

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 7

By Thy Cross Thou didst destroy death. To the thief Thou didst open Paradise. For the Myrrhbearers Thou didst change weeping into joy, and Thou didst command Thy disciples, O Christ God, to proclaim that Thou art risen, granting the world great mercy.

Troparion for the Cross in Tone 1

O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance! Grant victories to the Orthodox Christians over their adversaries; and by virtue of Thy Cross, preserve Thy habitation!

Kontakion for the Cross in Tone 7

Now the flaming sword no longer guards the gates of Eden; it has been mysteriously quenched by the wood of the Cross. The sting of death and the victory of hell have been vanquished; for Thou, O my Savior, hast come and cried to those in hell: "Enter again into Paradise!"

Prayer Requests

For Health of:

Archpriest Joseph Lickwar, Chancellor of the Diocese, recovering from surgery, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

Matushka Lorisa Gregory, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

Archpriest Paul Kucynda, recovering from injuries, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

Igor, Susan and Alexandra, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

In Memory of:

Emilita Poling, who fell asleep in the Lord, Sunday February 25th, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

Newly departed **Archil, Tatunashvili, Courtney and Ann**, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

SAINTS AND FEASTS OF THE DAY

MARCH 11, 2018

THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT: VENERATION OF THE CROSS



3rd Sunday of Great Lent: Veneration of the Cross

The Third Sunday of Lent is that of the Veneration of the Cross. The cross stands in the midst of the church in the middle of the Lenten season not merely to remind men of Christ's redemption and to keep before them the goal of their efforts, but also to be venerated as that reality by which man must live to be saved. "He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mt.10:38). For in the Cross of Christ Crucified lies both "the power of God and the wisdom of God" for those being saved (1 Cor.1:24).



St. Sophronius the Patriarch of Jerusalem

Saint Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, was born in Damascus around 560. From his youth he was distinguished for his piety and his love for classical studies. He was especially proficient in philosophy, and so he was known as Sophronius the Wise. The future hierarch, however, sought the true philosophy of monasticism, and conversations with the desert-dwellers.

He arrived in Jerusalem at the monastery of Saint Theodosius, and there he became close with the hieromonk John Moschus, becoming his spiritual son and submitting himself to him in obedience. They visited several monasteries, writing down the lives and spiritual wisdom of the ascetics they met. From these notes emerged their renowned book, the LEIMONARION or SPIRITUAL MEADOW, which was highly esteemed at the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

To save themselves from the devastating incursions of the Persians, Saints John and Sophronius left Palestine and went to Antioch, and from there they went to Egypt. In Egypt, Saint Sophronius became seriously ill. During this time he decided to become a monk and was tonsured by Saint John Moschus.

After Saint Sophronius recovered his health, they both decided to remain in Alexandria. There they were received by the holy Patriarch John the Merciful (November 12), to whom they rendered great aid in the struggle against the Monophysite heresy. At Alexandria Saint Sophronius had an affliction of the eyes, and he turned with prayer and faith to the holy Unmercenaries Cyrus and John (January 31), and he received healing in a church named for them. In gratitude, Saint Sophronius then wrote the Lives of these holy Unmercenaries.

When the barbarians began to threaten Alexandria, Patriarch John, accompanied by Saints Sophronius and John Moschus, set out for Constantinople, but he died along the way. Saints John Moschus and Sophronius then set out for Rome with eighteen other monks. Saint John Moschus died at Rome. His body was taken to Jerusalem by Saint Sophronius and buried at the monastery of Saint Theodosius.

In the year 628, Patriarch Zacharias of Jerusalem (609-633) returned from his captivity in Persia. After his death, the patriarchal throne was occupied for two years by Saint Modestus (December 18). After the death of Saint Modestus, Saint Sophronius was chosen Patriarch. Saint Sophronius toiled much for the welfare of the Jerusalem Church as its primate (634-644).

Toward the end of his life, Saint Sophronius and his flock lived through a two year siege of Jerusalem by the Moslems. Worn down by hunger, the Christians finally agreed to open the city gates, on the condition that the enemy spare the holy places. But this condition was not fulfilled, and Saint Sophronius died in grief over the desecration of the Christian holy places.

Written works by Patriarch Sophronius have come down to us in the area of dogmatics, and likewise his "Excursus on the Liturgy," the Life of Saint Mary of Egypt (April 1), and also about 950 troparia and stikheras from Pascha to the Ascension.

While still a hieromonk, Saint Sophronius reviewed and made corrections to the Rule of the monastery of Saint Sava the Sanctified (December 5). The saint's three Odes Canons for the Holy Forty Day Great Fast are included in the the contemporary Lenten Triodion.

St. Euthymius the Bishop of Novgorod

Saint Euthymius, in Baptism John, was born in answer to the fervent prayers of the presbyter Micah and his wife Anna. For many years they had been childless, and they vowed that if they had a son, they would dedicate him to God. The boy read priestly books and frequently attended church services, often helping his father in the small church of Saint Theodore. All this sanctified young John's soul. In the year 1411, he left his parental home for a monastery at the age of fifteen.

Twelve versts from Novgorod, in a wilderness spot named Vyazhisch, three monks, Euphrosynus, Ignatius and Galacteon, settled in the forests and the swamps. They were soon joined by the priest Pimen, who was tonsured with the name Pachomius. Here they lived in complete solitude at a wooden chapel they built in honor of Saint Nicholas. They lived in unceasing prayer and struggled with the severe conditions of nature in the northern regions.

The young John also came to these ascetics seeking salvation. The igumen Pachomius accepted him fondly and tonsured him into monasticism with the name Euthymius. His tonsure at such a young age is an indication of the young ascetic's outstanding spiritual traits.

During this time the See of Novgorod was occupied by Archbishop Simeon, a simple monk who became a hierarch. The virtuous life of Saint Euthymius became known to the archbishop. Saint Euthymius was summoned to Novgorod and after a long talk with Archbishop Simeon, he was appointed as the archbishop's steward.

At that time the Archbishops of Novgorod occupied a unique position. Independent of princely authority, they were elected directly by the assembly and they assumed a large role in secular matters. Moreover, they administered vast land-holdings. Under these conditions, an archbishop's steward had to combine administrative talent with the utmost non-covetousness and deep Christian humility. Saint Euthymius fervently entreated the archpastor to send him back to Vyazhisch, but then he agreed to stay.

Saint Euthymius evoked general astonishment and esteem, occupying such an important position, and being at the center of business life in a large city. As a monk he devoted himself to asceticism as fervently as he would have done in the deep forest.

Archbishop Simeon died in 1421. Under the new hierarch, Euthymius I, Saint Euthymius again withdrew to his monastery. Soon, however, the monks of a monastery on Lisich Hill chose the saint as their igumen. With the death of Archbishop Euthymius I in 1429, Saint Euthymius was then chosen as archbishop. On November 29, he entered into the temple of Saint Sophia. For four years the saint administered the Novgorod diocese, while putting off being installed as archbishop. Only on May 24, 1434 was he consecrated at Smolensk by Metropolitan Gerasimus.

Saint Euthymius wisely governed his diocese for twenty-nine years, zealous in fulfilling his archpastoral duty. Saint Euthymius labored in constructing and restoring churches, especially after the devastating fires of the years 1431 and 1442.

The Sophia cathedral was richly embellished by the saint, and several new churches were built in the Novgorod Kremlin. "If you wish to see a few of his great works," writes Pachomius the Logothete, "go to the temple of Saint Sophia. There you will see the churches he built, standing like hillocks. They speak of their varied charm, not with words, but indeed. 'This was given me by Archbishop Euthymius,' proclaims one church. Another says, 'He has adorned me so magnificently.' A third exclaims, 'He built me up from the very foundations.'"

The church of Saint John Chrysostom, tall and beautiful, blesses with the hand of Chrysostom, and proclaims: "Since you have built me a temple, I in turn shall entreat the Creator to prepare a habitation in Heaven for you."

The cathedral of the Wisdom of God, speaking across the years of its restoration by him, proclaims: "He has restored me to my original grandeur, he has adorned me with holy icons. He is my praise and beauty."

Saint Euthymius built also a church in honor of his Guardian Angel [i.e. Russian idiom for "patron saint"], and in 1438 he built a stone church at Vyazhitsk monastery in honor of Saint Nicholas. The following year he built a stone church in honor of Saint John the Theologian with a trapeza and consistory.

Zealous for the glory of God, Saint Euthymius had more spiritual books printed. Many service books survive from this period, transcribed "under the authority of Archbishop Euthymius." Despite his abundant works, the saint always promptly fulfilled the monastic Rule. Whatever he could not do by day he accomplished by night. An hour before Matins the saint rose up for his cell rule. He often spent the whole night without sleep, and he wore chains, but no one knew about them until his death. The saint spent the first week of Great Lent at Vyazhitsk monastery in silent prayer, eating nothing.

In 1446 the great-princely throne was usurped by Shemyaka, who established relations with Novgorod. The political situation in Novgorod was often quite strained. In 1451, Saint Jonah (March 31) in a special letter urged the people of Novgorod to cease their rowdiness and to heed their archpastor. "Heed our son and brother, your father and teacher, the God-beloved Archbishop Euthymius, in all things."

Saint Euthymius, advanced in age, was troubled in soul that the actions of Shemyaka might cast a pall over his relations with the revered primate, and he sent a letter to Saint Jonah. Sensing the nearness of his death, Saint Euthymius asked his prayers and pardon.

In his reply, a letter of pardon, Saint Jonah wrote: "We remind you, my son, that you comported yourself too simply: you accepted one who was excommunicated for his transgressions by Our Humility, and found him worthy of your blessing. My son, offer repentance to God for this."

Saint Jonah ordered that if the letter of pardon should arrive after the blessed end of Novgorod's archpastor, then it should be read over his grave. Saint Euthymius reposed on March 10, 1458. The priest Eumenius, sent by Saint Jonah with the grammota of pardon, arrived in Novgorod sixteen days after the death of Saint Euthymius, whose grave was at the church of the Vyazhitsk monastery.

When they opened the grave in order to read the letter of pardon, they then saw that the body of the saint showed no sign of decay. Saint Euthymius lay there as though asleep, and his fingers were positioned for a blessing. "God preserve Novgorod, for which Saint Euthymius prays," exclaimed Eumenius. Reading the letter of Saint Jonah, he placed it into the hand of the deceased hierarch.

Soon after the death of the saint, the Lord glorified him by working miracles for those who sought his prayerful intercession. Greatly revering the saint, the monks of the Vyazhitsk monastery built a church in honor of Saint Euthymius, which was noted in the census of 1500.

The commemoration of Saint Euthymius was established at the Moscow Council of 1549. The Life of Saint Euthymius was written by Pachomius the Logothete, having been commissioned by Saint Jonah, Archbishop of Novgorod (November 5)

Hieromartyr Pionius of Smyrna and those with him

The Hieromartyrs Pionius and Limnus, the Holy Martyrs Sabina, Macedonia, and Asclepiades suffered during the persecution of Christians in the reign of Decius (249-251). They suffered at Smyrna, a mercantile city on the eastern shores of the Aegean Sea. The Church in Smyrna was founded by the holy Apostle John the Theologian (May 8 and September 26), and was made glorious by its martyrs and confessors.

Saint Pionius knew that he and his companions would be arrested on February 23, the anniversary of Saint Polycarp's martyrdom, and a feastday for the Christians of Smyrna. The day before they were arrested, Saint Pionius entertained Asclepiades and Sabina in his house. Taking three lengths of woven chains, Saint Pionius placed them around his neck, and around the necks of the other two. He did this to show that they were all determined to be led off to prison rather than eat food sacrificed to idols.

The holy confessors were indeed arrested on February 23. After a brief interrogation they were dragged off by Polemon the verger in order to sacrifice to the idols and eat forbidden foods. They were brought to the forum, where a great crowd had gathered.

Saint Pionius addressed the people, chiding them for laughing and rejoicing at those Christians who had agreed to offer sacrifice. He quoted Homer to the pagans (Odyssey 22, 412) and said that it was shameful to gloat over those who were about to die. He reminded the Jews in the audience of the words of Solomon: "If your enemy falls, do not rejoice over him, and do not be glad when he stumbles" (Proverbs 24:17).

Polemon attempted once again to persuade Pionius to obey the law and offer sacrifice to the idols.

"If only I could persuade you to become Christians," he replied.

The men laughed at him, saying that he did not have the power to do that, because they knew they would be burned alive if they converted.

Saint Pionius said, "It is far worse to burn after death."

Saint Sabina laughed when she heard this. Then Polemon threatened to put her in a brothel, but she said she believed that God would protect her.

Under questioning, Saint Pionius stated repeatedly that he was a Christian, and could not sacrifice to the emperor or to the idols.

Before Polemon came to Sabina to question her, Saint Pionius told her to say that her name was Theodote. This he did so that she would not be returned to her former mistress Politta, an immoral woman. In an effort to turn her from Christ, Politta bound Saint Sabina and cast her out on the mountains. She was secretly helped by the brethren, and hid in Saint Pionius's house most of the time. That is how she came to be arrested.

Sts Sabina and Asclepiades were questioned, and they said they were Christians who worshiped Jesus Christ. Then they were thrown into jail.

In prison Saint Pionius and his companions met Limnus, a priest of the Church of Smyrna, and his wife Macedonia from the village of Karine. They had also been imprisoned for confessing Christ.

Many believers visited the holy confessors in prison, offering them whatever they could, but the saints did not accept it. The jailers were angry, because they used to keep a portion of the gifts given to prisoners for themselves.

The holy martyrs were brought to the marketplace, and were urged to offer sacrifice. When they refused, they were taken back to prison. On the way, they were beaten and mocked by the crowd. Someone said to Saint Sabina, “Why couldn’t you have died in your own city?”

Saint Sabina retorted, “What is my native city?”

Terentius, who was in charge of the gladiatorial games, said to Asclepiades, “After you are condemned, I shall ask that you compete in the games given by my son.”

“That does not scare me,” he said.

After many torments, the holy martyr was brought to the amphitheatre on March 11, 250. Since he still refused to offer sacrifice to the idols, Saint Pionius was sentenced to be burned alive. He was nailed to a cross, then they stacked wood around him and lit the fire. When the fire subsided, everyone saw the body of the saint was unharmed. Not even the hairs of his head had been singed. His face was radiant, and shone with divine grace. After his victory in the contest, Saint Pionius received an incorruptible crown of glory from the Savior Christ.

Saint Pionius transcribed the Martyrdom of Saint Polycarp of Smyrna (February 23) from an older copy made by Isocrates (or Socrates) in Corinth. This document in turn was transcribed from an earlier manuscript written by Gaius, and was based on the recollections of Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (August 23), who knew Saint Polycarp. Saint Polycarp appeared to Pionius in a vision, telling him to search for the text of Isocrates. Saint Pionius collected the material which was nearly worn out with age, thus preserving the account for later generations. Now Saint Pionius rejoices in the heavenly Kingdom, glorifying the Life-Creating Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, throughout all ages.

Martyr Asclepiades of Smyrna

Saint Asclepiades suffered with the hieromartyrs Pionius and Limnus, and the holy martyrs Sabina, Macedonia during the persecution of Christians in the reign of Decius (249-251). They suffered at Smyrna, a mercantile city on the eastern shores of the Aegean Sea. The Church in Smyrna was founded by the holy Apostle John the Theologian (May 8 and September 26), and was made glorious by its martyrs and confessors.

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“If only I could persuade you to become Christians,” Pionius replied.

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Saint Pionius said, “It is far worse to burn after death.”

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The Life of Saint Pionius does not mention how Saint Asclepiades died.

Martyr Macedonia of Smyrna

Saint Macedonia was martyred during the persecution in the reign of Decius (249-251), along with Saints Pionius and Limnus, Sabina, and Asclepiades. They suffered at Smyrna, a mercantile city on the eastern shores of the Aegean Sea.

Saint Macedonia was from the village of Karine. She and her husband Limnus, a priest of the Church of Smyrna, had been cast into prison for confessing Christ. That is where Saint Pionius and his companions met them.

The Life of Saint Pionius does not record the details of the martyrdom of Saints Limnus or Macedonia.

Martyr Limnus of Smyrna

Saint Limnus was martyred during the persecution in the reign of Decius (249-251), along with Saints Pionius and Macedonia, Sabina, and Asclepiades. They suffered at Smyrna, a mercantile city on the eastern shores of the Aegean Sea.

Saint Limnus was a priest of the Church of Smyrna, and his wife Saint Macedonia was from the village of Karine. They had been cast into prison for confessing Christ. That is where Saint Pionius and his companions met them.

The Life of Saint Pionius does not record the details of the martyrdom of Saints Limnus or Macedonia.

Martyr Sabina of Smyrna

Saint Sabina was executed with the hieromartyrs Pionius and Limnus, and the Holy Martyrs Macedonia, and Asclepiades during the persecution of Christians in the reign of Decius (249-251). They suffered at Smyrna, a mercantile city on the eastern shores of the Aegean Sea. The Church in Smyrna was founded by the holy Apostle John the Theologian (May 8 and September 26), and was made glorious by its martyrs and confessors.

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Saint Sabina retorted, "What is my native city?" The Hieromartyrs Pionius and Limnus, the Holy Martyrs Sabina, Macedonia, and Asclepiades suffered during the persecution of Christians in the reign of Decius (249-251). They suffered at Smyrna, a mercantile city on the eastern shores of the Aegean Sea. The Church in Smyrna was founded by the holy Apostle John the Theologian (May 8 and September 26), and was made glorious by its martyrs and confessors.

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The Life of Saint Pionius does not mention how Saint Sabina died.

Translation of the relics of the Martyr Epimachus of Pelusium

The Holy Martyr Epimachus of Alexandria was a native of Egypt. For a long time he lived in seclusion on Mount Pelusium. During a persecution against Christians at Alexandria (about the year 250), Saint Epimachus in his fervent zeal came into the city, destroyed pagan idols, and fearlessly confessed Christ. For this the saint was put to torture. Among the people watching the torture was a woman who was blind in one eye. A drop of blood from the martyr healed her infirmity.

After fierce tortures, the saint was beheaded by the sword.

Today we commemorate the translation of the relics of Saint Epimachus.

St. Sophronius the Bishop of Vratscha, Bulgaria

No information on the life of this saint is available at this time.

Venerable Sophronius the Recluse of the Kiev Caves

Saint Sophronius the Hermit of the Caves was an ascetic of the Far Caves (the Theodosiev Caves), during the thirteenth century. The saint wore a hairshirt and a heavy iron belt, and read through the entire Psalter every day.

GOSPEL AND EPISTLE READINGS

Prokeimenon, Tone 6:

O Lord, save Thy people / and bless Thine inheritance! (*Psalm 27:9*)
vs. To Thee, O Lord, will I call. O my God, be not silent to me! (*Psalm 27:1*)

Epistle Reading

The reading from the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Hebrews 4:14-5:6

Brethren, since we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee"; as he says also in another place, "Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

Alleluia, Tone 8:

Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased of old! (*Psalm 73:2*)
vs. God is our King before the ages; He has worked salvation in the midst of the earth! (*Psalm 73:12*)

Gospel Reading

The Reading is from Mark 8:34-9:1

The Lord said: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

Communion Hymn:

The light of Thy countenance has shone on us, O Lord.
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

PARISH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

[The Sisterhood of the Protection of the Mother of God will have a meeting today, March 4th](#). All members are encouraged to attend.

The Sisterhood is holding a raffle for 3 Paschal baskets. Tickets for the raffle are \$1 each and all church members are asked to sell ten tickets. Please see Lore Stefy for tickets and information. [Drawing will be Sunday, March 25th](#).

Two children's baskets will be raffled off. Children earn tickets for these baskets by their attendance at church school. The better your attendance, the better your chance of winning a basket. [Drawing will be Sunday, March 25th](#)

[Next Council Meeting: Sunday, March 25, 2018 \(St. Mary Of Egypt\)](#), following Divine Liturgy.

Annual Clean-up is on Saturday, March 31, 2018. Volunteers are needed; there is a sign-up sheet downstairs.

LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Sunday, March 11th

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

Wednesday, March 14th

6:30 pm: Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts

Saturday, March 17th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, March 18th

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

Wednesday, March 21st

6:30 pm: Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts

Saturday, March 24th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, March 25th

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

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.



Daily Inspirations by Abbott Tryphon

Being Real With God

Far more important than being emotional

When we find ourselves struggling with prayer, and feel that it has become dry and lifeless, we are sometimes tempted to stop praying. When our prayer has become a struggle, it is good to remember that God knows our needs, and even knows what we want to say when we don't seem to know. This is the time we need to just pray without worrying about it. When we find we can't keep our minds focused on the formal



morning and evening prayers, as found in our prayer book, it is perfectly acceptable to simply light our lampada (hanging oil lamp), sit quietly before our icons, and let silence be our voice.

God wants to enter into our heart, and requires only our permission and cooperation. This relationship does not require an emotional response, for, like all relationships, we are not always open to an emotional response. Being real with God is far more important than being emotional, since emotions can be contrived and fleshly. As in all relationships, there are times when we do feel moved by emotions, but the lack of such feelings in no way represents a lack of love for God, because God cares for us, and God knows we love him, even when suffering in those dry times.



Daily Reflection Possess Your Souls



“But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for my name’s sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion (ἀποβήσεται ὑμῖν) for testimony (εἰς μαρτύριον). Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess (κτήσασθε, gain possession of) your souls.” (Lk 21: 12-19)

This is one of the readings for today’s NC-feast of the 40 Martyrs of Sebaste. These were soldiers in the army of the pagan Emperor Licinius (AD 308 – 324), made to stand all night in a freezing lake, before being executed for being who they were, and that is, Christians. The pagan authorities tried to coax the martyrs into denying their Christian identity and into becoming who they were not, i.e., pagans. But the martyrs persevered, in “patience,” and thus maintained “possession” of their souls, of their “selves” as God called them to be.

Most of us do not endure persecution in such an extreme fashion. Nonetheless, “possessing” or “owning” who we are, according to our vocation, according to what God calls us to be and to do, can be challenged on a daily basis in subtle ways. I might be challenged today, not to do or be what I am called to do or be, by people-pleasing and merely-human fears, by despondency and procrastination, or by idleness and idle talk. Let me approach these crippling “spirits,” if they rear their ugly heads today, “as an occasion for testimony,” to who it is I choose to be, and to Whom I choose to belong. I re-connect with God this morning, opening up my heart to His grace, that He may give me “a mouth and wisdom” to do and to be according to His good purpose for me. And if I fail today, on any “occasion for testimony,” I pray for the wisdom and courage to get up, dust myself off, and move forward, in the grace of “patience.” Holy martyrs, pray to God for us!

Orthodox Quote of the Day

It is difficult for you, but think of how it was for the Savior on the Cross. The end is near; life passes quickly. We are guests on earth, migratory birds.

Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Bogucharsk