



SAINT LUKE THE EVANGELIST

G R E E K O R T H O D O X C H U R C H

SEPTEMBER 10, 2017—SUNDAY BEFORE THE ELEVATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

The Holy Virgins Menodora, Nymphodora, and Metrodora (305-311), were sisters from Bithynia (Asia Minor). Distinguished for their special piety, they wanted to preserve their virginity and avoid worldly associations. They chose a solitary place for themselves in the wilderness and spent their lives in deeds of fasting and prayer.

Reports of the holy life of the virgins soon spread, since healings of the sick began to occur through their prayers. The Bithynia region was governed at that time by a man named Frontonus, who ordered that the sisters be arrested and brought before him.

At first he tried to persuade them to renounce Christ, promising great honors and rewards. But the holy sisters steadfastly confessed their faith before him, rejecting all his suggestions. They told him that they did not value the temporal things of this world, and that they were prepared to die for their Heavenly Bridegroom, for death would be their gateway to eternal life.

Flying into a rage, the governor took out his wrath on Saint Menodora, the eldest sister. She was stripped of her clothes and beaten by four men, while a herald urged her to offer sacrifice to the gods. The saint bravely endured the torments and cried out, "Sacrifice? Can't you see that I am offering myself as a sacrifice to my God?" Then they renewed their torments with even greater severity. Then the martyr cried out, "Lord Jesus Christ, joy of my heart, my hope, receive my soul in peace." With these words she gave up her soul to God, and went to her Heavenly Bridegroom.

Four days later, they brought the two younger sisters Metrodora and Nymphodora to the court. They showed them the battered body of their older sister to frighten them. The virgins wept over her, but remained steadfast.

Then Saint Metrodora was tortured. She died, crying out to her beloved Lord Jesus Christ with her last breath. Then they turned to the third sister, Nymphodora. Before her lay the bruised bodies of her sisters. Frontonus hoped that this sight would intimidate the young virgin.

Pretending that he was charmed by her youth and beauty, he urged her to worship the pagan gods, promising great rewards and honors. Saint Nymphodora scoffed at his words, and shared the fate of her older sisters. She was tortured and beaten to death with iron rods.



THE HYMNS OF THE THIRD ANTIPHON

Today is Mode Plagal 1

Before the Entrance...

Apolytikion of the Feast.

MODE 4.

Your Nativity, O Theotokos, imparted joy to the entire earth, for out of you has risen the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God. He nullified the curse and instead gave His blessing; and causing death to be neutralized, He granted us eternal life. (x3)

After the Entrance...

Resurrectional Apolytikion.

MODE PL. 1.

Let us worship the Word who is unoriginate * with the Father and the Spirit, and from a Virgin was born * for our salvation, O believers, and let us sing His praise. * For in His goodness He was pleased * to ascend the Cross in the flesh, and to undergo death, * and to raise up those who had died, * by His glorious Resurrection.

Apolytikion of the Feast.

MODE 4.

Your Nativity, O Theotokos, imparted joy to the entire earth, for out of you has risen the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God. He nullified the curse and instead gave His blessing; and causing death to be neutralized, He granted us eternal life.

Apolytikion for the Church.

MODE PL. 1.

The holy Apostle, the All-hymned Luke, * who is acknowledged by the Church of Christ * as the recorder of the Acts of the Apostles, * and the splendid author of the Gospel of Christ. * Let us praise with sacred hymns as a physician, * who heals the infirmities of man, * and the ailments of nature, * who cleanses spiritual wounds, and prays unceasingly for our souls.

Kontakion.

MODE 4.

Both Joachim and Anna from their sterility's stigma, and Adam and Eve from their mortality's ruin have been set free, O immaculate Maid, by your holy nativity. For this do your people hold celebration, redeemed from the guilt of transgression as they cry to you, "The barren one bears the Theotokos, the nourisher of our Life."

“You’ll obtain Grace through pain and tears. And then, with tears of joy and gratitude, with the fear of God, you’ll retain it. It’s attracted by warmth and zeal; with coldness and inattention it’s lost.”

—ELDER JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST



THE READINGS OF THE DAY

EPISTLE READING

The Letter of Paul to the Galatians 6: 11-18

Brethren, see with what large letters I write to you with my own hand! Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised, only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. As for me, I shall find glory in nothing, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. In Christ Jesus, circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; only a new creation. To those who live by this rule, may there be peace and mercy upon them, and on the Israel of God. From now on, let no one cause me any trouble, for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus branded on my body. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen..

GOSPEL READING

John 3:13-17

The Lord said: “No one has ascended into heaven, except for the one who came down out of heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, likewise, the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone believing in him should not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God so loved the world that he gave his uniquely-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Certainly, God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world should be saved through him.”

“The tree of life which was planted by God in paradise pre-figured this honorable Cross, for, since death came by a tree, it was necessary for life and the resurrection to be bestowed by a tree.

—ST. JOHN DAMASCENE”



ANNOUNCEMENTS

UPCOMING CHURCH SERVICES:

Wednesday, September 13, Great Vespers for the Elevation of the Holy Cross, 5pm

Thursday, September 14, The Elevation of the Precious and Life-creating Cross, Orthros / Div. Lit. 8:30am

Saturday, September 16, Great Vespers, 5pm

St. Nicholas Shrine Collection!

Today's coffee hour is being sponsored by Philoptochos members in memory of those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. There will be a special collection basket for donations for the rebuilding of St Nicholas Shrine at Ground Zero in New York City. Thank you for your generosity. .

Bookstore Grand Re-Opening!

Come visit the renovated Bookstore! For any purchase of \$50 or more made on Sept 3 or 10, you will receive a \$5 off coupon good for use in the month of October.

Exaltation of the Precious Cross

Basil is needed for the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. If you have basil in your garden, please bring it to the Church on Wednesday, September 13.

Altar Server Robes

Thank you to all who donated towards the altar boy robes. Donations are still needed for additional sizes. Please see Father if you would like to help.

Philoptochos

Meeting: Our Philoptochos chapter will meet on Tuesday, September 12th, at 6pm. We are part of a nation-wide network and perform acts of philanthropy and raise money for others who do so. We

typically meet every 2nd Tuesday for an hour. New members are always welcome!

September Buddy Pack Supply Drive

Please join Philoptochos as we bring in donations for the local Buddy Pack Program for at-risk school children to have access to kid-friendly nutritious food on weekends. Please bring non-perishable healthy items from the detailed list found in the narthex. If preferred, checks can be written to Philoptochos and given to Becky Windle or Donna Hoffman.

Church Attire

There is no allowance for Church "summer-wear." An Orthodox Christian should always dress for Church in modest attire (in every season), so as not to draw attention to him/herself, becoming a distraction to others. Traditionally women wear dresses or skirts of at least knee length; dresses, blouses / tops should, at minimum, include short sleeves and cover the shoulder. ***Women should not wear lipstick or lip gloss to Church*** - it leaves a residue on the icons and on the Communion spoon. Men should dress in pants and polo or button-down shirts. Shorts should never be worn in Church. ***Additionally, tight-fitting clothing is not appropriate for women or men.***

The bodies of the holy martyrs were to be burned in a fire, but a heavy rain extinguished the blazing fire, and lightning struck down Frontonus and his servant. Christians took up the bodies of the holy sisters and reverently buried them at the so-called Warm Springs at Pythias (Bithynia).

Part of the relics of the holy martyrs are preserved on Mt. Athos in the Protection cathedral of the Saint Panteleimon Russian monastery, and the hand of Saint Metrodora is on the Holy Mountain in the monastery of the Pantocrator.

The Holy Right-Believing Empress Pulcheria, daughter of the Byzantine emperor Arcadius (395-408), was coregent and adviser of her brother Theodosius the Younger (408-450). She received a broad and well-rounded education, and distinguished herself by her wisdom and piety, firmly adhering to Orthodox teaching. Through her efforts the church of the Most Holy Theotokos was built at Blachernae, and also other churches and monasteries.

Through the intrigues of enemies and of Eudokia, the wife of the emperor Theodosius the Younger, Saint Pulcheria was removed from power. She withdrew into seclusion, and lived a pious life. Without her beneficent influence, conditions in the capital deteriorated. She returned after a while, following the urgent request of her brother. Then the unrest provoked by emerging heresies was quelled.

After the death of Theodosius the Younger, Marcian (450-457) was chosen emperor. Saint Pulcheria again wanted to withdraw into her seclusion, but both the emperor and officials entreated her not to refuse the throne, but to marry the emperor Marcian. For the common good she consented to become Marcian's wife if she were allowed to preserve her virginity within the marriage. They were married, but lived in purity as brother and sister.

Through the efforts of Saint Pulcheria, the Third Ecumenical Council was held at Ephesus in 431 to address the heresy of Nestorius; and also the Fourth Ecumenical Council which was convened at

Chalcedon in the year 451, to deal with the heresies of Dioscorus and Eutychius.

Saint Pulcheria built the church of the Mother of God at Blachernae at Constantinople, and also found the relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (March 9).

Throughout her life Saint Pulcheria defended the Orthodox Faith against various heresies. After giving away her wealth to the poor and to the Church, she died peacefully at the age of fifty-four in the year 453.

The Holy Apostle Clement of the Seventy was bishop in Sardica (an ancient wealthy city of Lydia in Asia Minor). The holy Apostle Paul mentions his name in the Epistle to the Philippians (Phil. 4:3). Addressing a certain "sincere co-worker of his", Paul entreats him: "Help those women who labored with me in the Gospel, and with Clement and my other co-workers, whose names are in the Book of Life" (January 4).

Saint Paul the Obedient was an ascetic in the Far Caves at Kiev. Upon assuming the monastic schema at the monastery of the Caves, the monk underwent very burdensome obediences without a murmur, on which the monastery's Superior had sent him.

He was never idle, and when he was not at an obedience, he ground the grain under the millstone, wearing down his body by this heavy work and attaining ceaseless inner prayer. The Church honors his memory on September 10, on the day of his namesake Saint Paul, Bishop of Nicea.

Saints Peter and Paul were bishops at Nicea. Saint Peter defended the Orthodox Faith against the iconoclasts during the reign of Leo the Isaurian (813-820) and endured suffering for this. He died no earlier than the year 823. Four Letters of Saint Theodore the Studite to Saint Peter are known, written between the years 816-823. No account about the life of Saint Paul of Nicea has been preserved. His name is first mentioned in the so-called "Petrine" Greek Prologue of the eleventh century.

Your Cross and the Cross of Christ

by St. Ignaty Brianchaninov

The Lord said to His Disciples:
If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (Matt. 16:24).

What is meant by “his cross”? And why is “his cross”—that is, the personal cross of every one of us—also called the “Cross of Christ”?

For each of us, “his cross” signifies the afflictions and sorrows that we undergo in our earthly life—afflictions and sorrows that are our own.

For each of us, “his cross” signifies fasting, vigil, and other deeds of piety, by which the flesh is humbled and brought into subjection to the spirit. These deeds must be carried out in accordance with each person’s strength, and thus are also personal to us. For each of us, “his cross” signifies our sinful failings and passions; these again are our own. With some we are born, whereas others we acquire over the course of our earthly life.

No matter how heavy is the cross that we bear in following Christ, it brings us no profit and bears no fruit inasmuch as it is not transformed into the Cross of Christ.

For the disciple of Christ, “his cross” becomes the Cross of Christ. The disciple of Christ is firmly convinced that He constantly keeps watch over him; that He permits all afflictions as an indispensable and inevitable element of Christian identity; that no sorrows would approach him without the dispensation of Christ; and that by way of tribulations he becomes like unto Christ, participating in His sufferings on earth, that he might also become a participant in His glory in Heaven (cf. Rom. 8:17).

For the disciple of Christ, “his cross” becomes the Cross of Christ. The true disciple of Christ has as his sole purpose in life the fulfillment of His Commandments. The Holy Commandments of Christ become for His disciple a cross upon which he con-

stantly crucifies his sinful “old” self, “with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24).

Hence, it becomes evident that to bear our cross and follow Christ we must deny ourselves even to the point of losing our own lives.

Sin has penetrated our fallen nature so deeply and thoroughly that the Word of God does not refrain from calling it the soul of fallen man.

In order to bear our cross, we must first deny our body the gratification of its fickle desires, offering it only what is essential for its needs. Second, we must acknowledge that our own “rights” are the greatest wrongs and that our “rational thought” is utterly irrational in the eyes of God. Third, we must place ourselves in God’s hands with unswerving faith and devote ourselves to careful meditation on the Holy Scriptures, while denying our own will.

Whoever denies himself in this way is in a position to bear his cross.

With a spirit of submission to God and invoking His aid, which comes to assist him in his weakness, such a person fearlessly and unflinchingly beholds approaching tribulations and courageously prepares himself to endure them. He aspires thereby to participate in the Passion of Christ and to attain to confession of Him: a mystical confession of mind and heart, but also a manifest confession by his deeds and his very life.

As long as our cross remains solely our own, it is very heavy. When, however, it is transformed into the Cross of Christ, it becomes exceedingly light. “For My yoke is easy and my burden is light,” said our Lord (Matt. 11:30).

The cross is placed on the shoulders of the disciple of Christ when he acknowledges that he is worthy of his afflictions sent to him by the Providence of God.

The disciple of Christ rightly bears his cross when he accepts that precisely these tribulations, and not others, are needful for his transformation into the

likeness of Christ and for his salvation.

We lift our cross with fortitude when we clearly perceive and understand our sinfulness. In such awareness, there is no place for self-deception. If, however, you admit that you are sinful but grumble about your cross, you thereby demonstrate that you have only superficial consciousness of your sinfulness and are deluding yourself.

Bravely bearing our cross is true repentance.

You who are crucified on the cross, confess to the Lord that His judgments are infallible. Condemn yourself, acknowledge the judgements of God, and you will receive remission of your sins.

You who are crucified on the cross, come to know Christ, and the gates of Paradise will be opened unto you.

From your cross, glorify the Lord and reject as unlawful and blasphemous every thought of complaint or grumbling. From your cross, thank the Lord for His inestimable gift; that is, for giving you the possibility to imitate Him by means of your suffering.

From your cross, theologize; for the cross is the only true school and treasure, and the loftiest throne of genuine theology. Without the cross there can be no living knowledge of God.

“Do not look [for the law of freedom] being perfected through human virtues; perfection is not found therein; its perfection is hidden in the Cross of Christ” (St. Mark the Ascetic, *On the Spiritual Law*).

The cross of the disciple of Christ is transformed into the Cross of Christ when he bears it with genuine consciousness of his sinfulness—which is in need of chastisement—in a spirit of thanksgiving and glorification of the Lord. From thanksgiving and glorification the sufferer receives spiritual consolation. Thanksgiving and glorification become abundant sources of ineffable and eternal joy, which well up beneficially in his heart, gushing

forth into his soul and body.

To carnal people, the Cross of Christ appears unbearable. For the disciple and follower of Christ, on the other hand, it is a path of inexpressible spiritual gladness. So great is this joy, that it completely eradicates sorrow, such that the follower of Christ, even in the midst of the worst torments, feels only gladness.

(See, for example, the Martyrdom of St. Eustratios [December 13] and his prayer at the Midnight Office for Saturdays.)

The young St. Mavra said to her husband, St. Timothy, who called her to martyrdom as he himself was bravely enduring dreadful tortures for his faith in Christ: “I fear, my brother, lest I lose courage when I see the instruments of torture and the enraged governor. I am afraid lest I give way on account of my youth.”

St. Timothy answered her: “Place your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ and the tortures will become like oil poured out upon your body; they will become a breath of fresh air, which will alleviate your pains.”

(See the Martyrdom of Sts. Timothy and Mavra, May 3).

The Cross is the strength and glory of the Saints through-out the ages.

The Cross is the healer of passions and the annihilator of the demons.

Deadly is their cross for those who have not taken pains to transform it into the Cross of Christ; for those who have grumbled and blasphemed against Divine Providence from their cross; for those who give themselves over to desperation and despair.

Sinners who have no consciousness of their sinfulness, and thus no repentance, die eternally on their cross and, from their lack of self-awareness and fortitude, are deprived of true life—life together with God. Their souls are taken down from the cross of sorrows only dead, to be thrown into the

eternal grave of Hades.

The Cross of Christ raises from the earth the crucified disciple of Christ. The disciple of Christ, nailed on his cross and the Cross of Christ, has his thoughts turned to the eternal and imperishable good things; with his mind and heart he lives in Heaven and beholds the mysteries of the Spirit in Jesus Christ our God.

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matt. 16:24) Amen

Prayer of Saint Evstratios

Imagnify you greatly, O Lord, because you have looked upon my lowliness, and have not hemmed me into the hands of enemies, but have saved my soul from constraints. And now, Master, let your hand protect me, and your mercy come upon me, for my soul has been troubled and is greatly afflicted at its departure from this wretched and soiled body of mine. May the evil plan of the adversary never confront and obstruct it, because of the many sins committed by me in this life in knowledge and in ignorance. Be merciful to me, Master, and never let my soul see the dark and gloomy sight of the evil demons; but may your bright and shining Angels receive it. Give glory to your holy name, and bring me by your power to your divine judgment seat. When I am judged, let not the hand of the ruler of this world seize me to cast me, sinner that I am, into the depths of Hell; but stand by me and be for me a savior and a helper. Have mercy, Lord, on my soul, stained with the passions of life, and receive it pure through repentance and confession; for you are blessed to the ages of ages.

Amen!

“Every action of Christ and all His working of miracles were truly very great and divine and wonderful, but of all things the most wonderful is His honorable cross. For by nothing else except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ has death been brought low, the sin of our first parent destroyed, hell plundered, resurrection bestowed, the power given us to despise the things of this world and even death itself, the road back to the former blessedness made smooth, the gates of paradise opened, our nature seated at the right hand of God, and we made children and heirs of God. By the cross all things have been set aright. For all we who are baptized in Christ, says the Apostle, ‘are baptized in his death’ and as many of us as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ; moreover, ‘Christ is the power and wisdom of God.’ See how the death of Christ, the cross, that is to say, has clothed us with the subsistent wisdom and power of God!”

—ST. JOHN DAMASCENE

