

Feasts and Saints of the Orthodox Church

12 APRIL

(25 April)

St Basil the Confessor the Bishop of Parium

St Basil the Confessor, Bishop of Parium, lived during the eighth century. He was elected as bishop by the inhabitants of Parium, who venerated the saint as a true pastor of the flock of Christ.

When the Iconoclast heresy broke out, St Basil resolutely came out on the side of icon veneration and refused to sign the orders for their abolition (the "Iniquitous Scroll" of the Council of 754 which was convened under the emperor Constantine V Copronymos (741-775)). The saint avoided any contact with the heretics and did not permit them into his diocese. For his zeal he suffered much persecution, hunger and deprivation.

St Basil remained faithful to the Orthodox Church until his death.

Hieromartyr Zeno the Bishop of Verona

Saint Zeno, Bishop of Verona, was born a Greek and came from Syria. In his youth he became a monk and devoted himself to the study of Holy Scripture. Visiting several monasteries, the saint came to the city of Verona and settled there. The people chose him as bishop of the city.

The emperors Constantius (353-361) and Valens (364-378), were advocates of the Arian heresy, which had been condemned at the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea in the year 325. Under their patronage the Arians began a persecution against the Orthodox. St Zeno bravely endured all the oppression from the heretics.

In his sermons and letters he firmly asserted the Orthodox teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ as the Only-Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. St Zeno wrote sixteen long and seventy-seven short discourses and directives. He died around the year 360.

St Gregory Dialogus (March 12) speaks of a miracle in the year 558 on St Zeno's Feast day. There were spring floods in Italy. The River Tiber overflowed its banks and inundated the surrounding area. The River Atesis flowing past Verona also flooded. The water reached the church built in honor of the hieromartyr Zeno, and came up to the windows of the church. The doors of the temple were open, but the water did not rush inside. It stopped at the wall, and did not harm the church.

St Isaac the Syrian, Abbot of Spoleto

St Isaac the Syrian lived during the mid-sixth century. He came to the Italian city of Spoleto from Syria. The saint asked permission of the church wardens to remain in the temple, and he prayed in it for two and a half days. One of the church wardens began to reproach him with hypocrisy and struck him on the cheek. Then the punishment of God came upon the church warden. The devil threw him down at the feet of the saint and cried out, "Isaac, cast me out!" Just as the saint bent over the man, the unclean spirit fled.

News of this quickly spread throughout the city. People began to flock to the saint, offering him help and the means to build a monastery. The humble monk refused all this. He left the city and settled in a desolate place, where he built a small cell. Disciples gathered around the ascetic, and so a monastery was formed. When his disciples asked the Elder why he had declined the gifts, he replied, "A monk who acquires possessions is no longer a monk."

St Isaac was endowed with the gift of clairvoyance. St Gregory Dialogus (March 12) speaks of this in his "Dialogues About the Lives and Miracles of the Italian Fathers." Once, St Isaac bade the monks to leave their spades in the garden for the night, and in the morning he asked them to prepare food for the workers. Some robbers, equal to the number of spades, had come to rob the monastery, but the power of God forced them to abandon their evil intent. They took the spades and began to work. When the monks arrived in the garden, all the ground had been dug up. The saint greeted the toilers and invited them to refresh themselves with food. Then he admonished them to stop their thievery, and gave them permission to come openly and pick the fruits of the monastery garden.

Another time, two almost naked men came to the saint and asked him for clothing. He told them to wait a bit, and sent a monk into the forest. In the hollow of a tree he found the fine clothes the travelers had hidden in order to deceive the holy igumen. The monk brought back the clothes, and St Isaac gave them to the wanderers. Seeing that their fraud was exposed, they fell into great distress and shame.

It happened that a certain man sent his servant to the saint with two beehives. The servant hid one of these hives along the way. The saint said to the servant, "I accept the gift, but be careful when you go back for the beehive that you hid. Poisonous snakes

have entered into it. If you stretch forth your hand, they will bite you." Thus the saint unmasked the sins of people wisely and without malice, desiring salvation for all.

St Isaac died in 550. This saint should not be confused with the other St Isaac the Syrian, Bishop of Ninevah, who lived during the seventh century (January 28).

Monkmartyr Menas of Palestine

The Monk Martyrs Menas, David and John lived in Palestine. They were martyred in the seventh century by Arabs, who shot them through with arrows (+ post 636, when Jerusalem was captured by the Arabs).

Venerable Anthusa the Virginmartyr of Constantinople

Saint Anthusa of Constantinople was the daughter of the Iconoclast emperor Constantine Copronymos (741-775) and his first wife. She and her brother, the future emperor Leo the Khazar (775-780), were twins born on January 25, 750. The empress suffered very much with their birth. Constantine Copronymos summoned Abbess Anthusa of Mantinea (July 27) from prison and entreated her prayers. The abbess predicted the birth of the twins and their fate, and the daughter was named in her honor.

When she grew up, the emperor began to urge her to marry. But from her youth St Anthusa yearned for monasticism and would not agree to his suggestions. After the death of her father, she used all her personal property to help the poor and the orphaned. The pious empress Irene (780-802), wife of Leo the Khazar, regarded St Anthusa with love and esteem and invited her to be a co-regent. St Anthusa, however, did not desire worldly honors. Being at court, she wore clothes befitting her position as an emperor's daughter, but underneath her finery she wore a hair-shirt.

St Anthusa was tonsured by the holy Patriarch Tarasius (784-806). She founded at Constantinople the Omonia monastery, known for its strict rule. St Anthusa was herself an example of humility. She did hard work, she cleaned the church and carried water. She never sat at table during meals, but instead served the sisters. She saw to it that no one left the monastery without a special need.

The humble and gentle ascetic lived to the age of fifty-two, and died peacefully in 801.

Venerable Athanasia the Abbess of Aegina

Saint Athanasia was abbess of a monastery on the island of Aegina in the ninth century. She was born into a pious Christian family, and her parents were named Nicetas and Marina. Already at seven years of age the girl studied the PSALTER, which she read constantly and with feeling. Once, while working at the weaver's loom, St Athanasia saw a shining star coming down to her from above, which touched her bosom and lightened all her being, and then disappeared. From that moment, the maiden was illumined in soul and she firmly resolved to enter a monastery.

When St Athanasia reached the age of sixteen, her parents entreated her to marry. She consented, but after sixteen days her husband was killed by barbarians who invaded Aegina.

St Athanasia decided to take advantage of her unexpected freedom and dedicate herself to God. Then the emperor Michael the Stammerer (820-829) issued a decree ordering all young widows and virgins to take husbands. Therefore, St Athanasia was forced to marry again. It is said that her second husband was a Moslem, whom she converted by her holy way of life.

She led a pious and virtuous life. She did housework, helped the sick and those in need, and took in wanderers. On Sundays and feastdays she invited family and acquaintances to her home and read the Holy Scriptures to them. Under her influence, her husband entered a monastery, and progressed in virtue and holiness. Soon, he departed to the Lord.

The saint gave away her property, became a nun, and founded a women's monastery in a remote place. After four years, the sisters asked St Athanasia to become the abbess of the small community. In spite of her position, the saint surpassed all the others in meekness and humility. She asked about the infractions of the sisters with love, not anger.

Although St Athanasia had the title of abbess, she regarded herself as the least of the sisters and always had in mind the commandment of the Savior: "Whoever would be first among you, let him be your servant" (Mt. 20:27). The saint never permitted the sisters to wait on her, not even to pour water over her hands.

St Athanasia wore a hair-shirt, and over it clothes of coarse sheep's wool. She slept very little, and prayed most of the night. By day she labored together with the sisters. On most days she ate only bread and water, and that in moderation, and only after the ninth hour of the day. She never ate cheese or fish except on Pascha and on the twelve Great Feasts. During Lent, she did not eat bread or drink water. She would only eat some vegetables every other day.

On the island of Aegina lived a certain monk named Matthew, who had been an igumen. Each night he read the whole PSALTER, and also read prayers. The saint slept sitting up and only for a short time. He could not refrain from tears when the Psalms were chanted, while reading prayers, or offering the Bloodless Sacrifice.

He wore only a coarse hair-shirt, and through his temperance and struggles his body became completely withered. He had a special love for St John the Theologian. Once, during the the Divine Liturgy he saw the Apostle standing by the altar table.

The saint healed a paralytic with his mantle; by making the Sign of the Cross he corrected the face of a man distorted by the actions of the devil; he cast out demons and worked many other miracles. St Matthew blessed St Athanasia to go to a more isolated place with her sisters. She built a monastery on a desolate hill of the island near an ancient church of the Protomartyr Stephen.

St Athanasia was granted the gift of healing by God. After she healed a man afflicted with a malady of the eyes, a crowd of people began to flock to her in order to receive healing from their infirmities of soul and body. From the abundant gifts brought to the monastery, she built three churches at the monastery: one dedicated to the Most Holy Theotokos, another to the holy Prophet John the Forerunner, and the third to St Nicholas the Wonderworker.

Her increasing celebrity distressed the saint, and she took the two sisters closest to her in spirit (Maria and Eupraxia) and went secretly to Constantinople. There, as a simple nun, she entered one of the women's monasteries, where she lived for seven years.

Again, her holy life attracted attention. The sisters of the Aegina monastery learned where their abbess had gone, and they went to her imploring her to return. Submitting to the will of God, she returned to the monastery she founded. Soon after this she had a vision of two radiant men, giving her a document which said: "Here is your freedom, take it and rejoice."

St Athanasia spent the twelve days before her death in unceasing prayer. On the eve of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos she summoned the sisters and said that she was able to read the PSALTER only as far as the twelfth Psalm. The saint asked them to continue reading the PSALTER for her in church. The sisters went to church and there fulfilled her request, and then they came to bid the saint farewell. She blessed them and asked them to celebrate the Feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos solemnly and joyfully, and also to provide a meal for the poor and destitute. Then, after Divine Liturgy, they could bury her body. With these words, St Athanasia fell asleep in the Lord on August 14, 860.

The saint predicted that she would receive glory in Heaven forty days after her death. On the fortieth day, two devout sisters were granted to see St Athanasia and two radiant men standing before the royal doors of the iconostasis. They clothed her with a purple robe embroidered with gold, pearls, and precious stones. They set a crown on her head,

handed her a gleaming staff, and led her through the royal doors into the altar.

Before her death, St Athanasia ordered the nuns to feed the poor for forty days. The sisters, however, did not fulfill her request and set out the memorial meal for only ten days. The saint appeared to some of the sisters and said, "Let everyone know that alms given for a departed soul for forty days after death, and food offered to the hungry, appease God. If the departed souls are sinful, they receive forgiveness from God. If they are righteous, then the good deeds bring God's mercy on the souls of those who perform them.

Then she thrust her staff into the ground and became invisible. The staff left behind sprouted the next day and became a live tree. A year after the saint's death, they led a possessed woman to the grave. When they dug up the ground, they then noticed a fragrance and removed the coffin. After she touched it, the demoniac was immediately healed. Then they opened the lid of the coffin and saw the saint's incorrupt body, from which myrrh flowed.

St Athanasia looked like she was asleep. Her face shone brightly, her body was preserved incorrupt and soft, and even her hands were supple. The priests decided to place her body in church. When they transferred the body into a new coffin, the nuns removed the hair-shirt from her holy relics and wanted to dress her in silken clothes, but the hands of St Athanasia were so firmly clasped to her bosom, that the nuns could not dress her in the silken garb. Even in death the saint displayed her love for poverty. Then one of the sisters knelt down and began to pray to the saint, saying, "O lady, hear us as you heard us when you lived with us. Now consent to be dressed in these clothes, our humble gift to you." St Athanasia, as though alive, lifted and extended her hands into the clothing.

The holy relics of St Athanasia were put into a crypt and became a source of healings.

The Life of St Athanasia is found in Vatican codex 1660, which dates from the year 916.

Venerable Acacius the Younger of Mt Athos

Saint Acacius the New was a monk at the Holy Trinity monastery of St Dionysius of Olympus (January 24) at Zagora. After visiting several monasteries on Mount Athos, the saint on the advice of his father-confessor, Father Galacteon, settled in the skete monastery of St Maximus the Hut-Burner ("Kavsokalyvites", January 13), who repeatedly appeared to the ascetic.

The exploits of St Acacius were extremely severe: in place of bread he ate dry grass, which he crushed with a piece of marble. When asked how much a monk ought to sleep, he said that for a true monk half an hour even was sufficient. He said, "In order to conquer the flesh, a monk must practice two virtues: fasting and vigil." In spite of his

age and illness, he was an example of this.

Once, when St Acacius had come on a Sunday to the skete church, the igumen Neophytus handed him his own staff and said, "Father, take the staff, and be the Superior for all these brethren until your last breath." St Acacius kissed the hand of the igumen, and accepted the staff with all humility. Although previously he had walked with a staff because of his age, from that time forward the righteous one no longer held a staff in his hand.

For his exalted exploits St Acacius was granted the gifts of unceasing mental prayer and divine revelations. He fell asleep in the Lord on April 12, 1730, being nearly a hundred years old.

Icon of the Mother of God of Murom

The Murom Icon of the Mother of God was transferred to Murom from Kiev by the enlightener of this remote region, the holy Prince Constantine (May 21), in the twelfth century.

St Constantine urged the pagans to accept Christianity, but they were stubborn and decided to murder the prince. Learning of this, the saint came out to the pagans with the Icon of the Mother of God he had brought from Kiev. The grace issuing forth from Her countenance touched the hearts of the pagans. They asked for the prince's forgiveness and agreed to be baptized.

St Basil of Ryazan (July 3) sailed from Murom to Ryazan on his mantiya, while carrying this icon. The Murom icon was originally commemorated during the Apostles' Fast, but the celebration was moved to Biwek April 12 (the Feast of St Basil). In the Murom icon, Christ leans against His Mother's shoulder, and He holds a scroll which says, "I am the light of the world."

Icon of the Mother of God of Belynich

The Belynich Icon of the Mother of God initially was in one of the Orthodox churches of the Mogilev district. After the emergence of the Unia (1596) the icon passed into the hands of the Catholics and was placed in a church of the Belynich Catholic monastery, founded in 1622-1624 by the hetman of Great Lithuania, Lev Sapega, on the banks of the River Druta, 45 versts from Mogilev. The icon was venerated both by Catholics and by Orthodox. In 1832 the monastery was dissolved, and the Catholic church became a parish church.

In 1876 the icon was given to the Orthodox after the restoration of the monastery. On April 12 of that year the first Divine Liturgy was served in the church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos on the altar table consecrated by an Orthodox bishop. The Belynich Icon of the Mother of God is venerated throughout the Christian world.

On this day we also remember the Transfer of the Venerable Belt of the Mother of God from Zila to Constantinople in the year 942.

On Silence, Idle Talk, and Boldness

Do not grieve for me, my child, but struggle ardently. Struggle in silence, prayer, and mourning, and you will find the elements of eternal life. Compel yourself: close your mouth both in joy and in mourning. This is a mark of experience, so that both states are kept safely. For the mouth does not know how to guard riches.

Silence is the greatest and most fruitful virtue; for this reason the God-bearing Fathers call it sinlessness. Silence and stillness, one and the same thing.

The first divine fruit of silence is mourning---godly sorrow, joyful sadness. Afterwards come luminous thoughts, which bring the holy flow of life-streaming tears, through which the second baptism occurs and by which the soul is purified, shines, and becomes like the angels.

Where shall I place, child of Jesus, the spiritual visions springing forth from silence? How the eyes of the intellect are opened and see Jesus with sweetness greater than that of honey! What a novel wonder is worked from lawful silence and an attentive intellect! You know these things, so struggle. I have revealed a little to you; compel yourself and you will find yet greater. I keep you in my prayers just as I promised you. I wonder, are you ready?
