

# SOBORNOST

**St. Thomas the Apostle  
Orthodox Church**

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## SERVICES

**Sundays** Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM, Divine Liturgy 10 AM

### February 5, 2012 – Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

#### The Holy Martyr Agatha of Palermo in Sicily

Agatha (Icon above), this glorious virgin and martyr for Christ, was born in Palermo of Sicily of noble and wealthy parents. When Emperor Decius began to persecute Christians, Agatha was arrested and brought to trial before Judge Quintian. The judge, seeing Agatha beautiful in countenance, desired her as his wife. When he suggested this, Agatha answered that she is the bride of Christ and cannot be unfaithful to her Betrothed. Quintian subjected her to cruel tortures. Agatha was ridiculed, whipped, bound to a tree and flogged until blood flowed. After that, the judge again tried to persuade her to deny Christ and to avoid any further torture and suffering. To that the bride of Christ replied: "These tortures are very beneficial for me; just as wheat cannot arrive at the granary before it is cleansed from the chaff, so my soul cannot enter Paradise if my body is not humbled by tortures." Then, the torturer ordered that her breasts be cut off and that she be cast into prison. St. Peter appeared to her in prison and restored her to bodily health. Agatha was again led out for torture and again cast into prison where she gave up her soul to God in the year 251 A.D. in the town of Catania. After her death, the torturer Quintian departed for Palermo to usurp her estate. However, along the way, his horse and the horses of his soldiers became wild with rage. Quintian was bitten on the face, thrown to the ground and trampled to death. Swift was the punishment of God that reached out for this savage crime perpetrated against St. Agatha.



### Today's Epistle Reading – St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 3:10-15

TIMOTHY, my son, you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

### Today's Gospel Reading – Saint Luke 18:10-14

The Lord said this parable, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

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Today we enter the Triodion (so-called because the canons composed for Matins during the period from today through Holy Week are composed of three Odes each.

The three weeks that begin today, the fourth Sunday before Great Lent, are called the weeks of preparation. Each Sunday has a distinct theme that is expressed in the Gospel readings appointed for the Divine Liturgies:

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee - Luke 18:10-14

Sunday of the Prodigal Son - Luke 15:11-32

Sunday of the Last Judgment (Meatfare) - Matthew 25:31-46

Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheesefare) - Matthew 6:14-21

The Church eases us into the Lenten fasting discipline during this period. The week following the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee (this coming week) is fast-free. The week following the Prodigal Son is a normal week, with fasting on Wednesday and Friday. In the week following Meatfare Sunday, no meat is eaten, but eggs, fish and dairy are permitted on any day. Forgiveness Sunday ends the period of preparation. The next day, Clean Monday, Great Lent begins.



## Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee



The name for this Sunday is taken from the parable of our Lord Jesus Christ found in Luke 18:10-14. This is the story of two men, one a Pharisee, a member of a Jewish sect known for its diligent observance of the Law, and the other a Publican, a government official charged with the responsibility of collecting taxes.

Both men enter the temple, and the Pharisee stands openly and prays, thanking God that he is not like other men, specifically extortioners, the unjust, adulterers, "or even this tax collector." He then begins to list his religious accomplishments by stating, "I fast twice a week, and I give tithes of all that I possess."

In direct contrast to the pride of the Pharisee, the Publican goes to a place where he will not be noticed by others and beats his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

Having told this story, Jesus affirms that it was the Publican who returned home justified and forgiven rather than the Pharisee. He states, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (v. 14).

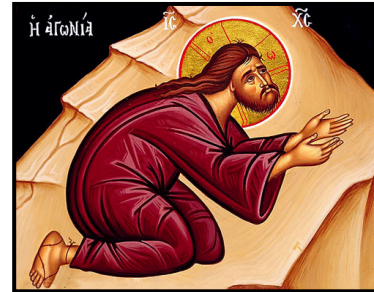
The theme of this parable is repentance. Repentance is the door through which we enter Lent, the starting-point of the journey to Pascha. To repent signifies far more than self-pity or futile regret over things done in the past. The Greek term *metanoia* means "change of mind." To repent is to be renewed, to be transformed in our inward viewpoint, to attain a fresh way of looking at our relationship with God and with others. The fault of the Pharisee is that he has no desire to change his outlook; he is complacent, self-satisfied, and so he allows no place for God to act within him. The Gospel depicts him as a man that is pleased only with himself who thinks that he has complied with all of the requirements of religion. But in his pride, he has falsified the meaning of true religion and faith. He has reduced these to external observations, measuring his piety by the amount of money he gives.

The Publican, on the other hand, truly longs for a "change of mind." He humbles himself, and his humility justifies him before God. He becomes, in the words of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3), "poor in spirit." He acknowledges that he is a sinner, and he knows that salvation is only found in the mercy of God. Here we find an example of true humility, an essential aspect of repentance. A "change of mind" and the transformation of our lives can only happen when we humble ourselves before God, acknowledge our willingness to turn from sin, and receive His grace into our lives. Our preparation for Lent thus begins with a prayer for humility, the beginning of true repentance. Through repentance, we can find and return to the true order of things, a restoration of our spiritual vision that will guide us in a very difficult and challenging world. By entering Great Lent in humility and repentance, we can attain deeper communion with God as we receive His forgiveness and He blesses by guiding us to greater spiritual heights.

## Archpastoral Letter of +His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas on Great Lent

(Originally published March 6, 2011)

Very Reverend Protospesbyters, Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers, and dearly-beloved faithful of our God-saved Diocese:



GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST! GLORY FOREVER!

*"Open to me, O Giver of Life, the gates of repentance, for early in the morning my spirit seeks Your holy temple, bearing a temple of the body all defiled. But in Your compassion cleanse it by Your loving-kindness and Your mercy."*

*Matins Stichiri of Repentance*

Once again we are about to embark on an amazing spiritual journey, for at sundown this evening we will begin the sacred season of the Great Fast. But our Holy Mother Church has already begun to prepare us for it well in advance. Even before the Triodion itself began three weeks ago, on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, when the above verse was first sung at Matins, we already heard the theme of the approaching season. It was on the Saturday before the Theophany that we first encountered the message. That great man of God, the Holy Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John revealed it to us as the entranceway into the Kingdom of God. He loudly proclaimed to all who came out to hear him: "REPENT, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2). On the Sunday after Theophany, we hear our Lord continue in the same vein with the very same words, "REPENT, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17). That is not simply the theme of Lent; IT IS OUR GOAL. This is what we are setting out to do!

From the pages of the spiritual literature of our Holy Orthodox Church, we hear this awesome example of repentance brought about through great humility:

The Bishop of a certain province once fell into great sin. The next day was a Feast Day, and he was supposed to liturgize at a Church that was celebrating its Patron Saint and to which the whole city usually went.

As soon as he entered the church, he went up on the amvon, revealed his sin in front of the crowd, took off his episcopal stole (omophor), gave it to his deacon, and with great contrition loudly said, so that all could hear: "After such a sin, I can no longer be your Bishop. Choose someone worthy."

He started to leave. However, the people, who loved him, prevented him from doing so. "Remain in your post and let the sin be upon us," they all shouted with one voice.

Moved by the love of the people, the Bishop once again ascended the amvon and said:

"If you want me to stay in my post, which I hold unworthily, you will do as I tell you."

He ordered the doors of the Church shut and only one small exit to remain open. He fell to

(Continued on Page 5)

## 2011 Lenten Archpastoral Letter – Continued from Page 4

the ground in front of the exit and shouted to the congregation for all of them to heed him:” Anyone who dares not step on me, when leaving here, will have no place with God.”

The Christians, in order not to lose their Bishop, obeyed. One by one, as they left, they stepped on him. When the last one had passed by, a voice from heaven was heard, saying: "Because of his great humility, his sin is forgiven."

Thus it is, great or lowly, young or elderly, educated or illiterate, whatever station in life, all of us have need of repentance. In the early Church, this was the manner of confession as revealed in the above incident. While many people may ask for a general or group Confession today, they have no idea of what this really means; it does not mean to confess silently as a group, but rather to declare your sins before the group! WHAT GREAT HUMILITY THAT TOOK! This concept ought to encourage those who shy away from Holy Confession to be more willing to approach this Holy Mystery with less fear and concern. We must all be grateful for private confession, considering the alternative!

True repentance is much more, however, than simply an enumeration of our sins, whether in our daily prayers or in sacramental confession, and then by saying some prescribed prayers of penance. True repentance - "metanoia," - is a "turning around," a change of life for the better, the putting off of the old man and putting on the new. In Holy Scriptures, everyone who came into contact with the Lord Jesus, and repented, came away a totally different person. Consider Zacchaeus! He was despised by his fellow Israelites because of his greed and dishonesty, but having met Christ, he changed his lifestyle completely. He promised to make considerable restitution for his sins. The Bible is full of numerous such examples of transformed lives.

St. Gregory Palamas, in his sermon "On the Precious and Life-giving Cross," reminds us: "After our First Parents transgressed against God through the tree in paradise, sin came to life, but we died, submitting, even before physical death, to the death of the soul, its separation from God." Every time we sin, we separate ourselves from God. Through the Tree of the Cross we can once again be reunited to God! This is the goal of our repentance: to be reunited with God!

This fasting season provides us with the tools to do precisely that. Through fasting, prostrations, profound repentance, prayer, Scripture reading, additional attendance at Divine Worship, Confession and Communion, almsgiving, and any other good and holy activity we might undertake, we return to God as did the Prodigal Son. My prayer for you is that you take advantage of this great opportunity afforded us, and that you are able to mend your own personal relationship with our loving Saviour during this special and unique time of year.

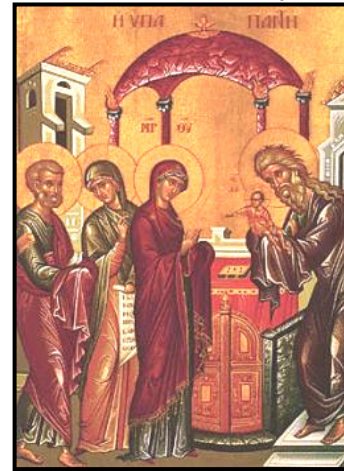
With my prayers for you and your families that you take up your Cross of repentance and bear it well throughout these holy days and grow in spirit and experience a meaningful, uplifting, and spiritually-beneficial Great Fast, I remain

Most sincerely yours in Christ,

+Metropolitan Nicholas

## + St. Simeon of the Prayer, a Story from Holy Orthodox Tradition

by Fr. Michael J. Buben, from The Word, March 1960



According to the witness of Holy Scripture, the old Simeon was a man "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was upon him." (Luke 2:25). From God, Simeon had been foretold about the coming of the True Messiah. Ancient historians teach us the following about Saint Simeon.

The great and divinely inspired work of translating the Old Testament Books from the Hebrew to the Greek language was begun by Ptolemy Philadelphus, King of Egypt (Seventy-two (sometimes referred to as 70) Hebrew elders from the twelve tribes of Israel were selected for the work of translation. Each Hebrew elder was a teacher of Mosaic Law, a Scriptural Scholar, and proficient in both the Greek and Hebrew languages. These divinely inspired men brought forth the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. Among these scholars who translated the Books of the Old Testament into Greek on the island of Pharos, near Alexandria,

was the elder Simeon.

While translating the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Simeon came to the words; "Behold a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son" (Isaiah 7, 14). Reading them, he became confused, thinking that it was impossible for a Virgin without husband to give birth. Simeon took a knife and was ready to erase the word 'Virgin' and substitute the word 'wife.' At this time an angel of God appeared, held Simeon's hand and said:

"Have faith in the written word, and you yourself will see its fulfillment. You will not die until you yourself see the one who is to be born of a pure Virgin — the Lord Christ."

With a strong belief in the prophetic words of the angel, Simeon impatiently waited the coming to earth of the Anointed One. For many, many years he led a righteous and immaculate life, avoiding all temptation and evil. Daily he prayed at the Temple that God would grant peace and mercy on His earth and save mankind from the all-vain Devil. His eyes gazed upon many infants who were brought to the Temple Forty Days after birth according to the Law of Moses (Exodus 13, 2). With all the infirmities of old age, and perhaps even a wish for release, Simeon continued to believe, and hope, and pray.

Forty Days after Christmas, Saints Mary and Joseph carried the Infant Jesus from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to present Him in thanksgiving at the Temple. When Simeon saw the Eternal Infant, he immediately recognized the predicted Messiah; and here at last stood she through whom the prophecy of Isaiah was accomplished. Seeing the Holy Family surrounded by a heavenly glow and crowned by a Godly light, Simeon with fear and joy came forth, received the God-Infant, and while carrying Him exclaimed: "Lord now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." (Luke 2, 29-32).

After this Simeon foretold the Passion of Christ, the Crucifixion, and the sorrow of the Theotokos seeing her Son on the Cross. (Luke 2, 34-35). He soon fell asleep in the Lord at an age likened to the patriarchs of the first biblical era. God had willed that he should live to the moment awaited for many ages; the birth of the Ageless Son from a Virgin to Whom be glory forever. Amen.

# PARISH NEWS



## Collection for January 29, 2012

Gifts and Pledges	\$	875.00
Candles & Prosporiki		78.00
Building Fund		340.00
Assessments		96.00
Priest Pension Fund		30.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>1,419.00</b>



Attendance: Adults 35, Youth 14, Total 49

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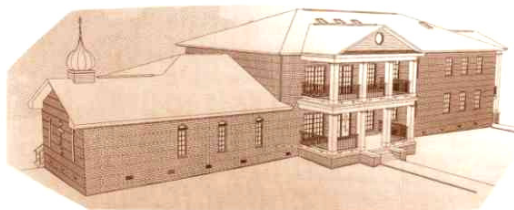
## Appeal for Saints Mary and Martha Monastery

During the week following our February 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Parish Meeting, Dn. Steve and Nancy hope to travel to Saints Mary and Martha Orthodox Monastery in Wagener, South Carolina for a short visit, and to take the beeswax candle stubs that we have been accumulating for the past few years back to the good nuns there for recycling into new candles.

Ss. Mary and Martha's is a small women's monastery of the OCA Diocese of the South. There are three nuns there: Mothers Thecla (Abbess), Helena and Lyubov. Some may remember Mother Helena from her time here in the Washington area at the Monastery of the Holy Cross, which was under the protection of +Metropolitan Nicholas and our diocese during the mid-'90s.

On past visits, St. Thomas parishioners were asked to donate paper goods to the monastery to help keep their expenses down. When we asked if that would be appropriate for this trip, they asked if we could ask the faithful to simply send any money they would have spent on paper goods, and instead, donate it to their building fund. At present, the nuns live and worship in a double-wide mobile home (reminiscent of our St. Thomas 'house-church'). But they have plans for building a proper monastery with both a chapel and living accommodations as soon as their building fund is adequate (also reminiscent of our St. Thomas new church building program).

If you would like to contribute to the monastery's building fund, a separate offering basket will be available on February 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. **Below:** Rendering of proposed monastery building; Mothers Helena, Thecla and Lyubov; Mother Helena making candles in St. Joseph's candle shop.



# PARISH NEWS (Continued)

## Make your Voice Heard NOW on Maryland's Same Sex Marriage Bill

Last Monday evening a very enthusiastic crowd rallied just outside the State House and the Governor's Mansion in Annapolis to protest legislation that has been introduced to redefine marriage in Maryland to include same-sex couples; a bill similar to one that was narrowly defeated last year. The point that rally participants and speakers were making in various ways was that NO government has the authority to redefine the institution of marriage as it was established by our God before government even existed. Further, "conscious clauses" that are sometimes included in legislation to gain passage are then diminished through executive action (see recent administration announcements concerning the health care bill). Special interest groups are now pressuring Maryland's legislators to destroy the fundamental basis of our society - the traditional family. Go to [www.mdelect.net](http://www.mdelect.net) to contact your state Senator and Delegate(s). Ask where they stand on this issue. If they're on the wrong side, ask them to thoughtfully reconsider. NOW is the time to get involved - NOT when it's too late. Visit [www.marylandmarriagealliance.com](http://www.marylandmarriagealliance.com) for other ways to become involved!



## In Your Prayers – Please Remember...

Please remember in your prayers: His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Archbishop DEMETRIOS, Fr. Joseph & Family, Fr. John Baranik, Pani Yvonne Lysack, Christina Alexandru, Andrew Anderson, Mary Lou Angus, Matthew Baker & Family, Riley Bodenhorn, Millie Borys, Cecilia Bosch, the Boswell family, Sean Buckingham, Christos Charuhas, Arthur Chumak, Matthew Costis, Tina Crull, Kari & Mary Diane David, Rev. Joe Dobson, Donald Faulkner, Amelia Flade, Robbie Graves, Michael Hall, Father Chuck Harding, Gregory Harmening, Heather Himler, Nancy Hinderliter, Cameron Houk, the Howl Family, Kelly Jennings & Family, Ron Justice, Michael Kapeluck, Faith Kirby, Nam Koory and Family, Phyllis & Christos Kopan, Alex Makowelski, Jim Maston, Anna Marie Matula & Family, Michael McKenzie, Janet McKinley, Anna Meinhold, Daniela and Michael Milne, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry Osborne, infant Westin Perry & Parents, Kaylee Pilkerton, Katie Piazza, Kelly Plowchin and Family, Mary Reed, Anne Rosario, Jennifer Ross, the Samson Family, Cynthia Sawyer, Rose Shaffer, Stephen & Marian Sheptak, Maria Shostko, Marilyn Single, George Smilo, John Smilo, Jeanne Springer, Michael Stainbrook, Linda Stevenson, Bryan Tucker, Lydia Vita, Leslie Wilkinson, Lori & Eric Wood, the Wright Family, Ann, Elizabeth, Elizabeth, Michaela, Natalia, Nicole, Tracy, Xenia, the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, Fr. Martin's Society and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of any prayer list changes.)