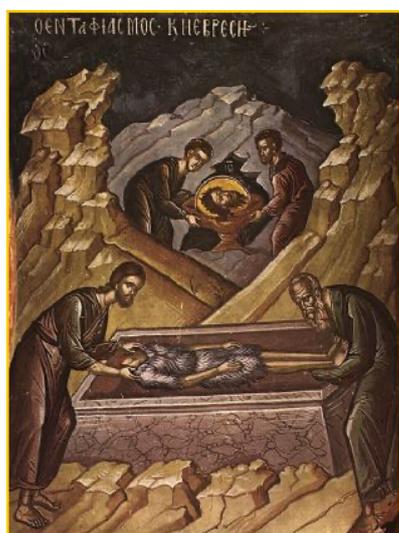


# The Feast of the First and Second Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist / The First Sunday of Great Lent / The Sunday of Orthodoxy 24 February / 8 March



**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 5:** Let us, the faithful; praise and worship the Word, / Co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, / born for our salvation from the Virgin; / for He willed to be lifted up on the cross in the flesh, / to endure death, / and to raise the dead / by His glorious Resurrection!

**The First Sunday of Great Lent, Troparion, Tone II :** We worship Thy immaculate Image, O Good One, and ask forgiveness of our sins, O Christ God; for of Thy own will Thou wast pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh, to deliver from slavery to the enemy those whom Thou hadst created. Therefore we thankfully cry to Thee: Thou hast filled all things with joy, O our Saviour, by coming to save the world.



**Troparion of the Forerunner tone 4:** The head of the Forerunner has risen from the earth/ and sends forth healing rays of incorruption to all the faithful./ In heaven it is mustering a host of Angels,/ and on earth it is, assembling mankind/ to ascribe glory to our God.

**Resurrection Kondak, Tone 5:** Thou didst descend into hell, O my Saviour, / shattering its gates as Almighty, / resurrecting the dead as Creator, / and destroying the sting of death. / Thou hadst delivered Adam from the curse, O Lover of Man, / and we cry to Thee, O Lord, save us.

**Kondak First Sunday of Great Lent, Tone 8:** The Uncircumscribable Word of the Father was circumscribed when he took flesh of thee, O Theotokos; and when He had restored the defiled image to its ancient state, He suffused it with divine beauty. As for us, confessing our salvation, we record it in deed and word.

**Kontakion of the Forerunner tone 2:** O Prophet of God and Forerunner of Grace,/ having obtained thy head from the earth as a most sacred rose,/ we are always receiving healings;/ for still as of old in the world thou preachest repentance.

**Vespers:** Isa . 40:1-3, 41:17-18, 45:8, 48:20-21, 54:1; Malachi 3:1-3, 5-7, 12, 17-18, 4:4-6; Wisd . 4:7, 16-17, 19-20, 5:1-7

## Matins Gospel V

**Epistle: St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews 11: 24-26, 32 - 12:2**

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. ... 32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

**Hebrews 12:1** Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

## WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

At all times, indeed, but specially then, when I reflect upon the achievements of the saints, it comes over me to feel despondency concerning my own condition, because we have not even in dreams experienced the things among which those men spent their whole lives, not paying the penalty of sins, but always doing rightly and yet always afflicted .. And having spoken of what befell the apostles (Cf. I Cor. 4:11, II Cor. 11:23-28, 12:7, Phil. 1:12, II Tim. 3:11) ...Elijah suffered the same thing with them (II Kings 1:8) and the Son of Man (Matt. 8:20) ...For God 'has provided some better thing for us.' In order that they might not seem to have the advantage of us from being crowned before us, He appointed one time for crowning for all ...Do you see His tender carefulness?

*St. John Chrysostom. Homily XXVIII on Hebrews XI, 1, 2. B#58, pp. 491, 492.*

for the Forerunner II Cor. 4:6-15

### Gospel John 1: 43-51

43 At that time, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. 46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. 49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, 'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel. 50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. 51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

### THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

"This is the Apostolic faith, this is the faith of your fathers, this is the Orthodox faith, this is the faith which has consolidated Christendom"

(from the "Order of Orthodoxy")

All our feast days are directly connected with sacred events and persons glorified by God. The present feast, however, is of a different nature. This first Sunday in Lent, dear brothers and sisters, the Holy Church has designated for the celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. This feast is unlike most others in the Orthodox Church, for it grew out of the very heart of our Mother Church, out of her long struggle to defend the true faith.

The Triumph of Orthodoxy was instituted by the Holy Church as a sign that the saving dogmas, i.e., the truths of Christ's teachings, have been received by the Church from the Son of God Himself and His Holy Apostles. Not only have these teachings been preserved unchanged and in all their purity, they have also received the necessary definition and elucidation during the long drawn-out struggle against various heresies and errors.

The last such heresy, whose defeat brought about the definite triumph of Orthodox dogmas, was that of the iconoclastic controversy. The heretics believed it wrong to depict in artistic images the Invisible and Indescribable God. This false interpretation of the veneration of icons led to the expulsion of icons from churches and the destruction of sacred images.

Orthodox defenders of icon veneration have shown from the Holy Scriptures and writings of the Holy Fathers that with the coming of the Lord of Glory in the flesh to the world, the depiction of God and of the history revealing the mystery of our salvation has become not merely possible but essential. The teaching on the veneration of icons and sacred images expresses the dogmatic unity of all Christian dogmatic truths, and has culminated in the present-day celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Through the decision of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, the Holy Church has enhanced the splendid edifice of Christian dogma, whose firm walls have sheltered the spiritual life of Christians from the winds of heresy.

As understood by the Mother Church herself, the Triumph of Orthodoxy expresses the joyous unity of all Christians in the truths of the holy faith, and the plenitude of communion with Christ through His Church. "Play music and clap your hands," proclaims the feast-day stikheron, "sing aloud with joy: so wondrous and fearful are Your deeds, O Christ! And who can express, O Savior, Your might, which has united the Church through our harmony of mind and concord?" (Apostikha).

What a profound and clear idea lies at the basis of our feast day! Our harmony of mind and common belief in the truths of faith revealed to us by God have united that which has been put asunder, have healed the terrible affliction of division, and have again made whole the Body of Christ, thus ensuring the triumph of the Universal Church.

How is this holy accord and singleness of mind of Christians manifested? In the very holy of holies of the Christian faith: the firm and unwavering faith and conviction in our Lord Jesus Christ as the True and Perfect God and Perfect Man.

Once again our Holy Church is filling the hearts and minds of her children with an awareness of the triumph of ecumenical faith. Each and every heresy is a denial of either the Divine or the Human nature of the Founder of our faith, the God-Man, Jesus Christ. "True faith," says St. Athanasius the Great, "consists in believing and confessing that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the God-Man—God, consubstantial and begotten of the Father in pre-eternity, and Man, born of the substance of the Mother within time. Perfect God and Perfect Man.... This is ecumenical faith. Whosoever will not steadfastly nurture the seed of faith cannot be saved" ("An extensive homily on faith").

Christians, as members of the Church of Christ, must bear witness to the world through their life, deeds and work: "professing salvation by deed, word, and images" (Ikos of the Feastday). Immersing our minds and hearts in the teachings of the Orthodox Church, we must ask ourselves in these days of penance: is our faith firm and well-founded, is our life pleasing to God, and do we have a living communion with the Mother Church through her Sacraments, prayers and teachings?

Thus it is with good reason that the Holy Church in today's Gospel reading has given us the outline of true Christians in the persons of the Holy Apostles Philip and Nathaniel, in whose thoughts there is no cunning, whose words are straightforward, and whose lives and deeds are pure and holy. From the moment they believed in Christ our Savior, they devoted their entire lives to His service.

Thus we too, brothers and sisters, must profess our Orthodox Faith not by acceptance of Christ's teachings alone, but also by leading righteous lives before God. Preserve and embody these few truths of faith revealed to us by God, "imprinting them into your memory like a seal. They will serve you as an invincible wall against slanderers, and will provide a fortress for your soul" (St. Basil the Great, "Homily on Faith"). Thus does the Holy Orthodox Church preach to us in the days of Great Lent, in celebrating the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Amen.

*The Living Word*

A.G.B

On this day the Church commemorates the final ending of the Iconoclast controversy and the definitive restoration of the holy icons to the churches by the Empress Theodora, acting as Regent for her young son Michael III. This took place on the first Sunday in Lent, 11 March 843. There is, however, not only an historical link between the first Sunday and the restoration of the icons but also a spiritual affinity. If Orthodoxy triumphed in the epoch of the Iconoclast controversy, this was because so many of the faithful were prepared to undergo exile, torture, and even death, for the sake of the truth. The Feast of Orthodoxy is above all a celebration in honour of the martyrs and confessors who struggled and suffered for the faith: hence its appropriateness for the season of Lent, when we are striving to imitate the martyrs by means of our ascetic self-denial. The fixing of the Triumph of Orthodoxy on the first Sunday is therefore much more than the result of some chance historical conjunction.

The Triodion gives the text of a special 'Office of the Triumph of Orthodoxy', which is held at the end of Matins or, more commonly, at the end of the Divine Liturgy on this Sunday. The Office celebrates not only the restoration of the holy icons but, more generally, the victory of the true faith over all heresies and errors. A procession is made with the holy icons, and after this extracts are read from the synodical decree of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787). Then sixty anathemas are pronounced against various heretics dating from the third to the fourteenth century; 'Eternal Memory' is sung in honour of the emperors, patriarchs and fathers who defended the Orthodox faith; and 'Many Years' is proclaimed in honour of our present rulers and bishops. Unfortunately in many parts of the Orthodox Church today this impressive service has fallen into disuse; elsewhere it is performed in a greatly abbreviated form. Before the Triumph of Orthodoxy came to be celebrated on the first Sunday, there was on this day a commemoration of Moses, Aaron, Samuel, and the prophets. Traces of this more ancient observance can still be seen in the choice of Epistle reading at the Liturgy (Hebrews 11: 24-6, 32-40), and in the Alleluia verse appointed before the Gospel: 'Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His Name'.

for the Forerunner: Matt. 11:2-15

### **Saints of the Week**

**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).

**25 February / 10 March — St Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople** - His predecessor, Patriarch Paul, secretly left the patriarchal throne, retired to a monastery and received the Great Habit. This was during the reign of Irene and Constantine. By Paul's advice, Tarasius, a senator and advisor to the Emperor, was chosen as Patriarch in 784. He quickly passed through all the stages of ordination and became Patriarch. A man of great physical stature and great zeal for Orthodoxy, Tarasius accepted this undesired state in order to help in the struggle of Orthodoxy against heresy, especially that of Iconoclasm. He was responsible for the summoning of the 7th Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787, where the iconoclasts were condemned and the veneration of the holy icons was restored and confirmed. Tarasius was very compassionate to the poor and indigent, building them shelters and feeding them, but he was decisive with those in power in the defence of faith and morals. When the Emperor Constantine divorced his lawful wife, Maria, and took a kinswoman to live with him, seeking the Patriarch's blessing to remarry, Tarasius not only withheld his blessing, but first counselled and then reproached him, and finally excommunicated him. As death approached, those round him saw him answering the demons: 'I am not guilty of that sin, nor of that one', until he was incapable of speech. He then began defending himself with his arms, driving them away from him. As he breathed his last, his face shone as with the light of the sun. This truly great hierarch entered into rest in 806. He had governed the Church for 22 years and four months; Our Holy Father Paphnutius of Kephala; St. Walburga, abbess of Heidenheim.

**26 February / 11 March — Commemoration of Great Martyr Theodore the Recruit** — On this day we celebrate the most glorious miracle which was performed by the holy and glorious Great-martyr Theodore the Tyro, through the boiled wheat - according to tradition recorded in the Synaxarion the Emperor Julian the Apostate (reigned 361-3), as part of his campaign against the Christians, attempted to defile their observance of the first week of Lent by ordering all the food for sale in the market of Constantinople to be sprinkled with blood from pagan sacrifices. St. Theodore then appeared in a dream to Eudoxios, Archbishop of the city, ordering him to warn his flock against buying anything from the market, instead the Saint told him, they should boil wheat (kolyva) and eat this alone.

**St Porphyrius, Bishop of Gaza** - This great bishop and pastor was born in Salonica of wealthy parents. He spent his youth to the age of 25 in his home town, then left his parents' home and worldly life and went off into the Egyptian desert. Under the guidance of an experienced spiritual father, the young Porphyrius became a monk and remained for five years. He then paid a visit to the Holy Land in company with his friend, the monk Mark. He lived another five years in asceticism in a cave near Jerusalem. But then his legs became weak and he was no longer able to walk. But he was always able, crawling on his knees, to be present at Divine Service. One night the Lord Himself appeared to him in a vision and healed him of the weakness in his legs, and he became completely well. When he was chosen as bishop of Gaza, Porphyrius accepted this obligation with a heavy heart. He found only 280 Christians in Gaza; the rest of the inhabitants being fanatical idol-worshippers. Only by his great faith and patience did Porphyrius succeed in bringing the people of Gaza to the Christian faith. He had to travel in person to Constantinople, to the Emperor Arcadius and the Patriarch, John Chrysostom, to beg for help in the unequal struggle against the idolators. Seeking support, he received it. The temples of the idol-worshippers were closed, the idols demolished and a fine church built with thirty marble pillars. There was especial help forthcoming from the Empress Eudoxia. Porphyrius lived long enough to see the whole city brought to the Christian faith, but only after great toil, suffering and tearful prayer on his part. He entered peacefully into rest in 421. He was a wonder-worker during his lifetime and after his death. His relics are preserved in Gaza to this day; The Holy Martyr John Calpha.

**27 February / 12 March — Our Holy Father Procopius of Decapolis** - This saint came from Decapolis by the Sea of Galilee; hence his name. In youth, he gave himself to the monastic life and passed through all those prescribed labours that purify the heart and uplift the soul to God. When a persecution on the part of the wicked Emperor Leo the Isaurian broke out over icons, Procopius stood up and defended icons, showing that their veneration is not idolatry, for Christians know that to prostrate themselves before icons is not to prostrate before dead matter but before the living saints depicted on the icons. Procopius was bestially tortured, imprisoned, beaten and flogged with iron flails. When the wicked Emperor was murdered, being already a lost soul, the icons were returned to the churches and Procopius returned to his monastery, where he spent his remaining days in peace. In old age, he entered into God's Kingdom, where he beheld with joy the living angels and saints whose images were on the honoured icons on earth. He departed this life peacefully in the 9th century; Our Holy Father Thaleleus; Our Holy Father Titus of the Kiev Caves; Our Holy Father Stephen; The Holy Martyr Julian the Gout-Sufferer.

**28 February / 13 March — The Hieromartyr Proterius** - This saint was a priest in Alexandria at the time that the Patriarch there was the heretic Dioscorus, one of the founders of the Monophysite heresy which holds that in Christ there are not two natures but one. At that time, Marcian and Pulcheria were on the imperial throne. Proterius, a holy and devout man, stood up against Dioscorus, as a result of which he endured much misery. Then the 4th Ecumenical Council was summoned at Chalcedon, at which the Monophysite heresy was condemned. Dioscorus was cast down from the patriarchal throne and sent into exile, and in his place the orthodox Proterius was chosen. He governed the Church with zeal and love, a true follower of Christ. But the followers of Dioscorus did not stop creating confusion in Alexandria. In the face of such bloody chaos, Proterius left the town with the intention of going away for a time, but the Prophet Isaiah appeared to him on the road and said: 'Return to the town; I am waiting to take you.' Proterius returned and went into the church. Hearing of this, the insolent heretics rushed into the church, seized the Patriarch and stabbed him. About six of the faithful perished along with Proterius. Thus this wonderful pastor of Christ's flock received the crown of martyrdom for the truth of Orthodoxy, in 457; St Basil the Confessor; The Hieromartyr Nestor, Bishop of Magydos; Blessed Nicolas the Fool for Christ of Pskov; Our Holy Father John Cassian; Our Holy Father Barsanuphius; St. Oswald, archbishop of York (992).

**1 / 14 March — Our Holy Mother, the Martyr Eudocia** - Living in Heliopolis, a city of Phoenicia, during the reign of Trajan, she was at first a great harlot, then a penitent, a nun and finally a martyr. She gained great wealth from her harlotry. The reversal of her life was brought about, through the providence of God, by an elderly monk, Germanus, and that unintentionally. Coming to Heliopolis in the course of his work, he stayed at the house of a Christian woman whose home abutted onto Eudocia's. When at night he began, as was his monastic custom, to read the Psalter and a book on the Dreadful Judgement, Eudocia heard him and stood listening attentively to his every word until the end. Fear and dread took such hold on her that she remained awake until daybreak. As soon as it was dawn, she sent a servant to beg that monk to come to her. Germanus came, and they began a long conversation on that which the old monk had been reading the previous night, and especially on faith and salvation. The result of these discussions was that Eudocia asked the local bishop to baptise her. After her baptism, she gave all her goods to the church, to be distributed to the poor, dismissed her servants and slaves and retired to a women's monastery. She so devoted herself to the monastic life—to obedience, patience, vigils, prayer and fasting—that after thirteen months she was chosen as abbess. She lived fifty-six years in the monastery and was worthy in the eyes of God to be given the gift of raising the dead. When a persecution of Christians arose under the governor, Vincent, holy Eudocia was beheaded. Here is a wonderful example of how a vessel of uncleanness can be purified, sanctified and filled with a precious, heavenly fragrance by the grace of the Holy Spirit; Our Holy Father Agapius; The Holy Martyr Antonina;

**St. David of Wales, bishop (542 - 601)** – of Welsh royalty. Son of King Sant of South Wales and Saint Non. Grandson of Ceredig, Prince of Cardigan. Uncle of King Arthur. Priest. Studied under Saint Paulinus. Collaborated with Saint Columba, Saint Gildas, and Saint Finnigan. Missionary and founder of monasteries. Following his contribution to the synod of Brevi in Cardiganshire, he was chosen primate of the Cambrian Church. Archbishop of Caerleon on Usk; moved the see to Menevia. Presided at the Synod of Brefi which condemned the Pelagian heresy. Encouraged and founded monasteries. First to build a chancel to Saint Joseph of Arimathea's wattle church at Glastonbury. After a vision in his monastery in the Rhos Valley, he set out next day with two monks to Jerusalem to aid the Patriarch. While there his preaching converted anti-Christians. It is said that once while he was preaching, a dove descended to his shoulder to show he had the blessings of the Spirit, and that the earth rose to lift him high above the people so that he could be heard by them all. Born at Menevia (now Saint David's), Wales. Died 601 at Mynyw, Wales. Name means beloved one.

## **Lenten Synaxarion**

### **The Triumph of Orthodoxy Sunday**

**I rejoice when I see  
the veneration due the icons  
once so ignominiously rejected.**

On this first Sunday of Great Lent, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the Church of Christ celebrates the restoration of the holy and venerable icons by the Emperor Michael, the holy and blessed Empress Theodora and the Holy Methodius, Patriarch of Constantinople.

Through God's indulgence Leo the Isaurian, a swineherd and keeper of donkeys, inherited the scepter of the kingdom. At that time Saint Germanus was at the helm of the Church. Leo sent for him and said, "Since it seems to me that there is no difference between the holy icons and idols, command that they be removed immediately from among us. Although if they are true likenesses of the saints, let them be hung higher on the walls so that we who are wallowing in sins do not defile them by venerating them." But the Patriarch responded thus to the Emperor's abomination, "O King, we have heard of someone who once raised his hand against the holy icons. He was called Conon. Could you be this man?" The emperor said, "I was so called as a child." And since the Patriarch refused to obey the emperor, he deposed him and installed Anastasius, who sympathized with him. And so at that time began the struggle against the holy icons.

After this Leo Constantine Copronymus became heir to the kingdom as well as to the savage attacks against the holy icons.

And what can be said about the number and kind of deeds that lawless man committed except that he came to a most shameful end. His son, whose mother was a Khazar, inherited the kingdom after him, and he also came to a bad end. Irene and Constantine then ascended the throne. At the direction of the holy Patriarch Tarasius they assembled the Seventh Council, and the holy icons were once more accepted by Christ's Church. After they relinquished the kingdom, Nicephorus ascended to the throne. After him there were Stauracius and then Michael Rhangabe, who were both iconodules.

The beast-like Leo the Armenian seized the throne from Michael, and, having been misled by an impious hermit, began the second iconoclasm. And once more the Church was bereft of Her beauty. Michael Amorius succeeded him, whose son Theophilus then for the second time directed this madness against the icons. For it was this Theophilus who gave many of the Holy Fathers over to torments and tortures, seeking the truth about the holy icons and believing whatever he would. "If there be anyone in the city intent on uprising, then he will be caught not long after I am told." And after reigning for 12 years, he was stricken with an intestinal disorder so that he desired to relinquish his life. His mouth opened so wide, that his internal organs were visible.

The empress was so upset at what had happened, that she could barely sleep. And in a dream she beheld the most pure Theotokos holding the pre-eternal Child, surrounded by most luminous angels. They were striking Theophilus her husband and humiliating him. Now when her dream had passed and Theophilus had come to his senses, he cried, "Woe is me in my wretchedness, I am struck for the sake of the holy icons." And immediately the empress held an icon of the Theotokos above him and entreated her with tears. And Theophilus, so inclined, saw that one of the clergy surrounding him had an engolpion, which he grabbed and kissed. Now as soon as his lips touched the icon, and he opened wide his mouth, he returned to normal and was relieved of the adversity and affliction and fell asleep, after confessing that it is good to venerate the holy icons. Then the empress, fetching the holy and precious images from her bedchamber, convinced Theophilus to kiss them and venerate them with all his heart. A short while afterwards Theophilus departed this life. Theodora then commanded that all who were in exile and in prison be freed. John was deposed from the patriarchal throne, since he was more a sorcerer and demon worshiper than patriarch. Then Methodius, a confessor of Christ, ascended the throne, having suffered much through having been closed up in a tomb alive.

While he was there, Ioannicius the Great, who was practicing asceticism on Mount Olympus, received a divine visitation. The great faster Arsaacius came to him and said, "God has sent me to you, that we might go to the righteous Isaiah the recluse in Nicomedia and learn from him what God desires and what is fitting for His Church." Now when they came to the venerable Isaiah, he said to them, "Thus saith the Lord: Behold, the end is approaching for the enemies of My image. Go to the empress Theodora and to the Patriarch Methodius and tell them: 'Cease to do what is not holy, and offer sacrifice to Me with the angels by venerating the countenance of My image and of the Cross'." Hearing this they immediately left for Constantinople and announced what had been said to Patriarch Methodius and all God's assembled people. The assembly then went to the empress and found her agreeable in all things, since this was the pious and God-loving tradition of the Fathers. The empress straightway brought out the image of the Theotokos for all to see, and venerating it, she said, "Let all be condemned who do not venerate the images, kissing them in love, not in worship as gods, but as images for the sake of the love of their archetypes. And they rejoiced with great joy. And in response she entreated them to pray for her husband Theophilus. Seeing her faith, they obeyed reluctantly. For Patriarch Methodius among the saints assembled all the people, priests and bishops and proceeded to God's Great Church. Among the assembled were Joannicius the Great from Olympus, Arsaacius, Pancratius and the disciples of Theodore the Studite, and confessors Theophanes and Theodore Graptoi, Michael of the Holy City and Singelus and many others. And they prayed to God for Theophilus in tears all night long.

Now this took place throughout the first week of the Great Fast, with the empress Theodora herself, the women and all the people taking part. Having completed the prayers, the empress Theodora retired at dawn on Friday, and dreamed that she was at the foot of the Cross, and there were several people passing noisily by, wearing various instruments of torture. As she recognized the Emperor Theophilus among those being led with his hands bound behind his back, she followed the group and its guards. When they reached the brass gates, she saw a supernatural vision, a man sitting in front of the image of Christ and Theophilus brought before him. Reaching to touch his feet, the empress prayed for the emperor. He opened his mouth and said, "Great is thy faith, O woman. Know that because of thy tears and thy faith, as well as the prayers and petitions of My servants and My priests, I grant forgiveness to thy husband Theophilus." Then He said to the guards, "Loose him and give him to his wife." And taking him, she departed rejoicing in gladness. And immediately the dream left her.

Now Patriarch Methodius, while the prayers and petitions were being offered for him, had taken a new parchment scroll and written the names of all the heretical emperors, including Theophilus, placing it under the holy altar table. But on Friday he saw a great and terrible angel entering the temple, coming to him and saying, "Thy petition has been heard, O Bishop, and the Emperor Theophilus has received forgiveness. Trouble the Godhead about this no longer." And desiring to ascertain the truth of his vision the Patriarch descended from his place, and taking the parchment and unrolling it, he found (O, the judgments of God!) that all reference to the name of Theophilus has been erased by God.

Upon hearing this, the empress rejoiced greatly and requested the Patriarch to assemble all the people with the holy icons and crosses in the great church, so that might be adorned with the holy icons and God's new miracle could be known by all. And soon when all had gathered in the church holding candles, the empress arrived with her son. And a Litiya was

served there with the holy icons and the divine and precious wood of the Cross and with the sacred and divine Gospels. And leaving the church, calling out, "Lord, have mercy," they processed the agreed mile. Then they returned to the church, where Divine Liturgy was celebrated.

When the holy and precious icons were returned to their place, the holy men mentioned earlier and the pious Orthodox rulers were glorified, and those impious people who did not accept the honor of the holy icons were anathematized and condemned. And from that time these holy confessors appointed the annual commemoration of this solemnity, so that we might never again fall into a similar ignominy.

**O unchanging Image of the Father,  
through the prayers of Thy holy confessors,  
have mercy on us.  
Amen.**

## HOMILY

### About repentance and the forgiveness of sins

"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name" (St. Luke 24:47).

This is the final instruction of the Saviour to the holy apostles. In these words as in the shell of a walnut, is contained the gospel of reconciliation between God and men. What does God seek from men and what does God give them? He seeks repentance and He grants forgiveness of sins. He seeks little but He gives all. Let men only repent for committed sins and let men cease to sin and men will receive all from God; all; not only all that their hearts could desire rather even more, much more. In truth, to the righteous everything is promised. The righteous will be the inheritors of the Kingdom of God, they will be the sons of God, and they will be the children of light, the children of immortality, companions to the angels, brothers of Christ. The righteous will have an abundant life, an abundance of peace, an abundance of wisdom, an abundance of power and an abundance of joy. The righteous will have all, for all has been promised to them.

Let men only repent and they will receive all. Let the beggar only cleanse himself, bathe himself and clothe himself in purity before the doors of the royal court and he will be immediately ushered into the royal court and he will be met and embraced by the king and he will have all. He will live with the king, sit at the royal table; he will have all, all, all!

O my brethren, these are not only words rather this is the living and holy truth. For we know that many penitents, both female and male, received all of this, which was promised. Many have appeared from the other world and have proved the truth of these words, witnessing how they now live as royal sons and daughters. But they repented promptly; and there remains time for us to repent if we desire to be together with them as the heirs of the kingdom.

O Merciful Lord, help us that we may repent before death in order that we may live eternally.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen