



25th Sunday After Pentecost

The Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple

24 November / 4 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 of the Mother of God tone 4: Today is the prelude of God's goodwill/ and the prophecy of the salvation of men./ The Virgin appears openly in the temple of God and foretells Christ to all./ So let us cry to her with loud voices:/ Rejoice, thou who art the fulfilment of the Creator's providence.

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 of the Mother of God tone 4: The most pure Temple of the Saviour,/ the most precious bridal chamber and Virgin,/ the sacred treasury of the glory of God,/ today enters into the house of the Lord,/ bringing with her the grace that is the Divine Spirit./ And the angels of God sing of her:/ This is the heavenly tabernacle.

Vespers Ex. 40:1-5, 9-10, 16, 34-35; I Kings 7:51, 8:1, 3-7, 9-11; Ezek. 43:27-44:4

Matins Gospel IV

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.

THE GOSPEL - LUKE 12: 16-21

Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

THE RICH MAN WHO HAD A GOOD HARVEST

The Gospel for last Sunday related to us the parable about the Merciful Samaritan and finished with these words: "Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise" (Lk. 10:37). And today's Gospel- how does it end? "But God said unto him... This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (Lk. 12:20)

Here are two different ways. They both bring us to our last moment- to death. But there is no death, but rather eternal life. This means that these different paths bring us to the mysterious passage, to the meeting with eternity. All of us have to meet this mysterious something

And this meeting will prove to be the most important moment of our entire life on earth, basically what we have lived for. There aren't even words in our language to express it; but today's Gospel and also last Sunday's Gospel give us some indications of this moment, this meeting. At the end of one way will thunder the terrible word, "Fool!" (Lk. 12: 20). At the end of the other way, the Gospel does not even give us the word which we will hear, but says only: "Go, and do thou likewise!"

This means, only do the same, act in the same way! And you will receive what no words can express. What determines these two paths? The entire attitude of our life. And this attitude is expressed in our every step, in every action, in every breath. And how strange! Attitude seems to be something unimportant to people, something incidental. But it is not so in God's eyes. This attitude is just what defines that great mystery which you and I will meet then, at the moment of departure; and that which will determine our lot for ever.

The Merciful Samaritan lived in love for God and neighbour. And every human being was his neighbour. He was as if living in one great family of the Heavenly Father. For him everyone was a brother or sister, and he was a brother to everyone. And the one who fell among robbers was dear to him - he could not pass him by. He stopped, although he too was probably hurrying on some business, like those who did pass by. He helped him, put him on his donkey, brought him to an inn, and entrusted his further care to the innkeeper. He paid for him, and should the innkeeper spend more, he promised to reimburse him when he returned. From all this, it is not difficult for us to determine the attitude of this his life: he loved God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength, with all his mind; and his neighbour as himself (Lk. 10:27).

What was the life attitude of the rich man in today's Gospel? As a manager he apparently was a good one; and as a man he was sensible and practical. See how he reasoned: "I will pull down my barns, and build greater: and there will I bestow all my fruits and my (Lk. 12:18). Listen to what he says: my fruits, my goods, not even mentioning God; and yet the harvest came from God! And further: I will say to my soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry (Lk. 12: 19). And where was love for neighbour? There was none. Not even a thought for his neighbour. All care was for himself alone: rest, food, drink, merriment - only for himself. Selfishness - this was the attitude of his life.

Brothers and sisters, what is the spirit of our life, what is its attitude? I think if we honestly answer this question, then we will see in ourselves some of both. We have in us mercy, but not a little egotism. And if this is so, let us think about these words: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." Indeed, this is so, this is true. "This night" means for us any night, any day or hour; but it will definitely be taken. And then, what will our soul hear? What the rich man, the egotist, heard, "Fool!" or will we see that light which appeared to the Merciful Samaritan? Yes, this will be a sentence for all eternity, and this sentence depends on the whole attitude of our life, its spirit.

Before it is too late, let us choose this wonderful attitude of the Merciful Samaritan and let us fight our selfishness as our enemy. Let us fight until death. And let us always remember, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt. 5:7)

Archbishop Andrei, The One Thing Needful

Homily on the Entrance of the Theotokos Into the Temple

St. Theophylact of Ochrid

All too often the “remembrance of the righteous, which is accompanied by encomia” is an opportunity to censure the person praising if he falls short of expressing the worth of the person being praised - because the address is not always, nor in all circumstances, equivalent to reality. But how can I speak of the Lady of all the righteous, the Mother of God, of He who is the King of Righteousness, or touch very lightly on even a part of her real worth, since it is my intention to praise her memory?

I think that if there were angelic voices who really were the heralds of certain mysteries, even they would not be able reach the sublime grace of the Mother of God. No human person could ever, in a fitting manner, hymn the praises of her whose holiness surpassed the whole of creation. Shall we then keep silent and dismiss the Mother of God without further ado, who for us is the underlying cause of a life of reason, or shall we speak with whatever strength we possess, blessing her in accordance with the prophecy, and with all of our strength we will revere all the wondrous works she has done? In doing this we will also glorify the great and indescribable things of God, proclaiming His greatness, which of course is beyond comprehension, however at the same time we also who speak of these things as well as those who listen will become sanctified.

The entry of the Mother of God into this present life is richly adorned with divine grace, to the extent that the end which was to come about would be of the same import. She was endowed with all the virtues, superior to all created things, descended from a royal race, namely the tribe of Judah, born of parents who were also of noble lineage and even nobler piety and she was, indeed, a gift to them from God. Regard, however, the purpose of God. They were without reproach all their lives but were in danger of being unable to live down the shame of being childless.

This may have been because God wished to test their faith, just as He had done with the Forefather Abraham (since it is God’s habit to settle a heavier burden on those who are strongest, that, in the end, they may be crowned more brilliantly for their faith and be a comfort to the people who will succeed them) or because He wished to show them something more arcane, more symbolic. Because, whatever way we look at the matter, their hearts were overshadowed by the recollection of their lack of children and they were greatly distressed by it. In particular, the heart of the blessed Anna was pierced as it were with a sword, being a woman. They are more sensitive beings, more susceptible to sorrow and more generous of their efforts.

So what did they do? They did not take recourse to doctors, they did not burden themselves with amulets, seek a medicine to aid in pregnancy, or go to sorcerers. All of these options are indicative of people who really are sick, whose souls have been devoured by lack of faith and have fallen into the hidden snares of the Evil One. But Joachim and Anna were not like that. They turned their attention to the Creator of the universe, to Him Who fashioned humans and multiplied them, Who brought to life the dead womb of Sarah.

They began to fast and to try to attract divine goodness through prayer, to bring to His mind all the ancient miracles which the wives of the Patriarchs enjoyed, the Shunnamite woman, Hannah, the mother of the Prophet Samuel. “They sowed and reaped in joy”. Joachim and Anna were worn down, but were transformed and acquired a daughter, who surpassed them in sanctity and divine grace, since God dwelt to a greater extent in her than in them. God simply dwelt within them, according to the saying: “I shall dwell among them and walk with them”, but He actually filled the womb of their daughter.

Did they disdain divine grace? Did they imitate timid parents and keep their daughter at home and give her a gentle upbringing, in the hope that she would look after them in their old age, as their heiress and successor? They would not have been her true parents, nor would they have been worthy to bear her at all if they had thought like that. With the assistance of the Holy Spirit, they were alienated from any corporeal behavior, they exhibited a superior attitude, they handed back to God the gift He had given them and thus demonstrated that they realized that the blessing that had befallen them was in His gift and that they were returning it to Him. In the Temple, they presented the Lord with an offering who lived and moved and brought added beauty. The locus of the temple was chosen as the dwelling-place of glory, which for David was a “consummation devoutly to be wished”, but which he was not permitted to see with his own eyes. And the little girl forgot her family house and was taken to the King Who desired her beauty.

She was taken of her own free will, with honor and glory. She left her house in a splendid procession, with everyone applauding her exit. All their relatives, friends and neighbors accompanied her parents. Fathers gladly went along with the father and mothers with the mother. Girls and maidens holding candles walked alongside the handmaid of God, like a circle of bright stars around the moon. The whole of Jerusalem learned of the event and followed this unprecedented occasion, that is, a little girl of three years old surrounded by so much glory, being honored with such a great torchlight procession. When they arrived at the Temple, the whole order of the clergy was waiting for them and welcomed them with psalms, with the High Priest himself visibly moved by this wonder- more than anyone else, in fact, since he was divinely inspired.

The parents took their daughter to him, entrusted her to him and told him the story of Anna’s sterility, the promise they made, and acknowledged that her upbringing was now more than they could manage. Because she was so beloved of God, her upbringing had to be commensurate, so that a pearl so precious and rare should not be sewn onto cheap and inferior cloth, but onto royal raiment that would be its setting and background.

At that moment, the High Priest fell into something like ecstasy; he was possessed by the Spirit of God and had the insight that the maiden was indeed the dwelling-place of divine grace and that she, rather than him, was worthy to appear constantly before God. What is apposite here is what was said in the Law, with profound significance, about the ark of the covenant: that it would reside in the Holy of Holies. Clearly this really refers to this young maiden. Without reservation and

without fear, the High Priest undertook something entirely just, which transcended the Law, or rather the human Law and the lack of clarity of the letter of the Law, because he followed the Holy Spirit and led this offering into the Holy of Holies and left her there.

This place received the maiden, a place which other people had not even seen, which the priests themselves did not enter, except the High Priest and that only once a year. Of course, it was only proper that she should not slavishly follow the precepts of the Law, because, by her purity, she had been sanctified to a greater extent than the whole of creation and had been justified from the time she was in her mother's womb. The Law had been put into place not for the righteous but for sinners. The Law was established with an eye to transgressions and was an instructor for those who needed correction. For her who surpassed the angels, it was not the Law but the grace of God which wrought perfection. God showed that He was pleased with what had happened, because He sent an angel as a servant to nourish the oblate child who would give birth to Him and rear Him, so that no characteristic of hers would seem human, but rather that in everything she would appear divine.

This is today's feast, the event we're celebrating today, the escorting of the maiden to the Temple and her introduction into the Holy of Holies. What a strange event! What an astonishing thing it is that we hear! A little girl living in the fathomless and unseen depths of God. Even if she had no more than stepped into the courtyard, this alone would have shown her closeness to the Lord, because when God said He would not allow anyone to enter into His courtyard, He meant those who had created a rift with him. Even if they had no more than seen the Holy of Holies, that in itself would have been an indication of their boldness towards God. Even if the priest entered only once a year, that would still have far surpassed the humble position of a woman.

Yet now, Mary crossed the courtyard, passed beyond the second curtain and entered the Holy of Holies, appointed to remain constantly with God as a pledge of the future commitment of Divine Grace to human nature. In this, the Mother of God reveals herself to us prophetically and opens the way for the whole of the human race to ascend to and enter the heavenly and true Holy of Holies. It seems that she has abrogated the Law of Moses, which, because it was unable to justify us and cleanse us of our sins, was, in effect, an obstacle to all of us as regards participation in any form of sanctity.

Of course, it was Christ Who, with Divine Grace, would justify all of us and, "when He had, by His death on the cross torn down the wall separating us and causing hatred", would open for all of us the gates, which had previously been shut. When He had sanctified us and cleansed us with water and the Holy Spirit, He received us into the Holy of Holies. This is why He now receives the Virgin in the Temple. And what happens today to the Mother of God is, as it were, a guarantee from God of His future reconciliation with the whole of the human race.

A little child is offered because of her uprightness and lack of guile. "For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven" and "the Lord helps the innocent and looks upon the upright with goodwill". We are speaking of woman, from whom, because of Eve, came sin, so that "where there was an excess of sin, the grace of God would be even more abundant". And, although the woman was cast out of paradise, her nature would enter into the Holy of Holies. What did the procession symbolize? The grace of God extended throughout the world, and was not restricted to any particular place, as it would have been, according to the narrow interpretation of the Law.

What is the significance of the presence of the young girls? Members of God's "new leaven", who were simulating the Virgin, alongside whom they walked. Is there any symbolism in the candles they are carrying? They are the light of life, which shines so that God may be glorified; the light of knowledge, which is lit and held by strong hands, not that which seems to be held by exhausted hands from which all strength has fled, as David says: "and even the light of my eyes has abandoned me". This is why the Holy Spirit will avoid deceit and will not dwell in a body charged with many sins.

Are you celibate? Guard your celibacy, which guides you and elevates you, so that "your foot shall not slip nor shall your light be extinguished". Nor "will death come upon you, entering your house by the window". Nor will you desecrate the sanctity of incorruptibility, which acknowledges no recall. For who shall reclaim their celibacy, even if they fast away their flesh and even if they refrain from sinful thoughts.

Are you bound by the ties of marriage? Make sure you do not blame marriage for any estrangement between you and God. Do not make stupid excuses. Joachim and Anna were married, but they were still close to God. And the strangest thing of all is that, even when they had a child, they still held firm to the same outlook. They offered their daughter to God, and, in doing so, became the forebears of God, as a reparation. Take note of this and act properly within your marriage: "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's". Love your spouse as if he or she were your own flesh: "no-one has ever hated their own flesh". And do not cast your eyes outside your own house. "Drink from your own well", because the wells of others are very narrow and, according to the Law, "bring sorrow to the flesh". "Bring your children up in a manner and with advice which are inspired by the Lord.

And so, may we always celebrate this feast, may be worthy of coming into the perfect Entry, into the Holy of Holies: celibate souls, cleansed of any evil, with our souls holding bright lights burning the oil of charity. May we enter "where Christ entered before us and for our sake", our aid the Mother of God herself in both our intentions and actions. It is she who has made us worthy to receive her numerous favors and who now sanctifies us with her feast and enables us to sense the beauty of the All-Holy and Eternal Trinity, of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the only God, to Whom belong all glory, honor and worship, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Saints of the week

21 November / 4 December —The Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos — Nativity Fast — When the most holy Virgin Mary had reached the age of three, her parents, holy Joachim and Anna, took her from Nazareth to Jerusalem, to give her to the service of God in fulfilment of their promise. It was three days' journey to Jerusalem, but, going as they were on God's work, they did not find the journey difficult. Many of Joachim and Anna's kinsmen gathered to take part in this celebration, in which the invisible angels of God also took part. Maidens went ahead with lighted candles in their hands, followed by the most holy Virgin, led on either side by her father and mother. The Virgin was clad in royal and beautiful garments, like those of the 'king's daughter', the Bride of God (Ps. 44:9,10). Behind them walked many of their kinsfolk and friends, all bearing lighted candles. There were fifteen steps leading to the Temple. Her parents stood the Virgin on the first step, and she ran quickly to the top on her own, where the High Priest, Zacharias, the father of St John the Forerunner, met her and, taking her by the hand, led her not only into the Temple but into the Holy of Holies, the holiest place of all, into which none could enter except the High Priest, and that once a year. St Theophylact of Ochrid says that Zacharias was 'out of himself, and moved by God' when he led the Virgin into the chief place in the Temple, beyond the second curtain—otherwise there could be no explanation of his action. Her parents then offered sacrifices to God, according to the Law, received the priest's blessing and returned home, leaving the most holy Virgin in the Temple. She dwelt in the Temple for nine whole years. While her parents were alive, they visited her often. When they departed this life, the holy Virgin was left an orphan, and longed to remain in the Temple for the rest of her days, without entering into marriage. This being contrary both to the Law and Israelite custom, she was confided at the age of twelve to St Joseph, a kinsman of hers in Nazareth, so that she might, under the protection of betrothal, live in virginity and thus fulfil both her desire and the demands of the Law, for it was unknown in Israel at that time for a girl to vow perpetual virginity. The holy Virgin Mary was the first to do this, and was later followed by thousand upon thousand of virgin men and women in the Church of Christ.

St. Columbanus, abbot and founder of Luxeuil Abbey, France (615) - Born 543 at West Leinster, Ireland, handsome and educated, Columbanus was torn between a desire for God and easy access to the pleasures of the world. Acting on advice of a holy anchoress, he decided to withdraw from the world; his family opposed the choice, his mother going so far as to block the door. Monk at Lough Erne. He studied Scripture extensively, and wrote a commentary on the Psalms. Monk at Bangor under abbot Saint Comgall. In middle age, Columbanus felt a call to missionary life. With twelve companions (Saint Attala, Columbanus the Younger, Cummain, Domgal, Eogain, Eunan, Saint Gall, Gurgano, Libran, Lua, Sigisbert and Waldoleno) he travelled to Scotland, England, and then to France in 585. The area, though nominally Christian, had fallen far from the faith, but were ready for missionaries, and they had some success. They were warmly greeted at the court of Gontram, and king of Burgundy invited the band to stay. They chose the half-ruined Roman fortress of Annegray in the Vosges Mountains for their new home with Columbanus as their abbot. The simple lives and obvious holiness of the group drew disciples to join them, and the sick to be healed by their prayers. Columbanus, to find solitude for prayer, often lived for long periods in a cave seven miles from the monastery, using a messenger to stay in touch with his brothers. When the number of new monks overcrowded the old fortress, King Gontram gave them the old castle of Luxeuil to found a new house in 590. Soon after, a third house was founded at Fontaines. Columbanus served as master of them all, and wrote a Rule for them; it incorporated many Celtic practices, was approved by the Council of Macon in 627, but was superseded by the Benedictine. Problems arose early in the 7th century. Many Frankish bishops objected to a foreign missionary with so much influence, to the Celtic practices he brought, especially those related to Easter, and his independence from them. In 602 he was summoned to appear before them for judgment; instead of appearing, he sent a letter advising them to hold more synods, and to concern themselves with more important things than which rite he used to celebrate Easter. The dispute over Easter continued to years, with Columbanus appealing to multiple popes for help, but was only settled with Columbanus abandoned the Celtic calendar when he moved to Italy and adopted Eastern Orthodox Pascha. In addition to his problems with the bishops, Columbanus spoke out against vice and corruption in the royal household and court, which was in the midst of a series of complex power grabs. Brunehaut stirred up the bishops and nobility against the abbot; Thierry ordered him to conform to the local ways, and shut up. Columbanus refused, and was briefly imprisoned at Besançon, but he escaped and returned to Luxeuil. Thierry and Brunehaut sent an armed force to force him and his foreign monks back to Ireland. As soon as his ship set sail, a storm drove them back to shore; the captain took it as a sign, and set the monks free. They made their way to King Clothaire at Soissons, Neustria and then the court of King Theodebert of Austrasia in 611. He travelled to Metz, then Mainz, Suevi, Alamanni, and finally Lake Zurich. Their evangelization work there was unsuccessful, and the group passed on to Arbon, then Bregenz, and then Lake Constance. Saint Gall, who knew the local language best, took the lead in this region; many were converted to the faith, and the group founded a new monastery as their home and base. However, a year later political upheaval caused Columbanus to cross the Alps into Italy, arriving in Milan in 612. The Christian royal family treated him well, and he preached and wrote against Arianism and Nestorianism. In gratitude, the Lombard king gave him a track of land call Bobbio between Milan and Genoa. There he rebuilt a half-ruined church of Saint Peter, and around it he founded an abbey that was to be the source for evangelization throughout northern Italy for centuries to come. Columbanus always enjoyed being in the forests and caves, and as he walked through the woods birds and squirrels would ride on his shoulders. Toward the end of his life came word that his old enemies were dead, and his brothers wanted him to come back north, but he declined. Knowing that his time was almost done, he retired to a cave for solitude, and died as he had predicted. His influence continued for centuries as those he converted handed on the faith, the brothers he taught evangelised untold numbers more, and his brother monks founded over one hundred monasteries to protect learning and spread the faith. Miracles ascribed to Columbanus include: to obtain food for a sick brother monk, he cured the wife of the donor; once when he was surrounded by wolves, he simply walked through them; at one point he needed a cave for his solitary prayers; a bear lived there; when Columbanus asked, the bear left; when he needed water in order to live in the cave, a spring appeared nearby; when the Luxeuil monastery granary

ran empty, he prayed over it and it refilled; he multiplied bread and beer for his community; he cured several sick monks, who then got straight out of bed to reap the monastery's harvest; gave sight to a blind man at Orleans; he destroyed a vat of beer being prepared for a pagan festival by breathing on it; when the monastery needed help in the fields, he tamed a bear, and yoked it to a plough

22 November / 5 December — Afterfeast of the Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos —Nativity Fast — The Holy Martyr Cecilia — Born in Rome of rich and eminent parents, she had a firm faith in Christ the Lord and a great zeal for the Faith. Vowing life-long virginity to God, holy Cecilia wore a rough hair-shirt underneath the costly raiment that her parents gave her. When they forced her into marriage with a pagan, Valerian, she spent the first night urging her new-wedded bridegroom to go to Bishop Urban for baptism, and then himself to live a life of virginity. Embracing the Christian faith, Valerian also brought his brother Tibertius to it. Both brothers were very soon condemned to death for their faith, but their zeal did not falter in the face of death itself. Taken to the scaffold, these two brothers succeeded in bringing the captain of the guard, Maximus, to the Faith, and they all three suffered together for Christ the Lord. St Cecilia buried their bodies together and was then herself taken for trial, having unwearingly won over many pagans to the Christian faith. In one evening, she had won over four hundred souls. When the judge asked her whence came her daring, she answered: 'From a pure conscience and an unquestioning faith'. After harsh torture, she was condemned to be beheaded with the sword. The executioner brought the sword down on her neck three times, but failed to kill her; he only wounded her and the blood ran down from her wounds, being caught in kerchiefs and bowls by the faithful to use for healing. Three days later, Christ's martyr and virgin gave her spirit into the hands of her Lord, to rejoice with him in eternity. St Cecilia suffered with the others in about the year 230. Her relics are preserved in the church dedicated to her name in Rome. In the Western Church, St Cecilia is regarded as the patron of Church Music. St Kallistos, Patriarch of Constantinople; The Holy Martyr Menignus; Holy and Righteous Michael the Soldier; The Holy Apostles Philemon, Archippus and Apphia.

23 November / 6 December — Afterfeast of the Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos —Nativity Fast — St Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium — A fellow-countryman and friend of St Basil the Great and other great saints of the fourth century, Amphilochius early forsook the bustle of the world and withdrew to a cave where, as the solitary, he lived in asceticism for forty years. The episcopal throne in Iconium then fell empty, and Amphilochius was chosen in a wonderful way and consecrated as Bishop of Iconium. He was a marvellous shepherd and a great defender of the purity of the Orthodox faith, and took part in the Second Ecumenical Council in 381. He fought zealously against Macedonius, and against the Arians and the Eunomians. He personally begged Theodosius the Great to drive the Arians out of every city in the Empire, but the Emperor did not comply with his request. After a few days, Amphilochius came before the Emperor again. When the bishop was taken into the presence-chamber, the Emperor was sitting on his throne with his son Arcadius, whom he had taken as co-Emperor, sitting at his right hand. Entering the room, Amphilochius did reverence to Theodosius, but ignored Arcadius as though he were not there. Infuriated by this, the Emperor Theodosius commanded that Amphilochius be instantly driven from court. The saint then said to the Emperor: 'Do you see, O Emperor, how you do not tolerate a slight paid to your son? In the same way, God the Father does not tolerate dishonour paid to His Son, turning with loathing from those who blaspheme against Him, and being angered at that accursed Arian heresy.' Hearing this, the Emperor understood the reason for Amphilochius's seeming disrespect towards his son, and marvelled at his wisdom and daring. Among many other works, Amphilochius wrote several books on the Faith. He entered into rest in 395 in great old age, and went to immortal life.

St Alexander of the Neva (Nevsky) - The son of Prince Yaroslav, his heart was drawn to God from his youth. He overcame the Swedes on the river Neva on July 15th, 1240, whence he took the name 'of the Neva'. On that occasion, Ss Boris and Gleb appeared to one of Alexander's generals and promised their aid to the great prince, their kinsman. Among the Golden Horde of the Tartars, he refused to sacrifice to idols or pass through fire. The Tartar Khan valued him for his wisdom, and his physical strength and beauty. He built many churches, and performed innumerable works of mercy. He entered into rest at the age of forty-three, on November 14th, 1263, today being the commemoration of the translation of his relics to the city of Vladimir; St Gregory, Bishop of Agrigentum; St Mitrophan, Bishop of Voronezh' St. Trudo, Abbot.

24 November / 7 December — Afterfeast of the Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos —Nativity Fast — The Holy and Great Martyr Catherine — The daughter of King Constus, she lived with her mother in Alexandria after her father's death. Her mother was secretly a Christian and, through her spiritual father, brought Catherine to the Christian faith. In a vision, St Catherine received a ring from the Lord Jesus Himself as a sign of her betrothal to Him. This ring remains on her finger to this day. Catherine was greatly gifted by God, exceptionally well-educated in Greek philosophy, medicine, rhetoric and logic, and added great physical beauty to this. When the wicked Emperor Maxentius offered sacrifice to idols and ordered everyone to do the same, St Catherine came with daring before him and denounced his idolatrous errors. The Emperor, seeing that she surpassed him in wisdom and learning, summoned fifty of the wisest men, to dispute with her about faith and put her to shame, but Catherine was wiser than they, and put them to shame. The furious Emperor commanded that all fifty wise men be burned. These wise men, at St Catherine's prayers, all confessed the name of Christ at the moment of death, and proclaimed themselves Christians. When the martyr was in prison, she brought Porphyrius the general, with two hundred of his soldiers, to the Faith, and also the Empress, Augusta-Vasilissa. They all suffered for Christ. At St Catherine's martyrdom, an angel of God appeared to her, stopping and breaking the wheel on which she was being tortured, and after that the Lord Christ Himself appeared to her, strengthening her. After many tortures, Catherine was beheaded with the sword at the age of eighteen, on November 24th, 310. Milk flowed from her body in place of blood. Her wonderworking relics are preserved on Sinai. St. Minver, virgin of Cornwall, St. Romanus of Bordeaux (d.382) The Holy and Great Martyr Mercurius; The Holy Maiden Mastridia.

25 November / 8 December — Apodosis of the Entry into the Temple — Nativity Fast – The Hieromartyr Clement Bishop of Rome - Born in Rome and of royal blood, he was a contemporary of the apostles. His mother and two brothers were caught by a storm on a voyage and driven to different places. His father then went off to find his wife and sons, and himself disappeared. Clement, being then twenty-four years old, set off eastwards to look for his parents and brothers. In Alexandria, he made the acquaintance of the Apostle Barnabas, and afterwards became a friend of the Apostle Peter, who was already being followed by his two brothers, Faustinus and Faustian. By God's providence, the Apostle Peter found Clement's aged mother, who was living as a beggar-woman, and then his father also. Thus the whole family was reunited, and they all returned to Rome as Christians. Clement remained linked with the great apostles, who made him bishop before their death. After Peter's death by martyrdom, Linus was bishop in Rome, then Cletus—both of them only for a short time—and then Clement. He governed the Church of God with burning zeal and, from day to day, brought large numbers of unbelievers to the Faith. He set seven scribes to record the lives of the Christian martyrs who were at that time suffering for their Lord. The Emperor Trajan drove him out to Cherson, where Clement found about two thousand exiled Christians, who were all put to the hard toil of cutting stone in an arid region. The Christians welcomed Clement with great joy, and he was to them a living source of comfort. By his prayers, he brought water from the dry ground and converted so many of the pagan inhabitants to Christianity that there were seventy-five churches built in that place in one year. To prevent the further spreading of the Christian faith, Clement was condemned to death, and drowned in the sea with a stone round his neck in the year 101. His wonderworking relics were taken out of the sea only in the time of Ss Cyril and Methodius; The Hieromartyr Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria; Our Holy Father Paphnutius.

26 November / 9 December — Nativity Fast— Our Holy Father Alypius the Stylite - Born in Hadrianopolis, a city in Paphlagonia, he was from his youth dedicated to the service of God. As a deacon, he served in the church in that city with Bishop Theodore. But, desiring a solitary life of prayer and meditation, Alypius withdrew to a Greek cemetery outside the city, from which people fled as from a place of terror, as demonic visions had been seen there. Here he erected a Cross, and built a church in honour of St Euphemia, who had appeared to him in a dream. Near the church, he built a high pillar, climbed up onto it and spent fifty-three years there in fasting and prayer. Neither the mockery of men nor the evil demons could drive him away or shake his purpose. This saint endured endless assaults from the demons. They not only tried to terrify him with demonic apparitions, but also stoned him and gave him no peace day nor night for a long time. But Alypius courageously defended himself against this diabolical power with the sign of the Cross and the name of Jesus. Finally, the vanquished demons left him and fled, and men began to revere him and to come to him for his prayers, comfort, teaching and healing. Two monasteries were built beside his pillar, on one side for men and on the other for women. His mother and sisters lived in the women's monastery. St Alypius guided the monks and nuns from his pillar by word and example, and shone like the sun in the sky for them all, showing them the way of salvation. This man of God had such grace that he was often bathed in heavenly light, and a pillar of this light stretched above him to heaven. Alypius was a great and mighty wonderworker, both in his lifetime and after his death. Living for a hundred years, he entered into rest in the year 640, in the time of Emperor Heraclius. Of his holy relics, the head is preserved in the monastery of Koutloumousiou on the Holy Mountain. Our Holy Father James the Solitary; Our Holy Father Stylianus; Our Holy Father Nikon the Preacher of Repentance; St Innocent of Irkutsk.

27 November / 10 December — Nativity Fast –The Holy Martyr James the Persian - Born in the Persian town of Elapa, or Vilat, of Christian parents, he was brought up in the Christian faith and married a Christian wife. The Persian king, Yezdegerd, loved James for his gifts and for his skill, and made him a noble at his court. Flattered by the king, James was deluded and offered sacrifice to idols, which the king also worshipped. His mother and wife, hearing of this, wrote him a reproachful letter in which they grieved over him as an apostate and one spiritually dead, begging him at the end of the letter to repent and return to Christ. Moved by this letter, James repented bitterly, and courageously confessed his faith in Christ the Lord before the king. The furious king condemned him to death, and added that his body was to be cut to pieces, little by little, until he breathed his last. The executioners fulfilled this command of the accursed king to the letter, and first cut off James's fingers, then his toes, his legs and arms, his shoulders and finally his head. During the entire process, the repentant martyr gave thanks to God. A fragrance came from his wounds as of cypress. Thus this wonderful man repented of his sin, and his soul went to Christ his God in the heavenly Kingdom. He suffered in about 400. His head is to be found in Rome, and a part of his relics in Portugal, where he is commemorated on May 22nd. St. Congar, bishop of Somerset; St. Fergus, bishop of Glamis; The Seventeen Holy Fathers Martyred in India; Our Holy Father Romanus the Wonderworker; Our Holy Father Pinuphrius; Our Holy Father Nathanael.