

Selected Lives of Saints of March and April

Content: Witnesses to Truth: About the Holy Martyrs.

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April: St. Mary of Egypt. Holy Martyrs Agapia, Chionia and Irene. The Venerable Martyr Vadim. Holy Martyrs Victoria, Leonid, Nika, Galina, and others. Our Holy Father, the Monk Vitali. Holy Great Martyr George. Holy Martyr Alexandra. Holy Martyr Anatoly. St. Stephen of Perm.

Witnesses to Truth

The Great Deeds of the Martyrs

When someone enters an Orthodox church, he enters into a heavenly world: on all sides he is surrounded by the images of angels and saints. Among the righteous there are people of different nationalities, of different epochs, social origins, educational backgrounds and ways of life. Here are princes and simple folk, rich and poor, educated and illiterate. What most of them have in common is that they suffered for their faith in Christ.

Those who gave their lives for their faith are known as **martyrs**. The Russian word, *muchenik*, has at its root the concept of suffering, of a violent death. The ancient Church used the term *martis*, which means “witness” in Greek. Why they are so called and what gave them the strength to stand so courageously for the Christian faith are the issues we will discuss below.

The word “witness” is generally understood to mean **eyewitness**, i.e., a person who observed (or heard) something first-hand and testifies to it. Legal decisions are made on the basis of a witness’ testimony for the prosecution and for the defense. The demand is made of the witness that he present not opinions or hearsay, but only that which he actually observed. He must bring only facts. The Christian becomes a witness to his faith when his words and his life bear witness to a new life in Christ, a life in which he is a participant. Here the object witnessed is not the external so much as the internal spiritual experience.

The Holy Gospel refers to our Lord Jesus Christ as “The True Witness (*martis*).” “*Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead ... the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God*” (Rev. 1:5, 3:14). Following Pentecost, the Apostles and other preachers of the Gospel also become witnesses: “... *and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem...one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection*” (Acts 1:8, 1:22). “*I...who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ*” (1 Pt. 5:1). “*I know thy works and where thou dwellest ... the souls of them that were slain...for the testimony which they held*” (Rev. 2:13, 6:9).

Our Lord Jesus Christ said of His mission in the world: “*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (Jn. 18:37, 8:32). The truth which the Son of God bore witness to was not an abstract religious-philosophical system, but a divine revelation of that which He had heard from His Father and seen in that heavenly world from which He had come. He explained as someone who knew from experience, and taught how to live as the blessed live in the Kingdom of His Father. Those who accepted His witness, He brought, inasmuch as was possible in this temporal world, into contact with the heavenly life, giving them a foretaste of the joy of communing with God, and helping them to see their own divine light. Those who experienced this state of grace in turn became witnesses of Christ — sometimes by word, but more often by deed — in their virtuous lives.

For the Apostles, the religious experience was simultaneously internal and external. The Apostle John wrote of that which he and the other Apostles experienced when communicating with the Savior:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full (1 Jn. 1:1-4).

If Christ had offered only abstract ideas, they would have been accepted calmly and would not have caused the extreme split in society that we see in the history of Christianity. To accept the witness of Jesus Christ always meant to **open your soul** to His divine light, to make the first willful step toward the Kingdom of God. The words of Christ have the ability to open up before a person his own moral baseness; they expose the deep wounds of sin present in his soul. But at the same time they act upon a person as a beneficial balm. Bringing a renewing spiritual force for the internal struggle with evil, they inspire in him the desire to live for a higher good. And, as a person cleanses himself and approaches moral perfection, he experiences the love of God. New horizons open before his spiritual eyes, and he begins better to comprehend the basis of spiritual life, the passing and false nature of all that takes place around him. He understands better what he must attain and how he must act. Feeling from personal experience his own former baseness and the joy of communing with God, he no longer wishes to return to the old darkness from which he has escaped. Just the opposite — the Kingdom of God becomes for him something

precious, “...*the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth*” (Mt. 13:44), for which he is ready to give everything, even his own life.

Unfortunately not all are capable of seeing the light, and not all find in themselves the strength to part with their sinful habits, to refuse material goods for the renewal of their soul. The Gospel tells us how from the first day of Christ’s preaching, society began to divide into two camps — those who joyfully accepted His teaching and those who rejected it. Indeed, the latter group did not merely ignore Christ’s teaching, but actively rose against it with indignation, even with uncontrollable hatred. Jesus Christ thus defined the reaction of people to his witness: “*For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be re-proved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God*” (Jn. 3:20-21). In other words, the teaching of Christ possesses the ability to expose the true nature of a person, his secret motivations.

The animosity which the Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders held toward Christ ultimately led them to bring false witness against Him at His judgment, to sentence Him to death and to force Pilate to agree to his crucifixion. Thus the first witness to spiritual life — our Lord Jesus Christ — also became its first martyr. But He rose from the dead, thus promising to all that Truth would triumph.

The Resurrection of the Savior and the descent of the Holy Spirit were the significant events that totally convinced the Apostles of the truth of all that the Lord Jesus Christ had taught, and as witnesses they devoted their lives to the preaching of the Gospel among all peoples. They understood their preaching to be a type of witness before people of that grace which they had received in Jesus Christ. And just as during the life of Jesus Christ, His witness appealed to some and antagonized others, so too in subsequent ages did Christian proselytism enter into society as a dividing force: “*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household*” (Mt. 10:34-36).

The first Christian to suffer was the archdeacon Stephen, who was stoned by the Jews outside the walls of Jerusalem soon after the Apostles were visited by the Holy Spirit. Later, almost all the Apostles died violent deaths.

Nero (54-68 A.D.) was the first Roman emperor to embark on a course of massive and systematic persecution of Christians. During his reign, the Apostles Peter and Paul suffered in Rome. Christians were fed to wild beasts at Roman circuses or covered in tar and set aflame like torches to light the city streets.

A second-century author, St. Justin the Philosopher, who also ended his life as a martyr, illustrated how Christianity divided society at its most basic unit, the family. He related a story of how one pagan woman in the city where he lived had converted to Christianity. Her husband, who remained a pagan, was angered by this conversion and complained to a local magistrate. Forseeing no good in this, the woman received a postponement of her court appearance in order to tend to affairs relating to her property. While she was busy with these, her angered husband brought a certain Ptolemy before the court, who, he had learned, had been responsible for his wife’s conversion. Ptolemy was interrogated, and when he confessed his Christian faith, was sentenced to death by the judge. Two members of the court felt that a death sentence was rather harsh for a man whose only “crime” was his religious conviction. The judge inquired as to whether the dissenters were also Christians. When they confirmed this, he sentenced them to death as well. Thus, in the process of preparing for the trial of the Christian wife, three other

Christians were executed. Later, the wife was also tried and executed. In his Second Apology to the Roman Senate, St. Justin tells us that all this took place because the wife, having become a Christian, refused to participate in her husband's unnatural perversions, deeming them to be sinful.

Although we know the names of only a few thousand martyrs, their actual number runs into the tens of millions. The persecution of Christians never completely subsided; however, its intensity alternated between greater and lesser, and its geographic focus would shift. Certain periods of time were especially difficult for Christians. Roman emperors and pagan rulers directed bitter campaigns of persecution against believers during the first three centuries of Christianity. After a period of relative calm, Moslem Arabs began a new wave of persecution in the 7th to 9th centuries. The Turks followed in the 13th to 18th centuries. There is a great contrast between the methods used to spread Christianity and Islam: the Apostles came to people to preach love. They were full of gentleness and often became victims of unbelievers. However, from the first day of its appearance, the Moslem religion was literally spread by sword and flame. Finally, in our own century, ferociously anti-religious Communists attempted to root out all Christian faith mercilessly. Every new wave of persecution becomes more murderous and bloody than the previous one. The Holy Gospel predicts even greater persecution before the end of the world.

Thus, the battle against Christian faith is a continuing theme of all New Testament history. As the Holy Gospel explains, this warfare is directed by the fallen angel, the ancient dragon, become the "prince of the world." But even having suffered physically for Christ, His witnesses were not destroyed. Just the opposite — they, like Christ, were victorious and now sit with Him in Heaven: *"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne"* (Rev. 3:21).

The conditions of death are unique for every Christian confessor. They have a common logic in that the Lord Jesus Christ and the state of grace they found in Christianity became for them the most important element of their lives. "A Christian would sooner give his life for his faith than a pagan would give a piece of his cloak for all the gods," wrote Origen (182-215 A.D.) in his letter to Celsius (7:39). To disavow Christ and His teaching meant for them the forfeiture of that which was dearest to them — God and eternal life. It would have meant to bow their heads before evil and untruth in order to prolong their insignificant earthly existence — and to do so would have been a terrible tragedy for them.

Christian martyrdom is at its core quite different from the self-sacrifice of fanatics. Fanaticism is a blind attachment to an idea. Fanatics are capable of sacrificing their lives in order to prove something to others, for example, as Buddhist monks recently set themselves on fire in order to draw public attention to problems in their country. Christianity forbids suicide as a great sin. *"When they persecute you in one city, go to another,"* said Christ (Mt. 10:23). Martyrs did not suffer in order to "prove" something, but to guard the spiritual grace their lives had acquired in the Lord Jesus Christ. To them spiritual life was more important than physical life.

"For to me to live and die in Christ is a gain," said the Apostle Paul (Phil. 1:21). He taught Christians to accept persecution with thanks, as an honor and opportunity to receive an even greater reward in Heaven: *"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake"* (Phil. 1:29).

Our Lord Jesus Christ knew of the sufferings that his followers would endure and sought to prepare them for their sacrificial deeds by saying:

I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues... And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell... Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God... And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say. For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say... And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved... Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin and not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows (Mt. 10:16-42; Lk. 12:2-12; 21:12-19).

Having witnessed the unshakeable faith of the Christians, the great courage with which they accepted suffering and death, many pagans saw the truth of the Christian teachings and were themselves converted to Christianity. This justified Tertullian's comment in the third century that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity."

So Christian martyrs bear witness to eternal qualities, spiritual wealth and true life. Leaving this sorrowful world, they stand forever in indescribable joy near the throne of God, just as envisaged by the Apostle John:

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palm branches in their hands...These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7:9-17).

Through their sacrifice, the martyrs in Christ bear witness to the reality of spiritual values and the existence of another life, far superior to our own. They call on us to struggle courageously against evil, to love God and to feel for ourselves what a great gift it is to have Him in our souls. Through the prayers of the holy martyrs may the Lord grant to us a strong faith and the valor necessary to attain the quiet haven of the Kingdom of God.

Bishop Alexander

Protomartyr Evdokia the Samaritan

March 14th (March 1st Old Calendar)

The Holy and Righteous Martyr Evdokia the Samaritan lived in Heliopolis, a city of Phoenicia, during the reign of Trajan. Though she had been a great harlot, she became a penitent, and then a nun, and finally a martyr. She had gained great wealth from her harlotry. The reversal of her life was brought about through the providence of God, by an elderly monk, Germanus, and that unintentionally. Coming to Heliopolis in the course of his work, he stayed at the house of a Christian woman whose home abutted Evdokia's. When, at night he began his monastic practice to read the Psalter and a book on the Dreadful Judgment, Evdokia heard him and stood listening carefully to his every word until the end. She was taken by such fear and dread that she remained awake until daybreak. As soon as it was dawn, she sent a servant to beg that the monk come to her. Germanus came, and they began a long conversation on what the old monk had been reading the previous night, especially about faith and salvation. The result of these discussions was that Evdokia asked the local bishop to baptize her.

After her baptism, she gave all her goods to the church to be distributed to the poor, dismissed her servants and slaves, and retired to a women's monastery. She so devoted herself to the monastic life — to obedience, patience, vigils, prayer, and fasting — that after thirteen months she was chosen as abbess. She lived fifty-six years in the monastery and was worthy in the eyes of God to be given the gift of raising the dead. When a persecution of Christians arose under the governor Vincent, holy Evdokia was beheaded. She is a wonderful example of how a vessel of uncleanness can be purified, sanctified, and filled with a precious, heavenly fragrance by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Troparion

Evdokia, when godly fear entered thy heart,/ thou didst abandon the glory of the world,/ and hasten to God the Word./ Thou didst take His yoke on thy flesh,/ and shed thy blood in a contest surpassing nature./ O glorious Martyr, entreat Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.

Kontakion

He Who was pleased to raise thee from the depths of perdition to the summit of godliness/ has also made thee illustrious through thy contest./ He has granted thee the grace of healing,/ O righteous Martyr and equal to the Angels./ Beseech Him to save us, O Evdokia.

Holy Martyr Antonina

March 14th (March 1st Old Calendar)

Born in Nicaea, St. Antonina was a devout Christian woman. She was arrested and harshly tortured for the Christian faith. She was finally sewn into a sack and thrown into a lake. This was in the year 302. God saved her soul and glorified her forever among the angels in heaven and among the faithful on earth.

Holy Martyrs Paul and Juliana

March 17th (March 4th Old Calendar)

Brother and sister from Ptolemais in Phoenicia, the holy martyrs Paul and Juliana were cruelly tortured for Christ under the Emperor Aurelian and were finally beheaded. Many marvels attended their martyrdom and many of the pagans, on seeing them, were brought to the Faith. Several of them were beheaded in 273 and received martyrs' crowns.

The Forty Martyrs of Sebastia

Valerius, Claudius, Leontius, Theophilus, and others.

March 22nd (March 9th Old Calendar)

In the year 313, the emperor Constantine the Great signed a law decreeing freedom of religious faith. His co-ruler, emperor Licinius seconded this law, but the persecution of Christians continued as before in the provinces subject to him. Around the year 320, a unit of Roman troops was stationed in the town of Sebastia, in Armenia. Within that troop were forty Christian soldiers who were from Cappadocia by birth (presently Turkey). The commander in chief compelled them to bring a sacrifice to the idols, which they refused to do.

The soldiers were arrested and, while bound, led to the lake near the town of Sebastia. It was winter and night was approaching. The stripped soldiers were forced into the ice-covered lake. A terrible frost fettered the limbs of the saints and they began to freeze. This torment was made more difficult for them by a warm steam-bath, which was placed on the shore of the lake for their temptation. Anyone could save his life by informing the warden that he had rejected Christ; he could then enter the bath and be warmed. All night the soldiers valiantly bore the ferocious frost, encouraging each other and singing holy hymns to God.

At dawn one of the soldiers could no longer endure the suffering. He came out of the lake and hurried into the steam-bath. But as soon as the warm air touched his body he dropped dead. Soon after this happened, the warden Aglaius saw that an unearthly light shone above the remaining martyrs. He was so shaken by this miracle that he divested himself and joined the 39 martyrs.

Upon arriving at a later time, the torturers saw that the Christian soldiers were not only not frozen, but seemed to have thawed. Using mallets, the torturers broke their shins and threw them into a fire, after which the charred bones of the martyrs were thrown into the river.

Three days later, the torturers came to Peter, the Sebastian bishop, and recounted their deeds. Bishop Peter gathered the bones of the martyrs and buried them with honor. The names of the martyrs were saved: Cyrion, Candidus, Domnus, Hesychius, Heraclius, Smaragdus, Eunoius, Valens, Vivianus, Claudius, Priscus, Theodulus, Euthychius, John, Xanpheas, Helianus, Sisinus, Angius, Aetius, Flavius, Acacius, Ecdetius, Lysimachus, Alexander, Ilias, Gorgonius, Theophilus, Domitian, Gaius, Leontius, Aphanasius, Cyril, Sacherdon, Nicholas, Valerius, Philoctimon, Severian, Chudion, Meliton and Aglaius.

The memorial for the forty martyrs is numbered among the great feast days. On the day of their memory the strictness of Great Lent is lifted and the liturgy is conducted before the Pre-sanctified Gifts.

Hierarch Gregory **the Dialogist, Pope of Rome**

March 25th (March 12th Old Calendar)

St. Gregory was born in Rome about the year 540. His grandfather was Pope Felix; his mother Silvia and his aunts, Tarsilla and Emiliana, were also numbered among the choir of the saints by the Roman Church. Having received a brilliant secular education, he attained high state offices. Leading a God-pleasing life, he aspired to monasticism with all his soul. After the death of his father, St. Gregory spent all his fortune on the building of six monasteries. In Rome, he founded a monastery in the name of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called and there, having exchanged his palaces for a narrow cell, received the monastic tonsure. Then, on a commission from Pope Pelagius II, St. Gregory lived a long time in Byzantium. There he wrote his “Commentary on the Book of Job.” After the death of Pope Pelagius, St. Gregory was elected to the Roman cathedra. Considering himself unworthy, for seven months the saint would not bring himself to accept such a responsible ministry, and only in yielding to the entreaties of the clergy and the flock did he accept consecration.

Wisely governing the Church, Hierarch Gregory tirelessly planted the Word of God. St. Gregory compiled the order of the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts in the Latin tongue, which before him had been known only in oral tradition. Confirmed by the Sixth Ecumenical Council, this order was accepted by the whole Orthodox Church.

He zealously struggled with the heresy of the Donatists [Supporters of a movement that arose in North Africa at the beginning of the fourth century, during the period of Diocletian's persecutions of Christians, when the hierarchy of the Church treated with lenience those who had apostasized from the faith during persecution. The Donatists required purity from the Church, holiness from all its members and the rebaptism of apostates], and converted to the true faith the pagan inhabitants of Britain and the Goths who had been adherents of the Arian heresy.[Arianism arose at the beginning of the fourth century and was named after its founder, the Alexandrian priest, Arius. According to his teaching, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, Christ the Logos, even though the most perfect creation of God, is still a creature, and as such, He is the Son of God “not by essence, but by grace.” Arianism was condemned at the First Ecumenical Council].

Hierarch Gregory left behind him numerous works. After the appearance of his book, “Conversations or Dialogues on the Life and Miracles of the Italian Fathers,” the hierarch began to be called the “Dialogist,” that is to say, “one conducting a dialogue, a collocutor.” His “Pastoral Rule” (or “On Pastoral Ministry”) enjoys special renown. In this work, Hierarch Gregory thoroughly describes the image of the true pastor. Also, 848 of his letters of moral content have come down to us.

Hierarch Gregory headed the Roman Church for the course of thirteen years, taking care of all the needs of his flock. He was distinguished by an unusual love for the poor, for which he was vouchsafed a vision of the Lord Himself.

The Hierarch died in the year 604. His relics rest in the Cathedral of the Holy Apostle Peter in the Vatican.

Prince Rostislav the “Believer of Right”

March 27th (March 14th Old Calendar)

The Believer of Right, “Orthodox” Rostislav (christened Michael), prince of Kiev, was the grandson of Vladimir Manomah, son of Mstislav I and brother of prince Vsevolod. When Mstislav inherited the Kievan throne, he gave his third son, Rostislav, the rule of Smolensk. Rostislav ruled Smolensk as a prince more than 40 years. He founded many towns and built many churches in the Smolensk citadel. During his time the Smolensk arch-diocese was formed.

In the 50th year of the 12th century, he was embroiled in a war for Kiev, which was waged by the princely families of Olgovich and Manomahov. Rostislav became prince of Kiev in 1159. He was distinguished by high Christian qualities: his love for his subjects, his wish of good for all and the elimination of offenses. It is also known that Rostislav strove to become a monk, but was unable to realize his wish. His spiritual mentor was Polycarp, prior of the Kievo-Pechersk monastery. Rostislav was loved by the people. While returning from a journey to Novgorod he became ill and gave up his soul in the year 1167. He was buried in Kiev, in the Theodore monastery founded by his father.

St. Patrick

March 30 (March 17 Old Calendar).

The great Apostle and Enlightener of Ireland, St. Patrick (387-493 A.D.) was born to a noble Roman family of Gaul or Britain. At the age of 16 he was carried off by Irish marauders and sold as a slave to an Irish chieftain, who put him in charge of his sheep. Six years later, after the prompting of an angel, the saint fled to Gaul where he placed himself under the spiritual direction of St. Germanus of Auxerre. For 18 years he prayed, struggled and studied, and was often granted a vision of Irish children calling out to him: “O holy youth, come back to Erin, and walk once more amongst us.”

Celestine I, the Bishop of Rome, commissioned St. Patrick to bring the people of Ireland into Christ's one, true fold. And so, during the summer of 433, he and his companions arrived in Ireland. They were immediately persecuted by the Druids and other pagans, but the saint's meekness and wonderworking, as well as his God-inspired ability to preach the Gospel, resulted in the conversion of many thousands. In particular, St. Patrick contested spiritually with the Arch Druid, Lochru, who, by the power of demons and through many incantations, tried to maintain his power. On one occasion Lochru, like Simon Magus, was able to levitate himself high into the air in a display of sorcery; but the moment St. Patrick knelt in prayer, Lochru fell to his death. This was the beginning of the end of paganism in Ireland. The Orthodox Faith was victorious on that Easter Sunday when the saint explained the doctrine of the Holy Trinity using a shamrock with its single stem and three leaves.

After receiving Holy Anointing, St. Patrick departed to the Lord on March 17, 493. As he lay in public for several days, a heavenly light shone around his body.

St. Alexis

the Man of God

March 30th (March 17th Old Calendar)

In the fourth century, there lived in Rome the wealthy spouses, Euthymianus and Aglaia, who were known for their kindheartedness and compassion. They would receive the poor, orphans, widows and strangers in their home daily and feed them. If, on any day, only a few paupers came to the table, Euthymianus would say with sadness: “I am unworthy to walk on the earth of my God.”

Everyone loved Euthymianus and his wife, but they had no children. Euthymianus and Aglaia regretted this and daily begged the Lord that for comfort in old age He would send to them a son. Finally, God heard their prayer, and a son was born to them, whom they called Alexis at baptism. The parents exerted every effort so that their son would grow up good and pious.

Directed by his pious parents, Alexis loved the Lord from his early years. He fasted strictly, dressed modestly, and prayed often. When Alexis attained maturity, his parents found a bride for him and married him. [Translator's note: Literally, “crowned him” — a reference to the placing of crowns on the heads of the bride and groom during the Orthodox wedding service.]

On the first day of their marriage, when the young spouses were left alone, Alexis came up to his virgin-wife, gave her a gold ring and a precious belt and said: “Preserve this, and may God be between thee and me until the time that His grace will arrange something new for us.” Having said this, Alexis withdrew.

Having taken off from himself his rich wedding garments, he put on the garments of a village dweller, took a little money and left his parents' home. Alexis was drawn by Christ's words: “*And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life*” (Mt. 19:29). One may suppose that before leaving his father's house, St. Alexis had agreed to marry in order to assure a future for his bride.

Wandering from land to land, Alexis finally reached the city of Edessa. Here he found the ancient Image of the Savior Not-Made-by-Hands. In Edessa, Alexis distributed his last money to the poor and began to live on alms near a church in honor of the Most Holy Theotokos. Alexis passed day and night in prayer, while on Sundays he would partake of the Holy Mysteries. Thus, he passed seventeen years in poverty and spiritual struggles.

Gradually, many of the inhabitants of Edessa became acquainted with the pauper who sat by the church, and they valued his high spiritual qualities. One of the ministers of the church saw in a dream the Most Holy Virgin Mary, who said to him: “Bring into my church the man of God: for his prayer reaches unto God, and as a crown upon a king's head, so is the Holy Spirit upon him.” The church minister wondered to whom these words applied, but the vision was repeated, and the Mother of God pointed to the pauper who was sitting at the doors of the church.

From that time, esteem for Alexis grew still more, and he began to be praised and openly set forth as an example. Alexis, fleeing vainglory, left Edessa. Having reached the Mediterranean Sea, he boarded a ship in order to get to some other land. While sailing on the sea, a terrible storm arose, which after several days threw the damaged ship onto the shores of Italy — not far from Rome, where Alexis had lived formerly.

Reaching the shore, Alexis made for his home, and on the road met his father, who was returning from church. Bowing before him, Alexis said: "Have mercy on me a sinner and give me a corner in thy house. May the Lord bless thee for this and grant thee the Kingdom of Heaven, and if thou hast any of thy near ones wandering, may He return him safely." These words reminded Euthymianus of his lost son. He shed tears and commanded that the pauper be given a small little house on his property.

Thus, Alexis began to live on his father's property, unrecognized by anyone because he had changed so greatly in his outward appearance after having lived so long in deprivations. At home, Alexis led the same manner of life as he had earlier in Edessa: he constantly prayed to God, communed each Sunday, endured poverty, and was satisfied with the very least. It was difficult for Alexis, living near his father, mother and wife, to see their sorrow over their lost son and husband. Thus, seventeen more years passed.

When Alexis felt the approach of his death, he described his life on a parchment, beginning from the day of his parting from his kin, and began to prepare for death.

On the following Sunday, Bishop Innocent of Rome was serving the Liturgy in church, in the presence of the Emperor Honorius. There were many people praying. During the divine service, a voice rang out in the church: "Seek the man of God in the house of Euthymianus." The Emperor, having turned to Euthymianus, asked: "Why hast thou not informed us that the man of God is living with thee?" Euthymianus replied: "God sees that I know not of whom thou speakest."

Then the Emperor Honorius and Pope Innocent decided to visit Euthymianus' home personally to meet with the man of God. Coming to his property, they learned from the servants that in the little house lived a pauper who passed all his time in prayers and strict fasting. Entering, they saw an emaciated man lying without breath on the floor. His face shone, and his body was fragrant.

The Emperor, having seen the parchment in Alexis' hand, took it and read it aloud. Then, at last, Euthymianus and all those present learned that the pauper, who had lived there for so many years, was his lost son. Mother and father sorrowed greatly that they had learned about their beloved son so late, but at the same time were comforted by the fact that he had attained to such great holiness.

The saint's body, which performed many miracles, was placed in the middle of the square, where all Rome gathered. The Emperor and the Pope themselves bore the body of the saint into the church, where it remained for a whole week, and which was then placed in a marble sepulchre. From the holy relics a fragrant myrrh began to flow forth which granted healing to the sick.

Troparion

Thou didst bud from a famous and glorious root;/ thou didst blossom from a royal and illustrious city, O supremely wise Alexis;/ thou didst disdain all on earth as corruptible and fleeting;/ and didst hasten to Christ the Master./ Ever entreat Him to save our souls.

Kontakion

Today with hymns and praise/ we celebrate the festival of Alexis the blessed and cry aloud:/ Rejoice, gladsome adornment of the righteous.

Holy Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria

April 1st (March 19th Old Calendar)

The term “marriage made in Heaven” is brought to mind regarding a third century couple, whose marriage could be said to have been made “for Heaven” because of a rare, singular purpose to serve Jesus Christ. Sts. Chrysanthus and Daria are among the lesser known martyrs of the early Christian Church. They joined the early martyrs in shedding their blood for Christ as He did for all of mankind.

St. Chrysanthus was the only son of a great nobleman, Poleon, who moved from Alexandria to Rome. As the son of rich parents, Chrysanthus studied all the secular disciplines, having very learned men as his teachers. However, worldly wisdom only confused him, and he was left ignorant of the truth. He grieved over this, but God, who provides for each and all, assuaged the grief of the young Chrysanthus by putting copies of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles into his hands. The truth was revealed to him in the reading of these. He also desired a teacher and found one in the person of Carpophorus, a priest, who instructed and baptized him. But this did not please his father, who did all in his power to turn him back from the Christian faith. Then, in no way succeeding, the wicked father tried to corrupt him by shutting him up alone with shameless girls, but Chrysanthus gained the victory over himself in this, and preserved his virginity. His father then compelled him to marry the pagan Daria. Chrysanthus persuaded Daria to receive the Christian faith, and to live with him as his sister while appearing to be married. When his father died, Chrysanthus began openly to confess Christ and to live as a Christian, both he and his whole house. This was in the time of the Emperor Numerian, and he and Daria were both tortured terribly for their faith. Their torturer, Claudius, however, seeing the endurance of these martyrs and the wonders that were revealed at their martyrdom, embraced the Christian faith, as did the rest of his house. For this Claudius was drowned, both his sons were beheaded, and his wife died on the gallows with prayer on her lips.

Daria showed such endurance under martyrdom that it caused the pagans to cry out, “Daria is a goddess!” Finally it was decreed that Chrysanthus and Daria be buried in a deep pit and covered with stones. A church was later built on the site. Near this pit was a cave in which some Christians met together for prayer and communion in memory of the holy martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria. Discovering this, the pagans rolled a stone across the entrance to the cave, and thus by death drove those Christians from this world into that better world where Christ the Lord reigns in eternity. These glorious martyrs, Chrysanthus and Daria and the others with them, among whom are St. Diodorus the priest and St. Marianus the deacon, suffered for Christ in Rome in 283 and 284.

Troparion

Let us honor the like-minded pair of Martyrs,/ Chrysanthus scion of purity, and supremely modest Daria./ United in holiness of faith, they shone forth as communicants of God the Word./ They fought lawfully for Him and now save those who sing:/ 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

O Chrysanthus, in the sweet fragrance of holiness/ thou didst draw Daria to saving knowledge./ Together in contest you routed the serpent, the author of all evil,/ and were worthily taken up to the heavenly realms.

The Martyr Lydia and Her Family

April 5th (March 23rd Old Calendar)

St. Philitus, his wife Lydia and their children, Macedonius and Theoprepid, suffered for Christianity during the time of Hadrian (118-138). Philitus was the emperor's advisor. Information regarding them is scant. It is known that the sufferings of Philitus's family began in Rome and ended in Illyricum. Having been thrown into boiling oil, they remained whole and unscathed. Wishing to be quickly united with Christ, the martyrs themselves begged for their end, and with prayers departed to the Lord.

Upon seeing the staunch faith of Philitus and his family, the commander Amphiloichus and the jailer Kronid professed their belief in Christ and also suffered as martyrs.

Archangel Gabriel

April 8th (March 26th Old Calendar)

The herald of the incarnation of the Son of God, St. Gabriel the Archangel is one of the seven great angels who stand before the throne of God. He revealed to Zacharias the birth of St. John the Baptist, and said of himself, "*I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God*" (Lk. 1:19). His name, Gabriel, signifies "man of God." Speaking about the Annunciation, the holy Fathers comment that an angel with such a name was sent to signify who He was, and of what nature He was, who would be born of the most pure Virgin. Jesus would be the Man of God, the strong and mighty God. Others have found that it was this same Gabriel who announced the conception of the Virgin Mary to Joachim and Anna, and that it was he who taught Moses in the wilderness to write the Book of Genesis. The holy Fathers considered Gabriel to belong to the foremost and highest order of the heavenly powers, the seraphim, since the seraphim stand closest to God. The names of these seven are: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Selathiel, Jegudiel, and Barachiel. Some would add Jeremiel to this number. Each has his own particular service, but all are equal in honor. Why did God not send St. Michael? For the reason that St. Michael's service is the suppression of the enemies of God's truth, while St. Gabriel's is the annunciation of the salvation of the human race.

Troparion

Supreme Leader of the heavenly Hosts,/ we implore thee that by thy prayers thou wilt encircle us/ unworthy as we are,/ with the protection of the wings of thine immaterial glory,/ and

guard us who fall down before thee and fervently cry:/ Deliver us from dangers,/ for thou art the commander of the Powers above.

Kontakion

Supreme Leader of God's armies and minister of the divine glory,/ prince of the Bodiless Angels and guide of men,/ ask what is good for us and great mercy,/ as Supreme Leader of the Bodiless Hosts.

Kontakion

O Archangel, thou art the glorious intercessor and minister/ of the Splendid, Holy, All-accomplishing, Ineffable and Awesome Trinity./ Pray that we may be delivered from all harm and torment,/ that we may cry to thee: Rejoice, O protector of thy servants.

The Martyrs Alla and Larissa

April 8th (March 26th Old Calendar)

Sts. Alla and Larissa suffered together with other martyrs during the first half of the 4th century in Gotha, where by the order of the tsar Ungerik they were burned in the church during liturgical services.

St. Gaatha, wife of the other tsar of Gotha, together with her daughter Duklida, gathered the remains of the holy martyrs and departed with them to Kizik (in Crimea). When St. Gaatha returned to Gotha, the enraged pagans stoned her. Her daughter St. Duklida gave up her soul peacefully in Kizik.

St. Mary of Egypt

April 14th (April 1st Old Calendar).

The recorder of the life of this wonderful saint was St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem. A hieromonk, the elder Zossima, went off on a twenty-days' walk in the wilderness across the Jordan during the Great Fast. He suddenly caught sight of a human with a withered and naked body and with hair as white as snow, who fled in its nakedness from Zossima's sight. The elder ran a long way until this figure stopped at a stream and called: 'Father Zossima, forgive me for the Lord's sake. I cannot turn round to you, for I am a naked woman.' Zossima threw her his outer cloak, and she wrapped herself in it and turned round to him. The elder was amazed at hearing his name from the lips of this unknown woman. After considerable pressure on his part, she told him her life-story. She had been born in Egypt, and had lived as a prostitute in Alexandria from the age of twelve, spending seventeen years in this way of life. Urged by the lustful fire of the flesh, she one day boarded a ship that was sailing for Jerusalem.

Arriving at the Holy City, she prepared to go into one of the churches to venerate the Precious Cross, but some unseen power prevented her from entering. In great fear, she turned to an icon of the Mother of God that was in the entrance, and begged her to let her go in and venerate the Cross, confessing her sin and impurity and promising that she would then go wherever the

Most Pure led her. She was then allowed to enter the church. After venerating the Cross, she went out again to the entrance and, standing in front of the icon, thanked the Mother of God. Then she heard a voice: 'If you cross the Jordan, you will find true peace.' She immediately bought three loaves of bread and set off for the Jordan, arriving there the same evening. She received Communion the following morning in the monastery of St. John, and then crossed the river.

She spent forty-eight whole years in the wilderness in the greatest torments, in terror, in struggles with passionate thoughts, which were like great beasts. She ate only plants. After that, as she was standing in prayer, Father Zossima saw her lifted up in the air. She begged him to bring her Communion the next year on the bank of the Jordan, saying she would come to receive it. The following year, Zossima came with the Holy Gifts to the bank of the Jordan in the evening, and stood in amazement as he saw her cross the river. He saw her coming in the moonlight and, arriving on the further bank, make the sign of the Cross over the river. She then walked across it as though it were dry land. When she had received Communion, she begged him to come again the following year to the same stream by which they had first met. Zossima went, and found her dead body on that very spot. Above her head in the sand was written: 'Abba Zossima, bury in this place the body of the humble Mary. Give dust to dust. I passed away on April 1st, on the very night of Christ's Passion, after communion of the divine Mysteries.' Zossima learned her name for the first time, and also the awe-inspiring marvel that she had arrived at that stream the previous year on the night of the same day on which she had received Communion — a place that he had taken twenty days to reach.

Thus Zossima buried the body of the wonderful saint, Mary of Egypt. When he returned to the monastery, he recounted the whole story of her life and the wonders to which he had been an eyewitness. Thus the Lord glorifies repentant sinners. St. Mary is also commemorated in the Fifth Week of the Great Fast. The Church holds her up before the faithful in these days of the Fast as a model of repentance. She entered into rest around 530 A.D.

Troparion Tone 5

Enlightened by the grace of the Cross,/ thou wast seen to be a bright light of repentance,/ dispelling the darkness of passions, O all holy one./ Thou didst appear as an angel in the flesh/ to holy Zossima in the wilderness./ Intercede with Christ for us, O Mary our righteous Mother.

Kontakion Tone 3

Thou who wast once obsessed with fornication/ by repentance art now the Bride of Christ./ Thou didst lovingly imitate the life of the Angels/ and annihilate demonic hosts by the Cross;/ thou art now a Bride in the Kingdom of heaven, O most chaste Mary.

Another Kontakion Tone 4

Having escaped the fog of sin,/ and having illumined thy heart with the light of penitence,/ O glorious one,/ thou didst come to Christ and didst offer to Him/ His immaculate and holy Mother as a merciful intercessor./ Hence thou hast found remission for transgressions,/ and with the Angels thou ever rejoicest.

The Holy Martyrs Agapia, Chionia and Irene

April 14th (April 1st Old Calendar)

The Holy Martyrs Agapia, Chionia and Irene were sisters from the region of Aquileia. When the Emperor Diocletian was staying in Aquileia, he ordered that the famous spiritual guide, Chrysogonus, be executed. An old priest named Zoilus received a vision in which he was shown where the body of Chrysogonus lay unburied. The old man hurried off, found the body of the martyr, placed it in a coffin and carried it to his home. On the thirtieth day after that, St. Chrysogonus appeared to him and told him that the three maidens would be martyred in the next nine days, and that he, Zoilus, would himself enter into rest during that time. Anastasia the Seer also received the same tidings in a vision sent by Chrysogonus, who had been her teacher.

The elder Zoilus did indeed find his rest after nine days, and the three sisters were brought to trial before the Emperor. The Emperor urged the holy maidens to worship idols, but they all refused, confessing their firm faith in Christ. Irene told the Emperor that it was ridiculous to bow down to things made of wood and stone, made to order at an agreed price by the hands of a mortal man. The furious Emperor flung them into prison. Now, when the Emperor traveled to Macedonia, he took all his slaves and servants with him, including the three sisters. He gave them to Dulcitus, a general, for torture. Inflamed with a dark passion, he desired to defile the maidens, but, when he tried to go into the prison, he lost his mind: he fell upon the pots and cauldrons in front of the gate, embracing and kissing them, and was completely blackened with soot.

When the Emperor heard of this happening, he ordered another general to undertake the trial of the sisters. After terrible torture, the judge condemned the first two sisters to death by fire, but kept Irene for a time, hoping to defile her. However, when he had sent Irene to the brothel along with some soldiers, an angel of God turned the soldiers back and led her out onto a high hill. The next day the general went out to the hill with his soldiers and, being unable to climb it, ordered that Irene be shot at with arrows. St. Anastasia gathered all three bodies together in one place and gave them burial. They suffered for Christ their King and Lord around the year 304 A.D.

Troparion of the Martyrs Tone 1

Sisters in the flesh and united in the Spirit,/ you wrestled with the prince of evil and endured your martyrdom./ Holy and blessed Agape, Irene and Chionia,/ pray to Christ our God to save our souls.

Kontakion of the Martyrs Tone 3

Bright mirrors of virginity,/ radiant with your martyrdom,/ you fill the Church with light and dispel the darkness of evil./ Agape, Irene and Chionia,/ Christ's precious jewels.

The Venerable Martyr Vadim

April 22nd (April 9th Old Calendar)

St. Vadim was born to a prominent family in the Persian town of Bithlapet. Having distributed his riches, he built in the suburbs of the town a monastery which he dedicated to the archimandrite. In order to focus his thoughts on God and for more concentrated prayer, he sometimes departed to a neighboring desert mountain, and here he was once found worthy to have a vision of God.

During the reign of king Shapur I (376 A.D.) St. Vadim and his disciples were incarcerated. For four months they were oppressed and tortured so that they would renounce their faith in Christ. But the holy witnesses valorously endured all. They were joined in jail by a certain Nirsan, a Christian commander of the town of Aria. Fearing torture, Nirsan renounced Christ and promised the king to accomplish all his bidding. King Shapur ordered Nirsan to kill the archimandrite Vadim. With trembling hands Nirsan began to strike St. Vadim and only after many blows was he able to sever his head. Later on his disciples were also executed and became martyrs.

Shortly thereafter, not being able to cope with the torments of his conscience, Nirsan committed suicide.

**The Holy Martyrs Victoria,
Leonid, Nika, Galina, Chariessa,
Callis, Nunechia, Vasilissa and Theodora**

April 29th (April 16th Old Calendar)

These glorious saints were thrown into the sea, but it refused to receive them. They walked upon the sea as if it were dry land and sang praises to God: ‘I have won one battle, O Lord, and the soldiers have persecuted me, O Lord, and I have not denied Thee, O Lord; save Thou my soul!’ The pagans were at first astounded to behold this, but they then tied stones around their necks and again threw them into the deep, where they were drowned. They all suffered with honor for Christ our King and Lord in the year 281.

**Our Holy Father,
the Monk Vitali**

May 5th (April 22nd Old Calendar)

In the time of the Patriarch John the Merciful, a young monk appeared in Alexandria, who, as soon as he arrived, compiled a list of all the prostitutes in the city. His way of asceticism was exceptional and singular. During the day he hired himself out for the heaviest work, and at night he went into the brothels, gave the money he had earned to some prostitute and shut himself in her room with her for the whole night. As soon as he had shut the door, Vitali begged the woman to lie down and sleep, while he spent the entire night in a corner of the room in prayer to God for that sinner. So he kept the sinner from sinning even for one night. The second night he would go to another, the third to another, and so on in order until he had gone through them all, then he

went back to the one with whom he had started. By his counsel, many of these sinners left their foul calling; some married, others went to a monastery and others began some honest work for payment.

All these women were forbidden by Vitali to say why he had come to them. As a result, he became a scandal to the whole of Alexandria. People reviled him in the streets, spat on him and beat him. But he bore it all patiently, revealing his good works to the Lord but concealing them from men. When he died, all became known about him. There began to be many miraculous hearings over his grave; people came from various places, bringing their sick to it. Spat on by men, he was and is glorified by the all-seeing God.

The Holy and Great Martyr George

May 6th and November 16th (April 23rd Old Calendar)

The Great Martyr George was the son of wealthy and pious parents, who raised him in the Christian faith. He was born in the city of Beirut (in antiquity, Berytos), at the foot of the Lebanese mountains.

Having entered military service, the Great-martyr George stood out among the other soldiers by virtue of his mind, valor, physical strength, military bearing and beauty. Having quickly attained the rank of millenary [tribunus millenarius, an officer in the Roman army in charge of a thousand or more soldiers — Translator], St. George became a favorite of the Emperor Diocletian.

Diocletian was a talented ruler, but a fanatical devotee of the Roman gods. Having set for himself the goal of reviving dying paganism in the Roman Empire, he went down in history as one of the most cruel persecutors of Christians.

One day, hearing in court the inhuman sentence concerning the annihilation of Christians, St. George became inflamed with compassion for them. Foreseeing that sufferings were also awaiting him, St. George distributed his property to the poor, freed his slaves, appeared before Diocletian and, having revealed himself as a Christian, denounced him for cruelty and injustice. St. George's speech was full of power and convincing objections to the imperial order to persecute Christians.

After futile persuasions to deny Christ, the Emperor ordered that the saint be subjected to various tortures. St. George was confined in a dungeon, where they placed him supine on the ground; his legs they confined in stocks, and on his breast they placed a heavy stone. But St. George manfully endured the sufferings and glorified the Lord. Then George's torturers began to refine their cruelty. They beat the saint with ox-hide whips, subjected him to the wheel, threw him into quicklime and forced him to run in shoes with sharp nails inside. The holy Martyr endured everything patiently. Finally, the Emperor ordered the saint's head to be cut off. Thus, the holy sufferer departed to Christ in Nicomedia in 303 A.D.

The Great-martyr George is also called the “Trophy-bearer.” This is for his valour and his spiritual victory over his torturers, who could not force him to renounce Christianity, and likewise for his wonderworking assistance to people in danger. The relics of St. George the Trophy-

bearer were placed in the Palestinian city of Lydda, in the church that bears his name, while his head was preserved in Rome, in the church that is also dedicated to him.

On icons, the Great-martyr George is depicted sitting on a white horse and smiting a dragon with a spear. This depiction is based on tradition and relates to the posthumous miracles of the holy Great-martyr George. It is said that not far from the place where St. George was born, in the city of Beirut, there lived a dragon in a lake who frequently devoured people of that locale. What kind of beast it was, a python, crocodile or large lizard, is not known. In order to appease the wrath of that dragon, the superstitious inhabitants of that locale began regularly by lot to give a youth or maiden up to it to be eaten. Once the lot fell on the daughter of the ruler of that locale. They took her to the shore of the lake and tied her up where she began to await in terror the appearance of the dragon.

When the beast began to approach her, a radiant youth suddenly appeared on a white horse. He smote the dragon with a spear and saved the maiden. This youth was the Great-martyr St. George. By such a miraculous appearance he caused the extermination of youths and maidens to cease in the environs of Beirut and converted the pagan inhabitants of that country to Christ.

One may suppose that St. George's appearance on a horse to defend the inhabitants from a dragon, and likewise the description in his life of the miraculous reviving of a farmer's only ox, served as the cause for honoring St. George as a protector of animal husbandry and as a defender from predatory beasts.

In pre-revolutionary times, on the day of St. George's commemoration, the inhabitants of Russian villages, for the first time after the cold winter, would drive their animals out to pasture, after having performed a *moleben* [a short service of thanksgiving] to the Holy Great Martyr and sprinkling their homes and animals with holy water.

The Great Martyr George is a protector of the army. The depiction of George the Trophy-bearer on a horse symbolizes victory over the devil [the ancient serpent]: "...*behold a great fiery red dragon with seven heads and seven diadems on his heads...he laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the devil and satan and bound him for a thousand years...*" (Rev. 12:3, 20:2). This depiction was included in the ancient coat of arms of the city of Moscow.

Countless miracles have been performed at his grave. He has also appeared in dreams to those who, thinking on him, have sought his help, from then until the present day. Consumed by love for Christ, it was not difficult for St. George to leave all for this love — his status, wealth and imperial favor, his friends and the whole world. For this love, the Lord rewarded him with a wreath of unfading glory in heaven and on earth, and with eternal life in His Kingdom. The Lord further endowed him with the power to help in need and distress all who honor him and call on his name.

Troparion Tone 4

As the deliverer of captives,/ and the protector of the poor,/ as the physician of the feeble and combatant of kings,/ holy champion and great martyr George,/ intercede with Christ our God to save our souls.

Kontakion Tone 4

Thou wast cultivated by God/ and didst become a most wonderful cultivator of piety,/ and didst harvest for thyself the sheaves of virtue,/ for having sown in tears thou didst reap in joy/ and having withstood death thou art garnered for Christ./ By thy intercessions, O Saint,/ thou dost obtain for us all remission of our sins.

The Martyr Alexandra

May 6th (April 23rd Old Calendar)

St. Alexandra, wife of the emperor Diocletian, was secretly a Christian. Observing the staunch faith of St. George during his sufferings, she decided to witness her faith in Jesus Christ openly. She went to the area where St. George was being tortured, fell on her knees at the feet of the great martyr and professed herself a Christian before all.

The enraged Diocletian, condemned the queen to death. Alexandra accepted this condemnation and meekly went to the place of execution while turning her gaze heavenward in prayer. On the way, being tired, she asked the soldiers to be allowed to rest for a while. Leaning against the wall of a building she quietly gave up her soul. Her peaceful end transpired on April 21, 303 A.D. She is commemorated together with the great martyr George on April 23rd by the Church calendar.

The Martyr Anatoly

May 6th (April 23rd Old Calendar)

The commemoration of the martyrs Anatoly and Protoleon is annotated on the same day as that of the great martyr St. George and the queen Alexandra. Seeing the faith and valor of St. Gregory, these two soldiers openly declared their belief in Christ and were immediately beheaded.

The Holy Hierarch Stephen, Bishop of Perm

May 9th (April 26th Old Calendar)

St. Stephen was born in the town of Ustiug in the middle of the 14th century. From childhood he was singled out for his great talents and fondness of knowledge. Not far from the area of his birth there lived some Zyrians (presently known as Komi-Permyaks). Often seeing these Zyrians at the marketplace in his town, Stephen was aroused with a great wish to enlighten their savage land with the light of Christ's faith. In order to prepare himself for this deed, Stephen entered a Rostov monastery (the cloister of the Holy Hierarch Gregory the Theologian) which housed a rich library. Having studied the Holy Scripture and Greek, St. Stephen learned the Zyrian language (a Finno-Ugric language). Later, using Slavonic and Greek letters, he formulated the Zyrian alphabet and translated into that language some Holy and Liturgical books. In 1379 he embarked upon a missionary course.

For seventeen years (at first in the rank of a Presbyter and then in the rank of Bishop) he toiled over the enlightenment of the Zyrians, while suffering many temptations and adversities. But through humility and kindness St. Stephen was able to overcome his adversaries and con-

verted many Zyrians to faith. He burned down the famous Zyrian temple with all its idols, and with the help of local residents he erected the Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin within the main Zyrian settlement at the estuary of the Kama River. At the same time, he taught the newly enlightened Zyrians to write and read the Word of God. Depending on their success he raised some to the rank of priests, others to that of deacon, and yet others to that of readers.

St. Stephen's greatest adversary was a certain sorcerer Pansotnik, a very old man and the most formidable of pagan priests. Having a great influence on the Zyrians, he kept many from being baptized, and those that were he turned aside from the faith. On many occasions St. Stephen entered into open dispute with him. Their debates continued day and night, but Pansotnik remained an inexorable pagan. Finally the famous pagan challenged St. Stephen to walk together through fire and water in order to test whose faith was better. He never expected the Bishop to consent. St. Stephen immediately instructed the populace to set fire to a separately standing building and extended his hand to Pansotnik so that they would walk together through the fire; however, the latter refused, despite the urging and persuading of the Zyrians. The Zyrians set upon Pansotnik wishing to kill him, but St. Stephen prevented it and insisted instead that Pansotnik should leave that place forever.

Following this event many Zyrians turned toward faith, building many churches and founding monasteries. The zealous pastor was solicitous as well to the external well-being of the newly enlightened land. During the famine he often brought bread from Vologda to Perm, distributing it to the needy. He roused the Grand Duke on behalf of the Zyrians and obtained many privileges for them. He guarded them from oppression from the Boyars and traveled to Novgorod, asking the citizens not to besiege the defenseless district of Permyaks.

During one of his travels to Moscow for matters regarding his flock, St. Stephen took ill and died on April 26, 1396. His holy relics rested in Moscow in the *Spass na Boru* Church of the Savior at the Forest.

Troparion Tone 4

Aflame with divine desire from childhood,/ thou didst take Christ's yoke, O wise Stephen./ Thou didst sow the seed in a hardened people grown old in unbelief/ and give birth to them in the Gospel./ Venerating thee, we pray:/ Entreat Him Whom thou didst proclaim,/ that our souls may be saved.

Kontakion Tone 8

Thou wast found to be a Hierarch to those who sought thee not./ Thou didst free thy people from idols and bring them to the Faith of Christ./ Thou didst shame the sorcerer Pansotnik and become first bishop and teacher of Perm./ Wherefore thy people hymn thee with thanksgiving: Rejoice, wise teacher Stephen.

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