

Made With Faith

Prayers and Devotions for the Orthodox Home

March 2018

Important Dates:

11th Sunday of the Cross (middle of Lent)

25th Feast of the Annunciation (Sunday)

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, or Scripture, 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, or Scripture reading, 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.

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+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.

Friday, March 2

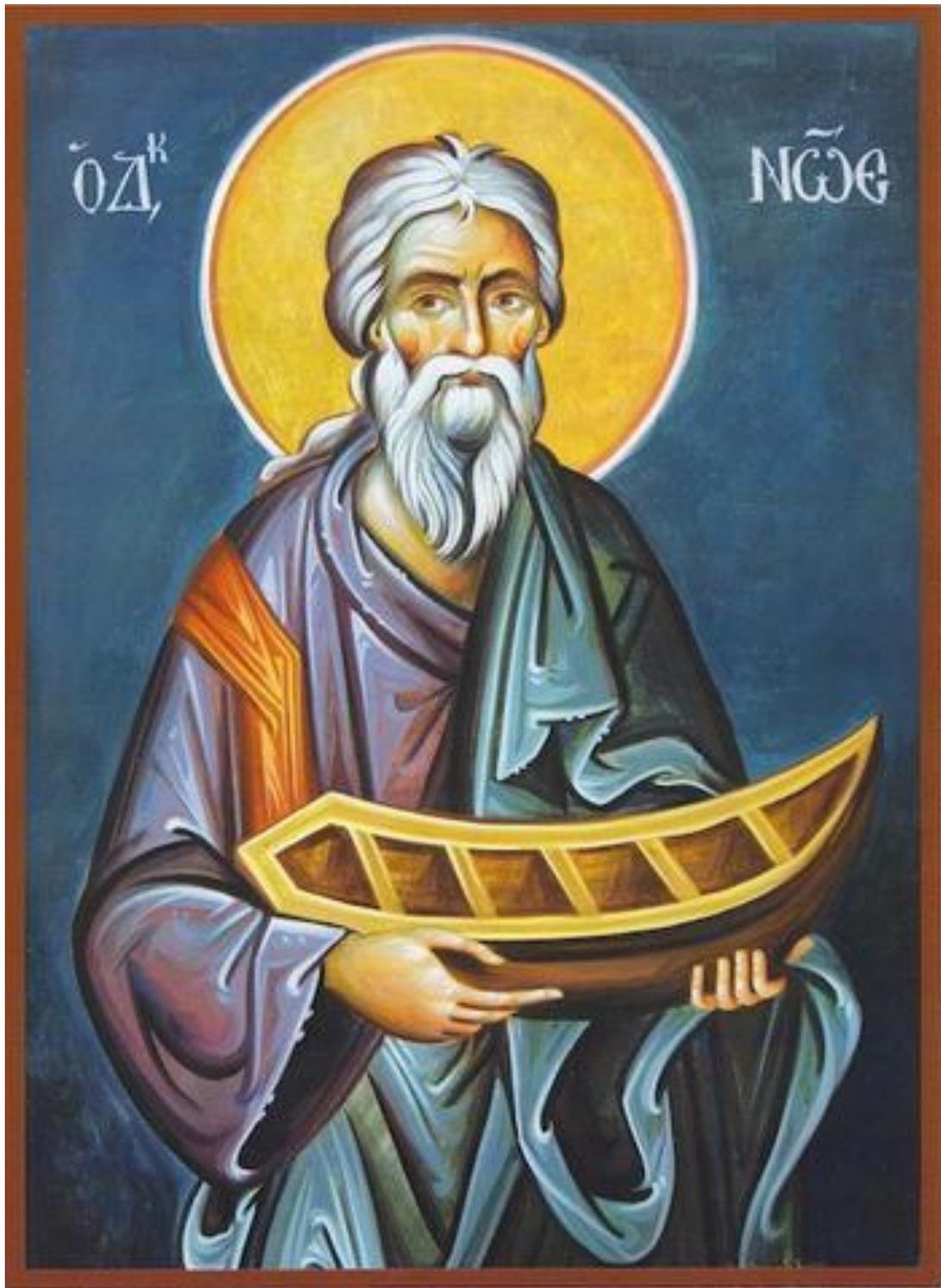
Read Genesis 5:32-6:8.

Look at the icon of the Righteous Noah. Ask: Why is he holding what appears to be a boat? He is holding a boat because he built the ark in which he, his wife, his three sons, and their wives, along with the animals, were saved from the Flood. That story is coming in the days ahead. The reading today tells the reason for the Flood.

First recall the names of Noah's sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. How old was Noah when he had his sons? He was 500 years old. Remember that Noah was descended from Adam through Adam's son Seth, the line of the promise. And what was the promise? – that a son would eventually be born to crush the head of the devil and undo the curse of death (cf. Gen. 3:15; 5:29). The line of the promise is “the sons of God” in today's reading (6:2).

Ask: But what happened when “the sons of God” began to mix with “the daughters of men”? “Giants, mighty men” were born, “men of renown,” that is, people famous for their physical strength and accomplishments; however, humankind became wicked, and the thoughts of their “heart was only evil continually” (6:5). God's Spirit did not remain with people who rejected Him. They would have 120 years until destruction.

So what did God decide to do with the earth having become evil because of human beings? He decided to wipe the evil people out, but He decided to save Noah who still followed God. It does no good have physical and material well-being with death. Like Noah, we should strive to serve God above all else to be saved from death; this is true life.



Read the life of the Hieromartyr Theodotus, Bishop of Cyrenia:

The Hieromartyr Theodotus, a native of Galatia in Asia Minor, was Bishop of Cyrenia in Cyprus. During a time of persecution against Christians under the impious emperor Licinius (311-324), Saint Theodotus openly preached Christ, calling on the pagans to abandon idolatry and turn to the true God. Sabinus, the governor of Cyprus, ordered that Bishop Theodotus be arrested and brought to trial.

When he heard about this order, the saint did not wait for the soldiers to be sent after him, but immediately went to the governor saying, “I, whom you seek, am here. I have shown myself in order to preach Christ my God.”

The governor ordered that the saint be beaten without mercy, suspended from a tree, raked with sharp implements, and then be taken to prison. Five days later Saint Theodotus was brought to the governor, who presumed that after his tortures the bishop would prefer to renounce Christ, rather than endure new sufferings.

However, Saint Theodotus did not cease to preach about Christ. At first they put the saint on an iron grate, under which they lit a fire, and then hammered nails into his feet and let him go. Many witnessed the sufferings of the martyr. Astonished at the saint’s endurance and his divinely-inspired speech, they came to believe in Christ. Learning of this, Sabinus gave orders to stop the torture and throw the saint into prison.

During the reign of Saint Constantine the Great, the freedom to confess their faith was given to all Christians, and among those set free from prison was Saint Theodotus. The saint returned to Cyrenia and after two years serving as bishop he peacefully fell asleep in the Lord in about the year 326.



St. Hesychios (l.), St. Theodotus (c.), St. Evthalia (r.)

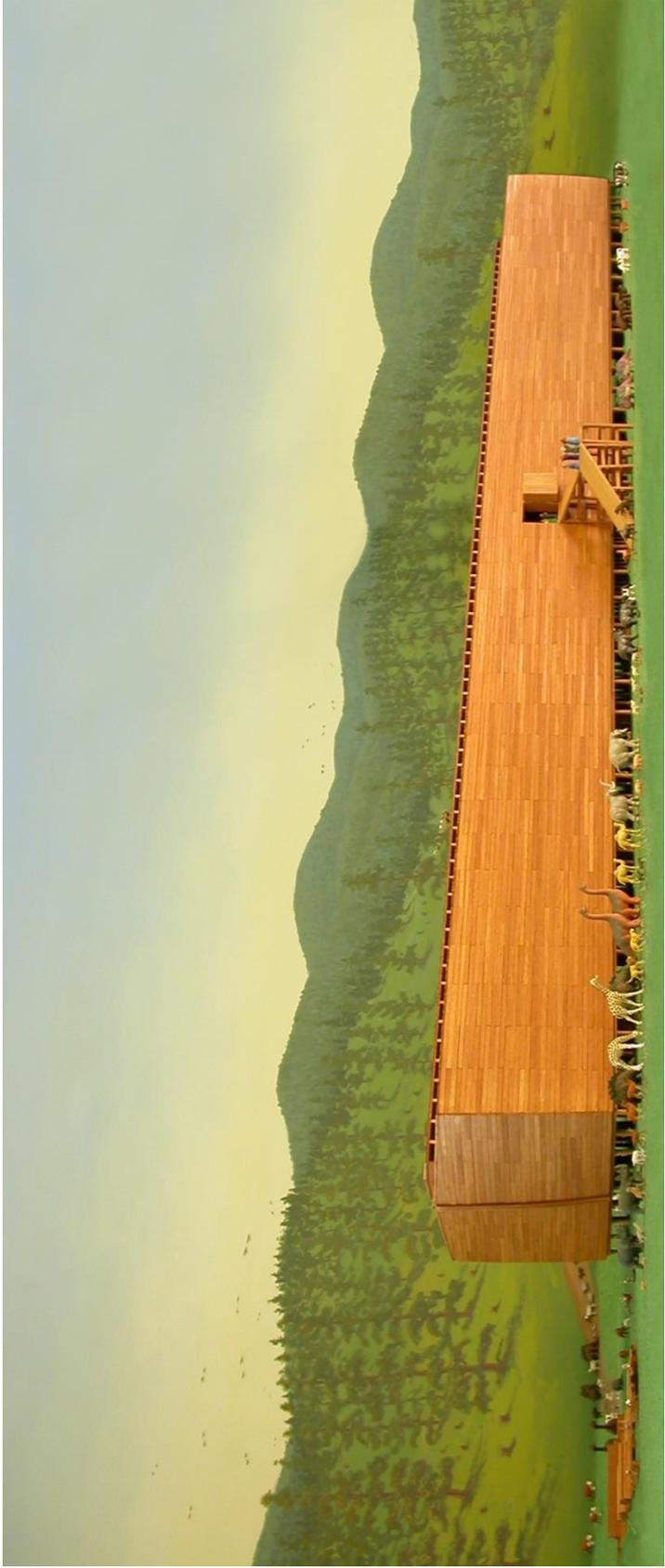
Monday, March 5

Read Genesis 6:9-22.

Look at the image of Noah's ark. Explain: There is an important difference between an "ark" and a "ship." A ship is built to travel and sail through the water from one place to another in a timely way. An ark is built to contain and keep safe whatever is inside of it. You can tell the ark was not meant to sail; it was meant to keep Noah, his family, and the animals safe. God told Noah how to build the ark in order to preserve his life, and Noah did exactly what God commanded him to do.

Note the words used to describe both Noah and the earth - Noah: righteous, perfect in his generation, well-pleasing to God, covenant, alive; the earth: corrupt, filled with unrighteousness, destroy, die. The fact that God was saving the animals shows that the world, in and of itself, is not evil. But sinful man had corrupted the earth by disobedience to God. People who continue in their disobedience will be destroyed and die. People who obey God and keep His commandments will be preserved and live.

As we consider the story of Noah and the ark, note that the Church is like the ark, and Noah is an icon of Christ Himself. By following Christ and remaining in the Church we will be preserved from a corrupt, unrighteous, and dying world.



Read the life of the Martyr Conon of Isauria:

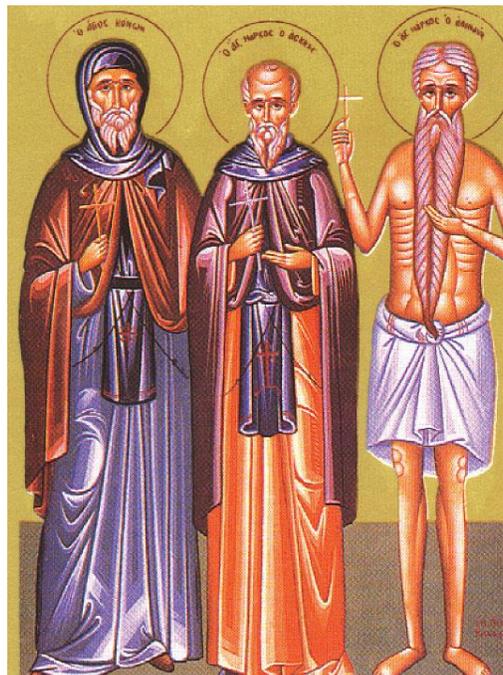
The Holy Martyr Conon of Isauria was born in Bethany, a village near the Asia Minor city of Isauria (in modern-day Turkey), whose inhabitants had accepted Christianity from the Apostle Paul. From his youth, Saint Conon was accorded the special protection of the “Archistrategos” (“Leader of the Heavenly Hosts”) Archangel Michael, who appeared to him and assisted him in many difficult circumstances in life.

At the insistence of his parents, Conon was betrothed to a maiden named Anna. He persuaded her to live with him in virginity after the wedding. The young couple lived as brother and sister, devoting themselves entirely to God. Saint Conon brought also his parents to the Christian Faith. His father, Saint Nestor, received a martyr’s death for denouncing idol-worshippers.

After burying both his mother and wife, Saint Conon continued his service to God, devoting himself entirely to monastic works, fasting and prayer. In his declining years the holy ascetic was glorified with the gift of wonderworking. By virtue of his preaching and miracles many pagans were converted to Christ. It is said that even the evil spirits were forced to serve him.

When a persecution against Christians broke out in Isauria, one of the first to suffer was Saint Conon. He was subjected to fierce torments for his refusal to offer sacrifice to idols. When the people of Isauria learned of the tortures to which the saint was being subjected, they came forth bearing arms to defend the martyr. Frightened by the people’s wrath, the torturers fled, and the Isaurians found the martyr wounded and bloodied at the place of torture.

Saint Conon wished to endure martyrdom for the Lord, but he lived two more years. Saint Conon died in the second century (100-200 A.D.) and was buried beside his parents and wife.



St. Conon (left)

W ednesday, March 7

Read Genesis 7:6-9.

Look at the icon of the Ark. How many people are in the Ark, and who are they? There are eight people in the Ark: Noah, his three sons – Shem, Ham, and Japheth, their wives. Note also the animals are all in pairs, male and female. Ask: Why are they in pairs? – so they can have offspring and keep each species alive after the Flood. God was assuring His promise given originally to creation, to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:22, 28). Procreation (having offspring, or children) is the normal order of creation despite the sin and death introduced into the world by mankind.

One other distinction among the animals is mentioned: the clean and unclean. Explain: “clean” animals are animals later designated both for sacrifice to God and fit for human food; the “unclean” could not be sacrificed to God or eaten in good conscience (see Genesis 8:20 and Leviticus 11). Just as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not evil in and of itself, but eating of it contrary to God’s command was evil, so all animals are good by God’s creation; however, using certain animals for worship and food was to be done by God’s direction, and disobeying God’s direction made their use bad.

In all things our life is not our own. We always look to God how to live because our life comes from God and leads back to God who created and saved us from death.

NOAH SAVED FROM THE FLOOD



Read the life of the Seven Hieromartyrs of Cherson:

The Hieromartyrs Basil, Ephraim, Eugene, Elpidius, Agathodorus, Aetherius, and Capiton carried the Gospel of Christ into the North Black Sea region from the Danube to the Dniepr, including the Crimea. They were bishops of Cherson at different times during the fourth century, and they sealed their apostolic activity with martyrdom. Only Aetherius died in peace.

Long before the Baptism of Rus under Saint Vladimir, the Christian Faith had already spread into the Crimea, which in antiquity was called Tauridia and was ruled by the Roman Emperor. The beginning of the enlightenment of Tauridia is attributed to the holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called.

The Church's enemies unwillingly contributed to the further spread of Christianity. The Roman emperors often banished traitors to this area. During the first three centuries, Christians were regarded as traitors because they would not follow the state religion. In the reign of Trajan (98-117), Saint Clement, Bishop of Rome, was sent to work in a stone quarry near Cherson. There he continued his preaching, and suffered martyrdom.

The pagans inhabiting the Crimea stubbornly resisted the spread of Christianity. But the faith of Christ, through its self-sacrificing preachers, grew strong and was affirmed. Many missionaries gave their lives in this struggle.

At the beginning of the fourth century a bishop's See was established at Cherson. This was a critical period when Cherson served as a base for the Roman armies which constantly passed through the area. During the reign of Diocletian (284-305), the Patriarch of Jerusalem sent many bishops to preach the Gospel in various lands. Two of them, Ephraim and Basil, arrived in Cherson and planted the Word of God there.

Later on, Saint Ephraim went to the peoples living along the Danube, where he underwent many tribulations and sorrows. He was beheaded at the start of the persecution. The preaching at Cherson was continued by Saint Basil, Saint Ephraim's companion. He set many idol-worshippers on the path of truth. Other wayward inhabitants of the city, enraged at his activity, rose up against him. The saint was arrested, mercilessly beaten and expelled from the city.

He went to a mountain and settled in a cave, where he unceasingly prayed to God for those who had driven him out, asking that He might illumine them with the light of true knowledge. And the Lord provided the unbelievers with a miracle. The only son of an important citizen of Cherson died. The dead child appeared to his parents in a dream and said that a certain man named Basil could resurrect him from the dead by his prayers.

When the parents had found the saint and entreated him to work the miracle, Saint Basil replied that he himself was a sinful man and had not the power to raise the dead, but the Lord Almighty could fulfill their request if they were to believe in Him. For a long time the saint prayed, invoking the Name of the Holy Trinity. Then he blessed water, and sprinkled it on the dead one, who was restored to life. The saint returned to the city with honor, and many believed and were baptized.

Soon, by order of the emperor Maximian Galerius (305-311), the persecution against Christians spread with renewed force. The Christ-haters rose up also against Saint Basil. On March 7, 309 he was dragged from his house during the night. They tied him up, dragged him along the streets and beat him to death with stones and rods. The body

of the saint was thrown out of the city to be eaten by dogs and birds, and for many days it was left unburied, but remained untouched. Then Christians secretly buried the body of the holy martyr in a cave.



Friday, March 9

Read Genesis 8:4-21.

Look at the icon and identify the following: Jesus Christ blessing, Noah and his family, the dove, and the altar for sacrifice (the rainbow is in the reading for next Tuesday, March 13).

How long was it from the time the rains started falling until land (the tops of the mountains) was visible again? Compare Genesis 7:11 and 8:5 – about 8 and a half months (~250 days). How much longer was it until the waters had receded completely and the earth was dry? Compare Genesis 8:5 and 8:14 – almost 4 more months (so Noah, his family, and the animals were in the Ark for just over a year).

Note the two birds Noah sent out over the waters: the raven and the dove. The raven just kept flying over the water until they dried up. The second time out, the dove brought back an olive leaf in its beak. The dove is an image of the Holy Spirit “hovering over the face of the water” (Genesis 1:2), just as the Flood waters are an image of creation. Through the Flood, God was recreating the world by wiping away the sinners. The Flood is an image of Holy Baptism by which we are saved from our sin and death (see 1 Peter 3:20-21).

Point out that the first thing Noah did after exiting the Ark was to worship God by building an altar and offering sacrifices. “The Lord God smelled a sweet aroma” (8:21) means that Noah’s sacrifice was acceptable to God. “The Lord God thought it over” means that God acknowledges Noah’s faith and obedience. Despite man’s sin, God wants to save us, especially all who believe in God and desire His salvation.



† ΜΩΥΣΕΣ ΠΑΡΕΚ. †
† Η ΕΠΙΘΑΨΗ †
ΤΩ ΜΩΥΣΕ.

Read the life of the Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste:

In the year 313 Saint Constantine the Great issued an edict granting Christians religious freedom, and officially recognizing Christianity as equal with paganism under the law. But his co-ruler Licinius was a pagan, and he decided to stamp out Christianity in his part of the Empire. As Licinius prepared his army to fight Constantine, he decided to remove Christians from his army, fearing mutiny.

One of the military commanders of that time in the Armenian city of Sebaste was Agricola, a zealous champion of idolatry. Under his command was a company of forty Cappadocians (from central modern-day Turkey), brave soldiers who had distinguished themselves in many battles. When these Christian soldiers refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods, Agricola locked them up in prison. The soldiers occupied themselves with prayer and psalmody, and during the night they heard a voice saying, "Persevere until the end, then you shall be saved."

On the following morning, the soldiers were again taken to Agricola. This time the pagan tried flattery. He began to praise their valor, their youth and strength, and once more he urged them to renounce Christ and thereby win themselves the respect and favor of their emperor.

Seven days later, the renowned judge Licius arrived at Sebaste and put the soldiers on trial. The saints steadfastly answered, "Take not only our military insignia, but also our lives, since nothing is more precious to us than Christ God." Licius then ordered his servants to stone the holy martyrs. But the stones missed the saints and returned to strike those who had thrown them. One stone thrown by Licius hit Agricola in the face, smashing his teeth. The torturers realized that the saints were guarded by some invisible power. In prison, the soldiers spent the night in prayer and again they heard the voice of the Lord comforting them: "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live (John 11:25). Be brave and fear not, for you shall obtain imperishable crowns." On the following day the judge repeated the interrogation in front of the torturer, but the soldiers remained unyielding.

It was winter, and there was a severe frost. They lined up the holy soldiers, threw them into a lake near the city, and set a guard to prevent them from coming out of the water. In order to break the will of the martyrs, a warm bath-house was set up on the shore. During the first hour of the night, when the cold had become unbearable, one of the soldiers made a dash for the bath-house, but no sooner had he stepped over the threshold, than he fell down dead.

During the third hour of the night, the Lord sent consolation to the martyrs. Suddenly there was light, the ice melted away, and the water in the lake became warm. All the guards were asleep, except for Aglaius, who was keeping watch. Looking at the lake he saw that a radiant crown had appeared over the head of each martyr. Aglaius counted thirty-nine crowns and realized that the soldier who fled had lost his crown.

Aglaius then woke up the other guards, took off his uniform and said to them, "I too am a Christian," and he joined the martyrs. Standing in the water he prayed, "Lord God, I believe in You, in Whom these soldiers believe. Add me to their number, and make me worthy to suffer with Your servants." Then a fortieth crown appeared over his head.

In the morning, the torturers saw with surprise that the martyrs were still alive, and their guard Aglaius was glorifying Christ together with them. They led the soldiers out

of the water and broke their legs. During this horrible execution the mother of the youngest of the soldiers, Meliton, pleaded with her son to persevere until death.

They put the bodies of the martyrs on a cart and committed them to fire. Young Meliton was still breathing, and they left him on the ground. His mother then picked up her son, and on her own shoulders she carried him behind the cart. When Meliton drew his last breath, his mother put him on the cart with the bodies of his fellow sufferers. The bodies of the saints were tossed in the fire, and their charred bones were thrown into the water, so that Christians would not gather them up.

Three days later the martyrs appeared in a dream to Saint Peter, Bishop of Sebaste, and commanded him to bury their remains. The bishop together with several clergy gathered up the relics of the glorious martyrs by night and buried them with honor.



Monday, March 12

Read Genesis 8:21-9:7.

Look at the icon and note Christ blessing Noah and his sons. The blessing after the Flood is very similar to the blessing of God before Adam and Eve fell into sin. Also note from 9:6 that man is still made in God's image, just as before at the original creation. Ask: But what has changed in the condition of mankind since Adam and Eve fell into sin? Read 8:21 again – “the mind of man is diligently involved with evil things from his youth.” Explain: While God's plan for human beings has never changed, now human beings have changed because of their sin to think and act with evil intent.

Review the original sin of trying to be one's own god, to act independently of God, and to do our own will even knowing this might be against God's will. Ask: What is the specific sin singled out in the reading today? See 9:5-6. It is the sin of murder, that is, intentionally killing another human being made in the image of God. Consider how common hatred, anger, violence, and killing are in our world today. Life in this world seems like a continual struggle of life and death for survival, and the strong seem to survive the best.

Whereas before sin entered the world, and with it death, Adam named the animals and they lived together in peace, now the world is full of “dread and fear” (9:2) leading to conflict. Once again we are to focus on the Savior to come who will redeem the world and restore it to its first beauty. Noah, his sons, and their wives, along with the animals, were spared from death in order to eventually give birth to the Savior, Jesus Christ. All the human race descended from them still exists to live in Him.



NOE ET SUAE ARCA
ANNO ANIMATA

DS

Read the life of St. Gregory the Great of Rome, the Dialogist:

Saint Gregory Dialogus, Pope* of Rome, was born in Rome around the year 540. His grandfather was Pope Felix, and his mother Sylvia and aunts Tarsilla and Emiliana were also numbered among the saints by the Roman Church. Having received a most excellent secular education, he attained high government positions.

Leading a God-pleasing life, he yearned for monasticism with all his soul. After the death of his father, Saint Gregory used his inheritance to establish six monasteries. At Rome he founded a monastery dedicated to the holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called, where he received monastic tonsure. Later, on a commission of Pope Pelagius II, Saint Gregory lived and studied for a while in Constantinople. There he wrote his Commentary on the Book of Job.

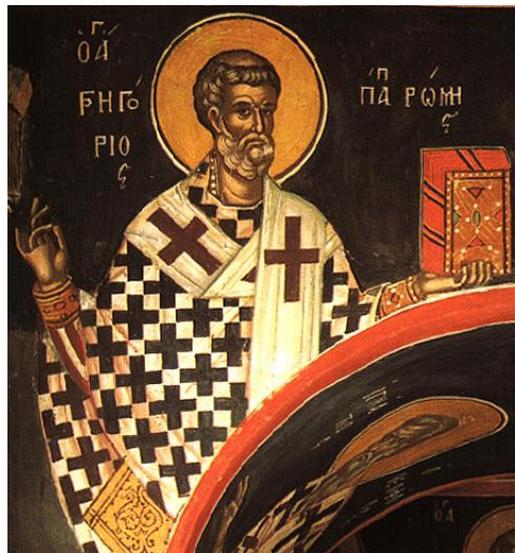
After the death of Pope Pelagius, Saint Gregory was chosen to the Roman See. For seven months he would not consent to accept this service, considering himself unworthy. He finally accepted consecration only after the persistent entreaties of the clergy and flock.

Wisely leading the Church, Saint Gregory worked tirelessly in propagating the Word of God. Saint Gregory compiled the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts in the Latin language, which before him was known only in the verbal tradition. Affirmed by the Sixth Ecumenical Council, this liturgical service was accepted by all the Orthodox Church.

He zealously struggled against the Donatist* heresy; he also converted the inhabitants of Brittany pagans and Goths, who had been adhering to the Arian heresy, to the True Faith.

Saint Gregory has left behind numerous written works. After the appearance of his book, *DIALOGUES CONCERNING THE LIFE AND MIRACLES OF THE ITALIAN FATHERS* (*DIALOGI DE VITA ET MIRACULIS PATRUM ITALIORUM*), the saint was called "Dialogus." His *PASTORAL RULE* (or *LIBER REGULAE PASTORALIS*) was well-known. In this work, Saint Gregory describes the model of the true pastor. His letters (848), dealing with moral guidance, have also survived.

Saint Gregory headed the Church for thirteen years, ministering to all the needs of his flock. He was characterized by an extraordinary love of poverty, for which he was granted a vision of the Lord Himself. Pope Saint Gregory the Great, as he is known, died in the year 604, and his relics rest in the cathedral of the holy Apostle Peter in the Vatican.



* *Pope* means "father" and is a title for the Bishops of Rome and Alexandria, Egypt.

* The *Donatists*, named for their leader Donatus, separated themselves from the Orthodox Church because they taught sacraments were not effective if administered by an unworthy bishop, or priest.

Wednesday, March 14

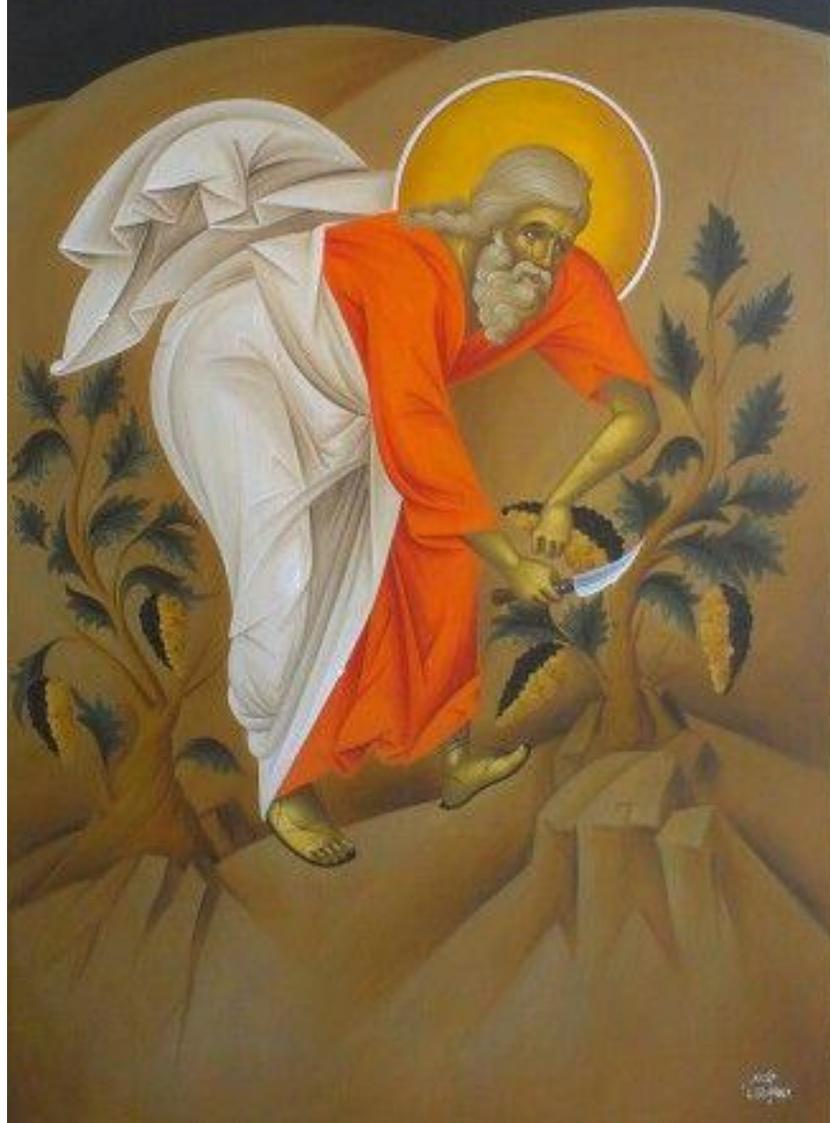
Read Genesis 9:18-10:1.

Look at the icon of Noah cutting grapes. Ask: How long did Noah live after the Flood? He lived 350 years more after the Flood. Then ask: What is the one incident from the remainder of Noah's life after the Flood recorded in the Bible? The one incident recorded is his getting drunk from wine and his nakedness being uncovered. Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the tree, their eyes were opened to notice their nakedness, so they were ashamed, hid themselves, and made themselves coverings. Now after the Flood, we witness a similar thing: Noah drinking grape juice fermented into wine and becoming drunk to expose his nakedness.

Note: Following Adam and Eve's sin, the serpent and the ground were cursed. Here with Noah and his son Ham's announcement of his father's nakedness, Ham's son Canaan was cursed to serve in the house of his uncles Seth and Japheth. St. Ephraim the Syrian points out, "From the fact that Scripture says, 'Noah knew what his younger son had done to him' (9:24), it is clear that it was not Ham (i.e., who was cursed), for Ham was the middle son and not the youngest...Canaan the youngest told of the nakedness of the old man. Then Ham went out into the street and jokingly told his brothers" (Commentary on Genesis VII.2).

Seth and Japheth refused to look on Noah's nakedness; instead, they walked backwards and covered their father. Likewise, Noah "blessed the Lord God of Shem" (9:26) because through Shem and his line the Christ would eventually be born. We cover up one another's faults and keep focused on the promise of God.

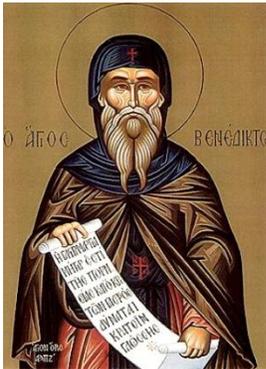
ὁ Δ^κ ΝΩΕ ἔργαζόμενος
τῆν ἀπέλει



Read the life of the Venerable Benedict of Nursia:

Saint Benedict, founder of Western monasticism, was born in the Italian city of Nursia in the year 480. When he was fourteen years of age, the saint's parents sent him to Rome to study. Unsettled by the immorality around him, he decided to devote himself to a different sort of life.

At first Saint Benedict settled near the church of the holy Apostle Peter in the village of Effedum, but news of his ascetic life compelled him to go farther into the mountains. There he encountered the hermit Romanus, who tonsured him into monasticism and directed him to live in a remote cave at Subiaco. From time to time, the hermit would bring him food.



For three years the saint waged a harsh struggle with temptations and conquered them. People soon began to gather to him, thirsting to live under his guidance. The number of disciples grew so much, that the saint divided them into twelve communities. Each community was comprised of twelve monks and was a separate skete. The saint gave each skete* an igumen* from among his experienced disciples, and only the novice monks remained with Saint Benedict for instruction. The strict monastic Rule Saint Benedict established for the monks was not accepted by everyone, and more than once he was criticized and abused by dissenters.

Finally he settled in Campagna, and on Mount Cassino he founded the Monte Cassino monastery, which for a long time was a center of theological education for the Western Church. The monastery possessed a remarkable library. Saint Benedict wrote his Rule, based on the experience of life of the Eastern desert-dwellers and the precepts of Saint John Cassian the Roman.

The Rule of Saint Benedict dominated Western monasticism for centuries (by the year 1595 it had appeared in more than 100 editions). The Rule prescribed the renunciation of personal possessions, as well as unconditional obedience, and constant work. It was considered the duty of older monks to teach the younger and to copy ancient manuscripts. This helped to preserve many memorable writings from the first centuries of Christianity.

Every new monk was required to live as a novice for a year, to learn the monastic Rule and to become acclimated to monastic life. Every deed required a blessing. The head of this cenobitic* monastery is the igumen. He discerns, teaches, and explains. The igumen solicits the advice of the older, experienced brethren, but he makes the final decisions. Keeping the monastic Rule was strictly binding for everyone and was regarded as an important step on the way to perfection.

Saint Benedict was granted by the Lord the gift of foresight and wonderworking. He healed many by his prayers. The monk foretold the day of his death in 547. The main source for his Life is the second Dialogue of Saint Gregory. Saint Benedict's sister, Saint Scholastica, also became famous for her strict ascetic life and was numbered among the saints.

* *Skete* – a small monastic village consisting of a central church surrounded by cells

* *Igumen* – the leader of the monastery

* *Cenobitic*, literally, “of a common life,” a monastic community of shared life

Friday, March 16

Read Genesis 12:1-7.

Look at the icon. What is the name of the man there? His name is Abraham. Note that the man in the reading – Abram – is the same as Abraham in the icon; his name was later changed by God. Ask: Who is Abram’s wife? Her name is Sarai. But explain: Sarai’s name would also later be changed by God to Sarah.

What was the first major change that took place in Abram and Sarai’s life by God’s direction? God told Abram to leave his country and family to go to a land God was going to show him. Ask: What did Abram do when he heard God’s command? Abram immediately obeyed God and left his country and family. What promise did God give Abram? He promised to make him a great nation and that through him all the tribes of the earth would be blessed, and he was already 75 years old at the time.

Note: Abram’s nephew Lot went with Abram and Sarai along with all their possessions and servants. Where did Abram go? He went to Canaan, the land which would later become Israel. The Lord “appeared to Abram” and spoke to him (12:7). God promised to give Abram and his descendants the land. What was Abram’s response to God’s appearance and promise? Abram, like Noah after the Flood, built an altar and worshiped God.

St. Paul later called Abraham “the father of us all” (Romans 4:16). God calls all Christians to leave everything and follow Him in Christ to the Kingdom of God. Like Abram, we simply trust the word and promises of God.



Read the life of the Martyr Sabinas of Egypt:

The Holy Martyr Sabinus was administrator of the Egyptian city of Hermopolis. During a persecution of Christians under the emperor Diocletian (284-305), Saint Sabinus and some like-minded companions hid in a remote village.

His hiding place was revealed by a certain ungrateful beggar who had brought him food. The saint used to feed him and help him with money, but the man betrayed him for two pieces of gold. Sabinus was seized with six other Christians, and after torture they were all drowned in the Nile in 287.



Monday, March 19

Read Genesis 13:12-18.

Compare the two maps. The top map shows Hebron and Sodom, the two places Abram and his nephew Lot settled respectively. The bottom map shows the elevation of the land of Canaan in which was Hebron and the plain just south of the Dead Sea where Sodom was. The side elevation view of the Promised Land by the bottom map shows that the Dead Sea is actually below sea level; in fact, the Dead, or Salt, Sea is the lowest land on earth relative to sea level.

At the time, the plain by the Dead Sea was very fertile. The hill country of Hebron was dry and very difficult to farm. The reason Abram lived at Hebron is by agreement with his nephew Lot because they both had many herds and possessions and the land could not support both of their families. Abram gave the choice to Lot, to settle where he wanted, and Abram would settle the opposite direction. Lot chose the best looking land next to Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 13:1-11).

Ask: Even though the land around Sodom was good, what was wrong with living there? The people there were very evil; living and interacting with evil people tends to corrupt the good. Lot was subjecting himself and his family to many temptations by living there, even though the land itself was materially prosperous.

Abram shows us the better way. Even though the land was less desirable, God blessed him and gave him the land with His promise. And once again, Abram built an altar to God and never stopped worshiping Him and following His word.

Read the life of the Holy Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria:

Today we honor the Holy Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria and with them the Martyrs Claudius the Tribune with his wife Hilaria and their sons Jason and Maurus, and Diodorus the Presbyter and Marianus the Deacon.

Saint Chrysanthus came from a pagan family who had moved to Rome from Alexandria. He received a fine education, and among the books he read were those in which pagans discussed Christianity. The young man, however, wanted to read books written by Christians themselves. He finally managed to find a copy of the New Testament, which enlightened his rational soul.

Seeking someone to instruct him in the Holy Scriptures, he found the presbyter Carpophoros hiding from persecution, and received holy Baptism from him. After this, he began to preach the Gospel. Chrysanthus' father tried to turn his son from Christianity, and finally married him to Daria, a priestess of Minerva.

Saint Chrysanthus managed to convert his wife to Christ, and the young couple mutually agreed to lead celibate lives. After the death of the father, they began to live in separate houses. Saint Chrysanthus converted several young men to Christ, and many pious women gathered around Saint Daria.

The people of Rome complained to the eparch Celerinus that Saints Chrysanthus and Daria were preaching celibacy and attracting too many young men and women to monasticism. Saint Chrysanthus was sent to the tribune Claudius for torture.

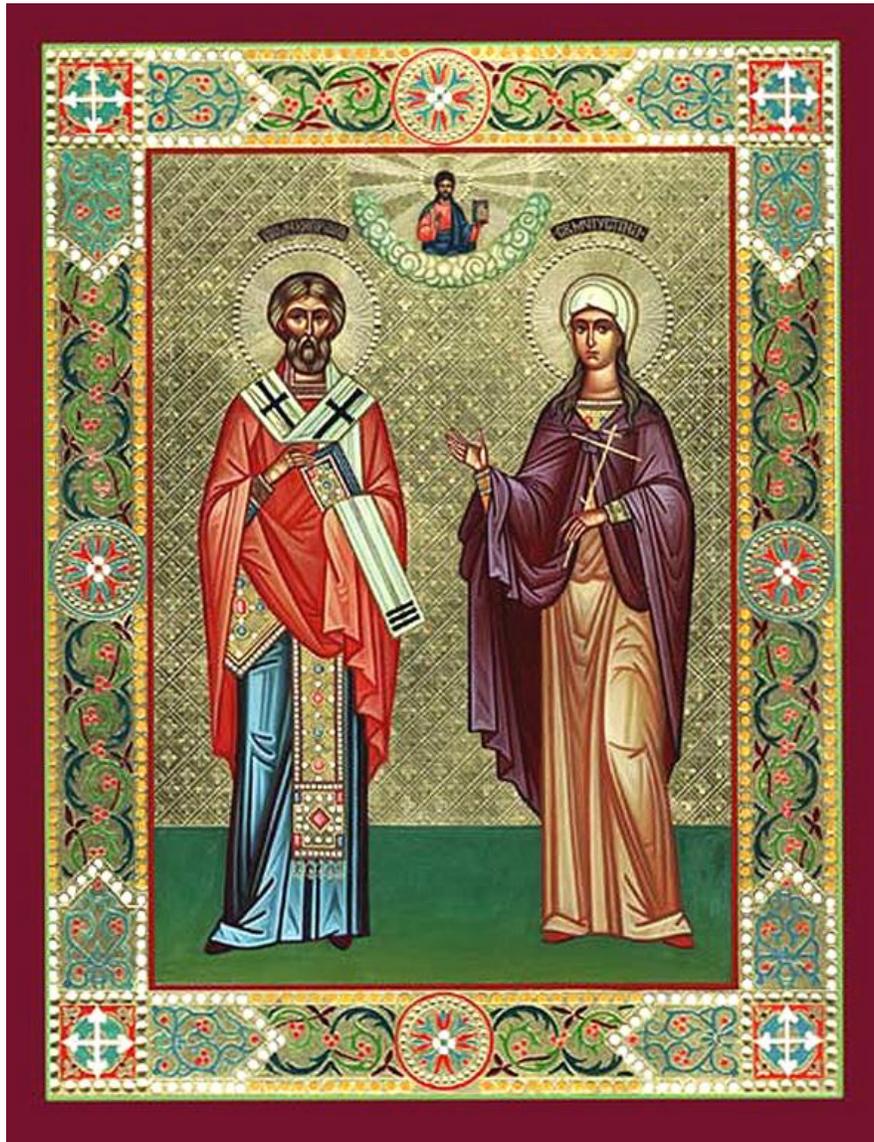
The torments, however, did not shake the bravery of the young martyr, since the power of God clearly aided him. Struck by this, the tribune Claudius himself came to believe in Christ and accepted holy Baptism together with his wife Hilaria, their sons Jason and Maurus, and all his household and soldiers. When news of this reached the emperor Numerian (283-284), he commanded them all to be executed. The Martyr Claudius was drowned in the sea, and his sons and soldiers were beheaded. Christians buried the bodies of the holy martyrs in a nearby cave, and Saint Hilaria constantly went there to pray. Once, they followed her and led her off for torture. The saint asked that they give her a few moments to pray, and as soon as she finished, she gave up her soul to God. A servant buried the saint in the cave beside her sons.

The torturers sent Saint Daria to a brothel, where she was protected by a lion sent by God. A certain man who tried to defile the saint was knocked to the ground and pinned down by the lion, but the lion did not kill him. The martyr preached to them about Christ and set them to the path of salvation.

They threw Saint Chrysanthus into a foul-smelling pit, into which all the sewage of the city flowed. But a heavenly light shone on him, and the pit was filled with a sweet fragrance. Then the emperor Numerian ordered Saints Chrysanthus and Daria to be turned over to the executioners. After many cruel tortures, the martyrs were buried alive in the ground.

In a cave near the place of execution, Christians began to gather to honor the anniversary of the saints' martyrdom. They celebrated Church services and partook of the Holy Mysteries. Learning of this, the pagan authorities sealed the entrance to the cave, and those within received the crown of martyrdom.

Two of these martyrs are known by name: the Presbyter Diodorus and the Deacon Marianus.



Wednesday, March 21

Read Genesis 17:1-9.

Look at the icon and notice the names of Abraham and Sarah. These are new names given by God. Ask: What were their previous names? They were originally called Abram and Sarai. Explain: Both Sarai and Sarah can mean “princess,” although Sarah can also be derived from a word meaning “she who strives.” Abram means “exalted father,” whereas Abraham means “father of many.”

Compare Genesis 17:1 with Genesis 12:4. How many years had elapsed from Abram’s journey to Canaan to his renaming as Abraham? Almost 25 years had elapsed. Importantly, God gave Abram the new name Abraham in conjunction with the establishment of His covenant with Abraham. Ask: What was required of Abraham in this covenant? Abraham was required to “keep [God’s] covenant” (v. 9), to “be pleasing before [God] and blameless” (v.1). Also ask: What did God promise to do according to His covenant with Abraham? God promised to multiply Abraham’s descendants and give them the land of Canaan in which he lived.

The matter of a covenant is essential to our faith. The covenant is the relationship we have with God and each other because of God. The covenant initiated by God is then dependent on mutual agreement to keep working properly. God gives His life, and we strive to live in accordance with God’s life. We have such a covenant given in our Baptism (when we received our Christian name); this covenant is nurtured and kept through Holy Communion, and we strive to live in repentance, faith, and love with God and one another.



Read the life of St. Jacob (James) the Confessor, Bishop of Catania:

Saint James, Bishop and Confessor, was inclined toward the ascetic life from his early years. Saint James left the world and entered the Studite monastery, where he was tonsured. He led a strict life, full of works, fasting and prayer. Pious and well-versed in Holy Scripture, Saint James was elevated to the bishop's throne of Catania (Sicily).

During the reign of the iconoclast* emperor Constantine V Copronymos (741-775), Saint James was repeatedly urged not to venerate the holy icons. They exhausted him in prison, starved him, and beat him, but he bravely endured all these torments. Saint James died in exile.

* *Iconoclast* – literally, one who breaks, or smashes, icons; during the 700's, the iconoclast movement, led by the emperor, sought to eliminate icons from the Orthodox Church.



Friday, March 23

Read Genesis 22:1-18.

Look at the icon and identify the following: Abraham, his son Isaac, the Angel of the Lord, and the ram caught in a thicket. Note that “God tested Abraham” (v. 1). Ask: What was the test, and why did God test Abraham?

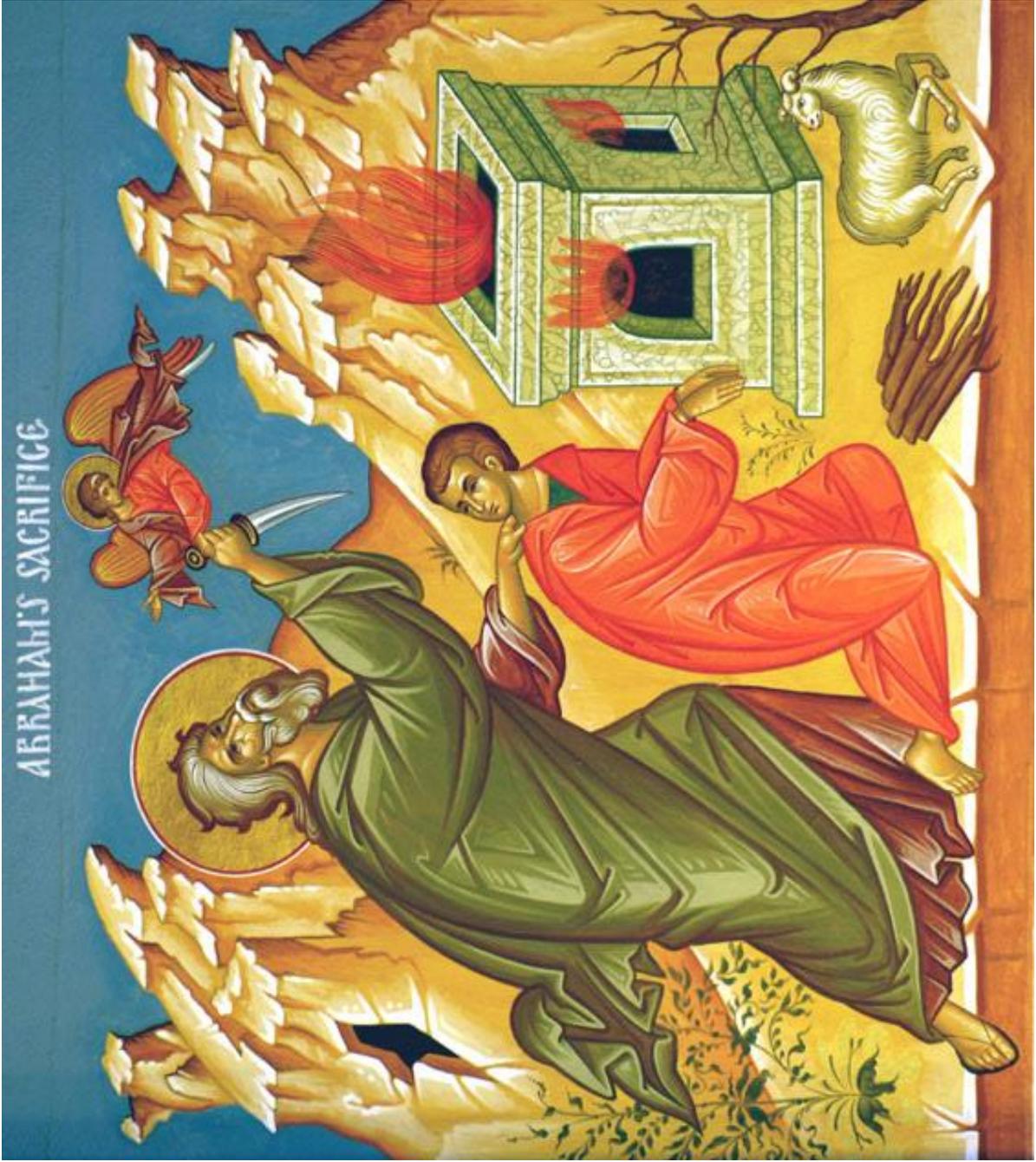
The test was one of obedience, whether or not Abraham would fear God and obey His command to sacrifice his son. The reason for the test was to prove Abraham faithful to God because God is gracious and loving. Explain: After the test, God repeated His promise to Abraham to bless him and multiply his seed, that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Point out that the word “seed” (singular) refers to one child, continuing the promise first made the Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15) that a child would be born to crush the power of the devil. This “seed” ultimately refers to the Savior Jesus Christ (see Galatians 3:16).

Isaac, Abraham’s son of promise born when Abraham was 100 years old, is an icon of Jesus Christ. Just as Abraham “did not spare [his] beloved son” Isaac (v. 16), so God did not spare His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to save the world by His death and resurrection (see John 3:16 and Romans 8:32).

We should be prepared to undergo a test for our faith as well, even to the point of death, knowing that God will grant us life. God wants to prove us genuine in our faith in Christ. No matter what happens, or what we are asked to do, God always loves us and gives the way out for our salvation.

АБРАХАМ'СЬКИЙ ЖЕРТВОПРИНОСЕННЯ



Read the life of the Martyr Nikon and 199 disciples:

The Monk Martyr Nikon was born at Neapolis (Naples). His father was a pagan, and his mother a Christian. He was not baptized, but his mother secretly instructed him in the tenets of Christianity. Nikon was still a pagan when he reached adulthood. He served as a soldier, and showed unusual courage and strength.

Once, Nikon and his military company were surrounded by enemies. In deadly peril, he remembered the Christian precepts of his mother and, signing himself with the Sign of the Cross, he prayed to God, vowing to be baptized if he were saved. Filled with unusual strength, he killed many of the enemy, and put the rest to flight.

He managed to return home, giving thanks to God for preserving his life. With the blessing of his mother, he set off in search of a priest. This was no easy thing to do in a time of persecution. Saint Nikon took a ship to the island of Chios. He went up on a high mountain and spent eight days in fasting and prayer, entreating the Lord to help him.

An angel of God appeared to Saint Nikon in a dream, showing him the way. Saint Nikon went to Mount Ganos, where many monks were hidden, headed by Theodosius the Bishop of Cyzicus. Saint Nikon received from the bishop both the mystery of Baptism and the angelic schema (i.e., monastic tonsure). Living in the cave church, Saint Nikon became an example for all the brethren.

When Saint Nikon had lived on the mountain for three years, an angel revealed to the bishop that Saint Nikon should be consecrated bishop, and should move to the province of Sicily with all the monks. Bishop Theodosius obeyed the angel, and then died after he had entrusted the 190 monks to Saint Nikon. After he buried Bishop Theodosius, Saint Nikon sailed to Sicily with the brethren, and so was saved from approaching barbarians.

By God's grace, Saint Nikon came to his native city Neapolis. He found his mother still alive, and he remained with her for the final day of her life. His mother collapsed on his chest with tears of joy and kissed him. Making a prostration to the ground, she said, "I give thanks to You, O Lord, for You have permitted me to see my son as a monk, and as a bishop. Now, my Lord, hear Your servant, and receive my soul." When she had finished this prayer, the righteous woman died. Those present glorified God and buried her with psalmody.

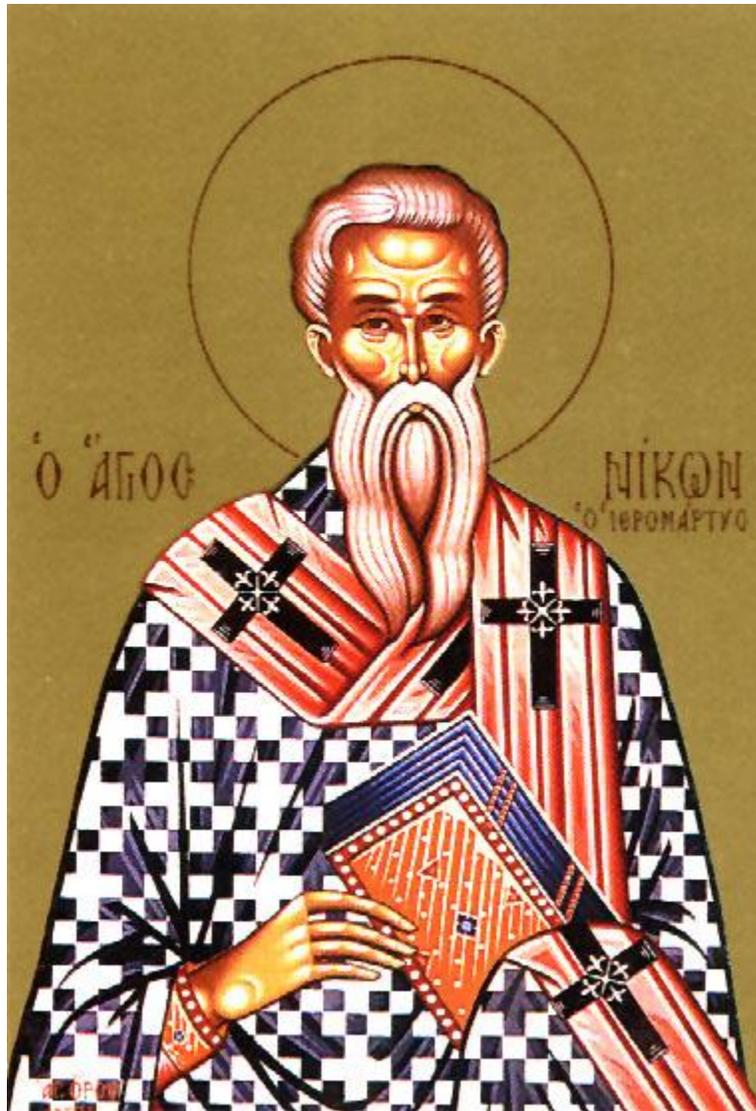
Rumors of Saint Nikon's arrival spread through the city, and ten soldiers, his former companions, came to see him. After conversing with the saint they believed and were baptized, and went with him to Sicily. Having arrived on the island, Saint Nikon settled with the monks in a desolate area, called Gigia, near the river Asinum.

Many years passed, and there was another persecution against Christians. Quintilian, the governor of Sicily, was informed that Bishop Nikon was living nearby with many monks. All 199 monks were seized and beheaded, but they left Saint Nikon alive in order to torture him.

They burned him with fire, yet he remained unharmed. They tied him to the tails of wild horses to be dragged over the ground, but the horses would not budge from the spot. They cut out the saint's tongue, threw him off a high cliff, and finally beheaded him. The body of the hieromartyr Nikon was left in a field to be eaten by wild beasts and birds.

A certain shepherd, possessed by an evil spirit, went to that place, and finding the body of the saint, he immediately fell to the ground on his face. The unclean spirit,

vanquished by the power of the saint, had thrown him to the ground and gone out from him with a loud shriek: “Woe is me, woe is me, where can I flee from Nikon?” The healed shepherd related this to the people. The bishop of the city of Messina also learned of this, then he and his clergy buried the bodies of Saint Nikon and his disciples.



Monday, March 26

Read Genesis 27:1-41.

Look at the icon. Isaac the father is in the middle; Esau is on the left, standing at Isaac's right, and Jacob is on the right, standing at Isaac's left. Jacob holds a ladder because he later had a dream of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven. Esau holds a sword because he was a hunter and threatened to kill Jacob. Not depicted in the icon is Isaac's wife, Rebekah, the mother of Esau and Jacob who were twin sons, though not identical twins.

First, note the family dynamics. Isaac favored his firstborn son Esau; Rebekah favored Jacob, conspiring with him to receive the blessing of the firstborn instead of Esau. Esau had already despised his inheritance as the firstborn and irritated his parents by marrying foreign, Hittite wives (see Genesis 25:27-33 and 26:34-35). Despite the trickery of Rebekah and Jacob ("Jacob" means both "grabber" and "tricker/deceiver"), Rebekah and Jacob desired the blessing of Isaac as a blessing from God, something about which Esau did not care and had already given to Jacob.

Second, note the reaction to what took place. Isaac accepted the results of what happened, that even done unknowingly, the blessing was given to the correct person, Jacob. Esau "hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him" (v. 41; see vv. 27-29). Esau felt slighted of material wealth and influence, and in retaliation decided to kill Jacob after the death of their father Isaac.

God's will was accomplished, and those who continue in disobedience to God (like Esau) will not inherit the blessing.



Read of the Holy Archangel Gabriel:

Synaxis of the Holy Archangel Gabriel: The Archangel Gabriel was chosen by the Lord to announce to the Virgin Mary about the Incarnation of the Son of God from Her, to the great rejoicing of all mankind. Therefore, on the day after the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25), the day on which the All-Pure Virgin is glorified, we give thanks to the Lord and we venerate His messenger Gabriel, who contributed to the mystery of our salvation.

Gabriel, the holy Archistrategos (Leader of the Heavenly Hosts), is a faithful servant of the Almighty God. He announced the future Incarnation of the Son of God to those of the Old Testament; he inspired the Prophet Moses to write the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament), he announced the coming tribulations of the Chosen People to the Prophet Daniel (Dan. 8:16, 9:21-24); he appeared to Saint Anna, wife of Saint Joachim, with the news that she would give birth to the Virgin Mary.

The holy Archangel Gabriel remained with the Holy Virgin Mary when she was a child in the Temple of Jerusalem, and watched over Her throughout Her earthly life. He appeared to the Priest Zachariah, foretelling the birth of the Forerunner of the Lord, Saint John the Baptist.

The Lord sent him to Saint Joseph the Betrothed in a dream, to reveal to him the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God from the All-Pure Virgin Mary, and warned him of the wicked intentions of Herod, ordering him to flee into Egypt with the divine Infant and His Mother.

When the Lord prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before His Passion, the Archangel Gabriel, whose very name signifies “Man of God” (Luke. 22:43), was sent from Heaven to strengthen Him. The Myrrh-Bearing Women heard from the Archangel the joyous news of Christ’s Resurrection (Mt.28:1-7, Mark 16:1-8).

Mindful of the manifold appearances of the holy Archangel Gabriel and of his zealous fulfilling of God’s will, and confessing his intercession for Christians before the Lord, the Orthodox Church calls upon its children to pray to the great Archangel with faith and love.



W ednesday, March 28

Read Genesis 43:26-31; 45:1-16.

Look at the icons. The one on the left is Joseph's brothers putting him into a pit before selling him into slavery (see Genesis 37:12f.). As a 17 year-old slave (Genesis 37:2), Joseph was taken to Egypt where he eventually became a ruler at 30 years of age (Genesis 41:46), second only to the Pharaoh (king). The icon on the right is Joseph, the ruler of Egypt.

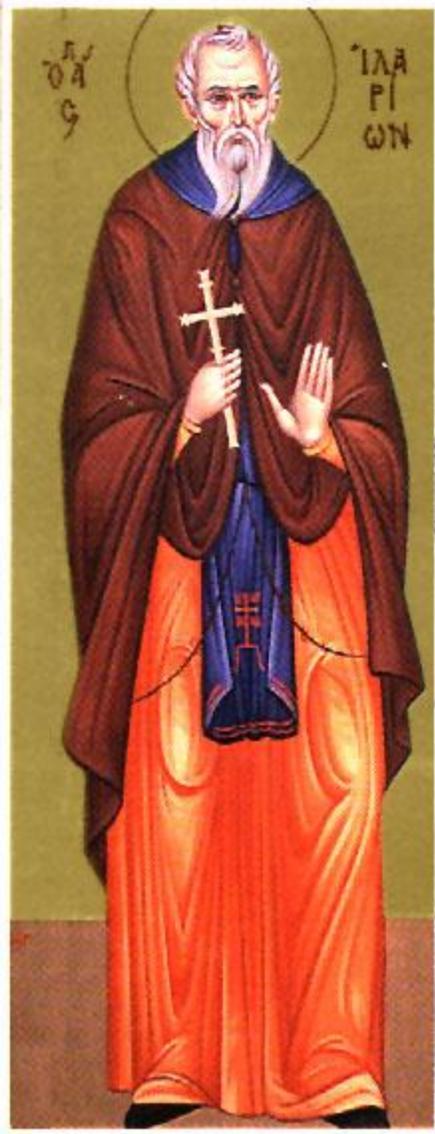
The events in today's reading took place about 8 or 9 years after Joseph had become ruler in Egypt (compare Genesis 41:34-36 and 45:6), when Joseph was almost 40 years old. Joseph and his brothers had not seen each other in over 20 years. Also, note that Benjamin, "his mother's son" (43:29), was Joseph's only brother with the same mother, Rachel; Benjamin was the youngest of all of Jacob's 12 sons.

Point out Joseph's faithfulness to God above everything else. "God sent me before you to save life...to preserve you as a remnant on the earth, and to sustain you as a great remnant" (45:5, 7). Joseph does not hold a grudge against his brothers who wanted him dead; rather, Joseph still loves them and his father, Jacob, and only wants the best for them according to God's promise.

Why does God bring about good for us, spare us from death, and give His abundant blessings? God does these things to give glory to God in saving us from sin and death. We do not live for our own benefit. We live to love others with the same love God shows us in His Son Jesus Christ, of whom Joseph is an icon and example.



Read the life of the Venerable Hilarion the New:



Saint Hilarion the New, Igumen of Pelekete Monastery, from his youth devoted himself to the service of God and spent many years as a hermit. Because of his holy and blameless life he was ordained to the holy priesthood, and later he was made igumen of the Pelekete monastery (near the Dardanelles, between the Aegean and Black Seas). Saint Hilarion was granted gifts of clairvoyance* and wonderworking by the Lord.

Through prayer he brought down rain during a drought, and like the Prophet Elisha he separated the waters of a river, he drove harmful beasts from the fields, he filled the nets of fishermen when they had no success in fishing, and he did many other miracles. In addition to these things, he was able to heal the sick and cast out demons.

Saint Hilarion suffered on Great and Holy Thursday in the year 754, when the military commander Lakhanodrakon suddenly descended upon the Pelekete monastery in pursuit of icon-venerators, boldly forcing his way into the church, disrupting the service and throwing the Holy Gifts upon the ground. Forty-two monks were arrested, slapped into chains, sent to the Edessa district and murdered. The remaining monks were horribly mutilated: they beat them, they burned their beards with fire, they smeared their faces with tar and cut off the noses of some of the confessors. Saint Hilarion died for the veneration of icons during this persecution.

Saint Hilarion left behind spiritual works containing moral directives for spiritual effort. Saint Joseph of Volokolamsk was well acquainted with the

work of Saint Hilarion, and he also wrote about the significance of monastic struggles in his own theological works.

* *Clairvoyance* (lit., “clear-seeing”) is the ability to perceive spiritual matters beyond the ordinary physical appearance of things.

Friday, March 30

Read Genesis 49:33-50:26.

Look at the icon. The three older men are Abraham (center), his son Isaac (right), and Isaac's son Jacob (left). The twelve younger boys are the 12 sons of Jacob.

The reading today describes the funeral of Jacob. Ask: Where was he buried? He was buried in his family tomb next to his father and mother, Isaac and Rebekah, and his grandfather and grandmother, Abraham and Sarah, "in the land of Canaan...in the cave of the field of Machpelah, opposite Mamre" (50:13). This cave was purchased by Abraham. Note: According to Joseph's directions, his remains were to be taken from Egypt and buried in the land of Canaan when the Israelites inherited the Promised Land (50:25), in the plot of land at Shechem purchased by his father Jacob (see Exodus 13:19 and Joshua 24:33).

Ask: Why did Abraham and his family take care to have a place of burial for themselves in the land promised to them? They believed in life after death. They believed in the resurrection. They believed God had a plan for their lives greater than just earthly life. The life of paradise lost to Adam and Eve because of their sin could be regained by God's faithful who hoped in God's promises of eternal life.

Point out the plan of God spoken by Joseph to his brothers (50:19-21). Evil exists in the world, and people oftentimes intend evil for each other, but God is still able to work His good plan to save people from sin and death. We witness this especially in the crucifixion of Christ, who submitted to die in order to rise and destroy the power of evil for all who believe.



Read the life of Saint John of Sinai, “of the Ladder” (Gk., Klimakos):

Saint John of the Ladder is honored by Holy Church as a great ascetic and author of the renowned spiritual book called THE LADDER, from which he is also called “of the Ladder” (Gk., *Klimakos*). There is almost no information about Saint John’s origins. One tradition suggests that he was born in Constantinople around the year 570, and was the son of Saints Xenophon and Maria.

John went to Sinai when he was sixteen, submitting to Abba Martyrius as his instructor and guide. After four years, Saint John was tonsured as a monk. Abba Strategios, who was present at Saint John’s tonsure, predicted that he would become a great luminary in the Church of Christ.

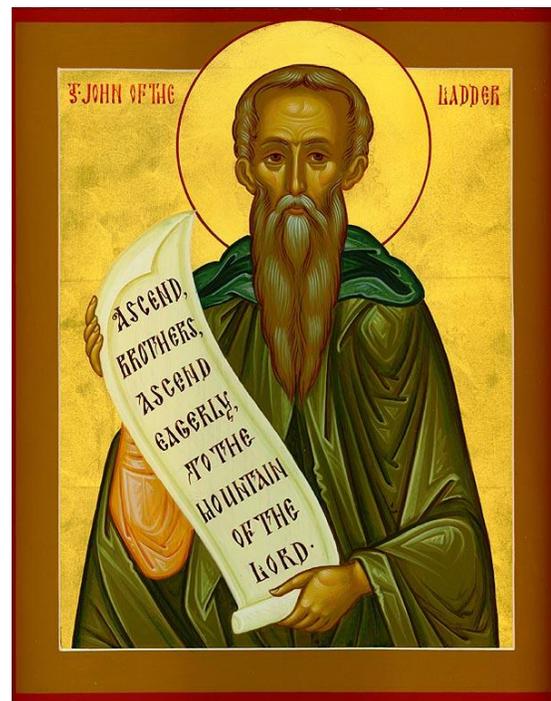
For nineteen years Saint John progressed in monasticism in obedience to his spiritual Father. After the death of Abba Martyrius, Saint John embarked on a solitary life, settling in a wild place called Thola, where he spent forty years laboring in silence, fasting, prayer, and tears of penitence.

It is not by chance that in THE LADDER Saint John speaks about tears of repentance: “Just as fire burns and destroys the wood, so pure tears wash away every impurity, both external and internal.” His holy prayer was strong and efficacious, as may be seen from an example from the life of the God-pleasing saint.

Saint John had a disciple named Moses. Once, the saint ordered his disciple to bring dung to fertilize the vegetable garden. When he had fulfilled the obedience, Moses lay down to rest under the shade of a large rock, because of the scorching heat of summer. Saint John was in his cell in a light sleep. Suddenly, a man of remarkable appearance appeared to him and awakened the holy ascetic, reproaching him, “John, why do you sleep so heedlessly, when Moses is in danger?”

Saint John immediately woke up and began to pray for his disciple. When Moses returned in the evening, Saint John asked whether any sort of misfortune had befallen him. The monk replied, “A large rock would have fallen on me as I slept beneath it at noon, but I left that place because I thought I heard you calling me.” Saint John did not tell his disciple of his vision, but gave thanks to God.

Saint John ate the food which is permitted by the monastic rule, but only in moderation. He did not sleep very much, only enough to keep up his strength, so that he would not ruin his mind by unceasing vigil. “I do not fast excessively,” he said of himself, “nor do I give myself over to intense all-night vigil, nor lay upon the ground, but I restrain myself..., and the Lord soon saved me.”



The following example of Saint John's humility is noteworthy. Gifted with discernment, and attaining wisdom through spiritual experience, he lovingly received all who came to him and guided them to salvation. One day some envious monks reproached him for being too talkative, and so Saint John kept silence for a whole year. The monks realized their error, and they went to the ascetic and begged him not to deprive them of the spiritual profit of his conversation.

Concealing his ascetic deeds from others, Saint John sometimes withdrew into a cave, but reports of his holiness spread far beyond the vicinity. Visitors from all walks of life came to him, desiring to hear his words of edification and salvation. After forty years of solitary asceticism, he was chosen as igumen of Sinai when he was seventy-five. Saint John governed the holy monastery for four years. Toward the end of his life, the Lord granted him the gifts of clairvoyance and wonderworking.

At the request of Saint John, igumen of the Raithu monastery (commemorated on Cheesefare Saturday), he wrote the incomparable LADDER, a book of instruction for monks who wished to attain spiritual perfection.

Knowing of the wisdom and spiritual gifts of Saint John of Sinai, the igumen of Raithu requested him to write down whatever was necessary for the salvation of those in the monastic life. Such a book would be "a ladder fixed on the earth" (Gen. 28:12), leading people to the gates of Heaven.

