



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2018

FIRST SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT; SAINT MELETIUS, ARCHBISHOP OF ANTIOCH

DIVINE LITURGY OF SAINT BASIL THE GREAT

RESURRECTIONAL TROPARION - TONE FIVE:

Let us, the faithful, praise and worship the Word, coeternal with the Father and the Spirit, born for our salvation from the Virgin; for He willed to be lifted upon the Cross in the flesh, to endure death, and to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection.

THE TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY TROPARION - TONE TWO:

We venerate Your most pure image, O Good One, and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ God. Of Your own will, You were pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh to deliver Your creatures from bondage to the enemy. Therefore with thanksgiving we cry aloud to You: 'You have filled all things with joy, O our Savior, by coming to save the world.'

TROPARION TO SAINT MELETIUS – TONE FOUR:

You appeared to your flock as a rule of faith, an image of humility and a teacher of abstinence. Because of your lowliness, heaven was opened to you. Because of your poverty, riches were granted to you. O holy bishop Meletius, pray to Christ our God to save our souls.

RESURRECTIONAL KONTAKION - TONE FIVE:

You descended into hell, O my Savior, shattering its gates as Almighty; resurrecting the dead as Creator, and destroying the sting of death. You have delivered Adam from the curse, O Lover of Man, and we all cry to You: O Lord, save us!

THE TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY KONTAKION - TONE EIGHT:

The indescribable Word of the Father accepted to be described when He took flesh from you, O Theotokos, restoring the fallen image to its former state and filling it with divine beauty; and confessing this our salvation, we depict it in word and deed.

KONTAKION TO SAINT MELETIUS – TONE SIX:

The apostate Macedonius fled in fear before your spiritual courage, but we your servants run to you to gain your intercession. Father Meletius, converser with the angels and fiery sword of Christ our God, we praise you as a star bringing light to all.

KONTAKION OF THE FIVE SUNDAYS OF GREAT LENT

To thee, the Champion Leader, do I offer thanks of victory, O Theotokos, thou who hast delivered me from terror; but as thou that hast that power invincible, O Theotokos, thou alone can set me free: from all forms of danger free me and deliver me, that I may cry unto thee: 'Rejoice, O Bride without Bridegroom!'

EPISTLE READING

THE PROKEIMENON IN TONE FOUR:

Blessed are You, O Lord God of our fathers, and praised and glorified is Your name forever!

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT: HEBREWS 11: 24-26, 32 – 12: 2

Brethren, by faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented - of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

THE ALLELUIA VERSES:

Moses and Aaron were among His priests; Samuel also was among those who called on His Name. They called upon the Lord, and He answered them.

GOSPEL READING

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT: JOHN 1: 43-51

At that time, Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit." Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel." Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Most

assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

THE SYNODIKON FOR THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

As the prophets beheld, as the Apostles have taught, as the Church has received, as the Teachers have dogmatized, as the Universe has agreed, as Grace has illumined, as Truth has revealed, as falsehood has been dissolved, as Wisdom has presented, as Christ has triumphed;

This we believe, this we declare, this we preach: Christ our True God, and His Saints, we honor in words, in writings, in thoughts, in sacrifices, in temples, in icons.

On the one hand, bowing down and worshiping Christ as God and Master; on the other hand, honoring the Saints as true servants of the Master of all, and offering them due veneration.

This is the Faith of the Apostles! This is the Faith of the Fathers! This is the Faith of the Orthodox! This is the Faith which has established the Universe!

FROM THE PROLOGUE:

FEBRUARY 12/25, BY SAINT NIKOLAI VELIMIROVIC:

Saint Meletius, Archbishop of Antioch

Meletius, this great and holy man, was an exceptional interpreter and defender of Orthodoxy. His entire life was dedicated to a struggle against the Arian heresy, which did not recognize the Son of God as God and blasphemed the Holy Trinity. On three occasions, Meletius was banished and exiled from his archiepiscopal throne to Armenia. The struggle between the Orthodox and the heretics was waged so bitterly that, on one occasion, when St. Meletius was preaching to the people in church concerning the Holy Trinity in unity, his own deacon, a heretic, ran over to him and covered his mouth with his hand. Not being able to speak with his mouth covered, Meletius spoke in signs. He raised his clenched hand in the air, opening at first his three fingers and showing them to the people. After that, he closed his hand and raised up one finger. He participated in the Second Ecumenical Council [Constantinople, 381], where Emperor Theodosius showed him special honor. At this Council, God revealed a miracle through His hierarch. When Meletius was propounding the dogma of the Holy Trinity to Arius, at first he only raised three fingers, separately one by one, and after that folded them into one. At that moment, before all those present, a light shone like lightning from his hand. At this Council, Meletius confirmed Gregory the Theologian on the patriarchal throne in Constantinople. Earlier Meletius had ordained Basil the Great to the diaconate and baptized John Chrysostom. After the close of the Council, St Meletius completed his earthly life in Constantinople. His relics were translated to Antioch.

Saint Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow (1378)

Alexis was a great hierarch of the Russian Church during the burdensome bondage of the Russian people under the Tartars. Once, as a child, while he was hunting birds, he fell asleep. In a dream he heard a voice: “Alexis, why do you labor in vain? I will make you a fisher of men.” At age twenty he was tonsured a monk and in time became Metropolitan of Moscow. Twice he went among the “Golden Horde” of the Tartars: the first time to mitigate the wrath of Khan Verdevir against the Russian people, and the second time, at the invitation of Khan Amurat, to heal the khan’s wife of blindness. She had been blind for three years, but her sight was restored when Alexis prayed over her and anointed her

with holy water. Following great labors and a fruitful life, Alexis died in the year 1378, at the age of eighty-five, and took up his habitation in the courts of the Lord.

The Venerable Mary (who was called Marinus), and her father, St. Eugene, of Alexandria (6th c.)

Maria was a young woman with indomitable courage. After the death of her mother, her father desired the monastic tonsure. Maria did not wish to be separated from her father, and they both agreed to journey to a men's monastery. Maria, with cropped hair and in masculine attire, looked like a young man. Her father died, and Maria was tonsured a monk, receiving the name Marius. In the proximity of the monastery there was an inn. The daughter of the innkeeper was attracted to Marius, the supposed monk. After unsuccessfully pursuing Marius, the innkeeper's daughter accused Marius of illicit carnal relations with her, for she had become pregnant by someone else and had given birth to a son. Maria did not defend herself and was banished from the monastery with ridicule. With someone else's child in her arms, Maria lived for three years in a grove belonging to the monastery, enduring hunger, frost and every difficulty and deprivation. Meanwhile, the innkeeper's daughter went insane. Soon after, Maria died. Only after her death was it discovered that the "monk Marius" was a woman. The deranged daughter of the innkeeper was healed as soon as she touched the body of St. Maria, and after that she acknowledged her terrible sin. St. Maria took up her habitation in eternal joy in the year 508.

Saint Anthony, Patriarch of Constantinople (895)

Anthony was at first a great ascetic of exceptional charity, and later he became Patriarch during the reign of Emperor Leo the Wise (889-912). He tonsured his father a monk and founded a monastery over the relics of St. Callia.

Saint Callia

Callia was generous toward the poor out of pure Christian charity, both as a maiden and later as a married woman. Callia's husband was a wealthy but miserly man. Once, when he returned from a business trip, he saw that his wife had distributed his wealth to the poor, so he killed her. But God glorified this charitable soul in this manner: many who were ill were healed by her relics. Convinced by this, the holy Patriarch Anthony built a monastery over her relics.

Hieromartyr Urbanus, pope of Rome (223-230).

St. Ethilwald of Lindisfarne (740).

St. Prochorus of Georgia, builder of Holy Cross Monastery near Jerusalem (1066).

New Monk-martyrs Luke (Mukhaidze) (1277) and Nicholas (Dvali) (1314), of Jerusalem, and the holy fathers of the Georgian monasteries in Jerusalem.

St. Bassian, founder of Ryabovsk Monastery (Uglich) (1509).

New Martyr Christos the Gardener, of Albania, at Constantinople (1748).

St. Meletius, archbishop of Kharkov (1840).

Appearance of the Iveron Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos (Mt. Athos) (late 10th c.).

HYMN OF PRAISE: The Holy Trinity, The Divine and Human Natures of Christ

Oneness and Threeness, One and Three.

Christ: He is God and He is Man, One and Two. Great and most wonderful are these two mysteries—The key of life and being is concealed in them.

Holy Threeness and Oneness, the eternal flame. Flame eternal: Three torches but One flame.

Oneness and Threeness, One and Three.

Christ: He is God and He is Man, One and Two.

REFLECTION

St. John Chrysostom cites the following example from the life of St. Meletius, which demonstrates the immense nobility of this great hierarch: "It would be unjust to omit that which occurred during the banishment of Meletius from Antioch. When the governor sat down in the coach and seated the saint beside him, he began to drive with great speed through the square. From all sides, the citizens hurled stones that fell like hail on the head of the governor, for they could not be parted from their hierarch easily and were prepared to part with life rather than part with this saint. But what did this blessed man do? Seeing the stones flying, he covered the head of the governor with his cloak. Thus, he shamed his adversaries by his tremendous meekness, and he taught a lesson to his followers as to what kind of forgiveness we ought to show toward those who offend us. He showed them that it is not enough to refrain from doing them evil, but that rather, with all our power, we must remove any danger that threatens them." Concerning the external appearance of Meletius, Chrysostom further says: "In truth, it was the greatest delight to see his holy face. Not only when he taught or preached, but when men simply looked at him, he instilled every virtue into the souls of those who beheld him."

HOMILY

on the wondrous visit of the Son of God

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father (John 16:28).

Brethren, these words are of crucial importance for us. For of all things in this world, this is the most important to know: Is there a God and is there life after death? These words are more precious than all the pearls in the world, more precious than the sun and more precious than the stars, for these words were spoken by Him Who is the most reliable and the most truthful Witness. In truth, these words are the source of the greatest joy for us who are plunged into despair and, after despair, face death. These words witness that there is a God and that there is life after death. I came forth from the Father—before all else, this means that there is a God, from Whom the Lord Jesus came. Again, I leave the world, and go to the Father—this means that God is the Father to Whom the Son of God returns. At the same time, both of these quotations mean that eternal life exists and that death does not mean our annihilation. The Lord spoke these words just before His death.

O sweet and wonderful tidings! That which the hearts of all men and nations throughout all ages dimly envisioned, the Lord witnessed as fact, as truth.

And further, these words confirm the unity of the Father and the Son, as well as the divinity of our Lord and Savior. My brethren, God visited us, the Most-high God Himself: the Holy, Mighty and Immortal God. This is the culmination of our comfort and our joy. O Lord Jesus, Son of God, the True Witness of all that is good and for which our hearts yearn day and night, sanctify us, strengthen us and make us immortal.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.
