

HOLY SATURDAY APRIL 13/26

Saints of the Orthodox Church

13 April

Hieromartyr Artemon the Presbyter of Laodicea in Syria

The Hieromartyr Artemon was born of Christian parents in Laodicea, Syria in the first half of the third century. From his youth, he dedicated himself to the service of the Church. The saint served the Church as a Reader for sixteen years.

For his zeal in Church services, Bishop Sisinius ordained him deacon. St Artemon also fulfilled this service with fervor and diligence for twenty-eight years, then he was ordained to the priesthood. In this position, St Artemon served the Church of God for thirty-three years, preaching Christianity among pagans. When the emperor Diocletian (284-305) began his fierce persecution against Christians, St Artemon was already old. The emperor issued an edict ordering Christians to offer sacrifice to idols.

Saint Sisinius, knowing of the impending arrival of the military commander Patricius in Laodicea, went with the priest Artemon and other Christians into the temple of the goddess Artemis. There they smashed and burned the idols, reducing them all to dust.

Afterwards, St Sisinius and St Artemon gathered the flock into the church and fervently exhorted the Christians to remain firm in the Faith and not to fear the threats of torturers.

When he arrived in Laodicea, Patricius celebrated a five-day festival in honor of the pagan gods, and then went to the temple of Artemis to offer sacrifice. He learned who had destroyed the temple, and went with a detachment of soldiers to the church where the Christians were praying.

As he approached the church, Patricius suddenly felt a chill, and then developed a fever, which left him barely alive. They carried him home and put him to bed. "The Christians have put a curse on me, and their God torments me," he said to those about him. Although Patricius prayed to the idols, they did not relieve his sufferings. He sent a messenger to St Sisinius and asked for his help, promising to set up a gold statue of the

bishop in the middle of the city. The saint replied, "Keep your gold, but if you believe in Christ, He will heal you."

Patricius was afraid of dying, so he declared that he believed in Christ, and the affliction left him. But even this miracle did not affect the obdurate soul of the pagan. Although he did not touch St Sisinius, he did enforce the imperial edict against other Christians in the city of Caesarea. Along the way he encountered St Artemon, who was followed by six wild donkeys and two deer.

When Patricius asked how he was able to control these wild beasts, St Artemon replied that he held them with the Word of Christ.

Patricius learned from the pagans that the old man was the same Artemon who had destroyed the pagan temple of Artemis. He ordered that Artemon be arrested and taken to the city of Caesarea. St Artemon went with the soldiers without fear, but he ordered the animals to go to St Sisinius.

Seeing the animals Bishop Sisinius asked, "Why have these animals come here?" A doe received the gift of speech from God and said, "The servant of God Artemon is being held by the impious Patricius, and is being brought to Caesarea in chains. He commanded us to come here to give you this news." Do not be astonished that the Lord, Who opened the mouth of Balaam's ass (Num. 22:28), also permits the doe to speak. The bishop sent Deacon Phileas to Caesarea to verify this information.

In Caesarea Patricius brought St Artemon to trial and tried to force him to offer sacrifice in the temple of Asclepius. In this pagan temple there lived many poisonous vipers. The pagan priest never opened the doors, nor did he place the sacrifice before the idol. But St Artemon, calling on the Name of Jesus Christ, went into the temple and released the snakes. The pagans fled, but the saint stopped them and killed the snakes by his breath. One of the pagan priests, Vitalius, believed in Christ and asked St Artemon to baptize him.

Patricius thought that St Artemon killed the snakes by sorcery, and again he interrogated and tortured him. Then the doe which had spoken arrived in Caesarea. The doe lay down at the feet of the martyr, licking his wounds. By God's command the doe spoke again, denouncing the impious pagans. Addressing Patricius, the doe predicted that he would be seized by two birds of prey, and dropped into a cauldron of burning pitch. Patricius was enraged because he had been censured by a wild beast. He commanded his soldiers to shoot the doe with arrows, but she escaped. Afraid that the miracles performed by St Artemon would draw more people to him, Patricius gave orders to execute him.

They filled an enormous cauldron with boiling pitch, intending to throw the saint into it. Patricius rode up to the cauldron on horseback to see if the pitch was indeed boiling. Then two angels in the form of eagles seized Patricius and threw him into the cauldron. His body was consumed so that not a single bone remained.

Seeing the miracle, everyone ran away except St Artemon, who blessed and glorified God. When the saint finished his prayer, a spring of water issued from the ground. St Artemon baptized the pagan priest Vitalius and many pagans, who had come to believe in Christ. On the following morning St Artemon communed the newly-baptized with the Holy Mysteries.

Many of the baptized were ordained to the diaconate and priesthood, and Vitalius was made Bishop of Palestine. The hieromartyr Artemon, instructed by the voice of God, preached the Gospel in Asia Minor. Then an angel appeared to him and transported him to the place which had been revealed to him, where he converted many to Christ. Pagans seized the saint and beheaded him (+ 303).

St Artemon is commemorated on March 24 on the Greek calendar.

Martyr Crescens of Myra in Lycia

The Holy Martyr Crescens (Kreskes) was descended from an illustrious family and lived in Myra of Lycia. When a throng of city inhabitants were on the way to the pagan temple, he urged them to forsake paganism and come to Christ. This incident became known to the city prefect.

When the prefect asked the saint about his parentage, the saint, not wishing to bring unpleasantness to his parents, said nothing except that he was a Christian. The prefect knew St Crescens' father and wanted to do him a favor. He suggested that St Crescens only appear to offer sacrifice to idols, while remaining a Christian.

The holy martyr replied, "It is impossible for the body not to do as the soul thinks, since the soul governs and moves the body." They beat the holy martyr Crescens and raked him with iron claws, and then burned him in a fire.

St Andrew of Crete (July 4) mentions the Martyr Crescens in his Sermon on the Feast of St Nicholas the Wonderworker (December 6), who also came from Myra of Lycia.

Womanmartyr Thomais of Alexandria

The Holy martyr Thomais was born into a Christian family in the city of Alexandria. She was raised in piety, and loved to read spiritual books.

When she was fifteen, the girl married a fisherman, who was also a Christian. The young couple lived in the house of her husband's family, where St Thomais was loved for her mild and gentle disposition, and for other good traits.

St Thomais' father-in-law, at the prompting of the devil, was captivated by her beauty. One night, when his son went out fishing, he attempted to lead his daughter-in-law into sin. Horrified, St Thomais admonished the senseless old man, reminding him of the Last Judgment and the penalty for sin. Infuriated by her steadfastness, he seized a sword and threatened to cut off her head. St Thomais answered resolutely, "Even if you cut me to pieces, I shall not stray from the commandments of the Lord." Overcome with passion, the old man cut St Thomais in two with the sword. The saint received the crown of martyrdom in the year 476.

Divine punishment overtook the murderer. He became blind and could not find the door in order to escape. In the morning, the companions of the saint's husband came to the door. They saw the body of the saint, and the blind old man covered with blood. The murderer confessed his evil deed and asked to be taken to the judge for punishment. He was beheaded for his crime.

At this time, St Daniel of Skete (June 7) happened to be in Alexandria. He told the monks of the Oktodekadian monastery (at the eighteenth mile on the road leading west from Alexandria) to bring the body of the martyr to the monastery and bury her in the cemetery with the departed fathers. Some of the monks were scandalized because he wanted to bury a woman's body with the monks. St Daniel replied, "She is a mother to me and to you, because she died for her chastity."

After the funeral St Daniel returned to his own skete. Soon one of the young monks began to complain to him that he was tormented by fleshly passions. St Daniel ordered him to go and pray at the grave of the holy martyr Thomais. The monk did the bidding of the Elder. While he prayed at the grave, he fell into a light sleep. St Thomais appeared to him and said, "Father, accept my blessing and go in peace."

When he awakened, the monk felt joy and peace in his soul. After this, he told St Daniel that he was no longer bothered by the temptations of the flesh. Abba Daniel exclaimed, "Great is the boldness of those who have struggled for chastity."

Many found both spiritual joy and release from their passions at the grave of St Thomais. Her holy relics were transferred to Constantinople to one of the women's monasteries. The Russian pilgrim Archdeacon Zosimas venerated them in 1420. St Thomais is invoked by those seeking deliverance from sexual impurity. Other saints whose intercession we seek for this purpose are: St John the Much-Suffering (July 18) and St Moses the Hungarian (July 26).

"Faith is the key of God's treasury. She dwells in simple, kind, loving hearts. `All things are possible to him that believeth.' Faith is a spiritual mouth, the more freely it opens the greater the stream by which the Divine springs enter into it; let this mouth freely open, as your bodily one does; do not let your lips be compressed by doubt and unbelief: if you compress them by doubt and unbelief, the treasury of God's blessings will be closed to you. The more openly, the more heartily you believe in God's omnipotence, the more

bountifully will God's heart be opened to you. `What things so ever ye desire, when ye pray believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them."

St. John of Kronstadt

From St. Leo the Great (The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series Vol. XII; Eerdmans pg. 107):

"If a fierce storm of tribulations fall upon us, let us not be terror stricken as if we had to overcome the disaster in our own strength, since both our Counsel and our Strength is Christ, and through Him we can do all things, without Him nothing, Who, to confirm the preachers of the Gospel and the ministers of the mysteries, says, 'Lo, I am with you always even to the consummation of the age' (Mt. 28:20). And again He says, 'these things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In this world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, because I have overcome the world' (Jn. 16:33). The promises, which are as plain as they can be, we ought not to let any causes of offense to weaken, lest we should seem ungrateful to God for making us His chosen vessels, since His assistance is powerful as His promises are true."
