



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

St Eudokia, Holy martyr

Memory celebrated March 1

Eudokia was a woman of Samaria who lived during the second century in Heliopolis. She was a pagan of immense beauty and became very wealthy by attracting wealthy lovers. As a harlot she never considered the Day of Judgement or the state of her soul.

One day, a pious monk by the name of Germanos stayed at a house next to Eudokia. One evening he sat on the window sill reading out loud from a book describing the Last Judgement of the world. From her window Eudokia listened curiously. What she heard both frightened her and fascinated her. The next day she invited Germanos to explain about the Christian faith.

The good monk spoke to her about the love of Christ for all sinners. Eudokia wanted to believe, but it all sounded too good to be true. "Could she also be saved?" she asked. Germanos told her to remain alone in her chamber and receive no-one for one week, whilst she prayed and fasted. He told her that she would then receive a vision which would assure her of the Creator's love for all human beings, including her.

Surely this came true, and after seeing a vision of Archangel Michael she confessed Christ as the only True God. Germanos Baptised her and became her Spiritual Father.

Eudokia was thirty years old when she gave herself over completely to the service of Jesus Christ. Her first act was to build a monastery near the city of Baalbeck, where she administered the disposition of her vast wealth to projects for charity. In a short time her monastery became a beacon which attracted thousands of spiritually as well as physically starved people, and St Eudokia became famous for the beauty of her soul as well as her face, acquiring in the process of her noble work a proximity to God no treasure could buy.

The stream of suitors to the palace became a river of pilgrims to her monastery, but there was one suitor named Philostratos who was persistent enough to seek her out in the hope of securing favor before her fortune had been dissipated. Eudokia refused to help him, and, when in his anger he seemed struck dead by the Lord, she prayed to God for his recovery. Brought back to his senses, he was easily converted to Christianity.

The continual conversion of so many pagans by St Eudokia brought down upon her the full wrath of the Syrian officials, who had her beheaded on 1st March 107 AD.

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The Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebastia

Commemorated 9th March



In the year 313 AD, St Constantine the Great signed a law decreeing freedom of religious faith. His co-ruler, Emperor Licinius seconded this law; however, in the provinces subject to him, the persecution of the Christians continued as before.

In the year 320 AD, these holy Martyrs, who came from various lands, were all soldiers under the same general, who tried to force them to bring a sacrifice to the idols, which they refused to do. Taken into custody for their faith in Christ, and at first interrogated by cruel means, they were then stripped of their clothing and cast onto the frozen lake which is at Sebastia of Pontus, at a time when the harsh and freezing weather was at its worst. This torment was made more difficult for them, since a warm vapour-bath was placed on the shore of the lake to tempt them to leave the freezing water.

They endured the whole night naked in such circumstances, encouraging one another to be patient and singing holy hymns to God until the end. He that guarded them, named Aglaius, who was commanded to receive any of them that might deny Christ, had a vision in which he saw heavenly powers distributing crowns to all of the Martyrs, except one. The one who abandoned the contest hurried into the bath, but as soon as the warm air touched his body he died. Seeing this, Aglaius professed himself a Christian and joined the Martyrs on the lake, and the number of forty remained complete. In the morning, when they were almost dead from the cold the torturers broke the martyrs' shins with mallets and cast them into fire, after which their remains were thrown into the river. Three days later, the torturers came to Bishop Peter of Sebastia and recounted their deeds. Bishop Peter gathered the bones of the martyrs and buried them with honour.

Thus they finished the good course of martyrdom in 320, and their names are: Acacius, Aetius, Aglaius, Alexander, Angus, Athanasius, Candidus, Chudion, Claudius, Cyril, Cyrion, Dometian, Domnus, Ecdicius, Elias, Eunoicus, Eutyches, Eutychius, Flavius, Gaius, Gorgonius, Helianus, Herachus, Hesychius, John, Lysimachus, Meliton, Nicholas, Philoctemon, Priscus, Sacerdon, Severian, Sisinius, Smaragdus, Theodulus, Theophilus, Valens, Valerius, Vivianus, and Xanthias.

Dismissal Hymn. First Tone

We plead to You for the sake of the sufferings of Your Saints which endured for You, O Lord, and heal all our pains, we pray, O Friend of man.

Kontakion. Plagal of Second Tone

Having left every military array of the world, you cleaved to the Master Who is in the Heavens, O Forty Prize-winners of the Lord; for having passed through fire and water, O blessed ones, you rightly received glory from Heaven and a multitude of crowns.

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St Symeon the New Theologian

Commemorated March 12



One of the most beloved Holy Fathers is St. Symeon the New Theologian, who was the abbot of St. Mamas in Constantinople. He is one of three great Fathers whom the Orthodox Church has granted the title of "Theologian", because he is one of a few, in the history of Christianity, to 'know' God. The other two Theologians are St. John the Evangelist, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus (390 AD).

St. Symeon was born in Galatia in Paphlagonia (Asia Minor) in 949 AD. His parents, Basal and Theophana, were Byzantine provincial nobles. St. Symeon received only the basics of a primary Greek school education until he was about eleven years old. He finished his secondary education at the age of 14 in the court of the two brother emperors Basil and Constantine Porphyrogenetes. At 14, he met St. Symeon the Studite, who became his spiritual father and who led him into the life of asceticism and prayer. Although he wanted to enter the famous monastery of the Stoudion at the age of 14, his spiritual father had him wait until he turned 27. During this period of preparation, St. Symeon's elder continued to counsel and guide him, preparing him gradually for the monastic life even in the midst of worldly cares. St. Symeon occupied himself with the management of a patrician's household and possibly entered the service of his emperor as a diplomat and a senator. While 'busy in the world' he also strove to live a monk's life in the evenings, spending his time in night vigils and reading the spiritual works of Mark the Hermit and Diadochus of Photike. One of

his elder's advice was, "if you desire to have always a soul-saving guidance, pay heed to your conscience and without fail do what it will instil in you".

There are many books, in English, on the wealth of work by St. Symeon. These include "Symeon the New Theologian, the Discourses" translated by C. J. deCatanzaro for Paulist Press; "The First-Created Man, Seven Homilies" translated by Fr. Seraphim Rose for St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood; and "St. Symeon the New Theologian, Life-Spirituality-Doctrine, in the Light of Christ" by Archbishop Basil Krivocheine for SVS Press. His writings grew out of his preaching and from the spiritual direction given to those under his charge. He is a writer sharing his experiences in prayer and the Triune. The monks of Mount Athos eagerly read his works today, in this Century's spiritual renewal. His works are also being discovered by the Roman monasteries, as they start to comprehend to wealth and beauty of his writings and personal experience.

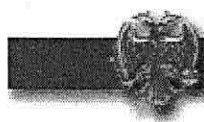
St. Symeon's words still speak to us today, even though he lived a thousand years ago. Of special note is his emphasises to return to the essence or spirit of the early Orthodox Church, and not merely depend on or shelter under the outward forms of Church life. His burning conviction is that the Christian life must be more than just a routine or habit, but rather it should be a personal experience of the living Christ. St. Symeon urges both monks and baptised laity back to a living spiritual experience of the Triune, calling himself the "enthusiastic zealot" who has personal, mystical experiences. His spiritual emphases is, however, misused by many 'charismatic Christians' and others today who claim to have "gifts of the Holy Spirit", which are probably

emotional or 'scholastic' rather than spiritual. The following is a quote from St. Symeon on Spirituality,

"Do not say that it is impossible to receive the Spirit of God. Do not say that it is possible to be made whole without Him. Do not say that one can possess Him without knowing it. Do not say that God does not manifest Himself to man. Do not say that men cannot perceive the divine light, or that it is impossible in this age! Never is it found to be impossible, my friends. On the contrary, it is entirely possible when one desires it" (Hymn 27, 125-132).

St. Symeon the New Theologian died in 1022 AD. The saint's feast is celebrated on 12 March.

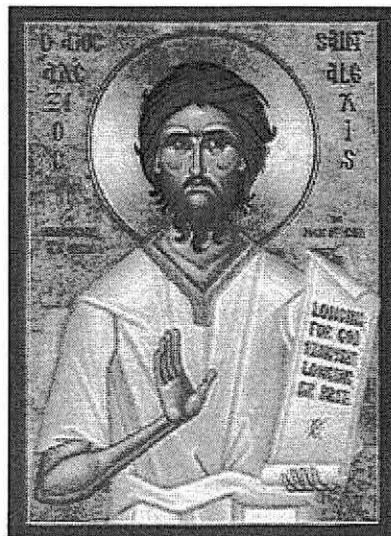
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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

St Alexios, Man of God

Memory celebrated March 17



The rare title, "Man of God," was bestowed on St. Alexios for the manner in which he gave himself over to Jesus Christ, forsaking a bride even at the altar in order to fulfill to the letter the admonition read to him while he was contemplating enlistment in the service of the Lord. He kept his true identity a secret for an entire lifetime rather than run the risk of betraying the Master through his own emotions and there is no telling how much mental anguish he suffered in silence for the sake of his commitment. When he felt the call he answered with a hesitation for which he judged himself too harshly and which he bore in mute secrecy.

Alexios was born in 380 AD in the eternal city of Rome during the reign of Theodosios the Great and was raised in a royal household by his parents, Ephemios and Aglaia, who discerned a predilection for the Church in their son, a religious fervour they could not share and which they sought to discourage for fear they would lose him. They lost no time in arranging for his marriage and in impressing upon him the debt he owed to his parents, for which he should respect their wishes in all things. He had reluctantly suppressed the call he felt to the Lord's service and had agreed to the marriage when he had a vision one day of St. Paul, who said he should answer the call to God at all costs, reading to him the passage in Matthew which says: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me."

The bewildered Alexios was torn between his sense of duty to his parents and that urging to serve the Lord, and swayed between both, at long last deciding to go through with what he had promised his family. The feeling that he should go the other way gnawed at him even as he stood at the altar, and when the ceremony had been completed he looked upon the Cross of Jesus and without a word walked away from bride, family and friends to do what he had to do.

He stepped into the anonymity of a Syrian monastery where for the next eighteen years he assumed another identity, and never looked back at Rome. Having made a choice they had opposed, he suspected his parents had disinherited him and that his bride had had the marriage annulled, but this was not the case. As a matter of fact, the bride had gone to live with his parents in the fond hope that Alexios would someday return, and the parents spared no expense in trying to locate their son, but after eighteen years with no word from him they presumed him to be dead.

In his eighteen years in the monastery, Alexios was transformed into a respected holy man whose solemn dedication to Jesus was the subject of many discussions among not only the monks but the community which he served. Unlike other monks, he was a man of few words and left the preaching and sermonising to other brother monks while he concentrated on writing on many issues concerning the faith. The vision that he had had many years before of St. Paul still haunted him and he had a burning desire to go to Tarsus, Paul's birthplace. He boarded a boat bound for the short trip up the coast, but while at sea a violent storm arose and blew the vessel miles off course also leaving her a derelict at the mercy of the wind and tides. They were finally picked up by a ship bound for Rome and Alexios found himself back in the city of his birth. Nostalgia seized him and he went to the family estate, primarily to get a glimpse of his folks, but when they

failed to recognise him he felt compelled to remain and was given the task of spiritual counsellor, not only to the estate, but to the neighbouring families as well. The abandoned bride was still living with the parents and she also failed to recognise him, for which he was grateful, for he found contentment in being able to serve the Lord while not revealing his true identity, which he considered would be a disservice to the Saviour after all the years of anonymity. He went about his duties with grace acquired and enjoyed the respect of families for miles around. When he felt death drawing near, Alexios wrote a letter to his family in which he expressed his love for them, which he could not do in life. The letter was read posthumously not only by his family but by the bishop of Rome, who had him interred in the chapel of St. Peter's. He died for Christ on 17 March 440AD, after thirty-four years of celibacy and anonymity.

from **Orthodox Saints**, v. 2
by Fr George Poulos, Holy Cross Orthodox Press

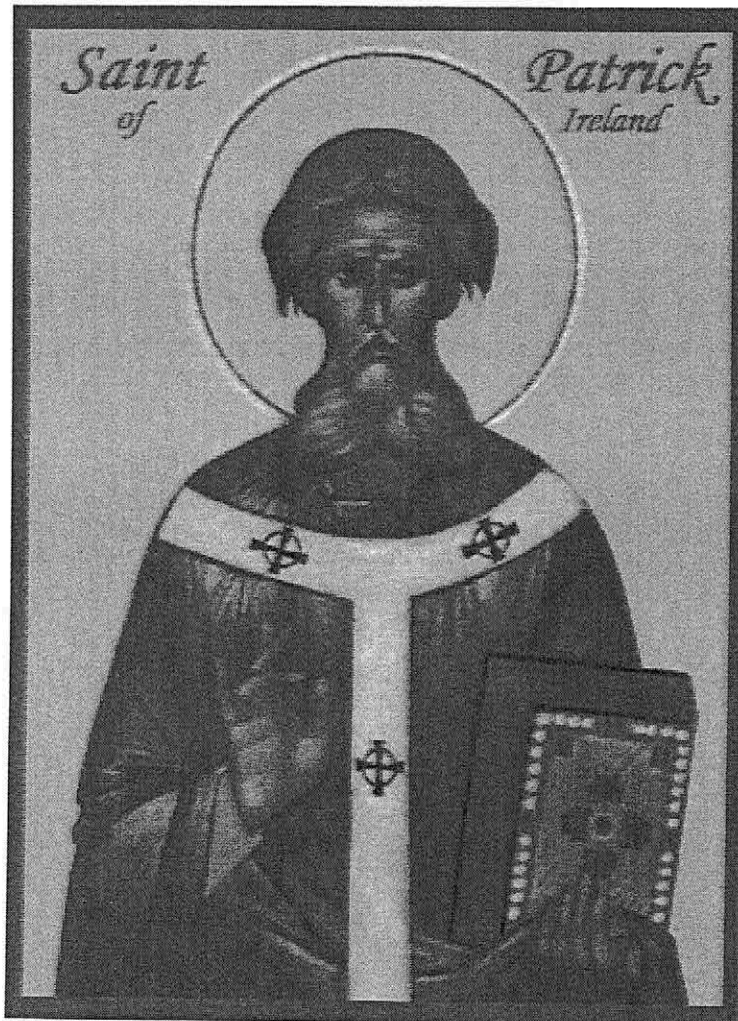
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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

St Patrick, the Enlightener of Ireland

Commemorated 17 March



St Patrick, the Apostle of the Irish, was seized from his native Britain by Irish marauders when he was sixteen years old. Though born the son of a deacon and grandson of a priest about 373 AD, it was not until his captivity that he sought out the Lord with his whole heart. In his Confession, the testament he wrote towards the end of his life, he says, "After I came to Ireland - every day I had to tend sheep and many times a day I prayed, the love of God and His fear came to me more and more, and my faith was strengthened. And my spirit was so moved that in a single day I would say as many as a hundred prayers, and almost as many at night, and this even when I was staying in the woods and on the mountain. And I would rise for prayer before daylight, through snow, through frost, through rain, and I felt no harm". After six years of slavery, he was guided by God to make his escape from Ireland, and afterwards struggled in the monastic life at Auxerre in Gaul, under the guidance of the holy Bishop Germanus. Many years later he was ordained Bishop and sent back to

Ireland around 432 AD, to convert the Irish to Christ. His arduous labours bore so much fruit that within seven years, three Bishops were sent from Gaul to help him shepherd his flock, "My brethren and sons whom I have baptised in the Lord - so many thousands of people", he says in his Confession. His apostolic work was not accomplished without much "weariness and painfulness", long journeys through difficult country, and many perils; he says his very life was in danger twelve times. When he came to Ireland as its enlightener, it was a pagan country, and when he ended his earthly life around 461 AD, some thirty years later, the Faith of Christ was established in every corner of Ireland.

Dismissal hymn of Saint Patrick. Third Tone

O Holy Hierarch, equal of the Apostles, Saint Patrick, wonderworker and enlightener of Ireland: Intercede with the merciful God that He grant unto our souls forgiveness of offences.

Kontakion of Saint Patrick. Fourth Tone
Be quick to anticipate

The Master revealed you as a skilful fisher of men; and casting forth nets of Gospel preaching, you hauled up the heathen to piety. Those who were the children of idolatrous darkness you rendered sons of day through holy Baptism. O Patrick, intercede for us who honour your memory.

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The Annunciation of the Theotokos

Celebrated March 25

Of all the solemn days in Orthodoxy the day of March 25 is one not only of religious significance but of political significance as well, allowing the Greek Orthodox to commemorate God's message to Mary and the independence of Greece on the same day.

The expression, "For God and Country," has real meaning for the Orthodox Greek on the 25th day of March, a day on which he can celebrate two events without diminishing either one for the obvious reason that devotion and patriotism have the same emotional root -- love. If Christianity could be compressed into a single word, that word would be love. The same holds true for patriotism.

Uppermost in the true Greek's mind on March 25, however, is Mary, chosen from all the women in the world to be the Mother of Jesus Christ. When the angel Gabriel brought the momentous message from God this day, the gentle Mary must have felt a solemn pride, but at the same time a disquieting apprehension at the prospect of this awesome responsibility. Assured by the Archangel, Mary's answer was a simple: "Let it be according to the will of God," and the rest is glorious history.



The world of Mary of two thousand years ago is envisioned as one in which life was simple and free of the complexities that plague the modern world, but in that age of self-sufficiency there were problems which would be insurmountable today. The mother of that day was all things to her family, and it can safely be said that when the Archangel Gabriel departed, the prospective Mother of God must have for several moments felt terribly alone. Everyone knows about the nativity and the mission of Jesus Christ, but the details of the days, months and years in between are known but to Mary and to God.

The political importance of March 25 is fully realized only when the suffering of four centuries is called to mind. In 1458 the Ottoman hordes overran all of Greece and most of the Balkans and held hostage a people whose culture dated back more than two thousand years, and who gave more to the world than it could ever receive in return, and it seems that the world just stood by while the cradle of democracy and Christianity was being defiled by a scourge that would have undone a less hardy breed.

Hopelessly outnumbered, Greece endured nearly four hundred years of brutal oppression, but the spirit of its people knew not a single moment's weakness. The fires of rebellion that the Turks thought they had snuffed out, but which had smouldered in Hellenic hearts for almost 400 years, were kindled into a conflagration on 25 March 1821, not by a bemedalled general but by a man of the cloth, Bishop Germanos of Patras, Greece, who chose the day of the Annunciation knowing God would be on the side of the Greeks.

The good bishop held the Cross of Jesus Christ aloft on the 25th day of March, 1821, and proclaimed freedom for all Greek Orthodox Christians. It was a motion seconded by every Greek in the country. In addition to engaging in a war for independence, the Greeks were actually waging a holy war because it was not only Greek against Turk but Christian against Muslim, and the subsequent Greek victory was a triumph of Christianity.

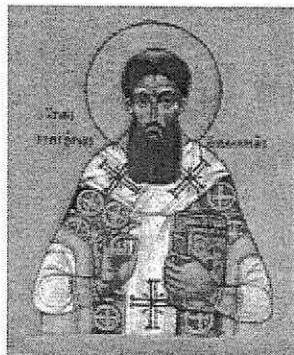
from **Orthodox Saints**, v. 1
by Fr George poulos, Holy Cross Orthodox Press.

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St Gregory Palamas (~1359 AD)

Memory Celebrated March 27



St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), Archbishop of Thessaloniki, was the defender of the Hesychasts. He upheld the doctrine that the human body played an important part in prayer, and he argued that the Hesychasts did indeed experience the Divine and Uncreated Light of Tabor. To explain how this was possible, St. Gregory developed the distinction between the essence and the energies of God. He set Hesychasm on a firm dogmatic basis, by integrating it into Orthodox theology, and by showing how the Hesychast vision of Divine Light in no way undermined the doctrine that God can not be comprehended. His teachings were confirmed by the local councils held in Constantinople in 1341 and 1351.

St. Gregory began by reaffirming the Biblical doctrine of man and of the Incarnation; i.e. the whole man, united in body and soul, was created in the image of God, and Christ, by taking a human body at the Incarnation, has 'made the flesh an inexhaustible source of sanctification'. The Hesychasts, so he argued, in placing emphasis on the body's part in prayer, are not guilty of a gross materialism but are simply remaining faithful to the Biblical doctrine of man as a unity. Christ took human flesh and saved the whole man; therefore it is the whole man that prays to God.

How is it possible for man to know God and, at the same time, affirm that God is by nature unknowable? St. Gregory answered this question by quoting St. Basil the Great who said "We know our God from His energies, but we do not claim that we can draw near to His essence. For His energies come down to us, but His essence remains unapproachable". St. Gregory added "God is not a nature, for He is above all beings.... No single thing of all that is created has or ever will have even the slightest communion with the supreme nature, or nearness to it". Even though God's essence may be remote from us, He has revealed Himself through His energies (or grace). These energies do not exist apart from God, but are God Himself in His action and revelation to the world. It is through these energies that God enters into a direct and immediate relationship with us. When we say that the saints are 'deified' by the grace of God, we mean that they have a direct experience of God Himself through his energies (or grace), not in His essence.

The vision of Light that Hesychasts receive is the same Light that surrounded Christ on Mount Tabor. It is a true vision of God in His divine energies.

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St Matrona

Memory celebrated 27 March

St Matrona lived in the 15th century. She was born on the island of Chios, Greece, in the village called Volissos. It was from this same village that a later Saint, Saint Marcella, martyred.

Saint Matrona's parents were highly respected and well-to-do Christians, compared to the other villagers. Mary, as she was called before she became a nun, was the youngest of seven children.

When the time came for her parents to arrange her marriage, she refused because she wanted to remain a virgin. She wanted to become a bride of Christ. (It was a strong Christian belief that the highest virtue a woman could have was that of her virginity. This philosophy was taught by Saint Paul). To avoid this marriage, Mary left Volissos and her family and went to an area overlooking the village, called Katavasis. Here she began her spiritual struggle. She fasted, prayed and meditated.

Meanwhile, her parents searched the area to find her. After locating her they convinced her to return home. Mary complied with her parents' wishes, except for one - she refused to wed. Her parents, seeing that she still desired to lead a monastic life, gave her their consent to pursue her ambition.

When Mary's parents died, she distributed the farmland she inherited among her sisters and the orphans of the community. She left Volissos, never to see her village again and returned to Katavasis, where she stayed for three years as she re-examined her spiritual beliefs. Her food was basic and was brought to her by one of her sisters.

God, however, wanted her to guide others in the way of righteousness and show them how to obtain their salvation, therefore she left Katavasis and went to the capital of the island. Here there were many women's monasteries which followed the rules of monastic society. It was in one of these monasteries that Mary was to spend the remainder of her life, undergoing spiritual struggles, leading others towards salvation and performing miracles.

Upon visiting the different monasteries, Mary found a secluded one which she preferred. It consisted of three nuns, a mother and her two daughters. The nuns, realising her sincerity, immediately welcomed her into their home. At this point Mary's name was changed to Matrona. (When a nun reaches a high point in her monastic life and becomes a Stavrophore, a new name is bestowed upon her, symbolising a second baptism and a new way of life).

Matrona surpassed the other nuns in her devotion, spirituality and understanding. Her sincerity convinced other girls to come to this monastery and lead the same type of life. The church itself was small and the Abbess agreed with Matrona to enlarge it and to build cells for the nuns. Any remaining farmland and personal belongings Matrona sold and with the money received, the monastery built a public bath so that the poor and wayfarers could bathe. These baths were very common during this time. After this, the renovation of the church began.

When the church was completed (with the help of Saint Artemios to whom it was dedicated) the Abbess of the monastery died. The nuns then elected Matrona as the new Abbess.

After the Genoese conquered the island of Chios, many barbarians inhabited the island. They plundered the island, including the monasteries. Among these was the monastery of Saint Matrona. One of these barbarians attempted to attack the nuns of the monastery. The Saint prayed for Divine help. From the heavens bolts of lightning fell to the ground, killing the assailant. The barbarians, seeing the destruction fled from the island in fear.

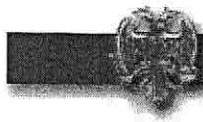
After these events, Matrona dreamt of her own death. Subsequent to this, she suffered from an illness for seven days. In the seven days she advised the other nuns as a mother would advise her children. She received Holy Communion and died on 20 October 1462. She was buried in the monastery's church in which she spent the greater part of her life. To honour this great Saint, God allowed her holy body to perform miracles after death. Many people with all types of afflictions came to the church and were cured.

In the village of Katavasis, there was a church built to honour the place where Saint Matrona had first started her spiritual struggles. Later, a larger church was built and the smaller one was used as a cemetery chapel.

The story of Saint Matrona of Chios is one of the most beautiful in our church history. She is an excellent example of a devoted Christian who tried in every sense of the word to be closer to her Lord, and guide and help her fellow man. She continues to perform many miracles for the worthy faithful.

by Christina Dedoussis
in **Voice in the wilderness**
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia
Greek Orthodox Community of St George, Brisbane.

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

Our Righteous Father John of Sinai, author of "The Ladder of Divine Ascent"

Commemorated 30 March



St John Climacus of Sinai accepted the ascetical life from the age of about sixteen and was tonsured as a monk three or four years later. Then, at the age of 35, he isolated himself from the world and lived as a hermit for 40 years at a monastery church called Thola, about 10 kilometres from the Mount Sinai monastery.

While living an ascetical life he is reported to have received the gift of tears and the grace of continual prayer. Fellow monks in large numbers began to seek him out for spiritual guidance. When criticized for making a mockery of his hermitage by entertaining so many people there, he decided to keep total silence. After a year or so of this, those who had criticized him pleaded with him to resume guiding others.

Experienced both in the solitary life of the hermit and in the communal life of cenobitic monasticism, he was appointed Abbot of the Monastery at Mount Sinai (built at the site of the **burning bush** where Moses spoke to God). The day he was made Abbot of Sinai, the Prophet Moses was seen giving

commands to those who served at the table.

St John wrote a book containing thirty homilies. Each homily deals with one virtue, and progressing from those that deal with holy and righteous activity (praxis) unto those that deal with divine vision (theoria), they raise a man up as though by means of steps unto the height of Heaven; thus the book is called "The Ladder of Divine Ascent", and the saint is known as "Climacus".

"The Ladder of Divine Ascent" is so greatly is this God-inspired book esteemed in the Orthodox Christian Church that its author, St. John Climacus, is celebrated twice a year - on 30th March (the day of his repose), and the Fourth Sunday of the Great Lent. Each monastic community of the Orthodox Church reads "The Ladder of Divine Ascent" during each day of the Great Lent, in their common dining hall (or refectory) during the daily meal. This is a period of strict fasting, struggle, prostration and extensive prayers; when only one meal is eaten in the day and after 3 pm, and water is only consumed during 3-6pm.

The book, by means of thirty steps (or logoi), calls us to the spiritual life; it inspires, instructs, speeds the reader towards the "things on high", and points-out the dangers and pitfalls. Each step

describes the origin of a certain virtue or passion and the path it can take us. The Ladder does not offer us a formula to accomplish salvation, for "the life you have is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3), but:

"Let us try to learn Divine truth more by toil and sweat than by mere word, for at the time of our departure it is not words but deeds that will have to be shown" (Step 26:36).

Saint John reposed in 603 AD, at eighty years of age.

Megalyrnarion.

Like that lofty ladder which Jacob was reaching to the Heavens, even so, by your godly words, you have raised a ladder that brings all the faithful unto the heights of virtue, O blessed Father John.

Dismissal Hymn. Plagal of Fourth Tone

WITH the streams of your tears, you cultivated the barrenness of the desert; and by your sighing, from the depths, you produced fruit a hundredfold in labours; and you became a luminary, shining with miracles upon the world, O John our righteous Father. Intercede with Christ God that our souls be saved.

Kontakion. First Tone

The soldiers standing guard

As ever blooming fruits, you offer the teachings of you God-given book, O wise John, most blessed, while sweetening the hearts of all them that heed it with vigilance; for it is a ladder from the earth unto Heaven that confers glory on the souls that ascend it and honour you faithfully.

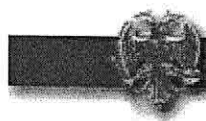
after the introductory sections of
The Ladder of Divine Ascent

by St. John Climacus

published in English by Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston 1991,

ISBN 0-943405-03-3

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

St. Innocent

Memory celebrated March 31 and September 23

by Patriarch Alexy of Moscow and All Russia and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church



"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world Amen" (Matt. 28:18-20)

Following God's call (Matt. 28:18-20), the Russian Orthodox Church has tirelessly performed its lofty and salvific ministry of preaching the Word of God throughout its millennium-long existence.

Soon after the Baptism of Russia took place, many peoples who grew in the cradle of the Russian State were enlightened with the Gospel's Truth through the zealous efforts of archpastors and pastors and especially monks from our ancient monasteries.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the Russian Church carried out its salvific mission in the vast lands of Europe and Asia reaching the Baltic Sea and the Carpathian Mountains in the west, the Black Sea and the Pamir in the south, and the Amur River and the Pacific in the east.

At the turn of the 19th century, the Russian Orthodox mission, following the "Russian Columbus, Gregory Shelikhov (1744-95 AD), spread to the remote North American continent where missionary monks from Valamo sowed the first seeds of orthodox faith.

It was in heretofore unknown Alaska and the Aleutian and Commander Islands, dispersed in the vast waters of the Pacific, that the all-holy name of God was glorified through the apostolic ministry of a yet little-known priest from Irkutsk by name of Ioann Veniaminov. Fr. Ioann was to become Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna in succession to luminaries Peter, Alexis, Jonas, Macarius, Philip, Job and Philaret. With the Message we now begin to mark in 1997 the 200th anniversary of St. Innocent, Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna whose life to the last breath was devoted to the sacrificial service of the Holy Church. Looking at his great apostolic feat, we praise and worship God the Saviour Who is wondrous in His saints.

St. Innocent was born on 26 August 1797 at the remote village of Anginskoye, Irkutsk Province, to the poor family of the local church's sexton. He was named Ioann at baptism. His modest origin and inconspicuous place of birth did not betoken the high social position and fame he was to be granted later by Lord for his ascetic life. He lost his father at the age of six to experience the bitter life of an orphan. In 1806 nine year-old Ioann was assigned to the seminary in Irkutsk. Significantly, not long before he came to Irkutsk in 1806, there were found, in the city's Monastery of the Ascension, the relics of St. Innocent of Irkutsk whose name and apostolic

ministry he was to inherit as the enlightener of America and Siberia.

During his eleven years at the seminary in Irkutsk, young Ioann showed brilliant abilities in assimilating the basics of theology, rhetoric, philology, which allowed him later to achieve a truly outstanding success in his educational work. In this seminary the future great enlightener was given the same fundamental academic training as his glorious predecessors in missionary work, such as St. Cyril Equal to the Apostles, the enlightener of the Slaves (+869), St. Stephen of Perm (+1369). He trained in the traditions of classical Greek education in St. Gregory's Monastery in Rostov, St. Innocent of Irkutsk (+1731) who graduated from the Theological Academy in Kiev and worked as prefect of the Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy in Moscow.

During his life in the seminary, the future luminary showed such Christian virtues as humbleness, natural kindness and exceptional industry. His extraordinary achievements and exemplary behaviour compelled the rector of the seminary in 1814 to give him the family name of Veniaminov after the late Bishop Veniamin (Bagriansiky) of Irkutsk who was much loved by the faithful.

In 1817 Ioann Veniaminov graduated from the seminary and was ordained deacon. In May 1821, he was ordained presbyter at the Church of the Annunciation in Irkutsk where he spent the first years of his pastoral service. Since the first years of his priesthood, Father Ioann enjoyed general favour and love for his "pastorship unprecedented in Irkutsk", which included Sunday talks with children on the interpretation of the Holy Gospel.

The Irkutsk period set an indelible stamp on the saint's memory. Later, performing his pastoral ministry, he never forgot about the church service he carried out in his native land. Later he dedicated the first church, in the Unalashka Islands, to the Ascension of the Lord and in memory of St. Innocent's Monastery of the Ascension in Irkutsk. He also renamed the Ust-Zeiskaya Cossack village on the Amur as the town of Blagoveschensk (Annunciation) after the Church of the Annunciation in Irkutsk in which he was ordained.

Yet, it was in such remote lands as the Russian America that God's selected-one had to carry out his educational ministry in the apostolic field. Monks from several northern Russian monasteries began this work in 1794 in the Kodyak Island of the Aleutian Archipelago. In 1822, the Holy Governing Synod decided to send the missionary priest to the Aleutian Islands. Motivated by the apostolic zeal, Father Ioann Veniaminov approached the Right Reverend Mikhail (Burdukov), Bishop of Irkutsk, and declared his willingness to assume this service. Already in May 1823, the 26 year-old missionary together with his family set off for a very hard and dangerous journey. In June of the following year, the travellers arrived in Unalashka, the main island of the Aleutian Archipelago. Father Ioann's primary concern was to learn the language of the local people and to build a church dedicated to the Holy Ascension. He built it with his own hands together with islanders, while teaching them various skills. The church was consecrated in July 1826 and became the center of Christian education for the Aleutians in Unalashka and the surrounding islands. Exposed to various dangers and deprivations, the pastor went in wretched boats from island to island, preaching the Word of God to local people. The zealous missionary managed to learn quickly six local tribal dialects and composed a Cyrillic alphabet for the prevailing Aleutian language and translated the Gospel from St. Matthew into it, as well as the catechises and the most popular prayers and church hymns. Using a simple and accessible language, He wrote an Aleutian brief course of Orthodox dogmatics and morality entitled "A Guideline to the Kingdom of God". Considered one of the best catechetical courses and educational aids for children and youth, this course has been reprinted many times since.

Father Ioann Veniaminov organized schools in which some 600 boys were taught to read and write, built a hospital and an orphanage, fought with hard drinking and polygamy widely

practiced by local people and managed to overcome these vices almost completely. After ten years on the Unalashka Island, Father Ioann baptized all the people in the archipelago. With the blessing of Bishop Mikhail of Irkutsk, he made a trip in 1829 to Nushegak in the American continent and preached the Word of God to people who Lived on the Bering Sea coast and baptized those who came to believe.

In 1834, Father Ioann was transferred to New Archangel in the Sitka Island, the center of the Russian possessions in North America, to serve in the Cathedral Church of Archangel Michael. During his four years in the island, he brought into the fold of the Church of Christ many local heathen Indians who had been known, before he came, for their commitment to paganism and cruel practices.

In spite of all the hardships, he encountered in his missionary work, the great enlightener, throughout his 14 years in the Russian America, found time and energy to engage himself in a fundamental study of the life, culture, languages and customs of the local population. He also studied the local climate, flora and fauna and left capital ethnographic, geographical and linguistic works for which he was later elected an honorary member of the Russian Geographical Society and Moscow Royal University.

The acute need to draw the attention of the Holy Governing Synod to the urgent needs of missionary and parish work in Russian America compelled Father Ioann Veniaminov to make a trip to St. Petersburg. He arrived in the city in June 1829 and met with a lively response of the Synod members whom he managed to convince of the need to establish a permanent Orthodox Mission in the north of the American continent. In acknowledgment of his missionary service on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Philaret (Drozdov) of Moscow elevated Father Ioann to the rank of archpriest.

It was in St. **Petersburg** in November 1840 that Father Ioann received sad news about the death of his wife in Irktitsk.

After a pilgrimage to St. Sergius Monastery of the Holy Trinity and to the shrines in Kiev, Archpriest Ioann, on the advice of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, took monastic vows on November 29. He took the name of Innocent, after Bishop Innocent of Irktitsk, and was elevated to the rank of archimandrite on the following day.

In December 1840, the Holy Governing Synod established a new diocese of Kamachatka-Kurils and the Aleutian islands based in the city of New Archangel. Bishop Innocent (Veniaminov) was consecrated bishop on 15 December 1840 at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan in St. Petersburg and became the first archpastor of the new diocese, New Archangel remained Bishop Innocent's See for eleven years. It was the time when his archpastoral gift blossomed. The bishop undertook many hard trips through Kamchatka and eastern Siberia, nourishing his flock, taking efforts to train clergymen from among local people in Alaska and Siberia and to set up new Orthodox missions. With his paternal kindness gaining him favour among the Koryaks, Chukcha and Tungus, he succeeded in spreading the Word of God among them. Wherever Bishop Innocent performed his Episcopal service, Orthodoxy invariably grew and gathered strength.

Bishop Innocent was elevated to the rank of archbishop in April 1850. Two years later his diocese extended to include the vast region of Yakutsk, In September 1853 he arrived in the city of Yakutsk. During his service there he translated scriptural books into the Yaktitian and Tungus languages, built churches, arranges parish life and set up orphanages. In April 1859, divine services in the Trinity Cathedral in Yakutsk began to be conducted in the Yakutian languages.

In 1857, Archbishop Innocent made a trip through Yakutia and North America to inspect his

farther parishes. In June, he was summoned to St. Petersburg twice (in 1860 and 1861), as the Holy Synod was to approve his proposal for transferring the See from Yakutsk to Amur and to establish vicarages in New Archangel, on the Sitka Island and Yakutsk. The bishop made archpastoral and missionary trips along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers. In September 1861, the apostle of America and Siberia met in Tokyo with hieromonk Nicholas (Kasatkin), the future apostle of Japan.

In April 1865, Archbishop Innocent became a member of the Holy Governing Synod after the death of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow. Archbishop Innocent was appointed on 5 January 1868 to the See of the Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna. He was to occupy it for eleven years.

Soon after his appointment to the See of the old Russian capital, Metropolitan Innocent established an Orthodox Missionary Society and guided it for nine years. "The Lord is pleased", he wrote, "that here too, in the centre of Russia and in an advanced age, I should not stay alien to the missionary work to which by Divine Providence my life was devoted since I was a youth working in the remote parts of my homeland". Through the efforts of Metropolitan Innocent the missionary work of the Russian Orthodox Church extended considerably as the church people learnt to believe it their sacred duty to help spread and affirm the Orthodox faith among the heathens.

Serving at the old Moscow See, Metropolitan Innocent showed a profound archpastoral wisdom and knowledge of life. He took the needs of the Moscow clergy close to heart and sought to alleviate them. He was concerned for arranging the work of theological schools in his diocese, opened a school for icon-painting and other arts for poor children and orphans, transformed Philaret's college into a school for daughters of the clergy who did not receive any pensions or allowances, founded the large Ostrovsky alms-house, and wrote educational aids for the clergy of the staff list, as well as their widows and orphans.

As the Holy Archimandrite of St. Sergius' Monastery of the Trinity, Metropolitan Innocent devoted much of his energy to improving it and ensured the development of its charitable ministry. With his blessing, the monastery began to publish "The Trinity Sheets" which were very popular among believers. He raised before the Holy Synod the question of spiritual improvement of monastic life in monasteries. He built a church dedicated to the 'Intercession' at the Moscow Theological Academy. Throughout his archpastoral activity, the Metropolitan gained the love of the clergy and faithful by his kindness, accessibility, and sincerity in human relations.

At the same time, the great enlightener continued his concern for the Russian Orthodox Church in North America. It was on his initiative that the Holy Governing Synod chose San Francisco as the bishop's See. Metropolitan Innocent also emphasized the need for the clergy to know English and for the Church to train priests from among local Americans as a necessary condition for strengthening Orthodoxy in the American continent.

Feeling his death approaching, Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow and Kolomna asked on the Great Tuesday, 27 March 1879, that the Sacrament of Extreme Unction be administered to him. On the Great Thursday, 29 March, he Communed. At 2.45 on the Great Saturday, March 31, the Metropolitan equal to the apostles passed away in the Lord.

On 5 April 1879 Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow and Kolomna of the blessed memory was buried at St., Sergius' Monastery of the Trinity. Two inscriptions were made at his tomb: "May the Lord remember your archpastoral service in his Kingdom always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages." and "O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us through the prayers of Metropolitan Innocent".

The apostolic preaching of Metropolitan Innocent spread to a vast territory including Alaska and Chukotka, the Aleutian, Kurils and Commander Islands, eastern Siberia, the Amur region, Kamchatka and the Far East. Metropolitan Innocent brought the light of Christian faith to the Aleutians, Koloshes, Kurils, Eskimo, Kenai, Chugaches, Kamchadals, Oliutores, Negidales, Mongols, Samogirs, Golds, Gulyaks, Koryaks, Tungus, Chukcha, Yakutians, and Kitians.

The preaching of the gospel was the primary achievement in the life of Metropolitan Innocent and occupied a special place in his apostolic service. The metropolitan had a great homiletic gift and was a remarkable preacher. He never missed an opportunity to preach and talk to people and tirelessly instructed his clergy to do the same: "Woe to him who is called but fails to preach". He wrote, "Interpreting matters of faith, one must speak after careful consideration, clearly, distinctly, as briefly as possible, otherwise your preaching will be of little success... One must say that the whole teaching of Christ is that we should repent believe in Him and have a selfless and pure love for Him and all people... In order to influence the heart, one must speak from the heart, for it is from the abundant heart that the mouth speaks. Therefore, only he who is filled with faith and love can have the mouth and wisdom which the hearts of listeners find hard to resist...

This is how the personality of the Metropolitan of Moscow was described by one of his contemporaries: "The Most Reverend Innocent appears majestically distinct and original among our Orthodox bishops both old and new. As one who was raised and then worked for seventy years amidst ingenious and simple nature and among as simple children of nature, he himself was open, gentle and affable, straightforward and impartial. He did not like smart artificiality in anything, he did not like to show off his knowledge or his merits, but always behaved simply and humbly. He enriched his powerful natural intelligence with a vast and manifold knowledge that only few can boast His heart was free from envy and craftiness, ambition and conceit, greed and luxury. Having faced severe nature, needs and deprivation since his early age, he trained himself to be patient and industrious, courageous and steadfast self-possessed and resourceful, temperate and content with little, and to be absolutely obedient to the sacred will of God in all circumstances. His name became famed and honoured both in his country and in foreign lands. Not only every Russian who is devoted to the honour and glory of his country, but also every educated person who only respects science and humanity respectfully bow before the great personality of our apostle of Kamchatka and the Aleutian Islands.

The fact that many Orthodox Christians, both in Russia and in the American continent, cherished the memory of Metropolitan Innocent of blessed memory and venerated him in their hearts led the Russian Orthodox Church to consider his canonization as an ardent apostle of Orthodoxy, selfless pastor filled with a profound humbleness and devoted love for God and people and zealous servant of the Church.

After a thorough consideration of this matter by the Synodal Commission for Christian Unity the Holy Synod, having praised our Lord the Saviour and Guardian of the world Who shows inexhaustible mercy for His Church, resolved that Metropolitan Innocent of blessed memory, Bishop of Moscow and Apostle of America and Siberia, be ranked among the saints glorified by God's grace. The Holy Synod resolved that the memory of our St. Father Innocent, Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna, be celebrated twice a year, namely, on the day of his blessed demise, 31 March (13 April according to the new calendar) and on the day of his glorification, 23 September (6 October according to the new calendar), and that his name be included in the Church calendar.

On 13 October 1994, the eve of the Feast of the Protecting Veil of the Most Holy Mother of God, the Orthodox people were honoured with God's great grace as the honourable relics of St. Innocent were found at St. Sergius' Monastery of the Trinity.

The year 1997 is marked with the 200th anniversary of Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow and Kolomna. The land of Irkutsk, which cultivated this great preacher of the Holy Gospel, is rejoicing. Orthodox America also rejoices, glorifying its Apostle and Luminary. Rejoicing is also the Siberian land, which has St. Innocent as its heavenly patron. The glorious city of Moscow, too, stands out vividly, lit up with the heavenly light of the star, which came from the east. Rejoicing also is the ancient monastery of St. Sergius, having under its protection the treasure, which are the holy relics of St. Innocent.

The Saviour's parable of a sower who sowed some of his seed into good ground and it brought forth fruit a hundredfold (Mt. 13:3-8) was embodied in the apostolic feat of St. Innocent. The seeds of faith he sowed in the hearts of dozens of thousands of children of God from many tribes and peoples in Alaska and northern islands of the Pacific, eastern Siberia and the Far East continue to sprout to this day. Nine dioceses in Siberia and the Far East cover today a vast territory whose indigenous peoples heard the Word of God from St. Innocent equal to the apostles...

At a time when we seek ways for reviving mission in the Russian Orthodox Church, the image of St. Innocent stands before us as an example of a man who was "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles" (Rom 15:16); a true apostle who devoted his life to the proclamation of Christ and the gospel.

The experience of this great apostolic enlightener shows convincingly that the church mission can be successful only if it is based on respect for every nation and its culture and for every person. The Church's witness should never be interrupted during shifts in social formations or radical social changes, but should call all to harmony and reconciliation, Apostolic zeal, profound humbleness, ardent love of people, boundless commitment to the task of preaching the gospel and faithfulness to the Orthodox Church. These are the qualities that are characteristic of St. Innocent. Every one of us should seek to acquire them, if the mission of our Church in the world today is to be successful. The preaching of Christianity is "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor 2:4). The missionary and archpastoral feast of St. Innocent shows us how profound and powerful should be the faith of a preacher. St. Innocent himself used to say, "human steps are corrected by the Lord", and we all serve as tools of God's grace.

We believe that the words of Christ the Saviour are addressed to every person, wherever he may live and whatever nation he may belong to. His **words are about one thing**, that is, the heavenly kingdom, repentance and the way to this kingdom. St. Innocent wrote to the Tunguses: "Do not be afraid of following the Lord Jesus Christ, He is a powerful Supporter; follow Him, hurry up, go, as long as the door to the heavenly Kingdom is open for you, and your Heavenly Father will meet you early on this way, kiss you, clothe you in the first garments and introduce you in His house". These words written in the last century by the light of an oil-lamp in an Eskimo shack can be addressed to any audience at any time.

from **The Orthodox Messenger**, vol 8(11-12) and 9(1-2), 1997-8
published bi-monthly by the SA Central Youth.
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