

We would like to welcome all parish visitors and invite you to join us after the Liturgy for Coffee hour.



ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

OCA – Diocese of New York & New Jersey

The Most Reverend Michael, Archbishop of NY & the Diocese of NY/NJ

V. Rev. Dr. Matthew Searforce, Temporary Rector

Sub-Deacon Edward Dawson Sub-Deacon Vlashi

Parish Council President: Andrew Romanofsky

Parish Council Vice President: Dean Inferrera

HYMNS OF THE DAY

Resurrectional Troparion in Tone 8

Thou didst descend from on high, O Merciful One! Thou didst accept the three day burial to free us from our sufferings! O Lord, our Life and Resurrection, glory to Thee!

Troparion for Maximus the Confessor in Tone 8

Champion of Orthodoxy, teacher of purity and of true worship, enlightener of the universe and the adornment of hierarchs: all-wise Father Maximus, thy teachings have gleamed with light upon all things. Intercede before Christ God to save our souls!

Troparion for Martyr Neophytus in Tone 4

Thy holy martyr Neophytus, O Lord, through his suffering has received an incorruptible crown from Thee, our God. For having Thy strength, he laid low his adversaries, and shattered the powerless boldness of demons. Through his intercessions save our souls!

Resurrectional Kontakion in Tone 8

By rising from the tomb, Thou didst raise the dead and resurrected Adam. Eve exults in Thy Resurrection, and the world celebrates Thy rising from the dead, O greatly Merciful One!

Kontakion for Maximus the Confessor in Tone 6

The Thrice-radiant Light took up abode in thy soul, O all-blissful father, and displayed it as an elect vessel, manifest to the ends of the earth. O blessed Maximus, thou didst explain hard-to-grasp doctrines with brilliance and clarity, proclaiming the transcendent and unoriginate Trinity to all.

Kontakion for Martyr Neophytus in Tone 4

Thou didst shine forth from the mount like lightning, glorifying Christ through thy struggles and death as a martyr. Therefore, thou hast received an unfading crown, O Great-martyr Neophytus.

Prayer Requests

For Health of:

Richard Dantinne, Jr., on his birthday, offered with love by his family.
Holly Dawson, on her birthday offered by Sub-Deacon Edward.
Presbyter Christopher Talleos, Matushka Ellen Chupeck, Michael Champion, Joan Babiak, Paul Babiak, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

Bulletin Sponsors

Dantinne Family; Sub-Deacon Edward

SAINTS AND FEASTS OF THE DAY

JANUARY 21, 2018

33RD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST. SUNDAY OF ZACCHAEUS.



Sunday of Zacchaeus

The paschal season of the Church is preceded by the season of Great Lent, which is also preceded by its own liturgical preparation. The first sign of the approach of Great Lent comes five Sundays before its beginning. On this Sunday the Gospel reading is about Zacchaeus the tax-collector. It tells how Christ brought salvation to the sinful man, and how his life was changed simply because he “sought to see who Jesus was” (Luke 19:3). The desire and effort to see Jesus begins the entire movement through Lent towards Pascha. It is the first movement of salvation.

Our Lenten journey begins with a recognition of our own sinfulness, just as Zacchaeus recognized his. He promised to make restitution by giving half of his wealth to the poor, and by paying to those he had falsely accused four times as much as they had lost. In this, he went beyond the requirements of the Law (Ex. 22:3-12).

The example of Zacchaeus teaches us that we should turn away from our sins, and atone for them. The real proof of our sorrow and repentance is not just a verbal apology, but when we correct ourselves and try to make amends for the consequences of our evil actions.

We are also assured of God’s mercy and compassion by Christ’s words to Zacchaeus, “Today salvation is come to this house” (Luke 19:9). After the Great Doxology at Sunday Matins (when the Tone of the week is Tone 1, 3, 5, 7) we sing the Dismissal Hymn of the Resurrection “Today salvation has come to the world,” which echoes the Lord’s words to Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was short, so he climbed a tree in order to see the Lord. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We are also short in our spiritual stature, therefore we must climb the ladder of the virtues. In other words, we must prepare for spiritual effort and growth.

St Zacchaeus is also commemorated on April 20.



St. Maximus the Confessor

Saint Maximus the Confessor was born in Constantinople around 580 and raised in a pious Christian family. He received an excellent education, studying philosophy, grammar, and rhetoric. He was well-read in the authors of antiquity and he also mastered philosophy and theology. When Saint Maximus entered into government service, he became first secretary (asekretis) and chief counselor to the emperor Heraclius (611-641), who was impressed by his knowledge and virtuous life.

Saint Maximus soon realized that the emperor and many others had been corrupted by the Monothelite heresy, which was spreading rapidly through the East. He resigned from his duties at court, and went to the Chrysopolis monastery (at Skutari on the opposite shore of the Bosphorus), where he received monastic tonsure. Because of his humility and wisdom, he soon won the love of the brethren and was chosen igumen of the monastery after a few years. Even in this position, he remained a simple monk.

In 638, the emperor Heraclius and Patriarch Sergius tried to minimize the importance of differences in belief, and they issued an edict, the “Ekthesis” (“Ekthesis tes pisteos” or “Exposition of Faith”), which decreed that everyone must accept the teaching of one will in the two natures of the Savior. In defending Orthodoxy against the “Ekthesis,” Saint Maximus spoke to people in various occupations and positions, and these conversations were successful. Not only the clergy and the bishops, but also the people and the secular officials felt some sort of invisible attraction to him, as we read in his Life.

When Saint Maximus saw what turmoil this heresy caused in Constantinople and in the East, he decided to leave his monastery and seek refuge in the West, where Monothelitism had been completely rejected. On the way, he visited the bishops of Africa, strengthening them in Orthodoxy, and encouraging them not to be deceived by the cunning arguments of the heretics.

The Fourth Ecumenical Council had condemned the Monophysite heresy, which falsely taught that in the Lord Jesus Christ there was only one nature (the divine). Influenced by this erroneous opinion, the Monothelite heretics said that in Christ there was only one divine will (“thelema”) and only one divine energy (“energia”). Adherents of

Monotheletism sought to return by another path to the repudiated Monophysite heresy. Monotheletism found numerous adherents in Armenia, Syria, Egypt. The heresy, fanned also by nationalistic animosities, became a serious threat to Church unity in the East. The struggle of Orthodoxy with heresy was particularly difficult because in the year 630, three of the patriarchal thrones in the Orthodox East were occupied by Monotheletes: Constantinople by Sergius, Antioch by Athanasius, and Alexandria by Cyrus.

Saint Maximus traveled from Alexandria to Crete, where he began his preaching activity. He clashed there with a bishop, who adhered to the heretical opinions of Severus and Nestorius. The saint spent six years in Alexandria and the surrounding area.

Patriarch Sergius died at the end of 638, and the emperor Heraclius also died in 641. The imperial throne was eventually occupied by his grandson Constans II (642-668), an open adherent of the Monothelete heresy. The assaults of the heretics against Orthodoxy intensified. Saint Maximus went to Carthage and he preached there for about five years. When the Monothelete Pyrrhus, the successor of Patriarch Sergius, arrived there after fleeing from Constantinople because of court intrigues, he and Saint Maximus spent many hours in debate. As a result, Pyrrhus publicly acknowledged his error, and was permitted to retain the title of "Patriarch." He even wrote a book confessing the Orthodox Faith. Saint Maximus and Pyrrhus traveled to Rome to visit Pope Theodore, who received Pyrrhus as the Patriarch of Constantinople.

In the year 647 Saint Maximus returned to Africa. There, at a council of bishops Monotheletism was condemned as a heresy. In 648, a new edict was issued, commissioned by Constans and compiled by Patriarch Paul of Constantinople: the "Typos" ("Typos tes pisteos" or "Pattern of the Faith"), which forbade any further disputes about one will or two wills in the Lord Jesus Christ. Saint Maximus then asked Saint Martin the Confessor (April 14), the successor of Pope Theodore, to examine the question of Monotheletism at a Church Council. The Lateran Council was convened in October of 649. One hundred and fifty Western bishops and thirty-seven representatives from the Orthodox East were present, among them Saint Maximus the Confessor. The Council condemned Monotheletism, and the Typos. The false teachings of Patriarchs Sergius, Paul and Pyrrhus of Constantinople, were also anathematized.

When Constans II received the decisions of the Council, he gave orders to arrest both Pope Martin and Saint Maximus. The emperor's order was fulfilled only in the year 654. Saint Maximus was accused of treason and locked up in prison. In 656 he was sent to Thrace, and was later brought back to a Constantinople prison.

The saint and two of his disciples were subjected to the crudest torments. Each one's tongue was cut out, and his right hand was cut off. Then they were exiled to Skemarum in Scythia, enduring many sufferings and difficulties on the journey.

After three years, the Lord revealed to Saint Maximus the time of his death (August 13, 662). Three candles appeared over the grave of Saint Maximus and burned miraculously. This was a sign that Saint Maximus was a beacon of Orthodoxy during his lifetime, and continues to shine forth as an example of virtue for all. Many healings occurred at his tomb.

In the Greek Prologue, August 13 commemorates the Transfer of the Relics of Saint Maximus to Constantinople, but it could also be the date of the saint's death. It may be that his memory is celebrated on January 21 because August 13 is the Leavetaking of the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord.

Saint Maximus has left to the Church a great theological legacy. His exegetical works contain explanations of difficult passages of Holy Scripture, and include a Commentary on the Lord's Prayer and on Psalm 59, various "scholia" or "marginalia" (commentaries written in the margin of manuscripts), on treatises of the Hieromartyr Dionysius the Areopagite (October 3) and Saint Gregory the Theologian (January 25). Among the exegetical works of Saint Maximus are his explanation of divine services, entitled "Mystagogia" ("Introduction Concerning the Mystery").

The dogmatic works of Saint Maximus include the Exposition of his dispute with Pyrrhus, and several tracts and letters to various people. In them are contained explanations of the Orthodox teaching on the Divine Essence and the Persons of the Holy Trinity, on the Incarnation of the Word of God, and on "theosis" ("deification") of human nature.

"Nothing in theosis is the product of human nature," Saint Maximus writes in a letter to his friend Thalassius, "for nature cannot comprehend God. It is only the mercy of God that has the capacity to endow theosis unto the existing... In theosis man (the image of God) becomes likened to God, he rejoices in all the plenitude that does not belong to him by nature, because the grace of the Spirit triumphs within him, and because God acts in him" (Letter 22).

Saint Maximus also wrote anthropological works (i.e. concerning man). He deliberates on the nature of the soul and its conscious existence after death. Among his moral compositions, especially important is his "Chapters on

Love.” Saint Maximus the Confessor also wrote three hymns in the finest traditions of church hymnography, following the example of Saint Gregory the Theologian.

The theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor, based on the spiritual experience of the knowledge of the great Desert Fathers, and utilizing the skilled art of dialectics worked out by pre-Christian philosophy, was continued and developed in the works of Saint Simeon the New Theologian (March 12), and Saint Gregory Palamas (November 14).



Martyr Neophytus of Nicea

The Holy Martyr Neophytus, a native of the city of Nicea in Bithynia, was raised by his parents in strict Christian piety. For his virtue, temperance and unceasing prayer, it pleased God to glorify Saint Neophytus with the gift of wonderworking, while the saint was still just a child!

Like Moses, the holy youth brought forth water from a stone of the city wall and gave this water to those who were thirsty. In answer to the prayer of Saint Neophytus' mother, asking that God's will concerning her son might be revealed to her, a white dove miraculously appeared and told of the path he would follow. The saint was led forth from his parental home by this dove and brought to a cave on Mt. Olympus, which served as a lion's den. It is said that he chased the lion from the cave so that he could live there himself. The saint remained there from the age of nine until he was fifteen, leaving it only once to bury his parents and distribute their substance to the poor.

During the persecution by Diocletian (284-305), he went to Nicea and boldly began to denounce the impiety of the pagan faith. The enraged persecutors suspended the saint from a tree, they whipped him with ox thongs, and scraped his body with iron claws. Then they threw him into a red-hot oven, but the holy martyr remained unharmed, spending three days and three nights in it. The torturers, not knowing what else to do with him, decided to kill him. One of the pagans ran him through with a sword (some say it was a spear), and the saint departed to the Lord at the age of sixteen.



Martyrs Eugene, Candidus, Valerian & Aquila at Trebizonde

The Holy Martyrs Eugene, Candidus, Valerian and Aquila suffered for their faith in Christ during the reign of Diocletian (284-305) and Maximian (305-311), under the regimental commander Lycius. Valerian, Candidus and Aquila had hidden themselves in the hills near Trebizonde, preferring life among the wild beasts to living with the pagans. They were soon found, however, and brought to Trebizonde.

For their bold and steadfast confession of faith in Christ the holy martyrs were whipped with ox thongs, scraped with iron claws, then were burned with fire. Several days later Saint Eugene was also arrested, and subjected to the same tortures. Later, they poured vinegar laced with salt into his wounds. After these torments, they threw the four martyrs into a red-hot oven. When they emerged from it unharmed, they were beheaded, receiving their incorruptible crowns from God.



Virginmartyr Agnes of Rome

The holy Virgin Martyr Agnes was born at Rome during the third century. Her parents were Christians and they raised her in the Christian Faith. From her youth she devoted herself to God, and dedicated herself to a life of virginity, refusing all other suitors.

When she refused to enter into marriage with the son of the city official Symphronius, one of his associates revealed to him that Agnes was a Christian. The wicked Eparch decided to subject the holy virgin to shame and he ordered that she be stripped and sent to a brothel for disdaining the pagan gods. But the Lord would not permit the saint to suffer shame. As soon as she was disrobed, long thick hair grew from her head covering her body. An angel was also appointed to guard her. Standing at the door of the brothel, he shone with a heavenly light which blinded anyone who came near her.

The son of the Eparch also came to defile the virgin, but fell down dead before he could touch her. Through the fervent prayer of Saint Agnes, he was restored to life. Before his father and many other people he proclaimed, “There is one God in the heavens and on earth: the Christian God, and the other gods are but dust and ashes!” After seeing this miracle, 160 men believed in God and were baptized, and then suffered martyrdom.

Saint Agnes, at the demand of the pagan priests, was given over to torture. They tried to burn her as a witch, but the saint remained unharmed in the fire, praying to God. After this they killed her by stabbing her in the throat. Through her death at the age of thirteen, Saint Agnes escaped everlasting death and inherited eternal life. The holy virgin martyr was buried by her parents in a field they owned outside of Rome.

Many miracles occurred at the grave of Saint Agnes. Her holy and grace-filled relics rest in the church built in her honor, along the Via Nomentana.

Martyr Anastasius the Disciple of the Venerable Maximus the Confessor

The Holy Martyr Anastasius was a disciple of Saint Maximus the Confessor, and with him suffered persecution under the Monothelites. Saint Maximus and two of his disciples were subjected to the crudest torments. Each one's tongue was cut out, and his right hand was cut off. Then they were exiled to Skemarum in Scythia, enduring many sufferings and difficulties on the journey.

Saint Anastasius wrote the Life of his teacher, and died in the year 662.

Venerable Neophytus of Vatopedi, Mt Athos

Saint Neophytus of Vatopedi was a church warden at the Vatopedi monastery at Athos. He was sent to the monastery's metochion (representation church) in Euboea to serve. Falling grievously ill, he turned with intense prayer to the Most Holy Theotokos, asking to be allowed to die in his own monastery. He heard a voice from the icon of the Mother of God saying, "Go to your monastery, Neophytus. You will be ready in a year." The miraculously healed Neophytus intensified his spiritual efforts in preparation for his departure from this life.

A year later, after he had received the Holy Mysteries of Christ, he again heard the voice from the icon of the Mother of God saying that it was time for him to depart. He returned to his cell and fell ill. After asking forgiveness from the brethren, he surrendered his soul to the Lord.



Venerable Maximus the Greek

Saint Maximus the Greek was the son of a rich Greek dignitary in the city of Arta (Epiros), and he received a splendid education. In his youth he travelled widely and he studied languages and sciences (i.e. intellectual disciplines) in Europe, spending time in Paris, Florence, and Venice.

Upon returning to his native land, he went to Athos and became a monk at the Vatopedi monastery. And with enthusiasm he studied ancient manuscripts left on Athos by the Byzantine Emperors Andronicus Paleologos and John Kantakuzenos (who became monks).

During this period the Moscow Great Prince Basil III (1505-1533) wanted to make an inventory of the Greek manuscripts and books of his mother, Sophia Paleologina, and he asked the Protos of the Holy Mountain, Igumen Simeon, to send him a translator. Saint Maximus was chosen to go to Moscow, for he had been brought up on secular and ecclesiastical books from his youth. Upon his arrival, he was asked to translate patristic and liturgical books into Slavonic, starting with the Annotated Psalter.

Saint Maximus tried to fulfill his task, but since Slavonic was not his native language, there were certain imprecisions in the translations.

Metropolitan Barlaam of Moscow highly valued the work of Saint Maximus, but when the See of Moscow was occupied by Metropolitan Daniel, the situation changed.

The new Metropolitan ordered Saint Maximus to translate the Church History of Theodoritus of Cyrrhus into Slavonic. Saint Maximus absolutely refused this commission, pointing out that "in this history are included letters of the heretic Arius, and this might present danger for the semi-literate." This refusal caused a rift between Maximus and the Metropolitan. Despite their differences, Saint Maximus continued to labor for the spiritual enlightenment of Rus. He wrote letters against Moslems, Roman Catholics, and pagans. He translated Saint John Chrysostom's Commentaries on the Gospels of Matthew and John, and he also wrote several works of his own.

When the Great Prince wished to divorce his wife Solomonia because of her infertility, the dauntless confessor Maximus sent the Prince his "Instructive Chapters on Initiating Right Belief," in which he persuasively demonstrated that the Prince was obliged not to yield to bestial passions. The Prince never forgave Maximus for his audacity, and locked Saint Maximus in prison. From that moment a new period began in the life of the monk, filled with much suffering.

Mistakes in his translations were regarded as deliberate and intentional corruptions of the text by Saint Maximus. It was difficult for him in prison, but in his sufferings the saint also gained the great mercy of God. An

angel appeared to him and said, “Endure, Abba! Through this temporary pain you will be delivered from eternal torments.”

In prison the Elder wrote a Canon to the Holy Spirit in charcoal upon a wall, which even at present is read in the Church: “Just as Israel was nourished with manna in the wilderness of old, so Master, fill my soul with the All-Holy Spirit, that through Him I may serve Thee always....”

After six years, Saint Maximus was set free from prison and sent to Tver. There he lived under the supervision of the good-natured Bishop Acacius, who dealt kindly with guiltless sufferer. The saint then wrote in his autobiography: “While I was locked in prison and grieving, I consoled and strengthened myself with patience.” Here are some more words from this vivid text: “Neither grieve, nor be sad, beloved soul, that you have suffered unjustly, for it behooves you to accept all for your benefit.”

Only after twenty years at Tver did they decide to let Maximus live freely, and remove the church excommunication. Saint Maximus, now about seventy years of age, spent the final years of his life at the Trinity-Sergiev Lavra. Oppression and work took their toll on his health, but his spirit remained vigorous, and he continued with his work. Together with his cell-attendant and disciple Nilus, the saint translated the Psalter from Greek into Slavonic.

Saint Maximus reposed on January 21, 1556. He was buried at the northwest wall of the Holy Spirit church of the Trinity-Sergiev Lavra. Many manifestations of grace took place at the grave of Saint Maximus, and a Troparion and Kontakion were composed in his honor. Saint Maximus is depicted on the icon of the Synaxis of the Saints of Radonezh (July 6).



Icon of the Mother of God “Comfort” or “Consolation”

The Vatopedi “Comfort” or “Consolation” Icon of the Mother of God is in the old Vatopedi monastery on Athos, in the church of the Annunciation. It was called “Vatopedi” because near this monastery Arcadius, the son of Emperor Theodosius the Great, fell off a ship into the sea, and by the miraculous intercession of the Mother of God he was carried to shore safe and unharmed. He was found sleeping by a bush, not far from the monastery. From this event the name “Vatopedi” (“batos paidion,” “the bush of the child”) is derived. The holy Emperor Theodosius the Great (January 17), in gratitude for the miraculous deliverance of his son, embellished and generously endowed the Vatopedi monastery.

On the Vatopedi Icon, the Mother of God is depicted with Her face turned towards Her right shoulder. This is because on January 21, 807 She turned Her face towards the igumen of the monastery, who was standing near the holy icon, about to hand the keys of the monastery to the porter. A voice came from the icon and warned him not to open the monastery gates, because pirates intended to pillage the monastery. Then the Holy Child placed His hand over His Mother’s lips, saying, “Do not watch over this sinful flock, Mother, but let them fall under the sword of the pirates.” The Holy Virgin took the hand of Her Son and said again, “Do not open the gates today, but go to the walls and drive off the pirates.” The igumen took precautionary measures, and the monastery was saved.

In memory of this miraculous event a perpetual lamp burns in front of the wonderworking icon. Every day a Canon of Supplication is chanted in honor of the icon, and on Fridays the Divine Liturgy is celebrated. On Mt. Athos this icon is called “Paramythia,” “Consolation” (“Otrada”), or “Comfort” (“Uteshenie”).

Icon of the Mother of God “Stabbed”

The “Stabbed” Icon of the Mother of God, (Greek: “Esphagmeni.” Slavonic: “Zaklannaya”) dates from the fourteenth century, and is in the Vatopedi monastery on Mt. Athos, in a chapel dedicated to Saint Demetrios of Thessalonica. The icon was painted on canvas, and received its name of “The Stabbed” from the following event:

A certain ecclesiarch, a deacon of the Vatopedi monastery, was occupied with overseeing the order of a long service. Delayed by his duties, he was late for the meal in the trapeza. The annoyed cook refused to give him any food, and reminded him that he should come on time if he wished to eat. Offended, the deacon flew into a rage and he went to the church again. Standing before the icon of the Mother of God, he said, “How long must I go on serving You? I have toiled, but I have nothing to show for it. You don’t even care whether or not I have anything to eat!”

Then he struck Her on the cheek with a knife and pierced right through the canvas. Blood flowed from the wound, and the deacon was struck blind. The terrified transgressor fell down right in front of the icon, trembling all over, like Cain, the murderer of old.

The igumen, served the all-night Vigil praying for mercy and the salvation of the hapless one. After three years the All-Holy Virgin appeared to the igumen and said that she had forgiven the deacon, and would restore his health, but his hand which committed the sacrilege would be condemned at the Lord's Second Coming.

The deacon recovered his sight, and deeply repented of his transgression. Settling himself in a stall opposite the icon he stabbed, he spent the rest of his life in repentance before it.

Three years after the deacon's death, his bones were uncovered, according to the Athonite custom. His body had decomposed, but his right hand remained intact and was all black. This hand is preserved at the monastery in memory of the unfathomable love of the Mother of God. It is in rather poor condition, however, because Russian pilgrims would take pieces of it, believing it to be a relic.

Icon of the Mother of God "Xenophon Hodigitria"

The "Xenophon Hodigitria" Icon of the Mother of God according to tradition, this wonderworking icon was for many years at the Vatopedi monastery on Mt. Athos, in the katholikon in front of a column on the left cliros.

In 1730, it mysteriously disappeared not only from the church, but also from the monastery. Since the doors were locked, the monks assumed that thieves had stolen it. Soon they heard that the icon was at the Xenophon monastery, a three hour journey from Vatopedi.

Several monks were sent to return their spiritual treasure to the Vatopedi monastery. The icon was restored to its former place, and the Fathers of the monastery took precautions to prevent the icon from being stolen again. However, the icon of the Mother of God left the Vatopedi monastery and appeared at Xenophon a second and third time. Persuaded that this was actually a miraculous occurrence, the brethren of the monastery decided not to oppose the will of the Mother of God, and left the icon at Xenophon. As a sign of their blessing, the brethren provided candles and oil for the icon.

The "Hodigitria" Icon at Xenophon is in the katholikon, before a column on the left cliros, the very same place it occupied at the Vatopedi monastery.

St. Fructuosis of Tarragona, Spain

Saint Fructuosis lived during the persecution of Valerian and Gallienus in the third century, during the consulship of Amelianus and Bassus.

On Sunday, January 21, 259 Bishop Fructuosis of Tarragona, Spain was arrested with his deacons Augurius and Eulogius. He had already retired to his chamber when soldiers of the VII Gemina Legion came for him. Hearing them approach, he went to meet them.

"Come with us," they told him, "the proconsul summons you and your deacons."

When they arrived, they were thrown into a prison where other Christians were also being held. They comforted the bishop and asked him to remember them. The next day, Bishop Fructuosis baptized Rogatianus in the prison.

On Friday, January 21, Bishop Fructuosis and his deacons were brought out for their hearing. When the proconsul Aemelianus asked to have the bishop and his deacons brought before him, he was told that they were present. The proconsul asked Saint Fructuosis whether he was aware of the emperors' orders.

"I do not know their orders," he replied, "I am a Christian."

Aemelianus said, "They have ordered that you worship the gods."

Bishop Fructuosis answered, "I worship the one God Who made heaven and earth, and all that is in them" (Acts 4:24).

Then the proconsul asked, "Do you know that the gods exist?"

"No," said the bishop, "I do not."

"You will know later."

Bishop Fructuosis raised his eyes to heaven and began to pray. The proconsul said, "The gods are to be obeyed, feared, and adored. If the gods are not worshiped, then the images of the emperors are not adored."

Aemelianus the proconsul said to Augurius, "Do not listen to the words of Fructuosis."

Deacon Augurius replied, "I worship almighty God."

Turning to Deacon Eulogius, the proconsul Aemelianus asked, "Don't you also worship Fructuosis?

"No," said the deacon, "I do not worship Fructuosis, but I do worship Him Whom he worships."

Aemelianus inquired of Saint Fructuosis, "Are you a bishop?"

The holy bishop replied, "Yes, I am."

"You were," said Aemelianus, then he ordered them to be burned alive.

As Saint Fructuosis and his deacons were being taken to the amphitheatre, many people felt sympathy for them, for the bishop was loved by both Christians and pagans. The Christians were not sad, but happy, because they knew that through martyrdom the saints would inherit everlasting life.

When offered a cup of drugged wine, Saint Fructuosis refused saying, "It is not yet time to break the fast." In those days, Christians did not eat or drink anything on Wednesdays and Fridays until after sundown (Didache 8:1).

As they entered the amphitheatre, the Reader Augustalis asked the bishop to permit him to remove his sandals. Saint Fructuosis replied, "No, my son. I shall remove my own sandals."

A Christian by the name of Felix took the bishop's hand and asked him to remember him. The martyr said that he would remember the entire catholic Church throughout the world from East to West.

Now the time was at hand for the martyrs to receive their crowns of unfading glory. The officers who arrested them were standing nearby as Bishop Fructuosis addressed the crowd in a loud voice. He told them that they would not remain long without a shepherd, and that the Lord's promises would not fail them in this life or in the next. He added that what they were about to witness represented the weakness of a single hour.

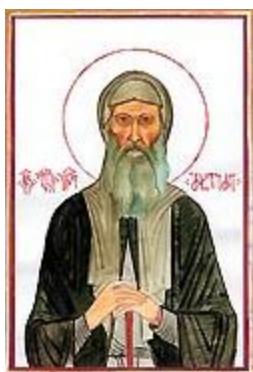
The three martyrs were tied to posts and a fire was lit. When the flames burned through their bonds, they knelt down and extended their arms in the form of a cross. They continued to pray in the midst of the fire until their souls were separated from their bodies.

Several people saw the heavens opened and beheld the three martyrs wearing crowns and ascending to heaven. They told Aemilianus to see how the martyrs had been glorified, but he was not worthy to behold them.

That night Christians went to the amphitheatre to put out the fire and gather the relics of the martyrs. Each one took a portion for himself. Saint Fructuosis later appeared to these Christians and admonished them for dividing their relics, saying that they had not done well. He ordered them to bring all of the relics together without delay. The holy relics were brought to the church with reverence, and were buried beneath the altar.

Sts. Augurius the deacon & Eulogius the deacon

The holy deacon Augurius was burned alive with Saint Fructuosis and Saint Eulogius the deacon at Tarragona, Spain in 259.



St. George (John) of Georgia

Archimandrite John (Basil Maisuradze in the world) was born in the town of Tskhinvali in Samachabalo around 1882. He was raised in a peasant family and taught to perform all kinds of handiwork. Basil was barely in his teens when he helped Fr. Spiridon (Ketiladze), the main priest at Betania Monastery, to restore the monastery between 1894 and 1896.

From his youth Basil was eager to enter the monastic life, and in 1903, according to God's will, he moved to the Skete of Saint John the Theologian at Iveron Monastery on Mt. Athos. Among the brothers he was distinguished for his simplicity and obedience. He was tonsured a monk and named John in honor of Saint John the Theologian, whom he revered deeply and sought to emulate.

The monk John was soon ordained to the priesthood. Throughout his life the holy father dedicated himself to serving God and his brothers in Christ in hopes that his own life might be fruitful for them.

Fr. John remained on Mt. Athos for seventeen years. Then, due to the increasingly troubling circumstances there, he left the Holy Mountain with the other Georgian monks sometime between 1920 and 1921. He settled at Armazi Monastery outside of Mtskheta, where the Bolsheviks had left just one monk to labor in solitude. Once a band of armed Chekists broke into the monastery, led both Fr. John and the other monk away, and shot them in the back.

Believing them to be dead, they tossed them in a nearby gorge. A group of people later discovered Fr. John's nearly lifeless body and brought it to Samtavro Monastery in Mtskheta. The other monk suffered only minor injuries and returned to the monastery on his own.

When his health had been restored, Fr. John went to Betania Monastery, where his first spiritual father was still laboring. He was appointed abbot shortly thereafter. Accustomed to hard work from his childhood, he skillfully administered the agricultural labors of the monastery. When visitors came to the monastery seeking advice or solace, Fr. John welcomed them warmly, spreading a festal meal before them. He enjoyed spending time with his guests, especially with children.

It is said that he always had candy or a special treat to give to the little ones. The children loved him so much that on the feast of Saint John the Theologian, while he was sprinkling the church with holy water, they skipped around him and tried to tousle his hair. The children's parents were ashamed, but Fr. John cheerfully assured them that it was fitting to be so joyous on a feast day.

Truly Fr. John was endowed with a deep love for young people, and he was also blessed with the divine gifts of prophecy and wonder-working. Once a certain Irakli Ghudushauri, a student at Moscow Theological Seminary, visited him at the monastery. Fr. John received him with exceptional warmth, blessing him with tears of rejoicing. This student would later become Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, the beloved shepherd who continues to lead the flock of the Georgian faithful to this very day.

Fr. John disciplined himself severely. He worked hard all day and slept on a single piece of wood. He would spend entire nights praying. Many wondered when he rested and where he had acquired such a seemingly infinite supply of energy.

Occasionally thieves would steal food or domestic animals from the monastery. But the monastery also had many protectors, even within the Soviet government. A group of Christians who worked for the government while secretly practicing their faith supported Fr. John and Fr. George (Mkheidze) (see below), explaining and justifying them to the government as "guardians of a national cultural monument."

Many of the miracles performed by Fr. John are known to us today, though he was wary of receiving honor for his deeds. Frs. John and George healed the deaf, and many of the terminally ill were brought to them for healing. After spending several days in the monastery, the infirm would miraculously be cleansed of their diseases. Fr. John bore the heaviest workload in the monastery. He sympathized deeply with Fr. George, who was ailing physically and unfit for strenuous labor. But Fr. John departed this life before Fr. George. Fr. John became ill and reposed in 1957, at the age of seventy-five. He was buried at Betania Monastery.

Fr. George (Mkheidze) was born in the village of Skhvava in the Racha region around 1877. He received a military education—a highly esteemed commodity among the Georgian aristocracy—but instead of pursuing a military career in defense of the Russian empire, he dedicated himself to Georgia's national liberation movement. At one point the pious and learned George worked for Saint Ilia the Righteous as his personal secretary. He often met Saint Ilia's spiritual father, the holy hierarch Alexandre (Okropiridze), and the holy hieromartyr Nazar (Lezhava), and he was acquainted with other important spiritual leaders of the time as well.

Desiring to sacrifice his life to God, George was tonsured into monasticism by the holy hieromartyr Nazar. His rare character combined a nobleman's deportment with a monk's humble asceticism. Fr. George was ordained a priest and soon after elevated to the rank of archimandrite.

Filled with divine love and patriotic sentiment, the holy father willingly endured the heavy burdens and spiritual tribulations afflicting his country at that time.

In 1924, while Fr. George was laboring at Khirsa Monastery in Kakheti in eastern Georgia, an armed Chekist mob broke into the monastery. The perpetrators beat him, cut off his hair, shaved his beard, and threatened to take his life. He sought refuge with his family, but to no avail—his brothers, who were atheists, shaved off his beard while he was sleeping. (One of Fr. George's brothers later committed suicide, and the other, together with his wife, was shot to death by the Chekists.) In the same year, Fr. George visited Betania Monastery and was introduced to Fr. John (Maisuradze), with whom he would labor for the remainder of his life.

Fr. George's health was poor, and he was able to perform only the lightest of tasks around the monastery. He tended the vegetable garden and took responsibility for raising the bees. He was extremely generous. At times he would give all the monastery's food to the needy, assuring Fr. John that God Himself would provide their daily bread.

Tall, thin, and with an upright posture, Fr. George was strict in both appearance and demeanor. He spoke very little with other people, and children did not play with him as they did with Fr. John. Knowing his character, they tried to please him by reciting prayers and behaving themselves. Fr. George did not like to leave the monastery, but it was often necessary for him to travel to Tbilisi to visit his spiritual children—among whom were many secret Christians who worked for the government.

Fr. George was endowed with the gifts of prophecy and healing, but he was careful to hide them. When constrained to reveal them, he would pass them off as though they were nothing extraordinary. Once a certain pilgrim arrived at the monastery and was surprised to discover that Fr. George knew him by name. Sensing his great amazement, Fr. George told the pilgrim that he had attended his baptism some thirty years earlier, thus concealing his God-given gift. Fr. George knew in advance when his nephew was bringing his sisters, whom he had not seen in forty-eight years, to visit him at the monastery during Great Lent.

Enlightened with this foreknowledge, Fr. George prepared fish and a festal meal in honor of the occasion.

The prayers of Fr. George and Fr. John healed the former's nephew, who was afflicted by a deadly strain of meningitis. They restored hearing to a deaf child and healed many others of their bodily infirmities.

In 1957, when Fr. John reposed in the Lord, Fr. George was tonsured into the great schema. He was given the name John in honor of his newly departed spiritual brother. Fr. George-John now bore full responsibility for the affairs of the monastery. His health deteriorated further under the weight of this heavy yoke. His spiritual children began to come from the city to care for him.

Once a twenty-year-old girl arrived at the monastery, complaining of incessant headaches. She had been told that the water from Betania Monastery would heal her. She remained there for one week and was miraculously healed. When she left to return home, Fr. George-John walked five miles to see her off, in spite of his physical frailty.

The Theotokos appeared to Fr. George-John in a vision and relieved his terrible physical pain. The protomartyr Thekla also appeared to him, presenting him with a bunch of grapes. Several days before his repose, the holy father was in the city when an angel appeared to him and announced his imminent repose. The angel told him to return to the monastery to prepare for his departure from this world.

Saint George-John (Mkheidze) reposed in 1960. He was buried at Betania Monastery, next to Fr. John (Maisuradze). These venerable fathers were canonized on September 18, 2003, at a council of the Holy Synod under the spiritual leadership of His Holiness Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia. Frs. John and George-John have been lovingly deemed "one soul in two bodies."

GOSPEL AND EPISTLE READINGS

Epistle Reading

Prokeimenon, Tone 8:

Pray and make your vows / before the Lord our God! (*Psalm 75:12*)
vs. In Judah God is known; His Name is great in Israel. (*Psalm 75:2*)

The reading from the First Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Timothy 4:9-15:

Brethren, the saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you. Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress.

Alleluia, Tone 8:

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord! Let us make a joyful noise to God our Savior! (*Psalm 94:1*)
vs. Let us come before His face with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise!
(*Psalm 94:2*)

Gospel Reading

The Reading is from Luke 19:1-10:

At that time, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeos; he was a chief collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeos, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeos stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

PARISH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Sisterhood of the Protection of the Mother of God will have their meeting today Sunday January 21st, after coffee hour. All Sisterhood members should attend.

There will be a Parish Council meeting on Sunday January 28th, after coffee hour.

The Annual Parish Meeting of the parishioners is scheduled for Sunday February 4th, after coffee hour. All members of the parish are invited to attend this important meeting.

LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Sunday, January 21st

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
After Communion: Sunday School pre-K - Grade 3

Saturday, January 27th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, January 28th

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
After Communion: Sunday School pre-K - Grade 3

Saturday, February 3rd

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, February 4th

9:30 am: No Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
After Communion: Sunday School pre-K - Grade 3

Saturday, February 10th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Request & Bulletin Sponsor: Use the sign-up sheet at the candle stand for the health of, eternal memory of or a Pannikhida for a loved one or friend will be remembered during Divine Liturgy for the day/week that you signed up for.

Memorial Candles: Candles can be purchased at the candle stand, suggested donation of \$10 for a large one.

Private Confessions: Can be heard a half hour before any service. See Father Matthew for other times.

General Confession: Will be at 9:45 am on the first Sunday of the month.

Receiving Holy Communion: Holy Communion is offered to those baptized Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves for the reception of the Sacrament by prayer and fasting. Blessed Bread is available for all our visitors at the very end of the Divine Liturgy.

Pannikhida Service: The third Sunday of each month there will be a Pannikhida after Divine Liturgy. If you would like your loved ones to be remembered please give a list of names to Father Matthew before that Sunday for those to be remembered in the month.

Special Announcements for the bulletin can be submitted by E-Mail: OrthodoxChurchMotherOfGod@outlook.com

The Living Clean Group of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Friday from 8-9:15 pm downstairs in the community room.

The Grey Book Step Meeting Group of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Tuesday from 7-8:00 pm downstairs in the community room.

Orthodox Quote of the Day

...should we fall, we should not despair and so estrange ourselves from the Lord's love. For if He so chooses, He can deal mercifully with our weakness. Only we should not cut ourselves off from Him or feel oppressed when constrained by His commandments, nor should we lose heart when we fall short of our goal...let us always be ready to make a new start. If you fall, rise up. If you fall again, rise up again. Only do not abandon your Physician, lest you be condemned as worse than a suicide because of your despair. Wait on Him, and He will be merciful, either reforming you, or sending you trials, or through some other provision of which you are ignorant.

St. Peter of Damascus



The Morning Offering

Daily Inspirations by Abbott Tryphon
The Inverted Pyramid
We must go downwards to be united with Christ



The Blessed Sophrony of Essex, in his book on Saint Silouan the Athonite, suggests the “inverted pyramid,” is an image of Christian living we should all strive to imitate. The world would suggest that the natural pyramid, such as we see in the pyramids of Gaza, see the powerful sitting at the very top, holding power and dominion over the rest of humanity. Occupying the top of this earthly image of the pyramid, is the natural goal of most of us, for because of our fallen nature, we desire to be important. We are, by nature, dissatisfied with being at the bottom, desiring as we do to sit with the powerful of this world.

But our natural nature, as created by God, desires equality and justice, and therefore is thus not satisfied with this “pyramid of being.” Thus, Christ took this earthly pyramid and inverted it, and put Himself at the bottom, becoming its Head. Because He took upon Himself the weight of our sin, He revealed His Way to us, and in so doing showed us that no one can be justified but by faith in Him. This means that we must go downwards to be united with Him, this Christ Who is Head of the inverted pyramid. It is there that the power of divine life is to be found. Christ alone holds the pyramid, and it is essential for us to find the way of going down, the way of humility. This is the Way of the Lord, Who came to us as a humble servant.



Daily Reflection
Family Isn't Everything



“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Mt 10: 34-39)

What kind of “sword” is our merciful Lord talking about here? The kind that slashed the ropes with which children were tied to beds in Perris, California. And what kind of “peace” does He “not” bring? The insidious, dark kind, which was maintained for years in that “quiet” household in Perris, under the brutal rule of human will run wild.

Christ does not come into our lives to destroy our family-life. But He does liberate us from the shackles of human codependency; from making any household entirely “our own,” without Him in the picture. Those in our “own” household, including ourselves, insofar as they or we are not “God’s,” but merely “our own,” easily become our “enemies”; that is to say, “enemies” to our freedom to follow Christ’s call or our “vocation.” Glory be to God, Who gave a 17-year-old the courage to climb out a window of that dark house, and to “lose” the life she had there. Lord, give me the courage to change the things I can, in Your light, and save me from making any merely-human will absolute in my life.