

St. Matthew, Chapter 20, verses 1-16

1: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2: After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3: And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place; 4: and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. 5: Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. 6: And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' 7: They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' 8: And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' 9: And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. 10: Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11: And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, 12: saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' 13: But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14: Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. 15: Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' 16: So the last will be first, and the first last."

St. Luke, Chapter 14, verses 7-15

7: Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he marked how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, 8: "When you are invited by any one to a marriage feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest a more eminent man than you be invited by him; 9: and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. 10: But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. 11: For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." 12: He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. 13: But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, 14: and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." 15: When one of those who sat at table with him heard this, he said to him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" 16: But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; 17: and at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' 18: But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' 19: And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' 20: And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' 21: So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.' 22: And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' 23: And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. 24: For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

St. Luke, Chapter 17, verses 1-19

1: And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come! 2: It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. 3: Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; 4: and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." 5: The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6: And the Lord said, "If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. 7: "Will any one of you, who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep,

say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down at table'? 8: Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink'? 9: Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 10: So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" 11: On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Sama'ria and Galilee. 12: And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance 13: and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." 14: When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. 15: Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; 16: and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. 17: Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? 18: Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19: And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

St. Luke, Chapter 18, verses 1-30

1: And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2: He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; 3: and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' 4: For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, 5: yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.'" 6: And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7: And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8: I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" 9: He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: 10: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11: The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12: I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' 13: But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14: I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." 15: Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16: But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 17: Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." 18: And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 19: And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 20: You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" 21: And he said, "All these I have observed from my youth." 22: And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 23: But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. 24: Jesus looking at him said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! 25: For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26: Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" 27: But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." 28: And Peter said, "Lo, we have left our homes and followed you." 29: And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30: who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."

Acts, Chapter 17, verses 15-34

15: Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. 16: Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. 17: So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there. 18: Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him. And some said, "What would this babblers say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" -- because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. 19:

And they took hold of him and brought him to the Are-op'agus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you present? 20: For you bring some strange things to our ears; we wish to know therefore what these things mean." 21: Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. 22: So Paul, standing in the middle of the Are-op'agus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23: For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 24: The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, 25: nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. 26: And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, 27: that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, 28: for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.' 29: Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. 30: The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, 31: because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead." 32: Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." 33: So Paul went out from among them. 34: But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionys'ius the Areop'agite and a woman named Dam'aris and others with them.

1 Timothy, Chapter 4

1: Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2: through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, 3: who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4: For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; 5: for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. 6: If you put these instructions before the brethren, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have followed. 7: Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. Train yourself in godliness; 8: for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 9: The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. 10: For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. 11: Command and teach these things. 12: Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 13: Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. 14: Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you. 15: Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. 16: Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

2 Timothy, Chapter 2

1: You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2: and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 3: Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4: No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him. 5: An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 6: It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. 7: Think over what I say, for the Lord will grant you understanding in everything. 8: Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel, 9: the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the word of God is not fettered. 10: Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory. 11: The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; 12: if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 13: if we are faithless, he remains faithful -- for he cannot deny himself. 14: Remind them of this, and charge them before the

Lord to avoid disputing about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 15: Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 16: Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, 17: and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenae'us and Phile'tus, 18: who have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already. They are upsetting the faith of some. 19: But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." 20: In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble. 21: If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. 22: So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart. 23: Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. 24: And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, 25: correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, 26: and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

1 John, Chapter 4, verses 7-21

7: Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. 8: He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. 9: In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10: In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. 11: Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12: No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. 13: By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. 14: And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15: Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16: So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17: In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. 18: There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. 19: We love, because he first loved us. 20: If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21: And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.

Life of St. Nicholas for December 6 (December 19) from "Feasts and Saints of the Orthodox Church" of the Orthodox Church in America Official Website at www.oca.org

Saint Nicholas, the Wonderworker and Archbishop of Myra in Lycia is famed as a great saint pleasing unto God. He was born in the city of Patara in the Lycian region (on the south coast of the Asia Minor peninsula), and was the only son of pious parents Theophanes and Nonna, who had given a vow to dedicate him to God. As the fruition of longtime prayer of his childless parents, the infant Nicholas from the very day of his birth revealed to people the light of his future glory as a wonderworker. His mother, Nonna, after giving birth was immediately healed from illness. The newborn infant while still in the baptismal font stood on his feet three times, without support from anyone, indicating by this to honour the MostHoly Trinity. Saint Nicholas from his infancy began a life of fasting, and on Wednesdays and Fridays he accepted milk from his mother only but once, after the evening prayers of his parents. From the time of his childhood Nicholas thrived on the study of Divine Scripture; by day he would not leave church, and by night he prayed and read books -- fashioning in himself a worthy dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. His uncle, Bishop Nicholas of Patara, rejoiced at the spiritual success and deep piety of his kinsman. He ordained him a reader, and then elevated Nicholas to the dignity of presbyter, making him his assistant and entrusting him to speak instructing the flock. In serving the Lord the youth was fervent of spirit, and in his proficiency with questions of faith he was like an elder / starets, which aroused the wonder and deep respect of believers. Constantly at work and vivacious, being in unceasing

prayer, presbyter Nicholas displayed great kind-heartedness towards the flock, and towards those afflicted coming to him for help, and he distributed all his inheritance to the poor. Having learned about the bitter need and poverty of a certain formerly rich inhabitant of his city, Saint Nicholas saved him from great sin. Having three grown daughters, the despairing father considered to give them over to profligacy so as to save them from hunger. The saint, grieving lest the man perish a sinner, by night secretly brought him through the window three sacks with gold and by this saved the family from falling into spiritual destruction. In bestowing charity, Saint Nicholas always strove to do this secretly and conceal his good deeds.

In setting off on pilgrimage to the holy places at Jerusalem, the bishop of Patara entrusted the guidance of the flock to Saint Nicholas, who fulfilled this obedience carefully and with love. When the bishop returned, he in turn asked blessing for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Along the way the saint predicted the onset of a storm threatening the ship with inundation, since he saw the devil itself having got on ship. At the entreaty of the despairing pilgrims, he calmed by his prayers the waves of the sea. Through his prayer also was restored to health a certain sailor of the ship, who had fallen from the mast and was mortally injured.

Having reached the ancient city of Jerusalem and having come to Golgotha, Saint Nicholas offered up thanksgiving to the Saviour of the race of mankind and he made the rounds of all the holy places, doing poklons and making prayers. By night on Mount Sion the closed doors of the church opened by themselves in front of the arriving great pilgrim. Going round the holy places connected with the earthly service of the Son of God, Saint Nicholas decided to withdraw into the wilderness, but he was stopped by a Divine voice, urging him to return to his native country. Having returned to Lycia and yearning for a life of quietude, the saint entered into the brotherhood of a monastery, named Holy Sion. But the Lord again announced another pathway, awaiting him: "Nicholas, this is not the field, on which thou ought to await Mine harvest, but rather turn round and go into the world, and there My Name shalt be glorified in thee." In the vision the Lord gave him a Gospel of exquisite workmanship, and the MostHoly Mother of God -- an omophor.

And actually, upon the death of archbishop John, he was chosen bishop of Lycian Myra -- after one of the bishops of the Council gave a decisive reply on the question of choice of a new archbishop -- the choice of God as directed him in a vision -- Saint Nicholas. Summoned to the flock of the Church in the dignity of archbishop, Saint Nicholas remained a great ascetic, appearing to his flock as an image of gentleness, kindness and love towards people. This was particularly precious for the Lycian Church during the time of persecution of Christians under the emperor Diocletian (284-305). Bishop Nicholas, locked up in prison together with other Christians, sustained them and exhorted them to bravely endure the fetters, punishment and torture. He himself the lord preserved unharmed. Upon the accession to rule of the holy equal-to-the-apostles Constantine, Saint Nicholas was restored to his flock, which joyfully received back their guide and intercessor.

Despite his great gentleness of spirit and purity of heart, Saint Nicholas was a zealous and ardent warrior of the Church of Christ. Fighting evil spirits, the saint made the rounds of the pagan temples and shrines in the city of Myra and its surroundings, shattering the idols and turning the temples to dust.

In the year 325 Saint Nicholas was a participant in the 1st Ecumenical Council [Sobor]. This Council proclaimed the Nicean Symbol of faith, and he stood up with the likes of saints Sylvester the pope of Rome, Alexander of Alexandria, Spyridon of Trimiphuntum and others of the 318 fathers of the Council against the heretic Arius.

Saint Nicholas, in the heat of denunciation and fired up with zeal for the Lord, even gave the false-teacher a good drubbing on the ears, for which he was deprived of his bishop's omophor and put under guard. But several of the holy fathers shared a vision revealing that the Lord Himself and the Mother of God had made the saint to be bishop, bestowing upon him the Gospel and omophorion. The fathers of the Council, having concurred, that the audacity of the saint was pleasing to God, gave glory to the Lord and restored His holy saint to the dignity of bishop.

Having returned to his own diocese, the saint brought it peace and blessings, sowing the word of Truth, nipping in the bud defective and spurious claims of wisdom, uprooting heresy and healing the fallen and those led astray through ignorance. He was indeed a light in the world and the salt of the earth, wherein his life did shine and his word was mixed with the salt of wisdom.

Even during his life the saint worked many miracles. Of them the one accorded the greatest fame was the deliverance from death by the saint of three men, unjustly condemned by a greedy city-commander. The saint boldly went up to the executioner and took hold of his sword, already suspended over the heads of the

condemned. The city-commander, denounced by Saint Nicholas in wrong-doing, repented himself and begged for forgiveness. During this time there were present three military officers, dispatched by the emperor Constantine to Phrygia. They did not suspect that they soon likewise would be compelled to seek the intercession of Saint Nicholas: it so happened that they had been vilely slandered before the emperor and were come under a sentence of death. Appearing in sleep to the holy equal-to-the-apostles Constantine, Saint Nicholas called on him to dismiss the wrongful death-sentence of the military officers who, now in prison, prayerfully called out for help to the saint. He worked many other miracles, and asceticised many long years at his labour. Through the prayers of the saint, the city of Myra was rescued from a terrible famine. Having appeared in sleep to a certain Italian merchant and having left him as a pledge of payment three gold money-pieces, which the merchant found in his hand upon wakening in the morning, he requested him to sail to Myra and furnish grain there. More than once did the saint save those drowning in the sea, and provide release from captivity and imprisonment.

Having reached old age, Saint Nicholas expired peacefully to the Lord (+345-351). His venerable relics were preserved undecayed in the local cathedral church and flowed with curative myrrh, from which many received healing. In the year 1087 his relics were transferred to the Italian city of Bari, where they rest even now (about the Transfer of Relics see under 9 May).

The name of the great saint of God, the hierarch and wonderworker Nicholas, a speedy helper and suppliant for all hastening to him, is famed in all the ends of the earth, in many lands and among many peoples. In Russia there are a multitude of cathedrals, monasteries and churches consecrated in his name. There is not, probably, a single city without a Nikol'sk temple.

Life of St. Polycarp of Smyrna for February 23 (March 8/7) from "Feasts and Saints of the Orthodox Church" of the Orthodox Church in America Official Website at www.oca.org

Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was born about the year 80 and lived in Asia Minor in the city of Smyrna. He was left an orphan at an early age, but through the direction of an Angel, he was raised by the pious widow Kallista. After the death of his adoptive mother, Polycarp gave away his possessions and began to lead a chaste life, caring for the sick and the infirm. He was very fond of and close to the holy bishop of Smyrna, Bukolos (commemorated 6 February). He ordained Polycarp as deacon, entrusting to him to preach the Word of God in church.

At this time the holy Apostle John the Theologian was still alive. Saint Polycarp was especially close to Saint John the Theologian, whom he accompanied on his apostolic wanderings. Sainted Bukolos ordained Saint Polycarp presbyter, and shortly before his death expressed last wishes that he be made bishop upon the Smyrna cathedra. When the ordination of Saint Polycarp to bishop was accomplished, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him. Saint Polycarp guided his flock with apostolic zeal. He was also greatly loved among the clergy. With great warmth did Saint Ignatios the God-Bearer regard him. Setting out to Rome where execution awaited him -- he was torn asunder by wild beasts -- he wrote to Saint Polycarp: "Just as the winds and turbulence require the rudder for coming ashore, so likewise are the present times necessary, in order to reach God."

The emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180) came upon the Roman throne and started up a most fierce persecution against Christians. The pagans demanded that the judge seek out Saint Polycarp -- "the father of all the Christians" and "the seducer of all Asia". During this while Saint Polycarp, at the persistent urging of his flock, stayed at a small village not far from Smyrna. When the soldiers came for him, he went out to them and led them in to eat, and at this time he began to pray, having prepared himself for the deed of martyrdom. His suffering and death are recorded in "An Epistle of the Christians of the Church of Smyrna to the other Churches" -- one of the most ancient memorials of Christian literature. Having been brought to trial, Saint Polycarp firmly confessed his faith in Christ and was condemned to burning. The executioners wanted to tie him to a post, but he calmly told them that the bonfire would not work, and they could merely tie him with ropes. The flames encircled the saint but did not touch him, coming all together over his head. Seeing that the fire did him no harm, the throng of pagans demanded that he be killed with a sword. When they inflicted the wound upon Saint Polycarp, there flowed from it so much blood, that it extinguished the flames. The body of the priestmartyr Polycarp was then committed to flame. The Christians of Smyrna reverently gathered up his venerable remains, honouring his memory as sacred.

A story has been preserved about Saint Polycarp by his disciple, Sainted Ireneios of Lyons, which Eusebios cites in his *Ecclesiastical History* (V, 20):

I was still very young when I saw thee in Asia Minor at Polycarp's -- writes Saint Ireneios to his friend Florinus -- ... but I would still be able to point out the place where Blessed Polycarp sat and conversed, be able to depict his walk, his

mannerisms in life, his outward appearance, his speaking to people, his companionable wandering with John, and how he himself related, together with other eye-witnesses of the Lord -- those things that he remembered from the words of others and in turn told what he heard from them about the Lord, His teachings and miracles ... Through the mercy of God to me, I then already listened attentively to Polycarp and wrote down his words not on tablets, but in the depths of my heart ... Wherefore, I am able to witness before God, that if this blessed and apostolic elder heard something similar to thy fallacy, he would immediately stop up his ears and express his indignation with his usual phrase: 'Good God! That Thou hast permitted me to be alive at such a time!'

During his life the sainted bishop wrote several Epistles to the flock and letters to various individuals. There has survived to the present his Epistle to the Philippians which, on the testimony of Blessed Jerome, was read in the churches of Asia Minor at Divine-services. It was written by the saint in response to the request of the Philippians to send them a letter of the PriestMartyr Ignatios, which had been preserved by Saint Polycarp.

Life of St. Perpetua for February 1 (February 14) from "Feasts and Saints of the Orthodox Church" of the Orthodox Church in America Official Website at www.oca.org

The **Holy Martyress Perpetua** was descended from patrician lineage and lived in Carthage. In secret from her father, a convinced pagan, she accepted holy Baptism through believing in the Saviour. She was vouchsafed a martyr's end together with her own brother Satyrus, the maid-servant Felicitia and the youths Revocatus, Saturnilus and Secundus, who also were preparing to become Christians. Despite the exhorting of her father who persistently appealed to her maternal feelings, the early on widowed 22 year old Saint Perpetua subdued earthly attachment for the beloved infant at her bosom on account of the Heavenly Life. Before execution the saint had a vision from God, fortifying her strength of soul. Saint Secundus died in prison, but the remaining martyrs were given over for devouring by wild beasts. But the beasts would not touch the condemned, and then they were all killed by the sword. This occurred in about the year 203.

Life of St. Elizabeth the Grand Duchess for July 5 (July 18) from "Orthodox America: Lives of the Saints" from www.roca.org

A Sacrificing Love - New Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth

One of the brightest stars in the celestial array of Russia's New Martyrs is holy Grand Duchess Elizabeth. A convert to Orthodoxy, she outshone many of those whose Faith she had so ardently embraced. She was like a sun whose penetrating rays warm hearts grown cold and renew the lost faith of a fallen and despairing humanity, as if to say that not all have succumbed to an egotistical self love, that there are still those servants of Love, whose example points the way to the true path, to happiness both on this earth and for all eternity. She placed a law in her heart: that the strong bear the frailties of the weak. Love was the cornerstone of her life and all her activities. This love made easy for her what was difficult, it made serving her fellowman a pleasure, and through it the forgiveness of enemies was made possible. For the sake of this Love she sacrificed herself for others, thereby fulfilling that greatest of commandments according to the Apostle of love, that "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John3:16).

There exists perhaps no more eloquent tribute to the holy Grand Duchess than the spiritual portrait so finely drawn by the late Metropolitan Anastassy:

"She was a rare combination of exalted Christian spirit, moral nobility, enlightened mind, gentle heart, and refined taste. She possessed an extremely delicate and multifaceted spiritual composition and her outward appearance reflected the beauty and greatness of her spirit. Upon her brow lay the seal of an inborn, elevated dignity which set her apart from those around her. Under the cover of modesty, she often strove - though in vain, to conceal herself from the gaze of others, but one could not mistake her for another. Wherever she appeared, one would always ask: "*Who is she who looketh forth as the morning, clear as the sun*" (Song of Solomon 6:10)? Wherever she would go she emanated the pure fragrance of the lily. Perhaps it was for this reason that she loved the color white--it was the reflection of her heart. All of her spiritual qualities were strictly balanced, one against another, never giving an impression of one-sidedness. Femininity was joined in her to a courageous character; her goodness never led to weakness and blind, unconditional trust of people. Even in her finest heartfelt inspirations she exhibited that gift of discernment which has always been so highly esteemed by Christian ascetics..."

The Grand Duchess was born on October 20, 1861, the daughter of Princess Alice of Hesse and the granddaughter of Queen Victoria of England, under whose strict tutelage she received both an extensive and a practical education. Her mother died when she was still young, the first tragedy in a life marked by inner suffering. But through, greatness of spirit, her sorrow at the absence of maternal love was later transformed into a tender and solicitous compassion for others who lacked this love.

Chosen as the future wife of the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, the Grand Duchess arrived in Moscow and set about learning all she could about her newly adopted homeland, its people and its culture. Her heart was soon captured by the beauty and spiritual depth of Orthodoxy which she discovered so tightly interwoven into the rich fabric of the Russian soul. It was not mere formality that prompted her decision to become Orthodox, but a strong inner conviction. In Orthodoxy she found full expression for the natural spiritual cast of her character. Social obligations at the palace, however, prevented this disposition from blossoming, although in keeping with her new position she was able to dedicate much time to philanthropic activities. It was only with the tragic assassination of her husband in 1905 that Providence granted her the opportunity to withdraw from the tumult of a world which her soul found so wearisome. But through her patient endurance she had already achieved a measure of Christian perfection. This was manifest in her ready forgiveness of her husband's murderer whom she even went to visit in hopes of softening his heart. On the memorial cross erected upon the site of her husband's death, she had inscribed the Gospel words, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do..." She had already begun the ascent up the ladder of Christian virtue.

Ignoring the scandal caused by such a move, the Grand Duchess left the royal apartments and settled in a building which she had acquired at Ordinka. Here, with the counsel of the elders of the Zosima Hermitage under whom she had placed herself in total obedience, she laid the foundation for a sisterhood which combined in itself the ascetic labors of the monastic life and works of charity. This quiet haven in the midst of a bustling city was named in honor of Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, whose two natures of service and prayer were so beautifully intertwined in the mission of the new community. "To be not of this world and at the same time to live and act in the world in order to transform it--this was the foundation upon which she desired to establish her convent."

The Grand Duchess was personally involved in all the plans for the buildings of the community, and they reflected her refined aesthetic sensibilities. The main church was built in the traditional Novgorod-Pskov style and painted by the well-known Russian artist Nesterov. The austere white walls were balanced with exquisite sculptured ornamentation. The architectural harmony of the buildings, the peaceful atmosphere, the beauty of the church services--all combined to lift the tired soul from its earthly cares and give it a glimpse of paradise. Even members of the unchurchly contemporary Russian society, whose spiritual re-education was of such concern to the Grand Duchess, were drawn to this unique community.

"It is not surprising that the convent quickly blossomed and attracted many sisters from the aristocracy as well as the common people. Neatly monastic order reigned within the inner life of the community and both within and without the convent the activities of the Grand Duchess consisted in the care of those who visited the sick who were lodged in the convent, in the material and moral help given to the poor, and in the almshouse for those orphans and abandoned children found in every large city. The Grand Duchess paid special attention to the unfortunate children who bore within themselves the curse of their fathers' sins, the children born in the turbid slums of Moscow only to wither before they had a chance to blossom. Many of them were taken into the orphanage built for them where they were quickly revived spiritually and physically. For others, constant supervision at their place of residence was established. The spirit of initiative and moral sensitivity which accompanied the Grand Duchess in all her activities, inspired and impelled her to search out new paths and forms of philanthropic activity, which sometimes reflected the influence of her first, western homeland, and its advanced organizations for social improvement and mutual aid..."

Wherever there was a need the Grand Duchess would try to answer it, and only her strong spirit was able to keep her from being entirely overcome physically by all that she in her willingness was ready to undertake. All her activities, however, did not cause her to wander from the "one thing needful," and while serving the least of Christ's brethren, she was ever at Christ's feet, listening to His words.

The sorrowful tribulations which visited Russia as the Revolution spread its shadow over the land only caused her virtues of love and self-sacrifice to shine more brightly. Together with her younger sister, Tsaritsa Alexandra, she was slandered on account of her German blood. But she harbored neither bitterness nor hatred towards her enemies, and even the revolutionaries recognized her greatness of spirit and spared her and her community for a time,

Finally, however, the martyr's crown was brought within her reach. On Pascha, 1918, the Grand Duchess was suddenly arrested and taken first to Ekaterinburg and then to Alopaevsk where, with her ever-faithful companion Sister Barbara, she was imprisoned in one of the city schools. On the fateful night of July 5/18, together with other royal captives, she was taken in an automobile outside the city and buried alive in a mine shaft. Even here, in the bowels of the earth, she did not cease to manifest her sacrificing love. Excavations have shown that until the last moment she strove to serve the grand dukes who were severely injured by the fall.

At last her precious remains – which, according to eye-witnesses were found in the mine shaft completely untouched by corruption – were received with triumph in Jerusalem and laid to rest in a sepulchre of the church of St. Mary Magdalen, just over the hill from Bethany where the sisters, Sts. Martha and Mary, served and glorified the Lord.

(Quotations from "The Holy New Martyr, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna," by Metropolitan Anastassy, in *Orthodox Life*, Sept.-Oct., 1981)

**From “The Sacramental Life of the Orthodox Church” by Fr. Alciviadis C. Calivas
in A Companion to the Greek Orthodox Church**

MARRIAGE

Christian Marriage. Orthodox theology has always presented Christian marriage as something absolutely unique, and indeed, eternal. In marriage, human love "is being projected into the Kingdom of God" (John Meyendorff), reflecting the intimate union between Christ and the faithful which St. Paul speaks of (Ephes.5). Married life is a special vocation which requires the grace of the Holy Spirit; and it is this very grace which is conferred in the Marriage Service.

The contemporary Marriage Service of the Orthodox Church is itself divided into two parts: the office of betrothal and the office of crowning. In the first, the rite includes the exchange of rings, demonstrating that both partners enter into marriage of their own volition. At the second, "crowns" placed upon the heads of the partners signify the grace of the Holy Spirit. These crowns are crowns of both joy and martyrdom. Because the couple has been united for eternity, there is joy; but because every marriage involves enormous self-sacrifice on the part of each partner, both also become "martyrs" in their own right.

The complete love each of the partners has for the other, should be the motivating factor in Christian marriage. In such a context marriage exists not only for the procreation of children, but also that a mutual love may be expressed, sustained and extended to others. While it is not to be denied that God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, children must always be considered a gift from God and not the sole reason for marriage. Certainly, children do contribute to making marriages an authentic image of the Trinity; and St. John Chrysostom spoke of the family as "a little Church"

Divorce. Because marriage implies a decision of free will on the part of both partners, there will always be the possibility of error. When a marriage fails, the Orthodox Church has generally declared that . . . the bond did not demonstrate its necessarily eternal character. It would not be totally accurate, however; to say that the Orthodox Church grants divorces, although such a practice has crept into the practice of some local Churches. Divorce is actually a civil matter which recognizes the breaking of a legal contract; the Church can merely recognize that an attempt at building up a true marriage has failed. Without going into an exhaustive analysis of the historical and canonical developments, it should be mentioned that the Orthodox Church today normally allows the laity three attempts at establishing a true marriage. A fourth marriage is positively forbidden. Clergy, however, are permitted to marry only once and this must be prior to ordination. Finally, it remains only to comment upon the penitential character assigned to a marriage rite in which both partners are being married for the second or third time. A special service exists for these situations in which the prayers are more somber and the entire service far more subdued. In this way, the Church reminds both the partners and the entire people of God that one lasting marriage is the Christian norm.

Addendum by the Bible and Church History Tournament Committee

According to the canonical tradition of our Church, an Orthodox Christian should marry only another Orthodox Christian. This is the ideal. However, by the principle of Orthodox economy, an Orthodox Christian is permitted to marry a Catholic or Protestant Christian who has been baptized by water in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity. This marriage must take place in the Orthodox Church. If an Orthodox person marries his/her Catholic, Protestant or even Orthodox spouse in a Catholic or Protestant wedding or in a civil ceremony, the Orthodox person chooses to excommunicate him/herself from the Church—please see what this means below. (S)he may reinstate him/herself in the Orthodox Church by the Sacrament of Holy Confession and by having his/her marriage blessed in the Orthodox Church.

An Orthodox Christian may not marry in the Church a member of a non-Christian religion (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.) or a member of the following cults who deny the Holy Trinity or in any other way depart from traditional Christianity: such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons (Church of Latter-Day Saints), Christian Science, Quakers, Seventh Day Adventists, some Pentecostal groups who do not baptize their members in water in the Name of the Holy Trinity, etc. An Orthodox Christian who marries any member of these religions chooses to excommunicate him/herself from the Church and may not receive Holy Communion. (S)he also may not serve as a sponsor at a wedding or at a baptism, and (s)he may not have an Orthodox funeral. (S)he may be reinstated in the Church by the Sacrament of Holy Confession.

From the “Second Century” from Fr. Thomas Hopko’s “The Orthodox Faith: An Elementary Handbook on the Orthodox Church,” Vol. 3—“Bible and Church History”

The Persecutions

The second century saw the further development of the Christian faith, and the greater persecution of Church by the Roman imperial authorities for whom Christianity was an “illegal religion.”

The Christians were criminals in the eyes of Romans, not only religiously, but politically. They transgressed the laws of the state because they refused to honor the earthly emperor as king, lord, and god, which was required of them as members of society. They prayed for the civil authorities and gave “**honor to whom honor is due**” (**Romans 13: 1-7**), but they refused to give the earthly king the glory worship which was due to God, and to His Christ alone. Thus the Roman law declared: **It is not lawful to be a Christian.**

One of the first witnesses to the Christians which we have in secular writing is found in the second correspondence between Pliny the Younger and the Emperor Trajan who ruled from 98-117. This correspondence reveals that Christianity was indeed proscribed, and that though Christians should not be sought out and were innocent of the gross charges against them, such as the sacrifice of children and the eating of human flesh (a misunderstanding of the eucharist which was conducted in “secret meetings”), the Christians nevertheless were to be executed if, when seized, they refused to give up their faith.

The persecution of the Christians in the second century was largely local, conducted according to the zeal of the local imperial authorities. Nevertheless, the persecutions were widespread and the Christians were generally hated even by the most tolerant and open-minded of the Roman rulers. They were hated mostly for what was considered their stubbornness and intolerance due to their exclusive devotion to Christ as Lord. They were persecuted also for what was considered to be the political danger which they brought to the unity of law and order in the imperial reign, particularly because of the increasing number of persons who were joining the Church.

Among the most famous of the Christian leaders and martyrs of the second century were the bishops **Ignatius of Antioch** (d. 110) and **Polycarp of Smyrna** (d. 156), and the philosopher **Justin** (d.c. 165). Each of these men who were killed for the faith left writings, which, together with the **Didache** (the Teachings of the Twelve Apostles), the **Letter to Diognetus**, the letters of **Clement of Rome**, the **Letter of Barnabas**, the **Shepherd of Hermas** and the apologetic writings of such men as **Athenagoras of Athens**, **Melito of Sardis**, **Theophilus of Antioch** and the greatest of the second century theologians, **Irenaeus of Lyons**, all give a very vivid picture of the faith and life of the second century Church.

**From the “Fifteenth Century” from Fr. Thomas Hopko’s
“The Orthodox Faith: An Elementary Handbook on
the Orthodox Church,” Vol. 3—“Bible and Church History”**

The Papacy

The West in the fifteenth century was in turmoil over the relationship between the papacy and church councils. Some held that the papacy was supreme. Others held that the authority of the church councils supercedes that of the pope. A council was called in **Ferrara-Florence** (1438-1439) to consider that question. Representatives of the Eastern Church arrived at this council once again looking for help in the struggle against the Turks. Among the Eastern Churchmen who were accepted at the council on “equal terms” with the Latins, were the emperor of Constantinople, **John VIII**; the patriarch of Constantinople, **Joseph**; and the Metropolitan of Kiev, a Greek named **Isidore**.

The Council of Florence

At the council of Florence the Eastern representatives accepted a strong doctrine of **papal power**--although the issue was not deeply discussed--and the doctrines of **filioque** and **purgatory**. The Byzantine emperor pressed to stop theological discussions in the hopes of completing the union. All the Orthodox bishops signed the union statement except **Mark Eugenikos**, the bishop of Ephesus.

The union of Florence was not publicly proclaimed until 1452 in Saint Sophia in Constantinople. On May 29, 1453, the Turks under **Mohammed II** took the city which was renamed **Istanbul**, marking the end of the Byzantine Empire. The first act of the patriarch **Gennadios Scholarios** after the fall of Constantinople was to repudiate the union of Florence. The patriarch was under strong pressure of **St. Mark of Ephesus** in this action. Saint Mark, the firm defender of Orthodoxy against what has come to be called through him the “unrighteous union,” was canonized a saint for his actions.