

Psalm 138 (139)

1 For the End; a psalm by David.

O Lord, You test me and know me; 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thoughts from afar; 3 You search out my path and my portion, And You foresee all my ways. 4 For there is not a word on my tongue, 5 But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether; The last things and the first things, You fashioned me, and placed Your hands on me. 6 Your knowledge has become too wondrous for me; It has become too overwhelming; I am unable to grasp it. 7 Where could I go to go from Your Spirit, Or flee from Your face? 8 If I should ascend into heaven, You would be there; If I should descend into Hades, You would be there; 9 If I should take up my wings at dawn And pitch camp at the furthest part of the sea, 10 Even there Your hand would lead me, And Your right would hold me. If I asked darkness to cover me, 11 And I said, "Perhaps darkness shall cover me", But the night shall be light to my delight; 12 For darkness shall not be dark because of You, And the night shall be bright as day; As its darkness, so shall be its light. 13 For You possess my heart, O Lord; You took hold of me from my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to You, For I am fearfully and wondrously made; Marvelous are Your works, And my soul knows this very well. 15 My bone you made in secret was not hidden from You. And my substance was in the lowest parts of the earth; 16 Your eyes saw me when I was unformed, And all men shall be written in Your book; They shall be formed day by day, When as yet there was none among them. 17 Your friends, O God, became very honourable to me; Their principalities became very strong; 18 I shall count them, And they shall be multiplied more than the sand; I awakened, and I am still with You. 19 If you should slay sinners, O God, You would turn aside from me, O men of blood. 20 For you will say regarding their reasoning, "They shall receive your cities in vain." 21 Have I not hated those who hate You, O Lord? And was I not wasting away because of Your enemies? 22 I hated them with perfect hatred; They became my enemies. 23 Test me, O God, and know my heart; Examine me, and know my paths, 24 And see if there is a lawless way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 7

1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. 6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. 7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! 12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. 13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. 15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them. 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' 24 "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." 28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that

the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Gospel of St. Luke, Chapter 13

¹Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ²Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." ⁶Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. ⁷So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' ⁸" 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' " ¹⁰On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, ¹¹and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." ¹³Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. ¹⁴Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." ¹⁵The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? ¹⁶Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" ¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing. ¹⁸Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? ¹⁹It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." ²⁰Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? ²¹It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." ²²Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, ²⁴"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' ²⁶"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' ²⁸"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last." ³¹At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." ³²He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' ³³In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! ³⁴"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! ³⁵Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

I Corinthians, Chapter 6

¹If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? ²Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! ⁴Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! ⁵I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers! ⁷The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. ⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the

kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 12"Everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything. 13"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. 15Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! 16Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." 17But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. 18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 19Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

2nd Epistle of St. Peter, Chapter 1

1Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: 2Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 5For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. 10Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 12So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 13I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, 14because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. 16We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. 19And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

St. Theodora of Alexandria
(from <http://www.antiochian.org/node/16691>)
Commemorated on September 11

St. Theodora and her husband lived in Alexandria. Love and harmony ruled in their family. A certain rich man was captivated by the youthful beauty of Theodora and attempted to lead her into adultery, but was initially unsuccessful. He then bribed a woman of loose morals, who led the unassuming Theodora astray by saying that a secret sin, which the sun does not see, is also unknown to God.

Theodora betrayed her husband, but soon came to her senses and realizing the seriousness of her fall, she became furious with herself, slapping herself on the face and tearing at her hair. Her conscience gave her

no peace, and she went to a renowned abbess and confessed her transgression. Seeing the young woman's repentance, the abbess spoke to her of God's forgiveness and reminded her of the sinful woman in the Gospel who washed the feet of Christ with her tears and received from Him forgiveness. In hope of the mercy of God, Theodora said: "I believe my God, and from now on, I shall not commit such a sin, and I will strive to atone for my deeds." St. Theodora resolved to go off to a monastery to purify herself by labor and by prayer. She left her home secretly, and dressing herself in men's clothes, she went to a men's monastery, since she feared that her husband would find her in a community of women.

In order to test the newcomer, the monastery's abbot would not permit her to enter. St. Theodora spent the night at the gates. In the morning, she fell down at the knees of the abbot telling him her name was Theodore from Alexandria, and entreated him to let her remain at the monastery for repentance and monastic labors. Seeing the sincere intent of the newcomer, the abbot consented. Even the experienced monks were amazed at Theodora's all-night prayers on bended knee, her humility, endurance and self-denial. The saint labored at the monastery for eight years. Her body, once defiled by adultery, now became a vessel of the grace of God and a receptacle of the Holy Spirit.

While on a journey to buy provisions, Theodora was instructed by her abbot to stay at the Enata Monastery if there was cause for delay. There was also a young woman staying at the guest house of this same monastery. She tried to seduce St. Theodora, not realizing the monk before her was a woman. Discouraged that she had been rejected, the girl undertook a liaison with another guest and became pregnant. Ultimately, the father of this shameless girl began to question his daughter about the father of the child. The girl told him the father was the Monk Theodore, which was immediately reported to the abbot of St. Theodora's monastery. Upon being confronted, St. Theodora replied, "As God is my witness, I did not do this." Knowing of Theodore's purity and holiness of life, the abbot did not believe the accusation. When the infant was born, the monks brought the infant to the monastery where St. Theodora lived and reproached all of their monastics for leading an unchaste life. The abbot became angry at the innocent Theodore and entrusted the infant into the care of the saint, throwing her out of the monastery in disgrace. The saint humbly submitted to this new trial, seeing in it the expiation of her former sin. She settled with the child not far from the monastery in a hut. Shepherds, out of pity, gave her milk for the infant, and the saint herself ate only wild vegetables.

Bearing her misfortune, St. Theodora spent seven years in banishment. Finally, at the request of the monks, the abbot allowed her to return to the monastery with the infant, and in seclusion she spent two years instructing the child. The abbot of the monastery received a revelation from God that the sin of the monk Theodore was forgiven. The grace of God dwelt upon the monk Theodore, and soon all the monks began to witness the signs worked through the prayers of the saint.

Before her death, St. Theodora shut herself in her cell with the child and instructed him to love God above all things. She told him to obey the abbot, to preserve tranquility, to be meek and without malice, to avoid obscenity and silliness, to love non-covetousness, and not to neglect their communal prayer. After this, she prayed and, for the last time, she asked the Lord to forgive her sins. The child also prayed together with her. Soon the words of prayer faded from the lips of St. Theodora, and she peacefully departed to a better world.

The Lord revealed to the abbot the spiritual accomplishments of the saint, and also her secret. The abbot, in order to remove any dishonor told of his vision and uncovered the bosom of the saint as proof. The monastics shrank back in terror. Falling down before the body of the saint, with tears they asked forgiveness of St. Theodora. News of St. Theodora's death reached her former husband, and he received monastic tonsure at this same monastery where his wife had lived. The child also followed in the footsteps of his foster-mother. Afterwards, he became abbot of this very monastery.

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St. Menodora, St. Nymphodora, and St. Metrodora
(from <http://www.antiochian.org/node/16710>)
Commemorated on September 10

The Holy Virgins Menodora, Nymphodora, and Metrodora (305-311) were sisters from Bithynia (Asia Minor). Distinguished for their piety, they wished to preserve their virginity and avoid worldly associations. They chose a solitary place for themselves in the wilderness and spent their lives in fasting and prayer.

Reports of the holy life of the virgins soon spread, since healings of the sick began to occur through their prayers. The Bithynia region was governed at that time by a man named Frontonus, who ordered that the sisters be arrested and brought before him. At first Frontonus tried to persuade them to renounce Christ, promising great honors and rewards. The holy sisters steadfastly confessed their faith before him, rejecting all his suggestions. They told him that they did not value the temporal things of this world, and that they were prepared to die for their Heavenly Bridegroom, for death would be their gateway to eternal life.

Flying into a rage, Frontonus took out his wrath on Menodora, the eldest sister. She was stripped of her clothes and beaten by four men, while a guard urged her to offer sacrifice to the gods. She bravely endured the torments and cried out, "Sacrifice? Can't you see that I am offering myself as a sacrifice to my God?" They renewed their torments with even greater severity, with the martyr crying out, " Lord Jesus Christ, joy of my heart, my hope, receive my soul in peace." With these words she gave up her soul to God, and went to her Heavenly Bridegroom.

Four days later, the two younger sisters, Metrodora and Nymphodora, were brought to the court, and were shown the battered body of Menodora in order to frighten them. The virgins wept over her, but remained steadfast. Thereafter, St. Metrodora was tortured. She died, crying out to her beloved Lord Jesus Christ with her last breath.

They then turned to the third sister, Nymphodora with the bodies of her sisters before her. Frontonus hoped that this sight would intimidate the young virgin. Pretending that he was charmed by her youth and beauty, he urged her to worship the pagan gods, promising great rewards and honors. Nymphodora scoffed at his words, and shared the fate of her sisters. She was tortured and beaten to death with iron rods.

The bodies of the holy martyrs were to be burnt, but a heavy rain extinguished the blazing fire, and lightning struck down Frontonus and his servants. Christians took the bodies of the holy sisters and reverently buried them at the Warm Springs at Pythias (Bithynia). Part of the relics of the holy martyrs are preserved on Mt. Athos in the Protection Cathedral of the St. Panteleimon Monastery, while the hand of St. Metrodora is on the Holy Mountain in the Monastery of the Pantocrator.

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St Ahmed the Calligrapher
(from <http://khanya.wordpress.com/2010/02/25/st-ahmed-the-calligrapher/>)
Commemorated on May 3

The holy New Martyr Ahmed was born in the seventeenth century to a Muslim family in Constantinople. By profession he was a copyist in the Great Archives. In accordance with Ottoman law, since he did not have a wife, he had a slave instead, a Russian woman. Another captive from Russia lived together with her, an old woman, also a slave. Both these women were very pious.

On feast days the old woman would go to church. Taking the blessed bread or antidoron, she would give it to the young woman to eat. The old woman would also bring her holy water to drink. Whenever this occurred and Ahmed was close to her, he would smell a beautiful and indescribable fragrance coming out of her mouth. He would ask her what she was eating to make her mouth smell so fragrant. Not realizing what was happening, the slave would say that she was not eating anything. However, he persisted in asking. Eventually she told him that she was eating the bread which had been blessed by the priests, which the old woman brought her whenever she returned from church.

On hearing this, Ahmed was filled with longing to see the Orthodox church and how Orthodox received this blessed bread. Therefore he summoned a priest and told him to prepare a secret place for him, so that he could go when the Patriarch was serving the Liturgy. When the appointed day arrived, dressed as an Orthodox, he went to the Patriarchate and followed the Divine Liturgy. While he was in church, he saw the Patriarch shining with light and lifted off the floor, as he came out of the altar and through the holy doors to

bless the people. As he blessed, rays of light came from his finger tips, but though the rays fell on the heads of all the Orthodox, they did not fall on Ahmed's head. This happened two or three times and each time Ahmed saw the same thing. Thus, Ahmed came to the faith. Without hesitation he sent for the priest, who gave him rebirth through baptism. Ahmed remained a secret Orthodox for some time, concealing his baptismal name, which is why it has not come down to us.

However, one day Ahmed and certain noblemen were eating together. Afterwards they sat talking and smoking, as is the custom. In the course of the conversation they began to discuss what the greatest thing in the world. Each gave his opinion. The first guest said that the greatest thing in the world was for a man to have wisdom. The second maintained that woman was the greatest thing in the world. And yet a third said that the greatest thing in the world, and by far the most delightful, was good food – for was this not the food of the righteous in paradise?

Then it was Ahmed's turn. They all turned to him, asking him for his opinion on this matter. Filled with holy zeal, Ahmed cried out that the greatest thing of all was the Faith of the Orthodox. And confessing himself to be a Christian, he boldly censured the falseness and deception of the Muslims. At first, on hearing this the Muslims were aghast. Then, filled with unspeakable rage, they fell on the holy martyr and dragged him to a judge, so that he could be sentenced to death. He was beheaded, receiving the crown of martyrdom on the orders of the ruler on 3 May 1682.

The Holy Hieromartyr Eleutherius
(from <http://www.westsrbdio.org/en/>)
Commemorated on December 15

From The Prologue from Ohrid by St. Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich
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From a good tree comes good fruit. This wonderful saint had noble and greatly eminent parents. Eleutherius was born in Rome, where his father was an imperial proconsul. His mother Anthia heard the Gospel from the great Apostle Paul and was baptized by him. Having been left a widow early, she entrusted her only son for study and service to Anicetus the Bishop of Rome. Seeing how Eleutherius was gifted by God and illumined by the grace of God, the bishop ordained him a deacon at the age of fifteen, a priest at the age of eighteen, and a bishop at the age of twenty. Eleutherius's God-given wisdom made up for what he lacked in years, and this chosen one of God was appointed Bishop of Illyria with his seat in Valona (Avlona), Albania. The good shepherd guarded his flock well and increased their number day by day. Emperor Hadrian, a persecutor of Christians, sent the commander Felix with soldiers to seize Eleutherius and bring him to Rome. When the raging Felix arrived in Valona and entered the church, he saw and heard the holy hierarch of God; suddenly his heart changed, and he became a Christian. Eleutherius baptized Felix and departed for Rome with him, returning joyfully as if he were going to a feast and not to trial and torture. The emperor subjected the noble Eleutherius to harsh torture: flogging, roasting on an iron bed, boiling in pitch, and burning in a fiery furnace. But Eleutherius was delivered from all these deadly tortures by God's power. Seeing all this, Caribus the Roman eparch declared that he also was a Christian. Caribus was tortured and then beheaded, and so was Blessed Felix. Finally, the imperial executioners cut off the honorable head of St. Eleutherius. When his mother, the holy Anthia, came and stood over the dead body of her son, she also was beheaded. Their bodies were translated to Valona, where even today St. Eleutherius glorifies the name of Christ by his many miracles. He suffered during the reign of Hadrian in the year 120.

Excerpt from the "Historical Note" of the book,
Silent as a Stone: Mother Maria of Paris and the Trash Can Rescue
by Jim Forest and illustrated by Dasha Panchesnaya
(Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007)

[Note by 2013 Bible Bowl Committee: St. Maria Skobtsova lived from 1891 to 1945. The "Yuri" referred to below is Yuri Skobtsov, St. Maria's son from the time when she was married before she became a nun. The "Father Dimitri" referred to below is Father Dimitri Klepinin who served as the chaplain at the rented house at Rue de Lourmel where St. Maria ministered to the refugees, the needy, the downcast and the lonely.]

The last phase of Mother Maria's life was a series of responses to World War II and Germany's occupation of France. Paris fell on June 14, 1940. With defeat came greater poverty and hunger for many people. The house at Rue de Lourmel became an official food distribution point.

Russian refugees were among the special targets of the German occupiers. In June 1941, a thousand Russians were arrested, including several close friends and collaborators of Mother Maria and Father Dimitri.

Early in 1942, Jews began to knock on the door at Rue de Lourmel, asking Father Dimitri if he would issue baptismal certificates to them. The answer was always yes. With baptismal certificates, they hoped not to be punished by the occupiers for being Jews.

In March 1942, the decree came from Berlin that Jews in all occupied countries must wear the yellow star. The order came into force in France in June. Jews were forbidden access to nearly all public places. Shopping was restricted to one hour per day.

In July came the mass arrest of 12,884 Jews. Almost 7,000 Jews (two-thirds of them children) were brought to the Vélodrome d'Hiver—the "Vél Div" as it was often called—a stadium for bicycle races, not far from Rue de Lourmel. Held there for five days, the captives were at last sent to one of the most notorious concentration camps, Auschwitz. Few survived.

Mother Maria had often considered her monastic robe a godsend in her work. Now it opened the way for her to enter the stadium. She was able to work for three days in the stadium, trying to comfort the children and their parents and distributing what food she could bring in. She even managed to rescue a number of children by enlisting the aid of trash can collectors who smuggled the children out in trash cans--until the Nazis barred her from the stadium.

Early in 1943, the long-expected event happened: Mother Maria, Yuri, and Father Dimitri were arrested and soon after were sent to the first of several concentration camps.

The final destination for Yuri and Father Dimitri was a camp called Dora. Both died there in the early months of 1944. A final letter from Yuri was discovered in a suitcase of his possessions returned to Rue de Lourmel:

"I am absolutely calm, even somewhat proud to share Mama's fate. I promise you I will bear everything with dignity. Whatever happens, sooner or later we shall all be together. I can say in all honesty that I am not afraid of anything any longer.... I ask anyone whom I have hurt in any way to forgive me. Christ be with you!"

Mother Maria was sent in a sealed cattle truck to the Ravensbrück camp in Germany, where she endured for two years. Here she managed to help those around her and even made an embroidered icon of the Mother of God holding a cross that supported her crucified Son.

One fellow prisoner recalled that Mother Maria "was never downcast, never. She was full of good cheer, really good cheer. She was on good terms with everyone. She was the kind of person who made no distinction between people no matter what their political views might be or their religious beliefs."

By March 1945, Mother Maria's condition was critical. She had to lie down between roll calls and hardly spoke. Her face, a friend recalled, "revealed intense inner suffering. Already it bore the marks of death. Nevertheless Mother Maria made no complaint. She kept her eyes closed and seemed to be in a state of continual prayer."

The last day of her life was the day before Easter. The shellfire of the approaching Russian army could be heard in the distance.

Accounts vary as to what happened during the last hours of her life. According to one account, she was simply one of those selected to die that day. According to another, she took the place of a fellow prisoner, a Jewish woman.

Although perishing in the gas chamber, Mother Maria did not perish in the Church's memory. Soon after the end of World War II, essays and books about her began appearing in French and Russian. Two biographies were published in English, and little by little her essays were made available in several languages, most recently English.

On May 1 and 2, 2004 at Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Paris, Mother Maria, her son Yuri, Father Dimitri Klépinin, and their friend and co-worker Ilya Fondaminsky were officially recognized as saints. The Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople established the 20th of July each year as the day of their remembrance.

**From Fr. Thomas Hopko, "The Orthodox Faith: An Elementary Handbook on
the Orthodox Church--Volume 2: Worship--The Sacraments"
Baptism**

The practice of baptism as a religious symbol did not begin with Jesus. **Baptism**, which means literally the immersion in water, was practiced among the people of the Old Testament as well as the people who belonged to pagan religions. The universal meaning of baptism is that of "starting anew," of dying to an old way of life and being born again into a new way of life. Thus, baptism was always connected with **repentance** which means a moral conversion, a "change of mind," a change in living from something old and bad to something new and good.

Thus, in the Gospel we find John the Baptist baptizing the people as a sign of repentance in preparation for the Kingdom of God which was coming to men with Christ the Messiah. Christ himself was baptized by John not because he was sinful and needed to repent, but because in allowing himself to be baptized he showed that indeed he was God's "Beloved Son," the Saviour and Messiah, the "Lamb of God who takes upon himself the sins of the world" (See *Mt 3, Mk 1, Lk 3, Jn 1-3*).

In the Christian Church the practice of baptism takes on a new and particular significance. It no longer remains merely a sign of moral change and spiritual rebirth. It becomes very specifically the act of a person's death and resurrection in and with Jesus. Christian baptism is man's participation in the event of Easter. It is a "new birth by water and the Holy Spirit" into the Kingdom of God (*Jn 3:5*).

Baptism in the Church begins with the rejection of Satan and the acceptance of Christ. Before being baptized, a person—or his sponsors or **godparents** for him—officially proclaims the symbol of Christian faith, the Creed. Because the godparent speaks on behalf of the child, sponsors his entrance into the Church and "receives" the child out of the baptismal waters into the Church and cares for his spiritual life, the godparent himself must be a member of the Church.

After the proclamation of faith, the baptismal water is prayed over and blessed as the sign of the goodness of God's creation. The person to be baptized is also prayed over and blessed with sanctified oil as the sign that his creation by God is holy and good. And then, after the solemn proclamation of "Alleluia" (God be praised), the person is immersed three times in the water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Through the act of immersion, the baptized person dies to this world and is born again in the resurrection of Christ into eternal life. He is clothed with the "garments of salvation" symbolized by the white baptismal robe which is the "new humanity" of Jesus himself who is the new and heavenly Adam (See *Jn 3, Rom 5, 1 Cor 15*). Thus, the words of the Apostle Paul are chanted as the newly-baptized is led in procession around the baptismal font three times as the symbol of his procession to the Kingdom of God and his entrance into eternal life: "For as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia" (*Gal 3:27*).

In ancient times this procession was made from the baptistery to the church where the newly-baptized received Holy Communion at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Baptisms were normally done in connection with the Easter Liturgy; our present procession around the church building on Easter night is nothing more than our remembrance that we are baptized, that we have left the life of this world to enter the eternal life of the Risen Christ in the Kingdom of God. This new life is given to us in the life of the Church, most specifically in the Divine Liturgy. Before the baptismal procession and the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel is fulfilled in the reception of Holy Communion, however, the newly-baptized is given the gift of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Chrismation.

**From Fr. Thomas Hopko, "The Orthodox Faith: An Elementary Handbook on
the Orthodox Church--Volume 2: Worship--The Sacraments"
Chrismation**

In the sacrament of **Chrismation** we receive "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" (See *Rom 8, 1 Cor 6, 2 Cor 1:21-22*). If baptism is our personal participation in Easter—the death and resurrection of Christ, then chrismation is our personal participation in Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us.

The sacrament of chrismation, also called **confirmation**, is always done in the Orthodox Church together with baptism. Just as Easter has no meaning for the world without Pentecost, so baptism has no meaning for the Christian without chrismation. In this understanding and practice, the Orthodox Church differs from the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches where the two sacraments are often separated and given other interpretations than those found in traditional Orthodoxy.

Chrismation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, is performed in the Orthodox Church by anointing all parts of the person's body with the special oil called **holy chrism**. This oil, also called **myrrh** [miron] is prepared by the bishops of the Church on Holy Thursday. It is used in chrismation to show that the gift of the Spirit was originally given to men through the apostles of Christ, whose formal successors in the world are the bishops of the Church (see *Acts 8:14; 19:1-7*).

In chrismation a person is given the "power from on high" (*Acts 1-2*), the gift of the Spirit of God, in order to live the new life received in baptism. He is anointed, just as Christ the Messiah is the Anointed One of God. He becomes—as the fathers of the Church dared to put it—a "christ" together with Jesus. Thus, through chrismation we become a "christ," a son of God, a person upon whom the Holy Spirit dwells, a person in whom the Holy Spirit lives and acts—as long as we want him and cooperate with his powerful and holy inspiration. Thus, it is only after our chrismation that the baptismal procession is made and that we hear the epistle and the gospel of our salvation and illumination in Christ.

After the baptism and chrismation the person newly-received into God's family is **tonsured**. The tonsure, which is the cutting of hair from the head in the sign of the cross, is the sign that the person completely offers himself to God—hair being the symbol of strength (*Jud 16:17*). Thus, until the fifteenth century the clergy of the Orthodox Church—the "professional Christians," so to speak—wore the tonsure all their lives to show that their strength was in God.

The Rite of Churching

Together with being baptized and chrismated, the new-born child is also "churched." The **rite of churching** imitates the offering of male children to the temple according to the law of the Old Testament, particularly the offering of Christ on the fortieth day after his birth (*Luke 2:22*). Because of this fact, baptism in the Orthodox tradition came to be prescribed for the fortieth day or thereabouts. In the New Testament Church both male and female children are formally presented to God in the Church with special prayers at this time.

Also at this time, once more in imitation of Old Testament practice, the mother of the new-born child is also "churched." Here we have the specific example of the purification ritual of Jesus' mother Mary (*Lk 2:22*). In the Orthodox tradition the churching of the mother is her re-entry into the assembly of God's people after her participation with God in the holy act of birth and after her separation from the Liturgy during her confinement. Thus, the mother is blessed to enter once more into communion with the mystery of Christ's Body and Blood in the Divine Liturgy of the Church from which she has been necessarily absent.

The new mother should be churched before the baptism of her infant so that she can be present at the sacramental entrance of her child into the Kingdom of Christ. The official service book indicates that this should be done.

It is also the Orthodox tradition that the mysteries of baptism and chrismation, called officially “holy illumination,” are fulfilled in the immediate reception by the “newly-enlightened” of Holy Communion in the eucharistic liturgy of the Church. This is the case with infants as well as adults.

**From Fr. Thomas Hopko, "The Orthodox Faith: An Elementary Handbook on
the Orthodox Church--Volume 2: Worship--The Church Building"
Icons**

In the Orthodox Church the icons bear witness to the reality of God’s presence with us in the mystery of faith. The icons are not just human pictures or visual aids to contemplation and prayer. They are the witnesses of the presence of the Kingdom of God to us, and so of our own presence to the Kingdom of God in the Church. It is the Orthodox faith that icons are not only permissible, but are spiritually necessary because “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (*Jn 1:14*). Christ is truly man and, as man, truly the “icon of the invisible God” (*Col 1:15; 1 Cor 11:7; 2 Cor 4:4*).

The **iconostasis** or **icon screen** in the Orthodox Church exists to show our unity with Christ, his mother and all the angels and saints. It exists to show our unity with God. The **altar table**, which stands for the Banquet Table of the Kingdom of God, is placed behind the so-called **royal gates**, between the icons of the Theotokos and Child and the glorified Christ, showing that everything which happens to us in the Church happens in history between those “two comings” of Christ: between his coming as the Saviour born of Mary and. His coming at the end of the age as the King and the Judge.

The icons on the royal gates witness to the presence of Christ’s good news, the gospel of salvation. The four evangelists who recorded the gospels appear, and often also an icon of the Annunciation, the first proclamation of the gospel in the world. (In Greek the gospel is the *evangelion*, the authors of the gospels the *evangelistoi*, the annunciation the *evangelismos*).

Over the doors we have the icon of Christ’s Mystical Supper with his disciples, the icon of the central mystery of the Christian faith and the unity of the Church in the world. It is the visual witness that we too are partakers in the “marriage supper of the lamb” (*Rev 19:9*), that we too are blessed by Christ “to eat and drink at my table in my kingdom” (*Lk 22:30*), blessed to “eat bread in the Kingdom of God” (*Lk 14:15*).

Over and around the central gates are icons of the saints. The **deacon’s doors** in the first row (for the servants of the altar) usually have icons depicting deacons or angels, God’s servants. The first row also has an icon of the person or event in whose honor the given building is dedicated, along with other prominent saints or events. Depending on the size of the iconostasis, there may be rows of icons of the apostles, the major feasts of the Church, the prophets and other holy people blessed by God, all crowned on the top by the cross of Christ.

In recent centuries the iconostasis in most Orthodox churches became very ornate and developed into a virtual wall, dividing the faithful from the holy altar rather than uniting them with it. In recent years this development has happily been altered in many places. The iconostasis in many church buildings now gives first place to the icons themselves and has become once more an icon “stand” or “screen” (**stasis**) rather than a solid partition.

Besides the iconostasis, Orthodox Church buildings often have icons or frescoes on the walls and ceilings. The “canon” of Church design is to have the icon of Christ the Almighty in the center of the building, and the icon of the Theotokos with Christ appearing within her found over the altar area. This latter icon is called the “image of the Church” since Mary is herself the prototype of the entire assembly of believers in whom Christ must dwell. In the altar area it is also traditional to put icons of the saints who composed Church liturgies and hymns. Directly behind the altar table there is usually an image of Christ in glory—enthroned or transfigured or resurrecting, and sometimes offering the eucharistic gifts.