



SAINT LUKE THE EVANGELIST

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

SEPTEMBER 17, 2017—SUNDAY AFTER THE ELEVATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

The Holy Martyrs Saint Sophia and her Daughters Faith, Hope and Love were born in Italy. Their mother was a pious Christian widow who named her daughters for the three Christian virtues. Faith was twelve, Hope was ten, and Love was nine. Saint Sophia raised them in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Saint Sophia and her daughters did not hide their faith in Christ, but openly confessed it before everyone.

An official named Antiochus denounced them to the emperor Hadrian (117-138), who ordered that they be brought to Rome. Realizing that they would be taken before the emperor, the holy virgins prayed fervently to the Lord Jesus Christ, asking that He give them the strength not to fear torture and death. When the holy virgins and their mother came before the emperor, everyone present was amazed at their composure. They looked as though they had been brought to some happy festival, rather than to torture. Summoning each of the sisters in turn, Hadrian urged them to offer sacrifice to the goddess Artemis. The young girls remained unyielding.

Then the emperor ordered them to be tortured. They burned the holy virgins over an iron grating, then threw them into a red-hot oven, and finally into a cauldron with boiling tar, but the Lord preserved them.

The youngest child, Love, was tied to a wheel and they beat her with rods until her body was covered all over with bloody welts. After undergoing unspeakable torments, the holy virgins glorified their Heavenly Bridegroom and remained steadfast in the Faith.

They subjected Saint Sophia to another grievous torture: the mother was forced to watch the suffering of her daughters. She displayed adamant courage, and urged her daughters to endure their torments for the sake of the Heavenly Bridegroom. All three maidens were beheaded, and joyfully bent their necks beneath the sword.

In order to intensify Saint Sophia's inner suffering, the emperor permitted her to take the bodies of her daughters. She placed their remains in coffins and loaded them on a wagon. She drove beyond the city limits and reverently buried them on a high hill. Saint Sophia sat there by the graves of her daughters for three days, and finally she gave up her soul to the Lord. Even though she did not suffer for Christ in the flesh, she was not deprived of a martyr's crown. Instead, she suffered in her heart. Believers buried her body there



THE HYMNS OF THE THIRD ANTIPHON

Today is Mode Plagal 1

Before the Entrance...

Apolytikion of the Feast.

MODE 1.

Save, O Lord, Your people and bless Your inheritance, granting victory to the rulers over the enemies, and by Your Cross protecting Your commonwealth. (x4)

After the Entrance...

Resurrectional Apolytikion.

MODE PL. 2.

When the angelic powers appeared at Your grave, the soldiers guarding it feared and became as dead. And standing by the sepulcher was Mary who was seeking Your immaculate body. You devastated Hades, not afflicted by it. You went to meet the virgin, and granted eternal life. You resurrected from the dead. O Lord, glory to You.

Apolytikion of the Feast.

MODE 1.

Save, O Lord, Your people and bless Your inheritance, granting victory to the faithful over the enemy, and by Your Cross protecting Your commonwealth.

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.

You who were lifted on the cross voluntarily, * O Christ our God, bestow Your tender compassions * upon Your new community to which You gave Your name. * Cause our faithful emperors to be glad in Your power, * granting them the victories against their adversaries. * And for an ally, Lord, may they have You, * peace as their armor, the trophy invincible.

“If we want to be delivered from evil and to avoid temptation, let us believe in God and forgive those who’ve offended us in any way.”

—ST. MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR



THE READINGS OF THE DAY

EPISTLE READING

The Letter of Paul to the Galatians 2:16-20

Brethren, knowing that no one is justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, we believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. But if, even though we desired to be justified in Christ, we were found to be sinners, does that mean that Christ is a servant of sin? Certainly not! Indeed, if I build up again those things which I [once] destroyed, I show that I am breaking the law. For I, through the law, died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. I now live this life in the flesh, but I live [it] by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and who gave himself up for me.

GOSPEL READING

Mark 8: 34-38, 9: 1

The Lord said: "Whoever wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Indeed, whoever wants to save his life will lose it; and whoever will lose his life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will save it. What will it profit if someone gains the whole world and loses his life? Or what will someone give in exchange for his life? Whoever will be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also will be ashamed of when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I tell you that there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God come with power."

“We should lead the spiritual life, be obedient to our spiritual guide, confess, take communion regularly, and, most important of all, avoid criticizing other people. We should read spiritual books and Scripture, the Psalter, and take part in beneficial, spiritual discussions. It needs a lot of caution, because the times we live in are difficult. We need to persist in prayer and obedience. We have to struggle.

—ELDER IAKOVOS TSALIKIS”



ANNOUNCEMENTS

UPCOMING CHURCH SERVICES: NO GREAT VESPERS THIS WEEK

Hurricane Harvey Relief - 2nd tray today

Let's join National Philoptochos in sending financial support to the IOCC for emergency relief for victims of Hurricane Harvey in Houston. Thank you for being generous.

Bookstore

Spiritual reading is part of Orthodox Christian living — visit the Bookstore today!

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.

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.

Save the Date

Hope and Joy children are invited to go Lazer Bowling on Saturday, October 21. Please see Calin

Chindris if you are interested. More details to follow.

Parish Feast Day Pot Luck

There will be a Parish Feast day Pot Luck held on Sunday, October 15. Please sign up on the form in the Narthex so that we know what food items everyone plans to bring.

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.**

beside her daughters.

The relics of the holy martyrs have rested at El'zasa, in the church of Esho since the year 777.

The Holy Martyr Theodota, a native of Cappadocia, suffered in the city of Nicea during the reign of the emperor Alexander Severus (222-235). At this time the governor of Cappadocia was a certain Symblicius. They told him that a rich woman named Theodota was confessing Christ. The governor summoned Theodota and for a long time urged her to turn from the true Faith.

Seeing the futility of his attempts, he gave Theodota over to torture. They suspended her and began to rake her with iron hooks, but she did not feel any pain. Then they put her in chains and led her away to a prison cell.

After eight days, when they led the saint out for new tortures, only faint traces of the tortures already endured remained on her body. The governor was amazed and asked, "Who are you?" The saint answered: "Your mind is darkened, but if you were sober, then you would have realized that I am Theodota."

Symblicius commanded the martyr to be cast into a red-hot furnace. Flames shot out from the furnace and scorched those standing nearby, while those remaining unharmed shut the furnace and scattered in fright. After a certain while, pagan priests came and opened the furnace to scatter the ashes of the martyr, but they too were burned by the flames. Those remaining unhurt saw Saint Theodota unharmed. She stood in the midst of the flames between two youths in white raiment, and was glorifying the Lord. This apparition so terrified the pagans that they fell down as if dead. Later, they returned the saint to prison.

The invincibility of the martyr gave Symblicius no peace. He made a journey to Byzantium, on the return trip he stopped over at Ancyra and tried to get the better of Theodota. He gave orders to throw her all at once onto red-hot iron, but again the mar-

tyr remained unharmed.

Then Symblicius gave orders that the saint be taken to Nicea. There, in a pagan temple he wanted to compel her to offer sacrifice to the idols, but through the prayer of the saint, the idols fell and were shattered. The outraged governor gave orders to stretch the martyr out and saw through her body, but here also the power of God preserved the saint. The saw caused Theodota no harm, and the servants became exhausted. Finally, they beheaded the saint. Bishop Sophronius of Nicea buried her body.

The Holy martyr Agathocleia was a servant in the home of a certain Christian named Nicholas. His wife Paulina was a pagan. For eight years Agathocleia underwent abuse from her mistress because of her faith. Paulina fiercely beat the servant, and made her walk barefoot over sharp stones.

Once in a fit of nastiness, Paulina broke her rib with a blow from a hammer, and then cut out her tongue. Nothing could make the saint give in to the demand of her mistress to worship idols. Then Paulina locked the martyr in prison and exhausted her with hunger. But Agathocleia did not perish: birds brought her food each day. Finally, in a fit of evil, Paulina went to the prison and murdered the holy martyr.

The Holy Martyrs Peleus and Nilus, Bishops of Egypt, Presbyter Zeno, Paternuthius, Elias and another 151 Martyrs suffered during the reign of the emperor Maximian Galerius (305-311). The majority of them were Egyptians, but there were also some Palestinians among them. Firmilian, the governor of Palestine, arrested 156 Christians. They gouged out the eyes of the holy martyrs, cut the tendons of their feet, and subjected them to all manner of tortures. They beheaded 100 of the martyrs, and burned the rest.

Sermon on the Precious and Life-Giving Cross

by St. Gregory Palamas

The Cross of Christ was forecast and mystically predicted from of old and no-one has ever become reconciled to God without the power of the Cross. After the transgression of our forefathers in God's paradise, through the tree, on the one hand sin spread and, on the other we died, having suffered the death of the soul- separation from God- before that of the body.

God is spirit and goodness and virtue and our spirit is the image and likeness of His. If we're to be renewed and reconciled to God in spirit, sin must be eradicated. This is Christ's Cross.

Many friends of God were in evidence before God and the law, even prior to the appearance of the Cross. David says: 'But, God, your friends have been greatly honoured by me' (Ps. 139, 17 [Septuagint]). How then were there friends of God before the Cross? Because the mystery of the Cross acted within them.

Let's begin first with Abraham. God told him to leave the land of his birth and his family and to go to the land He would show him. He didn't say 'the land I will give you', but 'the land I will show you'. These words bear the mystery of the Cross within them.

After Moses had left Egypt and gone up onto the mountain, God told him to unfasten his sandals from his feet. This is another of God's mysteries. He was to rid himself of the leather footwear through which sin acts and which separated him from the holy ground. He was no longer to live in sin and in the flesh, and life which was opposed to God was to be abandoned and killed off. As Saint Paul puts it, the flesh is to be crucified together with the passions and desires.

Since it's not possible for us to be entirely free of the wicked passions and for the world of sin not to act upon us collectively, unless we rise to the level of contemplation of God, the mystery of God is contemplation of the kind which crucifies to the world those who deserve it. Thus, in the case of Moses, this vision of the flaming but not burning bush was the mystery of the Cross, greater and more perfect than the mystery at the time of Abraham. So was Moses initiated into the mystery of the Cross, but Abraham not?

Abraham was granted the most wonderful vision when he saw the three Persons of God at the Oak of Mamre (Gen. 18, 1), and the mystery of the Cross was active in him when he sacrificed his son, Isaac. Isaac himself was a model of Him Who was nailed to the Cross, because he was obedient to his father unto death, as was Christ. And the ram which was given to Abraham to sacrifice on our behalf, as well as the plant to which it was tied, also contained the mystery of the model of the Cross, which is why it was called 'Selichah', the tree of forgiveness, just as the Cross is called the tree of salvation.

The mystery and model of the Cross also acted in Jacob, Isaac's son, because he increased his flock with wood and water. The wood prefigured the wood of the Cross, while the water foreshadowed holy baptism, which also contains within it the mystery of the Cross. When Jacob prostrated himself at the end of his staff and when he blessed his grandsons (Gen. 48, 9-20), these actions prefigured the Cross even more clearly.

In the same way as the mystery of the Cross acted in Abraham and as his son, Isaac, was a model of Him Who was later crucified, so, too, the mystery of the Cross informed the whole of Jacob's life, and his son, Joseph, was a model of the Divine Word and His later sufferings. Because he, too, was led to the slaughter through envy and, indeed, by his kinsmen after the flesh. He wasn't actually slaughtered, just as Isaac hadn't been, but this is nothing to wonder

at, because they were not the truth, but models of the future truth. Slaughter prefigured Christ's suffering in the flesh, while the avoidance of passion foreshadowed the impassivity of the Godhead.

Let us return to Moses, who was himself saved with wood and water, when he was exposed in a basket on the waters of the Nile. (As we've said, wood and water prefigure the Cross and baptism). But Moses went further in foreshadowing most clearly the model and even the shape of the Cross and our salvation through it. Because when he stood with the rod and crossed his hands over it, he routed the enemy (Ex. 17, 8). Moreover, when he placed the bronze serpent lengthwise on a standard, raising it as a model of the Cross, he told those Jews who'd been bitten by snakes to look at it and they would be cured of their snake bites.

There's no time to explain how the mystery of the Cross acted in so many other people, such as Joshua and the judges and prophets who came after him, David and those came later, who cut off rivers, stopped the sun, destroyed the cities of the impious, were victorious in war, avoided death by the sword, or fire or lions, chastised kings, raised the dead, caused droughts and then, when they wanted, brought rain, and all the other things mentioned by Saint Paul regarding faith in the Cross, in particular, which for us who are saved is the power of God, but foolishness for those who are lost.

But let's leave all those under the old law and go on to Christ Himself, for Whom and through Whom all things were made and Who said just before the crucifixion that those who don't take up their cross and follow Him aren't worthy of Him. He also said that those who wished to follow Him should deny themselves and take up their cross.

The commandment ordains that we have to deny the body and take up our cross. People who live close to God still have their body, but they aren't particularly attached to it; they use it as a collaborator in necessary things, but when the time comes,

they're prepared to give it up, as they would possessions and any other necessities. This is the word of the Cross and, as such it is a great and really divine mystery, whether it acted in the prophets before the crucifixion or today, after the crucifixion has occurred. How? Because superficially it appears to bring dishonor to those who demean and humble themselves in all things, in pain and agony, who avoid bodily pleasures, who give away their possessions, are themselves the cause of their own poverty. Through the power of God, however, this poverty, pain and dishonor begets eternal glory, inexpressible pleasure, limitless riches, both in this world and in the next.

This, then, is the wisdom and power of God, to triumph through weakness, to raise up through humility and to enrich through poverty. It's not only the word and mystery of the Cross which is divine and to be venerated, but also a sign, because it's a holy seal, saving and venerable, sanctifying and perfecting the supernatural and ineffable good things which have been activated in the human race by God, the destruction of the curse and condemnation, remover of mortality and death, provider of eternal life and blessing, the tree of salvation, the royal sceptre the divine trophy against visible and invisible enemies, even if the supporters of heresies are insanely displeased by this. The Lord's Cross represents the whole dispensation of His bodily presence and contains the whole of the mystery contained therein. It extends to the ends of the earth, embracing everything above, below, around and between. They have not understood that the Lord's Cross discloses the entire dispensation of His coming in the flesh, and contains within it the whole mystery of this dispensation. Extending in all directions, it embraces everything above, below, around and between. The Lord Himself, when He was going to ascend the Cross, openly referred to it as His lifting up and His glory [John 3.14-15]. And He announced that in His coming and manifesta-

tion in the future, this sign of the Son of man would come with great power and glory [Matthew 24.30].

Saint Paul writes to the Colossians: 'And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it' (2, 13-15).

Inclining our hearts as well as bending our knees, come, 'let us worship', with David the psalmist and prophet, 'at the place where His feet stood' (Psalm 132.7 Septuagint), where His all-embracing hands were outspread and His life-giving body was stretched out for our sake. As we venerate and greet the Cross with faith, let us draw the abundant sanctification flowing from it and retain it. Then, at the sublimely glorious future advent of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, as we see Him come in glory, we shall rejoice and skip for joy for ever, having attained to a place on His right hand, to the glory of the Son of God crucified in the flesh for us.

To Whom belongs all glory, together with His Father without beginning and the all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages.

Amen!

“Sins are the causes of all evils. Through sins come pains, from sins come disturbances, from sins come wars, from sins come diseases and all die incurable passions that assault us. Therefore, just as excellent doctors do not examine the visible sufferings but rather investigate their cause; likewise, the Savior, wanting to demonstrate that sin is the cause of all the evils within men, says to the one with a paralyzed body (because the Physician of Souls saw that his soul was paralyzed first and then his body). “See you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you.” Therefore, sin was the reason even for the aforementioned illness. It was also the cause of the damage and the pain. It becomes the opportunity for all misfortune.

—ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

