



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **February 14, 2016** ✠

Zacchaeus Sunday

St. Auxentius, Monk of Bithynia (470)

St. Cyril, Evangelizer of the Slavs (869)

St. Isaac, Recluse of the Kiev Caves (1090)



St. Nicholas Cathedral ("Nikolai-Do"), Tokyo

✠ **Tomorrow, February 15- 5:30pm ~ Memorial Service + Fr. Demetri Edwards (40th Day)**
 ➤ **6:30pm ~ Inquirer's Class Resumes**

➤ **House Blessings resume and are coming to a conclusion in 2 weeks.**

✠ **Holy Baptism – Saturday, February 27, 3:00pm ~ The Zannis Family**

Sunday of Zacchaeus

The Paschal season of the Church is preceded by the penitential season of Great Lent, which is also preceded by its own liturgical preparation. The first sign of the approach of Great Lent comes five Sundays before its beginning. On this Sunday, the Gospel reading is about Zacchaeus the tax-collector. It tells how Christ brought salvation to the sinful man, and how his life was changed simply because he "sought to see who Jesus was" (Luke 19:3). The desire and effort to see Jesus begins the entire movement through Lent towards Pascha. It is the first movement of salvation.

Our Lenten journey begins with the recognition of our own sinfulness, just as Zacchaeus recognized his. He promised to make restitution by giving half of his wealth to the poor, and by paying to those he had falsely accused four times as much as they had lost. In this, he went beyond the requirements of the Law (Ex. 22:3-12).

The example of Zacchaeus teaches us that we should turn away from our sins, and atone for them. The real proof of our sorrow and repentance is not just a verbal apology, but when we correct ourselves and try to make amends for the consequences of our evil actions.

We are also assured of God's mercy and compassion by Christ's words to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation is come to this house" (Luke 19:9). After the Great Doxology at Sunday Matins (when the Tone of the week is Tone 1, 3, 5, 7) we sing the Dismissal Hymn of the Resurrection "Today salvation has come to the world," which echoes the Lord's words to Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was short, so he climbed a tree in order to see the Lord. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We are also short in our spiritual stature, therefore we must climb the ladder of the virtues. In other words, we must prepare for spiritual effort and growth. St. Zacchaeus is also commemorated on April 20.

Venerable Auxentius of Bithynia

Saint Auxentius, by origin a Syrian, served at the court of the emperor Theodosius the Younger (418-450). He was known as a virtuous, learned and wise man, and he was, moreover, a friend of many of the pious men of his era.

Distressed by worldly vanity, St Auxentius was ordained to the holy priesthood, and then received monastic tonsure. After this he went to Bithynia and found a solitary place on Mount Oxia, not far from Chalcedon, and there he began the life of a hermit (This mountain was afterwards called Mt. Auxentius). The place of the saint's efforts was discovered by shepherds seeking their lost sheep. They told others about him, and people began to come to him for healing. St Auxentius healed many of the sick and the infirm in the name of the Lord.

In the year 451 St Auxentius was invited to the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon, where he denounced the Eutychian and Nestorian heresies. Familiar with Holy Scripture and learned in theology, St Auxentius easily bested those opponents who disputed with him. After the end of the Council, St Auxentius returned to his solitary cell on the mountain. With his spiritual sight he saw the repose of St Simeon the Stylite (459) from a great distance.

St Auxentius died about the year 470, leaving behind him disciples and many monasteries in the region of Bithynia. He was buried in the Monastery of St Hypatius at Rufiananas, Syria.

Repose of St Cyril, Equal of the Apostles and Teacher of the Slavs

Saint Cyril Equal of the Apostles, Teacher of the Slavs (Constantine in the schema), and his older brother Methodius (April 6), were Slavs, born in Macedonia in the city of Thessalonica.

St Cyril received the finest of educations, and from the age of fourteen he was raised with the son of the emperor. Later, he was ordained as a priest. Upon his return to Constantinople, he worked as a librarian of the cathedral church, and as a professor of philosophy. St Cyril successfully held debates with iconoclast heretics and with Moslems.

Yearning for solitude, he went to Mount Olympos to his older brother Methodius, but his solitude lasted only a short while. Both brothers were sent by the emperor Michael on a missionary journey to preach Christianity to the Khazars in the year 857. Along the way they stopped at Cherson and discovered the relics of the Hieromartyr Clement of Rome (November 25).

Arriving at the territory of the Khazars, the holy brothers spoke with them about the Christian Faith. Persuaded by the preaching of St Cyril, the Khazar prince together with all his people accepted Christianity. The grateful prince wanted to reward the preachers with rich presents, but they refused this and instead asked the prince to free and send home with them all the Greek captives. St Cyril returned to Constantinople together with 200 such captives set free.

In the year 862 began the chief exploit of the holy brothers. At the request of Prince Rostislav, the emperor sent them to Moravia to preach Christianity in the Slavic language. Sts Cyril and Methodius by a revelation from God compiled a Slavonic alphabet and translated the Gospel, Epistles, the Psalter and many Service books into the Slavonic language. They introduced divine services in Slavonic.

The holy brothers were then summoned to Rome at the invitation of the Roman Pope. Pope Adrian received them with great honor, since they brought with them the relics of the Hieromartyr Clement. Sickly by nature and in poor health, St Cyril soon fell ill from his many labors, and after taking the schema, he died in the year 869 at the age of forty-two. Before his death, he expressed his wish for his brother to continue the Christian enlightenment of the Slavs. St Cyril was buried in the Roman church of St Clement, whose own relics also rest there, brought to Italy from Cherson by the Enlighteners of the Slavs.

St. Nicholas, Enlightener of Japan ~ February 16

In the village of Berezky (Province of Smolensk), a child was born into the family of the parish deacon. This child, baptized John, was to know his mother for only five years, for she died at an early age herself. When he was of age, young John went to study at the Smolensk Theological Seminary and on to the post-graduate St. Petersburg Theological Academy. On June 24, 1860, John took monastic vows and was given the name Nicholas. He was ordained as a priestmonk on the following day. At 24 years old, Father Nicholas left for Japan in order to fulfill his ambition of take the True Faith to the people of the Orient.

While on his journey, Father Nicholas visited with Bishop Innocent Veniaminov (later St. Innocent of Alaska), who noticed the tattered cassock of the young monk. Bishop Innocent himself cut and tailored a new robe for his young co-missionary. Nicholas arrived in Japan, but it was during a very difficult period for foreigners. There was a profound mistrust in the 1860's among the Japanese for anyone from abroad. The old empire was struggling to keep itself pure and strong. Nonetheless, Nicholas knew that despite the problems of conflicting cultures and civilizations, the message of Christ's Gospel was universal. He studied Japanese history, religion, customs, traditions and language. (This latter was his most difficult task. In his own words, "I battled seven years over the Japanese language and sighed nearly every day over the fact that the day does not have 100 hours, and that if even it did, it would be impossible to devote all of them to language studies." St. Nicholas was approached by many officials who were suspect of his intentions. (It was illegal to teach the Christian faith, and for a Japanese to accept baptism meant death.) Nonetheless, first a samurai (who originally came with suspicion) and two of his friends clothed themselves with Christ, spreading the Good News among their people.

By 1868 there were nearly 20 men and women who had adopted the Orthodox Christian faith. Father Nicholas returned briefly to Moscow in order to obtain extra supplies and missionaries. He also obtained a lithograph machine that would not only print bibles, prayer books and literature in Japanese, but simple icons as well. His work led him to Tokyo in 1872. By now, after a brief but fierce persecution, Christianity was legalized. Renting a small room in a hotel, Father Nicholas began his missionizing efforts by lecturing and by visiting his neighbors.

By 1873 a stone church was built right in the heart of the city. It housed a school for 50; apartments for missionaries, a place for the printing press, etc. By 1878 a Theological Seminary was established. Orthodoxy now had a firm hold in Japan. Father Nicholas celebrated the Liturgy in Japanese, of course. Within the next year six church schools were in operation throughout Japan. However, because foreigners were not allowed to go to the inner territories of the nation, missionization was a problem. Therefore, Paul Sawabe, the samurai convert, was ordained a priest by a visiting bishop. Soon six other native Japanese were ordained. By 1878 there were 4,115 Orthodox Japanese. Two years later Father Nicholas was consecrated as the first bishop of the Japanese Church. A beautiful cathedral was built, which is known by most every Tokyo resident today as Nicholai-do ("The House of Nicholas") even though it was consecrated s Holy Resurrection Cathedral.

Soon a few native Japanese iconographers emerged, homes for orphans, the elderly, and the sick were sponsored by the Church. A regular publishing house that produced magazines, books and tracts was established. Bishop Nicholas was finally allowed to visit his faithful in the hinterlands. He found that the Orthodox Church in Japan was thriving more than he had suspected.

However, in 1904, the Russo-Japanese war proved to be a test of faith for the members of the Orthodox Faith in the country. The Orthodox Mission and all Orthodox Japanese were hated and called traitors. Bishop Nicholas, once loved by everyone, was accused of being a Russian spy. Nonetheless, Bishop Nicholas worked long and hard during the war to care for his Japanese flock as well as the Russian prisoners of war. Once the War was over, he was elevated to Archbishop of Japan but looked forward to the day when another bishop would be able to assist him in his pastoral duties. In 1908 the Russian Church sent Bishop Sergius. This gentle man became quickly loved by

the Japanese people, and finally, Archbishop Nicholas felt that he could be at peace. In 1911, exactly 50 years after he had first set foot on Japanese soil, there were 35 native priests, 6 deacons, 14 choir teachers, 116 catechists, 94 seminary students, and 33,017 Orthodox Christian faithful under St. Nicholas' omophorion. At the age of 76, on February 3rd, 1912 (old style), Archbishop Nicholas of Japan fell asleep in the Lord. He was canonized in 1970, being given the designation of Saint Nicholas, Equal-to-the-Apostles and Evangelizer of Japan. We celebrate his feast day on February 16.

Episcopal Encyclical to the Japanese Orthodox Christians for the Peace of the Church Disturbed by the Declaration of War Between Russia and Japan

To the Pious Christians of the Holy Orthodox Church in Great Japan
Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord:

It has pleased the Lord to permit a break between Russia and Japan. May it be according to His holy will. We believe that this is permitted for good goals and will lead to a blessed end, because the will of God is always blessed and wise.

Thus, brothers and sisters, fulfill all that is demanded from you in these circumstances by the duty of faithful citizens. Pray to God that He will grant victory to your Imperial Army, thank God for all victories He gives, and sacrifice for military necessities; those who must go into battle must fight, not sparing their own lives, not out of hatred for the enemy, but out of love for your fellow citizens, remembering the words of the Savior: "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." In a word, do all that love for your fatherland demands. The Savior sanctified this feeling by His example of love for His earthly fatherland. "He wept over the wretched fate of Jerusalem" (Luke 1:91).

But besides an earthly fatherland we also have another heavenly fatherland. People belong to it with no regard to nationality because all people are equally children of the heavenly Father and brothers among themselves, this fatherland is our Church, of which we are all equally members and in which we are children of our heavenly Father, truly forming one family. Therefore I shall not depart from you, brothers and sisters—I will stay in your family as in my own family. Together we will perform our duty to our heavenly fatherland, which everyone must. I will, as always, pray for the Church, be involved with church affairs, and translate the services. You priests, diligently tend the reasonable flock entrusted to you by God; you preachers, zealously preach the Gospel of the still unknown true God, the heavenly Father; you Christians, whether living peacefully at home or going to war, grow and be confirmed in the Faith and flourish in all Christian virtues. We will all pray fervently together that God will quickly restore the broken peace. May the Lord himself help us in all of this. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Bp. Nikolai of the Orthodox Church of Great Japan

11 February 1904

This and That

Russia – Church and State Today

Rod Dreher: Have we so internalized the progressive notion that the public square should be purged of Christian values that we don't recognize a pre-modern relationship of mutual support between state and church where it still (or rather, again) exists? It's great fun for (literally) holier-than-thou Christians to condemn the Constantinian symphonia, which was the bedrock of Christendom for a millennium and a half. Sure, it was not without its problems. (Feel free to counter with references to the Inquisition, the Crusades, pogroms, and witch-burnings here.). **But in the broad history of Christianity, there have essentially been two, and only two, conditions for the Church:**

Condition 1. A cordial church-state relationship, usually in the form of an established church, whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant; less commonly in an informal symbiosis, of the sort that existed in the U.S. from the disestablishment of state churches in the early 19th century to just a few decades ago.

Condition 2. Some form of marginalization if not outright persecution by anti-Christian rulers.

Maybe it's just me, but Condition 1, adapted to a given country's culture and traditions, with a reasonable degree of forbearance, seems preferable. America used to be a pretty straight-laced though generally tolerant Protestant country. That was a pretty good deal, but now it's gone. Given what we have lost, are we really so smugly superior to Russia's recovery – after unimaginable persecution – of their traditions, which are not the same as ours?

No one truly familiar with the resurgence of the Orthodox Church in Russia can regard it as anything less than a miracle. Not coincidentally, with it has come something approximating the pre-modern church-state symphony. Today Russia is the only major power where the state is openly supportive of the Church and where the state, though formally non-sectarian, openly promotes Christian values as public policy. (The only other Christian country that comes close is Poland, which is a respectable country but has not been a major power for some time.)

James Jatras: As I recently wrote (with Fr. Victor Potapov and Fr. Alexander Webster): 'Whatever criticisms one might have of the symphonia model [in Russia], blanket condemnation is hardly appropriate as we witness the trend in our own country, where Christianity is increasingly marginalized, moral vices are officially promoted as virtues, and abortion "rights" and homosexual "rights," in particular, are now key components of U.S. foreign policy . . .'

<http://www.aoiusa.org/patriarch-kirill-and-russian-orthodoxy-deserve-respect-not-insults-an-open-letter-to-george-weigel/>

Moreover, protection of Christians in the Middle East (notably in Syria) is an element of Russian state policy. <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2015/09/30/will-russias-holy-war-save-syrias-christians/> (Oh sure, sure. It's all hypocrisy and posturing, right? But can one imagine the U.S. or NATO government suggesting, even for hypocritical reasons, that saving Christians should be a specific policy goal? No. Instead, we'll just hear more blather about "democracy" ...

Rod Dreher: I can understand that progressives of various stripes hate Russia. She was offered the “opportunity” to serve as guinea pig for the most horrendous experiment in godless social transformation in recorded history. She failed, or rather the experiment failed. Russia has reemerged as a conservative society that is very different from ours in some respects (itself intolerable to some of the social engineers from NED, Open Society, and Planned Parenthood) but remarkably like what she was before 1917. Why is that so bad? Isn’t that what a Russian post-communist rebirth should look like? Or put another way, as we Americans accelerate our own descent into something like what the Russians experienced after 1917 (in spirit though hopefully not in the methods), maybe a little comparative perspective is in order? Especially from self-declared conservatives?

Birth of the Modern Tragedy

The West’s destiny was determined a long thousand years ago, in the run-up to and aftermath of the Great Schism of 1054. Without the guidance of the saints and without the true teachings, post-Schism Europe would experience a distortion of many of the Church’s understandings; translating them in ways which would serve as future fuel for counter-reactions and/ or future deviations. A post-Schism Europe would eventually give way to the Reformation, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and other ideologies and movements, including today’s European Union.

These very movements (and the Zeitgeist they carried) would give undeniable testimony that Europeans had found themselves deprived not only of living saints, but of the very understanding of what is Christianity, the Church, man and the reason for man’s existence. Indeed, such ideologies and movements were to warp the understanding of such things as they were to erase from memory Christian orthodoxy, the Church based on the Nicene Symbol of Faith, and of the Church’s hesychastic ethos.

Not only the reality, but even the concept of ‘Christianity’ in this post-Schism Europe was eventually to be lost. Christianity was instead to be defined as Roman, Protestant, sectarian or Western. Yet Christianity was not about the Bishop of Rome, indulgences, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, etc. Europeans, unlike their pre-Schism forefathers, were now oblivious to the fact that ‘Christianity’ was only to be synonymous with the Holy Church (the Body of Christ).

In post-Schism Europe the use of the word ‘Christian,’ in reference to another body outside His Church, was eventually to become not only possibility, but a reality. In other words, Europeans were to find themselves no longer able to distinguish between a pre and post-Schism Christianity. No longer was the Church to be synonymous with Christianity or Christianity with the Church. Instead, though a series of events, Christianity in Europe would only come to signify a plurality of churches and of christianities. The orthodoxy of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church was to lose its reality as Christianity was becoming relativized.

Previously, even in a post-Schism Europe, human freedom was connected with a Christian cosmology. In our post-Christian times, however, this notion seems to have been lost. It is this thesis’s contention that without the Church, without the saints, without the Holy One, without the hesychastic understanding of the Faith, Europe perhaps is or will be ripe for another (and this time more sophisticated and more subtle) form of totalitarianism as the anthropological answer to the question of what is man would be connected less with God, and more with governance. No longer was man to be first and foremost among God’s creatures, but a wholly political creature; a creature of the state. Less and less was God to be relied upon, as mankind was creating for itself a dependence upon as well as submitting to systems of governance.

St. Theodora the Empress (Feb. 11)

The Seventh Ecumenical Council, in 787, affirmed the proper place of the Holy Icons in the life of the Christian Church. It affirmed that since God became man, when can depict Christ in the sacred images; and also that when we venerate an icon, the honor goes to the person depicted. This ruling came after a century-long bloody struggle in the Church for the Icons. There were many Orthodox confessors and martyrs who fought for the sake of the Holy Icons.

However, the Council was not the resolution of this controversy. Soon, emperors rose up who once again attacked the Icons, rejecting the decision of the Council. One of these in the early 800's was the heretic Emperor Theophilus. His wife, Theodora, however, was an Orthodox Christian, but secretly for fear of her life. She saved, and one could say rescued, many icons and kept them hidden secretly in a private room. When St. Theodora would say her prayers, she would bring out some of the icons and light a lamp before them. She knew she could be killed for doing this, even by her own husband, so vicious was the iconoclastic passion. Once, while the Empress was praying, her son, Michael, came into her room. Seeing the icons, the child asked, "Mommy, what are those?" Theodora was fearful and not knowing what to say, she replied, "Oh, those are Mommy's dolls. Mommy is playing with her dollies." As soon as the child left, the Saint hid the icons again.

Meanwhile, the child had gone to his father and said, "Guess what, father. Mommy is playing with her dollies and burning candles." When the evil emperor heard this, he knew the truth. But, despite a search, God protected the empress Theodora and her icons were not found.

In 842, Theophilus died, and St. Theodora became ruler of the Byzantine Empire, since her son, Michael, was only six years old at the time. St. Theodora quickly set about the restoration of the Holy Icons to the Christian Churches, and in effect, the return of the Orthodox Faith, destroying the iconoclast heresy. She encouraged the clergy to teach and instruct the faithful in the proper understanding and veneration of the Icons. The pious Orthodox people rejoiced and gave glory to God. At was then that the celebration of *The Triumph of Orthodoxy* was established to be held on the first Sunday in the Great Fast each year, as is has been to this day.

St. Theodora ruled the Empire until 855, when her son, Michael, was old enough to reign as Emperor. Soon after this, St. Theodora became a nun and spent the rest of her life in prayer, fasting and struggle, until she departed this life around the year 860.

We honor St. Theodora for her courage in confessing the Orthodox Faith and for restoring the Holy Icons in the Church once and for all. God used her at a crucial time in Church history to bring about the victory of the Truth, when the Orthodox Faith was under fierce assault. ✠

Through her prayers, may we also have courage to confess the Holy Orthodox Faith!

✠ Brother, do not allow yourself to judge concerning the thoughts that come to you: this a matter beyond your means; you do not understand their cunning, and that is why they disturb you just as they wish. But when they disturb you, say to them: "I do not know who you are; may God, Who knows this, not allow you to deceive me." And lay down before God your weakness, saying: "O Lord! I am in Thy hands; help me and deliver me from their hands." Any thought that lingers in you and engages you in warfare, reveal to your spiritual father, and he, with God's help, will heal you.

St. Barsanuphios the Great (6th C)

✠ It makes no difference what it is that has soiled the purity of the soul; the time comes and one must clean it and wash away the uncleanness with repentance. *Newmartyr Archbp. Barlaam*

St. Photios the Great on Exposing the Sins of Others

johnsanidopoulos.com/2015/07/st-photios-great-on-exposing-sins-of.html

Commentary of St. Photios the Great on Ephesians 5:8-17

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, and everything that is revealed becomes a light. This is why it is said: "Awake, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (Eph. 5:8-17)



He said, "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness," and by this he generally names every sin. And why, you will ask, did he not name each of these acts by name? Because even merely mentioning them fills the one who lists them with uncleanness.

Rather he says how to "expose" them: by contrasting them with your own life. For by exposing their deeds by listing them and shaming them we say nothing - because I know that the great and virtuous consider it shameful to even recount them - and, therefore, I know that they will be much more exposed when our virtues shine through our deeds, instead of someone exposing them through words.

But all their acts are exposed much more with the light of our life and thus they are disclosed and revealed, and when they are made manifest they are illuminated, changed and transformed for the better, because the manifestation of hidden (sins) through a virtuous state pushes towards awareness, and awareness in turn is the beginning of a return, and this again leads to works of virtue, which is "light", and the cause of light. And again (it is) light, because having blinded our passions, it completely illumines us to see the shame, obscenity and ugliness of sin.

And the phrase, "everything that is revealed becomes a light," is interpreted as has already been said, as the preparation of the possibility for the perfect to expose through their life the state of evil. For they are revealed, he says, by the life of the great ones, and when they are revealed they are light, and when the light shines the darkness is exposed, namely the life of evil.

"Rather expose them" means you are to expose them with your bright and virtuous life, and do not expect them to announce themselves, to ridicule what they themselves do and display themselves, and thus improve this way. Because even if they act in violation of the law, but knowing through innate knowledge their uncleanness, they are shamed, although it may still be necessary for them to discover their shame.

"Everything that is revealed" means what is disclosed and revealed becomes light, and even its use is revealed: for he says "Awake, O sleeper," in other words, arise from slumber and attend to the passions, and "rise from the dead," leaving off that which is dead and vile to be exposed, and when this is done then you will be illuminated and full of light for "Christ will shine on you," so that which is revealed becomes light and is illumined.