7th Sunday After Pentecost
Venerable Sisoes the Great
7 / 19 July

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 6: The angelic powers were at Thy tomb; / the guards became as dead men. / Mary stood by Thy grave, / seeking Thy most pure Body. / Thou didst capture hell, not being tempted by it. / Thou didst come to the Virgin, granting life. / O Lord who didst rise from the Dead, / Glory to Thee!

Troparion of St Sisoes tone 5: From thy childhood/ thou didst follow the angelic life/ and wast therefore filled with many godly gifts./ O Sisoës, emulator of Angels,/ thou didst shine resplendently like a sun/ in the hour of thy going forth,/ and so didst reveal thy glory and illuminate our souls.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 6: When Christ God the Giver of Life, / raised all of the dead from the valleys of misery with His Mighty Hand, / He bestowed resurrection on the human race. / He is the Saviour of all, the Resurrection, the Life, and the God of All.

Kontakion of St Sisoës tone 4: Thou wast an earthly angel in asceticism/ and didst divinely illumine the thoughts of the faithful./ Wherefore we acclaim thee with faith, O righteous Father Sisoës.

Vespers: Lord I have Cried, Tone 6, on 10: Octoechos 7; Saint 3 (Thine all-festive commemoration); G: Saint (We honor thee as the instructor of a multitude of monks); N: Sunday Dogmatic in the 6th Tone. Aposticha: Octoechos; G/N: Theotokion in the Octoechos.

Matins Gospel VII

EPISTLE: ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS 15: 1-7

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus

For since he had given his own advice, and had also urged the example of Christ, he added the testimony of the Scriptures also, to show that with the Scripture Himself gives patience also. And this is why he said, Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus. For this is what love would do, be minded toward another even as toward himself. Then to show again that it is not mere love that he requires, he adds, according to Christ Jesus. And this he does, in all places, because there is also another sort of love. And what is the advantage of their agreeing?

" That ye may with one mind, he says, and one mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." He does not say merely with one mouth, but bids us do it with one will also. See how he has united the whole body into one, and how he concludes his address again with a doxology, whereby he gives the utmost inducement to unanimity and concord.

St. John Chrysostom, Homily 27 on Romans.

GOSPEL: ST. MATTHEW 9: 27-35

When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, "See that no one knows it." But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country. As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed. And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never seen like this in Israel!" But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons." Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

JESUS HEALS THE BLIND AND THE DUMB

The first Sunday readings after Pentecost showed us the Commandments of God according to which all the saints of the universal Church and our Russian Church lived. These commandments were like steps into the Kingdom of Heaven. And the Kingdom of Heaven the Merciful God has prepared for all. This means that these steps are leading there; these commandments of God are a must for every one of us. So with such a purpose the Holy Church presented them to us. But now for the last several weeks the Holy Church has begun to show us not what we should cultivate in ourselves, but things which we should avoid, against which we should fight. These readings told about the power of evil, about being possessed by it, about passions, sins, slavery to sin, bodily paralysis which is the result of sin; and this pointed out to us our spiritual paralysis, which is always the result of sin. In the same way, today's Gospel tells us: "When Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed Him.... As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil" (Mt. 9:27,32). And Christ healed all of them.

Yes, there is physical blindness, but there is also spiritual blindness. This is our unbelief, our stoniness of heart. Such a state may be temporary, as a storm cloud rushes in and goes away, with God's help. This is a terrible feeling of being forsaken by God, a horrible loneliness. And there is another condition: this is when we can talk about anything, but not about spiritual things, Godly things. Or when before us a brother is suffering, is living through some terrible grief, and we don't have even one word of comfort. Or again, a state of mind when we cannot even pray. Are these not states of spiritual dumbness? And Christ alone can heal us, heal our blind and dumb soul. But how does it happen?

Well, in order to answer this question I would like to relate one example, one experience from my personal life. Here it is: I will tell just how this experience was inscribed on my heart. This was a very difficult period of my life. It seemed there was no way out. My church in the town of Romni was closed, I was exiled from Romni, my family was left to the mercy of fate. To be registered in any church in Kiev was impossible. I had to live from day to day, hiding out with friends, knowing that by doing this I could harm them. At church services I could only be present secretly, hiding somewhere in a corner of the altar. And not even in every church would they let in an unregistered priest. Before me there seemed to be impenetrable darkness. I was losing heart. I felt both blind and dumb, in a spiritual sense.

Then came a bright thought: go to Lavra, to the cave Church of St. Anthony, to the early Liturgy. I wanted to believe that maybe there at the relics of the saints the veil would fall from my eyes and I would be able to see the Providence of God for me. I stopped for the night in Lavra and stayed with a close friend of mine. At three in the morning the gong was struck. We dressed quickly and went out. It was absolutely dark. But from all sides stretched lines of little lights; these were monks with lanterns going to the service in the caves. Everything was quiet, reverent, mysterious. And the two of us proceeded. Now we started to go down into the cave. And as we descended I grew more and more oppressed. The Liturgy started. I saw how everyone was praying. And I.. .I could not pray. Something terrible was happening to me; the ceiling of the cave pressed down on me. I was suffocating. And not so much physically, as spiritually. Anguish was simply tearing my chest apart. If I could have run away, I would have. But with an unbelievable effort of will I forced myself, at least outwardly, to remain at the service, which came over to me only automatically. I was both blind and dumb. Minutes seemed

like hours. I felt that I was perishing, and as one who was dumb, without words. I cried out in my heart: "Lord have mercy!" not even understanding the meaning of these words.

If the service had lasted for one more minute, I could not have stood it. But here was the end. I simply ran out onto the surface of the ground. And then a miracle happened to me. The sun was high already, the grass, the leaves, the trees, covered with morning dew, seemed to be strewn with diamonds. In the distance I could see the blue Dnieper River, and this blue was broken up by the bright reflection of the rising sun. This reflection was like gold which had fallen from heaven; and beyond the Dnieper were fields, forests — the world of God! I breathed deeply. Before me was hope. God had taken the stone away from my heart. I had been blind, but suddenly I recovered my sight: all these earthly beauties were now just symbols for me — symbols of unearthly beauty and Eternal Life. I wanted to live for eternity, and I wanted to share this joy with those around me. The dumbness passed and I began talking to people again who were all now near and dear to me. See how God heals our spiritual blindness and dumbness! So let us go in His Way. Let us endure. Let us imitate the blind men. After all, they did not see Christ. And what is more, they had never seen the image of a human being; but they knew that Christ was there, nearby, and believed that He could heal them. This is the classic image of prayer. The Orthodox Faith never forms any images, but only knows that Christ is, and He is near and can do anything.But let us be attentive, because He will ask us too: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" (Mt. 10:28). Then let our answer to Him be: "Yes, Lord! We believe."

Archbishop Andrei, The One Thing Needful

Saints of the Week

6 / 19 July — Our Holy Father Sisoes the Great - an Egyptian by birth, he lived at first in Scetis then, after St Antony's death, settled on the desert mountain on which Antony had earlier lived in asceticism and which was named after him. He learned humility through great struggles with himself, becoming meek and guileless as a lamb. Therefore God gave him the great gifts of healing the sick, driving out unclean spirits and raising the dead. Sisoes lived in the desert for sixty years, and was a fount of living wisdom for all the monks and lay folk who came to him for advice. At the time of his death, his face shone like the sun. The monks stood around him and marvelled at this sight and, when the saint gave up his soul, the whole chamber was filled with a wonderful fragrance. He entered into rest in great old age, in about 429. St Sisoes taught his monks: 'When temptation comes to a man, that man must give himself over to the will of God, and acknowledge that the temptation comes upon him because of his sins. If something good comes to pass, he must acknowledge that it comes about by the providence of God.' A monk asked him: 'How can I please God and be saved?' The saint replied: 'If you desire to please God, withdraw from the world, separate yourself from the earth, leave aside creation and draw near to the Creator, unite yourself to God with prayers and tears, and you will find rest in this world and in the next.' A monk asked Sisoes: 'How can I acquire humility?' The saint replied: 'When a man learns to regard every man as better than himself, he thus acquires humility.' Ammon complained to Sisoes that he could not memorise the wise sayings that he had read, to be able to quote them in conversation with others. The saint replied: 'It is not necessary. That which is necessary is to acquire purity of mind and to speak from this purity, placing one's hope in God.'

Also commemorated on this day: Martyrs Martha, Marinus, Audifax, Abbacum (Habakkuk), Cyrinus, the priest Valentine, and Asterius at Rome (†269); Martyr Quintus of Phrygia (†c.283); Martyr Isaurus the deacon, Innocent, Felix, Hermias, Basil, Peregrinus, Rufus, and Rufinus (†283-284); Martyr Lucy the Virgin and with her: Martyrs Rixius, Anthony, Lucian, Isidore, Dion, Diodorus, Cutonius, Arnosus, Capicus, and Satyrus (†301); Venerable Goar, hermit of the Rhine (†649); Venerable Sisoes of the Kiev Caves (13th C); Finding of the relics of St. Juliana, princess of Olshansk (c.1550); Monk-martyr Cyril of Hilandar (†1566); New Hieromartyr Theodore (Bogoyavlensky) (†1943); Synaxis of the saints of Radonezh; 'Bogorodsko-Ufimsky' Icon of the Mother of God. Movable feasts on the Sunday after June 29th: Venerable Tikhon, Basil, and Nikon of Sokolovo (16th C); Synaxis of the saints of Tver.

7 / 20 July — Our Holy Father Thomas of Mt. Maleon - was a general, famed for his courage and wealth. He was massive of body and a source of fear to his enemies. But, when he came to love Christ more than the world or anything in the world, he left everything and retired to the desert, where he became a monk and gave himself to asceticism. St Elias the Prophet appeared to him, and led him to the mountain called Malea, near the Holy Mountain. There he lived in solitude, alone with God, in unceasing prayer day and night. Although he hid from

the world, he could not succeed in concealing himself. Learning of the holiness of his life, people began to go to him, bringing their sick. St Thomas healed them of all ills and weaknesses. When he went to God (in the tenth century), his relics continued to give aid to all who drew near to them in faith.

Our Holy Fathers, the Martyrs Epictetus and Astius - Astius, the only son of his parents, was persuaded to love the Faith of Christ by Epictetus the priest who baptized him and tonsured him a monk. After that they moved from somewhere in the eastern regions of Scythia and settled in the Scythian town of Almirida (now Ramzina) on the mouth of the Danube on the Black Sea. They were tortured and beheaded for the Faith of Christ about 290 A.D. After their deaths, they both appeared in great radiance to the parents of St. Astius, Alexander and Marcellina, who were converted to Christ and who were baptized by Bishop Evangelus who himself, then was beheaded for Christ: "Evangelus, another angel" as is sung about him.

St. Illtyd, founder of the Llantwit abbey in Wales - (c. 425 to c. 505), the founder of the great school/seminary/abbey of Llan Illtyd Fawr (English, "Llantwit Major") in the west of South Glamorgan. Illtyd was considered the most learned person in Britain, expert alike in Maths, Grammar, Philosophy, Rhetoric and Scripture. One of the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, or Welsh Triads, refers to him as one of the "three knights of the Court of Arthur who kept the Holy Grail". In an age when any schooling was available only to a very few privileged people, perhaps Illtud's seminary was the closest approximation in existence to an institution of higher education. Among Illtyd's pupils were Saints Pol Aurelian (in Latin, *Paulinus Aurelianus*), Samson, Gildas and Dewi (English, *David*).

Also commemorated on this day: Venerable Acacius, who is mentioned in The Ladder (6th C); Martyrs Peregrinus, Lucian, Pompeius, Hesychius, Pappias, Saturninus, and Germanus (2nd C); Righteous Pantaenus the confessor, teacher at Alexandria (†203); Martyr Cyriaca of Nicomedia (†c.303); Hieromartyr Evangelus, bishop of Romania (4th C); St. Hedda, bishop of the West Saxons (†705); St. Willibald, bishop of Eichstätt (†c.786); Right-believing princess Eudocia (Euphrosyne in monasticism) of Moscow (†1407); New Hieromartyr Paul Chernyshev, priest (†1918); 'Blachernae' Icon of the Mother of God.

8 / 21 July — Appearance of the "Kazan" Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos - The celebration of the Most-holy Theotokos, in honour of her Icon known as the Kazan Icon, was established in thanks for the saving of Moscow and all Russia from the attack of the Poles in 1612. The late 16th and early 17th Centuries are known in Russian history as the Time of Troubles. The nation was attacked by Polish armies, who mocked the Orthodox Faith, and who looted and burned churches, towns and villages. By means of deceit, they succeeded in seizing Moscow. In response to the appeal of His Holiness Patriarch Hermogenes (commemorated on May 12) the Russian people rose up in defence of the homeland. The miraculous Icon of the Most-holy Theotokos was sent from Kazan to join the militia led by Prince Dimitry Mikhailovitch Pozharsky. In his "Homily on the day of the appearance of the Icon of the Mother of God in Kazan" (celebrated July 8), Holy Hierarch Dimitry of Rostov (commemorated September 21) said: The Mother of God saves from great misfortunes and evils not only the righteous, but also the sinful, but what manner of sinners? Those, who like the prodigal son, return to their Heavenly Father; who lament [over their sins]; who, like the publican, beat their breasts; who are like the sinful woman that wept at the feet of Christ and washed His feet with her tears; those who, like the thief on the cross, confess Him. The Mother of God looks after such sinners and rushes to help them, and saves them from great misfortunes and evils. Recognizing that the misfortune had been permitted because of their sins, the entire people and militia observed 3-day fast, and turned to the Lord and His most-pure mother for divine help. Their prayers were heeded. Holy Hierarch Arseny (later to become bishop of Suzdal), who was a prisoner of the Poles, sent word that he had had a vision revealing by the intercession of the Most-holy Virgin, God's judgment been had turned to mercy. Inspired by this news, the armies on October 22, 1612 liberated Moscow from the Polish occupiers. The celebration in honour of the Kazan Icon of the Most-holy Theotokos was established in 1649. To this day, that Icon is highly venerated by the Russian Orthodox people.

The Holy and Great Martyr Procopius - born in Jerusalem of a Christian father and a pagan mother, at first bearing the name Neanias. After his father's death, his mother brought him up entirely in the spirit of Roman idolatry. When he had grown up, the Emperor Diocletian saw him at sometime and was so pleased with him that he took him to court to serve in the army. When this wicked Emperor launched a persecution of Christians, he ordered Neanias to go with a detachment of soldiers to Alexandria and exterminate the Christians there. But, on the road, there happened to Neanias something similar to that which happened to Saul. At three o'clock in the morning there was a violent earthquake, the Lord Jesus appearing to him and saying: 'Neanias, where are you

going, and against whom are you rebelling?' In great fear, Neanias replied: 'Who are you, Lord? I cannot recognise You.' Then a brilliant Cross, as of crystal, appeared in the sky and a voice came from the Cross: 'I am Jesus, the crucified Son of God.' The Lord went on: 'By this sign that you have seen, overcome your enemies, and My peace will be with you.' This event utterly changed Neanias's life. He caused a cross such as he had seen to be made, and, instead of moving against the Christians, set off with his soldiers against the Agarians, who were attacking Jerusalem. He entered Jerusalem victorious and told his mother that he was a Christian. Brought to trial, he took off his army belt and sword and cast them before the judge, demonstrating by this that he was a soldier only of Christ the King. After harsh torture, he was thrown into prison. There Christ the Lord appeared to him again, baptising him and giving him the name Procopius. One day twelve women came to the window of his cell and said to him: 'We also are the servants of Christ.' Arrested for this, they were thrown into the same prison, where St Procopius instructed them in the Christian faith and carefully prepared them to receive the crown of martyrdom. (*) These twelve women were then harshly tortured. Beholding their sufferings and courage, Procopius's mother also came to faith in Christ, and then all thirteen were put to death. When St Procopius was led to the scaffold, he raised his hands towards the East and prayed to God for all the poor and needy, the destitute and the widowed, and especially for the holy Church, that it might grow and spread and that Orthodoxy might shine to the end of time. He was assured from heaven that his prayer was heard, after which he joyfully laid his head under the sword and went to his Lord, to eternal joy. St Procopius suffered with honour in Palestinian Caesarea, and was crowned with an eternal wreath of glory, on July 8th, 303. *Author's note: Therefore those in the married state ('crowned'), invoke St Procopius, together with the God-crowned Constantine and Helena.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Theodosia, mother of the Great Martyr Procopius (4th C); Martyr Mirdat, King of Kartli (†410); Blessed Procopius, fool-for-Christ, Wonderworker of Ustiug (†1303); Venerable Theophilus the Myrrh-Gusher (†1548); Righteous Procopius of Ustya (†c.1600); Monk-martyr Anastasius from Janina (†1743); Translation of the relics of St. Demetrius of Basarabov (1774); New Hieromartyrs Alexander Popov, Nicholas Bryantsev, and Theodore Raspopov, priests (†1918); ‘Peschanskaia’ Icon of the Mother of God.

9 / 22 July — **Fast Day - The Hieromartyr Pancratius, Bishop of Taormina. -** this holy hierarch was born in Antioch at the time that the Lord Jesus walked as a man among men on earth. Hearing of Christ's miracles, Pancratius's parents desired to see the Lord, the wonderworker. They came to Jerusalem, bringing Pancratius, where they saw Jesus, heard His words and witnessed His miracles. There Pancratius met the Apostle Peter. After the Lord's Ascension, both parents and their son were baptised in Antioch. Pancratius retired to a cave in Pontus, where the Apostle Peter found him and, in consultation with the Apostle Paul, installed him as bishop of Taormina in Sicily. St Pancratius worked great wonders in that town. He destroyed idols, baptised the unbaptised and instructed the baptised, and governed the Church of God. A pagan general, Aquilinus, hearing that the whole town of Taormina had become Christian, set out with an army to the town to destroy it. Holy Pancratius encouraged the faithful to be fearless, and he himself went out from the city with the clergy, carrying in his hands the unconquerable sign of the precious Cross. When the soldiers drew near to the town, a darkness fell on them and they were seized with great terror. A great confusion arose, so that they fell over one another and were stabbed and cut about by their own swords. Thus that godly man, Pancratius, saved his city and his flock by the power of his prayers before God. He was finally stoned to death by some envious and wicked pagans, and entered into rest in the Lord. His holy relics are preserved in Rome.

The Hieromartyr Cyril, Bishop of Gortyna - as an old man of eighty-four, he was tortured for Christ during Decius' reign. Cast into the flames, he was saved by the providence of God. Then the judge pronounced this sentence: 'Just judgement cannot tolerate that Cyril, having been delivered from fire, remain among the living. I therefore command that he be killed with the sword.' The old man joyfully laid his head under the sword and was beheaded, to live eternally in the Kingdom of Christ.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Alexander the Soldier, of Egypt (4th C); Venerable Patermuthius and Coprius, ascetics in Egypt (4th C); Hieromartyrs Killian, bishop of Wurzburg, Colman, priest, and Totman, deacon (†689); St. Theodore, bishop of Edessa (†848); Venerable Theodosius the stylite, of Edessa (9th C); New Hieromartyr Peter Solvychegodsky, priest (†1613); New Martyr Michael of Athens (†1771); New Hieromartyr Methodius, bishop of Lampa (†1793); New Hieromartyr Constantine Lebedev, priest (†1918); ‘Cyprus’ and ‘Koloch’ Icons of the Mother of God.

10 / 23 July — Saint Anthony of the Kiev Caves --born in the year 983 at Liubech, not far from Chernigov, and was named Antipas in Baptism. Possessing the fear of God from his youth, he desired to be clothed in the monastic schema. When he reached a mature age, he wandered until he arrived on Mt. Athos, burning with the desire to emulate the deeds of its holy inhabitants. Here he received monastic tonsure, and the young monk pleased God in every aspect of his spiritual struggles on the path of virtue. He particularly excelled in humility and obedience, so that all the monks rejoiced to see his holy life. The igumen saw in St Anthony the great future ascetic, and inspired by God, he sent him back to his native land, saying, "Anthony, it is time for you to guide others in holiness. Return to your own Russian land, and be an example for others. May the blessing of the Holy Mountain be with you. Returning to the land of Rus, Anthony began to make the rounds of the monasteries about Kiev, but nowhere did he find that strict life which had drawn him to Mt. Athos. Through the Providence of God, Anthony came to the hills of Kiev by the banks of the River Dniepr. The forested area near the village of Berestovo reminded him of his beloved Athos. There he found a cave which had been dug out by the Priest Hilarion, who later became Metropolitan of Kiev (October 21). Since he liked the spot, Anthony prayed with tears, "Lord, let the blessing of Mt. Athos be upon this spot, and strengthen me to remain here." He began to struggle in prayer, fasting, vigil and physical labor. Every other day, or every third day, he would eat only dry bread and a little water. Sometimes he did not eat for a week. People began to come to the ascetic for his blessing and counsel, and some decided to remain with the saint. Among Anthony's first disciples was St Nikon (March 23), who tonsured St Theodosius of the Caves (May 3) at the monastery in the year 1032. The virtuous life of St Anthony illumined the Russian land with the beauty of monasticism. St Anthony lovingly received those who yearned for the monastic life. After instructing them how to follow Christ, he asked St Nikon to tonsure them. When twelve disciples had gathered about St Anthony, the brethren dug a large cave and built a church and cells for the monks within it. After he appointed Abbot Barlaam to guide the brethren, St Anthony withdrew from the monastery. He dug a new cave for himself, then hid himself within it. There too, monks began to settle around him. Afterwards, the saint built a small wooden church in honor of the Dormition of the Mother of God over the Far Caves. At the insistence of Prince Izyaslav, the igumen Barlaam withdrew to the Dimitriev monastery. With the blessing of St Anthony and with the general agreement of the brethren, the meek and humble Theodosius was chosen as igumen. By this time, the number of brethren had already reached a hundred men. The Kiev Great Prince Izyaslav (+ 1078) gave the monks the hill on which the large church and cells were built, with a palisade all around. Thus, the renowned monastery over the caves was established. Describing this, the chronicler remarks that while many monasteries were built by emperors and nobles, they could not compare with those which are built with holy prayers and tears, and by fasting and vigil. Although St Anthony had no gold, he built a monastery which became the first spiritual center of Rus. For his holiness of life, God glorified St Anthony with the gift of clairvoyance and wonderworking. One example of this occurred during the construction of the Great Caves church. The Most Holy Theotokos Herself stood before him and St Theodosius in the Blachernae church in Constantinople, where they had been miraculously transported without leaving their own monastery. Actually, two angels appeared in Constantinople in their forms (See May 3, the account of the Kiev Caves Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos). Having received gold from the Mother of God, the saints commissioned master architects, who came from Constantinople to the Russian land on the command of the Queen of Heaven to build the church at the Monastery of the Caves.

The 45 Holy Martyrs: Leontius, Maurice, Alexander, Sisinius and the rest - in the time of the wicked Emperor Licinius, who ruled over the eastern half of the Byzantine Empire, there was a great persecution of Christians. In Armenian Nicopolis, Leontius came before the imperial governor, Lysius, together with several of his friends, and told him that he was a Christian. 'And where is your Christ?', asked Lysius. 'Was he not crucified and did he not die?' To this, St Leontius replied: 'If you know that our Christ died, know that He also rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.' After much harassment for their faith, Lysius had them whipped and thrown into prison, where they were given neither food nor drink. A noble Christian woman, Vlassiana, brought them water and gave it to them through the window of the prison, and an angel of God appeared to them there, to comfort and encourage them. When their trial was held, two of their warders came before Lysius as Christian converts, and many others, numbering forty-five in all. The judge condemned them all to death, ordering that their arms and legs be hacked off and that they then be thrown into the flames. This vicious punishment was carried out, and the souls of the holy martyrs flew off to their Lord, to eternal life. They suffered with honour and inherited the Kingdom in the year 319.

The Translation of the Precious Vesture of our Lord Jesus Christ - at the time of our Lord's suffering for the human race, there was to be found in the ranks of the Roman army in Jerusalem a Georgian, Elias, from the town of Mtskhet. His mother had heard of Christ, and believed in Him in her heart. Sending her son into the

army in Palestine, she exhorted him to do nothing against Christ. When the Lord was nailed to the Cross, the sound of the hammering on Golgotha came to the ears of Elias's mother in Mtskhet. Hearing this sound, she cried out: 'Woe is me that I did not die before this hour, that death might deliver me from this terrible sound!' And, thus saying, she fell dead. Elias was at that time underneath the Cross, and, with the other soldiers, was casting lots for Christ's vesture. The vesture fell to him, and he took it to Mtskhet, making a gift of it to his sister Sidonia. She, hearing of the Lord's death and learning that her brother had a hand in the shedding of innocent blood, fell dead with the Lord's vesture in her hands, in such a way that no-one could take it from her and they were constrained to bury it with her. A cedar grew up over her grave, from which flowed a healing myrrh. In time, the cedar fell and the place was forgotten. St Nina found it by the aid of a pillar of fire on that spot, in response to her prayers. King Mirian, when he had been baptised, built a church there to the Holy Apostles. In 1625, Shah Abbas took this vesture and sent it to Moscow as a gift to Prince Michael Feodorovitch and Patriarch Philaret. The vesture was then placed in the Cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow.

Also commemorated on this day: Martyr Apollonius of Sardis (3rd C); Venerable 10,000 martyred Egyptian hermits of the deserts and caves of Scetis (†398); Martyrs Bianor and Silvanus of Pisidia (4th C); Venerable Silouan, schemamonk of the Kiev Caves (14th C); Hieromartyr Joseph, priest of Damascus, and those with him (†1860); Venerable Parthenius (†1905) and Eumenius (†1920) restorers of Gortyna; New Hieromartyrs Alexander Popov, Basil Pobedonostsev, Peter Zefirov and Stephen Lukanin, priests, George Begma and Nestor Gudzovsky, deacons (†1918); 'Konevets' Icon of the Mother of God.

11 / 24 July — **Fast Day - The Holy and Great Martyr Euphemia -** this saint is commemorated on September 16th, the day on which she suffered. On this day is commemorated the miracle wrought by her precious relics, revealed at the time of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon. This Council was called together in the reign of the Emperor Marcian and the Empress Pulcheria, in 451, after the death of the Emperor Theodosius the Younger, and was summoned because of the heresy of Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria, and Eutyches, an archimandrite in Constantinople, who had disseminated the false teaching that there were in Christ not two natures, divine and human, but only one, a divine nature. At this Council, the chief role was played by Anatolius, Patriarch of Constantinople and Juvenal, Patriarch of Jerusalem. Because, through the quarrels and evidence on both sides, no decision could be reached, Patriarch Anatolius suggested that the Orthodox and the heretics each write down their confession of faith, and that they be put into the coffin that contained the relics of St Euphemia. All agreed to this. Two confessions of faith, then, were written and placed in the hands of the great martyr. The coffin was closed and sealed with the imperial seal, a watch then being set over it. They then all spent three days in fasting and prayer. On the fourth day, when the tomb was opened, they saw the Orthodox confession of faith in the saint's right hand and the heretical one beneath her feet. Thus was the conflict resolved by God's power, on the side of Orthodoxy. In the time of the Emperor Heraclius, the relics of St Euphemia were translated from Chalcedon to Constantinople, to the church dedicated to her near the Hippodrome. The iconoclast Emperor Leo the Isaurian ordered that her relics be thrown into the sea; but, by a wonderful act, the coffin was brought to the island of Lemnos and placed in the church of the holy martyr Glykeria. Then, in the time of the Empress Irene, the coffin with its relics was again taken to Constantinople, to its former place. Blood has flowed from these relics from time to time, to the succour of the sick and the feeble.

Blessed Equal-to-the-Apostles St Olga, princess of Russia in baptism called Elena - renowned for her wisdom and sobriety, in her youth became the wife of Igor, Great Prince of Kiev, who ruled during the tenth century. After her husband's death, she herself ruled capably, and was finally moved to accept the Faith of Christ. She traveled to Constantinople to receive Holy Baptism. The Emperor, seeing her outward beauty and inward greatness, asked her to marry him. She said she could not do this before she was baptized; she furthermore asked him to be her Godfather at the font, which he agreed to do. After she was baptized (receiving the name of Helen), the Emperor repeated his proposal of marriage. She answered that now he was her father, through holy Baptism, and that not even among the heathen was it heard of a man marrying his daughter. Gracefully accepting to be outwitted by her, he sent her back to her land with priests and sacred texts and holy icons. Although her son Svyatoslav remained a pagan, she planted the seed of faith in her grandson Vladimir (see July 15). She reposed in peace in 969.

Also commemorated on this day: Hieromartyr Cindeus, the priest of Pamphylia (†c.300); Translation of the relics of Venerable Benedict of Nursia (547); Venerable Drostan of Aberdeen (†610); Venerable Nicodemus of Vatopedi (†1320); Monk-martyr Nicodemus the Slav (†1722); Monk-martyr Nectarius of Mt. Athos (†1820); Hieromartyrs of Dabro-Bosna:

Momcilo, Dobroslav, Milan, Mihailo, Jovan, Jovan, Bozidar, Bogdan, Trifun, Velimir, Bozidar, Miladin, Bishop Varnava, Mark, Dimitrije, Budimir, Relja, Lazar, Savo, Savo, Milorad, Ratomir, Mihailo, Dusan, Dobroslav, Nestor, Serafim, Andrew, Slobodan, Simo, Mirko, Milan, Vukosav, Milan, Radoljub, and Damjan (†1941-45); Finding of the relics of the New Hieromartyr Hilarion, archbishop of Verey (1998); 'Rzhevsk,' 'Shuisk-Smolensk,' and 'Borkolabov' Icons of the Mother of God.

12 / 25 July — St Veronica - this is the woman with the issue of blood, whom the Lord healed (Matt. 9:20). In gratitude to the Lord her healer, Veronica caused a statue of the Lord Jesus to be made, before which she prayed to God. By tradition, this statue was preserved up to the time of Julian the Apostate, when it was altered to become a statue of Zeus. This is one of the very rare occasions that a holy statue has been used in the Eastern Church. As is known, this later became a common custom in the Western Churches. St Veronica remained faithful to Christ till death, and entered peacefully into rest.

The Holy Martyrs Proclus and Hilarius - these martyrs were born in Kallippi in Asia, Proclus being Hilarius's uncle. They suffered in the time of Trajan. The judge asked Proclus: 'Of what race are you?' Proclus replied: 'I am of the race of Christ, and my hope is in my God.' When the judge threatened him with torture, he said: 'When you are afraid to transgress the Emperor's commands and risk falling into temporal punishment, how much more do we Christians fear to transgress against God's commands and fall into eternal torment!' While Proclus was being tortured, Hilarius came up to the judge and said: 'I too am a Christian!' After many tortures, the two of them were condemned to death, Proclus being crucified and Hilarius beheaded with the sword. They both entered into the joy of their Lord.

The Icon of the Mother of God, named "Three-Handed" - The wonderworking image, before which the Monk John Damascene (Comm. 4 December) received healing of a cut-off hand, was given over by him to the Laura of the Monk Sava the Sanctified. In the XIII Century the icon was situated in Serbia, and afterwards it was miraculously transported to Athos to the Khilendaria monastery.

The Icon of the Mother of God, named "Of Three Hands" ("Troeruchitsa"): In the IX Century at the time of the Iconoclasts, the Monk John Damascene (+ c. 780, Comm. 4 December) was zealous in his veneration of holy icons. Because of this, he was slandered by the emperor and iconoclast Leo III the Isaurian (717-740), who informed the Damascus caliph that the Monk John was committing treasonous acts against him. The caliph gave orders to cut off the hand of the monk and take it to the marketplace. Towards evening Saint John, having asked the caliph for the cut-off hand, put it to its joint and fell to the ground before the icon of the Mother of God. The monk begged Our Lady to heal the hand, which had written in defense of Orthodoxy. After long prayer he fell asleep and saw in a dream, that the All-Pure Mother of God had turned to him promising him quick healing. Before this the Mother of God bid him toil without fail with this hand. Having awakened from sleep, the Monk John saw that his hand was unharmed. In thankfulness for this healing the Monk John placed on the icon an hand fashioned of silver, from which the icon received its name "Of Three Hands". According to tradition, the Monk John wrote a song of thanksgiving to the Mother of God – "All of creation rejoiceth in Thee, O Full of Grace", which appears in place of the Mother of God hymn "Mete it is in truth" in the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great.

Saint John Damascene accepted monasticism at the Laura monastery of the Monk Sava the Sanctified and there bestowed his wonderworking icon. The Laura presented the icon "Of Three Hands" in blessing to Sainted Savva, ArchBishop of Serbia (+ 1237, Comm. 12 January). During the time of an invasion of Serbia by the Turks, Christians wanting to safeguard the icon entrusted it to the safekeeping of the Mother of God Herself. They placed it upon a donkey, which without a driver proceeded to Athos and stopped in front of the Khilendaria monastery. The monks put the icon in the cathedral church. During the time of discord over the choice of hegumen, the Mother of God deigned Herself to accept to head the monastery, and from that time Her holy icon has occupied the hegumen's place in the temple. And from that time at the Kilendaria monastery there is chosen only a vicar, and the monks by monastic useage receive from the holy icon blessing in every obedience.

Martyr Golinduc - Golinduc was a Persian by birth. She entered into marriage with a Persian sage and lived three years in the marital state. She then had a vision of angels who showed her the other world: the torments of sinners and the unbelievers and the joy of the righteous. After this, she left her husband and was baptized. At baptism, she received the name of Mary. Persecuted by her husband, she was sentenced to prison for life. She was imprisoned for eighteen years and remained steadfast in her faith. After this, she was thrown into a pit with a terrible snake but God saved her and the snake did not harm her. When evil young men were sent to defile

her, God made her invisible to their eyes. Astonished at her sufferings, many Persians embraced the Faith of Christ. She visited Jerusalem where she denounced the Severian heresy, which taught that the divine nature in Christ suffered for which they read the Trisagion [TrisvjatojeThe ThriceHoly Hymn] in the following form: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy and Immortal crucified for us, have mercy on us." Finally, after preaching the True Faith, she peacefully died near the city of Nisibus in the year 587 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: Venerable Michael of Maleinus (†962); Martyrs Theodore and John, his son, in Kiev (†983); Venerable John (†988) and Gabriel (10th C) of the Holy Mountain; St. Serapion, bishop of Vladimir (†1275); Venerable Arsenius of Novgorod (†1570); Venerable Simon of Volomsk (†1641); St. Gregory (Kallides), metropolitan of Herakleia (†1925).

† Daily Scripture Readings †

Monday – Epistle: I Cor. 9:13-18 (§142); Gospel: Matt. 16:1-6 (§65)

Tuesday – Epistle: I Cor. 10:5-12 (§144); Gospel: Matt. 16:6-12 (§66)

Wednesday –Epistle: I Cor. 10:12-22 (§145); Gospel: Matt. 16:20-24 (§68)

Thursday – Epistle: I Cor. 10:28-11:7 (§147); Gospel: Matt. 16:24-28 (§69)

Friday - Epistle: I Cor. 11:8-22 (§148); Gospel: Matt. 17:10-18 (§71)

Saturday –Epistle: Rom. 13:1-10 (§111); Gospel: Matt. 12:30-37 (§47)

HOMILY

-About the terrible prince of redemption-

"For as much as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers. But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1: 18-19).

Brethren, could anyone have purchased a cure against sin with silver and gold? Never and by no one.

Brethren, could anyone forge arms against the devil with silver and gold? Never and by no one.

Brethren, could anyone have been redeemed from death with the help of silver and gold? Never and by no one.

Something far more precious than silver and gold was needed to be a cure, a weapon and ransom. The Precious Blood of the Son of God was needed to be applied on the sinful wounds in order to be healed. The Precious Blood of the Son of God was needed in order to be directed against evil spirits and by its power to burn them and to drive them away from man. The Precious Blood of the Son of God was needed to sprinkle the earthly graves in order to subdue death and to raise the dead.

"As a Lamb without blemish and without spot," the Lamb of God was slain for us to pull us out from the three-fold jawbone of the beast. A pitiful but life-giving banquet. God arranged this costly banquet to manifest freedom to man. Sin, the devil and death charged with all their might against the innocent and All-pure "Lamb of God without blemish and without spot." They killed Him but they were poisoned by His blood. This blood was shed in order to be poison for them but for mankind, life and salvation.

O my brethren, if you do not know how consuming sin is and how wicked the devil is and how bitter death is, judge this by the greatness of redemption by which we are redeemed from their bondage. The Precious Blood of Christ, that is our deliverance from bondage! Remember, brethren, that if we are again willing, by recklessness and evil to offer ourselves up to that terrible three-fold bondage, there is not anyone on earth or in heaven who could give a ransom for us. For the precious ransom is one and it was given once and for ever.

O merciful Lord, strengthen us so that we may be sustained in freedom which You have gifted to us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.