

ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

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March 6, 2022

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray this message finds you all well and healthy.

Today, March 6th, we celebrate Forgiveness Sunday (Cheesefare Sunday), and we remember the exile of Adam and Eve from Paradise. When God created Adam and Eve, he commanded them not to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Despite God's Commandment, Eve was tempted by the devil, who appeared in the form of a snake, to eat the fruit of that tree and Adam followed. Respecting his creation, God gave them free will, so they had the choice to not transgress God's Commandment. Even so, both of them decided to disobey God, which was the only divine commandant given to them by their Creator to sustain and maintain their heavenly coexistence with Him, which was walk, talk, communicate and live in person with God. When they disobeyed God's Will and Commandment they instantly felt ashamed for being unclothed, and they instantly felt the absence of God's grace when their feelings of eternal joy, peace, love and comfort fell away from them. They felt humiliated by their own actions and hid themselves from God's presence in Paradise. The reason they were exiled from Paradise was not only because they disobeyed the Commandment of God—which certainly was not right—but, because they did not acknowledge and repent for their disobedient actions.

And this is why the Holy Fathers of the Church placed today's Gospel passage to be read on Forgiveness Sunday, which tells us to forgive others who have wronged us. When we do not forgive others, we flee from God's forgiveness for ourselves. The second thing to point out here is the secret spiritual life that each one of us should follow, for the Glory of God. We should fast, pray and give alms in secret so that we do not fall into the temptation of thinking highly of ourselves through others' praises. As Christ says, "when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly." (Matthew 6:3-4). And, lastly, Christ in today's Gospel advises us to always seek the heavenly virtues and treasures of heaven and to not concentrate on gather material treasures, which are fleeting and can be consumed, stolen or destroyed, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21). Our hearts should always be turned towards God so that we may experience in this temporary world a taste of the heavenly life that awaits those who love and are faithful to our Triune God during their earthly lives.

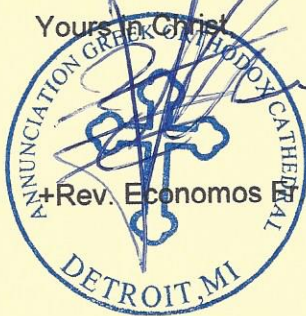
On March 8th we celebrate the feast day of St. Theophylaktos, Bishop of Nicomedia. He was a faithful Christian and an educated man who lived during the 8th and 9th centuries. His spiritual wealth and Christian virtues escalated him to the ecclesiastical position of Bishop of Nicomedia. In the city of Nicomedia he followed in the footsteps of St. Basil the Great of Cappadocia and built churches and established hospitals, hospices, orphanages and shelters for the poor and needy. During the dispute of the iconoclasts, he, alongside with Patriarch Nikiforos I, defended the holy icons against the edict of emperor Leo V the Armenian, which resulted in their exiles from the cities they oversaw. St. Theophylaktos was exiled to the fortress of Strobilus, and after 30 years of hardship he reposed in the Lord. His honor and righteousness for defending the holy icons was restored by Empress Theodora and Patriarch Methodios, and he is known as a confessor of the true faith.

On March 9th we celebrate the 40 Martyrs at Lake Sabaste. They lived during late 3rd and early 4th centuries. Although they were part of an elite Roman military unit, they were all Christians, and during the reign of Licinius they were sentenced to martyrdom for their faith. They were thrown into the frozen Lake of Sebaste. All of them (except for one who left his companions, yielding to the warm baths along the shore) confessed their allegiance to our Trinitarian God and continued with their martyrdom. Just then, 39 shining wreaths descended from heaven over the martyrs' heads, and Aglaius, a guard stationed at the shore who witnessed this miracle and the saints' brave martyrdom, removed his clothes, confessed his belief in Christ, and joined the 39 martyrs. The 40 Martyrs at Lake Sabaste were and still are honored and venerated by many Christians around the world, and, so, we have many churches dedicated to the memory of the holy 40 Martyrs at Lake Sebaste.

On March 12th we celebrate the First Saturday of Lent and The Commemoration of the Miracle of Kollyva involving St. Theodore the Tyro. We always celebrate this miracle 43 days before Holy Pascha. During the middle of the 4th century, the emperor Julian the Apostate decided to ridicule the fasting of the Christians during the first week of Great Lent by sprinkling the blood of sacrificed animals on all the market foods in Constantinople. St. Theodore of Tyro appeared to the God-fearing Archbishop of Constantinople Eudoxios in his sleep to inform him about emperor Julian's plan. The saint instructed him to guide his Christian flock to boil and eat kollyva for that week in order to avoid consuming the market foods tainted from the blood of sacrificed animals. The Christians glorified God and St. Theodore for this miracle and celebrated the Saint's commemoration with kollyva. To this day, the Church has kept this commemoration to glorify God and honor St. Theodore the Tyro for helping to preserve the Christians' fast during Great Lent (Sarakosti).

Let us all forgive our fellow brothers and sisters who have wronged us in order that we might, also, be forgiven by God. Let us fast in secrecy so that we are not praised by man for our seeming spiritual virtues but praised by God for our hidden spiritually-edifying efforts. Let us venerate the holy icons and pray to the Saints depicted on them for their intercessory prayers and always try to assist with and support iconographic efforts to place them in Orthodox Christian Churches, as did St. Theophylaktos. Let us all praise God for the courage and spiritual strength shown by the 40 Martyrs at Lake Sebaste who confessed their faith by martyring for His name, and let us venerate them with respect and divine love. And let us all honor the fasting observed on the First Saturday of Great Lent, not only with our mouths by controlling what and how much we eat (according to the fasting calendar and the guidance of our spiritual father), but, also, through the words that come out of our mouths, because Great Lent serves as a time for us to prepare ourselves spiritually to live our personal Pascha and Resurrection of Christ within our hearts, minds and souls—on Pascha and every day of our lives.

Yours in Christ



Georgios Manias

