



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2018

**SUNDAY OF FORGIVENESS (CHEESE-FARE); HOLY MARTYR AGATHA;
HOLY POLYEUCTUS; LEAVE-TAKING
OF THE MEETING OF THE LORD**

RESURRECTIONAL TROPARION - TONE FOUR:

When the women disciples of the Lord learned from the angel the joyous message of Thy Resurrection; they cast away the ancestral curse and elatedly told the apostles: Death is overthrown! Christ God is Risen, granting the world great mercy.

THE MEETING OF THE LORD TROPARION - TONE ONE:

Rejoice, O Theotokos, full of Grace! From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, enlightening those who sat in darkness! And you, O righteous elder, rejoice and be glad, for you accepted in your arms the Redeemer of our souls, who grants us the resurrection.

TROPARION TO THE HOLY MARTYR AGATHA – TONE FOUR:

Your lamb Agatha, calls out to You, O Jesus, in a loud voice: ‘I love You, my Bridegroom, and in seeking You I endure suffering. In baptism I was crucified so that I might reign in You, and I died so that I might live with You. Accept me as a pure sacrifice, for I have offered myself in love.’ Through her prayers save our souls, since You are merciful.

RESURRECTIONAL KONTAKION - TONE FOUR:

My Savior and my Redeemer as God rose from the tomb and delivered the earthborn from their chains. And He has shattered the gates of hell, and as Master, He has risen on the third day!

KONTAKION TO THE HOLY MARTYR AGATHA – TONE FOUR:

May the Church be robed today in a garment of glorious porphyry, dyed by the pure blood of the martyr Agatha, and let us cry out: ‘Rejoice, pride of Catania!’

SUNDAY OF FORGIVENESS KONTAKION - TONE SIX:

Teacher of wisdom, Bestower of reason, Instructor of the foolish and Protector of the poor; strengthen and enlighten my heart, O Master. You have given me words, O Word of the Father, and behold, I will not restrain my lips from crying to You: ‘O Merciful One, have mercy on me who am fallen.’

THE MEETING OF THE LORD KONTAKION - TONE ONE:

By Your Nativity, You did sanctify the Virgin’s womb! And did bless Simeon’s hands, O Christ God. Now You have come and saved us through love. Grant peace to all Orthodox Christians, O only Lover of mankind.

EPISTLE READING

THE PROKEIMENON IN TONE EIGHT:

Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God.

SUNDAY OF FORGIVENESS: ROMANS 13: 11 – 14: 4

Brethren, do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

THE ALLELUIA VERSES:

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your mercy in the morning, and Your faithfulness by night.

GOSPEL READING

SUNDAY OF FORGIVENESS: MATTHEW 6: 14-21

Jesus said, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

FROM THE PROLOGUE:

FEBRUARY 5/18, BY SAINT NIKOLAI VELIMIROVIC:

The Holy Martyr Agatha of Palermo in Sicily (251)

Agatha, this glorious virgin and martyr for Christ, was born in the Sicilian town of Palermo of noble and wealthy parents. When Emperor Decius began a persecution against Christians, St. Agatha was arrested and brought to trial before the judge Quintian. The judge, seeing Agatha beautiful in countenance, desired to have her for his wife. When he suggested this, Agatha answered that she was the bride of Christ and could not be unfaithful to her Betrothed. Quintian subjected her to cruel tortures. Agatha was mocked, whipped, bound to a tree and flogged until blood flowed. After that, the judge again tried to persuade her to deny Christ and avoid any further torture and suffering. To this 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 into Paradise if my body is not humbled by tortures beforehand.” Then the torturer ordered that her breasts be cut off and that she be cast into prison. St. Peter appeared to Agatha in prison and restored her to health and wholeness of body. Again Agatha was led out for torture, and again she was cast into prison, where she gave up her soul to God in the year 251 in the town of Catania, during the reign of Emperor Decius. 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 for the savage crime perpetrated against St. Agatha. Saint Agatha is fervently venerated by the people of Catania as the patroness of their city, and she is honored as much in the East as in the West.

The Holy Martyr Theodula

Theodula suffered for Christ during the reign of the wicked Roman Emperor Diocletian. During her torture Theodula brought one of her torturers, Heladius, to his senses and converted him to the Christian Faith. When Heladius openly confessed his faith in Christ, he was beheaded. Theodula behaved very courageously at her trial, because of which the judge called her deranged. To this Theodula replied: “It is you, who have forgotten the One True God and bow down before lifeless stones, who are deranged.” The judge then subjected Theodula to cruel tortures, which she heroically endured. By her heroism while suffering torture, she astonished many and converted them to Christ. Among these were two distinguished citizens: Macarius and Evagrius. With these two and many others, Theodula was thrown into a fiery furnace, where they all died honorably and were made worthy of the Kingdom of Christ.

Saint Polyeuctus, Patriarch of Constantinople

Because of his great mind, religious zeal and eloquence, Polyeuctus was called a “second Chrysostom.” During the time Patriarch Polyeuctus governed the Church and Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus ruled the empire, the Russian Princess Olga traveled to Constantinople and was baptized in the year 957. The patriarch baptized her, and the emperor was her godfather. St. Polyeuctus said to her prophetically: “Blessed are you among Russian women, for you have loved light and cast off darkness. The sons of Russia will bless you to the last generation.” From among the simple monks, Polyeuctus was elevated to the rank of patriarch in the year 946. He remained on the patriarchal throne until his death in 970.

St. Theodosius of Skopelos in Cilicia (ca. 421).

St. Avitus, bishop of Vienne (Gaul) (525).

St. Theodosius, archbishop of Chernigov (1696).

New Martyr Anthony of Athens, at Constantinople (1774).

New Martyrs Matushka Agatha (Agafia) (1938), and with her schemamonk Eugene (1939) and Righteous Paramon (1941), of Belorussia.

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos “Seeking of the Lost” (17th c.).

HYMN OF PRAISE: SAINT AGATHA

Dark is the dungeon, radiant is the martyr. In the darkness, St. Agatha shines. Over the courtyard of the dungeon, drenched in light, there the tormentor lives, covered with shame, thinking up new tortures for the virgin Agatha. He torments himself and

contemplates, darkened in the midst of light. The dungeon is bright for whoever is wedded to Christ, while the palace is a place of despair to the enemy of justice!

HYMN OF PRAISE: SAINT THEODULA

Dark is the dungeon, radiant is the martyr. As soon as she heard of Christ, St. Theodula, the pure dove, followed Him. Because of Christ, the mob drove her into darkness, but joyfully Theodula stands, joyfully stands, not fearing anyone, while her enemies, filled with malice and in wretched despair in the midst of the enchanting palace, think only of evil and serve only malice. Everything for them is empty, and about everything they complain, for they do not possess God, for they know not Christ. Erroneously they read all the mysteries of life!

REFLECTION

The monks asked the great Abba Ischyryon: “What have we done?” “We have fulfilled the commandments of God,” Ischyryon replied. “And what will those do who come after us?” “They will do what we do, but only half as much.” “And those after them?” “Before the end of time, they will not keep the monastic rule, but such misfortunes and temptations will befall them that, through their patience during those assaults and temptations, they will prove themselves greater than us and our fathers in the Kingdom of God.”

HOMILY

on death as sleep

Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep (John 11:11).

The Lord of life calls death sleep. Oh, what an inexpressible comfort that is for us! Oh, what sweet news for the world! Physical death, therefore, does not mean the annihilation of man, but merely a sleep from which only He can wake man—He Who woke the first dust to life by His word. When the Lord cried out, “Lazarus!” the man awoke and lived. The Lord knows the name of each of us. If Adam knew the names of every creature of God, why would not the Lord know each one of us by name? Not only does He know, but He also calls us by name. Oh, the sweet and life-creating voice of the only Lover of mankind! This voice can create sons of God from stones. Why, then, can He not rouse us out of our sinful sleep? It is told that a certain man raised a stone to kill his brother, but at that moment it seemed to him that he heard the voice of his mother calling him by name. He merely heard the voice of his mother, and his hand began to quiver. He dropped the stone and was ashamed of his evil intention. The voice of his mother woke him from committing a deadly sin. If the voice of a mother saves and awakens from death, how much more does the voice of the Creator and Life-giver!

Whenever the Lord cried out to someone who was physically dead, the person awoke and arose. But not everyone among those who were spiritually dead awoke and arose when the Lord cried out to them. For this awakening, for this resurrection, the agreement of the will of the deceased is necessary. Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss? (Luke 22:48). That is how the life-creating voice cried out, but the dead man [Judas] remained dead, and the sinner did not awaken. Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? (Acts 9:4). The same life-creating voice cried out and he who was asleep in sin awoke, and the dead man came to life. In truth, deeper is the sleep of sin than the sleep of death, and the one who is asleep in sin does not easily awaken.

O Sweet Lord, wake us from the sleep of sin; wake us, O Lord!

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.
