



## ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

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My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray this message finds you all well and healthy.

On April 11th we celebrate the feast day of Hieromartyr Antipas, Bishop of Pergamum, who lived during the 1st century. He was a very faithful, loyal and dedicated man to Christ, our God. St. Antipas was ordained a Bishop by the Apostles of Christ. He lived during the reign of Domitian who issued an edict against followers of the Christian faith. St. Antipas was accused of being a Christian and not worshiping the idols, which led to his arrest. The local governor attempted to persuade him to convert to idolatry, but no matter how intense their arguments were against Christianity, St. Antipas could not be persuaded. By the God's Grace, St. Antipas challenged all of their arguments without leaving any doubt about his allegiance to Christ.

The Apostles' prayers were constantly living within St. Antipas's heart, mind and soul. Although he was mature in age, his experience of the beauty of the Christian faith could not persuade him to renounce his faith and embrace the emptiness and joylessness that the pagan idols offered. His unwavering faith angered the local governor, who sentenced him to death by casting him toward a fiery bronze ox in 92 A.D.

On April 12th we celebrate the feast day of St. Basil the Confessor, Bishop of Paros, located on the shore of Propontis (now known as the Sea of Marmara). St. Basil the Confessor had a strong theological understanding of the faith and was steadfast against the heresy of the iconoclasts. Because of his opposition of the iconoclasts and his loyalty towards honoring and venerating the holy icons, he made many enemies, both inside and outside of the Church. As an iconophile, he was persecuted and suffered many hardships, and spent most of his life as an exiled hierarch. When the heresy of iconoclasm was defeated and the icons were restored to their rightful place in the Orthodox Church, St. Antipas returned to the city of Paros. Upon his return, the Christians of Paros treated him with honor and respect as one of the martyrs who suffered for the glory of God and for steadfastly defending the holy icons against the heretical iconoclasts.

On April 15th we celebrate the feast day of St. Crescens the Martyr. He was born and raised in Myra of Lycia and lived during the 1st century. He lived a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice so that he could follow the Will of God. He lived his life as a good and true Christian worshiping our Trinitarian God, and he worked fervently to catechize and convert pagans to Christianity. As a God-fearing man, his good works in Myra resulted in the conversion of a great number of people to Christianity, and he spiritually guided them to live a Christian life. For this reason, St. Crescens became a living threat for the pagans and idolaters, and, so, the authorities arrested him. But despite his elderly age, he was steadfast in his Christian faith and confession of his love and devotion for Christ our God, and he refused to offer sacrifice to the idols. He surrendered himself to the tortures that his accusers afflicted upon him, and he martyred for the Glory of God after

being thrown into a fire. By God's miraculous intercessions, his holy relics (including the hair on his head) remained untouched by the flames.

On April 16th, which is the 6th Saturday of Great Lent, we celebrate St. Lazarus. St. Lazarus was a good friend of Christ. When Christ heard about Lazarus's death He wept, despite the fact that He knew that our physical death here on earth is our birth in the Heavens and that each person's soul lives on forever. But because of His fully human nature, he felt the sadness and sorrow of the temporary separation of the body and soul of the reposed. Christ, then, prayed to His Heavenly Father, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me." (John 11:41-42) Once the stone in front of Lazarus's tomb was rolled away, Jesus called out to Lazarus to come forward, and so he did to everyone's amazement.

Christ fully shared with us our human flesh and felt all possible human emotions, even though he was perfect Man and perfect God. He fully became one with us so that we could become one with Him. Lazarus's death and resurrection was a climactic event in St. John's Gospel and provides proof of Christ's divinity. It was, also, a prophetic event that foretold, only a few days later, Christ's own Resurrection on the third day and His victory over death.

They say that when the Pharisees and Scribes found out about Lazarus's resurrection, they tried to apprehend and kill him so as to avoid any more scandals of their faith and in their synagogues, which were leading Jewish people to become followers of Christ. When Lazarus found out about their intentions, he left the Holy Land and went to Cyprus where he became its first Bishop and faithfully held this position for thirty years until his peaceful repose in 63 A.D. The tomb of St. Lazarus can be found in Larnaca, Cyprus, and the Church of St. Lazarus was built over the location where his relics were found in 890 A.D.

Let us all venerate and embrace, with spiritual love and respect, the holy icons as we enter the Orthodox Church, as did God's holy defender of icons, St. Antipas the Hieromartyr and Bishop of Pergamum. Let us all take courage from St. Basil the Confessor's living witness of the Orthodox Christian faith and care only for the heavenly realm of God, remembering that our earthly life is temporary and that we must shun our sinful habits for the love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us all become burning flames of faith and light, for the Glory of God, by imitating St. Crescens the Martyr's God-fearing devotion to Christ. And let us all remember and imitate St. Lazarus's dedication to the Word and Wisdom of God and become true friends of Christ by resurrecting ourselves from our soul-killing sins, repent of them and return to the path towards Christ, for the Glory of God and the salvation of our souls.

