

# Sunday of the Dread Judgement

## (Meatfare Sunday)

18 February / 3 March



**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 7:** By Thy Cross, Thou didst destroy death / to the Thief, Thou didst open Paradise / for the myrrh-bearers, Thou didst change weeping into joy! / and Thou didst command Thy disciples, O Christ God / to proclaim that Thou art risen / granting the world great mercy.

**Resurrection Kondak, Tone 7:** The dominion of death can no longer hold men captive, / for Christ descended, shattering and destroying its powers. / Hell is bound, while the prophets rejoice and cry: / The Saviour has come to those in faith, / enter, you faithful to the Resurrection.

**Kondak to Meat-fare Sunday, Tone 1:** When Thou, O God, shalt come to earth with glory, and all things tremble, and the river of fire floweth before the Judgement Seat and the books are opened, and the hidden things made public, then deliver me from the unquenchable fire and deem me worthy to stand at Thy right hand.

### Matins Gospel VII

#### Epistle: I Corinthians 8: 8 — 9: 2

8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. 9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? 12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Chapter 9: 1 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

#### SHALL THE WEAK BROTHER PERISH, FOR WHOM CHRIST DIED?

If one of you sees something unedifying and so much as goes on to pass it on and put it into the heart of another brother, in doing so you not only harm yourself but you harm your brother by putting one more little bit of knavery into his heart. Even if that brother has his mind set on prayer or some other noble activity, and the first arrives and furnishes him with something to prate about, he not only impedes what he ought to be doing, but brings a temptation to him.

*St. Dorotheos of Gaza. Discourses: On the Fear of God. B#45, pp. 114, 115.*

#### Gospel: St. Matthew 25: 31-46

The Lord said: 31 When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory. 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was ahungered and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in; 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee ahungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 for I was ahungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee ahungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

## I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU GAVE ME FOOD

And in return for what do they receive such things? For the covering of a roof, for a garment, for bread, for cold water, for visiting, for going to prison. For indeed in every case it is what is needed, and sometimes not even that. For surely, the sick and one who is in bonds do not seek only for this, but the one to be freed, the other to be delivered from his infirmity. But He, being gracious, requires only what is within our power ...leaving to us to exert our generosity in doing more...For even if they had done ten thousand things, the munificence would be of grace, since in return for services so small and cheap, such a heaven, and a kingdom and such great honour should be given them.

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily LXXIX on Matthew XXV, 2. B#54, p. 476.*

*The two past Sundays spoke to us of God's patience and limitless compassion, of His readiness to accept every sinner who returns to Him. On this third Sunday, we are powerfully reminded of a complementary truth: no one is so patient and so merciful as God, but even He does not forgive those who do not repent. The God of love is also a God of righteousness, and when Christ comes again in glory, He will come as our judge. 'Behold the goodness and severity of God' (Rom. 11:22). Such is the message of Lent to each of us: turn back while there is still time, repent before the end comes. In the words of the Great Canon: The end draws near, my soul, the end draws near; Yet thou dost not care or make ready. The times grows short, rise up: the judge is at the door. The days of our life pass swiftly, as a dream, as a flower. (Canticle Four, Tropar 2). This Sunday sets before us the 'eschatological' dimension of Lent: the Great fast is a preparation for the Second Coming of the Saviour, for the eternal Passover in the Age to Come. (This is a theme that will be taken up in the first three days of Holy Week.) Nor is the judgement merely in the future. Here and now, each day and each hour, in hardening our hearts towards others and in failing to respond to the opportunities we are given of helping them, we are already passing judgement upon ourselves.*

*Lenten Triodion*

Dearly beloved, in today's Gospel, our Lord tells the multitudes gathered to hear Him, a surprising story about a group of people very similar to themselves. He tells them of the whole race of humanity gathered before Him in that final day of Judgment. He tells them of the surprised reactions of many of those gathered there, when they are finally assigned either to the right or to the left hand of God; either to eternal salvation or to eternal damnation. They are judged either for their willingness or unwillingness to help our Lord Jesus Christ in a variety of needy situations: in times of hunger, thirst, nakedness, imprisonment, etc. And we hear, beloved, that neither group is able to comprehend when they had ever encountered and either helped or refused to help the Lord.

And it really matters little that they find it hard to comprehend this message, because God is able to discern a good and dedicated heart even if they themselves cannot. Before our Lord came, those righteous people may have performed their works of mercy out of a sort of second sense; a kind of innate feeling that they were doing what was pleasing to God. Possibly their sacrifices may have been even more meaningful because they had never heard the life-giving counsels of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the age of "an eye for an eye" they had the foresight to anticipate the teachings of "love your enemy", "turn the other cheek" etc.

Consider the awesome responsibility, beloved, that we bear—to provide suitable dwelling places for Him to dwell in. Christ makes His abode in us and we must be certain that just as the ideal home today is one where peace, love and devotion to one another reign, the spiritual home we provide for Him is the same.

What, then, must we do to make those homes exemplary dwellings for our Lord? We must follow the very counsels He set down for us. We must follow to the letter His perfect example. He was compassionate to the sick, the crippled, the poor, the sinner. So too, if we wish to have a suitable repository for our Lord, we must open it to admit all those other children of His with whom He concerns Himself.

If Christ comes to our hearts and sees that we hold them exclusively for Him and cannot bring ourselves to admit His needy children. He will know that He could not dwell in peace there. He came to serve and if we provide Him with a dwelling place which stifles His activity. He will pass by our spiritual homes.

What He wishes to see are spiritual hospitals, old-age homes, orphanages, etc., within us, where He knows that He can dwell and dispense His love to all in need of it. If we close the doors of our hearts to our brothers in Christ, He will pass by our door and our splendour will fall into decay. Remember, then, beloved, that it is not poverty, disease or any other earthly, human infirmity that will prevent our Lord from dwelling in a man, but rather sin. But, even in the case of sin, our Lord continues to knock and hope that we will expel it and accept Him back.

Beloved, all of mankind was created in the Image and Likeness of God and all share in Christ's humanity. Therefore it is not possible for us to call ourselves His followers and not recognize Him in our neighbour. And for this reason our Lord tells us in today's Gospel lesson, *inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me* (Matt. 25:40). Amen.

*The Living Word*

*Anon.*

## Saints of the Week

**Cheesefare Week** during which all foods **except meat** may be eaten.

**18 February / 3 March — The "Holy Night" of Russian Monasticism.** The 'Holy Night', so called by the people, was on the night of the 17-18 February, 1932. It is a radiant yet terrible date, the Passion Friday of Russian Monasticism - ignored by all and almost unknown to the whole world - when all of Russian monasticism in a single night disappeared in to the concentration camps. It was all done in the dead of night and with the full knowledge of Metropolitan Alexis (later appointed Patriarch Alexis I of Moscow under the Communists) - about which there is sufficient evidence. In Leningrad there were arrested: 40 monks of the St Alexander Nevsky Lavra; 12 monks of the Kiev metochion (the other monks had all been arrested in 1930); 10 monks from the Valaam metochion; 90 nuns of the Novodevichi Convent; 16 nuns of Abbess Taisia's Leushinsky metochion; 12 monks from St Theodore's Cathedral; 8 monks from the "Kinovia" of the St Alexander Nevsky Lavra's "Big Okhotko"; a hundred or so monastics from various other Leningrad churches. In all - 318 people. That same night all the monks and brethren of the St Macarius the Roman Monastery were arrested and brought to Leningrad as vicious criminals whose very presence was a threat to society; they were treated as deadly insects whose presence must be stamped out. The wave of arrests, like thunder, rolled over the Russian land, striking chiefly the monastic population which so recently had been the glorious guardian of the nation's morals and values. It also struck many of the white (parish) clergy and laymen who, in one way or another, were close in spirit to monasticism. For example, the flaming sermons of the parish priest Father Alexander Medvedsky were the cause of his arrest. All were sent to the Kazakhstan region from where almost no one ever returned.

**Papa-Nicholas Planas** - was born on the island of Naxos, the only son of a well-to-do family. He moved to Athens with his mother and sister at the age of 14 following the death of his father. He married at the age of 17, but his wife died giving birth to their first child. Soon afterwards, in 1879, he was ordained a deacon, and five years later, a priest. For fifty years without a break he celebrated liturgy daily from eight in the morning till three in the afternoon. His joy and his life was to celebrate Liturgies, Vigils, Vespers, Canons, Blessings of the Waters, Holy Unction, and Memorial Services. Many times he would say with simplicity, "I will chant unto the Lord for as long as I have my being". He was a great faster, eating only once a day, in the evenings. He would commemorate names for hours on end - sometimes 2000 at a time. First deceased patriarchs, metropolitans, priests, deacons, monastics, and the people of Naxos & Athens. He would tie the lists of names into a big bundle and carry them close to his heart. He was patient & long-suffering, enduring all manner of trials and insults. He quietly observed the Old Calendar and the ways of True Orthodox Christianity. He had no attachment to earthly things, and passed his whole life without acquiring anything. There were many miraculous occurrences during his life, as those close to him have testified, and there are many reports of healings through his prayers and contact with his relics after his repose. He reposed in February 1932 at the age of 81, following a short illness. He shines forth as one of the great saints of the 20th Century. Holy Papa-Nicholas, pray for us!

### Tropar of Papa-Nicholas

Planas, Tone 5: Let us praise our protector, the godly Nicholas; as one endowed with blest virtue, he shone forth as a true priest of the Most High God, and was his fervent worshipper. For, by his holy life on earth, he hath left us most sublime, divine and unfailling teachings of long suffering, meekness, patience, unfeigned humility and true God-like love.

Kondak of Papa-Nicholas Planas, Tone 3: Humble of spirit and pure of heart, illustrious in life and dispassionate of a truth, wast thou, O wise one. Thou didst illumine all by thy virtues and dost grant grace unto them that draw nigh unto thee; and by thine intercessions, thou dost heal them that call upon thee, O Father Nicholas. St Leo the First, Pope of Rome; St Flavian;

**St. Colman, bishop of Lindisfarne** - An Irish bishop of Lindisfarne, England, a disciple of St. Columba. He was born in Connaught, Ireland. At the Synod of Whitby Colman defended the Celtic ecclesiastical practices against St. Wilfrid and St. Agilbert.

**19 February / 4 March — Commemoration of all the holy and God-bearing Fathers who shone forth in the ascetic life** — there is a general commemoration of all the ascetic saints of the Church, both men and women. As we set out on the journey of the Lenten fast, we are reminded that we do not travel alone but as members of a family, supported by the intercessions of many invisible helpers.

**The Holy Apostles Archippus, Philemon and Apphia.** Archippus was one of the Seventy. The Apostle Paul mentions him in his Epistles to the Colossians (4:17) and to Philemon (2), calling him his fellow-soldier in the battle. The Christians' gathering-place for prayer in the town of Colossae was in the house of Philemon. The Apostle Paul, writing to Philemon, calls this 'the Church in thy house'. This was in the time when the apostles were consecrating their disciples to the episcopate—some to permanent sees and others as missionaries, travelling to various places. Philemon was one of these latter. Apphia, Philemon's wife, remained to serve the house-church with fasting. At the time of a feast of the pagan goddess Artemis, all the faithful in Colossae were, as was their custom, gathered at prayer in the house of Philemon. The pagans came to hear of this gathering, rushed in on them and seized all the Christians. They flogged Archippus, Philemon and Apphia as their leaders, then buried them up to the waist in the ground and stoned them. Philemon and Apphia died of this, but they took Archippus out of the hole barely alive and left him for the children to play with. They took knives and stabbed him all over, and thus this fellow-soldier of Paul's in the battle made a good end of his earthly road. Our Holy Father Dositheus.

**20 February / 5 March — St Leo, Bishop of Catania** - beneath Mount Etna the volcano, in the town of Catania, St Leo was a good shepherd and compassionate teacher of the people. He had great care for the sick and poor, and both his zeal for the Faith and his compassion for the needy were great. There appeared one day in that town a magician called Heliodorus, who deluded the people with many illusions and greatly seduced the young. He once entered a church during divine service and began his tricks. St Leo came up to him, bound him with one end of his pallium and led him out to the market place. There he

ordered that a great fire be kindled. When it was burning fiercely he stood among the flames and pulled Heliodorus to him. Heliodorus was completely burned up, but Leo remained alive and unharmed. All who had been taken in by Heliodorus, and who had regarded him as in some way divine, were put to shame by this. The compassionate and zealous Leo became known throughout the whole kingdom as a wonder-worker, helping people by his miracles. When he had finished his course, some time in the 8th century, his soul went to the Lord and healing myrrh flowed from his relics.

**The Hieromartyr Sadok, bishop Persia and the 128 martyrs with him** - Sadok was a bishop in Persia, following St. Simeon. At one time, St. Simeon appeared to him in a dream and said: "Yesterday, I - today, you!" Sadok interpreted these words to his flock as meaning: Last year I [St. Simeon] suffered, this year you [Sadok] will suffer. Indeed that year the Emperor Sapor arrested him with many of the clergy and people and brought them to trial. Sapor first ordered them to worship fire and sun as divinity. Sadok replied: "We are eagerly prepared to die for our God, but we cannot worship the sun nor fire." After that, they were tortured and sentenced to death by beheading. Before being beheaded, Sadok uplifted a prayer to God: "Wash us, O Lord, from our sins in our blood!" Sadok, with his priests and faithful gloriously gave up their bodies to death and their souls to the immortal God. They suffered in the year 342 A.D. or 344 A.D. 21

**February / 6 March — St Zacharias, Patriarch of Jerusalem** - the Persian King Chozroes attacked Jerusalem, ransacking the city, in the time of the Greek Emperor Heraclius, in 614. He took the Precious Cross off to Persia and enslaved an enormous number of Christians, including Patriarch Zacharias. The Jews supported him in his wickedness towards the Christians. It is recorded, among further malice on the part of the Jews, that they bought 90,000 Christian slaves from Chozroes and killed them all. The aged Patriarch spent fourteen years in slavery. Many marvels were wrought in Persia by the Precious Cross, and the Persians exclaimed: "The Christian God has come to Persia!" The Emperor Heraclius later compelled King Chozroes to return the Precious Cross to Jerusalem, together with the Patriarch and the remaining slaves. The Emperor himself carried the Cross into the Holy City on his back. St Zacharias spent his remaining days in peace, and went to the Lord in 632. Patriarch Modestus deputised for him on the patriarchal throne, and after him came St Sophronius.

**Our Holy Father Timothy** - Timothy was a recluse in a place called Symbola on the Asiatic side of Mount Olympus. In his youth, Timothy entered a monastery, was tonsured a monk and until old age spent his earthly time in fasting, prayer, vigils and ceaseless labour. He remained pure and chaste throughout his entire life. To the pure and chaste God gives authority over evil spirits and He gave this to Timothy. Though his labours for the salvation of his soul, St. Timothy succeeded to build in himself a beautiful home for the Holy Spirit. This holy man died in the year 795 A.D.;

**St Eustathius (Eustace), Archbishop of Antioch** - a great zealot and protector of Orthodoxy. As such, he was especially prominent at the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea 325 A.D.], where he intellectually and systematically refuted the teaching of Arius. With the other Holy Fathers, Eustathius confessed correctly that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit according to divine Hypostasis [natures]. Following the death of Emperor Constantine, the Arians somehow again gained prevalence and began to bitterly persecute Orthodoxy. St. Eustathius was ousted from his throne and exiled, at first to Thrace and after that to Macedonia. Eustathius suffered much and long until, in the end, he gave up his holy soul to God in the year 345 A.D. St

**John III Scholasticus, Patriarch of Constantinople** - As an advocate, John was ordained a priest and after that became patriarch in the year 565 A.D. He compiled canons, which were included in the Nomo-Canon.

**22 February / 7 March — Blessed Theoktista the Fool for Christ** - when Archbishop Peter (Zverev) & Bishop Alexis (Bui) were in Voronezh, a remarkable holy woman lived there, a fool for Christ, the blessed Theoktista Michaelovna. Who she was or where she came from - no one knew. It was said that she had been the wife of a high-ranking naval officer who had died during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), and that after this tragedy, becoming disillusioned with the solidity of earthly life, she directed the gaze of her heart on high and took upon herself the exploit of foolishness for the sake of Christ. God rewarded her with a gift of clairvoyance with which she helped her suffering neighbours. She was small of stature, skinny, worn out, with noble features in her face. She lived in the Voronezh Monastery until it closed in 1931 and then took shelter with various people. She had literally "nowhere to lay her head". She did not sleep at nights, but would spend them in prayer and vigil. She had a remarkable mind and a refined way of expressing her thoughts and feelings. It was apparent that she was well bred. The righteous Theoktista saw the rapid liquidation of the Orthodox Churches and monuments of Voronezh in the 1930's, which was only a part of the satanic program that was conducted all over the much suffering Russian land, to the appalled outrage of almost the whole Russian people.. By the mid-1930's all the churches were closed, levelled by dynamite, or turned in to factory storehouses. The heart of the blessed one, which inspired so many good deeds for her neighbours, could not endure any longer. One day blood rushed to her throat, and on February 22, 1936 (OS), she died. It was said that before her death she dressed all in white to meet her bridegroom, Christ. She was buried in the cemetery outside the city and her memory was erased from Voronezh. But the Christian conscience bears her image in loving hearts throughout the world, wherever there is knowledge and understanding of Russia's Catacomb Saints.

**The Holy Martyr Maurice and the Seventy Soldiers with him** - During the reign of Emperor Maximian there was a great persecution of Christians. In the Syrian town of Apamsea, Maurice was superior of the local army. The pagans reported him to the emperor as being a Christian and a sower of the Christian Faith among the soldiers. The emperor himself came and conducted an investigation. Along with Maurice seventy Christian soldiers were also brought before the emperor among whom was Photinus, the son of Maurice. Neither the emperor's flattery nor threats could sway these heroes. To the threats of the emperor, they replied: "O Emperor, there is no fear in the sound and powerful souls of those who love the Lord!" When the emperor ordered and removed their military belts and garments, they said to him: "Our God will clothe us with incorruptible garments and belts and eternal glory!" When the emperor rebuked them because they despised the military honor given to them by him, they replied: "Your honor is without honor, for you have forgotten God Who gave you imperial authority!" Then the emperor commanded and the executioner beheaded Maurice's son Photinus before his eyes to instil fear in the father and

in the others. But, Maurice said: "You have fulfilled our wish O torturer and have sent Photinus, the soldier of Christ before us." Then the emperor sentenced them to a most inhuman death: they were brought to a muddy place, stripped, bound to trees and rubbed them with honey, in order to be bitten by mosquitoes, wasps and hornets. After ten days under the most painful sufferings, they gave up their souls to God and departed to rejoice eternally with the holy angels in heaven. Christians secretly removed their bodies and honourably buried them. These courageous soldiers of Christ suffered about the year 305 A.D.;

**The Many Martyrs of Eugenius** - During the reign of Emperor Arcadius, the relics of many martyrs of Christ were unearthed, among whom was the Apostle Andronicus and his female assistant Junia. "Great Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are prominent among the apostles and they were in Christ before me." (Romans 16:7). These relics were discovered according to a revelation from God to a cleric Nicholas Calligraphus. "Their names are known only to God Who has written their names in the Book of Life in the heavens." In the twelfth century, Emperor Andronicus II built a beautiful church over the relics of the Apostle Andronicus;

**Our Holy Fathers Thalassius and Limnaeus** - Both Thalassius and Limnaeus were Syrian ascetics. One of their unique forms of asceticism was "silence." Following the death of St. Thalassius in 440 A.D., Limnaeus joined St. Maron (February 14) and with him lived a life of mortification on top of a mountain under the open sky.;

**St Papias of Hierapolis** - a disciple of the holy apostles and a patristic author. From Papius we have testimony of the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, the four Marys and the brothers of our Lord as well as an incomplete but preserved manuscript: "An Interpretation of the Words of our Lord."

**23 February / 8 March — The Hieromartyr Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna** - born a pagan. St John the Theologian brought him to the Christian faith and baptised him. Polycarp was left an orphan in early childhood and a noble widow, Callista, after a vision in a dream, took him in, rearing and educating him as her own son. Polycarp was God-fearing and compassionate from his early years. He made great efforts to emulate the life of St Bucolus, the then Bishop of Smyrna, and of the Holy Apostles John and Paul, whom he had met and heard. St Bucolus ordained him priest and, at the time of his death, proclaimed him his heir in Smyrna. The apostolic bishops, who had gathered for Bucolus's funeral, consecrated Polycarp bishop. From the very beginning he was endowed with the power of wonder-working. He cast out the evil spirit from a servant of some prince and put out a great conflagration in Smyrna by his prayers. Seeing these things, many pagans regarded him as one of the gods. He brought rain in a drought, healed sickness, had the gifts of insight and prophecy, and so forth. He suffered in the time of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Three days before his death, he prophesied: 'In three days I shall be consumed by fire for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ!' When, on the third day, the soldiers arrested him and took him for trial, he cried out: 'May this be the will of the Lord my God!' When the judge urged him to deny Christ and recognise the Roman gods, Polycarp said: 'I cannot exchange the better for the worse.' The Jews especially hated Polycarp and endeavoured to have him burned. When they placed him, bound, on the pyre, he prayed long to God. He was very old and grey, and he shone like an angel of God. All the people saw how the flames licked around him but did not touch him. Frightened by such a phenomenon, the pagan judge ordered the executioner to stab him with a lance through the flames. When this was done, a vast flow of blood gushed out and extinguished the whole fire, and his body remained whole and unburned. At the Jews' persuasion, the judge ordered that Polycarp's dead body be burned according to the Greek custom, and so they dishonourably burned dead him whom they had failed to burn alive, St. Polycarp suffered in the year 167, on Holy Saturday;

**Our Holy Father Damian** - a monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenou on Mt. Athos, was a contemporary and companion of the great Cosmos of Zographou. He lived a life of asceticism on Mount Samareia between Esphigmenou and Hilendar. He died peacefully in the year 1280 A.D. When he died, a pleasant and sweet-smelling aroma emitted from his body for forty days; St. Mildburga (Mildred), abbess of Much Wenlock; St. Jurmin, prince of East Anglia.

**24 February / 9 March — The Finding of the Head of St John the Forerunner** - The great and glorious Forerunner was beheaded at the wish and request of the wicked Herodias, wife of Herod. When John had been beheaded, Herodias ordered that his head should not be buried with his body, for she feared that the terrible prophet would somehow rise from the dead. So she took his head and buried it in some hidden and unworthy place, deep in the earth. Her lady-in-waiting was Joanna the wife of Chuza, a courtier of Herod's. This good and God-fearing Joanna could not bear that the head of the godly man should remain in an unworthy place, so she disinterred it secretly, took it to Jerusalem and buried it on the Mount of Olives. Not knowing about all this, King Herod, when he heard about Christ and His great miracles, was afraid and said: 'It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead!' (Mk . 6:16) . After a considerable time, an eminent government official came to believe in Christ, left his position in the world and became a monk. Under the name Innocent, he settled on the Mount of Olives, in precisely the place where the Baptist's head had been buried. Deciding to build himself a cell, he dug deep and found an earthen pot containing a head which, it was revealed to him secretly, was that of the Baptist. He venerated it and re-buried it in the same place. By God's providence, that wonder-working head went from hand to hand, disappearing into the darkness of forgetfulness and then being once more revealed, until it was finally taken to Constantinople in the middle of the 9th century, in the time of Patriarch Ignatius and the God-fearing Empress Theodora, mother of Michael and wife of Theophilus. Many miracles were performed by the head of the Forerunner. It is important and interesting to note that, while he was alive, John did not work a single miracle (Jn. 10:41), but to his relics was given the blessed power of working miracles;

**Our Holy Father Erasmus** - a monk in the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev. He inherited great wealth from his parents and spent all on adoring churches, especially on silver-plating and gilding icons. When he had become impoverished and remained without anything, he was despised by all. The devil whispered to him that he squandered his estate in vain; instead of distributing his wealth among the poor, he gave it for the adornment of churches. Erasmus succumbed to this temptation and believed it for which he despised himself and fell into a state of despair and began to live aimlessly and lawlessly. When the hour of his death approached the brethren assembled around him and discussed his sins which he himself was not conscious of. All at once, he straightened up in bed and said: "Fathers and brothers, it is as you say; I am sinful and unrepentant, but

behold St. Anthony and St. Theodosius appeared to me and after that, the All-Holy Mother of God told me that the Lord gave me more time for repentance." The Mother of God also spoke these encouraging words to him: "The poor you have with you in every place and my churches you do not." Erasmus lived for three more days, repented and fell asleep in the Lord. This teaches us that zeal for the Church and adornment of the churches is a task pleasing to God. St. Erasmus died in the year 1160 A.D.; St. Ethelbert, king of Kent (616).

## *Icon Of The Feast*

The icon of the Sunday of the Last Judgment incorporates all of the elements of the parable from Matthew 25:31-46. Christ sits on the throne and before him the Last Judgment takes place. He is extending his hands in blessing upon the Theotokos on his right, and John the Baptist on his left. Seated on smaller thrones are the Apostles, represented by Peter and Paul, a depiction of the words of Christ in Matthew 19:28. (1.)



1. Christ is seated on the throne between the Theotokos (left) and Saint John the Baptist (right). Seated on smaller thrones are the Apostles, represented here by Saint Peter (left) and Saint Paul (right).

Proceeding from the throne are the scrolls pronouncing the judgment upon the sheep and the goats. (2.) The faithful are received with the words that are written on the scroll to the right of Christ the Judge, "Come, you blessed of My Father, and inherit the kingdom" (v. 34). The scroll on the left condemns the unfaithful with the words, "Depart from me you cursed, into the everlasting fire" (v. 41).



2. The scrolls pronouncing the judgement can be seen at Christ's feet and below them, Adam and Eve bow before Christ.

3. Below Adam and Eve is the Archangel Michael surrounded by the books which contain the works of each person.

Before the throne, the progenitors of the human race, Adam and Eve, bow before Christ. (2.) In the center of the icon is the Archangel Michael. He is holding the scales of judgment and is surrounded by the books that contain the works of each person (Revelation 20:11-13). (3.) Also shown are the angels with trumpets announcing the return of Christ and signaling the resurrection of the dead and the commencement of the Last Judgment (I Thessalonians 4:16-17). (4.)



4. To the left and right of the Archangel Michael are angels with trumpets announcing to the world the return of Jesus Christ, the start of the Last Judgements, and signaling the resurrection of the dead.

To the left of the Archangel are both the living and the dead who are approaching the throne and Christ the judge. Whereas Adam and Eve are representative of all of humanity, this part of the icon shows that both the living and the dead will stand before Christ. (5.)



5. Pictured to the bottom-left of the Archangel Michael are the living and dead coming before the throne of Christ the judge.



6. To the bottom-right of the Archangel Michael is the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil, his demons, and those who are not worthy of inheriting the Kingdom of God.

At the bottom right of the icon is the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and the demons, and also for those who are not found worthy to inherit the Kingdom of God. (6.)

The icon offers a clear image of the theme of judgment with Christ on His throne, the Archangel with the scales and books, and the anticipation of the sentence of everlasting punishment for the unrighteous and the reward of eternal life for the righteous.

*This above article is from <http://lent.goarch.org/judgement/learn/> Copyright © The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.*

Available on the net at <http://www.saintjonah.org/bltn/> or at <http://www.roq.org.au/bulletins.html> where you can subscribe to the email list.