



Veneration of the Holy Cross / The Third Sunday of Great Lent /

10 / 23 March

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 6: The angelic powers were at Thy tomb; / the guards became as dead men. / Mary stood by Thy grave, / seeking Thy most pure Body. / Thou didst capture hell, not being tempted by it. / Thou didst come to the Virgin, granting life. / O Lord who didst rise from the Dead, / Glory to Thee!

Tropar of the Holy Cross, Tone 1: Save O Lord Thy people and bless Thine inheritance / Granting unto Orthodox Christians victory over their enemies / and by the power of Thy cross / preserving Thy community.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 6: When Christ God the Giver of Life, / raised all of the dead from the valleys of misery with His Mighty Hand, / He bestowed resurrection on the human race. / He is the Saviour of all, the Resurrection, the Life, and the God of All.

Kondak of the Holy Cross, Tone 4: O Thou Who wast lifted up willingly on the Cross, bestow Thy

mercies upon the new community named after Thee, O Christ God: gladden with Thy power the Orthodox Christians, granting them victory over enemies; may they have as Thy help the weapon of peace, the invincible trophy.

Vespers: Lord I have Cried, Tone 6, on 10: Octoechos 6; Triodion 4 (Shine, Cross of the Lord); G: Triodion (O Christ our God, of Thine own will); N: Sunday Dogmatic Tone 6. Aposticha: Octoechos; G/N: Cross (O Lord Who hast helped gentle David).

Matins Gospel VI

Epistle - Hebrews 4: 14 - 5:6

14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Chapter 5: 1 For every priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also beset by weakness. 3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. 4 And no man takes this honour to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son today I have begotten You." 6 As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek".

SEEING THEN THAT WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST... JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

What priest could be so righteous and holy as the only Son of God, who had no need to purge his own sins by sacrifice, neither original sins nor additional sins committed during a man's life? And what more suitable offering for men could be taken from men than human flesh? What more fitting for this immolation than mortal flesh? And to cleanse the faults of mortals what offering so clean as flesh that came to life in a virgin womb, and from a virgin womb, without any pollution of lust? And what could be offered as acceptably, and received as readily, as the flesh of our sacrifice, the flesh that made up the

body of our priest? In every sacrifice there are four considerations: to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, what is offered, for whom it is offered. And so the one True Mediator Himself reconciled us to God, and in this he remained one with Him to whom He made the offering, and made one in Himself those for whom He offered, and was Himself one as the offerer and the offering.

St. Augustine of Hippo. On the Trinity, 4.19. B#15, p. 226.

Gospel - Mark 8: 34 - 9:1

34 The Lord said, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 35 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it. 36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? 37 Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." MARK 9: 1 And He said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

WHOEVER DESIRES TO COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME

And you see how He also makes his discourse unexceptionable: not saying at all, 'whether you will or not you must suffer this,' but how? 'If any man will come after Me.' I do not force, I do not compel, but each one I make lord of his own choice ...For to good things do I call you, not to things evil or burdensome; not to punishment and vengeance, that I should have to compel. No, the nature of the thing alone is sufficient to attract you ...For you ought not, O Peter, because you have confessed Me Son of God, therefore only to expect crowns (Cf Mark 8:29), and to suppose this enough for your salvation, and for the future to enjoy security, as having done all. For although it be in My power, as Son of God, to hinder you from having any trial at all of those hardships, yet such is not My will for your sake, that you may yourself contribute something, and be more approved.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily LV on Matthew XVI, 1. B#54, p. 339.

THE CROSS PRESERVES THE UNIVERSE

In the Prophet Ezekiel (9:6), it is said that when the Angel of the Lord was sent to punish and destroy the sinning people, it was told him not to strike those on whom the "mark" had been made. In the original text this mark is called "tau," the Hebrew letter corresponding to the letter "T," which is how in ancient times the cross was made, which then was an instrument of punishment.

So, even then, it was foretold the power of the Cross, which preserves those who venerate it. Likewise, by many other events in the Old Testament the power of the Cross was indicated. Moses, who held his arms raised in the form of a cross during the battle, gave victory to the Israelites over the Amalekites. He also, dividing the Red Sea by a blow of his rod and by a transverse blow uniting the waters again, saved Israel from Pharaoh, who drowned in the water, while Israel crossed over on the dry bottom (Exodus, ch. 14, 17).

Through the laying on of his hands in the form of a cross on his grandsons, Jacob gave a blessing to his descendents, foretelling at the same time their future until the coming of the "expectation of the nations" (Genesis, ch. 48).

By the Cross, the Son of God, having become man and accomplished our salvation. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the Cross (Phil. 2:8). Having stretched out His hands upon the Cross, the Savior with them as it were embraced the world, and by His blood shed on it, like a king with red ink, He signed the forgiveness of the human race.

The Cross of the Lord was the instrument by which He saved the world after the fall into sin. Through the Cross, He descended with His soul into hell, to raise up from it the souls who were awaiting Him. By the Cross Christ opened the doors of paradise which had been closed after our first ancestors had been banished from it. The Cross was sanctified by the Body of Christ which was nailed to it when He gave Himself over to torments and death for the salvation of the world. Then it was filled with life-giving power. By the Cross on Golgotha the prince of this world was cast out (John 12:31) and an end was put to his authority. The weapon by which he was crushed became the sign of Christ's victory.

The demonic hosts tremble when they see the Cross, because the kingdom of hell was destroyed by the Cross. They do not dare to draw near to anyone who is guarded by the Cross.

The whole human race, by the death of Christ on the Cross, received deliverance from the authority of the devil, and everyone who makes use of this saving weapon is inaccessible to the demons.

When legions of demons appeared to St. Anthony the Great and other desert-dwellers, they guarded themselves with the sign of the Cross, and the demons vanished.

When there appeared to St. Symeon the Stylite, who was standing on his pillar, what seemed to be a chariot to carry him to heaven, the Saint, before mounting it, crossed himself and it disappeared. The enemy, who had hoped to cast down the ascetic from the height of his pillar, was put to shame.

One cannot enumerate all the various incidents of the manifestation of the power of the Cross. Invisibly and unceasingly, Divine grace that gushes from it saves the world.

The sign of the Cross is made at all the Mysteries and prayers of the Church. With the making of the sign of the Cross over the bread and wine, they become the Body and Blood of Christ. With the immersion of the Cross the waters are sanctified. The sign of the Cross looses us from sins. "When we are guarded by the Cross, we oppose the enemy, without fearing his nets and barking." Just as the flaming sword in the hands of the Cherubim barred the entrance into paradise of old, so the Cross now acts invisibly in the world, guarding it from perdition.

The Cross is the unconquerable weapon of pious kings in the battle with enemies. Through the apparition of the Cross in the sky, the dominion of Emperor Constantine was confirmed and an end was put to the persecution against the Church. The apparition of the Cross in the sky in Jerusalem in the days of Constantius the Arian proclaimed the victory of Orthodoxy. By the power of the Cross of the Lord, Christian kings will continue to reign until Antichrist, barring his path to power and restraining lawlessness (St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on II Thes. 2:6-7).

The "sign of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:30), that is, the Cross, will appear in the sky in order to proclaim the end of the present world and the coming of the eternal Kingdom of the Son of God. Then all the tribes of the earth shall weep, because they loved the present age and its lusts, but all who have endured persecution for righteousness and called on the name of the Lord shall rejoice and be glad. The Cross then will save all who conquered temptations, from eternal perdition by the Cross, who crucified their flesh with its passions and lusts, and took up their cross and followed afar Christ.

However, those who hated the Cross of the Lord and did not engrave the Cross in their soul will perish forever. For "the Cross is the preserver of the whole universe, the Cross is the beauty of the Church, the Cross is the might of kings, the Cross is the confirmation of the faithful, the Cross is the glory of angels and the scourge of demons" (Octoechos: Exapostilarion, Monday Matins).

St John of Shanghai and San Francisco - Shanghai, Exaltation of the Cross, 1947

Saints of the Week

10 /23 March — The Holy Martyr Codratus of Corinth, and others with him - In a time of persecution of Christians, many of the faithful fled to the mountains and caves. The mother of this Codratus did so. She was pregnant just at that time, and gave birth to Codratus in a forest, dying almost at once. He was kept safe and fed by the providence of God and his guardian angel. Codratus grew up in solitude with nature. He who gave manna from heaven to the Israelites in the wilderness released a sweet dew from a cloud onto the mouth of the child Codratus. When he was twelve years old, he went down to the town, and there some good people took a fancy to him and educated him. He studied medicine and then began to heal the sick, using both natural medicines and, more importantly, the spiritual power and prayer which had been with him from childhood. When a new persecution arose under Decius, Codratus was taken for trial and thrown into prison. Five of his friends stood beside him and confessed the name of Christ. They were: Cyprian, Dionysius, Anectus, Paul and Crescens. They were all dragged through the streets and struck with sticks and stones by the unbelievers, especially by the children, until they arrived at the scaffold. Here the martyrs prayed to God and were beheaded with the sword. A spring of water gushed out onto the earth at the spot, which to this day is called by Codratus's name and commemorates the heroic death for Christ of the holy six. They suffered with honour for the truth in Corinth in the year 250, in the time of the Emperor Decius and his governor Jason.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Quadratus of Nicomedia and with him Saturninus, Rufinus and others; Venerable Anastasia the Patrician of Alexandria; Venerable George Arselaites, brother of Venerable John Climacus; Venerable John of Khakhuli, Georgia; Martyr Michael of Thessalonica; Blessed Paul of Taganrog; New Hieromartyr Demetrius Legeydo, priest.

11 / 24 March — St Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem - born in Damascus of eminent parents. Having acquired worldly wisdom, he was not content with this, and began also to acquire pure, spiritual wisdom. In the monastery of St Theodosius he found himself with the monk John Moschus, whom he took as his teacher; then, together with him, set out to visit the monasteries and ascetics of Egypt. Their motto was to glean more spiritual wisdom each day. They wrote down all that they discovered, and later

published it in two books entitled 'The Spiritual Meadow'. They later went to Rome, where Moschus died, leaving Sophronius with the pledge to take him either to Sinai or to the Monastery of St Theodosius. Sophronius fulfilled the desire of his teacher and took his body to the monastery, after which he was delayed in Jerusalem, which by that time had been freed from the Persians. He witnessed the return of the Precious Cross from Persia, which the Emperor Heraclius carried into the Holy City on his back. The old Patriarch, Zacharias, who also returned from slavery, did not live long and, when he went to the other world, was followed first by Modestus, who died in 634, and then by blessed Sophronius. He governed the Church with outstanding wisdom and zeal for four years, standing in defence of Orthodoxy against the Monothelite heresy, which he condemned at his Council in Jerusalem before it was condemned at the 6th Ecumenical Council. He wrote the life of St Mary of Egypt, compiled the rite of the Great Blessing of Water and introduced various new hymns and songs into different services. When the Arabian Caliph Omar captured Jerusalem, Sophronius begged him to spare the Christians, which Omar hypocritically promised. When Omar quickly began to plunder and ill-treat the Christians in Jerusalem, Sophronius, with many lamentations, begged God to take him from among the living upon earth, that he should not see the desecration of the holy places. And God heard his prayer, and took him to Himself in His heavenly courts in 644.

St. Angus (Oengus) of Culdees, compiler of first Irish martyrology - Born in Ireland; died c. 830. The appellation "Culdee," Ceile De, or Kele-De means "worship of God," which became the name of a monastic movement otherwise known as the "Companions of God." Oengus was of the race of the Dalaradians, kings of Ulster. In his youth, renouncing all earthly pretensions, he chose Christ for his inheritance by embracing the religious life in the monastery of Cluain-Edneach (Clonenagh) in East Meath (County Laois). Here he became so great a proficient both in learning and sanctity, that no one in his time could be found in Ireland that equalled him in reputation for every kind of virtue, and for sacred knowledge. To shun the esteem of the world, he disguised himself and entered the monastery of Tamlacht (Tallaght Hill), three miles from Dublin, where he lived for seven years as an anonymous lay brother. There he performed all the drudgery of the house, appearing fit for nothing but the vilest tasks, while interiorly he was being perfected in love and contemplation absorbed in God. After his identity was discovered when he tried to coach an unsuccessful student, he returned to Cluain-Edneach, where the continual austerity of his life, and his constant application to God in prayer, may be more easily admired than imitated. For example, he would daily recite one-third of the psalter (50 Psalms) while immersed in cold water. He was chosen abbot, and at length raised to the episcopal dignity: for it was usual then in Ireland for eminent abbots in the chief monasteries to be bishops. He was known for his devotion to the saints. He left both a longer and a shorter Irish Martyrology, and five other books concerning the saints of his country, contained in what the Irish call *Saltair-na-Rann*. The short martyrology was a celebrated metrical hymn called *Felire* or *Festilogium*. The longer, *Martyrology of Tallaght* was composed in collaboration with Saint Maelruain of Tallaght. He died at Disertbeagh (now Desert Aenguis or Dysert Enos), which became also a famous monastery, and took its name from him.

St. Euthymius, Bishop of Novgorod wonderworker - Sainted Evthymii, in Baptism Ioann (John), was born at the fervent prayers of the presbyter Mikhei and his spouse Anna. For long years they had been childless, and they gave a vow: if a son were born, they would dedicate him to God. The reading of priestly books and frequent visits to Divine-services, which the boy served at with his father - a priest at a not-large temple named for Saint Theodore, - all this gave sanctity to the soul of young Ioann. And at the age of fifteen, in the year 1411, he departed his parental home for a monastery.

Twelve versts from Novgorod, in a wilderness spot named Vyazhisch, amidst the forests and the swamps there had settled three monks - Evphrosyn, Ignatii and Galaktion. There soon joined them the priest Pimen, who accepted tonsure with the name Pakhomii. Here they asceticised in complete solitude at a wooden chapel built by them in the name of Christ's Saint Nicholas, living in unceasing prayer and in the harsh struggle with the severe conditions of nature in the Northern regions. The young Ioann in seeking salvation came also to these ascetics. The hegumen Pakhomii accepted him fondly and tonsured him into monasticism with the name Evthymii. Tonsure at so early an age reflects the outstanding spiritual traits of the young ascetic, which were evident to the perspicacious Pakhomii. During this period in time the Novgorod archbishop's cathedra-seat was occupied by archbishop Simeon, a simple monk elevated to archbishop. The virtuous life of the Monk Evthymii became known to the archbishop. Saint Evthymii was summoned to Novgorod and after a long talk with the vладыka he was appointed the archbishop's steward. During these times Novgorod archbishops occupied quite unique a position: independent of princely authority, they were elected directly by the veche-assembly and they assumed a large role in secular matters; moreover, it imposed upon them the administration of vast land-holdings. And an archbishop's steward under these conditions had to combine administrative talent with the utmost non-covetousness and deep Christian humility. Saint Evthymii fervently entreated the archpastor to send him away back again to Vyazhisch, but then he yielded.

In his new duty, Saint Evthymii evoked general astonishment and esteem, in that while occupying so important a position, and being at the centre of business life in a large crowded city, he as a monk asceticised as fervently as he would have in the deep forest. In 1421 archbishop Simeon died. Under the

new hierarch, Evthymii I, Saint Evthymii again withdrew to his monastery. Soon however the monks of a monastery on Lisich Hill chose the saint as their hegumen. With the death of the Novgorod archbishop Evthymii I in 1429, the hegumen Saint Evthymii was then chosen archbishop of his native city, and on 29 November he entered into the temple of Saint Sophia. For four years the saint administered the Novgorod diocese, whilst putting off being acclaimed archbishop, and it was only on 24 May 1434 that he was consecrated at Smolensk. The archepiscopal laying on of hands was headed by metropolitan Gerasim.

Saint Evthymii wisely governed his diocese over the course of 29 years, zealous in the fulfilling of his archpastoral duty. Saint Evthymii toiled much at the construction and restoration of churches, especially after the devastating conflagrations of the years 1431 and 1442. The Sophia cathedral was richly embellished by the saint, and in the Novgorod Kremlin there was built several new churches. "If thou dost wish to see, - writes Pakhomii the Logothete, - some few from the number of his great works, go to the temple of Saint Sophia. There thou wilt catch glimpse the temples of saints built by him, standing like hillocks. Not by the voice, but in the deed do they bespeak their varied charm. This was bestowed me by archbishop Evthymii, - proclaims the one church; while another sayeth - so magnificently hath he adorned me; and yet a third one doth relate - he did build me up from the very foundations. The temple of great John Chrysostom, tall and beautiful, with the hand of a Chrysostomos he blesses and from its face is proclaimed: "In as thou hast erected me a temple-habitation, I in turn shalt beseech the Creator to prepare thee habitation in Heaven". The cathedral temple of the Wisdom of God, Saint Sophia, answering from over the years in its restoration by him, proclaimeth: "He hath returned me to mine original grandeur, he hath adorned me with holy icons, he - is my praise and beauty". Saint Evthymii built also a church in honour of his Guardian Angel [i.e. Russian idiom for "patron saint"], and in 1438 he built at Vyazhitsk monastery a stone church in honour of Saint Nicholas; and in the following year - a stone church in honour of Saint John the Theologian with a refectory and consistory. Zealous for the Glory of God, Saint Evthymii concerned himself over the increase of spiritual books. From this period is found quite many a Divine-service book, transcribed "under authority of archbishop Vladyka Evthymii". Despite his abundant works, the saint always promptly fulfilled the monastic rule: whatever he did not succeed doing by day he accomplished by night. An hour before Matins the saint rose up for cell prayer. Often the whole night he spent without sleep; he wore chains, but no one knew about them until his end. The first week of Great Lent the saint spent at Vyazhitsk monastery in silent prayer, eating nothing.

In 1446 the great-princely throne was usurped by Shemyaka, who entered into relations with Novgorod. The political situation in Novgorod was often quite strained. Sainted Jona (Comm. 31 March) in a special missive in 1451 urged the Novgorod people to cease their rowdiness and to heed their archpastor - "be ye in everything heedful to our son and brother, your father and teacher, the God-beloved archbishop Evthymii". Saint Evthymii, quite up in age, was troubled in soul that the actions of Shemyaka might cast a pall over his relations with the church primate he so deeply revered, and he dispatched a letter to Saint Jona. Sensing the nearness of his death, Saint Evthymii besought for himself prayers and pardon. Saint Jona in the reply letter - a grammota of pardon, wrote: "We call to mind for thee, my son, that thou didst comport thyself too simply: one, who was excommunicated for transgressions by our humility, ye did accept unto yourself and find worthy of your blessing. And do thou, my son, offer repentance in this before God". And with this Saint Jona gave orders: if the grammota of pardon should arrive after the blessed end of the Novgorod archpastor, then it should be read over his grave. Sainted Evthymii reposed on 10 March 1458. The priest Evmenii, dispatched by Saint Jona with the grammota of pardon, arrived in Novgorod 16 days after the death of Saint Evthymii, whose grave at his bequest stood at the church of the Vyazhitsk monastery. When they opened the grave so as to read the grammota of pardon, they then saw that no decay had touched the body of the saint. Saint Evthymii lay there as though asleep, and his fingers were positioned in blessing. "God preserve yet Novgorod, for which Sainted Evthymii doth pray", - loudly exclaimed Evmenii, and reading the grammota of Saint Jona, he placed it into the hand of the deceased hierarch.

Soon after the death of the saint, the Lord glorified him in blessing with grace those, who resorted to his prayerful intercession. Highly revering the saint, the monks of the Vyazhitsk monastery in gratitude erected a church in honour of Saint Evthymii, which was noted in the census of 1500. The celebration of the memory of Saint Evthymii was established at the Moscow Sobor of 1549. The Vita (Life) of Saint Evthymii was written by Pakhomii the Logothete, having been commissioned by Saint Jona, Archbishop of Novgorod (+ 1470, Comm. 5 November).

Also commemorated on this day: Hieromartyr Pionius of Smyrna and those with him: Asclepiades, Macedonia, Linus, and Sabina ; Translation of the relics of the Martyr Epimachus of Pelusium; Venerable John Moskhos; Hieromartyr Eulogius, archbishop of Cordoba; Venerable George the New, Wonderworker of Constantinople; Venerable Theodora, queen of Arta; Venerable Sophronius, recluse of the Kiev Caves; St. Sophronius, bishop of Vraca, Bulgaria; Venerable Alexius of Goloseevsk Skete, Kiev Caves; Venerable Patrick (Petrov), confessor; Righteous priest Basil Malahov, confessor.

12 / 25 March - St Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome - son of the senator Gordianus, he himself became a senator and governor of the city of Rome, but, as soon as his father died, he gave himself to the spiritual life. He built six monasteries in Sicily and a seventh in Rome itself, out of his great wealth, being tonsured in this last, which he dedicated to the Apostle Andrew. His mother, Sylvia, also received the monastic habit in a women's monastery. After the death of Pope Pelagius, Gregory was chosen as Pope. He fled from this honour and power and hid himself in the mountains and ravines, but God showed people where to find him by making a fiery column, reaching from earth to heaven, appear at the place where Gregory was hiding. He had a rare compassion, using all his income for the housing of the poor and on hospitality. He frequently brought the poor in and fed them from his own table. He occupied himself with the writing of instructive books. 'The Dialogist', or 'the one who converses' was the name he was known by, having written a book entitled 'The Dialogues' in which he brought to light the virtues and miracles of the Italian saints. He also compiled the service of the Presanctified Gifts that is used on Wednesdays and Fridays in the Great Fast. His archdeacon, Peter, often saw a dove hovering over his head when he was writing. He went to the Lord in 604.

Venerable Simeon The New Theologian - This God-bearing and great Father of the Church was born in Galatia, Paphlagonia. Simeon was educated in Constantinople and was assigned as a courtier in attendance to the Emperors Basil and Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Simeon left all for the sake of Christ and retreated to a monastery. He lived a life of asceticism under the direction of the Elder Simeon, after which he became the abbot of the Monastery of St. Mamas and in the end became a recluse. He is the greatest theologian after St. Gregory the Theologian. Simeon felt God's Grace in his heart. His words are true spiritual and theological revelations. He died in 1032 A.D. His relics are miracle-performing.

St. Alphege the Bald, bishop of Winchester, England (951) - (also known as Elphege the Elder or Elphege the Bald) Before he was raised to the dignity of bishop of Winchester in 935, Alphege was a monk or hermit. He persuaded many others to enter monastic life, including his kinsman Saint Dunstan and Saint Ethelwold, both of whom he ordained to the priesthood on the same day. His feast is still kept at Winchester and Saint Albans.

Also commemorated on this day: Venerable Theophanes the Confessor of Sigriane; Righteous Phineas, chief priest of Israel; Venerable Abba Cyrus (or Cyrus) of Alexandria; Venerable Symeon the Reverent; Martyr Demetrius, king of Georgia; Right-believing Stephen (monk Theoctistus) Dragutin, King of Serbia; Righteous priest Alexander Derzhavin, confessor; New Hieromartyrs John Plekhanov, Constantine Sokolov, priests, and Monk-martyr Vladimir (Volkov); New Hieromartyr Sergius Skvortsov, priest; 'Not Made by Hands' Icon of the Mother of God on the pillar at Lydda.

13 / 26 March — St Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople. (c. 758-829) - he governed the holy Church with wisdom and zeal as the greatest arch-pastor of Constantinople. When Leo the Armenian made his stand against icons, he opposed the Emperor; first counselling him and then denouncing him. For this the accursed Emperor exiled him to the island of Prochonis. There was a monastery on that island, which Nicephorus himself had built in honour of St Theodore. And this confessor of the Orthodox faith spent thirteen years there, then died and went to the Lord in 827. Then all the iconoclast Emperors perished, and Michael, with his mother Theodora, came to the imperial throne in 842, and Methodius became Patriarch. Then, in 846, the relics of St Nicephorus were translated from Prochonnessus to Constantinople and placed first in the Church of St Sophia, from which he had been driven in his lifetime, and then in the Church of the Holy Apostles. The main commemoration of this great hierarch is on June 2nd, but on March 13th is commemorated the finding and translation of his uncorrupt relics. St Nicephorus was driven from Constantinople on March 13th, and on March 13th, nineteen years later, his relics were brought back to his patriarchal seat.

Martyr Christina of Persia - For her unwavering confession of faith in Christ, she was cruelly tortured in Persia in the fourth century. So much did they torture her, flogging her with a whip, that she became weak and died. Her soul then departed from her tortured body and entered into the joy of Christ, the King and Lord.

Hieromartyr Publius - This priestly-martyr was successor to the episcopal throne of the glorious Dionysius the Areopagite in Athens. As a bishop, he was tortured by the pagans and beheaded in the second century. After a brief period of torture, he inherited life eternal.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Sabinus of Egypt; Martyrs Africanus, Publius, and Terence; Hieromartyr priest Alexander of Macedonia; New Hieromartyr Nicholas Popov, priest; New Hieromartyr Gregory Pospelov, priest; New Hieromartyr Stephen (Bekh), bishop of Izhevsk; New Hieromartyr Michael Okolovich, priest; Venerable Aninas, the wonderworker; 'Moldovan' Icon of the Mother of God.

14 / 27 March — St. Benedict - born in Nursia in Italy in 480, of rich and eminent parents, he did not persevere long with his schooling, for he realised himself that he could, through book-learning, lose 'the great understanding of my soul'. And he left school 'an untaught sage and an understanding ignoramus'. He fled to a monastery where a monk, Romanus, gave him the habit, after which he withdrew to a craggy mountain, where he lived for more than three years in a cave in great struggles with his soul. Romanus brought him bread and dropped it over the wall of the crag on a rope to the mouth of the cave. When he became known in the neighbourhood, he, to flee the praise of men, moved away from that cave. He was very brutal with himself. Once, when an impure rage of fleshly lust fell on him, he stripped bare and rolled among nettles and thorns until he had driven out of himself every thought of a woman. God endowed him with many spiritual gifts: insight, healing and the driving out of evil spirits, the raising of the dead and the ability to appear to others from a distance in a dream or vision. He once discerned that he had been given a glass of poisoned wine. He made the sign of the Cross over the glass and it broke into pieces. He founded twelve monasteries, each having twelve monks at first. He later compiled the specifically 'Benedictine' rule, which is today followed in the Roman Church. On the sixth day before his death he commanded that his grave, already prepared as the saint had foreseen that his end was near, should be opened. He gathered all the monks together, gave them counsel and gave his soul to the Lord whom he had faithfully served in poverty and purity. His sister, Scholastica, lived in a women's monastery, where, guided by her brother and herself practising great asceticism, she came to great spiritual perfection. When St Benedict set his soul free, two monks, one on the road and one at prayer in a distant cell, had at the same moment the same vision: a path from earth to heaven, curtained with precious cloth and illuminated at the sides by ranks of people. At the top of that path stood a man of indescribable beauty and light, who told them that the path was prepared for Benedict, the beloved of God. After that vision, the two brethren discovered that their beloved abbot had gone from this world. He died peacefully in about 550 and went to the eternal Kingdom of Christ the King.

St. Theognostus, Metropolitan of Kiev - he was a Greek by origin and a successor to St. Peter of Kiev. He suffered much from the Mongol hordes, especially at the hands of Janibeg Khan. Theognostus was slandered by his own Russian people before the Mongolian emperor because he did not render the emperor any tribute for his episcopal rank. When the emperor summoned and questioned him concerning this, Theognostus replied: "Christ our God has redeemed this Church from paganism by His Precious Blood. For what and on what should I pay tribute to the pagans?" In the end he was released and returned home. He governed the Church for twenty-five years. He died to the Lord in the year 1353 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Eustathius and those with him, at Carrhae, Mesopotamia; St. Euschemon, bishop of Lampsacus; Right-believing Great Prince Rostislav (Michael in baptism) Mstislavich of Kiev; Venerable Andrew, abbot of Raphael Monastery in Tobolsk; 'Feodorovskaya' or 'St. Theodore' Icon of the Mother of God of Kostroma.

15 / 28 March — The Holy Martyr Agapius and the seven with him: Publius, Timolaus, Romulus, Alexander, Alexander, Dionysius and Dionysius - They all suffered in Palestinian Caesarea at the hand of Urban, the governor, in the time of the Emperor Diocletian. All of them, apart from Agapius, were very young men and were not yet Christians. They had never been baptised with water, but their baptism was of blood. One day these seven were watching how the Christians were being tortured: one in fire, another on the gallows, a third before wild beasts, and when they saw with what patience the Christians endured all these tortures, they were inflamed with zeal for Christ, bound their own hands behind their backs and, thus bound, came before Urban saying: 'We too are Christians!' Urban's flattery and threats were in vain. Agapius, a prominent inhabitant of that city, who had previously suffered somewhat for Christ, joined them, and they were inspired with an even greater faith in and love for the Lord. They were all beheaded in 303, and went to the courts of the King of heaven.

Hieromartyr Alexander of Side, in Pamphylia - a deputy of the Emperor Aurelius asked Alexander, "Who are you and what are you?" To that, Alexander replied that, he is a shepherd of the flock of Christ. "And where is this flock of Christ?" further inquired the wicked and suspicious governor. Alexander replied, "Throughout the entire world where men live whom Christ the God created, and among those who believe in Him, they are His sheep. But all who are fallen away from their Creator and are slaves to creation, to man-made things and to dead idols, such as you, are estranged from His flock. At the dreadful judgment of God, they will be placed on the left with the goats." The wicked judge then ordered that Alexander, first of all, be beaten with oxen straps and then thrown into a fiery furnace. But the fire did not harm him in any way. After that, he was skinned and was thrown to the wild beasts, but the beasts would not touch him. Finally, the deputy ordered that Alexander be beheaded. Just as soon as the judge pronounced the sentence, he became possessed by an evil spirit and went insane. Howling, the judge was led before his god-idol and on the way, his evil soul was wrenched from him. St. Alexander suffered between the years 270 - 275 AD.

Martyr Nicander of Egypt - Nicander was skinned and then beheaded for his faith in Christ. As a physician, his crime was that he ministered to Christian martyrs and honourably buried their martyred bodies. He suffered honourably in the year 302 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Zachariah, pope of Rome; Venerable Nicander of Gorodets; Martyr Manuel of Crete; New Hieromartyr Alexis Vinogradov, priest; New Hieromartyr Michael Bogoslovsky, priest; translation of the relics of Venerable Barsanuphius (Yurchenko) of Cherson, Hieroconfessor.

16 / 29 March — The Holy Apostle Aristobulus, one of the Seventy - He was the brother of the Apostle Barnabas and was born in Cyprus. He was a follower of the Apostle Paul, who mentions him in his Epistle to the Romans (16:10). When the great Apostle Paul created many bishops for different parts of the world, he made this Aristobulus bishop of Britain (i. e. England). In Britain there was a wild people, pagan and wicked, and Aristobulus endured among them unmentionable torments, misfortunes and malice. They smote him without mercy, dragged him through the streets, mocked him and jeered at him. But in the end this holy man came to success by the power of the grace of God. He enlightened the people, baptised them in the name of Christ the Lord, built churches, ordained priests and deacons and finally died there in peace and went to the Kingdom of the Lord whom he had served so faithfully.

The Holy Martyr Sabinas - An Egyptian from the city of Hermopolis, he was the administrator of that city. In the time of a persecution of Christians he went off into a mountain with many other Christians and shut himself in a hut, where he spent the time in fasting and prayer. But a poor man who had brought him food and for whom Sabinas had done much betrayed him; as Judas did Christ, so this poor man for money (for two pieces of gold) betrayed his benefactor. Sabinas, with six others, was taken by soldiers, bound and brought to judgement. After harsh torture, he was thrown into the River Nile, where he gave his spirit to God in 287.

The Holy Martyrs Trophimus and Thallus - They were born in Syria and were brothers by birth. They openly and freely preached Christ and denounced the folly of the Hellenes [Greeks] and Romans. The enraged pagans decided to have them stoned to death, but when they began hurling stones upon these two holy brothers, the stones reverted and struck the assailants and the brothers remained unharmed. Afterward they were both crucified. From their crosses the brothers taught and encouraged those Christians who stood sorrowfully around. After much agony they presented their souls to the Lord to Whom they remained faithful to the end. They suffered honourably in the year 300 A.D., in the city of Bofor.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Papas of Lycaonia; Hieromartyr Alexander, bishop of Rome; Martyr Julian of Anazarbus; Venerable Christodoulus of Patmos, wonderworker; Venerable Pimen, fool-for-Christ, and Venerable Anthony of Meskhi, Georgia; St. Serapion, archbishop of Novgorod; St. Ambrose (Khelaia) the Confessor, catholicos of Georgia; Venerable Eutropia of Cherson.

‡ Daily Scripture Readings ‡

Monday - Isaiah 14:24-32 (6th Hour); Genesis 8:21-9:7 (Vespers, 1st Reading); Proverbs 11:19-12:6 (Vespers, 2nd Reading)

Tuesday - Isaiah 25:1-9 (6th Hour); Genesis 9:8-17 (Vespers, 1st Reading); Proverbs 12:8-22 (Vespers, 2nd Reading)

Wednesday - Isaiah 26:21-27:9 (6th Hour); Genesis 9:18-10:1 (Vespers, 1st Reading); Proverbs 12:23-13:9 (Vespers, 2nd Reading)

Thursday - Isaiah 28:14-22 (6th Hour); Genesis 10:32-11:9 (Vespers, 1st Reading); Proverbs 13:19-14:6 (Vespers, 2nd Reading)

Friday - Isaiah 29:13-23 (6th Hour); Genesis 12:1-7 (Vespers, 1st Reading); Proverbs 14:15-26 (Vespers, 2nd Reading)

Saturday - Hebrews 6:9-12; 1 Corinthians 15:47-57 (Departed); Mark 7:31-37; John 5:24-30 (Departed)

Lenten Synaxarion

Cross Veneration Sunday

**Let all the earth venerate the Cross,
through which it has learned to worship Thee, the Word.**

On this third Sunday of the Great Fast we celebrate the Veneration of the precious and life-giving Cross. Since during the forty days of the Fast we are also in a way crucified, mortified to the passions, contrite, abased and despondent, the precious and life-giving Cross is offered to us as refreshment and confirmation, calling to mind the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and comforting us. If our God was crucified for our sake, how great should be our effort for His sake, since our afflictions have been assuaged through the Lord's tribulations, and by the commemoration and the hope of the Cross of glory. For as our Savior in ascending the Cross was glorified through dishonor and grief; so should we also endure our sorrows, in order to be glorified with Him. Also, as those who have traveled a long hard road, weighed down by the labors of their journey, in finding a shady tree, take their ease for a moment and continue their journey rejuvenated, so now in this time of the Fast, this sorrowful and laborious journey, the Holy Fathers have planted the life-giving Cross, for our relief and refreshment, to encourage and make easier the labors that lie ahead. Or as when there is a royal procession, the king's scepter and banners precede him, he then appears himself, radiant and joyous in his victory, causing his subjects to rejoice with him. So then our Lord Jesus Christ, desiring to show His sure victory over death and His glory on the day of the Resurrection, sends His scepter before Himself, the sign of His kingship, the life-giving Cross, to gladden and refresh us, as it greatly fortifies and enables us to be prepared to receive the King with all possible strength, and to praise Him in His radiant victory.

This week lies at the middle of the holy Forty Day Fast. The Fast is like a bitter source because of our contrition and the sadness and sorrow for sin that it brings. And as Moses plunged the branch in the bitter waters of Marah, making them sweet, so God, who has led us through the spiritual Red Sea away from Pharaoh, through the life-giving wood of the precious and life-giving Cross sweetens the bitterness of the Forty Day Fast, and comforts us as those who were in the wilderness, up until the time when by His Resurrection He will lead us to the spiritual Jerusalem. And since the Cross is called, and indeed is, the Tree of Life, it is the very tree that was planted in the Garden of Eden. So it is fitting that the Holy Fathers have planted the Tree of the Cross in the middle of the Forty Day Fast to commemorate both Adam's tasting of its sweet fruit and of its being taken from us in favor of the Tree of the Cross, tasting of which we shall in no way die, but will have even greater life.

**Through the power of Thy Cross, O Christ our God,
preserve us also from the temptations of the Evil One.**

**And make us worthy to venerate
Thy divine Passion and life-bearing Resurrection,
having radiantly traversed the great length of the Fast,**

**and have mercy on us, as Thou art good
and lovest mankind.**

Amen.