

# The Forth Sunday of Great Lent /

## St John of the Ladder

29 March / 11 April

**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 3:** Let the heavens rejoice / let the earth be glad / for the Lord has shown strength with His arm! / He has trampled down death by death! / He has become the first-born of the dead! He has delivered us from the depths of hell / and has granted the world great mercy.

**Tropar of St. John Climacus, Tone 3:** Having raised up a sacred ladder by thy words/ thou wast shown forth to all as a teacher of monastics/ and thou dost lead us, O John/ from the purification that cometh through godly discipline/ unto the light of Divine vision/ O righteous father/ do thou entreat Christ God// that we be granted great mercy.

**Resurrection Kondak, Tone 3:** On this day thou didst rise from the tomb, O Merciful One, / leading us from the gates of death / On this day Adam exults as Eve rejoices. / With the prophets and the patriarchs they unceasingly praise the divine majesty of Thy power.

**Kondak of St. John Climacus, Tone 1:** Offering teachings from thy book as ever-blossoming fruits, O wise one, thou dost sweeten the heart of them that attend to them with vigilance, O blessed one; for it is a ladder that, from earth unto the heavenly and abiding glory, doth lead the souls of those who with faith do honour thee.

**Our Holy Father John Climacus (of the Ladder)** - The author of the famous 'Ladder', he came from an unknown place to Mount Sinai as a sixteen-year-old boy and remained there, first as a novice, then as a hermit and finally as abbot of Sinai, until he died at the age of eighty, in about 649. His biographer, the monk Daniel, says of him: 'He brought his body up to Mount Sinai, but his spirit he brought to the Mount of Heaven'. He spent nineteen years in obedience to his spiritual father, Martyrios. Anastasius of Mount Sinai, who saw John once as a young man, foretold that he would be abbot of Mount Sinai. After the death of his spiritual father, John took himself off to a cave, where he lived for twenty years in strict asceticism. His disciple, Moses, fell asleep one day in the cool shade of a huge rock. John was at prayer in his cell, and, perceiving that his disciple was in danger, began to pray for him. Moses came up to him later, fell to his knees and began to thank him for saving him from certain death. And he related how he had heard John calling him in his sleep and had jumped up at the very moment that a rock fell. Had he not jumped out of the way, the rock would certainly have killed him. At the importunate urging of the brethren, John accepted the abbacy, and guided their souls to salvation with loving zeal. He once heard a monk reproach him for being too verbose. He was not in the least angered, but was silent for an entire year, not uttering a single word until the brethren begged him to speak. He then began to instruct them with the wisdom with which God had endowed him. Once 600 pilgrims came to Mount Sinai. At supper they all noticed an agile young man dressed as a Jew who was serving at table and giving orders to the other servants, taking charge of everything. Suddenly, he disappeared. While everyone was pondering this and asking questions among themselves, John said: 'Do not bother to look for him; that was the prophet Moses serving you in his own home.' During the time that he was silent in his cave, John wrote many instructive books, of which the most famous, 'The Ladder', is much read to this day. It describes the way to raise the soul to God as if on a ladder. Before his death, John appointed his own brother, George, to the abbacy, but George began to grieve greatly at the approaching parting with John. Then John said that, if he were found worthy to stand close to God in the next world, he would pray that George be taken up to heaven in the same year. And so it came to pass. After ten months, George also fell asleep and departed to take his place among heaven's citizens alongside his brother John.

### Matins Gospel XI

#### Epistle: for Sunday: Heb 6:13-20

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, Saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, Where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.



## **AFTER ABRAHAM HAD PATIENTLY ENDURED, HE OBTAINED THE PROMISE**

Do you see that the promise alone did not effect the whole, but the patient waiting as well? ...This shows that oftentimes a promise is thwarted through faintheartedness ...What is 'the hope set before us?' From these past events we conjecture the future. For if these came to pass after so long a time, certainly the other will. So that the things which happened in regard to Abraham also give us confidence concerning the things to come ...He shows that while we are still in the world, and not yet departed from this life, we are already among the promises. For through hope we are already in heaven ...And you see how very suitable an image he has discovered: for he did not say 'foundation,' but 'anchor.' For that which is in the tossing sea, and seems not to be very firmly fixed, stands on the water as upon land, and is shaken and yet is not shaken.

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily XI on Hebrews VI 1, 2, 3. B#58, pp. 418, 419.*

for the Saint: Eph 5:9-19

### **Gospel: for Sunday: Mark 9:17-31**

Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."

### **HEALING THROUGH PRAYER AND FASTING**

Do you see how He now proceeds to lay beforehand in them the foundation of His doctrine about fasting? ...You see, at any rate, how many blessings spring from them both. For he who is praying as he ought, and fasting, has not many wants, and he who has not many wants cannot be covetous; he who is not covetous, will be also more disposed for almsgiving. He who fasts is light, and winged, and prays with wakefulness, and quenches his wicked lusts, and propitiates God, and humbles his soul when lifted up. Therefore even the apostles were almost always fasting. He who prays with fasting has his wings double, and lighter than the very winds ...nothing is mightier than the man who prays sincerely ...But if your body is too weak to fast continually ...although you cannot fast, yet you can avoid luxurious living.

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily LVII on Matthew XVII, 4, 5. B#54, pp. 355, 356.*

for the Saint: Matt 4:25-5:12

### **WILL WE GO TO HEAVEN OR HELL?**

We learn even as small children about going "to heaven" or "to hell." There is a great difference between them in our minds. This distinction comes from the Scriptures. St. John and the other Evangelists speak in glowing terms of eternal life, and St. Paul tells us 'But it is written, eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him' (I Cor. 2:9). So we know heaven is indescribably beautiful. St. Paul also speaks of having experienced a vision of paradise or heaven (Cf II Cor. 12). The other is a place of hopelessness and desolation. St. Basil the Great says (On the Holy Spirit, 40): "Those who have grieved the Holy Spirit...will according to one of the Evangelists, be completely 'cut asunder.' (Cf. Matt.24:51) which means utter separation from the Spirit.. the eternal alienation of the soul from the Spirit... Thus 'in hell there is no one who confesses, no one in death who remembers God', because the help of the Spirit is no longer available." We know this also from the story of Lazarus and the Rich man (Luke 16:19-31). Lazarus begged crumbs from the rich man's table and was refused. Both the poor and the rich man died, Lazarus went to heaven, to the arms of Abraham; the rich man to hell, pleading with Abraham to send Lazarus to the rescue. The holy fathers tell us: "But what do we learn from this? That no man can protect us there, if we are betrayed by our works, not because he will not, but because he cannot. For these too take refuge in the impossibility, this the blessed Abraham also indicated, saying 'between us and you there is a great gulf,' so that not even when willing is it permitted them to pass it... The end of each one is at the doors, whether he be old or young: and it is not possible for men after they have gone hence, either to buy oil any more, or to obtain pardon by prayers, though he who entreats be Abraham, or Noah, or Job, or Daniel." (St. John Chrysostom. Homilies LXXVIII on Matthew XXV and XX on Matthew VI).

The parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, recorded by St. Matthew (Mt. 25:1-13) covers the same subject: "What are we to understand by that petition for oil which they make to the prudent virgins if not that, in the hour of judgment, discovering their interior want, they seek testimony from without?...In that day...the testimony of each one will scarcely suffice for himself...They will not find pardon then who waste the time now in which they might repent...The prophet says, (Isa. 55:6) 'Seek the Lord while He may be found: call upon Him while He is near.' (St. Gregory the Great. Parables of the Gospel).

## Saints of the Week

**29 March / 11 April — St Mark the Confessor, Bishop of Arethusa** - St Gregory the Theologian and Blessed Theodoretus have given us an account of his sufferings. According to these accounts, Mark destroyed some pagan temples and brought many to the Christian faith during the reign of the Emperor Constantine. But when the Emperor Julian came to the throne and quickly became an apostate from the Faith, some of the inhabitants of Arethusa renounced Christ and lapsed into paganism. They rose up against Mark because he had demolished the temple and demanded that he either rebuild it or pay them a very large sum of money. As Mark refused to do either the one or the other, he was flogged and flayed and dragged through the streets. They then cut off his ears with strong, fine threads, stripped him naked, smeared him with honey and left him bound to a tree in the summer heat for the wasps, mosquitoes and hornets to eat. The martyr of Christ endured all this without complaint. He was quite old, and his face shone like an angel of the Lord. The pagans lowered the price of their temple again and again, finally demanding a quite insignificant amount which Mark could easily have given. But he refused to give even a single coin for that purpose. His endurance made a great impression on the citizens, and they began to admire him for it and to feel sorry for him, and gradually reduced the price of their temple to nothing just to allow him to remain alive. Finally, they let him go free and, one by one, all came to him to receive instruction and become Christians again. A deacon, Cyril, also suffered at this time for a similar cause in Heliopolis at the foot of mount Lebanon. He had broken some idols at the time of the liberation of Christianity and was cruelly tortured under Julian for this. The pagans were so enraged with him that, after they had killed him, they tore out his teeth and ripped open his stomach. Many others suffered on the same day as St Cyril. The evil pagans cut their bodies into small pieces, coated them with barley and fed them to the pigs. But retribution came swiftly upon them; all their teeth fell out and their mouths emitted an unbearable stench; Our Holy Father John the Hermit.

**30 March / 12 April — Our Holy Father John Climacus (of the Ladder)** - The author of the famous 'Ladder', he came from an unknown place to Mount Sinai as a sixteen-year-old boy and remained there, first as a novice, then as a hermit and finally as abbot of Sinai, until he died at the age of eighty, in about 649. His biographer, the monk Daniel, says of him: 'He brought his body up to Mount Sinai, but his spirit he brought to the Mount of Heaven'. He spent nineteen years in obedience to his spiritual father, Martyrios. Anastasius of Mount Sinai, who saw John once as a young man, foretold that he would be abbot of Mount Sinai. After the death of his spiritual father, John took himself off to a cave, where he lived for twenty years in strict asceticism. His disciple, Moses, fell asleep one day in the cool shade of a huge rock. John was at prayer in his cell, and, perceiving that his disciple was in danger, began to pray for him. Moses came up to him later, fell to his knees and began to thank him for saving him from certain death. And he related how he had heard John calling him in his sleep and had jumped up at the very moment that a rock fell. Had he not jumped out of the way, the rock would certainly have killed him. At the importunate urging of the brethren, John accepted the abbacy, and guided their souls to salvation with loving zeal. He once heard a monk reproach him for being too verbose. He was not in the least angered, but was silent for an entire year, not uttering a single word until the brethren begged him to speak. He then began to instruct them with the wisdom with which God had endowed him. Once 600 pilgrims came to Mount Sinai. At supper they all noticed an agile young man dressed as a Jew who was serving at table and giving orders to the other servants, taking charge of everything. Suddenly, he disappeared. While everyone was pondering this and asking questions among themselves, John said: 'Do not bother to look for him; that was the prophet Moses serving you in his own home.' During the time that he was silent in his cave, John wrote many instructive books, of which the most famous, 'The Ladder', is much read to this day. It describes the way to raise the soul to God as if on a ladder. Before his death, John appointed his own brother, George, to the abbacy, but George began to grieve greatly at the approaching parting with John. Then John said that, if he were found worthy to stand close to God in the next world, he would pray that George be taken up to heaven in the same year. And so it came to pass. After ten months, George also fell asleep and departed to take his place among heaven's citizens alongside his brother John; Commemoration of an Uncondemning Monk; St. Osburga of Coventry, virgin (c.1015)

**31 March / 13 April — Metropolitan Innocent, Enlightener of Siberia and Alaska** - born John in the Irkutsk district in 1797 the son of a poor sacristan. His father died when he was seven leaving him and his family in great poverty. Fortunately his uncle took him in, provided for his education and taught him manual crafts himself. He entered seminary at age 9 and was a good student. Whilst there the rector changed his surname to Veniaminov. John married in 1817 at the age of 20 and became a deacon in Irkutsk. After a year he was ordained priest and in 1823 the Bishop sought a priest to undertake missionary work in the islands between Siberia and Alaska. Although at first unwilling, Father John was seized with the desire to preach the Gospel of Christ to the unenlightened. His bishop consented, and although his family were at first opposed they began the long journey. In the following year they arrived on the island of Unalaska. He began to teach the natives carpentry and building, and with their help erected a church and dwellings. He then began to study the native language, hoping to translate the Gospel and divine services. He preached to the natives in their own language, adapting concepts to their understanding. He travelled widely throughout the diocese, which stretched over several thousand kilometres, serving, preaching, and baptising. He sometimes traversed great distances on the open sea in a small canoe. He developed an alphabet for the Aleutian language and translated the catechism and the Gospel of St. Matthew. At this time he wrote his most famous work - Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven. He opened a school and himself taught the children to read and write. He spent 10 years in Unalaska, in which time he converted all the inhabitants to Christianity. He was then transferred to Sitka, an island port close to the mainland of Alaska. He laboured there for five years, learning the language and translating, preaching and baptising, and teaching the natives manual trades. He was greatly loved by the native peoples. In 1838 returned to Russia to seek help for his work and for a blessing to print his translations. He was raised to Archpriest and at the same time his wife died. He accepted monasticism and in 1840 was tonsured with the name of Innocent eventually becoming Bishop Innocent and returning to Alaska to finish his work. In 1850 he was elevated to Archbishop and in 1857 was recalled to Russia where he laboured

greatly for the conversion of the unenlightened peoples on the Russian-Chinese border. Finally in 1867, he was chosen to succeed the newly reposed Metropolitan Philaret. By now an old man he accepted this great burden with humility, fulfilling his duties to the glory of God until his repose on 31 March, 1879. This great worker planted the Faith of Christ amongst a great many pagan tribes, labouring for their salvation with true patience, humility and simplicity. For his labours, the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad resolved in May 1993 to recognise Metropolitan Innocent as a saint on January 17/30, 1994.

**Archbishop Averky of Jordanville** - the world known as Alexander Pavlovich Taushev) was born on October 19, 1906, in the city of Kazan. His father was employed by the government until the Revolution of 1917 and was required to travel widely. Thus Vladika, although only 14 when he was forced to leave Russia, knew a great deal of his beloved homeland. He read widely from a young age, and was especially moved by spiritual books which he father obtained from the Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mt. Athos. In 1920 the family settled in Bulgaria amongst many other Russian refugees. Then in 1925, he met Archbishop Theophan who had a tremendous influence on this young man, and it was at this time he became firm in his desire for monasticism. He entered theological Academy and graduated in 1930 with top marks. Desiring greatly to labour for the Russian people, he decided to travel to Czechoslovakia, where many were returning from the Unia to Orthodoxy. Vladika Theophan blessed him, and Alexander was appointed secretary to the Diocesan Administrator. In 1931 he was tonsured a monk with the name Averky. The next day he was ordained to the diaconate, and in the next year was ordained priestmonk. In 1937 he was made Abbot before in 1940 he was forced as a result of World War II to move to Belgrade where he taught and laboured in the serve of the Synod. In 1951 he moved to America and was invited to teach at Holy Trinity Seminary in Jordanville. In 1961 he was made Archbishop - a great preacher and zealot of True Orthodox Christianity, Vladika suffered greatly as a result of the attacks of modernism and ecumenism on the Orthodox Faith. It was said that he was one of the last giants of 20th Century Orthodoxy. May his memory be eternal! The Hieromartyr Hypatis, Bishop of Gangra; St. Jonah, Metropolitan of Moscow; The Hieromartyr Audas; Our Holy Father Apollonius.

**1 / 14 April — St Mary of Egypt** - The recorder of the life of this wonderful saint was St Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem. A hieromonk, the elder Zossima, had gone off at one time during the Great Fast a twenty-days' walk into the wilderness across the Jordan. He suddenly caught sight of a human being 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.' Then 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 got into a ship that was sailing for Jerusalem. Arriving at the Holy City, she tried 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 like gigantic beasts. She fed only on plants. After that, when she was standing in prayer, Zossima saw her lifted up in the air. She begged him to bring her Communion the next year on the bank of the Jordan, and 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 there on that 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. And 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 in about 530.

**St Meliton, Bishop of Sardis** - A well-known pastor of the Church in the second century, he was a man of great learning and laboured to codify all the books of Holy Scripture. He laboured also in meekness and devotion to bring peace to the Church in Laodicea, involved in a quarrel about the celebration of Easter. Apart from this, he defended Christianity against the pagans. He travelled to Rome in about 170, bringing a written apologia on the Faith and the Christian Church to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. St Meliton, this learned, devout and zealous man, entered peacefully into rest in the Lord in about 177;

**2 / 15 April — Our Holy Father Titus the Wonderworker** - He conceived a love for Christ from his earliest years, and despised the vanities of the world. For His sake, he left the world, went off to a monastery and received the angelic habit. With not a backward glance, he gave himself to the sober and narrow way of monasticism. Through great patience, he attained the two basic virtues of humility and obedience, and in these virtues he exceeded 'not only the brethren, but all men'. He preserved his purity of soul and body right from his youth. In the time of the iconoclast heresy, he was seen to be a steadfast pillar of the Church of God. For his great humility and purity, he was endowed by God with the gift of wonderworking, both in

his lifetime and after his death. And when he went to the Lord, he left a large number of disciples behind him. He entered peacefully into rest in the 9th century;

**The Holy Martyrs Amphianus, and Edesius** - These two young men were blood brothers from the city of Patara of distinguished but pagan parents. While they were studying the secular sciences in the city of Beirut, they were enlightened by the Spirit of God, and acknowledging the falsehood of paganism, discerned the truth of Christianity. When they returned home they could no longer live with their pagan parents and kinsmen and secretly fled to Caesarea in Palestine to the presbyter Pamphilius, renowned for his sanctity and spiritual learning. With Pamphilius, they studied the Law of God day and night and practiced Christian asceticism. It is said of Pamphilius that he was twenty years old according to the flesh but, in understanding and generosity, he was a hundred years old. When a persecution began during the reign of Maximian, many Christians fled the city and hid themselves. Others, willingly and rejoicingly, gave themselves into the hands of the persecutors in order to suffer for the Name of Him, Who first suffered for them. Amphianus was among the latter. Unafraid, he entered a pagan temple where Prince Urban was offering sacrifices to the idols, grabbed the prince by the hand which was holding the sacrifice and cried to him to refrain from serving and making sacrificial offerings to dead idols and to acknowledge the True God. Some of the pagans who heard these words and witnessing the great courage of Amphianus, repented and embraced the Faith of Christ. The enraged prince subjected Amphianus to torture. Among the other tortures, they wrapped the legs of Amphianus with cotton and set them on fire. When he remained alive, they tossed his body into the sea with a stone around his neck. The sea became turbulent and hurled his martyred body back into the city. At first, Edesius was sent to a cooper mine in Palestine and was later taken to Egypt. In Alexandria, Edesius was filled with holy zeal against a certain Prince Hierocles who, in the market place, assembled Christian nuns, maidens and virtuous women and handed them over to the most shameful perverts for derision. Edesius, filled with holy zeal, struck the disgraceful prince. For that, he was tortured and drowned in the sea as was his brother Amphianus. As two innocent lambs, they were sacrificed for Christ about the year 306 A.D. and were translated to the glorious mansions of the Lord.

**3 / 16 April — St Nicetas the Confessor** - He was born in Bithynia, in the town of Caesarea. His father, Philaret, losing his wife, became a monk. Nicetas remained with his paternal grandmother. After he had grown up and finished his schooling, he went to a monastery in Midikion, where Nicephorus, the abbot, tonsured him as a monk. After seven years of toil and asceticism, he was ordained hieromonk by Patriarch Tarasius. After the deaths of Nicephorus and Nicetas's great friend, Athanasius, the brethren chose Nicetas as abbot, much against his will. St Nicetas was a holy example of life and asceticism to his brethren for many years. But when Leo V, the Armenian, came to the throne, following the devout Empress Irene and the pious Emperors Nicephorus and Michael, the iconoclast heresy sprang up again. The Emperor deposed Patriarch Nicephorus and sent him into exile, and in his place put a heretic, Theodotus Cassiteras, a man of impure life. Nicetas was imprisoned and tortured, but remained unwavering in his Orthodoxy. He was taken from prison to prison and tortured by hunger and thirst, by cold and heat and malice. But he remained utterly unwavering. A certain Nicolas pestered him particularly with his derision and malice. But one night the dead father of this Nicolas appeared to him in a dream and said: 'Leave that servant of God alone!' From that moment Nicolas repented, and not only refrained from pestering him but prevented others doing likewise. When the Emperor Leo the Armenian had made an evil end, the throne passed to the Orthodox Emperor Michael Balbus, who freed all the Orthodox sufferers. Nicetas retired to a lonely place near Constantinople, where he spent the remaining days of his earthly life in prayer and thanksgiving to God. When he died, his body was taken to his monastery and, during that journey, many of the sick, on touching his body, were healed. His relics were placed close to the graves of his spiritual father, Nicephorus, and his friend Athanasius. This great hierarch entered into rest in 824; St Paul the Wretched; **The Holy Martyr Ulphianus** - a young man from the city of Tyre. He suffered for Christ at the hands of Urban, the mayor of the city of Tyre, who also was the torturer of Amphianus [April 2]. Finally, he was tied in a sack along with a dog and a snake and tossed into the sea. He suffered and was glorified in the year 306 A.D.

**4 / 17 April — Our Holy Father Joseph the Hymnographer** - He was born in Sicily of devout and virtuous parents, Plotinus and Agatha. After the death of his parents, he moved to Salonica, where he became a monk. As a monk, he was an example to all in fasting, restraint, ceaseless supplication, psalmody, vigils and toil. The Bishop of Salonica ordained him hieromonk. The famous Gregory of Decapolis, visiting Salonica, loved Joseph with heart and soul for his rare character, and took him back with him to his monastery in Constantinople. When the flame of iconoclasm sprang up again under Leo the Armenian, Joseph was sent to Rome to call the Pope and the Roman Church to battle for the true Faith. But pirates captured him on the way and took him to Crete, where he was kept in prison for six years by the heretics. Joseph rejoiced that he was made worthy to suffer for Christ, and thanked God constantly, regarding the iron chains with which he was bound as golden ornaments. In the sixth year, around Christmas, the wicked Emperor was murdered at the morning service in church. At the same moment, St Nicolas appeared to Joseph in the prison and said to him: 'Get up and follow me.' Joseph felt himself lifted up in the air, and found himself all at once in Constantinople. His arrival was a source of rejoicing to all the Orthodox faithful. He composed Canons and hymns for many of the saints. He had the gift of insight, because of which Patriarch Photius made him spiritual father and confessor to his priests, recommending him as 'a man of God, an angel in the flesh, a father of fathers'. In great old age, he gave his soul into the hands of the God he had served so faithfully in work and song. He died peacefully on the eve of Holy Thursday in 883;

**The Holy Martyr Pherbutha** - During the reign of the Persian Emperor Saborius, St. Simeon, the bishop, was slain. At the wish of the empress, Pherbutha, the sister of Bishop Simeon, was taken to the palace. Pherbutha was exceptionally beautiful and because of that many suitors thronged to her among whom were many pagan priests and soothsayers. Pherbutha rejected them all and provoked much anger against herself. At that time, the empress became ill and all the pagan priests explained to the emperor that the empress was poisoned by Pherbutha and, as a cure for the ailing empress, they recommended the following: that Pherbutha, her sister and their slave, as Christians, be sawn and that three parts of their bodies be placed on one side and three parts on the other side and that the empress should be borne between them. The emperor agreed to the

recommendation of these blood-thirsty pagan priests. Pherbutha, together with her sister and their slave, suffered for Christ in the year 343 A.D., thereby earning the incorruptible wreath in the eternal kingdom of their Lord; Our Holy Father Zossima; **Our Holy Father, the Martyr Nicetas** - a Slav from Albania. As a monk of the Holy Mountain (Mt. Athos), he went to Serres where he debated with the Mullahs about religion. Being that they could not overcome him with reason, the Turks subjected him to torture under which Nicetas, the holy one, died and gave up his soul to his God in the year 1808 A.D.

### Thursday of the Fifth Week

At Matins on this day the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is read in its entirety once a year, which was read in four parts on the first four days of the first week, and the Life of St. Mary of Egypt is read after the Sessional Hymn (Kathisma). According to this feature of the Thursday Matins it is called either the St. Andrew of Crete or the St. Mary of Egypt Thursday. In the Canon are collected and stated, as was stated above (see page 510), all the exhortations to fasting and repentance, and the Holy Church repeats it now in its fullness to inspire us new strength for the successful end to Lent. "Since", it is said in the Synaxarion, "the Holy Forty Day Lent is drawing near the end so that men should not become lazy, or more carelessly disposed to the spiritual efforts, or give up their abstinence altogether," that this Great Canon is offered. It is "so long, and so well-composed, as to be sufficient to soften even the hardest soul, and to rouse it to resumption of the good, if only it is sung with a contrite heart and proper attention". And the church Typikon (Ustav) orders the Great Canon to be read and chanted slowly and "with a contrite heart and voice, making three prostrations at each Troparion". For the same purpose of abstinence and strength, and attention to repentance is the reading of the Life of the Venerable Mary of Egypt. According to an explanation of the same Synaxarion, the Life of the Venerable Mary also "manifests infinite compunction and gives much encouragement to the fallen and sinners", representing itself to us as a paradigm of true repentance, and an example of the unutterable mercy of God. It serves as the continuation of the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete and a transition to the order of the following Sunday. Reading the Canon of St. Andrew and Mary of Egypt on the Thursday of the Fifth Week was established from the time of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

### Fifth Saturday of Great Lent

The service on this Saturday is called the Praise of the Most Holy Theotokos, because on this day "we sing the hymns of praise" to the Most Holy Theotokos in memory of the triple deliverance of the imperial city of Constantinople from the attack of enemies through Her intercession (see March 10). In the reign of Heraclius (in 626) the Persians from the East and the Scythians or Avars from the west blockaded Constantinople. Patriarch Sergius took the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos called the Hodigitria (refer to July 28), and her encased robe, in a cross procession to the walls of city and when he dipped the robe of the Mother of God into the water, the sea began to boil, and the ships sank, and the unwelcome enemies were exterminated. The people spent the whole night in prayer in the Blachernae church, which is on the seacoast, singing the thanksgiving hymns to the Mother of God (Akathist). A similar deliverance of Constantinople from the Agarians occurred during the reign of Constantine Pogonatus (in 670), Leo the Isaurian (716-740), or, according to other reports, during the reign of Michael III (864) from the Agarian and the Scythian Ascold and Dir. The Holy Church entered into the universal use of the thanksgiving hymns to the Theotokos, performed on the 5th Sunday of Great Lent as the first deliverance of Constantinople was about this time. With thanksgiving for former deliverance from enemies, the Holy Church connects the prayer to the Most Holy Theotokos with even freeing us from all misfortunes, looking to the Mother of God as the Helper in prayers and repentance. Reminding believers about the heavenly Mediatrix and Intercessor of the Christian race, the Holy Church thus confirms repenting in the hope of greater help in one's spiritual efforts, for She never abandoned the suffering and grieving needing Her help, even in the struggle against external enemies.

*S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 0523-5  
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