Made With Faith

Prayers and Devotions for the Orthodox Home

November
2017

Important Dates:

8th Archangel Michael and All Angels (Wednesday)
15th Nativity Fast begins (40 days before Christmas)
21st Entrance of the Theotokos (Tuesday)
30th Apostle Andrew, the First-called (Thursday)

Christians are made, not born.
(Tertullian, 2nd century)

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Made With Faith is a collection of materials for prayers and devotions in the Orthodox home. At a convenient time, three days a week: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the family is to gather for a short time in a comfortable place set apart for this purpose – in your Icon Corner, at your kitchen/dining-room table, or den, etc. Even if you gather at a place other than the Icon Corner, set up icons (e.g., of Christ, the Theotokos, patron saint(s)) and light a candle prior to beginning. Turn off all extraneous devices: cell phones, televisions, computers, electronic games, and music players.

Prayer and Devotion time is composed of three parts: 1) The Trisagion Beginning Prayers, 2) the Gospel reading and Saint of the Day account, and 3) the Concluding Prayers. It is important to say the same Beginning and Concluding prayers each time so that your children learn these fundamental prayers by heart. If your child(ren) are old enough and capable, have them read the Gospel and/or Saint of the Day account. Parents, read these selections in advance both to digest them yourselves and to prepare for explaining their content in a way your child(ren) can understand. By teaching, parents will learn that much more themselves.

Three immediate benefits will result from practicing this Prayer and Devotion time. One, your faith will become a normal, real, and deep part of everyday life. Two, the faith practiced in daily life will harmonize and illuminate what we pray and do in the services of the Church. Three, devotions three days a week will engender a genuine desire to pray and read the Scriptures more often while relying on the vast experience of the saints of God for guidance.

The contents of this book are just a start, but an important start. May our homes and our lives be filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit who makes us anew in Jesus Christ our Lord to the glory of God the Father.

The Trisagion (thrice-holy) Beginning Prayers

Making the sign of the Cross (+), we say:

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

+Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.
+Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.
+Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.

+Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O Most-holy Trinity, have mercy on us.
Lord, cleanse us from our sins.
Master, pardon our transgressions.
Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

+Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Concluding Prayers

The Theotokion:
Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your womb, for you have borne the Savior of our souls.

The Creed:
+I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
+And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one essence with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man; and He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried; and the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.
+And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets; in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

For the Living:
Lord Jesus Christ, our God, bless our grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, family, and friends, especially _____, and preserve them in Your grace unto salvation. +Amen.

For the Departed:
Lord Jesus Christ, our God, grant eternal rest and life in Your kingdom to our family and friends departed this life, _____, in the hope of the Resurrection to come. +Amen.

Wednesday, November 1

Read Luke 11:42-46.

Then look at the picture of a Pharisee in his typical attire. Explain that the Pharisee was known for his appearance. What are some identifying marks of the Pharisee? – a long robe, a prayer shawl with tassels, and phylacteries (little boxes containing verses of Scripture bound to the forehead and arm). The Pharisee was regarded as a person who knew the Bible well, thus he is holding and reading a scroll of Scripture. The name 'pharisee' means "one who is separate," that is, 'special, distinguished' from the common mass of people. The Pharisees were known for keeping the commands of the Law carefully so as to be more righteous than the average Israelite.

Why then does Jesus criticize the Pharisees in the Gospel? He calls them 'hypocrites,' a Greek word literally meaning "actors." The Pharisees do the things the law requires (e.g., tithing, studying the Scriptures, going to the synagogue to pray), but they do them only to be seen and recognized by other people. What does Jesus say the Pharisees should really be doing? He says they should be doing "justice and the love of God." Real keeping of the Law means serving God and other people – not yourself. We are not "play-acting" the Faith in order to be congratulated by other people. We must humbly serve God like Christ who never sought to draw attention to Himself, always giving glory to God alone for His love and mercy to us.

The Pharisee

Read the life of the Holy unmercenary physicians Cosmas and Damian:

The Holy Wonderworkers and Unmercenary Physicians Cosmas and Damian and their mother Saint Theodota were natives of Asia Minor (some sources say Mesopotamia). Their pagan father died while they were still quite small children. Their mother raised them in Christian piety. Through her own example, and by reading holy books to them, Saint Theodota preserved her children in purity of life according to the command of the Lord, and Cosmas and Damian grew up into righteous and virtuous men.

Trained and skilled as physicians, they received from the Holy Spirit the gift of healing people's illnesses of body and soul by the power of prayer. They even treated animals. With fervent love for both God and neighbor, they never took payment for their services. They strictly observed the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Freely have you received, freely give." (Mt. 10:8). The fame of Saints Cosmas and Damian spread throughout all the surrounding region, and people called them unmercenary* physicians.

Once, the saints were summoned to a grievously ill woman named Palladia, whom all the doctors had refused to treat because of her seemingly hopeless condition. Through faith and through the fervent prayer of the holy brothers, the Lord healed the deadly disease and Palladia got up from her bed perfectly healthy and giving praise to God. In gratitude for being healed and wishing to give them a small gift, Palladia went quietly to Damian. She presented him with three eggs and said, "Take this small gift in the Name of the Holy Life-Creating Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Hearing the Name of the Holy Trinity, the unmercenary one did not dare to refuse.

When Saint Cosmas learned what had happened, became very sad, for he thought that his brother had broken their strict vow. On his deathbed he gave instructions that his brother should not be buried beside him. Saint Damian also died shortly afterward, and everyone wondered where Saint Damian's grave should be. But through the will of God a miracle occurred. A camel, which the saints had treated for its wildness, spoke with a human voice saying that they should have no doubts about whether to place Damian beside Cosmas, because Damian did not accept the eggs from the woman as payment, but out of respect for the Name of God. The venerable relics of the holy brothers were buried together at Thereman (Mesopotamia).

Many miracles were worked after the death of the holy unmercenaries. There lived at Thereman, near the church of Cosmas and Damian, a certain man by the name of Malchus. One day he went on a journey, leaving his wife all alone for what would be a long time. He prayerfully entrusted her to the heavenly protection of the holy brothers. But the devil took on the appearance of one of Malchus' friends, and planned to kill the woman. A certain time went by, and this man went to her at home and said that Malchus had sent him to bring her to him. The woman believed him and went along. He led her to a solitary place intending to kill her. The woman, seeing that disaster threatened her, called upon God with deep faith.

Two fearsome men then appeared, and the devil let go of the woman and fled, falling off a cliff. The two men led the woman home. At her own home, bowing to them deeply she asked, " My rescuers, to whom I shall be grateful to the end of my days, what are

your names?" They replied, "We are the servants of Christ, Cosmas and Damian," and became invisible. The woman with trembling and with joy told everyone about what had happened to her. Glorifying God, she went up to the icon of the holy brothers and tearfully offered prayers of thanksgiving for her deliverance, and from that time the holy brothers were venerated as protectors of the holiness and inviolability of Christian marriage, and as givers of harmony to conjugal life. From ancient times, their veneration spread also to Russia.

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* *Unmercenary* literally means "one who works for no wages."

Friday, November 3

Read Luke 12:1-12.

Repeat this verse: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (v. 1). Clarify the two terms "leaven" and "hypocrisy." Leaven is yeast used in baking bread. What does yeast do? It causes the bread to grow and expand in size while being full of air on the inside. Hypocrisy is putting on an act for people to see. What does putting on an act do? It hides one's true feelings and thoughts behind a false appearance, like putting on a mask, or a costume. Look at the examples of costumes. Reflect on the appearances we often use throughout the day and week – with our family members, at work, at Church, etc.

Jesus is warning us of a major spiritual problem – the yeast of putting on a religious act by which we grow with pride and puff ourselves up to look important, but inside we're empty of genuine faith and love. Jesus tells us that eventually who we are on the inside will be revealed, no matter what kind of mask (or, costume) we wear on the outside.

Can we learn to be free from hypocrisy? We have to be honest and truthful about ourselves and God. Jesus tells us not to be afraid of the changing world around us; instead, we should fear God and strive never to be separated from Him, declaring the truth of Jesus Christ our Savior and trusting the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom to live.

Read the life of the Martyrs Akepsimas, Joseph, and Aethalas:

Martyrs Akepsimas the Bishop, Joseph the Presbyter (i.e., Priest), and Aethalas the Deacon of Persia* were leaders of the Christian Church in the Persian city of Naesson. His flock devotedly loved their hierarch* for his ascetic life and tireless pastoral work.

The emperor Sapor ordered his men to seek out and kill Christian clergy. Saint Akepsimas also was arrested, even though he was already an eighty-year-old man. They took him to the city of Arbela, where he came before the judge Ardarkh, a pagan priest of the sun god. The holy Elder refused to offer sacrifice to the Persian gods. For this he was fiercely beaten and thrown into prison, where on the following day the seventy-year-old priest Joseph and the deacon Aethalas were severely beaten and thrown into jail with him. For three years the saints were held in confinement, and suffered from hunger and thirst.

Emperor Sapor came to the temple of the god of fire, located not far from Arbela, and wanted to take a look at the three holy martyrs. Exhausted and covered with festering wounds, the saints were brought before the emperor. When he asked them to worship the pagan gods they firmly refused, confessing their faith in Christ instead.

The holy bishop was beheaded, but the presbyter and deacon were taken into the city to be stoned. The execution of the presbyter Joseph was prolonged for several hours. A guard was placed near the place of execution, so that Christians would not take the body of the holy martyr. On the fourth night a strong windstorm raged near the city, lightning killed the guard, the wind tossed stones about, and the body of Saint Joseph disappeared. Deacon Aethalas was taken to the village of Patrias, where he was stoned. Christians secretly buried his body. A tree grew on the saint's grave, and its fruit brought healings.

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* *Persia* was located in modern-day Iran.
* *Hierarch* literally means "priest-leader," referring to a Bishop in the Church.

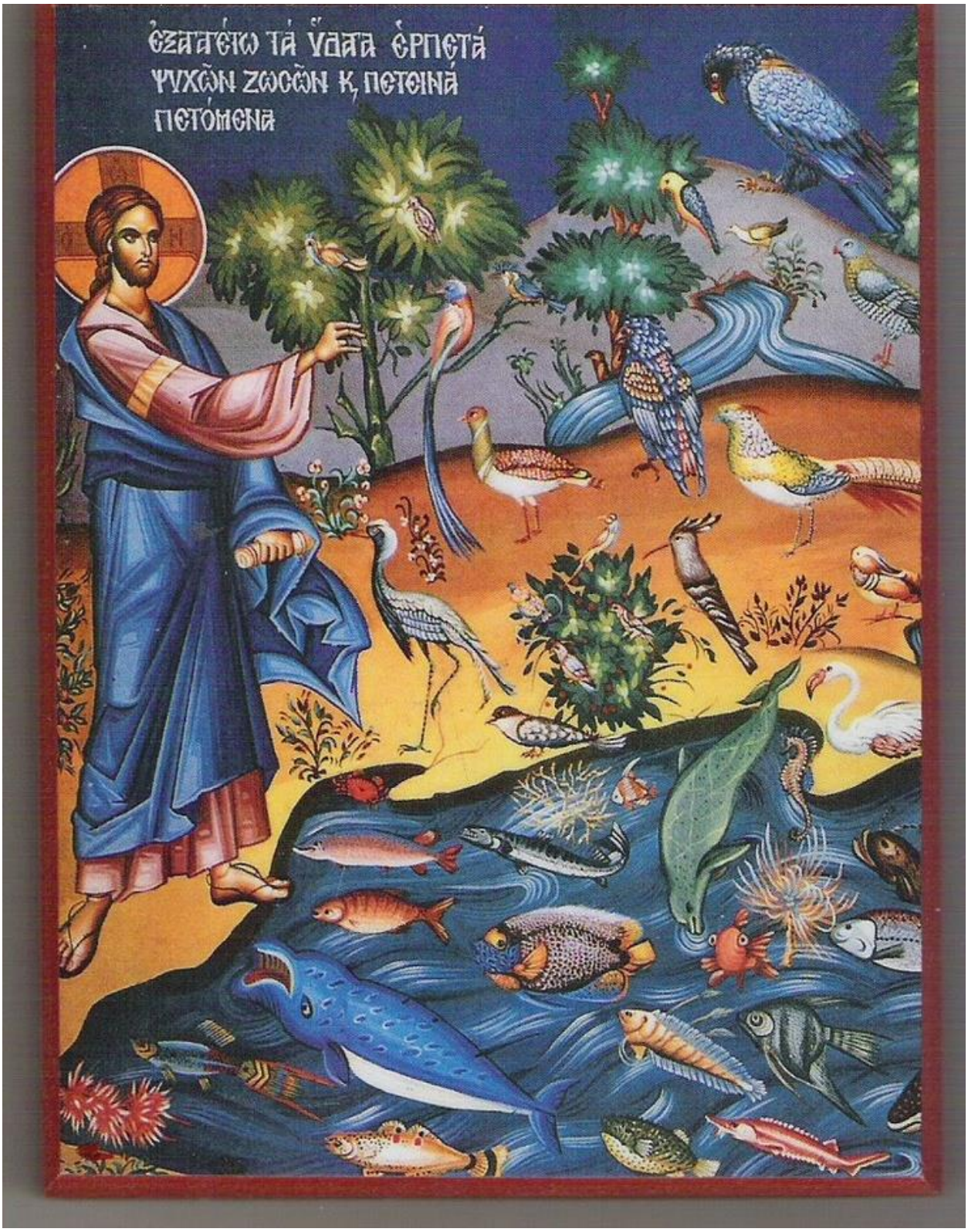
Monday, November 6

Read Luke 12:13-15, 22-31.

Then looking at the icon from Creation Week explain that the Son of God not only created all things, but He cares for and preserves all things, not only plants and animals, but especially human beings created in His image. The harmonious working of the universe around us should be a lesson to us that as God preserves things which are inanimate (e.g., rocks), unthinking (e.g., plants), and irrational (e.g., animals), He will surely preserve the people whom He made to share in His own divine life.

What are the most worrisome things in our lives? We worry about not having the things which help sustain our lives: the basics of food, drink, clothing, and shelter. We also worry we won't have enough of these things throughout our lives, so we tend to always want more, and we plan and scheme how to get more even though we might have enough for the time being. Here we need to distinguish between what we need and what we want. God always supplies our needs, but we often want more.

Jesus warns against two sinful tendencies: covetousness and an anxious mind (vv. 15, 29). Covetousness literally means 'to want to have more,' in other words, to never be content with God has given you. An anxious mind means to be unsettled all the time with worry that your life will collapse for lack of what you need to live. The solution to both tendencies is trust in God by seeking His kingdom first. Life is found in knowing God in Jesus Christ, not in having stuff.


ἐξαγαγέτω τὰ ὕδατα ἑρπετὰ
ψυχῶν ζωσῶν καὶ πετεινὰ
πετόμενα

Read the life of St. Paul the Confessor, Archbishop of Constantinople:

Saint Paul the Confessor, Archbishop of Constantinople, was chosen to the patriarchal throne after the death of Patriarch Alexander (+ 340), when the Arian* heresy had again flared up. Many of the Arians were present at the Council which selected the new Archbishop of Constantinople. They revolted in opposition to the choice of Saint Paul, but the Orthodox at the Council were in the majority.

The emperor Constantius, ruling over the Eastern half of the Roman Empire, was an Arian. He was not in Constantinople for the election of the Archbishop, and so it took place without his consent. Upon his return, he convened a council which illegally deposed Saint Paul, and the emperor banished him from the capital. In place of the saint they elevated Eusebius of Nicomedia, an impious heretic. Archbishop Paul withdrew to Rome, where other Orthodox bishops were also banished by Eusebius.

Eusebius did not rule the Church of Constantinople for long. When he died, Saint Paul returned to Constantinople, and was greeted by his flock with love. But Constantius exiled the saint a second time, and so he returned to Rome. The Western emperor Constans wrote a harsh letter to his Eastern co-ruler, which he sent to Constantinople along with the holy exiled archpastor. The threats worked, and Saint Paul was reinstated upon the archepiscopal throne.

But soon the pious emperor Constans, a defender of the Orthodox, was treacherously murdered during a palace coup. They again banished Saint Paul from Constantinople and this time sent him off in exile to Armenia, to the city of Cucusus, where he suffered a martyr's death.

When the Archbishop was celebrating the Divine Liturgy, Arians rushed upon him by force and strangled him with his own omophorion*. This occurred in the year 350. In 381, the holy Emperor Theodosius the Great solemnly transferred the relics of Saint Paul the Confessor from Cucusus to Constantinople. In 1326, the relics of Saint Paul were transferred to Venice, Italy.

Saint Athanasius the Great, a contemporary of Saint Paul who himself was exiled for the Faith five times, writes briefly about his exiles, "Saint Paul the first time was sent by Constantine to Pontus, the second time he was fettered with chains by Constantius, and then he was locked up in Mesopotamian Syngara, and from there moved to Emesus, and the fourth time to Cappadocian Cucusus in the Taurian wilderness."

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* The *Arians*, named for their leader Arius, stated that the Son of God was a creature, not God.

* The *omophorion* is the distinctive vestment of a Bishop which drapes over his shoulders.

Wednesday, November 8

Read Luke 12:48-59.

Look at the icons. The one leads to and results in the other: the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan led to His suffering and death on the Cross. The Holy Spirit which descended on Christ at His Baptism descended on the disciples as fiery tongues following Christ's Resurrection and Ascension into heaven.

Thus the fire and baptism Jesus mentions refer to the purifying and cleansing work of the Gospel which Jesus Himself accomplishes by His life, death, and Resurrection. As we know, Jesus' life and message caused division and conflict among people. He came to cleanse people from their sins, but many did not think they needed cleansing and felt insulted by Christ. Jesus came to purify people by calling them to follow His commandments, but many wanted to go their own way and rejected the way of Christ.

We who believe the Gospel – the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord – continue to struggle to live a holy life by following Christ. This leads to conflicts with our own desires, with our own family members and friends, and with the world around us. Oddly, such conflict is a sign we are following the Gospel. It is a sign like interpreting the weather, or listening to our conscience to make things right. Christ Jesus has shown us the way to salvation by His own Life. Now we have this Life in the Church and strive to remain joined to Christ to the very end.

Η ΒΑΠΤΙΣΙΣ
Τοῦ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ

Η ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΣ
ΧΣ

Η ΠΕΜΠΤΗ ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ

Read the account of the Archangel Michael and all angels:

The remembrance of the Chief of the Heavenly Hosts, Archangel Michael and the Other Heavenly Bodiless Powers: Archangels Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Selaphiel, Jehudiel, Barachiel, and Jeremiel was established at the beginning of the fourth century at the Council of Laodicea, which met several years before the First Ecumenical Council. The 35th Canon of the Council of Laodicea condemned and denounced as heretical the worship of angels as gods and rulers of the world, but affirmed their proper veneration.
A feastday was established in November, the ninth month after March (with which the year began in ancient times) since there are Nine Ranks of Angels. The eighth day of the month was chosen for the Synaxis (lit., liturgical gathering) of all the Bodiless Powers of Heaven since the Day of the Dread Last Judgment is called the Eighth Day by the holy Fathers. After the end of this age (characterized by its seven days of Creation) will come the Eighth Day, and then "the Son of Man shall come in His Glory and all the holy Angels with Him" (Mt. 25:31).

The Angelic Ranks are divided into three Hierarchies: highest, middle, and lowest. The Highest Hierarchy includes the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones:
a) The six-winged SERAPHIM (Flaming, Fiery) (Is 6:12) stand closest of all to the Most Holy Trinity. They blaze with love for God and kindle such love in others.
b) The many-eyed CHERUBIM (outpouring of wisdom, enlightenment) (Gen 3:24) stand before the Lord after the Seraphim. They are radiant with the light of knowledge of God, and knowledge of the mysteries of God. Through them wisdom is poured forth, and people's minds are enlightened so they may know God and behold His glory.
c) The THRONES (Col 1:16) stand after the Cherubim, mysteriously and incomprehensibly bearing God through the grace given them for their service. They are ministers of God's justice, giving to tribunals, kings, etc. the capacity for righteous judgment.

The Middle Angelic Hierarchy consists of three Ranks: Dominions, Powers, and Authorities:
d) DOMINIONS (Col 1:16) hold dominion over the angels subject to them. They instruct the earthly authorities, established by God, to rule wisely, and to govern their lands well. The Dominions teach us to subdue sinful impulses, to subject the flesh to the spirit, to master our will, and to conquer temptation.
e) POWERS (1 Pet 3:22) fulfill the will of God without hesitation. They work great miracles and give the grace of wonderworking and clairvoyance to saints pleasing to God. The Powers assist people in fulfilling obediences. They also encourage them to be patient, and give them spiritual strength and fortitude.
f) AUTHORITIES (1 Pet 3:22, Col 1:16) have authority over the devil. They protect people from demonic temptations, and prevent demons from harming people as they would wish. They also uphold ascetics and guard them, helping people in the struggle with evil thoughts.

The Lowest Hierarchy includes the three Ranks of Principalities, Archangels, and Angels:
g) PRINIPALITIES (Col 1:16) have command over the lower angels, instructing them in the fulfilling of God's commands. They watch over the world and protect lands, nations

and peoples. Principalities instruct people to render proper honor to those in authority, as befits their station. They teach those in authority to use their position, not for personal glory and gain, but to honor God, and to spread word of Him, for the benefit of those under them.

h) ARCHANGELS (1 Thess 4:16) are messengers of great and wondrous tidings. They reveal prophecies and the mysteries of the faith. They enlighten people to know and understand the will of God, they spread faith in God among the people, illuminating their minds with the light of the Holy Gospel.

i) ANGELS (1 Pet 3:22) are in the lowest rank of the heavenly hierarchy, and closest to people. They reveal the lesser mysteries of God and His intentions, guiding people to virtuous and holy life. They support those who remain steadfast, and they raise up the fallen. They never abandon us and they are always prepared to help us, if we desire it.

All the Ranks of the Heavenly Powers are called angels, although each has its own name and position by virtue of their service. The Lord reveals His will to the highest ranks of the angels, and they in turn inform the others.

Over all the Nine Ranks, the Lord appointed the Holy Archangel Michael (his name in Hebrew means "who is like unto God"), the faithful servitor of God, as Chief Commander. He cast down from Heaven the arrogantly proud Lucifer and the other fallen spirits when they rebelled against God. Michael summoned the ranks of angels and cried out, "Let us attend! Let us stand aright before our Creator and do not consider doing what is displeasing unto God!"

Friday, November 10

Read Luke 13:31-35.

Look at the icon. What event in the life of Christ is it depicting? It shows His entrance into Jerusalem just prior to His crucifixion. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, the people cried out, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (v. 35; see Luke 19:38).

In the Gospel today, Jesus talks about being on a journey to Jerusalem. Ask: When Jesus finally got to Jerusalem, did the people of the city treat Him well? No, they eventually rejected Him and killed Him on a Cross, just like they did for centuries in the past when they killed the prophets sent to them by God. Even though Jesus performs all kinds of saving works on the way, it is only in Jerusalem that His work will be perfected, that is, reach its goal.

Ask: Why did Jesus go to Jerusalem knowing that He would be killed there? Why didn't He simply run away and escape? Jesus went to Jerusalem to prove the words and promises of God to be true, that God would provide salvation for His people in His only-begotten Son. God gave His people every opportunity to believe in Christ and turn to Him, but they did not want to.

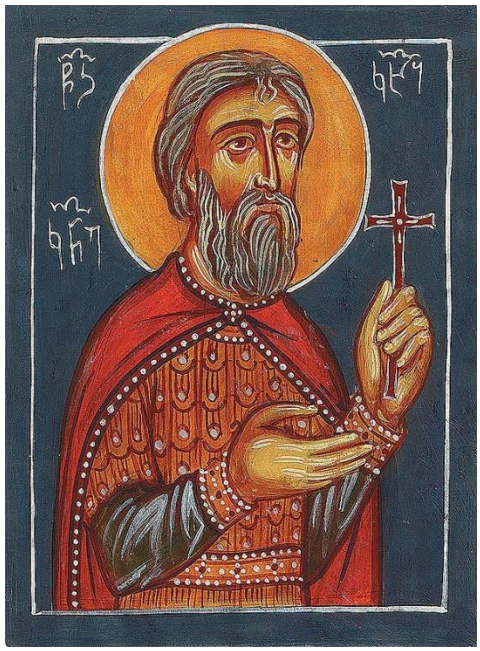
Jesus came on a mission to save the world, and He finished that mission. If we don't accept the love of God in Christ, His love is still real and available, just like the Body and Blood of Christ are always present for us at Holy Communion during the Liturgy, even if we don't believe it or don't go to receive it. God wants us to receive Christ and live in Him. Not to do that is to be empty and lost.

THE ENTRY OF THE LORD INTO JERUSALEM
ΙC ΧC

Read the life of the Martyr Constantine, King of Georgia:

The 9th century was one of the most difficult periods in Georgian history. The Arab Muslims wreaked havoc throughout the region of Kartli, forcibly converting many to Islam with fire and the sword. Many of the destitute and frightened were tempted to betray the Faith of their fathers.

At that time the brave aristocrat and faithful Christian, Prince Constantine, was living in Kartli. He was the descendant of Kakhetian princes, hence his title "Kakhi."



As is meet for a Christian believer, Saint Constantine considered himself the greatest of sinners and often said, "There can be no forgiveness of my sins, except through the spilling of my blood for the sake of Him Who shed His innocent blood for us!"

While on a pilgrimage to the holy places of Jerusalem, Constantine distributed generous gifts to the churches, visited the wilderness of the Jordan, received blessings from the holy fathers, and returned to his motherland filled with inner joy. After that time Constantine would send thirty thousand pieces of silver to Jerusalem each year.

In the years 853 to 854, when the Arab Muslims invaded Georgia under the command of Buga-Turk, the 85-year-old Prince Constantine commanded the army of Kartli with his son Tarkhuj. Outside the city of Gori an uneven battle took place between the Arabs and the Georgians. Despite their fierce resistance, the Georgians suffered defeat, and Constantine and Tarkhuj were taken captive.

The captive Constantine-Kakhi was sent to Samarra (a city in central Iraq) to the caliph Ja'far al Mutawakkil (847-861). Ja'far was well aware of the enormous respect Constantine-Kakhi received from the Georgians and all the Christian people who knew him. Having received him with honor, he proposed that Constantine renounce the Christian Faith and threatened him with death in the case of his refusal. Strengthened by divine grace, the courageous prince fearlessly answered, "Your sword does not frighten me. I am afraid of Him Who can destroy my soul and body and Who has the power to resurrect and to kill, for He is the true God, the almighty Sovereign, Ruler of the world, and Father unto all ages!"

The enraged caliph ordered the beheading of Saint Constantine-Kakhi. Bowing on his knees, the holy martyr lifted up a final prayer to the Lord. Saint Constantine-Kakhi was martyred on November 10, 852, the day on which Great-martyr George is commemorated. The holy martyr's body was hung from a high pillar to intimidate the Christian believers, but after some time it was buried. A few years later a group of faithful Georgians translated Saint Constantine's holy relics to his motherland and reburied them there with great honor. In that same century the Georgian Orthodox Church numbered Prince Constantine-Kakhi of Kartli among the saints.

Monday, November 13

Read Luke 14:12-15.

Look at the icon of the Mystical Supper, the Lord's Supper given by Christ to His apostles on the night when He was betrayed. This is the icon over the Holy Doors of the iconostasis (icon-screen) in every Orthodox Church. Explain that we have this icon in every Church to show why we are gathered as the Church, that is, to be at the Lord's Supper to receive the very Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus. At the Lord's Supper we have communion with God and communion with each other, which means we are completely united in the Love of God. This is why we say during the Divine Liturgy before Holy Communion: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:14).

At this Lord's Supper, who is the Head of the Table, and who is invited to the Supper? Jesus is the Head, and all of us who believe in Him are the guests. What does Jesus ask, or require, of us so that we can join Him at His Supper? He simply asks that we admit our need for what He gives. Apart from Christ we are poor, maimed by sin, lame in works of righteousness, and blind in our spiritual eyes. We cannot possible "pay" to be at His Supper; rather, Christ is the One who "pays" everything to give the Supper, that is, the sacrifice of His life in suffering, death, and resurrection.

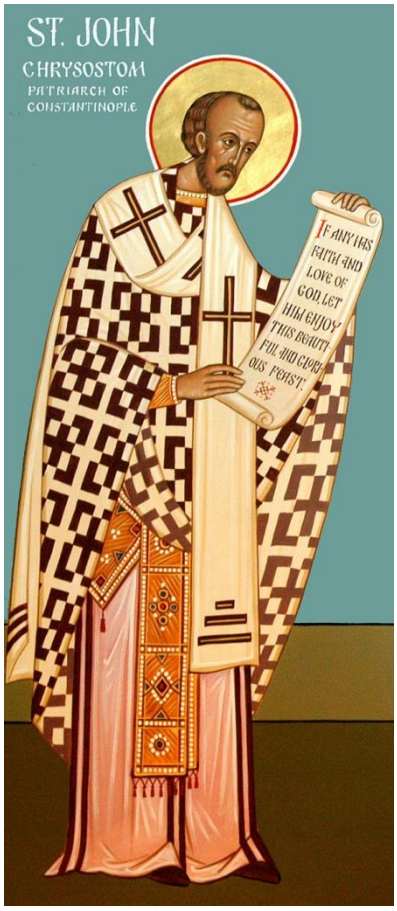
Thus we are called to follow Christ, sit at His Table, and love people around us in the same way.

MYSTICAL
SUPPER

Read the life of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople:

Saint John was born at Antioch in about the year 347 into the family of a military commander. His father, Secundus, died soon after the birth of his son. His mother, Anthusa, widowed at twenty years of age, did not seek to remarry but rather devoted all her efforts to the raising of her son in Christian piety. The youth studied under the finest philosophers and rhetoricians. But, scorning the vain disciplines of pagan knowledge, the future hierarch turned himself to the profound study of Holy Scripture and prayerful contemplation. Saint Meletius, Bishop of Antioch, loved John like a son, guided him in the Faith, and in the year 367 baptized him.

After three years John was tonsured as a Reader. When Saint Meletius had been sent into exile by the emperor Valens in the year 372, John and Theodore (afterwards Bishop of Mopsuestia) studied under the experienced instructors of ascetic life, the presbyters* Flavian and Diodorus of Tarsus. The highly refined Diodorus had particular influence upon the youth. When John's mother died, he embraced monasticism, which he called the "true philosophy." Soon John and his friend Basil were being considered as candidates for the office of bishop, and they decided to withdraw into the wilderness to avoid this. While Saint John avoided the episcopal* rank out of humility, he secretly assisted in Basil's consecration.



The saint spent four years struggling in the wilderness, living the ascetic life under the guidance of an experienced spiritual guide. For two years, the saint lived in a cave in complete silence, but was obliged to return to Antioch to recover his health. Saint Meletius, the Bishop of Antioch, ordained him deacon in the year 381. In the year 386 Saint John was ordained presbyter by Bishop Flavian of Antioch. Saint John was a splendid preacher, and his inspired words earned him the name "Golden-Mouthed" ("Chrysostom"). For twelve years the saint preached in church, usually twice a week, but sometimes daily, deeply stirring the hearts of his listeners.

As a priest, Saint John zealously fulfilled the Lord's command to care for the needy. Under Saint John, the Antiochian Church provided sustenance each day to as many as 3,000 virgins and widows, not including in this number the shut-ins, wanderers and the sick.

The fame of the holy preacher grew, and in the year 397 with the death of Archbishop Nectarius of Constantinople, successor to Saint Gregory the Theologian, Saint John Chrysostom was summoned from Antioch, and elected Archbishop of Constantinople. At the capital, the holy archpastor was not able to preach as often as he had at Antioch. Many matters awaited the saint's attention, and he began with the most important -- the spiritual perfection of the priesthood. He himself was the best example of this. The financial means apportioned

for the archbishop were channeled by the saint into the upkeep of several hospices for the sick and two hostels for pilgrims. He fasted strictly and ate very little food, and usually refused invitations to dine because of his delicate stomach.

The saint's zeal in spreading the Christian Faith extended not only to the inhabitants of Constantinople, but also to Thrace to include Slavs and Goths, and to Asia Minor and the Pontine region. He established a bishop for the Bosphorus Church in the Crimea. Saint John sent off zealous missionaries to Phoenicia, to Persia, and to the Scythians, to convert pagans to Christ. He also wrote letters to Syria to bring back the Marcionites* into the Church, and he accomplished this. Preserving the unity of the Church, the saint would not permit a powerful Gothic military commander, who wanted the emperor to reward his bravery in battle, to open an Arian church at Constantinople. The saint exerted much effort in enhancing the splendor of the church services: he compiled a Liturgy, he introduced antiphonal singing for the all-night Vigil, and he wrote several prayers for the rite of anointing the sick with oil.

The saintly hierarch denounced the dissolute morals of people in the capital, especially at the imperial court, irrespective of person. When the empress Eudoxia connived to confiscate the last properties of the widow and children of a disgraced dignitary, the saint rose to their defense. The arrogant empress would not relent, and nursed a grudge against the archpastor. Eudoxia's hatred of the saint blazed forth anew when malefactors told her that the saint apparently had her in mind during his sermon on vain women. A court was convened composed of hierarchs who had been justly condemned by Chrysostom: Theophilus of Alexandria, Bishop Severian of Gabala, who had been banished from the capital because of improprieties, and others.

This court of judgment declared Saint John deposed, and that he be executed for his insult to the empress. The emperor decided on exile instead of execution. An angry crowd gathered at the church, resolved to defend their pastor. In order to avoid a riot, Saint John submitted to the authorities. That very night there was an earthquake at Constantinople. The terrified Eudoxia urgently requested the emperor to bring the saint back, and promptly sent a letter to the banished pastor, beseeching him to return. Once more, in the capital church, the saint praised the Lord in a short talk, "For All His Ways."

The slanderers fled to Alexandria. But after only two months a new denunciation provoked the wrath of Eudoxia. In March 404, an unjust council was convened, decreeing the exile of Saint John. Upon his removal from the capital, a fire reduced the church of Hagia Sophia and also the Senate building to ashes. Devastating barbarian incursions soon followed, and Eudoxia died in October 404. Even pagans regarded these events as God's punishment for the unjust judgment against the saint.

In Armenia, the saint strove all the more to encourage his spiritual children. In numerous letters (245 are preserved) to bishops in Asia, Africa, Europe and particularly to his friends in Constantinople, Saint John consoled the suffering, guiding and giving support to his followers. In the winter of 406 Saint John was confined to his bed with sickness, but his enemies were not to be appeased. From the capital came orders to transfer Saint John to desolate Pityus in Abkhazia on the far-eastern side of the Black Sea. Worn out by sickness, the saint began his final journey under military escort, traveling for three months in the rain and frost. He never arrived at his place of exile, for his strength failed him at Comana.

At the crypt of Saint Basiliscus, Saint John was comforted by a vision of the martyr, who said, “Despair not, brother John! Tomorrow we shall be together.” After receiving the Holy Mysteries, the hierarch fell asleep in the Lord on September 14, 407. His last words were, “Glory to God for all things!”

The holy relics of Saint John Chrysostom were solemnly transferred to Constantinople in the year 438. Although he died on September 14, Saint John’s celebration was transferred to this day because of the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross.

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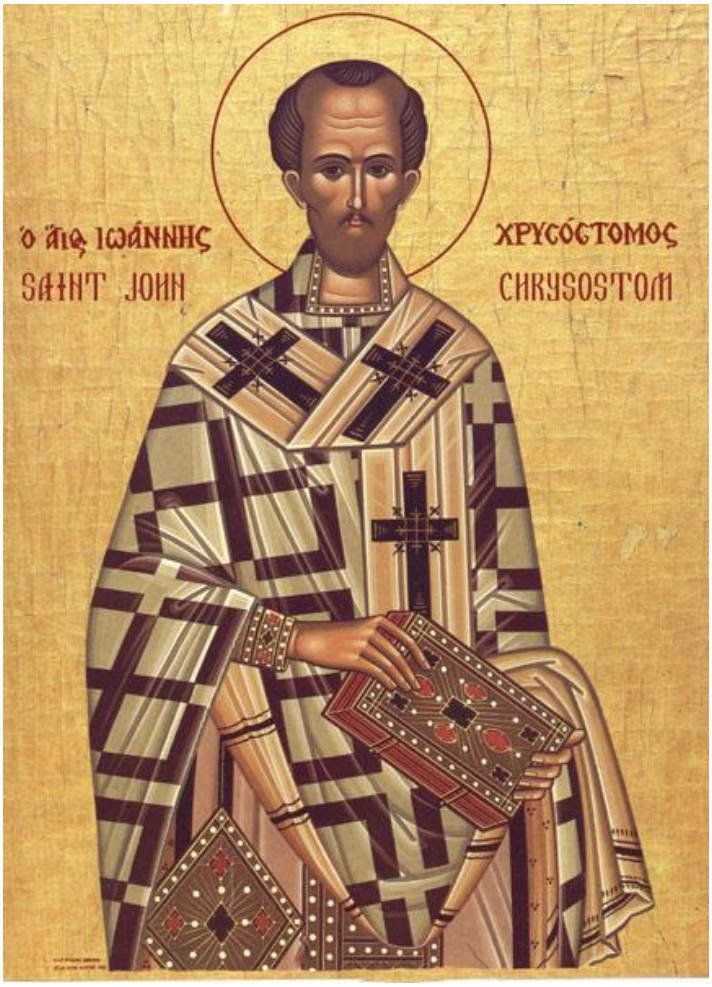
* *Presbyter* is the Greek word for “Priest”; the English word *priest* is a shortened form of *presbyter*.

* *Episcopal* means “of the *episcopos*,” that is, “of the *bishop*.”



Wednesday, November 15

Read Luke 15:1-10.

Look at the icon. Explain: Jesus found the sheep that was lost, put the sheep on His shoulders, and He carried it back to the flock. What is the response to finding and retrieving the lost sheep? The response is mutual rejoicing with friends and neighbors.

Ask: Have you ever lost something very valuable to you? Have you ever had to search long and hard to find something you lost? How did you feel when you finally found it?

Then ask: What is the most valuable thing that can be lost? The most valuable thing is a person, their soul. The person, their soul, is created by God to live with God forever in His kingdom. How then can a person get lost? A person is lost when they wander away from God in their soul by trusting in something other than God, or by disobeying God, or by forgetting God.

Jesus' stories in the Gospel of the lost sheep and the lost coin are examples of God's love in finding people who get lost from God. God sent His Son in the flesh to search us out and return us to Himself. Ultimately that meant dying for us on the Cross and being raised from the dead. We trust in that love of God and resolve not to get lost again, that is, to remain with Christ and not wander away from God's kingdom.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD
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XC

Read the life of the Martyrs Gurias, Samonas, and Habibus, of Edessa:

The Confessors Gurias, Samonas, and Habibus were martyred during the persecution against Christians under the emperors Diocletian (284-305) and Maximian (305-311). The two friends Gurias and Samonas, preachers of the Word of God, were arrested in the city of Edessa.

The saints refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods, and boldly confessed their faith in Christ. For this they were subjected to cruel tortures: they were beaten, hung up by their hands, heavy weights were tied to their feet, and they were cast into a stifling prison.

The martyrs endured everything with firmness and Samonas uttered a prayer to the Lord, which one of the witnesses to their death wrote down: "O Lord my God, against Whose will not a single sparrow falls into the snare, it was You Who made room for David in his sorrow (Ps. 4:1), Who proved the Prophet David stronger than lions (1 Kgm. 17:14), and granted a child of Abraham to be victor over torture and flames (Dan. 3, 14). You know also, Lord, the infirmity of our nature, You see the struggle set before us. Our foe strives to snatch us, the work of Your right hand, away from You and to deprive us of the glory which is in You. With Your compassionate eye watching over us, preserve in us the inextinguishable light of Your Commandments. Guide our steps by Your light, and make us worthy of Your Kingdom, for You are blessed unto ages of ages." By night, they took the martyrs out beyond the city and beheaded them. Christians buried their holy bodies with reverence.

After some years, the last pagan emperor, Licinius (311-324), began a persecution against Christians. Habibus, a deacon* of the Church of Edessa whom the emperor ordered to be arrested for his zealous spreading of the true Faith, presented himself before the executioners when he learned they were searching for him. The saint confessed his faith in Christ and was sentenced to be burned alive. The martyr went willingly into the fire and with a prayer surrendered his soul to the Lord. When the fire went out, the mother and relatives of the saint found his body unharmed. They buried the martyr next to Saints Gurias and Samonas.

After the death of the saints, numerous miracles were wrought by them for those who entreated their help with faith and love. Once, a certain Gothic soldier, sent to serve at Edessa, took the pious virgin Euphemia as his wife. Before this the barbarian vowed to

her mother Sophia at the graves of the Martyrs Gurias, Samonas, and Habibus that he would do his spouse no harm, and would never insult her, but would always love and cherish her.

At the completion of his service in Edessa, he took Euphemia with him back to his native land. It turned out that he had deceived her, for he already had a wife at home, and Euphemia became her slave. Her evil husband threatened to kill her if she revealed to anyone that they were married. Euphemia suffered much abuse and humiliation. When she gave birth to a son, the jealous Gothic woman poisoned him. Euphemia turned with prayer to the holy Martyrs Gurias, Samonas, and Habibus, the witnesses to the perjurer's oath, and the Lord delivered Euphemia from her suffering and miraculously returned her to Edessa, where she was welcomed by her mother.

After a certain while the Goth was again sent to serve in Edessa. The whole city learned of his misdeeds after he was denounced by Sophia. The Goth was executed by order of the prefect of the city.

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* In the icon, Habibus is identified as a *deacon* by the orarion (long strip of cloth) over his shoulder and holding a censer; the Holy Napkin, or Image of Christ-not-made-by – hands, at the top of the icon is there because this Icon of Christ was originally kept in the city of Edessa.

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November 15 is the first day of the Nativity Fast, also called the season of Advent. The Nativity Fast continues for forty days until the Feast of our Lord's Nativity (Christmas; December 25).

The general fasting rules for the season are as follows:

1. **Abstain from meats and meat products, including fish.**
2. **Abstain from cheese, milk, eggs, and dairy products.**
3. **Abstain from wine and alcoholic drinks.**
4. **Abstain from olive oil.**

Consult your Church calendar for days when certain foods are allowed. For instance, on November 16, fish, wine, and (olive) oil are allowed.

Fasting rules are relaxed for persons with physical or medical limitations, such as infants, the elderly, diabetics, etc.

The crucial point of fasting is to exercise self-control for the taming of sinful desires and habits. Fasting is a tool for repentance to be done in conjunction with increased prayer, meditation on the Word of God, and works of mercy. We put off sin to put on Christ; we fast in order to Feast.

Friday, November 17

Read Luke 16:15-18; 17:1-4.

Explain that there are two parts in today's Gospel reading. The first part is about what is right. The second part is about forgiveness (the picture is of mutual forgiveness the first day of Lent).

Ask: How do you know if something is right or wrong? Explain: there are two main ways of determining what is right – one, I think it's right; and two, I rely on a higher authority, God, to teach me what is right. We sinful human beings are masters of self-justification. We defend our own opinions, which we think are wonderful, even if they sometimes oppose God's word. Jesus calls this thinking an abomination, that is, disgusting to God.

Thus Jesus gives two examples of relying on God to teach us what is right: the preaching of the kingdom of God in Christ, and the connection of divorce and adultery. Explain: sometimes God's standard of what is right seems harsh. But it only seems harsh because we often don't want to accept what God says (like believing in Jesus Christ to be saved, or remaining married to one spouse no matter what); we want to change or make exceptions to what God says, once again defending our own opinions.

An equally great problem is refusing to live in forgiveness. We have to learn how to confess our own sins, ask others for forgiveness, and stop sinning as a habit. We also have to learn how to give forgiveness to other people no matter how many times sin is committed. Christ came to forgive and free us from sin.

Read the life of St. Gregory the Wonderworker of Neocaesarea:

Saint Gregory the Wonderworker, Bishop of Neocaesarea, was born in the city of Neocaesarea (northern Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey) into a pagan family. Having received a fine education, from his youth he strived for Truth, and the Truth was revealed to him only in the Holy Gospel, and the youth became a Christian.

For the continuation of his studies Saint Gregory went to Alexandria (in Egypt), known then as a center for pagan and Christian learning. The youth, eager for knowledge, went to the Alexandrian Catechetical* School, where the presbyter Origen taught. Origen was a famous teacher, possessing a great strength of mind and profound knowledge. Saint Gregory studied for eight years with Origen, and was baptized by him.

The ascetic life of Saint Gregory, his continence, purity and lack of covetousness aroused envy among his conceited and sin-loving peers, pagans that they were, and they decided to slander Saint Gregory. Once, when he was conversing with philosophers and teachers in the city square, a notorious harlot came up to him and demanded payment for the sin he had supposedly committed with her. At first Saint Gregory gently remonstrated with her, saying that she perhaps mistook him for someone else. But the profligate woman would not be quieted. He then asked a friend to give her the money. Just as the woman took the unjust payment, she immediately fell to the ground in a demonic fit, and the fraud became evident. Saint Gregory said a prayer over her, and the devil left her. This was the beginning of Saint Gregory's miracles.

Having returned to Neocaesarea, the saint fled from worldly affairs. He went into the desert, where by fasting and prayer he attained to high spiritual accomplishment and the gifts of clairvoyance and prophecy. Saint Gregory loved life in the wilderness and wanted to remain in solitude until the end of his days, but the Lord willed otherwise.

The bishop of the Cappadocian city of Amasea, Thedimos, having learned of Saint Gregory's ascetic life, decided to have him made Bishop of Neocaesarea. But having foreseen in spirit the intent of Bishop Thedimos, the saint hid himself from the messengers of the bishop who were entrusted to find him. Then Bishop Thedimos ordained the absent saint as Bishop of Neocaesarea, beseeching the Lord that He Himself would sanctify the unusual ordination. Saint Gregory perceived the extraordinary event as a manifestation of the will of God and he did not dare to protest. This episode in the life of Saint Gregory was recorded by Saint Gregory of Nyssa. He relates that Saint Gregory of Neocaesarea received the episcopal dignity only after Bishop Thedimos of Amasea performed all the canonical rites over him.

During this time, the heresy of Sabellius and Paul of Samosata began to spread. They taught falsely concerning the Holy Trinity that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three distinct Persons but three different ways God appears. Saint Gregory prayed fervently and diligently imploring God and His most pure Mother to reveal to him the true faith. The All-Holy Virgin Mary appeared to him, radiant like the sun, and with Her was the Apostle John the Theologian dressed in archepiscopal vestments.

By the command of the Mother of God, the Apostle John taught the saint how to correctly and properly confess the Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Saint Gregory wrote down everything that Saint John the Theologian revealed to him. The Mystery of the Symbol of the Faith (or, Creed), written down by Saint Gregory of Neocaesarea, is a great divine revelation in the history of the Church. The teaching about the Holy Trinity in Orthodox Theology is based on it. Subsequently it was used by the holy Fathers of the Church: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa. The Symbol of Saint Gregory of Neocaesarea was later examined and affirmed in the year 325 by the First Ecumenical Council, showing his enduring significance for Orthodoxy.

Having become a bishop, Saint Gregory set off to Neocaesarea. Along the way from Amasea he expelled devils from a pagan temple, the priest of which he converted to Christ. The convert was witness to still another miracle of the saint: at his word a large stone shifted from its place.

The preaching of the saint was direct, lively and fruitful. He taught and worked miracles in the name of Christ: he healed the sick, he helped the needy, he settled quarrels and complaints. Two brothers sharing an inheritance were not able to agree over the property of their dead father. There was a large lake over which they argued, for each of the brothers wanted the lake for himself. They both gathered their friends together, and were ready to come to blows. Saint Gregory persuaded them to delay their fight until the following day, and he himself prayed all night long at the shore of the lake which sparked the quarrel. When dawn broke, everyone saw that the lake had dried up or gone underground. Through the intense prayer of the saint, now there was only a stream, and its course defined the boundary line. Another time, during the construction of a church, he commanded a hill to move and make room at the place of the foundation.

When a persecution against Christians began under the emperor Decius (249-251), Saint Gregory led his flock to a faraway mountain. A certain pagan, knowing about the hiding place of the Christians, informed the persecutors. Soldiers surrounded the mountain. The saint went out into an open place, raised up his hands to heaven and ordered to his deacon to do the same. The soldiers searched the whole mountain, and they went several times right past those praying, but not seeing them, they gave up and went away. In the city they reported that there was nowhere to hide on the mountain: no one was there, and only two trees stood beside each other. The informer was struck with amazement, he repented of his ways and became a fervent Christian.

Saint Gregory returned to Neocaesarea after the end of the persecution. By his blessing church Feasts were established in honor of the martyrs who had suffered for Christ. When Saint Gregory first ascended his cathedra (bishop's chair), there were only seventeen Christians in Neocaesarea. At his death, only seventeen pagans remained in the city.

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* *Catechetical* means "of *catechesis*," that is, "of instruction" in the Christian Faith.

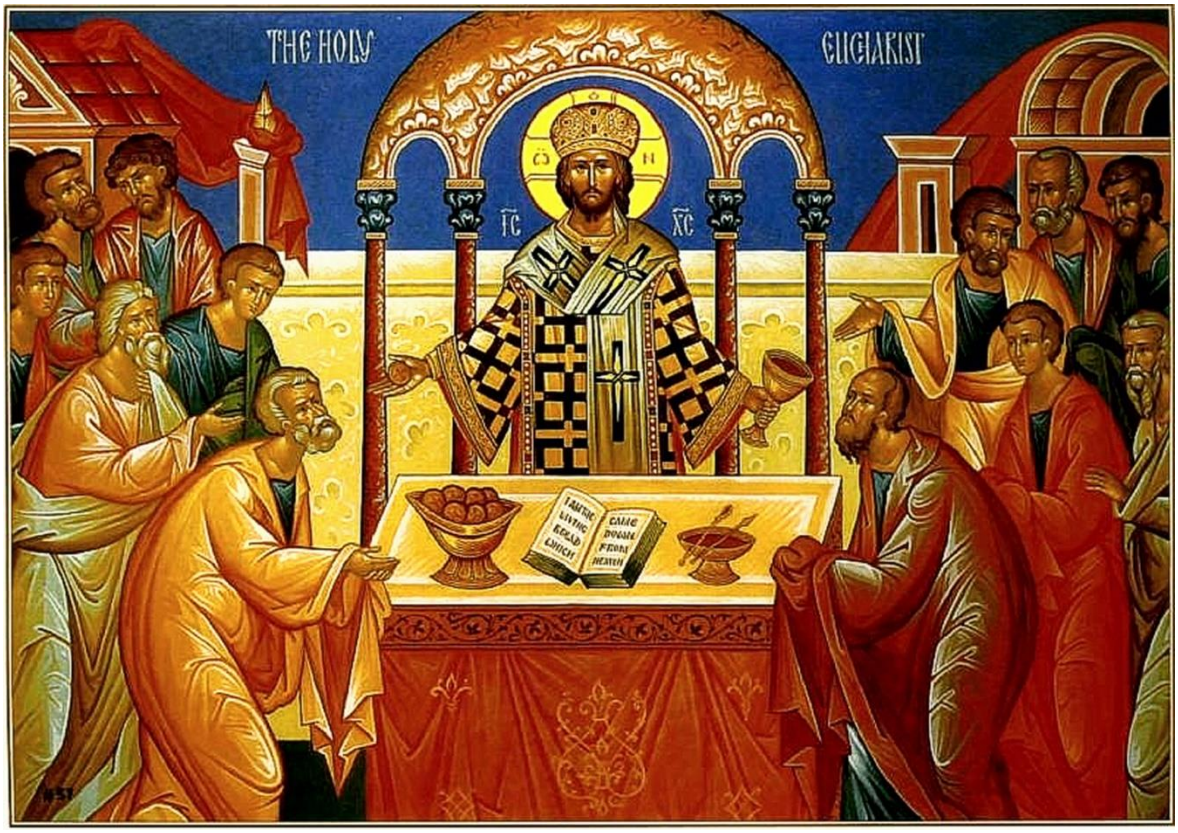
Monday, November 20

Read Luke 17:20-25.

Look at the icon and picture. What is happening in both? They both depict Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Christ given to the disciples to eat and drink. What is Holy Communion? It is the Kingdom of God revealed in and around us in the Person of Jesus Christ by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. What are the first words the Priest says at the beginning of Divine Liturgy? "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We are in the Kingdom, and the Kingdom is in us.

Ask: Do we always see the Kingdom of God in our own lives or in the world around us? Explain: the Kingdom is often hidden from our sight. It is hidden beneath suffering, pain, misfortune, and death. Remember that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, suffered and died on the Cross. Did that mean He was not the Son of God, or that His power to save was temporary or false? No, Christ rose from the dead incorruptible; He entered into our suffering to overcome its hold on us.

Explain: Jesus will return in power for all the world to see, on the Last Day of judgment. In the meantime, Jesus is still with us as He promised to be. We have the great proof of that fact in Holy Communion as we seek to live in Christ as He lives in us, guiding, guarding, and directing us.


THE HOLY
EUCHARIST
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Read the life of St. Gregory the Decapolite:

Saint Gregory the Decapolite was born in the Isaurian city of Decapolis ("ten cities"; modern-day southeast Turkey) in the eighth century. From his childhood he loved the temple of God and church services. He read the Holy Scripture constantly and with reverence.

In order to avoid the marriage which his parents had intended for him, he secretly left home. He spent all his life wandering: he was in Constantinople, Rome, Corinth, and he lived as an ascetic on Olympus for a while. Saint Gregory preached the Word of God everywhere, denouncing the Iconoclast* heresy, strengthening the faith and fortitude of the Orthodox, whom the heretics in those times oppressed, tortured and imprisoned.

Through his ascetic effort and prayer, Saint Gregory attained the gifts of prophecy and wonderworking. After overcoming the passions and reaching the height of virtue, he was permitted to hear angelic singing in praise of the Holy Trinity. Saint Gregory left the monastery of Saint Menas near Thessalonica, where he had labored for a long time, and he went again to Constantinople in order to combat the Iconoclast heresy. At the capital, a grievous illness undermined his strength, and he departed to the Lord in the year 816.

Saint Gregory was buried at a monastery in Constantinople, and many miracles took place at his tomb. As a result, the monks removed the holy relics of Saint Gregory and enshrined them in the church where people could venerate them.

When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, the relics of Saint Gregory were carried to the region of the Danube by a Turkish official. In 1498 Barbu Craiovescu, the Ban of the Romanian Land (Wallachia), heard of the miracles performed by the holy relics and bought them for a considerable sum of money. Barbu Craiovescu placed the relics in the main church of Bistritsa Monastery which he founded in Rimnicu Vilcea, where they remain to the present day.

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* *Iconoclast*, meaning "icon-smasher," refers to the false teaching and movement to destroy and prohibit icons originating in the 700's.

Wednesday, November 22

Read Luke 18:15-17, 26-30.

Look at the icon of Jesus and the little children. Ask: If the Kingdom of God belongs to infants and small children, what does that tell us about the kind of kingdom God has? [What are the characteristics of infants and small children, especially when it comes to religious, or spiritual, matters? – they are dependent, trusting, and completely loving.] Explain that in the Kingdom of God the trust and faith of infants is the standard for adults, not the other way around. Adults tend to rely on their own strength and abilities to reason things out. In regard to God, adults who tend to be prideful and aware of appearances need to be humble and unassuming like children.

Explain: When we humble ourselves before God, we have to give up everything we tend to put in the place of God. What are some of those things we put in the place of, or are more concerned with than, God? – possessions, family members, personal safety (think of things in your own life). Jesus is clear that when we follow Him as our first concern, we will not be broken when we leave aside all the things of this world we think are so important. Why is that? – because we have the Kingdom of God, which is not only God the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but all the faithful people of God as well, and God's promise to sustain us in body, soul, and spirit both in this world and beyond this world.

SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN TO
COME UNTO ME
IC
XC

Read the life of the Apostles of the Seventy Philemon and Archippus, and the Martyr Apphia:

The Holy Apostles of the Seventy Philemon and his wife Apphia lived in the city of Colossa in Phrygia. After they were baptized by the holy Apostle Paul, they converted their house into a house of prayer, where all those who believed in Christ gathered and attended services. They devoted themselves to serving the sick and downcast.

Saint Philemon became bishop of the city of Gaza, and he preached the Word of God throughout Phrygia. The holy Apostle Paul continued to be his guide, and addressed to him his Epistle filled with love, and in which he sends blessings "to Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow laborer, and to our beloved Apphia, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house" (Philemon 1:1-3). Saint Onesimus, also mentioned in the Epistle, was Saint Philemon's former slave.

Saints Philemon and Apphia, and also Saint Archippus (who also lived at Colossa), all received the crown of martyrdom during the persecution of Nero (54-68). During a pagan festival an enraged crowd rushed into the Christian church when services were going on. All fled in terror, and only Saints Philemon, Archippus, and Apphia remained. They seized them and led them off to the city prefect. The crowd beat and stabbed Saint Archippus with knives, and he died on the way to the court. Saints Philemon and Apphia were stoned to death by order of the prefect.

Friday, November 24

Read Luke 19:12-28.

Looking at the depiction of the parable, note the people working producing crops, but also note the man in the front burying the mina given to him, putting it away and doing nothing with it. Ask: Why did the nobleman give a mina to each of his servants? [A mina is a unit of weight often in the form of coins; in the ancient Greco-Roman world, 1 mina = 100 drachmas. A drachma was roughly one day's pay for a common worker.] He gave it expecting them to use the money to make more money by trading one thing for another. For instance, one basket of wheat might be traded for 3 baskets of barley, or one chicken for 2 baskets of wheat.

Ask: What happened to the servants who traded wisely? They were rewarded with more responsibility. What happened to the servant who did nothing with his mina? He had it taken away from him and was judged as being a wicked person.

Explain: This parable of Christ teaches us to put God's gifts to work in this age until Christ comes again in glory. We cannot simply sit idly by doing nothing, or in the end even what we have been given will be taken away from leaving us absolutely empty. Ask: And what kind of business should we conduct while in this life? We should be careful to do the business of God's kingdom above all else: sharing God's grace and forgiveness, His love, His truth, and His kindness. The more we share, the more will be multiplied to us.

ЧЛВКЪ ДѢЛАТЕЛИ НАѦ ІПОСЛА ЕВИНОГРАДЪ ПЛАДѢ
ПЕРВЫМЪ ИПОСЛѢДНИМЪ РАВНО МАТ: ГЛА:К
АГРАН

Read the life of the Greatmartyr Catherine:

The Holy Great Martyr Catherine was the daughter of Constus, the governor of Alexandrian Egypt during the reign of the emperor Maximian (305-313). Living in the capital, the center of Hellenistic knowledge, and possessed of a rare beauty and intellect, Catherine received an excellent education, studying the works of the greatest philosophers and teachers of antiquity. Young men from the most worthy families of the empire sought the hand of the beautiful Catherine, but she was not interested in any of them. She told her parents that she would enter into marriage only with someone who surpassed her in nobility, wealth, comeliness and wisdom.

Catherine's mother, a secret Christian, sent her to her own spiritual Father, a saintly Elder living in a cave outside the city, for advice. After listening to Catherine, the Elder said that he knew of a Youth who surpassed her in everything. "His countenance is more radiant than the shining of the sun, and all of creation is governed by His wisdom. His riches are given to all the nations of the world, yet they never diminish. His compassion is unequaled."

This description of the Heavenly Bridegroom – Jesus Christ - produced in the soul of the holy maiden an ardent desire to see Him. "If you do as I tell you," said the monk, "you will gaze upon the countenance of this illustrious man." In parting, the Elder handed Catherine an icon of the Theotokos with the divine Child Jesus on Her arm and told her to pray with faith to the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the Heavenly Bridegroom, and She would hear Catherine and grant her heart's desire.

Catherine prayed all night and was permitted to see the Most Holy Virgin, Who said to Her Divine Son, "Behold Thy handmaiden Catherine, how fair and virtuous she is." But the Child turned His face away from her saying, "No, she is ugly and unbelieving. She is a foolish pauper, and I cannot bear to look at her until she forsakes her impiety." Catherine returned again to the Elder deeply saddened, and told him what she had seen in the dream. He lovingly received her, instructed her in the faith of Christ, admonished her to preserve her purity and integrity and to pray unceasingly. She then received the Mystery of holy Baptism from him. Again Saint Catherine had a vision of the Most Holy Theotokos with Her Child. Now the Lord looked tenderly at her and gave her a beautiful ring, a wondrous token of her betrothal to the Heavenly Bridegroom (this ring is still on her hand).

At that time the emperor Maximian was in Alexandria for a pagan festival. Therefore, the celebration was especially splendid and crowded. The cries of the sacrificial animals, the smoke and the smell of the sacrifices, the endless blazing of fires, and the bustling crowds at the arenas defiled the city of Alexandria. Human victims also were brought, the confessors of Christ, those who would not deny Him under torture. They were condemned to death in the fire. The saint's love for the Christian martyrs and her fervent desire to ease their sufferings compelled Catherine to speak to the pagan priest and to the emperor Maximian.

Introducing herself, the saint confessed her faith in the One True God and with wisdom exposed the errors of the pagans. The beauty of the maiden captivated the emperor. In order to convince her and to show the superiority of pagan wisdom, the emperor ordered fifty of the most learned philosophers and rhetoricians of the Empire to dispute with her, but the saint got the better of the wise men, so that they came to believe in Christ themselves. Saint Catherine made the Sign of the Cross over the

martyrs, and they bravely accepted death for Christ and were burned alive by order of the emperor.

Maximian, no longer hoping to convince the saint, tried to entice her with the promise of riches and fame. Receiving an angry refusal, the emperor gave orders to subject the saint to terrible tortures and then throw her in prison. The Empress Augusta, who had heard much about the saint, wanted to see her. She prevailed upon the military commander Porphyrius to accompany her to the prison with a detachment of soldiers. The empress was impressed by the strong spirit of Saint Catherine, whose face was radiant with divine grace. The holy martyr explained the Christian teaching to them, and they were converted to Christ.

On the following day they again brought the martyr to the judgment court where, under the threat of being broken on the wheel, they urged that she renounce the Christian Faith and offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. The saint steadfastly confessed Christ, and she herself approached the wheels; but an angel smashed the instruments of execution, which shattered into pieces with many pagans standing nearby.

Having beheld this wonder, the Empress Augusta and the imperial courtier Porphyrius with 200 soldiers confessed their faith in Christ in front of everyone, and they were beheaded. Maximian again tried to entice the holy martyr, proposing marriage to her, and again he was refused. Saint Catherine firmly confessed her fidelity to the heavenly Bridegroom Christ, and with a prayer to Him she herself lay her head on the block beneath the executioner's sword.

The relics of Saint Catherine were taken by the angels to Mount Sinai. In the sixth century, the venerable head and left hand of the holy martyr were found through a revelation and transferred with honor to a newly-constructed church of the Sinai monastery, built by the holy Emperor Justinian. Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai continues to this day.

Monday, November 27

Read Luke 19:37-44.

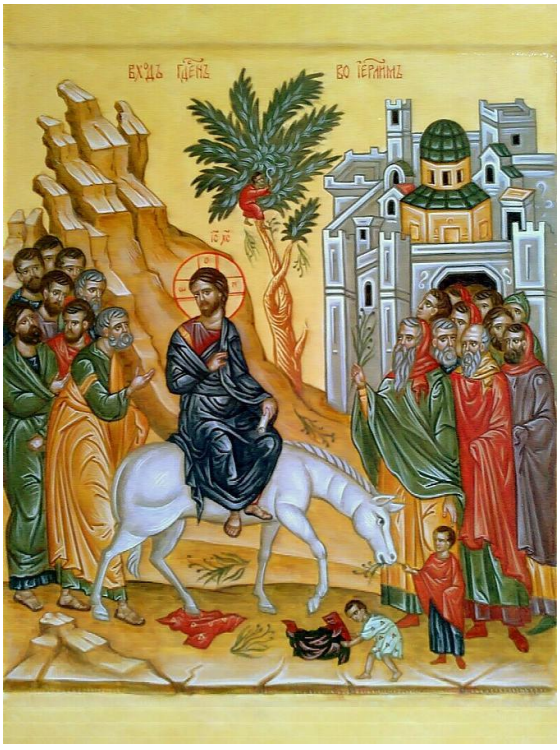
Look at the pictures and icon of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. In the Church we refer to this event as Palm Sunday because according to the other Gospels, the people cut palm branches and spread them on the road as a sign of victory and joy at Jesus' arrival.

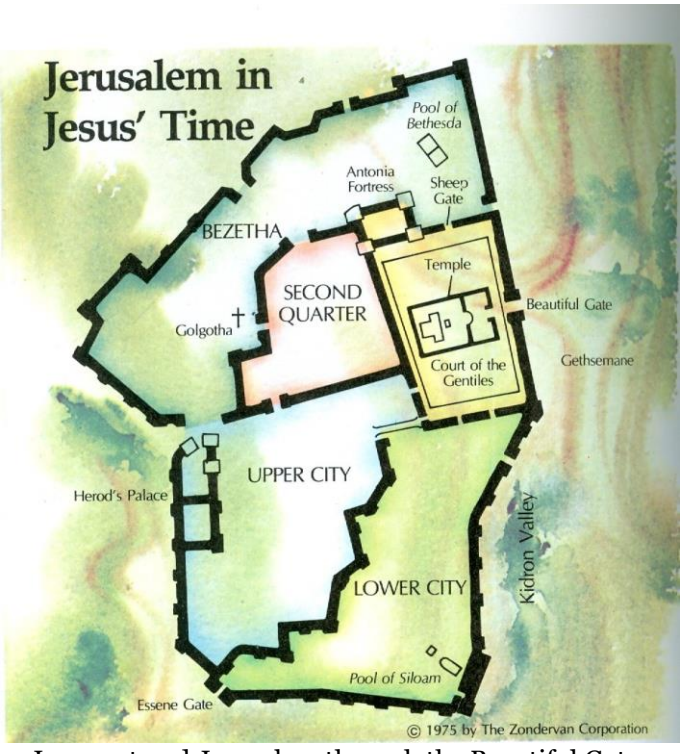
Ask: What were the different reactions from people upon Jesus' approach to the city? The crowd of disciples praised God and welcomed Jesus as a king. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to stop the disciples from praising Him. Jesus even said that the stones would cry out if the people didn't! Notice in the icon that the mountains appear to be raised up like hands in praise to Christ.

Ask: What was Jesus' reaction upon coming near the city? Jesus wept over the city. Why did Jesus weep? Jesus wept because He knew the city was going to be destroyed – which happened in the year 70 when the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem and leveled the Temple. Importantly, Jesus said the city would be destroyed because the people "did not know the time of [their] visitation" (v. 44).

Explain: "Visitation" refers to the city's visit from God Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ the God-man. The disciples welcomed Jesus with shouts of praise when He rode into Jerusalem, but what would the people do to Jesus just five days later? They would reject Him as their Savior and give Him over to death on a Cross. We have to learn to receive Christ when He comes to us every day, every Liturgy, and not be ashamed of or reject Him because He is our Savior.

Jerusalem in Jesus' Day, looking from the East over the Mount of Olives at the Temple





Jesus entered Jerusalem through the Beautiful Gate.

Read the life of the Greatmartyr Jacob (James) of Persia:

The Holy Great Martyr Jacob (James) the Persian was born in the fourth century into a pious Christian family, both wealthy and illustrious. His wife was also a Christian, and the couple raised their children in piety, inspiring in them a love for prayer and the Holy Scriptures. James occupied a high position at the court of the Persian emperor Izdegerd (399-420) and his successor Barakhranes (420-438). But on one of the military campaigns James, seduced by the emperor's promises of gifts, was afraid to acknowledge himself a Christian, and so he offered sacrifice to idols with the emperor.

Learning of this, James' mother and wife wrote him a letter, in which they rebuked him and urged him to repent. Receiving the letter, James realized the seriousness of his sin. Faced with the horror of being cut off not only from his family, but also from God Himself, he began to weep loudly, imploring the Lord for forgiveness.

His fellow-soldiers, hearing him pray to the Lord Jesus Christ, reported this to the emperor. Under interrogation, Saint James bravely confessed his faith in the one True God. No amount of urging by the emperor could make him renounce Christ. The emperor then ordered the saint to be put to death.

They began to cut off his fingers and his toes one by one, then his hands and his feet, and then his arms and legs. During the prolonged torture Saint James offered prayers of thanksgiving to the Lord, Who had granted him the possibility of redemption from his sins by enduring these terrible torments. Finally, the martyr was beheaded. Christians gathered up the pieces of his body and buried them with great reverence.

Wednesday, November 29

Read Luke 20:1-8.

Look at the icon of St. John baptizing Christ. There are many people in the icon: in the upper right hand corner, Elijah the Prophet, in whose spirit and power John came; in the upper left corner Jesus telling John to baptize Him to fulfill all righteousness; angels opposite John across the Jordan witnessing the Baptism; and people down below, such as a soldier, women giving their children into baptism, and others observing and discussing the event. Above Christ we see the hand of God and the Holy Spirit descending upon Him in the form of a dove.

Explain: When questioned about His authority to preach and teach, Jesus pointed to John's Baptism. John's Baptism was an unmistakable sign and proof of God's presence among men, especially because Christ accepted it, and the Holy Trinity was revealed when John baptized Jesus.

Yet even with so much evidence of God's working, we are still able to look the other way and refuse to acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, our God and Savior. The chief priests, scribes, and Jewish elders – all religious authorities(!) – were not asking Jesus about His authority in order to accept it. They were asking so that they might accuse Him of blasphemy if He said He was from God. So Jesus did not give another answer. He is already the answer. We have only to believe Him and follow Him in repentance and love.

Read the life of the Martyr Paramon and his companions:

The Holy Martyr Paramon and the 370 Martyrs with him suffered for their faith in Christ in the year 250 during the rule of the emperor Decius (249-251). The persecution under Decius was the first empire-wide persecutions of Christians. The governor of the Eastern regions, Aquianus, had locked up 370 Christians in prison, urging them to renounce Christ and instead offer sacrifice to idols.

They subjected the captives to beatings, hoping by torture and the threat of death to persuade them to renounce Christ and worship the pagan gods. One of the local inhabitants, Paramon by name, openly denounced the cruel governor and confessed his faith in the One True God, the Lord Jesus Christ. They beheaded Saint Paramon after fierce tortures, together with the other 370 martyrs. Paramon and the others lived in the region of Bithynia (modern-day north central Turkey).