

27th Sunday After Pentecost

St. Sabbas the Sanctified

5 / 18 December



Resurrection Tropar, Tone 2: When Thou didst descend to death, O Life Immortal, Thou didst slay hell with the splendour of Thy Godhead! And when from the depths Thou didst raise the dead, all the powers of Heaven cried out: O Giver of Life, Christ our God, Glory to Thee!

Troparion of St Sabbas the Sanctified tone 1: Sanctified from youth, O righteous Sabbas,/ thou wast a summit of righteousness equal to the Angels./ Thou didst lead a heavenly life, and guide thy flock to godliness by word and deed./ And they cry to thee with faith:/ Glory to Him Who has strengthened thee; glory to Him Who has crowned thee;/ glory to Him Who through thee works healings for all.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 2: Hell became afraid, O Almighty Saviour, seeing the miracle of Thy resurrection from the tomb! The dead arose! Creation, with Adam, beheld this and rejoiced with Thee! And the world, O My Saviour, praises Thee forever.

Kontakion of St Sabbas the Sanctified tone 8: Thou wast offered to God from childhood as a blameless sacrifice,/ as one dedicated to Him before birth,/ O blessed Sabbas,/ thou adornment of the righteous and blessed dweller in the desert./ Wherefore I cry to thee: Rejoice.

Matins Gospel V

EPISTLE: Ephesians 6: 10-17

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE WILES OF THE DEVIL

He does not speak against the fighting, nor against the hostilities, but against the 'wiles.' For this enemy is at war with us, not simply, nor openly, but by 'wiles.' To use 'wiles' is to deceive and to take by artifice or contrivance ...and stratagems in the case of those who seduce us. I mean something like this. The Devil never proposes to us sins in their proper colours ...Our conflict is with one skilled in the arts of war ...'For you were once darkness' (Eph. 5:8); so naming that wickedness which is in this present life; for beyond it, it will have no place, not in Heaven, nor in the world to come ...By 'evil day' he means the present life, and also calls it 'this present evil world' (Gal. 1:4) ...How then, you may say, are we to wrestle with the darkness? By becoming light. How with the spiritual hosts of wickedness? By becoming good ...No, if we have a mind, neither will we wrestle at all, for it is because we choose it, that there is a struggle, since so great is the power of Him who dwells in us, as He said, 'Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:9). All power He has given us, both of wrestling and of not wrestling. It is because we are slothful, that we have to wrestle with them ...Then let us trample under foot the power of the devil; let us trample under foot our sins, I mean everything that pertains to this life: wrath, lust, vainglory, every passion.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily XXII on Ephesians IV. B#57, pp.159-162.

for the Saint: Galatians 5:22 – 6:2

GOSPEL: ST. LUKE 17: 12-19

Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

THE BLIND MAN HEALED NEAR JERICHO

The lepers then having met the Saviour, earnestly besought Him to free them from their misery, and called Him Master, that is, Teacher. No one pitied them when suffering this malady: but He Who had appeared on earth for this very reason, and had become man that He might show pity unto all, He was moved with compassion for them, and had mercy upon them. And why did He not rather say, "I will, be ye cleansed;" as he did in the case of another leper; but commanded them rather to show themselves unto the priests? It was because the law gave directions to this effect to those who were delivered from leprosy: for it commanded them to show themselves to the priests, and to offer a sacrifice for their cleansing. He commanded them therefore to go, as being already healed, and, that they might, so to speak, bear witness to the priests, as the rulers of the Jews, and ever envious of His glory, that wonderfully, and beyond their hope, they had been delivered from their misfortune by Christ's willing that they should be healed. The nine then, as being Jews, falling into a thankless forgetfulness, did not return to give glory to God: by which He shows that Israel was hard of heart, and utterly unthankful: but the stranger, for as being a Samaritan he was of foreign race, having been brought thither from Assyria: for the phrase is not without meaning, in the middle of Samaria and Galilee: " returned with a loud voice to glorify God. It shows therefore that the Samaritans were grateful, but that the Jews, even when benefited, were ungrateful.

St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St Luke, Homilies 113-116. B#42, pp. 465-466.

In today's Gospel lesson according to St. Luke, our Lord Jesus Christ was going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered into a certain village, He was met by ten men that were lepers. Our Lord was always accompanied on all His journeys by a crowd as well as by His disciples.

Lepers knew the law that forbade them to enter the company of healthy men; they knew that only the most devout would ever go near them, and that only the omnipotent Jesus could touch them with impunity (Mark

1:41). For these reasons, the ten unfortunates, when they found out where Jesus would pass, stood afar off within sight of the village and cried out with one voice: Jesus, Master, have mercy on us! (Luke 17:13).

The Lord noticed the lepers, but He did not let them approach Him as He had one leper, nor did He cure them immediately as he had that other, by one touch of His hand (Mark 1:41). He sent them to the Jewish priests, saying, Go, show yourselves to the priests (Luke 17:14). The Mosaic Law obliged the priests to inspect those that were sick with leprosy or with other skin diseases resembling it. If the symptoms of leprosy were quite clear, the priests immediately declared the sick man unclean and banished him from society. Likewise, if the leprosy had passed of its own accord, the leper had to show himself to the priests for them to declare whether he was healed and could return home. And if he was, the recovered leper had to go through the rite of purification laid down in the Mosaic Law and make the required sacrifice to God.

It was this last demand of the Law that our Lord Jesus Christ meant when He said to that leper whom He had cured on another occasion: ...show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them (Matt. 8:4), i.e., although one was cured by miraculous means, it was the same God Who gave the cure as gave the law for lepers through Moses.

But why did the Lord send the ten lepers to the priests before He had cured them? In this instance the Lord acted just as He always acted when He wanted to test and elevate the faith of those who begged Him to cure them. The lepers showed their faith in the omnipotent power of Jesus, in His goodness and mercy towards those who came to ask Him to cure them.

They hoped that He would not reject them as unclean, and they never doubted for a moment that He could cure ten men from an incurable disease as easily as one. But they asked Him only for a temporal blessing--the curing of their bodies.

The Lord does not refuse those who approach Him; He is pleased when men ask Him for bodily blessings, too. But this is not enough both for the good of those who ask and for His Divine Love. The Lord uses every opportunity, afforded by need or misfortune to draw a person to Him. self, to acquire his trust and obedience, and in giving him the good for which he seeks, to awaken in him the feeling of love and gratitude, and through this feeling bring him to spiritual union with Himself, setting him on the road to salvation. In this way He transforms into a full-grown and saving faith our embryonic faith, born of external misfortunes and nurtured with external blessings.

In this sense the instruction to go to the priests which Christ gave to the lepers was a commandment designed to test their faith. The lepers could receive the Lord's words in faith and obedience, thus earning not only the healing that they asked for, but also further blessings revealed to faith; or they could receive them with doubt, refusing to carry out Christ's instructions and leaving Him without receiving anything.

If we put ourselves in their place we will see that there was much to tempt them and urge them to puzzlement and doubt in the Lord, but that there was also a firm foundation for their faith and a strong stimulus to obedience. "What does this mean?" they might have thought. "We came to Him to ask His help, and all He does is send us to the priests. Obviously He considers us unworthy of His attention, and does not wish to do anything for us Himself. But why? And anyway, we all know that the priests do not cure people of leprosy, and to go to them would only mean to hear confirmation of the fact that we are unclean and rejected by the society of men, and to be doomed once more to exile. Why should we go?" Lack of faith would have spoken with this voice. The extremity of their situation, however, brought the lepers to the Lord; they had no other hope for healing than in Him. His words were a sign to approach. And from here it was no great step to obedience.

The Lord made this movement into faith easier for the lepers. He did not give them a new commandment, but merely demanded that they fulfil the law with which they were familiar. "Surely He wishes to cure us?"

Is that not why He sends us to the priests, so that we should carry out the cleansing rite and make sacrifice?" This is the ray of light with which faith could enlighten the dark hearts of the lepers! All that remained to say was "Let's go!" They went, and soon received their reward for their obedience. And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed (Luke 17:14), says the Evangelist.

How great must have been the surprise and joy of the lepers! They were healthy, they were clean, they were restored to life and all its joys! What was natural and right that they should do next? That which reason and fairness dictate, and that which the Lord Himself expected: that they return to their Benefactor, open before Him their hearts, full of joy and happiness; dedicate to Him the first motions of the life that had been miraculously restored to them, and promise in love and gratitude never to forget Him in memory of what He had done for them. The Lord would have accepted with benevolence these feelings from all of them, would have illumined them with the new light of His grace, and would have added ten new souls to the numbers of those who had found salvation.

But only in one of the ten did the Lord have the satisfaction of seeing a clear understanding of the greatness of what He had done for them and a vital feeling of gratitude. Now, one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan (Luke 17:15-16)! Approaching the Lord, he fell down on his face at His feet, and poured forth his heart in words of love and gratitude. And the Lord looked upon him with love, of that there is no doubt. But while He rejoices when He finds faith and love in the hearts of men, the Lord sorrows when He does not find them.

Was this event an occasion for joy or for sorrow in this respect? From a human standpoint, more for sorrow. Only one returned to Him, while nine went their way. Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? was all He said of the ungrateful nine (Luke 17:17). He knew in His omniscience where they had gone and what they were doing. So why does He ask about them? It is the voice of love, mourning for the loss of the beloved, just as a mother who has lost her child seeks to know where it is and what has happened to it.

But where are the nine? If they went to Jerusalem to fulfil to the letter the commandment given them by the Saviour, they acted wrongly, because they did not recognize in the Lord, Who healed them, the embodiment of both Jerusalem and the Temple, the priesthood and the whole of the Law; they did not recognize their Messiah, revealed to them so clearly in their miraculous cure, without Whom no rite will cleanse and no sacrifice bear fruit. If they rushed to inform their relatives of their joy, they acted wrongly, for they placed their kin above Him Who resurrected them almost from death. If they were carried away, after their protracted sufferings, by the desire to indulge in innocent pleasures of life, they did wrong, for they neglected their duty of gratitude for the sake of their own enjoyment. Wherever they went, whatever they did, they are only to be wept over, for they have departed from the Lord. If, in their first moments of joy, they have forgotten Him, will they ever remember Him when they return to their former life, to carnal joys, to daily cares and worries?

Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner (Luke 17:18)? The ingratitude of the nine who were cured seems astonishing considering the fact that they were Jews, members of God's Chosen People and of the true Old Testament Church, while he who had shown his gratitude was a Samaritan, a member of a race that was despised by the Jews. Their leprosy had humbled the Jews and forced them to keep company with a sick Samaritan, whom if they were healthy they would consider it a sin to touch (John 4:9); but as soon as they were healed by the Lord, the division arose again: the Samaritan came to throw himself at the feet of Christ in gratitude, while the Jews deserted Him without a word of thanks!

Interpreters of Holy Scripture have given us the general reason for that which is mostly responsible for making both the thankless Jews and us ungrateful to God: the depravity of the heart and its hardening through a life of sin and of the flesh.

Why does the Lord desire our gratitude? For our own sakes, for gratitude is the direct way to communion with Him. Thank God for the least blessing, and it will grow in your hands, and thank Him for great blessings with great sincerity, and your growing gratitude will call down upon you new blessings from the storehouse of God's goodness. Be like a grateful son with God, and you will never see Him as a terrible judge and avenger.

We are used to thinking of God more as a judge and avenger than as our Father and Benefactor; we are more inclined to cry to Him and beg His mercy than to rejoice and thank Him for His blessings. Why is this? Or does He prefer revealing Himself to us as angry and terrible more than meek and merciful? No! He always wants to be our Father and Benefactor, but we in our ingratitude and hardness of heart force Him to be our Judge. He wishes to see in us grateful and obedient children, but we turn ourselves into slaves, either slaves who revolt and disobey, or else slaves who wail and tremble for fear of punishment.

The Samaritan who had been cured forgot all else on earth and returned to thank the Savior; this means that he clearly understood the greatness of the mercy that had been granted him and the greatness of the God-Man. His unexpected cure

brought him to perfect joy, and showed thus that his heart was sensitive and impressionable to good, a heart which did not let this good slide over its surface, without affecting his soul and his life, as happens with many of us. He praised and thanked God in his joy, and thus demonstrated the piety of his spirit, always ready and prepared to turn to God. He fell at the feet of the Saviour and, expressing his gratitude, did not rise until the Saviour told him to.

We do not know what he said to the Lord, but the position he adopted (kneeling) is in itself enough to speak for him. The attitude is perfect faith, indispensable for our salvation. It is evident that the Lord Himself bore witness to this fact before the whole crowd when He said: Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well (Luke 17:19). Obviously these words refer to more than simply his cure from leprosy. The Jews were cured, too, but the Lord did not praise their faith. Instead, He reproached their lack of faith. The Lord seems to be saying: "Arise, go out into the world; your faith has not only brought healing to the body, but it has also set your soul on the road to salvation, and will lead you there!" The commandment to go to the priests which was given to the lepers is full of profound meaning for us, too. The leprosy which kills our inner life is the sin active within us. Go and confess your sins to the Priest, mindful of the Lord Who has given him the power to bind and to loose, and in obedience to the lessons and guidance of your spiritual father.

Obedience to the commandment of the Lord brought healing to the ten lepers; observance of the divine rules of the Holy Orthodox Church brings healing to untold thousands of the spiritually sick, with all kinds and all degrees of disease. But it is no use trying to heal our sin of our own volition, arbitrarily, in conjunction with pride and presumption.

Filled with humility, let us cry from the heart with the voice of faith:

"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Or, as the Church teaches us, "Eternal King, Comforter and True Christ, cleanse us of all evil, just as You once cleansed the ten lepers."

A.A.K.

for the Saint: Matthew 11: 27-30

Saints of the week

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. Our Holy Fathers, the Martyrs of Karyes; Our Holy Father Nectarius of Bitola; Our Holy Fathers Karion and Zachariah;

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 (Cawrdaf in English): Cawrdaf is recorded as one of the sons of King Caradog Freichfras. Though the kingdom of the latter appears to 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.

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 aforesaid, 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 re-instatement 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).

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 dissension 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; Our Holy Father Gregory the Hesychast; Our Holy Father Nilus of Stolobnoye.

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 Apostles Sosthenes, Apollos, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, Onesiphorus, Cephas and Caesar; The Holy Martyrs in Africa;

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.

9 / 22 December — Nativity Fast— The Conception by St Anna of the Most Holy Mother of God - St Joachim was of the tribe of Judah, and a descendant of King David. Anna was the daughter of Matthan the priest, of the tribe of Levi as was Aaron the High Priest. This Matthan had three daughters: Mary, Zoia and Anna. Mary was married in Bethlehem and bore Salome; Zoia was also married in Bethlehem and bore Elisabeth, the mother of St John the Forerunner; and Anna was married in Nazareth to Joachim, and in old age gave birth to Mary, the most holy Mother of God. Joachim and Anna had been married for fifty years, and were barren. They lived devoutly and quietly, using only a third of their income for themselves and giving a third to the poor and a third to the Temple, and they were well provided for. Once, when they were already old and were in Jerusalem to offer sacrifice to God, the High Priest, Issachar, upbraided Joachim: 'You are not worthy to offer sacrifice with those childless hands.' Others who had children jostled Joachim, thrusting him back as unworthy. This caused great grief to the two aged souls, and they went home with very heavy hearts. Then the two of them gave themselves to prayer to God that He would work in them the wonder that He had worked in Abraham and Sarah, and give them a child to comfort their old age. God sent them His angel, Gabriel, who appeared to each of them separately and told them that God had heard their prayer and that a daughter would be born to them. St. Anna conceived at once, and in the ninth month gave birth to the holy Virgin Mary who was blessed by God and all generations of men.

Tropar of the Conception by St. Anna of the Most Holy Theotokos, Tone 4: Today, the bonds of barrenness are loosed, / for God, hearkening unto Joachim and Anna, / doth manifestly promise them that they will, / beyond all expectation, / give birth to the divine Maiden, / from whom The Infinite One Himself, / becoming man, shall be born. / And He commandeth the angels to cry unto her: / Rejoice thou who art full of grace, // the Lord is with thee!

Kondak of the Conception by St. Anna of the Most Holy Theotokos, Tone 4 (Special Melody): Today the whole world doth celebrate / Anna's conceiving, / which was brought about by God; / for she gave birth unto her // who ineffably gave birth unto The Word.

St Hannah, Mother of the Prophet Samuel; Our Holy Father Stephen the New Light; St Sophronius, Archbishop of Cyprus; St. Diuma, bishop of the Mercians and Middle Angles - an Irishman and companion of St. Cedd

10 / 23 December — Nativity Fast — The Holy Martyrs Menas, Hermogenes and Eucarpus - Both Menas and Hermogenes were born in Athens. They both lived in Constantinople, where they enjoyed the high favour of the Emperor and the honour of the people. Menas was known for his great learning and gift of speech and, although he acted outwardly as a pagan, he was in his heart a convinced Christian. Hermogenes was Eparch of Constantinople, and was a pagan through and through. He was, however, a merciful man and performed many good deeds. When dissention broke out between the Christians and the pagans in the city of Alexandria, the Emperor Maximian (285- 305) sent Menas to calm the turmoil and drive the Christians from the city. Menas went and restored peace, but he also declared himself to be a Christian and brought many of the pagans to the true Faith by the power of his words and the witness of his many miracles. When the Emperor heard this, he sent Hermogenes to punish Menas and to liquidate the Christians. Hermogenes brought Menas to trial, and he cut off his feet and his tongue, gouged out his eyes and then threw him into prison. The Lord Jesus himself appeared to him there, to heal and console His suffering servant. When he saw Menas miraculously healed, Hermogenes was baptised and began to preach the mighty Faith of Christ, being made Bishop of Alexandria. Then the furious Emperor Maximian came himself to Alexandria and put Menas and Hermogenes to harsh torture, which they endured courageously with the help of God's grace. Beholding the fortitude of these soldiers of Christ and the miracles God wrought upon them, Eucarpus, Menas's

secretary, went into the judgement-hall and shouted to the Emperor's face: 'I too am a Christian!' The Emperor flew into a rage, took a sword and beheaded Eugephus himself, and then he commanded the executioner to behead Menas and Hermogenes. Their holy relics, thrown into the sea, floated in a miraculous way to Constantinople, where the bishop, forewarned in a dream, met them with great ceremony and buried them with honour; Our Holy Mother Angelina and St John the Despot; The Holy Martyr Gemellus; Our Holy Father Thomas of Bithynia.

11 / 24 December — Nativity Fast — Our Holy Father Daniel the Stylite - Born in the village of Maroutha, near the city of Samosata in Mesopotamia, of Christian parents, Elias and Martha, he was a gift of God through the tearful prayers of his mother, who was barren, and was dedicated to God in his youth. He embraced the monastic state at the age of twelve and visited Simeon Stylites, receiving his blessing. Desirous of solitude, Daniel left his monastery and withdrew to an abandoned pagan temple on the shore of the Black Sea. He endured many assaults from demons, but overcame them all by prayer, endurance and the sign of the Cross. After that, he climbed up onto a pillar, where he remained till his death, enduring with equanimity both heat and cold, and attacks from both men and demons. Many disciples gathered around his pillar, and he led them towards eternal life by his example and his words. God rewarded His devoted servant with great grace in this life, and he worked many miracles of help to men, and foretold future events. People came to his pillar from all parts, seeking help and advice from the saint of God. Kings and patriarchs came to him, as well as simple folk. The Emperor Leo the Great used to bring his foreign guests, princes and nobles, and show them Daniel on his pillar: 'Here is the wonder of my empire!' Daniel foretold the day of his own death, taught his disciples as a father would his children, and took leave of them. At the time of his death, his disciples saw angels, prophets, apostles and martyrs around the pillar. Having lived in asceticism for eighty years, this angelic man entered into rest, and into the Kingdom of Christ in 489; Our Holy Father Luke the Stylite; Our Holy Father Nikon the Withered; The Holy Martyr Meirax.

HOMILY on the absence of evil in God's works

And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1).

Brethren, the first revelation about this world that Holy Scripture communicates to us is that the world proceeded from good and not from evil, from God and not from some power contrary to God and not from some imagined primordial mixture of good and evil. The second revelation, brethren, about this world is that everything that the good God created is good. The light is good; the firmament of heaven is good; the land is good; the sea is good; the grass, the vegetation and the fruitful trees are good; the heavenly lights- the sun, moon and stars-are good; the living creatures in the water and the birds in the air are good; all living beings according to their kind are good; the cattle, the small animals and the beasts of the earth are good. Finally, man-the master, under the lordship of God, over all created things-is also good. *And God saw that it was good*. The appraiser of the value of this world is not and cannot be someone who views this world superficially and partially, but can only be He who views all of creation together and each part individually, He who knows their number, name, composition and essence incomparably better than all men on earth. *And God saw that it was very good* (Genesis 1:31). But, nevertheless, there have been men who have slandered the work of God, saying that this world is evil in its essence, that each individual creation is evil, and that matter, from which all earthly beings are formed, is evil. However, evil is found in sin, and sin is from the evil spirit; therefore, evil dwells in the spirit of evil and not in matter. This spirit, fallen from God, is the sower of evil in the world, from whence come the tares in God's wheat. The spirit of evil strives to use both the human spirit and material things in general as his weapons of evil. He is also the one who instils in the human mind the thought that the whole created world is evil and that matter, from which creation was formed, is fundamentally evil. He slanders God's works in order to conceal his own works; he accuses God in order not to be accused. O my brethren, let us guard ourselves from the cunning of the evil spirit. Let us guard ourselves in particular from the evil thoughts that he sows in our minds.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our true Enlightener and Saviour, into Thy hands we give over our minds and our hearts. Do Thou illumine us with Thy true light.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

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