

God is Wonderful in His Saints

Orthodox Saints commemorated in February

FEBRUARY 1

Forefeast of the Meeting of the Lord

Holy Martyr Tryphon (250)

He was the son of humble, pious parents in Phrygia, and as supported himself keeping geese. At a very early age he was granted the gift of healing illnesses of man and animals, and driving out unclean spirits.

The daughter of the Emperor Gordian (238-244) was possessed by a demon, which no physician or pagan sorcerer had been able to drive away. One day the demon shouted, 'Only Tryphon is able to drive me out!' Gordian sent servants to scour the Empire in search of the unknown healer; eventually their inquiries led them to the teen-aged goose-keeper, and they brought him to Rome, where his prayers immediately drove out the demon. The Emperor showered Tryphon with gifts, which he gave away to the poor on his journey homeward.

When the persecution of Christians under Decius (250) broke out, Tryphon, was denounced to the regional government as a dangerous promoter of Christianity (though he had continued to live as a humble peasant, his miracles and healings had made him known). His former service to the Emperor was either forgotten or of no account to the governor, who had him viciously tortured, then sent to Nicaea for further interrogation. There, when no torment would persuade him to deny Christ or worship the idols, he was beheaded outside the city gates. His relics were returned to Lampsacus, near his home, where he continued to work many miracles of healing.

Saint Tryphon is especially invoked for the protection of gardens and farmland against locusts, reptiles (what reptile hurts gardens?) and all small pests.

Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicity, and those with them at Carthage (203)

Perpetua, Felicity, Saturus, Saturninus, Secundus and Revocatus were all young catechumens living near Carthage.

Perpetua was of noble birth; Felicity (Felicitas) was her slave. All were arrested under Emperor Valerian's persecution and sent to Carthage. Perpetua had a young child still at the breast, which she asked to take with her.

The holy martyrs appeared before the tribunal and joyfully received their sentence of condemnation to be thrown to the wild beasts in the arena. Felicity, who was eight months pregnant, was concerned that her martyrdom might be postponed because of her pregnancy, but at the prayers of her friends, she went into labor three days before the games. As she groaned in labor, a jailer mocked her, telling her that the pain she felt was nothing to the pain that she would feel in the arena. The Saint replied, 'Here I suffer for myself; then there will be Another with me, who will suffer with me; and my sufferings will be for Him!' When she gave birth, she entrusted her newborn child to the care of a Christian couple and prepared for her end.

On the day of the games, the brothers and sisters in Christ entered the arena together. The men were soon killed by the beasts, but Perpetua and Felicity, though mauled, remained alive. The impatient persecutors ordered that they be beheaded. Walking to the center of the arena, the two spiritual sisters exchanged the kiss of peace and gave up their souls to God.

Our Holy Mother Brigid of Kildare (524)

Her name is also spelled Brigit or Bridget; she is considered, equally with St Patrick (March 17), patroness of Ireland. She was born in Ulster of a noble Irish family which had been converted by St Patrick. She was uncommonly beautiful, and her father planned to marry her to the King of Ulster. But at the age of sixteen she asked her Lord Jesus Christ to make her unattractive, so that no one would marry her and she could devote herself to Him alone. Soon she lost an eye and was allowed to enter a monastery. On the day that she took monastic vows, she was miraculously healed and her original beauty restored.

Near Dublin she built herself a cell under an oak tree, which was called Kill-dara, or Cell of the Oak. Soon seven other young women joined her and established the monastery of Kill-dara, which in time became the cathedral city of Kildare. The monastery grew rapidly and became a double monastery with both men's and women's settlements, with the Abbess ranking above the Abbot; from it several other monasteries were planted throughout Ireland. (Combined men's and women's monastic communities are virtually unknown in the east, but were common in the golden age of the Irish Church).

The Saint predicted the day of her death and fell asleep in peace in 524, leaving a monastic Rule to govern all the monasteries under her care. During the Middle Ages her veneration spread throughout Europe.

FEBRUARY 2

† The Meeting of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

When the ever-virgin Mary's forty days of purification were passed, according to the Law of Moses she took her son Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem, to dedicate him to God as her first-born son. At the temple the Lord's parents offered the sacrifice of a pair of doves (Luke 2:22-23), from which we learn that they were poor, since those who were able were required to offer a lamb. At the Temple, the Lord was met by Zacharias, father of St John the Baptist, and by the aged, righteous Symeon, who had awaited the salvation of God for many years. (Sts Symeon and Anna are commemorated tomorrow.) We are told that some Pharisees, seeing the child Jesus recognized as the Messiah of Israel, were enraged, and went to tell King Herod. Realizing that this must be the child of whom he had been warned, Herod immediately sent soldiers to kill Him. But the righteous Joseph, warned in dream, fled with the child and his wife, the most holy Theotokos, into Egypt, and they were preserved.

The Feast of the Meeting of the Lord was observed in Jerusalem at least from the fourth century. Its observance was brought to Constantinople by the Emperor Justinian in 542. In the West it is called the Feast of the Purification of the Mother of God, or Candlemas Day.

FEBRUARY 3

Holy and Righteous Symeon the God-receiver and the Prophetess Anna

"There is an ancient tradition that the holy, righteous elder Symeon, who came from Egypt, was one of the Seventy learned Jews chosen in the days of the Pharaoh Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 BC) for the task of rendering the Hebrew Bible into Greek, and that to Symeon was assigned the translation of the book of the Prophet Isaiah. When he reached the famous passage where the Prophet foretells the virgin birth of Christ, saying: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, shall call his name Immanuel (Is. 7:14), he was so perplexed that he took a penknife to erase the word 'virgin' in order to replace it by 'young woman'. At that moment, an angel of God appeared and prevented him from altering the sacred text, explaining that what seemed impossible to him was, in fact, a prophecy of the coming into this world of the Son of God. To confirm the truth of this, he promised that Symeon would not see death until he had seen and touched the Messiah born of the Virgin. When, after many long years, Christ was brought into the Temple at Jerusalem by the All-Holy Mother of God, the Holy Spirit revealed to the Elder Symeon that the time of fulfilment of the promise had come. He hurried to the Temple and, taking the Child in his arms, he was able to say wholeheartedly to God: Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation (Luke 2:29). For indeed, the Elder Symeon was the living image of the ancient Israel of the Old Testament, which having awaited the coming of the Messiah was ready to fade away and give place to the light and truth of the Gospel. The relics of the holy and righteous Symeon were venerated at Constantinople in the church of St James, built at the time of the Emperor Justin.

"The prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, was eighty-four years old. Since the early death of her husband, she had spent her whole life in the Temple in hope of the coming of the Saviour. She is the pattern for holy widows, virgins and monks, who have freed themselves of worldly cares in order to dwell always in the Temple, offering their fasts, hymns and prayers in eager expectation of the Lord's coming. And when, like Anna and Symeon, they have seen the indwelling Christ with the eyes of their heart and touched Him through their spiritual senses, they proclaim with joy and assurance to all mankind that the Saviour is still coming into the world: A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of His people (Luke 2:32)." (*Synaxarion*)

The *Synaxarion* notes that the tradition that St Symeon was one of the Seventy is by no means universal among the Fathers. According to some, Symeon was the son of Hillel and father of Gamaliel, St Paul's teacher. According to others, he was a righteous and devout Jew aged 112, neither a priest nor a Pharisee.

Our Father among the Saints, Nikolai (Nicholas), Archbishop and Enlightener of Japan (1912)

Born in Russia in 1836, he became one of the great Orthodox missionaries of modern times. As a boy, he resolved to become a missionary in the far East. With the counsel and blessing of Bishop Innocent of Siberia and Alaska, he went to Japan in 1861 and joined a small Russian mission there. Though the mission's official purpose was to minister to the Russian consular community, the consul-general who invited Hieromonk Nikolai hoped to bring the light of the Orthodox Faith to the Japanese people as well. Realizing that he could only hope to convert the Japanese people if they understood one another well, Fr Nikolai immersed himself in the study of Japanese thought, culture and language. Over the course of his life he translated most of the Bible and most of the Orthodox services into Japanese, and became a fluent speaker of the language. He encountered much resistance: Preaching of Christian doctrine was officially banned in Japan, and a Samurai once approached him with the words "Foreigners must die!" It was this same Samurai who later became his first Japanese priest. In 1880 he was elevated to Bishop of Japan. During the Russo-Japanese war he remained in Japan and labored

successfully to overcome nationalist strife that might have harmed or destroyed the Church in Japan. He encouraged all Japanese faithful to pray for the Japanese armed forces, though he explained that as a Russian he could not do so, and excluded himself from all public services for the duration of the war. He sent Russian-speaking Japanese priests to the prison camps to minister to Russian prisoners of war. At the time of his repose in 1912, after forty-eight years in Japan, St Nikolai left a Cathedral, eight churches, more than 400 chapels and meeting houses, 34 priests, 8 deacons, 115 lay catechists, and 34,110 Orthodox faithful. The Church of Japan is now an autonomous Orthodox Church under the care of the Moscow Patriarchate.

FEBRUARY 4

St Isidore of Pelusium, monk (440-449)

He was born to a noble family in Alexandria. For a short time he taught rhetoric in Pelusium in Egypt; but soon his love for the things of God led him to flee to the Desert as a solitary. After a year of ascetical life, he returned to Pelusium, where he was ordained to the priesthood. After a few years he retired to a monastery where he spent the rest of his life, eventually becoming Abbot. From the monastery he wrote thousands of epistles full of divine grace and wisdom; of these more than two thousand still survive.

Saint Isidore was a student and devout disciple of St John Chrysostom, as he knew him through his writings. When St Cyril became Patriarch of Alexandria, he refused to commemorate St John in the diptychs during the Divine Liturgy. Saint Isidore wrote him a strong letter reminding him not to heed the rumors, prejudices or threats of men, and St Cyril was persuaded to restore commemoration of the Archbishop of Constantinople, and later became a strong advocate of the veneration of St John. Isidore, though a monk, was treated as a spiritual father by Patriarch Cyril: around 433, when St Cyril was inclined to deal harshly with some who had been swept up in the Nestorian heresy, St Isidore wrote to him: 'As your father, since you are pleased to give me this name, or rather as your son, I adjure you to put an end to this dissension lest a permanent breach be made under the pretext of piety.'

With reputation came persecution, and St Isidore suffered much from Imperial and church authorities unhappy with his holy influence. He bore all these troubles impassibly, and in 440 (according to one source) or about 449 (according to another) he joyfully gave up his soul to God.

Venerable Cyril of New Lake (Novoezerek) (1532)

When he was only fifteen, St Cyril left home in secret to join the Monastery of St Cornelius of Komel (May 19). Seven years later his father visited the monastery and recognized his son. Instead of persuading Cyril to return to the world, the father was persuaded by his son to enter monastic life; his mother soon joined them, entering a convent nearby. Within the next few years, St Cyril's mother and father both died, prompting him to exclaim 'I too am mortal!' He redoubled his ascetical labors and before long was granted the gift of tears in prayer. Ten years after entering the monastery, St Cyril obtained his abbot's blessing to live the life of a hermit. He lived in complete reclusion, subsisting on wild greens and mushrooms. After seven years of solitude, he built a hermitage at New Lake and established two churches there. Soon he was ordained to the priesthood. His sanctity attracted a large company of disciples, and he founded a large monastery. There he continued to live in the strictest asceticism and shared in all the common labor of the monks. Once some thieves tried to steal the church bells, but by divine intervention became disoriented and circled the monastery in the dark until morning. When they were apprehended and brought to the Saint, he told them, 'My children, no one has ever been enriched by stealing, but many have lost even what belonged to them.' He then ordered that they be given food and released.

During his lifetime the Saint wrought many healings, and was especially known for restoring the sight of the blind. Once his disciple Athanasius saw an unknown deacon serving with St Cyril at the Liturgy. The mysterious deacon disappeared at the end of the service, and St Cyril forbade his disciple to speak of the incident until after his death. In 1532 the Saint reposed in peace: his last words were 'Glory to God for all things!'

FEBRUARY 5

Holy Martyr Agatha of Palermo in Sicily (251)

She is one of the best loved and most venerated Martyrs of the West. She was born to a noble family in Catania or Palermo in Sicily. At an early age she consecrated herself to the Lord and, though very beautiful, sought only to adorn herself with the virtues. During the persecution under Decius (251), she was arrested as a Christian; at this time she was about fifteen years old. Quintinian, the Governor of Sicily, was taken by her beauty and offered to marry her, thinking in that way not only to possess her body but her riches as well. When she spurned his advances, and continued to mock the idols, he grew angry and decided to have her tortured. She was gruesomely tormented and cast bleeding into a dungeon to die; but in the night her Guardian Angel brought the Apostle Peter to her, and he healed her wounds. The following day, the Governor

ordered that she be subjected to further torments, but at his words the city was shaken by an earthquake and part of the palace collapsed. The terrified people stormed the palace and demanded that Agatha be released, lest they be subject to the wrath of her God. The Saint was returned to her prison cell, where in response to her prayers she was allowed to give up her soul to God.

At Agatha's burial, attended by many, her Guardian Angel appeared and placed a marble slab on her tomb, inscribed with the words 'A righteous mind, self-determining, honor from God, the deliverance of her fatherland.' Quintinian died soon thereafter, thrown from his chariot.

On the first anniversary of Agatha's death, Mt Etna erupted and Catania was about to be engulfed in lava. Christians and pagans together, remembering the inscription on her tomb, took the slab from the tomb and bore it like a shield to the river of lava, which was immediately stopped. The same miracle has happened many times in the following centuries, and Saint Agatha is venerated as the Protectress of Catania and Sicily, loved and honored by Christians of the East and the West.

Our Holy Father Polyeuctus, Patriarch of Constantinople (970)

Born in Constantinople, he was made a eunuch in childhood by his parents, who hoped that he would go into the Byzantine civil service. But he became a monk, and so distinguished himself for his holiness and learning that in 956 he was made Patriarch of Constantinople by the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos. In his own day he was called 'the Second Chrysostom' for the power of his preaching and his zeal for the Orthodox faith.

In 957, St Polyeuctus baptized the Russian princess St Olga (July 11) in Constantinople; at her baptism, he spoke these prophetic words: 'Blessed are you among all the women of Russia, for you have rejected darkness and desired the light. Moreover, the children of the Russian land will bless you in every generation.' He fell asleep in peace in 970.

Holy New Martyr Antony of Athens (1774)

'Saint Antony was the son of poor Christians from Athens. In order to help his parents, he entered the service of an Albanian Muslim at the age of twelve. In 1770, during the repression which followed the Greek rising in the Peloponnese, his masters sold him to some Turks, who tried in vain to convert him. He was then sold to a succession of five harsh, fanatical masters, but he remained unshaken in the Faith, and was bought at last by a Christian coppersmith in Constantinople. Having been warned one night in a dream that he would receive God's help to obtain the glory of martyrdom, he was recognized next day in the street by one of his former masters, who began shouting to the passers-by that the young Christian was his runaway slave and an apostate from Islam. Antony was dragged to the court amid much commotion. He confessed that he was willing to die a thousand deaths for the love of Christ. "You would become a Christian more easily than you could make me deny my Christ," he told the judge. Unable to persuade the Saint to feign conversion in order to save his life and under pressure from false witnesses, the judge reluctantly committed him to prison. Antony consoled the other Christian prisoners, gave away what little money he had to the poor, and wrote to thank his master for all his kindnesses and through him asked the forgiveness of all Christians and besought the prayers of the Church.

'As the vizir delayed passing sentence, the Saint's accusers made a complaint to the Sultan Abdul Hamid who, fearing a breach of the peace, ordered his immediate execution. The valiant sixteen-year-old went joyfully to the place of martyrdom. He offered his neck to the executioner, who struck him lightly three times to see if the pain would make him yield. Finding that he remained steady, he cut his throat like a slaughtered lamb.' (*Synaxarion*)

FEBRUARY 6

St Photios, patriarch of Constantinople (891)

St Photios, along with St Mark of Ephesus and St Gregory Palamas, is counted as one of the Three Pillars of Orthodoxy, who stood against Latinizing influences on the Orthodox Church.

He was born in Constantinople in 810, son of pious parents belonging to one of the prominent families of the City. Both his parents were martyred during the Iconoclast persecution, leaving their son an example of adherence to the True Faith even unto death. He received a superb education, and was widely considered the single most learned person of his time. He was elevated to the Patriarchal throne in 858, after being raised through all the degrees of the priesthood in six days.

Throughout his Patriarchal reign he was troubled by the usual political battles and intrigues and, more importantly, by various threats to the Faith in the form of Manicheans and Iconoclasts.

Photios showed a special concern for the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world: it was he who commissioned Sts Cyril and Methodius to embark on their mission to the Slavs.

Most memorably, it was the Patriarch's lot to stand against the arrogant, uncanonical and heretical claims of Pope Nicholas I of Rome, who openly asserted for the first time the Pope's pretensions to universal jurisdiction over the Church.

When the Patriarch opposed these claims, Pope Nicholas summoned a council of western bishops, which "deposed" Photios and excommunicated all clergy whom he had ordained. In 867 the Emperor Michael III was assassinated, and his successor Basil I deposed Photios, had him imprisoned, and reinstated his predecessor Ignatius. To gain legitimacy for this widely-opposed move, he submitted it to the Pope for approval. Delighted, the Pope ratified the Emperor's decision and used it to advance the claims of the Papacy. When the eastern bishops realized what was happening they prevailed on the Emperor to release Photios from his three-year imprisonment; and when Ignatius died, the Church unanimously returned Photios to the Patriarchal throne. A Council in Constantinople in 879-880, at which Photios presided, restored communion between the Eastern and Western Churches but at the same time anathematized the heretical addition of the *filioque* to the Creed, which the Papacy had been promoting.

When Leo VI succeeded Basil I as Emperor, the Patriarch was once again deposed, and was imprisoned in the Monastery of the Armenians for five years. During this time he wrote the *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, a learned and eloquent refutation of the *filioque* heresy. The Saint, still imprisoned, reposed in peace in 893.

Ss Barsanuphius and John the Prophet, monks of Palestine (6th c.)

Saint Barsanuphius the Great, who was from Egypt, and his disciple, Saint John the Prophet, struggled in very strict reclusion during the sixth century at the monastery of Abba Seridus at Gaza of Palestine, and were endowed with amazing gifts of prophecy and spiritual discernment. They are mentioned by Saint Dorotheus of Gaza, their disciple, in his writings. Many of the counsels they sent to Christians who wrote to them are preserved in the book which bears their names. Once certain of the Fathers besought Saint Barsanuphius to pray that God stay His wrath and spare the world. Saint Barsanuphius wrote back that there were "three men perfect before God," whose prayers met at the throne of God and protected the whole world; to them it had been revealed that the wrath of God would not last long. These three, he said, were "John of Rome, Elias of Corinth, and another in the diocese of Jerusalem," concealing the name of the last, since it was himself. (*Great Horologion*)

Saint Barsanuphius lived in such reclusion that only Abbot Seridus ever saw him: once a week the Abbot would bring him three loaves and some water, and would write down the Saint's counsels. Some of the brethren came to suspect that Barsanuphius was an invention of the Abbot, and to relieve their minds he came out of his cell for the only time, greeted them, washed their feet, and withdrew again.

It is unknown when St Barsanuphius reposed. When it was suspected that he had died in his cell, the Patriarch of Jerusalem ordered that it be opened, but fire blasted forth from the door, preventing any from entering.

SUNDAY NEAREST FEBRUARY 7 (NEW CALENDAR), JANUARY 25 (OLD CALENDAR)

Synaxis of All the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia

Today we commemorate the uncounted millions of faithful who suffered and died at the hands of the Soviet atheists. These include the Tsar-martyr Nicholas II and the rest of the Russian Royal Family (July 4); Patriarch Tikhon (March 24); Grand Duchess Elizabeth (July 5); thousands of martyrs, both clergy and laity, whose names are known; but also millions upon millions of simple believers whose names have been lost to history. The number of the New Martyrs of Russia far exceeds all those from the "Age of the Martyrs," the first three centuries of Christianity. May their memory be eternal.

The date of this commemoration was first set by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia in 1981, then adopted by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1992. About 1050 new martyrs were glorified by the Patriarchate in 2000, and many more are expected to be recognized in coming years.

FEBRUARY 7

Our Holy Father Parthenius, Bishop of Lampsacus (4th c.)

He was an illiterate fisherman, but always listened carefully to the readings of Holy Scripture in church, and strove to put their teaching into practice. Whatever he earned from his trade he gave to the poor, keeping back nothing for himself. His charity became so well-known that Philetus, Bishop of Melitopolis, ordained him to the priesthood, charging him to travel throughout the diocese visiting Christians. Parthenius fulfilled his mission admirably, and his many miracles and healings — even raising the dead to life — showed that divine favor rested on him. Aecolus, Metropolitan of Cyzicus, made him Bishop of Lampsacus, at that time an almost completely pagan city. By virtue of his preaching, prayer and fasting, St Parthenius in time converted the whole city to Christ.

Miracles of healing poured forth from the holy bishop so reliably (according to the *Synaxarion*) the city's doctors became superfluous. Demons took flight at the Saint's approach. Once, when he commanded a demon to depart from a poor man, the spirit begged him, 'Give me a place to live, even swine!' 'No,' the bishop replied, 'But you may come and dwell in me!' The demon fled, crying as though burned, 'How can I enter God's house? Great is the power of the Christianos!'

Once Parthenius visited Heraclea in Thrace, whose Bishop Hypatian was extremely ill. The Saint revealed to the bishop that avarice was the true cause of his ailment. 'Give to the poor the goods that you are withholding from them, and you will recover.' The Metropolitan had himself carried to the church on a stretcher and publicly gave all his possessions to the poor. Three days later he was completely cured. On leaving the city, Parthenius told the Metropolitan that his own death was near and, soon after returning to Lampsacus, reposed in peace.

Our Venerable Father Luke the New of Mount Stirion (~950)

Is there such a thing as a natural monk? Saint Luke was born in 896 to pious parents who came from Aegina but were forced to settle on the Greek mainland due to Saracen raids. From his earliest years, he showed a desire for a life of asceticism and contemplation usually only found in seasoned elders. He abstained from all flesh, cheese, eggs, and delicacies, drank only water, and kept a total fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. While herding cattle or tilling the family fields, he would often give away his food and even his clothing to the poor, returning home naked. When his father died, he abandoned farm work to devote himself entirely to prayer, making such progress that he was often lifted above the ground while praying. After a time he secretly left home and entered a monastery in Athens (he was now only fourteen years old), but the abbot sent him home after seeing his mother every night in dream, tearfully calling for her son. He returned home for a while, but when he had obtained her permission to leave once again set out upon the monastic life. He traveled widely, living as a hermit in various places, sometimes attached to a monastery and sometimes not. Often he would be forced to move by the number of visitors who learned of his holiness, no matter how secretly he tried to live, and came to him for prayer or a word of counsel or prophecy. Once he lived for three years on the island of Ampelon; his sister would occasionally bring him some bread, but he gave much of it away to the needy or to passing sailors. Finally, his health damaged, he returned to the mainland at the entreaties of his disciples and settled at a place called Stirion (which may be a corruption of Soterion), where he built a hermitage.

Saint Luke fell ill in his seventh year at Stirion. Embracing his disciples, he asked them to pray for him, prophesying that the place where he died would someday be the site of a great church and monastery; he then reposed in peace and joy.

His tomb exuded a fragrant oil which was collected and burned in a lamp, and many miracles and healings were wrought at the tomb. As the Saint had predicted, two churches and a monastery were built there, and the monastery of Hosios Lukas became a great place of pilgrimage, as it remains to this day.

FEBRUARY 8

Great-Martyr Theodore Stratelates ("the General") of Heraclea (319)

He was a renowned commander in the Imperial army, and dwelt in Heraclea of Pontus. The Emperor Licinius heard of Theodore's fame as an officer, and also that he was a devout Christian; the Emperor determined to visit the general, officially to honor him, but secretly to turn him from Christ.

When the Emperor came to Heraclea, Saint Theodore met him with all honor, and the Emperor in turn praised him for his service to the state. Licinius then publicly bade Theodore make sacrifice to the gods. Theodore asked that he be given the most venerable gods, made of gold and silver, to attend upon at home, and promised that the following day he would return and honor them before the people. The Emperor, thinking that he had succeeded in restoring Theodore to paganism, gladly agreed.

That night the Saint smashed all the idols he had taken home, and distributed the gold and silver pieces to the poor. When this was discovered, Theodore gladly admitted his deed and confessed Christ boldly. The Emperor, in a fury, had the Saint subjected to many tortures, then crucified. On the cross, he was subject to further torments and mutilations: parts of his body were cut off, his eyes put out, and he was shot with arrows, finally being left on the cross for dead. The next day Licinius sent men to cast his body into the sea, but to their amazement they found the Saint alive, his body perfectly intact. Through this, many spectators and some of the Emperor's own men turned to Christ. Seeing that the Saint, far from renouncing Christ, was leading others to Him, the Emperor promptly had him beheaded. His holy relics were returned to his family home in Euchaita, where they worked so many miracles that the town came to be known as Theodoropolis.

Holy Prophet Zechariah (6th c. BC)

He was among those who returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity, following the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC. With the Prophet Haggai (December 16) he began to prophesy in Jerusalem in 520, to encourage the Jews to return to their task of rebuilding the Temple, which they had given up in discouragement. His prophetic ministry is described both in the Book of Ezra and in the Old Testament book that bears his name. His prophecies, in addition to speaking to the situation in which he lived, are replete with prophecies of the coming, and second coming, of Christ. His name means "The Lord is renowned." Sozomen's Ecclesiastical History reports that under the Emperor Honorius, Zacharias' holy relics were discovered by divine revelation in Palestine, and were found to be incorrupt.

St Sabbas II, Archbishop of Serbia (1271)

He was the son of St Stephen the First- Crowned King of Serbia (September 24), and the nephew of St Sabbas (Sava) (January 14), the first Archbishop of Serbia. Like his uncle, he became a monk at the monastery of Chilandar on Mt Athos, where he zealously lived the ascetical life until he was elected Bishop of Zachourios, then Archbishop of Serbia. He fell asleep in peace in 1271, having shepherded his flock with love and wisdom. His holy relics are in the monastery of Pech.

FEBRUARY 9

Leavetaking of the Meeting of Our Lord.

Holy Martyr Nicephorus (~257)

Sapricius the priest and the layman Nicephorus lived in Antioch of Syria. Though they were the closest of friends, a disagreement between them led to estrangement and then to outright enmity. In time, Nicephorus came to himself and realized that reconciliation and love among brethren are precious in the sight of the Lord, and he sent to Sapricius to ask his forgiveness for Christ's sake. But his messengers were turned away, and Sapricius coldly refused any reconciliation. At the same time he violated the Lord's commandment by continuing to serve at the altar without seeking to make peace. Nicephorus finally went in person and threw himself at Sapricius' feet, but even this had no effect.

Soon, persecution of Christians broke out, and Sapricius was arrested. When he confessed Christ without fear or hesitation, and refused to make sacrifice to the idols even under torture, he was condemned to be beheaded. Nicephorus was distressed that Sapricius might give his life in Christ's name while still at enmity with a brother; and that he himself would lose his chance to make peace. As Sapricius was being led to the place of execution, Nicephorus went on his knees before him and cried 'Martyr of Christ, forgive me the offences for which you are angry with me!' Still, Sapricius coldly spurned his former friend's pleas. For this reason, as the executioner was raising his sword, and the crown of martyrdom was only seconds away, God withdrew his grace from the priest, who turned to the executioner and declared his readiness to adore the idols. Nicephorus, who was among the witnesses, begged him not to apostatise, but his words were of no effect. Nicephorus then turned to the executioner and shouted 'I am a Christian! I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ whom he has just denied. Let him go and put me to death in his place!'

The Governor agreed, and ordered the release of Sapricius and the execution of Nicephorus. The Martyr laid his neck on the block joyfully and claimed the crown that Sapricius had thrown away. The *Synaxarion* concludes:

'When he departed for heaven to receive the crown of glory, Saint Nicephorus left to us Christians a vivid illustration of these words uttered by the Holy Spirit: *If I deliver my body to be burned but have no love, I gain nothing (1 Cor. 13:3). If you do not forgive men their trespasses neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses... For the measure you give will be the measure you get (Matt. 6:15; 7:2).*'

Hieromartyr Peter of Damascus, bishop of Damascus (~776)

'Saint Peter was Bishop of Damascus during the reign of Constantine Copronymus (c. 776) and a contemporary of Saint John of Damascus. He was arrested on the orders of the Caliph Walid for castigating the heretical doctrines of the Muslims and the Manichaeans. His tongue was cut out and he was exiled to South Arabia (Arabia Felix), where he continued to teach the true Faith and to serve the holy Mysteries until he entered into the reward of his labours in heaven.' (*Synaxarion*)

Peter of Damascus, Hesychast (12th c.)

Little is known of him except by his writings in the *Philokalia*. Saint Nikodemos, compiler of the *Philokalia*, writes that his work is 'a recapitulation of holy watchfulness... a circle within a circle, a concentrated *Philokalia* within the more extended *Philokalia*.'

FEBRUARY 10

Hieromartyr Charalambos (Charalampus), bishop of Magnesia (202)

'This great saint was bishop in Magnesia, and suffered for Christ at the age of 113. When a violent persecution broke out under the Emperor Septimius Severus, the aged Charalampus did not hide from his persecutors, but freely and openly preached the Christian faith. He endured all tortures as though not in the body, and when they flayed the living flesh from him, the godly saint said to the Emperor's soldiers: 'Thank you, my brethren, for scraping off the old body and renewing my soul for new and eternal life.' He performed many wonders and brought many to the Faith. Even the Emperor's daughter, Gallina, repudiated the paganism of her father and became a Christian. Condemned to death and led to the place of execution, St Charalampus raised his arms to heaven and prayed for all men, that God would give them bodily health and salvation of soul, and that He would grant them the fruits of the earth in abundance: 'Lord, Thou knowest that men are flesh and blood; forgive them their sins and pour out Thy blessing on all.' After praying thus, the saintly elder gave his soul to God before the executioner had laid his sword to his neck. He suffered in 202. Gallina took his body and buried

it." (Prologue)

The *Great Horologion* puts his age at 103.

St Scholastica of Italy, sister of St Benedict (543)

She was the twin sister of St Benedict, patriarch of monasticism in the West (March 14), and his constant fellow-laborer in the vineyard of Christ. They lived in neighboring monasteries; though they loved one another dearly, they met only once a year, spending the day in prayer and spiritual conversation, then parting after sharing a simple meal. At their meeting in 543, she prevailed on her brother (and the monk who accompanied him) to break his own monastic rule and stay with her in vigil through the night. Three days later, as Benedict looked out his cell window, he saw his sister's soul in the form of a dove ascending to heaven.

Recommended: *The Holy Twins: Benedict and Scholastica*, a beautifully illustrated children's book about the two Saints; by Kathleen Norris, illustrated by Tomie dePaola.

Our Venerable Father Prochorus of the Kiev Caves (1107)

"A wonder-worker of the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev, he was named the Orach-eater because the whole time he lived in the monastery, he never tasted bread but fed himself on orach [a kind of wild spinach] prepared according to his own particular method as a sort of bread. When he gave someone some of this bread with his blessing, it was as sweet as honey, but if someone stole some, it was as bitter as wormwood.

"At one time, when there was a dearth of salt in Russia, Prochorus distributed ashes to the people for salt. The ashes that he distributed with his blessing became salt; ashes, however, that anyone took for himself remained ordinary ashes. Prince Svyatopolk ordered that all the ashes from Prochorus' cell be brought to the court without his permission, let alone his blessing. When the ashes were brought there, it was obvious to everyone that they were ashes and not salt. Then Prochorus told all the people who came to him for salt to go to the prince's court, and, when the prince threw the ashes away, use them and use them as salt. This they did, and the ashes again became salt. The prince himself, learning of this, was filled with a deep respect and love for him and, when Prochorus died in 1107, placed him with his own hands in a grave near the great Russian saints, Antony and Theodosius." (Prologue).

FEBRUARY 11

Hieromartyr Blaise, bishop of Sebaste (316)

He was born in the province of Armenia, and was a physician by profession. Such was his reputation for holiness that his fellow-citizens elected him Bishop of Sebaste in eastern Anatolia. Though there were few Christians in that pagan city, the bishop labored tirelessly for his flock, encouraging them to stand firm during the fierce persecutions then raging, and visiting the martyrs in prison.

When the city was stripped of Christians, all of whom had fled or been killed, the bishop, already an old man, withdrew to a cave on Mount Argea and devoted himself entirely to prayer. As they often do, the wild beasts sensed his sanctity, and gathered around the cave, waiting quietly for him to give his blessing or heal their injuries and ailments.

The persecutors, who had not stopped hunting for the bishop, eventually found his cave, and were amazed to find it like a second Eden, with lions, tigers, bears and wolves grazing peacefully around it. The Saint greeted them cheerfully and told them that he knew from a vision that they were coming for him.

As Blaise was taken back to Sebaste, the peace and gentleness that seemed to radiate from the Saint were enough themselves to turn many pagan bystanders to faith in Christ. Diseases of men and animals were cured as he walked by. One mother brought him her child, who was choking on a fishbone. The Saint put his hand down the child's throat, took out the fishbone, and prayed to the Lord to restore him to full health. (For this reason he is invoked in the West for the cure of throat ailments).

At his trial, the holy bishop fearlessly confessed Christ and scorned the idols, for which he was savagely beaten with rods and thrown into a dungeon. Seven women and two of their children were imprisoned with him. The women were slain first after many tortures. The *Synaxarion* continues, "Having failed in his efforts to break Saint Blaise's resolve, Agricolaus [the governor] condemned him to be drowned in the lake. The holy Martyr made the sign of the Cross at the water's edge and began walking across the surface of the lake as the Saviour had done on the Sea of Galilee. On reaching the middle, he invited the pagans to join him, if they believed they could trust themselves to their gods. Sixty-eight of them took up the challenge and drowned, while a bright angel appeared and invited the Saint to return to the shore in order to receive the crown of glory." Then Blaise and the two young children were beheaded together.

Saint Blaise is one of the most-venerated holy healers in both the East and the West. He is called upon for protection from wild beasts, and for the healing of every kind of ailment. His head is kept at the Monastery of Konstantinou on Mount Athos.

St Theodora the Empress (867)

Theodora was the wife of Emperor Theophilus the Iconoclast, but secretly revered the icons, and protected others who did until the emperor's death. Upon his death, she quickly restored veneration of icons to churches throughout the empire, the event celebrated on the upcoming Sunday of Orthodoxy, the first Sunday of the Great Fast. She ruled wisely as regent for the young emperor Michael for fifteen years: she is said to have initiated the mission of Sts Cyril and Methodios to the Slavs. Before Michael III reached his majority, he was prevailed upon by Bardas, Theodora's brother, to depose her and send her to a monastery, where she finished her life in peace and holiness.

When Constantinople fell, her incorrupt relics were taken to Corfu along with those of St Spyridon. They are still venerated there.

There is a much-debated story that, when Theophilus was dying, the Empress, moved by compassion for him, brought an icon of the Mother of God out of hiding and laid it on his face; and that Theophilus, coming to himself, kissed the holy icon and confessed the true Faith before giving up his soul. Other accounts say that the Emperor died in heresy. It seems possible that the holy Empress circulated the story to ensure that her departed husband would be remembered in the Church's prayers.

Venerable Demetrius of Priluki (1392)

He entered monastic life as a youth and was a disciple of St Sergius of Radonezh. After years of monastic obedience he was ordained to the priesthood, then founded a monastery on the shores of Lake Priluki, whose rule followed that of the Lavra of St Sergius. Saint Demetrius, who was exceptionally handsome, always concealed his face behind his monastic veil and never conversed with women. Once a noblewoman, driven by curiosity, managed to catch sight of his face in church. She immediately fell paralyzed to the ground. The Saint asked her 'My child, why did you want to gaze at the face of a sinner who has long been dead to the world?' He then gave her some words of instruction in the spiritual life and sent her away healed.

In time St Demetrius became so renowned in Russia that the flow of visitors burdened him and he retreated to an uninhabited area to live as a hermit, until he was found out and made abbot of a nearby monastery. He kept a constant fast, living only on prosphora and water. In his own lifetime the Saint was known for his gift of prophecy, his care for the poor, and his healings. Once his brother sought his blessing to trade with the pagans in the far north. He made a good profit there and asked for a blessing to return. This time the Saint would not give his blessing, but his brother went anyway, and was killed by pagans.

Toward the end of his life St Demetrius withdrew into solitude in his cell. One day the brethren noticed a wonderful aroma of incense coming from his cell and knew that he had departed this life for heaven. After his repose he continued to work countless miracles, healing illnesses (especially the plague), and driving away invaders.

FEBRUARY 12**St Meletios, archbishop of Antioch (381)**

Our holy father Meletios, an Armenian by birth, became archbishop of Antioch at the height of the Arian controversy. Though he was appointed by influential Arians who thought that he shared their views, as soon as he was raised to the throne he began to preach the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. "At this, the archdeacon, an Arian, put his hand over the bishop's mouth; Meletios then extended three fingers towards the people, closed them, and extended one only, showing by signs the equality and unity of the Trinity. The embarrassed archdeacon then seized his hand, but released his mouth, and Meletios spoke out even more forcibly in defense of the Council of Nicea" (*Great Horologion*). It was St Meletios who ordained St John Chrysostom reader and deacon in Antioch. He presided at the Second Ecumenical Council in 381. At his repose, St Gregory of Nyssa gave his funeral oration, lamenting: "Our Elijah has been caught up, and no Elisha is left behind in his place."

St Alexis, metropolitan of Moscow and wonder-worker of all Russia (1378)

He was born early in the 14th century to a family of court dignitaries in Moscow. Despite a fine education, he was not drawn to worldly success and became a monk at the age of twenty. In time Alexis was consecrated Bishop of Vladimir, then Metropolitan of Moscow, then the highest rank in the Russian church (which was still under the Patriarchate of Constantinople). Russia was then under the cruel domination of the Tatars. Saint Alexis traveled twice to the Golden Horde, where the Tatar Khan kept court. On his first visit (1359), he healed the Khan's wife of a blindness which had afflicted her for three years — a miracle that did much to soften the Tatar's treatment of their Russian vassals, and to preserve the liberty of the Church.

His ceaseless labors in the world did not deprive the Saint of his love for monasticism: he conferred with holy monks at every opportunity, and founded many new monasteries. As he neared the end of his life he tried without success to

persuade his friend St Sergius of Radonezh (September 25) to succeed him. He reposed in peace in 1378. His incorrupt relics are venerated in the Cathedral of the Theophany in Moscow.

FEBRUARY 13

St Martinian, monk, of Caesarea in Palestine (422)

"The life of this saint is wonderful beyond measure and is worth reading in full. What did he not endure to fulfil the Law of God? At the age of eighteen, he went off into a mountain in Cappadocia called the Ark and spent 25 years in fasting, vigils and prayer, and struggling with manifold temptations. When a woman came to tempt him and he saw that he would fall into sin with her, he leapt barefoot into the fire and stood in it until the pain brought forth tears from his eyes and he had killed all lust within himself. When other temptations arose, he fled to a lonely rock in the sea and lived there. When, though, in a shipwreck, a woman swam to the rock, he leapt into the sea intending to drown himself. But a dolphin took him upon its back and brought him, by God's providence, to the shore. He then decided to make nowhere his permanent home but to travel incessantly. Thus he passed through 164 towns in two years, exhorting and advising the people. He finally arrived in Athens, where he died in 422." (*Prologue*)

Holy Apostles and Martyrs Priscilla and Aquila

Aquila and his wife Priscilla (or Prisca) were Jews from Pontus who settled in Rome, where they worked as tent-makers. When the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome in 49-50, they moved to Corinth. (They may already have been Christians; at that time the Empire made no distinction between Christians and Jews.) In Corinth they hosted the Apostle Paul, who lived and worked with them for awhile (Acts 18:1-3). They worked diligently with the Apostle, traveled with him, and were considered worthy to bring Apollos (December 8) to a full knowledge of the Faith (Acts 18:26)

Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome around 58, and later went to Ephesus; they were living there when St Paul and his disciple Timothy, Bishop of Ephesus, to greet them (2 Tim. 4:19). It was probably in Ephesus that they were martyred by the pagans.

St Symeon the Myrrh-streamer, founder of the Chilandar Monastery (1200)

He was born in 1114. In the world, he ruled the kingdom of Serbia as Stephen Nemanja; after ruling wisely and mercifully for many years, he renounced all worldly wealth and glory in 1196 to become a monk. Traveling to the Holy Mountain, he took for his spiritual father his own son Sava, who had preceded him in renouncing royal honor for a life of prayer. Together Symeon (as he was named in monastic life) and his son founded Hilandar monastery. His wife Anna became a nun, taking the name Anastasia; she is also commemorated as a saint of the Church. After his repose, St Symeon's relics exuded a fragrant and healing myrrh. Saint Sava brought his father's holy relics back to Serbia. The *Synaxarion* says "From Saint Symeon's empty tomb at Chilandar, a vine miraculously sprang up whose dried grape seeds are to this day sent all over the world as a blessing for childless married couples."

FEBRUARY 14

Our Holy Father Auxentius (470)

He was of Persian origin, born in Syria. As a young man, he distinguished himself as a member of the court of the Emperor Theodosius the Younger. Seeing the vanity of the world's honors and pleasures, he became a monk in Constantinople but when the people began to praise his holiness, he fled to Mount Oxeia near Chalcedon, which later became known as Auxentius' Mountain. There he built a small hut and lived in reclusion; but in time he was discovered by some shepherds, and the faithful began to come in increasing numbers for his teaching, blessing, prayers and healing. He performed countless miracles, but such was his humility that he always sought to avoid their being attributed to him. When he was asked to pray for someone's healing, he would try to refuse, saying "I too am a sinful man." But, when he was prevailed on by the pleas of the people, he would call on all of them to pray together for the healing; or he would remind them that God would give according to *their* faith; or he would say to the sick person "The Lord Jesus Christ heals you." When the Emperor Marcian summoned the Fourth Ecumenical Council to Chalcedon, he ordered that the hermit join the assembly of holy Fathers. Auxentius refused, saying that doctrinal teaching was the province of bishops, not monks. The Emperor's envoys took him by force. He was greeted with honor by the Emperor, and affirmed all the decisions of the Council.

He never returned to Mount Oxeia, but settled in an even wilder and more remote spot on Mount Skopa, which later came to be called Mount St Auxentius. His disciples built him a tiny wooden hut with one small window through which he could converse with his steady stream of visitors. He reposed in peace in 470. A great crowd gathered for his funeral, and his holy relics were taken into the care of a women's monastery whose spiritual father he had been.

Mount St Auxentius soon became a center of hesychastic life, with seven monasteries.

Saint Cyril, Equal to the Apostles and Enlightener of the Slavs (869)

See the joint commemoration of Sts Cyril and Methodius on May 11.

What Happened to Valentine's Day?

On February 14 the Roman church commemorates two Saints named Valentinus, both martyred in Rome at different times (one was a bishop in Italy). Both are also saints of the Orthodox Church, but are commemorated on July 30 and October 24. As for chocolates, flowers, cards, etc., the *Encyclopædia Britannica* says: "St Valentine's day as a lovers' festival... has no relation to the saint or to any incident in his life. These customs seem rather to be connected either with the pagan Roman festival of the Lupercalia which took place in the middle of February, or with the spring season in general."

FEBRUARY 15

Holy Apostle Onesimos (~109)

He was a Phrygian by birth, a slave of Philemon, to whom the Apostle Paul addressed his epistle. Onesimos escaped from Philemon and fled to Rome, where he was converted to the Faith by St Paul. St Paul sent him back to his master, who at St Paul's urging gave him his freedom. He served the Church for many years before dying a martyr, beaten to death with clubs.

Saint Onesimos is also commemorated on November 22, with Sts Philemon, Archippus and Aphia; and on January 4 at the Synaxis of the Seventy Disciples.

Our Venerable Father Dalmatius of Siberia (1697)

Saint Dalmatius is venerated as a pioneer of the movement that took many ascetics to dwell in the wilderness of Siberia, establishing a new company of Desert Fathers and causing the Russian Far North to be called the 'Northern Thebaid.' He was born in Tobolsk and reared in piety by his family, recently-converted Tatars. When grown, he entered the imperial army as a Cossack and served with such distinction that the Tsar awarded him a noble title. He married and lived in Tobolsk in comfort and prosperity. One day — after the destruction of Tobolsk in a great fire in 1643 — struck by a realization of the vanity of worldly things, he left family, wealth and property and went to a monastery in the Ural Mountains, taking with him only an icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos.

He was tonsured a monk with the name of Dalmatius, and devoted himself to prayer and asceticism with such fervor that, a short time later, the brethren elected him Abbot. Fearing pride and fleeing honor, Dalmatius fled with his icon of the Theotokos to a remote cave, where he lived a life of silence and continual prayer. His presence did not long remain secret in that sparsely-settled region, and soon Christians were coming from far and wide to ask his prayer and counsel; many pagans came to him for holy Baptism. Soon his habitation became too small for those who had chosen to stay as his disciples, and the Saint received a blessing from the Bishop of Tobolsk to build a wooden chapel and some cells. This was the beginning of the great Monastery of the Dormition (also called the Monastery of St Dalmatius).

Over the years the brethren endured many tribulations. Once the Tatar Prince of the region, provoked by false rumors, planned to destroy the monastery and kill all the monks. The night before the attack, the holy Mother of God appeared to the prince in resplendent clothes, holding a flaming sword in one hand and a scourge in the other. She forbade the Prince to harm the monastery or the brethren, and commanded him to give them a permanent concession over the region. Convinced by this vision, the Prince made peace with the monks and became the Monastery's protector, though he was a Muslim.

In the succeeding years the Monastery was repeatedly burned down by the fierce pagan tribes which inhabited the area; once all the monks except St Dalmatius himself were butchered, but always the monastery was rebuilt. The Saint reposed in peace in 1697, and was succeeded as abbot by his own son Isaac, who built a stone shrine at the Monastery to house the relics of the Saint and the icon of the Mother of God which he had kept with him throughout his monastic life.

Our Venerable Father Anthimos of Chios (1960)

He was born in 1869 to devout peasants on Chios; he left elementary school early to become a shoemaker. At the age of nineteen he visited a monastery (founded by the monk Pachomios, who had been the spiritual counsellor of St Nektarios); he was so moved by the monks' 'angelic life' that on returning home he built himself a small hut and dwelt in it. His only 'help' in his spiritual contests was an icon of the Mother of God, which soon began to work miracles, drawing many to his hermitage. After a time he retired to a monastery where he was tonsured under the name Anthimos. He fell ill there, and his abbot sent him home to his parents for the sake of his health. At home, despite the fact that he was caring for his aged parents and practicing his shoemaker's trade, he continued to live as a monk, spending nights on end in prayer and sometimes living only on bread and water for extended periods.

Increasing numbers of visitors came to his hermitage and wonder-working icon of the Theotokos, and in 1910 he received the Great Schema. The people of Chios wanted him to be ordained to the priesthood, but his bishop refused due to the Saint's lack of education. At the prompting of Anthimos' godfather, the Bishop of Smyrna ordained him instead. After a

pilgrimage to Mt Athos, he returned to Chios, where he became chaplain to a leper hospital. Soon the hospital, which had fallen into corruption, became a spiritual center, as much like a monastery as a hospital. Saint Anthimos tended many of the sickest with his own hands, working many miracles of healing; some of his recovered patients became monks or nuns.

With the notorious 'Exchange of Populations' of 1922-1924, refugees poured into Chios, many of them destitute nuns and girls. In response to a vision of the Mother of God, St Anthimos built a monastery, which opened with thirty nuns and grew rapidly, despite the opposition of many who said that setting up such a community was out of date (in 1924!). The monastery soon housed eighty nuns and was known throughout Greece as a model of monastic life. Father Anthimos served as priest to the nuns, and continued to receive the many faithful — often sixty or seventy per day — who came to him for prayer or counsel. He carried on this ministry for more than thirty years, working many miracles of healing. When he was too old to work with his hands, he retired to his cell and prayed that he be enabled to serve his neighbor until his last breath. He reposed in peace at the age of ninety-one, mourned and revered by the whole island of Chios.

FEBRUARY 16

Martyrs Pamphilus and those with him, at Caesarea in Palestine (308)

These twelve holy Martyrs suffered in the reign of Diocletian.

"The first of these, Pamphilus, was priest in the church at Caesarea in Palestine; a learned and devout man, he corrected the mistakes of various copiers in the text of the New Testament. He himself copied this saving Book and gave it to any who desired it. The second was a deacon, Valentine, old in years and white with wisdom. He was a great expert in the Holy Scriptures, knowing them by heart. The third was Paul, a respected and eminent man, who had on a previous occasion been cast into the fire for the sake of Christ. With them were five Egyptians, brothers both in blood and soul, who were returning to their native land from serving a sentence in the mines of Cilicia. As they reached the gate of the city of Caesarea they said that they were Christians, and were therefore brought to trial. When asked their names, they replied: 'We have cast away the pagan names given us by our mother, and are called Elias, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Samuel and Daniel.' When asked where they were from, they replied: 'From Jerusalem that is above.' They were all beheaded, and a young man called Porphyrius, who had searched for their bodies to give them burial, suffered soon afterwards. Him they burned. An officer, Seleucus, who had come up to the martyrs and embraced them before the sword descended on their heads, was also burned, and an old man, Theodulus, a servant of the Roman judge, who had embraced one of the martyrs while they were under escort. Lastly Julian, who had kissed the dead bodies of the martyrs and honoured them, followed them in death. So they exchanged the small for the greater, the tawdry for the precious and death for immortality, and went to the Lord in 308." (*Prologue*)

The *Synaxarion* concludes, "After the martyrdom of Pamphilus, the leader of the glorious cohort, the impious governor gave orders that his body and those of his companions should be left where they lay as food for carnivorous animals. However by God's Providence, no animal came near their holy relics, which the Christians were able to lay to rest with due honour." The account of these Martyrs was written by Eusebius of Caesarea, Pamphilus' disciple.

FEBRUARY 17

† Great-martyr Theodore the Tyro (~306)

The Greek *Tyron* means "conscript." This holy Martyr of Christ came from Pontus and was a Roman legionary during Maximian's persecution (~303). Though he had been a Christian since childhood, he kept his faith secret while in the army. While his cohort was stationed near a town called Euchaita, he learned that the people there were being terrorized by a dragon which lived in the neighboring forest. He set off to face the dragon, praying to God that the outcome of the contest would be a sign to him of whether the time had come to offer himself for martyrdom. He found the fire-spitting monster and, arming himself with the sign of the Cross, drove his spear through its head and killed it.

His success convinced him that, having vanquished this fleshly dragon, he was ready to vanquish the spiritual dragon, the Devil. When the commander of his camp next ordered a sacrifice to the Gods, Theodore boldly refused, saying "I am a Christian!" Further, he encouraged the other Christians in his company to do the same. That night he went to a nearby pagan temple of Rhea, mother of the gods, and burned it down. He was seen by the caretaker of the temple and was brought unresisting to the governor Publius. Theodore was thrown into a solitary dungeon cell; there he refused bread and water, saying that Christ had promised him food from heaven. He spent his time there chanting hymns with the angels, so that the guards were convinced that other Christians had somehow joined him in his cell.

When all argument, cajolery, bribery and threat had failed to turn the soldier from Christ, the governor resorted to torture, subjecting the Saint to terrible mutilations; but when Theodore endured them calmly and resolutely, the governor began to fear that his example would encourage other Christians, and ordered that he be burned. Taken to the stake, the

Martyr walked freely into the flames, where he gave back his soul to God. When his body was ransomed and taken from the ashes by a pious Christian, it was found to be untouched. A church was built in Euchaita in honor of the Martyr; many pilgrims came there for the healing of soul and body.

In 361, the Emperor Julian the Apostate ordered the Prefect of Constantinople to have all foods in the marketplaces sprinkled with blood of animals sacrificed to the pagan gods during the first week of Lent, so that Christians would be unable to escape contact with idolatry. But St Theodore appeared in a vision to Patriarch Eudoxius (360-364), warned him of the plan and told him to instruct his flock not to buy any food in the marketplace, but to eat *kolyva* made from boiled wheat grains. So, through the Saint's intervention, the people were preserved from the stain of idolatry. Ever since, the Church has commemorated the miracle on the first Saturday of Great Lent. Since that time *kolyva* has come to be offered also in honor of the Saints and in memory of the departed. The whole grain represents the body, sown corruptible, which will be raised incorruptible (2 Cor. 15:37); it is usually sweetened with honey to signify the delights of Paradise.

FEBRUARY 18

St Leo the Great, pope of Rome(461)

Pope Leo was one of the great bastions of Orthodoxy during the time of the monophysite heresy and its offshoots. According to some, this Saint was born in Rome, but according to others in Tyrrenia (Tuscany), and was consecrated to the archiepiscopal throne of Rome in 440. In 448, when St Flavian, Archbishop of Constantinople [also commemorated today], summoned Eutyches, an archimandrite in Constantinople, to give account for his teaching that there was only one nature in Christ after the Incarnation, Eutyches appealed to St Leo in Rome. After St Leo had carefully examined Eutyches' teachings, he wrote an epistle to St Flavian, setting forth the Orthodox teaching of the person of Christ, and His two natures, and also counseling Flavian that, should Eutyches sincerely repent of his error, he should be received back with all good will. At the Council held in Ephesus in 449, which was presided over by Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria (and which Saint Leo, in a letter to the holy Empress Pulcheria in 451, was the first to call "The Robber Council"), Dioscorus, having military might behind him, did not allow Saint Leo's epistle to Flavian to be read, although repeatedly asked to do so; even before the Robber Council was held, Dioscorus had uncanonically received the unrepentant Eutyches back into communion. Because Saint Leo had many cares in Rome owing to the wars of Attila the Hun and other barbarians, in 451 he sent four delegates to the Fourth Ecumenical Council, where 630 Fathers gathered in Chalcedon during the reign of Marcian, to condemn the teachings of Eutyches and those who supported him. Saint Leo's epistle to Flavian was read at the Fourth Council, and was confirmed by the Holy Fathers as the Orthodox teaching on the incarnate Person of our Lord; it is also called the "Tome of Leo." The Saint wrote many works in Latin; he reposed in 461. (*Great Horologion*).

St Leo is remembered for saving Rome from conquest by Attila the Hun. When Attila drew near to Rome, preparing to pillage the city, St Leo went out to him in his episcopal vestments and enjoined him to turn back. For reasons unknown to worldly historians, the pitiless Attila with all his troops abandoned their attack and returned the way they had come.

FEBRUARY 19

Apostles Archippus and Philemon of the Seventy, and Martyr Apphia

Archippus was the son of Saints Philemon (Nov. 22) and Apphia (Feb. 15), and, like them, was a disciple of the Apostle Paul, who calls him "our fellow soldier" (Philm. 2). He and his father preached the Gospel at Colossae, and Archippus probably served as a priest for the church that gathered there at his family's house (Col. 4:17). Archippus' fervor in preaching the Gospel of Christ so angered the pagans that they seized him and brought him before the governor Androcles. When the Saint refused to sacrifice to Artemis, he was stripped, beaten, tormented in various ways, and finally stoned to death.

Our Venerable Mother Philothea of Athens (1589)

"This bright star of compassion arose in the dark days of the Turkish occupation to shed God's mercy upon the oppressed people of Athens and to guide many endangered souls onto the path of righteousness." (*Synaxarion*)

She was born in 1528 to the prominent Venizelou family, miraculously answering her mother's prayer of many years. Though even in childhood she showed a love for asceticism and prayer, she was much sought-after as a wealthy heiress, and was married at the age of twelve to a rough, violent man. She endured his ill-treatment nobly, and prayed daily for his conversion. After three years, the brutal husband died, and Philothea gave herself entirely to a life of prayer and fasting, living like a hermitess though still in her parents' house. When her parents died ten years later, she used her entire fortune to found a convent. Its design had been given her in a vision by the Apostle Andrew, and it was dedicated to him. Alongside the monastery, she founded a hospital, a hospice for the poor, and schools where boys and girls could receive a Christian education, something obviously not provided by the Turkish rulers.

As soon as the monastery was begun, she took monastic vows under the name of Philothea, and she, her own maidservants, and many young women of the city, became the first nuns there. Philothea continued in her boundless compassion for the poor and infirm, whom she visited and tended. She was so free in her almsgiving that more than once the monastery was left without food or other necessities of life, and the sisters began to complain about her. But each time, large donations appeared unexpectedly and saved the community from starvation.

Philothea offered asylum and refuge to Christian slave women who had fled their masters to preserve their faith and chastity. This angered the Turks, who surrounded the monastery, seized Philothea, and brought her before the judge. She was told to deny Christ or die, and when she refused was sentenced to death; but some influential Athenian Greeks were able to intervene on her behalf and to obtain her release.

Immediately upon her release she redoubled her prayers, her apostolic labors and her works of mercy, and was soon granted the gift of working miracles and healings. So many disciples came to join her that she established a second monastery. Her growing influence aroused the hatred of some of the Turks, who broke into the monastery one night and beat her violently, leaving her half-dead. She bore the effects of her injuries patiently, and after a short time gave back her soul to God in 1589.

Twenty years after her repose, a beautiful scent began to issue from her tomb. Her precious relics, venerated at the Cathedral in Athens, remain incorrupt to this day.

FEBRUARY 20

St Leo, bishop of Catania in Sicily (~780)

He lived at the time of the first persecutions of the holy icons. He was born in Ravenna to a noble family, and became bishop of his native city. Soon his reputation as a true shepherd of Christ's flock spread, and he was elected Bishop of Catania in Sicily. As is so often true even today, the city, though nominally Christian, was plagued by superstition and paganism. The holy bishop set about to turn the people away from error: by his prayers he caused a pagan temple to collapse and built a church on its site, dedicated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. At that time the entire island was under the oppressive rule of a magus named Heliiodorus, who used all his magical skills to oppress the people and advance himself. Though he had been taken captive by Imperial order, and condemned to death, he was always able to escape his captors by his occult skills. Saint Leo, who sought the conversion of everyone, did his best to turn the magus to Christ, but to no effect. One day Heliiodorus entered the church during the Divine Liturgy, mocking the Mysteries of Christ. The Saint came out of the sanctuary and, casting his *omophorion* over the mocker, instantly deprived him of his demonic powers. The Prefect of Sicily ordered the magus to be burnt alive. Bishop Leo went to the stake with him, but emerged unmarked without even the smell of fire upon him, while Heliiodorus was burnt to ashes.

Saint Leo's fierceness in defense of the Faith was matched by his love and compassion for the poor and defenseless, for whom he poured himself out unceasingly with prayers, alms and visitation. By his prayers he restored sight to the blind and healed the paralyzed. After his repose, his holy relics, which exuded a fragrant myrrh, were venerated in a church that he had founded in honor of Saint Lucia.

St Bessarion the Great, wonder-worker of Egypt (466)

"An Egyptian by birth, Abba Bessarion was initiated into the angelic life by Saint Anthony the Great. He later became a disciple of Saint Macarius, the founder of Scetis (19 Jan.), and then set out to lead the life of a wanderer, borne hither and thither by Providence like a bird by the wind. All his wealth lay in the Gospel, which he always had in his hand. Living in the open air, he patiently endured all weathers, untroubled by care for a dwelling or for clothing. Fortified by the strength of the faith, he thus remained untouched by all the passions of the flesh.

"On coming to a monastery where the brethren led the common life, he would sit weeping at the gate. A brother once offered him hospitality and asked why he was distressed. 'I cannot live under a roof, until I have regained the wealth of my house,' he replied, meaning the heavenly inheritance lost since Adam. 'I am afflicted, in danger of death every day, and without rest because of my huge misfortunes, which oblige me ever to travel on in order to finish my course.'

"He wandered for forty years without ever lying down to sleep, and he spent all of forty days and forty nights standing wide awake in a thorn bush. One winter's day, he was walking through a village when he came upon a dead man. Without hesitation, he took off his own coat and covered the body. A little further on, he gave his tunic to a poor man who was shivering in the cold. An army officer, who happened to be passing, saw the naked ascetic and wanted to know who had stripped him of his clothing. 'He did!' replied Bessarion, holding up the Gospel Book. On another occasion, he met with a poor man and, having nothing to give him in alms, he hurried to the market in order to sell his Gospel Book. On his disciple's asking him where the Book was, he replied cheerfully, 'I have sold it in obedience to the words which I never cease to hear: God, sell what you possess and give to the poor (Matt. 19:21).

"Through this evangelic way of life he became a chosen vessel of Grace, and God wrought many miracles through him. One day, for example, he made sea water sweet through the sign of the Cross, to quench his disciple's thirst. When the latter wanted to keep some for the remainder of the journey, he prevented him, saying, 'God is here, God is everywhere!' At another time, having stood for two weeks in prayer with hands raised to heaven, he brought about rain enough to fill a thirsty brother's coat. Then there was the time when he stopped the sun from setting until he reached the cell of an elder whom he wished to meet; and the time when he walked across the waters of a river. Through these and many other wonders wrought by the Saint, God showed, as He did with Moses, Joshua and Elias, that He grants His servants mastery even over natural phenomena. Through the power of Christ, he raised a paralytic, drove out demons and showed himself truly to be a 'god' upon the earth.

"When, having reached his goal, he was at the point of regaining that dwelling in heaven which he had sought throughout his wanderings, he said to those about him, 'The monk ought, like the cherubim, to be all eye.'

"In answer to a brother who asked what a monk living in community ought to do, he replied: 'Keep silence and do not measure yourself.' Indeed, this is how even in the midst of people one can obtain the grace of the great anchorites." (*Synaxarion*)

Thirty-four Holy Martyrs of the Monastery of Valaam (1578)

These thirty-four venerable fathers of the Monastery of the Transfiguration at Valaam on Lake Ladoga were massacred by a party of converts to Lutheranism who besieged the monastery and attempted to make the brethren renounce the Orthodox Faith.

FEBRUARY 21

S tathius, archbishop of Antioch (337)

He was consecrated Bishop of Berea (Aleppo) in Syria, then of Antioch in 324. He took an active part in the Council of Nicea against the Arian heresy. His zeal for the Faith aroused the hatred of various heretics, who convened a council in Antioch where, by means of slanders and false witnesses, they were able to have the holy bishop deposed and exiled to Thrace, where he died a few years later.

The deposition of the Saint caused a schism in the Church of Antioch which was not healed until 414 (see St Meletius, Feb. 12). Saint John Chrysostom publicly praised Eustathius as a Martyr, and his relics were finally brought back to Antioch in 482. The *Synaxarion* says "The people then went in jubilation to meet him with lights and incense, and escorted him as he made a triumphal entry into his city, which thus recovered its unity in the Faith and in the veneration of this champion of Orthodoxy."

St John the Scholastic, patriarch of Constantinople (577)

He came from the region of Antioch, and only became a clergyman at the age of fifty. He won a wide reputation as representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch at Constantinople, and was elected Patriarch of Constantinople following the deposition of Eutyches in 565. He compiled the *Nomocanon*, a collection of Church canons, and added the Communion hymn "Of Thy Mystical Supper..." to the Divine Liturgy. He reposed in peace.

Saint Zachariah, Patriarch of Jerusalem (632)

He was the *Skrophylax*, keeper of the sacred vessels in the Church of Constantinople, then was made Patriarch of Jerusalem in 609. When the Persians took Jerusalem in 614 and took the Precious Cross of our Lord as a trophy, Zachariah went to Persia with the Cross, clasping it in his arms. In 631 the Emperor Heraclius conquered the Persians and recovered the Cross, bringing it to Constantinople. According to one account, Zachariah returned with the Cross, then returned to governing the Church in Jerusalem until his repose in 632 when Modestus (who had been acting in his absence) succeeded him. According to another account, Saint Zachariah died in exile, and Modestus was made Patriarch when the Holy Cross returned to Jerusalem.

FEBRUARY 22

Uncovering of the relics of the Holy Martyrs at the gate of Eugenius at Constantinople (395-423)

"At the time of the holy Patriarch Thomas I of Constantinople (607-610), the relics of some unknown holy Martyrs were discovered buried in the district of Eugenius. As soon as the Patriarch exposed them for the veneration of the people who gathered from all over the city, numerous healings took place.

"Many years had gone by when a clergyman named Nicolas, who worked as a book copyist, learnt by divine revelation that among these anonymous relics were those of Saint Paul's disciples, the holy apostles Andronicus and Junia, who are mentioned in the *Epistle to the Romans* (16:7). The Emperor Andronicus I (1183-5) built a beautiful church at the place where these relics were venerated." (*Synaxarion*)

FEBRUARY 23

Hieromartyr Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (167)

He was born at Ephesus around the year 70. St Irenaeus of Lyons, his disciple, says that St Polycarp was 'a disciple of the Apostles and acquainted with those who had seen the Lord.' His parents died as martyrs, and he was given into the care of a devout lady named Callista. As a child, the Saint was so eager to follow the commandments of Christ that he repeatedly emptied his foster-mother's pantry to feed the poor. Since her supplies were always miraculously renewed, Callista changed his name from Pancratius to *Polykarpos*, meaning 'Much fruit.'

When grown, Polycarp became a disciple of St John the Theologian, and in time became Bishop of Smyrna; it is told that the messages to the Church at Smyrna in the Book of Revelation are addressed to St Polycarp and his flock. He knew St Ignatius of Antioch personally, and some of their correspondence is preserved.

Polycarp led his Church in holiness for more than fifty years, and became known throughout the Christian world as a true shepherd and standard-bearer of the Faith. About the year 154 he traveled to Rome and consulted with Pope Anacletus on the defense of the Faith.

Not long after he returned to Smyrna, a fierce persecution was unleashed against Christians in Asia Minor; along with many others, St Polycarp was arrested, having predicted his imminent martyrdom. (The account of his martyrdom that follows is based on eyewitness accounts gathered immediately after his death.)

On the evening of Holy Friday, soldiers burst into the farmhouse where he was staying. The Bishop welcomed them cheerfully, and ordered that a meal be prepared for them. He was granted some time to pray, and for two hours stood commemorating everyone that he had known and praying for the Church throughout the world. His captors sorrowed that they had come to take such a venerable man, and reluctantly took him to the Proconsul. When urged to deny Christ and save his life, the aged Saint replied, 'For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has wronged me in nothing. Can I blaspheme my King and Savior?' Told that he would die by fire if he did not apostatize, Polycarp replied 'You threaten me with a fire that burns for a short time and then goes out, while you know nothing of the fire of the judgment that comes and of the everlasting torment awaiting the wicked. Why wait any longer? Do what you will!'

Placed on the pyre, Polycarp lifted his eyes heavenward and gave thanks to God for finding him worthy to share with the holy Martyrs of the cup of Christ. When he had said his *Amen*, the executioners lit the fire. The eyewitnesses write that the fire sprang up around him like a curtain, and that he stood in its midst glowing like gold and sending forth a delightful scent of incense. Seeing that the fire was not harming him, the executioners stabbed him with a sword. His blood flowed so copiously that it put out the fire, and he gave back his soul to God. His relics were burned by the persecutors, but Christians rescued a few fragments of bone, which were venerated for many generations on the anniversary of his repose.

Saint Gorgonia (372)

She was the elder sister of St Gregory the Theologian (Jan. 25), and the daughter of St Gregory Nazianzen the Elder (January 1) and St Nonna (August 5). She married Alypius, a citizen of Iconium, and with him had three daughters. She became a holy guide to countless Christians whose lot it was to live out their Faith in the world. The *Synaxarion* says, "Her wisdom and knowledge of all that pertains to godliness made her the very model of a Christian wife. Her relatives, fellow-citizens, and numerous strangers relied on her as a counsellor who would indicate the Christian response in any of the knotty problems which they encountered while living in the world. She was foremost in her care for the churches of God, and in her respect for the priests and clergy, to whom the doors of her house were always open. Neither had she hesitated in almsgiving nor in compassion for all the afflicted, so that you could well say that, like righteous Job, she was *eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, a mother to the orphans.*"

She received holy Baptism late in life, as was common at that time, and soon afterward the day of her death was revealed to her. She fell ill on the appointed day and, gathering her family and friends around her bed, gave them her final counsels. She then reposed in peace.

Our Venerable Father Alexander the Unsleeping (430)

He was born sometime in the mid-fourth century on an island in the Aegean. For a time he lived successfully in the world, receiving a good education in Constantinople, then serving for a time for the Prefect of the Praetorium. But, becoming aware of the vanity of worldly things, he answered Christ's call, gave away all his goods to the poor and entered a monastery in Syria. After four years in obedience, he came to feel that the security of monastic life was inconsistent with the Gospel command to take no thought for the morrow; so he withdrew to the desert, taking with him only his garment and the Book of the Gospel. There he lived alone for seven years.

At the end of this period he set out on an apostolic mission to Mesopotamia, where he brought many to Christ: the city prefect Rabbula was converted after Alexander brought down fire from heaven, and a band of brigands who accosted the Saint on the road were transformed into a monastic community. He finally fled the city when the Christians there rose up

demanding that he be made bishop. He once again took up a solitary life in the desert beyond the Euphrates, spending the day in prayer and part of the night sheltered in a barrel. There he remained for forty years. His holiness gradually attracted more than four hundred disciples, whom Alexander organized into a monastic community. Each disciple owned only one tunic, and was required to give away anything that they did not need for that day. (despite this threadbare life, the monastery was able to set up and run a hospice for the poor!)

Alexander was perplexed as to how the admonition *Pray without ceasing* (1 Thess. 5:17) could be fulfilled by frail human flesh, but after three years of fasting and prayer, God showed him a method. He organized his monks into four groups according to whether their native language was Greek, Latin, Syriac or Coptic, and the groups prayed in shifts throughout the day and night. Twenty-four divine services were appointed each day, and the monks would chant from the Psalter between services. The community henceforth came to be known as the *Akoimētoi*, the Unsleeping Ones.

[Note: Similar communities later sprang up in the West, practicing what was there called *Laus Perennis*; St Columban founded many of these.] Always desiring to spread the holy Gospel, Saint Alexander sent companies of missionaries to the pagans of southern Egypt. He and a company of 150 disciples set out as a kind of traveling monastery, living entirely on the charity of the villages they visited. Eventually they settled in some abandoned baths in Antioch, setting up a there a monastery dedicated to the unceasing praise of God; but a jealous bishop drove them from the city. Making his way to Constantinople, he settled there with four monks. In a few days, more than four hundred monks had left their monasteries to join his community. The Saint organized them into three companies — Greeks, Latins and Syrians &rmash; and restored the program of unsleeping prayer that his community had practiced in Mesopotamia. Not surprisingly, his success aroused the envy and anger of the abbots whose monasteries had been nearly emptied; they managed to have him condemned as a Messalian at a council held in 426. (The Messalians were an over-spiritualizing sect who believed that the Christian life consisted exclusively of prayer.) Alexander was sent back to Syria, and most of his monks were imprisoned; but as soon as they were released, most fled the city to join him again. The Saint spent his last years traveling from place to place, founding monasteries, often persecuted, until he reposed in 430, 'to join the Angelic choirs which he had so well imitated on earth.' (*Synaxarion*)

The practice of unceasing praise, established by St Alexander, spread throughout the Empire. The Monastery of the *Akoimētoi*, founded by a St Marcellus, a successor of Alexander, was established in Constantinople and became a beacon to the Christian world. 'Even though it has not been retained in today's practice, the unceasing praise established by Saint Alexander was influential in the formation of the daily cycle of liturgical offices in the East and even more so in the West.' (*Synaxarion*)

FEBRUARY 24

First (4th c.) and Second (9th c.) Findings of the Precious Head of St John the Baptist

After the Forerunner was beheaded at the order of Herod and his illicit wife Herodias, his head was discarded in what the *Synaxarion* calls "an unseemly location," presumably a privy. According to some, it was secretly recovered by Joanna, one of the Myrrhbearing women, and given honorable burial near Jerusalem. There it was found, through a revelation of the Forerunner, by two monks who had come to Jerusalem to worship at the tomb of our Savior (the first finding). Putting the head in a bag, the monks returned home. On the way, they met an indigent potter from Emesa. That night the Forerunner appeared to the poor man and instructed him to make off with the relic. He returned with it to Emesa and immediately began to prosper in his business. Just before he died, he put the holy relic in a chest, which he left to his sister with these instructions: never to open it without instructions from the one hidden inside it; and to pass it on to a pious man beloved of God. Thus the Head of the Baptist passed through many generations, eventually being concealed in a cave near a monastery founded during the reign of Marcian (450-457), whose abbot was the godly Marcellus.

The blessed Forerunner appeared several times to Marcellus, embracing him and once even giving him a pot of honey. The Baptist ordered Marcellus to follow a star which led him to the cave and came to rest in front of a niche in the wall. Marcellus dug there and came upon a marble slab, under which was a large jar containing the precious Head. The holy relic was taken with rejoicing to the cathedral in Emesa, where it worked many wonders. In the reign of Michael III (842-867), it was taken to Constantinople. It was at this translation that the present Feast was instituted.

The version given here is that of St Symeon Metaphrastes. Other sources give substantially different accounts.

The *Prologue* observes: "It is important and interesting to note that, while he was alive, John did not work a single miracle (Jn 10:41), but to his relics was given the blessed power of working miracles."

Saint Aethelberht (Æthelbert), first Christian King of Kent (616)

In 597, a party of forty missionary monks, led by St Augustine of Canterbury (May 28), was sent to Britain by the holy Pope Gregory the Great, to bring the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ to the English people. Aethelberht, who had been King of

Kent for thirty-six years, received the monks favorably, allowed them to preach in his kingdom, and invited them to establish their headquarters in Canterbury, his capital city, which already contained a small, ruined church dedicated to St Martin of Tours in Roman times.

The king himself was converted and received holy Baptism at the hands of St Augustine; a crowd of his subjects followed his example. When St Augustine was consecrated bishop, Aethelberht allowed him to be made Archbishop of Canterbury and gave his own palace to serve as a monastery. The king worked steadily for the conversion of the neighboring kindoms, and in 604 established an episcopal see in London. Unlike some Christian rulers, he refused to see anyone converted forcibly.

Saint Aethelberht reposed in peace in 616, after reigning for fifty-six years. He was buried in the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, which he had established. Many miracles were worked at his tomb, where a lamp was kept lit perpetually until the monastery was disbanded by the protestants in 1538.

FEBRUARY 25

St Tarasios, archbishop of Constantinople (806)

He was a nobleman born in Constantinople, and distinguished himself in a secular career, rising in the year 780 to the rank of *protasecretis*, Principal Secretary of State to the Emperor Constantine VI and his mother the Empress Irene, who was serving as regent.

His life took a sudden turn when, in 784, Patriarch Paul IV resigned, recommending Tarasios as the only man capable of restoring the Patriarchate, ravaged by the iconoclast heresy, to true Faith and full communion with the other Patriarchates. Tarasios, though unwilling, was virtually forced to accept the Patriarchate by the rulers and the Senate: he agreed a condition that an Ecumenical Council be summoned immediately to put an end to the iconoclast heresy. In a few days he was raised from a layman through all the degrees of the clergy and on December 25 784, was consecrated Archbishop of Constantinople.

At Saint Tarasios' insistence, the Imperial rulers summoned a Church Council, which met at Constantinople in 786. Before its sessions had even begun, iconoclasts burst into the church and drove out the Fathers, who were forced to reconvene in Nicaea, where the first session opened. Patriarch Tarasios presided, and the Council concluded with a condemnation of the iconoclast heresy and the restoration of veneration of the holy images.

As Archbishop, the Saint was a model of humility, compassion, and firmness in the Faith. He refused to have any servants and dressed simply, a living rebuke to the luxury that had corrupted the clergy at that time. His works of charity were so great that he became known to the people as 'the new Joseph': he founded hospices and shelters, distributed the Church's wealth freely to the poor, and often invited the poor to his own table to share his simple fare. He insisted on exercising all gentleness and mercy in restoring repentant heretics to the Church, a policy that met with opposition from the more severe leaders of the Studion monastery. At the same time he was unbending in the defense of the Faith: when the Emperor Constantine came of age he repudiated his wife Mary in order to marry Theodota, one of her servants, the Patriarch refused to bless the adulterous union and threatened the Emperor with excommunication if he persisted in sin. The Emperor had Tarasios imprisoned, forced his licit wife to enter a monastery, and found a priest, Joseph, to bless his second marriage. The following year Constantine was blinded and dethroned, and Tarasios regained his freedom.

The holy Patriarch continued to serve his Church faithfully, occupying the episcopal throne for a total of twenty-six years. In his last years, despite a long and painful illness, he continued to serve the Divine Liturgy daily, supporting himself with his staff. In the year 806, serving at the altar, he began to chant from Psalm 85, *Bow down thine ear, O Lord, and hear me*, and gave up his soul to God.

"In 820, the Emperor Leo the Armenian, who for seven years had supported the iconoclasts and had fiercely persecuted the Orthodox, had a disturbing dream. He saw a stern-looking Saint Tarasius ordering a man by the name of Michael to run Leo himself through with a sword. Six days later, Leo was in fact assassinated by Michael the Stammerer, who seized power... In physical appearance, Saint Tarasius is said to have closely resembled Saint Gregory the Theologian." (*Synaxarion*)

FEBRUARY 26

St Porphyrios, bishop of Gaza (420)

He was born to a wealthy, noble family in Thessalonica around 347. Filled more and more with a yearning for God, he abandoned his worldly possessions and traveled to Egypt, living for five years as a monk at Sketis. From there he went to Palestine, where he lived for another five years in a cave in the Jordan desert. Suffering from a severe ailment, he was forced to move to Jerusalem; there he was suddenly and completely cured following a vision on Golgotha, in which he saw

the Good Thief come down from the cross to lead him to Christ, who gave the Cross into his keeping. Porphyrus took up the trade of a shoemaker in Jerusalem to provide for his few needs. His humility and charity became so well-known that the Bishop of Jerusalem ordained him to the priesthood at the age of forty-five, and made him *Stavrophylax*, keeper of the True Cross of the Savior — thus fulfilling Porphyrus' vision on Golgatha. Three years later, much against his will, he was elected Bishop of Gaza.

Throughout his episcopate he was persecuted by the pagans who still dominated the life of that city — though he was able to convert many of them by his own example of holiness, and by the many miracles that were wrought through his intercessions. Once, when the city was suffering from a long drought, the Saint gathered the city's Christians (who numbered no more than 280), told them to fast, and celebrated an all-night vigil. The next morning, as the Bishop and his entire flock went in procession through the city it began to rain. At this, 127 pagans were converted. When the pagans' violent attacks continued, Porphyrus appealed to the Emperor Arcadius for an edict closing of the pagan temples in Gaza. With the support of St John Chrysostom the edict was issued. When the Imperial representatives entered Gaza, accompanied by Bishop Porphyrus bearing the Cross, the statue of Aphrodite in the city's main temple shattered into pieces. Eight temples were destroyed, and a Church was built on the site of the largest. Hundreds of pagans embraced the Faith and, after instruction, were baptized by the Saint.

After twenty-five years as bishop, during which he had seen his see transformed from a small flock of beleaguered Christians into a Christian territory, Saint Porphyrus reposed in peace in 420.

St Photine the Samaritan Woman, and those with her (66)

She was the Samaritan Woman who met Christ at Jacob's Well (John ch. 4). She repented, and told her townsmen that she had met the Christ, for which she is sometimes called the first to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. She converted her four sisters (Phota, Photis, Parasceva, and Cyriaca), and her sons (Victor and Joses), and all of them became tireless evangelists for Christ. After the martyrdom of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, she traveled to Carthage to proclaim the Gospel there. She, with her Christian sisters and sons, all met martyrdom under the persecutions of Nero. She is also commemorated on the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman during the Paschal season.

FEBRUARY 27

Our Holy Father Procopius of Decapolis (9th c.)

He was from Decapolis near the Sea of Galilee, and entered monastic life as a youth. When the Emperor Leo the Isaurian began his persecution of the holy icons, Procopius, who had previously spent his life in hiddenness and silence, boldly stood forth to defend the true Orthodox veneration of the icons. For this he was cruelly tortured and imprisoned. When the cruel Leo died and the icons were restored to the churches, Procopius returned to his monastery, where he lived in peace to a great old age. The *Prologue* concludes, 'In old age, he entered into God's Kingdom, where he beheld with joy the living angels and saints whose images were on the honoured icons on earth.'

St Raphael, bishop of Brooklyn (1915)

He was born in Syria in 1860, in the waning years of the Ottoman Empire. In his childhood, his family took refuge in Lebanon after their parish priest, St Joseph of Damascus (July 10) was martyred; but they later returned to Damascus. In 1879 he was tonsured a monk and entered into the service of Patriarch Hierotheos of Antioch. The Balamand Seminary had been closed since 1840, but the young monk was offered a scholarship at the Constantinople Patriarchate's seminary at Halki. Returning to Syria with a theological degree, St Raphael became assistant to Gerasimos, the new Patriarch of Antioch, traveling and preaching on his behalf. After further studies in Kiev, he transferred to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow and for a time was professor of Arabic studies at the Theological Academy in Kazan. (At that time the downtrodden Orthodox of the Middle East received considerable aid and theological training from the Tsar and from the Church in Russia).

In 1895 he was sent to the United States to shepherd the Arab Orthodox Community in New York, which was without a church or a priest. He quickly consecrated a chapel and with great energy set about the work of shepherding his flock there; but he was concerned not only for them but for the Arab Christian immigrants scattered through North America, most of whom were without a pastor and in danger of falling into heterodoxy or abandoning religious life. He traveled widely throughout the continent, visiting, counseling and serving Arab Christians, preaching, celebrating marriages and baptisms, receiving confessions and celebrating the Divine Liturgy, usually in private houses. In 1898 he published the first Orthodox prayer book in Arabic to appear in the New World. In 1899, he made a seven-month journey through forty-three American cities, seeking out the "scattered sheep" of the Church in America. His services were attended not only by Arabs but by Russians and Greeks, all of whom at that time depended on the Russian mission to North America. During this entire period, he held the official rank of Archimandrite, though his work and duties exceeded those of most bishops.

In 1901, Patriarch Meletios was elected to the see of Antioch, the first Arab to occupy the patriarchal throne for 168 years. Several proposals were made to elect Archimandrite Raphael to a see in Syria; but he refused all such offers, pointing out the Orthodox people's great and little-met needs in North America. In 1904, the Moscow Patriarchate made him Bishop of Brooklyn, the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated on American soil. He redoubled his already impressive pastoral work, ordaining priests to the many new parishes that he had founded, and assisting Saint Tikhon (then Bishop of North America) in the care of his huge diocese. In 1905 he laid the foundation of the Monastery of St Tikhon in Pennsylvania.

The bishop saw the importance of integrating the faithful into the life of their new homeland, and was an early advocate of the use of English in American Church services. When Isabel Hapgood's *Service Book* — the first useful English translation of the Church's services — was published in 1906, he advocated its use in all his parishes.

In 1912, St Raphael was found to be suffering from heart disease, but continued his exhausting pastoral work for two more years. In 1915 he was finally unable to continue, and reposed after two months' illness.

When his relics were transported in 1998 from Brooklyn to Antiochian Village in Ligonier, PA, they were found to be incorrupt, and in 2000 he became the most recently glorified Saint of North America.

In North America St Raphael is commemorated on the anniversary of his repose: February 27 on the Civil/New Calendar, February 14 on the Julian Calendar. He is also commemorated with the Synaxis of Saints of North America on the Second Sunday after Pentecost. The Patriarchate of Antioch also commemorates him, but on Saturday before the Synaxis of the Archangels (November 8).

Our Venerable Father Titus of the Lavra of the Kiev Caves (1190)

Titus and Evagrius, two monks in the famed Kiev Caves Lavra, were dear friends who, through the instigation of the demons, allowed a disagreement to descend into mutual enmity. Despite the efforts of their brother monks to reconcile them, their mutual hatred grew, to the extreme that when one of them censured the church, the other would turn another cheek out.

Titus fell gravely ill and, feeling that his end was near, at last repented and asked that Evagrius come and be reconciled with him. Evagrius was unwilling, but the other monks brought him by bodily force to his brother's bedside. Titus fell at his feet and said 'Forgive me for having offended and wounded you in my anger. Bless me!' Evagrius, unmoved, shouted 'I will never forgive him, neither in this world nor in the next!' As soon as he had uttered these words he suddenly fell down dead. Titus, on the other hand, rose up, completely cured of his illness. He told his brethren that he had seen a spear come down from heaven and strike Evagrius, and that the spear had then touched and healed him; and that the swarms of demons who had been terrifying him as he lay dying, vanished at the moment he asked Evagrius to forgive him. Saint Titus spent the rest of his days in repentance and love, and fell asleep in peace around 1190.

Our Holy Father Leander, Bishop of Seville and Apostle of Spain (600)

He was born to an aristocratic Roman family living in Spain: his father Severian was Duke of Cartagena. Saint Leander embraced monastic life as a young man in Seville, capital of the Visigoths, who had embraced Arianism and caused the Arian heresy to dominate throughout Spain. Leander became a leading figure in the struggle to restore his land to Orthodoxy, founding a school in Seville to promote the Orthodox faith. In 583 he travelled to Constantinople to seek the Emperor's support for the Spanish Orthodox; while there he met St Gregory the Great (the future Pope of Rome), with whom he formed a lifelong friendship. On his return to Spain, Leander was made Bishop of Seville.

One of the holy bishop's converts was Hermengild, one of the sons of the Arian king Leovigild. When Hermengild rose up against his father in the name of Orthodoxy, Leovigild launched a violent persecution of the Orthodox throughout his kingdom. (Leovigild had his son imprisoned, then executed on Pascha Day of 586.) By God's grace, at the very height of the persecution Leovigild fell mortally ill, repented, and embraced the true Faith; at his urging his son and successor Recared converted to Orthodoxy and convened the Third Council of Toledo in 589, at which he proclaimed that the Gothic and Suevic peoples were returning to the unity of the One Church. Saint Leander presided at the Council, and devoted the rest of his life to educating the (mostly) newly-Orthodox people of Spain in the Faith. It was he who established the early form of the Mozarabic Liturgy. He reposed in peace on March 13, 600. (He is venerated on this day because his name was incorrectly placed on February 27 in the *Roman Martyrology*.)

FEBRUARY 28

Blessed Nicholas of Pskov, fool for Christ (1576)

"A rare fearlessness is a characteristic of fools for Christ. Blessed Nicholas ran through the streets of Pskov, pretending madness, rebuking people for their secret sins and foretelling what would happen to them. When Tsar Ivan the Terrible entered Pskov, the whole town was in fear and dread of the terrible Tsar... The Tsar, learning about this blessed man, who and what he was, visited him in his tiny room. [Ivan was a great lover of external piety.] It was the first week of the Great Fast. Hearing that the Tsar was coming to visit him, Nicholas found a piece of raw meat and, when the Tsar entered his

cell, Nicholas bowed and offered the meat to the Tsar. 'Eat, little Ivan, eat!' The terrible Tsar answered him furiously: 'I am Christian, and do not eat meat in the Fast.' Then the man of God retorted, 'You do that and worse; you feed on men's flesh and blood, forgetting not only the Fast but God as well.' This lecture entered deeply into the heart of Tsar Ivan, and he immediately left Pskov in shame, having intended to wreak great slaughter there." (*Prologue*)

Holy New Martyr Kyranna (1751)

This pious and beautiful maiden lived in a village near Thessalonica. One day a Janissary, come to collect taxes, laid eyes on her and was struck by lust. When she refused his advances, the wicked official brought her before the judge in Thessalonica and, using other soldiers as false witnesses, said that she had agreed to marry him and to convert to Islam. To all these claims Kyranna replied, 'I am a Christian, and I have no bridegroom but Christ, to whom I have offered my maidenhood as a dowry. Him I love and for Him I am ready to shed my blood! That is my answer; expect no other from me.' Having said this, she 'enclosed herself in silence' (*Synaxarion*) and would testify no more. She was cast into prison, where she was tormented and finally beaten to death by her jailer. When she died, a divine Light surrounded her and illuminated the entire prison. When news of the miracle spread, the shamed Turkish officials handed over her body to Christians, who laid it to rest outside the city.

FEBRUARY 29

Commemorations for February 29 are moved to February 28 in non-leap years.

St John Cassian the Roman (435)

The *Synaxarion* calls him "Our Father Cassian, chosen by God to bring the illumination of Eastern monasticism to the West." He was born in Scythia of noble parents, and was well educated in secular things. But, thirsting for perfection, he left all behind and travelled with his friend Germanus to the Holy Land, where he became a monk in Bethlehem. After becoming established in the monastic life for several years, St John felt a desire for greater perfection, and sought out the Fathers of the Egyptian Desert. He spent seven years in the Desert, learning from such Fathers as Moses, Serapion, Theonas, Isaac and Paphnutius. Through long struggles in his cell, St John developed from personal experience a divinely-inspired doctrine of spiritual combat. Many say that it was he who first listed the *eight basic passions*: gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, acedia, vainglory and pride.

In time, struggles in the Alexandrian Church made life so difficult for the Egyptian monks that St John (still accompanied by his friend Germanus), sought refuge in Constantinople, where they came under the care and protection of St John Chrysostom. When the holy Archbishop was exiled, St John once again fled, this time to Rome, where he came under the protection of Pope Innocent I. This proved to be providential for the Western Church, for it was St John who brought the treasures of Desert spirituality to the monasteries of the West. He founded the monastery of St Victor in Marseilles, then, at the request of his bishop, wrote the *Cenobitic Institutions*, in which he adapted the austere practices of the Egyptian Fathers to the conditions of life in Gaul. He went on to write his famous *Conferences*, which became the main channel by which the wisdom of the desert East was passed to the monastics of the West. Saint Benedict developed much of his *Rule* (which at one time governed most monasteries in the Latin world) from St John's *Institutions*, and ordered that the *Conferences* be read in all monasteries.

Saint John reposed in peace in 435, and has been venerated by the monks of the West as their Father and one of their wisest teachers. His relics are still venerated at the Abbey of St Victor in Marseilles.

St John's writings were soon attacked by extreme Augustinians and, as Augustinianism became the official doctrine of the Latin Church, his veneration fell out of favor in the West. Outside the Orthodox Church, his commemoration is now limited to the diocese of Marseilles.

Our Holy Father Barsanuphius (457)

He was born a pagan in the Holy Land. As a young man he saw the truth of Christ, was baptized at the age of eighteen and immediately became a monk, given the name of John. Such was his reputation for virtue that in time he became Archbishop of Damascus. But, spurning worldly distinction and desiring only a solitary life of prayer, he secretly left Damascus and travelled to the Nitrian desert. He entered a monastery as the monk Barsanuphius, telling no one of his past. He joyfully accepted the obedience of water-carrier for the monastery, and lived out his life in humility, becoming a model of monastic life for his brethren. Only at his death was it revealed to the monks that their humble and obedient brother Barsanuphius had been an Archbishop. He reposed in peace in 457.

† Indicates a Saint or day whose commemoration is at least "Doxology rank" (Great Doxology sung at Matins); there is generally some dispensation from fasting when these days fall on fast days.

Assembled by John Brady. The opinions and errors contained herein are his own.
Lives are compiled mostly from: The *Synaxarion* published by Ormylia Monastery;
The *Prologue from Ochrid* by St Nikolai of Zika (Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic);
and the *Great Horologion*, published by Holy Transfiguration Monastery.

