



26th Sunday After Pentecost

Hierarch John the Merciful & St. Nilus the Faster

12 / 25 November

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 1: When the stone had been sealed by the Jews; / while the soldiers were guarding Thy Most Pure Body; / Thou didst rise on the third day, O Saviour, / granting life to the world. / The Powers of Heaven therefore cried to Thee O Giver of Life: / glory to Thy Resurrection O Christ! / Glory to Thy Kingdom; / Glory to Thy Dispensation, O Thou who lovest mankind.

Troparion of St John the Almsgiver tone 8: In patience thou didst win thy reward, O. righteous John./ Thou didst love the poor and provide for them bountifully. Pray to Christ our God to save our souls.

Troparion of St Nilus of Sinai tone 4: With live coals of wisdom thou didst purify thy mind;/ thou didst drink from the Fountain of Life and live as an Angel. Hence thou dost ever pour forth springs that water the world divinely./ We praise thee, Father Nilus.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 1: As God, Thou didst rise from the tomb in glory, / Raising the world with Thyself. / Human nature praises Thee as God, for death has vanished. / Adam exults O Master, Eve rejoices, for she is freed from bondage, and cries to Thee; / Thou art the Giver of Resurrection to all, O Christ.

Kontakion of St John the Almsgiver tone 2: Thou didst dispense thy wealth to the poor/ and obtain wealth from heaven, O John./ Wherefore we acclaim thee and celebrate thy memory, O namesake of mercy.

Kontakion of St Nilus tone 8: By thy vigilant prayer thou didst cut away the undergrowth of the body's insurgent passions./ Thou hast boldness with the Lord: free me from dangers that I may cry to thee: Rejoice, O Father Nilus.

Matins Gospel IV

EPISTLE: Ephesians 5: 9-19

Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light." See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

NOT AS FOOLS, BUT AS WISE, REDEEMING THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL

The acquisition of God's Spirit is also capital, but grace-given and eternal, and it is gained in very similar ways, almost the same ways as monetary, social and temporal capital. God the Word, the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, likens our life to a market, and the work of our life on earth He calls buying, and says to us all: Buy till I come, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. That is to say, economize the time for receiving heavenly blessings through earthly goods. Earthly goods are virtuous acts performed for Christ's sake and conferring on us the grace of the Holy Spirit, without whom there is not and cannot be any salvation; for it is written: 'By the Holy Spirit is every soul quickened and by purity exalted, yea, is made bright by the Three in One in holy mystery' [from Orthodox Matins hymn]. The Holy Spirit Itself enters our souls, and this entrance into our souls of Him the Almighty ...is only granted to us through our own assiduous acquisition of the Holy Spirit, which prepares in our soul and body a throne for the all-creative presence of God with our spirit according to His irrevocable word: I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Lev. 26:12) ...Most of all it is given through prayer; for prayer is somehow always in our hands as an instrument for acquiring the grace of the Spirit ...prayer is always possible for everyone, rich and poor, noble and simple. strong and weak. healthy and suffering, righteous and sinful ...Trade thus spiritually in virtue. Distribute the gifts of the grace of the Holy Spirit to them that ask, as a candle, burning with earthly fire, lights other candles for the illumining of all in other places, but diminishes not its own light.

St. Seraphim of Sarov, Conversation with Nicholas Motovilov Concerning the Aim of the Christian Life. B#26, pp. 269-270.

for the Hierarch: Heb . 4:14-5:6

THE GOSPEL: St Luke 10: 25-37

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbour as yourself.'" And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a classic tale that teaches us how we may each put the Great Commandments to love God and to love our neighbor into practice. However, as with almost everything in the Gospel, this parable is rich with layers of meaning, revealing to us the fullness of the God/man Jesus Christ. In this parable, not only do we see a lesson about how we should act towards others but also we see how God has acted towards us. This parable expresses the whole plan of our salvation from beginning to end.

Blessed Theophylact, in his commentary upon the Gospel, states that "it was our human nature that was going down from Jerusalem, that is, was descending from tranquility and peace, for Jerusalem means 'vision of peace'. Where was man descending? To Jericho, a place sunk down low and suffocating with heat, that is to a life of passions. See that He did not say, 'went down', but, 'was going down,' For fallen human nature is always inclined downwards, not just once of old, but continuously going down towards passionate life. And man 'fell among thieves,' that is, among demons...who strip the man, depriving him of his raiment of virtue, and then inflict the wounds of sin. They strip us of every good thought and of God's protection and when we are thus naked, they lay on the stripes of sin. They leave human nature 'half dead.'" Here we see the whole problem, the reason that we require God to save us for we are "half dead" – we are an immortal soul joined to a mortal body. We are "stuck" as it were, unable to ascend to the Kingdom of God, and yet not quite lost completely. How then can we be saved, how then can this situation be resolved?

This question is the whole reason we are here; the whole point of our faith is that it provides a means of healing, a way back to the Kingdom of God. Men do, in fact, seek spiritual healing in many ways, but it is Jesus Christ, in the person of the Samaritan, who comes to us and is able to help us. The priest and the Levite who came by and saw the injured man represent the law and the prophets who desired to make human nature righteous, but were unable to do so. They were defeated by the severity of the wounds of sin and they were compelled to "pass by". The law was given to man by God not as a means to heal sin, but rather as a safety measure to prevent man from falling into further injury from sin. God knew that He would Himself come to heal men, but as the time had not yet come, He gave the law to His people to help them avoid further injury from sin – but it did not heal them, it only stabilized the situation so that things might not deteriorate further.

Finally though, the Samaritan comes to the fallen man – that is Jesus Christ comes to heal our soul. Note that it is said that the Samaritan did not come upon this man by chance, but as the parable says, he "journeyed and came to him". Jesus Christ came into this world to find us and to bring us healing. Out of His great love for us, He "came to us and had compassion upon us". It is only Jesus Christ who has the power to treat the wounds of sin and to begin to heal them. He first binds our wounds with oil and wine. In binding our wounds, He restrained the power of sin no longer permitting it to operate in us freely. In binding our wounds, He "poured on oil and wine". Oil, when applied to a wound serves to soothe it and wine is an astringent which destroys the infection which might otherwise set in. We can understand the oil as the grace of God, which He pours out upon our soul. It soothes the irritation of sin by the promise of healing and blessings. Not only this, but it is also by the power and action of the grace of God in us that the healing is effected and we begin to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. The wine is the forgiveness of sin which comes through repentance. It cleanses the soul from the corruption which sin introduces. The wine, when poured on a wound is at first sharp, stinging and unpleasant. So with repentance which at first stings the soul and is unpleasant as we humble ourselves, confessing our sins. But this stinging is only temporary for once the wound is cleansed by forgiveness, it subsides and the healing can continue unimpeded by the infection of corruption.

We can also see in the oil and wine the images of the sacraments. The wounds of sin are washed first by baptism and then the oil of chrism is applied, sealing the soul with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then we receive in the sacrament of Holy Communion, the most holy Body and most precious Blood of Christ. In these sacraments we see the binding of the wound by baptism and pouring on the oil and wine by the application of Chrism and the reception of the Eucharist. We receive these gifts of the sacraments from the font of the Church which leads us to the next part of the parable.

Jesus Christ does not stop with this simple “first aid”, bandaging the wound and pouring on oil and wine. He knows that the wounds of sin are deep and require ongoing care. Thus the parable tells us that the Samaritan picked up the wounded man and placed him on his own beast of burden and took him to an inn where he cared for him further. Then, even though it was necessary that he himself move on, he gave the wounded man into the care of the innkeeper providing all that was necessary for his care and promising to return again to complete the care of the wounded man. The “beast of burden” is the body of the Lord. In receiving us, He places us on His own “beast of burden, that is, His own Body. We are made members of the Body of Christ. And then He brings us to an inn where He cares for us and gives us into the care of others while He is away. This inn is the Church and the innkeeper represents those who are given the responsibility in the Church for the care of the souls therein – that is the bishops and priests and deacons.

When He comes to us and begins to heal us and treat our wounds, our Lord does not leave us alone but brings us into the Church that we might not be left alone. The Church in its essence is not a religious organization, but rather it is a spiritual hospital whose purpose is the care and healing of the souls wounded by sin. For this, Jesus Christ has supplied the Church with all that is necessary to the task. He has given to the Church the sacraments by which His transforming grace is poured out upon us. He has also given to the Church the Scripture, the written Word of God by which she is continually guided in her task. In the Church there is also the Holy Tradition which is the means of treatment and therapy by which the wounds of sin continue to heal, further injury is prevented and by which we become strong in the faith so that we might not again fall under the power of the “robbers”: sin and the demons.

Having placed us in the hospital of the Church, Jesus has not left us alone, but has placed us in the company of our fellow strugglers, of those other souls wounded by sins who are seeking, as are we, to be healed and to return to the Kingdom of God. Nor has He abandoned us, but has ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us and has promised that He will return to us and will take us with Himself into His heavenly kingdom.

In this parable of the Good Samaritan, we can see how it is that we must work out in our own lives the love of God and neighbour. But we also see the love of God for us expressed in His incarnation and in bringing us to salvation. We see that He cleanses and binds the wounds of sin that leave us “half dead” and He gives us His grace and forgiveness to begin the healing of our wounds. He then adopts us into His own Body and places us into the Church where we receive all that is necessary for our recovery and spiritual health. He has promised, as well, to return to receive us into His heavenly Kingdom that we might live with Him throughout eternity.

Archpriest David Moser
<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/propoved/info>

for the Hierarchy: Luke 6:17-23

Saints of the week

12 / 25 November- St John the Merciful - Born on the island of Cyprus of a princely family, his father, Epiphanius, being the governor, he was brought up from childhood as a true Christian. Under pressure from his parents, he married and had children. But, by the providence of God, both his wife and children went from this world to the next. Famed for his compassion and devotion, John was chosen as Patriarch of Alexandria in the time of the Emperor Heraclius. He governed the Church in Alexandria for ten years as a true pastor, guarding it from pagans and heretics, and was a model of meekness, compassion and love for his fellow-men. 'If you seek nobility', he said, 'seek it not in blood but in virtue, for in virtue lies true nobility.' All the saints are distinguished by compassion, but St John was utterly dedicated to this great virtue. Celebrating the Liturgy one day, the words of Christ: 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee ...' (Matt. 5:23), came into the Patriarch's mind, and he remembered that one of the clergy in the church there had a grudge against him. He left the holy gifts, went up to the priest, fell before his feet and begged his forgiveness. As soon as he had made his peace with that man, he returned to the Table of Preparation. Another time, on the way to the Church of Sts Cyrus and John, it happened that he was met by a poor widow, who started speaking to him of her poverty. The Patriarch's companions were bored by the woman's lengthy lamenting, and urged the bishop to hurry to the church for the service, and listen to the woman when it was over. St John replied: 'And how will God obey me, if I don't obey Him?', and he would not move from the spot until he had heard the widow out. When the Persians invaded Egypt, Patriarch John took ship to flee from the assault. He fell ill on the voyage and, arriving in Cyprus, died at his birthplace in 620, entering into the immortal kingdom of his Lord. His wonderworking relics were first taken to Constantinople, then to Budapest and finally came to rest in Presburg. The Holy Prophet Ahijah; Our Holy Father Nilus of Sinai; Our Holy Father Nilus the Outpurer of Myrrh; St. Lebuin, monk of Deventer (d.777); St. Machan, bishop of Aberdeenshire.

13 / 26 November - St John Chrysostom - the Golden-Tongued - He was born in Antioch in the year 347, his father's name being Secundus and his mother's Anthusa. Studying Greek philosophy, John became disgusted with Hellenic paganism and turned to the Christian faith as the one and all-embracing truth. John was baptised by Meletius, Patriarch of Antioch, and, after that, his parents were also baptised. After their death, John became a monk and began to live in strict asceticism. He wrote a book: 'On the Priesthood', after which the holy Apostles John and Peter appeared to him, prophesying for him great service, great grace and also great suffering. When the time came for him to be ordained priest, an angel of God appeared at the same

time to Patriarch Flavian (Meletius's successor) and to John himself. When the Patriarch ordained him, a shining white dove was seen above John's head. Renowned for his wisdom, his asceticism and the power of his words, John was, at the desire of Emperor Arcadius, chosen as Patriarch of Constantinople. He governed the Church for six years as Patriarch with unequalled zeal and wisdom, sending missionaries to the pagan Celts and Scythians and purging the Church of simony, deposing many bishops who were given to this vice. He extended the Church's charitable works, wrote a rite for the Holy Liturgy, put heretics to shame, denounced the Empress Eudoxia, interpreted the Scriptures with his golden mind and tongue and left to the Church many precious books of sermons. The people glorified him; the jealous loathed him; the Empress twice had him sent into exile. He spent three years in exile, and died on Holy Cross Day, September 14th, 407, in a place called Comana in Armenia. The holy Apostles John and Peter again appeared to him at the time of his death, and also the holy martyr Basiliscus (see May 22nd), in whose church he received Communion for the last time. 'Glory to God for everything!' were his last words, and with them the soul of Chrysostom the Patriarch entered into Paradise. Of his relics, the head is preserved in the Church of the Dormition in Moscow, and the body in the Vatican in Rome.

Tropar to St. John Chrysostom, Tone 8: Grace shining forth from thy mouth like a beacon hath illumined the universe, and disclosed to the world treasures of uncovetousness, and shown us the heights of humility; but while instructing by thy words, O Father John Chrysostom, intercede with the Word, Christ our God, to save our souls.

Kondak for St. John Chrysostom, Tone 6: From the heavens hast thou received divine grace and by thy lips thou dost teach all to worship the One God in Trinity, O John Chrysostom, all-blessed righteous one. Rightly do we acclaim thee, for thou art a teacher revealing things divine. The Holy Martyrs Antoninus, Nicephorus, Herman and Manetha; Our Holy Father, the Martyr Damascene; St. Quintianus & St. Euprasius, bishops of Clermont, Gaul.

14 / 27 November - The Holy Apostle Philip - He was born in Bethsaida near the Sea of Galilee, as were Peter and Andrew. Instructed in the Holy Scriptures from his youth, Philip immediately responded to the call of Christ and followed Him (John 1:43). After the descent of the Holy Spirit, Philip preached the Gospel with zeal in many regions of Asia and in Greece, where the Jews sought to kill him but the Lord saved him by the might of His wonders. The Jewish leaders, whose aim it was to kill Philip, were suddenly blinded, and found themselves in total darkness. There was a great earthquake, and the earth opened and swallowed up Philip's wicked persecutors. Many other wonders were wrought, especially the healing of the sick, by which many of the pagans came to faith in Christ. In the Phrygian town of Hierapolis, St Philip worked for the Gospel with John the Theologian, his own sister Mariamna and the Apostle Bartholomew. There was in that place a dangerous snake, which the pagans fed with care and worshipped as a god. God's Apostle destroyed the snake with prayer as though with a spear. This called forth the fury of the benighted people, and the wicked pagans seized Philip and crucified him upside-down on a tree, and then crucified Bartholomew also. At this, the earth opened and swallowed up the judge and many others with him. The terrified people ran to take the crucified apostles down, but they succeeded only in taking Bartholomew down alive; Philip had already breathed his last. Bartholomew made Stachys bishop for those baptised in the city. Stachys had been cured of blindness and baptised by Philip, having been blind for forty years. St Philip's relics were later taken to Rome. This wonderful Apostle suffered in the year 86, in the time of the Emperor Domitian; St Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Salonica; St Justinian, Emperor of Byzantium;

St Dyfrig, bishop in Hereford & Gwent, hermit of Bardsey Island (c.550).- St. Dyfrig was the son of the unmarried Princess Efrddyl, daughter of King Peibio Clafrog (the Leprous) of Eryng. The King was furious when he discovered his daughter was pregnant, some say and he tried to destroy her by casting her into the River. He failed and Dyfrig was born at Chilstone (Child's Stone) in the parish of Madley (Herefords), traditionally in the mid-6th century. When the baby Dyfrig kissed his grandfather, he cured him of his leprosy and the King Peibio quickly grew to love him. He gave him the whole area around Madley called Ynys Efrddyl. Here, Dyfrig, who had grown up a Christian, founded a monastery at Hennllann (Hentland) where he entered the religious life. After seven years, he founded a second establishment at Moccas and, at these two places, he became the tutor of many saints: Teilo, Samson, Ufelfyw, Merchwyn, Elwredd, Gwnwyn, Cynwal, Arthfoddw, Cynnwr, Arwystl, Inabwy, Cynfran, Gwrfan, Elhaern, Iddneu, Gwrddogwy, Gwernabwy, Ieuan, Aeddau and Cynfarch amongst them. Dyfrig became Bishop of Eryng, probably from Caer-Eryng (Weston-under-Penyard) and then Bishop of the whole of Glywysing & Gwent. Later, he was supposedly, raised to be Archbishop of Wales by St. Germanus, with his base at Caerleon. In this capacity, he is said have consecrated St. Deiniol as Bishop of Bangor Fawr and to have crowned the High-King Arthur at Caer Vudi (variously thought to be Silchester or Woodchester). Dyfrig was a great friend of St. Illtud and supported him in the foundation of Llanilltud Fawr Abbey (Llantwit Major) which he often visited. He would always spend lent on Ynys Byr (Caldy Island) nearby and consecrated St. Samson as Bishop of Dol there in AD 521. He also liked to call upon St. Cadog at Llancarfan and had a small cell built a mile away where the Fynnon Ddyfrig still survives. In AD 545, Archbishop Dyfrig attended the Synod of Llandewi Brefi in order to condemn the Pelagian Heresy and, with St. Deiniol, persuaded St. Dewi to also attend. The latter spoke so eloquently that Dyfrig resigned his Archiepiscopate in Dewi's favour. Dewi moved the Archiepiscopal See to Mynyw (St. Davids) while Dyfrig retired to the Abbey on Ynys Enlli (Bardsey). He was not there long before he died (on 14th November) and was buried within the monastic confines. His body was later translated to Llandaff Cathedral, in 1120, where his shrine can still be seen today. St. Dyfrig is amongst the most important of early Welsh saints, despite the fact that the area in which he was active is now part of the English county of Herefordshire.

15 / 28 November - Beginning of Nativity Fast - Repose of St. Herman, wonderworker of Alaska; The Holy Martyrs Gurias, Samonas and Abibus - Gurias and Samonas were eminent citizens of Edessa. At the time of a persecution of Christians, they hid outside the city and lived in fasting and prayer, giving courage to the faithful who came to them for counsel. They were seized and taken before the judge, who threatened them with death if they refused to observe the imperial decree on the worship of idols. Christ's holy martyrs replied: 'If we observe the imperial decree, we shall be lost even if you do not kill us.' They were thrown into prison after harsh torture, and were there confined from August 1st to November 10th,

enduring hunger, darkness and great hardship. They were then brought out again and tortured afresh, and, as they remained steadfast in the Christian faith, were condemned to death and beheaded with the sword in the year 322, under the wicked Emperor Licinius (who ruled the eastern half of the Empire until 324). Later Abibus, a deacon in Edessa, was tortured for Christ his Lord and, in the flames, gave his spirit into God's hands. His mother took his unharmed body from the fire and buried it together with those of Gurias and Samonas. When the persecution had ended, Christians built a church in honour of these three martyrs, and placed their wonderworking relics in one coffin. Of the manifold miracles of these wonderful saints of God, one is specially remembered: A widow in Edessa had a young daughter, who was to marry a Goth serving in the Greek army. As the mother was concerned at the thought of sending her daughter to a distant land, the Goth swore over the grave of the martyrs that he would do no ill to the girl, but take her as his legal wife. He was, though, in fact, already married. When he took the girl back to his own land, he treated her, not as his wife, but as a slave, until his lawful wife died. He then agreed with his kinsman that he should bury his living slave along with his dead wife. The slave implored the holy martyrs with tears to save her, and they appeared to her in the grave, took hold of her and, in an instant, carried her from the land of the Goths to Edessa, to their church. On the following day, when the church was opened, the girl was found by the tomb of the saints, and the story of her miraculous deliverance was heard. The Holy Martyrs Elpidius, Marcellus and Eustochius; The Feast of the Icon of the Mother of God of Kupyatich;

St. Maughold, apostle to the Isle of Man (d.488) - an Irish prince and reputedly a captain of robbers who was converted by Patrick. Upon his conversion, he became a new man by putting on the spirit of Christ. One version of the legend says that Patrick told him to put to sea in a coracle without oars as a penance for his evil deeds. Another says that he set sail in order to avoid the temptations of the world. In both stories, he retired to the Isle of Man (Eubonia) off the coast of Lancashire, England. Earlier Patrick had sent his nephew, Saint Germanus, as bishop to plant the Church on the island. Germanus was succeeded by Saints Romulus and Conindrus during whose time Maughold arrived on the island and began to live an austere, penitential life in the mountainous area now named after him Saint Maughold. After their deaths, Maughold was unanimously chosen as bishop by the Monks. In one of the 18 parish churchyards on the island can be found Saint Maughold's well. The very clear water of the well is received in a large stone coffin. Those seeking cures of various ailments, particularly poisoning, are seated in the saint's chair just above the well and given a glass of well-water to drink. Maughold's shrine was here until the relics were scattered during the Reformation. Maughold, commemorated in both the British and Irish calendars, is described in the Martyrology of Oengus as "a rod of gold, a vast ingot, the great bishop MacCaille." Many topological features on the Isle of Man, which he divided into 25 parishes, bear Maughold's name.

16 / 29 November - Nativity Fast - The Holy Apostle Matthew the Evangelist - the son of Alphaeus was at first a tax-collector, and it was as such that the Lord saw him in Capernaum and said to him: 'Follow Me!' Leaving everything, he followed Him (Matt. 9:9). After that, Matthew prepared a feast in his house, and there provided an opportunity for the Lord to voice some great truths about His coming to earth. After receiving the Holy Spirit, Matthew preached the Gospel among the Parthians and Medes and in Ethiopia, the land of the negroes. In Ethiopia, he consecrated as bishop one Plato, a follower of his, and himself withdrew to prayerful solitude on a mountain, where the Lord appeared to him. Matthew baptised the wife and son of the prince of that land, at which the prince was greatly enraged and sent a guard to bring Matthew before him for trial. The soldiers went off, but returned to the prince, saying that they had heard Matthew's voice, but had been unable to set eyes on him. The prince then sent a second guard. When this guard drew near to the Apostle, he shone with a heavenly radiance so brilliant that the soldiers were unable to look at him, but threw down their weapons in terror and returned home. The prince then went himself. When he approached Matthew, such radiance shone forth from the saint that the prince was blinded on the instant. But the Apostle had a kind heart: he prayed to God and the prince's sight was restored—unfortunately, only on the physical plane, his spiritual eyes remaining closed. He seized St Matthew and put him to harsh torture, twice lighting a fire on his chest, but the power of God kept him alive and unharmed. Then the Apostle prayed to God, and gave his spirit into His hands. The prince commanded that the martyr's body be put into a leaden coffin and cast into the sea. The saint appeared to Bishop Plato and told him where to find his body in its coffin, and the bishop went and brought them back. Seeing this new marvel, the prince was baptised and received the name Matthew. He then set aside all earthly vanity and became a priest, serving the Church in a manner pleasing to God. When Plato died, the Apostle Matthew appeared to this Matthew and counselled him to accept the episcopate. So he became a bishop, and was a good shepherd for many years, until God took him to His immortal Kingdom. St Matthew the Apostle wrote his Gospel in Aramaic, and it was very soon translated into Greek. It has come down to us in Greek, the Aramaic original being lost. Of this Evangelist, it is said that he never ate meat, but fed only on vegetables and fruit; Our Holy Father Sergius of Malopinega.

17 / 30 November — Nativity Fast — St Gregory the Wonder-worker, Bishop of Neocaesarea - Here is a man of God and a mighty wonderworker, who was called a second Moses! Born of wealthy and eminent pagan parents, Gregory at first studied Hellenic and Egyptian philosophy, but, seeing its barrenness and insufficiency, he turned to Christian teachers, particularly Origen of Alexandria, with whom he studied for several years and by whom he was baptised. Pure in soul and body, he desired to consecrate himself utterly to Christ, to which end he withdrew to the desert, where, in painful asceticism, he spent many years. His fame spread abroad everywhere, and Phaedimus, the bishop of Amasea, wanted to make him Bishop of Caesarea. The discerning Gregory was warned of Phaedimus's intention, and hid in the wilderness from those sent to find him, so that they failed in their quest. Finally, Phaedimus consecrated him by devious means, and Gregory had to accept the work of a shepherd. The most holy Mother of God appeared to him, together with St John the Theologian, and, at her command, St John gave him the Creed that is known by Gregory's name. (The Nicene Creed, that Gregory was instrumental in establishing at the Second Ecumenical Council in 381). Who can enumerate the miracles of this second Moses? He commanded evil spirits, commanded mountains and waters, healed every sort of pain and ill, became invisible to his persecutors and had insight into both distant events and men's thoughts. He finished his earthly course in the year 270, in great old age. When he arrived in

Caesarea as bishop, the whole town was composed of pagans, with just seventeen Christians. When he departed this life, the whole town was Christian, with just seventeen pagans. He therefore received a wreath of glory from his Lord in the heavenly Kingdom. Our Holy Father Nikhon of Radonezh' Our Holy Father Gennadius of Vatopedi;

St. Hilda, abs & eldress, who convened the Council of Whitby and adopted the orthodox Pascha.- Daughter of Hereric. Sister of Saint Hereswitha. Grand-niece of King Saint Edwin. Baptized in 627 at age thirteen by Saint Paulinus of York. Lived as a lay woman until age 33 when she became a Benedictine nun at the monastery of Chelles in France. Abbess at Hartepool, Northumberland, England. Abbess of the double monastery of Whitby, Streaneshalch. Abbess to Saint Wilfrid of York, Saint John of Beverley, and three other bishops. Patroness and supporter of learning and culture, including patronage of the poet Caedmon. Hilda and her houses followed the Celtic liturgy and rule, but many houses had adopted the continental Benedictine rule, and the Roman liturgy. Hilda convened a conference in 664 to help settle one a single rule. When the conference settled on the Roman and Benedictine, they were adopted throughout England, and Hilda insured the observance of her houses. Born 614 at Northumbria, England Died 680 of natural causes Representation - holding Whitby abbey in her hands with a crown on her head or at her feet; turning serpents into stone; stopping wild birds from stealing a corn crop; being carried to heaven by the angels

18 November / 1 December — Nativity Fast - The Holy Martyr Platon — From the town of Ancyra in Galatia, he was born and brought up a Christian. Even in his youth, he showed great perfection in every virtue. Platon did not conceal his faith in Christ the Lord, but preached it openly, denouncing idolaters for their bowing down to dead creatures in place of the living Creator. For this, he was brought before the governor, Agrippinus, for trial, and was harshly tortured by him. When the governor began to urge him to escape death and save his life by worshipping idols, Platon replied: 'There are two deaths: the temporal and the eternal; and there are two lives: the one transitory and the other without end.' Then Agrippinus put him to harsher torture. Among other tortures, he commanded that red-hot cannon balls be placed on his naked body, and that his flesh be cut into strips. 'Torture me more harshly', cried the martyr to the torturers, 'that your inhumanity and my endurance may be the more clearly seen.' When the torturer spoke to the martyr about the philosopher Platon, saying that he was a pagan philosopher, he replied: 'I am not like Platon, nor he like me, except in our names. I learn and teach the wisdom that is of Christ, while he teaches the wisdom that is folly before God.' After that, Platon was thrown into prison, where he spent eighteen days without bread or water. When the warders marvelled that Platon could live without food for so long, he said to them: 'You are satiated by food, but I by holy prayer; you rejoice in wine, but I in Christ the true Vine.' He was finally beheaded with the sword in about 266, and received a wreath of eternal glory. The Holy Martyrs Romanus and Barulas; St. Mawes, bishop in Cornwall & Brittany (5th c.).

HOMILY - Nativity Fast

Dear brothers and sisters!

As we enter the days of the Nativity Fast, that period of preparation for one of the greatest feasts of the Orthodox Church: the radiant and joyful day of the Nativity of Christ.

In our daily lives, we are immersed in our usual earthly cares, and concerns. It can be difficult for us to put these things aside and turn to the heavenly, eternal, and Divine. The law of the Gospel is known and accessible to all, but we are weak and often stumble and commit sin. The more our soul is burdened, clinging to the earthly things, the more difficult it becomes for us to perceive the spiritual.

The Church, therefore, has wisely established a time of fasting for Christians: a time of penitential reflection, to work on oneself, and of conforming oneself to the traditions, foundations, and rules of the Church.

In this regard, modern society's attitude towards the fast is no exception: we might sometimes wonder if this fast is necessary, or mitigate, or shorten it in some way... after all, it's not Great Lent is it...

But it is characteristic of the true Christian to be completely obedient to the Mother Church, accepting that which it has established and which has been observed by its faithful children for centuries.

People with an inadequate understanding of church life often perceive the fasts as being concerned exclusively with limitation in food, in both quantity and quality. But, as we have spoke about before, fasting is primarily a spiritual matter.

Today the spirit of sacrifice and the capacity for self-denial are dying out. Fasting is the best means of reviving this spirit, through restraining the flesh and resisting its insistent demands.

Spiritual fasting is essential: the rejection of entertainments, amusements, and of everything that in ordinary, non-fasting, times might sting a Christian's conscience.

In order to understand the fast's essence, its true content, one should spend as much time as possible in church throughout the duration of the fast and be more diligent in fulfilling one's personal rule of prayer. During this time it is especially important to live to the fullest possible extent within a grace-filled life of the Church by approaching the Mysteries of Confession and Communion more frequently.

I know well how difficult fasting can be, especially at this time of year amongst people who go not share our church Calendar and we can sometimes be met with incomprehension from friends and colleagues – sometimes we may even be ridiculed.

This sometimes causes in our weakness a desire to abandon the fast, so as not to appear strange in people's eyes or to stand out from our surroundings. But it should be firmly understood that the steadfast observance of church rules by Christians, although it might seem unusual to non-churchgoers, will gain their involuntary respect. The example of our fasting itself is like a wordless sermon for many, reminding them of our faith and of that great and majestic event for which we are preparing by means of this fast.

I sincerely wish all of us to complete the course of this fast with spiritual profit, looking attentively into our souls and hearts during these days in order to cleanse them of everything that could hinder God – Who became Man for our sake and our salvation by descending from heaven to earth – from entering and making His abode in them.

If we will render to the Lord only the small labor of abstinence that is within our powers, then He will grant us His great and incomparable spiritual joy – the joy of the living knowledge that God has appeared unto us in order to be with us always, never leaving those who have put their trust in Him, through the joy of Christ's radiant Nativity.

Amen.

REFLECTION

Their time of death and the necessity of preparation for it was revealed beforehand to many holy men and women. This is a great gift from heaven, but as we do not expect this gift, we unworthy ones need daily repentance to prepare for our departure. One can flee from men, but never from God. When St. John the Merciful fled Egypt from the Persians, a gloriously radiant man with a golden sceptre in his hand appeared to him on the boat and said: "The King of kings is calling you to Himself." John understood these words and began to prepare for his repose, which came soon. The holy King Stefan of Deç< face="AGaramond">ani's beloved St. Nicholas often appeared to him, and did so before Stefan's repose, saying: "Stefan, prepare for your departure, for soon you will appear before the Lord." Both saints were very similar in their compassion. Despite the immeasurable wealth that St. John had at his disposal as Patriarch of Alexandria, he personally had only one-third of a dinar at his repose, and he willed even that to the poor. When St. Stefan of Deç< face="AGaramond">ani was in the Monastery of the Pantocrator in Constantinople, a generous Serbian nobleman secretly sent him a substantial sum of money. "I give thanks to the good gentleman for his love," replied Stefan to the bearer, "but he would give me greater joy if he would distribute this money, intended for me, to the poor."

HOMILY - on how strangers become members of the household

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19).

Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, it seemed that only the Jews were close to God and that the pagans were farther away from God. But as a matter of fact, the Jews and the pagans were equally estranged from God, and from true reverence for Him. Then He came, Christ the Savior, *and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh* (Ephesians 2:17) and by that, brought both Jews and pagans *by one Spirit unto the Father* (Ephesians 2:18). In the new creation, or the new man, or the Church of God, the Spirit is one; and everyone who enters the Church of God receives this Spirit, so that no matter how much the Church increases in members, there always remains the one Spirit of God; and no matter how many nations or tribes or races enter the Church of God, the Spirit does not change, but remains forever and ever, one and the same Spirit. That is why pagans are not *strangers and foreigners* in the Church, but are *fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*, as are all other members of the Church. For the Church is founded on holiness, and her cornerstone is the Saint above saints, and according to the plan, all of her members should be holy. All those who lived before Christ but expected Christ and hoped in Him, as well as those who lived after Christ, and who recognized Christ as Lord, Son of God, Savior, Redeemer, Resurrector and Judge, are also called saints. Sin separates and alienates from God, but through the Lord Jesus Christ, division and alienation have vanished, and all the faithful-whether former Jews or pagans-became members of the household of God, by and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

O my brethren, the Lord Jesus Christ gave us something greater and more precious than this life: He gave us peace and friendship with God, and this is greater and more precious than life in alienation from God.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of Peace and Giver of Peace, sustain us to the end in peace with God.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

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