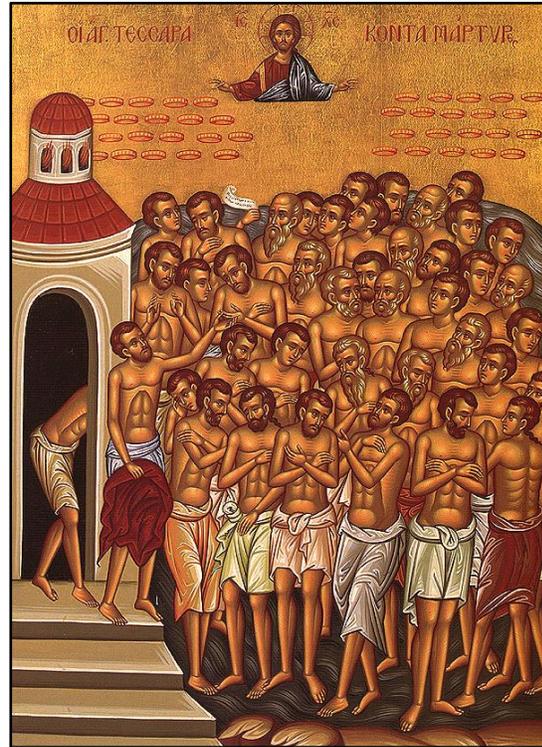


Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church

1723 E. Fairmount Avenue, Baltimore, MD. 21231

410-276-6171 www.HolyTrinityOrthodox.com



3rd Sunday of the Great Fast Veneration of the Cross

Tone 7

March 9/22, 2020

The Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste: Cyron (or Quirio), Candidus, Domnus, Hesychius, Heraclius, Smaragdus, Eunoicus, Valens, Vivianus, Claudius, Priscus, Theodulus, Eutychius, John, Xanthias, Helianus, Sisinius, Angus, Aetius, Flavius, Acacius, Ecdicius, Lysimachus, Alexander, Elias, Gorgonius, Theophilus, Dometian, Gaius, Leontius, Athanasius, Cyril, Sacerdon, Nicholas, Valerius, Philoctimon, Severian, Chudion, Aglaius, and Meliton (320); Martyr Urpasianus of Nicomedia (295); Righteous Caesarius, brother of St. Gregory the Theologian (369); Righteous Tarasius of Liconium; Hieromartyrs Michael, Alexis, Demetrius, Sergius, Sergius – priests, and Nicholas – deacon, Venerable-martyr Josaph and Venerable-martyrs Natalia and Alexandra (1938). “Albazin” Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos (“The Word Was Made Flesh”) (1666).

Today’s Scriptural Readings:

[Hebrews 4:14-5:6](#) / [Mark 8:34-9:1](#)

[Hebrews 12:1-10](#) / [Matthew 20:1-16](#)

Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

Before Thy Cross, we bow down in worship O Master, and Thy Holy Resurrection we glorify.

If you truly seek God's forgiveness and want to cure your soul, you need four things. The first is to forgive your enemies. The second is to confess thoroughly. The third is to blame yourself. The fourth is to resolve to sin no more. If we wish to be saved, we must always blame ourselves and not attribute our wrong acts to others. And God, Who is most compassionate, will forgive us. St. Cosmas Aitolos (+1779)

This Week's Liturgical Calendar – WATCH ONLINE	
Tuesday, March 24 th – 7:00 PM	Moleben in Times of Pestilence
Saturday, March 28 th – 6:00 PM	Vigil Service
Sunday, March 29 th – 10:00 AM	Divine Liturgy

Divine Services at Holy Trinity are live-streamed at
<https://www.youtube.com/user/HolyTrinitySermons>

CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC

Unfortunately, our church is closed to the public because of State restrictions connected to the COVID-19. However, we will continue to celebrate Divine Services on the weekend and live stream them online. Let us pray that our Lord will comfort and heal all who are suffering in sickness and that He will deliver all of us from this pestilence, forgive us and save us.

Candles and Proskomedias

We know that many of you regularly place candles in prayerful support of your loved ones and submit lists of names (living and departed) for commemoration during Proskomedias. And so, we want to give you the opportunity to “remotely” place candles and/or submit names for commemoration during Divine Liturgy.

To request candles / commemorations, please complete this online form:

<https://forms.gle/Si3X1Ja5KaLyYw8K7>

It will ask you the types and quantities of candles you wish to purchase and where to place the candles. We will do our best to place them as you requested, space permitting. Also, in this online form, you can submit names of your loved ones for commemoration during Proskomedias. At the end of the request form you will find directions on how to submit your donation online for the candles and commemorations.

Petitions during times of pestilence

“**M**ore than all others we have sinned against Thee and we have transgressed, O Master, and if we have not acquired repentance instead of repentance accept our offering. And having set Thyself to mercy, as Thou art almighty, free Thy servants from death bearing sickness and grievous afflictions, groaning in pain we pray Thee, quickly hearken and have mercy.”

“**W**e have sinned and we have transgressed, and therefore Thy righteous anger has visited us, O Lord, our God; and the darkness of death has encompassed us and we have drawn nigh unto the gates of Hades. But, with compunction, we cry out unto Thee, our God, in our infirmities: Spare, O spare Thy people, and destroy us not utterly, humbly we pray Thee, hearken and have mercy.”

“**O** Lord, Who rules by life and by death: do Thou not enclose the souls of Thy servants in death, but turn aside from wrath and forsake anger, for our days vanish like smoke, and our strength has wasted away, and we are perishing utterly because of our sins. Be Thou merciful unto Thy servants who are repenting with tears, we pray Thee, hearken and have mercy..”

Pledging Members

We encourage all our members and guests to continue offering your contributions in support of our parish. Unfortunately, our expenses continue. We need and greatly appreciate your generous contributions. Pledging members, please use your donation envelopes. Thank you very much!

Please send your checks to:

Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church
1723 E. Fairmount Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21231

Pray at home every day. On Sundays and other days when we conduct services, please pray with us as you watch the live-streamed services. Just as you earlier set aside time to come to church, continue to do the same, but from your homes watching online. During the services, turn off your phones, remove any possible distractions and pray attentively, just as you would if you were in church. When we pray, we are touched by God’s Grace. May God bless you!

Special Parish Meeting – Results

A special parish meeting was conducted on Sunday, March 8th after coffee hour to decide on a proposal to replace the large wooden doors in the front entrance. The proposal was approved. The doors will be installed by early June.

Challenge Grant – Matching Donations

The Lisowsky and Mickel families have pledged to match all donations for the new front doors on a 1:1 ratio. For every dollar you donate, they will match one dollar, up to \$10,000 towards the new front doors. Double the value of your donation: \$20 becomes \$40, \$50 becomes \$100, and \$100 becomes \$200! Special donation forms are on the candle stand in the vestibule of the church.

Website Working Committee – Church Communications Survey

Your feedback is requested by April 2, 2020.

We are reviewing and updating our digital communications. Before we make any changes, we are asking for your feedback and comments. Please complete this short online survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HTROC>. All responses will be held in confidence and used only to help us improve our communications. Thank you in advance for your response. To join the committee, contact Martin Masiuk 410-336-8909.

Church School Camping Trip – May 15-17, 2020

The 20th Annual Church School Camping Trip at Camp Running Bear (formerly Camp Alkor) in Monkton, MD for children ages 6-12 will take place May 17-19. Our theme this year is “The Triumph of Orthodoxy.” **Registrations due by May 1st**. Registration forms are on the bulletin table. For more information contact Dr. Pat Disharoon 410-233-5337. *Important*, all adult chaperones/volunteers MUST register with Dr. Pat by May 1st to expedite background checks.

Pilgrimages in 2020

As a part of the celebrations of the 50th Anniversary of the Founding of the Patriarchal Parishes in the USA, we will conduct a pilgrimage to St. Petersburg, Russia in July 2020. This is a unique opportunity, because we will have access to sites that are available only for pilgrims. The itinerary is on our website www.holytrinityorthodox.com.

Cleaning Group – Group #4 / Join a Group – Help your brothers and sisters

Group #4 will clean the week of March 23-28: Natalia and Vlad Volkov, Yelena, Vadim and Katie Radchenko and Nadiya Aleksandrovyh. Please join a group. We always need more members.

Birthday / Anniversary Celebrations: March 22-29

We offer our best wishes and birthday congratulations to Kleopatra Shipley and Denise Hall (3/29). May God bless them with health, prosperity and many years. To include your birthday/anniversary in the bulletin call Fr. John.

Vigil Candles: On the Altar and near St. Barbara

March 22-28: Candles offered by Alina Klimova for the health/salvation of the servants of God: Alina (Aleftina), Eva, Katrina (Ekaterina) and Zinaida. A \$15 donation will keep all three candles lit for one week. Schedule your candle offering with Elena Loyko 443-537-8978.

Pre-Order Homemade Kolbasa for Pascha

Submit your kolbasa pre-orders to Albert Blaszk 410-799-3226. This is the same as we make for the Festival. Order now so we know how much to make.

Special Petitions for the Unity of the Orthodox Church

Again we pray to the Lord and our Savior to preserve the Orthodox Church abiding in the whole world in unity and right belief, and to grant her peace and tranquility, love and consent, let us all say, Lord, hearken and have mercy.

Again we pray to look upon the Holy Orthodox Church with the goodness of heart and with mercy, and to preserve her from divisions and schisms, from hostility and disorder, so her unity will not be diminished or shaken, but Thine Thrice-Holy name be glorified in her, let us all say, Lord, hearken and have mercy.

Submit your 2020 Pledge

The mission of our parish is to spread the Word of God, to grow, to expand, to improve and not just to preserve our traditions. Our parish shouldn't become stale, but pursue holiness. We strive to fulfill the mission of our parish, through prayer, work and sacrifice. Prayer – because we are called to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17); work – because we are taught to increase the talents given to us (Matt. 25: 14-30); and sacrifice – because "everyone to whom much is given, from him will much be required" (Luke 12:48). Please be generous as the Lord is generous to you. When completing your pledge for the new year, please consider raising your level of giving. Our church cannot operate without your financial contributions. Our parish will grow only through your prayers, work and generous sacrifice.

When you are generous, you are not bestowing a gift, but repaying a debt. Everything you possess materially comes from God, who created all things. And every spiritual and moral virtue you possess is through divine grace. Thus, you owe everything to God. More than that, God has given you his Son, to show you how to live: how to use your material possessions, and how to grow in moral and spiritual virtue. St. John Chrysostom

Please Remember in Your Prayers...

Archpriest George Konyev; Deacon Michael Bishop; Mat. Myra Kovalak; Mat. Klavdiya Burbelo; Kh. Jocelyn Mathewes; Mat. Natalia Kosich; Mat. Catherine Kowalchik; Marie Vass; Charles Snipes; Arthur-Stephen & Evelyn-Evanthia Lisowsky; Yelena Radchenko; Lydia Zorina; Katherine Plaskowitz; Philip Plaskowitz; Bernadine Borawick; Julia Aymold; Lilli Ann Hoffman; Lara Marinich; Ioann and Galina Zernetkin; Monika-Anastasia & Stephanie Handley; Blanche-Julia Stolkovich; Ekaterina Koroleva; Nina and Glen-Gregory Lewis; Lyudmila, Anton & Aleksander Karnup; John Alexander Bylen; Katherine Garrett; Stephen Kaminitzky; Kenneth Pukita; William and Ann Ferkile; Irina Kononova; Petr and Lyudmila Borodkin; Svetlana & Aleksey; Alla; Anna; Alla; Raisa, Zinaida; Pavel, Vladimir, Valentina, and Maria; Maria Pappas; Bonnie Duke; Diana Radchenko; Aleksey & Lidia Potapov; Oleg and Andrei; Vitaliy, Tatiana, Olena & Nicholas Berchuk; Cynthia and Bill (Basil) Popomaronis; Andrei, Marina, Valentina and Vladimir; Valentina Shultieva; Katherine Shultieva; Shanna, Stephen, Trent-Michael, Grant-Alexander, Adalynn Lisowsky; Julie Smith; Tayisia Solvieva; Leonid and Zoya; Jayne Sudol; Rita and Richard Herber, Mary Orzolek, George Matassov; Janice & John DesLauriers; Nicholas Rodzianko; Alexandra; Alexandra Vinogradova; Armen Nostrant; Vasiliy; Archpriest Michael, Alexandra, Larisa, Gabriel and Julianna; Elizabeth Wright.

Next Council Meeting: Thursday, March 26th – 7:00 PM in the Church Hall

Fr. John Vass, Rector 443-527-7067	Fr. Deacon Michael Bishop: 410-563-0472
Victor Marinich, Council President: 443-512-0985	Vadim Radchenko, Vice President: 410-465-6172
Andrei Burbelo, Recording Secretary: 443-567-6031	Albert Blaszak, Treasurer: 410-799-3226
Anna-Zumrat Shkurba, Stewardship Chair: 443-857-8541	Member-At-Large: Vacant
Natalia Makarava Sisterhood President: 443-625-8470	Michael Mickel, Cemetery Manager: 410-666-2870

Synaxarion for the Third Sunday of Great Lent

On this third Sunday of the Great Fast we celebrate the Veneration of the precious and life-giving Cross. Since during the forty days of the Fast we are also in a way crucified, mortified to the passions, contrite, abased and despondent, the precious and life-giving Cross is offered to us as refreshment and confirmation, calling to mind the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and comforting us. If our God was crucified for our sake, how great should be our effort for His sake, since our afflictions have been assuaged through the Lord's tribulations, and by the commemoration and the hope of the Cross of glory. For as our Savior in ascending the Cross was glorified through dishonor and grief, so should we also endure our sorrows, in order to be glorified with Him. Also, as those who have traveled a long hard road, weighed down by the labors of their journey, in finding a shady tree, take their ease for a moment and then continue their journey rejuvenated, so now in this time of the Fast, this sorrowful and laborious journey, the Holy Fathers have planted the life-giving Cross, for our relief and refreshment, to encourage and make easier the labors that lie ahead. Or as when there is a royal procession, the king's scepter and banners precede him, and then he then himself appears, radiant and joyous in his victory, causing his subjects to rejoice with him. So then our Lord Jesus Christ, desiring to show His sure victory over death and His glory on the day of the Resurrection, sends His scepter before Himself, the sign of His kingship, the life-giving Cross, to gladden and refresh us, as it fortifies and enables us to be prepared to receive the King with all possible strength, and to praise Him in His radiant victory.

This week lies at the middle of the holy Forty Day Fast. The Fast is like a bitter source because of our contrition and the sadness and sorrow for sin that it brings. And as Moses plunged the branch in the bitter waters of Marah, making them sweet, so God, Who has led us through the spiritual Red Sea away from Pharaoh, through the life-giving wood of the precious and life-giving Cross, sweetens the bitterness of the Forty Day Fast, and comforts us as those who were in the wilderness, up until the time when by His Resurrection He will lead us to the spiritual Jerusalem. And since the Cross is called, and indeed is, the Tree of Life, it is the very tree that was planted in the Garden of Eden. So it is fitting that the Holy Fathers have planted the Tree of the Cross in the middle of the Forty Day Fast to commemorate both Adam's tasting of its sweet fruit and of its being taken from us in favor of the Tree of the Cross, tasting of which we shall in no way die, but will have even greater life.

Through the power of Thy Cross, O Christ our God, preserve us also from the temptations of the Evil One. And make us worthy to venerate Thy divine Passion and life-bearing Resurrection, having radiantly traversed the great length of the Fast, and have mercy on us, as Thou art good and lovest mankind. Amen.

Holy Hierarch Ignatius (Brianchaninov) Homily on the Third Sunday of Great Lent

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mk. 8:34), said the Lord to his disciples, calling them unto Him, as we heard today in the Gospels.

Dear brothers and sisters! We too are disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, because we are Christians. We too are called unto the Lord, to this holy temple, to hear His teaching. We stand

before the face of the Lord. His gaze is directed at us. Our souls are laid bare before Him; our secret thoughts and hidden feelings are open to Him. He sees all of our intentions; He sees the truth, and the sins we have committed from our youth; He sees our whole life, past and future; even what we *have not yet done* is already written in His *book*. He knows the hour of our passing into immeasurable eternity, and gives us His all-holy commandment for our salvation: *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*. Through living faith, let us lift up the eyes of our mind to the Lord Who is present here with us! Let us open our hearts, rolling back the heavy stone of hardness from its entrance; let us ponder, accept, and assimilate the teaching of our Lord.

What does it mean to *deny ourselves*? It means leaving our sinful life. Sin, through which our fall occurred, has so encompassed our nature that it has become as if natural; thus, denial of sin has become denial of nature, and denying nature is denying ourselves. The eternal death that has struck our souls has become like life for us. It demands food: sin; it demands to be pleased—with sin. By means of such food and pleasure, eternal death upholds and preserves its dominion over man. But fallen man accepts the growth of the dominion of death in himself as growth and success in life. Thus, he who is infected with a fatal disease is overcome by the forceful demands of this disease and looks for foods that would strengthen him. He seeks them as the most essential foods, as the most needed and pleasant delights. The Lord pronounced His sentence against this eternal death, which mankind, sick with terrible fallenness, imagines to be life: *For whosoever will save his life, cultivating in it the life of fallenness or eternal death, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it* (Mk. 8:35). Placing before our eyes the whole world with all its beauty and charm, the Lord says, *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? What good is it for man, what has he really acquired if he should come to possess not only some minor thing, but even the entire visible world? This visible world is no more than man's temporary guesthouse! There is no item on the earth, not a single acquirable good that we could call our own. Everything will be taken from us by merciless and inevitable death; and unforeseen circumstances and changes often take them away even before our death. Even our own bodies are cast aside at that sacred step into eternity. Our possession and treasure is our soul, and our soul alone. What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Mk. 8:37), sayeth the word of God. There is nothing that can recompense the loss of the soul when it is killed by eternal death, which deceitfully calls itself life.

What does it mean to take up our cross? The cross was an instrument of shameful execution of commoners and captives deprived of a citizen's rights. The proud world, a world at enmity with Christ, deprives Christ's disciples of the rights enjoyed by the sons of this world. *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me* (Jn. 15:19; 16:2–3). Taking up our cross means magnanimously enduring the mocking and derision that the world pours out upon followers of Christ—those sorrows and persecutions with which the sin-loving and blind world persecutes those who follow Christ. *For this is thankworthy, says the Apostle Peter, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For even hereunto were ye called* (1 Pet. 2:19, 21). We were called by the Lord, Who said to his beloved ones, *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world* (Jn. 16:33).

Taking up our cross means courageously enduring difficult unseen labor, agony, and torment for the sake of the Gospels as we war with our own passions, with the sin that lives in us, with the spirits of evil who vehemently make war against us and frantically attack us when we resolve to cast off the yoke of sin, and submit ourselves to the yoke of Christ. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood,* says the holy Apostle Paul, *but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (Eph. 6:12). *(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)* *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ* (2 Cor. 10:4–5). After gaining victory in this unseen but laborious warfare, the Apostle exclaimed, *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world* (Gal. 6:14).

Taking up our cross means obediently and humbly submitting ourselves to those temporary sorrows and afflictions that Divine Providence sees fit to allow against us for the cleansing away of our sins. Then the cross will serve us as a ladder from earth to heaven. The thief in the Gospels who ascended this ladder ascended from out of terrible crimes into most radiant heavenly habitations. From his cross he pronounced words filled with humility of wisdom; in humility of wisdom he entered into the knowledge of God, and through the knowledge of God, he acquired heaven. *We receive the due reward of our deeds,* he said. Lord, *remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom* (Lk. 23:41–42). When sorrows encompass us, let us also, beloved brothers and sisters, repeat the words of the good thief—words that can purchase paradise! Or like Job, let us bless the Lord who punishes us, Who is just yet merciful. *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, said this sufferer, and shall we not receive evil? As it hath pleased the Lord so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 2:10; 1:21). May God’s promise, which is true, be fulfilled in us: *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.* (Js. 1:12).

Taking up our cross means willingly and eagerly submitting ourselves to deprivations and ascetic labors, by which the irrational strivings of our flesh are held in check. The Apostle Paul had recourse to such a crucifixion of his flesh. He says, *But I keep under [in Slavonic: “deaden,” or “mortify”] my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway* (1 Cor. 9:27). *They that are in the flesh,* that is, those who do not restrain their flesh, but allow it to overcome the spirit, *cannot please God* (Rom. 8:8). Therefore, though we live in the flesh, we should not live for the flesh! *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die* (Rom. 8:12) an eternal death; *but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live* (Rom. 8:13) an eternal, blessed life. The flesh is essentially restrained by the spirit; but the spirit can only take control of the flesh and rule it when it is prepared to submit to its crucifixion. The flesh is crucified by fasting, vigil, kneeling in prayer, and other bodily labors placed upon it wisely and within measure. A bodily labor that is wise and within measure frees the body from heaviness and corpulence, refines its strength, keeps it ever light and capable of activity. *They that are Christ’s,* says the Apostle, *have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts* (Gal. 5:24).

What does it mean to take up our cross, and take up specifically *our own* cross? It means that every Christian should patiently bear those very insults and persecutions from the world that come to *him*, and not any others. This means that every Christian should manfully and constantly war with those very passions and sinful thoughts that arise in him. It means that every Christian

should with obedience and dedication to God's will, with confession of God's justice and mercy, with thankfulness to God, endure those very sorrows and deprivations that Divine Providence allows to come upon him, and not some other things painted and presented to him by his proud dreams. This means being satisfied with those bodily labors that correspond to our physical strength, the ones that our flesh require in order to keep it in order, and not to seek after increased fasting and vigil, or all other ascetic feats beyond our measure, which destroy our physical health and direct our spirit towards high self-opinion and self-deceit, as St. John Climacus describes. All mankind labors and suffers upon the earth, but these sufferings differ; the passions differ that war against us, the sorrows and temptations differ that God sends us for our healing, for the cleansing away of our sins. What differences there are in people's physical strength, in their very health! Precisely: every person has his own cross. And each Christian is commanded to accept this cross of *his own* with self-denial, and to follow Christ. He who has denied himself and taken up his own cross has made peace with himself and with his own circumstances, with his own position both internal and external; and only he can reasonably and correctly follow Christ.

What does it mean to follow Christ? It means studying the Gospels, having the Gospels as the only guide of the activity of our mind, heart, and body. It means adapting our thoughts to the Gospels, tuning the feelings of our heart to the Gospels, and serving as an expression of the Gospels by all our deeds and movements, both secret and open. As we said before, only the person who has escaped deceit through *voluntary humility* (Col. 2:18), who has desired to obtain true humility of wisdom where it abides—in obedience and submission to God—is capable of following Christ. He who has entered into submission to God, into obedience combined with complete self-denial, has taken up *his own* cross, and accepted and confessed this cross to be *his own*.

Beloved brothers and sisters! Bowing down bodily to worship the precious Cross of the Lord today according to the rule of the Holy Church, we bow down also in spirit! We venerate the precious Cross of Christ—our weapon of victory and banner of Christ's glory—each confessing from his own cross, "I have received the due reward of my deeds! Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom!" By recognizing our sinfulness with thankfulness to God and submission to His will, we make our cross—that instrument of execution and mark of dishonor—an instrument of victory and sign of glory, like unto the Cross of the Lord. Through the cross we open paradise to ourselves. Let us not allow ourselves any evil murmuring, and especially not any soul-destroying blasphemy, which is often heard from the lips of the blind and hardened sinner, who writhes and thrashes upon his cross, vainly endeavoring to escape from it. With murmuring and blasphemy, the cross becomes unbearably heavy, dragging to hell the one crucified upon it. "What have I done?" cries the sinner in denial of his sinfulness, accusing the just and merciful God of injustice and mercilessness, blaming and rejecting God's Providence. The one who saw the Son of God crucified, mockingly and evilly demanded of him, *If thou be Christ, save thyself and us* (Lk. 23:39),—*let him now come down from the cross* (Mt. 27:42). But our Lord Jesus Christ *was pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh and to endure death* in order by the cross to make peace between God and man, and to save mankind by death from eternal death. Having prepared the holy Apostles for this great event—the incarnate God-man's sufferings and shameful death, potent to redeem the human race—the Lord informed the Apostles in good time that He must be given over into the hands of sinners, must suffer much, be killed, and resurrected. This forewarning seemed strange and unlikely to certain of the holy Apostles. Then the Lord called unto Him his disciples

and said to them: *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* Amen. <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/34407.htm>

St. Theophan the Recluse - *Thoughts for Each Day of the Year*

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mark 8:34). It is impossible to follow the Lord as a cross-bearer without a cross, and everyone who follows Him, unfailingly goes with a cross. What is this cross? It is all sorts of inconveniences, burdens and sorrows—weighing heavily both internally and externally—along the path of conscientious fulfillment of the commandments of the Lord, in a life according to the spirit of His instructions and demands. Such a cross is so much a part of a Christian that wherever there is a Christian, there is this cross, and where there is no such cross, there is no Christian. Abundant privileges and a life of pleasure do not suit a true Christian. His task is to cleanse and reform himself. He is like a sick person, who needs cauterization, or amputation; how can this be without pain? He wants to tear himself away from the captivity of a strong enemy; but how can this be without struggle and wounds? He must walk counter to all practices surrounding him; but how can he sustain this without inconvenience and constraint? Rejoice as you feel the cross upon yourself, for it is a sign that you are following the Lord on the path of salvation which leads to heaven. Endure a bit. The end is just around the corner, as well as the crowns!

The Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste Sunday, 09/22 March

In the year 313 St Constantine the Great issued an edict granting Christians religious freedom, and officially recognizing Christianity as equal with paganism under the law. But his co-ruler Licinius was a pagan, and he decided to stamp out Christianity in his part of the Empire. As Licinius prepared his army to fight Constantine, he decided to remove Christians from his army, fearing mutiny.

One of the military commanders of that time in the Armenian city of Sebaste was Agricola, a zealous champion of idolatry. Under his command was a company of forty Cappadocians, brave soldiers who had distinguished themselves in many battles. When these Christian soldiers refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods, Agricola locked them up in prison. The soldiers occupied themselves with prayer and psalmody, and during the night they heard a voice saying, "Persevere until the end, then you shall be saved."

On the following morning, the soldiers were again taken to Agricola. This time the pagan tried flattery. He began to praise their valor, their youth and strength, and once more he urged them to renounce Christ and thereby win themselves the respect and favor of their emperor.

Seven days later, the renowned judge Licius arrived at Sebaste and put the soldiers on trial. The saints steadfastly answered, "Take not only our military insignia, but also our lives, since nothing is more precious to us than Christ God." Licius then ordered his servants to stone the holy martyrs. But the stones missed the saints and returned to strike those who had thrown them. One stone thrown by Licius hit Agricola in the face, smashing his teeth. The torturers realized that the saints were guarded by some invisible power. In prison, the soldiers spent the night in prayer and

again they heard the voice of the Lord comforting them: "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live (John 11:25). Be brave and fear not, for you shall obtain imperishable crowns."

On the following day the judge repeated the interrogation in front of the torturer, but the soldiers remained unyielding. It was winter, and there was a severe frost. They lined up the holy soldiers, threw them into a lake near the city, and set a guard to prevent them from coming out of the water. In order to break the will of the martyrs, a warm bathhouse was set up on the shore. During the first hour of the night, when the cold had become unbearable, one of the soldiers made a dash for the bathhouse, but no sooner had he stepped over the threshold, than he fell down dead.

During the third hour of the night, the Lord sent consolation to the martyrs. Suddenly there was light, the ice melted away, and the water in the lake became warm. All the guards were asleep, except for Aglaius, who was keeping watch. Looking at the lake he saw that a radiant crown had appeared over the head of each martyr. Aglaius counted thirty-nine crowns and realized that the soldier who fled had lost his crown.

Aggias then woke up the other guards, took off his uniform and said to them, "I too am a Christian," and he joined the martyrs. Standing in the water he prayed, "Lord God, I believe in Thee, in Whom these soldiers believe. Add me to their number and make me worthy to suffer with Thy servants." Then a fortieth crown appeared over his head.

In the morning, the torturers saw with surprise that the martyrs were still alive, and their guard Aggias was glorifying Christ together with them. They led the soldiers out of the water and broke their legs. During this horrible execution the mother of the youngest of the soldiers, Meliton, pleaded with her son not to persevere until death.

They put the bodies of the martyrs on a cart and committed them to fire. Young Meliton was still breathing, and they left him to lay on the ground. His mother then picked up her son, and on her own shoulders she carried him behind the cart. When Meliton drew his last breath, his mother put him on the cart with the bodies of his fellow sufferers. The bodies of the saints were tossed in the fire, and their charred bones were thrown into the water, so that Christians would not gather them up.

Three days later the martyrs appeared in a dream to St Peter, Bishop of Sebaste, and commanded him to bury their remains. The bishop together with several clergy gathered up the relics of the glorious martyrs by night and buried them with honor.

There is a pious custom of baking pastries shaped like skylarks on the commemoration day of the Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. Holy Tradition tells us that birds sang at the time of the Holy Martyrs' deaths to announce the arrival of spring and the victory of Life over death.