the judge hoped for a submission to the Roman civil authority, since his words had not prevailed. Even the most cruel tortures did not shake Saint Alban's faith, and on seeing this the judge ordered him to be put to death.

“As Saint Alban was led out of Verulam, by Divine instinct all the townspeople followed him, leaving the place deserted and the judge alone. The people, knowing what was to happen, attempted to help the Saint by pulling down the bridge over which he was to pass, which spanned the river dividing the town from the place of execution. This bridge crossed over a very fast-flowing river which had too rapid a course to allow a ford. The desire now came upon Saint Alban to meet his Lord soon and thus he stood on the river bank and, looking towards Heaven, he prayed for help. At once the river dried up and Saint Alban was able to pass over on dry land. The executioner who accompanied him was so overcome by this wonder that he threw his sword down and begged to be allowed to suffer with, or in place of, the prisoner. Thus his role changed from persecutor to companion in the Faith. His fellow executioners hesitated at this and so Saint Alban went on alone to the top of Holmhurst Hill where he prayed for water. Forthwith a spring appeared from out of the ground, and the river that had dried up returned to its natural course, as a testimony of its obedience.

“Here it was that the martyr's head was severed from the body and he received the crown of life which is the promise of God. He who struck the final blow was not to look upon the martyr's holy body because, in recompense for his deed, his eyes dropped out and fell to the ground. The soldier who had cast down his sword suffered at the same time. Of him it is true to say that he was surely baptized in his own blood and thereby rendered worthy to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Convinced by the signs and miracles accompanying the death of Saint Alban, even the judge came to honor the martyred Christian and so afterwards ordered the cessation of the persecution of Christians...

“Very soon after his death the remains of St. Alban were buried in a church built on the site of his martyrdom. Saint Germain, Bishop of Auxerre in Gaul, whilst on a visit to Britain in 429 in order to quell the heresy of Pelagianism, is recorded as praying at the shrine of the Saint. Great must have been his devotion to Saint Alban for he caused a church in his own diocese to be dedicated in the Saint's honor.

“The site of martyrdom can still be seen today, although sadly, due to the ravages of Protestantism, the precious relics are now lost.”

## **St. John, the Forerunner and Baptist of Christ**

July 7<sup>th</sup> (June 24<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

**S**ix months before his appearing to the most holy Virgin Mary in Nazareth, the great Gabriel, archangel of the Lord, appeared to Zacharias the High Priest in the Temple in Jerusalem. Before he revealed the miraculous conception by a virgin who had not known a man, the archangel revealed the wondrous conceiving by an old and barren woman. Zacharias was unable at once to

believe the words of God's herald, and for this his tongue was bound in dumbness and remained thus until the eighth day after John's birth. The kinsfolk of Zacharias and Elizabeth gathered together on that day for the infant's circumcision and naming. When they inquired of the father how he wished the child to be called, he, being still dumb, wrote on a slate: 'John'. At that moment his tongue was loosed and he began to speak. Zacharias' house was on the heights between Bethlehem and Hebron. The news of the angel's appearing to Zacharias, of his dumbness and of the loosening of his tongue at the exact moment that he wrote 'John', was carried throughout all Israel, coming to Herod's ears.

So, when he sent men to kill all the infants around Bethlehem, he sent men off to Zacharias' family house in the hills to slay John also. But Elizabeth hid the child in good time. The king was enraged at this, and sent an executioner to the Temple to kill Zacharias (for it was then his turn to serve in the Temple again). Zacharias was killed between the court and the Temple, and his blood clotted and solidified on the paving slabs, and remained as an enduring witness against Herod. Elizabeth hid herself and the child in a cave, where she soon died. The young John remained in the wilderness alone in the care of God and His angels.

#### **Troparion Tone 4**

O Prophet and Forerunner of the coming of Christ,/ we honor thee lovingly but cannot extol thee worthily;/ for by thy birth/ thy mother's barrenness and thy father's dumbness were unloosed;/ and the Incarnation of the Son of God is proclaimed to the world.

#### **Kontakion Tone 3**

The formerly barren one today gives birth to the Forerunner of Christ/ Who is the fulfillment of prophecy./ For the Prophet, Herald and Forerunner of the Word/ submitted to Him Whom the prophets foretold/ by laying his hand on Him in the Jordan.

## **Holy Martyr Leonida**

July 8<sup>th</sup> (June 25<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

**T**he information regarding the Holy martyr's death of the nun Leonida and other nuns who suffered with her are very sketchy. In the year 310, for her Faith in Christ, the nun Leonida was beheaded. The nun Livia was burned and Saint Eutronia died during her tortures.

#### **Troparion to St. Leonida Tone 3**

Like a fragrant rose of asceticism/ thou didst breathe forth the myrrh of Christ./ Wherefore He has glorified thee as a righteous martyr, O Leonida./ Intercede with Him for those who cry:/ Rejoice, noble and blessed Martyr.

#### **Kontakion to St. Leonida Tone 3**

Thou wast adorned with the grace of virginity and the beauty of martyrdom,/ O Leonida, Bride of Christ./ Thou didst bear thy lamp and run to thy Bridegroom/ and wast crowned with incorruption./ Pray for those who faithfully praise thee.

# Holy Apostles

## Peter and Paul

July 12<sup>th</sup> (June 29<sup>th</sup> old calendar).

### The Holy Apostle Peter

Apostle Peter, formerly known as Simon, was the son of a fisherman named Jonah from Bethsaida in Galilee (John 1:42-45) and brother of Andrew the “First-called,” who was the one that brought him to Christ. St. Peter was married and had a house in Capernaum (Mark 1:21,29). Having being called by Christ the Savior while fishing on the lake of Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee; Luke 5:8), he always expressed extraordinary loyalty and zeal, for which he earned, together with the Zebedee brothers, an exceptional closeness to Christ (Luke 9:28). Being strong and ardent of spirit, he naturally assumed an influential role among Christ’s Disciples. He was the first to resolutely acknowledge Lord Jesus as Christ — i.e., Messiah (Mat. 16:16) — and for this, earned the name *Rock* (Peter). It was on this rock of Peter’s faith that Christ promised to build His Church, which even the gates of Hell would not prevail against (Mat. 16:18). Peter’s three renunciations of Christ (on the eve of Christ’s Crucifixion) was washed away with bitter tears of repentance. Consequently, after His Resurrection, Christ reinstated his apostolic standing thrice, matching the number of his renunciations, charging him to “*feed my lambs*” and “*tend My sheep*” (John 21:15-17). After the descent of the Holy Spirit, Apostle Peter was the first to assist in the spread and affirmation of Christ’s Church by making a fiery speech on Pentecost and converting 3000 souls to Christ. Shortly after, having cured a man “lame from his mother’s womb,” Peter’s second sermon converted an additional 5000 Jews to Christianity (Acts chps. 2-4) From the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter through to the 12<sup>th</sup>, the Book of Acts narrates his apostolic activities. However, after his miraculous release from prison by an Angel, and being forced to hide from Herod (Acts 12:1-17), he is mentioned only once and that is in the passages about the Apostolic council (Acts ch. 15). Other data on Peter had been preserved only in the Church tradition records. It is known that he preached along the shores of Mediterranean sea, in Antioch (where he ordained Bishop Evodius). The apostle Peter preached also to the Jews and Proselytes (pagans that have converted to Judaism) in Asia Minor, and later in Egypt, where he ordained Mark (the author of the Gospel “according to Mark,” transcribed from the apostle Peter’s words; Mark was not one of the twelve Apostles) as the first Bishop of the Alexandrian Church. From here he crossed over to Greece (Achaia) and preached in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12). He then evangelized in Rome, Spain, Carthage, and Brittany. Toward the close of his life, the apostle Peter returned again to Rome where he accepted martyrdom in 67 AD, by being crucified upside down.

The apostle Peter’s **First General Epistle** is directed “to the pilgrims dispersed in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” – provinces of Asia Minor. It must be understood that “pilgrims” would, in the main, be converted Jews as well as converted heathens that were part of the Christian communities. These communities were established by Apostle Paul. The apostle Peter’s reason for writing the Epistle was his wish to “*strengthen your brethren*” (Luke 22:31-32) when disagreements arose in these communities, and also when they were persecuted by the enemies of Christ. Internal antagonists in the form of false teachers appeared among the Christians. Taking advantage of the apostle Paul’s absence, they began to distort his teachings on



Christian freedom and began patronizing every type of immoral profligacy (1 Peter 2:16, 2 Peter 1:9, 2:1).

The apostle Peter's aim for this Epistle was to encourage, comfort, and confirm the Asia Minor Christians in their faith as he himself points out: "*By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand*" (1 Peter 5:12).

The place of the first Epistle is shown as Babylon (5:13). In the history of the Christian Church, the Babylonian Church in Egypt is well known where, apparently, St. Peter wrote his Epistle. At that time, both Silvanus and Mark were with him after leaving Apostle Paul, who was sent to trial in Rome. That is why the data of the first Epistle is dated to be between the years 62 and 64 AD.

The apostle Peter's **Second General Epistle** is written for the same Asia Minor Christians. In this second Epistle, the apostle Peter cautions the faithful with particular vigor against the corrupt false teachers. These false teachings resemble those that the apostle Paul discloses in his Epistle to Timothy and Titus, as well as the apostle Jude in his General Epistle. These false teachings posed a threat to the faith and morals of the Christians. At that time, there was a swift spreading of Gnostic heresies, which imbued into themselves elements of Judaism, Christianity, and various pagan teachings. (In essence, gnosticism is theosophy, which in turn is a fantasy clothed in philosophy). In real life, the adherents of these heresies were conspicuous in their immorality, and prided themselves in the knowledge of the "mysteries."

The second Epistle was written by Peter shortly before his martyr's ending: "*I know that shortly I must leave my temple, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.*" These writings can be put down to the years 65-66. The apostle Peter's final years were spent in Rome, from which it can be concluded that the second Epistle was written there in the nature of a "death-bed" testament.

## **The Holy Apostle Paul.**

Saint Paul, carrying at first his Hebrew name Saul, belonged to the tribe of Benjamin and was born in the Cilician town of Tarsus (in Asia Minor), which was then praised for its Greek academy and for the education of its citizens. Because he was a native of this city and descended from Jews freed from Roman slavery, Paul had the rights of a Roman citizen. In Tarsus Paul received his first education, and probably became familiar with the pagan culture, since his acquaintance with gentile writers is clearly shown in his speeches and writings (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12). He received his final education in Jerusalem from the famous teacher Gamaliel in the rabbinical school which was acclaimed at that time. Gamaliel was considered an expert of the law and despite belonging to the party of Pharisees, he was a freethinking person (Acts 5:34) and an admirer of Greek wisdom. Here, according to the accepted custom of the Jews, young Saul learned the art of tent-making, which later helped him to earn the means to live off his own labors (Acts 18:3; 2 Cor. 11:8; 2 Thes. 3:8).

Evidently young Saul was preparing for a rabbinical career, since directly after finishing his education and training he appeared as a strong zealot of pharisaic traditions and persecutor of the Christian faith. Perhaps by the appointment of the Sanhedrin he was a witness of the death of the first martyr, Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1) and then he received the authority to officially follow the Christians even beyond the borders of Palestine to Damascus (Acts 9:1-2.).

The Lord, seeing in him a “chosen vessel,” called him to apostolic service by miraculous means on the road to Damascus. During his journey a bright light shown on Saul, from which he fell to the ground blind. A voice resounded from the light, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Saul asked, “Who are you?” Jesus answered, “I am Jesus, who you are persecuting.” The Lord commanded Saul to go to Damascus, and there he would be instructed on what to do further. Saul’s companions heard the voice of Christ, but they did not see the light. After being led by the arm to Damascus, Paul was taught the faith and on the third day was baptized by Ananias. The moment Saul was submerged in the water he regained his sight. From that time he became a zealous preacher of the teachings he had formerly persecuted. For awhile he left for Arabia, and then again returned to Damascus to preach about Christ.

The rage of the Jews, angered by his conversion to Christ, forced him to run to Jerusalem (Acts 9:23) in 38 AD, where he joined with the community of believers and was introduced to the apostles. Because of an attempt on his life by the Hellenists, he left for his native Tarsus. He was called from there with Barnabus to Antioch to preach around 43 AD, and then they traveled together to Jerusalem, where they brought aid for the needy (Acts 11:30.).

Soon after his return from Jerusalem, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, Saul, together with Barnabus, left on their first missionary journey, lasting from 45 to 51 AD. The apostles traveled though all of the island of Cyprus, and by the time Saul converted the proconsul Sergius Paulus, he was already known as Paul. During the time of Paul’s and Barnabus’s missionary journey, Christian communities were founded in the Asia Minor cities of Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. In 51 AD Saint Paul took part in the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, where he heatedly stood against the necessity for gentile Christians to follow the traditions of Mosaic law.

Returning to Antioch, Saint Paul, accompanied by Silas, undertook his second missionary journey. At first he visited the churches that he had founded earlier in Asia Minor, and then he crossed over to Macedonia, where he founded congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. In Lystra Saint Paul acquired his favorite pupil Timothy, and from Troas he continued the journey with Apostle Luke who had joined them. From Macedonia Saint Paul crossed over into Greece, where he preached in Athens and Corinth, being detained for the last half of the year. From there he sent two letters to the Thessalonians. The second journey lasted from 51 to 54 AD. In 55 AD Saint Paul left for Jerusalem, visiting Ephesus and Caesaria, and from Jerusalem he went to Antioch (Acts 17 and 18.).

After a short stay in Antioch Saint Paul undertook his third missionary journey (56-58 AD), at first visiting, according to his custom, churches that were founded earlier in Asia Minor, and then stopping at Ephesus, where he preached daily for two years in the school of Tyrannus. He wrote his letter to the Galatians (because of the insurgence of a faction of Judaizers there) and his first letter to the Corinthians (because of the springing up of agitators and to answer a letter from the Corinthians to him). A local riot, stirred up against Paul by Dimitrius a master at working silver, forced Paul to leave Ephesus, and he left for Macedonia (Acts 19). On the way he received news from Titus about the condition of the Corinthian church and about the successful result of his letter. So from Macedonia he sent with Titus a second letter to the Corinthians. Soon, he came himself to Corinth, where he wrote a letter to the Romans, intending to leave for Rome and further west after going to Jerusalem.

After saying farewell in Miletus to the Ephesian elders, he arrived in Jerusalem. Because of a riot that sprung up against him, Paul was taken under guard by the Roman authorities and ended up in prison, at first under Proconsul Felix and then under his successor, Proconsul Festus. This happened in 59 AD. In 61 AD Paul, as a Roman citizen was granted his wish to be sent to



Rome to the court of Caesar. Enduring a shipwreck in Malta, the apostle only made it to Rome in the summer of 62 AD. Because of the great leniency of the Romans, Paul was able to freely preach. Thus ends the details of his life in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 27 and 28). In Rome Saint Paul wrote his letters to the Philippians (with thankfulness for the financial aid sent to him by Epaphroditus), to the Colossians, to the Ephesians, and to Philemon, a citizen of Colossus (concerning his slave Onesimus, who had run away). All three of these letters were written in 63 AD and were sent with Tychicus. Also in Rome was written an epistle to the Palestinian Hebrews in 64 AD.

The further fate of Apostle Paul is not known for certain. Some think that he stayed in Rome and by the orders of Nero died a martyr's death in 64 AD. But there is evidence that suggests that after a two year imprisonment, Paul was given his freedom and he took on a fourth missionary journey, which was indicated by his "Pastoral Epistles" to Timothy and Titus. After defending his actions before the Senate and Emperor, Saint Paul was freed from bondage so he could again travel to the east. Spending a long time on the island of Crete, he left his pupil Titus to ordain elders throughout all the cities (Titus 1:5), which shows that Titus was ordained by Paul to be the bishop of the church in Crete. Later in his letter Paul instructs Titus on how to go about his duties as a bishop. From this letter it is clear that Paul intended to spend that winter of 64 in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), near his native Tarsus.

During the spring of 65 AD, he visited the rest of the churches in Asia Minor and in Miletus he left the sick Trophimus. The people in Jerusalem rioted against Paul because of Trophimus earlier, which brought about Paul's first imprisonment (2 Tim. 4:20). Whether Saint Paul went through Ephesus is not known. He said that the Ephesian elders would not see his face again (Acts 20:25), but it appears that he ordained Timothy to be a bishop of the Ephesian church at this time. Later the apostle went through Troas, where he left his cloak (the outer layer of liturgical clothing) and books (probably also liturgical books, 2 Tim. 4:13) with a certain Carpus, and then he left for Macedonia. There he heard about the strengthening of false teachings in Ephesus and wrote his first letter to Timothy. After spending some time in Corinth (2 Tim. 4:20) and meeting Peter on the way, they continued their journey together through Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10) and Italy. They arrived at Rome, where Peter stayed, and in 66 AD Paul went alone further to the west, possibly reaching Spain.

After his return to Rome, he was imprisoned (for the second time) where he stayed until his death. There is a tradition that upon his return to Rome, he preached at the very door of the emperor Nero and brought his favorite concubine to Christ. For this he was condemned and even though, by God's mercy, he was "delivered from the lion's mouth," according to the saying, that is from being devoured by animals in the circus (1 Tim. 4:16-17), he was yet again in prison. During this second imprisonment he wrote his second letter to Timothy in Ephesus, inviting him to Rome for a last meeting, feeling the closeness of his own death. Tradition doesn't say whether Timothy managed to see his teacher again among the living, but it does say, that the apostle did not have to wait long for his martyr's crown. After a nine-month imprisonment he was beheaded, as a Roman citizen, not far from Rome. This happened in 67 AD during the 12th year of Nero's reign.

After a quick look on the life the Apostle Paul, it is seen, that it cleanly divides into two halves. Before his conversion to Christ, Saint Paul, then Saul, was a strict Pharisee, fulfiller of the law of Moses and his ancestor's traditions, thinking that he could be justified by works of the law and zeal for the faith of his fathers, reaching even fanaticism. After his conversion, he became an apostle of Christ, entirely given to the task of spreading the gospel, happy in his call, but

recognizing his own weakness for fulfilling this high calling and attributing all of his deeds and merits to the grace of God. All of Paul's life before his conversion was, according to his deep convictions, error and sin and led him towards condemnation instead of justification, and only the mercy of God saved him from this fatal error. From that time on Saint Paul tried to be worth of this gift of God and not to stray from his calling. Therefore there could not be any talk about that there ever was merit — all of it was God's doing.

All of Saint Paul's teachings opened in his epistles, being a full reflection of the life the apostle, carry this very basic thought: man is justified by faith, independent of lawful deeds (Romans 3:28). But from this, it is impossible to support the conclusion that the Apostle Paul was against all lawful works (See for example Gal. 6:4, Eph. 2:10 or 1 Tim 2:10 and others). According to his letters, "lawful works" does not, of course, include "good deeds" in general, but ritualistic observance of the Mosaic Law. We need to remember that Paul, during the time of his evangelistic work, needed to carry out a bitter struggle against the opposition of the Jews and Judaizing Christians.

Many of the Jews, upon becoming Christians, held the view that it was necessary for Christians to vainly hold all of the ceremonial instructions of Mosaic Law. They puffed themselves with proud thoughts that Christ came to earth only to save the Jews, and therefore gentiles wanting to be saved, needed to be circumcised and observe all of the Jewish rituals. This error so strongly prevented the spread of Christianity among the gentiles, that the apostles needed to call together the Jerusalem Council in 51 AD, which removed the requirements of the ceremonial decrees of the Law of Moses for Christians. But even after this Council many Judaizing Christians continued to stubbornly hold onto their former views and subsequently split from the Church, establishing their own heretical society. These heretics, personally opposed Apostle Paul, carried disorder into church life, and used Paul's absence in one church or the other. Therefore Saint Paul needed to continually underline in his epistles that Christ was the savior of all humanity, for Jews just as for gentiles, and that a person was not saved by fulfilling the ceremonial actions of the Law, but only by faith in Christ. Unfortunately, these thoughts of Apostle Paul were distorted by Luther and his successors, the Protestants, as if Paul denied universally the meaning of every good deed for salvation. If this were so, then he would not have written in his first letter to the Corinthians in the 13th chapter that "*if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing*" (1 Cor. 13:2, NIV), since this love would immediately appear in good deeds.

#### **Troparion to Saints Peter and Paul Tone 4**

Leaders of the Apostles and teachers of the world,/ pray to the Master of all to grant peace to the world/ and great mercy to our souls.

#### **Kontakion to Saints Peter and Paul Tone 2**

Thou hast taken the firm and divinely inspired Preachers, O Lord,/ the leading Apostles, for the enjoyment of Thy blessings and for repose./ For Thou hast accepted their labors and death/ as above every burnt offering,/ O Thou Who alone knowest the secrets of our hearts.

Editor: Bishop Alexander (Mileant)