



25th Sunday After Pentecost

Holy Prophet Habakkuk

2 / 15 December

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 8: Thou didst descend from on high, O Merciful One! / Thou didst endure the three-day burial / to free us from our sufferings! / O Lord, our Life and Resurrection, glory to Thee.

Troparion tone 4: Of old thou didst describe the Virgin Mother of God as a mountain/ from which the God of all would shine forth in the flesh for our sake./ Hence we honour thee as a God-proclaiming prophet/ and beseech thee to make us partakers of grace/ by thy intercessions, O glorious Habbakuk.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 8: By rising from the tomb Thou didst raise the dead and resurrect Adam/ Eve exults in Thy Resurrection, / and the world celebrates Thy rising from the dead, O Greatly Merciful One.

Kontakion tone 2: O God-proclaiming Habbakuk,/ thou didst discern the disciples as horses trampling the seas of ignorance/ and submerging error by their doctrine of piety./ Wherefore we praise thee as a true prophet/ and beseech thee to intercede for our souls.

Vespers

Lord I have Cried, Tone 8, on 10: Octoechos 7; Prophet 3 (The wondrous Habakkuk); G/N: Sunday Dogmatic in the 8th tone. Aposticha: Octoechos; G/N: Theotokion in the Octoechos

Matins Gospel III

EPISTLE: Ephesians 4: 1-6

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

I BESEECH YOU TO HAVE A WALK WORTHY OF THE CALLING WITH WHICH YOU WERE CALLED

Great has the power of Paul's chain been shown to be, and more glorious than miracles. It is not in vain then, as it would seem, nor without an object, that he here holds it forward ...It is not merely being a prisoner that is honourable, but being so for Christ's sake ...Nothing is equal to this ...But what is this calling? You were called as His body, it is said...You have Christ as your head; and though you were 'enemies,' and had committed misdeed out of number, yet 'He has raised you up with Him and made you sit with Him' (Eph. 2:6) ...But how is it possible to 'walk worthily' of it? 'With all lowliness.' Such a one walks worthily. This is the basis of all virtue. If you are lowly, and realise what you are, and how you were saved, and will take this recollection as a motive to all virtue ...The lowly-minded man is able to be at once generous and a grateful servant. 'For what do you have,' he says, 'that you did not receive?' (I Cor.4:7) ...Even in your good deeds be lowly; for hear what Christ says, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' (Matt.5:3), and He places this in first order ...How is it possible to forbear, if a man is passionate or censorious? ...If you, he would say, are not forbearing to your neighbour, how shall God be forbearing to you? ...Wherever there is love all things are to be borne ...

THERE IS ONE BODY AND ONE SPIRIT

The love which Paul requires of us is no common love, but that which cements us together, and makes us cleave inseparably to one another, and effects as great and as perfect a union as though it were between limb and limb. For this is that love which produces great and glorious fruits. Hence he says, there is 'one body;' one, both by sympathy, and by not opposing the good of others, and by sharing their joy, having expressed all at once by this figure. He then beautifully adds, 'and one Spirit,' showing that from the one body there will be one Spirit ...God has called you all on the same terms. He has bestowed nothing upon one more than upon another. To all He has freely given immortality, to all eternal life, to all immortal glory, to all brotherhood, to all inheritance. He is the common Head of all; 'He has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ' (Eph. 2:6). You then, who in the spiritual world have such great equality of privileges, how is it that you are high-minded?

St. John Chrysostom. Homilies IX, X, XI on Ephesians IV. B#57, pp. 94, 96, 97, 99, 102.

GOSPEL LUKE 18: 18-27

Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.' "And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

WHY DO YOU CALL ME GOOD?

Now he, who is here called a Ruler, and who fancied himself to be learned in the law, and supposed that he had been accurately taught therein, imagined that he could convict Christ of dishonoring the commandment spoken by the most wise Moses, and of introducing laws of His own. For it was the object of the Jews to prove that Christ opposed and resisted the former commandments, to establish, as I said, new laws, of His own authority, in opposition to those previously existing, so that their wicked conduct towards Him might have a specious pretext. He draws near, therefore, and makes pretense of speaking kindly; for he calls Him Teacher, and styles Him Good, and professes himself desirous of being a disciple...

And what does the Omniscient reply, 'Who, as it is written, takes the wise in their craftiness?' (Job 5:13) Why do you call Me good? None is good but one, God. You see how He proved at once that he was neither wise nor learned, though the ruler of a synagogue of the Jews. For if, He I says, you did not believe that I am God, and the clothing of the flesh has led you astray, why did you apply to Me epithets suitable to the supreme nature alone, while still you suppose Me to be a mere man like yourself, and not superior to the limits of human nature? In the nature that transcends all, only in God, is found the attribute of being by nature, and un-changeable good; but the angels, and we on earth, are good by resembling Him, or rather by participation in Him.

But those whose minds are perverted by sharing in the wickedness of Arius will probably not assent to the correctness of this explanation. For, they make the Son inferior to the supremacy and glory of God the Father... For they assert, as though they had obtained a reason for their blasphemy from the passage now before us, Behold, He has clearly and expressly denied that He is good, and set it apart as something appropriate only to God the Father; but verily, had He been equal to Him in substance, and sprung from Him by nature, how would He not also be good, being God?' Let this, then, be our reply to our opponents. Since all correct and exact reasoning acknowledges a son to be consubstantial with the father, how is He not good, as being God? For He cannot but be God, if He is consubstantial with Him Who is by nature God ...We have the Savior's own testimony, Who says this: A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruits' (Matt. 7:18). How from a good root has there shot forth an evil sprout? Or how from a sweet fountain can there flow a bitter river? Was there ever a time when there was no Father, seeing that He is the Father eternally? ...We conclude, therefore, that the fruit of the good God is the good Son.

St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St Luke, Homily 122. B#42, pp. 486-488.

Saints of the week

2 / 15 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Prophet Habakkuk - The son of Simeon, of the tribe of Simeon, he prophesied six hundred years before Christ, in the time of King Manasseh, and foretold the devastation of Jerusalem. When Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem, Habakkuk went into the land of the Ishmaelites, whence he returned to Jerusalem and made his living working on the land. One day, when he was carrying lunch to the workers in the fields, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him and said: 'Go, carry the meal that thou hast into Babylon, unto Daniel who is in the lion's den.' Habakkuk replied: 'Lord, I never saw Babylon, neither do I know where the den is' (Daniel 14:33 in the Greek text. It is omitted in the Hebrew Bible, and is to be found in the Apocrypha under Bel and the Dragon). Then the angel seized him by the hair and carried him straight to Babylon, over an immense distance, to the lion's den where Daniel had been cast by King Cyrus because he would not worship idols. 'O Daniel, Daniel,' cried Habakkuk, 'take the dinner which God hath sent thee!' And Daniel took it and ate. Then the angel of God again took hold of Habakkuk and carried him back to his field in Judea. Habakkuk preached and prophesied about the liberation of Jerusalem and the coming of Christ. He entered into rest in great old age and was buried at Keilah. His relics were discovered during the reign of Theodosius the Great.

The Holy Martyr Myrope - Myrope was born in Ephesus of Christian parents. After the death of her father, she moved with her mother to the island of Chios, where she suffered for Christ. The suffering of this holy virgin took place soon after the suffering and death of the glorious Martyr Isidore the soldier (May 14). When the torturers had beheaded Isidore, the courageous Myrope secretly took his body, censed it, and honorably buried it in a special place. The villainous prince Numerian heard that the martyr's body had been stolen and wanted to kill the guards. Learning that innocent men would suffer for her good deed, blessed Myrope appeared before the authorities and acknowledged that she had taken the martyr's body and buried it. By order of the prince, the entire body of Christ's holy virgin was severely whipped, and finally she was cast into prison covered with wounds. But the Lord did not leave His martyr comfortless. At midnight a heavenly light illumined the prison, and many angels, with St. Isidore in their midst, appeared to her. ``Peace be to you, Myrope," St. Isidore said to her. ``Your prayer has reached God, and soon you will be with us and will receive the wreath prepared for you." The holy martyr rejoiced and at that moment surrendered her soul to her God. A sweet fragrance issued from her body, filling the entire prison. One of the guards, seeing all of this and sensing the fragrance, believed in Christ, was baptized, and soon received a martyr's death. St. Myrope took up her habitation in eternity in the year 251.

Also commemorated on this day: Venerable John, Heraclemon, Andrew, and Theophilus of Egypt (4th C); Venerable Jesse (Ise), bishop of Tsilkani (6th C); Venerable Solomon, archbishop of Ephesus (1060); Venerable Cyril of Philea (1110); Venerable Athanasius, hermit of the Kiev Caves (1116); Venerable Athanasius, another hermit of the Kiev Caves (1264); St. Stephen-Urosh, king of Serbia (1371); New Hieromartyr Matthew Alexandrov, priest (1921); New Hieromartyr Demetrius Blagoveshtensky, priest, and Venerable Vera (Grafovoy), confessor (1932); New Hieromartyrs Alexis, archbishop of Veliky Ustyug, Vladimir Proferansov, John Derzhavin, John Dniprovsky, Constantine Nekrasov, Nicholas Vinogradsky, Nicholas Zabolotsky, Nicholas Safonov, Paul Pontatsky, Sergius Felitsin, Theodore Alexinsky, priests, Monk-martyrs Danact (Kalashnikov), Cosmas (Magda), Nun-martyrs Antonina Stepanova, Margarita (Zakachurina), Mary (Zhuravlevoy), Tamara (Provorkino), Febronia (Ishina), Martyrs Mary Dmitrievska, and Matrona Konyukhova (†1937); Nun-martyr Mary (Zeitlin) (1938); Martyr Boris Uspensky (1942).

3 / 16 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Prophet Zephaniah (Sophonias) - Born on the mountain of Savarat and of the tribe of Simeon, he lived and prophesied in the seventh century before Christ, in the time of Josiah the pious King of Judah, and was a contemporary of the Prophet Jeremiah. With his great humility, pure mind and constant striving after God, he was found worthy of seeing into the future. He foretold the day of the wrath of God and the punishment of Gaza, Ashkalon, Ashdod, Ekron, Nineveh, Jerusalem and Egypt. He looked upon Jerusalem as 'a filthy, polluted and oppressing city ... her princes within her are like roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves ... her prophets are light and treacherous persons; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the Law (Zeph. 3:1-4). Foreseeing the coming of the Messiah, he cried out with rapture: 'Sing, O daughter of Sion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all thy heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ' (3:14). This seer of secrets and mysteries went to his rest in the place where he was born, there to await the general Resurrection and his reward from God.

St. John the Silent - John was a native of Nicopolis in Armenia and was the son of Enkratius and Euphemia. He was tonsured a monk at the age of eighteen and lived a strict and resolute life of asceticism, cleansing his heart by his many tears, fasting and prayer. After ten years, he was appointed bishop of Colonia. By his example, he attracted his brother Pergamius and his uncle Theodore-both distinguished men at the imperial courts of Emperors Zeno and Justinian-to a God-pleasing life. Seeing the malice and intrigues of this world and his inability to put matters right, he abandoned his episcopal

throne. He disguised himself as a simple monk and went to the Monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified near Jerusalem. There he remained unknown for many years, conscientiously and capably completing every task that the abbot ordered him to do. For this, St. Sava recommended to Patriarch Elias that he ordain him a presbyter. When the patriarch wanted to ordain John, he confessed that he already possessed the rank of bishop. Then St. John closed himself in a cell and spent years and years in silence and prayer. Afterward he spent nine years in the wilderness feeding himself only on wild vegetables, and then he returned to the monastery. He turned the faithful away from the heresy of Origen and contributed greatly to the condemnation and elimination of this heresy. He clearly discerned the spiritual world and healed people from sickness. Having conquered himself, he easily conquered demons. Great in humility, might and divine wisdom, this servant of God entered peacefully into rest in the year 558 at the age of 104.

St. Lucius -in the days of Good King Lucius came a revival. Llewrug Mawr, Llewrug the Great (grandson of Saint Cyllinus and great-grandson of Caractacus), nicknamed Lleiver Mawr or the great luminary (hence his latinised name of Lux or Lucius), was king in Britain in the middle and towards the end of the 2nd century. He increased the Light that the first missionaries, the disciples of Christ, had brought, by sending emissaries to Eleutherius, Bishop of Rome, requesting him to send missionaries to Britain. The Welsh Triads tell us that Eleutherius, in response, sent Dyfan and Fagan, Medwy and Elfan, all of them British names, in AD 167. These missionaries journeyed through Britain and came to Glastonbury. There, God leading them (wrote William of Malmesbury), they found an old church built, as 'twas said, by the hands of Christ's disciples, and prepared by God Himself for the salvation of souls, which Church the Heavenly Builder Himself showed to be consecrated by many miraculous deeds, and many Mysteries of healing.... And they afterwards pondered the Heavenly message that the Lord had specially chosen this spot before all the rest of Britain as the place where His Mother's name might be invoked. They also found the whole story in ancient writings, how the Holy Apostles, having been scattered throughout the world, St. Philip coming into France with a host of disciples sent twelve of them into Britain to preach, and that there, taught by revelation they constructed the said chapel which the Son of God afterwards dedicated to the honour of His Mother; and, that to these same twelve, three kings, pagan though they were, gave twelve portions of land for their sustenance. Moreover, they found a written record of their doings, and on that account they loved this spot above all others, and they also, in memory of the first twelve, chose twelve of their own, and made them live on the island with the approval of King Lucius. These twelve thereafter abode there in divers spots as anchorites - in the same spots, indeed, which the first twelve inhabited (traditionally in huts round the wonderful Chalice Well at the foot of St. Michael's Tor). Yet they used to meet together continuously in the Old Church in order to celebrate Divine worship more devoutly; just as the three pagan kings had long ago granted the said island with its surroundings to the twelve former disciples of Christ, so the said Phagan and Deruvian (Dyfan) obtained it from King Lucius for these their twelve companions and for others to follow thereafter. And thus, many succeeding these, but always twelve in number, abode in the said island during many years up to the coming of St. Patrick, the apostle of the Irish.

St. Birinus, (600-50) - Ordained in Rome. Bishop in Genoa, Italy. Sent by Pope Honorius I as a missionary to Britain in 634. Preached with the pagan West Saxons where he had great success, converting King Cynegils and many of his subjects. Bishop of Dorchester, England. Founded many churches in the region. Known for a great devotion to the Eucharist.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Cassian of Tangier (298); Venerable Theodulus of Constantinople (440); Hieromartyr Theodore, archbishop of Alexandria (606); Venerable Theodoulos of Cyprus (755); Venerable Sola of Fulda (790); Venerable Sabbas of Storozhev in Zvenigorod (1406) [Gal. 5:22-6:2 (§213); Matt. 4:25-5:12 (§10)]; Hieromartyr Gabriel, bishop of Ganos (1659); Martyr Angelus of Chios (1813); New Hieromartyr Andrew Kosovsky, priest (1920); New Nun-martyr Parasceva of Toplovsky (1928); New Hieromartyr Nicholas Yershov, priest (1937); Righteous George Sedov, confessor (1960); Icon of the Mother of God 'Pakhromskaya.

4 / 17 December — Nativity Fast -The Holy and Great Martyr Barbara - This famous follower of Christ was betrothed to Him from her early years. Her father, Dioscorus, was a pagan in the city of Heliopolis in Egypt, and was famed for his wealth and standing. Dioscorus shut up his only daughter, who was both intelligent and beautiful, in a high tower, surrounded her with all possible comforts, gave her a host of attendants, set up idols for worship and built her a bathroom with two windows. As she gazed through the windows of the tower upon the earth below and the starry sky above, Barbara's mind was opened by the grace of God, and she came to know Him as the one, true God and Creator, although she had no human teacher to bring her to the knowledge of Him. Once, when her father was away from the city, she came out of the tower and, by God's providence, met some Christians who told her about the true Christian faith. Barbara's heart was set on fire with love for Christ. She had a third window cut in the bathroom as a symbol of the Holy Trinity, and traced a Cross with her finger on one wall of it, which etched itself deep in the stone as if cut by a chisel. A spring of water gushed forth from the bathroom floor from her footprint, and it later gave healing from sickness to many. When Dioscorus found out about his daughter's faith, he beat her harshly and drove her from the tower, chasing after her to kill her,

but a cliff opened and hid Barbara from her irate father. When she appeared again, Dioscorus took her to Marcian, the governor of the city, who handed her over for torture. The innocent Barbara was stripped and beaten until her entire body was covered in bloody wounds, but the Lord Himself appeared to her in the prison with many angels, and healed her. A certain woman, Juliana, beheld this and conceived a desire for martyrdom herself. Both of them were fearfully tortured and taken around the city to be mocked, then their breasts were cut off and much blood flowed from them. They were finally led out to the place of execution, and Juliana was slain by soldiers while Barbara was killed by her own father. On the same day, lightning struck Dioscorus's house, killing both him and Marcian. St Barbara suffered in 306, and her wonderworking relics are preserved in Kiev. Greatly glorified in the Kingdom of Christ, she has appeared many times down to our own days, sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of the most holy Mother of God.

St John Damascene - he was first a minister of Caliph Abdul-Malek, and then became a monk in the monastery of St Sava the Sanctified. For his ardent advocacy of the veneration of icons while still a courtier during the reign of the iconoclast Emperor Leo the Isaurian, he was slandered by the Emperor to the Caliph, who had his right hand cut off. John fell down in prayer before the icon of the most holy Mother of God, and his hand was re-joined to his arm and miraculously healed. When he beheld this wonder, the Caliph repented, but John no longer desired to remain at court as a nobleman, but to withdraw to a monastery. There, he was from the beginning a model of humility and obedience, and of all the works of asceticism prescribed for monks. He wrote the hymns for the Parting of the Soul from the Body, put together the Octoechos, the Irmologion, the Menologion and the Easter Canon, and wrote many theological works of an inspired profundity. A great monk, hymnographer and theologian, and a great warrior for the truth of Christ, Damascene is counted among the great Fathers of the Church. He entered peacefully into rest in about 749, being seventy-five years old.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Heraclius, patriarch of Alexandria (246); Martyr Juliana (c.306); Venerable John, bishop of Polybotum (716); St. Gennadius, archbishop of Novgorod (1504); Hieromartyr Seraphim, bishop of Phanarion (1601); New Hieromartyrs Alexander Posokhin, Alexis Saburov, John Pyankov, Nicholas Yakhontov, priests, Basil Kashin, deacon, and with them 10 Martyrs (1918); New Hieromartyr Demetrius Nevedomsky, priest, Nun-martyr Anastasia (Titov), Martyrs Princess Kyra Obolensky, and Catherine Arskoy (1937)

5 / 18 December — Nativity Fast - Fish, Wine & Oil allowed — Our Holy Father Sabbas the Sanctified - The unknown village of Mutalaska, in the province of Cappadocia, became famous through this great light of the Orthodox Church, for St Sabbas was born there. He left the home of his parents, John and Sophia, at the age of eight and became a monk in a nearby monastery called 'Flavian's' . After ten years, he moved to the monasteries of Palestine, staying longest in the monastery of St Euthymius the Great (Jan. 20th) and Theoctistus. Euthymius, who had the gift of discernment, foretold that he would be a famous monk and leader of monks, and that he would found a monastery that would be greater than any other of that day. After St Euthymius's death, Sabbas went into the desert, where he lived for five years as a hermit in a cave which an angel of God showed him. After that, when he had become a perfected monk, he began by divine providence to gather round him many desirous of the spiritual life. They very quickly grew in number, so that Sabbas had to build both a church and many cells. Some Armenians also came to him, and he set aside a cave for them, and they celebrated the services there in their own language. When his father died, his aged mother Sophia came to him and he made her a nun and gave her a cell away from the monastery, where she lived in asceticism till her death. This holy father endured many attacks from those close to him, from heretics and from demons. But he overcame them all in these ways: those close to him he won over by his goodness and forbearance, the heretics by an unshakeable confession of the Orthodox faith, and the demons with the sign of the Cross and the invocation of God's aid. He had a particularly severe battle with the demons on the mountain of Castellium, where he founded the second of his seven monasteries. He and his neighbour, Theodosius the Great, are considered to be the greatest lights and pillars of Orthodoxy in the East. Kings and Patriarchs were brought to the right Faith by them, and these holy and wonderful men, strong in the power of God, served each and every man as an example of humility. St Sabbas entered into rest in 532 at the age of ninety-four, after a life of great labour and great reward.

St.

Justinian, hermit of Wales (560) - Breton noble. Well educated. Priest. Left his country to become a travelling evangelist. Settled on the Isle of Ramsey near southern Wales, living with a pious layman named on Honorius; he moved in on the condition that all the women of the household were sent away. Hermit on the island. Visited Saint David of Wales, who was so impressed with the man's holiness that he gave him hermitages on the mainland and a nearby island. Justinian is listed on very ancient Welsh calendars of saints and martyrs, and the church at Llanstinan is dedicated to him. Once some sailors landed at the island hermitage. They said that Saint David was very ill, and that they had been sent to bring Justinian to the mainland. En route, Justinian discerned that the sailors were actually devils in disguise. The saint recited Psalm 79; the devils changed to blackbirds and flew, leaving the boat to sail itself safely to shore where Justinian found David in excellent health. Justinian died when he advised his servants that they should apply themselves to their jobs. Goaded by devils, the three of them became enraged, assaulted Justinian, and beheaded him. At the place where the body fell, a spring of healing

water emerged from the ground. The killers were struck with leprosy, and lived out their days in the caves and rocks near the hermitage. Justinian had already specified a location for his burial; a church was built over the tomb, and became known as a scene of miracles. Saint David later moved the body to his own church.

St. Cawrdaf (Cowdrey in English): Cawrdaf is recorded as one of the sons of King Caradog Freichfras. Though the kingdom of the latter appears of have been Gwent & Eryng, tradition ascribes that he also held sway over areas to the north, between the Wye and the Severn. When his kingdom was divided, upon his death, this region apparently fell to Cawrdaf. It was called Fferreg, though, in later centuries, it was known by the descriptive name of Rhwng Gwy ag Hafren. He was apparently a wise monarch, one of the 'Three Chief Officers' of Britain and counsellor of King Arthur. Nothing is recorded of his reign, but Cawrdaf was a founder of churches, sometimes described as a saint with his feast day on 5th December. His endowments, at Llangowdra (Ceredigion), Abererch (Llyn) and Llangoed (Mon), were, however, not in Fferreg; and it is possible that, in old age, he abdicated in favour of his son, Caw, in order to follow his religious calling. He was supposedly a disciple of St. Illtud. Cawrdaf had several saintly children and though it is unknown how long his descendants remained Kings of Fferreg, they continued for many centuries as two of the leading patriarchal families of Brycheiniog.

Tropar of St. Cawrdaf, Tone 8: O Father Cawrdaf, spurning the transitory glory of temporal power,/ thou didst flee from the world to serve God in monastic seclusion./ Wherefore, O righteous one, pray that we, following thy example by serving God rather than self,/ may be found worthy of eternal salvation.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Anastasius of Aquileia (3rd C); Great martyr Crispina of Thagora (304); Venerable Karion and Zachariah of Egypt (4th C); St. Nicetius, bishop of Trier (566); Venerable Cosmas of Vatopedi (1276); Monk-martyrs of Karyes, Mt. Athos, martyred by the Latins (1283); Venerable Nectarius of Bulgaria (1500) and his teacher, Philotheus of Mt. Athos (15 C); St. Gurias, archbishop of Kazan (1563); New Hieromartyr Elias Chetverukhin, priest, of Moscow (1932); New Monk-martyr Gennadius (Letyuk) (1941); Righteous Sergius Pravdolyubov, confessor, priest (1950).

6 / 19 December — Nativity Fast — St Nicolas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia
-- This saint, famed throughout the entire world today, was the only son of his eminent and wealthy parents, Theophanes and Nona, citizens of Patara in Lycia. They dedicated to God the only son He gave them. St Nicolas was instructed in the spiritual life by his uncle Nicolas, Bishop of Patara, and became a monk at 'New Sion', a monastery founded by his uncle. On the death of his parents, Nicolas distributed all the property he inherited to the poor and kept nothing back for himself. As a priest in Patara, he was known for his charitable works, fulfilling the Lord's words: 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth' (Matt. 6:3). When he embraced a life of solitude and silence, thinking to live in that way until his death, a voice from on high came to him: 'Nicolas, set about your work among the people if you desire to receive a crown from Me.' Immediately after that, by God's wondrous providence, he was chosen as archbishop of the city of Myra in Lycia. Merciful, wise and fearless, Nicolas was a true shepherd to his flock. He was cast into prison during the persecutions of Diocletian and Maximian, but even there continued to instruct the people in the Law of God. He was present at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325, and, in his zeal, struck Arius with his hand. For this act, he was removed from the Council and from his episcopal duties, until some of the chief hierarchs had a vision of our Lord Christ and His most holy Mother showing their sympathy with Nicolas. This wonderful saint was a defender of the truth of God, and was ever a spirited champion of justice among the people. On two occasions, he saved three men from undeserved sentences of death. Merciful, trustworthy and loving right, he walked among the people like an angel of God. People considered him a saint even during his lifetime, and invoked his aid when in torment or distress. He would appear both in dreams and in reality to those who called upon him for help, responding speedily to them, whether close at hand or far away. His face would shine with light as Moses' did aforetime, and his mere presence among people would bring solace, peace and goodwill. In old age, he sickened of a slight illness, and went to his rest in the Lord after a life full of labour and fruitful toil. He now enjoys eternal happiness in the Kingdom of heaven, continuing to help the faithful on earth by his miracles, and to spread the glory of God. He entered into rest on December 6th, 343. St Nicolas, Bishop of Patara - The uncle of the great St Nicolas, he set his nephew on the spiritual path and ordained him priest; The Holy Martyr Nicolas of Karamanos; St Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch; On icons of St. Nicolas, our Lord and Saviour will often be seen on one side with the Gospels in his hand, and the most holy Mother of God on the other with an episcopal stole in hers. This has a twofold historical significance: it denotes firstly, Nicolas's calling to episcopal office, and secondly his vindication and reinstatement following the punishment for his clash with Arius. That very night, several of the fathers had the selfsame vision: how the Lord stood on one side of Nicolas with the Gospels and the Mother of God on the other with a pallium, offering to the saint those marks of rank that had been stripped from him. Seeing this, the fathers were amazed, and quickly returned to Nicolas that which they had taken from him. They began from that time to respect him as a great man, and to interpret his action against Arius not as some senseless rage but as the expression of great zeal for God's truth. Name Day Tsar Nicholas II (1918).

Also commemorated on this day: St. Theophilus the confessor, bishop of Antioch (†c.181); St. Nicholas, bishop of Patara (4th C); St. Abramius, bishop of Cratea (557); Blessed Maxim, metropolitan of Kiev (1305); Martyr Nicholas of Karamanos (1657).

7 / 20 December — Nativity Fast — St Ambrose, Bishop of Mediolanum (Milan) - This great Father of the Orthodox Church was of eminent parentage. His father was the imperial governor of Gaul and Spain, and a pagan, while his mother was a Christian. While he was still in his cradle, a swarm of bees once settled on him, left some honey on his lips and flew off; and, while still a child, he thrust out his hand and said prophetically: 'Kiss it, for I shall be a bishop!' On the death of his father, the Emperor made him governor of Liguria, of which province Milan was the chief city. When the bishop of Milan died, there was great dissention between the Orthodox Christians and the heretical Arians about the choice of a new bishop. Ambrose went into the church to keep order, this being his responsibility. Thereupon, a child at its mother's breast cried out: 'Ambrose for bishop!' All the people took this to be the voice of God, and unanimously elected Ambrose as their bishop, although it was against his will. Ambrose was baptised, and passed through all the necessary ranks in one week, and was consecrated bishop. In this capacity, he strengthened the faith of the Orthodox, restrained heretics, adorned churches, spread the Faith among the pagans, wrote many instructive books and was an example of a true Christian and a true shepherd. He also composed the Te Deum, the great hymn of thanksgiving. This renowned hierarch, who was visited by people from distant lands for his wisdom and gracious words, was very austere in his personal life, being no stranger to toil and full of good works. He slept little, worked and prayed constantly and fasted every day except Saturday and Sunday. God therefore permitted him to witness many of His wonders, and to perform many himself. He discovered the relics of Ss Protasius, Gervasius, Nazarius and Celsus. Humble before lesser men, he was fearless before the great. He reproached the Empress Justina for heresy, cursed Maximus for tyranny and murder and forbade the Emperor Theodosius to enter a church until he had repented of his sin. He refused to meet the powerful Eugenius, the self-styled Emperor. God granted this man, who was so pleasing to Him, such grace that he could raise the dead, drive demons from men, heal the sick of every ailment and see into the future. He died peacefully at daybreak on Easter Day in the year 397.

Venerable Nilus of Stolbensk - Nilus was a farmer and was born in Novgorod. Withdrawing into the wilderness, he fed on plants. At the instruction of a voice from on high, he settled on the island of Stolbensk. Once, some robbers entered his cell in order to plunder it, and they were immediately blinded. He dug a grave for himself close to his cell and wept over it every day. Nilus entered into rest peacefully and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ in the year 1554. His miracle-working relics rest in the place where he fasted.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Athenodorus the Syrian (304); Venerable Bassa of Jerusalem (5th C); Venerable John the faster of Palestine (6th C); Venerable John the faster of the Kiev Caves (12th C); Martyr Philothea the Romanian (1218); Venerable Gregory the silent of Mt. Athos (1405); Venerable Anthony of Siya (1556); New Monk-martyrs Sergius (Galkovsky) and Andronicus (Barsukov) (1917); New Hieromartyr Antonius Popov, priest (1918); New Hieromartyrs Michael Uspensky, Sergius Goloshapov, Sergius Uspensky, priests, Nikiphor Litvin, deacon, Monk-martyrs Galaction (Urbanowicz-Novikov), Guriy (Samoilov), and Martyr Joanna Demidova (1937); New Hieromartyrs Peter Krestov and Basil Mirozhin, priests (1941); Venerable Paul the obedient; 'Seliger-Vladimir' Icon of the Mother of God.

8 / 21 December — Nativity Fast — Our Holy Father Patapius - born and brought up in the Faith and in the fear of God by pious parents in the Egyptian city of Thebes he early perceived and rejected the empty vanity of the world and went into the Egyptian desert, where he devoted himself to cleansing his heart from every worldly thought and desire for the sake of divine love. When his virtues became known among the people, they began to come to him and seek relief from their troubles. Afraid of human glory, which darkens a man's mind and separates it from God, Patapius fled from the desert to Constantinople, for this wonderful saint thought that he could more easily hide himself from men in the heart of a city than in the desert. He built himself a hut close to the Blachernae church and there, enclosed and unknown, took up again his interrupted life of asceticism. But the light cannot be hidden. A child, blind from birth, was led by divine Providence to St Patapius and begged him to offer a prayer that he might be given his sight and look upon God's creation, and praise God all the more. Patapius had pity on the suffering child and prayed to God, and the child saw. Through this miracle, Patapius's godly life became known throughout the entire capital, and people began to turn to him for healing, comfort and teaching. Patapius healed one eminent man of dropsy after blessing him with a cross and anointing him with oil. Making the sign of the Cross in the air, he freed a youth from an unclean spirit which had cruelly tormented him, and the evil spirit went out of God's creature like smoke, uttering a great cry. He made the sign of the Cross over a woman who had sores on her breasts all filled with worms, and she was healed. St Patapius worked many other miracles, all through prayer in the name of Christ and by the

power of the Cross. He entered into rest in great old age, going to the Kingdom of God in the seventh century.

The Holy Martyrs in Africa - They suffered for the truth of the Orthodox Faith at the hands of the Arian heretics during the reign of the Vandal King Gunerik or Genzerik (477-484). Two priests were burned and sixty more had their tongues cut out. In addition, three hundred laymen were beheaded. All of them suffered, but they defeated falsehood and confirmed Orthodoxy through their deaths, handing the Faith down to us pure and untarnished. The Lord crowned them with wreaths of glory in His Immortal Kingdom.

St. Budoc, bishop of Plourin - from an early age resolved to embrace the religious life, and was in due course made a monk by the Abbot of Youghal. His mother died, and on the death of the Abbot of Youghal he was elected to rule the monastery. Later, upon the death of the King of Ireland, the natives raised Budoc to the temporal and spiritual thrones making him King of Ireland and Bishop of Armagh. After two years he wished to retire from these honours, but the people were "wild with despair" at the tidings, and surrounded the palace lest he should escape. One night, while praying in his metropolitan church, an angel appeared to him, bidding him betake himself to Brittany. Going down to the seashore, it was indicated to him that he must make the voyage in a stone trough. On entering this it began to move, and he was borne across to Brittany, landing at Porspoder, in the diocese of Léon. The people of that district drew the stone coffer out of the water, and built a hermitage and a chapel for the Saint's convenience. Budoc dwelt for one year at Porspoder, but, "disliking the roar of the waves," he had his stone trough mounted on a cart, and yoking two oxen to it he set forth, resolved to follow them wherever they might go and establish himself at whatever place they might halt. The cart broke down at Plourin, and there Budoc settled for a short time; but trouble with disorderly nobles forced him to depart, and this time he went to Dol, where he was well received by St Malglorious, then its bishop, who soon after resigned his see to Budoc. The Saint ruled at Dol for twenty years, and died early in the seventh century.

Also commemorated on this day: Apostles of the Seventy: Sosthenes, Apollos, Cephas, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, Caesar, and Onesiphorus (1st C); Hieromartyr Valerian, bishop of Abbenza (457); Martyr Victoria of Kulusa (c.477); Martyr Anthusa at Rome (5th C); Venerable Cyril of Chelmogorsk (1368); New Hieromartyr Sergius Orlov, priest (1937).

‡ Daily Scripture Readings ‡

Monday - 1 Timothy 1:1-7; Luke 20:27-44

Tuesday - Matthew 25:1-13 (Matins Gospel); 1 Timothy 1:8-14; Luke 21:12-19; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2:8-15; Luke 21:5-7, 10-11, 20-24; Galatians 3:23-29 (Great-martyr Barbara); Mark 5:24-34 (Great-martyr Barbara)

Wednesday - Luke 6:17-23 (Matins Gospel); Galatians 5:22-6:2 (Epistle, Saint); Matthew 11:27-30 (Gospel, Saint)

Thursday - John 10:9-16 (Matins Gospel); Hebrews 13:17-21 (St. Nicholas); Luke 6:17-23 (St. Nicholas)

Friday - 1 Timothy 4:4-8, 16; Luke 21:37-22:8; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Luke 21:28-33

Saturday - Galatians 3:8-12; Luke 13:18-29

HYMN OF PRAISE
SAINT NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER, ARCHBISHOP OF MYRA IN LYCIA

Holy Father Nicholas,
The four corners of the world glorify you
As a knight of the powerful Faith,
The Faith of God, the true Faith.
From the cradle he was devoted to God,
From the cradle until the end;
And God glorified him-
His faithful Nicholas.
Famous was he throughout his life,
And even more renowned after death;
Mighty on earth was he,
And even more mighty is he in heaven.
Glowing spirit, pure heart,
He was a temple of the Living God;
For this the people glorify him
As a wondrous saint.
Nicholas, rich in glory,
Loves those who honor him as their ``Krsna Slava";
Before the throne of the eternal God,
He prays for their good.
O Nicholas, bless us,
Bless your people
Who, before God and before you,
Humbly stand in prayer.

REFLECTION

In icons of St. Nicholas, the Lord Savior is usually depicted on one side with a Gospel in His hands, and the Most-holy Virgin Theotokos is depicted on the other side with an episcopal omophorion in her hands. This has a twofold historical significance: first, it signifies the calling of Nicholas to the hierarchical office, and second, it signifies his exoneration from the condemnation that followed his confrontation with Arius. St. Methodius, Patriarch of Constantinople, writes: ``One night St. Nicholas saw our Savior in glory, standing by him and extending to him the Gospel, adorned with gold and pearls. On his other side, he saw the Theotokos, who was placing the episcopal pallium on his shoulders." Shortly after this vision, John the Archbishop of Myra died and St. Nicholas was appointed archbishop of that city. That was the first incident. The second incident occurred at the time of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea. Unable to stop Arius through reason from espousing the irrational blasphemy against the Son of God and His Most-holy Mother, St. Nicholas struck Arius on the face with his hand. The Holy Fathers at the Council, protesting such an action, banned Nicholas from the Council and deprived him of all emblems of the episcopal rank. That same night, several of the Holy Fathers saw an identical vision: how the Lord Savior and the Most-holy Theotokos were standing around St. Nicholas-on one side the Lord Savior with the Gospel, and on the other side the Most-holy Theotokos with a pallium, presenting the saint with the episcopal emblems that had been removed from him. Seeing this, the fathers were awestruck and quickly returned to Nicholas that which had been removed. They began to respect him as a great chosen one of God, and they interpreted his actions against Arius not as an act of unreasonable anger, but rather an expression of great zeal for God's truth.